

SAC Debate: National Menorah *Secondary Learners*

In 1979, US President Jimmy Carter lit the first National Menorah in Washington, DC to celebrate Hanukkah. While some Jews celebrated the recognition of Hanukkah on a national stage, others were concerned by what they saw as infringement on the separation of church and state. In this lesson, students will learn about Hanukkah, read primary sources with arguments for and against the use of a National Menorah, and come to their own conclusions about the National Menorah and the meaning of religious liberty. It takes the format of a Structured Academic Controversy (SAC).

Essential Question: Should the United States have a National Menorah?

Time Estimate: 60-80 minutes

Materials:

- [SAC Debate Slides](#)
- 1 [Instructions](#) and [Evidence Sheet](#) for each student
- 1 set of [documents](#) for each pair of students
- Notebook paper or electronic submission for Closing written response

Activities:

1. Prepare the materials and pair students.
2. Introduce the First Amendment to the US Constitution and discuss students' prior knowledge as a hook. (Slide 2) Review the background knowledge so students begin on similar footing (Slide 4-5).
3. Distribute the Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) Instructions and Evidence sheet, as well as 1 set of Documents per pair.
4. Follow the SAC instructions as described (with supporting slides 6-9).
5. Assessment: Students independently write a one paragraph response to the question using the evidence and analysis they learned in the SAC. They should share their own personal viewpoint, regardless of the one they were originally assigned (Slide 10).

Standards/Objectives:

Washington, DC K-12 Social Studies Standards 2023 Standards:

- 8.2 Use excerpts from documents that shape constitutional democracy in the United States...to analyze principles about the role of the government.
- 8.54 Analyze how the First Amendment of the US Constitution has been interpreted to limit or provide opportunities for citizen action to protest, resist and influence government policy.
- GC.14 Analyze the ways in which the US Constitution and Bill of Rights protect individual rights and liberties from undue governmental influence, analyzing to what extent these rights have expanded or been abridged over time.

- GC.49 Analyze the origins of a public policy issue, and present a proposal defending a position or invoking a call to action at the local, state or national level.

C3 Framework

- D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.
- D2.Civ.4.9-12. Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that has powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changed over time and that are still contested.
- D2.Civ.10.9-12. Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.
- D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.
- D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.

Modifications/Accommodations:

To Increase Challenge:

- Research to add additional relevant documents
- Require use of all documents on both sides (ensure counter-arguments)
- Students work alone instead of with partners
- Change assessment type – write to a local elected official regarding opinion

To Increase Accessibility:

- Shorten the Documents or remove one or two (be sure to keep the evidence balanced, so students do not feel there is an obvious “correct” answer)
- Define words in the margins, including translations for English Language Learners
- Display thesis stems (“The National Menorah should/should not be used because”)
- Expand Background Knowledge (slide 4)
- Model how to read documents to pull evidence/explanation (i.e. “I do, we do, you do” model for first few documents)
- Change assessment type – provide sentence stems and model writing a detailed paragraph

STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY: Should the United States have a National Menorah?

Side A	Side B
Yes, the United States should have a National Menorah.	No, the United States should not have a National Menorah.

I) Prepare the evidence (20 minutes)

- 1) You will partner with one other classmate, and together you will be assigned either Side A or Side B.
- 2) Read the documents once through together.
- 3) Read the documents a second time and identify evidence that supports your assigned side of the argument.
- 4) Fill out your Evidence Sheet with quotes from the documents and be sure to include explanations of how those quotes support your argument.
- 5) Develop in your own words the thesis of your argument and write it at the bottom of your Evidence Sheet.
- 6) Practice the clear delivery of your thesis, along with the best evidence and explanations. Craft your position thoughtfully and anticipate counterarguments.

II) Conduct the Controversy (10 minutes)

- 1) You and your partner will be matched with a set of partners from the other side.
- 2) Side A presents their argument using the evidence they collected on the Evidence Sheet. Side B takes notes on Side A's presentation on their Evidence Sheets. (4 minutes)
- 3) Side B presents their argument using the evidence they collected on the Evidence Sheet. Side A takes notes on Side A's presentation on their Evidence Sheets. (4 minutes)
- 4) Controversy! Question each other, evaluate the sources, introduce new analysis. (2 minutes)

III) Consensus-Building (5 minutes)

- 1) Drop your assigned side – you are no longer arguing the sides of the debate, but rather working as a group of 4 to fully understand both sides of the question at hand.
- 2) Find points of consensus or agreement regarding the question (or at least clarify what specific points are at issue between the sides), using supporting evidence. In other words, what can both sides agree on?
- 3) List these points of agreement and specific disagreement at the bottom of the Evidence Sheet.
- 4) Consider: What evidence did you personally find the most convincing?

STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY: Evidence Sheet

Side A : Yes		Side B : No	
Document	Evidence / Explanation	Document	Evidence / Explanation
Thesis:		Thesis:	
Consensus: List the points that both sides can agree upon			

STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY: Documentsⁱ

Document A: First Amendment to the United States Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Document B: Rabbi Sidney Schwartz, executive director of the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington (1984)

We have a commitment to the separation of church and state. We objected to having a creche on the Ellipse, and we object to having the menorah on public property too...It happens to be our symbol, but we feel it is equally wrong.

Creche: A model of the Christian Nativity scene, with baby Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the "Holy Family" according to Christian tradition

Ellipse: a park on White House grounds in Washington DC

Document C: Rabbi Abraham Shemtov, director of the American Friends of Lubavitch, who erected the first Menorah (1984)

The lighting of candles at Hanukah is the one observance in the Jewish religion where public display is not just an ingredient of the observance but its very essence... [Jewish groups who oppose the National Menorah] fail to believe fully in what Hanukah is all about.

Document D: Rabbi David Saperstein, codirector of the Religious Action Center of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (1984)

Our fundamental constitutional prohibition against government establishment of religion mandates that government-maintained public lands not be used to display religious symbols... There is ample opportunity for all Americans to display their particular religious symbols in their homes, churches and synagogues.

Document E: Treasury Deputy Secretary Stuart E. Eizenstat Remarks At Lighting Of The National Chanukah Menorah Washington, Dc (2000)

For more than 20 years, due to the leadership of the Chabad Lubavitch Movement, a menorah has stood here in our nation's capital as a symbol of the pluralism and religious liberty that are such a precious part of the American heritage ...My wife Fran and I watched our young sons Jay and Brian light the first National Menorah in 1979 in Lafayette Park with President Jimmy Carter. Since then, I have been privileged to travel across the globe as an ambassador and representative of my country. As I have done so, I have seen more and more Menorahs lit each year in places unthinkable when we first lit this menorah more than 20 years ago. From the former Soviet Union to Eastern Europe to South America and elsewhere, a few more candles are being kindled each year to celebrate Chanukah as more and more people enjoy the freedom to worship according to their own conscience-that inalienable right for which Judah and the Maccabees fought so many years ago.

Document F: Gratz College President Zev Eleff (1984)

Pushing this symbol in public spaces has far greater implications for the Jewish community than just Chanukah...[W]here the church operates as government, Jews do not always fare that well.

Document G: *Hanukkah In America: A History* by Dianne Ashton (2013)

In Pittsburgh, in December 1989, Chabad placed its eighteen-foot-tall menorah along with a sign proclaiming a "Salute to Religious Liberty" next to a forty-five-foot tall decorated Christmas tree on the steps of the city courthouse... When the American Civil Liberties Union objected to [these] displays because they exhibited religious symbols on government property, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. Justice Brennan explained the Court's decision to allow both menorah and tree...While each item, tree and menorah, might be seen as particular religious symbols under some circumstances, when they are displayed together, that is not necessarily the case. "The menorah here stands next to a Christmas tree and a sign saluting liberty," he wrote. That turns the display into "simply a recognition of cultural diversity." The objects remained.

ⁱ Documents Cited Below

Ashton, Dianne. *Hanukkah in America: A History*. New York University Press, 2013. Book.

Eizenstat, Stuart E. "TREASURY DEPUTY SECRETARY STUART E. EIZENSTAT REMARKS AT LIGHTING OF THE NATIONAL CHANUKAH MENORAH WASHINGTON, DC." 21 December 2000. *US Department of the Treasury*. 9 November 2023. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/ls1095>

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The Bill of Rights: A Transcription. National Archives, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 9 Nov 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>