



EDUCATOR GUIDE

Whack-a-Haman



'Interact with Judaism' is a collaboration between **Jewish Interactive** and **RE:ONLINE**, aimed at teachers and children in non-Jewish settings who want to find out more about Judaism. <http://jewishinteractive.org>

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WHACK-A-HAMAN

DESIGNED BY MIDDLE SCHOOL KIDS

Whack-a-Haman is a fun creative twist on the classic game of “Whack a Mole”, while also being rooted in Jewish Purim customs.



This game was created by an international partnership between Jewish Interactive and 6th and 7th grade students from the Martin J. Gottlieb Day School (MJGDS) in Jacksonville, Florida, USA. The sixth graders wrote the questions that pop up at multiple points in the game, and seventh graders created the drawings, the score, the audio, and everything else but the questions. The game was animated, programmed and produced by Jewish Interactive. The Jewish Interactive team mentored the students throughout the project.

OVERVIEW

The Book of Esther relates how Haman plotted to wipe out the Jewish nation, which means that the Jewish people considers Haman to be an archenemy. However, in addition to the attempts by Haman to harm Jews, tradition teaches that Haman was a descendant of Amalek – the leader of an anti-Semitic tribe who attacked the Israelites when they left Egypt (see Deuteronomy 25:17).

Given the history between Amalek and the Jewish nation, it comes as no surprise that the Torah states that ‘you shall surely erase the memory of Amalek’ (Deuteronomy 25:19), and this verse is the inspiration behind the unusual custom of making noise with a gregger (noisemaker) each time the name of Haman is said during the public reading of the Book of Esther on Purim. Whack-a-Haman takes this association to a new level, with players being encouraged to ‘Whack’ Haman with a gregger. In addition to the game itself, players are asked a variety of questions about the Purim story.

Overall, Whack-a-Haman is a playful reinterpretation of a Jewish custom, while also helping players learn more about the festival of Purim.

The whole story can be found in the Book of Esther but here is a summary that can be used with pupils aged 7 – 11:

SUMMARY OF THE STORY OF ESTHER

The Story of Esther begins by introducing us to *Achashverosh* (sometimes called Ahasuerus, Assuerus or Xerxes), the king of Persia and Media, who ruled over a 127-province worldwide empire. In the third year of his reign, *Achashverosh* threw a 180-day party for all his officials, and once that party was over, he threw a further party for the inhabitants of his new capital city, *Shushan*. All were invited to this grand bash, from the highest nobleman to the lowliest peasant. On the final day of the party, *Achashverosh* called for his wife, Queen Vashti, to

parade in front of the men at his party, wearing nothing but her crown. She refused, and this infuriated *Achashverosh*.

Achashverosh swiftly punished *Vashti* by putting her death, after which he began the search for a new queen, and every beautiful young maiden was ordered to be brought to Shushan the capital. Amongst the girls was Esther, who was the niece of a famous Jew called Mordechai who had been exiled from Jerusalem to Shushan by *Nebuchadnezzar*. Esther's parents were no longer alive, and since then, Mordechai had cared for her and raised her. Esther was charming and beautiful, and the king was instantly impressed by her. He immediately set the royal crown upon her head, pronounced her as his queen, and made a great feast in her honour. Following Mordechai's instructions, Esther kept her Jewish ancestry hidden.

We then read that two men - Bigtan and Teresh - plotted to assassinate king *Achashverosh*, and that the assassination attempt was thwarted by Mordechai who overheard their plot. This incident was recorded in the king's Book of Chronicles, and was then promptly forgotten!

The book now introduces us to Haman, who was a senior member of *Achashverosh's* inner circle. According to the king's command, all would bow down before Haman. However, Mordechai refused. When Haman became aware of the defiance of this Jew, he was filled with rage, but rather than merely punished Mordechai, Haman plotted to destroy the entire Jewish people. Haman cast lots to identify the fateful day when the Jewish people would be destroyed, and he chose the thirteenth of Adar. Once decided, Haman approached the king and told him about "a certain people that are scattered throughout and dispersed among all the provinces in your realm". He explained that "their laws are different, and they do not observe the king's laws", and suggested that *Achashverosh* "should not tolerate them". *Achashverosh* removed his signet ring and gave it to Haman to write an edict for the destruction of the entire Jewish people and to have it sealed with the king's signet ring. Happy with their new plan, the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the Jews of *Shushan* were confused and bewildered.

When Mordechai learned of the threat, he tore his clothes and wore the mourning clothes of sackcloth and ashes. The Jews throughout the provinces followed him, and they also cried and fasted. Mordechai sent a message to Esther, asking her to appeal to the king on behalf of her people. However, Esther responded to Mordechai by reminding him that "anyone who approaches the king without being summoned is put to death. And I have not been summoned for the past thirty days." However, Mordechai pressed Esther, saying "who knows... perhaps it was for just such an opportunity as this that you attained your royal position". Esther agreed to try, but with one condition. Mordechai was to gather all the Jews in *Shushan* and declare a three day long public fast. Esther, together with her maids, would also fast. "Only then," she said "will I go. And if I perish, I perish".

Esther approached the king's chambers and fortunately she was welcomed by *Achashverosh*. "What is your wish Queen Esther?" he asked her, "Up till half of my kingdom, I will grant you". However, Esther did not request half of his kingdom. Instead, all she asked of him was that he come together with Haman to a private banquet later that day.

Later, at this little feast *Achashverosh*, sensing that Esther was leading up to something repeated his offer to Esther “What is your request? Up to half of my kingdom and I shall grant it you”. Again, Esther replied, that all she desired was that the king, together with Haman, attend yet another banquet the following day. When Haman left the party, he was over the moon. However, just as he left the palace, he saw Mordechai who refused to stand up for him or bow down to him. Haman told his wife and sons of all the honour that had been accorded to him. “But all this is worthless to me as long as I see that Jew Mordechai sitting at the king’s gate”.

Haman's wife Zeresh had the answer – “Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high; and tomorrow morning speak to the king and have them hang Mordechai on it”. Haman was pleased with this plan and was so eager to carry it out that he immediately had the gallows constructed. But that night *Achashverosh* was unable to fall asleep, and he ordered his Book of Chronicles to be brought before him and be read to him, and he then heard the story of how Mordechai had saved the king's life. “What honour has been bestowed upon Mordechai?” asked the king. “Nothing has been done for him”, answered the king's pages. However, just then, Haman happened to be standing in the outer court of the palace. *Achashverosh* ordered for him to be brought in and he asked him, “what should be done for the man whom the king wishes to honour?” asked *Achashverosh*. Haman - thinking that there could be no one who the king would want to honour more than him – suggested the highest honour of “dressing him in the king's robes and have him ride on the king's horse with a royal crown on his head. Then have one of the king's most noble officers parade him through the city square”. The king responded by telling Haman to “get the robe and the horse and do as you have suggested for Mordechai the Jew”. Haman returned home, dejected and despondent and told over the day's events to his wife Zeresh and to his advisors. Zeresh saw that there was no hope and forecast his downfall. “If Mordechai is of Jewish descent then you will not prevail”.

At Esther's second party, *Achashverosh* once more repeated his offer: “What is your request, Queen Esther? What is your petition? Up to half of my kingdom and I will grant it you”. The time was right. Esther replied “If I won your favour, let my life be granted to me as my request and my peoples as my petition. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, slain and annihilated”. *Achashverosh* was taken by surprise. “Who is the one who dared to do this?”. Esther answered, “an adversary and an enemy...this wicked Haman!”. As Haman trembled in terror, the king rose in anger and went out to the palace garden, leaving Haman to beg Esther for his life. *Achashverosh* returned to find Haman prostrated on the couch upon which Esther was sitting.

“Would he actually assault the queen while I am in the house?”, stormed *Achashverosh*. At that point, *Charbonah*, one of the chamberlains in attendance, informed the king that the fifty cubit gallows, which Haman had built for Mordechai, was ready and waiting and would be perfect for Haman! “Hang him on it!” ordered the king. So Haman was hanged on the very same gallows which he had prepared for Mordechai. In response to these events, *Achashverosh* gave Haman’s entire estate to Esther and placed Mordechai over it.

But the threat was not over yet. Esther approached the king and begged him to avert the evil decree, which Haman had brought about. However, as *Achashverosh* explained, there was a problem because “an edict signed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked”. However, he

handed his signet ring to Mordechai and Esther and told them that they may write whatever they desired.

Mordechai ordered letters to be sent to the Jews in all the provinces stating that the king had given permission for the Jews of every province to prepare their defence against anyone who may attack or threaten them. The fate of the Jewish nation had been turned around. From destruction to salvation; from dejection to honour; from sorrow to gladness.

So the Jews organized their defence. Those in the provinces succeeded in fighting off their attackers on the thirteenth of Adar and so celebrated on the fourteenth. However, the Jews of the capital, *Shushan*, took until the end of the fourteenth to fight off their enemies, and so their celebration took place on the fifteenth of Adar.

Haman's ten sons were hanged and their enemies were destroyed, but the Jews did not lay their hands on the spoils. The Jewish nation accepted upon themselves to celebrate these two days, without fail, at the proper time each year. Aside from the feasting, they were to send food parcels to one another, and gifts to the poor. That was how Purim would be remembered for generations to come.

The story ends by informing us how Mordechai was promoted to the position of Viceroy to the king. He was respected by all and was able to take care of the welfare and posterity of his people.

Adapted from [a summary of the story of Esther](#) by Rabbi Nissan Wilson