

Unfinished Revolutions

Cincinnati and Reform Judaism

OVERVIEW

Theme Introduction

In this unit, we're exploring "Unfinished Revolutions." What do America's founding documents have to do with our lives today? In what ways are they used to benefit the American people? How and when have groups expanded liberty and equality for all? We'll explore these questions and more.

Podcast Short

[Cincinnati and Reform Judaism](#) with Christine Engels, Curator of Manuscripts at Cincinnati Museum Center and Rabbi Dr. Gary Zola, Executive Director Emeritus of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience and Reform Jewish History at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

Guiding Questions

As students listen to the podcast, have them consider the following questions:

- What is Reform Judaism? Why is it considered a uniquely American faith movement?
- In what ways was Reform Judaism considered revolutionary?
- How is the history of Reform Judaism entwined with Cincinnati?

Key Vocabulary

- **Reform Judaism:** A movement of Judaism that seeks to reconcile ancient Jewish traditions with the modern world for a religious experience that is meaningful for contemporary life.

ACTIVITIES

Cincinnati's Jewish Community

Recommended for grades 4-8

As we learned in the podcast, Jewish community members have made many contributions to Cincinnati from the 1800s to today. Rabbi Dr. Zola mentioned Seasongood, Fleischmann and Krohn as individuals whose names may be familiar to students. In this activity, students will investigate the impacts of Cincinnati's Jewish community on the arts, business and more.

Provide students with a list of Jewish individuals with ties to Cincinnati (see below) or let students choose someone to research. Have students read about that person and write a short biography about their life – including when they came to Cincinnati – and their contributions. Invite students to share their research with the class or combine their biographies into a "book" of Cincinnati's Jewish heritage.

Possible subjects:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| • Charles and Maximilian Fleischmann | • Elias Kahn | • Albert Sabin |
| • Jacob Frank | • Irwin Krohn | • Murray Seasongood |
| • Stella Heinsheimer Freiberg | • Setty Swarts Kuhn | • Estelle Miller Sternberger |
| • Henry Heimlich | • Robert Marx | • Irvin F. Westheimer |
| • Joseph Jonas | • Sally Priesand | • Isaac M. Wise |

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Comparing Synagogue Architecture

Recommended for grades 5-8

As we learned in the podcast, the Reform Judaism movement sought to make Judaism more adaptable to immigrants' new land and more easily understandable to Americans. This activity will allow students to examine and compare the architecture and design of American and European synagogues to identify influences of the Reform movement in Cincinnati structures.

Review the purpose of the Reform movement within Judaism and its influence on Cincinnati in the 1800s. Share images of the Isaac M. Wise Temple and Rockdale Temple, examples of early Reform synagogues in Cincinnati (see below). Provide links to view the interior and exterior of a variety of Orthodox synagogues in Europe. Ask students to examine the photos, identifying similarities and differences in synagogue design.

Some specific elements to examine might include:

- Placement of the bimah (reading platform)
- Placement of pews or chairs
- Decorative elements
- Musical elements
- Architectural style (e.g. Gothic, Moorish Revival, Neoclassical)

Guide students in a discussion of any of the following questions:

- What, if any, differences did you observe between the European and Cincinnati synagogues?
- How do those differences reflect the values of Reform Judaism, such as modernization, integrating into American culture and adapting worship practices?
- How did these changes shape the identity and experience of Jewish communities in Cincinnati?
- How can architecture reflect community beliefs and values?

Synagogue images:

- Exterior of Isaac M. Wise Temple, Cincinnati:
https://searchcollections.cincymuseum.org/public/museum/Portal/Combined.aspx?lang=en-US&p_AAEE=tab2&p_AAHL=tab6&d=d
- Interior of Isaac M. Wise Temple, Cincinnati:
<https://www.wisetemple.org/about/our-history/history-of-plum-street-temple/>
- Exterior of Rockdale Temple, Cincinnati:
<https://searchcollections.cincymuseum.org/public/archive/Portal/Sharedlink.aspx?component=AAAE&record=7061590c-c851-4a29-9d8c-14ca695b6c7b>
- Interior of Rockdale Temple, Cincinnati:
<https://digital.cincinnati.library.org/digital/collection/p16998coll6/id/67/rec/22>
- Interior and Exterior of Princes Road Synagogue, England:
<https://synagogues-360.anumuseum.org.il/gallery/princes-road-synagogue/>
- Interior and Exterior of Lengnau Synagogue, Switzerland:
<https://synagogues-360.anumuseum.org.il/gallery/lengnau/>
- Interior and Exterior of Portuguese Synagogue, Netherlands:
<https://synagogues-360.anumuseum.org.il/gallery/portuguese-synagogue/>
- Interior and Exterior of Remuh Synagogue, Poland:
<https://synagogues-360.anumuseum.org.il/gallery/remuh/>
- Interior and Exterior of Pitigliano Synagogue, Italy:
<https://synagogues-360.anumuseum.org.il/gallery/pitigliano/>

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Washington and the Hebrew Congregation

Recommended for grades 6-10

In the podcast, Rabbi Dr. Zola discussed George Washington's letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island. In this activity, students will examine that letter and other founding documents for themes such as religious freedom and tolerance.

Provide students with the text of the letter from the file below and ask students to read it. Give them copies of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the Virginia Assembly Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, also linked below. Ask students to compare Washington's language to the language in those two documents. Invite students to highlight differences in tone, word choice or style and to ponder whether the message in Washington's letter is in keeping with the promises within the two founding documents.

Possible discussion questions include:

- How does Washington's personal language compare to the formal, legal language of the Constitution or Virginia Bill?
- Does Washington's tone convey religious tolerance? If you received this letter, would you feel welcome? How would you feel about your freedom to worship how you choose?
- Remember the podcast. How does the tone of this letter imply an experience in America different from the experience that some Jewish communities faced in Europe?

Optional extension: Invite students to write a reflection explaining how Washington's letter reflects early American values of tolerance and why it might have been meaningful to the Jewish community at the time.

Documents:

- Washington's Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, 1790:
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-06-02-0135>
- First Amendment of U.S. Constitution, 1791:
<https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/>
- Virginia Assembly Bill Establishing Religious Freedom, 1779:
[82. A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, 18 June 1779](#)

STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

- **OH Geography 4.13:** The population of the United States has changed over time, becoming more diverse (e.g., racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious). Ohio's population has become increasingly reflective of the multicultural diversity of the United States.
- **OH Geography 4.14:** Ohio's location and its transportation systems continue to influence the movement of people, products and ideas in the United States.
- **OH Government 4.18:** The U.S. Constitution establishes a system of limited government and protects citizens' rights; five of these rights are addressed in the First Amendment.
- **OH History 8.1:** Primary and secondary sources are used to examine events from multiple perspectives and to present and defend a position.
- **KY 5.H.CE.2:** Analyze the role religion played in early colonial society.
- **KY 5.C.CV.1:** Describe the democratic principles of equality before the law, inalienable rights, consent of the governed and right to alter or abolish the government.
- **KY 8.C.CV.1:** Analyze the impact of the democratic principles of equality before the law, inalienable rights, consent of the governed and the right to alter or abolish the government in the United States from the Colonial Era to Reconstruction from 1600-1877.