Comprehension Workbook 7

Purim
(Book of Esther)

Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

understand • key words • summarise • sequencing • AF2–3 • AF4–5 • AF6–7 • discuss • create

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שמח!

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Jewish faith

Matches the requirements of the Literacy Strategy and designed to integrate with the study of world religions. (This material is independent of any specific text book and can be used alongside any publisher's books including our Jewish Faith, Synagogue, Jewish art and writing and Jewish holy days books.)

Contents

Unit 7: Book of Esther - Purim

Book of Esther - Purim

The holiday of Purim is unusual in several ways. The holiday remembers a time when a woman named Esther saved the Jewish people from Haman, who tried to convince the King of Persia to kill all the Jews. During Purim the Book of Esther is read out in synagogue. This is the only book in the Jewish Bible that does not contain the name of God, or even any mention of God. This is the story of Esther. Purim is a carnival time, as the pictures here show.

Long ago, in Babylon, there was a king named Xerxes. One day Xerxes decided that he needed a new wife, and he chose Esther, a beautiful Jewish woman. At this time, the Jews were living in Babylon because they had been driven out of their homeland. In Babylon, the Jews were treated very harshly. Esther had been raised by her cousin, Mordechai, who was respected because he had once saved the king's life. Before she was taken to Xerxes, Mordechai warned Esther not to tell the king that she was a Jew.

Haman was one of the King's advisors. Haman hated Mordechi because Mordechai would not bow down to Haman, so Haman plotted to destroy all the Jews in Persia. One day, Haman told the King, "There is a certain people living in your realm. Their laws are different from those of every other people's, and they do not observe the king's laws. They should be punished."

The king told Haman to decide for himself what to do about the Jews, and Haman decided that he would have all the Jews killed. Now, it was a law in Persia that anyone who entered the king's presence without being summoned could be put to death, but Mordechai was desperate. He asked Esther to speak to the king and tell him about Haman's plan. Esther fasted for three days and then went in to talk to the king. Luckily, the king loved Esther, so he spared her life and told her she could have anything she wanted. Esther told the king that all she wanted was for the king and Haman to come to a banquet the following night.

That night, Haman built a gallows, so he could hang Mordechai before the banquet. At the same time, the king remembered that Mordechai had never been rewarded for saving his life. In the morning, the king ordered Mordechai to be dressed in the king's robes and led through the streets while the criers shouted, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!"

That night at the banquet, Esther revealed to the king that she was a Jew. She told the king about Haman's plans and begged him to save them. The king was furious that Haman planned to hang the man that had saved the king's life. He ordered the Jews to be spared and instead Haman was hung on the gallows he had built for Mordechai.

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write a sentence in which you found the word 'banquet'.

b From that sentence, write what you think 'banquet' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'banquet'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'banquet'.

e Draw a picture illustrating 'banquet'.

Try this for other words, too.

Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: respected	admired

Summarising
(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence. e.g. "This story tells us..."

3 Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

Finally, can you rewrite your summary to make it better?

1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.

2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.

3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.

4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?

There is nothing wrong with rewriting; even the best authors rewrite their work.

123 4 Sequencing

One day, Haman told the King, "There is a certain people living in your realm.

Esther told the king that all she wanted was for the king and Haman to come to a banquet the following night.

One day Xerxes decided that he needed a new wife, and he chose Esther, a beautiful Jewish woman.

She told the king about Haman's plans and begged him to save them. Esther fasted for three days and then went in to talk to the king.

Luckily, the king loved Esther, so he spared her life and told her she could have anything she wanted.

Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.

Write a sentence to answer each of these questions:

(a) Why were the Jews living in Babylon?

(b) Why did Haman hate Mordechai?

(c) What was the punishment for anyone who went into the king's presence without permission?

(d) Why was Mordechai respected?

(e) Why did the king order Mordechai to be dressed in his robes and taken through the streets?

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.

1 What did Haman tell the king as the reason why the Jews should be punished?

2 Why do you think Esther asked the king to a banquet instead of asking him to spare the Jews right away?

3 Why was the king angry at Haman at the end of the story?

4 Why do you think Esther fasted for three days before going to see the king?

Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

1. Why do you think Mordechai told Esther not to reveal she was a Jew when she married the king?

2. It is a commandment that Jews should eat and drink as much as they can on Purim? Why do you think this is?

3. Do you think Esther was brave?

4. Do you think the punishment the king gave Haman was too severe?

5. Do you think it was a coincidence that the king remembered Mordechai had saved his life on the night before the banquet?

Talking it through

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.

Discussion topic: Hatred

Discuss why Haman hated Mordechai and the Jews so much. Do you think it had anything to do with the fact that the Jews were not from Babylon? Did it have to do with the fact that the Jews had different customs.

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

Esther and the king

You are Esther. Mordechai has just told you that you must go and convince the king to spare the lives of the Jews.
(Now describe what you are thinking about and what you will do next...)

Book of Esther - Purim

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