

Create your own Megillah

Framing this unit

At the heart of the Purim activities is the reading of the Megillah – the Book of Esther. The Megillah tells the dramatic story of the Jews of Shushan, the capital of Persia, who were saved by the actions of the Jewish Queen Esther. The Megillah is written by a scribe on parchment and is often illustrated with traditional decorations and drawings of the events.

The National library of Israel has a unique collection of Megillot. One of the oldest is from Ferrara in Italy and was made in 1616. Other illustrated Megillot in our collection come from Venice, Prague, Berlin, and Holland.

If necessary, teachers should give an introduction to Megillat Esther and the Purim story. This could be followed by a discussion about the writing of Jewish religious texts, such as Torah scrolls, tefillin, mezuzot, and megillot, and subsequently about illuminated Hebrew manuscripts.

Discussion

- What do Megillot look like?
- How is the writing organized on the parchments?
- Are there illustrations or decorations on the parchment?
- What do the illustrations depict?
- Why is it common to see an illustrated Megillat Esther?

Group Activity

Students [fill in a table about Megillot](#) from the National Library collections and other Megillot they find online. This table will help the students to analyze the different graphic features of the Megillot. Teachers can decide whether to give each student (or group of students) a different Megillah to analyse or whether to give them more than one.

Creative Activity

In this activity students create their own modern illustrated scene from the Megillah based on their previous analysis. They can incorporate graphic elements that they found in the online images of Megillot.

1. Teachers are recommended to select a number of scenes from the story for students to choose from: for example, the first feast, the beauty contest, the Jews of Shushan in mourning, the hanging of Haman, etc.
2. Each student chooses one scene and illustrates it, attaching an appropriate verse from the Megillah. Teachers could also suggest that students copy the relevant texts from an online source and include it in their work.

This activity can be done using either digital resources or arts and crafts.

Primary sources in this lesson

- [Megillah – Ferrara, 1616](#)
- [Megillah - Venice, 1746](#)
- [Prague Megillah](#)
- [Megillah from the Royal Library of Berlin \(p.25-30\)](#)
- [18th Century Dutch Megillah](#)