



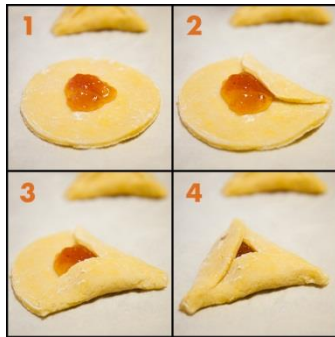
Purim

The festive holiday of Purim celebrates the Jews' eleventh-hour escape from an ancient Persian decree to destroy them. According to the *Megillat Ester*, aka the *Megillah* or the biblical Book of Esther, King Ahasuerus's evil advisor Haman ("Boo!"*) convinces the king to allow the annihilation of the Jewish people. Queen Esther and her cousin Mordechai find the courage to speak out about their Jewish identity and save the day. (*It is customary to boo or hiss at the mention of Haman's name.)

The four *mitzvot* (plural of *mitzvah*, commandment) associated with Purim are all related to taking care of one another. The first is listening to the *Megillah*, a story meant to inspire bravery and determination. The second *mitzvah* is *mishloach manot*—sending gifts. Gifts of food to friends and colleagues ensure that everyone has the means to be happy, further foiling Haman's ("Boo!") plans. Third is the *mitzvah* of *matanot la'evyonim*—gifts to the poor. The gifts can be money or food, so the needy have cause to celebrate, too. The fourth *mitzvah* is a *seudah*, a Purim feast, helping to truly enact the phrase "eat, drink, and be merry!"

Pinch or fold?

There is an ongoing debate about whether to pinch or fold the dough circles to form the triangle cakes. Stefani Pollack, PJ Library mom and cupcake blogger (www.cupcakeproject.com) swears by the folding method. Where do you stand on this issue? Photo courtesy of J. Pollack Photography (www.jpollackphoto.com).



Hamentaschen math

Make [salt-dough](#) hamentaschen of different colors and sizes with your students for sorting and patterning. You might also supply your classroom with a container of hamentaschen fillings to sort, such as dried apricots, cherries, and prunes. If you are really daring, add in poppy seeds and chocolate chips.

What's hidden in each of us?

Costumes and masks are a part of Purim because God is not mentioned and therefore "hidden" in the Purim story. The name Esther, the heroine of the story, also means hidden. Make your own [papier-mâché masks](#) with your students. Exploring with masks can lead toward discussions about dressing up in costumes and can empower students to "try on" different appearances and express a hidden part of their true selves.

Now is your chance

Purim (pu-*reem*) is the Hebrew word for lots or lottery. Haman ("Boo!") chose a date at ransom for his evil plan. But a lottery can be fun! Use a deck of cards or raffle tickets to assign jobs for the week, choose snack, or cast parts in your Purim spiel (play).

More info and related books

Check out the PJ Library [Purim page](#).