



Alex Schlotsky: “Full Court Miracle”
A Disney Channel Episode for Cable in the Classroom
Ages 8-14

Program Synopsis:

Alex Schlotsky loves the game of basketball, but he is tired of being called a loser. His basketball team, the Hebrew Academy Lions, has not won a game in two years and has a very important tournament coming up. In class, Alex is learning from his instructor, Rabbi Lewis, about Judah and the Maccabees. When they talk after class, Rabbi Lewis tells Alex to look for his own Judah Maccabee to help his basketball team win.

While shooting baskets and contemplating what Rabbi Lewis said, Alex sees an incredible basketball player shooting hoops on the other court. Suddenly, Alex is convinced that he has found the “Judah” that will lead his team to victory. After first getting rebuffed and then doing some research, Alex discovers that the man he saw was Lamont Carr, former basketball star of the Virginia Cavaliers. Lamont has numerous similarities to Judah, including the same nickname (“The Hammer”) and the same number of brothers (four).

Alex ends up having to offer Lamont money to help coach his team. Though skeptical, Lamont agrees, and he begins by whipping the Lions into shape. Soon, however, the money begins to run out, and the parents of the team members are becoming suspicious of the whole situation.

After Alex’s mom finds out that the team is paying Lamont, she tries her best to put a stop to it. But then Rabbi Lewis talks her into getting the Lions to put Lamont on a day-to-day contract. The team is back in business, ready to win, and finally making progress when things start to unravel again; Alex has fallen behind in his grades, and Lamont has suspended him from the team until his schoolwork improves.

Alex manages to better his grades just before the tournament is about to begin. But then Lamont gives the team some “bad” news -- he has just been hired by the Philadelphia 76ers. Alex and the others are devastated. Nevertheless, as Alex talks with Rabbi Lewis, he realizes that the courage and leadership exhibited long ago in the great Judah Maccabee is something that can be found in each and every person.

With teamwork and faith, the Lions make it all the way to the championship game. The team is down in points but coming back quickly, only there's one problem; the game is about to be called on account of a power outage, since the emergency generator is running out of fuel. The team needs a miracle -- and gets one. Just as Judah and the Maccabees were able to light the temple lamps for eight nights on only enough oil for one, so the emergency generator, its tank apparently empty, keeps working until the end of the game. As time runs out on the clock, the Lions hit the final shot and win both the game and the tournament. In the end, Alex has found the Judah Maccabee within himself.

Objectives:

The student will:

- Gain a better understanding of Jewish traditions
- Become familiar with the Jewish holiday of Chanukah
- Develop a greater appreciation for other cultures

Preview Questions:

- What do you know about Judah and the Maccabees?
- What ideas do you have about Chanukah?
- What skills does a team need in order to be good?



- How would you feel if your team always lost?
- Do you have different goals than the ones your parents have for you?

Post-Viewing Questions:

- Why was Alex looking for a new coach?
- What did Rabbi Lewis tell Alex to do?
- What did Alex's mom think about basketball? What did his dad think about it? How did they differ?
- Who does Alex think is the team's Judah?
- How does Alex get Lamont to coach his team?
- How do the parents (Alex's mom in particular) feel about Lamont coaching their boys?
- In what ways does Alex help Lamont?
- Why does Alex get suspended from playing basketball?
- What is Rabbi Lewis's role throughout the movie?
- How does the team help Alex prepare for his make-up exam? What does Alex have to do to help himself during the test?
- How does Lamont follow his dream of being a player in the NBA?
- How does the team win without Lamont as their coach?

Vocabulary:

Menorah, yarmulke, Chanukah, rabbi, symbolism, kosher, festival, traditions, customs

Have students use a dictionary to define each word or term above. Students can arrange the words on a piece of graph paper to create a crossword puzzle and come up with their own clues for each term.

LANGUAGE ARTS:

Activity #1: Journal Entry

Background Information: Alex and his teammates had to overcome many obstacles throughout the basketball season; how did these obstacles transform them into better players and a more confident team?

Brainstorm: Have students think about the following ideas from Alex's point of view (have them express their thoughts in the first person):

- Needing a coach
- Finding a Judah
- Improving as a team
- Facing setbacks (no place to play, getting kicked off the team, mother's feelings toward Lamont and basketball)
- Losing Lamont as the coach
- Playing in the tournament
- Championship game (the generator, Lamont returning)

Discuss student ideas and list several responses on the board. Have students use those responses (as well as their own) to write five journal entries from Alex's point of view. Each entry should reflect, in chronological order, a different event within the story.



Extension: Have students write about the same events from another character's point of view:

- Lamont Carr
- Dr. Schlotsky
- Another team member
- Rabbi Lewis

Activity #2:

Background Information: In the film, Alex's mother is a doctor and has high aspirations for her son to follow in her footsteps. She doesn't feel as if basketball can take her son anywhere. She even goes so far as to get him into a program to "shadow" a leading physician. On the other hand, Alex is uninterested in what his mother has planned for him. He dreams of being a professional basketball player, memorizes player names and statistics, and practices continuously.

Brainstorm: Ask students to discuss different career choices that they have always "dreamed" of. On the board, list several of the possible career opportunities that students discuss (if some choose the same career, they can work together as partners). Provide books and Internet access for students to research and discover different aspects of their career choice as well as perhaps explore a career they know little about.

Have students complete a job description form and then create a resume that answers the following:

Job description (<http://www.yahooligans.com> [or another search engine] for students to gather more information):

- Type of career
- Salary
- Work hours
- Daily activities
- Amount of education needed

Resume:

- Name and address
- Amount of schooling
- Student strengths (friendliness, honesty, punctuality, etc.)
- Clubs or school projects the student has been involved in
- Sports or team competitions
- Grades
- Any awards (student of the month, perfect attendance, etc.)

Extension: Invite various career people into the classroom as a type of "job fair" in which students may talk to working adults and show off their own resumes; this gives students an opportunity to test their beliefs/ideas/preconceptions against the real-world experiences of the classroom guests.

Activity #3:

Background information: At the beginning of the film, Alex sees Lamont shooting hoops and decides to convince him to coach his team, even if it's just for an hour. He persuades him to coach for \$40, \$20 at the beginning and the remainder due at the end. For the first two sessions, all the team members pitch in, but



by the third and fourth sessions most are complaining about their lack of money and suspicious parents. Alex, therefore, has to come up with more cash by selling his "Dr. J" card. Unfortunately, this does not bring in enough money to pay Lamont who has to fix his van in order to continue practicing with the team, so the kids launch their own business selling coffee on the corner.

Brainstorm: Arrange students into small groups and have them list several different practical ways, other than selling coffee or basketball cards, that the team might use to earn money. Some examples are:

- Lemonade stand
- Babysitting service
- Mowing lawns
- Recycling cans
- Car wash
- Dog walking/pet care
- Working at home for money
- Not spending allowances

After the groups have come up with several possibilities, students need to present a business plan to the class using one of their ideas. Groups could choose one or more of the following ways to present their information:

- Create an advertisement illustrating the business on a poster board
- Create and perform a commercial inviting people to come and check out the business
- Write an ad to be placed in the newspaper that lists various qualities about the business that might encourage people to come and see what is for sale
- Turn in an essay with detailed descriptions about how they decided on the business, how it will be run, what are the roles of each member in the group, who they are selling to, how much the expenses and supplies will be, etc.

Extension: Students can watch different commercials and describe what products each one is selling, and with what type of advertising technique: propaganda, bandwagon, persuasion, etc.

Activity #4:

Background information: Throughout the film, Lamont continues to hope that he'll be able to leave coaching and pursue his dream of playing for the NBA. Towards the end of the film, he gets an offer to play for the Philadelphia 76ers on a 10-day contract. Unfortunately for the Lions, Lamont's contract begins around the same time as the tournament does -- the one the team has been practicing so hard for. Against the wishes of everyone on the team, Lamont decides to accept the contract.

Brainstorm: Divide students into two debate teams. One team needs to come up with all the pros and cons of Lamont staying with the Lions and forgetting about the 76ers. The other team needs to come up with the pros and cons of Lamont accepting the 76ers' offer and leaving his coaching position with the Lions. Each debate team also needs to draw up a list of questions to ask the opposing team during the debate.

Teams will be given time to prepare their arguments and questions and then will decide which team will make its arguments first during the actual debate. Each team member will have two minutes to argue/discuss the various points on the team's list in order to make the case for whether Lamont should go or stay. A suggested time for the debate is 25 minutes depending on the amount of student participation and preparation. At the conclusion of the debate, students need to discuss ways they might have been more



effective in their arguments and should also write a short paragraph describing what took place.

Extension: Create a school debate team that might continue to branch out and possibly become part of debate competitions.

Activity #5:

Background information: The parents and principal in this film are not terribly happy to have Lamont coaching their kids. The basketball team members, Rabbi Lewis, and Alex's dad are continuously figuring out ways to keep the parents and principal at bay until they, too, can understand how beneficial Lamont's coaching is to the players and to the school.

Brainstorm: Extend the story by adding that, in order for Lamont to continue coaching, the team members have to write a letter to the principal persuading her to allow Lamont to stay.

Prior to this lesson, students should have a general idea of what makes up a persuasive letter. Some of the elements might include:

- Introduction that gets the reader's attention
- A clearly identified focus for the letter
- Logical reasons supporting the focus
- Good punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
- A conclusion that summarizes why the recipient of the letter should agree with the letter's focus

Have the whole class create a model persuasive letter (on another topic) so that all students get a clear idea of what their letter should be like. Give students time to write their own letter to the principal persuading her to allow Lamont to coach the team.

Extension: Students could write a persuasive letter to their own principal about something they want changed at the school.

Activity #6:

Background information: Throughout the entire film, Alex has various flashbacks that connect him and his team to Judah and the Maccabees going up against the Greeks. In addition, Alex and the team keep finding various similarities between Judah and Lamont. These types of inferences represent *symbolism*, a technique employed throughout the film.

On the website <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>, symbolism is defined as the practice of representing things by means of symbols, or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships.

Brainstorm: Discuss and define the term *symbolism* with students and have them list examples of where it is used during the film. Some examples are:

- Lamont's license plate with the initials of Judah Maccabee and the year (JM165) that the Maccabees drove out the invaders and reclaimed the temple
- Lamont's dad's name (Matthew) was similar to Judah's dad's name (Matthias)
- Lamont and Judah share the same nickname, "The Hammer"
- Lamont and Judah have an equal number of brothers (four)



- The small number of Hebrew Academy Lions compared to their opponents reflects the way the Maccabees were outnumbered by the Greeks
- The generator miraculously lasting to the end of the game compares with the oil for the Maccabees' lamp lasting eight days instead of only one

To determine if students have a general grasp of the concept of symbolism, have students list several symbols associated with the United States:

- The flag (stars symbolize the 50 states, 13 red and white stripes symbolize the original 13 colonies)
- Eagle (symbolizes freedom)
- Olive branch (symbolizes peace)
- Individual state flags (symbolism varies state by state)

PHYSICAL EDUCATION:

Activity #1:

Background information: When Alex asks Lamont Carr to coach his team, he isn't really prepared for the amount of physical exertion Lamont will require of him and his fellow players. Lamont makes it clear to the team that, other than sheer love of the game, conditioning is the most important component of a winning team. From the very first practice, Lamont has them doing 17/55s, a sideline-to-sideline running drill, until everyone on the team can complete one in 55 seconds or less.

Brainstorm: As an example to students of how to get in shape for any team sport, have them try to accomplish a 17/55. Divide the class into groups to see which can meet the challenge in the fastest time. This is a good way to promote exercise and physical activity in the classroom.

This film is largely about a boy wanting his team to be competitive enough to have a chance at winning an upcoming basketball tournament. Have students learn the rules of basketball and create their own basketball teams and tournament. For a more detailed account of the rules visit the website http://www.nba.com/analysis/rules_index.html.

Some of the basic rules of basketball are listed below:

- Rule 1 - must have a basketball and a ten-foot basketball goal
- Rule 2 - must dribble consistently and then pass or shoot the ball once you stop dribbling or you will be subject to a "walking" violation
- Rule 3 - you cannot dribble the ball and then pick it up and dribble again or you will be subject to a "double-dribble" violation
- Rule 4 - the defender cannot make physical contact with any player or it is considered a foul
- Rule 5 - each team has five players on the court at any one time
- Rule 6 - the ball may not go out of bounds or it is given to the opposing team

Extension: Invite a basketball player from a local college or high school to visit your classroom and answer any student questions. Have the class attend a local high school basketball event.



SOCIAL STUDIES:

Activity #1:

Background information: Due to the nature of the film, it might be of interest to the students to know a bit of background on the Jewish people.

Brainstorm: Help students sort out and gain an understanding of Jewish history by having them create a timeline that lists chronological events. You might want to reference the following website:
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/history/timeline.html>.

970-931 BC	Solomon constructs the first temple
587-586 BC	First temple destroyed
520-515 BC	Temple rebuilt
450 BC (approx.)	Torah gains recognition as Jewish scripture
168 BC	Greek king Antiochus Epiphanies takes over Jerusalem and desecrates the temple
166-160 BC	Maccabees recapture the temple from the Greeks and rededicate it
160 BC	Judah Maccabee dies
66-73 AD	Masada (rebellion against the Roman Empire)

Have students choose one of the above events to do further research and present it to the class. The events from 168 BC to 73 AD will have the most information. Provide books and Internet access so students can research their event.

Activity #2:

Background information: The students in the film are studying Chanukah and the events related to the lighting of the menorah. The Jewish people celebrate eight days of Chanukah because the oil for the Maccabees' lamp lasted eight days instead of only one. The lighting of the menorah celebrates this miracle, with a candle lit to represent each of the eight days. Chanukah is also celebrated to commemorate the victory of the few (the Maccabees) over the many (the Greeks), as well as the purification of the temple.

Brainstorm: Discuss this holiday with students from the viewpoint that there are many holidays only celebrated by specific cultures. Show various clips from the film while describing the Chanukah holiday including the lighting of the menorah.

Teach the students the well-known Jewish game associated with Chanukah and played with a *dreidel*. Details are at <http://www.holidays.net/chanukah/dreidel.html>.

The dreidel is a four-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side. The letters together mean "a great miracle happened there." The four letters are:

- Shin ש
- Hey ה
- Gimel ג
- Nun נ



In order for students to play the game they need to know the rules for each letter (a suggested item to play with is small candy):

- Shin ן - player puts something in the middle
- Hey ה - player takes half of what is in the middle
- Gimel ג - player takes everything from the middle
- Nun נ - player does nothing

Allow students playing time and have them record how many times they land on a certain letter. After the playing time is over, encourage students to discuss the elements of the game and what it represents to the Jewish people.

Extension: Have students write about a tradition that their family celebrates and then have them share it with the class.

Activity #3:

Background information: During the film, Alex and his teammates are searching for a Judah Maccabee to lead them to victory the way that the Judah Maccabee they are learning about in school led the Jews to victory against the Greeks. Alex finds a coach, Lamont Carr, who has a lot of things in common with Judah Maccabee.

Reference the following website for more detailed information regarding Judah Maccabee:
<http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/maccabees/pages/jmaccabee.html>

Judah Maccabee:

- Grew up 20 miles outside of Jerusalem
- One of five boys
- His father, Matthias, brought his sons up to be faithful to Jewish traditions
- When Judah was still a young man, the Greek king Antiochus Epiphany came to power
- Judah's father Matthias refused to follow an order given by a Greek officer so he and his family were forced into exile
- During this period of exile, Judah gathered together a number of Jews still loyal to Judaism and not the king
- This small group of Jews fought a more numerous foe who tried to control them, and were still victorious
- After several years of fighting, they decided to enter Jerusalem and rededicate the temple that Antiochus Epiphany had desecrated
- In order for Judah to rededicate the temple, he needed to light the holy lamp; however, there was only enough oil for one day and the lamp needed to remain ablaze for eight days; miraculously, the oil lasted eight days and nights, which is what the Chanukah holiday commemorates
- Judah died in 160 BC, but his memory lives on in Jewish culture

Brainstorm: Using the information listed above, and from the website reference and the film, have students write a biography of Judah Maccabee and his contributions to the Jewish people. The biography should focus on his accomplishments and his influence upon modern-day Jewish celebrations.



RESOURCES

Internet

Chanukah

<http://www.zuzu.org/chan.html>

Chanukah as seen through the eyes of sixth graders in New York City.

Happy Chanukah

<http://www.holidays.net/chanukah>

The story of Chanukah, the menorah, and the dreidel game.

Online Chanukah Games

<http://www.kidsdomain.com/games/chan.html>

Contains a variety of Chanukah games for children to play, as well as quizzes.

NBA

http://www.nba.com/analysis/rules_index.html

Details the rules of basketball.

Holiday Fun and Games

<http://www.torahtots.com/holidays/chanukah/chanuk.htm>

Contains interactive games and coloring pages about Chanukah.

Virtual Chanukah

<http://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah>

Contains information about Chanukah, games, and worldwide menorah lightings.

Judah Maccabee

<http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/maccabees/pages/jmaccabee.html>

Biographical information on Judah Maccabee.

Hot Shot Business

<http://www.disney.go.com/hotshot/hsb.html>

Lets you establish a business to see how much money you can make in six weeks.

Lemonade Stand

<http://www.lemonadegame.com>

Run a lemonade stand and try to make as much money as possible in 30 days.

Lighting the Menorah

<http://www.beingjewish.com/yomtov/chanukah/menorah.html>

Contains information about the menorah and the exact rules for lighting the candles. Also lists the various prayers recited during the ceremony.



Books

A Job for Jenny Archer, by Ellen Conford, Little Brown, 1990.

A Sweet Year: A Taste for the Jewish Holidays, by Mark Podwal, Doubleday, 2003.

Celebrate! Stories of the Jewish Holidays, by Gilda Berger, Scholastic, 2002.

Classic Jewish Tales, by David Sokoloff, Spi Books, 2003.

Chanukah, by Dana Rav, Children's Press, 2000.

Chanukah: A Joyous Celebration, by Daniel Wolk, Peter Pauper Press, 1998.

Hanukkah Fun: Great Things to Make and Do, by Judy Bastyra, Kingfisher, 2003.

Hanukkah (World of Holidays), by Anne Clark, Raintree, 1998.

How I Saved Hanukkah, by Amy Koss, Puffin Books, 2000.

Judaism (Eye Witness Books), Dorling Kindersly Publishing, 2003.

Like a Maccabee, by Raymond Zwerin, Urj Press, 1991.

Masada, by Neil Waldman, Boyds Mills Press, 2003.

When Mindy Saved Hanukkah, by Eric Kimmel, Scholastic, 1998.