



Latke/Hamantash Debate

Topic

Purim, Hanukkah

Grade Level(s)

K to PhD

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Debate the merits of latkes and hamantashen
- Think creatively about the merits of latkes and hamantashen
- Enjoy tasty holiday treats

Materials needed

- Latkes
- Hamantashen

Technology needed

- PowerPoint or other presentation software and projector (optional)

Background for Teachers

The Latke-Hamantash^{*} Debate is a tradition that began at the University of Chicago in 1946, and it has been held annually since then. At the debate, generally held before Hanukkah each year, university professors debate the relative merits of the two delicious Jewish holiday treats as a way to provide levity to a serious academic environment. Since then, other Latke-Hamantash debates have popped up on other university campuses. At each location, debaters use their own areas of expertise to convince the other side which food is superior.

While culinary history indicates that both the hamantash and the latke likely appeared on the Jewish food scene in the 19th century (though it should be noted that both dishes are based on older Italian ones), the debate over which is better is really an eternally existential one. Which is superior: the sharp angles of the triangle or the infinite line of the circle? Is it better to add flavor through filling or dipping? Which has more meaning: the heavenly asteroids that look like potatoes or the majestic mountains in the shape of hamantashen? The Latke-Hamantash Debate tries to answer these questions and more.

Examples of recent debates can be found [here](#) and [here](#).



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Description of Activities

1. Remember that the goal of the Latke/Hamantash Debate is to have fun.
2. Pick sides for the debate. This can be done based on which delicacy people like better, which people work best together, or which will be able to offer the most insightful/humorous arguments for each side. There should also be a moderator to introduce the debate.
 - a. It should be noted that a good latke/hamantash debater will be able to present arguments for both sides (sort of like the Sage Sumakhus, who was known to be able to give 48 reasons why an item was ritually pure and 48 reasons why the same item was ritually impure; see Tractate Eruvin 13b)
3. Debaters create their presentations to defend their foods. While the traditional method of the debate is to require debaters to use their fields of expertise (e.g. philosophy, soccer, law) to defend their positions, debaters can also be permitted to use whatever arguments work best for them. Some ideas of categories that people can debate:
 - Taste
 - Texture
 - Physical Beauty
 - Music (one looks like a triangle, the other perhaps like a drum)
 - Nutritional (e.g. butter/margarine vs. oil)
 - Sports (e.g. which one makes a better projectile for playing catch)
 - Geopolitical (e.g. which one better represents the traits needed to engage in dialogue with foreign nations)
 - Metaphorical (eating a villain's hat vs. cooking in miracle oil)
4. Encourage debaters to use props, video, slideshows, art, music, etc. to emphasize their points.
5. Remember that, in the end, the winners are the people who get to enjoy tasting the subjects under debate.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For debaters who need more assistance

- Students who prefer not to debate can make signs and draw pictures to hang in support of their team.
- Provide arguments in advance for people to read and expand on.

For debaters who need extension opportunities

- Students research other food traditions (from different cultures) connected to the holidays of Hanukkah and Purim.



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Ways to Get the Community Involved

- Set up an Instagram page and ask people to post their pictures/arguments.
- Create a graffiti wall in your school and ask people to add their positions. Better yet, create one wall in the shape of a latke and one wall in the shape of a hamantash and have people write their arguments on the appropriate wall.
- Livestream the debate to the community. Use [Poll Everywhere](#) to see which is the preferred delicacy. Ask viewers to vote at different times during the debate to see if opinions change.
- Hand out graggers. Ask people to use the graggers instead of cheering when a particularly good argument is made during the live debate.
- Ask audience members to come dressed as their preferred food.
- Gather recipes for each dish from community members and collect the recipes into a latke/hamantash cookbook. Sell the cookbooks and donate the proceeds to tzedakah.

*Note: "Hamantash" refers to one pastry, while "hamantashen" refers to more than one. The proper spelling of the name of the filled three-cornered pastries is another popular debate. While the most popular way to spell the name is "hamantaschen," the University of Chicago, which has its own style, drops the "c." Since the modern debate began there, this debate drops the "c" as well.