



Super Abraham

Topic

Torah, Daily Life & Sacred Moments

Grade Level(s)

5th – 12th

Big Ideas

- Being a superhero does not require superpowers but rather a strong belief in something greater than oneself
- Everyone has something within them that can make them a superhero.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Consider how the Abraham portrayed in the narrative of the 4 and 5 kings is similar to / different from how Abraham is portrayed in other places in the Torah.
2. Compare how Abraham rates as a superhero to other more traditional superheroes
3. Create their own superhero persona and narrative

Materials / Technology Needed

- A comic book creator like [Canva](#) (web-based and available for both iOS and Android) or [Pixton](#) (web-based)
- Text of [Beresheet 14](#)

Background for Teachers

Look! Out on the battlefield. It's a bird! It's a plane! No! It's Abraham!

The biblical figure of Abraham is generally thought of as the first Jew, but a superhero? Not usually. However, an often-overlooked narrative of the Torah involves what could be a superhero storyline.

While the idea of the hero who fights for what is right and good is an old one, the idea of the superhero is a relatively new one. The exact date of the first superhero is murky, but the idea seems to have come about at the beginning of the 20th century, with popularity soaring with the introduction of Superman in 1938. Since that time, superheroes with superpowers (e.g. Superman, Wonder Woman, Spiderman) and those who rely on their wiles and/or technology (e.g. Batman, Iron Man) have captured the imagination as they fought to protect people and a proper way of life.



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The superhero trope shows up in the Torah in the narrative of the kidnapping of Lot and Abraham's efforts to rescue him.* Often referred to as the War of the Four Kings against the Five Kings, the narrative shows Abraham as an almost superhuman warrior, able to defeat entire armies with a minimum of support. In this narrative, four kings led by Chedorlaomer of Elam conquer the Valley of Siddim, ruled by five kings, and kidnap Lot. When Abraham hears about Lot's kidnapping, he gets together 318 men, rescues Lot, and defeats the Four Kings. Importantly, Abraham takes no spoils from his victory but rather focuses on saving Lot and the others captured (*Beresheet* 14).

Abraham's efforts seem almost superhuman as he takes a small band of men and defeats the powerful Four Kings. In fact, some even state that Abraham took only his servant Eliezer into battle with him (*Nedarim* 32a and quoted in Rashi *Beresheet* 14:14). His refusal to even accept reward from the Five Kings, whom he helped with his efforts, fits with the traditional trope of the superhero who acts only for what is right and good.**

*To give further context to this event in Abraham's life, it is worth considering some of his other major life events. These include listening to God's command to leave his home (*Beresheet* 12:1 – 8), going out of his way to welcome guests into his home (*Beresheet* 18: 1 – 8), negotiating with God to save the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Beresheet* 18:16 – 33), and the *Akeidah* (The Binding of Isaac, *Beresheet* 22)

**There has been a revisionist superhero trend in the last couple of decades that focuses on the dark side of being a superhero, whether from origin stories or just the idea that superheroes are no better than masked vigilantes. While that might be an interesting area of exploration for older or more advanced students (see Differentiation Options), that is not the focus of this activity. Rather, this activity focuses on the more traditional angle of the superhero as someone who fights “bad guys” for the good of society.

Description of Activities

1. Ask: Who is your favorite superhero?
2. Brainstorm: What makes these individuals superheroes? Put the characteristics into two columns: Superhuman Characteristics (e.g. fly, lift cars, communicate with aquatic animals) and Things Regular People Can Do (e.g. stand up for those unable to stand up for themselves, use cool tech tools to fight villains).
3. Discuss the narrative of the Four Kings against the Five Kings
 - a. For younger students: Relate the narrative of the four kings vs. the five kings. [This can be a dramatic retelling.] Make sure to emphasize Abraham's superhuman ability to defeat a huge army almost singlehandedly. Also make sure to emphasize that Abraham participated in the war reluctantly and did so only to help his nephew Lot.
 - b. For older students: Engage with the text about the war.



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- i. If in a classroom, divide in *chavruta* pairs for students to read and understand the text.
 - ii. If doing over videoconference, send students to breakout rooms, in pairs if possible. If breakout rooms are not an option, read and discuss the text together.
 - iii. Discussion should focus on the following questions: Who is fighting the war? What precipitated the war? What happened to Lot, Abraham's nephew? Why might Abraham not participate in the war? Why might he be motivated to participate in the war? What does Abraham accomplish in the war? What spoils does he take at the end? What spoils does he reject? What ultimately was his goal in joining the war?
4. Discuss how might Abraham be considered a superhero. What characteristics and actions lead to this conclusion? Discussion could center around his superhuman ability to win a war almost singlehandedly, his single-minded efforts to save his nephew, etc.
 - a. To add depth to the discussion, consider how the Abraham of this narrative seems like the same Abraham that is seen in other places in the Torah and how he seems out of character in this narrative. [Could this even be a secret identity?]
5. Compare Abraham's superhero characteristics to those from the earlier brainstorm.
6. Ask students what it takes to be a superhero. Does someone need a superhuman power, or can someone become a superhero with what they have? Encourage students to identify their own superhero characteristics.
7. Students create a comic book about their own superhero alter egos. Students will need to:
 - a. Identify what their superpowers are. [Note that these are not meant to be superhuman traits like the ability to fly or speak to marine animals but rather their actual abilities that make them everyday superheroes.]
 - b. Come up with a superhero name.
 - c. Create an appropriate superhero outfit.
 - d. Use either art supplies or a comic creator app to create their comic.
8. Remind students that a good superhero comic book shows the superhero swooping in to save the day.



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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 learners who need more assistance

- Students pick one thing they know about Abraham and demonstrate why it is something that might be characteristic of a superhero.
- Students either draw themselves doing something heroic or make a list of their heroic characteristics.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Students explore other narratives of the *Tanakh* that might include superhero tropes. These narratives might include Rebecca watering the camels (STEM extension to do the math of just how much water she would have had to carry to water all of them), Joshua conquering Jericho, and David defeating the Philistine armies (or Goliath).
- Students explore what it means to work outside the law to work as a superhero and how that compares with how Biblical “superheroes” work within or outside of societal norms.