

*The Devil's Arithmetic*  
(as published in 1990 by Haffin Books)

## KWHL Strategy

### Purpose

The KWHL strategy is a good method to help students reflect on what they already know about a subject, what they want to learn about the subject, how to find out what they want to know about the subject, and finally to reflect on what they learned from the experience.

### Rationale

As many students will likely be unfamiliar with Jewish customs, I think that this strategy would be well-suited to helping students gather some good background information that will help them better understand many of the cultural references found in the text. This will also help them to better understand the richness and complexity of Jewish culture, which should in turn help them better appreciate the way that the novel celebrates the Jews' ability to rise above adversity. As references to Jewish customs appear right at the books beginning, this strategy would be best used prior to beginning the novel.

### Directions

**Step One:** Pass out the sheet with the KWHL chart. Tell students to write down what they already know about or what comes to mind when they think of Jewish customs or traditions. If they are hesitant, give them prompts such as what they may know about Passover (anything about Elijah, the food they eat, the history behind it), or what they've seen in popular movies such as *Yentl* (traditional role of women, religious studies) or *Fiddler on the Roof* (the importance of tradition, family ties, their history of persecution). After they've had enough time to brainstorm and write down some ideas, ask them to share some of their best ideas with the class, and record any appropriate response (even if it is incorrect) on an overhead transparency copy of the chart while discussing the student responses.

**Step Two:** Use the discussion on the things students already know to begin a discussion on what they want to know. This can be done by asking questions about things they already know, and also by listing more unrelated things that the students would like to learn more about (see chart for suggestions). Encourage them to take about five to ten minutes to record their own and the class's ideas on their own charts. Then, divide them into groups of four or five. Give the groups

about five minutes to agree on a topic that they would like to research together. Have them sign up to ensure that each group is researching a different topic.

**Step Three:** Now, discuss with students ways in which they can find out the information that they want to know. Make sure to share any information on school media center resources with them, as well as any online resources that may be available.

**Step Four:** Set aside a class period for student research. This will likely involve a trip to the school's media center and/or computer lab. If necessary, teach students basic internet and electronic database research skills. Tell them to keep track of what they learn (it may be wise to ask them to limit their research to one of their questions if many questions are broad and to ensure that all the questions are covered), and organize their information into a creative presentation (using PowerPoint, a poster, skit, etc.) to be shared with the class. Also tell them to keep track of any new questions that arise while they research.

**Step Five:** Have the groups present their research, asking those who are listening to record what they learn on their KWHL charts. Each presentation should take five to ten minutes. After the presentations, get out the class KWHL transparency chart. Ask the students to help you record what they collectively learned. Tell the students to retain their charts, so they can refer to it while reading the novel, as other questions may arise.

**Assessment:** The KWHL class chart, along with turned in copies of the students' individual KWHL charts, can help the teacher assess how much background knowledge students will have going into the text, and may highlight information that still needs to be covered for optimum reading comprehension. It can also help the teacher ensure that students are gaining a cultural appreciation that will better prepare them for this powerful book.

### *KWSL* Chart (Example)

<i>What I Know</i>	<i>What I Want To Know</i>	<i>How to Find Out What I Want to Know</i>
<p>Jews celebrate Passover instead of Easter and Hanukkah instead of Christmas.</p> <p>They eat unleavened bread and herbs.</p> <p>They leave an extra seat for the prophet Elijah.</p> <p>There are many Jewish celebrations.</p> <p>Unlike Christians, Jews do not believe that their Messiah has come yet.</p>	<p>Why do Jews have so many celebrations?</p> <p>What is the significance behind the bread and herbs?</p> <p>What is a “Seder” dinner?</p> <p>Who are some famous Jews? Do they practice these cultural customs?</p> <p>Do Jews still have many of the same traditions that they used to?</p>	<p>Media Center</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encyclopedia – look up “Passover,” “Jewish,” “Hanukkah,” etc.</li> <li>• Use the computer to look up nonfiction books about Jews and their traditions.</li> </ul> <p>Online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/32812/jewish/About-Chabad.org.htm">http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/32812/jewish/About-Chabad.org.htm</a> – this website’s purpose is to provide reliable information concerning Judaism to Jews and the public.</li> </ul>
<b><i>What I Learned</i></b>		
<p>Hanukkah is not celebrated <i>instead</i> of Christmas – it coincidentally coincides with the Christian holiday.</p> <p>Passover is celebrated to commemorate when the Destroying Angel passed over the Israelites during the plagues in Egypt.</p> <p>Traditionally, Jews read the Torah all night on the first night of Shavuot.</p> <p>The Seder dinner is the dinner eaten at Passover.</p>		

*KWL Chart – What do we know about Jewish customs?*

<i>What I Know</i>	<i>What I Want To Know</i>	<i>How to Find Out What I Want to Know</i>
<i>What I Learned</i>		

