SCROLL & STONE - GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES: JUDAISM

Shabbat in the home and the synagogue

A starting point for teachers to adapt - a GCSE lesson on what Shabbat is, why Jews keep it, and how two reasons in the Torah became candles, wine, bread, song and a box of spices.

Matched to AQA GCSE Religious Studies A (8062) 3.1.6.2; Pearson Edexcel GCSE Religious Studies B (1RB0) Area of Study 1F, 3.6; OCR GCSE Religious Studies (J625/03), Practices: Shabbat.

scrollandstone.org

16 November 2026

DRAFT - AWAITING THE OWNER'S REVIEW ROUND

LESSON PLAN

Shabbat in the home and the synagogue

A starting point for teachers to adapt to their own classes - the route, groupings and timings below are ideas to build on, not a fixed script.

Level: GCSE Religious Studies (Judaism); usable with KS3 RE using the KS3 route
Suggested length: 60 minutes, plus an optional 20-minute extension
Materials: one printed pupil worksheet per pupil, pencils. A school-approved Tenakh or Sefaria on the teacher's screen if you want to show Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5 and Exodus 31 side by side.

Specification match

Wording below is quoted or closely summarised from each board's current published specification (checked 16 November 2026). Check your own centre's entry before teaching.

Board and code	Content this pack teaches	Not covered here
AQA GCSE Religious Studies A **8062**, Component 1, 3.1.6 Judaism, 3.1.6.2 Practices: The synagogue and worship	"Shabbat in the home and synagogue and its significance." Supports "Worship in the home and private prayer."	Synagogue design and the Amidah (see the synagogue pack).
Pearson Edexcel GCSE Religious Studies B **1RB0**, Paper 1, Area of Study 1F Judaism, Section 3 Living the Jewish Life, **3.6**	"The nature, features, history and purpose of celebrating Shabbat ... in the home and in the synagogue, including interpretations of Exodus 31:12-18; why the celebration of Shabbat is important for the Jewish community and the individual today."	Orthodox and Reform understandings in detail (see the divergent-views task).
OCR GCSE Religious Studies **J625/03** Judaism, Practices: Shabbat	Meaning, origins and significance of Shabbat; its traditions and mitzvot; preparation, candle lighting, the Shabbat meal, Kiddush and Havdalah; issues about what is prohibited in the modern world. Suggested texts Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11.	The detailed order of the Shabbat morning service.

Purpose and required outcome

Pupils explain how Shabbat is kept at home and in the synagogue, and why. They start from the Torah's two versions of the commandment, which give two different reasons, and follow those reasons into practice. Along the way they meet evidence from outside the tradition: Roman writers who noticed, and disliked, the Jewish day of rest. The lesson asks what each source tells us. It does not ask pupils to judge a religious belief.

Every pupil completes the core route: the two-reasons task, the Friday-to-Saturday sequence, one practice-meaning-source chain, the evidence timeline, one board-matched exam question and an exit ticket.

By the end, pupils can:

- give the two reasons for Shabbat in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and the "sign" of Exodus 31;
- describe the main home rituals from candle lighting to Havdalah and say what each means; and
- use a source of wisdom and authority to explain why Shabbat matters to Jews today.

Suggested 60-minute route

Minutes	Required activity	Evidence and output
0-6	Introduce the layer key. Starter question: what would change in your week if one whole day had no work, no shopping and no screens?	Pupils annotate the layer key.
6-16	Teacher models cards A1-A3: "remember" (creation), "observe" (freedom from slavery), "a sign" (covenant).	Two-reasons table completed together.
16-30	Pairs put the Friday-to-Saturday practices in order and add the meaning of each.	Sequence table completed.
30-38	Pairs read cards B1-B3 and C1-C2: the thirty-nine categories, Kabbalat Shabbat, the Roman witnesses, the spice tower.	One chain completed; timeline ordered.
38-42	Feedback: the Roman writers are hostile witnesses. What can a hostile source still prove?	Oral check.
42-56	Individual exam practice for each pupil's own board.	AQA 6-mark, Edexcel 5-mark or OCR 6-mark answer.
56-60	Exit ticket.	One practice, one meaning, one source.

Optional extensions

- Divergent views (20 minutes): Shabbat in the modern world. Use the thirty-nine categories and the smartphone question on the worksheet, then add one Orthodox and one Reform view from the textbook or class notes.
- Plan the 12- or 15-mark evaluation question for your board.
- Compare Heschel's "palace in time" with the Shabbat table as "the smallest sanctuary". Which describes Shabbat better, and why?

Distinct outcomes

- **KS3 required output:** the completed sequence table and a four-sentence final response from the stems. Accept 60-90 words.
- **GCSE required output:** one board-matched exam answer that names a Shabbat practice, explains its meaning and refers accurately to a source of wisdom and authority.

Differentiation and access route

- **KS3 support:** read the cards aloud; complete the first two rows of the sequence together; offer the practices as cut-out strips to order.
- **GCSE stretch:** ask why the two versions of the commandment give different reasons, and whether Jews need to choose between them.
- **EAL:** pre-teach Kiddush, challah, Havdalah, melachah (work), sanctify and covenant.
- **SEND and large-print route:** print at 16-point type or present on a high-contrast screen. Use the reduced oral grid. A trusted adult may scribe verbatim, or the pupil may use speech-to-text.
- **Motor and handwriting access:** accept ordered strips, labelled sticky notes or an oral answer recorded by a scribe.
- **No-device route:** all required evidence is in the worksheet.

Sensitivity and context

- Shabbat is kept by Jewish families in Britain every week, in many different ways. Invite, never require, a Jewish pupil to share their own practice, and avoid suggesting that families who keep it differently are keeping it "wrongly".
- Do not ask pupils to perform the blessings or light candles as role play. Pictures, the words in translation and a description are enough.
- The Roman sources are hostile. Use them to show that Shabbat was visible and consistent, not to repeat their mockery.
- Observant Jewish pupils may be unable to attend Friday-evening or Saturday school events. If that comes up, it is a good live example of the lesson's content, handled with tact.

Teacher preparation

Read the teacher notes and source ledger. Every factual statement in this pack is traced there to a Scroll & Stone article or to a named primary text. The linked articles are good teacher reading and suitable extension reading for older pupils.

PUPIL WORKSHEET

Shabbat: why stop?

Name: _____ Class: _____

Layers of evidence

- **[S] Scripture:** the Tenakh, the written law, a source of wisdom and authority.
- **[R] Rabbinic and later teaching:** the Mishnah, the Talmud, codes of Jewish law and later Jewish teachers.
- **[M] Material evidence:** a real object you could go and see.
- **[O] Outside witness:** what non-Jewish writers recorded about Jews.
- **[P] Practice today:** what Jewish families and synagogues do now.

Word bank: rest, sanctify, Kiddush, challah, manna, covenant, sign, melachah (work), Havdalah, separation.

Part A - Two reasons and a sign

Shabbat runs from Friday evening, shortly before sunset, until nightfall on Saturday. The commandment to keep it is one of the Ten Commandments, and it appears twice in the Torah, with a different reason each time.

A1. "Remember" [S]

In Exodus 20:8-11 the commandment is to *remember* the Sabbath day, because God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Genesis 2:1-3 tells the same story: God finished the work of creation, rested on the seventh day, blessed it and made it holy.

Read more: Shabbat: A Palace in Time

A2. "Observe" [S]

In Deuteronomy 5:12-15 the commandment is to *observe* the Sabbath, and the reason is different: remember that you were a slave in Egypt. The rest is for everyone in the household: sons and daughters, servants, animals and "the stranger who is within your gates".

Read more: Shabbat: A Palace in Time

A3. "A sign between me and you" [S]

Exodus 31:12-18 calls the Sabbath a sign between God and the people of Israel throughout their generations, and a covenant for all time, because God made heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh.

Read the text: Exodus 31:12-18 (a school-approved Tenakh or Sefaria)

Text	The reason it gives for Shabbat	One way you might see that reason in Shabbat practice
Exodus 20 "remember"		
Deuteronomy 5 "observe"		
Exodus 31 "a sign"		

Part B - From Friday to Saturday night

Number these practices 1-8 in the order they happen, then add what each one means.

Order	Practice [P]	What it means
	Havdalah ("separation"): after nightfall on Saturday, when three stars can be seen, blessings over wine, sweet spices and a braided candle.	
	Candle lighting: at least two candles lit before sunset on Friday, often said to stand for "remember" and "observe". In many homes, especially Ashkenazi ones, the person lighting covers their eyes for the blessing.	
	Kiddush ("sanctification"): a blessing over a cup of wine that declares the day holy, in words from the account of creation.	
	Kabbalat Shabbat ("welcoming Shabbat"): the Friday evening synagogue service, with the hymn Lecha Dodi, which welcomes Shabbat as a bride.	

Order	Practice [P]	What it means
	Two challot: two plaited loaves, kept covered until their blessing, recalling the double portion of manna that fell on the sixth day so that none had to be gathered on the seventh.	
	Zemirot: table songs sung between the courses of the Friday night meal.	
	Saturday: synagogue, study, rest and long meals. The liturgy calls Shabbat a delight, oneg Shabbat.	
	Preparation: food cooked and the home made ready before Shabbat begins, because cooking and kindling a fire are among the kinds of work not done on Shabbat.	

Part C - Evidence cards

B1. The thirty-nine categories [R]

The Mishnah, compiled around 200 CE, lists thirty-nine main categories of work (melachot) that are not done on Shabbat (Mishnah Shabbat 7:2). They include sowing, ploughing, reaping, writing, erasing and kindling a fire. The tradition connects the list with the kinds of work used to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Jewish teachers have applied it to every new technology since, which is why there is a live discussion about smartphones on Shabbat.

Read more: Shabbat: A Palace in Time

B2. The blessings written into law [R]

The blessings of the Shabbat table, over the lights, over wine and over two loaves, are set out in the Shulchan Aruch, the code of Jewish law by Rabbi Joseph Karo, published in 1565. It is still a standard reference for observant practice.

Read more: The Shabbat Table

B3. A song from Safed [R]

Shlomo Alkabetz composed Lecha Dodi in Safed, in the Galilee, in the sixteenth century. The Kabbalat Shabbat service that grew around it spread from Safed to Jewish communities everywhere, and Lecha Dodi is sung in synagogues on Friday night today.

Read more: The Town on the Hill

C1. The Romans noticed [O]

The Roman historian Tacitus, writing around 110 CE, recorded that the Jews gave the seventh day to rest, and sneered at it as idleness (Histories, Book 5). The philosopher Seneca, in the first century CE, complained that Jews lost a seventh of their lives by resting; his words survive because Augustine quoted them in The City of God.

Read more: Shabbat: A Palace in Time

C2. A spice tower [M]

For Havdalah, many families keep sweet spices in a silver container, often shaped like a little tower. Among the oldest surviving spice towers is a German one of about 1550, thought to come from Frankfurt am Main, now in The Jewish Museum, New York. The blessing over the spices thanks God "who creates varied spices".

Read more: A Spice Tower

Evidence timeline - number from 1 (oldest) to 5 (most recent)

Order	Source	Date
	Shulchan Aruch [R]	1565
	Tacitus, Histories [O]	about 110 CE
	Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath [R]	1951
	Frankfurt spice tower [M]	about 1550
	Mishnah Shabbat [R]	about 200 CE

1. Tacitus did not like the Jews' day of rest. What can his hostile comment still prove?

Chain - practice, meaning, source

Practice [P]	What it means	Source of wisdom and authority [S] or [R]

Shabbat in the modern world

Jewish teachers have argued for centuries about how the thirty-nine categories apply to new things, from electric light to smartphones, and they do not all reach the same answer. The modern philosopher Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1951) called Shabbat "a palace in time which we build": a day for being rather than doing.

Add one difference between Orthodox and Reform approaches to Shabbat from your textbook or class notes:

Exam practice - answer the question for your board

These are practice questions written in each board's style for this pack. They are not real past-paper questions.

AQA (8062) - 6 marks. Explain two reasons why Jews mark the start of Shabbat at home. Refer to sacred writings or another source of Jewish belief and teaching in your answer.

Pearson Edexcel (1RB0) - 5 marks. Explain two reasons why celebrating Shabbat is important for Jews today. In your answer you must refer to a source of wisdom and authority.

OCR (J625/03) - 6 marks. Outline the importance of Havdalah for Jews.

KS3 route - complete all four lines

Shabbat begins when _____ and ends when _____.

One thing Jews do at home on Friday night is _____ because _____.

The Torah gives two reasons for Shabbat: _____ and _____.

Roman writers prove that _____.

Reduced oral grid - SEND / scribe route

Choose one Shabbat practice. Point, say or dictate an answer. A scribe may record your exact words.

My practice	When it happens	What it means	Where it comes from

Exit ticket

Finish this sentence: "On Shabbat Jews _____, which means _____, and this comes from _____."

Shabbat: teacher notes

Ideas for teachers to build on - adapt the wording, groupings and pacing below to your own class.

Status and source boundary

This is a text-only classroom draft. It reproduces no images. Every factual statement is traced in the source ledger below. The pack's sources do not describe the Shabbat morning synagogue service in detail or set out specific Orthodox and Reform positions, so the pack points pupils to their textbook for those rather than filling the gap with unsourced claims.

Answers and accepted alternatives

Two reasons and a sign

Text	Reason	Seen in practice
Exodus 20	God rested on the seventh day of creation.	Kiddush, which uses words from the creation account; rest from creative work (the thirty-nine categories).
Deuteronomy 5	Remember slavery in Egypt; give rest to everyone, including servants, animals and strangers.	No one in the household works; a day free from being made to work. Accept "freedom".
Exodus 31	A sign of the covenant between God and Israel for all generations.	Keeping Shabbat every week as a mark of Jewish identity. Accept Ahad Ha'am's idea that Shabbat has kept the Jews.

Friday-to-Saturday order

1 Preparation; 2 Candle lighting; 3 Kabbalat Shabbat; 4 Kiddush; 5 Two challot; 6 Zemirot; 7 Saturday; 8 Havdalah. Accept candle lighting before or after Kabbalat Shabbat if the pupil explains that the candles are lit at home before sunset, and accept Kiddush and challah in either order if the pupil knows both come at the start of the meal (the tradition is wine first, then bread).

Meanings to credit: candles mark the threshold into holy time and the two commands "remember" and "observe"; Kiddush declares the day holy; two loaves recall the double manna (Exodus 16); zemirot make the meal joyful; Saturday rest is a day of delight; Havdalah separates holy time from the working week, and the spices comfort the household as Shabbat leaves. A rabbinic tradition holds that each Jew has an extra soul on Shabbat, which leaves when the day ends.

Timeline

1 Tacitus (about 110 CE); 2 Mishnah (about 200 CE); 3 Frankfurt spice tower (about 1550); 4 Shulchan Aruch (1565); 5 Heschel (1951). Question 1: a hostile writer has no reason to invent a practice he dislikes, so his comment is good evidence that Jews in the Roman world were known for resting on the seventh day. It does not tell us how Jews themselves understood the day.

Model answers

AQA 6-mark model (Shabbat in the home)

One way Jews celebrate Shabbat at home is by lighting at least two candles before sunset on Friday. This marks the moment ordinary time ends and holy time begins, and the two candles are often linked to the two versions of the commandment, "remember" in Exodus 20 and "observe" in Deuteronomy 5. A second way is the Friday night meal, which begins with Kiddush over wine and a blessing over two challot. Kiddush declares the day holy using words from the creation story, recalling Exodus 20:11, where God rested on the seventh day. The two loaves recall the double portion of manna in the wilderness, so the meal itself teaches the story of God providing for Israel.

Edexcel 5-mark model (importance of Shabbat)

Shabbat is important because it is a sign of the covenant. Exodus 31:12-18 calls the Sabbath a sign between God and Israel for all generations, so keeping it every week shows a Jew's commitment to that covenant. It is also important for the community and the family: the shared meal, Kiddush and the Friday night service bring people together every week, and the rest of Deuteronomy 5 is for everyone in the household, so no one is left working.

OCR 6-mark model (Havdalah)

Havdalah means "separation". It is said after nightfall on Saturday, when three stars are visible, and it marks the end of Shabbat and the return to the working week. Jews say blessings over a cup of wine, over sweet spices and over a braided candle with several wicks. The spices, often kept in a spice box or tower, give a sweet smell to comfort the household as Shabbat leaves; a rabbinic tradition says each Jew has an extra soul on Shabbat which departs at its end. Its central blessing praises God "who separates between holy and ordinary". Havdalah is important because it teaches that Jewish life is divided between holy and ordinary time, and it carries something of Shabbat into the week ahead.

Evaluation questions (12 or 15 marks) - planning frames only

- **AQA (12, plus up to 3 for SPaG):** "Shabbat is more important in the home than in the synagogue." Evaluate this statement.
- **Edexcel (12, plus 3 for SPaG on some questions):** "It is impossible to keep Shabbat properly in the modern world." Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

- **OCR (15):** "The most important thing about Shabbat is rest." Discuss this statement.

Useful arguments from this pack: home rituals (candles, Kiddush, challah, zemirot, Havdalah) against the synagogue's Kabbalat Shabbat; the thirty-nine categories and the continuing debate about new technology; the two reasons (creation and freedom) and the covenant sign; Heschel's "palace in time"; the Shabbat table as the household's sanctuary after the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE.

Marking checklist

1. Names a Shabbat practice accurately.
2. Explains what it means to Jews.
3. Names a relevant source of wisdom and authority.
4. Links the source to the practice, rather than placing it alongside.

Exam answers: use your board's published mark scheme and levels of response.

Misconceptions and language

- Shabbat is not "the Jewish Sunday", and it is not a day of gloom. The tradition calls it a delight.
- The rest is not simply "doing nothing". The thirty-nine categories are specific kinds of creative work.
- Shabbat starts on Friday evening, not Saturday morning: the Jewish day begins in the evening ("there was evening and there was morning", Genesis 1:5).
- Jews do not all keep Shabbat in the same way. Avoid "Jews can't ..."; prefer "many observant Jews do not ...".

Source ledger

Every statement in the pupil worksheet, with where to check it. Articles are on scrollandstone.org; primary texts are on Sefaria (sefaria.org).

Statement	Where to check it
Two versions of the commandment: "remember" (creation, Exodus 20) and "observe" (slavery in Egypt, everyone rests, Deuteronomy 5).	Shabbat: A Palace in Time; Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Genesis 2:1-3; Genesis 1:5 (the day begins in the evening)
The Sabbath as a sign and a covenant for all generations.	Exodus 31:12-18

Statement	Where to check it
Candles, at least two, "remember" and "observe"; eyes covered; Kiddush over wine with words from creation; two covered challot for the double manna; zemirot.	The Shabbat Table; Shabbat: A Palace in Time; Exodus 16:22-29
Saturday: synagogue, study, rest, meals; oneg Shabbat; Havdalah after nightfall when three stars are visible, with braided candle, spices, wine and blessings.	Shabbat: A Palace in Time
Mishnah Shabbat 7:2, thirty-nine categories; examples; Tabernacle link; application to new technology.	Shabbat: A Palace in Time
Shulchan Aruch, Joseph Karo, 1565: laws of lights, Kiddush and two loaves.	The Shabbat Table
Lecha Dodi by Shlomo Alkabetz in Safed; Kabbalat Shabbat spreads; Shabbat welcomed as a bride.	The Town on the Hill
Tacitus, Histories Book 5, about 110 CE; Seneca's complaint preserved by Augustine, City of God Book 6.	Shabbat: A Palace in Time
Havdalah blessing "who separates between holy and ordinary".	The Havdalah liturgy in any siddur
Spice tower: Havdalah blessing "who creates varied spices"; German tower of about 1550, probably Frankfurt, The Jewish Museum, New York; extra soul tradition.	A Spice Tower
Heschel, The Sabbath (1951), "a palace in time which we build"; Ahad Ha'am's saying.	Shabbat: A Palace in Time
Shabbat table and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.	The Shabbat Table
Specification wording, codes and question tariffs.	AQA 8062 specification (September 2025 version), 3.1.6.2 and 4.4.1, with AQA's 2026 assessment update; Pearson Edexcel 1RB0 specification, Issue 2 (January 2024), 1F 3.6; OCR J625 specification, Version 2.0 (July 2026), J625/03 Practices.

Further reading on the site

The Shabbat Stew Map, on how a Sabbath without cooking produced a slow-cooked dish in every Jewish kitchen; The man of fire (Elijah), who is sung for at Havdalah.