

TEACHING JEWISH VALUES THROUGH LITERATURE A BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE FROM SEFER, SO GOOD

Transmitting the ideas and values of Social Justice to our children and grandchildren is among our chief duties as parents and grandparents. Being effective in this critical task becomes ever more challenging in today's modern world. Children often see little connection between their own interests and daily lives with Judaism. How can we help children to see the place that Jewish values have in their world? Children's literature provides a unique strategy for making this connection quite easily. Helping children to see that the values in stories they hear and books they read are present in their own religion establishes a strong connection between Jewish values and children's own interests. Selecting excellent Jewish and secular picture books and middle-school fiction to best make this connection can be extremely difficult. How can we make the best choices in the literary characters our children and grandchildren meet so that they portray the Jewish values we cherish? How can we make the connection between literature and Jewish values clear and relevant? "*V'shinantam l'vanecha* – And you shall teach them to your children." The lasting effect of using literature to impart Jewish values to our children and grandchildren has proven to be most powerful. Following are many suggestions for using literature to teach Social Justice.

PICTURE BOOKS

Bee Tree by Polacco – *When Mary Ellen gets bored with her reading, Grandpa takes her on a hunt for the bee tree, but it is not until all the other townspeople follow her home that Mary Ellen discovers the value of knowledge and the joy of books.*

Cain and Abel: Finding the Fruits of Peace by Sasso – *Retells the biblical story of the two brothers who, after years of sharing everything, became angry enough to lose control and bring violence into the world. Invites conversation about dealing with anger in positive ways.*

Chicken Soup by Heart by Hershenhorn – *Winner of the coveted Sydney Taylor Award for outstanding Jewish content from the Association of Jewish Libraries! When his sitter, Mrs. Gittel gets the flu, Rudie Dinkens cures her by making Mrs. Gittel's special chicken soup recipe. Her secret is to spice the soup with stories and Rudie recalls many of them as he stirs. A charmingly illustrated, warm and humorous story of inter-generational friendship.*

God in Between by Sasso – *This is the magical, mythical tale of a poor village at the foot of a hill—a topsy-turvy town with no roads and no windows, where the people sneeze through tall tangled weeds and trip over rocks as big as watermelons. Surely God would help them, they decide ... but how can God be found, and where should they look? They soon find that the answer is much nearer than they thought. This story teaches that God can be found where we are: within all of us and the relationships between us.*

Hardest Word: A Yom Kippur Story by Jules – *This charming story about saying "I'm sorry" features a prehistoric bird named Ziz. But when Ziz, as clumsy as he is magnificent, accidentally destroys a children's garden and asks God how to fix it, he is sent on a quest that gets to the heart of Yom Kippur.*

Hey, Little Ant by Hoose – *When a little boy sets out to squish an ant, the trembling ant pleads for his life, in a playful story about ethics and peer pressure.*

Humongous Pushka in the Sky by Siegel – *A first book of tzedakah, this book tells of day-dreaming and cloud gazing while it teaches the youngest reader about mitzvah-doing.*

It Could Always Be Worse by Zemach – *A poor man lives with his mother, wife, and six children in a very crowded, very noisy one-room hut. When he can't stand it any more, he goes to the Rabbi for advice. The Rabbi's humorous advice in this classic Yiddish folktale helps him appreciate what he already has.*

Keeping Quilt by Polacco – *A homemade quilt ties together the lives of six generations of the author's immigrant Jewish family, remaining a symbol of their enduring love and faith, in a touching story of "Dor L'Dor."*

NO Rules for Michael by Rouss – *While learning about the Ten Commandments Michael says he would rather there were no rules, but when his teacher gives him a day without rules, Michael learns an important lesson.*

Shalom, Salaam, Peace by Bogot – *This gorgeous book is a poetic and evocative call for peace in the Middle East and everywhere. Presented in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to agencies working toward peace in the Middle East.*

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge by Fox – *A small boy tries to discover the meaning of "memory" so he can restore that of an elderly friend.*

PICTURE BOOKS FOR KINDERGARTEN-THIRD GRADERS

Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate by Cohn – Sydney Taylor Honor Winner – *Retells a true story that describes how people in Billings, Montana joined together to fight a series of hate crimes against a Jewish family. This is an incredibly powerful story for any age, but it is best read aloud together as a family.*

First Strawberries: A Cherokee Tale by Bruchac – *A quarrel between the first man and the first woman is reconciled when the Sun causes strawberries to grow out of the earth. A beautiful way to begin a discussion about Shalom Bayit.*

Letter on the Wind: A Chanukah Tale by Lamstein – *When his village suffers a drought leaving no olive oil for the Chanukah menorahs, Hayim, a poor and humble man, writes a letter to the Almighty to request enough oil for the entire village.*

Light by Zalben – Sydney Taylor Honor Award Winner – *The concepts of tikkun olam, literally ‘repair of the world,’ making the world a better place are explained simply yet lyrically in this picture book inspired by the writings of Rabbi Isaac Luria, a 16th century Kabbalist.*

Old Turtle by Wood – *At a time when all the living things of the world could communicate an argument broke out over who and what God is. Old Turtle, in his wisdom, settles the argument in this parable that promotes our relationship with the earth and all the beings that inhabit it.*

One Candle by Bunting – Sydney Taylor Honor Winner – *A Hanukkah tale of remembering the past and celebrating the present. Every year a family celebrates Hanukkah by retelling the story of how Grandma and her sister managed to mark the day while in a German concentration camp.*

CHAPTER BOOKS FOR 3RD-7TH GRADERS

Confessions of a Closet Catholic by Littman – Sydney Taylor Award Winner – *Justine Silver struggles to balance her family’s expectations that she should be Jewish “but not too Jewish.” Frustrated, she follows a Catholic friend’s example by giving up Judaism for Lent, and thus begins a search for identity and belonging*

Dave at Night by Gail Carson Levine – Caudill Honor Book – *When orphaned Dave is sent to the Hebrew Home for Boys in 1926, where he is treated cruelly, he sneaks out at night and is welcomed into the music- and culture-filled world of the Harlem Renaissance. This adventure by Newbery Award winning author Levine poses many life situations that make youth think about how they treat others, and is based on the author’s father’s experiences in an orphanage as a child.*

David and Max by Provost – Sydney Taylor Honor Award Winner – *A charming and funny story of a grandfather and grandson woven deftly around a deeper and darker tale ... sensitive, honest, and all the more powerful for its brave simplicity. This book’s treatment of poignant and topical issues such as homelessness, divorce, and especially the Holocaust is exemplary in its age group.*

Mitzvah Magic: What Kids Can Do to Change the World by Siegel and Eisenberger – *Presents a range of projects, from simple to demanding, from real-life examples that children have accomplished.*

Passover Passage by Atlas – *Rebecca is having a most memorable Passover, sailing the Caribbean with her grandparents. On this unforgettable trip, Becca learns not only how a Passover Seder is celebrated on board a sailboat, but also about freedom, opportunity, family, and Judaism.*

War Within: A Novel of the Civil War by Matas – *In 1862, after Union forces expel Hannah’s family from Holly Springs, Mississippi, because they are Jews, Hannah reexamines her views regarding slavery and the war.*

Zayda Was a Cowboy by Nislick – *When their grandfather moves in with them, Bill and Danny are off put by his habits, but are then fascinated by his stories of immigration from Russia and work as a cowboy in Texas.*

NOVELS FOR 7TH-12TH GRADERS

Real Time by Kass – Sydney Taylor Award Winner – *A minute-by-minute account in real time of a terrorist bombing in Jerusalem, told from many different perspectives and in varying narrative styles. The plot is suspenseful, involving teenagers whose need to discover their pasts has taken them to Israel, and the conclusion is chilling. In addition to its outstanding literary qualities, this is a very rare objective look at modern Israel, Palestinians, terrorism, and diversity.*

Strange Relations by Levitin – *Fifteen-year-old Marne decides to spend the summer with her Aunt Carole in Hawaii. But, Aunt Carole is now Aunt Chaya, married to a Chabad Rabbi with seven children. What Marne anticipates will be a relaxing summer of jogging on the beach, surfing, sun tanning, and shopping turns out to be a summer of exploration, spirituality, and growth.*

A VERY UNUSUAL BOOK FOR ALL AGES

This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort edited by Georgia Heard –Includes 18 works, including poems by Langston Hughes, Walt Whitman and Heard herself. Each is paired with illustrations by well-known picture book artists. A portion of the profits from the sale of the book benefit Save the Children.

BOOKS FOR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

Blessing of a Skinned Knee by Mogel – Every parent hopes his or her child will be self-reliant, optimistic, and well-mannered, a challenge in our current culture. The ancient teachings of the Torah, the Talmud, important Jewish thinkers, and contemporary psychological insights are combined in nine blessings that address key parenting issues.

Book of Jewish Values by Telushkin – The author of *Jewish Literacy* and *Jewish Wisdom* offers his own daily guide to integrating Judaism into everyday life, in a guide that encompasses selections from the Torah, the Talmud, the Mishnah, and other sacred writings.

Can I Have a Cell Phone for Hanukkah? The Essential Scoop on Raising Modern Jewish Kids by Estroff – A practical handbook for Jewish parents explains how to balance family with the realities of modern-day culture as it illuminates how to incorporate Jewish traditions into a healthy family environment, covering such topics as how to celebrate the High Holy Days, manage extracurricular activities, plan around Shabbat, supervise the use of modern technology, and more.

God's To-Do List – 103 Ways to Be an Angel and Do God's Work on Earth by Wolfson – “What on earth are you here for? To do the tasks that God has for you.... You can call someone who is lonely. You can visit a friend who is sick. You can read a book to a child. You can comfort a mourner. You can volunteer your time. You can make a difference. You can give of your self—a self that is infused with godliness.” — from the Introduction

MUSIC FOR LISTENING TOGETHER

The World is a Narrow Bridge CD – From darkness to light, from pain to peace, from loss to hope, from grief to healing. *Narrow Bridge* is a treasure of 14 healing songs by famous artists including Debbie Friedman, Craig Taubman, Neshama Carlebach, Beth Shafer, and Shirona, that will lift your spirit, helping you find some measure of comfort.

Additional recommended resources –

Judaism through Children's Books: A Resource for Teachers and Parents – Musikant and Grass – Behrman House/A.R.E. Publishing, Inc. 2001

Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities – Freeman – Behrman House/A.R.E. Publishing, Inc. 1999

Jewish Values Finder on-line resource from Association of Jewish Libraries – www.ajljewishvalues.org

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THE SEFER, SO GOOD SOCIAL JUSTICE ORDER FORM

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PICTURE BOOKS

Title and Description	Quantity	x Price	= \$ Amt. Due
<i>Bee Tree</i>		\$7	
<i>Cain and Abel: Finding the Fruits of Peace</i>		\$17	
<i>Chicken Soup by Heart</i>		\$17	
<i>God in Between</i>		\$17	
<i>Hardest Word: A Yom Kippur Story</i>		\$8	
<i>Hey, Little Ant</i>		\$15	
<i>Humongous Pushka in the Sky</i>		\$8	
<i>It Could Always Be Worse</i>		\$6	
<i>Keeping Quilt</i>		\$7	
<i>NO Rules for Michael</i>		\$7	
<i>Shalom, Salaam, Peace</i>		\$18-hard \$10-soft	
<i>Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge</i>		\$8	

PICTURE BOOKS FOR KINDERGARTEN-THIRD GRADERS

Title and Description	Quantity	x Price	= \$ Amt. Due
<i>Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate</i>		\$7	
<i>First Strawberries: A Cherokee Tale</i>		\$7	
<i>Letter on the Wind</i>		\$17	
<i>Light</i>		\$18	
<i>Old Turtle</i>		\$18	
<i>One Candle</i>		\$16-hard \$6-soft	
<i>Old Turtle</i>		\$18	<i>Old Turtle</i>

CHAPTER BOOKS FOR 3RD-7TH GRADERS

Title and Description	Quantity	x Price	= \$ Amt. Due
<i>Confessions of a Closet Catholic</i>		\$6	
<i>Dave at Night</i>		\$7	
<i>David and Max</i>		\$15	
<i>Mitzvah Magic: What Kids Can Do to Change the World</i>		\$9	
<i>Passover Passage</i>		\$6	
<i>Picture of Grandmother</i>		\$15	
<i>War Within: A Novel of the Civil War</i>		\$8	
<i>Zayda Was a Cowboy</i>		\$10	

NOVELS FOR 7TH-12TH GRADERS

Title and Description	Quantity	x Price	= \$ Amt. Due
<i>Real Time</i>		\$8	
<i>Strange Relations</i>		\$16	

A VERY UNUSUAL BOOK FOR ALL AGES

Title and Description	Quantity	x Price	= \$ Amt. Due
<i>This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort</i>		\$17	

BOOKS FOR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

Title and Description	Quantity	x Price	= \$ Amt. Due
<i>Blessing of a Skinned Knee</i>		\$14	
<i>Book of Jewish Values</i>		\$30	
<i>Can I Have a Cell Phone for Hanukkah?</i>		\$13	
<i>God's To-Do List – 103 Ways to Be an Angel and Do God's Work on Earth</i>		\$16	

MUSIC FOR LISTENING TOGETHER

Title and Description	Quantity	x Price	= \$ Amt. Due
<i>The World is a Narrow Bridge CD</i>		\$16	

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