

Introducing How Libraries Can Support Jewish Patrons, Communities, and Authors: A Guide to Standing Together Against Antisemitism

BY ERIKA DREIFUS

If you're among the AJL members who attended a panel titled "Jewish Stories Before and Beyond the Holocaust" at the 2026 American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in June, you may have left the room with a hot-off-the-press copy of a new publication. That's because the session, organized by Artists Against Antisemitism (AAA; theartistsagainstantisemitism.com), offered an opportunity to distribute a brand-new brochure co-created by AAA and AJL: *How Libraries Can Support Jewish Patrons, Communities, and Authors: A Guide to Standing Together Against Antisemitism*.

Just twelve pages long, the guide builds on an earlier AAA resource — co-created with Jewish Book Council — for bookstores. Included within are practical suggestions for making libraries welcoming spaces, collection development, staff education, and programming. The guide concludes with some FAQ and a three-year calendar to help libraries avoid scheduling important meetings and events on Jewish holidays. A downloadable version is available at bit.ly/AAA_AJL_LibraryGuide (please note the underscores). Please read, print, and share!

Notably, both the guide and the panel where it made its public debut owe a great deal to AJL News and Reviews Editor-in-Chief Sally Stieglitz. She championed the panel from the very beginning and helped make it a reality at ALA through the EMIERT roundtable. Sally also serves



as liaison between AJL and AAA; in that capacity she coordinated the AJL contribution to the guide's content.

For those who may not be familiar with AAA: It is a 501(c)3 organization that envisions an artistic world where Jewish identity is never an obstacle and where Jewish artists have equal access, equal representation, and the freedom to create work that is unapologetically and authentically their own; a world in which Jewish art and culture are woven into the full fabric of artistic life, not set apart from it; and where every Jewish artist has the confidence that their work has a place in the larger cultural conversation. AAA aims to support, elevate, amplify, and advocate for Jewish

(Continued on page 2)

Contents

- 1 Introducing How Libraries Can Support Jewish Patrons, Communities, and Authors: A Guide to Standing Together Against Antisemitism**
- 2 Preserving Memory Through Story, Law, and Education**
- 3 "The Best AJL Conference EVER!"**
- 4 Jackie Ben-Efraim's Incoming President's Speech at AJL Annual Conference**
- 4 Fanny Goldstein Award Acceptance Speech**
- 5 AJL President's Letter**
- 6 Chapter Chatter & Member News**
- 7 From the Editor**
- 9 Reviews of Titles for Children & Teens**
- 9 In The Spotlight**
 - 9 Bible Stories and Midrash**
 - 9 Biography**
 - 10 Board Books**
 - 12 Fiction - Early Readers**
 - 14 Fiction - Middle Grade**
 - 16 Fiction - Teen**
 - 16 Holocaust and World War II**
 - 17 Lifecycle and Jewish Values**
 - 18 Nonfiction**
 - 19 Picture Books**
 - 20 Shabbat and Holidays**
- 25 Reviews of Titles for Adults**
 - 25 In The Spotlight**
 - 25 Fiction**
 - 28 Non-Fiction**
 - 39 Advertising Rates**

artists by fostering community, showcasing artistic work, building bridges to other organizations, providing grants (one such grant facilitated a public librarian's poster presentation at the ALA conference), and ensuring that Jewish voices are represented across the cultural world. AAA's roots are in the literary arts, but its goal is to support Jewish artists in every discipline, through its own efforts or by connecting them to partner organizations.

Preserving Memory Through Story, Law, and Education

As the granddaughter of two Holocaust survivors, I grew up understanding that memory is fragile unless it is actively preserved. My grandmother survived the Holocaust by constantly moving—from the ghetto to an attic, to a shed, to the home of a woman named Janina, and eventually into the forest until liberation. Her story became the foundation of my first book, *Living among the Dead*, and ultimately shaped much of the work I continue to do today as both an author and a career prosecutor.

In recent years, I have had the privilege of speaking with libraries, museums, universities, and educational organizations across the country about Holocaust memory, education, and the importance of preserving personal testimony for future generations. Most recently, I spoke during a webinar hosted by the Long Island Library Resources Council, where we discussed not only my family's story, but also the broader role libraries and cultural institutions play in safeguarding history at a time when firsthand survivor testimony is rapidly disappearing.

One of the themes I emphasized during that presentation was that Holocaust education is not simply about teaching historical facts. It is also about helping audiences understand the human impact of persecution, displacement, dehumanization, and cultural destruction. Libraries are uniquely positioned to support that work because they serve as centers for both education and remembrance.

When I wrote *Living among the Dead*, I wanted readers—particularly younger generations—to encounter the Holocaust through the lens of one individual life and one family story. Over time, educators began reaching out asking how they could use the book in classrooms and discussion groups. That led to the development of an accompanying Educator's Guide, published in 2022, which is now used internationally in schools, libraries, and Holocaust education programs. The guide includes historical context, discussion questions, writing prompts, and interdisciplinary learning activities designed to encourage thoughtful engagement with the material.

As someone who regularly speaks with students and community groups, I have seen firsthand how powerful personal narrative can be in making history accessible. Many young people connect to history not through statistics or timelines, but through stories that allow them to see the humanity behind the events.

That understanding also influenced my second book, *Stolen Legacies: The Fight for Nazi-Looted Art*, released earlier this year. While the book examines Holocaust-era art theft through legal analysis and investigative history, at its core it asks larger questions

To conclude on a personal note: As a (non-librarian) AJL member who currently serves as AAA Secretary, it's deeply meaningful for me to be able to introduce this guide to the broader AJL community. I look forward to the organizations' continued collaboration!

about memory, identity, and cultural loss. The Nazis did not simply steal paintings and objects of value; they also attempted to erase families, histories, and cultural identities. In many ways, the theft of art was part of the same broader assault on human dignity.

In my presentations, I often discuss how restitution efforts today are about far more than economics or ownership disputes. They are about recognition, accountability, and historical truth. They are also reminders that the effects of the Holocaust did not end in 1945. Many families continue to search for missing heirlooms, documents, artwork, and fragments of their history even generations later.

Libraries and librarians remain essential partners in that process. Archives, special collections, provenance records, oral histories, and educational programming all contribute to preserving collective memory and making historical research accessible to future generations. At a time when misinformation and historical distortion continue to spread, these institutions play an increasingly vital role.

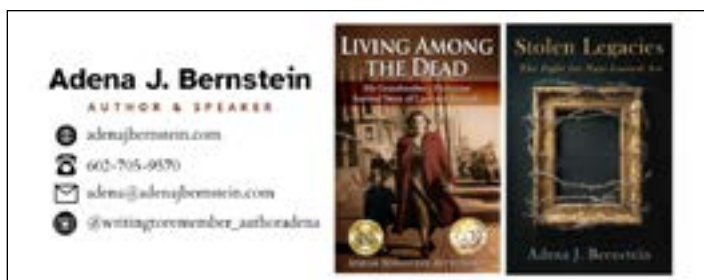
I remain deeply grateful for the opportunities I have had to engage with library communities and educational organizations through both of my books. These conversations continue to reinforce my belief that remembrance is not passive. It requires active preservation, active education, and a willingness to continue telling these stories long after the survivors themselves are gone.

Because ultimately, memory matters not only for understanding the past, but for shaping the future.

I continue to welcome opportunities to speak with libraries, schools, museums, universities, book clubs, law enforcement groups, community organizations, and professional associations, both virtually and in person. Programs can be tailored to topics including Holocaust memory and education, intergenerational storytelling, ethics and justice, Nazi-looted art and restitution, cultural preservation, and the continuing importance of historical remembrance. As survivor testimony becomes increasingly rare, these conversations and educational efforts matter more than ever.

Adena J. Bernstein

adena@adenajbernstein.com



“The Best AJL Conference EVER!”

MARCIE ESKIN & RACHEL KAMIN, 2026
CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS

Thank you for joining us at the 2026 Association of Jewish Libraries Conference. More than 260 AJL members, guests, award winners, presenters, vendors, and volunteers came together in Evanston, from across the United States, Austria, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Israel—including six representatives of the National Library of Israel—Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, and Spain. This was by far the largest in-person gathering since AJL met in New York in 2017 and registration increased by 26% from two years ago in San Diego.

The conference featured more than 40 sessions by over 100 presenters. Popular sessions included discussions by the winners and honorees of the Sydney Taylor and AJL Jewish Fiction Book Awards as well as recommended reads from the committee members; updates from the National Library of Israel and the Library of Congress; and sessions on Lithuanian libraries and the Soviet Jewry movement. Participants were also treated to a private tour of the Deering Library at Northwestern, the Mansueto Library at University of Chicago, the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center, and a walking tour of Chicago's Loop District focusing on significant sites in Illinois Jewish history. Attendees reported that it was “the best AJL conference EVER!” with “powerful learning opportunities and superior organization and logistics.” One participant noted, “I felt that I was with my tribe” while another commented on how people were “so warm and friendly.” Most impressively, 98% of attendees said they would recommend the AJL conference to a friend or colleague!

Since this conference was the long-awaited “do-over” from the 2020 Evanston conference that never happened in person, this event has been six years in the making. Yet bringing it to life was truly a team effort. The 26 members of the Conference Committee met regularly on Zoom for the past year, contributing their time, expertise, and creativity. Every committee member played an important role, but a few people deserve special recognition:

Paula Breger has been the driving force behind our

communications - from the conference website and email updates to the program, press releases, and countless behind-the-scenes edits. She also served as our secretary, proofreader and trusted advisor.

Yahm Levin devoted countless hours to SCHED, managing updates large and small and catching details the rest of us never would have noticed.

AJL's Development Vice-President Hannah Srour-Zackon, together with Jackie Ben-Efraim and Jerry Krautman, raised nearly

\$30,000 to support this conference. We are equally grateful to AJL Treasurer Anjelica Ruiz, who made sure every financial detail was handled smoothly.

- Lenore Bell oversaw more than \$37,000 in conference support funding, helping 35 AJL members attend this year's conference.

- Kathy Bloomfield, the 2026 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award Winner, coordinated our conference bookseller, Booked from Evanston, and organized the book signings with award winners and presenters.

- And Rena Citrin, in addition to chairing the

AJL Fiction Award Committee, served as our catering liaison, guiding menu planning and meal arrangements. She also introduced us to the art of transforming withdrawn library books and unsolicited donations into the beautiful centerpieces that decorated the tables throughout the conference.

We were also fortunate to have the unwavering support of the AJL Board and Council, along with an extraordinary team of local volunteers from the Judaic Library Network of Metropolitan Chicago. JLNMC members helped plan tours, compiled local resources, created centerpieces, sponsored the Hospitality Suite and donated the snacks, and volunteered throughout the conference. We are so lucky to be surrounded by such a strong group of hard-working Jewish library professionals in the Chicago area.

We both feel that AJL has been a hugely significant part of our careers. We wouldn't be successful in our jobs without the support of this organization. And the friendships we have developed over the years have enriched our lives immeasurably. Sure, we've devoted a lot of our time to AJL, but we have gained so much more, both personally and professionally, than we could ever give back. We thank each and every one of you for supporting this year's conference and we can't wait to see you online in 2027 and in Montreal in 2028!



Marcie Eskin & Rachel Kamin, 2026 Conference Co-Chairs

Jackie Ben-Efraim's Incoming President's Speech at AJL Annual Conference

Good Afternoon to my AJL Family,
The world has changed drastically since I started my library career at American Jewish University. I could never have imagined that there would be a surge in antisemitism that the very fact that I am a Jew could be dangerous to my health and safety, that many Jewish books that are such an integral part of my life would be banned and so many people stand against Israel, my beloved homeland, or that stating I am a Zionist could be controversial. Make no mistake, I bleed blue and white. However, I don't want to give a speech filled with anxiety about the future of Jews and Jewish culture, I want to celebrate the work that we do, as members of the Association of Jewish Libraries, to preserve our rich cultural heritage.

I joined AJL on my first day on the job at AJU because I had a preservation question I couldn't answer—the internet was still young, but I was not—and after my colleague posted it to HaSafran, I had several answers within an hour. I figured that a group of people dedicated to generously sharing knowledge had to be the kind of people I wanted to associate with, and that proved to be the case.

Five years after that HaSafran post, I received a phone call from Jim Rosenbloom when he invited me to join the AJL Council as the advertising manager. At that very moment I was on a rickety outdoor staircase, really little more than a ladder. The act of climbing those stairs mirrored my service to AJL and made me think of the story of Jacob's Ladder. (Jacob was my favorite forefather because I was named after my grandfather, Jacob Kamerow.)

Jacob had left his childhood home and on his journey he went to sleep with his head on a rock. I too had left my family just outside of Washington DC and my life was a little rocky. He dreamed

of angels going up and down that ladder, and I had moved to the City of Angels. A ladder is not an escalator, you must extend yourself to rise, and I extended my job description at American Jewish University to include volunteering for AJL's conference in Pasadena. One *Midrash*, or tale is that angels coming down the ladder, they brought fragments down from Heaven for the benefits of those on Earth. I hope that some of what I have brought back from AJL events have been of value to my library and its patrons.

Another *midrash* states that each angel, whether going up or down the ladder, had a particular *middah*, attribute, mission or word of comfort that was needed for each stage of Jacob's journey. There have been many angels on my journey to become a Judaica librarian, and most of them are members of the Association of Jewish Libraries. The suggestions made by my AJL colleagues from the very start of my new job were invaluable. You have helped me curate exhibits, catalog books and gain many insights into Judaism that I had not learned in the past. Moreover, you all have become like family to me in the process.

I, like Jacob, also have a dream. My dream is that as AJL continues to grow in strength as we gain members worldwide that we are universally acknowledged as the leading authority on Judaic librarianship. Just yesterday we had the inaugural meeting of AJL's European Chapter and heard from the National Library of Israel how they want to work more closely with AJL as we all share a common mission to provide our patrons with access to information and research in all forms of media relating to all things Jewish. It is only through accurate information vetted by our knowledgeable members that we can help stem the tide of antisemitism. Together AJL can promote Jewish content in both our own libraries and in the public libraries in our community. Each member of AJL is an angel bringing a fragment of Heaven to Earth and putting fragments together is an act of *tikkun olam*—healing the world.

Thank you for allowing me to lead you on this journey.



Fanny Goldstein Award Acceptance Speech

DELIVERED BY KATHY BLOOMFIELD JUNE 23, 2026

Thank you, Michelle, and thank you all for this incredible and totally unexpected honor.

Many of you know that I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology, not a master's degree in library science. So how does someone with a background in zoos, corporate management, and Jewish non-profits wind up receiving this prestigious award?

Well, I have been collecting and organizing books since I learned to read. No matter where I live, the first thing I do is build bookcases. And, as my husband will confirm, every room in our home has at least one bookcase — and that includes the bathrooms!

Books, especially children's literature, are my passion.

Many years ago, when I discovered that Scholastic could not provide Jewish books for my children's synagogue preschool book fair, I started forwordsbooks, a book fair and catalog sales business, where I focused on finding secular children's literature with Jewish values content. That is how I met many of you, as a vendor at an AJL conference in Chicago in the 1990s. You welcomed me with open arms, talked "book" with me, and invited me to serve on the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, several conference planning committees, the AJL Council, and the Board.

And despite my lack of an MLS, you elected me to serve as your President from 2019-2021. A difficult time for the Association facing a pandemic and financial issues. During the COVID

(Continued on page 5)



Kathleen Bloomfield and Michelle Margolis

epidemic, your board creatively found ways to keep us regularly connected with each other via Zoom (thank God for Zoom!) They also had the far-reaching idea of holding our planned annual conference on Zoom. That was so successful, we now have online conferences every other year.

Most importantly, however, was the establishment of an

endowment to ensure AJL's financial future. That is my proudest achievement, and I marvel at how it continues to grow year over year. Each of you has had a hand in the success of this important tool. Whether you have personally donated, or encouraged others to make gifts, the endowment is growing at a rapid pace. It is my hope that all of you will continue to support this important part of our organizational structure so that AJL can go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

Of course, I have a few people to thank. First, my husband, Mark, who is here today. Despite my crazy ideas, for over 46 years, he has been my supportive, loving rock.

And thank you to the friends I have made in AJL. There is a time limit on this speech, or I would thank each of you personally. Just know that I will find you and thank you for your guidance and encouragement over these many years.

And thank you to the Fanny Goldstein Committee and all of you for this award. I am humbled and grateful for this recognition. There are not enough words to express all my feelings about this, so I will simply say...

Toda raba

Thank you very much.

AJL President's Letter

BY JACKIE BEN-EFRAIM

By now, most of my fellow AJL members have heard about the truly outstanding AJL Conference in Evanston in June through our social media and the numerous posts to HaSafran thanking the conference committee. Since you can never show too much gratitude, I would like to extend my thanks again to Marcie Eskin and Rachel Kamin for chairing a fabulous committee. Both the RAS and SSCPL sessions were engaging, and the meeting rooms were often filled to capacity as this year's gathering had the largest attendance in many years. Sessions were given not only by our knowledgeable membership; we also heard from two fascinating scholars at the Keynote and Feinstein lectures that gave us much food for thought. Of course many attendees feel that the best part of the conference is the opportunity to see old friends and meet new colleagues, bridging the gap between members of long standing with our newest cohort of librarians and making everyone feel part of a special community.

Through the Conference Committee's valiant work to hold down costs and our VP of Development, Hannah Srour-Zackon's, fund raising efforts, this year's in-person conference had a surplus of funds. Please support our other conference sponsors through purchases of their books and services and let them know that you saw their ad on the AJL website.

We are especially grateful to Jo Taylor Marshal for underwriting the Sydney Taylor Book Awards, Dan Wyman for establishing the Fiction Award, and Eric Chaim Kline for stepping up to continue the Reference Award when the previous donor was no longer able to, in addition to his longtime support of the Bibliography

Award. Once again we are indebted to the Gottschalk Family Fund for providing conference support to so many deserving applicants and to Rivka Yerushalmi for funding the Shirley Epstein AJL Keynote in memory of her aunt. I would like to give special recognition to the Crown Family Center for Israel and Jewish Studies at Northwestern University, The National Library of Israel and Candlewick Press for sponsoring the delicious meals and wine service.

AJL's General Fund Campaign raised over \$12,000 this past year and included many gifts from AJL members. Another fiscal highlight from the General Meeting Minutes is that AJL's Board approved a budget with a \$28,000 surplus as opposed to a deficit as in the past. This is, in part, due to holding the 2027 conference virtually, a practice initiated during the pandemic but its continuation ensures AJL's fiscal health. Furthermore, our endowment funds are now earning enough that we can withdraw funds from the earnings to pay for the awards for which they were created.

However, the biggest accomplishment made by AJL this year was building bridges across the globe. We held the inaugural meeting of the European Chapter chaired by Katalin Rac with a hybrid pre-conference Zoom. There were over thirty European members in attendance. In addition, we had several international members in person in Evanston. I am excited to see how this new chapter will enrich our membership with new projects and perspectives. The National Library of Israel also participated in not only this session, but in the entire conference with its largest delegation to AJL in years.

At a time when so many people are building walls around their communities and those that share their viewpoint, AJL built

(Continued on page 6)

bridges by collaborating with many other organizations. We have been working with AJS for several years, and the recent White Paper of Provenance was created in cooperation with NLI to promote best practices in acquisitions and collection management. This year we started to cross-promote with other Jewish organizations as well. There was a well-attended session at ALA with Jean Meltzer about her books and Jewish Joy Con which AJL will help support. The Jewish Book Council, Jewish American Heritage Month, Hadassah and Centropa all reached out to AJL for our expertise as the leading authority on Judaic librarianship. Artists Against Antisemitism hosted a Zoom right after our conference where our own Heidi Rabinowitz and Susan Kusel helped in a two-hour brain-storming session. Look out for posts on HaSafran on how you can help fight antisemitism with books at your own library and at the public libraries in your town.

Personally, the biggest bridge I crossed, besides the one from my hotel to the Chicago Convention Center, was the one between AJL and the other ALA Affiliates, mostly those of the other

faith-based organizations. I wore my Jewish star with my heart pounding in my chest as I feared I wouldn't feel welcome at my first ALA session. However, I was warmly received by everyone in the room and by the time I crossed the bridge back to the hotel, I had made lasting connections with a diverse group of librarians who want to work with AJL to nurture all of our members with new understanding and join together towards the common cause against banned books. I don't want to be on this bridge alone. If you have suggestions for online programming we might share with other affiliates, please share your ideas with me or with Aaron Taub, the new RAS co-chair of our programming committee.

In closing, I would like to thank the AJL membership for your confidence in me. I am open to your suggestions and willing to hear your complaints. I hope that together we can build on the momentum from the past few years to promote the best in Judaic books and media, share our expertise with others and provide support for our member librarians because AJL is the leading authority on Judaic librarianship.

Chapter Chatter and Member News

AJL-Canada presented a Canadian Authors' Showcase on May 4, 2026. Ten authors who have published books in the last two years (or who have upcoming books) were featured. Attendees got a taste of board books for toddlers; books featuring Holocaust memory as embedded in the streets of Europe; the writings of children of survivors; books on American and Canadian Jewish history and on Israeli life.

Some publishers, like Orca, Second Story, Scholastic Canada, and Nimbus, are Canadian; others, including KarBen and Apples & Honey, are American.

The session ended with a lively Q & A that focused on Jewish publishing today and on the various issues Jewish authors highlight in their work, especially those for young readers.

All presenters were AJL-Canada members. The presentation was open to the public. It was recorded and put on the AJL National and AJL-Canada website at this link: [AJL Canada Canadian Authors' Showcase 640x360](#)

AJL-Canada was delighted to give our participants a chance to showcase their creations, especially to the Americans in the audience.

Submitted by Anne Dublin,
Steering Committee, AJL-Canada

In Memorium: Randy Belinfante z"l

Editor's Note: Randy Belinfante was a longtime reviewer for AJL News and Reviews. He will be greatly missed. The following tribute is by his wife Anne-Marie.

Randy was a natural collector and organizer. He began his library journey as a cataloger at the Jewish Theological Seminary. On moving to the American Sephardi Federation, he started with a

cart of donated books and some boxes of assorted files and went on to build a dedicated library and archives reflecting the culture, history, liturgy, and rabbinical traditions across the spectrum of Sephardi and Mizrahi communities.

Seeking out donations, he transported collections of books in cabs, took the subway to Queens to pick up siddurim, and drove to Washington to bring back boxes of papers. For a few days he sat on a basement floor packing up donated records that had been recently digitized (maintaining the hard copy turned out to be fortunate as some of the digital copies became corrupted). With some donors, he spent months visiting each week, collecting papers and artifacts, but also listening to stories. Randy loved stories, collecting them and sharing them on the holidays and at the *Shabbat* table.

Learning was a huge part of his life. He frequently expressed his frustration at being a slow reader, and yet he kept reading. Primarily focused on Judaica, he read widely in other areas that fascinated him. Our bookcases reflect his interest in constitutional law and the Supreme Court, the aircraft and pilots of the Great War, space, archaeology, Houdini, Chagall and Wayne Gretsky. Visitors to our home would always find a few books by their bedside that Randy thought might interest them.

He sought out study partners and spent years working with his *havruta* over the phone. During the last few months of his life, even as his health declined, he continued to wrestle with *gemara*. Alongside learning, he loved to teach, giving lectures at conferences, tours of the library and mounting exhibits at ASF and Congregation Shearith Israel in NYC. I was fortunate that Judaica librarianship was a journey that we shared, because more than anything else he was my best friend.

Anne-Marie Belinfante



Continued on page 6

From the Editor

Dear *Safanim*,

What a delight it was to see so many of you at AJL's Annual Conference in Evanston this past June. As much as we have zoom and email, being in person together cannot be replaced. I'm looking forward to the 2028 Conference in Montreal already, even though it is quite far off.

Our summer issue is full of news for our readers: a new collaboration between AJL and Artists Against Antisemitism, an article on Nazi-looted art and preserving memory, conference highlights, and chapter chatter and member news. The reviews are chock-full as well—don't sleep on these upcoming and recent titles for your collections. This issue welcomes two new proof-readers to our team as well: Jane Rothstein, librarian & archivist at Congregation Mishkan Or in Cleveland and Mimi Leyton, volunteer at the Greenberg Families Library at the Solway JCC in Ottawa. Mimi and Jane, welcome and thank you to both for joining our small but mighty News/Reviews team!



Left to right: Rebecca Levitan, Daniel Scheide, Sally Stieglitz, and Judy Ehrenstein

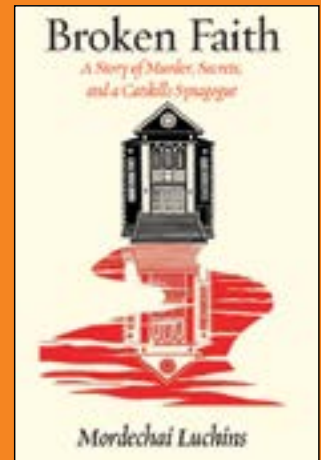
We also have some news from our editorial team. Longtime Co-editor of Reviews for Adults Daniel Scheide is stepping down from his role after this issue. Daniel, thank you for your years of service to *News and Reviews*. You will be greatly missed! Joining our team now, in that role, is Dainy Bernstein, Hebraica Library Specialist, University of Pennsylvania Libraries. You may be familiar with their work as a reviewer, and we are excited to welcome them as Co-Editor as well.

As we approach the holidays, I want to wish everyone a *shana tova*, may your new year be filled with sweetness and joy.

Warm regards,
Sally

Ben Yehuda Press

all kinds of books for all kinds of Jews



Bring a Ben Yehuda Press book fair to your community!

Hosting a Ben Yehuda Press digital book fair is a great way to raise money for your library. We offer your community a discount on all of our books, and then we pay you a percentage of sales.

Here's how it works: We set up a custom landing page for the sale on our web site, highlighting titles from our catalog curated for your readers. They order through our regular checkout system. When the sale ends, we ship the books to you for pickup — along with a check for your commission.

"An excellent range of quality Jewish books at a great price. The website was efficient and overall it was a huge success for our library and much appreciated by the congregation," says Leora Troper, Librarian, Feldstein Library, Congregation Neveh Shalom, Portland, Oregon.

Learn more at
BenYehudaPress.com/AJL

OPALS

Modular. Flexible. Intuitive.
Your Library, Your Way.



Revolutionize Your Library Management

VISIT OPALS

Scan the QR code to
explore **OPALS** today!



MODULAR
Built for
your needs.



FLEXIBLE
Adapts to
your library.



INTUITIVE
Easy to use.
Easy to learn.



EMPOWERING
Better services.
Stronger communities.

Empowering Libraries. Enriching Communities.

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

In The Spotlight



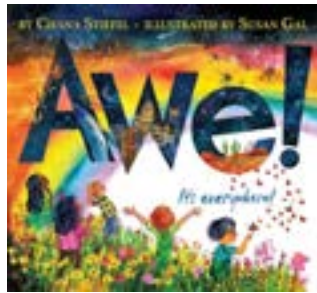
CO-EDITED BY REBECCA LEVITAN
AND JUDY EHRENSTEIN

Stiefel, Chana. *Awe!* Illustrated by Susan Gal. New York, Scholastic, 2026. 48 pp. \$19.99 (9781546150350) HC. PreK-Gr. 2

Rhymed text, simple and elegant, explains and encourages readers to search for, identify and appreciate awe and wonder in the world around them. Gal's gorgeous colorful spreads complement the text with visual joy. The children and their adults are diverse in many ways but it is the amazing tableau of the world around them that brings the poem home. The author and illustrator notes on the final double spread explain the basis for creating the book: the descriptions of the how and why of AWE by psychology professor Dr. Dacher Keltner. That note and others, including a quote from Psalm 65, and awesome facts uncovered by scientists, are shown in planet-like circles against a starry background.

The words from the psalm and a boy in a *kippah* lighting *Hanukkah* candles (on a page with children of other religions lighting candles or incense for their particular rituals) are the only obvious representations, but all the descriptions in the book can be incorporated into Jewish learning. A beautiful book that will start many discussions (the end notes will prove helpful for this), recommended for all school and library collections serving younger children.

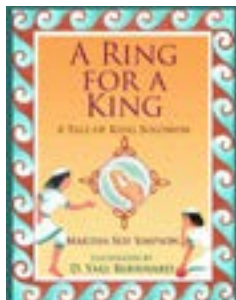
Carla Kozak,
Retired Children's Librarian,
San Francisco, CA



Bible Stories and Midrash

Simpson, Martha Seif. *A Ring for a King: A Tale of King Solomon.* Illustrated by D. Yael Bernhardt. Bloomington, Wisdom Tales, 2025. 40 pp. \$19.95. (9781957670126) HC. PreK-Gr. 3.

Ezra, a worker in King Solomon's palace, was perfectly positioned to hear news, gossip and chatter of all kinds. The king often confided in Ezra about how weary he was of listening to everyone's troubles but unsure of how to effectively help them. The king was also tired of hearing all the bragging of the noblemen who liked to show off their power. Making sad people hopeful and overly proud people humble was a great challenge for a king who



only wanted to help all his subjects.

Ezra came into possession of a ring with mysterious letters engraved into the metal. This ring was said to help those in need. He brought it to the king, hoping the king would be able to decipher the letters. The king told him that those letters stood for the Hebrew phrase, *Gam Zeh Ya'avur*, which translates to the phrase, this, too, shall pass. Here, finally, was the answer to the dilemma; that everyone's situation in life can change and that their luck, either good or bad, is not frozen in time.

Solomon now knew how to counsel his confused and needy subjects. He richly rewarded Ezra who was now set to live a better life. Ezra was appreciative and vowed to learn a lesson from this experience — that staying humble is a value worth pursuing.

Readers will learn a bit about ancient Israel and much about important ways to look at the world as they interact with others. An appended Author's Note delves into the history of this classic story. An informative Artist's Note is included, as well. The illustrations evoke a sense of ancient times in King Solomon's court.

A tale for the ages, this lovely book will find a welcome home in schools, libraries, and personal collections and makes a wonderful read-aloud which will be referred to again and again.

Michal Hoschander Malen,

Children's and YA Review Editor, Jewish Book Council;
Great Neck, NY

Biography

Koffsky, Ann Diamant. *What Emma Wrote: The Woman Behind the Words on the Statue of Liberty.* Illustrated by N. Tarcan. Millburn, Apples and Honey Press, 2025. 40 pp. \$19.95 (9781681157191) HC. Gr. 2-5.

Ann Diamant Koffsky has written another winning picture book biography in *What Emma Wrote: The Woman Behind the Words on the Statue of Liberty*. Emma Lazarus is best known for her famous 1883 poem, "The New Colossus," which is carved into the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. Koffsky writes Emma's backstory. Raised in a loving, well-to-do Jewish family, Emma enjoyed writing from the time she was a young girl, growing up in NYC during the mid-1800s. Proud and supportive of their talented daughter, Emma's parents published her excellent poems to distribute to their friends. As Emma grew older, her writing started to take a serious turn as she penned her ideas in a more purposeful mission after having visited new immigrants on Wards Island. It was there that her eyes were opened to a whole world so different from her own. These were poor people who suffered from persecution and were



Continued on page 10

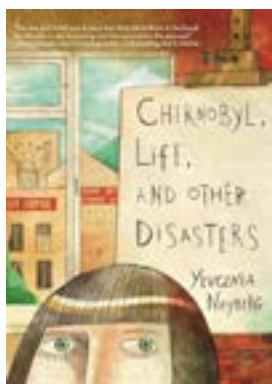
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

forced to flee their home countries in order to make a new life for themselves in America. Instead of disparaging them, Emma stood up to the prejudice she witnessed and wrote many articles defending the immigrants, encouraging New Yorkers to change their attitude. She wrote that American people should welcome these new Americans claiming “They are not so different—they are people like us.” Her sense of empathy stemmed from her own family immigrating to America in the 1600s, escaping religious persecution in Brazil. Once in America, her family found safety, freedom and acceptance. As she became known for her articles, Emma was invited to write a poem about the Statue of Liberty. Imagining Lady Liberty embracing these new immigrants as her children, Emma composed her famous poem. Tarcan beautifully illustrates Koffsky’s words as well as the time period. The back matter includes an author’s note, connecting this story to her grandparents immigration experience. There is a two-page spread with photos and facts about the Statue of Liberty, another page with additional biographical information and the entire *The New Colossus* poem. This beautiful and important story will be enjoyed by grade school children and adults. Recommended for all libraries.

Esther Schnaidman,
Librarian and Teacher,
Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey,
River Edge, NJ.

Nayberg, Yevgenia. *Chernobyl, Life, and Other Disasters*. New York, Neal Porter Books, an imprint of Holiday House, 2026. 143 pp. \$24.99 (9780823460588) HC. Gr. 3-5.

Genya grows up in Kiev with her mother and grandparents, dreaming of being an artist like her mother. At age eleven, she is preparing to take the entrance exams for the prestigious Kiev Art School. Even at her young age, she understands that being Jewish in the Soviet Union means she is competing against other Jews for a spot because the Art School accepts only 1% of Jewish applicants. With Olga, the art tutor her mother hired, Genya practices the Soviet art style she finds boring and tedious but which is required for entrance to the school. When the radio reports a nuclear explosion in Chernobyl, the adults become obsessed with rumored remedies, relying on word of mouth because they don’t trust the official reports to provide full or accurate information. Genya makes sacrifices: she cuts off the long hair she lovingly grew once her mother stopped giving her boyish haircuts, because there are rumors that hair holds radiation, and she resigns herself to not getting into art school



when Olga joins the masses of people leaving Kiev for safer locations. But her mother will not give up on Genya’s art dreams, and resolves to bring Genya back to Kiev for the exams, even after they evacuate themselves and move in with relatives in Volgograd.

Nayberg’s graphic memoir is a fascinating narrative of a child’s experience during a disaster. Effects of radiation and evacuation are essential parts of the narrative, but like most children, Genya is more concerned about her personal circumstances, including resisting her mother’s treatment of her as a boy, navigating relationships with her mother’s new husband and their new baby, following the rules, expressing her independence and personality, and—most importantly—passing the art exam that will determine her future. The memoir’s focus on a child’s perspective allows details of Jewish Soviet life and the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster to appear almost in the background. Young readers will connect with the narrator on an emotional level and absorb historical details along the way. Recommended for all libraries serving children. A worthwhile purchase for adult collections as well.

Dainy Bernstein,
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

Board Books

Aroeste, Sarah. *Bavajadas! That’s Just Silly!* Illustrated by Annabel Tempest. Agawam, PJ Publishing, 2025. 12 pp. \$ 9.99 (9798991041270) Board Book. Ages 0-3.

This charming board book, a tribute to Ladino, will have young people and their caregivers rolling on the floor laughing. A series of questions require the listener to imagine crazy situations. “Do you know cows that go ‘purr,’ And sheep that go ‘grrrr’?” Do you use cookies to scrub, and eat *halá* in the tub?” And the answer to all is “Bavajadas [pronounced: bah-vah-ZSA-das]! That’s just silly!”



The book’s pen-and-ink-like drawings painted with beautiful colors will promote more laughter. Ears on a nose, eyes on toes, brush teeth in bed, sleep on your head? Each provokes the refrain “Bavajadas! That’s just silly!”

As a PJ Library book, the back cover provides an explanation of the unfamiliar words used in this book as coming from Sephardic Jewish communities. There is also a link to the author singing Ladino songs. The book’s verse and response style will engage the youngest of children who will delight in learning a new word from

Continued on page 11

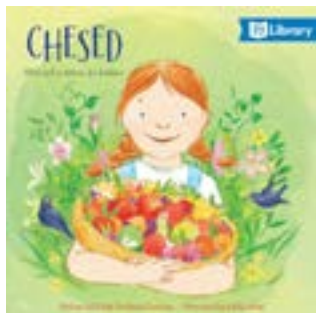
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Ladino. This happy message would be ideal in a home or PreK setting, or in a book basket at a synagogue Tot *Shabbat*.

Kathy Bloomfield,
AJL Past President
Natick, MA

Friedman-Everham, Karyn. *Chesed*. Illustrated by Gabby Grant. Agawam, PJ Publishing, 2025. 12 pp. \$8.99 (9798991041263) Board Book. Ages 0-5.

A charming board book simple enough for the very youngest, but with enough going on in the illustrations to capture the interest of a kindergartener. The story is told in short, simple rhyming sentences with one line per page. The words convey the theme of the story: *chesed* are the acts of kindness all around us that make us a community, “*Chesed* gives our neighbors care...*Chesed* for the life we share.”



It's the illustrations that really tell the story. Full page, with rich saturated color and interesting details, they are big enough for a group story time. A family and friends tend to an orchard, harvest fruit, bring it to a food bank, distribute food to community members and neighbors, and enjoy a *Shabbat* meal together. While the adults are busy with activities too difficult for a child, a young girl finds something kind to do on each double page spread. It would make for an interesting discussion with a young audience, “Who is doing *chesed*? How is this *chesed*? In one picture the little girl chats with a girl in a wheelchair with a broken leg while the other children are busy playing hopscotch. The text reads, “*Chesed* mends the lonely heart.” There's a lot to notice in each illustration. The art also connects the story from page to page. The harvested fruit is donated later in the story; the lonely girl with the broken leg joins the group for *Shabbat* dinner. The little shoot tended on the first page has grown by the end of the book, bringing the story full circle.

The book shows people of all ages and races doing *chesed*. It was especially nice to see a person of color helping at the food bank while the first people in line are young and blond.

Highly recommended for any setting with young children.

Hillary Zana,
Volunteer Librarian,
Seattle Hebrew Academy
Seattle, WA

Suneby, Elizabeth. *Challabballoo!* Illustrated by Adriana Hernández Bergstrom. Agawam, PJ Publishing, 2026. 14 pp. \$ 9.99 (9781967764990) Board Book. Ages 0-3.

A delightful board book about a Latin American family preparing *challah* for *Shabbat*. Using very short, rhyming text accompanied by a repetitive refrain, we watch the dough being kneaded, “Mix and knead dough, then watch it grow,” braided, baked “Bake two loaves to last until *Shabbat*'s passed,” blessed, and eaten “Enjoy every day, prepared any way.” Each short verse is followed by the chorus, “*Challah, Challah, Challaballoo!*”



The illustrations are beautiful. Blues, reds, and purples hop off the page and perfectly illustrate a young family enjoying a weekly tradition. Most charming, however, are the animals that join the family for the Sabbath. Colorful drawings of a capybara, a toucan, an anteater, parrots and monkeys expertly and ingeniously place this story in a South American country.

As a PJ Library book, the back cover provides an explanation of *challah* and a way to make a game of finding the South American animals. The verse and response style will engage the youngest of children while presenting Judaism as a multicultural experience. It would be ideal in a home or PreK setting, or in a book basket at a synagogue Tot *Shabbat*.

Kathy Bloomfield,
AJL Past President
Natick, MA

Ultman, Suzy. *How Do You Jew? A Celebration of Jews Around the World*. New York, Rise x Penguin Workshop, 2026. 24 pp. \$9.99 (9780593751978) Board Book. PreK-Gr. 2.

Jews around the world celebrate in so many ways, a selection of which are highlighted in an inviting, upbeat text matched with colorful illustrations. *Shabbat*, holidays, and weddings are all celebrated in different ways depending on where the Jewish community is based and these are the subject of this board book for children who may—or may not—experience Judaism in all its richness of practice. Illustrations featuring vibrant colors and doodle-influenced art draw the readers to discuss the images that might be familiar as well as different from their own practices.



A wonderful choice for a baby gift, or for all collections serving Jewish populations.

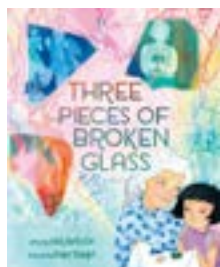
Judy Ehrenstein,
Children's Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries,
Co-editor, Children's and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews,
Silver Summer, MD

Continued on page 12

Fiction - Early Readers

Barth Isler, Emily. *Three Pieces of Broken Glass*. Illustrated by Vesper Stamper. New York, Abrams, 2026. 32 pp. \$19.99 (9781419778728) HC. Gr. 2-5.

A little girl is on her best behavior at her Great-Grandmother Inge's house when she accidentally breaks a beautiful goblet. Sobbing, she is comforted by her great-grandmother, who assures her broken glass can mean many things. This framing device brings the reader into Inge's life story, which she shares by showing her great-granddaughter three pieces of broken glass that she has saved for years. One is from the glass broken at her wedding ceremony, the second piece is from Kristallnacht, which is explained in language appropriate for younger elementary children. The third shard came from a teacup broken the day before Inge and her mother were reunited in England. Her mother felt that the broken cup would bring good luck, and it did.



In simple, lyrical, almost musical sentences, the author conveys the importance of remembrance, family love, and how lessons from the past can guide us today. The little girl ends her visit bearing a piece of glass from the goblet she broke, a symbol of her connection to, "all the people in my family who came before me," and their stories.

This is a perfect introduction to the Holocaust for younger elementary students, yet it is as much a book about memories and family stories. The message of family love and connection is strong. Inge speaks of her love for her parents and husband, and the reader sees the warmth she shows her great-granddaughter. The Kristallnacht pages show pictures of people being afraid, fire, and broken windows, but no graphic violence.

The illustrations are gorgeous. They truly complement and enrich the story being told. The cover art draws the reader in; even the end papers are distinctive. Each time period being described has a different style and color palette.

The publisher lists the book as being for grades K-3 or even ages 4-8, but it definitely skews older. The author's note at the end explains that the book is based on the life of the author's husband's grandmother. It includes pictures of the real Inge and her family and the author's purpose in writing Inge's story.

Highly recommended. Appropriate for all settings and ages. What a special, profound, and beautiful book. Text and illustrations work together to deliver historical information as well as ideas about family and memories.

Hillary Zana,
Volunteer Librarian,
Seattle Hebrew Academy
Seattle, WA

Bennett, Artie. *The Tenth Man: A Miracle of Jewish Faith and Friendship in New Orleans*. Illustrated by Shira Neiss. New York, Candlewick Press, 2026, 40 pp. \$18.99 (9780823458431) HC. Gr. 2-4.

Alex Brown was a young man mourning the loss of his grandfather when he wandered past a shul that seemed to beckon him. He realized that he'd been there as a child, and his return began his own healing process as well as new and welcome support for the barely surviving congregation. All the elderly members are Holocaust survivors; their dwindling numbers meant that they didn't have a *minyan*. Alex's presence allowed them to perform the required prayers and rituals. His participation going forward also provided the pleasure of intergenerational friendship. Alex could enjoy the humorous conversations of the old men and admire the skills they retained from their earlier lives, while his youth and physical strength helped the shul stay afloat. Watercolor and digital illustrations accurately depict the physical space of the synagogue. They capture the warm bond created between Alex and his grandfatherly companions, whose names are listed in a memorial tribute at the end of the book. Many Hebrew words are included parenthetically in the text and also in a glossary. The New Orleans setting provides a much-needed view of Judaism being practiced in less common locations. This touching, true story which is expanded with detailed back matter will resonate with readers of all faiths. It is suitable for secular as well as Jewish institutions and homes.



Gloria Koster,
Member of the Children's Book Committee of Bank Street College
of Education

Cypess, Leah. *The Mystery of the Mermaid*. Miriam's Magical Creature Files; 3. Illustrated by Sarah Lynne Reul. New York, Amulet Books, 2026. 106 pp. \$19.99 (9781419785849) HC. Gr. 2-4.

The third entry in Cypess' *Miriam's Magical Creature Files* has Miriam and her family on their way to their annual vacation destination at Mermaid Lake. In the past, her family has tried to convince her every year that the lake is named after a real mermaid. She has always believed this, but now that she is older, she questions whether this is true or if her family is just teasing. She believes that if she can prove it, she will finally be taken seriously by her family and even hilariously dreams that the lake will be renamed for her!



Continued on page 13

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

So this summer, Miriam is determined to use her detective skills to solve the mystery of the mermaid. Though she has big ideas for what will win her fame and recognition, she often gets distracted and neglects the pesky details. For example, her big investigation gets off to a disappointing start when she realizes she left her special mermaid-attracting props at home. Never discouraged for long, Miriam quickly accepts this reality and pivots to a new plan, one involving her special Israeli-made, personalized hairbrush and Ariella's phone. This plan does come with some strings attached, as Ariella convinces her to confront her fear of a super-high water-slide so she can get a better view of the lake.

Chock-full of delightful cartoon illustrations by Sarah Lynne Reul, it further adds to the charm of this already adorable and fast-paced, light mystery story (with a hint of magic thrown in). Characters present as modern Orthodox with *kippot*, kosher ice cream, Jewish holidays, and mentions of Israel, but will still have plenty of universal kid appeal. Cypess is completely spot-on when it comes to Miriam's voice as a misunderstood little sister who wonders why her exasperated family does not share her world-view. The humor and dialogue are perfect, and kids will relate while laughing at Miriam's antics. Another delightful winner by Cypess for the 2nd through 4th-grade crowd. Recommended for synagogue, day school, and JCC libraries

Esther Schnaidman,

Librarian and Teacher.

*Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey,
River Edge, NJ*

Gehl, Laura. *Becca & Bubbe's Bucket List*. Illustrated by Sarah Lynn Baker. New York, Rocky Pond Books, 2026. 32pp. \$18.99 (9780593857120) HC. PreK-Gr. 3.

While celebrating the first day of summer at an ice cream shop with her Bubbe, Becca learns the term bucket list. As in "You should put that Trash Can Sundae on your bucket list." (note: a Trash Can Sundae is ALL the flavors of ice cream with ALL the toppings.) So, Becca makes a bucket list for her summer vacation with tasks such as "swim in the ocean," "bake turtle-shaped *challah*," "sleepover under the stars," and more. When Becca asks Bubbe about her own bucket list, Bubbe has pretty much done all she wanted, except "walking down a runway in a glamorous outfit."

Becca and Bubbe work through the many items on Becca's bucket list with help from friends and family including driving three hours to a beach where Bubbe states that Becca can cross one of her last items off the list—"swimming in the ocean." "No, I can't," [Becca] said. "Of course you can," Bubbe encouraged. "I'll

hold your hand." And with that they plunge into the water.

One week before school begins, Becca is excited to find that she has almost checked off all the items on her list. But now she wants to check off an item for Bubbe. Becca and her friends and friends' grandmothers have all been working on staging a modeling show with Bubbe as the star. "No, I can't," Bubbe gasped. "Of course you can," Becca encouraged. "I'll hold your hand." With that, Bubbe became the star of the show. With gratitude, Bubbe wants to celebrate, so they enjoy the last item on Becca's list—The Trash Can Sundae!

With a sprinkling of Yiddish and Hebrew words (e.g. *mishigas*, *schvitzing*, *verklemp*, etc.) this story demonstrates the love and respect that Becca and Bubbe have for each other and how they overcome fear and anxiety to achieve their goals.

The illustrations were done in India ink and dip pens on watercolor paper. They are warmly colored, mostly in blues and greens, and beautifully display the emotional relationship between everyone involved in the story. There is a glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish words in the front of the book.

While a picture book format, this is a wonderful book to say "Thank you" to a grandparent and/or encourage a young person to pursue a bucket list of their own. I highly recommend this to all Jewish and other libraries.

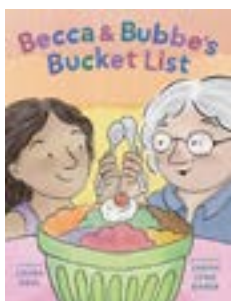
Kathy Bloomfield,

AJL Past President

Natick, MA

Schwartz, Ellen. *The Mysterious Lopsided Letter* (Liberty Clubhouse; 1). Illustrated by Margeaux Lucas. Millburn, Apples & Honey Press, 2026. 79 pp. \$17.95 (9781681157207) HC. Gr 2-4.

Set in 1785 Boston, this transitional chapter book is the first in a new series called *Liberty Clubhouse* about two cousins and their friend who turn an old shed into a clubhouse and solve mysteries. Although the story is fiction, the characters of Catherine Hays, Judah Touro, and Joseph Revere (Paul's son) are based on real people. Catherine's father (Judah's uncle) holds Sabbath services in his home since it was illegal to build a synagogue in Boston. When the children discover flyers all over town accusing Mr. Hays of holding "unlawful" gatherings that "insult Christianity," the children swing into action. They start removing the hateful flyers and are determined to identify the person responsible for them. Catherine notices that the printing of the letter J in Jew is lopsided and knows she has seen it printed like this before, although at first she doesn't remember where. The children investigate several possible perpetrators who prove to be innocent. When they finally identify the culprit, the



Continued on page 14

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

three of them help in reconciling the community, reminding everyone of religious freedom in the newly established United States.

The back matter includes an explanation of “Fact or Fiction?” and other interesting information about life for children in the late 1700s. Detailed black and white illustrations support the text well and include a map of Boston with labeled sites mentioned in the story. This historical fiction series introduces readers to life in Boston in the early years following the Revolutionary War and sheds light on religious tolerance. The book is recommended for synagogue and public libraries.

Evelyn B. Freeman,
Professor Emerita,
The Ohio State University,
Columbus, OH

Fiction - Middle Grade

Asher, Diana Harmon. *Trouble Finds Evie Lefkowitz*. Agawam, PJ Library, 2025. 246 pp. \$9.99 (9798992481839) PBK. Gr. 5-7.

While this book starts out with Evie, who is unhappy that her mom, a substitute teacher, is dating the middle school’s new assistant principal, it quickly evolves into a story of family, friends, school and community. Likeable Evie and her classmates deal with bullying, peer pressure, learning more about each other, and committing a daring rescue and release of the praying mantises caged in their science class.

Evie’s father had died a few years earlier. He had been a cantor, and along with all the other things poking at Evie—her mother’s new swain, tutoring and reconnecting with a friend from PreK (he’s dealing with a broken leg and concussion) whose best friend is the class bully—it’s time for her to start preparing to be a *bat mitzvah*, which she always thought she’d do under her father’s tutelage.

The Jewish aspects of the story fit in seamlessly. Evie’s family has been an integral part of their Reform synagogue. Her memories of her father’s *shivah* are absolutely what a child would feel and remember. She is reluctant to listen to the recording of her father demonstrating her *Torah* portion, sent to her by the temple’s new cantor. More than that, Evie matter-of-factly mentions that Hebrew School classes are sometimes canceled due to security concerns, putting the book squarely into contemporary times and issues.

Then the synagogue becomes a target of antisemitism; a rock is thrown through the beautiful stain-glassed window dedicated to Evie’s father. How the town comes together to support the Jewish community is realistic and hopeful, as is Evie moving forward in

dealing with her grief and cementing her loving relationship with her mother.

Readers will cheer for Evie when she vigorously confronts Joey (on whom she has a bit of a crush) and his troublesome and troubled friend Tommy, after overhearing them insult her and her two best friends (one of them, Rachel, also has a cool confrontation, and it’s good to learn more about her, and Japanese customs, too). Equally important is how the two boys own up to their behavior and apologize. Readers may hope for a sequel. These are interesting adolescents—their adults are interesting too—and moving forward with their challenges and comradery would be welcome.

An excellent choice for many school and public libraries. In or out of trouble, Evie is a compelling and sympathetic character.

Carla Kozak,
Retired Children’s Librarian,
San Francisco, CA

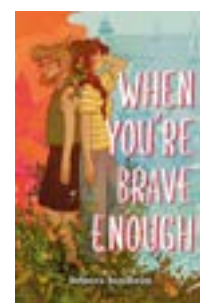
Bendheim, Rebecca. *When You’re Brave Enough*. New York, Viking, 2026. 298 pp. \$18.99 (9780593695135) HC. Gr. 6-8.

Lacey’s family has moved from Austin to Newport, where the musical-loving teen will be attending a middle school with an amazing endowment supported student theater. She misses her lifelong best friend Grace but wonders how she will be accepted just for herself.

Lacey gets the main role of Kim in *Bye Bye Birdie*, learning that the school has a fifty year tradition of the main show couple kissing at the end of whichever play is performed. Her two classmates, Isa and Nell, talk about this constantly; there are two male leads, which one will Lacey kiss? There’s also the female lead, Rosie, played by another new student, Violet. Lacey, who never had a crush before (Grace had them constantly, both boys and girls), realizes as uncomfortable as the kissing tradition is for her, she’d rather it be with Violet than with either of the boys.

Also in the mix of this coming out novel is Lacey’s reading of Anne Frank’s diary, especially Anne’s honesty in admitting her attraction for her girlfriend Jacque as well as her feelings for Peter van Daan, and Lacey’s preparation for her *bat mitzvah*. Her *Torah* portion is Joseph and his brothers, and discussing Reuben with her rabbi makes Lacey think deeply about how Grace is always encouraging and loving her, but how often had Lacey stood up for Grace?

There’s a lot of honesty in all that surrounds Lacey’s realization that she identifies as lesbian, with whom she really wants to share her first kiss (spoiler alert: it’s not anyone in the cast), and her ultimate challenge of tradition. Her family and her classmates, though sometimes exaggerated, ring true overall in their reactions,



Continued on page 15

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

assumptions, and support. The *bat mitzvah* discussions with Rabbi Herrera fit in beautifully with Lacey's questions about herself, whom she wants to love, and the person she wants to be.

Lacey's family is contemporary in many ways: her mother was not born Jewish; she states the aspects of Judaism that she loves, and it is the religion of their home. They do not keep kosher, but they observe the High Holidays and fast on *Yom Kippur* (Lacey feels guilty for ending her fast early to attend a sleepover). Public- and public-school libraries will want to consider this book, as will synagogue and Jewish school libraries accepting of the rainbow of issues affecting their teens.

Carla Kozak,
Retired Children's Librarian,
San Francisco, CA

Henderson, Judith. *Becca the Brave and The Life of Chai* (Becca the Brave; 3). Illustrated by Amy Jindra. New Rochelle, Reycraft Books, 2026. 46pp. \$ 15.95 (9781478880523) HC. Gr. 3-6.

In this third and final book of a series, Becca, Benj, and Warren return to finish what they started at a dilemma-filled *Shabbat* dinner (from Book 2 of this series). While Becca's Bubbe always taught her "to make her own luck," Becca is not sure she can do what it takes to save her friendship with Benj and make a new friend of Warren. Who will be Becca's best friend? Will Warren stop bullying Benj? Can jelly donuts solve their relationship problems?



The story teaches lessons of friendship, acceptance, conflict resolution and more by using the characters as examples of thoughtful behavior. However, just like the vocabulary, the story lines are also way above the early reader age group. Surveillance, managing anger, "smooching," stealing, bad language, etc. are not concepts familiar to young grade schoolers especially in their library reading material.

While the vocabulary and the story lines are for a higher grade level, the full-color pen and ink, or perhaps digital, illustrations are appropriately juvenile, if sometimes stereotypical. For example, cranky Madam Petrova looks like an old, angry Russian with a wide frowning mouth, wrinkled face and a gray bun at the top of her head (minus the head scarf,) wearing garter stockings with slippers. Becca's deceased Bubbe appears gray-haired and pinch-lipped, wearing brightly colored clothes with large red eyeglasses, oversized earrings and lots of jewelry (think Iris Apfel with less style.)

At first glance, this looks like an early reader book. It measures approximately 6" x 9" x .25", and is set in a large type font resembling 12pt Times Roman. However, upon reading, the story has vocabulary more suited to middle schoolers. Several words are capitalized with accompanying definitions, (e.g. "ABERRATION,

which means the colors are perfect"). Much of the text is written for a middle school grade level (5th–9th) rather than the publisher's lower suggested age range.

While this is a book that could appeal to older students having difficulty reading, the recommendation is to look for a different, hi-lo (high interest/low reading level) series such as those published by Orca Currents. For collections serving Jewish children.

Kathy Bloomfield,
AJL Past President
Natick, MA

Rubenstein, Elana. *A Whiff of Magic*. (Saralee Siegel; 6). Illustrated by Jennifer Malchigar. Millburn, Apples & Honey Press, 2026. 132 pp. \$17.95 (9781681157177) HC. Gr. 3-5.

In this latest book in the *heimish* and accessible Saralee Siegel series, Saralee and her Zadie are planning the *Shavuot* cheesecakes for the family restaurant, with her best friend Harold ready to design the cakes' decorations. Saralee's "super-nose" reconstructs a recipe from Zadie's childhood, and with it, a magical, movie-like memory of antics with his best friend, Irving. But in school the next day, Saralee learns she was the only girl not invited to Rachel's birthday party, and the girls are forming a club which also excludes her. Rachel's excuse is that they're classmates but not really friends, because Saralee is always with Harold, not her.



The friendship dilemma is the heart of the book, and it illustrates the pain of such exclusions, the balance of best friend and other friends, and unintentionally hurting the best friend to be one with the crowd. It's the rare child who hasn't experienced these things in some form.

Saralee courts Rachel and her crowd, earning entrance to their movie-making club by sharing her powers to invoke visions with baked goods. What starts out in awe and wonder starts to take over Saralee's life. Harold is left by the wayside and worse than that, becomes the object of embarrassment in one of the visions.

Zadie can tell things are not right with Saralee and Harold. He reminds her of the truth in the holiday they're preparing to celebrate. Stories are powerful, Zadie says, and it's important for Saralee to focus on the ones that are like *Torah*, stories that matter, feel true, and brighten the world. Saralee quickly bakes a cake that invokes all the good memories of her friendship with Harold and brings it to him with her apology.

Her family's restaurant opens; Saralee's cheesecakes fly off the shelves. Her classmate Talia comes with her parents, and she tells Saralee she'd like to be friends with both her and with Harold, whom she thinks is a nice, smart, and fun person. And Zadie's old

Continued on page 16

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

friend Irving shows up too, happy to resume their old friendship.

The magical realism is fun, but it's the challenges of grade school friend politics and Saralee's warm relationship with her Zadie that are the icing on the cake. Wonderful for Jewish readers, this will work for others as well, and for general collections. A recipe for Saralee's Honey Walnut Surprise Cheesecake is included.

Carla Kozak,
Retired Children's Librarian,
San Francisco, CA

Fiction - Teen

Reynolds, Hannah. *A Practical Guide to Dating a Demon*. New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2026. 352 pp. \$12.99 (9780593859032) PBK. Gr. 9-12.

Naomi has been telling boys that she is betrothed to a demon. She knows the boys just want to get close to her aunt, a member of the Sanhedrin. She just wants to focus on trying to decipher fragments of an ancient text written in an unrecognizable language, discovered by her professor several years earlier. But then one boy presses her for details, she makes up a name—Daziel—for her demon betrothed, and a demon appears and claims that her pronouncement means they really are betrothed. After failed attempts by Naomi and her friends to banish the demon, Naomi reluctantly allows Daziel to stay in her dorm room so that he can explore the city. Over the subsequent weeks, Daziel becomes part of Naomi's friend group, and Naomi finds herself not minding his presence as much. When the winds in Talum become increasingly erratic, with no plans from the Sanhedrin to address it, Daziel suspects that the Ziz, the primordial creature who controls the air, is injured. With his help on the mysterious language, the students find what might be a solution but must race to implement it before the Ziz dies, and against the Sanhedrin's orders.

A Practical Guide to Dating a Demon is a fresh new version of Jewish Young Adult fantasy. Aspects of Jewish history are taken for granted, like the Sanhedrin, and no attempt is made to explain how or why these aspects are still operational. Mention is made of other lands, but geopolitical intrigue is not an element of this book, nor are questions of faith. Instead, the book focuses on stories, language, and magic, detailing the students' work on the unknown language and their developing understanding of both the natural and social worlds. Rich in Jewish mythology and tradition, this book promises to excite and inspire young readers. Recommended for all libraries serving teens.

Dainy Bernstein,
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA



Wilson, Kip. *Backpack, Boy, Berlin*. Illustrated by Matt Schu. Somerville, Candlewick Press, 2026. 393 pp. \$18.99 (9781536239461) HC. Gr. 7-12. ARC

Based on a true story, this novel-inverse engages the reader from the first page. Don Heath Jr. is a curious, confident American boy in 1938 Berlin, brought there by his diplomat father Don Heath Sr. There is much to explore and friends to do it with. As Nazi control grows, friends start moving away, but the Heath family remains, united in their desire to help where they can. For young Don, it is in caring about the fate of his classmates including a few Jewish ones, innocently infiltrating a Nazi Youth group in order to gain useful knowledge, and to knowingly serve as a courier of messages, until it is too dangerous and he evacuates. Because, of course, he can while his friends are left to survive as best as they can.

Don's observations and maturity carry the story along, conveying the seriousness of the world around him while also allowing him to sometimes just be a kid with other kids in a crazy world. The Jewish content is in the setting, the events, and in Don's observations. Fans of Alan Gratz and Jennifer Nielsen will eagerly snatch this up.

This is a worthwhile purchase for public and school libraries, as well as for day school collections. The story of the helpers during WWII should be known, to show that individuals make a difference even if it all seems futile.

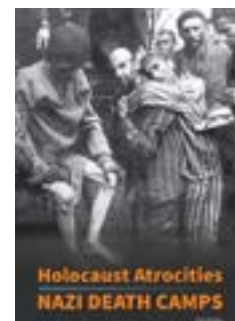
Judy Ehrenstein,
Children's Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries,
Co-editor, Children's and Teen Literature,
AJL News and Reviews,
Silver Summer, MD



Holocaust and World War II

Nardo, Don. *Holocaust Atrocities: Nazi Death Camps*. San Diego, ReferencePoint Press, 2025. 64 pp. \$45.26 (9781678208004) HC. Gr. 7-12.

A slim yet powerful volume on the horrors of the death camps of World War II, where millions of Jews, Roma, homosexuals, and others died. Readers will find the five chapters well organized, and well written, covering the topics of the rise of the camps, life and death, resistance and rebellion, and the final downfall and liberation at



Continued on page 17

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

the end of the war. Each chapter is divided into topical sections, sometimes with asides in dark blue boxes to highlight particular details, such as the treatment of the disabled and the dressmakers in Auschwitz who survived by becoming useful to the camp commandant's wife. The descriptions are moving as well as deeply distressing. While death was the goal of these camps, an amazing number of births took place, many of which were attended by Polish midwife Stanislaw Leszcaynska. Unfortunately, most of these babies were murdered shortly after delivery, but close to 30 lived to be liberated. Images include photos of victims, both alive and dead, some unclothed. They are distressing yet show the extent of the dehumanization that took place. Other photos are from museum exhibits or from the remains of camps themselves. Quotes set in orange boxes help make it even more accessible, highlighting words from survivors, historians, and even Nazis themselves. The index is well organized and further reading and source notes are included. A map titled "Ghettos, camps, and Killing Centers, 1942" is extremely user friendly and vital to understanding the realm of Nazi control.

Suitable for middle school and high school collections as well as public libraries. Synagogues may already have this information elsewhere.

Judy Ehrenstein,

*Children's Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries,
Co-editor, Children's and Teen Literature,
AJL News and Reviews,
Silver Summer, MD*

Fredman, Marion Seidemann. *A Time to Hide: Based on a True story of Survival During the Holocaust*. Art by Elisa Kleven, Diane Dove, and Juliana Fredman. Oakland, The Collective Book Studio, 2026. 96 pp. \$24.95 (9781685556280) HC. Gr. 3-7.

Author Marion Seidemann Fredman was born in Holland while her German-Jewish parents were in hiding. Told in a scrapbook format and with simple sentences, the horrors of the war are approached with sensitivity for the reader, limited to the loss of freedoms and material possessions. Siedemann's parents left Germany for Holland where they were able to live, first freely, then in hiding, thanks to the kindness and bravery of Dutch individuals. Even when Nazi soldiers came to the house, a pair of sisters stood steadfast with their story that the baby (the author) was from a liaison with an Italian soldier. Once the war was over and family members who had emigrated to the US were found, the author's parents chose to join them; the only mention of death of family members is in this section of the book.

Archival and personal photos combined with drawings and paintings by three illustrators create a visual delight and offer much to talk about.



Recommended for Jewish collections and for communities with large numbers of Holocaust survivors and their children.

Judy Ehrenstein,

*Children's Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries,
Co-editor, Children's and Teen Literature,
AJL News and Reviews,
Silver Summer, MD*

Lifecycle and Jewish Values

Newman, Leslea. *Something Sweet: A Sitting Shiva Story*. Illustrated By Sarita Rich. Boston, Charlesbridge, 2026. 32 pp. \$18.99. (9781623545710) Pre K-Gr. 3.

When her friend Joshua's grandfather dies, Lizzie and her mother come to pay a *shiva* call. The story is told in the first person voice of the little girl, who is not Jewish. This is an excellent choice by this multi-award winning author, allowing us to focus on Lizzie's confusion of a "shiver" call, her curiosity surrounding the *shiva* customs and her attempt to cheer up Joshua.



Lizzie's mom tries to prepare her for the visit and explains traditions of the washing pitcher at the front door, and the front door being left open. Other customs are blended into the story, including food being provided by the community for the family, mirrors being covered, low seats for the mourners, and the prayer service chanted in Hebrew.

The reader's immersion in the story intensifies when Joshua shares memories of his grandfather during the service. His grandfather liked to say that he was a lucky guy, but Joshua says he's the lucky one, he was lucky to have his grandfather. Trying to cheer him up in his room Lizzie asks if he wants to finish a puzzle or do a magic trick. But Joshua is truly grieving, when he starts to cry Lizzie asks him to talk more about his grandfather. This is when Lizzie learns how to step up as a friend, just by listening. Comforted by his memories the two enjoy the brownies Lizzie brought. "Something sweet for me, something sweet for Grandpa," says Joshua.

The muted tones of the watercolor art smoothly support the mood of the text and the topic. The female rabbi is dark skinned, wearing a *tallit* and *kippa*, several of the male visitors wear *kippot*. Sarita Rich's illustrations of the facial expressions of the boy and his parents skillfully capture their grief, adding a deeper layer of emotion to the story.

Providing more detailed information on the observance of *shiva* in the backmatter, the author, without judgement, reminds us that each family decides which of these customs feel right to observe.

Continued on page 18

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Deserving a place in all children's libraries as well as Jewish children's libraries, this book offers an approachable and sensitive way to prepare young people for the experience of making a *shiva* call, or any condolence visit. In efforts to create interfaith connections, this could be paired with books covering the mourning traditions of other faiths. While rituals vary, grief is relatable to all of us, a universal strand in the bridge of shared humanity.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS,
Children's Book Committee, Bank Street College
West Orange, NJ

Robinson, Doreen Klein. *A Place to Pray: A Tale of Friendship and Community*. Illustrated by Yuke Li. New York, Worthy Kids, 2026. 40 pp. \$18.99. (9781546009139) PreK-Gr. 2.

In December 2020, the century-old Middle Collegiate Church in New York City suffered devastating damage, the result of a raging fire. The reader shares this experience with a young Jewish boy and Black church member girl. Each has many different questions, but one question in common: where will the church members pray?



The story begins as we see the routine of the boy on his way to temple on *Shabbat*, usually seeing the girl, his friend. And then we see the girl on her way to church on Sunday mornings, waving to the boy. But, on the day the fire, burned everyone in the community stands in shock and alarm together. Just a few months later the church community is welcomed and begins to worship in the East End Temple, where they continue to pray on Sundays and holidays until five years later, when the new church building opens. Through these years of sharing space the communities created a lasting relationship with a shared goal of *tikkun olam*.

The mixed media artwork is clear and vibrant, synchronized well with the text and the emotions of the developing story. The temple congregation presents as racially diverse with mixed seating, males wearing *kippot* and the rabbi wearing a *tallit*. While there are several spreads showing the exterior and interior of the church before and after the fire, there are notably fewer illustrations of the temple. The endpapers and an interior spread provide an engaging map of the neighborhood.

The extensive backmatter with photographs, a bibliography, and important information about the Liberty Bell that was housed in the church enhance the value of this book, encouraging an audience of readers of all ages. The prefacing author's note emphasizes the values of *tikkun olam*, *mitzvot*, and *tzedekah*, brought to life in this recent historic event. This book is a worthwhile addition to all children's libraries of all faiths, an excellent resource for interfaith events.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS,
Children's Book Committee, Bank Street College
West Orange, NJ

Nonfiction

Lewis, Amanda West. *Looking at the Sky: How Dr. Janusz Korczak Fought for Children's Rights*. Illustrated by Abigail Rajunov. Toronto, KidsCan Press, 2026, 79 pp. \$16.99 (9781525310249) HC. Gr. 4-6.

This is a gently told graphic novel about real-life pediatrician and child advocate Dr. Janusz Korczak, who worked in pre-World War II Poland and perished in Treblinka. Born Henryk Goldszmit, he directed several orphanages in Warsaw and worked to promote children's rights as well as care for their physical, emotional, and educational needs. The story is told by a fictional character, Izaak, who is a composite of many real children who lived at Dom Sierot, the Home of Orphans. When a resident turned 14, they needed to leave, but not without receiving a gift, that of Hope: "hope of a better life, a life of truth and justice." Izaak emigrated to Canada after leaving Dom Sierot, leaving his sisters, friends, and Dr. Korczak behind. While life was hard at first, it was nothing compared to that of those still in Poland. While Korczak was offered travel documents, he chose to remain with his staff and the children of Dom Sierot at first in the Warsaw Ghetto, then sent together to Treblinka. Long after the war ended, our fictional narrator learned their fate. The narrator ends the tale as an old man, who passes on the message to readers that they can make the world a better place. Korczak's work influenced the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



The author cites her conversations with Leon Gluzman (1914-2012), a Korczak orphan, as the impetus for this book. While not mentioned, a play, "The Children's Republic," written by Hannah Moscovitch and co-produced by Lewis, premiered in 2009, as a thank you to Gluzman, who supported the Ottawa School of Speech and Drama.

Abigail Rajunov's illustrations, done in pencil with a muted color scheme, evoke the central role children played in Korczak's life, filling most pages with the activities of life in Dom Sierot and only occasionally showing Korczak himself.

A worthwhile purchase primarily for Jewish collections.

Judy Ehrenstein,
Children's Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries,
Co-editor, Children's and Teen Literature,
AJL News and Reviews,
Silver Summer, MD

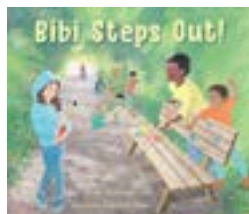
Continued on page 19

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Picture Books

Schotter, Roni. *Bibi Steps Out!*. Illustrated by Christy Hale. Somerville, Candlewick Press, 2026, 32 pp. \$18.99 (9781536238525) HC. Gr. 1-4.

Bibi Bernstein is painfully shy, avoiding contact with others. Her refuge is an old rail trail which is in disrepair but serves as a quiet getaway spot. Bibi, an artist, loves to go there to think and to sketch. It is her creativity that unexpectedly draws her into a community project to rescue the rail trail. A neighbor, who recognizes her talent, asks her to design a poster. This story, which validates kids with introverted personalities and focuses on rail trail renewal, is also about the power of collaboration and the wonderful things that can be accomplished when people of varying skills work together. The theme of *tikkun olam* runs throughout the book. It's the name of the neighbor's fix-it shop, and it's the spirit of Bibi's community as they begin to repair the world by starting in their own backyard. Realistic, mixed media illustrations help to convey this contemporary story that celebrates a key Jewish value. The book is suitable for religious and secular libraries.



Gloria Koster,

*Retired School Librarian—New Canaan, CT Public Schools
Member of the Children's Book Committee of Bank Street College
of Education*

Silverberg, Alan. *The Bagel Who Wanted Everything*. New York, Viking, 2025. 32 pp. \$18.99 (9780593693131) HC. PreK- Gr. 4.

Alan Silberberg has already introduced us to the *Latkes*, the *Hamantaschen*, and the *Matzah* in his previous books. In his latest entry of personified traditional Jewish foods, Silberberg introduces us to the Everything Bagel, recounting its own origin story. He was born as a humble plain bagel to a proud plain bagel family, going back for generations. This plain bagel decides it is too boring to be just ONE thing. He is not content living so plainly; he wants more, so he experiments with adding other things, including fancy hats, lamps, and washing machines. Sadly, this approach actually brings him more challenges, and his Great-Plain-Grandbagel scolds him, "Be happy with the ONE thing you are," but he does not give up on ways to spice things up in his life. So plain bagel decides to explore further in the world and incorporate a different array of things, like sunshine, puffy clouds, flowers, and the moon's glow. After wearing all of these new features, he shows himself to the flavored bagels. Their initial shock turns into giggles at the plain



bagel's antics. When he glances in the mirror, he understands their reaction and accepts that it was ridiculous to try to be more than one thing. When everyone is done with their rollicking, he sees they all left a little of themselves behind, which he has been rolling in. In fact, he sees he is plain no longer, and has all sorts of bits on him, including onion, poppy, garlic, and salt! And this is how a plain bagel turned into the first Everything Bagel! His bagel friends realize that they, too, can be creative if they so choose.

Silberberg's pages are packed with vibrant colors and super-expressive, whimsical bagels. He wonderfully conveys the unique personalities of bagels as they drink coffee, wear glasses, and (the elderly) use canes. Lots of speech balloons and cartoon different-sized fonts add to the fun. Endpapers illustrate humorous poses of a variety of bagels. Perfect amount of humor and antics to be enjoyed by everyone from pre-school age to older kids. Recommended for public and synagogue libraries.

Esther Schnaidman,
Librarian and Teacher.

*Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey,
River Edge, NJ*

Stein, Tammar. *Cats in Jerusalem*. Illustrated by Menahem Halberstadt. London, Green Bean Books, 2026. 16 pp. \$12.99 (9781805000877) HC. PreK-Gr. 2.

A trio of cats (one white, one black and white, one orange tabby) serve as opportunistic tour guides around Jerusalem to a diverse family of four and to young readers. Colorful illustrations somewhat exaggerate the humans and the cats with an eye toward the comical, but the sites (described by name and identifying illustrations on the final page) are painted with respect.



Hebrew signage is visible throughout the book. A variety of people are shown, including an Orthodox father and son, busking with a guitar and harmonica (the three cats sing along). All four family members are clad in shorts; the mother and son have baseball caps (the son's says *Shalom*, in Hebrew), the brown-skinned father wears a brimmed cowboy-style hat. The darker-skinned daughter's curly head is bare except for the final small illustration where she too wears a baseball cap. A good book for introducing verbs, and an enjoyable introduction to the city that can serve as a guidebook for young visitors, this is a must for synagogue and other Jewish PreKs and Kindergarten classes, and libraries serving Jewish communities.

Carla Kozak,
*Retired Children's Librarian,
San Francisco, CA*

Continued on page 20

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Stemple, Heidi E. Y. *Zoey Zoombeck, Superhero*. Illustrated by Alexandra Colombo. Millburn, Apples and Honey Press, 2026. 32pp. \$19.95 (9781681157153) HC. Gr. K-2.

In Heidi Stemple's adorable picture book, the reader meets young and apprehensive Zoey, who has recently celebrated her birthday with her family, which consists of her two dads and her older brother, Aaron. All of the presents she has received—a yoyo, marbles, and a bike—are big red flags for her super-cautious nature. Her attitude shifts when she opens a gift from Aunt Miriam: a beautiful purple cape, personalized with her initials. Her amiable gray tabby cat, Afikomen, is her faithful sidekick. Emboldened by her gift, Zoey suddenly becomes a superhero of everyday adventures, be it at school, the deli or the vet's office. Turning mundane events into imaginary narrow escapes, where this young superhero (and cat) saves the day. In fact, with her newfound confidence, she feels comfortable riding her new bike and courageously races to the playground to continue her heroic work, saving children from accidents that they do not seem to know are waiting for them. After her much deserved relaxing bubble bath, she discovers that her superhero cape is gone! And so is Afikomen. Her Abba assures her that her cape is safe, just being washed and dried. Whew! But what will she do if an emergency arises while her cape is drying and not available to boost her confidence? As she searches for Afikomen outside, her bravery is tested as she sees the cat is stuck up a tree. Will she have the courage, without her cape, to put herself in harm's way to do what needs to be done? It takes all of her fortitude to overcome her fears to find a way to save her beloved Afikomen. "Cape or no cape, Zoey Zoombeck was a superhero!" Zoey's dads and older brother cheer for her. Colombo's illustrations do a beautiful job conveying the characters' expressions and highlight the details in the story, adding to the gentle humor. After the story, there is a note from Zoey sharing her thoughts about courage. And for a special bonus, there are simple instructions for making a cape out of a pillowcase. Recommended for all collections.



Esther Schnaidman,
Librarian and Teacher,
Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey,
River Edge, NJ

Shabbat and Holidays

Benamy, Talia. *Twinkle, Twinkle, Hanukkah*. Illustrated by Aura Lewis. New York, Workman Publishing, 2025. 28pp. \$12.99 (9781523530168) HC. PreK-Gr. 2.

This simple book uses easy rhyming text to describe and celebrate the many traditions that occur during the holiday of *Hanukkah*. Each description begins by using a descriptive word twice: "Twinkle, twinkle *menorah*..." "Brightly, brightly, candles shine..." "Spinning, spinning" *dreidels*... "Sharing, sharing" to discuss gift giving, "sizzle, sizzle" *latkes*, and "Mighty, mighty Maccabees." One of the highlights is a "happy, happy we will be, with neighbors, friends, and family. Near or far or in between, in one room or on a screen" depicting grandparents on a computer screen (Zoom?) greeting their family online.



The art is subtly colored and appears to be electronically generated featuring multiethnic and diverse family units. Everyone is represented as happy.

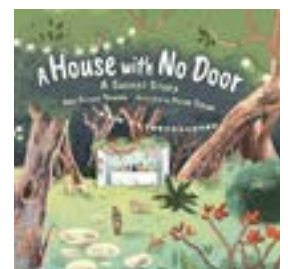
The book ends with two pages describing *Hanukkah* as a "celebration of Jewish survival." It contains explanations of the Maccabee story, eating food fried in oil, playing *dreidel*, giving gifts and singing.

This simple message would be excellent in a PreK or library setting during *Hanukkah*, or in a book basket at a synagogue Tot *Shabbat*.

Kathy Bloomfield,
AJL Past President
Natick, MA

Dominy, Amy Fellner. *A House With No Door: A Sukkot Story*. Illustrated by Rotem Teplow. Minneapolis, KarBen Publishing, 2026. 24 pp. \$19.99 (9798765670569). PreK-Gr. 2.

The repeated refrain, "What kind of house is this?" propels the narrative of this poetic expression of the *Sukkot* holiday. The first page invites the reader in: "It's a house with three walls and no door. It's a house where the outside hangs on the inside, and the inside feels like the outside. It's a house with room for everyone. This house is called a *Sukkah*." The author's purpose is not to explain the rituals, but to present the holiday as a whimsical adventure through the natural world of plants, animals, and the wonder of creation. A curious child follows promptings of an unseen narrator who asks and answers various questions about



REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

what the family and young children (and animals) are doing in the bright and cheery illustrations. The *sukkah* is decorated by the family in a wooded area nearby and the author presents each of the senses as a way to discover holiday joy. They look up through the roof, they hear the whisper of the wind, they taste the foods, smell the *etrog*, and make decorations together.

Information about *Sukkot* is included in an author's note at the end, including a photo of a real *sukkah* with a family inside. It is a lovely book for young children and the poetry of the text will make a delightful read-aloud to a group. A recommended purchase for home, Jewish schools and libraries, and public libraries with Jewish populations.

Lisa Silverman,

Retired Director,

Sperber Jewish Community Library,

Los Angeles, CA

First Festivals: Hanukkah—A Lift-the-Flap Book. Illustrated by Kathryn Selbert. New York, Running Press Kids 2025. 12 pp. \$ 8.99 (9798894140643) Board Book. Ages 0-3.

Hanukkah is being explained and celebrated from page-to-page and family to family throughout this short, sweet board book with lift-the-flap inserts that bring everyone into the story. Each page spread depicts a *Hanukkah* tradition: "This Jewish holiday celebrates freedom...a candle is lit on the *menorah* for each night that passes." *Latkes* and *sufganiyot* are fried in oil to remember the oil that burned for the Maccabees. *Tzedakah* is explained with "Gifts are exchanged, and families give to charity." *Dreidels* are spun. The *Hanukkah* story is told at a synagogue. The families celebrate together on the eighth night.

Diverse, multigenerational family structures, along with many different Jewish ethnicities and traditions, are illustrated in this charming board book using cute, warmly colored and cheerful watercolor style pictures. Simple language and interactive flaps on each page reinforce the traditions and celebrations of *Hanukkah*.

Overall, this would be a fine addition to any PreK holiday library, especially for a Tot *Shabbat* or *Hanukkah* service.

Kathy Bloomfield,

AJL Past President

Natick, MA

Gruen, Naomi. *Hear Me Roar! I'm a Hanukkahsaur.* Illustrated by Mel Zohar. Moosic, Kalaniet, 2026. 40 pp. \$19.99 (971962011198). PreK-Gr. 2.

There are a surprising number of dinosaur/*Hanukkah* themed picture books out in the world, but they tend to be aimed at the youngest PreKers. Here's a fun one for



an older child that's funny, educational, and Jewish—hitting all the right notes for that dinosaur-loving kid. The author infuses holiday traditions with dinosaur lore, self-reliance, dinosaur puns, and an ethical lesson. The story of dino-expert Miles and his enthusiasm for making *Hanukkah* messes around the house will be a hit with kids.

On the first night of *Hanukkah*, Miles gets a green dinosaur costume, makes his first mess with the wrapping, and proclaims he is a "HANUKKAHsaur". The second night, he again wears his outfit, "helps" his mom make potato pancakes, and becomes a "veLATKEraptor." On the third night, he plays *dreidel* with friends dressed as a "TriceraTops" and breaks a cookie jar. And so it goes, until the final night of the *Hanukkah* Raptor Romp party, where the whole house looks like a disaster area, and the parents are exhausted. A lesson on good behavior is included each time Miles makes a mess, realizes he needs to help with cleanup, and exclaims that "Dinos can do it!" The illustrations are bright, cartoonish, multiculturally inclusive, and full of humor that children will enjoy pointing out. Extensive back matter is a boon for dino-lovers, including Miles' favorite actual dinosaurs, and also his favorite imaginary dinosaurs, along with a glossary of terms and a challenge to find hidden dinosaur figurines among the illustrations. This is a clear winner for a new *Hanukkah* title that will engage the intended audience. Highly recommended for all schools and libraries.

Lisa Silverman,

Retired Director,

Sperber Jewish Community Library,

Los Angeles, CA

Kimmelman, Leslie. *All Who Are Hungry, Come and Eat!: A Passover Story* Illustrated by Alyssa Russell. New York, HarperCollins, 2026. 32 pp. \$18.99 (9780063325364) PreK-Gr.2.

Young Ethan is disappointed while helping to set the *seder* table that this year there will only be his parents, himself and his poodle, Sadie. His mother tells him that maybe they will get some unexpected guests and to ensure he sets an extra place for Elijah the prophet. As the preparation to start the *seder* continues there is a knock at the door and Ethan wonders if it is Elijah. It is a neighbor with a bowl of haroset asking if he may join them and Ethan replies, "Of course! All who are hungry, come and eat!" Throughout the *seder* more knocks on the door occur



Continued on page 22

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

and Ethan answers each time anticipating Elijah. As grandparents, talking animals, and extended family ask if they can come in, Ethan always replies, "Of course! All who are hungry, come and eat!"

The illustrations portray many of the parts of the *seder*, including the full *seder* plate, and the text mentions many of the different foods brought by guests including sweet potato *tzimmes* and sweet fried *bimuelos*, drizzled with honey. Characters are depicted with various skin tones, with some males, including Ethan, wearing *kippot*.

Back matter includes an author's note describing the history and meaning of Passover, what some of the special foods symbolize, and why Elijah is an important part of the evening. A basic recipe for *Haroset*, with suggested substitutions, is also included but there is a printing error: it should be ½ tsp cinnamon instead of 4 tsp. Great addition to libraries with Passover picture book collections.

Sean Patrick Boyle,

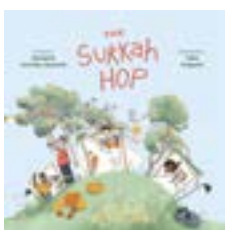
*Librarian, Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley
Allentown, PA*

*Immediate Past President
Association of Jewish Libraries*

Lerman-Golomb, Barbara. *The Sukkah Hop*. Illustrated by Talia Drigues. London, Green Bean Books, 2026. 16 pp. \$12.99 (9781805001409). PreK-Gr. 2.

The idea of families visiting different *sukkahs* on the same day during the holiday of *Sukkot* is rather new.

This picture book celebrates that option with a joyous "Sukkah Hop" that follows participants walking from one *sukkah* to another, until reaching four separate ones,



pied piper style. The first family hops to *sukkah* number one with a plate of cookies and baskets of colorful paper chains. The family is multicultural, with three kids and a wagging puppy, and they are greeted by an elderly couple who supplies craft materials as everyone helps to decorate their *sukkah*. The pair (the woman has a walker) join the family to hop on to *Sukkah Two*, occupied by a red-headed (and pregnant) family who welcomes them in to do some *lulav* shaking together. The group becomes larger at the next two *sukkah* stops, *Sukkah Three* has two dads and a baby, and the last *sukkah* is huge, where the group of now twenty-five people sits down for a festive meal together. Adorable family pets fill the illustrations, and the rhyming couplet narration is charming. This is a perfect story for preschoolers, who will love to narrate some of the *mishigas* seen in the pictures, and perhaps even take some guesses at how all these guests might be related to each other.

Lisa Silverman,

Retired Director,

*Sperber Jewish Community Library,
Los Angeles, CA*

Ludwig, Sidura. *Our Spectacular Sukkah*. Illustrated by Sophia Vincent Guy. Somerville, Candlewick, 2026. 32 pp. \$18.99 (9781536235104) HC. PreK-Gr. 2.

Our Spectacular Sukkah is a sweet and personal story highlighting the joy and excitement of a family's celebration of the holiday of *Sukkot*. They gather materials along with original and colorful decorations while reveling in the fun of building, sharing, and helping each other. They prepare for basic weather issues of warmth and cold and finally declare their *sukkah* to be complete and perfect.



Then the unexpected happens and gala winds blow down the beloved *sukkah*. Friends and neighbors come to the rescue gathering the scattered items and help rebuild the *sukkah* into a spectacular and welcoming new *sukkah* big enough for everyone.

The bright pictures portray a loving family committed to Jewish holidays and basic customs while encouraging the reader to become involved and excited through inclusive text and simple vocabulary appropriate for young children. An author's note at the end provides factual information about *Sukkot* and there is a "make your own *sukkah*" guide included as well. For all collections.

Rachel Glasser,
Teaneck, NJ

Rouss, Sylvia A. *Sammy Spider's Big Book of Jewish Holidays*. Illustrated by Katherine Janus Kahn. Minneapolis, Kar-Ben Publishing, 2025. 24 pp. \$19.99 (9781728492919) HC. PreK-Gr. 2.

A continuation of the Sammy Spider series, where Sammy Spider and his mother, Mrs. Spider, secretly live in the Shapiro household. Sammy learns of Jewish holidays and practices through watching the Shapiros' son Josh prepare for each holiday. The book starts with Josh helping Mr. Shapiro hang the Jewish calendar on the wall. The holidays celebrated are *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Simchat Torah*, *Hanukkah*, *Tu B'Shevat*, *Purim*, Passover, and *Shavuot*. As in the previous Sammy Spider books, Sammy asks his mother what Josh is doing and then asks if he too can participate. Mrs. Spider always responds, "Silly little Sammy, spiders don't ..., spiders spin webs."



A perfect complement to the Sammy Spider holiday books, the artwork is the same bright collage style used by Kahn in all of the Sammy Spider books. Each holiday has its own two page spread with an original story and often original artwork. Each

Continued on page 22

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

holiday ends with a very short description of the holiday and will state if linked to another holiday, or often tells which Northern Hemisphere season it falls in. Perfect as a quick way to introduce or review the holidays and tie into the Sammy Spider series and the famous catchphrase “spiders spin webs.” Rouss provides more descriptions of the holidays in each story than typically in the Sammy Spider series, making it more accessible to non-Jewish readers. Highly recommended for libraries that already have the Sammy Spider series and for all libraries with Jewish holiday picture books.

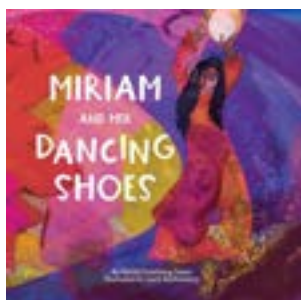
Sean Patrick Boyle,

*Librarian, Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley
Allentown, PA
Immediate Past President
Association of Jewish Libraries*

Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg. *Miriam and Her Dancing Shoes*. Illustrated by Joani Rothenberg. Millburn, Apples and Honey Press, 2026. 38pp. \$19.95 (9781681157276) HC. K-Gr. 2.

J oy, hope and humor propel a charming, fast moving vignette of Miriam’s role in the dramatic climax to the Exodus from Egypt. This Passover holiday picture book is challenging for its targeted age group with its strong vocabulary, but, more obviously, its sophisticated swirling artwork. The Jewish people must move fast to be saved! The tempo of the words delivers a sense of haste as well as the fear of people fleeing into the unknown. Miriam calms that fear, making their flight successful.

The dialog stands out because in a threatening situation the words are not heavy, but recognizable, relatable sibling rivalry between Moses and his older sister. Every sensible person flees with dough that will feed them as *matzah*. Miriam brings a timbrel and dancing shoes made of the same reeds that made her basket that saved Moses as a baby and brought him to the pharaoh’s palace. Now as an adult and leader he sees his sister as a silly lightweight in her preparations. But the frightened people can hear the music of Miriam. It inspires them to hope and joy; it allows them to keep plodding on in a scary scene where Moses is far ahead, out of sight and out of touch. He is stern and heavy; she is joyous and eager for the future. Her short but strong, effective role makes her a feminist hero that expands this book beyond the holiday genre. The art’s deep jewel tones create a swirling background imitating waves; the words sometimes follow this undulating pattern, flying



around with the spraying water. The art supports the words as figures are either shadowy or defined against this strong background depending on the text. Despite its importance in Jewish lore, the tale arrives here as a brother/sister competition that all readers will grasp and giggle at.

The volume offers a new song with lyrics and music by David Sasso, two craft activities, and a strong endnote about sources from the Bible and ancient rabbis which impart the origins of the delicious volume here whose focus makes it stand out. Recommended for synagogue, school, and public libraries.

Ellen G. Cole,

*Retired Librarian,
Temple Isaiah,
Los Angeles, CA*

Stoller, Melissa. *Stella’s Secret Recipe: A Rosh Hashanah Story*.

Illustrated by Valerya Milovanova. Minneapolis, Kar-Ben Publishing, 2026. 32 pp. \$18.99 (9798765670552) Gr. K-3.

S tella is so excited that she is finally old enough to help cook the Rosh Hashanah family favorite, stuffed cabbage rolls which have become a beloved recipe handed down from Bubbe to Nana to Mama and now to Stella. Each generation adds its own special ingredient such as raisins, onions, garlic, and honey as well as a special touch to personalize the dish. As the recipe grows and develops, so does the story as it portrays close and loving family relationships while highlighting role models and a love for cooking and utilizing fresh ingredients.

The language is simple and clear as appropriate for a holiday story for young children, but there is no reference to *Rosh Hashanah* themes, customs, observances or other Jewish rituals. This is just a sweet tale about a traditional Jewish food that is suitable for any library. There is a detailed stuffed cabbage recipe at the end of the book.

The whimsical illustrations are colorful and expressive and are important to the story’s action and progression. A younger child will enjoy following Sophie’s experiences through the pictures feeling the warmth, history, and love of the family. For all collections.

Rachel Glasser,

Teaneck, NJ



CELEBRATE

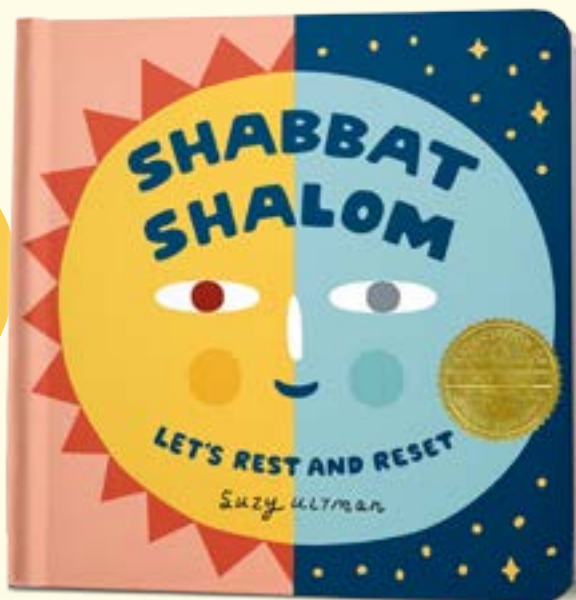


THE JOY AND BEAUTY OF JUDAISM WITH SUZY ULTMAN!

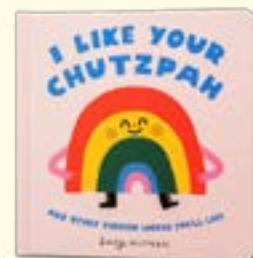
BRIGHT BOARD BOOKS FOR EVERY LIBRARY

The
Sydney Taylor
Book Award
winner

The second-ever
board book to win
an ALA Youth
Media Award



9780593751930



9780593751916



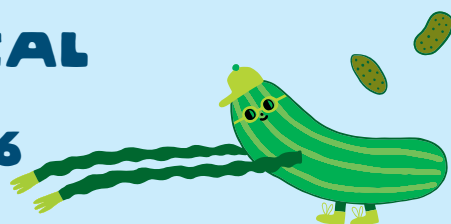
9780593751978



9780593751954



AND WHIMSICAL FOOD FUN COMING 10.6



Art © 2016 Suzy Ultman

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

In The Spotlight



EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE
AND TREVAN HATCH

Franklin, Ruth. *The Many Lives of Anne Frank*. New Haven, Yale UP, 2025. 424 pp. \$19.00 (9780300248128) PBK.

This in-depth biography of Anne Frank by Ruth Franklin will be a definitive work on the diary Anne Frank wrote and on all that followed its publication almost eighty years ago, first in 1947 in Dutch and then in 1952 in English. These initial books were edited, and the full diary followed in later years. The book is an incredible work of thorough research, beautifully written, very readable, and most informative. The diary has been translated into seventy languages. It is impossible to count the many books and articles written about it. It has also been made into movies and plays, and the many books cover every genre, from critical works to children's books, illustrated ones, and more.

Franklin analyzes the diary and describes it, including many direct quotes from its pages. She places these within the historical context of the two years that Anne and seven others were hidden in the attic in the heart of Amsterdam. While reading the book, one learns about the times, as well as many comments made about parts of the diary by authors over the years. Franklin writes about the diary's importance around the world and its use as a source for comparisons with the suffering of children everywhere. Among other countries, a chapter is devoted to Anne Frank in Ethiopia and the story of how the diary was translated into Tigrinya, an Ethiopian-Semitic language native to Eritrea and parts of Ethiopia. In using the diary in so many ways, the fact that Anne was Jewish—and that her fate was determined solely because of that—often becomes blurred. As Franklin states, “An Anne Frank who is everywhere will ultimately be nowhere.” As a result, when the book is used to combat prejudice in general, the specifics of Anne's life as a Dutch Jew who was a victim of the Holocaust are lost. This excellent book, published to much acclaim by reviewers, analyzes in depth both the diary and its place in literature over the past eighty years. It is recommended for every library—school, synagogue, and academic.

Michlean Lowy Amir,

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, retired

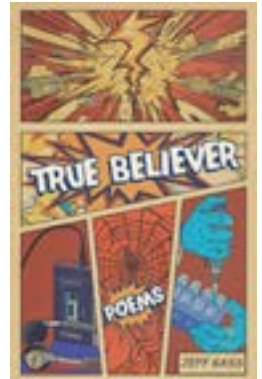


Kass, Jeff. *True Believer: Poems*. Ann Arbor, Dzanc Books, 2025. 95 pp. \$17.95 (9781938603266) PBK.

Despite what the comic-riddled cover may convey, Jeff Kass's book of poems is a compelling read for any reader, not just the comic book nerd. Kass's work weaves together various styles, from limericks to hip-hop lyrics to ten-page-long epic poems that leave the reader with much to think about. The poems are all cleverly written that some are filled with truths about the world and some just plain silly. While many poems celebrate Marvel comics and their iconic characters, others explore family, teaching, baseball, and Jewish identity, revealing the varied experiences that have shaped the poet's life. Jewish themes appear throughout the collection, sometimes directly through references to tradition and heritage, and sometimes more subtly through the values of community, resilience, and questioning that underpin many of the poems. *True Believer* clearly comes from a strong place of love and childlike wonder, to a point where the reader may find themselves also wanting to be as true a believer—not just in superheroes, but in the joy and wonder that each day brings. The poem titled “The Thing About The Thing,” in particular, was a highlight, displaying Kass's mastery of the craft. Whether writing about superheroes or everyday life, Kass finds moments of wonder in the ordinary and invites readers to do the same.

This book of poems would fit easily in a public library and could find a home in an academic library with a focus on Jewish literature or contemporary poetry.

Sara Merkin,
Dunwoody, Georgia



Fiction

Ain, Meryl. *Remember to Eat and Other Stories*. Brooklyn, Spark Press, 2026. 212 pp. \$17.95 (9781684633401) PBK.

In this collection of charming interconnected short stories, Meryl Ain uses a vignette style to relay the multigenerational journey of a Jewish New York family, spanning the eras from World War II until the present, primarily focusing on mother and daughter, Alice and Marjorie. The anecdotes beautifully reflect the events of this time period. The book chronicles how these women see the world and how the



Continued on page 26

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

world sees them, directly impacting the opportunities available to them and the boundaries they must adhere to.

Their narratives reflect the choices they make, whether in their families or careers. Alice confidently enlists in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) during WWII, hoping to serve as a public relations officer. While her father was fearful of losing another child, her mother, Sadie, steadfastly supported Alice's decision because her parents suppressed her own dreams. After the war, however, Alice returns to a more traditional female trajectory of marrying and becoming a homemaker. Some years later, she is frustrated, like so many women of her day, by the lack of options for women who want to make a greater impact. Though her daughter Marjorie is offered more life choices, she has a challenging time figuring out what the best path is for her. Then her daughter, Deborah, an ambitious lawyer, cannot comprehend or relate to her mother's decision not to push harder to attend law school when she was younger and had the chance.

Many of the anecdotes are told out of sequence, which can make it somewhat confusing to follow, but the individual stories are well-written, entertaining, thoroughly enjoyable, and stand alone. A glossary of Hebrew/Yiddish terms and book club discussion questions is included. This short story collection is recommended for synagogue libraries and public libraries.

Esther Schnaidman,

Librarian and Teacher,

Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, River Edge, NJ

Bechdel, Alison. *Spent: A Comic Novel*. New York, Mariner Books, 2025. 272 pp. \$30.00 (9780063278929) HC.

In this graphic novel, which also serves as a memoir, cartoonist Alison Bechdel chronicles a fictionalized account of her life wherein her fictional self, also named Alison, ran a pygmy goat sanctuary and tried to write a new book. Along with the new book, which deals with the history of capitalism and its impact on the world and human nature, she was also trying to stay involved with a TV show based on the fictional counterpart to her real-life memoir



Fun Home (Mariner Books Classics), about growing up in a funeral home run part-time by her father. This fictional counterpart, titled *Death and Taxidermy*, plays a central role in the narrative of the book. During the period of Covid, Bechdel and her wife, Holly, and their friends try to stay connected both physically and virtually. One way they do this is by celebrating *Shabbat* communally to disconnect from the politics of the era as well as the situation around Covid. The participants are all advocates for LGBTQ+ and other progressive politics and policies, and these commitments are also at the heart of the book, which also serves as both a warning and chronicle of this era in American politics.

The art style is very expressive and realistic, and it is colored by the author's wife, Holly, who is also an artist. Many of the characters in this book will be familiar to readers of Bechdel's earlier works, especially the *Dykes to Watch Out For* series (Firebrand Books), which ran from 1983 to 2008 and featured younger versions of many figures in *Spent*. Bechdel has these characters advising the younger generation, including their own children, on LGBTQ+ and political issues. This ties many of her works together, which will be rewarding for those who have read her earlier titles, although *Spent* can also be read on its own without prior knowledge. This book is recommended for libraries that collect graphic novels and/or works on LGBTQ+ issues, American politics, and other similar subjects.

Eli Lieberman,

Interim Library Director,

HUC-JIR New York

Botnick, Diane. *Becoming Sarah: A Novel*. Berkeley, She Writes Press, 2025. 339 pp. \$17.99 (9798896360001) PBK.

Becoming Sarah is a debut novel from writer Diane Botnick that presents a multigenerational family portrait that originates with a baby girl's birth at Auschwitz in the winter of 1942. The novel traces the newborn infant's unlikely survival in Auschwitz and then Birkenau, as she is cared for by a cohort of suffering women who somehow keep a small child's existence a secret from the guards for several years.



The book opens with a prologue and is then divided into 'before' and 'after' sections, covering the different periods and people in the life of the main character, Sarah Vogel. While the story starts in Europe, most of the book takes place in the United States, in New York and in the Midwest, describing the varied life experiences of Sarah Vogel and those of her daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughter. The story ranges through blocks of time, from 1963 to an imagined 2044. In addition to the impact of the Holocaust, themes of identity, love, loss, motherhood, and displacement are reflected in the interconnected stories told by multiple voices.

The book captures the readers' interest and attention and is moving, compelling, and innovative. It also includes a glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew terms for readers unfamiliar with those languages. It is recommended for synagogue and Jewish public library collections.

Susan Freiband,

Retired Volunteer Librarian, Agudas Achim Congregation,

Alexandria, Virginia

Continued on page 27

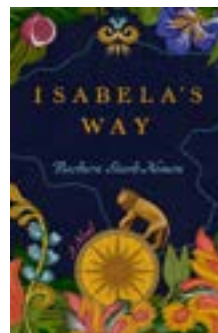
Freedman, Leora. *Cherry Baum: A Novel*. Jersey City, KTAV Publishing House, 2025. 196 pp. \$27.95 (9781602805385) HC.

Freedman's *Cherry Baum* introduces a spiritual and determined protagonist, a self-proclaimed "Holy Woman" who can read truths spelled out on people's foreheads and perform miracles, all while shopping at her local No Frills in Toronto, Ontario. The book follows Cherry Baum, an otherwise typical Jewish mom of four with another on the way. Cherry runs a blog called diasporamom.com, where she posts about her experience as a Jewish mother, *Torah* thoughts, and occasionally about her holy powers. On this blog, Cherry reveals herself to the world, unleashing a whirlwind of fame. The book takes the reader along for the ride as Cherry goes from praying for women to conceive to growing a tree from nothing in the middle of an auditorium. While it is certainly an entertaining read, the book feels unfinished. It attempts to tackle far too many topics without delving deeply enough into any of them. For example, Cherry's mother is teased for being a feminist, and Cherry runs from the label herself, yet her primary adversaries are rabbis who do not want to endorse a "holy woman." Cherry's aversion to the feminist title is not addressed as she progresses through her journey. Additionally, *Cherry Baum* seems to reach its climax at the end of the book, leaving the reader unsatisfied. Perhaps that just means we have not seen the last of Cherry Baum. While this could be recommended for a public library, it is probably not worth the purchase.

Sara Merkin,
Dunwoody, Georgia

Stark-Newman, Barbara. *Isabella's Way*. Brooklyn, She Writes Press, 2025. 280 pp. \$17.99 (9781647429645) PBK.

In the early seventeenth century, the Inquisition came to Portugal, prohibiting non-Catholic religious practice. Isabella, a fourteen-year-old "New Christian" with a talent for needlework, receives a message from a mysterious old woman. Her father instructs her to flee. She embarks on a dangerous journey that will take her to Spain, France, and Germany, aided by spirit guides, supporters, and her friend, David. Isabella follows a route that takes her to a clandestine network of safe houses set up by the converso community. Her talent for embroidery is a crucial skill that she uses to convey secret messages through symbols in her artwork. Along



"THE DEFINITIVE STUDY OF THE TOPIC."

— Prof. Antony Polonsky, Chief Historian,
POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw
Emeritus Professor of Holocaust Studies, Brandeis University



"The best-documented and also the most extensive description of the heroic effort ...at Auschwitz."

— Dr. Adam Cyra, Senior Curator, Dept. of Historical Research,
Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum



Learn more!
www.polww2.com/FightingAuschwitz

AQUILA
POLONICA
www.AquilaPolonica.com

Continued on page 28

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

the way, she encounters danger, narrowly escaping Inquisitors. She learns about new countries and cultures and discovers her true origins.

Isabella's Way is a coming-of-age story that reads like a thriller, featuring a strong young female protagonist. The author's detailed research helps to capture Isabella's desperate situation. This is a good choice for book groups, and it has crossover potential for young adult readers. Recommended for synagogue and public libraries.

Barbara M. Bibel,

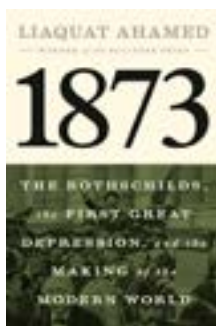
*Reference Librarian/Consumer Health Information Specialist,
Berkeley, CA*

Non-Fiction

Ahamed, Liaquat. *1873: The Rothschilds, the First Great Depression, and the Making of the Modern World*. New York, Penguin Press, 2026. 346 pp. \$32.00 (9781594204173) HC.

Although eclipsed by the year 1929, the Crash of 1873 paralleled similar behaviors and produced similar effects. Its memory is revived here as the author shows the confluence of social and economic events behind the disastrous era. Chapters alternate chronologically between the major financial centers of London, Paris, and Vienna, and the United States, where the Civil War and the expansion of railroads fueled factories and attracted traders from across the Atlantic. Author Liaquat traces the rapid growth of the middle class and industrialization alongside the rise of the Rothschilds as a major force in finance and its global reach. The fates and outcomes of family members, far-flung but interbred, “popped up again, sometimes as protagonists, other times as informed observers, some as policymakers, even victims.” The earlier generations encouraged the growth of capital, although the later generations largely assimilated into high society.

Liaquat's writing is brisk and the narrative colorful, featuring a rogues' gallery of speculators, stockbrokers, bankers, agents, and scammers. Included are contemporary political cartoons, along with familiar stereotypes and caricatures. Some fact-checking of names might have been useful: the Tsar at that time was Alexander II, not Alexander I. Knowledge of economics would also be useful, although not necessary, as concepts are presented clearly for the general reader—e.g., “bimetallic” (a currency system built on gold and silver and the standard among many nations). Paralleling the 1920s, when optimism fueled overspending and lending on margin, a lack of credit led to the default of government bonds, and citizens from all walks of life watched their savings vanish. Loans to developing nations in Asia and Latin America failed,



toppling rulers and helping to make the Ottoman Empire the “Sick Man of Europe.” The crash also exacerbated colonialism and the carving up of Africa by European powers desperate for wealth, while the U.S. Congress killed Reconstruction policies. In the aftermath, instead of self-blame or introspection, fingers pointed at the Rothschilds and antisemitism resurfaced with fringe groups and figures screaming about Jewish conspiracies. Given its largely secular content, this book belongs more in a public rather than a synagogue library, or in an academic library with history or economics collections. Nevertheless, it is a great, even fun read. Largely a cautionary tale, it will resonate with many for its lessons in human nature and fiscal recklessness.

Hallie Cantor,
*Yeshiva University
New York, NY*

Baumgarten, Jean, Ruth von Bernuth, and Moshe Lavee, editors. *Bridges of Knowledge: Jewish Languages in Cultural Context*. Leiden, Brill, 2025. 318 pp. \$124.00 (9789004730816) HC.

Flourishing linguistic variety has long marked Jewish diasporic life.

Jews have spoken and written abundant vernaculars such as Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Turkish, and more. This gathering of fourteen studies by specialists in their fields makes Jewish languages visible and discloses their importance. It shows how Judeo-languages, whatever their location and individual attributes, were significant agents in diffusing Jewish knowledge. An introduction previews the chapters and summarizes their goal of exhibiting the socio-cultural, literary, and religious functions of Judeo-languages. The text begins with three studies showing how translations of Hebrew Kabbala and rabbinic sources into Yiddish and Ladino made them accessible to diasporic communities stretching from Europe to the Ottoman Empire's fringes. The discussion then turns to the role of Judeo-languages in cultural life: Judeo-Arabic helped transmit both oral folk traditions and written works of law and high culture throughout the Ottoman Empire. Yiddish was incorporated into Hebrew liturgy. Proverbs recognized no linguistic boundaries, and Hebrew-Old French biblical glossaries reveal that Jews used the local vernacular. The text continues by examining linguistic contact, including Prague Yiddish songs that sometimes incorporated German and Christian influences. Chapters focus on Judeo-Italian in both its literary and scientific uses and the examination a Jewish newspaper written in Judeo-Turkish, which used Hebrew characters to write Turkish and was significant in all forms of cultural interpenetration in the Ottoman Empire. The text concludes with Jewish travelogues, one



Continued on page 29

THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF UNDERGROUND PRISONER RESISTANCE AT AUSCHWITZ



**“Powerful testimony
to the courage
and resourcefulness
of the resisters.”**

— Dave ‘Doc’ Kirby,
WTBF radio host, “On the Bookshelf” podcast.



Learn more!
www.polww2.com/FightingAuschwitz

AQUILA
POLONICA® 
www.AquilaPolonica.com

a widely disseminated seventeenth-century Yiddish account of travel in Eretz Yisroel and the other a nineteenth-century account of Asia originally in Hebrew but widely translated. This collection is notable for its geographical range and historical depth (medieval to twentieth century), as well as its cultural and linguistic scope. Even though aimed at academic readership, it includes much that is accessible and fascinating for any interested person. This work is recommended for research libraries and larger synagogue libraries.

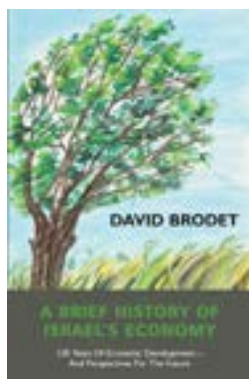
Riva Berleant,

Associate Librarian,

Congregation Beth El, Bangor, ME

Brodet, David. *A Brief History of Israel's Economy: 120 Years of Economic Development—And Perspectives for the Future*. London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2025. 393 pp. \$79.95 (9781803710808) HC.

People will read this book for its focus on the Israeli economy and will also find a volume that delves deep into the country's history, demography, and social structure. David Brodet, the author of this 393-page volume, writes with authority few can match—having served as State Budget Director with Israel's Ministry of Finance and as its Director General. With an analytical depth often lacking in discussions aimed at popular audiences, he examines the complex, interrelated elements broadly shaping contemporary Israel. Brodet takes the reader through the twists and turns of the country's economy from the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate to the creation of the independent state of Israel until today. He underlines the shift from the collective, communal orientation of Israel's early years—with the development of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*—to the current individualistic focus, valuing financial success over communal commitment and concern.



Brodet emphasizes Israel's early focus on high-tech, in considerable advance of nearly all other advanced economies. High-tech then became the country's economic driver, bringing in its wake international investment, joint ventures with the United States and Europe, and global scientific collaboration. Brodet underscores the emergence of a “dual economy” in Israel—one of entrepreneurs, IT specialists, and the highly educated—and that of those left behind. He also devotes considerable attention to the people most affected by this divide, Israel's Arab and Ultra-Orthodox populations, the factors contributing to the growing schism, and what could and should be done in redress.

The author sees the main challenges now facing Israel as education, the labor market, public infrastructure, productivity, the

Continued on page 30

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

environment, and climate change. Brodet also addresses the overarching issue of security and peace, affecting so many aspects of Israeli life. He sees the economic consequences of Israel's involvement in regional wars undermining Israel's international political status, harming foreign investment as well as international business, scientific, and academic collaboration, "so essential for economic progress." Absent a far-reaching political solution to the region's many conflicts, Brodet believes "Israel will have no choice but to continue as a mobilized society, with a return to the high rates of defense spending not seen in other Western developed countries."

This is a book that would be at home in a research library, a synagogue library with a wide-ranging collection, and in a public library.

Mindy C. Reiser,
Vice President, Jewish Study Center,
Washington, DC

Chalom, Adam and Jodi Kornfeld, editors. *Contemporary Humanistic Judaism*. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 2025. 264 pp. \$40.00 (9780827615649) PBK.

The foundation of Humanistic Judaism is the proposition that belief in God is not required for being a Jew and living a Jewish life. The editors of this sourcebook gathered fifty-two brief selections from the writings and speeches of a wide range of Humanistic Jewish sources and individuals, many of whom are well-known figures in contemporary Jewish culture, such as Amos Oz, Yehuda Amichai, Nicole Krauss, and Nathan Englander. Statements from Humanistic Judaism organizations and spokespersons introduce a vibrant area of Judaism that may not be widely familiar. These include the Association of Humanistic Rabbis and the Society for Humanistic Judaism. A selection from the writings of movement founder Rabbi Sherwin Wine on the *Torah* illuminates basic principles of Humanistic Judaism.

The sources are divided into fourteen sections. Each embraces a significant aspect of Jewish life and describes how Humanistic Judaism interprets and practices it. These include ethics, identity, living a Jewish life, spirituality, liturgy, and life cycle events, among others. This collection is one of a Jewish Publication Society series on Jewish thought. It is an accessible and clear exposition of Humanistic Judaism that will be useful in Jewish education and discussion groups. Further, and equally important, it offers questioning, hesitant Jews who know they do not believe in God a welcome opening into a rich Jewish communal life. This title is recommended for synagogue libraries and discussion groups.

Riva Berleant,
Congregation Beth El Jewish Community Library,
Bangor, Maine

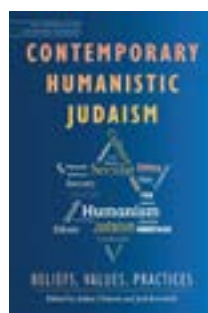
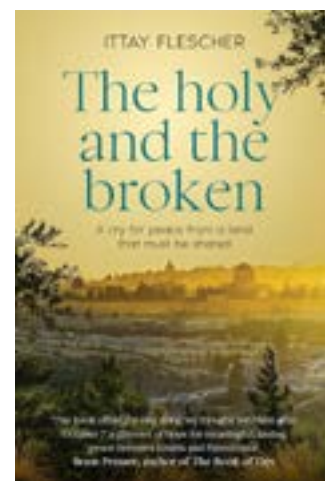
Flescher, Ittay. *The Holy and the Broken: A Cry for Israeli-Palestinian Peace from a Land That Must Be Shared*. Sydney, HarperCollins Australia, 2025. 310 pp. \$21.99 (9781460767078) PBK.

In his book *The Holy and the Broken*, Ittay Flescher recounts his journey as a Jewish Australian growing up in Melbourne, attending Jewish schools there, and eventually moving to Jerusalem with his wife and children. He writes that on October 7th, as he woke to the sound of rocket attack alerts and sirens in Jerusalem, where he lives, he and his family and community ran for their shelters for protection. While there, everyone received messages from friends, family, and others about what was happening during the Hamas attack on the kibbutzim, the Nova music festival, and other locations. Children in the shelter asked their parents what was going on and whether they would be safe. Flescher's 11-year-old son asked for an explanation as well, and because of his job as a journalist focused on Israel for Australian and worldwide outlets, he accepted the challenge. Flescher states that his son "wanted to know who was firing rockets at us and why. He wanted a history lesson about how we got here... some questions I was able to answer, some I could not."

Along with his journalism, Flescher also serves as the education director at Kids4Peace, an interfaith movement for Israeli Jewish, Muslim, and Christian youth. This gives him a perspective that combines all of his experiences and professional knowledge. The book represents in part his attempt to build understanding and peace between the next generations of Israelis and Palestinians to counter rising dehumanization on both sides. He also tries to provide some answers about how the Jewish world should contend with the rise in both antisemitic rhetoric and attacks. He discusses the need to recognize deep historical grievances and misunderstandings on both sides that must be addressed by both communities and by governments. Flescher contends that peace will eventually be achieved, even if it is painful for all sides.

This book is recommended for all levels of Jewish libraries, as well as school, public and academic libraries, because the entire community would benefit from another hopeful voice on the future of Israel and the wider Jewish world.

Eli Lieberman,
Interim Director, HUC-JIR Library,
New York



Continued on page 31

Friedman, Michelle. *Divine Corners: In the Shadow of the Holocaust on a Catskills Chicken Farm*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam Publishers, 2026. 292 pp. \$24.95 (9789493418714) HC; \$17.95 (9789493418707) PBK.

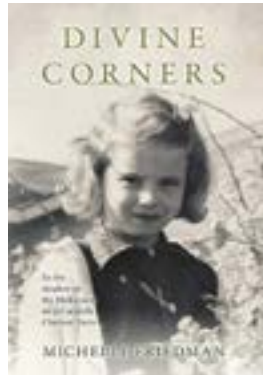
While many memoirs have been written by Holocaust survivors, fewer have been written by their children. Michelle Friedman's memoir, *Divine Corners*, gives readers a glimpse of life in the Catskills for a child living there year-round. Friedman shares stories of family *seders*, visiting Grossinger's, and the various characters who somehow found themselves in *Divine Corners*. Using her psychiatric background, Friedman couples anecdotes of her childhood with psychological analysis of how her parents' experiences in Węgrów, Poland, during the Holocaust trickled down into their family dynamic. She highlights her father, set to be a great engineer, a man who risked his life to visit his mother and sister while they hid from the Nazis, who found himself stuck on a chicken farm, running it to appease his brother after the war. Friedman's father's stormy temper is contrasted with a mild-mannered mother who only opened up about life during the war in her old age. But perhaps the most impactful parts of the book are when Friedman talks about her two siblings, Lisa and Jay. She reflects on how she skipped into Lisa's grade when they were in elementary school and the effect that had on their relationship. She describes the rift with Jay caused by their father's impact, and the heart-wrenching reconciliation with him that came all too late, as she helped him through his final days as he lost a battle to cancer. Ultimately, the memoir is a brilliant and well-written look at the life of the child of survivors, aptly representing a generation of inherited trauma that will likely see much more exposure in the years to come. This memoir is highly recommended for public or academic libraries looking to expand their nonfiction or Jewish collections.

Sara Merkin,
Dunwoody, Georgia

Green, Arthur. *Can Judaism Be Saved? Its Future after Gaza*. Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2025. 140 pp. \$18.00 (9781963475845) PBK.

Like many Jewish leaders, Rabbi Arthur Green has agonized over the situation since October 7, 2023. This short book is his analysis and response to the ongoing tragedy. Rather than categorize the issues as a "Current Events" crisis, Rabbi Green takes a historical view. He begins with the *Torah* and the

Continued on page 32



HISTORY'S BEST KEPT SECRET IS NOW AN AWARD WINNING BOOK!



**"Amazing account
of the resistance
movement among
the political prisoners
at Auschwitz."**

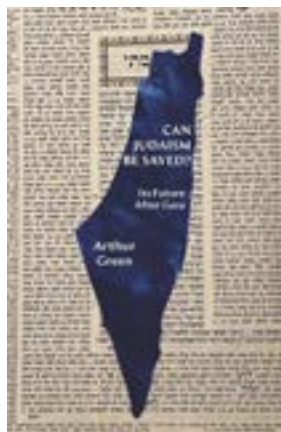
— Dave 'Doc' Kirby,
WTBF radio host, "On the Bookshelf" podcast.



Learn more!
www.polww2.com/FightingAuschwitz

AQUILA
POLONICA® 
www.AquilaPolonica.com

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS



sovereignty over the land given to Abraham. He follows that with chapters on the changing views presented by Christianity, Medieval Europe's opinion of Judaism, and the development of *Kabbalah* and Hasidism, which created a "magical" aura over the Holy Land. He then points to the differences between Western European Jewry's modernization, the generation-long struggles of Russian and Eastern European Jews, and the Sephardi/Mizrachi retention of

regional Jewish traditions. Each group has brought a different set of structures and tensions into Zionism, both before Independence and over the past eighty years. Their understanding of what it means to be Jewish, and their interpretation of "Israel," contribute to the current difficulties of the state. Add in the tensions between the "liberal/secular" and Haredi communities, along with Diaspora relationships, and the mixture has become toxic. All of it, of course, is layered on the changing relationship with the Arab population, from the early days of settlement through the past 125 years. He concludes with a "Response," arguing that Judaism and Israel can be united, but only through mutual acceptance. As a "seeker" and questioner for the past fifty years, Rabbi Green has earned his position of authority. This book is not an easy read; though it is written to be accessible, it requires background knowledge. It is recommended for academic libraries, libraries with in-depth Judaic collections, synagogues and Jewish community centers.

Fred Isaac,
Oakland, CA

Greenspan, Henry Hank. *Remnants & What Remains: Moments from a Life Among Holocaust Survivors*. Detroit, Wayne State UP, 2025. 128 pp. \$24.99 (9780814352632) PBK.

Henry Hank Greenspan has spent more than fifty years studying the world of Holocaust survivors, hearing their stories, reflecting with them on their experiences, and how, over time, their understanding of what transpired has changed. Through his dialogues with them, Greenspan has sought to bring survivors' own voices, in their own words, to the larger world. He sees his life's work as conveying to a wider world the lived reality of survivors—their uniqueness, their individuality. To underscore the importance of emphasizing the singularity of each survivor, he cites the words of Agi, a survivor of Auschwitz: "OK. I survived. But I am not The Survivor.



I am not a category. Not a thing. We have enough experience being categories."

Greenspan's approach to exploring and explicating survivors' stories has transformed research in the field, with his earlier book, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, setting a gold standard. A psychologist and now emeritus professor at the University of Michigan, he has served as a mentor and role model for generations of students and fellow academics. To communicate his findings more broadly, Greenspan has used unusual channels. He has transposed his written narratives of the survivors' stories into plays, produced across the United States and internationally, and into radio broadcasts aired through local affiliates of National Public Radio.

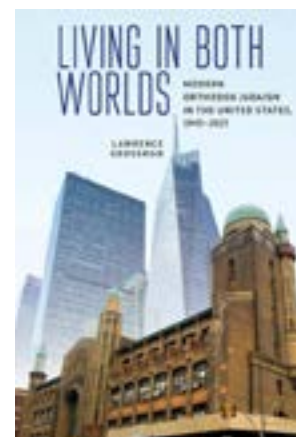
His current book, *Remnants and What Remains*, consists of two parts, "Remnants," which includes the text used in both the play and the broadcasts, and "What Remains," Greenspan's reflections on his experiences with survivors, some of whose conversations continued over months and even years. A number of these encounters developed into close friendships spanning decades. This book would be valuable in many settings—academic libraries, Jewish community centers, and synagogues. Because "Remnants" includes the text of the play along with directions for performance, colleges, adult education programs, and Jewish communal organizations could consider producing and performing it.

Mindy C. Reiser,
Vice President,
Jewish Study Center, Washington, DC

Grossman, Lawrence. *Living in Both Worlds: Modern Orthodox Judaism in the United States, 1945–2025*. Boston, Academic Studies Press, 2025. 405 pp. \$89.00 (9798887197586) HC.

Scholars, sociologists, and historians have frequently traced the history of American Judaism. In this recent title from Academic Studies Press, Lawrence Grossman takes on the ambitious task of presenting a multifaceted study of Modern Orthodoxy, offering a survey notable for both its breadth and depth.

Grossman begins after World War II, when the observant community was at a low point. He explains the post-war challenge from the Conservative movement and Orthodoxy's revival. He cites Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik and the growth of Yeshiva University in both size and influence as critical to this Orthodoxy's regeneration. He also points to issues, such as mixed seating, and



Continued on page 33

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

individuals (Yitz Greenberg among others) who challenged the status quo. The period from 1975 to the end of the 20th century traces both successes and trials: the reinforcement of observance (“Haredization”) beginning in the 1960s; the path of Yeshiva under Rabbi Norman Lamm’s presidency (including his sponsorship of “*Torah U-Madda*”); the rise of feminism and the debate over women’s roles in the synagogue and the wider world; and the rise and fall of Edah, which questioned the structure from within. In conclusion, Grossman brings the story up to date, including women’s roles as leaders, homosexuality, the “Open Orthodoxy” challenge, and the demographic and identity issues that continue to challenge the community.

The author succeeds in explaining and exploring the many issues facing the Orthodox community over the past eighty years, and the leadership’s responses. The text is scholarly but not too dense, and the footnotes are extensive. All libraries interested in contemporary American Judaism should consider purchasing this title.

Fred Isaac,
Oakland, CA

L., Hannah, with Harvey Winokur. *Mussar in Recovery: A Jewish Spiritual Path to Serenity & Joy*. Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2025. 307 pp. \$27.95 (9781963475364) PBK.

Mussar in Recovery connects Jewish wisdom and practices to the principles of spiritual living that guide Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) Twelve Step recovery work. Twelve Step programs are peer-to-peer aid programs developed in the 1930s to overcome alcoholism; they now support recovery from substance or behavioral addictions and from compulsions. The Mussar movement is an ethical movement in Judaism that developed in 19th-century Lithuania among Orthodox Lithuanian Jews. It is historically associated with Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (1809–1883) and was recently popularized in the Western Hemisphere by Alan Morinis (b. 1949), a Canadian anthropologist and writer who founded the Mussar Institute (2004), based in Vancouver, BC. This is a book written by a recovering addict, Hannah L., for addicts and those who love them. L. remains anonymous but has a strong connection with the clergy of The Central Synagogue in Manhattan. Rabbi Harvey J. Winokur is emeritus rabbi of Temple Kehillat Chaim in Roswell, GA, and a trainer/facilitator for The Mussar Institute. After introductory chapters, especially one showing how Mussar practice aligns with recovery, the structure of the book is straightforward. There are twelve chapters, one for each of the Twelve Steps. Each chapter begins with the recovery journey associated with the Step, followed by a Mussar perspective on the Step. Each chapter concludes with practical tools, exercises, and daily reminders



to deepen the meaning of the specific Step/Mussar teaching. Perfect for any seeker on a path toward recovery and personal growth and appropriate for synagogue and Jewish community centers libraries.

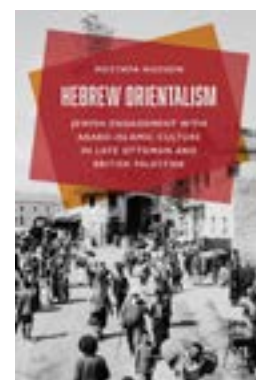
Roger S. Kohn,
Silver Summer, MD

Hussein, Mostafa. *Hebrew Orientalism: Jewish Engagement with Arabo-Islamic Culture in Late Ottoman and British Palestine*. Princeton UP, 2026. 335 pp. \$35.00 (9780691202037) PBK.

Hebrew Orientalism is a deeply researched study of ways that Jewish writers in Palestine constructed a body of ideas about the Islamic culture of their Arab neighbors and used it in the creation of Jewish settler culture. The time period is 1882 to 1948. Hussein revises the received view that Jewish writers and intellectuals in Palestine ignored Arab culture and specifies some of the ways they adopted and adapted it. Five chapters cover a range of fascinating topics. The first three emphasize the “shared homeland” and Jewish-Arab encounters during the late Ottoman period, 1882 to 1917. Jewish land purchases and Arab rational fear of dispossession stoked hostility. Arab land use and cultivation practices initially roused ridicule. Nevertheless, inexperienced Jewish settlers came to recognize and adopt proven Arab methods. Both Arabs and Jews regarded each other and themselves as people of the land. How the landscape was imagined was as significant as the way land underfoot was used. Biblical reference and Western cartography had formed the Zionist imagination. Hussein shows how Arab and Islamic views of the landscape entered into descriptions by Jewish writers. The third chapter, on the revival of Hebrew as a living language, describes how recognition of the undoubted kinship of Hebrew and Arabic allowed the use of Arabic in the re-creation of Hebrew. Mandate Palestine, 1917 to 1948, saw increasing complexity and intensified hostility in inter-ethnic relations after the Balfour Declaration and the succeeding influx and growth of the Jewish population. The last chapters reveal how Jewish writers and scholars drew on Arabic literature and the Arabic cultural landscape to create Jewish identity and a sense of indigeneity. *Hebrew Orientalism* authoritatively broadens understanding of Jewish settler history and the formation of a Jewish ethnos in Palestine before 1948.

This work is recommended for all research libraries and larger synagogue libraries.

Riva Berleant,
Congregation Beth El Library,
Bangor, ME



Continued on page 34

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

Lachs, Vivi, and Barry Smerin, translators. *East End Jews: Sketches from the London Yiddish Press*. Detroit, Wayne State UP, 2025. 222 pp. \$34.99 (9780814351345) PBK.

London's East End (Whitechapel, Aldgate, Stepney) was the center of Jewish immigrant life for decades. (For many Eastern European Jews, it was also a way station to North America.) The compilers of *East End Jews* combed through seven decades of the London Yiddish press and translated "fifty-three sketches from ten newspapers, two literary journals, and a chapbook," by twenty-six authors. Some of the writers (Morris Winchevsky, Yosef Haim Brenner, Esther Kreitman) now enjoy international reputations; others remained familiar only to readers of the local Yiddish press. These feuilletons, which were originally published from 1884 to 1956, are short, fictionalized, mostly first-person accounts that capture the flavor of the Jewish quarter during the era of large-scale immigration and beyond. "They fill in gaps in the history of the East End and are part of the creation of a Jewish East End identity and, later, mythology," the translators write. In addition, they provide "details of the domestic and community lives of Jewish immigrant Eastenders which are missing from the political, institutional, or social histories of Jewish London." *East End Jews* follows recent trends in Yiddish Studies scholarship which focus on "analyzing and translating Yiddish popular forms and exploring writing that cuts across the arbitrary boundary of high and low literature." Many of the translations adopt a highly conversational tone. Alluding to the title of a long-running BBC TV soap opera, the sketches "aren't so much a history lesson as a trailer for a serialized drama hit: East End Jews." The volume includes an excellent introduction and exemplary scholarly appendices. Its academic bona fides aside, *East End Jews* also appeals to a general audience and is recommended for all types of Judaica libraries.



Zachary M. Baker,

*Reinhard Family Curator Emeritus
of Judaica and Hebraica Collections,
Stanford University Libraries, Palo Alto, CA*

Mandel-Edrei, Chen. *Hagiography in the Age of Mass Publishing: Hasidic Writing and the Making of Jewish Modernity*. Stanford UP, 2026. 230 pp. \$65.00 (9781503646308) HC.

In this book, Chen Mandel-Edrei argues that the Hasidic mass-produced hagiographies of important rabbis and other leaders, as well as other popular texts, contributed to the ongoing project of creating Jewish modernity in the 19th century. This corpus of texts has been largely overlooked by scholars of the period, as these publications were generally seen as anti-modern. Mandel-Edrei traces the ways these texts were argued for and against by the Hasidim



and the Maskilim, who sought to bring the Enlightenment to Eastern Europe. The historical record shows that despite the viewpoint that these materials were both poorly written and poorly produced, these texts were widely shared and read by the Hasidic followers who were the target audience. The texts also engaged with the political and social movements of their day, both for and against various positions. By

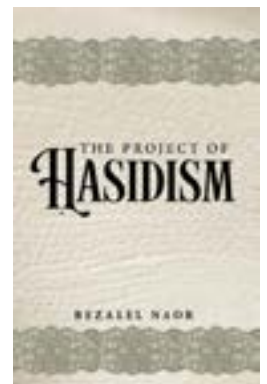
placing these works in their sociopolitical context, she illustrates the ways in which the authors and readers were deeply involved in the larger world in which they lived. The 1848 revolutions in the region "provoked new questions about collective identity and national affiliation among the Jewish population of the Habsburg Empire." These questions and their varied answers show that the Jewish population was not living a static life in the shtetl but was participating in the larger culture. In the conclusion, the author states that the popular genres, including the Hasidic and shund romances (mass-produced, Yiddish pulp fiction and romances), discussed in this work attracted a far-reaching range of Jewish readership and worked as a unit that embodied common experiences and aspirations. These literary genres have been ignored or dismissed by scholars of the project of Jewish modernity, but Mandel-Edrei deftly brings them back to their rightful place in the scholarship of the period. This book is highly recommended for academic libraries with collections on Jewish literature, history, modernity, political thought, and related topics.

Eli Lieberman,

*Interim Director, HUC-JIR Klau Library,
NY*

Naor, Betzalel. *The Project of Hasidism*. New York, Kodesh Press / Orot, 2025. 184 pp. \$18.00 (9798888940457) PBK.

Rabbi Betzalel Naor, an author, teacher, and public speaker focusing on the thought of Rav Kook, Kabbalah, and Hasidism, presents a collection of specialized essays examining aspects of Hasidic spirituality. The first two essays are annotated translations of previously published Hebrew articles; both reprinted here. In the first essay, which gives its title to the volume, Naor argues, influenced by Rav Avraham Kook, that one goal of Hasidism was to revive Biblical prophecy, using song, dance, and ecstatic prayer to enhance the imaginative faculty to induce divine inspiration. Kook felt this revival was occurring in modern Israel. The second essay presents the



Continued on page 35

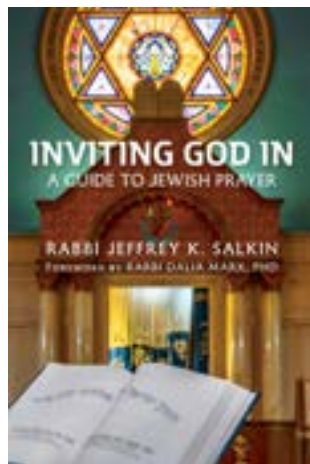
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

radical idea of the Izbitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Mordechai Yoseph Leiner, that there is a divine will that can occasionally contradict written Jewish law. At times one must depart from *Halakhah* to truly fulfill the law. Naor traces this idea back to Rabbenu Nissim of Girona and to the Ramban. The next essay explores the different stances toward the meditative contemplation of God's unity among third-generation figures of Chabad and the *Mitnagdim*. For Chabad, God is imminent and felt everywhere; God's unity is experiential. For the *Mitnagdim*, the matter is more theoretical, an intellectual endeavor. Naor continues with the third generation in the following essay, focusing on Rabbi Dov Baer of Lubavitch, exploring his contemplative practice (*hitbonenut*) and contrasting stances toward inclusivity and universality. Finally, in a book review of contemporary Neo-Hasidism, Naor mentions the turn from Brisker Talmudism to the spirituality of Rav Shagar. He speculates on whether this would have occurred earlier if Avraham Joshua Heschel had taken a teaching job at Yeshiva University, interacting with Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik and discussing the role of prophecy. Scholars of Hasidism will most appreciate Naor's arguments. This book is recommended for academic libraries with Hasidism collections.

Harvey Sukenic,
Hebrew College Library,
Newton, MA

Salkin, Jeffrey K. *Inviting God In: A Guide to Jewish Prayer*. New York, Reform Jewish Press/CCAR, 2025. 240 pp. \$22.95 (9780881236743) PBK.

There are many books exploring Jewish worship. This is Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's introduction to the *Shabbat* prayers and the *siddur*. Rabbi Salkin has been the guide for Reform teens (and their families) for the past generation. In this volume, he discusses many of the prayers in our weekly ritual. The two services (*Maariv* and *Shacharit*) are divided into sections. "Preliminary Stuff" includes candle-lighting, psalms, and songs. This is followed by four "Acts" in each service: "What we believe"—the *Shma* and its blessings; "What we need"—*T'filah*; "What we learn"—the *Torah* service; "What we hope"—the conclusion. Each "Act" contains discussions of the prayers, from the opening songs to the *Kaddish*. The service text is from the Reform *siddur*, *Mishkan T'filah*. Salkin layers the process with references from *Torah* and stories from tradition, as well as examples from his own life. Each short section concludes with a box containing questions for readers to ask themselves and to discuss with others. As with his other writings, this book seems



directed primarily at *b'nei mitzvah* students and conversion classes. The style is conversational, and the information is easy to digest. The level of detail suggests a Reform audience, though others can benefit from it. It is recommended for non-Orthodox synagogues and academic libraries that have collections on religion and ritual.

Fred Isaac,
Oakland, CA

Sofer, Gal. *Solomonic Magic: Methodology, Texts, and Histories*. Leiden, Brill, 2025. Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity. 360 pp. \$137.00 (9789004546776) HC.

This book, Volume 11 in Brill's series *Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity*, explores texts revolving around summoning and subjugating demons. *Solomonic Magic* is divided into three parts. Part I, "Methodology," presents the history of text analysis in general. Part II, "Texts," reviews three key texts preserved in some sixty manuscripts in a variety of languages (chiefly Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) from the 15th to the 19th century. Sofer, a Senior Lecturer at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, examines almost thirty small textual units (which he calls "Genes") across the languages and manuscripts of these three key texts, as well as later magical texts, to determine whether they quote or are influenced by them. In Part III, "Histories," Sofer draws tentative historical conclusions and shows how scribes of these manuscripts sometimes shared common sources and how innovative they could be in creating their own practices. He concludes that the various *Clavicula* parts (literally "Key of Solomon" parts)—a famous book of magic attributed to King Solomon of the "Solomonic network"—represent an attempt to harmonize practices that circulated in Italy in the early Renaissance. This volume is recommended for large academic libraries.



Roger S. Kohn
Silver Summer, MD

Wildes, Mark. *The Jewish Experience: Discovering the Soul of Jewish Thought and Practice*. New Milford, Maggid Books, 2025. 312 pp. \$29.95 (9781592647125) HC.

In this book, Wildes does a remarkable job of clearly presenting major Jewish theological principles, giving brief but significant explanations of core and essential tenets. Among the main topics Wildes explores are finding God (the significance of mass revelation at Mount Sinai), the *Tanakh* and the books that comprise it, the difference between the Oral and Written *Torah*, what Jewish prayer is and its purpose, the Jewish attitude toward human interaction and charity, the beauty, importance, and reality of *Shabbat*,

Continued on page 35

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS



and different perspectives on *tikkun olam*. These are very large topics, and the intention of the book is not to be exhaustive but rather to serve as a thoughtful and comprehensive overview. For example, in the first chapter, “Finding God,” Wildes gives a condensed but substantive historical overview of Jewish history, emphasizing Jewish survival against all odds. This, along with a significant examination of the complex design of the universe and human beings, helps make the case for God’s existence. Written with warmth and heart, Wildes invites his readers to understand what it means to be Jewish. He offers a rich discussion bolstered by ancient and contemporary Jewish and secular scholars, philosophers, scientists, and authors. The book is not written like a textbook or philosophy book; it is very accessible and enjoyable, with many sidebars and photos to help illustrate his points. In each chapter, there are extra features, including a short *Kabbalah* addition, “Stop and Reflect,” further reading, and summary takeaways. Wildes includes an impressive number of footnotes to the many quotes he uses. Rabbi Mark Wildes is a Yeshiva University-ordained rabbi, lawyer, and founder of the Manhattan Jewish Experience. While Wildes is Orthodox, this book is appropriate for all branches of Judaism. Ideal for group discussions or individual study, it is recommended for synagogue libraries and Jewish collections in public and academic libraries.

Esther Schnaidman,
Librarian and Teacher,
Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey,
Teaneck, NJ

Wirth, Mike. *Hiddur Olam: Bereshit—Genesis*. Mike Wirth Art Inc., 2025. 87 pp. \$57.00 (9798993441900) HC.

In this self-published art book, Mike Wirth reimagines the book of Genesis through his signature “Jewish Futurism” style, blending biblical tradition with contemporary artistic expression. Covering the twelve parashot (weekly *Torah* portions) of Genesis, the volume pairs each one with an original full-page artwork inspired by the text. Wirth’s bold use of color, layered symbolism, and imaginative compositions transforms familiar biblical narratives into visually compelling scenes that invite readers to see the *Torah* from a fresh perspective. Each parasha is followed by an artist’s statement in which Wirth discusses his creative process, the biblical themes that informed the work, and the paintings, sculptures, or other artists that inspired his interpretations. These reflections provide valuable context for readers who may be unfamiliar with his unconventional visual style and encourage thoughtful engagement with both the artwork and the *Torah* text. The artwork is truly a sight to behold. Rich, swirling colors and intricate details display Wirth’s passion for both Judaism and visual storytelling. Readers interested in contemporary Jewish art, visual *midrash*, or innovative approaches to *Torah* study will find much to appreciate in this beautifully produced volume. Although its niche subject matter and self-published format may not suit every public or academic library, *Hiddur Olam* would be a worthwhile addition to synagogue libraries and a beautiful addition to any home coffee table.



Sara Merkin,
Dunwoody, Georgia



DIANA HARMON ASHER

A NEW FAVORITE FOR YOUR LIBRARY



TROUBLE FINDS EVIE LEFKOWITZ

PJ PUBLISHING



“It’s hard to know where to start in describing the depth and heart of this delightful must-read.”

—The Sydney Taylor Shmooze

“The novel brims with authentic characters, pitch-perfect dialogue, and emotional truth, making it a story that young readers will want to revisit.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“Young as well as adult readers will relate to the characters’ unmistakable authenticity in a novel which is both accessible and sophisticated, perfect for sharing across generations.”

—Jewish Book Council

VISIT MY WEBSITE : DIANAARMONASHER.COM



OTHER TITLES BY THIS AUTHOR



UPSTAGED

ABRAMS/AMULET BOOKS

“A sincerely moving story with a whole lotta heart.”

—Kirkus Reviews



SIDETRACKED

ABRAMS/AMULET BOOKS

“Oh, how you will love this seventh grader! A witty, observant, and sensitive novel for kids, as well as a delight for the adults in their lives.”

—Susan Isaacs, NYT Bestselling Author

CREDITS AND CONTACT

Association of Jewish Libraries Teaneck, NJ 07666

(201) 371-3255

The AJL Newsletter (Irene Levin-Wixman z"l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. From January 2011 through

August 2019 it was split into two separate electronic publications — the *AJL News* and the *AJL Reviews*. As of September 2019 it is published digitally as *AJL News and Reviews*. Receipt of this publication is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at <https://jewishlibraries.org/> for membership rates.

Editor-in-Chief

Sally Stieglitz

Communications and
Outreach Coordinator
Long Island Library Resources Council
627 N. Sunrise Service Road
Bellport, NY 11713
generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org

Assistant Editor-in-Chief

Ellen Drucker-Albert

Head of Reference & Faculty Services,
Lecturer in Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law,
Yeshiva University
edruckerajlreviews@gmail.com

Membership

Please send requests for membership
and dues information to:

AJL VP for Membership

Rebecca Levitan

3732 Clarinthe Road
Baltimore, MD 21215
rlevitan@gmail.com

Children and YA Review Editors

Rebecca Levitan

Librarian III
Baltimore County Public Library -
Pikesville Branch
rlevitan@gmail.com

Judy Ehrenstein

Children's Librarian,
Montgomery County Public Libraries—
White Oak Branch
jehrenstein.ajlnews@gmail.com

*Please contact Rebecca Levitan by email
to inquire where to send children's and
YA books for review.*

Adult Review Editors

Daniel Scheide

S. E. Wimberly Library
Florida Atlantic University
777 Glades Road
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6424
561-297-0519
dascheide@gmail.com
*Please send adult books for review to
D. Scheide*

Trevan Hatch

Ancient Near East, Middle East,
& Religion Librarian
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602
801-422-6118
trevan_hatch@byu.edu
*Please send adult reviews to
T. Hatch*

Design and Art Direction

Rachel Levitan

Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel
ajlcopyeditor@gmail.com

Proofreaders

Jane Rothstein

Librarian & Archivist, Congregation
Mishkan Or, Cleveland

Mimi Leyton

Volunteer, Greenberg Families Library,
Soloway JCC, Ottawa

Advertising Rates

Full page	\$200	7 1/2" x 9 1/2"
Half-page (vert)	\$110	3 5/8" x 9 1/2"
Half-page (horiz)	\$110	7 1/2" x 4 3/4"
Quarter-page	\$55	3 5/8" x 4 3/4"

Ads may include color and hyperlinks.
Dimensions are in inches

All ads must be prepaid. Please submit all
inquiries, finished copy, and PDFs to:

Hannah Srour-Zackon

vpdevelopment@jewishlibraries.org