

CHILDREN'S HEBREW BOOKS: WHAT'S AVAILABLE, WHERE TO FIND THEM, AND HOW TO CATALOG THEM

Janice Resnick Levine

Description: There is a real problem finding Hebrew children's books to use with students in the U.S. Most Hebrew books available for children are written in Israel for Israelis. Therefore, many of the books written for younger children in Hebrew are too hard for our children to read. Our older children have an even more difficult problem, since books at their interest level are at a very hard reading level. At the Epstein School in Atlanta (a Schechter Day School) we started a Hebrew storytime in the Media Center last year for our students in Grades 1-5. After the children heard a story they checked out Hebrew books. I will share my discoveries about Hebrew children's books as I purchased books over the past two years to update our Grades 1-8 Hebrew children's book collection. The challenge with Hebrew books is how to find out what is out there to buy, and where to buy them. In this session information will be shared on the variety of Hebrew children's books available at various reading levels for school libraries, where to purchase them, and thoughts on cataloging these books.

Janice Resnick Levine has been Judaica Media Specialist at the Epstein School, Solomon Schechter School of Atlanta since 1994. Prior to that she was a part-time librarian for Temple Beth-El Library in Syracuse, NY. She also has worked as an information specialist for Laubach Literacy International and Central City Business Institute in Syracuse, NY. She received her BS from Pennsylvania State University and her MLS from Syracuse University.

At the Epstein School, Solomon Schechter of Atlanta we have approximately 700 students from age 2 to Grade 8. We are very lucky to have a supportive administration. We have a Technology Department that consists of the Media Center and the Computer Department. We are very lucky to have 3 people in our Media Center—a full-time general studies Media Specialist, a full-time assistant, and a part-time Judaics Media Specialist. It is my job as Judaics specialist to purchase and catalog all the Judaics and Hebrew materials for the Media Center, do Hebrew storytime and Jewish booktalks with classes, help classes that are doing Judaics research, and be the Judaics resource person for the school. The computer dept. and Media Center are one entity and we work as a team.

All of our students preschool through Grade 8 come to the Media Center either for storytime, instruction, book checkout and/or research. Two years ago we added a once a month Hebrew storytime to our schedule for Grades 1-5. I read a Hebrew story to the children and then they check out Hebrew books. Sometimes the children are assigned book reports, sometimes book checkout is optional. When Hebrew book checkout began in earnest I realized that I did not have enough Hebrew books in my collection for so many classes to take out books, even though I staggered the classes throughout the month. So, I began a heavy-duty Hebrew children's book buying campaign and have added hundreds of new Hebrew books to my collection over the past two years.

Figuring out what books to buy and where to buy Hebrew children's books is a challenge. Hebrew book publishers and distributors do not seem to believe in annotated, illustrated catalogs with reading levels of books included. What one finds is a catalog with a list of titles and authors, usually

in Hebrew, and it is a guessing game to figure out what books to buy. As with English picture books, unless they are specifically easy readers, most Hebrew picture books are written to be read to Israeli children by adults and are not necessarily written on an easy Hebrew reading level. As time has gone by I have begun to learn which authors and which books my students will be able to understand. Another challenge for me has been trying to find Hebrew books that are not too juvenile for the older children in Grades 5-8. What books are out there that are on their interest level but are also at a reading level that they can understand?

Sources to Purchase Hebrew Children's Books

At this point in time I have found three places where I buy Hebrew books and other Hebrew materials. Complete information on these sources can be found on my handout from my AJL session (see the information at the end of this paper to request my handout) You can always start with your local Jewish bookstore and see what they can do for you.

The Israel Book Shop in Brookline, MA is an incredible Jewish bookstore. They have a large inventory of Hebrew books, videos, maps, games, music CD's and cassettes, as well as curriculum materials. They also have a wonderfully knowledgeable resource person, Risa Krohn, whom you can call at 1-800-323-7723. You can ask for help locating almost any Jewish educational materials in English or in Hebrew and Risa will have it or can possibly get it. She compiles booklets of materials available on various topics, such as Jewish values, Judaic Children's Literature, various holidays, etc. The latest listing is "Educational Resources from Israel," which is an incredible list of Hebrew materials with sample pages, some of which would be good in a library, and others that would be great for classroom use, all of which are available upon request. There is a red booklet which came out in 1999, called "**Children's Hebrew Literature from Israel**," which is a fairly extensive list of Hebrew children's books by grade level, all of which can be ordered through the Israel Book Shop. (most are still available) Risa is an invaluable resource-she can make recommendations for you based on your needs, as to what are good Hebrew books to buy for various reading levels. They have a library discount, and are always getting in new materials from Israel.

Sifrutake, located in the New York City area, is another distributor of materials from Israel, with a fairly extensive selection of Hebrew books, videos, and music. Their number outside New York is 1-800-737-8853. Their catalog is mostly in Hebrew and it would be hard to order from them if you do not know Hebrew. Their catalog is also found on the Internet, and their website is listed on my handout. Sifrutake is a great place to buy books if you know what you want to order and are familiar with various Israeli authors. They are worth knowing about as a second option and they also give a library discount.

Both Sifrutake and the Israel Book Shop, since they are here in the United States, have reasonable shipping costs.

Another seller of Hebrew children's books is **Tal-Shahar**, which you will see on the AJL listserve HaSafran, advertising their specials. Their catalog is only available online at <http://www.tal-shahar.com>. You will have to pay more hefty shipping charges when you order from them, since their materials are shipped from Israel, but sometimes they have interesting materials available that

may be harder to get from sources here in the U.S. It is worth taking a peek at their website and getting on their email list to hear about their specials. You can communicate with Shahar Geva via email or by telephone if you are searching for specific materials from Israel. For example, I recently bought from them a set of videos on the history of the Jews in Spain, available in English or Hebrew, that was originally a series on Israeli television. Tal-Shahar also has a library discount, based on the amount of materials ordered.

Cataloging Hebrew Books

Once I receive my new children's Hebrew books I have the time-consuming task of cataloging them, since you cannot get MARC records for them on disk like you can with English titles. On my handout you will find listed sources for the romanization charts and books on cataloging Hebrew materials which I will cover shortly as well as a few basic tips on cataloging Hebrew children's books.

If you download some of your cataloging records from the Internet through Zmark, or a similar program, you can try searching for MARC records for Hebrew titles online from libraries such as the Library of Congress. I have not had any luck yet locating MARC records from other libraries for Hebrew children's titles.

How do you catalog Hebrew books? Unless you are a large academic library you probably do not have the capability on your online catalog to catalog your Hebrew books in Hebrew. I therefore romanize/transliterate all my information when cataloging a Hebrew book, using the Library of Congress romanization tables. If you do not do a lot of Hebrew cataloging you will probably find it sufficient to print out the romanization table approved by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress, that is posted on the web at the following address: <http://infoshare1.princeton.edu/katmandu/hebrew/trheb.html> The table tells you what letter to use in English for each corresponding letter and vowel in Hebrew so you can be consistent in your transliterating from Hebrew to English letters.

If you catalog Hebrew books on a regular basis I highly recommend that you buy the publication, HEBRAICA CATALOGING by Paul Maher, that is available from the Cataloging Distribution Service (CDS) of the Library of Congress. You can call them at 1-800-255-3666 to order it. The price is \$15. Included are a romanization chart and detailed and helpful information on various aspects of Hebrew cataloging. There is also another Library of Congress publication available, the ALA-LC ROMANIZATION TABLES which gives the transliteration charts for several dozen languages, including Hebrew and Yiddish. This publication would only be necessary if you catalog Yiddish materials. Otherwise, the publication by Paul Maher is the best one to buy.

Hebrew books are much harder to catalog not only because of the transliteration involved but also because Israeli books often do not include complete cataloging information such as the place of publication or even the copyright date. You obviously can only include the information provided. I usually put the English translation of the Hebrew title, even if the book is not a Hebrew translation of an English book. Officially that information is not necessary to include unless it is found on the back of the title page. I find it is helpful for my patrons and my assistant to know the book's name in

English since our assistant does not know Hebrew and it gives her an additional clue as to what the book is about!

There are a few fields that are used especially for Hebrew materials and they are listed on my handout. There is a whole team of Hebrew catalogers at the Library of Congress that get inquiries all the time about Hebrew cataloging. You can look in the AJL directory for some of their email addresses if you have any detailed questions related to cataloging Hebrew books. (I want to say “thank you” to Joan Biella, one of the Hebrew catalogers at the Library of Congress, and Marcia Goldberg, head cataloger at Gratz College for their advice on cataloging Hebrew books)

I always include in my notes field the reading level of each Hebrew book. I assign each book a reading level-Easy (Beginner), Beginner Intermediate, Intermediate or Advanced. My books are then color coded with dots that indicate that reading level to help students and teachers to locate appropriate Hebrew books on the shelf.

I always assign subject headings to each book so that it can be accessed by subject, not just by title and author.

Our library has its Hebrew books in a separate Hebrew section. A sample call # is HE KOR if the book is fiction, and HE plus the Dewey # or Weine # and the author, if the book is nonfiction. We also have a section of biographies where the call number is HE Biog XXX (with the first three letters of the person the biography is about)

Also included on my handout are a sampling of some Hebrew and English Internet sites that have Hebrew games and Jewish holiday activities. We have those types of sites posted on our school computer network and they can be accessed by any computer in the school, including those in the classrooms, computer labs, and in the Media Center.

The World of Children’s Hebrew Books

There is a wide range of children’s books available in Hebrew. I have included in my bibliography many of my favorite books for various reading levels. **My bibliography is meant as a supplement to the more thorough listing available from the Israel Book Shop entitled “Children’s Hebrew Literature from Israel.”** Any series listed in full by the Israel Book Shop’s listing was not included in full in mine. **It is therefore highly recommended that for the purpose of book selection for your library you use both my bibliography and the Israel Book Shop’s compilation of Hebrew children’s book titles.** When I look at a book to determine its difficulty my rule of thumb is if I can understand it, the children can. You will have to work out a system that works for you.

All of the titles discussed below can be found in one of the two listings mentioned above.

For first graders in our day school that begin by learning the Hebrew alphabet we start the year taking out aleph bet books, and picture books of Hebrew words (i.e. the “Temunot Le-Pa’Otot” Series which is laminated and very sturdy). By mid-year we move into storybooks. There are several great series for beginning Hebrew readers, written by authors such as Mirik Snir and Shulamit

Tzarfati. The “Shel Mi” series by David Bennett is a good beginning series, as is the continuously growing series, “Korim Kemo Gedolim.” Another good series of three is the “Pitzponim” series, which including “Biscuit” in Hebrew, which the children really enjoy. You have to be careful with the beginning reader series books because they are inconsistent-some are very easy to read, others have some very hard words for non-Israelis. I usually start by buying single copies of books and if I like the book a lot I will buy multiple copies.

Paul Kor is a great author to have in a collection. He has a great book entitled “Lifamim,” a very basic book about feelings which is for easy readers. Another cute book that has come out recently is “Lu Haya Zeh Ha-Kova Sheli” by Dominique Maes.

Mirik Snir is a very prolific writer of children’s books in Hebrew. Many of her books are found on the two listings I have mentioned above. Some I like better than others-I have listed a few on my bibliography that are good for beginning readers.

There are some beginning readers that are little booklets. They are available from the Israel Book Shop. I did not list them on my bibliography because they would not work well as library books-they are small and flimsy and can get lost easily. They do work out very well as readers in the classroom-for example, the series “Nitzanim.” We use them in our classrooms and it is worthwhile to let your teachers know that those types of readers are available.

By second grade we progress into slightly harder Hebrew storybooks. The children love Hebrew picture books-the more colorful the pictures, the more they go out. There are only a few relatively easy Dr. Seuss books in Hebrew, including such titles as “Sefer Ha-Regel” (“The Foot Book”), and “Benny Ben Buni Matai Ata Telech” (Marvin K. Mooney will you please go now?). I make sure, though, that I do not purchase only books that are translated from English. I like my students to be introduced to Israeli authors and stories.

Paul Kor has also written a very nice set of three picture books about Kaspiyon, a little silver fish. I read them all to my students and they love them. I have been reading two in Grade 3 and one in Grade 4. Many of Paul Kor’s stories work well for storytime. Another story the children enjoy hearing by Paul Kor is called “Ha-Pil She-Ratza Lihiyot Hachi,” the story of an elephant who did not like being gray.

“Bentzi” by David McKee is another good story to read aloud. It is about a multicolored elephant that just wants to be gray like all the other elephants. Pnina Kass has written a nice set of books about Berale, a snail. A few of the classics in Hebrew that are good for storytime, and are also available on video, are the following: “Eliezer Ve-ha-gezer” by Levin Kipnis, about a farmer that grows a huge carrot and cannot pull it out of the ground, and “Mitz Petel,” about a giraffe and a lion that are trying to determine who lives in a mysterious house in the forest.

For older readers many of you may remember two sets of books, the Lador series, and Gesher series from your own Hebrew school days. Gesher has updated some of their books so that they are more attractive and reader friendly. Risa Krohn at the Israel Book Shop can fill you in on which ones to

buy. Some on the list are very old, with old illustrations. You therefore have to pick and choose if you are starting from scratch. Gesher has put out two series, the “Gesher Kal” and the “Gesher Liyladim” series that we use a lot because they are on an easier reading level and are good for Grade 3 and up. Be aware that many of them are skinny and small and easy to lose or misplace, but are still worth buying. The “Gesher La-Noar” series is much more challenging, and some of those have been updated as well. Some of my students are discouraged by the length of these books and lack of very many illustrations. More popular for the oldest readers in Grades 4-8 are books by such authors as Shlomo Abbas and Moshe Yahalom. Their books are short story collections with good illustrations and larger print that make them very reader friendly. On the Israel Book Shop’s bibliography are listed all of Shlomo Abbas’ books. I highly recommend Abbas’ books-they are very popular in my library and I have most of his books on my shelf. There are several collections of Chelm stories which are also very popular, one by Shlomo Abbas and one by Nurit Yoal. If you have Israelis in your school that can handle harder books, the “Gingi” series, Harry Potter in Hebrew, and other similar books can be purchased. A good listing of some of these more challenging books for older readers can be found in the Israel Book Shop listing.

Also included in my bibliography is a listing of some my favorite nonfiction Hebrew children’s books that we have in our Media Center.

There are also Hebrew story videos available, a sampling of which I have included in my bibliography. The students and teachers at my school are very excited about these videos and they are enjoying their addition to our Media Center. You can also purchase or recommend to your teachers audiocassettes of popular Hebrew books or sets of books and cassettes which can be used in classroom or library listening centers.

Hebrew Storytime

When I do Hebrew storytime with my children I read a book to them just like you would in English. I use the pictures to help me explain what words mean. You can also get more creative and use props and puppets to help you out. Our session is all in Hebrew. If the students have comments or questions they must ask me in Hebrew (once in a while if a word is too hard to explain in Hebrew I will break down and give the English translation).

When I read a story and there are harder Hebrew words that the children do not understand I will explain those words in easier Hebrew as I go along. If the story is too wordy I may water it down a little and not read the story word for word. The trick is to be expressive, as in English, and choose a story that lends itself to reading aloud. In our school I am amazed how well the children understand what I am saying in Hebrew!

In Grades 4 and 5 this spring the children worked in groups of two or three to create puppet shows in Hebrew. They then presented their shows first to their classmates and then to a group of children in another grade. The resulting puppet shows were very creative and it was great to see the children able use their Hebrew skills and their imaginations so well!

The world of Hebrew children's books is vast and exciting and hopefully this paper has provided a glimpse of what's available, where to find good books, and how to catalog them.

For copies of the handout and bibliography discussed in this paper contact: Janice R. Levine at the Epstein School during the school year at: jlevine@epstein-atl.org or by phone at 404-250-5641. For a copy of the more extensive listing of books entitled "Children's Hebrew Literature from Israel," contact Risa Krohn at the Israel Book Shop at 1-800-323-7723.