The Association of Jewish Libraries, with the support of the Jewish Grandparents Network, is proud to present a list of 100 classic and soon-to-be classic picture and middle grade books recommended for the bookshelves of Jewish children. The books on this list create a portrait of the Jewish world in real and substantive ways. Whether your absolute favorite Jewish children’s book is here or not, you are certain to discover a new favorite or two in this comprehensive list.

**PICTURE BOOKS (Generally 4-8 Year Olds)**


*Around the Shabbos Table* by Seryl Berman. Illustrated by Ari Binus. "In any seat, no matter where, in any spot, in any chair, whether it is here or there, I'll be happy anywhere!" is Tova Leiba’s refrain as she gladly switches seats at the Shabbat table to accommodate her siblings. *Sydney Taylor Notable Book*. Hachai Publishing, 2009. Ages 4-8.


*Bagels from Benny* by Aubrey Davis. Illustrated by Dusan Petričić. After accepting compliments for the tasty bagels made at the family bakery, Benny's grandfather explains that God is really to thank for the delicious creations, causing Benny to begin leaving a bag of bagels for God every week at the synagogue as a demonstration of his gratitude. Based on a traditional tale. *Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner*. Kids Can Press, 2003. Ages 4-8. See also: *Bone Button Borscht* by Aubrey Davis and *In God’s Hands* by Lawrence Kushner & Gary Schmidt.

Benjamin and the Silver Goblet by Jacqueline Jules. Illustrated by Natascia Ugliano. Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob’s sons, must accompany his brothers to Egypt and meet the governor (his long-lost brother, Joseph). This young boy’s perspective remains true to the biblical narration while making it accessible to younger readers. Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Kar-Ben Publishing, 2009. Ages 5-9. Also in the series: Abraham’s Search for God, Sarah Laughs and Miriam in the Desert, all by Jacqueline Jules.


The Creation Book by Chani Gansburg. Illustrated by Dena Ackerman. This unique picture book about the Creation of the world uses rhyming couplets to detail the creations Hashem (God) brought into being on each passing day. Hachai Publications, 2018. Ages 3-8.

Dear Tree by Doba Rivka Weber. Illustrated by Phyllis Saroff. On Tu B’Shevat, the Birthday of the Trees, a young boy simply and sweetly states his wishes for the trees in the coming year including rain, blossoms, and fruit.


Engineer Ari and the Rosh Hashanah Ride by Deborah Bodin Cohen. Illustrated by Shahar Kober. When Ari is selected to engineer the first train between Jaffa and Jerusalem, he fills with pride, boasts to his friends and neglects to say good-bye before he sets off. As the train stops to collect items to celebrate the Jewish New Year, Ari recalls the true meaning of the holiday, and apologizes. Charming, colorful illustrations give the reader a sense of what Israel’s countryside might have looked like in 1892. Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Kar-Ben/Lerner, 2008. Ages 4-8. Also in the series: Engineer Ari and the Sukkah Express, Engineer Ari and the Hanukkah Mishap and Engineer Ari and the Passover Rush, all by Deborah Bodin Cohen.


Hannah’s Way by Linda Glaser. Illustrated by Adam Gustavson. Hannah’s teacher’s attempt to arrange carpools for a Saturday class picnic puts Hannah in a quandary. She cannot ride on the Sabbath, but she neither wants to miss the picnic nor draw attention to her Jewish heritage. Well researched illustrations with details of Depression Era northern Minnesota complement the story of how the community supports Hannah and helps her fit in, a message that serves contemporary populations as well. Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner. Kar-Ben Publishing, 2012. Ages 5-9.

Here is the World by Lesléa Newman. Illustrated by Susan Gal. Here is a book of simple rhymes for each Jewish holiday (plus a baby naming). Here are recipes or crafts to enrich the celebrations. Here is a lively description of each holiday. Here is the repetition of the rhyme that will keep young children reading along with the text. Sydney Taylor Notable Book. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2014. Ages 4-7.


I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark by Debbie Levy. Illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley. This delightful biography of the late Supreme Court Justice teaches children that dissent does not make a person disagreeable, and can even help change the world. Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016. Ages 4-8. See also: Ruth Bader Ginsburg: The Case of R.B.G. vs. Inequality by Jonah Winter and Dissenter on the Bench by Victoria Ortiz.


JPS Illustrated Children's Bible by Ellen Frankel. Illustrated by Avi Katz. Frankel succeeds in creating an age-appropriate interpretation of fifty-three of the most intriguing and familiar stories from the Bible that allow families to glean the essence of Jewish teachings, ethics, and history. Sydney Taylor Notable Book. Jewish Publication Society, 2009. Ages 5+.


Mommy, Can You Stop the Rain? By Rona Milch Novick, PhD. Illustrated by Anna Kubaszewska. The parents in this loving Jewish family comfort and reassure their young daughter who, frightened by a storm, asks if they can stop the rain, thunder, lightning, and wind. Includes a note to parents. Apples and Honey Press, 2020. Ages 2-5.

Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks written and illustrated by Amy Schwartz. Mrs. Moskowitz is unhappy in her new apartment until the discovery of her old Sabbath candlesticks prompts her to create a family dinner that turns her new dwelling into a home. Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner. Jewish Publication Society, 1984. Ages 4-8.

The Mysterious Guests: A Sukkot Story by Eric A Kimmel. Illustrated by Katya Krenina. During the festival of Sukkot, Eben builds a fancy sukkah, but he makes the poor stand in the corner and eat leftovers. His brother Ezra’s sukkah is plain, but he welcomes all who come with a full heart. When the ushpizin (spiritual guests) visit, they bestow an identical blessing with very different results. Sydney Taylor Notable Book. Holiday House, 2008. Ages 6-9.


New Year at the Pier: A Rosh Hashanah Story by April Halprin Wayland. Illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch. The author employs her own memories of community tashlich at the beach in this loving, charmingly illustrated depiction of Izzy, his family and friends as they gently apologize for misdeeds, grant forgiveness, and toss breadcrumbs into the sea as part of their Rosh Hashanah observance. Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner. Dial Books for Young Readers/Penguin Random House, 2009. Ages 5-8.

Nonna’s Hanukkah Surprise by Karen Fisman. Illustrated by Martha Avilés. When Rachel loses the special menorah her mother gave her so she could share Hanukkah with her Catholic cousins during her visit, her Italian grandmother comes to the rescue with a creative and crafty solution. Kar-Ben Publishing, 2015. Ages 4-8.

**Papa Jethro** by Deborah Bodin Cohen. Illustrated by Jane Dippold. A young girl asks her grandfather why she goes to synagogue and he goes to church. He explains that she is Jewish and he is Christian and retells the biblical story of Jethro, the Midianite father-in-law of Moses. *Sydney Taylor Notable Book. Kar-Ben Publishing, 2007. Ages 4-8.*


**One City, Two Brothers: A Story From Jerusalem** by Chris Smith. Illustrated by Aurélia Fronty. Two brothers divide a field and its harvest. Each decides that the other needs the larger share of the crop; night after night, they secretly cross the land to enlarge the other’s supply of grain. Finally they meet during their crossing, and embrace in brotherly love. *Barefoot Books, 2007. Ages 4-8.* See also: *Yaffa and Fatima, Shalom, Salaam* by Fawzia Gilani-Williams.

**The Purim Superhero** by Elizabeth Kushner. Illustrated by Mike Byrne. Nate wants to dress as an alien for Purim but his friend wants him to wear a superhero costume like the other boys. Nate seeks guidance from his Daddy and Abba (father), who advise that being yourself makes you stronger. A positive portrayal of a Jewish family with two dads. *Kar-Ben Publishing, 2013. Ages 4-8.*


Ruth and Naomi: A Bible Story written and illustrated by Jean Marzollo. In all her biblical retellings, Marzollo condenses details while preserving the stories’ spirit and meaning. This one exemplifies chesed (loving-kindness), shown by Ruth and Naomi’s caring for one another and by the kindness extended to them by Boaz. Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Little Brown and Company, 2005. Ages 4-8. Also in the series: Daniel in the Lions’ Den, David & Goliath, Jonah & The Whale and Miriam & Her Brother Moses, all by Jean Marzollo.

A Sack Full of Feathers by Debbie Waldman. Illustrated by Cindy Revell. Yankel loves to tell stories about his neighbors. He does not see the hurt these rumors cause as they spread and change. When the rabbi has him scatter feathers and try to regather them, he learns an important message in this retelling of an old folktale. Orca Book Publishers, 2006. Ages 3-7. See also: Yettele’s Feathers by Joan Rothenberg.

Sadie’s Sukkah Breakfast by Jamie Korngold. Illustrated by Julie Fortenberry. Sadie and her brother Ori wake up early and decide to eat in the sukkah. After schlepping all the food and utensils outside, they decide breakfast would be nicer with guests: they bring out their stuffed animals. Sydney Taylor Notable Book. KarBen/Lerner, 2011. Ages 4-8. Also in the series: Sadie’s Almost Marvelous Menorah, Sadie’s Snowy Tu B’Shevat, Sadie and Ori and the Blue Blanket, Sadie and The Big Mountain and Sadie’s Lag B’Omer Mystery, all by Jamie Korngold.


A Sweet Passover by Lesléa Newman. Illustrated by David Slonim. By the last day of Passover, Miriam has had her fill of matzah. As the family recounts why Jews eat matzah on Passover, she is convinced and happily tries her grandfather’s matzah brei. Recipe included. Sydney Taylor Notable Book. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2012. Ages 4-8. See also: Welcoming Elijah and Matzo Ball Moon also by Lesléa Newman, and Miriam at the River by Jane Yolen.


The Yankee at the Seder by Elka Weber. Illustrated by Adam Gustavson. Based on a true tale, this beautifully illustrated story recounts the participation of a “Yankee Jew,” Myer Levy, as a guest at a Virginia Passover Seder near the end of the Civil War. Ten-year-old Jacob sees the words of the Haggadah ring true, as all who are hungry are welcome at the table. A year later, Myer sends his thanks to the host family in a moving ending. *Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Tricycle Press, 2009. Ages 3-7.* See also: *One Little Chicken* and *Shimri’s Big Idea: A Story of Ancient Jerusalem* all by Elka Weber.

**MIDDLE GRADE BOOKS (Generally 8-12 Year Olds)**

- **All-of-a-Kind Family** by Sydney Taylor. Five Jewish sisters share adventures on the Lower East Side of New York City at the turn of the 20th century in this beloved classic, the first in a series about first generation Americans. *Bantam Doubleday Dell for Young Children, 1951. Ages 8-12.* See also: *More All-of-a-Kind Family, All-of-a-Kind Family Uptown, All-of-a-Kind Family Downtown,* and *Ella of All-of-a-Kind Family* all by Sydney Taylor.

- **Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret** by Judy Blume. Faced with the difficulties of growing up and choosing a religion, a 12-year-old interfaith girl talks over her problems privately with God in this outstanding classic. *Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1970. Ages 9-13.* See also: *Starring Sally J. Freedman As Herself* by Judy Blume.


- **Annie Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl** by Anne Frank. This is the must-read diary kept by Anne Frank while she was in hiding for two years with her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Originally written in Dutch, it has been translated into many languages. *Bantam Doubleday Dell for Young Children, 1952. Ages 10-14.*


- **Benny Feldman’s All-Star Klezmer Band** by Alison Marks. Shy Benny Feldman signs up his imaginary klezmer band to play in the school talent show, then must put together a real band in this hilarious and touching story of building friendships. *Green Bean Books, 2021. Ages 9-12.*


**Broken Strings** by Kathy Kacer and Eric Walters. A violin and a middle-school musical unleash a dark family secret in this moving story, mixing the modern tragedy of the Twin Towers and the legacy of the Holocaust. **Puffin Canada, 2019. Ages 10-14.** See also any of Kathy Kacer’s other works.

**A Ceiling Made of Eggshells** by Gail Carson Levine. From age seven, Loma relishes traveling with her beloved grandfather across fifteenth-century Spain, working to keep the Jews safe from the Inquisition. She soon realizes she must make personal sacrifices to help her people. The novel includes historical notes, recipe, glossary, and a link to a bibliography. **Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, 2020. Ages 8-12.**

**Confessions of a Closet Catholic** by Sarah Littman. Justine Silver struggles to balance her family’s expectations that she should be Jewish “but not too Jewish.” Frustrated, she follows a Catholic friend’s example: she gives up Judaism for Lent. Thus begins a search for identity and belonging that will resonate with readers of all religions. **Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner. Dutton Children’s Books, 2005. Ages 10-13.**

**Death by Toilet Paper** by Donna Gephart. Benjamin Epstein faces many challenges. His father is dead. He will soon be evicted from his home. Benjamin helps his mom by entering contests, including one for a toilet paper company slogan. When his aging grandfather moves in, trouble escalates. This realistic, deeply touching novel includes the right amount of kid-friendly humor to balance the pain. **Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Delacorte Press for Young Readers/Penguin Random House, 2014. Ages 9-12.** See also: **Abby, Tried and True** by Donna Gephart.

**The Diamond Tree: Jewish Tales from Around the World** by Howard Schwartz and Barbara Rush. Illustrated by Uri Shulevitz. A collection of traditional Jewish tales from many different countries. **Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner. HarperCollins Childrens Books, 1991. Ages 8-10.** See also **The Day the Rabbi Disappeared: Jewish Holiday Tales of Magic and Invisible Kingdoms: Jewish Tales of Angels Spirits and Demons** by Howard Schwartz.

**Dreidels on the Brain** by Joel Ben Izzy. In this semi-autobiographical story set during Hanukkah 1971, 12-year-old aspiring magician Joel describes his family and life in the L.A. suburbs. His observations are frequently hilarious, even as his family faces significant challenges. Funny, serious, and heart-warming. **Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Dial Books for Young Readers/Penguin Random House, 2016. Ages 10-14.**

**Fish Out of Water** by Joanne Levy. A 12-year-old boy prepping for bar mitzvah is frustrated that he's not able to do the things he loves because they're too "girly." Uplifting and gentle, the novel exudes intergenerational warmth, family love, and friendship. **Orca Book Publishers, 2020. Ages 9-13.**

**Get a Grip, Vivy Cohen** by Sarah Kapit. Eleven-year-old Jewish knuckleball pitcher Vivy Cohen, who has autism, becomes pen pals with her favorite Major League baseball player after writing a letter to him as an assignment for her social skills class. **Dial Books, 2020. Ages 8-12.**
Hereville: How Mirka Got Her Sword written and illustrated by Barry Deutsch. Eleven-year-old Mirka, living in a contemporary Orthodox community, has more on her mind than learning the “womanly arts” her stepmother insists she acquire. She is on a quest to find a sword and slay a dragon in this amusing and refreshing graphic novel adventure. Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner. Amulet Books/Abrams Books, 2010. Ages 8-12. Also in the series: Hereville: How Mirka Met a Meteorite and Hereville: How Mirka Caught a Fish, all by Barry Deutsch.


Meet Rebecca by Jacqueline Dembar Greene. Illustrated by Robert Hunt. The Jewish historical character in the American Girl Collection lives on the Lower East Side in 1914, hopes to be an actress, and tries to balance an American way of life with traditional Jewish values. Sydney Taylor Notable Book. American Girl, 2009. Ages 8-10. Also in the series: Rebecca and Ana, Candlelight for Rebecca, Rebecca and the Movies, and Rebecca to the Rescue, all by Jacqueline Dembar Greene.


This is Just a Test by Wendy Wan-Long Shang and Madelyn Rosenberg. David Da-Wei Horowitz is preparing for his Bar Mitzvah, trying to appease both his Jewish and Chinese grandmothers, digging a fallout shelter, and trying to balance his friends. Add a little 1980s David Hasselhoff and Betamax for a quirky and fast-paced read. Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Scholastic, 2017. Ages 8-12. See also: Not Your All-American Girl by Wendy Wan-Long Shang and Madelyn Rosenberg.


The Trouble with Good Ideas by Amanda Panitch. A spooky story about a girl who creates a golem (a Jewish mythological creature) to babysit her ailing grandfather before realizing that golems ultimately turn on their creators. Roaring Book Press, 2021.


The War Within by Carol Matas. During the Civil War, General Grant issues an order expelling all Jews from the territory under his control. Affected teenager Hannah Green, a Southern belle in the making, questions many of the values she took for granted, including slavery. Sydney Taylor Notable Book. Simon & Schuster, 2001. Ages 10-14.


**The Whole Story of Half a Girl** by Veera Hiranandani. When Sonia’s father loses his job forcing her to move from her small, supportive private school to a public middle school, the half-Jewish half-Indian sixth-grader experiences culture shock as she tries to navigate the school's unfamiliar social scene. A thoughtful story, told with affectionate humor. *Delacorte Press for Young Readers/Penguin Random House, 2012. Ages 9-12.* See also: *Mira in the Present Tense* by Sita Brahmachari and *My Basmati Bat Mitzvah* by Paula J. Freedman.

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The Jewish Grandparents Network began in August 2017 with a conversation about the under-recognized role of grandparents and the complex dynamics of today’s “new Jewish family.” We believe that Jewish grandparents are essential assets for our communities, our families, and our future. The Jewish Grandparent Network seeks to develop and steward the spaces and partnerships that will advance the wonderful blessings that grandparents represent. [https://jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org/](https://jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org/)