In response to rising anti-Semitism in the United States and around the world, the Association of Jewish Libraries offers the Love Your Neighbor series of book lists, intended to provide children and their families with a greater understanding of the Jewish religion and its people. Books read in youth impact future outlooks, and it is our hope that meeting Jews on the page will inspire friendship when readers meet Jews in real life. This list #8: Israel, Revised Edition, has been expanded in light of increased interest due to the Israel-Hamas War. You can find these titles in libraries, bookstores, and online.

**Book List #8: Israel, Revised Edition**

**PICTURE BOOKS**

**Engineer Ari and the Hanukkah Mishap** by Deborah Bodin Cohen, Kar-Ben 2011, ages 3-8 [buy](#) | [borrow](#)

Engineer Ari drives a train in pre-state Israel in the 1890s. One day, Ari’s caboose derails in Modi’in, home of the ancient Maccabees, when he stops for a camel on the tracks. The Bedouin camel owner befriends Ari and helps him celebrate Hanukkah. The story highlights the intertwined history of Hanukkah with the Israeli landscape, and the friendship that can exist between the diverse peoples there. Another highlight of the series is **Engineer Arielle and the Israel Independence Day Surprise** (Kar-Ben 2017, ages 3-8) [buy](#) | [borrow](#), which showcases Ari’s granddaughter Arielle, driving a modern train and celebrating the country’s national holiday with friends and family.

**Snow In Jerusalem** by Deborah da Costa, Albert Whitman 2001, ages 4-10, [buy](#) | [borrow](#)

Avi lives in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem; Hamudi lives in the Muslim Quarter, and a beautiful white stray cat lives in both, traveling back and forth between its beloved boys. On a rare snowy day, the boys find each other and learn to cooperate to care for their joint pet. Lush paintings bring the city to life. A 2001 Sydney Taylor Notable Book.

**Barefoot in the Sand** by Hava Deevon, Green Bean Books 2023, ages 4-10, [buy](#) | [borrow](#)

A Jewish man from Romania and a Jewish man from Yemen each have lifelong dreams of living in Eretz Yisrael. Upon arrival, they explore the desert barefoot to commune with the land, and joyfully connect through their differing yet parallel experiences. They sing the ancient Hallel prayer together: “When the Jews left Egypt - a place so strange to Jacob and all his descendents - the land of Israel became their haven and their home.”

**A Queen to the Rescue** by Nancy Churnin, Creston Books, 2021, ages 8-13, [buy](#) | [borrow](#)

This picture book biography of Jewish American Henrietta Szold details her many projects to better the world, many of which took place in pre-state Israel. She founded Hadassah, a women’s social justice organization, to help residents of all faiths, and she rescued thousands of Jewish children from Nazi Germany by bringing them to British-controlled Palestine. Chagall-inspired artwork accompanies this lyrical tribute to a tireless activist who helped to build modern Israel. A 2022 Sydney Taylor Notable Book.

**Chicken Man** by Michelle Edwards, HarperCollins 1991, ages 3-10, [buy](#) | [borrow](#)

Rody cheerfully performs a variety of jobs on a kibbutz, an Israeli communal farm, but he’s happiest taking care of the chickens. While many kibbutzim are now private industrial enterprises, this story pays tribute to the
institution’s agricultural roots. Winner of the National Jewish Book Award.

**Yaffa and Fatima, Shalom, Salaam** by Fawzia Gilani-Williams, Kar-Ben 2017, ages 3-8, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
A Muslim author retells a folktale with roots in both Jewish and Arab traditions, a story of caring that emphasizes the commonalities between the Jewish and Muslim friends. A 2018 Sydney Taylor Honor Book and winner of the Cooperative Children’s Book Center Choices Award.

**A Feather, A Pebble, A Shell** by Miri Leshem-Pelly, Kar-Ben 2024, ages 3-8, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
In this celebration of Israel’s geology, flora, and fauna, a young narrator explores the varied landscape of the country and stops to admire shells, seedpods, minerals, feathers, and more. Respectfully, she examines them and leaves them in place for others to enjoy. Leshem-Pelly’s bilingual Hebrew/English picture book *Lon-Lon’s Big Night* (Milk & Honey Press 2007, ages 3-8, [buy](#) [borrow](#)), about a Negev Desert sand fox, is another example of her love of nature. Also check out *Stork’s Landing* by Tami Lehman-Wilzig (Kar-Ben 2014, ages 3-8, [buy](#) [borrow](#)), a picture book about an injured stork nursed back to health on a kibbutz.

**Jodie’s Shabbat Surprise** by Anne Levine, Kar-Ben 2015, ages 5-9, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
Jerusalemite Jodie wants to be an archaeologist like her dad. One day her dog falls in a hole where she discovers an ancient wine press from biblical times. As a birthday surprise for dad, Jodie and friends wash their feet, add grapes, and make juice the old fashioned way. Based on the true story of a puppy who stumbled across a wine press from the First Temple period, this story shows how past and present are layered together in Israeli life. Part of a series about Jodie’s archaeological adventures.

**Saliman and the Memory Stone** by Erica Lyons, Apples & Honey 2024, ages 3-8, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
Saliman and his family leave persecution in Yemen in 1881 to move to their homeland in Jerusalem. The young boy carries a stone in his pocket to help him remember all the things he leaves behind.

**Pumpkin Pie for Sigd** by Jennifer Tzivia Macleod, Apples & Honey 2021, ages 4-8, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
Sigd is an Ethiopian Jewish holiday that marks the acceptance of the Torah and the yearning for Israel and the Temple. In this story, an Israeli neighborhood of immigrants comes together to help American-born Maddie create a (sort of) Thanksgiving pumpkin pie, which she brings to her Ethiopian-born friend Orly’s Sigd celebration.

**My Israel and Me** by Alice B. McGinty, Kalaniot 2021, ages 4-10, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
An introduction in verse to the diverse populations, cultures, and traditions of Israel’s people, this warmly illustrated picture book provides a glimpse into Israel’s history, scenery, and industry.

**The Language of Angels, A Story About the Reinvention of Hebrew** by Richard Michelson, Charlesbridge 2017, ages 4-10, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
The ancient language of Hebrew was all but lost by 1855, mostly used in prayers. This Sydney Taylor Book Award and National Jewish Book Award winner is the fascinating story of how Eliezer Ben Yehuda brought the language back to life, raising his son Ben Zion to be the first native speaker of modern Hebrew. The book also won the Junior Library Guild gold medal.

**Tisha B’Av: A Jerusalem Journey** by Allison Ofanansky, Kar-Ben 2017, ages 4-10, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
Tisha B’Av is a day of mourning on the Jewish calendar, commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem in 586 BCE and 70 CE. This stunning photo essay takes us on a tour through modern Jerusalem, led by children who explore the city from all angles - even underground.

**Jerusalem Sky: Stars, Crosses, and Crescents** by Mark Podwal, Doubleday 2005, ages 5 to adult, [buy](#) [borrow](#)
Spare, poetic text and evocative paintings capture the importance of the ancient city of Jerusalem to the three major Abrahamic world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A 2006 Sydney Taylor Notable Book.
The Golden Bell by Tamar Sachs, Kar-Ben 2019, ages 4-10, buy | borrow
In ancient Israel, Itamar and his tailor father mend the High Priest's robe, hemmed with little golden bells. Poor Itamar worries for years after one golden bell goes missing. It finally turns up… in an archaeological dig in 2011! While Itamar and his father are imaginary, the bell and the long history of Jews in Israel are very real indeed. For a great read-alike, try Shimri’s Big Idea (Apples & Honey 2019, ages 4-10, buy | borrow) by Elka Weber, about a child in ancient Jerusalem who uses keen observational skills to devise a way to bring spring water into the city, based on the real water tunnels.

This Is Israel by Miroslav Sasek, Universe 2008 (reprint, orig 1962), ages 5 to adult, buy | borrow
This stylish oversized picture book is part of a classic travel series from the 1960s, republished with an updated endnote in 2008. Charming illustrations and witty text take readers on a tour of the country, including sites meaningful to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, often accompanied by quotes from sacred texts. The book gives a sense of the modernity of Israel as well as its rich history. Adapted into a short film by Weston Woods.

Shoham’s Bangle by Sarah Sassoon, Kar-Ben 2022, ages 5-9, buy | borrow
Baghdadi Jewish Shoham and her family escape danger and violence in Iraq, fleeing to Israel in Operation Ezra & Nehemiah in the 1950’s. This story, based on the author’s family history, shows how Shoham holds onto her Iraqi culture even while embracing life in the holy land. A 2023 Sydney Taylor Notable Book.

Yuvi’s Candy Tree by Lesley Simpson, Kar-Ben 2011, ages 5-9, buy | borrow
Yuvi and her family are Ethiopian Jews who flee persecution on foot. After enduring exhaustion, thirst, and robbery, they finally join Operation Moses, the 1980s airlift that brings them to Israel, “our real home.” Based on the true story of Yeuvmert Tashome’s escape from Ethiopia. For the continued story of Ethiopian Jewish rescue, read Yosef’s Dream by Sylvia Rouss (Apples & Honey 2016, ages 4-10, buy | borrow). In 1991, Operation Solomon brought thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, including Yosef, who has a strange dream that doesn’t make sense until his family “makes aliyah” (moves to Israel), where they can at last live freely as Jews.

Speak up, Tommy by Jacqueline Dembar Greene, Kar-Ben 2012, ages 3-8, buy | borrow
Israeli immigrant Tommy is shy about his Hebrew accent in his new American school. When a police officer and Israeli-trained police dog visit his class, Tommy helps the officer and gains his classmates’ respect by pronouncing the Hebrew commands. While highlighting the Israeli contribution to counterterrorism through the training of explosive-detection dogs, this story offers universal themes about being the new kid and fitting in. A 2013 Sydney Taylor Notable Book.

Shoshi’s Shabbat by Caryn Yacowitz, Candlewick 2022, ages 4-8, buy | borrow
Near ancient Jerusalem, Shoshi the ox plows happily for six days but refuses to work on the seventh day. Yohanan realizes that Shoshi’s previous Jewish owner always rested on Shabbat and gave his animals a break, as commanded in the Hebrew Bible. Yohanan adopts this healthy habit. According to the endnote, the real Yohanan ben Torta was inspired in this way to become a Jew, and eventually, a rabbi. This title was included on AJL’s Fall 2022 Holiday Highlights list and the Cooperative Children’s Book Center Choices Book List.

MIDDLE GRADE & YOUNG ADULT

One More River by Lynne Reid Banks, HarperCollins 1992, ages 9-12, buy | borrow
A remarkably deep dive into the experience of emigrating to Israel, joining a kibbutz, and living through the Six-Day War, from the point of view of a Canadian Jewish girl. Lesley’s growth arc from spoiled softie to tough farmer is satisfying, and her connection with a Jordanian boy just across the border river adds empathetic nuance.

The Importance of Wings by Robin Friedman, Charlesbridge 2009, ages 9-12, buy | borrow
Israeli-American Roxanne struggles with her immigrant identity and misses her mom, who’s back in Israel. When Liat moves into the neighborhood, she brings a sense of Israeli pride that helps Roxanne blossom. Told in the first person, this novel, set in the 1980s, won the 2010 Sydney Taylor Book Award.

The Sound of Freedom by Kathy Kacer, Annick Press 2018, ages 9-12, buy | borrow
In 1936, Polish violinist Bronislaw Huberman rescued nearly 1000 European Jews from the Holocaust by
recruiting them to form the Palestine Symphony Orchestra in the British Mandate. Fictional Anna gets an audition for her father, a clarinetist in the Krakow Philharmonic; they move to Tel Aviv to escape the Nazis and become part of musical history. This was a Sydney Taylor Notable Book in 2019. For a picture book about Huberman’s orchestra, read A Concert in the Sand by Tami Shem-Tov and Rachella Sandbank (Kar-Ben, 2017, ages 4-9, buy borrow). Check out the related documentary, Orchestra of Exiles.

Real Time by Pnina Moed Kass, Clarion 2004, ages 13-adult, buy borrow
Multiple points of view chronicle the minutes leading up to and following a suicide bombing in modern Israel. We hear sympathetically told stories of immigrants, kibbutzniks, a Holocaust survivor, a German visitor, and even a Palestinian would-be bomber. Winner of the 2004 Sydney Taylor Book Award.

Rebel Daughter by Lori Banov Kaufmann, Delacorte Press 2021, ages 9 to adult, buy borrow
Esther is the daughter of a priest of the Second Temple, and lives through the Romans’ Siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE. She sees the temple destroyed and survives being sold into slavery. Richly detailed descriptions of ancient Jerusalem and the Jewish life that took place there make this historical novel a fascinating read. One end note explains the author’s ten years of research; another, from a Tel Aviv University professor of history and classics, provides extra information about the setting.

Things That Shimmer by Deborah Lakritz, Kar-Ben 2024, ages 8-12, buy borrow

The Miracle Seed by Martin Lemelman, Eerdmans 2023, ages 8-14, buy borrow
This graphic novel details the remarkable true story of how Judean date palm trees were brought back from a 2,000 year extinction. We see how the Jews were defeated at Masada and exiled from their land by the Romans, leaving behind weapons, coins, holy scrolls… and a jar of Judean date palm seeds. Centuries later, Israeli scientists germinated male and female seeds, harvesting the first Judean dates in millenia, which are now being studied for possible health benefits. An author’s graphic note, timeline, and photos round out the book.

Freefall by Anna Levine, Greenwillow 2008, ages 12-18, buy borrow
This coming of age story depicts the universals of teens’ lives, like friendship, disagreements with parents, and falling in love, against the unique backdrop of Israel’s mandatory military service. A 2009 Sydney Taylor Honor Book.

Running on Eggs by Anna Levine, Cricket Books 1999, age 10-13, buy borrow
Israeli kibbutznik Karen and Palestinian Yasmine connect through their love of running on an Arab-Israeli track team. When Yasmine’s father withdraws her from the team due to the immodest dress code (running shorts), she secretly agrees to help her friend Karen train. The discovery of their friendship threatens to pull their communities apart, but the girls remain loyal to each other and peace prevails.

Scout’s Honor and the Cave of Courage by Anna Levine, PJ Publishing 2018, ages 8-12, buy borrow
American twins Josh and Nate visit their Israeli cousins and join a group of Israeli scouts on a camping trip in a park riddled with historic caves and tunnels. Through a series of adventures and mishaps, the kids overcome fear and danger, learn about Jewish history, and have an exciting Hanukkah.

Watch Out for Flying Kids: How Two Circuses, Two Countries, and Nine Kids Confront Conflict and Build Community by Cynthia Levinson, Peachtree 2015, ages 10-14, buy borrow
A Sydney Taylor Notable Book, this is the true story of two youth circuses that partner to build trust and community. A St. Louis circus including inner-city and suburban kids, and an Israeli circus made up of Arab and Jewish members, work together to connect and entertain. Interviews, history, and photos make this an intriguing nonfiction work. A documentary on the subject, Circus Kids, was made in 2010. A good read-alike is the nonfiction photo essay Sharing Our Homeland: Palestinian and Jewish Children at Summer Peace Camp by Trish Marx (Lee & Low, 2010, ages 8-12, buy borrow), another Sydney Taylor Notable Book.
Not So Shy by Noa Nimrodi, Kar-Ben 2023, ages 9-14, [buy | borrow]
Mizrahi Jewish Shai and her family relocate from Israel to California for dad’s work. At first resentful of the move, Shai soon connects with new friends, including Muslim Hakim. After getting past initial distrust, the two realize that their Arabic backgrounds share similarities, and they support each other while dealing with Islamophobic and antisemitic bullying at school. After Shai’s Safta (grandma) is injured in a Tel Aviv terrorist bombing, Hakim’s family continues to provide love and support. As Kirkus says, “Nimrodi tackles difficult subjects with a hopeful, uplifting outlook.”

Pickled Watermelon by Esty Schachter, Kar-Ben 2018, ages 8-12, [buy | borrow]
Molly, an American, connects with her mom’s heritage for the first time when the family spends the summer in Israel in this sweet historical novel set in the 1980s. Light on politics and strong on familial love, with some interesting history in the mix.

The Six Day Hero (Kar-Ben 2017, a Sydney Taylor Honor Book, [buy | borrow]) and Beni’s War (Kar-Ben 2020, a Sydney Taylor Notable Book, [buy | borrow]) both by Tammar Stein, both ages 9-13
These fast-paced novels evoke the anxieties and hopes of Israelis during the 1967 Six Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, by personalizing the events through the eyes of brothers Motti and Beni.

A Bottle in the Gaza Sea (republished as Message in a Bottle) by Valérie Zenatti, Bloomsbury 2008, ages 12-adult, [buy | borrow]
A Jewish Israeli girl and a Muslim Palestinian boy share their hopes and fears over email in the early 2000s, slowly bonding as they earn each other’s trust despite their differences. Winner of the 2009 Sydney Taylor Book Award. Translated from French, and made into a French-language [motion picture] in 2010.

THE “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR” SERIES
The Love Your Neighbor series of book lists was created by the Association of Jewish Libraries to grow young readers’ understanding of the Jewish religion and its people.

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