HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS TITLES FOR SPRING 2024

These titles are the Association of Jewish Libraries' picks for the best Jewish holiday children’s books of Spring 2024.

SHABBAT


Friday afternoon, Mom is cooking and baking while Dad cleans the house. Leelee and her dog Pickles are also doing several mitzvot to help prepare for Shabbat, but their help creates more chaos. Eventually, the two start a parade through the neighborhood, which leads family and friends back to the house. They arrive just in time for everyone to help with the final preparations before sitting down to a delicious Shabbat dinner. A fun and relatable look at the storm before the calm of Shabbat.


A young child wakes up early Friday morning to prepare challah with mom. Once they mix in the ingredients and knead the dough, it is time to tuck the challah dough under a towel like a sleeping baby and wait for it to rise. Ima (Mother) explains that everything grows in its own time. This is a tender story about being patient and enjoying the process of preparing for Shabbat. The beautifully detailed illustrations of the family and their home capture an extra element of warmth.
PASSOVER


A stellar line-up of middle grade authors share Passover joy (and a bit of anxiety) in this delightful anthology. With one story for each step of the Seder, the stories encompass fiction, memoir, verse, and fantasy. They highlight family and tradition, two of the most beloved aspects of Passover. Four “thought questions” are included at the beginning of each section, as well as Passover recipes.


Passover is coming, so it's time for Workitu and her sister Almaz to smash all their dishes. Workitu resists breaking her favorite cup but Auntie Balainesh explains how they grind the pieces into fine powder to make clay for new holiday dishes. Workitu takes comfort in knowing her favorite cup will live on in the new dishes and that the powder has been used for generations, possibly all the way back to Egypt. Based on Goshen's childhood in Ethiopia, it's a gentle tale of Beta Israel holiday preparations.


It's time to find the hidden Passover matzah! Told in bouncy rhyme, with the repeated refrain, "Afikoman? Afikoman? Afikoman? Where’d you go?" each spread features diverse children searching a different part of the house or yard. The Afikoman, depicted with stick figure legs, arms, and face, is hiding in each spread. A fun and challenging read-aloud that will have children examining each page to see if they can spot the Afikoman.


As a family prepares for their seder, a little girl continues to look for her late Poppy. Family members remind her that he's in the soup, the chair, and in the seder itself, as she comes to recognize that his presence is felt in the continuation of his family and traditions. Back matter includes a note about the author's real Poppy, and a glossary of seder terms and traditions.

This colorful board book is a delightful read for Shavuot, focusing on the gratitude we have for God providing us with fruitful land. The simple finger painting illustrations are a fun way for children to imagine they are planting and tending to their own first fruits, like the Jewish people in ancient Israel. It is rare to find a Shavuot story for children that highlights the agricultural elements of the holiday, especially in a board book, so this story nicely fills a gap in Jewish holiday books.

AJL’s 2024 Holiday Highlights judges are Rebecca Levitan, Librarian at the Baltimore County Public Library - Pikesville branch in Baltimore, MD; Jennifer Rothschild, Collection Engagement Librarian at Arlington Public Library in Arlington, VA; and Danielle Winter, Reference Librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library in Brooklyn, NY.

To learn more about the Association of Jewish Libraries, please visit www.jewishlibraries.org.

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