Enduring Questions

Using Jewish Children’s Literature in Classrooms
Any book for children that represents authentic Jewish experience including its culture, history, religion, languages, and the day-to-day life of Jewish people around the world through specific themes, characters, settings, plots, or content.
The “Wealth” of Jewish Children’s Literature

There is a huge number of high-quality Jewish books and stories for children to which Jewish (and non-Jewish) children are not exposed.

Exposing children to these Jewish books and stories enriches their lives and deepens their thinking and sense of who they are in the world.

Jewish children’s literature provides “mirrors,” “windows”, and “sliding doors.”

Talking about these Jewish books and stories with children provides an opportunity to engage children in “Enduring Questions.”
What Makes Jewish Children’s Literature High-Quality

• Accuracy
• Authenticity
• Reflects literary merit; the diversity of Jewish children and families; authentically represents Jewish content and Jewish Values such as:
  “Justice and Righteousness”    “Lovingkindness”,
  “Remembrance”                 “Repairing the World,”
  “Memory”
What are “Enduring Questions”?

No matter how young they are, children are deeply concerned with the so-called eternal questions: Who created the world? Who made the earth, the sky, people, animals? … Children think about and ponder such matters as justice, the purpose of life, the why of suffering. They often find it difficult to make peace with the idea that animals are slaughtered so that man can eat them. They are bewildered and frightened by death. They cannot accept the fact that the strong should rule the weak. … If I had my way, I would publish a history of philosophy for children, where I would convey the basic ideas of all philosophers in simple language. Children, who are highly serious people, would read this book with great interest. In our time, when the literature for adults is deteriorating, good books for children are the only hope, the only refuge. Many adults read and enjoy children’s books. We write not only for children but for their parents. They, too, are serious children.

Isaac Bashevis Singer
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Appendix A: Select List of Jewish Children’s Literature Organized by Topics / Themes

Appendix B: Select Resources for Using Jewish Children’s Literature in the Preschool Through Elementary Classroom

Appendix C: Select List of Professional and Scholarly Books and Articles on Jewish Children’s Literature
• Why did Clara “persist?”
• When we see injustice around us, what can we do to help?
• Why did the owners of the factories insist on such deplorable working conditions?
• Even if it is legal, is it ethical to hire teenage girls or children to work in a factory for low wages?
• Book was shared by a teacher in a Christian school who asked: "Why do people immigrate to new places?"
• A child's response to the book: "I wonder how Clara got to be so brave?"
• Written in 3 Languages: Arabic, Hebrew, & English

• Book opens as Arabic, Hebrew and Yiddish Books open
• What type of loyalty must you have to your parents for following their rules? When is it ok to disobey your parents?

• How do you think Daniel & Ismail found the courage to go against their parents’ wishes?

• Daniel & Ismail are proud of their own community, yet they enjoy playing soccer together. How can someone be proud and loyal to their own community, yet also be proud and enjoy having friends from other communities?
Story from
Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1811) retold by Ann Redisch Stampler
• Why does the prince want to be a rooster?

• Why did the old man succeed in helping the prince when the others failed?

• Rackhmunis

• Mitzvot

• What does it mean to be fully human (and not a rooster)?

• What can we learn about teaching from this story?
How Teachers Might Use Jewish Children’s Literature in the Classroom

- To Explore “Enduring Questions” as part of multicultural literature
- To Broaden Conceptions of Diversity Within the Curriculum
- To Engage in Social Justice Educational Work
- To Share Joy and Celebrate Life
we imagine a life for one...
together? What is justice? What is a religious person to do? What is wisdom and foolishness?
time? What is our purpose? Love? What is our story? What
for our literature? What is foolishness?