REPRESENTING JEWISH LIFE IN THE EVERYDAY: EXPLORING NEW CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE GRADE AND YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Gayle Forman, Sarah Mlynowski, Leila S. Sales and Courtney Sheinmel

Description: Jewish kids’ books have often been historical, trauma-focused or both, but today more and more authors incorporate everyday contemporary Jewish life into their novels. In this panel, four middle grade and young adult writers discuss how and why they choose to weave Jewish characters, experiences and themes into their books. This means Hebrew school classes in Leila Sales’s The Museum of Lost And Found, Shabbat dinner in Sarah Mlynowski’s Best Wishes, a Passover seder in Gayle Forman’s Just One series, and tikkun olam in Courtney Sheinmel’s The Kindness Club. As publishing prioritizes representation and own voices, these authors write characters for whom being Jewish isn’t the conflict and isn’t the point - it’s just part of who they are.

Gayle Forman, an award-winning author and journalist, has written several bestselling novels for young adults, including the Just One Series, I Was Here, Where She Went and the #1 New York Times bestseller If I Stay, which has been translated into more than 40 languages and in 2014 was adapted into a major motion picture. Frankie & Bug, Gayle's first middle-grade novel was published in 2021 and was a New York Times notable children's book of the year. She lives in Brooklyn, NY with her family.

Sarah Mlynowski is the New York Times bestselling author of the Whatever After series, the Magic in Manhattan series, Best Wishes, Gimme a Call, and a bunch of other books for teens and tweens, including the Upside-Down Magic series, which she co-writes with Lauren Myracle and Emily Jenkins and which was adapted into a movie for the Disney Channel. Originally from Montreal, Sarah now lives in Los Angeles with her family.

Leila Sales is the author of eight critically acclaimed middle-grade and young adult novels, including, most recently, The Museum of Lost and Found (Abrams 2023). Her books have been optioned for screen and stage, appeared on many state lists and been translated into a dozen languages. Leila worked for many years at Viking Children’s Books, where she edited bestselling and award-winning books for readers of all ages. She now lives in Austin, TX and runs the Book Engineer, a book development consulting firm. Learn more at leilasales.com.

Courtney Sheinmel is the author of nearly thirty books for kids and teens, including the acclaimed Stella Batts and My Pet Slime series for young readers. Her book, Helen Keller, was part of Chelsea Clinton’s She Persisted series. Courtney received a National Scholastic Outstanding Educator Award for her work as a writing instructor at the non-profit Writopia Lab. You can visit her online at: courtneysheinmel.com Instagram: @courtneysheinmel