

# FRESHMAN SEMINAR II: MORE INFORMATION ON THE FUNDAMENTALS OF JUDAICA LIBRARIANSHIP

## Part I: Developing a Children's Collection AJL Convention Toronto 2003

*Linda Silver*

**Description:** Need help organizing your library? Feeling overwhelmed? The Freshman Seminar II can help! Building on what was covered at the Freshman Seminar in Denver, new and inexperienced librarians and volunteer staff can learn more about the basics of Judaic librarianship from experts in the field. This first session will focus on developing a children's collection as well as programs and outreach activities that will bring children into your library. Attendance at the 2002 Freshman Seminar is not required. Participants in the Freshman Seminar II are encouraged to attend all 4 sessions on Monday, but everyone is welcome to attend individual sessions.

**Linda Silver** is the librarian of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland. Her M.L.S. is from Case Western Reserve University and she has wide experience in public, school, and Judaic libraries. Linda specializes in children's literature. She is the editor of the children's book review section of *Jewish Book World*, co-editor, with Ellen Cole, of the children's book review section of the *AJL Newsletter*, a columnist for CAJE's Jewish Education News, a reviewer for *School Library Journal* and the *Cleveland Jewish News*, editor of an AJL publication called Developing a Judaic Children's Collection: Recommended Books and Videos, and editor of AJL's web published guide called "The New Jewish Valuesfinder".

## Selecting Materials for Young People

Presented by Linda R. Silver, Jewish Education Center of Cleveland

[lsilver@jecc.org](mailto:lsilver@jecc.org) [www.jecc.org](http://www.jecc.org)

### **A. SELECTION OF MATERIALS**

#### Selection Criteria in General (DISCUSS)

1. Positive and/or authentic Jewish content
1. Compatibility of materials with Movement principles
2. Compatibility of materials with institution's educational philosophy and curricular goals
3. Literary and artistic merit
4. Age-appropriateness
5. Accuracy, solid research, and reputable scholarship
6. Timeliness
7. Sensitivity to Jewish concerns
8. Inviting and "user-friendly" format
9. Favorable reviews

#### Criteria for Selecting Picture Books (Handout)

1. Is the content appropriate for the intended age level?
2. Does the book have child-appeal or is it really written for adults?
3. How is the theme developed through words and pictures and what makes it Jewish?
4. In what ways do the illustrations help create meaning from the text?
5. Are the illustrations accurate and consistent with the text and with Jewish practice and belief?
6. What medium has the illustrator chosen to use and does it advance the mood of the story?
7. Is the style of the illustrations appropriate for the story?
8. Does the format seem appropriate to the content?
9. How durable are the paper and binding?
10. Do the format and overall book design expand on the theme or content of the book?

#### Criteria for Selecting Fiction (Handout)

1. What kind of book is this (historical fiction, life cycle story, etc.) and what can the reader anticipate from the title, dust jacket illustration, size of print, illustrations, chapter headings?
2. Plot: Is it believable, engaging, suspenseful, well-constructed, age appropriate? Is it marked by Jewish time, Jewish space, Jewish issues, or Jewish characters?
3. Setting: Where does the story take place, how does the setting affect the action, characters, or theme, and does the story transcend the setting to have meaning to today's Jewish children?
4. Theme: What is the theme, is it a Jewish theme, is it age-appropriate, and does it emerge naturally from the story or is it imposed and didactic?
5. Characterization: Are at least some of the characters Jewish? Is characterization believable, convincing, multi-dimensional? Is there character development or growth?
6. Style: Is the writing style appropriate to the subject and natural to the characters? What is the overall mood: reverent, cynical, depressing, hopeful, etc? Are factual details accurate and blended smoothly into the story?

7. Point of View: Is it appropriate to the purpose of the book and is it sensitive to Jewish issues?

#### Criteria for Selecting Non-Fiction (Handout)

1. Accuracy and authenticity: What are the author's qualifications to write a book of this type? Are the facts accurate according to other sources? Is the information up-to-date? Are generalizations supported by facts? In the case of folklore and traditional literature, are sources given and explanatory notes included?
2. Content and perspective: Is the subject adequately covered? Is the content and format age-appropriate? Is the content presented objectively or does it favor a particular point of view or ideology? If so, is that point of view or perspective Jewishly acceptable?
3. Style: Is the content presented clearly, in an age-appropriate manner, and in language that is vivid and engaging? Does usage show a sensitivity to Jewish concerns?
4. Organization: Is the information structured clearly and coherently, with appropriate subheadings, and easy to use reference aids such as table of contents, index, bibliography, glossary, chronology, etc?
5. Illustrations and format: Do illustrations clarify and extend the text? Are they accurately presented and clearly captioned? Does the total format contributed to the clarity and attractiveness of the book.

#### **B. SELECTION RESOURCES** (Handouts)

##### AJL Publications

Developing a Judaic Children's Collection: Recommended Books and Videos  
AJL Newsletter  
AJL's New Jewish Valuesfinder, [www.ajljewishvalues.org](http://www.ajljewishvalues.org) ((DISCUSS))

##### Other Jewish Review Media

Jewish Book World  
Jewish Education News (CAJE) for software reviews  
JECC website for software reviews

#### **C. REACHING LIBRARY USERS AND POTENTIAL USERS** (DISCUSS)

##### Children

Be there when classes are there.  
Arrange for regularly scheduled class visits.  
Provide interesting programs that are geared to what children are learning and what they are interested in.  
Hold special events like contests and Simcha Books; include grandparents.  
Make and keep the library an inviting and friendly place to visit; put up book displays, displays of students works, etc.

##### Teachers

Mingle with teachers in the staff room or office before school; suggest ways that both you, the librarian, and library resources, can help them.  
Attend faculty meetings and speak up, always pointing out what the library can provide and suggesting ways that library resources can make teaching and learning more

meaningful.

Offer your services for all library-related issues.

Obtain copies of the school's curricula, read it, and gear library services to it.

Initiate activities that will help teachers, such as making book or media lists that relate to what they are teaching.

### Parents

Welcome parents to come to the library when they drop off or pick up their children.

Serve coffee.

Establish a parenting shelf and publicize it.

Sponsor programs that involve parents and children, like a Mother-Daughter book group.

Offer occasional programs for toddlers and parents and spend a little of it showing parents how and what to read to toddlers and what your library has to offer.

Recruit parent volunteers.

### Publicity

Write a regular column for the synagogue or school newsletter.

Ask the rabbi or director to announce library events from the bima, on the PA system, and in the weekly bulletin.

Send press releases about the library to the local paper.

Be sure that attractive, up-to-date information about the library is included in material used to recruit new members/students.

### **TIME**

Time: 45 minutes per speaker plus questions

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SELECTION AIDS 10

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## General Selection Criteria

1. Positive and/or authentic Jewish content
2. Compatibility of content with Movement principles
3. Compatibility of materials with institution's educational philosophy and curricular goals.
4. Literary and artistic merit
5. High degree of potential user appeal
6. Age-appropriateness
7. Accuracy, solid research, and reputable scholarship
8. Timeliness
9. Sensitivity to Jewish concerns
10. Inviting and "user-friendly" format
11. Favorable reviews

## Criteria for Selecting Fiction

1. What kind of book is this (historical fiction, life cycle story, etc.) and what can the reader anticipate from the title, dust jacket illustration, size of print, illustrations, chapter headings?
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## REACHING LIBRARY USERS AND POTENTIAL USERS

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- Attend faculty meetings and speak up, always pointing out what the library can provide and suggesting ways that library resources can make teaching and learning more meaningful.
- Offer your services for all library-related issues.
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- Welcome parents to come to the library when they drop off or pick up their children. Serve coffee.
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- Offer occasional programs for toddlers and parents and spend part of them showing parents how and what to read to toddlers and what your library has to offer.
- Recruit parent volunteers.

### Publicity

- Write a regular column for the synagogue or school newsletter.
- Ask the rabbi or director to announce library events from the bima, on the PA system, and in the weekly bulletin.
- Send press releases about the library to the local paper.

- Be sure that attractive, up-to-date information about the library is included in material used to recruit new members/students.
- Establish a library page on the school/synagogue website. Keep it current.
- Create media lists and displays that relate to topics of importance to your institution.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Guidelines and Criteria

Huck, Charlotte, et al. *Children's Literature in the Elementary School, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.* NY: McGraw-Hill, 2001. The leading children's literature text and well worth the hefty price.

Jewish Book World. *Reviewers' Guidelines.* (Attached)

Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox). *Mission Statement.* (Attached)

*SLJ's Average Book Prices 2003* IN *School Library Journal*, March 2003.

School Library Journal. *Checklists for Reviewers.* [www.slj.reviewsnews.com](http://www.slj.reviewsnews.com)

Schorsch, Ismar. *The Sacred Cluster: the Core Values of Conservative Judaism.* [www.jtsa.edu/about/cj/cluster.shtml](http://www.jtsa.edu/about/cj/cluster.shtml)

Silver, Linda R. *Judging Judaica* IN *School Library Journal*, Jan. 2002, pp.44-45.

*A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*, May 1999. <http://ccarnet.org/platforms/principles.html>

## JEWISH BOOK WORLD

### Guidelines For Children's Book Reviewers

1. When you receive a book to review, it will have a due date on it – usually three weeks from the date it is mailed. If this is not enough time, please contact Linda Silver. Email your reviews to Linda Silver at [silverlr@adelphia.net](mailto:silverlr@adelphia.net) or [lsilver@jecc.org](mailto:lsilver@jecc.org). Do not send your reviews directly to *Jewish Book Month* or the Jewish Book Council.
2. All of the books reviewed in the Children's Books section are recommended, subject to the qualifications stated in the reviews. If, after reading a review book, you do not recommend it, send Linda Silver an email stating the reasons but do not bother to write a complete, polished review. You may keep all review books – those you recommend and those you don't.
3. Reviews may be as long as 500 words (approx. 2 typed pages, double spaced) or they may be shorter. Your reviews should be descriptive enough to be helpful to colleagues who will not see the book. A brief summary of what the author is trying to convey should be included along with an evaluation of the book's literary and artistic qualities and its appropriateness for its intended readers. Comparisons with other books of a similar nature or by the same author are encouraged.
  - For picture books: please consider in your evaluation: content, illustrations, medium (if you recognize it or if it is stated somewhere in the book) and style of illustrations, and format.
  - For fiction, please consider in your evaluation: genre, plot, setting, characterization, theme, and style.
  - For non-fiction, please consider in your evaluation: accuracy, authenticity, content, perspective, style, organization, illustrations, and format.

(For a much longer and excellent discussion of the criteria for evaluating different types of children's books, see *Children's Literature In the Elementary School*, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed., edited by Charlotte Huck, et al. NY: McGraw Hill, 2001.)

4. At the top of your review, state the author, title, illustrator, series, publisher, copyright date, price, and ISBN. If the book is a paperback, type Pbk. after the ISBN. No special formatting is required. At the end of the review, state the age range that you - not the publisher - recommend. Give actual range, not "Gr. 2 and up." Last, give your name.
5. When you submit your first review to the editor, send along with it a short, two or three sentence, biographical statement about yourself. This will be published in the "About the Reviewers" section in every issue of *Jewish Book World* in which you have a review. If you want to revise your bio at any time, send a new one.
6. Reviewers are responsible for the accuracy of statements they make in their reviews. Reviews may be edited for grammar, style, and length.

No guidelines for reviewers of children's books in *Jewish Book World* would be complete without a word of thanks. Volunteer book reviewers who are practicing children's librarians offer a perspective that cannot be matched. The critical evaluations and selection advice given by their reviews provide sound guidance to those who choose children's books for library, school, or home use. Just as important, their reviewing insights encourage an appreciation for the fine art of writing books for children and an awareness of how a good book always has the potential to change lives. Reading and thinking about books critically has many benefits for the reviewer as well as for the reviewer's audience but as a labor of love in the service of Jewish children and books, it deserves much praise.

## Selection Resources

*AJL Bibliography Bank.* [www.jewishlibraries.org](http://www.jewishlibraries.org) Bibliographies compiled by AJL members.

*AJL Newsletter.* Quarterly. [www.jewishlibraries.org](http://www.jewishlibraries.org). Reviews recommended and not recommended titles. *The AJL Newsletter* and *Jewish Book World* (below) are the two leading sources for reviews of Jewish children's books.

*AJL's New Jewish Valuesfinder.* [www.ajljewishvalues.org](http://www.ajljewishvalues.org). An Internet site that identifies the Jewish values in children's books published since 1995. For each title in the database, the following information is given: author, title, illustrator, publisher, copyright date, ISBN, pages, grade level, and a brief annotation. All titles in the database are recommended, with reservations as noted. Updates *Developing a Judaic Children's Collection* (below).

Association of Jewish Book Publishers. <http://www.avotaynu.com/ajbp.html>

*Jewish Book World.* Three issues per year published by the Jewish Book Council. [www.jewishbooks.org](http://www.jewishbooks.org). Reviews recommended titles.

Jewish Education Center of Cleveland website. [www.jecc.org](http://www.jecc.org). Selected reviews of print and non-print materials including software.

*Jewish Education News.* Quarterly published by CAJE. [www.caje.org](http://www.caje.org) Each issue has a column about children's books and another that reviews software.

Silver, Linda, Ed. *Developing a Judaic Children's Collection: Recommended Books and Videos.* NY: AJL, 2001.

## Mission Statement

### **Vision:**

The Rabbinical Council of America, an international organization of Orthodox rabbis, promotes the primacy of Torah values and halachic practice by strengthening the bonds among rabbis, congregants, and the broader community.

### **Mission:**

The Rabbinical Council of America fosters and supports Torah in the contemporary context, in keeping with a philosophy that is sensitive and responsive to the needs of all members of the Jewish people, affirms the centrality of the State of Israel and which values secular knowledge. It supports the spiritual, personal, and professional growth of its members by assisting in their development as Torah scholars, halachic authorities, teachers, ideological spokesmen, and pastoral counselors. The RCA facilitates the growth of its member rabbis as leaders of their congregations, of the Jewish people, and of society as a whole.

### **Goals:**

- ! To raise the level of spirituality and religious practice in our communities.
- ! To assist, advise, and advocate on behalf of its members, better enabling them to serve individuals and families as they address contemporary family, interpersonal, social, and religious issues.
- ! To lead the diverse Orthodox rabbinate and Orthodox community in confronting key social and religious issues.
- ! To interact in the rabbinic role with all relevant lay, communal, and synagogue organizations.
- ! To accomplish the above by having a structurally sound, properly staffed, and financially viable organization.

