

ASKING (AND ANSWERING) TOUGH QUESTIONS IN JEWISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Confessions of a Closet Catholic / Tough Questions Jews Ask Read-A-Likes & Resources

Picture Books:

Boritzer, Etan. *What Is God?* Illus. Robbie Marantz. Willowdale, Ontario: Firefly Books, 1990.

The title is deceiving; this book really answers the question "What is religion?" in simple, straightforward language, as well as examining different people's interpretations of God and discussing various religions. (Grades 1-3) See also: *What is Death?*, *What is Love?*, *What is Beautiful?*, and *What is Right?*

Gold, August. *Where Does God Live?* Illus. Matthew J. Perlman. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2001.

Using simple, everyday examples that children can relate to, this colorful book helps young readers develop a direct and personal understanding of God. (PK-Kindergarten) See also: *Does God Hear My Prayer?*, *Does God Forgive Me?*, *Does God Ever Sleep?* by Joan Sauro, and *How Does God Listen?* by Kay Lindahl.

Kushner, Lawrence & Karen. *Because Nothing Looks Like God.* Illus. Dawn W. Majewski. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000.

Mixing sparks of curiosity and spiritual imagination, this wondrous book lights children's creativity and shows how God is with us everyday, in every way. (PK-Grade 2) See also: *What Does God Look Like?*, *How Does God Make Things Happen?*, and *Where Is God?*, board book editions.

Portnoy, Mindy Avra. *Where Do People Go When They Die?* Illus. Shelly O. Haas. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben Publishing, 2004.

Different children ask various adults the question "Where do people go when they die?" and get a variety of simple, honest, and helpful answers. A note to parents and a list of suggestions for talking to children about death is included. (PK-Grade 2)

Fiction:

Asher, Sandy. *With All My Heart, With All My Mind.* New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1999.

An anthology of original short stories about Jews coming of age by thirteen well-known Jewish authors. Each story is followed by an interview with the author. (Grades 6-8) See also *On Her Way: Stories and Poems about Growing Up Girl.*

Bat-Ami, Miriam. *Dear Elijah.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997. (reissue)

As Passover approaches, eleven-year-old Rebecca writes letters to the prophet Elijah as she struggles to cope with her father's illness and her own emotions about Judaism and life. (Grades 4-6)

Blume, Judy. *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.* New York: Laurel Leaf, 1991.

Everything is changing for Margaret Simon - she is dealing with adjusting to a new school, her religious identity, and puberty. (Grades 4-6)

Bush, Lawrence. *Emma Ansky-Levine and Her Mitzvah Machine.* New York: UAHC Press, 1991.

For her 12th birthday, Emma receives a special Mitzvah Machine, which helps her discover her Jewish identity and the true meaning of becoming a Bat Mitzvah. (Grades 4-6)

Cone, Molly. *Hello, Hello, Are You There, God?* Illus. Rosalind Charney Kaye. New York: UAHC Press, 1999.

Contains stories to teach children what it means to be a part of the Jewish people, to cherish learning, and to love God. (Grades 1-3)

Herman, Charlotte. *What Happened to Heather Hopkowitz?* New York : Dutton, 1981.

When the parents of fourteen-year-old Heather go on a month-long cruise, she goes to stay with Orthodox family friends and decides to change her life. (Grades 6-8) See also *Our Snowman Had Olive Eyes* and *The Difference of Ari Stein*.

Howe, James. *13: Thirteen Stories that Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen.* New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003.

Thirteen moments in a teen's life, such as a first kiss and obsessing over a pair of special sneakers, are told in this collection of tales by various authors. Includes the story "Jeremy Goldblatt is So Not Moses" by James Howe.

Kornblatt, Marc. *Understanding Buddy.* New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2001.

When a new classmate stops speaking because of the sudden death of his mother, fifth grader Sam tries to befriend him and risks destroying his relationship with his best friend Alex. (Grades 4-6)

Mack, Tracy. *Birdland.* New York: Scholastic Press, 2003.

Fourteen-year-old, tongue-tied Jed spends winter break working on a school project filming a documentary about his East Village, New York City, neighborhood, where he is continually reminded of his older brother, Zeke, a promising poet who died the year before. Sydney Taylor Honor Award 2003. (Grades 7-12)

Matas, Carol. *Sparks Fly Upward.* New York: Clarion Books, 2002.

In 1910, when a family of Russian Jews move from Saskatchewan to Winnipeg, Canada, twelve-year-old Rebecca must live with a Christian family temporarily and struggles with anti-Semitism, confusion about God, and changing relationships with family and friends. (Grades 4-6)

Meyer, Carolyn. *Drummers of Jericho.* San Diego: Gulliver Books Paperbacks, 1995.

As a Jew, Pazit Trujillo objects when she and the rest of the Jericho High School band are instructed to play hymns and march in a cross, turning the whole town against her, except for one brave friend. (Grades 7-10) See also *Gideon's People*.

Newman, Leslea. *Fat Chance.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994.

In a series of diary entries, thirteen-year-old Judi recounts her struggles to lose weight, hide her bulimia from her mother, find a boyfriend, and decide on a profession. (Grades 6-8)

Potok, Chaim. *The Chosen*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1995. (reissue)

A baseball game between two different Jewish schools becomes the catalyst that starts a bitter rivalry between two boys and their fathers. (Grades 7-12) See also: *The Promise, Davita's Harp, The Gift of Asher Lev*, and *My Name Is Asher Lev*.

Rahlens, Holly-Jane. *Prince William, Maximilian Minsky, and Me*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2005.

In Berlin, thirteen-year-old Nelly Sue Edelmeister - a self-described nerd and aspiring astronomer - gains a greater understanding of herself and those around her as she develops her first crush, considers whether to go through with her bat mitzvah, and tries out for the basketball team. (Grades 6-8)

Shalant, Phyllis. *When Pirates Came to Brooklyn*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2002.

After the friendship between Lee and Polly begins, one filled with imaginary pirates plaguing their 1960 Brooklyn homes, they find themselves struggling to stay together when their mothers' bigotry stands in the way. (Grades 5-7) See also *Shalom, Geneva Peace*.

Wolff, Ferida. *Pink Slippers, Bat Mitzvah Blues*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Thirteen-year-old Alyssa tries to balance the conflicting demands of ballet training with finding her place as a Jew in today's world. (Grades 6-8)

Non-Fiction:

Adelman, Penina, Ali Feldman and Shulamit Reinharz. *The JGirls' Guide: The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2005.

For the girl who asks "Where do I fit in?," this includes lessons based on *mitzvot*, interpretations of text, diary entries, and the views of young girls on contemporary issues. (Grades 7-10)

Freedman, Rabbi E. B., Jan Greenberg, and Karen A. Katz. *What Does Being Jewish Mean? Read-Aloud Responses to Questions Jewish Children Ask about History, Culture, and Religion*. New York : Fireside, 1991.

Answers to questions commonly asked about the daily practices and beliefs of Judaism. (Grades 4-6)

Gellman, Rabbi Marc and Monsignor Thomas Hartman. *Lost and Found: A Kid's Book for Living through Loss*. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1999.

Describes different kinds of losses - losing possessions, competitions, health, trust, and the permanent loss because of death - and discusses how to handle these situations. (Grades 5-8). See also: *Where Does God Live? Questions and Answers for Parents and Children, How Do You Spell God? Answers to the Big Questions from Around the World, And God Cried, Too: A Kid's Book of Healing and Hope*, and *Bad Stuff in the News: A Guide to Handling the Headlines*.

Gordon, Sol. *When Living Hurts*. New York: UAHC Press, 2003. (revised edition)

This insightful, direct book is written for young people who are in trouble or for those who wish to help those in trouble. It identifies early warning signs of suicide, suggests how to get help for

different kinds of problems, and offers ways to cope creatively with anxiety, anger frustration, sadness, loneliness or depression. (Grades 7-12)

Kushner, Lawrence. *The Book of Miracles: A Young Person's Guide to Jewish Spiritual Awareness*. Woodstock, VT : Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997 (new edition).

From the miracle at the Red Sea to the miracle of waking up this morning, this intriguing book introduces young people to a way of spiritual thinking to last a lifetime and helps them make - and treasure - the connections between religion, spirituality and everyday life. (Grades 4-6)

Kushner, Harold S. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Random House, 2004 (new edition).

A new edition of the classic self-help guide by the respected rabbi explains how to find comfort and strength in the face of tragedy and the challenges of life, and how to understand God's role in recovery. (Grades 8 & up)

Salkin, Jeffrey K. *For Kids - Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

An informative, lighthearted, inspiring, and instructive guide for kids as they embark upon a journey of growth, self-discovery, and exploration in preparation for their bar or bat mitzvah. (Grades 6-8) See also *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*.

Parent & Teacher Resources:

Feinstein, Rabbi Edward. *Tough Questions Jews Ask - Teacher's Guide*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2004.

A step-by-step guide to creative use of the book *Tough Questions Jews Ask* in the classroom. Each lesson includes: a clearly stated goal, an opening hook to grab students' attention, excerpts from the book followed by a series of engaging discussion questions, and a selection of Jewish sources addressing these important issues

Freeman, Susan. *Teaching Hot Topics: Resources and Tools for Confronting Complex Issues*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, 2003.

Fifteen chapters on such "hot topics" as abortion, euthanasia, school violence, cloning, the death penalty, the ethics of war, harmful behaviors, and sexuality with hundreds of suggestions for activities in a variety of modalities.

Goodman, Roberta Louis. *Teaching about God and Spirituality*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, 2002.

Includes chapters on theology, curricular approaches, lessons for teacher training, lessons and programs for learners of all ages, background material to enrich the teacher's sense of God and spirituality, and numerous approaches and activities to use in teaching about God and spirituality from a Jewish perspective.

Gordis, Daniel, Rabbi. *Becoming a Jewish Parent: How to Explore Spirituality and Tradition With Your Children.* New York: Harmony Books, 1999.

An invaluable guide for parents who are interested in introducing Judaism into their homes so that their children can grow up loving, understanding, and cherishing their heritage.

Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *40 Things You Can Do to Save the Jewish People.* Los Angeles: Alef Design Group, 1993.

Some really practical things for parents who want to raise "good enough" Jewish kids to insure that the Jewish people last at least another generation.

Kamin, Ben. *Raising a Thoughtful Teenager: A Book of Answers and Values for Parents.* New York: Penguin Books, 1996.

In this warm and reassuring guide Rabbi Ben Kamin provides parents with careful, evenhanded, and practical information on talking with teenagers.

Kushner, Harold S. *When Children Ask About God: A Guide for Parents Who Don't Always Have All the Answers.* New York: Schocken Books, 1989.

The author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* helps parents understand their children's fears and fantasies, and offers advice on answering their questions about religion, the Bible, illness, and bereavement.

Mogel, Wendy. *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children.* New York: Scribner, 2001.

Provides parents with advice on using Jewish teachings from the Torah and Talmud to overcome struggles with raising children, nurture strengths and uniqueness, and encourage respectfulness towards their parents and others.

Polis, Miriam P. Polis and Shulamit Reinharz. *JGirl's Teacher's and Parent's Guide.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2005.

A step-by-step guide to creative use of *The JGirl's Guide* in the classroom, synagogue, and home. Each lesson includes a clearly stated goal, a list of Hebrew words to enrich the girls' vocabulary, a series of engaging questions and thoughtful activities, and a selection of Jewish sources relating to each lesson's topic.

Wolpe, David J. *Teaching Your Children About God: A Modern Jewish Approach.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1993.

For modern Jewish parents, a richly anecdotal and reassuring guide for helping children understand God.

Yedwab, Paul. *The God Book.* New York: UAHC Press, 2002.

Each chapter features a "My God Diary," in which students can write about their feelings, thoughts, doubts and affirmations about God.

AJE Book Club – February 15, 2006
Rachel Kamin, Director, Temple Israel Libraries & Media Center
5725 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield, MI 48323
248/661-5700 (phone), 248/661-1302 (fax)
rkamin@temple-israel.org