

# BOOKS ON JEWISH VALUES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Compiled by Linda R. Silver, Librarian  
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The books of Jewish content on this list are all recommended for use with families of young children. The age ranges vary from board books with just a few words for the very young to full-fledged stories for slightly older children. Needless to say, the attention spans of individual children differ depending on both developmental factors and the environment in which books are presented. A quiet setting, with babies and toddlers held on parents' laps and the attention of all present focused on the story, will be more conducive to engaged listening than one with noise and background activity. The advantage of using picture book stories rather than board books is that they are more interesting not only to children but to the adults in the family who, presumably, will also be present when the books are being read. They also tend to portray their themes and communicate their values in a more engrossing and thought-provoking manner than the super-simple board books. Several of the Jewish publishers offer board book sets which would be appropriate for purchase for the home libraries of families with very young children. UAHC Press, Jewish Lights, and Kar-Ben all have websites which list the children's books that they have available.

Virtually all of the books listed here are in AJL's New Jewish Valuesfinder, [www.ajljewishvalues.org](http://www.ajljewishvalues.org), where publication information, grade levels, subjects, values, and a description of the contents are given. Publishers' websites are also useful and Amazon.com was checked for the in-print status of each title. For inclusion on this list, non-Orthodox Jewish publications and general trade publications are cited. It is important to remember that more than one value is often found in a story; the categories below are not, therefore, mutually exclusive.

Note: The numbers before titles indicate my recommendations, with one being first choice, etc. If there are board book versions of a numbered title, they are also recommended. If titles are not numbered, it indicates that they are acceptable but not outstanding unless a note says otherwise.

## DERECH ERETZ

No numbers to indicate preferences because all are recommended. Children's ages will determine the selection.

Davis, Aubrey. **Bagels From Benny**. Illus. by Dusan Petricic. Kids Can Press. In print. A little boy leaves bagels in the Holy Ark for God but discovers that a hungry, jobless man has been eating them. Grandpa tells him that by feeding someone hungry he has

indeed thanked God. Great illustrations and values, even though the word “Jewish” never appears in the story. A Sydney Taylor Book Award winner for ages 5 – 9.

Edwards, Michelle. **A Baker’s Portrait.** Lothrop, Lee and Shepard. In print. A portrait painter learns to see the good that is inside her subjects. Delightful illustrations and a message conveyed with subtlety and humor. For ages 5 – 9.

Edwards, Michelle. **Chicken Man.** Mulberry Books. Out of print. RMC owns a copy of this endearing story set on a kibbutz, with a theme of making the best of things. Ages 6 – 9. Please note that this story also illustrates values of kindness to animals and peace in the home.

Eisenberg, Ann. **Bible Heroes I Can Be.** Illus. by Roz Schanzer. Kar-Ben. Out of print. RMC owns a copy. Young children are encouraged to emulate the hospitality of Abraham, the kindness of Rivka, and the exemplary traits of several other biblical figures, as each is introduced in just a few lines. Ages 3 – 5.

Jaffe, Nina. **In the Month of Kislev.** Illus. by Louise August. Puffin. May be out of print. RMC owns a copy of this outstanding story of a miserly man who learns the error of his ways. Ages 4 – 7.

Marzollo, Jean. **Miriam and Her Brother, Moses.** Little Brown. In print. Miriam, her mother, and Pharaoh’s daughter all exemplify human decency in their efforts to save baby Moses’ life. A delightful version of the Bible story, very cleverly illustrated with great child-appeal. Ages 3 – 6.

## ENVIRONMENT

Biers-Ariel, Matt. **Solomon and the Trees.** Illus by Esti Silverberg-Kiss. UAHC Press. In print. A somewhat preachy story with dark illustrations for ages 5 – 8.

2 Downey, Lynn. **This Is the Earth That God Made.** Illus. by Benrei Huang. Augsburg Fortress. In print. A cumulative rhymed narrative and full page color illustrations combine to sing the praises of the natural world and its creator. The publisher is Christian but this is ecumenical except that the family kneels to pray. For ages 3 – 7.

1 LeTour, Bijou. **Noah’s Trees.** HarperCollins. Out of print. RMC owns a copy. A gentle and serious story that young children ages 3 –6 find meaningful.

Sasso, Sandy. **Naamah, Noah’s Wife.** Illus. by Bethanne Anderson. Board book version of Noah’s Wife. In print. Ages 3 – 5.

Sasso, Sandy. **Noah’s Wife: The Story of Naamah.** Illus. by Bethanne Andersen. Jewish Lights. In print. Ages 5 – 9.

## GOD

**2** Bogot, Howard. **Becky and Benny Thank God.** Illus. by Norman Gorbaty. CCAR. In print. A touch and feel board book that is fun for young preschoolers, up to age 5.

**5** Brichto, Mira Pollak. **The God Around Us, Vol. 1.** Illus. by Selina Alko. UAHC Press. In print. Ages 4 – 6.

**5** Brichto, Mira Pollak. **The God Around Us, Vol. 2.** Illus. by Selina Alko. UHAC Press. In print. Ages 4 – 6.

**3** Fitch, Katherine. **A Book About God.** Illus. by Henry Sorenson. HarperCollins. In print. Not specifically Jewish but consistent with Jewish belief. Ages 4 – 7.

Gold, August and Matthew J. Perlman. **Where Does God Live?** Jewish Lights. In print. Ages 4 – 6.

**4** Kushner, Lawrence and Karen. **Because Nothing Looks Like God.** Illus. by Dawn Majewski. Jewish Lights. In print. Note that the three board books listed below are abridgements of this story. This longer and well-illustrated version would be good to use in homes with children ages 4 – 7. The board book versions would be best with young preschoolers. They would also be suitable books to buy for families.

Kushner, Lawrence and Karen. **How Does God Make Things Happen?** Illus. by Dawn Majewski. Jewish Lights. Board book version of *Because Nothing Looks Like God.* In print.

Kushner, Lawrence and Karen. **What Does God Look Like?** Illus. by Dawn Majewski. Board book version of *Because Nothing Looks Like God.* Jewish Lights. In print.

Kushner, Lawrence and Karen. **Where Is God?** Illus. by Dawn Majewski. Board book version of *Because Nothing Looks Like God.* Jewish Lights. In print.

**1** Sasso, Sandy. **In God's Name.** Illus. by Phoebe Stone. Jewish Lights. In print. This is Sasso's most childlike book and very stunningly illustrated. It is great for reading aloud to ages 4 – 7. The board book version for younger preschoolers is listed below.

Sasso, Sandy. **God In Between.** Illus. by Sally Sweetland. Jewish Lights. In print. Ages 5 – 8.

Sasso, Sandy. **What Is God's Name?** Illus. by Phoebe Stone. Board book version of *In God's Name*.  
Jewish Lights. In print.

## HOSPITALITY

No preferences are noted; all of the books listed in this section are good to outstanding. Choice of books to use will depend on the ages of the children in the home.

Davis, Aubrey. **Bone Button Borscht.** Illus. by Dusan Petricic. Kids Can Press. In print. A Jewish version of the "Stone Soup" folktale that children love. Ages 4 – 8.

Gellman, Ellie Gellman. **Tamar's Sukkah.** Illus. by Shauna M. Kawasaki. Kar-Ben. Board book. In print.  
A child decorates her sukkah but finds that it isn't complete until all her guests have arrived. There was once a larger version of this story but it doesn't appear to be in print. Ages 3 – 5.

Jules, Jacqueline. **Once Upon a Shabbos.** Illus. by Katherine Janus Kahn. Kar – Ben. Out of print. A funny and boldly illustrated story about a bear in New York and a bubbe who straightens things out. Based on a Southern folktale with lots of Yiddish expressions. RMC owns a copy. For ages 5 – 8.

Kimmel, Eric A. **The Chanukah Guest.** Illus. by Giora Carmi. Appears to be out of print. An elderly woman mistakes a hungry bear for the rabbi she has invited for latkes. Children find this story hilarious. RMC owns a copy. Ages 4 – 8.

Lanton, Sandy. **Lots of Latkes.** Illus. by Vicky Jo Redenbaugh. Kar-Ben/Lerner. In print. Ages 5 – 7.

Schram, Peninnah. **The Chanukah Blessing.** Illus. by Jeffrey Allon. UAHC Press. In print. Elijah, disguised as a beggar, is welcomed into the home of a poor family who are then rewarded for their hospitality. Ages 4 – 7.

Schuman, Burt E. **Chanukah On the Prairie.** Illus. by Rosalind Charney Kaye. UAHC Press. In print.  
A charming story about an immigrant family who is welcomed into a thriving Jewish community in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Based on real events. The title is misleading; only the last episode in the book is about Hanukkah. For ages 5 – 9.

Ungar, Richard. **Rachel's Gift.** Tundra Books. In print. Vivid illustrations enhance this story about a family who welcomes Elijah among their guests. For ages 4 – 7.

## KINDNESS TO ANIMALS

I have no preferences to note because I recommend all of these excellent books for reading aloud to all but the youngest children. The formats are large and colorful and will engage the attention of adults as well as children.

Blanc, Esther Silverstein and Godeane Eagle. **Long Johns for a Small Chicken.** Illus. by Tennessee Dixon. Volcano Press. In print. A warm hearted story set on a farm for children ages 5 – 8.

Brett, Jan. **On Noah's Ark.** Putnam. In print. A beautifully illustrated embellishment of the Noah story for ages 3 – 6. Brett is popular and families may be familiar with her other books, such as *The Mitten*. Jan Brett has a website with some fun art and craft activities that can be printed.

Burstein, Chaya. **Hanukkah Cat.** Illus. by Judy Hanks Henn. Kar Ben. In print. A new edition of a delightful story for ages 4 – 7.

Ludwig, Warren. **Old Noah's Elephants.** Putnam Publishing Group. Out of print. RMC owns a copy. Based on an Israeli folktale, this has striking illustrations, especially of the wise-eyed elephants. One of my favorites! For ages 4 – 7.

Manushkin, Fran. **Latkes and Applesauce.** Illus. by Robin Spowart. Scholastic. In print. A lovely story set during Hanukkah for ages 4 – 8.

Polacco, Patricia. **Mrs. Katz and Tush.** Yearling Books. In print. Multicultural and very popular with children ages 5 – 8.

Swartz, Nancy Sohn. **In Our Image: God's First Creatures.** Illus. by Melanie Hall. Jewish Lights. In print. Handsome illustrations for ages 3 – 6.

## PEACE IN THE HOME

Bergman, Tamar. **Where Is?** Illus. by Rutu Modan. Houghton Mifflin. In print. Although there is no explicit Jewish content to this charmingly childlike story, it is set in Israel and was written originally in Hebrew. For ages 2 – 4.

Handelman, Maxine Segal. **The Shabbat Angels.** Illus. by Joani Rothenberg. UAHC Press. In print.

A quarreling family is visited by two Shabbat angels, one with a blessing and one with a curse. Their rabbi (a woman) helps them make peace. For ages 4 – 7.

Harel, Nina. **The Key to My Heart.** Illus. by Yossi Abulafia. Kane Miller. In print. A father and son share a busy afternoon in this disarmingly simple story set in a friendly

Israeli neighborhood. No explicit Jewish content but some of the street signs are written in Hebrew. Ages 4 – 7.

Stampler, Ann Redisch. **Something For Nothing**. Illus. by Jacqueline M. Cohen. Clarion. In print.  
An outstanding folktale about bringing peace to a noisy neighborhood, with animal characters. Ages 6 – 10.

Zemach, Margot. **It Could Always Be Worse**. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. In print.  
Jewish folklore rarely gets better than this version of the tale about the man with a very crowded house. There are several other versions, as well. For ages 4 – 8.

## LOVE OF LEARNING

Silverman, Erica. **Raisel's Riddle**. Illus. by Susan Gaber. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. In print. Ages 6 – 9.

## SHABBAT

No preferences indicated. All are excellent!

Hest, Amy. **The Friday Nights of Nana**. Illus. by Claire Nivola. Candlewick. Probably out of print. RMC owns a copy. A serene story set in a peaceful home where a little girl and her grandmother prepare to welcome guests for Shabbat. (Note the multiple values). For ages 4 – 7.

Kropf, Latifa Berry. **It's Challah Time**. Photographs by Ted Cohen. Kar-Ben/Lerner. In print. Color photographs show children in a Jewish preschool class preparing for Shabbat. Ages 3 – 5.

Rouss, Sylvia. **Sammy Spider's First Shabbat**. Illus. by Katherine Janus Kahn. Kar-Ben. Part of a series about a curious young spider that is very popular with Jewish preschoolers. Ages 3 – 5.

Schweiger-D'mil, Yitzhak. **Hanna's Sabbath Dress**. Illus. by Ora Eitan. Simon and Schuster. This flawless picture book expresses the joy of Shabbat and the mitzvah of helping others. Ages 3 – 6.

Simpson, Lesley. **The Shabbat Box**. Illus. by Nicole in den Bosch. Kar-Ben. In print. A preschooler makes a Shabbat box to replace the one from school that he lost. Gives a good example, with directions, of a project young children can make at home. Ages 3 – 6.

Schwartz, Amy. **Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks.** Jewish Publication Society. In print. A lonely woman is inspired by her Sabbath candlesticks to seek companionship and invite her family for dinner.

Topek, Susan Remick. **A Holiday for Noah.** Illus. by Sally Springer. Kar-Ben. In print. Set in a Jewish preschool and part of an appealing series about Noah and his friends. Ages 3 – 5.

### **VISITING THE SICK**

Hershenhorn, Esther. **Chicken Soup By Heart.** Illus. by Rosanne Litzinger. Simon and Schuster. In print. A little boy makes soup for his sitter when she is sick, spicing it with stories of their good times together. A Sydney Taylor Book Award winner. Ages 4 – 7.