

# Getting ready for Rosh Hashanah



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## Books for kids, for the holidays ... and beyond

Jewish involvement in the High Holy Days can be encouraged through Jewish books, which can teach about all aspects of Jewish life as they entertain

By GILA WERTHEIMER Associate Editor Chicago Jewish Star

**C**HICAGO - As the High Holiday period approaches, many find themselves, as at no other time of year, thinking about their Jewish lives.

If you are parents of young children, you are probably considering enrolling your child in a Jewish school. You may be paying more attention to adopting Jewish traditions, considering whether your children should attend synagogue services with you this year, deciding how to celebrate and observe the holidays as a family. If your children are pre-teens or teens, you are surely pondering ways to keep them involved in Jewish life.

The one-word key, no matter what their age, is participation. Experi-



Simkin Middle School Grade 6 students hold out hands, showing breadcrumbs they've been given to fling into the Assiniboine River in a September, 1998 Rosh Hashanah "tashlich" ceremony. The breadcrumbs symbolize sins the thrower committed in the Jewish year that's about to end.

tial Judaism is the approach that crosses all denominational lines. Kids have to be part of Jewish holiday preparations, traditions and observances. Since this gets harder and harder as they get older, start young. If they are already teens, you may have to drag them into the holidays, but drag away. Jewish involvement can be encouraged through Jewish books, which can teach about all aspects of Jewish life as they entertain.

As always prior to the holidays, here is a brief look at selected new publications for children. New this year, for early elementary age children is *My Jewish Holiday Fun Book* by Ann D. Koffsky (NY: UAHC Press, 32 pp.). This is a coloring and activity book that, in spite of some slightly confusing directions, is a good way to involve a young child in the holidays. For Rosh Hashanah, for example, they can cut out and color two New Year's cards. For Sukkot there are decorations to draw and a sukkah to color. For Shabbat, they can make a placemat. There are also puzzles, games, mazes all activities that young children enjoy. An adult or older sibling will be needed to read the directions and help with the activities.

Similar in concept but with a focus on stories from the Bible rather than on the holidays is *Bible Story Crafts For Little Hands* by Ruth Esrig Brinn, illustrated by Sally

Springer (Rockville, MD: Kar-Ben Copies, 80 pp.). Here are 30 brief Bible stories, each with a picture to color and a craft activity. Children can make Noah's Ark from a paper plate and construction paper, construct Jacob's Dream Mobile, showing the sun, the moon and the stars, cut out the burning bush, create a picture of Pharaoh plagued by frogs made from thumbprints dipped in green food color, and so on.

The directions are clear, the materials needed for the crafts are basic, and the ideas for the projects are interesting and go beyond the ordinary. Thinking of the child (or parent!) whose drawing skills may be limited, patterns of figures and objects specified in the crafts are provided to copy or trace. This is an excellent idea that will short-circuit frustration in doing the projects. In addition to the stories and crafts, there

are costumes and musical instruments, again using readily available items, that children can make to dress up as biblical characters. And what child doesn't love to dress up? This is an excellent book that, in 80 pages, manages to combine learning with crafts and projects that are creative and unique without being overly complex or confusing. Highly recommended!

The 24th edition of *My Very Own Jewish Calendar* by Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler (Rockville, MD: Kar-Ben Copies) is perfect for Rosh Hashanah and the beginning of the school year. Hang it on the wall in your child's bedroom, and you can follow with them the Jewish and secular holidays, Torah portions of the week, candle-lighting times, Hebrew dates, plus information and activities.

(Cont. on page B13. See "Books for kids".)

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# Getting ready for Rosh Hashanah



## Books for kids

(Cont. from page B12.)

All this, and space for them to write in their own activities, in a manageable format, measuring 12 x 18 when open. As we have come to expect from this singular publisher of Jewish children's books, we have something original, creative, attractive and educational, all in one package.

What may have been no more than a footnote has become a charming story in *Come, Let Us Be Joyful*, by Fran Manushkin, illustrated by Rosalind Chamey Kaye (New York: UAHC Press). Mixing history and folklore, Manushkin writes of how a wordless melody, brought by European immigrants to pre-state Israel, became the popular Hebrew song Hava Nagila, or in English, Come, Let Us Be Joyful. According to this story, A.Z. Idelsohn, a collector and teacher of Jewish songs, heard the melody and taught it to his music class.

One of his young students, Moshe Nathanson, declared, "Teacher, this tune sounds lonely. I think it wants words." And so he wrote the joyous words. Soon the song was being sung throughout the land, sprouting up everywhere, like sunflowers in the newly-planted Negev. In fact, it is not definitively known whether Nathanson or Idelsohn wrote the words, since both later claimed they did and each has his supporters. Manushkin's engaging story gives the credit to young Nathanson, fitting, of course, for a child's book.

Historical fiction can be a compelling way to spark interest in a subject, and period. This is what Julius Lester has achieved for pre-teens and younger teens in *Pharaoh's Daughter* (San Diego: Harcourt, 182 pp.). Here he fictionalizes the story of Moses, from his rescue from the Nile River, his life growing up in Pharaoh's palace in ancient Egypt, to his killing of the Egyptian and subsequent flight from Egypt. Aside from the broad outlines, this is not the story found in the Bible, which tells us very little of this aspect of Moses' life. Lester has used his imagination to paint a picture of royal life in ancient Egypt and to create a biography for Moses.

Lester tells his tale mostly through Moses' sister - not Miriam, whom we know from the Bible - but an older sister Lester calls Almah, who also goes to live in



Shore Early Years School students draw shofars and fruit for Rosh Hashanah in September, 1998, using a real shofar and apples as models.

Pharaoh's palace. She is the vehicle through which Lester writes of daily life in ancient Egypt, for she becomes like a daughter to Pharaoh, moreso, in fact, than his own daughter, the one who drew Moses from the Nile. In an Author's Note, Lester is clear about what he has written: This is a novel. As such, it is ultimately a work of the imagination. The figure of Moses has fascinated Lester, and the result, *Pharaoh's Daughter*, is likely to capture a teenage imagination as well. While we prefer to transmit Jewish joy rather than Jewish tragedy to children, at some point it will be appropriate to begin to approach the subject of the Holocaust.

An excellent resource, for children 8 and older, is *My Secret Camera* by Frank Dabba Smith with photographs by Mendel Grossman (San Diego: Harcourt). Mendel Grossman secretly photographed daily life in the Lodz Ghetto over a period of four years. Shortly before he was deported, he packed his negatives which numbered some 10,000 into cans and hid them. Although Grossman did not survive, the negatives were recovered and sent to a kibbutz in Israel. During the 1948 War of Independence, the kibbutz was attacked and the negatives were destroyed. However, there were some prints left behind in the ghetto and these are today housed in Israel.

Sixteen of them have been reproduced here, with a text created by Frank Dabba Smith, writing as Grossman's voice. This beautifully produced book conveys and illustrates something of ghetto life, and while it may leave children with more questions than answers, it is an excellent introduction to a disturbing subject.

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