AJL Sydney Taylor Book Award Presentations, 1993

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Recommended Citation


Introduction

I am completing my fourth year on the Sydney Taylor Awards Committee. Working on it as a reviewer and as a chairperson has truly been a labor of love. I am sure that the other five members of the committee share this feeling. Spread as we have been all over the country, ours has still been a group effort par excellence, and so I would like to recognize the committee members: Marion Stein, Claudia Fechter (the next chairperson), Etta Gold, Carol Witt, and Chava Ben Zvi.

We read and evaluated 42 books published in 1992; the number was about equally divided between picture books and those for older children. Among them were eight books on holidays, and six of those were Hanukkah books! There were ten books on the Holocaust and five on immigrant experiences. Another category which has been growing recently is that of collections of stories. In 1992 five such books were submitted to the committee.

Our task, though time-consuming and demanding, has been most enjoyable, for we read many excellent books.

Jewish Children’s Books Too Good to Miss: Selected List of 1992 Titles

Association of Jewish Libraries, Sydney Taylor Book Awards Committee

I. Picture Books


In a most beautifully illustrated book, Eisler has presented to young readers a selection of Psalms so well chosen and so skillfully arranged, adapted, and translated that they will be read and enjoyed by youngsters of all faiths who have an interest in history, poetry, and art.


A wonderful Hanukkah book, with several surprises gradually revealed. A group of children, led by a creative art teacher, prepares special dreidels to be used for games during Hanukkah. One of the children creates an environmentally friendly dreidel. Another one uses an optical illusion for his dreidel, and a third draws the letters on the dreidel in Braille! This is how his friends find out about the boy’s father’s blindness and learn how he and his family deal with this handicap.


A charming book based on a Yiddish folktale of a favorite article wearing out and converted successfully into something smaller. The surprise is that there are two stories going on simultaneously, one above and one below.


This beautifully produced and sensitively written and illustrated book attempts to explain what having riches really means and what one should do with wealth to please the Almighty.


This is a very beautifully illustrated Hanukkah tale in which a wealthy but miserly head of a family is taught an important lesson by the town’s rabbi, following which he welcomes a poor family into his home so that they all can celebrate together. Through this lovely story, children will learn Hanukkah customs as well as the mitzvah of sharing with the poor.


Although the subtitle of this book leads one to think that it is a collection of Hanukkah stories, in fact, it is not. There are eight short “Shammes” stories, followed by eight longer ones. The stories are beautifully and skillfully told in a rich and colorful language. The morals are not always important lessons, though children will find them enjoyable to either hear or read.


In Ms. Polacco’s tradition of excellence, this is a beautifully illustrated and sensitively written book about an old Jewish widow’s growing friendship with her Black neighbor’s son, Larnel. The closeness is woven through another “friend,” an uninvited kitten taken in by Mrs. Katz and called Tush because she is without a tail.

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** = Winner of Sydney Taylor Award
II. Books for Older Children


An extremely well-written book—a true page-turner. One feels for Henry, who lost a brother and has a very ill, depressed father. He goes to work in order to help the family finances, but meets a very disturbed person in the grocer who employs him. The grocer manipulates his daughter and wife, and attempts to do the same to Henry.

A chance meeting at a city-run arts-and-crafts studio brings Henry together with Mr. Levine, a Holocaust survivor. The short description of the Holocaust is well done, but above all there is an excellent study of the kind of tests humans can be put to.


A novel in the form of letters to Rifka’s cousin back home in Russia of 1919. The letters describe the family’s escapes, frightening encounters, bouts with typhus, and the ringworm which keeps Rifka in Belgium and, a year later, almost gets her sent back to Russia from Ellis Island.

Many Yiddish words and expressions are used throughout the book. Attempts are made to include Jewish traditions and to explain Jewish customs. Some of the social problems of the era are exposed.


One of several books written recently on the subject of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States. Many feelings are explored in this book: the pains of separation from loved ones and from the familiar, the fear of the new, the difficult trip by land and sea, and finally the possibility of not being allowed into the U.S. through Ellis Island.


A very well-done text for teaching the Holocaust. The use of photographs, official documents, memoirs, diaries, and journals as well as the clear arrangement of these materials is superb. Teachers and students alike will benefit greatly from this book.


A story about the pains and difficulties of growing up: loneliness, the need for friends, peer pressure, alienation from parents, the search for attention and, mainly, learning to care, to love, and to understand. Both fifteen-year-old Andi and Geneva change in the course of the novel. The author is certainly in touch with adolescent feelings and behavior.