

SYNAGOGUE LIBRARIES

Reading Motivation Ideas for Synagogue Libraries

Margot S. Berman

*Temple Beth Am
Miami, FL*

Introduction

The synagogue librarian's contact with students in an after-school and weekend setting is limited by the need to share enrichment periods, which compete for non-classroom time. In addition, especially if the school is a large one, the librarian rarely has an opportunity to discern each student's reading skill and interests. How to forge a connection between books and readers is the focus of the program ideas which follow. The reward-beyond-the-reading is the favored approach.

We all know that synagogue librarians are not only receptive to, but are also anxiously seeking, reading program designs. The plans which follow should serve as a stimulus for the future exchange of additional successful reading motivation ideas. Send your proven schemes to the editor; your colleagues will be grateful.

Finally, there is that old saw, "You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink." True, but your job is to "Make Him Thirsty."

Margot S. Berman is the Librarian of Temple Beth Am in Miami, Florida, and the Contributing Editor for SYNAGOGUE LIBRARIES of Judaica Librarianship.

Helping Books Compete with Technology in a Congregational Setting

Ralph R. Simon

*Temple Emanu El
University Heights, OH*

The traditional role of the congregational librarian is to encourage youngsters to become readers of Jewish books, and, in a technology-oriented world, librarians need—more than ever—to develop methods for motivating youngsters to read and love Jewish children's books. Even though contemporary Jewish children's literature is of better literary and artistic quality than was formerly the case, and recently published Bible stories and books about Jewish customs, folklore, and tradition offer more diversity and are more appealing than earlier publications, it is simply not enough to place

a volume on the shelf and forget about it. We have to use various techniques—from arranging and displaying books in unique and attractive ways, to direct involvement of young readers—in order to develop and sustain their appetite for Jewish children's books.

Physical Arrangement

In our synagogue library, we have used what might best be described as a "merchandising" technique to display books. Approximately a dozen books are stood up or



placed in display holders. This makes the covers clearly visible (see photo).

Since most of today's juvenile books have attractive covers, we shelve all juvenile books in eight custom-built, wooden picture-book bins arranged along both sides of a cabinet. By placing books sideways in these units, young patrons view the front cover of each book—instead of only the spine as in traditional shelving. The bin arrangement also facilitates quicker shelving and provides for a neater, as well as a more attractive library environment. The bins are on wheels and can be easily relocated for collection rearrangement. In short, a high degree of flexibility has been achieved by using picture-book shelving for older children's books, as well as for picture-books.

Storytelling for Younger Children

To acquaint youngsters with Jewish children's literature and to directly involve them, a creative storytelling technique is used. As an example, we have always given children a small piece of *challah* at the conclusion of the reading of *Bemblem's Bakery*. We try to find stories with repetitive words or phrases. These are particularly well suited for storytelling use, as youngsters can be "prompted" to repeat the phrase at a specific point. This is a technique that encourages attentiveness, and helps children to "enter" the story.

Challenging Older Children

This past year, the staff of the local Jewish Community Center let it be known that they would be running a city-wide Academic Challenge for Jewish Book Month. Our idea was to start the Academic Challenge earlier in our own school—at the very start of the school year, to be exact. Our goal was to pique student reading interest for a period longer than just the few weeks prior to Jewish Book Month, when the event was to culminate. Each student in our religious school received information about the Academic Challenge, and the reading-list of about twenty books from which the questions in the Challenge were drawn. During class visits, the idea of the Academic Challenge was reinforced by providing brief highlights of the books on the list. This encouraged the students to achieve the six-book minimum reading requirement necessary for participation in the JCC city-wide Academic Challenge.

The actual JCC Academic Challenge event involved teams of eight students. Each team was grade-related, but team members were drawn from several congregations. Questions were sufficiently specific that one had to have read the book to respond correctly.

Prizes were given to all members of the winning team. Students on the remaining teams were given certificates of participation.

The JCC Challenge attracted a large number of students. All twenty titles were read by some of the children. The contest served to familiarize youngsters who themselves may have read only six books with a broad cross-section of Jewish literature. Even those youngsters who did not participate in the contest had a chance to be exposed to Jewish literature and to experience the excitement generated by Jewish literature.

Dr. Ralph R. Simon is the Librarian of the Sindell Library, Temple Emanu-El, University Heights, Ohio. He is also Vice President for Publications of the Association of Jewish Libraries.

Editor's Note:

Comparing a "Hot" with a "Cool" Medium

Marcia W. Posner

It would be interesting to have the older children compare the same fiction title in two media, using Berman's outline for writing a book report for a work of fiction (see below).

The book is a "hot" medium because it demands reader involvement and understanding in order to reach the reader—in other words, in order to exist for that reader. A film, filmstrip, or videotape that is played is there, whether or not the viewer participates (unless the viewer shuts his eyes and stuffs his ears); thus it is a "cool" medium.

Books and films treat stories and characters differently. Students might list what a book does better than film medium, and what film does better than the printed page.

*Dr. Marcia W. Posner, co-editor of *Judaica Librarianship*, did her doctoral studies at New York University in the field of *Communication Technology in Education*.*

Read a Book; Do a Mitzvah

Lillian N. Schwartz

*Temple Emanu-El
Providence, RI*

The Temple Emanu-El Library, in conjunction with its religious school, created a reading incentive program for Jewish Book Month called "Climb the Double Mitzvah Ladder." The "double mitzvah" consists of (1) reading a Jewish book, and (2) contributing to another's welfare through the Jewish Braille Institute.

An oversized poster of a ladder was drawn and hung in the library. As each student presented a written report of a book read from our library, his/her name was added to a step, beginning from the bottom step. At step three, a donation was made in honor of that student to the Jewish Braille Institute of America. At the top of the ladder, step seven, another gift was made to the Braille Institute, and a bookplate (figure 1) was placed in a book in our children's collection honoring that student. (Donations to the Jewish Braille Institute in honor of students were made through the Temple's Men's Club.)

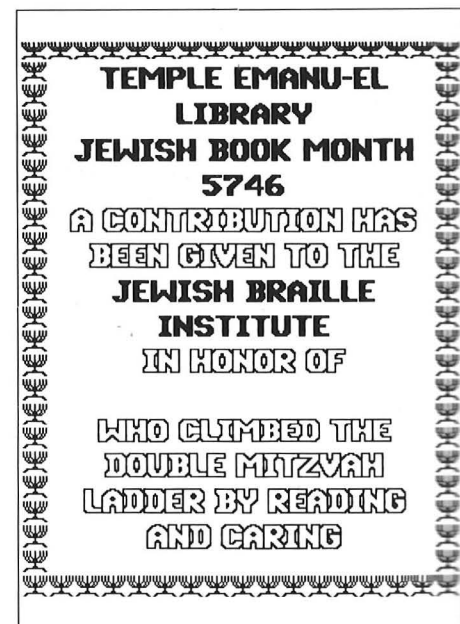


Figure 1. Bookplate honoring students who have read seven books.