

Book Mensch: A Reading Motivation Game for Jewish Summer Camps

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Purpose

Book Mensch was created to encourage children in the residential summer camps supported by UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York to read Jewish-content books during their vacation and to learn how Jewish values or concepts relate to daily life, thereby providing discussion topics for *Onegs*.

Materials

Each camp was supplied with a Book Mensch Chart (figure 1); reading log markers; bookmarks and stickers with the Book Mensch logo; reader response forms (figure 2); certificates (figure 3); a list of Jewish concepts; and a bibliography of books with Jewish values. Each camp also received a paperback library of appropriate books—with characters whose thoughts or actions are influenced by Jewish values.

How to Play

Reading and reacting to a book allows the player to advance along the Path of Jewish Values to the next station. The stations are labeled with positive Jewish values. Between stations are boulder-like obstacles, labeled with negative terms such as "lashon hara," "pride," "greediness," "worship of many gods," etc. The object of the "game" is to reach "The Kingdom of *Menschlichkeit*" in the "Land of *Mitzvot*." There are no penalties, and no winners or losers, in the Book Mensch game.

Upon joining, each child receives a Book Mensch bookmark and chooses a book. When the book is read and returned, the child receives his/her reading log marker and enters name, class, etc. and the title of the book. After the child reacts to the book on a form or orally—not with the plot of the story, but with an explanation of why the characters in the story act the way they

do—his/her reading log marker may be tacked on station #1 of the chart (or a smaller marker can be used and the reading log filed by the librarian). With each book read and reacted to, the child's marker advances one station along the path. After the third book, the child receives a "Book Mensch" sticker (which could be converted to a button during the Arts and Crafts period of camp). After the fifth book, the child receives a Book-Mensch Certificate. The certificates were awarded individually in some camps, or during a ceremony at the end-of-season banquet in others.

The idea can be duplicated by copying and enlarging the chart in figure 1, or better yet, by using a whole room for the journey to *Menschlichkeit*, with stations around the room. There are no restrictions on the copying of Book Mensch materials illustrating this article.

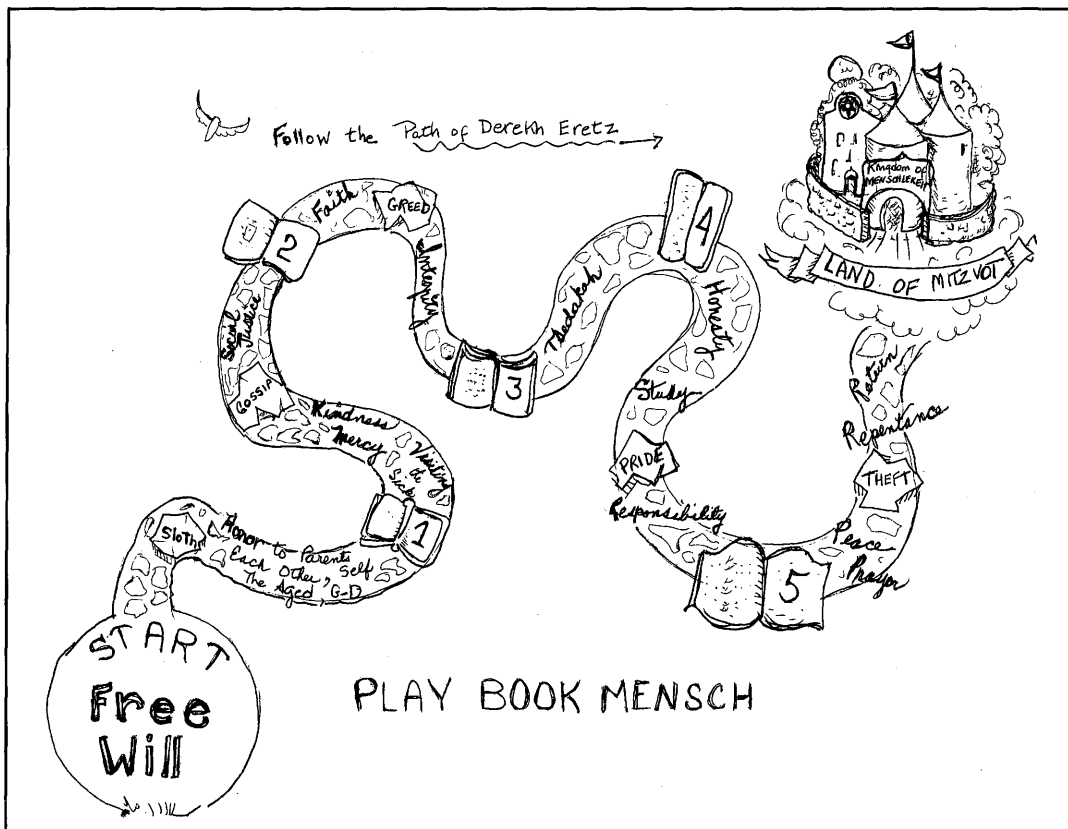


Figure 1. Book Mensch chart.

Book Mensch Response Form

My name is _____ Class _____

Room # _____ School _____

The book I read is _____

The main character (or characters) changed their way of thinking and acting because: _____

(Use the reverse side if you need more room)

I would have handled the situation (explain how and why) _____

(Use the reverse side if you need more room.)

Figure 2.

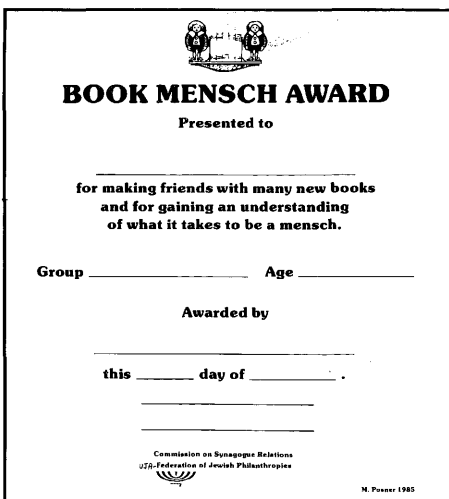


Figure 3. Book Mensch Award Certificate.

Dr. Marcia W. Posner is Library Consultant for UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York and organized its Reiss/Wiener Library.