

# SYNAGOGUE LIBRARIES

## The Sefer Stars Reading Incentive Program

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There is a way to encourage religious school students to read material available at the Temple library: create a reading incentive program. A reading incentive program is a dynamic way to interest your congregation in the Temple library. It is important to keep the logistics simple, the cost low, and the administration easy. At Temple Emanu-El, in Oak Park, MI, such a program was implemented with great success.

### Description of the Program

"*Sefer Stars*" was so named because students reported on books that they read on six-pointed Jewish stars (see Figure 1). Elements included title, author, opinion of book, name, grade, and parent's signature. The contest was designed to run for three months. The length of the program could vary according to need—this program ran in a Jewish supplementary school. It began in November, in conjunction with Jewish Book Month, and ended January 31st. All religious school students received entry forms (see Figure 2) and six Sefer Star forms. When students turned in completed registration forms, they were given bookmarks as a reward. After students had read three books and filled out three Sefer Star forms, they earned Treasure Tickets, each good for one trip to the Treasure Chest. The Treasure Chest was filled with inexpensive incentive/prizes such as rulers, stamps, yoyos, pencils, and key chains (see resource list for addresses of suppliers). When a student had read six books and turned in six Sefer Stars, he or she could select a paperback book to take home. The paperback books, by Jewish authors, with Jewish content, and suitable for boys or girls, were selected according to varying reading levels. Students also received Certificates of Recognition for reading six Jewish books.

### Publicity and Planning

Two months before the reading program was to begin, the Library Advisory Committee sent publicity to the Temple Brotherhood, Sisterhood, Couples Club, Seniors Group (EMES), Parent-Teacher Organization, the clergy, and the office staff. Financial support was requested from appropriate groups, in the form of a \$50 donation. Bookmarks for all participants were ordered, along with posters, incentives, and certificates for winners. Entry forms were printed. The Sefer Star Form—a Jewish star with six lines for information—was created. The event was publicized in the monthly Temple bulletin.

One month prior to the start of the reading program, the librarian selected books to be given to students who had completed six books/forms. The books were purchased from a local distributor who was able to offer a 40% discount, pending availability. Reading level, interest to boys and girls, price, and content were all considered. Books selected included: *Noah's Ark*, by Peter Spier; *Harry Houdini*, by Kathryn Borland; *All of a Kind Family*, by Sydney Taylor; *David and the Giant*, by Emily Little; *Ali Baba Bernstein*, by Johanna Hurwitz; *The Upstairs Room*, by Johanna Reiss; and *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry. Forty-eight books were purchased, at a total cost of \$97.88.

Two weeks before the reading program commenced, a memo was sent to all religious school teachers, describing the program and requesting their support. One week before the reading program began, six Sefer Stars book report forms were distributed to all students by their teachers. All students were urged to participate.

### Results and Evaluation

Results were simply astonishing! In three months, 46 students in grades K–6 completed six Sefer Stars, which meant that they had read 276 Jewish books! 73 students visited the Treasure Chest after reading three books, and a total of 420 Jewish books were read in the program. Circulation of all Temple library materials nearly *tripled*: from 250 books, the previous year, to 732 books in the three months of the Sefer Stars program. Sometimes, there were large gaps on the Children's Picturebook bookshelves. Children were reading *lots* of Jewish books.

The contest was easy to manage. Library Advisory Committee members staffed the library on Sunday mornings to provide extra help.

If you can prepare the forms on in-house computers and office machinery, you will save on printing costs and the contest can be very inexpensive. With solicited funds from groups within our Temple, we were able to keep costs very low. Temple Emanu-El arms and auxiliaries such as the Sisterhood, the Seniors Group (EMES), the Parent-Teacher Organization, and the Couples Club were eager to support our purchases of the paperback books (rewards), because they were an inexpensive way to encourage the children to read Jewish books.

The staff of the Temple library enjoyed the resurgence in interest and in circulation of materials. When severe budget cuts threatened library staffing in 1992, the Board of Trustees did not make any direct cuts to the library budget for 1992–93, in part because of renewed congregational interest in and support of the library.

In encouraging our young people to read Jewish books, we preserve our heritage and invest in our future Jewish citizens at the same time. Sefer Stars enlarged the world of many Jewish young people at Temple Emanu-El. We urge you to give it a try!

**Resources:**

Upstart Catalog  
32 East Avenue  
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Oriental Trading Company, Inc.  
P.O. Box 3407  
Omaha, NE 68103  
Tel. (800) 228-2269

*Editor's Note: Descriptions of other reading programs have been published in Judaica Librarianship vol. 4 (1988), pp. 99-107 and in vol. 6 (1992), pp. 175-179. —B.H.W.*

**Sefer** **Star**

\_\_\_\_\_

MY NAME

\_\_\_\_\_

GRADE

\_\_\_\_\_

BOOK TITLE

\_\_\_\_\_

AUTHOR

\_\_\_\_\_

PARENT'S SIGNATURE

THIS BOOK IS:

GREAT

GOOD

OK

Figure 1. Book Report Form.

SEFER STARS

CONTEST RUNS NOVEMBER 1, 1991  
JANUARY 31, 1992

READ A BOOK BY A JEWISH AUTHOR, OR A BOOK WITH JEWISH CONTENT!!!

EARN YOUR OWN BOOK, AND SOME SURPRISES ALONG THE WAY!!

**RULES:**

1. Read at your own reading level.
2. Books must be by a Jewish author or have Jewish content. They are available at the Temple Emanu-El Sasson Shaya Library, your public library and local bookstores. (Borensteins, Spitzer's, Book Beat, Borders or Waldenbooks.)
3. When you sign up, receive a free book mark. When you complete the STAR forms after reading 3 books, choose 1 item from our Treasure Chest. When you complete the STAR forms after reading 6 books, choose a book for yourself. (We will order it from our selected list of gift books.)

**SIGN UP BY COMPLETING THE FORM BELOW:**

TEAR OFF, TURN IN AT THE TEMPLE LIBRARY

=====

SEFER STARS SIGN UP

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE:

GRADE:

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL TEACHER:

BOOKS READ: (TO BE FILLED IN LATER)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Suzan Caplan is Librarian of the Temple Emanu-El Sasson Shaya Library, as well as a religious school teacher. Interested readers may write her in care of the Library, 14450 West Ten Mile Road, Oak Park, MI 48237.

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Figure 2. Registration Form.