

# CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

## Association of Jewish Libraries Book Awards for Children's Literature\*

Judy Greenblatt

Temple B'nai Israel Library  
Toledo, Ohio

President Karp, AJL members and friends, I ask you to join me in welcoming our award-winning authors, Florence Freedman and Carol Snyder, and illustrator Robert Andrew Parker. We are thrilled that you could be here with us tonight.

I would also like to thank the hard-working members of the Book Award Committee who put in many hours reading, and more hours writing reviews. The committee members are Leni Albaugh, Merrily Hart (who will be chairman next year), Anne Kirschenbaum, Edie Salzman, and Frances Wolf. It has indeed been a privilege to work with this committee as we shared each other's reviews and views until we reached a consensus.

Being chairman of this committee has changed my perspective on Jewish children's books. Instead of merely being delighted when such a book, particularly a good book, happens to cross my path, I now search for them in all possible places, including some that are far from the usual sources. Our initial list is based on gleanings from *Publishers' Weekly*. Subsequent efforts are less systematic, relying on publishers' responses, suggestions from you and other librarians, as well as serendipity.

Working on the Book Award Committee, and chairing it, has changed my perspective in another way. It has given me a greater awareness of the total scope of publishing for Jewish children. Instead of just accepting what comes my way, I have come to realize what is and isn't available to our children; and that in publishing, as in everything else, there are fashionable and unfashionable topics. I would like to share with you some of what I have learned about this year's publications.

I have grouped the books into broad subject categories for this purpose, classing individual books in more than one subject area where appropriate. I have also noted whether the books were published by Jewish or trade publishers. I did not examine the hero/heroine ratio, although I'm sure that would be very interesting.

### Books About the Holocaust

The Holocaust still is a prevalent theme.

Five of the six Holocaust books we considered this year were not published by "Jewish" publishers. Two of the books are fiction; one is history with fictionalized dialogue; two biography, and one straight history. In fact, the runners up in both award categories—*Rose Blanche* (picture book) and *The Yanov Torah*, (older children's book)—deal with the Holocaust; interestingly, both were published by smaller publishers. *Rose Blanche* is the first book published by Creative Education that we have ever considered. Kar-Ben Copies, the publisher of *The Yanov Torah*, is familiar to all of us for the high quality of their work.

### Jewish Values

There were seven books concerned with what I have called Jewish values. In this category, most were published by "Jewish" publishers. I am very pleased to welcome Feldheim to the list of publishers submitting their works for consideration. Feldheim books make an important contribution to Jewish learning. The number of children's books they publish is increasing, and their quality improving. The same can be said for Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch, who this year submitted two delightful picture books.

### Coming-of-Age Books

Another popular group involves coming-of-age stories. There were six books in this group, which of course overlaps with the group of books concerned with Bar-Mitzvah, and this year, overlaps with the Holocaust group as well. None of these books were published by Jewish publishers—nor were any of the Bar-Mitzvah books.

### Holiday Books

Trade publishers produced all five of the holiday books published this year. Pass-

over and Hanukkah were the only holidays represented. Shavuot often gets short shrift in our schools because it falls after the school year ends, but I, for one, would like to share with the children a Shavuot title that compares to Chaikin's *Ask Another Question* (about Passover). Tu Bi-Shevat, Lag Bomer, Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hodesh are also holidays I would like to see explored in print more often.

### Additional Topics

Immigrant stories, all published by trade publishers, account for five of our titles. There were four books concerned with Bar-Mitzvah, and three Bible stories—also trade. There were but two biographies this year, again an area where much needs to be done. We could use biographies of Henrietta Szold, Hannah Solomon, and Mathilde Schechter, to name just a few. Of the three histories, one was a new edition of Milton Meltzer's *The Jews in America*, enhanced by many fine photographs. There were two books about Israel, both published by UAHC, both fiction. Then we have a smattering of other subjects such as grandparents, divorce, and folktales.

The grand total of books represented in this breakdown is 38, published by 23 different publishers. That is the number that were seriously considered for an award. It does not include ineligible books—those submitted, but without significant Jewish content or that were not published in 1985.

*\*Remarks made at the Banquet of the 21st Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries held in Montreal, Canada, June 17, 1986.*

*The Sydney Taylor Awards for children's literature were established in 1984 through an endowment fund to the Association of Jewish Libraries. This has enabled AJL to make cash awards in three categories: Best Picture Book, Best Children's Book, and Body-of-Work. The award-winning books will bear a seal embossed with the names of the Association and Sydney Taylor. The awards have been established to perpetuate the memory of Sydney Taylor by encouraging the publication of quality literature for Jewish children.*

**Jewish Children's Books  
Too Good to Miss:  
Selected List of 1985 Contenders**

**ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES  
BOOK AWARD COMMITTEE**

**I. For the Youngest—Early  
Elementary Grades**

- \*Freedman, Florence B. *Brothers*. Harper & Row. Our award winner gracefully retells a legend of brotherly love. Beautiful water-color illustrations.
- Ganz, Yaffa. *The Story of Mimmy and Simmy*. Feldheim. Two girls are miserable being themselves until they trade places in a charming story that illustrates Pirke Avot 4:1.
- Garfield, Leon. *The King in the Garden*. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard. An account of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and madness, magnificently illustrated by Michael Bragg.
- Hirsh, Marilyn. *I Love Passover*. Holiday House. Simplified retelling of the story and rituals of Passover, including the Seder. Bright, cheerful illustrations.
- Karlinsky, Ruth Schild. *My First Book of Mitzvos*. Feldheim. Orthodox child performs mitzvos throughout the day. Photo essay.
- Levinson, Riki. *Watch the Stars Come Out*. Dutton. Immigrant experience, not overtly Jewish but applicable. Wonderful pastel illustrations.
- Phillips, Mildred. *The Sign in Mendel's Window*. Macmillan. A newcomer's evil intentions, foiled by Mendel's shtetl friends in a tale enhanced by Margot Zemach's evocative illustrations.
- Pomerantz, Barbara. *Who Will Lead Kiddush?* Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). Deals with the changes divorce brings.
- Rosenfeld, Dina Herman. *A Tree Full of Mitzvos*. Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch. Tells young children about mitzvos, from the viewpoint of a tree.
- Rosenfeld, Dina Herman. *The Very Best Place for a Penny*. Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch. Wonderful introduction to the concept of tzedakah, with illustrations that are witty depictions of the text.
- Rounds, Glen. *Washday on Noah's Ark*. Holiday House. Delightful tall tale based on the Biblical account, with humorous pastel illustrations.
- Segal, Sheila. *Joshua's Dream*. UAHC. Joshua dreams of Israel, eventually planting his own tree there.

**II. For Middle Graders—Grades 3-6**

- Chaikin, Miriam. *Ask Another Question: The Story and Meaning of Passover*. Clarion. Continuation of her holiday series, and of the same high quality.
- Chaikin, Miriam. *Yossi Asks the Angels for Help*. Harper & Row. Yossi is back, asking the angels to help him retrieve the money he lost for Hanukkah presents.
- Clifford, Eth. *The Remembering Box*. Houghton Mifflin. Strong Jewish values—about grandparents, death, and continuity.
- Cohen, Barbara. *The Secret Grove*. UAHC. Beni and Ahmed reach an understanding beyond that of their elders. A wise, sad story about people, prejudice and political reality.
- Cushnir, Howard. *The Secret Spinner: Tales of Rav Gedalia*. Kar-Ben. Rav Gedalia gives modern lessons in ancient problems such as sharing and tzedakah.
- Finkelstein, Norman. *Remember Not to Forget*.

- Watts. Illustrated introduction to the Holocaust and the observance of Yom Ha-Shoah.
- Herman, Erwin and Agnes. *The Yanov Torah*. Kar-Ben. Story of the smuggling of a Torah into the Yanov Nazi Labor Camp, its rescue after liberation, and its journey to America in the care of a Soviet emigré.
- Innocenti, Roberto. *Rose Blanche*. Creative Education. Magnificently illustrated story of a young German girl who experiences the Holocaust without understanding it, and resists its cruelty.
- Kipper, Lenore C. and Bogot, Howard I. *The Aleph-Bet of Jewish Values: Code Words of Jewish Life*. UAHC. Letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used to teach about Jewish values and to present important Hebrew words.
- Mark, Michael. *Toba at the Hands of a Thief*. Macmillan. Portrait of Toba growing up in Poland in the early 1900s.
- Schur, Maxine. *Shnook and Peddler*. Dillon. An unworldly peddler and a young boy with a guilty conscience are the heroes in a tale appropriate for Hanukkah reading.
- \*Snyder, Carol. *Ike and Mama and the Seven Surprises*. Lothrop. Our award winner tells the story of Ike's Bar Mitzvah year.
- Waskow, Arthur, David and Shoshana. *Before There Was a Before*. Adama. Thoughtful modern interpretation of the story of Creation.
- III. For Young Adults—Grades 7-10**
- Angell, Judie. *One Way to Ansonia*. Bradbury. Story of Rose's difficult life on the Lower East Side, and of her escape.

- Atkinson, Linda. *In Kindling Flame: the Story of Hannah Senesh, 1921-1944*. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard. Biography of Hannah Senesh, with political and historical background. (Winner of the National Jewish Book Award—Children's Literature—1986.)
- Evernden, Margery. *The Dream Keeper*. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard. Life in the shtetl and the problems of a contemporary intermarried Jewish family are both part of this novel about 13-year-old Becca and her grandmother.
- Kaufman, Stephen. *Does Anyone Here Know the Way to Thirteen?* Houghton. The story of too smart, too fat Myron's Bar Mitzvah year.
- Ossowski, Leonie. *Star Without a Sky*. Lerner Books. Group of German young people must decide the fate of a Jewish boy they find days before the Russians invade their town.
- Swartz, Sarah Silberstein. *Bar Mitzvah*. Doubleday. An anthology for the Bar Mitzvah boy to browse through, and return to again and again for further insights.
- \*Award Winners.

Judy Greenblatt is Librarian of Temple B'nai Israel in Toledo, Ohio and Chairman of the AJL Book Award Committee for Children's Literature.

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