

The Teaching of Jewish Values through Humor

within the PJ Library Book Collection

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While taking a graduate seminar class in didactic children's literature at Hollins University, I realized that I actually had children's didactic literature in my house through the Jewish-themed picture book selections delivered through the mail each month from PJ Library. As a mother, I have always appreciated these books as extremely useful stories that enhance our story time and Jewish perspective. This is the first time I took a different viewpoint on these books by examining them as examples of didactic children's literature.

It is unsurprising that Jewish literature would be didactic in nature as Penninah Schram argues that "Jewish folklore mirrors its ethical conceptions. The values in Judaism are folk values in that they reflect collective, rather than individual judgments" (Schram 39). The PJ Library books do not seem particularly preachy, but I argue that they fit the very definition of didactic literature, as they are attempting to teach value and ethics via Jewish cultural stories to children.

About the PJ Library

PJ Library Foundation is a philanthropic program started by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation which sends Jewish picture books through the mail to families around the world in an effort to enhance children's understanding of Jewish life, history, values and culture. Children receive colorful Jewish books free of charge, each month that explain Jewish traditions and values in various formats. Rachel B. Gross explains that "PJ Library seeks to persuade American Jewish families to make Judaism an important part of their lives and to connect them, one illustrated book at a time, to networks that will help them do so" (Gross 178). At synagogues around North America, families are encouraged to enroll their children to receive free books when they show up to a kid friendly event. The PJ Library program "attempts to shape the existing experience of story time in Jewish households" (Gross 179). The PJ Library book selections contain all types of stories including folktales, modern characters, poems and biographies. They are based around Jewish subjects ranging across Jewish history, holidays, family life, ritual and culture, Yiddish, how to bake Challah bread, modern day life, Jewish summer camp and more.

The PJ Library website explains the program's purpose in this way: "PJ Library serves as an entry point to engage in conversations about Jewish values or concepts with their kids. Through guides on book flaps, online resources, and local engagement programming, PJ Library empowers parents to create their own Jewish practices that are meaningful and resonant." (*PJlibrary.org*). Reading further on the website, it is stated that part of the book selection criteria that is considered by the committees is: "Is the content appropriate to the PJ Library mission? Does the book contain a message of strong Jewish values?"

It is the storytelling in the home where the PJ Library program really shines. By sending free picture books with Jewish stories, the concept of Jewish values also makes itself known to families as it's woven into the literature. The PJ Library books create a space for uniquely Jewish stories and enhances story time. Schram writes, "The ritual storytelling event in the home, other kinds of storytelling between parents and children, provides an opportunity to experience educational stories, proverbs, and personal family stories" (Schram 37), which, when viewed in the context of the PJ Library book collection makes perfect sense as a way to increase awareness of Jewish culture, values, life and history.

I chose the books examined in this paper because they elicited laughter and joy while reading and also taught a moral value in the process of storytelling. I sifted through a large stack of PJ Library books that had been collected as the result of having three children in the program over ten years, to find the books that were enjoyable to read and taught some sort of ethical value. I discovered the common thread of some of our favorite books was in the light and humorous storytelling style, from folktales to comedic illustrations. The books that made us laugh and have a happy moment, while learning about these values, led me to thinking about why exactly these particular books were so effective for teaching values. This is when I realized, that this is because the PJ Library is using a non-heavy-handed humorous methodology in order to teach Jewish values through the children's literature included in the collection.

I must note, however that the PJ Library is huge and it includes a wide range of folktales, parables, historical, biographical, and instructional picture books, not all of which contain humor or focus on values. Some are more serious in nature, though still very useful for children. So many types of Jewish children's literature are included that it would be impossible to cover every aspect and style of books, so I have opted to narrow the scope of my analysis of the PJ Library

books that fit the following qualities; one, if it was teaching a Jewish moral value or ethical lesson and two, if it had a component of humor to the story whether through the written narrative text or in the accompanying artwork illustrations.

One of the reasons parents decide to read PJ Library books to their children, is because the books are actually funny and enjoyable, not necessarily because parents deliberately set out to teach their kids Jewish values or morality. While the teaching of Jewish values seems to be part of the core mission of the PJ Library, the learning happens naturally because so many of the stories themselves are delightful to read due to the inclusion of humorous elements. Frank Serifini and Richard Coles write, “The enjoyable feelings associated with funny texts and surprising events provide a powerful motivation for children to seek out humor in their daily lives” (Serafine and Coles 637). “While many teachers and librarians might be skeptical of cartoons and funny stories, it is coming to light within teaching “that humorous texts often contain sophisticated elements of satire, irony, and parody and require readers to think and use their imaginations to associate one even or character with another” (Serafine and Coles 636). Humor has become a valuable teaching tool in and out of the classroom. Humor can make learning topics more enjoyable.

Studying While Laughing: Theories of Humor and Jewish Jokes

While storytelling and Judaism go hand in hand, weaving humor into the mix is a natural element of the relationship as well. There is a surprisingly long history of humor being used within Judaism where it is even found in ancient scriptures. According to J. Vlieghe, “It is precisely because of its subversive character that laughter is to be valued as pedagogically relevant” (Vlieghe 2014). A *mashal* is the Hebrew word for a short parable with a moral lesson or religious allegory, called a *nimshal*. *Mashal* is used also to designate other forms in rhetoric, such as the fable and apothegm. (*wikipedia.org*) If you ever listen to a rebbe speak, you may notice that humor is often used in the form of a related story during a sermon. This humorous use of storytelling and the word *mashal* is further explained within *The Complete Jewish bible* version by David Stern. “One type of story delivered before a live audience which continues to fascinate and to transmit the enduring values of the Jews, is the parable of the mashal.” David Stern defines the *mashal* as a narrative that “actively elicits from its audience the solution of its meaning, or what we could call its interpretation”. What further differentiates a Jewish parable from parables of other traditions, according to Sterns, is that the *mashal* always includes a *nimshal*, “the so-called explanation or solution, usually beginning with the conjunction Kakh. In this way, the audience clearly understands the allusive tale in the Mashal itself and its scriptural connection. (Schram, 40). Jewish stories with moral lessons are woven so deeply into the culture of Judaism that each holiday has its own set of stories.

The formula for teaching Jewish values by using short *mashals* which are told in a humorous fashion is how the PJ Library books manage to teach values, yet modern parents are willing to read the books because they involve laughing with their children. Schram endorses this approach: “Because it has remained an integral part of the Jewish religion and society,

storytelling in Jewish life continues to be an ongoing, effective way of transmitting a cultural heritage and thereby of sharing the values of a people.” (Schram 33). Funny stories are really a perfect match for teaching lessons such as values, manners and morality.

Storytelling is natural to Jewish culture across the spectrum within Jewish life. “Jewish storytellers - and these can be educators and parents as well as rabbis - draw their material from a culture rich in bible stories, the narratives in rabbinic literature (i. e. parables and fables), folktales, myths, fairytales, proverbs, anecdotes and legends” (Schram 33). Rebbes themselves often tell funny stories on the sabbath and other holidays, so it is worth noting that within Judaism’s culture itself are three main categories for storytelling. “Oral reading of stories in a liturgical setting, oral reading in the home - word for word - of a religious text that is a story and stories created imaginatively by the teller, in addition to recounting - in one’s own words - existing stories and legends” (Schram 35) are all useful methods for communicating ideas within Judaism. The clear conclusion is that the Jewish people tell a lot of stories, often weave humor into the narrative and read a lot of books.

Now, in order to consider books which are funny, first, we must define what makes a book funny. Well-known children’s author E.B. White says it best, that “humor could be dissected as a frog can, but few people are interested in the results and the frog always dies in the process” (Serafine and Coles 636). It is challenging to define what exactly is humor and more specifically to understand what makes humor “Jewish” as opposed to another culture’s jokes. Asking someone, “Why are you laughing?” can be challenging! Laughter can be contagious and people often don’t actually know why they are laughing. In a standard definition of a textbook definition of humor, humor is defined as; “any communication which is perceived by any of the interacting parties as humorous and leads to laughing, smiling, or a feeling of amusement”

(Robinson 10). Humor can be added to almost any sort of situation in the real world, from a boring traffic school class, to a late-night television comedy show, to its function for pedagogy, and of course for picture books. Robinson explains the use of humor quite well; “Humor can serve a communication function as well. It can offer a way to introduce oneself, a topic, a lecture or a course. Because of its play frame, it can provide a vehicle for moving in and out of serious situations.” (Robinson 41) The choice to utilize humor makes it easier for young children reading picture books to better understand the concepts of values, as well as making it more enjoyable in the process.

The problem is, that if you overthink and analyze humor, things stop being funny in first place. On an academic level, theories of different types of humor can be broken down into three main categories: “(1). Functional and relief theories which offer an explanation of the value of laughter, (2) stimuli or cognitive theories that look at surprising events and incongruities to understand which makes things funny, and (3) superiority theories that analyze people’s responses to humorous events and phenomenon and try to explain why people find things funny”(Cross, 2011).

It is challenging to pinpoint precisely what makes something funny because laughter is difficult to pin down and the reasons people laugh can vary so widely by culture and situation. Donald Hanks echoes the point that it is virtually impossible to construct a general theory that would cover all the different instances of humor when he writes that “humor wells kaleidoscopically from unseen depths, forever bursting into novel instantiations, and will therefore resist the formulation of any general theory that seeks to integrate it with the other causes of laughter by isolating a single thread.” (Hanks 32). However, others studying humor might disagree and believe there are specific ingredients: “Many researchers of humor agree that

the perception of incongruity (the feeling of being out of place, recognizing unexpected events, or considering surprising phenomenon) in a text, image or picture book is essential when determining whether something is humorous (Weems 2014; Wyer and Collins, 1992). Something that is funny is surprising, unusual, or different from one's normal expectations, is also considered to be funny according to researchers" (Serafine, Coles; 637).

In terms of how humor functions for children Serafine and Coles observe that, "To generate humor from riddles, magazines, sitcoms, cartoons or picture books, children mentally process information from their experiences, consider the ideas presented and then decide which aspects of these new experiences are playful or serious" (Serafine and Coles; 637). Different styles of picture books that are considered humorous, either deal with someone's problems, offer absurd premises or are books that exploit reader expectations. PJ Library uses a lot of folktales and absurd premises to weave values into children's literature in a fun process. "The basic premise of the story sets up the humorous events to ensue and creates certain expectations for the reader" (Serafine and Coles 637). Using humor in the teachings of Jewish values is a good strategy for didactic literature because the moral teachings become cleverly disguised if you are laughing while learning. Researchers agree that if you use humor in the classroom, it has many positive benefits in addition to learning. "Evidence suggests that the use of humor helps decrease anxiety, stress and boredom; improves classroom environments, makes learning less threatening and more enjoyable; helps create more positive attitudes with regard to learning; and increases student's perceptions about how much they have learned. "(Serafine and Coles 638). Basically, if students laugh while learning, it becomes a more enjoyable experience. If they laugh while reading a book, they might be more receptive to the content of the story.

What is Jewish humor and can it be differentiated from non-Jewish humor? The website My Jewish Learning, defines this way: “To begin, it is humor that is overtly Jewish in its concerns, characters, definitions, language, values or symbols” (Novak 10). If a book contains Jewish drawings and Yiddish words, then it can be easily identified as being Jewish simply by the language, culture or subject. However just because an author is Jewish; doesn’t make the literature easily identifiable as specifically Jewish in nature. William Novak writes, “Jewish humor is too rich and too diverse to be adequately described by a single generalization. Jewish theologians used to say that it is easier to describe God in terms of what He is not; the same process may be useful in understanding Jewish humor. It is not, for example, escapist. It is not slapstick. It is not physical. It is generally not cruel and does not attack the weak or the infirm. At the same time, it is also not polite or gentle... First and foremost, Jewish humor snickers in the face of authority” (Novak 10). Specific examples of the varying types of humor uniquely recognized as Jewish appear in some of the more detailed websites and guidebooks directly devoted to the study of Jewish humor.

Jewish humor can also be defined in terms of the qualities it possesses rather than its subject matter and the author’s relationship to Judaism. When trying to narrow down humor into Jewish humor, *The Big Book of Jewish Humor* has even more specific properties we can look for. First, “Jewish humor is usually substantive”. Second, “Jewish humor tends to be anti-authoritarian.” Third, Jewish humor “frequently has a critical edge” and fourth, “Jewish humor mocks everyone - including god” (Novak 2010). Jewish humor and comedy can be many things, depending on who you ask, and being Jewish, it also means everybody has a different opinion about it.

The PJ Library's book selections include many parables and *mashals* drawn from Jewish folk tales. "Of all the elements in Jewish folklore the parable is probably the most distinctly Jewish," states Nathan Ausubel. (Ausubel 56) While the invention of the parable is credited to King Solomon, it played an important role in the storytelling of the celebrated Preacher of Dubno, Rabbi Jacob Krantz who has been called "The Jewish Aesop". He followed the tradition of the sages of the Agada and the Midrash by finding the ideas for a story in the Bible and its commentaries by listening to the folktales of the people he met in his travels. Then, he imaginatively and creatively adapted these tales to serve didactic ends. (Schram 40)

The Jewish people have dealt with so much persecution that humor developed almost as a way to survive and continue to persevere. Jewish humor and comedy have come to be one of the enduring characteristics found within Judaism as a culture. It is not surprising that humorous stories have found a useful placement among the PJ Library's book selections. "Comedy doesn't have to do anything, in fact, except make people laugh — and often enough in Jewish history, a bit of laughter has provided solace when nothing else could. Joking has served as a coping mechanism for all the worst afflictions faced by the Jewish people" (Novak 10) Comedy and being able to laugh at many situations has helped Jewish people cope with life's challenges through the course of history.

Funny Yet Didactic Books in the PJ Library

I noted four different methodologies of humor when reading the PJ Library book selections chosen. There were books teaching Jewish values combined with absurd premises, use of Yiddish words, incongruity and comedic illustrations. Some of the books combined more than one of these humorous methodologies to teach values and created a stronger storytelling experience for children as a result.

A timeless method for generating humor when writing picture books is the use of an “absurd premise”, which is basically an outlandish or unusual idea to base a story on. The absurd premise technique is used across many cultures and works especially well within the context of a Jewish children’s story. It is the most popular humorous methodology that I observed in the book collection. The absurd premise is used specifically in a Jewish context with the PJ Library book selection, *Five Little Gefiltes* written and illustrated by Dave Horowitz. The comedy of the book’s premise is amplified due to its inclusion of Yiddish language and comedic illustrations. The story follows the day-to-day life of anthropomorphic Gefilte fish balls as they go about life in the city of New York. The absurd premise of talking fish balls is very funny. One by one they all disappear and the Mama Gefilte is very sad. This book is also filled with Yiddish words which are learned through reading. The ending of the story is when the five little gefiltes finally return to their mother, exhibiting good behavior by returning home, staying in contact with their mother, is basically asking kids to be a “*mensch*”. A *mensch* is a Yiddish word for a “good person of moral value”. The book also uses comedic illustration building on the absurd premise concept, at one point even showing the talking gefilte fish balls attempting to masquerade as matzo balls inside of a deli, where they are accused by nearby pickles of impersonation. A child

will understand that to be a good person, eventually they must return home to their parents and family home or at least keep in touch with their mother! These are Jewish values being taught in such a funny context that it doesn't feel preachy at all.

Yiddish can also be considered a humorous methodology within this book collection based on humor's definition of eliciting laughter and smiles. In the front flap of the short story collection called *Kibitzers and Fools, Tales my Zayda Told Me* by Simms Taback, is a long explanation about the funny stories in the book and its use of Yiddish to evoke humor. The flap reads, "Even in jokes, Jewish people value intense thinking, deep conversation, and logic (even backwards logic!)" Reading out loud books with Yiddish words makes for a really good laugh when young kids are around because of the humorous pronunciations. Whether its intentional that Yiddish always elicits laughter or if it is intended as more of an educational tool by writers is something which can be debated depending on your viewpoint, however Simms Taback specifically mentioned that he was using Yiddish for warm, humorous feelings. The flap written by PJ Library on the front cover of the book also reads: "The Yiddish words sprinkled throughout the book are funny, too. Yiddish, once spoken by millions of Eastern European Jews, is filled with expressive noises that sound like shishing and gargling. For many families, using Yiddish words creates a warm feeling of connection to earlier generations who used this vocabulary." This really gives us permission to view the inclusion of Yiddish as a humorous methodology within this context.

A story found in the *Kibitzers and Fools* anthology is called "*The Rabbi Is Smart - How Chelm Got Bigger*," and is also told using the absurd premise technique and Yiddish language to make the story humorous. The people in the town of Chelm (a town of fools) have run out of room. When their Rebbe advises them to move a mountain out of the way, the townspeople

become so hot trying to move the mountain, they take off their coats. Robbers come and steal their coats, but the people foolishly think they have instead moved the mountain so far away and lost their clothing which is why they cannot find the clothes. It is a very funny tale with a moral at the end, “Where’s there’s a will, there’s a way.” The rest of the book *Kibitzers and Fools*, is filled with other tales which also have moral lessons at the end, funny illustrations and Yiddish words sprinkled throughout. The brightly colored illustrations are very comical in nature with primitive, childlike drawings, caricature faces with expressive eyes and hand-written funny words on the depicted scenes.

Another particularly funny story included in the book, is all about a *kibitzer*. Basically, a *kibitzer* is Yiddish for a know-it all person who offers you unsolicited advice. The *Kibitzer and Fools* story becomes very funny as multiple kibitzers offer their advice, complete with cartoon styled illustrations. The end moral being, don’t be a know-it-all (don’t be a kibitzer). Children and parents reading this book will absorb an expanded vocabulary of Yiddish words along with learning values from a series of moral lessons (*nimshals*). Families will also be laughing due to the funny Yiddish pronunciations when they close the book. The entire short-story collection of *Kibitzer and Fools* was a recipient of an award from the Association of Jewish Libraries. A bonus to reading this particular book, is that my children and I can now drop random Yiddish words into everyday conversations to get a laugh.

Many book selections in the PJ Library also successfully use incongruity as a humorous method. Mordechai Gordon explains, “On many occasions we laugh when we discover an incongruity or a discrepancy between our expectations that something will follow a certain pattern and our actual perceptions of this reality. For instance, if our doorbell rings, we expect to open the door and find a person there; however, if we were to open the door and find a dog or a

cat standing there, this would be funny.” (Gordon 738) The humorous method of incongruity also works well to make young readers laugh because it allows for things to be shown out of place which can be taken to the extreme by an illustrator. *Estie the Mensch* by Jane Kohuth, illustrated by Rosanne Litzinger uses comedic illustrations and a perception of incongruity (the feeling of being out of place) for the main character in the story who pretends to act like various animals when in ordinary situations such as a library. The character of Estie is continually told to behave, and “Be a mensch” This story is funnier to child readers, as adults might not find the behaviors depicted to be funny, similar to the adults in the story. I didn’t enjoy it because I was identifying as the mother and imagining if it was my child was misbehaving in a grocery store, I would be annoyed and embarrassed. At the end of the story, another child loses their ice cream and begins to cry, Estie shares her ice-cream, and the child stops crying. She has finally behaved like a “mensch” at the end of the story. My child found this story quite amusing because she identified with the hysterics shown in the illustrations of the main character, Estie.

Incongruity as a very useful technique for eliciting humor is also found used in the story, *Hanukkah Bear* by Eric A. Kimmel, illustrated by Mike Wohnoutka. *Hanukkah Bear* uses a perception of incongruity (the feeling of being out of place, recognizing unexpected events combined with comedic illustration), an absurd premise and the use of Yiddish words. The front flap of this book writes about the Jewish cultural value of welcoming guests into the home, identifying this as “The most important Hanukkah custom - *hachnasat orchim*, Hebrew for welcoming guests.”

Hanukkah Bear tells the story of an old lady named Bubba Brayna who is preparing for the Hanukkah holiday by baking latkas. A wild bear shows up at her front door, lured by the smell of cooking latkas. Bubba mistakes the bear for the rebbe, and invites the bear into her

house. Illustrator Wohnoutka visually depicts the absurd premise, showing a gigantic brown bear in the tiny cottage sitting at the table eating all the latkas. The bear is illustrated wearing a knitted scarf, and later the illustrator also has created a drawing of the rebbe who does indeed resemble the bear. Bubba Brayna doesn't ever realize she is entertaining a bear which makes the story very comical for young readers. She thinks that she is talking to the large rebbe with a beard, shares all her latkas, plays dreidel with the bear, and gifts the bear a knitted scarf. The bear even licks her good night, to which Bubba replies, "Oh Rebbe, at my age!" thinking she was getting kissed. It isn't revealed to Bubba Brayna until later in the story when she realizes that she had a bear in her house because the visiting children discover the bear's footprints. We see the "real" rebbe with his large, fluffy bear-like beard. This story is very fun to read and children will learn about how the holiday of Hanukkah was celebrated in historical villages, while also learning of the Jewish value of generously inviting guests into the home.

The need to apologize is an overly didactic topic yet through the use of humorous methodologies, such as the "absurd premise" and comedic illustration, the message contained in the book; *The Hardest Word* by Jacqueline Jules illustrated by Katherine Janus Kahn is considerably lightened. This colorfully illustrated story included in the PJ Library book collection, seeks to teach about the value of "saying sorry" and "asking for forgiveness." It's also related to exploring the moral values around the Jewish religious holiday of Yom Kippur. The absurd premise of the story is; a giant clumsy bird known as the Ziz, (a magical character from Jewish folklore) flies everywhere knocking down stars, trees and clouds and causing accidents. The idea that the bird should have to apologize since it feels guilty for accidentally destroying things is the basic plot. Comedic illustrations will also make children laugh as they see drawings of a gigantic bright yellow and orange bird wearing funny green glasses as it accidentally

destroys the children's vegetable garden. The giant bird feels so terrible about knocking down a tree that he flies to Mount Sinai to ask God what to do about it. God sends the Ziz in search of the hardest word. The bird flies everywhere, and thinks saying, "good night", "spaghetti" and dozens of other words are the hardest word. Eventually the bird realizes what the "hardest word" is, and that it should simply apologize and tell the children, "I'm sorry." The book is a recipient of an award from the Association of Jewish Libraries and a National Jewish Book awards finalist. Its humorous methodology is also assisted by its bright comedic illustrations in order to successfully teach the "value of apologies" to children in a lighthearted approach.

Not only are there books teaching about being a good person, and books about having to apologize within the PJ Library collection, but there are even more explicitly didactic books teaching kindness, manners and basic behavior rules such as "Do Unto Others" textbook examples of didactic literature. A humorous example of a book found in the PJ Library attempting to teach children how to treat others with kindness is, *Do Unto Otters, A Book about Manners* by author illustrator Laurie Keller. The book's commentary flap reads, "Treating others with kindness involves combining morality and etiquette. *Derech eretz*, Hebrew for 'the way of the land', refers to good manners and decent conduct - those things that help us live in relative peace and harmony". This story stars a cartoon bunny with a silly smile who gets three otters as neighbors. The caricature like drawings portray anthropomorphic otters wearing clothing. The bunny worries that he will not get along with his neighbors and many comedic illustrations show wild expressions of angry otters and comedic expressions on various animals. Basically, the books pose the question of how the bunny would like to be treated by the otters and then talks about how he should treat them the same way. This story is light and humorous by using the absurd premise of a bunny dealing with otters as neighbors. Illustrated cartoon otters and the

bunny in various states of emotion, combined with large cartoon font choices make this book more enjoyable and funny rather than preachy about kindness. It covers the Golden Rule; and also tries to teach about keeping promises, manners, such as please, thank you, etc.

Picture book illustration with a comedic twist enhances all of the stories mentioned and adds humor visually. Visually interpreting the funny characters with artistic imagery enhances the understanding of the story plot, absurdity of the premise, and the values being taught. By using bright colors, funny expressions, caricatures for faces, funny speech bubbles, and anthropomorphic animals wearing human clothing, these illustrators in various styles add another methodology to elicit laughter from young readers.

The books would not read the same without the humorous illustrations which complete the joyful and fun experience of reading these picture books to young children. *The Little Gefiltes* really stands out with its background scenes containing entirely visual jokes in the form of speech bubbles depicting talking pickles, cartoon matzo balls and theater posters in NYC. *The Hannukah Bear* illustrations succeed in showing the absurdity of the story premise in great detail, especially the scene showing Bubba reaching for the Rebbe's beard resembling the bear. *Kibitzers & Fools* stands out with expressive cartoon like caricatures, while *Este the Mensch* illustrates the comical reality of the main character's imagining. The *Do Unto Otters* illustrations personify the animals with cute articles of clothing, allowing for the absurd premise to be visualized and make the story more enjoyable. *The Hardest Word's* illustrations of the gigantic mythical bird, the Ziz show the bird's absurd proportions in relation to everything around it, enhanced by saturated primary and secondary colors. While the illustrations from different artists are all created in different types of artist media, ranging from chalk, ink and watercolors; the

visual ideas communicating humor all work the same to enhance the reading experience of the picture books.

Through this critical analysis above of these six books, I have shown that there are didactic titles included within the PJ Library which skillfully teach moral values to children using various types of humorous methodology in a picture book format. These selections incorporate the absurd premise technique, use of Yiddish, incongruous scenarios and comedic illustration in order to elicit laughter from young readers. The moral values are taught in a lighthearted fashion and do not feel heavy-handed or overly didactic.

PJ Library Books Successfully Use Humor to Teach Values

PJ Library successfully uses humorous methods to teach Jewish values in a non-heavy handed, fun, light and engaging methodology. So, parents do not feel they are reading preachy, overly moralistic stories and can instead relax and enjoy story time while gaining the benefit of their young children learning Jewish values. The program has become very successful with the PJ Library books now available in many countries. Parents enjoy these books specifically because of their fun approach.

My family's participation in the PJ Library, has shown me that the books have had a positive effect on our family's perception of Jewish culture, Jewish holidays, and Jewish history and have enhanced our sacred story time space while communicating Jewish values to my children. Initially I signed up for the program years ago, when my children were little because someone had mentioned it was a way "to get free storybooks for kids". As my kids have slowly aged out of the program, we still have the books and I can now look at them with a new appreciation to them with regards to positive didactic literature examples which serve a valuable purpose in helping our young children construct a Jewish cultural identity.

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