

Books for First Graders with a Social Justice Theme/Mitzvah Connection

Gershon's Monster: A Story for the Jewish New Year by Eric Kimmel shows us how the love for our family can be the biggest motivator to become better human beings and help us understand what is most important in our lives. Focus: *Teshuvah* and making a plan for the new year

Mr. Peabody's Apples by Madonna is based on a Kabbalistic story that paints a realistic picture of the power of our words and how they can be used to lift up the spirits of another person or even destroy their good name. Focus: *Teshuvah* and making a plan for the new year

Tashlich at Turtle Rock by Rabbi Susan Shnur and Anna Shnur-Fishman tells the semi-autobiographical story of Rabbi Susan Shnur's family (her husband Len Fishman is the CEO of Hebrew SeniorLife) and how their creative ritual of doing tashlich enables them to acknowledge their mistakes, cherish the great moments and make a plan for a sweet new year ahead. Focus: *Teshuvah* and making a plan for the new year

The Hardest Word: A Yom Kippur Story by Jacqueline Jules introduces us to a zany and loving bird called the Ziz who has made a mistake, wants to correct it, and for the life of him can't seem to find the right words to make it better – until by accident he discovers what two words will set him on the right track for the new year! Focus: *Teshuvah* and The Power of our Words

Two Brothers – A Legend of Jerusalem, retold by Neil Waldman, teaches us how the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Horim* (honoring our parents) and its impact – can live on long after our parents are no longer living.

In God's Name by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso tells a simple and profound story about how we show **Kavod – respect and honor for God** - by the many ways we think of God, give names for God and the commonalities that unite all of us.

The First Gift by A.S. Gadot illuminates the simple but profound message that the first gift parents give to their children is their name and how our names can often tell a story about us and the people who came before us. Focus: *Kavod* – respect and honor

Miss Tizzy by Libba Moore Gray beautifully lays out how the *mitzvot* of *Bikkur Cholim* (visiting and caring for the sick) and *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of loving kindness) can work as powerfully as medicine sometimes – especially when children learn from elders how to do it.

A Sick Day for Amos McGee by Phillip C. Stead tells the poignant story of zookeeper Amos McGee and how his daily thoughtful connections with the many animals in the zoo are repaid one day when he becomes ill and the animals know exactly what to do when they visit him! Focus: *Bikkur Cholim* (visiting the sick) and *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of loving kindness)

The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig by Eugene Trivizas and Helen Oxenbury is a fabulous twist on the classic story of *The Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf*. The Big Bad Pig encounters a new house made of lovely scented flowers, which leads the Pig to a major transformation and an invitation from the wolves to come inside their home, enjoy a snack and live with them “as long as he wanted.” Focus: *Rodeph Shalom* – pursuing peace and *Hachnasat Orchim* – welcoming guests

The Tree House by Lois Lowry is a moving story about two friends who each have a wonderful tree house, but who are too proud (and jealous of the other) to enjoy it. It takes a while for them to understand that the best part of the tree house is sharing it with a good friend.

Focus: *Hachanast Orchim* – welcoming guests

Because Brian Hugged His Mother by David L. Rice invites us to consider how the power of one act of *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of loving kindness) can set off a whole day of kindness, caring and love – like the “domino effect” – for a group of people who are connected to one another.

Moishe’s Miracle by Laura Krauss Melmed is a story about a sweet and generous man, Moishe, who has very little and wants to help everyone! Then it’s Chanukah time and Moishe and his wife, Baila, discover that they have no money left to buy the ingredients needed to make potato latkes. With the help of a talking cow and an old magic frying pan, a miracle happens on Chanukah that transforms Moishe, his wife Baila and the entire town. Focus: *Chesed* (kindness)

Something from Nothing by Phoebe Gilman is a story based on a Jewish folk tale about a boy and his grandfather and his special coat and how even when the boy outgrows his coat, he is left with remnants and memories of it that sustain him over time.

The Littlest Pair by Sylvia Rouss and Holly Hannon is a wonderful twist on the story of Noah and his ark. When the animals on the ark get wind that a pair of termites will be joining them, all their pre-conceived ideas about termites come to the fore and only after the termites show that they are of a different kind do the other animals realize that they have misjudged the termites completely.

Focus: Do not judge others

The Trees of the Dancing Goats by Patricia Polacco is a true story of how the *mitzvot* of *V’ahavta L’rayacha K’mocha* (loving your neighbor as yourself) and *Bikkur Cholim* (visiting and caring for the sick) were put into action when the author’s family reached out to non-Jewish neighbors and helped them prepare for Christmas one year when scarlet fever affected so many families.

Gorilla! Gorilla! by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross is a story about a very small mouse and a very big gorilla. At first, because of her preconceived ideas about the size and personality of gorillas, the mouse mistakes this gorilla’s attempt at helping her find her missing baby and thinks instead she is going to be eaten by him. Focus: *Kavod/* and not judging others by their “outside”

The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson Focus: *Rodeph Shalom* (pursuing peace) and *Va’ahavta L’reicha K’mocha* (love your neighbor as yourself)

Each of these stories presents us with “teachers” who model for us how to be good people and make the world a better place. Think back to each of the stories above and the main characters in each story. Who are our teachers in each of the stories and what have we learned from them that we can personally “try out” RIGHT THIS MOMENT in our own lives?
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Compiled by Stephanie Rotsky with assistance from Rashi students