



**Dedicated to Marcia W. Posner,  
friend, mentor, and *mensch*.**

Published by Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.  
100 William St., Suite 2004  
New York, NY 10038

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Printed and bound in the United States of America.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

ISBN 978-1-55570-624-1

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## Foreword

As a researcher on children's services and former director of the Association for Library Service to Children, I sometimes receive requests from synagogues, parents, or educators in Jewish preschools or day schools looking for a comprehensive list of good children's books for a Jewish library collection. I've also received calls from individuals looking for good books with Jewish themes or events for a public school library or a community library in order to balance a collection and to raise awareness and sensitivity to Jewish-related themes and issues.

*The Jewish Values Finder* is the answer to these questions. Now there is a compilation of titles that can be selected to fill the expressed needs. Because of the variety of approaches to Jewish literature in *The Jewish Values Finder*, an individual can find just the right books for any collection. The arrangement is by values—a good choice because readers can search for books on a particular theme. The comparison among several books on a common theme (or among biographies) allows the selector to decide which of the books would fit into an existing collection or be the start of a new collection. Additionally, the title and author indexes give yet another approach to finding books.

The introduction defines, describes, and gives a history of how Jewish children's literature came of age. This valuable chapter can be used to enlighten library and education students and to edify other individuals interested in the history of children's literature. It may surprise some people to find that the history of Jewish children's literature follows much the same course as non-Jewish children's literature; for example, when the first realistic Jewish books for children began to be published in the 1960s, realism emerged in mainstream children's books as well. Scholars and others can explore these comparisons. The first chapter also includes an excellent list of selection criteria, which will help everyone choose the very best books for children.

This is one of those rare books that has multiple uses and offers a variety of ways to find information you need. It can be used equally well by professionals, parents, and grandparents. Enjoy!

*Susan Roman  
Dean and Professor  
Dominican University  
River Forest, IL  
August 2007*



## Preface

Jewish teaching, law, tradition, and history embrace a remarkably constant set of beliefs and behaviors that can be considered Jewish values. These principles are not exclusive to Judaism—many religious and secular groups embrace concepts such as respect, justice, and self-worth. We all know that our worldviews can be influenced by the books we read, especially the stories we encounter as children. The titles in *The Jewish Values Finder* help teach and reinforce positive ideals through engaging and high-quality children’s literature.

The number of Jewish children’s books (defined as those that portray real or fictional Jewish characters interacting with discernible Jewish settings, experiences, practices, beliefs, or themes) published each year has more than doubled since 1990, to 160 in 2006. Despite this dramatic increase, few review sources cover these titles. Mainstream magazines review some books from large publishers, but their reviewers do not always recognize inaccuracies or inauthenticity. Publications from small Jewish presses and texts reflecting Orthodox views are rarely recognized in the general media.

If it is difficult to find information identifying high-quality Jewish books, it can be even more challenging to choose titles that support a particular Judaic concept. *The Jewish Values Finder* is the first wide-ranging guide to Jewish children’s literature since Marcia Posner’s last edition of *Juvenile Judaica* in 1995. It is based on the Jewish Valuesfinder Web site sponsored by the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL). *The Jewish Values Finder* book includes additional titles and background information and uses value and age range as organizing principles to make it easy to find texts on a specific topic (such as a holiday or a specific Bible story) and to determine the titles that should be added to a particular collection. Browsing through any of the chapters will give readers an overview of the depth and breadth of the literature available, as well as help them select individual titles by grade range.

*The Jewish Values Finder* includes annotations on over 1,000 exemplary fiction, nonfiction, and picture books written for young people from preschool through high school age, arranged by grade level within the chapters. Each book meets the following selection criteria:

- **It meets recognized standards of literary and artistic quality within a range from acceptable to excellent.** The annotations point out weaknesses in literary or artistic quality when appropriate.

- **It has Jewish content exemplified by character, time, place, or theme, or it was originally written in Hebrew.** The Jewish content is presented accurately, authentically, and with sensitivity to Jewish concerns, without employing stereotypes or sentimentality. Where applicable, the books reflect a pluralistic view of Judaism, acknowledging racial and cultural differences, and avoid Christian conventions such as A.D. dates and Christian interpretations of the Bible. Some titles use Hebrew as well as English, but all can be read and understood by readers who do not know Hebrew.
- **To be fully appreciated by children, it merits introduction by a knowledgeable librarian, teacher, or parent.**
- **It has potential for use in the school curricula of Jewish and other schools in North America.**

The values, which were identified by drawing on numerous ancient and modern sources, are broadly conceptualized here. For example, the chapter on observing and beautifying *mitzvot* includes books on Jewish holidays, Sabbath observance and the dietary laws, prayer, and some Bible stories. The chapter on lovingkindness lists stories about kindness to animals as well as kindness toward one's fellow humans. In every case, the primary value exemplified in the text determines its placement within a given chapter. The majority of titles are in print. Out of print books are included when they are both especially valuable and readily available through second-hand or online sources. The Jewish Values Finder emphasizes up-to-the-minute recent works and older works that can be considered classics.

*The Jewish Values Finder* is written for adults who want to introduce a values-rich literature to children and teens in schools, libraries, churches, synagogues, and homes. Homeschoolers of every creed may also find *The Jewish Values Finder* useful. It may be used for book selection and collection development purposes, as a quick reference to identify a title embodying a specific concept, and as a source of ideas for curriculum enrichment, programs, and independent reading suggestions. Parents of any religion hoping to teach their children morals and ethics can use *The Jewish Values Finder* to identify books for family reading and for creating a home library.

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## ORGANIZATION

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The first chapter, “Jewish Children’s Literature Comes of Age,” provides an introduction to the definition and history of Jewish children’s literature in the United States. Chapters 2 through 18 each highlight a particular value. The last chapter lists short story collections, which by their nature illustrate multiple values.

Within the chapters, books are listed by grade level: preschool (ages 1–5), primary (ages 6–8), elementary (ages 9–11), middle school (ages 12–14), and high school (ages 15–18). Shaded boxes indicate essential titles recommended for first purchase. Every entry gives author, title, and publishing information. The annotations cover the general premise and plot, along with a critical evaluation of the book’s limitations and strengths.

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Because some of the annotations use Hebrew and Yiddish words, Appendix A, the glossary, allows readers to look up the meaning of unfamiliar words or terms. Since many Jewish children's books are about holidays, brief explanations of Jewish holidays are given in Appendix B. Additional appendixes list Jewish publishers and the winners of the Sydney Taylor Book Award, the most prestigious award for Jewish children's literature, given annually by the Association of Jewish Libraries. The body of *The Jewish Values Finder* includes annotations for many of these winners.

The great Spanish cellist, Pablo Casals, once said: "Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are?" Values-rich literature helps do just that—it awakens children's moral and ethical sensibilities, it teaches them to respect themselves, and, in the words of Micah 6:8, it teaches them "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God."



## **Acknowledgments**

The author thanks her husband for relinquishing his time at the computer so that this book could be written and for his advice whenever it was requested. Thanks also to my colleagues at the Association of Jewish Libraries for their encouragement and support, and to my editor at Neal-Schuman, Elizabeth Lund.

