

## Read the PJ Library Book

### A Big Quiet House (4's)

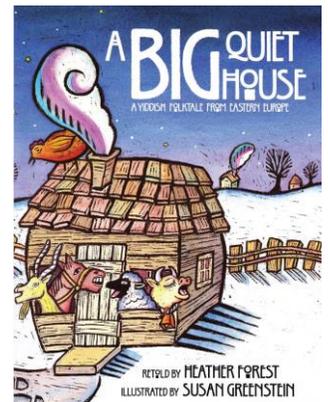
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#### Synopsis

This is a retelling of a popular Jewish folktale in which a man feels uncomfortable in his crowded, noisy home. The story is told with a mixture of poetry and prose, inviting group participation. Every noise makes the man grumpy, and he can't sleep. He thinks all would be well if only he had a "big quiet house." The wise old woman at the edge of town gives him some unexpected advice, and the man proceeds to fill his home with farm animals. When the ruckus becomes unbearable, the wise woman tells him to remove the animals. Now his home appears quiet and roomy, and the sounds of his family are like music to his ears.



## Discuss the Jewish values and vocabulary with one another

Tradition - *Me-so-ret* - מְסוֹרֶת

Being happy with what you have - *Sa-me-ach be-chel-ko* - שְׂמֵחַ בְּחֶלְקוֹ

Peaceful home - *Sha-lom ba-yit* - שְׁלוֹם בַּיִת

**Tradition - Mesoret.** The Hebrew word *mesora*, tradition, comes from the word for deliver or hand over. For millennia the Jewish people have been "handing over" tradition (passing it on to the next generation) through story-telling. The Torah itself is often referred to as "the greatest story ever told," though of course it is much more than that. While Torah has always been the primary source of learning Jewish law and morals, Jewish folklore developed as another way to transmit important values. There are common themes in these folktales, such as appreciating loved ones, and realizing what's most important in life may not be material possessions.

**Being happy with what you have – Sameach be-chelko.** *Pirkei Avot*, a classical Jewish text often translated as Ethics of our Ancestors, says "Who is rich? The one who is happy with his lot." [4:1] This teaches that wealth is an internal property and an exercise in optimism. Ancient rabbis understood that you can always acquire more objects, but those objects are not the path to happiness. Happiness



is in many ways a mental discipline. The Chassidic leader Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught, "Gratitude rejoices with her sister, joy." If we habituate ourselves to a positive and thankful attitude, happiness should follow.

**Peaceful home – Shalom bayit.** The home is a sanctuary; a place to find and give comfort to those with whom we share our lives. Families today come in diverse configurations. The bonds of love and respect transcend gender and age. A peaceful home affords us the strength to meet the rest of life's challenges. King Solomon declares in Proverbs: "Better a morsel of dry bread, with peace, than a house full of feasting, with strife." [17:1] For more about *Shalom Bayit*, please refer to the 2012 Resource Guide, *A Horse for Hanukkah*.

## Imagine your community living these Jewish values.

**How would your classroom change?  
How will families be involved?**

### In the Classroom / Centers



☆ **Tradition/Folktales:** This story is ripe for re-telling. Look through the book with your students. Ask them to point out things you could add to the **dramatic play area** that will help them act out the story. Take photographs of the children as they play, so they can make their own story book in the **literacy center**.

☆ **Tradition:** Using ritual objects can lead to conversations about tradition. Perhaps children can "show and share" about a ritual object from home during **morning meeting**. Photos can substitute for objects too precious to send to school.

- ☆ **Peaceful home/classroom:** Help your students learn to appreciate the members of your classroom family. Start with children drawing portraits of one another in your **art center**. Create citizenship awards as part of a **social studies** project. Children can nominate class members for their excellence in watering the plants or taking turns.
- ☆ **Peaceful home:** Listen to loving and peaceful songs at **rest time**, such as the soothing "Shalom Aleichem" from Felicia Sloin's *Zeh Hayom* musical CD or "In My Lev" from Rick Recht and Sheldon Low's *Look at Me!* CD.
- ☆ **Being happy with what you have:** Make a habit of noticing aloud positive things throughout your day. "Playing outside makes me feel good. I love the fresh air." "Our art center has so many brightly colored crayons."
- ☆ **Being happy with what you have:** A classroom blessing can be part of your **job chart**. Each day it will be someone's turn to begin the day with a happy statement, such as "I'm happy I have a baby sister," or "I'm thankful I have friends to play with."



## Bridging Home and School

### Shalom Bayit Photo Op

Update the family photos in your classroom. Perhaps your school will hire a photographer to take family portraits as a fundraiser (or fun-raiser). Or you can be on hand with your camera to take a photo at drop-off or pick-up time. You can make house-shaped frames with the children so families can proudly display their photos.

### The Grateful Book

Invite each family to contribute one page to the classroom Grateful Book. They can write a statement of gratitude and decorate the page together. Once the book is completed, it can travel to everyone's home for an evening or two. All will be welcome to read from the book at school.



## Family Engagement at Home

### Tell a Family Story

What are the stories that have become folklore in your family? Recommend that your families spend an evening telling stories, on Shabbat perhaps, about their family history. How wonderful if they would share the stories with your class, too.

# Share

your stories and experiences with everyone.

**What happened?**

**How can the learning go deeper?**

### Tell us a story... about children's curiosity.

What interested the children in your classroom after you read the book? How did you help them learn more about the topic? For example: *A Big Quiet House really made us laugh. Eric wondered, "Could a cow really fit in the house?" "Or a horse?" Mimi echoed. Our class did some research on how big these animals really are, and we built a life-sized cow out of boxes. We also talked about how much they eat (and poop.) "My mom wouldn't want that in our house!" said Lily. We all agreed. [Picture of children and cow]*

Then share with all of us on our private Facebook group page! <http://pjfor.me/pjgts-facebook>

# More

resources and websites for inspiration

Family traditions and children: <http://www.kellybear.com/ParentTips/ParentTip10.html>

Raising optimists <http://stress.about.com/od/parentingskills/ht/raiseoptimists.htm>

Rituals and Symbols <http://www.scheinerman.net/judaism/Rituals/>

