



GOES to SCHOOL

## Read the PJ Library Book

### Estie the Mensch (3's)

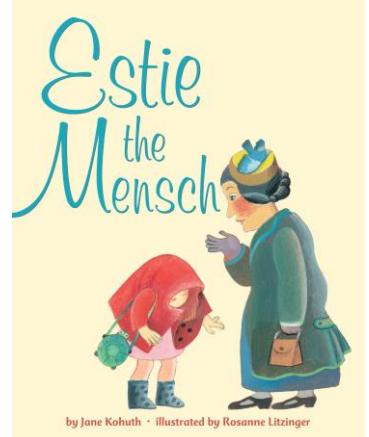
By Jane Kohuth

Illustrated by Roseanne Litzinger

Published by Random House

#### Synopsis

Estie is a quirky and somewhat socially awkward little girl, whose family constantly reminds her to “be a mensch,” or act like a well-behaved human being. Estie is often more comfortable pretending to be an animal. Estie discovers her humanity, and embarks on a new and very human friendship during a trip to the zoo with her grandmother and a boy named Petie.



## Discuss the Jewish values and vocabulary with one another

Good manners (the right path) - *De-rech e-retz* - דרך אֶרְצָה

Celebrating uniqueness/Created in the image of God - *Niv-ra b'tze-lem* [E-lo-kim] -  
נִבְרָא בְּצֵלָם [אֱלֹקִים]

Friendship - *Ch-a-ve-rut* - תְּבִרּוֹת

**Good manners – Derech eretz.** Derech eretz literally means “the way of the land,” but it is understood as decent behavior and common courtesy. Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of Our Ancestors, quotes Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaryah: “If there is no Torah, there is no derech eretz, and if there is no derech eretz, there is no Torah.” [3:23] The rabbis teach us that Torah imparts the basic rules of conduct, but in order to fully pursue Torah we should add a moral component. Estie’s family encourages her to be a *mensch*, the Yiddish word for human being. Mensch also has a meaning beyond its precise translation – a mensch lives with derech eretz, showing respect for everyone and behaving in a dignified manner.

**Celebrating uniqueness/Created in the image of God – *Nivra b’tzelem Elokim*.** Human beings are designed to be different from one another. According to Jewish thought, we are all created in the image of God; not a physical image, but reflecting God’s distinctiveness, creativity, and compassion. There is a *berakha* (blessing) in the Jewish prayer book that praises God for *me-sha-neh ha-bri-yot* – the diversity of creation. What a beautiful reminder to appreciate each person’s unique looks, temperament, and learning style in what would otherwise be a boring world.



**Friendship – *Chaveirut*.** Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer, better known as the Baal Shem Tov and creator of Chasidism, said: “Just as we love ourselves despite the shortcomings we have, so should we love others despite the shortcomings they have.” This statement gives us a glimpse into what true friendship is about. In *Estie the Mensch*, Petie views Estie’s unusual behavior in a positive light. Estie reveals her compassion and empathy as she shares her ice cream with Petie.

## Imagine your community living these Jewish values.

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

### In the Classroom / Centers

- ❖ **Good manners:** In this book Estie has a hard time meeting new people. She is not alone. Prepare your students to go on a **meet-and-greet walk** throughout your building. Practice the skills they will need, such as looking people in the eye or shaking hands. Teach them to say “Hello,” and to respond, “Fine, thank you” if someone asks, “How are you?”
- ❖ **Good manners:** Good manners include cleaning up after oneself and wiping a runny nose. Try some **path-math** to reinforce these habits. How many steps does it take to get from the tissue box to the trashcan?
- ❖ **Celebrating uniqueness:** Create a classroom “Guess Who” game for your **game center**. Take photos of each of the children in the class and arrange them on the table or floor. Decide which of the pictures is “unique” for the first round. The children ask questions such as “Does the person have brown hair?” If the answer is yes, remove pictures that do not have brown hair. The children continue to narrow down the choices until there is one unique photograph left.
- ❖ **Celebrating uniqueness:** Add feathers and fur to the **dramatic play and art centers**. Allow children to create and act out animals as Estie does, and then become happily human again.
- ❖ **Friendship:** Play a **match-and-find-new-friends game**. Give out pictures of animals (or any object or playing card). Ask children to find the child with the matching picture. Once they have found their match, the pair can choose an activity to do together.
- ❖ **Friendship:** Have a share-only **snack time**. Each pair of children gets two of a school-provided snack item (that would not cause any allergic reactions.) Each child shares half of the snack with their snack buddy.



## Bridging Home and School

### Family Quilt

Just as individuals are unique, each family is as well. Provide a fabric (or paper) square for each student to take home. Ask the parents to discuss with their child what makes their family special, and then decorate their square. Assemble the squares (sew or glue) for a display, making sure that each square shows the family's identity. Collect the families' stories, too. Be sure the families stop by to see the quilt at drop-off or pick-up time.

### Good Manners Book

Solicit photographs from families for a manners book that features photographs of students displaying good manners. Examples for desired photos include a child putting guest towels in the powder room, setting the table, or giving Zaydie a hug. Add photos from classroom clean-up time and playing nicely in the playground.



## Family Engagement at Home

### Family Friends

You know that family you just love to spend time with or invite to your home? What makes them such special friends? Ask your families to discuss these friendships with their child. Invite the children to share their family conversations about friendship with the class.

# Share your stories and experiences with everyone.

**What happened?**

**How can the learning go deeper?**

### Tell us a story... about a child's emerging social skills

Children at this age manage many steps to regulate their emotions in order to interact with others.

Help them along this path by telling stories of their accomplishments. For example:

*Madeline did not always like to interrupt her play when the rabbi came to visit our classroom. This morning, however, Maddie stood right up and sang, "Good morning, Rabbi!" I never saw the rabbi smile so brightly.*

Please submit your stories for our monthly eNewsletter at [PGtS@hgf.org](mailto:PGtS@hgf.org)

# More resources and websites for inspiration

Mensch [http://www.kveller.com/preschooler/behavior-and-discipline/Raising\\_a\\_Mensch.shtml](http://www.kveller.com/preschooler/behavior-and-discipline/Raising_a_Mensch.shtml)

Kindness <http://www.foundthemarbles.com/2012/02/acts-of-kindness-for-kids/>

Sharing with friends <http://tinyurl.com/shalomsesame-sharing>

