



Destination: PJ Publishing

Eight years ago, PJ Library saw an opportunity to publish engaging books for its young readers — and PJ Publishing was born. Today it's fast becoming home to both established and emerging talent.

BY REBECCA NORDQUIST, MANAGING EDITOR

PJ Publishing's board book *My Hands Make the World* guides young readers through the story of creation with bright, colorful illustrations. *Until the Blueberries Grow*, a picture book, follows a sweet relationship between a boy and his great-grandfather. And the graphic novel *Onions and Garlic* retells a Yiddish folktale with humor and delight.

These children's books and many others are giving PJ Publishing, the in-house press dedicated to PJ Library, a refreshed mission. "We'll focus on discovering new voices and emerging talent while also lighting the way for esteemed authors and illustrators to explore their craft through the lens of Jewish characters, narratives, and diverse Jewish experiences," says Jill Shinderman, PJ Library's director of

PJ Publishing looks to publish up to 10 titles a year — up from about five a year — and build upon its already stellar lineup.

PHOTO BY ALLISON BIGGS

publishing and creative development.

PJ Publishing started in 2014 to provide more opportunities for authors and illustrators and to publish a wider array of Jewish stories for PJ Library families. Oftentimes, if there was a promising manuscript and another publisher didn't pick it up, PJ Publishing would make an offer and publish it. "Now if the book looks like it has potential for us, we're going to make an offer right away. That's a huge change," says Catriella Freedman, director of author and illustrator stewardship at PJ Library.

Subscribers to PJ Library also receive books that have been curated from outside sources.

Some are custom editions published by traditional trade publishers, some are from small to midsize publishers who have focused on titles specifically for the Jewish children's book market, and some are licensed titles from US and international

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publishers. For example, PJ Library ordered 33,000 custom editions of *Dream Big, Laugh Often and Other Advice from the Bible*, a book going out in May to 8-year-olds, from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (See page 12 for a Q&A with the coauthor/illustrator.) It's the responsibility of the publisher's sales, design, and production teams to print and deliver finished copies of the book.

While this continues to be a successful model, Shinderman and Freedman see opportunity for PJ Publishing in many areas. In eight years, it has published 41 books — everything from board books for newborns to middle-grade readers for 12-year-olds — and now the goal is to publish up to 10 books a year. But not just any books. They're looking to tell authentic stories about Jews from different communities, family makeups, identities, and abilities. Ultimately, it's important for children to feel seen and recognize themselves in stories and content. "We're looking for the untold stories, both in terms of representing diverse authors in the Jewish community and emerging creators and talent," says Freedman. "At the same time, we're finding ways to get big-name authors to think of us as a publishing home as well."

One way PJ Library does that is by hosting the Author Israel Adventure. The experience is designed to inspire accomplished creators to bring to life Jewish ideas and stories in children's books. Freedman is gearing up for the third trip in 2023, thanks to generous support from the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies.

PJ Library also offers free webinars and runs picture-book retreats for established and emerging authors, including the recent Highlights PJ Library Picture Book Summer Camp, which had 116 applicants for 20 spots. PJ Publishing has also started working with art schools to identify students who are trying to break into the world of children's book publishing. "I have a global interest in discovering new stories and talent," says Shinderman, "stories that illuminate different perspectives, reflect different narrative styles, and present visual storytelling that explores a range of new art forms and media."

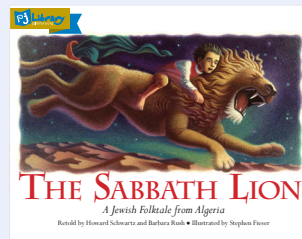
Another big push for PJ Publishing? Audio content. The hope is for every title to have an audio component, and there are expanded plans for animated read-alouds, video book reviews, audiobooks, and podcasts.

Even during this growth moment for PJ Publishing, the focus and priority always come back to telling stories that engage Jewish children around the world and connect them to each other. "I'm excited about discovering and publishing stories that are filled with humor, heart, and hope," says Shinderman.

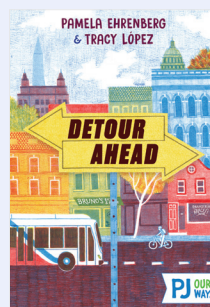
And that, Shinderman adds, is PJ Publishing's guiding star. 📖

LOOKING FOR A BOOK FOR A YOUNG READER IN YOUR LIFE?
A selection of PJ Publishing books is now available
on amazon.com/pjlibrary.

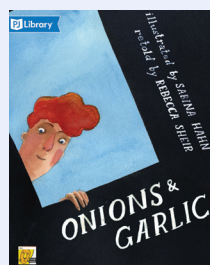
PJ PUBLISHING FIRSTS



The Sabbath Lion
First book offering by PJ Publishing in 2014



Detour Ahead
First book to receive the Kirkus Star, one of the most coveted designations in the book industry. The Kirkus Star marks books of exceptional merit.



Onions and Garlic
First graphic novel and first collaboration with a nationally known podcast, WBUR's *Circle Round*



Sign Language Shabbat
First creative partnership with the American School for the Deaf in Connecticut for books that reflect and represent diverse experiences



¿Dónde está Shmata?
First Spanish/English dual-language book