

Read the PJ Library Book

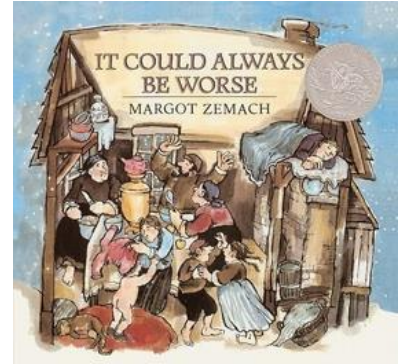
It Could Always Be Worse (4s)

Written and Illustrated by Margot Zemach

Published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Synopsis

This is an award-winning retelling of a delightful Yiddish folktale, in which a poor man is no longer able to tolerate his noisy and crowded home. He consults the local rabbi for help. To the man's surprise, the rabbi instructs him to bring more and more of his farm animals into the house. The ensuing chaos helps teach the man some important lessons about gratitude and learning to appreciate what one has.



Discuss the Jewish values and vocabulary with one another

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

Storytelling (tradition) - *Me-so-rah* - מְסוֹרָה

Introducing the value of being happy with what you have *Same'ach b'chelko*

From Jewish teachings

“Who is rich? The one who is happy with what one has” (Pirkei Avot 4:1). Ben Zoma, the author of this maxim, believes that the key to leading a rich, fulfilling life lies in focusing on the positive. To strengthen gratitude skills, Rabbi Meir suggests that individuals try to offer up 100 different blessings or words of thanks each day (Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 43b).



For the teacher

- How do you express appreciation for what you have?
- As you encourage children to acknowledge their blessings, how can you help them move beyond thinking about their toys and possessions to focusing on the non-materialistic aspects of life?
- How can we minimize kids' desire to have what everyone else has?

Questions for children

- Why was the man unhappy at the beginning of the story?
- How did the man feel at the end of the story? What changed?
- Sometimes it's important to pause and think about all the good things that we have.
- In addition to saying thanks for food and holidays, like the *brachot* we say at snack time and before Shabbat, what else might you want to say thanks for?

Introducing the value of storytelling (as a way to transmit values and tradition)

Mesorah

From Jewish teachings

Judaism believes in the power of stories, particularly as a way to pass along tradition. The root of the Hebrew word *mesorah*, tradition, comes from the word for deliver. The Torah is full of dramatic tales. The Talmud, an important rabbinic text designed to explain the Torah, contains thousands of additional stories, known as *midrashim*, which strive to fill in the gaps in the Torah text. Centuries after the completion of the Talmud, the Jewish people were scattered across the globe. New stories arose and old stories acquired new details, but stories continued to transmit Jewish values and lessons to the next generation.

For the teacher

- When you were a child, what stories and/or types of stories made the strongest impressions on you?
- What activities and routines can you incorporate into your classroom that will strengthen children's storytelling skills and interacting with stories?
- Take a close look at your classroom bookshelf. How does it reflect your goals for helping students' moral development, storytelling, and artistic and scientific discovery?

Questions for children

- What are some of the stories we love to listen to and read together in class?
- What stories do you like to tell or act out?
- How are stories different from conversation?
- What needs to be part of a good story?



Imagine

your community living these Jewish values.

How would your classroom change?

How will families be involved?

In the Classroom / Centers

☆ **Sameach b'chelko/being happy with what you have:** Teach your class the blessing that is recited upon seeing a wonder of nature: *Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, oseh maasei v'reishit*. Go on an **outdoor nature walk**, and direct the children to look out for opportunities to recite this blessing. Bring along a camera to snap photos of all the wonders that you find.

☆ **Sameach b'chelko/being happy with what you have:** Challenge children to classify classroom objects based on their purpose. For example, tables hold stuff, lights help us see, and sponges clean things. Ask each child to dictate a note acknowledging one item's usefulness for the job it does.

Collate the notes into a book for your **literacy or engineering center**.

☆ **Mesorah/storytelling:** To help children understand how folktales change with each telling, play "telephone" at **game time**. Begin with a one sentence story, such as "The fat black cat chased the little gray mouse into a hole." As the children whisper or say the story aloud to one another, keep track of when changes are introduced. Ask the children how the changes add to the story.

☆ **Mesorah/storytelling:** In your **writing/art** center ask children to draw a picture as you read this story. When the pictures have been completed, ask children to tell a new story based on their friend's drawing. If appropriate, allow students to act out the stories as part of a **dramatic arts** activity.



Does anyone remember when phones looked like this?



Bridging Home and School

Make gratitude a habit

Place a table outside your classroom door and stock it with note paper, pencils, and a shoe box with a slit. Post a note explaining that in order to practice gratitude, you'd like to begin each day by having families jot down one or more good things that have happened to them since yesterday.



Host a storytelling dinner

In preparation for the dinner, have the children prepare some classic story-related foods. Good examples include *Bone Button Borscht*, *Latkes*, *Latkes*, *Good to Eat*, *Once Upon a Shabbos*, or one of many secular books that mention food. At the dinner, ask families to work in small groups retelling the stories that inspired the food. Add to the fun by drawing props out of a bag and incorporating these items into the story.

Family Engagement at Home

One more time

Every family has a relative or friend who tells great stories. Call or invite that special person and ask for your favorite story or maybe a new one. Share your family stories with them, too.

Share

your stories and experiences with everyone.

What happened?

How can the learning go deeper?

Tell us a story... about storytelling in your classroom

Try writing up your classroom events as a story to retell with your students. For example:

Once upon a time, a happy teddy bear named Goldie lived in the Kochavim classroom. One day, the children noticed that Goldie was looking very raggedy. The children began to worry that perhaps Goldie was sad. Remembering how her grandmother had helped her sick stuffed doggie, Mitzi asked if Goldie could spend a few days at her grandmother's house. Mitzi's grandmother did a little sewing here and a little snipping there, and soon Goldie was as good as new.



More

resources and websites for inspiration

Nurturing gratitude in children

<http://pjlibrary.org/pj-blog/index.php/archives/1950/nurturing-gratitude/>

Who is rich: the tool for being happy right now

<http://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/pirkei-avos-who-is-rich/>

Gratitude/hakarat hatov

<http://jewishvalueseveryday.blogspot.com/search/label/gratitude>

