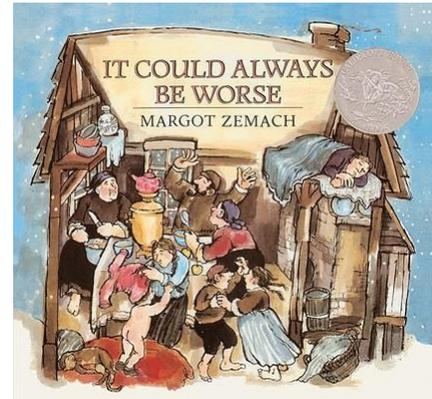
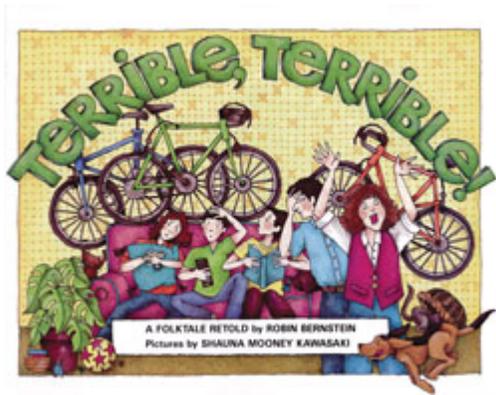


## It Could Always Be Worse

By Margot Zemach



## Terrible, Terrible

By Robin Bernstein

Illustrated by Shaun Mooney Kawasaki

### Program Focus

Central value: Happiness / Contentment With What One Has / Gratitude  
Age group: Age 3 and older - ***It Could Always Be Worse***  
Age 5 and older - ***Terrible, Terrible***  
Time frame: 75 minutes

### Synopsis

In ***It Could Always Be Worse***, an award winning retelling of a Yiddish folktale, a poor unfortunate man lives with his 6 children, his mother, and his wife in a crowded one room house. Unable to cope with the crying and quarrelling which daily fill his home, the man goes to the local Rabbi for help. To his surprise, the rabbi instructs the man to bring more and more of his farm animals into his home. The chaos and catastrophes which ensue help teach the man some important lessons about gratitude and learning to appreciate what one has.

Similarly, ***Terrible, Terrible*** focuses on what happens when a modern day girl named Abigail tries to adjust to life in a crowded house. When her mother remarries, Abigail must move into a house filled with new step sisters and brothers and lots and lots of junk. Much to her chagrin, Abigail's cramped new home lacks space for her to be alone. Turning to her rabbi for help, Abigail is told to bring more and more items into the house. Like her Eastern European counterpart above, Abigail begins to realize how changing one's perspective and viewing the world through a lens of gratitude can instantly transform one's life.

### Submitted by

Vivian Newman – [Vivian@hgf.org](mailto:Vivian@hgf.org)

# Plan in advance

## Space Set Up

You'll need table seating for both children and parents, as well as enough empty floor space at the front of the room for the group to gather for story time.

Set up craft tables with house decorating materials.

## Materials Needed & Advanced Prep

### My "Special" Home Mobile

- Cut outs of paper homes (template attached) made from poster board, card stock, or scratch art paper (Scratch art works well with older children - <http://www.scratchart.com>)
- Circles cut from construction paper or craft foam (approx. 3.5 inches in diameter), with holes at top and bottom
- Pipe cleaners, cut in half
- "Who is Rich" sign for top of mobile (template attached)
- Plastic coat hangers
- To simplify the process, you may want to attach the Who is Rich signs to the hangers before the program begins)
- Home decorating materials: dot paints, stickers, markers, glue sticks, tissue paper or construction paper shapes,
- Craft sticks/styluses for decorating scratch art paper
- Pictures of meaningful activities for the home (samples attached)
- Markers
- Optional: Pony Beads



### Storytelling Stick Puppets

- Cut out photos and pictures of animals, bicycles, and other items which are brought into the home in either ***It Could Always be Worse*** or ***Terrible, Terrible***
- Glue each cut out onto the top portion of a popsicle stick

### Graham Cracker House Snack

- Graham crackers (chocolate and cinnamon, if possible)
- Animal crackers
- Square waffle shaped pretzels (windows)
- Square cookies (doors)
- Ziploc sandwich baggies, with one corner snipped off, filled with several spoonfuls of cream cheese (sealed)
- Gallon size Ziploc bags with house building materials: 6 graham cracker squares, 5-6 animal crackers, 4 waffle pretzels, 1 small square or rectangular cracker/cookie-for door, baggie filled with cream cheese)
- Paper plates



## Gratitude Grab Bag

- Large bag- (Laundry bags or pillow cases work well)
- Collection of small every day, inexpensive items which have values/benefits which can be easily overlooked (toothbrushes, Band-Aids, cups, broken crayons, glove, rubber bands/pony tail ties, scotch tape, small empty cardboard boxes)



# Introduce families and the story

## Greet Families

As families arrive encourage them to decorate their houses, explaining that these houses will be used to make a very special mobile which will help families express gratitude for their homes. Remind families to write child's name on the back of their completed home

## “My Special Home” Mobile -Step 1

Today we'll be reading a book about a man/girl who, at the beginning of the book, does not like his/her house. By the end of the story, however, the man/girl loves his/her house. Do you like your house? I bet there are a number of things which make your home very special. Today, you'll be making a mobile which will show just how special your home is. As a first step in making this mobile, you'll need to decorate this paper house. Can you decorate this house in an extra-special way, making it look as wonderful as your own house really is? Remember to write your name on the back of your house



## Introduce the Story

Have everyone gather and introduce story:

Many of you have just decorated some very beautiful homes. I bet the houses in which you live are as special and unique as the homes which you just decorated. Can you raise your hand if you like the house that you live in? Today, as we read our book, we're going to meet a man/girl who doesn't think that his/her home is very special. In fact he/she really, really dislikes his/her home. The man in our book/Abigail, the girl in our book, thinks that his/her home is much too noisy and crowded. What would you do if you felt that your home was too crowded? Let's read and discover what the people in our story do in order to obtain a quieter, more comfortable house.

# Read the story

## Use Stick Puppets to Enliven Storytelling

Hold up stick puppets of each animal (or person or object) as it is being brought into the house. Ask the children to label the item and, if appropriate, make the noise of the specific animal/item that is being added to the house.



## Post Reading Questions

- At the beginning of the story why was the man/ **girl** unhappy?
- To whom did he/**she** go to for help and advice?
- What advice did the Rabbi give?
- What happened when the man/**girl** followed the Rabbi's advice?
- Why did the man/**girl** keep on listening to the Rabbi if things were getting worse and worse at home?
  
- What happened when the man let the rooster, goose and cow out of the house?
- What happened when **Abigail** and her family took the bikes, animals, and extra cousins out of the house?
- How did the man/**girl** feel about his/**her** house at the end of the story?
  
- At the end of the story, the house is really not any different than it had been at the beginning of the story. In **It Could Always Be Worse** the man's house still contains his mother, his wife, and his six children, and the house is still crowded. Why does the man now like his house?
  
- In **Terrible, Terrible**, Abigail, at the end of the story, is still living in her step father's house with her new step sisters and brothers. There are still seven people who need to share the couches, TV, and bathrooms and there are still lots and lots of "stuff" in the house, but Abigail is happy. What changed for her?
  
- Was there a way for **Abigail**/the man in our story to have avoided bringing everything into the house? When the man/**Abigail** first began to dislike his/ her house, what could **she**/he have done?

## Jewish Values Discussion

In Judaism we learn that we should always search for the good in a situation. Do you know how to say "good" in Hebrew? The Hebrew word for good is **tov**. One way for us to make sure that we have a very happy life is to be careful to always look for the good. In Hebrew the term **Hakarat Hatov**- refers to recognizing/acknowledging the good.

Turn to one of the opening pages of the book which shows an image of the crowded house:

One way for us to look at this house is to say –It's crowded, it's noisy, it's full of stuff. But what if we readjusted our eyes and tried to look for the good in this house. What good might you see in this house, what might make this house special ?

In **Pirkei Avot**, a special Jewish book which teaches lessons about how to live a good life we're told that we should always try to be happy with what we have. The Hebrew words for being happy with what one has are:

**Sameach B'chelko.** When we look for the good and feel happy about what we have, the Rabbis tell us that we'll feel very rich. We'll feel as if we have lots and lots of money and own the best things in the world.

Let's see if we can readjust our eyes and look for the good in our own homes. What is special about your home?

Gradually direct the conversation away from listing all of the special toys, objects which children possess by using questions such as:

- *It's nice to own special toys and furniture, but could you be happy without those things?*
- *Let's think about the people and activities which go on in your home. Who lives in your house with you? What do you like to do at home with your mom and/or dad or brothers or sisters or pet?*

Wow, your homes do sound very special. Right now, we're going to make a mobile which will show how special and rich your homes is. We hope that whenever you see this mobile, you'll remember to look for the good in your home and appreciate what you have. Once you hang your mobile at home you may find that there are even more things which you'd like to add to it. As you'll see, there will be lots of circles on your mobile and lots of places to add additional notes about what makes your home so special. In a minute, we're going to stand up and go to the crafts tables. If you had a chance to decorate a house when you first came to the program, please find your home and bring it over to the crafts table. If you didn't have a chance to decorate a home, don't worry, there will be extra blank houses at the crafts table. (You can take some stickers home with you and decorate your house once you've brought your mobile home.)

## Follow Up activities and resources

### My Special Home" Mobile –Part II

#### Set up

During the reading of the book and the follow-up discussion, volunteers/staff should clear away the house decorating materials and reset the table with the remaining mobile supplies (see material list above)

#### Directions

- String a pipe cleaner through the house cut-out, and attach the house to the hanger.
- On a paper circle, draw a picture or write a note describe something which makes your home special (examples, *There are 2 parents, and 3 children who live in my home; We have a pizza/movie night every Saturday evening; We grow tomatoes in our back yard.*)
- **Adaptation for younger children:** Rather than drawing their own picture, younger children can glue pre-printed pictures onto their circles
- After you've decorated several circles, use pipe cleaners to attach the circles to the plastic hanger. You can create a chain of several circles, stringing pony beads in between the circles. Or you can attach circles individually to the hanger.



## Snack Activity

*Just for fun, let's see if we can create edible homes for snack. We'll put animal crackers inside our graham cracker houses so that our edible houses will be as crowded as the home we read about in our book. Before we eat our homes, let's take a moment to note everything which makes our graham cracker house special.*

### Directions:

- Hand every child a paper plate and Ziploc bag containing edible home building supplies (see materials listed above)
- Squeeze cream cheese baggie and apply cheese (as glue) to edges of graham crackers.
- Assemble graham crackers into the shape of a home.
- Place animal crackers in the center of the home
- Create a roof, using graham crackers and cream cheese (optional)
- Apply cream cheese to backs of pretzels (windows) and square cracker/cookie (doors). Stick windows and doors onto graham crackers



*Before eating your home, see if you can offer up some words of praise. What's special about your graham cracker home? What features/aspects of your edible home do you especially like?*

## Gratitude Grab Bag

Have families return to the floor/book reading area for this activity:

*Before you go home, we want to give you even more practice in learning to search for the good and feeling happy with what you have. Right now, we're going to play a game in which you're going to reach into our bag and pull out a small object. At first glance, these objects may not seem special and you may feel disappointed that you pulled such an uninteresting item from the bag. Your challenge is to open your eyes and look for the good. Tell us why you're happy that you picked this object. Tell us why this would be an important item to own. (If you'd like, you can even keep the item which you selected.)*



### Adaptation for larger group

Display items on a table. Ask families to briefly pick up one or two items and explain to one another something which is special / important about this item. Ideally, it would be great if each family could take one small item home with them, but if that's not possible, simply ask families to pick up an item, discuss it, and then put it back down on the table.

*So, do you feel rich? Are you happy with the small present that you chose?*

## Songs of Gratitude

*Today we learned all about being happy with what we have. Let's sing a few songs to help strengthen our ability to appreciate and enjoy what we have, and which will also give us a chance to offer thanks for everything which is good in our lives.*

Optional: ask families to make up their own lyrics to any of these songs:

# Kobi's Lullabye

words and music by **Rick Recht** (Free to be the Jew in Me CD)

Listen: <http://www.rickrecht.com/music/index.php#album-18>

Sheet music: <http://rickrecht.com/resources/Kobi.pdf>

Before I close my eyes at night and sleep  
before I drift into my dreams  
I give thanks for the blessings in my life  
for the people who care for me

thank you G-d for my family  
thank you G-d for my friends  
thank you G-d for the earth and sea  
thank you G-d for the trees  
and the air I breathe  
and thank you G-d for me

When I open my eyes  
to the new daylight  
before I rise and start my day  
I give thanks for the music  
and love in my life  
for the freedom I have to say

thank you G-d for my family  
thank you G-d for my friends  
thank you G-d for the earth and sea  
thank you G-d for the trees  
and the air I breathe  
and thank you G-d for me

thank you G-d for my hope  
thank you G-d for my heart  
thank you G-d for the strength to know wrong from right  
thank you G-d for the faith I have in myself  
and thank you G-d for me

Sh'ma Yisrael Ad-nai  
El-heinu Ad-nai Echad

# Thank You

words and music by **Rick Recht** (Look at Me CD)

Listen: <http://rickrecht.com/music/>

Sheet music: <http://rickrecht.com/resources/ThankYouv3.pdf>

Song book: [http://jewishrockrecords.com/resources/LAM\\_Songbook.pdf](http://jewishrockrecords.com/resources/LAM_Songbook.pdf)

Yai dai dai dai yai dai dai dai dai dai

Yai dai dai dai yai dai dai.

yai dai dai dai yai dai dai dai dai dai

yai dai dai dai yai dai dai.

Thank you thank you

Thank you for this special time

Thank you thank you to walk and dance and run and climb

Thank you for my heart and my mind

Thank you thank you for my life

# I Give Thanks

words and music by **Sheldon Low** (Look at Me CD)

Listen: <http://rickrecht.com/music/>

Sheet music: <http://rickrecht.com/resources/IGiveThanks.pdf>

Song book: [http://jewishrockrecords.com/resources/LAM\\_Songbook.pdf](http://jewishrockrecords.com/resources/LAM_Songbook.pdf)

I (I) I give thanks (I give thanks)

I give thanks (I give thanks) to you (to you)

Thank you for my parents we love love love

Thank you for the trees we hug hug hug

Thank you for doggies we pet pet pet

Thank you for the water so wet wet wet

Thank you for chocolate we eat eat eat

Thank you for the soil that tickles our feet

Thank you for the flowers we sniff sniff sniff

Thank you for this life we live live live

# What are you thankful for

words and music by **Elana Jagoda** (Uri Uri CD)

Listen: [http://www.zumgali.com/fr\\_listenbuy.cfm](http://www.zumgali.com/fr_listenbuy.cfm)

Lyrics: <http://content.bandzoogle.com/users/zumgali/files/UriUribooklet.pdf>

Sheet music: Contact [elanajagoda@gmail.com](mailto:elanajagoda@gmail.com)

What are you thankful for today?  
Share with me the blessings that have come your way  
What are you thankful for today?  
Share with me the blessings that have come your way

I'm thankful that the sun is shining  
I'm thankful I've got food to eat  
I'm thankful for the songs I sing  
I'm thankful for my dancing feet

What if you and a friend had a fight  
Maybe you got hurt when you fell off your bike  
Maybe mom and dad made a dinner you didn't like  
But be grateful  
you have a plateful

I'm thankful that I've got clothes to wear  
I'm thankful that I've got enough to share  
I'm thankful for what the earth brings me  
I'm thankful for my friends and family

What if your brother or sister didn't share  
Maybe you just couldn't find anything to wear  
Maybe you just had a really bad day for hair  
When life's distressing  
just count your blessings

# Resources for parents, teachers, families

## Follow Up Email to Families

Following the program, try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming, and providing them with the words and MP3 downloads to some of the songs that you sang at the program. Families may also enjoy receiving instructions on how to participate in additional values -based projects within their own homes. Some families may be interested in learning more about the values discussed at the program. Try sending families one or more of the following links

Start a Family Gratitude Journal

<http://blog.littlepicklepress.com/2011/11/starting-family-gratitude-journal.html>

## Further Reading on Gratitude and being Happy with what one has

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/>

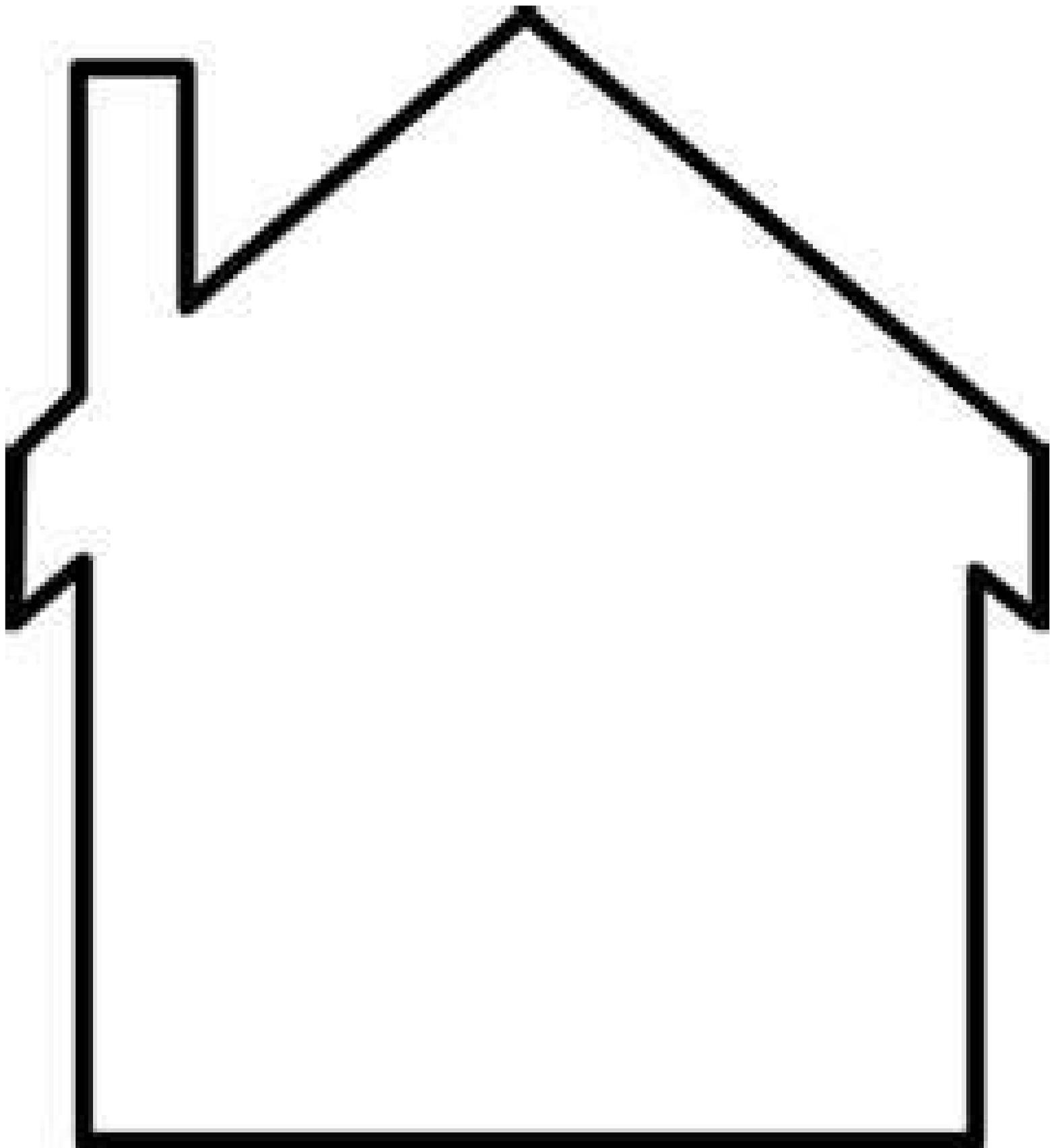
Gratitude-HaKarat Hatov

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

## Additional PJ Library Books about Gratitude

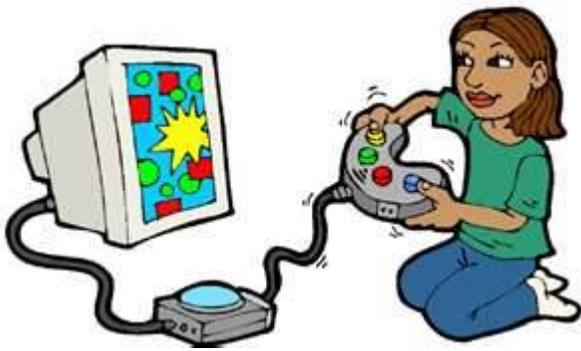
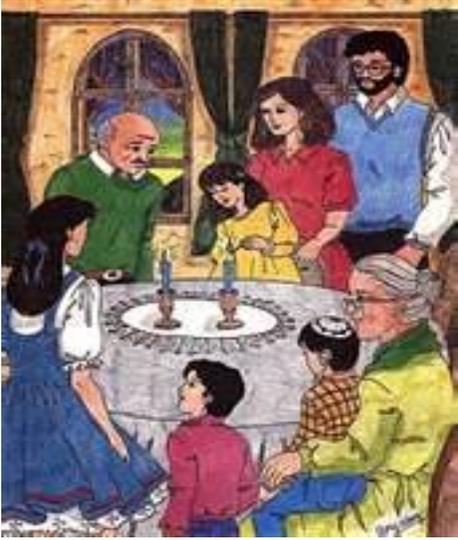
This lesson plan can be adapted to use with:

- ***Kishka for Koppel*** by Aubrey Davis
- ***Meshka the Kvetch*** by Carol Chapman









# Who is Rich?

One who is happy with what one has

(Pirkei Avot 4:1)

*I love my house because of all that goes on within it...*

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One who is happy with what one has

(Pirkei Avot 4:1)

*I love my house because of all that goes on within it...*