Children at Passover Time

There are many ways to build excitement in your children before the big event arrives. Some suggestions include:

- Make a seder plate with cupcake holders.
- Decorate plastic wine goblets for Elijah’s and Miriam’s cups.
- Chop nuts for charoset.
- Learn Passover songs. Perhaps the best known is “Dayenu” which means “It would have been enough for us.” It describes all the great things God did for the Jews during the Exodus.
- Make a matching game placemat showing different parts of the seder. Children will be able to follow along as you progress through each section.

The seder is meant to be an interactive event, marked by ongoing questions and discussion among the participants. It is traditional for the youngest child to chant the Ma Nishtanah, or Four Questions. The internet is a great place to learn the words and music for this and Dayenu as well. Throughout the seder there are places for children to be up and moving: they can open the door to welcome Elijah and act out various plagues, such as the frogs. A highlight is always the search for the afikoman! It is customary for the service leader to hide this piece of matzah early during the seder, and after the meal, the children try to find it. The lucky detective usually barter with the service leader: afikoman for some reward. Many families provide a little something for each child at the holiday table.

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This Is Passover! by Santiago Cohen
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Matzo Ball Moon by Leslea Newman

Passover titles for children 0 to 2:
My First Passover Board Book by Claire Lister
It’s Seder Time! by Latifa Berry Kropf

Passover titles for children aged 3 to 5:
This Is the Matzah by Abby Levine
Sammy Spider’s First Passover by Sylvia Rouss
My Very Own Haggadah by Judyth Groner & Madeline Wikler*
Sammy Spider’s First Haggadah by Sylvia A. Rouss*

Passover titles for children aged 6 to 8:
Had Gadya: a Passover Song by Seymour Chwast
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Pearl’s Passover by Jane Breskin Zalben
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Passover Around the World by Tami Lehman-Wilzig**
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* Haggadah
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The Jewish holiday of Passover, *Pesach* in Hebrew, is the most widely celebrated holiday by today’s Jewish people. It falls on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of *Nisan* (late March or April). Israeli Jews and some in the Diaspora observe the holiday for seven days, while others participate in an eight-day observance.

Passover is both agricultural and historical in origin. Also known as *Chag haAviv*, the “Festival of the Spring,” it reminds us of the early spring harvest in the former land of Canaan, now Israel.

Much more commonly recognized for its historical significance, Passover is also known as Zman Cheruteynu, “The Season of Our Freedom.” For generations rabbis and scholars have touted Passover as the birth of the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. The Passover story comes from the first half of the Book of Exodus in the Bible. In those pages we read of the Jewish people’s plight under slavery in Egypt, and their subsequent escape to freedom.

Interestingly, Moses, hand-selected by God to lead the Jews to their freedom, is never referenced in the haggadah, the Passover text which outlines home rituals for the holiday. The guide for the seder is the haggadah, Hebrew for “telling,” which contains the texts, blessings and songs of the ceremony. Telling the story again and again, year after year, is one way of fulfilling the instruction from Exodus 13:8 “You shall tell your children on that day, saying, ‘It is because of what God did for me when I went free out of Egypt.’” Furthermore, at the seder, we read, “In each generation, every individual should feel as though he or she had actually been redeemed from Mitzrayim [Egypt].”

Some Rituals and Traditions

- On each seder table is matzah, a cracker-like bread substitute representing the bread that didn’t have time to rise when the Jews fled Egypt. Tradition teaches that during Passover Jews refrain from eating chametz, food with leavening such as bread, cookies or pasta.

- Early in the seder the leader takes one of the matzot [plural for matzah] and breaks it in two. One of the broken pieces becomes the afikoman and will be eaten later for dessert.

- Also on each table is a goblet of wine called “Elijah’s Cup.” Traditionally someone opens the door to wel-