



## A HORN FOR LOUIS

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*In the early part of the 20th century, young Louis Armstrong is helped by a Jewish family in his quest to own a “real” horn. In the process, Louis learns about Hanukkah and the power of friendship and goodwill.*

In *A Horn for Louis*, Eric Kimmel gives us insight into the childhood of the great trumpeter, Louis Armstrong, as well as a taste of New Orleans at the beginning of the 20th century.

Neither Louis nor the Karnofskys comes from a privileged background, and their friendship is unusual given the circumstances of the times. The Karnofsky family exemplifies the word *mensch* (Yiddish for a kind and decent person). The Karnofskys and Louis also have a strong, historic common bond: both the Jewish people and African-Americans know the feeling of being “strangers in a strange land,” the Israelites having been slaves in Egypt and Africans in the United States and elsewhere.

One powerful moment in *A Horn for Louis* comes when Louis receives a horn as a *Hanukkah* present. Louis is eager for a new instrument, but is embarrassed accepting the gift. When Mr. Karnofsky puts himself in Louis’s shoes, he understands the boy’s embarrassment and thinks of a way to make him comfortable. The Jewish sage, Hillel, said: “Judge not your fellow man until you have been in his place.” (Pirke Avot 2:5).

Maimonides, an ancient Jewish man of wisdom, described eight degrees of charity. The highest degree is providing a gift or a loan that allows a person to take care of himself. Maimonides said: “The greatest charity is to enable the needy to earn a living.” As Mr. Karnofsky explained, he and his family were the recipients of help themselves; now they are able to help Louis.

### USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Here are a few questions to spark conversations about this book:

- Louis and the Karnofsky boys worked hard to help their families. What things do you do to help out in your family?
- How might Louis’s life have been different if he hadn’t known the Karnofskys? Was knowing and caring for Louis good for the Karnofskys?
- It was clear Louis had a special talent even when he blew on a simple tin horn. Is it a responsibility to have a special talent? Do you think Louis would have become a famous musician if he hadn’t worked hard?
- Mr. Karnofsky considers Louis’s feelings when giving Louis the horn. Can you think of a time when you put yourself in someone else’s shoes? Did it change the way you acted?
- Louis learned about *Hanukkah* and Jewish customs from the Karnofsky family. Why is it important to understand other people’s traditions? How can you find out about the beliefs of people? How can you share your traditions?

Share a Jewish holiday with your friends who don’t celebrate it. What would you like others to know about it? You might have a party where you make special foods, share a book about the holiday, and play traditional games. A great party activity is to do something to help others—like collecting food to donate or making cards for children in your local hospital. Pj