



LIKE A MACCABEE

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The saying “brains before brawn” has its origins in the Bible: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit” reminds us that the preferred way of solving problems is through thinking and discussion rather than through force. Many people today idealize qualities such as wealth or physical strength, but in this book Ben learns the importance of creative thinking and teamwork to meet challenges. He also learns that success can come in many forms.

In the beginning of *Like a Maccabee*, Ben has a habit of making assumptions about people before he knows or understands them. *Pirkei Avot*, a book of rabbinic teachings sometimes translated as *Ethics of Our Ancestors*, tells us: “Do not judge another until you stand in his place.” We all live and work in shared spaces and need to learn the art of empathy -- considering others’ feelings.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN READING

- Practice empathy: How is each member of Ben’s family affected by their grandfather coming to live with them?
- What is Ben’s greatest challenge in living with his grandfather?
- What do you think leads to the change in Ben’s feelings about Tank?

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Having empathy for others doesn’t mean we have to agree with everyone, but we should try to look at every situation from different perspectives. Is there a person at school or in a club whose first impression kept you from becoming friends? What was it that caused you to feel this way? Can you try to get to know that person and perhaps form a new opinion?

Ben realized he had more in common with his grandfather than he originally suspected. Think about your family. Do you see yourself in a brother or sister, a parent or grandparent? What traits do you like in yourself? What characteristics do you admire in others?

On the first night of Hanukkah, Ben’s family recited the *Shehecheyanu* prayer, thanking God for enabling us to “reach this season.” What momentous occasions in your family’s life deserve this type of acknowledgement?