



THE STORY OF ESTHER

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The Purim story, full of drama, brings together a mighty king, a jealous scoundrel, and a wise uncle. At its center is a clever heroine, Queen Esther. It was her courage that saved the Jewish people at a dangerous time.

A traditional greeting each year in the weeks leading up to the holiday of *Purim* is “Be happy! It’s *Adar!*” (*Adar* is the month of the Hebrew calendar in which *Purim* occurs.) *Purim* is a joyous time of reveling in freedom, courage, the triumph of good over evil, and the ability of an individual to make a difference.

Around the world today, Jewish people celebrate *Purim* in a number of ways. Many people attend a service to hear the story of *Esther*, taken from an ancient *megillah* (scroll). Whenever the reader mentions Haman, a great deal of noise is made to drown out his name. Other ways of commemorating *Purim* include both children and adults dressing in a wide variety of costumes and “making merry;” taking part in a skit or play about the holiday, called a “*spiel*” in Yiddish; exchanging gift baskets—often including the filled, three-cornered cookie, *hamantaschen*; and, as is the custom on Jewish holidays, remembering those less fortunate with *matanot l’evyonim*, (literally, gifts to the poor). This is something with which children can easily be involved, through an act as simple as donating items to a food bank or helping deliver a plant to an assisted living home.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Here are some thought provoking questions to ask while you read *The Story of Ester* at Home. You might consider:

- If Esther had dressed lavishly, would the king have noticed her? How do accessories affect our impressions of a person?
- Do you think Esther was born with courage? Can one learn to be brave?
- Haman advises the king: “there is a people living in the land” who “cannot be trusted.” Should an entire group or nation ever be mistrusted or feared?
- Esther invites the king to a feast and says, “I desire only your happiness.” Was this entirely true? Is it ever all right to leave out important information or use trickery to reach a positive goal?
- If you could, what would you say to Haman?
- If you were king or queen, what would you do for a person you wished to honor?
- Why is it important to remember and celebrate the lessons of *Purim*? Pj