



A POEM FOR PETER

Written by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Illustrated by Lou Fancher & Steve Johnson

When Ezra Jack Keats was growing up, he knew what it was like to feel different and left out. So when he created his famous picture book, *A Snowy Day*, he had an idea about how to write and draw his main character, Peter.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Storytelling is a defining component of Jewish life, history, and religion. In fact, stories from the Torah, kabbalistic teachings, and Hasidic tales are so central to Jewish tradition that Professor Jacob Neusner has called Judaism “a religion that tells the truth in narrative form.”

The author and illustrators of *A Poem for Peter* offer several overlapping types of narratives. Drawings, prints, newspaper clippings and swatches of fabric are collaged to tell a visual story of different places and times. Repetition and rhymes play together in poetry addressed to an imagined figure from the past. At the end of the book, expository essays place *The Snowy Day* in the context of literary, artistic, and political history in the U.S. (To enjoy this classic story, visit pjfor.me/keats.)

Readers may wonder why so many stories are nestled and woven together in this book. Why are we offered a visual landscape of Brooklyn in the 20th century, an expressive poem about a child who inspired seven beautiful books, and straightforward facts about the legacy of Ezra Jack Keats?

These multiple layers reflect the varied ways that stories can be used to empower, educate, motivate, and inspire. A traditional Jewish saying asks, “Why were human beings created?” The proverb answers: “Because God loves stories.”

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Because this is such a multi-layered book, you may wish to explore different parts of it with your child over several sessions. Extending the experience will provide opportunities to engage with interesting ideas that may be too weighty to discuss in a single sitting. Consider reading the book several times to talk about different components such as:

- Immigration history
- Art and illustration
- What makes someone a hero

Andrea Davis Pinkney has written many books about African Americans, celebrating the lives of Alvin Ailey, Duke Ellington, Benjamin Banneker, Sojourner Truth, and other Black heroes and freedom fighters. You may want to read some of these books with your child to explore themes of heroism, naming, and personal identity. Then ask, for example:

- Can you tell from a person’s surname—Ailey, Banneker, Ellington, Katz, Keats, Pinkney, Truth, or your own last name—what the family’s identity might be?
- Why did Jacob Ezra Katz change his last name to Keats? How might his life have been different if he hadn’t changed it?
- Musician Duke Ellington was born Edward Kennedy Ellington. Do you think his life would have been different if he had been known as Edward rather than Duke?