



Content Framework

PURPOSE

This framework presents the core content themes for PJ Library® books, offering families both mirrors and windows into Jewish life. The framework will guide the PJ Library Book Selection Committee and other content creators. PJ Library books should fall into at least one of the Content Framework's three main categories, and into at least one subcategory.

The framework will also encourage writers, editors, and community partners to brainstorm and innovate around the core content messages PJ Library wants to convey.

MIRRORS AND WINDOWS

For PJ Library, the need to have both mirrors and windows in its books is imperative. “Window” books show the variety of Jewish families, traditions, and experiences. They can take the reader beyond their own homes and show the breadth and diversity of Jewish life, yesterday and today. They help break down barriers by expanding on the commonalities and giving context to the differences found in Jewish communities.

“Mirror” books play an equally crucial role in affirming for PJ Library families that through their celebration of Judaism’s customs and practices, and their striving toward Judaism’s ethical ideals, they are an integral part of the Jewish community and its future. These books often show characters who echo the experiences of the readers. Other “mirror” books connect values to their Jewish source, demonstrating Judaism’s relevance in today’s world. These books answer the question “Why be Jewish?” with compelling and relatable narratives.

All PJ Library books must be “kid-tested and parent-approved,” exemplifying high quality, age appropriateness, and worthiness of a family’s time. This applies to both the story and the visual appeal of the books’ illustrations. Content should be clearly Jewish, and this is a challenge – over thousands of years, Jewish values have spread to influence cultures and communities worldwide. The stories should appeal to the broadest range of Jewish families and should be accessible to readers who have little or no Jewish background.

To state it simply, PJ Library strives to curate the very best children’s story books that convey Jewish values, traditions, and themes for the broad spectrum of families raising Jewish children.



“Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or re-created by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror.”

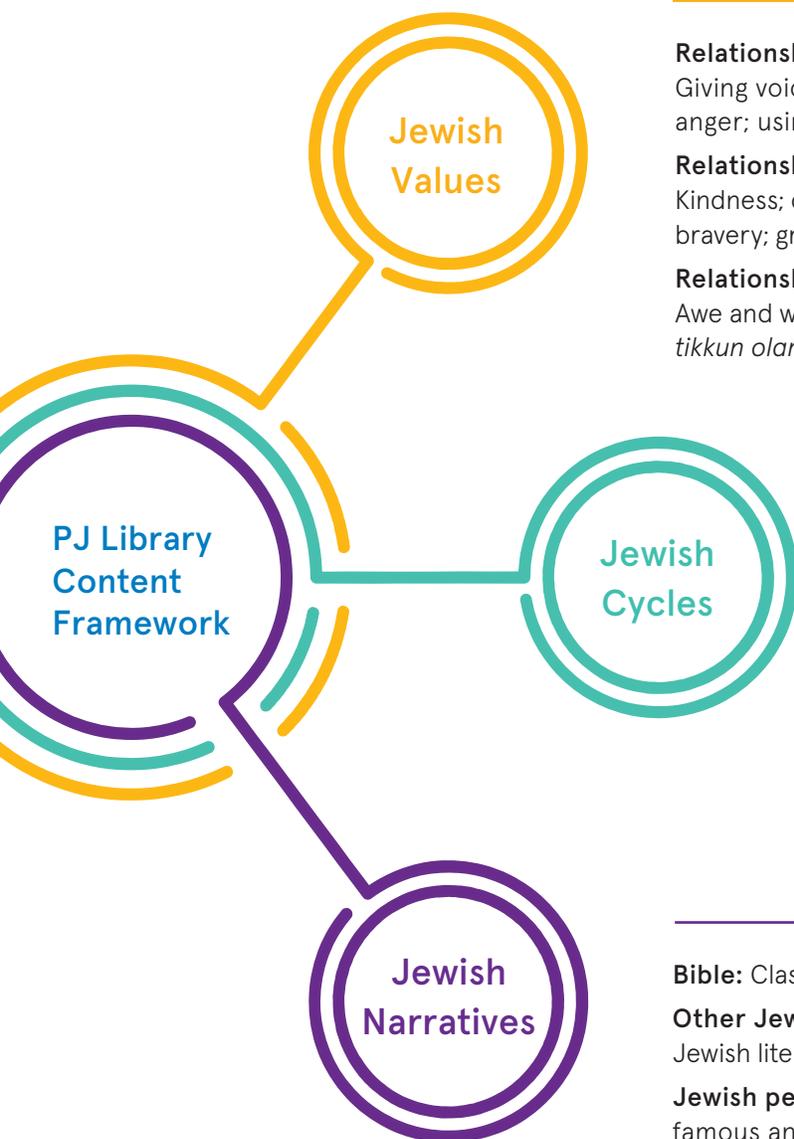
Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.”

–RUDINE SIMS BISHOP

Overview

The framework is divided into three main sections:

Jewish Values, Jewish Cycles, and Jewish Narratives, with key topic areas under each section. Each one of these topic areas shows illustrative examples. While this document is linear in form, nearly all of these topics are interwoven in complex ways. Jewish life and experience are holistic, composed of concepts that continually refer to and rely on one another. Authors and creators can choose to focus on a single content idea or to integrate several ideas.



Relationship with oneself:

Giving voice to emotions; expressing joy; controlling anger; using your words

Relationship with others:

Kindness; compassion; fairness, justice, and righteousness; bravery; gratitude

Relationship with the Divine:

Awe and wonder; recognizing the divine spark in others; *tikkun olam*

Family moments and milestones:

Birthdays, beginning school, life-cycle events, and rest-time shehechyanu moments

Shabbat: Time for awe and appreciating creation; time for family togetherness; time to unplug; time and place for celebration

Holidays: Themes and values; rituals and traditions; songs and actions; history

Jewish objects and customs:

Home and synagogue Relationship

Bible: Classic stories of Jewish heritage

Other Jewish texts: Stories from Midrash, Aggadah, and Jewish literature

Jewish people and places: Historical and contemporary; famous and every day; American and around the world

Israel: People and places; challenges and innovations; connectedness

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CONTENT FRAMEWORK

Jewish Values



Raising Mensches

The values found in classic Jewish texts can help bring more kindness and compassion into the world. They are organized around the emotional and social development of the child, beginning with values that help address a child's growing sense of identity and to answer the question, "Who am I?"

The focus is on a child's uniqueness, place within family and community, connection to others, and relationship to the infinite.

Relationship with Oneself

Bein adam le'atzmo

Raising a child is an ongoing developmental challenge that demands constant work. Parents need to nurture and develop their children's growing and unique sense of self, helping them to be aware of their emotions, speech, and behaviors. They need to provide boundaries and rules to help their children develop into their best selves and relate to the world at large.

Emotions: "Who is strong? Those who master their own emotions" (*Pirke Avot* 4:1).

- Learn what you have control over, and how to respond to it
- Experience and express joy¹
- Practice patience and controlling anger²

Speech: What distinguishes us from animals?

- The power of speech to reason, ask questions, and to resolve problems and conflicts (e.g., "Don't hit. Talk.")
- The power of saying positive things vs. negative things when referring to other people, and how such comments affect those who say them, hear them, and are the subjects of them³

Behaviors: Actions over words; walking the walk⁴

- Work on self-improvement (*tikkun atzmi*) as a first step toward *tikkun olam*, improving the world

Uniqueness

- Helping children to recognize, enjoy, and cultivate their strengths and special gifts

Gratitude (*hakarat hatov*): As children grow, they can cultivate their recognition of and gratitude for what they have been given, and be inspired to pay it forward. Judaism provides blessings of thanks to recite, but also creates space for people to personalize expressions of gratitude and appreciation. Recent research shows that fostering a sense of gratitude correlates with a greater sense of happiness, an idea that is reflected in Talmud.

- Recite blessings⁵
- Say thank you
- Appreciate the good in everyone
- Be happy with what you have⁶
- De-emphasize material possessions

Relationship with Others

Bein adam le'chavero

The following traditional values, which parents strive to teach children as well as practice themselves, are in many ways at the heart of the PJ Library Framework. Jewish law and its master narratives model ethical behavior to treat "the other" with respect, compassion, and kindness and to work for justice and equity. Jewish law recognizes the difference between right and wrong, and emphasizes standing up to evil with strength and bravery.

Kindness (*chesed*): Being kind to others is a core value for children – share, take turns, use kind words. Learning to be kind takes practice through actions. Jewish tradition refers to these as acts of loving-kindness (*gemilut chasadim*).⁷

- Friendship: Be a good friend, be a good listener, help and take care of your friends⁸
- *Shalom*: (Peace) Be a peacemaker, helper, and conflict resolver⁹

Compassion (*rachamim*): We all experience hurt, sometimes in our body and sometimes in our spirit. As children develop empathy, they can learn to take practical actions to help others in need. As they grow, children can learn to give of themselves and inspire others to do the same. They begin to understand that everyone will need help at some point.

- Have empathy toward other creatures, both animal and human¹⁰
- Help and honor the elderly¹¹
- Visit the sick¹²
- Welcome guests¹³

1 "Greet every person with a cheerful face." *Pirkei Avot* 1:15

2 "Who is mighty? One who subdues his passions. As it is written, 'One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.'" *Pirkei Avot* 4:1

3 "You shall not go up and down as a slanderer [in some translations: talebearer] among your people." Leviticus 19:16; "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Proverbs 18:21

4 "A Jew is asked to take a leap of action rather than a leap of faith." Abraham Joshua Heschel

5 Talmudic sages held that a special mitzvah is to say 100 blessings (*brachot*) a day, or about one every 10 minutes over the course of 16 hours. Each blessing provides a moment of meditation that can enhance gratitude. *Menachot* 43bb

6 "Who is rich? He who is satisfied with his portion." *Pirkei Avot* 4:1

7 "The world rests upon three things: Torah, works (*avodah*), and acts of loving-kindness (*gemilut chasadim*)." *Pirkei Avot* 1:2

8 "Acquire for yourself a friend." *Pirkei Avot* 1:6

9 "All that is written in the Torah was written for the sake of peace." *Tanhuma Shofetim*⁸

Fairness, justice, and righteousness (*tzedek and tzedakah*): The Hebrew words *tzedek* (justice) and *tzedakah* (charity) have the same root and are interrelated. Giving charity is right and fair. It can be hard for children to learn to be fair and just with others, and to recognize that no single person is more special or important than any other. Everyone has a place and gets a turn. As children learn to be fair, they can begin to recognize and stand up to injustice when they encounter it. And they can grow to embody justice by being righteous and giving of themselves. Children can come to understand and act upon the moral conviction that people of all ages can act individually and collectively to create a more just and kind world.

- “Justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20)
- Treat others as you would have them treat you¹⁴
- Stand up to injustice, such as bullying¹⁵
- Aid the needy – the poor, the refugee, the sick¹⁶
- Give charitably – not only through money and things but by addressing people’s needs
- Return lost objects¹⁷
- Help everyone have equal access to resources

Bravery, strength, and perseverance (*gevurah*): Bravery comes in many forms. For toddlers, it can be learning to walk. For a first-grader, it can be riding a two-wheeler. For an older child, it can be performing with a musical instrument. As children grow, they will see that life will bring hurdles, stumbling blocks, and discouragement. Developing perseverance, independence, and fortitude are necessary to achieve goals and make one’s way through life. Jewish learning recognizes these many kinds of bravery as well as more traditional forms, such as those in classic stories of Moses approaching Pharaoh and David confronting Goliath, and contemporary examples such as Natan Sharansky standing up to the Soviet government.

- Overcome fears
- Have persistence
- Show courage of convictions¹⁸

10 Jewish law prohibits cruelty to a living creature (*tza’ar ba’al hayyim*). For example, see Psalms 145:9; Sefer Hahinnuch, Mitzvah 186; Deuteronomy 22:10

11 “You shall honor the face of the elderly.” Leviticus 19:32

12 The mitzvah of visiting the sick (*bikkur cholim*) has multiple Biblical and Talmudic references, with the oldest appearing in Genesis 18, in which three angels visit Abraham after Isaac’s circumcision. For more examples, see Leviticus Rabba 34; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah 335:1

Relationship with the Divine

(*bein adam la makom*)

When children ask questions about God, many parents feel unprepared to answer. What if the very concept of God proves difficult for adults, but they want to offer their children an answer? The notion of being created in the divine image is central in Judaism, and can inspire people to take on godly traits, explore creativity, and transcend less noble tendencies. PJ Library seeks to share books that present God and godliness through simple stories from the Jewish tradition.

Awe and wonder in creation (*ma’aseh bereishit*):

- Recognize the splendor, divine, and beauty of nature and the mysteries of life and the universe

Humans are created in God’s image (*b’tzelem elohim*)

- Appreciate and respect the uniqueness of every individual
- Walk in God’s ways (*lalechet bidrachav*): Visit the sick, clothe the poor, be kind and compassionate, stand up for the oppressed
- Create things in this world that are for the greatest good of all people and creatures

People are God’s partners in taking care of the planet and fixing a broken world (*tikkun olam*)

- Protect and preserve the environment²⁰
- The world is bigger than just our needs or the needs of those with whom we interact regularly
- Address injustice and inequality – frame those actions in a Jewish perspective
- Apply social activism and Jewish values within both Jewish and broader communities

13 The mitzvah of welcoming guests (*hachnasat orchim*) has multiple Biblical and Talmudic references, with the oldest also appearing in Genesis 18 when Abraham welcomes three angels into his tent, and repeated yearly at Passover seders: “Let all who are hungry, come and eat!”

14 “What is hateful to you, do not do to others; that is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary.” Hillel, Babylonian Talmud Shabbath 31a

15 “To be is to stand for.” Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

16 The mitzvah of aiding the needy, or giving *tzedakah*, has multiple Biblical and Talmudic references. For example, see Deuteronomy 15, which states “There need be no poor people among you,” *Pirkei Avot* 2:8; Psalms 41:2

17 The mitzvah of returning lost objects (*hashavat aveidah*) has multiple Biblical and Talmudic references, the oldest appearing in Exodus 23:4: “If you come upon your enemy’s bull or his stray donkey, you shall surely return it to him.” For more examples, see Deuteronomy 22:1, Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 262:1

18 Having courage of one’s convictions, or having strength of the heart (*ometz lev*), is a running theme in Biblical stories – it enabled David to confront Goliath, the Maccabees to battle the Greeks, and Esther to approach Ahashveros.

19 “It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but nor are you free to absolve yourself from it.” *Pirkei Avot* 2:16

20 “God took the human and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” Genesis 2:15

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CONTENT FRAMEWORK

Jewish Cycles



Family Milestones and the Experience of the Jewish Calendar

Here is PJ Library's opportunity to give families scripts and suggestions for celebrating their family's milestone moments, both Jewish and secular. Judaism has an internal cycle that families can incorporate into their lives. The Jewish calendar, with its weekly countdown to Shabbat and its roster of seasonal holidays, provides structure, consistency, rhythm, and routine to help a child acclimate to the world. It not only connects us to our history, it also connects us to the seasons and rhythms of the land, our agricultural heritage, and changes happening within us.



Family Moments and Milestones

All families mark milestone life-cycle events, but they don't all do so in the same way. The first time a child achieves a milestone – such as the first day of school or learning to ride a bike – and the first time a family experiences anything new in a year, such as snowfall or the first night of Hanukkah – is a moment to invoke the intention of the shehechyanu blessing, an opportunity to create meaning and sanctity to that achievement. Many families add their own rituals to create such meaning and sanctity. PJ Library conveys the rituals that so many in its audience are curious about in ways that are authentic, inclusive of diversity, and developmentally appropriate.

Births and birthdays: the arrival of a sibling, baby naming, and welcoming ceremonies

First moments: first day of preschool, developmental milestones

Summer camp

Bar and bat mitzvah celebrations of siblings and other relatives

The relationship between the generations, especially grandparents and grandchildren (*I'dor vador*)

Shabbat

“More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews,” said Ahad Ha’am, the founder of cultural Zionism. During the week, parents are often too busy to spend much time with each other and their children. Families need time to unplug from the outside world and reconnect with each other. Shabbat encourages families to focus on together time.

Prepare for Shabbat: Save the new and the best, invite a special guest, prepare a special treat

Reserve Friday night for Shabbat rituals: ambiance, blessings, songs, and food

Attend a service, traditional or otherwise, marking Shabbat through ritual

Rest and unplug, and discover the positive effects of doing so on community

Shabbat is a time that allows the land to rest and harkens back to the original moment of rest during the story of Creation

Observe the close of Shabbat through Havdalah rituals, setting intentions for the coming week

Shabbat can be a preview of a perfect world to come

Holidays

PJ Library shares with families the history of holidays; their associated objects, symbols, and foods; and the holidays' deeper themes. PJ Library's offerings can serve as easy access points for families to enrich their celebrations and to share the what, why, and how of each holiday.

Rosh Hashanah: Birthday of the world; awe of nature, creation, the universe, and the infinite; serving as partners in creation and stewards of our planet's well-being; the potential for a more just world; renewal; introduction of the shofar, apples and honey, and tashlich

Yom Kippur: Recognizing our mistakes and saying sorry; new chances to reboot and learn from mistakes; the concept of repentance (*teshuvah*)

Sukkot: The sukkah and how it can represent vulnerability; de-emphasizing material possessions; recognizing our and others' history of being homeless and on the move; welcoming guests; the agricultural calendar; bounty and harvest; the ritual importance of the lulav and etrog, Simchat Torah

Hanukkah: The story of the Maccabees and the fight to be true to oneself and not be forced to conform; miracles; symbols and their meaning; light chasing away darkness; lights in our lives

Tu B'Shevat: Birthday of trees; the seven species; planting of trees and their importance; the joys of nature; environmental awareness

Purim: The story of Esther; bravery and standing up to evil; listening to the Megillah (the book of Esther); feeding the poor and giving food to neighbors (*tzedakah and mishloach manot*); costumes; everything being upside down (*ve'nahafoch hu*); the symbolism of masks and uncovering the hidden; noisemakers (groggers); hamantaschen

Passover: Freedom and slavery – what it means to lack control over one's time and actions; the story of Exodus and how it applies through the ages; springtime, liberation, and growth; symbols and their meaning

Shavuot: The giving of the Torah; the importance of laws and rules; the story of Ruth and the role of kindness and loyalty, choosing Judaism, and welcoming the stranger; first fruits



Jewish Objects and Customs

Families will encounter many Jewish symbolic and ritual objects that transcend a particular holiday or time of year. By gaining a deeper understanding of how ritual items are created and telling stories of why they are special, PJ Library books can introduce and contextualize certain objects and rituals for children that act as an early introduction for later encounters and experiences.

- Mezuzah
- Tzedakah box
- Kippah
- Tallit
- Torah
- Kiddush cup
- Shabbat candlesticks
- Jewish family heirlooms
- Food
- Family customs

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CONTENT FRAMEWORK

Jewish Narratives



Parents talk to their children about family – who they are and where they came from. This provides a basic framework for where they are going. Judaism does the same thing. The Jewish story is one of people, places, times, ideas, and ideals. It explains where the Jewish people have been. The overarching story has been told by all generations. PJ Library families – parents and children – are the next generation to write a chapter, and in order to do so they need to know the backstory. They need to know Biblical stories, traditional stories, historical stories, stories of how upstanding people act. In doing so, children and parents will know that the classic Jewish texts contain the collective wisdom and values of our people, which are still relevant to Jewish families today.

Bible

This is the core of the Jewish story, the master narrative, told week after week, year after year, and not just by Jews. Some of these stories are familiar to PJ Library families, some are not. Most have important lessons, and some are just great stories. The Bible remains Judaism's rulebook and moral compass.

Genesis: a rich, story-driven book with a wealth of tales to be told and models to learn from and emulate, including the patriarchs and matriarchs

Exodus: the quintessential story of escape from slavery into freedom; receiving a mission and laws at Sinai; the story of Moses and leadership, of siblings and relationships

Additional points of inspiration can be drawn from other points of the Bible, including Kings and Prophets

Other Jewish Texts

Embedded in the legal code of the Talmud and elsewhere are many fine stories that convey values and challenge, clarify, explain, and interpret Jewish life.

Aggadah and Talmudic stories: Tales of Rabbi Hillel (an impoverished student who became a scholar known for patience, tolerance, and the democratization of Jewish learning) and Rabbi Akiva (who became literate at age 40 and went on to be the greatest rabbi of his generation)

Midrash: A Jewish literary genre that embellishes and re-imagines Biblical stories

Jewish oral literature and folktales: Folklore that spans centuries and continents. Because many of these were originally children's stories, this is an area rich in potential for PJ Library content.

Jewish People and Places

Historically, as Jews were exiled and moved throughout the world, Jewish communities encountered other cultures. Jewish stories reflect these rich convergences and highlight the fascinating diversity of Jews and their communities. Much can be learned from the lives of everyday people, scholars, artists, and scientists, and how they tried to improve the world no matter where they lived.

Jewish people: We all need heroes, and Judaism's run the gamut from Biblical heroes to contemporary American figures – anywhere people who lived (or continue to live) their lives with Jewish values and to whom children can look to for inspiration. Some are famous, but some are everyday characters.

Jewish places: Due to the Diaspora, Jews have lived all over the world. As such, Jews have made a mark on many cultures and have been influenced by those same cultures.

Jewish American history: America holds the largest population of Jews outside of Israel and is a place where Jews, while still a minority, have generally felt welcome and integral to the fabric of the nation.

Diaspora communities: As Jews have spread out across the globe, different communities have formed – Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi, Beta Israel – and different languages as well, such as Yiddish and Ladino.

Cultural life: Jews have deep roots in the arts, sciences, and many other fields, not to mention humor, and cultures all over the world have both influenced Jewish participation in these areas and been influenced by them.

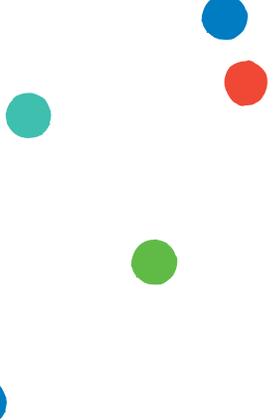
Israel

Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and is a land with a rich history. The story of the Jewish people is intertwined with the land and its history, from Biblical times to the present. Today Israel is a vibrant democracy, a cultural and artistic center, and a world leader in scientific and technological innovation. Judaism celebrates a connection to Israel and promotes a sense of responsibility to the country and its people.

The people: their stories, their diversity, and their languages. Israel's inhabitants include Jews from every continent, Arabs and other people of multiple religious backgrounds, refugees and immigrants, heroes and everyday folk.

The geography: *Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel) is the land of the Bible; a land of valleys, mountains, seas, desert, and cities; a land that is dynamic and constantly changing

Well-known Israelis: founders, innovators, inventors, artists, musicians, actors, dancers, athletes



About PJ Library

PJ Library seeks to engage Jewish families with children from birth through 8 years with Jewish ideas and conversations through the introduction of books, music, and other media. PJ Library aims to enhance Jewish identity, increase engagement with Jewish life and community, and build a more vibrant Jewish community.

For many, PJ Library serves as an entry point to Jewish life. Through PJ Library books, families learn about the values, ideals, and traditions that have sustained and enriched the Jewish people for millennia. Through stories, families gain familiarity with Jewish holidays, customs, and life cycle events and discover how other Jews have lived around the world, in both the past and present.

PJ Library introduces readers to basic principles and aspirations of Judaism, sourced in the Torah, and expanded and developed by generations of Jews. PJ Library validates for families that their own approaches to Judaism fit in the greater mosaic and longstanding traditions of Jewish life.



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