



What makes a mensch?

Honorable Menschen

In Yiddish, the language once spoken by millions of Jews across Eastern and Central Europe, the word mensch literally means “person.” The fact that it is so often used to refer to a good person suggests a hopeful view of humanity. In this story, Estie does “not always like people,” which may be why she often imagines herself to be an animal, but at our best we humans are caring, big-hearted, and kind. Sometimes children (and, okay, grown-ups too) need a little reminding, but every day is a new day to be menschen (plural of mensch) -- in other words, our best selves. To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/estiethemensch.

HANDS ON!

**Be an Animal!
(And a Mensch.)**

Estie pretends to be many different animals in this story – but she’s also a mensch. How would you pretend to be a . . .

. . . chimp? Pretend to be a chimp as you pick up your toys.

. . . turtle? Pretend to be a turtle as you get into bed.

. . . elephant? Pretend to be an elephant as you help your parents carry groceries.

. . . bird? Pretend to be a bird as give your grandmother a hug.

You can do kind and helpful things and still use your imagination!

The Way to Be

When the grown-ups in this story remind Estie to zai a mensch (Yiddish for “be a mensch”), they clarify that they mean a well-behaved person. Good manners help pave the way for a functional society, one where we look out for one another. The Hebrew phrase for good manners is derech eretz, which literally means “the way of the land” but colloquially refers to ethical behavior – a humane way of being human. One popular Jewish idea, derech eretz kadma laTorah, says that basic ethics underlie all philosophical and religious teachings. In other words: zai a mensch!

A Natural Inclination

When Petie’s ice cream falls, Estie’s first response is to try to make him laugh by pretending, yet again, to be an animal. When that doesn’t work, she tries something else: she shares her ice cream with him, a true act of kindness (in Hebrew, gemilut hasadim). Estie might need a little coaching on how to be polite, but when she realizes her friend is sad, she instinctively knows just what to do. “That’s my Estie,” says her grandma. “She’s a real mensch.”

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

ESTIE behaves like a mensch when she shares her ice cream with Petie. When have you been kind to others and behaved like a mensch?

ESTIE likes pretending to be animals for her different moods. Which animal would you pretend to be when you’re mad? How about when you’re happy? Can you act it out?

THE grown-ups keep telling Estie to be a mensch and have good manners. What do you do when you are trying to have good manners?