



Dr. Esperanto and the Lan-

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{ **How do words connect or divide us?** }

A Bridge, Not a Tower

Back in the time of the biblical Tower of Babel, everyone on earth spoke the same language, and people decided to build “a tower that reached heaven.” Taking this as an act of arrogance, God scattered the people around the world – and also split their single language into many different languages, making it harder for humans to work together. Thousands of years later, Leyzer Zamenhoff tried to reverse the Tower of Babel story by creating one language that anyone could understand – a bridge between cultures. This act was not arrogant, but rather aimed at building a more peaceful world. These ancient and modern stories have a lot to teach each other. To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/dresperanto.

Sailing through Storms

We can link the story of Dr. Esperanto to another Jewish text: the story of Noah’s ark. In Hebrew, the word for “ark” is teivah. Teivah can also mean “a word”! What’s the connection? Noah’s teivah (ark) was sent from place to place in search of dry land. So, too, words sail out of our mouths in the hopes of finding a good place to land – that is, other people to hear and understand them. Just like the rainbow at the end of the Noah story, words are powerful reminders of the possibility of peace and new beginnings, even after a storm.

Hoping for Hope

The name of Leyzer’s language, Esperanto, means “one who hopes.” Leyzer understood the importance of working hard and staying positive; his motto was Ni laboru kaj esperu, “Let us work and hope.” Even after his disapproving father burned the first bunch of papers containing his new language, Leyzer kept working and stayed hopeful – and the second time he wrote down all the words, his language was “even better”! Improving the world and hoping for the future are important Jewish values. The national anthem of Israel, “Hatikvah,” means “the hope.” By the time the first World Congress of Esperanto met in 1905, there were hundreds of people who “share[d] a dream” of making a more peaceful world. things. When we’re grateful for our bodies, we’re celebrating what unites all of us as people. (Even the dog in this book seems grateful!)

HANDS ON!

Create Your Own Words

In this story, Leyzer is inspired to create kind words, since sharp words “cut him like stones.” He begins by borrowing words and changing them. Can you make up five new words this way? Extra credit for kind words!

For example, maybe borrow from “hug” and “snuggle” to create “huggle”.... [illo could be someone holding a small child]

...or mash up “sweet” and “fuzzy” to create “swuzzy”... [illo: kitten?]

...or combine “warm” and “comfy” to create something womfy! Too far? Give it a try yourself. Creating a new language may not be easy, but it’s fun!

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

WHAT difficulties might you run into if you tried to invent a new language?

HAVE you ever had to start over on a project like Leyzer did after his papers went up in flames? What kept you motivated to continue?

DO you think it would be a good thing for the whole world to speak one language, or not? Why?