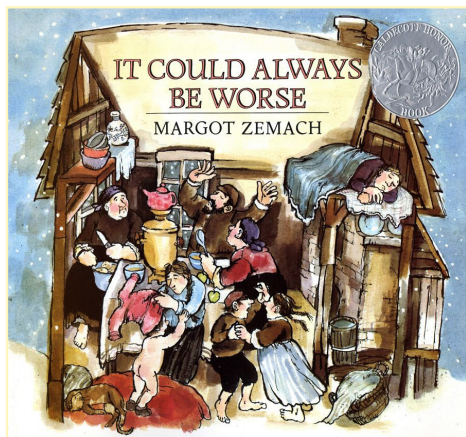


It Could Always Be Worse

written by
Margot Zemach

illustrated by
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{ **How can we create peace?** }

A Matter of Perspective

Clean dishes, folded laundry, a made bed – that’s all great, but the most important bit of housekeeping is the Jewish value of *shalom bayit*, Hebrew for “peace in the home.” In this story, a “poor unfortunate man” feels his house is cramped and chaotic. In the end, he didn’t need a new house. He needed a new perspective – a change on the inside, not the outside. Once the man is able to adjust his attitude, boom: he’s no longer poor or unfortunate! To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/itcouldalwaysbeworse.

Who Is Rich?

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Ancestors, an ancient collection of rabbinic sayings) says, “Who is rich? Those who are content with what they have.” It’s okay to want things, like ice cream on a hot day or a special gift for our birthday, but we should also take time to be grateful for what we already have – especially the care and love of our family. Psychological studies suggest that the early sages of *Pirkei Avot* were on to something: the more gratitude we feel, the happier we tend to be.

A Tale for the Ages

Does this story feel familiar? This famous folktale has been retold countless times. Folktales often express deep human truths, which is why they tend to pop up again and again. Jews have lived virtually everywhere, so Jewish folklore stems from all corners of the globe, and our stories often reflect those different places. This version comes from the Ashkenazi community, the Jews who settled throughout Central and Eastern Europe for centuries. It highlights life in the *shtetl* (Yiddish for “little town”), where multiple generations tended to live together in modest homes, and the rabbi was a trusted resource for people’s problems – even problems like this one!

HANDS ON!

Make It Worse (and then Better!)

Want to try this out at home? Don’t worry – we’re not going to suggest that you bring chickens and cows into your house (phew!). Build a tiny house instead.

Supplies

Small cardboard box
Paints
Scissors
Dolls, dollhouse furniture, animal figurines, toy cars...

Turn the box on its side and you will have a roof, floor, and three walls. Cut windows into the walls, and decorate the house to your taste. Now fill it!

Don’t feel the need to limit yourself to dolls and dollhouse furniture. In the spirit of this story, go ahead and cram the house with all sorts of things...and then see how nice it is when you take them all out again.

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

TURN to a page in the book that shows the house looking very crowded. What sounds might you hear, if you were in this house/ What do you think some of the people or animals on this page are thinking?

THIS book gives is set in a *shtetl*, a small town in central or eastern Europe where many Jews lived long ago. Look closely at the illustrations. How can you tell that this takes place long ago?

HOW do you think you would you feel if you lived in the house in this story? Do you think you’d feel differently at the end than you did at the beginning?