

# Sifriyat Pijama Books Travel the



As PJ Library expands across the globe, we are constantly on the lookout for more stories that will speak to Jewish families everywhere. Some stories simply don't translate well from country to country (a story about American Thanksgiving may be understood in Peoria, Illinois, but not so much in Perth, Australia). Still, many books — especially those based in Jewish values and history — transcend borders. Lately, Jewish homes as far-flung as Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg, and Hong Kong have been receiving books originally published in one particular country: Israel.

It makes sense if you think about it. Where better to find rich Jewish stories, both ancient and contemporary, than the Jewish homeland? Israel's storytellers may have been born in Israel or may have made *aliyah* by immigrating to Israel from another country; they might be telling a story about Israel, or the land may be a subtle backdrop. Regardless, the glue that holds it all together is the same as what holds PJ Library families together: Jewish history and values. And this universal bond is most apparent in PJ Library's sister program in Israel, Sifriyat Pijama.

Operated by Keren Grinspoon Israel (Hebrew for "Grinspoon Israel Foundation"), Sifriyat Pijama distributes Hebrew children's books to kids through school. Once they read and learn about the books in the classroom, kids then bring the books home to share with their families, echoing the model of family storytime reading promoted by PJ Library.

But unlike PJ Library's lineup, you won't find many Sifriyat Pijama books about Jewish holidays. Because Jewish holidays are observed nationally in Israel

and part of everyday life for Israeli children (not to mention that Israeli kids are out of school during these times), the Hebrew books in the program instead focus on Jewish culture and heritage. This makes them perfect for translating; though Hebrew may be foreign to readers in other countries, the Jewish values expressed in Sifriyat Pijama stories can be understood in any language.

Though Hebrew children's books have been translated into other languages for a while now, as of 2021, the translation process is coming directly to (and from) PJ Library. This year, PJ Publishing — the publishing branch of PJ Library — is releasing English translations of Sifriyat Pijama books that were initially released in Hebrew, bringing a new and exciting venture to PJ Publishing and the English-speaking PJ Library programs. Two of the first releases will include *Eat, Coat, Eat!*, a retelling of a traditional Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) folktale that teaches readers not to judge a book by its cover (so to speak), and *Do You Like Being a Tree?*, an illustrated version of the classic Israeli song written by Datia Ben-Dor in which a child asks a tree what it's like to be a tree. These stories create a bridge between different cultures with ideas that all kids can understand.

As Hebrew children's books make their way from Israel to other countries around the world, it's an exciting time of growth for Sifriyat Pijama and Jewish children's book publishing in Israel. But even more importantly, these books connect Israeli children with other children around the world, expanding PJ Library's mission of a universal Jewish book experience for families across the globe.



## WHY IS THE ARTWORK ON THE HEBREW EDITION FLIPPED?

Hebrew is read from right to left, so Hebrew books are published with the spine on the right side. Illustrations are often drawn with characters looking in certain directions to help the story move with the text or stop you as you're reading. When translating a book to or from Hebrew, we want to maintain as much of the original intention as possible, which means determining which images need to flip for the story to make sense.

# Translating from Hebrew

Here are just three popular children's books initially written in Hebrew and published in Israel that are now being translated into Spanish, Portuguese, German, and English for PJ Library as the stories make their way into the global Jewish world.



## **Tali Under the Table**

Written by Tamar Weiss-Gabbay  
Illustrated by Zoya Cherkassky  
*Translated into Spanish and Portuguese*

This story is actually adapted from a famous tale told by the 18th-century sage Rabbi Nachman of Breslov: “The Rooster Prince.” In it, a young prince believes he is a rooster. His royal parents try everything to convince him he’s human. Finally, a wise visitor accepts that the prince is a rooster and pretends that he, too, is a rooster. Once the prince trusts the wise visitor is his friend, the visitor is able to coax the prince back into behaving like a human, even if he’s still a rooster in his heart.

In this contemporary version of the tale, which is also featured in an episode of PJ Library’s podcast *Have I Got a Story for You!*, young Tali feels so prickly that she decides she’s a porcupine and plops herself under the table. Her cousin Shira accepts Tali’s mood and joins her, giving Tali the space she needs to behave like her human self again.



## **Outside My Door**

Written and illustrated by Gil-ly Alon Curiel  
*Translated into English*

A small boy takes a walk through his neighborhood to visit his grandmother. At first glance, this neighborhood could be almost anywhere. But take a closer look: A solar water heater on the roof shows that we’re looking at a very sunny place. There is an abundance of apartment buildings rather than stand-alone houses, many of which sit above ground-level stores. And then there are the signs, newspapers, welcome mats – all in Hebrew. That clinches it: We’re in Israel, a place that feels both familiar and unique.



## **The Juice Tree**

Written by Yossi Maaravi  
Illustrated by Shahar Kober  
*Translated into Spanish, Portuguese, and German*

In this story, a tree provides people with the most delicious juice ever, but only when people take care of it in return. For centuries, Jews have used tree metaphors to express our values. The Book of Proverbs compares the Torah to a tree (“It is a tree of life to all who hold on to it, and happy are those who hold it fast” [3:18]). The Talmud tells of Honi, who wonders why an old man is planting a carob tree if he will not live to eat its fruit. The man replies, “As my fathers planted for me, so I shall plant for my children.” Every time we share a bit of our tradition or heritage with our children, we are planting for a rich future.