

The Chocolate King

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How do we share something new?



A Distinct Flavor

This story is set in France, but Benjamin’s family is originally from Spain, where for centuries Sephardic Jews (Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent) lived in harmony with their neighbors. When Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, they scattered to other countries around Europe, the Middle East, and the New World. Wherever they settled, Sephardic Jews brought their distinctive Jewish flavors with them – and shared those flavors with their new communities. To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/chocolateking.

“King” Grandpa

While there are some famous kings in Jewish history, Judaism isn’t big on monarchies. According to Jewish tradition, Jews avoid bowing down to any human being, saving that honor for God. In this story, though, Grandpa is king! L’dor vador (Hebrew for “from generation to generation”) refers to the value of passing down family customs and culture from one generation to the next. Marco eventually crowns Benjamin as the next Chocolate King, creating a dynastic tradition that will have a delicious result throughout the land.

Strangers in Strange Lands

Benjamin’s story is unique in some ways and common in others. Jews have long found themselves moving from one country to another, fleeing persecution and pursuing opportunity. When Benjamin’s family first arrives in France, no one wants to buy their chocolate, which leaves them quite poor. This is similar to the experience of 19th-century Eastern European Jews who moved to the United States to work in sweatshops, or highly educated Soviet Jews who became street cleaners in Israel. It takes time, hard work, and a bit of luck to find one’s way in a new land.

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

BENJAMIN’S family leaves Spain and moves to a new country. What do you think might be difficult about moving to a new place? What might be nice about it?

BENJAMIN’S family worries that no one will want to buy their chocolate because no one wants to try new things. Can you think of a time when you were afraid to try something new? What happened when you finally tried it?

THE back of this book contains a quote from the Talmud (the core collection of rabbinic writings): “Even this is for the good.” What happens in this book that seems bad at first, but then ends up being good?

HANDS ON!

Make a Hot Chocolate Kit

Benjamin introduces the King of France to chocolate in a very messy way. You can share hot chocolate with a friend, too – but you don’t have to wear it! Make a gift kit for someone who could use a sweet treat.

Supplies:

- 1 quart/litre jar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup/95 grams powdered milk
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup/95 grams unsweetened cocoa powder
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup/95 grams powdered sugar
- Chocolate chips
- Mini marshmallows

Layer all the ingredients in the jar and top with a lid. To make a serving of hot chocolate, blend all ingredients evenly. Put a half-cup of the mixture in a mug, add 8 ounces/255 ml of hot water, and stir it up! It’ll be perfectly sweetened and ready to share.