

Innovation & Inspiration

with the Help of a Book



EDUCATOR AND PJ LIBRARY PARENT Jared Matas is determined to teach children how they can make an impact on the world, and a PJ Library book is helping him make that goal a reality.

When Matas served as director of **STEAM*** innovation at Boston's Jewish Community Day School, he felt something was missing from the curriculum. "Our kids got really good at building things like bridges and towers out of Popsicle sticks," he says. "But it nagged at me, working in a Jewish day school with a commitment to contributing positively to the world, that this work wasn't really helping anyone."

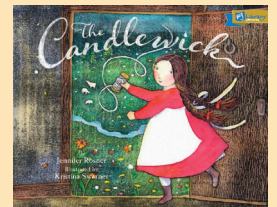
That changed when he read the PJ Library book *The Candlewick*, written by Jennifer Rosner and published by PJ Publishing, PJ Library's own imprint. While *The Candlewick* is set more than a century ago in a *shtetl* in Eastern Europe, the story is still relevant today. A child named Ruthie visits her friend Bayla, and since Bayla is deaf and cannot hear her knocking at the door, Ruthie has to be creative to let her friend know that she's there.

Matas realized that the story could spark children's imaginations with a real-world example. "When we read the story out loud with the students," Matas explains, "we stopped ... and said, 'Well, we're engineers, and we want to help. What can we invent to help a friend know Ruthie is at the door?' That way, instead of presenting an abstract engineering challenge, it becomes very relevant. This is a real problem that people have."

Students were eager to find a way to help. The group of kids, comprising kindergartners through fourth graders, stepped up to the challenge and brainstormed all sorts of creative ideas, such as a doormat that sends an alert to the person's watch when a visitor steps on the mat or a device that releases a scent when someone knocks on the door. They suggested using strings, levers, or even trained animals to let the deaf person know when someone is at the door. "This planted the seed for younger students to think about how accommodating the world is — or isn't — for people with disabilities," Matas says. "We want even kindergartners to feel empowered to solve those problems."

Since Matas' experiment, other organizations — synagogues, supplementary schools, and other day schools — have started introducing similar innovative programs. And Matas is still reading *The Candlewick* to inspire children — and adults — to think critically and come up with creative solutions to real problems. He knows something about reading PJ Library books repeatedly: He has young children of his own. But he doesn't mind rereading this book. "It's such a moving story that I love reading it over and over." And just like every other PJ Library book, it's making a difference.

***STEAM**
(science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics)



The Candlewick
Age 6
Written by Jennifer Rosner
Illustrated by Kristina Swarner

At the heart of this story lies the friendship between Ruthie, a little girl who loves to knit, and Bayla, a young woman who makes candles. Bayla is deaf and cannot hear when Ruthie or potential customers knock on her door. Creative Ruthie comes up with a solution, just as she did in *The Mitten String*, the first book to feature this sweet friendship.