

Lessons I Learned from PJ Library

I've been receiving PJ Library books for as long as I can remember. Their lessons have stayed with me over the years.

BY MICAH BLACHMAN

Editor's note: PROOF magazine is proud to work with a variety of talented writers. Here we're thrilled to welcome PJ Library subscriber Micah Blachman, age 10, as a PROOF contributor reflecting on some of his favorite books.

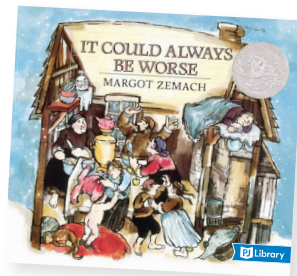
When you outgrow clothes, you can always look back and appreciate the designs. You can also do that with PJ Library books. The "design" for PJ Library books is the part that sticks with you years after you've finished the book – the Jewish value.

I'm 10 years old, and I've been receiving PJ Library books for practically my whole life (I now choose my own books through PJ Our Way, PJ Library's extension program for kids ages 9–12). Certain PJ Library books have stuck with me over time because I can still relate to the values. Here are a few I'd like to share with you.

It Could Always Be Worse (Age 3)

Written and illustrated by Margot Zemach
Published by Macmillan

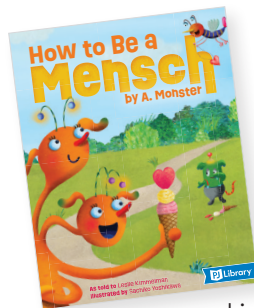
A classic Yiddish folktale, this book teaches us about gratitude. At first, a man is upset by how noisy his family is, which makes life in his crowded one-room hut unbearable. But then his rabbi tells him to bring his goat, cow, and chickens into the



Favorite books can take on new meaning over time.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICAH BLACHMAN

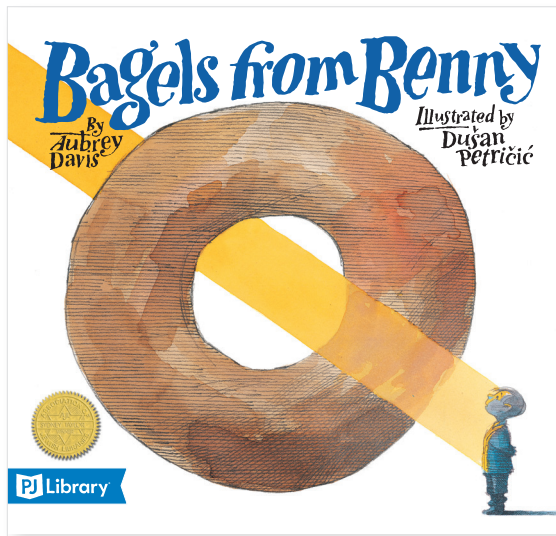
house, which makes everything worse. Once he has something to compare his situation to, his perception changes and he is able to be grateful for what he previously had. Bad and good are relative and depend on your perspective. As a pianist, pieces that looked hard to me years ago now feel easy because I've now done much harder things. When compared to the past, my perception is different.



How to Be a Mensch by A. Monster (Age 4)

Written by Leslie Kimmelman
Illustrated by Sachiko Yoshikawa
Published by Apples and Honey Press

This book teaches us the values of kindness and inclusion. Through whimsical pictures of helpful monsters, this book illustrates the point that anyone can be nice, no matter their appearance. By not judging monsters (or, in the applicable lesson, people), you are being kind. This book connects to the proverb, "don't judge a book by its cover." It shows us that just because someone is different from us doesn't mean we should treat them differently. We all need kindness and sometimes a helping hand. Earlier this year at my school, we welcomed Israeli children (one of whom was in my class) whose schools had closed. It felt really rewarding to help people in need.



Bagels from Benny (Age 5)
Written by Aubrey Davis
Illustrated by Dušan Petričić
Published by Kids Can Press

In this book, Benny's grandfather, a baker, teaches Benny a lesson about giving thanks. Although Benny's grandfather is the one who bakes the bagels, he teaches Benny that he is not the one deserving of thanks; instead, Benny should thank God. To do so, each week Benny asks his grandfather to give him a big bag of bagels, which he then puts into the synagogue's holy ark. Little does he know, a poor man visits the ark weekly and takes the bagels to eat. On the surface, this book teaches the lesson that feeding the hungry helps make the world a better place. But there are other lessons too. When Benny's grandfather first sees him putting bagels in the ark, he yells at him because he doesn't know Benny's intentions. But what Benny was doing wasn't bad — he was just trying to thank God for the bagels. We can't always make judgments based on our initial instinct. For me, each year I am afraid to get a flu shot (mostly because I don't remember how much it hurt or didn't hurt the previous year). But then when I get it, it hurts for a second, and I realize that it wasn't nearly as painful as I anticipated. Sometimes assumptions turn out not to be true.

These books have taken on new meaning for me now that I'm older. No matter your age, you can still take out your old PJ Library books and see how their Jewish values fit in your life! 📖

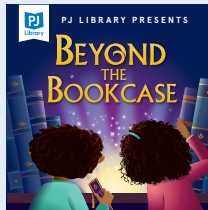
Micah Blachman lives in New York and is going into sixth grade. He enjoys crossword puzzles, Scrabble, and writing short stories.

LISTEN IN FOR MORE PJ LIBRARY

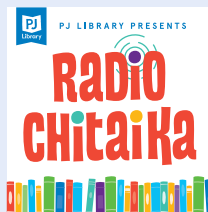
Kids of all ages love PJ Library books. Did you know they can also put on their headphones and tune in to PJ Library's original podcasts? Children (and their families) are discovering even more storytelling joy on PJ Library's award-winning podcast network, PJ Library Presents. In fact, families have downloaded PJ Library podcasts over 1 million times!



Afternoons with Mimi is a storytime podcast that invites young children to listen as everyone's favorite grandmother — Mimi — reads PJ Library books, Jewish folktales, and original stories designed to capture the imagination. *Afternoons with Mimi* is now a two-time Webby Awards honoree!



Beyond the Bookcase, a fantasy series for older children, allows listeners to follow a group of friends as they adventure to a magical land where familiar fairy tales come to life. *Beyond the Bookcase* is a 2023 Signal Awards silver winner!



Radio ChitaiKa is PJ Library's new Russian- and Ukrainian-language podcast. Families can enjoy 10 episodes featuring familiar Jewish folktales and favorite PJ Library books, all in Russian or Ukrainian.



PJ Library podcasts are available on the Yoto Player, the Kids Listen app, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. You can also hear episodes at pjlibrary.org/podcast.



Does your child understand Hebrew? Check out **Yarden and Didi in Pajamas**, a new Hebrew-language children's podcast produced by the Israel Broadcasting Authority in partnership with Sifriyat Pijama, PJ Library's sister program in Israel. Stories, songs, and poems — in Hebrew — enliven each episode. [Scan the QR code to listen!](#)