

# *Encouraging* WORDS

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## **IT'S NOT EASY TO WRITE A 300-WORD BOOK.**

I know: I've done it. Writing the article you're reading right now was a piece of cake in comparison.

When you're working with so few words, each one counts more than ever — and young audiences are, shall we say, easily distracted. So how does PJ Library offer extra encouragement to writers who might have a Jewish story or two knocking around in their heads? We've got a few tricks up our sleeve.

In summer 2016 PJ Library announced the **AUTHOR INCENTIVE AWARD**. Every time the book selection committee accepts a new, unpublished story submitted to us (up to December 31, 2018), the author receives \$2,000 for a PJ Library book and \$5,000 for a PJ Our Way book. This award is truly an award. It is separate from and in addition to any other payment received by the author from a publisher. And anyone, including authors, agents, and publishers, can submit stories. This incentive has sparked conversations with new authors and created opportunities to promote PJ Library with the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), Jewish Book Council, and *Publisher's Weekly*.

We're not doing this alone. In addition to our own incentive award, PJ Library has partnered with the SCBWI on the new **JEWISH STORIES AWARD**. To encourage the creation of more high-quality Jewish children's literature, an award of \$2,500 will go to the

author of the most promising manuscript that furthers PJ Library's mission. Submissions were accepted from September 1, 2017, through October 31, 2017, and are in the process of being judged by an expert panel. The winner will be announced at the SCBWI Annual Winter Conference in 2018 in New York City.

In August 2017, we also collaborated with the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, MA, to host **TENT: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**, a week-long summer retreat for 20 emerging or midcareer authors. The goal was to create a cohort of peers who understand PJ Library and its mission — and if they left inspired to write a manuscript or two for us, so much the better.

Are these added incentives working? I can tell you this much for certain: We Book Selection Committee members are reading more new manuscripts than ever before. At time of publishing the book selection committee is on track to receive more than 1,000 manuscripts in 2017 — nearly double the amount received in 2016. Personally, while the numbers are impressive, I am thrilled to see more diverse families and playful stories in the pages of PJ Library books.

The results will bear out in the next several years. If you notice more titles that you've never seen before coming in the mail, that'll be a sign that authors of Jewish books are feeling more encouraged than ever to write, and write, and then write some more.