



# KIBITZERS AND FOOLS

Written and Illustrated by Simms Taback

*Care to learn a bit Yiddish? With a little chutzpah and a lot of charm, this book – written and illustrated by the late, great Simms Taback – will give you just a shtickle of the colorful, expressive language of Ashkenazi Jewry.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Jews have a reputation for being funny. Many favorite comedians are Jewish, from Groucho Marx and Mel Brooks to Jerry Seinfeld and Sarah Silverman. Jewish humor often plays with language, pokes fun at those in power, and ponders big questions. In Eastern Europe, humor helped the Jews cope with the hardships of poverty and oppression. “A joke is a half-truth” goes an old Yiddish saying. The short, silly stories in this book are funny because they each say something crazy but somehow true.

Jokes reveal a lot about a culture and its values. The stories in this book show characters who like to pick ideas apart. Where else do we see these kinds of discussions? In the Talmud (the core collection of rabbinic writings), which records the arguments of ancient rabbis as they analyzed and playfully engaged with Torah. Even in jokes, Jewish people value intense thinking, deep conversation, and logic (even backwards logic!).

The Yiddish words sprinkled through the book are funny, too. Yiddish, once spoken by millions of Eastern European Jews, is filled with expressive noises that sound like shushing and gargling. For many families, using Yiddish words creates a warm feeling of connection to earlier generations who used this vocabulary. It seems that author Simms Taback felt the same: look at the family pictures on the title pages and the opening scene with his *zayda* (grandfather)!

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

In this book, Simms Taback is sharing tales from his *zayda*. You and your family can make your own homemade book of funny stories. You’ll need paper, something to write with, a stapler, and of course, your sense of humor.

- Invite kids to write and/or illustrate their favorite jokes or silly stories.
- Write down your own funny tales or memories.
- Ask friends and family to share their favorite crazy yarns.
- Include a glossary of words that make you laugh, in English, Yiddish, or any language.
- The sayings on this book’s endpapers are a bit like fortunes. Make up your own sayings, or save the papers from fortune cookies to put in your book.
- Add photos of loved ones making faces, striking poses, or dressed in costume.
- Put everything together in a scrapbook or just staple the pages together to make a fun book you can read again and again!

*Mazel tov* (congrats)! You’ll end up with a *shayna* (beautiful) and *meshugge* (crazy) keepsake to treasure until your kids grow up to be *zaydas* and *bubbes* (grandmothers)!