



What makes Israel special?

A Moving Story

At the heart of this story is a family’s move to Israel. For many, moving to the Jewish state (also called making *aliyah*, from the Hebrew for “going up”) can feel like coming home. Perhaps the first example of aliyah comes from the Book of Genesis, when Abraham and his family journeyed to live in the Land of Canaan. Immigrants to Israel have been arriving throughout the centuries, with waves of immigration occurring since the birth of the modern state. A recent example of mass immigration was Operation Magic Carpet (1949–1950), when nearly the entire population of 49,000 Yemenite Jews was airlifted to Israel. (Most of these people had never seen an airplane, yet they believed the prophecy from the Book of Isaiah that the children of Israel would return on “wings.”) In 1991, Operation Solomon transported 14,325 Jews to Israel from Ethiopia — in a single day! Today Israeli agencies assist new residents — many of them children like Abby — to learn Hebrew, find work, schools, and housing, and adjust to a new and sometimes very different life.

Far-Flung Family

First Rain is a universal story of relatives separated by distance. A few generations ago, many Jewish families endured geographical divides when some family members headed to North America to escape persecution while others stayed behind in Europe. Still, the norm was for extended families to live near each other, sometimes even in the same household. Today it is common for children to be separated from relatives — not only grandparents but also aunts, uncles, cousins, or even a parent. Jewish holidays are a time when far-flung family members may make a point to reunite, but as Abby and her grandmother prove, you don’t have to wait for a special occasion to spend quality time “together.” Phone calls, letters, texts, and video chats are great ways to bridge the distance.

Praying for Rain

Israel really has two distinct seasons — summer, which is hot and rainless, and winter, which kicks off in October when the rains return. The change in seasons happens to coincide with a lesser-known Jewish holiday called *Shemini Atzeret*, which comes right on the heels of a string of autumn holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. One special thing about Shemini Atzeret? It includes a prayer for rain! Farmers in ancient times and today depend on rain for a healthy, vital harvest. Abby and her grandma share wonderful rainy memories of their own — and this time the rain answers *their* prayers. To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/firstrain.

HANDS ON!

Make a Welcome Bag

When Abby and her family first land in Israel, they receive a warm welcome. When someone new moves to your community, put together a welcome bag.



Supplies

- Plain paper bag
- Markers
- Stickers



Decorate the bag however you wish. You might want to write “Welcome!” or “We’re happy to meet you!” somewhere on the bag. Now fill it with anything you think the family might enjoy, such as flyers from local restaurants, homemade treats, fruit, a small houseplant, or a bouquet of fresh flowers. If possible, drop the bag off in person so you can meet your new friends!

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

- What do you think it would be like to live in Israel?
- How do you stay in touch with friends and relatives who live far away?
- Have there been times when you’ve hoped it would rain? Why?