



LITTLE RED RUTHIE

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Ruthie is walking through the woods to spend Hanukkah at Grandmother's house, carrying a basket of fragrant latkes. When a latke-loving wolf crosses her path, Ruthie has to think quickly!

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Little Red Ruthie creatively joins the beloved story of Little Red Riding Hood with that of Hanukkah. In her frightening encounters with the wolf, Ruthie draws great courage from the Hanukkah story, determining to be “brave as a Maccabee.”

The Maccabees were a family of Jewish priests who lived in the land of Israel during the Syrian-Greek occupation more than 2,000 years ago. The Greeks believed they held the key to an enlightened way of life and wanted to impose their cultural views on the Jewish people. They were willing to absorb some aspects of Judaism, but sought to force the Jews to discard those they found incompatible with their culture – namely the Jewish commandments of the *Shabbat* (Sabbath), *Rosh Chodesh* (sanctification of the months), and circumcision. The Maccabees understood the dangers of allowing their treasured Jewish way of life to be mixed with the values of the Greeks. They led a fierce revolt, ultimately driving their oppressors from the land.

Sometimes the battles we face in life are as clear as a wolf standing in front of us, threatening to eat us up. At other times, the attack is more subtle, aimed at the very core of who we are. Like Ruthie, the story of the Maccabees can give us the courage to boldly stand up for ourselves and our most precious beliefs.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Everyone loves a hero. Whether a superhero in a cape or real-life heroes like the Maccabees in the Hanukkah story, we can't help but be drawn to someone who fights the bad guys and saves the day. It goes without saying that young children especially relate to this theme. It can be easy to think that brave heroes are never afraid; however, *Ruthie* shows us in this story that we can feel fear in an uncomfortable situation, but decide not to let that fear hold us back.

Encourage your children to share their thoughts about what it means to be brave. Can they think of a time when they were afraid to do something, such as a new activity or talking to a new person? Did they decide to give it a try even though they were unsure? How did they feel afterward? You might also talk about fear. Though fears sometimes need to be conquered, a feeling of fear can also be a signal that there is danger and that we need to look for safety. If your children are willing, ask them to share something they fear. (You might share some of your own fears, too, if appropriate.) Help them to identify which ones could be opportunities to summon courage and stand up to fear, and which ones might call for caution. Helping your little ones identify their feelings and make distinctions between different types of fear will help them navigate more complex situations as they grow.