

"I was a stranger in a strange land" – Books and Teaching Resources for Jewish Children and Tweens on Immigration & Refugees

Key:

-  Sephardi, Mizrachi, or Ethiopian Jewish immigration story
-  Set in North America in the 1940s
-  Multigenerational family story
-  Universal (not explicitly Jewish)
- ✓ True stories or about real people

[Across So Many Seas](#) by Ruth Behar

Ages 9–13

Beginning with the Inquisition and the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and spanning over 500 years, this powerful historical novel by Behar relates the journeys and discoveries of four young girls from different generations of the same family.

Resources: [Educator Guide](#) (Penguin Random House) | [Author Interview](#) (Kveller) | [Book Playlist](#) (Ruth Behar)

[Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909](#) ✓ by Michelle Markel. Illustrated by Melissa Sweet.

Ages 5–9

Just because Clara Lemlich is a young immigrant doesn't mean she's going to let factory owners treat workers poorly. After all, equality and a fair shot is what America is all about—and no one understands that better than this brave girl.

Resources: [Reading Guide](#) (PJ Library) | [Jewish Hero Video](#) (PJ Library)

[Butterflies Belong Here: A Story of One Idea, Thirty Kids, and a World of Butterflies](#) by Deborah Hopkinson. Illustrated by Meilo So.

Ages 5–9

In this moving story of community conservation, a recently immigrated girl finds a home in a new place and a way to help other small travelers. This book is about the real change children can make in conservation and advocacy. *Butterflies Belong Here* is proof that even the smallest of us are capable of amazing transformations.

Resources: [Book Guides, Activities & Lessons](#) (TeachingBooks)

[Call Me Gebyanesh](#) ✓ by Arlene Rosenfeld Schenker and Gebyanesh Addisu. Illustrated by Chiara Fedele.

Ages 4–8

Gebyanesh loves the things that her family brought with them from Ethiopia. But when her teacher in Israel says "Gebyanesh" is too difficult to pronounce, it's hard to feel like she belongs in her new home. This true story about finding the courage to be yourself will resonate with anyone who's ever felt different.

Resources: [Book Review](#) (Sydney Taylor Shmooze)

Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty ✓ by Linda Glaser. Illustrated by Claire A Nivola.

Ages 4-8

Emma Lazarus was a wealthy Jewish American family in 1880's New York City moved by the plight of immigrants. To raise money for a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty, she wrote the poem "The New Colossus" and became the voice of the Statue of Liberty.

Resources: [Book Guides, Activities & Lessons](#) (TeachingBooks) - Including Discussion Guide from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | [Interview with Linda Glaser](#) (TC Jewfolk)

Mr. Katz and Me ✓ by Marc Kornblatt. Illustrated by Nanette Regan.

Ages 6-8

At 81 years old, Mr. Katz is very different from the other students who come to Sarah's father for bar mitzvah lessons: he is fulfilling his dream of finally becoming a bar mitzvah, something Russian religious persecution prevented when he was a child. Sarah isn't sure what to make of this clumsy and forgetful man with a Russian accent, but she loves listening to his beautiful singing. As Sarah gets to know Mr. Katz better, she soon realizes that she's made a friend—one who might have something to teach her, too.

Resources: [Author Video - Book Walk](#) (Marc Kornblatt)

Refugee  by Alan Gratz

Ages 12-14

A Jewish boy in 1930's Nazi Germany, a Cuban girl in 1994, a Syrian boy in 2015: all three go on harrowing journeys in search of refuge. This action-packed novel tackles topics both timely and timeless: courage, survival, and the quest for home. The book cul-mi-nates in bit-ter-sweet out-comes for all three, Josef from Ger-many, Isabel from Cuba, and Mah-moud from Syr-ia.

Resources: [Discussion Guide and Writing Prompts](#) (Scholastic)

Room for One More  by Monique Polak.

Ages 8-12

Twelve-year-old Rosetta and her sisters get a ready-made brother when her family welcomes teenage refugee Isaac Guttman into their Montreal home. Rosetta and Esther are less than thrilled to share a bedroom, but soon talkative Rosetta and reticent Isaac form a strong bond.

Resources: [Educator's Guide](#) (Kar-Ben)

A Scarf for Keiko  by Ann Malaspina. Illustrated by Merrilee Liddiard.

Ages 5-9

It's 1942, and Los Angeles neighborhood Boyle Heights is home to Jewish American Sam and his Japanese American friend Keiko. Some kids at school don't want anything to do with Keiko because the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor. When Keiko's family is forced to move to a camp for Japanese Americans, can Sam find a way to demonstrate his friendship?

Resources: [Educator's Guide](#) (Kar-Ben)

Shoham's Bangle  by Sarah Sassoon. Illustrated by Noa Kelner.

Ages 4–8

Shoham and her family must leave everything behind when they emigrate from Iraq to Israel, including her prized bangle. But Shoham's Nana Aziza has prepared a special surprise to make their new country feel like home.

Resources: [Educator's Guide](#) (Kar-Ben)

The Suitcase  by Chris Naylor-Ballesteros. Illustrated by Chris Naylor-Ballesteros.

Ages 3–7

When a new stranger arrives in town with a single suitcase, he doesn't receive a warm welcome. Bird, Rabbit, and Fox wonder what's inside the stranger's suitcase, and they're not sure they believe his answers. Soon they'll learn a lesson about just how much we carry with us—and how much a warm welcome can mean.

Resources: [Reading Guide](#) (PJ Library) | [Author Video](#) (YouTube)

The Welcome Chair  by Rosemary Wells. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney.

Ages 5–9

Based in part on a 100-year-old family journal, Rosemary Wells brings to life a story that the diary's fragile pages tell. It's the story of a wooden rocking chair handmade in about 1825 by her great-great-grandfather, an immigrant Jewish boy who made his way to America from Germany in the early 1800s.

Resources: [Curriculum Guide](#) (Simon & Schuster)

Reading List 29 Jan 2026

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Resources: [Curriculum Guide \(Simon & Schuster\)](#)

Educational Resources

- I. Immigration
 - a. American Jewish Historical Society - [Emma Lazarus Curriculum](#)
 - b. JDC - [The Story of the S.S. St. Louis \(1939\)](#)
 - c. **Not on the Portal** – Facing History - [The Child Refugee Debate](#)
 - d. **Not on the Portal** HIAS - [You Shall Not Pass: Responding to Fear-based Immigration Policy](#)
 - e. **Not on the Portal** - [HIAS Mitzvah Project Toolkit for Educators](#)
- II. Protest
 - a. Facing History - [Fostering Civil Discourse](#)
 - b. Covenant - [Civilly Speaking: A Curriculum on Civil Discourse](#)
 - c. PJ Library - [5 Books to Read With Your Budding Activist](#)
 - d. **From the Portal but no Portal link (Civic Responsibility 2020)** RAC - [Jewish Texts On Civic Engagement](#)
 - e. **From the Portal but no Portal link (Civic Responsibility 2020)** RAC - [Civic Spirit - The First Amendment](#)
- III. Communal responsibility
 - a. HUC - [Darchei Shalom: Paths of Peace- Our Responsibility as Jews to Civic Engagement](#)
 - b. Facing History - [The Common Good in Times of Crisis](#)
 - c. **From the Portal but no Portal link (Civic Responsibility 2020)** And You Shall Teach Your Children... Civic Responsibility, Leadership, And Civil Discourse
 - d. **From the Portal but no Portal link (Civic Responsibility 2020)** Civic Spirit - [Media Literacy Challenge: Can You Trust Your News Feed?](#)
 - e. **From the Portal but no Portal link (Civic Responsibility 2020)** Introducing Young Children into The Concepts Of Democracy And Citizenship
- IV. How to talk to kids about complicated issues
 - a. PBS - [Helping Kids Navigate Scary News Stories](#)
 - b. Mental Health America - [Helping Children Cope With Tragedy Related Anxiety](#)
 - c. The Southern Poverty Law Center's Learning for Justice - [When Bad Things Are Happening](#)

- d. **Not on the Portal** American Academy of Pediatrics - [How to Talk With Kids About Tragedies & Other Traumatic News Events](#)
- e. **Not on the Portal** – PJ Library - [Why do Jewish People say: “May Their Memory be a Blessing”?](#)

Books:

- I. [*Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty*](#) by Linda Glaser, illustrated by Claire A Nivola. Ages 4-8. In 1883, Jewish Emma Lazarus, deeply moved by an influx of immigrants from eastern Europe, wrote a sonnet that gave a voice to the Statue of Liberty. The statue, thanks to Emma's poem, came to define us as a nation that welcomes immigrants. A true story.
- II. [*Refugee*](#) by Alan Gratz. Ages 9-13. A Jewish boy in 1930's Nazi Germany, a Cuban girl in 1994, a Syrian boy in 2015 - all three go on harrowing journeys in search of refuge. This action-packed novel tackles topics both timely and timeless: courage, survival, and the quest for home

Articles

- I. Kveller - [Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's Daughter: 'My Father Would Be in Minneapolis'](#)
- II. TC Jew Folk - [On A Freezing Day, Interfaith Clergy Brings Warmth To Challenged Community](#)
- III. Kveller - [As a Jewish Mom in Minneapolis Right Now, 'History Feels Too Close'](#)
- IV. Religion News - [US rabbis head to Minneapolis to join protests to counter ICE raids](#)

New Version of the Civic Responsibility Page based on [Civic Responsibility 2020](#)

[JEWISH TEXTS ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT](#) | Religious Action Center (RAC) and NFTY (Reform Youth)

A varied collection of eight different Jewish texts and commentaries, traditional and contemporary, each with a set of discussion questions. Appropriate for teen and adult learning.

[AND YOU SHALL TEACH YOUR CHILDREN... Civic Responsibility, Leadership, and Civil Discourse](#) | Ellen Rank, Educational Consultant | The Jewish Education Project

This guide through Jewish texts focuses on three critical themes at this time. Divided by grade level (K-4, 5-8, 9-12) with discussion questions for each text. Prepared especially for parents who are often the frontline educators for their children, especially now. Also helpful for educators looking to engage with the questions and possible answers from our tradition.

[INTRODUCING YOUNG CHILDREN INTO THE CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP](#) | Sasha Kopp, Community Educational Consultant for Early Childhood and Family Engagement | The Jewish Education Project

A guide for Early Childhood educators which provides practical ideas (including a mock election) to explore themes and concepts relating to elections from both a universal and Jewish lens. Also recently [published by NAEYC](#) (National Association for the Education of Young Children) as part of their "[Our Votes. Their Futures](#)" campaign.

<https://civicspirit.org/civic-responsibility-2020/>

[The First Amendment](#) (grades 9-12)

Case studies, sources, and discussion prompts to gain a fuller understanding of the First Amendment. Designed for class use and can be easily used at home.

[Media Literacy Challenge: Can You Trust Your News Feed?](#) (grades 9-12)

Many of us are primarily exposed to articles, messages, and posts that reinforce our existing way of thinking. There is tremendous power in understanding the logic of "the other side" for the purposes of problem-solving. This lesson guides students to create a newsletter reflective of multiple perspectives on a civic issue.

Add framing from [Racial Justice: Responding to the Moment and Beyond](#)

1) Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof: Education in Pursuit of Racial Justice

How does the Jewish tradition and community manifest and actualize its value of

Tzedek, Justice, in relation to racism and related societal inequities?

2) Diversity and Jewish Education

What is the diversity within our Jewish community and how do we improve/increase education about and the engagement of ALL individuals within our community?

3) Engaging with Complexity in Jewish Education

How do we help our learners develop the skills to consider, engage with, and respond to complex topics and questions?

<https://hias.org/how/jewish-educational-resources/>

- a. ***Not on the Portal*** – Facing History - [Refugees and Rescuers: The Courage to Act](#)
- b. - HIAS - [Arami Oved Avi: My Ancestor Was a Wandering Aramean](#)