



Book Reviews

— Children's Books on Hanukkah —

Festival of Lights: The Story of Hanukkah. Retold by Maida Silverman; illustrated by Carolyn S. Ewing. Wanderer/Simon & Schuster, 1231 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. 1987. 24 pages. \$7.95 (cloth); \$2.25 (paper). Ages 6-10.

Miracle Meals: Eight Nights of Food 'n' Fun for Chanukah. Madeline Wikler and Judyth Groner; illustrated by Chari Radin. Kar-Ben Copies, 6800 Tildenwood Lane, Rockville, MD 20852. 1987. 64 pages. \$6.95 spiralbound. Ages 4 and up.

Just Enough Is Plenty: A Hanukkah Tale. Barbara Diamond Golden; illustrated by Seymour Chwast. Viking Kestrel, 40 West 23 Street, New York, NY 10010. 1988. 32 pages. \$12.95 cloth. Ages 3-8.

My Hanukkah Book: Questions, Answers, Activities. Kimberly Colen; illustrated by Richard Rosenblum. Scholastic, 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. 1987. 48 pages. \$3.95 paper. Ages 5 and up.

The Last Candle. Doris Pylkas; illustrated by Barbara Knutson. R. Smyth Associates, 812 Hilltop Road, Mendota, MN 55118. 1987. 18 pages. \$2.95 spiralbound on vellum stock; \$4.95 spiralbound on glossy stock; \$12.98 cloth special order for libraries only. Ages 3-5.

Treasures of Chanukah. Illustrated by Greg Hildebrandt. Unicorn Publishing House, Inc., 1148 Parsippany Boulevard, Parsippany, NJ 07054. 1987. 48 pages. \$14.95 cloth. All ages.

Reviewed by Naomi Kleinberg

It seems that every year there's a whole new crop of Hanukkah books available (almost as many as the variations and misspellings of the holiday name!) for learning about and celebrating this winter festival. Some are more attractive or better made, more useful or more engaging than others; the value of these volumes may well be in the judgment of the individual user/reader. Below are a few worthy of mention.

Festival of Lights is a retelling of the Hanukkah story for

younger children but it is more than just a rehash of a familiar tale. With short, simple declarative sentences, Maida Silverman brings history to life in the present, drawing the reader or listener in through the immediacy of language and the use of telling detail. She concludes with short sections on the legend of the menorah and the miracle of the oil and on the possible genesis of the dreidel game (as camouflage for forbidden Bible study) plus instructions for lighting candles and playing dreidel.

What's noteworthy about this small book is the active participation of children throughout the drama of the story and in all the illustrations (except the battle scenes). This will interest and involve youngsters who can identify with their historical counterparts instead of hearing about remote events populated and acted out only by adults. This is a useful, very attractive and engaging volume.

Miracle Meals is a nifty Chanukah (authors' spelling) cookbook for kids. It's spiralbound for easy kitchen use and offers clear, uncomplicated recipes for soups, meat and dairy dishes, "lotsa latkes," desserts and fun foods, beverages.

A dreidel-symbol coding system indicates level of preparation difficulty and whether the recipe is meat, dairy or pareve. Each recipe lists ingredients and utensils needed. Also included are a visual guide to utensils, metric conversion and other equivalency charts, the story of Chanukah, suggestions for parties, instructions for Chanukah games, and whimsical black-and-white illustrations on every page. This book promises lots of fun in the kitchen at any time of the year.

Just Enough Is Plenty is an original folktale about a Hanukkah visit from the prophet Elijah to a poor Jewish family in Poland. The kopeks are scarcer than usual for Malka's family; papa can't buy enough cloth to keep the tailor shop busy and mama's not sure she can afford a proper celebration of the holiday. Then an old peddler stops by...

A spare text offers just enough detail for children to

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get a picture of Jewish life and holiday tradition in the old country while dishing up a sweet, hopeful story at the same time.

Two-dimensional, semi-impressionistic oil paintings by renowned graphic artist Seymour Chwast flesh out the story and, in spite of their static quality, add a remarkable degree of warmth to the whole. This is a nice addition to the Hanukkah bookshelf.

My Hanukkah Book is a colorful activity and workbook — rather a mixed bag of information about the holiday along with suggestions and materials for things to make and do for the celebration.

A question-and-answer section about the holiday and its genesis is followed by drawing games; a punch-out menorah with instructions for completion, use and appropriate blessings; a punch-out dreidel with game instructions; 30 full-color stickers; punch-out cards and gifts; recipes and questions and answers about traditional foods. As remarked before, quite a grab bag of things to do and learn, but this could be lots of fun for kids at home or in Hebrew school.

The Last Candle is a very brief story about one family celebrating Chanukah. It is so linear and spare that it is nearly flawed in its lack of elaboration or explanation of terms such as gelt, latkes, shammass, hora — and there are plenty of people (even Jews) to whom these are foreign words. When a toy elephant is given as a gift, there's no explanation of how the animal might be tied

to the holiday (the Greeks supposedly invaded Judea on elephants).

Still, there is a melancholy sweetness in this little book and the illustrations are a real treat. Evocative pen-and-ink drawings and watercolor washes make this, for all its bare-bones feel, something to look at. While this small offering might make a nice gift for one of the eight nights of candle lighting, it is supplemental reading only; anyone wanting basic holiday information will have to go elsewhere first.

Finally, *Treasures of Chanukah* is a lush, expensively produced family-album type of book, chock-a-block with double-page spreads of full-color paintings and numerous pages printed in gold ink, all on heavy stock (the \$14.95 cover price is remarkably low for the production standards used here).

The story of the Maccabees and the origins of Chanukah are told in somewhat elegant language, followed by "The Festival of Lights," a poem incorporating holiday history and modern celebration; and then a section of songs with words and music, blessings and poetry.

The major selling point of this book is the work of artist Greg Hildebrandt, renowned for his children's book illustrations. His color work here is at once realistic and dreamlike: the faces and details are very real while his use of light is surreal.

This is the quintessential Chanukah gift book and will undoubtedly find its way into many a school and family library.

Naomi Kleinberg, an editor at a New York trade publishers, is a frequent book reviewer.

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is a service of the JWB Jewish Book Council,
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