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THE BOOK OF ELSIE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Elsie Rose-Miller loves celebrating the Purim holiday and can't wait for the annual costume party at her local synagogue.

Elsie plans to dress up as the fierce and smart Queen Esther, who saved all the Jewish people. But when financial hardship and a terrible incident of hate-inspired vandalism threaten not only the party but the synagogue too, Elsie, like Queen Esther, takes action to bring her entire community—Jewish and non-Jewish alike—together.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Joanne Levy's love of books began at a very early age. Being the youngest among four children, she was often left to her own devices and could frequently be found sitting in a quiet corner with her nose in a book. Now that she's a grown-up, Joanne is most often at her computer, channeling her younger self into the books she writes for other kids who enjoy reading in quiet corners. She loves hamantaschen, but not ones made with olives. Joanne lives in Ontario with her pets and husband.

KEY THEMES

- Antisemitism and prejudice
- Standing up for what's right
- Judaism
- Family
- LGBTQ+ families

READ-ALoud SUGGESTIONS

- p. 32—Elsie’s dad explains why he’s not behind her fundraiser idea, reminding her that her fathers have faced prejudice in their lives.
“I had just taken a huge bite of my taco...”
- P. 85—Grace and Elsie are going door to door in her grandparents’ seniors building, selling tickets to the synagogue fundraiser.
“We turned, finding ourselves in front of apartment 3C...”
- P. 123—After the synagogue is vandalized, Elsie and her dad are giving out Purim baskets to the community and start with Elsie’s grandparents.
“We took some baskets to seniors...”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the main theme of *The Book of Elsie*?
2. Elsie is excited to dress up as the fierce and smart Queen Esther for her Purim party. If you could dress up as a historical figure that you admire, who would it be and why? What would be the elements of the costume and where would you find them?
3. Elsie, Grace and Elsie’s dads encounter prejudice in various forms. Have you ever experienced prejudice for any reason? How did it make you feel? What did you do about it?
4. Elsie and Grace enjoy shopping at thrift or second-hand stores. Have you ever shopped at a store like this? What are some of the advantages of shopping second-hand?
5. How did it make you feel to read about the vandalism at Elsie’s synagogue? How would you have reacted in the same situation?
6. Does your family have any cherished recipes like Elsie’s grandmother’s hamantaschen? If so, what are they and what makes them special? Have you ever tried to cook them?
7. What character do you identify with most in this book? Why?
8. In chapter 15, Elsie’s grandmother says, “Hate has never solved any problems. In fact, it often creates more.” What do you think she means? Can you think of situations where this would be true?

ACTIVITIES

1. Follow the recipe at the back of the book to make your own hamantaschen (get an adult’s permission/help with using the oven). Be creative with the fillings, although tapenade is not recommended.
2. Create a poster or new book cover for *The Book of Elsie*.
3. Several types of prejudice are mentioned in *The Book of Elsie*: racism, antisemitism, homophobia, ableism. Research the terms and write a paragraph explaining each.
4. Film a commercial about prejudice and how and why it is hurtful.
5. One of the traditions of the Purim holiday is to distribute baskets of goodies, particularly to those who are less fortunate. Prepare and deliver a basket or two to a homeless or women’s shelter, or a senior’s home. Write about your experience. How did it make you feel? How was the gift received?