



# RATNER MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY CENTER



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## Celebrate Diversity within the Jewish Community

*God's voice at Sinai was heard in all languages.*

*-Shemot Rabbah 5:9 quoting Exodus 20:18*

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More and more, Jewish classrooms are reflecting the diversity of the world in which we live. Adoptions and intercultural marriages bring us children with Asian, African or Latino roots. An expanding definition of family means children may have one parent, a mom and dad or even two dads. The educational materials we choose should reflect the diversity of Jewish life.

The following materials, in the RMC collection, show children that a person does not have to look a certain way to be Jewish.

*For preschool through grade 2:*

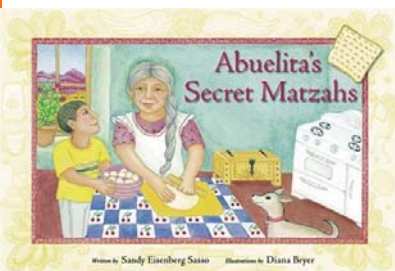
- **What Makes Someone a Jew?** by Lauren Seidman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2007) contains photographs of different ethnicities of Jewish children in the United States and around the world.



- **Rebecca's Journey Home** by Brynn Olenberg Sugarman (Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben, 2006) is a picture book about the adoption of a Vietnamese child by a Jewish family. The welcoming of the child and the process of giving her a Jewish identity play a large role in the warmly told story.

*For grades 1—4:*

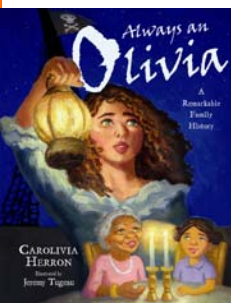
- In **Hanukkah Moon**, by Deborah DaCosta (Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben, 2007), a young girl participates with her aunt from Mexico in the *luna nueva*. This is a custom of the Latin-Jewish community in which people welcome the new moon that appears on *Hanukkah*.



- **Abuelita's Secret Matzahs** by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Cincinnati, OH: Emmis, 2005) portrays the crypto-Jews in New Mexico. Jacoba is raised Catholic, but he notices his grandmother's different traditions when he visits her. His grandmother reveals to him that his family descends from Spanish Jews and his grandmother tells him that eventually he must choose if he is Catholic or Jewish.

- The *Holidays Around the World Series* by Deborah

Heiligman (Washington DC: National Geographic) includes three books: **Celebrate Hanukkah: with Lights, Latkes and Dreidels** (2006), **Celebrate Passover: with Matzah, Maror and Memories** (2007) and **Celebrate Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur: with Honey, Prayers and the Shofar** (2007). Each book contains photographs of Jewish people celebrating in such diverse countries as India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Uganda, the United States and Zimbabwe.



- **Always an Olivia** by Carolivia Herron (Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben, 2007) describes how Carol Olivia, who is African-American, learns that she has Jewish ancestors. Her family fled the Spanish Inquisition and eventually sailed to America. To honor the family's Jewish ancestry, one daughter in each generation is given the name Olivia which is from the Hebrew, *shulamit* meaning peace.

As learning aids, textbooks should project images of our diverse community. Below are some that do:

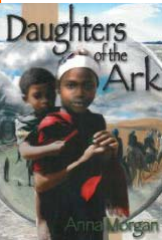
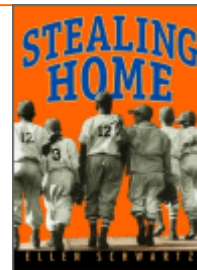
- **The Circle of Jewish Life** by Joel Lurie Grishaver (LA: Torah Aura, 2007) contains a photograph with a girl of Asian descent holding the *Torah* at her *Bat Mitzvah*. Also, the resource features a photograph of two men participating in a commitment ceremony officiated by a woman rabbi. (For grades 5–8).
- The workbook **Yisrael Artzaynu: Our Home, Our Homeland** (Denver, CO: A.R.E., 2001) contains a diverse group of Israeli children including: a Yemenite boy, an Orthodox boy, a girl from South Africa, etc. (For grades 3-6).
- The pamphlet **Let's Discover Holidays: Shabbat** (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 2003) features photographs of a young Asian girl blessing the *Shabbat* candles with her Caucasian grandparents and giving *tzedakah*. (For grades 1-2).

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For grades 5-8:

Set in Brooklyn in 1947, **Stealing Home** by Ellen Schwartz (Toronto: Tundra, 2006) is the story of a bi-racial boy who is sent to live with his Jewish grandparents. Joey struggles to gain acceptance, especially from his stern grandfather. He is inspired by the baseball player Jackie Robinson who stoically endures racism on the field.



- Parallel stories about Beta-Israel, the Jewish community of Ethiopia, are told in **Daughters of the Ark** by Anna Morgan (Toronto: Second Story, 2005). Based on legend of the Queen of Sheba, in 939 B.C.E., Aleesha and her family are sent by caravan from Jerusalem to the court of the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopia. Almost three thousand years later, a Beta-Israel girl flees religious persecution and famine to return to Israel, her ancestral home.

For grades 9 - 12:

- **The Beautiful People of the Book: A Tribute to Ethiopian Jews in Israel** by Colette Berman & Yosef Miller (LA: Millhouse, 1988) is a photographic essay that illustrates the story, religion, folkways and struggles of the Ethiopian Jews.
- **The Fire Within: Jews in the Amazonian Rainforest** (Israel: Ruth Diskin, 2008, DVD, 60 min.) is a documentary about the Jewish community of Iquitos, an isolated Peruvian city in the Amazon jungle of South America. In the late 19th century, following the rubber boom, Jewish men from Morocco settled in Iquitos. They married natives and their Jewish traditions mixed with Amazonian customs. Directed by Larry Salcedo Mitrani.
- Another documentary is **The Jews of Rhodes in Los Angeles** (NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1999, VHS, 58 min.) in which the remnants of a 500-year old *Sephardic* community that lived on the Island of Rhodes, Greece is examined. The community was exiled during the Holocaust and settled in Los Angeles. The film shows the current generation performing *Sephardic* rituals such as a *seder*, a bride preparing for her wedding day and a healer performing her ancient healing rites.
- **Out of Spain.** <http://www.outofspain.com/>  
This series traces the history of the multitude of Jews whose ancestors came from the Spanish peninsula. The website contains historical information and sample lesson plans.

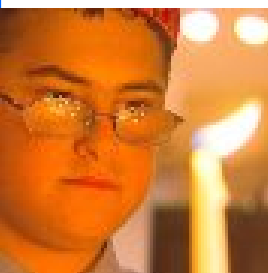
Diversity in the Jewish community stretches beyond heritage and includes students with different learning styles, physical abilities, socio-economic backgrounds and sexual preferences. The following resources help promote inclusion:



- The documentary **Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School** (Boston: Keshet, 2007, DVD, 62 min.) chronicles the story of one student's fight to establish a gay-straight alliance at a Jewish high school in the Boston area. This is the story of a community wrestling with pluralism and diversity. A curriculum is available with activities and lesson plans that complement the documentary. (For grades 9 - 12)

- In the novel **Gravity** by Leanne Lieberman (Victoria, BC: Orca, 2008), Ellie Gold is an Orthodox teen struggling with her sexuality. She tries to fight her feelings of attraction to other young women, because she knows that goes against her parents' and community's religious beliefs. (For grades 9 -12).

• The **Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities** by Shelley Christensen (Minneapolis, MN: Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities, 2008) is a step-by-step approach for inclusion committees to assess, organize and implement an inclusion plan for congregations, schools, camps, youth groups and other agencies.



- **Praying with Lior: Faith Can be Simple** (NY: First Run Features, 2007, DVD 87 min., 2-disc-set) is a powerful documentary about Lior Liebling, a boy with Down syndrome, who is called the "Little *Rebbe*" for his ability to pray with intensity. This story follows Lior through his *Bar Mitzvah*. The second disc has classroom-ready units.
- In **Daniel and the Silver Flute: An Old Hassidic Tale** by Gerald C. Ruthen (NY: United Synagogue, 1986), a boy's family excludes him because he is unable to follow along with services. During *Yom Kippur*, the rabbi shows Daniel's father that he can pray through playing the flute. (For kindergarten—grade 2).

- **Educating Everybody's Children: Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners 2nd Ed.** by Robert W. Cole, ed. (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2008) provides teaching strategies for the needs of students from economically, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse groups.