Hanukkah Book Recommendations

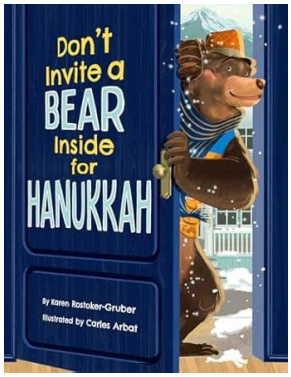
Vicki Michela Garlock, Ph.D.

By my count, there are over 100 published kids' books about Hanukkah – board books, nonfiction books, activity books, I Spy books, a Hanukkah-themed Mad Libs, and at least one YA romance novel! These are my favorites out of the 20+ books published since 2016 for school-aged kids. All are available on Amazon; many are available as Kindle versions. If they are not available in your libraries, please make a point to request them. Libraries do take specific requests into consideration.

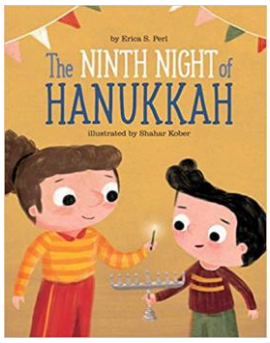
Nearly all these books require some prior knowledge of Hanukkah practices (e.g., menorah, latkes, dreidels, jelly donuts), so I've included a quick primer on the back side of this page.

My full blog post can be found here or use this QR code:

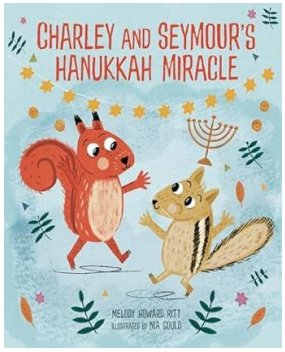
Full Article



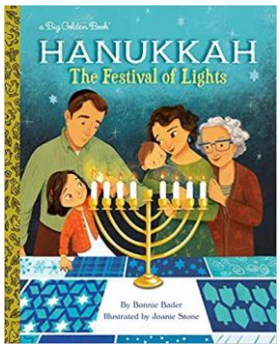
Overall Favorite



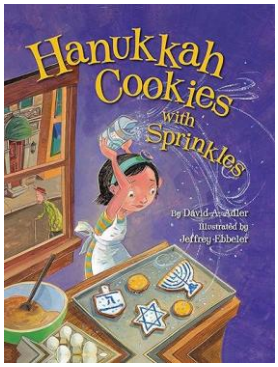
Best Book to Promote Inclusivity

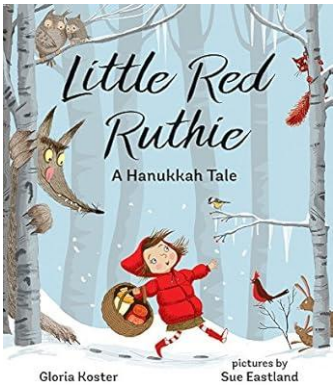


Best Whimsical Book



Best Book about Hanukkah Legend





Honorable Mentions





For Readers

Hanukkah Basics

Menorah {men-OR-uh}: Jewish candle-holder. In synagogues, menorahs generally have 7 candles, but Hanukkah menorahs have 9 candles. The ninth candle, called the *shammas* (helper candle), is used to light the other 8. On the first night of Hanukkah, one candle is lit. On the second night, two candles are lit. And so on until the 8th night when all 8 candles are lit. Prayers and blessings are said during the candle-lighting, and the candles are lit in a certain order. You can certainly show your students a menorah. Many stores sell them at this time of year, and kids love to "experience" one by actually holding it. However, **lighting** a menorah in your classroom would be considered a devotional practice, as well as cultural appropriation if you are not Jewish, and I do not recommend it.

Shammas {shah-MAHSH}: ninth "helper candle" on a Hanukkah menorah. The *shammas* is often (but not always) the tallest candle in the center of the menorah. It is lit first every night and then used to light the other 8 candles on the menorah. In the *Ninth Night of Hanukkah*, the family creates an extra night of Hanukkah festivities, once the official 8-night Jewish celebration has ended, to celebrate with their neighbors.

Latkes {LAHT-kuhs}: traditional fried potato pancakes. Frequently made with onions, cheese or other added ingredients, they are often topped with applesauce and/or sour cream. In general, foods fried in oil are part of the Hanukkah tradition because it recalls how one day's worth of oil miraculously lasted for 8 days. Many kids' books include a *latke* recipe, but they are fried in hot oil, so be careful if you decide to make them with your students!

Sufganiyot {soof-gahn-ee-yoht}: Hebrew for the jelly donuts, also fried in oil, which are another Hanukkah favorite.

Dreidel {DRAY-duhl}: spinning top used in a traditional Hanukkah game (also called dreidel). Players sit in a circle, place game pieces in the center, and then take turns spinning the dreidel. Each of the 4 sides contains a Hebrew letter that instructs the player on what to do next. It's really fun and easy. This video from My Jewish Learning literally teaches you how to play in one minute. Playing dreidel is a Hanukkah tradition, but it's not really a religious practice, *per se*, so please feel free to share it with your students!

Gelt (pronounced with a hard "G"): coin-shaped chocolate candy covered in foil. Sometimes, it's just eaten during Hanukkah, but it can also be used as game pieces when playing dreidel. Many stores sell gelt during the Hanukkah season, and most kids love chocolate, so feel free to enjoy this taste of Hanukkah.

How to Play Dreidel from My Jewish Learning

Hanukkah Text Set – Developed for Freedom Forum