

Interdisciplinary Ideas

LANGUAGE ARTS

1. What might have happened if Leibush hadn't returned the dreidel? Rewrite the end of the story to tell what he might have felt like waiting a whole year for Shimon to return.
2. Research Yiddish words or expressions that have become part of our language. Explain why you think we adopt words and expressions from other languages.
3. The author uses descriptive details to show instead of tell that Leibush's family didn't have money or luxuries. Find examples of these details in the story. How do traditions enrich people's lives even in the absence of material wealth?

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Research and present information about life in a Russian Jewish community in the early 1900s.
2. Hold a "Peddlers' Fair." Bring items from home to display and trade, complete with costumes, stories, and peddler flair.

ART

1. Make and decorate dreidels. Learn to play.
2. Play songs from "Fiddler on the Roof," such as "Traditions," "If I Were a Rich Man" and "To Life." While listening, draw a peddler or his wares.

The Peddler's Gift

Maxine Rose Schur
1999
New York: Dial Books

HONESTY

Russia
Realistic Fiction
Reading Time: 12 minutes

CONCEPTS

Honesty
Respect
Compassion

SUMMARY

A young boy in turn-of-the-century rural Russia learns that appearances are often deceiving. The simple peddler Shnook teaches honesty, honor and kindness when Leibush steals a dreidel. This well-told story speaks volumes about wisdom and forgiveness as it finds its way into the listeners' hearts. Carefully crafted illustrations in watercolor and pencil complete this cultural experience.

OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to discuss honesty, respect and compassion as they apply to this story. The student will recognize the worth of these character traits in building trust.

After the Story

The Peddler's Gift

DISCUSSION

1. How did the villagers view Shimon? Why? What did Leibush mean by "cut from a different cloth?"
2. Shimon the peddler was a compassionate and kind man. Give examples of these qualities from the story.
3. Describe Leibush's "frantic reasoning" about taking the dreidel. Reread the page with the dreidel under the table. Did Leibush think he was doing something wrong? Explain.
4. Reread the page describing Leibush's thoughts while lying in bed. Why did he decide to give the dreidel back?
5. Talk about Leibush's encounter with Shimon in the synagogue: his plan, his fear and the outcome.
6. Think about a time you were honest and admitted you had done something wrong. How did you feel? How did you know it was wrong? How could you have made it right?
7. Besides the dreidel and cloth, what was the peddler's true gift?

ACTIVITIES

1. Find Russia on the world map. Locate some of the places mentioned by the peddlers: St. Petersburg, Moscow, Vladivostok, Minsk, Kiev (some of the cities are now in the countries of Belarus and Ukraine).
2. We often make excuses, even to ourselves, rather than admitting the truth. When Leibush returned the dreidel, he said, "You left it in our home. I mean I stole it." Roleplay making excuses and finally admitting what really happened.
3. Make a list of the wise sayings in the book. Add other proverbs and sayings that teach about character. Write on cards and post around the room.
4. In groups of 3 or 4, make a chart comparing and contrasting Shimon and the other peddlers. Include their character traits and also the way the townspeople judged them. Take notes and report to class.

HOME CONNECTION

1. Write a definition of conscience with your family. Share times your conscience "knew" what you needed to do.
2. Talk at home about the positive and negative consequences of being honest.

JOURNAL

1. The author uses metaphors to describe Leibush's struggle ("dreidel burned in my hand," "my mind spun like a dreidel"). Use your own metaphors to write about a time you struggled with being honest.
2. Write about a time you took something that wasn't yours. What did you do and what do you wish you had done?

VOCABULARY

peddler
ruble
Torah

Shabbos
czar
dreidel

Cossack
synagogue
valise