

The Challah Girl

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In a faraway village, can anyone make the royal prince smile?

Zlatah Leah is a capable girl, talented in many things. One day, she joins her village's effort to make the prince smile again and takes her challah-baking expertise to the royal palace. She is sure that she has just what it takes to turn things around, but after nothing seems to work, she wonders if anyone at all can succeed. Can she?

The Challah Girl is a beautifully illustrated Jewish folktale about the power of prayer and tears that the whole family can enjoy.

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\*A 2019 **Moonbeam Children's Book Awards SILVER MEDALIST** Award Winner, for the "**Best First Book--Picture Book**" Category

## A Reader's Study/Educational Guide with Questions

### The World of Jewish Fairy Tales and Folktales: Setting the Scene

1) The author starts off the beginning of this book with the words, "Once, a very, very long time ago..." This hints that this story will be similar to other, more traditional fairy tale introductions.

Because it is similar to the usual "Once upon a time..." opening line that features as the first line of many traditionally-based fairy tales, what do you think the author is trying to achieve with this setup?

2) The opening lines create an intertextual approach which alerts the reader that what will happen in the story may be similar to other fairy tales, but because the lines are different, it hints that this will be no ordinary outcome.

How does the author maintain many of the aspects of traditional fairy tales that we are familiar with, while flipping some tropes on their head? What does this seek to accomplish? Did you feel that this worked for the story?

3) World-building and scene-setting is an important factor in many books. Is there a reason that the village and the scene-setting was described first, rather than introducing us to Zlatah Leah right away?

What sort of suspense does this create? Why is it important to build a scene first, in this case?

4) In setting the book's opening scene as taking place, "Once, a very, very long time ago..." the author first sets the scene as a macrocosm. How does learning about the larger village and then about one individual and her family in that village help us to become attached to the main character?

In your opinion, is there a benefit to going from a macrocosm to a microcosm, as we set the scene?

5) In your opinion, does the fairy tale setting, as a scene, become a sort of player or even a main character in this picture book? If yes, then how so?

### **What Defines a Fairy Tale?**

1) In your opinion, what separates a fairy tale from another story?

2) Is it enough for the author to have used a similar opening line in *The Challah Girl* for it to be considered a true fairy tale in the same vein as other, usual fairy tale stories that we are more often familiar with?

3) Fairy tales and folktales are often set in magical lands where unusual occurrences often take place. How does placing this story in an everyday, ordinary Jewish village enhance the effect of Zlatah Leah's journey?

Is her journey made more singular without the aid of magical help? Or does the idea of "magic" and "magical aid" take on a new meaning, when divested of its usual definitions?

4) Where can you see motifs of other fairy tales running through the plot? Take a guess—and then come up with some ideas of your own!

5) Does this story end with the usual fairy tale ending that we may be used to as readers of traditional fairy tales? In what way is it similar? In what ways do you think that the ending is

different? Does this make it more satisfying, while exploring and putting forth the idea that not all fairy tales must end in the same way?

### **Characters--Both Major and Minor:**

- 1) Zlatah Leah and Prince Isaac are the only two people in this book whose names we get to learn. What do you think that the author is trying to accomplish by doing this? Does this make their intertwining stories more interesting or special? Are we supposed to focus on them more than on the other characters, or do they help us to recognize the important roles that the other characters have, as a result?
- 2) What do you think is the impetus for Zlatah Leah's journey? Do you think that her reasoning changes after her first failure to cure the prince? After subsequent tries to heal him begin to fail?
- 3) Why do you think that the Prince is healed by the third challah that Zlatah Leah bakes for him? Is there a difference between the first, second, and third times that she makes each individual challah?
- 4) Do you think that crying and/or releasing emotions plays an important role in this story? Is there a difference between Zlatah Leah's tears when she drops her ingredients on the way? When she makes the third-and-last challah for Prince Isaac? When she prays on Sabbath evening, after everyone has gone to bed?
- 5) What would YOU do for Prince Isaac if you were a villager? Would it be something similar to the other villager's ideas? Would you do the same thing as Zlatah Leah?

Come up with your own special ideas!

### **Challenges and Character Development:**

- 1) At the start of the story, Zlatah Leah is sure that she can help cure Prince Isaac, because she has no doubt in her abilities to do so. Is there a point in the story where Zlatah Leah begins to question her abilities? If so, where? Why do you think that it appears at that juncture in the story?
- 2) While Zlatah Leah has many talents, the most specific talent that she is known for is her finesse in making challahs. This has led her to have great pride in her abilities. Is there such a thing as too much pride? Is there a point in the story where Zlatah Leah becomes overconfident in her abilities?

Is there a benefit to being proud of one's accomplishments while still being able to celebrate other's talents?

List your ideas here!

3) Prince Isaac's unhappiness leads to a community-wide effort to help relieve him of his burdens. Is there a specific reason why Prince Isaac was sad and needed some cheering-up? How did the villagers demonstrate the ability to care for another person, no matter their rank?

Is it important to help someone out, even if they are very different than you?

List some examples!

4) Can you think of a time when either you or a friend was sad? What did you do? What did the friend do for you? How did it make the both of you feel?

Write down some examples, below!

5) At the end of the story, Zlatah Leah has learned to recognize her talents as gifts that can be utilized to help another and Prince Isaac has learned to reach out to others, and to seek help, when needed.

How have both Zlatah Leah and Prince Isaac grown from their challenges? What other character traits have been explored in this picture book? For example, perseverance, belief in one's own abilities, asking for help and advice, not giving up, (etc.).

List a few ideas below!

### **Further Reading Resources:**

Read a few of these interviews, below, which shed more light on the writing process, the influences which shaped this story and the various fairy tales which came into play during the writing of this book. Take a deep-dive, behind-the-scenes—then, go back to the story and the questions above!

Have the answers to your questions changed? Are they similar or different?

Discuss!

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<https://thewholemegillah.wordpress.com/2019/09/10/authors-notebook-the-challah-girl-by-bracha-k-sharp/>

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