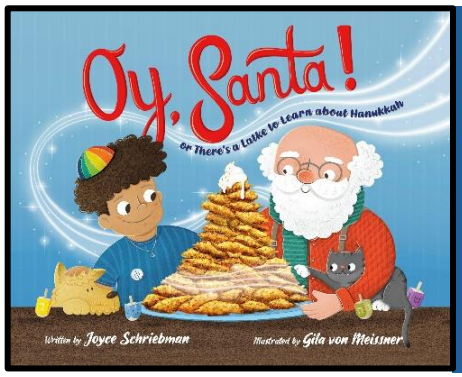

Discussion Guide

. . .for a holiday story that highlights
the importance of honoring diversity and respecting differences

This guide contains tools for helping students discuss and reflect on some of the themes in Oy, Santa!

KEY THEMES

- Honoring diversity
- Understanding "The Other"
- Celebrating personal family traditions
- Recognizing religious difference
- Strengthening religious identity
- Expressing religious pride
- Developing religious literacy
- SEL (Social Emotional Learning)
    - Patience
    - Decision-making
    - Self-awareness
    - Role models

MULTIFAITH UNDERSTANDING

- Set the tone by offering guidelines on respectful listening: hand raising, one-at-a-time talking, and preparing students to learn about experiences that might be different from their own.
- Invite students to share religious and cultural holiday traditions they celebrate in their homes.
- Ask children to talk about some of the favorite parts of their holiday observances.
- Ask students if they know someone who celebrates more than one holiday at the same time.
- Talk about language, symbols, and rituals used in students' holiday celebrations.

BEFORE READING - Preparation

Lay foundational information, spark curiosity, set expectations

- What does the word "Oy!" sound like to you? What do you think it means?
- Show the cover and ask the students to guess what the story is about.
- Ask if anyone in the class celebrates or has friends or family who celebrate Hanukkah.
- Is it possible for someone to be confused about holidays that aren't part of their tradition?
- What are some differences/similarities you notice about the characters shown on the cover?
- How do you feel when someone is interested in YOUR holiday?

INTRODUCTORY VOCABULARY

Hanukkah/Chanukah	Jewish holiday also called the Festival of Lights, multiple spellings
OY!	Yiddish expression of dismay or exasperation ("Oh!" or "Oh, my!")
Interfaith	the relationship between people of different religions
Chocolate gelt	Candy coins wrapped in shiny foil that are given out at Hanukkah
Dreidel	a spinning top used in a game at Hanukkah (or the game itself)
Synagogue	a house of worship for Jews
Mosque	a house of worship for Muslims
Latkes	fried potato pancakes, often served with sour cream or applesauce
Rosh Hashanah	The Jewish New Year, celebrated in the fall

DURING READING – Connection

Keep students engaged, check for understanding and clarity, encourage association

- Stop on the first page to make sure students understand not everyone celebrates Christmas.
- Ask students to point out details in the pictures. "What do you see?"
- How are Christmas and Hanukkah different? In what ways are they similar?
- Why do you think Ollie keeps saying, "Oy, Santa!"?
- Why does Ollie think he might be on Santa's Naughty List?
- Use "What just happened" and "How do you think Ollie feels now?" and "What do you think will happen next?" questions.

AFTER READING – Reflection

Deepen understanding, encourage empathy

- Why did Ollie say, "I don't want you to smush Hanukkah and Christmas together"?
- Ask students, "Have you ever been to a holiday event that wasn't a part of your religious tradition?"
- Ask how your students might feel attending an event for a holiday they don't celebrate?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING

- Create a Venn Diagram that includes Christmas/both/Hanukkah traditions, asking students to contribute ideas to the diagram.
- Use the OY, SANTA! ACTIVITY SHEET.

TEACHER TIPS

- Encourage students to listen to each other and ask questions for clarification.
- Keep the discussion inclusive, supporting an exchange of ideas and experiences.
- Reinforce acceptance of different cultures and religions.

SOCIAL STUDIES – Religious Literacy

Identify characteristics of a family, who we are and where we come from

- Families come from many different backgrounds.
- Ollie is part of a bi-racial family.
- Ollie is deeply involved with his family and actively engages with his parents and his sister.
- Illustration (Santa's photo) shows Mrs. Claus counter-intuitively in a bathing suit.
- Santa has cats. Ollie has a dog.
- Ollie is Jewish. Santa is Christian.
- Ollie is bi-racial. Santa is white.
- Both Santa and Ollie take pride in their traditions.
- Ollie and Santa live in different parts of the world, enjoy different foods, are different ages, yet they become friends.

Understand that difference is a vital and important part of life

- Santa's workshop is racially and religiously inclusive and includes an elf in a wheelchair.
- Santa delights in visiting houses with interfaith families.
- It's important to Ollie that Santa understand Jewish holidays and traditions.
- Diversity is a natural part of Ollie's life. Ollie grasps some aspects of The Other (e.g., reindeer fly, Santa comes down the chimney.)
- Ollie is comfortable communicating with non-Jews and emailing Santa.
- Ollie has a Muslim friend named Ibrahim.
- Santa acknowledges that the diversity in his workshop requires different considerations so that religious beliefs of all the elves can be accommodated.

Santa as a role model

- Santa is patient.
- Santa listens closely to Ollie and later repeats Ollie's explanation of Hanukkah's message about "letting people be who they want to be."
- Santa models forgiveness and graciously sets aside any misunderstandings.
- Santa respects Ollie and accepts Ollie's apology with empathy, acknowledging "we all get carried away sometimes."
- Santa generously thanks Ollie for teaching him about Jewish holidays.

SOCIAL STUDIES – SEL Competencies

SOCIAL AWARENESS – empathy, understanding multiple POVs, welcoming diversity, recognizing social cues, recognizing community resources

- Ollie shows consideration for Santa's time and feelings when he sends the first email.
- Ollie lacks the ability to understand why Santa is confused about Jewish holidays and traditions.
- Ollie lacks respect for Santa's preference for ketchup even though his own tradition includes both sour cream and applesauce.
- Ollie has the capacity to accept people with cultural differences.

SELF-MANAGEMENT – impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, setting goals, motivation, organizational skills

- Ollie apologizes for his behavior and says he'll try to do better.
- Ollie catches himself when he brags about knowing the candle lighting blessings and his sister doesn't [backmatter].
- Ollie realizes he's lost patience and crossed the line with Santa.
- Ollie admits that he sometimes gets overly excited.

RELATIONSHIP AWARENESS – communication, social engagement, teamwork, conflict resolution, seeking and offering help, building trust and respect

- Ollie lacks the ability to understand why Santa is so confused about Jewish traditions.
- Ollie acknowledges that his frustration with Santa is because Hannukah is important to him.
- Ollie explains the Hanukkah story in a way that Santa eventually understands.
- Ollie doesn't give up on Santa—even as he gets frustrated.
- What has Ollie learned by the end of the book about what he could have done differently?
- Ollie and Santa become friends.