



A SICK DAY FOR AMOS MCGEE

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Illustrator: Erin E. Steads

Jewish Value:

Visit the Sick—*Bikkur Cholim* בקור חולים

Enduring Understandings

- Visiting the sick is a *mitzvah*.
- Visiting the sick helps the person who is ill feel better.

Book Summary

Amos McGee is a zookeeper who always found time to visit his friends--the elephant, the tortoise, the penguin, the rhinoceros, and the owl. But one day, Amos McGee didn't go to work because he was sick. His friends were worried and decided to pay a special visit to their friend Amos McGee!

Be Inspired: Consider the ideas included as starting points, as you and your students explore, discover, and live the values. Be sure to elicit and encourage student and parent participation, consistently reinforcing the value being addressed. Allow lessons to authentically develop and change based on engagement and interests.



For the Educator Jewish Thought, Text, and Traditions

(For more information on Jewish values, visit www.jewishlearningmatters.com.)

These are the things that have no equal, where one might enjoy the fruits of them in this world, but the true reward is stored up for the world to come! [Among them are] doing acts of loving kindness (*g'milut chasadim*), and visiting the sick (*bikkur cholim*). -Morning Prayer, based upon *Mishna Peah* 1:1 and Shabbat 127a

As this Talmudic passage stresses, the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim* is central to Jewish tradition. In fact, it is considered an obligation without limit. Therefore, we must visit the sick to help uplift those who are ill.

Visiting the sick ensures that the ill-stricken have their needs met and prayers are recited on their behalf. Prayer is an integral part of the healing process, so much so that there are special prayers said while one is bedside. Perhaps the most famous of prayers is that of the *Mi Sheberach*, popularized by Debbie Friedman's heartfelt melody. Another well-known phrase that is often said and sung is "*El nah, r'fah nah lah!*," the words Moses said when he turned to G-d and prayed for his sister, "O G-d, pray heal her!" (Numbers 12:13).

This value is essential because people need to feel connected to the community especially when they are ill or homebound. Bringing the community to the bedside lifts the spirits of those who may feel forgotten. Social contact and support positively influences those needing and receiving comfort. Visiting and caring for the sick help build community and character. And, most importantly, we are acting in a godly way when we visit.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why do you think that *bikkur cholim* is an obligation without limit in Jewish tradition?
2. What would a visit to the sick be for you, and what would you do to help uplift a person's spirits?
3. Why do you think that prayer is such a powerful tool for those who are in need of healing?
4. How can you incorporate the value of *bikkur cholim* within the classroom?



Jewish Every Day Incorporate Jewish Values

Create a special classroom routine for “visiting the sick.” If someone is sick and out of school for two days, have the students, sitting together during circle time, call the child to say, “Hello, we miss you. We hope you are feeling better ...” Engage in “virtual *bikkur cholim*.” Make a video get-well message, and email it to the child and his or her family.



Materials and Resources

MATERIALS

- Copy of *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*
- Reading the Story: a “discovery box” with stuffed animals representing Amos’s friends
- After the Story: items for creating potato print get-well cards: potatoes, cookie cutters, paint, cardstock, decorations such as stickers, feathers, and other craft items

TECHNOLOGY

- President Obama and family read *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoF2Rf3x5Gs>
- YouTube trailer for *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x--s2qewws>



Sharing the Story

INTRODUCING THE STORY

For strategies for teaching vocabulary, see Appendix, Vocabulary Strategies.

Introduce the story by showing students the cover and reading the title. Have them predict what the story might be about.

Take a picture walk through the book as students look at the pictures and make new predictions as to what is happening in the story. Point out (or encourage students to point out) interesting details in the illustrations. For example, you may wish to point out how Amos's footwear is always changing, or how his teddy bear shows up in several of the scenes.

Help students connect the concept of the book with their own lives by posing questions such as the following:

- Has anyone ever had a cold and had to stay home from school?
- Has anyone ever been sick and wanted their mother, father, a grandparent, or another grown-up to sit with him? What would it be like to be home sick and all alone?
- What do we mean by “cared for”? (Discuss the fact that visiting or sitting by a person's side are ways that we “care for” someone who is sick.)
- Have you ever cared for someone or something who was sick (for example, a friend, parent, grandparent, or pet)?
- What do you like people to do for you when you are sick? Make a class chart to record responses.

READING THE STORY

*Read the story aloud, stopping when appropriate to explore illustrations, address comments, clarify, predict, and guide students' understanding of the story and the value to **visit the sick—bikkur cholim**.*

As each animal is introduced, select a child to pick out the appropriate stuffed animal from those in the discovery box.

Allow time for students to revisit the illustrations in the book, especially focusing on facial expressions that give hints as to what the characters may be thinking (for example, how the characters feel and why). Encourage students to think about their own feelings by asking questions for example, “Do these illustrations make you feel happy? Sad?”.

Point out the special connection Amos had with each animal. Encourage students to consider why the elephant would be a good chess player, why Amos would choose



Sharing the Story

continued

to race with the tortoise, or why he would read nighttime stories to the owl. What did Amos do with each animal when he or she visited him? (For example, when Amos was too tired to run races, what did he do with the tortoise instead?)

AFTER THE STORY

Watch the Obama family read the story at the White House:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoF2Rf3x5Gs>. Ask students if they recognize the family. Ask why they think the president's family chose to read this story. Alternatively, view the trailer for *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, and tell the story through the illustrations: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x--s2qewws>. (You can watch the trailer without reading the text by lowering the volume and allowing students to “tell the story.”) At the end of the trailer ask, “What happened next?” to allow students to summarize the rest of the story. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x--s2qewws>

Explain that the *mitzvah* to visit the sick—*bikkur cholim* is one that we can all do for friends and family. It makes a person feel much better just to see a familiar face or get a hug from someone. Remind students that Amos began to feel better while his friends were visiting. Ask them what they think made Amos feel better.

Ask students to tell about a time they went to visit someone who was sick. How did it make the person feel? How did it make the student feel?

Have students think of a time they were sick and could not go out and play. Ask them who they would like to have visit them if they get sick again.

Create a “get-well card making box” and involve students in creating get-well cards that they can send throughout the year to family members and friends who are sick, or have them delivered to a children's hospital, a senior center, etc. Remind them that by doing this they are doing a *mitzvah*, *bikkur cholim*—to visit the sick.

You may wish to use potato prints to decorate the cards. These are similar in a fashion to woodcut prints, which were used by the illustrator of *A Sick Day For Amos McGee*. Many websites include directions for creating potato prints. Try using cookie cutters rather than knives to create the shape of the print by pushing the cookie cutter through the potato. Here is a sample website: <http://rubberstamping.about.com/od/stampingforchildren/ht/PotatoStamp.html>.



Explore, Discover, and More

Extension and Reinforcement Activities

THE SPREAD OF GERMS

SCIENCE, SENSORY

Have several students put shaving cream on their hands and go around the room shaking hands with their friends. (Be sure students don't get the shaving cream in their eyes. As an alternative, use a drop of baby shampoo.) Ask what happens to the shaving cream. (It is transferred from one person's hand to another's.) Explain that this is what happens with germs, and that is how we transfer germs from one person to another. (You may wish to pre-tint the shaving cream in order to give a more visual impact to the concept of spreading germs.)

- Talk about ways to help stop the spread of germs. Have students role-play these preventative measures, take pictures, and create a class poster with their ideas in words and photos.
- Watch the Wiggles' music video of "Wash Your Hands": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_RwRoiwe6Q.

"JEWISH MEDICINE"

COOKING

One of the staples of the Jewish home is chicken soup! We eat it on special holidays (for example, on Passover with matzo balls), we eat it with our meals, and we eat it when we are sick. Somehow, chicken soup gives comfort and helps us feel better. With the help of students and parents, make a pot of chicken soup. *Make sure to observe the safety and kashrut policies of your community.*

- Collect recipes (see Home and Community Connections) and select one.
- Microwave vegetables to soften them so that children can cut them, or ask individual parents to prepare one of the ingredients for the soup (for example, chop the onions or celery), and have students take turns putting these into a large pot.
- If a Crock-pot is permitted in your classroom or in a school kitchen area, you can simply add water and cook the soup during the day. Enjoy the aroma as it fills the air. If this is not an option, ask a parent volunteer to take home the pot with the ingredients and add water and chicken and cook. When the soup is finished, ask the parent to remove the chicken from the bone, cut it into small pieces, place the pieces back in the pot, and return the cooked soup to the classroom the next day for all to enjoy!
- While students are eating their soup, you may wish to read Esther Hershenthorn's heartwarming story *Chicken Soup by Heart*.
- Bind recipes together to create a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* recipe book. Have students create their own covers, and distribute to family members. (You may also wish to ask families to submit a recipe for a "traditional" food they serve to include in the recipe book.)



Explore, Discover, and More

Extension and Reinforcement Activities

continued

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

MOVEMENT

Have students brainstorm all the silly things they could do if they were visiting a favorite animal at the zoo (for example, growl with the tigers, leap with the frogs, etc.). Act out each motion!

VISITING THE SICK ROLE-PLAY

DRAMA, LITERACY

Give students the opportunity to role-play a visit to a friend who may be ill (not contagious) or hurt. Set up the center to look like a bedroom. Include a pretend bed and chest of drawers, and add books, toys, a chair, etc. Have students pretend that the stuffed toys are the “patients.” In addition to reinforcing this value, students develop literacy skills as they talk to their friends and entertain them during the visit.

MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR

ART, TECHNOLOGY

Explain that *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* won the Caldecott Award for the best picture book for children. Watch the YouTube video made by the illustrator of the book about wood printing, the type of art she used in the book:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TuHyU-onkc>.



Music

(Access all songs at www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music.)

“El Na” by “Miss” Emily Aronoff Teck Track # 11 from Good Choices, Volume 1

INSPIRATION TEXT

“*El na refa na la*” (Numbers 12:13), which means “G-d heal her, please,” was Moses’s brief, yet powerful, spontaneous prayer for his sister, Miriam, after she was stricken with disease. “*Na*” in Hebrew means “please,” so the repetition in the song is a polite appeal.

“EL NA” ACTIVITY

The chorus of this song can be written into a get-well card that students send to a classmate who is home sick. Alternatively, let students record themselves using audio or video, personalizing it with a greeting, and email the “v-card” (voice / video card) to the person in the community who is ailing. Upon healing, invite the person who was sick to visit your classroom and share how the v-card made him or her feel. (Be sure to get proper school and home permission.)

LYRICS

Part A:

El na, na na na na na na na refa na la

El na, na na na na na na na refa na la

Part B:

I hope that you feel better

And you get well quick.

I pray that G-d will heal you

So you won’t be sick!

ADDITIONAL MUSIC CONNECTIONS

To access additional Jewish and secular songs from a variety of traditional and contemporary artists that reinforce and teach this value, visit www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music.

- Although “*Mi Shebeirach*,” by Debbie Friedman, is not traditionally a “kids” tune, ask students to listen carefully for words they understand. Ask them if they have ever heard the tune before. Bear in mind, we don’t actually ask G-d to “heal” people who are sick. What we do ask is that G-d should watch over them, protect them, and grant them peace and comfort.



Evidence of Learning

Even after this exploration is completed, students continue to initiate the suggestion of making phone calls or sending cards when they hear that a friend is sick.



Home and Community Connections

Encourage families to learn more about the value and reinforce the concept with their children through video and song by visiting www.jewishlearningmatters.com.

Send home a letter explaining that the students have just learned about the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim*, and ask parents to send in a note if there is a family member or friend to whom they would like their child (or class) to send one of the get-well cards made in class.

Ask parents to be sure to have their child call a sick friend or family member and discuss the experience with their child. (For example, ask how this call makes the child feel, as well as how the child thinks the person who is ill might feel.) If the child visited the sick friend or family member, ask the parent to discuss what things the child did to cheer up the person (similar to the way in which Amos McGee knew exactly what games to play with the animals in the zoo).

Nothing helps people feel better than chicken soup! Elicit help from parents in making a pot of chicken soup and submitting recipes for the class *Chicken Soup for the Soul* recipe book. (See Explore, Discover, and More activity above.) Encourage parents and grandparents to involve students in making chicken soup at home to take to a sick friend, neighbor, or family member.

“VISITING” THE SICK

Contact a local children’s hospital and ask if your class can send cards throughout the year to children who are in the hospital.

CARING FOR PETS

Contact the local ASPCA or Humane Society and invite a representative to come to the class and talk about how to care for sick pets.



Literature Connections

Title	Author(s) and Illustrator(s)	Summary
<i>Llama Llama Home With Mama</i>	Anna Dewdney	Llama Llama's mother takes good care of him when he has to stay home from school because he is sick, but when Mama Llama begins to feel sick, too, Llama Llama knows how to take care of her.
<i>Bear Feels Sick</i>	Karma Wilson Jane Chapman	When Bear is too sick to play, his animal friends go to his cave to make him soup and tea and to keep him company.
<i>Dear Daisy, Get Well Soon</i>	Maggie Smith	When his friend Daisy gets sick, Peter sends her gifts, more each day of the week, until she feels better. This is a great book for a math activity. Each day the boy sends special treats to Daisy.
<i>Nanny Goat's Boat</i>	Jane Belk Moncure Joy Friedman	Nanny Goat's boat will not float anymore. Nanny Goat falls into the water and she gets a sore throat. Her friends help her recover.
<i>The Sick Day</i>	Patricia MacLachlan Jane Dyer	Emily has a sick day. She has a tummy ache and a sore throat. Her father is taking care of her, but she keeps him busy. By the end of the book, both Emily and Father realize that this sick day turned into a special day for them to be together.
<i>Chicken Soup by Heart</i>	Esther Hershenhorn	A story of friendship and the power of chicken soup! With his mother's help, Rudie prepares chicken soup for his babysitter, Mrs. Gittel, using Mrs. Gittel's secret ingredient: sweet memories of their friendship!



Thematic Connections

Health
Germs and how they spread
Letter / card writing
Caring for sick pets

LESSON CONTRIBUTOR

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