



## *A BIRTHDAY FOR BEN*

Author: Kate Gaynor

Illustrator: Karen Quinke

### **Jewish Value:**

Be Inclusive, Don't Place a Stumbling Block—*Lifnei Aver* לִפְנֵי עוֹר

**Additional Value:** Show Respect—*Kavod* כְּבוֹד

### **Enduring Understandings**

- Each of us is unique and it is important that we respect and accept the differences in one another.
- Each of us has special strengths, talents, interests, and different ways of learning.
- Friends support and care about one another—differences and all.
- Children who are deaf communicate differently but can participate in most of the same activities that hearing children enjoy.

### **Book Summary**

Ben doesn't want a birthday party. He doesn't like parties because he often feels left out and can't take part in some of the games. *A Birthday for Ben* introduces the reader to some of the challenges faced by those who are hearing impaired, and at the same time, builds empathy, understanding, and the realization that we can make our world far more inclusive so that every child feels that he or she belongs.

**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](http://www.jewishlearningmatters.com).)

Proverbs 22:6 reminds us that each child learns differently, as we are to “educate each child according to their way.” Regardless of how a person learns or how different he or she may be from others, the value to be inclusive—*lifnei aver* challenges us to understand that we all are different. Our differences should be celebrated and our differences should not limit our ability to participate actively in the world.

Traditionally, the idea of *lifnei aver*—to be inclusive and “not place a stumbling block” comes from Leviticus 19:14, which states, “You shall not curse the deaf nor place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your G-d. I am the Lord.” Much of Jewish teaching focuses on the figurative implications of not cursing the deaf or putting stumbling blocks before the blind. It is our responsibility to meet the needs of everyone, whether they be hearing or sight impaired, as well as those who struggle physically, emotionally, or intellectually.

Rather than looking at these struggles as handicaps, it is our imperative to ensure that that these individuals are fully part of the community. Tradition teaches a special blessing, which is to be said when one meets with someone or something that is unique and different from what is expected:

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, M'shaneh Ha-briyot.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who has created such variety in the world.

This is a reminder that G-d loves variety and wonder, and has instilled such in creation. Every student is unique, every student is a blessing. Far from being a burden or distraction, this is part and parcel of how G-d created the world, and we should give our thanks. We are reminded that it is not for the children to have to “fit” into the classroom, rather it is the responsibility of educators to ensure that the classroom and curriculum “fit” the needs of diverse learners.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can you as a teacher create a more inclusive classroom?
2. What “stumbling blocks” do you place before yourself?
3. How can you help everyone feel part of a community?
4. How can you incorporate the notion of *lifnei aver* within the classroom?



## Jewish Every Day Incorporate Jewish Values

Judaism consistently encourages learning and the understanding that we are all unique, and therefore each of us learns differently. What better way to embrace this belief than to introduce students to a new language—sign language! During the day, as appropriate, introduce or review new signs for common words, such as directions, colors, numbers, animals, students' names, etc. Many websites offer instruction in sign language, which has been found to have a variety of developmental benefits for all children. Please be aware that American Sign Language and Israeli Sign Language are two different languages; vocabulary from each can be incorporated into daily routines.



## Materials and Resources

### MATERIALS

- Copy of *A Birthday for Ben*
- Teacher resource: the article “According to Their Ways,” strategies for supporting the learning of students with various types of special needs (source: Al Pi Darco): [http://urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=document&item\\_id=11633](http://urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=document&item_id=11633)

### TECHNOLOGY

- Introducing the Story: Signing “Hello”:  
<http://www.signingsavvy.com/sign/HELLO/4943/1>
- After the Story: “Everyone Counts: My Friend Isabelle”:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEB2bk29AMQ>
- The alphabet in sign language: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-NeizIkHBY&list=PL54B9210EE88425DA>
- Videos for young children to demonstrate how to sign common words:  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/BabyBundle>



# Sharing the Story

## INTRODUCING THE STORY

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

Bring students together for meeting time. Greet each, signing the word “Hello” or “*Shalom*.” Explain that many of those who cannot hear use sign language to help them communicate. (Various online sites contain instructional videos of American Sign Language [ASL] or Israeli Sign Language [ISL] to help students learn common signs used in conversational signing.)

Introduce the story *A Birthday for Ben*. Focus on the cover illustration. What do students notice about each child? (Ben is wearing a hearing aid, and his friend is wearing glasses.)

Talk about what people use to help them see (glasses, contacts), to help them move around (a cane, walker, wheelchair, etc.), to help them communicate when they can't hear or speak (sign language, hearing aids, assistive speech devices, etc.). Ask students what they know about guide dogs. Have they ever seen one? Talk about ways in which guide dogs can help people with special needs.

Reread the title of the story. Go around the circle. Have each student give the date of his or her birthday. Do they like birthday parties? What are some of the games they play? Explain that Ben's birthday is coming up, but he doesn't want to have a party. Say, “Let's find out why.”

## 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 values to **be inclusive—lifnei aver** and **show respect—kavod**.*

Throughout the story, focus on the interactions between Ben and the other children. Notice the use of sign language.

Ask the following questions:

- What makes Ben seem happy? What makes Ben seem sad? What makes Ben seem lonely?
- Why doesn't Ben like parties?
- When Ben realized that his family had planned a birthday party for him, what was the first thing he was worried about? (He didn't want his friends who were deaf to feel left out.)
- What did his mother do to make sure that Ben and all his friends could be included in all the games?
- Can you think of anything else they could do to make everyone feel included?



# Sharing the Story

continued

## AFTER THE STORY

As a follow up to the discussion about why Ben might not want to have a birthday party, ask students what ways they could celebrate their birthdays other than having a party.

Take a picture walk of the book. Explain that the pictures were drawn by a person who cannot hear, but who has a special talent to draw.

Discuss the following questions:

- Do you have a friend like Ben?
- What did you learn from Ben about what it might be like to be deaf?
- What did you learn from Ben about how people who are hearing impaired communicate and learn in different ways?
- What do you know about people who are blind? How do they read?
- What do you think would be different if you were deaf? What things would be the same? (You may wish to read these lines to your students from *I Have a Sister—My Sister Is Deaf*, by Jeanne Whitehouse Peterson: “You could dance and march but not hear the music; you could play outside but not hear your mother calling you in for dinner; you can watch a frog hop, but can’t hear it croak.”)

Share the video “Everyone Counts: My Friend Isabelle”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEB2bk29AMQ>. The video includes cartoon characters based on real children. At the end of the video, the two children, upon which the story is based, are introduced and the concept that each of us is unique and important is reinforced.

Discuss the following questions:

- How can we help friends who have trouble seeing, hearing, walking, etc.?
- What can we learn from one another?

## School Tour: How Are We Inclusive?

Take students on a tour of the school. Look for examples of inclusion in the building. For example, braille lettering on certain signs and in the elevator, books that have been recorded as well as in print, special ramps and elevators near stairs, fire alarms that have blinking lights as well as sound, special bathroom bars to help people use the toilet, automatic door openers for those who are in wheelchairs or can’t move their arms, signs warning about food allergies along with specific rules, etc. What else can students discover on the tour? What else do they think would be important for the school to have to be inclusive to children who can’t hear, see, etc. (For example, is the playground accessible to all children?)



# Explore, Discover, and More

## Extension and Reinforcement Activities

### CELEBRATE RESPECT!

### DRAMATIC PLAY

Have a class party to celebrate a special holiday, to mark a special class accomplishment, or just because! Emphasize to students that this party will be a celebration of the values of respect and inclusion. Show students this video about respect: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FY4qNs4onYQ>.

- Brainstorm how students can show respect for their guests, to make them feel cared for and important. Throughout the planning process, praise students as they present sensitive, thoughtful ideas and demonstrate a desire to be inclusive. Consider the following, for example: Are there any community members who have trouble walking, and if so is there a clear path in the room for a walker or wheelchair? Are there any food allergies or food sensitivities that need to be considered as the menu is planned?
- Create invitations for parents and students in other classes whom you wish to invite.
- Sing songs appropriate to the occasion. If possible, invite a parent, local community member, etc., who can sign and ask them to sign some of the songs.
- Think about the food you can serve, appropriate to the occasion that all students can eat. Involve students in making some of these, and as well, ask parents to help.
- Think about the games students like to play and discuss which need to be modified for children like Ben who have difficulty hearing and may communicate differently and for children who have difficulty seeing. Play some of the games mentioned in the book that Ben and all his friends enjoyed (for example, musical chairs, using a light switch instead of music).
- During holiday celebrations, consider types of holiday-themed games that can be adapted for children with various challenges and play these in your class.
- Reinforce the importance of making guests feel comfortable and included.

### BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

### LITERACY, MUSIC, TECHNOLOGY

Sing and sign “Building a Better World” with Ellen Allard: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9ZidwybN5k>. After viewing and learning the signs, ask students to brainstorm a list of more specific examples of how they can build a better world. Ask students to describe how they can build the world with love, friends, and peace.

### WORLD-FAMOUS PERCUSSIONIST AUDITIONS FOR SESAME STREET BAND

### SCIENCE, MUSIC, TECHNOLOGY

Introduce students to Evelyn Glennie, who is an award-winning percussionist and considered the best female drummer, the best barefoot drummer, and the best deaf drummer. Explain that she uses her feet to help her “hear.” Play the YouTube video in which Glennie auditions for Oscar the Grouch’s band on Sesame Street: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVw5KawqUIg>.



# Explore, Discover, and More

Extension and Reinforcement Activities

continued

- Glennie has been deaf since the age of twelve, having started to lose her hearing from the age of eight. She regularly plays barefoot when she performs and records in order to feel the music. To help students start to understand how sound can be felt or seen and to demonstrate how sound travels in waves, involve students in the following:
  - Blow up balloons and have students hold them in front of a speaker playing music—they will feel the vibrations. Change the tempo of the music. What happens?
  - Use a tuning fork to allow students to witness waves of sound that are usually invisible. Tap a tuning fork against a solid object to hear the tone it creates, then dip the tip of the fork into a container of water to “see” the tone it creates.
  - Have students drum on their desks, on toy drums, and on other percussion instruments. Have students take off their shoes. Can they feel the vibrations? Through which objects were the vibrations the strongest?
- Show additional examples of deaf musicianship by Glennie: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyYXMKtGwGQ>. Show additional examples of deaf children participating in music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9Q5dnN699w>.
- Discuss the fact that our world is filled with people like Evelyn Glennie who have challenges and use the talents they have to do good deeds.

## THE DEAF MUSICIANS

## LITERACY

Read the book *The Deaf Musicians*, by Kennedy Center honoree Pete Seeger, poet Paul DuBois Jacobs, and Coretta Scott King Award winner R. Gregory Christie. The story highlights the power of music and overcoming challenges, and presents different ways to hear the world.

Ask, “Who will listen to a deaf musician?” (Answer: Everyone!)

## THE FIVE SENSES

## SCIENCE

Involve students in exploring the five senses.

- Place common food items on one covered plate and common objects on another. (You may wish to integrate traditional Jewish foods [a piece of Challah, piece of matza, etc.] and Jewish symbols [a mezuzah, small menorah, Jewish star, etc.].) Blindfold students as they take turns selecting an item from one plate or the other. Using their senses of taste, smell, or touch (as appropriate), can they identify these food items or objects?
- Turn off the sound and have students view the following YouTube video of children signing a terrific song: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbLz9-riRGM>. Can students tell you what the video is about? What clues helped? Play the video again, this time with sound. Which did they enjoy more?
- Guide students in understanding that when we don’t have full use of one of our senses (smell, touch, taste, sight, hearing), other senses work even harder.



## Music

(Access all songs at [www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music](http://www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music).)

### **“Diversity” by “Miss” Emily Aronoff Teck Track # 10 from *Good Choices, Volume 1***

#### **INSPIRATION TEXT**

“Blessed (is the One who) differentiates the creatures.” -Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, BT Berachot 58b

#### **“DIVERSITY” ACTIVITY**

Help students recognize positive elements and characteristics in themselves and their friends. Support the formation of healthy self concepts in all students by regularly encouraging them to appreciate the ways members of their community are similar and the ways they are different.

#### **LYRICS**

##### CHORUS

I’m so glad you’re you, I’m so glad I’m me  
I’m so glad we live in a world with diversity

We’ve got different ways of thinking  
Different ways to use our mind  
But what I know is all the same  
We’re each unique, one of a kind

##### CHORUS

We’ve got different kinds of families, different kinds of homes  
But what I know is all the same, is we are not alone

##### CHORUS

We’ve got different kinds of bodies, different eyes and skin and hair  
But what I know is all the same, is this great world we share

#### **ADDITIONAL MUSIC CONNECTIONS**

To access additional Jewish and secular songs from a variety of traditional and contemporary artists that reinforce and teach these values, visit [www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music](http://www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music).



## Evidence of Learning

Student discussion and actions reflect understanding, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and a desire to be inclusive.

Students demonstrate an understanding that each of us communicate and learn in different ways, and they are sensitive to the needs of their classmates.



## Home and Community Connections

*Encourage families to learn more about the values and reinforce the concepts with their children through video and song by visiting [www.jewishlearningmatters.com](http://www.jewishlearningmatters.com).*

### **TYPES OF LEARNERS**

Send parents this link to help them assess and think about what type of learner their child is: <http://parenting.quiz.kaboose.com/25-what-s-your-child-s-learning-style>. Make sure to inform parents that no matter the results, children will excel when they are given a variety of ways to learn.

### **A WORLD OF DIVERSITY**

Share with parents the lessons learned from the book *A Birthday for Ben*, to help them as they plan parties for their children. Ask them to share any party ideas or games that helped make their events more inclusive for a variety of special needs. Try these ideas and games in your classroom.

### **LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE**

Learning a second language is fun and has many developmental benefits. American Sign Language (ASL) stimulates learning through different senses. Knowing how to sign even just a few words also provides children with confidence to interact with a deaf or hard-of-hearing child. Encourage parents to set aside time to introduce or review the signing of new words as appropriate. Suggest some of the websites and videos listed in this lesson that offer instruction in sign language to help students become aware of and interested in learning ASL.

### **COMMUNITY SIGNERS**

Invite a guest speaker who is versed in ASL to visit the class. Ask him or her to teach the students about sign language, demonstrate signing simple words and the letters of the alphabet (do this to the ABC song), help students sign their names, teach students to sign the song "Happy Birthday," etc. Along with your guest, be sure to underscore the fact that children with challenges, such as those who are deaf or hard of hearing, may have to communicate differently, but can communicate and enjoy the same things that hearing children do. Together they can build strong friendships.



## Literature Connections

Title	Author(s) and Illustrator(s)	Summary
<i>The Deaf Musicians</i>	Pete Seeger and Paul DuBois Jacobs  R. Gregory Christie	<i>The Deaf Musicians</i> , by Kennedy Center honoree Pete Seeger, poet Paul DuBois Jacobs, and Coretta Scott King Award winner R. Gregory Christie, highlights the power of music and overcoming challenges, and presents different ways to hear the world.
<i>I Have a Sister—My Sister Is Deaf</i>	Jeanne Whitehouse Peterson  Deborah Kogan Ray	A lyrical book that explains the challenges of a child who can't hear, along with the ways she uses her other senses to play the piano, "hear" the cat purr, and interact with the world around her.
<i>The Golden Rule</i>	Ilene Cooper  Gabi Swiatkowska	Grandpa explains the golden rule to his grandson, which applies to all people, all places, and all religions.
<i>Moses Goes to a Concert</i>	Isaac Millman	A group of deaf children go to a concert where the youngsters meet the percussionist, who is also deaf. She helps them understand that anything is possible with hard work and determination. An engaging book, <i>Moses Goes to a Concert</i> also includes the signed alphabet and a conversation in sign language as Moses relates his experiences at the concert.
<i>The Only One Club*</i>	Jane Naliboff  Jeff Hopkins	This heartwarming story explores the many ways in which children feel unique and special. The only Jewish child in her class, Jennifer enjoys the attention and creates "The Only One Club," of which she is the sole member. When her classmates want to join, she is resistant until she realizes that each of her friends is also "the only one" at something. As she inducts them into her club, she reveals the unique qualities that make each of her classmates extraordinary.

\*PJ Library Book



## Thematic Connections

Understanding physical challenges  
The five senses  
Friendship

### **LESSON CONTRIBUTORS**

The Rosenfeld *Legacy* “Dream Team”