

# Inside PJ Library's Family Holiday Guides

It takes many hands to build 80-page guides. We talk to contributor Lisa Rachlin about her role in creating content for Jewish holidays year-round.

BY PJ LIBRARY STAFF

**M**ore than four years ago, PJ Library began creating dynamic guidebooks intended to help families more easily and meaningfully celebrate Jewish holidays. The team creating these guides includes PJ Library staff, experts, and educators, but an invaluable perspective comes from contributors like Lisa Rachlin. Rachlin is a Boston-area attorney and PJ Library mom raising three Jewish children, although she was not raised Jewish herself. *PROOF* spoke with Rachlin about joining the family holiday guide creation team and her unique contributions.



Holiday guides content creator Lisa Rachlin shares her labor of love with one of her three children.

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**PJ Library:** How did you discover PJ Library?

**Lisa Rachlin:** I made the decision to become Jewish in my mid-20s after meeting my now-husband. Shortly after having our first child, I heard rumors about an organization giving away free books to Jewish families. I initially assumed there was a catch, but I signed up for the program anyway and was pleasantly surprised when books started arriving every month. As new parents, we didn't have a library of children's books at home, let alone Jewish children's books. As we explored how we wanted to "do Jewish" as a growing family, PJ Library became an important part of our journey.

**PJ Library:** How did you come to help create PJ Library's family holiday guides?

**LR:** A friend of mine recruited me to join the Harold Grinspoon Foundation's Next Generation Advisory Board [which is comprised of young professionals who provide feedback to the senior leadership team on strategy and project ideas], hoping my perspective could enhance the group. The Next Gen team had already spearheaded the creation of PJ Library's Passover Haggadah for families with younger children. Based on the strongly positive feedback the Haggadah received, PJ Library decided to pilot a family guide for the High Holidays. My immediate response was to volunteer to help with content creation. I loved the Haggadah's playful imagery and its balance between accessibility and substance. My hope was to bring those same qualities to guides that would assist families in navigating other Jewish holidays.



**PJ Library:** Why are Jewish holiday guides important?

**LR:** Holidays are a special and important part of Jewish practice. However, I often felt it was a struggle to create a meaningful holiday experience while juggling naps and meals and activities for kids of different ages. I felt strongly that parents needed accessible, child-friendly resources that also incorporated meaningful content for adults. Of course, there are lots of valuable online resources for the Jewish holidays, including ones on the PJ Library website. But for busy parents stretched thin, it is helpful to have a print resource with curated content that you can pull off the shelf and use to jump right into a guided family experience.

**PJ Library:** What holidays did you focus on first?

**LR:** The project started in early 2020 with a guide for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and it quickly took on more urgency as COVID hit. We expedited timelines and adjusted content as it became clear that many families would celebrate at home. In 2021, we expanded the guide to include Sukkot and *Simchat Torah*. Not as many families may celebrate these holidays, but they offer joyful kid-friendly experiences, and we wanted the guide to serve as a gateway for expanding practice. For example, if you are a family who typically goes to services on the High Holidays but aren't sure how to celebrate Sukkot, we wanted to provide some ideas.

**PJ Library:** Are there plans to expand?

**LR:** At the end of last year, we began testing a family guide to the winter Jewish holidays (though we're aware that for families in the Southern Hemisphere the seasons are reversed). Our hope is that families who celebrate Hanukkah will see the guide as an opportunity to explore Tu B'Shevat and Purim as well as the Ethiopian Jewish holiday of Sigd, which is not well-known outside of Israel. We are already looking toward opportunities to explore the holidays between Passover and the start of Rosh Hashanah.

**PJ Library:** What challenges are you encountering in the creative process?

**LR:** Many Jewish holidays have very mature themes: Yom Kippur is a day of atonement, and Purim deals with threats of annihilation. We chose to emphasize the key themes of each holiday, including how the ancient roots of



**In August, PJ Library families will receive the High Holidays guide *A Time to Grow* in their mailboxes. Each section presents tips on preparing for the holidays and ideas for celebrating as a family.**

holidays connect to our contemporary lives. For example, the High Holidays guide [now called *A Time to Grow*] features a reflection on how the holidays' origins in the autumnal harvest season in the land of Israel echo the parental experience of raising children. Our amazing illustrator Sophia Vincent Guy and designer Zoe Pappenheimer have brought the same cast of illustrated characters from the Haggadah through all the subsequent guides. Readers see the same kids experiencing the joy and introspection of the Jewish holiday cycle with their families.

**PJ Library:** How has working on the family holiday guides impacted you?

**LR:** It has been an amazing growth opportunity. Nothing in my background (as a musician turned lawyer) prepared me for this type of project – other than being a busy parent! In September 2021, I also joined the board of trustees of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. I've really enjoyed exploring the Foundation's larger mission and how its various programs, including PJ Library, support the Jewish community. My personal goal is to help promote meaningful experiences for parents who are interested in raising their children as Jews, regardless of their family structure, background, or observance level. If the holiday guides can serve as a useful tool to help parents fulfill their own goals for Jewish practice with their children, that's a success. 