



# PJ Library Goes to Space

PJ Library books have shown up in some unexpected places – a hut on the Appalachian Trail and islands in the Caribbean, to name a few – but a stay on the International Space Station tops the list.

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**M**ission specialist Eytan Stibbe floats effortlessly into view on the screen. A blue children's book spins in front of him. Behind him are cords plugged into every kind of device and outlet, and two yellowish lights illuminate the techy-looking area. Dressed in a navy polo and khakis, he's completely upside down by the time he reaches his destination. Once upright, he introduces himself with a wave and says in Hebrew, "In just a moment, we're going to read a book I really like called *A Beautiful World*."

A few days earlier on April 8, Stibbe boarded the SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule for a 20-hour-plus flight to the International Space Station, some 250 miles above Earth. This made Stibbe the second Israeli to venture into space, and he took *A Beautiful World* with him, making it the first PJ Library book in space.

**As a young boy, Eytan Stibbe dreamed of going to space. He realized that dream in April – and took a PJ Library book with him to the International Space Station.**

SCREENSHOT  
COURTESY OF  
THE RAMON  
FOUNDATION

Stibbe – an Air Force fighter pilot turned businessman and philanthropist – and three other Axiom Mission 1 crew members were part of an inaugural all-private mission to the International Space Station. Their collective goal? Advance science, technology, art, and education through experiments and outreach. For Stibbe, reading to the children of Israel in both Hebrew and Arabic was a part of that.

The idea for a storytime started with the Ramon Foundation, a foundation to which Stibbe has a personal connection. It was founded after Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon – his friend and former Air Force commander – died when the space shuttle Columbia broke apart just before landing in 2003. In part, the organization works to inspire a new generation of young Israelis through advanced programs in the fields of science, aviation, and space, including helping to send Stibbe to space.

When it needed a book for storytime, organizers called Keren Grinspoon Israel, which runs the classroom-based literacy programs Sifriyat Pijama (Hebrew for PJ Library) and Maktabat al-Fanoos (Arabic for Lantern Library).

And *A Beautiful World* was an obvious choice for the event. Written by Yael Gover, illustrated by Paul Kor, and published by Kinneret Publishing, it tells the story of creation from Genesis, and the bright illustrations show Earth from an aerial perspective. It also helped that Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking children in Israel were already familiar with the book. In the 2018–2019 school year, KGI distributed *A Beautiful World* to almost 200,000 children in partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Education, and leading up to the storytime, there were videos, games, and other activities available to children.

“Storytime in space was especially meaningful to us because so many children across Israel could watch an astronaut reading a book from space and say, ‘That’s my book!’” said Winnie Sandler Grinspoon, president of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, PJ Library’s parent organization. “We are excited that so many children got to share that proud Israeli moment in history more deeply with one of our books.”

Three of those children belonged to Sara Chertoff. On April 17, they headed to a friend’s house in Jerusalem for a viewing party. The children, six in total, plopped on the couch and watched the prerecorded storytime on the projector screen. “They were so excited,” she said. “They couldn’t stop giggling, but once he started speaking, they were silent.”

For Chertoff, the gravity of the event went far beyond its unique nature. Her children, especially her 8-year-old son who is fascinated with space, didn’t realize there were other Israeli astronauts besides Ramon. “To say that is an Israeli up in the International Space Station representing us and speaking Hebrew was really special,” said Chertoff, mother to 4-year-old twins as well. “To say, ‘Yeah, you guys could do this too,’ and to see the light in their eyes.”

That light is exactly what Andrea Arbel, the executive director of Keren Grinspoon Israel, hoped this storytime would give children. She also hopes that reading PJ Library books — at home or in space — will continue to inspire children to dream. “If you have that love of getting lost in a good story,” she said, “that’s going to help ensure that you’re going to have that next generation of dreamers, visionaries, and educators.”

## FAST FACTS



**For *A Beautiful World* to fit into Eytan Stibbe’s luggage and meet NASA specifications, the book size was reduced by 20% to save on weight.**



**During Stibbe’s 15-day stay on the International Space Station, he traveled around Earth approximately 240 times — or every 90 minutes — flying about 6.3 million miles in total.**



**Stibbe brought several meaningful items with him to space, including pages of the late Ilan Ramon’s journal that survived the space shuttle Columbia tragedy. In fact, he continued Ramon’s work of studying thunderstorms from space.**



**The estimated ticket price for a private trip to the International Space Station? \$55 million.**

### WANT TO WATCH THE STORYTIME?

Go to [pjlibrary.org/storytime-in-space](https://pjlibrary.org/storytime-in-space) to see it on YouTube with English subtitles.