

70 FACES

TODAY'S HILLEL STUDENTS, TOMORROW'S PJ LIBRARY PARENTS

By **SHEILA KATZ**

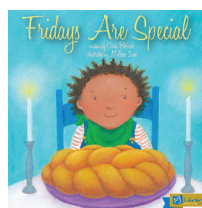
We learn in Jewish tradition that there are 70 faces of Torah. Anyone who has spent time on a college campus knows that there are at least as many faces of Jewish students today. While it might not seem like the children reading PJ Library books today have much in common with current college students, the span of children just being born to young adults entering college are all a part of the same Generation Z. Nicknamed “The Plurals,” members of Generation Z value pluralism, and it’s no surprise why. They are the most diverse generation, holding a multiplicity of ethnic and racial identities, and they take pride in that diversity.

Hillel International works to engage all Jewish students on college campuses around the world. To do this, we stay informed about trends and tailor our student engagement strategies to provide both relevant and compelling Jewish experiences for students on campus. By learning about today’s Hillel’s students, we’re also preparing for tomorrow’s PJ Library parents.

Below are the top five diversity trends among Jewish members of Generation Z. Also included are suggested PJ Library books you can be reading to your children or grandchildren that celebrate the diversity in our community.

1. JEWS OF COLOR

We are currently living in the last period during which, the United States will ever have a Caucasian majority. Since 2000, there has been a 50 percent increase in the number of biracial babies born in the United States. Jews of color, including Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, make up approximately 10 to 20 percent of the Jewish population. Hillel on campus is working to strengthen programs that focus on race, power, and privilege, while also making sure that all Jewish students, regardless of the color of their skin, feel welcome at Hillel.



Fridays Are Special

Like any typical Jewish family, a biracial little boy and his African-American father prepare for Shabbat. As they make challah and set the table, they prove that Fridays are special not only because of the things we do, but because of with whom we are doing them.

2. INTERFAITH FAMILIES

More than half of Jewish students on campus today come from families in which only one parent is Jewish. They likely also have family members of additional faiths. Hillel is a pluralistic organization that believes deeply in the value of inclusivity. A student with one Jewish parent—whichever parent—is welcome at the table. Through our partnership with the Genesis Prize, we have launched campaigns that showcase and celebrates the diversity of Jewish students on campus today, including our Jews of the University Facebook page which regularly features Jews from interfaith backgrounds.

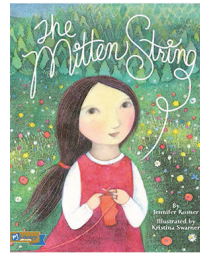


Nonna's Hanukkah Surprise

Rachel's grandmother, Nonna, isn't Jewish—but when Rachel forgets to bring her homemade menorah to Nonna's house, Nonna figures out a way to save her granddaughter's holiday. A story about an interfaith family, this book puts the emphasis on family.

3. JEWS WITH DISABILITIES

Approximately 1 in 5 people in the United States has a disability. On campus today, we work to engage students with seen and unseen disabilities, including mental health issues. Hillel's Ruderman Inclusion Ambassador program trains students with skills to engage their peers with disabilities while creating more inclusive programming for Hillel.

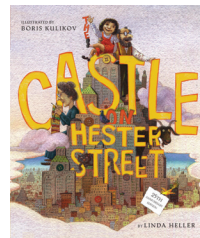


The Mitten String

Ruthie, an avid knitter, helps a deaf woman “hear” her young baby: she knits a connecting thread that lets mother and child communicate without sound. When Ruthie sees the differences in the people around her and works to meet their needs, she’s helping make the world a better place with every stitch.

4. RUSSIAN-SPEAKING JEWS

Fifteen percent of American Jews today come from Russian-speaking families. Understanding this statistic, Hillel has supported campuses seeking to engage Russian-speaking students in innovative ways. These include Baruch College Hillel's Russian Speaking Sisterhood Project and Hillel at the University of Connecticut's Babushka's House.

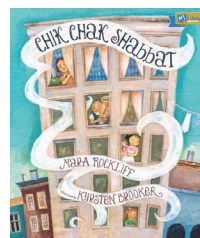


The Castle on Hester Street

Julie's grandfather tells her all sorts of tall tales about his family's emigration from Russia, but her grandmother tells her the truth: it wasn't easy, but they're glad they did it. Julie's life wouldn't be the same today if they hadn't made the journey. Couched in humor and warmth, this story underscores the importance of holding on to one's history while celebrating the present.

5. GLOBAL NETWORK

For today's college students, it's cool to have friends across the world. And because of international staff at camps, Birthright Israel trips, and study abroad, they have lots of ways to make global friends and connections. Students want to learn and explore other cultures and believe in being connected globally. Many Hillels are working across continents to help students interact with each other and partner on projects focused on justice. Recently, Hillel International launched a student cabinet, which features 23 student leaders from around the world who are charged with building a global student network.



Chik Chak Shabbat

Goldie Simcha lives alone in apartment 5-A, and every Friday night makes herself a delicious, fragrant cholent for Shabbat. When she's too sick to cook, her neighbors, all of different international backgrounds, stop by with their countries' versions of the stew—and Goldie learns that maybe she's not exactly alone after all.

Our Jewish community is stronger when we are all represented in the pages of the books that we read and in the stories and traditions we tell. We look forward to welcoming future generations to campus and to continue the great work of PJ Library in celebrating diversity and inclusion.

SHEILA KATZ is the Vice President for Social Entrepreneurship at Hillel International, working to engage students on the periphery of Jewish life in innovative ways. She can be reached at skatz@hillel.org