

# **A Place at the Table: The Jewish Community Within the Library Diversity World**



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## **Presenter:**

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## **Why Include Jews in EDI?**

A crash course in the marginalization of Jews and the interconnection between antisemitism and racism:

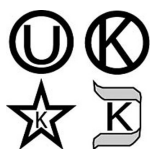
- **Jews are 2% of the US population but are the target of 12% of all hate crimes, and 60% of religiously motivated hate crimes.** The next-highest stat is for Muslims, who are 1.1% of the US population and the target of 13% of religiously motivated hate crimes. [See FBI Hate Crime statistics from 2019](#), the last year for which [comprehensive data](#) is available. The Anti-Defamation League reports that the [rate of antisemitic incidents](#) is the highest it's been since they began tracking in 1979.
- **Antisemitism, like racism, is the water we swim in.** For most of us, it's not the rabid KKK version, but its messages are absorbed into the subconscious: [conspiracy theories](#) that claim Jews control the media or are all rich, that Jews are all-powerful and are out to get non-Jews; these are all dangerous lies. Antisemitism is a paranoid mentality that uses Jews as the ultimate scapegoat, a false oversimplified explanation for the world's complex societal problems. As British comedian and social commentator David Baddiel [points out](#) in his book [Jews Don't Count](#), Jews are "Schrodinger's whites," seen as white or non-white depending on the politics of the observer.

- **Antisemitism is a core belief of white supremacy, and is the pattern that racism was built upon.** The [first example](#) of systemic biological racism is actually antisemitism. Since ancient times, Jews faced religious persecution but during the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, the first blood purity laws were created, defining Jews not just as believers in a specific religion, but as a race whose members supposedly inherited impurity. This formed the pattern later used to justify race slavery and racial genocide in the “New World.”
- **Your Jewish neighbors are not safe.** Antisemitic conspiracy theories are regularly spread by elected officials in the US [government](#). Jews who choose to wear religious garb risk [violent attack](#) from strangers on the street. Synagogues must hire full time security teams and conduct active shooter trainings to reduce the risk from the inevitable [attacks](#) like those in Pittsburgh, PA, Poway, CA and Colleyville, TX. Every day when I go to work in my synagogue library, where I conduct storytimes for preschoolers, I worry that this might be the day when an antisemitic attacker targets me and my students.
- **Jews are not all white or white-presenting.** It’s estimated that approximately [20%](#) of US Jews are African American, Latinx, Hispanic, Asian, Sephardic, Mizrahi and mixed race. These intersectional Jews face extra challenges because of the many aspects of their identities.
- Like disability and sexual identity, Judaism and other religions are identities which may or **may not be [visible to others](#)**. There may be more Jews in your community than you realize.
- Please [watch](#) “**Diversity Needs: Jewish Voices**,” a lightning talk from ALA’s EDI Assembly 2022, presented by librarian Rebecca Levitan. Start the video at 42:30.

**Ways to include Jews & Jewish representation in library spaces and in the diversity conversation (works for other minorities too):**

- Collection development. Even if your community has few Jews, your readers need Jewish books so that they can “meet” Jews on the page if not in real life, and learn to empathize with them. Jewish “window” books can create empathy and reduce hate. FYI: Traditionally, Jews do not proselytize. We want to make clear that we are not promoting Jewish sacred texts or trying to teach non-Jewish readers to practice Judaism. We want ALL readers to read Jewish books as **window books and bridge builders** (thank you to Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop for the vitally important “windows and mirrors” metaphor). We want to be seen and understood, as all people do.
- Bibliographies & Displays: include Jewish books in your diverse displays and booklists.
- Library programming (book discussion, storytime, speakers): include Jewish books or speakers among others.

- Workshops/seminars/conferences/library school: When planning a diverse line-up, include Jewish speakers on your program. Check a Jewish calendar and schedule events when observant Jews can participate.
- Partnerships with local organizations (programs, volunteers, outreach): reach out to local PJ Library representatives, Jewish Federations, college Hillel groups, synagogues, etc.
- Consider the Calendar:
  - The Jewish calendar is Lunar-based, so holiday dates aren't fixed from year to year. When planning programs - especially in the fall (the main Jewish holiday season) - double check to make sure you aren't conflicting with Jewish holidays. The biggest ones to avoid are Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover in the spring. Many Jews additionally don't work or attend programs on Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, and Shavuot. Note: Hanukkah is not a major holiday and can be scheduled over. Check out <https://www.hebcal.com/> for specific dates and [https://www.chabad.org/holidays/default\\_cdo/jewish/holidays.htm](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/default_cdo/jewish/holidays.htm) for information about Jewish holidays and associated restrictions. For a simple yes/no answer, check <https://isitajewishholidaytoday.com/>.
  - For Jews who keep the Sabbath (aka, Shomer Shabbat) programs from sundown Friday until after dark on Saturday nights are off limits. Consider switching up the timing of some programming to make it accessible.
  - Be aware that the calendar may affect other groups too, such as Muslims.
  - Plan ways to recognize Jewish American Heritage Month in May and Jewish Book Month in November each year. Consider intersectional events or displays, like inviting an Asian American Jewish author to speak in May when both Jewish American Heritage Month and Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month are celebrated.



- Consider your Snacks:

- Many observant Jews keep kosher. If you're serving snacks, putting food out in its original packaging that displays Kosher symbols, as well as serving uncut fruit will ensure that Kosher-keeping patrons can feel included and not go hungry. A few common kosher symbols can be seen here.

### **Where to learn about authentic Jewish books:**

**The Association of Jewish Libraries** is the leading authority on Judaic librarianship and offers bibliographies, publications, book awards, book reviews, virtual programs, and an annual conference. See [www.jewishlibraries.org](http://www.jewishlibraries.org). Here is a list of helpful AJL resources:

- [Evaluating Jewish Representation in Children's Literature](#) is a free guide for libraries
- ["Love Your Neighbor"](#) booklists recommend Jewish books for ALL young readers

- [Holiday Highlights](#), recommendations for the best new Jewish holiday books for youth, released each spring and fall
- The [Sydney Taylor Book Award](#) recognizes the best Jewish children's and teen books each January
- The [Sydney Taylor Shmooze](#) mock award blog reviews Jewish juvenile books year-round
- Association of Jewish Libraries [Fiction Award](#) recognizes Jewish literature for adults
- Association of Jewish Libraries [Reference](#) & [Bibliography](#) Awards recognizes scholarly works
- [Nice Jewish Books](#), an AJL podcast, has audio interviews with authors of Jewish fiction
- [The Book of Life](#), an AJL podcast, has audio interviews with authors of Jewish children's and young adult books
- June 2023: daily Jewish LGBT+ kidlit recommendations for Pride Month on [The Book of Life's Facebook page](#)
- [AJL News & Reviews](#), is the quarterly member newsletter of the Association of Jewish Libraries, offering book reviews of children's and adult materials
- [AJL Calendar of Events](#): watch for "AJL Presents" virtual events which are free and open to the public; see recordings of past events on [AJL's YouTube Channel](#); for additional members-only Roundtable events, [join AJL](#)

**Additional resources for finding authentic Jewish books:**

- [The Jewish Book Council](#)
- [Association for Jewish Studies Review](#)
- [The Jewish Review of Books](#)
- [Hadassah Magazine](#) book reviews
- The American Library Association [Sophie Brody Medal](#)
- [Jewish Quarterly Wingate Literary Prize](#)
- [The National Jewish Book Awards](#)
- [The Sami Rohr Prize](#)
- [Natan Notable Books](#)
- [The Edward Lewis Wallant Award](#)

- [Canadian Jewish Literary Awards](#)
- [Jewish Books for Kids...And More!](#) blog
- [The Whole Megillah](#) blog
- The [Jewish Kidlit Mavens](#) Facebook group is a discussion forum about Jewish kidlit
- [List of Jewish publishers of children's literature](#)
- [KidlitKippot](#) is an Instagram curating images of Jewish representation in children's book illustrations, especially in non-Jewish books
- [PJ Library](#) (picture books) and [PJ Our Way](#) (chapter books) offer free Jewish books for children

### **OPPORTUNITY:**

The Association of Jewish Libraries annual conference will be held online, June 19-22, 2023. Register to learn more about Jewish literary resources and Judaic librarianship! Recordings of conference sessions will be available to registrants for one year following the conference. In 2024 the conference will be held in-person in San Diego, CA. The conference is held digitally every other year. <https://jewishlibraries.org/2023-digital-conference/>

### **CAUTION:**

**Please avoid Messianic materials**, which can often be recognized because they refer to Jesus as Yeshua. These are not authentic Jewish books. [Messianism is actually a form of Christianity](#), not Judaism.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Jews want to be your allies, and we need your support in return. The sage Rabbi Hillel, author of the Golden Rule, said in the Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Ancestors: "If I am not for myself, who is for me? When I am only for myself, what am I? And If not now, when?" When indeed? Thank you, and if you have questions please reach out to me at [bookoflifepodcast@gmail.com](mailto:bookoflifepodcast@gmail.com).