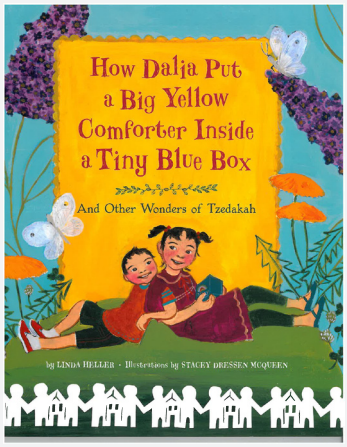
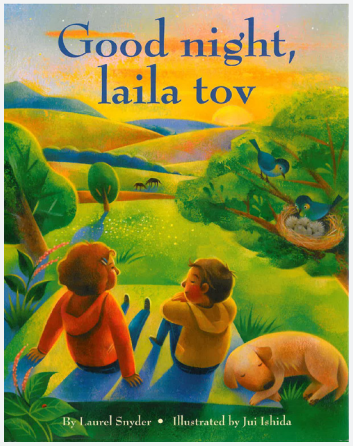
Second Reaction: Reflections of a Kindergartener's Reaction to Two Jewish Picture Books

Heller, Linda. *How Dalia Put a Big Yellow Comforter Inside a Tiny Blue Box and Other Wonders of Tzedakah*. Illus. Stacey Dressen McQueen. Berkeley: Tricycle Press, 2011.

Snyder, Laurel. *Good night, Laila tov*. Illus. Jui Ishida. New York: Random House, 2012.

Nicole Spurlock





I took an opportunity to share Laurel Snyder's *Good Night, Laila Tov* and Linda Heller's *How Dalia Put a Big Yellow Comforter Inside a Tiny Blue Box* with my own little kindergartener at home. After some initial resistance to story time, my daughter was taken in by the illustrations in Laila Tov. A brief picture walk beforehand helped to show that it's a story about family, and camping, and nature—all themes of which I know she has prior knowledge. She settled down and showed interest after that—a success for Jui Ishida, its illustrator.

What makes this book enjoyable is its short, rhyming text. Its quick text allowed for plenty of interactive discussion as we progressed through the book. I emphasized the book's rhyming stanzas in an effort to reinforce my daughter's developing "ear," and to reinforce an understanding of rhyme. Also, every single illustration in the book includes either an animal or bug, which was an attraction for my child and probably would be for most other children. In fact, she asked me to read the story again so we could stay on certain pages longer, like the one with the jars full of nature treasures.

This book passed the interest and interaction test with my own kindergartener, and therefore it is something I would try in a larger classroom of kindergarteners during read-alouds of any size, especially for lessons that emphasize rhythm and rhyme in text. However, additional discussion is needed in order to teach the Jewish concepts of *Laila Tov,* including the English translation of Laila Tov, and an explanation of the tradition of Tikkun Olam which is the whole point of the family's camping trip. But even without that discussion, it's still a vivid and attractive picture book with engaging rhymes about a family who goes on a camping trip, plants trees and experiences nature together. Aside from the title, the Jewish aspect of the book is subtle, but symbols in the illustrations provide more opportunities for discussion about the Jewish culture should the teacher or parent choose to do so.

Yellow Comforter is a different kind of book because it is written in prose with much more text, but the Jewish culture is more evident in this book than in *Laila Tov.* My five-year-old wondered why I kept saying the word *tzedakah* and pronouncing the Hebrew letters so many times, so more discussion is necessary to explain the meaning of the new words and to connect to prior knowledge of different languages. For example, even preschoolers know that Dora speaks Spanish, Kai Lan speaks Mandarin Chinese, and many of us speak English—a good place to start connecting. I worried that the book would lose my daughter's attention because of the amount of text, but it actually didn't. The book's format works well to build the reader's curiosity, and, indeed, it kept her attention. She was also inspired to make her own "'dakah" box after we finished the story. Did she understand the purpose of the tzedakah box? It's questionable. More discussion and reinforcement would definitely be needed to teach its purpose within Jewish traditions.

This book could be used in classrooms as young as kindergarten because its theme is age appropriate and it provides a perfect opportunity for an after-story project and/or a unit about the Jewish culture, including the Hebrew alphabet and the tradition of the tzedakah box.

About the Author

Nicole Spurlock lives in West Lafayette, IN with her husband and daughter. She is a senior pre-service teacher in the College of Education at Purdue University and a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.