



WHEN JESSIE CAME ACROSS THE SEA

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Jessie lives in an Eastern European shtetl. The rabbi in her town decides to give Jessie his ticket to America, where she works for years to save enough money to send for her beloved grandmother.

Jessie represents the many thousands of Jewish people from Eastern Europe who left their villages and came to the United States in search of a better life. There were three main waves of immigration, the last being from 1880-1920. *When Jessie Came Across the Sea* does not depict life in the village as harsh, but the truth is that many Jews fled their pogrom-torn homeland and came to the United States seeking refuge. It was not Jessie's choice to come to America. It was typical of many families to invest in their strong and promising youth who might be able to earn enough money to send for older family members, as Jessie did. Countless Jewish immigrants settled on the Lower East Side of New York City; while it was not always easy for these immigrants, they approached their new lives with hard work, discipline, and great love for America's promise.

IMMIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

Jessie demonstrates great courage when she must leave her home, her grandmother, and everything she knows to travel alone to a new country and a new life. Some interesting questions to ponder with your children include:

- How would you describe Jessie? What kind of a person is she?
- Why didn't Jessie tell her grandmother that she didn't want to go to America?
- Why did Jessie leave her mother's wedding ring behind?
- Why didn't Jessie marry Lou right away?

Jessie's mother's wedding ring is very dear to her. Ask your

children to think about what objects are most precious to them. Teach your children about different kinds of value, including sentimental value.

V'HADARTA P'NEI ZAKEN

V'hadarta P'nei Zaken is the Biblical teaching to respect the elderly. In Israel, every public bus has a sign that reads: "*V'hadarta p'nei zaken*," clearly instructing the young to offer their seats to anyone older who does not have one. Respect is a central value in Judaism—respect for parents, for animals, for the earth, for others, and for oneself.

Jessie loved and honored her grandmother. Talk with your children about the Jewish value of respecting the elderly. Plan some activities to help them practice *v'hadarta p'nei zaken*. Some suggestions are:

- making paper flowers and taking them to a nursing home;
- visiting a community senior lunch program and visiting with the seniors during the meal;
- organizing a group visit (through a classroom, after school program, scout group, etc.) and preparing a skit, poem or songs to perform at a senior center or assisted living community;
- making cookies that represent a holiday—Thanksgiving turkeys, 4th of July flags, or *Purim hamantaschen* and presenting them to elders at your Jewish community center.

These activities will be well worth the effort as your children learn that our elderly are to be honored and cherished. Pj