

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

All-of-a-Kind Family

by
Sydney Taylor

Book Information

Sydney Taylor, All-of-a-Kind Family
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Five girls have simple but happy times, with parents rich in kindness but poor in money.

Award: Misc./Other

Topics: Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Growing Up; Family Life, Mothers; Family Life, Sisters; People, Jewish; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Just Connect: Relationships; Recommended Reading, Jewish Stars

Main Characters

Charlie Papa's peddler friend, who is sad because he cannot find his lost sweetheart

Charlotte and Gertie the youngest two sisters, ages six and four

Ella the oldest of the five sisters, who is twelve and has a crush on Charlie

Henny (Henrietta) the second oldest daughter, who is ten and has long blonde curls

Mama and Papa the girls' parents; Mama runs the household and Papa owns a junk shop

Miss Allen the library lady who is kind to the five sisters

Sarah the eight-year-old sister who loses her library book

Tanta Mama's widowed sister, who helps whenever Mama needs her

Vocabulary

lox smoked salmon

quarantine to isolate a person who has a contagious disease

tenement a building to live in, especially one intended for rent

Torah the entire body of Jewish religious law and learning

unleavened without yeast

Yiddish Jewish speech (language)

Synopsis

The "all-of-a-kind family" consists of Mama, Papa, and five daughters: Ella, Henny, Sarah, Charlotte, and Gertie. The family lives in the crowded tenement section of the lower East Side in New York City around the beginning of the twentieth century. They are fortunate to occupy an entire floor of a two-story private house.

The story begins with Sarah upset over losing her library book. Mama tells her it is her responsibility to pay for the book. When the sisters go to the library and explain about the missing book, Miss Allen, the library lady, is kind and allows the book to be paid off one penny a week. All the sisters agree to pitch in one penny per week to help Sarah pay for the book as quickly as possible.

As helpful as the girls are to Sarah, there is one thing in which they are not very helpful. All the sisters hate to dust. Mama becomes tired of the girls trying to avoid the chore and creates a game to make dusting more fun. She hides buttons around the house and tells the girls the one who finds all the buttons while dusting has done a wonderful job. All the girls want to dust so they can play the button game and are taught to be the "best little housekeepers in the whole world."

Papa owns a junk shop, and on occasion the girls go visit him. They especially like one of Papa's peddler friends, Charlie. Charlie is Papa's special friend who often disappears for days at a time and always returns sad. Papa discovers Charlie is looking for his girlfriend, who left him when she found out his parents did not want them to marry. When Ella overhears Papa telling Mama Charlie's story, she is upset because she realizes his heart belongs to someone else, and her schoolgirl crush is

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over.

One particularly hot day, Mama takes her daughters to Coney Island. They enjoy swimming at the beach and walking along the boardwalk. While watching a show, Henny becomes separated from the family and Mama and Ella frantically search for her. A barker suggests they try the police station, which is exactly where Henny shows up.

The family is Jewish and each Friday, at dusk, the Sabbath begins with a Hebrew prayer. Throughout the year, they proudly celebrate other Jewish holidays. Purim Day celebrates a failed attempt to hang all Jews. While preparing for Passover, Mama must also take care of her four daughters with scarlet fever. The High Holy Days, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, lead to the final holiday, Succos, a thanksgiving for the harvest. During this holiday a special wooden hut is built out in the family's tiny backyard. It is on Succos eve that Charlie discovers his lost girlfriend, Kathy (Miss Allen). The family is surprised, but pleased by this turn of events.

The story concludes with Mama giving birth to a baby boy, little Charlie. Gertie, the youngest daughter, needs some convincing that she will like being an older sister. Ella states that they are no longer an "all-of-a-kind family." Mama tells her the family will always be close, loving, and loyal, which in some ways makes them "all-of-a-kind."

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Gertie is upset when another baby is on the way because she has been the "baby" of the family for five years. Where do you fall in the order of brothers and sisters in your family? Do you find you are treated differently based upon this order? Would you rather be in a different order in the family? If you are an only child, would you prefer to have a younger or older sibling?

Students will identify their role in the family and how they feel this role affects them. They should have appropriate responses as to why they would want to be the oldest, a middle, or the youngest child. For example, the oldest child might be allowed more privileges, buy may have more responsibilities, as well.

Literary Analysis

The story takes the reader through many Jewish holidays. It is obviously very important to them to celebrate these as part of their culture. What holidays or traditions do you celebrate in your family? Which are the most important? Which are your favorites? Why?

Students should list holidays and traditions they celebrate; some may be religious and some may not. Favorites will vary.

Inferential Comprehension

List important details or traits about each of the girls in the family. Which sibling is most similar to you? Which is the least similar?

Ella is the oldest daughter at twelve and is just becoming an adolescent. She has a crush on Charlie. Henny (Henrietta) is ten and is mischievous. Sarah is eight years old and has a stubborn streak. This is apparent at the supper table one night when she will not eat her rice soup. Charlotte is six and is labeled as the "dreamer," for she is often daydreaming. Gertie is the youngest daughter at age four. She likes being the youngest and is not sure she wants another baby in the family. Students will compare the siblings and identify which ones are most and least similar to themselves.

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Constructing Meaning

Explain why the book is titled, *All-of-a-Kind Family*.
Think of a book title that would describe your family.

"All-of-a-kind family" describes the family based on all five children being the same gender. It also means they will always be loving, close, and loyal to each other.

them prepare a Yiddish dictionary complete with words and definitions.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story takes place in the lower East Side of New York City around the beginning of the twentieth century. Most of the people in the family's neighborhood live in tenement buildings. Tenement housing was often crowded. Immigration added greatly to the problems of New York City. Have students identify what types of problems might have occurred. How could these problems be solved?

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The Jewish faith plays an important role in the story. The family celebrates many Jewish holidays and traditions. Have students choose a country and find out what holidays and traditions it celebrates. Each student should choose a different country. Once information is gathered, have students bring in one picture that best represents a holiday or tradition from the country they chose. Display all pictures on a classroom bulletin board.

Recognizing Details In the chapter entitled, "The Sabbath," Mama must shop for the Sabbath meals. She takes her daughters to market, and they have a great time. Have students reread this chapter and write down as many details as they can find describing the market scene. Once they have done this, students should work in small groups to prepare a shoebox diorama of the market.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Mama notes that the girls are the only ones who speak English rather than Yiddish. Throughout the story, many Yiddish words and phrases are used. Working in pairs, have students scan the book for as many of these words and phrases as possible. Have