



ACROSS THE ALLEY

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Abe's grandfather wants him to be a violinist; Willie's father assumes he'll grow up to be a baseball superstar. As it turns out, the boys are happiest when they exchange hobbies!

In *Across the Alley*, two boys make the case for understanding, learning from one another, and the naturalness of friendships between people who have both obvious similarities and clear differences.

The story follows the blossoming friendship of two boys, Willie and Abe. At night they are the best of friends. During the day, however, racial differences dictate that their friendship be kept a secret. *Across the Alley* opens a door to valuable discussions between parents and youngsters about the meaning and values of friendship and the difficult topics surrounding racial prejudices.

IN THE TORAH

In the Torah we read: "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself," and at every Passover *seder* we recall what it was like to be "strangers in a strange land." Many Jewish precepts call for treating all people with respect. Point out to your children the historical similarities between Jewish and African American experiences: a history of slavery, of being ostracized in the countries in which they lived, their longstanding lack of access to educational and work opportunities, etc.

Across the Alley provides great context within which to discuss difficult topics, like slavery and race, with your children. Take advantage of biographies of famous figures

mentioned in this book to continue your discussion and learning together. For example, the breakthrough of Jackie Robinson into the major leagues in 1947 is a fascinating way of furthering this dialogue; so, too, is an examination of Jewish musicians in the 20th century, many of whom fled Europe for freedom of expression in the United States.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After reading the book with your children, consider the following questions:

- Why did the two boys believe their friendship should be kept a secret?
- Do you think someone told Abe and Willie that they shouldn't be friends? What was wonderful for the boys in having a secret friend?
- Do you think Willie's dad and Abe's grandpa would have understood their friendship when it began?
- At the beginning of the story, do you think Willie's father would have approved of his attraction to the violin? Why is this?
- Why did Abe's grandpa believe that "Jewish kids shouldn't waste time with baseball"?
- What do you think children and adults could learn from Willie and Abe's friendship? Pj