



SHLEMIEL CROOKS

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A pair of thieves lose their horse and wagon while trying to steal a shipment of kosher Passover wine from Israel

Yiddish is a Germanic language with heavy Hebrew influence, written with the Hebrew alphabet. At one time, Yiddish was the primary language of Ashkenazi Jews (of Eastern and Central European descent). Referred to by many as the *mameloschen* (mother tongue), it is estimated that at its height, Yiddish was understood by approximately 11 million Jews. In New York, Yiddish-speaking Jews of the 19th and early 20th centuries developed a fount of Yiddish literature, music and theater. Though estimates state that there are fewer than 250,000 Yiddish speakers in U.S. today, the language is experiencing resurgence and is being taught at an increasing number of colleges and universities.

READING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Shlemiel Crooks is written to mirror the nuances and rhythms of Yiddish. It includes witticisms and mild “curses” that are associated with Yiddish. When the story’s narrator wishes that “potatoes should sprout in [the crooks] ears” or “a trolley car should grow in their stomachs” we certainly get the idea, but an amusing way typical of Yiddish. Asking a question and immediately answering it is also typical of Yiddish. Even within the title of this book the crooks are referred to as inept bunglers or “*shlemiels*.”

Enjoy Yiddish with your children! Take turns pointing out the humorous words and phrases in the book taking pleasure in the sounds rolling off your tongue. Ask your children to create their own clever phrases reminiscent of those in the book.

THE TELMUND

The Talmud is a compilation of writings stemming from centuries-old rabbinic discussions on Jewish law, customs, history, and ethics. Jews around the world study Talmud to gain understanding of Torah and Jewish ways of interacting with the world. The Talmud is comprised of the Mishnah (the earliest major rabbinic work) and the Gemara (commentaries on the Mishnah), accompanied by interpretations from as far back as the 11th century. The Talmud contains rules to govern relationships between people, the proper treatment of animals, and laws for dealing with nature.

The Talmud has been a source of learning for many centuries. It is said that when one participates in the study of Talmud one is taking part in discourse that has been unbroken across the millennia. It should come as no surprise that the Jewish people came to be known as The People of The Book, referring to the sacred text of the Torah. In a very important way, you continue this extraordinary tradition by reading to your children and supporting their Jewish learning.

Encourage your children to think beyond the limits of the books they read. Help them choose a subject area to explore and make it a family exercise to discover additional information on this subject. From *Shlemiel Crooks*, you might look further into how kosher products are marketed, how wine is made, or the history of St. Louis. Pj