



THE VANISHING GOURDS: A SUKKOT MYSTERY

Written by Susan Axe-bronk

Illustrated by Marta Monelli

Sara and her mom make a special trip to the country to choose decorations for the family sukkah. Who's responsible for the fact that Sara's favorite gourds disappear, one by one, from the sukkah?

Sukkot is a Jewish fall harvest festival, similar in some ways to celebrations of the earth's bounty found in other cultures. Also called the Festival of Booths, *Sukkot* reminds us of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, during which they lived in temporary shelters. In addition, we remember the ancient times when farmers slept in temporary huts in order to be near their fields during the harvest. And it is commonly held that the Pilgrims of New England created the first Thanksgiving by drawing on the Biblical roots of *Sukkot* for their community celebration.

SUKKOT AND THE SUKKAH

Sukkot refers both to the name of the holiday and to the plural form of the word *sukkah*—the booth or hut which is partially open to the sky, a place to “dwell” during the holiday. Today, Jewish families all over the world decorate family or community-owned *sukkot* with fruits, vegetables, homemade paper crafts and whatever else inspires gratitude for the many wonderful blessings in our lives. During the holiday, the *sukkah* is used for meals, entertaining guests and, sometimes, even for sleeping.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Sukkot is a joyful holiday that lends itself to family participation—from decorating to cooking to entertaining

guests. The Internet is a great source of ideas, crafts, and recipes for all things *Sukkot*-related.

Here are some discussion starters for your family related to *The Vanishing Gourds: A Sukkot Mystery*:

- Which Jewish holiday is your favorite, and why?
- Is it more fun to prepare for a holiday or to actually celebrate it?
- What parts of this story help you understand why Sara loved *Sukkot*?
- Would you be angry like Sara if your gourds were smashed by squirrels?
- What does it say about Sara that even though the animals destroyed her gourds, she fed them throughout the cold winter weather?
- A harvest celebration seems an especially good time to help people who may not have a warm home and plenty of food. What ideas do you have to help others in your community? Pj

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