



## RIFKA TAKES A BOW

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*Rifka is growing up in the world of 1920s Yiddish theater on the Lower East Side, where both her parents are actors. She loves poking around backstage. But one day, Rifka herself is in the spotlight!*

### JEWISH CONCEPTS

The year is 1915; the place is the Grand Theatre in New York City's Lower East Side. On this night it is packed with Jewish immigrants who have put aside their day's worries and come to see a play.

The play they are eager to see is in Yiddish, a European Jewish language which combines elements of Hebrew and German. Yiddish theater had its roots in 19th century Europe, and as more and more Jews immigrated to America, Yiddish theater came too. By the early 1900's New York City had become a center of Yiddish culture with more than 24 Yiddish theaters!

But what was the draw? American life in the early 20th century was not easy for emigrating families. Jewish immigrants, often fleeing persecution or poverty in Europe, struggled to make a living in cities such as NY. These struggles, along with their dreams, were brought to life by Yiddish actors and given a collective context in which people could laugh, cry and find meaning.

How to be American and Jewish? How to break out of poverty? These were questions that Yiddish theater addressed. Unlike theater today where audiences sit quietly, in Yiddish theater everyone participated. So when little Rifka spontaneously joins the show, no one is too surprised -- and we can imagine how her words "Not to worry," were just what the audience needed to hear.

### USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Rifka is not afraid when her parents disguise themselves, but she is a bit afraid to explore under the stairs where the props are kept. She shows real *ometz lev*, courage of the heart when, finding herself on the stage, she spontaneously joins right in!

Here are some questions you might like to discuss with your child:

- How do you think Rifka felt on the stage at first?
- Did her feelings change, at the end, when she takes a bow? If so, why?
- Is there something that sometimes scares you?
- What might help you overcome your fears?

Little Rifka probably goes with her parents to the theater because she has no other place to go while they work. She loves to be part of what they do. What do you as a parent do that your child might like to learn about? Perhaps you can take your child to work one day, or maybe you can go to your child's school and share a story or something from your grown-up life.

Yiddish Theater still exists! To find out more visit the National Yiddish Theatre online at [www.nationalyiddishtheatre.org](http://www.nationalyiddishtheatre.org).