

*Building a Nation of Little Readers: Twentieth Century Yiddish Primers and Workbooks for Children*

Faded cloth covers, peeling spines, frayed edges, splitting seams, stained endpapers, vulgar doodles and scribbles effacing every page. Kids rarely take good care of books. Of these, the primers and workbooks once owned, loved, and abused by children in Yiddish schools, some have endured better than others. But all of them resound with profound loss. The schools are long gone. The children have grown into aging adults. And the language, Yiddish, once spoken by the majority of Jews in the world, is all but forgotten today.

As a teacher of Yiddish, I am captivated by the the storied histories of the individuals and institutions that came before me. I am awed by their passion and their fight and inspired by their commitment to entrust this thousand-year-old language to generations that, ultimately, failed to sustain it. I collect the evidence of those efforts—the schoolbooks, the song sheets, the Jewish holiday-themed coloring books, the ephemera—in order to remember the fire that once burned, and to learn how to rekindle it.

Teaching children to read and speak Yiddish in the twentieth century held a special significance: the Yiddish school system in America was a product of half a century of struggle for the soul of the Jewish people. In the nineteenth century intellectuals, radicals, and revolutionaries known as *maskilim* (advocates and practitioners of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment) had called for the national awakening of a Jewish people on the threshold of a new era of self-definition. Literature was central to their cause: when the German philosopher Herder had said that the spirit of a people could be found in its literature, the Jews of Europe listened. But what would be the language of such a literature? Hebrew, the ancient, sacred language of the Bible and religious life, was one answer. Yiddish, the European Jewish vernacular for a thousand years, was another, and one with tremendous audience potential. Harnessing the power of a new medium, the Yiddish press, writers, intellectuals, and social reformers cultivated a Yiddish reading public and an impassioned literary culture. By the turn of the twentieth century literary modernism emerged in Yiddish. It was psychological and individualistic, secular, experimental, spanning symbolism, surrealism, futurism, existentialism, and expressionism, and asking what it all meant for the Jews in a changing Europe. Before and especially after the First World War, Jewish political parties and ideological movements of staggering variety emerged and fought, and idealists and revolutionaries battled for the heart of the people.

The purest symbols of the vitality, vibrancy, and future of any movement are its children. The most influential modern pedagogical system of schools for Jewish children emerged in the

United States, established by Jewish activists who had emigrated from Europe between the 1880s and the 1920s and founded organizations to promote their visions for secular Judaism. They developed schools, too, which were as ambitious as their founders, running the gamut from right-leaning Zionists to moderate Labor Zionists to leftist socialists and radical Marxists. By the 1940s, secular Jewish schools could be found in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Toronto, Montreal, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Melbourne, and countless other small and large Jewish centers around the world.

Today only a handful of these old places are left, and none of their schools have survived. As the remaining organizations have shuttered over the years, I have collected their dusty, neglected, and unwanted pedagogical materials.

I began to collect vintage Yiddish educational materials when I took my first Yiddish class at Rutgers University in 2009. My collection grew enormously recently, when the Toronto branch of the Workmen's Circle, a one hundred-year-old Yiddish socialist organization that once had the most expansive Yiddish school system in North America, finally sold its building. I offered to help them pack up, and discovered that the classrooms, which had been vacant for decades, were filled with material from the old school. Once word got out that I was collecting, the calls and emails began pouring in. Graduates of the bygone Yiddish schools were eager to give me their childhood schoolbooks. Then another historic Yiddishist organization alerted me that they'd found a storage closet full of unknown Yiddish books. I catalogued the collection, and found children's primers from *their* long-gone school, too.

Yiddish literature for children, including primers, was a dynamic and extraordinarily diverse frontier for modernist writers and artists. The artwork and illustrations are enduring examples of experimental avant-garde renderings. The poems and short excerpts of literature were often authored by well-known literati and distinguished writers, especially women. Certain pedagogues became well-known for their children's material. Their names repeat across several titles: Y. Kaminski (1884-1958), Yudel Mark (1897-1975), and Salman Yefroikin (1893-1966) were among the most prolific Yiddish primer authors and compilers. The characters in the books would also become legendary: Berele and Serele were the Yiddish Dick and Jane, and every Yiddish-speaking child knew their names. Extended sections of reading practice often included Yiddish literature for adults adapted for younger readers. In this way the books moved bidirectionally between adults, who authored and assembled the books, and children, in whose hands the future of the language—and the people—was placed.

The majority of my collection is composed of primers with accompanying workbooks dating to the 1920s through 1950s. I collect these texts with certain goals in mind: I look for detailed illustrations, ink stamps that announce the school's alignment with a particular

movement, marginalia that reveals the personality and creativity of their authors as they sat, bored in class, embellishing (and vandalizing) their schoolbooks with extraordinary intent. Clean copies are wonderful as archival specimens, but I especially enjoy marked-up books that were visibly used: students' names scribbled in inside covers (sometimes multiple students, if books were recycled), additional illustrations and commentary supplied by students, workbook exercises that have been completed. Blank books are only evidence of a language that *could* have been learned, that *might* have been taught. These messier copies show the learning process at work, acting as material witnesses to the dynamic transmission of the language. They are also all that remains of this vibrant children's culture that was lived in Yiddish.

In addition to bound primers, my collection also includes other Yiddish educational material dating to the 1960s and 70s: an abridged Yiddish children's Bible, booklets of poems and songs, short Jewish histories adapted for children, songbooks from school celebrations, scripts from school plays. My collection consists of boxes and boxes of mimeographed booklets and zines of songs, grammar exercises, and short poems (often authored by the teachers themselves). Themes typically include Jewish holidays, famous Yiddish writers, Jewish history, school, home life, family, nature, and animals. Often there is a socialist bent to this material: poems about May Day and Labor Day, vocabulary for artisans and craftsmen (tailors, shoemakers, painters), and images of agricultural work in fertile fields. The most prized objects in my collection are two gigantic bilingual Yiddish-English hand-painted wooden signs that have hung on the exterior of the Workmen's Circle building since the late 1950s. Today my collection comprises seventeen clothbound hardcover books, two dozen workbooks, dozens of mimeographed booklets, songbooks, and short plays, and three sets of vocabulary flashcards. More will certainly follow.

The decline of Yiddish as a Jewish vernacular is a strange kind of tragedy. Strange, because it left so few mourners, though it was a victim of genocide, migration, and trauma. Six million Yiddish-speaking Jews were murdered in Europe between 1939 and 1945, devastating Jewish communities around the world. The Holocaust cast a dark shadow on Yiddish for many. Those who followed news of the war, and those who survived it, viewed Yiddish as painful reminder of all that was lost, and all that could never be rehabilitated. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and with it the rise of Hebrew as the language of the Jewish nation, convinced many that Hebrew, not Yiddish, would rebuild the shattered Jewish world.

Like so many things, Yiddish was also a victim of neglect. In the United States, processes of Americanization converted the children of native Yiddish-speakers into native English-speakers. At the time very few mourned this, or even noticed it. But as a result, the Yiddish

school system in America collapsed in the postwar years. By 1960 it had been virtually abandoned. There would be no more child readers of Yiddish children's books.

Sure enough, when I teach Yiddish today, I don't teach it to children. I teach it to adults. Some are former students of these Yiddish schools who have forgotten the language over the years. Others are children of parents who didn't even bother with Yiddish school when it was still an option. All of them are filled with regret over this lost link to their own past.

But there is another reason I feel this loss so acutely. There was no heirloom china in the house where I grew up, no silver from grandmother's chest to be taken out and polished for holidays and family celebrations. That china had all been shattered, the silver stolen, and those who had cherished it had long since been scattered or murdered at the hands of the Nazis who invaded my grandmother's country. The heirlooms, and most of the family, were lost. But that does not mean I am bereft of inheritance. I was raised with an heirloom language, a treasure that could be taken out and polished and used on those rare moments when no word in English or Polish or Hebrew would fit the occasion. I was raised to speak the language of the dead. But never for a moment did it ever dawn on me that it was a dead language. Yiddish is the key to a thousand years of living Jewish experience, with an uncanny knack for survival. If you ask me, there's a good chance it will be the key to the next thousand.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY



Barkan, H. *Kinder: mayses* [Children: Stories]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1951. 48 pages.

Unmarked. Softcover perfect-bound book. Intermediate-level prose stories for children with some illustration.

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Bass, H. and S. Yefroikin. *Mayn shprakhbukh: arbet- un leyen-bukh far yidish: tsveyter teyl* [My Language Book: Work- and Reading book for Yiddish: Part Two]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1942. 256 pages.

Primer for intermediate students: more complex prose, following by reading comprehension questions. Some illustrations throughout. Sylvia Simon, who once owned this book, wrote her name and address in Yiddish on the front inside cover; in English on the back inside cover.

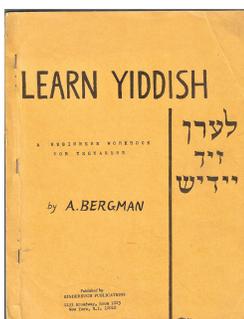
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Bassein, Leon. *Di idishe shprakh: a idish lerh-bukh mit bilder in tsvey opteylung, far onfanger un hekhre talmidim* [The Yiddish Language: A Yiddish Primer with Pictures in Two Parts, for Beginners and More Advanced Students]. New York: M. Yurevitch, 1918. Third edition. 128 pages.

Unmarked. Light green hardcover primer, worn at the edges. Originally published in 1914. An early example of a primer, illustrated with etchings of animals, household items, and food throughout. Price is printed on the cover: 45 cents.

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Bergman, A. *Lern zikh yidish* [Learn Yiddish: A Beginners Workbook for Teenagers]. New York: Kinderbukh Publications, 1959. Second edition 1960. Third edition 1963. Fourth edition 1970. Fifth edition 1973. 85 pages.

Unmarked. Yellow softcover workbook of mimeographed pages, stapled along the left side. Yiddish vocabulary and grammar exercises intended for teenage learners.



Bridger, David. *Der onheyber* [The Beginner]. New York: Matones, 1947. 141 pages.

Unmarked. Ivory clothbound hardcover book. Illustrated by Note Kozlowski. Reading primer for beginners. Simple reading exercises using basic vocabulary in prose and rhyme, mostly organized around the family and school lives of brother and sister Berele and Serele.



Bridger, David. *Arbets-bukh tsum onheyber* [Workbook for the Beginner]. New York: Matones, 1955. Second edition 1956. Third edition 1957. 60 pages.

Unmarked. Beige softcover saddle-stitched workbook. Grammar, vocabulary, and syntax exercises to accompany the texts in Bridger's 1947 primer, *Der onheyber* [The Beginner].



Dunski, Shimshen. *Mayn lider bikhele* [My Little Book of Poems]. Montreal: Home and School, by the Jewish People's Schools and Peretz Schools, n.d. 10 pages.

Unmarked. Mimeographed booklet of poems for children. Stapled at the right edge. Illustrated by Y. Sheynblum. The cover page reads: "A gift to the children of the Montreal Jewish People's Schools and Peretz Schools."



Fishman, Gele. *Sholem aleykhem, kinder!* [Hello, Children!] New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, ca. 1960. 59 pages.

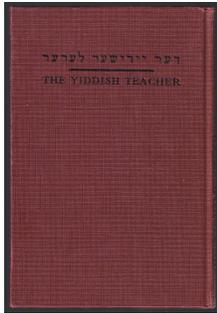
Pink softcover spiral-bound workbook composed of mimeographed hand-drawn pages of Yiddish grammar and vocabulary exercises and songs for young children. Includes Notes to the Teacher in Yiddish. An introduction on the inside cover reads: "This workbook is designed for use in Sunday schools and pre-school classes. It consists of a series of projects on the family, school, and the seasons of the year. It aims to teach young children a number of Yiddish sentences, phrases, and short poems. It is a proven means of teaching Yiddish reading." Andrew has written his name on the front cover.



Glazer, Moyshe. *Lustik, lebedik, freylikh* [Brilliant, Alive, Joyous]. Los Angeles: Moshe Publishing, 1961. 18 pages.

Unmarked. Stapled booklet of photocopies of a book of illustrated children's poetry by Moyshe Glazer.

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Goldin, H.E. *The Yiddish Teacher: A Method for the Study of Yiddish*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1939. Revision of an earlier 1924 edition. 140 pages.

Unmarked. A primer intended for adult learners. Grammar lessons and short reading sections accompanied by glossaries.

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Goldman, Y.M. *Yidische geshikhte heftn: farn dritn lern-yor fun yidisher geshikhte* [Jewish History Notebooks: for Third Grade Jewish History]. New York: Matones, 1945. 55 pages.

Unmarked. Softcover saddle-stitched Yiddish prose and workbook providing an overview of major figures and moments in Jewish history: "After the Spanish Expulsion," "Jews in Poland," "Zionism," "Socialist Movement," and more.

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Golomb, Avrom. *Mayselekh far kinder: bukh tsvey* [Stories for Children: Book Two]. Mexico City: Collegio Israelita de Mexico, 1947. 162 pages.

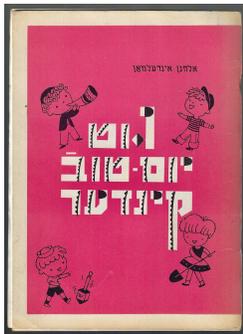
Hardcover. Cover is nearly detached. A reader for intermediate students: prose short stories and long poems about children. Nancy Gotlieb inscribed her name and address in the inside cover, within a large Star of David. Includes a Note to Teachers by the author.



Gottesman, Beyle. *Mir forn* [We Are Travelling]. New York: Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1963. 16 pages.

Unmarked. Saddle-stitched book of simple poems for children, authored by the well-known Yiddish poet, songwriter, and artist Beyle Gottesman. Illustrated throughout with images of children at play.

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Indelman, Elkhonen. *Gut yontef kinder* [Happy Holidays, Children]. New York: Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1958. 52 pages.

Unmarked. Pink softcover saddle-stitched book. A collection of rhyming poems for children about Jewish holidays, organized according to the Jewish calendar. Illustrations of various styles throughout. Many of these poems were first printed in the Yiddish children's periodicals *Kinder-tsaytung* and *Kinder-zhurnal*.

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Jofen, Jean B. *Yidish far onheybers* [Yiddish for Beginners]. New York: Jean B. Jofen, 1960. Second edition 1962. 64 pages.

Unmarked. Blue softcover saddle-stitched workbook. Introduction by Sol Liptzin, professor at City College. Intended for high school students. In the Introductory Remarks section, the author states: "This book is based on lessons in mimeographed form which the author has been using and constantly improving for the past twelve years in Brooklyn and City Colleges." Includes exercises based on folksongs, dialogues, reading comprehension sections, glossaries, and translation.

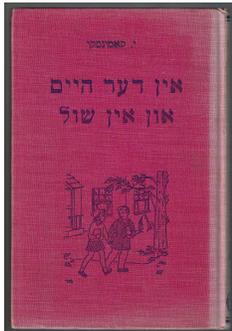
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Kaminski, Y. *Ikh lern zikh yidish: a leyen-bukh un shpil-bukh far onfanger* [I Learn Yiddish: A Reading and Game Book for Beginners]. New York: Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle, 1945. 112 pages. First edition 1938. Second edition 1943. Third edition 1944. Fourth edition 1945. Fifth edition 1948.

Unmarked. Red clothbound hardcover book. Illustrations on title page depict flowers, birds, and lions in the Russian folk art style. Black and white text with ornamentation in red ink throughout; likely letterpress printed with a

platen press. Primer consists of short rhymes and poems, songs, and longer prose sections. Exercises include fill-in-the-blank, matching, true-or-false, reading comprehension, and cursive writing. Instructions for exercises are in Yiddish.



Kaminski, Y. *In der heym un in shul: a lernbikhl for onheyber* [At Home and In School: A Little Primer for Beginners]. New York: Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle, 1951. 128 pages.

Unmarked. Red clothbound hardcover primer that includes rhyming poems, prose sections, and songs, illustrated with stylized black and white line drawings by Shirley Knoring. Includes an Afterword to Teachers by the author.



Levitz, J. *Yidish: her un red metode (eksperimentaler proyekt)* [Yiddish: An Audio-Lingual Approach (Experimental Project)]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, ca. 1960. 62 pages.

Unmarked. Blue softcover workbook (stapled at the right edge) of mimeographed Yiddish lessons using the audio-lingual method. Includes dialogues and exercises relying on oral and written repetition.



Lewin, Y., Y. Lukowski, and Sh. Hurwitz. *Unzer naye shul: a khrestomatiye far kinder fun tsveytn un drith lehr-yohr, mit bilder un tekst* [Our New School: A Chrestomathy for Children in Second and Third Year, with Images and Text]. Warsaw: Lewin-Epstein Brothers, 1913. 230 pages.

Boards are extremely worn, bent, and frayed. On title page, a library stamp from the Toronto Jewish National-Radical School. Inside cover and end page is profusely scribbled with several students' names, apparently all girls' names, all in pencil. Primer is organized according to the four seasons. Historiated initials, illustrations, and etchings interspersed with short reading sections.



Mark, Yudel. *Geshikhte-heft alef: fun Avrom ovinu bizn tsveytn beys-hamikdesh* [History Notebook A: from the Patriarch Abraham to the Second Temple]. New York: Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle, 1967. 32 pages.

Yellow softcover saddle-stitched workbook. Fill-in-the-blank, matching, true-or-false, multiple choice, and translation exercises pertaining to Jewish history. Some exercises have been completed.

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Mark, Yudel. *Geshikhte-heft beys: fun tsveytn beys-hamikdesh biz geyrush shpaniye* [History Notebook B: from the Second Temple to the Expulsion from Spain]. New York: Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle, 1967. 32 pages.

Yellow softcover saddle-stitched workbook. Fill-in-the-blank, matching, true-or-false, multiple choice, and translation exercises pertaining to Jewish history. Ada Shtarkman wrote her name on the cover. Some exercises have been completed and graded. Someone has used the back cover to pass a note in class asking, "Would you like to invite a boy?"

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Mark, Yudel. *Heft far yidish in tsveytn lernyor: alef* [Workbook for Yiddish in Second Grade: A]. New York: Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1954. 32 pages.

Blue softcover saddle-stitched workbook. Grammar and vocabulary exercises: fill-in-the-blank, matching, true-or-false, multiple choice, and translation exercises; some exercises have been completed. The owner of this workbook, Berl, wrote his name (in Yiddish) on the front cover.

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Mark, Yudel. *Heft far yidish in tsveytn lernyor: gimel* [Workbook for Yiddish in Second Grade: C]. New York: Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1955. 32 pages.

Yellow softcover saddle-stitched workbook. Grammar and vocabulary exercises: fill-in-the-blank, matching, true-or-false, multiple choice, and translation exercises; some exercises have been completed. The owner of this workbook wrote "bukh" (book) on the cover. Note to Teachers printed on the inside back cover.



Mlotek, Joseph. *Yidishe kinder: alef* [Jewish Children: A]. New York: Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle, 1959. 104 pages.

Unmarked. Stylized illustrations by Ayelah Gordon. Unmarked. Reading comprehension-based primer for beginners; exercises include dialogues, short sections of prose, rhyming poems.

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Mlotek, Joseph. *Arbeitsbukk tsu ydishe kinder: alef* [Workbook for Jewish Children: A]. New York: Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle, ca. 1960. 76 pages.

Unmarked. Softcover saddle-stitched workbook to accompany Mlotek's 1959 primer, *Yidishe kinder: alef* [Jewish Children: A].

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Noskovitsh, Y. *Mayn folk: geshikhte far der elementar-shul, ershter teyl* [My People: History for Elementary School, Part One]. New York: Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle, 1962. 167 pages.

Blue clothbound hardcover book of Jewish history adapted for children. Throughout, the text and illustrations are creatively and profusely (and at times, obscenely) ornamented with marginalia by several students. One student's name is inscribed overlaying another in the inside cover: Stephen Goren's name (in cursive graphite) is written over Hannah's name, written in colored pencil.

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Olitsky, Matis. *Gut yontev kinder* [Happy Holidays, Children]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1981. 32 pages.

Unmarked. Orange softcover saddle-stitched coloring book with poems for children about Jewish holidays. Poems include English translations by Moyshe Rosenfeld, and illustrations by Tsirl Waletsky.



Olitsky, Matis, and Joseph Mlotek. *Yidische kinder beys* [Jewish Children B]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1975. 120 pages.

Unmarked. Blue softcover primer and workbook. Songs, poetry and short prose sections (some by well-known writers of Yiddish literature), with exercises for the intermediate student.



Rosenthal, Sonya, Nemi Mark, Israel Grossman, et al. *Shiler-arbetn oyf yidisher literatur* [Student Work on Yiddish Literature]. Toronto: Workmen's Circle Y.L. Peretz Middle School, 1942. 35 pages.

Unmarked. Orange softcover saddle-stitched journal. Essays on themes in Yiddish literature by students in the 1942 graduating class of the Workmen's Circle Y.L. Peretz Middle School in Toronto, the second class ever to graduate from the school. Also include essays by the graduating class of 1941.



Sigal, Goldie. *Der karger un der kinig Shloimeh* [The Miser and King Solomon]. Montreal: Jewish People's Schools & Peretz Schools, 1972. 33 pages.

Yellow softcover mimeographed coloring and story book (all hand-drawn). Story based on a dramatic adaptation of a folktale by J.J. Grossman. Some pages have been colored in.



Simon, Solomon. *Khumesh far kinder, loyt Yehoash* [The Pentateuch for Children, According to Yehoash]. Edited by Yudel Mark. New York: Matones, 1940. 268 pages. Fourth edition, 1956.

Unmarked. Light blue clothbound hardcover book. An abridged Hebrew Bible (in Yiddish) for children, adapted from the celebrated 1940 Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible by the poet Yehoash (pen name of Solomon Bloomgarten). Brief chapter headings and sparse illustrations throughout. This copy belonged to Gerry Finger, who inscribed her name several times in the inside cover. On back cover, a stamp from the long-running bookstore Hyman's Book and Gift Centre, Toronto, Canada.



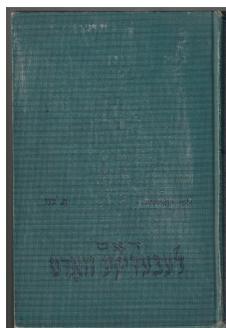
Tarant, Dvoyre. *Mayn yidish bukh: Eyns* [My Yiddish Book: One]. Illustrated by Morris Pas. New York: Committee for Progressive Jewish Education 1944. Second printing 1946. Third printing, 1948. 158 pages.

Light blue clothbound hardcover book. Primer in black and white text with illustrations: short rhyming poems, dialogues, and longer prose sections. Exercises include fill-in-the-blank, reading comprehension, and cursive writing. Intended for native English speakers: instructions for exercises are in English; some exercises also rely on English knowledge. Primer is heavily marked with marginalia in pencil; many exercises have been completed. Inscriptions and illustrations on inside cover and on pages throughout. In cursive on page 46: "Marvan read this page on Tuesday, Dec. 6, 1955 in Jewish school." Front cover is hanging on by a single thread.



Waletzky, Cecelia Grobla (illustrator). *Mol un dertseyl* [Color and Tell]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1963. 47 pages.

Softcover saddle-stitched interactive coloring and Yiddish storytelling book for children. Page 1 explains (in English): "This is a special book. It is filled with pictures. It is a story book where *you* are going to tell or write the stories in Yiddish to fit the pictures. There are words to give you ideas. You may also color the pictures." Avrom, who evidently owned this book, wrote his name on the cover and completed many of the exercises and some of the coloring pages.



Yefroikin, S. and H. Bass. *Dos lebedike vort: leynbukh far dem dritn lernyor* [The Living Word: Primer for Third Grade]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1954. 256 pages.

Dark green clothbound hardcover book. Albert Obaznek inscribed his name on the inside cover and decorated it ornately with doodles. Emma Cohen's name is written in cursive on the title page. Primer includes poems and longer prose sections, followed by glossaries. Various styles of illustration throughout. Includes a Note to Teachers by the authors.



Yefroikin, S. and H. Bass. *Dos lebedike vort: leynbukh far dem dritn lernyor* [The Living Word: Primer for Third Grade]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1954. Reprinted 1959. 256 pages.

Dark green clothbound hardcover book. Spine is falling off; front and back cover are hanging on by threads. Title page is adorned with several cursive signatures and scribbles; also a Portuguese inscription by a student. Title page bears a stamp from Lar da Velhice Israelita Religiosa (the Jewish home for elder care in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). Copyright page bears a library stamp from the H.N. Bialik school in Rio de Janeiro.



Yefroikin, S. and Yudel Mark. *Yidishe kinder: beys* [Jewish Children: B]. New York: Education Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1961. 215 pages.

Unmarked. Orange softcover saddle-stitched workbook. Reading comprehension-based primer for intermediate students that features more complex dialogue and prose sections. Illustrations in a variety of styles by Leah Port, Hershl Danielovitz, Shirley Knoring, and others.

## WISHLIST

1. **A complete set of the primers authored by Y. Kaminski.** His books are my favourite in my collection. The art is distinctive, the colors are vivid (and have remained vivid for over half a century), and his rhyming poems and short dialogues have become iconic, perhaps second only to those in the *Yidishe kinder* [Jewish Children] books by the Workmen's Circle a few years later. I would love to acquire the other four editions of his *Ikh lern zikh yidish* [I Learn Yiddish] books. Not only are they an aesthetic standout: the first edition came out in 1938, just a year before Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and the last edition appeared in 1948, the year the State of Israel was founded. Bracketed by these watershed moments in Jewish history, these editions are imbued with a poignancy—and an urgency—that other books lack.
2. Yiddish pedagogy audio materials, especially the **1962 LP *Kinder, Lummir Reddin Yiddish!*** Audio materials like these are rare: I currently have just one album, the 1962 *Invitation to Yiddish* (by the author and pedagogue Yudel Mark), which is well, a little dry. It features sixteen recorded dialogues read really, *really* slowly and comes with a 108-page transcript and manual/workbook (which is equally rare). But that album is for adult learners. Audio materials for children tended to feature actors from the Yiddish stage and relied more on music. But they are impossible to come by, and none of them are digitized.
3. I am eternally searching for **children's books from the Soviet Union**, especially from the period immediately following the Russian Revolution in 1917. The new Soviet Union had embarked on a campaign promote indigenous folk languages. Yiddish fit the bill, and in the early 1920s received state support for the first and only time in its thousand-year history. But to align the Jewish language with the interests of the secular communist state, the Soviets gave Yiddish a unique facelift: they removed all Hebrew (and thus, *Jewish*) elements from Yiddish—and there are many, especially because Yiddish and Hebrew share an almost identical alphabet. So, the most distinctive change was orthographical: they removed the six letters from the Yiddish alphabet that also appear in the Hebrew alphabet. This made for some very strange spelling choices, and books produced with this orthography are considered rare by experts.