

RAC Reads Guide

***Mrs. Katz and Tush*, by Patricia Polacco**

Introduction:

The following guide is intended to facilitate conversations about *Mrs. Katz and Tush*, by Patricia Polacco. *Mrs. Katz and Tush* is an illustrated children's book published in 1992. The book tells the story of a friendship between a young African American boy, Larnel, and an elderly Jewish woman, Mrs. Katz. The story is rich with opportunities for discussion about important ideas and values such as intergenerational respect and admiration, intercultural exchange, interracial relationships, and new definitions of family.

RAC Reads is a program by the Religious Action Center to encourage reading groups that explore contemporary social justice topics in the context of Jewish teachings and values. This installment of RAC Reads is designed for families with children as well as for use in religious school classrooms (grades 2-5/ ages 7-11). The discussion questions are meant to be a guide to help you facilitate a conversation about what we can learn from the friendship between Mrs. Katz and Larnel. Feel free to take from and adapt the information provided here as you structure your own conversations.

We hope that this guide will spark engaging and challenging discussions among Reform Jews about race and Jewish-Black relations within our communities and in the United States. For more information about the RAC's current work on racial justice, visit our website at www.rac.org/racial-justice.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How are Mrs. Katz and Larnel similar? How are they different?
2. What is necessary for a friendship to form? What do we see happen between Mrs. Katz and Larnel that allows a friendship to form?
3. What can Larnel learn from making friends with someone whose life is so different from his? What can Mrs. Katz learn from being friends with Larnel?
4. What values do you think Larnel's family lives by that makes it important to Larnel to keep visiting Mrs. Katz?
5. Why does Mrs. Katz feel like it is important to talk about the similarities she and Larnel share from their family histories?
6. What might have been going through Larnel's mind when he came back to visit Mrs. Katz without his mom?
7. Why did Larnel think giving Mrs. Katz one of the kittens would be a good idea?
8. In the scene in the deli when Mrs. Katz explains Pesach (Passover) to Larnel, what are some other parts of the Passover story she could have mentioned that Larnel might have recognized from his own background?
9. We learn much more about Mrs. Katz in the story than we do Larnel. What do we learn about Larnel and his family? What more would you have liked to learn?

10. What do we learn in the story about the connection between Jewish history and Black history?
11. What makes Mrs. Katz and Larnel's friendship special or unique?
12. Do you have any friends who come from different backgrounds or cultures than your own?
13. Do you have any friendships with people of a different generation than you?
14. What can be learned from forming friendships with people who come from a different culture than our own, or grew up during a different time in history?

“Such a Person!” Extension Discussion

1. Throughout the story, Mrs. Katz continually refers to different characters as being “such a person!” Who does Mrs. Katz describe this way?
2. What do you think Mrs. Katz means when she describes someone this way?
3. Who in your life would you describe as “such a person!”? What makes them “such a person!”?
4. Every January, we honor Martin Luther King Jr. for all that he did to promote equality. He is famously quoted as saying, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” When Mrs. Katz says “such a person!” what do you think she is saying about the “content of their character”?
5. What are three things you can do in your own life to be “such a person!”?