

Discussion Guide

“These stories could be my stories.” This is what one early reader of *The Best Boy in the United States of America* said to me. She had grown up with immigrant grandparents, a family filled with traditions and holiday celebrations, good times and sad times, and the dreams of generational continuity.

Sharing our stories is the way we define ourselves in the world. Here are some questions and activities that may help you tell your story after reading *The Best Boy in the United States of America*:

1. Which story in the book most resonated with you? Why?
2. How did your grandparents influence you? Were there other special people who influenced you?
3. Life stories can be summed up in so many different ways: “Hebrew-school-dropout turned Jewish educator” or “Nebraska boy turned Californian.” How would you describe your life in one or two lines? What’s *your* story?
4. What was your experience of Hebrew or religious school? Did you have a “Mr. Friedman”?
5. In the story “Bubbie’s Candles,” I ask, *how do we find meaning in a ritual*? Share an experience of a ritual that is meaningful to you.
6. Did you have a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah? What memories do you have of that special occasion?
7. What’s your favorite Jewish food that begins with the letter “k”? What role did food play in your family?
8. Holiday celebrations are great memory makers. Share a memory of a holiday from your youth.

9. Bring a favorite recipe or creative holiday idea to share with your group. Collect them into a booklet and copy for each participant.
10. Bonus creative idea: Make Seder fortune cookies. Wrap two small matzah crackers with a ribbon and place a “fortune” inside. Pass them out to each of your guests at the end of the evening and ask them to read their fortune out loud. The fortunes can be serious—“May we all enjoy good health!”—or funny. At Sara and David Aftergood’s Seder (where we learned this idea), my fortune was: “You get to stay and help clean up this mess!”
11. What experiences have you had helping the young people in your life find true love? What do you do till the kids say “I do”?
12. Has there been a moment in your life when you struggled to overcome a personal tragedy? What helped you through it?
13. Have you ever been in a hospital waiting room? How do *you* handle the tension between hope and fear?
14. “Parents and grandparents are the most important Jewish educators our children will ever have.” What are some ways you transmit your values and traditions from one generation to the next?
15. Have you written an ethical will? What process did you use? How did it feel to write a love letter to your descendants? A good resource is *Ethical Wills and How to Prepare Them: A Guide to Sharing Your Values from Generation to Generation*, edited by Rabbi Jack Reimer and Dr. Nathaniel Stampfer (Jewish Lights Publishing).
16. If you have been blessed with grandchildren, what are you called? Bubbie? Zaydie? Pappa? Grammy? Share a story about one of your best boys or best girls in the United States of America.
17. How do you shape your life to be the best you you can be?