



Summary: This nonfiction book tells the story of the life of Sarah Schenirer and the creation of the Bais Yaakov school system.

Author: Ann D. Koffsky, Leslie Ginsparg Klein

Title: Sarah Builds a School

Genre: Biography/Informational Text

Challenging Book Features

Content: Students may have difficulty visualizing the world in which Sarah Schenirer lived and understanding why the idea of a system of girls' schools was so innovative.

Supportive Book Features

Language: Much of the language used in this book is simple and easily within students' speaking vocabulary. There are repeated phrases throughout the book that make it easier to follow.

Text features: The mix of nonfiction text with illustrations, along with comics-style drawings, helps to maintain students' interest in the story and deepen their understanding.

Preparing to Read

Read the title and subtitle with students and discuss the cover photo. Ask:

- What do you already know about Sarah Schenirer?
- What do you notice on the cover?
- What new information do you think you will learn in this book?

Developing Comprehension Strategies

Determining importance and summarizing: Explain to students that as they read narrative nonfiction (nonfiction that is told as a story), they should be considering what is most important about the story as a whole. One way to figure this out in a biography is by asking:

- What was the major problem or obstacle the person was trying to solve?
- How did s/he solve it?
- What is this person famous for?

Model for students how this can be used to determine the important information in this book, using the following think-alouds:

"What is the most important problem Sarah Schenirer was trying to solve? She saw Jewish girls who were growing up without a Torah education..."

"How did she solve it? She tried to teach Torah to Jewish girls..."

"But then she faced more problems — they weren't interested..."

"But as we continue reading, we realize... What is she really famous for? She is famous for not giving up, for continuing to pursue her dreams of Torah schools for girls even when others laughed at her, until she eventually succeeded."

Ask students to discuss their answers to these questions with a partner. Then, have them share their discussions and use those to summarize the story.

Synthesizing: Reading needs to make sense. When reading nonfiction text, we sometimes need to paraphrase chunks of the text and then put them back together to make meaning. Teach students to stop after each paragraph or short section and jot a note or retell what they have just read. After reading a longer section of the book, students can put those ideas together and say what the story is mostly about.

Word Study

Noun suffixes (-er, -ess): Explain to students that there are several suffixes that can be used to form nouns. In this book, Sarah Schenirer was a seamstress and then a teacher and a leader. The word seamstress ends in the suffix -ess, which forms the feminine conjugation of nouns. The words teacher and leader both end in the suffix -er, which designates the job form of a noun. Have students sort other words into these two categories, defining each word based on its suffix. Some words you might sort include: traveler, actress, speaker, mistress, lioness, and player.

Developing Fluency

Repeated phrases: Explain to students that sometimes authors use a repeated phrase in a book to convey a certain idea or message. By reading that phrase in the same tone of voice each time it appears in the text, we can demonstrate our understanding of the deeper message or theme of the book. Direct students' attention to the phrase *studied, listened, and learned* the first time it appears in the book on page 5 and then again on page 6. Model how you read this repeated phrase with the same expression or intonation each time. Ask students to find a similar phrase at the bottom of page 10 and to read it with the same intonation.

Oral Language/Conversation

Choose some of these talking points for class discussion:

- One person can accomplish so much. Sarah Schenirer began with a small idea in Krakow, and look how much she achieved. Today, close to 100 years later, thousands of girls across the world attend Bais Yaakov schools. Ask your students to share some dreams that they would like to accomplish if only they could. What are some small steps they can take toward fulfilling those dreams?
- Sarah Schenirer was not discouraged when people mocked her ideas. She took the stones that were thrown at her and used them to build Bais Yaakov. What does this show us about her personality? What can we learn from her?

Other Books

Students can read other books in the Young Readers Biography series, such as *No Day Without Torah*.

Professional reference: *The Reading Strategies Book: Your Everything Guide to Developing Skilled Readers* by Jennifer Serravallo (Heinemann, 2015)