



## **Yossi's Goal**

Ellen Schwartz

Interest level: ages 8–11

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144 pages

AR Quiz # 110027

**Consider the following question as you read *Yossi's Goal*:**

How can friends help you in a time of great need?

### **Story**

Yossi, a Jewish immigrant boy in Montreal, longs to play hockey. But when his father becomes ill and cannot work, the hard-earned money Yossi has saved to buy skates must go to help the family.

### **Author**

**Ellen Schwartz's** grandparents emigrated to North America at about the same time, and in similar circumstances, as Yossi's family. In order to learn about early Jewish immigrant life, she did a lot of research in Montreal, a city she loves. Ellen is the author of many books for children, including *Jesse's Star*, the first book about the irrepressible Yossi. She lives in Burnaby, British Columbia.

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Language Arts*

- Yossi works in the garment industry and sells newspapers to make money to help his family. Have students write three to five journal entries as Yossi, discussing how he might feel about each of these jobs and his situation.
- In the previous novel, *Jesse's Star*, Yossi is bullied by the Russian soldiers; in *Yossi's Goal* he and his friends are bullied by older boys trying to take over their ice rink. In both cases Yossi comes up with a plan to stop the bullying. Have students think of a time they or someone they know has been bullied, and then write a solution to the situation.
- Have students imagine they are Yossi, and they've just played their first hockey game ever. Write a letter or email to someone back in Russia describing the game—and the feelings that playing such a game would bring!
- Have students create poems about hockey, using the drawings they have created (see Art) or a hockey scene from *Yossi's Goal* as inspiration.
- In *Jesse's Star*, Jesse travels back in time to become Yossi before he emigrates to Canada. Now imagine Yossi traveling forward in time to be Jesse, and ask students to write about what he might experience.
- Yossi sells newspapers on the street corner. Have students create a newspaper using events from *Yossi's Goal* as the content of the newspaper. Include illustrations and captions in the paper.
- Yossi and his friends gag Max and tie him up in order to prevent him from stopping the strike. Discuss the meaning of “the end justifies the means,” and debate its truth. Have students write a paragraph explaining their response to this idea.

### *Social Studies*

- Yossi and his family immigrated by ship to Canada from Russia in the late 1890s. Have students research what life was like in Montreal at that time. Compare it with what life is like in Montreal today.
- Yossi's family left Russia because of persecution. Research the conditions of Jews in Europe and Russia in the late 1800s.
- Yossi finds new friends and allies by playing ice hockey. Today there are many hockey leagues, the most famous being the National Hockey League. Find out how the game was invented and what the first rules were.
- Yossi is angry when he realizes wealthy Jews own the garment factory in Montreal, but many factory workers are very poor Jews. Discuss why and how this happened. Can students think of ways that the situation might have been changed for the better?

- Engage students in a discussion of socialism. Compare it to capitalism. Do they think one is better than the other? Why? As a class, determine whether your country leans more toward socialism or capitalism. Discuss where the lines blur. Extension: establish teams to debate the relative merits of socialism vs. capitalism. Stand back and watch the sparks fly!
- What is a labor union? Find out about the rise of labor unions in the garment factories of Montreal.
- Garment factories were not easy to work in. They were referred to as sweatshops. These types of places still exist today. In pairs or in small groups, have students research sweatshops in the modern world. Assign some groups to research child labor in sweatshops too. Share the students' findings.

### *Science*

- Yossi tastes his first maple syrup stirred into snow after a game of hockey. Maple syrup is made from the sap of the maple tree. Investigate the steps involved in the production of maple syrup and where in North America it is produced.

### *Health/Personal Planning*

- What are Yossi's goals? Have a discussion about what goals are and how they influence the way we live. Have students select several goals that they would like to achieve. Use a one-week timeline, a one-month timeline, a six-month timeline, and a one-year timeline. Discuss with students the importance of breaking goals down into manageable steps as a strategy for success.

### *Art*

- Bring in a pair of hockey skates and have students draw them using charcoal or pencil.
- Ken Danby is a Canadian painter who has created some famous hockey paintings, such as "At The Crease" and "Wayne Gretzky Farewell." Find out more about Danby's work and have students create a painting or drawing in his style.
- Yossi and some of his family work in a garment factory. Using primary source pictures online or excerpts from *Yossi's Goal*, draw a picture of what it might be like inside the factory.
- Have students select six scenes from *Yossi's Goal* to use in the construction of a comic strip.

**Drama**

- The garment factory workers in *Yossi's Goal* were not treated fairly. They decided to stand up for their rights as human beings. Have students create skits from scenes in the book that reflect this. For example: When Daniel talks about the workers pulling together to get better wages, or when Miriam explains to her father that the workers are ready to take action.
- In chapter 9, there is a problem with the ownership of the ice-hockey rink. Have students create short skits that illustrate how this problem could have been solved.

**Physical Education**

- In *Yossi's Goal*, the boys play ice hockey. But hockey can be played in a gym, on a street or on a field. Learn the rules for field and floor hockey and have your students play games of hockey in both venues.

**Connecting to the Text**

- Ellen Schwartz uses vivid character description to paint a picture in the reader's mind. For example, here's a passage from when Yossi first sees his dad's boss, Mr. Steiner, up close:

*As Yossi, Papa and Daniel made their way toward the front door to wait for the women outside, along came a short man with an imposing belly, florid cheeks and a balding head. His stylish black coat hung open, revealing a shiny black waistcoat over a gleaming white shirt. A golden watch chain dangled from a pocket of the waistcoat.*

Have students describe a different character from *Yossi's Goal* in the same way. Choose words that help the reader to "see" the character in his or her mind's eye.

- Yossi has a strong personality with many positive qualities. Have children create a character map for Yossi. Add his likes, dislikes, weaknesses, strengths and dreams as well as notes about his appearance, family, job and lifestyle.
- In chapter 11, Yossi is excited about the walkout that is about to happen. He runs to his hockey friends and hollers at them to come with him. Hugo—who didn't even like Yossi initially—tells his friends, "Listen, boys, if Yossi says come, we'd better come." Dialogue is a powerful way for the author to move the story forward or provide important information quickly. What do these words tell us about Yossi? Why did the author choose to have another character tell us this, instead of writing the information into a narrative passage? Can students find other examples from *Yossi's Goal* where the dialogue provides information quickly to the reader?

- Make an overhead of the following list. Discuss with students some of the things that make a good story:
  - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
  - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
  - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading
  - ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems
  - ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there
  - ◆ a variety of settings
  - ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
  - ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
  - ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve

Using these criteria, have students write a critical review of *Yossi's Goal*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment. Share these reviews with the class.

### Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Yossi struggles with his new country. He and his family are free from religious persecution, but they are very poor. Discuss or debate the following: Is freedom worth giving up everything for? Write a paragraph that explains your opinion.
2. Yossi doesn't get paid very much. He's saving for a pair of skates, yet he chooses to buy his friends some herring to share when they are out wandering one afternoon. What does this say about the kind of person he is? Do you know someone who's like that?
3. Is Yossi right to seek vengeance against Max Steiner for teasing him about his hand-me-down coat? Explain. If you were a friend of Yossi's, would you advise him differently?
4. Yossi's father has a bad cough from working in the textiles factory. His health is at risk. How would you feel if you knew your parent's life was in danger because he or she didn't have a safe enough workplace?
5. Imagine the conversation that Yossi had with himself when he was debating whether to give his pennies to his mother. What would he have been thinking? Can you see both sides of his argument? Have you ever had to make a difficult choice like this?

6. In chapter 7, Yossi's mother scolds his sister, Miriam, for attending labor meetings in the evenings. She says it's not proper. Discuss how this attitude has changed over time. Can you think of any other examples of shifts in our expectations of the way the sexes should behave? In your own world, or in books you have read, can you think of instances of where sexism still limits the choices of girls and women? How do you feel about this?
7. Yossi takes a big chance when Daniel asks him to deliver the posters. Should Yossi have accepted the request? Should Daniel have involved him? What are the risks to everyone? Is it okay to ask people to put themselves at risk if it's for the greater good?

### Author's Note

Dear Readers,

After I published *Jesse's Star*, I thought I was finished with feisty, mischievous Yossi. After all, his family had escaped from Russia and were on a steamship, about to land safely in Canada.

But Yossi wouldn't leave me alone. And readers kept asking me what happened to him after he arrived in Canada. I wondered too. What would his life be like? How would he and his family survive in a strange new place? So I had to write another book to find out.

For starters, I knew that Yossi and his family would be very poor. That's usually the case with immigrants, especially those who don't speak the language and don't have the kind of skills needed in the new country. My own Jewish grandparents fled from Eastern Europe (Russia, Poland and Lithuania) and landed in New York. They lived in the poorest neighborhoods near the port, until they settled in, learned the language and started earning enough money to move "uptown."

I visited the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York and saw the appalling conditions poor immigrant families lived in during the 1890s: no running water, no indoor toilets, poor lighting, few windows and lots of people living in one room. As soon as I saw this, I knew this was how Yossi and his family would have lived.

I decided to set the story in Montreal—partly because I love the old section of the city, with its brick buildings and cobblestone streets; partly because Montreal has a rich Jewish history (some stores still have Hebrew lettering in the windows); and partly because my daughter lives there and the need to do research gave me an excuse to visit her! I spent several days at the Jewish Public Library, looking at old photographs and reading books about early immigrant life in Canada.

I found out that most of the Jewish immigrants worked in garment factories under truly terrible conditions. What surprised me most was that the owners of those factories—called "sweatshops"—were Jews themselves. These wealthy business owners were treating their fellow Jews terribly, forcing them to work long hours for very little pay. That piece of information was too good to pass up, and I knew I had to use it in my story.



Somehow, from the moment I decided to write the book, I knew Yossi wanted to play hockey. (I had an anxious moment when I wasn't sure whether hockey had been invented by the 1890s—but thankfully it was!) But of course, since his family was so poor, he wouldn't have been able to afford skates and a stick. So the quest to get some skates and learn how to play became an important part of the story.

In that way, the title *Yossi's Goal* has a double meaning. It's about Yossi's desire to help his family thrive in their new home, and it's also about the hockey goal that Yossi longs to score.

I love when titles have double meanings, don't you?

Sincerely,  
Ellen Schwartz

## Resources

### Books

#### Fiction

- Bierman, Carol. *Journey to Ellis Island*  
 Bouchard, David. *That's Hockey!*  
 Carrier, Roch. *The Hockey Sweater*  
 Dueck, Adele. *Nettie's Journey* (Russian Revolution)  
 Flanagan, Katie. *Polar Bears on Ice*  
 Harlow, Joan Hiatt. *Joshua's Song*  
 Leonetti, Mike. *My Leafs Sweater*  
 London, Johnathan. *The Sugaring-Off Party*  
 MacGregor, Roy. The Screech Owls series  
 Napier, Matthew. *Hat Tricks Count: A Hockey Number Book; Z is for Zamboni: A Hockey Alphabet*  
 Nixon, Joan Lowry. *Land of Promise*  
 Schwartz, Ellen. *Jesse's Star; Mr. Belinsky's Bagels*  
 Taback, Simms. *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat*  
 Vandervelde, Beatrice. *Ice Attack*  
 Ward, David. *The Hockey Tree*  
 Watling, James. *Two Cents and a Milk Bottle*  
 Woodruff, Elvira. *The Memory Coat*

#### Nonfiction

- Etue, Elizabeth. *Hayley Wickenheiser: Born to Play* (796.96)  
 Faulkner, Megan. *A Day at the Sugar Bush* (633.6)  
 Foley, Mike. *Play by Play Hockey* (796.96)  
 Freeze, Gregory L. *Russia: A History* (947.9)  
 Hughes, Susan. *Coming to Canada: Building Life in a New Land* (304.8)  
 McDermott, Barb. *All About Canadian Sports: Ice Hockey* (796.96)

Maki, Wilma, ed. *Weaving a Country: Stories from Canadian Immigrants* (971.008)  
Purslow, Frances. *Jewish Immigrants in Canada* (971.004)  
Rutter, Jill. *Jewish Migrations* (304.8)  
Thomas, Keltie. *How Hockey Works* (796.96)

**Online**

Child Labour

[www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html)

The National Hockey League

[www.nhl.com](http://www.nhl.com)

Ice Hockey Glossary

[www.proicehockey.about.com/od/hockeyglossary](http://www.proicehockey.about.com/od/hockeyglossary)

Standing up for your rights

[www.changingminds.org/techniques/assertiveness/standing\\_up\\_for\\_rights.htm](http://www.changingminds.org/techniques/assertiveness/standing_up_for_rights.htm)

How do they make maple syrup?

[www.home.howstuffworks.com/question71.htm](http://www.home.howstuffworks.com/question71.htm)

National Museum of American Jewish History

[www.nmajh.org](http://www.nmajh.org)

Virtual Jewish History Tour Canada

[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/canada.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/canada.html)

The Migration to North America

[www.let.leidenuniv.nl/history/migration/chapter52.html](http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/history/migration/chapter52.html)

How Smart Clothes Work

[www.howstuffworks.com/computer-clothing.htm](http://www.howstuffworks.com/computer-clothing.htm)

Sweatshop

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweatshop>

The History Place Child Labor in America 1908-1912

[www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/index.html](http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/index.html)