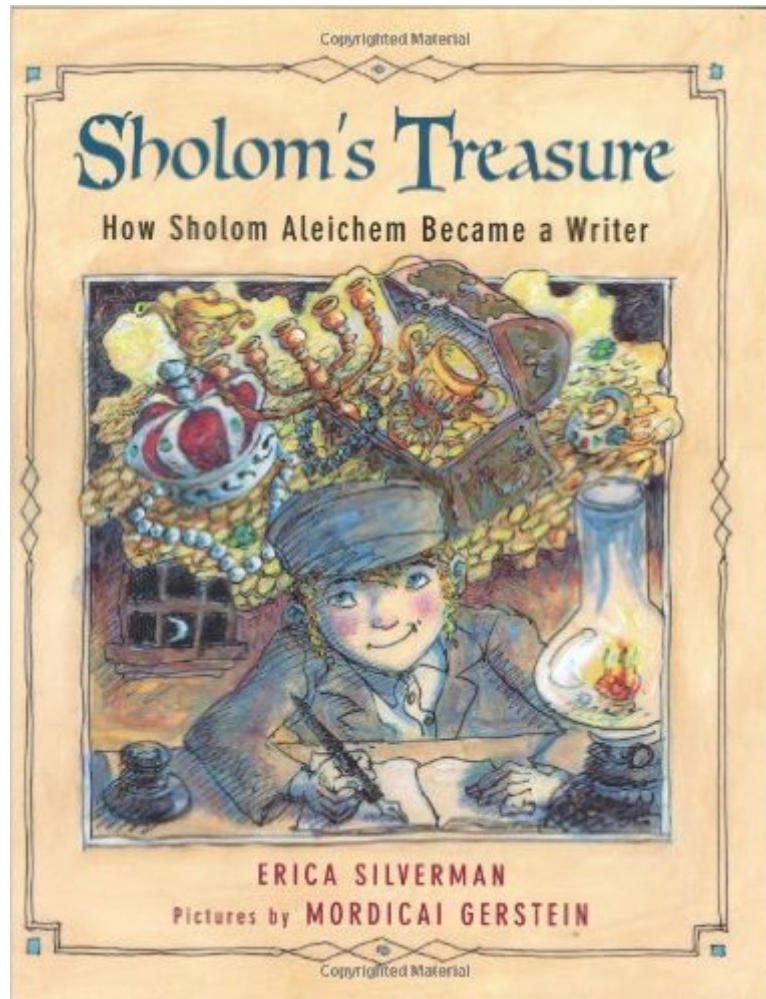


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# Sholom's Treasure: How Sholom Aleichem Became A Writer



## Synopsis

The boy whose stories became *Fiddler on the Roof* Sholom Aleichem's favorite childhood memory may have been listening as his father read stories aloud on Saturday nights and a roomful of adults burst out laughing. Sholom wanted to make people laugh, too. At school he became the class clown. At home he imitated even his pious grandmother. But Sholom was also thoughtful. In Russia in the 1800s, life was especially difficult for Jews, and Sholom longed to help his father by finding a legendary hidden treasure. It turned out that Sholom Aleichem's destiny was to give his father a different kind of treasure - one of words and tales that to this day bring laughter to readers around the world. This taut, focused biography of the young Sholom Aleichem is animated with the artist's quick, brilliant line and richly toned watercolors.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 660L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 40 pages

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Product Dimensions: 7.9 x 0.4 x 10.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (5 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #795,685 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #137 in [Books > Children's Books > Religions > Judaism](#) #249 in [Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Literary](#) #302 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Religious Fiction > Jewish](#)

Age Range: 6 - 10 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 5

## Customer Reviews

Illustrator Mordicai Gerstein never ceases to amuse me. Sometimes his pictures are too loosey-goosey to hold my attention (as with any of the books he's illustrated for Elizabeth Levy) while other times he bowls me over with his originality and spice (as with the adorable "Seal Mother"). I did not, on the outset, have high hopes for "Sholom's Treasure", I admit. Sure I knew the name Sholom Aleichem. That's the fella who wrote the stories that "Fiddler On the Roof" was based on, yes? But how interesting could a children's biography of him be? I'm not a huge biography fan to

begin with. Seems to me that most picture book bios are deathly dull David A. Adler-like affairs. They are usually the perfect way to put the kiddies to sleep. Fortunately there are smash-hit artists like Erica Silverman and the aforementioned Mr. Gerstein to put me in my place whenever I think this way. "Sholom's Treasure" is definitely one of Gerstein's best books, helped in no small way by Silverman's skill at winnowing out a slice of the great man's life that makes for a fabulous story. Evil stepmothers, a treasure, hardship, glory, putting a bully in his place, it's all here! Best of all, it's the kind of thing kids will actually want to hear about. He was born Sholom Rabinowitz and was one of twelve children. He lived in Russia in 1859 and attended kheyder like the other boys. Though a fabulous student, Sholom was also a class clown. Mimicry was his talent though nobody appreciated it as much as he would have liked. In his spare time he and his friend Shmulik would discuss how to locate a treasure that they were sure was buried under a nearby hill. Unfortunately the family had to move soon thereafter and then Sholom's mother died. When his father remarried, the new stepmother was not exactly a kindly sort. Still, Sholom was able to have a fair amount of small adventures and triumphs in his own way. In the end, he realized exactly what kind of treasure it was that he would someday present to his father. He was going to be a writer. An Afterword describes how Sholom spent the rest of his life, the number of works he created (more than six thousand stories, essays, plays and novels) and where and when he died. There is also a particularly well written list of Sources and Archival material used by Silverman to tell this truly interesting tale. Usually I do not trust award winners. This particular story won the 2006 Sydney Taylor Book Award and so I picked it up with the faintest moue of apprehension gracing my lips. I mean, award winners tend to have one thing in common - they're dull dull deathly deadly dull. And winners of awards for a specific ethnic or religious minority have such a small pool to pull from to begin with that often I find myself deeply disappointed with what I find. "Sholom's Treasure" breaks that rule squarely in two and does so with a kind of manic glee. The glee can be attributed directly to two participants - Silverman and Gerstein. Let's take Silverman for a start. It's really remarkably difficult to take a famous figure, condense their life (or, in this case, a portion of their life) into picture book size with simple words AND give the tale a beginning, a middle, and an end. This she has done beautifully. We read about Sholom wanting to dig up a mysterious treasure so that he could present it to his family. Later, he realizes what the true treasure he could present could be. Along the way we get to read funny little anecdotes, such as the time Sholom copied down his step-mother's insults and curses into a compiled (and alphabetized) dictionary entitled, "The Sharp Tongue of the Stepmother". Little humorous touches like this one give the book a depth that few children's book biographies achieve. Then there is Mr. Gerstein's work. As I mentioned before, I'm

never sure if I'm going to like what he does from book to book. I enjoyed, "The Man Who Walked Between the Towers", but I had a hard time figuring out whether or not the art was good enough for the story. No such wavering exists with "Sholom". Gerstein has given his hero particularly bright blue eyes and some yellow curls that make him easy to find even in group settings. When Sholom is described as mimicking someone, we see split panels where the "victim" does something and then Sholom does the same thing, only goofier. There's a truly enjoyable sequence where Sholom stands fascinated by his stepmother's curses. In brightly colored squares we see each curse turned to its literal visible equivalent. There's a picture of Sholom covered in worms for "May worms eat you!" and Sholom in various pieces for "May you ache and break!". To my chagrin, publishers like Farrar, Straus & Giroux don't seem to care to mention the artistic process their illustrators use to make their pictures on their publication pages anymore. A Publisher's Weekly review once said that the book used pen & ink and watercolor washes to create the pictures. I don't have anything to back this information up with, so I guess we'll just have to trust PW on this one. The Author's Note at the beginning of the book clears up quite a few misconceptions of its own. I was delighted to find that Sholom's pen name (Sholom Aleichem) was a kind of play on words. He changed his last name to the humorous "Aleichem" so that every time you said his title in full you were basically saying "peace be with you" in Yiddish. I also appreciated that there was a note at the beginning mentioning that, "The dialogue in this book is based on Sholom Aleichem's own words as they appear in his autobiography, 'From the Fair'". That's just in case you were worried that Silverman made some of this stuff up. The book has received two awards as of this review (the aforementioned Sydney Taylor and the New York Public Library's 100 Titles For Reading and Sharing) and has been given glowing reviews by at least nine legitimate review resources. It may sound greedy, but I wish more people knew about it. It's a pity it didn't garner itself a Caldecott Honor, but that's the way it goes sometimes. In any case, it's a lovely little book and an even cleverer pairing of selective story and finely honed artwork. A treasure for people of every culture and persuasion.

This winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award for Young Readers is just charming and works on many levels. Mordecai Gerstein's illustrations complement the text perfectly. It is a biography for younger readers; a story reminiscent of a fairy tale with a mean step-mother and a dream that comes true; and a lesson that you will succeed if you pursue your passion.

Sholom's Treasure is the 2006 winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award in the Younger Readers Category, presented by the Association of Jewish Libraries for the best in Jewish children's

literature. An interview with the author and illustrator may be heard on the Jewish literature podcast The Book of Life at [...] (the January 2006 episode), and information about all Sydney Taylor Book Award winners is available at [...]. The subtitle of this book, "How Sholom Aleichem Became a Writer" accurately describes this childhood portrait of the famous author. From toddlerhood to the teen-age, we learn of the influences on the writer's work, from his shtetl upbringing to his collecting of interesting curses uttered by his stepmother. The story ends with the boy's realization that he will become a writer; his adult life is not depicted. This is not a shortcoming; anyone who has seen Fiddler on the Roof knows who Sholom grew up to be, but this book satisfies our curiosity as to how he became that person. This picture book biography is a perfect blend of text and illustration. The writing is simple and clear, engaging and full of interesting detail and well-placed dialogue. The illustrations are busy, at first glance perhaps too much so; yet further examination reveals that they are incredibly alive and that they perfectly complement and flesh out the text. The use of cartoon-style series of small illustrations interspersed with full-page scenes moves the story along and supports the pacing of the text. Faces and body language are expressive and vivid. Sholom comes to life as a lovable rascal despite the potentially distancing old-fashioned clothing and long side-curls. Sholom's Jewish identity is unapologetically front and center in this biography. Explanations of Jewish life are not necessary, as the story itself smoothly defines all terms and customs. The Jewish aspects of the story are not coyly told for insiders nor stiffly recited to educate non-Jews, but are described matter-of-factly; Sholom's culture is an integral part of his individuality and of his life story. This is a vital, engaging, living-and-breathing portrait of one of modern Judaism's most famous and beloved champions. The book stands along beautifully but would also make a perfect introduction to Sholom Aleichem's own works. Grades 2-5

This is a delightful picture book, featuring Sholom, an iconic Yiddish writer. It presents his early life in a humorous manner as he jokes and charms his way through life. Despite hardships, Sholom used the power of words to bring some light and hope to those around him. Overall this was a wonderful book, one any child would enjoy.

Love this book, was a gift and hope my friend likes it as much as I did . It's a good read.:)

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