

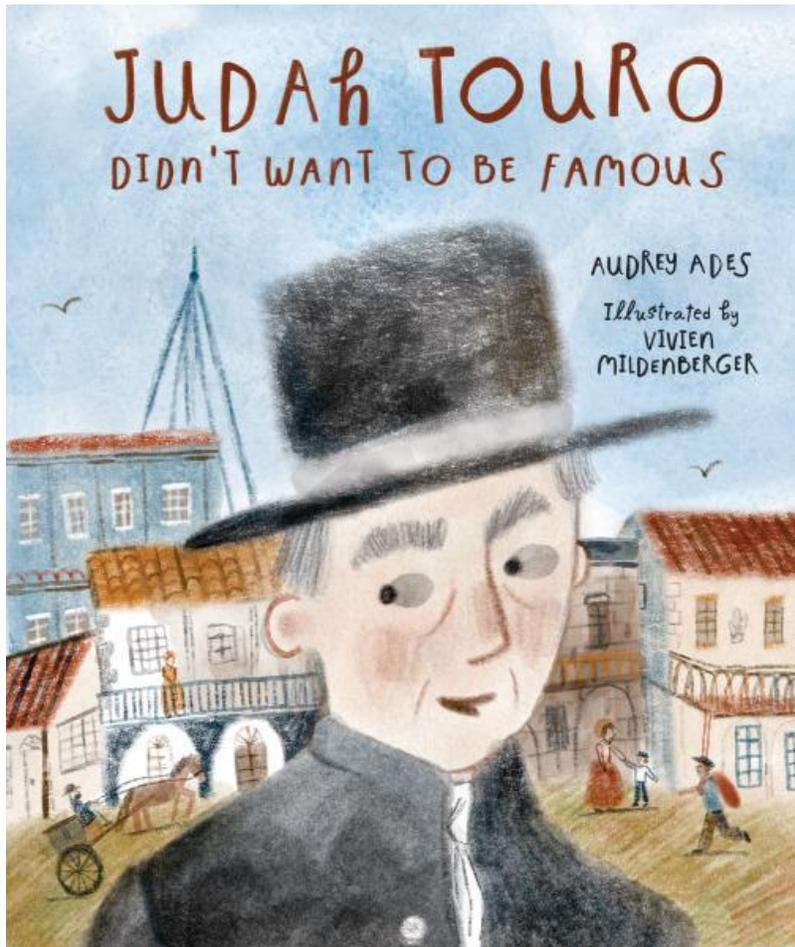
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About the author: Audrey Ades never cared much about history as a kid, but is making up for lost time now! She loves learning about “unsung heroes,” people who have not been recognized for the important things they did. Along the way, she learns about many different periods in American and European history. Audrey has a BA in theatre from Tufts University, a master’s degree in social work from Simmons College and a PsyD from the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology.

About the Illustrator: After graduating from Art Center College of Design, **Vivien Mildenberger** packed up her pencils and moved to a lovely farm just outside of Nashville, Tennessee. There she works on her illustrations, pottery, and other general magic-making.

Story Summary:

This story begins when Judah Touro is already a young man and is leaving home to make a life for himself in New Orleans, LA. Once he is settled, Judah works very hard and makes a lot of money. But, one question burns in his brain: What is God’s purpose for him? Surely, it’s not just to be a rich businessman!

Judah volunteers for a dangerous job during the war of 1812 and is badly injured. It takes a whole year for him to recover. During this time, he thinks long and hard about why God spared his life. Judah has always been a caring person, but now he sees the pain and struggles of the people of New Orleans through new eyes. Perhaps his true calling is to help others. But Judah is a quiet and modest man. He doesn’t want a lot of attention or praise for the charity he gives. Judah wants his gifts to be anonymous. He does not want to be famous. By the time of his death in 1854, Judah Touro had donated more to charity than anyone else in the United States.

The prevailing theme of the story is *tikkun olam*, the Jewish concept of repairing the world. It is each person’s responsibility to contribute to this global effort. Judah gave generously to people of all races and religions, and supported charitable causes around the world.

Background:

Judah Touro was born in 1775 in Newport, RI. His father was a rabbi, but he died very young. His mother took Judah and his brother and sister to Boston, MA, where they were raised by her brother. Uncle Hays gave Judah and his siblings a solid Jewish education and taught them traditional Jewish customs and traditions. He also taught Judah a lot about trade and business. In 1801, Judah left for New Orleans. No one is exactly sure why. For more visit AudreyAdesBooks.com

Discussion: Before Reading the Book

1. What can you tell about the story just by looking at the cover of the book? Do you think this story takes place in modern times or long ago? Can you tell anything about Judah from his picture on the cover? Does the story take place near a port? What makes you think so?

2. What does “famous” mean to you? Would you like to be famous? Why do you think a person wouldn’t want to be famous?

Discussion: After Reading the Book

1. Soon after Judah left home, he got sick and lost all his money. His situation looked bleak. How do you imagine he felt? How did he cope with his feelings? How did he feel when he finally reached New Orleans?
2. Judah was happy running his shop, but he had an important question in mind. What was that question? What does it tell us about Judah’s values and priorities?
3. Judah was almost 40 years old when he volunteered to join the army in the War of 1812. Why do you think he volunteered? Why do you think he offered to take such a dangerous job?
4. Take a close look at how the illustrator portrays the people of New Orleans. What differences do you see in them before and after the war? Remember, this story is being told through Judah’s eyes.
5. Judah did a lot of wonderful things with his money. Which is your favorite thing and why?
6. Why do you think Judah didn’t want people to know about his donations? One reason may be in some of the Jewish values he learned as a boy.

A Lesson: Maimonides and the 8 Levels of Charity

Maimonides was a Jewish scholar who was born in Cordova, Spain over 700 years ago (1138-1204). Today, he is best known for his “ladder of giving.” Although helping others is always a good thing, Maimonides believed that some forms of *tikkun olam* were better than others. It is very likely that Judah learned about Maimonides when he was a student in Boston.

Maimonides 8 Levels of Charity, from the least degree of righteousness to the highest level.

1. The giver doesn’t want to give or does it in a way that makes the recipient feel disgraced or embarrassed.
2. The giver donates cheerfully but gives too little.
3. The giver donates cheerfully and enough but only after being asked.
4. The giver gives before being asked.
5. The giver doesn’t know who is getting his donations, but the recipient knows who the giver is.
6. The giver knows whom s/he is giving to, but the recipient doesn’t know who the giver is.
7. Neither the giver nor the recipient knows the other’s identity.
8. The giver donates money, makes a loan, donates his or her time or whatever else it takes to enable an individual to be self-reliant.

Discussion:

1. Do you agree with Maimonides that some ways of giving are better than others?
2. What do you think about #4, “The giver gives before being asked?” Why is that a good thing?
3. What does Maimonides mean by “self-reliant” in #8? Why do you think Maimonides thought that helping someone become self-reliant was the highest form of charity?

Activities:

1. Divide students into groups of two or three children. Print out one blank copy of the *tikkun olam* ladder for each group. Have children look through the book and fill in Judah’s acts of giving on the appropriate step of the ladder. How many of the levels did Judah reach? Why was some of his giving on lower or higher levels than others?
2. Print out the two *tikkun olam* ladders attached to this page. One is filled in with Maimonides’ ideas, and one is blank.
 - a. Ask children to think about the last time they gave something to someone who needed it. It doesn’t have to be money. Ask children to fill in other rungs of the ladder with acts of kindness, charity or *tikkun olam* they could do. Remember, all ways of helping others is good. Sometimes you can’t reach the highest level, but you can still help repair the world. (Hint: if you go to audreyadesbooks.com and click on “Activities,” you might find some ideas.)

Learn more on the levels?

To learn more about Maimonides, check out these websites:

www.historyforkids.net/mainonides.html and <https://www.charitywatch.org/charity-donating-articles/eight-rungs-of-the-giving-ladder>