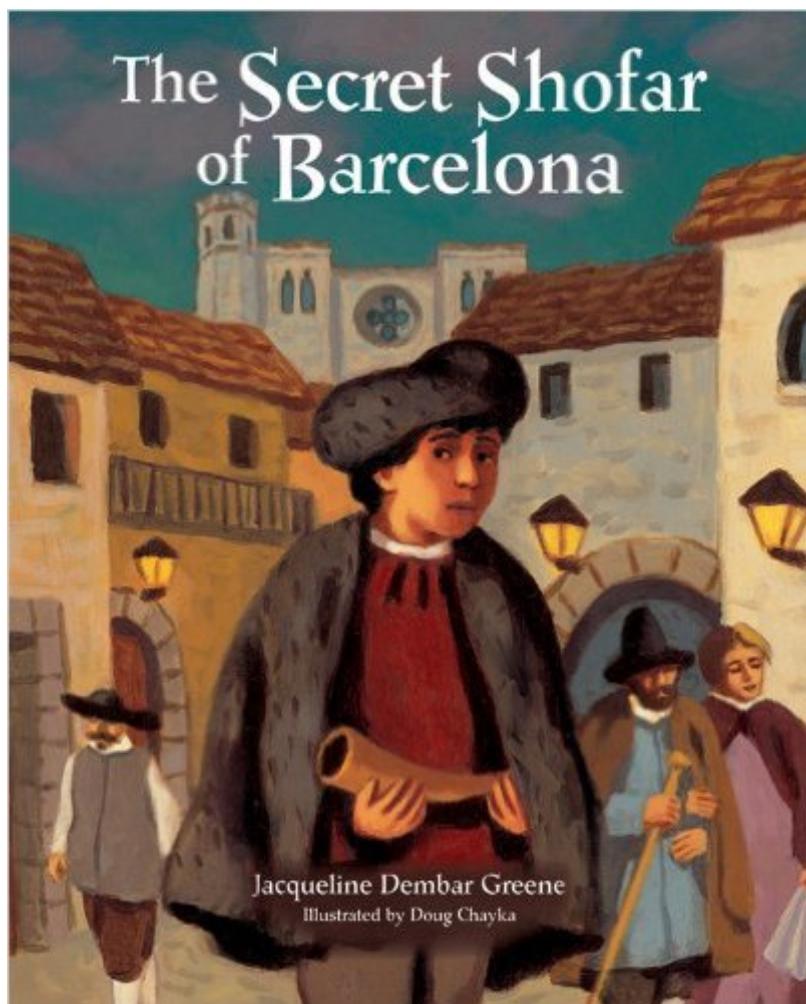


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The Secret Shofar Of Barcelona (High Holidays)



Synopsis

Musician Don Fernando longs to hear the sounds of the shofar on the High Holidays, but, like the other secret Jews in Inquisition Spain, he must hide his religion. But when he is asked to perform a symphony celebrating the new world, he and his son Rafael devise a daring plan to usher in the Jewish New Year right in plain sight of the Spanish nobility!

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #131,323 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #39 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Holidays & Celebrations > Religious #44 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Religious Fiction > Jewish #1088 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Religions

Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

Customer Reviews

Talented children's author Jacqueline Dembar Greene mixes a high holiday with scary Jewish history during the Spanish Inquisition in a little known Sephardic legend. The conductor of the Barcelona Orchestra is a Converso; he will lead a concert celebrating the Spanish colonies on the first night of Rosh Hashanah. When the musician introduces strange native instruments from the New World, he plots to slip the shofar in among them, then blow it for the Jewish New Year, assuming only other Conversos in the audience will recognize the ram's horn. His son shares the secret of their Jewish identity and the youth offers to blow the shofar, which he practices in the fields amidst grazing sheep. On the night of the concert the secret Jews are thrilled with the brave, rare observance of their holiday. In a tense ending to this dramatic holiday historical fiction, the Spanish duke calls the musician forward. Luckily, the duke does not recognize the Jewish religious object.

The Jews are safe to play the shofar as a native horn the following year! Muted art in greys and browns perfectly realizes this story of whispers and secrets. An opening paragraph clearly explains the Inquisition to the picture book crowd. A warm end note stresses this book rests on an old legend no doubt born of wish fulfillment. It is a heroic act far too dangerous for father or son to have really tried, no matter how good they are hiding in plain sight. For ages 6 - 10. Ellen Cole

As the librarian in a synagogue library, I get to see and read a large number of children's books. I recommended this to several teachers as well as reading it aloud to a few classes. The teachers loved it, as did the children. We look forward to more of this quality book.

This elegant story introduces young readers to the idea of the Spanish Inquisition in a language that is accessible and yet not too scary. It demonstrates the resiliency of the Jewish people through fictional characters that represented the likely thoughts, feelings, motives and ingenuity of real people of that time.

Unearthing a mystery or providing an explanation for something that is unusual always sparks interest. The story of the Secret Shofar interested me, but did not impress the children with whom I shared the story. I may try again when they are older.

Reviewed by: Wayne Walker
Do you know what a shofar is? It is a musical instrument that is made from a ram's horn and used by many Jewish people. In 1492, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand decreed that everyone in Spain must be Catholic. Most people of other faiths were forced to leave the country or convert to Catholicism. Some Jews who remained and pretended to follow Catholic ways were called conversos and had to hide their religion during the Spanish Inquisition. There is a legend about one such converso named Don Fernando Aguilar, who was a famous composer and/or conductor of the Royal Orchestra of Barcelona in the late 1500s, and this book is based on that legend. Author Jacqueline Dembar Greene notes, "While such a man may have existed, there is no mention of him in history books. Nor is there record of a Royal Orchestra. But music was an important part of Spanish life." Rafael Aguilar was listening to a new piece that his father had composed and was to conduct at a concert celebrating Spain's colonies in the New World. It had parts for many strange instruments that were used by the natives of those colonies. At the same time, the Aguiars and their friends were planning to hold their secret observation of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, since it would appear that they were only celebrating the festival.

Rafael had the idea of including a part for the shofar as a "native instrument," saying, "Maybe it's safest to hide the shofar in plain sight" and that hearing it would encourage the Jews. But who would be brave enough to play the shofar in public, and would he or she be able to get away with it? With period-appropriate illustrations by Doug Chayka, The Secret Shofar of Barcelona will be of special interest to Jewish children, but it is a well-written story that all youngsters should enjoy reading.

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