

**Book Discussion Research Projects (Revised and updated 8 Feb 2006)**

“The [American Library Association \(ALA\)](http://www.nextbook.org/ala/index.html) and Nextbook are partnering to present *Let's Talk About It: Jewish Literature*, a new reading and discussion program for libraries interested in exploring Jewish literature and culture. *Let's Talk About It* is a reading and discussion series led by local scholars and organized around themes that engage and stimulate audiences. Millions of people have gathered at libraries across the country to participate in *Let's Talk About It* programs since its inception in 1982.” (see <http://www.nextbook.org/ala/index.html>). **In preparation for my role next fall as leader of a series of discussions that will be held at Johnson County Library in Fall 2006 on five texts that address the theme of fathers and daughters in a changing world (see <http://www.nextbook.org/ala/participants.html>), I am assigning research projects on the following Jewish texts:**

- *Tevye the Dairyman*, by Sholem Aleichem;
- *Bread Givers*, by Anzia Yezierska;
- *1185 Park Avenue: A Memoir*, by Anne Roiphe;
- *American Pastoral*, by Philip Roth; and
- *Bee Season*, by Myla Goldberg

Please familiarize yourself with this project by consulting the following websites:

<http://www.nextbook.org/ala/index.html>

<http://www.ala.org/template.cfm?Section=ppo>

<http://www.ala.org/ala/ppo/currentprograms/currentpublic.htm>

<http://www.ala.org/ala/ppo/currentprograms/letstalkaboutit/letstalkaboutit.htm>

<http://www.ala.org/ala/ppo/currentprograms/letstalkaboutit/schedule.htm>

<http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2006/january2006/jewishliterature.htm>

<http://www.mdc.edu/kendall/jl/amindofherownindex.htm>

For further reading on reading and book clubs as cultural practices and the shift to electronics as the dominant medium involved in the shaping of tastes and preferences and in the negotiations that produce identities, you might consult the classic study, Jan Radway's *Reading the Romance*; Kathleen Rooney's new study *Reading with Oprah: The Book Club that Changed America*; or Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*.

**Book Discussion Papers:** Work with your partner(s) to lead and participate in discussions of the text you have chosen to read. Group members for each book are: *Bee Season* (Dana Halpern and Caitlin Tew); *1185 Park Avenue* (Blake Harris, Brendan Petrandio, and Susan Schwarz); *American Pastoral* (Adam Kravitz and Micayla Nemer); *Bread Givers* (Elizabeth Stuewe, Scott Steffens, and Timothy McCahill); *Tevye the Dairyman* (David Heit and Jason Krejci). Although you are not obligated to build a larger group for your discussion(s), you are free to recruit additional members (friends, family, etc.). Two people you might call upon to attend your discussion(s) are Charlie Goodman at [cgoodman@mail.ku.edu](mailto:cgoodman@mail.ku.edu), who is doing an independent study on these five books this semester, and/or Melissa Horen, the service learning intern working on Let's Talk About It with the Johnson County Public Library.

The three short papers leading up to your final paper should be 3-5 pages long. The final papers (draft and revision) should be 9-11 pages long, including the works cited page.

Paper One. In your own words and to the best of your abilities, describe one of these texts and offer a personal response to it, drawing on specific material from the text to explain and illustrate your points. Select and defend a focus for a discussion of the text that engages with the question of Jewish American identity formation and might draw upon specific dimensions or themes such as time, place, immigration, language, the Holocaust, generations, family, etc.

Paper Two. Describe, analyze, and compare six sources that you consulted in order to prepare yourself to lead an informative and interesting discussion of the text. Explain how you selected these sources and discuss how they challenge or illuminate your interest in the text.

*The Jewish Reader*, a feature on the website of the National Yiddish Book Center, offers materials for leading discussions of a selection of Jewish texts, including *Tevye the Dairyman* and *Bread Givers*. Is the information provided sufficiently informed? Are the discussion questions interesting or meaningful to you? If you consult such sources, be sure to give me your opinion of them. In the end, choose your own direction. Samples such as these are FAR from exhaustive.

Paper Three. Report on your discussions of the text, as a leader and participant. Report all the particulars, such as who participated; when, where, and how long you met for each discussion; how the discussion was organized, and what happened. What were your foci and what did you learn about the text, its meanings, or its uses? What proved to be the most and least interesting directions for discussion. How were your text and discussions connected to our studies as a class of how identities, specifically Jewish American identities, are produced through ongoing cultural practice?

Draft of Final Paper: Assemble your drafts in a final paper that draws upon and revises your earlier research and your experience in group discussions to recommend directions for leading a focused and provocative discussion of this book. Explain how the text engages with questions of Jewish American identity and how your discussion critically engages with the ongoing process of producing Jewish American identities.

Revised Final Paper: Incorporate revisions of the final paper based on responses from me and your peers (and any other readers you may have) to your written draft and oral presentation.

**AVOID PLAGIARISM! CITE EVERY PRINT OR INTERNET SOURCE CONSULTED.**