

## Eli's Amazing Arabic Adventure

Written by Elliott Luftman, Nathan Mirsky, and Evan Ausmus

*Page 1 and 2 (Illustration: The opening scene shows the bustling New York cityscape with tall buildings and people going about their daily lives. The street is filled with intriguing corners and vibrant colors)*

In a big, busy city where lots of people lived, there was a young boy named Eli. His home was a cozy apartment on a street where every corner had something fun and new to discover.

Eli was a curious boy with curly hair that bounced when he walked. His eyes sparkled with excitement for exploring.

*Page 3 and 4 (Illustration: Inside Eli's apartment, the family scene is depicted. Eli and his parents, Leah and David, are surrounded by a treasure chest of family history, with old photos, books, and cherished belongings from the past)*

At home, Eli's world was filled with old tales and traditions. His parents, Leah and David, loved their family's history.

Their home was like a treasure chest, full of old photos, books, and special things from the past. Every evening, they shared stories with Eli and his little sister, Miriam. These stories took them on magical journeys to faraway times.

*Page 5*

When summer came, the city seemed to shine even brighter. Eli couldn't wait for summer adventures – playing in the park, visiting new places, and making memories. But this year, his parents had a different plan for the summer.

One evening, as they all sat eating their favorite dinner, Leah and David decided it was time to tell Eli about their summer plan.

*Page 6 and 7 (Illustration: Eli's emotions are portrayed vividly with his surprise, disappointment, and questioning look on his face, with Leah's hand on his.)*

“Eli,” Leah began, “this summer, you're going to a special kind of camp. There, you'll learn about our family's language and the stories of our ancestors.”

Eli's heart dropped a little. “A Jewish camp?” He had hoped for a summer of freedom, not stuck at a summer camp.

“Why do I have to go?” Eli asked, feeling a strong sadness.

Leah gently squeezed Eli's hand. "Learning about our family's past is like going on a treasure hunt. It's really important and one day, you'll understand why it's so special," she explained with a kind smile.

*Page 8 and 9 (Illustration: Eli lies in bed, staring at the ceiling with the room shining in the moonlight)*

Eli tried to understand, but he was still unsure. He thought about all the fun things he would miss. Lying in bed that night, Eli stared at the ceiling, filled with thoughts about the summer camp.

Would he make any friends there? Could learning about old stories be as exciting as his city adventures?

What Eli didn't know was that this summer was going to be an adventure in its own way.

*Page 10 and 11 (Illustration: Eli and his mom approach a grand, old building, while the courtyard is filled with children of diverse backgrounds)*

The sun was shining brightly on the first day of summer camp. Eli felt a little nervous but also excited as he walked with his mom to a big old building.

Lots of kids were coming in, some looking just as unsure as Eli. His mom gave him a big hug. "You're going to have so much fun," she said with a smile.

Eli wasn't sure yet, but he hugged his mom goodbye and went inside.

The camp was noisy with kids laughing and talking. Eli felt shy but also curious. Maybe he could make some new friends here?

*Page 12 and 13 (Illustration: The children are gathered on the front lawn. It is a vibrant space with many children eager to learn Judeo-Arabic)*

Mrs. Cohen, the camp counselor, was very nice. She started talking about a special language called Judeo-Arabic. "Judeo-Arabic is a mix of Arabic and Hebrew," she explained. "It's a very special way of talking."

Eli listened closely. He never knew languages could mix like that.

"Judeo-Arabic is spoken by Jewish people in some Arab countries. It's important to learn because it helps keep our history alive," Mrs. Cohen said.

Eli felt excited to be learning something so important.

*Page 14*

Mrs. Cohen then taught them five fun words in Judeo-Arabic. “These words are like little treasures,” she said.

abānā (meaning “father”)  
 samwāti (meaning “heaven”)  
 harif (meaning “welcome”)  
 maš’e (meaning “drink”)  
 donne (meaning “women”)

*Page 15*

After that, Mrs. Cohen sang a short song in Judeo-Arabic and French. “This song is very old,” she said. Her voice was soft, and the song sounded like a magic story.

<i>Fel Shara Canet</i>	Walking Down the
<i>Betet Masha</i>	Street
La signorina aux	The girl with the
beaux yeux noirs	beautiful dark eyes
<i>Fel Shara canet</i>	Was walking down
<i>betet masha</i>	the street
Come la luna était	As lovely as the
la sua fâcha	moon was her face
Qui éclairait le	Which lit up the
boulevard	boulevard

Eli felt happy listening to the song. It was like hearing a story from long ago.

*Page 16 and 17 (Illustration: During lunch, Eli sits with Amir, a fellow camper under a tree in the courtyard)*

At lunch, Eli sat with a boy named Amir. Amir liked Judeo-Arabic a lot. “It’s like a secret code,” Amir said, smiling. “It’s fun to know a language that’s special.”

Eli started to think that this summer might be fun after all.

As he walked back to his cabin that day with Amir, Eli thought about the new words and the song he heard. He felt proud and happy to be learning about his family’s past.

Days turned into weeks at the summer camp, and Eli found himself really enjoying learning Judeo-Arabic. Each new word was like unlocking a secret from the past. Mrs. Cohen made every activity fun and exciting.

*Page 18 and 19 (Illustration: The children are in a circle on the lawn with Mrs. Cohen in the middle)*

One day, Mrs. Cohen decided to surprise the class. “Today, we're going to play with our new words,” she announced. The class got into teams, and Eli teamed up with Amir. They laughed and learned as they played, each word bringing them closer to their heritage.

Eli was surprised by how much he liked the words and stories. “I didn't know camp could be this much fun,” he said to Amir during their break.

Amir smiled. “It's cool when we give new things a chance, isn't it?”

Eli thought about this. He realized that he had been wrong about the summer camp. He needed to have an open mind to really enjoy and learn new things.

*Page 20 and 21 (Illustration: As weeks pass, Eli's transformation is illustrated through various camp activities.)*

The weeks flew by, and soon it was the last day of camp. Mrs. Cohen had a special surprise. “We're going to have a little show where we use everything we've learned,” she said.

*Page 22 and 23 (Illustration: A stage is filled with props reflecting the cultural stories they've learned. Eli, confidently speaking in Judeo-Arabic, takes center stage.)*

The children put on a play, using new words and acting out stories from their culture. Eli felt proud as he spoke in Judeo-Arabic. His parents came to watch and were so happy to see what Eli had learned.

After the show, Eli's mom hugged him. “You did wonderfully, Eli!”

His dad added, “We're so proud of you for learning so much this summer.”

Eli smiled. “I'm glad I came to the camp. I learned a lot, not just about our language, but about having an open mind.”

On their way home, Eli thought about the summer. He had made new friends, learned a special language, and discovered something important: being open to new experiences could lead to great adventures.

*Page 24 (Illustration: Eli's family together as the sun sets on the last day of camp, creating a glow over Eli)*

As the sun set on the last day of camp, Eli felt grateful. He had learned more than he ever expected, and he couldn't wait to explore and learn even more in the future.

## Note To Parents

Dear Parents,

Judeo-Arabic holds significant value to many people all over the world and encapsulates a unique blend of language and culture. Preserving this amazing language not only preserves the linguistic heritage of Jewish communities but also offers history and customs of both Jewish and Arabic cultures. Parents play an extraordinary role in fostering a connection with your child to the language and culture they are from. Your efforts in imparting this knowledge is not only a gift to your children but also a testament to your effort of expanding and expressing the importance of your own or other people's language and culture. By expanding your children's knowledge of this, they will understand and respect different and diverse cultures. They will now be equipped with a broader perspective of the world while appreciating and valuing the importance of their past. They will also now have the empathy and knowledge needed to navigate this increasingly complex and interconnected world through language and culture.

I extend my deepest gratitude to you for being the spark in their life that will one day turn into a blaze emulating their ancestors' roots. Thank you for entrusting this book to help foster that spark in your child. May this story serve as a catalyst for many discussions between you and your children about the significance of their cultural languages and others as well.

With warmest regards,

Evan Ausmus, Elliott Luftman, Nathan Mirsky

## Authors' Statement

Our book is didactic, meaning it is “specifically designed to teach a lesson, whether moral, political, religious, social, or practical” (Hintz and Tribunella 34). The book teaches the importance of cultural heritage and language in shaping personal identity and fostering community connections. It highlights the transformative impact of education and friendship in overcoming initial resistance to cultural engagement. Additionally, our book showcases the dynamics of intergenerational communication and the role of parents and educators in guiding young people towards cultural appreciation.

Both interviewees expressed a keen interest in the preservation and revitalization of Judeo-Arabic, emphasizing a deep emotional connection to the language. Oded, for instance, reminisced about his childhood, recounting how his family observed the Sabbath, adhered to kosher practices, and followed the rules of the day. He taught people Judeo Arabic and explained how ecstatic all of the people were to learn the language of their ancestors. We used this as a baseline for our plot.

Judeo-Arabic is, as of recently, a dormant language. “Many Jewish dialects of Arabic have already been or will soon be lost because they are not being passed down to younger generations” (Rubin and Kahn 12). A reason for Judeo-Arabic becoming nearly extinct is the flight of Arab Jews in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The majority of these Jews relocated to Israel, where there was intense pressure from Zionist Israelis to abandon Judeo-Arabic and embrace Hebrew (Hary and Benor 38). When asked about using loanwords from Judeo-Arabic into his vernacular, Simon explained how due to the lack of speakers of the language, he hasn't

spoken it and as a result forgotten it. Unless language is consistently passed down, it will cease to exist, and because Simon didn't surround himself with speakers of the same language, he consequently forgot it. Our book describes how we can stop this by creating Jewish communities through language revitalization.

We referred to John Fox's blog, "How to Write a Children's Book in 12 Steps (From an Editor)" for creating our title. Fox says, "the title is the number one marketing tool of your book. Most readers decide whether or not to pick up your book from the title alone." This is why we decided to make our title an alliteration, so it was appealing to our target audience.

The camp setting in the story was used to introduce our main character to the idea of language revitalization. It is extremely common for Jewish kids to go to a Jewish summer camp where they are exposed to Hebrew. The goal of these camps "are not towards language acquisition, but toward affective and communal goals: creating a distinctively American Jewish camp culture that places a positive value on Hebrew" (Benor, Krasner, and Avni 142). At the end of the story, Eli might not remember all of the words and songs he learned, but he had fun and enjoyed learning about his heritage, which was the goal of the camp. Complete language revitalization isn't necessarily the end goal, but rather post-vernacular use to spark interest and revival of the language.

## Bibliography

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