

GESM130 Book Assignment

# Mordechai and John's Super Shabbat Supper!

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Pages 1-2: On a Friday evening as the sun began to set, Mordechai grew eager to celebrate Shabbat with his loved ones. This week's Shabbat was extra special to Mordechai because his friend John would be joining his family. (Illustration: the inside of a home with a sun setting outside of the window, Mordechai and John in the dining room setting the table).

Pages 3-4: "Tonight, you'll meet my grandmother, Sabriya. She speaks a language called Lishana Noshan and may not always understand what you say to her in English. She immigrated here from Iran," said Mordechai. Before John could respond, Sabriya bursted through the door, a freshly cooked dish in hand.

(Illustration: John and Mordechai talking in the kitchen, front door of the home open with Sabriya, the grandmother bursting in the doorway. She is holding a platter with food on it).

Pages 5-6: Mordechai exclaimed, "**Dakarabtah!**" and leapt toward her to give her a hug. John waved his hand and said, "My name is John. It's very nice to meet you!". As Mordechai and Sabriya held each other in an embrace, Sabriya suddenly lost her balance, and her dish shattered on the ground! (Illustration: Sabriya mid-air with her dish shattered on the floor, John in shock, Mordechai trying to catch Sabriya).

Pages 7-8: "Oh no! My **Pushpara Sabzi!**" Sabriya shrieked in horror, food smeared on her blouse. "**Hayat aljada**, my life," Sabriya said to Mordechai. "Shabbat begins in 20 minutes! You and your friend must help me by remaking my special dish while I freshen up!" Sabriya handed Mordechai a wrinkled piece of paper from her pocket while saying, "Thank goodness I brought the recipe to give to your mother!" (Illustration: Sabriya speaking closely to Mordechai, Mordechai looking apprehensive).

Pages 9-10: Frenzied and worried, Mordechai and John began to read the recipe. "I can't understand half of this recipe, it must be Lishana Noshan! You have to help me Mordechai!" John shouted. (Illustration: John looking at the crumpled piece of paper, Mordechai with hands on his head).

Pages 11-12: "It's okay, John! I'm here to help. First up, we need 300 grams of chopped and mixed herbs. Will you list off the herbs that my grandmother wrote down?" said Mordechai. (Illustration: Mordechai pointing at paper, John looking stressed).

Pages 13-14: "Your grandmother listed scallions, mint, coriander, and **ja'afari**? What is that?" said John. "**Ja'afari** is parsley!" Mordechai explained while chopping the herbs. "Now read me the next step." (Illustration: John handing over a bunch of parsley, Mordechai chopping herbs).

Pages 15-16: "It says you must combine the chopped herbs, mixed eggs, flour, and **m'lkha**." Before he could ask, Mordechai informed John, "Salt! **M'lkha** is salt," patting his shoulder. "The

next step is to heat *m'shkha* in a pan.” (Illustration: John and Mordechai smiling with the chopped herbs on a cutting board, a carton of eggs, a container of flour, and a salt shaker seen in the background).

Pages 17-18: Without needing a translation, John began pouring the oil, excitedly asking, “What’s next, Mordechai?” “Next, we add the mixture to the pan and fry until golden brown on each side.” As John plopped the mixture into the pan, the sound of sizzling oil caught the attention of Sabriya. (Illustration: John watching pan with mixture, Mordechai smiling, Sabriya seen peeking around the corner).

Pages 19-20: “Mordechai, **maso kefa**? How are you?” inquired Sabriya. “**Basile**, I’m good, grandmother! Our dish is almost complete!” (Illustration: Sabriya still peeking around the corner, smiling, both boys smiling back at her, John still at pan).

Pages 21-22: John and Mordechai’s anticipation was building as their remaining time dwindled. As the clock ticked and ticked, John slowly slid the Pushpara Sabzi onto a decorated platter. Almost instantly, the door burst open with Mordechai’s relatives. As Mordechai embraced his aunts and his uncles, John slid the platter to the center of the dinner table. (Illustration: first page is John sliding the dish from the pan onto the platter, the second page is John placing the platter at the middle of the table, Mordechai seen giving a hug in the background)

Pages 23-24: John and Mordechai sat across from Sabriya and anxiously awaited her thoughts on their dish. Sabriya took a large bite, pursed her lips, and remained silent for a moment. Out of her silence, Sabriya yelled, “**Bassimah**, Delicious! I am so proud of you both! **Tota havelock**, thanks be to God, for your ability to help me today.” (Illustration: first page shows Sabriya with a blank expression with a fork next to her mouth, second page shows Sabriya with a beaming smile)

Pages 25-26: The two boys high fived and placed a heaping serving onto their plates. They talked and laughed, and by the end of Shabbat, their dish was entirely eaten! “**Yom 'asal, yom basal**. Life is a day honey, a day onion,” said Sabriya. When the boys returned her comment with a confused gaze, she said, “Life has its ups and downs. What started as a low point has turned into a great thing. You made my dish even better than I did!” (Illustration: Sabriya standing behind John and Mordechai smiling while they high five)

Pages 27-28: As Mordechai walked him to the door, John stopped and asked, “Mordechai, do you think we can cook together again next week?” He smiled, nodding, “Absolutely, John. **Bara hazenöh**, see you later.” (Illustration: the two boys standing by the door, smiling).

**Glossary:**

Dakarabtah- Grandmother

Pushpara Sabzi- A traditional Shabbat dish of Jews from Kurdistan

Hayat aljada- A Neo-Aramaic term of endearment, directly translates to “grandmother’s life”

Ja’afari- parsley

M’lkha- salt

M’shkha- oil

Maso kefa- A Jewish Neo-Aramaic phrase meaning, “How are you?”

Basile- A Jewish Neo-Aramaic phrase meaning “I am good”

Bassimah- A Jewish Neo-Aramaic phrase meaning, “Delicious”

Tota havelock- A Jewish Neo-Aramaic phrase used to express gratitude, directly translating to

“Thanks be to God”

Bara hazenöh: A Jewish Neo-Aramaic phrase meaning, “See you later.”

Yom 'asal, yom basal: A Jewish Neo-Aramaic phrase equating to “life has its ups and downs.”  
Directly translates to “Life is a day honey, a day onion.”

## **Note to Parents:**

Parents, this book will take your child on a captivating journey into the rich tapestry of Jewish Neo-Aramaic culture and the joyous traditions of Shabbat cooking. There are many dialects of Jewish Neo-Aramaic, including Lishana Deni, Lishana Noshan, and Lishan Didan. Sabriya, Mordechai's maternal grandmother, immigrated to the United States from Iran and is a native speaker of Lishana Noshan. Upon her migration, she began to learn English as her second language.

Although experiencing the pressure to assimilate, Sabriya prioritizes the transmission of some elements of Lishana Noshan to her grandchild, Mordechai. As they exchange some loanwords throughout the story, Mordechai too is able to pass on elements of the language to his non-Jewish friend, John. Despite being born in the United States, Mordechai identifies with his Sephardi heritage and takes joy in sharing language with his grandmother and his friend alike.

As Mordechai and John engage in the preparation of this traditional dish, your child will discover the significance of each step in the cooking process, and the cultural importance of sharing a festive meal on Shabbat.

We believe that this book will not only captivate your child's imagination but also serve as a wonderful educational tool, fostering an appreciation for diverse cultures and traditions. It provides a unique opportunity to learn about Jewish Neo-Aramaic, a language that has stood the test of time and remains a vital part of the cultural heritage of many communities.

We encourage you to read this book with your child, sparking conversations about language, community, and the special rituals associated with Shabbat. We hope that Mordechai and John's Super Shabbat Supper! becomes a cherished addition to your family's library and a source of joy for many Shabbat evenings to come!

### **Authors' Statement:**

Our book reflects many concepts from class and information we learned from our interviews. When choosing the names for our characters, we sought both the guidance of our interviewees as well as our knowledge of Jewish naming patterns. Our book names the Jewish child “Mordechai”, a name with origins in Jewish religious texts. This name was mentioned by both Ariel and Ilana in our interviews, but also speaks to a greater theme in Jewish naming patterns. As described in Steven M. Lowenstein’s book, “The Jewish Cultural Tapestry”, names with origins in the Tanakh or rabbinic texts are very popular among Jewish families (Lowenstein 70). Furthermore, the grandmother’s name, Sabriya, was recommended by Ilana as a popular name in Sephardic families, mentioning that it is one of her favorites.

Also, the dish was provided to us by our interviewee, Ariel Nosrat. Cuisine can serve as a valuable indicator of the local culture of Jewish communities. This phenomenon can be explained by the concepts of the Great and Little Tradition. As described by Lowenstein, the Great Tradition refers to the written, universal aspects of Judaism practiced by Jews around the world, while the Little Tradition, or folk culture, refers to the variations in traditions within specific Jewish communities (Lowenstein 2). Thus, this dish is representative of the geographical influences of the Jewish Neo-Aramaic community, but nonetheless, remains Judaized: “Even when the Jews adopted recipes from their neighbors, they modified them to conform to the laws of Kashruth or associated them with a Jewish holiday or ritual” (Lowenstein 137). This dish is not a standard dish for Shabbat dinner, but nonetheless represents the individual cultural addition to a Jewish ritual.

Furthermore, we demonstrate ethnolinguistic infusion throughout our book. Ethnolinguistic infusion is “the incorporation of elements of a group’s special language in the

context of another primary language with the goal of fostering group members' connections to the language and/or to the group” (Benor 128). Our method of infusion was the incorporation of Jewish Neo-Aramaic loanwords, like “ja’afari” and “m’shkha”, into our matrix language, English. This method of infusion allowed for our book to be entirely comprehensible by an English speaker while still exposing them to elements of Jewish Neo-Aramaic.

Our book chooses to make the child, Mordechai, understand some loanwords in Jewish Neo-Aramaic even though this often isn't the case for younger generations today. Anthony Woodbury in his article “Endangered Languages,” describes how the endangerment of languages through lack of intergenerational transmission not only contributes to language loss, but also a loss of identity, culture and heritage (Woodbury). For example, our interviewee Ilana’s father was fluent in Jewish Neo-Aramaic, yet did not transmit the language to Ilana and her siblings. Although Sabriya does not fully transmit the language to Mordechai, he nonetheless knows certain loanwords and about the language in general which can contribute to language revitalization. Our book also addresses the current dilemma of native Jewish Neo-Aramaic speakers being forced to learn the general language of where they live to some extent. Leanne Hinton in “The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice” writes, “Immigrant minorities are also very likely to undergo language shift, either voluntarily or involuntarily, as part of their assimilation to their new country.” This is displayed in our book as the grandmother, Sabriya, was evidently forced to learn some level of fluency in English after immigrating to the United States.

Our book represents a post-vernacular engagement with Jewish Neo-Aramaic. As described in Jeffrey Shandler’s book, post-vernacularity refers to the use of a language not for daily communication, but rather for symbolic purposes (Shandler 22). Our book doesn’t

demonstrate the continuous use of Jewish Neo-Aramaic for communication, simply loanwords and phrases. Nonetheless, we utilize glossing in the dialogue of the book for the sake of John and the reader's understanding, which itself demonstrates the post-vernacular intentions behind our narrative. The use of glossing and our glossary served our readers by ensuring that they won't have to understand the Jewish Neo-Aramaic in order to comprehend the story. This method of teaching Jewish Neo-Aramaic serves a symbolic purpose of exposing a larger audience to an endangered language.

Overall, our children's book aims to foster a deeper connection to Jewish Neo-Aramaic through language revitalization efforts of post-vernacular engagement, ethnolinguistic infusion, and the use of food as a source of cultural identity. The pedagogical nature of this book serves as a tool for children to perhaps become interested in learning Jewish Neo-Aramaic and thus, insert themselves into a world of diverse cultures and language practices.



## Bibliography

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