

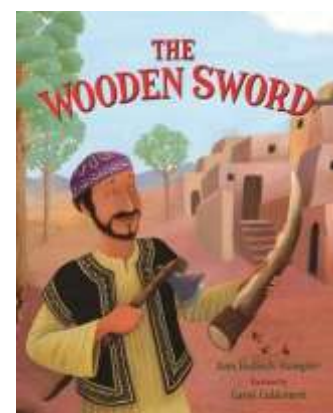


SOUTH ASIA BOOK AWARD
for Children's and Young Adult Literature

Teaching resources for
The Wooden Sword
by *Ann Redisch Stampler*

"Disguised in servant's clothes, an Afghani shah slips out of his palace to learn more about his people. When he meets a poor Jewish shoemaker full of faith that everything turns out just as it should, the good shah grows curious. He decides to test the poor man's faith, only to find that the shoemaker's cheerful optimism cannot be shaken. But the biggest challenge of the shoemaker's man's life is yet to come!"

Story description from the book's dusk jacket



The setting

The story takes place in Kabul, Afghanistan. While the exact time period is never specified, it is clearly well before the modern era. The author and her illustrator, Carol Liddiment, consulted experts to ensure that everything, down to the smallest details (such as the shapes of the cups and the draping of turbans), were depicted accurately.

The story

The basic story - a wealthy ruler repeatedly testing the faith of one of his poor subjects' - is one that is known in many cultures and countries. *The Wooden Sword* is a variation that was told by the Jewish community in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that most Afghans are Muslims and the story is identified on the book's title page as a "Jewish Folktale", neither Islam nor Judaism is ever explicitly mentioned in the text. The Sabbath lamps in the shoemaker's home and the shah's evening prayer are the only real references to either religion. The narrative is primarily concerned with the ways in which the optimistic and resourceful shoemaker cleverly overcomes each of the challenges the shah places before him.

Vocabulary

There are a few terms that young readers might need defined.

shah - a Persian term meaning King or Emperor

puli - pul is Persian for "small copper coin." 100 puli (the plural of pul) equals 1 afghani (the basic unit of currency in Afghanistan). So puli can be thought of as "pennies."

Isha - the Isha, or evening prayer, is the fifth and final daily prayer for Muslims.

Some lesson ideas and activities based on the book

- Ask your students if they have heard (and can share) any folktales similar to this one.
- Have your students locate Afghanistan and Kabul on a world map.
- Have them illustrate their favorite scene from story.
- Have the students make props from the story (swords made from cardboard or turbans and robes from colorful cloth) and then act out important scenes.

History and current events

Some background on Jewish peoples in Afghanistan can be found here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Afghanistan

Here are some recent news items on the last remnants of Jewish society in Afghanistan:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A39702-2005Jan26.html>

<http://www.rferl.org/media/video/afghanistan-last-jew/25168911.html>

Other resources

The link to the page devoted to the book on Ann Redisch Stampler's website

<http://annstampler.com/pb/the-wooden-sword/>

An interview with the author in which she discusses *The Wooden Sword* and other folktales

<http://shelf-employed.blogspot.com/2013/02/the-wooden-sword-interview-with-ann.html>

The Center for South Asia at University of Wisconsin has developed an **Afghan Discovery Box** that is complete with artifacts, clothing, books, DVDs, CDs and lesson plans to explore the region. The box can be used by K-12 schools within the U.S. (shipping costs are not included). For more details or to inquire about using the box in your classroom, contact:

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