



The Journey of a PJ Library Book

Every month, children experience the excitement of a new story. Here's a behind-the-scenes peek at how it gets to their home for storytime.

PHOTOS AND WORDS BY SHANA SURECK

It takes multiple spreadsheets, tractor trailers, forklifts, and a philanthropic vision to complete the mammoth task of getting almost 670,000 PJ Library books a month into the hands of Jewish children around the world.

It really “takes a village,” says Renée Zborowski, operations manager at PJ Library. “And what’s awesome is it’s feel-good work.”

While Renée and the global operations team make the complicated process seem simple, there is a lot of careful planning that goes into delivering upward of 6 million books yearly to homes, schools, and organizations in more than 35 countries. Renée handles about 3 million of those books from the US, and programs in countries such as Israel, Russia, and Brazil manage the rest.

Take, for instance, the September delivery of *The Cholent Brigade*, the January book for 5-year-olds. After the picture book was written in Illinois by Michael Herman, illustrated by Sharon Harmer in England, published by Kar-Ben Publishing in Minnesota, and printed in China, a tractor trailer from a port in New York City delivered 31,248 copies to the PJ Library warehouse in Connecticut. Quite a journey, right? It’s not even close to over. This is where Renée and her team’s careful planning comes in handy. Follow along and see how the books go from the PJ Library warehouse to the houses of PJ Library families.

▲ Before PJ Library books find their homes, they live at the organization’s 14,000-square-foot warehouse. On any given day, there are approximately 1 million board books, picture books, and chapter books waiting to be shipped out. Each pallet, strategically placed by warehouse support representative Doug Zborowski (yes, that’s Renée’s husband) is inventoried and labeled.



▲ Renée is the supreme multitasker: With an often-ringing phone nearby, she keeps spreadsheets updated, negotiates with vendors, and like today, checks the quality of newly arrived books. In fact, if her Apple Watch didn’t remind her to stand up every hour, she might sit busy at her desk all day. But she has reliable colleagues at her side. In this case, Doug, her husband of 24 years.

▶ On September 13, this tractor trailer delivered nine pallets — or 279 boxes — filled with *The Cholent Brigade*. The books' previous stop? A container ship from China for about six weeks at sea. Delivery day is a common occurrence at the warehouse. Doug meets and greets approximately 25 tractor trailers a month and unloads about 250,000 books.



▲ Doug also wears many hats. Forklift operator included. And even through the COVID-19 pandemic, he kept the forklift running. He and the operations team managed timely shipments and the distribution of books with very few glitches. Their efforts didn't go unnoticed: Children sent in thank-you notes and said the monthly books gave them a sense of normalcy.

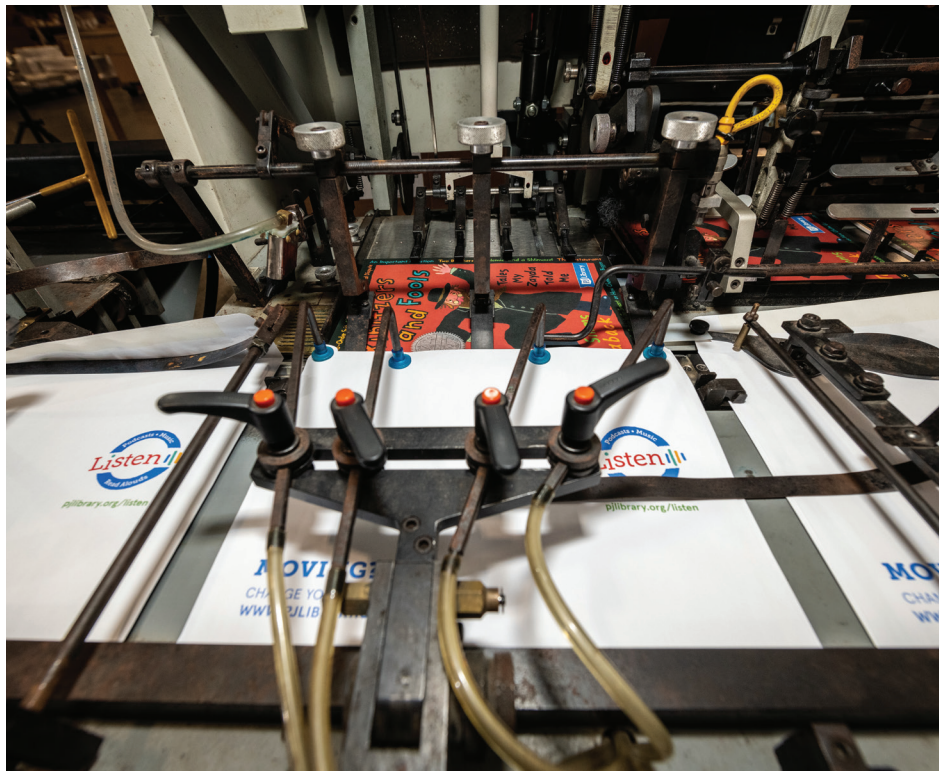


◀ This is the village Renée is referring to: (from left to right, clockwise) Brian Buerkle, publisher relations manager; Adrienne Levine, director of data management; Doug Zborowski, warehouse support representative; Renée Zborowski, operations manager; Suzanne Pilet, marketing and operations coordinator; and Alicia Asarese, operations associate. This team represents the full journey of a book: from publisher to PJ Library family.



▲ Once the books are ready for their children, they leave the PJ Library warehouse and stop by Andrews, a nearby direct-mail and marketing company. A well-orchestrated crew addresses and stuffs the envelopes and prepares them for shipment. “Mail is complex,” says Heather Strange, manager of business services at Andrews. “When you open your mailbox, you don’t think about what it takes to get that mail. It’s a lot of physical labor done by very hardworking people. It is our pleasure to partner with PJ Library by sending these wonderful books to children all over the country every month.”

▶ While *The Cholent Brigade* won’t arrive at Andrews until December, *Kibitzers and Fools* was headed to the homes of 8-year-olds in October. It takes three humans and one machine, aka a large format inserter, to stuff approximately 1,200 envelopes an hour.





▲ **The final step of the book-stuffing process is bundling.** Josué Maldonado, a machine operator, uses the blue strap machine to bundle them according to United States Postal Service requirements. In a few days, the USPS will pick up *Kibitzers and Fools* and the rest of the October domestic mailing – 209,307 books in total – for PJ Library subscribers ages 0-8.



▲ **The inserting machine can't accommodate chapter books, and that's when Kanmaly Pharattanavong (left) and Heather Strange, who's filling in for an employee, step in.** In this case, *The Lost Spy* and *the Green Dress*, a PJ Our Way selection for tweens, is getting the VIP treatment.

▶ **Andrews' work for the October mailing is almost done.** It'll take four tractor trailers to get the 400 pallets of books to the post office in Springfield, Massachusetts, about 15 minutes away. When the USPS driver arrives, mail handler Shawn Violette (above right) is ready with the pallet jack. And then the books start the final journey to PJ Library children ... at long last. ■

