

# The Little, Little House

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## When do we have enough?

### Enough Is Enough

Think about everything Joseph has going for him: a happy marriage, three healthy kids, animals grazing in his yard. It's a lot, right? Yet he believes he can "never be happy in such a little, little house" — and so he isn't. Clever Aunty Bella knows he needs to change his outlook. As it says in *Pirkei Avot* (*Ethics of the Ancestors*, an ancient collection of rabbinic wisdom), "Who is rich? Those who are happy with what they have." In Judaism, this is referred to as *same'ach b'chelko*, Hebrew for "satisfied with what you have." We forget how good it feels to be healthy until we get sick, or how wonderful the sun feels until it rains — or how comfortable our home is until it's too crowded. An "attitude of gratitude" helps us feel happy even when things aren't perfect — which, let's face it, is most of the time.

### True Story

Does this story feel familiar? It's based on a famous folktale — you may know it from other books! Folktales have staying power because they speak to universal human truths. Because Jews have lived virtually everywhere, Jewish folklore stems from all corners of the globe, and stories often reflect those different places. This story comes from the Ashkenazi community, the Jews who settled throughout Central and Eastern Europe for centuries, and versions of it have popped up in many forms over the years. It may be human nature to strive for more, but it isn't a recipe for contentment or satisfaction — and that moral holds true over time and across cultures. To learn more, visit [pjlibrary.org/littlehouse](http://pjlibrary.org/littlehouse).

### Rest and Relaxation

Home is where kids let it all hang out, which means high-energy play and even occasional arguments, but it's also a haven for peace and quiet. *Shalom bayit* (Hebrew for "peace in the house") provides much-needed calm, and this concept is built into Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath. That's what we see in the last scene of *The Little, Little House*: candles, wine, and challah on the table, and a family enjoying each other's company in a moment of rest and intimacy.

### Animal House

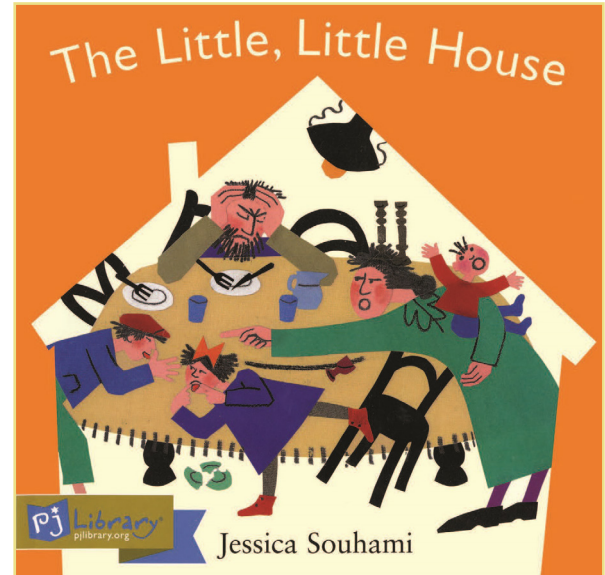
Crazy as it sounds, in certain times and places farm animals *have* lived indoors with families. Animals have long been woven into the fabric of people's lives, and that's why Jewish laws shows sensitivity to animals. The Torah (the first five books of the Bible) tells us never to till a field with an ox and a donkey together (Deuteronomy 22:10) because it would be cruel to the much-smaller donkey. It also tells us that if we see our acquaintance's oxen or sheep have fallen in the road, we should help raise them up (Deuteronomy 22:4). The mitzvah of *tza'ar ba'alei chayim*, caring for animals, is an important Jewish value — but that doesn't mean we have to play cards with chickens under the kitchen table!

## TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

**T**he animals in this story don't always behave like animals! When do you see them behaving more like people?

**W**hy was Joseph unhappy at the beginning of the story? How did he feel at the end of the story? What changed?

**H**ow would you feel if you lived in Joseph's little, little house? What might be nice about living in a very small space? What might be difficult?



## HANDS ON!

### Create Your Own Little, Little House

Your family probably wouldn't appreciate it if you brought livestock into your home, but you can make a tiny house of your own — and make it as crowded as you wish.

### Supplies

Small cardboard box  
Paints  
Scissors  
Dolls, dollhouse furniture,  
animal figurines, toy cars...



Turn the box on its side and you will have a roof, floor, and three walls. Cut windows into the walls, and decorate the house to your taste. Now fill it! Don't feel the need to limit yourself to dolls and dollhouse furniture. In the spirit of this story, go ahead and cram your little house with all sorts of things...and then see how nice it is when you take them all out again.