

A CASE STUDY: HOW WE DID THE WHODUNIT

BY DANNY PALLER, CREATIVE DIRECTOR

This past December, PJ Library mailed families with children ages 3 to 8 a surprise Hanukkah gift — a whodunit story called *Who Stole Hanukkah?!* with an accompanying jigsaw puzzle that kids could assemble to solve the mystery. That same month, PJ Library’s Instagram engagement spiked: Kids everywhere were cracking the case, piece by piece. We had a Hanukkah hit on our hands!

“The most recent book which we received, *Who Stole Hanukkah?!*, is an absolute gem.

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Madelynn K.

My 5-year-old daughter absolutely loves it,” David S. from Fairfax Station, Virginia shares.

Adds Madelynn K. of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: “Joining a story with a puzzle like this — where the puzzle is integrally connected to the plot — was genius.”

Now that families have succeeded in solving the mystery, let’s unpack yet another mystery: What goes into producing a gift like *Who Stole Hanukkah?!* Read on to learn how a simple idea became hands-on Hanukkah joy.



The Idea

One day, Harold Grinspoon, the founder of PJ Library, said to the team, “Wouldn’t it be great to send kids a puzzle this Hanukkah?” We thought it over and replied, “Wouldn’t it be great to send a Hanukkah mystery book with a puzzle kids need to assemble in order to solve the mystery?” And we were on our way.



The Plan

We developed a plan to bring the product concept to life. First, we detailed the goals — in this case, building cognitive skills (let’s hear it for sleuthing!), reinforcing Hanukkah values and rituals, and supporting family togetherness and fun. Senior creative manager Beth Honeyman then created a production timetable (roughly a year) and held us to it, every step of the way.



The Story

I wrote a draft of the story, and Naomi Shulman, managing editor of PJ Publishing, improved it. (As they say, two is better than one.) We changed the ending a few times before we agreed on the “who” of the whodunit.



The Manufacturer

Renée Zborowski, our operations manager, is responsible for hiring the right manufacturer for each in-envelope piece. Following a rigorous review, she chose WPS Worldwide Printing Solutions, who helped create puzzle templates with the number of pieces and the shapes we wanted. We went with 30 pieces for ages 3 to 5 and 72 pieces for ages 6 to 8, and we decided to make the puzzles a little more challenging than a standard puzzle.



Production, Assembly, and Mailing

When the story, illustrations, and puzzle art were finalized, we received sample books and puzzles. They looked great! We gave the go-ahead for mass production. Books and puzzles arrived at the PJ Library distribution center, where they were placed in envelopes and mailed around the world to arrive in time for PJ Library families' Hanukkah celebrations!

The Puzzle

With the story complete, it was time to create the jigsaw puzzle, which, when assembled, would solve the mystery and reveal the Hanukkah thief! Barb took the final illustration in the story (hidden behind a sealed page) and merged it with the puzzle template.

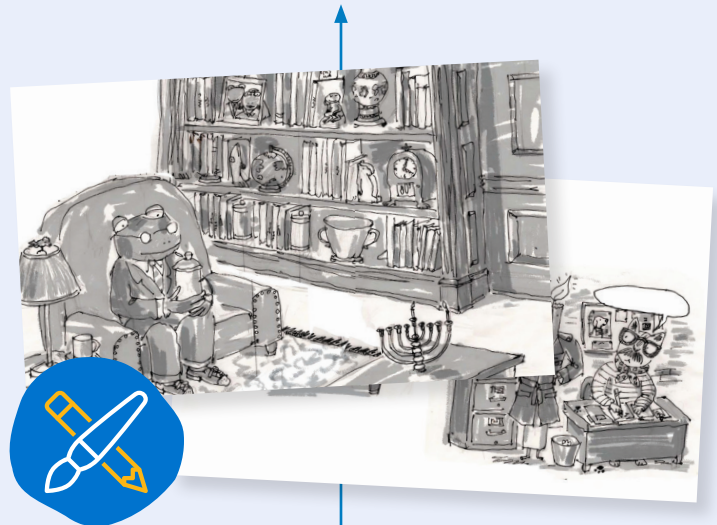
Editing and Revising

Various team members weighed in, and as a result, Naomi and I inserted a clearer motive and planted more clues to add intrigue and make the detective look smarter. Barb Bastian, the senior graphic designer on the PJ Library team, shared tips on the visuals. As a result, the detective became more appealing, and the cat turned out ... shorter!



The Illustrator

Artist Paul Meisel illustrated one of my all-time favorite PJ Library books, *The Schmutzy Family*. I wanted some of that same Schmutzy fun in *Who Stole Hanukkah?!*, and luckily, Paul was in! I sent him the story, and soon afterward he began working.



First Sketches

When Paul sent his first round of sketches, we made a mock-up, pairing the text of each page with Paul's sketches. Everyone was getting excited – it started to feel like a book!