

Reviewed by **Jacqueline Garcia**

Kibitzers and Fools: Tales My Zayda Told Me

Written and illustrated by Simms Taback
New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2005

“**A**ll that glitters is not gold” is one of the more popular sayings in Simms Taback’s book, *Kibitzers and Fools: Tales My Zayda Told Me*. It is an oft-repeated description of the city of Las Vegas, where I reside, although most residents have no idea the saying came from the Yiddish language. It should come as no surprise that, across the country, adults and children are unaware there are over 500 commonly used Yiddish words currently in the English dictionary. After reading Taback’s delightful book, however, you will be delighted to learn the many words and phrases that originated from the Yiddish language.

Just what exactly is the difference between a schlemiel and a shlamazel? Taback answers that question and includes 13 short, zany tales, coupled with traditional Yiddish proverbs his grandfather taught him, illustrating their meanings. The author explains how Yiddish was the everyday language of Jewish people in Eastern Europe, whose descendants are now found around the world. To help with the etymological origins of words, Taback includes a brief glossary in the back of the book.

Orff Schulwerk teachers in any setting often are responsible for reaching children from diverse backgrounds, religions, cultures, and income levels. Including multicultural lessons creates a classroom culture inclusive of everyone,

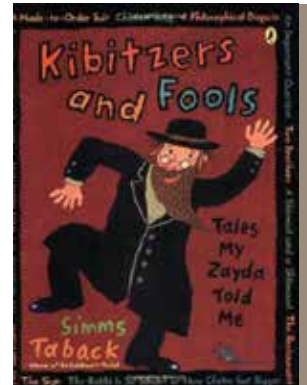
even those not in the room. This book can be used to connect children with the Jewish culture in America and can allow those familiar with it to see life lessons explained. Those not familiar will be surprised to learn how many of the Yiddish words are used in the English language.

Kibitzers and Fools begins by introducing the concept that words from one language travel to another. Stories follow, each with rich characters and a Yiddish proverb. Yiddish words and phrases embellish each story. The book is written with old world charm, a bit of chutzpah—which means nerve—and the story is told in the outrageous way only a grandfather, or zayda, could convey.

Kibitzers and Fools can be used for a variety of rhythmic and melodic music activities. Almost every page invites imaginative ways to incorporate the proverbs or stories in lessons that will appeal to children of all ages. The liberal sprinkling of proverbs throughout provides a rich cultural connection as well as built-in rhythm. They may be set to a melody or explored for their rhythmic or phrase properties and are ripe for the Orff Schulwerk classroom. Use them in whole or in part for speech pieces, adding instruments to imitate or accompany their rhythm.

This enchanting book will help children develop their vocabulary and pique their curiosity about popular words and phrases and, ideally, motivate them to start questioning the origin of other common words and phrases they hear people using in their schools and communities.

Explore movement opportunities that illustrate the meaning of the proverbs. An ostinato might be created to accompany proverbs while students look for important words within each. For example, play “Out of sight, out of mind” on unpitched instruments and divide players by timbre. Sayings might also be used with barred



instruments and played on a pentatonic scale. Opportunities abound for small group work, based on either the proverbs or the stories. Create a class rondo piece within the small group setting, either rhythmic or melodic, and a performance is born, developed as part of a music program on diversity.

Taback's creative artwork adorns the pages in a colorful and photo-realistic collage. The glossary defines the words and gives tips on pronunciation. Yiddish proverbs, or sayings, are listed separately on two pages in the front and the back of the book for easy retrieval when time is short. This enchanting book will help children develop their vocabulary and pique their curiosity about popular words and phrases and, ideally, motivate them to start questioning the origin of other common words and phrases they hear people using in their schools and communities.

Readers may be familiar with Taback from his Caldecott Award winning *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*. Through its delightful and humorous short tales, *Kibitzers and Fools* is sure to be a hit with your students. The captivating artwork invites readers in, while the stories tempt them to laugh out loud. The number of ways to enjoy this book can be summed up in the words of many a Jewish grandmother: "Yadda, yadda, yadda." ■

JACQUELINE L. GARCIA teaches kindergarten through Grade 5 music at Halle Heweston Elementary School in the Clark County School District, Las Vegas, Nevada. She received her bachelor's degree in music from Arizona State University, her master's degree in special education from Arizona State University, and her doctorate of education in curriculum and instruction from the University of Las Vegas. She has successfully completed three levels of Orff Schulwerk teacher education and is a member of the Desert Valley Chapter of AOSA.