

## Canadian Children's Book Week Southern Ontario Storytelling Tour 2018 By Shoshana Litman

“Bring Books to Life,” the theme for Canadian Children’s Book Week 2018, was perfect for storytelling. As a storyteller, I love encouraging people to become a living part of each tale.



*Abe and his Grandma (left) with Shifra Aaron and their Mom (right). Photo by Miriam Drukker-Tikoten, Kehillat Sha'arei Torah Children's Library Youth Director.*

The Southern Ontario storytelling tour kicked off at Kehillat Sha'arei Torah Children's Library in Toronto with an intimate, keen group of grandmas, parents and preschoolers. American Storyteller and Folklorist, Penninah Schram’s delightful book, *The Apple Tree’s Discovery*, offered an engaging way to highlight the tour’s theme.

I introduced Penninah’s book, then set it aside as the story unfolded, accompanied by an original tune I taught the audience to sing. At the end, I brought the book back again for its lovely star-in-the-apple illustrations. This publication, one of many provided free by PJ Library <https://pjlibrary.org/about-pj-library> to young Jewish families each month, arrived on my doorstep when the Jewish community in my hometown of Victoria joined this innovative program.



*Aurora Preparatory Academy K-4 students. Photo by Music Teacher, Bernadette Ko.*

Another excellent book I refer to is Celia Lottridge's, *The Name of the Tree*. Aurora Preparatory students responded with enthusiasm to my musical retelling of this Bantu tale. *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch as well as musical *Pete the Cat* stories by Eric Litwin and James Dean were all hits at this and many other schools. A captivating *Pete the Cat* puppet helped animate the stories about him.

*Pete's* author, Eric Litwin, a gifted musician as well as a storyteller, was thrilled when I let him know that I planned to tell a few of his stories during the book tour.

Litwin added, "What is truly amazing is what we know as storytellers also helps children learn to read! Yes, it's true. Repetition, rhyme, call and response, cadence, melody, and movement are powerful tools for emerging readers. And that is my focus, bringing these worlds of storytelling, music and early literacy together."



*Vicky Iannetta and me at the entrance to Divine Mercy Catholic Elementary School Library.*

Teacher-Librarian, Vittoria (Vicky) Iannetta, at St. James and Divine Mercy Catholic Elementary Schools in Maple, was an excellent guide during the tour. Vicky, who danced and sang along with her students, added enthusiasm to the presentations. I also chose stories based on discussions with Vicky and her students during and between performances.

For example, the ethnically diverse students at St. James Elementary responded well to traditional tales from Africa, Haiti, China and the Appalachian Mountains. The stories inspired thoughtful discussions about family, memory and generosity. At Divine Mercy, located a few blocks away in a wealthier neighborhood, my musical story, *Play the World Awake*, was well received, initiating conversations about writing, cartooning, helping the environment and the role of the Divine in our lives.

*St. James Elementary School  
Students. Photo by Mrs. V.  
Teacher-Librarian, York Catholic  
Board*



*Grade 1-3  
Iannetta,  
District School*

On the last day of the tour, Campbell (Grey Highlands Public Children's Program Coordinator) the verdant countryside to Osprey where Mennonite children half the student population. On the Mennonite women wearing white black hatted men in horse drawn

Michelle Library drove me through Central School comprise about way, we saw bonnets and carts.

Girls in long purple dresses and shirts and black pants filed into the gym for stories. Most of the more comfortable listening to

boys in white Osprey School children appeared stories and knew

more about nature than any other audience on the tour. Almost every student put up their hand, for example, when I asked them to name a bird species. Many seemed at home with the spiritual aspects of the stories and needed no prompting from teachers to offer their thanks at the end.

Two bright homeschooled families joined the final presentation at Beavercrest Community School in Markdale. Beavercrest students shared unique wisdom about the nature of rumors and how mistakes can be opportunities "...to teach ourselves something we need to learn."

As the tour wrapped up, I received a gratifying compliment from a Beavercrest teacher who said that when he attended Teachers' College in Toronto, he had enjoyed listening to a storyteller. He thanked me for recreating this intriguing experience for him and his students, providing a sweet conclusion to this whirlwind tour. After the tour, I enjoyed a relaxing weekend with family and friends in Hanover where I provided one last puppet show and composed a new song for my four month old grand-nephew, Shai.



*Four month old, Shai, listened to Pete the Cat sing about his shoes. Photo by Seth Rabovsky*

I am grateful to the Canadian Children’s Book Centre and Storytellers of Canada/Conteurs du Canada for providing this marvelous opportunity to “Bring Books to Life” for more than 980 young people at fifteen Southern Ontario venues.