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## Copper's "Can I tell you about being Jewish?: A helpful introduction for everyone" (book review)

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# Book Reviews

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Copper, H. (2019). *Can I tell you about being Jewish?: A helpful introduction for everyone*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 86 pp. \$14.95. ISBN 9781785924910

Because it is such a complex topic, there is no major consensus on what it means to be Jewish. Therefore, explaining this concept to children is not an easy task. In his book *Can I Tell You about Being Jewish?*, Rabbi Howard Cooper decided to take on the challenge of not only explaining what it means to be Jewish, but of conveying it to children in an engaging way.

In the book's fictional introduction, a twelve-year-old girl named Ruth shares her diary with her Muslim friend, Ayla, after Ayla asks her what it means to be Jewish. In order to answer the question, Ruth not only shares her diary, but also adds additional explanatory notes. Thus, *Can I tell you about being Jewish?* reads as if it were Ruth's diary, and alternates between handwritten notebook paper (the diary) and regular text (Ruth's explanatory notes).

Because the book documents Ruth's entire year, all of the major Jewish holidays are briefly explained. However, other important Jewish traditions, such as Bat Mitzvahs, weddings, and the Sabbath are also addressed. Whenever a new Jewish custom is being discussed, that custom is found written at the top of the page, making it easy for someone to refer back to if he or she is looking up a specific topic.

Since the author is a Reform rabbi in London, the book is written from a Reform Jewish perspective, as is evident from such comments as how the Bible's stories are akin to fairy tales. Although the book has a Reform viewpoint, the author attempts to share some other Jewish perspectives on different issues as well. If readers are interested in investigating these perspectives further, they can refer to the bibliography at the end of the book, which lists a variety of other resources about Judaism. However, many of these recommended resources might be a bit difficult for a younger audience.

Although the book is primarily organized into different Jewish celebrations observed throughout the year, the author manages to insert other important aspects of Judaism into the book as well. For example, when Ruth explains how her mother is Jewish, but not her father, she raises the topics of intermarriage and how Judaism is matrilineal. Ruth also touches on the Holocaust when discussing how her great-grandfather was a Holocaust survivor.

Even though the character of Ruth is a twelve-year-old, this book would be appropriate for a slightly younger audience as well, because of its simple writing style. There are also several illustrations found within the book, making it more welcoming to a younger audience. This book would be an appropriate addition to a public library as a reference for children who would like to better understand what Judaism is. It may not go too deeply into any specific topic, but is a concise introduction to a more intricate conversation.

**Reviewer**

Esther Lang, Trinity International University