

Hallelujah! The Story of Leonard Cohen

By Alicia Jo Rabins | Illustrated by Gene Pendon

READING GUIDE

About the Book

Writer and musician Alicia Jo Rabins makes her picture book debut with this biography of Leonard Cohen and the creation of his masterpiece “Hallelujah.”

Leonard Cohen was surrounded by music. His mother would sing folk songs in Yiddish and Russian. The synagogue where his grandfather was rabbi sounded like the gates of Heaven opening. And Leonard’s heart turned the beauty of the world into music only he could hear.

But there was also sadness. How could life contain so much joy and also so much sorrow? Leonard wondered if there was a way to capture all those feelings at once.

He learned to play the guitar. He wrote songs. As a musician, people would come to see him perform. But there was still something missing. A song, hidden inside of him. One that he believed in, even when he struggled to write it or when others didn’t understand it.

An author’s note asks readers to consider what their Hallelujah is and encourages them to share their talents and joys with the world.

Alicia Jo Rabins is an award-winning performer, musician, poet, and Jewish scholar. Author of *Even God Has Bad Parenting Days*, published by Behrman House, she has also written articles for *Kveller*, *Ecotone Magazine*, *Tablet Magazine*, and *American Poetry Review*, among others. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

Gene Pendon is the artist behind the mural *Tower of Songs, Hommage à Leonard Cohen*, in Montreal. He has a bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts (drawing and painting) from Concordia University. He co-creates the *Heavyweight Art Installation*, an international project that partners live painting with music and urban cultures. He lives in Montreal, Canada.



Key Themes:

Creativity, Introspection, Growth, Family and Heritage

ISBN 978-1-68115-688-0

Ages 5–8 years

Use these questions to preface and conclude a reading of this book with children. Encourage them to share their observations as you read the book together, and take time to linger on pages or spreads that generate more discussion.

Before Reading

- Look at the cover. What does the design remind you of? From the cover, what do you think Leonard Cohen is known for?
- Open the book and look at the printed paper inside the front cover. It shows a scene of Montréal, Canada with a 20-story mural of Leonard Cohen. Why do you think Montréal had such a large mural of Leonard Cohen painted in its downtown?
- The book's illustrator, Gene Pendon, is from Montréal. He designed and helped paint this mural. What questions would you have for Gene Pendon about painting the mural? Where do you think he got the idea to paint the mural?

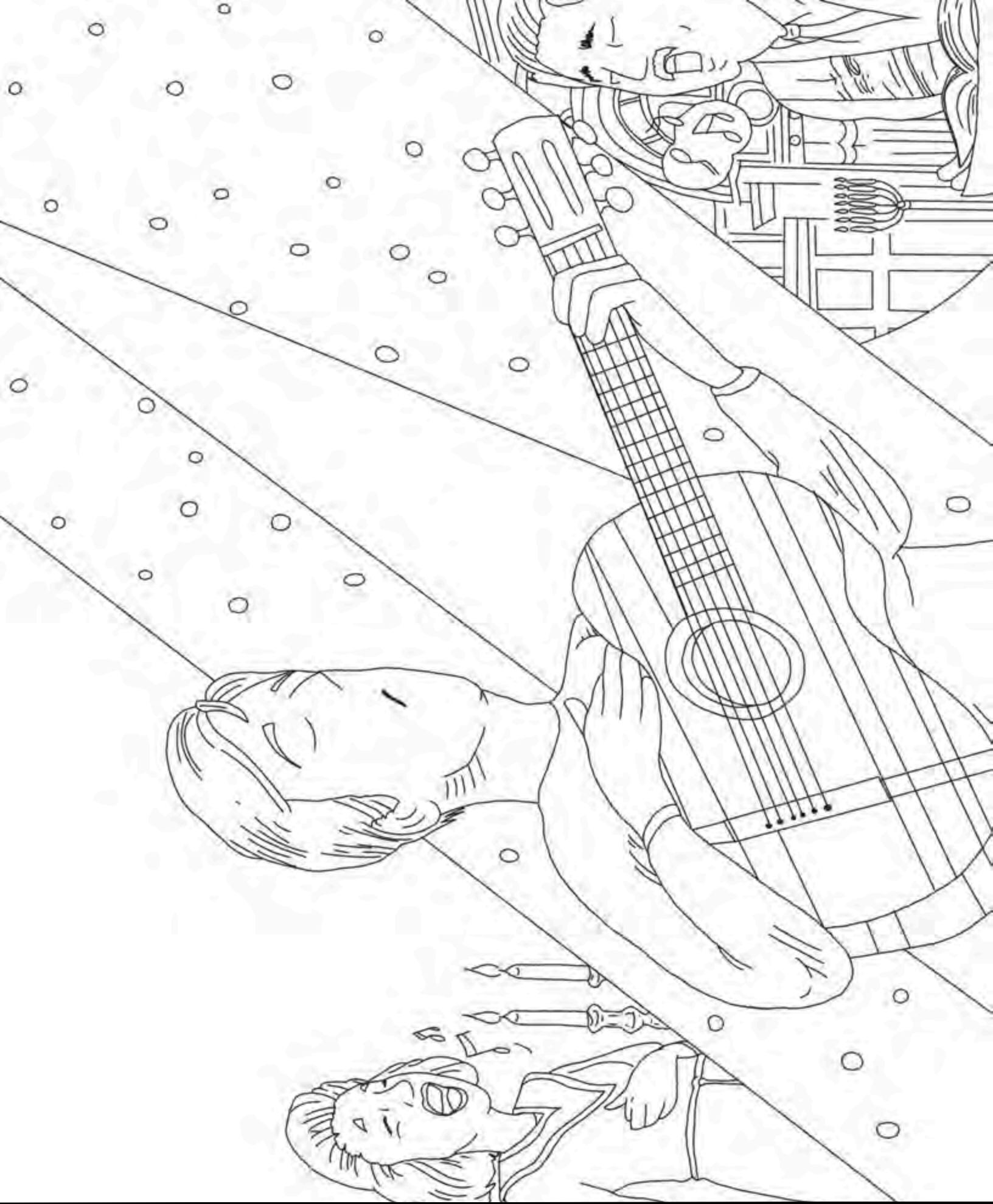
After Reading

- Leonard learned to play guitar from a street musician. Have you ever had an unexpected or surprising teacher?
- Leonard is very influenced by his faith and his family's religious life. How does this come through in his songs? How is religion an inspiration for him?
- Leonard writes songs about the people, places, and things all around him. Often he writes about small details, like walking up with messy hair or eating an orange. If you were to write a story or song, what details might you include?
- When Leonard is scared before a concert, what does he do to calm his nerves and give him confidence?
- It took years for Leonard to write "Hallelujah" and get the verses just right. Why do you think it took so long? What personal qualities might have helped Leonard conclude the song?
- Record producers rejected "Hallelujah" when Leonard first finished it. How did Leonard react to this rejection? How would you have?
- In author's note, Alicia Jo Rabins says that we each have a hallelujah within us. What do you think she means? What do you think is your hallelujah?

Optional: Extension Activity

The song "Hallelujah" has been translated into many different languages and has appeared in movies like Shrek. YouTube has recordings of "Hallelujah" in multiple languages. Listen to several different versions. What differences do you notice? How do different verses compare? Does the message of the song come through, regardless of the language?





Hallelujah! The Story of Leonard Cohen

By Alicia Jo Rabins | Illustrated by Gene Pendon

Character Cut Outs

