

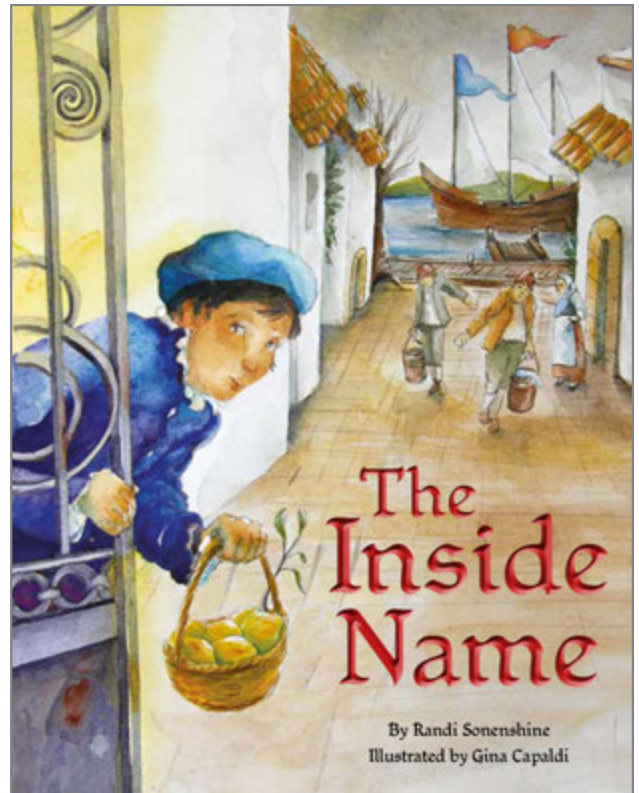
About the Book

It's the early 1500s in Portugal, and Felipe has a secret. He and his family are conversos—Jews forced to convert to Christianity but who maintained their Jewish identities and practices behind closed doors. Even his real name, his Jewish name, is a secret. Felipe is his outside name, the only one it is safe to use. The one his mother tries not to use. She whistles for him instead.

But with the coming of the Inquisition from Spain to Portugal, it becomes more dangerous for them to continue to live a secret life. Felipe is sent on a mission by his mother to bring lemons from his grandfather's tree to Father Tomás, a local priest and converso. In exchange, Father Tomás gives Felipe a mysterious pouch and hides it in his hat for the walk back home. Inside is a letter, promising Felipe's family safe passage on a trading ship to Belgium, then will travel by land to Ferrara, Italy, a refuge for Jews.

Over the next week, Felipe and his family prepare for the journey. He wonders what he should bring, since they cannot take everything. He decides on a chess set he used to play with his Solomon, who has been captured and jailed for being a converso. Felipe also cuts a small stem from his grandfather's lemon tree. With their treasures, Felipe and his family escape and emigrate to a place where a young boy can be called by his real name, Samuel.

Spotlighting the Sephardic Jewish converso life, this illustrated historical fiction chapter book also includes an end note explaining the Inquisition and the role of Gracia Nasi Mendes, a wealthy and influential converso who used her large sailing fleet and her international connections to help families flee.



Key Themes:

discrimination, prejudice, antisemitism, perseverance in the face of hardship, overcoming adversity, inclusion, diversity, helping others, emigration

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Ages 6–9 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.
Take time to linger on pages or spreads that generate more discussion.

Before Reading

- Find Lisbon, Portugal on a world map. Is it above or below the equator? Is it in the eastern or western hemisphere? What continent is it a part of? What is it nearby?
- This book takes place about 500 years ago. Do some research into what life was like back then. What did people eat? What did they wear? What did they do for work or for fun?
- The Jews of Spain and Portugal, and their descendants, are known as Sephardic Jews. Conduct research to learn about Sephardic culture. What are their traditions?

After Reading

- Which characters in this story show bravery? How do they show it? How do beliefs and values influence the way characters behave?
- How can you tell that Felipe and his family feel strongly about their religion?
- How does Felipe react when Diego calls him a name? Why does he react this way?
- Papa explains that La Señora helps Jews escape “the claws of the Inquisition.” What do you visualize when you read this phrase? What ideas about the Inquisition does it convey?
- Just before Felipe gets on the ship, he cuts a small stem from his grandfather’s lemon tree to plant in his new home. Why does Felipe want to grow a new lemon tree? Why are family traditions important?

Optional: Extension Activity

Felipe imagines what he would change if he were king of Portugal. Using paper, scissors, glue, and crayons, make yourself a crown. Then, create your own list of laws that you would enact if you were in charge. If there are many of you, consider what laws you would make for your classroom. Are these laws fair to everyone? Do they help or hurt?