

Miryam's Dance

By Kerry Olitzky and Rachel Stock Spilker |
Illustrated by John Baptist Tumuhaise

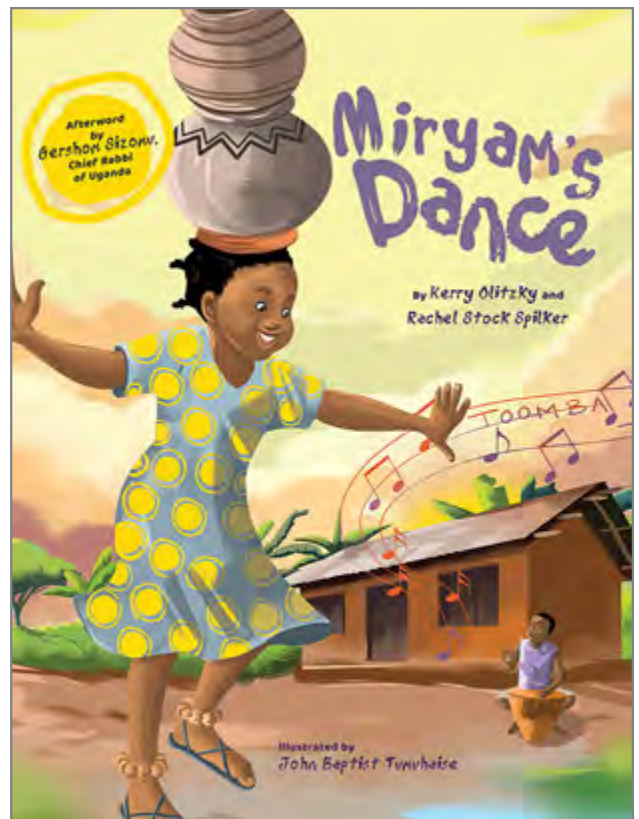
READING & ACTIVITY GUIDE

About the Book

Young Miryam wakes to a bright morning and the many chores needed to help get ready for the Friday night Shabbat celebration in her small Ugandan village. Throughout the day, Miryam picks mangoes from a tree, buys plantains from Mr. Okello, delivers an egg to her mother for baking the challah, and gathers water from a pump. During it all, she is distracted by distant sound, a beat that excites her. She spies dancers through the trees as they balance pots on their heads and move to the beat of the drums. The dancers encourage her to join them, and Miryam learns how they dance. That night, the drummers and dancers arrive at Shabbat dinner to perform and celebrate for the villagers. Despite their initial reservations, Miryam's family learns to see that dancing is also another way to celebrate the day.

As readers follow Miryam through her day, they learn elements of this weekly Jewish holiday that are both universal to Jewish culture worldwide and also unique to the Jewish Ugandan community, known as the Abuyadaya, or Tribe of Judah.

A glossary explains the names of ritual foods, Ugandan terms, and landmarks in the story. A note at the end from the chief rabbi of Uganda describes what Judaism looks like in his part of the world.



Key Themes:

Community; family; Judaism in Uganda; Shabbat celebrations across the world; celebration; dancing

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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

- This story takes place in Uganda. Where is Uganda? Find it on a map. What continent is it a part of? Do some research into what life is like in Uganda. How is it different from your life? How is it the same?
- Look at the cover. What do you recognize? What are you curious about?
- Open the book. On the inside of the front cover is a map of Miryam's village. What are some of the places marked? What do you think will happen at those places?

After Reading

- Why is Miryam distracted? How can you tell?
- Think of a time when you got excited thinking about something, that you couldn't get it out of your mind. Describe what happened.
- Miryam visits many different people as she runs her errands. Who are they? What do Miryam's interactions with them tell you about their relationship? What is a community?
- Miryam wants to dance to celebrate Shabbat, but her parents are hesitant. Why? Would you join Miryam and the dancers? Why?
- Look at the glossary of Ugandan words in the back of the book. Reread the book with those definitions in mind. Are there other words or names do you want to learn about? Make a list and research them.

Optional: Extension Activity

Make your own drum! Using a paper or plastic cup, a tissue, and a rubber band, build a drum by placing the tissue over the opening of the cup, and secure it with the rubber band. You can even use markers, crayons, stickers, and more to decorate the drum. Then, holding the drum in one hand, bang on it with the other. If there are a lot of you, play your drums together. You can even take turns dancing to the beat!

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Character Cut Outs



