

Rembrandt Chooses a Queen

By Deborah Bodin Cohen and Kerry Olitzky | Illustrated by Cinzia Battistel

READING GUIDE

About the Book

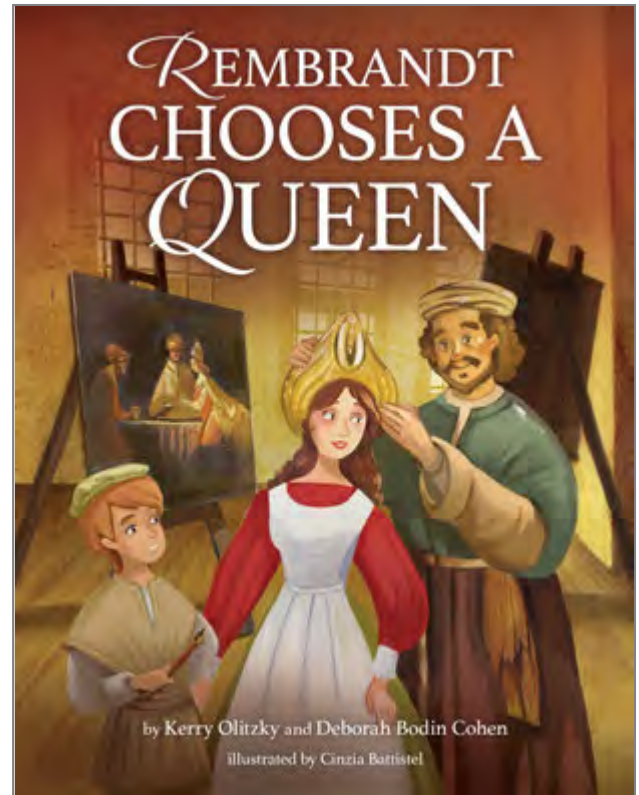
The famous artist Rembrandt has a problem. He wants to paint a scene from the biblical Purim story, but his model is too vain to portray the beautiful yet humble Esther. Samuel, a Jewish apprentice in Rembrandt's workshop, believes his sister Isabel would be the perfect replacement. She knows the Purim story well, is inspired by Esther's bravery, and proud to be Jewish. Now they just need to convince the great artist, and their disapproving father.

Based on the real Rembrandt painting *Ahasuerus and Haman at the Feast of Esther*, this inspiring story of Judaism and art intersecting in 17th century Amsterdam includes an author's note about Purim and a short biography of Rembrandt by a professor of art history.

Rabbi Deborah Bodin Cohen is the award-winning author of many books for children including *An Invitation to Passover* and the Engineer Ari series, and the coauthor of *The Heroes Haggadah*. She is an editor at Behrman House and the rabbi of Congregation Beth Chai. She lives in Maryland.

Rabbi Kerry Olitzky is the author or coauthor of nearly 100 books for children and adults, including *Welcome to the Seder: A Passover Haggadah for Everyone*; *The Heroes Haggadah* (with coauthor Rabbi Deborah Bodin Cohen); and *Miryam's Dance*. He lives in New Jersey.

Cinzia Battistel is an illustrator, teacher, author, and painter. She received her degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan, Italy. She has illustrated many children's books. She currently lives in Italy.



Key Themes:

Courage; Humility; Family; Purim.

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Ages 4–8 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

- Rembrandt was known for using light and dark in his work. In fact, he is sometimes called, “The Master of Light and Shadow.” Look at the picture of Rembrandt’s work “Ahasuerus and Haman at the Feast of Esther, 1660” on the last page of the book. How does Rembrandt use light and shadow to share a message about Esther and Haman in this piece of art? What about the King?

Background: Rembrandt’s technique is *chiaroscuro*. It was first used by Leonardo Di Vinci. “Chiaro” means light in Italian and “curo” means dark.

After Reading

- Master Rembrandt was not Jewish but he lived in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam. How can you tell Rembrandt is interested in Judaism? How would living in a community with many ethnic cultures affect you?
- Samuel really wants to be an artist and work in Master Rembrandt’s studio, but his father thinks he should be studying instead. How does each character compromise to make the other happy? Have you ever disagreed with parents about an activity or hobby? How did you and your parents resolve it?
- What qualities does Master Rembrandt value in his Queen Esther? What qualities do you think a queen, or another person in leadership, should have?
- Cleaning paint brushes is a dull task. In Samuel’s time, he had to gather water from the canal, so it was also hard work. But Samuel chooses to clean brushes for Rembrandt rather than doing any other activity. Why? What does Samuel gain by cleaning brushes?
- In the Bible, Esther eventually reveals her true identity to the King. She’s worried that the King might not accept her, but he does. How is Esther’s relationship to the King similar to Samuel’s relationship to his father? How does it differ?

Optional: Extension Activity

- Divide into groups of four. Have each member choose a part: Rembrandt, Esther, Haman, and the King. (If you have an odd number, groups can have two Rembrandts.) Rembrandt needs to position the other three characters to create a tableau of Esther confronting Haman. How would they be standing/sitting? What would they be doing with their arms and bodies? What would be their expressions? If you had spotlights, what would you illuminate? Have each Rembrandt introduce their tableau.

For added fun:

- Extend the activity by taking a photo of each tableau and then compare the photos as a group.
- If you are doing the activity at home, consider using dolls or stuffed toys for the characters.

Optional: Extension Activity Continued

- Rembrandt often painted portraits and self-portraits. Many of his portraits followed a similar style, with the face painted on an angle and half in light and the other half in shadow. Look online for several Rembrandt portrait examples to share. Then, create your own self portrait, emphasizing light and dark. Start with a flashlight or other spotlight. Hold it close to your face so shadows and highlights fall on you. Have a friend take a picture. You could try various poses. Either print your favorite photo or extend the project by painting it. photo and paint it.



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Character Cut Outs

