

About Feeling Jewish

Jean Little

Introduction

This is an excerpt from *Hey World, Here I Am!*, a book written by Jean Little and published in 1986.

I wanted to feel Jewish. I didn't know how. I told Emily.

"You mean, you don't?" Emily said, with interest.

I looked at a spot over her head and almost wished I hadn't told her. "Not really," I muttered. "At least... I don't think I do."

Emily gave it serious thought. And I knew telling her had been right, after all. That's one of my favorite things about Emily. She hardly ever laughs when she shouldn't.

"Read some books," she advised, at last. "Maybe that would help. It's somewhere to start, anyway."

I had already dipped into a couple, but this time, I sat myself down and read properly. I struggled through over half of a book called *Judaism*. I read almost all of a book called *What Is a Jew?* (The only thing he left out was the answer.) I read big chunks of a fat book called *Jews, God and History*. And I read every word of Rabbi Plaut's book *Your Neighbor is a Jew*. I thought, what with him being a Canadian, it might help more than the others. I learned millions of things, both fascinating and dull. I still didn't feel Jewish.

"It didn't work," I reported to Emily.

"Well," she said, helplessly, "you wait. Something will."

Nearly a month went by. Then I read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and I read *The Endless Steppe*.

"Hey, guess what?" I burst out, when I got Emily by herself. "I read these books – and it happened! I feel Jewish!"

Emily grinned. "Good," she said. She borrowed both books. Emily and I swap books all the time.

Two days later, she brought them back.

"Kate," she said, as she handed them to me, "brace yourself."

"What for?"

"They made me feel Jewish too," Emily said.

Source

TEXT COPYRIGHT © 1986 BY JEAN LITTLE Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers. This selection may not be re-illustrated without written permission of HarperCollins

TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

Why does the narrator, Kate, “mutter” to Emily?

Based on the story, what does the word “mutter” mean?

What advice does Emily give the narrator?

The first set of books Kate reads are more historical in nature. The second set of books are real people’s

experiences as Jewish people. Why might the second set of books help to make Kate “feel” Jewish?

How did the second set of books make Emily feel?

Is Emily Jewish?

How do you know?

Which books made the difference for Kate?

What evidence can you find in the text to show what makes Emily such a good friend to Kate?

How would you describe the challenge Emily was experiencing at the start of this excerpt?

Write about a way that you can relate to her.

About Feeling Jewish

TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Why does the narrator, Kate, “mutter” to Emily? Based on the story, what does the word “mutter” mean?

Answer: She mutters because she is unsure and wishes she hadn’t said anything to Emily. To mutter means to mumble or talk in a low tone that is hard to hear.

Question: What advice does Emily give the narrator?

Answer: She tells her to read some books and maybe that will help.

Question: The first set of books Kate reads are more historical in nature. The second set of books are real people’s experiences as Jewish people. Why might the second set of books help to make Kate “feel” Jewish?

Answer: They are more personal accounts. They are something Kate can relate to.

Question: How did the second set of books make Emily feel? Is Emily Jewish? How do you know?

Answer: They made her feel Jewish, too. We can infer she is not Jewish because she tells Kate to “brace herself,” as if she were delivering bad news. Since Emily isn’t Jewish, she doesn’t want Kate to feel bad that the books also made her feel Jewish.

Question: Which books made the difference for Kate?

Answer: The Diary of Anne Frank and Endless Steppe

Question: What evidence can you find in the text to show what makes Emily such a good friend to Kate?

Answer: Answers should include: She doesn't laugh at her feelings; she gave her problem serious thought; she offered a suggested solution to Kate's problem; they share books with each other; and she read the books after Emily did and similarly identified.

Question: How would you describe the challenge Emily was experiencing at the start of this excerpt? Write about a way that you can relate to her.

Answer: Student answers will vary greatly but should mention Emily's curiosity and exploration of her ethnic/religious identity and, perhaps, the way books and reading helped her find out about herself. Students can share any personal connections they may have about their own identities.