

A GUIDE TO **ZAYDA WAS A COWBOY**

Whether your family came to America on the Mayflower or a 747, in a slave hold or steerage, because they wanted to, or because they had to – they all came from somewhere else. That is why we are called a ‘Nation of Immigrants.’ *Zayda Was a Cowboy* tells of one boy’s journey. It also tells about The Galveston Plan, a little known, but most interesting piece of the Jewish-American experience.

Before You Read

1. Zayda means grandfather in Yiddish. What do you call your grandparents?
2. Yiddish is a language spoken by the Jews of Eastern Europe. It is a mix of German and Hebrew. Do you know anyone who speaks Yiddish? What languages do your family members speak?
3. How did your family come to America? Ask a family member to tell you if you don’t know.

Chapter One – The Arrival

In this chapter we meet Zayda and his family.

- ❖ Why does Zayda come to live with Billy and Danny?
- ❖ Imagine you are Zayda. How does it feel to come live with your children and grandchildren?

Chapter Two – Growing Up in Sherashov

Zayda begins his story. He tells of growing up in Russia. He talks about his family and his village. He talks about his mother’s cooking.

- ❖ What are special foods your parents or grandparents enjoy? Do you like them too?
- ❖ How different was life in Sherashov in 1892 from life in the United States today?

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ABOUT THE WORLD IN 1892](#)

Chapter Three – The End of Childhood

The event that changes Zayda’s life – he is stopped by a Cossack and forced into the army.

- ❖ What is a Cossack?
- ❖ Why is Meyer forced to join the army?
- ❖ Imagine you are sent away from home, all alone, to a whole new place. Write a journal entry explaining how you feel.

Chapter Four – The Journey Begins

Meyer begins his journey and travels all the way to Bremen, Germany

- ❖ While traveling through Europe, how does Meyer earn enough money to live?
- ❖ What jobs do you think you could do if you were in Meyer’s place?

Chapter Five – Steaming to America

Meyer travels to America.

- ❖ What was a voyage across the ocean in steerage like?
- ❖ Do you have a song that makes you think of your home or your family? What is it? If you can't think of a song try writing your own.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ABOUT THE GALVESTON PLAN](#)

Chapter Six – A New Me

Meyer Ben Yehezkiel gets a new name – Mike Benson – along with a new country, new clothes and a new job, all in one day!

- ❖ Do you know what your name, first or last, means? How did you get your name?
- ❖ What was the one piece of clothing Meyer refused to throw away? Why did he want to keep it?
- ❖ Do you have a favorite piece of clothing? Why is it special to you?
- ❖ Would you trust a stranger who offered to help you? Why or why not?

Chapter Seven – Luke

Mike is picked up by the ranch foreman, Luke, and begins his journey to his new job, as a cowboy.

- ❖ Imagine you are Luke. What do you think of the new cowboy, Mike Benson?
- ❖ Do you have a friend who is very different from you? What's the most interesting or special thing about him/her?

Chapter Eight – Home On The Range

Mike arrives at the ranch, meets the other cowhands, and begins learning how to be a cowboy.

- ❖ What are some of the skills Mike has to learn to become a cowboy?
- ❖ Think of a time you had to learn a whole new skill or way of doing something. Were you scared? Excited? Did you enjoy the experience?

Chapter Nine – A Cowboy's Life

Mike settles in, becoming a good cowboy and learning the language and jobs of the ranch. One day, Mike makes an exciting discovery at a soda fountain in town.

- ❖ Name two jobs Mike does on the ranch.
- ❖ Who is Sam Toibin? What do Sam and Mike have in common? How are they different?
- ❖ Who is your best friend? How are you the same? In what ways are you different?

Chapter Ten – The Cattle Drive

- ❖ Which States does the cattle drive pass through?
- ❖ Draw a map showing the route of the cattle drive through different states.
- ❖ What does Mike tell us about Indians and why is their story so sad?

Chapter Eleven – An Ending and A Beginning

- ❖ What are two things Mike does after his career as a cowboy is over?
- ❖ Have you ever gone away for a vacation or for the summer and done something totally different than anything you've done before? How did you feel when the time and experience were over and you went home?

After you read:

Ask your parents, grandparents, or another older relative to tell you about their childhood. Write a short story sharing one of their memories.