



# Oskar and the Eight Blessings

*T.R. Simon , Richard Simon , Mark Siegel (Illustrator)*

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A refugee seeking sanctuary from the horrors of Kristallnacht, Oskar arrives by ship in New York City with only a photograph and an address for an aunt he has never met. It is both the seventh day of Hanukkah and Christmas Eve, 1938. As Oskar walks the length of Manhattan, from the Battery to his new home in the north of the city, he passes experiences the city's many holiday sights, and encounters it various residents. Each offers Oskar a small act of kindness, welcoming him to the city and helping him on his way to a new life in the new world.

## Oskar and the Eight Blessings Details


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Author : T.R. Simon , Richard Simon , Mark Siegel (Illustrator)

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# **From Reader Review Oskar and the Eight Blessings for online ebook**

## **Tasha says**

Oskar survived Kristallnacht in Nazi Europe and has been sent by his family to live with his aunt in New York City. When he arrives, he has to walk over 100 blocks down Broadway to reach her, hopefully before she lights the menorah at sunset. Along the way, Oskar is reminded again and again about looking for blessings in life. He is given bread by a woman feeding the birds, a comic book by the man who runs the newsstand, mittens by a boy in the park. But most of all in his long walk in the cold, he is given hope once again that he is somewhere safe.

The authors have created a picture book that speaks to the horrors of the Holocaust only in passing. Instead it is much more focused upon feeling embraced by a city even as a newly-arrived immigrant. It is about the small things that we do in kindness each day and the way that those small things build to something larger and more important for someone. This book celebrates New York City and the shelter and home that can be found there.

The illustrations are interesting for a book set in the past. They incorporate comic-like panels on the page that really work well. The illustrations have a sense of wonder about them. They capture small pieces of New York, allowing the snow and city to swirl around the reader just as they do around Oskar himself.

A lovely holiday book that is about more than either Christmas or Hanukkah but about home and hope. Appropriate for ages 3-5.

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## **Lisa says**

Wise advice from a loving father to a son, "Even in bad times, people can be good. You have to look for the blessings." True during the holidays, times of unrest and war, everyday of our lives. A part of everyday is wonderful or magical; you must have the heart to look for it and appreciate it. The book's suggested age range is Pre-K to 2nd grade. IMO, it is more appropriate for 2nd grade and older. The story is heartwarming. There are many teachable moments and topics. What better time than when your child is snuggled up next to you? Plan to give this a gift this holiday season and will keep a copy for our library.

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## **Kayla Edwards says**

A beautiful story about a young immigrant's arrival in New York City. As Oskar travels to his aunt's house, he learns that even the smallest encounters can be blessings. The illustrations in this one are gorgeous and compliment the story so well. I'll definitely be reading this one during the holiday season!

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## **Jeff Chase says**

I don't often buy or read children's books; my kids are grown, and my granddaughters live far away. However, Oskar has a story that we would all do well to read and heed. The last page brought a tear to my eye, but not because of sadness. I would enjoy reading this book to my granddaughters, and I would enjoy the discussions that would ensue.

The illustrations were especially effective in showing the cold and fatigue that Oskar must have been feeling. Any author that can work Superman into a book like this is always going to have my admiration.

Like I said, I don't often buy or read children's books. But I'm glad I bought this one.

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

Lovely story and pictures! Great map of Manhattan in NYC circa 1938 at the end of the book that shows Oskar's journey and the events/people he encounters along the way. There is a touching and informative author's note at the end too. Great story for Hanukkah, and as a gentle introduction to the Holocaust, and even for Christmas too, for historical fiction NYC, and a wonderful story about perseverance and kindnesses and finding the good there is to be found. I followed along with Oskar as he goes down Broadway to his destination and found the story entrancing. It was a perfect book for me to read at this time of year, and brought back some memories of NYC too. Also, we need a story like this right now. Highly recommended as a story about a refugee/immigrant!

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### **Calista says**

HOPE! This little amazing book is about hope and keeping hope alive when life is scary. Powerful, the writing and story are very powerful.

Oskar was put on a ship by himself during Kristallnacht and sent to NYC to find his Aunt Ester. He had to walk up Broadway by himself to 103rd street. He is tired and scared and he meets wonderful people along the way. This is like Mister Rogers mother's saying. In any disaster look for the helpers, they are always there.

It is Christmas Eve and always the 7th day of Hanukkah. He wants to get home before the Shamash is lit. The spirit of giving is in the air. Our country feels scary to me right now and this is a great reminder to look for the helpers, they are still there.

The art is beautiful and is as much a part of the story as the words are. Many frames are Oskar's perspective or another character. It is mysterious and skillful. A fantastic read.

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### **Patrick says**

What I really enjoyed about this book was the message of looking for kindness and blessings all around us every day; even in the hardest of times. Quite often we are so caught up in the forest we are unable to see the trees. We think so much on the negative that we are unable to recognize the small, intimate blessings and kindness that we encounter every day.

I also liked that this book focused on a Jewish character without being exclusively about a holiday, historic or religious aspect. Though the time in which the story takes place is around Hanukkah and makes mention of The Night of Broken Glass, these aspects are part of the background of the story. They are informational bits to give you context within the story. The story itself is of Oskar's trip through New York City to find his Aunt after arriving from Europe. During his trip he encounters a few New Yorkers, each who show him a bit of kindness or blessing. This is something to which we can all relate.

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### **Abigail says**

Shortly after the events of Kristallnacht, a young German Jewish boy named Oskar is put on a ship to America by his parents, sent to live in safety with his Aunt Esther in New York City. "*Oskar, even in bad times, people can be good,*" his father tells him, "*You have to look for the blessings.*" Set on the seventh day of Hanukkah in 1938 - a day which also happened to be Christmas Eve - this is the story of eight blessings that came into Oskar's life, in the form of eight people he met on his first day in a new city and a new world. Landing at the Battery in lower Manhattan, Oskar has to walk over one hundred blocks up Broadway to reach Aunt Esther's apartment. Along the way he encounters a kind old woman feeding birds, who gives him a loaf of bread; and a newsstand man who gives him a *Superman* comic as a Christmas gift; and a jazz musician with whom he has his first "conversation" in America. A young snowball fighter whom he aids helps him in return, while a Christmas tree vendor helps him to his feet when he falls. Oskar even encounters Mrs. Roosevelt on his journey north! Finally though, he reaches 103rd Street, where his first meeting with Aunt Esther makes him feel truly at home...

A lovely book, one that pairs a deeply thoughtful and emotionally powerful story with beautiful artwork, Oskar and the Eight Blessings is one of my favorite picture-books of 2015, and has joined the ranks of my favorite holiday tales as well. Everything and everyone that Oskar encounters in his trek up Broadway is based on real events that occurred in 1938. Mrs. Roosevelt *was* visiting the city that Christmas, Superman had just appeared as a comic-book hero that year, and Count Basie had just given a concert in New York City the night before Christmas Eve. All of this gives the story an added authenticity, although even without that information, supplied in the author's afterword, the tale still feels genuine, offering a glimpse into a diverse New York City of the past. I was deeply appreciative of the message imparted through the story, about finding blessings through people of all backgrounds and faiths, and was moved to tears by the conclusion, in which Oskar finds Aunt Esther. The artwork by Mark Siegel perfectly matches the text, capturing in sepia tones the beauty and magic of the city at holiday time, and the emotional undercurrents of Oskar's journey. Truly a marvelous book, one with appeal as a New York story, an immigrant story, a Hanukkah story, a Christmas story, and *most* of all, a human story which emphasizes the bonds of community and humanity that are to be found among diverse peoples, even in the darkest of times.

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### **Patricia Tilton says**

This Hanukkah story, set in 1938, is timeless and should be shared with children no matter what tradition they celebrate. Compassion and kindness towards others is not limited to color, race or culture. This is a story of hope for humanity.

This heartwarming story captures the best of New York and its residents who welcome Oskar to their city through their generous spirits and acts of kindness as he walks 100 blocks to his aunt's house. It is the

essence of what America is about, welcoming immigrants fleeing oppression or seeking a better life. The story is realistic and believable for children. The characters are diverse. The plot is engaging.

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### **Linda says**

It gives me shivers when a book comes along at just the right time, and this book, lying on my shelf for weeks, suddenly became one I wanted to read. It's a made-up story, based on history of the Hanukah, then Christmas in New York City, 1938. Richard Simon also connects one of his grandfather's stories to it, a choice of staying in America during this time, or returning to Lithuania.

Oskar's family felt blessed, and the story begins, "until the Night of Broken Glass". He was put on a ship to America with nothing but an address and a photo of a woman he didn't know, his Aunt Esther. His father's last words were "Even in bad times, people can be good. You have to look for the blessings." When he arrived, it was the last night of Hanukah and Christmas Eve. Oskar needed to walk 100 blocks to reach his aunt's home, all the way down Broadway! There is a marvelous map showing his route, and how the story makes Oskar connect to those "blessings" along the way. He begins with Trinity Church, seeing an old woman feeding bread to the pigeons. She offers a part of a roll so he can, too, but notices that he eats it himself. From her pocket, she gives him a small loaf of bread, energy so he can make the long journey. Oskar moves along, has some sweet encounters with others known, like "Mrs. Roosevelt and Count Basie" and unknown, a boy having a snowball fight whom he helps, who offers his mittens when he sees how cold Oskar is. I won't give all the blessings away, but Mark Siegel's illustrations are beautiful portraits of each scene, in muted brown tones with just a few bits of color, showing that evening walk. They enhance the memory of one fine night when Oskar found his blessings. I would hope that America will be as kind today as it was to Oskar so many years ago.

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### **Melanie says**

I may have already mentioned that I love Christmas books. I especially love the ones that aren't as much about Santa as they are about the spirit of the season, that glowy, happy feeling that you get that time of year. (And yes, my library got a bunch of new Christmas picture books today, which is why I'm reviewing several.) Anyway, *Oskar and the Eight Blessings* isn't exactly a Christmas book, even though it takes place on New Year's Eve, because Oskar is Jewish. However, it isn't exactly a Hanukkah book either, even though it takes place on the eighth night of Hanukkah. It's a book about seeing the small blessings in our lives every day, a book about giving and lifting people who are having a hard time. It made me a little bit teary. Fabulous picture book.

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### **Annette Vellenga says**

Part of the joy of reading books is the sheer amount of variety one gets. Just as *Knights* is a quick fun read, *Oskar and the Eight Blessings*, is a book that you want to take your time. Walking with Oskar who is learning to look for blessings even in the middle of bad times and in the process learning to be a blessing himself. It's a quiet read which had my boy looking pensive. "Why would that boy's mom and dad send him away? Did he break the glass and they were mad at him mom?" And so one explains how during the war parents send their children away to keep them safe and it was a hard time for their children. At the close of

the book we learned what the Night of Broken Glass was all about and the sending away of Oskar made a lot of sense to both of us. It was a good book.

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### **Douglas says**

This book is entirely unfair. It's the story of Oskar, a young immigrant from Germany sent to America by his parents after Kristalnacht. The last words his father says to him before setting him on the boat is, "blessings are everywhere, you just have to look for them." The book itself is focused on the long trek from the port to his aunt's house on the last night of Hanukkah which happens to be Christmas Eve in this story. Oskar runs into and meets people and indeed discovers that blessings *are* everywhere. By the time he runs into his aunt who calls him by his father's name, I'm just about a wreck. I can't even read the last lines without choking up.

There is a magic to this book that places it firmly in the holiday category, but it's an everyday, mundane magic -- the people he meets and interacts with are everyday people. The blessings he receives are simple, everyday acts of compassion, generosity, and joy. I don't care what holiday you celebrate at the end of the year, as the message and story of the book are about as universal as you can get. I highly recommend this. Just bring plenty of tissue.

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### **Antoinette says**

" Oskar, even in bad times, people can be good. You have to look for the blessings." So says Oskar's father to him as he embarks on his own for America. The date is Dec 23,1938 and Oskar is Jewish.

He arrives in New York with an address and a picture of his Aunt Esther. As he walks to get to her place, "blessings" greet him along the way.

This is a beautifully illustrated child's book with a lovely message.

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### **Jenny says**

4.5 stars...this was such a beautiful and touching book!! Oskar leaves Europe to head to an unknown aunt in America after Kristallnacht. Before he departs on the ship, his father says, "Oskar, even in bad times, people can be good. You have to look for the blessings."

When Oskar arrives, he has a long walk before him in order to reach his aunt's home. He is tired and hungry and it is the 7th day of Hanukkah and Christmas Eve. He sets off on his journey. As he travels, a woman is feeding the birds. She gives him a piece of bread to feed the birds, but he is so hungry, he eats it. The woman, recognizing his need, gives him fresh, warm bread. He falls and someone helps him up. Over and over, small acts of kindness are extended to Oskar, and with his father's words ringing in his ears, he recognizes them as blessings.

There's a touching author's note at the end and the book is lovely. While the illustrations are dark and would not typically be favorites for me, they work quite well with the setting and background...and the characters' eyes seem to speak great depths of emotion.

Highly recommended.

