

Survey of Jewish Literature

For many years, Jews have been known as “the People of the Book” because of the importance of reading and studying to Jewish culture.

Originally, Jewish literature was sacred in its context—*midrash*, for example were stories that were written to explain and comment on the Torah.

Yiddish Literature

In Eastern Europe, during the 1800s, Jewish authors began to tell stories that were more secular in nature, written in Yiddish. One of the most famous Yiddish writers was Shalom Aleichem, whose stories about Tevye the Dairyman and his family became the basis for the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Writers like Shalom Aleichem used satire and humor in their exploration of very human characters. Poland-born author Isaac Bashevis Singer emigrated to the United States and was a winner of the Nobel Prize.

Israeli Literature

At the end of the 19th century, as Jews from around the world began to make aliyah to Israel and the Hebrew language was modernized, writers began to pen secular stories, poems and longer works of fiction in Hebrew. Some of the most known early Israeli authors include Chaim Bialik and S.Y. Agnon; later authors include Yehuda Amichai, Amos Oz and Orly Castel-Bloom.

Jewish-American Literature

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In the United States, many acclaimed Jewish-American authors have emerged in the last century, exploring Jewish themes, characters, issues and identity in their work. Some important Jewish-American authors include Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Grace Paley, Cynthia Ozick, Rebecca Goldstein Chaim Potok and Michael Chabon.

Holocaust Literature

Jewish literature has helped to preserve history. In the post-Holocaust years, books have been an essential way of bearing witness and sharing the history of the Holocaust with the wider world. From Anne Frank's diary to Elie Weisel's memoir, "Night" and more recently, Art Speigelman's graphic novel inspired by his family's story "Maus", the Holocaust figures prominently in Jewish literature of the last fifty years.

Today, Jewish authors around the world are writing fiction, poetry, graphic novel and other forms of literary expressions.