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Jewish Literature series.

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SAUL BELLOW

JEWISH LITERATURE

Identity and Imagination



Let's Talk About It:

Jewish Literature—Identity and Imagination

is presented by Nextbook, a gateway
to Jewish literature, culture and ideas,
and the American Library Association.

Jeremy Dauber, Atran Assistant Professor
of Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture
at Columbia University, serves as the
project scholar.

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Millions of people at thousands of libraries across the country have gathered for *Let's Talk About It* programs since its inception in 1982. Now, the American Library Association and Nextbook partner to bring *Let's Talk About It* reading and discussion series to new audiences through *Let's Talk About It: Jewish Literature—Identity and Imagination*.

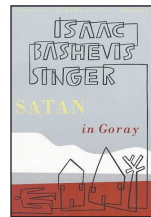
Join us for a reading and discussion series like no other. Led by a local scholar, *Let's Talk About It: Jewish Literature* will feature lively discussion of five books on a common theme in Jewish literature and culture.

Visit www.nextbook.org to learn more about Jewish literature. The site features author interviews, essays on Jewish culture and history, and a daily cultural news digest with links to stories and reviews from around the world. The site also allows visitors to search annotated reading lists and to keep up with other Nextbook programs.

DEMONS, GOLEMS, AND DYBBUKS

Monsters of the Jewish Imagination

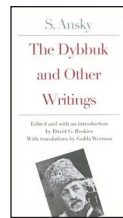
These five tales, which are as much about bodies—the enchanting, the ailing, the monstrous—as about spirits, leave the reader wondering: which is stranger, the supernatural world or our own?



Isaac Bashevis Singer **Satan in Goray**

The residents of Goray, having survived Bogdan Khmel'nitsky's notorious 1648 massacre, are convinced that the Messiah will arrive at any moment. So when followers of purple-robed mystic Sabbatai Zevi come to the Polish shtetl offering a return to the Promised Land, the villagers are quick to join their ranks—with disastrous results. Dietary laws and society's basic civilities are quickly forgotten. Life in the isolated village deteriorates in a blaze of famine and chaos.

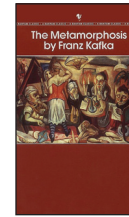
Originally published in Singer's native Poland in 1935—the same year he emigrated to America—this dark, chilling tale clearly reflects the anxieties of its era. The Nobel laureate's first novel is an epic story of desperation and religious fervor.



S. Ansky **The Dybbuk**

Ansky (ne Solomon Rappoport) became at turns a Russian revolutionary, a miner, and a bookbinder in Paris. He was in his mid-thirties when, already a successful writer, he gravitated back to his roots. In 1911, he embarked on an ambitious trek throughout Polish and Galician shtetls, gathering materials for folkloric research.

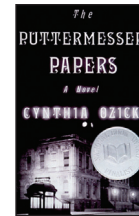
His best known work, *The Dybbuk*, was directly inspired by this ethnographic quest. The four-act play, a metaphysical take on *Romeo and Juliet*, tells the story of Leah, who, on the eve of her wedding, is possessed by the spirit of the dead Khonon, a poor rabbinical student who had been in love with her. First performed in Vilna in 1920, weeks after Ansky died, *The Dybbuk* quickly became a cornerstone of Jewish literature.



Franz Kafka **The Metamorphosis**

In November 1919, Kafka drafted a long, angry letter to his father, calling him a "vermin" who drained other's blood to sustain himself. At 36, the Czech writer had spent the previous ten years trying to wrest free from his controlling parents, who demanded financial support and denigrated his literary efforts.

In that difficult decade, Kafka composed the now-classic tale of Gregor Samsa, a put-upon salesman who finds himself transformed into a "monstrous vermin," often rendered as a cockroach. Read as both an allegory of Jewish alienation in Europe and a perverse rewriting of Yiddish folk tales, *The Metamorphosis* resonates because of Kafka's furious and at times hilarious portrayal of a family at war with itself, struggling first to care for, and then destroy the child it no longer understands or loves.



Cynthia Ozick **The Puttermesser Papers**

One expects a formidable critic like Ozick to be erudite and incisive, but the surprise of her haunting, fantastical 11th book is how funny it is. The novel's interlinked stories, most of which appeared over the past 20 years in *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*, chronicle the life of Ruth Puttermesser (Yiddish for butter knife): a friendless, uncommonly learned, unmarried civil servant with a law degree, whose "only irony" is "to postulate an afterlife."

But one morning Puttermesser finds a golem in her bed, and everything changes: she becomes Mayor of New York; forms an "ideal friendship" with a younger man; grows old; is brutally murdered; and ascends to Paradise. Ozick's distinctive, poetic style, meanwhile, elevates a novel of ideas to a work of art.



Tony Kushner **Angels in America**

This two-part play opens with a rabbi's eulogy for Louis Ironson's immigrant grandmother, but the nebbishy paralegal soon becomes embroiled in a personal drama emblematic of the Reagan years. Louis abandons his AIDS-stricken lover for a married Mormon lawyer, a protégé of Roy Cohn, the censorious powerbroker who lives in denial of his own identity and terminal illness.

At a time when many playwrights were thinking small, Kushner crafted a sprawling tapestry unafraid to embrace large political, social, and spiritual themes or to weave the phantasmagoric into everyday life. By invoking the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg as well as Aramaic texts, this Pulitzer Prize-winning epic, full of mordant humor and literary zest, uses its ethnic and sexual specificity to illuminate the American experience.