

**Reflections:**

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *My Name is Asher Lev*

*by Chaim Potok*

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ISBN: 978-1-58049-998-9

Item No. 201689

**BOOK ONE**  
**ONE**

1. Chaim Potok, the author of *My name Is Asher Lev*, takes you right into the heart of his story in the first two paragraphs. In his use of the words “Brooklyn,” “Crucifixion,” “Jew,” and “Christian,” you know that New York and religion will play a prominent part in the life of the central character Asher Lev. To help you with the background to this novel, do the following activities:
  - A. Look up the meanings of the terms above in a dictionary or encyclopedia. Then write in complete sentences three facts about each of the terms in your own words.
  - B. Write an explanation of the difference between a cross and a crucifix.
  
2. Asher certainly does know a great deal about his Russian great-great-grandfather. You may find it a bit unusual for a person to know about his forebear in such detail. Think about how much you know about your great-great and great grandparents. Complete the following format with as much information as you know about your own forebears. Do not worry if you don't know too much—that is normal in this day and age.
  1. What I know about my mother's mother (called one's *maternal* grandmother):\_\_\_\_\_
  2. What I know about my mother's father (called one's *maternal* grandfather):\_\_\_\_\_
  3. What I know about my father's mother (called one's *paternal* grandmother):\_\_\_\_\_
  4. What I know about my father's father (called one's *paternal* grandfather):\_\_\_\_\_

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## Response Journal

3. Asher, even at six years old, is already showing signs of being a gifted artist. His father does not seem to take Asher's gift very seriously. He did not allow Asher's uncle to buy one of his drawings and seemed angry that he had even tried. Though you may not have as great a gift as Asher has, every person does have at least one gift. It may be as simple as doing a magic trick or knowing how to change bicycle tires. Complete the following in a paragraph where you tell about one gift you have that you are proud of:

One thing I can do really well is\_\_\_\_\_

4. The names of two great artists, Chagall and Picasso, are mentioned in this first chapter. To become acquainted with their work, it would be helpful for you to find a copy of one painting by each. Most encyclopedias would carry one of their works under their names, or a modern art book in your library would have one. When you have the copies of their pictures, do this: Turn it upside down, and look closely at it; then make a drawing of the *upside down* pictures in pencil. You will find this very easy to do. When you have finished, turn the pictures you have drawn *right side up*. You will be surprised at how much they look like the original. Have fun.
5. In this chapter, there are many words having specific meanings with which you may not be completely familiar. Leaf back through the chapter to find words which would fit under each of the following categories when one is an "observant" Jew:
1. Jewish clothing and hairstyle:
  2. Jewish names:
  3. Jewish titles:
  4. Jewish rituals, celebrations, festivals, and customs:
  5. Jewish food:

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*My Name Is Asher Lev*

**TWO**

6. One of the indications that Chaim Potok is an excellent writer is his ability to convey the essence of Asher's experiences over time and back to his childhood in a clear, interesting way. The first two pages of this chapter bring his early school days to life. He continues to vividly describe one of Asher's summers as a child in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. Try writing like Potok. Choose either A and write about your school days as a young child, or B and write a memorable summer when you were young. After finishing, compare your descriptive paragraph to Potok's on the same subject. Begin your paragraph as follows:
- A. When I was in the early grades I remember.....
- OR
- B. I remember one summer in particular from when I was a young (boy/girl). It was...
7. By the end of chapter two, you have met many of the characters who live in Asher's world. In complete sentences, write a brief description and of each person listed below; then explain how each one affects Asher. The first one is given as an example.

<u>Character</u>	<u>Description and Effect on Asher</u>
Aryeh Lev	Aryeh is Asher's father, who travels for the Rebbe. He is away a great deal on Hasidic business, and is always gentle and kind with Asher.
Rivkeh Lev	
Uncle Yaakov	
Yudel Krinsky	

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## *Response Journal*

8. Imagine you are a classmate of Asher who has watched him draw in the schoolyard and liked his drawings. Complete the dialogue below between the two friends about Asher's drawing:

**Friend:** Asher, I don't see you draw anymore. Is something wrong with your hand?

**Asher:** No, my hand's okay. It's kind of mixed up about my not drawing anymore. I...

9. The year is 1952. The author mentions Russia, Stalin, imprisoned Russian writers, Hitler, and the Jews in this chapter. Leaf back through this chapter, and copy any quotation from it that explains what was happening in regard to the words below:

Russia:

Stalin:

Russian writers:

Hitler:

10. This chapter gives a detailed picture of Asher and his father's attending the morning service in the synagogue. Re-read the description of it; then on notebook paper, make a drawing of the scene. When you have finished the drawing, label the items in the picture which match the words listed below:

tallis

table

benches

chair

the Ark

the Rebbe

Asher

Aryeh Lev

## THREE

11. Asher learns that his father is being sent to Vienna, and Asher is not happy about moving. His friend Yudel Krinsky tells him Vienna “hates Jews.” In his explanation to Asher why they must move to Vienna, his father tells him that they also eventually are going to open Hasidic “yeshivos in Paris, Geneva, London, Zurich, Bucharest, Rome....” Look up each of the seven cities above in an encyclopedia. Write beside each city name the encyclopedia information about Jews, given in the entry. (This information will be probably for the current years, not the 1950’s.)
12. You will notice that Asher does not receive any encouragement from his parents to pursue his drawing skills. His Uncle Yitzchok, however, does continue pushing him to draw every time they meet. Yitzchok knows his brother Aryeh does not approve, but he seems not to care about that. Think back to the chapter in which Aryeh took Asher’s drawing away from his brother; then write a letter that Yitzchok might write to his brother explaining why he is encouraging Asher’s art work and why Aryeh should encourage Asher also. Begin your letter as follows:

Dear Brother Aryeh,

You’ve made your disapproval felt about Asher’s drawing. That’s your right. But...