



## Golem

*David Wisniewski*

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Retold from traditional sources and accompanied by David Wisniewski's unique cut-paper illustrations, Golem is a dramatic tale of supernatural forces invoked to save an oppressed people. It also offers a thought-provoking look at the consequences of unleashing power beyond human control. The afterword discusses the legend of the golem and its roots in the history of the Jews. A Caldecott Medal Book.

## **Golem Details**

Date : Published October 18th 1996 by Clarion Books (first published January 28th 1996)

ISBN : 9780395726181

Author : David Wisniewski

Format : Hardcover 32 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Folklore



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## From Reader Review Golem for online ebook

### Ann says

The illustrations in this book are INSANE. Honestly, maybe the most impressive pictures I've ever seen in a children's book. The story is very interesting, and there is an excellent source note in the back of the book. But the pictures will leave you in awe.

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### Manybooks says

While I definitely much appreciate both the historical and the religious background of David Wisniewski's Golem (and can in all ways very much understand how and why he won the Caldecott Medal for his expressively intense, colourful, evocative illustrations, for pictures that are bold, immediate, emotion-laden and very much both a mirror to and often even an expansion of the narrative, of the accompanying printed words), I also do not really and cannot really claim that I all that much enjoy Golem as a tale in and of itself (and in fact, it is actually more the visually stunning illustrations than the printed words I find potentially too frightening and almost too intense in nature, although even with regard to the text, with regard to the author's presented narrative, there are issues and scenarios shown that I do find potentially problematic and open to question and debate, and as such not really all that suitable or even approachable for children below the ages of seven or eight, and perhaps even nine or ten).

As very much an adamant pacifist, David Wisniewski's message (or perhaps rather the culturally traditional message) that violence might well be necessary to combat violence or the threat of violence (via means of the super-strong and supernatural monster-like Golem), while to a point definitely understandable from a historical and realistic point of view (as the Jews of Prague were in peril, were being relentlessly and with brutality and lies persecuted without mercy) also leaves me personally a little majorly uncomfortable, even though I do indeed appreciate that Rabbi Loew does recognise that what he has created, that what he has called forth has caused, is causing much too much danger and destruction, all important and even necessary points for discussion, analysis and debate, but are these here themes not perhaps somewhat above and beyond the traditional picture book crowd (not to mention that the Golem, that Joseph, after he has served his purpose, it simply destroyed, even though life has become precious to him, a necessary act perhaps, but also sad, infuriating, inherently unfair and unjust in many ways).

But all that having been said, and my issues with the level of textual savagery and the possible over-intensiveness of the accompanying illustrations notwithstanding, I do highly recommend Golem and find especially David Wisniewski's informative supplemental note exceedingly well researched, informative, simply and utterly outstanding (although the hopeless academic in me would most definitely have enjoyed and also kind of missed a bibliography, list of works cited and suggestions for further reading). And please do note that while I personally tend to think that Golem is not really all that suitable for children below at least the ages of seven or eight, that is my own feeling, my own reaction to the text/image combination, and I would NEVER in any way desire to impose this attitude on others (I just know on a personal level that if I had had Golem read to me as a younger child, I would more than likely have had nightmares and a great many potentially uncomfortable questions, such as for example, if the danger faced by the Jews of 16th century Prague was dire enough to call forth the Golem, why was the Golem then not called forth during the Holocaust).

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### **Jen says**

My class of 1-3 graders read and studied *Golem* this week. The story is set in the late 16th century when Jews in Prague were being persecuted and forced to live in a walled ghetto. A golem was created out of clay to protect the Jews. This story opened up some great dialogue in class about humanity. The illustrations are amazing.

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### **Laura says**

Ugh, I did not care for this story at all. It was not something that I would want young children reading, for it mixed the fantasy world closely with reality, almost blending them together, and I can easily see a child becoming confused and not knowing the different between the two. The illustrations were pretty unique, but some pictures were a little gruesome/creepy. I would not recommend this book.

\*Taken from my book reviews blog: <http://reviewsatmse.blogspot.com/2008...>

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### **Dolly says**

This is the second book I read about the "Golem," and the first one that I've read to our girls.

The first book, by Elie Wiesel, matched this story very closely, but didn't have illustrations, and I think it was a little too scary for younger kids.

This one was also a little scary, perhaps, but I tried to give it a dramatic reading that made it more exciting, less real, and not so scary.

Our girls weren't overly excited about the book, but I thought it was great. The illustrations were wonderful, as you would expect for a Caldecott Medal winner.

This story was selected as one of the books for the April 2012 - Mystical/Magical Creatures reads at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

It was also featured in the October 2016 - Quarterly Caldecott discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

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### **Chantal says**

David Wisniewski's 1997 Caldecott Award winner, *Golem*, recounts the experience of Jews in 16th century Prague (Czech Republic). Retold from traditional rabbinic sources such as that of *Cabala* the *Talmud*, and the *Zohar*, Wisniewski creates a compelling visual and historical narrative of persecution and the dangers

inherent in assuming God-like power. The antagonism of the cut-paper illustrations, the contrasts in the dark palette, and the variety of eye paths and angles, create tension, advance the plot, and hold the reader captive in this tale of destruction and human frailty.

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### **Michelle Pegram says**

When the Jews in Prague are in danger due to a lie about their using the blood of Christina children in their unleavened bread, one rabbi, fearing approaching violence, seeks guidance through prayer. He is answered with one word: Golem. Only a righteous man using mystical teachings and power could create this giant of clay, which is what the rabbi does. Golem is tasked with the protection of the Jews and the thwarting of those who would plant evidence of the "blood lie." Even though he knows that he will only live as long as the Jews are in danger, he works doggedly to keep them safe. When the enemies of the Jews become angered by the failure of their blood lies, they attack. Will Golem be able to save them now?

This Caldecott Medal winning picture book is powerful in text and the image. The story of the creature who works towards his own death with the safety of the Jews is evenly matched by beautifully haunting paper-cut images that have depth and layers that make them seem as though they are coming off of the page. The only reason that I didn't give this book five stars is that the story is told in a very formal manner that lacks some sense of humanity.

This book would be perfect as a part of a history or social studies lesson about oppression or persecution of any kind.

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### **Ronyell says**

"Golem" is a Caldecott Medal award winning book by David Wisniewski which is about how the Jews are being persecuted because of the "blood lie" and how Rabbi Loew tries to figure out a way to save the Jews by building a Golem! "Golem" is a great and dark story that might please older children and adults, but it will definitely scare smaller children who do not understand the book's mature content.

David Wisniewski has done a brilliant job at writing and illustrating this book. David Wisniewski's writing is extremely dramatic and intense as it discusses the persecution of the Jews and his description of the Golem as being a frightening yet obedient being makes the story intense and somewhat heartwarming at the same time. David Wisniewski's illustrations are frightening yet beautiful at the same time especially whenever David Wisniewski illustrates the lightning during the resurrection of the Golem and the lightning would spread across the whole page and look both frightening and fascinating at the same time. Also, David Wisniewski uses cardboard figures including the characters to illustrate the story and therefore, makes this story extremely captivating and realistic at the same time.

Parents should know that this book is too scary for smaller children since the story is too dark as it describes the persecution of the Jews in such vivid detail that it will scare small children. Also, the images in this book are extremely intense, especially of the image of Rabbi Loew resurrecting the Golem and there is lightning all over the page while the Golem's expression looks extremely terrifying as it has a surprised and painful expression on its face as lightning shoots out of its eyes and mouth while it is being resurrected. Parents might want to steer young children away from this book until they are old enough to learn more about the

persecution of the Jews and can handle the frightening images.

“Golem” is a truly brilliant yet frightening book about the persecution of the Jews and their savior that older children will love because of the amount of excitement and drama involved in the story. I would recommend this book to children ages eight and up because of the themes of the persecution of the Jews and the frightening images will frighten small children who do not understand about the persecution of the Jews and can not handle the frightening images in the book.

**Review is also on: Rabbit Ears Book Blog**

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### **Jon(athan) Nakapalu says**

I have always been fascinated by the story of the Golem. This retelling of the story is informative and retains the deeper questions of 'Golemic' solutions to violence while still remaining accessible to children.

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### **Andrew says**

While 'Golem' is presented as a children's book it is really a great read for any age. Presenting the tale of the golem in a manner that even children can comprehend and follow, this book is simply wonderful. I would like to start by mentioning the art by David Wisniewski because it is beautiful. Use of shadows and lines help to create the atmosphere of foreboding and fear that the Jews of Prague in this story would have felt. I would like to see more of his work. As for the story itself Mr. Wisniewski does a great job of conveying the persecution the Jews were experiencing during the Blood Libe, and the desperation of the rabbi who created the golem. Once Joseph (as the rabbi names the golem) has joined the Jews within their walled neighborhood in Prague you see right away his awe at even the mundane aspects of life. His refusal to give up his new-found life once his task is completed is heartbreakng because of course we can relate. Who wants to die? Especially when the world contains so many undiscovered wonders and unseen beauty. I think that this book would be great for a child to read, regardless of religious affiliation, because of this message. 'Golem' illustrates that life is precious to all, even if you are summoned up from clay.

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### **karen says**

This Caldecott Honor book draws upon Jewish mythology to tell the story of the persecution of the Jews in Prague in 1580. The Jews were forced to live in a walled ghetto and were accused of killing Christian babies and using their blood for their ancient rituals. The chief rabbi, Judah Loew ben Bezalel, creates a golem out of clay to protect the Jewish people. As the golem spends more time alive, it begins to acquire a human yearning for life. The golem, however, was only created to protect the Jews as long as they needed him, and after it has rebuffed several violent attacks and frightened the emperor into a withdrawal of his men, the rabbi returns the golem to the earth.

The artwork for the volume, also by David Wisniewski, is made up of cut-paper illustrations, which are layered like a collage and then photographed. This adds a depth to the illustrations that is very eye-catching. The amount of detail that can be conveyed with this method is impressive, and the intricacies of the art supports the old-world feeling of the story; something that computer-manipulated illustrations would be

unable to convey.

The language in this picture book is quite sophisticated and the themes of the difference between life and humanity can lead to some complicated discussions. The scene of the rabbi consigning the golem to the earth once more despite his pleas for life is particularly emotional, and may lead some readers to question the justice of his decision. There is also a page-long endnote about the history of the golem in Jewish mythology, and a short history of the persecution of the Jews, for further discussion.

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### **Sarah says**

I rarely give a book 5 stars, but this one deserves it. The unique story, fully-formed characters and the twists and turns of the plot make for an incredible book. I love a book that makes you think about your own life while immersed in the characters' lives. I highly recommend this one.

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### **Randie D. Camp, M.S. says**

This book is not the traditional myth but more of a Jewish tradition or as Wisniewski suggests a cautionary tale. I must admit that I know bits and pieces of the Jewish religion but am not familiar enough to pick up on all the significant references and meanings in this book.

There was a time when there was hatred present between all the religions. The Jews were attacked more viciously and were even made to live in ghettos. The Golem, a large strong, simple, giant was summoned from clay to protect the Jewish people from the vicious attacks of the other religions' people. Tradition says that the Golem would protect the Jews for as long as they were in danger. Golem blocks numerous attacks but eventually the attackers break into the Jewish ghetto. Golem uses his strength to knock them down and protect his people. The attackers were so fearful of Golem that they promised to leave the Jews alone as long as they destroyed Golem.

The layered cut-paper illustrations are dark, consisting of browns, blacks, and reds. This adds to themes of violence and caution that are reiterated throughout the story.

The story is a bit overwhelming. Not necessarily because of the content but because of how the content is delivered. The text is dense, full of religious terms and names that can be difficult to pronounce, and there is just so much text on each page. I would not hesitate to share the myth of Golem with my five year old son, but this book is much too long for his attention span. After reading the author's note at the end of the book, I am intrigued about Golem. I wonder how many Jews that suffered the unspeakable acts of the holocaust thought of Golem and clung to this story as hope for survival. I must know more about Golem for this reason and will seek out more books about him.

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### **April Helms says**

To protect the Jews of Prague, Judah Loew ben Bezalel, the chief rabbi, calls forth a Golem. The almost childlike Golem does do its job well, and the Jewish people no longer have to fear for the lives. This book

covers a lot of lore and issues in a few short pages. I like the historical afterwards in the back. The illustrations and stark colors are very eye-catching.

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### **Jodi Ottobre says**

Unique illustrations and story. I was kind of sad the ending ended how it did. Perhaps a Golem Returns sequel (hint hint Wisniewski) can redeem it. My husband read this book to me with a Rabi voice so that might have made me love it more.

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### **Kathryn says**

Four stars for talent, though I did not "like" this story.

This is a powerful, deeply disturbing "cautionary tale about the limits of human power." It also shows the cruelty of man, and the dangers of believing rumors. I really don't feel equal to writing a review of this story.

On the one hand, I admire the obvious talent in the (Caldecott Medal-winning) illustrations and the author's note at the end enhances the story, helping explain about Jewish religion and history for those who might be ignorant of certain details. I found it especially interesting that the Golem, created to help protect the defenseless Jewish people, is now seen as Israel (in an allegorical fashion) by some as it was "created to protect the physical safety of the Jews through the use of physical power."

On the other hand, I can't help but feel that this story is too graphic (both in content and illustrations) for the standard picture book audience. In addition to the mention of the "Blood Lie" spread about Jews "mixing the blood of Christian children with flour and water of matzoh" and the fact that some of those spreading the lie went around carrying blood or dead children, the story is very violent and the illustrations are graphic.

Moreover, it is deeply haunting as the poor Golem was created only to protect (and protecting some meant destroying others)--and to be destroyed when his task was done, no matter how much he pleaded to stay alive. And, while certainly the message of the story can be understood even if one is not acquainted with the traditions, the nuances of Jewish history and religion in the Author's Note (so beneficial for older audiences) are beyond the reach of many young children. Thus, I can't help but feel confused as to whom Wisniewski was trying to reach with this book. Certainly adults and older children might appreciate it, yet they may very well be turned away by the "kid's book" format. While I wouldn't want to see a totally diluted version of the story, I can't help but feel young children might be better served by a less graphic introduction to the story of Rabbi Loew and his Golem.

The book left me deeply disturbed and heart-sore.

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### **Beverly says**

I love Wisniewski's detailed, intricate cut paper illustrations, and they definitely helped to tell the story. I

only found a couple of spreads particularly graphic. I also liked the story and felt sad for the Golem when it was returned to clay form. I appreciated the informational author's note at the end as well.

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### **Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says**

I've always liked stories about the Golem, and Wisnewski's detailed papercuttings fascinate me. Combine the two, and you've got an award-winning book.

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### **Betsy says**

I did a whole paper on Wisnewski's cut paper illustrations in grad school (the last grad school :-) ) and his art still fascinates me. Probably because I don't have the patience for it! But this story of the Golem is not a "fun" story. It's very thought-provoking--all about power, supernatural assistance, faith.... The Golem is a figure from Jewish legend.

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### **Mila says**

The cut-paper illustrations are gorgeous, but I enjoyed the story in Clay Man: The Golem of Prague more. The last page called "A Note" is a great summary reference.

In many European cities, Jews were confined to walled areas called ghettos and locked in at night. Venice banished its Jews to an island where a foundry was located; the word *ghetto* is derived from the medieval Venetian word *getto*, "foundry".

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