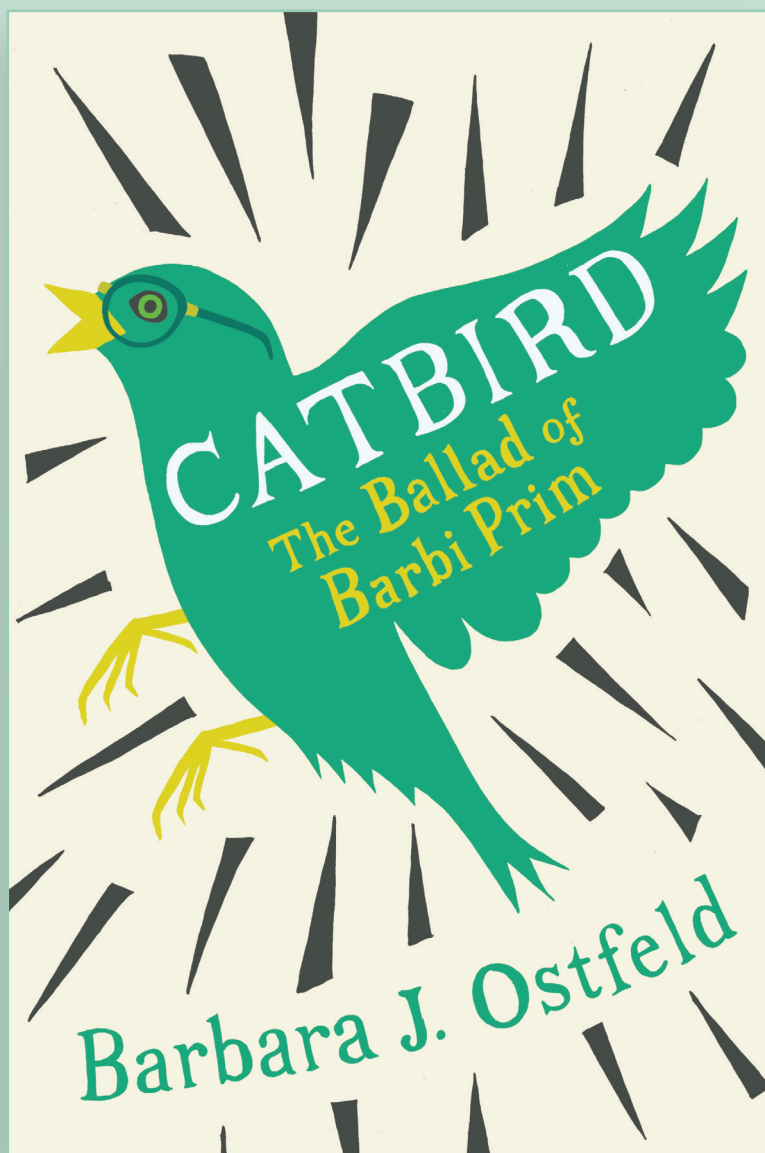


A Reading Guide for Jewish Groups

CATBIRD *The Ballad of Barbi Prim*



ERWA

catbirdbook.com

CATBIRD *The Ballad of Barbi Prim*

Questions

1. What Jewish rituals and observances capture Barbara's imagination in childhood? What do you remember thinking about religion when you were a child?
2. How did Barbara develop a feeling for the sacred as a child? Were you ever struck by a childhood feeling of holiness?
3. In what ways are Barbara's parents similar to or different from typical first-generation American Jews of their generation? Is there an immigrant story in your family?
4. Why do you think Barbara learns to associate unattractiveness with Jewishness? Do you recall any assumptions from your childhood that you learned later on weren't accurate?
5. What are the sources of her defiance? Her compassion? Were you defiant as a child or teen? Sensitive?
6. What does *Catbird* tell us about growing up Jewish in the 1950s and '60s? What adjectives would you use to describe your growing up years?
7. What has changed for Jewish kids, especially girls, since then? What hasn't? What changes have you witnessed in society since your childhood?
8. Barbara feels awkward during a number of her first experiences at HUC. Have you ever found yourself feeling awkward in group settings because of your perceived differences?
9. How do the following themes play out in *Catbird*? In your own life?
 - Repentance
 - Hair (Is this a Jewish theme?)
 - Modesty/make-up/clothes/costumes
10. What role does therapy play in Barbara's growth? How do you think her life would be different without the good mental health care she received and still pursues? Have you ever gone to therapy? How did it affect your life?

Thoughts



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11. Would Barbara have become the first ordained woman cantor if she hadn't been raised in the Reform movement? Have there been times when religious rules or cultural norms have held you back?
12. How do you relate to your cantor? Your rabbi? Do you hold them to different standards with regard to religious observance? Parenting? Good works? Appearance?
13. What changes in synagogue life and in prayer did Barbara witness during her career? What changes have you observed?
14. Is there a specifically Jewish message in *Catbird*?
15. Has *Catbird* influenced your Jewish identity?

Thoughts

