On a cold December night during the height of the Revolutionary War, General George Washington surveys his weary troops at Valley Forge. He spies a soldier lighting a candle. Curious, he asks the soldier what he is doing. The soldier explains that he is celebrating the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. He goes on to relate a miraculous story—how long ago a ragtag army of Jewish soldiers defeated a much larger force of powerful Greeks, a tale that provides just the kind of inspiration General Washington needs. Stephen Krensky’s fictionalized version of a poignant historical anecdote is brought vividly to life in Greg Harlin’s brilliant watercolor illustrations.

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My Personal Review:
When General George Washington encounters a Jewish soldier lighting the Hanukkah candles, he learns about the Maccabee’s fight for freedom and how it relates to his own fight for liberty during the Revolutionary War. The dark, somber illustrations in blue tones depict the cold, bitter conditions at Valley Forge. The explanation of the Hanukkah story is effectively differentiated from the rest of the narrative using a yellow background. The author’s note explains the origins of this historical anecdote and its sources. This is a beautiful and accessible way to remind readers of the Jewish presence and involvement in early American history and about the commonalities between Jewish and American beliefs and values.

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