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Review: How I Learned Geography

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Shulevitz, Uri (author and illustrator), *How I Learned Geography*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2008. ISBN: 9780374334994. Grades K-2

Awards: Caldecott Honor Book

Description

The spare text and large illustrations transport the reader to Uri's memories of his family's life during World War II. Forced from their home by the devastation of war, they head east and find shelter in "...a city of houses made of clay, straw, and camel dung...burned by the sun." There they live in poverty sharing a small room with another couple. One day Uri's father returns from the bazaar with a large map instead of bread to eat. Angry at first, Uri becomes fascinated by the map and begins to imagine the places it represents far away from his hunger and misery.

Critique

Though there are a few difficult words scattered throughout, Shulevitz manages to tell the story of this important time in his life with simple but tremendously effective sentences. What could be a dark story is filled with light, with hope, and with a sense of adventure. Readers are shown the power of the imagination to bring comfort in difficult times. Geography becomes more than rote memorization of places on a map. Alternating pages of simple almost bare illustration with pictures of exquisite detail, Shulevitz captures not only the image, but the also the feeling of his journeys both real and imagined.

Character Themes: Ingenuity, Inquisitiveness, Coping, Family Loyalty