



How I Learned Geography

Uri Shulevitz

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Having fled from war in their troubled homeland, a boy and his family are living in poverty in a strange country. Food is scarce, so when the boy's father brings home a map instead of bread for supper, at first the boy is furious. But when the map is hung on the wall, it floods their cheerless room with color. As the boy studies its every detail, he is transported to exotic places without ever leaving the room, and he eventually comes to realize that the map feeds him in a way that bread never could.

The award-winning artist's most personal work to date is based on his childhood memories of World War II and features stunning illustrations that celebrate the power of imagination. An author's note includes a brief description of his family's experience, two of his early drawings, and the only surviving photograph of himself from that time.

How I Learned Geography is a 2009 Caldecott Honor Book and a 2009 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

How I Learned Geography Details

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Author : Uri Shulevitz

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From Reader Review How I Learned Geography for online ebook

Karol says

I was enchanted and intrigued by this story. How could the boy's father buy something so impractical as a map, when the family was starving? Yet the map helped the young boy see that there were places in the world beyond his home. It allowed him to dream and imagine what they were like.

The illustrations in this picture book are colorful, captivating, and full of hope.

I especially enjoyed the end notes where the author shared a bit of his real-life story, and some of his early drawings

Manybooks says

A moving and emotionally affecting story (based on Uri Shulewitz's own boyhood, his family's escape from Nazi-occupied Poland to Central Asia), How I Learned Geography not only poignantly demonstrates the ravages of war, of being a refugee with scant resources for food and other basic necessities many of us take for granted, the book also shows how one special object (in this case, a map of the world that the young boy's father buys instead of purchasing bread) can make a terrible, inhumane reality more tolerable. And while at first glance, said map might be regarded as a frivolously foolish purchase, as the young boy's father explains, he had just enough money to buy a very tiny piece of bread, which would have partially nourished the family, but only for a day, or a night at the most. On the other hand, the map the father has purchased soon floods the family's small, desolate room with colour and vision, encouraging imagination, learning, a sense of escapism, making the harsh reality of the present more livable. While the bread would only have provided temporary nourishment of the body, the map lastingly nourishes the soul, providing both solace and a sense of lasting, healing wonder.

Like my GR friend Lisa, I would also not really suggest reading How I Learned Geography when hungry, although my reaction (when I read the book on a very empty stomach) was a bit different from hers. For I never wished that the father had bought bread instead of the map, but I did feel quite livid at the couple who shared the family's hut (at not sharing their food, but more specifically, at the way the husband eats with such enthusiasm, seemingly rubbing it in that the young boy and his family have to go without any and all supper).

Uri Shulewitz's illustrations are bright and evocative, and while on their own, they would likely not be altogether to my taste, the illustrations work wonderfully well with the text, the narrative, both mirroring and expanding the latter. My personal favourite is the picture where the boy seems to soar above the world map, being transported to explore deserts, beaches, mountains, encountering the richness and diversity of the world, of the earth, armed only with a large world map and the power of his imagination (and I can in all ways both appreciate and applaud Uri Shulewitz' Caldecott Honour designation for How I Learned Geography).

Although the narrative is simply told, and easy to understand, I would not necessarily recommend this excellent picture book for very young children, as some of the themes presented (war, hunger, being a

refugee) are rather heavy and potentially traumatic. I think that a good age group would be children from about ages five to eight, although even older children would likely enjoy and appreciate How I Learned Geography, especially if reading the book were accompanied by discussions on and about some of the issues mentioned above.

Sandy says

Very moving story about Uri Shulevitz's move as a little boy to Russia. His home in Poland is destroyed by war and his family gets out with nothing except the clothes on their back. His father spends what little money they have on a map instead of food, and this makes Uri angry. However, as he studies the map, he is transported into other worlds and lives, thus being able to forgive his father and forget about his hunger. C.2008, Genre-biography

Laura says

This book was simply okay. I'm not sure why it won the Caldecott Honor, it was interesting and told from a different perspective, but I'm not sure a child would be very impressed with it. The illustrations were nice, but I wasn't a big fan of this book. I might recommend, but only if you were trying to read all the Caldecotts.

*Taken from my book reviews blog: <http://reviewsatmse.blogspot.com/2009...>

Betsy says

Your story is your own, and when you choose to share it with the world you may find it hard to stop. There is no subject you are better familiar with, of course. Human beings can write diaries with a lifetime's worth of memories. They can pen autobiographies that go from cradle to near grave and still find enough information for a couple thousand pages more. Maybe that's why I have so much respect for the picture book autobiography. Particularly when it's not even a look at an entire life, but a snatched moment in a person's youth that made them who they are today. Look back on your own life. If you had to synthesize it down to the one moment that defined who you are right now, what would it be? For Caldecott Award winner Uri Shulevitz, it all comes down to a map. And so, with brevity and wit and a feel for what makes a picture book worth reading, Mr. Shulevitz recounts a time of trial from his life that is touching in its seeming simplicity.

When young Uri Shulevitz fled Moscow with his family to the relative safety and security of then Turkestan (now Kazakhstan) they had little money and littler food. One day the boy's father goes out to buy bread, but when he comes home it is not with anything edible but with a map. Uri is furious at this dad and has to put up with his neighbors noisily smacking their lips as they devour their own miniscule dinner. Yet when Uri's father hangs the map on their wall, it offers the boy unexpected joys. Through its presence he goes round the world, exploring everything from cold mountain peaks to the thrill of beautiful temples. The map offers the boy escape from his hard life and perhaps helps to set him on his way as an artist and illustrator. An Author's Note explains more about Uri's life with a photograph and two drawing samples, one from age ten and one from thirteen.

My co-worker Rebecca made a remarkable point about this book. She recounted to me a story in which a

person referred to himself as poor. His mother was quick to correct him, saying that they weren't "poor" they were just broke. If you are broke you're simply going to bad times, but if you're poor then that's a state of mind from which you can never escape. As Rebecca puts it, the moment Uri's father bought that map instead of bread he made a conscious choice to be broke. Not poor.

Many of us will recognize Mr. Shulevitz's work because of his remarkable Caldecott Honor winning book *Snow*. That was a book of cold blues and an almost Maurice Sendakian feel for children's playfulness. *How I Learned Geography* replicates that playfulness, but the art is where Shulevitz does what may well be his best work. The watercolors in this book run the gamut from the blood red overtones of a Warsaw sky to the bleak sand-colored roofs of Turkestan homes. Because the map has long since been lost to time, Mr. Shulevitz had to replicate it here from memory. It really is a splendid, colorful creation too, and when Uri recites the exotic names he finds there in a kind of incantation, he is seen flying over its flattened surface. I loved the tiny details of this imaginative journey. Look at how Shulevitz has somehow created the undulating lines of little ripples of sand in a burning desert. And the view of the city with all its buildings becomes a model of impossible angles and jutting towers. Little Uri even engages the reader directly when his father first comes home with the map. As his mother holds out her hand for the bread that will not come, Uri looks directly at the reader and points to his father, as if to say "What is up with this guy?"

The natural comparison to make when considering this book is to hold it up against Peter Sis' *The Wall*. This isn't a particularly fair comparison, though. Sis' autobiography had an adult slant to it. He was actually summing up his early life in a thousand bits and pieces, as opposed to Shulevitz's minimalist view of his own. And while *The Wall* had child-friendly sections below each picture, it didn't feel like something made with an entirely child-aged audience in mind. What's so interesting about *How I Learned Geography*, in contrast, is that it feels wholly and entirely child-friendly. Yes, it has an Author's Note in the back that's directed at adults, but the book itself has a wonderfully young feel. Sentences are simple and beautiful and short. The flights of fancy Uri goes on are so much fun to read that kids will find quite a lot to grab onto and love in this author's story. It's a remarkable mix of memory and storytelling that works beautifully in its current elegant format.

It's one thing to have a life worth telling and another thing entirely to know how to tell it. In *How I Learned Geography*, Uri Shulevitz presents his masterpiece. Image, heart, and story combine to show us the best of the autobiographical picture book format. A book that will touch all who read it because it reminds us that once in a while our dreams bleed into our reality. A beautiful piece.

Ages 4 and up.

538pm_jlytle says

How I Learned Geography
by Uri Shulevitz
2009 Caldecott Honor Book

A war forced the author's family to flee when he was just a boy. His family move to a far off country and they were very poor. One day, instead of bringing home bread to eat (the only food for that night), the author's father brought home that he said was better than bread - a map. This nonfiction account of the author's childhood captures the essence of living in poverty as a displaced person, and how even though the

cost might seem great at first, education and imagination can bring far a far greater escape than one night's meal. The colors and rich scenes of the background in this story are only superseded by the look and expression of the characters that manage to say so much to children about the complexities and strains of life as an impoverished, displaced family, in a way that words cannot. This would have been my choice for the winner of the Caldecott medal for illustrated children's book. This book would be a great read aloud for parents, librarians, and teachers of kindergarten through second grade. The book would tie in well with lessons on geography and maps, as well as contemporary social topics like refugees, poverty, and displaced persons. Although this is a picture book, it does contain some words that might be too difficult for early elementary students to read independently (enthusiasm, incantation, and place names). The uplifting theme of the book about how imagination can be a great escape in a bad situation, and the vivid pictures of the places Uri would travel with his imagination are all the more wonderful because this is a true story (the page at the end has a brief biography of the author.)

Dolly says

This is a wonderful tale of imagination and hardship that will inspire the reader to learn that it is as important to feed your mind as it is your body.

The watercolor and collage illustrations are softly rendered in muted tones, and show the sadness and desperation of the boy's poverty, but also the wonders of his imagination.

Our girls enjoyed this tale, but I loved it. Mr. Shulevitz' story, and the trials he lived through as a young boy, are a lesson for us all.

This book was featured as one of the selections for the August 2011 Maps and Geography themed books for the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books group here at Goodreads.

This book was also selected as one of the books for the September 2017- Caldecott Honors 2008-2012 discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

Kathryn says

This story is based on the author's own boyhood when his family had to flee war-torn Poland at the onset of WWII and how one evening his father purchased a map, instead of bread, to bring home to their somber camp. At first, Uri and his mother are upset that all they have is a map while their roommates enjoy dinner. Yet, soon they begin to realize that father has brought home food for the spirit, as Uri daydreams over the map, imagining himself in many wonderful places far away from their somber reality.

I think this book is wonderful!!! I read it for the Picture Book Club's Geography theme over in the Children's Book Group I went into it without knowing what it was about, so was surprised to find it was set during wartime and the beginning was so somber. At first, I wasn't sure where it was going and how it would become a book about geography. But, wow, I just loved how visually and emotionally the map changed everything, making the book so much brighter and warmer. The rhyme young Uri made up was just a delight! I could see how this map inspiring his around-the-world in his imagination was just so vital for him keeping his spirits up during their difficult time. I imagine it was a source of conversation and hope for the

parents, too; I am not sure that, at that young age, Uri would have known which places had cities and which had jungles, for example, unless his parents were talking about it and sharing that knowledge with him. What a wonderful way to keep the family together and strong of heart and mind! The author's note at the end was marvelous, bringing everything together; though I felt the story was very moving and strong as a stand-alone, it made it even more vivid and poignant seeing the photograph of Uri during that time and it was a delight to see his childhood illustrations! This was a real winner in my book!

Luisa Knight says

A memoir from the author's childhood; it's about The Warsaw blitz in 1939 and about a map his father bought during that time.

Ages: 5 - 9

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Laura says

Caldecott Honor 2009

This was good. It is based on the true events that the author experienced as a four year old boy. He and his family had to flee Poland, because of the Warsaw blitz, and lived six years in what is now known as Kazakhstan. During those years they often had very little money to buy food. One night, his father didn't bring home dinner, instead he brought home a map. That map inspired him in many ways that left a huge impact on his life.

Laura Rumohr says

How I Learned Geography was intended for children in grades 2-5. In this story a young boy and his family leave Poland and move to Turkestan. Here his family struggles to make money. One day the boy's father was supposed to come home with food, but instead comes home with a map. Although the boy and his mother are upset because they were so hungry, they decide to hang the large map on the wall. In the days and weeks that follow the young boy dreams of places he could go on the map. He even memorized the map and could recreate it at other times on paper.

Uri Shulevitz made the illustrations in the book colorful and lively. They were created with ink and watercolors. The pictures are double page spreads on some pages while other pages have two separate pictures. He also does a wonderful job including light and shadow to emphasize mood and focal points.

In the back of the book Uri even included an author's note with a photograph of himself at the precise time

the story took place along with some of his first pictures of maps and of the Russian bazaar.

Ronyell says

When I have heard of Uri Shulevitz's most recent children's book, I was excited at reading this book! "How I Learned Geography" is a Caldecott Honor book by Uri Shulevitz that details author Uri Shulevitz's experiences as a young Polish refugee during World War II and how he lived in Kazakhstan and how a map made him realize the beauty of the world. "How I Learned Geography" is a truly brilliant book for children who want to learn about author Uri Shulevitz's life during World War II and want to look at the beauty of the world through a map.

When World War II started, a young Polish boy had escaped the land with his mother and father and they headed to a country called Kazakhstan where they lived their lives as refugees. One day, the boy's father went to the bazaar to buy bread and he ended up buying a map instead. This ended up making both the boy and his mother furious at the father for letting them starve that night, however the next morning; the boy's father put the map on the wall of their little room, which covered the entire wall. When the boy started looking at the map, he discovered that the map can open up a world that he has never known existed right before his eyes!

Oh my goodness! This book was truly a wonderful experience for me! I never would have realized that a map could help a person see the true wonders of the world through their own eyes and help them get through tough times during their lives! Uri Shulevitz has done a brilliant job at writing about his childhood during World War II and it was truly written in such a dramatic and heartwarming way that I often find myself sympathizing with the boy in the story many times. It was interesting seeing how the family had to run away from their home to find safety from the war and Uri Shulevitz has certainly done a brilliant job at detailing the hardships and pain that he and his family had to go through during the war, such as not having enough food to eat. I loved how Uri Shulevitz pointed out in the book that he found happiness in the dreary life he was thrown into by witnessing the wonders of a map through his mind. Uri Shulevitz's illustrations are extremely colorful as there are detailed images of the country Kazakhstan with images of small houses that are made of clay, straw and camel dung, in the background. I also enjoyed Uri Shulevitz's colorful images of the different countries that the boy visits through the map such as running across the beach and jumping about in the desert sand. My favorite image in this book was of the boy flying all around the world and you can see various buildings from Europe to North America standing beneath him.

Overall, "How I Learned Geography" is a truly amazing and imaginative book that detailed the magic of viewing a map in an exciting and inventive way and children might be interested in witnessing the lives of many refugees during World War II in this book. I would recommend this book to children ages five and up since some of the countries that the boy mentions might be difficult for smaller children to understand and the themes of war and hunger might upset smaller children.

Review is also on: [Rabbit Ears Book Blog](#)

Lisa Vegan says

I found this book very touching. The author writes about his childhood memories of being a refugee from war, a Jewish boy whose family managed to escape from Nazi occupied Poland. He writes about how he had no toys or books, and not enough food. Then, instead of buying a bit of bread, his father buys a map. The story shows how learning, immersing oneself in another world, and using one's imagination, can make reality more tolerable.

The book's illustrations fit the story well. Aesthetically, my favorite picture was probably that of the city buildings; I loved the way color was used in that picture. The illustrations were colorful and fun, but I don't think they come close to matching those in another book I just read by this author-illustrator: Snow.

I suggest not reading this book when you are hungry. I did, and I felt as the boy did at first: I wished the father had bought the bread and not the map, especially when the family's hut mates ate their meager dinner. Reading about that made me even hungrier. I think the author did a great job with this book!

It's a very simple story with not too many words on each page, but because of the subject matter, I wouldn't recommend it for the youngest children. I think it would be ideal for early primary school children.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

This autobiographical story tells of a young boy who comes as a refugee to a country where they are poor and hungry. A huge map of the world which his father buys helps him learn geography and forget about his discomforts at home. The artwork, especially drawings of the boy, reminded me of Maurice Sendak. It was a nice story, but not anything I'd have given the Caldecott to.

Magila says

2.5?

I seriously considered not posting a rating or review.

It is a fairly difficult thing to 'judge' someone's personal experience. That's why I'm not. If I were looking at this in that light I might give this book a 5. Instead, I'm considering it as a children's book.

Be advised this book is about a person (presumably Jewish) who was forced to leave Poland, and later moved through multiple other locations until they ended up in America during the World War II era. I have no qualm with that, but you certainly do not get that from the cover.

To brass tacks. The artwork was ok-good. The story was lackluster. Even kind of bad. A young boy is forced to move, and his dad is responsible for supporting his family. One day he comes home with a map instead of food. His wife is upset. His boy learns about the world. The end.

My personal feeling is that the author has a tremendously compelling story to tell, and this book does not do it justice. Sorry.

Not recommended.

