

Peppe the Lamplighter

Elisa Bartone , Ted Lewin

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In the tradition of Lois Lowry and Paul Fleischman, Elisa Bartone's Caldecott Honor-winning book gives children a glimpse into American history and the immigrant experience.

This is the story of Peppe, who becomes a lamplighter to help support his immigrant family in turn-of-the-century New York City, despite his papa's disapproval. Peppe's family is very poor, and though he is just a boy he needs to find work. Being a lamplighter is not the job his father had dreamed of for Peppe, but when Peppe's job helps save his little sister, he earns the respect of his entire family.

Supports the Common Core State Standards.

Peppe the Lamplighter Details


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Author : Elisa Bartone , Ted Lewin

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From Reader Review *Peppe the Lamplighter* for online ebook

Beverly says

I really liked the story and the lovely paintings. I am not sure why the father was so unreasonable, but perhaps he couldn't get a job himself and was a bit jealous.

Autumn says

1. Awards Received: This book has received the Caldecott Medal.
 2. Appropriate grade level(s): This book is appropriate for preschool to grade 3.
 3. Summary: In the early 1900's Pepe, a young immigrant, lives in Little Italy. His mother had died and his father is sick. Because of this, Peppe has to help support his eight sisters as a temporary street lamplighter. While his father disapproves of the job, his sisters support him. Peppe's father's disapproval continues to bother him until the point where he gives up one night. This same night, his youngest sister does not come home because she is afraid of the dark. Peppe's father realizes how important Peppe's job is and pleads with him to light the lamps.
 4. The colors illustrations in the book are very beautiful and reflect the time period and the neighborhood that the story takes place in. I also like that it brings in aspect of Italian culture, especially the historical aspects of Italian culture in little Italy decades ago. On top of Italian culture, it gives perspective into the ambitious lives of immigrants and the lengths they made to go through to make a living for their families.
 5. Uses in the classroom:
 - Going off of what the sister says: "You scare the darkness way," the children could think metaphorically about how they can bring light into the world.
 - Talk about ambition: how Peppe's ambitious and then connect that to how the students themselves are ambitious about something in their life
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Linleigh says

Peppe the Lamplighter by Elisa Bartone tells a story of immigration to the United States. This book is a historical fiction book that tells the story of a young boy named Peppe living in Little Italy, New York. Peppe is trying to find a job to help his family, and after searching all over town, he finally finds one as a lamplighter. Peppe loves his job but struggles to feel proud as his father tells him he is ashamed, and that this was not the job he had in mind for his children when they came to America. However, Peppe comes to the rescue after he lights the town and finds his little sister, which in the end, makes his father extremely proud.

Some major themes in this book are ambition and family. Peppe takes initiative and finds a job to help support his family and create a life for himself in America. He was ambitious and excited as he began his job as the city lamplighter, and viewed each light as hope for the future. The theme of family is evident because Peppe got the job to support his family, and as he lit each lamp, he wished for good things to come to his

sisters, mother, and father.

This book is fabulous for many reasons. The illustrations convey what life must have been like in Little Italy, and there is a strong emphasis on light, as each page is done in dark colors with many shadows. As a fourth generation American from Italian Immigrants myself, I loved how the pictures and the text included aspects of Italian culture. The story is heartwarming as it portrays the importance of family during hard times.

I would absolutely recommend this book for upper elementary levels. It gives students a look into the lives of immigrants, past and present. It also emphasizes that working toward the betterment of your life or your family's is always something to be proud of.

Nicole says

I found myself drawn to the underlying message of the dignity to be found in each person's work, no matter how menial it may seem.

Claire Morrison says

"Peppe the Lamplighter" is a sweet, wonderful story about a boy who struggles to help support his immigrant family after they move to New York City. This book exposes students to concepts and realities of immigration, history of past immigration movements, and a diverse vocabulary, and thus is best for students in grades 3-5. This book could, obviously, be connected to social studies lessons regarding immigration and American history, as well as how those topics are relevant today.

Elisa Bartone's eloquent writing, like in the line "small flame of promise for the future," inspires and captivates her readers. Additionally, the illustrations that go along with the book are beautiful and do a great job of illustrating a reality that goes along with the story. I would love to use this book with my class if I were placed with upper grade students!

Randie D. Camp, M.S. says

Peppe works, against his father's wishes, as a lamplighter in Little Italy. He is young but he must work to help support his many sisters. One night, Peppe is too discouraged to light the lamps and his sister is so frightened to come home...can Peppe save the day?

The illustrations are beautiful and are true to the time period. I also appreciate the family dynamics of this story. The father's pride shows the high expectations that immigrants often had for America. Peppe had to grow up fast in order to contribute to his family, this was common at the time but might be tough for today's young readers to grasp.

SamZ says

1994 Caldecott Honor - Favorite Illustration: When Peppe finds his little sister sitting beneath an unlit street lamp.

I love the beautiful illustrations in this book. They fit the tone and the time frames wonderfully and definitely help tell the story of a young boy struggling in a new country to help feed his family. However, I don't like the story. I think Peppe's father is a jerk and it doesn't really make sense why he is so angry with his son for taking a job to help the family. I understand if he were sorrowful at the necessity, but standing about yelling and slamming doors won't help the situation. Overall, underwhelmed with what could have been a lovely look into the lives of immigrants.

Mariana Gutierrez says

Peppe the Lamplighter is a book about a young boy who lives in Little Italy. He lives with his father and many sisters, so he has to find work to help sustain his family. He has bad luck at first trying to find a job, but he ends up getting a job as the town's lamplighter. He is so excited to have this job, but his father is verbal about his disappointment at Peppe's decision. One night, Peppe feels so ashamed at his father's disapproval that he decided to not go out and light the lamps, so the town is pitch black when sunset arrives. However, because it is so dark, Peppe's younger sister doesn't arrive home which worries everyone. His father apologizes to Peppe and begs him to light the lamps and bring the sister home. Once Peppe finishes the job and carries his sleeping sister home, Peppe's father and family thank him and tell Peppe how proud they are of him.

The major theme of this book is that hard work will always be important and appreciated. Peppe is led to believe that his job is meaningless and that everyone is laughing at him behind his back, but in the end, Peppe's lack of work leaves the town in darkness and even makes his sister get lost. His family finally acknowledges that Peppe's hard work is very important to the safety and productivity of everyone in the town.

I really enjoyed this book because it is a heartwarming story of a young boy trying to work to sustain his large family. The images are very well designed in colors and details to focus on the theme of the book and all the hidden emotions the characters experience. Throughout the whole book, Peppe works hard to either find a job and to do his job well. At first his hard work isn't acknowledged in a positive light, especially from his father. I feel like many children or people who read this book can relate to their work being ridiculed or taken for granted to the point where they want to give up. In the end, Peppe is needed and everyone appreciates the work he does as a lamplighter.

I highly recommend this book to parents or teachers as either a read aloud or to have in a library for children because it shares an important message that children of any age should know. Hard work may not always be publicly acknowledged, but it will always be noticed and appreciated. The book would also be a good resource for teachers to either talk about the immigration that occurred in history, or it can be used to show how poverty can impact families.

Linda Lipko says

The 1994 Caldecott Honor book is filled with page after page of beautiful illustrations telling the tale of the search for the American dream.

Peppe's large Italian family immigrated to the United States. His father was sick and his mother was dead, thus with little money, they settled in a tenement on Mulberry Street. As the only male child in the family, Peppe sought work and found a job as the lamplighter.

In frustration his father lashed out night after night expressing anger and pent up disappointment. Peppe was told his job and that he did not bring his family to America for his son to be a mere lamplighter.

When, one night his father looked down on him from the window and told him that he belonged to the streets, Peppe cried. When his father told him he was ashamed, Peppe cried and began to believe his father was correct.

When afraid of the nastiness, his young sister ran away into the darkness, Peppe's father realized the importance of his job. Lighting the lamps enabled Peppe to find his sister.

Rich in history, accurate in cultural beliefs, I highly recommend this book.

Laura Kenny says

Peppe the Lamplighter is a beautiful historical fiction picture book. It's filled with engaging, beautiful and authentic language. This story is about a little boy named Peppe, who is trying to help make money for his family in Little Italy, New York. He comes from a family of immigrants consisting of a dead mother, a frustrated father and six sisters. Peppe does not let his situation define him and shows real persistence in trying to find a job. His father was saddened at first because he thought lamp-lighting was a street job, but then had a revelation that it was actually a very important job which made him and Peppe proud.

I believe this book would be perfect for read alouds among younger elementary students and could be a good independent book for older students. One could use this book when talking about the importance of work ethic and not giving up. It also teaches children to be grateful for the little things and showing them about life in New York when there was no electricity. Perhaps, one could turn this into a writer's workshop where students try to write about what life would have been like without electricity! So many places to go with this heartwarming story.

Cynthia Egbert says

A gorgeous reminder that all work is honorable and that the words we say as parents can make or break a child. I highly recommend this one.

Rebecca Zadick says

"Peppe the Lamplighter" is a heartwarming tale about a little boy who's sole desire is to make his father proud. He experiences setback when his father disapproves of his efforts, but eventually his father realizes that Peppe's role as the lamplighter is important to every member of their community. The story is intended for children 6 years of age and older. This age range is appropriate because the text includes some words that may be difficult for younger readers to pronounce or comprehend. In addition, there is also historical background to the story that young children would not be able to recognize. Peppe and his family are immigrants living in a tenement on the streets of Little Italy in New York City, which might be confusing for some readers. The book received the Caldecott Honor in 1994 for its beautiful artwork displayed through watercolor painting and realism. I know that watercolor painting is the medium and realism is the style because I researched the illustrator, Ted Lewin, and found that these are his most popular styles of illustration. The detailed street scenes painted throughout the story provide historical context through the clothing that people are wearing and the emotions that are felt in each particular moment. I love the cover of the book because it is a wrap around cover showing a picture of Peppe lighting up the dark night with a lamp post. The illustrations are double page spreads throughout the book with the text residing in the top left or right corners. I loved this book because of its historical context, but I am not sure that children would be intrigued by the story line. However, the illustrations are beautiful and fun to examine. I would read this book to children if I were teaching them a history lesson, but I am not sure that I would choose to read it for fun. Overall, a very well-written story with phenomenal illustrations.

Todd R says

This is a story of a young boy named Peppe who lived with his family in the neighborhood of Little Italy back when there was no electricity and streetlights had to be lit by hand. Peppe's mother had died and his father became ill so he had to find work to take care of himself, his father, and seven sisters. Peppe searched around for work but could not find anything until one day a friend of his asked him to light the streetlights that night for him. Peppe was so excited and found a love for this job but his father was not so happy. He had higher expectations for Peppe when they moved to America. Throughout the story, Peppe tries to win his father's respect and one day it finally happens. This book would be good to use for an immigration unit.

Manybooks says

An evocative marriage of text and image, both Elisa Bartone's moving (albeit at times rather desolate and upsetting) narrative and Ted Levin's realistically brilliant and atmospheric accompanying illustrations perfectly mirror and complement one another, with pathos, with grace relating a story that according to the dust cover is based on the author's own family history. Bartone's narrative flows gently, although at times with much sadness, evocatively describing a by-gone era with a thoughtful, thought-provoking universality (that nevertheless still remains intensely personal), whilst Ted Levin's watercolours demonstrate both a grim and yet joyful reality (both darkness and light, as epitomised by Peppe and his job as a lamplighter, who, as his youngest sister Asunta so lovingly claims, chases away the darkness).

Some of my GR friends do not seem to like Peppe the Lamplighter all that much as a story, and mostly due

to the unfortunate fact that Peppe's father is, indeed, a rather nasty and opinionated individual (denigrating Peppe and his job as a lamplighter, telling him that his job is shameful, and that he is in all ways unworthy). However, while Peppe's father is majorly biased, illogical, and really quite viciously verbally abusive to his son, I think one should perhaps also ponder and consider the possible reasons why the father might originally be so very much against Peppe becoming a lamplighter. First and foremost, the father, as undoubtedly a proud and probably rather macho "pater familias" type, might deep in his innermost soul be ashamed of himself for being ill and unable to work, to provide for his family. And perhaps, if he, before the family had immigrated to America, had also been a well-known and respected "pillar" of his native community (or had been more than basically, rudimentarily educated), the mere concept of his son becoming, working as a menial labourer, as a lamplighter, might really have massively chafed for the father (totally unreasonable, but really, not all that historically uncommon, although the father's behaviour is both extreme and therefore also a bit worrisome).

And while I thus agree wholeheartedly that Peppe's father acts with loatheworthy prejudice, bias and illogical anger towards his son and his new profession, I for one also and majorly APPLAUD Elisa Bartone for not sugar coating this or pretending it away (especially considering that Peppe's story is supposedly based on her own family history, her own ethnic background), for showing, or rather for daring to present the father as he likely was (and let's face it, the father does finally apologise and tell Peppe he is proud of him, something that is NOT an automatic given with and for parents). Recommended, but with the caveat that the father's behaviour really does need to be discussed, actualised and harshly condemned and criticised (and with that salient fact in mind, Peppe the Lamplighter is thus perhaps also more suitable for slightly older children and not necessarily the very young).

Jenny says

Peppe's mother has died and his father is sick. So Peppe searches for a job to help support his family. When he gets a job as a lamplighter, his father is angry and says, "Did I come to America for my son to light the streetlamps?" Then he walks out, slamming the door. Peppe continues to light the lamps but begins to feel that it is a bad and worthless job, due to his father's continued expressions of disappointment and anger. One night he decides not to light the lamps and his sister does not come home; she is too scared to walk home without the light from the lamps.

The illustrations are absolutely wonderful...such emotion shines through.

His sister says that he has the best job in the world. He asks why. She says, "You scare the dark away."

This got me thinking a bit philosophically...how can we "scare the dark away?" How can we light up the world and make it a safer place? The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to mind: "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." So we love. We work to add light. Eleanor Roosevelt said, "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness." We remember Edith Wharton's words: "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." If speaking metaphorically, then perhaps Peppe's job of being the lamplighter really was one of the most important jobs.
