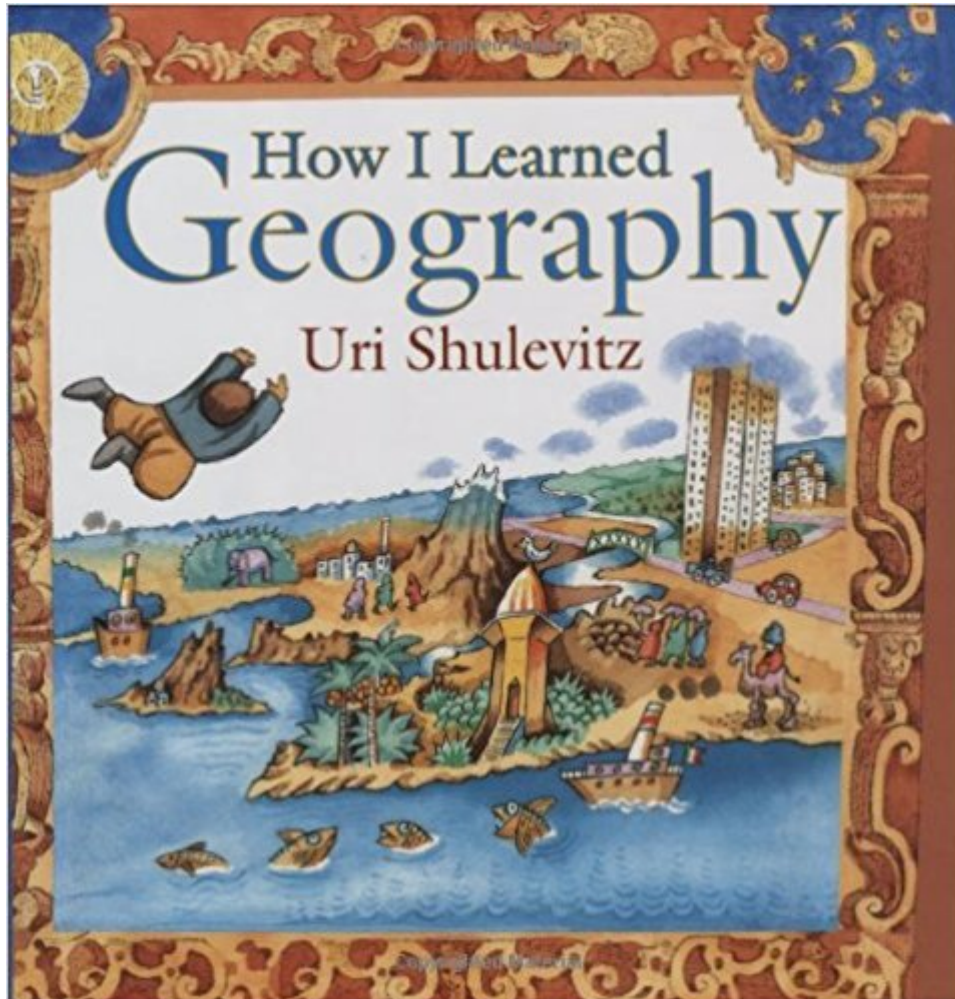




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# How I Learned Geography



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 660L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

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Product Dimensions: 10.3 x 0.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 37 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #111,546 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Emigrants & Immigrants](#) #59 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Homelessness & Poverty](#) #66 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Military & Wars](#)

Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 2—5 •Shulevitz provides a note and early drawings to source this story based on his own childhood experience. A small boy and his parents flee Poland in 1939. They travel to Turkestan (modern-day Kazakhstan) where they live in one room in a house made of "clay, straw, and camel dung" with strangers. When the narrator's father returns from the

bazaar with a huge map instead of bread to feed his starving family, his wife and son are furious. But the map turns out to provide food for his spirit as the youngster becomes fascinated by its every detail. Using his imagination, he can transport himself to all of the exotic-sounding places on it without ever leaving the dreary room in which it hangs. The folk-style illustrations, rendered in collage, watercolor, and ink, combined with the brief text, create a perfectly paced story. A page turn to discover where Father is going "one day" brings readers into a Russian bazaar with its crowds of colorful sellers and buyers, the scene closely resembling a drawing the illustrator made at age 10. Scenes framed in white depict the family boxed in by their desperate circumstances, first fleeing their war-torn country with its angry red-black sky, and then cramped in their small room in a distant land. The frames disappear as the boy imagines himself released from his confinement to travel his newly discovered world. This poignant story can spark discussion about the power of the imagination to provide comfort in times of dire need.

—Marianne Saccardi, formerly at Norwalk Community College, CT Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**\*Starred Review\*** Recasting a childhood memory as a fictional tale, Caldecott Medalist Shulevitz revisits the journeying theme from his recent *The Travels of Benjamin Tudela* (2005), while harking back to the fanciful simplicity of *Snow* (1998) and *So Sleepy Story* (2006). Driven from home by a "war that devastated the land," a family flees to a remote city in the steppes. One day, the father returns from the market not with bread for supper but with a wall-filling map of the world. "No supper tonight," Mother said bitterly. "We'll have the map instead." Although hungry, the boy finds sustenance of a different sort in the multicolored map, which provides a literal spot of brightness in the otherwise spare, earth-toned illustrations, as well as a catalyst for soaring, pretend visits to exotic lands. Shulevitz's rhythmic, first-person narrative reads like a fable for young children. Its autobiographical dimension, however, will open up the audience to older grade-schoolers, who will be fascinated by the endnote describing Shulevitz's life as a refugee in Turkestan after the Warsaw blitz, including his childhood sketch of the real map. Whether enjoyed as a reflection of readers' own imaginative travels or used as a creative entry to classroom geography units, this simple, poignant offering will transport children as surely as the map it celebrates. Grades K-3.

--Jennifer Mattson

Love this book bought 2 one to donate to the school one for home. We took it to parent read day at school and it covered the timely topic of war immigration, poverty, hunger and a childhood innocence used with imagination to combat all of that and make a happy memory. I will ignite an interest about the world in your little one and break your heart just a little. Over all a great message of hope read it to a 3rd grade class and they all loved it and asked such good questions after about the story. The afterword by the author clears up some of the questions not answered in the book.

This book has grown on me. I bought it expecting something much different, even after reading the reviews prior to purchase. My first read-through with the kids was a bit ho-hum. But my 4 1/2 year-old picked it again the other night, and the story felt different. We talked about displaced lives. We talked about hunger. And we talked about the world, in general geographic terms. And the fact that the kids are selecting this book to be read says something about what they're getting out of it -- even if it's nothing, it catches their attention.

This is the jolting start to a book with the innocuous title "How I Learned Geography". Shulevitz continues, "Everything we had was lost, and we fled empty-handed". The picture on this first page evokes an almost unimaginable pain and loss. Three figures, faces contorted into masks of suffering, are fleeing from a conflagration. As the father leads the way, the mother turns to hold the hand of a child, who is running to keep up. There is nothing else; the ground is grey and the sky is red. Should your kids be reading this? Well, yes. It's a story of loss, of survival, but ultimately of redemption and freedom. And it's a true story, an autobiography of events that took place when the author was four or five year's old. (This is explained in a helpful author's note that provides the historical context.) "We traveled far, far east to another country, where summers were hot, and winters were cold, to a city of houses made of clay, straw, and camel dung, surrounded by dusty steppes, burned by the sun". This is the city of Turkestan, where the subsequent action unfolds. The Shulevitz family has nothing, is hungry, and truly subsists as strangers in a strange land. And then - freedom. The vehicle is a map of the world, and fuel is provided by the imagination of a young boy. And so the circumstances are overcome, and in the end we sense that all is well. While the content of this book might be seen as weighty, there can be no doubt that it is very worthy.

With such excellent reviews and an interesting storyline, I had high hopes when I ordered this book. But I was a little disappointed after reading it. The illustrations are certainly captivating...wonderful.

And the story is good: a little sobering but also very encouraging. I just felt that the story could have been a little more developed, or that perhaps some compromises were made in re-telling the story in order to keep it short, happy, and politically correct. The 2nd half seemed a little "Disney-fied" to me.

fun way to look at geography

Great book and beautiful pictures. Very touching story. My sons really liked it and gave us an opportunity to get our Atlas :)

Beautiful book. Beautiful story.

Not at all what I expected. Story is too simple and not what I thought. I guess it'll be okay.

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