



The Coal Thief

Alane Adams

Lauren Gallegos, Illustrator

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This beautiful picture book explores themes of right and wrong and is certain to provoke interesting conversations with children.

Exploring topics such as the history of the coal-mining industry and questions of right and wrong, *The Coal Thief* is one of those rare picture books that gives adults a lot to talk about with children. Alane Adams uses few words and makes each one count, while Lauren Gallegos's beautiful illustrations become just as important as the writing itself.

The story is set in Girard, Pennsylvania, circa 1929. It is brutally cold, but Georgie's family lacks the coal they need to warm themselves. Georgie's papa is away for the day fixing a broken rail line.

Georgie's friend Harley shows up with a wheelbarrow and invites Georgie on an adventure to the train station. The train arriving from Virginia carries special cargo that will make all of their lives warmer for a while. Harley and Georgie steal some of this precious load, and related decisions, formed with Papa's moral guidance, make *The Coal Thief* a very heartwarming story.

The text and illustrations of *The Coal Thief* work hand in hand, forming a beautifully cohesive project. Adams wisely chooses to use a sparse writing style, often giving entire pages over to artwork. Such decisions will allow children to follow along easily and to use their imaginations. It's one thing to read about a child shivering and is another thing entirely to see a picture of a youngster in a thin, raggedy shirt. A close-up of Georgie peeking into his potbellied stove, hoping to find a spare piece of coal, is especially poignant.

This story is called *The Coal Thief*, so obviously there is some stealing involved. So much can be talked about with children on each page, but an important theme here is the question of whether stealing is ever justified, even to help others. These pages provide the ideal opening for such discussions.

A beautiful book in so many ways, *The Coal Thief* will leave an impression on many hearts for a long time to come.

KELLY THUNSTROM (February 18, 2016)

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