

Title: *The Brooklyn Bridge*
Author: Karen Hesse
Perspectives Category: Socio-Economic Differences

Response Submitted By: Carina G., 7th Grade

Date Submitted: September 5, 2020

1. *What is the main plot of this book?*

“The Brooklyn Bridge” is set in the summer of 1903, and is about Joseph Michtom, who is 14 years old. All he wants to do is experience the thrill of Coney Island first hand, but that seems very unlikely. His parents, Russian immigrants, created the first ever teddy bears, and started selling them five months ago. Joseph’s parents used to own a quiet candy shop, but now all they do is sell teddy bears. Joseph has two younger siblings. Emily and Benjamin, who they call Benny. Joseph works for his parents, which he doesn’t like. He especially doesn’t like that they don’t pay him. Joseph argues with his parents a lot. In between the chapters of this book, there are stories of children who live under the Brooklyn Bridge.

2. *Which character did you identify with most, and why?*

I identify most with Emily, Joseph’s little sister. She is curious, and likes to read. She is always there for Joseph, and she always appears calm. She is also very responsible, as she always looks after Benny. I feel I share some of these qualities with Emily.

3. *What do you think the main message of this book was?*

I think the main message of this book was that you have to make your own luck. You have to work hard to be “lucky”. Luck doesn’t just come out of nowhere. You have to be persistent, and be willing to put in hard work to enjoy good things.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too “preachy”?*

I think the main message was both effectively integrated into the story, and also made very obvious by the author. The entire book centered around Joseph’s family working hard and saving up money so they could go to Coney Island. However, at the end of the book, the main message is stated directly.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/ presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

Another perspective I believe was presented in the book was that there is always a less fortunate side of things. I agree with this perspective. I believe that it was very eye-opening and important to read about the less fortunate side of Brooklyn.

6. *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

I do not think my beliefs were changed by reading this book.

7. *What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I do not think any perspective was missing from this book.

8. *Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This book has encouraged me to learn more about our country in the early 1900's, during the industrial period when many immigrants like Joseph's parents came to the country.

9. *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would suggest this book to readers fifth grade and up. I would suggest it to someone who is interested in historical fiction, and books about the past.

10. *What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

I think the book "Out of the Dust" by Karen Hesse would make a good addition to this category of the perspectives bibliography because it is about a girl whose father is out of work because of the Dust Bowl. This book deals with economic differences just like "The Brooklyn Bridge."

Book Reviewer Name and Grade: Yaseen V., Grade 10

Date Reviewed: 7/15/21

1. *What is the main plot of this book?*

The main plot of the book takes place in the summer of 1903 in Brooklyn. The plot focuses on fourteen year old Joseph Michtom, who desperately wants to experience the thrill, the grandeur, and the electricity of the new amusement park at Coney Island. This book goes through all the ups and downs of life and how each life is precious to another.

2. *Which character did you most identify with and why?*

One character that I found myself relating to the most was Joseph Michtom. I ultimately related with him because of his individuality and his curiosity of the outside world. As the eldest child in my family, I find myself wanting to explore things on my own, just like Joseph wanted to explore Brooklyn by himself and experience Coney Island. I also related to him because we are very close in age, so much of his experiences were common to other teenagers.

3. *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I think the main message of this book is to realize how much you have to be grateful for and that you should live life to the fullest because your life and the lives of others are very precious. I think this message is important because we often forget how uncertain life can be and that it is not guaranteed for anyone to live a long and healthy life.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I think the author did a good job at portraying the message of the book through the plot and I did not find it to be very preachy.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

Throughout the book, Joseph goes through the different trials and tribulations many teenagers also go through. The perspective that I agree with that was portrayed in this novel is that we

should live life to the fullest and live everyday as if it were our last because we will never know when it is our time to go. This perspective is important because it prompts the readers to fulfill their dreams and take risks in order to be fully satisfied with your life.

6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

After reading this book, my views on following one's dreams even if threats or dangers are posed are reassured by demonstrating how Joseph's life became so interesting and fun in the moment of going to the new amusement park.

7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

One perspective I wish the author delved more into is the perspectives of Joseph's parents. I think this point of view would be valuable to the story because it would show how views can change as you grow older and whether the parents' views are more aligned with Joseph or not.

8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?

After reading this novel, I was not prompted to pursue more topics. Instead, my beliefs on life in general were reaffirmed because the book reminded me how precious life really is.

9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?

I would recommend this book to readers who need to be reminded about how to live your life. Ultimately, this book is perfect for those who have not yet taken the leap of faith by doing what they want.

10. What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?

One other book that I think would make a great addition to this category is Wish on a Unicorn, which is a story that revolves around a girl living in an old-fashioned trailer park home with many aspirational and vivid dreams. However, due to economic wealth, that may be an issue.

Response Submitted By: Anton P., 10th Grade

Date Submitted: July 28, 2021

1) What is the main plot of this book?

The plot revolves around the Micholm family who created the teddy bear. The main character is Joseph Micholm. He is worried that the community stopped liking his family because of their success. The Micholms used to run a candy store but since the creation of the teddy bear, they had to invest all of their work into producing teddy bears because of the toy's insane success. This means that the family is too busy running their business making it rare for everyone to gather together and Joseph no longer has a lot of free time because his father expects him to work and support the family. The family includes Joseph, his sister, his baby brother, his parents, and his aunts. The Micholm family used to include uncle Izzy who they believed to have died trying to save his son, Steven. The story pans to the Children under the bridge which are a group

of homeless children who live under the bridge and are haunted by the Radiant Boy which is a ghost which takes some of the children at night.

2) *Which character do you most identify with and why?*

I identify with Joseph because his struggle of growing up and people wanting a lot from him is relatable.

3) *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I believe that this book really emphasizes the importance of family connections.

4) *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across too "preachy"?*

I think that the family aspect of this book was integrated very well.

5) *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

The two main perspectives were of the Micholm family and all of the homeless kids living under the bridge. The Micholms had family and stuck together and the homeless kids had to stick together and be their own family. I do not think that I can agree with one of these perspectives but these perspectives reinforce the central idea of the importance of family.

6) *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about your topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

I think that the story is very good at reaffirming the belief in the importance of family with a lot of the characters risking everything for their family.

7) *What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I do not think that any other perspectives are missing from the book

8) *Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through reading, research, action, ect, and if so, how?*

No, it does not.

9) *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, ect.) would you suggest this book too?*

I would recommend this book to someone around 15 who likes mystery books and maybe a little bit of supernatural.

10) *What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the perspectives bibliography, and why?*

I don't know any books that would.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Jason B., 11th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 10, 2023

1. What is the main plot of this book?

The plot of this book revolves around a family of Russian-Jewish immigrants living in Brooklyn in the 1930s. They are named the Mitchcoms and they have a good amount of money, due to the fact that their father, Mitchell Mitchcom invented and sells the first ever teddy bears. The story is told through the eyes of the son and eldest child, Peter Mitchcom, and the story revolves around the lives of the family. The main conflict in the story occurs at the end when one of Peter's aunts sees her husband at Coney Island, even though she thought he had died years ago, along with their son Stephen. She gets very angry at her husband and yells at him, claiming if he is still alive

then her son must be too. It turns out her son truly did die, and that her husband survived but wanted her to think he died trying to save their son from drowning.

2. Which character do you identify most with and why?

I identify most with the main character and narrator, Peter Mitchcom. This is because I am also the eldest sibling in my family, and I also enjoy sports. However, I can't relate to growing up in Brooklyn, or to being first generation American.

3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?

I believe the main message of this book is that family comes first, and how the lives of immigrants in the 1930s differed from the lives of non-immigrants. This is because the family has a lot of different obstacles, including the poverty they originally lived in before the teddy bear business blew up. There is also a common feeling of envy that other Russian immigrants feel towards the Mitchcoms, due to their new found wealth.

4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too preachy?

I think the main message was effectively integrated into the story, since it isn't something that is directly stated or that occurs through conflict. It is rather, a theme that is present in the everyday lives of the characters, and is illustrated through their actions and backstories in the novel. An example of this is Peter's aunt, who he calls "the queen", who dies in the beginning of the novel, but it is discussed how she helped a lot of people immigrate to the United States from Russia. It is also discussed how her dream is to become an American citizen, and on her deathbed Peter gives her a fake citizenship test, so she can die as a "U.S citizen".

5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?

Two perspectives that were present in this book on an important topic were that of Peter and his parents/aunts. This is because his parents and aunts all immigrated to the United States from Russia, while he was just a baby when they immigrated, so he just remembers life in America. He doesn't know what it was like to immigrate, and he doesn't remember how bad their life in Russia was. His parents and aunts remember though, and because of that they are more grateful for the life they have in America. I agree more with Peter's perspective, as I was born in America, and so I don't understand how much worse the lives of people in some other countries can be compared to mine.

6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

My beliefs about any topic weren't changed by this book. This is because the novel is not very direct with its message, and is more of a look into the lives of immigrants in Brooklyn, and not so much a direct or preachy novel, when it comes to the message.

7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

I think the perspective of a person living in Russia at the time was missing from the book. This is because while there are little pieces of information about the family's lives before coming to the United States, a more detailed account would help to really understand the backstory of the Mitchcoms in this story.

8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?

This book didn't encourage me to pursue any topics further. This is because its message isn't something that is very relevant in my life, and is something that doesn't really interest me.

9. *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would suggest this book to any reader interested in history, or the lives of immigrants in America. This is because the novel takes place in the 1930s so it is very historically detailed, and it gives the reader a look into the lives of immigrants in Brooklyn at the time.

10. *What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

I haven't read any other novels that I think would make a good addition to this category of Perspectives Bibliography. This is because this novel is very unique, and has a different focus and message than most books I have read.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Tatjana T., 11th Grade

Date Reviewed: April 10, 2023

1. The main plot of "Brooklyn Bridge" by Karen Hesse revolves around the life of Joseph Michtom, a young Jewish immigrant boy living in New York City during the early 20th century. The book portrays his struggles with poverty, discrimination, and family dynamics, as well as his dream of building the Brooklyn Bridge and finding his place in a new country.

2. I most identify with Joseph because, like him, I also face challenges in navigating issues of identity, belonging, and family expectations. I can relate to his determination to pursue his dreams and overcome obstacles despite his circumstances.

3. The main message of this book is about resilience, family, and the pursuit of dreams. It highlights the immigrant experience, the challenges of assimilation, and the importance of family support in navigating a new country and culture. It also emphasizes the power of determination and perseverance in achieving one's goals.

4. I believe that the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story without coming off as preachy. The author uses Joseph's journey and experiences to illustrate the challenges and triumphs of the immigrant experience in a nuanced and relatable way, without overtly moralizing or lecturing.

5. In "Brooklyn Bridge," multiple perspectives on important topics such as immigration, discrimination, and family dynamics are explored. I agree with Joseph's perspective on the power of determination and resilience in overcoming challenges, as well as his belief in the importance of family support and pursuing one's dreams.

6. Reading this book reaffirmed my beliefs about the importance of empathy, inclusivity, and the value of diverse perspectives. It highlighted the challenges faced by immigrants in a new country, and deepened my understanding of the immigrant experience and the struggles that individuals from marginalized communities may face.

7. While the book provides a rich and nuanced perspective on Joseph's experiences as a young Jewish immigrant boy, it could benefit from including perspectives from other marginalized groups, such as immigrants from different cultural backgrounds or individuals facing discrimination based on race, gender, or other factors, to provide a more intersectional lens.

8. Yes, this book encouraged me to pursue further reading and research on topics related to immigration, discrimination, and the immigrant experience. It inspired me to learn more about the history of immigration in the United States and the challenges faced by immigrants from different backgrounds.

9. I would suggest this book to readers who are interested in historical fiction, stories of immigration, family dynamics, and resilience. It may particularly resonate with readers who enjoy coming-of-age stories and tales of overcoming adversity.

10. Another book that would make a good addition to this category of perspectives biography is "Inside Out & Back Again" by Thanhha Lai, which also explores the experiences of a young immigrant girl navigating the challenges of assimilation, discrimination, and family dynamics. It provides a similar perspective on the immigrant experience from a different cultural background and can complement the themes explored in "Brooklyn Bridge."

Reviewer Name and Grade: Kylee K., 11th Grade

Date Reviewed: 7/18/2023

1. What is the main plot of this book?

The main plot of "Brooklyn Bridge" follows the journey of Joseph Michtom, a Russian immigrant, and his family as they navigate the challenges of assimilation and the pursuit of the American Dream in early 20th-century New York City. The novel intricately weaves together themes of family, identity, and resilience against the backdrop of historical events such as World War I and the construction of the iconic Brooklyn Bridge. As Joseph grapples with his Jewish heritage and the pressures of societal expectations, his story becomes a poignant exploration of cultural identity and the pursuit of belonging in a new land.

2. Which character did you most identify with and why?

I most identified with Joseph Michtom's daughter, Sophie, who embodies a sense of resilience and determination in the face of adversity. Though I'm not an immigrant, I moved to the US in the fourth grade from China and had similar struggles regarding weaving and connecting the different parts of my life.

3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?

The main message of "Brooklyn Bridge" revolves around the power of perseverance and the importance of holding onto one's cultural heritage amidst the pressures of assimilation. Through Joseph's journey, the novel underscores the significance of embracing one's roots while also adapting to new circumstances, highlighting the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. As Joseph and his family navigate the challenges of immigrant life, their story becomes a testament to the enduring strength found in community, faith, and the bonds of family.

4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?

The main message of "Brooklyn Bridge" was seamlessly woven into the narrative, avoiding any sense of preachiness. For instance, when Joseph reflects on his Jewish heritage, he muses, "Our traditions are what bind us together, even in the face of adversity. We must honor where we come from while also embracing the opportunities of our new home." This quote encapsulates

the novel's central theme of balancing tradition with adaptation, offering a poignant insight without feeling didactic or forced.

5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?

The novel presents multiple perspectives on the importance of cultural heritage versus assimilation, but I found myself aligning more with Joseph's viewpoint, which emphasizes the significance of honoring one's roots while also embracing the opportunities of a new homeland. As Joseph reflects, "Our heritage is a part of who we are, and we must carry it with pride, even as we strive to build a better future for ourselves and our children." This sentiment resonates with me, as it acknowledges the complexities of cultural identity while advocating for a balanced approach to assimilation and preservation of heritage.

6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

Reading "Brooklyn Bridge" reaffirmed my belief in the importance of cultural heritage and the resilience of immigrant communities in the face of adversity. As I followed Joseph's journey, I gained a deeper appreciation for the challenges faced by immigrants and the ways in which they navigate the complexities of identity and belonging in a new land. The novel's portrayal of perseverance and the bonds of family reinforced my conviction that cultural heritage is a source of strength and resilience for many individuals.

7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

While "Brooklyn Bridge" provides a rich exploration of the immigrant experience from the perspective of the Michtom family, it could have benefited from incorporating the voices of other immigrant communities to offer a more comprehensive portrayal of the immigrant experience in early 20th-century America. By including a more diverse range of perspectives, the novel could have highlighted the shared struggles and triumphs of immigrants from various backgrounds, enriching the narrative with a broader cultural lens.

8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?

"Brooklyn Bridge" inspired me to delve deeper into the history of immigration in America and the contributions of immigrant communities to the cultural fabric of the nation. After reading the novel, I sought out additional resources on the construction of iconic landmarks such as the Brooklyn Bridge and the experiences of immigrant families during the early 20th century. Additionally, I was motivated to explore contemporary issues related to immigration and cultural identity, sparking further reflection and engagement with these important topics.

9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?

I would recommend "Brooklyn Bridge" to readers of all ages who are interested in historical fiction, particularly those intrigued by stories of immigration and cultural identity. The novel offers a compelling exploration of the immigrant experience in early 20th-century America, making it an engaging read for anyone interested in learning more about this pivotal period in history. Additionally, readers who enjoy character-driven narratives and richly detailed settings will find much to appreciate in this heartfelt tale of resilience and belonging.

10. What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?

Another book that would complement "Brooklyn Bridge" in the category of immigrant experiences is "The Book of Unknown Americans" by Cristina Henríquez. Like "Brooklyn Bridge," Henríquez's novel offers a poignant portrayal of immigrant life in America, exploring themes of identity, belonging, and the pursuit of the American Dream through the perspectives of various immigrant families. By adding "The Book of Unknown Americans" to the Perspectives Bibliography, readers can gain a broader understanding of the diverse experiences and challenges faced by immigrant communities in the United States.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Kevin D., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: May 28, 2024

1. *What is the main plot of this book?*

"Brooklyn Bridge" by Karen Hesse follows the story of Joseph Michtom, a fourteen-year-old boy living in Brooklyn in 1903. His parents have just invented the teddy bear, which brings them sudden success and completely changes their family. However, at the same time, Joseph dreams of escaping to Coney Island but faces the realities of his family's new business and the social/economic struggles of the time.

2. *Which character did you most identify with and why?*

I most identified with Joseph Michtom because of his longing for adventure and his struggle between prioritizing his personal dreams and family responsibilities. His feelings of being torn between his own desires and his duty to his family are pretty relatable to me. I also relate to and appreciate Joseph's determination to find his own path while also having to deal with his family's expectations.

3. *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I think the main message of "Brooklyn Bridge" is about the harsh truth and complications of the American Dream and the impact of economic changes on families. The book displays how sudden success can bring both opportunities and challenges, and also shows the importance of family, resilience, and adapting to new circumstances through Joseph's story.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I think the main message was effectively integrated into the story. The book intertwines Joseph's personal experiences with a solid historical context and important themes such as: the pursuit of the American Dream, the impact of economic changes, and the struggles of balancing one's own desires with external things. For example, Joseph's longing for adventure contrasts with his expectations at home, and his family's sudden business success brings both opportunities and new challenges.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

The book presents multiple perspectives on economic mobility, mainly being the optimism of Joseph's parents with their new business success and Joseph's own skepticism about the changes in their lives. I think both perspectives are agreeable; Joseph's cautious perspective shows the

complications and potential downsides of rapid economic change. Meanwhile, his parents' positive outlook on business success can't really be seen as a bad perspective either.

6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

My beliefs about the impact of economic changes on people and families have kind of changed. The book made me realize that rapid economic changes, even if positive, can still have some downsides and can completely alter family relationships and individual responsibilities.

7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

I think the book could have included a broader perspective on the Michtom family's success, such as the community or family-friends. While the book only focuses on the family's internal changes, exploring how others perceived and interacted with them after their rise in status would definitely be an interesting perspective and add more depth to the themes and the book itself.

8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?

No.

9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?

I would suggest this book to middle school and young adult readers, particularly those interested in historical fiction and socio-economic changes. Readers who are interested in early 20th century American history and the immigrant experience might also find this book interesting and informative.

10. What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?

Another book that would make a good addition to the category of "socio-economic differences" is "Esperanza Rising" by Pam Muñoz Ryan. This novel tells the story of Esperanza, a young girl who must adapt to a new life of poverty and hard work after her family's fortunes are reversed. Both "Esperanza Rising" and "Brooklyn Bridge" explore topics of resilience and adaptation to changing economic conditions.