

TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

Armando and the Blue Tarp School

written by Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson

illustrated by Hernán Sosa

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

*Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades K–5

Guided Reading Level: Q

Accelerated Reader® Level/
Points: 2.8/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: AD500L

*Reading level based on the Spache
Readability Formula

Themes: Education, Poverty, Leadership, Optimism and Enthusiasm, Friendship, Kindness and Caring, Responsibility, School, Overcoming Obstacles, Working Toward a Dream, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest

SYNOPSIS

Buh-beep! Buh-beep!

A truck horn sounds through Armando's colonia, his neighborhood, near the city dump. Señor David is back, setting up school on a blue tarp spread on the ground. Oh how Armando longs to go to this school, but he knows he must help his father pick through trash in the dump. Armando's family is *pepenadores*, trash pickers, living off things they can use, recycle, and sell from the city trash dump. Armando works with his father to help support the family, but he also finds things for himself—pencil stubs, a notebook, and an old paint set—with which to write and paint.

When Armando's parents decide at last to let him spend afternoons at Señor David's school, Armando is overjoyed. The children learn to read and write in Spanish and English. They learn math. And they draw, much to Armando's delight. And one momentous day Armando's love of drawing helps bring an almost unimaginable treasure to the children of the colonia.

The story is inspired by the work of David Lynch, a teacher from New York who first began working in a *colonia* in Mexico in the early 1980s. Told with honesty and hope, *Armando and the Blue Tarp School* is a testament to the pursuit of dreams and the power of one person to make a difference in the lives of others.



BACKGROUND

From the Author's Note: Although this story is fiction, it is based in fact. Señor David is David Lynch, a former special education teacher from New York. Armando is a composite of children we met at the *colonia*. Like them, he works alongside his father in the dump. He sees beauty in the simplest of things, even though his surroundings are bleak. Neighborhoods like his surround trash dumps in big cities around the world. David Lynch's first school was a blue tarp spread on a patch of bare ground. Over time Lynch created a school curriculum that included kindergarten, Mexican culture, and English as a second language.—*Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson, 2007*

Authors Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson have created a special website for *Armando and the Blue Tarp School* at <http://www.bluetarpschool.com/>.

Pepenadores (Trash Pickers): This LA Times article describes trash pickers as “impoverished people [who] make their living by scavenging from dumps, often jealously guarding their bounties and residing in makeshift hovels alongside and within the heaps of trash.” http://articles.latimes.com/1988-07-25/news/mn-4650_1_tijuana-dump. The Tijuana dump sits on 22 acres of privately owned land. Its proximity to the US border makes it one of the more desirable and potentially more profitable dumps at which to work. The LA Times article goes on to explain, “Despite their impoverished and desperate appearance, most of the grimy trash-pickers of Tijuana eke out a living. The pickers’ limited incomes are supplemented by usable salvaged items, from building material to clothing to food.” There is a monopoly system in which there is one buyer designated to purchase each type of item found at the dump from the pickers, with the dump receiving a cut of the profits.

The documentary “The Tijuana Project” includes video footage of the Tijuana dump and a great deal of background information. The trailer, found here, gives younger students a visual image of the dump: <http://www.sagetechnovideo.com/tijuana-project.htm>. Portions of the full length feature, found at the same site, may be appropriate for older students but it should be pre-screened due to drug and violence-related content.

David Lynch and Responsibility, Inc.: David Lynch was given a World of Children award in 2006 for his efforts to educate the children of the Tijuana city dump. The World of Children website explains: “Leaving his tenured teaching position behind, Lynch set up a tarp near where the children worked with their parents at the dumpsite (<http://www.worldofchildren.org/honoree/david-lynch/>). Here he offered an English class which eventually became a complete education system, called **Responsibility, Inc.**, serving 400 children per year. As financial support for buildings and teachers became available, Responsibility grew to provide classes for children ages 3 to 7 and a computer lab and art school for all the children living around the city dump... From inception in 1992, Lynch’s program has placed a majority of its kindergarten graduates a full year ahead on the entrance exam provided by the Mexican public school system, Lynch’s efforts have served to significantly better the lives of thousands of Mexican students, involve the lives of thousands of American students, and inspire the lives of countless others. For more information, please visit www.responsibilityonline.org.”

Awards and honors for *Armando and the Blue Tarp School* include:

- “Choices,” Cooperative Children’s Book Center
- **Best Children’s Books of the Year**, Bank Street College of Education
- **Paterson Prize for Books for Young People**, The Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College
- **San Diego Book Awards**, Picture Book, San Diego Book Awards Association
- **Skipping Stones Honor Award**, *Skipping Stone Magazine*



VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

colonia, gravelly, plank, tarp, stubby pencil, ledge, hillside, smoldered, reporter, newspaper, front page, fence boards, chicken wire, garage doors, cement, easel

Academic

trudged, rickety, tumbledown, blared, silent, scrawny, flapped, frowned, sketch, foul, squawking, tattered, swatted, drooped, copied, treasures, longed, manage, whooped, lumbered, echoed, snuffling, jolted, howled, crackled, gathered, roared, greedy, swallowed, sturdy, chattering, tumbled

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. What does it mean to live in poverty? How might a child's life be impacted if his or her family is poor?
2. What would be different about your life if you couldn't go to school?
3. What's it like at a city dump? What might you find there?
4. As a hook for students, consider showing them the book trailer created by authors Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson: <http://www.bluetarpschool.com/booktrailer.php>

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, author and illustrators' dedications, illustrations, author's note, photographs, and glossary and pronunciation guide.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out about:

- what life is like for Armando and his family working in the Tijuana city dump
- how the opportunity to go to school changes Armando's life
- how Armando helps his community
- how the actions of one person can impact the lives of many people

Encourage students to consider why the authors, Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson, would want to share this story with young people.



AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses.

To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What do Armando and Papa do all day? What do they see on the way home? What does Armando do?
2. Who is Señor David? What does he bring? What does he ask the children? How do they respond?
3. What do the children do at the blue tarp school?
4. What does Armando ask his parents at dinner? How do they respond? How does Armando react to their answer?
5. What is it like at the dump? What does Armando find? What does he think about?
6. What does Isabella tell Armando about school? What does Armando do?
7. What does Papa tell Armando about school? How does Armando react?
8. What do the children do at school?
9. What wakes Armando up? What happens?
10. What do the children do at school in the days after the fire? Who comes to visit? What do they do and say?
11. What does Señor David show the children? What happens because of the newspaper article?
12. How is the school built? What materials are used? Who helps? What is the school like once it is finished? What special item does Papa contribute?

How does Armando react when he sees the finished school?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What might Papa and Armando's mood be as they "trudge" home from the dump? How does Armando's mood change when he sees Señor David's truck? How can you tell?
2. What does Señor David mean, "A school can be anywhere?" How does this challenge the common idea of a school?
3. Describe Señor David as a teacher. What makes him likable? What makes him effective?
4. Explain how Armando feels when his parents say he can't go to school.
5. What does Armando's work in his notebook show about him as a person? Why does he call his notebook and paints "treasures"?
6. Explain Papa's decision to let Armando go to school. Why did he change his mind?
7. How can you tell the children are learning? How else would you say school impacts their lives?
8. How might the children and families feel as they watch the fire burn their *colonia*? Why does Señor David say, "I'm sorry" to Armando?
9. Why do you think Señor David chooses just to have the children draw during the days after the fire?
10. How does the building of the school demonstrate the power of community? What does it show about the community's belief in the power of education?
11. What are some themes of this story?



“This poignant picture book narrated by a young boy . . . Without melodrama, Armando’s story shows what poverty means and the hope that things can change.”

–*Booklist*

“Without patronizing, Señor David defines the essence of humanitarianism, while the pepenadores, ever searching for beauty in the beast, find gold-and prize it.”

–*Kirkus Reviews*

“An extensive author’s note explains that Señor David is based on David Lynch. . . . The well-written text will be an eye-opener for children who take school for granted.”

–*School Library Journal*

Reader’s Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader’s response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What are some of the impacts of poverty illustrated in this book? Explain how the effects of poverty are interrelated. Provide examples from the text.
2. What does the word “resilience” mean to you? (Find a definition here: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/resilience?s=t>) How do the characters in this book demonstrate resilience? What factors do you think contribute to someone’s ability to be resilient? Write about a time when you or someone you know was resilient.
3. On the book’s website, the authors describe Señor David’s impact as an example of the “Power of One” (<http://www.bluetarpschool.com/justforkids.php>). What does this mean? Who else’s actions end up contributing to the positive outcomes in this book?
4. One commentator on this book described it as being “an eye-opener for children who take school for granted” (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2354/reviews/778>). How does this book show that learning is a privilege? How does Armando have a different appreciation of this privilege than a

student who’s always attended a traditional school? What privileges have you experienced related to learning?

5. How does the finished school building represent what Armando has “longed” for, as the text says? Think back to when you started school. What did you long for school to be like? What aspects of school are most important to you now?

NOTE: Additional Reader’s Response questions are available in this Resource Guide (http://static.squarespace.com/static/533e5b23e4b089b274abbd9/t/53f6cc1ae4b0a52701b0660d/1408683034190/2009_PBOR.pdf).

ELL/ESL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students’ level of English proficiency, after the first reading:



- Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about their school or a favorite teacher.
 5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
 6. This book is available in a Spanish edition (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2719>). Use this edition if it would be beneficial for your students.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3 and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production and Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 5)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 6)

1. Perform this book as Readers' Theater using this script from the California Young Reader Medal (CYRM) committee members (http://static.squarespace.com/static/533e5b23e4b089b274abbd9/t/53f6cc80e4b0a52701b06698/1408683136497/2009_PBORReadersTheater.pdf). Discuss the emotions of each character to help students read with expression.
2. Read other books about students who overcome obstacles to obtain an education, such as *Up the Learning Tree* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2464>) or *Yasmin's Hammer* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2718>). Compare the experiences and actions of Armando and the other main characters. Discuss the supports and influences that enabled each character to learn.
3. Complete the “I wish my teacher knew...” exercise described in this news segment (<http://www.bluetarpschool.com/cbs-this-morning.php>). Discuss with students what Armando and/or characters in other books may have written had they completed the assignment.
4. Read this interview with the authors, in which they discuss the benefits and challenges of being co-authors (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2354/interviews>). Pair students up to complete one of the writing tasks in this guide. Afterwards, discuss the experience of co-authoring.

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3 and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7–9)

(Writing Standards, Texts Types and Purposes, Strands 1 and 2)

1. Using the author's note and supporting web resources (e.g. www.responsibilityonline.org), create a factual timeline about the work of David Lynch. Discuss how each event influenced the next (e.g., the role of the *LA Times* article in expanding Lynch's impact).
2. Discuss how publicity can raise awareness for important issues. Have students choose an issue important to them, either in their own community or further afield. Have students write about the issue in a newspaper article format and share in



the school or local paper or an applicable online platform.

3. Discuss the various factors that could prevent children from being able to attend school, or otherwise challenge their ability to learn. Have students or small groups choose a specific topic to investigate in depth and report back to the class. For example, students could focus on access to education for girls (<https://www.malala.org/girls-education>) or nutrition and school performance (<https://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Publications/Studies/Fueling Academic Performance - Strategies to Foster Healthy Eating Among Students/Nutrition and Students' Academic Performance.pdf>).

Art

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strand 2, Craft and Structure, Strand 4, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)

1. The authors' note describes Armando as someone who "sees beauty in the simplest things, even though his surroundings are bleak." Discuss what this means. Ask your students to create a painting or drawing highlighting the beauty of something simple, labeling it with a sentence as Armando did in his notebook.
2. Have students experiment with the illustrator, Hernán Sosa's, style by creating a picture using white outlines. Provide Manila paper and colored pencils, including white to outline each shape, or have students draw and cut figures out from white paper with outline around each shape and attach them to a background page.
3. Additional art activities can be found on <http://www.bluetarpschool.com/justforkids.php>.

School-Home Connection

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strand 1 and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4 and 5)

1. Have students interview an adult family member about their own education and ideas about education. Brainstorm questions as a class using the text as to spark ideas. (E.g., Did you face any barriers to obtaining an education? Who was your

most inspiring teacher?") Share and compare responses as a class.

2. Involve families in an effort to support an organization that promotes education for at-risk students. Collect spare change or returnable bottles and cans, host a bake sale, collect used books, etc.

Additional titles to teach about responsibility:

As Fast As Words Could Fly written by Pamela Tuck, illustrated by Eric Velasquez
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/as-fast-as-words-could-fly>

The Bus Ride written by William Miller, illustrated by John Ward
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-bus-ride>

Buffalo Song written by Joseph Bruchac, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/buffalo-song>

The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families written by Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore, illustrated by Susan L/ Roth
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-mangrove-tree>

Seeds of Change: Planting a Path To Peace written by Jen Johnson, illustrated by Sonia Sadler
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/seeds-of-change>

Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story written by Ken Mochizuki, illustrated by Dom Lee
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/passage-to-freedom>

Twenty-Two Cents: Muhammad Yunus and the Village Bank written by Paula Yoo, illustrated by Jamel Akib
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/twenty-two-cents>

Irena's Jars of Secrets written by Marcia Vaughan, illustrated by Ron Mazellan
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/irena-s-jars-of-secrets>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edith Hope Fine is a full-time writer of children's books and stories. Fine's *Under the Lemon Moon*, published by Lee & Low Books, was a Parents' Choice Award Honor book. Fine lives in Encinitas, California. To find out more, visit Edith Hope Fine's Web site at edithfine.com. Fine, along with co-author Judith Pinkerton Josephson, have created a special site for the Lee & Low Books title *Armando and the Blue Tarp School* at bluetarpschool.com.

Judith Pinkerton Josephson is a full-time writer of children's books and stories. Josephson's *Growing Up in World War II* won first place in the San Diego Book Awards. She lives in Encinitas, California. To find out more, visit Judith Pinkerton Josephson's Web site at judithjosephson.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Hernán Sosa was born in Argentina and raised in Paraguay. He received a degree in visual communications from the Colorado Institute of Art. He currently works as an illustrator of children's books and as a graphic designer focusing mostly on magazines. His web site is coroflot.com/hernansosaillustration.

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.

ORDERING INFORMATION

On the Web:

www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering (general order information)

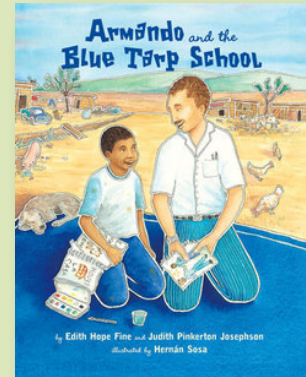
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/armando-and-the-blue-tarp-school>
(secure online ordering)

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail: Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Book Information for *Armando and the Blue Tarp School*



\$9.95, PAPERBACK

978-1-58430-278-0

32 pages, 9-1/8 x 9-5/8

*Reading Level: Grade 3

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades K-5

Guided Reading Level: Q

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 2.8/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: AD500L

THEMES: Education, Poverty, Leadership, Optimism and Enthusiasm, Friendship, Kindness and Caring, Responsibility, School, Overcoming Obstacles, Working Toward a Dream, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/armando-and-the-blue-tarp-school>

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.