

Armando and the Blue Tarp School

by Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson
illustrated by Hernán Sosa

(Arranged for Readers' Theater by CYRM Committee Members, for classroom use only.)

Characters:	Armando	Papá	Mamá	People	David	Isabella
	Children	Narrator 1	Narrator 2	Narrator 3	Narrator 4	

Narrator 1: All day Armando and Papá had worked at the dump, picking through trash. Now they trudged down the rocky hillside. Afternoon sunlight shone on broken glass, rickety fences, and tumbledown houses in their *colonia*, their neighborhood.

Narrator 2: Buh-beep! Buh-beep! A truck horn blared from below.

Armando: (*pointing*) ¡Mira! Look, Papá! It's Señor David, from last summer!

Papá: You can go. Just this once.

Narrator 3: Armando hurried down the gravelly path to tell his friend Isabella the news. Off they ran—down the dirt road, across the wobbly plank, and past the big rock.

Armando: Señor David! You're back!

David: My friends, *mis amigos*, I've missed you!

Narrator 4: Señor David spread a big tarp on the ground. The first time Señor David called his blue tarp a school, Armando hadn't understood. He thought schools had walls, floors, and roofs. But Señor David said a school could be any where—even on a tarp in a *colonia*.

David: Ready to learn more?

Children: ¡Sí! Yes!

Narrator 1: Nearby, scrawny chickens pecked at the dirt.

David: Hen.

Narrator 2: He flapped his arms.

David: Brawk-brawk-brawk.

Children: *La gallina*. . . hen. Brawk-brawk-brawk.

Narrator 3: On his chalkboard Señor David wrote the letters of the alphabet. The children called out letters in Spanish and English, then practiced words they had learned last year: house—*la casa*; boy— *el muchacho*; girl—*la muchacha*.

David: Very good! *¡Muy Bien!* We'll work hard this summer, but we'll have fun too.

Narrator 4: Armando couldn't wait. That night Armando ate slowly. At last he asked if he could go to school on Señor David's blue tarp.

Papá: (*frowning*) Do not fill your head with dreams of school.

Armando: I went last year.

Papá: You are older now. I wish things could be different. Be we are *pepenadores*, trash pickers. You must do the work of our family.

Mamá: Your sisters are small. I need to stay here with them. The money you and Papá earn helps us live.

Narrator 1: Tears stung Armando's eyes. More than anything, he wanted to learn, but he knew Papá and Mamá were right. Later Armando sat on his thin mattress. With a stubby pencil, he sketched a picture of Señor David's truck.

Narrator 2: As Papá and Armando neared the dump the next morning, the foul smell grew stronger and stronger. Armando searched for bottles and cans, clothes and toys. Some to sell, some to use. In one bag, he found shiny buttons and silvery thread. From another he pulled a smudged notebook and a dented tin of paints. These he kept.

Narrator 3: By the time Armando and Papá headed for home, the sun had dipped low, painting the sky red. Hearing the gate squeak, Isabella raced over to share what she had learned at school. Words covered her paper.

Isabella: *La rana* is frog. We hopped with Señor David. We said ¡*cruá-cruá!* and *ribbit-ribbit!*

Armando: I wish I could go with you.

Isabella: I know. But I'll bring you new words. I promise.

Narrator 4: After Isabella left, Armando copied her words into his notebook. Then he made a picture for each one. Before he went to sleep, he put his notebook and paints with the other treasures on the ledge above his head.

Papá: People are talking about Señor David's school. We have always been *pepenadores*, but learning is important. It could help you find different work when you grow up. Maybe in the city. So Mamá and I decided. You may leave the dump early— for school.

Armando: But ... the money ...

Papá: Somehow we will manage.

Armando: *Gracias*, Papá. Thank you.

Narrator 1: From then on Armando worked mornings with Papá. Each afternoon Armando and Isabella walked down the dirt road, across the wobbly plank, and past the big rock to Señor David's school.

Narrator 2: One night the smell of smoke jolted Armando awake. Winds howled. Wood crackled.

People: (*shouting*) ¡*Fuego!* ¡*Fuego!* Fire! Fire!

Narrator 3: Mamá and Papá gathered the children and ran from the house. Flames roared through the *colonia*. Papá rushed to help. Men slapped at the fire with wet blankets. They threw buckets of water.

Narrator 4: Safe on the hillside, Mamá hugged the children close. Heart thudding, Armando watched as a wall of greedy flames swallowed up the house.

David: Your words and drawings?

Armando: *Todo está perdido*. All gone

David: I'm sorry. *Lo siento*.

Narrator 1: Two days later the scent of smoke still hung in the air. Señor David and the children gathered on his blue tarp.

David: What a hard time for you, *mis amigos*. No lessons today. Let's just draw.

Narrator 2: Armando colored orange and red flames, black smoke, and frightened faces. As the children worked, a car drove up.

David: Please welcome our visitors. They're writing a story about the fire and our school in the city newspaper.

Narrator 3: The photographer snapped pictures. The reporter scribbled notes. When she spotted Armando's drawing, she asked to borrow it. Armando wondered why but Señor David said it was okay. The next day Señor David held up a newspaper.

David: Look! ¡*Mira!*

Narrator 4: Armando's eyes grew wide. On the front page was his drawing of the fiery night. His picture — for everyone to see! The children cheered. Armando grinned. Señor David gave him a copy of the paper to show Mamá and Papá.

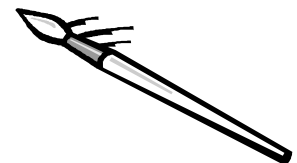
Narrator 1: Later that week came another surprise. When a kind woman in the city saw Armando's painting and read the story, she sent money to build a school.

Armando: Where?

David: Right where our blue tarp school had been.

Narrator 2: Over the next weeks Señor David and Papá built a new house for Armando's family from fence boards, chicken wire, and old garage doors. They helped other families rebuild too.

Narrator 3: Whenever people could, they worked on the school. They mixed cement and smoothed out a floor. They sawed wood and pounded nails to build four walls and a sturdy roof. Light poured in where the windows would go. At last, the school was finished.

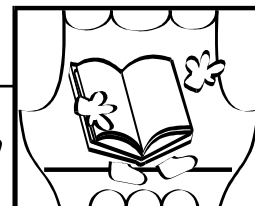


Readers' Theater

Owney: The Mail-Pouch Pooch

by Mona Kerby

illustrated by Lynne Barasch



(Arranged for Readers' Theater by CYRM Committee Members, for classroom use only.)

Characters: Narrator 1 Narrator 2 Narrator 3
 Narrator 4 Narrator 5

Narrator 1: In the year 1888, on a cold rainy October night in Albany, New York, a straggly terrier mutt wandered through the empty streets looking for a place to get out of the rain. He was so skinny his ribs stuck out.

Narrator 2: Owney settled in at the Albany Post Office. He patrolled the mail room, nosing out trouble. Rats and cats didn't stand a chance. He supervised the men as they sorted and bagged letters. Different men took Owney home, thinking that he might want a family. But Owney wasn't interested. Each time, he made his way back to the post office—and to his mail pouches.

Narrator 3: A few weeks later at the depot, as the train started pulling away, Owney chased after it. Running lickety-split, he leaped and landed in the mail car. The Albany men were sad.

Narrator 4: The train crew waved their hats. They were glad to have Owney aboard. All the way to New York City, Owney sat in the open doorway, seeing new sights and sniffing new smells.

Narrator 5: The Albany postmen looked for Owney on the next train from New York—and the next, and the train after that. Days and weeks went by, but Owney didn't return.

Narrator 1: Several months later, the Albany postmen were at the train depot when, lo and behold, Owney jumped off the mail train. His friends asked him where he had been, but Owney just wagged his tail.

Narrator 2: After that, the men tied a note to his collar. "Dear Railway Postmen: Owney guards the U.S. Mail. Will you let us know where he has been? Please attach your note to his collar."

- Narrator 3: It wasn't long before Owney hopped another train. The next time Owney showed up in Albany, he had so many tags hanging from his collar that he could barely lift his head. The postal employees tried to remove some to make his load a little lighter. But Owney didn't like that. He growled.
- Narrator 4: So his pals bought a harness that stretched across his back and around his chest. They spread his silver and brass medals all over his body instead of under his neck. This made it easier for Owney to walk. He liked it fine.
- Narrator 5: Owney took off again, crisscrossing the country on the mail trains. He hopped a train to Denver and stopped at all the small towns in between. Some say he even inspected trains and depots in Alaska, Canada, and Mexico.
- Narrator 1: Owney guarded the mail and the men in their blue wool uniforms. If a railway man fell asleep when it was time to pitch out or pick up a pouch, Owney barked him awake.
- Narrator 2: In those days, there were lots of train wrecks. But no train ever had an accident when Owney was onboard. Railroad crews called him a good-luck dog.
- Narrator 3: Owney not only picked up tags from the railway postmen, he also collected trinkets and coupons. Owney just wanted the trinket. He loved the jingling sound of his medals when he walked.
- Narrator 4: Not everyone welcomed Owney. In Montreal, Canada, the dogcatchers threw him in the pound. Then they wrote to the postal employees in Albany and demanded two dollars and fifty cents.
- Narrator 5: Owney's pals paid the fine, and Owney was put on the next train home.
- Narrator 1: No dog worked harder for the U.S. Postal Service. In 1892, Owney greeted the Republicans at their convention in Buffalo, New York. In 1893, he met with the Iowa bankers in Council Bluffs, Iowa. In 1895, he welcomed the chicken farmers at the Tacoma, Washington, Poultry Association.
- Narrator 2: But Owney was beginning to slow down. He was at least eight years old, which is old for a dog, especially one that has spent a lifetime jumping on and off trains. His friends decided to give him a trip around the world, by mail boat. He had his own suitcase with a blanket, comb, and leash.

Narrator 3: Before Owney could travel, his pals had to make up a new mailing rate. They called it “Registered Dog Package.” And they attached this note to his harness: To all who may meet this dog: Owney is his name. He is the pet of 100,000 postal employees of the United States of America . . . Treat him kindly.

Narrator 4: On August 19, 1895, Owney boarded the steamship Victoria in Tacoma, Washington. Since the mail was in no danger of falling off the boat, Owney didn’t have to spend all his time supervising. He chased rats. And in the afternoons, he curled up on a mail pouch. In a way, he was still doing his job.

Narrator 5: When the ship arrived in Japan, Owney was issued an imperial passport. From Japan, Owney went to China and then on to Hong Kong. He sailed up the Suez Canal and into the harbor of Algiers in the Mediterranean Sea and then to Sao Miguel in the Azores Islands in the Atlantic Ocean.

Narrator 1: And, finally, he arrived in New York City. Owney finished his world trip in his favorite way—by train. On December 29, 1895, he arrived back in Tacoma, Washington. His trip lasted 132 days. He wore two hundred new tags, trinkets, and ribbons. He had gained six pounds.

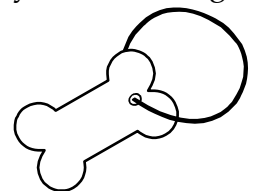
Narrator 2: In 1896, at the San Francisco dog show, surrounded by fancy-looking dogs and their fancy-dressed owners, two postal employees stood at attention. The judge presented Owney with a medal—“Greatest Dog Traveler in the World.”

Narrator 3: In the spring of 1897, when the National Association of Railway Clerks invited Owney to their convention in San Francisco, he took one last trip.

Narrator 4: In the huge auditorium, the curtains opened. Owney walked to the center of the stage. He was slow, but he still jingled with every step, and his shiny tags sparkled in the spotlight. The crowd leaped to their feet, roaring.

Narrator 5: After that, there was only one thing to do. Owney had to retire. His pals sent him home to the Albany Post Office, where his career as a mail dog had begun. He was given plenty to eat and a soft mail pouch where he could curl up and fall asleep.

Narrator 1: Sometimes on those long, sleepy afternoons, his nose twitched and his paws quivered. Maybe Owney was dreaming about the good old days—of running lickety-split to catch a train and traveling the world.

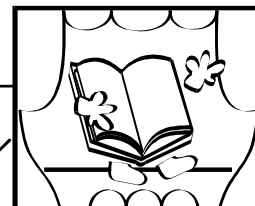


Readers' Theater

Willy & Max: A Holocaust Story

by Amy Littlesugar

illustrated by William Low



(Arranged for Readers' Theater by CYRM Committee Members, for classroom use only.)

Characters:	Willy	Max	Professor Solomon	German Officer
	Narrator 1	Narrator 2	Narrator 3	Narrator 4

Narrator 1: Long ago in the city of Antwerp, when my grandpa Will was just a boy, his parents owned an antique shop in a tall, narrow house on Twelve Months Street. It was always filled with unusual things, and you never knew what you might find— a mummy's crown, a pirate's peg-leg, a fire-breathing dragon from ancient China!

Narrator 2: One day, Willy's papa put a painting in a golden frame in the shop window. It was called *The Lady*, and she was so beautiful that when you smiled at her, she smiled back!

Willy: Do you—do you like to play hide-and-seek?

Max: Of course.

Willy: Come on, then.

Narrator 3: Down they went into a cellar as big as a cave. Here Willy's papa kept the biggest antiques—the ones that weighed so much, they needed chains and ropes to move them.

Max: Wow.

Narrator 4: But Willy was used to the old pipe organ and the dusty suits of armor.

Willy: You count.

Max: 1-2-3-4-5-

Narrator 1: Willy ran quickly to a bronze angel with folded wings—his favorite hiding place. In a secret hollow between its wings, Willy made himself very small.

Max: I'll find you!

Narrator 2: They took turns running, hiding, and laughing—especially when Max tried to fit inside a dusty suit of armor. Willy didn't feel shy with Max, and he was sorry when Professor Solomon came to the top of the cellar steps and said Max had to go home.

Max: Let's meet at the park. Tomorrow—by the big stone fountain.

Narrator 3: Willy's eyes were shining. The park! He could hardly wait.

Narrator 4: The next day Max was waiting, as he'd promised.

Max: Look what I brought. Soap, sticks. All we need's some paper for the sails and we'll have two boats.

Narrator 1: Willy loved to make boats. And newspapers made perfect sails! He poked around in a nearby trash can and found one. GERMAN TROOPS INVADE NORWAY! Willy froze. The faraway war wasn't far away anymore! Soon, maybe the soldiers would be marching into Antwerp—into the Jewish quarter where Max lived. Hastily, Willy tore the page off the newspaper and threw it away.

Willy: Here Max, I've found our sails!

Narrator 2: For the rest of the afternoon, Willy and Max were pirates on the high seas. And only once did Willy shiver.

Narrator 3: The weeks passed quickly. If a war was coming, Willy and Max never talked of it—and they were never apart. One time, Max brought a camera to the park. He asked a policeman to take their picture.

Max: Now, we'll be friends forever.

Narrator 4: And Willy knew it must be true, for one Friday night, Max invited him to erev Shabbos—their Sabbath dinner. Willy loved the way the house smelled of soap and floor wax. The way the silver candlesticks flickered and glowed.

Professor

Solomon: You're like family to us, Willy.

Narrator 1: After dinner, Professor Solomon told the boys the stories of Abraham, Daniel, and Esther while *The Lady*, on a carved rosewood easel, smiled nearby. There was no mention of war.

Narrator 2: One afternoon at Willy's house, he and Max sat listening to the radio. They could hear the sound of a thousand cheering voices—and one, louder and angrier than the rest.

Narrator 3: "The Jews are the enemy of the German people!" it screamed into Mama's kitchen, and Mama took Max into her arms and held him close. But they all knew it was no longer safe. Within days, war came to Belgium. German tanks rumbled over the cobbled streets of Antwerp, and soldiers in iron-gray helmets marched into the Pelikaanstrasse—the Jewish quarter. They banged on Professor Solomon's door.

German

Officer: You are no longer a citizen of Belgium. This house is ours now.

Narrator 4: The officer ordered his men to kick in every locked door—to search every room. They found money—jewelry. One soldier took a pearl ring. Another found the silver candlesticks and stuffed them in his coat. Then the officer saw *The Lady*. She smiled at him.

German

Officer: We'll be back for this.

Narrator 1: The next day, Max told Willy everything that happened.

Max: Papa says we may have to leave Antwerp.

Narrator 2: They sat in the park and Max wore a little yellow star on his coat. Willy missed him already.

Narrator 3: It was the middle of the night when Willy and his parents awoke to a knock at the door. It was Professor and Max. He handed him something rolled up in brown paper.

Professor

Solomon: We are going away. It's *The Lady*. Will you take care of her for me until the war is over?

Narrator 4: Willy's papa nodded. But Willy couldn't bear to look at Max. He might not see him again. Not ever! And now suddenly they were going. Willy had to say something. Only Max said it first.

Max: Friends forever?

Willy: Forever.

