



## The Matchbox Diary

*Paul Fleischman, Bagram Ibatoulline (Illustrations)*

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**Newbery Medalist Paul Fleischman and Bagram Ibatoulline tell a breathtaking immigration tale with appeal across generations.**

*"Pick whatever you like most. Then I'll tell you its story."*

When a little girl visits her great-grandfather at his curio-filled home, she chooses an unusual object to learn about: an old cigar box. What she finds inside surprises her: a collection of matchboxes making up her great-grandfather's diary, harboring objects she can hold in her hand, each one evoking a memory. Together they tell of his journey from Italy to a new country, before he could read and write — the olive pit his mother gave him to suck on when there wasn't enough food; a bottle cap he saw on his way to the boat; a ticket still retaining the thrill of his first baseball game. With a narrative entirely in dialogue, Paul Fleischman makes immediate the two characters' foray into the past. With warmth and an uncanny eye for detail, Bagram Ibatoulline gives expressive life to their journey through time — and toward each other.

## The Matchbox Diary Details

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Author : Paul Fleischman , Bagram Ibatoulline (Illustrations)

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## From Reader Review The Matchbox Diary for online ebook

### **Bonnie says**

My new favorite book to recommend to teachers, especially in this season of test prep. As we prepare for our 3rd-5th grade state standardized testing, there is a focus on reading short passages to make inferences as well as writing responses to short passages. This title wins on all counts--it is a beautifully illustrated telling of a wonderful story in its own right. The fact that it is also suitable for so many curriculum-based uses is lagniappe. (As Fleischman is also the author of *Weslandia*, another well-used book in many curricula, I guess it should not be a big surprise.)

A perfect fit for immigration, this book also lends itself to the "small moment" writing of the writers' workshop model of teaching. I have discussed with teachers using it to introduce a writing prompt of what would you put into a matchbox that would represent a small moment in your life, or asking students to write about what a historical character might put into their box and why. So many possibilities!

Definitely a keeper, maybe even one to order a second copy of. Props to Junior Library Guild for choosing it to send my way, too.

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### **Courtney says**

Read/skimmed it quick, but I want to give it a better read when I have time one day.

A great-grandfather meets his granddaughter for the first time, and offers to tell her a story about any item she picks out from his collection. She picks out a box of matchboxes, each containing small objects - this is his childhood diary that he started in Italy and kept while his family immigrated to America and started a new life.

Interesting story for adults, though I'm not sure how much kids will appreciate it. The illustrations are **amazing**.

I am kind of confused by the one illustration of him, his mother, and sisters though - he's dressed as I'd expected for the estimated time period, but they look like they're dressed almost in medieval or renaissance clothing. It could be the veils throwing me off...

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### **QNPoohBear says**

I loved this story because the first half is so very very similar to my own family's story. I love the idea of a matchbox diary and using the objects to tell a life story. Those objects lose meaning without the story so I hope great-granddaughter remembers the stories to pass down and writes them down.

I loved how the boy worked hard and savored words when he finally learned to read. I also liked how he didn't gloss over how hard it was to become American and the prejudices he faced. His chosen occupation is lovely and perfect for the boy who dreamed of keeping a diary.

The illustrations are gorgeous and lifelike! I felt like I was right there with my family in impoverished southern Italy in the 1910s and on that ship with them. The flashback sequences are done in a sepia tone to mimic old photos.

This is a must-read to children/grand/great of immigrants, particularly great-grandchildren of Italian immigrants of that generation. My nieces just about remember my Nonnie and she lives on through her stories and recipes.

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### **Clare Cannon says**

A magnificent picture book about a girl who meets her great-grandfather for the first time, and with the help of little keepsakes in an old cigar box, hears the story of his childhood and his family's journey from Italy to the USA.

Though a story of hardship and struggle, it gains a special beauty and worth when passed on to a younger generation, as though both are now enriched by the experience of one. The text is simple, like an elderly man talking with a child; he remembers, and she chimes in with an occasional question or comment.

The illustrations are a window into the now faded but still emotive pull of memories held dear; we are shown a past re-lived, and it is a treasure.

A marvellous book about history and sacrifice, family and education, and the importance of stories to communicate from one person to another the meaning and value of life.

Reviewed for [www.GoodReadingGuide.com](http://www.GoodReadingGuide.com)

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### **Heidi says**

WOW! I'm not sure I know what to say about this book. I knew when I saw that it was written by Paul Fleischman and illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline that it would be a wonderful book. I was not disappointed. The book more than lived up to my expectations. The immigration experience is not a new story, but telling it through the lens of a diary kept by a young boy through small objects he collected and stored in old matchboxes is brilliant. A story told through the objects gathered over a lifetime. The grandfather in the story grew up in Italy and didn't learn to read until moving to America, but he wanted to have a diary so he began collecting items that represented things of importance to him. Each object has seemingly little significance, except in his memory. A tender story of the power of things around us to remind us of important events in our lives.

As for the illustrations, they are exquisite. The detail on the acrylic gouache (watercolor) paintings is amazing. The illustrations are so detailed they almost look like old photographs, which is clearly what the artist was going for. The pictures of the great-grandfather with his granddaughter are done in beautiful shades of color while the pictures representing the stories of his past that he tells are in shades of brown and white. The innocence of the children and the kindness and wisdom of the grandfather shine through very clearly. This is the kind of picture book that I love to just sit and look at because of the beauty of it. I highly recommend this story of family and change and life.

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### **Clay says**

Moving story from one of my favorite writers, Paul Fleischman, combine perfectly with warm, detailed, beautifully made illustrations from one of my new favorite illustrators, Bagram Ibatoulline. Four well-deserved stars so far. Highly recommended. Can you say Caldecott?

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### **Paula says**

So pretty, so affecting! So happy to unreservedly praise this marvelous book by Paul Fleischman and Bagram Ibatoulline. Makes me think of books by Allan Say, but just a little bit more accessible.

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### **Blanco Meyers says**

I usually prefer simple line drawings to realistic paintings, and this book had more dialogue than most of my favorites.

However, I really enjoyed the idea that the great-grandfather created a "diary" using matchboxes with an important object to commemorate certain life events. And the illustrations are beautiful.

We follow Great Grandfather from Italy when he is quite young through his immigration and many travels and travails in the U.S.

Great Grandfather is an inspiration to document our own stories and to learn the stories of others.

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### **Cheryl says**

Historical fiction for those youngsters who prefer picture-books. The pictures add a lot to the story, and I like them. Too bad, though, that they are old-fashioned and sepia, which makes history seem more remote than relevant.

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### **Macklin says**

I loved the illustrations for this book. It is a lovely story of a man telling about his journey to America to his great-granddaughter, and collecting memories in matchboxes. A lovely tale of family and history.

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## **Donalyn says**

A great-grandfather shares his immigration story through the matchbox diary he kept before learning to read.

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## **Tasha says**

A great-grandfather shares his life's story with his great-granddaughter who picks out a cigar box filled with matchboxes to find out more about. He has been collecting matchboxes that are filled with small items documenting his life, a diary of objects. They tell of his poor childhood in Italy where he'd be given an olive pit to suck on to make him less hungry. There is a picture of his father who went to work in America and sent money home. His story then turns into one of an immigrant with a trip to the port and then aboard a large ship. He tells of arriving at Ellis Island, of the terror of possibly being denied entrance, and the eventual reunion with his father. The entire family, including the children, worked to earn enough money to survive. Life became better and he learned to read until he started in the printing industry and opened a bookstore.

Fleischman writes of the tentative relationship of a young child and her great-grandfather who are just getting to know one another for the first time. This is a story filled with small gems, treasures of stories that the two of them explore side by side. The small matchboxes are a wonderful device to add surprise and delight to the story. Fleischman has created an entire picture book told only in dialogue, making it a pleasure but challenge to read aloud.

Ibatoulline's illustrations are precise and detailed. The matchboxes are shown up close and just opened, as if the reader had been the one exploring them. The stories are shown in sepia tones with modern day in full color. They are filled with a beautiful warmth in both cases.

A distinguished picture book, this is a brilliant combination of historical story and vivid illustrations. Appropriate for ages 6-9.

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## **Grace says**

I absolutely adored Paul Fleischman's picture book, *The Matchbox Diary*. What really stood out to me about this book was the main character, the great-grandfather of the little kindergarten girl. What an endearing man! I was captured with his story about immigrating from Italy to America. Fleischman did a great job of telling the story through the trinkets the elderly man collected over a lifetime and the memories that they represented. He took ordinary items and made them come to life. The illustrations made the story seem even more realistic. Bagram Ibatoulline made the images look as if they were photographs taken from the great-grandfather's past. The details of the matchboxes and the intricate items that each box contained contributed to the realistic feel of the story. The great-granddaughter was a relatable character for many young readers. This book is heart-warming and engages readers in history. I think this is a lovely picture book that deserves to win the 2014 Caldecott Award!

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## **Kimberly says**

Wonderful! What a lovely story, and beautiful illustrations!

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## **David Schaafsma says**

I am on this path to read all the 2013 Goodreads nominated Illustrated books. Got up early this morning and read three or four we got from the library. But this is one of three or four I have read that I will own, for sure. Gorgeously, delicately, romantically illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline, and much space is given to these illustrations. It is a story I was imagining might be less for kids than the librarians that are choosing this book, and parents who just love it for its love of history and family memory, and grandparents who want to pass memories down.

My friend Roxanne Pilat has written a dissertation called *Piano, Piano* about her own nineties-year old father's memories that she calls "paramemoir" (not her term), stories told in snatches and added to and filled in and told alongside pictures and railway tickets and poems and recipes and reflections about memory and narrative. Memory and family history as pastiche, as scraps, and the compilation of them as a kind of diorama or collage. This story, *Matchbox Diary*, is less ambitious, maybe, but no less impressive, the story of a grandfather who tells the story of his life through small objects he kept in his youth in matchboxes. Each object connects to a story for him. He wants to encourage his granddaughter to keep a diary and value memory and story and the past in the way Pilat also cares about. I loved this book, in part because the stories are like Pilat's, Italian-American. Gorgeous book. About history and memory and family and storytelling.

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