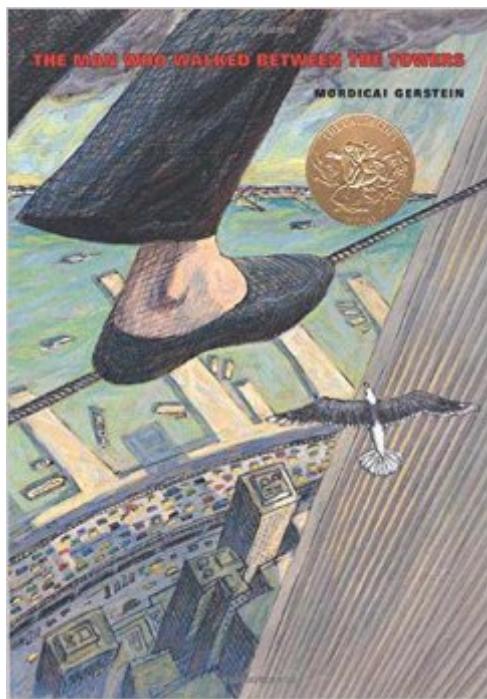


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# The Man Who Walked Between The Towers



## **Synopsis**

The story of a daring tightrope walk between skyscrapers, as seen in Robert Zemeckis' The Walk, starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt. In 1974, French aerialist Philippe Petit threw a tightrope between the two towers of the World Trade Center and spent an hour walking, dancing, and performing high-wire tricks a quarter mile in the sky. This picture book captures the poetry and magic of the event with a poetry of its own: lyrical words and lovely paintings that present the detail, daring, and--in two dramatic foldout spreads--the vertiginous drama of Petit's feat. *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers* is the winner of the 2004 Caldecott Medal, the winner of the 2004 Boston Globe - Horn Book Award for Picture Books, and the winner of the 2006 Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Children's Video.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: AD480L (What's this?)

Paperback: 44 pages

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Language: English

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ISBN-13: 978-0312368784

Product Dimensions: 7.6 x 0.2 x 11.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars Â See all reviews Â (143 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #5,156 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in Â Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Performing Arts

Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

## **Customer Reviews**

I have heard that very refrain from children time and time again while reading this book. In my Gypsy-like lifestyle of a substitute teacher, I took this book with me, knowing that it would enchant the students I had, no matter where I was. Every class I read this to was spellbound. They would gasp and stare and just could not believe that a REAL person ever did what Phillippe was doing! I had a first grader reach out to touch the sky under Phillippe on one spread, he was so enthralled. In a class of 29 very-hard-to-impress third graders that I was in for 6 weeks, we made a project out of it when they designed their own drawings on what they would walk between, because they were so

inspired. During the reading, near the end, on the page that stated quietly "Now the towers are gone," I had very quiet acceptance of the missing towers. The author tells the story with such reverent delight (if it was ever possible to combine the two, Gerstein has) that children naturally fall in and accept the story as is. "The Man Who Walked Between The Towers" has become one of my favorite children's books and has earned a spot in my teaching "bag of tricks." It is very moving and inspiring, and highly deserving of the Caldecott Medal for 2004.

After the events of September 11 there was an odd movement on behalf of the children's book publishers to explain the event in picture book form for the benefit of the little ones. Some of these attempts verged on the callous (paper cut airplanes flying into paper cut buildings) while others were nice thoughts but ultimately raised more questions than they answered ("Fireboat", for example). In the case of Mr. Mordicai Gerstein, however, a happy medium was reached. Here is a book that is all about the Twin Towers, but it does not linger on their fate. A mere two years after the events of 9/11, this book is an eloquent and elegant elegy to a moment when the Twin Towers helped to bring the world a great deal of wonder and joy. The story is based on the true tale of one Philippe Petit. A French aerialist, Petit was adept at juggling, unicycle riding, and (as it happened) tightrope walking. When construction finished on the Twin Towers in 1974, Petit happened upon the crazy notion of walking between them. The man was no stranger to such a stunt. He had, after all, walked between the towers of the Notre Dame Cathedral back in his native France. After asking the Tower's owners for permission, his request was quickly declined. To be allowed would fly in the face of a million safety regulations, after all. The quick thinking Petit reasoned that all that was left was to go ahead and do it anyway. Involving some friends, a construction disguise, and a four hundred and forty pound reel of cable, Petit successfully made it to the roof of one tower in the night and connected the line between the towers with help. Then, as the dawn broke, he did his famous walk across. Once finished, Petit was sentenced by a judge to perform for the children of the park as his penance; a punishment the artist suffered gladly. The book concludes the story on a wistful note. We view the space where once the towers stood and read, "Now the towers are gone". A ghost of the Two appears on the next page and the book says, "But in memory, as if imprinted on the sky, the towers are still there. And part of that memory is the joyful morning, August 7, 1974, when Philippe Petit walked between them in the air". What Gerstein has done is give us a memory of the Twin Towers that is a good and joyful one. This is no mean task, especially when you consider the horrors that were to follow. I've heard an interesting assortment of objections to the book in my time. Some people argue that no book about the Twin Towers is appropriate for children, whether the

book concentrates on 9/11 or not. Such sentiments are silly. You can't ignore the past and, when done tastefully, a book about a significant event can teach more to children than a lesson plan could ever hope to. Other objections say that the book glorifies a silly stunt. Considering the fact that Petit was well trained, took all the necessary precautions, and did what he did for the love of his art, this objection is petty at best. Some say that this is not Gerstein's strongest work and that he should have won the Caldecott for another book instead. I have not read other Gerstein creations, so my experience is (like that of the Caldecott committee) limited to only his most recent creation. But to say this book is not medal worthy is patently ridiculous. Just at glance at the book is enough to tell you that. Look with me. The text is not only true, it is respectful. What I'm about to write here is second-hand knowledge garnered from a children's literature listserv, so I can't vouch that what I'm about to say is true. However, I believe that before this book was published Philippe Petit knew that it was being written and requested a look at the galleys prior to publication (not a ridiculous desire considering he was the book's star and hero). Such a look was not granted but just after publication Petit was allowed a copy of the story and he greatly approved of it. The only correction he wished to make was the section discussing the thickness of the cable he walked across. I believe he wished it to be changed from five-sixths of an inch to seven-eights of an inch. Future books have been published with this change, so if you happen to have an earlier printing of the story you may have a collector's item on your hands. My point with this story is the pains with which the author has taken to render everything in it factual. On top of that, it's very well written, with the viewer gasping and cheering with every close shave and near accident Petit incurs. As for the illustrations, they are utterly lovely. From the windswept cover (note the very American bald eagle flying below Petit) to the large pull out sections showing both Petit's walk and the height at which he was walking. If you can read through this book and successfully suppress all shudders then you're a better man than I, Gunga Din. Best of all is how evocative the tale is. The title page displays the towers being built on a snowy day, and there is a repetitive motif of parents holding up babies to look at Petit. This book is filled with delicate wonders and scintillating details on every page. I can't imagine how anyone could dislike this story, but some do. Just the same, if you want a picture book filled with beauty and breath-taking adventure, with one happy ending and one wistful ending apiece, select Gerstein's award winning creation. It deserves its applause.

On an otherwise normal day in August 1974, a young Frenchman pulled off what may be the most impressive (not to mention foolhardy) wire-walking exhibition in history. New York City's early commuters looked up to the almost-completed World Trade Center towers to see a man,

experienced aerialist Philippe Petit, walking back and forth across them on a wire. This amazing (albeit highly illegal) achievement has now been immortalized in impressive ink and oil paintings in Mordicai Gerstein in *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*. Among the artwork you will find the ingenious use of two foldout illustrations, each one establishing an amazing change in perspective of Petit's wire-walking feat and making the drama of the event all that more palpable. Published in 2003 and the recipient of The Caldecott Medal, this book is sure to captivate many young minds with its story and artistry (with a sense of vertigo thrown in absolutely free of charge), and it does stand as something of a touching reminder of the two towers that fell on September 11, 2001 and the spell they cast in their own silent yet mighty fortitude. Alongside the artwork is the story, economically told, of Petit's dream and the manner in which he made it come true. It describes how he and some friends dressed up as construction workers, hid out on both towers until nightfall, and got the wire-walking cable (which was a mere seven-eighths of an inch wide) in place, after which Petit walked, ran, danced, and even lay down on the outstretched wire over the course of nearly an hour. He was then, of course, arrested but, to my surprise, ordered only to perform his feats for the children of New York City. This is a fabulous story that will literally take your breath away, especially if you are as afraid of heights as I am, but I can't get over just how dangerous and illegal this was (to his friends as well as himself) and can only wonder how Petit got off so easily.

I'm a special education resource teacher who works with struggling readers in small groups. I recently read "*The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*" as an instructional read-aloud to one group. They were absolutely fascinated, and these fifth and sixth graders who have reading difficulty were so engrossed in the story of Philippe Petit. They asked wonderful questions and eagerly tore into a post-reading writing assignment. The illustrations in this book, also by the author, are awe-inspiring. I can't recommend this book highly enough; it's fantastic and one of the best additions to my classroom library in a long time.

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