

FRONT SREET REVIEWS: August 1, 2006

In the tale of Arthur, the Christmas Elf by Valerie Connelly, two misguided children are reminded of the joy that Christmas can bring to those with open hearts.

Angie Smith has everything a girl could want and has begun to see the traditions of the holidays more as a nuisance than a blessing. When she informs her mother, Anna, that she would rather receive money than gifts for Christmas, Anna becomes exasperated with her daughter's attitude and begins to wonder when Angie lost her Christmas spirit.

Timothy Anderson has survived on second-hand clothes and toys ever since his father died and left behind a family of six. Timothy's grandmother moved in to help out, but her age and frailness prevent her from being of much assistance any longer. Timothy works to help his mother, Marie, support their family, which she finds difficult on the wages she earns as housekeeper to the Smith family.

As a blizzard threatens to extinguish holiday celebrations, Anna Smith and Marie Anderson find themselves stranded alone in Anna's SUV, stuck in a snowdrift. As they wait for help and try to keep warm, the two mothers discover they have more in common than they ever imagined. Anna is alarmed by Angie's nonchalant dismissal of the Christmas season and Marie worries over Timothy's growing hostility toward any reminder of his poverty, Christmas being the most recent.

Meanwhile, Arthur the Christmas Elf, who is Santa's appointed "Keeper of the Endangered Children List," has spotted Angie and Timothy in his magical Christmas Globe. He is determined to delete the two children from the Endangered Children List and restore their faith in the holiday spirit. He sets off with his trusty reindeer, Snowflake, to bring some warmth into the hearts of Angie and Timothy before it is too late.

Connelly's story is meant to be shared as a family. Part of Arthur's strategy for convincing the children is to provide them with ideas of gifts they can make with their own hands for their loved ones. The story is completed with detailed instructions for the reader on constructing gifts like the ones Angie and Timothy made for their own families. The tale, along with the craft instructions, contains colorful illustrations to engage the reader. The crafts emphasize the meaning of the story: that one does not have to lack money and possessions to be poor, and Christmas is not about cherishing gifts, but the people behind the gifts.

While the text of the story is written on a late elementary school/middle school reading level, the message of the story and the craft ideas are more appealing to younger children, which makes it even more important that the book be shared as a family or group. Younger children will enjoy the experience enthusiastically, as my own did, but may become frustrated if they attempt to read the story on their own.

www.readerviews.com

Arthur, the Christmas Elf

Valerie Connelly Nightengale

Press (2006)

ISBN 1933449233 Reviewed by Beverly Pechin for Reader Views (5/06)

"Arthur, the Christmas Elf" is one of the few books you will ever say must adorn your Christmas rituals. Like curling up with "The Night Before Christmas" in front of the tree and sharing a memorable time with your kids, this book will soon become one of the favorite and most asked for in families far and wide. A cup of hot cocoa and the story of "Arthur the Christmas Elf" will make your holiday times complete for years to come.

A wonderful collection of not only a beautiful story of friends and family and the true meaning of Christmas but a beautiful way to celebrate the family event with crafting afterwards! It's not often you get two books in one!

A touching story takes place during a huge blizzard on Christmas Eve and Arthur, the Elf, rescues the true meaning of Christmas as he saves Timothy and Angie from despair. They band together to keep Christmas alive and well as Arthur and his reindeer friend, Snowflake, fly through the night delivering Christmas magic.

I'm not sure if it's more fun to read the wonderful story or later craft the fun items at the end of the book designed to help kids of all ages create their own Christmas magic! Truly a book that will become a must in any family library and resorted back to often throughout the years to come. There are few books that become classics in family tradition, but this one should be in every family's Christmas adventures!

"Arthur, the Christmas Elf" would make a wonderful inexpensive gift to a family or teacher. I couldn't imagine being any more excited than to be able to share this wonderful piece of literature with my kids year after year. Keeping family values and family times together during the holiday season will become an easy task, even for the busiest of families.