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www.bookrapt.org.nz info@bookrapt.org.nz



***Once a Shepherd* by Glenda Millard illustrated by Phil Lesnie**

Publisher: Walker Books

RRP \$29.99

A thought-provoking picture book with a First World War theme.

The 100th anniversary of the war, and the thousands of lives lost, are being commemorated in many ways at the present time. No doubt many children will be aware of discussions, television documentaries, and events surrounding the WW1 remembrances. It is useful to have books such as *Once a Shepherd* to talk about with young people to help them comprehend the long-lasting consequences of war.

In the early pages, soft-toned illustrations convey an atmosphere of peaceful, country life. The rhyming text tells of a young man happily working on his farm and in love with a rosy-cheeked girl.

The symbolism of the gentle shepherd has Biblical overtones which carry over into the stark horrors of the battlefield. Grim, muddy scenes show stricken soldiers and emphasise the bewilderment and terror of those caught up in the deadly encounter. Even in that dreadful arena, compassion for others is shown.

The partnership between story and illustration reveals the humanity of soldiers on both sides of the conflict. It highlights what they have in common and how there are no winners in war. The message is clear that combatants are all human beings following orders in horrendous situations and, ultimately, all participants are changed forever.

This is a poignant tale to discuss with individual children, or in group situations. It accentuates the profound effect war has on soldiers and their families, and how a personal response can perhaps make a difference in the future.

Reviewed by children's author Jean Bennett

Author's website:

www.glendamillard.com

Illustrator's website:

www.phillesnie.tumblr.com

