



# The Sydney Taylor Shmooze

A MOCK BOOK AWARD BLOG

Review: *When Lightnin' Struck*

[May 11, 2022](#)



*When Lightnin' Struck*

by Betsy R. Rosenthal

Kar-Ben Publishing (imprint of Lerner Publishing Group), 2022

Category: Middle Grade

Reviewer: Rachel J. Fremmer

[Buy at Bookshop.org](http://Bookshop.org)

James Aaron (“Butch”) Ridgely doesn’t have it easy. His father died after being struck by lightning, his depressed and alcoholic mother is in jail, and his abuela, his paternal grandmother, a healer who could not heal herself, recently passed away. Now being raised by his grandfather, Pappy, James struggles to figure out his place and purpose in the world, how to stand up to his bully, and the meaning of a mysterious “charm” left him by his abuela. Helped along by a cast of characters including a Jewish friend whose family immigrated to Odessa, Texas because it was the name of their hometown in Ukraine and the local oilmen who eat at his Pappy’s diner, James makes his way. Texas on the verge of the Great Depression comes to life in *When Lightnin’ Struck*, tumbleweeds, dust storms, and all.

Does the book have sufficient Jewish content to be a contender for the Sydney Taylor Book Award? Well, answering that necessitates a spoiler (but one any adult would figure out early in the book). Paul, the Jewish immigrant best friend, is not, strictly speaking, the only Jewish character in the book. Church-going James, it turns out, has Jewish ancestry. I would say that the book indeed has sufficient Jewish content to be considered for the Sydney Taylor Book Award.



*Reviewer Rachel J. Fremmer is a lawyer-turned- elementary-school librarian. She is a native New Yorker and lives there with her husband and two daughters, ages 16 and 14, who are rapidly outgrowing her area of book expertise. She loves baking and doing crossword puzzles.*