

Following the tradition of many famous tales for children, such as *Toy Story* (1995), Gianni Rodari's 1964 novel *La freccia azzurra* (*The Blue Arrow*) explores the realities of childhood from the perspective of beloved toys.

The novel takes place on the Italian holiday of Epiphany (January 6), when, according to legend, an old witch called La Befana brings gifts to good children. However, in Rodari's tale, La Befana is not just a benevolent witch, but rather a shrewd business woman who owns a toy store. When a little boy named Francesco tells her that he would like a toy train called La Freccia Azzurra for the holiday, she informs him that he cannot receive it, since his mother never paid for his gifts the previous year. In fact, La Befana refuses presents to all the children whose parents are poor. Seeing this injustice, and how sad it makes little Francesco, the toys in her store devise a plan to escape aboard the Freccia Azzurra and deliver themselves to needy children throughout Italy.

This paper will explore how Rodari illustrates the plight of poor children for his young readers, but also encourages them to be proactive in helping other young people. Through the rhetorical technique of personification, the toys take on the qualities of actual kids, who work together to look after their less fortunate counterparts. In this way, Rodari's readers learn to understand class differences, and devise strategies to overcome them through collective action.