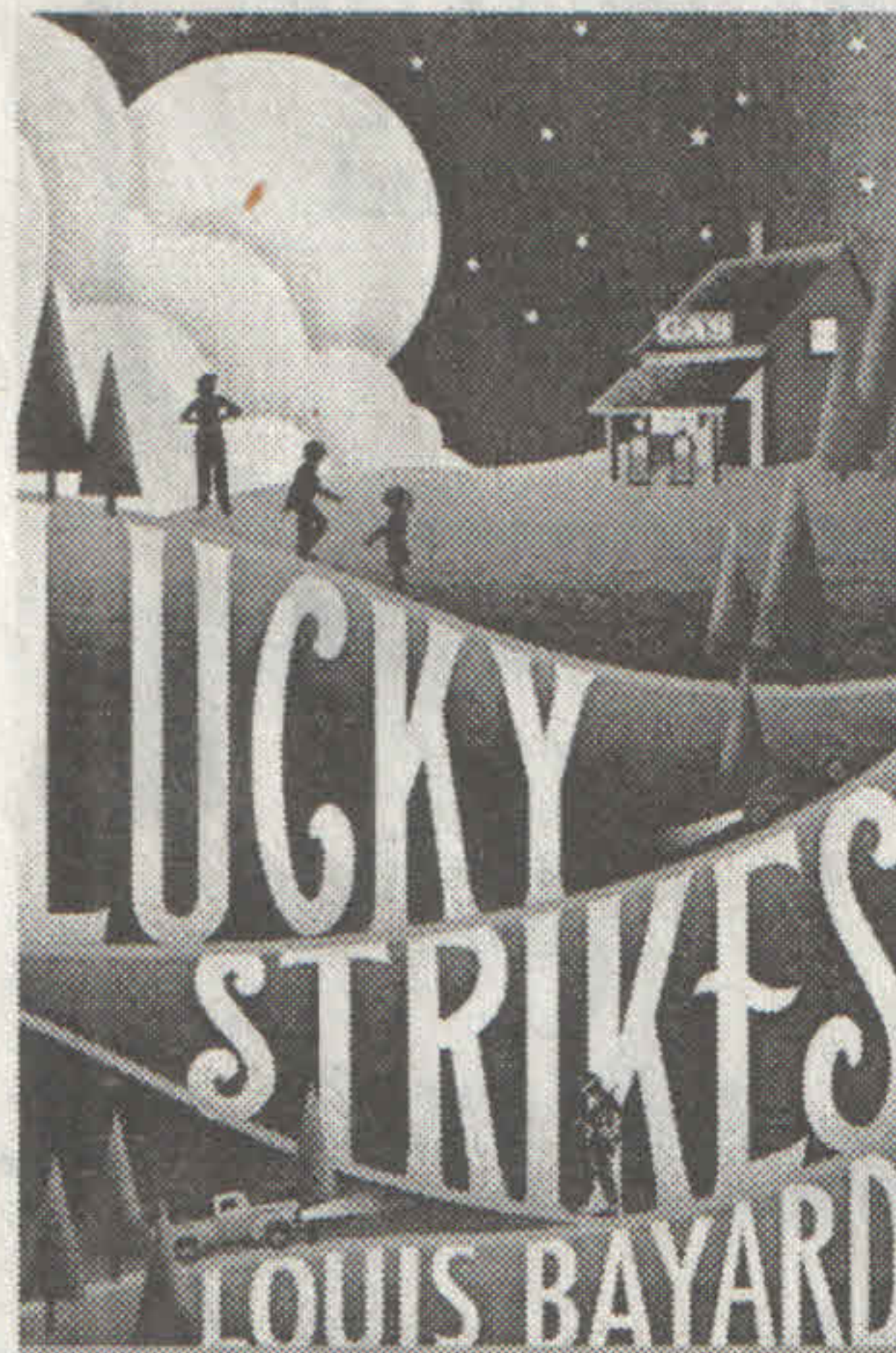




The Village School's Children's Book of the Month



'Lucky Strikes' By Louis Bayard

"Lucky Strikes" is set in the Depression era in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The book is filled with tragedy, joy and lots of humor. Fourteen-year-old Melia is determined to hold her family together after her mother dies, raising her younger brother and sister and somehow keeping their run down gas station going. She also has to figure out how to keep child services from taking them all and putting them into an orphanage, or worse, splitting them up and putting them up for adoption. Melia has gumption; as one disaster is resolved and the next one looms, she meets it all fearlessly, head on. She is also an excellent car mechanic. Told in first person, Melia has one of the best character voices I have ever heard in fiction. Her voice leaps off the page. It sings of 1934 Appalachia.

Along the way, Melia figures out that they need a father to avoid adoption. She takes in a stranger and asks him to be their daddy. He says yes, and Daddy Hiram become an essential member of their family. Hiram tells a lot of stories of his life — are they true? Is he a con artist? Is he their real daddy? Melia herself wavers back and forth on who Daddy Hiram really is.

Another thread of tension runs through the story: how are they going to survive on next to nothing, and at the same time, not cave in to the offers and threats from an evil rich man who wants their gas station to add to his portfolio of Standard Oil gas stations? And against her best intentions, Melia is falling for Dudley, the nephew of the evil rich man.

Poverty wraps itself around the story — it touches and influences all the characters, bringing out the best in some and the worst in others.

After I read the book the first time, I went back and read it again. It's that good. Knowing the outcome, I could spend more time enjoying the different characters and see how Louis Bayard was building the story in a particular direction.

Plucky stubborn head strong Melia wins our hearts early on. A special twist at the end is very touching. It makes you consider: what makes a family? This book is not sentimental at all.

I recommend this book for anyone 12 and older. It's for young and old adults. It would make a terrific movie.

**Book reviewed by
Rise Richardson,
Village School director**