

The House in the Night
2009 Caldecott Winner
Illustrated by Beth Krommes
Written by Susan Marie Swanson

When I went to my local library armed with the list for this week's book choices, I was looking forward to discovering the treasures each book held within its illustrations. As I made my way through the stacks I began to become discouraged and worried because none of the books were there. Finally, I came across *The House in the Night (House)* and my first reaction was, "Really, a black and white book, great...." I was so discouraged that I did not look at the book for several days. I even considered going to a different library but life has a way of taking over and I never did make it to another library. With the looming deadline I resigned myself to taking a look at this book and move forward with this assignment. My, my, my, what a gift was I given!

My first surprise was that the main character was a little girl, finally a little girl! This helped me become more interested because my life is full of little girls (who are not so little any more). As I looked more closely I also saw a dog, I have a dog that I love just as much as my girls. As the story moves along I found that the little girl does everything that my daughters used to do when they were younger especially wanting to unlock the front door when we got home. I even had to come up with a schedule for them. This little girl has three cats we too had three cats at one point, when we were experimenting with new pets. When she arrives into her room there are objects strewn about: toys, clothing, and instruments. My daughter's rooms are an exact replica of this

double page spread. The little girl soon settles into her bed leaving her clothing on the floor and goes into an adventure through the book she is reading. I wondered if this illustrator had been to my home, the happenings in this book can be the happenings in my home on any given night. As she returns from her adventure, we can see the mom's foot as she enters the room, just as I do each and every night to kiss them goodnight. Mom kisses her daughter, turns off the light, and picks up the clothing on the floor, now I have tears in my eyes.

The medium used by Krommes is scratchboard and watercolor the main colors are black, white and gold highlights. As I began to look at the illustrations I realized that this story would be a bedtime story. I noticed that the illustrator took great care in creating a world that any child would be able to relate with no matter where they were reading the book. The main character's house was one that any child could picture in their mind regardless of where they were reading the book. The night time sky would be a familiar scene as well as her pets, and surroundings. I was very intrigued to read her acceptance speech.

As I read the speech I felt as if this woman was one of my friends, she was nervously waiting to hear about an award but tried to go about her day as normal as possible. She shared her excitement, her realization that she had to pack and go shopping, and appear on the *Today* show the very next morning. This speech really made her human in my eyes. I felt that I was getting to know her because so often we read books and we look to see who the author is and who the illustrator is, but we do not really *know* them.

She goes on to describe her inspiration for her illustrations. She shared that the time she spent reading to her daughters served as instructional time for her. She took great care in taking note of what her daughter's liked in illustrations. As she was working on this book she often thought about what interactions parents and children would have as they read this book together. She shared that illustrators are encouraged to draw what they know therefore her main character would be a girl. However, in this story the girl would be her and not her daughters as she would not be able to decide between her two children. Yes indeed, what mother can choose between her children?

She gives credit to her editor for inspiring her to add the gold and not add any more colors. She shares that the house in the story is what she aspires to having once her own children grow up and leave the house. The objects in the house are modest because they are things she would want in her house. The dog in the story was her childhood dog. There is a mobile in the room which was something her family put together after a vacation. It is clear that this illustrator has poured so much of herself into this book.

When I did the first picture walk, then read the book I just looked at it as a really heartwarming story that an author and illustrator collaborated upon. I then looked at the book more closely and made all of the discoveries mentioned above. When I read her acceptance speech it was clear to me that so much more went into this book. I realized that in my hands I held a piece of this woman's hopes, dreams and fears. I also realized that as a mother of daughter's we share many of the same daily routines. As women who are mothers we share many of the same things, to love our children, to be

successful, and to have our work recognized and applauded. I never imagined that so much of a person could be seen through their illustrations. Then again, this activity also taught me that when we slow down and really look, so much of ourselves are reflected back to us because the perspectives we bring as readers influences that point of view. Each book we encounter will impact us on different levels because of our life experiences. I also learned that “black and white” goes beyond *black and white*.

I feel like I need to thank you for this assignment and send Beth Krommes a thank-you card as well. Oh, and a special thanks to the library for not having the other books. What an emotional week!