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A Big Quiet House



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Synopsis

It is the man who changes, and the world he perceives is transformed. With a tiny, cluttered house, giggling children, and a snoring wife, one man can't get a good night's sleep. "If only," he thinks, "I had a big quiet house!" He throws off his covers and decides to visit the wise old woman at the edge of the village. Surely she can help him solve his problem and she does, but not without giving him some very unusual advice. The woman convinces the man to fill his house with rambling animals, none of which cure his sleeping problem. Until one day, the man takes the animals back to where they belong, and he welcomes the rhythmic sound of his wife's snoring. This ancient Yiddish folktale proves that quite often, nonsense makes the best sense of all. Susan Greenstein's bold illustrationsÃ¢â ¬â ¢white pencil on black surface with watercolor - carry the reader through the warm interiors and peaceful nights of the shtetls of Eastern Europe. This story highlights the importance of perspective. Everyone has problems, however attitude can dramatically affect perception. It is the man who changes, and the world he perceives is transformed.

Book Information

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Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

Customer Reviews

Forest revisits the popular Yiddish folktale that also inspired Margot Zemach's classic It Could Always Be Worse (1976). A poor man who longs for a "big quiet house" where his wife's snoring

and his children’s giggling will not annoy him consults the wisest woman in the shtetl (most versions cast a rabbi as the advice-giver). On successive visits, she instructs him to bring first a chicken, then a goat, horse, cow, and a sheep inside his house, which of course adds to the din. Finally, when she tells him to remove the noisy animals, the man has a new appreciation for his relatively large and quiet house. Forest hams up her telling with intermittent rhymes and refrains, inviting audience participation with a number of animal noises, but she lacks Zemach’s canny wit and expert pacing. Greenstein enhances the story’s historical flavor by using watercolor and streaky white pencil on a black surface, resulting in a pleasingly old-fashioned, woodcut-like appearance. Ages 4-7. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Kindergarten-Grade 2-A flawed retelling of a familiar folktale. When a peasant complains that his small hut is too crowded and noisy, an old woman (in traditional versions, a wise man) tells him to bring first one animal, then another, and then still more into the house. Finally, when the poor man is driven to distraction by the crowd and the noise, she tells him to remove all the animals. The peasant is then delighted to find that his once-crowded hut is now roomy and filled only with the joyful sounds of his family. Forest’s narrative slips in and out of rhyme to the extent that the inconsistency becomes annoying. Some of the couplets flow naturally, while some seem forced. The meter is erratic as well. Greenstein’s bright, colorful scratchboard illustrations add a delightfully humorous tone to the piece, although the consistency of her depiction of the small town will not bear close scrutiny. Collections that already have Margot Zemach’s It Could Always Be Worse (Farrar, 1990), Marilyn Hirsh’s Could Anything Be Worse? (Holiday, 1974; o.p.), or Joanna Cole’s It’s Too Noisy! (HarperCollins, 1989) can pass on this one.Linda Greengrass, Bank Street College Library, New York CityCopyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is one of my favourite folktales, and Forest’s adaptation, with Greenstein’s witty illustrations, adds to the amusement and truth behind this classic story.In an twist from versions I’ve heard before, it is a village wise woman that the father in the story consults, rather than the traditional male rabbi/sage. She is just as wise as that rabbi ever was, though, leading us straight to a happy ending your kids (mine are 6 and 8) will enjoy over and over.Forest has chosen a loose, semi-rhyming scheme which is soothing but never predictable or "doggerel-ish." And the ending, though it IS predictable, is delightful when it comes, as this beleaguered "baalabos" (homeowner) is finally able to get some rest.

With children’s books, more often than not it is the illustrations that bring the story to life. I have heard this story many times, in many formats but the illustrations in this edition are wonderful, vibrant, and with a wonderful woodcut quality. The illustrations give this old and somewhat tired story a new life! They are so wonderful that they would be perfect by themselves without the story line, framed as decorations for a child’s bedroom-or any other part of the house for that matter.If quality illustrations, and not the typical run of the mill canned cutesy drawings, are what you value when picking a child’s book than this one is for you!

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