



## Ox-Cart Man

*Donald Hall , Barbara Cooney (Illustrator)*

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**Ox-Cart Man** Donald Hall , Barbara Cooney (Illustrator)

**Winner of the Caldecott Medal**

Thus begins a lyrical journey through the days and weeks, the months, and the changing seasons in the life of one New Englander and his family. The oxcart man packs his goods - the wool from his sheep, the shawl his wife made, the mittens his daughter knitted, and the linen they wove. He packs the birch brooms his son carved, and even a bag of goose feathers from the barnyard geese.

He travels over hills, through valleys, by streams, past farms and villages. At Portsmouth Market he sells his goods, one by one - even his beloved ox. Then, with his pockets full of coins, he wanders through the market, buying provisions for his family, and returns to his home. And the cycle begins again.

**"Like a pastoral symphony translated into picture book format, the stunning combination of text and illustrations recreates the mood of 19-century rural New England."**--*The Horn Book*

## Ox-Cart Man Details

Date : Published October 27th 1983 by Puffin Books (first published October 8th 1979)

ISBN : 9780140504415

Author : Donald Hall , Barbara Cooney (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Ox-Cart Man for online ebook

### SamZ says

1980 Caldecott Medal - Favorite Illustration: The winter scene where the family is tapping the trees for maple syrup and the sky is lit up by the sun - so beautiful!

This was a fun story about how people used to work the land they lived on and sold the excess to buy things they couldn't make themselves. My daughter (6) was having a hard time understanding why the man sold everything (especially the ox), and we had to have a talk about how the farmers didn't have a Target to run to whenever they needed stuff, so they had to make what they could to raise money to buy whatever they needed. The illustrations were beautiful and I really enjoyed the discussion that I had with K after we finished it.

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### Mike Smith says

Only the illustrations earn the second star. All are classic representations of colonial New England, but only the panoramic depictions of the Ox Cart Man's journeys are anything special. The flowing path evokes a journey of many days while allowing the whole journey to appear in one frame. The colors in these illustrations also portray the beauty of the region missing in the dreariness of the rest of the tale.

Unfortunately these three illustrations cannot overcome the boring, repetitive and deeply depressing language of the book. He did this. He did that. He did yonder. He did whatever. It's merely a catalogue of actions, barely even driving the action through time. Worst of all it cycles through to the next year, right into the EXACT SAME activities of the previous year, with only a few pieces of peppermint candy to highlight the year. The story lacks any human touch. The family is waiting for him, but they don't show any joy upon his return. They just take the tools he brought them and get to work sending him off with a new ox cart full of commerce the next year. Sure, the father still has a few coins still in his pocket, but they are forgotten and never directed towards bettering the family in any way. It's like being a Cubs fan - sure, there's next year, but it's going to be as miserable as this year. Wow, now that I've reviewed this and vented I want to take away the second star. But I won't, I did like those three panoramas. This book would have been better without the words.

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### Jamie says

Nice portrayal of a farmers life in the 19th Century. How the Farmer loads up his cart to products his family works on over the year. It shows many different uses for what a farmer might have access to. Such as mittens made from sheep wool. A great book to introduce your child to a good history lesson.

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### Carol says

I read this book when my kids were young, but the impact of the story didn't hit me until I watched Bill Moyers documentary about Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon. When Hall explained hearing the story that prompted him to write this book, I decided to revisit the children's book.

It begins in October when an unnamed farmer packs a cart with all the products and produce his family has made and grown. He arrives in Portsmouth and sells the candles, maple sugar, cabbages, etc. When I read aloud to my grandsons this afternoon, "...Then he sold his ox cart," one of them gasped. That reaction delighted me.

The idea of homesteading and self-sufficient living is attractive (as long as it remains theoretical) to me. The cycle of carving, sawing, weaving, whittling, knitting, etc. begins again as soon as he walks home.

The story charmed me. While I know that this won a Caldecott, I wasn't thrilled with her portraits. I liked the panoramas.

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### **Kathryn says**

I remember liking the book from Reading Rainbow\* (great episode where LeVar goes to Old Sturbridge Village! ) and I think I appreciated it even more now as an adult. I know I'm romanticizing the past, but as I read and explained the story to my son (he is almost three and was wondering about the old-fashioned aspects, such as why the man was walking with the ox instead of taking a car) I was really struck with the beautiful simplicity and lack of excess in that way of life... how ones work and home were so closely linked together, to the family and to the seasons... how one sold ones own goods directly... how everything was sold, not wasted, even the containers... how useful were the purchases made from the proceeds well, except those precious those wintergreen peppermints! ;-) I still get a little lump in my throat when the man has to sell his ox. I think the kiss on the nose really speaks to how, even though these animals were not pets and had their purpose to the family livelihood, the farmer still cared for him.

As to the illustrations, I love them. I'm a Barbara Cooney fan and I think her work here is just so spot-on to reflect the time period and the seasons. I love the spreads with the village and the one where the apple trees are blooming (my son is convinced that the cow on the hill is the baby ox spoken of earlier -- he kept waiting for that baby ox to show up ;-)

\*Does anyone know where the older episodes of "Reading Rainbow" can be found? There's a hodgepodge on Netflix now but I'd like more from the earlier years--those are the ones I remember as a kid and would love to share with my sons one day.

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### **Ronyell says**

I have actually first seen "Ox-Cart Man" on an episode of "Reading Rainbow" and I have decided to re-read this book after so many years of not reading it in my adult years. "Ox-Cart Man" is a Caldecott Medal Award winning book by Donald Hall along with illustrations by Barbara Cooney and it basically details the everyday life of how a man and his family keep on making new items to sell at the market and to use the money they earned from selling their items to buy new items. "Ox-Cart Man" might have a good insight on how people lived in America during the Colonial times, but the story might be a bit too boring for most children to handle.

This book is basically about a New Englander and his family and how he usually packs some wool from the sheep, mittens made by his daughter, a bag of goose feathers and birch brooms that his son carved in his ox-

cart. The father would then take these items to the market in his ox-cart and sell them and then he would use the money to buy his family provisions and then his family would use the provisions to make the same items they made at the beginning and the cycle starts all over again.

Donald Hall has done an excellent job at explaining to readers about how the people lived in America during Colonial Times. I liked the way that Donald Hall mentions how the family is able to make the items that they are planning to sell such as the daughter making the mittens by knitting it from the wool that came from the sheep and we were able to see the family make the items out of the materials at their own home. It was interesting seeing how the family made most of their items from their own backyard and then sell it to the market to buy new materials for their home. Barbara Cooney's illustrations contain the old-fashioned look of nineteenth century New England as the characters are dressed in colonial styled clothing such as the wife wearing a white bonnet on her head and the father wearing olive colored breeches with tall black boots. I also loved the way that Barbara Cooney drew the seasons of the year, especially with fall as we can see all the leaves falling off the trees, making the New England landscapes extremely breathtaking to look at.

The biggest issue I had with this book is that the story is a bit too boring since not much really happens in the story. All that happens in this story is that the family makes some items to sell at the market and then the father comes home and brings more materials for the family to make more items to bring to the market and that is pretty much the whole story. There is no action in the story and this might actually bore many children.

Overall, while "Ox-Cart Man" had a great insight on the family life in Colonial New England, the story might be a bit too boring for many children to handle since there is no action involved in the story.

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### **David Schaafsma says**

RIP Donald Hall, at 89.

Poet Donald Hall's children's book about a man and his family living his life in New England. The simple repetitions of the prose mirror the simple, regular life he lives in keeping with the land. The illustrations by Barbara Cooney seem old fashioned... which help us see that this way of life has been around for centuries... there's a lot of muted but still vibrant, warm colors in the illustrations and love and admiration for the man and his family and his way of living and exchanging goods for goods, his family's crafts...

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### **Mimi says**

The illustrations are just beautiful, detailed and nostalgic, and the story is educational. Lovely children's book.

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## **Manybooks says**

I absolutely love Barbara Cooney's expressive illustrations (they are bold, colourful and show a detailed slice of life, an almost palatable sense of time and place). By contrast and comparison, Donald Hall's text, while it is for the most part a more than adequate mirror of the illustrations, I do tend to find somewhat overly positive and saccharinely optimistic. The poetic narrative never really seems to expand all that much on the very salient and obvious truth that the Ox-Cart Man is away from his family for weeks, perhaps even months on end, that his wife and children must run the family farm on their own during his absence (probably not even knowing how their husband and father is faring unless he has time and/or is able to write them a letter), that the father himself is traveling in a covered wagon, constantly on the road, and that once he has sold his oxen and his cart, he must walk home. And while the narrative, Donald Hall's printed words, actually do point out this latter fact, the potential hardships and even dangers of this kind of traveling, they are never really detailed or even all that much acknowledged by the author (and perhaps even the illustrations do not even really point this out all that much either, but they do seem a trifle more realistic than how the text, the narrative appears, is presented).

As a counterpoint, in the *Little House on the Prairie* series, Laura Ingalls Wilder clearly demonstrates how difficult it is for the Ingalls when Pa has to leave the family to look for work (even if she never exaggerates, the hardships the family faces, the uncertainty of not having gotten a letter from Pa, that Pa has to walk for many many miles wearing shoes that are falling apart, the fact that chores are much more difficult when Pa is away, these potential issues are always clearly presented). And while I do not necessarily think that Donald Hall needed to have added information about this within the text proper of Ox-Cart Man, I think that a supplemental note, explaining the potential hardships faced by the Ox-Cart Man and his family during and because of his forced absence from the farm (and his travels) would have been an added bonus, and increased the teaching and learning value of this otherwise excellent offering.

Finally, I also have to wonder, if Donald Hall had added a bit of potential danger and uncertainty to the narrative itself, might that not have made Ox-Cart Man a bit more eventful and interesting (exciting) in scope? For the presented text does, at times, read more like a list of things for a farmer to do and for a farmer to sell. Still, highly recommended, especially for Barbara Cooney's illustrations (most definitely much deserving of the Caldecott Medal they were awarded)!

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## **Kristine Hansen says**

I find myself longing for a life this simple. Not that it isn't hard work, for it certainly is. But this is the old American ideal - to use your wit and ingenuity to provide for yourself and your loved ones. To me, a book like this is about a definition of 'success' that most people have forgotten.

The story is told simply. With repetition enough to get the point across. The illustrations reflect the historical period and the type of man the ox-cart man is, with their beautiful simplicity. Overall, I rather liked this book and wouldn't mind having a copy of my own to look at again and share with my children.

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## **Laura says**

Caldecott Medal 1980

I had just finished reading this book and it was laying open on my kitchen table when my husband came in and asked me what I was doing. I told him that I had just read a children's book and that I really liked it, I actually gave it five stars. He took one look at the page I had it opened to and said, " Is that Ox-Cart Man? I loved that book as a kid!"

I think my husband's reaction/ memory speaks volumes. It's simply a special book. I even googled real photos from the early 1800's from Portsmouth New England, the setting of this story, and can attest that the illustrations are tremendous in the way they express the architecture and the countryside of that time period. It's educational and sweet with lovely art work.

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### **Dolly says**

An interesting look at pioneer times and the things that people would do to make a living. Our girls enjoyed this book a lot and asked a lot of questions about why the man would sell his mode of transport. The illustrations by Barbara Cooney, as usual, are fantastic.

This book was selected as one of the books for the January 2016- Quarterly Caldecott discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

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### **Fjóla says**

The illustrations of Barbara Cooney really "make" this book. But the "dated" story is touching, how the farmer and his family work the land, harvest and make, knit, carve, weave things to sell at the market, how they make the utmost use of everything the farm and the land give them. It was a great opportunity to explain how people used to live in the "olden days" and how there used to be an age where people did not have stoves (well, okay, some people may still not have stoves), cars, supermarkets, TV, iPads ... All references to gender roles are of course very old fashioned, the daughter knits, the son carves and the father goes to the market and takes care of business. That makes one more thing to talk about, as we read the book. Finally, and again, the pictures are so beautiful, especially the big spreads, depicting the seasons. Some of the pages made me want to tear them out of the book to frame and hang, such as the sunset scene where the farmer is finally making his way home, or the winter scene with the low rising sun putting the clouds on fire. The vocabulary is a little bit challenging for a four year old, especially since so many of the terms and objects described are not part of our modern day reality. Other than that, it could even be an early reader book.

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### **Josiah says**

Perhaps as much so as any other Caldecott Medal winner, *Ox-Cart Man* finds the power of its telling chiefly through its incredible artwork by Barbara Cooney.

I think of Barbara Cooney as quite likely the hardest-working illustrator in the children's literature history, given her tendency to go the extra mile (or 2,000 miles!) collecting research for the scenes she creates. In *Ox-Cart Man*, Barbara Cooney brilliantly evokes the scenes of the simple life portrayed in the story. At times, I hardly noticed Donald Hall's text because the illustrations are the main focus; what makes this book memorable is Barbara Cooney's artistic expression.

*Ox-Cart Man* meets the gold standard for illustrations in a picture book. You're not likely to find artwork that is better at telling a story than what you see here.

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### **Laura (Book Scrounger) says**

I remember enjoying this book as a child. Reading it again I still enjoy it, but wasn't sure whether it would have quite the appeal for young children like my kids, because it's just so... practical. There's a lot of making and buying and selling, and these aren't things that young children generally give much thought to (I was probably a bit older before I really got to like it). But, if you're trying to find a book that involves all of those things, and gives a glimpse of an earlier, simpler but harder-working time period, and portrays the life cycle of family-oriented farm-based commerce, AND has wonderful illustrations as well, you couldn't do much better than this book.

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