



In a Village by the Sea

M??n Th? V?n , April Chu (Illustrations)

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Written in a spare, lyrical style using fresh, evocative imagery, *In a Village by the Sea* tells the story of longing for the comforts of home. A perfect book for teaching about diverse cultures and lifestyles through rich pictures and words, moving from the wide world to the snugness of home and back out again.

In a Village by the Sea Details

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Author : M??n Th? V?n , April Chu (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review In a Village by the Sea for online ebook

I'd So Rather Be Reading {Nat} says

In A Village By the Sea is a very unique and beautiful book. Kaitlyn really enjoyed it and so did I.

The illustrations make this book so beautiful and fun to read. As we read the book for the first time, I found myself looking forward to what each new page would hold. I especially liked the cricket's paintings, even though I didn't completely understand his role in the story. And maybe I wasn't meant to fully comprehend the seemingly prophetic cricket---it certainly didn't seem to bother Kaitlyn, so I was probably over-thinking things. He ended up being part of the allure of the book for both Kaitlyn and me.

The text is spare, and while I personally felt it was a little too simple for a book geared towards ages 4-10, the sparsity of words lets the reader imagine their own story. At least that's what Kaitlyn did: she embellished the main story theme with her own thoughts and characters. "This man is thinking that, this mom is saying this," etc. I like that she did that, instead of just passively listening to the story. I guess what I'm saying is that Muon Van wrote In A Village By the Sea in a way to encourage children to add to the story with their own imaginations. I love that.

We really enjoyed In A Village By the Sea and would definitely read Muon Van again.

Ramon Requena says

This story follows a fisherman and his family in a small house. It is then discovered that the house is in a painting, which shows the same thing, thus giving the same continuous images in paintings. This story presents a fun mystery of perspective and reality.

The media used is colored pencil with computer-based drawings. The art very detailed and sharp that the whole book looks of expensive material. All of the art takes over every page so the story is very engrossing. This book is very interesting and even invites multiple readings to see all parts of how this reality works in the story. The book doe snot have an educational use but it can be a fun book to read as a class and analyze the illustrations.

Benji Martin says

Very interesting.

Linda says

It is a fabulous book, to read the words, to see what happens, and to enjoy the surprises. I won't say more!

N.N. Light says

Such a sweet story with incredible illustrations. Highly recommend this one!

My Rating: 5+ stars

Barbara says

The luminous illustrations in this picture book portray life in a small fishing village perfectly. The story moves from the sea where the boats are searching for fish to a house where the inhabitants are waiting for one fisherman's return. I loved how the story moves in and out from the house on the hill to the fisherman waiting out a storm so he can return home. The text and the illustrations capture perfectly the longing the family has to be reunited. The expressive eyes of the family dog and the choppy waves on the sea are not to be ignored.

Cynthia says

A fisherman sails off, leaving his village in pursuit of a day's catch. But with each page turn, the narrator carries the story deeper, revealing the home he leaves behind, a wife and child waiting for his return. The family dog leads readers to a grasshopper hidden in the walls, painting a sea scape eventually circling back to the fisherman. In this layer-upon-layer narrative told in sparse text and rich illustrations, Van and Chu present a story of family and home, and the longing for both.

Annie Do says

This book was one of the easiest reads I have ever read, yet one of the most heartfelt book I have ever read. The story revolves around a small house by the village, and inside the house lives a mom, a baby, a dog, and a little cricket. By the end of the story, we see a fisherman traveling out at sea, hoping that the storm could end so that he could go home to his family. The pictures he pulled out from his pocket was of the mom, the baby, the dog, and the little cricket.

I really connected with this story simply because it accurately reflects the typical life of a Vietnamese. Vietnam is a poor country, so often times, the dad would venture far for work and leave his family behind. The mom would always stay home and take care of the house and kids, and the kids would always stretch their necks out waiting for the dad to come home. The book reflected a look into the life of a Vietnamese family as well as portraying the socioeconomic status that was dominant in the country (working poor class). Additionally, I also loved the simple words and the stunning illustrations of the book. The images were captivating and colorful, and it complements the text beautifully. This is also one of those hard-to-find books that has both the author and illustrator originating from the culture (Vietnam) that they are writing and illustrating about, and having both the author and illustrator originating from Vietnam gives the reader a feeling of authenticity and reassurance that there will be little bias within the storyline. For someone who was born from Vietnam, I always get inspired whenever I see a book written/illustrated by a Vietnamese.

Jennifer Alvarez says

Lovely pictures! Sweet, imaginative story. Dramatic too. I loved it!

Betsy says

We talk a lot about wanting a diverse selection of picture books on our library, bookstore, and home shelves, but it seems to me that the key to giving kids a broad view of the wider world (which is the ultimate effect of reading literature about people outside your immediate social, economic, and racial circle) is finding books that go into formerly familiar territory and then give the final product an original spin. For example, I was just telling a colleague the other day that true diverse literature for kids will never come to pass until we've a wide variety of gross out books about kids of different races, abilities, genders, etc. That's one way of reaching parity. Another way would be to tackle that age old form so familiar to kids of centuries past; nursery rhymes. Now we've already seen the greatest nursery rhyme collection of the 21st century hit our shelves earlier this year (*Over the Hills and Far Away*, edited by Elizabeth Hammill) and that's great. That's swell. That's super. But one single book does not a nursery rhyme collection make. Now I admit freely that Muon Van and April Chu's *In a Village by the Sea* is not technically a nursery rhyme in the classic sense of the term. However, Merriam-Webster defines the form as "a short rhyme for children that often tells a story." If that broad definition is allowed then I submit "*In a Village by the Sea*" as a true, remarkable, wonderful, evocative, modern, diverse, ultimately beautiful nursery rhyme for the new Millennium. Lord knows we could always use more. Lord knows this book deserves all the attention it can get.

On the title page a single brown cricket grabs a rolled piece of parchment, an array of watercolor paints and paintbrushes spread below her (to say nothing of two soon-to-be-necessary screws). Turn the page and there a fisherman loads his boat in the predawn hour of the day, his dog attentive but not following. As he pushes off, surrounded by other fishermen, and looks behind him to view his receding seaside home we read, "In a fishing village by the sea there is a small house." We zoom in. "In that house high above the waves is a kitchen." The dog is now walking into the house, bold as brass, and as the story continues we meet the woman and child inside. We also meet that same industrious cricket from the title page, painting a scene in which a fisherman combats the elements, comforted by the picture of his family he keeps beside him. And in another picture is his village, and his house, and in that house is his family, waiting to greet him safely home. Set in Vietnam, the book has all the rhythms and cadence of the most classic rhyme.

When it comes to rhymes, I feel that folks tend to be fairly familiar with the cumulative form. Best highlighted in nursery rhymes like "The House That Jack Built" it's the kind of storytelling that builds and builds, always repeating the elements that came before. Less celebrated, perhaps, is the nesting rhyme. Described in *Using Poetry Across the Curriculum: A Whole Language Approach* by Barbara Chatton, the author explains that children love patterns. "The simplest pattern is a series in which objects are placed in some kind of order. This order might be from smallest to largest, like the Russian nesting dolls, or a range of height, length, or width . . . A nursery rhyme using the 'nesting' pattern is 'This Is the Key to My Kingdom'." Indeed, it was that very poem I thought of first when I read *In a Village by the Sea*. In the story you keep going deeper and deeper into the narrative, an act that inevitably raises questions.

Part of what I like so much about the storytelling in this book is not just its nesting nature, but also the

questions it inspires in the child reader. At first we're working entirely in the realm of reality with a village, a fisherman, his wife, and their child. But then when we dive down into the cricket's realm we see that it is painting a magnificent storm with vast waves that appear to be a kind of ode to that famous Japanese print, "The Great Wave Off Kanagawa". When we get into that painting and find that our fisherman is there and in dire straits we begin to wonder what is and isn't real. Artist April Chu runs with that uncertainty well. Notice that as the fisherman sits in his boat with the storm overhead, possibly worrying for his own safety, in his hands he holds a box. In that box is a photo of his wife and child, his village, and what appears to be a small wooden carving of a little cricket. The image of the village contains a house and (this isn't mentioned in the text) we appear to zoom into that picture and that house where the sky is blue and the sea is calm. So what is going on precisely? Is it all a clever cricket's imaginings or are each of these images true in some way? I love the conversation starter nature of this book. Younger kids might take the events at face value. Older kids might begin to enmesh themselves into the layered M.C. Escher-ness of the enterprise. Whatever draws them in, Van and Chu have created a melodic visual stunner. No mean feat.

For the record, the final image in this book is seemingly not of the cricket's original painting but of the fisherman heading home on a calm sea to a distant home. What's so interesting about the painting is that if you compare it to the cricket's previous one (of the storm) you can see that the curls and folds of the paper are identical. This is the same canvass the cricket was working on before. Only the image has changed. How is this possible? The answer lies in what the cricket is signing on the painting's lower right-hand corner. "AC". April Chu. Artist as small brown cricket. I love it.

So who precisely is April Chu? Read her biography at the back and you see that she began her career as an architect, a fact that in part explains the sheer level of detail at work in tandem with this simple text. Let us be clear that while the writing in this book is engaging on a couple different levels, with the wrong artist it wouldn't have worked half as well as it now does. Chu knows how to take a single story from a blue skied mellow to a wrath of the gods storm center and then back again to a sweet peach colored sunset. She also does a good dog. I'll say it. The yellow lab in this book is practically the book's hero as we follow it in and out of the house. He's even in his master's family photograph.

One question that occurred to me as I read the book was why I immediately thought of it as contemporary. No date accompanies the text. No elements that plant it firmly in one time or another. The text is lilting and lovely but doesn't have anything so jarring as a 21st century iPhone or ear bud lurking in the corners. In Van's Author's Note at the end she mentions that much of the inspiration for the tale was based on both her family's ancestral village in Central Vietnam and her father's work, and mother's experiences, after they immigrated to American shores. By logic, then, the book should have a bit of a historical bent to it. Yet people still fish in villages. Families still wait for the fisherman to return to shore. And when I looked at April Chu's meticulous art I took in the clothing more than anything else. The mom's rubber band in her hair. The cut of the neck of her shirt. The other fishermen and their shirts and the colors of the father's. Then there was the way the dishes stack up next to the stove. I dunno. It sure looks like it's set in a village today. But these things can be hard to judge.

There's this real feeling that meta picture books that play with their format and turn the fourth wall into rubble are relatively new. But if we look at rhymes like "This Is the Key to the Kingdom", we can see how they were toying with our notion of how to tell a story in a new way long long before old Stinky Cheese Man. I guess what I like most about "In a Village by the Sea" is how it deals with this duality. It manages to feel old and new all at the same time. It reads like something classic but it looks and feels like something entirely original. A great read aloud, beautifully illustrated, destined to become beloved of parents, librarians, and kids themselves for years to come. This is a book worth discovering.

For ages 3 and up.

Aaron says

A doorway into the world of a family living on the other side of the globe. Interesting perspectives of the different family members and other inhabitants of the house. Short, poetic text goes well with vast pictures.

Carrie Gelson says

Gorgeous.

Ann says

A remarkable picture book with spare, poetic text and a strong visual narrative, by a Vietnamese American author and illustrator, that is whole, complete; and also serves as a tool for cross-cultural appreciation.

Barb Middleton says

I wrote one of the blurbs on the back of the book.

Sharon says

Written in limited, but descriptive text with gorgeous illustrations this book shares the familial story of Muon Van and many other Vietnamese Families who reside *In a Village by the Sea*.

I thoroughly enjoyed April Chu's illustrations. They so beautifully depict a life that is foreign to many in the Western World. Naomi carries her sketchbook everywhere and is enthralled and inspired by April Chu's style. She noted, "Mom, the water drawn on the front inside cover, in the cricket's painting and during the storm is similar to *The Great Wave*." (*The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai)

I so enjoy discovering these "hidden gems" to share our wonderful world with Naomi and other children who are looking for something new to read.
