

Barb's BookSpot: Episode 9 Design Features in Picture Books

April, 2016

***Cricket Song*. Written and Illustrated by Anne Hunter. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2016.**

Peaceful, poetic text leads us through the experience of listening to night sounds and feeling a gentle breeze as a child sleeps. Various creatures come out as night falls. At the bottom of the pages, a border strip shows the action of the larger scenes in miniature, but it also tells its own story, as we can see another house across the water, and boats on the sea. About half-way through the book, we see whales, and we feel like we are now in the middle of the ocean. From that point on, all of the larger illustrations reflect the action occurring to the right side of the border, on the far side of the water. Details show that this is a different land, but in the end, we meet another child, asleep at night with a gentle breeze drifting in her window. The story comes full circle, and yet because of shared human experiences, it has travelled across the ocean, and to you, the reader, who might also recognize this experience. Note the similarity in the illustrations on the first pages and the last pages, which adds to the circular sense of the tale.

***Are We There Yet*. Written and Illustrated by Dan Santat. Edited by Bethany Strout and designed by David Caplan. Production was supervised by Erika Schwartz and the production editor was Andy Ball. Published by Little, Brown and Company, 2016.**

A family sets out to visit Grandma for her birthday, and the young man trapped in the backseat for the ride begins the familiar litany..."Are we there yet?" "This is taking forever." Any parent or anyone who has been on a road trip with children can relate. At the heart of this story is a commentary about the nature of time – it is elastic, sometimes minutes seem like years. Other times, it flies by so fast, we hardly remember. Then, there are daydreams; imagination takes hold when we have time to think, feel bored, or begin to doze. As the trip moves forward, the young man begins to doze, and as his dreams take him back in time, the reader must turn the book upside down and move "backwards" through the pages of the book to read the story! Eventually, all is righted and the family arrives to give Grandma her gift, but along the way, you will see terrific details in the illustrations, dinosaurs to robots. There are plays on words in text that rings true, and the wonderful expressions and body language of the characters helps to visually tell the tale. Alternating between full bleed illustrations and multiple frames like comic panels sets the pace for this fun road-trip tale.

