

Eric Rohmann's Caldecott Acceptance Speech

When I first read and looked through the illustrations of My Friend Rabbit, I found the book to be humorous and lively. I love how in the middle of the story there were no need for words and that the illustrations were enough for the reader to come to their own conclusions or predications about what the characters were trying to accomplish. I found the animals to be realistic, especially the elephant with the wrinkles and shadows. I liked how Rohmann used the full page bleed of his illustrations within a black frame on every page. I also found it interesting how the entire book is illustrated in landscape form, but in the middle Rohmann switches to portrait as a way to show the reader the tower of animals rabbit created. This gives the reader a little surprise and perspective of the height of the tower. My Friend Rabbit is a light-hearted picture book that children will find little joys within each page.

After I read Rohmann's acceptance speech for the Caldecott Medal, I noticed some parts of the illustrations that I normally would not pay attention to, such as the color, shapes, and subtleties found on each page. In the beginning of his acceptance speech, Rohmann discusses how an illustrator makes several little decisions that affect the entire book, like the blending of colors. He talks about how he wonders if he used too much red in the blue, and after reading that line I went back and looked at all of the pictures with a critical eye noticing the colors that were used. I usually would not pay that close attention to the shades of the colors, or how illustrators want to be consistent with the colors they use, and how much of another color to add to a base. For example, each animal is a different color (the hippo is purple) and how the shading of the animal requires a new shade of color (the body is lavender, but the shading is a dark purple). The shading and blending of colors is something that I would normally not notice in an illustration if I did not read Rohmann's acceptance speech about making those difficult decisions in creating his award winning book.

Another part of the illustrations I would not have noticed is the way the animals are positioned. In Rohmann's acceptance speech he discusses his worries about making the alligator's leg look awkward, which led me to go back and look at the pages with the alligator. Then, I found myself looking at all of the animals' legs and shapes of their bodies. For example, in the middle of the book the illustrations go from landscape form to portrait form to show the tower of animals rabbit has created in order to reach the airplane, and I noticed that the bear's face is not as detailed as the other animals, and how the duck's face is lost in the gutter of the book. My first time reading the story, I did not notice any of these features.

The little subtleties on the pages really make the story fun and interesting for the reader. For example, on almost every page there is a partial illustration of something off the page, such as the wings of the airplane, the rest of the elephant, or rabbit's bushy tail. By leaving parts of objects out of the illustration allows the reader to fill in the blanks of what is happening between the pages of the book. As Rohmann says in his acceptance speech, "This is the way children see—fully—with attention to subtlety and engagement to detail." Rohmann sure does know his audience, especially with the subtleties and details found within his book, My Friend Rabbit that make the story engaging and entertaining for children (and adults).

From this experience of looking at the Caldecott winners this week, I learned attention to detail is extremely important to illustrators. Each and every detail and decision plays a role in the pictures of the books, and can affect the feeling the reader gets from the story. Also, I learned to pay more attention to the illustrations of picture books about what is and is not on the page, and maybe the illustrator created it that way for a particular reason. Even though picture books contain less text than novels, they are still difficult to create from an artistic standpoint, because the pictures have to work with the text to tell a story in an appropriate manner for their audience. Picture books are much more complicated than I had previously thought, and definitely deserve their own award to be honored.