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When Pigs Fly

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“Illustration in picture books is meant to delight, to capture attention, to tell a story or teach a concept, and to develop appreciation and awareness in children.” (Jacobs, 35) David Wiesner’s Caldecott award-winning book Tuesday is a wordless picture book about the mischievous adventures of a clan of frogs on a late Tuesday night. Their adventures take them through a local human town as they interact with it on a human level. Through his skillful artistic ability with action pictures and detail, Wiesner creates a realistic human setting inhabited by frogs. Wiesner’s evident ability stimulates the reader’s imagination.

The skillfully crafted pictures make it easy to imagine that the frogs could have human characteristics. The frogs are not depicted in their normal setting, but the pictures help the reader see how much the frogs are enjoying themselves in this strange new world. For example, the frogs are pictured high above the city on their lilly pads, twisting and turning. Their expressions are ones of enjoyment and excitement. As the frogs approach a bird, the bird’s expression is one of fright, while trying to escape from them. Another example of the frog’s flight, made more realistic through the detail of the frogs’ expressions, happens when the frogs pass a man eating a sandwich. The man looks over to the window and sees the frogs flying, and a frog waves at him. The look on his face clearly portrays his amazement at what he sees outside his window.

Another illustration shows an old woman asleep on a living-room chair, frogs all around her. The human characteristics of these frogs are displayed as one frog holds the remote control while the others watch the television in awe. The expression on each frog’s face is clear and unique. One can feel the mysterious mood in this scene by the darkness of the room, depicted by deep blue and green hues.

A work of pure fantasy, this picture book requires the reader to actively participate with their imaginations. Weisner captures his readers’ attention from the first page by dividing the picture into three separate frames. The first frame is of the frogs sleeping on their lilly pads, the second is of them waking up, and the third shows one of the frogs suspended above the water, still on its lilly pad. The last frame shows one frog telling the other something. Even though no words are given, the reader can easily sense that something interesting will happen, by the expressions on their faces. Weisner creates a sense of curiosity in the story page by page—the reader wonders what the frogs could possibly do next. Every illustration also depicts the amazement of the bystanders as they watch the frogs go about their adventures. Whether the viewers are turtles, fish, birds, or men, all are clearly dumbfounded when they see the flying frogs.

As the story draws to a close, the reader is taken closer and closer back to reality by scenes showing a police officer on the street holding a dripping lily pad, an expression of bewilderment on his face. Once again, everything in the picture creates the same feeling of curiosity and amazement. This confusion is shown through an officer on a walkie-talkie, a reporter interviewing a man who is pointing upward, and dogs sniffing lily pads. This scene creates a feeling of tension and stimulates the reader’s curiosity.

This feeling of curiosity and wonderment is further stimulated at the end of the book by a picture of a barn with a pig’s tail in the air and a shadow of the pig on the other side of the barn. Wiesner uses foreshadowing to show that this
adventure never ends. The last illustration shows the pigs flying above a rooftop. Their expressions are all different. Some are relaxed, while others have the expression of shock. Wiesner creates these expressions very clearly on the pigs’ faces leaving plenty of room for the reader to interpret these emotions and share in them.

*Tuesday* is skillfully crafted to elicit different emotions in the reader, stimulate curiosity, personify the frogs, and tell a fantastically imaginative story. Wiesner’s story captures the reader’s complete attention without words by showing each animal’s human like characteristics.

References: