



2003

Dan's Angel: A Detective's Guide to the Language of Paintings

Donna Cardon

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Sturgis, Alexander. *Dan's Angel: A Detective's Guide to the Language of Paintings*. Illustrated by Lauren Child. Kane/Miller, 2003. ISBN 1929132476. \$16.95. 38 pp.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Picture Book;

Subject: Museums—Juvenile fiction; Art appreciation--Juvenile fiction; Angels--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Dan wants to be a detective. He visits a museum of fine art hoping to find clues. As he looks at Fra Angelico's "Annunciation," Gabriel, the angel from the painting, pops out. He suggests to Dan that if he uses his detective skills to examine the paintings he will find visual clues to their meaning. As Dan and Gabriel go from one famous painting to the next, Dan learns to recognize and interpret the symbolism in the paintings. When the museum guard comes looking for the missing angel, Gabriel pops back into his painting and the friends say good-bye.

Snappy text and bright cartoon illustrations make what could be a dry topic into a lot of fun. Dan and the other museum patrons are cartoons, but the paintings they consider are sharp color photographs of the originals. When Gabriel leaves his painting he retains his late medieval appearance, but his long robe does not keep him from wanting to try Dan's skateboard. Even though the conversation between the angel and Dan is casual, it deals with some sophisticated concepts. They identify objects and colors as symbols that add meaning to the pictures. "You give flowers to someone you love, so maybe flowers are symbols of love," he [Dan] said... "You really are a detective," said Gabriel." The paintings they consider are from a variety of time periods and styles. Each painting has a caption box that tells its title, artist, and date with an interesting fact about the painting. This is an inviting and accessible introduction to art appreciation that is conceptually more sophisticated than the *How to Look at Art* series (Gareth Stevens, 2000). It is a kid-friendly resource for parents or educators who are planning a trip to a museum or who just enjoy art.