

4.4. Caldecott Winners' Speeches

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I read *Kitten's First Full Moon* by Kevin Henkes. Prior to reading it and looking at the pictures for this assignment, I first read it to my students. I wanted to first get their reaction to a black and white picture book and also see if they could pick up on the humor of the kitten imagining the moon as a bowl of milk. I was happy to discover that my students were very interested in the pictures. They especially liked the pages that showed continuous narration. They were excited to follow the kitten's path within one page. I was surprised to find that they understood the confusion of the kitten. One of my favorite parts of Henkes speech is that he referred to a quote by Northrop Frye, "Nearly all of us have felt, at least in childhood, that if we imagine that thing is so, it therefore either is so or can be made to become so." It is so true and I only wish I had that imagination back. Kitten's imagination is so much like a child's; is that why my students were able to follow the story so well? Thanks to this "first" experience for me, this is now one book I know I have to add to my classroom library.

After reading the speech given by Henkes, I did not know exactly what to discuss regarding his illustrations. I thought there would be a bit of picture book terminology used throughout the speech where I could refer to specific pages to see if I, too, had picked up on the use of certain aspects of the art. However, Henkes mostly talked about the "firsts" in one's life. I do like that he referred to the night the kitten had to those first experiences that a child has. First car trip. First smile. First cold. First day of school. As I read through the book I was able to see how the experience the kitten had does relate to the experiences that children have. Henkes also refers to a book he wrote that was all about circles and this book did not get published. He did like one line from the book, "The cat thought the moon was a bowl of milk." I noticed throughout *Kitten's First Full Moon* that there are many circles throughout the book. He mentioned that he could not get the line from the circle book out of his mind so he used it for *Kitten's First Full Moon*. Throughout the book I found the following circles: end pages are simply white circles outlined in black (like the moon), fireflies' lights, flowers (ovals), Kitten's eyes, and the pads of Kitten's paws. Was this Henkes attempt to incorporate the fail of his circle book into this one?

The medium in this book is very different and a "first" for Henkes. He mentioned that he typically uses a quill pen and many small marks of thin line. He also usually incorporates many bright colors into his illustrations. In this book he used a brush (for the first time) where he was able to use thick brush strokes. He also only wanted this book to be black and white. This seemed to really focus the story for me. There were no other colors to look at and get distracted by. The story takes place at night

and a black and white layout really allowed me as well as my students to follow the kitten on her journey through the story.

Henkes speech really made me look at the book and the story behind it. Prior to reading the speech I thought the book was cute and humorous and well written for children. Now I see it as so much more. He referred to the lives of his children as well as his own life and the many “firsts” that every person goes through and encounters throughout their whole lives. This is now a story I would love to buy for all my nieces, nephews, and my own children someday. It is a great way to understand going through a first experience that is not comfortable or “normal” to us.

I thoroughly enjoyed this assignment as it opened up my mind to really look at books in another way. I’m so used to viewing books and reading them to my class for the obvious intent and theme behind the story. This allows me to dig deeper. Having referenced this acceptance speech makes me want to go back and read some others. I had thought about reading *The Three Pigs* or *My Friend Rabbit* or *House in the Night* as well; maybe I’ll read their acceptance speeches first to see if there is a “hidden meaning” that I did not catch while reading it on my own.