



Imagine a House: A Journey to Fascinating Houses Around the World

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Rondavels and manyattas, beehives and bataks. Just imagine what these houses look like! Most American children, who live in houses made of bricks, stone, or wood, and covered with stucco or vinyl siding, might find that a challenge unless they are fortunate enough to read this book, written by a former Peace Corps volunteer. Gustafson was inspired to write about other lands while she was living in a watermelon-colored house in the Dominican Republic.

She shares what twenty-two houses in fifteen countries are like, many of them found in less-affluent nations. With maps, drawings and photographs, she wraps the facts about adobes, igloos, houseboats, tents, and other dwellings into easily absorbed and intriguing bits of information.

Her language pushes the reader into the picture, just as her title is a command. Introducing batak houses in Sumatra, Indonesia, she writes: "Climb up a ladder to reach the front door. Remember to duck because the walls are so short!" While children imagine a bamboo house with its thatched roof with gables and topped with a buffalo's horns, Gustafson provides information about the people who live in it (farmers) and what their community is like. A map indicates where Indonesia is located, and a photograph shows children climbing up ladders to get into the dwelling. The baskets hanging from the first level are for chickens, she notes.

In one instance, the same style of round house, a rondavel, is found on two continents-Africa and South America. Again, the reader is directed to become a part of the picture, to look around on the ground to see what can be used to make the house. What is found-mud, sticks, grass, clay, and stones-is free and readily available in these lands.

Finally, youngsters are encouraged to draw or attach a photograph of their own houses, and write about them.

There is enough variety of houses pictured and described that children will be stimulated to use their imaginations to design their own houses. They are likely to take a closer look at their homes and community as they learn to appreciate other cultures.

Gustafson plans a series of books "to celebrate the diversity, creativity and richness of the world's cultures." She and her creative team of photographers and designers are off to an imaginative start.

LINDA SALISBURY (January / February 2004)

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