

Tennyson's Big Secret

A. H. Benjamin

Peter Trimarco, Illustrator

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Tennyson's Big Secret is a whimsical, high-energy picture book that invites its audience on a quest to learn what a sweet boy's hidden talent is.

A boy withholds a surprising truth until the final pages of A. H. Benjamin's picture book *Tennyson's Big Secret*.

The plot is straightforward, proceeding through a repeated process of questions and answers: Tennyson has issued an open invitation to his audience to join his cat in guessing what his magical secret is. However, through its accumulation of a variety of carnivalesque and theatrical activities—representing some outlandish and incorrect guesses that are illustrated page after page—it still creates a strong sense of accelerating anticipation for the sweet reveal of Tennyson's big secret in its final pages.

The represented guesses range from Tennyson being able to ride his hobby horse faster than fastest racing horse to scoring ten goals in a football match to bouncing on a space hopper as high up as the moon. As befits these convivial and exaggerated activities, the complementary illustrations are fun and filled with motion and color. There is little blank space left in the background of their colorful and lighthearted pages, which are filled by Tennyson and his cat as they are poised in a variety of dynamic activities: they create a painting that is displayed next to the Mona Lisa, play a set of drums with both arms and legs, and create a tower out of connecting blocks that is taller than a skyscraper.

To match the whimsy and high energy of the story's illustrations, the text often curves across the page or contours itself around the motions of Tennyson, his cat, and the objects with which they are engaged. With its varying colors, font sizes, capitalization, and boldness, the text takes on an added layer of dynamism to match the quest for Tennyson's secret. Still, despite the energy that fills the wild activities described throughout the story, Tennyson's face is more monotonous in its depiction, with his big eyes, button nose, and close-mouthed but wide and mischievous smile—an expression he maintains regardless of his exploits.

The energetic and fast-paced picture book *Tennyson's Big Secret* generates inquisitiveness about a boy's talents via rapid-fire questions and whimsical illustrations.

ISABELLA ZHOU (September 30, 2023)

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