

The Flying Rock

Robert Rush

Ruth Whiting, Illustrator

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The Flying Rock is an intriguing and layered picture book containing a potent reminder that nothing occurs in isolation.

In Robert Rush's picture book *The Flying Rock*, a boy learns a valuable lesson from his grandfather.

Classically framed, the story begins when Billy's grandfather finds him crying. Billy has just thrown a rock at his tormentor, Timmy, and he fears he's caused damage. Billy's grandfather shares a childhood memory that underscores some family wisdom: all anyone can do is "deal with the present moment."

Several events reinforce the idea that all actions have consequences, though no one can ever foresee what the ramifications will be. What seems like good fortune may not be; what looks difficult may prove to be a blessing.

When Billy's grandfather speaks to Timmy's father, it is learned that the injury caused by Billy's rock prompted a CAT scan that indirectly saved Timmy's life, suggesting the message that even darker impulses can coalesce into something beautiful. Still, Timmy's medical crisis comes across as an abrupt way to emphasize this message. By necessity, Billy's grandfather reiterates how wrong it is to respond to people with violence. Moral as the advice is, it begins to sound unsubtle.

Billy does not show enough agency. His grandfather offers all the insight and initiates the phone call to Timmy's father; Billy is a bystander. Missing commas, verb tense errors, and a tendency toward formal dialogue keep the work from flowing naturally.

Ruth Whiting's beautiful art elevates the story. Its approach is thoughtful and varied, employing both a moody, dark gray fingerprint style for the framing story, and a brighter, watercolor atmosphere for its central story, set on Billy's grandfather's childhood farm. Frames skillfully evoke Billy's uncertainty as he waits to learn what happened to Timmy, while Billy's grandfather's memories are tinged with feelings. The disparate styles harmonize well.

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KAREN RIGBY (October 19, 2018)

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