ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

The Invisible Seam
Andy William Frew, Jun Matsuoka (illustrator)
Moon Mountain
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Children can be inordinately cruel to one another, in all cultures around the world. In this book, a young Japanese girl named Michi must leave her aunt, her only known relative, to work with a seamstress, Mistress Shinyo. Michi soon discovers she has a talent for needlework and her mistress is very pleased with her. The three other girls who work for the seamstress are less than pleased because the mistress increases their workload and attempts to force them to sew as well as Michi.

All three girls have other gifts (flower arranging, cooking, and gardening) and resent Michi's aptitude with needle and thread. Michi sympathizes with their anger and understands their wish to be doing what they enjoy, but she sees no way out of her situation. She cannot avoid sewing well without dishonoring her aunt and disrespecting her mistress. The young girls eventually steal all the thread except the red, hoping Michi will fail to sew a white silk kimono for a fine lady and be discharged. Despite their efforts to sabotage her, Michi completes the kimono with an invisible seam. Michi's mistress is very angry that she would take such a risk willfully and begins to punish her, when the other girls come forward and admit their treachery. When they are in turn threatened with dire punishment, Michi comes to their defense, protesting that they only desire to practice their talents. In the end, Michi's aunt comes to live in the House of Mistress Shinyo, which is filled with good food and beautiful flowers and surrounded by lovely gardens.

The Invisible Seam abounds with lessons and avenues for further exploration for young readers. The author, a teacher and author of Frew's Daily Archive, has prepared a true story resounding with cultural authenticity that would augment any study of Japanese culture and customs. The lovely, full-page, watercolor illustrations of spare rooms, busy street scenes, and gardens from Japan a hundred years ago will inspire curiosity about a world outside mainstream America.

Children will also relate to Michi's struggle to do what is right despite pressure and spitefulness from her peers. She models kindness and understanding in the face of adversity and

malice. The book could inspire a lesson about individual abilities. Like the characters, every child who reads this book has talents, strengths, and hobbies. Reading The Invisible Seam will lead to thoughtful conversations about the gifts different people have and the joy of knowing and pursuing one's talents.

Kate Husband