

Reviewed by **Lori Ann Arner**

Hush! A Thai Lullaby

Written by Minfong Ho/Illustrated by Holly Meade
New York, NY: Orchard Books (An imprint of Scholastic Inc.), 2000

The lullaby is one of the most culturally universal types of music. It deeply touches a safe and quiet place in the hearts of those who sing the song and those who listen to it. Minfong Ho dedicates *Hush! A Thai Lullaby* to her father in memory of her own bedtime rituals. This book transports its readers to that soothing yet curious realm of the lullaby's magic through the author's text and Holly Meade's ink and cut-paper collage illustrations. First published in 1996 by Orchard Books, *Hush!* was chosen as a Caldecott Honor Book in 1997.

The story follows the familiar travail of a mother unable to coax her baby to sleep. She systematically hushes the noisy creatures as their sounds crescendo through the book, leaving mother sound asleep and baby wide awake with "eyes bright and round." The stark contrast of the family's one-room bamboo home to the typical American child's bedroom makes *Hush!* unique from other sleep-averse books such as Audrey Wood's *The Napping House*, or Martin Waddell's *Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?*

Despite the modest home mother and baby occupy, tranquility is manifested through Holly Meade's serene illustrations, subtly reinforcing the possibility of finding contentment in simple means. The intense hues of orange and red, combined with the ink and paper cuttings, pull the images off the page and directly to the eye. Astute readers, and those listening to the book while viewing the illustrations, will delight in noticing the antics of baby not mentioned in the text.

Books with onomatopoeia seem to have been written with Orff teachers in mind. These teachers will embrace Ho's *Hush!* and delight in

the sound depictions in Thai, rather than English. Reading it evokes a new exploration of animal sounds: the "uut-uut" of a pig, the "jiak-jiak!" of a monkey, and even the "hoom-praaa!" of an elephant.

Children will be drawn to the opportunity to vocalize the text in a different language, and the use of animal sounds from another part of the world offers the possibility to extend the book's range beyond the age when animal sounds are typically explored with the voice. Regardless of age, as the parade of animals keeping baby awake increases in size and clamor, the inclusion of a sound carpet of unpitched percussion will be hard to resist.

The rhythmic repetition throughout the text lends itself to vocal exploration with primary grade students. With each recurrence of "My baby's sleeping right nearby," I guide the children through vocal improvisation on so-mi-la pitches as they sing the text of the phrase. With either the teacher or children playing a simple bordun accompaniment, this moment of vocal improvisation easily serves as a page-turn transition. The playful nature of the book, combined with an imported sense of security children already identify from their own bedtime rituals, allows them to take vocal risks successfully with improvisation. *Hush! A Thai Lullaby* provides a safe zone in which the mood can easily be set for high-quality vocal tone production. ■

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