

Reviewed by **Marjie Van Gunten**

I See a Song

Written and Illustrated by Eric Carle
Scholastic Inc., 1973



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My music talks. My colors dance.
Come, listen, and let your
imagination see your own song.
The preamble to this wordless
book sets up an invitation to see a song on the
pages that follow. From the dots and crescents
introduced at the beginning flows a succession
of two-page spreads that suggest, but do not
tell, a storyline. Eric Carle's tissue paper collage
illustrations offer hints of the song we might see
in this book, but are abstract enough to leave
much to the imagination.

What begins as partner work in younger grades
may expand as children revisit the images in
cooperative groups and bring to their compositions
a deeper understanding of concepts.

Carle, who died in May of this year, is beloved
by children for his wonderful books that are as
much fun for little people as they are for the
bigger folk who hold them on laps as they meet
The Very Hungry Caterpillar, or answer the
question in *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do
You See?* Although *I See a Song* is out of print,
it is easily available through online booksellers.
Once you find it, you may want to photocopy and
laminate the two-page spreads so your precious
copy can be used again and again. YouTube also
presents versions of this book, but you will want

to turn off the sound so the music in the video
does not spoil the experience for you or your
students.

There is a unity throughout the book as
shapes from one illustration reappear in new
forms on succeeding pages. A crescent begins as
a moon, becomes a boat, and later appears as
unfolding petals of a flower. The dot appears as
a sun, the top of a jellyfish, and a single tear that
falls to become water for roots underground.

The pages of this artful picture book offer
many possibilities for music and movement
exploration. Younger children who have been
introduced to hand percussion will enjoy selecting
instruments to create a sound carpet to go along
with the colorful pages. What timbre would best
suit the sun and moon ... and why? Can you play
your instrument in a way that shows a difference
between the unfolding bud and the flower as it
bursts into bloom?

Movement concepts can be introduced or
reviewed as children make shapes inspired by the
images on the pages. How can your body become
the cool crescent moon or the hot, blazing sun?
How do the sun and moon relate to each other?
On the next spread the sun and moon change
positions to become a boat rocking on water as
the sun shines above. How might you transition
from one shape to the next? What pathway and
locomotion would you use?

Students may create dances from these
transitions, and the choreography can become
the "score" for a musical composition. What
is the story these pages tell you? How can you

interpret this story in a dance that moves from illustration to illustration? What type of music would support the dance?

This is a book to return to as students advance through the grades and gain skills and knowledge in music and movement. What begins as partner work in younger grades may expand as children revisit the images in cooperative groups and bring to their compositions a deeper understanding of concepts. A favorite memory of students interpreting this book is of a group engaged in a friendly argument about the best way to represent the page in which it appears a tear is falling. After experimenting with turbulent music, they settled on a single tone played on a

triangle as the tear fell. An awed silence filled the room as the ringing faded and we all understood the profound power of simplicity and silence in performance.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I see a song. I paint music. I hear colors. This opening is all you need to get started! ■

MARJIE VAN GUNTEN is retired from the classroom after 40 years of teaching music and movement from early childhood through college. She has served on the editorial board of *The Orff Echo* and is currently the communications director for AOSA. Marjie presents sessions on creative process at conferences and workshops and shares beautiful books with her grandchildren at every opportunity.

Sources

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