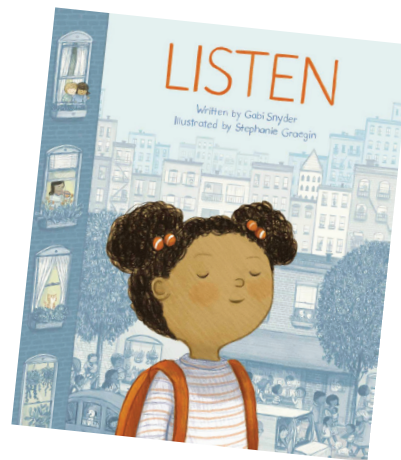


CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by **Melissa J. Ryan**

Listen

Written by Gabi Snyder/Illustrated by Stephanie Graegin
Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2021



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In *Listen*, readers follow a young girl and are invited to “listen to everything waiting to be heard” in each new context and circumstance as the girl makes her way through a typical day. At the start, the girl steps outside her urban home wearing her red backpack, ready to walk to school and begin her day. Immediately, she is bombarded by noise. Then the fun begins. With each passing page, we are encouraged to “listen past the noise,” to pay attention and make sense of the cacophony through the eyes and ears of our nameless protagonist.

Author Gabi Snyder and illustrator Stephanie Graegin work seamlessly together to create a

symphony of sights and sounds: the “crunch” of gravel and “scrape” of sidewalk chalk, the “brush-rush-hush” of the wind in the trees, and even the “sob,” “sigh,” or “silence” of a friend at school. The story takes us outside to experience nature and inside to interact with friends, family, and pets. We go to noisy places and very quiet places. In all places, the author asks us to not just hear, but to close our eyes and listen—even to listen to our friends and, poignantly, to our own voice.

This lovely take on the act and art of listening leads naturally into activities like creating soundscapes and producing music from “found sounds” based on our students’ environments and lived experiences. A great place to start is to ask

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students questions such as, “What do you hear when you are on your way to school? In your classroom? In your bed at night?” Using the illustrations as inspiration, encourage your students to create their own storyboard or artwork to mimic their unique, personal soundscapes. My students were captivated by this exercise in imagination and exploration, which has resulted in creative collaboration with other arts and classroom teachers as well.

I am also inspired to use this text as a complement or precursor to any listening activity, especially for older students. When used along with the supplemental material on the final page, the text invites discussion: “How can we be more engaged, creative, and critical when listening to music?” Even adult readers will be motivated by the challenges the book presents to listen more creatively to music.

Beyond these connections, I am most struck by the possibilities of connecting the author’s ideas

about listening to music and sounds to the practices of mindfulness, empathy, and self-awareness. This means listening not only to the concrete sounds we hear day-to-day and in the music classroom, but listening to our feelings, to our friends, to ourselves, and to the world around us. These are skills and dispositions that go beyond the walls of our music classrooms and get right to the heart of living a flourishing life. If my students reflect on only one insight from this story, I hope it is, “Can you hear the voice inside you?” ■

MELISSA J. RYAN has taught music for 15 years. She currently serves as a music education professor at University of New Hampshire where she continues to share her passion for the elementary music classroom with preservice music teachers. She has completed AOSA Teacher Education Levels I–III. Melissa holds a PhD in music education from the University of Miami and is an avid reader of books for people of all ages.