

Mr. Pine's Purple House

by Leonard Kessler • Purple House Press



Reviewed by
David DeStefano

"A white house is fine," said Mr. Pine. "But there are FIFTY white houses all in a line on Vine Street. How can I tell which one is mine?"

So begins the classic children's story of *Mr. Pine's Purple House* by Leonard Kessler. I remember my early fascination with the story of Mr. Pine's plight to make his house unique. Even before I could read, I could begin to understand Mr. Pine's predicament. I remember flipping through the pages of a hand-me-down copy of the book and marveling at the simple black line drawings with splashes of purple. On one page, identical houses, side by side. On the next, one of the houses has a small tree. On the next, each house has the same tree. Even a child could figure out what Mr. Pine was up against.

Fast forward to the fall of 2002 and I could only vaguely recall the details of the story. Mr. Pine had become more of an impression than a concrete memory. Luckily, I saw a news story about a fellow fan of "Mr. Pine" who had started Purple House Press to bring classic children's books like Mr. Pine's Purple House to a new generation of young readers. My chance to read the old story had come.

What a joy it was when I opened those familiar pages! Childhood memories flooded me, accompanied now by my adult mind and ear. I was at once taken with the many musical qualities of the book. I devised a theme song to sing at key points of the story, but knew there were many opportunities for my students to play with the musical suggestions within its pages. Lines like "Squish, squish went the brush. Squish squish squish," fell naturally into the realm of rhythmic speech and percussion ostinati.

Movement and instrumental possibilities presented themselves as well. For example, stroking a chime tree with each repetition of the word *purple* brought out the magical quality of Mr. Pine's world. Mr. Pine's eventual house painting naturally became improvised dancing, as students imagined splattering paint around the room. The cat and dog chasing each other around Mr. Pine's precariously placed ladder provided a natural springboard for experimenting with different instrumental timbres. Every additional house decoration left my students guessing what Mr. Pine might add next: Would Mr. Pine really paint his house purple? Would his neighbors copy his actions again? Or would they finally allow him to celebrate his individuality? They couldn't wait until their next music class to find out.

In the spring of 2003, my second-grade students performed their interpretation of Mr. Pine's Purple House for author Leonard Kessler. It

was quite an honor to show him how much we loved the story, and how we had breathed new life into his work. Since then, Mr. Pine has become a regular presence in my classroom. Each spring, a new group of second-grade students discovers what fascinated me as a child. Classics like this should never go out of print!

For more information, visit the Purple House Web site:
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