

Reviewed by Karen Williams

Pieces: A Year in Poems and Quilts

By Anna Grossnickle Hines

New York: Greenwillow Books, 2001

Pieces: *A Year in Poems and Quilts* is a book that was cherished by a colleague of mine, and has become one of my favorites as well. The original seasonal poems in this collection, illustrated by colorful photographs of handmade quilts, are rich in language suggestive of movement and sound. Beginning with the introductory poem, "Pieces," the verses are organized in the sequence of the year's annual seasons. The final pages of the book describe how the book and quilts came to be, with detailed pictures showing the step-by-step process of creating a quilt.

The year begins with the pale green of early spring. The unsteadiness of a dark crow landing on a branch creates an impromptu "Ballet." Spring continues with "In March" and "Just When I Thought," both pieces with thawing, wet phrases dripping from melting snow into raindrops.

"Do You Know Green?" reawakens trees and grass in imaginary onomatopoeia. The poem begins with waiting and stillness, the anticipation of new life. Green softly, slowly whispers its way into "...twiggy tree fingers," increasing in tempo and volume as spring emerges in baby grass, skunk cabbage, and leaves bursting from bare branches.

A variety of flower poems appear in late spring. Dandelion blooms explode in "Good Heavens" with tiny, triangular quilt pieces resembling fireworks blossoming in the night sky. A quilt's border of purple, violet, and lavender flowers accompanies more flower poems while spring blossoms continue to bloom in the sweet-smelling lilacs of the "Nose Knows."

As spring transitions to early summer, Mama Wren patiently waits for Papa Wren as she

warms the eggs in "Takeout." Bird images continue with "Encore," a sound picture of hummingbirds flitting from flower to flower on a honeysuckle vine.

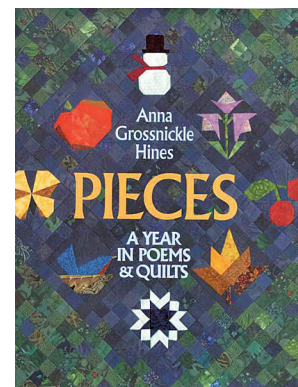
The overwhelming abundance of summer's growth bursts forth in "Misplaced." The bright, cacophonous profusion of blooms belies the term "flower bed." Summer continues with brown cows surrounded by the lush, green grass of "Noon-time." Read aloud, each word or phrase written on its own line creates a pause after each movement and sound, just as cows leisurely graze in a meadow.

Leaves are the theme of the next poems. In "Rock and Roll," moving green leaves seem to demonstrate many dances. Leaves change from summer's green to autumn's orange, gold, and brown in "To Each His Own." Just as leaves slowly drift down from the trees, the short, descriptive lines and phrases of the poem descend the page in sound and motion. "Pageantry" likens the colorful leaves to royal garments, while "Ode to a Rake" compares leaves to falling snowflakes.

Each poem in this collection evokes at least one of the five senses, the images in the quilt patterns complementing the expressive verses.

Early winter poems reveal the unadorned juxtaposition of light and dark. The black, bare branches stand in stark contrast to the grayish green background in the quilts for "Silhouettes" and "Shadows."

The final poems of the collection, "Winter Sunshine" and "Magic Show," bring the year to a close with the arrival of snow. "Winter Sunshine" tells of two yellow roses blooming on a chilly, winter day. The bright yellow flowers and border of the accompanying quilt stand out against the small black, white, and gray flowers of the background. In "Magic Show," the world mystically becomes white with snow as the child sleeps. The red horizontal and vertical



bars of the quilt pattern suggest looking out a window at snow-covered pines beneath a dark, starry sky.

Each poem in this collection evokes at least one of the five senses, the images in the quilt patterns complementing the expressive verses. The wonderful language leads naturally into movement, dramatization, and instrumental accompaniment on Orff or small percussion. The poems are the right length for music classroom activities with children. They may be combined with seasonal songs or lessons throughout the year. Because the poems are seasonal, they work well for programs at schools where the celebration of holidays is not permitted. I have found *Pieces: A Year In Poems and Quilts* to be a delightful collection of poems to use in my classroom. ■

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