

Reviewed by Darla Meek

Snowflakes Fall

By Patricia Maclachlan

Illustrated by Steven Kellogg

New York, NY: Random House Books
for Young Readers, 2013

After the flowers are gone
Snowflakes fall.

Flake

After flake

After flake

Each has a pattern

All its own—

No two the same—

All beautiful.

—From *Snowflakes Fall*

One of the beauties of the arts is their role in self-expression. Since the beginning of human life, we have wailed, drawn, and danced our longings, our joys, and our sorrows. The verses above are one example of this phenomenon—loss and hope simultaneously expressed in the 2013 children's book, *Snowflakes Fall*, written by Patricia Maclachlan and illustrated by Steven Kellogg.

Recently, I had the privilege of hearing Steven Kellogg speak to a group of 400 teachers at Texas A & M University in Commerce, TX,. During his talk, I learned of the events that inspired his latest book about the tragic massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in the village of Sandy Hook, CT on December 14, 2012.

When Mr. Kellogg expressed his distress after the Sandy Hook events, his agent suggested that he collaborate with his longtime friend, Newbery Award winner Patricia Maclachlan, who was in a similar state. The result was *Snowflakes Fall*.

The theme throughout this book is a message of hope: life goes on. The theme is supported several ways. First, it presents the wonder of changing seasons. On the front end paper, illustrations show children playing in the woods through spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

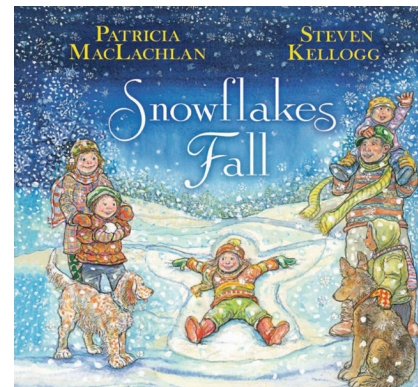
Then the snowflakes fall. The random, darting actions of the snowflakes are likened to the antics and voices of children. The lively, impish expressions on the children's (and animals') faces are a trademark of Steven Kellogg's work. The children romp joyfully from scene to scene in actual places found in the picturesque village.

The author alludes to the horrific events only once: "Wailing winds may blow...shadows darken dreams." The illustrations depict icy, howling winds and the frightened expressions of children peering through the windows. But the darkness is dispelled with a brilliant golden sunrise. The book continues, "When we wake in the morning light—Surprise! The world shines."

The next several pages remind us again of the circle of life. Snowflakes melt, filling the streams, where drops of water rise and then fall as rain. The rain waters the flowers where snowflakes once landed. Children who have experienced loss can find comfort in this message of continuous renewal.

Probably the most poignant theme throughout the book is the use of snow angels. In Mr. Kellogg's own words, "The shadows are dispelled on the endpaper, which depicts 20 snow angels rising from the silent, moonlit playground, and soaring with the healing peace as gently falling snowflakes." If you look closely, you will see that the snowflake on the author page and the back of

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the book is actually comprised of four snow angels connected together in an eternal circle of love.

Kellogg's pictures are full of light and movement, and exquisite detail—trademarks of his work. Mr. Kellogg explained that his mentor, renowned illustrator Maurice Sendak, advised him to use mixed media: colored pencils, pens, watercolor, and sometimes acrylic paint. The effect is almost three dimensional, a feeling that the page will jump out of the book and come to life.

The music of the text almost seems to sing. Though unrhymed and unmetered, the text is written in a poetic fashion that lends itself to dramatic readings.

The text could be explored through creative movement. Pathways abound: snowy hillsides, winding rivers, chattering streams, and waterfalls. Streamers, scarves, and large strips of cloth

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will enhance the beauty of the movements.

The music of the text almost seems to sing. Though unrhymed and unmetered, the text is written in a poetic fashion that lends itself to dramatic readings. Adding music pieces, perhaps from Orff's volumes, or original pieces created by the children to signify the falling of snow, rain, darkness, sunrise, and the awakening of new life, would make for an unforgettable winter program.

What a beautiful tribute to children. ■

DARLA MEEK serves as music education coordinator at Texas A & M University, Commerce, TX, teaching undergraduate and graduate music classes and supervising student teachers. Meek joined TAMUC after 15 years teaching music and movement in elementary schools. She serves as an Orff Schulwerk teacher education trainer in both pedagogy and movement. Meek has published children's choir curricula for Lifeway Christian Resources and Celebrating Grace, Inc. She often presents sessions at district, state, and national levels.