

# The Dot

By Peter Reynolds

Candlewick Press



Reviewed by  
Marjie Van Gunten

Every once in a while a children's picture book has so much wisdom that even adults get the message. This little book tackles fear of failure in a way that invites both children and adults to overcome their perceived

limits. Beware: after you read this book you will want to compose, create or invent just because you can.

"Just make your mark and see where it takes you," is the sage advice of an intuitive, grade-school teacher to a frustrated young artist. The child responds with a good, strong jab of a colored marker on her blank page. The wise teacher studies the dot, pushes the paper back toward the girl and says, "Now sign it."

On her next trip to the art room, our reluctant artist sees her dot framed and hanging above the teacher's desk. "Hmmp!" she says as she opens her watercolors to prove she can make a better dot than that. This time there is no stopping her creative energy. The remainder of the book is an explosion of dots: dots in various shades and hues, dots gigantic and dainty, solo dots and dot designs - even a negative-space dot masterpiece.

A few weeks later, the school art show includes the young artist's amazing and wild exploration of the possibilities inspired by that first dot. Not only is she the star of the art show, she is the inspiration for another fearful young artist. She encourages him to draw his first line and, of course, to sign it.

Our children spend so much of their school day in a world of

right and wrong answers that they often enter our classrooms with the same fear as the heroine of this book. The current climate of testing threatens to kill spontaneity in the classroom. As arts teachers, we have a tremendous responsibility to empower our students to make that first mark and to claim their creative spirit. This book is a reminder that inspiration for a child's personal creative expression comes not from our brilliantly creative lessons, but from giving them the courage to begin the journey.

Your students will enjoy a reading

of *The Dot* as much as you will, and they may be inspired to try some dot compositions of their own: staccato dots and sustained dots, slow dots and fast dots, ascending and descending dots ... the possibilities are endless. (Hmmm... I wonder what can be done with dots of silence.)

The author's hand-lettered text reinforces the lesson that great things can come from our own hands. The watercolor and ink illustrations are charming in their simplicity. It is hard to put this book down without the urge to "Just make a mark..."

