

Waiting for Wings

Written and illustrated by Lois Ehlert • Harcourt, Inc. 2001



Reviewed by
Jennifer Schramm

This past summer I worked as a storyteller in a fine children's bookstore. While perusing the shelves for "healthy" books that would fascinate my listeners, I discovered *Waiting for Wings* by Lois Ehlert. It was love at first sight, for I love butterflies and gardens. I chanced upon her biography as well, and was reminded of the lifelong impact of an artistic environment during childhood.

Ehlert was born into a family of artists, where oils, papers, glue, scissors and beauty surrounded her. She embraced them readily, and became an artist at an early age. From that place, she has taken books to extraordinary levels of brightness with varied colors and shapes, intertwining them with natural settings, and adding educational supplements in the back of some of her books. Her books cry out for arts integration: movement, music, and drama combined with science and the visual arts.

As you open the pages of *Waiting for Wings*, you will notice a large, hard cover that embraces smaller pages within. Ehlert's unique style of brightly colored collage is infused with curved shapes formed with batik watercolor papers, drawing the eye from page to page. Rich plums, vivid chartreuses, forest greens and lovely oranges and pinks stimulate the imagination. Her renderings of flowers and butterflies are not only creative, but accurate as well. Each small page includes a portion of the life cycle of the butterfly, beginning with the small eggs. "Out in the fields, eggs are hidden from view, clinging to leaves with butterfly glue." The life cycle of the butterfly continues throughout the small pages. Child and adult alike will gain a simple understanding of the

wonder of a caterpillar transforming itself into a butterfly. Beautiful pictures of the chrysalis and the emerging butterfly create excitement for eyes and hearts. When the young butterflies take flight and finally discover the garden, it is the garden that becomes alive, for it has been waiting.

Her illustrations create the hope of spring in each of us. The book invites creative movement or exploration of musical metamorphosis. Or, you could communicate with your art and science teachers for some truly integrated teaching. Suggestions for starting a butterfly garden are included in the back of her book. She also identifies the names of all the flowers and butterflies she has included in her batik

illustrations. She includes the species of butterflies next to their nectar sources as well as their host plants. The back of the book will encourage further study for you and your students as you venture into the world of possibilities, including the fascinating art of butterfly gardening itself.

Waiting for Wings reminds us that we are responding to the needs of each child by creating a beautiful place within our classrooms where they can grow. As music educators or classroom educators grow in their own artistic beauty, the children will follow them with willing wings into a future full of artistic and creative expression!

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