

A Conversation with Susan Marie Swanson

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I love how picture books connect words and text, and how they connect adults and children. And picture books can connect tradition to the present moment. The form of *The House in the Night* was inspired by an old poem that begins, "This is the key of the kingdom." This has long been one of my favorite traditional poems, and it inspired the pattern of this picture book.

How long did it take to complete *The House in the Night*?

Oh, it would be so fascinating to know! I worked and reworked this text many times over the course of more than 10 years. I wonder how many hundreds of times I read the text aloud while I was working on it.

What do you hope people experience with your book?

The House in the Night engages light and dark, comfort and adventure, rest and creativity. I hope that it brings delight and comfort to readers of all ages.

What has your journey as a writer been like?

I have been writing since I was a child, beginning on writing pads that I bought at the dime store on the main street of the small Illinois town where I grew up. During my student years at St. Olaf College, I was lucky to be part of a writing community that included students, professors, and members of the Northfield community. I went on to earn an MFA in poetry at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

When I returned to Minnesota, I began writing poetry with elementary school students and their teachers through COMPAS Writers and Artists in the Schools, which is based in Saint Paul. That set me on the path to writing poetry and picture books for children.

How do you enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I love to drink coffee with my friends and take long walks by myself. I sing in the alto section of a wonderful choir that rehearses every week. We sing a lot of beautiful poetry!

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651-366-6497



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

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Poetry

Young People's Literature

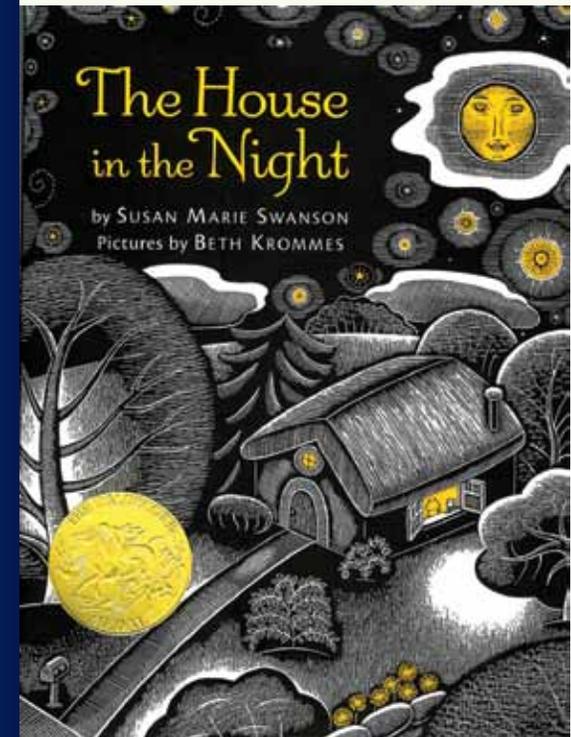
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards

21ST ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Children's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by
MLBA Children's Fund



The House in the Night

by Susan Marie Swanson,
illustrated by Beth Krommes

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

The House in the Night

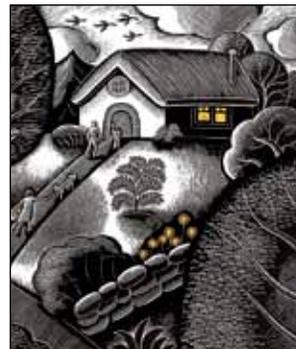


SUMMARY:

In this bedtime story, the rhythmic text and glowing pictures explore the origins of light that make a house a home. The book is about nighttime things that are both comforting and intriguing to children, such as a key, a bed, a book, a light, and the moon.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think the author decided to write about nighttime things?
2. What are your favorite nighttime things?
3. Are there things that sometimes make you scared at night?
4. If you wrote a book called, *The House during the Day*, what favorite daytime things would you include?
5. The author wrote the book in a style that's called poetry. What is poetry?
6. What other books does this story remind you of, and why?
7. What is your favorite book to read before going to sleep, and why is it your favorite?
8. If you wrote a book for children, what would you write about?
9. What is your favorite page in the book, and why?
10. If you illustrated *The House in the Night*, what would your pictures look like?



About Susan Marie Swanson:

Susan Marie Swanson is an award-winning poet and the author of many books, including The First Thing My Mama Told Me, a Charlotte Zolotow Honor Book and New York Times Best Illustrated Book.

Growing up in a small town on the edge of the Chicago area, Susan Marie loved visiting the public library and the bookstore. Both were within walking distance of her house, her school, and a bakery with really good sweet rolls. Susan Marie is a resident of Saint Paul.



Photo by Chris Bohnhoff

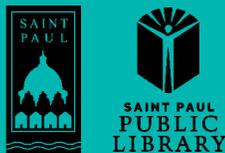
Susan Marie's other picture books include:

To Be Like the Sun, 2008

The First Thing My Mama Told Me, 2002

Letter to the Lake, 1998

For additional information about the author and her work, visit www.susanmarieswanson.com.



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