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First Painter



Synopsis

A powerful, eerily beautiful book about self-expression -- and who the "first" painter might have been. The moon of the singing grass has come and gone three times, and still there is no rain. Mishoo's prehistoric clan is starving, her little sister's arms like twigs. Can a Dream Catcher bring them rain? Mishoo's mother had been the clan's Dream Catcher. She spoke with spirits, trying to catch a dream of rain. Now she is a spirit herself. She tells a sleeping Mishoo: "You are Dream Catcher. You must go to the cave of the she-tiger." Mishoo dares to go-and there discovers rock that looks like dripping animal fat, rock like giant fangs from the saver-toothed tiger. Something stirs inside her. And as she picks up a charred stick from the fire and begins to draw the animal she sees buried in the stone, she wonders, "Am I catching spirits or being caught myself?" This powerful and strikingly original picture book provides a fascinating glimpse into the prehistoric world as it imagines who the first painter might have been.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

FIRST PAINTER literally took my breath away. It is a truly powerful and beautiful picture book--the words, the illustrations, and the design. I've read it three times in a row and I love it more with each rereading. FIRST PAINTER is Lasky's fictional story about what she imagines could have been the first cave painter. The story is told from the perspective of Mishoo, a young girl who is the shaman for her prehistoric tribe. There is a severe drought and their tribe is dying ("My younger sister, Erloo,

is so thin her wrists are like twigs." Mishoo must visit the cave of the she-tiger in one last attempt to bring water to her people. There, in the cave, the walls seem to come alive to Mishoo with their shadows and indents. She uses a fire stick and the colors from her spirit bundle to draw horses and bison and the she-tiger. She gathers energy from her paintings and finally emerges days later to clouds--"immense and woolly against the horizon." Rain has arrived, and so too has Mishoo's passion to paint again and again!! I've enjoyed Lasky's books for many years, but she has outdone herself this time. This book is brilliant--the words are simple, yet poetic and powerful. The first-person telling pulls me into the story (as close as I can come to being there in prehistoric times). The whole idea for the book is thought-provoking and should encourage many children's discussions and imaginings about not only who painted the first picture, but who started the first language (with words or gestures?), who made the first fire (by accident or on purpose?). Is the "need" for artistic expression solely a human need? On and on. This is my first experience with Rocco Baviera's illustrations, but they won't be my last--what a master!

Our family enjoyed this book, which is an imaginative story about the first cave painting. A tribe is starving and suffering with a lack of food and enduring a drought. The tribe's shaman has died and she passed the job onto her adolescent daughter named Mishoo. Fearing this responsibility, she has chosen not to "catch dreams" which is apparently the cause of both the drought and the lack of hunting success. Finally Mishoo follows the commands given by her mother and grandmother in her dreams...she goes to a sacred cave. Once in the cave she builds a fire and sees how the rock walls seem to come alive with shapes of animals. She uses her gathered clays to paint the walls. The writing is poetic and eerie. The illustrations are gorgeous and set the mood perfectly. When Mishoo returns to her tribe after three days of painting, it has just begun to rain. The rain will stimulate growth of the grasses, which will lure the animals back to the land. It ends by saying their hunting was successful and the tribe is thriving again. Both the writing and the artwork drew us in and made us feel a part of the story. This is the first fiction historical book for children that I have found. It is the perfect addition to our homeschool curriculum for learning about early man and cave paintings. Both my 3 and 5 year old boys enjoyed this story, although I needed to explain some of the passages such as what "moon of the singing grass" and "dream catcher" meant. I loved the way the author captured an artist's imagination and ability to imagine and "see" the finished piece before even starting work on it, how the rock walls seemed to speak to her and how she then created what she already saw in her mind's eye. This type of explanation is seldom seen in children's literature; I appreciated that.

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