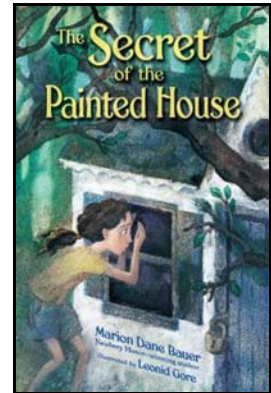


Classroom Guide

The Secret of the Painted House

written by Marion Dane Bauer and illustrated by Leonid Gore
published by Random House Books for Young Readers
(a Stepping Stone Book), 2007



A note to the teacher: This is a good book for a transitional reader.

Themes found in the book:

- ◆ Loneliness
- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Responsibility
- ◆ Ghosts
- ◆ Secrets

About the Book

Emily and her family have moved to the country, and she feels out of place. Will she ever find friends? Will it ever feel like home? When she ventures into the woods behind her house, Emily discovers that she is not the only girl her age in the neighborhood. In an abandoned playhouse she finds something unusual. The walls are painted with another forest and another playhouse. She is pulled into this strange world by the ghost of Pin. Will they be friends? Is Pin just trying to trick Emily into staying? Is this real?

The Secret of the Painted House is about a haunted playhouse and a lost little girl who is searching for her dead mother. It's about rediscovering connections to people you care about, and learning to take responsibility for your actions. The unexpected twists keep the reader engaged without being too scary, making this the perfect "ghost story" for young readers.

About the Author

Marion Dane Bauer's writing for children covers a wide range of genres including fiction and nonfiction, picture books, chapter books, young adult novels, and writing guides. Her titles include the Newbery Honor book *On My Honor* as well as *Rain of Fire*, winner of the Jane Addams Peace Association Award. In 1996, Marion was honored with the Kerlan Award for the body of her work.

About the Illustrator

Leonid Gore trained at the Art Institute of Minsk and illustrated over fifteen books for children in the former Soviet Union before immigrating to the United States in 1990. His illustrations for *Jacob and the Stranger* won the Ann Izard Storyteller's Choice Award and the Rhode Island Children's Book Award.

Main characters in the book

- ◆ Emily, 9 years old, a girl who moved to the Illinois countryside from Chicago
- ◆ Logan, Emily's 4 year old brother
- ◆ The ghost of Pin (Penelope Hanson), a girl Emily's age who died in a fire in the 1950's

Things to think about before you read the book

- ◆ Where do you like to play?
- ◆ If you could live in another place or world, what would it be like? What would your friends be like?
- ◆ Have you ever been lonely? How does it feel?
- ◆ What is a mystery? (*A puzzling event or situation, something unknown, something strange, something that is hard to explain*)
- ◆ Has anything mysterious ever happened to you?

Things to think about as you read the book

- ◆ What is happening in this story that is unexpected?
- ◆ Look for clues about what will happen next.
- ◆ Compare how you would act to the ways in which Emily, Pin, and Logan act.

Things to talk about after you read the book

- ◆ What makes this book a mystery?
- ◆ Did you expect Pin to get trapped inside the painted forest? How would you have felt if it had been you?
- ◆ Would you have followed your little brother?
- ◆ Was Pin wrong to trick Emily and Logan into the painted forest just so she wouldn't be lonely?
- ◆ How did the author make you curious about what was going to happen next?
- ◆ Did you find any clues about what was going to happen next?

Loneliness

Loneliness can mean different things to different people.

- ◆ Emily is having a hard time in her new home. Her family has just moved from the city of Chicago to rural Illinois and she wonders if she will ever have any friends, other than her little brother.
- ◆ Pin felt all alone when her mother left her, so when she died she kept searching for her in the painted walls of her playhouse.

- ◆ Pin’s mother felt guilty that she had left Pin, but was afraid to tell her so. Instead, she hid in the painting of the forest adding special things she thought would make Pin happy, such as campfires and marshmallows.
- ◆ The abandoned playhouse was a symbol of loneliness. “It had been standing here for a long time. The white paint had peeled. One blue shutter hung crooked. A branch had fallen and punched a hole in the roof.” (P6).

A classroom activity

Sometimes all we need is for someone to pay a little attention to us. Pin trapped Emily and Logan inside her painting within a painting so she wouldn’t be alone.

Talk to your students about what it means to be lonely.

- ◆ Have you ever felt lonely?
- ◆ What can you do to feel better when you are lonely?
- ◆ Do you know, or have you seen, people you think might be lonely? What do you think might make them feel less alone?

Have your students write letters to people in a nursing home or children’s hospital or a friend who has moved away.

A classroom activity

Schools today are filled with students from all over the world, and many share Emily’s uncertainty about making friends in a new place. How many countries do the students in your class come from? Mark all the places on a map.

Talk with your students about moving.

- ◆ How many have moved before?
- ◆ How did it feel?
- ◆ Did they have to leave anything behind?
- ◆ Was it difficult to make new friends?
- ◆ What have they done to make new students feel welcome?

Challenge your students to make one new friend today. You might role-play how this would be done: asking someone to help you, introducing yourself and asking a question such as “what is your favorite ...?” or asking a new student about the city in which they used to live.

A classroom activity for older students

The playhouse was a symbol of loneliness and neglect, and looked very much like Pin felt. Abandoned, forgotten.

Talk with your students about other symbols for loneliness. For example: a leaf blowing in the wind, the wind howling through the trees, a door swinging on its hinges, an empty classroom, or a box of broken toys.

Have them find images that mean loneliness to them, create a collage, and then write about what they see.

Fear

Fear can make us anxious, worried or scared. It can keep us from making a bad decision or force us into doing something we would rather not do. Fear can make us freeze in our tracks, unable to move, or it can motivate us to run away as fast as we possibly can.

There are many ways fear is demonstrated in *The Secret of the Painted House*.

- ◆ Things that make us shiver
 - "...a playhouse in the woods. Woods inside the playhouse. A playhouse inside the woods inside the playhouse." (p. 10)
 - "... a voice from nowhere – 'Come here. Come here with me.'" (p. 43)
- ◆ Getting lost. Emily thinks she has lost Logan, and then discovers that he is out of reach in the middle of the painting within a painting. She feels frightened when, once inside the painting, she can't figure a way out. "Logan!" she yelled. She had been trying to stay calm. But she wasn't calm anymore... Her little brother was a pain sometimes. Still... what would she do if anything happened to him?" (p. 75)
- ◆ Discovering ghosts. Emily feels afraid when she discovers that she is a part of a painting, and that Pin won't let her go. "You can't go. You're in my world now. You have to stay. ... I need... someone. I get so lonely waiting for my mom to come back." (p. 60-61)

A classroom activity

Have the class make a list of activities and emotions that make them shiver. These can be physical, such as putting your hand in cold spaghetti or waking up in the dark. They can be emotional, such as feeling as though your best friend doesn't like you anymore or realizing that your grandmother is gone forever. They can be personal, such as not liking to climb ladders or being afraid the teacher will call on you in class to read aloud.

Brainstorm about ways the students can feel less afraid the next time they face that situation or emotion.

A classroom activity

Look at images from magazines. Imagine that you are inside that picture. Write a story that might include: How would you get inside the picture? What would it feel like? What would you do there? If something made you afraid in that place, how would you confront that fear? How would you get out?

Responsibility

- Emily is responsible for her younger brother, Logan, but she can't take him with her. He's a blabbermouth and will tell their parents about the playhouse. So she leaves him picking violets next to the stream (p. 28) so she can return alone to the playhouse.
- Pin is not acting responsibly when she traps Logan and Emily inside the walls of her haunted playhouse.
- Emily realizes she has been irresponsible leaving Logan in the woods and does the right thing, even when it makes her afraid. "Emily couldn't hear Logan calling anymore. ... this is where she had left Logan picking flowers ... but he was gone. ... What if Pin had taken him inside the picture?" (p. 65)

- Pin's mother painted herself into the picture so she can be close to her daughter. "I heard her say she was sorry ... for leaving you." Emily tells her (p. 87)

A classroom activity

Children, even if they are young, can learn about responsibility. Discuss with your students things for which they are responsible (for example: cleaning their room, picking up their toys, brushing their teeth, doing their homework). Challenge the class to find something they can be responsible for together (for example: picking up the classroom or the school grounds, helping a younger class with a project, visiting older people in a nursing home, collecting recycling within the school grounds).

Ghosts and Secrets

Emily notices a girl painted into the picture, peeking from behind a tree. "I'm Emily," she told her, although she knew it was silly to talk to a picture. Then she heard her name. (p. 39) But when Emily looks for the girl in the picture, she suddenly isn't there. "Just a patch of crushed grass where someone might have been standing." (p. 41)

Ghosts are a way for us to explain things we don't understand. Often, when we imagine a ghost, we imagine a shadowy figure of a person or animal. Ghosts are portrayed as mean creatures who take delight in scaring living, breathing humans. But that is an image of ghosts created by Hollywood and book authors. Some people have reported that they have seen ghosts in the form of shadow, mist, or orb. They theorize that these are people who may not have been buried properly or who may wish to give a special message to someone they care about.

SOME FAMOUS GHOSTS

- ◆ Slimer from the movie *Ghostbusters*
- ◆ The Ghost of Christmas Past in *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens
- ◆ Casper the Friendly Ghost from the television cartoon and movies
- ◆ The Flying Dutchman made famous in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies

A classroom activity for older students

Pin was looking for her mother and her mother was trying to find a way to reconnect with Pin. Both of them were searching for something. In the end, they found each other and were ready, perhaps, to leave the painting on the walls of the playhouse. "A woman in a red dress had come out from behind one of the trees. She stood waiting, her arms open. Sobbing, Pin ran into them ... Finally, the pair turned and moved away, holding hands ... They simply vanished among the trees. They had never even bothered to look back." (p. 90-92)

Have your students imagine that they have died and have returned to earth as a ghost. What do they look like? Why have they come back? What do they have to do so they can leave the earth once and for all?

SECRETS

"Last night at dinner she had to bite her tongue to keep from blurting out her secret. That's all she had been able to think about... the playhouse." (p. 22) Emily was so enthralled with the secret of the playhouse that she didn't tell her parents and she left her little brother alone in the woods to go back to it.

Discuss the following questions with your students:

- ◆ What is a secret?
- ◆ Have you ever told one?
- ◆ Have you ever kept one? Are secrets hard to keep?

Sometimes secrets can be so powerful that they push you to do things you know are wrong. Even though Emily knew she shouldn't be there, knew she shouldn't break in to a locked building, she couldn't help herself – the pull of the secret was too strong. "She pushed on one of the windows... she tried picking at the rotten wood.... She held the stick over her shoulder like a baseball bat. She swung at the frame... the glass shattered." (p. 33)

Emily knew it was dangerous. She "wanted to step into the wall. She wanted to sit down on the checked cloth and light the fire." (p. 37) Her desire made it real and soon she was lost inside the painting.

Discuss the following questions with your students:

- ◆ Is it right or wrong to keep secrets?
- ◆ Can secrets ever hurt anyone?
- ◆ What secrets did Emily keep? Pin?

A classroom activity

Tell your students a secret, something they will have a difficult time keeping. Tell them they can't tell anyone. The next day talk about the secret. Who kept it? Was it hard?

A classroom activity

Sometimes secrets can be okay, like doing something nice for someone. Challenge your students to do something nice for someone today without expecting a thank you or telling anyone that they did it (for example: picking up at home without being asked, giving someone a seat on the bus, letting someone else be first in line). The next day, talk about how that felt.

A classroom activity

The secret game: Have the students sit in a circle. One person starts by whispering a secret in the ear of the person sitting next to them. The secret is whispered around the circle. What is the secret at the end? Did the last person hear the same secret that the first person told?

A classroom activity

Have students write a one-page mystery story by posing a question, planting a clue, and revealing the solution.

Companion Books for the Classroom

ADDITIONAL BOOKS BY MARION DANE BAUER

The Blue Ghost, Marion Dane Bauer, Random House Books for Young Readers (A Stepping Stone Book for Young Readers), 2006

The Green Ghost, Marion Dane Bauer, Random House Books for Young Readers (A Stepping Stone Book for Young Readers), 2008

The Red Ghost, Marion Dane Bauer, Random House Books for Young Readers (A Stepping Stone Book for Young Readers), 2008

Earthquake!, Marion Dane Bauer, Aladdin, 2009

(for a complete list go to www.mariondanebauer.com)

BOOKS FOR TRANSITIONAL READERS

Chocolate Fever, Robert Kimmel Smith, Gioia Fiammenghi, Puffin, 2006

City Witch, Country Switch, Wendy Was, illus by Scott Gibala-Broxholmm, Marshall Cavendish Children's Books, 2008

Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang, Mordecai Richler, illus by Fritz Wegner, Tundra Books, 2003

My Father's Dragon, Ruth Stiles Gannett, illus by Ruth Chrisman Gannett, Yearling, 2005

Sideways Stories from Wayside School, Louis Sachar, illustrated by Julie Brincklow, HarperTeen, 2004

The Judy Moody Totally Awesome Collection: Books 1-6, Megan McDonald, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, Candlewick, 2007

Young Cam Jansen and the Pizza Shop Mystery, David A. Adler, Viking Juvenile, 2000.

BOOKS ABOUT MOVING, FINDING FRIENDS, AND LONELINESS

Alexander Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move, Judith Viorst and Ray Cruz, illustrated by Robin Preiss Glasser, Atheneum, 1998

Amber Brown is Not a Crayon, Paula Danziger, Putnam, 1994

Big Ernie's New Home: A Story for Young Children Who Are Moving, Teresa Martin and Whitney Martin, Magination Press, 2006

Bravo, Grace! Mary Hoffman, Frances Lincoln Books, 2005

Chester's Way, Kevin Henkes, HarperCollins, 1997

Danitra Brown Leaves Town, Nikki Grimes, illus by Floyd Cooper, Amistad, 2001.

I'm Not Moving, Mama, Nancy White Carlstrom, illus by Thor Wickstrom, Simon & Schuster, 1990.

Mitchell is Moving, Marjorie Weinman Sharmat, illustrated by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey, Alladin, 1996

Moving House, Anne Civardi and Michelle Bates, illustrated by Stephen Cartwright, Usborne Books, 2005

The Monster in the Third Dresser Drawer and Other Stories About Adam, Joshua, Janice Lee Smith, illustrated by Dick Gackenbach, HarperCollins, 1988

My Last Best Friend, Julie Bowe, Harcourt, 2007.

Who Will Be My Friends? Syd Hoff, HarperCollins, 1985.

BOOKS AND WEBSITES ABOUT GHOSTS AND MYSTERIES

Kids.Ghostvillage.com (for kids, parents, and educators who want some help in framing the supernatural discussion with a younger audience)

www.kidsloveamystery.com (activities for kids, parents and teachers)

www.nationalghosthunters.com/kids.html (all about hunting ghosts from the National Ghost Hunting Society)

All the Lovely Bad Ones, Mary Downing Hahn, Clarion Books, 2008

Cousins in the Castle, Barbara Brooks Wallace, Backinprint.com, 2006

The Curse of the Blue Figurine, John Bellairs, Puffin, 2004

Ghosts: Monster Chronicles by Stephen Krensky, Lerner Publications, 2007

Ghost Town at Sundown (Magic Tree House), Mary Pope Osborne, Random House Books for Young Readers, 1997

Ghost Towns by Sarah Parvis, Bearport Publishing, 2008

Spooky Sillies: A Book of Ghost Jokes, Mark Moore, Picture Window Books, 2004

The Ghost Belonged to Me, Richard Peck. Puffin, 1997

The Ghost in the Mirror (Goosebumps), R.L. Stine, Scholastic, 2000

The Ghost of the Grand Canyon (Real Kids, Real Places), Carole Marsh, Gallopade International, 2004

Who's Haunting the White House? The President's Mansion and the Ghosts Who Live There, Jeff Belanger, Sterling, 2008