

Winners and Speeches Dan Santat's Acceptance Speech

Dan Santat won the Caldecott Award in 2015 for his book *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend*. His speech is set up in three parts: his struggle to become a published illustrator, his experience with winning the award, and thanking all those who helped him succeed. Santat has been in publishing for eleven years and published over 60 books. He discusses how he believes hard work was an essential component of his success. In his speech he discusses how he focused on one goal at a time. Santat was determined to follow his career in children's book publishing and turned down a prestigious job at Google, but he does not regret this decision. He also credits his success to studying other well-known authors and illustrators. As he begins thanking those who have helped him achieve success, many of them are provided as inspiration for the book: his editor discussed the ending of the book, the name Beekle was what is son called a bike. In his book as well as in his speech the idea of being perfect together which connects his book to his speech. He ends with that idea when he says, "Beekle may not seem perfect to everyone, but he was perfect to those who closely examined all the little details, and that in itself is a perfect representation of the book." This connects to his picture book because in the story the little girl, Alice, and Beekle were perfect for each other. Dan Santat's speech highlighted aspects of the illustrations and the story, which adds to the meaning of his award winning picture book.

When I initially looked at his picture book, I was immediately drawn to the cover and title of the story. The background was mostly dark muted colors, but the word Beekle was in bright patterned font, which highlights the real world and imaginary worlds combining. There is a combination of realistic images with imaginary cartoon images. The pictures are double page spread where the pages that focus on the real world were dark and muted colors where as the imaginary world pages were bright and colorful. These illustrations also highlighted loneliness felt until Beekle

and Alice found once another. For example when Beekle was in the subway everyone was alone and the colors were dark while the page where Beekle entered the playground with imaginary friends there were many bright colors and happy children. These two contrasts show that friendship makes life happy and exciting. The end pages of the book also tell the story. At the front side many children are in little circles with their imaginary friends, and Beekle is all alone looking very sad. At the back pages of the book, all the same children are there with their imaginary friends, but now Beekle is with Alice. The children in these end pages reflect how the imaginary friends are similar to them. For example, a little boy is playing a guitar while his imaginary friend is a drum, which reflects their personalities. They both have common interests and could enjoy playing music together. A guitar alone can make beautiful music, but drums can add depth to the song. These images show how friends can be better and happier together. Dan Santat used the whole book to illustrate his story of friendship, and I originally felt this was a wonderful example for young children.

When I read his acceptance speech, the meaning of the book changed for me: the meaning of the imaginary friends. Dan Santat discusses the idea of perfection, and how they are perfect for one another. Taking another look at the end pages of the front and back of the book, I no longer see just their personalities of the children, but how the imaginary friends are perfect for each other. The little boy with the guitar has the perfect imaginary friend as a drum because they can play music together. Is the message of this book that our friends should be perfect for us? I feel this could be a dangerous message for children because do we want them to only be perfect? Perfection is unobtainable because we all make mistakes. Many children can become overwhelmed by the idea of being perfect. Parents and teachers tell children to try their best, but this book wants children to look for what is perfect in others. This is asking too much of children and their friends to ensure they are perfect for one another. Everyone and every relationship have flaws, and no one is perfect. Dan Santat describes

wanting to have perfection and claims he has created it, but the message of his book could influence children to look for perfection in a harmful way.

This experience has highlighted for me how an author and illustrator's intentions can be different than the reader's interpretation of the book. This experience highlights how every individual can have a different interpretation of a text based on his or her background and personal experiences. Dan Santat thought about the idea of perfection when he was creating this book, and by reading his speech I was able to connect that idea to his picture book. As a reader it is essential to learn about all the elements of a book including the author's perspective. In the future I can read other author speeches and interview about their literature to get their intentions and meaning behind their book. I feel more connected to the book because I know the original intention and meaning of the story. In the end I saw the book completely different than before I read his speech, and it changed my experience of reading the book from happy to cautious. Originally I felt the book message was about finding friendship, but after reading he speech I feel he wanted to highlight finding the perfect friend. The book facts of the book remain the same for me, but the meaning has changed due to the author's explanation of his motive and inspiration of the book.