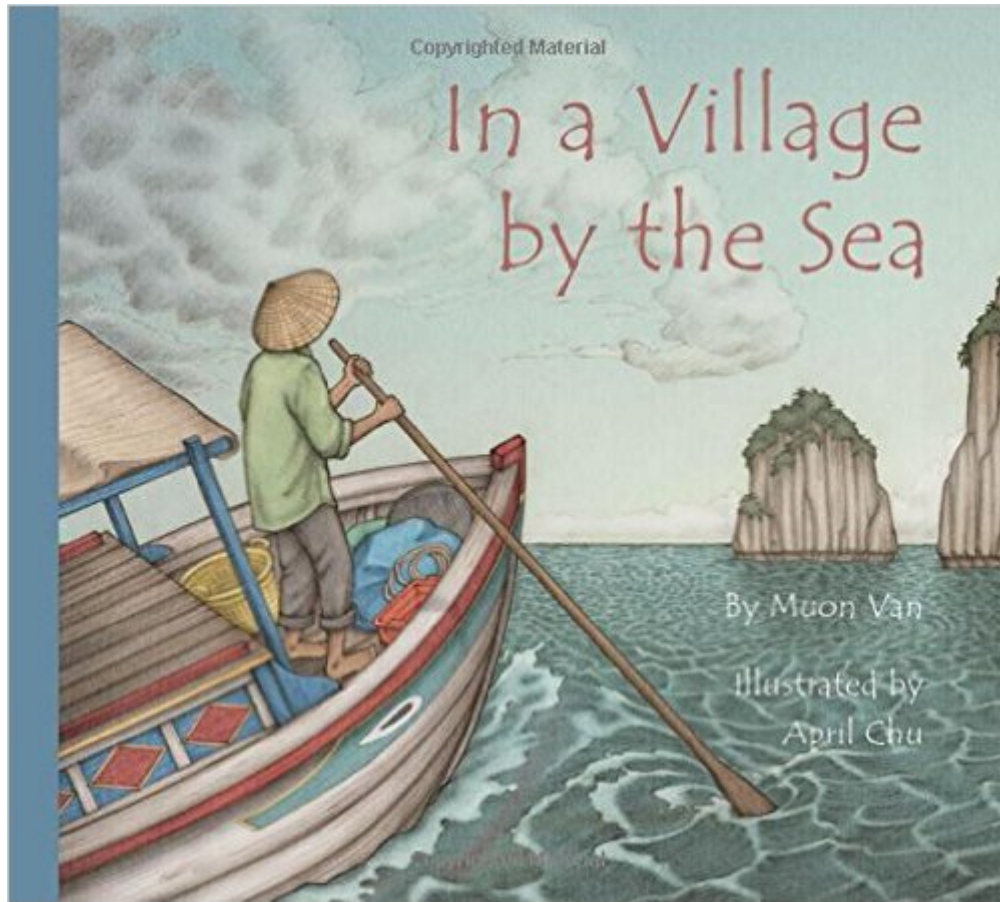


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# In A Village By The Sea



## Synopsis

Written in a spare, lyrical style using fresh, evocative imagery, *In a Village by the Sea* tells the story of longing for the comforts of home. A perfect book for teaching about diverse cultures and lifestyles through rich pictures and words, moving from the wide world to the snugness of home and back out again.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 32 pages

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Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #59,056 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #59 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Asia](#) #75 in [Books > Children's Books > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > Multicultural](#) #194 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Multigenerational](#)

Age Range: 4 - 10 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 5

## Customer Reviews

My 2 year old son loves this book - he loves looking at the illustrations - beautiful detailed landscapes featuring boats, ocean waves, a dog, a baby... even the chopped vegetables get his attention - and the best part, a magical cricket who knows how to paint! I love is that the story has just enough suspense without being scary (a boat in big waves on the ocean), and that depending on how you read the last pages, you can make the ending neatly wrap up for a young child ("the fisherman comes home and is so happy to see his family!") or for an older child it can explain (and inspire discussions about) difficult concepts like how even when mom and/or dad are working, they always love their family and are thinking about them.

Summary: In a village by the sea, a woman and her child wait for the fisherman husband/father to return. Near the baby's cradle is a hole in the wall. Inside that hole is a cricket who is

painting a picture of a fisherman on the sea. The fisherman in the painting is dreaming about his family at home, waiting for his return. An author's note tells about her father, a Vietnamese refugee, who made his living as a fisherman, and her mother, who raised their nine children while he was away. Ages 4-8. Pros: A deceptively simple tale that moves outward from the sea to the tiny cricket in the hole then back out again. The illustrations are gorgeous and evoke a feeling of home while showing details of the Vietnamese culture. Each picture shows a unique perspective. The author's note adds an interesting dimension to the text and illustrations. Cons: I didn't find the cover as appealing as the illustrations, so it took me awhile to get around to reading this book.

A beautiful picture book story of the love and hope that ties a family together. The book is a portrait of a Vietnamese fishing family's life but, with the addition of a fantastical cricket, it becomes so much more than that. There's tons of details for kids to love in this book, from the animals around the house to the beautiful pictures of the family's home to the story which transports the reader to a culture half way around the world. The story's pacing features just enough repetition to hold the attention of children without boring them. In the end, it's a lovely work and, if your experience is like mine, you'll be reading this book to the kids a lot.

We talk a lot about wanting a diverse selection of picture books on our library, bookstore, and home shelves, but it seems to me that the key to giving kids a broad view of the wider world (which is the ultimate effect of reading literature about people outside your immediate social, economic, and racial circle) is finding books that go into formerly familiar territory and then give the final product an original spin. For example, I was just telling a colleague the other day that true diverse literature for kids will never come to pass until we have a wide variety of good books about kids of different races, abilities, genders, etc. That's one way of reaching parity. Another way would be to tackle that age old form so familiar to kids of centuries past; nursery rhymes. Now we've already seen the greatest nursery rhyme collection of the 21st century hit our shelves earlier this year (*Over the Hills and Far Away*, edited by Elizabeth Hammill) and that's great. That's swell. That's super. But one single book does not a nursery rhyme collection make. Now I admit freely that *Muon Van and April Chu's In a Village by the Sea* is not technically a nursery rhyme in the classic sense of the term. However, Merriam-Webster defines the form as "a short rhyme for children that often tells a story." If that broad definition is allowed then I submit *In a Village by the*

Sea<sup>TM</sup> as a true, remarkable, wonderful, evocative, modern, diverse, ultimately beautiful nursery rhyme for the new Millennium. Lord knows we could always use more. Lord knows this book deserves all the attention it can get. On the title page a single brown cricket grabs a rolled piece of parchment, an array of watercolor paints and paintbrushes spread below her (to say nothing of two soon-to-be-necessary screws). Turn the page and there a fisherman loads his boat in the predawn hour of the day, his dog attentive but not following. As he pushes off, surrounded by other fishermen, and looks behind him to view his receding seaside home we read, <sup>TM</sup>In a fishing village by the sea there is a small house. <sup>TM</sup>We zoom in. <sup>TM</sup>In that house high above the waves is a kitchen. <sup>TM</sup>The dog is now walking into the house, bold as brass, and as the story continues we meet the woman and child inside. We also meet that same industrious cricket from the title page, painting a scene in which a fisherman combats the elements, comforted by the picture of his family he keeps beside him. And in another picture is his village, and his house, and in that house is his family, waiting to greet him safely home. Set in Vietnam, the book has all the rhythms and cadence of the most classic rhyme. When it comes to rhymes, I feel that folks tend to be fairly familiar with the cumulative form. Best highlighted in nursery rhymes likes <sup>TM</sup>The House That Jack Built<sup>TM</sup> it<sup>TM</sup>s the kind of storytelling that builds and builds, always repeating the elements that came before. Less celebrated, perhaps, is the nesting rhyme. Described in <sup>TM</sup>Using Poetry Across the Curriculum: A Whole Language Approach<sup>TM</sup> by Barbara Chatton, the author explains that children love patterns. <sup>TM</sup>The simplest pattern is a series in which objects are placed in some kind of order. This order might be from smallest to largest, like the Russian nesting dolls, or a range of height, length, or width . . . A nursery rhyme using the <sup>TM</sup>nesting<sup>TM</sup> pattern is <sup>TM</sup>This Is the Key to My Kingdom<sup>TM</sup>. <sup>TM</sup>Indeed, it was that very poem I thought of first when I read <sup>TM</sup>In a Village by the Sea<sup>TM</sup>. In the story you keep going deeper and deeper into the narrative, an act that inevitably raises questions. Part of what I like so much about the storytelling in this book is not just its nesting nature, but also the questions it inspires in the child reader. At first we<sup>TM</sup>re working entirely in the realm of reality with a village, a fisherman, his wife, and their child. But then when we dive down into the cricket<sup>TM</sup>s realm we see that it is painting a magnificent storm with vast waves that appear to be a kind of ode to that famous Japanese print, <sup>TM</sup>The Great Wave Off Kanagawa<sup>TM</sup>. When we get into that painting and find that our fisherman is there and in dire straits we begin to wonder what is and isn<sup>TM</sup>t real. Artist April Chu runs with that uncertainty well. Notice that as the fisherman sits in his boat with the storm overhead, possibly worrying for his own safety, in his hands he holds a box. In that box is a photo of his wife and child, his village, and what appears to be

a small wooden carving of a little cricket. The image of the village contains a house and (this isn't mentioned in the text) we appear to zoom into that picture and that house where the sky is blue and the sea is calm. So what is going on precisely? Is it all a clever cricket's imaginings or are each of these images true in some way? I love the conversation starter nature of this book. Younger kids might take the events at face value. Older kids might begin to enmesh themselves into the layered M.C. Escher-ness of the enterprise. Whatever draws them in, Van and Chu have created a melodic visual stunner. No mean feat. For the record, the final image in this book is seemingly not of the cricket's original painting but of the fisherman heading home on a calm sea to a distant home. What's so interesting about the painting is that if you compare it to the cricket's previous one (of the storm) you can see that the curls and folds of the paper are identical. This is the same canvass the cricket was working on before. Only the image has changed. How is this possible? The answer lies in what the cricket is signing on the painting's lower right-hand corner. *April Chu. Artist as small brown cricket.* I love it. So who precisely is April Chu? Read her biography at the back and you see that she began her career as an architect, a fact that in part explains the sheer level of detail at work in tandem with this simple text. Let us be clear that while the writing in this book is engaging on a couple different levels, with the wrong artist it wouldn't have worked half as well as it now does. Chu knows how to take a single story from a blue skied mellow to a wrath of the gods storm center and then back again to a sweet peach colored sunset. She also does a good dog. I'll say it. The yellow lab in this book is practically the book's hero as we follow it in and out of the house. He's even in his master's family photograph. One question that occurred to me as I read the book was why I immediately thought of it as contemporary. No date accompanies the text. No elements that plant it firmly in one time or another. The text is lilting and lovely but doesn't have anything so jarring as a 21st century iPhone or ear bud lurking in the corners. In Van and Author's Note at the end she mentions that much of the inspiration for the tale was based on both her family's ancestral village in Central Vietnam and her father's work, and mother's experiences, after they immigrated to American shores. By logic, then, the book should have a bit of a historical bent to it. Yet people still fish in villages. Families still wait for the fisherman to return to shore. And when I looked at April Chu's meticulous art I took in the clothing more than anything else. The mom's rubber band in her hair. The cut of the neck of her shirt. The other fishermen and their shirts and the colors of the father's. Then there was the way the dishes stack up next to the stove. I dunno. It sure looks like it's set in a village today. But these things can be hard to judge. There's this real feeling that meta picture

books that play with their format and turn the fourth wall into rubble are relatively new. But if we look at rhymes like *“This Is the Key to the Kingdom”*, we can see how they were toying with our notion of how to tell a story in a new way long long before old *“Stinky Cheese Man”*. I guess what I like most about *“In a Village by the Sea”* is how it deals with this duality. It manages to feel old and new all at the same time. It reads like something classic but it looks and feels like something entirely original. A great read aloud, beautifully illustrated, destined to become beloved of parents, librarians, and kids themselves for years to come. This is a book worth discovering. For ages 3 and up.

"In a Village by the Sea" is a great story that centers on the themes of love and family. The heartwarming story depicts a fisherman's anticipation to be reunited with his family. Not only is the story heartfelt but also the illustrations are breathtaking. The illustrations are detailed and mix realism with fantasy. The stunning visuals not only help transport readers to another world but also work to bring the story to life. This is an enjoyable book that appeals to both children and adults alike. I highly recommend it!

I read this story to my nephew and niece and they loved it! The illustrations are great and the story is simple yet intriguing. It is a page turner for the kids and they always reach for this book come bed time. I have read it to them for 5 nights in a row and they still haven't gotten tired of it yet! This is definitely an instant classic that I'll be reading to my own kids. I'm looking forward to more books by this author.

This short book is about a fisherman's family who waits for their fisherman husband/father to arrive home from his fishing trip. Although the story is about a fisherman, it's a life every family with a working parent can relate to. Combined with beautiful illustrations, it's a great book for young kids.

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