

# WAITING

By KEVIN HENKES

It seems as if children have to wait all the time. They wait in lines. They wait for dinner. They wait for their birthdays and holidays and weekends. Waiting is part of their daily lives. “Wait” is a word like “yes” or “no”—something they hear a lot.

“Can we go now?”

“Wait.”

“I want a turn!”

“Wait.”

I wanted to create a book for a young child about waiting, one that cast a favorable light upon the concept. I also wanted to put a slightly different spin on waiting. Having five figurines on a windowsill waiting for different things—including a rabbit who “wasn’t waiting for anything in particular”—seemed right when the idea came to me.

At first, I thought I’d use three-dimensional figurines for my characters and have them photographed. Since 2006, I’ve been going to my neighborhood clay studio once a week. I’ve made nearly a hundred and fifty small hand-built animal sculptures. However, it didn’t take me long to realize that I could better capture the expressions of my characters and the essence of each by drawing and painting.

I used brown ink and watercolor paint to render my characters and the window frame and sill. I used colored pencils to draw what was outside the window. Doing this was a way for me to contrast inside and outside, interior and exterior. It was also a way to play with the idea that a window is a gateway to something else, something beyond.

Although there is no child depicted in my book, I imagine an unseen child playing with the figurines offstage—moving them, making them “sleep,” talking for them, giving them presents.

I chose not to show a child, to keep the book clean and simple in its design and universal in its scope. And there are no references to a home other than the window—no wallpaper, no floor, no carpet, no furniture, no pets.

These are some of the things I was thinking about while I worked: the changing of the seasons, the wonder of nature, sudden sadness and disappointment, unexpected moments of joy, birth, death. All of these things—these aspects of human experience—were filtered through the lens of a child’s imaginative play.

I love most things about my job. What I don’t like is waiting for an idea for the next book, and then waiting again until I know the idea is good and solid.

Waiting was a long time coming; its birth was slow. I had to stop and put it away several times. I suppose it’s strangely fitting that I waited so long for a book about waiting.

Now, I’m waiting to see what’s next. . . .

