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Stian Hole , Don Bartlett (Translator)

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This unique, award-winning picture book delves into the mind of a young boy who is afraid of starting school. Summer is nearly over. The old aunts have come to visit, and autumn is in the air. Everything is ready for Garmann's first day of school, but he is still nervous. And he can't believe that he hasn't lost a single tooth yet, despite his best efforts! Stian Hole has created a memorable and endearing character in Garmann, whose musings about fear and courage, life and death, beginnings and endings, help him understand that everyone is scared of something. Published in ten languages, Garmann's Summer was the recipient of the 2007 BolognaRagazzi Award, one of the most prestigious international prizes for excellence in children's book publishing, awarded each year in conjunction with the Bologna Children's Book Fair.

Garmann's Summer Details

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From Reader Review Garmann's Summer for online ebook

Emma says

This freaked me out with the weird pictures.

Alison says

I love the way the fresh, funky appearance of this book's illustrations draws out both its humor and humanity. But I know a lot of people going to find the art creepy. To you creeped-out peeps I say, READ THE TEXT! READ THE TEXT! Ignore the art long enough to let the writing of this book wow you, both for its style and the sensitivity of its content. I think this book is an absolute gem. For one thing I'm not sure when I've seen old age depicted in a picture book with more grace and beauty.

Sydney Kirk says

I did not enjoy this book at all. It was very odd and I did not think the story had a big reason behind it. This book is meant for ages 5-8. I do not think this is very appropriate because the book is heavy in words and topics. It discusses things such as death which may be a little too heavy on younger ages. I think this book is most appropriate for 5th and 6th graders. "Garmann's Summer" won the Ezra Jack Keats Award. The artworks serves as a way to show the readers how Garmann perceives things. For example, when Garmann is describing his two girl neighbors, they are shown as having missing teeth (which he has not yet experienced), and shown doing what they are great at, like ballet. I think children may think this artwork is a bit odd, but most would think it is funny. The people in the story are portrayed with large, surrealistic faces. The faces seem as if they are made of cut out features (eyes, nose, mouth) and placed on a face. This leads me to think that the style of this book is surrealism because it is beyond the real and almost dreamlike. I believe the medium used for the illustration is mixed media. I believe this because there are actual pictures of real-life items, along with drawn and painted things such as trees, buildings and flowers. The artwork in this book is a perfect mix of "real" and not. The end pages stand out to me the most in this book. On these pages is just a blue sky with white clouds, which is a nice contrast to the busy artwork continued throughout the book. I would use this book with children in a 5th or 6th grade art class. I would use the artwork in the book to inspire the students to go outside the box and create their own mixed media art.

Sam Bloom says

Reading this book is like watching one of those memorable, truly bizarre dreams you once had come to life. The illustrations are photorealistic but completely surreal at the same time; there are dragonflies and butterflies on pretty much every page, but they tend to be prehistoric in size. Garmann's mother looks like she's straight out of Leave it to Beaver, if June Cleaver ever went to a luau. The twins from next door make Chucky from Child's Play look like a little angel. Sitting on a bus in one illustration are Elvis circa Heartbreak Hotel, Dizzy Gillespie circa The Cosby Show, a penguin, a track star (?) in a bow tie, and any number of old-fashioned looking people with orchestra instruments. Did I mention this book was completely bizarre?

Then there's the plot, which basically revolves around Garmann stewing in his own juices as summer winds down and he is about to go to school for the first time. The Aunts are in town - 3 ancient creatures who visit for the summer as long as they're still breathing, which (judging by the illustrations) won't be long. My favorite part of the book revolves around Garmann asking the Aunts what they're scared of; a couple of very touching moments where the old women compassionately share fears with Garmann, except for Auntie Augusta, who "isn't scared of anything... 'I'm so looking forward to the almond tart,' she says when Garmann asks."

This book is so totally unlike any other picture book I've ever seen that, despite the fact that I would *never* read it at a story time and probably would never even read it to my own child, I've got to give it 4 stars. The ending is so unusual for a children's book; there is no comfort for Garmann mere hours before his first day of school. In fact, when I read the last sentence ("And Garmann is scared.") and turned the page, I was flabbergasted that the book was over. But after I read it a second time (a MUST, in order to see all of the little tidbits in the illustrations) I realized that all of the reassuring parts had happened back in the middle, when Garmann was asking the adults in his life about their fears. Because for some children, if you know that the adults in your life are as scared as you are, maybe you don't need a fairy tale ending after all.

Cindy Dobrez says

I read this a month ago and loved the illustrations but wasn't sure about the story. I've reread it again and am enchanted by Garmann and his honest questions. I'm still not sure if young children will embrace this book, but I'm thankful to Eerdmann's for making it available in the U.S. I'm eager to get some kid reaction...

Neva says

I saw the original Norwegian edition of this book months ago at a book fair, and couldn't get it out of my mind afterwards, couldn't find peace before finding it in a language that's accessible for me. Now I am happy: I finally read it in English and I loved it! For a grown-up it is a real treat: both visually and as a text.

The conversations between the boy Garmann (who soon will start school) and his three elderly Aunties (who "all talk at the same time, clap their hands and flit from plant to plant like bees" in the garden) are delightful and, in the best Nordic tradition (Karlsson on the roof!), paradoxical and funny.

"What are you going to be when you grow up?" Auntie Augusta whispers to Garmann. "A fireman or football player?"

"A fire eater", Garmann answers.

"Soon I will have to use a walker with wheels" Auntie Ruth says.

"You can borrow my skateboard."

It is a book about a careless Summer and fear of death, about family and raspberries, about questions and school bags. A poetical, wonderful little story.

Kathy says

This book was a pure delight!

Jen says

The last sentence! Resolutely unresolved. Fear is. It is. It changes shapes, but survives. What to do with it? What scares Garmann in this story (going to school) isn't what scares me now, as an adult, but it is a real fear; it's a fear that I've encountered before. Of course, when I was starting school my fears were perfectly tailored for me: I was afraid of the school bus- certain that after it all, I would somehow end up the only kid left on the bus and the strange driver would just keep driving. (I think I thought I could handle the kids, it was the adult that had power I didn't have that scared me)

So, yeah, if you're starting kindergarten, or just starting anything for the first time, those beginnings can be scary... pretty much anything can be scary, even not feeling scared can be scary (oh the suspense of a horror movie that opens with a brilliantly sunny day). Fear is.

In this amazing book with offbeat artwork, young freckledy Garmann goes around asking family members what scares them. Death is mentioned, among other fears, and Garmann tries to understand, but sometimes it seems hard (one visiting aunt is afraid of winter and for Garmann winter is fun times!). This book made me cry because of the sweet wrinkled aunts' faces and answers, the metaphor for death (walking in a garden...now that is rest-forget you, stupid pearls and gold), and the wonderful opportunity to talk to my own children about what fear is and what I do about it. Thank you Stian for comfort in uncomfortableness.

Christiane says

Very odd picture book. Originally published in Norway and winner of the 2007 BolognaRagazzi Award ("one of the most prestigious international prizes for excellence...awarded each year in conjunction with the Bologna Children's Book Fair". ---from the front inside cover)

I liked the collage illustrations which are detailed and colorful, sometimes whimsical and other times rather frightening. The story is about a six year old boy scared about starting school. His three old aunties come to visit and they all have tea in the garden. Garmann discovers that everyone is scared of something...but does not seem comforted by this knowledge. It's hard to find much kid-appeal in the book, fascinating and odd as it is.

Roxanne Hsu Feldman says

What an unusual book. At first glance, the images turned me off -- from the cover to the first pages -- with the weirdly proportioned heads/bodies done with photo-collages. Then.. I got sucked into this style and most importantly, I got mesmerized by the text and by the matter-of-fact tone of everyone's answer to Garmann's queries about death and fears. The illustrations eventually reminded me of Terry Gillian's work for Monty Python's Flying Circus with many pages featuring curving flower stems and vines and the unlikely pairings of objects: the ancient aunt on a skateboard above skyscrapers or the bus load of images of famous jazz and other musicians... So, this is a very strange experience: from "Ugh" to "Brilliant!!!"

Laura says

Garmann's summer is coming to a close and he is worried about his first day of school. His aunts come to visit at the end of his summer and Garmann uses this time to ask them what they are afraid of and they give him thoughtful answers, as do his parents. The text can cause you to laugh out loud or to stop and pontificate for awhile about what your own answers or emotions would be in the same situation. The author has done an excellent job writing with humor as well as sincerity. The illustrations are a mixture of multiple artistic medians that offer very vivid, yet weird pictures that accurately represent and support the text while also invoking laughter. This book is appropriate for grades 1-4 because the content and grammatical structure can provide a challenge even for a fourth grader.

Ditte says

Elsker den bog. Garmann er 6 og han skal snart starte i skole. Han er bange for skolestarten, og hans nervøsitet ligger som et forsigtigt og næsten udtalt lag under hele teksten. Illustrationerne er fantastiske.

Eunhye Yu says

Growing up, summer was the one season that we absolutely loved because it was school free and we could do whatever we wanted to do. For my Contemporary Realistic Fiction I chose the book Garmann's Summer by Stian Hole and the basic story is about Garmann's adventure before the summer ended. Every summer Garmann's three aunts come over and stay at his house and interesting things happen. One funny part from the book is when his aunts would talk about certain expressions. "How do you feel about starting school? Do you have butterflies in your tummy?" Auntie Borghild asks. 'I'm scared,' Garmann answers, wondering how butterflies get into your stomach" (Hole 7). The book keeps going on and Garmann's just thinking these ridiculously funny thoughts in his mind, which makes the book really fun to read.

I thought this was a very good book. It was a very cute book to read and to see how Garmann reacts to certain things that his aunts do. I really like this book because the drawings look so realistic, I honestly don't know if they took pictures and pasted them on the pages or not for every thing that Garmann imagines in his mind. One example is that his aunts were talking about having butterflies in his stomach. To represent what he thought to himself they had an x-ray over his stomach and showed butterflies flying around in his stomach. They put those pictures on the pages to help the reader understand what he's thinking which I thought was very useful and very funny. This would definitely be a good book to share to students because I think they would enjoy this a lot because of the pictures and all the things that Garmann thinks and how the author illustrates them. Also, I think some students can definitely relate to Garmann. I think the teacher could help the students guess what Garmann would do or how he would think that certain expression that his aunt says. Teacher definitely can have fun with this book with their students, it can encourage students to continue to use their imagination.

Mary says

I found this book to be dark and rather frightening, particularly when thinking of the age group towards which it is directed. This is the story of a little boy who is scared of going to school for the first time and he asks the people in his life what scares them. His three older aunts, his father, and his mother all have

something that scares them.

There are many aspects of the book that are less than appealing as a children's book to me: the images are compilations of photographs and drawings, but in a way that makes each person seem unreal. The text is lengthy and in very small print, which makes the images even more pronounced.

This is a book that even I, as an adult, would be reluctant to read again.

Betsy says

In the head of even the most open-minded person there are still in-born beliefs of what purpose a picture book really serves. If you sat your average citizen down and played that old word association game, the term "picture book" would inspire thoughts of Seuss or Sendak or *Are You My Mother?* Large American publishers recognize this and tend to publish homegrown titles that fulfill these whitebread expectations. The few overseas titles they bring in tend to be English or Australian. That leaves picture books from other places like China, Sweden, or Norway to the small publishers. Kane/Miller, Simply Read Books, and Eerdmans Books for Young Readers are some of the ones who are left to take chances on books that simply do not slot neatly into the little pre-ordained picture book categories we have in our heads. So when a book like *Garmann's Summer* plops down on your lap, your initial instinct is to reject it. "It looks weird!" "What's this book about?" "Why's he look like that?" It's a knee-jerk series of reactions. Only when you slow down, read the book fully, and think about it do you realize that maybe there's room in this world for a small unassuming Norwegian tale about a boy's thoughts on death, age, fear, and losing your baby teeth. Children, as odd as it sounds, are not adverse to age-appropriate emotional complexity.

Garmann is six-years-old and soon he'll be attending his first day of school. Not surprisingly, he's a little scared about this. The summer is almost over and once again, as they do every year, three old aunts have come to visit Garmann's family to drink coffee in the garden and admire the season's show. Talking about many things with the aunts, Garmann discovers what it is that they are afraid of. Aunt Ruth is scared of having to switch to a walker soon, and the cold winter ahead. Aunt Borghild is a little scared of death. Aunt Augusta has few memories left, and so she is scared of very little. Garmann's daddy is sometimes scared when he plays in the orchestra that he'll make a wrong note. Garmann's mama is scared that her son might someday run into the busy street. And soon, with little asides about teeth, Batman hats, and the summer, the aunts leave on their boat and Garmann puts his things in order for the first day of school. And he's a little scared.

When this book won the 2007 Bologna Ragazzi Award for excellence in children's book publishing, the citation accompanying *Garmann's Summer* said of it, "The book has a poetic force that sets itself apart." True enough. But even more than this, I feel that it's the tone of this book that stays with you. Let's separate it out from its illustrations for just a moment here. Though translated, *Garmann's Summer* doesn't have that slightly off-kilter feel of a book written in one language and transferred to another. What it does have is a quietness. A patience. From the start, the story acknowledges that sometimes the only grown-ups six-year-olds can really connect with are the elderly. It's almost as if at a certain point, old people have gained enough wisdom to talk to small people AND tall people in meaningful ways. Maybe that's what it means to be wise.

Plus the translation is almost eerily seamless. Terms and names switch from one language to another without so much as a hitch. For example, it appears that the term "butterflies in your tummy" is the same in Norwegian as it is in English. And there is no fear that translator Don Bartlett took creative license with any of this since the accompanying illustration is of Garmann behind an x-ray, butterflies fluttering about clear as crystal. At another point Garmann, "realizes that the flowers have the same names as old ladies - Gladiola,

Dahlia, Chrysanthemum, Marigold, and Petunia." Again, true in both cultures. We are not as different as we may think. There is one important fact that didn't translate entirely, however. Garmann would be starting Kindergarten if he were an American child. Yet in this book his first day of school will be in the first grade. This may prove a little confusing to kids when they read the book, but it's not a make or break detail by any means.

One of the most requested books out there is the average First Day of School picture book title. Countdown to Kindergarten, Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten, Will I Have a Friend?, etc. All these books tap into children's anxieties and worries. What "Garmann's Summer" does so deftly is tie an understandable fear (the first day of school) into grown-up fears (leaving, death, messing up) and in doing so shows kids that all human beings are afraid of something. Now in an American title this would mean that the book would inevitably end with a neat and tidy resolution. Somehow the message of "there's nothing to be afraid of" would filter in and everything would be hunky dory by they tale's end. There are many reasons to believe while reading *Garmann's Summer* that it was not originally produced in America, but the clearest of these is the ending. The very last four sentences of the book are, "From the corner of his eye he sees the first leaf falling from the apple tree. Before going to bed he checks his teeth one last time to see if any are loose. Thirteen hours to go before school starts. And Garmann is scared." The thing is, this isn't seen as a good or bad thing, but a fact. The accompanying image is of Garmann looking at a windowsill, his packed backpack on the floor behind him. It's a wistful kind of ending. One that assures children, without saying too much, that they are not alone in their fears. Everyone is scared of something.

Stian Hole's words are one matter. His illustrations, the first thing people react to upon seeing this book, are another. On a first reading I was initially repulsed by how different the images were from anything else I'd ever seen. A kind of mixed-media collage of photographs, drawings, and retro images, some adults have a hard time with this book. I'd love to pinpoint exactly why this is. For some of them, maybe it has to do with the three aunts. Hole doesn't beautify their wrinkles or pretty up their age. These women, whoever they might be, are old old old. There's one shot of Auntie Borghild asleep that shows every crease, crevice, and wrinkle on her face (to say nothing of the occasional white hair on her chin) that back up the sentence, "The wrinkles remind Garmann of rings on a tree" perfectly. Here in America, we don't see many wrinkles in our media. Old people don't have reality shows. In picture books, when we do see them, they tend to be cartoons or drawings. To see a real old person this close reminds adults of aging and death, and we react accordingly. Kids, however, don't see it that way. Faces, both young and old, fascinate them and they are willing to ask questions about them that adults would never dare. Children will love the pictures in this book. If anyone thinks that they are odd, it's going to be people who already are familiar with the status quo.

I tend to pinpoint time periods with books like these, but Stian Hole likes to mix up eras as much as he does images. Garmann's father leaves on a tour bus containing everyone from Elvis to lithographed heads. Garmann imagines Auntie Ruth on his skateboard, a fabulous flame image viewable on the underside. And Garmann's toys are an amazing mix of ages too. At one point Garmann stands before a table containing his stuff. He is wearing a Batman shirt circa the Tim Burton film (note the bat image within the circle). On the table are three Batman comics, all in English too. The top one is a late 1960s issue, and underneath that are two comics that are much earlier (probably from the forties or so). There are also objects like tin toys, a pencil case, plastic Indians, two pogs (?) and, astoundingly, an Indian head nickel. What a little Norwegian boy is doing with an Indian head nickel is beyond my comprehension. In any case, Garmann's backpack is contemporary, so Hole is clearly messing with our minds here. Don't try to pin this book down. It resists your every attempt to do so.

None of this is to say that the book is for everyone. It isn't. There will be a lot of parents that eye the cover warily when you hand it to them, smile, and place it gently back on the shelf again. But a book like "Garmann's Summer" teaches us that not everyone in this world is alike. Sometimes you're going to find creative adults who are willing to read this story, love it, and pass it on to their children who will (in turn) read the book and love it too. I receive a lot of books for review and I keep almost none of them. *Garmann's*

Summer, however, is one of the few I will keep until my children (whenever I have them) are old enough to go to school. Like nothing you've ever read before, this is the very definition of a beautiful children's picture book. Highly recommended.

Ages 4-8
