First Opinion: What Was It Like to Visit Uncle Andy’s?


Shaylyn Barrie

“Uncle Andy said it all started with a little blue pussycat named Hester” (unpaged). After noticing that Hester was lonely, Uncle Andy and Bubba got a new cat, Sam, as a companion for Hester. Hester and Sam hit it off immediately and are enthralled with one another. After awhile, Uncle Andy and Bubba find a problem on their hands; there are twenty-five new kittens that all look like Sam! The house soon feels a little too crowded, causing Uncle Andy and Bubba to find a solution. Both Uncle Andy and Bubba create books with paintings of the cats to help find them good homes. The books are a huge success, and slowly Uncle Andy and Bubba are relieved of the kittens so that things can go back to normal.

Although the narrator is never explicitly mentioned or revealed within the book, readers are aware that the book is based on Warhola’s personal experiences of visiting his uncle, Andy Warhol. As eccentric as the story sounds and is portrayed, much of the information conveyed within Uncle Andy’s Cats is true. As it turns out, Andy Warhol did have an abundance of cats at one time and did go through the process of creating two books (25
Cats Name Sam and One Blue Pussy and Holy Cats) to advertise the need for new homes for the cats. With so much of the information in Uncle Andy’s Cats being true, one can only assume that Andy Warhol was able to get rid of his excess cats as he does in the book.

Using this single memory of visiting his uncle in New York, Warhola is able to give readers a glimpse into the crazy life of Andy Warhol through another’s eyes. Although James writes about his adult uncle’s experience, he is able to do so from the perspective of a young child, a perspective that young readers can understand and appreciate. Warhola’s ability to capture the voice of a young child, when telling the story, is one of the characteristics that set this book apart from many other books written for young children. The simplistic and childlike writing style is just one aspect of this book that makes it largely appealing to young children.

The artwork within the book is very busy but entertaining to children of varying ages. While young children will pay the most attention to all the Sams in the book, an older audience might have a keener eye for hints of Andy Warhol’s artwork that lingers in the background. Although the illustrations of the book work to tell the story of Uncle Andy’s cats, there is also a lot of Andy Warhol’s work represented within the pages. This book would be fun to use to introduce some of Andy Warhol’s work or ideas. Although this would be an enjoyable introductory activity, possibly in a classroom setting, this would need to be supplemented with more authentic examples of his work.

One concern that I did have when reading this book is that there are some sexual undertones to the storyline. I wonder if this story might lend itself to questions about the sleeping arrangements of Hester and Sam and/or the appearance of so many cats. Depending on the age and maturity of the children the book is being shared with, this may or may not be problematic. Putting this aside, there are things that can be looked at with the assistance of this book such as the capturing of a particular voice, using a memory as a start point for telling or writing a story, and looking at or being introduced to the work of Andy Warhol.

Works Cited


About the Author

Shaylyn Barrie currently teaches seventh grade language arts at Westfield Middle School. She is working on her doctorate degree within the Curriculum and Instruction Department at Purdue University, specializing in English Education.