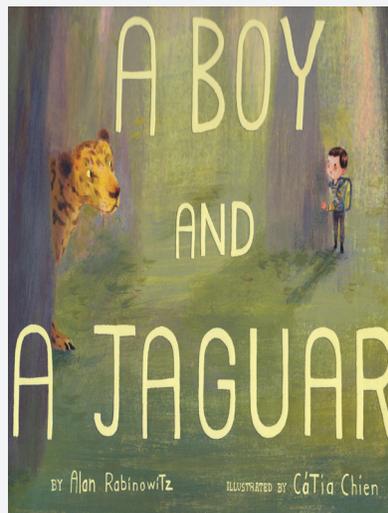


Second Reaction: Rumble in the Jungle: Reflections on *A Boy and a Jaguar*

Rabinowitz, Alan. *A Boy and a Jaguar*. Illus. Catia Chien.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Print.

Veronica Falcinella



Based on the life of conservationist Alan Rabinowitz, *A Boy and a Jaguar* is a gentle and moving story of a child who battles severe stuttering. While all children struggle to be heard by the adults around them, Alan is unable to even speak the words that could communicate his thoughts and feelings. When he visits the zoo, he finds the zoo's residents, particularly the big cats, sad and alone—much like himself. Confused and discouraged, he identifies with the zoo animals who also cannot verbally advocate for themselves.

Throughout his school years, Alan endures misunderstanding, isolation, and negative labeling. The school system pigeonholes him as damaged goods, and he bears the label of “broken.” His parents do their best to support him, but Alan only finds solace among animals. While unable to express himself elsewhere, he can speak to animals without impediment; they accept him as he comes. As a young adult, he details the difficult task of undergoing treatment to help him free his captive tongue. There are no magic wands or fairy godmothers, just hard work. Alan eventually learns strategies that allow him fluid speech, but he still feels the stigma of “broken.”

Ultimately, Alan finds a life path as a wildlife biologist, zoologist, and conservationist. This life allows him solitude while working with the animal kingdom that always accepted him

and that he loves so well. He travels the world to study specific animal populations and their environments and becomes one of the world's leading authorities on big cats. While working in the jungles of Belize, Alan realizes that his beloved animals are facing destruction. Humans are encroaching on the jaguar's habitat at an alarming rate. Their only hope is for Alan to speak to some of the most powerful decision-makers in the country on their behalf, but Alan faces the dilemma of speaking and making himself *heard*. Unsure of whether he can meet the challenge and make people listen, he hopes he can save his beloved jaguars.

This beautifully illustrated story was a huge hit with my eight-year-old daughter. She read it and said, "Best. Book. Ever." *A Boy and a Jaguar* is among a small number of books addressing stuttering for a younger audience. This autobiography of an important biologist and conservationist can be used to start conversations with youngsters about coping with our emotions and becoming advocates. How does one person make a difference? Alan's story echoes the struggle so many children (and adults) experience: do I matter? Does anyone truly hear me? With powerful potential, *A Boy and a Jaguar* is a definite keeper in any family or classroom library.

Works Cited

Rabinowitz, Alan. *A Boy and a Jaguar*. Illus. Catia Chien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Print.

About the Author

Veronica Falcinella is an educational consultant and licensed speech language pathology assistant with a passion for hanging out with wildlife in wild places. Like Alan, she has sweltered in the jungles of Belize, just not in the company of a jaguar.