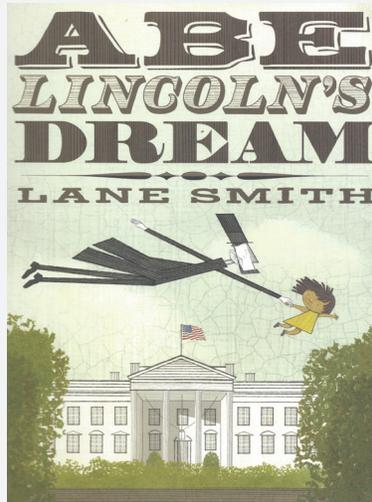


First Opinion: A Delightful Vision of *Abe Lincoln's Dream* by Lane Smith

Smith, Lane. *Abe Lincoln's Dream*. New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2012. Print.

Jennifer Brown



Lane Smith, author and award-winning illustrator, offers a whimsical look into the hopes and dreams of the 16th president of the United States in *Abe Lincoln's Dream*. Smith is a well-known illustrator, especially for *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl and many John Scieszka books. In addition to his artwork, Smith has authored many pieces of children's literature that have contributed to the elementary classroom. His previous works include favorites such as *It's a Book*, *The Stinky Cheese Man*, and *Madam President*.

Abe Lincoln's Dream opens with several anecdotes relating to the ghost of Abraham Lincoln and its suspected presence in the White House. Then it switches to the story of a little girl, Quincy, who is visiting the White House and discovers an ominous figure looking at the Gettysburg Address. She follows him, and after discovering that he never leaves the Executive Mansion, she brings the presidential apparition up to date on the current State of the Union address during an imaginative, out-of-this-world tour.

Smith carefully weaves tidbits of facts and folly about President Lincoln throughout the story. He showcases President Lincoln's affinity for jokes and, as the introduction shares, his continued supernatural presence in the White House. Quincy, a little girl on a school tour of the White House, inquires of his sadness, and Lincoln shares that there is so much that still worries him. They travel across the country, with Smith's illustrations highlighting key American landmarks and symbols. President Lincoln asks questions and Quincy answers them. Pleased with the progress, Lincoln's apparition fades and sails off to an unknown

shore. Incidentally, Quincy has her own dream that night, one of a smiling Lincoln sailing toward a rising sun.

While the story is enjoyable and entertaining, the transition into the crux of the story is awkward and abrupt. The introduction about presidential dogs who barked at the Lincoln bedroom seems a bit out of place. There is note about it in the Afterword, along with the explanation of a recurring dream President Lincoln had about sailing toward an unknown shore. It is obvious how this relates to Quincy's story, but the information is not carefully written into the text. This misstep will most likely go unnoticed by Smith's intended audience, but the unexpected cut to Quincy's experience could bother some adult readers.

There are a large number of books used to teach about Abraham Lincoln, designed for students in grades kindergarten through high school. Despite the awkward introduction, *Abe Lincoln's Dream* provides a delightful literary experience with a great deal of instructional potential. Exploring Lane Smith's superb illustrations could be a lesson itself. The careful construction of truth and fabrication combined with his art provide a platform to delve deeply into how illustrations contribute to a narrative. It is not a text of great complexity, but it would serve elementary students well on a variety of levels. A certain amount of background knowledge about Lincoln's aspirations for his war-torn America could afford greater discussion opportunities, although with appropriate direction from a teacher, not entirely necessary. Using this book as an introduction to Abraham Lincoln's character, and then moving forward using primary sources to support or contradict what this book presents, would be an interesting venture.

Regardless of the purpose for reading, *Abe Lincoln's Dream* offers a charming story and a great springboard into the study of America's 16th Commander in Chief. All variety of readers will enjoy this kindhearted tale of a little girl and her visit with Abraham Lincoln's ghost. Smith's magnificent illustrations and the beautiful fonts only add to the whimsy of this narrative, which is sure to inspire those in its possession to learn more about Abraham Lincoln.

About the Author

Jennifer Brown is a graduate teaching assistant and PhD student at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. Her research interests include investigating informational text in the primary grades and exploring social justice literature for children.