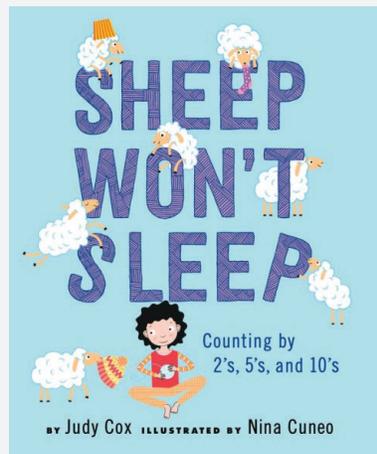


## **First Opinion: Clarissa Uses Mathematics to Seek Slumber in *Sheep Won't Sleep***

Cox, Judy. *Sheep Won't Sleep*. Illustrated by Nina Cuneo.  
New York: Holiday House, 2017. Print.

*Julie Smith Sodey*



Clarissa can't fall asleep! *Sheep Won't Sleep* follows Clarissa's search for slumber and is packed with colorful creatures, rich vocabulary, and mathematical concepts along the way. When the usual remedies of warm milk, reading, singing, and knitting fail to help Clarissa drift off to dreamland, she moves to another classic cure: counting sheep. Yet sleep continues to evade her and now she has perhaps a larger problem: ten bossy sheep have set up camp in her bedroom, disturbing her belongings and ordering her to try harder to rest. The reader is easily tempted to skip count along with Clarissa by 2s, 5s, 10s, and 20s as she counts her way both up and down on her search for sleep.

*Sheep Won't Sleep*, authored by veteran storyteller Judy Cox and illustrated with Nina Cuneo's signature use of pattern, follows a visually stimulating journey with Clarissa as she tirelessly (pun intended!) seeks the solution to her struggle with insomnia. When simply counting sheep one by one proves useless, Clarissa moves on to animals that are not as common—at the insistence of the aforementioned bossy sheep. Try alpacas, the sheep say...and count them in pairs. So, she counts the alpacas by twos up to twenty. Still no sleep! How about llamas in groups of five? 5, 10, 15, 20. Still awake. Yaks in herds of 10? The yaks come quickly as she counts: 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50. Over the course of this counting, Clarissa's bedroom gradually becomes crowded, and she is overwhelmed with noise, smells, and the chaos of one hundred

animals mucking about in her toys, books, and clothes. And still no sleep! Can she count them away? Clarissa decides to retrieve her knitting needles and roll a ball of the animals' wool as she counts backward, hoping that subtraction might be the key to her insomnia. She starts again counting by ones and quickly rolls away the ten original sheep. Next come the twenty alpacas, and Clarissa's ball of wool grows larger and more vibrant. Eventually all of the animals are rolled away and her room is filled only with a very large and very colorful ball of wool. What to do now? Her knitting needles begin to move and by dawn, Clarissa is at last in a deep slumber, resting beneath a new afghan that is rich with the colors and patterns of the animals that had filled her room the night before.

Literature fulfills an essential role in elementary classrooms, providing young learners with engaging opportunities to encounter and rehearse unfamiliar and familiar content. As a former educator, Cox is keenly aware of this important role, and she has authored a text that engages readers in multiple contexts of learning. *Sheep Won't Sleep* would fit easily into a primary classroom library and provides potential applications in mathematics, language, and art. The mathematical implications are readily apparent, engaging students in opportunities to practice skip counting, create and review related number sentences that parallel Clarissa's oral counting, and connect mathematics vocabulary to perhaps more familiar terms (such as subtraction and counting backward). In addition to the obvious mathematics connections, the story also provides opportunities for vocabulary enrichment. Cox uses more complex terminology wisely, creating word placement that encourages the use of context clues to decipher meanings both by students independently and with guidance. Complex vocabulary is also supported by illustrations that serve to both entice the reader and provide additional explanation of the story.

Nina Cuneo's illustrations are lively, rhythmic, and contribute immeasurably to the appeal of *Sheep Won't Sleep*. The bold choices of color and pattern that are used for the animals and details of Clarissa's room are balanced against simple backgrounds. Cuneo's strategic use of color palettes and patterns helps to group the animals as they are introduced and counted. This approach provides much-needed order to the pages of the story where multiple groupings are represented and the setting of Clarissa's room becomes more and more chaotic. Concrete representations are an essential element for early learners who are building their understanding of skip counting; the story could be improved by even clearer representations of each group, providing early counters with distinct groupings to correlate with each count.

*Sheep Won't Sleep* is a worthy addition to classrooms, providing multiple contexts for learning and a lively, brightly illustrated storyline that you can count on to capture the attention of young learners.

### **About the Author**

**Julie Smith Sodey** is an assistant teaching professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Her teaching focuses on content and clinical experiences for teacher candidates in the areas of education foundations, instructional design, and methods of teaching. Prior to earning her Ed.D. in educational policy and leadership, she was a public-school educator for ten years, beginning her teaching career in elementary classrooms. She is also the mother of two children, one nearing middle school and the other a toddler. Literature is an integral tool in her capacities as both a teacher-of-teachers and as a mother of curious, book-loving children.