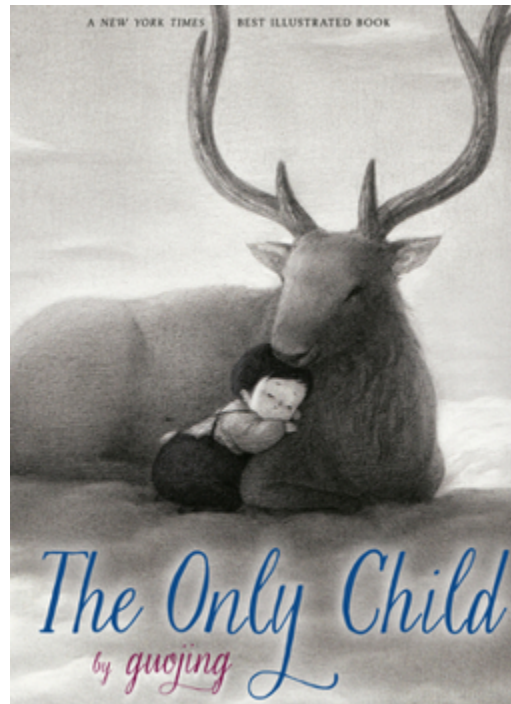


First Opinion: The Only Child

Guojing. *The only child*. Random House Studio, 2015.

Natalya Stepanova



Guojing's powerful narrative successfully exemplifies the age-old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. Through her picture book *The Only Child*, she manages to evoke a myriad of emotions and sparks contemplation about children's loneliness and isolation being the only child in a family, as well as the unconquerable power of love and friendship, highlighting their pivotal role in nurturing a child's growth and happiness.

The story begins with a brief author's note, which provides readers with some background information for the narrative. Being set in the 1980s, the story depicts the deplorable ramifications caused by the legalization of the one-child policy in China - 'a lonely generation of children' lacking attention and company, awaiting their parents' return from work or being under the care of their grandparents. The note guides the reader to the main narration that is unfolded through compellingly fascinating pictures.

The portrayal of the main character as a charming little girl is both heartwarming and enchanting. Being habitually left at home alone, the child tries to entertain herself by looking through a

family album. She runs into a photo of her Granny who she must be missing a lot and decides to see her at any price. The little girl plucks all the courage that a little child might have and sets on a journey to her Granny. Being childishly inquisitive about the world, the girl enjoys the snow, and the sights of the streets. This makes the reader believe in her having enough independence and maturity to find the way to her Granny. However, the little girl gets lost and here the adventures begin. In a desperate attempt to come back onto the lost path, she finds help and support from a dream-like friend, a deer who, subsequently, becomes her loyal friend protectively accompanying the girl and eventually leads her to Granny's house. The moment of saying goodbye to each other is especially moving as it is hard to believe that the friends will have to get apart. But the author leaves the reader hope: the last pictures depict the child peacefully and sweetly sleeping in her Granny's house and there is a small figure of a deer tightly clutched in a little hand.

Notably, the different shades of gray color used in the pictures and indifferent people in the streets might arouse gloomy feelings and some anxiety for the child's journey. However, the girl's unwavering bravery and her innocent charming smile instill hope and optimism. Her unlikely friendship with the deer underscores the power of love and friendship proving that kindness and sympathy can blossom into sources of infinite strength.

The Only Child serves as an invaluable resource for classroom discussions about loneliness, bravery, and independence. It vividly explores the universal and timeless human longing for joy, loyal friendship, and love and demonstrates that those who seem to be defenseless and vulnerable can successfully find the path that will guide them. The only thing they need to do is to 'look hard enough'.

The book stands as a universal means for educators across linguistic and cultural boundaries to teach students speaking in different languages as it is truly comprehensible for all nationalities and suits all ages - both children and adults. As an ESL teacher, I would wholeheartedly embrace its potential and would gladly implement it to initiate discussions about universal moral values and the profound impact of love and friendship. Indeed, the world has drastically changed and is still undergoing global transformations. Therefore, it is essential for educators to promote stability through the cultivation of moral values. Let us be fully equipped with state-of-the-art technology, but never should we let our children be deprived of love and friendship - the pillars of humanity.

About the Author

Natalya Stepanova is an ESL teacher working with students through elementary to high school. She is also a doctoral student in Language and Literacy at the University of South Carolina. Along with developing her students' literacy, Natalya is passionate about nurturing moral values in her students. Using texts and other visual materials, she facilitates her students' critical views and fosters oral and written discussions to promote social prosperity.