



Step Gently Out

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Stunning close-up photography and a lyrical text implore children to look more closely at the world around them.

Be still, and watch a single blade of grass.

An ant climbs up to look around.

A honeybee flies past.

What would happen if you walked very, very quietly and looked ever so carefully at the natural world outside? You might see a cricket leap, a moth spread her wings, or a spider step across a silken web. In simple, evocative language, Helen Frost offers a hint at the many tiny creatures around us. And in astonishing close-up photographs, Rick Lieder captures the glint of a katydid's eye, the glow of a firefly, and many more living wonders just awaiting discovery. Fascinating facts about all the creatures pictured may be found at the end.

Step Gently Out Details

Date : Published March 13th 2012 by Candlewick

ISBN : 9780763656010

Author : Rick Lieder , Helen Frost

Format : Hardcover 32 pages

Genre : Poetry, Childrens, Picture Books, Environment, Nature, Nonfiction, Art, Photography



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From Reader Review Step Gently Out for online ebook

Melody says

Simple and lyrical, the poem illuminates the photographs, the photographs inform the poem. This is a book that Owen would have worn out from reading over and over. The photos are stellar- macro-lens insects and arachnids. It reads the way being a bug-obsessed kid feels, and brought back with crystalline clarity a certain afternoon I stood frozen in a cornfield watching one particular spider go about her life.

Rebecca Reid says

Step Gently Out by Helen Frost and illustrated by Rick Lieder (Candlewick, 2012) is a lovely poem illustrated by photographs of the smallest creatures outside. Bees on a flower, an ant, a cricket singing, a spider on a silken thread. The poem is lovely, and the pictures invite the reader in to the natural world. I was amazed at how well the poetry and the images wove together. I found myself wondering which came first: the lovely poem or the images that captured the words. I am a very amateur photographer, and I could not believe the careful photographs. The last page of the book tells about some of the animals. I loved how the insects shown in this book were ones that are found in our backyards. This is a great book for helping kids come to appreciate the small creatures in their own outside world. That said, I struggled to interest Raisin in the book. I don't know what it was about it, but the book simply did not interest him.

Donalyn says

Stunning photographs of insects, spiders, and plants enhance Frost's simple poem. Back matter includes information about each creature.

Richie Partington says

Richie's Picks: STEP GENTLY OUT by Helen Frost and Rick Lieder, photographer, Candlewick, March 2012, 32p., ISBN: 978-0-7636-5601-0

“...the creatures shine with stardust,
they're splashed with morning dew.
In song and dance and stillness,
they share the world with you.”

“Then Sam saw Gus do another bad trick. It made the firefly laugh and laugh. It was funny to see them go in free to the movie show.

“‘Stop your tricks,’ called Sam. ‘No more words!’

“‘Stop, Gus! Stop! Now STOP!’”

--from SAM AND THE FIREFLY by P.D. Eastman (1958, Random House Beginner Books), the first of my own books that I learned to read.

I've now spent half of my life here in northern California where you never see fireflies (or lightning bugs, as we called them on Long Island). There were lots of lightning bugs around in the summer when I was a kid back there. I associate them with those warm summer nights, long ago, back even before the Beatles, when dozens of us kids would be playing hide-and-go-seek after dinner, as evening fell and the lightning bugs made their appearance.

It was such a great time and place to be a little kid, and it makes me a bit sad to not be able to cross back over all the years and revisit it for real.

It makes me even sadder to think of a generation of kids someday growing up where lightning bugs are something that used to be, like dinosaurs and woolly mammoths, and those large mammals that still lived in the wild back in the fifties and the sixties, but are basically only left in zoos these days.

"We used to see a LOT of them in upstate New York when I was a kid. Here in Connecticut we saw more of them years ago, but these days it's a real occasion when a few make an appearance. I miss them!"

--my Facebook friend Florence Friedmann Minor, responding to my question on FB about who sees fireflies these days in their part of the country.

We are the bees bees bees

We're flying in the trees trees trees

And when we sing we buzz buzz buzz

We like to sing because because because

We are the bees bees bees

We're flying in the trees trees trees

Buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz

--part of a circletime clapping chant I used often with my preschool students

I haven't been aware of photographer/painter/illustrator Rick Lieder before now, but it turns out that he is responsible for some great and very familiar children's and YA book covers. My favorite is his haunting photograph for the cover of Kathe Koja's STRAYDOG.

"be still,
and watch
a single blade
of grass."

Helen Frost has written a poem about looking closely and being aware of the small creatures that inhabit our own immediate worlds. In STEP GENTLY OUT, the lines of her poem span a picture book full of amazing single and double-page spreads of Rick Lieder close-up photographs. Thanks to the informative back matter, I can tell you that those photographs are of a European Honeybee, a Chinese Praying Mantis, a Tussock Moth Caterpillar, an Eastern Black Carpenter Ant, a Big Dipper Firefly, a Greater Angle-wing Katydid, an Ebony Jewelwing Damselfly, a Striped Ground Cricket, a Chickweed Geometer Moth, an Orb-weaver Spider, and a Common Yellow Jacket.

To see some of these bugs blown up in photographs to a size larger than your hand and staring at you with enormous beady eyes is probably inspiration enough to look more closely where you are walking. But this is one of those life lessons that so many learn too late, the idea that one needs to find some stillness in order to maintain sanity and to really experience one's precious life and precious world. In this sense, STEP GENTLY OUT is a great book for multigenerational sharing.

For me, the former little kid turned Cub Scout and Boy Scout, turned citizen environmentalist, this is a book in stunning image and spare verse about our natural world, a book that reminds me about the magic of that world, and of our role as stewards of our fragile home.

Richie Partington, MLIS

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The Styling Librarian says

Gorgeous picture book with beautiful photographs and gorgeous poetic texts.

Paula says

"Step gently out, be still and look closely at the world just outside your door-you are sure to be amazed by the tiny creatures you can find. You might see a cricket leap and land, a moth open her wings, a spider walking across the air, or maybe even a praying mantis looking back at you!"--Dust jacket. Close-up photos and lightly-rhymed declarative verse capture a bug's-eye view of nature and encourage children to experience the world outside their doors with care and openness. Includes insect facts.

Mary Ann says

Step outside, take some time to be still and just watch the world. Get down low to the ground or close to some plants, and you're sure to see tiny animals going about their business. Frost and Lieder have captured the wonder children experience as they notice these creatures.

Lieder's photography will be the first thing to grab children's attention. Each page brings the reader up close to an insect, as if you were right there crouching in the garden. The animals are caught in crisp, clear detail that will fascinate children. The colors in each photograph and the balance between sharply focused animals and soft backgrounds are stunningly beautiful. Moreover, Lieder's photographs perfectly interpret and complement Frost's poem. Just look at the beautiful title page - I love the color of the thistle this bee is perching on. The balance between the sharply focused animal and the soft background complements the text perfectly.

Frost begins by calling readers to step outside, take a moment from their busy day, and notice the world around them:

Step gently out,
be still,
and watch
a single blade
of grass.

Frost introduces animals children will be familiar with - an ant, a honeybee, a moth - and some that may be

new to them - a firefly, a katydid, a damselfly. With each, Frost uses just a few words to capture its essence. Her poetry capture the magic of the moment and never overwhelms the young reader with its artistry. Frost manages to balance concrete details with just a few perfectly placed lyrical phrases.

Yes, I know I'm gushing, but I adore this book. It took my breath away when I read it, and it keeps pulling me back again and again. I second Travis Jonker's suggestion - this is certainly a book that could either be considered for the Caldecott for its stunning photographs or the Newbery for its beautiful text.

Angela Bailey says

Title / Author / Publication Date:

Step gently out. / Helen Frost. Rick Lieder (Photographer). / 2012.

Genre: Nonfiction.

Format: Picturebook (in verse) - print.

Plot summary:

"Simple, evocative poetic language and close-up photographs invite youngsters to make observations about the natural world while profiling such subjects as a katydid's eye, a spider on a silken web and a glowing firefly" (NoveList).

Considerations or precautions for readers advisory:

nature, insects, poetry

Review citation:

"Frost's spare text is nicely rhythmic and falls into long rhyming couplets. Appearing in small chunks set in inviting double-page pictures, the poem reads rather as blank verse, the imagery and phrasing pleasing when shared aloud. The felicitous pairing of poetry and pictures is enjoyable and useful. A glossary cites the species name of each insect with a brief paragraph describing some of its behavior" (Margaret Bush in School Library Journal).

Section source used to find the material:

NYPL Children's Books 2012: Picture Books

Recommended age: Ages 4 - 8.

Barbara says

In this simple poem readers are reminded to approach with gentleness the natural world and quietly observe the busy insect and spider world. The photographs are incredible, almost eliciting gasps of awe at the miniscule beauty of an orb-weaver spider or a common yellow jacket whose colors make her decidedly uncommon. Some of the phrases used to describe the insects are particularly memorable; for instance, a yellow jacket is "balanced lightly on a leaf"(unpaginated), and a spider is "splashed with morning dew" (unpaginated). Back matter includes thumbnail sketches that describe each of the creatures found in the

accompanying photographs. This book would be a stunning addition to any science library.

April says

Pretty disappointing.

Basically: bugs on leaves paired with a large-font rhyming poem that I could probably write in eight minutes.

David says

Step Gently Out by Helen Frost, illustrated by Rick Lieder features close-up insect photography and a lyrical poem encouraging children to look more closely at the natural world around them.

Lieder's stunningly beautiful close-up photography features honeybees, a Praying Mantis, a Tussock Moth caterpillar, an Eastern Black Carpenter ant, Striped Ground cricket, Chickweed Geometer moth, Orb Weaver spider, Common Yellow Jacket, Pavement Ant, Big Dipper Firefly, Greater Angle-wing Katydid, and Ebony Jewelwing Damselfly. The cover of an ant and the endpapers showing morning and evening are perfect.

Frost's lyrical poem suggests watching insects as they climb, leap, land, sing, rest, look, balance, flash, and dance. It urges us to "Step gently out" and observe an ant that is "bathed in golden light", katydids that "shine with stardust," and much more. Thumbnail sketches of pictured animals are included in the back. This could be used in science units or for writing examples. Step Gently Out is highly recommended for school and public library collections. It should also be in consideration for Caldecott and Best of 2012 recognition.

For ages 3 to 8, librarians, teachers, read-aloud, nature, insects, poetry, photography, science, and fans of Helen Frost and Rick Lieder.

Sadie says

Step Gently Out by Helen Frost is a rhyming tale of the small creatures that share the world with us. I chose this book because I enjoy nature, and the cover is a photograph of an ant in its natural environment. Before beginning the story, I looked at the end pages. The beginning end page showed a daytime photograph while the end end page showed a nighttime photograph. The differences provided insight that the story of this book goes from the start of the day to the end of the day. While reading, I enjoyed the fact that every image is a photograph of the small bugs in the world we live in (ants, bees, crickets, etc.) and that they both coincide with what the text says and in some cases add to it (i.e. one of the pages mentions only a blade of grass, the photo is of a blade of grass with a tiny bug on it). I really enjoyed the book because it doesn't show the bugs as just disgusting, obnoxious bugs. Instead, it showed the beauty of their existence, something we far too often overlook.

Betsy says

I have lots of little soapboxes scattered around my home that I like to pounce on in idle moments. Big soapboxes. Little soapboxes. Anyone who knows me is forced to hear me expound from one of them at least once daily. It's rare that I get to shove two of them together, though. Usually they represent separate entities that don't overlap. Picking up the remarkably gorgeous work that is Helen Frost and Rick Lieder's *Step Gently Out*, however, allows me to stack one soapbox on top of another. That may make them a little more difficult to balance on, but with practice I'll have it down pat. From that perch I can then cry to the heavens above, "Why is there no poetry award for children's books given out by the American Library Association?" while also bemoaning, "Why has a work of photography never won a Caldecott Award?" Yes, *Step Gently Out* appears to be a double threat. Poetry meets photography in a single undulating poem. And if my soapbox seems strange, it will make all the more sense when you learn that the pair behind the book includes the remarkable poet Helen Frost and photographer extraordinaire Rick Lieder. Put them both together and you'd be a fool to overlook this book for any reason whatsoever.

"Step gently out," the book urges us. "... be still, and watch a single blade of grass." As we follow the words and instructions we are brought in close to a wide array of common backyard insects. An ant lifts its head from the center of a yellow flower and is "bathed in golden light." A spider weaves webs soaked in droplets and we hear that "they're splashed with morning dew". By the end we begin to understand them better and the text closes with "In song and dance and stillness, they share the world with you." A final two-page spread at the end identifies all the insects shown in the book and gives some facts about their lives.

Reading through the book a couple times I couldn't help but wonder if the photos came first or the poem. Did Ms. Frost see Lieder's work and construct just the right poem to accompany the images? After all, there are specific mentions of many of the bugs you'll find in the photographs. Or did Mr. Lieder read Ms. Frost's poem and then set out to find the right insects required to carry her vision? Or (a third idea just came to me) was this a case of an already existing poem and already existing photographs coming together by a clever editor, seeming to fit from the start? I simply do not know.

For parents wishing to instill in their children a sense of Zen, often they'll turn to something like Jon J. Muth's *Zen Shorts* and the like. A worthy choice, but if what you are trying to do is to give your kids a sense of communion with nature on its most basic and essential level, *Step Gently Out* is the better bet. I've always been a big fan of Ms. Frost's poetry, though often her medium is middle grade or early young adult fiction. It was in books like *The Braid* or *Diamond Willow* or *Hidden* that I could enjoy her clever hidden messages and original forms. "Step Gently Out" marks a distinct departure for her, partly because the single poem used here is so simple. With a large font that highlights each word to maximum effect, Frost taps into that moment when you stand in the presence of something as familiar and alien as an insect.

Part of the magic of Lieder's art is the balance between distance and intimacy. When we pick up a book of insect photography from some other children's book photographer like Nic Bishop we are brought nose to pincher with his subjects to a degree we would never find in real life. Bishop's books are novel for this reason, but from Lieder I learned that there's a real joy to be found in backing up a step or two. When we page through this book we look at the insects exactly as a child in her backyard might. The crickets and fireflies are no less powerful because they are the size you'd find if you held them in your hand and up to your eyeball. In their natural state they become somehow more approachable, particularly when you consider the gorgeous backgrounds they recline against. Not that there weren't surprising details to be found in Lieder's work. I had no idea the common yellow jacket was such a lovely vibrant little creature. Not that I'd want to get any nearer to it, of course.

The book pairs rather well with another insect/photography/poetry work for children. Certainly I will inform anyone who shows an interest in using *Step Gently Out* in their programming or lesson plans that the longer *Bug Off : Creepy Crawly Poems* by Jane Yolen, with photos by her son Jason Stemple, also would work. Of course that book has many poems in it. This book contains only one, but one is all that it needs. Folks may associate bug and insect books as ephemeral, deserving only a single reading and then moving on. This book in sharp contrast deserves to be read again and again and again. And hey, if it manages to get a bug-loving kid out there interested in a little poetry as well, no harm no foul. Steeped in lovely, through and through. I don't need a soapbox to tell you that.

For ages 3-8.

Dolores says

Absolutely STUNNING. What a tribute to nature and the beautiful little creatures we pass by every day without noticing.

Rebecca says

Truly beautiful in words and images. You can tell it was written by a poet and not someone who decided it would be nice to write a rhyming picture book. And Rick Lieder's photographs of tiny creatures are soft, sparkly, and magical. This whole book is like a meditation. Don't forget to look closely at the world and it will reward you with beauty.
