



Book Review: *There is a Crocodile Under My Bed!*  
Written and Illustrated by Ingrid and Dieter Schubert  
Lemniscatt, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2014/2015, np  
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The story begins on the book cover as Carl, a wide-eyed crocodile, peers at a bed with the apparent intent of crawling beneath it. We learn a bit more about this creature from the end pages where four other animals with various bumps on their heads peer angrily at him as he walks away with a mask over his eyes and a sling shot in hand. By the time we read the first page of the story, we are already focused on the crocodile under the bed, although we aren't alone. Sophie, a little girl carrying a stuffed toy that could easily have come from Sendak's *Wild Things*, notices Carl right away. She proclaims that there is a crocodile under her bed and she isn't scared at all. Carl, however, is frightened and attempts to hide. So begins a delightful story in brilliantly constructed images of a little girl taming, training, and making friends with a very subservient and likeable crocodile. Sophie is demanding but Carl joins in her play as they jump through hoops, make pancakes and create cardboard crocodiles with empty egg cartons. She eventually insists that Carl take a bath before sharing his adventure stories. Carl quietly leaves when she falls asleep to return to his awaiting playmates pictured on the final end pages of the book. Very simple narration provides an outline for the story; however, rich illustrations reveal the imagination and delightful play reflective of the experiences of many children around the global community.

Ingrid and Dieter Schubert, an award winning husband and wife team of artists, are well known in their homeland of Holland as well as in the 21 other countries where they are published. They are originally from Germany where they studied at the Academy and University in Münster. *There is a Crocodile under My Bed!* was first published in 1980 and was an immediate success followed by publication in 14 countries. This new edition reflects their modernization of the story. The Schuberts began their careers using colored pencil and then added pastels as a key technique in their books. Now they enjoy mixing media, such as acrylics and soft pastels. Appreciating the tactile experience of real materials, they never use the computer. The pastel background invites the shadows of the characters' night play and the hazy appearance of a night context. The more focused Sophie and Carl are when engaged in a project or game, the brighter and crisper the background is to imply what would be a daytime activity.

First published in 1980, the authenticity of the story, outside the credentials of the author/illustrator team, lies in the universality of this portrayal of a young child's imagination. Finding a creature under the bed or elsewhere in the house is a universal theme in literature as many children are cautious about going to bed, being in the dark,

and separations from parents. How these books approach the creature in the bedroom is where stories take on a variety of unique plots that are directed by either fear or bold engagement with the night visitor. Sophie's spunky personality comes through in her few words supported by energized images that come to life with the turning of the page.

*There Is a Crocodile under My Bed!* provides a welcoming entrance into the artistry and humor of this unique couple and is a rich resource for themes such as fear of the night, unlikely friendships, and imagination at work and play. Paired with other books by the Schubert's, such as *The Tiny Mouse* (2013), *Elephant Soup* (2013), or *The Umbrella* (2011), young readers can identify with characters, discuss how the author/illustrators create their art, especially their characters, and consider the elements of humor that reflect everyday life as well as the imagination. This book could also be paired with titles that focus on a monster living in the bedroom, such as *Where the Wild Things Are* (Maurice Sendak, 1984), *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* (Mercer Mayer, 1968), *There's an Alligator under My Bed* (Mercer Mayer, 1987), or *There's a Dragon Downstairs* (Hillary McKay, 2005).

More information about the book or its creators can be found on their website.

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