



This Is Our House

Written and illustrated by Hyewon Yum
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Author/illustrator Hyewon Yum, a Korean immigrant herself, beautifully describes how a three-generation Korean immigrant family in New York City builds their own legacy on U.S. soil with familial love. Using the phrase “our house,” the smiling girl on the cover serves as the narrator to state that the red-brick house behind her is inhabited by her beloved family members. The story starts with the girl’s grandparents arriving in the U.S. on a wintery day with two suitcases. They go on to build their family and interweave their beautiful moments with the house, beginning with their daughter’s (the narrator’s mother) first steps to her marriage which starts a new family’s history and legacy in the house.

The story does not explicitly include Korean immigrant struggles or their hardships, however, it sheds light on how this family grows together. The verbal and visual components highlight the linked lives of the immigrant family in the U.S. This linkage is created through every corner of the house and is embedded in the verbal components of the text. Every sentence starts with “This is where” followed by memories that are cherished by the family. The most remarkable example is “This is the front door where my mom left through when she went away to college. And this is the front door she came back through with the boyfriend who would be my father.” The girl’s mother grew up in this house, left to go to college, and returned with her boyfriend who eventually became a family member. Through this front door, two different pasts come together and a new family and a new generation begins. Also, it must be noted that the daughter (the narrator’s mom) brought a White American as her boyfriend, who was eventually welcomed as her husband. In addition to the linked lives of Korean immigrants, this picturebook sends the message of human interconnectedness without describing European Americans as saviors for struggling immigrants. The boyfriend who becomes the daughter’s husband is simply greeted and invited into the family.

The linked lives of this Korean immigrant family are also shown visually through the use of bright colors and rhythmical lines. The cheerful mood within the visuals seems to imply that building a happy family serves as a cornerstone to feeling appreciated and rooted whether in the original homeland or on foreign soil. More importantly, the foreign soil can turn into a home based on familial love that grows roots deep into the ground.

Readers will benefit by reading other books about Asian immigrants to learn more about their experiences in the U.S. and to expand young readers’ understanding of racial diversity in the U.S. Stories about Asian immigrants’ finding and building a home in the U.S. can help young readers think further about feeling rooted and finding a home away from the homeland. *A Piece of Home* by Jerri Watts and Hyewon Yum (2016) could be a perfect match for *This Is Our House*, because both picturebooks focus on Korean immigrant families and their journey of putting down roots in U.S. soil. A picturebook about a

Vietnamese immigrant family, *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi and Thi Bui (2018), also invites readers to think about the lives of immigrant families in the U.S.

Hyewon Yum is a Brooklyn-based author and illustrator, who was born, raised, and educated in South Korea until she came to New York City to study illustration in the MFA program at the School of Visual Arts. She is an author and illustrator of many picturebooks including *Bark in the Park* (2019), *Saturday Is Swimming Day* (2018), *This Is Our House* (2013), *The Twin's Blanket* (2011), and *There Are No Scary Wolves* (2010). She is known for her heart-warming stories that braid parents' love with children's creative imaginations on the canvas. She received the Ezra Jack Keats Award for her deft description of motherhood and childhood and its universal appeal both to parents and children in *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten* (2012). For more information about the author, readers can visit her website.

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