



The Chickens Build a Wall

Written and illustrated by Jean François Dumont
Eerdmans, 2013, 33 pp.
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The Chickens Build a Wall, was originally published in France as *Une poule Derriere un Mur* in 2011, and translated into English in 2013. The book is on the 2014 USBBY award list and the 2014 Notable Books for a Global Society award list. The author and illustrator, Jean François Dumont, was born in Paris in 1959 and studied architecture in

college although he later devoted himself to the art of drawing. Dumont illustrated numerous books in his native France prior to both writing and illustrating several of his own books for children that include *A Blue So Blue* (2003), which won the 2004 Prix Saint-Exupéry award given annually to the best illustrated picture book in France and *The Geese March in Step* (2014) and *The Sheep Go on Strike* (2014).

The book centers on a group of chickens who over react when another creature, a hedgehog, appears in their farm yard. The chickens have never seen a hedgehog before and decide that for their own protection they need to build a wall around the farmyard to keep the stranger out. The chickens work all winter to build a wall only to find that their intent to keep strangers out did not go as planned and the hedgehog has mistakenly been inside the wall the entire time. Sly humor resides both in the text and illustration as the irony of their paranoia and mistrust is brought to life in their realistic intent. The story invites readers to step back and smile at human error while contemplating the underlying cause and deeper significance of their actions.

The language and short sentences of this story make the book easy to use for multiple age groups. Dumont's acrylic illustrations appear simplistic but imply an energy within the pop-eyed chickens that keeps the story moving. Their seriously intended actions appear silly as the hedgehog is still and quiet. Emotions are clearly created as readers can sense anger, fear, and determination. The illustrations also work to set a time frame as the seasons change against neutral colored backgrounds while the chickens continue to work.

Children from pre-school through early elementary will enjoy the story and illustrations, while the story can be used for older students as a means to broach discussions on a variety of social issues. This allegorical story has numerous themes ripe for discussion such as: problems that come about by making hasty judgments, blaming strangers for both real and imagined offenses, being different, immigration, treatment of strangers, group mentality, and fear of the unknown.

When considering the theme of immigration, several books that could be paired with this book are: *Migrant* (2011) written by Maxine Trottier, and illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault;

Hannah is My Name (2004) written and illustrated by Belle Yang; *I am René, the Boy* (2005) written by René Colato Lainez and illustrated by Fabiola Graullera Ramirez. Along the same theme, but for older students, *The Chickens Build a Wall* could be paired with *La Linea* (2008) by Ann Jaramillo as an introduction to the many forms of borders that keep others out. Book pairings around other themes, such as trying to fit in, could include *Sneetches* (1961) by Dr. Seuss.

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