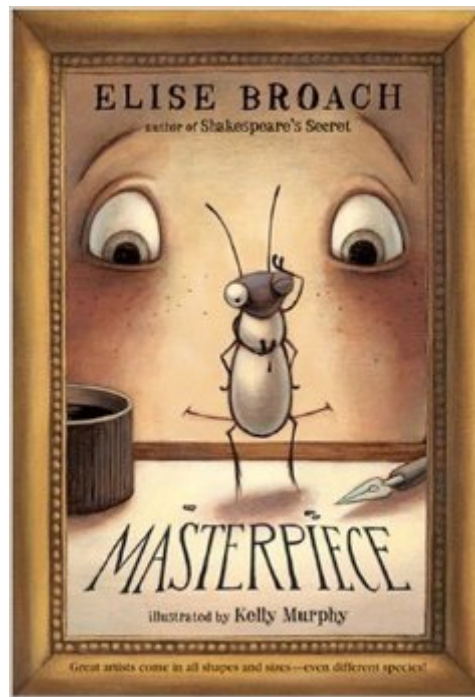


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Masterpiece



Synopsis

Marvin lives with his family under the kitchen sink in the Pompadays' apartment. He is very much a beetle. James Pompaday lives with his family in New York City. He is very much an eleven-year-old boy. After James gets a pen-and-ink set for his birthday, Marvin surprises him by creating an elaborate miniature drawing. James gets all the credit for the picture and before these unlikely friends know it they are caught up in a staged art heist at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that could help recover a famous drawing by Albrecht Dürer. But James can't go through with the plan without Marvin's help. And that's where things get really complicated (and interesting!). This fast-paced mystery will have young readers on the edge of their seats as they root for boy and beetle. In Shakespeare's Secret Elise Broach showed her keen ability to weave storytelling with history and suspense, and Masterpiece is yet another example of her talent. This time around it's an irresistible miniature world, fascinating art history, all wrapped up in a special friendship • something for everyone to enjoy. Masterpiece is a 2009 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 700L (What's this?)

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Square Fish; Reprint edition (March 30, 2010)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars • See all reviews (72 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #50,190 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #129 in Books > Children's Books > Animals > Bugs & Spiders #212 in Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Art #517 in Books > Children's Books > Mysteries & Detectives

Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

I'm debating what level of stars to give this, because it is a technically well-written story - rich with imagery filled vocabulary. The message, however, is so misguided that it cannot receive

endorsement. This mystery is certainly amusing and adequately enjoyable. A young boy is in the typical stranglehold between divorced parents. His mother is somewhat neglectful and more interested in her new family and in being difficult to his artsy father than parenting her older son. A beetle living in the home demonstrates an incredible talent for drawing which leads to the boy getting credit for the drawing by his father and, ultimately, an art museum. The art museum curator hatches a plan for the boy's drawing skills (actually the beetle's) to be used to create a copy of a masterpiece as a decoy to find an art thief. The beetle cooperates with this deception out of a sense of obligation to the boy's friendship and to somehow validate (by counterfeited art) the boy in his mother's eyes. This is where the point of the story gets muddy to me. What is the author's message to young readers? The boy's deception is never revealed. In fact, he ultimately is made a heroic character despite his credit-taking lies and breaking/entering - yes for an ultimate good - but is this exonerated? The book amplifies the flaws of parents and adults, and supports the often-touted message to conceal info from parents - even to the point of endangerment of the young protagonist. Even the beetle goes against his parent's protective instruction and receives only a prodigal beetle's reception.

"Home, for Marvin's family, was a damp corner of the cupboard beneath the kitchen sink." Marvin, a young beetle -- not a roach-- lives with his happy family in the kitchen of the Pompaday family, where they dine on a "constant litter of apple cores, bread crumbs, onion skins, and candy wrappers." They dislike the Pompadays themselves, but they are fond of Mrs. Pompaday's eleven-year-old son, a quiet boy. When Mrs. Pompaday throws James a birthday party and invites all the obnoxious sons of her clients, only Marvin's family notices how unhappy he is. They decide to give him a present, and send Marvin, a clever young beetle, off to deliver it. But in James' room, Marvin has an urge to give him something really special, and leaves a tiny beetle-leg-and-ink drawing for him... And so James' life will never be the same again, because Marvin's delicate sketch is so perfect that it could be confused for a Duhrer masterpiece. In fact, it is confused for a Duhrer masterpiece. Broach, author of the equally excellent stories, "Shakespeare's Secret" and the witty and funny picture book "When Dinosaurs Came With Everything", is a wonderfully gifted story teller. "Masterpiece" leaves the reader with the hope that it might be possible, in a good world, to enjoy the friendship of a gifted insect, to visit behind the scenes at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and to solve a mystery. There's more than a little wisdom embedded in Broach's prose as well: "Why don't beetles ever get divorced?" Marvin asks.... "Well, our lives are short, darling. What would be the point?... And we expect a lot less than people do."

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