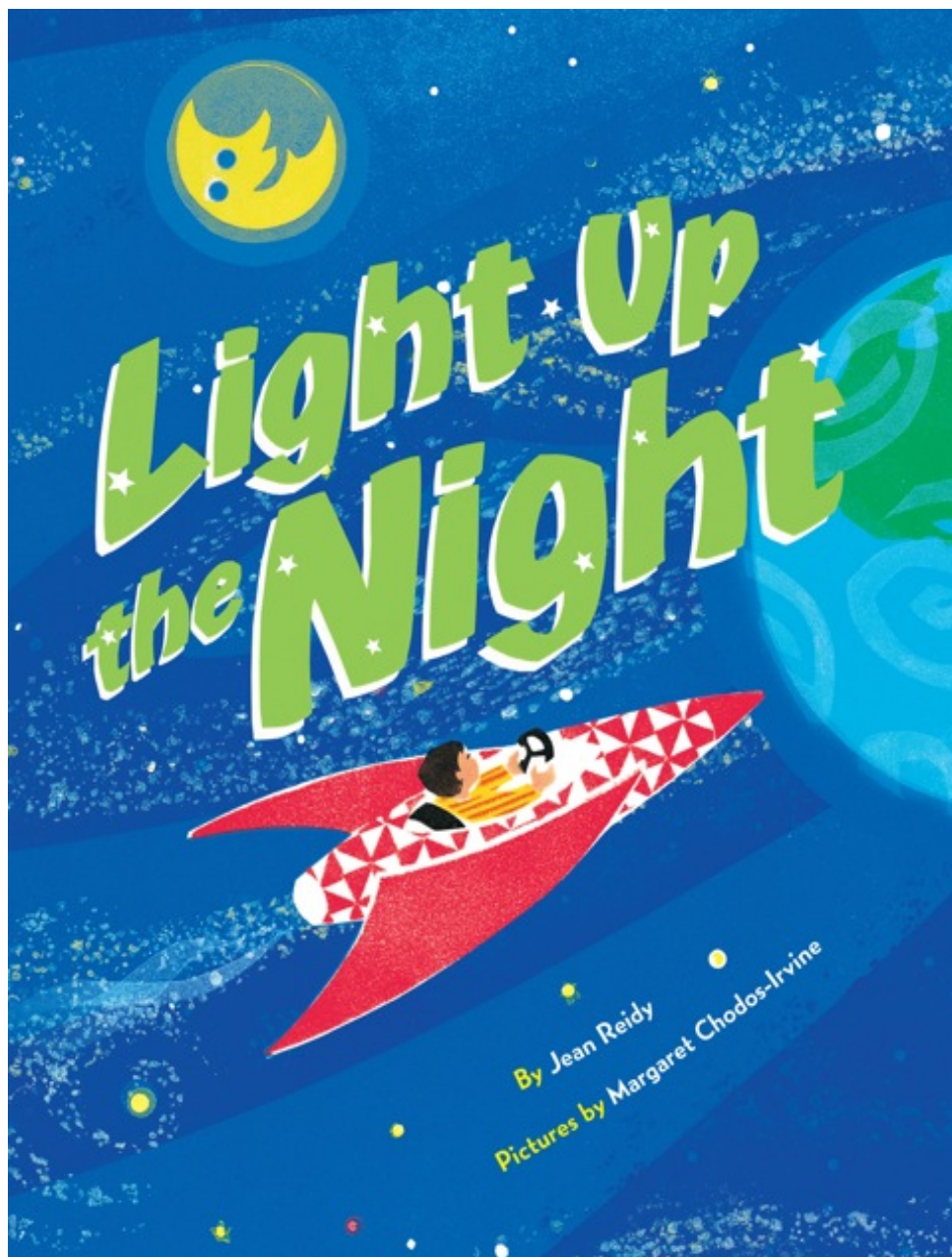


A Teacher's Guide to

Light Up the Night

Written by Jean Reidy
Illustrated By Caldecott Honor Winner, Margaret Chodos-Irvine



LIGHT UP THE NIGHT © 2011 by Jean Reidy
Art by Margaret Chodos-Irvine; Disney Hyperion Books
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Praise for Light Up the Night

“The coziest of quilts becomes a rocket ship in this gorgeous, mesmerizingly rhythmic read-aloud that explores a boy’s small place in a vast world...The soothing rhythms and comforting refrain are just right for very young ears, and the geographical terms will stretch young minds. Caldecott Honor-winner Chodos-Irvine’s colorful illustrations are fun and friendly A dreamy-yet-instructive ode to the universe.”

~Kirkus Starred Review

“Soft assonant sounds soothe the cumulative rhyme that parallels nighttime routines through its repetition and structure. Visually, the most important object in the book is the boy’s best bedtime companion: his blanket. Reproduced on the endpapers, the blanket first swaddles the book and then the boy as pieces of it morph into the vehicles that transport him. Double-page spreads of bright but not overpowering collages depict his journey, while the opening and closing actions (of going to bed and going to sleep) are shown in smaller wordless panels, bringing the story full circle.”

~Horn Book

“A boy celebrates his place in the world in Reidy’s soothing bedtime story. Caldecott Honor artist Chodos-Irvine’s brightly colored matte prints portray the universe as a welcoming place, abuzz with activity, with swirling, starlit skies and friendly constellations, astronauts, and aliens. The collaborators are entirely in sync as they remind readers that the universe and its wonders are theirs to revel in.”

~Publishers Weekly

Story Summary

When it's time to sleep, it's nice to know there's a place that's safe. In a cozy house, in a comfy bed, under a blanket that's white and red under stars so bright they light up the night in your own little piece of the universe.

About the Author



Jean Reidy is a freelance writer whose articles and essays have appeared in more than fifty publications, including *Family Fun* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. Her first two picture books, *Too Purpley!* and *Too Pickley!*, were both published by Bloomsbury USA and illustrated by Genevieve Leloup. She lives in Denver with her husband and four children. Visit her at www.jeanreidy.com.

About the Illustrator

Margaret Chodos-Irvine is the illustrator of several books for children, including *Buzz*, an ABA pick of the Lists and a Los Angeles Times Book Review Best Book of the Year, and her own Caldecott Honor Book *Ella Sarah Gets Dressed*. She lives in Seattle, Washington, with her husband and two daughters. Visit her at www.chodos-irvine.com.



Pre-Reading

Time for Bed

Bring in a stuffed animal to share. Have students sit in a circle and let them pass it around. As the stuffed animal is passed from child to child, share one bedtime routine that he or she follows each night. As each child shares, keep track of responses on chart paper. Tally the responses, then create a graph. Discuss the results. Which bedtime routine is the most common? Least common?

- *Activate schema and background knowledge to construct meaning*

Take a Book Walk

What is the book's title? Who wrote the story? Who did the illustrations?

Discuss the boy's bedtime routine in the opening of the story. What happens after his mother leaves the room? Follow the boy through the pages of the story. Where does he go? What does he see? Where does he end up?

- *Make predictions about what will happen in the text and explain whether they were confirmed or not and why.*
- *With prompting and support, name the author and illustrator of a story and define the role of each in telling the story.*

Vocabulary

Your students may be unfamiliar with the following words. Encourage them to use picture clues to infer meanings.

- *Relate new vocabulary to prior knowledge.*



Discussion Starters

1. What does the boy's mother do before she tucks him into bed? (*knowledge*)
2. What forms of transportation does the boy use throughout the story? (*comprehension*)
3. If you could travel anywhere and see anything, where would you go? Why? (*application*)
4. Does the boy really go on a journey into space? What parts of the story are fantasy? Which parts feel realistic? (*analysis*)
5. Where might the boy and his blanket travel the next night? Brainstorm other themed destinations that the boy could explore (jungles, cities, the ocean, the center of the earth, etc.) (*synthesis*)
6. Do you think the boy's "journey" helped him to fall asleep? Why or why not? How do you use your imagination before bedtime? Does it help you fall asleep, or keep you awake? Explain your thinking. (*evaluation*)

Student Activities

My Galactic Address

List the places the boy visits in the pages of the story. In order to help students conceptualize the view from wide to narrow, help them to create their own “galactic address.”

Find your school using Google Earth (www.google.com/earth). On chart paper, leave some blank lines at the top, then write the first line of your school's address. Now zoom out slightly in order to see the borders of your town, and add the name of your town to the address on the chart paper. Do the same for your state, country, continent, hemispheres (northern/southern and eastern/western), then add the planet earth to the next line. Zoom out from earth and add our galaxy, the Milky Way, to the last address line.

Now zoom back in so that your school is in view. Go back up to the line above the address and add the section of the school where your classroom is located. Above that, write your hall name (if you have one) and then top it off with your classroom number.

To create students' own galactic addresses, give them a copy of the galactic address you created, leaving off the name of your school. Help them to add their own street addresses, and top it off with where their bedrooms are located in their homes.

- *Identify the hemispheres on a globe.*
- *Recite address including city, state, and country and explain how those labels help find places on a map.*
- *Use geographic tools and technology such as observations, maps, globes, photos, satellite images, and geospatial software to describe space and uses of space.*

Shedding Some Light

Place a bright sticker on your town's approximate location on a globe. Have the students stand in a circle with one child in the center holding a flashlight who will act as the sun. Dim the lights. Have another child spin the globe slowly in a counterclockwise direction. Ask the class to observe the daytime/nighttime cycle. When it's time for bed in your area of the planet, which children are just waking up (and vice versa)?

If the globe is on a tilted stand, discuss the way the earth is angled. Guide a child slowly around their classmate who is acting as the sun. Have the class observe when your hemisphere is facing towards the sun and when it's facing away from the sun. What is the globe's position in summer? Winter? What about spring and fall?

Give four students each a sign with the name of a different season. When the globe reaches the height of each season, have the child holding the corresponding sign stand to mark the spot in the rotation of the earth around the sun.

- *Use models to explain the relative motions of Earth over time.*
- *Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.*
- *Identify, predict, and extend patterns based on observations and representations of objects in the sky, daily weather, and seasonal changes.*

Creating Constellations

Find the constellations of the dog and rabbit in the illustrations. Draw the stars only and then have students guess which animals' shapes these constellations form.

Visit <http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/starfinder/> to download a free constellation finder from NASA.

Give students glow-in-the dark star stickers and black paper to create their own constellations. They can either model their constellations after real ones or invent their own. Let them share their star patterns and see if their classmates can guess what their constellations form. Afterwards, let students "connect the stars" using white chalk or crayon. Display them under a banner that reads:

_____ is Out of This World!
(your class name)

- *Use simulations to explore objects in the solar system.*

Bedtime Quilt

Point out the boy's red and white quilt on the end pages. Can students spot this quilt in each scene? Discuss the shapes they see in the quilt. Next, show the template of the quilt square on the following page. How many triangles can students find in this square? At first, students may only see eight triangles. Trace these eight triangles in one color. Next, ask students to look for larger triangles (two of the small triangles combined). Trace these large triangles using a second color. Now how many triangles do they see? Have them do the same activity with squares and rectangles.

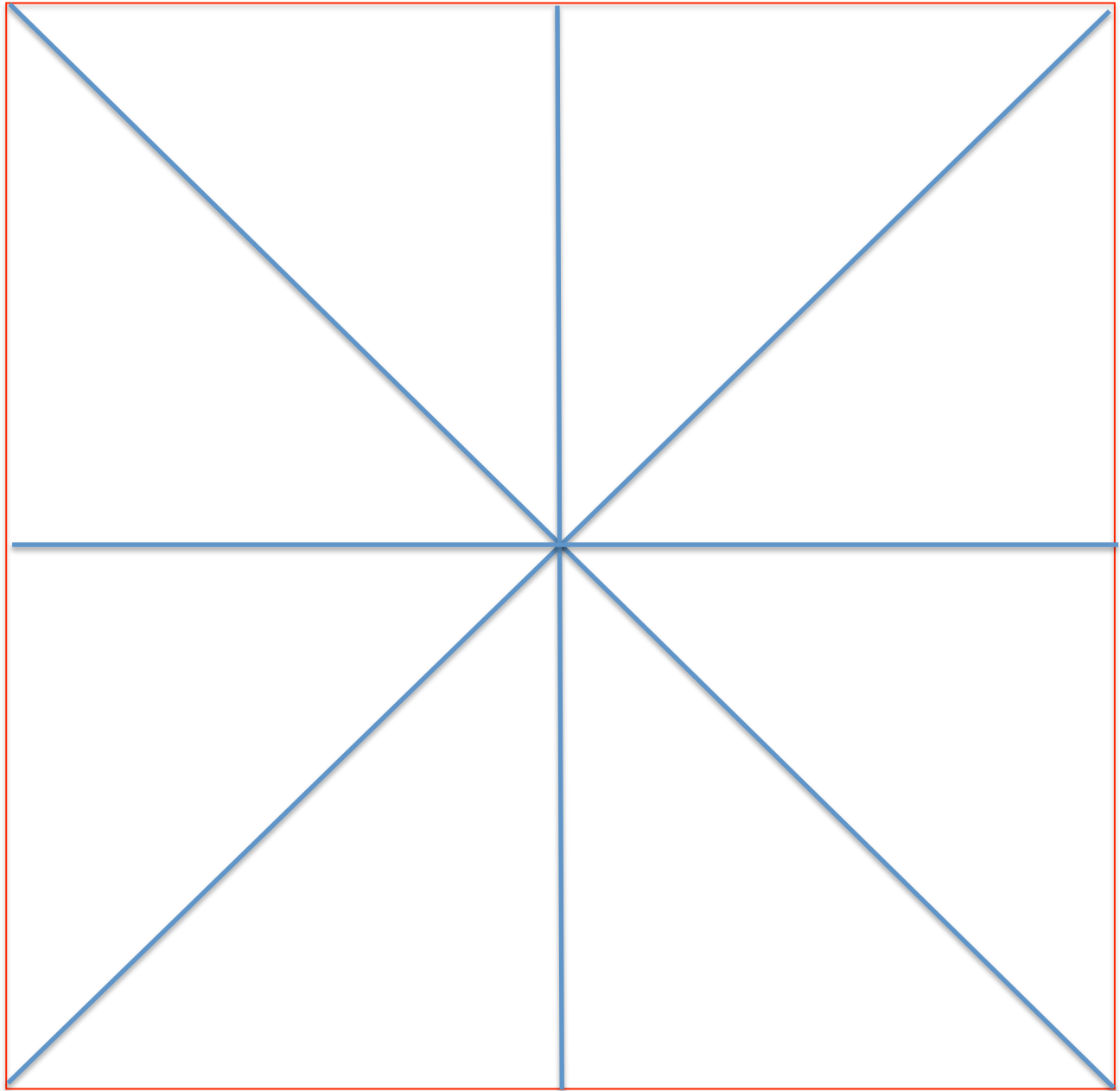
Let students decorate their own quilt square, either a cloth square or a paper version (see template on the following page). Inside the square, have them illustrate each section with an object or words from their own bedtime routines.

When they've finished, you can either display the squares in one large quilt, or create a "Getting Our Zzzzzs" display.

For the latter, take a photo your students from the shoulders up with their eyes closed, pretending to sleep. Let them cut out their individual photos and "tuck" themselves in under their quilt squares to sleep.

- *Recognize and draw shapes having specified attributes.*
- *Describe objects in the environment using names of shapes.*
- *Compose simple shapes to form larger shapes.*

How many triangles do you see in this quilt square? How many squares and rectangles do you see?



In each triangle, illustrate or write something that you do before falling asleep each night.

Continent Puzzlers

Introduce your students to *Pangaea*, the theory that all the continents were once joined in a single supercontinent. Let students label, color and cut out templates of the continents, then try to piece them together like a puzzle. Compare their results with this model from National Geographic:

http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/multimedia/earths-tectonic-plates/?ar_a=1&ar_r=1.

Afterwards, give them a blue sheet of construction paper. Fold it in half lengthwise, open the paper, then draw the equator on the creased line. Do the same with a vertical crease for the Prime Meridian. Using a world map as a reference, have students glue the continents into place as they are positioned today. Label the continents and oceans.

- *Identify the hemispheres, equator, and poles on a globe.*
- *Find oceans and continents on maps.*

Rocketing into Space

Download these directions for fun, kid-friendly experiments from NASA:

☑ Create a bubble rocket: <http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/pop-rocket/en/>. Talk with students about the shapes that make up the rocket. Why do rockets have this shape? How well would they fly if they were shaped like a box? A sphere? For older children, which variables can be manipulated? (Hints: weight of canister, amount of “fizz” added to the rocket, materials used, etc.). How does changing a variable affect the rocket’s performance?

☑ How easy is it to launch a rocket from a spinning planet? To find out, all you need is a merry-go-round, a bucket and some tennis balls.

<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/launch-windows/en/>

☑ For more advanced designs, try

<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/external/http://science.nasa.gov/kids/the-universe/universe-spacecraft-paper-models/>.

- *Describe methods and equipment used to explore the solar system and beyond.*
- *Use simulations to explore objects in the solar system.*
- *Understand that space missions can be planned because we understand planetary motion.*

Planetary Passport

Host a spin around the planets with aliens as tour guides:

1. Let students work in small groups to research the planets. (Visit this NASA site for kids and click on the planets to learn some facts about each one:

<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/solar-system-explorer/en/#/review/solar-system-explorer/game.swf>. With poster board or Styrofoam balls, students can create two or three-dimensional models of the planets they researched.

2. Using the story's alien illustrations as models, have students create their own alien puppets or masks.

3. Spread the displays out around the room with at least one student posted at each station to act as the alien tour guide. As students "visit" each planet, they can stamp each section of their passports, along with one fact they learned about each.

- *Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which students name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.*
- *With peers, use a variety of resources (direct observation, trade books, texts read aloud or viewed) to answer questions of interest through guided inquiry.*
- *Participate in shared research and writing projects.*
- *Gather, analyze, and interpret data about components of the solar system.*
- *Investigate, explain, and describe that the Sun provides heat and light to Earth.*

			
	MERCURY		VENUS
	EARTH		MARS
	JUPITER		SATURN
URANUS			NEPTUNE

Sort It Out

In each spread, the boy imagines his blanket as a different form of transportation. Place several kinds of toy vehicles—cars, trucks, motorcycles, trains, airplanes, boats, etc.—in a box. Ask students to sort into groups without giving any other instructions. Children will likely sort them into groups according to the type of vehicle. Help them to think of other ways to sort the objects—by color, number of wheels, modes of transportation they've used vs. those they haven't used, etc. For an extra challenge, group the objects by some attribute, then ask student to guess which attribute each group shares.

- *Sort common objects into categories to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent.*


Traveler's License

Ask students in which kind of vehicle they'd most like to travel—car, truck, train, plane, boat, rocket, or even hot air balloon! Have them create a driver's license for their vehicle below, then send them off on their imaginary journeys. Using the postcard template on the following page, children can illustrate and write about what they "saw" on their imaginary trips. There's also a space for them to design a stamp from their imaginary place.

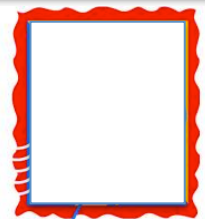
<div style="border: 2px solid red; width: 250px; height: 250px; margin: 10px auto; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">(photo)</div>	<h1>Driver's License</h1>
	THE FOLLOWING DRIVER:

	IS PERMITTED TO OPERATE A

	DATE ISSUED: _____
	SIGNATURE OF DRIVER:



Wish you were here!



- *Focus on a topic and add details to strengthen writing as needed.*

More Cumulative Tales

Check out these other cumulative tales and encourage your students to compare the story elements with those in *Light Up the Night*:

✿ ***Boom Boom Go Away!*** by Laura Geringer, illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline. A little boy, playing in his room, finds a very noisy and original way of telling his parents to keep out when they tell *him* that it's time to go to bed! How many sounds can *you* make when bedtime is only one *blart, plong, clink, neeee neeee*, or *ding* away?

✿ ***Creak! Said the Bed*** by Phyllis Root, illustrated by Regan Dunnick. It's the middle of the night. Everyone's snoozing in bed when out of the darkness, squeak goes the door. Mama's eyes fly open. Who is awake? Evie? Ivy? Little Mo? On a stormy night in a little house, only Papa keeps snoring away — snurkle, snark — unaware of the wild weather outside and the growing number of nervous bedmates within. Can nothing wake him?

✿ ***In Enzo's Splendid Gardens***, written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco. An innocent bee stops on a tree in Enzo's Italian restaurant. When a small boy turns to look—and drops his favorite book—the chaos begins! Polacco uses her rich and colorful art to complement this wild and spirited cumulative romp through Enzo's, her husband's Italian restaurant.

✿ ***The Cazuela That the Farm Maiden Stirred*** by Samantha R. Vamos, illustrated by Rafael López. In this amusing tale of five farm animals, their farmer and a farm girl, the action builds and the Spanish words repeat. At the book's end, a glossary with pronunciation and recipe are provided.

✿ ***This is the Teacher*** by Rhonda Gowler, illustrated by Mike Lester. What happens when everything goes wrong at school? How is a teacher to cope?! A funny text and hilarious, cartoon-like illustrations capture just that kind of chaotic day.

✿ ***There Was An Old Monster!*** by Rebecca & Adrian Emberley, illustrated by Ed Emberley. In the tradition of the Old Lady Who Swallowed A Fly, this monster swallows a tick, some ants, a lizard, a bat, a jackal, and a bear. When he tries to swallow a lion...ROAR! — Now that monster eats no more!

- *Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.*

An Interview with Author Jean Reidy



How did you get the idea for *Light Up the Night*?

Light Up the Night was inspired by every kid who threw a sheet over the kitchen table and called it a clubhouse. It's for every kid who makes a fort out of couch cushions. And it's especially for every kid who huddles down under a blanket at night — where safety and security reign, allowing imagination to blast off.

I was one of those kids. For me, my favorite space was my own bedroom in the house where I grew up. Well, it wasn't really my own. I shared it with three sisters. And my grandmother slept just down the hall. While my brothers were relegated to the first floor and basement, our "girls only" attic bedroom, which my dad fashioned out of knotty pine and oak parquet, had enough cubbies and closets to hold many "treasures." From there, I embarked on some of my most amazing adventures. Most were in my head. Other times, I might have been holed up in our garden shed, or hidden between the fruit trees and the fence with friends, deciphering secret club codes or spying on squirrels. Every shrub became a hideout. Unfinished basements were canvases for kingdoms and castles.

My own four kids also cherished their special spaces and beloved security items. Corners and closets were much preferred to full blown playrooms. Tents were better than bedrooms. Beds were better bunked. And when we moved into a new home, my kids' biggest concern was that their blankets and their "guys" (stuffed animals) moved with us. Security and a sense of place seem essential to childhood.

But unfortunately, as we know, not all children enjoy that security and sense of place. Over the past six years my family has developed strong connections to the country of Uganda and its people. And with that came my understanding of the plight of Uganda's children. HIV/AIDS robs these kids of family and health. Past civil war threatened their security as many were kidnapped out of their beds to be child soldiers. And the warehouses and refugee camps where they currently seek security and safety are unimaginably inhumane.

So it was with both an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what we have and a deep sense of responsibility for those who have not, that I wrote *Light Up the Night*.

Once the idea came to you, what did you do next?

During my musing on *Light Up the Night*, I was drawn to the idea of the universe embracing the child with its many layers like a nesting doll. I thought instantly of The House That Jack Built and settled on the cumulative verse which I thought kids would like. So while *Light Up the Night* is my longest book thus far, weighing in at a whopping 650 words, it's the repetition within the cumulative verse that raises that word count. Once I had the rhythm, the verses flowed fairly easily. I'm thrilled that my agent, Erin Murphy, and Disney Hyperion loved the story. I hope kids will too.

***Light Up the Night* is your third published picture book. How did your writing and/or publishing experiences differ this time around?**

While I feel as though I'm always learning — about writing, about publishing, about kids — and applying that newfound knowledge with every new book, one thing remains the same — the wonder, amazement and thrill of picture book creation. Starting with a story, born of life experience and imagination and having an agent and editor say, “Yes.” Seeing the first illustrations. Revealing a cover. Announcing a release date. Reading it aloud for the first time to a child. It's always completely exciting.

How did the illustrations come about?

Folks often ask how much control I have over the art in my books. Writers frequently want to know what guidance I've given the illustrator in my text. My answer? Very little. And I prefer it that way. I like to leave room for the illustrator to not only complete my stories but take them to a whole new level. That's exactly what the brilliant Caldecott Honor artist Margaret Chodos-Irvine did with *Light Up the Night*. My only “Illustration Note” on the original text mentioned that the story zooms from out to in (duh!) and that the blanket should appear, in some form, on every page. I have a feeling Margaret understood that long before she read my note.

While considering a manuscript of mine, one of my editors once said, “In the hands of the right illustrator ...” She didn't need to finish that sentence because I knew

what she was thinking. The right illustrator would get the vision she and I shared. And that editor ultimately bought that book.

This picture book process is a bit about trust — trusting your agent, your editor and your illustrator. And I do. Margaret proved to be not only the right illustrator, but the perfect illustrator for *Light Up the Night*.

Do you have a writing routine?

An interesting question. And I'm especially intrigued with the routines of the world's great writers and best-selling novelists. I consider some routines legitimate for inspiration and others ... well, downright superstition. But who am I to judge authors who sell millions of books?

More so, I admire the writers with full-time day jobs who write at night or in the wee hours of the morning. I wish I had that grit. They are the true writing warriors who have the work ethic for great success.

So this is where I feel like a phony among fellow writers. Routine? Who has time for a routine? Don't get me wrong. I dream of a routine and sometimes, for a day or two, I fake one. I perk my coffee at just the right hour. I check my e-mail while it's perking. I bang out 1000 words and then I go for a run, during which I meditate on plot points and characterization. But sooner or later, usually within a few hours, life gets in the way.

Life - as in a lacrosse banquet or a high school graduation or a son's wedding or a mother's move or a baby going to college or 200 kids in Uganda. And then my writer's routine, in an instant, implodes. I can't be routine with passions competing for time and space.

But I'm not entirely sold on routines. Because, interestingly, it's often when I'm not perking or pecking or penning that I find the fodder for my stories. And when I write when I least expect it - rather than according to some predetermined schedule — I have few expectations. And that's when fun things happen.

As of this past August, I've found myself in a new situation — empty nesthood. So all that blather you just read about life getting in the way and writing when I least expect it, may be rendered a thing of the past. Watch, you'll probably find me every 6:47 A.M., wearing my 1978 Cotton Bowl T-Shirt (ask me who won!), revising my

manuscript with my lucky totem pole pencil (too big to sharpen!). I just hope I can keep the magic.

What advice do you have for young writers?

First, read, read, read. Read anything you want. Comic books, magazines, funny stories, sad stories, adventures, fantasy - whatever you like. Reading is the best writing teacher. I actually schedule reading time into my work schedule, studying story structure and characters and settings, in order to be able to write my own stories.

Then don't be afraid of the blank page or the blank screen. Just write. Don't be afraid of sounding stupid. Just get it down. You can always revise it. Write about things you like and write the way you like to write. Make lists, doodle, rant and rap. Write poems, wacky stories, diary entries. If you're stuck on what to write, remember there are ideas all around. Look at your everyday life and ask, "What if?" What if that lamp grew tentacles? What if the bully became the principal of the school? What if dinosaurs drove fire trucks? It can be lots of fun. But just write. The more you do it, the more you'll love it. AND the better you'll become!

When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?

I love to read. And I'm a sucker for card games. Consequently, my kids have turned into some pretty savvy card players. But we also enjoy the outdoors. Here in Colorado we're so lucky to have miles of amazing trails and, of course, the Rockies, so I take full advantage of this beautiful state. I love to hike, run, walk, ride my bike, and ski. I'm also an ice skater. I grew up in Chicago across the street from an outdoor rink and spent hours teaching myself jumps and spins. I still wear my really old, broken-in, "just right" skates.

What were your own bedtime routines as a kid? Did you carry over some of those routines with your own children?

Bedtime routines. What could be sweeter? I miss them so much (trying to clear large knot from throat).

Books and music. Those were the staples of my nighttime routine as a kid. Remember that "girls only" attic bedroom I mentioned earlier? Well my sisters and I used to sing to each other. Not traditional lullabies, but instead, fully harmonized Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, Peter, Paul and Mary, Broadway show tunes — you

name it. We played “Name That Tune” almost every night. Then we’d read, read, read – whatever was on the nightstand or bookshelf —Archie Comics, Dr. Seuss, *Gone With the Wind*.

For my kids, I carried on that tradition but reversed the routine – first the reading then the singing, until they drifted off to sleep (or faked sleep to stop my annoying singing). It was one of my favorite parts of the day.

When one of my sons graduated from college, he made my husband and me a mahogany music box as a thank you gift. It has an inlaid “Dr. Seuss – esque” house on the lid and it plays “Getting to Know You” a song that I sang while rocking my kids to sleep when they were babies. Okay, here come those tears again. Comfy, cozy, security ... home. It’s what this is all about, isn’t it?

What makes *Light Up The Night* a particularly special book for you?

The *Light Up the Night* story ends in the sublime comfort of a kid’s cozy bed – so I’d like to close this interview with some good news and hope. When I travelled to Uganda in the summer of 2010 I worked at the beautiful and joy-filled Musana Children’s Home in Iganga which provides a home and school to 80 children and education to an additional 120 day students. The Musana community was founded and is run by three young women from my hometown here in Colorado. In addition to dormitories and classrooms, the school has a small library badly in need of books. On November 7-18, I’m holding an online auction called Light Up the Library which, in coordination with Books for Africa, will provide funding for thousands of books for Musana’s library. The auction items feature something for everybody. I hope you will join me reaching beyond our borders to celebrate literacy, a love of reading as well as earth, space and a kid’s sense of place.

For more information on Jean and her books, please visit www.jeanreidy.com. For information on Light Up the Library see <http://lightupthelibrary.blogspot.com/>.

An Interview with Illustrator

Margaret Chodos-Irvine



When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?

I always knew I could draw well, but when I was young I wanted to be an Archaeologist. I remember I got mad at my first grade teacher because she said I was going to be an artist when I grew up (I had drawn an especially nice cow) and I didn't like being told I was going to be something different than what I had decided. I did go to college and get a degree in Anthropology, but I took so many art classes too that I ended up getting a degree in Art as well. But, I still didn't choose to call myself an artist until I was much older.

How did you become an illustrator?

I was always illustrating stories when I was young--fairy tales, fables, stories my dad told me. When I was a teenager I illustrated for my high school newspaper and magazine and in college I illustrated for the University of Oregon Museum of Natural History, but my first PAID Illustration job was for Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*. I was about 21 years old when she hired me. That's when I started to think that maybe being an illustrator was even better than being an Archaeologist.

What type of media do you like working with the most, and why?

I am a printmaker. I use a variety of printmaking techniques to illustrate my children's books. There is a certain amount of suspense to printing images as opposed to painting or drawing them. There is an extra step between what you do and seeing the end result. It is kind of nerve-wracking, but I like not knowing exactly what my picture is going to look like until I peel the paper off of the surface I'm printing from. Printmakers are kind of funny that way.

How long did it take to illustrate *Light Up the Night*?

About 9 months from the first rough sketches to the finished art.

How did you prepare for this project?

I made a lot of little drawings and character sketches to get acquainted with the figures in the story. I drew storyboards to figure out the pacing of the pictures and the breaks between the pages. Then I worked out how my pictures could best add to Jean's story. When I came up with the idea of having the boy in the book use his blanket as a variety of vehicles to journey through his universe, I went to toy stores to look at toy vehicles to use as reference. For the blanket pattern I looked at books of quilt designs at my local library. I also looked through old kids' books on planets and space travel for inspiration. I love those old books from the 50's!

Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?

No, I worked with the editor, designer and art director for the book, but not the author. That's how it usually works. I think of making a children's book as kind of like running a relay race. Each person does their part—the author writes the story and passes it on to the editor, who edits the text and finds an illustrator and passes it on to them. The illustrator creates the imagery for the story and passes the art on to the designer who adds the type, and so on.

Are any of the characters or aspects of the setting modeled on real-life people and places?

I took lots of pictures of a very nice neighbor boy who was willing to model for me for this book. Among other poses, he got to pretend to drive a spaceship and pretend to fly a plane and pretend to ride a skateboard. He did a very good job.

Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up."

Do you agree? Children like to create and explore and experiment for no reason other than the pursuit of discovery and the joy of making something new—as if their fingers have a direct line from their hearts. As we grow up we start to judge and compare and fret and all that thinking gets in the way of making art. I think our job as grown-up artists is to continue to find our hearts in our work.

What advice do you have for young aspiring artists?

Don't worry about what other people think of your artwork, just aspire to make art that YOU are proud of.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I like to make stuff. I make clothes. I make jewelry. I make jam. I'm always happiest when I have some project in the works.