



**Review and creative writing ideas  
by Early Years Specialist and former Reception Class Teacher  
Jane Blatt**

Review

Satoshi Kitamura gives us wonderful insight into what is ‘real’ everyday knowledge within a child’s world and how this reality can be changed into something magical. We know that Hannah is a gardener and she knows about plants. She knows about violins and bows and birds that fly in the sky. She knows about clouds and she knows about insects and farm animals and pets. She knows about other musical instruments and she knows about thinking and talking out loud and she knows about the differences between daytime and night time. She knows about her body and movement and all her senses. In her play and violin playing she explores make believe and magic. Hannah is a very gifted creator.

A leaf can become a fabulous child sized violin; flying birds in the sky can sing with her; she can smell the flowers as she plays her leaf violin; she can hear the insects singing and see the clouds in all their shapely glory like an orchestra in the sky. Night time comes and she is lying on her back with the jumble of real looking instruments in her mind’s eye taking on unusual shapes and the flowers’ petals closing up and sleeping with her. And suddenly Hannah hears her mother singing to her that it’s time for supper. And she opens her eyes and finds out that it’s nearly dark and the tulips in her garden are really closed up and sleeping and the sun is setting and the indoor lights through the windows make patterns on the dark green grass. When Hannah comes inside she looks happy and excited and wants to share her musical experiences with her family.

And after supper, she does. She doesn't need words to retell it. All she needs is her leaf and stick. And magical it truly is.

So many illustrators of young children's books use a recurring animal as a talking point and a link across pages. Kitamura's ubiquitous white dove bird is no gimmick but an important part of the opening plot and the development of this enchanting book. We see Hannah looking sad at the start of the book as she wants someone to play with and when the bird drops the leaf the magical story can begin. Of course the role of the dove in spreading joy and peace and new beginnings won't be lost on the adults but needn't be explained to young readers. Using the dove is wonderfully creative Kitamura, and he passes this creativity onto the exquisite little girl. Hannah transforms the leaf into a violin and a stick, lying on the ground, into a bow. And very importantly, when the dove drops the leaf it's able to sing with Hannah's beautifully held violin. In my experience as a violinist and teacher of young children, I have not come across such a beautifully held violin in literature (or real life). Her child body moves and dances and the violin is always held naturally, steadily and comfortably. I wonder whether Kitamura is a violinist!

### Creative Writing idea

I'd now like to offer up the idea that Kitamura could have made Hannah and the Violin into a wordless picture book. The illustrations are perfect for the magical element as well as for showing real feelings and family life. I love the idea that Hannah's mother sang the words to call her in for supper and I wonder whether, in such a silent version, Kitamura could have shown this in his illustration more clearly. As an Early Years' specialist and now retired Reception Class Teacher I would suggest that another way to explore the book (in addition to Jake Hope's ideas) would be to encourage the children to make up their own words for the story. Doing this as a whole class is a great way to engage children at different levels of literacy to focus on the visual images and magic of Kitamura's remarkable illustrations.



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