

Illustrator: Lane Smith

Lane Smith was born in 1959 and according to the back flaps of his books he has not stopped doodling since third grade and if he had stopped he perhaps would have become president. His books with Jon Scieszka have included the Caldecott Honor winner *The Stinky Cheese Man*, as well as the best sellers *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*; *Math Curse*; and *Science Verse*. Lane's other high profile titles include *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day!* by Dr. Seuss and Jack Prelutsky; *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* by George Saunders; and *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl. In 1996 Lane served as Conceptual Designer on the Disney film version of *James and the Giant Peach*. He also wrote and illustrated *The Happy Hocky Family* and *The Happy Hocky Family Moves to the Country*. He and book designer, Molly Leach, are married and live in the town of Washington, CT. Molly Leach is also the book designer of many of Smith and Scieszka's books.¹

The three books of Lane Smith's that I chose for analysis are:

John, Paul, George, and Ben by Lane Smith

Seen Art? By Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith

The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales by Jon Scieszka; Illustrated by Lane Smith

John, Paul, George, and Ben by Lane Smith

This picture book is written and illustrated by Lane Smith. The overall book design is by Molly Leach. The front of the book features gold crests surrounding the young historical figures to be discussed throughout the book: John Hancock, Paul Revere, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. The book is pretty ingenious in the combination with the old and the new in the design. There are some antiquing processes done to the paper to create an overall faded classic look to the illustrations. For example, the inside flaps use the stripes of the American flag to blend in with the dark blue end papers. The text and drawings take the child into a world where John, Paul, George, Ben & Tom were children. The text in this book is better executed than Smith's previous writing attempts in "*Glasses – Who Needs 'Em?*," "*The Happy Hocky Family*," and "*The Big Pets*." In his earlier writings it seems as if Smith could not connect his words with his illustrations that caused these books in general to not succeed as much as his books with Scieszka. This book though connects quite well with the historical myths and truths to make a child become more interested in learning more about American History. The illustrations of the historical children are fantastic; you can see the classic history book representations and it is easy to place them as such without even knowing this before opening the book. Lane Smith features each of the characters in their own separate segment of the book, which helps the child learn some early basic facts about the historical figures (and even a little bit

¹ Smith, Lane. "Ye Olde Bio". Website. < <http://www.lanesmithbooks.com/bio.htm>>

about the Beatles). The illustrations combine hand made collages with pen and ink drawings and even incorporate oil paintings on canvas. At the very end of the book Lane Smith provides a true and false guide list to the parts of the historical information, which all children have lots of fun with. For example “George Washington having chopped down the cherry tree” is false, “Dullard is a funny word” is true. Overall I think this is a really great direction for Smith’s work to start taking and is would definitely spark an interest in history for elementary school children.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES for John, Paul, George, and Ben by Lane Smith

Have the children choose John Hancock, Paul Revere, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin or Thomas Jefferson and then do one of the following:

1. John Hancock: Have the child write his/her name as big as possible on a sheet of paper and decorate it, see if a classmate can read it from across the room.
2. Paul Revere: Have the child think of something that they are excited about coming or something they would like to warn family or friends about “I don’t like chocolate” and give a presentation to the group or make a drawing.
3. George Washington: Have the child draw a portrait of George Washington with his various materials for teeth OR write a poem or a drawing for something that they did not initially tell the truth about.
4. Benjamin Franklin: Have the child choose one of Benjamin Franklin’s quotes from the book or another book you may have in your library/classroom and draw a picture to illustrate it.
5. Thomas Jefferson: In the book Thomas Jefferson makes a palm tree out of hands, have the child do this perhaps with the colors red, white, and blue.

Seen Art? written by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith

This book features a boy traveling through MOMA because he is told by people on the street and in the museum that this is where he can find Art. Art is revealed at the end of the book to be his friend Art who has been waiting for him outside of the museum. Seen Art?’s book shape is very wide and not very tall. This helps the illustrations of the boy walking through the museum work with great fluidity. The book is especially well conceived for any child living in New York City because the boy goes to the new MOMA building and waits on the corner of Fifth and Fifty-Third. Through this book you can see the use of Smith’s collage work that he typically uses with a bit of pencil drawings. The use of the artwork at MOMA is throughout the book and could be fun for a child to acquire an early knowledge of some of the art and artists. The surprising success of this book is that the MOMA art is not the star of the pages; it is actually Smith’s collage drawing of the little boy and the people that he meets throughout. They truly stand out on every page and have great personality in their faces. At the very end of the book it provides a list of the artworks that are in the book with a picture of the art and a short biography of the artists. The book is overall really well done there are points when the text or the art gets lost in the spine space between the two pages, if the book had been bound differently this would not have been an issue. There is a good bit of humor towards the art world expressed for an adult audience to catch, but the story will also grab a child because of the captivating cast of characters that Smith utilizes.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES for Seen Art? By Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith

1. Have a child pick an art work to recreate on their own from the book, it could be a mobile in the style of Calder, finger paintings in the style of Picasso, or whatever grabs the child from the book.
2. Have the child think of a name similar to Art that has a double meaning and write a poem about the name.

The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith

The Stinky Cheese Man is and was a huge success when it was released in 1992 and won the Caldecott Honor for its illustrative work. Lane Smith truly excelled in the creation of this book, it plays with the ideas of the children's book in every way and makes the entire experience of the book lots of fun for anyone who reads it. There are a total of ten classic fairytale-type stories retold by Scieszka but they are truly brought to life by Smith's work. The text size is constantly played with and also the basic properties of books, the title page, the end papers, the book flaps, really the whole book is poking fun at everything involved in the book; even the characters of the separate stories interact with each other. The book really is an innovative leader in what has become the modern day picture book it makes for more interactive reading. Beyond this it incorporates the idea that books really can be fun and do not have to be held within a certain guidelines, it shows exactly how to think outside of the box.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES for The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales.

1. Have a child pick their favorite fairytale, and modernize it. They can draw, act it out, rewrite it, or bring in outside objects to help tell the tale.
2. The Stinky Cheese Man is the modern day Gingerbread Man, have a child make a play friend out of food or other materials.

OVERALL ANALYSIS of Lane Smith

Lane Smith has had a great career utilizing a similar design throughout but adapting it for each story he has been asked to help tell or told himself. His earlier work of "The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs" really set a high standard for his artwork and collage to live up to. After this point he sort of fell down a bit when he attempted to do his own writing and illustration with "The Big Pets," "The Happy Hocky Family," and "Glasses – Who Needs Them?". "Glasses..." is definitely the most successful, but it is also the most simple of the stories. When Smith early in his career attempted to combine his writing with illustration it was not a good harmony, the writing tended to be very confusing and not very interactive with the illustration. After this point he worked again with Scieszka and also illustrated a Dr. Seuss found writing called "Hooray for Diffendoofer Day." This period was a great time for his illustrative work. He seems to have a down period after 1998 until 2004 where not much was published; today his career seems to be flourishing once again. He has re-partnered with Scieszka for some work and has had considerable success with "John, Paul, George, and Ben."

Examined Lane Smith Book List

Dahl, Roald. Smith, Lane, ill. James and the Giant Peach. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1961. Ill. 1996.

Seuss, Dr. Prelutsky, Jack and Smith, Lane, ill. Hooray for Diffendoofer Day!. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998.

Scieszka, Jon. Smith, Lane, ill. Math Curse. Viking, 1995.

Scieszka, Jon. Smith, Lane, ill. Seen Art?. Viking, 2005.

Scieszka, Jon. Smith, Lane, ill. The Sticky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales. Viking, 1992.

Scieszka, Jon. Smith, Lane, ill. The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs. Viking, 1989.

Smith, Lane. The Big Pets. Viking, 1991.

Smith, Lane. Glasses Who Needs 'Em?. Viking, 1991.

Smith, Lane. The Happy Hockey Family. Viking, 1993.

Smith, Lane. John, Paul, George and Ben. Hyperion Books for Children, 2006.