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Catherine Stock. *Gugu's House.* New York: Clarion Books, 2001. 31 pp. $14.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-618-00389-1.

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A Classic Tale

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The well-known author and illustrator Catherine Stock (illustrator of *Galimoto*, and author/illustrator of *Where Are You Going Manyoni*) has created another sweet children's story from southern Africa. In *Gugu's House* a young girl arrives from the city to visit her grandmother who loves to decorate her home with wall paintings and life-size clay sculptures of wild animals.

Gugu's House opens on a young child and her "Gugu," walking through the Zimbabwean countryside. Kukamba loves Gugu's house with its brightly sculpted and painted animals, including a zebra Kukamba mounts for a "gallop" across the veldt. Kukamba works with her grandmother to make paints from natural materials and tries her own hand at painting, which Gugu lavishly praises. While Kukamba happily paints, the rest of the village worries over the lack of rain and the consequences of a long drought for their crops and cattle. One evening, Gugu tells a story as neighbors gather around a fire. Choosing the tale of the rabbit and the tortoise, she gets everyone laughing and feeling more hopeful. The rain finally does come, inspiring a crazy night of dancing, clapping and singing. Following days of rain, crops spring up and flowers and trees burst into blazing bloom. As for Gugu's clay sculptures–including the big beautiful zebra Kukamba had adored–they have once more become large wet lumps of clay. So Gugu and Kukamba set about rebuilding and making Gugu's home beautiful once more.

Gugu's House was inspired by the life of a rural artist and grandmother, identified simply as Mrs. Khosa. (In the back of the book are two small photos of her and her artwork, together with the author Catherine Stock.) Stock illustrated her story with such vibrant and detailed watercolors that they could tell the story by themselves. The drawings bring to life rural Zimbabwe with its granite outcroppings, acacia trees and earthen homes that crumble a bit after heavy rains.

This simple story packs in a lot: the seasons along with the unpredictability of drought and rain; the division of labor between men and women; the ways in which a community supports itself morally and economically; and, the vibrancy of art and oral literature. In short, this is not one of those Ndebele wall painting books, such as Maya Angelou and Margaret Courtney-Clarke's, *My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken and Me*, which portray Ndebele (and other artists who paint the walls of their homes) as fundamentally exotic people.[1]

Children will love this book because it is a well-told and classic tale: the familiar and hopeful story of children and their grandmothers, of worries, joys and hope, and of beautiful art created by seemingly ordinary people.

Note

[1]. A note to readers unfamiliar with rural Africa: while "Gugu" sculpted a zebra, the story appropriately shows no wild animals roaming the countryside, as such animals are rarely seen near human communities.

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