The Umbrella

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A walk through the Costa Rican cloud forest provides a wonderfully lush setting for Jan Brett's beloved animal illustrations. When Carlos drops his umbrella to climb a tree for a better view of the animals, they all cram into the banana-leaf umbrella as it floats by--from the little tree frog to the baby tapir to the big jaguar and more. It gets so crowded in the umbrella that there isn't even enough room for a little hummingbird! So over the umbrella tumbles, everyone falls out, and poor Carlos comes back wondering why he didn't see any animals all day.

In the spirit of Jan Brett's The Mitten and The Hat, this cheerful tale of escalation will have readers poring over every illustration for the world of details Jan packs in. With its classic story, exotic jungle setting, and brilliantly colorful menagerie, The Umbrella is sure to take its place among Jan's many family favorites.

Jan Brett, well-loved for her ornate, Scandinavian-themed picture books takes her talents deep into the Monteverde Cloud Forest of Costa Rica. A tropical twist on The Mitten, this story chronicles the antics of myriad animals that make themselves right at home in the handcrafted leaf umbrella that Carlos has left at the foot of a giant fig tree. As the tree frog, toucan, kinkajou, tapir, quetzal, monkey, and more pile into the umbrella, Carlos, who is visiting the cloud forest expressly to see these animals, doesn't see a single one. Things heat up when the impulsive monkey hurls the umbrella into the river: "② Qu② pasa? What is happening?' Froggy asks as water starts to pour into the umbrella." Jaguar jumps in, adding to the confusion, but it's the addition of the tiniest of hummingbirds that causes the big "KER-SPLASH!" Brett's gorgeous, detailed watercolor and gouache illustrations steal the show here, from the exquisite endpapers to the vine-encased leafy side panels that reveal the tree-climbing boy on the left side and a sneak preview of the next umbrella-dwelling animal on the right side. Not Brett's best-crafted story, but her fans will want this lush offering anyway. (Ages 5 to 8) --Karin Snelson

Did You Know?

Fun Facts about Jan Brett

- >> Each book begins with the art first.
- >> Jan likes to listen to audiobooks while drawing--usually thrillers!
- >> Each book takes about a year to complete.
- >> The pages of each book are not created in sequence (she saves the front materials and endpapers for last).
- >> Each book is carefully researched--she created The Umbrella after a trip with her husband to Costa Rica.
- >> Jan prefers to use her memories of a place to create her art, rather than relying on pictures.
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For Young Writers and Artists

Tips from Jan Brett

- >> Want a reality check on your artwork? View your work in a mirror.
- >> Be honest with yourself, and get comfortable with personal and private writing. Write in a notebook that no one sees but you.
- >> Remember the things that happen to you now. It's okay to feel things strongly as a kid. You can use your emotions as part of the recipe for something later.

With over thirty four million books in print, Jan Brett is one of the nation's foremost author illustrators of children's books. Jan lives in a seacoast town in Massachusetts, close to where she grew up. During the summer her family moves to a home in the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts.

As a child, Jan Brett decided to be an illustrator and spent many hours reading and drawing. She says, "I remember the special quiet of rainy days when I felt that I could enter the pages of my beautiful picture books. Now I try to recreate that feeling of believing that the imaginary place I'm drawing really exists. The detail in my work helps to convince me, and I hope others as well, that such places might be real."

As a student at the Boston Museum School, she spent hours in the Museum of Fine Arts. "It was overwhelming to see the room-size landscapes and towering stone sculptures, and then moments later to refocus on delicately embroidered kimonos and ancient porcelain," she says. "I'm delighted and surprised when fragments of these beautiful images come back to me in my painting."

Travel is also a constant inspiration. Together with her husband, Joe Hearne, who is a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Jan visits many different countries where she researches the architecture and costumes that appear in her work. "From cave paintings to Norwegian sleighs, to Japanese gardens, I study the traditions of the many countries I visit and use them as a starting point for my children's books."

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