



The House Baba Built: An Artist's Childhood in China

Ed Young, Libby Koponen

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I knew nothing could happen to us within those walls, in the house Baba built.

In Ed Young's childhood home in Shanghai, all was not as it seemed: a rocking chair became a horse; a roof became a roller rink; an empty swimming pool became a place for riding scooters and bikes. The house his father built transformed as needed into a place to play hide-and-seek, to eat bamboo shoots, and to be safe.

For outside the home's walls, China was at war. Soon the house held not only Ed and his four siblings but also friends, relatives, and even strangers who became family. The war grew closer, and Ed watched as planes flew overhead and friends joined the Chinese air force. But through it all, Ed's childhood remained full of joy and imagination.

This powerful, poignant, and exquisitely illustrated memoir is the story of one of our most beloved children's illustrators and the house his *baba* built.

The House Baba Built: An Artist's Childhood in China Details

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From Reader Review The House Baba Built: An Artist's Childhood in China for online ebook

GraceAnne says

The art is wonderful, inventive, brilliant. The story could easily be used by a middle grader for history, biography, or art study. Or all three. It is definitely one of those picture books that needs an older audience and it will draw them in.

Wendy says

I read this book not long after reading Drawing from Memory - two fascinating memoirs set around Asia during and after WWII. This book is less about Young's artistic influences as what his family did to survive WWII, but the layouts are quite interesting. I also must confess a weakness for this book since my mother also lived in Shanghai during the war, and it gave me a springboard for talking to her about her experiences.

Teresa says

Very moving, and a fascinating picture of a culture in transition. One of his very best works.

Bobby says

Author Ed Young retells and brings to life the days of his childhood in Shanghai during World War II. Young recalls the house he grew up in with his sister and brothers, as well as with cousins. The House Baba Built is a biography told by Young about the house his father built to give the family a better life. This book is a solid choice for a 4th grader to read on his or her own, but also a great book for a teacher to share in any elementary classroom. It has easy, yet sophisticated writing, and unique, colorful pictures that help readers visualize the writing and the childhood of Young.

The House Baba Built was winner of the 2012 Norman A. Sugarman Children's Biography Award which is given by the Cleveland Public Library for excellence in biographies for children. It also won the American Library Association Notable Books Award and the Notable Social Studies Trade Books Award in 2012. A book with plenty of notoriety, history, and culture, The House Baba Built is a must read for any young reader, and a solid choice for any elementary teacher's classroom.

538pm_juliejanowitz says

I was not prepared for the inexplicable beauty that is The House Baba Built. Ed Young details his days as a

young boy using brilliant illustrations that explore every medium and fresh prose that provide detailed history. Young invites us into his past...into the house is father built. Young's memoir is a tribute to his father, and I think he honors his father beautifully with this work he created. Young tells his story with funny anecdotes that give the reader a picture of his everyday life as a boy.

The reading level is 5.6, and while I would read this to younger students as well, I think students who are a little older (grades 4-5) will be able to gain the most from this book. I would use this book as a read aloud or as an independent reading book. I would use this book by incorporating social studies. Reading this while studying about China or World War II is a perfect fit. I would do an activity after reading this book where students make a collage depicting their homes and lives. It will surely be a fun challenge and make them appreciate Young's work even more!

The House Baba Built won the American Library Association Notable Books Award and the Notable Social Studies Trade Books Award in 2012. The House Baba Built easily fits the ALAN Award criteria of being a work of commendable creativity. The criteria for the NSSTB Award is that the selection must, "emphasize human relations, represent a diversity of groups and are sensitive to a broad range of cultural experiences, present an original theme or a fresh slant on a traditional topic, are easily readable and of high literary quality, and have a pleasing format and, when appropriate, illustrations that enrich the text." In my opinion, The House Baba Built does that and more. It was a perfect choice for this prestigious award, and I feel grateful to have stumbled upon it. This is a must-have for your classroom!

Bethany says

Ed Young, winner of the 1990 Caldecott Medal for *Lon Po Po* and recipient of two Caldecott Honors (including one for *Seven Blind Mice*, which I love!), grew up in China, during World War II. His father, Baba, built a home for his family--five children, his mother, himself--the part of Shanghai safest from the Japanese bombs. I think the interesting part about this book is just how normal it all seems, despite there being a World War taking place in this family's backyard: the children are always hungry, thanks to food shortages and increased prices, and there's almost never eat. But Ed goes to movies, Westerns even, and the children ride their bicycles and have picnics and play pretend. There's a lot of extended family--cousins, aunts, uncles, even a German family that rents space in this large home, and these children always seem busy, always seem safe. Even when they hear the warning sirens and the blasts from the bombs, they're tucked away, listening to their father tell stories.

This book is the very definition of mixed-media. There are pencil drawings, photographs of the family, photo collages, cut paper, what looks like marker, paint, crayons, probably more. It gives the book amazing texture, incredible feeling. It should be confused, muddled, ugly, and instead each medium is perfectly appropriate, purposefully rendered.

I think my very favorite thing about this book is how very clearly Baba loved his family. He built this house on this land, knowing that in twenty years, the lease would be up and he would have to leave, without any sales proceeds to buy a new home, to keep his family safe. He built it with "double-tiered brick walls and eighteen-inch thick concrete slabs on the roof" to keep his family safe. And he wrote a letter to his grown children saying that a successful life is one that you measure in how much you've done for others. I think Baba must've had a very successful life.

Jennifer says

In *The House that Baba Built*, Ed Young invites readers into his personal story with an autobiography exploring his childhood years in Shanghai. The story is set in the 1930s and opens with Ed's father looking for a safe place for his family to live as the war creeps closer to Shanghai. With little money, Ed's father strikes a deal that allows him to build a home in the safe embassy neighborhood of Shanghai and live in the house for 20 years after which he would give up rights to the house. This plan afforded the Young family, and several others, the safety so rarely found in this period of China's history.

In this story, Ed Young shares his memories of the time spent with family in "the house that Baba built." Readers share Young's memories of young Eddy playing with siblings, riding bikes in the empty swimming pool with cousins and drawing pictures of American cowboys with his uncle. He remembers food rations and the occasional treat of meat. While they had to "do without" during this period, Ed conveys to his readers the safety and security afforded to him by his family and that special house.

Ed Young's simple words are set on backdrop of complex collages consisting of drawings, watercolor paintings and photographs. Young uses the text to describe his playful experiences and the images are used to describe the mood of the time period. For example, we know that the war weighs heavy on his father's mind because Young uses flocks of black crows to represent the threat of aerial attacks. The mixed medium style adds a unique dimension to Young's memories.

This book won the 2012 Norman A. Sugarman Award and would be appropriate in elementary classrooms. It would add an interesting perspective to a unit on Chinese civilian experiences during the 1930s and 1940s. The timeline and the author's notes provide scaffolding for students to understand interplay between Ed Young's life and the world events of his time. I think that elementary students would be able to relate to the young Ed. It would not work as well for preschool students. This text may not work as well as a stand alone text for middle school students, but put in the context of a larger study, it could compliment more traditional informational readings.

Lisa Vegan says

Outstanding!

This is a stellar true story, a biography of sorts, by one of the sons of Baba. During the Great Depression and then WWII, Baba kept his family safe. He was smart and clever and principled, and skilled. He built a house for his family, and was eventually joined by extended family and a refugee family from Germany. This was in Shanghai. Somehow, Baba managed to not only protect his family from bombs and invaders but from fear as well.

The multimedia illustrations, made up of real photos and collage, etc. are just amazing. The colors used and art style is fabulous. There are many fold out pages. There is even a fold out floor plan of the house, and I love, love, love home floor plans in books. (I used to read entire books of just house floor plans.)

This is the kind of story that ostensibly tells about a small group of people in a certain time and place, but also manages to convey messages of anti-war, of what humans have in common with one another, and of conveying Baba's message: "...that life is not rich not real unless you partake life with your fellow man. A successful life and a happy life is one as measured by how much you have accomplished for others and not one as measured by how much you've done for yourself."

Eddy wrote this book as a tribute to his father and did a lovely job. It's a beautiful and special book. I was completely engaged and emotionally touched. As a child I'd have been utterly fascinated and could have spent many hours reading and viewing this book.

Barbara says

What a treasure this memory-filled book is! The multimedia illustrations by Ed Young, who himself is an artistic treasure, are filled with images of the artist and his family during their early years in Shanghai. In order to keep the family safe, Ed's engineer father designed and built a house on the edge of the town. So structurally sound was the house [Ed's father built double-tiered walls from bricks and covered the roof with concrete--that it survived World War II, something the illustrator realized only as he was creating the book that pays homage to his father and "the house that Baba built" (unpaginated), a phrase that is repeated throughout the story. The way the family spent its free time and Young's first attempts at drawing are described, and it is clear that despite the war and the changes that were occurring in China, the house's rooms were filled with affection and trust. The love of family and the difficulties involved in retrieving long-lost pieces of the past shine through in this wonderful memoir. Pair this one with the memoir of another well-loved children's illustrator, Allen Say's *Drawing from Memory*.

Dolores says

I'm always intrigued to read about the childhood of authors, because they are often so fascinating. All that creative energy has to come from somewhere, right? Ed Young is no exception. This loving tribute to a childhood lived amidst a war, but somehow cushioned, insulated from it all. In the house his Baba built, he felt safe, and obviously, very loved. It sounds as though it was a house filled with people, laughter and fun. And his father was a clever and giving man, who offered a place for those in need when their own homes were no longer safe. Beautiful story.

Kathleen Dixon says

I find this book beautiful, though I'm not so sure it appeals to children. My grandson had only a perfunctory look through it when I handed it to him. However, I'm going to sit with him again and talk about it as we read. It's history and art and culture all within just 40 pages.

Edward Sullivan says

Ed Young's memoir about his childhood home in Shanghai is an astonishingly beautiful, exquisitely

designed work of art, a genuine masterpiece.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

I would like to give this book 4 stars, because I enjoyed the text very much. However, I didn't care for the illustrations, which were of cut and torn paper, drawings, and photos compiled into collages, some of them opening out into 3-page spreads. They just didn't appeal to me. Ed Young talks about growing up in Shanghai in the house his father built, during the 1930s and through World War II. I was surprised to learn that the activities they enjoyed, the movies, the books, and games, were no different than the things enjoyed by children in this country at that time. I especially liked the photos of the end of the house Baba built as it still stands today, and the floor plans. What a nifty house! Ed Young was fortunate to have had such a happy childhood despite the war. Kids who have read his books would enjoy reading this one too. Recommended.

Cindy Sarnowski says

Detailed story of Ed Young's childhood in Shanghai with his four siblings. Ed's father offered to build a home in the influential part of Shanghai with the understanding that the building would belong to the government after twenty years. It was not until 75 years later that Ed understood the reasons his father had built double tiered brick walls and 18" thick concrete slabs on the roof - this made the home bomb proof. It withstood World War II and still stands today.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

About a year ago, I reviewed Allen Say's autobiographical work Drawing from Memory and the effect World War II had on his life growing up in Yokohama, Japan. Ed Young's The House Baba Built is also an autobiographical work and describes his life in Shanghai, China during the war.

Ed Young's father was an engineer and realizing that war was coming to China, he decided he needed a safe place for himself, his wife and five children to live in. The safest place would be around the foreign embassies in Shanghai, known as the International Settlement. But land there was expensive and so Baba (an affectionate term for father) made a deal with a landowner - Baba would built a house on his land with the proviso that his family could live in it for 20 years. The family moved into the house in 1935 and for the first few years that they lived in Baba's house, life was good. There was a lovely swimming pool, where friends and family would gather in summer, there was lots of pretend playing, lovely gardens and even a roof that made a great roller skating area. Life wasn't rich in goods, but it was rich in so many other ways.

But when the Japanese invaded Nanking in 1937, Baba had to build an apartment where the kids roller skated because relatives from there had escaped to Shanghai to live. After that, the effects of the war began to be felt more and more. And in 1940 a family who had escaped Hitler's Germany, the Luedekes, also moved into Baba's house.

The three families living in Baba's house were very fortunate. Even after things changed with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the loss of British and American protection, the house that Baba built was able to withstand the war, and even when bombs were being dropped directly on Shanghai, they missed the house completely.

When the 20 years were up, the Young family honored their contract and turned the house over to the landowner. By then, most of the children had grown, married and gone their own way.

It was during the war, living in Baba's house, that Young discovered his talent as an artist. Given crayons and paper to use while recovering from a cold, his first attempt at drawing was a cowboy that didn't quite match what was in his mind. But he sought guidance and the rest is history. For *The House Baba Built*, he used a mixed media, which gives it depth and texture. Young's family is shown in an interesting combination of old photographs and drawings, there are all kinds of collages (my favorite art form), and some of the pages fold out to reveal even more of the life of the Young family in Baba's house.

Most of the book consists of vignettes that are put together to resemble the collages, rather than a linear history of Young's early life. However, there is a timeline at the end which can help orient the reader if needed. And there is an extended section at the end of the book of later photographs, including Baba's house, as well as a diagram of the house and some facts regarding how the house was built to bombproof it.

All in all, *The House Baba Built* is an interesting book for all kinds of readers, but especially a reader who likes to explore each and every page of an illustrated book. This is a work that proves itself to be an insightful look at some of the early influences on a beloved author/illustrator.

This book is recommended for readers age 8+

This book was borrowed from the Webster Branch of the NYPL
