My Light

Molly Bang Ala Peter Sis' Style

Though we often take it for granted, the sun provides the energy that powers everything on Earth, from planets and trees to machines and cities. With dazzling paintings and simple text, acclaimed author and illustrator Molly Bang takes young readers on an incredible journey that follows the light of the sun as it transformed into the energy we use every day in our homes. From windmills and solar cells to fossil fuels and dams, here is a fascinating presentation of the way we use our amazing natural resources to light up our world.

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My Personal Review:
If you ever want to freak a kid out (or, in more professional terms, cause a kid to think in a constructive manner) ask them to consider what life would be like without electricity. After some considerations of this awful possibility the child you speak to may have a newfound appreciation for something he or she has always taken for granted before. But where does electricity really come from? How is it made? Author/illustrator Molly Bang has made a graceful departure from her adorable fiction based picture books into that nebulous territory known as non-fiction. "My Light" shows the myriad ways in which our own dear Sun has created (either directly or indirectly) the energy we use in our very light bulbs.

Says the Sun at the beginning of the book, "When you see the city lights at night, they look like stars have fallen down to earth". That, the sun points out, is a pretty smart assessment. After all, the Sun is a star and almost all the electric light in the world began with it. To explain how this works we are privy to various displays of energy, transferred to earth in multiple ways. One section discusses how the sun causes water to evaporate, rain, fall into rivers, and eventually operate the dams that create energy via generators. Too complex an idea? What about the fact that the sun causes warm air to rise so that cooler air operates the giant electric turbines of the world? And don't forget that coal was once living trees that needed the sun for their growth. Heck, solar power itself is explored in this book too, giving kids a clear vision of solar cells. Tying together the theme of continually shifting energy, the book ends by pointing out that all light, even electric ones, eventually fade back into space in some way. The back of the book contains additional information about the various topics touched on, giving more details on the various types of electricity available
to us. It is here that Bang mentions that in her original conception of this book she had some many notes that they, "started turning into an encyclopedia". For kids doing science projects on electricity, Bang suggests that see these notes on her website at www.mollybang.com. Bang is commended for these sections, if only because she offers ample explanations about which forms of energy are pollutants and which ones aren't.

Moreover, you cannot say that Bang hasn't covered her bases in this book. Her facts, as presented in the text, are clear and easy for kids to understand. The book is also the author's most beautiful to date. Much like fellow author/illustrator Peter Sis, Bang has adopted a style of art that works perfectly within the context of her tale. The sun emits thousands of tiny yellow dots, all representing the energy that floats across space and to the Earth itself. By watching these yellow dots of energy, kids have a clear image of how they are transferred from the sun, to the water, to the rain, to the river, and finally into electricity itself. Bang's generators glow with remarkable beauty all the while remaining scientifically accurate. Whether she's showing the intricate details in the cell structure of a plant leaf or displaying the methods by which coal-fired electricity "flows in copper wires", the book is immensely interesting.

Some of Bang's books in the past, while good, have a messy edge to them. Don't get me wrong... I'm a huge fan of her "Ten, Nine, Eight", as well as "When Sophie Gets Angry - Really, Really Angry...". But those picture books were always just flirting with Bang's slapdash painting style. Here, in "My Light", she's eschewed that school of art for a book that's very tightly reined in. The lines here are clear and straight. Her towns are realistically rendered and I've yet to see a book that displays a night-time cityscape from above any better than she does here. With the aid of unknown thousands of tiny dots, Bang has (in my mind anyway) graduated from merely okay picture books to spectacularly good ones. If you're looking for a book that is scientific but also deeply beautiful (and factual too, for what it counts) this is your best bet. I can't push it into your arms fast enough. Buy it now and enjoy it fully.

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