

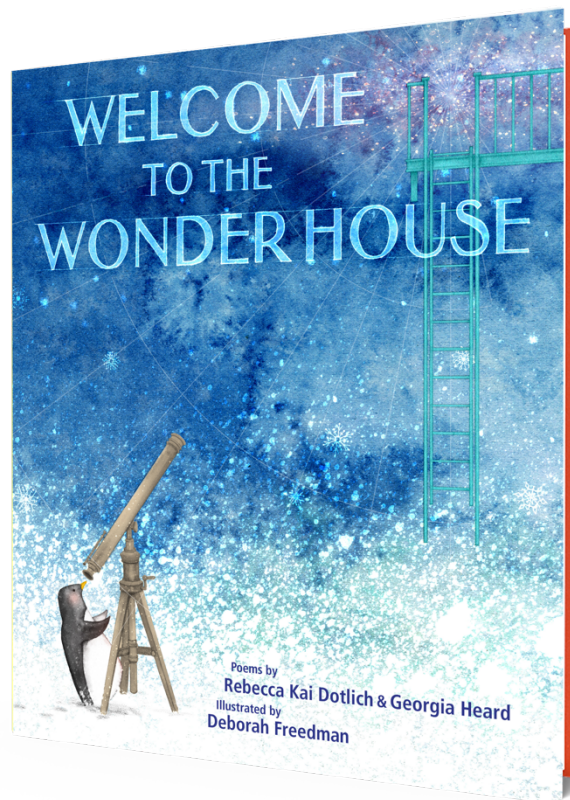
DISCUSSION GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

Poems by Rebecca Kai Dotlich &
Georgia Heard
Illustrated by Deborah Freedman

\$18.99 US / \$24.99 CAN
ISBN 9781635927627 HC
ISBN 9781635928631 eBook

Grades: 2 and up
Ages: 7 and up



ABOUT THE BOOK

Welcome to the Wonder House, a place to explore the cornerstone of every great thinker—a sense of wonder. This Wonder House has many rooms—one for nature, one for quiet, and one for mystery, among others. Each room is filled with poems and objects covering a wide variety of STEAM topics, including geology, paleontology, physics, astronomy, creative writing, and drawing, that will inspire curiosity in young readers.

This enchanting book written by award-winning poets Rebecca Kai Dotlich and Georgia Heard and illustrated by Deborah Freedman both sparks wonder and shows readers how to kindle it in themselves.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

PRAISE FOR WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

★ “This slim volume teems with STEAM extensions, from exploring poetic forms and devices to investigating scientific facts and hypotheses. A beautifully conceived invitation: to look, see, wonder.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Crisp and concise, with internal rhymes and alliteration, these poems beg to be shared and read aloud. Freedman’s illustrations complement and add whimsical details... thoughtful readers will relish the figurative language and imagery, and pore over the well-crafted illustrations. An excellent resource for teachers looking to inspire students in an array of topics, from science and nature studies to creative writing.” —*School Library Journal*, starred review

BOOK ACTIVITIES

A Dozen Rooms in the Wonder House! This lovely collection of 29 poems is gathered into a dozen “rooms” in a house of wonder. Each “room” is presented in a double-page spread of art and poetry that explores the natural world. Each has a slightly different focus and each “room” encourages young readers to think, wonder, and imagine. One doesn’t have to read the “room” poems in sequential order, so you can choose the “room” theme that fits with your instructional focus or with the events of the moment.

In each “room” of poems:

BEGIN by talking about the *theme* of the room, for example, *curiosity*.

- What does that word mean?
- What thoughts or images does this word conjure?
- How might a poet explore the idea of the theme, such as *curiosity*?

THEN, read the poems in the room out loud and talk about them together.

- How do these poems reflect the theme?
- How do they surprise or inspire?
- What other examples can students generate for this theme?

FINALLY, examine the art together. A single poem or room could be interpreted visually in an infinite number of ways.

- How do the illustrations affect your experience of the poems?
- If you hear one of these poems with your eyes closed, what do you see?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

Read the poems in the “room” aloud again, but in this repeated reading, invite student volunteers to read or to share in reading key lines.

1. Room of Curiosity

Two poems invite readers to question, imagine, and connect emotionally as they observe their surroundings and investigate the world around them. Work together to brainstorm a list of questions these poems might generate for students.

2. Room of Praise

Here the poets offer poems that praise or celebrate attributes of common, everyday objects or creatures like rain, spiders, or paper. What are some (other) examples of students’ favorite items and what do they admire about them?

3. Room of Ordinary Things

Two poems focus on truly ordinary, commonplace objects—a stone and a stick. But instead of merely describing these objects, the poets imagine a different life or purpose for each one. Challenge students to identify a common object (in nature) and to imagine three imaginative or unusual functions for that object.

4. Room of Creatures

Invite students to peruse the illustrations and guess which creatures may be highlighted in the poems on this double-page spread. Then read the four poems together and make a list of all the creatures mentioned. Which are familiar and which are new? Do a quick image hunt to find a picture of each and talk about the creature characteristics captured in the poems.

5. Room of Nature

Here, Georgia Heard’s poem focuses primarily on the sky and Rebecca Kai Dotlich’s poem concentrates largely on what’s under the sky. Talk about how these two poems capture nature in different ways—which words or phrases are most vivid or descriptive? Ask your students to name things that spark curiosity in the natural world for them.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

6. Room of Science

The poems in a “Room of Science” consider the work of different scientific disciplines from entomology to chemistry. Work together to identify each scientific field and talk about its focus. Discuss how Heard’s poem hints at each specific field of scientific study with only three lines while Dotlich’s poem hints at the mysteries that can be found beneath our earth’s surface.

7. Room of Time

Trees and fossils are the objects that help tell time in this unique “room” of poems. Identify the time-telling objects found in the poem together (tree rings, skull, tooth) and talk about how scientists use them to identify the time or era for each object and how poets use them for inspiration.

8. Room of Place

Three poems explore our sense of place whether intimate or far-away. Talk about how each poet captures that feeling of being inside and outside using a treehouse, a globe or a city block. Invite students to think about where they are this very minute and what sights they see, sounds they hear, feelings they experience, and wonderings that occur.

9. Room of Quiet

Even when things are totally quiet, there are still sounds to hear. Two poems explore the absence of noise in space and the quiet noise of walking on snow. Listen. Talk about how poets describe silence and what emotions that evokes.

10. Room of Imagination

When we are little, toys are the tools of our imagination. We can use blocks to build, create, and imagine. And with a pencil, we can try to draw whatever we can dream up. The poems exploring these two tools include lots of details and descriptions to discuss. Encourage students to think about their own childhood toys and the imaginary scenarios they would create with those toys when they played with them.

11. Room of Mystery

Science is full of facts, but full of mystery too. Here, Dotlich imagines the last day of the dinosaurs on earth and Heard wonders about the presence of life across the universe. Guide students in discussing the scientific details that combine with the questioning and imagining. Which is which?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

12. Room of Wishes

Everyone loves making wishes! In a “Room of Wishes” anything is possible. We can write wishes and send them up into the air (on a kite or balloon) or remember a wish that came true (like the wish for a bicycle) as Dotlich does in her poems. Or we can wonder about all the wishes made all around the world as Heard does in her poem. Students may want to remember an old wish or turn a new wish into a wishing poem.

Follow-up

Encourage young readers and listeners to think big thoughts, small wonders, and to share their questions about the world. Can they imagine other “rooms” in this house of wonder? What label or name might they choose? What might be the focus of this new room? Invite them to write a featured poem (alone or with a partner) for their new room. Other students may want to illustrate their new room instead. Are there enough new “rooms” of poems and illustrations to create a new, original class book? Go for it!

Illustrating Poems

The double-page illustrations are an essential component of this book giving us a visual context for each “room” of wonder. The art helps convey a tone of mystery, suspense, and wonder. Deborah Freedman’s intriguing mixed-media illustrations use wide washes of color in shades of blue, green, gold or purple with subtle hints of the objects referenced in the poems. Talk about the illustrations and what feelings they convey and how they complement the poems on each page.

Writing Poems

Of course students who hear poems read aloud, read poems aloud together, reread poems silently, and discuss poems thoughtfully, usually want to write poems of their own too. *Welcome to the Wonder House* has a wonderful variety of poems as models to inspire students’ own wondering and writing. Ask students what they notice about the poems (after sharing and discussion). Some poems rhyme and some don’t; some are long and some are very short, and so on. Point out examples of rhyming poems, free verse poems, concrete or shape poems, list poems, question poems, and haiku—all present in this collection. Give students opportunities to work independently and/or collaboratively to try writing some of these types of poems. Perhaps students can create a new class collection of poems with their own “rooms” of wonder.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

A Note About Wonder

In the final “Note about Wonder,” the poets encourage questioning and creativity and challenge young readers to express themselves through writing, painting, building, and more. This note is not a poem, but it can form the basis for a discussion of what poetry is and of found poetry. Ask students if the note is in the form of a poem. If so, what makes it a poem? If not, why not? Challenge students to turn instructions or guidelines or hints or tips into a poem. Are there classroom rules? Testing instructions? School mottos or mission statements? Turn those into “found” poems and post or share them.

Wondering Homework

On p. 31, the poets share a list of ways to encourage wondering. What a fun “homework” assignment for students to choose one of these to do on their own time. They may choose to share the results in class or not. Some wondering can be private!

- Begin a poem
- Tell a story
- Paint a picture
- Imagine you are someone or something else
- Peer into a microscope
- Build a model
- Draw a blueprint
- Take a wonder walk
- Share your discoveries with a friend

Back Page Questions

In the very back of the book, there is a list of intriguing, thought-provoking questions. Some can be answered with a bit of scientific research and others are totally speculative. Use these questions as prompts for group discussion and pondering during brief break times—in just 5-10 minutes to stimulate thinking or as “brain breaks.” Focus on wondering about these phenomena, rather than on guessing correctly. Talk about where we might look for the answers to some of these questions. Generate a list of even more questions students might have about human history, the natural world, the future of the universe, and so on. Here are the questions that the authors present:

- What was the first word ever spoken?
- How do bubbles get inside of marbles?
- Are there undiscovered treasure chests on the ocean floor?
- Can an owl really twist its head all the way around?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE WONDER HOUSE

- Is a mood ring magic?
- Is there someone on the other side of the world just like me?
- What happens when you break the sound barrier?
- Where were the first swords made?
- How tiny are toadlets?
- Who invented the first alphabet?
- What are the planets we haven't discovered yet?
- Why does time pass so fast when I am sleeping?
- How do peacock feathers get their patterns?
- Could I invent a new color?
- How long would it take to circle the world without an airplane?
- Do stars really twinkle?
- How does a pit get inside a peach?
- When do dolphins talk to each other?
- How did Saturn get its rings?
- What was the first thought on earth?

Guide written by Sylvia Vardell, Professor Emerita of Literature for Children in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University.