

THERE'S A GHOST IN THIS HOUSE

Oliver Jeffers

HarperCollins Children's Books

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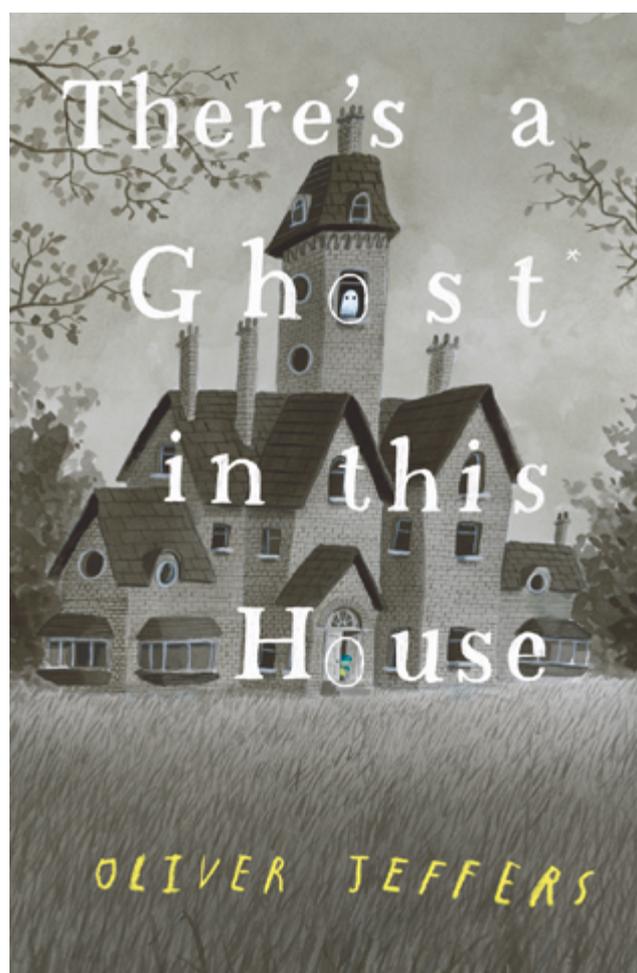
Themes

- Critical thinking
- Observation
- Ghosts
- Death
- Aloneness
- Art

Summary A spooky child invites us into their abandoned house to search for ghosts with them. What will we find?

Judges' Comments This wonderfully playful picturebook from Jeffers provides a fun and enjoyable read through innovative use of form, as readers are guided by a young girl through a house that she believes is haunted – but she hasn't actually seen any ghosts. We soon realise that we can see more than she does if we just take time to turn the pages correctly. This beautifully produced and expertly crafted book is original and imaginative in its use of counterpoint, with words and (multiple) illustrations presenting the reader with differing perspectives.

About the Author Oliver Jeffers is a world-renowned picturebook maker and artist from Northern Ireland. He has written eighteen children's books so far, which have been translated into over fifty languages. Oliver has won many awards internationally for his work, including a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children's Books Award, a Bologna Ragazzi Award, an Irish Book Award and a United Kingdom Literary Association Award, as well as eight Children's Books Ireland Book of the Year awards. His most recent book – *There's a Ghost in This House* – was released concurrently with a related art installation in New York.



QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Look at the cover. What do you see? Do you like the font (the way the letters are drawn)? Are they all similar in style, or are some different? If some are different, why might that be?
2. What do you think the asterisk (*) is for?
3. Take off the dust jacket (the paper around the book). Do you see anything new? Did you find another asterisk? What effect does the dust jacket have on the appearance of the book? Do you prefer the book with or without it? Would you have removed it and looked underneath if we hadn't asked you to?
4. Look at the endpapers (the decorated first and last pages of the book). Are they the same?
5. Do you think the ghosts would be easy to draw or difficult?
6. What do you think this book will be about?

AS YOU READ

While you read the book for the first time, have a look through the questions and notes below. You might have noticed there are no page numbers – instead there is a small doodle on the bottom right of each two-page spread. Can you find the doodled object in each photo? We're going to use these doodles to guide us through the book, rather than writing in our own page numbers!

1. **Keyhole page to candles page**
In these opening pages, we are invited by a strange-looking child to hunt for ghosts with them in an old house. Did you find the doodled objects in each photo? How many ghosts did you see? Are they mean ghosts or friendly ghosts?
2. **Fancy-plate page**
This is a very interesting page. Do we know more than the child, or does the child know more than us? Who are the ghosts gesturing to? What do they want us to do? Do the ghosts know more than us?
3. **Newel-post (the end/beginning of a stair's banister) page**
What do you think is through the door?
4. **Angled-door page to lampshade page**
What do you think the child is feeling? What is the ghost feeling? How would you feel if you were the child? Where do you think the child's adults might be?

5. **Ornate-soap-dish page to teapot page**
Not all of the two-page spreads have a doodle at the bottom right corner. Can you see the other doodles on these pages? Are the pages different in another way? The teapot page is very dark, and we have to look very closely to see the teapot in the photograph. Have you found it yet?
6. **Book page to picture-frame page**
How many ghosts can you see on these pages? Do they have different personalities? Which is your favourite? Why can't the child in the book see them? We are encouraged to look very closely throughout this book. If you looked this closely at the world around you, do you think you'd notice things that you hadn't seen before?
7. **Final pages**
What do you think of the ending?
8. You may have noticed that this book uses lots of different artistic techniques (ways to make a picture). Read it a second time, and think about words like 'collage' (sticking together different pictures) and 'readymade' (making art out of a thing that was made in a factory), while also thinking about texture (fuzzy, clear, smooth, rough), aesthetics (the value of beauty) and what makes a story a story.
9. The illustrations in this book are simply done – particularly of the ghosts – and the backgrounds are old photographs. Some techniques are very original – like using the place where page numbers usually are to draw us back to the previous page instead of moving us forward. In this way we hover over and around each page like ghosts ourselves! Do we read this book in the same way that we read a regular picturebook?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. Did you think this book was a traditional story?
2. Did it feel like you were part of what was happening?
3. Which was your favourite page?
4. Which artistic techniques did you like the most?
5. Which did you like least?
6. Which do you think you could do too?

QUESTIONS FOR OLDER READERS

1. Did this book feel more like a story, a play, a pantomime or a piece of art?
2. Do you think the story had a moral, or do you think the author wanted to teach us to do something?
3. How many different types of paper are in the book (including finishings like matte, glossy and so on)? It would have been easier to produce a book with one type of paper and finish. Why do you think each type was chosen for particular pages?
4. How many layers are there to this book, if the first layer is the unaltered photos and the final layer is the reader engaged in the book?
5. The drawings in this book are quite simple, but the author is a renowned artist. What do you think is the most artistic thing about the book?
6. On the publishing information page (just after the title page) we can find lots of practical information about where and when the book was published, what fonts were used, who designed the book (what does this mean?), where the photographs came from and more. Unusually, there is a detailed description of how the art for the book was made. What does Oliver Jeffers emphasise here about the art-making process?
7. In the text accompanying photographs of his related art exhibition, Jeffers contemplates mortality and the mundanity of day-to-day life – something I'm sure many people have considered over the past two years. He suggests that we should spend more time seizing the day – what could you do this week to live your best life?

ACTIVITIES

- Watch Oliver Jeffers's book trailer for *There's a Ghost in This House* on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb4ez_qE5Vg. Then have your own spooky performance of the story. Organise some readymade or found objects to make it look like you are in an old and spooky place. Think about what sound effects you might like to use.
- Have a debate about whether the child in the book is alive or a ghost.
- 'A afraid of ghosts' is a fantastic collective noun. List all your other favourites and make up some more!
- Make a haunted picture using a photo from an old magazine or the internet and tracing paper. You can do the same as Oliver Jeffers and paint white ghosts over the tracing paper, or you could cut out ghost shapes and stick – or draw – googly eyes on them and move them about the picture to make a mini-play or decorate your classroom or house with them.
- Make a haunted room using a box and old magazines for wallpaper and floorboards (or you can print these from the internet). Make a 3D ghost using modelling clay or papier mâché and some furniture using lollipop sticks. If you are reading this as a group, stick all the boxes together to make a big haunted mansion!

ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER READERS

- Watch Oliver Jeffers's book trailer for *There's a Ghost in This House* on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weBodfabfh0>. Then make your own short movie about the book or another ghost story that you like.
- Explore the related exhibition, *A Fraild of Ghosts*, on Oliver Jeffers's website: <https://www.oliverjeffers.com/a-fraid-of-ghosts>. How is it similar and different to the book? Which do you prefer?
- Make your own haunted artwork using readymade images or objects.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Check out this colouring sheet by Oliver Jeffers from Children's Books Ireland: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/sites/default/files/2021-09/CBI-ImagineNation-Jeffers.pdf>
- Watch Oliver Jeffers reading *There's a Ghost in This House* on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb4ez_qE5Vg
- Check out Oliver Jeffers's *Fraid of Ghosts* art exhibition on his website: <https://www.oliverjeffers.com/a-fraid-of-ghosts>
- Read this interview with Oliver Jeffers, from Creative Review, on his artistic process: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/oliver-jeffers-theres-a-ghost-in-this-house-illustration-book/>