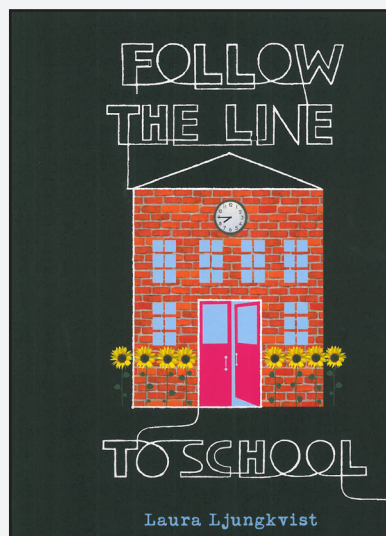


First Opinion: A “Line’s-Eye” View of School

Ljungkvist, L. *Follow the Line to School*. New York: Viking, 2011.

Prisca Martens and Ray Martens



In her newest *Follow the Line* book, Swedish born Laura Ljungkvist invites readers to explore various places in a school, all united by an unbroken line that begins in the book title on the cover, runs across the front end pages and title page, and then through the book to the back end pages, ending in the dot for an exclamation point on the back cover. The line’s tour of the school begins at the front door and proceeds to a classroom, the library, the art room, the cafeteria, the playground, and the music room. Between visits to these rooms, the line returns back to different parts of the classroom - including the science corner, the back area where the class pet and games are, the math area, and the show and tell corner - before exiting out the door to go home. On each double page spread, the line forms key words that are part of a description of part of the school day on the left side and draws objects in the illustration on the right side as it creates a path for readers to follow.

Ljungkvist pays close attention to details throughout the book. For example, each illustration shows a clock on the wall that changes time as the day progresses, beginning at 8:00 and ending at 3:00. In addition, the illustrations on each page are filled with a wide range of objects that might be found in that place in a school. While at first glance these pages might appear overwhelming, Ljungkvist’s use of mixed media draws the reader’s attention to the page. Each illustration is a collage of brightly colored figures, including

cut-out photographs of objects, and cut paper, all organized and arranged around the line. To additionally help readers focus on what is included in each illustration, Ljungkvist poses three questions to guide readers as they closely examine what is presented. The questions for the playground illustration, for example, are, “Someone left a baseball cap outside. Can you find it?” (unpaged); “How many balls do you see?” (unpaged); and, “What colors are the jump ropes?” (unpaged) Other pages ask children to identify numbers and letters, count pasta and headsets, and name animals and instruments. Some questions are open-ended, such as, “Which of the foods shown here would you pack in your own lunch box?” (unpaged) for the cafeteria page, and can be used to generate more critical discussions.

One aspect of *Follow the Line to School* that we, as readers, particularly appreciate is the emphasis Ljungkvist places on the arts. The dedication in part reads, “To all the teachers who, over the years, tried to make me put down my pencil, stop drawing, and pay attention in class,” hinting that an appreciation of art and Ljungkvist’s interest and talent in it were not part of her own schooling. Unfortunately, not much has changed; the arts are still devalued in too many schools. Ljungkvist’s attention to both art and music as parts of the curriculum emphasize their critical and important roles in learning.

The *Follow the Line* series of books has been published in different countries, including China, France, Japan, and Brazil. Given the variation in schooling practices around the world, we can’t help but wonder how children in those places relate to this book. For American children, however, the book provides a rich experience in which children will delight. While the detailed illustrations don’t make *Follow the Line to School* a good class read aloud, smaller groups of children will have no problem engaging with it and, perhaps, comparing the school and curriculum to their own or posing their own “I spy” questions to their classmates.

About the Authors

Prisca Martens is a professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Towson University. **Ray Martens** is an associate professor in the Department of Art and Design, Art History, and Art Education. Their current research explores helping young children learn to read the art as well as the written text in picture books.