

Title		The Little House			
Author (Text & Illustration)		Virginia Lee Burton			
Publication Year		1942	Publisher	Houghton Mifflin Company	
Translated Versions		Japanese translation available			
Words	1,335 words	Pages	42	YL Level	2.5
Synopsis					
<p>Once upon a time, there was a Little House out in the country side. The Little House was on top of a hill and lived a happy life with a kind family, experiencing the changes of nature every day. As time went by, the Little House transformed into a city, with more and more people and cars, and even a train in it. Eventually, there was a noisy elevated train above the Little House. Missing the peaceful old time, one day...</p>					
Introduction					
<p>The author, Virginia Lee Burton (1909-1968), was a picture book author and painter from Massachusetts, USA. The author won the Caldecott Award for <i>The Little House</i>.</p> <p>This work is a classic picture book and needs no introduction. The year I started elementary school, we usually had classes held in the classroom. However, one day, our homeroom teacher took us to the library and encouraged us to read, saying, "You can read whatever you want." The book I chose to read that day was <i>The Little House</i>, translated by Momoko Ishii. Strangely, even with my poor memory, I somehow clearly remember the book's binding as well as the story, even though decades have passed since then. I guess that is how appealing this book is. Similar to extensive reading, the experience of choosing the book I wanted to read from the many books available may have been another factor that made the book so memorable.</p> <p>I picked up <i>The Little House</i> again for the first time in decades when I decided to read the English version of it with my students a few years ago. Every page is full of nostalgia. I was moved by the story for some time. After I settled, interestingly, the details of the illustration caught my eye. The flora and fauna of the four seasons, the orbit of the sun, the calendar of the phases of the moon, the night sky with the stars shining around the Big Dipper, and the skillful composition that guides the reader's gaze from front to the back, creating a sense of perspective and flowing motion, reminded me of Katsushika Hokusai's “Ukiyoe.” Even though the story is two-dimensional, there</p>					

is a dynamic movement in its flow. The flow of time, human activity, and changes are expressed with a sense of speed.

The story made me think on the lines of how human life is changing nature. This book was first published in the 1940s. When I read it as a child, Japan was in the midst of a period of rapid economic growth, with pollution being a major social problem. Nearly 80 years since the book's publication, the problems of destruction of nature and habitat degradation due to urbanization has not changed at all. In fact, we are still facing the big challenge of global warming. I wonder what Burton, a great lover of nature, would think if she were alive.

Rural and urban areas, consumer society, changes in housing, lifestyles, and occupations, nature and technology, destruction of nature, pollution, global warming, slow life, happiness, and SDGs (sustainable development goals) are some of the issues that can be discussed by keeping this book as a starting point.

(Text: Yuka Kusanagi)