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L533: Library Materials for Children and Young Adults
Fall, 2002

Mock Caldecott:
Chris Van Allsburg's *Jumanji*
preparatory notes for class presentation

The seemingly plain pencil drawings of Chris Van Allsburg's *Jumanji* may appear unremarkable at first glance. There is no color, no texture of collage, no striking folk motif. The more time you spend with these illustrations, however, the more you find yourself moving into them: this is a place of light and motion, where the story comes alive almost effortlessly in the mind's eye because of the depth and detail of the drawings. You are drawn into these pictures just as surely as the children are drawn into the surprising realities of the *Jumanji* game.

The School Library Journal likened these illustrations to the "eye-fooling angles, looming shadows and shifting perspectives" of an Alfred Hitchcock film; Carol Hurst cites Van Allsburg's references to the influence of Edward Hopper. Hopper's clean, well-lit places can certainly be remembered here, but for me the quality of light, and the emphasis on light and its effects, are even more strongly evocative of Vermeer. And all this with "just" a pencil!

Van Allsburg created these illustrations with Conté dust and Conté pencil. The dust produced from sharpening the pencil is picked up with cheesecloth and rubbed into the paper to produce subtle tones of gray. Van Allsburg would begin by laying a gray background of dust onto the paper, and then used erasers to create lighter areas and more pencil to create darker areas of background. This innovative use of Conté dust contributes to the depth and subtlety of the illustrations in *Jumanji*.

In interviews Van Allsburg has described his technique as representational or figurative, but with the aim of creating a sense of mystery behind the superficial orderliness and ordinariness of the drawings. Joseph Stanton goes further in his analysis of Van Allsburg's work, and calls him a surrealist. Study of the pictures in *Jumanji* bears out both these claims.

The format of the book seems simple as you begin. There are two title pages: one bearing only the title of the book, and another only slightly more embellished page giving the title, the author's name, the publisher, and an illustration of the game under the tree—which is *not* repeated in the body of the book. The game is waiting for us before we begin the story. There are no endpapers, and the dustjacket presents a plain back, and one of the more striking illustrations from the book on the front (one wonders if Mr. Van Allsburg was consulted).