



October 2, 2023

We received your Request for Reconsideration form regarding the book *The Big Bath House* by Kyo MacLear. We have owned this title since 2011, and it has been checked out 8 times. We reviewed it and have decided to retain it in the Juvenile Picture Book section.

According to our book vendor, this book's intended audience is children ages 6-7, grades 1-2. The publisher recommends ages 4-8, grades K-3. The front cover, title, and book jacket provide information about the content of the book – a depiction of the traditional Japanese bath house. At the back of the book, an author's note expresses the goal of her story in a fictionalized narrative of visiting her grandmother in Japan:

This story, close to my heart, was inspired by my childhood memories of 'Baachan' ... Because of the bath house, I grew up surrounded by naked bodies of all ages, shapes, and sizes. I saw breasts of women who had nursed many babies. Large bottoms, saggy bottoms. Grandma with gentle rolls of fat. The idea that bodies should always be private and clothed wasn't the norm, and part of my hope with this story is to share and celebrate this other way of being.

Some individuals may find the content of this book uncomfortable or the illustrations objectionable, but the book is a well-reviewed work, and located where one would expect to find it. Picture books are sometimes used by parents to introduce various cultures and experiences to children. The Christian County Library makes every effort to provide a broad selection of materials to meet the needs of diverse audiences, and we rely on parents and guardians to determine what is or is not suitable for their own households.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Renee Brumett, Executive Director
Christian County Library

Review Excerpts:

Publishers Weekly, September 2021

Maclear (It Began with a Page) remembers with affection the local bathhouse her Baachan took her to during childhood visits to Japan. In bold black ink and wash drawings, Zhang (Lala's Words) captures the girl's arrival and the slow walk through the neighborhood as the child, her grandmother, and her aunties (who have "big stories and bigger purses") stroll along in yukata, enter the bathhouse, and wash ("the aunties scrub



each other's backs"). Then everyone soaks in the hot water together, "a chorus of one long breath:// Ahhhhh." Against a tile backdrop, dazzling candid portraits capture groups of nude girls and women of various ages, shapes, and skin tones sharing the big communal pool: "You'll all dip your bodies,/ your newly sprouting,/ gangly bodies,/ your saggy, shapely,/ jiggly bodies,// your cozy, creased,/ ancient bodies./ Beautiful bodies." Maclear and Zhang portray with great warmth the nourishment offered by this cultural institution, making clear to readers the ritual's cozy, home-away-from-home feeling. In this treasured familial memory grounded in a specific place, tender nakedness resolves into an undressing of both emotional and physical selves: "You'll reach for Baachan's hand, and she'll reach for yours./ And it'll be understood." An author's note discusses the book's origins. Ages 4–8. Author's agent: Jackie Kaiser, Westwood Creative Artists. Illustrator's agent: Hannah Mann, Writers House. (Nov.)

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Kirkus Reviews, August 2021

Family, community, body positivity, and a nice hot bath—ahhhhh! A young international traveler with beige skin and straight dark hair eagerly greets her grandmother at Baachan's home in Japan. Accompanied by gregarious aunties with "big stories and bigger purses," she and Baachan visit the big bath house nearby and engage in a cultural, communal event: the Japanese bath. A soapy shower comes first so the women enter the bath clean. Then the girl joins all kinds of women—old and young, thin and fat—who are naked and thoroughly enjoying the hot water and female companionship. Together, the young girls dance while the women talk in this protected and private (yet public) space. Entering the pool, they all take "a chorus of one long breath. Ahhhhhh." Beautifully loose-lined and delicately colored illustrations depict vibrant, earth-toned scenes so soaked with conversation and interaction that, if readers lean close, they might be able to listen in. Various skin tones and body shapes and sizes celebrate a broad spectrum of body diversity. Rhythmic, occasionally rhyming second-person narration invites young readers into the rollicking fun of the bath-house experience. The girl and Baachan understand each other without saying a word—a powerful metaphor for how this book can serve as a cultural bridge between Western and Eastern sensibilities of privacy and body positivity. (This book was reviewed digitally.) A must-have celebration of cultural understanding and community—and the joy of family. (glossary, author's note) (Picture book. 3-7)