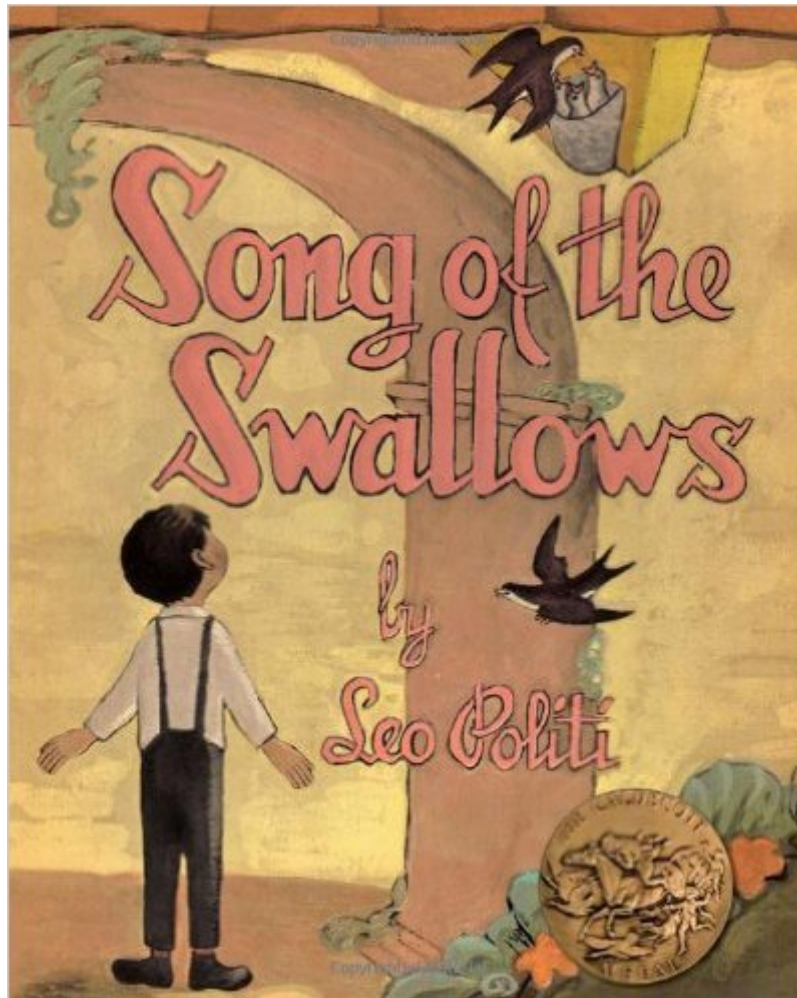


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# Song Of The Swallows



## Synopsis

*Song of the Swallows*, which won the Caldecott Medal when it was first published in 1948, was written and illustrated by Leo Politi, one of Los Angeles's most beloved artists. It tells the famous story of the yearly return of the swallows to the Mission San Juan Capistrano through the eyes of a small child. Julian, the bell ringer of the Mission, tells Juan, a young boy who also lives at the Mission, the story of the swallows and how "without anyone really knowing why or how" they return each year from their winter home in South America to San Juan Capistrano in California. Thrilled by the story, Juan makes his own small garden in the hope that at least one family of swallows will nest there when they return. This delightful book also includes the music and lyrics for "La Golondrina," a song about the swallows that Politi composed himself, and Spanish phrases are sprinkled throughout the story. This book provides a delightful introduction for young children to California's centuries-old Latino heritage and Mission culture.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 620 (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: J. Paul Getty Museum; 1 edition (September 9, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0892369892

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Product Dimensions: 8 x 0.4 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (21 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #197,555 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #69 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Children's Literature #435 in Books > Children's Books > Animals > Birds #1580 in Books > Children's Books > Classics

Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

## Customer Reviews

This summer the swallows returned to San Juan Capistrano, but many didn't nest at the mission. Due to restoration work at the mission, many of the swallows decided to nest at a single family home nearby. A family of swallows even decided to nest in the high entranceway to my neighbor's house here in Whittier [about an hour north of SJC]. It reminded me that it was time to get out my

copy of Leo Politi's beautiful book *Song Of The Swallows* and read it again. This excellently illustrated book tells the story of the yearly nesting of the swallows through the story of the relationship between Julian, a bell ringer at the mission, and Juan, a young school boy who lives nearby. Politi's exquisite art tells the story as much or more than his words. This was one of my favorite story books from my childhood and I'm lucky to still have the copy given to me as a young boy. The story still enchants me in my middle ages. Like many older copies of Politi's books, my copy was personalized to me by Politi [he didn't just sign the books, he did a personal watercolor on the front endpaper]. Please make this story a part of your child's personal library.

The *Song of the Swallows* commemorates Saint Joseph's Day, which is the day when the swallows, or *las golondrinas*, return to their sanctuary at the Mission of San Juan Capistrano. This particular story bears significance to me because I can remember constructing a cardboard replica of the Mission as a school project; it was one of the first important assignments, second came a plaster model of the state of California, I had ever done. And there is no doubt that this was definitely a creative way to learn about history. The story is about a young boy, Juan, who meets a gardener and bell-ringer at the Mission, Julian, and asks questions about Capistrano. He tells Juan the story of the swallows and how they always come to Capistrano during the warm spring and summer months, and how the Mission is a significant part of California and Native American history. Most importantly, the story emphasizes the kindness to nature and animals. Leo Politi wrote and illustrated the book. And the unique aspect of his narrative is how he tells the story in English, but there is also a little bit of Spanish. The story is further enriched when Politi complements the book with a colorful array of drawings and the words to two of the songs about the swallows. Overall, *The Song of the Swallows* reveals that a part of history does indeed exist in the stories that are told. And for Juan, he happened to find it just down the road from where he lived. Cleverly, Politi may have been suggesting that in any city or town, the history of the past is closer than you think.

The first time I ever heard of Leo Politi, it was not in reference to the author, but instead to the school that was named after him. Then one day, I was walking through a Los Angeles Unified School District office, when a painting from another Politi book stopped me dead in my tracks. I couldn't explain it, but it was the most simple and yet whimsical thing I had ever seen. The painting was of *Moy Moy*, the title character in a book about Chinese New Year in Los Angeles's China Town. Politi loved Los Angeles, and it makes no difference that picture books this old definitely feature a style of writing that would be frowned upon today, Politi's stories come from the heart.

Song of the Swallows, to me, is an important story, because though one reviewer referred to its minor detours into political incorrectness, I feel that those were the true feelings of that time, and it is important for children to understand that people's attitudes change over time. I believe that Politi's Song of the Swallows is one of the most compelling reads for fourth grade students who must learn about the mission system, as it is told from the eyes of a child. It was awarded a Caldecott Medal in 1950, and it is clear to me why it is still in print in paperback form today. It captures a brilliant little piece of California history. For those that sing or play the piano, there is even a song about "Las Golondrinas" to learn. After reading this book, children are begging to go to the Mission San Juan Capistrano on that special day to see if the swallows really come. If you ever happen to visit on any given March 19th, you will see that they really do.

Every Californian needs to read this version of early California history, and Spain's settlement of our state. There are so many foreigners in this state from other states, that Leo Politi's book is a wonderful story to learn from. Also, "Song of the Swallows" should become part of each child's library. It will be appreciated as the child grows to adulthood. A visit to a local Mission is also a wonderful trip for anyone after one reads this book. The Missions are part of 3rd grade curriculum in the state of California. How gentle, lovely and loving this story becomes for even a 4 yr. old. This book is part of the Childrens' literature course given by Mt. St. Mary's University for anyone seeking an Elementary Credential from the State of California. Enjoy it over and over, Moms and Dads, aunts, and uncles.

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