

Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet

Leave Me Alone! by Vera Brosgol

1. **Opening Image:** In the first spread, the main character, an old woman, sits in a rocking chair on the recto page (right-hand side). A pile of colorful balls of yarn sits at her feet, and the expansive blank white space on the verso page (left-hand side) hints at emptiness and loneliness. The ellipses at the end of the last line encourage the reader to turn the page.
2. **Theme Stated:** The theme of family is stated on page two (“with a very big family”) and reinforced in the illustrations: The old woman sits in her rocking chair (in almost the exact same location as on the first page), only now she’s confined by a small house that is filled to the brim with family members. While the old woman furrows her eyebrows, one child literally hangs from the ceiling while another climbs the wall, alluding to the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe: “She had so many children, she didn’t know what to do.”
3. **Set-Up:** In the first few pages we’ve been introduced to the curmudgeonly main character and her predilection for knitting (note the exception to the never-cast-an-adult-as-a-protagonist-in-a-picture-book rule). We’ve also been introduced to her almost countless grandchildren.
4. **Catalyst:** The first leaf falls from a tree, showing that winter is approaching. The old woman needs to get her knitting done before the seasons change. This is also the moment when the main character is knocked down quite literally: While the grandchildren run underfoot, she’s knocked over and her balls of yarn are sent flying.
5. **Debate:** Can the children help her knit? The unraveling ball of yarn encourages the reader to move through the spread in a circuitous route from left to right as we follow the children batting at, eating, and chasing the yarn. When we turn the page, we come to the end of the yarn, and, with a clever visual pun, the end of the old woman’s patience.

6. **Break into Two:** The old woman decides to leave; however, first she takes care of a few things so as not to make it appear as if she's abandoning her family: She makes her bed (as best as she can with kids jumping on and hiding under it), she sweeps the floor clean (as best as she can with kids tracking in more dirt), and she has a relaxing cup of tea (as relaxing as possible with kids climbing on her and around the table). She drags her bag across the page from left to right, encouraging us to turn the page and keep reading. On the next full spread, we see the bustling community she's leaving behind, as she walks into the distance and into act two with determination, declaring "Leave Me Alone!" in big, bold letters.
7. **B Story:** After the old woman enters the deep, dark forest, makes a fire, and starts knitting, a curious family of bears arrives. Playing with the old woman's yarn, the cubs act as the "upside down versions" of the kids we saw earlier (one cub is literally upside down, on his back juggling a ball of yarn with all four paws).
8. **Fun and Games:** After packing up her things and leaving the bears, the old woman climbs up a mountainside, finds shelter, and encounters a herd of mountain goats. It's all fun and games for the goats who are especially excited that their new visitor has brought snacks. While one goat tugs on her scarf, another performs a balancing act on the balls of yarn, and two more have a lady-and-the-tramp moment in the foreground.
9. **Midpoint:** After packing up her things and leaving the goats, the old woman climbs higher and higher up the mountain. Eventually, she reaches the top and continues climbing onto the moon. She has finally attained her sought-after solace. She thinks she has everything she wants; however, it's a false victory because she has a ways to go (quite literally here) before she learns the lesson she really needs. This is also the climax or peak of the story – again, quite literally with the old woman summiting the mountain and continuing her journey into outer space.
10. **Bad Guys Close In:** When the old woman sits down in a rock chair (note the close connection to her rocking chair we saw earlier), bad guys close in in the form of "little

green moon-men,” holding hand-held scanners that emit “beep boop” sounds. When she demands the moon-men leave her alone on the next page, she’s standing so close to the bottom of the page she appears to be shouting up at the reader. With each command to leave her alone, the camera zooms in slightly, revealing her mounting frustration and anger that is also so wonderfully captured in her facial expressions. The goat peeking out from behind a rock in the distance hints at the approaching world of synthesis in the third and final act.

11. **All Is Lost:** The old woman escapes into a wormhole where it is dark and quiet. She was “absolutely, completely, utterly alone,” which is emphasized not only in the author’s use of three adverbs but also in the placement of the text on the page: each adverb is given its own line, moving from longest to shortest and creating the effect that the words themselves are slipping into a wormhole. This beat is another false victory, or, perhaps more accurately, a pyrrhic victory (a be-careful-what-you-wish-for victory that inflicts such a devastating toll on the victor it’s equivalent to defeat). The old woman has won; she has her alone time so she can finally knit; however, everything only seems “PERFECT.” Although this beat isn’t the inverse of the midpoint, it is the visual inverse; it’s almost as if we’re standing in a darkroom looking at the negative image.
12. **Dark Night of the Soul:** By the time we turn the page, the old woman has completed her knitting. With her hands in her lap and her toes curled toward each other, she appears uncomfortably alone and bored, in the midst of an existential crisis. This emptiness and loneliness is exacerbated by the white text on the black page, creating an infinite amount of space as if the book itself has become a wormhole.
13. **Break into Three:** The old woman packs her knitting in her bag, she sweeps the void, and has a cup of tea, illustrating the rule of three yet again and paralleling her actions at the story’s start. Although the bears do not return in this act, these “upside down versions” of the children reappear throughout the story in different forms: first as mountain goats, then as moon-men, and lastly – in the next beat – as the kids themselves, creating a satisfying circular effect.

14. **Finale:** After crawling through another wormhole, the old woman ends up at home where she belongs. A fire burns in the hearth, creating a cozy and comfortable mood.

15. **Final Image:** Everything is as she left it, including the rambunctious children. Even her rocking chair is as she left it – on the recto page – but this time eager children surround it. As the old woman opens her sack and doles out handmade sweaters, the children run around as before, only this time the old woman “[doesn’t] say a word.” She’s experienced what it’s like to be truly alone, and now – for the first time in 32 pages – she appears content to be amidst this happy hubbub.