

Reading Horizons

Volume 33, Issue 2

1992

Article 13

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1992

Children's Books

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Abstract

Tony Blundell (1991). *Beware of Boys*; Eve Merriam (1992). *Fighting Words*; Marisabina Russo (1992). *Alex is My Friend*; James Stevenson (1992). *Monty*; Roland Edwards (1992). *Tigers*; Peter Sis (1992). *An Ocean World*; Ann Jonas (1992). *The Thirteenth Clue*; Elsa Marston (1992). *Runaway Gazebo*

Children's Books

Beware of Boys. Written and illustrated by Tony Blundell. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1991. ISBN: 0-688-10924-1. 32 pp. US\$14.00.

Reviewed by Rick Kowalski
Lawton Community Schools, Lawton Michigan

Who can resist a story that begins *Once upon a time, not so very long ago, nor so very far away, a small boy took a short-cut through a forest...?*

Sound vaguely familiar? Well, this opener combined with a drawing of a little boy in a red sweater about to enter a deep dark forest immediately brings to mind the classic tale of Red Riding Hood. However, this is no ordinary fairy tale and the little boy is no naive little waif about to be done in by the big bad wolf. In fact, our hero is a very ingenious little boy who soon realizes that the wolf is not very clever. He convinces the wolf that a little boy would taste much better if prepared in some elaborate culinary concoction instead of being eaten raw. He sends the wolf on a scavenger hunt looking for all the elaborate ingredients needed to prepare such savory dishes as "Boy Soup," "Boy Cake" and "Boy Pie." The end result is one very exhausted wolf who falls prey to the boy's mischievous plans and ends up being the victim.

Tony Blundell has created a book full of delightful illustrations that complement the text and bring the story to life. The wolf is wonderfully zany both in looks and actions and the reader is captured by the vividness of the drawings.

This story would fit nicely into thematic units dealing with fairy tales, cooking and wolves. Children would enjoy writing their own recipes for "Boy This" and "Boy That" as well as using this story as a model to rewrite other fairy tales. The story is predictable and children soon find themselves involved in the action. They begin to discuss what will happen next before you have a chance to turn the page. This is a good book to get kids actively involved in reading.

Four Books for Friends

Fighting Words. Written by Eve Merriam. Illustrated by David Small. William Morrow and Company, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016. 1992. ISBN 0-688-09676-X. 32 pp. US\$12.95.

Alex Is My Friend. Written and illustrated by Marisabina Russo. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1992. ISBN: 0-688-10418-5. 32 pp. US\$14.00.

Reviewed by Karen Welch
Western Michigan University

Leda has curly hair and lives in the city. Dale has straight hair and lives in the country. Each sees the other as having everything and their envy leads them into a large-scale, name-calling fight. Their argument covers the area of the city and the country and sends citizens of both areas into a tizzy. Insults such as DIMWIT, OAF, and LUMMOX are just a few of the *fighting words* spoken. When Leda's and Dale's voices weaken, they decide to shake hands and be friends again. The story is hilarious, with perfect illustrations to go along with the text. The characters are oversized for the settings and they both have a tough, bullylike appearance. The pictures comically show the upheaval in the city and the country that is caused by two little kids and their mighty big *fighting words*.

Alex Is My Friend is a heartwarming story about two young boys who develop a friendship while their sisters play on a Sunday soccer league. As time goes on, Ben notices that Alex is different – not only does Alex like different things, he also isn't growing like Ben. Alex then undergoes a serious operation on his back. This story portrays a confused little boy who, with the guidance of his mother, comes to understand that people may be different but are still loving, caring friends. This story is certainly an aid for teaching children diversity of humans and expression of care to others.

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Monty. Written and illustrated by James Stevenson. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. Reissued 1992. ISBN: 0-688-11241-2. 32 pp. US\$14.00; paperback \$4.95.

Reviewed by Rick Kowalski
Lawton Community Schools, Lawton Michigan

James Stevenson's illustrations are so crisp and expressive that the reader can't help being drawn into the story. His formats are eye-catching and there is a marvelous balance between the illustrations and the text, both of which contain a message that even the youngest of readers will understand. The story of Monty the alligator is no exception to the Stevenson rule. A duck, a rabbit and a frog have been asking their friend Monty to ferry them across the river on their way to school and back each day. However, the three friends are constantly complaining that either Monty is going too slow, or too far to the right, or that he is getting their books wet. So much for trying to do someone a favor! Monty decides that he is tired of all this complaining and announces that he is going on vacation, leaving the duck, the rabbit and the frog to find another way to get across the river. Each of the animals tries to think of an alternative way of crossing the river but none of the plans are successful. What they do discover, however, is that they had not realized how much they were complaining. No wonder Monty wanted to go on vacation. This is an excellent book for a unit dealing with friends, feelings or cooperation.

Tigers. Written by Roland Edwards. Illustrated by Judith Riches. Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11685-X. 1992. 32 pp. US\$15.00.

A father tries to explain the winter furnace sounds to his young son; the boy, however, knows there may be another reason for muffled sounds in the night. Silent, graceful tigers roam the house — sly and gleeful, they “circle softly” in and out of rooms, only occasionally letting out a “whispered roar.” Judith Riches' soft, colorful drawings capture perfectly the curious, curious tigers — so clearly harmless and fun-loving, they should quickly become favorite bedtime friends. (SDC)

Celebrating Nature

An Ocean World Written and illustrated by Peter Sis. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1992. ISBN: 0-688-09067-2. Unpaged. US\$14.00.

Dedicated "to all who care about our world," Peter Sis' gorgeous picture story shows a whale raised in captivity and released into the wilderness of a great, ever-changing, multi-colored ocean and sky. Fittingly, there are words only while the whale is a part of the human world: a plane trailing an ad for "OCEAN WORLD," a postcard to "Family Sis" telling about the whale, one page of text paralleling pictures of the whale's growth. Then even the whale is dwarfed by the vast, wordless ocean as it searches sea and sky for its own kind. (JMJ)

Mystery and Adventure

The Thirteenth Clue. Written by Ann Jonas. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1992. ISBN: 0-688-109742-1. 32 pp. US\$14.00. *Cynthia and the Runaway Gazebo*. Written by Elsa Marston. Illustrated by Friso Henstra. Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1992. ISBN: 0-688-10282-4. 32 pp. US\$14.00.

In a pell-mell hunt through a deserted house and into the woods, eager readers will follow clues written in twined electric cords, mowed into the lawn, and spelled out in rebuses created from plants and garden objects. The mystery's solution, as the thirteenth clue is revealed, turns a sad puzzling day into a joyous occasion. When children have read Ann Jonas' clever, vivid story, they will want to reread by sharing it with friends.

Whatever happened to Horatio and Algernon? Proper British tots, their favorite spot was the gazebo on the lawn of their spacious family estate — until they ran away to sea. Years later their niece Cynthia, "so frail and delicate a child," is hostess at a garden party when a storm causes the young guests to shelter in the gazebo. Washed away to the river and thence to the sea, their croquet mallets are insufficient to protect the children from attack by a pirate captain who has always fancied a gazebo. Elsa Marston's elegant plot twists eventually reunite a separated family, and show Cynthia to be far from frail. (JMJ)