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The Lion & The Mouse



Synopsis

In award-winning artist Jerry Pinkney's wordless adaptation of one of Aesop's most beloved fables, an unlikely pair learn that no act of kindness is ever wasted. After a ferocious lion spares a cowering mouse that he'd planned to eat, the mouse later comes to his rescue, freeing him from a poacher's trap. With vivid depictions of the landscape of the African Serengeti and expressively-drawn characters, Pinkney makes this a truly special retelling, and his stunning pictures speak volumes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

How trustworthy do you find a reviewer who loves a particular author's work, praises it regularly, and then reviews that writer's next book with predictable kisses, cheers, and thrown rose petals? I admit that I am usually that exact reviewing type. If I like someone's work, I'm more likely to review that same person in the future. That's just how the game goes. But for once, I think I should point out that a positive review is all the MORE impressive when it comes from someone who not usually a fan of a particular author or illustrator. Take Jerry Pinkney, for example. The bloke has won his own fair share of Caldecott Honors in his day. He is prolific. He has an eye for a good story. But prior to the publication of *The Lion and the Mouse* I would have to admit that the only picture book of his that I really truly enjoyed was his version of *Little Red Riding Hood* and even that wasn't one of my favorite books of its year. I say all this not to degrade Mr. Pinkney but to point out that his newest book has a singular ability to do something most artists do not even hope to try for. It is

appealing to both die-hard Pinkney fans and the folks who could take him or leave him. Everybody likes this book. It's actually a little weird, but who are we to argue? The Lion and the Mouse takes a classic Aesop tale and spins it into wordless picture book gold. A must have, and a must purchase. Set against the African Serengeti of Tanzania and Kenya, a single small mouse escapes the claws of a hungry owl, only to find herself trapped within the paw of a huge lion. On a whim, the lion lets the mouse go and then sets about his merry way. Unfortunately, poachers have been putting up traps, and before he knows it the lion is caught and bound in nasty ropes, high above the ground. To his rescue comes the little mouse, and she nibbles the ropes until they give way and free the lion. In her mouth she leaves with one of the knots of rope, which she gives her family of tiny babies at home to play with. On the final endpapers, the lion and his family of cubs prowl with the mouse and her family safely ensconced on the lion's back. Go into your local library, ask for the Aesop tales, and you'll find a wide variety of takes on the genre. Generally, it is hard to turn a single Aesop fable into a picture book for the simple fact that Aesop's tales are a bit on the short side. That's why you're more likely to either find his book in collections (as in *Animal Fables* from Aesop as illustrated by Barbara McClintock) or in greatly expanded texts (as in *Lousy Rotten Stinkin' Grapes* by Margie Palatini). Pinkney's decision to make this book almost entirely wordless is therefore nothing short of inspired. Without words, Pinkney is free to expand his storyline. To show elements and characters that wouldn't deserve a mention in a straight interpretation of the original text. And at forty pages Pinkney hasn't had to skimp on his storytelling either. Pinkney places his story within the quiet majesty of the Serengeti. Now I'm sure I'm not the only person who, when hearing the title *The Lion and the Mouse* immediately thinks of the jungle. It doesn't matter how many times you tell me that lions don't live in the jungle. Certain stories have been so battered into my brain that it will take books like Pinkney's do undo the mental imagery there. Pinkney has also given himself over entirely to the Serengeti landscape. Each animal has been meticulously researched and rendered here. On a first read I was skeptical as to whether or not the owl featured in the book would actually exist in this African landscape. The answer? Yep. It would indeed. Pinkney has researched this puppy out the wazoo, and the result is a book that fairly pops with accuracy. Mouse feet. I have a strange appreciation for any artist who can accurately portray well-proportioned mouse feet. Mice do not have attractive feet. They are long and pink with their toes all scrunched on one end and their heels too far away to look good on the other. So while I am sure that most folks will be ooing and cooing over Pinkney's depiction of the lion in all his mane-y goodness, I'm all about the mouse and her footsies. And from time to time I did also wonder about scale. There's a wonderful moment when the mouse pauses on the lion's tail, unaware that she is

close to a new predator. Next to her three ants walk the length of a single piece of grass, even smaller than the mouse herself. Later you see the mouse and her family on the back of the lion, and they seem a bit big, but it's not overly jarring. I doubt a kid would care two cents about whether or not the mouse is always in direct proportion to the lion, but it's worth noting anyway. According to the publication page, "The full-color artwork for this book has been prepared using pencil, watercolor, and colored pencils on paper." And within that medium, and without becoming cartoonish, Pinkney gives characters expressions but keeps them well within the realm of realism. The mouse can go from terrified to delighted and still look like a real mouse. And the lion's expression when the mouse finds him in the net? If cats feel shame, the big cats must sometimes feel big time shame. Other choices made in the book are worth noting. The white poachers, for example, have their faces obscured when they appear to set up the trap that will snare the lion. In doing so they take on the faceless void of villainy, without the artist having to render them cartoonish in their badness. There are words in this book, but they tend to be onomatopoeic. The "who who whoooo" of an owl or the tiny terrified squeak of the mouse when caught by the lion. In the scene where the lion is lifted off the Serengeti floor no sound is made. You just see the wide-open mouth and rolling eyes. It isn't until you turn the page that the "RRROAARRRRRRRRRRRR" appears at the top of a two-page spread. Below the sound, four panels show the mouse scurrying to the rescue below. This use of panels gives the already near silent book a kind of silent movie feel. Like a graphic novel, *The Lion and the Mouse* finds use for panels, white space, timing and inserts of dialogue, such as it is. It is able to use the best of both the comic world and the picture book world. One minute you're limited to panels. The next you turn the page and here's a double spread, full-color, lush and gorgeous. Pinkney has expanded his medium with this book and the payoff is evident. As a children's librarian, sometimes I find wordless picture books a hard sell to parents. Kids are often willing to dig them, but for a parent a wordless book means a lot of interaction with their child, and some folks are squeamish about poring over a single title for too long. The nice thing about *The Lion and the Mouse* is that it hooks you from the cover onward. Heck, I suspect that there's many a parent that will completely miss the fact that the book even is wordless until they've gotten more than halfway in, so compelling is Pinkney's visual storytelling. It's been a while since an Aesop fable had this many people talking about it. Worth the buzz. Worth the hype. Worthy.

Pencil, watercolor and colored pencils on paper...That's all that was used to create the new children's book, *The Lion & The Mouse*. But those simple tools were being wielded in the hands of Jerry Pinkney and that, apparently, was enough. The magical combination of the artist and his skill,

of tool and medium has resulted in a masterpiece of beauty and creativity. Because this retelling of Aesop's fable is presented here with almost no words, it will challenge parents, teachers and others doing the "reading" to find words worthy of doing justice to Pinkney's art. It's just that gorgeous. I've never encountered Pinkney's work previously and am now looking forward to discovering what other wonders have come from his hands and to collecting and sharing them. And though it goes against all my beliefs as to how a book should be treated, I'm considering purchasing an additional copy solely to snag the dust jacket and have the cover art matted and framed. I simply can't take my eyes off it! Highly recommended!

The African countryside was teeming with life. A pair of red-necked ostriches and a family of zebras leisurely stood in the grass while a giraffe family loped through the grass in the background. An eland and her fawn watched a baboon stroll by with her baby on her back. An African water buffalo stared at a lion family while the elephants trumpeted in the distance. When night rolled around and the moon rose all was quiet and a mouse came out of her rock den to look over the landscape. When the light was out an owl came swooping down to catch her and she narrowly escaped her clutches, but ended up in the lion's. "GRRR." He teased her a bit and when he let her loose she ran back to her babies. "Squeak, squeak, squeak . . ." The proud lion roamed the grasses, but elsewhere some poachers began to set a rope trap, hopefully to catch him. He wandered into a wooded area where the baboons and crows watched him. The trap was weighted and when he stepped on the trap . . . whoosh! He was pulled up and he roared in anger and fear. "RRROAARRRRRRRRRR! The little mouse heard him and quickly ran to help him. "Scratch, scratch." Would such a little creature be able to free the king of the jungle? This beautifully illustrated and practically wordless tale illustrates the kindheartedness that one creature can show to another, despite differences. It is directly patterned after Aesop's fable, "The Lion and the Mouse." This is the type of wordless tale that can be retold by any adult to a young child from his or her own perspective. Each person can say what the fable of the lion and the mouse means to them in their own life. This gorgeous book is so sweepingly beautiful that few people would want to pass it up for their personal library!

I usually am pretty quick to return books that don't have any words written on the pages of the book. Yes, be fore-warned...this book is only pictures and nothing but pictures. Yet, the pictures are beautifully drawn. One really enjoys looking at the detail of each drawing. They are done in such a way and the story is laid out in such a way that one can easily 'talk' through the story, to their child,

without needing to 'read' the story. I do still wish that the author had taken the time to write out the story on each page and really don't get why the author doesn't do this because, it is a well-known story. I do feel that this technique is better utilized in a story which is very open-ended. Therefore, allowing the reader to 'imagine' their own path for the characters. But, that is not what most people will do with this story because, it is already such an established tale. I predict that most readers will simply try to re-tell the classic tale using the pictures as their guide. Therefore, the author might-as-well include the text.

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