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# The War

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Not to be taken  
off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

It's a fair bet that a picture book entitled *The War*, whose cover shows a child in medieval dress looking down sadly on an armed camp, is likely to have a message to put across. Vaugelade's tale of battling red and blue armies and a prince who hates fighting was originally published in France and has already won the UNESCO Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance 2001. The action takes place in a pale devastated landscape and vast empty throne rooms peopled by anxious and implacable kings, on horses and towering thrones, and their weary, footsore soldiery, dragging themselves from skirmish to skirmish. Apart from the use of colours to mark out the allegory, there are visual references to chess figures and, in the portrayal of the horses, a sardonic link to the famous battle scenes of Paolo Uccello, where carnage was translated into lines of painterly symmetry. It's done with a light, if bitter, touch. The absurd confrontation of the red prince on his proud charger and the blue prince on his war-harnessed sheep proves to be a duel to the death, when the sheep's bleating alarms the war horse, who throws the red prince to the ground. This tragedy prompts the blue prince to employ a stratagem that brings the blue and red armies together in mutual defence, and means his exile, as the adopted son of the peace-loving yellow king. The ending is unlikely to convince any older child who is aware of the intractability of any real lifelong standing conflicts. Still, it's a tale whose motives are irreproachable and it is told with conviction and skill in words and pictures, and that will give children food for thought.

Running Order:

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