



A Child's Garden

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Two children, on opposite sides of a barbed wire fence that divides a war torn landscape of dust and rubble, tend a vine. It begins as a weak single shoot, nurtured by a boy on one side of the fence; gradually grows into a sturdy plant that climbs, binds and obliterates the fence, vibrant with butterflies and birds; is torn down by soldiers on the other side; and is then resurrected, from the shoots of its scattered seeds, by the boy himself, by a girl on the other side of the fence, and by a growing army of child gardeners on both sides. Foreman realises this allegory perfectly. Landscape, fence and boy are drawn in shades of grey, with the economy and precision of a political cartoonist. A reduced spring palette of yellow, blue and green enters with the vine and spreads gloriously, gradually extending to the children. In the final pages, there are occasional touches of red to suggest the possible blossoming of fragile hope. The story can be read entirely from the pictures and could be applied to any conflict. However, there are indications that Foreman has the Palestinian situation in mind. The buildings certainly have a Middle Eastern look. To my mind this setting is both a strength and weakness. The weakness arises from the possibility of reading the story, however unfairly, as direct political commentary. It is interesting to speculate about how Palestinian and Israeli children might respond to it, and I can see that there are aspects of the story that some on each side of the fence might not like. Curiously, given the suggested setting, all the children are depicted as largely indistinguishable either in dress or physical appearance from western Europeans (although barefoot), perhaps anticipating the main audience for the book. Also suitable for 5-8 year olds.

Running Order:

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