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Peter and the Wolf

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Children often first encounter this favourite Russian fairy tale by seeing it performed or by listening to it on DVD. The music of Sergei Prokofiev adds hugely to their enjoyment so how successful is this picturebook version of the story? The print narrative by Martin West tells the tale well and uses convincing dialogue to help the reader picture the characters and the events. The boy goes to the meadow with his friend the little bird . ?How quiet it is? chirped the bird cheerfully. But then there is excitement and friction. A duck waddles into the meadow and starts an argument with the bird; then a terrifyingly fierce cat tries to catch the bird. Grandfather adds to the drama when he sees Peter and angrily warns him that a wolf could come from the woods; he takes the boy home and locks the gate to the meadow. The narrator emphasises Peter?s thoughtfulness and quick wittedness. The boy watches from behind the gate and sees the wolf come from the wood and eat the duck. He tells the little bird to distract the predator by flying around his head. Then he captures it by lassoing its tail and, finally, he helps the hunters lead the wolf to the zoo. Good as the telling is, it is the illustrations that lift the story to a new level of inventiveness and drama. In fact this picturebook is as much an artistic creation by Prague based Kveta Paakovsk as a retelling of the familiar tale. Intense colours, geometric shapes and striking collages almost overpower the text . Pages have cut outs and alternate pages are pure abstraction with red and black predominating. This aesthetic power is what print rather than screen based texts can achieve. The cat and the wolf are fearsome predators with jagged sharp teeth and threatening eyes. Children today have post modern picturebooks as part of their reading experience and many will find the pictures of this fine colourist thrilling. The book would make a welcome gift for an imaginative child fascinated by interesting art and design. I can also see it used as a centrepiece in a display supporting a class study of fairy tales from different countries and times. Types of illustration would no doubt be part of such a study and the present book would be of great interest here.

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