ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

JUVENILE FICTION

A Big Decision
Kenneth Ian Segel
Sonny Heston, illustrator
AuthorHouse
978-1-4817-5005-9
Three Stars (out of Five)

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Children love animals, but owning a pet is a big responsibility. In *A Big Decision*, Kenneth Ian Segel explores how one child takes care of his pets and helps other pet owners in his community—even when doing so demands that he make a big decision.

Although Jake is not yet ten years old, his parents, teachers, friends, and fifth-grade classmates know him to be very responsible. He loves animals and has a house full of pets. He gets up every day at 6:30 a.m. to feed the animals and walk his dog. After school, his first thoughts are again for his pets; each one is fed and cared for before dinner.

Jake is eager for his tenth birthday to arrive because he yearns to attend a special summer camp with his best friend, Drew. The camp offers hands-on experiences with animals, such as milking cows, collecting eggs, helping birth baby animals, and riding horses. Jake has been saving money for what will be his first time away from home, and he has already made a deposit on the camp fee. But as the time to go to camp draws near, his friends ask Jake to care for their animals while they and their families go on vacation at exactly the same time Jake would have been away himself. Now Jake has a decision to make.

Segel's story deals with important concepts: responsibility, love, personal initiative, family and community relationships, and concern for the well-being of animals. The book would be more interesting had it dealt with its own point of conflict; the "big decision" that Jake has to make. Children of all ages experience emotional turmoil as long-anticipated plans change, yet the book does not address the emotions surrounding issues such as Jake's responsibility to his best friend, the compromised camping plans, the arrangements his parents and grandparents had already made, and the need for healthy boundaries when others ask things of us. Allowing

readers to experience Jake's emotions as he makes his decision would have added much-needed depth to the tale.

While the book's descriptions ("anxious rabbit," "opinionated parakeet") are imaginative, the dialogue is formal and stilted: "Father and I are so thankful to have such a wonderful son. We admire and respect you. To show how dear you are to us, and because you give so generously of yourself to help others, we have arranged a special gift for you."

Sonny Heston's colorful and appealing illustrations feature children of various races engaged with each other and with animals. However, the picture-book format may lead to some confusion because the book is listed as "Juvenile Fiction," has a reading level suitable for that classification (using words like "meticulous"), and features characters from fifth-graders to adults.

With its colorful illustrations and a topic that will be appreciated by children, parents, and teachers, Segel's book is a valuable and fun addition to the family or school library.

Kristine Morris