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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Axel Adventures

Jordan Imutan
CreateSpace
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When preschooler Axel Gabe visits a hot air balloon festival, he meets a girl who has lost her teddy bear. As they search for the missing toy, Gabe and the girl meet up with other kids at the festival and learn some important lessons about problem solving and teamwork. An illustrated introduction to life lessons for young children, *Axel Gabe's Adventures in Angeles City: Grown up lessons for our children* is a family affair inspired by the author's son, who shares the main character's name, and illustrated by the author's brother.

Axel Gabe's Adventures in Angeles City is presented in a graphic-novel style, with illustrations and word balloons conveying most of the action in single-panel spreads of artwork on each page. At key moments in the action, boxed "lessons" spell out the message young readers should infer from Axel Gabe's experience. For example, when the children locate the missing toy, which is lodged out of reach on a tree branch, a young boy yells, "Here I come," and then crashes right into the tree. The lesson presented on the page reminds young children that "it is safer to think first before acting." A scene where the children try to brainstorm a solution to the problem of the bear in the tree is labeled with this lesson: "Sometimes we need to think out of the box to come up with a solution to the problem."

The book is illustrated with computer-generated artwork. While the pictures are colorful and the characters are visually appealing, there is a lack of depth and artistry to the illustrations that may prove distracting to some readers. Close examination of individual pictures show some anomalies in sequence and scale, such as a hot dog that flies out of a character's hand, and lingers in the air through the next scene. The book relies heavily on these serviceable illustrations to deliver the story, since the only text appears in the form of the boxed lessons and the characters' dialogue.

Jordan Imutan incorporates ten lessons in his story of *Axel Gabe's Adventures in Angeles City*, covering a range of behaviors that will promote good character and teamwork among children: asking for help, giving people a chance to participate, thanking others for their help. Some of the lessons are more tangible than others. However, as illustrated in the story of Axel Gabe, they do have meaning in the lives of young children. The graphic format might be confusing to very young children, but read with an adult, this book makes a useful springboard for discussions on manners and problem-solving skills.

CAROLYN BAILEY (July 5, 2011)

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