ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Benny and Penny: Just Pretend
Geoffrey Hayes
Raw Junior
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“I’m brave Benny the pirate!” announces big brother mouse when his little sister, Penny, wants to play with him. Although little sisters are not allowed on his pirate ship, no matter what Benny says or does, he cannot get rid of her. Finally resorting to calling “dumb” Penny names, he hears that old maternal scolding, “Be nice and play with your sister.” When Benny suggests a game of hide-and-seek, of course never intending to actually find Penny, he relishes his freedom until he notices that Penny is not calling for him. After worrying about his little sister and then observing her stand up to wild creatures in their forest, Benny realizes that Penny is brave after all and a worthy companion for his pirate ship.

Although picture books about sibling rivalry abound, as do graphic novels for teens and adults, this comic book or early graphic novel provides an entrée for young children into this popular and ever-growing reading format. *Benny and Penny* is one of the first TOON Books, a new line of book format comics launched by Art Spiegelman, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Maus*, and Francoise Mouly, art editor of the *New Yorker*. The goal of TOON Books is to combine early literacy fundamentals with high-quality comic art.

Author and illustrator Geoffrey Hayes meets the challenge with a relatable topic and a simple yet entertaining and surprising storyline. His delightful and touching colored pencil illustrations help young children identify the range of emotions felt by the adorable mouse siblings. Hayes has written and illustrated more than forty children’s books, including the Patrick Bear books and the *Otto and Uncle Tooth* early readers. He also illustrated *When the Wind Blew* by Margaret Wise Brown.

Many parents and educators reprimand children to put down comics and read “real” books. With *Benny and Penny*, however, they will see its value for emerging and newly independent readers. Young children will be enamored with the familiar antics and engaging format. Adults and children alike will hope to see more titles involving these endearing mice.