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Picture Books

Bingo Explores the Farm
Julia King
Julia King
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Bingo, a gray cat, goes looking for adventure and ends up on a farm. While he embraces the chance to explore, he also experiences some trepidation as he encounters unfamiliar animals and objects.

Appropriate for children in the early stages of learning to read on their own, the story will appeal to children familiar with working farms who recognize many of the animals and objects depicted, and it could also serve as an educational tool for those not as familiar with farm life.

A few words, such as “mechanic,” “frustrating,” and “concentration,” may be too advanced for the target audience and will require adult assistance to pronounce and understand the meanings.

Over the course of his adventure, Bingo becomes bored, fearful, and, finally, at ease and comfortable. And although his dealing with these feelings is revealed as a prominent message at the very end of the story, this theme would be more recognizable throughout the story and have more impact if a parallel structure was used and repeated each time the cat experienced a different feeling.

The visuals include photographs of Bingo in various scenarios, providing a realism not found in other books in the genre that rely strictly on artists’ illustrations, but several photographs look too similar and the lack of variety may not fully capture the attention of the age group.

A strength of the book is that it goes beyond the typical picture book, with the last few pages containing a series of activities, which adds educational value and crosses over into the workbook genre. However, there is a disconnect between the questions provided and the text of the story, as the answers to the quiz-type questions are not directly mentioned in the narrative.

The final pages also provide a “cast of characters,” and there is a missed opportunity

here as well. Names for each animal and person pictured in the story are provided, but the names are not actually used in the story in most cases, creating some confusion. For example, a character referred to only as “the Boy” in the story is listed as “Wyatt ‘the Boy’” in this section.

If more character names were used throughout the narrative, there would be a stronger emotional element for readers, which is particularly important to this story because the overall theme of the book is focused on Bingo’s feelings. Nevertheless, this tale celebrates the adventurous spirit and encourages readers to embark on their own explorations, prompted by the various suggested educational activities.

Maria Siano