

Children's Stories by Grandma Dee Dee

Delores Dee Ray

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The pieces in Children's Stories move through teaching opportunities and magical, if under-explored, worlds.

Children's Stories by Delores Ray is a cute and ranging collection for young readers.

Each story brings with it an interesting new world. "A Trip to the Farm" contains realistic depictions of farm life in the US; its main character visits their grandparents' farm. "Christmas with Grandma and Grandpa" is colorful as its lead leaves their grandparents' house to swing on stars and interact with woodland creatures. The setup of each story is minimal, though, and introductions of magic or realism are unexpected and difficult to follow.

While "The White Fawn" features a young deer scorned for his appearance who goes on to be a hero, other stories give no sense of their main characters at all. Characters generally serve as placeholders or excuses to explore their worlds, functioning without clear agency. The narrator seems to address the audience with "we," but the reach of that "we" is unclear. Narrators' ages and genders are also unclear.

Dialogue is limited and stiff. Black and white illustrations and photography help in visualizing the stories, though there's no consistent visual aesthetic or theme between them.

The stories feel unrelated to each other, and their language and themes are inconsistent. While some have very plain language, others are colorful, more elaborate, and aimed at a higher reading level. Jumps from elementary to advanced diction are hard to track and throw the intended audience even more into question.

Missing material—such as moments in the text where chunks of dialogue are left out and the story moves forward without clarifying what was missing—are distracting. Internal inconsistencies, such as in "The White Fawn" where the other deer call on Brandy because he's white and can blend into the snow, even though the story takes place during the fall, are jarring.

Section breaks within stories have their own titles, but these are awkward and don't serve a clear purpose, especially because the breaks are so frequent.

Collection themes include the importance of kindness and will be instructive for young readers. However, many of the stories have no conflict at all; nothing really moves the stories forward. Some stories exchange a clear plot for educational elements, explaining the basics of everything from recipes to farming techniques without commanding attention.

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TIA SMITH (December 1, 2018)

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