

City Beats: A Hip-Hoppy Pigeon Poem

S. Kelly Rammell

Jeanette Canyon, Illustrator

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This is a kaleidoscopic, prismatic, bee-bopping, hip-hopping look at the day in the life of one of the most taken-for-granted creatures in a city—the pigeon.

From the first line, this poetic tale jogs along until the last page when the daylight begins to fade. The multi-colored doves are showcased in every scene: where the city awakens and human feet hit the pavement, where the cars honk and the subways roll, where the skyscrapers are assembled, where the popcorn is popped, where the gardens bloom, and where the jazz floats on evening air.

The author, a musician and poet, says he likes to celebrate the things people are often too busy to notice—the pigeon is the perfect subject. This is his first book, written in poem form. The verse is accompanied by remarkably detailed, three-dimensional, vivid illustrations fashioned solely of polymer clay. *City Beats* is the illustrator's second children's book; her first, *Over in the Ocean: In a Coral Reef*, won numerous awards, including the 2006 *Learning Magazine* Teacher's Choice Award for Best Children's Book.

The layout is clever, with text on the left page and a window on the right, in which the reader gets a glimpse of a larger picture. "Sun is rising— / People too. / Brimming, bustling, / Busy street. Passing faces / In the morning, / Different shoes / On different feet." On the opposite page two shoe heels are shown in the window. A turn of the page and it becomes a two-page spread of remarkably real-looking pigeons, pecking at discarded curbside donuts, seemingly oblivious to the lime green high heels and hot pink flip-flops clicking past them. "Rumble, grumble, / Grinding gears, / Whirzip, whirzip! / ker-chunk-ker-chunk!" reads another page, the text encircled by bright-eyed pigeons perched on steel cables among the steel girders, winches, and men in yellow hard hats.

The text is lively and lovely, replete with loads of alliteration ("bouncing, basking, / Bubbling, blooming") and assonance ("...Beep! / Screech! Squeak!"). This book begs to be read aloud. Canyon's illustrations are the perfect accompaniment, with their colorful and captivating realism. Her creations look so real that younger (and older) readers will want to touch the pages. On each page are a multitude of colors, shapes, and textures that will stop readers in their tracks to carefully study the detailed renditions.

A brief history of the pigeon (also known as the rock dove) is included in the front of the book, and it just may persuade some readers to see this city bird in a whole new light.

What is a day like for a pigeon? One can only hope it is as wonderful and wild a ride as it appears in this tale.

CYMBRE FOSTER (August 8, 2006)

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