

Don't Be Preposterous, Mr. Rhinoceros!

Gloria Fligg

Benjamin Fligg, Illustrator

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The picture book Don't Be Preposterous, Mr. Rhinoceros! is fun and timely as it delivers the message that sharing hope makes it grow.

In her picture book *Don't Be Preposterous, Mr. Rhinoceros!*, Gloria Fligg shows how caring for others, even in small ways, can help with the biggest problems.

Mr. Rhinoceros is a florist with a problem—he's run out of daisies. That's because he enjoys making his customers happy by giving them away for free. His friends tell him that he is being preposterous, and will never make a profit that way.

One day, he is shocked to see large, fast-growing, thorny weeds taking over the town, tangling the animals in their vicious vines. Shops and schools close down, and everyone has to stay at home. The streets are deserted. No one can believe how quickly life has changed. It all looks hopeless—until Mr. Rhinoceros comes up with a way to use his flower seeds to boost everyone's spirits.

When the weeds are finally uprooted and things begin returning to normal, Mr. Rhinoceros has another problem: his shop is empty, and his seeds are all gone. Now, it's his friends' turn to help him. Apologizing for calling him "preposterous," they fill his shop with beautiful flowers.

Written during the Covid-19 lockdowns and designed to help children cope with the events of the pandemic, the book's direct, clever story and appealing animal characters impart messages of hope and resilience in an easy-to-understand, fun format. The story conveys several important messages through the attitudes and actions of Mr. Rhinoceros, who demonstrates that he cares about his customers by doing something he knows will brighten their day, even though his friends call his behavior "preposterous." Even when the crisis hits, Mr. Rhinoceros doesn't give up. The message is clear: taking positive action, no matter how insignificant it may seem, and no matter what others may say, is empowering, combats feelings of sadness and hopelessness, and is a major component of the resilience needed to survive and thrive in difficult times.

The book's diverse animals also come in varied sizes and from a range of species. They all have their own personalities. The bright, colorful illustrations bring their activities and emotions to life: Mr. Rhinoceros, big and broad-shouldered, looks like he could be relied upon in any emergency; Mrs. Rabbit looks frazzled at having to home school her brood of rowdy children. Many of the pictures are humorous: the basset hound doesn't appear to have enough energy to lift his head off the table; and the giraffe's neck is so long that his head vanishes over the top of the page. However, one image is a bit disturbing, as it appears that a doctor is about to chop off the nose of a weed-wrapped crocodile.

The picture book *Don't Be Preposterous, Mr. Rhinoceros!* is fun and timely as it delivers the message that there is

always hope, and that sharing hope makes it grow.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March 18, 2021)

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