



Hatching Sharey

Bao-Khanh Tran

David Swaschnig, Illustrator

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A young hatchling finds meaning in helping others in this sweet take on a classic tale.

Hatching Sharey features a purple platypus whose looks inspire a journey from dismay to self-acceptance. In Bao-Khanh Tran's whimsical riff on *The Ugly Duckling*, the sensitive protagonist finds strength in her own limitations. Together with illustrator David Swaschnig, Tran brings a familiar message of encouragement to a new audience.

The story begins when Sharey hatches alone in the wild. Finding no one who resembles her, she seeks the company of others. When a duck denies any similarity to her and a mole unwittingly responds to her attempt at friendliness with indifference, she's disheartened, until she meets a beaver who suggests that she change her perspective. The straightforward plot concludes with Sharey finding meaning in helping others.

The book has uplifting aims but falters when it comes to delivery. Rhymes stumble and use unusual syntax, while elsewhere small, extra words are included to keep a rhyme.

Clean, bright illustrations feature lakeside and woodland scenes but stay too faithful to the text, not enhancing the story with their own nuances, unique perspectives, or specific character designs that might suggest each of the animals' personalities.

Several pictures place the animals on the same plane as their backgrounds, which minimizes their depth and keeps them from pulling the eye in. One picture struggles with scale; when the emphasis should be on Sharey's courageous attempt at flying, a too-large boulder and sun near the horizon dominate the scene. In another pair of illustrations, the shape of the mole's tunnel and the placement of background plants appear to change from one page to the next.

Sharey's determination, honest expression of her own doubts, and willingness to accept useful advice all offer worthy lessons in humility. The subtle theme of finding healing through acts of service, which is a refreshing take on Andersen's homely-fowl-turned-beauty story, will appeal to parents and teachers.

Among subversive, zany, fractured fairy tales and modernized classics, *Hatching Sharey's* quiet approach may not immediately draw attention, but it does shift the focus from worrying over belonging to gracefully adapting to circumstances.

KAREN RIGBY (August 1, 2017)

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