

I'm Not Very Good at It

Darrel Gregory

Ari Miller, Illustrator

FriesenPress

(34pp)

978-1-5255-7646-1

Sincere in its depiction of growing past self-doubt, the picture book I'm Not Very Good At It encourages positive outlooks.

In Darrel Gregory's encouraging picture book *I'm Not Very Good at It*, a mother suggests a means for her daughter to handle her low self-esteem.

The story centers on a downcast girl, who, when asked to do anything, tells herself, "Okay, but I'm not very good at it." This refrain is voiced aloud whether she's making a birthday card, baking, or helping her mother with a bird house. When her mother asks her why she responds in this manner, the girl replies, "Because that's what my brain said." Through a series of playful explanations, her mother advises her to listen to her heart instead. After a few attempts at practicing this new habit, the girl realizes that being good at something—or not!—is not as important as trying.

The story's focused, repetitive structure reinforces its therapeutic message about halting self-denigrating talk and about practicing stillness, the latter of which is likened to listening to "dandelion seeds falling on grass." Though perfectionism and fear of failure are possible explanations for the girl's behavior, the specific reasons and context for her self-doubt are absent. The effect is a depersonalized story whose heroine is generic, nameless, and tough to connect with. She is preschool-aged, but is asked to possess great self-awareness about her own metacognition, and to shift her own internalized script; her rapid turnaround is precocious, if not idealistic. And the abstract heart-versus-mind concept is shared through wordy conversations that are too didactic.

Ari Miller's soft, pastel illustrations elevate the text. Their detailed domestic scenes portray the girl's activities, and their alternating backgrounds emphasize the metaphor of falling dandelion seeds. They are faithful depictions of the story that track the girl's emotional change through subtle facial expressions. The girl's mother is left out of these images, though her advice and support is one of the main features of the story; her visual absence diminishes the idea of a close family bond. The book's busy typography mixes italicization, boldface print, and font styles; this detracts from the otherwise crisp layout.

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KAREN RIGBY (November 4, 2020)

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