Clarion Review

Picture Books

Jake, Dad and the Worm
Martha Sears West
CreateSpace
978-1-4538-9070-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

A frustrated child learns a lesson from one of nature's most unassuming creatures in this cozy picture-book offering. Jake crashes his skateboard into a tree and trips over his legs while walking on stilts. He plays his kazoo for family members, only to have them wander out of the room during his performance. He tells his father, "I wish I could be big…and good at doing stuff. When there are things I want to do, I'm never big enough."

As his father consoles him with encouraging words, they are both distracted by a wriggling worm on their doorstep, struggling to make its way back to the grass. Jake is fascinated by the worm's antics, and he and his sister closely observe the worm's every movement. By watching the worm persevere in its struggle, Jake gains insight into his own place and purpose in the world.

The story is narrated in adequately-rhymed quatrains, which only rarely lead to awkward sentence construction or obviously forced rhymes. The vocabulary is accessible to emergent readers, the age group which will most closely identify with Jake's situation. The text is enhanced by expressive watercolor paintings that illustrate the story in a detailed, realistic style. Superbly rendered visual images of the worm dressed as a superhero or "performing" in an imaginary circus, and a stunning close-up of Jake's eyes watching the worm move in a way "elastic and gymnastic" will prove particularly appealing to a young audience.

Ultimately, watching the worm struggle to descend the steps helps Jake put his own growing pains into perspective. With help from his dad, he realizes that "though he's small, there's an awful lot that he can do." Young elementary school students will identify with Jake's situation, and the easy reading level and engaging illustrations make this an excellent offering for both shared and independent reading.

Carolyn Bailey