



Picture Books

Jambo, Watoto!

Barbara Spilman Lawson

Elizabeth Massie

Marsha Heatwole, illustrator

Creative Art Press

978-0-9642712-3-4

(August 31, 1998)

The Creative Art Press was started by fine artist Christine Unwin, and, indeed, the first books published by the small West Bloomfield, Mich.-based company were fine art coffee table books, *The Artistic Touch* and *The Artistic Touch 2*. The third, [title=book]Primary Cats[title=book], a toddler's counting book, was beautifully illustrated, but naturally light on text.

Jambo, Watoto! is this publisher's first attempt at a children's book that demands good story-telling to accompany its gorgeous, watercolor illustrations. How did it fare? Exceptionally well.

The book begins with Mama Duma's counsel: "Stay, my watoto...Stay here and be safe."

Mama Duma instructs her four cheetahs to hide in the grass while she goes off to hunt. But the cheetahs are tempted to come out of their hiding place—by an ostrich who crazily spins, an elephant who takes a cool dunk on a hot day, an alligator who invites the cheetahs to join him for a tasty meal, and a giraffe who tempts them with a view of the world. Do the cheetahs stay wisely in the grass or do they sneak out? The story ends with lessons that are imparted—not with a heavy or patronizing hand—but as a natural consequence of the plot.

Children, ages 4-8, will identify with the cheetahs' struggle between freedom and obedience and delight in the whimsical drawings and lively text infused with Swahili words (defined in a glossary). Illustrator Marsha Heatwole magically captures each of the cheetah's unique personalities (bossy, gentle, bored and lazy) in her paintings. The book's type is smaller than what's usually found in children's books, the only drawback to an exceptionally engaging book.

Anne Stanton