ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

JUVENILE FICTION

Kayla the Koala Bear
Wendy Marie
Kirk Harris, illustrator
978-1-4343-5319-1
Two Stars (out of Five)

Kayla the Koala Bear is front and center in this book's title but she is by no means the star of the story. From the title and cover illustration this appears to be a book about a koala bear living in its natural habitat but it is actually a book intended to impart lessons on math science and behavior. The book deals with the classroom dynamics in Mr. Covington's elementary school class where Kayla is one of eleven students. There is no mention of the grade level of the class.

The book opens with the arrival of Mr. Covington's students—each one belongs to a different species of Australian wildlife and this is one of the educational components of the book. Mr. Covington informs the students of the ground rules for his class which include a points/reward system for good behavior. Then he leads the class through a basic geometry lesson and takes time to discipline them for various infractions. Kayla a model student is not among those who are disciplined.

Author Wendy Marie has a bachelor's in Sociology and a master's in Elementary Education and it is obvious that she knows what goes in a classroom.

In fact reading the book is like being a fly on the wall in a classroom. This makes it very accurate but it doesn't aid the story. Teachers do reprimand students often but for the purposes of a picture book some of this could have been left out. All of the students' antics are true to life but the razor sharp focus on small details takes away from the story arc. By showing the consequences of bad behavior the author allows the story to drag.

There is a lot going on between the lesson on shapes and symmetry behavioral issues and introducing Australian animals but the author's wish to integrate several educational elements into one text is admirable.

Jada Bradley