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Clarion Review

Picture Books

Kobee Manatee: Heading Home to Florida

Robert Scott Thayer
Susan Korman, editor
Lauren Gallegos, illustrator
Thompson Mill Press
978-0-9883269-2-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

This luxuriously illustrated, infectiously charming story makes us want to save the manatee and have a plush version to hug.

The weather is getting colder, and *Kobee Manatee* must make the journey from Cape Cod Bay to Blue Spring State Park in Florida. Along the way he meets Pablo, a wonderfully vulnerable hermit crab, and Tess, an empathetic and adventurous seahorse. Through the arc of the story and the development of the characters, author Robert Scott Thayer demonstrates the honorable values of strong friendship and helping creatures in need.

Although *Kobee Manatee* is an infectiously charming fictional story, it was also written to raise awareness about the recovery and protection of manatees. Thayer, who is also a musician, developed a picture book that not only teaches young readers about manatees and their habitats but is also captivating enough to hold the attention of the parents reading aloud to their children.

One of the strongest attributes of the book is how the depth and color of the ocean is captured in the illustrations. Lauren Gallegos is able to harness underwater shadows and light in a magnificent way. Gallegos has also created an exceptional look for the main character. Kobee Manatee's anthropomorphic expressions amid the radiant scenery express empathy, kindness, and wonder.

The pages of *Kobee Manatee* are glossy and wonderful to touch. The printing appears luxurious because of the deep blue and turquoise hues, and the entire layout has an extremely professional feel. While the cover is a bit cluttered, it captures the feel of the book.

Because of the distribution of words per page, *Kobee Manatee* is best suited for readers between four and seven years old. The book is a unique mixture of fiction and fact and includes fun information about manatees on every page. At some points, the fun facts mirror the plot of the story too perfectly, lending the text a repetitive feel. At other points, there are several pieces of information presented that aren't related to one another, which is a bit dizzying. That being said, the scientific and historic facts are a great way to help children learn about manatees and relevant information related to their recovery.

All in all, the book promises to appeal to a large audience. It encourages learning, curiosity, and awareness in readers of all ages. *Kobee Manatee* is so adorable that young readers may find themselves wishing that its main character were on the big screen or came in a plush version to hug.

Colby Cedar Smith