ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Leo the Lightning Bug
Eric Drachman
James Muscarello, illustrator
Kidwick Books
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Leo, the littlest lightning bug, has a problem. “He started off with a little squeeze? no light. / Then a push? no light. / Then a big oomph!? still no light!”

Leo’s mother tells him to be patient. He just needs time and practice. Following her advice, he flies off to practice. Other young lightning bugs are watching him, and start to tease and laugh at him. Feeling sorry for himself, Leo hides in a cave, where he cries and shouts out in anger. “Then all of a sudden” the cave echoed. “With a little time, time, time” and practice, practice, practice” Leo remembers his mother’s words and decides to give it another try.

With renewed enthusiasm he flies out of the cave into a raging storm. Leo is blown about in the wind and rain, but that does not stop him from trying to light his light. Suddenly thunder roars and lightning streaks through the sky, and Leo thinks that he has caused it! The exciting climax, which gives Leo confidence in his own light and in his dealing with the other lightning bugs, will thrill adults and children alike.

The author’s degrees in psychology and acting have helped him write a story that children will relate to as they struggle with their own challenges of growing up, reinforcing the importance of practice and persistence.

The illustrator’s use of deep browns on the pages inside Leo’s home, and blues outside beautifully reflecting the evening sky, allows readers to experience the lightning bugs’ glow. The expressions on the faces of the whimsical lavender lightning bugs depict well the emotions that Leo goes through, from disappointment to frustration to success. The large, clear illustrations make this an ideal book for group sharing.

Included with the book is a CD, which offers the gentle swishing sound of pages turning (rather than the annoying beep that usually signals page turns), allowing even the youngest reader to follow along. The CD is narrated by the author and features the delightful voice of his five-year-old son as Leo. The voices are clear and the sound effects are very realistic. The reader is transported with Leo to the field where the crickets are chirping. The listener hears the

echoing in the cave and the rain and wind and crack of lightning as Leo flies through the thunderstorm.

Written for children aged three to eight, this book would light up any library.

Dianne Weber