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Picture Books

Leon the Chameleon
Mlanie Watt
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Little Leon has a problem. His skin does not properly change color according to his surroundings, like other chameleons. All the others turn green when they sit on a green leaf. Leon turns red instead. In the blue pond, where his friends turn blue, Leon turns orange.

Even though the other chameleons never tease him about being different, Leon is acutely aware that he stands out, and feels that he doesn't fit in. His inability to turn the proper color is downright dangerous, because it's hard for him to hide from predators, and it's a particular disadvantage in games of "camouflage and seek." Leon feels isolated and lonely.

One day, the little chameleons go exploring, with Leon tagging behind, trying to hide. They get lost in a wide-open stretch of yellow sand. Leon's dramatic appearance leads to a dramatic rescue, and he feels he finally has a special place in the group.

The author's storytelling is a bit oversimplified, and the lesson she teaches about valuing others' differences is less than subtle. Her illustrations, however, done in acrylic and black ink, are rich, bright, and charming. They are beautiful tools for teaching about color theory. It's no accident that Leon turns the opposite color to his surroundings—Watt has chosen colors that are literally opposite each other on the color wheel. At the end of the book is a concise and clearly illustrated explanation of primary, secondary, and complementary colors. Watt, who lives in Montréal, Québec, started this book while enrolled in the graphic design program at the Université du Québec Ã Montréal. Leon was developed as part of her project on color theory.

He's an endearing creature, with facial expressions that plainly indicate his hopes and insecurities. Parents and teachers will find this book an excellent jumping-off platform for activities exploring color lessons, and readers of all ages will sympathize with Leon's emotions and cheer for his victories.

Karen McCarthy