

Lola & Fred

Christoph Heuer

Christoph Heuer, Illustrator

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Lola, a turtle, and Fred, a frog, dream of taking wing like the birds they watch soaring over their heads. With perseverance, cooperation, and imagination, this unlikely pair transform this dream into reality.

This is a wordless tale told by the Swiss artist, who chose to illustrate a text-free book to avoid translation complications in Switzerland where it was first published (that country has four national languages). In doing so, he has created a book that is accessible to a boundless audience. This is his debut picture book, and the first in a series that will introduce a new character in subsequent publications.

The reader needs no words to see the trust and friendship between the reptile and amphibian who go to great lengths to see the heavens. They try several modes of transportation—they strap themselves to a rocket, take a brief ride on a catapult, and tie themselves to hundreds of balloons—all to no avail. The pair remain indefatigable, and literally go back to the drawing board, where they design a kite to hold Lola. The kite takes the friends to a hot air balloon, where they meet Tom, a monkey, who will play a featured role in Heuer's next book, *Lola & Fred & Tom*.

Despite the lack of written language, this is an engaging tale. Heuer's cartoonish watercolors bring the creatures to life with their expressive faces and action poses. In one scene, Lola is about to strap herself to the giant kite when Fred brings her a hat and scarf for the journey. When Lola is suited up, she gives Fred a thumbs-up. Fred returns the gesture as he holds the rope taut. The reader is anxious to turn the page to see whether this experiment works, or fails like their previous attempts.

The wonderful thing about a wordless book is that it is accessible to children of all ages. Each of Heuer's colorful renditions is a vignette that can be told in the simple words of a young child or expanded upon by an adult. It offers up an opportunity for the reader to use his or her imagination.

As the story comes to a close, Lola and Fred climb aboard the hot air balloon to join Tom. The trio quickly become fast friends, and on the final page the reader sees them sailing through the air, knowing that they are en route to another adventure.

If a wordless picture book is done well, there is still a complexity and depth to the story, and in this Heuer has succeeded. He not only gives the reader a sweet tale of friendship and a fast-moving adventure, but illustrations that inspire viewers to speak.

CYMBRE FOSTER (June 8, 2006)

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