

Looking Upward

Olivia Charters

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Nature sings and sends children over the rainbow in this uplifting bedtime story.

A rabbit riding a bicycle on top of a rainbow is the striking cover image designed for *Looking Upward*, a children's picture book by Olivia Charters, and it perfectly sums up the fantastic, nature-friendly tone of the book.

Looking Upward is written in rhyme, which is appealing to young readers, but difficult to do well. There are occasional awkward rhyming lines with different syllable counts: "Pondering over things to know / Rabbit distantly hears the song of the crow." Additionally, there are lines that seem redundant or otherwise unnecessary. For example: "Become mindful and give attention / for Rabbit's purpose is intention."

But the optimistic, hopeful tone of *Looking Upward* manages to succeed to a degree, despite the sometimes clumsy delivery. Even use of the adult words "attention" and "intention" is acceptable, as the book includes definitions (found on the back cover) for potentially unfamiliar words within the context of the story: "Intention (noun) a course of action or purpose / Rabbit's intention was to laugh, play, learn, and allow others to do the same." The result is a healthy exposure to some "big" words that will not intimidate young readers; the definitions will aid parents working on vocabulary words with their children.

The color illustrations manage to pull their weight overall, though some look more professional than others. There are close-up views of paintings, which often show the gaps in acrylic paint coverage and other media used. This rough-hewn look sometimes works well, but some pictures look rushed or incomplete, making the reader very conscious of the illustration itself, rather than the subject of the illustration.

The book is a little rough around the edges, lacking a single, clear, consistent message. In one sense, the book indicates that anything is possible, even a rabbit riding a bicycle over a rainbow: "'Watch me, I can have fun, too! / In fact, I can do anything!' / Then up Rabbit flew." But it also tells us we should appreciate what's around us, respect the earth, and generally be happier: "Suddenly they begin to sing, / 'Look for the light in everything.'"

There's a kind of communal, nonreligious spirituality in these pages, but it's never made specific enough to bring it down from the clouds. In the end, most children would probably have a hard time answering the question, "What is this story about?"

Despite the sometimes nebulous qualities of *Looking Upward*, the book leaves readers feeling positive and distinctly uplifted, making it a nice bedtime book for children.

PETER DABBENE (January 23, 2014)

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