

More Tales for Your Monkey's Mind

Steve Michael Reedy

Tom Fee, Illustrator

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These fables are designed to help children make sense of the world around them and do so in a quaint, charming, and soothing way.

Steve Michael Reedy's *More Tales for Your Monkey's Mind* is a charming and intelligent collection of short stories full of fantastical lands and whimsical and weird characters. With elements like dancing purple hippos and a town run by a giant clock, these are tales that adults will enjoy reading as much as their children will enjoy listening to.

These fables are designed to help children make sense of the world around them. Each tale follows an overarching theme of things not being as they seem, with characters encountering people and situations that lead them to question what they thought about the world.

In one story, Tilly Tiller and Cropper Roo think their lives are pretty good until a mysterious chef shows up and convinces the townspeople they are actually miserable. Accepting her offer of free food has bizarre consequences, however, and it's up to Tilly to save her town. In another, Piper must overcome a horde of pink fuzzy bunnies that hop around being mean to everyone in town. A pair of strangers offer a solution, but it might be just as bad as the original problem.

The soothingly calm tone of the narratives and poetic prose that slips in and out of rhyme give the fables a bedtime story feel. There is plenty of action, including a wild chase scene where a girl is chased by two men who are chased by a mob of villagers who are chased by angry rabbits, but the mood never veers into stressful territory.

Tom Fee's imaginative black-and-white line drawings fit perfectly with this atmosphere. While landscapes are beautifully detailed, people are rendered in silhouette, adding a slight sense of mystery that reinforces the quaintly eccentric settings of the stories. This also allows children to engage with the fables by imagining the characters' features or even imagining themselves in the tale.

In addition to being excellent bedtime stories, these tales would work well in a classroom to spark conversation about the problems children might face and possible solutions to them. Using surprising elements like pink bunny bullies makes it easier for kids to look at real-world problems in a more objective way and talk to adults about them.

For example, in the story "The Nuts in Nuttersville," a boy named Max feels like he doesn't fit in because everyone else does silly things like hop around town dressed as kangaroos. Reading about how Max comes to terms with his feelings of loneliness and discovers ways to connect with those around him can lead children to think about how they too might connect with others who seem to be different from themselves.

Steve Michael Reedy's *More Tales for Your Monkey's Mind* is a children's book that successfully mixes memorably strange characters and fanciful plot lines with upbeat and confidence-building morals.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (October 4, 2017)

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