



My Friend Gideon

Heather S. Lonczak

Dusica Dimitrovska, Illustrator

Heather S Lonczak (Aug 1, 2019)

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My Friend Gideon is an educational picture book that suggests ways to take care of animals and the natural environment.

Heather S. Lonczak's *My Friend Gideon* is a sweet picture book about a girl's love for an endangered frog.

Six-year-old Rebecca is envious of her friend who has a pet dog. She begs her parents for a pet, and they eventually agree. Before they make it to a pet store, though, they go on a picnic at a park in the mountains, where Rebecca finds a lively frog that she believes would be a better pet than a dog. After she takes him home, naming him Gideon, he is much less energetic, sulking in the corner of the box that she fixed up for him. Rebecca's parents encourage her to take Gideon back to the pond at the park where he was much happier, and she learns that most animals thrive best in their natural environments.

The book's illustrations are realistic and appealing, though the speckled effect of their style—as if they were painted on a bumpy canvas—is hard on the eyes. Details from nature, like colorful mushrooms growing in the grass and adorable ducks and fireflies who also live at Gideon's pond, make Rebecca's world feel real and full.

The story is written in a singsong rhythm with rhymes. Imperfect rhymes, as with “mug” to “love,” elevate the text and provoke the imagination. The poem's lines are even, and the hopping rhythm within stanzas is fun and engaging.

Rebecca's nickname—Becky—is mentioned once and never again. It seems to be included for the sake of rhythm and rhyme. Other phrases that do not move the story forward work better toward building an image of the environment, as when Rebecca roams through “cattails and weeds” to gather “twigs, rocks, and sand” for the new home she creates for Gideon. These also contribute to the book's message about caring for animals by understanding their ecosystems. Additional information is included at the back of the book about endangered frog species.

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AIMEE JODOIN (March 26, 2020)

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