

Outside, Inside

Cindy Helms

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This charming tale illustrates abstract concepts of inside and outside to the preschool set in suitably simple words and images.

A quietly charming tale of friendship and humor, Cindy Helms's *Outside, Inside* is a fun and educational book to read to children. The main character, Birdie, searches for his friends in the bright outdoors, while they hide inside a dark house for Birdie's carefully-planned surprise birthday party. The author demonstrates opposites in suitably simple words and images, reinforcing strong contrasts between inside and outside, light and dark, and the natural environment and the man-made one—all important concepts for toddlers.

Helms has a delightful artistic style. Her whimsical creatures and fanciful flowers are playful and interesting to look at, and she uses simple compositions and shapes that are audience-appropriate. They are reminiscent of the imaginative illustrations of Dr. Seuss with the quirkiness and the eye-popping color palette of designs from the 1960s. Similarly, the selection of colorful marker outlines and pencil shading adds to the simple, homey appeal. Bubble-style lettering reinforces the whimsy and informality of the images.

However, some of illustrations can be confusing. A loosely defined smoke-like path that Birdie walks on towards the party house and a representation of joy emanating from his neck as lines and hearts do not translate to clear images on the page. Stronger, less ambiguous illustrations would strengthen the book's visual appeal.

The author summarizes the plot at the rear of the book, and it is the only time that one learns that the main character is called Birdie, so it is recommended that Birdie be introduced on one of the early pages.

Outside, Inside would be improved as a children's picture book with some clearer illustrations for better understanding of Birdie's world, but on the whole, it is a charming story with delightful, memorable images.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (August 4, 2015)

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