ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Play Lady: Anti-Bias Books for Kids Series
Eric Hoffman
Suzanne Tornquist, illustrator
Redleaf Press
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Every neighborhood, every child, needs a "Play Lady"—someone who encourages children to play in mud, create castles and makes a place for every treasure the children find. The children feel safe, secure and able to express their feelings during their visits to Play Lady (whose grown-up name is Jane Kurosawa). She offers gentle reminders about safety as she allows her young friends to use hammers ("Wear safety goggles") or put a broken clock in her tomato garden. ("Don't step on the seedlings.")

Play Lady lives in a small trailer in the middle of a lush urban garden that she tends. The children who visit are of many cultures and colors, and one, Kayla, is in a wheelchair.

But one day the children are horrified and sad to discover that Play Lady is the victim of a hate crime. Vandals painted mean words on her
trailer, broke her windows and threw trash in the yard, so Play Lady leaves to stay with her son. The children enlist their parents? help to make repairs and restore her house and yard, and when their surprised friend returns, it is back to play again. The children have learned compassion, responsibility and that they can make a difference for the good in their community.

Hoffman is a master teacher in the laboratory preschool at Cabrillo College in Aptos, California. The book begins a new anti-bias series that is designed to teach children new ways to know the people around them. The text is in both English and Spanish and there are discussion questions in the back of the book for parents, teachers and other caregivers.

The art is colorful and appealing. The book has important lessons for children, but is not preachy. There is no unnecessary detail. We know Play Lady, with her serene countenance, as the children see her.

In a world where the joy of playing in mud or backyard construction seems to be lost to mindless television viewing, Play Lady shares the joy of childplay among its other messages.

Linda Salisbury