

Picture Books

Rainbows in the Dark

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Alice Priestley, illustrator

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“I miss rainbows so much,” confesses Joanna, a blind musician, to a young girl she meets in a second-hand clothing store. Abby is in the shop reluctantly and feeling restless and bored while she waits for her mother to finish shopping. Misunderstanding the presence of Joanna’s guide dog, Abby tells her, “Dogs aren’t supposed to be here.” Joanna responds with a good-natured explanation, and invites Abby to shop along with her as she chooses an outfit for a special event.

In *Rainbow Joe and Me*, author Maria Diaz Storm used rainbows as a metaphor for the music created by a blind musician, and this author does something similar in this picture book, her first. Rainbows surface repeatedly. Abby secretly wishes for “a hundred rainbows,” a wish that Joanna fulfills in an unusual way at the end of the story. The illustrator, who has created art for more than twelve picture books, capitalizes on the rainbow theme to create a visual delight. The brightly colored illustrations feature rainbow-hued clothes and fabrics, and rows of paints and shoes depicting the color spectrum.

This story respectfully presents disability as a part of diversity. Joanna and Abby maintain a give-and-take of knowledge and services that keeps them on an equal footing throughout their encounter. Joanna’s vocation and presence in the second-hand shop defy stereotypes. Their conversation about Joanna’s guide dog is handled particularly well. Abby expresses a child’s typical concerns about a strange dog, when she asks, “Does he bite?” Joanna eases her fears and provides a thorough explanation of his role and daily habits. That scene provides a springboard for the discussion of human etiquette around dogs working as community helpers.

Although the plot to this story is slight, the believable characterization and witty dialogue make up for the lack of dramatic action. It may be improbable that an adult and child would speak so openly to each other without any prior relationship, but, here, the premise

works. There are few characters with blindness in children's literature, and the talented, generous, child-friendly Joanna is a welcome addition. The second-hand store setting and shopping scenario will appeal to the book's most likely audience, elementary-school-aged girls, and the rainbow motif provides an added attraction.