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Picture Books

Red Riding Hood Races the Big Bad Wolf
Richard Paul
Richard Paul Color Illustrations by Eugene Clark
Eugene Clark, illustrator
Twilight Press
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Updating the classics to reflect modern sensibilities has been somewhat of a growth industry during the past three decades, the results including jive-talking scarecrows, feminist Cinderellas, and Capulet and Montague street gangs.

Some of these modern versions retained the essence of the original story; others use the classic tale as a framework for something entirely new. This story by motivational speaker and ventriloquist Richard Paul falls into the latter category.

The only resemblance between Paul's version and the well-known European folk tale is that both feature a red-capped little girl, a wolf and a grandmother. In Paul's story, Red Riding Hood, who uses a wheelchair, is shooting baskets in the driveway when her mother, clad in jeans and a tank top, asks her to take an apple pie to Grandma's house. On the way, she encounters the wolf, who is sporting running shoes and sunglasses, and challenges him to a race for the pie. As a result of losing the race, the wolf must clean Grandma's house for a year, and begins his service while Grandma, Red and her friend Jack Rabbit enjoy lemonade and microwave-heated pie in the backyard pool.

Paul dispenses with the multi-level symbolism of the folk tale in favor of a single themed self-esteem/morality lesson, namely that a child in a wheelchair can accomplish whatever she sets out to do if only she believes in herself and gets confident support from her friends and family. While that lesson may appear to be directed at children with special needs, the book also works with able-bodied children. Parents and educators will likely find this book a useful tool in encouraging positive thinking for special needs children and their peers.

Sharon Flesher