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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ PICTURE BOOKS

Reporting for Duty: A Day at the White House

H. K. Gilbert
H.K. Gilbert
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In H.K. Gilbert's *Reporting for Duty*, children and their parents get a fun-filled introduction to the White House led by Barkley, a fluffy Secret-Service dog charged with protecting the First Family. This combination read-aloud and activity book invites children to color rooms, furnishings, and even Barkley himself, as descriptions of the White House, its inhabitants, and their activities are read out loud.

Gilbert's tone is friendly and enthusiastic as she takes readers on a tour of the White House. Though she points out the high-level political and social events that occur in its various rooms, she never forgets Barkley's point of view—for him, crumbs dropped at state dinners are much more important than the alliances made there.

Although very small children may not understand everything that is read to them, they will enjoy Barkley's descriptions of rooms in which one has to be very quiet and careful not to break anything, portraits with spooky staring eyes, the shoes and socks on the feet under the dinner table, and just how important and responsible the little dog feels himself to be.

Some of the illustrations should have been made larger, as a small child may find it difficult to color the tiny books or plates.

The author has taken a topic that children might otherwise find dry and uninteresting, and has made it fun; the inclusion of activities that involve important developmental skills like distinguishing colors, shapes, size, and numbers adds to the book's appeal.

Both adults and children will learn more than facts about the White House by reading this book; they will come away with the awareness that even in the most important house in our country, small things, small dogs, (and small people) are important.
(December 22, 2009)

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