FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Picture Books

Rickity & Snickity at the Balloon Fiesta
Patricia Derrick
J-P Loppo Martinez, illustrator
JP Loppo Martinez, illustrator
Animalations
978-1-933818-11-5
(January 31, 2007)

Current brain research has established a positive link between preschoolers' exposure to music, rhyme, and rhythm, and future reading ability. This offering, one of a series of titles created by a college professor with a master's in education and thirty years' experience in early childhood education, is one of the first packages designed specifically to support these research findings. This language program for pre-readers consists of a picture book, a CD that sets the words of the story to music, and accompanying materials like sheet music and ideas for instructional activities bound along with the story.

In the picture book, vibrant, cartoon-like illustrations depict Rickity and Snickity, Rocky Mountain bear cubs who accidentally fall asleep in the back of a park ranger's van and wake up at the International Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Their adventures at the fiesta and subsequent homecoming are narrated in simple quatrains, one on each page. The verse sometimes sacrifices fluency and good grammar in an effort to preserve the rhyme scheme, as when the rangers found the cubs and "Took them to their home. / Back to the Rockies, so / The cubs again, could roam."

However, what makes for an awkward read-aloud becomes a delightfully catchy sing-along when used with the accompanying CD. The illustrator is an experienced composer as well as an artist with more than 100 international exhibits to his credit. He has created a tune as lively as the mischievous bear cubs, and it is as a song that this tale truly comes to life. Presented musically, the story invites kids to sing and move to the music, thus fostering the connection between rhythm, rhyme, and movement at the core of current brain research.

The large-scale illustrations, multimedia package, and accompanying materials of use to educators seem aimed at classroom use. The publisher promises complimentary replacements of

the music CD for libraries, increasing its attractiveness as a choice for that venue. The cubs' antics will amuse their preschool audience, who, after listening to just a line or two, will be sure to wholeheartedly embrace the story's refrain: "Rickity and Snickity, / Rocky Mountain Cubs, / You are the bear cubs / That everyone loves!"

Parents and caregivers should feel equally enthusiastic at this first step in creating materials that incorporate the most scientific knowledge available regarding how young children learn.

Carolyn Bailey