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Juvenile Fiction

Russ and the Almost Perfect Day
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Pete McGahan, photographer
Woodbine House
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Russ is one lucky kid. His mom makes s'mores for breakfast, he finds a five dollar bill while walking to school, and he gets to watch a video in math class! The luck increases steadily, a giant snake in science class, the book he's been waiting for is available at the library, and finally, a social studies test is met with good cheer. Only when Russ heads to buy ice cream with his new found money does the conflict emerge. He overhears a girl crying about losing her lunch money and decides, after some hesitation, to give her the five dollars. Without knowing quite why, he finds that he feels good inside, and his perfect day continues. While the book ends abruptly, "It started pouring down rain… but that's another story," it's possible to imagine that even this won't put a damper on Russ' day.

Children will surely respond to this book. The deadpan, understated text is coupled with well placed exclamation points that serve to underline the mounting pleasures of the day. The school setting is familiar and identifiable. While the photographs for this book are obviously staged, they are not stiff. They provide nice action shots of the typical school scenes with Russ, in his bright Hawaiian shirt, as the central focal point.

It is through the photographs that readers can see that Russ is a child with Down syndrome. No mention is made of this fact in the text. As Russ seems to be fully integrated in school and treated with respect, so too is his handicap an integral and totally nonalarming aspect of this book. This is both refreshing and righteous.

The decision Russ must make in this story is a difficult one for any child. Readers will be pleased to see that although Russ does the right thing in the story, the book's cover shows he still gets his ice cream!

Martha Topol