ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

PICTURE BOOKS

Smiley's World
Darlene Buchanan
978-1-4490-2675-2
Three Stars (out of Five)

Hatched in a classroom, Smiley the duck is taken home by a student named Sarah, who cares for him kindly until the day her family has to move away. They arrange to send Smiley to a new home, but their plans go awry when his crate bounces out of a truck and onto the side of the highway. Soon, Smiley finds that life is much harder than he imagined, and that food and shelter can be difficult to come by without the help of both friends and strangers.

Smiley's adventures are told in a simple, appealing manner that should hold the interest of younger children and prove just as engaging for elementary-level independent readers. The ups and downs of Smiley's search for a place to call home are portrayed sensitively, exploring fear and loneliness as well as perseverance as the little duck looks for friendship and a sense of belonging.

Life lessons are imparted subtly but clearly, augmented by simple pencil drawings. Smiley settles for a time at a large pond where he meets many other animals, including a wise Great Blue Heron named Blue. Blue teaches him about survival and acceptance, and points out that those around him have their own special challenges and deserve compassion and assistance. He balances these life lessons with a bit of optimism, reminding him that, "You need to pick yourself up and make the best of what you have now. Find the good stuff!"

Darlene Buchanan, a former elementary school teacher, wrote and illustrated the book. She tells a charming tale about friendship and compassion which touches on themes of diversity and responsibility. While Sarah is initially enthusiastic about bringing Smiley home, she is ultimately unable to continue caring for him, and Buchanan makes the point that our best intentions can sometimes result in future hardship for animals. The lesson is tempered by instances of humans and animals existing in harmony, with an old woman eventually providing Smiley and his new dog friend with food and shelter.

The story would benefit from tighter editing and formatting, and more colorful illustrations would likely help younger readers better engage with the story. Even so, *Smiley's World* is an endearing tale that manages to share important lessons about life, friendship, and

responsibility in a thoughtful manner that young children can understand and enjoy. The book's last pages include photographs of the "real life" models for the story, which is a nice touch.