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Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Tadias and the Pitbully Tree
Saidat Vandenberg
Sarah Nickel, illustrator
Xlibris
978-1-4797-0172-8
Three Stars (out of Five)

There are plenty of books that aim to help children who are being bullied, but the titles that stand out are the ones that encourage a bullied child to have empathy for the bully. Some children may not be able to assist the person who bullies them, as the protagonist does in *Tadias and the Pitbully Tree*, but they can be made aware that bullies probably don't have a very good self image. The strength of Saidat Vandenberg's book is that it offers suggestions to a bullied child, not only for getting over the hurt, but also for helping the bully, who is probably also hurting.

Vandenberg is a Canada-based motivational speaker and entertainer who speaks to children and adults about bullying and self-esteem. Her anti-bullying film, *What Have We Done*, which focuses on teenagers, had its Canadian premiere in January 2013. Her book is aimed at grade-school children, so a fifth grader would be able to read it alone, while a second grader would probably need a parent's help. The story is illustrated with serviceable illustrations by Sarah Nickel.

In *Tadias and the Pitbully Tree*, a young girl named Tadias (the author's name spelled backward) sets out for a street called I Like Me, only to turn back after being bullied by a mean tree. With the support of her mother and friends she is able to stand up to the tree. In fact, Tadias stands up so well that the tree falls over when she and her friends say "I like me!" in unison. Tadias and her friends decide to show compassion to the tree and help it recover.

The story will resonate with readers who need to see that unkind words should not prevent them from enjoying life. The author's use of a bullying tree may make it easier for some readers to consider who they have hurt or who has hurt them. Children who struggle to make friends may not see themselves in this tale if they don't have friends and family to summon for

help in the face of taunting, like Tadias does. Children may not completely understand the symbolism of Tadias being interrupted on her way to I Like Me Street. However, the inspiring message that being able to say, “I like me!” can make a difference in one’s life is the most important takeaway.

Jada Bradley