

Tales from Bombast's Bookshelf: Monkey Mind Tales

Steve Michael Reedy

Tom Fee, Illustrator

Monkey Mind Tales (Jan 1, 2020)

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Tales from Bombast's Bookshelf is a lovely children's storybook whose morals are delivered as seamless components of its entertaining tales.

Fairy tales full of woodland creatures and thoughtful lessons are contained in Steve Michael Reedy's *Tales from Bombast's Bookshelf*.

Bombast and Pix's boat arrives full of books and stories. They share six with the audience. Each is about thirty pages long, and there are multiple full- or half-page black-and-white illustrations to complement them.

The stories feature similar heroes and heroines: bright, spirited humans and lovable creatures who have good hearts, even if they don't always make the best decisions. Though they experience their share of struggles, their stories work toward upbeat endings: in one, though a boy is almost taken in by a sly trickster, he emerges unscathed and wiser for the experience.

Practical lessons, like not to trust strangers and to be wary of what seems too good to be true, are common within the stories, which incorporate echoes of familiar themes like valuing oneself and others, regardless of wealth or appearance. Some of the entries resonate because they were fresh, as with the book's parables for the anxious modern age. These include "The Floralins of Dandaleen Forest," which cautions its audience against worrying too much.

Though it becomes more thematically sophisticated as it progresses, the book is accessible throughout. "The Bundletooth" alludes to the illogic of the Salem witch trials with its story of a tree-dwelling species that considers burning one of its own to determine if she's really a monster in disguise. In "Doodles, Glixies, & A Giant Thumpin," leaders rally their groups and prevent internal discord by targeting other individuals or groups that are somehow different. In "An Answer for the Tendlebees," students and their teacher spend days agonizing over the question "Why are we here?" until a youth teaches them the answer.

Distinctive rhyming patterns make these entries a treat to read. Lines slide in and out of rhythms with elegance; rhyming lines aren't set apart, and they blend well with non-rhyming lines, reading like wandering into a field of wildflowers while on a already pleasant walk. Within the illustrations, characters are portrayed in silhouette. The accompanying backgrounds are drawn with attention to detail, and all drawings are inserted in a consistent pattern, arising as a form of respite.

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PETER DABBENE (March 30, 2020)

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