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Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

The Amazing Sparkey
Kenneth Ian Segel
Amory Abbott, illustrator
AuthorHouse
978-1-4817-5007-3
Two Stars (out of Five)

This light mystery about a special pet will appeal to dog lovers.

The Amazing Sparkey is a story about the Kelly family's incredibly smart dog, Sparkey. He reads, adds and subtracts, helps with the grocery shopping, and even gives rides in the swimming pool to the neighbor's cat. He is so smart that when strange things begin to happen in the Kelly household—the children's homework is disappearing, as is food from the kitchen—they are advised by friends to ask Sparkey for help. Can he solve the mystery?

Author Kenneth Ian Segel has written a light story about a very special dog. The mystery in the Kelly home will be obvious to even the youngest reader, and the book's simple content will be most appealing to children of ages three to five.

With entire pages filled with words, the book is text-heavy, and at forty-two pages, it is longer than most for this age group. This makes the story feel very slow, and it may challenge the patience of both children and the adults. For example, this is the first of six paragraphs the author has written to describe the mystery: "Mysterious and strange things were happening in the Kelly home. Neither Char nor Tommy nor their parents could explain the unusual happenings. It was weird. Was it the work of ghosts? Was it leprechauns? Was someone sneaking in and out of the house without being noticed? What was really going on? Did Char and Tommy have reason to be anxious?"

The accompanying illustrations by Amory Abbott are bright, colorful, and consistently well drawn, but their content is somewhat lackluster—they are very simple and convey little emotion. To make matters worse, the word-heavy pages provide insufficient space for Abbott to illustrate much of the story. Ideally, the illustrations in a picture book tell as much of the story as

the words themselves, often providing insight into character and emotion that is too complex to convey in the limited pages of the book. That is not the case here.

Neither text nor illustrations in *The Amazing Sparkey* are particularly compelling. Beyond telling the reader that Sparkey is an amazing dog, there is nothing to connect the reader emotionally to the Kelly family or to inspire the reader to care about the mystery unfolding in the Kelly home. Some children, particularly those with a fondness for dogs, may enjoy the book, but it is not likely to become a family favorite as soon as the last page is read.

Catherine Thureson