

The Little Book of Animal Stories: Part I

Michelle Chin

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These edifying rhyming tales deliver morals in a delightful way.

Michelle Chin summons the spirit of Aesop's Fables in her delightful picture book, *The Little Book of Animal Stories*.

Many children are familiar with at least some fables, even if they've never heard the name Aesop. "The Tortoise and the Hare," "The Ant and the Grasshopper," and "The Lion and the Mouse" have all become part of the storytelling canon because of the child-friendly way they use animals to succinctly communicate a moral or message.

It's not a bad model to imitate, and Chin does a good job of creating new, equally succinct stories to deliver a moral. *The Little Book of Animal Stories* features three stories of six or seven pages each, with the rhyming text kept simple and relatively sparse for easy reading. For example, "The Cat that did not like to Work" ends with:

*They would eat his food, right where he stood.
He wished they would go away for good.
What can we learn from this lazy cat's tale?
Sloth will make you likely to fail!*

The rhymes are generally strong, with a few falling a bit short, like the pairings of "chicken" with "rotten" and "spots" with "sorts."

Rachel Foo's illustrations are charismatic and amusing, with plenty of nice stylistic touches like a meandering pattern of z's surrounding the sleeping cat, or a small x in a thought balloon as an overstuffed rat considers and rejects the idea of more food. Chin and Foo have developed a design that works perfectly for this book: while the images are smaller than those in some picture books, the text is easy to see; the smaller pictures create a pleasing composition on the page, making use of horizontal blank space.

The book is a quick twenty pages, but it will hold up to repeated readings. The prideful dog, lazy cat, and greedy rat are examples of how not to live, but in telling their stories, Chin and Foo have created a positive example—of how to make an edifying and enjoyable picture book.

PETER DABBENE (November 21, 2016)

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