Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

The Misadventures of Fink the Mink: Playground Troubles
David Zielinski
Miss Ballou, editor
Kezzia Crossley, illustrator
David Zelinski
978-0-615-69214-2
Two Stars (out of Five)

It's a lesson in playground manners for Fink, a mischievous mink who causes trouble by cutting in line for the swing and telling a lie when the teacher scolds him for his naughtiness.

Later, Fink hops off the seesaw, which causes the friend who is is still up in the air to land with a thud. After several turns on the slide, Fink decides to rebuild it so it reaches the sun. When the slide comes crashing down, the teacher gives Fink a time-out. The young boy who is narrating concludes the story with the moral: "Treat your friends the same way you want to be treated when it's your turn to play."

The themes of following rules and respecting others are appropriate for young children in preschool or kindergarten or for newly proficient first-grade readers. Grammatically, the text is polished, but the story is vague; it offers the old adages of doing unto others and following rules without clearly stating the etiquette to young audiences.

Though the repetitive use of basic words allows children to practice their reading skills, the inconsistent rhythm of the rhyme scheme is distracting: "They bounced on the / seesaw from the grass / to the sky making / them feel like they / could fly."

Part of the story lacks consistency. Fink gets a time-out ("Fink's time to play finally got taken away"), but the next line reads, "Fink does not know what is right or wrong and / that is why he always ends up playing alone." It is unclear here if Fink was allowed to keep playing or if he actually was asked to stop. Readers might also be confused because the text implies that Fink doesn't really know why he is put in a time-out, which makes him appear as an underdog who is given unfair punishment rather than a naughty mink.

The choice of words in the narrative seems to be driven by the need to rhyme rather than

the goal of making a meaningful impact. For example, the narrator says, “Don’t be the kind of kid that will quarrel, use / Fink’s experience to understand the moral.” But even though Fink played unfairly and misused the playground equipment, he didn’t actually “quarrel” with anyone.

The layout of the text, illustrations, and background is often unbalanced and has an unfinished quality about it, with the majority of the images set against a vast white backdrop or floating on the page. The highlight of some of the basic illustrations is that they capture a sense of movement as the sneaky-looking mink dashes around the playground. The background and remaining images of the other characters are recycled throughout the book, differing only slightly, if at all, in each appearance. The illustrations of the teacher and the three almost identical-looking boys change mostly in size or are flipped so the characters are facing the opposite way.

While David Zielinski’s message of fair play on the playground is pertinent, the redundant illustrations and lackluster narrative, with its incomplete message and inconsistent rhyme scheme, might prevent young children from fully connecting with the content.

Maya Fleischmann