

The Pandas and Their Chopsticks: And Other Animals Stories

Demi

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Animals come alive in beautifully illustrated, powerful stories with an Eastern flair.

Aesop meets Confucius in *The Pandas and Their Chopsticks: And Other Animal Stories*, a blend of classic Chinese proverbs, Indian jatakas, and traditional fables. With her trademark Eastern flair, award-winning and critically acclaimed author and illustrator Demi is back with a collection of ten vignettes, each accompanied by colorful and imaginative illustrations and a brief word of wisdom meant for children ages four and up but relevant for everyone.

Demi's spirited animal friends will help children discover, among other things, the joys of being humble, generous, and helpful. Each tale, with names like "The Cat Who Prayed" and "The Owl's Hoot," packs a powerful yet succinctly worded message. Brightly detailed borders indicate main characters, so, even without a table of contents, it is easy to locate a favorite.

The animals of each story come alive through Demi's bright, oriental style paintings. Children will enjoy counting the number of animals on each page; there are more than a hundred butterflies on the two page spread of "The Kite on a String." The subtle, sparkling stars scattered throughout are in turns vividly bold and so subtle they're barely discernible, yet they serve as a uniting element for each fable.

Most tales are straightforward enough that even the very young will easily make the connection between the events in the story and the proposed moral. However, some—like "Be very careful with your thoughts. They can make false things seem true" from "A Hedgehog Thinks Twice"—may require further exploration and discussion with an adult, making *The Pandas and Their Chopsticks* perfect for character education or introducing self-reflection.

At this point, loyal Demi fans may be thinking that this all sounds awfully familiar, and it should. "The Fox who was King of the Forest" is a reincarnation of "The Tiger's Tale" from *The Dragon's Tale and Other Fables of the Chinese Zodiac*, as is "The Frog Who Counted Two Stars from the Bottom of his Well," known previously as "The Goat's Tale." The same is true for *Demi's Reflective Fables* and *A Chinese Zoo*, which includes five retold fables, including the titular "The Pandas and their Chopsticks." There are enough appreciable variants, though, including artwork and the focus of each story, that collecting these and other volumes is not overly redundant.

Beginning readers will appreciate the brevity of each tale, and the detailed borders will captivate when the stories are read aloud. *The Pandas and Their Chopsticks* is a versatile collection that would work well for independent reading and group sharing. This book is a solid choice for public, elementary, and home libraries.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (June 17, 2014)

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