

The Phoenix and the Butterfly

T. J. Jurgens

Bob Hobbs, Illustrator

Trafford

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T. J. Jurgens shows children that everyone has the power and strength to make a difference in their own life and the lives of others, regardless of their size.

A delicate butterfly named Ashley hops onto the back of a large, red phoenix just before the bird takes flight over a meadow. As they soar higher, the air becomes thin and cold. When the phoenix realizes that Ashley, sleepy and cold, is on its wing and in need of more oxygen, the bird keeps the butterfly warm and alive. When the bird attempts to return to earth, it begins to fall. The butterfly, realizing that the phoenix is in danger, looks for a way to help the bird and ultimately saves them both.

With its details about the world of flowers and the outer limits of space, *The Phoenix and the Butterfly* engages the senses, especially when the language is rich and precise: “it was glowing like a million fireflies.”

There are times, though, when the narrative rambles and the story loses its connectivity. For example, repetitive and wordy phrases slow the pace of the story: “...it was starting to get tired, and it felt its energy slowly running out.”

For the most part, Jurgens' vocabulary is suitable for young children, although sometimes he is inconsistent in his descriptions of the concepts presented in the book. An example is when he describes the phoenix soaring into the air and explains that the higher the bird flies, the thinner the air becomes, which is why “airplanes need to have their own air inside them when they fly.” Although the concept of atmosphere is not fully fleshed out, Jurgens does attempt to offer an explanation. In another instance, however, the author refers to “the aura created by the flame,” and uses the concept of *aura* as an integral part of some scenes without defining the word.

The illustrations are bold and colorful. Ashley's newfound confidence is well-portrayed when she is shown landing on a daisy in the closing scene of the book. When she notices that her weight can cause a flower stem to bend, the butterfly is aware she can cause change in her surroundings—Ashley realizes she is significant in the world. The story also shows that the phoenix, although powerful and compassionate, is capable of bad judgment, which could have caused the demise of both creatures.

The Phoenix and the Butterfly is a fresh story that conveys a positive message of friendship and self-awareness designed to empower children of all ages and sizes.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (October 24, 2011)

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