ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

The Quiltmaker's Gift
Jeff Brumbeau
Gail De Marcken, illustrator
Pfeifer-Hamilton
978-1-57025-199-3
(October 1999)

In the mountains, an ancient woman creates beautiful quilts incorporating all the colors of nature. Though many wish to purchase these works of art, she refuses, and will only donate her quilts to those who are poor or homeless. In the valley lives a greedy, unhappy king, whose castle is stuffed with presents from his subjects. Thinking a quilt would be just the thing to finally make him smile, he demands one from the old woman. What she gives him instead is a lesson about the true nature of happiness, which of course has nothing to do with how full one's castle might be.

Brumbeau's charming fable, set in some unspecified time and place, is a thinly veiled commentary on our modern culture of consumerism and conspicuous consumption. Using this story along with other quilt books, such as Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt (Morrow), would be a nice way to show how quilting incorporates so many fine traditional virtues such as thrift, creativity and generosity.

Gail de Marcken's bright watercolor illustrations are crowded with details that often expand the text. These pictures invite careful inspection by the reader, and children will delight in discovering small drawn stories within each page. Quilt patterns and names are also painted on the endpapers, and a kind of seek-and-find puzzle is printed on the cover's verso. A website directs readers to more puzzles, information about quilting and sites for charitable giving. This book, about the art of giving, would make a lovely gift itself.

Leigh Forrest