

The Secret Path

Nancy Gee

Kathleen Newman, Illustrator

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This is a gentle introduction to teamwork, friendship, and perseverance.

Themes of friendship and determination lead to a delightful surprise ending in *The Secret Path*, Nancy Gee's sequel to her debut, *The Secret Drawer*.

Al and Sal set off to share some special news with friends, but the choice to veer onto a different path by herself leaves Sal in a situation where all her friends need to work together to help her. When Sal falls into a deep hole and gets stuck, each friend takes turns in trying to help, to no avail. They all quickly pull together, some going for assistance while others stay to comfort Sal in her precarious position. The eventual rescue leads them to a reunion with old friends and gives them the opportunity to share their secret news.

The Secret Path is a charming picture book with unique main characters in Al and Sal, who are flying squirrels. Their group of woodland friends—along with a human friend, Maddie, and her cat, Kitty—includes a raccoon, a rabbit, and a turtle. Their devotion to the safety and well-being of their friend is complete and charmingly expressed. For instance, while the turtle may not be able to fit into the hole to rescue Sal himself, he settles over the opening to shield her from the rain with his shell while they wait for rescue.

Illustrations by Kathleen Newman are colorful and expressive, conveying the animals' emotions without overwhelming young readers with the potentially scary situation in which Sal finds herself. The different animal footprints filling the front and back pages are a fun addition.

The story is simple but engaging, written in a rhyme scheme that occasionally feels forced, though the young target audience is not likely to notice. The author includes a list of flying squirrel facts at the end of the book, also cleverly written in rhyme, which children are sure to enjoy and learn from.

The Secret Path is a gentle introduction to teamwork, friendship, and perseverance written in a style likely to appeal to even the youngest children. This beautifully bound book, filled with thick, brightly illustrated pages, is sure to be a keeper.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (April 16, 2016)

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