

The Wolf Who Cried Girl

Midge Leavey

Raphael de la Rosa, Illustrator

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Leavey presents an alternative picture book that teaches children about stranger danger while striving for humor and irony.

Once upon a time, a fairy tale didn't go exactly as planned. And kids loved it. In the tradition of Fractured Fairy Tales, Midge Leavey presents an alternate version of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story. In her picture book, *The Wolf Who Cried Girl*, Leavey teaches children about stranger danger while striving for humor and irony.

Willie Wolf wakes up hungry and asks his mother if he can go to his uncle's for rabbit stew. Permission granted, he wanders down the road, only to encounter Red Riding Hood, who offers him a sandwich he can't resist. When he eats it, she captures him and takes him to her grandmother's house, intending for the "puppy" to be her pet. But Grandmother has darker plans for the wolf. Grandma begins her nefarious scheme when suddenly, the door blasts open.

The switch of hero and antagonist certainly draws interest to the story and offers a fun sense of irony. Building on the trend toward ironic retellings of classics is a tall order, though. It has been done a lot, and done expertly. Any new book of this type risks coming off as redundant and invites comparisons that are difficult to live up to. In this case, a few issues keep this work from rising to the challenge.

Confusion initially arises from a mixed message about the intended audience. The author states elsewhere that she intended this for a preschool audience. Yet the art appears rather violent and sophisticated for that age group. And at times, the vocabulary seems advanced for them as well. Little Red Riding Hood is described as "a vision in red that burns his eyes like fire" and "a ball of fire." Terms and phrases like "in preparation for," "abrupt," and "flails" may also be problematic. On another note, the use of present tense rather than past, along with a few slips into passive language, slightly diminishes the drama: "With his paws covering his ears, Willie's curiosity takes over."

In addition, the plot could be stronger in some spots. Red originally captures Willie Wolf to be a pet but then has no problem with her grandmother's more vicious intent. It doesn't quite flow. And the ending of the story has a twist that borders on the contrived.

On the other hand, Raphael de la Rosa's illustrations are nicely done. They are closer to colorful high-quality line art than the more sophisticated illustrations common today, but they add a professional look.

In the end, *The Wolf Who Cried Girl* is a creative effort toward helping kids understand that talking to strangers is very risky. Making Red Riding Hood and her grandmother the villains teaches kids that the bad guy isn't always whom you expect.

DIANE GARDNER (October 8, 2013)

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