Clarion Review

Picture Books

The Wonderful Adventures of Ozzie the Sea Otter

Nora Dohlke
Forest Stearns, illustrator
Bay Publishing
978-0-9822046-0-3
Three Stars (out of Five)

In three stories about an ocean journey, Ozzie the Otter and Mother Otter travel from Monterey Bay in California to visit their otter cousins in Alaska. Meeting danger and wonders along the way, they encounter an ocean of characters—Paul Pelican, Sally Starfish, a paranoid crab, and Oscar Octopus, to name a few from the first story section. Forest Stearns' inviting and endearing illustrations dominate each page and bring the cantankerous but loveable Ozzie to life. Stearn also includes an additional eight pages for coloring.

Ozzie the Otter tends to break rules and take off on tangents, much like the author of this oversized, overlong, and overly wordy children's picture book. Most picture books max out at forty-eight pages, with illustrations that are supplemented by three to five lines of text on each page. This book squeezes approximately fifteen lines of closely spaced type onto each page.

The author has woven together several stories in each of the three vignettes—a moral story about parenting responsibilities and character building; a religious analogy; and another storyline about man's cruelty to animals and current efforts to save endangered otters from extinction. Finally the author offers an entertaining story about a young otter experiencing the world around him.

The writing stops and starts with a choppy rhythm jammed with words and mixed messages. The voice moves from storytelling to preaching to teaching with an overarching tone of an adult trying to speak like a child. For example, on the second page, a teaching voice disrupts the story: "The air trapped in our fur keeps our body temperature perfect. Remember we must always keep our fur from being soiled from dirt and oil, or we can lose our natural insulation." The vocabulary of this book zips from over-simplified to adult level discourse often within one paragraph. Add life lessons about obedience, and young readers will feel exhausted

by the end of the first section.

With judicious editing, some trust in the readers to get the message, and efforts to tailor the vocabulary and content to the appropriate age level, the text could rise to meet the level of the professional illustrations.