Clarion Review

Picture Books

Vanilla Gorilla: Animal Art and Poems
David Harrow
Judith Krimski, illustrator
AuthorHouse
978-1-4567-1190-0
Five Stars (out of Five)

With the multitude of children's books published every year, it is often difficult for a new book to stand out, especially one that doesn't feature licensed characters from television or other media. *Vanilla Gorilla: Animal Art & Poems* does stand out because it's that good.

The book's format is simple: a page of illustration facing a page of rhyming text with each set focused on a particular animal. The selection of animals—familiar favorites like the crocodile, chameleon, sea horse, and dragonfly, plus more exotic animals like the fanaloka, Portuguese man o' war, and aye-aye—is varied enough to keep any kid (or adult) interested. In fact, it is hard to believe any animal lover wouldn't find some new and interesting fact here. The variety also provides Judith Krimski, an award-winning graphic designer and illustrator, with opportunities to show off her brightly colored style of collage art that might be described as a more organic-looking Eric Carle.

David Harrow's delightful rhyming text uses a scattering of four-syllable words so younger kids will need an adult to read to them. The text for reef octopus begins: "Did you ever dream you were a cephalopod / And woke up feeling rather odd."

The vocabulary keeps the book lively for adult readers and for kids who might be getting bored with the same old grade-level lexicon. It's not every day that kids come across the words "recoil," "devoid," or "circumspection," not to mention animal biology terms like "siphonophore" or "aposematic." Such words are helpfully defined in the factoid at the bottom of every text page. There is also plenty of short, fun text to keep the big words from overwhelming, as in this passage about the Portuguese man o' war: "They evoke words like EECCCHH! And OOOOH! And EEEEE! / And you probably would not invite them over for tea."

Vanilla Gorilla offers a perfect balance of art and text, education and fun, and is a wonderful find for any adult or child. Readers will surely hope that Harrow and Krimski have more animal art and poems to come.

Peter Dabbene