ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Vulture Verses: Love Poems for the Unloved
Diane Lang
Lauren Gallegos, illustrator
Prospect Park Media
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Generally, cute and fuzzy animals get all the attention while the slithering, buzzing, odorous, and biting critters live in the dark, repulsed and feared. In *Vulture Verses: Love Poems for the Unloved*, writer Diane Lang and illustrator Lauren Gallegos attempt to change this perspective through the medium of poetry.

Thirteen animals, including the mole, snake, and bee are featured in this book, each with a two-page spread devoted to it. An illustration of the creature in their natural environment is paired with a six- to sixteen-line rhyming poem and a quick scientific fact meant to encourage appreciation for the animal's role in nature. The valentine-like poems are quirky and friendly, with a consistent rhyme, rhythm, and structure. The skunk's entry is a representative example of the poetry found in this book:

> *Skunk, although you sometimes stink,*
> *You're sweeter than most people think,*
> *Because you eat each buggy pest*
> *That thinks my garden tastes the best.*

This book is successful in its portrayal of creepy critters as deserving of praise. Curiously, there are two poems devoted to the bat while every other animal has only one entry, and there are numerous other creatures that deserve the attention. Gallegos's playful illustrations transform the hideous creatures such as the vulture, spider, and bat into animals that children would not fear approaching. Preschoolers and early elementary-aged children will adore the colorful pictures and the rhythm of the poems, but they may feel shortchanged when it comes to the facts about the creatures, as only one or two sentences describing a critter's role appear on each page.

If the book were to exceed the author's expectations, children could take the meaning

behind these poems and transfer it into their everyday lives, perhaps resulting in bully prevention and a greater respect for hard work over appearances.*Vulture Verses* ends with a quote from novelist Freeman Tilden that sums up the book's efforts: "There is nothing ugly in nature. The seeming exceptions are simply facts of beauty we have not yet grasped." Parents will be proud at the delight their children will take in this pleasant book.

Aimee Jodoin