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Picture Books

What's a Jaybird to Do?
978-0-9704460-2-2

The author of Brown Bag Bedtime Books hopes that parents will judge a book by its cover … or lack thereof. Sauer's series of apparently handbound storybooks are printed, without pictures, inside and out with brown ink on plain brown paper, and tied together with decorative raffia. In the case of this volume, a pheasant feather is tucked in the bow. Her other books have a different element of the book similarly tied.

There is a reason to this heresy. Conventional publishing wisdom suggests that young children like to look at pictures as they follow a story, and that parents are attracted to artistic covers when making a book selection. Sauer, however, intends for her books to be read in bed with children, eyes closed, imagining the characters, the way they used to do before the popularity of four-color art. For parents who don't have the time or interest to read, the book is packaged with a "read-along CD inside." Cassette tapes of other books in her series are also available.

The voices on the Jaybird CD are very professional and bring the hapless creature's long story to life in a way that most parents, at the end of the day, would be unable to replicate.

Jaybird is having troubles because he is molting. He has lost his appetite and is no longer singing and dancing as he has done on Broadway. His voice is "so weak it sounds like a bean." His decline and depression worry the other animals, including Flip Flop, a friendly bunny. The creatures try to help Jaybird recover by preparing wonderful foods and rebuilding his self-esteem.

Through her story, Sauer draws a parallel to the similar problems faced by children and adults who are victims of cancer. Her message-that it is what's on the inside that matters-is reinforced in an explanatory note to the adult readers on the title page. Although the story is perhaps too long for a single reading, it has convenient stopping points. The book suffers from punctuation deficiencies and excesses, and readers and listeners will need to know the meaning of French words and terms spoken by an erudite caterpillar named Pierre.

For parents who want to return to storytime basics, stimulating their children's imaginations without the distractions of visuals, Brown Bag Bedtime Books offers a novel

approach in a plain brown wrapper.

Linda Salisbury