FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Picture Books

Why?
Lila Prap
Lila Prap, illustrator
Lili Potpara, translator
Kane/Miller
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Although there are no explanations here of why the chicken crossed the road, this charming book of silly riddles pairs giggles with real information about hyenas' laughter, crocodiles' tears, and a dozen other features of the animal kingdom. In addition to the traditional speculations about zebras and pajamas, the reader learns that zebra stripes, like human fingerprints, are unique, and can therefore be used to identify individual animals.

Whales don't exactly spout water: they merely exhale very moist air. Also, camel humps are a clever adaptation to desert life, storing the fat that enables these animals to survive when food and water are scarce—or maybe they're the result of youngsters' ignoring adult exhortations to sit up straight! Perhaps the surest second-grade crowd pleaser, though, lies in one of the reasons for elephants' long trunks—they are handy when tissues are not.

The author's punch lines are satisfyingly goofy, and provide a relaxing warm-up for the simple, clear, informative, "serious" answer to each query. Each topic is laid out in a two-page spread dominated by an engagingly blocky, child-like illustration. Interestingly, every animal, from giraffe to snake to elephant, has identically innocent, perfectly circular eyes. While the layout is visually appealing, the haphazard order of the text on the page is somewhat confusing—sometimes the introductory question appears at the top, other times at the bottom, and the answers are scattered throughout. Appropriately, though, the jokes are printed in a variety of whimsical fonts, and the straight text appears in a consistent spot and a reassuringly serious typeface.

Prap has illustrated and co-authored several previous children's volumes, including *Animals Speak*, *I Like Colors*, and *I Like Black and White*. This book was originally published in Slovenia, where Prap is a well-known author and illustrator and was the 2004 nominee for the

Hans Christian Andersen Medal. *Why?* exhibits clarity and humor that reflect well on the translator's ability to convey the essence of Prap's work.

Why? is a book for both the smart-aleck and the knowledge-seeker—which co-exist, of course, in every child.

Bonnie Deigh