

Winter Games with Woodland Will

Heidi Moosmann

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A picture book should be more than a series of illustrations bound together with words. The best picture books contain whole new worlds that fill a child's imagination with memorable characters, insightful sentiment, and delightful adventures. A well-told story combined with careful illustrations can live for a lifetime in the mind of a reader.

Winter Games with Woodland Will by Heidi Moosmann tells the simple story of Woodland Will, Jack, and their animal friends as they spend a day playing on their mountain. When Jack shows up in his horse drawn sleigh one winter morning, Will puts on his skis and the animals follow after him, "slipping and sliding, zipping and gliding, fumbling and tumbling, twirling and swirling over ice and snow." When evening comes, they all go home and take a cozy nap in front of the fireplace.

Sadly, the story lacks substance. The characters are merely names on a page with no distinguishable personalities or even interesting dialogue to bring them to life. There is no attempt to teach any sort of a lesson or to educate children with interesting language. The story seems to be included only as an afterthought, leaving the illustrations to take center stage. The images are soft and hazy, lending a feeling of comfort and peace to this tale. The characters have far more energy and life in the pictures than they do in the words of this book. Two squirrels, who are never even given names, are particularly enchanting; they glide through the pages on tiny skis, snowboards, inner tubes, and ice-skates.

Without the words, the illustrations might have been enough to guide a child in making up his or her own story. The story the author has chosen to write, however, actually detracts from the world she has drawn, limiting what a child might otherwise see and making the book ultimately unsatisfying.

CATHERINE THURESON (June 28, 2010)

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