ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Winter is
Ann Dixon
Mindy Dwyer, illustrator
Alaska Northwest Books
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Sandwiched between the “bright leafy green” of successive summers, creating a seasonal Eskimo pie, is winter. Far from boring, even in Alaska, where the author lives, winter is many things for the observant and playful. Dixon’s deceptively simple text is poetic and packed with details about winter experiences common to anyone who lives where snow can be enjoyed in the country.

She describes children’s eager anticipation of winter and the outdoor activities it brings-sledding, skating, and jumping in snow pillows. Welcoming the cold and snow, kids don jackets, boots, and mittens. Winter is found even inside, as children discover that on the windows, “a frost garden grows. We melt the flowers with our breath.” They observe the breathtaking northern lights when “winter is black.” Winter is light from cozy, comforting lamps and the brightness of a full moon … or dark, as woods fill with shadows. Sometimes winter is warm, as the sun melts the snow on hills. Winter is also “long,” as children’s thoughts turn to spring and summer.

Dixon is the award-winning author of Blueberry Shoe. She also wrote The Sleeping Lady and collaborated on Alone across the Arctic. The illustrator, who lived in Alaska for many years, has fancifully captured the essence of winter in her watercolors, just as the author has captured it in her prose. Some of children at play in the snow have Inuit features; the family dog has a wolfish look; wildlife-like moose, foxes, and owls-hide in shadows or snowdrifts, or hibernate. Young children will enjoy locating a rabbit (white or brown, depending on the season), tucked into each illustration. The rabbit serves as a silent observer of what winter is.

The artist’s repeated patterns, such as circular swirls, suggest wind, tracks in the snow, vegetation, and even dreams. Winter is contrasts. Even when they are described as “white” or “black,” Dwyer depicts snow and sky with color-shades of green, rose, purple, and blue.

The celebration of winter leads to new appreciation of the seasonal cycle, which leads back to spring and summer, when the children shed their heavy garments and enjoy oozing mud,

ducks, and boating.

Even those who live among palm trees and only know frost from the inside of an ice cream freezer will sense the chill and excitement of winter through this imaginative book.