

Cocorikiii

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Reader:

Cat Mansfield

Every morning, Roke the cockerel has the important job of waking up everybody in the valley with his song. The hens always congratulate him on the good job that he's done, to which he modestly replies: "Thanks, it comes naturally to me."

One of the hens, Peka, wishes she could sing, and fantasizes about a career as a famous singer. However, the other hens tell her that hens can't sing, and no hen has ever sung, only cockerels can sing, which makes Peka very sad. She has to knit and look after the chicks, like all the other hens, and she doesn't understand why she can't sing.

One day, Peka hears some beautiful music and follows the sound. She finds herself at Professor Nightingale's singing school. Professor Nightingale welcomes her to the school. She explains that she's a hen. He says that he knows she's a hen - and invites her in anyway.

Inside the school, she's the only hen amongst a crowd of songbirds. She tries to sing but finds she can't do it, which makes her sad again. But Professor Nightingale encourages her, explaining that we all start as beginners and telling her that she just needs to practice.

Peka practices all year, in spring, summer, autumn and winter. She keeps going to the singing school and begins to grow in confidence. Meanwhile, Roke follows her and watches her secretly, seeing how much she is improving.

One winter day, Roke wakes up just before dawn with a cough and a cold; he has lost his voice. He rushes to the henhouse and wakes Peka up, telling her she needs to sing to wake up the valley. At first she says she can't, because hens have never done that. But Roke insists, saying he's heard her and he knows she can sing.

Peka decides to give it a go. She is very nervous at first but she finally manages a really loud "cockadoodle!" that wakes up the whole valley. The hens all think it was Roke and congratulate him on his wonderful singing. He tells them it was Peka and they are very surprised. One of the smaller hens tells Peka she wants to sing as well. Then the birds from the music school come to the valley and give a concert, with Roke on guitar, Professor Nightingale on the piano, the songbirds singing and Peka conducting.

In the last scene, we see Peka teaching Roke how to knit. She compliments him on his work and he says, "Thanks, it comes naturally to me!"

Advantages

- This is a strikingly illustrated picture book with a message for young children about female empowerment and breaking down barriers. It is also about resilience, with its focus on not giving up and not expecting to be able to do things right away (fostering a growth mentality).
- The message is clear enough to spark conversations about these topics between the adult reader and the child.
- The images are interesting to look at and include lots of detail, giving the adult and child reader plenty to look at and talk about together.
- There are some nice humorous details, such as Peka fantasising about featuring on the cover of “Famous Hen” magazine and the funny faces of the sleeping hens and their chicks.

Negatives:

- It’s probably overthinking things but it’s arguably not ideal that Peka is only supported in her quest by apparently male characters (Professor Nightingale and Roke), and she doesn’t receive any support or encouragement from any female characters (although they do recognise her achievement later on). Professor Nightingale won’t necessarily be seen as a male character by small children though, so this probably isn’t really a problem!
- The charm of the book is in the story (and its message) and the images, while the text itself is quite basic i.e. very straightforward language without much colour or humour. The English translation that has been provided is a very direct translation, but a more creative English translation could look at ways to bring the story to life a bit more.
- The illustrations may not be to everybody’s taste: it will be interesting to hear the industry experts’ views on this.

Potential translation difficulties

- The language is quite simple and I don’t see any difficulties translating this into English.