



La Isla de Oko

Author:

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Reader:

Joe Williams

This book is a quirky and humorous book for young children, complete with illustrations that harmonize well with the offbeat story, eccentric characters and the whimsical world which they inhabit, to produce a work that feels congruent and cohesive.

The book is very light on text, and the visual elements appear to be its main focus. Indeed, significant sections of it consist exclusively of images. The narrative, such as it is, is also very simple and seems secondary to the visual aesthetics, and the book feels more like a portrait of a colourful and vibrant world inhabited by whimsical and eccentric characters, who are all animals.

The book begins by introducing us to Oko, the main character of the story to whom the title “Oko Island” refers (“Oko Island” refers to her world, and the setting itself feels like one of the book's main characters). Oko and her family are cats with very human characteristics and personalities. The first time we meet Oko, she is holding her baby brother Leo, who is actually far bigger than her. The book then goes on to introduce us to Oko, her family and some of her friends, describing their personalities and likes and dislikes.

One of the book’s most successful aspects is the depth and detail of the world it takes place. Minor characters are richly drawn and even elements of the physical environment itself are afforded their own personalities and characterizations in unexpected and even outrageous ways - in one scene, for example, the clouds discuss an amusing but embarrassing incident which occurred to one of them, to the protest of the cloud in question, before deciding to go and block out the sun to stop people from being able to dry their clothes. This attention to detail adds an additional dimension and depth to the world in which the book is set and the author skillfully utilizes this resource to great comic effect.

The rest of the book consists of a series of fragments and short story lines detailing the exploits of Oko, her family, and other inhabitants of Oko Island, with much of these narratives being depicted via the vibrant and colourful illustrations, with speech bubbles in comic book style. There isn’t an overarching theme or narrative arc that unites all of these elements together, apart from the world in which they take place and a consistent mixing of mundane themes and situations (i.e., Oko’s brother losing his first tooth), combined with entirely surreal and fantastic elements.

This book would appeal to younger readers, perhaps in the 6-8 age range, and would probably be well-suited to collaborative reading between an adult and a child, with the adult eliciting what’s happening in the narrative by asking the child about the pictures (“Who’s this?” “What are they doing?” “Why?”) While the book could clearly be an enjoyable and interactive reading experience for

your readers, especially those who enjoy a participatory approach to reading, the fragmentary structure and lack of any overarching cohesion leave the reader with the feeling that is no more than the sum of its parts, rather than constituting a cohesive and self-contained narrative. This kind of book can work well in certain situations, but might leave some readers feeling disappointed with the lack of sustained plot development. That being said, the characters are likeable, the world intriguing and the humour effective. The book's graphic elements are arguably its strongest point, so readers who particularly appreciate visual aesthetics will likely respond well to the illustrations.

The language is simple and makes little reference to culture-bound concepts, and the book would therefore lend itself well to translation.