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Winter Is Coming



Synopsis

Witness the changing of a season through a watchful child's eyes in this story of nature and discovery from award-winning author Tony Johnston and Best Illustrated artist Jim La Marche. Day after day, a girl goes to her favorite place in the woods and quietly watches from her tree house as the chipmunks, the doe, the rabbits prepare for the winter. As the temperature drops, sunset comes earlier and a new season begins. Silently she observes the world around her as it reveals its secrets. It takes time and patience to see the changes as, slowly but surely, winter comes.

Book Information

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

A dark-haired girl sits alone in the woods, observing the behavior of animals from a platform up in a tree. Each animal that ventures into the clearing is getting ready for winter's cold. Though the foliage glows, food is becoming harder to find: "The mother bear snuffles for food among the flaming leaves. The cub snuffles too. But no luck.... Winter is coming." The girl's narration makes it clear that her family possesses a store of knowledge about the natural world. About skunks, she says, "I can smell them before I see them. Not a bad smell; a real smell. My father says animals are true to themselves." In one of several spreads meticulously worked with feather-light strokes, LaMarche (A Single Pearl) looks down on

both the skunks and the girl on her platform, doubling the sense of secret observation. Sketches of the skunks lie beside her. With meditative language, Johnston (*The Cat with Seven Names*) offers a vivid sense of the changing seasons and of stillness. LaMarche quietly and sensitively portrays a child who is comfortable spending hours alone, working on her own projects and observing a young naturalist. Ages 4–8. (Aug.) (Publishers Weekly, *STARRED REVIEW May 26, 2014) Armed with a sketchbook and patience, a young girl watches animals from a platform in a tree. With quiet appreciation, the narrator describes what she sees on visits made from September through late November to her special place on the edge of the woods. She watches a fox take the last apple from a tree. A bear mother snuffles for food with her cub. Honking Canada geese fly overhead. There are skunks, acorn woodpeckers, rabbits, chipmunks, a deer with still-spotted fawns and turkeys. One day the lucky girl even observes a lynx. “I stay quiet, quiet / to keep it here / for a moment. Even on the gray, cold day on which no animals come, the narrator sits patiently, her back to readers, steadily waiting and watching. LaMarche’s illustrations, done mostly in shades of orange and brown with acrylics, colored pencil and inks, beautifully and realistically portray the ever changing woods, trees, plants and animals. The girl’s appreciation for all she sees and hears is as evident in her face and body language as it is in the text. While not as obviously place-specific as the prolific author’s *Desert Song*, illustrated by Ed Young (2000), the flora and fauna are recognizably Californian but the appeal will be universal. This gentle, lyrical celebration of the natural world will reward similarly observant readers. (Picture book. 4-8) (Kirkus Reviews, *STARRED REVIEW June 15, 2014) On a cold September day, a girl takes her binoculars, sketch pad, and pencils outdoors to draw the wildlife around her family’s farm. She returns several times before late November, when the first snowflakes fall. Often observing from a platform in a tree, she sketches what she sees: a red fox, a bear with her cub, a lynx, a skunk family, woodpeckers, rabbits, chipmunks, a doe with two fawns, Canada geese, and wild turkeys. The geese are flying south, but the other animals are foraging for food as they prepare to winter in the woods and fields around the farm. Written from the girl’s point of view, Johnston’s text is plainspoken and natural sounding but poetic in effect, with graceful repetition: on most double-page spreads, the lines end with “Winter is coming.” Created with acrylics, colored pencils, and opaque inks, LaMarche’s captivating illustrations convey the radiance of an autumn meadow, the girl’s rapt attention to her surroundings, and the unique qualities of the animals she observes. Winter may be in the title, but this evocative picture book is best for reading aloud in the fall, when children can notice the subtle changes happening in their own

outdoor spaces. A quiet, beautiful picture book to share. (Booklist, *STARRED REVIEW August 1, 2014) As fall winds down to winter, a keen-eyed girl quietly observes the animals' preparation from her cleverly situated platform in a tree at the edge of a meadow. She watches deer and skunks, and spies a fox and a lynx, as the season grows colder and the animals scurry to find whatever food they can to fill up for the tough times ahead. Though the text is lengthy, Johnston makes it work, demonstrating her authorial chops with ragged-right prose that moves smoothly between naturalistic observation and lyricism (the deer "nibble the brittle grass. They nibble at the edges of ferns. They nibble at nothing"); careful use of rhythm and the periodic repetition of "winter is coming" help structure the account of the move through fall. The illustrations, employing colored pencil, ink, and acrylic paint, use the realistic figures of girl and animals as the centerpieces of creative compositions: viewers peer down on the flying Canada geese to see the girl looking up at them from below, or perch alongside her in a neighboring pine as she sketches some busy chipmunks. The tree's curving limbs and solid trunk anchor hazy full-spread landscapes suffused with autumnal golds and russets. Literarily inclined youngsters will appreciate this as an entrée to a nature study unit or a field trip involving wildlife observation. (Bulletin September 2014) An empty sketchbook, freshly sharpened pencils, and binoculars set the stage for this luminous story about the powerful magic of being still and experiencing the natural world. Sitting in her tree house, using all her senses to witness the changing season, a girl sketches a variety of Northern animals and notes their habits as they forage for food. The short journal entries combine poetry with pragmatism, resulting in spare, elegant observations about nature: "Dawn burns the sky./A flock of wild turkeys jostles by./They poke everywhere, muttering/food, food, food.?" Although the variety of animals that she sees within a single season is rather implausible, the respect she has for nature and the life cycle keep the text grounded: "I know animals/are best left alone./Maybe the deer will find enough food./Maybe not./ Soon they move on, nibbling.?" Gorgeous acrylic and colored pencil illustrations show the wonder that the girl feels and evoke the experience of witnessing the layers of the natural world slowly revealing themselves as apparent stillness becomes full of life—wind rustling leaves, birds chirping, and scurrying insects. This book unflinchingly faces the fact that the cold is coming, the lean season is approaching, and there are endings within the cycle of life. A touching reminder about the beauty of the natural world. (School Library Journal, *STARRED REVIEW October 2014)

Tony Johnston is the award-winning author of more than 100 beloved children's books. She lives with her family in San Marino, California, where she grew up. Jim LaMarche is one of the

most talented artists working in children's books today. His many successful books include *Rainbabies* by Laura Kraus Melmed and *Albert* by Donna Jo Napoli, which was selected as a New York Times Best Illustrated Book; and *Up and Raft*, which he also wrote. Most recently he illustrated *The Carpenter's Gift* by David Rubel. Jim lives in Santa Cruz, California.

This book is beautiful. I bought it for my 4 year old as part of her collection of seasonal books. This is great for the transition from fall to winter. The story is about a girl who sets out to observe the animals in her local wilderness. With poetic (but age appropriate) poetic prose, she describes the weather and animals and what she sees everyday. She carries a sketchbook with her and takes notes and draws pictures. There isn't much plot to this book. However I love that it can inspire its readers to go out and observe and draw their own wilderness. My own 4 year old is a bit too young for it or perhaps just not that interested to do such at the moment. However I can see this being a great activity for next year or further down the road. Great for homeschooling then. If you like this book, I also recommend to check out Wong Herbert Yee's books. They feature an active young girl who interacts with nature in the different seasons, and I find her adventures have inspired my daughter's own.

Because illustrator Jim La Marche is both a talented artist and a fellow Santa Cruzan, I always enjoy adding his new titles to my picture book collection. I purchased *Winter Is Coming* a few months ago but put it aside because I thought my 3+ year old granddaughter wasn't quite ready for it. ("A lot of words!" she said when she first saw it.) But guess what, I was wrong. Since I brought it out last week, she has asked for multiple readings every time she has visited. In retrospect, I shouldn't be surprised since this is a picture book that manages to combine two current obsessions-- snow and woodland creatures. Instead of being bored by "too many words" or the contemplative, poetic nature of the text, she examines each page after I read the text and is full of questions: "Why is the girl being quiet?" "What do skunks eat?" "Is a lynx like a bobcat?" "Where are the geese going?" And finally, when the first snowflakes begin to fall and the girl gets down from her perch in the trees and heads home, drawing pad under arm, I hear, "Is it going to keep snowing?" (She said hopefully, this being a California girl who has never seen snowflakes floating down and yearns for the day.) Lovely, lovely book.

I really liked the illustrations but the story line was a bit of a downer. Not very uplifting. Didn't leave me with a great feelings. But I thought the art was great and captured new england really well.

Beautiful illustration

Don't care what others say about this story, I love it! And the illustrations alone make it worth the purchase price. Beautiful!

Beautiful beautiful book. I purchased from after seeing this at my local Barnes and noble (cost twice as much). I got it for my two year old this fall but I decided to save it another year because it's a bit wordy for a two year old attention span. And it's such a beautiful book I don't want it trashed before he can sit still long enough to read the whole thing!

Our whole family enjoys this book! It is truly beautiful and amazing. We even bring it to the nursing home and read it there. People of ALL ages should be reading this book. It's breathtaking and wonderful. We get it for all of our family and friends with children to inspire them to be outside.

I buy books for the "pretty pictures" ~illustrations & style~ as much as I do for the content sometimes. This book is quite lovely in both respects, artistically and in its message.

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