

Barb's BookSpot: Episode 5  
Picture Books with Subtle Messages  
September, 2015

***My Dog, Bob* by Richard Torrey. Holiday House, 2015.** Bob is a great pet and he is no ordinary dog, who can do all kinds of unexpected things like cook, drive a car, play golf and even dig for bones – dinosaur bones! When, Mimi brings her dog Truffles over to show off the tricks she can do (sit, speak, fetch) she claims her dog is better. Bob can't seem to do these typical dog-tricks. The story resolves quietly as Bob and his master return home for lunch, but the readers are left to answer who really has the better dog. This might be a great discussion starter about ideas like the meaning of "better", how and why we compare and measure abilities, and the value of being different.

***Ragweed's Farm Dog Handbook (Learn from the Best)* by Anne Vittur Kennedy. Candlewick, 2015.**

Want to be the best farm dog you can be? Just follow Ragweed's simple tips, and pay special attention to what NOT to do. Ragweed cautions that you might "really, really want to" do things like wake up the farmer, roll in the mud, and eat the grass, but those are not your jobs. Rooster, pigs and cows will handle all that. Somehow, in Ragweed's world, there is always a way to earn a biscuit, even for just quietly going away. This book is laugh-out-loud funny, and Ragweed's antics and explanations are delightful, but I sensed an unspoken message here about motivation. Perhaps this is a cautionary tale, reminding us that we want those in our care to find intrinsic value in what they do and learn– let's not have them work for "biscuits".

***The Wonder* by Faye Hanson. Templar Books, an Imprint of Candlewick, 2015** "This is a boy whose head is filled with wonder," begins this glorious book. But all day, he is reminded to pay attention to the world around him, stop daydreaming, and get his head out of the clouds. It isn't until art class when the teacher invites him to use his imagination that he freely shines. The sepia toned background of the pages provides contrast for the intricate, colorful imaginings that emerge as the boy wonders. Several wordless, double-page spreads depict his elaborate creations and in the end, we see that he has enough wonder and creativity to share with everyone. How do we as caregivers and teachers inspire wonder, creativity and imagination? How might our institutions and practices be stifling it?

***Water is Water: A book About the Water Cycle* by Miranda Paul. Illustrations by Jason Chin. Neal Porter/Roaring Brook/ Macmillan, 2015.** The action really begins in the illustration on the cover of this book and progresses through the title and dedication pages, before the text actually begins. Two children are watching a turtle in a pond, planning to capture it before the rain begins and they hurry home. The poetic text scans beautifully as the characters move through the seasons, interacting with water in all of its states. Rain, steam, clouds, fog, ice and snow all make appearances. "Drip, Sip, pour me a cup. Water is Water unless....it heats up." Each page contains the beginning of the rhyme, ends with the word "unless" and the resolution is found after the page-turn. The repeated pattern offers great opportunities for prediction. Soft, detailed, watercolors accurately depict the action, moved forward by elegant word choice. This non-fiction text reads like a simple story. Several pages of back-matter include facts about water, its states, and how it is essential to life. Use this book in science class, in writing class, or just to read aloud and enjoy. The subtle message here? We see a mixed race family and a multicultural gathering of children, all playing, learning, and sharing together. Nothing more needs to be said.

