

Fiddle-I-Fee

by Will Hillenbrand
Harcourt 2002



Reviewed by
Mary Johns

Creative illustrations, fun-filled animals that come out at night to play their instruments, and a surprise ending all contribute to Will Hillenbrand's fresh interpretation of the familiar folk song, *Fiddle-I-Fee*. He keeps us engaged by giving us two parallel stories of life on a farm.

One story is about a farmer and his wife as they go about their busy days, doing chores on the farm and making preparations for the birth of their new baby. As the months pass by, the animals on their farm seem to be going about their lives as usual, eating and making ordinary animal sounds. However, another story actually is taking place at night as the animals secretly practice their instruments by the light of the moon. The cow plays "strum, strum" on the banjo, the pig plays "griffy, griffy" on the harmonica, the goose plays "hum sum" on the accordion, and of course, the cat plays "fiddle-i-fee." When the book ends, we find that the animals have all been practicing to surprise the farmer and his wife with a musical welcome for their new baby!

The humorous details in Hillenbrand's mixed-media illustrations invite children to return to its pages again and again. With only one reading, it is easy to miss details like the duck that eats "Quakers," the alphabet blocks that spell "cow," and the box of "Pilgrim's Scratch and Peck Chicken Feed" that the chicken eats in November.

The illustrations in this book offer opportunities for children to learn to make predictions; before each animal is introduced, Hillenbrand shows it as a toy in the preceding verse. Children can also observe, anticipate, and discuss seasonal changes in the illustrations. Weather, crops, chores, clothing, and decorations all change in each picture as the months go by. Higher-order thinking skills can be encouraged by comparing and contrasting this version of *Fiddle-I-Fee* with other versions of the same title.*

Most importantly, this book will inspire children to create their own versions of the song with new instruments, invented sounds, added body percussion, or perhaps a dramatization. This is would be music-making at its best. Children of all ages will return to *Fiddle-I-Fee* for the sheer joy of singing a great folk song from a wonderful book.

* Other versions of the same book:

Fiddle-I-Fee A Farmyard Song for the Very Young adapted and illustrated by Melissa Sweet; Little, Brown and Company; Boston, New York, Toronto, London; 1992

Cat Goes Fiddle-i-fee adapted and illustrated by Paul Galdone; Clarion Books; New York; 1985

Fiddle-i-fee: A Noise Rhyme illustrated by Jakki Wood; Bradbury Press; New York 1994

Fiddle-i-fee illustrated by Santiago Cohen; Blue Apple Books; Maplewood, N.J. Distributed in the U.S. by Chronicle Books; 2003

A Farmyard Song: an old rhyme with new pictures illustrated by Christopher Manson; North South Books; New York; 1992

I Had a Rooster, A Traditional Song illustrated by Laura Vaccaro Seeger; Viking (a division of Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers); New York; 2001

