

Handsprings

Poems and paintings by Douglas Florian
Greenwillow Books, 2006



Reviewed by
Nancy Glen

Spring may come every year, but we never tire of the excitement and promise it brings. New plants, animals and warming weather signal the renewal of the life cycle and our release into the outdoors after a long, cold winter. Douglas Florian's delightful book is a compilation of 48 poems about this wonderful season. His child-like paintings accompany them, each showing activities the poetry describes, such as spring cleaning, bike riding, berry picking and nature walks. The poems are organized to flow from the end of winter to the approach of the warm summer months. The book is one of several written by Florian, but most notably it is a companion book to his other seasonal titles: *Winter Eyes*, *Summersaults*, and *Autmnbings*.

The joy of this book is in the way Florian plays with colorful, active words in each poem, giving readers a sense of movement, inviting their imaginary, if not actual, participation. For example, "When Winter" has a simple text: "When winter winds wind down and end/Then spring is coming round the bend./When winter ice begins to thaw/Then spring is knocking at the door./When winter snow is nowhere found/Then spring, you know, has come to town." The poem provides an excellent springboard to launch a rondo-form performance, including improvisational movement, a speech piece and instrumental ostinati to accompany the reading of the poem.

The book is a visual treat, with the poems arranged on pages in different styles of organization. "Spring" provides a narrow, vertical list of what spring "does" with colorful verbs

including singing, stinging, zooming and blooming. One of the most visually appealing layouts is for the poem, "Rain Reign," presenting all the words in vertical sentences, like sheets of rain falling from the sky.

The book's inviting design draws a child into the text. It is attractive, engaging and provides ample material in every poem for a teacher to use in developing rhythmic and improvisational activities for the classroom. Its gentle, contemplative encourages the

reader to experience the sights, sounds and feel of spring in an original offering. In the book-jacket notes, Florian explains that his collection of poems and paintings "captures the freshness and promise of spring, whether it comes in like a lion or lamb." Yet the true promise of this book is the wealth of opportunities it provides for enjoyment of the beautiful spring season!

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