

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Dr. Kelly Jackson

Rabbityness

By Jo Empson

Auburn, ME: Child's Play, Inc., 2012

Jo Empson's book *Rabbityness*, a 2013 Independent Publisher Book Awards Silver Medal winner, is a story of a joyful, creative rabbit that positively influences those around him. But by digging below the surface, readers can discover a deeper meaning which may be explored in the music classroom and beyond.

Rabbit enjoyed doing normal rabbit things—jumping, burrowing, washing his ears—but he also liked doing “unrabbity things” such as painting and making music. His happiness in pursuing these unrabbity activities was infectious. His rabbit friends danced in his colorful, musical woods until one day, Rabbit disappeared. The other rabbits grew sad because they could not find him. However, inside a deep, dark hole, Rabbit had left presents for his friends—instruments and paint with which to make their own art and music. In time the rabbits came to enjoy these unrabbity activities, which warmly reminded them of Rabbit. Remembering their special friend made them so happy that, with the gifts left by Rabbit, they returned to color the woods once again.

Empson's background in graphic design is evident in her illustrations. Rabbit's plain world bursts into color when he is being unrabbity. The instruments, woods, and even Rabbit himself are splashed with bright colors, as if he had jumped in the paint and frolicked around the woods. When Rabbit disappears, the book's illustrations turn

stark and gray until Rabbit's colorful gifts are discovered at the bottom of the black hole. Once the rabbits begin to explore their creativity, they restore the woods to color and life to how it was before—this visual return to the vibrant surroundings that their absent friend originally created ends the book.

In the music classroom this story may be brought to life through pantomime. Some groups of students might portray rabbits or trees in the wood. For example, as one child portrays Rabbit, paints, and makes music, other children could toss scarves or ribbons in the air and onto the trees as the other rabbits dance in the wood. When Rabbit disappears, the scarves may be removed and placed under a large piece of black fabric representing the black hole. The rabbits can employ differences in level and weight—as they bounce happily before Rabbit's disappearance, or as they walk with heavy hearts through the wood when he is gone. As the story concludes each rabbit might take a scarf and begin to color the wood as before, becoming more joyous with each step.

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Rabbityness lends itself perfectly to the incorporation of instruments. At the start, a single instrument may represent Rabbit's normal rabbit activities. The joyous abandon of his and his friends' unrabbity leaping could be transferred to melodic instruments (set in a pentatonic key) and rhythmic percussion. A single low tremolo sound might be used as the rabbits wander in grief. When they discover and use Rabbit's gifts, the instruments return to their exuberant representation of the animals' pantomime. To extend this activity, one could pair each rabbit to an instrument, having the instrumentalist improvise to the rabbit's movement.



I first read *Rabbityness* as a celebration of how one can make a positive difference. My friend, who had recently lost a loved one, delved below the storyline and connected with the rabbits' sense of loss. Her circumstance led her to a different interpretation of the story, and our students may also have diverse reactions based on their experiences. The book may spark discussions about individuality, loss, and moving beyond grief, which makes it an excellent source to share with art specialists, counselors, and

other classroom teachers. *Rabbityness* reaches out to all. ■

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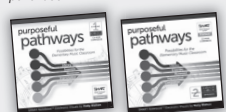


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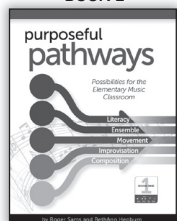
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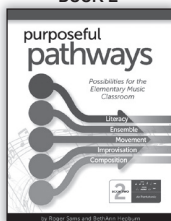


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