The Watcher: Jane Goodall's Life with the Chimps by J. Winter

Sandy Campbell

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Abstract


Jeanette Winter is a prolific and award winning American children's author and illustrator. She tells us in her author’s note at the end of this book that, as a child, she wished that she “could have read about someone like Jane Goodall – a brave woman who wasn’t afraid to do something that had never been done before”. So she wrote this book.

The picture book format and the Grade 3 reading level make this work appropriate for the lower elementary school target audience, children who are beginning to think about what they want to be when they grow up.

While written mostly in poetic line form, the work is not particularly poetic. However the form does seem to give Winter the licence to begin sentences with conjunctions and end them with prepositions. The text reads more like folksy spoken American English than poetry. For example, “She woke at dawn and saw them slowly rise from their nests, sit for a spell, then go off to find food.”

Winter’s illustrations are the delight of the book. They are simple, two-dimensional folk art works. In this volume Winter purposefully uses two distinct forms of presentation. In the early part of the book, which traces Goodall’s life from her English childhood until she travels to Gombe, the illustrations are square and centred on a coloured page with the text structured below them. Once Goodall has set up her camp in the forest, the illustrations are as wild and uncontained as the life Goodall led. The paintings splash out across the pages and the text fits in and around them wherever there is space.

As an introduction to the life of a remarkable female scientist and role model, this is a work that belongs in every public and elementary school library. However, because the text is not exemplary of well-written English, it should not be used for classroom study.

Recommended with reservations: 2 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Sandy Campbell

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Author Biography

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About the Journal

The Deakin Review of Children's Literature is an electronic quarterly review of contemporary English-language materials of interest to children and young adults. Of particular use to librarians, parents, teachers and anyone working with young people, we also publish news and opinions relevant to children’s literacy.

Learn more
Susan Cheyney. Jane watched the chimps. when they were angry or scared. and their hair stood on end. She saw them
swagger and throw tantrums, and kept out of the way. Jane watched the chimps at the Kakombe waterfall, leaping and swinging in awe
and wonder. at the tumbling water. If you are interested in learning more about Jane Goodall, she has written a number of books about
her life, including My Life with the Chimpanzees and The Chimpanzees I Love: Saving Their World and Ours. You can also visit
Goodall, Jane, Peterson, Dale.