



the lake. At one point, Andy asks his Grandfather if he can skip out on helping with the boat (sanding the boat was taking so long and was so hard!) and his grandfather readily agrees to finish it by himself. Whew!—thinks Andy—I am free now! But he still dreams of winning that \$100 and as he loves to fish he is sure he will be the winner. He and his friend Katie set up an elaborate experiment concerning plant growth, only to have it ruined by the carelessness of Jessica who was supposed to give them some petunias but had let them die. Jessica doesn't seem to notice how upset Katie and Andy are. This gets Andy thinking: didn't Jessica make a kind of promise to help? And now look what happened when she broke it! He goes home to ask his grandfather if he can still help with repairing the boat and ends up finishing the last coat of paint. The book ends with the fishing contest.

This "chapter book," aimed at middle elementary school children, has lovely line drawings by Colin Alexander that convey the warm community of children and adults and the beauty of the lake region. While the story revolves around the central question of what constitutes a promise, the reader can think along with Andy and Chuck as to what makes a promise a promise and whether we have an obligation to keep promises made, explicit and implicit. What role do our intentions, the circumstances and consequences play in promises? Are promises made to children different than those to adults? As the story develops, there are opportunities for a host of other questions to emerge:

- Are dogs friends? Can animals make promises?
- How can each character *know* that he will win the contest?
- Are identical twins two people or one?
- What makes a scientific experiment a good one?
- Why would a person want to be an astronomer?
- When are old things worth fixing; when should we get new ones?
- And finally: could a girl like fishing?

This is a delightful gentle story that can both entertain young readers and help them think about their own relationships with other children and adults. It is aimed at middle elementary school years as an early "chapter book."

*The Mouse in the Bathtub*, written by Cheryl McKinley and illustrated by Colin Alexander is a picture book aimed at preschoolers through first/second graders. The three children, Billie, Matt and Annie are bored and ask Grandmother to tell them a story so she offers them a story with a *dilemma*. "What's a dilemma?" asks the youngest, Billie. Let's see if you can find out, Grandmother preaches. Hmm . . . this is sounding more like a ditto exercise than a story. The dilemma turns out to be that of a mouse who has escaped three hungry looking cats to hide out in a bathtub. But what to do next? Are the cats still out there?

The children each offer possible inferences on whether the mouse can know that the cats are there based on the presence of absence of a bell sound from one of the cat's collars. Now what should that mouse do? Go down the drain? Run out of the tub and sneak back to his hole? In each scenario, the children dutifully imagine what might happen. Grandmother suggests a third alternative where the mouse does nothing. And indeed that is the mouse's choice: he stays in the tub, taking a nap until the cats go away. The children conclude that a dilemma is similar to solving a problem; it is a riddle or puzzle. Grandma cautions them that we can get stuck into thinking there are only two solutions to a dilemma and miss a third option that might solve the puzzle. Annie muses whether there are dilemmas that we cannot solve at all but as the rain has stopped, the children decide to go out and play.

This story seemed a bit forced but it might turn out to be quite effective with children as they think along with the characters in the story to guess what

options the trapped mouse might have and how those options might compare with one another. I was bothered by the concept of doing nothing. Is staying put in the bathtub really "doing nothing?" And frankly, how good an option was that? In the alternatives of going down the drain or escaping up the shower curtain, the children mused about possible outcomes, good and bad. But grandmother presented doing nothing as the best alternative. How might that have gone badly? I know it would have if I had walked into the bathroom . . .

One aspect of this book struck me: while the cats were drawn with loving realism, the mouse was a cartoon mouse. Was this because the mouse was a figment, a conceit for the purposes of the story? Could we consider what dilemmas the cats faced here? Perhaps we could look at this from all sides! And is a dilemma a kind of riddle? So, while I found this book rather self-consciously reflective, I guess it did generate some thinking in me and that is the purpose of a good philosophical story! Teachers and parents, as well as children, might find other themes and ideas to explore.

Wendy C. Turgeon

Here at *Questions* we believe that book reviews serve a valuable role in helping all of us that do work in pre-college philosophy to better understand what is available. We have several texts on hand for future reviews and are always open to suggestions for additional materials.

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