Sylvester and the Magic Pebble

Resource Review # 1

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Resources for Children
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Although not written to appeal to a generation of children raised in the era of daily Amber Alerts, Sylvester the donkey and his tale of pebble bliss insinuate the modern dangers associated with scenarios that are too good to be true and the absence of level headedness in precarious situations. Sylvester is a young donkey with a happy home and healthy hobby of collecting pebbles. Upon finding a magic pebble that grants his every wish with its touch, Sylvester fails to recognize the importance of being careful for what you wish for. When Sylvester runs into a dangerous lion with his new pebble in tow, he becomes distressed and reacts on impulse, thus turning himself into a rock to evade the lion. Unable to touch the pebble and turn himself back, Sylvester takes on the scary role of a missing donkey, leaving his loving parents searching for their son and fearing the worst.

As the story depicts the search for Sylvester, illustrations effectively expose the worry, depression, and fear felt by Sylvester’s parents in his absence. Lonely and isolated illustrations of Sylvester the rock existing through seasons of cold and snow adequately portray the abandonment associated with a child’s absence from his or her accustomed home life. The story’s happy ending of Sylvester’s accidental salvation at the hands of his picnicking parents helps to level out the book’s overall tone of foreboding circumstances leading to Sylvester’s disappearance. Illustrations of domestic and familiar bliss that begin the story also conclude Sylvester return home, therefore illustrating the full-circle
journey of the young donkey from a happy home life to self-inflicted disappearance back to the arms of his loving parents.

Children will love the atmosphere of independence and adventure implemented by young Sylvester as he is out on his own looking for pebbles. Although Sylvester’s magical transformation into a rock is laughable and silly, children will also learn and understand the consequences Sylvester brought upon himself after failing to think through his actions and deciding to act on impulse. The descriptions and illustrations of Sylvester’s mother and father as they search for their son will hit home for children, causing them to recognize the love parents have for their kids and the reality that children are invaluable to their parents. Additionally, the concluding words of the story instill in children the message that nothing is more desirable than one’s family.

Few picture books convey a serious lesson for young, impressionable, and naïve children in an age of frequent child disappearances and kidnappings. Sylvester’s journey with his magic pebble is most appropriate for children between preschool and third grade. As children in this age range begin to experience frequent independence from their parents and increased levels of self-interested curiosity, Sylvester’s experience serves as a quality example of what not to do in unsafe situations. Since children of this age also begin to develop the longing to be separate from their families in order to be “cool”, Sylvester’s discovery that nothing is better than family serves to benefit both guardian and child.