



A First Bible Story Book

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Illustrated in full colour throughout, this book contains retellings of 13 stories from the Bible, seven from the Old Testament and six from the New Testament. There is also a three-page 'Who's Who' of the main characters from the stories. In her introduction Hoffman says, 'the stories are full of vivid pictures' and refers to images potentially 'disturbing in their power' along with those more 'comforting ones of creation, repentance and salvation'. And yes, her tellings do all read aloud well (some better than others: hence we hear of Jonah going' ... down, and round and round ... swirling and tumbling through the water into the dark ...') so it may seem carping to say that I felt less than one hundred per cent positive about them. I want to offer children retellings which have the potential to invoke feelings of awe and wonder and an open, questioning attitude towards the mysteries embedded in stories from world religions, together with feelings of excitement for language. If language is to invite children to engage with such symbolically conveyed meanings, then one can't help but want a certain richness of verbal imagery which, for the most part, I couldn't find here. Four- and five-year-olds most certainly can engage with, appreciate and discuss (together with the symbolism) such richness of language. One senses (and can sympathise with) the author's concern to make the stories accessible to a very young audience - and she has certainly done so - and parents or others with a slightly different, less demanding, agenda when sharing the stories will, very likely, wholeheartedly appreciate this. One cannot but ask why only the first part of the Jonah story is told. Surely by omitting Jonah's anger at God NOT destroying Ninevah, and his subsequent understanding of God's all embracing forgiveness - i.e. not just for the chosen (Jewish) people - much of the message and impact is lost? Aside from this, Downing's slightly understated, watercolour illustrations, while never overwhelming the text, invite exploration of the feelings of the characters portrayed (and thus potentially deeper understandings on behalf of the child audience). Despite my personal reservations this book has much to offer adult readers-aloud and those under-sixes with whom it is shared.

Running Order:

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