



Umbrella

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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There's an umbrella lying in the park, so Clara puts it on a bench. To her amazement the umbrella thanks her - but talking isn't the only wonder unleashed by Clara's act of thoughtfulness. There are all sorts of marvels tucked away beneath the umbrella's shabby looking canopy. Clara finds a 'lovely someone' to play with - a cat to keep her company - but the umbrella doesn't stop there. Old Mr Roberts can't reach the apples any more so an elephant is thoughtfully provided to help him. And when the Moodie boys interrupt their family picnic with a tantrum, a band of butterflies emerges, bringing 'magic and music' to the delight and distraction of everyone.

All except the sly old fox, of course, who's been quietly visible on almost every spread and whose promotion centre-stage will please those children who've already spotted him. Mr Fox wants riches and has been waiting for his chance to commit a sneaky act of theft. But the umbrella 'doesn't take kindly to commands' and drenches him with an unexpected downpour. In a change-of-heart denouement that feels a little rushed, Mr Fox realizes his error and apologises, and everyone gathers beneath the umbrella to be showered with rainbows instead.

This quirky book takes a familiar folktale trope - the object of power, capable of granting wishes to the righteous - and plays with it, forging its own eccentric and appealing path through a landscape that feels fresh and new. Arevalo Melville's illustrations are confident to be themselves and don't talk down - there's no hint of the cute and cuddly in this book, despite its subject-matter, and children will be pleasantly challenged as well as entertained.

Although charming, the text doesn't quite sing, but its overall message is clear and compelling. If we behave with kindness and respect and thereby open ourselves to finding it, the world is full of joy. Or, as the umbrella puts it, 'anything is possible.'

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