

# JoLLE@UGA®

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

**Review of Boy**  
Written by Phil Cummings & Illustrated by Shane Devries

Adult/Educator Reviewers:  
Merida Lang & Alex Winninghoff

University of Georgia

Student Reviewers: Frankie Simmons & Lincoln



Cumming, P., & Devris, S. (2017). *Boy*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

ISBN: 1760277053

### Adult Review: Merida Lang & Alex Winninghoff

*Boy* (2017) centers on the experiences of a young Viking boy who is deaf. He speaks sign language with his parents, but they are the only ones in the village who seem to know how to communicate with him. The king and his knights are embroiled in an ongoing battle with a nearby dragon that has burned the leaves off of the trees. Everyone in the village is very scared of this dragon, including the knights and the king. However, the boy is not aware of all the details. Without giving too much away, his deafness ends up working to his advantage and helps him to broker peace in his kingdom.

As a mother to a hearing three-year old girl, Frankie, I (Merida) was interested in reading this book with her to introduce her to the diversity of sensory experiences people have in the world. Until recently, she had never met a deaf person and was largely unaware of what that meant. But it seemed timely, considering that Frankie had to undergo a series of hearing tests for speech therapy. Also, she has recently befriended Alex's grandson, Lincoln, whose parents are both deaf. We read the book all together, with Alex signing for Lincoln, who is bilingual in English and American Sign Language (ASL). For Frankie, it was her first time seeing sign language and the experience helped to both illustrate the concepts in the book and to broaden her understanding of language.

As a parent of a Deaf adult son and grandmother to a hearing child of deaf adults (CODA), I (Alex) have long been frustrated by the lack of positive representation of deafness in children's literature. So, I was excited to read and share *Boy* (2017) in English and ASL with Lincoln and Frankie. Lincoln's parents frequently read to him in ASL, so hearing a story read aloud in English is a less common experience for him. Lincoln was excited to actually listen to the story, and perhaps more excited to speak up, to add his voice to the story, and to mimic the words he was hearing as Merida read. The illustrations and the story were engaging. Moreover, I appreciated the ways its

overarching message challenged a deficiency-based concept. With that said, there are ways that this book reifies negative perceptions of deafness, which is most evident early in the story when a townsperson refers to him as a "strange boy." Though this message is ultimately challenged as Boy becomes the hero of the town, there is risk in pointing to deafness and ASL as a stigma when readers, including my grandson, may have never reached that conclusion independently. That moment in the book, however, does not necessarily overshadow the value of *Boy* (2017); the opportunity for young people to be introduced to ASL, as well as to the idea that all young people have unique strengths to offer to their community, no matter their differences.

### Student Review: Frankie Simmons & Lincoln

#### Frankie's response:

*I like it, it was fun!*  
*Granny would like this book.*  
*The dragon was nice in the end.*

#### Lincoln's response:

*Let's read it again!*

Please follow [the link](#) to access Frankie and Lincoln's digital review, captured on video.