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Review of *Finding Kindness*

Written by Deborah Underwood & Illustrated by Irene Chan

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Dustin Michael
Savannah State University, Savannah, GA

Student Reviewer: Avonlie Michael, 3rd Grade



Underwood, D., & Chan, I. (Illustrator). (2019). *Finding kindness*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

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Adult Review: Dustin Michael

Deborah Underwood and Irene Chan's *Finding Kindness* opens with a girl kneeling at her window to release a ladybug into the wild. This gesture not only establishes the picture book's theme but also creates a symbolic frame around a series of benevolent actions. The book, an illustrated poem, presents the reader with one or two lines of rhyming dactyls per page galloping briskly across the scene where the narrated action is occurring. One of the fascinating aspects of this poet/visual artist collaboration is the contrast in their styles. Underwood's poetry is concise, contained, and metrical, while Chan's artwork plunges from the edge of the page into the gutter and leaps straight out the other side. Her deft uses of color, texture, and perspective belie the childlike simplicity of her shapes and forms. As one might expect of a children's book with "finding" in the title, there is a seek-and-find quality to the book that urges readers to scan for details and notice patterns, such as the pattern that emerges where the subject of a page later becomes a subordinate figure in the background of a later page. This creates the impression of a great chain forming, as displays of kindness vine across landscapes and connect people of differing ages, abilities, races, and occupations.

I selected *Finding Kindness* for review because I was intrigued by its title—by the idea that kindness was something that could be found—and because of my curiosity for how kindness might be presented to this age group. As an educator and a parent, I am interested in approaches to encouraging kindness in my students and children, and I think this book will appeal to children age 4-8 as it is intended to do. The broad message—assist the vulnerable—should resonate with parents and teachers as well. What makes the book somewhat noteworthy in terms of audience is the degree to which the illustrations attempt to be inclusive: a child in a wheelchair offers to play tennis with a child who can walk; a woman

snaps a photo for a biracial family that is posing with a person wearing a bear costume; a woman wearing a hijab feeds seeds to wild songbirds. A presumably healthy child brings soup for her sick friend. While the relationships depicted here are almost glaringly heteronormative, there does appear to have been at least some thought given to presenting a population on the page that otherwise resembles the population that exists in our world.

There are no really challenging vocabulary terms to explain or define here, but it should be mentioned that full appreciation of this book's message hinges on an ability to clearly see and decipher visual cues in the images. Even then, there are moments in the book when the established pattern collapses and the kindness chain breaks apart. Perhaps that is rendered intentionally to reinforce the notion that true kindness is not something that is done for reward. There is no guarantee that kindness will be revisited on a person who is kind. As the book ends, we reunite with the girl by the window and a ladybug appears, but it is unclear whether this is the same ladybug she set free at the start, or a different ladybug—her same act of kindness, returned to her, or an opportunity to perform kindness anew.

Student Review: Avonlie Michael

This book is about finding kindness all over, anytime. My favorite part was the page with the puppy adoptions because they are getting bought and loved and not ignored. This book would be good for kids and grown-ups and old people because everyone needs to be kind.

The part of the book that I felt like I could understand the best was the lemonade part because my two younger siblings have done stuff like spill things I

don't want them to spill. That has made me angry, but then I calmed down. Kindness goes in a circle like the

lifecycle from one person to the next person and spreads kindness all over the world forever.