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A Beginner's Guide to Bear Spotting

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

We have all been on a bear hunt - and arrived safely home. But it is good to be prepared! Here Michelle Robinson, ably assisted by David Roberts, sets out to ensure the young bear hunter is just that; there are, of course, no guarantees - though taking Teddy could be a life saver.

Taking the stance of the teacher, the author addresses the young reader directly. This works on a number of levels since it allows a degree of adult collusion - note the reference to porridge for example. The result is a text that combines a certain amount of factual information together with a lot of fun. The bears are given their Latin names for example, though I suspect bubble gum is not a reliable defence. How to disentangle this mingling of fact and fiction?

It is the genius of David Roberts's illustrations that provide the clues, as he cleverly ranges from images that reference the style of an artist's field guide to the quirky narrative of the picture book. His little bear spotter, clutching his Field Notes, gazes out at young readers, placing them in the position of the instructor, the one in-the-know. Against a plain white background, the narrative of the images, cleverly acting as a counterpoint to the text, provides drama as well as humour. The design is exceptional. The illustrations make bold statements filling the page, or as clear narrative vignettes, enhanced by Roberts's unfussy palette, itself echoing the subject matter - black and brown bears. Complementing Roberts's visual treat, the text is presented in an attractive font that has a matching clarity. Bloomsbury are to be commended for ensuring the artist and designer have been given the space to make an impact.

This is a book to raise a smile with both adult and child reader; a book to share that combines witty text with witty illustration. This is the picture book for those Early Years readers who want more than the cosy bunny - a cautionary tale to stand beside Belloc's **Jim**.

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