Rachel Bright , Jim Field

The Lion Inside

United Kingdom (2015)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables Fable Phaedrus





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General information	
Title of the work	The Lion Inside
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Rachel Bright, *The Lion Inside*. London: Orchard Books, 2015, 29 pp.
ISBN	9781408331606
Available Onllne	See YouTube for various read-along videos
Genre	Fables, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (c. 3–6)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
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Creators



Rachel Bright (Author)

Rachel Bright is a British children's writer and printmaker based in Southern England. As well as writing children's literature, Bright also designs cards and gifts for the Brightside brand. She studied graphics at Kingston University, and followed this with a Master's Degree in Printmaking at the University of the West of England. Bright's books are aimed at young children and tend to emphasise the importance of emotional warmth, including the *Love Monster* series, and *Amazing Daddy*. She is the author of the Aesop's Fable-themed, *The Lion Inside*.

Source:

Twitter (accessed: October 24, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Jim Field (Illustrator)

Jim Field is a British illustrator based in Paris, France. He also works as an animation director and character designer. Field illustrated other works written by Rachel Bright: *The Lion Inside* and *The Koala Who Could*.

Source:

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Additional information

Summary

The Lion Inside is a reworked retelling of the Aesop's Fable, *The Lion and the Mouse*. It is a highly illustrated work in rhyming couplets. The tale opens by introducing both characters; the Lion lives atop a large rock formation, the Mouse in a "tinyful house" underneath. Mouse is small; other animals barely notice that he is there, which makes him sad. Lion, on the other hand, is very loud and ensures that all the animals know how loudly he can roar, how tough he is, how strong he is, and how good at dancing he is. Mouse determines that he must learn to roar so that the other animals will notice him and want to be his friend. He realises the predicament – the animal best placed to teach him how to roar is Lion, who might eat him. Mouse takes the risk, clambers up the rock, and wakes Lion from his sleep. The startled Lion squeals. He is afraid of mice. Mouse promises not to harm Lion. He realises that he need not roar now that he has found his true voice. The two become friends and live on Lion's rock. Mouse now feels big (even if he is not) and Lion now roars "with laughter instead!" The story finishes with the moral lesson that the two had learned – that "we all have a mouse and a lion inside".

Analysis

The Lion Inside works within the tradition that children's stories should contain moral lessons and that those moral lessons can be well-communicated via animal characters. This aspect is carried over from the well-established tradition of Aesop's Fables published for children. The main premise of the story is inherited from Aesop's *The Lion and the Mouse*, although there is no reference to Aesop in the work or related encouragement to explore antiquity. Although there is a clear relationship between the stories, especially in the key moment of a mouse crawling over a sleeping lion, the plot of *The Lion Inside* differs from its ancestor, as does the moral or learning point. As the debt to *The Lion and the Mouse* is so apparent, it is worth considering what adaptations have been made and what difference that makes to the morals that are established.

The Lion and the Mouse and *The Lion Inside* both function by contrasting the great size and strength of the Lion with the diminutive nature of the Mouse. In *The Lion and the Mouse*, Mouse accidentally wakes Lion by running over Lion's sleeping body. Lion catches Mouse, but laughingly releases him when Mouse promises to do Lion a good

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turn one day if he will spare him. Shortly after, Lion is caught in a hunter's net. Mouse hears him roaring and runs to his aid. He uses his tiny rodent teeth to gnaw through the net, releasing Lion. Lion thanks Mouse and observes that even the small and humble can have merit after all. The essential lesson of the story is that different people contribute different things; there is more than one way of being useful or skilled. An additional learning point is that even the mighty sometimes need help from the less powerful.

In following the basic set-up of the fable, *The Lion Inside* establishes the same thought-provoking contrast between two very different (and differently-sized) animals. The contrast between the two has a dual resonance for children: they may increase their social insight from the articulation of differences between different types of creature/people, and, as children, they are familiar with differentials based on size and power and are therefore likely to identify to some extent with the Mouse. In *The Lion and the Mouse*, the child reader sees that even the smaller party – something/someone like them – can be of use, and learns that the less powerful have their own merit – that everyone has their own sort of skill. *The Lion Inside* looks rather at the idea that even the large and powerful can be scared sometimes, and even the small and powerless can be brave sometimes. Rather than type and difference between beings, there is similarity; at the same time, there is difference within individual people/creatures so that the same individual can feel differently at different times. This is a valuable lesson in developing emotional awareness. People's emotions do indeed vary; those who seem confident may harbour fears. These life lessons are not immediately apparent to children who rarely have the maturity to comprehend these sorts of social and psychological nuances. From that perspective, it is an excellent idea to use the fable format to introduce emotion-based truisms.

It might, nonetheless, be argued that the moral of *The Lion Inside* is less clearly communicated than the moral of the traditional fable is as several loose ends are left hanging. *The Lion and the Mouse* has something to teach children about power dynamics; power difference does not disappear by itself despite the possibility of mutual appreciation between those with more or less power. In *The Lion Inside*, Lion stops roaring and the power difference between the two creatures appears to disappear; the powerful and less powerful become friends because the powerful has in some way enjoyed feeling intimidated by the less powerful. This is not a life lesson that will ring true for everyone. As for Mouse, in the fable he demonstrates his

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	worth by being able to gnaw the rope – that is his mini-beast skill. In *The Lion Inside*, Mouse demonstrated his bravery by approaching Lion, but it was only a coincidence that Lion was frightened of mice. Mouse did not demonstrate anything else and any other Lion would, on the logic of the story, have eaten him. It is said that Mouse 'felt big' now and has learned that he does not need to roar and frighten others. That seems to be because he managed to frighten Lion anyway. How will this new feeling help Mouse in the rest of his life? He does not seem to have made any other new friends. It is unlikely that young children will examine the story in this sort of detail and they are likely to benefit from the basic message that the timid can be brave, the strong vulnerable, and that it is nice to be friends. Nonetheless, the story is an interesting example of the phenomena that when long-surviving short stories are adjusted, it can be difficult to replicate the same rigour of internal logic.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aesop Aesop's Fables Fable Phaedrus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Animals Character traits Conflict Emotions Friendship Gaining understanding Humour Judgement Learning Morality Peers Subjectivity Talking animals Values
Further Reading	*Babrius and Phaedrus Fables*, trans. B.E. Perry, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1965. Daly, Lloyd, R., trans., ed., *Aesop Without the Morals. The Famous Fables, and a Life of Aesop*, New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961. Hall, Edith, "Our Fabled Childhood: Reflections on the Unsuitability of Aesop to Children", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed. *Our Mythical Childhood… The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

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