

Doggerel. Sheila Dalton. Illus. Kim LaFave. Doubleday, 1996. Unpag. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-25533-0.

Any child who has a dog or wants one will probably like this cheerful picture book. Really just a rhyming list of dogs — not by breed, but by, oh, shape, or temperament (“burly dogs, curly dogs, and dogs without hair” for example), it is particularly well-designed, by Roger Handling. The text roams across the page like a dog roams, slantwise, across a street, or squares off against itself, on facing pages, like a hostile meeting. The words are simple and felicitous, if sometimes a little too colloquial for my taste (doesn’t “dumb” ever mean “silent” anymore?). And Kim LaFave’s illustrations, in a gentle palette aimed at younger children, are full of energy and humour. These dogs have chutzpah, and a repertoire of facial expressions that some people should probably envy. A happy book, its words and images have found soul-mates in each other.

If You Could Wear My Sneakers. Sheree Fitch. Illus. Darcia Labrosse. Doubleday, 1997. Unpag. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-25597-7.

Children’s rights are a good thing; children’s verse is a good thing. But they don’t necessarily come together to make a good thing. This is an odd book, one in which the ostensible purpose — to illustrate the United Nations’ children’s rights with verse — sits uncomfortably with the result. Perhaps that is because poetry called upon to be a vehicle for propaganda usually balks at the task. Now, of course it is worthwhile educating children about their rights, but I don’t think this is the way to do it, and I don’t think this book manages it. Reading through the poems, which are very uneven in quality (as often with Fitch), I could not usually tell which right was being discussed! So, for instance, “One little firefly/In a jar/ Lovely lonely/Fallen star” is one half of a poem illustrating Article 37: “Children have the right to fair treatment by the law.” Huh? Others, like the poem entitled “Whoa!”, which illustrates the right to protection from abuse and violence, succeed more happily, and this little verse is indeed one of the best in the book. But on the whole I am afraid this project was ill-conceived, and does not succeed either as poetry, or as a billboard for children’s rights.

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