Cecily G. and the 9 Monkeys (Curious George) by H. A. Rey

George's Debut

“There is originality and a childlike humor in both the amusing antics and engaging pictures.” —Booklist Cecily G. and the Nine Monkeys was the first book to feature Curious George, as well as being Hans and Margret Rey’s first book for children. In this initial effort, about a lonely giraffe befriended by George and his eight siblings, we see all the hallmarks of Curious George’s signature style: humor, adventure, playfulness, and the episodic storytelling that later characterized classic George set pieces like the flyaway balloons, the rocket ship, and the bunny escape.

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My Personal Review:
This is a clever, witty, and ultimately cheerful book about how a Giraffe and nine monkeys unexpectedly help each other. Published in 1946, it's the first book featuring "Curious George." George was eventually taken from his habitat by the kind man in the yellow hat, but here we see George with his Mother and seven siblings. The book is filled with both verbal and visual humor (the nine monkeys all sleep together in a gigantically long giraffe bed). The giraffe helps the monkeys play by volunteering to play as a slide, a teeter-totter, and a sailboat. In all of these scenarios, the giraffe volunteers to play, is asked nicely to play, or looks pleased. There's one funny scene where the monkeys make a pair of stilts for Cecily, who is described as "terribly excited" (not coerced). In some deft self-referential humor, Rey draws the giraffe on the stilts "so high the page isn't big enough to show all of her."

There is only one slightly dissonant note in the book, when the monkeys have tied strings between Cecily's head and outstretched legs to make a harp. For some reason, Cecily's smile looks forced, and the array of strings make her look tied up. Moreover, while Cecily does not object, neither does she explicitly give her permission for this activity. Other than this possibly flawed scene (given the tone of the book, undoubtedly inadvertent), I see only mutual support and friendship. It is also possible that a young reader who is familiar only with the later Curious George books may be upset to know that Curious George apparently left a rather large family behind (I don't know how--or even whether--the author dealt with this in some later book), but you can judge whether this will be
troublesome for your audience. Here, however, George and family happily make a new home with the giraffe (after saving her house), and the formerly lonely giraffe has a house full of new friends. This is a creative (but apparently overlooked) book that shows how imagination (and a long neck) can bridge the distance between strangers and lead to fun and mutual help.

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