Scranimals

Learning About Literature While Having Fun? You Bet!

Poet Jack Prelutsky again pairs up with two-time Caldecott Honor artist Peter Sís to create Scranimal Island, a fantastical, off-the-map place inhabited by unusual animals from Hippopotamushrooms to Potatoads to a pride of Broccolions. A boy and girl on a scooter, equipped with essentials from umbrella to inner tube, fly from habitat to habitat over Sís dreamy, mountainous landscapes à la Tibet: Through the Red Box. They make their way through the clutch of Spinachickens, past the Camelberta Peaches to the Sweet Porcupineapple, / Unflappable chap, / You happily amble / All over the map. Prelutskys biological inventions are as clever as they are silly, and its wonderful that kids are allowed to figure out the hybrid themselves in Rhinocerose, Cardinalbacore, etc. Prelutskys glee is contagious, and kids will get a kick out of the wordplay in poems like Oh Sleek Bananaconda: You slither on your belly, / And you slither on your chin. / Youre only unappealing / As you shed your slinky skin. Pronunciation guides for each creature garnish each page, in case you cant pronounce Toucanemones right off the bat, and an iconic guide to the islands animals adorns the table of contents page. Gorgeous endpapers reveal Sís map of Scranimal Island and its curious denizens. Its impossible to pick a favorite, between the unbelievably cute Pandaffodil and the detested Radishark. Highly recommended. (Ages 6 to 10) --Karin Snelson

My Personal Review:
I was intrigued and amused to see another reviewer say her children were obsessed with Scranimals -- because thats the same reaction we got with our kid!

Jack Prelutsky evidently knows the secret of how to captivate children, especially when teamed up with illustrators like Peter Sís. Nearly every Prelutsky book that enters our home gets the same treatment: fascination, amusement, and above all, lots of reading and re-reading.

One might say that this is not Prelutskys most ingenious work, since its basically a single concept stretched out into a series of variations, not all of which are equally clever. But theres more to it than that. The illustrations are compelling and fun. And much of the poetry is more highly-crafted than one might expect, given the silly first impression the book makes.
A great example is the description of the Bananaconda (that word alone always makes ME laugh!) in which the author slathers syballant syllables in silly sequences. I took the opportunity to point out to our first-grader how a poet describes things differently than other kinds of writers.

I then read it aloud to demonstrate that point, sssimply by exssstending each of the esses on the page. At that point, most kids can make the connection between the sound of the words, and their understanding of S as the sound made by a snake -- something many of them learn in preschool, if not earlier.

And of course those words were written ABOUT a snake. For a kid to learn that words can have multiple layers of meaning, and to learn that concept at such an early age... well, thats really something. And Prelutsky is one of the best at delivering that kind of depth, even when combined with utter silliness.

In short, Scranimals is definitely a worthy addition to any childs collection, at nearly any age.

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