



A Book of Flies Real or Otherwise

Richard Michelson

Leonard Baskin, Illustrator

Marshall Cavendish (Sep 11, 1999)

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The highly acclaimed American sculptor and painter Baskin has teamed up again with author Michelson (whose gallery shows much of Baskin's work) to produce another hit. *A Book of Flies Real or Otherwise* is a delightful mixture of whimsical verse, intriguing information and off-beat illustrations. Of the thirteen insects portrayed, only nine are true flies, but all will be familiar to children. The introduction describes scientific order as "clubs," and grabs the reader's attention with amazing facts. Did you know that the common housefly can flap its wings two hundred times a second?

The real power of this book, however, is the design. Short, funny poems appear on the left, cleanly centered. On the right, Baskin takes liberty with each fly's name and gives us funny and arresting paintings, surrounded by plenty of contrasting white space. The deer fly, for instance, is shown as a trophy with antlers. Each fly is then sketched in realistic black and white, accompanied by a short factual paragraph. The humorous writing is intriguing and sometimes grotesque. Children will be fascinated by the coffin fly, who feeds on dead bodies, and fairy flies (wasps, actually) who are smaller than the period at the end of a sentence. This hard-to-classify book will be thoroughly enjoyed by those who discover it.

LEIGH FORREST (September / October 1999)

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