

Alphabet by Heart: Kindness A to Z

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4U2B Books & Media

(32pp)

978-0-8294-5483-3

About doing and saying what is right to build healthy relationships, Alphabet by Heart models kind behavior, letter by letter.

Jeanne and Mark K. Shriver's didactic picture book *Alphabet by Heart* is about using words to heal and show kindness to others.

With the knowledge that words have the power to make people happy or sad, this book suggests that choosing what to say in each moment is important. It uses rhyming lines and the alphabet to illustrate this principle, and its pages model situations in which children and parents connect to themselves and to others.

The central terms for each letter appear in bold print and in different colors from the surrounding text for clarity. Herein, *B* is connected to the encouragement, with "Believe in yourself / and all that you are" appearing alongside an illustration of a father smiling at his son as the latter tries to sink a basketball in the hoop. In another entry, a girl says "thank you" as someone helps her tie her roller skates, exemplifying gratitude for *G*; and a child is offered a seat in the lunchroom by others, an image of joy for *J*. Some of the text can be adopted as life mottos, as with *C*:

*Care about people,
not the things that you see.
When you care about people,
the happier you'll be.*

Further, inclusivity is more than just a verbal proclamation in this book. In discussing empathy, for example, it encourages fostering heartfelt connections with others, and its take on including people is complemented by the image of a girl in a wheelchair playing volleyball with a girl without visible disabilities. Indeed, the book's characters represent a bevy of skin tones, gender identities, and hair and face types.

The warm images are pleasant in their consistency, with each letter's illustration centering childhood exploration, wonder, and scrappiness. Most are framed in a similar manner. Still, each is distinctive in color choice and character design: there are combinations of cyan blue and salmon pink, barn red and snow white, and rustic brown and leafy green in images featuring shopping, wintertime, and forest settings. And some of the book's later illustrations (*M* takes place at a museum, and *Z* at a zoo) stretch to awesome panoramas showing people at play, learning how to have the best manners and showcasing their zest.

According to the instructive picture book *Alphabet by Heart*, curiosity, wonder, and kindness should direct one's interactions with others.

ALEENA ORTIZ (May 22, 2024)

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