

If You Were Me and Lived in ...Norway: A Child's Introduction to Cultures Around the World

Carole P. Roman

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A perfect balance between simple and sophisticated, this introduction to the language and culture of Norway will fascinate preschoolers.

Call it the pen pal effect: Children who wouldn't sit still for a standard geography lesson are fascinated to hear from other kids like them living in different places. And they learn just as much, if not more, from their peers. That's the magic of Carole P. Roman's picture book series, *A Child's Introduction to Cultures Around the World*. Each book draws readers and listeners into the everyday lives of children in a different country. In Roman's latest entertaining and educational title, children from the "Land of the Midnight Sun" show other kids what it would be like "if you were me and lived in Norway."

Roman clearly understands kids. She starts with simple, colorful drawings that show Norway's shape and its spot on a globe held aloft by two friendly Norwegian children. Roman delivers a fair amount of information in just a few lines, catering to the limited attention spans of the preschool to first-grade set. For instance, she introduces Norway's currency, the *kroner*, with a trip to the store to buy bread. After the kids make their purchase, the shopkeeper thanks them and they reply, "*Din velkommen*." A foreign language has entered the picture quite naturally, without seeming like a lesson at all.

If You Were Me and Lived in ... Norway, like Roman's earlier titles for Mexico, France, and South Korea, is structured for reading aloud to a group of kindergartners. Large text on one page faces full-size illustrations that are easy to see when held up high for kids' inspection. The images appeal to a variety of senses, featuring regional foods like *vaffler* with *krem* (waffles with cream) and regional activities like dog-sled trips with huskies at the helm. Parents and teachers needn't worry about mispronouncing unfamiliar words, as Roman thoughtfully provides a pronunciation guide at the back of the book.

As engaging as it is to enter the homes of our young Norwegian hosts, *If You Were Me and Lived in ... Norway* is not a traditional story book. The characters are anonymous tour guides; readers learn little about them personally. There's no story arc, conflict, or resolution, and nothing in particular happens to the characters. Children's interest may be piqued by this very open-ended presentation, which invites them to picture themselves in the book's pages.

The matching design of all of the books in the series creates a comforting familiarity that will appeal to a young audience. Representative children from each culture point to their home on the globe on each cover; it's that way for France and Norway, and will be the same for Kenya, Turkey, India, and all of the other countries Roman plans to cover over the life of the series. One can picture them nestled together on a library bookshelf and taken out by students time after time. Neither too simple nor too sophisticated, the series is perfect for five- to seven-year-olds, teachers, and parents.

SHEILA M. TRASK (November 26, 2013)

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