

Oh Brother! A Nico and Tugger Tale

Kimberly Sentek

Eumir Carlo Fernandez, Illustrator

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An older child resentful of the attention paid to a new baby brother or sister is a popular theme for children's books; the Little Critter series by Mercer Mayer and the Berenstain Bears by Jan and Stan Berenstain offer just two examples. Kimberly Sentek has made a valuable addition to this subgenre with *Oh Brother! A Nico and Tugger Tale* by telling the story from the viewpoint of two dogs, one already living with a family and the other newly adopted. Sentek allows children to not just relate to the situation but, in an era of blended families, to fully understand the fears that are common to both parties.

Nico is the older dog and Tugger the younger adoptee. The book is evenly divided—first readers see from Nico's perspective why it's a bother to have a new puppy in the house. Nico's uncertainty about his role in the household is also explored. Then, in the book's second half, readers get the viewpoint of Tugger, who can't understand why Nico is so standoffish toward him. The two dogs eventually realize there is room for both of them and that they enjoy each other's company as brothers.

Oh Brother! has many strengths: the characters are sympathetic and enjoyable, and their concerns ring true. The illustrations are cute and consistent, and they clearly convey the emotions of the two dogs as they shift throughout the story. The text is written in rhyme, and while generally good, some verses could have been more concise, which would have helped to deliver a consistent syllable count and rhythm.

Nico wonders about his place in the household, with four verses featuring line counts of nine, five, twelve, and thirteen syllables: "Why don't they love me like they used to? / What wrong did I do? / Is it because I will not share my fluffy bed? / Is it because sometimes I will sit on Tugger's head?" A few pages later, four other verses feature line counts of fifteen, twelve, seventeen, and thirteen syllables, respectively. This is enough to throw off the book's rhythm, and with a little editing, the message and most of the language could be preserved while keeping a better poetic cadence. Most pages don't have this shortcoming, though, and overall the text is light and fun and moves the story along briskly.

Kimberly Sentek has set up a website with free Nico and Tugger crossword puzzles, word searches, and coloring pages. Many readers—children and adults—will hope there are more Nico and Tugger tales as charming as this one following soon.

PETER DABBENE (January 3, 2013)

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