

On Reindeer Watch

Nikki Mask

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On Reindeer Watch is a heartwarming picture book about the joy of focusing on others at Christmas.

In Nikki Mask's charming picture book *On Reindeer Watch*, a girl and her little brother find joy in making sure that Santa's reindeer are cared for.

A rhyming poem celebrates all of the qualities that the girl and her brother love about Christmas, their favorite holiday. They have fun baking cookies, decorating the tree, and seeing the colorful Christmas decorations in their neighborhood. Still, their favorite family tradition is going on reindeer watch—putting out oats, carrots, berries, and spices for the deer to eat and leaving notes of appreciation for their work to make Christmas special.

Later, the children wake to signs that the reindeer made an appearance. There are hoofprints on the porch, and the food they prepared has been eaten. The book closes with a suggestion that other families make the reindeer watch part of their Christmas traditions too.

Adding appreciation for hard-working animals to the celebration of Christmas, this text is fueled by idealism and excitement: the children are more enthusiastic about caring for the reindeer than they are about their own gifts. Still, the text is short on some crucial details: only four reindeer are named, and no other family members or friends seem to participate in the story at all. This narrative distance is furthered by the fact that the children are unnamed.

Still, the book's illustrations are bright and festive, and they portray the children as bright-eyed, beautiful, and bursting with excitement. The bright snow adorning the buildings and sidewalks evokes a northern setting whose colder elements are made to contrast with the warm interior settings that the children inhabit. An image that shows a reindeer sleeping on the sofa is at odds with a textual indication that no reindeer were spotted, though.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (February 10, 2023)

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