



Sage Smiles: An Illustrated Collection of Poetry

Jet Widick

Kimberly K. Taylor-Pestel

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Sage Smiles is a wry, witty collection that encourages reflections on joy and connection.

Sage Smiles, the third book in a collaboration between poet Jet Widick and illustrator Kimberly Taylor-Pestell, is filled with optimistic, charming meditations on the wisdom and joy to be found in daily life.

A short collection, featuring under twenty poems, the book also contains a preface by Elizabeth Auckland meditating on the miracles that surround people in their daily lives, as well as an introduction by Widick that describes the collaboration's intentions. Thereafter, "Sage Smiles" praises "loyalty like breathing / simple luxuries with whimsies" and encourages an attitude of "less is more / except for quality." The poem illustrates a tug-of-war between internal satisfaction, since many of the praised "simple luxuries" in life are free, and a desire for external connection, as the poem ends: "Love when you beam at me." This balancing act is a theme found throughout the collection, whose poems often speak to topics of human connection and community.

One standout poem, "What Is," begins: "There are no classes to teach what is / Nevertheless—it was ingrained in me / Starting early—love shown daily / warm-hearted souls" and concludes with "everlasting tenderness." The use of both end-line and slant rhymes, as well as similes like "hugs velvety soft as suede," results in visceral warmth. Continuing the theme of textiles, the accompanying illustration shows a crochet hook and ball of yarn alongside a crocheted heart.

Natural images abound too. In "Worldly Vast," the narrator praises "this exquisite earth" on which people live and thrive. In "Kindness Always," an act of kindness is likened to "A sunshine ray / brilliance that / lights the way," thereby improving someone's day.

Metaphor and rhyme are among the primary poetic devices used, and the poems are short, akin to Zen koans that inspire meditation on a given topic. The jaunty curlicues of the lettering also convey a personable warmth throughout the book. Each poem is written in a different font and style, with illustrations accompanying each. "Community Brains," about a "Community of artists / putting their hearts and heads together," appears on a page with a series of disembodied hands all doing different crafts: knitting, writing, sculpting, cooking, and photographing. The preceding poem, "Love," is written on a piece of paper shown on the page, and outside the paper's edges sit an ink pot and pen along with a stamp showing a tiny flourishing branch of a plant. The visual attention to detail brings the poems alive and suggests new themes to ponder.

Wry and witty, with creative formatting to further its surprises and inspirational power, *Sage Smiles* is a collection that encourages reflections on joy and connection.

JEANA JORGENSEN (April 5, 2023)

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