

The Crazy Untamable, Tamable Tongue: Love with Words, Words with Love

Cynthia M. Warren

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*In the instructive picture book *The Crazy Untamable, Tamable Tongue*, a sharp-tongued boy has his tempers tamed by a girl's love.*

In Cynthia M. Warren's picture book *The Crazy Untamable, Tamable Tongue*, a boy learns about the importance of tempered speech.

A schoolboy who is prone to hurtful words tells a classmate that he doesn't like her hair, insults his big brother, tells off his father when he's asked to clean his room, and says that his friends' baseball skills are not as good as his own. With each offense, his tongue grows longer. It reaches from his nose all the way down to his toes. Though initially amused by this development, the boy then becomes distraught. With the help of a girl who speaks with sweet words, he eventually learns how to keep his tongue under control.

Told in rhyming prose, the book leans on repetition, capitalization, and spacing in the boy's thoughts and spoken words to achieve maximum impact. The delight that he feels while insulting others is effectively juxtaposed to his later distress. And the boy's feelings are reemphasized via how his words are shared on the page:

*But I was also feeling a little PROUD...
Obnoxious! Big! A goof and LOUD!
Fiery, grand, just, and right.
(I had a hard time being polite.)*

Biblical verses and symbolism are used to flesh out messages about speaking with good intentions, while references to lions, the sun, and rivers convey the scary, profound, and calming nature of righteous speech. However, once the girl names these comparisons, the story comes to an abrupt conclusion.

While the book's story is effective with its messaging, its illustrations are not complementary. They feature rough graphite and colored pencil strokes that blend together, resulting in splotchy, dirty, and hazy lines. And they are stylistically inconsistent, with the characters appearing stretched and distorted depending on their expressions and gestures. Their arms and hands change in size and proportion; their guiding lines and instances of erasure are visible in the finished product. And the characters' expressions—including those of the girl whose hair the boy insults and his baseball peers—have an age-inappropriate, nightmarish quality.

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ALEENA ORTIZ (May 4, 2023)

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