



## Footprints in the Snow

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Wolf is feeling offended and indignant: All the wolves he's ever read about are nasty, scary, and greedy! To set the record straight he decides to write a story about a nice wolf. But will his wolfish instincts get the better of him after all?

Author/illustrator Mei Matsuoka's simple yet sophisticated art imbues Wolf's story of searching for a friend with wry humor and subtle wit.

## **Footprints in the Snow Details**

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Author : Mei Matsuoka

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## From Reader Review Footprints in the Snow for online ebook

### Luisa Knight says

A wolf decides to write a story about a "nice" wolf to set the fairy tales straight. The ending will leave you smirking.

Ages: 4 - 8

#winter #snow

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### Chance Lee says

Cute artwork in a picture book about a wolf writer who writes a fiction story about a wolf who behaves differently than wolves do. Even in fiction, the wolf learns that characters must remain true to their instincts.

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### Betsy says

Children's librarians spend, I'd say, at least 2% of their lives reading pictures books (it'd be longer, but those puppies are blessedly short). And I suspect that reading that many of them does something to your brain. You notice patterns. You pick up on weirdnesses. And sometimes, once in a great big while, you crack. There is a kind of picture book out there (and I'm looking at YOU, Miss Spider) where a creature goes against its god-given normal instincts and goes from predator to silly happy friend. Even if you can't recall one off the top of your head I'm sure that you've seen those books where some poor carnivorous wretch is left bereft and alone because everyone assumes that they are going to eat them. Then, by the end of the story, the creature somehow proves itself to be a sweet and happy fellow; everything is sunshine and roses, la-di-da-di-da. Read enough of these and you find that you've been unconsciously tearing out the follicles on your head, one by one, in an effort to distract yourself from the pain of dealing with the book. Fortunately, there is a balm for your swollen noggin, and even better it's British. *Footprints in the Snow* by Mei Matsuoka manages to balance out the sweet with the knowing and in doing so comes up with a book faithful to the predator and honest with the prey.

Wolf's enjoying a nice snowy day inside, eating his milk and cookies, reading his books about wolves. Yet as he reads Wolf realizes something. Wolves in books have been getting a pretty bum rap. If they're not frightening boys who cry wolf then they're dressing up as grannies or swallowing live pigs. Determined to take matters into his own hands (paws, whatever) he declares, "I think it's time somebody wrote a story about a NICE wolf." So begins the story of (what else?) Mr. Nice Wolf. In this tale, Mr. Nice Wolf sees some tracks in the snow and decides to investigate. His queries about the owner of the feet meet with fear from various animals that doubt his intent in finding "a new friend". And when at last he finally sees the

footprints' owner... let's just say the instincts of Mr. Nice Wolf and his author can't compete with good intentions at the end of the day.

The easy comparison here is with Jon Scieszka's award winning *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, which isn't entirely fair. I mean, yes in both books the wolves want to set the record straight on how they're viewed in literature. And yes, in both cases the wolves pretty much come off looking the worse for wear because of their efforts. But Matsuoka's story has a very different tone than Scieszka's. Not a better tone or a worse tone. Just a different one. A subdued, chuckle-into-your-hot-cocoa one.

Really, one of the things I enjoyed about this book was that it didn't go 180 degrees in the opposite direction of those saccharine-laden everybody-loves-everybody books. How easily it could have ended up as some nasty, sardonic, sarcastic, almost kid-inappropriate collection of bile. That happens to picture books a lot of the time too, and really it's the best books that strike a perfect balance between the cute and the postmodern. Plus you need a book that a kid is going to enjoy without making the adult reader inclined to pitch the pages against the wall. Matsuoka's text does this. There's something restrained about the writing. Wolf has a very sensible approach to the dearth of nice wolves in picture books. I mean, why not write your own book if there's a gap in the market? The fact that he ultimately fails in his endeavor just endears him to the reader even more (how can you dislike a guy who pounces on his rubber ducky in a fit of hunger?). In this book the sweetness of the character is perfectly balanced out by the carnivorousness of his nature. Fabulous.

The art, for its part, employs a kind of mixed media and paint combo. For example, the scarf of Mr. Nice Wolf appears to be painted newsprint. The kind where an occasional letter will peep through unannounced. There are a lot of wood grains and instances where the sentences will curve around and about the images in the frame. Matsuoka also plays around a bit with fonts, particularly during the part where the different wolf books are discussed, giving the word "greedy" a nice plump look while "nasty" shakes and quivers with internal wormy wriggles.

Now I am a sucker for any picture book that has loads of details because I know all to well the pain of the bored parent. If your child's favorite book of all time is as dull as dishwater then the poor adult reader is going to expire of boredom eventually. If, on the other hand, there are all kinds of nifty little nooks and crannies in the book before you, everybody wins. Mei Matsuoka doesn't just provide you with nooks and crannies, though. There are practically whole side stories at work on the fringes of this text. Note, for example, that the front and back endpapers continue the story. I've seen author/illustrator Emily Gravett do the same thing with these seemingly superfluous pages, making me wonder whether or not this is a British thing. Then on the first two-page spread that shows the story beginning you see Wolf sitting in his cozy home, eating some cookies, surrounded by books and mice. On his shelves sit the stuffed versions of the animals that crop up later in his story, and to one end of the room are the pages he will write upon. As for the story he writes, at first you might assume that Wolf's written pages would fill our own, but this is clearly not the case. As you go along you can see his pen or paw at the corners of the page. When the duck (the owner of the footprints) is finally spotted, a reference book showing duck prints for comparison's sake sits at the top of the desk. There are tons of details of this sort peeking out here and there. It's just up to the reader to find them.

I showed the cover of this book to a colleague not long ago and they stared at it in consternation. "Why is there a dog on the cover? I thought you said it was about a wolf." "It is a wolf," I explained. "It's a dog," they countered, and that was such a ripping riposte that I couldn't think of much else to say. To be honest with you it does sort of look a bit like a dog when you get right down to it. I'm not sure how an artist is supposed to distinguish between dogs and wolves when their style is as bold as Matsuoka's. Actually, if you go into the book you will see that the wolf writing the story is a nice stormy gray color. It's the wolf

protagonist, Mr. Nice Wolf, that is brown and dog-like.

The book might pair beautifully with another particularly nice readaloud title *My Lucky Day* by Keiko Kasza (particularly since both end with a knock at the door). Of course, in Kasza's story the predator ends up losing out on the encounter whereas the ending of *Footprints in the Snow* suggests that maybe Wolf will fare better in his footprint following than his fictional creation. A good readaloud is a rarity, so I am pleased to announce this to be one of the best I've read all year. Visually enticing and effective when read in front of large groups, there's something for everyone in this tasty morsel. Give it a try.

Ages 4-8

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### **Jackie says**

I liked this story. The animals can talk and have some human backgrounds, but the characters are animalistic. Very funny that the beginning is...

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### **Ruth Ann says**

As the story opens, wolf is reading all of his books about wolves and in each of them the wolf is depicted as greedy, mean, or bad. Hence, wolf is motivated to write his own story containing a "good" wolf. But is a wolf always a wolf? The non-conclusive ending allows the reader to decide. This book could easily be used to introduce a writing lesson on characters or to spark a discussion on stereotypes. It might also be fun to have kids locate several stories with wolves and investigate if all of them are "big & bad". A different take would be to pair this fiction book with a nonfiction one on animal tracks/footprints.

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### **Tasha says**

Wolf knows that most books portray wolves to be evil, greedy and cruel. So he sets out to write his own book about a nice wolf. The book starts with footprints in the freshly-fallen snow that may lead him to a new friend. Following the trail of footprints, Mr. Nice Wolf discovers that no one trusts him to be a friend, thinking he is tracking breakfast or lunch instead. When Mr. Nice Wolf reaches the duck who made the tracks he has been following, his natural instincts get the best of him and the duck looks so delicious! Wolf is torn out of his story as he falls into the bathtub where a rubber ducky is bobbing. After drying off, Wolf hears a knock on the door and when answering it finds a trail of footprints leading away in the fresh snow.

This book is just as nicely designed as it is written. Matsuoka has created a book with perfect action and style for children. His text is light and inviting, though the story is deeply layered, making the book very approachable. The parts of the book that are Wolf's story have illustrations that are bordered in wood and often have Wolf's hand drawing in them. A delightful and subtle way to keep children understanding that this is a story within a story.

Matsuoka's illustrations are filled with small details. The warmth of Wolf's house in the beginning of the book is brought to life with the tiny touches of munched cookies, books strewn across the floor, and a roaring

fire. Her illustrations tell the story almost as much as the text does. The two are inseparable and unite to become a very special picture book.

Capturing the power of imagination, the joy of a hunt across a snowy landscape, the fun of creating your own story, this beautifully designed book is perfect for wolf story times. Appropriate for ages 3-6.

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### **Carolyn Stover says**

Review given by a 4 year old friend ❤️? it was a good book. I liked the pictures. Especially of the mice. I liked the wolf talking to all the animals!

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### **Hξα???? ?ι???? says**

Interesting take on wolves in stories.

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### **Seema Rao says**

A wolf tries hard to reframe his public image by writing a book about wolves, only to see that in life he is about to be tested.

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### **Liza Gilbert says**

This is the story of a wolf who decides there are too many bad stories about wolves and wants to create a good one. He follows footprints in the snow to find a nice friend and all the creatures he meets do not want to talk to him out of fear they will be eaten. Even though a wolf would have been able to smell the identity of the creature who left the tracks, the reader is led through an are-you-my-mother? type hunt. The wolf reverts to his natural tendencies (wanting to eat others) only for the book to have a happy ending as all the creatures meet together.

Not only does the story lack any kind of spine, the message about changing who you are in order to influence the opinions of others is appalling.

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### **Wendy says**

Cute.

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### **Scope says**

Kids like cyclical books. They enjoy the familiarity that comes with repetition and knowing that the story will loop around to the beginning. *Footprints in the Snow* is a story within a story that has a nice loop at the end, leaving young readers to ponder how the story concludes. Definitely not your cookie-cutter title, and not one for “must have a clear happy-ending” kids (Scope Notes Note: There is nothing wrong with that), *Footprints* will be most successful with clever young readers who like their books a little mischievous.

The story is based upon a fact of life. That there are not many stories about wolves who are nice. Wolf sets out to write a story that will change that. His story within the story begins with “Mr. Nice Wolf” following a set of footprints outside his door in the hopes of finding a new friend. Mr. N. Wolf runs into a squirrel, a rabbit, and a frog, all of whom flee in fear. It is his last encounter, with a tasty-looking duck, where Mr. Nice Wolf begins to let his instincts get the best of him. Just before he devours the duck, the story is abruptly stopped. We find that the author, Wolf, is in the bathtub writing and has let his mind wander. Relieved that he stopped his story before it became another ‘bad wolf’ tale, he hears a knock at the door. Upon stepping outside, Wolf finds a set of footprints and sets off to find out who they belong to. And the story continues...

The illustrations are clear and basic in layout with subtle details thrown in. Readers will find new things to look at with repeat readings. Text is also used to nice effect here, with words winding and floating on various pages. Appropriate fonts (and font sizes) are used to express emotions when it is needed.

This is the kind of book to which kids won’t declare their love at once. I envision young readers putting this one down with a sly smile on their face, thinking about what will happen next.

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### **Chinasa Izeogu says**

There are a few absolute truths in life and one of them is if you introduce a wolf into a story it will likely want to eat one of the other characters. What makes Mei Matsuoka's story, "Footprints in the Snow" so entertaining is that it centers on a wolf who would like to write a story with a nice wolf in it. However, the other characters, ahem, the prey, are well aware of the deadly danger that wolves pose.

"But as he spoke Mr. Wolf took a good long look at the duck..." and well you'll have to read the rest yourself to see whether he was able to fight his instincts.

Similar Book:

Scieszka, Jon. *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by A. Wolf

Complementary Books:

Fleming, Candace. *Oh, No!*,

Klassen, Jon. *I Want My Hat Back.*

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### **Kristen says**

Wolf is not thrilled to find that in every book he reads, wolves are portrayed as the villain. Wolf decides to write and illustrate his own story about a wolf, Mr. Nice Wolf. No matter how nice Mr. Nice Wolf is, he is shunned by the other animals. Love that this is a story within a story, and that Wolf writes to make his own version of how others should see him. And thanks, Matsuoka, for not making this a sappy story, but for

leaving the ending open for the reader to continue.

Add this one to the wolf units!

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**Katy Vance says**

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Great. Loved the ending.

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