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The Five Chinese Brothers (Paperstar)



Synopsis

The classic picture-story about five clever brothers, each with a different extraordinary ability, has been in print for over 50 years. "An original nonsense tale told with...spirit and gusto." -- The Horn Book

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 710L (What's this?)

Series: Paperstar

Paperback: 64 pages

Publisher: Puffin Books; Reissue edition (June 18, 1996)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0698113578

ISBN-13: 978-0698113572

Product Dimensions: 8.8 x 0.2 x 7 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (281 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #8,085 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 inÂ Books > Children's Books >

Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > Multicultural #621 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Humor

Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

This charming book has taken a lot of heat in recent years for not being politically correct enough to suit modern sensibilities. The author and artist have been accused of non-PC conduct, the most famous charge being the representation of all Chinese as looking alike through out the book. I remember reading this book as a young child back in the 60s and being entranced by its clever story of five look-alike brothers with supernatural powers who save their own from an unjust punishment. I've thought of this book many times over my 45 years, remembering it with a fondness and awe unmatched by many other books--children's or no, that I have read. I have only recently revisited this fondly remembered favorite, all too mindful of the criticisms launched against it, paying close attention to the text and art. The book, originally written in 1938, deserves to be judged not by our modern sensibilities, but for where the world was at the time it was written. Keeping that in mind, the book becomes less the poster child for racism than a respectful retelling of an old Chinese folktale. Careful study of the artwork will reveal that aside from the identical brothers (and their

resemblance to each other is an unassailable plot point from the original folk story) there is as much effort placed into creating depictions of peripheral characters as there generally is in any children's book. The pen and watercolor wash drawings are simplified as one would expect for the age group that is the target audience, but each person rendered is an individual in facial expression, hair style and dress. Complaining of the sameness of all Chinese depicted becomes mystifying--as aside from similar dress and skin tone used the charge proves to be specious.

For 30+ years I've had the images and themes of "The Five Chinese Brothers" in my mind--I haven't seen it or read it in years. I remember reading it in the morning with my mother helping me along--the first book I remember reading. I remember thinking how brave and clever the brothers were. How wonderful that they looked out for each other. How they overcame injustice. How they worked together. How they lived in another culture that was foreign to me. It was my first realization that there were other cultures, other lands. My mother talked to me about how the world is a very big place. A few years later, when I started to meet kids of different colors and races and background I was curious, I wanted to know who people were. And I remember being taunted by some of the kids in school for being one of a couple of Jews in my class. Not by all the kids--only by kids who heard things at home from their parents and other adults. They didn't get that from stories, they got it from the conversations around the dinner table. I remember being thrilled by the adventures of the brothers. It can be a dangerous world, and I learned that no matter how dire the circumstances, through ingenuity, love, courage and community we can prevail. I also remember as a three year old being terrified by a dump truck rumbling down the street. And as an 8 year old by a neighbor with a mental illness. And as a kindergartner falling asleep on the back of the bus and missing my stop. The world is full of wonderful adventures, stories, treasures, dangers, successes, opportunities to learn and grow and develop. They don't have any inherent meaning or message, not until we add them in. Any of these can lead to hatred or to happiness, to suffering or to wisdom.

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