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Fire Truck vs. Dragon by Chris Barton (review)

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BARTON, CHRIS *Fire Truck vs. Dragon*; illus. by Shanda McCloskey. Little, 2020 [38p]

Trade ed. ISBN 978-0-316-52213-7 \$17.99

E-book ed. ISBN 978-0-316-52209-0 \$9.99

Reviewed from galleys

R 4-7 yrs

Though “it might surprise you that a fire truck and a dragon can in fact be good friends,” this truck and dragon, who tell their story in dialogue, are besties. The duo boast of their contributions, but they’re always teasing the expected fiery/watery payoff and then averting it, so “everyone loves having us at campfires” not for fire and water but for sharing spooky stories and bringing marshmallows; next, they’re popular at the neighborhood barbeque not for charring but for contributing tasty side dishes, and so on. The neighborhood kids are clearly waiting for a more dramatic event between the two, though, and finally the friends go “head-to-head” in an ultimate showdown: a staring contest. The disappointed kids leave, and the fire truck and dragon say goodbye by finally blasting fire and water at each other in the long-awaited battle. This readaloud is playful in its subversion of kids’ expectations, with the fire truck and dragon building up each other’s skillsets rather than fighting. McCloskey’s art, in saturated watercolor with thick lines, drops in some humorous background details (for example, the dragon supplies blankets to keep the kids warm in the winter while one kid gestures toward the unlit fireplace with a question mark over his head). The fire truck is anthropomorphized, adorned with a goofy grin and windshield-wiper eyes, while dragon is a bit on the scraggly side, further emphasizing their physical differences. With a lot of reread potential to catch the background characters’ expressions, this is sure to be a favorite at bedtime and storytime. NB

BEASON, LAYLA *Dinosaurs Can't Roar*; illus. by Mariano Epelbaum. Sourcebooks Wonderland, 2020 [36p]

Trade ed. ISBN 978-1-4926-9365-9 \$17.99

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 4-7 yrs

A cartoony, upright, polo-shirted T. rex gets schooled in his own anatomy in this rhymed text aimed at the dino-mad pre-and primary crowd. A Black, female, pith-helmeted paleontologist points out what’s wrong with his image. First, there’s the posture. “We’ve seen Rex look tall, just straight up and down,/ with his head in the sky and his tail on the ground,/ but the doctor declares the posture that’s best/ is his head pointing east and his tail pointing west,” to which Rex replies in a cartoon speech bubble, “This feels strangely comfortable.” He’ll need to add a few feathers, probably down his back; the short arms unfortunately stay, but they probably allow for the strong head and neck muscles that make him a superior chomper. Rex’s buddies are in for a redo as well, as Triceratops sports a more colorful head shield, Stegosaurus learns he does not have a second brain in his butt, and Brontosaurus ditches the moniker Apatosaurus. Then there’s the bad news: none of them can roar, just rumble a bit at best, and two of the them live in different geological periods than the other pair. With a bouncy, info-rich text and great end matter comments that extend the verse explanations, this should be a good choice for a slightly younger audience than Kudlinski’s *Boy, Were We Wrong About Dinosaurs!* (BCCB 1/06). Unfortunately, the digital illustrations let the book down; the body changes are often slight, ephemeral, or even at odds with the text, as when