



Book Review: Worm Loves Worm

Written by J.J. Austrian

Illustrated by Mike Curato

Baalzer & Bray, 2016, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9780062386335

This delightful romp of a picture book explores traditional gender roles in the marriage ceremony. When Worm and Worm declare their love and that they will marry, their friends tell them that there are certain cultural marriage customs that must be observed. “That’s how it’s always been done.” claims Cricket who asserts that he will marry them. Beetle says, “You’ve got to have a best beetle.” Three Bees say the Worms need bride’s bees. The Worms at first agree with their friends’ requirements. There is the matter of rings, music for the ceremony, clothes, cake and flowers. At first the Worms make accommodations by agreeing to go along with “how it’s always been done.” When they are told, “You’ll need to get rings to wear on your fingers...” Worm points out that they don’t have fingers, but the other Worm comes up with a solution—they can wear the rings as belts. The Bees ask, “But which one of you is the bride?” Each Worm agrees to be both bride and groom. The one wearing the bridal dress wears the top hat and the one wearing the tuxedo wears the bridal veil, with the help of Spider who attaches the head apparel with her sticky web. Finally, when Cricket who clings to traditional ways, repeats “That isn’t how it’s always been done,” the Worms, dressed for the ceremony, assert, “Then we’ll just change how it’s done.” “And so they are married ... because Worm loves Worm.”

J.J. Austrian demonstrates his writing talent in creating this groundbreaking book that will challenge children’s perceptions of gender roles. There are few, if any, simple picture books that explore same sex weddings or practices. The story is mainly told with dialogue between the characters. The story demonstrates the silliness of requiring certain traditions for all weddings. The humor in the text demonstrates how a wedding can be a celebration that matches the needs and desires of the couple uniting in love. In this way, *Worm Loves Worm*, is a book that tells a universal story.

Books that could be paired with this picture book would include Leslie Newman’s *Donovan’s Big Day* (2011) and Cynthia Chin Lee’s *Operation Marriage* (2011), both of which address same sex marriage from a young person’s perspective.

The illustrator, Mike Curato, sets the expressive characters off with a white background that makes them stand out. Simple touches add to the characterizations. For example, the Cricket wears a vest and glasses and consults a book when making his declarations about how it’s always been done. Droll touches increase the humor, such as when Spider winks at the reader about an inside joke.

Marilyn Carpenter, Professor Emeritus Eastern Washington University, Spokane, WA

