

Hilde Myklebust/Akin Duzakin: *YLVA AND THE WILD GOATS*

book review

“A tale of beating and braving problems for the not-so-big amongst us”

You don't need superpowers to do super nice things. The picture book, *Ylva and the Wild Goats*, shows us how being brave can be more than enough.

What catches my eye the moment I open *Ylva and the Wild Goats* are Akin Düzakin's illustrations. They have a kind of texture about them that captivates me. They feel both dusty and crisp at the same time, shifting the focus from great swathes of archetypal Norwegian landscapes filled with steep mountains and fjords to close-ups of the shaggy fur of billy goats, wild and terrifying.

The images are true to life. You can zoom right into each snippet to make out each strand of hair, then zoom out again to give way to fresh air, sky and sea.

We can understand the story through its pictures just as well as through its words. Which is likely what many children will end up doing. While the grown-ups are reading aloud, their child will be closely examining the illustrations.

There is quite a lot of text in the book. For this reason, it would be perfect for children in the early years of primary school, who have just learnt to read on their own. I suspect that the illustrated format of the story might make children aged 9-10 regard the book as a little childish (they are used to illustrated books targeting younger children) and so I think that *Ylva and the Wild Goats* will probably be best read by grown-ups to children.

This story can still be enjoyed by both little and larger children. It emphasises that of course it is possible to be a hero without having to rely on any superpowers. The totally normal powers of a human being and a little courage are all you need.

Daring to look after nature

The narrative, in both its words and its imagery, sets a spotlight on a little person out and about in vast, majestic nature. The little person might be a child, but she is a brave one. A girl who cares for animals, regardless of whether they're acting threatening or being threatened.

Ylva is on a trip with her Dad to their mountain cabin. On their way there they stumble across a dangerous billy goat, one that has scared off many a hiker, and even rammed people into the fjord. He's blocking the path with sharp horns and a dark glare. Just as her Dad is about to start some physical retaliation, Ylva grabs a hot dog bun from her backpack and places it down on the ground.

Ylva treats the billy goat with kindness, and before long the billy goat is paying them back when they really need it.

Completely intuitively, Ylva treats nature in a way that's beneficial for both animals and humans. Without being shamefully moralistic, the book can be read as a call for mankind to look after the animals around them, even if it demands from them a lot of effort and nerves.

Safe framework

Ylva is a confident girl. She explores nature on her own terms and her father doesn't put any restrictions on her development, which is nice to see. Nowadays there are far too many children's books where the protagonist's family lacks confidence in them.

Hilde Myklebust paints the close relationship between Ylva and her Dad as straightforward. Her Dad is openly envious of Ylva's ability to understand animals:

"I just... I just feel like I can see what animals are thinking. They speak a body language that I can understand a little bit."

"That must be nice," Dad smiles, squeezing her shoulder."

These aren't magical powers, however. Ylva just uses her heart and her head. Hilde Myklebust shows children that nature is filled with challenges we must confront and conquer. If we feel confident in our abilities, it is easier to trust the things we find frightening, too.

"Ylva and the Wild Goats is an engaging tale which provides its readers with the idea that even though they are small, they can still manage a lot."

NRK Cultural radio P2 21 April 2020