Home and Away Review

There is no way *Home and Away* is just a kid's book. If John Marsden is involved, there is bound to be deep, dark themes at the books heart, and with the help of Matt Ottley, *Home and Away* is simply a masterpiece. With the books cleverly drawn illustrations, swapping between professional and simplistic childlike drawings, it will cut you to the quick, and leave you reflecting on every value you’ve ever held towards immigrants.

John Marsden is famous for making the reader question their values, and this book is no exception. The book shows the journey of a refugee family as they flee a terrible war. There’s just one catch, the family is from Australia. This book is fabulous for showing you just how easy the story of a refugee could be our story.

One of the most moving pictures of *Home and Away* depicts a soldier throwing food rations to an enormous crowd, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge in ruins in the background. Your eyes are drawn to the soldier first, primarily because of the natural reading path that our eyes follow. Then you slowly realise the other elements of the picture; first the soldier, then the crowd, and finally the bridge. This is what all great pictures should: let you gradually discover every meaning within the picture; and it has done this beautifully.

*The Island* by Armin Greder is another picture book that relates closely to *Home and Away*. Both comment on our preconceptions about refugees. *Home and Away* highlights the horrors endured by refugees and how easily it could be us in their position. Whereas *The Island* comments on us as a society, and how we deal with refugees.

Why though? Why write a children’s book about such dark and horrific topic? The answer is simple; because we need to know. We as a society close our eyes against this issue. We as individuals have all turned away at some point in our lives, at some important issue; especially this one. These books force us to turn back around and make us look at the issue with new clarity. Especially *Home and Away*. Both books are two of the most insightful picture books on the subject of asylum seekers.

*Home and Away* rocks your world. It messes with your head and leaves you pondering on it for days afterwards. Two things that all metaphoric picture books should do and *Home and Away* has achieved this beautifully. Younger readers will find it confronting, there’s no doubt.

I would recommend ages seven and up because the themes are very dark and it does deal with a lot of death. Nevertheless, *Home and Away* is a fantastic picture book, and something we would all benefit from reading.

10 out of 10

Lachlan Hoyle