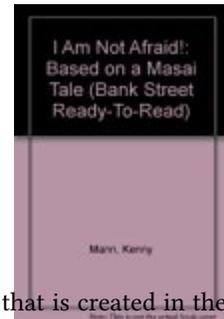


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kenny Mann. *I am not Afraid': Based on a Masai Tale*. New York: Gareth Stevens, 1997. 32 pp. \$4.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8368-1692-1.

Reviewed by Sarah Manyika (University of California, Berkeley)
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'I am not Afraid!' is a story of two brothers who travel together while tending their cattle. There is no reference to a geographical or cultural setting in this story but the author's note indicates that it is based on a Masai tale. The youngest brother, Leyo, is frightened when the river roars at him for "stealing" its water and when the tree from which he chops firewood accuses him of "stealing" its branches. Such conversations between humans and inanimate objects of nature are an accurate reflection of a style that is common in many Masai tales.

Tipilit (the elder brother) shows Leyo how to take from nature without being afraid. He explains to Leyo that if he takes only what he needs and no more, he does not have to fear the river or the trees. Tipilit's character exemplifies courage and bravery which are two character traits highly valued amongst the Masai. Leyo learns much from his elder brother on how to be respectful rather than fearful of nature. At the end of the story Leyo is caught by what the author describes as a nine-headed "demon." It would have been more accurate for the author to refer to this nine-headed being by its traditional name of "oga" or to refer to it as a "one-eyed monster" rather than label it a "demon." When Leyo is caught by the one-eyed monster, Tipilit once again comes to the rescue by fighting off the monster and showing no fear. The book concludes with Leyo modeling the fearlessness of his brother.

The strength of this book lies in its exploration of the importance of respecting nature. Young children will

also be captivated by the suspense that is created in the face of fearful events. The author does a fine job of creating and building suspense through a well crafted story line. The book is, however, weak in its illustrations—which are at times inaccurate and misleading. Many of the illustrations depict large bodies of water which are an inaccurate representation of the topography of Masailand. Large bodies of water are infrequent in Masailand. Indeed, the story begins with the statement that "the brothers were looking for water and green grass for their cows" (p. 5) and yet the accompanying picture, and many of the subsequent pictures, indicate that large bodies of water are a regular feature of the terrain. Another example of weak illustrations is the brothers' clothing. The matching bright red robes secured at the waist by rope are more reminiscent of stereotypical Roman togas than of Masai clothing.

Children's stories based on the Masai are now relatively plentiful in children's literature and as interesting as this book may be, stories that reflect a greater variety of the cultures in East Africa would be a welcome change. In future, the author of this book might consider drawing on her extensive research to show the diversity of lifestyles in this region.

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