

Gus Becomes a Big Brother: An Adoption Story

Heather S. Lonczak

Claudia Varjotie, Illustrator

Heather S Lonczak (Nov 1, 2019)

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This bighearted and eventful picture book concerns itself with how families cultivate love.

Heather S. Lonczak's picture book *Gus Becomes a Big Brother* clarifies the adoption process through an endearing canine family.

Three-year-old Gus is the only son of the Barkers. He's eager to meet his new sibling, but that won't happen for months. In a realistic portrayal of adoption, the Barkers fill out forms, decorate a spare bedroom, meet an agency worker, find a match, bring home Pacco (a baby chow hound), and spend time adjusting. Throughout, Gus's parents guide him by talking about sharing and handling feelings.

The book ably explains what it's like for a whole family to anticipate a new member and to face special challenges, such as bonding and feeding hurdles. Gus is quick to follow his parents' lead, which keeps new situations upbeat. The story concludes when Gus is proud to tell strangers that he's Pacco's big brother.

Geared at adults who need to introduce adoption to their kids, this informative guide captures the patience that everyone strives for despite the involved steps. It is refreshing in admitting that even adults feel irritation. That Pacco is a dog of a different breed alludes to transracial adoptions without delving into related details.

The book's ratio of text to illustrations is dense, and some of its conversations run long. Prosy sentences repeat information that the art shows, as with a description of Gus as being covered in mud, or when the text details what the family sees on a computer screen. The text also brings up emotions, like excitement, that the dogs' faces make clear, slowing the book's read-aloud rhythms.

Cheerful and adorable, the book's illustrations are packed with background details, from toys to Gus's drawings, that enhance the Barkers' household and make it seem like a welcoming space. The interplay between text and art is strongest when there's room for the visuals to fill the imaginative gaps, as when a kitchen scene is used to represent how the Barkers' "got on with their daily lives."

Bighearted and eventful, *Gus Becomes a Big Brother* is a picture book designed to inspire discussions about a growing family's love for each other.

KAREN RIGBY (March 25, 2020)

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