

A Cultivated Wolf



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Wolf arrives in town, ready for something to eat, and heads for a nearby farm, salivating over the prospect of a duck, a pig and a cow.

So far, so not out of the ordinary. But then the story takes a delightful twist because the duck, the pig and the cow are reading books. In fact, so intent upon their books are they that they fail to notice the arrival - at speed - of the hungry, howling wolf.

Bloodshed is averted by the composed reactions of the readers: "What is that awful noise?" complains the cow, one hind leg folded nonchalantly over the other. "I can't concentrate on my book." The others advise him to ignore it - not something to which wolves are accustomed.

It is explained to the wolf that this is an exclusive farm for cultured animals, and that he is therefore unwelcome.

The wolf retreats, offended, but determined to regain his dignity by learning to read. His first tentative attempts don't meet with very much encouragement - "You've got a long way to go" - but gradually he improves until he is reading "with confidence and passion".

His stories entrance his erstwhile menu options to the extent that he is now "one of them" - a cultured book lover. (Presumably his dietary requirements are met more peaceably elsewhere.)

It seems especially apt that this delightful, witty picture book should arrive during the National Year of Reading.

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