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New picture book portrays contemporary haying

"Hey, Hey, Hay! A Tale of Bales and the Machines That Make Them"

By Christy Mihaly,
Illustrated by Joe Cepeda
Holiday House, 2018

Christy Mihaly and Joe Cepeda have combined noteworthy talents in a picture book about haying, aimed at preschoolers, but with charm that also appeals to adults. The story is told in rhyming couplets that reflect the enthusiastic outlook of the bouncy, overall-clad girl who, together with her mother, spends June and July gathering hay for the winter. The text follows each step of the haying process: waiting for the grass to grow tall enough, mowing, fluffing the cut grass with a tedder, waiting for it to dry, raking it

into windrows, bailing it, and finally storing it in the barn. In the middle of the process, the girl and her mother take time out "for switchel and a piece of cake!" Adults stumped when the child listener asks what switchel is will find a recipe for it in the book's concluding pages. Those who remember Laura Ingalls Wilder's "The Long Winter" may recognize it as the "ginger water" Ma sends to Pa and Laura when they are haying in scorching hot weather.

Cepeda's illustrations add a social dimension that expands the meaning of the text. There's the machin-

ery, of course -- machinery-loving kids will pore over the tractor, the baler, and the less familiar tedder, soon mastering vocabulary not necessarily familiar to their parents. But there is also the scenery, with its flat fields, far-away barns and big sky, which takes the book far from Mihaly's Vermont and the pastoral landscape of Jessie Haas' earlier two picture books on haying ("Mowing" and "Hurry!"), and sets it in the 21st century Midwest. The "tale of bales" is vis-

ibly a tale of huge round bales familiar even to city kids who see them out of car windows.



One-Minute Book Reviews

Laura Stevenson



Author Christy Mihaly.



Illustrator Joe Cepeda.

Important in both text and illustrations, the machinery is handled solely by Mom, as is the entire process her daughter narrates with familiar pride.

The one-person scenario is perhaps unlikely, given the grueling process of haying even with big machines, but the point that the mechanical expertise involved in haying (and by implication, farming) is not the exclusive province of white males is well taken.

This is a beautifully pro-

duced book, well-coordinated between Vermont author and California illustrator. The rhymes are catchy, the pictures delightful and instructive.

Families who read it will think of it every time they pass huge bales in a hayfield, and recite in unison, "Listen and I'll tell the tale/of storing summer in a bale."

Laura Stevenson lives in Wilmington and her most recent novels, "Return in Kind" and "Liar from Vermont," are both set on Boyd Hill Road.

