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The Magic Weaver Of Rugs: A Tale Of The Navajo



Synopsis

Two women from a starving tribe go to the Spider Woman for help, and learn to build looms, dye wool, and weave with their very souls. Not until they return home, teach their tribe to weave, and begin to prosper, do they realize the value of their skills. A dramatic explanation of the origin of Navajo rugs and the skills of their weavers.

Book Information

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Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

Customer Reviews

In their second collaboration, Oughton and Desimini (*How the Stars Fell into the Sky*) bring to life another tale from the Navajo, this time explaining the origins of weaving and the famous Navajo rug. "In the beginning," hunger and cold are the source of constant worry until two women seek help through prayer. They are answered by Spider Woman, a forceful figure in shimmering emerald who radiates strength. She magically erects an enormous loom, then leaves the women with instructions: "Hold only beautiful thoughts in your mind while you weave" and "weave with your very souls." Fearful of trickery, the literal-minded women disobey, but the gift of weaving is theirs anyway. Oughton's fluid prose, studded with images ("white wolf of fear," "sun-blistered desert sand"), has a poetic intensity, mirrored by Desimini's lush if dark illustrations. These gleam with an otherworldiness, evoking an atmosphere of mythical wonder, rippling as if painted on fabric. Her Spider Woman, elfin yet godlike, severe yet generous, is especially well rendered. Ages 4-8. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 2-5-Sources for this story are not cited, and therein may lie some of its weaknesses. The Navajo people are starving and cold. Two women travel out into the mesa to pray for help. Here they encounter Spider Woman, a grand and frightening deity who teaches them how to weave rugs and dye wool. When the women tire of the long, hard task, they intentionally make mistakes that will free their souls from the rug. It is only after they return to their people and teach them their newly acquired skills that Spider Woman's gift becomes apparent. Intensely colored, stylized pastel illustrations capture the grandeur and mood of a mythic time. The focus on women and a female deity is refreshing and long overdue. However, inconsistencies mar this book. The weavers, who don't know a thing about cloth or dyeing, are wearing brightly colored post-conquest skirts and blouses. The rugs that the people weave are not especially Navajo, but rather generic striped blankets. And the colors, while attractive, do not reflect the Southwestern landscape. Such discrepancies illustrate the problems inherent in using borrowed cultural material. Carolyn Polese, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book is about how a mythical being taught the native americans to weave rugs to keep them alive, through warmth and profit. The book is illustrated with vivid colors, and the story teaches young children that a temporary answer is not always the answer. It's language is simple, told in the form of a folktale - best read aloud.

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