



March 18, 2020

Writers to Readers Weekly

Writers to Readers Weekly is a weekly newsletter for teachers of English, highlighting short works by contemporary writers for children and teens



Ed. 1, Issue #6

The Herd

My mother is the boss. One day maybe I'll be the boss. When she says walk, we walk. When she stops, we stop. It's because she finds the best food and places to drink or lie down in the mucky mud and cover our bodies so we get all cool when the hot air blows up against our hides.

She's always talking to us. She doesn't make a lot of noises, sometimes just huffs and sighs. Other times she talks to us with moving her nose or shifts side to side or with the way she bats her eyelashes. I like it best when she nudges me closer to her legs. I flap my ears at her in thanks and raise my head and nose up high.

Today though, she speaks to us loudly. Today she raises her trunk in the air and trumpets a long blast that echoes around us. The pack raises their heads and gets wide-eyed staring in the direction mother is. All I see are clouds of dust billowing up and getting closer. Then I see what the rest of my herd see, the rumble beasts.

The rumble beasts roll. They don't run or fly or swim. Inside them live other beasts, hairless like us but much smaller and not as wrinkled. Their hides are red, tan or dark brown like the deepest part of a mud pit. They carry branches with the twigs broken off like from a tree except they are shiny and make a bang noise and something pierces your hide. I saw it happen once to an old female. They took the vines and threw them over her. She fell on her side and went quiet. Mother wouldn't let us go back to get her.

Mother trumpets and stamps her feet. She pushes me forward. We begin to run. The rest of

the herd runs with us. We're afraid of the rumble beasts and the beasts within with the shiny sticks and vines. Mother will keep us safe. Mother always does.

I trip. Mother circles back, loops her trunk under me, holding me until I get my footing and am running again. The rest of the pack is ahead of us kicking up dust and sand. Mother runs slower because of me and I can hear the rumble beasts getting closer.

There's another herd up ahead. If we can make it there, we might be safer with more numbers. We normally avoid them, but the rumble beasts make our herds allies.

The other herd doesn't run with us. They run toward the rumble beasts which arc around with a squealing noise. The other herd keeps advancing. Mother trumpets and our herd joins them to chase the rumble beasts away, going straight for them as they retreat. Soon they are dust clouds on the horizon.

Mother nods at the matriarch of the other herd, offering her thanks. The matriarch nods back.

A male comes toward mother and me. Mother strokes my back gently with her trunk before she raises it and brushes the cheek of the male. He brushes hers back and looks down at me. He reaches out his trunk and I touch the tip of it with my own.

Mother and the male link trunks around one another and flap their ears. This is how she introduces me to my father.

By Paul Coccia

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About this week's author: Paul Coccia

Paul Coccia is the debut author of *Cub* from Orca Book Publishers. Paul received his MFA in Creative Writing from UBC. He lives in Toronto with three dogs. He is often baking cookies and cakes when not writing.



Writers to Readers Weekly Study Guide



Comprehension Questions:

1. Who is telling the story?
2. Where do you think the story takes place?
3. What do you think a 'rumble beast' is?
4. Who do you think the villain is?
5. In what ways do the characters communicate (name as many as you like)?

Discussion/Essay Questions:

1. The author uses terms like 'rumble beasts' or 'shiny sticks.' What do you think is being referred to and why use these terms instead?
2. None of the characters speak using words with one another. Write a few sentences to a few paragraphs where characters communicate without using dialogue.
3. The author chose to tell the story from the point of view of an animal. Pick an animal and imagine you are that animal. Write a few sentences to a few paragraphs as that animal.

Vocabulary – Use each word in a sentence

Billowing	Matriarch	Allies
Trumpets	Horizon	Introduces

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