

## Second Reaction: The Land of Living Things

Turnbull, Victoria. *Pandora*. Clarion Books, 2017.

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This is a story about Pandora, a little fox. She lives alone in a place of broken things. The story begins with her walking on top of debris, a junk pile of discarded belongings: an old bicycle, an umbrella turned upside down, mattresses stacked on top of one another, and dresser chests with drawers out and askew. These items are drawn in black and white, while Pandora walks along with a hint of color.

Much of the meaning in this story is captured within the illustrations. They are highly appealing in a soft, watercolor texture. The mood of Pandora is also reflected in the illustrations. When she is happy, there is color. When she is alone, the picture is a sepia tone. The large pictures and minimal amount of text is appealing to very young children, ages three to five, so they can concentrate on small bits of information and not be overwhelmed with listening. The illustrations promote easy engagement with the story, such as one that shows a bird falling from the sky.

As the story continues, we see more of the bare, depleted land where Pandora lives. Nothing is growing and there are hills and mountains of bareness, which hint at sorrow and despair. She lives alone in a home on stilts, similar to homes in an Asian country. This desolate feeling is a bit depressing at first, but things end happily.

We see her in her home, which we learn she has made from what others have left behind. It's unknown who those people are or when they left. Again, the message is that she is all alone in this world.

Pandora is a “do-gooder” character as she spends her time taking forgotten items home, repairing them, and bringing them back to life. It is reminiscent of “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and the Island of Misfit Toys” where misfit items are together but isolated from the rest of the world.

Pandora’s life changes when a small bird falls from the sky. This is a sign of how our lives may change quickly and suddenly. The bird is injured, so Pandora takes care of it, tucking it away carefully in a comfortable place in which to heal. Over time, the bird does heal, and so does the spirit of Pandora. A stark contrast occurs as Pandora dances about on the heap of old, discarded items while the bird takes wing, flying in the sky. Her bird goes away, but then returns to her. One day the bird does not return and Pandora is alone again. She sits on the pile of discarded belongings again before retreating to her bed, forlorn.

Pandora hibernates in her bed in the background; however, in the foreground we see some life forming in the small box, the former home of the bird. First, a small sprout forms; then, the sprout gets larger, and then medium-sized, and eventually a large plant is growing out of the box. There is not only a plant, but flowers, leaves, and buds of many kinds. With great and sudden activity, even the small little toy bear with Pandora becomes alert.

Next, we see sun and warmth as the plant has spread all over her bedroom, cascading up and arching over the ceiling. The reaction of the very young children sharing this story was slight confusion, as they didn’t understand why there were trees at the end of the story. It was revealed that the bird brought plants back to Pandora.

Finally, as the story ends, Pandora is happy in her surroundings, with her friend and the sound of other birds. The land is no longer a place of broken things, but rather a land of living things as we readers notice lush green hills, rabbits hiding behind a tree, and butterflies fluttering.

### **Work Cited**

*Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and the Island of Misfit Toys*. Directed by William R. Kowalchuk, performance by Kathleen Barr and Scott McNeil, Goodtimes Entertainment, 2001.

### **About the Author**

**Melissa Stinnett** is a professor of reading at Western Illinois University in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses. She teaches reading methods, supervision in the field, early childhood courses, and reading graduate courses, including both in-person and online. One of Stinnett’s research interests is international education; for example, she has studied literacy practices from New Zealand. She has had much experience with early literacy instruction, teaching Reading Recovery as well as kindergarten, first, and second grades. She is a frequent presenter at state and national literacy conferences.