

Lester's
Dreadful Sweaters

K.G. CAMPBELL



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A fastidious fellow, Lester likes everything just so. So when Cousin Clara moves in and knits him truly dreadful sweaters as fast as he can surreptitiously dispose of them, Lester must think of a way to get rid of them for good — or be doomed to look like a clown forever.

Lester's Dreadful Sweaters Details

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From Reader Review Lester's Dreadful Sweaters for online ebook

Kelly says

Clever, funny, tongue-twisting, amazing! Lester's Cousin Clara keeps knitting dreadful sweaters for Lester.

La Coccinelle says

Something about this one made me a little uncomfortable. The poor kid was never allowed to say no and constantly had the grown-ups' wills imposed on him. I'm not sure that's a great message to be sending (kids need to learn about consent, too). Lester was forced to wear all these horrible sweaters; people treated him differently, and he wasn't happy. The more he tried to get rid of the sweaters, the worse the problem got. It was frustrating.

The illustrations were cute (I especially liked Lester's little dog), but I just can't get past the icky feeling this one left me with. Kids need to know that it's okay to say no when something is making them uncomfortable. Lester's parents should've supported him rather than the crazy knitter who, as it turned out, might not have been a cousin after all.

Elisabeth Cole says

I normally really enjoy quirky picture books, the quirkier the better. "Lester's Dreadful Sweaters" is supposed to be quirky but tries way too hard and instead just seems strange. The way the dialog was written came across as clunky and odd to me and made it hard to understand what was going on. I couldn't figure out what the point of the story was until I read the synopsis. And don't get me started on the creepy clowns...

Betsy says

When writing a picture book it can sometimes be a good idea to take a universal childhood annoyance and then build upon it in a satisfactorily ridiculous manner. And kids, let's face it, are often annoyed. They have to eat vegetables and take baths and take out the trash and any number of grumble-worthy daily events. And though I have no evidence to support it, I have a theory about bad gifts from relatives. I think that's something that crosses space and time and language and culture. I think that you could find a kid in China, a kid in Tanzania, a kid in Peru, and a kid in Canada, all of whom have had to tolerate subpar gifts from well-meaning aunts, uncles, etc. We hold these truths to be self-evident that gift giving is an art. And when that art is perverted or twisted into something wrong and unholy, it can wreck havoc with a child's everyday life. Enter *Lester's Dreadful Sweaters*. You think you had it bad when Great-Aunt Hilda sent you twenty pairs of off-white tams? Buddy, you ain't seen nuthin' yet.

When Lester is informed that Cousin Clara will be staying with his family he thinks little of it. And everything is fine at first (Lester's a little anal retentive and fortunately she doesn't muck with his stuff). But the boy has no idea what he's in for when she informs him one day that, "I made you a sweater." And whatta

sweater. It may in fact be the worst sweater Lester has seen in his entire life. After wearing it to school Lester finds that the sweater has conveniently become shrunk in the wash. No matter. Cousin Clara is, as she says, a "curiously speedy knitter". And from her knitting needles erupt sweater after sweater, each beating the last out in terms of horrific awfulness. It isn't until Lester uses his head after a birthday party and enlists the help of some good-natured clowns that he solves his sweater problem and even manages to break out of his shell a little.

There is some understanding out there that a good first sentence is imperative to a children's novel. I would take that one step farther and say that it can do wonders for a picture book as well. Listen to how Campbell chooses to begin this book: "Cousin Clara's cottage was consumed by a crocodile. Luckily, Cousin Clara wasn't in it." It is surprising to find that this is Campbell's debut because his writing is remarkable. Clipped and catchy. Unafrfraid to use big words that are there on the page simply because they sound so good. The book works because everything is understated to a beautiful degree. Catcalls at school are simply put as, " . . . Enid Measles made a less-than-pleasant remark." Explanations regarding Lester's sweaters' strange fate vary from "What a mysterious accident" to "It's an inexplicable tragedy." And of course the story works beautifully within itself. It is true to its own strange internal logic.

Lester is a very interesting picture book hero in that he is a brave, yet put-upon neurotic. Neurotics are usually portrayed in books as simpering cowards, clutching their hand sanitizers and avoiding any and all dogs. Lester may measure his socks to make sure they are sufficiently even and he may keep a notebook of everything from "Forty-Four Foul Foods" to "Stinky Things Beginning With B" but he does not pale in the face of adversity. Heck, when he first hears about Cousin Clara's home his reaction is not to register horror or fear like his parents but rather to get good and angry (presumably at the crocodile). Later, when he finds himself at war with Clara's unholy knitting speed he uses his brain to do away with the intolerable woolen garments.

And they are terrible. They're horrible. They're so magnificently bad that it is clear from the outset that K.G. Campbell was both author and artist on this book. Had someone else done the pictures I don't think the writer could have counted on them to render Cousin Clara's sweaters half as atrocious as they deserve to be. It can be difficult to do justice to a lines like, "It was shriveled yet saggy. It has holes where it shouldn't and none where it should. It was a less-than-pleasant yellow and smothered with purple pom-poms." It is magnificent in its horror and Lester's misery is palpable from the page. Every sweater, in fact, outdoes the last in terms of sheer grotesqueness. The pencil crayon art is the perfect medium too, giving a soft hue to Lester's dire situation. Not that Campbell won't ratchet up the horror when he needs to. In one particularly memorable spread we see Lester kneeling with the red dripping shreds of a sweater in one hand and the world's sharpest scissors in the other. It's a scene straight out of a horror film and the only thing more frightening than the unapologetic wool gore is Cousin Clara's expression as she holds up a work of feathers and striped feet and would be enough to drive a second grader mad. Horror for the post-preschool set, then.

We hear a lot about picture books helping kids to put a face to their fears, but what about their annoyances? I understand the need for folks to write books about fearing the dark, a new bed, the bathtub drain, etc. But once the kids have outgrown some of those smaller fears they're going to have much worse ones to contend with. Relatives that insist on kissing you on the lips. Neighborhood dogs that always bark at you. Parents who insist on putting you to bed at the same time as your little sibling. For them, folks like K.C. Campbell put a face on their grievances and give them hope that maybe they'll find a solution to their own problems. And with *Lester's Dreadful Sweaters* as a guide, there is hope for us all.

For ages 4-8.

Elizabeth A says

"Cousin Clara's cottage was consumed by a crocodile. Luckily, Cousin Clara wasn't in it."

When a picture book for young readers starts that way, you know that you are in for a fun ride. The only problem, as far as Lester is concerned, is that Cousin Clara comes to live with them, and brings along her knitting needles and is determined to knit him sweaters. Adults are often guilty of giving hideous gifts to kids, and Cousin Clara is no exception. What is poor Lester to do?

This is a cute, quick read with lovely art. I especially loved the expressions the dog had on his face throughout this story. As an Aunt myself, I was rather fond of Cousin Clara. Elementary school aged kids, who need to obey seemingly random decrees by adults, will empathize with Lester I think.

Liza Gilbert says

Inspired, divine, hilarious, and just plain brilliant. With text that is reminiscent of Lemony Snicket and illustrations that channel Charles Addams, this picture book is an absolute gem amid too-cutesy and overly "charming" books that sometimes flood this portion of the book market.

This is the kind of picture book that you not only enjoy sharing with children, but buy copies of for your adult friends and family.

Lorna says

I adored the illustrations and overall, I liked the premise of Lester's cousin who knits ghastly sweater after ghastly sweater in this cute and quirky story. There were a few awkward page turns where I felt a bit confused and wondered if I missed something, and had to go back to see if I missed a page, but alas, I didn't. It is a wordier picture book, so I'd recommend this for 3rd grade and up.

Skye Kilaen says

You know that cousin, that no one knows how they're related, but they keep showing up at family gatherings? Cousin Clara is THAT cousin. Except she doesn't get drunk or make inappropriate jokes or try to borrow money or set the couch on fire by accident. She KNITS. Horrible, horrible sweaters that Lester's parents insist he wear. Is he doomed?

One of our favorite children's picture books about families, even though it diverges from the shiny happy mode that many kids' books tend to favor.

Melody says

Oh, this was a fun book! I am in love with the dog who is drawn with the cutest expressions. The drawings are whimsical and weird, the story is odd and inventive. I could read this one out loud over and over again. From the beginning, where Lester measures his socks to make sure they are even, to the end, when Cousin Clara finds her people, it's just an unmitigated delight. There is also plenty to look at on every page, which practically guarantees success at bedtime. Lester is a quirky and interesting kid who clearly has enough backstory to support several more books, and I hope K.G. gets right on that.

Hannah Mousha-book says

“No one knows who’s cousin Cousin Clara really is” so she comes to stay with Lester’s family. When Cousin Clara knits Lester a sweater he is delighted, until he sees it. The sweater is very ugly and nothing Lester would like to wear with his neat ties and nicely combed hair. So everyday he devises a way to get rid of the sweater and everyday Cousin Clara knits him an even more horrifying one. Can he get rid of them all in time for Enid’s birthday party? Campbell’s comical illustrations go hand in hand with the wonderfully written alliteration. A funny story of the familiar dilemma of being forced to wear cloths you hate! - Hannah

Cheryl says

Well, I'm definitely not the target audience for this. I'd find a way to say 'no thank you' to Cousin Clara. And the parents, sheesh, you can tell by their expressions they don't like the sweaters either, so why make Lester wear them? And the resolution, well, it's just too implausible for me (though perfect for the story).

But that's just me. Yet again, this is a book that deserves its fans. I agree with another reviewer who suggested second graders, and another who said fans of Charles Addams. Ok.

Arminzerella says

Lester lives a very orderly, meticulous life until the arrival of Cousin Clara (whose “cottage was consumed by a crocodile). She installs herself in his family’s home and begins knitting sweaters – each one more horrific than the last. Lester manages to destroy every single one of them almost as quickly as Clara churns them out, but his reputation is beginning to suffer. When he’s forced to wear a particularly hideous sweater to a classmate’s birthday party, he attracts the attention of the clowns hired to entertain the party guests. They absolutely adore his sweater. Lester – seeing the light at the end of the tunnel – invites the clowns home where they carry Cousin Clara off in their caravan to knit dreadful sweaters for them full-time.

This story is a little strange and quirky and may appeal more to adults. Kids, however, should appreciate Lester’s dilemma – being forced to wear clothes that he hates. And, although Lester is a peculiar little boy, I found him very appealing (especially his many notebooks, one of which is entitled, “Suspicious Stuff Starting with C”). Funny and full of alliteration and interesting wordplay, this would make a great read-aloud.

kate says

If Edward Gorey & Polly Horvath had a literary love child, this would be it. - Kirkus Reviews.

Lisa Vegan says

I love the premise of this story and found it hilarious, tinged with a bit of sadness until the very happy and funny ending. The illustrations definitely fit the story and were also properly amusing, but except for the adorable dog, I can't say I found them aesthetically pleasing. The dog and its expressiveness is great though. I really loved Lester; he's a wonderfully unique character. I like the story's message of a person finding a good fit for themselves and its potential for discussing how to react to unwanted but well-meaning gifts, but mostly it's just silly and fun. Thanks to Goodreads friend Melody for alerting me to this book.

Laura says

Lester's Dreadful Sweaters by K.G. Campbell was a surprise treat for me.

This quirky and slightly creepy tale revolves around just how much misery and mayhem the clickety-click of knitting needles can cause one boy. Can Lester survive the itching, the pain, and humiliation from each and every one of the dreadful sweaters?

Pages tinged with muted colors and dark humor brings our tale to light. A tale filled with crocodiles, clowns, and sweater massacres galore!

An original story that tickled my funny bone and made me smirk and snicker.
