



# Zeraffa Giraffa

Books Reviewed:

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Not on the Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

In 1824, Muhammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt, decided to present Charles X of France with the gift of a giraffe. A baby giraffe was duly captured and dispatched to the French court ? over 2500 miles away. The true story of Zeraffa the giraffe is told here by Dianne Hofmeyr and Jane Ray.

The story is a fascinating one and its telling in this beautiful and unusual book will capture readers? imaginations, and quite likely inspire them to find out more about Zeraffa and her keeper, Atir.

Zeraffa?s journey begins on the plains of Sudan, where ?the grass grows tall and the acacias taste sweet?. To reach Paris, Zeraffa must first sail down the river Nile in a *felucca*, the khaki green of the grasslands becoming the dust of the desert, split down the middle by the shining green waters of the river, which is dotted with the white sails of the little boats. She arrives in Marseille to a film star?s reception, and there the decision is made that Zeraffa and Atir will walk the final 550 miles. Now the dry heat of Africa is left behind, as the two walk through the bright greens of Europe, the pink houses and rich clothes of the crowds who flock to see her vibrantly depicted in Jane Ray?s detailed yet almost impressionistic paintings.

Arriving in Paris Zeraffa is just as at home strolling down the *Champs-Élysées* as she was on the plains of Africa, and soon has the capital at her feet, the ladies of the court vying to style their hair *à la Girafe* and going so far as to glue false eyelashes to their lids.

The book opens in the morning, and ends in the evening with Zeraffa, Amir and the king?s grand-daughter Louise Marie Thérèse gazing towards Africa and feeling its warmth ? just enough of a hint of melancholy to send you back to the beginning to read the story again.

Hofmeyr?s narrative is short, but packs a huge amount in, and Jane Ray?s illustrations perfectly match the singularity and strangeness of the story, a fairytale that just happens to be true. Each spread is a delight, a chapter in itself, with so much to read, observe and wonder at. A very special book indeed.

**Links:**

[1] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/zeraffa-giraffa>

[2] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/206>

[3] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/lucy-staines>