

Kinerk, Robert. *Oh, How Sylvester Can Pester! And Other Poems More or Less About Manners*. Illus. Drazen Kozjan. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011. Print.

“You be nice to me; I’ll be nice to you. / That agreement might work. It may get us quite far. / (And it *could* be what manners, in truth, really are.)” (1).

Books filled with poems about manners must be relatively rare. If so, then a book filled with twenty rollicking, frank, vivaciously-illustrated poems about manners must be nearly unheard of. However, this is what Robert Kinerk and Drazen Kozjan have given us in *Oh, How Sylvester Can Pester!*

Readers of all ages will enjoy Kinerk’s direct, extravagant rhymes. His approach is comprehensive: he provides poems on entry-level etiquette such as cleaning one’s room, saying “please” and “thank you,” and keeping one’s clothes on in public, while also exploring more complex courtesies, such as shaking hands with adults, being on time, and keeping quiet at the movies.

Kozjan’s illustrations are rich in both colour and detail. His style has been widely described as “retro,” likely because his work shares a particular rosy-cheeked exuberance with the work of iconic predecessors such as Mary Blair. Kozjan’s is a style in which an entire story is contained within a few strands of hair or a precisely-arched eyebrow.

Despite its rolling rhythms and cheeky illustrations, what is most winning about *Oh, How Sylvester Can Pester!* is its sophisticated approach to its topic. It even contains a poem about the fact that it’s bad manners to lecture others about their manners. “Manners aren’t lists of things you should do. / Manners help folks become *easy* with you,” Kinerk writes (12). It’s this deft touch that makes this book memorable and admirable.

*Oh, How Sylvester Can Pester!* will be appreciated by primary-school readers (and their adults). The poems are best read out loud, but the illustrations should not be neglected.

Highly recommended: 4 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Sarah Polkinghorne