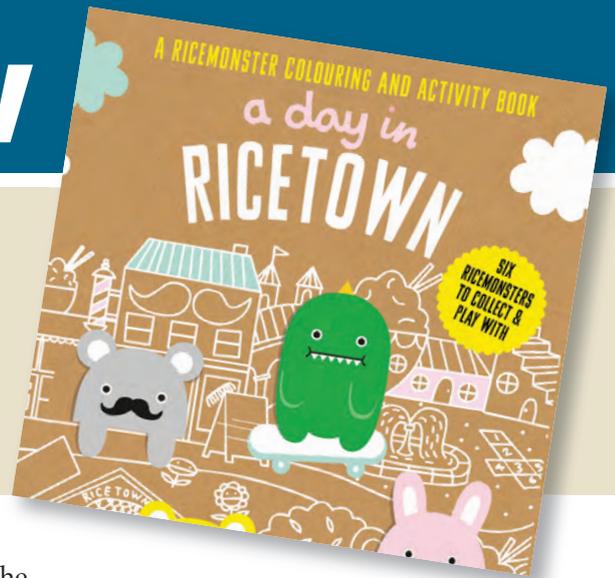


# Book review



Dawn Nasser reviews an activity book produced by designer YiYing Yang while studying for her MA in design



**W**hen I first flipped through *A Day in Ricetown* from Noodoll Studios, I was a bit surprised by what I found. Instead of the storybook I was expecting, I had, in fact, received an activity book. And, at first glance, not just any activity book but what appeared to be an incredibly 'busy' activity book. The pages were full. I was really not sure.

The blurb told me that the book is aimed at children aged 4+ years. Hmm, again, I was not sure. If you wanted to work with this on your own, you really needed to be able to read, understand the instructions and actually understand the concept.

*'...what I discovered, when I sat down with a three or four-year-old (with crayons and pencils at the ready) was that they love the idea of you reading the instructions and them following'*

## The concept

So, what is the concept? Well the book is about Ricetown and its inhabitants, the Ricemonsters puppets. It is these puppets who bring the fun and activities in the book to life. For those as old as me, the Ricemonsters seem to be a 21st century version of the Mr Men books. That is, there are lots of 'monsters' (actually paper puppets) to collect, but the fun part is that they all come with a background.

So, there are Ricecracker, Ricemon, Riceapple and Ricequirl plus Do Bird and Dino, to name just a few. I could feel an abundance of mischief evolving with these moveable puppets. My Ricetown book came with eight puppets. Seven from the collection and a blank one for me to decorate and name.

What I really liked about the book was the underlying idea that the puppets come to life on each page so that you, the reader, can imagine your own story within the activity. But would a four-year-old be able to do that?

## Child as participator

Actually, what I discovered, when I sat down with a three or four-year-old (with crayons and pencils at the ready) was that they love the idea of you reading the instructions and them following. Like when Ricetache

forgot about the party at the art gallery! Then, you as the reader and participator now have to draw lots of pictures. While being guided to draw around one of the puppets, drawings on the page come to life and, of course, as is always true of young children, so did the story behind them.

Being able to move the collectable Ricemonsters around and slot them into the slits throughout the book continued to bring the art of storytelling to life for the adult guiding the younger child. I could also see that this would encourage an older child to use their imagination and tell their own stories of what the Ricemonsters get up to.

And then there is the fun of collecting the whole Ricemonster family. The eight in the book are just the start.

I know that if I saw this on the bookshelf in the shop I would not take it down to look at, but how wrong I would be. The blurb is right: the book encourages you and your child to 'have fun slotting the Ricemonsters into the pages to bring scenes to life and use them to complete puzzles, games and colouring and drawing activities'. As they say, "Come on in for a fun day in Ricetown!" ■

- Dawn Nasser is owner and director of Spectrum Montessori Ltd and Rose House Montessori School, SE London. *A Day in Ricetown* from Noodoll Studios is available from Thames & Hudson at £9.95.

T: 020 8699 9260 E: principal\_rosehouse@live.co.uk  
W: rose-house-montessori.com