



The Mermaid and the Shoe

K.G. Campbell

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King Neptune had fifty daughters. Some might call them mermaids. Each one, it seemed, was more remarkable than the last. Except Minnow.

The only remarkable thing about Minnow was the questions she asked. So *many* questions! "Where do bubbles go?" "Why don't crabs have fins?" "What lies beyond the kingdom?"

When a curious and beautiful new object drifts into her life, Minnow can't imagine what it might be for, but she's certain it must have a purpose. So she follows her questions into the unknown, all the way to another, wondrous world. There she makes several remarkable discoveries...

The Mermaid and the Shoe Details

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From Reader Review The Mermaid and the Shoe for online ebook

Betsy says

Why are magical creatures so hard to write? I'm a children's librarian. That means that a goodly portion of my day can consist of small starry-eyed children asking for an array of otherworldly cuties. "Do you have any unicorn books?" "Any fairies?" "Any mermaids?" Actually, more often than not it's their parents asking and you can read between the lines when they request such books. What they're really saying is, "Do you have any books about a fairy that isn't going to make me want to tear out my eyebrows when I end up reading it for the 4,000th time?" Over the years I've collected the names of picture books that fulfill those needs. Like fairies? The Dollhouse Fairy by Jane Ray is for you. Unicorns? You can't go wrong with Unicorn Thinks He's Pretty Great by Bob Shea. But mermaids . . . mermaids posed a problem. It isn't that they don't have books. They simply don't have that many. For whatever reason, writers don't like doing mermaid books. Easy to understand why. What is a mermaid known for aside from brushing their hair or luring young sailors to a watery grave? Add in the fact that most kids associate mermaids with a certain red-haired Disney vixen and you've got yourself a topic that's avoided like the plague. It takes a bit of originality, spark, and verve to overcome these obstacles. Having read his picture book Lester's Dreadful Sweaters I knew that K.G. Campbell was a bit of a witty wordsmith. What I didn't know was that he was capable of creating wholly new storylines that are as satisfying to adult readers as they will be to children. You want a mermaid book? *The Mermaid and the Shoe* is officially my latest recommendation.

Mermaids are talented creatures. Just ask King Neptune. The merman has fifty (count 'em) fifty daughters and every single one of them has a talent. Every single one . . . except perhaps Minnow. The youngest daughter, Minnow can't garden or train fish or sing particularly well. Instead, she asks questions. Questions that nobody seems to know the answers to. One day, a strange red object falls from above. No one, not even Minnow's stuck up sister Calypso, can say what it is or what it does. Inspired, Minnow goes up to the surface to discover its use. What she finds shocks her, but also gives her a true purpose. She's not just the youngest daughter in her family any more. No, Minnow is an explorer through and through.

My three-year-old daughter has a laser-like ability to hone in on any new picture book that appears in my bag when I come home from work. I hadn't necessarily meant to try out *The Mermaid and the Shoe* on her, but once she zeroed in on it there was no stopping her. At this point in time she doesn't have much of a magical creature frame of reference so it was interesting trying to explain the rudimentary basics of your everyday merman or mermaid in the context of Campbell's book. She had a bit of a hard time understanding why Minnow didn't know what a shoe was. I explained that mermaids don't have feet. "Why don't they have feet?" Not much of an answer to be given to that one. Happily she enjoyed the book thoroughly, but with its emphasis on cruel older siblings and the importance of making your own path, this is going to be best enjoyed by a slightly older readership.

As I may have mentioned before, Disney ruined us for mermaids. There will therefore be kids who read this book and then complain that it's not a cookie cutter Ariel mass media affair. Still, I like to think those kids will be few and far between. First off, the book does have some similarities to the Ariel storyline. King Neptune/Triton is still the buff and shirtless father of a bunch of mermaid sisters and he still has his customary crown, flowy white beard (beards just look so keen underwater, don't you think?), and triton. The story focuses yet again on his youngest daughter who longs to know more about the world up above. She's accompanied by an adorable underwater sea creature. But once you get past the peripheral similarities, Campbell strikes out into uncharted territory, so to speak.

With this book Campbell strikes a storytelling tone. It's a bit more classic than that found in some other contemporary picture books, but it fits the subject and the art. When you read that Calypso called her little sister "useless" the text says, "for sisters can be mean that way." There's an art to the storytelling. I loved that Minnow considers the shoe important because "This thing . . . was made with care. It has a purpose, and I will discover it!" As for the plot itself, I've never seen a book do this particular storyline before. Maybe it's because authors are afraid of incurring the litigious wrath of Disney, but shouldn't more mermaids be curious about our world? The fact that they'd be horrified by our feet just makes complete and utter sense. If you didn't know they weren't hands then of course you'd consider them knobby, gnarled and smelly (though how they know about that last bit is up for contention). Campbell knows how to follow a plotline to its logical conclusion.

I also love the core message of the book. Minnow's talent lies in not just her brain (which I would have settled for) but also in how she sets about getting answers to her questions. At the end of the tale her father proclaims that her talent is being an explorer but I'm not so sure. I think Minnow's a reporter. She not only asks the right questions but she sets out to find answers, no matter where they lead her. Then she comes back and shares information with her fellow mermaids, reporting her findings and sticking to the facts. You could also call her a storyteller, but to my mind Minnow is out there chasing down leads, satisfying her own curiosity over and over again. You might even say she comes close to the scientific method (though she never sets up a hypothesis so that would be a bit of a stretch).

There's been a lot of talk over the years as to whether or not the greatest picture books out there are always written and illustrated by the same person (just look at the most recent Caldecott winners if you doubt me). You could argue both ways, but there is little doubt in my mind that Campbell just happened to be the best possible artist for this book . . . which he also just happened to write. I hate the term "dreamlike" but doggone it, it's sort of the best possible term for this title. Notice how beautifully Campbell frames his images. In some pages he will surround a round image like a window with aspects of the scene (seaweed, fronds, or in the case of the world above, wildflowers). Consider too his use of color. The single red shoe is the only object of that particular bright hue in the otherwise grey and gloomy underwater lands. The mermaids themselves are all white-haired, a fact that makes a lot of sense when you consider that sunlight never touches them. They're like lovely little half-human cavefish. And then there's the man's scope. I was reminded of a similarly aquatic picture book, David Soman's *Three Bears in a Boat* in terms of the use of impressive two-page spreads. There's an image of Minnow confronting a whale that could well take your breath away if you let it. The man knows how to pull back sometimes and then go in for the close-up. I have heard some objections to the mermaids' teeny tiny seashells that seemingly float over their nonexistent breasts. And true, you notice it for about half a second. Then you get into the book itself and all is well.

With its can do mermaid who seeks answers in spite of her age and size, its beautiful watercolor and pencil crayon imagery, and writing that makes the reader feel like they're indulging in a contemporary classic, there is no question in my mind that *The Mermaid and the Shoe* is the best little mermaid related picture book of all time. Utterly charming and unique, I can only hope it inspires other artists and authors to attempt to write more quality works of picture book fiction about magical creatures for the kiddos. It's not an easy task, but when it works boy HOWDY does it work! Beguiling and bewitching, there's only one true word to describe this book. Beautiful.

For ages 3-7.

Storywraps says

The illustrations in this book are hauntingly beautiful and add so much character and class to the text. The underwater world of sea creatures and mermaids are always enchanting to both the young and old alike. This tale tells the story of mighty King Neptune and his 50 (yes 50) daughters. Each of his lovely daughters has a special talent: Clio is a gifted gardener, Thetis, a fantastic fish trainer and Calypso with a singing voice like an angel. They all are extremely remarkable up until the very last one. Little Minnow struggles to find her place and purpose in her vast underwater world. She is unlike her sisters because she hasn't realized her potential and what she is capable of contributing to her family and her community. She is good at one thing and that is asking lots and lots of questions and trying to find the answers.

One day she encounters a very unusual and beautiful item floating in the sea near her. Her curiosity gets the best of her and she grabs it, clings on to it and tries to discover what it is. She asks her sisters what they think it may be but they do not know. She then ventures out to ask many sea creatures their opinion, but they do not know either. She finally ends up on the sea surface....and I love this line the best..."she had arrived at the edge of the kingdom, where the bubbles burst and the above place began." She feels she will never find out the answer and comes to the conclusion that she is useless after all. Suddenly she is fortunate enough to witness a little girl bound out of her house run to the water and after staying very still and observing, she finds out the exact answer she is looking for. Happily she high-"tails" it back to her family and recounts her day's adventures. They are amazed and mesmerized by her storytelling, especially her father, who scoops her up and hugs her tightly. "My Minnow," he boasted to the entire kingdom, "is a daring explorer." That is the confirmation she needs to know precisely what her calling is and she embraces her new role enthusiastically.

L says

When I read this to my daughters I expected nothing but a simple tale. This blew me away. The author so skillfully worked in some larger concepts that are incredibly important to our family: questioning everything, finding a purpose for living, and pursuing the answers until one reaches his/her own conclusion.

In addition to being just a lovely little story of a curious mermaid who finds a human shoe, this expands to embrace the natural inclinations of children and teaches them that questioning and the pursuit of answers is a good thing. Although it may not be welcomed by everyone (mean sister, Calypso), it will be welcomed by some and even rewarded.

I cannot like this book enough. My daughters got excited when Minnow discovered answers and even offered me explanations for why what she found made sense. They asked me to read it again. And so I did.

Tasha says

King Neptune's 50 daughters are all special and talented in their own ways. All except for Minnow who tries to be like her sisters, but only manages to ask lots and lots of questions about things. Minnow did not fit in with her sisters at all, often drifting alone on her own. Then one day, she found a remarkable object in the water, a red shoe. She tried asking her sisters what it was for, but none of them knew, so Minnow headed out

to answer her own questions and find out what the red object was for. Minnow swam closer and closer to shore, discovering answers to some of her other questions like why crabs don't have fins. Then she found out exactly what shoes were for and headed home to tell the others. In the end, Minnow not only discovers the answers she is looking for, but she discovers exactly what her special talent is too.

Campbell, author of the uproarious Lester's Dreadful Sweaters, returns with a quieter book that shows the same sort of depth as the first. This book beautifully wrestles with deep questions about one's purpose in life and how to remain true to oneself rather than give in to external pressure. Disney's The Little Mermaid comes to mind throughout the story, but in the end this is a unique mermaid story that holds up well against the Disney version.

The illustrations are rather haunting. They pair the darkness of the deep water with a near glowing brightness of the mermaids. The mermaids have drifting white-blond hair that moves with the currents, fish tails that look like real fish, and small seashells to cover their chests.

Beautiful, quiet and deep like the ocean, this book will find readers in Little Mermaid fans who may just have found a new favorite mermaid to adore. Appropriate for ages 4-6.

Gabrielle Carolina says

Absolutely loved it!

Isa Lavinia says

ARC provided by Kids Can Press through Netgalley

All of King Neptune's 50 daughters have a special skill: there is Clio with her gardening, Thetis and her fish training, Calypso and her singing... but what of the King's youngest daughter, Minnow?

The only thing Minnow does is ask questions and more questions. And when one day she comes upon a mysterious object she goes exploring to find answers to her questions.

This was such a delightful story!

First of all, there is Minnow - and has there ever been a more delightfully named character? - she is inquisitive and does not give up when things aren't easy, or when she is teased. She keeps searching and asking, until she finds what she wants and - more importantly - finds what she is meant to be.

But sweet as this story is, what really makes it shine are its illustrations. I simply LOVE the artwork! The style is amazing and the colour choices are brilliant. I will definitely be keeping my eye on this author's works from now on! Just look at this:

I really, really loved this book!

Also worth mentioning, how nice it is to see mermaids looking suitably horrified by feet, instead of longing to change who they are and have feet of their own...

Highly recommend this - kids are sure to love it, as are any grown-ups who chance to read it!

Eva says

This is beautifully laid out. The story's not the strongest point, but the lay out and illustrations make up for it.

acascia says

I got an arc from netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

King Neptune has fifty daughters who are all remarkable, except Minnow. She is trying to find her place in a family that is gifted and talented. While traveling one day, she finds a shoe and decides she will find the purpose of this object. But more than that, she is looking for her own purpose...

This was a very cute story. Very easy to read, of course, and taught some important morals. The mermaid who finds her purpose in the world.

We are all trying to find our own purpose so it's a relatable story. I am sure kids will love it, and I am actually thinking about buying it, just so I could read it to a few five year olds that I baby sit. They would love this.

The illustrations of mermaids with long breezy hair really gave the story a fairy tale type feel. I thought all the pictures were very beautiful.

I also really like how the mermaid describes the humans and her things. Our feet were "knobby, gnarled, smelly, hands." People are half mermaid, but with octopus legs. Houses are sea shells with doors. Really cute and thought out.

I am also glad she got all her questions answered, instead of just "what is this object?" Which of course, was the main question.

Anyway, I enjoyed this story.

If I ever babysit any kids, I will read it to them. I think they would really enjoy it.

Jareed says

Simple beautiful message accompanied by age appropriate illustrations which do not fail when aesthetics are put to the test. I would gladly read this to children over story time.

Jessie says

Story was a bit boring. The illustrations were very pretty.

Cheryl says

So original, and relatively long, I had to read it a second time to realize how special it is. (Think 'acquired taste.') Other reviews are better so I'm only going to say that I recommend this for ages 4-8 or so, and, of course, adults.

Rachel says

I received The Mermaid and the Shoe from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you Netgalley, Kids Can Press, and K.G. Campbell.

I was excited when I found The Mermaid and the Shoe on Netgalley because my daughter's favorite Disney character is Ariel, so I figured she would really enjoy this mermaid story. I was right - she really liked it! Minnow is the only of King Neptune's 50 daughters who doesn't have a special talent, such as singing or gardening. Calypso makes her feel worthless, so when she finds an object she isn't familiar with, she sets off to find out where it came from and what it is. When she comes back with the answer and the incredible tale of the journey she had taken, so realizes she has found her purpose. So it has a nice little moral to the story. The only thing that I didn't love, and I seem to be the only one to have this opinion, was the seashells that served as the mermaid's tops. Something about how tiny they were just creeped me out a bit. But my daughter didn't even seem to notice that, so I tried to disregard that.

I would recommend The Mermaid and the Shoe, and my family will be reading this beautiful story again.

paula says

Every time I do this, read forty picture books in a day, there's always one that I finish and sigh, "No more calls, ladies and gentlemen. We have our winner." That's this one tonight. This inky undersea fable of the littlest mermaid sister who looks for her place among her dainty, accomplished sisters, and discovers that she fits in by looking outward.

Art: tender fronds of delicate white mermaid hair and sharp inked details, with sea creatures in glowing colors or murky darks. An antique palette of sepias, yellows, and blues of every hue.

Jessica says

The art is stunning, and so is the story. The contrasting colors are what really sets this apart: the striking red of the shoe, the darkness of the water, and the gold and white mermaid . . . so beautiful! My daughter, who loves mermaids, adores this story heart and soul!

Christopher Lehman says

Beautiful illustrations surround a sweet story about the littlest mermaid in the family and the discovery she makes while in search of what makes her unique. I especially love how adventurous Minnow is and the message the story sends about brave, smart girls.
