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The Boy Who Swam With Piranhas



Synopsis

A boy escapes home to seek his own way in the world in a whimsical new outing by the award-winning David Almond, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers. Stanley Potts's uncle Ernie has developed an over-the-top fascination with canning fish in the house, and life at 69 Fish Quay Lane has turned barmy. But there's darkness in the madness, and when Uncle Ernie's obsession takes an unexpectedly cruel turn, Stan has no choice but to leave. As he journeys away from the life he's always known, he mingles with a carnival full of eccentric characters and meets the legendary Pancho Pirelli, the man who swims in a tank full of perilous piranhas. Will Stan be bold enough to dive in the churning waters himself and choose his own destiny?

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

Gr 5-7-When Stanley Potts's Uncle Ernie takes his fish-canning business in a new, inhumane direction, the orphaned boy decides to leave the home his relatives made for him and join a traveling carnival of Gypsies. With the guidance of the hook-a-duck booth proprietor Dostoyevsky, Stan finds success tending the goldfish prizes and forms a tentative friendship with the boss's prickly daughter, Nitasha, who broods over the desertion of her ballerina mother. Big news is the arrival of famous Pancho Pirelli, who swims in a tank with piranhas. Pirelli is convinced that Stan is destined to be his successor and sets about teaching him to dive, to overcome fear, and to find faith

in himself. Meanwhile, as Stan settles into his new life, back home Uncle Ernie and Aunt Annie are distraught over his disappearance and plagued by DAFT, the Department for the Abolishun of Fishy Things. Setting out to find him, they unintentionally lead DAFT to the carnival, where mayhem ensues. Master storyteller Almond combines delicious wordplay, zany antics, wacky characters, and a bit of magical realism in a novel that touches the heart. Quick-paced, accessible, and enhanced by stylized cartoonlike drawings, this book is sure to be enjoyed by fans of humorous, quirky stories. -Marie Orlando, formerly at Suffolk Cooperative Library System, Bellport, NY (c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review Dahl meets J. K., flavored with a soupçon of Choose Your Own Adventure, but in the end, this novel is all pure, sweet Almond. Stanley Potts has lost his parents, but his Aunt Annie and Uncle Ernest have ably stepped in. Then Uncle Ernest goes fish crazy, making a fortune by canning fish in the living room. Stanley is on board until his beloved goldfish get tinned, and he takes off. After joining a carnival, he lives with Mr. Doestesty, the hook-a-duck operator, and his daughter, Nitasha, who has been abandoned by her mother and wishes to become the world's ugliest, fattest bearded lady. Stanley seems an ordinary boy, but those who come in contact with him sense his purity and goodness. So, when Pancho Pirelli appears to perform his great act in which he swims in a tank of piranhas, it's no surprise that he recognizes Stanley as his successor. As with most everything Almond writes, there is the story on paper and then all that churns over and around it. This is as much a meditation on chance, choice, and destiny, as it is a frolicsome tale of a boy who runs away for a circuslike life. In the subtlest ways possible, Almond masterfully makes young readers understand this, and they will be delighted that life lessons can be administered so deliciously. Simple pencil drawings illustrate. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Almond is one of the finest writers for young people working today, which makes anything he writes something to look forward to. Grades 4-6. --Ilene Cooper --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I loved this book. It's a gentle tale about a boy called Stanley Potts who loves fish. The writing reminds me of Roald Dahl. It is recommended for ages 8 - 12, but I'd change that to 8-100. Would be great to read aloud too.

I read this to my 9 year old twin boys and it was such a fantastic story, so different and well written. We all enjoyed it immensely.

It reads like an English book. Some of the terms and ways the sentences were phrased were hard for my 10 year old to grasp. I'm sure it's a great book overseas.

I enjoy David Almond very much and while I've only read a handful of his books to date; I've found them to share themes of death/grief and either father/mother to child relationship. So I looked forward to this one though I hadn't heard anything about it beforehand. The book is much lighter than the previous books I've read by the author and while I still find the same themes present it is only in a smaller way. The book starts with a boy being orphaned quite horrifically and then going to live with an aunt and uncle who, obviously love him, but he's treated with neglect and the uncle is near abusive. This is all kept in a high over the top humorous manner with the entrance of the DAFT Squad who investigates all suspicious goings on. The second half of the book has Stanley running off with the circus, an age-old dream of childhood. (though I think it went out with not Almond's but perhaps my own generation). The story is hilarious and like all of Almond's works, very British. Candlewick publishes the US editions but they don't Americanize the text, so you get a very big dose of crazy, off the wall British humour. While the book holds many characters, Stanley is the one the reader gets to know the best and watching out for his welfare and caring about what happens to him enhances the reading experience. The bad guys get theirs in the end and each character receives their own kind of redemption for a satisfying and (funny) ending.

I read this book aloud with my 4th grader and it was perfect. (Yes, we still read books together and it's great fun!) I had seen this book reviewed somewhere and put it on the must-read list. It hasn't disappointed me, or my son, who loves anything to do with fish, fantasy, adventure, quirky characters, kids trying something unknown, kids trying to escape some situation, adults attempting to teach kids a lesson, etc. The quirkiness of the characters comes out along with their unique use of the English language...or the characters' attempt at simply incorporating phrases and cliches in their everyday speech that, well, show that they're not a high-brow crowd. I found that usage putting a smile on my face since it was clever and my son understood most of it, or it created a great discussion with him about a cliché or phrase that he wasn't familiar with...but is now thanks to this book! The fantasy elements are well described and believable. Even though the chapter endings didn't seem like serious cliff hangers at all, my son was eager for us to continue reading this book every single time we had to put it down. Compact, short chapters helped us read a lot in a little time which was rewarding while reading aloud. If this book is a movie script masquerading as a book, I

know we would enjoy seeing the movie too!Bottom line, I think most kids who enjoy quirky stories (isn't that most of 'em?) will enjoy this book. And, adults that like a little out-of-the-ordinary dialogue to spice things up will enjoy reading this aloud to their kids.

After Stanley's uncle makes life unbearable and commits the ultimate betrayal, young Stan has no choice but to leave home. When Stanley is swept up by the carnival he discovers new ways of living, mysterious happenings, and a tank full of piranhas. Now Stan must search inside himself for his true destiny.

Three adjectives that describe this book: intriguing, fanciful, strange

After reading quite a few gushing reviews of this book, I feel kind of bad about finding it to be so meh. Don't get me wrong, I really enjoyed *The Boy Who Swam With Piranhas*, but there were a few annoying flaws and I'm not sure it will grab middle grade readers - the intended audience.

Other reviewers have compared the style of this novel to Roald Dahl's work. These comparisons are totally appropriate. It reminded me of some of his shorter works such as *George's Marvelous Medicine*. Overall the plot was fun and the main character, Stan, was endearing and well-written. This book is quirky. For people who like quirky - this is the book for you! While reading, I just kept thinking how much it felt like a movie. The epic amount of narration made me think that David Almond was actually writing this novel as a script in some ways.

And therein lies the problem.

In the first two-thirds of the novel, Almond's use of author intrusions was quaint and felt right for the tone of the story. Think Lemony Snicket in *A Series of Unfortunate Events #1: The Bad Beginning: The Short-Lived Edition* or Pseudonymous Bosch in *The Name of this Book Is Secret (The Secret Series)*. However, the last third of the novel took this narrative style over the precipice. Almond frequently interrupted the plot's flow with unnecessary asides. For instance, right at the climax of the drama Almond takes an entire page to ask the reader if he should switch to a subplot or continue with the action. Argh! Just tell me the story. But the ultimate example of annoying author intrusions is the way the villain's story is resolved. Rather than write ANY resolution whatsoever, Almond asks the reader, "What do you think should happen?" What a cop-out!!!!

My other concern is that one element of the style would not work for the target audience of middle grade readers. Clarence P. Clapp, the villain, has terrible control of the English language. For instance at one point he says, "We must bite our time" and later, "Come to a complete and nutter halt." These misunderstandings of common phrases, and elsewhere his atrocious spelling, demonstrate the character's level of intelligence in a creative way. However, to fully grasp this element, the reader needs a strong command of idioms, phrases, and spelling. A lot of middle grade readers would struggle with this text's complexity.

Bottom line, I think that readers in grades 4-6 who need a challenge and enjoy quirky books would like this novel. It's

just not for everyone.

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