



A Walk from the Sea

Laurel Lorraine Lancer

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Parents and grandparents will enjoy sharing many of these poems with their loved ones.

Visual artist and educator Laurel Lorraine Lancer has compiled a varied and voluminous book of formal poems. Sometimes serious and often whimsical, the rhymed and metered verse that appears throughout *A Walk from the Sea* spans a variety of subjects and is musically precise and well-crafted.

Because the poems are filled with perfect rhyme, they often have a youthful tone. This complements the children's poems in the sections "For My Kids," "More Rhymes For Children," and the chapter titled "Just Magic," which is a wonderfully playful section dedicated to fairy poems. Many of Lancer's children's poems pull pleasing images from nature and use humor in an ironic and intelligent way. Lancer's unique poetic banter is especially apparent in the poem "Cabbages." Lancer begins the poem with the quippy phrase, "Yes, I did try to write a poem / About the cabbages. / I have one sitting on my shelf." She continues at the end with a snarky twist: "His leaves grew limp, no longer crisp, / I'll bet his flavor fled. / I turned the task of writing to / The sweet eggplant instead."

It is when Lancer tries to apply form to heavier topics (i.e., growing older, duplicity, grief) that the tone falters. While the lighter joyful poems warrant this heavy use of form, the darker searching poems get a bit repetitive in language and theme. In these poems, the form appears to be a box that holds Pandora too tightly under lock and key.

In *A Walk from the Sea*, there is often more than one poem on each page, which does not give each poem its due pause. Trying to maneuver emotionally through a poem about the glory of dandelions and then moving on to a poem about politicians' lies on the same page is too big of a leap.

The illustrations done by Lancer are gorgeous, especially at the beginning of each section. The image on the cover is not one of the strongest, and it appears quite blurry and pixelated. Ghosted images are printed behind the text on every page; these are very difficult to discern. A cleaner design would have distracted less from the strength of the poems.

Although many of the individual poems are quite solid, the collection does not work as a whole because many of the poems are intended for very different audiences. *A Walk from the Sea* should have been split into two books: one book of poems for children, and a second book of spiritual poems linked with poems about aging. The problem is that these two audiences do not often read the same material. Parents might not have the patience or the time to weed through the other poems in the collection to find the ones that are appropriate for their children.

In the end, it is clear that Lancer is a skilled poet. Her poems have strong rhythm and a driving emotional force. The entire collection is well edited, and parents and grandparents especially will find joy sharing these poems with their loved ones.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (June 18, 2014)

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