

## Rudy and the Sea Urchin Special

**Meghan Piercy**

Blue Marble Friends

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*Rudy and the Sea Urchin Special is a heartwarming picture book about an imperiled otter whose situation is used to teach marine ecology concepts.*

Meghan Piercy's *Rudy and the Sea Urchin Special* is an engaging picture book about a sea otter and his endangered underwater community.

When Rudy the sea otter gets tangled in a mass of ocean trash, his life is in danger—and so is the kelp forest that he and his friends call home. With the debris wrapped around his neck, Rudy has trouble breathing, and he can't eat his favorite meal: the Canopy Café's Sea Urchin Special. Unless he eats his daily quota of the prickly creatures, they will multiply and devour every blade of the kelp forest.

Rudy's friends try to save him, but not even the shark can cut through the tangled mass. Time is running out, Rudy is losing hope, and the sea urchins are becoming a hungry, kelp-devouring army. The tense situation is resolved in a surprising way in the book's happy, satisfying ending.

Featuring appealing characters; accessible, age-appropriate language; engaging dialogue; and an exciting story, this book ably introduces children to marine ecology. It is informative and entertaining as it highlights the role of sea kelp forests in providing food, shelter, a place to hide from predators, and safety from storms. As the sea otter's desperate situation unfolds, his important role in keeping the sea urchin population under control is revealed—as are the dangers that marine debris pose to the ocean's inhabitants and delicate ecosystems.

Further, each creature's attempt to help Rudy is a learning opportunity, revealing information such as that a molting crab's claws remain soft for a month, and that a shark with a full belly is not likely to attack. Opal the snail, who longs for Rudy's friendship but is at first overlooked as being too small to be considered, is ultimately credited with saving him—in combination with Rudy's own massive case of hiccups.

The skillful illustrations feature brilliant primary and secondary colors that make each character pop against the bright, contrasting backgrounds. Characters' faces are expressive, and their emotions can be read with ease as the fast plot unfolds. Depicting the sea urchins as red, evil-eyed, and intent on destruction as they close in on the friends' kelp forest home makes the threat they pose real and urgent.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (April 21, 2022)

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