

Seaweed McTweed: Everyone Needs a Friend

Jon Nappa

Jason Hendrickson, Illustrator

NIPI Books (Aug 23, 2020)

\$19.95 (30pp)

978-0-9985450-6-6

Seaweed McTweed is a powerful picture book about the anxiety of not fitting in, and about the power of friendship to save the day.

In Jon Nappa and Jason Kendrickson's fun picture book *Seaweed McTweed*, a sea monster wants to make a friend.

Though he wants to be loved, Seaweed McTweed's sea monster exterior means that he is shunned by nice sea creatures, who only see the monster in him. At the same time, he is denounced by sea monsters for having a big heart and not wanting to destroy ships or hurt anyone. Despite not being understood in the sea, Seaweed remains resolute in his morals. He imagines a time when friendly fish will understand him and befriend him.

Every interaction that Seaweed has with other sea creatures drives home the notion that no one should be judged by their outsides. Seaweed's misunderstood perspective is centered, and the fact that he's so empathetic helps to make him memorable. Further, his story is told in a rhyming format, using syllabic symmetry to create a musical rhythm and encouraging compelling read-alouds.

Though much of the text's language is direct, it includes more nuanced terms and concepts, too. These are often denoted by different colored text, drawing attention to how they interact with the prose around them. For example, when he's addressing his relationship to other sea creatures, Seaweed muses, "monsters don't like me, because I act differently. Others don't like me because I look different." Here, both "act" and "look" appear in different colors, highlighting the reasons he thinks that he doesn't fit into specific groups.

The illustrations construct the sea monsters in crude and dark ways, communicating their wicked-seeming atmosphere without becoming scary. In contrast, the book's crabs, starfish, and other friendly creatures are more detailed, with brighter colors and textured patterns used to make them enticing. In these and other ways, the illustrations tell the complete story on their own, showing other sea creatures swimming away from Seaweed when he tries to talk to them, and depicting Seaweed's distaste for sea monster mayhem when his fellow monsters rip ships in half. Later, they reveal Seaweed's new, bright, and happy friend swimming close to him, helping to bring Seaweed closer to his own happiness.

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GEORGE HAJJAR (June 15, 2021)

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