

The Adventures of Grandmasaurus: At the Aquarium Rescue Centre

Caroline Fernandez

Shannon O'Toole, Illustrator

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This is an appealing picture book that introduces young audiences to ancient animals in a fun manner.

A grandmother's sneezes transform her into one ancient creature after another in Caroline Fernandez's picture book *The Adventures of Grandmasaurus: At the Aquarium Rescue Centre*.

On a field trip led by Ms. Priya, a girl, her classmate Moonie, and the girl's grandmother visit an aquarium that specializes in helping sick and injured marine animals. The children are supposed to write reports on what they observe and learn at the aquarium, but they're pulled away several times to search for Grandma.

Inhaling aquarium dust prompts Grandma to sneeze, and every time she does, she changes into an ancient creature, including a Shonisaurus and an Ammonite. Each time, the girls consult the internet to identify the animal. At last the two girls write their reports, which meet with the glowing approval of their teacher. Grandma regains her human form; the animals she was are covered again in the nice visual glossary that comes on the book's last page.

The story is narrated by Grandmasaurus's granddaughter, who is not herself named; wondering who she is distracts from the main story. In addition, there's no explanation as to why sneezing changes Grandma into Grandmasaurus, other than a brief equation: "Dust + sneezing = Grandma's funny business." Nor is it shared why each subsequent sneeze transforms her into a different creature, or why it all finally ends and she changes back to Grandma. Audiences will get the gist of the "rules" of Grandma's transformations as the story progresses, but doing so demands unnecessary attention.

After the teacher's early introduction of the aquarium's mission, there's no further mention of injured and sick animals; this particular aquarium setting comes to seem interchangeable with other, more conventional aquariums. At one point, Grandma knocks over a bottle from a ledge into an animal tank; Ms. Priya uses it as an opportunity to teach about litter and recycling, but the substance isn't named as what it seems to be, a common bottle of water. Such lacks of specificity raise questions and slow the story's momentum.

The book's illustrations, though, are excellent, doing much to counter textual gaps. They are full of convincing, colorful, aquarium-specific sights, like large animal tanks full of kelp and coral. Grandmasaurus, pictured with her glasses and a tuft of hair visible in every incarnation, is amusing; so are the visual details of the once-again human Grandma tracking watery footprints while a custodian looks on in wonder.

Introducing young audiences to ancient animals in a fun manner, *The Adventures of Grandmasaurus: At the Aquarium Rescue Centre* is an appealing picture book.

PETER DABBENE (August 24, 2021)

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