



## Whale of Wonder

**Marie-Paule Mahoney**

**Ginger Triplett, Illustrator**

Outskirts Press

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*Whale of Wonder is a tender picture book whose intelligent orcas reveal the importance of conservation.*

Based on true events, Marie-Paule Mahoney's ecological picture book *Whale of Wonder* is the emotional story of an orca whale's migration that shares the difficulties that whales face because of humans.

Mama Tahlequah and her son, Notch, live with their pod in the Salish Sea. They migrate up to a thousand miles, depending on the season. Then Notch encounters an orca whale whose language he doesn't recognize. When he asks his mother why the other whale communicates differently, she tells him the whales from other pods have different languages. This leads to a larger conversation about why orcas behave the ways that they do, about what is threatening their habitats, and about why Mama Tahlequah carried Notch's little sister for many days after her death. As Notch ponders the world he lives in, Mama Tahlequah answers his questions with honesty and tact.

Much of the text is devoted to the conversations between the orca mother and her son. His curious, innocent questions, and her gentle replies, are compelling. Beautiful, photorealistic illustrations mirror the duo's conversation, as when Mama Tahlequah tells Notch that humans dump their garbage into the sea, making whales sick; the complementary image exhibits an array of plastic jugs and bottles sloshing around in white and blue waves.

Though its themes—grief, worry for the future, and resilience—are mature, Mama Tahlequah is careful to contemplate her answers before replying to Notch, and her explanations about starvation, pollution, humans kidnapping whales for marine shows, and the grieving process are considerate and age appropriate. The book's ending is at once sentimental and hopeful, while its afterword includes ample factual information about the whales that inspired the story.

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AIMEE JODOIN (February 19, 2021)

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