

Willie Wish and the Magic Realm

Neale Payne

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Willie Wish and the Magic Realm is a beautifully imagined fairy tale that imparts lasting moral values.

Neale Payne's gentle juvenile fantasy *Willie Wish and the Magic Realm* follows a thirteen-year-old boy who can see the supernatural world and who serves the magical beings that he encounters.

Willie Wish is a small, sensitive boy who has a unique connection to the natural world. One night, Willie watches as his father, Evan, walks into the woods toward a mysterious light, returning a short time later with a mysterious package. This continues for several years.

On his thirteenth birthday, Willie decides to follow his father. He finds Evan convening with fairies. Soon after, Evan confides to Willie that he has inherited the same ability to interact with magic realms invisible to the naked eye. If Willie accepts the gift, he must remain pure of heart and act in service to the realm as its official handyman; otherwise, he risks losing his memory of the supernatural connection.

The story is a unique coming-of-age morality tale on duty and selflessness packaged as a young readers' adventure. It is told in a series of visually stimulating, interconnected anecdotes that have the simplicity, clarity, and excitement of a great read-aloud work. With its fairy-tale imagery, the story's narration hooks and engages children's imaginations from beginning to end. The story proceeds chronologically, following Willie from childhood into adolescence.

The story resonates with its strong environmentalist slant. Characters with questionable morality either abuse the natural world or greedily overindulge in its bounty. Willie, Evan, and the beings of the magic realm are portrayed as nature's protectors through their fierce guardianship over animals and plant life. There are no major conflicts beyond those concerning nature.

Serving its purpose as a morality play that children can understand, the story portrays Willie, Evan, and the beings of the magic realm as full of innocence and innate goodness, adaptable to the environment and able to problem solve after "lessons learned" situations. Peripheral characters do not serve much of a function other than in setting Willie up as a positive, self-sacrificing role model.

The father-son bonding moments are exceptional. Evan and Willie show respect and devotion to each other in the story's quieter moments of teaching and learning. Evan is a strong father who serves as both hero and mentor to his impressionable young son.

Issues with agreement and grammar are compounded by missing prepositions and lead to some halting reading moments. Sentences are short and digestible, and language is tuned for young readers.

Willie Wish and the Magic Realm is a beautifully imagined fairy tale with lasting moral values that aims to teach children responsibility and patience.

NANCY POWELL (April 10, 2018)

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