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Most Magnificent Thing, The



Synopsis

A little girl and her canine assistant set out to make the most magnificent thing. But after much hard work, the end result is not what the girl had in mind. Frustrated, she quits. Her assistant suggests a long walk, and as they walk, it slowly becomes clear what the girl needs to do to succeed. A charming story that will give kids the most magnificent thing: perspective!

Book Information

File Size: 21016 KB

Print Length: 32 pages

Publisher: Kids Can Press (April 1, 2014)

Publication Date: April 1, 2014

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00IZH626G

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

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Customer Reviews

I was at a conference of math enthusiasts the other day to discuss kids and the state of math related children's books. Not my usual scene but I was open to it. Despite what some might fear, the day was thoroughly fascinating and the mathematicians in attendance made many fine and salient points that I had never thought to consider. At one point they took it upon themselves to correct some common math-related misunderstandings that have grown over the years. Most fascinating was the idea of trial and error. Kids today live in an era where it often feels to them that if they don't get something right the first time then they should just give it up and try something else. It's hard to make them understand that in a lot of professions, math amongst them, much

of the job consists of making mistakes and tinkering for long periods of time before getting to the ultimate solution. It got me to thinking about how there really aren't a lot of children's books out there that tackle this subject. Or, for those few that do, tackle it well. The remarkable thing then about a book like "The Most Magnificent Thing" by Ashley Spires isn't just the way in which she's gone about discussing this issue, but also the fact that it works as brilliantly as it does. This is the anti-perfection picture book. The one that dares to suggest that maybe a little trial and error is necessary when trying to get something right. A girl and her dog are best friends. They do everything together from exploring to racing to making things. So when the girl has an idea one day for "the most MAGNIFICENT thing" that they can make together, the dog has no objection. Plans are drawn up, supplies gathered, and the work begins. And everything seems to be fine until it becomes infinitely clear that the thing she has made?

As you may have guessed the protagonist is attempting to create a most magnificent thing. Frustrated by her lack of immediate and not so immediate success the girl continues to make her idea for the most magnificent thing come to life, over and over again. I love all the different ways the girl tries to make the magnificent thing better, one time she makes it long, then she tries short, then rough, smooth, big, small... At the peak of her frustration she explodes, "it's not her finest moment" and she quits. She gains a little perspective with the help of her assistant (her pug-ish pup). And comes back to examine the many wrong things she made only to realize they all have things about them that she likes. After closely examining all of the wrong things she finally knows how to make her thing magnificent and she does! It's not perfect, it leans, it's heavy, it's not the best color but it's just what she wanted and she's no longer disappointed. This is a sweet book, I like that the protagonist isn't named, she's just "the girl", she could be any girl. The story has a nice sense of humor to it, the assistant adds the levity with his contributions, he circles, he tugs, he wags, then later "suggests" a much needed walk. I also like the way the neighbors found uses for the girl's failures, they might not be the magnificent thing but they're not worthless, they will serve someone else's purpose. But what I like most about this story is the way the author conveys the emotions the girl goes through in the process of creating her magnificent thing, Ms. Spires gets it just right. The girl is consumed and a little oblivious of the world around her as she works toward her goal.

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