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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

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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? It's all wrong! Not a problem. She tosses it and tries again. And again. And again. Soon frustration turns to anger and anger into a whopping great temper tantrum. Just when the girl is on the brink of giving up, her doggie partner in crime suggests a walk. And when they return they realize that even if they haven't gotten everything right yet, the previous attempts did a right thing here or a right thing there. And when you put those parts together what you'll have might not be exactly like it was up in your brain, but it'll be a truly magnificent thing just the same. I think perhaps the main reason we don't see a lot of books about kids trying and failing is that this sort of plot doesn't make for a natural picture book. I won't point any fingers, but the usual plot about success follows this format: Hero tries. Hero fails. Hero tries. Hero fails. Hero tries. Hero succeeds. Now hero is an instant pro. You see the problem. I've seen this plotline used on everything from learning to ride a bike to playing an instrument. And what Spires has done here that's so marvelous is show that there's a value in failure. A value that won't yield success unless you go over your notes, rethink what you've already thought, reexamine the problem, and try it from another angle. In this book the failure is continual and incredibly frustrating. The girl actually has quite a bit of chutzpah, since she completes at least eleven mistakes before finally hitting on a solution. Useful bits and pieces are culled, but it's also worth noting that the inventions left behind, while they don't do her much good, are claimed by other people with other ideas. It sort of reinforces the notion that even as you work towards your own goals, your process might be useful to other people, whether or not you recognize

that fact at the time. Spire's doesn't cheat either. Our unnamed heroine idea is actually clear cut about what she wants to make from the start. On the page where it reads, "One day, the girl has a wonderful idea. She is going to make the most MAGNIFICENT thing" you can see her on her scooter explaining her idea to her now thoroughly exhausted pup. It's only on the last page that we learn that the thing in question was to be a pug-sized sidecar for the aforementioned scooter. Now Ms. Spire's is no newbie to the world of children's literature. If you have not seen her Binky the Space Cat graphic novel series for kids, it is about time you hied thee hence and found those puppies. In them, you will discover that not only is she remarkably good at the subtle visual gag, but that her writing is just tiptop. Some of the choices she made for this book were fascinating to me. It's written in the present tense. Neither the girl nor the dog has a name. At the same time it's incredibly approachable. I love how Spire's relates the girl's travails. The final solution is also all the better because even with her success it's not perfectly perfect. "It leans a little to the left, and it's a bit heavier than expected. The color could use a bit of work, too. But it's just what she wanted!" Perfection can be a terrible thing to strive for. Sometimes, just getting it right can be enough. And yes, I have to mention it at some point: it's about a scientifically minded girl character. Now you might feel like this ain't no big a thing, but let me assure you that when I was wracking my brain to come up with readalikes for this title, I came up nearly empty. Picture books where girls are into nature science? Commonplace. But books where girls are into math or invention? Much more difficult. There are a couple exception to the rule ("Violet the Pilot" by Steve Breen, "Rosie Revere, Engineer" by Andrea Beaty, and "Oh No! Or How My Science Project Destroyed the World" by Mac Barnett come to mind) but by and large they are rare. Yet if this had been a book where the whole point was something along the lines of even-girls-can-love-science I would have loathed it. The joy of "The Most Magnificent Thing" is that the girl's goal is the focus, not the girl herself. Her love of tinkering is just natural. A fact of life. As well it should be. On the back bookflap for this book we are able to discover the following information about Ms. Spire's: "Ashley has always loved to make things and she knows the it-turned-out-wrong frustration well! All of her books have at one point or another made her cry, scream and tear her hair out as she tried to get them JUST RIGHT. I guess that children's authors really are the finest authorities on trial and error. They know

frustration. They know rejected drafts. They know how much work it takes to get a book just right. And when all the right elements come together at last? Then you get a book like *The Most Magnificent Thing*. I don't know how long it took Ms. Spires to write and illustrate this. All I know is that it was worth it. In the end, it's precisely the kind of book we need for kids these days. Perfection is a myth. Banged up, beat up, good enough can sometimes be the best possible solution to a problem. A lesson for the 21st century children everywhere. For ages 3-7.

I'm only 11 and I loved it I will encourage the author to keep up her dreams in writing books like that so other people will follow their dreams just like her and her family. Love Gracie Mauck PS always follow your heart! I'm only 11 I love this book I encourage other people to follow their own dreams and meet their goals just like me I know that you can follow your heart and your mind so go for it this woman did something incredible so can you just put your mind to it! Love Gracie Mauck

Great book to inspire creativity. I use this as a read aloud before kicking off our engineering unit. My class participates in a Rube Goldberg competition. The students have to build a 10 step machine using all 6 simple machines to complete a specified task. It takes a lot of trial and error just like the girl in the book has a lot of trial and error before she gets her invention right.

What a wonderful idea book. A book that encourages conversation and questions, gives a person something to think about well after the last page is turned and the book is closed. The little girl in the book looks like my granddaughter in a way.

Great story about persistence and using a time out when one gets frustrated. The young heroine and her dog are good companions and part of a delightful tale of invention and resourcefulness.

This story is a darling way of teaching creative power, fix to frustration and hard work pays off. It never hurts to have a friend along the way... share and discuss with the children you love.

I'm happy with *The Most Magnificent Thing*. I bought the book for my 2yo daughter who loves to read. My daughter is becoming more aware of building, her imagination and her emotions. I think

this story illustrates all these things so well. My only critique is that I went with hardcover vs board book because my daughter does so well with not destroying books, most of the time. However, the hardcover is a large square book. I think a board book would suite her toddler fingers better for toting the book around the house. Overall, a good buy.

Given as a gift to a young girl much like the one in this book.

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