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**Who is Fish Girl?**

**What is Fish Girl?**

She lives in a tank in a boardwalk aquarium. She is the main attraction, though visitors never get more than a glimpse of her.

She has a tail. She can't walk. She can't speak.

But she can make friends with Livia, an ordinary girl, and yearn for a life that includes yoga and pizza. She can grow stronger and braver. With determination, a touch of magic, and the help of a loyal octopus, she can do *anything*.

## Fish Girl Details

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## From Reader Review Fish Girl for online ebook

### Erin Cataldi says

As a child I was obsessed with David Wiesner's gorgeously illustrated children's novels (Jumanji, The Polar Express, Zathura, etc.) and as a teenager I was completely taken with Donna Jo Napoli's young adult books, especially since the majority of them were fairy tale retellings. I re-read Sirena (a book about a mermaid coincidentally) so many times in middle school. When I saw that these two literary power houses had teamed up to write a graphic novel I knew I HAD TO READ IT! Fish Girl is by n means complex, but it's simplicity is wonderful and inspiring. Fish Girl lives in a giant aquarium by the beach and helps Neptune put on a show for the humans who come in from the boardwalk. It's a lonely existence and she only has her octopus and the fish to keep her company, if she's lucky Neptune will tell her a goodnight tale while she gathers coins at the bottom of the tank. One day a little girl sees her, really sees her and nothing is ever the same again. A wonderful quick read. I found it absolutely refreshing and wonderfully drawn.

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### Calista says

I'm not sure how I really feel about this book. I think I need to throw up a spoiler warning to speak about it so:

SPOILER Ahead

It's an interesting tale. I believe this is David's first graphic novel and he certainly pulled it off well.

We have the example of the little mermaid who was a mermaid that wants to be a human. There is precedent. The funny thing is that most children seem to want to be mermaids or something else. This Fish Girl is a mermaid and she doesn't seem to desire to be human, she simply desires to be free. In the end, she is completely human and she can't go back. Maybe this is saying as we step into ourselves and stand up, we have to give something up. There are sacrifices needed to take our shackles off. I feel like he is speaking of growing up and getting out of our parents house and into our lives.

Fish Girl lives in an aquarium with some man calling himself Neptune. He has the girl convinced he is THE Neptune. She does find out he uses machines to do the things she thought we his power of the seas. The man is simply trying to pay bills and he is providing for the Fish Girl while also limiting her experience of life.

The girl gets out of the tank at night. She becomes more bold and eventually she finds out she has legs. When she gets back in the water, her tail comes back. At least until the end, when she gets her legs for the last time. She tries to go back in the water and her tail doesn't come back. She can not ever go back to her home in the ocean. She has a best friend of an Octopus who seems to be able to change sizes and I wonder if he is the real Neptune??? The octopus must go back to the ocean and the girl finds a human family. We assume she is not going to be put in the foster home system, because that would be cruel after what she did.

The artwork is lovely in the giant building of an aquarium. The building must have been reinforced somehow to how that much weight. There was wonder in the story and the story has something to say. I go back and forth between 3 and 4 stars. After discussing it, I still don't know how I feel. I thought the setting and characters were good and a great seed of an idea for the story. I thought it was a good story, but I don't have a fully positive feeling after the story either and maybe that's ok. Not all stories are to lift us up. This story left me feeling sad and unsatisfied over the story I think. THAT is why I'm at 3 stars. I somehow feel

unsatisfied.

I love David Wiesner as a storyteller. I guess this has to do with where I'm at this moment. The story does ask questions and provokes thought, so it does its job. It's a story on in the middle on.

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### **Alia says**

Pretty big let down for me. The writing and dialogue felt unnatural & the story wasn't super interesting/slightly disturbing. I went in with high hopes (Donna Jo Napoli!!) and came out just meh. It's just okay.

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### **Sarah says**

Oh I loved this! I adore David Wiesner's illustrations, and have just come off of reading aloud many of his books, including my favorites-Flotsam and Sector 7- to a few classes. His incredible sea creatures and octopi take center stage here, along with a mermaid. And speaking of mermaids-Donna Jo Napoli is also an author I like.

I was charmed by this imaginative story and I loved the pictures. Wiesner and Napoli were an inspired pairing and perfect for this book. I'm looking forward to sharing it with others.

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### **Sesana says**

The art is gorgeous, and I love the idea of a mermaid with an octopus for a best friend. But the story just fell flat for me.

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### **Charles Lint says**

I would have given this five stars but the prose just doesn't sing the way the art does. It's a touch too simplistic. But oh the art is gorgeous. And the narrative hits all the right notes.

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### **Colona Public Library says**

I've been thinking about this book even after I finished reading it. This is a story about a mermaid who is the secret main attraction in a aquarium, Her mystery is what keeps the costumers coming back to try and find her. Her closest friend and guardian is an octopus, until a girl spots her and says she is beautiful and makes friends with her quickly. The mermaids friend starts to question why she is treated the way she is and wonders how Neptune does his act. The mermaid has only ever know Neptune as a god so when she finds out he has been manipulating her she questions her freedom and who she can trust. Soon she finds out she has some new legs to stand on and wants to escape. The art in this book is also gorgeous! You really lose yourself when you are reading this story. ~Ashley

This book is really powerful to me because this mermaid was lied to and manipulated all her life, she is trapped in a house aquarium all her life, no one is allowed to see her (only briefly to make money), and this is the only life she's ever know until she makes a connection with a true friend does she start to question her treatment. Neptune is no god and she now is growing more confident and working hard to leave. It's not easy having a controlling figure in your life (especially a parental one) and leaving these toxic and awful relationships can be hard. I really liked this book a lot because it was kinda a fantasy but also metaphorical. The message at the end is very empowering and is why I've been thinking about it so much. Great story and I highly recommend.

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### **Kazia says**

I'm a huge fan of Napoli, but this did nothing for me and it didn't feel anything like the rest of her fairy tale work, which is what I was anticipating. Weisner's art felt completely flat and emotionless to me. What a disappointment.

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### **Agn? says**

I LOVE David Wiesner's picturebooks and Donna Jo Napoli's fairy tale retellings, but this graphic novel is nothing like their previous works (unfortunately).

Wiesner's artwork in *Fish Girl* is mostly flat and rather boring:

...with the exception of a few spreads, which hint at the illustrator's full potential:

Although the theme of abduction and Stockholm syndrome did capture my attention, the story in *Fish Girl* is rather simplistic and seems rushed, the dialogue (and monologues) feels unnatural, and the plot is full of holes (view spoiler). Too bad...

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### **David Schaafsma says**

*Fish Girl* joins the talents of popular novelist Donna Jo Napoli and popular children's picture book maker David Weisner. Neither had done graphic novels before, but clearly Napoli is as established a storyteller as Weisner is an illustrator. I think it's okay on a kind of basic level, with a pretty bland theme of empowerment for the Fish Girl, who finally gets to stand (literally) on her own. But I have to say it has some creepy elements to it, and maybe it has a good point to make for middle grade girls in this respect. Maybe, too, I should say spoiler alert here since I can't discuss the story much at all and say anything of significance about it without revealing the plot. So read on at your own risk!

*Fish Girl* is a mermaid who works (and this is the point, that she works for a living, as child/mermaid labor, with all the other creatures there) for Neptune at his seaside aquarium-for-profit. They're not rich, but the Fish Girl is for some reason asked not to show herself very clearly to visitors; they look in the aquarium and

sometimes think they spot her. I was never sure what the point of this hiding-the-main-feature-of-the-exhibit really is, actually.

Anyway, Fish Girl grows up, trusting Neptune, loving him as he also loves his "treasure" (her; and this is really true, financially, because he makes no money without her cooperation). He's not her father, but a strong and somewhat overbearing father figure to her. At one point Neptune tells Fish Girl of her origins, as a reward for her working hard one day; when she doesn't work hard she is ignored by him; he gets very angry when she does not do what he wants, when she violates his rules. Think of King Triton with his trident angrily keeping Ariel from the human world; Neptune's trident operates as the same symbol here to separate Fish Girl from the human world.

Fish Girl has an octopus for a best friend, and she loves her home, under water in the tank. But one day a girl named Livia sees her and over time befriends her, in secret, until they are angrily discovered by Neptune. But the clandestine friendship continues. And, as with *The Little Mermaid*, this mermaid Fish Girl suddenly becomes interested in all things human and gradually ventures more and more into the human world; in the evenings she literally goes out, because she finds she can wear human clothes, and . . . uh, she discovers she has legs. There's a big ol' world out there, she sees, and she wants her piece of it. Cue Mary Tyler Moore music here. "She's gonna make it after all . . ."

So Fish Girl finds that Neptune is not Neptune, but just a guy who has made her and kid visitors of the exhibit think he has mythological powers. "Neptune" has in fact abducted this young girl, binding her legs, and has imprisoned her. She is not a mermaid; she was lied to! The origin story he has told her is a lie! He is using her to make money. Are there echoes here of Pinocchio? Pygmalion? Maybe. Or maybe this is Brothers Grimm mean adult territory.

So if we see this story as a kind of parable for growing up, well, maybe it is okay--girls need to break from their fathers, make their own way, make their own friends; this can be seen as a coming of age story, of empowerment and connecting with friends instead of lovers (as with Ariel). And it's feminist, in the #metoo moment; girls need to break free from domineering men who use them for their own purposes. And it's not a romance, to get free from Dad to marry out of species, as with *Little Mermaid*, so that's different. And when the aquarium is finally destroyed, by a sudden convenient storm (!) all the fish and sea animals also become free to live in their natural habitat, so free-to-be-you-and-me is the useful point, I guess; this dude is imprisoning sea creatures for his own profit!

We live in a time of true crime abductions and abuse of young girls by domineering men and this bears real resemblance for me to those stories. So I am glad she is free to live with her friend in the end, or I think that is what we are meant to think will happen, but . . . it feels pretty creepy for a middle grades book. There's no hint of sexual assault here, just to be clear, but the abduction, the lying, the imprisonment: It's got the creep factor here.

But another thing, how can she suddenly can talk in the end? If we see this as a coming of age myth, and this is allegory, well, okay, she "finds her voice," but how does it suddenly happen? Why couldn't she literally speak any time before this? We do see her trying, too. I guess the point is Fish Girl breaking free from her abductor, which frees her to speak and be the person she wants to be, be herself. So I have a few questions, and concerns. I liked the art a lot, of course, very much. But maybe the thing I seem to be objecting to in this book is the very point of it?

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**Mary Librarian says**

There is no question that David Wiesner is an amazing artist. Here he joins forces with Donna Jo Napoli for a tale of a mermaid who lives in an aquarium and makes a human friend for the first time. Overall, the story is interesting and the interactions between Fish Girl the mermaid, Livia the human girl, and Neptune the aquarium owner move the plot along. I didn't feel that there was enough back story to explain how Neptune had come to have Fish Girl for his show and the ocean's storm also felt a little out of left field.

Still fans of Roller Girl and Raina Telgemeier will like this new graphic novel that comes out in March.

Review based from reading advanced copy.

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### **Jason says**

It's about TIME Wiesner did a proper graphic novel, since he's been making them as picture books for the past twenty-odd years. I loved this so much--the singular location kept the story simple and allowed the creators more time and space to develop the characters, Mira in particular--she really is the whole story. And she is enough for the whole story, too. Her growth from naivete to empowerment is exciting to witness, and should provide inspiration to many young boys and girls who are struggling to find their own voices. Most interesting is the character of Neptune, whose behavior is never excused but who is also presented as a broken man who ends up hurting others out of his brokenness. He has a genuine love of the things of the sea, but his shallowness doesn't allow him to enjoy them unless he can control them, and that struggle to control is his undoing in the end. I want redemption for him, too, just like I wanted freedom and agency for Mira. And I want these things because of the brilliant portrayal of both characters by the creators. It goes without saying that the art is incredible. Those of us who grew up well into adulthood with his picture books would have high expectations for the art and it does not disappoint. I would LOVE to see more of Mira's story, possibly even her return to her people, but that would be a completely different kind of story than this one, so maybe it's best to leave well enough alone. Either way, please keep making graphic novels, David Wiesner!

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### **Rebecca Shelton says**

Review of an ARC.

I'm not sure how appropriate this subject matter is for middle grade readers. Just because the author sugarcoats it into a nice mermaid story doesn't hide the fact that this is about abduction and abuse. On the other hand, it may be a good thing. To show how strong and resilient the human (haha) spirit is. I don't know though, I was pretty angry most of the way through.

Update 12-16-16:

I've had a day to think about this book and my reaction to it. It's not often that a book lingers with me after I read it so when it does I know that it's made an impact. I stand by the fact that I still don't think this is a graphic novel for middle grade readers. The story is about a young mermaid who lives in an independently owned aquarium. The aquarium owner plays Zeus to his visitors. The problem is that Fish Girl believes him and the stories he tells about her origins. Why shouldn't she? He's had her since she was a baby, of course there would be no reason that he would lie to her, right? Unfortunately for him, she begins to unravel the mystery and realizes just how controlling, manipulative and mean he's been to her. Having grown up witnessing several abusive relationships, this book struck a chord with me and I can't unwrap my mind from that aspect of the story to enjoy anything else about it. I'm proud of Fish Girl for escaping and choosing her

own life. The outcome for her is a lot better than it is for most children who go through what she's been through.

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## Lola says

**\*This is my 1000th Goodreads review! Whoohoo!\***

There is a mermaid imprisoned inside a house by a self-proclaimed Zeus. Every day, she plays with the visitors who come in the hope of getting a glimpse of her.

The mermaid does not realize something is wrong with the way she is living her childhood—does she even have one?—until a girl her age opens her eyes to her own situation.

This is a beautiful story. The narration is in short supply and simple... Not exactly poetic, though it is fitting for a middle grade story. The beauty of the story, however, lies in the images, which are detailed, colourful and realistic.

Although I'm tempted to question how the mermaid could possibly have lived this long without having wondered once about the mechanisms of her own home and the very person who keeps her there.

But at the same time, she is a captive who got attached to the person she doesn't yet know is her captor. It is not easy to recognize abuse in our personal lives. Sometimes it does take an exterior source to help us become aware.

Romanticized themes? True. Important story? More than true.

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## Nancy Kotkin says

Story: 4 stars

Art: 5 stars

Fish Girl is a middle grade graphic novel about a mermaid who is held captive in a boardwalk sideshow by the owner, a former fisherman who impersonates Neptune the King of the Seas to entertain paying audiences. But Fish Girl is the main attraction of the aquarium, and she believes her captor really is Neptune the God. At least at first.

But Fish Girl is clever and observant in her search for truth, freedom, and humanity. She has help along the way by an octopus, who has been her loyal companion since she was a baby, as well as a new female human friend and a magical ocean. Spectacular full-color art.

While Neptune is a manipulative and creepy adult male who is imprisoning a young girl, the fantasy elements make this story a gentle way to introduce this seedier, tragic aspect of life to middle grade readers. The loving friendship between Fish Girl and Octopus is heartwarming and palpable, despite the fact that neither can speak.

I just wish the ending was more conclusive, given the targeted age group and all that Fish Girl has endured.  
(view spoiler)

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