



The Wheel on the School

Meindert DeJong , Maurice Sendak (Illustrator)

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Why do the storks no longer come to the little Dutch fishing village of Shora to nest? It was Lina, one of the six schoolchildren who first asked the question, and she set the others to wondering. And sometimes when you begin to wonder, you begin to make things happen. So the children set out to bring the storks back to Shora. The force of their vision put the whole village to work until at last the dream began to come true.

The Wheel on the School Details

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Author : Meindert DeJong , Maurice Sendak (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Wheel on the School for online ebook

Nora says

MCL. I thought I wouldn't like it, but then I did.

Phil Jensen says

I was delighted to find that not only does this book age very well, but it also joins Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH as one of the very few books in which the antagonist is a problem or situation rather than a human. The plot really is as simple as it sounds: the students want to put a wagon wheel on their school so that they can get storks to roost there. Problem-solving ensues. They encounter all sorts of physical, environmental, meteorological, and even economic obstacles, but at no point does a snobby rich kid or a greedy industrialist show up to twist a mustache. I found it refreshing and compelling to see a group of students carefully, scientifically work their way through the problem-solving process without some kind of cheesy moral oversimplification shoehorned in.

Christina says

This is a darling story about a group of children living in a tiny Holland village trying to encourage storks to settle in their town. The story is very simple, but had a few deep moments (like watching Janus's transformation).

I probably would have given it just 3 stars except for one thing. Near the beginning, the children divide up and go on a 'quest'. We hear about the same afternoon from each of their points of view. I enjoyed how those 5 stories were interconnected and came together at the end. For example, one of the children would do 'x'. Then, in the next story, another child would be doing something and notice the previous child doing 'x'. Okay, that's confusing. But the stories influence each other and everyone comes together in the end, and I felt it was very cleverly written. Auka's interaction with the tin-man is my favorite.

*** SPOILER ***

I was a little bit disturbed by the number of times children and adults alike were willing to risk their lives to get the wheel and the storks. Eelka didn't know he was risking his life when he tied the wheel around his waist and pushed it out the second story window, but the other instances were instigated by adults. All the dads climbing around on the roof in a storm? Sending Pier out in the rising tide to get the storks alone? Lina & Douwa waiting on the boat to get the wheel with the tide coming in - trusting that someone would come get them before they drown?

Sarah says

A friend was just asking for recommendations for a book for her just-turned-11 daughter, and I thought I'd send her to goodreads to read my recommendation for this book. Imagine my surprise when one of my favorite books was not on my list!

The Wheel on the School is a wonderful book about things being made right. When a child asks a question,

the teacher pushes her - and the whole class - to find answers. As they begin to imagine answers, they begin to see their own community with new eyes, and wonderful things begin to happen. At times hilariously funny, this book is a great read-aloud for the whole family.

Gisoo says

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Reem says

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Anna says

I love kids books where the dialogue is realistic, and the characters of the grown-ups are also realistic. It's not contrived, it's not "goody goody" adults, it's REAL people. This story of the little schoolchildren in the Dutch town of Shora is so endearing. They put forth so much effort to get a wheel on the school so the storks can come. There are such lessons to be learned here: people aren't always what they seem (Old legless Janus isn't really a mean man), and the value of hard work and working together (the tin man, the old man Evert, fishermen fathers) and accomplishing something so everyone benefits. My kids will definitely read this one!

Jen Vanderwey says

This man is my all-time favorite fiction author. Reminiscent of CS Lewis in his child-like spirit. The old Dutchman tells the captivating story of how the children of Shora work to bring storks to nest on the roof of their school. A picture of old world Holland. The moral of the tale: you can become friends with just about any human (no matter their age), if you give it a chance.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

Sadly, Meindert DeJong's books are impossible to find where I live. I have a battered secondhand copy of

this one that I read periodically. I love the way DeJong handles language, such as when Lina thinks of coming out with a clever answer at school and the boys in her class "sitting there with their mouths full of teeth." I love the way he gets into the minds of small children and remembers how they think and feel about things. Things that to an adult are "little" or "unimportant" can be huge to a child.

The children of Shora feel that something is missing--there are no storks on their roofs! Why not? And what can they do about it? It's easier to pull together when there are only about eight students in a one-room schoolhouse, but that doesn't mean it's not a good read. It is. Life is not perfect in little Shora--there isn't much to do (particularly if you're the only girl in the school), and all the children have to deal with their fears--of drowning, of heights, of dogs, of fierce Janus, the mean neighbour in a wheelchair. As they learn to face their fears and find ways to bring storks to Shora, they learn about getting along in their time and place--with each other, the smaller kids, and adults. *I see a lot of negative reviews saying "this book isn't suitable for middle-school kids." No, nor was it intended for them when first published. It's meant for kids in the 8-10yr bracket. Though thinking adults can also enjoy it if their inner child hasn't been done to death by Play Station and "gritty" crime, vampires, the substitution of cynicism for humour, etc.*

On another website I have read a scathing review saying that Friesland does not exist. It most certainly does, though Shora is fictional. Said reviewer was also oh so superior because the children's names are not "real Dutch names." Given the fact that the person didn't know about Friesland, I wonder how they decided that? And why does it matter? It's a gentle, life affirming story about a past time and place. And I devoutly wish I could go there.

Joann says

The beauty of these older Newberry winners is their innocent simplicity. The story was simple- children in a small town trying to entice storks to nest on the roof of their school. It really didn't stray much from that. It was, I felt, a refreshing break from the adolescent drama so common to the more recent Newberry winners. I really enjoyed the characters particularly the elderly people that the children came to know and love. This was a beautiful, unassuming story that I enjoyed very much.

Cindy Rollins says

One of the joys of teaching is getting to reread old friends. This one must be read in short sections but it is a wonderful story of life in community.

Ariel says

I remember reading and loving this Newbery award-winner from Holland about children in a tiny fishing village on the Dutch coastline and it's still great. Their teacher encourages them to figure out why there are no lucky storks living on the roofs of their village (unlike the surrounding towns) and work together to remedy the situation. They wind up befriending adults, most notably the formerly surly and isolated double amputee Janus, who performs feats of strength with his powerful arms. The whole town pitches in and everyone gets to know each other in a different way, but yet it's not cloying, it's inspiring. And it's so satisfying when they finally achieve their goal.

This book was Newbery Medal winner of 1955, written in America by an American author who remembered his Dutch childhood and brought the Netherlands to life for generations of readers.

I had many opportunities to read this as a child but never did. I love it now, but tbh I think my instincts then were right and that I would not have appreciated. Now I love the humor, the environmental message, the fondness for the Dutch countryside and culture, the insights into the lives of children... and those of adults, too... well, really, there is so much to love about DeJong's work. Some of it is too subtle for most young readers... but that just means that his books have a very good 're-read value' imo.

QNPoohBear says

In the small Dutch village of Shora, there are no storks. Little Lina knows this. She wrote a composition on the subject. She would love for storks to return to Shora, but the roofs are too sharp. Perhaps if everyone put a wheel on their roofs the storks would come back. Teacher thinks this is a great plan but they also need trees. There aren't any trees in Shora. First things first, where to find a wheel that is not in use? Time is running out before the storks return to their familiar nesting places. Promising to cancel school for the day if storks land in Shora, Teacher sets the children on a quest to find a wheel. Which one will be the first to find a wheel, if they can find one at all? Where will it be? The expected places like a barn or unexpected? What is an unexpected place? Will the storks come to Shora?

This is a cute story I failed to remember from elementary school. Opening it again, I did not remember what it was about until I read about Lina's composition on storks. Then I remembered the wheel on the school but nothing else. The story starts out fairly slow. I didn't care for the choppy writing style in the beginning. The author may have been trying to mimic the speech pattern of a young child but it didn't quite flow smoothly enough to read. Once the children began their quest, the story picked up and I had a hard time putting it down. I especially liked how the teacher encouraged the children and got involved in the excitement too.

The setting is magnificent. I get a real sense of place from the architecture and the natural landscape. The canal and the dike play a huge part in the story. The weather also brings the story to life. I don't know specifically when the book was set- probably pre-WWII or even pre-WWI. The only real reference is to a Queen and looking up Queens of the Netherlands, I see Queen Wilhelmina ruled from 1890-1948 so we know the story takes place somewhere between those years! I liked the quaint village setting, the wooden shoes and the somewhat pre-modern lifestyle. They have newspapers and telegraphs and old steamers but no radios, TVs, cars or modern intrusions. This is a real farming village.

The storks play the lead role in the story. I learned a lot about storks from the story. The birds sound beautiful and magnificent. I was rooting for them to come to Shora and nest there. The newspaper article made me sad, like the children, and also because it sounds like these storks may have been endangered. (Wikipedia says yes they were endangered in the first half of the 20th-century). This understanding makes the story extra poignant.

Lina is the only school age girl in the village and the boys may not let her jump ditches because they think she'll squeal and cry but she's a plucky girl and more resourceful than the boys. The boys are portrayed as lazy and stupid. They barely have individual personalities. Lina is very sweet and caring and this proves to be crucial in the plot.

The story of Janus, the local crank, is pretty typical for a children's book of this period. However, I found him to be a fun character. I understand why he cultivates his grouchy persona and he understands why the children may be afraid of him. He adds some humor to the story later on in the book when it needs to be

lightened up a bit.

The illustrations didn't wow me. For Maurice Sendak, they're tame black and white pencil drawings. They give an impression of a place. To do justice to the setting and the magnificent storks full color, full page illustrations would have been nice.

I think I enjoyed this book more as an adult than I did as a kid.

Stacey says

I adore this book. I never heard of it until I saw it at the bookshelf at my local library. Something drew me to it and I read the summary. Why do I want to read about six schoolchildren from Holland? How did Lina influenced her whole community about trying to get storks to live in her town? Anyway, I checked it out. After reading this book, I can see the depth of the characters, the actions, and suspense. Each child in the book reminds me of real children that I care for and my peers and myself as we were children. I love the learning and team work. I'm glad that this book won the Newbery Award back in 1955. This book is timeless and so universal.

Please read this book for yourself or even better yet read aloud to your kids. Though I've been told that the read aloud is better done for students from third grade and up. Though, I don't see why not read it to a first grader. I may have to break it down and it will take longer to read through. There are first graders who need to hear that it's okay to make mistakes and how we can learn from them as well as fix the hurt done. They may even see themselves in the six school children and two younger kids as well as recognize the adults in the book as someone they know in life.

Gina Johnson says

The children (and I!) all thoroughly enjoyed this book. The language and imagery were rich and flowed smoothly and with a nice cadence too. "It's so impossibly impossible, I can believe it now."

Antof9 says

Love, love, loved this book! I'd read his "Journey to Peppermint Street" a million years ago, and the illustrator Maurice Sendak recently passed away, so it seemed fitting to read this one recently, even though I'm ... two? behind the Newbery group.

Anyway, I loved it. At some point near the end, I couldn't believe how much I was enjoying a book about storks, of all things! The way this town was described reminds me quite a bit of the town my dad is from. It's on the Northern corner of Holland, and has two streets. The town ends at the dyke, and I have sat on that dyke many, many times. It was SO easy to picture what was happening in this book because that town was the stuff of my memories.

Loved the interaction with the older people, loved the boys, loved the schoolteacher, Janus, oh, this was so good.

