



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Julián Is a Mermaid

Jessica Love
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia
Locked Bag 22
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

Ph +61 2 9517 9577
Fax +61 2 9517 9997

These notes were created by Steve Spargo.
For enquiries please contact:
educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au

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Outline:

While riding the subway home with his Nana one day, Julián notices three women spectacularly dressed up. Their hair billows in brilliant hues, their dresses end in fishtails, and their joy fills the train carriage. When Julián gets home, daydreaming of the magic he's seen, all he can think about is dressing up just like the ladies and making his own fabulous mermaid costume. But what will Nana think about the mess he makes – and even more importantly – what will she think about how Julián sees himself?

Author/Illustrator Information:

Jessica Love is an illustrator and Broadway actress. She has a BA in studio art from the University of California, as well as a graduate degree from Juilliard. *Julián Is a Mermaid* is her first picture book.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary (all years)
- Ages 4-8

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Picture Book

Themes/Ideas:

- Inspiration
- Family
- Love
- Gender



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before reading

Before reading *Juliàn is a Mermaid*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title
- The author–illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? After reading, revisit your answer to this question. Were your predictions correct?

Exploring the text

Many of the spreads are wordless. Ask students to describe what is happening on the spreads. What clues do you get from the illustrations as to what is happening and how that makes the characters feel?

Examine the spread where Juliàn's abuela comes out of the bath and sees him dressed as a mermaid. How do you think the characters are feeling at that moment? How can you tell? How does the story surprise you or subvert expectations after this point?

Exploring the Illustrations

Examine the colour palette used throughout the book. What are the dominant colours? What mood or feelings do they create? How do Jessica Love's colour choices convey meaning in each spread? Does the colour palette change throughout the book? Why do you think that is? Find a colour ad in a magazine or newspaper. Discuss how colour is used. Re-create the ad using a different colour scheme and discuss how the meaning of the ad changes with a different colour scheme.

Themes

Inspiration

What does inspiration mean? What inspired Juliàn in this book?

Have you ever seen, read or heard anything that inspired you in a strong way, like Juliàn? Write a few sentences about that moment, or the thing that speaks to you the way the mermaids spoke to Juliàn. This can be a private activity for those that don't feel comfortable sharing their story.

Family/unconditional love

At first it seems like abuela is angry with Juliàn for dressing as a mermaid, but this feeling is short-lived. How does abuela demonstrate that she is supportive of Juliàn?

Think about the term "unconditional love". What does it mean to you? How is it demonstrated in this book?

Being yourself

Though it is not explicitly shown in this book, the reader can assume that Juliàn is different to other boys his age. Split the class into two groups and have a class discussion – the first group can imagine they are Juliàn and they can discuss what fears or anxieties being different might cause; and the second group can imagine they are the other kids at Juliàn's school and they can discuss how they could help Juliàn feel safe and comfortable.

Gender

Have a class discussion on what are traditionally masculine and feminine traits. Do you think it's ok for boys to have traditionally feminine traits and for girls to have traditionally masculine traits? Why or why not? Imagine people made fun of you for the way you naturally walk, talk or your interests – how would that make you feel?

Language – Spanish

Ask the class if anyone knows the meaning of the Spanish words used in the book. Continue this activity with some other Spanish words not used in the book.

- Abuela (*ah-bwel-ah*): Grandmother
- Mijo (*me-ho*): my son
- Vamos (*ba-mah-nos*): let's go
- Abuelo (*ah-bwel-oh*): Grandfather
- Madre (*mah-dray*): Mother
- Padre (*pah-dray*): Father
- Sirena (*see-ren-ah*): Mermaid
- Amor (*ah-more*): Love

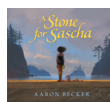
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