



Three Bears in a Boat

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From the co-creator of the *New York Times* bestselling *Ladybug Girl* series comes a high seas adventure inspired by the classic picture books *Little Bear* and *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Three bear siblings break their mother's favorite blue seashell, and rather than tell her, they decide to set out in their sailboat to find her a new one. On their quest they encounter salty sailors, strange new islands, huge whales, and vast seas but no blue seashells. When a treacherous storm suddenly blows in, the three bears find themselves tossed about in their little boat, far from Mama. What will become of their search, and what will it take to bring them safely home?

This read aloud shares its best qualities with classic picture books: breath-taking illustrations, epic adventure, and a subtle message about taking responsibility for your actions.

Three Bears in a Boat Details

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Author : David Soman

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From Reader Review Three Bears in a Boat for online ebook

Paula says

Well, shit. I keep wanting a female illustrator to be my frontrunner for Caldecott, but then Aaron Becker comes along, or Jon Klassen rewrites all the rules, or David Soman paints a couple dozen beautiful seascapes with tender, expressive bears in 'em.

Masterful. Recalls the drawings in Else Holmelund Minarik's Little Bear books AND Miss Potter's little paintings of fluffy animals, and you just can't go wrong with forebears like that.

Lynn says

Alliteration is used effectively and does not feel forced into the story: "...the sly bears slid their boat into the sea and set sail." The storm they encounter represents the argument they have in which they blame each other, then as they resolve their disagreement, they '...sailed out of the storm and into the sun...and floated on water as smooth and calm as glass."

Oversized book has beautiful watercolors on two page spreads that invite one right into the story! I love the page where they are sailing into the sunlight.

One of my favorite parts of a book is the end papers, and this book delights with the introduction of the bears at the beginning and the map of their adventures at the end. Students always ask which character is which in animal stories. I wonder if students will recall that the three little kittens also were denied dessert....

Teresa says

The story was all right (I was hoping the story would be more interesting as the title reminded me of that wonderfully droll "Three Men In a Boat") but the illustrations...wow! I could lose myself in the illos for months. The rating is for the art.

Miriam says

Bratty bears epic adventure!

All the nautical literature visual references bump this up to 4 stars.

Betsy says

I always suspected there was more to David Soman than met the eye. That's the problem with success. Folks just dismiss you out of hand. If the man's name is ringing a couple bells here and there that's probably you

have, at some point in your life, read a child one of the Ladybug Girl books that he created with his wife Jacky Davis. *Ladybug Girl* is a big hit (particularly in my household) and therein lies the trouble. When people think of picture book bestsellers they sometimes associate it with books like *Pinkalicious* or those perfectly nice but innocuous *Night Before* books. They don't think about truly lovely art. Yet ever since the beginning, Soman hasn't been afraid to make his books beautiful. For me, one of his greatest works is *Ladybug Girl at the Beach*. I loved the way he shaped his watercolors to give the impression of gigantic waves and pounding surf. It took him a while, but at long last Soman is returning to a nautical theme and it's in this, his solo effort *Three Bears in a Boat*. Haunting and touching by turns, this is just a beautiful journey you'll want to return to repeatedly.

It wasn't their best idea. But Dash, Theo, and Charlie were so sure they'd be able to reach that distant jar of honey their mama put out of grasp on the mantle shelf. Unfortunately in their bid for sweets they accidentally destroy their mother's lovely blue seashell. The solution? If they can set out across the sea in their little boat and find a replacement seashell, maybe their mother won't even notice the switch. So away they go, but after asking for advice it seems the only place to find such a shell is on an island shaped like a lumpy hat. As one old sea salt advises them, "Just look the right place." Thus begins a mini epic, as the bears encounter creatures, storms, and even dark caves in their quest for the near impossible.

When children read picture books, they carry away images that stay with them the rest of their lives. Their lifelong dreams are infused with the illustrations of their youth. There is a reason that the English poet Walter de la Mare once said, "Only the rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young." It means that if you give them beauty, they'll take that beauty with them and carry it in their minds for always. I say all this because there is a very particular two-page spread in this book so awe-inspiring and frightening and gorgeous that I think it will be infecting my dreams as much as those of my children. In the midst of a fight, the three little bears do not notice that a storm has grown up around them. They do not notice, I say, until a sudden two-page spread of a mountainous wave, green at its core (why should green be so frightening, I wonder), towers over their tiny boat. The only book I've ever seen conjure up similar feelings of helplessness in the wake of a wall of water to this extent would be Ed Young's devastating wave in *Tsunami* by Kimiko Kajikawa.

Mind you, Soman's much more than just a fount of terror. Water is not just his medium of choice (watercolors) but his inspiration. One moment you can see the sea spray pelting the little bears in their boat, the waves rising up around them like living things. The next moment the water is "as smooth and calm as glass" and Soman perfectly captures the wavy mirror-like reflection of the three now thoroughly baffled bears. There are other moments of pure beauty before this, of course. A scene where a pod of whales lift them from the green-blue sea benignly. Another where their little boat sits poised in the white-hot light of the sun, the waves all spit and flecks of white around them. It doesn't disappoint.

Soman isn't afraid to put in a couple jokes for parent readers as well. I'm a fan of in-jokes. When I consider the lot of parents forced to read the same three picture books over and over to their kiddos I feel all the more grateful when folks like Soman come up with ways to keep things interesting. At one point in this book the three bears start asking fellow bear/boat travelers for help locating a blue shell for their mama. The first boat contains four bears on a raft, the youngest wearing overalls. This is the Huckleberry Finn boat, complete with Duke and King. Well played there. They also see a boat called the "Melville" crammed with bears of all sorts. From the polar bear with tattoos around his face and shoulder to the stern captain, harpoon in hand, this is the Moby Dick boat. So that's clear as crystal. It is at this point that you might start wondering what a third boat would consist of. What other fictional classics take place on the water? I suppose that there's *Life of Pi*, but that's a bit recent. Or maybe something a little overdone like *Noah's Ark*. Instead, Soman gets a bit crazy on us.

In the third boat three bears wearing party hats and benign expressions point every which way when confronted with the little bears' query of where to find a blue seashell. Looking at it, I was stumped. Ladies and gentlemen it took me weeks before I could figure this one out and it wasn't until I had a friend over that all was revealed. She looked at the picture (I was hoping inspiration would strike) when she commented, "Why do they have a checkerboard?" Checkerboard? Checkerboard! I rushed over to my daughter's easy book collection and there it was. The trick is in the details. You have to take into account the little things, like the banjo, the Chinese lantern, the lollipop, and the toy boat floating on the sea. I'm not going to spoil it for you. I'll just say that this is from a very famous work for children that many people know, but few would put together with this image. And to David Soman, wow! It takes guts to put something that obscure, and clearly personal, in your own book. He'll be fielding questions about what this is from for the rest of his natural born days. There may be other in-jokes in this book of course (is the boat the "Ursusula K." an oblique nod to Ursula K. Le Guin?) but some secrets are meant to stay unknown.

They've always said that Soman co-created the *Ladybug Girl* books with his wife, so there's no way of knowing where her contributions started and his ended. I knew that his art was great, but how would his writing fare? "Three Bears in a Boat" is an odd little thing in many ways. It's only 40 pages but feels somehow like a longer, more epic story. The writing itself also gets the job done. It culls down the tale to the most essential elements, which is no easy task when you're writing an epic adventure on the high seas. And somehow, even with his limited wordplay, Soman ably brings across the personalities of his three little heroes. They don't say much but what they do say counts.

He's also pulled a reverse *Where the Wild Things Are* on us. You remember how at the end of *Wild Things* the line about the dinner is "and it was still hot"? Well here the little bears do get a warm supper, but alongside the cozy image of their home at night, the lights all lit, smoke emanating from their chimney while their boat sits on the land and the full moon gleams down is the line "But they didn't get any dessert." I love the succinctness of this. In fact, when you sit down and look at the story, the comparisons to *Wild Things* don't stop there. Max too sails away "for a year and a day" while the three little bears sail "on farther than they had ever gone before". But while Max had only his own singular wits to rely upon, these three bears have one another, even if it leads to the occasional quarrel.

Even if a child has never set so much as a sandy toe in the waters of a lake, river, or ocean, there's something compelling in Soman's voyage by sea. The thrill of setting out on your own with friends/siblings along for company is inherently enticing. Plug in adventure and an escape from parental oversight and you've got yourself a snazzy little number. David Soman isn't afraid to get pretty. His ocean scenes are some of the best I've ever seen in a picture book, and his story holds up in the end. If you're looking for a gift book, a bedtime book, or just something uniquely attractive to the eye, seek ye just three little bears. Charm incarnate.

For ages 3-7.

Luann says

I didn't expect to love this! There are so many bear books out there, but this one caught my attention when I saw that each bear had a name and a personality. I was completely hooked when I noticed some sly literary references. I knew then I needed to slow down and pay close attention. I read it several times - once for the story, once for the illustrations, and another time just to enjoy it again. Now I want to read it aloud to some children!

I'm adding this to my list of picture books that would work well to teach the adventure genre.

Sandy says

There's something about these three brown bears and their styling wardrobe that captured my heart. While mother bear was out these three bears decided to have a bit of honey and whoops, mothers pretty blue seashell smashed to the floor. All three of these siblings know what a big bear mother bear is, so they decide they better climb into their boat and find mother bear another blue seashell before she returns. Sounds easy to three little bears but it don't really turn out that way. Using bright colorful pictures, the bears chat with many different bears in the open sea, hoping that one of them knows the location of these blue seashells. When they meet a salty bear, he gives them vague directions but it gives them hope and off they go. It's a grand adventure with lots of obstacles but their journey brings the siblings closer together. The expressions on the bear's faces and the experiences the bears have are just wonderful and children will love this book as I truly enjoyed it. The language had its up and downs using a few difficult words that might need explaining like yonder or incident and then some childish language thrown in that fit the moment. I might just have to buy this one for my own library.

Adele says

The story is a little bit slight, but there are some gorgeous two-page spread seascapes, as well as rhetorical devices you don't often find in a picture book, and some clever visual literary allusions.

Shannon Dunn says

What a wonderful adventure of a book! The illustrations swept us away, and the writing had me excitedly wondering what would happen next. But the best part was when I read the last line, "But they didn't get any dessert," and my four year old daughter shrieked in high-pitched horror, "WHY?!?!" We'll be reading this one again and again.

Jess says

Fantastic seascapes, some visual humor, a substantial (but never too wordy) text and story, sly bears, and a satisfying but just ending. This would be a treat to read aloud.

June 2016 - I still love the illustrations, but bumped it down a star. Ben enjoyed it.

Michelle Nero says

I know there was a lot of love for this book. At first, I wasn't hooked ... "Just another bear book" I thought. However, once the storm came and the three bears in a boat clung to each other, I melted a little. I have high

standards for bear books and this one came through!

Amy says

We are using this book for our March Book Madness bracket and I have loved the response that my students have had to the three bears! They can relate to their plight of being in trouble for breaking something, the quest to fix the situation before anyone finds out, and the forgiveness of their mother in the end. But one student could contain his frustration in the end- "WHO would want honey for dessert??" Three bears would!!

Jan Polep says

Mixed reviews last night on this preschool-kindergarten picture book about three bears who break their mother's blue seashell, then go off in search of a replacement. 5 stars for me, 1 star for Dylan (age 5). I know the Twain and Melville references will be wasted on little kids but the illustrations are super and the message of owning up to your mistakes is a good one. The down side is that Dylan was really concerned about which bear was the girl (hard to tell), where were their folks, and did their folks know they sailed off in the boat without them. He lost interest before they reached any of the islands and went off in search of a brownie.

Monica Edinger says

I am probably not completely objective about this book because it pushes my nostalgia button big time --- the bears (especially the mother) make me think of the Little Bear books written by Else Holmelund Minarik and illustrated by Maurice Sendak. There are other seemingly Sendak references (say from Where the Wild Things Are and In the Night Kitchen) as well as possibly Beatrix Potter. And other literary references --- say Huck Finn and Moby Dick. But these are all just icing for the adult reader --- the story and illustrations are terrific for a child reader/listener too. I'm partial to the double spread of the whale, but there are many other gorgeous pages as well.

Joel says

Picture Book Favorites

Beautiful paintings and a nice adventure with a sweet ending. I also liked the nods to Ursula K. Le Guin and Herman Melville.
