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Crab Moon

By Ruth Horowitz

Illustrated by Kate Kiesler

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Ages: 6-9

Selected by the National Science Teacher's Association as an Outstanding Science Trade Book, Ruth Horowitz's *Crab Moon*, starring the horseshoe crab at more than three hundred and fifty million years young (!), offers children a positive experience of the natural world, claws and all, and assures them that they matter very much indeed to its survival. Horowitz has made a practice of writing about "species that get overlooked because they're not big-eyed or cuddly or cute" (her first children's book featured a bat), and wants to help her readers experience "the rewards of reaching out to a being that may seem utterly alien at first glance" (a skill that may stand them in good stead when dealing with human beings, too).

Horowitz's text respects a child's intelligence and natural curiosity and is straightforward in its scientific explanations of crab behavior (a fascinating facts page is included at the end); but the language also maintains a pleasing and reassuring poetical quality throughout. The "fat, round face of the full moon waver[s] on the surface of the water." The horseshoe crabs are likened to "restless cobblestones." "Curly black seaweed" is "strewn on the sand, like streamers left over from a party."

Kate Kiesler's remarkably gentle yet grounded illustrations, which appear to be done in oils, somehow merge the realism of the modern with the dreamlike quality of a centuries-old fable—what this story is, really, with its (less common lately) moral, simply the good old golden rule of treating others (even hard-shelled arthropods) as you yourself would like to be treated: with respect and compassion. Something the horseshoe crab could use more of, apparently, since their "populations are plummeting as their spawning grounds are destroyed and as they are killed for use as bait." (Also declining dramatically—yes, the circle of life thing—are the "numbers of shore birds who depend on the horseshoe crab eggs.")

At the end of the book, when Daniel says goodbye to the crab he saves, significantly, it is to *his* crab that he says it, and that is as it should be. As Saint-Exupery wrote, "One sees clearly only with the heart." True connection is, can only be, personal, as it becomes for Daniel when he takes responsibility for the survival of another living creature. Now that he has a friend in the ocean, the ocean becomes his—both to enjoy and to worry about. And so, like his mother before him, Daniel, in his imagination, in his ability to care, follows this oddest of creatures, the horseshoe crab, out into the wide world, back to the

sea, and is himself drawn into the tide of life, so many years old, so beautiful and strange and self-renewing. *Crab Moon* is a brief sentence in the longest story in the world: the fate of the earth, a story that we, along with all the Daniels and Danielles who are discovering it for the first time, still dare to hope will have a happy ending. Thanks in part to books like *Crab Moon* that quietly show the next generation that the world needs their two hands and all the love they can muster, maybe it will be.

— Ann Stapleton