



Lota the Sperm Whale

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Reader's name:

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As a hook for potential readers, the title *Lota la cachalota* is misleading; the book's pages convey little about what one might expect to learn about a sperm whale. Rather, the book's authors employ young Lota, who is alarmed by the rain of trash increasingly messing up her deep-sea home, as the agent for exposing basic truths about ocean pollution.

The book's environmental messages are developed gradually, in a discovery fashion, as appropriate for the target pre-school audience. The storyline follows Lota's quest to track down where all the trash is coming from. Her sleuthing ultimately reveals the problem is human in origin and that plastification of the human lifestyle is the primary culprit. When young readers turn the page to a birthday party scene, replete with banners, balloons, cups, straws, boxes, toys, wrapping paper, etc., they witness how they too, not just adults, are part of the problem.

An important theme for child development is cooperation. Lota engages the help of other animals – sea, air and human – who work together to figure out, then clean up the problem. Diversity, another one of the book's themes, is quietly built into the spectra of animal and human life illustrated in the book's pages.

The mixed media illustrations are colorful and engaging. Their collaged elements are a nod to the environment-friendly practice of re-purposing scrap. Pictures include just the right details for 2 to 5-year-olds to grasp the book's messages without being overwhelmed. They'll be able to identify everything they see floating in the sea and littering its bottom. They'll guffaw when they spot the discarded toilet seat humorously wedged in the trash heap.

Executing the book's cultural crossover into an US English context should pose few challenges. An obvious one is how to best reconcile the book's title with the name of its lead character: the charm of the Spanish rhyme pairing Lota with *la cachalota* vanishes in literal English. With that exception, there are convenient English counterparts for the narrative language and kid-level dialog. In terms of the illustrations, they contain only a few elements that a US English-speaking child might notice as unfamiliar, such as the sign for Euro (€) on a billboard and the words "leche" and "leche de casa" on a couple of containers in the garbage heap. The words could be changed to English, or several different languages, or removed altogether; leaving them in Spanish alone risks communicating the message that Spanish-speaking countries are to blame for the garbage.

In regard to Lota... and the existing market of picture books dealing with ocean pollution, a review of three lists¹ of recommendations revealed predominantly non-fiction books, general explorations of

the ocean and sea life, aimed at somewhat older (up to ages 8-12) kids. Lota... is one of few fiction books for the pre-school set focusing specifically on pollution, told from the perspective of affected sea creatures.

Lota la cachalota may not elicit “wows!” from readers/listeners. It has a soft touch; it is not scary; it is non-threatening; it is a playful, funny book. And that is the perfect approach for opening a discussion with 2-5 year-olds, as the book intends to, suggesting in the final lines, “. . . ¿y si aprendiéramos a no ensuciar?”

1 “Eleven books about the sea that kids will love” (2020,); “Children’s books about plastic pollution” (2019, ;

“Twelve books that will inspire kids to protect oceans” (2016,);