Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables by Jon Scieszka, Lane Smith", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1244. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Jon Scieszka , Lane Smith

Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables

United States of America (1998)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1998
First Edition Details	Jon Scieszka, *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables*, ill Lane Smith. New York: Viking Press, 1998, 48 pp.
ISBN	9780439653695
Genre	Fables, Humor
Target Audience	Children (intended readership humorously described as 49–630 in dog years)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Photograph of Jon Scieszka taken by photographer Marty Umans, 2008. Retrieved from Wikipedia (accessed: February 2, 2022).

Jon Scieszka , b. 1954
(Author)

Jon Scieszka was born in Flint, Michigan, United States in 1954. He was the second of six sons born to his parents, who had emigrated to America from Poland. In his autobiography, *Knucklehead: Tall Tales and Almost True Stories of Growing Up Scieszka* (2008), he reveals that many of his writing ideas originate from his childhood experiences. His mother was a nurse and his father the principal of an elementary school. Scieszka considered becoming a doctor and studied both Science and English at Albion College, Albion, Michigan, before moving to New York as an aspiring writer. In 1980 he graduated from Columbia University with a Master of Fine Arts. He taught at an elementary school and worked as a house painter while seeking publishers for his children's stories. He met and began collaborating with illustrator Lane Smith. After numerous rejections, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (1989) was published by Viking Press, and has since won many awards, sold over three million copies, and been translated into fourteen languages. Scieszka's books often employ parodic and intertextual elements to rework traditional fairy tales, including *The Frog Prince Continued* (1991) *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) and *The Book that Jack Wrote* (1994). T*he Time Warp Trio* series (1991-2006) contains lighthearted depictions of various historical epochs, as well as engaging with literary classics. The series includes a book on Greek mythology, *It's All Greek to Me* (1999) as well as *See You Later Gladiator*. Scieszka is a passionate advocate for boys' literacy and is the founder of the Guys Read program (guysread.com). In 2008 he was named as America's first National Ambassador for Young People's Literature by the 13th Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington.

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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Lane Smith , b. 1959
(Illustrator)

Lane Smith is a celebrated and prolific American writer and illustrator of children's books. He was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, but grew up in Corona, California. He has been creating children's books since the 1980s and has won numerous prestigious awards, including the Caldecott Medal for *The Stinky Cheese Man* (1992, with Jon Scieszka) and *Grandpa Green* (2012). In 2012 he was named an "Honour Artist" by The Eric Carle Museum for his innovative contribution to the field of children's book illustration and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of Illustrators in 2014. His eclectic style fuses high and lowbrow elements, and his work is both comic and serious. Smith has collaborated with many well-known children's authors, including Jon Scieszka. Most of his projects also involve his partner, designer Molly Leach. The couple lives in rural Connecticut.

Source:

http://www.lanesmithbooks.com/LaneSmithBooks/Bio.html (accessed: May 24, 2019, no longer active)

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Additional information

Translation

French: *Calmar un jour, calmar toujours : fables bestiales : nouvelles morales*, trans. Jean-Luc Fromental, Seuil jeunesse, 1999.

Hebrew: *Deyonon nish'ar deyonon : meshalim ba'ale ḥayim 'im musar heśkel 'asisi*, trans. Irit Erb, Or Yehudah, 2000.

Japanese: *Ika wa ikayōnishitemo ika da : Isoppu ga ikiteitara hanashiteita ni chigainai iyarashii tatoebanashi mizumizushii kyōkun tsuki*, trans. Minami Aoyama, □□□□□, 1999.

Summary

Squids Will Be Squids is a satirical illustrated collection of fables. Where Aesop's tales traditionally feature dogs, foxes, wolves and donkeys, the parodic Squids includes obscure creatures (walruses, horseshoe crabs, platypuses, slugs) as well as inanimate objects (one story centres on the competition between paper, scissors and rock) and food (toast and fruit loops). The characters, who are described as variously "bossy, sneaky, funny, annoying, dim-bulb," experience some of the joys and challenges of modern life. Some of them go to school, watch TV, and hang out. The eighteen stories are self-contained, though there is a running joke about an elephant who repeatedly forgets to call home. Following the Aesopian tradition, each story concludes with a pithy moral statement.

A "serious historical foreword" defines the form and intention of a fable, introduces the figure of Aesop, and locates the book as a contemporary version of his work:

"This book, *Squids Will Be Squids*, is a collection of fables that Aesop might have told if he were alive today and sitting in the back of class daydreaming and goofing around instead of paying his attention and correcting his homework like he was supposed to, because his dog ate it and he didn't have time to run out and buy new paper and do it over again before his bus came to pick him up in the morning."

The final story, featuring a shark, wasp, and bacteria who cannot understand why no one likes them, is followed by a "'very serious historical afterword," in which the reader is reminded that the animal characters in these stories are substitutes for humans, without getting into trouble or causing offence. A story of Aesop's death is retold, with

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the suggestion that the storyteller was thrown off a cliff because the king didn't like his fable about a bossy "Lion" who ruled a city. The moral of this story speaks directly to the reader: "If you are planning to write fables, don't forget to change the people into animals and avoid places with high cliffs." (no page number)

Analysis

The text references Aesop's enduring influence, highlighting the presence of moral adages in the contemporary world, such as "he who smelt it dealt it" and "it takes one to know one". These rather crude and juvenile sayings evoke the tone of the school playground, yet Scieszka's text is underpinned by a more sophisticated message. The final story in the collection concludes "Think about it." These words, printed in enormous letters on a double-page spread, challenge the reader to actively question the text, its moral messages, and even their own behaviour. Though silly rather than didactic in tone, Squids nevertheless promotes the importance of kindness, communication, and diligence. Though celebrated as "fresh morals," these principles remain close to the maxims of Aesop's originals.

The book is lavishly illustrated, with endpapers featuring medieval lithographs of various animals and people (at first glance the pictures appear traditional, but include "Stinky" the cheese-headed man from Scieszka and Smith's bestselling collaboration). Old world fonts reference the Aesopian tradition, but Smith's illustrations are bold and contemporary, rendered in a style that is alternately silly and serious. The book's endpapers feature rows of animals who figure in Aesop's tales rendered in the style of a traditional wood-cut, but closer examination reveals more unexpected creatures in the menagerie - an elephant, a unicorn - as well as human figures labelled "Scold," "Simpleton" and "Stinky," the cheese-headed figure from Scieszka and Smith's renowned collaboration. Each story is illustrated with a distinct and individual style, incorporating elements of paper collage, lino-printing, and hyperreal photography. This melange underscores the surreal humour of the stories and the surprising, bizarre characters. This collection invites readers to reflect on the significance of Aesop's fables within a postmodern world.

Classical, Mythological,

Aesop Aesop’s Fables

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Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Character traits Friendship Morality Socialisation Talking animals Values
Further Reading	Hall, Edith, "Our Fabled Childhood: Reflections on the Unsuitability of Aesop to Children", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood… the Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Leiden: Brill, 2016. Kubiak Ho-Chi, Beata, "Aesop's Fables in Japanese Literature for Children: Classical Antiquity and Japan", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood… the Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

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