



Why the Whales Came

Author: Michael Morpurgo
Genre: Literature for Children
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This is an odd title for a story, I know, but I invite you to come back with me on a great journey to re-visit one of the most memorable (and best) books from my childhood.

This is a story about the past, exactly one hundred years ago in fact, in one of the furthest reaches of these islands: the Scilly Isles. It is the story of two children, Gracie and Daniel, and their relationship with the mysterious 'Birdman' a scary old loner that the children have been warned to avoid, as they have the mysterious haunted island of Samson, the stranger's former home. But, never, ever, judge a book by its cover! The children soon realise that the scruffy old hermit is not at all bad, just different, and with very good reason: he holds the secret of a curse that has haunted the islands for years, and one thing becomes obvious: when that curse threatens the islands again, the Birdman won't be able to save the islanders alone... this time, he's going to need some help. Illustrated and with large print, I would recommend this book for children of roughly 8-12 years (I first read it at the age of 10). I can remember it holding me captivated back in 1987 – indeed I couldn't put it down - and it was almost as much reading it this time as it was back then.

Though it measures out at well over a hundred pages, they really do fly by, I mean, we all love a ghost story, right? If one also adds to the mix the various moral messages of the narrative such as the avoidance of prejudice, animal welfare, the subtly implied consequences of war to name but a few, the result is a book that is good for kids to read directly, and equally good for parents to read to them. I honestly thought well into my teens that there really does exist a species of whales that have horns and the islands in the story were made up... ooops.

I actually had the pleasure of meeting the author of this story (and indeed many others, including *War-Horse*) not long after reading this book. I was 11 at the time, and we were on a school trip to his farm in Devon. The farm (and he) had affected me greatly, and I loved reading even more than I had previously due to the experience. I won't bother quoting the many flattering sound bites on the blurb, but as long as you keep it away from the really young kids, you can't really go wrong with this one. Happy reading!

10 sausages out of 10

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