

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN AN ADJACENT WORLD

If you love nothing better than to get lost in a different world through a new book, have I got a pick for you.

“A Whale of the Wild” is a new offering from Greenwillow Books, which publishes “books for children of every age.” This book strikes that chord perfectly. While it’s officially a book for middle-grade readers, I’ll wager that anyone from age 9 to 99 will find it enthralling.

This Week’s Book

‘A Whale of the Wild’ by Rosanne Parry, illustrated by Lindsay Moore
Greenwillow Books — 336 pp — \$17.99

Portland author Rosanne Parry and illustrator Lindsay Moore traveled 1,000 miles around the Salish Sea before writing the book. Their research enabled them to immerse readers in this tale of two orcas, Vega and her little brother Deneb.

While the orca is the apex predator of the ocean, it’s no secret that human activities — in the form of trapping, overfishing, and polluting water and noise — have endangered southern resident killer whales. Their shrinking population has been further endangered by recent high infant mortality rates (Although since this book was published last fall, three new orca calves have been spotted regionally within the last six months).

For this work of fiction, Parry incorporates these different types of hardships into her story and throws in an earthquake and tsunami — resulting in the inadvertent separation of the siblings from the rest of their pod.

Readers join the pair as they search for their lost family. The earthquake and tsunami choked the inland waters with sediment and transformed the shapes of landmarks both above water and undersea so the normal wayfinding cues are no longer available.

Vega and Deneb find themselves heading out into colder open waters, where they encounter seals, sea otters, sharks and other types of whales. What they don’t find is salmon — their sole source of food. After currents carry them further out into the “Blue Wilderness,” Vega must summon all of her budding skills as a wayfinder to get them back to their home waters, while Deneb hones his abilities as an essential helper.

Parry switches back and forth between the two whales’ points of view. It may take readers a while to get accustomed to this.

Parry provides evocative descriptions of the habitats the duo swims through and the sights they see, including “a shimmering moon of fish” and “the long, steady shoosh of waves.” Parry also concocts amusing whale terms for the strange human contraptions they encounter. More importantly, she deftly infuses loads of information about whale culture into each action-packed chapter.

On almost every page, Moore’s illustrations provide dreamy accompaniment. Rendered in shades of gray, this imagery transports readers from our frenetic, human-built environment, ushering us into a world that operates at a different pulse.

I can’t recommend “A Whale of the Wild” highly enough. Anyone who reads it will emerge from the experience as a more thoughtful citizen of the world.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com

