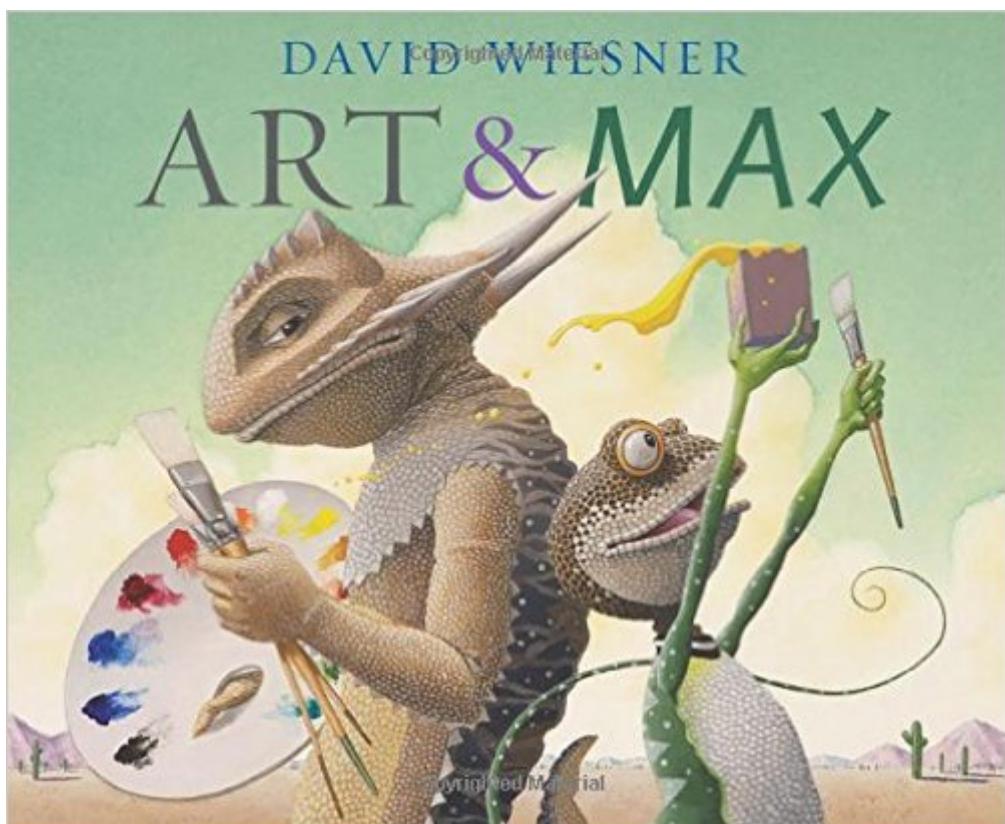


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Art & Max



Synopsis

Max and Arthur are friends who share an interest in painting. Arthur is an accomplished painter; Max is a beginner. Max's first attempt at using a paintbrush sends the two friends on a whirlwind trip through various artistic media, which turn out to have unexpected pitfalls. Although Max is inexperienced, he's courageous and a quick learner. His energy and enthusiasm bring the adventure to its triumphant conclusion. Beginners everywhere will take heart.

Book Information

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Age Range: 4 - 7 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

David Wiesner is one of only two people to win the prestigious Caldecott Medal on three occasions, forÂ TuesdayÂ (1992),Â The Three PigsÂ (2002) andÂ FlotsamÂ (2007). In his first book since Flotsam, Wiesner wanted to try something different and his exploration into various media led him to write & illustrate a story about the creative process itself. Set in the desert, Art & Max is the story of two lizards; one, Arthur (Art), is an artist, the second, Max, admires Art and hopes to be an artist as well. When he shows up, brushes and canvas in hand as Art is working on a portrait and claims that he can paint, too, Arthur's first reaction is a dismissive "Don't be ridiculous!" Upon seeing Max's crestfallen reaction to his words, though, Art relents and invites Max to set up his easel but instructs him to stay out of his way. When Max is stuck for a subject and Art rather grandly suggests that Max paint him, Max takes him at his word. Chaos, as they say, ensues. While I loved the artwork - the

muted desert tones and simplicity of the backgrounds, the expressive faces, the melting watercolors - I simply don't have the knowledge of art to analyze Wiesner's work in Art & Max in depth. So I'll leave that commentary to others with more expertise and instead go a different route, sharing the messages I took from the book as a whole. 1. Hold fast to enthusiasm and never, ever lose your grip. 2. Never stop learning. 3. Be willing to experiment. 4. Look at the world with curious eyes. 5. Breaking out of the box can be exhilarating. 6. While a master may be a source of inspiration to his/her students, the master can also gain inspiration FROM the student. 7. Even as our outer appearance changes, we are still, at the core, much the same person. 8. Though not a message, I also learned that Acme delivers to desert-dwelling animals that are not coyotes. Who knew? After spending some time with Art & Max today, I re-read Wiesner's other books. I'm going to have to admit that I still prefer Flotsam and (my personal favorite) *Free Fall*, but I loved the messages I took from Art & Max. My admiration for and appreciation of Wiesner's talent continues to grow. Happily recommended.

Illustrators of children's books are easier to deal with if you can lump them into little boxes. Multicultural family stories that tug at the heartstrings? That's the Patricia Polacco box. Cute kids in period clothes frolicking with goats? Yup, that's Tasha Tudor. So my problem with David Wiesner is that he throws my entire system off. Though his style is recognizable in each and every one of his books (*Free Fall*, *Sector 7*, etc.) his storylines zigzag around the globe. One minute he has a book about frogs that unexpectedly take flight. The next it's a wordless tale about a boy who finds a fantastical camera from beneath the sea. He remains an unpredictable force. You literally never know what he will do next. When *Art & Max* was first discussed, folks had a very difficult time figuring out what it was about. There are lizards? And painting? As always, Wiesner considers his reader first, then creates a story that will be both fun to read and visually stimulating. Consider this your Example A. *Art*, a horned lizard with an artist's temperament, is doing a bit of portraiture in his desert environment when along bounces happy-go-lucky Max. Max wants to paint just like *Art*, and the grumpy elder agrees grudgingly, informing the little guy, "Just don't get in the way." When Max asks what he should paint, *Art* suggests himself. Unfortunately for him, Max takes this advice a little too literally and Max finds himself covered in oils, turned into pastels, and eventually nothing more than a mere outline of his former self. By the end, however, he has come around to Max's exuberance and the two decide to paint. Max makes a portrait. *Art* throws paints at a cactus. The thing I forget about Mr. Wiesner is that he always has the child reader in mind. Sure, he may break down the fourth wall in *The Three Pigs*, but he's still having fun with the kids reading the book when

he does so. That said, a friend of mine suggested that Art & Max differed from The Three Pigs in this way. She was concerned that Art & Max wasn't kid-friendly enough. She said it deals with characters coming to terms with the fact that they themselves are drawn, but not in a way that kids would relate to. With that in mind I gave the book another reading and I have to say that I respectfully disagree. I think kids could get a lot out of this book, particularly if it was read in conjunction with fun art projects. Yet Wiesner isn't treating this book like an art lesson. Certainly an art lesson can be garnered from what he's done here, but not once does the word "watercolor" or "brush type" enter into the conversation. He lets the books speak for itself. Having previously conquered the world beneath the waves (Flotsam) it seems natural that Wiesner would go 180 degrees in the opposite direction and try his hand at a land bereft of moisture. To this end he has rendered not only the backgrounds of the desert but also its native occupants. Take a look at a photograph of a horned lizard sometime. Note their eyes. That snide, faintly contemptuous glance they give the world. Now look at Art on the cover of Art & Max. Look familiar? David Wiesner knows his lizards, and gives Art most sterling qualities. Max is harder to identify. At first I thought he might be a Jesus Lizard, running hither and thither as much as he does. But his coloring and stripes don't match the Jesus Lizard's, particularly with that dexterous little tail of his. Max is a mystery but he feels authentic. Half the time I look at a publication page in a picture book I'll find that no one bothered to write down the artist's medium. This is a real pity since the publication page should read like the credits at the end of a film. You want to know who's responsible. In the case of Art & Max, I need not have worried. Says the tiny text, "The illustrations were executed in acrylic, pastel, watercolor, and India ink." They had to be, considering what the artist puts his materials through. In the course of a single book Art appears to go through (and correct me if I'm wrong) watercolors to oils to pastels to a thin India ink outline and then back to watercolors (or it is oils again?) in the end. I'm trying to think of books in which characters of different mediums talk to one another within a single story and I'm having a hard time coming up with anything. Feel free to help me out with suggestions of your own. Not mixed media books, necessarily, but anything besides that. I'm a sucker for in-jokes and hidden details in books for kids. In one instance, the last image in the book has Art painting against a cactus in a style reminiscent of Jackson Pollock, while Max engages in an Impressionist style not too far off from Van Gogh. You could have a lot of fun asking kids to identify artists that have painted in the styles that crop up during this story. He's a detail-oriented man, our David Wiesner, though some of those details are more obvious than others. For example, I've little doubt that kids reading the book are going to be interested in the antics of the three little lizards that zip about our two heroes willy nilly. For my part, I was much more interested in the technology at

work here. Though they appear to be working in the desert, there seem to be plenty of electrical outlets available amongst the shrubbery. Max is often seen pulling out an old Acme metal fan, an Acme vacuum cleaner, and an old Victrola. Peer around the side of the Victrola and you'll see that Art has been listening to Pink Floyd (I kid you not) as he paints. This is, to the best of my knowledge, the very first time a Pink Floyd album cover has ever made it between the pages of a children's picture book. Doff your caps in respect, brothers and sisters. I've an Art & Max theory. My theory is that Mr. Wiesner got bored. He was bored with always doing gorgeous watercolors and watercolors alone. Maybe he couldn't decide on his next medium. I know that the children's literary criticism community probably would have fallen into a stupor if he had come out with a book done with computer graphics. Who knows? Maybe that's the way he'll go next. As I've said before, Wiesner's a wild card. You never quite know what he has up his sleeve. All a person can know is that it's going to be wonderful. He may not be consistent in terms of his content, but when it comes to quality David Wiesner is ever and always predictably magnificent. Art & Max is no exception. For ages 4-8.

Wiesner's latest picture book takes readers on an eye popping journey through the art world. Art & Max is the story of two artists: Art, a serious lizard who is painstakingly working on portrait and Max, a carefree, spur of the moment artist who has just picked up a paint brush and is ready to go. With eye-popping illustrations, three-time Caldecott medalist David Wiesner takes creates a stunning journey through the art world. The story magically romps through the world of art as acrylic paints, watercolor, and line drawing are all explored with wonderful whimsy. Art students will recognize the nod to Jackson Pollack, one of my favorite artists. Minimal text accompanies the brilliant illustrations, allowing readers to concentrate on the illustrations. This is a beautiful book - a must have for any art lover - young or old. Could this book earn Wiesner a fourth Caldecott? Recommended for ages: 4 and up (Adults - you'll like this one, too!)

David Wiesner is a Genius. The kids and I love him. BUT of all his works this is our least favorite. Not that the artwork isn't scrumptious and fun, but the fact is that the story didn't grab us the way David's other stories did. Flotsam, Three Pigs, Sector 7 ... all seemed more innovative and powerful: they stayed in our minds and we discussed them days afterwards. In comparison, "Art and Max" didn't glow as brightly. I can certainly see why others would love "Art and Max" but for us it was just okay. Not the book we'd suggest first to a David Wiesner novice. Ultimately, it's just a matter of taste. The book is fun, just not the fun-est. Pam T~mom/blogger

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