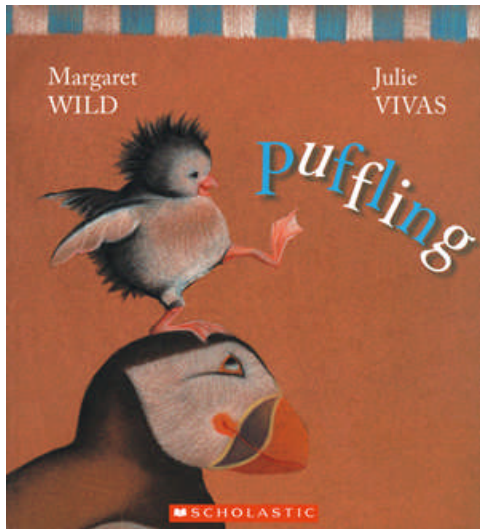


Puffling

Written by Margaret Wild
Illustrated by Julie Vivas
Omnibus Books Picture Book



Synopsis

Puffling begins as all puffins do, as an egg, hatching in summer. His doting parents, Long Black Feather and Big Stripy Beak, welcome him to the world and take turns to leave the burrow and go out hunting to bring him back food to eat. They warn him to stay inside the burrow at all times, as the 'scary gulls' are outside, watching for just such a morsel as a baby puffin. Puffling begins to grow, and to become impatient to grow up and go out into the big wild world outside, but his parents say that he should wait until he is 'strong enough and tall enough and brave enough', and then he will be able to make the trip all by himself along the cliff, jump off into the water and paddle away. Puffling is impatient, asking from time to time if he is ready for this moment. Only when he is strong enough (which he shows by paddling his feet and tall enough (by measuring himself against Big Stripy Beak) and brave enough (his parents listen to his heart) do his parents fly away and leave him. Puffling summons all his courage and makes the journey along the cliff, past the waiting gulls, which swoop! But they miss Puffling, and he leaps into the swell and finds friends in the ocean who will keep him company until it is time to come home.

Writing style

Margaret Wild has written a very special text about growing up and becoming independent. Julie Vivas' emotionally charged illustrations express beautifully the poignancy of the kind of parental love that allows the child to develop towards independence without overprotecting him or her or hiding from the pressures of the real world outside. The short text encompasses the stages of Puffling's growth from dependence to cocky self-assuredness (while still keeping part of himself inside the burrow) to the moment when he is ready to stand bravely by himself and make the dangerous journey past the waiting seagulls to the shelter of the ocean and all the other 'friends' he will find there. The repetition of Puffling's questions to his parents, and their answers to him, make for a structured story along traditional lines.

Teaching Tips

A touch of fantasy and reality are combined in the story of Puffling. The illustrations are not strictly realistic, in that the puffins make many gestures that are human, and they speak with each other. At the same time the story is based on a 'real' coming-of-age ritual.

- Children could be asked to research the behaviour of puffins, especially that in rearing their young. Which part of the world are puffins found in, and where do they go when they are fledged, and why do they come back to the same place in summer? Do the illustrations capture the landscape in which puffins live?
- <http://www.projectpuffin.org> is a website devoted to a puffin conservation project in the US. This is a website with interesting and accessible information about puffins in general.
- *Puffling* is a book about families. Children might be asked to think of six adjectives that would describe Puffling's family.
- Children could be asked to identify their favourite picture in the book and describe why it appeals to them.
- The last page shows Puffling leaving the land and heading off into the ocean with other puffin 'friends'. Children could be asked to talk about the emotions this scene suggests. Compare this illustration with the one on the half-title page (the very first page in the book).
- Older students could study the illustration style and compare it to other books by Julie Vivas. For these illustrations, Julie Vivas used pastel on textured papers of different colours. What do the different background colours suggest? How do the illustrations demonstrate how Puffling is growing up, and underline the repetition in the text?