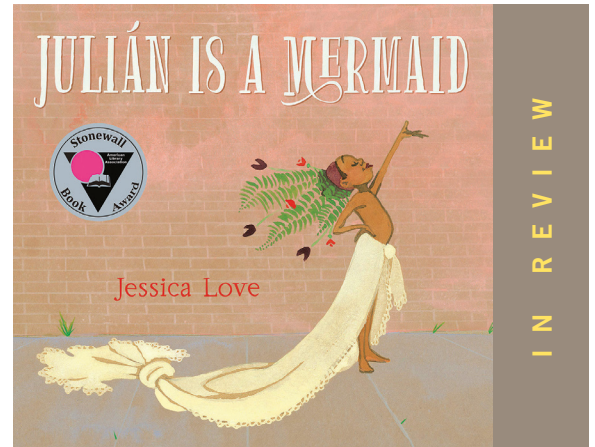


Reviewed by Patrick Dillon

## Julián Is a Mermaid

Written and Illustrated by Jessica Love  
Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2018



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**J***ulián Is a Mermaid* begins as young Julián rides the subway with his *abuela*. He sees three women who appear to be mermaids, and he is entranced by them because Julián loves mermaids. In this, her first book, author-illustrator Jessica Love immediately draws readers into the narrative by allowing them to see the mermaids outside the train window before Julián does. Through her skillful mix of media, Love illustrates the solid world of Julián's life through the use of gouache, an opaque, reflective paint, contrasted with the life of a mermaid Julián desires by using the more transparent, ethereal medium of watercolor.

As Julián and his *abuela* arrive home, he expresses his desire to be a mermaid. While *Abuela* takes a bath, he uses the opportunity to engage in pretend playing, picking up items from around the apartment to complete his mermaid costume. When *Abuela* sees Julián with a plant on his head for hair and gauzy curtains around his waist for a tail, she leaves the room with a cry, but then returns with a set of pearls for him. With Julián's ensemble now complete, they walk out into the busy city streets. *Abuela* does not

tell him where they are going, but closer to their destination they see others dressed as mermaids. "Like you, *mijo*," *Abuela* says. "Let's join them." The two joyously dance alongside the trio of mermaids they had seen on the subway, and all become part of the fantastic, wondrous parade.

This is a brilliantly depicted, inclusive book for so many reasons. From the inside cover and the page where we meet Julián, his *abuela*, and the three glorious mermaids, we are welcomed to see real people, all beautiful. Those in Julián's neighborhood are different ages and body types. In the throng of parade-goers, no two look the same, but all appear joyful and excited. Diving under the surface reveals broader messages of acceptance as well as invitations for our students within the classroom. As Julián dresses up, he is eager to transform himself into a mermaid, seeing in the mirror how he would like to be seen. His *abuela*, whose reaction is uncertain at first, accepts Julián as a mermaid, and her offer of the necklace demonstrates her love and understanding. When the two arrive at the parade and see diverse people decked out in their unique outfits, *Abuela's* invitation to join in suggests that whatever our differences and similarities, we all can join together. What is the diverse parade within our community, within our school, or within our classroom?

Julián imagines himself becoming a mermaid with effortless, fluid movements, feeling very alive, swimming with abandon. Love shows

Julián's creativity as he gathers materials around his apartment reflects the ingenuity of children to make even the most mundane things magical.

Julián’s imagination through watercolor illustrations that suggest gentle, flowing motion and legato musical lines. Invite students to swim and float lyrically through the classroom. Consider using recorded music, for example Saint Saens’ *Aquarium*, or ambient music such as *Fun in the Sun* by Swimming TV. Alternatively, utilize classroom instruments such as metallophones and an ocean drum to improvise accompaniment for the movement exploration.

Julián’s creativity as he gathers materials around his apartment reflects the ingenuity of children to make even the most mundane things magical. In Orff classrooms this happens with props, instruments, “found sounds,” and everyday

items. Besides mermaids, what might we imagine ourselves to be? How would we look? Move? Sound? How can we repurpose classroom and ordinary objects to bring our imaginings to life?

A beautiful book about acceptance, imagination, and freedom to be oneself, *Julián Is a Mermaid* is an engaging “tail” that will earn its place on anyone’s classroom shelf. ■

**PATRICK DILLON** teaches kindergarten through Grade 6 general music and chorus at Munsey Park Elementary in Manhasset, New York. He has completed his Kodály levels as well as three levels of Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education and Master Class. In 2018, Patrick took the Summer Course at the Orff Institute, Salzburg.

## CHILDREN’S BOOK REVIEW

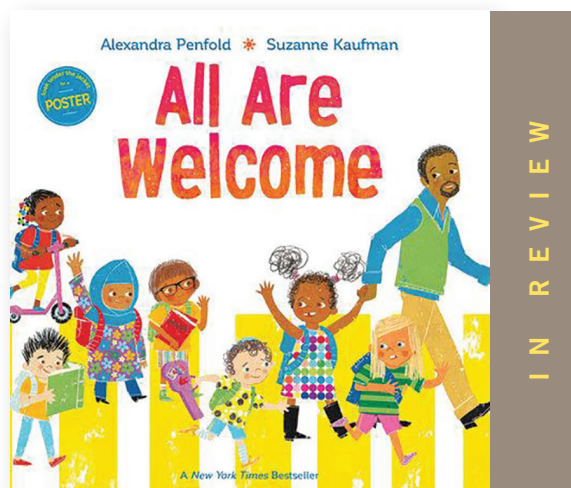
Reviewed by **Jody Petter**

### All Are Welcome

Written by Alexandra Penfold

Illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman

New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018



**A**ll Are Welcome by Alexandra Penfold, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman, is a charming book representing the diversity of community in its full glory. Readers are welcomed into a place where everyone is celebrated, included, and valued regardless of skin color, gender, age, ability, size, faith, or family structure. The story unfolds with families dropping off their children at school

where they are greeted with open arms, smiles, and waves from their teachers and classmates. “Fears are lost and hope is found” as the class begins with the children engaged in many different ways. The reader follows them through a very relatable elementary school routine including art, music, and story time in the library. As the day comes to an end, the children go home, get ready for bed, and reflect on all of the positive memorable things they experienced earlier. The last page is truly my favorite: “You