

Reviewed by **Katie Traxler**

The Pout-Pout Fish

By Deborah Diesen

Illustrated by Dan Hanna

New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2008

I was delighted to stumble across Deborah Diesen's *The Pout-Pout Fish* on the bookshelf. Children and adults who are already fans of fish stories like Marcus Pfister's well-known *The Rainbow Fish* can't help but fall in love with this "gloomy Gus" and quickly add his tale to their list of favorite aquatic adventures.

This is a touching story of an adorable little fish suffering from a case of the "dreary-wearies." We swim along with Mr. Fish through the ocean, carried on the waves by Deborah's skillfully crafted poetic text that is saturated with playful alliteration and rhythmic pulse. One by one, we meet Mr. Fish's ocean friends who try to cheer him up with some encouraging words. But, convinced his frown is permanent, he stubbornly chants his mantra over and over:

*I'm a pout-pout fish
With a pout-pout face,
So I spread the dreary-wearies
All over the place.*

Listeners and readers alike soon join him in his mantra as the book progresses.

In a surprising twist of fate, just as Mr. Fish sinks to the ocean floor from the weight of his woe, a beautiful newcomer silently swims by

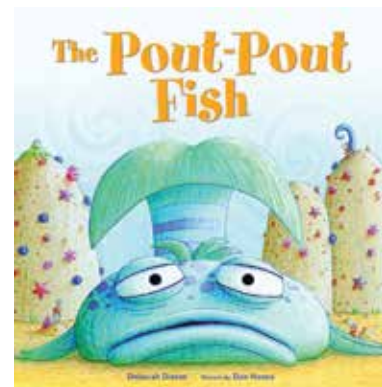
and kisses him on his "pout." Slowly Mr. Fish's frown turns upside down into a smile as he realizes that he doesn't want to be sad anymore. It's a happy ending that always brings cheers from the listening crowd.

This book is a wonderful opportunity for children to explore their personal experiences with feelings of gloom and sadness. It can start conversations about why children feel depressed or sad. It also presents opportunities for the class to brainstorm ways to overcome sad feelings. Starting with Mr. Fish's unexpected kiss, children extrapolate other solutions to escape the "dreary wearies": A kiss from a parent, a hug from a sibling, a high-five from a friend, or playing a favorite game with a buddy. Because many children are embarrassed to show their feelings when they are sad or upset, using Mr. Fish as a stepping stone helps young students talk about feelings without having to be the focus of the conversation.

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The powerful message of the story is greatly enhanced by Mr. Hanna's colorful and humorous characters. The vibrant illustrations are so imaginative and detailed that children discover new facets of Mr. Fish's ocean life every time they read the story.

The variety of ocean animals included in the story and illustrations—clams, jellyfish, squid, octopus, fish, snakes, crabs, seaweed, starfish, and more—begs for movement exploration. Try asking a few students to choose percussion instruments such as ocean drums, sandpaper blocks,



wind chimes, or glissandi on glockenspiels to create a sound carpet for the ocean. Encourage another group of students to choose unpitched percussion instruments to represent each ocean friend that Mr. Fish encounters. A third group of children can use movement to pretend to explore life in the “ocean” using different pathways, levels, and weights while accompanied by their chosen sound.

My students and I discovered that these activities could be turned into a musical play. We added

some pieces from Lynn Kleiner’s *S.O.S. Songs of the Sea* (Alfred Music, 2008) as interludes while turning pages in the book. Acting out the story of the pout-pout fish plus incorporating ocean songs for instrument play and movement created an exciting ocean-themed musical drama that the students begged to repeat over and over. ■

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