



***Julián Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love**

Candlewick Press, 2018

ISBN: 9780763690458 (Hardcover); 9781536210613 (Paperback);
978153621431-4 (Ebook)

*Age Range: 4–8 (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: Preschool–Grade 2 (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

In an exuberant picture book, a glimpse of costumed mermaids leaves one boy flooded with wonder and ready to dazzle the world.

While riding the subway home from the pool with his abuela one day, Julián notices three women spectacularly dressed up. Their hair billows in brilliant hues, their dresses end in fishtails, and their joy fills the train car. When Julián gets home, daydreaming of the magic he’s seen, all he can think about is dressing up just like the ladies in his own fabulous mermaid costume: a butter-yellow curtain for his tail, the fronds of a potted fern for his headdress. But what will Abuela think about the mess he makes—and even more importantly, what will she think about how Julián sees himself? Mesmerizing and full of heart, Jessica Love’s author-illustrator debut is a jubilant picture of self-love and a radiant celebration of individuality.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

“A little picture book I love.” —Judy Blume in [Variety](#)

“One of the best picture books I’ve read in this century.” —Jason Reynolds, former National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature and *New York Times* best-selling author

★ “Love couples the spare narrative with vivid, imaginative, and breathtaking illustrations. A heartwarming must-have for one-on-one and small group sharing.” —[School Library Journal](#), **starred review**

★ “[Julian] is, in a word, fabulous. Love lets an anxious beat pass before Abuela takes Julián by the hand, leading him to what some readers may recognize as the Coney Island Mermaid Parade. ‘Like you, mijo,’ says Abuela. ‘Let’s join them.’ Love’s deep empathy for her characters and her keen-eyed observations of urban life come together in a story of love, understanding, and embracing the mermaid within us all.” —[Publishers Weekly](#), **starred review**

★ “The luminous, lovely, and layered art is what really makes the book. . . . The concluding parade is a confectionary wonder of marine fantasy that many kids will yearn to join, and it might prompt adults to set up their own in-library mermaid celebrations. More importantly, though, those who’ve been shy about their love for

Updated 3/28/2025

Candlewick Press

publicity@candlewick.com

dazzle and showmanship will love the idea of a formidable grandparental ally, and they will find this encouraging and empowering.” —*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, **starred review**

★ “Julián’s emotional journey takes on depth through the small but important details: a wary look in the mirror, a slight inward slump of the shoulders, a chin held high while marching down the street. Love uses vibrant watercolors with gouache and ink and a lively style to create scenes that splash and swirl to life on the page.” —[The Horn Book](#), **starred review**

★ “Across her watercolor, gouache and ink spreads, Love captures the transformative power of being seen. Her affecting combination of the literary and the visual results in a powerful affirmation of individuality, creative expression and unconditional acceptance.” —[Shelf Awareness](#), **starred review**

★ “Though it could easily feel preachy, this charmingly subversive tale instead offers a simple yet powerful story of the importance of being seen and affirmed.” —[Kirkus Reviews](#), **starred review**

“Jessica Love’s vivid watercolor and gouache illustrations are made even brighter by her decision to paint on brown paper; the richly colored palette pops off the pages, and abundant character is conveyed via the subtlest of facial expressions and body language. Also subtle—and terrifically poignant—is the eloquent encouragement of Abuela’s spare words. A book for the ages, *Julián Is a Mermaid* is going to make a big splash.” —[BookPage](#)

“Love’s painted scenes glow against muted backgrounds, with saturated, opaque tones tracing the graceful shapes of the figures. They’re especially striking when Julián gets swept away in a vivid underwater fantasy: a school of sea creatures whirls around him as he transforms into a mermaid. . . . The affectionate depiction of a broad range of body types and skin tones makes this particularly cheery.” —[Booklist](#)

“This is Jessica Love’s debut picture book, and every choice she makes—the spare text, a color palette both muted and lively, full-bleed pages that make even subway cars and apartment rooms feel as expansive as the ocean—imbues the story with charm, tenderness and humor. . . . Alongside Julián, readers learn that anyone can be a mermaid: All it takes is love and acceptance, a little imagination and a big swishy tail.” —[The New York Times Book Review](#)

“In her author-illustrator debut, Jessica Love delivers a delightful story of celebrating what makes us unique and a joyful read for anyone in need of a little love.” —*Time Magazine*

“Gorgeous and dreamlike. . . . Love’s illustrations are vibrant and exquisitely detailed, but they also leave openings for the imaginative reader to fill.” —[The New Yorker](#)

“When Julián spies some fabulously dressed mermaids on the subway, he declares he is one, too, and his loving abuela completely understands.” —*People Magazine*

“Groundbreaking. . . . Here’s a happy picture book that challenges traditional gender stereotypes, rendering one boy free to be himself.” —[San Francisco Chronicle](#)

“This is a gorgeous tale of creativity and acceptance, rounded out with misty, jeweled gouache illustrations.” —[NPR](#)

“Beautifully illustrated and imagined, this award-winning book relates the story of Julián and his supportive abuela. Inspired by some magically dressed-up women he sees on the subway, Julián creates his own unforgettable mermaid costume. —[Parents](#)

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- Winner of a Stonewall Book Award
- An American Library Association Notable Children’s Book
- An American Library Association Rainbow List Selection
- Winner of a Bologna Ragazzi Opera Prima Award for Debut Authors and Illustrators
- An Ezra Jack Keats New Illustrator Honor Book
- A Cybils Award Finalist
- An Anna Dewdney Read Together Honor Book
- Short-Listed for the Kate Greenaway Medal
- *A New York Times Book Review* Notable Children’s Book of the Year
- *A New York Times* Editors’ Choice
- *A Boston Globe* Best Book of the Year
- *A Publishers Weekly* Best Children’s Book of the Year
- *A School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year
- *A Kirkus Reviews* Best Picture Book of the Year
- *A Horn Book* Fanfare Selection
- *A Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* Blue Ribbon Winner
- *A Shelf Awareness* Best Book of the Year
- *A BookPage* Best Children’s Book of the Year
- *A Time* Magazine Top Ten Children’s Book of the Year
- *A People* Magazine Best Gift Book for Kids
- An NPR Best Book of the Year
- A Common Sense Media Best Kids’ Book of the Year
- A Center for the Study of Multicultural Children’s Literature’s Best Book
- A New York Public Library Best Books for Kids Selection
- A Chicago Public Library Best Book
- An Evanston Public Library 101 Great Books for Kids List Selection
- A New Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association Book of the Year
- A Kentucky Bluegrass Award Master List Selection
- A Junior Library Guild Selection

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Teacher Tip Card](#)
- [Book Trailer](#)
- [TeachingBooks.net Title Page](#)
- [Watch. Connect. Read. Blog Post](#)
- [Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast Interview](#)
- [Stories Worth Sharing Blog Post](#)
- [Let’s Talk Picture Books Interview](#)

- [One Bad Mother Podcast Interview](#)
- [A Fuse #8 Production Blog Post](#)

AUTHOR STATEMENT

Book Banning is exactly the kind of traitorous hypocrisy children have come to expect from adults. Kids see right through that mess, and they know it has nothing to do with protecting their interests. If it did, it would be about banning guns, not books.

***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.