

Examining Children's Picture Books and Their Messages

By Liza Staland

1. What is the lesson being told in *The Monster at the End of this Book*? What are we learning? When this book was originally published in 1971, the final page where the monster was had a foil mirror that reflected the child reading it, the implication being that the reader was the monster at the end of the book. How has the message changed from that original ending to the edited one available in the second edition published in 1997? Why would this change have been made? What does this say about how our beliefs about "what's appropriate" has changed?

The Monster at the End of this Book was one of my favorite stories as a child. I still have it and read it to my kids when they were little. I think the lesson told is to not be afraid. We should continue on our journey even when we're scared it won't turn out the way we want.

The message from the original version and the new one is a little more complex. I don't think the original book was negative. It was more about the only thing that can hold us back is us, thus creating the monster we see when we look in the mirror.

I think, as far as the new version, that people decided that showing the child his or her face in the mirror would create a negative sense of self. I don't really agree with that, but it is what it is. Or maybe I'm looking too deep into all this and it's just a funny story.

2. What is your take away from *My Hiroshima*? Would you consider a picture book like this to be appropriate for children? Why or why not? Why do you think Morimoto wrote it? What lessons—short or long term—is she trying to impress? Is there anything in here that surprised you? Anything that you noticed was missing from the story? How does it compare to *The Monster at the End of this Book* in terms of intended audience, tone, etc?

My Hiroshima is a pretty great story. It shows the hard stuff in a way that is understandable and compassionate. I think this would be a book for three year old's and up but only because it's not as fun and interactive as other picture books. Kids can learn history and it opens up dialogue between kids and parents that may not have been possible otherwise.

Morimoto went through a lot. To write this for children is to impress upon them the importance of valuing human life and loving one another. It's a sad story but very important. There's a bit of a shock value, but sometimes that's necessary especially on the topic of war.

The tone was much darker for this book compared to *The Monster at the End of this Book*. It's also for a bit older of an audience. I noticed that Morimoto didn't mention who Japan was fighting and who dropped the bombs, but instead placed blame on adults making decisions that affected children. That was pretty great. The responsibility is everyone's.

3. What are the differences in approach in the way Sesame Street presents its content vs the way that *Peg+Cat* presents its content? How are the lessons presented? Are there any advantages to the way Sesame Street works when compared to *Peg+Cat*? What about vice versa?