



[Home](#) > Nico's Octopus

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# Nico's Octopus

Books Reviewed:

[Nico's Octopus](#) [1]

Issue:

[141](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Margaret Mallett](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

I read recently about an octopus called Frida, living in Munich zoo, which has learnt how to open a screw-top jar to get at the tasty shrimps inside. So I picked up this book about a young boy's passionate concern for his octopus pet with special interest. Nico rescues an octopus from a fisherman's net and the story invites us to share all the interesting things he finds out about this most fascinating of sea creatures. Often likened to a shell-less snail, the octopus has eight endlessly flexible and extremely sensitive legs. Young learners between about five and eight years will be interested to learn that the creature has three hearts to pump its blue blood and can show its feelings - turning white with fear and red with anger. Nico finds it is intelligent enough to get to know him, reaching out gently with the tip of its tentacle when it sees his face through the glass of the tank. There is a telling contrast between the octopuses hung up to dry 'like old grey bagpipes' ready for the pot in the cafe and the pink, moving, changing creature Nico is caring for. He calls his pet 'the chameleon of the sea' because of its ability for camouflage and refers to it as 'an alien' because of its strangeness. There is an intriguing, if rather sad ending - the octopus dies (as all female octopuses do) giving up her life to produce a large number of baby octopuses which Nico releases into the ocean. If children ask, as they probably will, why the mother dies in this way - we find in the note at the end that it is because she is so absorbed in nurturing her eggs that she does not feed. The book communicates a strong sense of place - a sunny Mediterranean fishing village where the people live an open air life. We see the fishermen on the shore pulling in their nets, the waiters serving the card-playing men in the seaside cafe below Nico's family's flat and we get glimpses of a devotional picture and of women in the background dressed in traditional black. An illustrated story of this quality is worthwhile in its own right, but this one also provides a context for a great deal of learning - about a particular sea creature and about a lifestyle.

Running Order:

50

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[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/nicos-octopus>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/141>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/margaret-mallett>