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Flamingo Boy

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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A child with an affinity with nature, in a war situation - it has to be Michael Morpurgo. This story starts with a modern young man, Vincent, following the idea of another Vincent, van Gogh, painting a boat on this particular beach, on holiday before he decides what to do with his life. He collapses on the road with a fever, and is carried by an older man to a farm, and nursed by him and an old lady. When he is well enough, the old lady tells him the story of how they came to be there.

The man is Lorenzo, and he is on the autistic spectrum. He lived on that farm in the Carmargue with his hard working parents, and local people mocked and despised him, so he stayed close to home. However, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, a carousel was brought by a Roma family to his village, and the daughter, Kezia, became his great friend. He loved the flamingos on the lake, and learnt to imitate their sound and their flapping, and he loved riding on the carousel, which had flamingos painted along the top. The families became friends, and the children inseparable, but everything changed when the Germans arrived. A tall Caporal showed the kinder side of the Germans and stuck up for the children when they were verbally abused, and helped provide materials to rebuild the carousel when it was broken, but not even he could prevent the local Milice from raiding the farm and arresting Kezia's parents. Of course it all works out in the end: Kezia and Lorenzo stay and work on the farm into their old age, Vincent stays there and is happy. The flamingos are wonderfully described, and Lorenzo's affinity with them can lead to miraculous healing. Flamingos fly around on the pages, and the carousel is on the cover, but these are stock images, not illustrations as such.

Michael Morpurgo has a tendency to sentimentality, and this is no exception, but it's a good story. He explains that he has an autistic grandson, and has written this to show sympathetically the happy life that is possible, though there are difficulties, of course, and how people around such a person may be helpful and supportive. Setting it during the war when people who were seen to be different, whether Jews, Roma or unlike other people in any way, were under threat, gives additional emphasis. The sub-title of the book is **It's the people who don't fit in who change the world**, and Lorenzo, with his simple pleasures and love of life, certainly changes the minds of many people he meets.

Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/flamingo-boy>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/230>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/diana-barnes>