



Fish Out of Water

Joanne Levy

Reading level: 2.9

9781459826595 PB

Book Summary

Twelve-year-old Fishel (Fish) Rosner doesn't like regular "boy" things. He hates sports and would rather read or do crafts than climb trees or ride dirt bikes with his friends. Fish also loves to dance. But everything he wants to do is considered "girly." Fish doesn't get why that's a bad thing. He's just interested in different things than other boys. When he asks his Bubby to teach him to knit, she tells him to go play outside. When he begs his mom to take him to Zumba, she enrolls him in water polo instead. Why does everyone else get to decide what Fish should or shouldn't do?

Author Biography

Joanne Levy's love of books began at a very early age. Being the youngest among four children, she was often left to her own devices and could frequently be found sitting in a quiet corner with her nose in a book. Now that she's a grown-up, Joanne is most often at her computer, channeling her younger self into the books she writes for kids who enjoy reading in quiet corners. She also likes to knit, but not dishcloths. Joanne lives in Ontario with her family.

Key Themes

- Gender Stereotypes
- Knitting and Crafts
- Bullying
- Judaism
- Charity
- Sexism
- Family

Read-Aloud Suggestions

- p. 10—“I love ice cream...” Fish is surprised to get pushback when he asks his grandmother to teach him to knit. Especially because of *why* she won’t teach him.
- p. 23—“By lunchtime, I was getting pretty nervous...” Fish discovers even his best friend has strong, negative opinions about who should knit.
- p. 61—“Later that night, we were all at the kitchen table...” Fish is faced with a situation where he can either admit he didn’t go to the activity his mom had signed him up for or cover up his actions with a lie.

Discussion Questions

1. Fish faces pushback from friends and family, even though he knows in his heart that the things he wants to do shouldn’t be “for boys” or “for girls.” Have you ever felt or been told you shouldn’t do something for the same reason? What happened? How did you feel?
2. Fish struggles with finding a charity (bar mitzvah) project that’s meaningful to him. What would your charity project be and why?
3. Why do you think Seth was so angry about Fish wanting to learn how to knit?
4. Fish didn’t tell his family that he went to Zumba instead of water polo—was he justified in that? Should he have told them?
5. What character do you identify with most in this book? Why?
6. There is mention of stereotypes in this book. Discuss other stereotypes and why they might be hurtful.

Activities

1. Create a new cover for *Fish Out of Water*.
2. Research beginner books or videos about knitting and give it a try.
Note: you can find inexpensive needles at a dollar store or borrow from a friend! If you’d like an easy beginner project, there’s one for a bookmark on the author’s website (joannelevy.com).
3. Ms. Harper wears a dress with math equations on it that is a tribute to Hedy Lamarr, the actress and inventor. Research Ms. Lamarr and her inventions.
4. Create a commercial or ad inviting all kids to take up knitting. Be creative and convincing.
5. As part of his bar mitzvah, Fishel has to choose a mitzvah—good deeds—project. Research a good deeds or charity project you might enjoy and that would be meaningful for you. Make a plan, then do it.
6. Write a list of what you think is in bus driver Karla’s giant purse.
7. Write a song or poem about what you think it means to be a fish out of water.

