



Arlene Sardine

By Chris Raschka

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Follows the short life of Arlene, from brisling to canned sardine.

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Arlene Sardine By Chris Raschka Bibliography

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- Original language: English
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"So you want to be a sardine." Although not every reader will personally relate to the opening presumption of Chris Raschka's *Arlene Sardine*, all will appreciate his lively approach to the humble story of an unsung heroine. Arlene starts out as a little fish who knows exactly what color her parachute is--the slippery gray-green of a sardine. Her career takes off when she and a few of her "ten hundred thousand friends" are caught in a purse net and thrown onto the deck of a fishing boat. After taking her last gilled gasp, Arlene is sorted, salted, smoked, packed in oil, *et voilà*, her dream has come true!

While some adults may read this tale as either a morbid take on the traditional fish story or a thinly veiled call to vegetarianism, it is intended to be neither. Grownups occasionally need reminding that for children, the concept of death is not nearly so fraught with fear and panic and heartache as it is for adults. Arlene isn't much bothered by it either. She knows that sardines are, by definition, dead fish--she simply marks her target and shoots for it.

Raschka earned a Caldecott Honor for *Yo! Yes?*, and his *Mysterious Thelonious* garnered acclaim as the *New York Times Book Review* Best Illustrated Book of 1997. In *Arlene Sardine*, he uses exuberant pastel watercolors and bold, abstract strokes to bring the undersea world alive (and keep it kicking even after the sea life is dead). His text is typically minimal and musical: "Then she was smoked, delicately. She was delicately smoked. Delicately smoked was she." Children will enjoy this matter-of-fact yet playful telling of one tiny fish's journey to sardinehood (and in the process discover words like *fjord*, *thronging*, and *hermetically*), and parents may also learn a thing or two by loosening up and swimming along for the ride. (Ages 4 to 8) --Brangien Davis

From Publishers Weekly

Raschka is at it again, setting picture-book precedent in this witty fjord-to-can account of how one little fish became a sardine. In addition to the deliciously eccentric subject matter, there's also an anomalous plot development: midway through the tale, the heroine expires. When readers first meet Arlene, she's a happy little fish with "about ten hundred thousand friends" who dreams of becoming a sardine. Then, rather abruptly, she's caught in a purse net and dumped on the deck of a fishing boat. Far from being a gloomy event, however, Raschka treats her demise matter-of-factly as just another step toward Arlene's ultimate goal. He then explains how Arlene becomes a sardine: she's sorted, salted, smoked and canned, covered in olive oil, hermetically sealed and finally cooked. Raschka's well-researched text is never ponderous; he opts instead for a playful, poetic approach ("Then she was smoked, delicately. She was delicately smoked. Delicately smoked was she"). The brushwork in his sea-colored watercolors is all swoops and swirls, with such piquant touches as a pink arrow pointing Arlene out in a crowd, and bright-eyed fish with eyes closed for the second half of the story. To top it off, Raschka has turned the cover art sideways and added labels such as "easy-open book" and "net wt. 12 oz." so that the book itself resembles a sardine can. Raschka delivers an uplifting message that death is a regenerative part of the life cycle. All ages.

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From School Library Journal

Kindergarten-Grade 2—"So you want to be a sardine" is the provocative opening line in this offbeat journey of a sardine from her birth in a fjord to her final resting place in a can. Arlene does typically aquatic things during her two-year life, dies on a fishing boat, and is then properly processed. Along the way, Raschka provides some new vocabulary ("1/4 dingley can," "brisling," etc.) and a clear and simple description of how

a swimming, breathing creature becomes a toothsome treat. The writing style is direct and casually conversational but also whimsical, with dramatic pacing and poetic repetition. The text, in script, appears in irregularly shaped boxes or is artfully scattered over the page and the graphic design is masterful. The pastel palette is unusual and oddly appealing and the clever layout of each spread reinforces the action. Even the cover has been turned on end and is decorated to resemble a sardine can. While the matter-of-fact treatment of Arlene's death and continued interest in the processing of her lifeless body remove much of the potential pathos, the watercolor illustrations take these mundane events and imbue them with charm and humor, making Arlene a piscine personality whose fate may disturb listeners. Lacking the empowering message of *The Blushful Hippopotamus* (1996) and the color-as-music symbiosis of *Mysterious Thelonious* (1997, both Orchard), Arlene's saga, like sardines, is an acquired taste.

Carol Ann Wilson, Westfield Memorial Library, NJ

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Hamrick:

Inside other case, little persons like to read book Arlene Sardine. You can choose the best book if you want reading a book. Given that we know about how is important the book Arlene Sardine. You can add understanding and of course you can around the world by way of a book. Absolutely right, since from book you can know everything! From your country till foreign or abroad you will be known. About simple thing until wonderful thing you are able to know that. In this era, we can easily open a book as well as searching by internet product. It is called e-book. You can utilize it when you feel bored stiff to go to the library. Let's study.

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Joe Timmons:

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