



Perfect Square

Michael Hall

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A perfect square is transformed in this adventure story that will transport you far beyond the four equal sides of this square book.

Perfect Square Details

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Author : Michael Hall

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From Reader Review Perfect Square for online ebook

Lisa Vegan says

This is a square book about a square that undergoes many changes, of shape and of color.

Oh dear. I've seen so many books with the same concept as this one. But I guess I'm a sucker for such things because I really loved it, and it was done so, so well here.

The pictures are colorful and fabulous.

Maybe the message here is a tad trite, but it's genuinely thought provoking and meaningful, and great fun too, and it manages to be given without being didactic.

I think introspective and thoughtful kids will have fun with this book.

I felt uplifted when I finished reading, and it also gave me ideas for art projects to do with kids.

The Library Lady says

This is the sort of book the snobs much-hipper-than-me librarians will pass by at the Caldecott. Hell, I could give you a long long list of innovative, creative, **KID FRIENDLY** author/illustrators who are never at the most more than the bridesmaids at these things. And it's a pity, because this is just the sort of smart, creative, **KID FRIENDLY** sort of book that they **SHOULD** recognize.

A simple square. But if you tear it into triangles, and punch holes in the triangles, it can become a "fountain that babbled and giggled and clapped". Snip it into ribbons? It's a river. Etc, etc, until the square, left as a square finds its squareness "confining" "cramped and rigid", and finds a way to express itself.

Michael Hall's My Heart Is A Zoo was a labor of love, a work of creativity with inspiration for crafty adults and children AND a story that appealed to my wiggly crews of toddlers and preschoolers. And with this book he has repeated the feat. I'm looking forward to his next work and crossing my fingers that the Caldecott types recognize his talent. But I'm not holding my breath on that one....

David says

Perfect Square by Michael Hall is an original look at shape, color, texture, change, adaption and transformation in a child friendly, appealing format.

A perfect red square is transformed in the gentle adventure story. When punched and cut, the red square changes itself into a fountain. When torn into scraps, the yellow square made itself into a garden. When shredded into strips, the green square becomes a park. When shattered, the blue-green square made itself into a bridge. When snipped into ribbons, the blue square made itself into a river. When crumpled, ripped and wrinkled, the purple square made itself into a mountain. On Sunday, when nothing happened and the red

square felt confined, it made itself into a window that looked out on a mountain that gave birth to a river that was crossed by a bridge that led to a park that was home to a garden that had a fountain that bubbled and giggled and clapped.

This simple story features a large font, with text that is partly white on colored background and colored on white background. The text has layers that can be interpreted differently depending on one's age and sophistication.

The illustrations feature acrylic monotype ink prints. This is a wonderful example of beautiful picturebook design. While appearing simple, great craft produces images that indicate texture, with small additions such as a bird, lamppost, fish or cloud that help transform the colors and shapes into new creations. The final window square features a rainbow of colors, while the last fountain shows a variety of dots depicting water and simple outlines of playing children. The images of the fountains, and the river are my personal favorites.

Possibilities for using this book abound, ranging from learning colors, shapes, and days of the week, to art, math, writing, and discussion of adaption and transformations. It's both creative and playful. This book richly deserves the awards that seem bound to come. Highly recommended for school and public library collections.

For ages 4 to 8 (and adults), colors, shapes, days of the week, textures, transformation, change, adaption, art, writing, math, and fans of Michael Hall.

Richie Partington says

30 December 2010 PERFECT SQUARE by Michael Hall, Greenwillow, March 2011, 40p., ISBN: 978-0-06-191513-0

"I've got a square look I'll show you
I got four sides on me
All my sides are the same size
Like a good looking square should be"
-- Sesame Street, "It's Hip to be a Square"

"It was a perfect square. It had four matching corners and four equal sides. "And it was perfectly happy.
"But on Monday, the square was cut into pieces and poked full of holes. It wasn't a perfect square anymore.
"So it made itself into a fountain that babbled and giggled and clapped."

Over the course of six days, this perfect square is cut and poked, torn into scraps, shredded in strips, shattered, snipped into ribbons, and crumpled and ripped and wrinkled. And in the process -- using the disassembled pieces -- that perfect square repeatedly recreates and reassembles itself into a fountain, a garden, a park, a bridge, a river, and a mountain.

(You'll need to read PERFECT SQUARE to discover what happens on Sunday when the square tires of waiting for something to next befall it.)

I love how Hall's use acrylic monotype ink prints which day by day progress through shades of the primaries

and secondaries (from red to orange to yellow to green to blue to purple and back to red) result in the square's repeatedly being so visually interesting each time it is disassembled, before the pieces are brought together into these various recreations. It makes PERFECT SQUARE so much more satisfying than many other picturebooks that can similarly be used to promote imagination and creativity.

PERFECT SQUARE leaves me grinning -- just like the square on the cover.

Richie Partington, MLIS

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Betsy says

Graphic designers of the world, take heed: I am wary of your intentions. I mean it. You guys are, and I say this in the kindest way possible, strange. I don't mind it when you take up large sections of MOMA with funky chairs. That is entirely your prerogative. No problemo. But when you start writing children's books my hackles start to rise. I've little patience for books like *The Graphic Alphabet* which seem to have more fun entertaining mod tots' parents than actual flesh and blood children. At worst you create coffee table picture books. At best . . . well, at best I guess you attain the ranks of folks like the great Leo Lionni, combining beautiful design with child-friendly art. Now Michael Hall is a fellow I've been keeping my eye on for a little while now. See, he's definitely a graphic designer and he put out the book *My Heart Is Like a Zoo* not long ago. A perfectly nice book, sure, but while it was a cool idea (making animals out of hearts) it lacked . . . well . . . heart. His newest title *Perfect Square*, however, seems to rectify the situation. A brilliant combination of color, texture, originality, mild message, and kid-friendliness, Hall achieves a perfect medium all thanks to a shape with four equal side and four matching corners.

We meet a square. Four sides. Four corners. Red at the outset. And we can see that the square is happy with its lot. In fact, it's probably utterly unprepared on Monday when it finds that someone somewhere has cut it up and poked out a couple of holes. Without even pausing to think it over, the square uses these newfound shapes to become a fountain. On Tuesday the square finds itself utterly changed again. This time it's orange and rather than holey and cut up, it's now a series of torn scraps. So the square uses those scraps to become a lovely garden of bright orange blooms. This continues in this way until one day something happens to the square that it never could have expected. Something, in fact, that makes it entirely question the life it led before.

There is no sense of who is putting the square through these trials, of course. No outside entity reveals him or herself through anything but the square's physical changes. If you read this book to a child and asked them who was doing this to the square, I bet their answers would be numerous and eye-opening. In the end, the central conceit of this book works because while you get a vague sense of the square's personality, the true star of the show is its ingenuity. This is a square that makes the best out of what one could construe as a series of bad situations and ends up the wiser for it. As for the ending itself, I loved how Hall tied everything together. The square, finding on Sunday that it has not been changed, discovers that it can no longer be

satisfied with going back to the way things were, and takes it upon itself to change of its own accord. It becomes a window, and the things that window looks out upon make all the difference in the world.

I wouldn't call the book tight-lipped about the medium in which Hall is working, but it's not the most descriptive sentence in the world, that's for sure. Says the book: "Acrylic monotype ink prints were used to prepare the full-color art". On one level I'm just grateful Hall didn't achieve the book's effect through a computer medium (it's hard to tell these days). And these "acrylic monotype ink prints", as they call them, conjure up no one so much as the sainted father of children's cut paper collage, Eric Carle. Carle painstakingly paints by hand all the papers that eventually make up the pictures in his books. I don't know that Hall goes quite that far, but the different colored papers that become the square in its various incarnations are perfect for this book. They're bright, bold, and at no point does the reader have any difficulty distinguishing one color from another. Of course, the images are often embellished by what looks like a graphite pencil, either in black or white, placing select details around the square's fountain, or the park, or what have you. After close examination, all I could figure was that these parts of the pictures had to have been done on a computer later in the game. The white is too perfect and the black doesn't look as if it has been drawn over the bumpy surfaces of the painted papers. And I wouldn't have it any other way. Clearly Hall felt that for the good of the story, this was the method he preferred to utilize. It doesn't distract from the images in the least, anyway. Once you get over the initial shock of a square sporting a goofy smile, you come to expect the other hand drawn details found further in the text.

I like message books where you can completely disregard the message and still enjoy the story. After a couple readings of *Perfect Square* I got that sinking feeling in my gut that informed me what it was that I was holding. Oh shoot . . . oh man . . . this is one of those picture books you're supposed to hand to a graduating Senior from high school or college or something, isn't it? Well, it certainly could be, but fortunately this book is a little deeper than your average reach-for-a-star-kid title out there. If there's a lesson to be learned from *Perfect Square* it's that some people are content to remain in their perfect little boring roles until outside forces show them what they're worth. The square in this book isn't about to turn into a mountain or a window without a little push, after all. That first time he finds himself cut into pieces and poked into holes, he doesn't sit around moping. Hell, no! He turns himself into a fountain for everyone to enjoy. This is not a go-getter square at the start, but he comes around to the idea in the end.

Of course the book reminded me of all those other shape-with-personality books out there. Titles like Norton Juster's *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics* or Shel Silverstein's *The Missing Piece*. For me, though, this book invokes no one more strongly than the aforementioned Leo Lionni. His *Little Blue* and *Little Yellow* would make a striking companion to *Perfect Square* (not least because you could have fun comparing 1959 color printing techniques to today's). Like Lionni's book there's a quiet tone to this book. A steady storytelling. This is a book that taps into those older picture books of decades past. In short, it is the perfect combination of storytelling and good design because it never forgets to appeal to those most discerning of readers of all: children.

For ages 4-8.

Peacegal says

Like that other book about sentient shapes, *The Missing Piece*, *Perfect Square* is more than meets the eye.

The square starts out as just that—a red, four cornered shape. However, in the following pages, it is cut into tiny pieces, ripped into strips, and painted a variety of colors. With each new challenge from the unseen force, the square creates something new—and beautiful.

Ok, clearly this is a metaphor for the ways forces out of our control can utterly change our constitution in life, but we always have the option of picking up the pieces and starting anew. Normally, I don't like stories such as this, my bitter mind deeming them sappy, corny, or over-optimistic. However, *Square* is subtle enough that it doesn't tell its readers what to think, but rather asks them to draw their own conclusions. It won me over, and I closed the book feeling reflective.

Nancy Kotkin says

Text: 5 stars

Illustrations: 5 stars

Another amazing picture book from Michael Hall. What I love most about his picture books is that they are accessible to, and fun for, young children, but conveniently double as philosophical treatises. In this one, a square is happy being a perfect square. Then he is crumpled, cut into sections, ripped into pieces, and punched full of holes. Yet each time, the square transforms himself into something useful and beautiful. In the end, the square no longer recognizes himself as just a square. What a brilliant metaphor for life!

Jade Nguyen says

1. { Genre }: Concept

2. { Summary }: A perfect square is cut, shredded and torn into pieces to create objects and landscapes. On Tuesday, the square turned itself into a garden. On Wednesday, the square made itself into a park.

3a. { Area for comment }: Multifunctional

3b. { Critique }:

As much as I enjoyed the vibrant colors and abstract designs of *The Perfect Square*, I want to give credit to its more effective feature. *The Perfect Square* is multifunctional in the sense that it can teach more than 1 subject/concept at once.

3c. { Critique Example }:

The main concepts in which *The Perfect Square* teaches are: 1) the days of the week, 2) introduction to abstract art, and 3) transition/change. Each day of the week aligns itself with a change in shape and mood. Typically, when you think of something being shredded or torn it doesn't exude positive feelings. Yet, somehow *The Perfect Square* is able to transform torn pieces (in the form of change) into beautiful things. This is a message that is not only important for young readers, but also juniors and adults. I appreciate the

fact that Hall attempts to share this influential message with children. The Perfect Square also introduces the fundamentals of abstract/geometric art - the ability to take shapes and create objects, people and landscapes.

4. { Curriculum Connection }:

The Perfect Square was the second title I chose for my literature sharing assignment. The way in which I wanted to communicate this book to the students was not only through it's reading but also through a supplemental activity in which extended the children outside of the book. At the end of the reading I had the children select pre-cut squares and directed them to create their favorite moments, places or people by shredding the square a part. I wanted them to see that you can always create something from nothing and that beauty is in the eye of beholder.

Ann says

Perfect Square is a metaphor of renewal, rebuilding and possibility. It is also illustrative and capitalizes on art, math & science in a fun and age appropriate way. The imaginative, multidimensional, and inspiring narrative is easily translatable to kids, classroom, patrons, and anyone's quest to renew and transform. I love this book even more because... Friends of MN Orchestra has commissioned music set to the story - premieres on Oct 25th at a fun community event that I'm co-chairing at Orchestra Hall. Contact me to find out more.

Jenny says

Simple but lovely. A square is cut, torn, shattered, and snipped. At first, it's disappointed to not be a perfect square anymore but it quickly realizes it can transform itself into amazing things such as a river and a fountain and a mountain. I love the simple, bright illustrations. I also love the creative aspect of the book. Finally, I love the idea that you can take what might seem to be a less than ideal situation and transform it into something wonderful.

This could also be used with young children to learn/talk about the days of the week and colors.

Karawan says

Each day of the week starts with a square (the color changes every day) that somehow gets ripped/cut/shredded and reinvents itself by making a work of art out of the pieces. At the end of the week all these creations come together.

It's deceptively simple, but covers a wide range of topics all at once: days of the week, colors, shapes, geography/landforms, and a lovely larger message about art and creation that you could push in a purely artistic direction or, if you're so inclined, a religious one (creating the world in a week, one piece at a time, with it all coming together on Sunday). The square is an artist, reinventing itself every day, and instead of being sad at getting ripped up, it shows that pieces and scraps can always be used to make something beautiful.

(Not that I thought of all this at the time, but it's one of those books that seems so simple at the first reading

and then when you can't stop thinking about it you realize how many layers there are to appreciate....)

This was a new book at our library that the librarian showcased at storytime. Gavin wasn't super-attentive while she was reading, but when she moved on to something else he grabbed this book and looked at it by himself for quite a while. I loved it and can't wait to read it to him again when he's old enough to get more out of it.

Candice says

This book of minimal words and simple pictures, oozes creativity! What can you do with a square? If you cut it into pieces and poke it full of holes, you can make a fountain. If you tear it into scraps, you can make it into a garden. And so it goes with our perfect red square. I can imagine a child reading this and wanting to take a square and make all these different things from it. Definitely a book to exercise the imagination and get the creative juices flowing.

Sarah Sammis says

I spotted Perfect Square by Michael Hall on the new picture book shelf at the library. It has a fetching red cover with a big white grin and a multicolored title. The book is about a square who transforms itself each day into something beautiful after being somehow deconstructed.

The square is first cut up and holes punched out of its shape. It rearranges those pieces into a decorative fountain, using the circles as drops of water. A couple birds are drawn on in black line art to complete the effect. Other things created from the square include a garden, a park, a bridge and a mountain.

After a week of learning to enjoy and anticipate new chances to build something beautiful from its remains, the square is left alone. Instead of being happy to be left intact, its disappointed. So rather than mope, the square finds something it can still be while still being a square.

While I checked out the book for my artistically inclined preschooler, my 4th grade son was the one who immediately took a liking to it. I'm thinking of getting him some colorful origami paper so he can make his own square scenes.

Kathryn says

An engaging and thoughtful book about a square who is perfectly happy being a square. But it can't stay a "perfect square" forever as it is crumpled up, torn up, shredded, etc. Each time, though, the square maintains its optimistic and beauty-loving nature and transforms its tattered pieces into something new and lovely and meaningful. On the one hand, this is a very fun and unique shapes/colors/textures. On another level, it has some life lessons at heart!

Tasha says

One perfect square is transformed again and again into something surprising and new. On Monday, the square had holes poked in it and was cut into pieces, so it became a fountain. On Tuesday, the square was torn into scraps, so it became a garden. Shredded strips became a park. Shattered shards became a bridge. Ribbons with curves became a river. Wrinkles and crumples became a mountain. Until finally, the square was just a square again and had to find a way to change within its four sides. The result? Triumphant!

This very simple premise offers small children a glimpse at art and inspiration. It celebrates creativity, creating something new from something ripped, crumpled or sliced. Hall sets the perfect tone with his brief text, allowing the images to do most of the work in the book. My favorite part of the text is that the square is the one reinventing itself rather than an outside force doing the creativity. It changes the dynamic of the book entirely.

I can see so many art projects emerging from this book. Get it into the hands of elementary art teachers in your school district! If you enjoy crafts with your preschool story times, share some squares of paper in a variety of colors, offer scissors, hole punches, markers and more. You just wait to see what those children create! Appropriate for ages 3-6.
