



The Biggest House in the World

by Leo Lionni



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A young snail dreams of having the biggest house—or shell—in the world. Then one day, his wise father tells him the story of another snail with the same dream. He grew and grew, adding bright colors and beautiful designs, until he found that his house came at a terrible cost. The young snail decides that a small, easy-to-carry shell might be best for a life of adventure and exploration.

The Biggest House in the World Details

Date : Published August 12th 1973 by Dragonfly Books (first published March 12th 1968)

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Author : Leo Lionni

Format : Paperback 32 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Animals

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From Reader Review The Biggest House in the World for online ebook

Anna says

Leo Lionni's "The Biggest House in the World" rivals Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree" for the "Saddest Children's Book Ever" Award.

Chak says

I like Leo Lionni books. They usually deal with some sort of personal self-discovery. In this book, the main character is being told a story about a snail who eventually has such a big house (shell on his back) that he can't move anymore and ends up starving, alone, dead and eventually decomposing. I tend to change some things here and there as I'm reading -- you can do that with a kid that can't read -- to make it less morbid, but I try to retain the minimalist sensibility.

So far in his life, my son is a "less is more" kind of person, which I will continue to encourage and be inspired by. I feel that this book as well as "Little Bear's Little Boat" by Eve Bunting have helped him become this way.

I would recommend this book for ages 4-6.

Rainey says

Is the message, "be happy with what you have" or "possessions are less valuable than experiences?" I don't know.

Giacinta Shidler says

Good moral, the story doesn't grab you though

Guinevere Johansson says

When I was a child this book stirred my imagination like no other. Living in the woods, as we did at the time - I would search for magical colors wherever snails had been. The illustrations posses a sophistication reminiscent of the etchings from "Cabinet of Curiosities."

Sylvester says

2* art

2* story

Sam says

The Biggest House in the World by Leo Lionni, published in 1968.

Genre: Fiction

Format: Picture Book

Plot: A young snail tells his father he wants a big house and his father tells him the story of a snail who did get the biggest house in the world. This snail's shell was huge and very pretty, but when all the food was gone he could not move his heavy home to follow the other snails and he and his shell faded away. The young snail determines to never do this and to keep his house small so he can travel.

Considerations: This story has a dark undertone in that the fictionalized snail dies for his prideful mistake.

Review Citation: Horn Book Magazine

Selection Source: Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature: A Brief Guide

Recommended Age: Ages 3 - 5.

Phoenix says

This book is perfect as recently Phoenix and her friends have been playing with the snails in the front lawn and not treating them nicely. When I saw what they were doing to the snails I made up a story on the spot about the snails having a mom and dad and how there will never stop crying because their baby never came home. It was a great performance I have to say but then the author/illustrator was recommended in a book club, so it was perfect! I'm not sure she really understood the main idea so we'll check this book out again in a year or so!

Kim says

another kids' winner. simple, timeless lesson about material things and how they weigh you down in life.

E.B. says

Well, that was a bummer.

Shiloah says

2019 update: what a great reminder about simplifying while we are preparing for an overseas move.

Dagmar says

The Biggest House in the World is the story of a snail who wants to have a huge house. His father tells him a story about another little snail who was advised by his own father to "keep his house light and easy to carry". The little snail in the story figures out how to twitch and make his shell grow and grow and grow until, of course, he can no longer move.

Wisely, the first little snail realizes that a small house is really the way to go. This is a cautionary tale, but one my students really enjoy. Leo Lionni's pictures of the snail with the enormous shell always garner lots of ooohs and aaaahs from my students.

While I really like this book, I think the better cautionary tale (or tail) is the story of Gertrude McFuzz who is incredibly jealous of Lolla Lee Lou's two feathers and tries to have the most feathers of all. Gertrude McFuzz appears in Yertle the Turtle and other stories by Dr. Seuss.

Argott says

When my kids ask me to read to them, they are torturing me. Except when it is a Leo Lionni book. This book however is problematic. I see snails on the sidewalk sometimes. Snails don't really talk. And they don't really have shells that are gigantic. If you intend to read this book be prepared to put up with all kinds of anatomical nonsense and additional scientific inaccuracies. Good writing should have an air of plausibility that this work lacks. Sorry Leo. I have to call 'em like I see 'em.

Fjóla says

This is sort of a harsh one. Although I agree that we should apply moderation in our life, not give in to vanity or let things get out of hand, I really felt for the little snail as he "faded away". He really put a lot of effort, ingenuity and artistry into building his wonderful house: "... by squeezing and pushing, and by wishing very hard, he was able to add bright colors and beautiful designs." By simply "wishing" he pulled off all these things, it seems there must have been some purpose to that? And the little snail DID bring some magic to others. Not only the snails, but also the butterflies, the frogs marveled at his accomplishment.

The upside: our snail in the story took this parable to heart, rejoiced in being mobile and instead took pleasure in all the marvelous things he saw through his journeys. Yes, sometimes it's better to think ahead and small can be good!

ABC says

Leo Lionni seems to love to write message-laden books. In this book, a snail wishes for a big house. His father tells a story about a snail who got a big, beautiful house. But then the snails fades away and the house crumbles. (Meanwhile, my son is saying, "Fades away????? What does that mean????? Uh....)

Anyway, the point is that a small house is good because we can be free, free, free. Personally, I think a small house sucks and I want a big beautiful house. I asked my son and he wants a medium-sized house. To each his own.
