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## Family Reading Guide for "Don't Trust Fish"

*Conversation starters for parents and children*

### Getting Started

#### What This Book Is About

"Don't Trust Fish" presents an urgent and extremely official warning: fish cannot be trusted. Why? They spend all their time underwater where we can't see them. Some are as big as a bus. We have no idea what they're teaching in their "schools." And they are almost certainly plotting our doom. This deadpan, side-splitting nature guide gone wrong is one of the funniest picture books around—and one of the most useful for teaching young readers how comedy actually works.

#### Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Absurdist humor:** The book's comedy comes from presenting completely ridiculous ideas with total seriousness—a valuable form of humor to recognize and enjoy
- **Critical thinking through comedy:** Young readers who laugh at this book are also developing the ability to identify faulty logic and silly reasoning—skills that serve them well beyond storytime
- **Curiosity about the natural world:** The book's outrageous claims invite real questions: What DO fish do underwater? How big do they actually get? This is comedy as a gateway to science
- **The joy of reading:** Books that are purely, confidently silly model that reading can be a source of unexpected delight and laughter

**Tip for Parents:** The best way to read this one is with full commitment and a straight face—at least at first. The more seriously you read the warnings about fish, the funnier it gets. Let your child be the one to laugh first and explain why it's funny. That moment of noticing the joke is part of the magic.

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### Discussion Questions

#### About the Very Serious Fish Problem

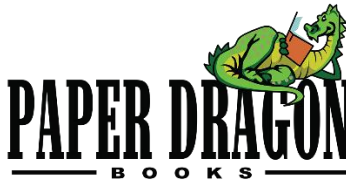
- Why does the book say we should never trust fish?
- Do you think fish are REALLY plotting to take over the world? How do you know?
- What's the funniest reason the book gives not to trust fish?
- What does it mean that fish have "schools"—and why is that funny in this book?

#### About Humor and How It Works

- Why is this book funny even though it's pretending to be serious?
- Can you think of another animal the book could have been written about?
- What would "Don't Trust Squirrels" say? What about "Don't Trust Cats"?
- Have you ever heard a joke that was funny BECAUSE it was told with a very serious face?

#### Fun Conversation Starters

- If you were a fish, what would you be plotting?
- What's the most suspicious thing you've seen a fish do?
- If fish could talk, what do you think they would say about US?
- What animal do you think is secretly up to something?



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## Discussion Activities

### Fish Facts vs. Fish Fiction

- After reading, look up real fish facts together—how big do they actually get? What do they eat?
- Compare the book's "warnings" to real fish behavior—what's exaggerated? What's not?
- Visit an aquarium or pet store and observe real fish together
- Watch a short nature video about deep-sea fish—some are genuinely surprising!

### Write Your Own Warning Book

- Pick a different animal and create your own "Don't Trust \_\_\_\_" warning poster
  - Draw illustrations in the style of the book—serious-looking but silly
  - Share your warning book with another family and enjoy their reaction
  - Try writing it with a very straight face and see if you can make each other laugh
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## Conversation Tips for Parents

### Understanding Absurdist Humor

- This book is a great opportunity to name a specific kind of comedy: absurdism—humor that comes from ideas that are impossible or ridiculous but treated as totally normal
- Ask: "Why is it funny when someone says something silly in a very serious voice?" Let your child work out the answer
- Point out other examples of absurdist humor in books, cartoons, or everyday life
- Laugh together—loudly and freely—at the fish conspiracy theories

### Building Scientific Curiosity

- Use the book's silly "warnings" as springboards for real questions: "What DO fish do all day?"
  - Honor your child's curiosity about animals—let the book open the door to real learning
  - Discuss how scientists actually study fish and underwater life
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## Questions by Age Group

### For Younger Readers (Ages 4–6)

- What are two reasons the book says not to trust fish?
- Is this book trying to tell us something true or something funny?
- Which picture made you laugh the most?

### For Older Readers (Ages 6–8)

- What makes this book funny? Can you explain the joke?
- How do you know that the author doesn't actually think fish are evil?
- What's the difference between something that's really scary and something that's pretending to be scary for a joke?
- Could you write a "Don't Trust \_\_\_\_" book about something else? What would it say?



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## Activity Ideas

### Comedy Craft Projects

- Write and illustrate a "Don't Trust \_\_\_\_" book featuring a different animal or object
- Perform a dramatic reading of "Don't Trust Fish" with the most serious voice possible
- Create a "Fish Defense Preparedness Guide" with silly but official-sounding rules
- Draw a poster warning the neighborhood about the fish conspiracy

### Science Connections

- Research the biggest fish in the world—the book says some are as big as a bus. Is that true?
  - Look up bioluminescent deep-sea fish and draw your own deep-sea creature
  - Learn about the difference between fish, whales, and dolphins
  - Research what fish actually DO in their "schools"
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"Don't Trust Fish" is proof that picture books can be pure comedy—and that pure comedy is a worthy and valuable thing. Neil Sharpson and Dan Santat have created a book that teaches children to laugh at absurdity, think critically about faulty logic, and discover that reading is one of the most delightful things a person can do. Use this book to laugh together, to invent your own silly warnings, and to head to the nearest aquarium with a healthy amount of suspicious curiosity about what those fish are planning next.