DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE
Educator's materials

“You’re smarter than you look”

That’s what the wise old squid tells Nardo.

Nardo is smart. He’s smarter than most of the creatures living on the Fingers. But he doesn’t look smart. He looks silly and clownish with big flopping ears and a lolling tongue. That’s what everyone sees, even though he’s constantly the hidden voice of wisdom in the story.

When I created Nardo, I wanted a character that connected to children’s empathy. “Nardo” is short for “Leonardo”. One name we associate with genius and the other sounds silly and dumb. It’s a pretty amazing difference for three letters.

Nardo is a hidden character in the story. Like an Easter egg, his part is backstory to “Deep Dark: A Bedtime Tale”.

> “I think that it cannot be as everyone says,” shares Nardo. “It must be filled with wonders. All our food comes from up there.” – Page 9
>
> “I see a path through the rocks,” Nardo says. “We should stay low so the big fish above do not see us.” – Page 15
>
> “If you wear those,” observes Nardo, “you will not be blinded.” – Page 25

This last is the big reveal for Nardo. It’s a moment that, for the others, is unremarkable as they press forward. For Nardo, this is the most important moment of the book.

The wise old squid sees past Nardo’s features and is already staring into Nardo’s eyes when he says, “Very good. You are smarter than you look.”

When he hears this, Nardo snaps his eyes up to meet the squid’s stare. He looks for any sign of mockery or laughter that he’s come to expect from others and when he doesn’t see it, he realizes that – finally, he has been judged by something other than his appearance, and praised.

I’m hopeful that children will see Nardo in others that look different, that have big ears or funny appearance, or less money, and look for the person that’s really there, beyond the outside.

Parents & Adults
My objective in adding detail outside the book is to provide insights that you can share with children. Ask them if they think Nardo is dumb or smart, and ask them how they decided. Use this backstory to make a teachable moment for them. I’d love to hear how your story time goes.

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