



An Interview with Author Jessie Sima

Jessie Sima is an author and illustrator living and working in New York City. They grew up in a small town in southern New Jersey, unaware that they were a storyteller. Once they figured it out, they told their family and friends, who took it quite well. They are the author of several notable titles, including their latest book, *Perfectly Pegasus*. The story follows Nimbus, a one-of-a-kind pegasus who feels lonely in her uniqueness. She finds a fallen star to make a wish on and wishes for friends who are just like her. Along the way, she meets a unicorn named Kelp, and a host of other creatures who might just open her eyes to something other than what's up in the sky.

What was it like for you to come back to your character, Kelp, in a new way and from a new perspective in *Perfectly Pegasus*?

It was a really comforting experience. As my first published book, *Not Quite Narwhal* holds a special place in my heart. I hoped I would find a way to return to Kelp and his sparkly, rainbow world, but I only wanted to do it for the right story. *Not Quite Narwhal* has meant a lot to me, and to many readers, so I wanted to be mindful and respectful of that. Once I discovered Nimbus, I realized that I could continue the story by following this new character who had her own dreams, struggles, and personality. Getting to build out Kelp's character through his interactions with a new friend his own age was really gratifying. In writing *Perfectly Pegasus*, I got to check in on how Kelp has been doing, and expand on who he is, without having to center on him exclusively. And I was happy to make a story where Kelp could demonstrate that his ability to make new friends and create a welcoming atmosphere is not limited to creatures who have horns or tusks.

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What advice do you have for readers who may be lonely like Nimbus, or who feel like they don't quite fit in with those around them, like Kelp in *Not Quite Narwhal*?

My advice for both of these situations is pretty similar. First, know that you are not the only one who feels these sorts of feelings. It's good to know that you aren't alone in that way. It can sometimes be scary to talk to new people, but you never know who could be a potential new friend. Try reaching out and making connections with others as your authentic self. Lots of people feel like they don't fit in for one reason or another, so if you are able to be your own unique self, it may help others feel more comfortable being their own unique selves, too. Creating an environment where everyone is accepted and celebrated is a great way to make friends and form community.

Nimbus doesn't try to hide how different she is from Kelp and his friends when she arrives on their island. What do you hope readers take away from *Perfectly Pegasus* about being unique?

Nimbus has grown up alone in the clouds and has never had to hide who she is from anyone. Unlike Kelp in *Not Quite Narwhal*, she is already secure in her identity. Instead, her journey is about understanding the concept of friendship. For me, it was important to introduce a character who connected with Kelp through their differences instead of their similarities. Of course, they are both mythological horse creatures, but when they

first meet, Kelp is impressed by Nimbus' wings, and Nimbus is amazed by Kelp's horn. Then, on their journey to find the star, Kelp and Nimbus use their abilities, to fly and to swim, respectively, to further the search. They find common ground and enjoy each other's company, but they both admire the other's unique abilities and self. I hope readers see that having differences can be a strength, and that being true to themselves can help others do the same.

When Nimbus and Kelp can't find the fallen wishing star together, Kelp turns to his friends to join in their search. Why was it important for you to show your characters asking for and receiving help?

While I always want my main characters to work toward solutions to their own problems, I don't want them to think that turning to others for help is a weakness or a form of admitting defeat. Other characters (or people, in real life) may have unique skills, experiences, and ideas that they can share. And whether the help from others leads to a solution or not, the process of collaborating may still bring characters together. I think about this a lot while creating picture books. There are so many people involved throughout the whole process, and the finished books would not be what they are without their help.

Interview courtesy of



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Perfectly Pegasus

Jessie Sima • Simon and Schuster • 2022 • IL K-3

Nimbus has always lived among the clouds. She's a pegasus, after all, and the sky is where she belongs. She is one of a kind. And when she wants a friend, all she has to do is look up – and talk to the stars. Only they don't really talk back. The clouds don't, either. And sometimes, being the only pegasus can be a little...lonely? So she decides to find a fallen star to make a wish on – and wishes for friends who are just like her. Along the way she meets a unicorn named Kelp, and a host of other creatures who might just open her eyes to something other than what's up in the sky.

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Not Quite Narwhal

Jessie Sima • Simon and Schuster • 2017 • IL K-3

Born deep in the ocean, Kelp is not like the other narwhals, and one day, when he spies a creature on land that looks like him, he learns why.

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