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# The Most Magnificent Thing



## Synopsis

Award-winning author and illustrator Ashley Spires has created a charming picture book about an unnamed girl and her very best friend, who happens to be a dog. The girl has a wonderful idea. She is going to make the most MAGNIFICENT thing! She knows just how it will look. She knows just how it will work. All she has to do is make it, and she makes things all the time. Easy-peasy! But making her magnificent thing is anything but easy, and the girl tries and fails, repeatedly. Eventually, the girl gets really, really mad. She is so mad, in fact, that she quits. But after her dog convinces her to take a walk, she comes back to her project with renewed enthusiasm and manages to get it just right. For the early grades' exploration of character education, this funny book offers a perfect example of the rewards of perseverance and creativity. The girl's frustration and anger are vividly depicted in the detailed art, and the story offers good options for dealing honestly with these feelings, while at the same time reassuring children that it's okay to make mistakes. The clever use of verbs in groups of threes is both fun and functional, offering opportunities for wonderful vocabulary enrichment. The girl doesn't just "make" her magnificent thing --- she "tinkers and hammers and measures," she "smoothes and wrenches and fiddles," she "twists and tweaks and fastens." These precise action words are likely to fire up the imaginations of youngsters eager to create their own inventions and is a great tie-in to learning about Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 380L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: Kids Can Press (April 1, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1554537045

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Product Dimensions: 9.4 x 0.4 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 419 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #105 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in [Books > Children's Books > Animals > Pets](#) #2 in [Books > Children's Books > Activities, Crafts & Games > Activity Books](#) #2 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Values](#)

Age Range: 3 - 7 years

## Customer Reviews

Collect all of Ashley Spires's picture books! You'll love these irresistible, quirky characters and laugh-out-loud stories. [View larger](#)

**Ashley Spires** Ashley Spires grew up in a little town on the coast of British Columbia called Tsawwassen with two parents, an older sister, eight cats, a dog and the occasional newt. For a while she thought that animation was her future, but then photography caught her eye, which led her to bookmaking courses. These classes opened her eyes to the world of illustration and she never looked back. Delighted that there was, in fact, a career that allowed her to remain in her pajamas, hang out with her cats and be productive at the same time, she knew illustration was the perfect job for her. Ashley spent time living in Toronto and Saskatoon before returning to her home turf of Delta, British Columbia where she now resides with three cats, a dog and her extremely patient fella.

Everyone Loves The Most Magnificent Thing!

"A model for girl

engineers." *–* **• Publishers Weekly.** "Precisely the kind of book

we need for kids these days." *–* **• Elizabeth Bird.** "Expert pacing and subtle

characterization for maximum delight." *–* **• Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review.**

100 Titles for Reading and Sharing *–* **• New York Public Library.**

K-Gr 2 *–* **• A girl decides to make something magnificent with the help of her**

assistant *–* **• her dog, but they "are shocked to discover that the thing isn't magnificent. Or**

good. It isn't even kind-of-sort-of okay. It is all wrong. The girl tosses it aside and gives it another

go." From her efforts, children see the importance of planning, gathering supplies, building, and not

giving up when a good idea doesn't initially work out. Ample use of white space makes the digital

artwork pop. The text consists mainly of one- or two-line captions for the pictures, and the layout

and design are spot-on, building action with a smart use of vignettes, boxed illustrations, and

spreads. Clever use of artwork conveys the youngster's spectrum of emotions as she "saws and

glues and adjusts," "smashes," "pummels," and "explodes" ("It is not her finest moment."). Then,

finally, the girl finishes, and her scooter really is "the most magnificent thing." This is a solid choice with a great message that encourages kids not to quit in the face of disappointment but rather to change their perspective and start over. —Melissa Smith, Royal Oak Public Library, MI

One day, a young girl who enjoys creating things decides to build something truly special. So, after drawing diagrams, hiring an assistant (aka her best-pal pooch), and collecting materials, she establishes her sidewalk workshop. But, alas, bringing vision to fruition isn't easy. Progressively, excitement and confidence wane, motivation turns to meltdown — then to defeat (I'm no good at this. I QUIT!). Happily, some timely dog walking brings clarity, calm, and an inspiration for an imaginative solution that just might work. Fanciful illustrations depict the spindly, cartoonish characters; the girl's intricate found-object contraptions; and colorful scenarios against black-and-white line drawings of a city-neighborhood setting. Interspersed all-capitalized words enliven the text, though the smaller-sized, spiky font may be more for one-on-one sharing or slightly older readers. With witty and whimsical elements (including the dog's side antics), this supportively portrays the sometimes-frustrating process of translating ideas to reality and shows how a new perspective can help problem solve and rekindle enthusiasm and joy. Grades K-2. --Shelle Rosenfeld

I was at a conference of math enthusiasts the other day to discuss kids and the state of math related children's books. Not my usual scene but I was open to it. Despite what some might fear, the day was thoroughly fascinating and the mathematicians in attendance made many fine and salient points that I had never thought to consider. At one point they took it upon themselves to correct some common math-related misunderstandings that have grown over the years. Most fascinating was the idea of trial and error. Kids today live in an era where it often feels to them that if they don't get something right the first time then they should just give it up and try something else. It's hard to make them understand that in a lot of professions, math amongst them, much of the job consists of making mistakes and tinkering for long periods of time before getting to the ultimate solution. It got me to thinking about how there really aren't a lot of children's books out there that tackle this subject. Or, for those few that do, tackle it well. The remarkable thing then about a book like "The Most Magnificent Thing" by Ashley Spires isn't just the way in which she's gone about discussing this issue, but also the fact that it works as brilliantly as it does. This is the anti-perfection picture book. The

one that dares to suggest that maybe a little trial and error is necessary when trying to get something right. A girl and her dog are best friends. They do everything together from exploring to racing to making things. So when the girl has an idea one day for *the most MAGNIFICENT thing* that they can make together, the dog has no objection. Plans are drawn up, supplies gathered, and the work begins. And everything seems to be fine until it becomes infinitely clear that the thing she has made? It's all wrong! Not a problem. She tosses it and tries again. And again. And again. Soon frustration turns to anger and anger into a whopping great temper tantrum. Just when the girl is on the brink of giving up, her doggie partner in crime suggests a walk. And when they return they realize that even if they haven't gotten everything right yet, the previous attempts did a right thing here or a right thing there. And when you put those parts together what you'll have might not be exactly like it was up in your brain, but it'll be a truly magnificent thing just the same. I think perhaps the main reason we don't see a lot of books about kids trying and failing is that this sort of plot doesn't make for a natural picture book. I won't point any fingers, but the usual plot about success follows this format: Hero tries. Hero fails. Hero tries. Hero fails. Hero tries. Hero succeeds. Now hero is an instant pro. You see the problem.

I've seen this plotline used on everything from learning to ride a bike to playing an instrument. And what Spire has done here that's so marvelous is show that there's a value in failure. A value that won't yield success unless you go over your notes, rethink what you've already thought, reexamine the problem, and try it from another angle. In this book the failure is continual and incredibly frustrating. The girl actually has quite a bit of chutzpah, since she completes at least eleven mistakes before finally hitting on a solution. Useful bits and pieces are culled, but it's also worth noting that the inventions left behind, while they don't do her much good, are claimed by other people with other ideas. It sort of reinforces the notion that even as you work towards your own goals, your process might be useful to other people, whether or not you recognize that fact at the time. Spire doesn't cheat either. Our unnamed heroine idea is actually clear cut about what she wants to make from the start. On the page where it reads, *"One day, the girl has a wonderful idea. She is going to make the most MAGNIFICENT thing* you can see her on her scooter explaining her idea to her now thoroughly exhausted pup. It's only on the last page that we learn that the thing in question was to be a pug-sized sidecar for the aforementioned scooter. Now Ms. Spire is no newbie to the world of children's literature. If you have not seen her Binky the

Space Cat graphic novel series for kids, it is about time you hied thee hence and found those puppies. In them, you will discover that not only is she remarkably good at the subtle visual gag, but that her writing is just tiptop. Some of the choices she made for this book were fascinating to me. It's written in the present tense. Neither the girl nor the dog has a name. At the same time it's incredibly approachable. I love how Spires relates the girl's travails. The final solution is also all the better because even with her success it's not perfectly perfect. "It leans a little to the left, and it's a bit heavier than expected. The color could use a bit of work, too. But it's just what she wanted!" Perfection can be a terrible thing to strive for. Sometimes, just getting it right can be enough. And yes, I have to mention it at some point: It's about a scientifically minded girl character. Now you might feel like this ain't no big a thing, but let me assure you that when I was wracking my brain to come up with readalikes for this title, I came up nearly empty. Picture books where girls are into nature science? Commonplace. But books where girls are into math or invention? Much more difficult. There are a couple exception to the rule ("Violet the Pilot" by Steve Breen, "Rosie Revere, Engineer" by Andrea Beaty, and "Oh No! Or How My Science Project Destroyed the World" by Mac Barnett come to mind) but by and large they are rare. Yet if this had been a book where the whole point was something along the lines of even-girls-can-love-science I would have loathed it. The joy of "The Most Magnificent Thing" is that the girl's goal is the focus, not the girl herself. Her love of tinkering is just natural. A fact of life. As well it should be. On the back bookflap for this book we are able to discover the following information about Ms. Spires: "Ashley has always loved to make things and she knows the it-turned-out-wrong frustration well! All of her books have at one point or another made her cry, scream and tear her hair out as she tried to get them JUST RIGHT. I guess that children's authors really are the finest authorities on trial and error. They know frustration. They know rejected drafts. They know how much work it takes to get a book just right. And when all the right elements come together at last? Then you get a book like "The Most Magnificent Thing". I don't know how long it took Ms. Spires to write and illustrate this. All I know is that it was worth it. In the end, it's precisely the kind of book we need for kids these days. Perfection is a myth. Banged up, beat up, good enough can sometimes be the best possible solution to a problem. A lesson for the 21st century children everywhere. For ages 3-7.

I'm only 11 and I loved it I will incourage the aorthor to keep up her dreams in writing books like that  
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Great book to inspire creativity. I use this as a read aloud before kicking off our engineering unit. My  
class participates in a Rube Goldberg competition. The students have to build a 10 step machine  
using all 6 simple machines to complete a specified task. It takes a lot of trial and error just like the  
girl in the book has a lot of trial and error before she gets her invention right.

What a wonderful idea book. A boom that enciuragez conversation and questions, gives a petson  
something to think about well after the last page is turned and the boom is closed. The little girl in  
the book looks like my granddaughter in a way.

Great story about persistence and using a time out when one gets frustrated. The young heroine  
and her dog are good companions and part of a delightful tale of invention and resourcefulness.

This story is a darling way of teaching creative power, fix to frustration and hard work pays off. It  
never hurts to have a friend along the way... share and discuss with the children you love.

I'm happy with the Most Magnificent Thing. I bought the book for my 2yo daughter who loves to  
read. My daughter is becoming more aware of building, her imagination and her emotions. I think  
this story illustrates all these things so well. My only critique is that I went with hardcover vs board  
book because my daughter does so well with not destroying books, most of the time. However, the  
hardcover is a large square book. I think a board book would suite her toddler fingers better for  
toting the book around the house. Overall, a good buy.

Given as a gift to a young girl much like the one in this book.

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