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# **MAMA: A TRUE Story, In Which A BABY HIPPO Loses His MAMA During A TSUNAMI, But Finds A New Home, And A New MAMA**



## **Synopsis**

Set during the devastating tsunami of 2004, MAMA is the touching true story of a baby hippo that was separated from his mother when the wave hit. After struggling alone for several days, the baby was rescued by Kenyan wildlife officers and brought to live in an animal refuge. There, all by himself, he adopted a new "mother"--that just happened to be a 130-year-old giant male tortoise. And they've been inseparable ever since. Although MAMA takes place against the backdrop of a terrible human tragedy, at the heart of this story is a moving and original tale of adoption--and of finding love and companionship in the least likely of circumstances. Includes an author's note.

## **Book Information**

Hardcover: 32 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 16 customer reviews

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Age Range: 4 - 7 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

## **Customer Reviews**

This visually poetic book's subtitle is longer than its entire text: "A true story in which a baby hippo loses his Mama during a tsunami, but finds a new home, and a new Mama." Using only two words, "Mama" and "Baby," Winter (The Librarian of Basra) reveals the true plight of a baby hippo rescued after the December 2004 tsunami struck the coast of Kenya (the facts appear in an endnote). A series of acrylic paintings with a thick golden border depict the young hippo calling, "Mama," as he swims alongside his parent in calm waters, nibbles on grass and cuddles next to her under the stars. But soon the frame turns to a violet blue that echoes the color of a tumultuous wave, which soon overtakes the spreads. Parent and child become separated; the mother calls, "Baby?", her

offspring cries, "Mama?" each facing away from the other. Subsequent pages reveal the young hippo making it to shore and ultimately to his new home in an animal sanctuary. There he spies a giant tortoise and, apparently recognizes a kindred spirit, exclaims, "Mama!!!" The two bond and a concluding image shows them snuggled up together under a starry sky, as an apparition of a smiling mother hippo looks on. Giving this account a more emotional interpretation than does Owen & Mzee (reviewed below), Winter reassuringly portrays how friendship can ease a devastating loss. All ages. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Pre-Grade 3 Winter used true stories to address difficult topics in September Roses (Farrar, 2004) and The Librarian of Basra (Harcourt, 2005). Here, she tackles the tsunami in a narrative consisting of two repeated words: mama and baby. A hippo and his mother are shown enjoying a swim when gigantic waves pull them apart. They call out plaintively for one another, until the baby is alone in the deep waters of a full spread. After washing ashore, he is taken to a refuge, where he bonds with a 130-year-old tortoise (according to the endnote); the dialogue bubble reads mama. Winter's signature acrylics turn from choppy, deep blues to placid turquoise, and the ratio of sky to water returns to a normal balance. It is hard to predict how the book will affect youngsters who are anxious about water or separation. The pitching of the topic to a preschool audience without more explanation is questionable. Not only will the design lead to dismay as adults discern, too late, what the book is really about, but the lack of narrative makes the situation seem typical rather than unique and results in oversimplification of a complex relationship. Explore this subject instead through Isabella and Craig Hatkoff and Paula Kahumbu's sensitively structured Owen & Mzee (Scholastic, 2006), see p. 111. Wendy Lukehart, Washington DC Public Library Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This is a wonderful book.

This is a look like brand new book and the author's autograph included. I bought this because Winter's illustration was fantastic. As a graphic designer, I am very picky about illustration. But hers are not sugary sweet cute drawings. I love how the story unfolded. It was concise and the ending was very touching. Owen and Mzee was sleeping side by side and the spirit of Owen's mother was with them in peace. That was very comforting and touching, which showed HOPE and LOVE. It is an excellent book for all ages! Thank you Jeanette Winter!

Love this heart wrenching story.

Such a beautiful story (true) and darling illustrations!!

Thinking about adoption? This simple story might help you finalize that decision. Has a book ever been as impressive repeating the same word over and over?

I brought over a stack of children's books when I was visiting friends recently. The five year old picked this one out of twenty to have read to him. He then chose it again and again to read to himself. I know part of the appeal for him is that it is so easy for a beginning reader to read, and yet it tells a powerful story. The only text is "mama" "baby" "mama?" "baby?" "mama!" "baby" Representing in the first pictures the baby hippo and his mama playing together, then their terror and bewilderment as the huge wave tears them away from each other and they are both alone and lost, and finally the little hippo's relief at finding a new mama (the big land turtle) and the turtle's acceptance of the little hippo as his new baby. However, this little boy's father is dying of cancer. The child knows his daddy is sick, but has not been told his daddy is dying. Another child may be terrified by the pages where the child and parent are torn away from each other and then the child flounders alone and lost in the huge empty ocean. I think this little boy found comfort that people came to help the little hippo get to safety, and the hippo ended up with a new (if unlikely) mama to take care of him. The last page shows the baby hippo sleeping snuggled against the side of the big turtle, and his original mama is now stars in the sky, cuddled around her baby and his adoptive mama, still smiling down at him in love. I think my friends' son is taking the message from the book that if daddy goes away, someone else will take care of him, and daddy will be glad and will still love him from afar. I would advise people to say something like "This book is about a little hippo who has something scary happen to him, but people help him, and he is okay," before reading this book to a child who may be frightened by it.

Mama by Jeanette Winter is another sweet story, told basically through illustrations only, except for the words "mama and baby". On the last page of the book is a brief synopsis of what really occurred when a baby hippo became separated from his mother when the great waves hit following the tsunami. After struggling alone for several days, the baby hippo was rescued by Kenyan wildlife officers and brought to live in an animal refuge. There, the baby hippo adopted a new "mama", a

130-year-old giant male tortoise. And they've been inseparable ever since. The author's illustrations demonstrate the fear and loneliness experienced by the hippo as he searched for his mama. Simplistic, yes, however, it is a very effective way to tell this story to young children.....RECOMMENDED

...but every time I read this book I get teary eyed. Of course I use the word "read" loosely as there are only two words in the whole book: mama & baby. I found this book after reading Owen and Mzee (Isabella Hatkoff) which was a short non-fiction book with photographs detailing the remarkable story of a baby hippo that lost his mom in the 2004 tsunami; he is later rescued and sent to a zoo where he is "adopted" by a giant 130 year old tortoise. This picture book attempts to condense that incredible story in a handful of pages that are illustrated with simple and homely images using only the word "mama" to move the story line along. (There is also an author's note at the end which explains more about the true story.) It's a pretty bold concept but I think it works. I'm still not a very big fan of the illustrations and the story is troubling but as a book it really does resonate for me and honestly I wouldn't change a thing about it. It's perfectly imperfect. There are lots of reviewers that will argue it's a scary book thematically, but I think it's also very touching. I probably wouldn't recommend it to everyone but it's certainly one of the most moving picture books I've happened across. I think this book may also find a welcoming home on the bookshelves of children who have themselves been misplaced from their parents and adopted by surrogates...or anyone who has tragically lost something and found it again in the unlikeliest of places. Essentially it's a story of trauma and loss and hope and love. It's a story about life.

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