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# Pax



## Synopsis

National Book Award Longlist \* New York Times Bestseller \* An Best Book of the Year From bestselling and award-winning author Sara Pennypacker comes a beautifully wrought, utterly compelling novel about the powerful relationship between a boy and his fox. Pax is destined to become a classic, beloved for generations to come. Pax and Peter have been inseparable ever since Peter rescued him as a kit. But one day, the unimaginable happens: Peter's dad enlists in the military and makes him return the fox to the wild. At his grandfather's house, three hundred miles away from home, Peter knows he isn't where he should be — with Pax. He strikes out on his own despite the encroaching war, spurred by love, loyalty, and grief, to be reunited with his fox. Meanwhile Pax, steadfastly waiting for his boy, embarks on adventures and discoveries of his own. . . .

## Book Information

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Grade Level: 3 - 7

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Gr 4 — A viscerally affecting story of war, loss, and the power of friendship.

Pennypacker, author of the exuberant "Clementine" series (Disney-Hyperion) and the charmingly morbid *Summer of the Gypsy Moths* (HarperCollins, 2012), here displays not only her formidable writing skills and a willingness to stretch her storytelling into increasingly complex narrative forms but also her ability to tackle dark and weighty themes with sensitivity and respect for the child reader. Set in an intentionally undefined time and place that could very well be a near-future America, the novel opens with a heartbreaking scene of a tame red fox, Pax, being abandoned at the side of the road by his beloved boy, Peter. Perspectives alternate between the boy and the fox, and readers learn that a terrible war rages in this land. Peter's father is about to leave for the frontlines, and while he's away, Peter must live with his grandfather out in the country—and his father makes it clear that there is no place for Pax in Peter's temporary home. Almost as soon as he arrives at his grandfather's, Peter is overcome with guilt, and he sets off under the cover of darkness to trek the 300 miles back to his home, where he prays he'll find Pax. The loyal fox, meanwhile, must figure out how to survive in the wild—though never losing hope that his boy will return for him. As the protagonists struggle to reunite in a world in the grip of violence and destruction, they each find helpers who assist them on their respective journeys: Peter breaks his foot and is rehabilitated by Vola, a hermit suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, while Pax is taken in by a leash of foxes who teach him the basics of foraging and hunting. Pennypacker doesn't shy away from some of the more realistic aspects of war, though she keeps most of the violence slightly off-screen: in one scene, the wild foxes define war for the naive Pax as a "human sickness" that causes them to turn on their own kind, akin to rabies; later, as the battle creeps closer, several creatures are maimed and killed by land mines. Black-and-white drawings by Klassen offer a respite for readers, while adding to the haunting atmosphere. With spare, lyrical prose, Pennypacker manages to infuse this tearjerker with a tender hope, showing that peace and love can require just as much sacrifice as war. VERDICT A startling work of fiction that should be read—and discussed—by children and adults alike. —Kiera Parrott, School Library Journal

“Pax the book is like Pax the fox: half wild and wholly beautiful.” (New York Times Book Review) “Moving and poetic.” (Kirkus Reviews (starred review)) “Pennypacker’s expert, evenhanded storytelling reveals stunning depth in a relatively small package.” (Booklist (starred review)) “In an exceptionally powerful, if grim story, Pennypacker does a remarkable job of conveying the gritty perspective of a sheltered animal that must instantly learn to live in the wild.” (Publishers Weekly (starred review)) “A startling work of fiction that should be read-and discussed-by children and adults

alike. (School Library Journal (starred review)) "An emotional, thought-provoking story of conflict, loyalty, and love. (The Horn Book) "Sometimes an author steps aside from a popular series to break new ground, as evidenced in this arresting novel, at once a wilderness adventure about survival and a philosophical foray into big questions. (San Francisco Chronicle) "Pennypacker's elegant language and insight into human nature spin a fable extolling empathy above all. By the novel's poignant ending, Pennypacker has gently made the case that all of us should aspire to that view—children and adults alike. (Time magazine) "Searingly honest and heartbreakingly lovely, Pax is, quite simply, a masterpiece. (Katherine Applegate, Newbery Award-winning author of The One and Only Ivan) "A sweeping and enchanting wartime story of trust, loyalty, betrayal, and the love of a boy for the fox he's raised since he was a kit. A master storyteller, Pennypacker leads the reader along a path of shifting hopes to the story's heart-wrenching conclusion. (Ann M. Martin, Newbery Honoree, author of Rain Reign) "Pax is set in an unspecified time and place so that the details of the war are unimportant. What is prime is the graceful but haunting story of boy and fox—their relationship set against man-made chaos. (Columbus Dispatch) "Both boy and fox experience the kindness of others even with the backdrop of imminent war. (Recommended 2016 Holiday Gift for Tween Readers (Brightly.com)) "A book that is as much about dealing with loss as it is about how people change and affect the world around them. (An Entertainment Weekly Best Middle Grade Book of 2016 (Entertainment Weekly)

I'm an almost 60 year old man. My wife bought this book from because I love foxes. It's a beautifully written story. Have a box of tissues nearby. It has a proper ending. I won't say anything else about the story other than I enjoyed the journey immensely.

Targeted at the 8 to 12 year old group, Sara Pennypacker's latest novel "Pax" is a book that carries universal truths and one that will touch readers of any age. Illustrated by Jon Klassen, the pen and ink drawings contained in the book enhance the story, strengthening the overall impact of the passages associated with each specific drawing. Set in an unidentified country during an unspecified time, "Pax" serves to remind readers that war and destruction may affect anyone or anything. Twelve-year old Peter has cared for his pet fox, "Pax", for five years. Orphaned as a kit,

*Pax* is now as domesticated as any wild animal can be; he has never had to survive in the wild. Distrust is no match for kindness administered consistently and unmeasured. Having enlisted in the army, Peter's father takes his son to live with his grandfather and demands that Peter release *Pax* back into the wild. Knowing Peter would not abandon him, *Pax* waits patiently for his return.

*Pax* would stay, ignore all temptations until his boy came for him. Haunted by his belief he has betrayed *Pax*, Peter leaves his grandfather's home to recover his pet. A broken leg, an encounter with an amputee-veteran whose unnamed war occurred twenty years previously, and a realization by both Peter and *Pax* that each must be true to his own nature creates an emotional, poignant story that will touch your heart. Writing in the third person voice, Sara Pennypacker alternates the focus of *Pax* between developments affecting Peter and those in which *Pax* learns what it is to be a fox. Each chapter remains true to the focal character. In *Pax*, the reader learns about his life and his past.

If he could visit the kind-eyed therapist, he'd smash those toy cars. Just to make everybody see. The reader also watches Peter grow in his understanding of himself and of others. Talking to his benefactor about her war experience, Peter empathizes with her emotional state and begins to formulate a plan that will free her from her self-imposed exile. In *Pax*'s chapters, the narrative does not humanize the animals but remains realistic when it details the actions and responses to their surroundings. By Sara Pennypacker doing so, those portions of the narrative seem less fictitious and more like an appealing nature documentary. In both characters' chapters, the horrors and the impact of war overshadow the narrative. One of Jon Klassen's drawings, shown on pages 164 and 165, is quite memorable. The shadowing and use of contrasting white rain against the darker background drawing is the strongest in terms of atmosphere and locale. *Pax* is a novel that will touch your heart. It is suitable for the target age group as well as anyone who loves an outstanding story. I recommend that parents or grandparents read *Pax* before sharing it with younger, advanced readers or with those in the target age group who may be very sensitive.

A truly beautiful book however I think kids should be over 10 prior to reading it. It's message is powerful and at times very unsettling. I loved it and am wildly thinking of people I can buy it for (both adults and children)

my 4th grade daughter really wanted this but then wouldn't read past the first few chapters as it was too sad (at least in beginning). I'm encouraging her to finish but.... She's a good reader and hasn't had this happen too much or with any of the Kate DeCamillo novels that I find handle tough subjects and aren't all sunshine.

A fox and a boy. This was a great story but I can only give it three stars because there are some really contradictory themes going on in the background. Peter loves his fox but passed up so many other pets along the way... I get the "horrors" of war but.. I don't know. I just think the love could've been spread out a little more. I don't want to spoil anything so I will only say.. I didn't feel any closure in the end. It's like my eyes fell off a cliff.

I purchased this for my 9 year old based on all the wonderful reviews. He is an avid reader and loves war and animal stories. I thought it was the perfect fit, but he found this book difficult to read (he said) and did not seem to enjoy it. In fact, he never finished it.

I'm 34 years old, but I love stories told from the point of view of animals. This was a very sweet story that I enjoyed a lot. The only problem I had with it is that it makes keeping a pet fox sound pretty easy - they really aren't good pets at all!

My son is 11 years old and I rarely get to read to him any more. This was the last read aloud of fifth grade for us and I loved it. Told in alternating chapters, each from the point of view of either Pax the fox or his boy, Peter, it is a tale of growth. Peter's father forces him to "free" Pax before dropping him off at his grandfather's and heading off to war. But Peter quickly realizes that he has abandoned his friend. What follows is a quest. A quest for Peter to discover his truth and a quest for Pax to survive. At turns heart-wrenching and inspiring, I loved it and was reminded of reading *Where the Red Fern Grows* in elementary school. It has a sad yet satisfying ending and I am so happy I was able to also read it.

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