

MAURICE SENDAK

b. June 10, 1928

AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

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“Inside all of us is a Wild Thing.”

Hailed as the Picasso of children’s literature, Maurice Sendak has captured the imagination of readers young and old for more than 40 years. A prolific author and illustrator, he has published over 100 works of children’s fiction.

Sendak has received numerous awards, including the prestigious Caldecott Medal, the National Book Award and the National Medal of Arts. PBS describes him as “one of the most consistently inventive and challenging voices in children’s literature. His books and productions are among the best-loved imaginative works of their time.”

Born in Brooklyn, New York, to Jewish immigrants, Sendak was plagued with illness in his early childhood. He spent most of his time indoors where he occupied himself with books. Having discovered his creative voice at a young age, he found a perfect outlet in drawing and illustration. At the age of 12, after seeing Disney’s “Fantasia,” the awestruck Sendak decided to become an illustrator.

Sendak is best known for his book “Where the Wild Things Are” (1963). Over 10 million copies have been sold worldwide. In 2009, it was adapted into a critically acclaimed film directed by Spike Jonze.

Sendak’s work has often generated controversy, despite his celebrated career as an illustrator. Over the years, his children’s book “In the Night Kitchen” (1970) has been censored in several states due to illustrations deemed inappropriate. “Where the Wild Things Are” has been condemned by conservatives who claim the book involves witchcraft and supernatural elements. “I thought my career was over,” recalls Sendak. “The kids saved me. They loved the books because they are not afraid of life.”

In addition to writing and illustrating, Sendak has created award-winning set designs for dance, opera and theater, including Mozart’s “The Magic Flute,” Prokofiev’s “Love for Three Oranges” and Tchaikovsky’s ballet “The Nutcracker.” In the 1970’s, he donated nearly 10,000 works of art, photographs, manuscripts and books to the Rosenbach Museum & Library in Philadelphia.

For decades, Sendak hid his sexuality from the public, fearing it would ruin his career. “All I wanted was to be straight so my parents could be happy. They never, never, never knew.” In a 2008 interview with The New York Times, Sendak opened up about his private life and revealed his 50-year relationship with Eugene Glynn, who passed away in 2007.

In 2009, filmmakers Lance Bangs and Spike Jonze teamed up to produce “Tell Them What You Want,” a documentary about the life of Maurice Sendak.



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