

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and *YouthWorker.com*

Wild Things: Famed Children’s Author Never Wrote for Children

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

Maurice Sendak, author of the classic children’s book *Where the Wild Things Are*, died earlier this month at the age of 83. More than 19 million copies of Sendak’s book have been sold, and it made a big impression on countless kids—maybe you.

Originally, the book was going to be called *Where the Wild Horses Are*, but Sendak couldn’t draw horses, according to *Mental Floss*. When his editor asked the author what he could draw, Sendak said, “Things.”

When some critics said the book was too scary for children, Sendak didn’t listen. He said he never wrote to children or to adults for that matter. He just wrote. Besides, he said, children have a greater capacity to deal with big themes—such as sadness, fear and anger, which are the wild things Max struggles with. “I refuse to lie to children,” Sendak said. Some believe that because he didn’t talk down to children is how he was able to connect with them.

“I’m totally crazy; I know that,” Sendak said. “I know that’s the very essence of what makes my work good, and I know my work is good. Not everybody likes it, that’s fine. I don’t do it for everybody—or anybody. I do it because I can’t *not* do it.”

Talk About It:

Did you ever read *Where the Wild Things Are* when you were young? Did you see the movie? Did you have a favorite book when you were younger? What was it? Why did you love it so much?

Sendak couldn’t draw horses, but that didn’t stop him from becoming one of the world’s most famous illustrators. There are loads of people similar to him—people who aren’t very good at a particular thing, but still managed to succeed by doing something just a little bit differently. Have you ever been discouraged when someone said you couldn’t do something? Enough to give up? Or did you push forward?

Some parents wouldn’t let their kids read *Where the Wild Things Are* because they thought it might be too scary for them. Do you think that was overprotective, or can you see why they might’ve done so? Do you think your parents are overprotective? Over-permissive? Just right?

Do you think being a little bit different—*crazy* to use Sendak’s word—can be a good thing? When? For what purpose? Do you see things a little differently from your friends

and classmates? Is that a good thing? Do you have interests, talents or hobbies that you'd never stop because you just can't *not* do them? Are you able to use those skills for God?

What the Bible Says:

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48).

“What makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

“My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life” (Prov. 6:20-23).