



Toilet: How It Works

David Macaulay , Sheila Keenan

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Celebrated author-illustrator and master explainer David Macaulay brings his unique voice and style to high-interest nonfiction books for newly independent readers.

Everyone knows what a toilet is for, right? But what exactly happens after you flush? Where does our waste go, and how is it made safe? With his unique blend of informative text and illustration, David Macaulay takes readers on a tour of the bathroom and the sewer system, from the familiar family toilet to the mysterious municipal water treatment plant.

Toilet: How It Works Details

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From Reader Review Toilet: How It Works for online ebook

Becky says

On one hand, I really liked this book. It has important and interesting information, not only about toilets, but also about waste treatment. Macaulay does a wonderful job.

On the other hand, I find I am questioning the format. This is written as an easy reader. The audience for an easy reader is usually a child who is learning how to read. Sentences are kept short and vocabulary is somewhat controlled to help these young readers. This book contains the shortened sentences, but does not have the easy vocabulary. Unless a child has a lot of background in the subject, a first or second grader (the usual readers of early readers) won't be able to handle the vocabulary without adult assistance (ie. bacteria, nutrients, intestine, processing - all within the first 4 pages of words). I think this book would be better in a nonfiction picture book format. That way teachers and/or parents will be reading it with younger children, and students in the middle elementary grades would not find it off-putting to read. It would also allow for longer sentence structure that would complement the higher leveled vocabulary.

Sunday Cummins says

I'm always looking for non-animal focused, non-narrative texts for students to read. Having always been a fan of his adult "how it works" books, I've been curious about Macaulay's "how it works" series of books for children. Alas, I am disappointed. See my notes below – these might be helpful when you are considering nonfiction for your own classroom or library...

Toilet: How It Works (My Readers Series – Level 4, Macaulay, 2013)

NOT ENOUGH INFO-READER MIGHT BE CONFUSED. On page 5, Macaulay mentions "bacteria" as being in the waste our bodies make and then he makes reference to bacteria multiple other times in the book. His intro to bacteria is in this sentence on page 5 – "Bacteria produce useful nutrients. But if they get on our hands or back inside our bodies, they can make us sick." This is the first time he discusses bacteria and it's confusing – the student has to infer that when bacteria is IN your body, it's okay. (Nutrients is a vague term- what are they? why are they a good thing?) Later he mentions bacteria in the aeration tank and there the "water is checked to make sure there is enough bacteria" – but there's no explanation why bacteria are helpful. UGH. I just think if "bacteria" is going to be a thread, it needs more explanation.

SEQUENCE STRUCTURE HAS GAPS. On page 10, Macaulay begins explaining what happens when you flush the toilet. The last line is "And keep your eye on that plastic float in the tank," but when you turn the page, he doesn't mention it again. On page 14, he returns to the float when he writes "As the float pulls down on the lever, fresh water enters the tank." This is hard, folks. A student has to know that the "float" sinks as the water in the tank sinks. And then he writes, "Slowly the water rises, and so does the float. When the float stops pulling on the lever, the water shuts off." It's very hard to figure out from the image how the float is pulling the lever.

NOT ENOUGH INFO – READER HAS TO INFER TOO MUCH FOR THIS DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL. On p. 19, Macaulay writes about how when water from the septic tank seeps into the surrounding soil, it has nutrients that produce "hungry bacteria" (what does that mean?) and then he says "See the happy, green grass?" There's just not enough info. Plus – aren't septic tanks a bad thing? My town is subsidizing the cost of people getting rid of septic tanks because they actually poison the ground water??? (I need to do some

research.)

I could go on. MOSTLY – I think there's some missing information and for the audience this is intended for, the gaps in info might leave the reader confused.

Evan says

A wonderfully illustrated, descriptive text about how a toilet works and, in a wider sense, how we manage waste in the modern world. The illustrations are clear and detailed, and especially entertaining are the ones that show the characters, their skin invisible showing their internal organs and how they relate to digestion.

Read as part of the Fairmount Water Works urban watershed workshop series.

Stacie says

Really interesting introduction to toilets and the processing of human wastes. Tastefully illustrated. Good level of detail for beginners to reading and science. I learned a lot too!

Elizabeth S says

Absolutely fascinating. From the basics on how our bodies make waste, to how a toilet flushes, to how a septic tank works, to how a sewer system and water treatment plant works. This isn't "what you've always wanted to know about a toilet and more." Instead, it is "interesting stuff that you were have never thought to wonder about, but not too much."

To give you a feel for the tone of the book, here is the second paragraph of the author's introductory note: "Everybody knows what a toilet is for. And everyone lucky enough to have one knows how to use it--even in the dark. Most toilets are quite simple, but they all have an important job to do. They take away the waste our bodies make. They are also not bad for reading on." Exactly.

Yapha says

Toilets. We all use them everyday. But most children (and probably plenty of adults) don't know how they work, or what happens after you flush. David Macauley's book takes a look at that process. With a brief introduction to where the waste in your body comes from, Macauley explains what happens next. Using plenty of illustrations, he explains how a tank toilet disposes of waste. Next he follows where it goes, depending on whether you have a septic tank or are on the sewer line. An interesting look at something we all take for granted. Recommended for grades 1-4.

Sarah says

It's a toliet. It's gross. Kids will love it.

The technical side of how a toliet and sewer works. Great diagrams. Contains glossary and index.

Miriam says

A whole new kind of bathroom humor. On the title page, we see a line of folks waiting to get into the rest room. Everyone's got business to do in there. (Of course, the dog just wants a drink and the mammoth? I think he wandered in from some other Macaulay book...)

Mr. Macaulay explains, in forthright text, what goes into the toilet, what should NOT go into the toilet and what happens after the toilet is flushed. It's very interesting and it's funny even if you aren't a third grader. (Unless you're the dog whose biscuit has fallen in by mistake.)

I liked this book so much that, after the first copy arrived in our library, I ordered two more.

Lisa says

Creative. Informative.

Sandy says

Interesting, but my daughter had more questions than answers after reading this. Example: The book says bacteria can be good for you, then jumps to it being dangerous. Not enough explanation was given.

Debbie says

I enjoyed Macaulay's early books when I was younger, so I picked up this one at my local library as I've never read it before. It gives an overview of how a toilet works and an overview of how septic tanks and sewage treatment plants work. Hard words (for 4th graders) are defined in the back of the book. I would have enjoyed this book as a kid (though probably not as a favorite). As an adult, I know more than it explained, but it was still fun to read as he makes his pictures interesting to study.

Elissa Schaeffer says

This is a brief introduction to "waste management" from a respected author of nonfiction for children. It's also very nice to see a nonfiction reader that's not about animals or insects as that seems to dominate the

area.

First let me say that the title may be misleading. Yes, there is a particular focus on the toilet, but we get information on how the body makes waste to septic tanks and sewer treatment plants. So there's more to this than just how toilets work. There are also so ideas introduced that aren't delved into very deeply so some prior knowledge would probably help, or this could serve as a jumping off point to discuss what nutrients or bacteria or compost are. That said, it's an incredibly fascinating trip and is handled very well. It's information with very little gross-out factor.

The category "leveled readers" covers a wide range. If we think of it as ranging from level 1 through level 5, I'd put this up towards a level 4.

Recommended, especially for those nonfiction readers, grades 1-2 and up. (Definitely "and up" too because I learned lots from this book as well!)

Tracey says

Author-illustrator David Macaulay has long been known for his "building" books: Castle, Cathedral, Mosque, and more. In 2012 he turned his considerable skills to a younger audience in this easy reader series by Macmillan, which this year includes a book on toilets. Readers will find out how a toilet flushes, as well as why humans need toilets, where their waste ends up, and how septic systems and sewers work. (Originally reviewed on Mackin Books in Bloom.)

Theresa Stadt says

The only problem with this book is the title. If it were about 'how a toilet works' it would have something about siphoning! There was no mention of water pressure, either, when talking about plumbing. But what this book is really about, is plumbing infrastructure, from our bodies all the way to the treatment plant. And for that, it is a great book. My kids (5 & 8) both enjoyed it, but I think older kids and an adult reader would, too.

Joan says

This was a nice explanation of how a toilet works. Macaulay wants to produce books that will entice kids to read and he does it in his way. He tells kids how something works. Now he is making these books for the beginning readers and I applaud him for doing that! There are plenty of boys...and girls...who don't want to read fiction about talking animals for example, but want real books about real things. This series will provide them with a great alternative. My only complaint is that this is not a beginning reader but a more advanced reader. On the other hand, I'm not sure how simply you can explain something complicated. Probably about grade 3-4 is the lowest you could go in terms of explaining things. Nonetheless, I hope this is a trend that continues and I hope some excellent author proves me wrong about grade 3-4 being the lowest reading level you can go with decent nonfiction. This will be an excellent book to hand a struggling reader who has to read a book but hates fiction. I must check and see if we have all of this series because these books will be ideal for Common Core assignments.

