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## BOOK REVIEW: THE BOY, THE MOLE, THE FOX AND THE HORSE BY CHARLIE MACKESY

July 16, 2020 | Janet de Acevedo Macdonald

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# Book Review: The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse by Charlie Mackesy

Reviewed by Lisa Graham-Peterson

Children have very big questions – about the universe, about feelings, about things seen and unseen. Grown-ups answer with facts, seizing every chance for a “teaching moment” but not realizing they’re really not answering at all. Children figure this out quickly and quit asking we grown-ups the Very Big

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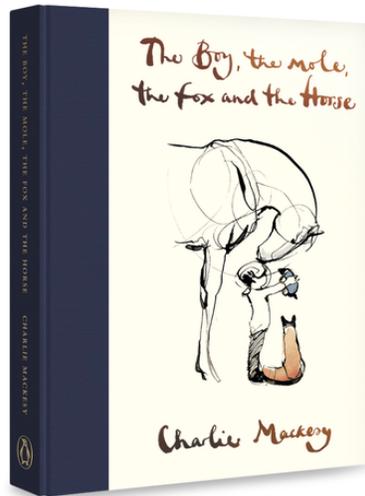
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Questions. They give us the simple ones (“How do I tie my shoes?”) and save the VBQs for special friends.

“The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse” by famed British illustrator **Charlie Mackesy** is a sweet tale of – you guessed it – a boy, a mole, a fox, and a horse helping each other answer the kind of Very Big Questions that grown-ups can’t (but probably still have). A book for everyone “eighty or eight” Mackesy unfurls a

simple storyline as the boy meets first one, then another, then another, until they are a traveling troupe. It’s the kind of book one can read in any order, or in no order at all. In fact, the author admits he prefers to start books in the middle and gives us permission to do the same if we wish. (Personally, I rather like to sneak a look at the endings of books. Mackesy said I could do that, too.)



Lonely and alone, the boy meets the mole first, a good start as the mole is small, meek, and mostly concerned with cake.

*“Do you have a favorite saying?” asked the boy.*

*“Yes,” said the mole.*

*“What is it?”*

*“If at first, you don’t succeed, have some cake.”*

*“I see. Does it work?”*

*“Every time.”*

But the mole’s insight beyond cake makes him a perfect companion.

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*"Being kind to yourself is one of the greatest kindnesses," said the mole.*

The pair meet the fox next. This could have been problematic because, well, it's a fox. But an unexpected act of bravery by the mole and they're now a trio.

*"Isn't it odd. We can only see our outsides, but nearly everything happens on the inside."*

Then comes the horse – gentle and wise, and towering over the other three.

*"What is the bravest thing you ever said?" asked the boy.*

*"Help," said the horse.*

The fox doesn't speak as much as the others.

*"To be honest, I often feel I have nothing interesting to say," said the fox.*

*"Being honest is always interesting," said the horse.*

The book's narrative is simple – like a child's conversation – yet profound, but that's not all that compels you to turn the page again and again (backward and forwards, even). As an acclaimed illustrator, Mackesy's pen-and-ink drawings and handwriting-styled fonts make each page a work of art. Some are black-and-white, piercing with bold lines. Other pages are awash with watercolor strokes, painting a comforting world of close friends, a soothing balm for stormy times.

*"When the big things feel out of control ... focus on what you love right under your nose."*



*"Nothing beats kindness," said the horse. "It sits quietly beyond all things."*



*"Being kind to yourself is one of the greatest kindnesses," said the mole.*

# The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse

## by Charlie Mackesy

- **Print Length:** 128 pages
- **Publisher:** HarperOne (October 29, 2019)
- **Publication Date:** October 29, 2019
- **Sold by:** HarperCollins Publishers

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** This is Charlie Mackesy's first book, although his artwork is widely known, shown, and displayed. His career began as a cartoonist and a book illustrator. He has since exhibited in galleries in New York, London, and Edinburgh. You can purchase his artwork and read more about him at [charliemackesy.com](http://charliemackesy.com). Follow him on social media and you'll occasionally be rewarded with animated versions of his whimsical drawings.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER:** Lisa Graham-Peterson ([lisagrahampeterson.com](http://lisagrahampeterson.com)) is a Minnesota-based freelance writer and editor, and an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota. She'd very much like to live in the world created by this book, perhaps with her very own magnificent horse to answer her Very Big Questions.



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