



PakaMdogo Press

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The Paka Mdogo Books by H.S. Toshack – Some Reviews

Reviews by, and about, young readers are to be found towards the end

Books Monthly

Books Monthly <http://www.booksmonthly.co.uk/>

From H S Toshack, now living and writing full time in the Algarve, three delightful adventure stories set in Africa and featuring Sheena the Cat. Illustrated brilliantly by Mary Ann Nelson McAlister, these charming stories are reminiscent of Kipling's Jungle Books - sometimes allegorical but always entertaining and beautifully packaged. Another place, and another culture, but young children will delight in having these stories read to them, and older children will find them a perfect read.

Available from Amazon, all three paperbacks are excellent value for money, and the Meerkat adventure in particular will appeal to people. In addition to being wonderful and exciting stories, they are also designed to assist children to read, and a full set of teaching resources is available to download for each title from Litworks.com - just click on the Children's Books link and you'll find it.

Teaching resources: A set of free, downloadable teaching resources (structured in line with the UK National Literacy Strategies but designed to help all 7-12 year old readers explore the text fully, and deepen their enjoyment of it) is available in the Paka Mdogo section of the LitWorks.com website. The resources are designed to be used on a page-by-page basis, and are wholly flexible, so that they can be employed in a variety of ways and settings: Students reading the book independently can be directed to the study tasks most appropriate to their level of language skill, as a way of supplementing what they have taken from the reading process itself. Teachers will be able to use the study tasks to focus attention on reading and comprehension, language awareness, thinking skills, individual writing (both creative and expository), open discussion, dramatic presentation, and simple literary judgement. Parents who wish to assist their children with reading and language development will find much in the resources to help them do that.



January Magazine Blogspot <http://januarmagazine.blogspot.com/>

You may have a hard time finding H.S. Toshack's Paka Mdogo stories but, for children seven to 12, it should prove to be a challenge well worth the effort.

Toshack, a former English teacher and educational consultant, conceived of the series both as entertainment and, at a more subtle level, as working educational tools. To this end, he has created a full set of teaching and learning resources and made them available on the Web. "The main purpose of this extension," it says on the site, "... is not to publicize the series but to provide support to teachers who wish to use one or more of the books in the classroom." And the attention to detail that has gone into these resources make this a credible claim.

As any teacher librarian will tell you, however, you can prepare material until the cow -- or the cat -- comes home, but that won't ensure that children will care about your book.

Sheena is a domestic cat who is lost in a game park in Tanzania where the author was living when he wrote the first in the series, *Paka Mdogo: Little Cat*. In the first book, she is separated from her human family, and finds them just in time to save them from a terrible fate.

On their second trip to Baragandiri National Park, in *The Gradual Elephant*, Sheena is again separated from the Allen family. While alone in the park, she teams up with Mpole, a 12-year-old African elephant who has been forced to leave the herd. Sheena helps him pass the tests necessary to become accepted as a young male.

In *The Meerkat Wars*, with the Allen family heading off on their safari in Baragandiri National Park, Sheena stows away in the back of the family Land Rover and so is on hand to help a young meerkat who's been poisoned by a scorpion. Sheena discovers, however, that this is the least of the problems, as whole tribes of Meerkats seem to be at war with each other for reasons that the civilized cat initially finds inexplicable.

All three of the Paka Mdogo stories are charming. The moral lessons are present, but subtly presented and deftly handled and though the animals seem to have some very human concerns, in the end they are animals, still.

Author Toshack is working on additional books for this series and new adventures for Paka Mdogo. An increasingly long line of children can hardly wait.

LibraryThing

<http://www.librarything.com>

Although I have not yet finished the book [*Paka Mdogo – Little Cat*], I have popped on-line to give it an early review as I am enjoying it so much. The prose is beautifully constructed and the little cat (Paka Mdogo in Kiswahili apparently) is a delight. This will definitely be heading in the direction of my eight year old once I have finished and then maybe in the direction of the school library to reach a wider audience! ★★★★★

Liz Lupton



Library Thing Early Reviewers <http://www.librarything.com/er/list>

I've always had a soft spot for books that involved groups of animals undertaking some adventure, or caught up in some conflict: *Watership Down*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Tailchaser's Song*, *The Incredible Journey*, the *Redwall* series...so I was very excited to read H.S. Toshack's *The Meerkat Wars*, a story of two tribes of meerkats and a very clever, very thoughtful little house cat.

Sheena is the small black and white pet cat of the Allen family, who live in Africa. She creeps into the back of the Allen's Land Rover as they embark on a camping trip to Baragandiri National Park, and she is inadvertently left behind in the hot desert sand after a pit stop. An encounter with a nasty scorpion leads Sheena to her first meeting with the Duwara tribe of meerkats, and as she spends more time with her new companions, Sheena becomes deeply involved in their struggle with a neighbouring tribe, the Utongo. It seems the two tribes, which live on either side of a deep, dark gorge, have long been at odds over the idea that each tribe has their own sun. As the sun is a renewing, life-giving force central to their lives (almost a deity, although this is never stated), this two-sun idea is worth so much to the Utongo and the Duwara that tribe members risk - and sacrifice - their lives to uphold their beliefs.

Sheena, a smart, creative, and empathetic cat, is determined to use all of the resources available to her to stop the meerkats from destroying each other. As she sets her plans in motion, she encounters much adversity, including acid-spewing ants, a hungry monitor lizard, a family of prickly porcupines, and a herd of den-destroying buffalo. The hardest part of all, though, is convincing the meerkats to co-operate and save themselves.

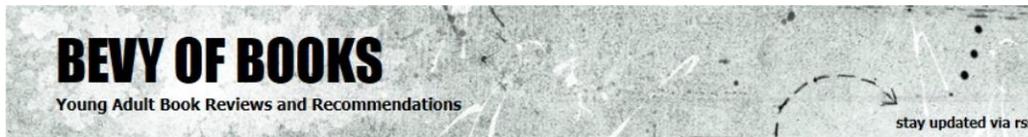
Undoubtedly, part of the charm of this book is the way Sheena's character is drawn - you can't help but admire her tenacity and resourcefulness, the way she thinks on her feet, and her countless selfless and kind deeds. And, as Sheena learns about her new meerkat friends, the reader learns about them as well - how they sleep, how they raise

their young, how they eat, how they survive in the stifling African heat. (I certainly know more about meerkats now than I ever did before!).

Above all, I loved Toshack's writing style - there are a ton of word-plays going on in this book, really fun stuff that would appeal to both children and adults. Humour, combined with a massive attention to detail, make this book an absolute delight to read. I think it would be a perfect selection to read aloud.

Now, I simply MUST go back and read the first two books in the series!

Sher Nor



Bevy of Books Reviews <http://bookbevy.wordpress.com/>

I am not the first to think "Watership Down" for meerkats when reading this wonderful little book in which I learned much about meerkats and, through them, about people and their conflicts.

As the story begins, Sheena, a bobbed-tailed, black and white kitty hops onto her people's Land Rover to make her third clandestine foray into Baragandiri National Park. She hops back into Great White when Dad drives off for firewood, only to be left in a dry section of the park, hoping to find her family before the campout ends in 10 days. Thirsty, she is sizing up an insect that looks juicy, when a young meerkat chomps down on it, getting stung at the same time by "Black Hairy Thick-Tail." Pebble, the meerkat, begins to recite the bad, bad symptoms of scorpion bites while experiencing them simultaneously. Hum, hypochondriac meerkat? Pebbles is pretty funny and the humor builds until Sheena realizes that he really is in bad shape at about symptom seven. A second meerkat, Sandstepper, determines that Sheena has the makings of an excellent furry ambulance and they maneuver Pebbles onto her back. With that rescue, Sheena is welcomed into the Duwara tribe of the meerkats, who begin each joyous day in a sunbath, the Sunwake. The Duwara are at war with the Utongo who worship a better sun. The Utongo are out for revenge against the Duwara for delivering sickness into their tribe. They attack and kidnap the Duwara's leaders' three pups. Sheena slinks across the Gorge in a Bond-like mission to infiltrate the Utongos, figuring there has to be more to this conflict. Along the way, she encounters animal friends and foes, and limps to the Utongos with severe injuries. There she was nursed by Fara until... (Fara found it hard to finish...) Sheena noted that the tribes were so similar, soaking in the warmth of the sun each morning, caring for the newborns, hunting, sleeping habits, playing. She knows that there is one solution to end the war, but she had to get the warring tribes together to make it work. Sheena is one resourceful kitty.

Can we learn about peace from slim, crew-cut fur creatures? One can hope. I thoroughly enjoyed learning about meerkats and the ten other creatures of the Baragandiri. Humor, pathos, danger, The Meerkat Wars really has it all. This is the third book about courageous Sheena and her adventures in Baragandiri National Park.

Joan Enders, Librarian Robert A. Long HS; Library Chair, Lower Columbia Review Group



Midwest Book Review <http://www.midwestbookreview.com/>

War isn't only a human creation. "The Meerkat Wars" is a novel taking conflict to the animal kingdom as a small cat becomes involved in a struggle between two tribes of meerkats, both unwilling to budge from their beliefs. A fun read of conflict set in the vast wilds of Africa, "The Meerkat Wars" isn't a read to be ignored. Recommended.

Willis M. Buhle



A Well -Told Tale with Just the Right Amount of Teaching Buffer

H.S. Toshack has the art of writing for young people down pat. Though the age range for this book is not indicated anywhere in the materials about the book, that is also a good aspect of this adventure story about animals. Too many authors 'dumb down' their books as though expecting only short attention span children will be interested enough to read the book. That is certainly not the case with Toshack.

THE MEERKAT WARS is a solidly written story of an ordinary house cat, on vacation with the owners, who happens upon some strange looking creatures who resemble the domesticated cat in ways and not in other ways. This meeting leads to a lively conversation about differences and eventually leads to a fine relationship - a fact that prepares Sheena, our family cat heroine, for the wilds of the African terrain and the interplay of warring tribes of Meerkats. Along the way we meet all manner of different critters, each with signature idiosyncrasies that continue to bait the reader with humor and fascination to the end of the book.

What makes this book so refreshing to read to children or to share with 'young adults' (sad we have to give up being a kid earlier and earlier these days) is the high quality of prose delivered through the pen of Toshack. This book entertains, but it also respects intelligence at every level. And that is a compliment!

Grady Harp, Amazon Hall of Fame Reviewer



Bookpleasures.com <http://www.bookpleasures.com>

A Clan of Meerkats and a Cat Join Forces Against a Daunting Enemy

If you are the kind of animal lover that revels in the antics of the smaller creatures on our planet and that chooses to look beyond the attention-grabbing Big Five of the African continent, then you just might be the ideal audience for The Meerkat Wars by H.S. Toshack (PakaMdogo Press, 2012; ISBN: 978-0-9563236-2-0). This inspiring tale

of how a cat helps a clan of meerkats to fend off an invading clan that wishes to take over its territory makes for a heart-pounding and insightful read, not only teaching youngsters (and those of an older generation who still are blessed with the ability to savor such writing) of the habits of these relatively small inhabitants of the African plains, but also encouraging them to empathize with others who may, in appearance at least, seem to be significantly different to themselves, especially at first sight.

The characters that comprise the cast of this tale all come to life under Toshack's thoughtful and perceptive penmanship. Even if a child has never before heard of the strange breed of mongoose that also bears the name 'suricate', they are bound to warm to the author's lively descriptions of this apparently sun-worshipping breed of small mammal that spends so much of its life underground. By starting from familiar territory, with a cat that, unbeknownst to its owners, stows away on board their Land Rover when they go on safari in the Baragandiri National Park, and who gets lost almost as soon as she arrives in the Park, Toshack cleverly elicits the sympathy of his audience, many of whom most probably have cats as pets, or who have relatives or friends who do. Sheena, despite being the pivotal figure in the story, in her position as a link between the two warring clans, provides an understandable and empathetic connection between the familiar and the unknown on more than one level. Meerkats, on her first encountering them, are as strange to her as they are likely to be for any human who has not yet been exposed to the wonderful range of creatures that there are to encounter in the African bush.

Although Toshack is, at times, inclined to indulge in a fair measure of anthropomorphism, he conveys with ease insights into not only the way of life of meerkats, but also into that of other animals that Sheena encounters in her adventures, such as porcupines and honey badgers. It comes as no surprise, then, to find that Toshack has both lived and worked in Africa, nor that he is a retired English teacher and educational consultant. Indeed, he takes great enjoyment in playing around with the English language, such as when Sheena first thinks porcupines are called 'porcupines' and has to be corrected in her language usage. Toshack's great sense of humor adds an extra bite to the ease and flow of his writing, which is complemented by numerous fine drawings by Nelson McAlister.

If you and your children become as enamored with Toshack's and Sheena's (she is accredited with coauthor status) story as many others have been, don't fret when you come to the end of this marvelous semi-allegorical tale-there are two others that you should also feel drawn to read: Paka Mdogo and The Gradual Elephant.

L.C. Henderson



Goodreads <http://www.goodreads.com/>

My eleven year old's new read is The Meerkat Wars by H. S. Toshack. It speaks to her love of animals and features an adventurous story set in Africa. The main character is Sheena, a very clever cat, who ends up the adventure of a lifetime when she finds herself in the middle of a war between two tribes of meerkats.

The Meerkat Wars is close to 250 pages and perfect for YA readers, or to be read to elementary-aged children. My eleven year old really enjoyed the different animal characters in the story as well as the amazingly detailed illustrations from artist Nelson McAlister that are strewn throughout the book. There are some powerful messages in this book, including focusing on the commonalities you have with others

rather than your differences. The Meerkat Wars is also full of humor (like the scene where Sheena meets the porcupines), adventure, and animal characters that many time feel like humans in regards to their concerns and emotions. In the end, the tribes find a common ground and peace at last, all thanks to a black and white cat named Sheena.

Myfourmonkeys Reviews

The Homeschool Post

Encouraging, Informing, and Connecting the Homeschool Community

The Homeschool Post <http://hsbapost.com/>



Kaden is a 15 year old homeschool student in the 9th grade. He loves reading, writing, drawing, playing x-box, Legos, piano, and mint chocolate sweets. His favorite school subject is science. When he isn't bumping in to things and wincing from self-inflicted pain, you can find him enjoying the great outdoors with his trusty {evil} sidekick, Minga the Snott (his cat)... because every evil cat deserves a devoted teen boy.

If you have any animal lovers in your house, The Meerkat Wars by H.S. Toshack is the perfect book for you. It follows the exploits of a clever and witty cat named Sheena as she stows away (not for the first time) on her family's Land Rover headed to the African Savannah. On her journey through the Baragandiri National Park, she meets many of the local inhabitants, friendly or otherwise. Nearly every chapter introduces a new species by their African name. The book familiarizes the reader with the animals encountered; meerkats most of all. Children from elementary up will delight in learning about African animals in this captivating story of safari adventure.

The story begins when Sheena is out exploring and comes across a pair of meerkats foraging for grubs. The younger of the two finds a scorpion and tries to capture it, only to be painfully stung on the cheek. Quickly, the other meerkat and Sheena carry him back to "Deepden", the home of the Duwara Meerkat Tribe. She is beginning to make friends within the tribe when she learns that they are at war with their neighbors, the Utongo Meerkats. She sets off on a journey to persuade them both that their reasons for fighting are silly. To reach the Utongo she must travel through The Gorge; a deep chasm filled with undergrowth that separates the rivals. Crossing this, however, is perilous. Sheena selflessly braves the danger in hopes of helping her friends find peace.

This 250 page book came to me as a free review item, but it has found a home on our shelf and I have taken it down to read it several times over. The book contains scattered black and white sketched illustrations that are enjoyable (and an added bonus for the younger reader or elementary child being read to). Each chapter begins with a witty rhyme about a different animal they encounter along their quest; for example, the poem from chapter twelve:

Mbogo

Broad in the head,
Flat in the nose,

Curved in the horn,
Split in the toes.
We snort and stamp,
And you'd better take heed:
That's, oh, more than a bluff -
We also stampede.

The Meerkat Wars is one of three stories about Sheena's secret safaris while her owners are camping nearby. As the author writes them, he maps, in the front of the book, the location of the journey in the Baragandiri National Park for the reader to visualize along with landforms, landmarks and Range Rover 'tracks'. He covers different African animals in each adventure, so you'll (like me) want to read them all. For sure the third book, The Meerkat Wars, was a great read. By using metaphor and story to teach character-building life lessons, H.S. Toshack has created a tale that will appeal to parents and children alike.

Kaden



Paka Mdogo – Little Cat: A Younger Point of View

I've read a part of this story, but my twelve-year-old daughter has read all of it, so this is what she had to say.

"The main character Sheena, a black and white cat, is a cheeky and outgoing type with a sense for adventure. When her owners, the Allen family (including children Amy and Thomas), decide to go on holiday Sheena goes along with them as she hates the idea of staying at home alone for a week. The Allens are unaware that she has joined them. So begins an occasionally scary series of events meeting strange and dangerous wild animals, not helped by losing her human family. Sheena has to find them before an elderly lion has Thomas and Amy for his next meal, by finding their parents to that they can rescue their son and daughter.

"This is a story that had me turning the pages quickly and I found it hard to stop reading. It's gripping, full of suspense and tension, and I kept on wondering how Sheena was going to escape the frightening animals such as a huge snake which almost ate her. I read it in just a couple of days and found it much better than the book my English teacher told me to read (by Terry Pratchett). I have already started the next book in the series 'The Gradual Elephant' which I think continues on from Paka Mdogo. I can recommend these stories to children of about 8 years old and upwards, although there are some unusual African words to understand. In summary I liked Paka Mdogo very much and I will remember it."

Normally my daughter spends a week or more reading a single book but this one was devoured in barely half that time, so there's no doubt in my mind: she enjoyed it!

OEJ



Emily Reviews <http://www.emilyreviews.com> - *The Meerkat Wars*

(Extract) I found when I left this book laying on the dining room table one evening that it mysteriously disappeared. Now while it would not surprise me to find my ten year old, who is an avid reader, sitting on his bed reading it, I was very surprised when it was my eleven year old who had picked it up to read. This is the child that will find anything possible to do but read, because it is difficult for him. This is what he had to say: *I really liked that there was not only words but some nice pictures to go along with it. I was able to picture what the cat and meerkats were doing and what they might look like. It has some tough topics like getting hurt and dying but I thought that it was cool that the cat was willing to help to bring all the meerkats together. I don't know if most animals would do that. I think that this is a book that some of my friends might like.* This is a pretty high compliment coming from a kid who really struggles to make it though the simplest of books.



The Eclectic Reader <http://teddyree-theeclecticreader.blogspot.com/>

This review of *The Meerkat Wars* is brought to you by 10 year old Gisele, my first guest reviewer. Gisele devours books, loves her kindle, she reads just about anything but her favourite genre is fantasy especially if it features dragons. Please make GiGi, as she is affectionately known feel welcome.

GiGi's Thoughts:

As I picked up this book I thought it would be a strange and messed up story, something like what I would write! But I slowly got caught up in the world of the meerkats; overall it was a fun book to read and the illustrations were really good.

At the start of each chapter there was a little verse suggesting something about the chapter which was really cool. Some parts lagged a bit for me with long descriptions and flashbacks and when the story got back on track I had completely forgotten what was happening. This also made some of the suspense vanish and I think a glossary would have helped me with some of the words.

However, I loved the creativity of the story. The author has done a great job creating a beautiful landscape to picture. It's an adventure set in Africa and all the problems for

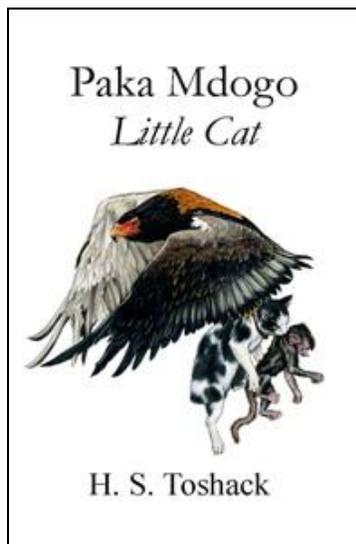
the meerkats are carefully explained so it doesn't seem like the author is just trying to kill off characters by writing all of these problems.

The Meerkat Wars is one of the most interesting books I've read. Sometimes when I pick up a book and look at the cover I think 'seriously? A meerkat book with a cat?!' After reading the book and having the author tell the story so well, it seems like the most 'normal' book you could read.

I loved the characters and their different personalities, Sheena, the clever little black and white cat, and the meerkats Pebble, Sandstepper, Tuft, Moon, and Shuffle. I loved how all the animals introduced added something to the story.

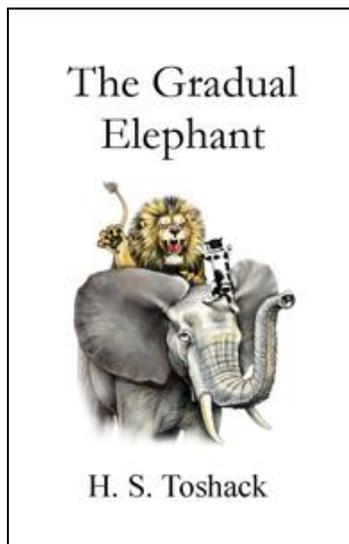
I enjoyed this book very much even though it had some rough patches. I wanted to find out what happened even though at one point I was so tired I fell asleep while reading! The Meerkat Wars is one of those interesting, fun books that everyone should read, even if you hate to read (which I think is crazy!)

If I was asked to read any sequels to this book I would jump at the chance. All I can say is GREAT job!



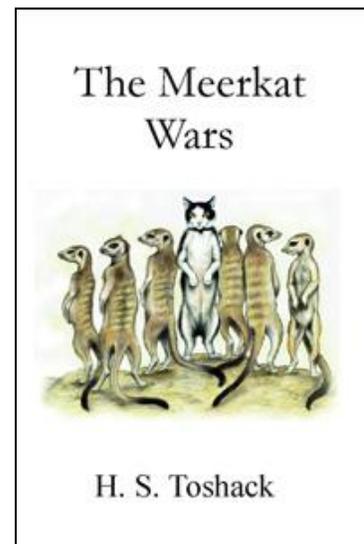
A Story about Taking Risks

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*A Story about Conflict
(nominated for the 2012
Jane Addams Peace
Award)*

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