El marinero y el mar
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El marinero y el mar (The Sailor and the Sea)

This is a delightful picture book, part-financed by the Spanish government and aimed at children with special educational needs, especially autism. In a simple, repetitive text, each action is described both in words and symbols. Symbols are used to support learning for people with autism because they are so much more easily understood than other forms of communication. That said, the symbols used here will be familiar to any young child used to navigating icons on iPads and smart phones and in this context could provide a useful jump to identifying words. Even children not yet at the stage of learning to read can follow the icons and begin to recognise the groups of words that go with them.

Symbol recognition has long been an important aspect of early years education, but this is the first time I have seen icons from the digital world so explicitly harnessed in a format that could work for children both with and without special educational needs, making it the perfect book to share in a group of mixed ability. A quick google search also suggests that books published in the UK for autistic children typically address their experience of autism and being different. This is simply a story - one that might appeal to anyone and which includes autistic children in the audience.

Carlos Comendador has previously written interactive books and designed characters for puppet shows and his imaginative range is evident here. His book El austronauta is available in English as The Astronaut, but I think only as an e-book.

The full page illustrations are beautiful and the story, with its message of kindness and gratitude repaid, is very endearing. Two pages of sketches at the end of the book provide an in-sight into the process of illustration that will interest adults as much as children. This is the kind of story an adult will not begrudge reading multiple times. It has the potential to be both a much loved element in a child’s journey to reading, and a really valuable tool in communication. Those twin objectives recommend it for publication in the UK. The translation should be straightforward, the story is charming and the inclusion of the icons represents both a novel and an inclusive approach to children with different needs and abilities.

From the reader´s report by .