



Book Review: Little Tree
Written & Illustrated by Loren Long
Philomel Books (Imprint of Penguin Group), 2015.
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Little Tree is growing in a grove with other saplings. During the summer heat his leaves keep him cool and he enjoys having squirrels and doves visit him. As autumn approaches, Little Tree's leaves turn to orange, red, and yellow. The other trees begin dropping their leaves, but Little Tree holds onto his tightly, even through winter, afraid to be without them. When spring arrives, the other trees are taller, grow new leaves, and have animals playing in their branches. As the seasons come and go, Little Tree continues to hold onto his leaves even though the other trees let go of theirs each autumn and grow. One summer, with the other trees towering above him, Little Tree realizes he can no longer feel the sun. That winter, Little Tree looks at the other trees, remembers they had once been his size, and lets go of his leaves. Though he feels the bitter winter cold, in time he grows new leaves and grows in size. By letting go of his leaves each year, Little Tree becomes tall and strong like the other trees.

This simple but provocative story demonstrates that letting go of fear and accepting change allows growth to occur, rather than stunting it. The anxiety associated with making difficult decisions that lead to an unknown future are concepts to which all readers can relate. Just as Little Tree feels the bitter cold when he lets go of his leaves, decisions may be uncomfortable but eventually lead to growth. Little Tree was afraid but, when he dropped his leaves, he flourished.

The illustrations, like the story, are simple but meaningful. The white space that initially spans each page shrinks as the other trees, and eventually Little Tree, grow and fill it. Rendered in acrylic, ink, and pencil, the art shows Little Tree in the same place in each illustration with the seasonal changes occurring around him. This book would work well in a text set of books focused on overcoming fears and accepting change to grow. Other books in this set could be *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson (2015), *Nana in the City* by Lauren Castillo (2014), and *Lenny & Lucy* by Philip Stead and Erin Stead (2015).

Loren Long grew up in Kentucky. Though he liked drawing and art, as a younger child he favored sports. His passion for art developed as he grew older and he decided to become an artist while at the University of Kentucky. Upon graduation he worked for greeting card companies and freelanced for clients such as Sports Illustrated, Time, and Reader's Digest. He began doing covers for novels and eventually was called to be an artist of picturebooks.

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