

NIKOS ANTONIOU

THREE STORIES



INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATION EDITION

Three stories. Three questions that belong to us all.

- *What makes time precious?*
- *What makes us seek the light?*
- *What makes us human?*

These questions lie at the heart of *Only One Day*, *A Place in the Sun* and *The Tin Man* — three cross-generational picture books that approach **universal human questions** through the imagination and emotional truth of childhood.

These stories **do not teach philosophy**. They invite children into worlds of play, wonder and discovery, allowing deeper meanings to emerge naturally through story, emotion and choice.

A child can enter the story and live it.

An adult may recognise in it a reflection of life itself.

This **double reading** lies at the heart of all three books. Different in subject, atmosphere and imagery, they are written first for children, yet leave room for parents and other adult readers to find meanings of their own — opening the way to meaningful conversations across generations.

One story can speak differently to different ages.

The child enters first. The questions remain for everyone.

NIKOS ANTONIOU

Nikos Antoniou is a Cypriot author of children's literature whose work explores **universal human experiences** through stories of simplicity, emotional depth and philosophical resonance.

After more than three decades in advertising and visual communication, working extensively with words, dialogue and imagery, he turned his creative focus to children's literature. His books are published in Greece and Cyprus by **Kastaniotis Editions**.

Antoniou writes **cross-generational stories** that begin in the world of childhood but reach towards questions that belong to every age: how we live, how we seek truth, what makes us human. His writing combines the clarity and emotional honesty of a child's perspective with deeper philosophical layers, allowing meaning to emerge through story rather than instruction.

At the heart of his writing is a simple principle: *every book must justify its existence by having something meaningful to say*. This has shaped a selective body of work in which philosophical ideas are discovered through character, emotion and choice.

Alongside his writing, Antoniou maintains a close relationship with young readers through interactive literary activities in schools and libraries across Cyprus and Greece, bringing his stories into direct contact with thousands of children, educators and librarians. Through these encounters, he seeks to encourage a love of reading while opening space for curiosity, thought and conversation.



SYNOPSIS

One spring morning, from a tiny egg, a mayfly named May hatches into the world.

Her entire life will last only one day. May knows this from the very beginning — but for her, it is the most natural thing in the world.

And the day cannot wait.

May sets off, eager to live it — to discover the world, make friends, play, laugh and fill every precious hour with joy.

Along the way, she meets Zulu, a hardworking bee, Roko, a tireless ant, and Lily, a busy butterfly, all absorbed in their daily routines. When May asks them to play, they promise her, "Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" May laughs. "But tomorrow I won't be alive. I'm a mayfly — I only live for one day!"

Her joy is infectious. One by one, May draws them away from their routines and into her games, laughter and delight in simply being alive.

And still, the day moves on.

The hours pass, and afternoon comes. May meets Julius, another mayfly. They fly and play together, their delicate tails entwined, sharing the precious hours that remain.

As evening draws near, May says goodbye to Julius. Her tiny belly begins to swell, and in a crevice in the rock she lays a cluster of tiny eggs. Then she settles on a dry branch and looks back on her day.

She had lived so many beautiful moments in just one day. Yes — she had lived a full day. Happy, May closes her eyes and falls asleep.

The following morning, another tiny mayfly hatches. When Zulu sees her, she pauses.

"I know you," she says. "I know you love hide-and-seek, chasing games and dancing. And I know something else."

"What?" asks the little mayfly.

"That you are a happy mayfly. Would you like to play?"

May's life lasted only one day. Yet the joy with which she lived it has left an imprint on the lives of those she met. And so, as a new life begins, something of May lives on.

EDITORIAL PRESENTATION

Only One Day is a joyful, cross-generational story that speaks effortlessly to children as young as four. Young readers identify with May's playful, carefree and irresistibly optimistic nature — laughing with her, sharing her excitement and embracing a tiny mayfly who speaks of her one-day life with disarming naturalness.

For adults, however, the same simple story opens another door. Beneath May's playful adventure lies a profound reflection on **time, mortality and the value of the present**.

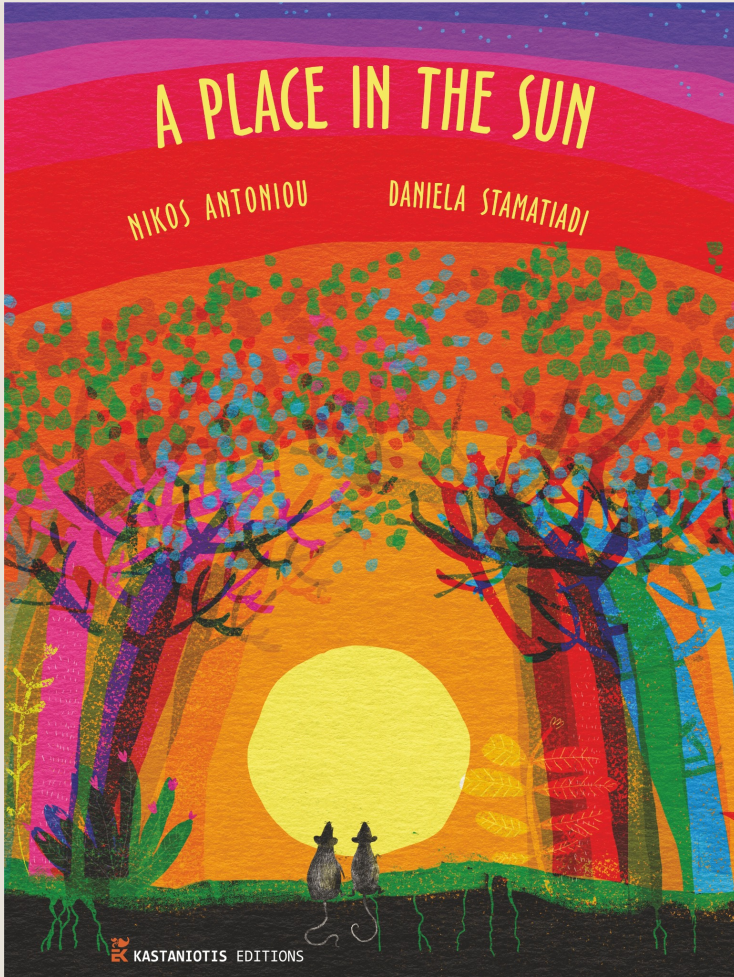
At its heart lie two ancient ideas: **memento mori** — the awareness that life is finite — and **carpe diem** — the choice to embrace the day. May knows from the moment she hatches that she has only one day to live. Yet this knowledge brings neither fear nor sadness. Birth and death are natural parts of the same cycle, and awareness of life's brevity only heightens its value.

Around her, the other insects — much like us humans — are absorbed in routines, responsibilities and the assumption that there will always be a tomorrow. But the past has gone and cannot be changed; the future remains unknown. **The present is the only time truly in our hands**. May does not teach this lesson; she simply lives it, drawing others into her joy and leaving an imprint that survives her brief existence.

The story's allegorical and philosophical depth was formally recognised with the **Cyprus State Literature Award for Young Children**. The Award Jury highlighted its exploration of existence, transience, death, joy, optimism, making the most of every moment and the continuity of life, noting its ability to touch and provoke thought in readers of every age.

Ultimately, Only One Day reveals a simple, liberating truth: our time is not inexhaustible, and that very awareness is **what makes life precious**. What remains are the moments we have truly lived and the imprint we leave on others.

The story does not ask us to fear that life ends. It asks us not to postpone living it.



SYNOPSIS

Deep beneath the earth live the Tartars, strange creatures whose eyes are always closed. After all, in their world there has never been any light to see.

They spend their days digging for food, keeping barely enough to survive and bringing the rest to their King.

No one questions why. Almost no one.

Hera is a dreamer — curious, observant, always wondering. Small signs seem to whisper that something exists beyond the world he has inherited.

But the Wise Tartar, the King and his official laugh at his ideas, dismissing them as nonsense and ingratitude.

Only Foni, his closest friend, believes his questions are worth asking.

"Why don't you explore it yourself?"

And Hera does. Instead of digging left or right, as Tartars have always done, he digs upwards.

What he discovers overturns everything he has been taught to believe: **light, colour, beauty — another world.**

Hera returns with the truth. But now, no one is laughing. What began as a ridiculous dream has become a threat to the established order — and to those who hold power.

Hera is imprisoned for stirring unrest.

With Foni's help, he escapes. Together they dig upwards and emerge into the world above. Foni cries out as the unfamiliar light burns her eyes.

"It's the light," Hera tells her. "We have lived in darkness all our lives. Now we have come into the light."

Back in the kingdom, everyone searches for Hera and Foni. But they have vanished.

And then the whispers begin.

"Do you think Hera was right? Could that world of light really exist?"

Something strange begins to happen. Young Tartars start disappearing.

The King and his official are beside themselves. Something is changing — something they can no longer control.

Above, in the newly discovered world, darkness still lingers.

Then a glow appears on the eastern horizon. A cry of wonder rises around them. The sun is beginning to rise.

It is the gentle dawn of a new, radiant day.

EDITORIAL PRESENTATION

A Place in the Sun is an allegorical, cross-generational picture book about the courage to question what we have inherited as truth — and to seek the truth for ourselves, even when opening our eyes to it may hurt.

Inspired by **Plato's Allegory of the Cave**, the story creates a world in which **darkness** is more than the absence of light. It represents ignorance, falsehood and unquestioned beliefs; **light** becomes knowledge, truth and the freedom to see for oneself.

Hera is different because he observes, wonders and doubts. He refuses to accept that the world must be exactly as he has been taught. His journey upwards is therefore more than an exploration: it is a passage from inherited certainty to **independent thought**.

And the light hurts.

Truth is not always comfortable. Sometimes, like light striking eyes accustomed to darkness, it can hurt. But once we have opened our eyes and seen the truth for ourselves, however uncomfortable it may be, we cannot willingly return to the darkness of ignorance and falsehood.

The kingdom of the Tartars adds another layer to the allegory. Its people labour while those in power benefit; obedience is encouraged and questioning discouraged. When Hera's ideas seem absurd, the establishment laughs at him. When he discovers they are true, laughter turns to fear. **Knowledge becomes dangerous** because it threatens those whose power depends upon others remaining in the dark.

Yet ideas cannot easily be imprisoned. Hera and Foni disappear, but the question they leave behind begins to spread. Whispers become doubt; doubt opens the possibility of change.

Even their names deepen the allegory: Hera evokes Plato's Er, who returns from the realm of the dead to tell what he has witnessed, while Foni echoes Persephone, another figure who emerges from the underworld.

Ultimately, A Place in the Sun is about more than escaping darkness. It is about choosing to open our eyes — questioning inherited beliefs, seeking knowledge even when the truth is uncomfortable, and daring to imagine that another world is possible.

It is, above all, an allegorical story for those who dream of a better world — and for those who dare to claim their own place in the light.

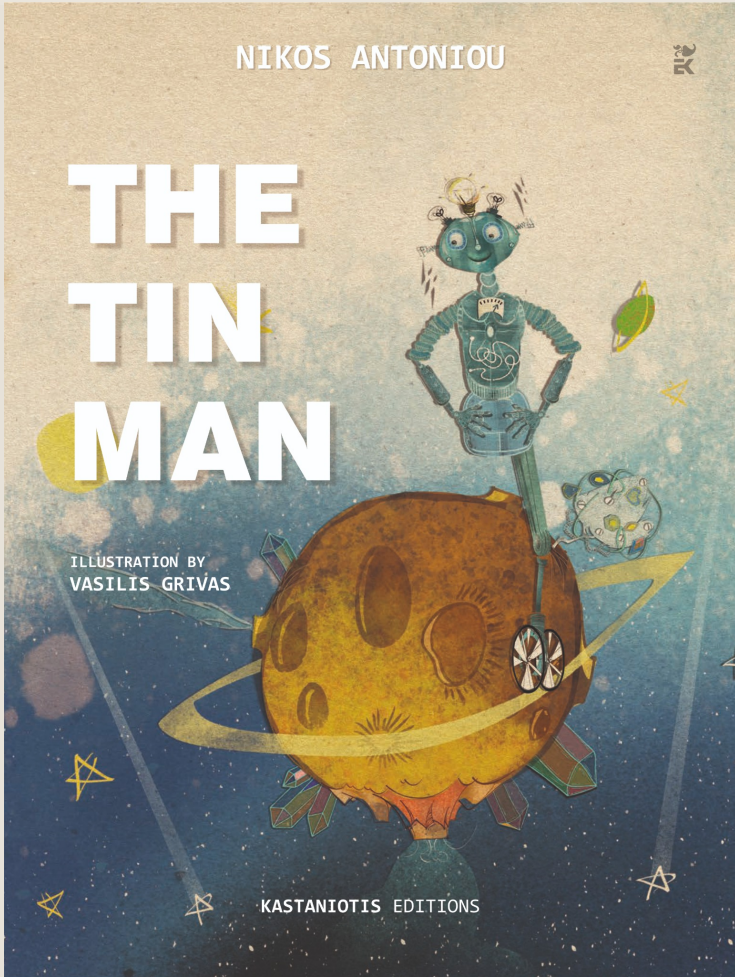
NIKOS ANTONIOU



THE TIN MAN

ILLUSTRATION BY
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KASTANIOTIS EDITIONS



SYNOPSIS

Markos has a secret. At bedtime, his schoolbag becomes an extraordinary means of transport, carrying him through the open window and off on adventures.

One night, it takes him to a tiny planet covered in precious stones, where he meets two creatures made of metal: Sen and Epi, who has only one leg.

Sen asks Markos what he is.

"Human," Markos replies.

Sen decides he must be human too: he has two arms, two legs and two eyes, just like Markos. Epi, however, cannot be human — he is missing a leg.

"A human isn't only what you see," Markos tells him.

The three set off towards the city, where Sen has a mission to complete. Along the way, unexpected events begin to give meaning to Markos's words.

Then they reach their destination — and the true purpose of Sen's mission is revealed.

A recycler. Sen has brought Epi there to recycle him. With only one leg, he considers him defective and useless.

Yet the choice belongs to Sen — and his choice will reveal what kind of "human" he has become.

By morning, Markos is back home.

"Markos, wake up! You'll be late for school!" his mother calls. Markos gets dressed and attaches his **prosthetic leg** to his left knee. With it, he can walk without limping. He can even run if he wants.

"Just a minute, Mom! I'm coming!"

In the kitchen, his favourite sandwich is waiting, as it is every morning. Markos puts it in his schoolbag and looks happily at his mother.

"Mom, did you know that you are a real human?"

She laughs. "Of course I'm human, my Markos! What did you think I was — an alien?"

And she wraps her arms around him and kisses him.

EDITORIAL PRESENTATION

The Tin Man is a philosophical, cross-generational picture book built around a simple yet profound question:

What makes us human?

For a young child, the answer may seem obvious: a human being looks like a human being. Sen, a creature made of metal, thinks the same way — two arms, two legs, two eyes. But if appearance is enough, what about Epi, who has only one leg?

From this deceptively simple premise, the story moves beyond appearance to explore **humanity through behaviour**. Care, prudence, justice, love and compassion emerge through choice, shifting the question from what a human looks like to how a human chooses to behave.

At its heart lies **free will**. Markos can guide Sen, but cannot choose for him. Sen must choose for himself — and live with that choice. Humanity is not merely something we possess, but something we reveal through our actions.

Its philosophical roots in Stoic thought run deeper still: Markos, Sen and Epi evoke Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus — the latter, like Epi, having lived with a physical disability. Then comes the final revelation.

Markos attaches a prosthetic leg to his own left knee.

In one quiet image, everything that came before acquires another meaning. Epi has found his voice through Markos, who has been speaking from a far more personal place than we realised.

And the title itself changes meaning.

Who, after all, is The Tin Man?

Sen, Epi or Markos, with his prosthetic leg? Or any one of us, whenever we become hardened enough to stop recognising the humanity of another?

The final scene brings the philosophical journey home: Markos recognises in his mother's unconditional love what it truly means to be human.

Ultimately, The Tin Man does not define humanity for children.

It invites them to discover it.

Its deepest proposition is also its simplest:

Being human is not about looking human. It is about choosing to behave humanly.

SELECTED RECOGNITION

CYPRUS STATE LITERATURE AWARD

Only One Day received the Cyprus State Literature Award for Young Children. The jury highlighted the book's exploration of existence, transience, death, joy, optimism, the value of each moment and the continuity of life.

ALL OF GREECE ONE CULTURE 2026

The Tin Man became the literary basis for a professional theatrical adaptation selected for the Greek Ministry of Culture's national programme All of Greece One Culture 2026.

IBBY INTERNATIONAL — 2027

The Tin Man has been submitted through IBBY Cyprus for consideration for the IBBY Selection of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities 2027.

BEYOND THE PAGE

Stories continue when the book is closed.

Nikos Antoniou's relationship with young readers extends beyond publication. Through interactive literary activities in schools and libraries across Cyprus and Greece, his stories become starting points for imagination, questions and conversation.

These encounters are not conceived as lessons around a book, but as **experiences built from the story itself** – inviting children to **participate, wonder, respond and discover meaning in their own way.**

Over the past three years alone, his Reading Promotion Marathons have brought his books into direct contact with **more than 20,000 children** and **over 700 educators** across Cyprus.

At the centre remains the same belief that shapes the books themselves: a story can be simple enough for a child to enter - and deep enough for the questions to remain.



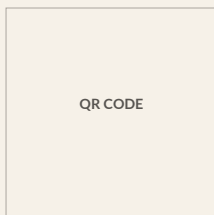
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