

Children's Literature Reviews

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Everything But the Kitchen Sink

Frieda Wishinsky and Elizabeth MacLeod ; Illustrated by Travis King
Scholastic Canada, 112 pp., pbk., \$9.99. 2008

Reviews:

Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)

Buckle up folks, this is 112 pages of fun! Ten chapters filled with short items about food that sound like Alton Brown and Anthony Bourdain have been moonlighting writing children's books. "Chapter One: Food Through the Ages, What We Eat and Why," includes the rather disgusting fact that during the siege of Paris, the delicate palates of the French feasted on everything from rats and dogs to elephants and zebras. "Chapter Two: What's for Breakfast" includes wonderful tidbits about cereal, soup, and beer for breakfast, a recipe for Omelet in a Bag, and a crossword puzzle. "Chapter Three: Why Don't Vampires Like Garlic" is full of food traditions, taboos and superstitions. "Chapter Four: Don't Grunt, It's a Piece of Cake" is about food expressions, food-related clichés, weird food names like "hushpuppies," and nomenclature trivia. "Chapter Five: Snack Attack!" offers facts about pop, popcorn, pizza, popsicles, and potato chips as well as cookies, candy, and a recipe for haystacks. Chapter Six is all about food chemistry and includes several recipes and experiments. "Chapter Seven: Would You Eat a Tarantula," covers world taste treats that tend to the bizarre. "Chapter Eight: Largest, Longest, Tallest, Stinkiest" covers the extremes of edibles. "Chapter Nine: Who Invented That?" is all about created foods and processes, and "Chapter Ten: Everything but the Kitchen Sink" is just loads of trivia. Each tidbit in every chapter is one or two paragraphs (about 100 words), with zippy illustrations that are not childish, making this a great browsing book for all ages. It even would be a great resource to use with English-as-a-second-language classes, because adults will love it as much as kids. Scattered throughout the pages are small sidebars called "Bits and Bites," with snappy facts well wrapped up. The book is indexed, with a trim size that makes it not a little kid book, not a mass market, but "just right" as Goldilocks would say, as she gobbled it all down. If I had my way, there would be a copy in the hand of every kid waiting in every line in every lunchroom in the land. 2008, Scholastic, \$7.99. Ages 7 to adult.

Rosemary Hollett (CM Magazine, May 30, 2008 (Vol. XIV, No. 20))

If you and your students are "foodies" with an appetite for wacky food facts and other fascinating trivia, then this slim but action packed book is for you and yours. *Weird Stuff You Didn't Know About Food*, by authors Frieda Wishinsky and Elizabeth MacLeod, builds on our fascination with food through history, science, art, superstitions and world records. Both of these authors have a talent for creating non-fiction books that make learning enjoyable, and this publication is no exception. A delightful exchange between the authors introduces the universal topic of food likes and dislikes. This exchange sparks the idea of a book for young people about food - weird facts, fun foods, myths, activities, and so on. Wishinsky and MacLeod create 10 fast paced, amusing chapters with titles such as: "Why Don't Vampires Like Garlic" (traditions and superstitions), "Would You Eat Tarantula?" (munching around the world), and "Who Invented That?" (incredible food inventions). Each chapter is not only chock full of facts and fascinating tidbits but also answers questions such as "Do watermelons remove freckles?" and "Can you really clean a toilet with a can of cola?" Each chapter

ends with a suggestion for an activity ranging from party ideas to crossword puzzles. Throughout the book, readers will find interesting sidebars called "Bits and Bites" which consist of morsels of amusing and informative antidotes, such as: "Imagine if you were paid in salt to wash the dishes or take out the garbage? Salt has been so precious to humans since ancient times that part of a Roman soldier's salary was paid in salt. (And that's how we get the word salary.) It's been key in preventing food from spoiling." And "Did you know that pigs love ice cream -- unless it's mint flavoured!" "There's a Lab in my Kitchen" (chapter 6) presents nine kid friendly (some adult supervision required) experiments and recipes with a scientific twist. Try your hand at making a soda fountain with mentos, making raisins "dance" or making ice cream in a bag! The book ends with a comprehensive index and puzzle answer key. Although the text as presented can stand alone as well done, illustrator Travis King must be commended for adding humor and energy that will attract readers and keep their interest. His illustrations are graphic, colorful and with a quiriness that sets the tone of learning through sheer enjoyment. Highly Recommended. Rating: **** /4. Grades 4-7. (Weird Stuff You Didn't Know About Food) 2008, Scholastic Canada, 112 pp., pbk., \$9.99. Ages 9 to 12.

Kelley McGuire (Resource Links, June 2008 (Vol. 13, No. 5))

From the introduction to the last page, this book is a fun and interesting read. The two authors have skillfully mixed history, science, weird facts and fun activities - all about food - to make an enjoyable and stimulating non-fiction book. The wide variety of subjects and thorough research to find the best little-known facts keeps the reader enthralled and sends them off to their friends and family asking, "Did you know...?" Only a few criticisms to mention: firstly, the "legend of the Easter bunny" is described, along with its country of origin and just what children were "told" would happen on Easter night. This might prove a shock for some children, so care should be taken to allow only those over the age of believing in the Easter bunny to read this book. However, I believe this book would be great for children younger than that age as well, so maybe rewording that section would be a more beneficial solution. Also, there are some spelling inconsistencies, especially in the section covering chocolate, where the words "cacao" and "cocoa" are both used, in a way that proved confusing for me (I do realize that they are different nouns but I believe they were used to represent the same thing in this case). Overall, this book was excellent. I highly recommend it. Category: Non-Fiction Grades K-6. Thematic Links: Food; Trivia. Resource Links Rating: E (Excellent, enduring, everyone should see it!), Gr. 4-6. 2008, Scholastic Canada, 112p. Illus., Pbk. \$9.99. Ages 9 to 12.

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