

Children's Literature Reviews

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Food & You: Eating Right, Being Strong, and Feeling Great

Dr. Lynda Madison

American Girl Publishing, \$8.95. 2008

Reviews:

Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)

The author is a psychologist, not an M.D. She is also a director of FOCCUS, a couples counseling organization, so it is not clear why she is writing this book for kids. We will charge ahead fearlessly nonetheless. Chapters purport to clarify messages that girls get from media (and people) about what they eat and how they look. The book offers the following simple “rules” for girls: There are no bad foods, What you drink counts, Your waist and weight will change as you grow, No body is perfect, Crash diets don’t work, Staying active is a smarter move, and Food is a family thing. The food pyramid is introduced, although an interesting mix of illustrations is provided--a slice of bread, a tennis ball for vegetables, a fist for fruits, a glass of milk for dairy, an egg for meat and beans, a hand with some nuts in it for fats and oils. “Nutrient News,” the next chapter, defines carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals, fats, and fiber in simple two-to-four-sentence definitions. A simple quiz of “Smart Choices” for readers to choose which food is better is followed by a “Pretty Plate” double-page spread that shows colors and examples of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple foods. Next is a two-page “Your Eating Style” quiz. The section featuring “Meals and Snacks” offers breakfast ideas, lunch ideas, dinner foods when eating in or out, snacks, and alternatives to junk food. A double-page spread of “Girl Picks” for healthy snacks which tells girls to have an adult cut up their strawberries or nuke the nachos has snack ideas in talk balloons followed by information about reading food nutrition labels. This seemed like an odd juxtaposition of abilities. Is there a kid who can read a nutritional label, but is not able to use a knife on soft fruit? A two-page discussion of “are you hungry for food or something else?” offers ideas for kids to listen to their body and not confuse mood and food signals. A section about movement, exercise, games, and short exercises is followed by the “Food and Fitness Q&A” which includes a brief mention of food allergies, vegetarian dilemmas, braces, and body talk among girls, as well as diet dangers and eating disorders. The book concludes with these four Keys to Confidence: Choose your friends wisely, Look for healthy role models, Be as kind to yourself as you are to your friends, and Give your body what it needs. Kids are encouraged to write to American Girl with their thoughts about and reactions to the sections of the book. The book is set in an easy-to-read typeface, and the reading level is third or fourth grade, so girls as young as seven can read it. The spiral binding and small size make it more appropriate as a purchase for an individual child rather than a library. Like most of the American Girl books, it is squarely aimed at the 7 to 10 year old girl, the magazine’s demographics. 2008, American Girl Publishing, \$8.95. Ages 7 to 10.

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