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JUNIE B. JONES: The Sweet Potato Princess?

Every lady in the land has undoubtedly encountered the fantastical ravings of Jill Conner Browne, the Sweet Potato Queen Her Ownself, whose books (*The Sweet Potato Queen's Book of Love; God Save the Sweet Potato Queens; The Sweet Potato Queen's Big Ass Cookbook and Financial Planner*, Three Rivers Press, \$12.95 each) have hovered like hungry hummingbirds at the top of the bestseller charts this year. Jill's irreverent and empowering rants to women of all ages about all the topics your mother forgot to tell you about, leave women gasping for breath.

So, I ask you, what is the KID equivalent? Now, I've puzzled over this until my hair got straight and the answer is: JUNIE B. JONES, that's what. This series of easy-to-read novels starring the articulate (q.v. smarty mouth) Junie B. has delighted kids of all ages since they first came out several years ago. The latest in the series, *JUNIE B., FIRST GRADER: Cheater Pants* (Random House, \$11.95) written by Barbara Park and illustrated by Denise Brunkus (that means she drew the pictures), is as much of a hoot as all the dozen-plus titles that preceded it.

Junie B. is trying hard to be good. She's trying hard to be nice to May (who would be the boss-from-hell in the adult world) and trying hard to follow advice from her stuffed elephant, Philip Johnny Bob. But when it comes to homework and spelling tests, Junie B. has reached the Road of Trials, as Joseph Campbell would say. And in true Sweet Potato Queen Style, she isn't going to just sit there, no sirree. She's going to speak her mind and that's where the fun starts. Although the books are all at about second or third grade reading level, they make me wonder about Barbara Park and whether she snuck into my house and read my grade school diary—that's how good her remembering is!

If you've got a kindergartener or a big kid (middle school), if you are in search of funny books that are easy to read and aren't full of sappy dorky girlie stuff, you need to run to the library and find Junie B. Jones and treat yourself and the youngsters in your life to an hour or so of hilarity. That means funny (as Junie B. would say). And after that, go buy yourself a copy of the new Sweet Potato Queens book (chances are you won't find this one at the library) and go home and make some Chocolate stuff, then repeat after Dorothy---"There's no place like home." In times like these, laughter is a rare and precious gift. Thank you to both Barbara Park and Jill Conner Browne

Gwynne Spencer is a great fan of Sweet Potato Queens AND Junie B. Jones and hopes that all moms will read both and then write to her at gwynnespencer@aol.com.