

## *Children's Literature Reviews*

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### **Shanté Keys and the New Year's peas**

*by Gail Piernas-Davenport ; illustrated by Marion Eldridge.*

*Cataloging in Publication*

Morton Grove, Ill. : Albert Whitman, 2007.

p. cm.

#### **Annotations:**

When Shanté is sent to find black-eyed peas for her family's New Year's celebration, she learns about each of her neighbor's New Year's traditions in their home countries.

#### **Horn Book Guide:**

Spring 2008 Picture Books Rating 3, Recommended, satisfactory in style, content, and/or illustration.

#### **Reading Measurement Programs:**

Accelerated Reader

Interest Level Lower Grade

Book Level 4.4

Accelerated Reader Points **0.5**

#### **Reviews:**

##### **Shelle Rosenfeld (Booklist, Nov. 15, 2007 (Vol. 104, No. 6))**

In rhyming text and vibrant illustrations, this upbeat story celebrates family, community, and multiculturalism, highlighting an African American family's New Year's food traditions, including "lucky" black-eyed peas. Grandma has prepared a delicious meal, but something is missing: "'Mercy!' cries Grandma. 'I'm weak in the knees. I cooked lots of food, but forgot black-eyed peas!'" Young Shanté is sent to check with the neighbors: Miss Lee, who is Chinese; grocer MacGhee, from Scotland; Shanté's friend Hari, who is Hindu. None of them have peas, but on her visits, Shanté learns about their celebratory food traditions—from dumplings to haggis and cheese. Finally, she finds peas, which Grandma prepares, and the neighbors happily share at the festive dinner. The story, with abundant dialogue, is written in couplets, with all lines ending in a long "e" sound, and the expressive art warmly portrays characters' interactions in bright, rich hues and lively detail. Notes on a few other culture's special New Year foods and a recipe for Grandma's hoppin' John are appended. *Grades K-2*

##### **Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)**

Shanté Keys and her parents go to visit Grandma for a New Year's feast, but Grandma has forgotten the black-eyed peas, a symbol of prosperity for the turn of the year. So Shanté is off to ask the neighbors if they have some. After a visit to Miss Lee (Chinese), Mr. MacGhee (Scottish), Señor Ortiz (Mexican), Hari (Indian Hindu), and finally Auntie Marie (?), she scores a bagful of chickpeas. The family chops onions, adds a dime and a bay leaf, and welcomes all the neighbors to join in the celebration of New Year's with a feast of black-eyed peas. Endnotes expand on the foods of the holidays with details of various New Year traditions from China, Scotland, Spanish culture, and India mentioned in the text. Additional information about Austria, Germany, Greece, Japan, Korea, Switzerland, and Jewish culture are briefly mentioned. A recipe for Hoppin' John, traditionally served with the American South's traditional New Year's Black Eye Peas is a full-page endplate. Teachers who are food-inclined (bless their hearts!) will welcome this unique title to the library collection. It offers many cooking possibilities for kids to participate in, perhaps a multicultural food festival celebrating New Year's when school reconvenes (since

we never go to school on New Years, right?). In her journey amongst the neighborhood's diverse foodies, Shanté hears about Miss Lee's "crisp golden dumplings," Mr. MacGhee's "haggis and cheese," Señor Ortiz's "grapes," Hari's "sweets," all of which could be included in a food sampling that followed reading the book (although the haggis will probably not be much of a hit when the kids find out what it really IS!). 2007, Albert Whitman and Company, \$16.95. Ages 4 to 10.

**Kirkus (Kirkus Reviews, October 15, 2007 (Vol. 75, No. 20))**

Shanté's family has a New Year's tradition. The family has a feast that includes one special item: black-eyed peas. They believe eating the peas will bring them luck throughout the new year. Grandma discovers she has forgotten this crucial dish and sends Shanté out to find some. As Shanté travels from neighbor to neighbor, she learns the New Year's food traditions of those families, and even though they don't have the peas she needs, she invites them to dinner to try the ones she's sure she'll find. Written in rhyming couplets, the verse often falters annoyingly, making it difficult to read aloud without practice, but readers will find any number of new rhymes for the word "peas." (Chef Ortiz is from Belize, for instance.) Bright, colorful illustrations portray Shanté's energy and determination to save her family tradition, but, of course, these seem to be miracle peas that don't need soaking overnight. Like Norah Dooley's *Everybody Cooks Rice* (1991), this is a simple way to introduce young children to other cultures and traditions. The recipe for Grandma Louise's Hoppin' John provides a fun activity for families. (afterword) 2007, Whitman, 32p, \$16.95. Category: Picture book. Ages 5 to 9. © 2007 Kirkus Reviews/VNU eMedia, Inc. All rights reserved.

**Deana Groves (Library Media Connection, November/December 2007)**

It is New Year's Eve and as grandmother prepares the holiday meal, she realizes she forgot to buy the essential black-eyed peas. As granddaughter Shanté makes her way around the ethnically diverse neighborhood searching for spare black-eyed peas, she discovers New Year's Eve customs from around the world. Written almost entirely in rhyme to the word peas, this book is as much fun to read as it is to see. Lively colorful illustrations depict the urgency of this situation as Shanté races from place to place searching for the elusive peas. The ever polite child, she also makes sure to extend an invitation to each of the neighbors to come sample her grandmother's New Year's Eve black-eyed peas. Shanté is finally successful and makes it back to grandmother's house just in time to prepare the peas and greet all the neighbors as they gather. A short narrative follows the story on special foods served by other cultures during the New Year celebration. To complete the story, a recipe for Grandma Louise's Hoppin' John is included. This book would support units on holidays, cooking, and family traditions. Highly Recommended. 2007, Albert Whitman & Company, 32pp., \$16.95 hc. Ages 5 to 10.

**Horn Book (The Horn Book Guide, Spring 2008)**

It's New Year's, but Grandma has forgotten to cook good-luck black-eyed peas. When Shante asks her various neighbors for some, they each detail their own New Year's foods and customs. Every line of the jaunty text rhymes with *peas*, and part of the fun is trying to anticipate the rhyme. Energetic, good-natured illustrations document Shante's search and ultimate success. Category: Picture Books. 2007, Whitman, 32pp, 16.95. *Ages 4 to 9*. Rating: 3: Recommended, satisfactory in style, content, and/or illustration.

**Subjects:**

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