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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ JUVENILE FICTION

Creatures in the Kitchen

William Charles Schirado
Teresa Assenzo, Illustrator
Lulu
Hardcover
978-0-9660166-3-5

Easy-to-read rhymes highlight this interesting examination of healthy eating habits for kids.

In William Schirado's *Creatures in the Kitchen*, the inhabitants of Lorem Ipsem have eaten convenience food since time began and now have no taste buds. This book of poetry offers a lighthearted exhortation to abandon fast food for culinary pleasures created from scratch.

As the well-intentioned yet clueless inhabitants of Lorem Ipsem ingest nutrients culled from cans and boxes, the long-neglected Seeds revolt. They plant fruits and vegetables and even create a test kitchen in which they teach the locals everything about food and taste buds. The result is an epicurean renaissance.

Written in simple four-line stanzas, *Creatures in the Kitchen* is easy to read. Children won't struggle with complicated words here. The pacing, however, could be revised to engage and stimulate young readers. Although this is not intended for the very young, the book is formatted to suggest it is. It looks like a picture book—the trim size (the actual page size after a book is published) is a child-friendly eight by ten inches, yet there are spreads with no images whatsoever. If this book is intended for an older audience, Schirado might consider reformatting to smaller dimensions to attract his target audience. Also, the poems are a little lengthy to sustain juvenile reader interest, but with careful editing, the story could easily flow better while still getting the main point across.

Teresa Assenzo's pencil and watercolor illustrations are dark—lots of chefs with large eyes and tails, wielding sharp knives. The art falls just short, not for lack of skill, but because it needs to tie into the text more clearly. For example, the image of a chef crunching a piece of celery corresponds to the section of poetry dedicated to the sense of taste. But since there is so much text and so few illustrations, the art is either a page behind or ahead of the actual text. This can cause confusion, unfortunately, even for older readers. It's fixable, but there must be a willingness to remove portions of the text to improve the flow.

Creatures in the Kitchen could be an interesting examination of healthy eating habits, and with an eye to young readership, revision would make this a sweet offering.

BARBARA NICKLES (May 26, 2015)

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