



## Mr. Mouthful and the Monkeynappers

**Joseph Kimble**

**Kerry Bell, Illustrator**

WordFancy Books

(32pp)

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*Bountiful physical comedy and jaunty wordplay results in considerable charm in the picture book Mr. Mouthful and the Monkeynappers.*

In Joseph Kimble's lively picture book *Mr. Mouthful and the Monkeynappers*, children team up with an eloquent man to rescue a monkey from thieves.

Mr. Mouthful and his pet monkey, Dupree, take a stroll in their typical highfalutin fashion. Along the way, wordy Mr. Mouthful attempts and fails to warn the children he sees of various dangers, including an unmarked hole and an open can of paint. But he uses antiquated language that the children don't understand.

After arriving at a soccer field, raucous Dupree steals the ball and runs away. Two thieves are on the prowl, looking to steal Dupree. Despite their annoyance with the unhelpful Mr. Mouthful, the children team up to save Dupree from these kidnappers.

Mr. Mouthful—an “incorrigible gasbag” in a bow tie and a bowler hat—is often depicted with his pinky up. He and Dupree make an outlandish pair, as the dancing monkey sows chaos wherever he goes. Indeed, Dupree's companionship helps make Mr. Mouthful an endearing hero whom the children are happy to follow and tease; they're eager to help him when he requires it too.

The illustrations showcase an array of emotions on the children's cartoonish faces and the unmistakable movement of tumbling from a bike, slam-dunking a ball, and throwing fruit at the bad guys. They also help make Mr. Mouthful's flowery language easy to decipher with their context clues. They depict the activities that follow Mr. Mouthful's loquacious speeches well: his warnings are often cut off by children falling into the holes or the goose excrement that he was attempting to warn them about. This bountiful physical comedy, paired with the anachronism of Victorian Mr. Mouthful at a playground with a monkey in overalls, results in considerable charm.

However, Mr. Mouthful is the only person in the story who speaks, and he and Dupree are the only ones whose personalities are distinctive. Though the children are named—each after a person in a Beatles song, including Desmond, Molly, Lucy, and Jojo—they act as a group, rather than as individuals. Their collective adoration for Mr. Mouthful and Dupree is evident in their unified sense of right and wrong, and their empathetic smiles in response to Mr. Mouthful's gratitude showcase their loyalty to each other and to their odd, uppity friend. The monkeynappers, meanwhile, are underdeveloped; their motivations are unclear, and their dastardly deed is a weak source of tension as a result.

In the charming, vocabulary-expanding picture book *Mr. Mouthful and the Monkeynappers*, an oddball cast teams up to save a kidnapped friend.

AIMEE JODOIN (February 12, 2024)

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