

Runabouts

P. J. Jenkins

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Runabouts is a brightly colored picture book that will engage readers with its story of fun-loving friends—who happen to be boats—enjoying the summer sun while at the same time coping with bullying and the dynamics of friendship.

The story begins with Sunny, a speed boat, being taken out of storage for the summer on the lake. He meets up with his friends Chris, Tommy, and Molly, and they race around the lake. Then the mean-spirited Sharky corners Chris, who almost hits the rocks near the shore. Tommy, Molly, and Sunny confront Sharky, making the bully boat leave. The following day, the friends take a trip down the river and back, only to find Sharky stuck in the mud. Even though he was mean to them, they gladly help him.

Runabouts, written by retired elementary teacher and boat enthusiast P. J. Jenkins, is a crisply designed book with a clean, fun font that is fitting to the story. The text is printed over faded-out boxes, making it easy to read. The two-page spreads are filled with clearly outlined illustrations in bright colors. The crayon illustrations form some flat shapes, but they are very kid friendly because the boats are personified with pleasant faces on the simple, recognizable images.

Teaching children the correct way to handle bullies can be difficult. Whereas befriending the bully may be a bit idealized, threatening the bully—as Sunny does by saying to Sharky, “We know where you dock if you try to hurt him again!”—may not be the best lesson to teach children. Sunny and his friends *do* help Sharky out when he is in trouble, however, and that does send a more positive message to the reader.

There are many boating terms in this book that children will not understand, and it would have been courteous if those terms were explained either within the context of the story or in a glossary at the end. But except for the boating jargon, the vocabulary is understandable. The dialogue is sharp and easy for children to follow, and it is nicely balanced with the prose. Jenkins writes, “‘Yippee! I love this!’ bellowed Sunny. Off in the distance, Sunny spotted some old friends. He took a swoop to the left and headed over to greet them.”

There are a few minor punctuation errors in the text, but nothing to detract from the story about friendship and overcoming bullying. *Runabouts* is recommended for children of ages four through eight.

BETH VANHOUTEN (June 27, 2013)

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