

The Crepe Makers' Bond

Julie Crabtree

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Whipping up the sequel to *Discovering Pig Magic*, Julie Crabtree blends themes of friendship and authentic emotions with the addition of some real recipes in *The Crepe Makers' Bond*. This insightful and humorous depiction of the evolving friendship of three middle-school girls is a great match for ten- to thirteen-year-old readers.

Ariel and Mattie (or “M,” as she prefers) have the inseparable friendship of many pre-teens, and together with their friend Nicki, feel completely helpless when M’s mother decides to move in the beginning of their last year of middle school. After some emotional negotiations with both sets of parents, M is granted permission to stay with Ariel’s family through the end of the year, which, naturally, has repercussions that neither girl imagined. While the situation seems to be the impetus for the changes in the girls’ friendship, the story really captures the universal emotions and changing dynamic of growing up.

Crabtree makes efforts to show all the girls as multidimensional, balancing family, friends, school, and their own passions and identities, but Ariel is the most developed as the book focuses on her journey. On the whole, it appears to be an accurate rendition of middle school behavior and especially relationships. Crabtree’s dialogue and references to well known brands and pop culture attempt to further connect readers with the girls, and while an ongoing reference to *The Sopranos* might be beyond the understanding of some, the author does give it an accessible context.

Of particular note are Ariel’s incredible passion for cooking and the recipes she shares with the readers at the end of each chapter. Crabtree almost always integrates the reason for the recipe into the story smoothly, since Ariel is always cooking, and the recipes are written in her funny, honest voice. This essential part of the girl’s character also serves to remind readers that having a passion and staying true to themselves can help them get through whatever struggles they may be facing.

One of Crabtree’s writing strengths is how she captures the tumultuous emotions that accompany the changes the girls experience. At times, Ariel speaks with a reflective voice that seems a little beyond her youth, but the quality helps younger readers recognize and name some of their own emotions. Similarly, how the girls balance the changes in themselves while maintaining and, more importantly, evolving their friendship is heartwarming and honest, and can guide readers to accept and understand what may be happening in their own lives.

Older readers may find themselves frustrated with certain behaviors of the characters or writing style, but the book is ideal for “tweens.” Although the buildup to the third volume in this trilogy seems a bit contrived, readers can look forward to the next installment’s focus on Nicki.

ALICIA SONDHI (September / October 2011)

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