

The Jellies and the Crunchers

Matt Bell

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The Jellies and the Crunchers is an encouraging picture book that promotes willingness to branch out from what one knows best.

In Matt Bell's hopeful picture book *The Jellies and the Crunchers*, a mountainside town embraces change.

In this entertaining allegory about what makes a community, a culinary rift shapes everyone's lives. The Jellies only eat jelly, while the Crunchers only eat crackers. Adults will appreciate the absurdity of the extreme picky eating that this suggests. Trouble brews when the public park becomes rundown, and each side blames the other for the mess. The mayor and sheriff fail to calm the crowd, so a food fight begins.

While they're cleaning up in the aftermath of the fight, everyone discovers that crumbs and jelly taste delicious together. The next day, a Jelly girl braves the threshold of a cracker shop, and a Cruncher boy breaks tradition with his jelly purchase. The story concludes with an uplifting lesson about combining differences to make everything better. Throughout, the situation is clear, and the melee is entertaining because it's free of real fear. The characters' about-faces, however, are inorganic.

The book's text-to-art ratio is heavy, and its exposition slows its pace, as do its repetitive uses of "and" to begin sentences. The book's descriptions state information that can be assumed, including notes that the town's public square is "located in the center of town," and that the two groups didn't get along.

The illustrations feature the town's variety of residents, as well as its benches and picnic tables, alongside the boisterous food fight. But the art is limited to literal depictions of events, which are at all times focused on the message of acceptance. Eye-catching, cheerful color combinations, like the greens and blues of the natural backgrounds, complement the book's bright clothing accents, though the characters' jointless, disconnected hands and feet and cartoon facial expressions are rough. Whimsical details help to drive home the residents' passions: the Jellies wear spoons around their necks, and the Crunchers store their snacks in fanny packs.

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KAREN RIGBY (July 1, 2020)

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