

## Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: Celebrating Food in Children's Literature

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Perhaps we were hungry when we chose this theme for an issue of FOSR, or perhaps we were just looking forward to the food-laden holiday season (hello, pumpkin pie and sugar cookies!). Or maybe we had just returned from a lovely dinner out, complete with white tablecloths and little bacon-wrapped appetizers and wanted to read books about more of the same. The truth is, while perusing recently published texts we noticed multiple interesting children's and YA books about food and its role in celebrations, lives, and relationships. Consequently, we decided on a theme that's slightly different than our usual contextual or genre oriented foci; we decided to review books about food!

It's certainly true that most of us can remember special foods from our childhood. As for me, I remember red Kool-Aid, Crock-Pots full of beef stew, and trips to the local market for a Hostess Suzy Q. (We may also remember foods we loathed in childhood but had to eat regardless. In my world, these foods included beef liver and Brussels sprouts.) While many of us have given up our childhood food cravings for healthier, more "adult" options, we can easily be transported back to a time of innocence and play upon seeing a certain wrapper or smelling a memorable aroma.

Many holidays, like Halloween, Christmas, Hanukkah, or Thanksgiving are built around food traditions, traditions that often specifically include, or even focus on, children. Many traditional fairy tales also tell stories of children in relationship to food, even if these stories are not always completely happy ones. Remember the story of Hansel and Gretel? The Gingerbread Boy? Snow White and her apple? Jack and the Beanstalk? In this issue, children's author Lisa Campbell Ernst describes how her own childhood love for animal crackers led her to write *The Gingerbread Girl Goes Animal Crackers*, which is also reviewed in this issue. I, too, remember loving (and eating) animal crackers as a child. Would the head be eaten first? Or the legs? It's true that looking at the animal-imitating crackers was surely as good as eating them.

In this issue, scholars, teachers, and parents review a wide range of children's books with food as a joyful and celebratory focus. In addition to Ernst's lovely book mentioned above which follows the gingerbread girl on a new adventure, some of these books creatively visualize food as imaginative fantasy, such as Carl Warner's *A World of Food*; others explore the centrality of food in holidays and celebrations, such as *A Sweet Passover* by Lesléa Newman and David Slonim and *Junie B., First Grader: Turkeys We Have Loved and Eaten (and Other Thankful Stuff)* by Barbara Park and Denise Brunkus. *Minette's Feast: The Delicious Story of Julia Child and Her Cat* by Susanna Reich and Amy Bates and *Bon Appétit! The Delicious Life of Julia Child* by Jessie

Hartland both celebrate the life, culture, and work of Julia Child upon the 100th anniversary of her birth in formats appealing to children who love to eat, but who have perhaps not yet had the chance to cook.

As you read through this issue, we hope that you find some new books to share with the young people in your life. We also hope you are inspired to cook, or at least to eat, something deliciously savory or sweet.

### **Works Cited**

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