

First Opinion: Deliciously Delightful—Julia Child for Children (and Adults!)

Hartland, Jessie. *Bon Appétit! The Delicious Life of Julia Child*. New York: Schwartz and Wade Books, 2012.

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Bon Appétit! The Delicious Life of Julia Child, a picture book detailing the life of Julia Child from her childhood to her death, begins appropriately with a quotation from Julia Child: “People who love to eat are always the best people.” Child’s taste for good cooking, her love of eating, and her enthusiasm for life comes through in this illustrated biography, beginning with the end pages, which are filled with drawings of chef’s tools, different types of foods, and even the Eiffel Tower.

Jessie Hartland, both author and illustrator, weaves her words into the pictures. The story literally unwinds on the page with the illustrations, almost feeling like the two are one. Those illustrations give the picture book a graphic novel feel and will attract students who need the help of pictures to understand the words. In fact, without the pictures, the text would be just another story (albeit a good one) about Julia Child.

Although the pictures and words are very much intertwined, at first the reader might wonder how to follow the plot. However, Hartland uses her illustrations to guide the reader’s eyes through the story, separating the thoughts with either pictures or lines. For example, on the two-page spread where Julia Child’s life begins, there is a drawing of the state of California and then childlike renderings of Julia and her siblings. Separating that information from additional facts about her childhood is the leafy part of a tree. As the reader looks under the tree canopy to read the next sentences, the eye follows the trunk down the page on the left side

and then moves to the right side, observing Julia hanging from a tree limb, and then finishes that page by reading “She is a true tomboy.” On the second page of that spread, there are four sections of illustrations with the sentences integrated into the pictures so that the reader is led to read the text in the order that the author meant it to be read. Since it might become difficult for the reader to determine how to follow Hartland’s text, she helps the reader by putting numbers in the lower right hand corner of each section. The illustrations serve as guides, enticing the reader further and further into the book.

As the reader travels with Julia through her life, Hartland inserts a small piece of artwork at the bottom of the page with the name of the place where Julia is living and a picture of the flag of that country. These appear when Julia moves to a different country or a different state within the United States. Hartland also uses asterisks to help explain the words that are in a language other than English. For example, when Julia and her husband Paul first arrive in France, they stop to eat lunch. Julia cannot speak French, so Paul asks the waiter, “Qu’est-ce que vous recommandez?” An asterisk follows that question in the thought bubble. Then, underneath the drawing of Julia and Paul sitting at the table, the translation is given, beginning with the asterisk, “*What do you recommend?” (Hartland 13).

The personality of Julia Child spills onto the pages of this book. Sometimes it seems as if Julia’s voice is literally coming out of the pages when reading “Always taste, taste, taste...” and “I’m Julia Child. Bon appétit!” Even though this is a biography, Jessie Hartland definitely caters to the child in all of us (and to Julia’s playfulness) by inserting humor into the text and the illustrations: “What the heck is Welsh rabbit? It’s a mix of beer, cheese, mustard, which is cooked together and served over toast. Nothing to do with bunnies... Whew” (3).

Hartland’s biography of Julia Child, replete with vivid illustrations, reveals a real person who survived ups and downs, excitement and disappointment, and stuck with the project she wanted to complete, her cookbook, even through several rejections. Even though the word “perseverance” is never used, readers will understand that the old “try, try again” was what Julia Child continued to do until she was successful. That is just one of the characteristics that makes *Bon Appétit* deliciously delightful!

About the Author

Vickey M. Giles is superintendent of schools in Sheldon Independent School District in Houston, Texas. She also serves as an adjunct professor at University of Houston, teaching pre-service teachers. Giles has always loved children’s and young adult literature and enjoys combining that love with her superintendent job by visiting classrooms and sharing her favorite picture books with students and their teachers.