

First Opinion: The Humor and Honesty of Junie B. Jones

Park, Barbara. *Junie B., First Grader: Turkeys We Have Loved and Eaten (and Other Thankful Stuff)*. Illus. Denise Brunkus. New York: Random House, 2012.

Anna Gilmore



When Junie B. Jones is mentioned to children, smiles and giggles follow. Educators, parents, and grandparents also know Junie B. and enjoy the series by Barbara Park in which she is the central character. Junie B. is a little girl who goes to school and gets into similar situations as students do on a daily basis. Park writes stories that have a strong visual effect on readers. Junie B. acts out what she thinks and is therefore a typical, literal little girl. She gets to the point and is very direct when explaining situations or answering questions, which is one aspect of the humor in the books. It is easy to fall in love with Junie B. Jones, because we can appreciate her honesty and lack of inhibition.

Barbara Park has written over twenty-five Junie B. Jones books which are well-loved by children. They are chapter books, but young children can enjoy them as a read-a-loud. The books are easy to read because of the vocabulary but are hard to put down once started because of the fast-paced adventure. Story topics range from school activities to holidays to everyday adventures. Park uses intertextuality by incorporating Junie's journal entries into the story. Her journals are sometimes messy and contain crossed out words which reflect how children really write. For that reason, children can relate to the format as well as the text.

Junie B., First Grader: Turkeys We Have Loved and Eaten (and Other Thankful Stuff) is the twenty-eighth hilarious adventure in this series. Park uses humor to teach children to be thankful. While adults can usually think of things to be thankful for such as family, friends, and

health, children, even though they are usually aware of these things, might like to think more about things that make them happy or bring excitement. In this particular story, the teacher, Mr. Scary, tries to teach the meaning of Thanksgiving and give some history at the same time. Mr. Scary plans a lesson that goes in the wrong direction but ends up teaching the lesson after all. The lesson does not go as planned but works well in the end. For this reason, teachers can often laugh at these books, because they relate to unexpected teachable moments.

The students in this story are thankful for things such as exploding biscuits and toilet paper. The biscuits pop out of the can and make a loud sound, and the toilet paper has a roll in the middle to create useful items such as binoculars. Adults are thankful for these things as well but not in the same way.

Mr. Scary tries to incorporate the Pilgrims several times in his lessons, but the children think the Pilgrims are boring and change the subject. Instead, they create their own list of things to be thankful for and end up winning the school contest, because the principal thought it was the most honest list he had ever had published.

As the class gets ready for their Thanksgiving feast, the parents bring food to school. The students discuss the foods that they would like to have. They are excited about carrot sticks and tater tots, not squash, beans, or stewed onions, which are authentic but not necessarily kid-approved. They also dread having to eat pumpkin pie but try it, and it is not so bad.

Another theme is friendship. Junie B. and her classmate, May, do not get along very well but do have some things in common. At the end, Junie realizes that she and May have things in common with each other just like the Pilgrims and the Native Americans. Junie and May also share that they are thankful for their differences. The children also realize at the end that Mr. Scary is thankful for them because of the look of acceptance and pride which shows on his face.

Park's stories allow children to internalize life lessons regardless of age. Her stories are just what students and teachers need for reflection, but most of all, entertainment. Junie B. Jones has her special way of making the characters in the story as well as the readers of her books laugh.

About the Author

Anna Gilmore is the Media Specialist at Wicksburg High School, which is a K–12 school located in Houston County, Alabama. She has a teaching background and an intrinsic love for children.