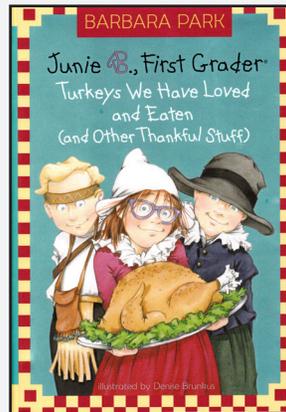


Second Reaction: Cultivating a Heart of Thankfulness

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

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Thankfulness: what does it look like? In a world that is constantly running from one obligation to the next, it can become difficult to be thankful, especially in regard to the small things in life. Each day people take for granted the ability to wake up, breathe clean air, have fresh water to take a shower, and eat a breakfast that is both nutritious and satisfying. They forget to be thankful for school and the opportunities it provides or for work and the bills that it helps pay. Thanksgiving is a time when the characteristic of thankfulness is remembered, when friends and family gather to appreciate one another and the blessings which they enjoy. Barbara Park brings the concept of thankfulness to life in her newest book, *Junie B., First Grader: Turkeys We Have Loved and Eaten (and Other Thankful Stuff)*.

Growing up, I always felt a strong affinity towards books. I would read whenever I would get the chance, becoming entirely involved in each of my stories. During all those years, I read from only one point of view: that of a student. Now, as a soon-to-be teacher, I have started reading children's books differently. I often critique them for their ability to engage the students, incorporate new vocabulary, or teach thematic units. After receiving this book, I will admit that I was hesitant in knowing how to integrate it into the classroom. It did teach about being grateful, but it was a chapter book with almost no pictures. My class consists of children who are five or six years old with approximately eight minutes worth of wiggle-free time before chaos ensues, and reading a story is out of the question. Nonetheless, I dug into the book. By

the time I had finished the first chapter, I knew that I had to read it to my students. I am not one who generally laughs when reading books, but this Junie B. Jones book had me smiling and giggling throughout the story. I was hooked.

The first challenge presented in reading this book to the class was whether to do it with the whole class or in small groups. The second challenge was in regard to how I would engage the students. Ultimately, I decided that I would read the book to the students during their “brain break,” the fifteen minutes allotted each day for the students to lay their heads on their desks and sit quietly. It was the perfect opportunity to gain their attention while keeping them calm. I also decided to read two or three chapters each day so that I would have the entire book finished within the course of one week. This would allow for the maximum amount of fun and would allow them to remember better.

The first day that I read *Turkeys We Have Loved*, I explained to the class that they would not be listening to classical music, as they normally did. As a change, they would be expected to sit quietly and listen to the book. I asked them to think about their favorite part, to which I was repeatedly told it was “Stinky,” Shirley’s dog (74), and to determine what they thought about the story. One of the girls in my classroom told the class that she very much liked the story; her favorite part was how Junie B. Jones had to go to bed at 7:30 p.m. Of course, several students spoke out, agreeing that such a bedtime was far too early and that, because of the absurdity of such an idea, it was very humorous. After reading, I had the students give thumbs up if they liked it, thumbs down if they did not, and thumbs sideways if they did not know. There was a mixed review after the first reading, so I waited expectedly for the second day’s determinations, which were, in fact, very positive.

Another way that I incorporated *Junie B., First Grader* into my classroom was by having the students participate in an activity presented in Barbara Park’s tale. In the second chapter, Junie B. and her “Room One” (2) classmates begin to compile a list of items for which they were thankful (15), and I had four of the students tell me what they were thankful for at the end of each reading. The first little boy I called on said he was thankful for God. The second child, a little girl, said she was thankful for the teachers, while the next two students discussed their appreciation for the library and gym. As we began to generate a longer list, I started writing it on a large sheet of paper. On the last day, I asked all the students to gather around me in a circle and tell me what else they appreciated. We created one final list, and each of the students signed it, designating that they, Room Two, had their own special “Thankful List.”

I appreciate Barbara Park’s look at thankfulness and the realization that there are so many things to be thankful for in our daily lives. I was blessed to have been able to cover this topic with my students and to help them understand how much we truly do have. It is a vital life lesson and can change an individual’s entire outlook on life.

Within *Turkeys We Have Loved and Eaten (and Other Thankful Stuff)*, Barbara Park teaches both children and adults what it means to be thankful. Thankfulness is an attitude where we choose to see the good in our lives rather than simply seeing what is difficult. We can be thankful for freedom, rights, and the chance to vote, but we can also be thankful for toilet paper, lightning bugs, and nasal spray (100, 101). After all, it can be the smallest things that make the most difference.

About the Author

Alivia Puterbaugh is a student teacher from Purdue University and is currently working in a Lafayette, Indiana, kindergarten classroom. She will graduate with a degree in elementary education with a reading specialist focus in December 2012.