



**OnlineBookClub.org**

Online Book Club Review – 6/9/18: 3 out of 4 stars!

What's with kids these days? Aren't they busy enough with Algebra, Chemistry, and Physics, varsity sports, and proms?

Of course, I am jealous! In my youth, my father would brag to his friends, "My daughter has been reading books since she was this tall!" Now, a typical SMS message from one teen to another would be, "Hey, fam! Wats d l8tst book u wrote?"

I exaggerate. But this book, *Fortune Cookie Surprise!*, was written by a 15-year-old high school student. (Well, she is practically an adult!) She did the illustrations, too. (What the!)

Jacqueline Prata dedicates the book to her grandpa, a WWII veteran buried at Arlington National Cemetery. She has a page telling the reader how she enjoyed writing the book and learned much from the experience. She also credits her family, teachers, and other mentors for inspiring and assisting her in the project. It is a project that I willingly rate 3 out of 4 stars.

In the story, Emily goes to a favorite Chinese restaurant to celebrate with Mom and Dad. The sumptuous meal will happily end with dessert – fortune cookies! Wikipedia says, "A fortune cookie is a crisp and sugary cookie usually made from flour, sugar, vanilla, and sesame seed oil with a piece of paper inside, a 'fortune', on which is an aphorism, or a vague prophecy." This time, the cookies do not only reveal fortunes but astound Emily with profound realizations about her role in the family and more.

This is a picture book for the very young, say kids from two to seven, who have had the pleasure of enjoying a fortune cookie. This cookie is traditionally served as a dessert in Chinese restaurants in the US and other countries. (Do you know that this is not a practice in China? If the websites I consulted are accurate, the fortune cookie is all but extinct in China.)

The vocabulary is simple, and the text is written in a large, clear font, so little people can read everything well. The grammar is almost perfect; I found only two tiny punctuation errors. Even the fortune cookies speak good English: the witty fortunes therein showcase Jacqueline's gift for humor.

The lessons the book teaches are universal and will be treasured by families. These include love in the home, the joy of laughing together, the children's role in the family, an individual's uniqueness, and each person's special gifts.

Children will find the illustrations eye-catching, although more lively colors would enhance the visual experience. Jacqueline is no da Vinci, but she is able to convey the happiness of the family

in her drawings. The pagoda-shaped restaurant, Chinese lanterns, bowls, and the unwieldy chopsticks are depicted well. The characters have physical attributes and clothes that make them easily identifiable. Mom's painted nails and the car seatbelts worn during the drive to the restaurant further display Jennifer's attention to detail and satisfactory attempts at realism.

As I can only draw stick figures, I find Jacqueline very talented. However, there are some oddities in the drawings which I will mention for her consideration. The colors of the characters' clothes are not uniform throughout; some pages have them darker. Dad's hair is different in his first two pictures. Emily's ponytails are also not consistently drawn, and her large head appears disproportionate to her little body. The most glaring oddity is in the picture showing the family eating with chopsticks: everyone is left-handed! (What is the probability that this could be true? Keith Milsom, the owner of UK-based Anything Left-Handed, reports on research findings that 10% of people are left-handed, and two left-handed parents have a 26% chance of having a left-handed child.) Without these odd details, the book would have merited 4 stars.

Overall, I enjoyed Jacqueline's book, and I will bet that fortune cookie fans, young and old alike, will like it as well.

There's more! This young lady is not only a budding writer/illustrator. She actively serves with Wreaths Across America, Special Olympics, and Alex's Lemonade Stand and helps people from all over America and beyond. May she be an example to the youth of today. Apparently, her favorite fortune cookie message is: Dream big! Why am I not surprised?