

The Power of a Good Book in Little Hands

BY MONICA PITRELLI

My mother dropped a bombshell during her last visit to Singapore. A mum of three, she nodded when I explained how hard it was to read in succession to my own three children at night. How did she find the time? “Simple,” she said. “I didn’t really read to you that much.” What? Wait... what? Now, I’m not sure what advice was being doled out in the late 1970s but it’s now universally agreed – by paediatric medical associations, psychologists, magazines (like this) and virtually every parent you’ll ever meet – that reading to kids today is a must.

And for good reason. Reading stimulates kids’ imaginations, develops language, listening and concentration skills, and expands their understanding of the world. Books entertain – transporting minds from the African savannah to the moon and back – while creating a thirst for knowledge and teaching important life lessons. No matter how tech evolves, books are still the heartbeat of early learning.

That’s why I was excited to come across **The Food ABC** books by Christina Castle. The set features ten healthy food characters (a nice break from animals, mermaids and Disney stars) that extol one moral lesson per book. Never preachy – young kids are on to this! – the author craftily works each virtue into a modern world setting while embracing topics as weighty as health, hard work, tidiness, self-confidence, narcissism, money, optimism and the importance of family – even the dangers of tech devices and child-aimed advertising are covered. To the author’s credit, she masterfully weaves these lessons into the storylines in a way that kids can relate to and understand – and that parents can appreciate, too.



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From Apples to Zucchini

Take, for example, Emily the Egg, who finds school difficult until she learns that practise, hard work and believing in herself are the keys to success. Or Willy the Walnut, who misses his rugby game because of his messy room. And Oliver the Orange angers his friends by being on his cell phone too much – a lesson many adults could use!

The books are small, so little kids can easily grasp them, with illustrations by the author, who interestingly is a Singapore expat from Europe. My own kids regularly reach for them; they like reading about foods eaten at our own dinner table – potatoes, carrots, even leeks – drawn with funny little faces. While the books don’t tell kids what to eat, healthy living (both in body and mind) is a subtle message throughout. This is especially true in the book about Zepp the Zucchini, who learns how great he feels after exercise. How true, and not a mention of exercise as it relates to weight – thank you!

These books are a joy to read. My toddler is attracted to the simplicity of the covers, my five-year old prefers the books with her favourite foods (apples, beans and walnuts) and my oldest daughter regularly reads them to herself. And they’ve solved my nightly bedtime problem – books that everyone loves make for the perfect “family reading night” all cuddled up in one big bed.

Available at all major bookstores, at Singapore Public Libraries and online at thefoodabc.com.