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Children's Books

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Children's Literature

Looking For Crabs. Written and illustrated by B. Whately. Angus and Robertson Publishers, Sydney, Australia. 1993. ISBN: 0-207-17596-9. US\$12.00.

William P. Bintz, Western Kentucky University

One day a family goes looking for crabs in rock pools on the beach. Mum and Dad provide good "do's and don'ts" to the children: be really quiet, look under small rocks, don't be scary, and watch your step. Despite this advice nobody in the family finds any crabs. Mum predicts the crabs are out to lunch. Dad suspects they are on holiday in Hawaii. Little sister thinks they are on vacation at Disneyland. Her brother, the narrator in the story, believes nobody is looking hard enough. Finally, the family decides to leave the beach, not really knowing where crabs go during the holidays. They only know that there are no crabs at this beach! This simple story has many appealing characteristics. To begin with, it describes a very familiar event — a family trip to the beach. Interestingly enough, this event is seen from the perspectives of two very different groups: the family members and the crabs. The author does a very clever job of juxtaposing a family excursion to the beach with the crabs' perspective on the same event. The result is a humorous story that is thoroughly entertaining reading.

Much of the humor occurs as family members spontaneously concoct and volunteer different theories about crabs without an inkling of what everyday life is like for them. In the end, all of these theories are amusingly proven wrong by the crabs themselves. This humor is exaggerated by the fact that readers can see the crabs lurking under the water, but

none of the family members can see them at all. Thus, in an interesting and ingenious turn of events, readers in this story are privy to more information visually than the story's characters are. The author-artist creates a series of attractive illustrations based on an imaginative combination of reality and fantasy. Attractive full-color illustrations of family and beach (reality) combined with adorable crabs (fantasy) are presented against an expansive white background. These illustrations effectively contribute to the aesthetic qualities of the book, as well as the general interest and amusement of the story. Not surprisingly, *Looking For Crabs* was short-listed for the 1994 Book of the Year by The Children's Book Council of Australia. For very young readers (preschool and K-3 elementary school students), it offers sheer reading enjoyment. For older readers, it offers a potential for starting some new and interesting conversations about a wide variety of topics related to the ocean and the beach — including oceanography, sea life, crustaceans, shellfish, and family outings, among other things. This award-winning picture book from Australia is sure to delight readers of all ages.



The Mouse and the Apple. Written and illustrated by Stephen Butler. Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-12810-6. 32 pp. US\$15.00.

Waiting patiently often pays off — that's the message of this good-natured, vividly illustrated story which offers an attractive updating of the old Fox and the Grapes fable. Here a series of large animals, unable to wait for a good thing or force events to happen when they wish, depart hungry, grumpy and convinced that the shiny apple in the tree is probably "rotten or sour or hard or soft," while a quiet, smiling little mouse is rewarded when a delicious apple finally falls from the tree. (JMJ)

