A Birthday for Cow! by Jan Thomas

Pig and Mouse are hard at work baking the best birthday cake EVER for Cow. But it would be a lot easier if Duck weren't hanging around, yammering on about turnips or some nonsense. (Sheesh!) With all this silliness going on, how will they manage to throw Cow a spectacular birthday party? Well, as it turns out, crazy Duck just might have had the right idea all along!

This second picture book from Jan Thomas features wacky humor that toddlers will adore, rowdy repetitions, irreverent dialogue--and a hilarious twist at the end.

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My Personal Review:
Its funny to think that even though we have all been kids, so few adults amongst us actually get them. Grown-ups like to think that children are merely shrunken versions of themselves. They forget that a child's sense of humor is a difficult thing to determine. Its easy to say, Well kids think farts are funny so Ill just write a whole book about farting, and leave it at that, but in the end its the lazy way to do things. Certain picture book authors/illustrators have figured out how to speak to a child's sense of humor without dumbing things down or patronizing the kids they are presenting to. Mo Willems is a good example of this. Jules Feiffer has his moments. Mara Bergman knows her stuff. And one of the newest additions to this laudable crew is Jan Thomas. Thomas burst onto the scene last year with her seemingly simple, What Will Fat Cat Sit On? and it proved an immediate success. Now shes back with another book that is, shockingly, as good and maybe even better than its predecessor. A Birthday for Cow! shows that even when Jan Thomas GETS kid humor, she also knows how to write a tale that'll charm adult readers as well.
Open the book and the first thing you see on the endpapers is a two-page spread of Duck carefully crossing out the days on the calendar until he has reached Cows Birthday. You see, cows birthday is today and Mouse and Pig have got everything under control. Theyre gonna make the best cake ever with flour, and sugar, and eggs . . . . AND A TURNIP? Duck whips out a turnip to the shock of his friends who inform him, very patiently, No, Duck. We will not put in a turnip. Fair enough. So next they mix it all with . . . A TURNIP! Again, Duck has to be told that turnips are not a part of the process. On it goes until the cake is ready. Cow walks in the room, takes one look at his friends and the cake, and exclaims with sheer heartfelt love and glee, A TURNIP! All works out well in the end with Pig and Mouse devouring the cake and Duck discussing with Cow his favorite methods of using turnips. Sometime I brush my teeth using a turnip. Really? Me, too!

Like What Will Fat Cat Sit On? this puppy is built for reading aloud. You just hunker down, get ready, and when you get to the word Turnip, you let rip for all youre worth. Now there was some concern here in New York that some kids who will be read this book wont know what a turnip is. Thats a legitimate worry, I guess. You get a lot of kids around here that are not exactly as well versed in their root vegetables as they might be. The concern, however, is minor because it really doesnt matter what kind of food Duck is promoting. First of all, until you read the book aloud youre never going to notice how funny the word Turnip is. We all knew that rutabaga was funny. And maybe if Duck kept throwing the word rutabaga in everyones face it would have a charm of his own, but theres something that feels just right about that blatant word turnip. Its the er sound, I think. Its funny. And as long as you see Cow eating it later (which you do) then it doesnt matter if kids are intimately familiar with turnips or not.

The art of Ms. Thomas is done entirely on computers with text types set in names like Eatwell Chubby and Chaloops. The book retains the manic glee of its predecessor, though many will be sad to find that the Fat Cat is unfortunately absent from this story. Still, it has the same gleeful goofiness present in the first book. These animals sport big round eyes and grins that make them look just a little too happy. Like those people you meet at parties who are so intense and focused on what youre saying that you suddenly loose your train of thought. Its that look. And for a picture book for small children, thats exactly what is going to capture the attention of even the most ADD of kids. The color scheme is fabulous as well. These characters are all thick black lines against blue, green, pink, and purple backgrounds. A graduate course in childrens literature would do well to examine exactly why it is that Thomas uses one color or another at certain points of the book (particularly the purple).

Like all sequels, there will be people who moan that A Birthday for Cow! doesnt have the same sense of manic danger that Thomas first book had. Pfui. As a sequel I tell you that it doesnt disappoint. If you liked her first book, youll love the second and if you never even read the first you will ADORE the second. For an artist who works in a misleadingly upfront
style, its clear that Jan Thomas has a few aces up her sleeve yet. Just a great creation.

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