Families

Respectful, Appealing And Interesting

In frank, funny, touching, and often surprising interviews, children from fourteen different families talk about how they identify themselves as a family. The range of families profiled in this engaging book reflects the kaleidoscopic diversity of families in America today: there are mixed-race families and immigrant families; families of gay and lesbian couples and very religious families; families with only children, many children, adopted children, and children with special needs. This book is a celebration of all families, and provides young readers with windows into other lives, as well as mirrors in which they can see their own family relationships reflected.

My Personal Review:
Although Kuklin claims looks were unimportant in this interesting photo picture book on family diversity, somehow she ended up with attractive, appealing subjects children and adults will enjoy looking at.

She set out to find a panoply of outgoing U.S. children with varied families willing to provide young readers either a window into their own lives or a mirror of the readers identities through tiny glimpses of themselves as perceived and expressed by the children-- Gutsy families, notes Kuklin, in the March 2006 American Library Association Book Links magazine.

Fifteen nurturing families representing a broad range of characteristics obliged. They are featured in fifteen attractive page spreads. Each has a group family picture, a cut-out shot of the children, an album photo, and text in the childrens own words, omitting questions or prompts that must have elicited some of the comments.

Kuklin let the childrens personalities and decisions guide her collaborative project. The children, ages four to fourteen, not the adults, were interviewed for the text, revealed whatever they chose about their families, and directed the depiction of their family life, including poses, props, pets, and what everyone should wear in the photos. (Parents did consult on location for the photo shoots.)
Additionally, because many of the children showed her their family albums during interviews, Kuklin had each family select one significant photo from their family's history which is included and described.

She took several rolls of photographs for each shoot, had the families select their favorites, and relied on them also to oversee and correct transcriptions from the interviews, every draft, every word. It all works! Somehow, its fascinating and inviting.

Choosing an inclusive array of families troubled Kuklin: Isn't it ironic that to do a book emphasizing inclusiveness, I needed to be somewhat exclusive? And in order to break down the notion of inaccurate stereotypes, I had to consider the race, religion, gender, and other features of the families. It was a most odd experience, one that went against my basic instincts and beliefs. (Book List)

She did manage to achieve a rich, authentic mix. The families are mostly New York City people, but some are rural too. She interviews an only child, twins, children adopted from different countries and from the United States and their siblings, an adopted daughter of two dads, two children in a two-mom family, and a family with two daughters in the U.S. and one in their country of origin because the parents hadn't been able to arrange childcare while they worked.

The families are of many races and ethnic backgrounds with parents from Japan, Korea, Germany, Trinidad, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Egypt, India, and the U.S. Some are extended families with relatives besides parents and children living together. Disabilities are not apparent except for one brother with Down syndrome. No one is mentioned in the service or in prison. There are no crises, no abuse, neglect or homelessness. These families are all positive models, secure and loving.

Some of the children mention religion, their parents work, their physical homes, favorite foods, talents, activities, education, dreams, and attitudes. The interviews bear no fill-in-the-blank, cooky cutter repetitiveness. Each is similar but unique. The children describe themselves, share details they choose about family members, and talk about how they get along with their siblings and other people. In few words, they leave strong impressions.

Cataloging the contents may sound dry, but personality shines in this book. The photos are beautiful. (Not knowing which children are which because the photos are unlabeled is slightly frustrating, but ultimately immaterial.) The children convey things about themselves that are important to them. They share their spirit with the reader in a way that should satisfy Kuklins' hope that the children in Families will inspire you to think about your own life and the family that makes you
special. Her book presents an excellent concept of family in many diverse aspects. It is a wonderful book just to have around and dip into.

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