Mr. Cookie Baker by Monica Wellington

Mr. Cookie Baker- Our All Time Favorite!

As sweet and satisfying as holiday baking, here is a beautiful update of Monica Wellington’s Mr. Cookie Baker. In this book, youngsters can follow the process of measuring, mixing, baking, decorating, and eating cookies. With six new full-color pages, a handsome new jacket, educational tie-ins, and more recipes, this is the perfect supplement to early math units on sequencing, sorting, measuring, and telling time. The simple, straightforward behind-the-scenes view of a bakery makes it a splendid addition to Monica Wellington’s other nonfiction for the very young, such as Zinnia’s Flower Garden. Yummy in any season!

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My Personal Review:
Some writer/illustrators can take a good idea and turn it into something a little special. "Pizza at Sally’s" might have been a rather formulaic, linear account of pizza making, but Monica Wellington treats us to a superior pizza book. The winning ingredients include a unique artistic style, a clear, engaging story, and a tasty concluding payoff for either the rapacious or the reluctant reader.

The illustrations, "colored copies of photos, labels, and other ephemera" pasted on gouache-prepared paper have a toy-like quality, as if your Lego decals leapt from signs and trains onto the pages.. Coupled the informal font, the look is a relaxed photo realism. The combination is much warmer than most of the computer-generated images I've seen. Photos of Sally's (she's the pizza maker) tomatoes complement shiny drawings of patterned green leaves, and tall background buildings with luminescent colored windowpanes hint at the urban setting. "Sally the pizza maker grows tomatoes in her community garden in the city." This is an exciting setting for non-city kids who have never seen a rooftop garden. Wallington also skillfully mixes farm scenes with their destination: The neighborhood stores where Sally buys her pizza ingredients. There's a beautiful,
atmospheric picture of the cheese shop with giant company labels hanging from the wall, and Wallington adds an unexpected lower panel that shows us the cows grazing many miles from the cheese shop interior. It's a bold montage that works extremely well.

At 11:00 AM, Sally--with her ubiquitous cat smiling up at her--begins making pizza! It's homemade of course, "Cut, chop, stir, and simmer. There are good smells in the air. Sally makes her tomato sauce." Yeast, oil, salt, and flour start the pizza dough, and we see a mixture of foods and measuring devices on one 2-page spread. At this point, I began to ponder a very serious question: Does Sally belong to the "through the dough" school of pizza-making, or whether she disdains such dramatics? (These two methods are hotly debated wherever pizza is taken seriously.) Culinary merits aside, I was thrilled to see that Sally twirls the dough--"Whoosh"--up in the air. Finally, "everything is ready to put together." As she layers the ingredients (the cat with its paws on the counter), Wellington uses some artistic license to bend health code regulations), hungry kids wait with great anticipation.

And the verdict? The pizza certainly looks delicious, and you can almost smell it as Sally slides it into the fiery oven. However, Sally's customers are the best judges, and the youngsters grab slices and close their eyes in pizza ecstasy. When the shop closes at 9pm, the chalkboard says "Arrivederci," and Sally and her little feline helper relax and enjoy a slice together. A truly kid-pleasing book might include Sally's pizza recipe as an après-story treat, and, as with the entire book, Ms. Wellington does not disappoint. There's much to savor in this sensational book!

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