



Pickle: The (Formerly) Anonymous Prank Club of Fountain Point Middle School

Kim Baker , Tim Probert (Illustrator)

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This is the story of THE LEAGUE OF PICKLEMAKERS

Ben: who began it all by sneaking in one night and filling homeroom with ball-pit balls.

Frank: who figured out that an official club, say a *pickle-making* club, could receive funding from the PTA.

Oliver: Who once convinced half of the class that his real parents had found him and he was going to live in a submarine.

Bean: Who wasn't exactly invited, but her parents own a costume shop, which comes in handy if you want to dress up like a giant squirrel and try to scare people at the zoo.

TOGETHER, they are an unstoppable prank-pulling force, and Fountain Point Middle School will never be the same.

Latino Interest.

Pickle: The (Formerly) Anonymous Prank Club of Fountain Point Middle School Details

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Author : Kim Baker , Tim Probert (Illustrator)

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Genre : Realistic Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade, Humor, Academic, School, Funny, Juvenile



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From Reader Review Pickle: The (Formerly) Anonymous Prank Club of Fountain Point Middle School for online ebook

Bethe says

2nd read December 2014 still a hoot!

February 2014

2014-15 Texas Bluebonnet Award nominee. What a hoot - 4.5 stars! Great beginning will pull in kid readers, especially to keep the secret, I went straight to the website to check it out, I'm sure young readers will as well. Loved the first prank, I kept thinking of the disclaimer: don't try this at home! My students will definitely connect with the Hispanic characters. This book will make a great read aloud with its humor and funny figurative language. The zoobreak chapter is hilarious, page 177 has some great language: oatmeal and animosity! Hope this book doesn't prompt a rash of pranks throughout Texas elementary and middle schools!

Betsy says

When I was in college I took a course in journalism to fulfill an English credit. I had no real desire to report the news in any way, shape, or form so when the time came to write an article for the paper I had to find something that would be in my wheelhouse. Ultimately I decided to write a piece on the history of pranks at my alma mater. It was a fun piece to write and instilled in me not a love of reporting but rather a love of pranking and all it entails. A good prank, a true prank, does no harm aside from a minor inconvenience for the poor schmuck who has to clean it up. It does not destroy school property, causing only joy for those innocents who witness it. And pranks, the really good ones, are almost impossible to think up. Now it's hard enough to think up a prank for a liberal arts college in eastern Indiana. Imagine how much more difficult it is to think up a whole roster of pranks for a fictional elementary school. That is the task Kim Baker gave herself and the end result is a book that I simply cannot keep on my library shelves. Kids eat this book up with a spoon.

What would you do if you found out your favorite pizza joint was getting rid of all the balls in their ball pit for free? If you're Ben Diaz, the answer is simple. You make several trips with the balls to your elementary school, dump the lot in your classroom window, and then sit back and enjoy the show. It's an auspicious beginning for an up-and-coming prankster, and once Ben gets a taste of the havoc (and admiration) his act garners, there's no stopping him. Next thing you know he's started a prank club with school funds. Okay... technically the school thinks that he's started a pickle club, but that shouldn't be a problem, right? Trouble is, once you've started something as silly as a prank club, it's hard to know when you've crossed a line and gone a little too far.

There's been a lot of talk in the press and the general public about the fact that when it comes to Latino characters in children's books you may as well be asking for the moon. They exist, but are so few and far between when compared to other ethnicities that one has a hard time figuring out who precisely is to blame. *Pickle*, I am pleased to report, stars a Hispanic kid who is featured on the cover front and center, no hiding his race or getting all namby pamby on who he is. And let me tell you now that the only thing rarer than a children's book starring a Latino boy is finding a children's book starring a Latino boy that's hilarious and fun. The kind of book a kid would pick up willingly on their own in the first place. It's like a little diamond on your bookshelf. A rara avis.

Now the key to any realistic school story, no matter how wacky, is likable characters. Not everyone in this book is someone you'd like to hang out with (personally I wouldn't cry a tear if Bean took a long walk off a short pier) but for the most part you're fond of these kids. Ben himself is a pretty swell guy. I don't think anyone's going to accuse Baker of failing to write a believable boy voice. Best of all, he's a can do kind of kid. He takes charge. His solution to the pickle problem is well nigh short of inspired, and a nice example of a protagonist using their special skills to problem solve. And though the true antagonist of the book is the principal, it's clear that his best friend Hector is a likable but lowly worm that serves as the emotional antagonist to our hero. You can't help but like the fact that Hector is such a stoolie/squealer that he will not only confess crimes he and Ben have committed but crimes they NOT committed as well. There is no better way to get a reader on your side than to tap into their sense of injustice and unfairness. It is a pity that the only girls in the group are the only people incapable of really good pranks. Or, rather, one is incapable of coming up with a good prank and the other is perfectly good but goes rogue with it.

Baker distinguishes nicely between pranks that merely annoy and pranks that upset and destroy. Undoubtedly there will be adults out there that worry that by reading this book kids are going to immediately go out and start putting soap in their own school's fountains/drinking fountains/what have you. Aside from the fact that most of the pranks in this book would be difficult to pull off (unless your kids have access to abandoned ball pits, I think you're pretty safe) the book distinguishes nicely between those pranks that do good and those that do harm. I'm sure there are adults who believe that there is no "good" prank in the world. Those are the folks who should probably steer clear of this one.

Pranking requires a certain set of requisite skills. You need to be smart enough to figure out what the pranks should be and how to make them work. You need to have the guts to pull them off, regardless of the consequences. And you need to know when you've gone too far. Include only the first two requirements and leave off the third and you've got yourself one heckuva fun book like *Pickle*. Celebrating the kind of anarchy only pranking can truly inspire, this is one of those books for kids that are truly FOR kids. Gatekeepers need not apply. Show one to a kiddo and watch the fun begin.

On shelves now.

Rogan says

It was not a great book. Not a lot happened. They just did pranks all around the school and were bad. Not a kid friendly book because it is encouraging being bad. Also, the pranks they do really aren't good.

Colby Sharp says

I am predicting this book to be a CYBILS MG finalist.

Barbara says

When sixth grader Ben Diaz fills his classroom with several donated pit balls as a prank, he decides it might be fun to do more of the same. Together, with four other classmates, he organizes the League of Pickle Makers as an extracurricular school club that even qualifies for funding, and under that name, the club's real

work is accomplished through the appropriately-named Prank and Trick Association. Because their work must be done anonymously, Ben and the others agree to exclude his best friend Hector, who is the grandson of the school principal, Mrs. Lebonsky. After all, he just can't keep a secret. Most of the pranks are harmless, but when one of the club members goes too far, all extracurricular clubs and activities are suspended until those responsible for the pranks are identified. This was lots of fun to read, with believable, imperfect characters and hints about their lives outside of school and the club.

Shanshad Whelan says

A lot of fun. I do feel like the author took a couple of ideas and pointers from Improv Everywhere or another group like it. In the end, this sort of felt like an updated take on the Gordon Korman MacDonald Hall books.

Heidi says

3.5 Stars

Kim Baker's debut, *Pickle*, is the type of middle grade book that invites the reader in, imparting special secrets and trusting them as part of an inner circle. It is creative, fun, never crosses that line into too cheesy, and yes, a little bit gross. Kids will love this book.

Pickle and the members of the League of Pickle Makers (aka the PTA—Prank and Trickster Association) will bring a little laughter to the lives of all it's readers (yes, even those over 20—as long as all of their humor hasn't leaked out). Ben, our main character, realizes that it's nice to kick back and have a little (mostly) harmless fun. Attending sixth grade at a middle school where the principal is not only strict and humorless, but also the grandmother and guardian of his best friend, Ben realizes that to continue the good life he's going to have to go underground. He recruits some classmates he feels are of like mind, founds the PTA, and even secures funding by officially registering the club as the League of Pickle Makers.

Pickle involves making new relationships, learning what lines shouldn't be crossed, and sticking by your friends. It also features two things that, quite frankly, there aren't enough of—a main character who is both male and a minority. Ben is of Mexican heritage, he speaks a mixture of Spanish and English at home, and his family runs the local Mexican restaurant. In fact, the entire League of Pickle Makers is a diverse group with Frank who is African American, Bean, who is Asian American, and Sierra and Oliver who are white. I really appreciate that this diversity was expressed through the illustrations, but that no deal was made of it in the text. Kids need to see that any character in the book could be diverse, not just as a token sidekick or in 'issue' books.

Of course, as one can imagine, the kids don't always make the best decisions as to what is and what is not a 'harmless' prank, and the adults don't always react with the same amount of humor. I really appreciated that in the end, none of the characters experienced 'The Great Reform'. The crabby and strict principal was still crabby and strict, and while she and the kids understood each other better, they maintained their rolls. Friendships were changed, because this is the time in life when those things happen, but at the same time it was fairly equitable all around.

I would be remiss if I didn't tip my hat to Tim Probert for his excellent illustrations in *Pickle*. They capture a sketchy scene and cagey looks perfectly, and definitely add to the humor of an already good story.

Pickle gives kids ideas of pranks they can do that are, more or less, harmless. The group decides early on never to do anything mean or hurtful, but to do things that will be fun (well, probably less fun for the poor janitor of Fountain Point Middle School). This book has a great spirit, and certainly has a place in classrooms, libraries, and home collections. Just be prepared for some interesting goings-on if you hand this to a child.

Here's the opening that I love. Follow the directions—they all work, and there is really a secret website for the PTA (Prank and Trick Association):

Can I trust you? I mean, to tell you this story I need to know that you can keep a couple of secrets. I'm already in a whole lot of trouble, and it's not just me. But I want to tell you everything that happened. Everything. I'll assume that you can keep the important stuff secret and not pass this book on to anyone older than twenty. I've been paying attention, and I'm pretty sure that's when a person's sense of humor starts leaking out. If somebody is that old, this isn't their kind of story, anyway.

I'm talking about the League of Pickle Makers. Can you think of a club a person would be less curious about? That's the point. Five of us meet on Thursdays, after school in the science lab. You'd expect somebody would think it was fishy that a group of kids are excited enough about making pickles to meet every week. On meeting days we take turns making a show out of carrying around some vinegar or a sack of cucumbers. We even have a website. Check it out—www.picklesforever.com. Click on the "Fizzy Pickle Soup" recipe, and then click on the word "simmer" down at the bottom. The password is "cheese."

Now you know we're not really an organization of picklers. Honestly, I don't even like pickles that much. Only a few people know how it started. Us—and if you think you can handle it—you.

I also want to point out that the character Bean's website—<http://catvsdude.com/> is also completely real! This was such a fantastic added touch to this book, just the type of thing that makes books an interactive, rather than an inactive, experience.

Ms. Yingling says

After Ben performs the epic prank of filling his school classroom up with the entire contents of a ball pit he gets from a local pizza parlor, he decides that he needs a group to help him pull off more pranks. His best friend, Hector, won't be any use, since his grandmother is the principal of their middle school. He enlists Frank and Oliver, since they seem like likely candidates for trouble, and Bean, since Frank won't join without her. They plan a birthday celebration for a new girl on her first day, then decide to become an official school group. As a cover, they pretend to be interested in making pickles for the school pioneer fair, and their teacher, Ms. Ruiz, gives them a lot of free reign as their advisor. Eventually, the new girl, Sienna, wants part of the action, which is okay with Ben, since he thinks she is cute. The group manages to pull off several fairly harmless pranks, like filling the school fountain with dish washing liquid and causing a panic at the local zoo while wearing animal costumes, but they save their final prank for the school pioneer fair. Ben doesn't agree with the prank, which ends rather disastrously, with all school activities being taken away as a

result. Ben and his group pull one more prank-- a protest to get school activities reinstated.

Strengths: This was a fairly funny book, and students will enjoy the pranks. Multicultural characters add depth (Ben's family runs a Mexican restaurant), and the illustrations by Tim Probert are perfect for middle school. Always can use funny books for middle school boys.

Weaknesses: The pranks really are rather destructive and need time-intensive clean up from middle school staff, but this doesn't seem to bother Ben and his friends. They absolutely ruin the pioneer fair and THEN complain that they don't have extracurricular activities? They are lucky they didn't get expelled! I found this facet of the book rather alarming-- I'm not big on lesson books, but if students are this destructive, I don't think it's even realistic for them to get away with it, even in fiction!

Tina Hoggatt says

Pickle is a delight, This first novel by Kim Baker follows a middle school group of friends as they create a prank club, under cover of a pickle making after-school club. Wise and funny, the story starts with Ben who plays a prank on impulse that starts off a series of events that threatens to get away from him and his fellow pranksters. This book is about friendship and family and in its gentle, engaging way models the society we actually live in: multicultural, complex, communal - without making a big hairy deal out of it. Kids will adore this book.

Becky says

Alright, what to say about this one?

When it started out, I was really "meh." The writing was very elementary. Not only was it not challenging to read, it basically offered itself caught, shot, and served on a platter. And not in a good, "this just flows so nicely" kind of way. More like a, "hey, there's a word longer than two syllables, let's throw it a parade!" kind of way. You're writing for children, give them something to chew on and stop spoon feeding them.

Okay, enough with the food references.

Once the story got going, things got better. The narrative started out very vague. It was in a hurry to get into the meat of the story (couldn't help it), which made for a bit of a weak start, but once things got rolling it became much more complex and detail oriented.

The story itself was fun, stressful at times, entertaining, and written well enough that, when required, suspension of disbelief went unnoticed. All the things children's books should be.

The characters were well done: very round, and very realistic.

I really appreciate little network of websites accompany the book! This is brilliant on so many levels. My favourite was the Cat Vs. Dude Tumblr (which I now follow), but the hidden PTA website was also excellent.

One of the features of the book I really appreciated was the idea of a "code of conduct." It never really got fleshed out in the book, which might actually have been for the best. Instead it was demonstrated through Seiarra's prank that ended up hurting other people. Then on the website the "club motto" thing is "Harmus Nonus, Amusus Allus," and the rules include "don't be mean. Tears equal the end of the prank." The point of the book was that life should and can be fun, and things shouldn't be taken too seriously, but fun should not be had at the expense of others. I liked this. It wasn't presented in a preachy way, but it was still a strong theme. One problem I had with the book was the role of adults, and the interactions the children had with them. This

went mostly for Ben's parents, who make him work at the restaurant after school. At the end of the book, Ben says he "had a talk" with his parents, and they agreed to ask him to work, rather than tell him all the time. This was an interesting little comment, because this dynamic was not presented as a real problem throughout the book. And what exactly did that "talk" look like? There was also the problem of Seiarra's (I don't think I'm spelling this right) dad, who was an absentee parent who sends his daughter money to make up for everything he misses in her life. I liked this, don't get me wrong. It made her easy to relate to, and help the reader understand her motivations. However it seemed like a big issue, which never was addressed (as opposed to Ben's issue with his parents, which seemed non-existent, and yet was addressed. Sort of.) Then there was the principle, but I actually really liked her. She was a great elementary-school villain. So! Final thoughts and recommendations: I liked it! I would definitely give it to a kid to read. It's something that is easily read alone, and is fun enough to keep the reader's attention the whole way through. Not likely to be the next big thing in the book world, but still a quick, fun read.

Anna says

Pickle: The (formerly) anonymous prank club of fountain point middle school / Kim Baker / 2012

Genre: fiction

Format: juvenile literature/ novel

Plot summary: Using a bogus name, the League of Picklemakers, sixth-grader Ben and three recruits start a prank-pulling club and receive funding from their middle school's PTA.

Considerations: mischievous behavior

Review citation: School Library Journal, vol 58

"The club members all have backstories that make them distinct characters; the adults get less attention. Probert's finely detailed, expressive illustrations depict the club's racially diverse makeup. Baker's debut novel shows promise and offers an enjoyable read."

Section source: School Library Journal

Recommended age: 8-12

Carissa says

The first thing you need to realize about pickle making is that it is serious business. Pickling has a long and illustrious history in the food preservation industry. Pssst! Are all of the grown-ups gone? They are? Great. Then we can let you in on a secret. The League of Pickle Makers is really a cover for the newest club at Fountain Point Middle School—the P.T.A. (Pranks and Trick Association). The club was started by me, Ben Ruiz and we only do pranks that are funny or fun and not mean. If you want more information about how we started our club, read Pickle by Kim Baker. We promise that you will laugh out loud. If this book doesn't make you laugh out loud, it might be because you're over the age of 20 and have lost your sense of humor. That happens to grown-ups sometimes. Ahem. In conclusion, for more information about the dynamics of pickling, please visit our website at www.picklesforever.com. Thank you for your attention.

note: this was a review i wrote for the library's website. For those of you who are children's librarians, you should know that i was SO impressed with this debut novel that I, upon finishing the book, promptly created

a brand new event series for my already crowded summer line-up. I'm calling it Pickles, Pranks and a Picnic Lunch. Kids bring a lunch and eat while I read a few chapters (yes, this sounds like ye ol' standard Lunch Bunch, but here's my favorite part) and then we craft a new practical joke each week to take home and try on our friends and family. want more details? contact me. want to steal the idea? be my guest!

Barb Middleton says

Pranksters at my high school made life exciting by doing stuff like plugging a stick up the ketchup dispenser so when the victim, such as myself, pushed down on the pump, the stick went sailing out like a blow dart spraying the victim with ketchup. First time it happened to me, I had to go home and change pants. When the ketchup dispenser was out for a lunch meal, I had to watch out for the blow dart prankster. When toilet paper draped the ten oak trees that sit in my parents' front yard, I thought it was pretty. My dad who is an architect was not happy, especially when an ice storm raged the next night freezing the toilet paper to the branches for 5 months as winter settled in the frigid northern city of Minneapolis. The flowing streamers from the first night looked like used toilet paper by then and it was definitely NOT pretty. But when does a prankster go too far? At our school it was when some students thought spraying the locker room with several fire extinguishers would be hilarious. Most pranks are funny and annoying but it seems that when damage is done to property or another person gets hurt by the caper the laughter stops.

This is just one of the many themes that Ben Diaz and his secret group of pranksters, The League of Pickle Makers, learn as they spice up school life with their shenanigans. On paper, the school club makes pickles which they plan to enter in the Pioneer Fair Days, but their true motive is to covertly pull pranks against everyone at school. The tomfoolery begins when Ben finds free goods online in the Classifieds. He can't resist filling his school classroom full of a bunch of stinky, used bouncy balls that the owner of the local Pizzeria wants to get rid of. Kids at school think this is so funny and exciting that Ben decides to form a club that's antics include dry ice in the bathrooms, Saran Wrap over the bathroom sinks, and more. The pickle club is having a hey-ho time until one of the members goes rogue causing damage to school property.

Students will love this book with its silly pranks, goofy characters, and friendship conflicts. Ben's best friend, Hector, just can't stand up to his grandma, the principal of their school. He's so afraid of her that when she accuses him of something he didn't do, he admits not only to the crime, but worse, he tells her Ben did it with him. When Hector wants to join the club, Ben questions his trustworthiness along with other members, and Hector is refused admittance, causing hurt in their friendship.

Ben's heritage is interweaved nicely throughout the story, particularly when the club looks into the diet of Mexican pioneers when they first came to their city. It is terrific fun seeing how the author creatively ties pickles into the plot with the students and adult characters. And I had to laugh at the reference to "The Joy of Pickling." My parents generation did a ton of canning, with pickles being one of the mainstays, and my mom loved her "Joy of Cooking" book. I even got two of those cookbooks as wedding presents it is so beloved by the older folks. Kids won't get that joke but who doesn't love a mixture of adult and kid humor in a book?

While the pacing clips along through the middle and end of the book, the start has too many subject pronouns that begin with "I" effecting sentence cadence. The last paragraph in the first chapter has nine sentences starting with "I." This is a little nitpicky on my part and most readers are not going to notice it enjoying a very likable main character whose pranks are fairly harmless. The goofy supporting characters held my interest and after a couple of chapters the sentences started to vary in rhythm and more themes were introduced adding nice tension to the development of the story.

The plot becomes more complex as the story progresses and Ben excludes his best friend, Hector, who wonders if he wants to remain friends with him. The students stand up for their First Amendment rights and the adults act authoritarian about the whole incident. I wanted this more hashed out but most readers are not going to care. The first person point of view can be tricky because it limits the view of the protagonist and sometimes I wanted more information from Ben about the supporting characters. Angry Sienna is struggling with her parents divorce and while I like that she fesses up and takes responsibility for her actions, the situation is not resolved. Also, I expected Hector to stand up to his grandma after he stood up for Ben. I wanted Hector to confront her about her bullishness and address her interference with his friendships and interrogating him to the point where he was confessing to crimes he didn't commit. But he doesn't. I thought the story would have been stronger if Hector's grandma showed some willingness to change in how she treated Hector and that she would try to be a better parent and administrator. In the end, she remains more one-dimensional and less interesting to me as the antagonist.

If you are like my dad who saw absolutely no humor in toilet paper hanging from the trees, then I recommend passing on this book. As a kid, I loved books where anarchy prevailed, the adults were idiots, the characters were funny, and exciting adventures oozed from the pages. This book delivers all that and more. I also loved to act out books with my best friend. Good thing this book wasn't around! We'd be dreaming up all sorts of mischief!

A great addition to your library.

Reading level: 5.7

Ashley says

bob

The Styling Librarian says

Pickle - The (Formerly) Anonymous PRANK CLUB of Fountain Point Middle School by Kim Baker, illustrated by Tim Probert - What a hilarious book where pranks get out of hand and just having fun becomes actions that impact numerous people in a negative light.
