



2009

### Crunch

Sandra L. Tidwell

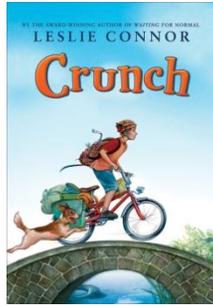
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Connor, Leslie. *Crunch*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2010. ISBN 9780061692291. \$16.99. 330 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Bicycles and bicycling--Juvenile fiction; Business enterprises--Juvenile fiction; Energy conservation--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

When a national fuel shortage occurs, the Bike Barn, the Marriss family business, suddenly has a lot more customers. The five children, ages 5-18, are feeling the "crunch." Mom and Dad, who went north for a vacation in Dad's big trucking rig, are stranded waiting for fuel to return to their East Coast home of Rocky Shores. Their nightly phone calls rally the children for the next day. With the shutdown of almost all public and private transportation, the highway near the Marriss home becomes the thoroughfare for walkers and bicyclers. Sons Dewey and Vince are running the bike business using cheat sheets which explain the most common problems and the eight rules of bike repair. These helps prove to be the answer for getting everything ready for their parents return. Later, Dewey notices something mysterious: Bike parts have disappeared from the Bike Barn, even though it is locked up at night. Dewey wants to blame their sneaky neighbor Spive, but it doesn't "feel" right. When he encounters the thief trying to get away, Dewey's quick thinking insures the thief's quick apprehension.

Although not specifically set in a time period, the economic situation, which sets the backdrop of this family-centered story, feels plausible. Writing from the perspective of 14-year-old Dewey, Connor presents not only a family, but a community of believable characters. The parents clearly believe in active parenting, even though they are separated from their children. They have established a close-knit family and have taught their children to respect each other and work together. Their absence gives the children opportunities to show their resilience and creativity as they figure out how to positively interact with their grouchy neighbor, purchase groceries and bike parts, transport the twins to daily camp, doctor injuries from home accidents, and mediate with customers who are upset with having to pay high prices for bike parts and to wait for their bikes to be fixed. The storyline and the way Connor weaves in the mysterious robberies are enjoyable. Although there are only a couple of instances in the book, it is saddening to see some profanity, even in the voice of the main character. Those words could have easily have been left out to make a totally wonderful read-aloud selection.

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