Spuds

Alison Canar

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Reviewer: Alison Canar;  
Reading Level: Preschool, Primary, Intermediate;  
Rating: Excellent;  
Genre: Picture books;  
Subject: Potatoes --Juvenile fiction; Country life --Juvenile fiction; Brothers and sisters --Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

It all begins when Ma leaves for her night shift. Maybelle, the oldest child, comes up with a scheme for the three children to help out their family. These days there doesn't seem to be much left over for the family, but their neighbor, Mr. Kenney, seems to have more in his fields than he can handle. Maybelle hauls her younger brothers to the potato field in the dark. They work for hours filling their sacks with "taters." Only when they arrive back home to examine their goods do they realize what they thought were taters are actually rocks! The children are ashamed to tell Mr. Kenney what they have done, but it turns out that he is grateful for their work. He invites them to come back next year to clear out rocks and take any leftover potatoes they might find. Back home, Ma cooks her family the best meal she can from their few potatoes, and the love they feel makes it all worthwhile.

Newbery Medal Winner Hesse is a master of using simple language to craft memorable stories. In *Spuds*, Hesse writes in a colloquial style which infuses her tale with character and realism. Watson's illustrations pull from a dark color palette to recreate the feeling of difficult country life. Meanwhile, light yellows and teal bring hope back into the piece. *Spuds* is an excellent way to introduce children to dialect and setting. Readers young and old will appreciate the message of family and community pulling together to make it through hard times.

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