



Picture books share positive problem-solving

‘The Power of One’ and ‘Second Banana’ come from Portland creatives

I believe January has been an unsettling month, following a deeply fractious 2020.

As a counterbalance to the tumult that prevails in the daily news, I’ve taken to indulging a few minutes every day in the solace of children’s picture books. The lively illustrations and minimalist stories convey joy and wisdom.

Two picture books — “The Power of One” and “Second Banana” — have been produced with the involvement of Portland creative folk.

Picture books are frequently a team effort between an author and an illustrator. In “Second Banana,” the text was written by Blair Thornburgh. The pictures come from Kate Berube, who is the Port-

This Week’s Book

‘Second Banana’ by Blair Thornburgh, illustrated by Kate Berube

Abrams Books — 32 pp — \$16.99

‘The Power of One’ by Trudy Ludwig, illustrated by Mike Curato

Knopf Publishing — 40 pp — \$17.99

land-based half of this endeavor.

The story focuses on a young, curly-haired girl whose class is putting on the annual “Food Is Fun Healthy Eating Good Nutrition Pageant.” That’s a mouthful right there.

This production is a class highlight because each student gets to wear a distinctive fruit or vegetable costume and have a speaking part. But this year, when

it turns out that there are more students than speaking parts, the teacher solves the problem by getting an additional banana costume.

Both our curly-haired girl and another student have been assigned the banana role and a banana costume. They’ve been told that they will divide up the banana line. Our heroine gets the end of the sentence: “has potassium, too.” So she is, in effect, the second banana.

While this is a crushing disappointment to the curly-headed girl, it turns out that the first banana has a different but equally unenthusiastic reaction. When the two bananas have a chance to talk it over, they figure out a solution that pleases everyone.

Using ink, paint and colored pencil, Berube has devised appealing characters that have a hint of the qualities found in the late, great Maurice Sendak’s work. The illustrations are a cheery addition to this

story about creative problem-solving.

“The Power of One” was written by Portland author Trudy Ludwig, who has built a body of work around anti-bullying themes. The lush mixed media illustrations that accompany her text were created by Mike Curato.

Ludwig crafts a thoughtful demonstration around the power that everyone has to make a difference. While we sometimes may feel insignificant, Ludwig suggests we think about the strength that one friend can provide with a smile, apology or hug.

Every nurturing act can initiate a positive chain reaction — just imagine if everyone were to take that message to heart.

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