



## Cranky Franky: The Selfish Shellfish

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**Joseph Penner**

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*A grumpy crab learns an important lesson about sharing in the jovial picture book Cranky Franky.*

In Michelle Chu and Joseph Penner's charming picture book *Cranky Franky*, a hermit crab learns the meanings of sharing, friendship, and gratitude.

Grumpy Frank—who, “like all hermit crabs, [needs] to find shells for his protection”—collects all of the available seashells where he lives. He gathers them in his shopping cart and accumulates large piles, determined to keep them all for himself. When another hermit crab asks Frank for a shell because his own is broken and none are available, Frank refuses. His fellow hermit crabs in Hermitville start calling him Cranky Franky for being selfish and mean, and he winds up all alone. In time, he learns important lessons about sharing and about how being selfish and angry is a lonely choice.

With straightforward prose and animated artwork, this is a playful story that leans into its imagery. Natural transitions are used to create suspense, as when Frank discovers a new town set apart in glowing sunlight while other settings lie in shadow; intrigued, he decides to visit it. Information about hermit crabs is woven in, too, including about how their shells need to be replaced.

Frank is an endearing, complex antihero despite his moodiness. A loner who lives outside of town, he shouts at other crabs, but there are also depictions of his sadness: His eyes are downcast; he eats alone. While his tenacity about collecting shells alienates him early on, it works to his advantage later in the story. Indeed, his mindset shift arrives at just the right time: He faces a personal hardship and realizes that he, too, needs help sometimes.

Vibrant artwork complements the prose, with details including bandages on broken hermit crab shells, underwater debris, and overturned sand buckets. The colorful hermit crabs appear in bright purple, blue, yellow, and green seashells of different sizes. The underwater scenes feature seaweed, fish, textured sand, and subtle white bubbles. The illustrations of Frank are consistent and reinforce his irritability: His eyebrows are thick and black, and he has pinpoint eye slits. These qualities distinguish him from the other hermit crabs, who have thinner eyebrows and rounded eyes. Even Frank's shell is drab compared to the rainbow colors of the other crabs.

*Cranky Franky* is a timeless picture book in which a crab learns the lesson that nothing good comes from being selfish. Here, kindness and gratitude save the day.

KATY KEFFER (October 9, 2024)

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