

Mrs. Spring's Garden: Critter Collection

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(32pp)

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Charismatic insects join forces to defend their home in Mrs. Spring's Garden, a spirited picture book that celebrates cooperation and biodiversity.

In Carole P. Roman's charming picture book *Mrs. Spring's Garden*, a snail and an earthworm gather their friends to confront the potential destruction of their homes.

The creatures in Mrs. Spring's garden argue about which of them the garden couldn't live without. The earthworm churns the dirt, the snail cleans up decaying leaves, and the bees pollinate the flowers. But when a gardener enters who is careless with his tools, the garden's inhabitants work together to protect each other. They learn that every creature's role serves a pivotal purpose in the success of the garden.

The snail and the earthworm's argument escalates from a minor disagreement to a community-wide brawl because of momentary rudeness and lack of respect. As tension builds, the peacemaker butterfly's concern grows, making the wisdom she shares at the peak of the debate all the more inspiring and the populace's brave defense of their ecosystem all the more cathartic. Indeed, the insects' lively conversations convey their strong feelings of frustration, selfishness, and compassion well.

The illustrations highlight the insects' dynamic facial expressions and body language, as when a bee hollers "Buzz off!" with angled eyebrows. Its wings have jagged lines that indicate vibration. And the earthworm's sullen, empathetic eyes when he realizes that the snail may be injured by the gardener's tools are complemented by the sparkles that surround the dazzling butterfly when she offers to distract the intruder with her wings. The gardener's swift movements convey true danger in an entertaining, comic-style action sequence. The insects' cute faces and their environment's ample flora—shown in various shades of muted green, yellow, and orange—have a brightening effect.

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AIMEE JODOIN (May 11, 2023)

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