



Wading Through Peanut Butter

Pamela Curtis Swallow

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Determined to show his fifth-grade class how cool he is, Bently Barker gets off on the wrong foot when the toughest seventh grader in the school begins bullying him and he is asked to feed the teacher's pet octopus.

Wading Through Peanut Butter Details

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Author : Pamela Curtis Swallow

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From Reader Review Wading Through Peanut Butter for online ebook

Josiah says

Pamela Curtis Swallow had a decent run in the 1980s, '90s, and 2000s as a children's author. She wasn't enormously popular, but her middle-grade fiction was simple and sincere with just the right amount of humor. *Wading Through Peanut Butter*, which debuted in 1993, follows Bently Barker's first days in fifth grade. Bently isn't special in any obvious way, and he wants to change that this year by accomplishing great things and impressing his teacher and classmates. He knows his teacher will be Mrs. Evans, who taught Bently's older sister Colleen two years ago and showed fondness for him back then. Bently won't mind if Maureen Hiffard ignores him—she's an annoying girl—but he hopes Lisa Rogers likes the new goal-oriented version of himself. With his old friends Howard and Louie, Bently is prepared to brave the jungles of upper elementary school. This should be his year.

But fifth grade doesn't proceed as planned. Mrs. Evans moved away over summer, leaving a new guy named Mr. Corby to teach her class. He's friendly, but it's an adjustment Bently hadn't calculated for. Bently is assigned to feed Archie, the class's pet octopus, a task he accepts fearfully. He's never supplied food for a sea monster. Maureen is irksome as ever, pestering the boys about this and that, which causes Bently to make the mistake of insulting the biggest kid in seventh grade behind his back. Uh-oh...what if Maureen reports to Anthony Magliari what Bently said about him? He'd bully Bently without mercy. As Bently tries to refocus on the plan he had going into the year, Mr. Corby encourages the class to write out goals for themselves to pursue in fifth grade. One goal is mentoring kids in younger grades; they look up to the fifth-graders, and some could use their help studying and learning to fit in with peers. Bently can't control whether Maureen snitches on him to Anthony, but he can help a kid who's floundering in school. That would be a noble goal.

School holds a few surprises as the days turn to weeks. Anthony is paying attention to Bently, but not for the reason he feared. The older kid isn't planning to beat him up (yet), but he does want something. If Bently delivers, he won't have to worry about getting bullied because he uttered an ill-advised insult. Bently is paired for the mentorship program with Leon, a first-grader, but tutoring him requires patience. Leon's focus is all over the place, and Bently will have to streamline his teaching techniques to be effective. Between dodging Anthony, struggling to help Leon, and dealing with Maureen and his own sister, Colleen, Bently has his hands full. Fifth grade is more stressful than he expected, but he's not as far from his goals as he thinks. Bently is progressing toward being a more thoughtful, interesting kid, and it's hard to hope for more than that. Fifth grade might be his year after all.

This book didn't bowl me over, but it's a sweet, unsentimental story that deserves to be read by kids figuring out life as preadolescents. Fifth grade is a cavalcade of responsibilities, personal drama, and uncomfortable new feelings bubbling up, and keeping pace in school and at home is harrowing. There's a lot of stickiness to wade through, and not all of it is as savory as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Fifth grade is a test of character, and you're bound to be an improved person on the other side of it if you do your best and learn to adapt. I like *Wading Through Peanut Butter*, and would almost consider rating it two and a half stars. I enjoyed the time with Bently, his friends, and even his adversaries. I hope to visit again.
