

to tell a story, but it is really a dialogue in which Mary's father asks questions and Mary tries to answer. Mary must first decipher what her father classifies as useful and then find suitable examples of the tree's usefulness. The result is that her search is not entirely her own. Perhaps if she had supplied ten uses for the tree then concluded that all ten relate to a living tree, as she first suggested, she would have had a real victory.

Still, by articulating the contributions of the tree to Mary's family, the book shows the reciprocal relationship between the human and natural worlds. Children to whom this book is read will probably eagerly contribute more than ten reasons why trees are valuable. As well as encouraging discussion, the book will evoke a feeling of community for a young audience. Mary takes emotional possession of the apple tree, demonstrating that everyone has a responsibility for the environment. That the tree is an old one strikes another emotional chord, as it exists in the child's familiar position of dependence on the adult world.

The composition of the cartoon illustrations is simple and supports the narrative. Decorative motifs spill from the picture page to float among the text. Children will be able to locate interesting details in the pictures and will appreciate their overall appealing vivacity.

The story's language and style belong to the oral tradition. Despite some grammatical errors, the book moves quickly, has good continuity, and conveys information persuasively. It does tend, however, to use verbal and visual stereotypes. The father mows the lawn and makes the decisions. The mother speaks in trailing sentences, mops the floor, and accepts the decisions. The little boy plays with trucks. The little girl helps cook and struggles to please the male authority figure. The illustrations also depict a thoroughly traditional, idealized house with a large, pleasant yard complete with white-picket fence.

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INSTRUCTION AND DELIGHT

Bubblemania. Sheila Dalton. Illus. Bob Beeson. Orca Books, 1992. 32 pp., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-920501-75-3; **Effie.** Beverley Allinson. Illus. Barbara Reid. Summerhill Press, 1990. Unpag., \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920197-72-8; **When Jeremiah found Mrs. Ming.** Sharon Jennings. Illus. Mireille Levert. Annick Press, 1992. Unpag., \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-237-8; **Mrs. Mortiffee's mouse.** Linda Hendry. Alligator Press, 1992. 32 pp., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223755-5.

I have recently read four picture books with my favourite three-year-old, and this review indicates his and my critical opinions. The books range, with varying success, between the two poles of instruction and delight; the most readable offer both in their exploration of relationships.

The book which ranked lowest for both my three-year-old and myself was *Bubblemania*, which teaches counting as David captures “5 cats with lashing tails, 6 toys that were for sale” in his gigantic bubble. This is an unsuccessful appeal to the sense of the ridiculous, contrary to the hopes of the press release: neither of our imaginations was captured by the growing collection in the bubble, nor by the climax when David uses the safety pin anchoring his pants to burst the bubble—as the pants and everything else fall down, both of us were glad it was over. The randomness of the dissimilar objects is forced, and the partially shown items in the crowded bubble seem to clamour for their own space. Likewise the rhymes clamour, but in another sense—this is not the book to introduce your child to the cadences of either rhythmic or rhyming language. The best part of the book, from my perspective, was the recipe for bubble mix on the last page.

My son’s favourite shows precisely how a book *can* get a point across without losing its readership or its delight. *Effie* is the story of an ant whose voice is too loud for other ants and similarly sized creatures, none of whom will listen to her. Her differentness, however, is precisely what saves the ant colony from the feet of an elephant, and makes a new friend for herself as well as for other members of her community. The interest and fascination both Effie and her elephant friend show in each other as they learn about someone very different from themselves is both gentle and compelling: “And for days and weeks and months after, they met to talk of things large and small.” There is a story here, as well as a skillfully communicated point. The plasticine art is equally skillful and compelling: the texture, the three dimensions, the colour and detail in the close-ups of insects display great technical sophistication, and make Effie and her world very real. I found some of the illustrations a little too ready to jump off the page, while my son was mesmerized.



The nature of relationships, the basis of the “instruction” in *Effie*, is explored in the two other picture books we read. In my favourite, *When Jeremiah found Mrs. Ming*, the second in a series of three, Jeremiah’s friend Mrs. Ming offers to read to him when he complains that he can’t think of one thing to do, while he prefers to help her work. At last Mrs. Ming can’t think of a thing to do, and Jeremiah suggests that they read a story together. The simplicity and repetition of the text’s language—“Mrs. Ming was ... sweeping the walk ... folding the laundry ... tinkering with the car ... when Jeremiah found her”—are balanced and supported by the warm and whimsical illustrations of the clearly eccentric Mrs. Ming’s person and home. The time

spent discovering the secrets on each page is well rewarded with delight. The pale sepia backgrounds and watercolour illustrations suggest the enchanted, affectionate setting which Mrs. Ming's and Jeremiah's friendship creates.

The fourth book, *Mrs. Mortifee's mouse*, again presents an interesting, eccentric woman, this time in an unusual relationship with the mouse in her house. On each day of the week she finds the mouse in yet another spot and after ingenious attempts to trap him, brings home a lion who prefers to play with rather than to catch the mouse. Mrs. Mortifee capitulates, and the three become a happy household. I liked Mrs. Mortifee, her bizarre and comfortable wardrobe, and her well-equipped workbench, but I couldn't help feeling that the illustrations pushed the book over the edge into the "cute" category, or what adults think children like. The busyness and the pretty pastels of the illustrations remind me of a certain kind of greeting card, designed to inspire feelings of hazy warmth and nostalgia of a child's world much improved by memory—again, geared to adults, as are Mrs. Mortifee's obvious independence and abilities. This book is all directed outward. *When Jeremiah found Mrs. Ming and Effie*, on the other hand, seem almost to forget their audience in the concentration on the book's internal integrity, just as the relationships of the two pairs succeed because each pays genuine and generous attention to the other—the ideal of any relationship in a child's world. This concentrated attention is, of course, what captures both reader and listener; the charm lies in its happening seemingly accidentally.

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INVENTIVE THEMES USING ANIMALS AS MAIN PROTAGONISTS

Cyril the seagull. Patricia Lines. Illus. Kim LaFave. Harbour Publishing, Nightwood Editions, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88971-1; **Rockanimals.** Vlasta van Kampen. Illus. Irene C. Eugen. Scholastic, 1991, 40 pp., \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-73660-4; **The Hippos' wedding.** Lindsay Grater, Lester Publishing, 1991, 32 pp., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-89555-12-4.

The striking feature about these picture books is just how well the main protagonists work as animals faced with human situations. Children five to eight years of age should enjoy them.

Cyril the seagull, a first picture book for Patricia Lines, is a well-paced story written in a traditional way about a seagull who discovers, to his horror, that he suffers from sea-sickness. Not only does he endure teasings from his relatives, but also he endures pangs of hunger when, because of high waves, he is unable to scavenge for food, or receive scraps from the fisherman Joe in his ferry boat. One day, however, a fog engulfs the ocean and the land, and Joe's ferry threatens to crash on the rocks. The foghorn on the lighthouse fails to sound out the