

ONE LOSER, ONE WINNER

Little Water and the gift of the animals. C.J. Taylor. Tundra Books, 1992. 24 pp., \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-285-9; **Hide and sneak.** Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak. Illus. Vladyana Krykorka. Annick Press, 1992. 32 pp., \$14.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-229-7, 1-55037-228-9.

These books offer a significant contrast, and not only because one deals with native Indians and one with Inuit experience. The quickest way to pinpoint the difference is to say that *Little Water and the gift of the animals* is the kind of book parents or librarians might choose, and *Hide and sneak* is the book kids would choose for themselves. Amazingly and sadly, books like *Little Water*, best characterized as “these primitive children of the forest” titles, are still being produced—in this case even by a Mohawk author. No doubt they sell well to adults still caught in the web of *their* childhood conditioning—seeing Native peoples condescendingly through a fuzzy historical-environmental haze. In this instance we are told the story of a young man named Little Water who, like Rex Harrison, talks to the animals and from them gets useful advice on how to deal with a vaguely defined tribal malaise. Little Water’s story offers no sense of historical context, but we are told in an afterword that “the Little Water Society still exists...showing us the relevancy of the legend to this day,” leaving young readers to assume that Native peoples live today as they did centuries ago. On the plus side, Taylor’s illustrations are dramatic, rich in colour, and recreate eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Indian life with some escapist appeal for contemporary urban children.

Hide and sneak, on the other hand, is a triumph. The appeal is partly that of the “other,” the distancing of place (the north) and Inuit culture, and partly based on responses to the protagonist, Allashua, a credible, open, imaginative and even slightly rebellious pre-teenager. The story is protagonist-centred, and incorporates Inuit cultural myths and artifacts (Ijiraqs and inuksugaqs) as they survive in contemporary life. The illustrations are realistic, with Allashua’s parents wearing blue jeans and living in a shack tent, for example, and attractive, with the subtle beauty of the barrens in summer carefully rendered. And Allashua’s adventures are *real*, even though they involve contact with the Ijiraq (an Inuit equivalent of leprechauns). Her feisty coping with capture by one of the “little people” and her subsequent escape and return home with the help of an inuksugaq, are both compelling and culturally educating. For Allashua and for us the Ijiraq comes alive, yet like the ptarmigan in summer in the illustrations, is ultimately and teasingly elusive.

The final score: *Little Water and the gift of the animals*: B-O-R-I-N-G. *Hide and Sneak*: Exciting and mind-stretching—rush out to buy it.

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