

plenty of dialogue and giving us the perspectives of both Aung Kyaing and Narathu. The author also hints at aspects of Thingyan, the Water Festival marking the Burmese New Year which is still celebrated today. A note at the end provides more information.

Wang Kui's vivid illustrations, with their energetic, swirling shapes and bright colours, are a perfect match for the text. Young readers will notice the numerous exotic birds that swoop and strut across the pages, and will particularly enjoy spotting the pair of fighting cocks that recurs throughout, perhaps symbolizing the enmity between Narathu and Aung Kyaing. Art and text together provide a taste of ancient Asia in an accessible form.

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Laughing between the Lines

Cold Night, Brittle Light. Richard Thompson. Illus. Henry Fernandes. Orca Books, 1994. 32 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-009-6. ***Bats about Baseball***. Jean Little and Claire Mackay. Illus. Kim LaFave. Penguin, 1995. 32 pp. \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-85270-8.

Cold Night, Brittle Light is a story in which a great deal happens; it is in fact seven stories framed by the main narrative. This complex structure, which moves between present events and flashbacks to past events, may prove confusing to younger readers. The text is also relatively long. Several of the mini-stories could have been expanded into books of their own. Despite this, the main narrative is compelling enough to make the structure work for older children. They will enjoy the zany humour of grandpa's outrageous tales about Canadian cold temperatures.

The story has a deliberately folksy feel and abounds in phrases such as "right full" and "darned if." Grandpa is a member of a traditional, extended family in which Mom bakes cookies, Dad works out, and Grandma knits. Cultural myths of wise elder storytellers, and of the "great white north," are invoked. This book should be a welcome addition in classrooms, to use with units on climate, to catalyse creative writing and oral narrative — or simply to share and laugh over.

Bats about Baseball, in contrast, is a story in which very little actually happens. Rather than a developed storyline, the book consists of puns and jokes shared between a grandmother and grandson. The book has a breezy, modern feel and the illustrator has risen admirably to the challenge of a story situated between an easy chair and a television set.

The authors have avoided gender stereotypes by casting an older female in the role of baseball fan. Her grandson seeks to distract her from the

game with a series of imaginative ideas of what he could be when he grows up.

This book might be meaningless for readers who are not initiates of baseball culture because it abounds in technical terms. The prose relies heavily on adult interpretation, not only for the baseball words but for those such as *kleptomaniac*, *ornithologist* and *paleontologist*. The puns cannot be explained until the words have been explained; this book could take an adult and child some time to work through. But those who do will certainly expand their vocabulary. However, some children may not feel it's worth the effort if all they want is an entertaining story.

Both books convey a sense of the fun and complexity of our language, and of the possibilities inherent in it. *Cold Night, Brittle Light* is sure to elicit chuckles. Because *Bats about Baseball* requires more sophistication, it may not work as well.

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Sometimes Pictures Are Better Than Words

I Heard My Mother Call My Name. Nancy Hundal. Illus. Laura Fernandez. HarperCollins, 1994, 1990. Unpag. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-647496-9. *November Boots.* Nancy Hundal. Illus. Marilyn Mets. HarperCollins, 1993. Unpag. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223893-4. *Moonsnail Song.* Sheryl McFarlane. Illus. Sheena Lott. Orca, 1994. Unpag. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55143-008-8.

Dreamy, poetic picture books are great bedtime reading for young children. They can work to stretch the youngsters' imaginations, yet soothe them to sleep by giving busy little minds something gentle to think about. *I Heard My Mother Call My Name*, *November Boots*, and *Moonsnail Song* all make good bedtime reading, but even better bedtime viewing.

The stories of all three books are very simple and direct. *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* is about a child lingering on the front porch at twilight, watching his or her street turn from day to night while mother calls. *November Boots* is about a little boy's frustrated search for puddles in which to try his new boots. Both are told from the child's point of view, in the first person and in the present tense. *Moonsnail Song* is about a young girl who daydreams about the seashore, and what she could find there, as she goes through her day. It is told in the third person by an omniscient narrator, again present tense. There is only a little dialogue in *November Boots*, none in the others, and all three focus on the thoughts of their protagonists.

The language used in all three books is lyrical and evocative of images rather than emotions or situations, and there is no superfluity of words in any of them; every word is precisely placed. In fact, they are so precisely placed that they constitute the major flaw of both Hundal books; adult words and turns of phrase are placed in a child's mouth, where they are unlikely to be. Sentences