

### Making New Friends: How Weird becomes Wonderful

*Sleepover Zoo*. Brenda Kearns. Illus. Wesley Lowe. Scholastic, 1998. 80 pp. \$4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-12443-9. *Worm Pie*. Beverly Scudamore. Illus. Susan Gardos. Scholastic, 1997. 80 pp. \$4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-24978-9.

New schools, new teachers, and new friends are favourite topics for both writers and readers of children's books. New relationships challenge children's assumptions about the world and themselves, providing opportunities for positive social development and emotional growth. As children cope with the rapid day-to-day changes characteristic of growing relationships, they learn to empathize with others and to identify their own fears and prejudices. Often, they discover that what they thought was weird is wonderful. These two titles examine the dynamics of new friendships from opposite yet complementary viewpoints.

*Sleepover Zoo* by Brenda Kearns tackles the problem of being the new girl at school. Toni's anxious desire to make a good impression on the most popular girl and Leona's corresponding disdain spark the plot into action, and what action! From ice-walking and tipping over tables to waving the toilet brush at an aggressive goose, readers will love the non-stop action as Toni prepares for Leona's visit to her house. Although most of the activity is clearly intended to amuse, it is nicely balanced with the quieter and purposeful pursuit of caring for convalescent wild birds. Since Toni's animal-loving parents run a bird care centre in their house, solid information on bird care and behaviour is conveyed in a context that children will relate to, as Toni shares in the bird care chores. Toni's worries about what Leona will think of her weird house and family are thrown into high relief by the unpredictable shenanigans of the family's pet dog, fish, kitten, and parrot, not to mention a runaway snake. Leona's visit to this zoo lurches from one hilarious disaster to another at an increasingly madcap pace that will have readers laughing out loud, and maybe even wiping a tear as both girls learn to appreciate the uniqueness of Toni's home.

In *Worm Pie*, Beverly Scudamore looks at newness from the opposite viewpoint. Tara tends to see anything new and different as suspect, including her geeky new substitute teacher and the Vietnamese food her best friend, Tam, brings for lunches. Like most people, Tara fails to see her own idiosyncrasies as weird. When her adoption of a pet worm has positive and negative effects in her relationships with friends and teacher, she learns to examine her assumptions about others a little more critically. I felt that the first-person narration was handled with thorough competence: Tara's thoughts and her observation of events are seamlessly interwoven and at no point did the narrative run aground. For this reason alone, this book might win over young readers who dislike first-person narration, but they will also enjoy the realistic dialogue and school-centred settings. Tara's ultimate acceptance of Tam's strange food and her re-evaluation of Mr. Stanley as "cool" present a positive model for children in similar situations, and the worm pie recipe provides not only a concrete symbol of the theme, but is also a perfect home or group activity with which to conclude a study of this book.

These Shooting Star books of about 8000 words each are quick reads, designed for ages seven to nine. They have large type, short chapters with mild cliffhanger endings, and deftly-drawn characters who talk and act like children today. The positive spin on dealing with newness is reinforced with humour, gentle

in the latter book and more energetic in the former. Soft line-and-wash illustrations at chapter headings and on several full pages add the visual appeal that is still important for the targeted age group.

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*Catherine Simpson's second picture book, **Sailor: The Hangashore Newfoundland Dog**, was recently published by Tuckamore Books. She lives with her husband and son in Lewisporte, Newfoundland.*

### Above the Clouds

*High Flight: A Story of World War II.* Linda Granfield. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Tundra, 1999. 32 pp. \$18.99. ISBN 0-88776-469-X.

"High Flight" is by far and away the most recognized aviation poem ever written. Only John Pudney's "For Johnny" approaches it in notoriety, and Pudney was an established poet by the time he penned his verse. Indeed, part of the appeal of "High Flight" lies in the fact that John Gillespie Magee was a mere boy of nineteen when he wrote it. That such a young soul could conjure up such timeless phrases fills us with wonder.

In this biography, it would have been easy for Linda Granfield to lapse into hero worship of Magee. Born in Shanghai, educated at Rugby School, comfortable in New England high society, enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force at age eighteen — this is the stuff of romance. Happily, Granfield resists the temptation to



*Illustration by Michael Martchenko  
from High Flight*