

## Mini-Reviews

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*The Twelve Tales of Christmas*. Margot Sexton. Illus. Janis Jones. Borealis Press, 1994. 54 pp. \$25.95 paper. ISBN 0-88887-135-X.

*The Twelve Tales of Christmas* is a collection of short Christmas stories aimed at readers from seven to ten years old. The stories are amusing, short, and the vocabulary age appropriate.

Sexton has taken some old stories and given them a new touch. "A gift of worth" tells of young Michael who desperately wants to help his Grandmother—especially by shovelling the snow from her driveway—but who always arrives too late. He finds the perfect Christmas gift for her, but cannot afford it without making a sacrifice. These stories have a message: that Christmas is more than just presents, the tree, lights and singing from "The little bear who found Christmas." However, at one point Santa and Father Time have a fireside chat over a glass of brandy, perhaps not the most appropriate image for this age of reader.

The illustrations are bright and the format of the book is eye-catching—on the first page of every story the title appears in big, bold print with the text of the story on the left side of the page and an accompanying illustration on the right. On the whole, *The Twelve Tales of Christmas* is a light, fun book, sure to bring a smile to the reader, and invite discussion concerning the content.

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*Grandpa*. Debbie Bailey. Photos Susan Huszar. Annick Press, 1994 (Talk-about books). Unpag. \$4.95 board. ISBN 1-55037-967-4. *Grandma*. Debbie Bailey. Photos Susan Huszar. Annick Press, 1994 (Talk-about books). Unpag. \$4.95 board. ISBN 1-55037-966-6.

For some people, *Grandma* and *Grandpa* may hold a lot of appeal. For this reader, however, these board books fall short of their potential to be consistently interesting.

To their credit, the photos in *Grandpa* and *Grandma* are rich in cultural diversity. This aspect of the pictures offers children and adults alike a chance to explore their connectedness to others through their shared affection for a grandparent. The inclusion of a grandfather in a wheelchair has a similar unifying effect.

Nowhere in these books are the familial bonds better expressed than in the cover photos. These are truly compelling. Unfortunately, many of the other pictures do not have the same award-winning quality. This makes the viewing experience reminiscent of looking through a family photo album where you do not know the subjects: an activity which can be quite dull unless the pictures are outstanding. *Grandma* and *Grandpa* would be more stimulating if all of the photos were memorable.

*Baby's Hands*. Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Linda Hendry. Annick Press, 1996. Unpag. \$4.95. ISBN 1-55037-470-2. *Baby's Feet*. Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Linda Hendry. Annick Press, 1996. Unpag. \$4.95 board. ISBN 1-55037-471-0.

*Baby's Hands* and *Baby's Feet* each have a combination of qualities which make them excellent first books.

During a child's first year, his or her hands and feet are a source of endless amusement. This means that the subject matter is of great interest to the child who is in the earliest stages of language development. The artwork successfully captures a baby's attention as well. The faces are prominent, the details can be easily distinguished, and there is plenty of bright pastel colour. Older children will also enjoy the warm and welcoming illustrations.

A beckoning slide, a large wading pool, and a sandcastle at the beach are just a few of the attractions. Within these pages, baby is always in the company of family and/or friends unless he is sleeping snuggled with his teddy bear. Mom and dad share the parenting, and, although mom cooks breakfast, dad does the dishes. Joining in on most of the fun is the friendly family cat.

*Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. Robin Muller. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1993. 28 pp. \$6.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-24667-4.

I doubt that many people will be able to resist singing the stanzas which are the song, Row, Row, Row Your Boat. The singing in turn, brings intuitive understanding to one of the main themes present: the power of music. While the rhymes and illustrations will hold the attention of even the very young, school age children will be motivated to learn to read such big words as "platypus" and "crocodile." This latter age group will also get more out of the often complex illustrations. This book is best shared among loved ones since the reader is likely to sing, and many vocalists require a tolerant audience. Either way, the effects are bound to leave you feeling cheerful.

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*The Amazing Milk Book*. Catherine Ross and Susan Wallace. Illus. Linda Hendry. Kids Can Press Ltd., 1991. 80 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-020-2.

Another in the series of information books from the publisher which has made a name for itself in this area, *The Amazing Milk Book* is a very enjoyable and enlightening read. Because the subject is approached from so many angles, the information encompasses many disciplines. Physics and chemistry figure strongly as the authors discuss the physical makeup of milk, but readers will also find fascinating information on history, language, cultural traditions, nutrition, zoology, and both modern and more primitive technology, all stemming from the study of milk. Thrown in throughout the text are recipes, crafts and even riddles. Linda Hendry's illustrations help to keep the mood light while still giving helpful visual information. With its well organized chapters, in-