

The simple wording, the rhyming and the standard alphabet formula, "A is for . . .", make this book a treat for very young children and for beginning readers aged three to six.

The Great Canadian Alphabet Book also presents an expensive format. It is a large, hardcover book suitable for children from five to eight years old.

The most impressive feature of this alphabet book is its wealth of information. Each letter is illustrated and annotated in detail with reference to one distinctly Canadian item. These items include natural phenomena, historical events, geographical forms and famous people. The inside covers contain a map of Canada in which the provinces and the places mentioned in the book are shown.

The text for each of the letters includes a wide variety of presentations: poetry, riddles, mirror writing, fill-in-the-blanks, postcards and French phrases are all used to capture the attention and imagination of young readers.

The illustrator has made the book attractive. The pictures are brightly coloured, interesting and artistically presented.

Unfortunately not even this good Canadian alphabet book has the magic combination of qualities that will capture the attention and feed the imagination of the television generation of young children.

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Children's perspective on Ottawa

FRANK M. TIERNEY

History Mystery: The Ottawa Book, Anne Wyse and Alex Wyse. Illus. by Peggy Steele. Herzig Sommerville, 1981. 131 pp. \$10.00 paper. ISBN 09690827-0-3.

This uniquely designed, illustrated, and constructed book is the result of the enthusiastic creation of students from grades three and four under the guidance of two award-winning children's story writers, Anne and Alex Wyse. A refreshing, informative, historical, and contemporary guide and story of Ottawa has evolved; it is of serious interest for visitors to the city of all ages, for elementary and high school teachers, and for professors of children's literature courses at universities — the latter because of its interesting method of communication, its creative process, and its special contribution as an unique Canadian book.

The idea was conceived by Anne and Alex Wyse when they arrived in Ottawa in 1972. They had already created two international award-winning children's books — now collectors's items — *Alphabet Book* (1969), and *The One to Fifty Book* (1973), both published by University of Toronto Press. Having worked closely with children during these creations, they were sensitive to children's needs in communication. Among the many questions asked by children who want to know about their capital city from a distance, or when visiting it, are these: "What is a capital? How did Ottawa get to be the capital? Why does that car have a flag on it? What do you mean, this is Parliament? What does it do? Why do the members bang on their desks? What's a bill? What's an M.P.? What's a P.M.? What's the mace for?" There is no other book available anywhere that answers these and other questions about Ottawa's history or presents them in such an interesting manner for children.

The story of the capital flows smoothly through maps, visits to Parliament, museums, old Sparks Street, Rideau Falls, and Rideau Canal, employing a balance of text — much of it in rhymes and chants — and illustrations created by the children.

Children's curiosity about the history of Ottawa is satisfied and enhanced by the succinct presentation of the story of settlement and growth of the area. From its beginnings with the Iroquoian and Algonkin Indians, through fur trading days, travel on the Ottawa by explorers, missionaries, Coureurs de Bois, and soldiers, up to the founding of Hull by Philemon Wright, and the work of Colonel By, the story leads to 1867 and Confederation, and through to the present.

There are definitions — of Parliament and its procedures, for example; lists of Governors General and Prime Ministers; word searches, word clues, and exciting innovative educational games.

The material is interesting in its own right. But the method of presentation is a special delight. This is partly because the children who created it speak in a familiar voice and tone to other children and partly because of the tasteful guidance of Anne and Alex Wyse. Here are the coordinators' comments about the process:

We proceeded as follows:

1. From many children's type font designs we chose the one here in the book.
2. A printer printed that font up in pads.
3. The letters were cut out and put into labelled drawers.
4. From the letters, as writers wrote the text from trip experiences and research from books, words and sentences were laid out on a table.
5. These were pasted up on 22" × 28" bristol board.
6. Illustrators drew as inspired around the text, or lino-cut prints

- were pasted onto the text pages as the pasters pasted.
7. Everyone had a chance to do each activity.

About 175 children contributed to the book over the five years of creation from 1972-1977. The energy and freshness of their voices will be heard with pleasure by other children, teachers, professors, librarians, and general readers.

Frank M. Tierney teaches Canadian Literature at the University of Ottawa. He is the author of a book and articles on Isabella Valancy Crawford's children's stories, and is also the author of the "Silly Sally" series of children's stories.

Lighting the Spark

JAMES AND JO ELLEN BOGART

The Canadian Wildlife Almanac, Darryl Stewart. Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981. 134 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-919630-68-5.

Wild Horses of Sable Island, Zoe Lucas. Greer de Pencier Books, 1981. 36 pp. hardcover. ISBN 0-919872-73-5.

Birds 1 Canadian Album Series A Coloring Adventure in Canadian Themes, Dr. Robert W. Nero. Illus. by Jim Carson. Hyperion Press Limited, 1981. 40 pp. paper. ISBN 0-920534-17-1.

Small Mammals, Canadian Album Series: A Coloring Adventure in Canadian Themes, Dr. Robert E. Wrigley. Hyperion Press, 1981. 40 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-920534-16-3.

Natural History Notebook, Charles Douglas. Illus. by author. National Museum of Natural Sciences, 1981. 110 pp. \$2.50 paper. ISBN 0-660-10321-4.

Nurturing a child's appreciation of the natural world is a noble aim and a joyous task. There is so much life around us that cannot be seen without the knowledge of how and where to look. Conservation of this life can only be achieved through education and cooperation with the environment.