

gramme d'immersion, le niveau de langue semble un peu trop recherché, ce qui nécessitera une étude du livre plus dirigée par le professeur.

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HOW TO WRITE HISTORY

Battle for the west: fur traders and the birth of western Canada, Daniel Francis. Hurtig, 1982. 224 pp. \$18.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88830-226-6, 0-88830-227-4; *Icelandic settlers in America*, Elva Simundsson. Queenston House, 1981. 168 pp. \$10.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-919866-55-7, 0-919866-56-5.

These two books take different approaches to the question of how to write history. Daniel Francis chooses to write a narrative which tells a story covering a long period of time, highlighted by the experiences of individuals caught up in the business of fur. Elva Simundsson chooses episodes from a shorter period of time and she, too, highlights the experiences of individuals. Despite the reservations that some historians have expressed about the value, or even the possibility, of writing narrative history, Francis' book is the more successful of the two.

Francis is not writing specifically for children but this should give no trouble to older children and will be a useful text for that perennial Canadian history topic of the fur trade. To begin with, the book is well written. It moves along briskly over the years from the mid seventeenth century to the late nineteenth and is successful in dealing with the questions of organizing the trade and the motives behind the establishment of the Hudson Bay and North West companies. Because he deals with such large sweeps of time, Francis sometimes has problems with the chronology. In the first chapter, the reader is taken from the early eighteenth century back to the mid seventeenth and forward again to the eighteenth. While the purpose of this structure is plain — establishing the French presence before turning to the English and their future rivalry — the result is less clear. Young history students have a shaky grasp of chronology and may find this structure confusing. Once the rivalry has been established, however, all is plain sailing again.

The *Battle for the west* gives much space to individuals in the trade, but it is not only a history in search of heroes. The leading figures in the exploration of western Canada and in the development of the trade are vividly described. Readers should enjoy, and speculate on, the contrast between sober portraits

of Alexander Mackenzie and William McGillivray published in the book and the description of one of their drinking parties. The role of personality in history is well illustrated in this book, with ambition, pride, rivalry and personal antagonism playing their part. Francis brings his people to life and he does not lose sight of their weaknesses even as he describes their strengths. Peter Pond, for example, is shown as a complex and not particularly likeable figure.

One of the strengths of this book is that Francis states his opinions clearly. They are opinions based on a reading of the current literature and the content of this book is very clearly shaped by a knowledge of recent writing. The judgements are sometimes provocative and should stimulate debate. A good example is Francis' treatment of the role of the Indians in the trade. Far from writing history as the action of the white man on the Indian, Francis shows that history is interaction. The fur trade depended on interaction between the different cultures and Francis denies that it made the Indians dependent on the whites. "Indians were participants in the trade, not its victims." He does recognise the variety of responses to the trade among different groups and the sight of Peter Pond beating Indians and robbing them of their furs remains vivid. Francis' purpose is to show that the Indians were "independent people . . . not . . . dupes." At the least, this discussion should alert readers to the fact that history deals with change and that there is not one description which fits a relationship for every time and place. Francis shows that it is possible to raise analytical questions within a narrative framework that provides the context for debate. He also shows that you can write popular history with solid historical foundations and tell a familiar story freshly.

Francis writes history with the assumption that things need to be explained, judgements made, events and people fitted into a context. Simundsson seems to have more modest ambitions. *Icelandic settlers in American* is community history. Its style brings to mind gossips around the fire, or letters from your aunt who keeps track of everyone in the family. The information you get is not formless but it is often very loosely connected and of limited interest to those outside the family. The structure of the book is generally chronological but the last chapters include some folk tales and a quick excursion into Viking history. The separate, short chapters detail a variety of episodes in the history of Icelanders in America but the total effect of the book is of reading a collection of columns published separately and gathered into a book. People are presented to us without introduction. We are given little or no explanation for why they are doing what they do — why, for example, did Mormonism make such an impact in Iceland that the first Icelanders to migrate to America were converts to the faith? We have little reason to know why the people written about are important or, if not important, typical of some aspect of Icelandic settlement. Children not of Icelandic background may wonder why they should be reading this book. The writing attempts a simplicity which has the result

of deadening the drama. On the first expedition to Utah, parents whipped their children to keep them walking through the desert. "Everyone felt bad about having to use whips . . . but it was the only way to make sure the children didn't get left behind to die in the wilderness."

We hope children will read history because it is intrinsically interesting. There are episodes in Simundsson which could be made into small dramas of high interest to any child but are not. We hope children can find in history some explanation of why we are what we are, what our ancestors did and what problems they faced and overcame. There is some description in Simundsson, but little explanation or analysis. *Battle for the west* tackles all the problems; *Icelandic settlers in America* does not.

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LE TRÉSOR DU RICHELIEU: SIGNE POÉTIQUE DE L'AMOUR, SIGNE MORALISANT

Un été sur le Richelieu, Robert Soulières. Illustré par Philippe Béha. Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1982. 130 pp. Broché. ISBN 2-89051-069-7.

Publié en 1982 sous le titre *Un été sur le Richelieu*, ce livre est une histoire d'aventures destinée aux jeunes gens de dix à quatorze ans. Le roman porte sur un certain nombre d'aspects souvent développés autour des trois protagonistes principaux: Benoît, Laurent et Nathalie.

L'été tend vers sa fin. Benoît et Laurent — amis inséparables, du même âge, de la même taille, souvent considérés comme deux frères — s'ennuient à mourir. Les vacances s'achèvent et rien d'extraordinaire ne s'est passé.

Une jeune fille, Nathalie apparaît soudainement sur la scène; elle a trouvé une épave: "Un bateau long couché sur le côté" (p. 13) au fond du Richelieu. Remarquable découverte qui marque le début de l'action: de l'apathie et de la passivité initiales on passe à l'enthousiasme et au dynamisme dans leurs formes les plus variées. Les trois adolescents s'en vont chercher les vieilles choses merveilleuses noyées dans les eaux de la rivière: "La fin des vacances s'anime enfin" (p. 20). Après un premier essai ils se rendent compte que sans équipement de plongée sous-marine il est impossible de récupérer le trésor renfermé dans l'épave. Laurent pense à quelqu'un qui pourrait les aider: Fred Campeau, le mécanicien du village. La scène change; du Richelieu on se retrouve dans le garage de Fred. Il s'ensuit un petit marchandage; enfin les trois jeunes obtiennent du mécanicien le matériel de plongée nécessaire à la réussite de leur opération. Animé par le rêves de découverte, le trio s'éloigne vite de cet endroit; mais Fred se doute de quelque chose, car il ferme son garage et le suit.