

## FROM BAABEES TO BROWNSTONES

*The baabee books: Series I, #1, 2, 3, 4*, Dayal Kaur Khalsa. Tundra books, 1983. 12 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 88776-136-4, 88776-137-2, 88776-138-0, 88776-139-9; Series II, #5, 6, 7, 8. ISBN 88776-140-2, 88776-141-0, 88776-142-9, 88776-143-7. *The yellow house*, Grete Janus Hertz. Illus. Iben Clante. Annick Press, 1982. Unpaginated. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920236-15-4.

Very young children are often associated with sleepless nights, damp clothing, and the smell of sour milk. These books should add something more pleasant to those associations. *The baabee books*, created by Dayal Kaur Khalsa for children up to twelve months and published by Tundra Books, is actually a boxed set of four accordion-folding books, each with twelve brightly-coloured plates. These are pre-word books: there is nothing on the plates except simple, stylized drawings of faces, toys, articles of clothing, and household objects. The colours have been selected for maximum contrast: blue, yellow, pink, red, green, and brown.

We asked our four-month-old daughter, Stephanie, to field test *The baabee books*, and they performed admirably. At first, we were a bit disconcerted by the brown faces, blue babies, and yellow feet, but Stephanie smiled at them all. It is impossible to know whether she responded to the images or the colours or the fact that her parents were also interested in these *things*, but she did have fun looking at the images, folding the plates, and kicking them over. After twenty minutes of pointing and cooing, the inevitable mouth test proved another practicality of these books: they're virtually waterproof!

The sheet of instructions enclosed with the books suggests that "Baabee is a symbolic baby of either sex and any race," and that the different books are meant to reflect a baby's growing familiarity with his or her new environment. The four books are titled "Here's baabee," "Baabee's things," "Baabee gets dressed," and "Baabee's home." The books themselves are the result of research involving the early association of two-dimensional symbols and awareness-development of three-dimensional objects, and are the first of a projected series of twelve books. These four are bound accordion style; the remaining eight will be bound along one edge, as they are intended for the baby to hold.

Not that *The baabee books* aren't for holding — not at all! You can hold them, stand them up on the floor or on a dresser, pin them on a wall, string them across a crib, tie them into a rotating shade, or simply sandwich them onto a bookshelf. Each book is made of sturdy cardboard with plastic lamination over the printed images, and has mounting holes on the top of each plate and at either end. They can be mounted individually or as a set, and the number of ways that you and your child can play with them is limited only by your collective imagination.

It would be hard to find fault with a design that is so simple and universal

that its appeal is based on playing with colourful shapes. *The baabee books* series is well made, easy to store or mail, and comes with instructions. Our one concern was with the subtle suggestion in those instructions that a baby's intelligence will depend upon his or her earliest development, that play *is* child's work. "The primary aim of *The baabee books* is to give Your Baby pleasure," the instructions admit, but they carefully direct this play based on the suggestion that "there seems a close correlation between the early recognition of symbols or pictures and awareness-development. The sooner a baby understands that a two-dimensional pictograph stands for a three-dimensional object, the earlier that child will read and the higher will be its I.Q." That may be true. Certainly, no parent wishes to inhibit such early development, but undermining the outright pleasure of using *The baabee books* with such value-laden goals as obtaining a higher intelligence quotient is, at best, unnecessary.

*The yellow house*, an apartment building of a book published by Annick Press in co-operation with Carlsen of Denmark, is not for babies; however, it is aimed at very young children. *The yellow house*, written by Grete Janus Hertz and illustrated by Iben Clante, only comes in hardcover because the book itself is six little books, stapled and bound into the cover in the shape of a three story walk-up apartment building. The introductory verse on the inside front cover suggests the different personalities living in *The yellow house*:

Some are very busy,  
some have plenty of time,  
and some just manage to do  
what they have to do.  
Some are moody,  
and some are happy,  
and some are neither.

On the ground floor we meet Mr. and Mrs. Wood. Mr. Wood is a bus driver who snoozes on the sofa after dinner instead of reading the paper. They become Grandma and Grandpa when Susan and Brian's parents go to the movies, and the four of them play "Mix and match." The prize is an orange; Susan wins.

Next door, predictably enough, lives Mr. Bird, the building's grumpy caretaker. Mr. Bird is very fussy about his building, and his wife still makes him wear his slippers in their apartment. Mr. Bird enjoys the playful company of his cat, Puddles; Mrs. Bird doesn't enjoy anyone's company.

Walking up to the first floor, we meet Miss Johnson and Mrs. Palmer. Actually, Miss Johnson isn't home. Her story focusses on the antics of Tippy the dog, Theodore the parrot, and Billy the Tortoise. Mrs. Palmer *is* home with Mandy and Robin and four of Robin's friends. It's Robin's fifth birthday party, and, in spite of a few upsets, all goes well.

Finally, on the top floor live the Novaks and Mr. Bertolini. Mrs. Novak supports the family as a teacher, while Mr. Novak studies for his medical exams and looks after Stefan. Mr. Bertolini gives music lessons, three children at a

time.

*The yellow house* does live up to its introduction. Its unique concept even won the book a Gold Medal at the Bologna International Children's Book Fair. In a decade in which not all parents live with their children and role reversal is a way of life, *The yellow house* reflects some of the realities with which children have to deal; however, it stereotypes those realities unnecessarily. The would-be doctor and the music teacher live on the top floor; the sleepy bus driver and the hen-pecked caretaker live on the ground floor. While the illustrations are enjoyable, the individual stories are unfortunately short and, in one or two cases, insubstantial. We never do find out anything about Miss Johnson, or whether Mrs. Palmer's husband lives somewhere else or just missed the party. Reading *The yellow house* is like peeking in the windows of an apartment building: you gain an impression of the people, but are left with the feeling that the rest of the story remains untold.

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## RÉPONSE AU POURQUOI

**Jean d'Ailleurs**, Marianne Kugler. Illus. Suzanne Duranceau. Ovale, 1983. Non paginé, relié. ISBN 2-89186-026-8.

Ce livre de littérature enfantine raconte la rencontre de deux êtres, Marie et Jean, dans un langage poétique, explicite et bien structuré.

Jean, venu d'Ailleurs, une toute petite planète, part à la rencontre de Marie qui habite la terre. Très curieuse de nature, Marie ne cesse de poser des questions. Jean l'entraîne magiquement dans une aventure merveilleuse afin d'apporter une réponse à un des pourquoi de Marie.

Les livres écrits à l'intention des enfants sont forts nombreux. Cependant, l'habileté de l'enfant à lire, sa capacité de compréhension du texte, sa connaissance du vocabulaire et l'intérêt qu'il porte à lire pour éveiller sa curiosité constituent différents facteurs qu'il faut considérer dans le choix d'un livre. C'est pourquoi il convient d'une part, de situer quel genre de livre représente *Jean d'Ailleurs* et d'autre part, à quel niveau scolaire le lecteur a intérêt à le lire.

*Jean d'Ailleurs* est un livre qui présente un texte informatif et poétique. L'auteure, Marianne Kugler, a donné matière à son livre en apportant des informations au lecteur (trice) par le biais de la question de Marie.