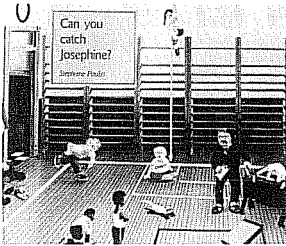
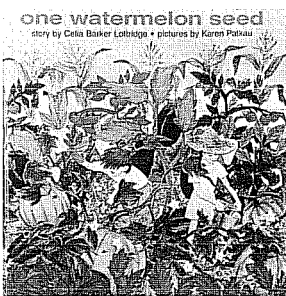


MINI-REVIEWS



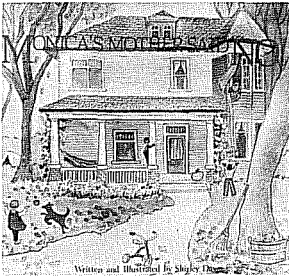
Can you catch Josephine?, Stéphane Poulin. Illus. author. Tundra, 1987. Unpaginated. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-198-4.

This is Stéphane Poulin's second book about the cat Josephine. In the first book, Josephine gave the reader a tour of old Montreal; in the second, this naughty bandit-faced cat follows her young owner to school and flees from room to room. In each detailed picture of an old-fashioned school-room, Poulin captures the cat, the boy, the students, and a teacher counter-poised in dynamic moment. If the images of a streaking Josephine are comical, the stances of the assorted teachers are priceless. The tone is humorous and affectionate, but never cute. Like so many contemporary Canadian picture books, this one reveals much ethnic variety. A particularly nice touch, following Poulin's depiction of several cross and eccentric-looking adults who are distinctly disenchanted with the cat-chase, is his resolution of the story through the principal — who is kind, female, and black.



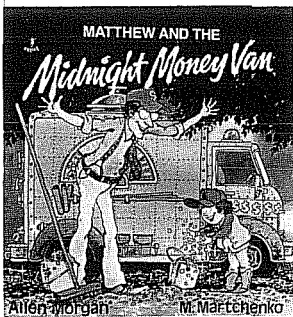
One watermelon seed, Celia Barker Lottridge. Illus. Karen Patkau. Oxford University Press, 1987. Unpaginated. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540473.

This colourful counting book moves briskly along with a very imaginative gimmick. The two little children who plant one-two-three (and so on) seeds next reap multiples (tens-twenties-thirties) in kind. The art is attractive: the proliferation of garden produce is handled with an explosion of colour and detail that catches all the seasons in the growing cycle. Even winter appears, but the expanding white blanket is not of snow, but of white popcorn. A good idea well executed makes this book quite original.



Monica's mother said no! Shirley Day. Illus. author. Black Moss Press, 1987. Unpaginated. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-158-X.

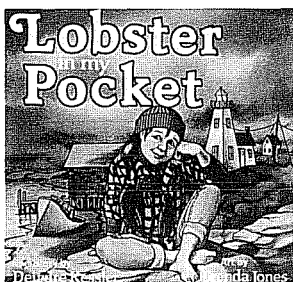
Most children have suffered because of a parent who says "No" to requests that *seem* reasonable. Some children are particularly unlucky and have parents that say "No" as a habit, without really evaluating each request. Monica's mother appears to be one of these habitual nay-sayers, but Monica is a persistent child who knows that her mother eventually will wear down. On such an occasion Monica escapes to stay over on Friday night at her bestfriend's house; the understanding is that she will come home early next day to help with chores. Shirley Day, who both wrote and illustrated this book, conveys the atmosphere of the friend's house well — it's full of the sprawling, unruly, and happy activity of energetic children — and maybe even of ghosts. However, an after-dark scare is not caused by a ghost, but by something that is *real* and in the room. Dawn barely cracks before Monica scurries out and rushes homeward with relief. Shirley Day's picture depicts a little girl who is clearly delighted to be back in her own orderly home, even with her nay-saying mother. However, the expression on her face says that she's not about to admit it: she looks as if keeping her scary experience to herself is her own revenge against her loving but overprotective mother. The book is full of nuances — both children and adults will enjoy its understated approach. One niggling question, however: shouldn't Monica have left a note telling her hosts that she had gone home?



Matthew and the midnight money van, Allen Morgan. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1987. Unpaginated. \$12.95, \$4.00, cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-75-7, 0-920303-72-2.

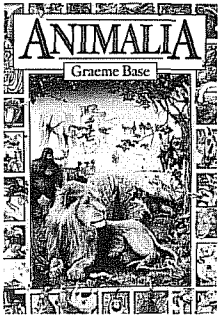
This book is built on a problem that many children encounter — how to purchase a really nice present for a parent when the child's funds are so limited. Allen Morgan describes little Matthew's dilemma. Night comes, and Matthew dreams — that it is midnight and money has rained all over the street. He goes out to help the "Midnight Money" man clean the streets, and they go together to purchase a diamond ring for Matthew's mother at the Midnight Madness Sale at the mall. Allen Morgan seems to be working himself into a situation where Matthew will wake up and find disappointment, but,

drawing on details presented at the beginning of the story, Morgan produces a happy ending. The illustrations are typical of Michael Martchenko — full of colour, vitality, and activity. The story line is sometimes cluttered, especially during the shopping spree, but the tone is so humorous and rollicking that some verbal excess isn't a serious fault.



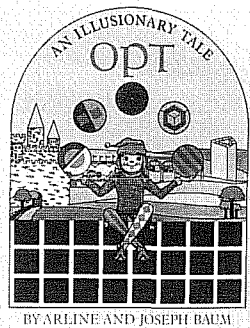
Lobster in my pocket, Deirdre Kessler. Illus. Brenda Jones. Ragweed Press, 1987. 36 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-920304-73-7.

This book tries, without total success, to blend a fairy-tale plot and contemporary realism. In the fairy-tale analogues, a captured fish with magic powers is liberated back into the ocean by someone who then benefits from the fish's gratitude; in this contemporary rendering, a little girl in P.E.I. frees a trapped lobster and is promised a later reward. The lobster makes good: for when the little girl falls off the wharf one lonely morning, he calls his lobster friends and they help her to safety. Unfortunately, such an ending requires the structure, tone, and pace of fairy-tale to really work; otherwise, in a realistic story it seems too far-fetched. As a realistic story, however, the book is an evocative depiction of contemporary life on a Canadian coast. The little girl (Lee) comes from a family that catches lobsters for a living; we learn how lobster claws are fastened together with thick rubber bands, that male lobsters can be identified because of their distinctive swimmerets. On the human level, we see that Lee's family lives a rather marginalized life, and little Lee is lonely; she wants a pet so much that even a lobster will suffice, despite the fact that her father tells her the sale of the lobster is necessary to pay for her own supper. The excellent pictures convey the atmosphere of the contemporary P.E.I. landscape, even without benefit of lavish colours: there are lobster traps, buoys, gnarled driftwood, herons, crabs, seagulls, fishing dories, lighthouses, piers, curdled and windy skies, and rumpiled fishermen. These pictures more than compensate for the uneven and sometimes prolix text, and for its overwritten and anti-climactic ending.



Animalia, Graeme Base. Illus. author. Irwin Publishing, 1987. Unpaginated. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7725-1668-5.

This book, written and produced in Australia, is co-published in Canada by Irwin Publishing, and Canadians can enter the contest explained in the book's promotional flyers; the winner will be provided \$1000 cash and an Air Canada flight to Los Angeles. Such ambitious marketing — unusual in Canada with children's books — is not misplaced, for the book is both beautiful and fascinating. The author, Graeme Base, outdoes Richard Scarry in filling pages with details, and his artwork, unlike Scarry's, is truly artistic. Each 1-2 page spread presents one letter of the alphabet — e.g., "the Armoured Armadillo Avoiding An Angry Alligator". The child (and parent) can begin studying the page to find other "A's" in the crowded and magical landscape. Even at the perspective's vanishing point yet another shadowy item may appear. It's a good thing the airtrip is for two: this book provides a "double hook", one for the child and one for the parent.



OPT: an illusionary tale, Arline and Joseph Baum. Illustrated by the authors. Viking Kestrel. 32 pp. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0670-80870-9.

This U.S.A. book, co-marketed by Penguin of Canada, deserves mention because it is so intriguing and well designed. The story is built on a series of optical illusions and each page is in splendid colour with lots of interesting detail for study. Best of all, an Appendix, which both explains the illusions and gives children further activities, should provide hours of entertainment. The authors are both artists, with varied experience in advertising, theatre and magician's shows.

Mary Rubio is co-editor of *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery. The second volume (1910-1921) was released by Oxford University Press in mid-November.*