

TWO FRIENDS, TWO GOOD STORIES

Greenapple Street blues. Ted Staunton. Kids Can Press, 1987. 90 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-921103-15-8; **Maggie and me.** Ted Staunton. Kids Can Press, 1986. 89 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-921103-00-X.

These titles are two in a series featuring friends and neighbours, Maggie and Cyril. Readers view events through the eyes of Cyril, but Maggie is often the pivotal character in their escapades. Maggie is the smart one, the one with all the right answers and ideas, who gets things going. And the willing and, at times, not so willing Cyril is there to aid and abet her. In fact, the central theme throughout the books is the relationship between these two characters. Cyril admires and is in awe of Maggie's talents and initiative, whereas Maggie views him as her accomplice and apprentice. Yet a certain sense of the competitive spirit pervades their exchanges and results in the eventual formation of a "partnership," uneven though it might be at times.

As partners, they sail through a series of school adventures and problems with much ingenuity and wit. Along the way readers are introduced to an assortment of classmates, including the requisite bully, and to an understanding and intuitive teacher. As well, parents are featured as gentle and supportive forces on the home front.

Essentially chapter books, each title consists of five separate vignettes or, more precisely, problem-solving exercises. In "Crime wave in room 7", Maggie takes on the challenge of uncovering the culprit who is "stealing" from classmates but instead highlights the "light-fingered" tendency of all of them. In "Hockey Stuck", Maggie and Cyril pull a switch when their parents force them to take respectively piano and hockey lessons. But when Maggie (read Cyril in disguise) gives a concert everything comes to light. In a particularly ingenious approach to putting bullies in their place, "Worms and Golfballs" proves to be a clever and hilarious chapter with a slight twist at the end. Logic, science, inventiveness and a good sense of humour figure prominently in the action and characterization.

Although they are in the tradition of Encyclopedia Brown and Einstein Anderson, these works are more subtle in structure yet just as appealing. While episodic in nature, the chapters maintain a continuity through the use of familiar characters and a cohesive time frame. A recurring theme involves Maggie's pregnant mother and the former's attempt to discover if she is due for a brother or a sister. Her parents plan to keep the news as a surprise but Cyril is enlisted to keep his ear to the ground. As a result he learns that there is a third option in the offing and he finally is one step ahead of Maggie.

Throughout the books, a certain sense of growth and development of character occurs. For Cyril, this change takes the form of a more positive and

assertive self-image, and in Maggie, the know-it-all image is softened to one of a still clever friend but one who is considerate and helpful. These developments are welcomed for they correct some bothersome aspects. First, Cyril's constant references to Maggie as the "genius" wear thin after awhile and serve to detract from her character. They elicit some negative reactions in the reader that are unsupported by her actions. As well, there is the nagging impression that Cyril is younger than Maggie. His hero worship of her and even the cover pictures point to some discrepancy in the ages. Yet they are in the same class. While these flaws are not major, they do exist.

Staunton has a winner with this series that should be popular with those in the junior level. Plenty of dialogue, action, and humour make for easy reading. In addition, the format and content lend themselves well to classroom reading. With a third title in the series, *Taking care of Crumley*, there are plenty of adventures to choose.

Anna Chiota has been dealing with children's literature in her eight years as a librarian; she now works in the Grantham Branch Library, St. Catharines, Ontario.

CHILDREN CHOOSE THEIR FAVOURITES

The best of children's choices, Compiled by Lenore Nilson. Citizens' Committee on Children, 1988. 114 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-9690205-5-4.

Although there are several available publications which recommend books for children, *The best of children's choices* is unique in that all of the selections have been reviewed by the children for whom they were written and all of the 600 entries are Canadian.

Over the past ten years, the children's reviews have been compiled into five volumes. *The best of children's choices* is an affordable handbook which lists only the young reviewers' favourite selections. It can be used in conjunction with the original five volumes or entirely on its own.

Within *The best of children's choices* the information related to each book is reduced to a minimum including title, author, illustrator, publisher, date of publication and number of pages. Also included are age categories from 3-14 years, easy readers, French versions, and a popularity range of three levels. All information is set up in an easy-to-read format and clear instructions about how to use the handbook are outlined. If further information is required, one could refer to the previous five volumes or to the original book itself.

It is very interesting to discover that some of the books an adult might pre-