abour the point, is her most ridiculous, however. His general commitment to interaction is annoyingly limited to telling people to "turn blue."

Nevertheless, the remarkable thing is that we're compelled to overlook these problems. Our attention is much more securely placed on the quandaries of Beth; she is the one we want to succeed in the end, the one we like the most, because nearly everyone else in the novel is more selfish, more superficial, and more insecure.

Beth gains our sympathies primarily because she is mistreated by her "tall and good-looking" boyfriend. Beth may be a follower among her friends, but he is cruel and insensitive, and he hurts her repeatedly. He even dumps her, unaware that she has been trying desperately to be like him. We feel sorry for Beth because we know that she needs this relationship most to compensate for her insecurity, but when she overcomes the separation bravely, she becomes the admirable character we've longed to emerge form the very beginning. Moreover, when Beth separates from her group only to appear more confident by the separation, we are even pleased with the story as a whole. We shouldn't be, but we are.

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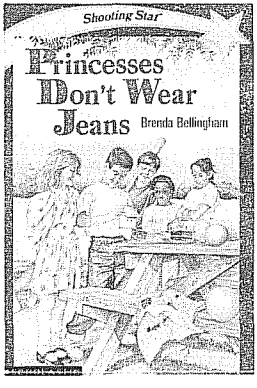
FOR "NEWLY-INDEPENDENT READERS"

Princesses don't wear jeans. Brenda Bellingham. Scholastic, 1991. 64 pp., $3.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-73765-1; **Project disaster**. Sylvia McNicoll. Scholastic, 1990. 88 pp., $3.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-73742-2.

Scholastic's Shooting Star series of chapter books is aimed at newly-independent readers. These books combine the picture book's full-page illustrations and the well-plotted action story.



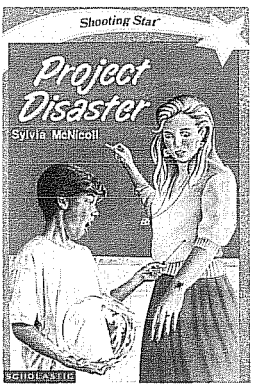
Brenda Bellingham's *Princesses don't wear jeans* is the most enjoyable of the Shooting Star books that I have read. The "princess" of the title, Tilly, is imaginative and individualistic. The narrator, Jeff, is afraid to be different from everyone else in his class at school. When the new girl Tilly arrives, unafraid of public opinion in her wrinkled tights, holey sweaters and uncombed hair, Jeff is intrigued. Initially thrilled by her outlandish stories of wild animals, Jeff eventually gains enough confidence to claim the unusual Tilly as his friend.

Tilly's charm derives from the strength of her imagination. She writes long, elaborate stories about

bears and dragons in her class journal. As promised, she brings her "wild" bears to school – stuffed toy bears which to her are real. To the children in her Grade Three class, they are just toys and Tilly is a liar. They reject her for fooling them about the bears. Jeff is tempted to give up on her, too, but on his parents' urging he reluctantly invites Tilly to his birthday party, at which she produces live white mice as Jeff's present. Jeff is vindicated, Tilly makes friends with those who were skeptical about the mice, and the other children begin to wonder whether Tilly really does have a dragon as she has told them.

The appealing features of this book are both verbal and visual. Whenever Tilly is faced with the censure of the class, the author asks a doubled, alliterating set of questions: "Did Tilly Perkins cry? Did Tilly Perkins confess?" She did not; neither did she "shake" or "shiver." Instead, strong little Tilly "argued," cheerful Tilly "grinned," and personable Tilly "looked around in a friendly way." The formula is predictable enough to become almost incantatory, ascribing ever more endearing character traits to Tilly. Tilly and her young friends are also beautifully drawn. The drawings are all focussed at child's eye level, drawing the reader up and into the scenes portrayed. To a child, the detailed pencil illustrations add a further dimension of reality to the story. The drawings represent about equal numbers of boys and girls, and the story is clearly intended to be read by both, although probably more girls than boys will be drawn by its title.

The appeal to boys is made more directly in *Project disaster* by Sylvia McNicoll. This book is a fast-paced first-person narrative about an almost unbelievable set of disasters in eight-year old Neil's life. His mother is in the hospital having a baby, his little sister is a crying brat, his goldfish Fido dies, his teacher squishes his pet spider, and he drives and crashes his grandfather's beloved new Firebird. The last of these events is what gives this plot its edge: this boy gets into *real* trouble. His policeman father, after the crash, even handcuffs Neil and puts him into his patrol car after telling him he has the right to remain silent.



The scene, echoing that of a cop show on television is one of many topical references that give the book its contemporary flavour. Neil, like other boys in the here and now, watches "Teenage mutant ninja turtles," collects hockey cards, plays Pizza Party and idolizes Wayne Gretzky. Unfortunately, these references will soon be dated as other fads supercede the Turtles craze, and the book will become just as ephemeral, with few enduring literary qualities beyond immediate entertainment.

The author tries to lift the intellectual tone of the book beyond the world of the shopping mall and the television set. Neil's forgiving grandfather, ac-

ting for other hopeful parents and teachers, gives Neil a copy of *Charlotte's web*, weaning Neil from the choose-your-own-adventure stories he had favored. This hint of didacticism is continued in occasional glosses and pronunciation guides for German words and phrases, given in an unlikely fashion in the young narrator's voice.

The illustrations lack the exacting realism of Carol Wakefield's drawings in *Princesses*; at times they are inaccurate, as when the text describes a baby sleeper and the picture shows a baby sweater. The perspective of the drawings is often that of an adult, looking down onto the children's activities, thus complementing the slightly inauthentic tone of the book as a whole. Young readers, however, will nevertheless be drawn in by the exciting plot, thrilled to read of Neil's growing list of real-life disasters.

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POUR MIEUX CHAUSSER VOS LUNETTES...

Mes lunettes et moi. Danielle Roger. Illus. Anne Michaud. Saint-Hubert, Raton Laveur, 1990. Non paginé, 6,95$ broché. ISBN 2-920660-14-4.

Mes lunettes et moi est un livre pour enfants à caractère informatif. Il sensibilise les jeunes lecteurs de trois à huit ans à l'importance d'une visite chez l'optométriste. Par le biais d'un personnage important qui se prénomme Valérie, l'auteure Danielle Roger, mise sur un événement qui se produit dans la vie de la petite fille. Un jour, en désirant dessiner un chat, Valérie éprouve des difficultés avec ses yeux. Son père décide de se rendre chez l'optométriste puisque Valérie a souvent mal aux yeux.

C'est une première visite et tout est nouveau. Ainsi ce livre peut se révéler un outil intéressant et sécurisant pour les jeunes lecteurs qui se rendent une première fois chez un optométriste, comme Valérie. Toute situation nouvelle comporte un élément inconnu. Le lecteur a besoin de savoir ce qui l'attend. *Mes lunettes et moi* prépare le lecteur d'une façon réaliste et stimulante. A travers le récit de Valérie, l'auteure établit le contact entre Valérie et le lecteur. Au début du livre, Valérie com-