

There the struggle between wanting to be part of the in-crowd and wanting to be kind is played out more delicately. Maybe what I really long for is Sarah Ellis's next novel, so I can find her anthropological precision threaded with her apprehension of the subtleties of human relationships.

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KORMAN'S CACHET

Macdonald Hall goes Hollywood. Gordon Korman. Scholastic-TAB, 1991. 218 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-43940-5; **Radio fifth grade** Gordon Korman. Scholastic-TAB, 1989. 179 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-41927-7.

Macdonald Hall goes Hollywood, the latest book in the Bruno and Boots series, will not disappoint Gordon Korman fans. Bruno, envious of the young movie star Jordie Jones, is determined to get a part in the movie *Academy blues* being filmed at Macdonald Hall. The plot follows his attempts to get into the movie as well as Jordie Jones' vying with Bruno for the limelight in the Macdonald Hall academy of fame.

The critical reader marvels that Korman has been able to sustain interest through six books in this series. After all, readers can anticipate the stock happenings and the almost predictable jokes and puns. While employing clichéd and predictable material is disastrous for most writers of children's fiction, Korman makes this material his stylistic hallmark. Consider, for instance, that his main characters are composites of caricature and individuality, his humour relies on the devices of vaudeville and slapstick comedy, and his boarding school setting is reminiscent of Victorian times. Yet it is Korman's fusion of character, situation and setting which is primarily responsible for the success of his books. Nor is their appeal confined to an exclusive readership between the ages of ten and fifteen. Most readers of any age will be able to see aspects of themselves in many of the characters. And while children love these books, adults will approve their underlying philosophy, stressing conscientiousness, humanitarianism, and a kind of live-and-let live attitude toward others. Bruno and Boots may be the terror of the school, but they endear themselves not only to the headmaster's wife, but to "the Fish," the headmaster himself. They are not specimens of the proverbial bad boy type who will play hooky at the least provocation, for academic achievement and keeping up the standards of the school which they attend are always high on their list of priorities (indeed, a strong sense of school spirit at Macdonald Hall unites the young characters).

Radio fifth grade is closely related to the Bruno and Boots series, but the driving force is Benjy Driver, as his name indicates. The adults in *Radio fifth grade* fall into definite stereotypes. Human foibles are "writ large" in all of Korman's books and here the pet shop owner who sponsors the fifth grade radio show is as tight-fisted as they come. In spite of his tendency to think the worst of the students, however, he, like Mr. Sturgeon in the Bruno and Boots books, has a kind wife who stands up for them. Like Mr. Sturgeon, his bark is worse than his bite. As veteran readers of Korman, we anticipate numerous difficulties for his characters as they cope with good intentions turned sour. Crises with the mascot parrot, with the questions a new teacher has assigned as homework, and with the school bully loom large. Korman does have a habit of poking fun at human inadequacies and society's sanctified and time-honoured customs. In *Macdonald Hall goes Hollywood*, the film industry receives the brunt of Korman's satiric thrusts, whereas in *Radio fifth grade*, Benjy's idol, the announcer Eldridge Kestenbaum, serves as a parody of those idols whom many professionals attempt to emulate.

It is clear that Korman's forte is situational comedy and he tends to rewrite the same plot with minor variations. The success of his books depends on a number of factors: his masterful pacing of narrative to achieve the timing so essential for comedic effect, his exploiting the naiveté of some of his characters, and his habit of relying on his reader's anticipation of his next move. It might be risky for Korman to launch into a new writing style when he so obviously has this one down pat. Formulaic as his fiction is, however, when you've read one Korman book, you haven't read them all. He keeps you reading, laughing, and coming back for more.

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CROSS-CULTURAL FRIENDSHIPS

Copper sunrise. Bryan Buchan. Scholastic, (1972), 1991. 112 pp., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-73623-X; **Darlene's shadow.** Norma Charles. General Paperbacks, 1991. 96 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 077-3672-958.

Recent multi-cultural consciousness in Canadian children's literature has produced a number of books involving cross-cultural friendships. Brian Buchan's *Copper sunrise* is an older novel, first published in 1972 and recently reissued by Scholastic in a handsome Gold Leaf edition; like Norma Charles's new novel, *Darlene's shadow*, it is about the growth of a friendship, through situations of danger and crisis, between two children who do not even understand each other's language. The two novels are, however, very different in setting and