in particular gives the book a strong visual appeal (stemming from the author's theatrical experience?), a quality shared by other excellent fantasy. The story sprawls a bit, but this is great reading from an unquestionable talent. The more mature language and content suggest an audience of about fourteen and up; they may be expected to look forward eagerly to any successor to *Nobody's Son*.

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AN "ISSUES" APPROACH IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

We're Still a Family. Frances Arnold. Illus. Lori Broadfoot. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Jem Books, 1994. 32 pages, $6.95 paper. ISBN 0-9697473-0-6. **Steven's Baseball Mitt: A Book about Being Adopted.** Kathy Stinson. Illus. Robin Baird Lewis. North York, ON: Annick Press, 1992. Unpag., $14.95 cloth, $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-233-5, ISBN 1-55037-232-7. **Real Sisters.** Susan Wright. Illus. Bo-Kim Louie. Charlottetown, P.E.I.: Ragweed Press, 1994. Unpag., $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-42-X. **Tiger Flowers.** Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Janet Wilson. Toronto: Lester Publishing Ltd., 1994. Unpag., $16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895555-58-2. **In Other Words.** John C. Walker. Illus. Connie Steiner. Toronto: Annick Press, 1993. Unpag., $14.95 cloth, $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-309-9, ISBN 1-55037-310-2. **Where There's Smoke.** Janet Munsil. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Toronto: Annick Press, 1993. Unpag., $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-290-4. **Strike!** Maureen Bayless. Illus. Yvonne Cathcart. Charlottetown, P.E.I.: Ragweed Press, 1994. Unpag., $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-41-1.

It is the world around the child that for better or worse must provide the ingredients that will direct his imagination and ultimately shape the style of his literacy. One of the most important of these ingredients is the picture book. For it is here that the child will have his first encounter with a structured fantasy, mirrored in his own imagination and animated by his own feelings and imagery. (Leo Lionni, qtd. in M.E. Wrolstad and D. Fisher, *Toward a New Understanding of Literacy*)

These books fill a needed gap in children's literature: all deal with special issues and challenges facing some families today—AIDS, death, divorce, adoption, labour disputes, smoking, and physical disabilities. These issues have only recently begun to be treated in Canadian literature for young children. The authors, writing from different points of view, all demonstrate a sensitive understanding of young children's feelings when faced with emotional confusion or personal disability.

Frances Arnold is a single parent with a six-year-old son. She was inspired to write a book for young children about separation and single parent families when she could not find a suitable published work that reflected her own situation. *We're Still a Family* consists of a series of short stories describing family changes when the parents separate. In some stories, the father moves away and in others he takes an active role in the child's life. The last story relates a variety of family situations. In all the stories, the father is the absent figure.

The book, narrated by the child, achieves its aim in reflecting the intense feelings of hurt and anger in a 3-6 year old child when he learns that his parents will no longer live together, but still love him. The vocabulary is easy to

understand. Black and white shaded sketches on each page are effective, especially the black hands and faces showing the mother and father arguing (8). However, some of the characterizations and facial features seem to be from the 1950s. Although the last story outlines a variety of family situations in two sentence clips, it would have been more believable had one short story been devoted to the absent mother. However, the book should be lauded for its realistic approach. At the end there is no reconciliation and no "happily-ever-after" approach, reflecting the viewpoint that marriage, love and family are no longer the only signs of emotional success.

As in her earlier works, Kathy Stinson demonstrates her ability to empathize with her characters. In *Steven's Baseball Mitt* she deals with adoption in a sensitive and non-condescending manner. Using the modern language of adoption, the term "birth mother" replaces "real mother." The coloured illustrations are imaginative and even humorous: the exaggeration of some of the facial features makes the characters seem natural, more human.

One of the book's strengths is its use of large letters and the terse text on each page (the story is told from Steven's point of view). Also, the colourful illustrations overshadow the text, which will appeal to young children. This format differs from *We're Still a Family*. The latter has smaller print and more writing on each page; the illustrations complement the text rather than overshadow it.

One of the messages of *Steven's Baseball Mitt* is that Steven's search for his mitt is symbolic for his search of something missing in himself. Although there is a reference in the text to this fact, at no time is there a direct reference to a baseball mitt. One must infer this fact from the title, which would be a difficult inference for a young child. Although the protagonist fantasizes about his birth mother, she does not come back to claim him. He remains with his adoptive parents and accepts them as his real loving parents. The clear message is that adoption is a permanent arrangement, a realistic message for which Stinson should be applauded.

Real Sisters is another book about adoption from a different perspective than *Steven's Baseball Mitt*. The issue concerns adoption of a multi-racial child named Claire. The author, Susan Wright, having herself grown up in a multi-racial family, has written a heartwarming story with a personal touch. The book also deals with the relationship between two sisters of different cultural backgrounds who belong to the same family. What is unique about this book is that it is written from the sisters' point of view rather than from the parents'. It is Claire's sister, rather than her adoptive parents, who helps Claire overcome her feelings of inadequacy in the face of taunts by her schoolmates. Unlike *Steven's Baseball Mitt*, this book does not deal with children's fantasies about their birth mothers. Its emphasis is on the adoptive child becoming accepted by her family as well as her peers.

The illustrations of the characters are realistic in their use of colour and shading. The faces are expressive of the children's feelings and the interspersion of the words "Just like a real sister," written in calligraphic print, not only adds to the charm of the book's visual component, but also emphasizes its message that deep love and caring between two sisters can help overcome personal problems. This is an excellent attempt for a first children's book. As in *We're*

Still a Family and *Steven's Baseball Mitt* the reader is left feeling positive, not depressed, about this sensitive topic. In addition, the straightforward text and emotional realism will encourage discussion between adults and children.

Patricia Quinlan has written a moving and sensitive story aimed at helping children confront the untimely death of a loved one, and helping them understand that AIDS is similar to other serious diseases. She wrote *Tiger Flowers* because she "feels that it is important for young children to be introduced to the subject of AIDS in a context that invokes compassion for people who are struggling with this, or other serious illnesses." In *Tiger Flowers* it is not an older grandparent, parent, sibling, or even family pet, who dies, but a young uncle. And the book offers a realistic exploration of death and its aftermath. The child in this book comes to grips with the fact that his uncle is never coming back through pleasant memories of the wonderful times they shared together when he was alive. The attitude towards the uncle is, of course, non-judgmental.

The colourful illustrations remind one of paintings, each of which could be framed and hung on a wall. The expressive lines the story's focal contrast—we see happy faces when Uncle Michael is alive and sad eyes after his death. The repetition of phrases makes the text suitable for a young child. The book's uniqueness lies in its treatment of love and courage in the face of a family tragedy. It ends on a positive note as the child takes comfort in the tiger flower that remains a symbol of life. Even adults will find comfort in reading this book.

Cerebral Palsy, too often confused

with mental retardation, is a neurological condition that affects muscular control but not necessarily the thought processes. Many children who are affected with cerebral palsy are intelligent and creative. However, since their speech muscles are affected, they have difficulty making themselves understood.

The author of *In Other Words*, John Walker, has lived with cerebral palsy all his life. He published a book of his poetry with the aid of his sister and family who helped him to communicate his thoughts and feelings.

The book begins with a realistic exploration of the difficulties that children with cerebral palsy experience when they try to communicate with others. It delves into the minds of the children and effectively portrays them as people who love nature and have the same desires and feelings as ordinary children. Toward the middle, the text becomes a fantasy tale where these children float into space, symbolizing the freedom of the body from the mind. The graceful flowing lines of the illustrations evoke this freedom well. The two protagonists communicate with each other through silent speech and through their thought processes. However, the book does not state very clearly how they understand each other. It suggests they are mind readers. This may be a difficult concept for a young reader. However, the message is a well-known one: children do not have to leave home in order to be free, "[f]or they know there is a very special place they can go, any time they please" (27).

In contrast to the books reviewed above, the issue in this work is the child's own disability. His problems are not the result of outside events. However, the underlying theme in all these stories, is that a child can learn to develop some measure of control over events affecting his daily life.

Janet Munsil has written a delightful book about the effects of cigarette smoke. In contrast to the serious treatment of issues in the books reviewed above, this subject matter of *Where There's Smoke* is treated with humour and light-heartedness. As in his previous works, Michael Martchenko's cartoonish illustrations, warm use of colour, and attention to detail add charm to the narrative and reinforce the words of the text. The message that it is very difficult to break bad habits is clearly stated. Unlike the other books reviewed above, where the parents or sibling helps the child to confront difficult issues, here it is the child herself who helps her father break his smoking habit, while he helps her break a nail-biting habit.

The vocabulary and use of alliteration gives a poetic style to the text. Every child will enjoy the exaggerated schemes that the father and child concoct to "keep their minds off chomping and puffing. They knit teacosies, 100 pairs of socks, 60 hats, 59 mittens, 30 pairs of long underwear ..." (19). The story is full of surprises and an unexpected ending.

Labour disputes and strikes are a part of daily life today, and, when parents face financial hardships as a result of such disputes, children are also affected. As in the other books reviewed above, *Strike* treats a difficult issue with gentleness, sensitivity and even a touch of humour. The plot is similar to *Where There's Smoke* in that it is the child who helps the parent solve a problem. The message is that even children can register a positive effect on the world around them. The unexpected manner in which this is done—the child's adventures and

its surprise ending—adds a quality of mystery to the story. The book explains the meaning of unions and labour disputes to young children in a language that they could understand. It does not preach and does not judge. The illustrations, with their warm use of colour, flowing lines and portrayal of expressive faces, add a new dimension to the text. While there is enough text on each page to be read by a young child, the vocabulary suggests that it would be more useful for a parent to read it to the child first and answer his/her questions. The concepts are too difficult for a young child to grasp immediately.

In general, all these books make an excellent attempt to treat difficult emotional issues affecting children's lives today. They are written in a sensitive, delicate, engaging and non-judgmental manner, and so belong on the shelves of children's homes and libraries.

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BRINGING UP BEAUTY: BRINGING UP ALL THE ISSUES CONFRONTING TODAY'S ADOLESCENT.

Bringing Up Beauty. Sylvia McNicoll. Maxwell MacMillan Canada, 1994. 204 pages, $14.95 cloth, $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-02-954256-1), ISBN 0-02-954257-X.

What appears at the outset to be a comic novel involving a twelve-year-old girl raising a black lab puppy for Canine Vision Canada quickly evolves into an account of the pressures adolescents encounter growing up today. In *Bringing Up Beauty,* Sylvia McNicoll quickly abandons the promise of a canine/adolescent adventure in favour of illustrating the abundant troubles of the nineties pre-teen.

Initially, characterization in *Bringing Up Beauty* is vivid and the comic potential of McNicoll's figures is great. Elizabeth humorously narrates her experiences raising Beauty. A computer-geek father, an older sister who dresses only in black and an environmentally-obsessed mother have initial appeal, but quickly disintegrate into flat stereotypical figures. Elizabeth's mother becomes particularly problematic: the "super-mom of the nineties" stereotype, she can work in and outside the home, hold the family together throughout adversity, volunteer to foster a puppy and clean up the environment single-handedly. But she is a martyr, one who "snaps and snarls" and cannot find time to add Elizabeth to her list of "things to do." Beauty, the black lab puppy, is adorable and McNicoll could have developed her character further—which would have been in keeping with the title. Secondary figures are flat and description of a "catty" clique of girls makes me despair that