

These are some of the problems that confront the writer who chooses an animal protagonist. Narrative engagement requires the reader's sympathy and identification, but the truth is that the natural world is a daily drama of violence and continuous carnage in which the actors are essentially amoral.

Shirley Woods tries to be faithful to the facts of raccoon life and has consulted with knowledgeable and unsentimental naturalists. There is no shrinking from the presence of death in the story and the sensitive reader will shed tears over the catastrophes that take the lives of Kit's two siblings. Preyed upon by horned owls and automobiles, hunted by dogs and men with guns, and trapped, the threats to raccoon existence accumulate in the reader's consciousness. What is inevitably missing, however, is a sense of the raccoon itself as predator. While Woods shows us raccoons catching fish and shellfish and rummaging in garbage cans, any mention of their standard practice of devouring live baby birds and squirrels is understandably avoided. The reader's sympathies will always lie with the furry, but not the scaled or carapaced. Few children's writers will risk trying to show one furry creature eating another, attempting to engage our sympathies with both. To write of both predator and prey as sentient beings shakes loose so many narrative conventions and crutches that most writers and editors balk at the prospect.

Woods deserves credit for avoiding some of the more egregious anthropomorphism and sentimentality to which this genre is susceptible. Even though the more brutal facts of raccoon existence are glossed over, most readers will know a little more about the life cycle of this uncanny creature after reading this book. Celia Godkin's illustrations are very well observed and their subtle shadings work well to convey the entirely nocturnal realm of raccoon experience.

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A Legend of the Sechelt People

Salmon Boy: A Legend of the Sechelt People. Donna Joe. Illus. Charlie Craigan. Nightwood Editions, 1999. Unpag. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88971-166-6.

One in a series of picture books retelling legends of the Sechelt people, *Salmon Boy* tells the story of a young boy who goes for a swim in the sea beside his village and is captured by a giant chum salmon. The salmon takes the boy to his own country beneath the sea, where the boy lives for a year and observes the way of life of the salmon people. Like many native legends, this one contains teaching and a message. When the boy returns to his own people, he is able to tell them about how the salmon people live off the abundant resources of the land and sea, eating and drying berries in season, making cedar root baskets and clothing, and holding feasts to celebrate the smoking of the salmon, which they will eat in the winter months. The boy's own people thus learn how to avoid hunger and treat the salmon themselves with gratitude and respect.

Joe, who supervises Sechelt language teaching for her band on the Sunshine Coast north of Vancouver, tells her story in simple and appealing words, which have the ring of the skilled storyteller. The strangeness of the country of the salmon people, dry land though it lies beneath the sea, and of the people themselves who are at the same time both the fish and humans who live off the fish, is conveyed in a matter-of-fact way, though it may leave some questions in the minds of readers unfamiliar with the tradition. Joe doesn't shirk from mentioning the practice of slavery: the giant chum salmon makes the captured boy his slave for a year. The tone of the story is one of calm acceptance and respect for the mysteries of life, and our responsibilities to nature.

Charlie Craigan's illustrations pair the stylized figures of traditional West Coast native art with softer representational scenes from the story on the facing pages. The combination is effective, and readers may be fascinated to trace the many variations of form within the various stylized salmon figures leaping across the pages, as well as gaining a sense from the evocative small drawings of the atmosphere of traditional coastal life. The book is in black and white, and not lavishly produced, but is a useful contribution to the growing body of first nations stories presented by the people from whose culture and experience they come.

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Leave Storytelling to the Writers and Tellers

African Tales from Tendai's Grandmother. Lakshmi Mukundan. Tara, 1997. 64 pp. \$11.99 paper. ISBN 81 786211-23-3. *A Tree in My Village.* Paritosh Sen. Tulika, 1998. \$23.99 cloth. ISBN 81-86895-10-8. *And Land Was Born.* Sanhya Rao. Illus. Uma Krishnaswamy. Tulika, 1998. 28 pp. \$29.99 cloth. ISBN 81-86895-13-2. *Ekki Dokki.* Sandhya Rao. Illus. Ranjan De. Tulika, 1996. Unpag. \$11.99 paper. ISBN 81-85229-32-5. *Suresh and the Sea.* Raghavendra Rao. Illus. Sandhya Rao. Tulika, 1998. 48 pp. \$19.99 paper. ISBN 81-86895-19-1.

The Banyan Tree, "an Ontario-based corporation providing consulting services in technology re-engineering and direct marketing (Winter '98 catalogue)," has collected and produced a selection of stories which originate mainly in South Asia. My review centres on the "visual expression series" (i.e. picture books) that I like quite well. More difficult to review are the audio read-along books and tapes, priced between \$12.99 and \$19.99, with such titles as *The Musical Donkey*, *The Talking Cave*, *Fish Friends Three*, and *Magic Vessels*. This later series is an example of what literature becomes when it emanates from corporations with design teams of producers, sound engineers and scriptwriters. Gone are the unique and unifying vision of storytellers and writers. However sophisticated the technology, the stories are lost in a wash of sound effects and poor writing. However guised in fun, the tapes were