

judged by my Faculty of Education students to be moralistic and heavy-handed. This makes them unsuitable for classroom use, and unsatisfactory as stories. *The Monkey and the Crocodile*, for instance, is a powerfully sexy tale when told by storytellers. Here it's silly.

Black-and-white photographs (rare in children's literature), in *Suresh and the Sea* reveal Suresh learning to fish, as his ancestors have done for generations, on a kattumaram off the Coromandal coast of India. A concern for the marine environment permeates the book. Rich factual details embedded within a compelling story encourage different levels of reading. Further scientific and cultural edification is available in the marginalia. *A Tree in My Village* also focuses on the interrelated, global-village quality of the environment, from the childhood point of view of the writer-illustrator. The text is factual, imaginative, and enhanced by loose, evocative illustrations.

*Ekki Dokki* is a tale in which a correct attitude ends in reward, while a bad attitude ends in downfall; a story similar to the Grimms' "Mother Hulda." The felt marker illustrations come to a near-exploding conclusion through a recurring triangle theme. The bomb-like characters are reinforced by a text that breaks into capital letters: "WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED?" I'd like to know what this triangle fetish is about. More successful is *And Land Was Born*, illustrated by the same artist, Rao. In this book the geometry is the right, light, touch for the mythic import of this origin story. God as well as the four jugni matas are colour-coded cutout figures. A zany, years-long adventure story in which god admits that only the astrologer can find land. Delightful.

The parallel narratives in *African Tales from Tendai's Grandmother* conjoin present purposes with traditional teachings. An unremarkable treatment of moralistic animal stories, but attention to crocodile eggs (46) and other aspects of nature are noteworthy. There's lively interaction between the main characters, and the book is written in awareness of the imposition of western culture and technology: "He (Tendai) put the balls (of yarn) into a plastic bag for grandmother."

I encourage Banyon Tree to continue publishing and distributing these works by Indian authors, but advise the company to omit the saccharine read-along books and to use the author's original stories on the audiotapes.

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### Family Dynamics and Secrets

*That Silent Summer*. Elaine Medline. Scholastic Canada, 1999. 169 pp. 5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-51500-0. *Topher*. Anita Horrocks. Stoddart Kids, 2000. 211 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-6092.

In *That Silent Summer*, readers follow family dynamics through a young girl's sum-

mer vacation. Young Gabby was sent by her mother to spend the holidays at Birch Lake with three elderly relatives. Throughout the book one learns how a reluctant young city girl comes to revel in the beauty of rural living and recognize the wonderful things that her relatives have to offer.

The book is written through the eyes of Anna, a trauma-induced mute, who relays the story through her keen observations. Anna is shown to be an extraordinarily intuitive individual and a very dominant character in the book. She fills a significant role as a “shadow” and friend to Gabby. The author adds excitement to the story by portraying grandmother Yanny as a stubborn and adventurous individual who possesses a fiery passion for many issues. Uncle Cliff, who is in poor health, is a deep thinker who is continually working on a hundred-line poem and shares his spontaneous verse throughout the book. His soft-spoken manner and quiet disposition show him to be a calming personality in the family and a listening board for young Gabby.

The author shows a very sensitive and balanced understanding of both the young mind and preconceived ideas people have about the elderly. Medline cleverly covers the art of bridging the generation gap by providing both the young and old perspectives while exploring the unique traits of this elderly trio. The book is broad in scope and touches on a wide range of topics that include family estrangement, true love, peer pressure, personal goals, and environmental issues.

*That Silent Summer* is an appealing story, which readers can easily finish in one sitting. Elaine Medline does an excellent job in making readers feel a part of the family and completes her story with a rewarding ending.

In *Topher*, Christopher and his young sister Stacie discover family secrets when they help their father restore the family’s rundown cottage at Christopher Lake. As the cabin at the lake is in a beautiful setting, the children become puzzled by their father’s obsessive desire to quickly renovate and sell the property. The mystery is heightened as Stacie is plagued by numerous incidents of déjà vu and mysterious voices. These voices almost provide a parallel story within the novel. Though Christopher believes his sister just has a wild imagination, Stacie’s knowledge of past happenings makes everyone feel ill at ease. On numerous occasions Liam, the children’s father, seems especially rattled by Stacie’s yarns. This unusual behaviour intrigues readers making them eager to read on.

At the very beginning of the story, one surprisingly learns that an escaped convict is lurking in the area where Stacie and her family are headed. Unusual events such as slashed tires and strange noises leave the reader assuming, whether correctly or incorrectly, that the convict is responsible. The other possibility is — could the cabin be cursed? An unexplained fire, the discovery of hidden coves, and unusual visits by residents all add an element of excitement to the story. When asked to discuss the family’s past, the children’s father is uncharacteristically abrupt and evasive. This encourages the children to set out on their own to try to discover the family’s secrets.

The world of the supernatural can be a fascinating subject for young readers as it allows them to ponder the role of our imagination. In *Topher*, Anita Horrocks has written a solid novel that is delightfully enhanced with liberal sprinklings of the supernatural. This is not done in a way that will disturb readers, but will maintain

intrigue and excitement. *Topher* is recommended as an excellent addition to any library. It demonstrates the value of truth, the importance of family bonds, and the rewards of a strong relationship between siblings.

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### In Search of the Secrets of History

*Albertosaurus: Death of a Predator.* Monique Kieran. Raincoast, 1999. 56 pp. 24.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55192-258-4. *I Was There: Graveyards of the Dinosaurs: What's It Like to Discover Prehistoric Creatures.* Shelley Tanaka. Illus. Alan Barnard. Scholastic Canada, 1998. 48 pp. \$19.99, \$7.99 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-590-12446-3, ISBN 0-590-12447-1. *I Was There: Secrets of the Mummies: Uncovering the Bodies of Ancient Egyptians.* Shelley Tanaka. Illus. Greg Ruhl. Scholastic Canada, 1999. 48 pp. \$19.99, \$8.99 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-590-51494-6, ISBN 0-590-51495-4.

For palaeontologists or archaeologists, digging up the secrets of history takes time, patience, an understanding of their subject, and insightful speculation on their discoveries. Writers who explain it to children have a daunting task. How to present those facts and insights and make the search both interesting and exciting requires all of those skills plus copious amounts of imagination. Following the recent trend to combine nonfiction with fiction both Kieran in *Albertosaurus*, and Tanaka in the *I Was There* series, *Graveyards of the Dinosaurs* and *Secrets of the Mummies*, accepted the challenge admirably and made reading it worthwhile.

Both of the books on dinosaurs are excellent additions to a genre already littered with numerous titles. Their focus is different — Kieran centres on one location and the remains of one special fossil; Tanaka travels around the world to three different locations and examines three different kinds of dinosaurs. Although Tanaka includes one of the same locations as Kieran, she follows another path of discovery. Both books contain a table of contents in lieu of an index to help one navigate the content.

*Albertosaurus* takes us to the badlands of southern Alberta in Dinosaur Provincial Park where Palaeontologist Phillip Currie found a fossilized bone sticking out of the ground. His discovery in 1991 led to the world's best-articulated juvenile tyrannosaur skeleton ever found. Kieran takes us on that search, capturing the wonder and the excitement of Currie's find. Recreating the drama of detective work inherent in palaeontology, she gives the facts about bones bit by bit. Interspersed in the narrative of the discovery, she weaves a compelling story of the young tyrannosaur as it struggled to survive but died an untimely death where it was found millions of years later in the same position with almost all its bones intact. Throughout the book, she maintains a connection to credible research and the Royal Tyrrell Museum.

Features include the Mesozoic Era timeline with dinosaur silhouettes on