

mile a minute as he invents magical wonders at his desk. The tale continues in verse with pictures dripping in comic details. Eddie decides to go to night school where the real fun begins. However, gradually Eddie and his classmates discover that they might not want to tarry in the unhallowed halls of *Night School*. While it might be fun to experiment with snacks “from La La Max, the nightclub down the street,” it soon becomes apparent that “Night School is fright school,” and a tired Eddie and his friends want out!

Through her artwork Lesynski unveils a gift for comic subtlety, a pleasant enhancement to her quirky wit. We all at one time or another have suspected that one of our teachers is a witch. Lesynski expands on this thought with her drawings of Eddie’s teacher. Lesynski certainly raises suspicions that the woman is a witch, but neither the reader or Eddie can be sure. Only mysterious parts — her talon-like fingernails and long black dress — are shown, but tantalizingly the whole teacher is never completely revealed. Another piece of genius is the illustration which prompts the reader to draw a comparison between Eddie and Pinocchio. One frame shows Eddie working on a project on animals with donkey-like ears tied round his head and his mouth open in a full heehaw laugh. Eddie thinks he is fooling the authoritarian adult world when initially he revels in his night-time escapades. The joke is on him, Lesynski winks at the reader. With this drawing, readers suspect that if Eddie doesn’t change his ways, his adventure might turn out to have a dangerous downside. The magic spell of *Night School* will make a Lesynski fan out of any reader, and the already-converted have a pleasurable opportunity to see this book creator’s talent develop.

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### A Story That Must Be Told

*Dead Reckoning*. Julie Burtinshaw. Raincoast, 2000. 120 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 1-55192-342-4.

Julie Burtinshaw’s *Dead Reckoning* provides a brief but stirring fictional recounting of the ill-fated last voyage of the *Valencia*, a steamship that went aground off Pacini Point, Vancouver Island, on 22 January 1906. Though rescue ships did arrive, the ferocity of the storm and the treacherous rocks off the point prevented assistance, with the result that only 38 of the 164 passengers originally on board survived. But this story is not primarily about the tragic ineptness of the rescue ships, though a brief epilogue does provide an account of the changes that this disaster evoked. Rather, it is the story of one particular survivor and the memory of a voyage that has haunted him all of his life.

The story begins when the narrator visits her great-grandfather, James Moffat, who announces that there is a story that finally must be told. The story he tells is of his part in the *Valencia* tragedy, but it is also a traditional “coming-of-age” tale in which a teenage boy must learn to accept adult responsibilities in a moment of crisis. This crisis begins on the second day when, as foretold by James’s somewhat

too numerous dreams, a great storm engulfs the ship and the captain is forced to plot its course by dead reckoning, "a combination of taking an educated guess about where you are and knowing how deep the water is where you are." The over-confident and rather arrogant captain, however, constantly assures his crew that he knows what he is doing, an error that, the great-grandfather comments, would cost him his life.

Burtinshaw's description of the tragedy from the viewpoint of a young boy works quite effectively, providing a vitality and immediateness that one cannot find in the historical accounts of the *Valencia* that she lists in her acknowledgements. We care about this boy and mourn with the old great-grandfather who has never really forgotten that he was one of the very few that survived. And the reader realizes that, indeed, this is a story that needed to be told.

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#### **A Promising Start: Four Titles from Orca's Young Reader Series**

*Three on Three.* Eric Walters. Orca, 1999. 122 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-170-X.  
*Full Court Press.* Eric Walters. Orca, 2000. 152 pp. \$6.50 paper. ISBN 1-55143-169-6.  
*Jesse's Star.* Ellen Schwartz. Orca, 2000. 108 pp. \$6.50 paper. ISBN 1-55143-143-2.  
*Ellie's New Home.* Becky Citra. Orca, 1999. 82 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-164-5.

Eric Walters, a former teacher and basketball coach and a popular and prolific author of junior novels, has the credentials to back *Three on Three*, in which underdogs Nick and Kia enter a basketball contest at school, and the sequel, *Full Court Press*, in which they try out for the school team. Considering the impressionable age of his intended readers, it is disappointing that Walters gives white Nick a house and two professional parents while his black friend Marcus (not so described but so drawn in the illustrations) is the school's best athlete and lives in a single-parent family in a housing "complex."

In books for developing readers we should be able to count on a competent use of English. Walters, a teacher, should be able to use "like" grammatically (*Three on Three* 10, 13, 26) and not write "those sort of things" (45) and "he weren't going to let us" (*Full Court Press* 106). He does not explain why Nick, by all indications an able student, is ten years old in grade three. In the plus column, Nick's relative timidity when a bully threatens and his tendency to "psych" himself out when odds mount against them on the court are refreshingly juxtaposed with Kia's boundless confidence and game-saving technical skills without this lapsing into a message-laden gender reversal. The conversion of bully Roy from menacing detractor to friend evolves believably from a motive of self-interest. The author effects a satisfactorily thrilling battle for the championship and does not resort to a fairy-tale ending. Walters has capably constructed interesting stories around a popular topic and he keeps them moving along. Dialogue is good and descriptions of on-court action excellent. The theme of younger children being accepted and successful