together the broken pieces of medaeval glass as if they were parts of an enormous and ancient jigsaw puzzle. His task resembles the reader's activity of piecing together the disparate clues Bedard scatters through the novel as to the origin of the homeless girl, Ambriel, who may be a ghost, an angel, or perhaps even a visitor from the past. Certainly for Ambriel, modern-day Caledon seems strange and alarming. As the two children wander from place to place, Bedard describes the city as if it were itself a stained glass window, criss-crossed with streets and railroad tracks that pull together the odd, mismatched pieces of the city: TV repair shops, greasy spoon diners, abandoned factories, tree-filled ravines, trendy shops and galleries, and sidewalk cafés. The challenge Bedard faces (and never fully meets) is to make the modern city as fascinating in its way as the incense-filled shadows of St. Bart's.

Stained Glass loses some of its momentum as Charles and Ambriel uncover the memories that will help readers to answer the questions raised in the early chapters of the novel. The sense of mystery evoked by Ambriel's strange appearance and by the unexplained absence of Charles's father and sister is not balanced by an equally satisfying sense of discovery as the novel draws to a close. Eventually, as Charles confronts his memories of the past, his family's history is fully explained. By contrast, Ambriel's identity remains obscure — she finds her way home, but readers must decide for themselves whether "home" is heaven, the past, or perhaps some alternate dimension. Neither the ambiguity of Ambriel's identity nor the prosaic facts of Charles's father's death can measure up to the initial sense of expectation that the novel creates. The answers, when they come, seem anti-climactic, as if to suggest that the mystery itself is more alluring than its solution.

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Finding Their Place

The Carved Box. Gillian Chan. Kids Can, 2001. 232 pp. $16.95 cloth, $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-895-5, 1-55337-016-3. Ages 10-14. ***Mary Ann Alice***. Brian Doyle. Groundwood, 2001. 168 pp. $19.95 cloth, $12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-453-2, 0-88899-454-0. Ages 9-13.

The Carved Box is the story of a boy and his dog. Callum Murdoch is an orphaned immigrant, and "Dog" is a magic dog. Dog becomes Callum's friend and guardian while he struggles to find his place on his uncle's homestead in rural Ontario. The work uses its historical setting effectively; the narrative is relatively straightforward, with a strong focus on Callum's thoughts and experiences.

The Carved Box is a serious book, but this solemnity weakens the credibility of the two protagonists. It is difficult to believe that even an extraordinarily bookish adolescent boy could remain as sullenly devoid of interest in his surroundings as young Callum. His self-indulgence becomes frustrating, although it must be sustained until the moral conclusion. Dog's magic reinforces the text's moral message and provides a very hazy connection with Native spirituality, but it diverts focus from her most satisfying aspect, her dogginess. Any dog is a magic dog to a lonely boy. The fantasy theme undermines the verisimilitude of the plot in favour of the thematic lesson of the text. *The Carved Box* tries to do too much. It is an excellent dog story and a good historical novel. The "problem novel" element weighs down the characters and the magic is superfluous.

Although written in a very different style, the protagonist of Brian Doyle's latest novel, *Mary Ann Alice*, shares Callum's sense of separation from her isolated Ontario community. Like the previous book, this has an historical setting, this time in the 1920s. Mary Ann Alice McCrank "has the soul of a poet." As a result, she is perfectly suited to document the building of the Paugan dam on the Gatineau River. Her voice is bubbly; like the river, it skips, swirls and dives around her family and neighbours, chronicling the dam's impact with an optimism that, nonetheless, acknowledges its uncertainty. The jumpiness and cleverness of the narrative can, admittedly, become exhausting — the book lends itself to being read bit-by-bit as a series of Leacock-esque sketches rather than in one long sitting. The story is unified by recurring motifs connected with the dam, by Mary Ann Alice's voice, and by the personalities of the community. The setting is not outwardly described in any great detail but, instead, is brought to life as a collection of meaningful places. The anecdotal rhythm of the narrative reinforces this sense of personal history in the landscape, making its change more poignant.

Because it is colloquial, with a non-linear plot, *Mary Ann Alice* requires a more self-conscious reader than does *The Carved Box*. Rather than focusing on only one moral, it raises a series of questions about place, property, environment and community. They are questions which apply to the contemporary world as much as they apply to Mary Ann's Martindale. *The Carved Box* would work nicely in a conventional school literature unit. In a more sophisticated class, *Mary Ann Alice* could be read as a literary work and as a catalyst for the discussion of some important social issues.

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Life's Meandering Twists and Turns

Light the Way Home. Nancy Russell. Ragweed, 2000. 230 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-78-0. ***The Twisting Road Tea Room.*** Deb Loughead. Ragweed, 2000. 176 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-79-9.

Both these books have fourteen-year-old protagonists who must adjust after a move from Toronto to the Maritimes. Russell's Christine has the harder time, missing her plastic friends and finding her new schoolmates prickly. Loughead's Emma has an easier social transition, though she too suffers emotionally. She also suffers believably.

There is little to dislike about *Light the Way Home*, but nothing lifts it from earnestness into life. We begin with an ABC trio of friends, Allie, Brittany, and Christine: one artsy, one athletic, and one called "Barbie" behind her back. Christine leaves