Although writing sequels, authors McNicoll, Schwartz and Waterton have created books that stand on their own. Reading Kathy Stinson's *The Great Pebble Creek Bike Race*, one can't forget that this story is a sequel. The author refers once too often to instances that happened in the first book, which takes precious pages away from the bike race story. The plot revolves around a bike race and competition for friendship. Again, a boy vs. girl contest theme runs through the book; this time the girl has a hearing disability. The characters move stiffly and the comic levity that comes through in the other books is missing here. There are no delightful surprises, and a few disappointments.

These four books are a sampling of plot-driven books that are similar to tried-and-true series on prime time television. Although they are not of poor quality, it's doubtful that they will be remembered several seasons from now. However, my craving for a finer literary feast, and more salt with my series, is tempered with the realization that many young readers don't want "great" literature. Most days, they'll avoid dealing with such complexities by selecting a burger-and-fries book series, and it appears that these books are popular. One of the teen-aged girls at our house enthusiastically claims that *Starshine at Camp Crescent Moon* is one of her "favourite books ever!" Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre's media release informs that Quincy Rumpel "is one of Canada's top-selling series for youngsters eight to ten." Perhaps, in our overly complicated world, many young readers need to sink into something straight-forward.

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Modes of Storytelling

PuddleDuck. Nancy Hundal. Illus. Stephen Taylor. HarperCollins, 1995. Unpag. $7.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-224012-2.

PuddleDuck is a unique little story. Its impact has something to do with the power of childhood imagination and its confusion of the real with the make-believe. It has something to do with the ways of memory, with the distancing that makes all that remembering and nostalgia a part of storytelling. *PuddleDuck* begins on a note of longing: Bianca yearns for the return of her Puddleduck [sic], a stuffed animal she considers so real that her wish for it to be alive becomes a certainty in her own imagination when the toy mysteriously disappears. If the dominant mood of the book could be described as a colour, the lavender of the duck's feather aptly recalls all the childhood yearning and emotion that the story holds.

To make a story, experience must be distanced and idealised by that memory. And Hundal creates this distancing on the first page:

> That one spring, Bianca knew that Puddleduck would come back. He had been gone a long time — since the summer before. But when she saw from her window the gray sheets of rain slicing through the clouds she knew her Puddleduck was coming too.

By beginning in *medias res*, the story in effect begins when another story ends, on a note of expectation.

Elements of distancing recur throughout the story so that each story's frame reminds us of another story inside that story. When the Puddleduck has disappeared from the picnic blanket and Bianca cannot fall asleep that night, her father tells her the story of how she first got Puddleduck. We hear how Bianca had a stuffed duck in the hospital nursery in which she was born while the other babies had the more typical teddies and stuffed rabbits. To evoke the child's confusion of the real with the make-believe, Puddleduck is throughout the story presented as if he were a real duck: Puddleduck's "glinty eyes made sure nothing would make *his* baby cry."

Metaphors recalling books, and the storytelling theme as another means of distancing real experience from its narrative account, infiltrate the prose. When autumn came and the brown ducks with one white duck distinct from the others "for a moment," "swerved from the others and seemed to notice Bianca," "the leaves stacked up like pages of a book outside her window, each one telling stories about caterpillars grown fat in the summer air or twiggy nests hidden in the shade." A sensual and poetic vision infuses the lines with a potent elixir which makes it linger long in the imagination.

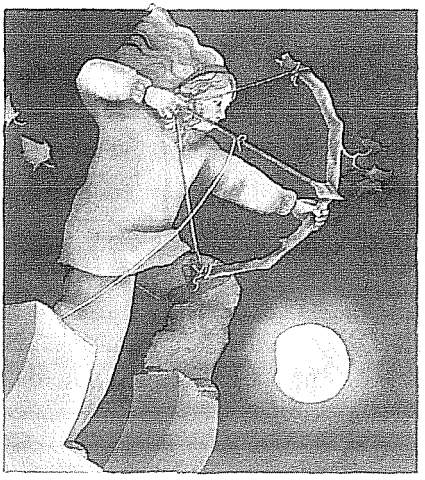
When Bianca's father tells her a story before bed, the still grieving Bianca watches the reflection of herself and her father in the night window and, again we are reminded how first comes the experience and then it is framed and distanced in the storytelling act. As though a series of reflecting mirrors that distil and refine memories during these flashbacks and flash forwards, the story ends with Bianca grown up and telling her own daughter the story of her Puddleduck as time has purified the memory in her imagination.

The poetic texture of the prose, the haunting structure of the story with its frames and its confusion of the real with the make-believe distinguish *PuddleDuck* from the mass of children's books turned out every year. And Stephen Taylor's pastels recreate the fuzzy warmth of summers past, whether there be ducks on ponds or children running to a neighbourhood swimming pool. But rarely does memory have the cloying feel of nostalgia, its annoying heaviness of sentiment, in these realist drawings that capture seemingly real children with genuine feelings.

Many Levels of Engagement

Blown Away. Julie Lawson. Illus. Kathryn Naylor. Red Deer, 1995. Unpag. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-99005-119-5. *Shō and the Demons of the Deep*. Annouchka Gravel Galouchko. Annick, 1995. Unpag. $17.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-398-6.

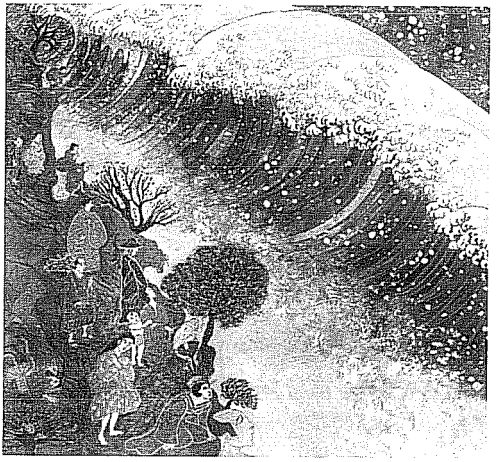
As the earliest form of storytelling, myths have attracted young and old since the beginning of time. Their paradigmatic story structure, simple figures and images have an aesthetic and mnemonic appeal that allows them to linger in our subconscious and provide a ground plan or reference for all subsequent stories and experiences.



Both *Blown Away* and *Shō and the Demons of the Deep* use myth in different ways. Whereas in *Blown Away* Julie Lawson creates a myth out of every child's experience of flying a kite on a windy day, Annouchka Gravel Galouchko offers us a fantastical or mythical account of why kites came to be invented. In *Blown Away*, the fanciful pretext for story is the wind, personified as a gentle giant, lifting Molly Melinda off her feet and taking her away to a magical world of make-believe. For the rest of the story, her friends Jess, Claire and Rigby search for her in a real and imaginative adventure during which their kite becomes the "Castle of Kite." When the giant sneezes and a gust of wind whirls over the ground, the children recover their lost toys and articles, including their friend, Molly Melinda. The story entices with the fantasy of imagined adventure as well as suggesting the joy of recovery.

In *Shō*, fantasy takes a psychological turn, while the story opens with the ocean overflowing the people's nightmares which they have tossed, in fright rather than through carelessness, into the ocean to inhibit them. *Shō*, a peasant girl, whose fisherman father has lost his livelihood for these teeming demons, urges the people to play with their dreams instead of throwing them away in shame or fear. Above all, the people must allow their nightmares to see the sunshine. Thus the kite as artifact evolved.

Both picture books develop from a fascinating kernel, either reshaping and embellishing everyday experience as myth or examining the ontological roots for a cultural phenomenon; however, the two books are uneven in their treatment and development. On principle, I try out children's picture books for review *on* children, namely my own. While I enjoyed the story's promising beginning with Molly Melinda swept off her feet as pretext for fantastical plot in *Blown Away*, I was disappointed by the way the personified wind resembled a similar giant in an Enid Blyton story about the west wind (*Sunny Stories 1926-53*), but then failed to live up to that figure's radiant stature, his charming



inconsequence and joviality. Even the wash of pastels that carry the bluster of wind and water reminded me of the Enid Blyton story from my childhood. I still remember the scene with the well-meaning giant, West Wind, and the refined Rainbow Lady, sitting cross-legged sharing lemonade in the wind's house after the giant has inadvertently caused so much upheaval. Nevertheless, my four-year-old enjoyed *Blown Away* anyway, with its figurative ambiguities, including the confusion of the giant with the agate moon in one arresting illustration and, at the end, the delight of recovering toys and treasures assumed lost forever. My six-year-old did cross-question the literal level of the story at several points, but was finally convinced, or accepted the tale for its own kind of poetic licence.

Even though my nine-year-old is at the chapter-book stage, she loved *Shō and the Demons of the Deep*. As expected, the sophisticated language structure alienated my two younger children, and I know they both did not pick up the psychological and spiritual implications of the story. Myself? I was enthralled by the underlying concept that explained the need for art as well as for kites. The ornate illustrations, styled after oriental art, with waves depicted as demons and the natural world given human qualities, held me captive. And I found my younger two children discovering hidden-in-the-picture devils and gargoyles on every page; so they too must have enjoyed the book at their own level. However, my six-year-old wanted to have the plot re-explained. Then he liked it as well as my eldest.

While *Blown Away* is a pretty kind of book, the powerful beginning fails to take off. I admit the idea of the kite as a castle-in-the-air is clever, and Molly Melinda turning up at the end is just right after her being swept away at the beginning. But otherwise, the storyline is thin. In contrast, *Shō and the Demons of the Deep* has the strong lines of myth built into its story, its classic simplicity and clarity. However, the language tends towards the archaic and the indirect.

Although this language may be intended to distance the story and to enhance its feeling of mystery and universality, for younger children it can be an impediment. Still, I consider the book a classic, and so does my nine-year-old.

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Isolation and the Immigrant Child

A Turtle Called Friendly. Jean Sangwine. Illus. Bernadette Lau. Rubicon, 1996. 30 pp. paper. ISBN 0-921156-48-0.

It is a something that occurs daily in our schoolyards and playgrounds. Among the groups of children engaged in active play, there are those who stand on the periphery. Seemingly unnoticed by the others, these children hang back, either unwilling or unable to join in the games. The reasons for their reticence are as diverse as the personalities that make up any community.

Jean Sangwine's *A Turtle Called Friendly* is a picture book that explores the territory of isolation from the point of view of an immigrant child. Though this subject has been examined by other writers, Sangwine has managed to produce a fresh text that is neither condescending nor moralizing in tone. There are no adult "quick fixes" in this story. In fact, it is the children's voices that drive the tale, and in particular, the lonely voice of a young boy from China.

As a newcomer, Ming must somehow make his way in a place that seems to offer him little. Children will readily identify with his painful attempts at making friends and his joy when he discovers Friendly, a turtle that eases his