

My students and I agree that children's books should respond to serious issues which touch children's lives. These stories tell of formulating and fulfilling dreams, facing the trials of the Atlantic Fishery and explaining the geography of the place we live, and facing the hurt which we or our circumstances create. With that, another criterion is filled.

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Multiple Joy — the Book as Toy

To the Post Office with Mama. Sue Farrell. Illus. Robin Baird Lewis. Annick, 1994. Unpag. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-358-7. *Jordan's Days Are Numbers.* Barbara Dilella. Annick, 1994. Unpag. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-996-8.

Both *To the Post Office with Mama* and *Jordan's Days Are Numbers* are children's books with added features than turn them into toys as well as books. The inside cover map retracing the mother and tot's journey from home to the post office in *To the Post Office with Mama* and the fold-out birthday present poster at the end of *Jordan's Days Are Numbers* made an instant hit with my just four-year-old. The next morning I found him turning to those pages and, with fascination, retracing the red-pencilled journey on the map, or admiring that glossy poster bringing together Jordan and his wished-for animals. While the map provided the delights that the puzzlebook labyrinth afford his six-year-old brother, the animal poster, by identification with Jordan made that exciting yet foreign natural work a part of his own. While Jordan is pictured holding onto a rope and hauling in a benign whale, I couldn't help feeling that the bear looked just like our dog panting after an exhilarating walk. The cat is smiling broadly and the horse looks observant, as if it might make an interesting point any moment. However, considerable detail texture of tooth and hair creates a stylized, albeit censured, realism that banishes possible complaints about sentimentality or cloying anthropomorphism.

Through its unfaltering child's perspective, *To the Post Office with Mama* reaches the read-to child's sympathy in more subtle ways as well. From the initial scene with Shea proudly putting on mittens with the thumb "in a special place by itself" to another child walking on a snowy mound that makes him as tall as his mother, to the focus on the train's loud noises and wheels going "around and around," Farrell brings us down to a child's physical and sensual level of excitement. After Shea has proudly claimed to have put them in the garbage, illustrator Robin Baird Lewis has fun with the narrative when she pictures banana peels and candy wrappers fallen to the other side of the sagging garbage bin. Again the reading adult will notice that the apparently independent child putting on his own mittens in an early scene must be carried home, undressed, and put to bed in the final scene. I was reminded of my own tot who has "no legs" on similar occasions at the end of the day.

The illustrator employs pen-and-ink drawings scantily painted in primary colours. On a predominantly white background, cool blues and greens with dabs of red and yellow enhance our sense of the wintry scene, and the crudely drawn map with the red-pencilled path on the map mother and tot follow lends an improvisory feel to the work. But down to the lilting rhyme in the mother's calling her child to attention

'No Shea. Come this way'

not very much turns out to be unplanned in this picture book.

Jordan's Days Are Numbers revolves around the counting principle up to the number four — Jordan's fourth birthday as well as the ideal reader's age. Just as the poster in making the animals look so friendly appeals to a child's sense of the familiar, so the child in drawing for himself one cat, two horses, three bears and four whales on the four invitations, makes them part of his world too. From the countdown of four days until Jordan's fourth birthday, to the four invitations and the incremental numbers of the four animals he draws on the invitations, the counting principle is made concrete and fun. As with the seemingly inconspicuous "No Shea. Come this way" in *To the Post Office*, the friends' names not so coincidentally all end in half rhyme: Simon, Aryan, Ryan and Sian. This lilting sing-song, recurring as a kind of refrain on every page, accelerates the countdown. And the child's drawing of the animals as a way of making them part of his world is carried further when each of the friends gives him a toy shaped as one of the animals he desires. His mother's gift of a poster, of course, completes this process. While reading *Jordan's Days are Numbers*, I was at several points reminded of the old English folk song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," with its fantastical anticipation and its sense of wish fulfilment.

Deceptively simple at face value, *To the Post Office with Mama* and *Jordan's Days Are Numbers* disprove the assumption that writing for the very young is necessarily a casual process.

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Dealing with Changes and Aging

Nanny-Mac's Cat. Anne Louise MacDonald. Illus. Marie Lafrance. Ragweed, 1995. 24 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-54-3. *Alfie's Long Winter*. Greg McEvoy. Stoddart, 1995. 32 pp. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29100.

Glynnis visits her grandmother, Nanny-Mac, and her cat Patches every Friday. Their time together is special and reassuringly routine, with their "... supper of fish sticks blackened on one side, peas from a can and orange pop." Every Friday Glynnis coaxes the timid Patches to come out and the three curl up in the fat turquoise armchair and, "... talk about grown-up things, like potholes in the