

Reign of Wonder: Unlocking the Imagination

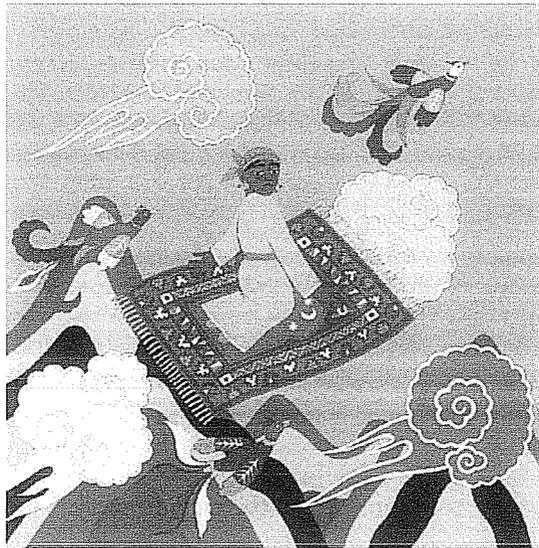
Sasha and the Wind. Rhea Tregebov. Illus. H  l  ne Desputeaux. Toronto: Second Story Press, 1996. 24 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-929005-848. *The Hummingbird's Gift*. Stefan Czernecki and Timothy Rhodes. Illus. Stefan Czernecki. Hyperion, 1994. 32 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920534-99-6. *Zorah's Magic Carpet*. Stefan Czernecki. Illus. Stefan Czernecki. Hyperion, 1995. 32 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895340-06-3.

Sasha and the Wind is invariably a feast of colours and tells of a young boy's memorable encounter with the chilly wind, portraying Canadian school children on a typical winter day. The dialogue catches a child's delight with the sensation of a fierce wind as Sasha plays with his friends: Tai, Talia, Daniella, and Nicky.

Wind — that powerful element of nature — is described with the eye of a child and with the child reader in mind. The pranks, playfulness, as well as the stormy, cutting ripples of the wind, are recreated through young Sasha's experiences outside home. He wishes he could fly with the wind over the buildings, and imagines himself as a little dot, like a chocolate chip in the sky. The child psychology is minutely observed and respected in various situations within the story. Rhea Tregebov has treated the theme imaginatively and interestingly. The illustrations by H  l  ne Desputeaux are marvellous. The power of the wind is symbolically illustrated with scattered maple leaves, with umbrellas turned inside out, and with bits of papers lifted high up and blown around. The snowmen made by five children represent the wind's friendliness, for it allows them to make these figures. The timely care and concern of Sasha's mother, who gives him and his friends hot chocolate with sweet marshmallows, relieves Sasha's lump in his throat, warming his dampened spirits. The book beautifully conveys the flavour of Canada, with maple leaves and snow flakes.

The Hummingbirds' Gift is drawn from a Mexican folktale, and shows the interdependency of man and nature, birds and beast, vegetation and rivers. The Torascan Indian name "Tzintzuntzan," which means "the place of the hummingbirds," gives the name to the Mexican village setting. As the reader opens the cover page, the beautiful straw woven figures by Juliana Reyes de Silva and Juan Hilario Silva attract our attention. There are roosters, hares, stags, skeletons, dogs and girls in a rich golden hue. The story tells about the farmer Isidro, whose family works hard in their wheat fields. But one year, due to draught, the wheat crop fails and the river dries up. This takes a heavy toll on the hummingbirds, who can get no nectar from withered flowers. Consuelo feels sorry and decides to make nectar by mixing sugar with water fetched by Isidro from a distant lake. Consuelo moulds tiny little pots in the shape of flowers, and bakes them in the sun, and then pours her nectar in these containers, which the children put in the branches of the garden bushes. The entire family rejoices together when the hummingbirds drink their fill and are saved.

As time passes, times remain hard: Isidro's family has no food for the children. Sensing the mother's worry, the hummingbirds fly all over the fields, gathering bits of straw. Settling at the feet of Consuelo, the birds weave the bits of straw into tiny figures of dancers, musicians, etc. Consuelo learns this craft



and teaches it to her family. They sell these figures at a coming festival, the Day of the Dead, giving the family a new source of income. Isidro's and Consuelo's great, great, great grandchildren still remember the hummingbirds' gift. The narrative depicts many emotions — sorrow, joy, concern for others' suffering. Text is on one page, the beautiful paintings on the other. The floral outline has a lasting impact.

Zorah's Magic Carpet also transports the readers to far off lands. The story and illustrations by Stefan Czernecki reveal a rich imagination, as well as familiarity with other cultures. Morocco is the locale of this story. Zorah enjoys fantastic rides on a magic carpet.

The lives of the goatherd Akhmed and his wife Zorah undergo a big change after a sheep arrives in the midst of Akhmed's goats. Zorah's poor livelihood has until now depended on her sale of goat's milk and cheese in the bazaar in Fez, in Morocco. In the market, however, she learns about the beautiful foreign lands from foreign traders who come here to trade their spices and silks for Moroccan silver jewelry and finely tooled leather. Zorah dreams of visiting the foreign lands some day.

Akhmed and Zorah are very poor, and cannot even celebrate the festival of Aid el-Kabir as they wish. But the little lamb, which has grown quickly due to Zorah's tender care, offers them a surprise. One day, it starts talking and requests that Zorah free it. It tells her how she may travel to all of the places she has dreamed about: it says to shear its "wool coat, spin it into yarn, dye it the colours of the flowers in the hills, and make a small carpet." Zorah does, although it takes a long time to complete the carpet. When done, she is tired, and rests on the carpet — which to her surprise, takes off. She remembers the sheep's words and asks it to take her to a new land. When it stops, she is on the vast

Ukraine steppes. She goes to a house where a wedding is to take place, and gives as a gift to the bride her typical Moroccan embroidered slippers. In return, the bride gives her the Vinok, the traditional floral wedding headdress. Then Zorah visits Bombay in India and Beijing in China on her magic carpet. Here she receives more typical gifts of each place. For peacocks and firecrackers, she gives jewelry and leather goods. She returns to Morocco inspired to weave more fabulous carpets, and does, though none ever equals her original magic carpet. With their tales of intercultural mingling, Stefan Czernecki's stories are a precious treasure trove in Canada's multicultural society.

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Living Folktales

Little Red Riding Hood. Mireille Levert. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1995. Unpag. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-226-2. *The Magic Boot.* Rémy Simard. Illus. Pierre Pratt. Annick, 1995. Unpag. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-410-9. *Just Stay Put.* Gary Clement. A Groundwood Book/Douglas & McIntyre, 1995. Unpag. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-239-4. *Bone Button Borscht.* Aubrey Davis. Illus. Dušan Petričić. Kids Can, 1995. Unpag. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-224-8.

Mireille Levert's bold rendition of *Little Red Riding Hood* does not so much retell as restore the original version of this classic tale. The merciless wolf actually swallows Grandmother without hesitation and, after the famous conversation scene between disguised wolf and deceived child, "he leapt out of bed and gobbled up poor Little Red Riding Hood!"

