

perspectives on these complex issues. While some of the lay-out features cause a break in the regular text which is sometimes difficult to follow, the book will grab the attention of young readers with the mini-biographies, tables, and most of all the vivid photographs of the youngest workers in the world. Their faces say more than hundreds of pages of text could possibly convey.

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### Making the Past Present-able

*The Kids Book of Canada.* Barbara Greenwood. Illus. Jock MacRae. Kids Can, 1997. 56 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-315-5. *Shaping a Nation: A History of Canada's Constitution.* Desmond Morton. Umbrella, 1996. 96 pp. \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895642-10-8.

Canada is plagued by a recurring collective nightmare: yet another survey reveals an appalling ignorance among the nation's young people about their own history. Politicians, historians, and educators embark upon a painful process of self-searching, and there is much gnashing of teeth and tearing of hair as they puzzle over the proper course of action. In the end, nothing is done, and eventually another survey is published and the process is repeated.

Both Barbara Greenwood and Desmond Morton have directed their energies towards breaking this frustrating cycle. Greenwood's is a bold, brightly coloured volume aimed at the eight- to fourteen-year-old and written, not as a complete national history, but rather as a way to foster a child's interest in Canada's past. Each province and territory is covered in four pages, with a time line showing significant historical events and thumbnail sketches of interesting facts and personalities. It is always difficult making arbitrary decisions about what deserves inclusion, and doubtless the author will be criticized for leaving out this or that event. But in fact she has done an admirable job of including both the essential (the Rebellions of 1837-38) and the esoteric (the giant Ukrainian Easter egg in Vegreville, Alberta), and doing it all without getting bogged down in extraneous detail. The book's one weakness is its lack of a reading list. Since Greenwood's intention was to provide a first look at Canada, she would have done well to include a bibliography so that interested readers would know where to turn for more in-depth information.

Morton has a tougher task, for there are few subjects about which Canadians are as shockingly ill-informed as the Constitution. Indeed, I would venture to suggest that more Canadians understand particle physics than understand the vagaries of the Constitution Act of 1982 and all of its legislative offspring. This is why Desmond Morton has done such a service with his *Shaping a Nation*. Written in lucid and engaging prose and complemented with excellent illustrations, it provides a primer on the evolution of the Constitution from the early nineteenth century to the 1995 Quebec referendum. Particularly

useful is the first chapter, which tackles the thorny (and usually neglected) question of why we need a constitution in the first place. The tone is informal but never condescending; Morton has simply rendered things like the amending formula and the notwithstanding clause into language that can be understood by someone who lacks a graduate degree in political science. Pitched to the teenaged reader, the book includes very informative appendices, such as a constitutional time line, short biographies of the major players in Canadian constitutional history, and the full text of the Constitution Act of 1982.

Rather than resort to that most Canadian of solutions, a Royal Commission on the teaching of history, to escape the recurring nightmare, our leaders could spend our tax dollars more effectively by purchasing copies of these books for every Canadian child. For if we have failed at anything, it has been in not providing children with accessible and entertaining accounts of the nation's history. It is also well to remember that today's parents are themselves the product of the same educational system, and that their knowledge of the nation's history may well be barely more complete than their children's. Both books, then, might be just as useful to parents as they are to children.

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### A Crafts Duo from Kids Can

*Pioneer Crafts*. Barbara Greenwood. Illus. Heather Collins. Kids Can, 1997. 40 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-359-7. *The Jumbo Book of Crafts*. Judy Ann Sadler. Illus. Caroline Price. Kids Can, 1997. 208 pp. \$12.00 paper. ISBN 1-55074-375-9.

*Pioneer Crafts*, a companion volume to Greenwood's award-winning *A Pioneer Story*, presents heritage crafts which didn't make the first book. Craft projects include intriguing items such as tin lanterns and whimsy diddles, as well as general skills like weaving, sewing, and carving. Notably, several projects have direct appeal for boys. Each project is presented on facing pages with detailed instructions and Heather Collins' watercolour illustrations in muted heritage hues. An attractive feature is the sepia-toned vignettes of pioneer children doing each craft, with an explanation of how our ancestors used the particular item or skill. Although the book is rated for ages seven and up, many of the projects require the guidance of an adult or older child for carving, braiding, boiling, melting wax, ironing, sewing and so on. But this is probably as it should be, in a book that models co-operation and making much with little.

*The Jumbo Book of Crafts* is a treasure chest of projects, 75 percent of which are new, according to the publisher. Sadler helpfully groups craft projects into categories such as things for your room, wearables, gifts, special days, and old-time crafts. Not only is the array of things to make breathtaking, but each project