

dans ce texte aux réflexions personnelles du protagoniste. L'approfondissement du thème principal étant devenu l'intérêt dominant de tout l'album, l'enfant qui a du mal à suivre ces réflexions philosophiques assez complexes aura peut-être de la difficulté à terminer le livre.

Le niveau de langue de ce livre est aussi assez élevé pour les plus jeunes du groupe d'âge suggéré (8 ans et plus), et on pourrait dire que le thème principal (la quête de l'identité) est un thème un peu trop avancé pour ce même groupe. Quand, par exemple, l'épouvantail commence ses méditations sur l'essence et l'existence, même l'adulte qui lit le texte pour la première fois doit porter attention à la suite d'idées pour ne pas se perdre dans des paradoxes insolubles. A un moment donné l'épouvantail se demande si, chez les hommes, on devient ce que l'on veut quand on a grandi et il raconte ensuite l'histoire de son ami le ruisseau (qui ne veut pas devenir un fleuve) pour essayer de découvrir une solution à son propre problème. Cependant l'épouvantail ne ressemble ni au ruisseau (un "être" tout à fait naturel) ni à l'homme (un être humain qui est né et non pas fabriqué). La question de son avenir posée, l'épouvantail cherche sa réponse dans la nature, mais finalement il n'y découvre rien qu'une prolifération de questions sans réponse: "Moi non plus, je ne peux rien devenir; je suis un épouvantail, c'est tout. D'ailleurs, je n'étais rien avant. Mais avant quoi? Si je n'étais rien, je suis donc quelqu'un aujourd'hui? Je viendrais d'où? Ah! C'est juste ces idées-là qui brouillent toutes les pailles de ma tête. On dirait que j'ai du feu dans mes brins d'odeur, tout se bouscule en dedans comme si c'était le ruisseau qui passait..." Les lecteurs aussi ont exactement le même sentiment que le pauvre épouvantail.

L'auteure, qui est aussi artiste, nous a donné de très belles illustrations qui traduisent de manière efficace l'atmosphère poétique et rêveuse du monde de l'épouvantail, mais la complexité du sujet de ce livre et les difficultés de langue que l'on y trouve nous obligent à recommander ce texte aux jeunes qui sont déjà bons lecteurs.

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THE CANADIAN NORTH

Very last first time, Jan Andrews. Illus. Ian Wallace. Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. Unpaginated \$10.95, cloth. ISBN 0-88899-043-X; **Snow Babies**, Eric Rosser. Illus. Olena Kassian. OWL Magazine/Golden Press, 1985. 24 pp. \$2.00 paper. ISBN 0-92077-501-2.

A few years ago books about the Canadian north depicted only a romanticized culture in which everyone lived in igloos, drove dog teams and hunted with harpoons. With the arrival of southern technology and sophisticated communications systems, the far north is no longer an unknown and forbidding land. The fact is reflected in two recent publications for children, *Very last first time*, by Jan Andrews, and *Snow babies*, by Eric Rossen. Although one is an adventure story about an Inuit girl and the other is a book of factual information about northern animals, both contribute to a greater understanding of Canada's north.

Very last first time is a story about Eva Padlyat, a young Inuit girl living in a village on Ungava Bay. Although the vocabulary and story line are suitable for the seven to ten-year-old reader, this story can also be enjoyed by a much wider audience. An appealing tale of adventure, it is also an interesting realistic portrayal of some aspects of contemporary Inuit life. Readers will also appreciate the vivid imagery of Jan Andrew's narration.

One's interest is immediately aroused by the apparent paradox in the title. Readers will want to find out what the title means, and what the main character is doing "for the very last first time." The opening paragraph sustains the readers curiosity as it states that "Ever since (Eva) could remember, she had walked with her mother on the bottom of the sea." How could Eva do this seemingly impossible thing? The fact that today Eva will walk on the bottom of the sea *alone* serves to increase the excitement and the sense of adventure. The mystery of how Eva can walk on the bottom of the sea is eventually solved when the reader learns of the eastern Inuit practice of searching for shellfish below the sea ice when the tide is out.

The feeling of danger and suspense is sustained throughout the story, from the time Eva goes alone through the hole into the ice until she finally returns safely to her mother. The reader first experiences a feeling of nervousness as Eva enters the unknown and mysterious world beneath the ice. This feeling dissipates with the author's descriptions of Eva's enjoyment as she collects mussels and explores the sea pools. The feeling of dread returns as Eva remembers the incoming tide, fear and suspense reaching a high point as the unthinkable happens: Eva's candle goes out, plunging her into darkness far from her escape hole. In a part of the world where people are lost through the ice every year, the fear of dying beneath the ice is a very real one. Happily for the reader — and Eva — she manages to light a new candle and find her way back to the mussel pan where "her mother's hands reach down and (pull) her up, too, through the hole."

Finally we understand the meaning of the title, as Eva exclaims "That

was my last very first — my very last *first* time — for walking alone on the bottom of the sea.”

Jan Andrew’s book is full of descriptive passages which add to children’s vocabulary and enhance their understanding and enjoyment of the story. The author provides an accurate description of an isolated northern village in winter, where “snow lay white as far as the eye could see—snow but not a single tree for miles and miles on the vast northern tundra...no highways but snowmobile tracks led away and disappeared into the distance.” Jan Andrews’ descriptions of the world beneath the sea ice appeal to all our senses — the feel of “the damp air”, the “salt smell”, the sound of the wind whistling through the ice hole above, and the sight of glistening white stones, blue-black mussel shells, pinky-purple crabs on the sea bed. The real world of rock pools full of shrimp, crabs and sea-anemones, of rocks covered with “long strings of (blue-black) mussels”, and sea-weed “piled in thick, wet, shiny heaps and masses” co-exists with a less tangle more spiritual under-sea world of “strange shadow shapes” and animal forms in the rock and ice. The story is full of auditory images sure to appeal to young readers’ imaginations, — the whistling wind through the ice hole, Eva’s echoing song and the rumbling as she hums “far back in her throat”, the clatter of mussels as she drops them in her pan, the lap, lap of the waves and their “whoosh and roar and whoosh again”, Eva’s panic-stricken calls, the roaring of the tide, the shrieking and creaking of the ice, and finally her mother’s welcome call.

Children find it easy to identify with Eva’s changing emotions as she moves from excited anticipation, through happiness and satisfaction as she completes her task, to the terror of being alone in the darkness under the ice, and finally to the relief of finding herself back with her mother again.

The beautiful illustrations by Ian Wallace add a great deal to the enjoyment and understanding of this story. His portraits of the Inuit community are full of realistic details instantly recognizable to anyone who has ever lived in a northern settlement. The stretched animal skins outside the house, the bare light bulbs dangling from the ceiling, the fuel tank attached to the outer wall of each house, the skinny huskies with their backs hunched against the cold wind, the stone inukshuks, the furtrimmed parkas and beautifully embroidered mukluks and the bush planes bringing mail and supplies from the outside world are all familiar parts of the Arctic existence.

Wallace also portrays the profusion of colour to be found in the snowy Arctic landscape, particularly in the spring and fall. The northern skies are full of colour, while the snow is not only white, but many delicate shades of blue, purple and pink as well. Through Wallace’s illustrations the reader receives a view of the north, not as a lonely, desolate land, but as a land of beauty and adventure, of an on-going life.

Through Wallace's artistry, the story exists on two levels — as an adventure story about a young Inuit girl collecting mussels under the ice, as a tale set in the spiritual "other world" of traditional Inuit belief. While his illustrations of life above the ice are a detailed realistic depiction of Inuit settlement life, the illustrations showing the world below the ice portray a foreign, mysterious, slightly sinister world of sparkling ice caverns filled with animal shapes and human spirits. His use of blues, purples, and dark greens produces images which are beautiful and ominous at the same time, hinting at an ever present danger even as Eva explores the wonders of the sea bed. In addition to their other-world qualities, however, Wallace's sea bed illustrations include such realistic details as seaweed, starfish, crabs, barnacles and mussels. As the danger to Eva increases with the incoming tide, the reader may wonder whether the shadowy human figures are the spirits of Eva's ancestors watching over her to keep her from harm, or the spirits of previous accident victims ready to welcome her to the underwater world of the dead.

Very last first time contains many elements which will appeal to children: an unusual setting, adventure, suspense, vivid descriptive language, colourful detailed illustrations and the opportunity to learn interesting facts about a uniquely Canadian lifestyle. It is an enjoyable and educational reading experience for young and old alike.

Snow babies by Eric Rossen is an introduction to Arctic animals providing interesting factual information about such northern animals as the polar bear, muskox, caribou, snowshoe hare, seal, snowy owl and Arctic fox. Geared mainly to the pre-school child or primary student, the vocabulary is at a level easy for small children to understand. It provides the young child with a good introduction to such concepts as hibernation, migration, protective colouring, food gathering and eating habits within the Arctic habitat. Organized around the seasonal cycle, the book follows various Arctic animals through spring, summer, fall and winter, with the seasonal cycle of the polar bear tying the book together.

Attractive illustrations by Oliva Kassian facilitate the child's understanding of the factual information presented in the text. Her use of pastels and earth colours makes the illustrations more appealing to young children. The northern habitat is depicted as an attractive and colourful one, full of living things. However this book may have had a wider appeal had actual animal photographs been used instead of drawings. As a subscriber to OWL Magazine, I am familiar with its excellent wildlife photographs which are at least as attractive and appealing as the artists drawings, some of which look more like cute stuffed toys than real animal babies. These cute drawings tend to limit the use of this book to the under seven age group, whereas the use of photographs depicting real animals in their actual Arctic habitat might broaden the book's appeal to include older

children as well.

Both books depict some aspect of northern reality, showing the Arctic as a land of colour, beauty and excitement, full of living creatures. Both can help contribute to a child's understanding of the Canadian north.

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LECONS DU MONDE ANIMAL

La ménagerie, Jocelyne Villeneuve. Illus. Michel Montcombroux. Saint-Boniface, Éditions des Plaines, 1985. 106 pp. 4,95\$ broché. ISBN 0-920944-57-4.

Voici un livre finement écrit, constitué de cinq contes mettant en vedette chacun un animal déjà familier aux enfants: le colibri, le chat, le porc-épic, le canard et la chèvre. Le reste du monde animal fait, comme en accompagnement, des apparitions ponctuelles à travers chacun des récits, justifiant ainsi le titre donné au recueil.

Le monde de Jocelyne Villeneuve est un univers d'harmonie où règne la bonne entente entre l'homme et les animaux. Ceux-ci, doués à leur façon de raison, savent s'insinuer dans les bonnes grâces des humains, discuter avec eux, leur venir en aide à l'occasion ou même leur apprendre certaines leçons de vie. Ainsi le colibri, fantaisiste et passé maître dans l'art d'être importun à bon escient, fera redécouvrir à un vieillard devenu hermite et taciturne depuis la mort de sa femme, les joies et les consolations de l'amitié. Poirot le porc-épic, quant à lui, mettra à contribution les épines de son pelage pour déboucher, la veille même de Noël, moment stratégique, s'il en est, dans une existence d'enfant, la cheminée des petits amis qui lui ont sauvé la vie. Et Nanette, la chèvre capricieuse et revêche, égaiera les vacances de Joanne dès que celle-ci se sera laissé persuader que la pauvre bête refuse d'être comme les autres, qu'il faut prendre le temps de l'appriivoiser et ne pas se fier aux apparences.

Comme il convient à un auteur de contes pour enfants, Jocelyne Villeneuve sait doser habilement, dans ses récits, l'utile et l'agréable. La vieille Ukrainienne qui, à l'approche de Pâques, se met en frais de décorer des oeufs selon les techniques séculaires qu'elle a emportées avec elle des vieux