

presque proverbiaux dont le texte est ponctué: "il faut du courage pour aimer", "quand on pleure, on ne se rend pas compte de ce qu'on dit", "l'âge n'a pas d'importance quand on aime", et "on est toujours trop jeunes!".

Dans ce texte, où se déploie un vocabulaire tout contemporain en un style vif et dense, agréablement complété par les illustrations de Philippe Brochard, l'ensorcelant et l'utile se marient de manière fort heureuse.

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INFORMATION AND ADVICE IN VARIOUS GUISES

The secret code of DNA. Mary Razzell. Illus. J.O. Pennanen. Penumbra Press, 1986. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-920806-83-X; **Little Stitch.** Margaret Brunel Edwards. Illus. Judi Pennanen. Penumbra Press, 1986. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-920806-69-4; **Barnaby Bear.** Margaret Leon. Illus. Linda Leon. Penumbra Press, 1983. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-920806-42-2; **Legs et Bizou/Legs and Bizou.** Frances Cherry. Illus. Corinne Tounsi. Penumbra Press, 1986. 34 pp., paper. ISBN 0-920806-60-0; **A Christmas tree from Puddin' Stone Hill.** Elsie Hadden Mole. Illus. Sylvia Hahn. Penumbra Press, 1985. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-920806-74-0.

The secret code of DNA is an informational picture book, its intent to impart factual knowledge rather than to tell a story. In simple, direct language, Mary Razzell explains the basics of genetics, being careful to avoid overloading her readers with complex ideas and terminology while giving clear explanations when specialized language is unavoidable. The text actively involves the reader, making what could be a dry recitation of facts into an interesting puzzle. The reader is addressed directly as "you" throughout and, from the opening sentence ("Have you ever wondered why pumpkins don't lay eggs?"), intriguing, imaginative questions are posed. Judi Pennanen's soft pencil illustrations generally serve to clarify the text. Her slightly distorted children are appealing and their physical differences from one another emphasize the basic message of the text, that each of us is unique. The concepts of genes and DNA are admittedly a challenge to illustrators and the use of the double helix shape in the accompanying drawings adds a level of abstraction that is the weakest aspect of the illustrations. Yet in addition to remaining true to the facts, the illustrator, like the author, tries to make the message an entertaining one. To relieve the monotony of the grey and white, the artist has incorporated splashes of green into each drawing – an appropriate choice with its underlying suggestions of the world of nature. Touches of humour appear regularly, such as a morose looking dog with huge green leaves in place of his ears

and a tiny winged cow held in the hand of a towering young man. As a first introduction to the subject of genetics, *The secret code of DNA* will both entertain and instruct.

Unlike *The Secret Code of DNA*, the remaining four books discussed in this review are picture storybooks in which artist and author have combined their talents to tell a story. *Little stitch* by Margaret Brunel Edwards is a prosaic cautionary tale of carelessness and its consequences. Penny is exuberant about how fast she can travel on her new bicycle. Zipping down a hill, she is surprised by a stop sign at the bottom and, braking too suddenly, takes a tumble. Her concerned parents trundle her off to the doctor who takes some stitches in her cut chin, and Penny returns home wiser about bicycle safety. Judi Pennanen's illustrations follow Penny, step by step, through her adventures – from her carefree early pedalling to her accident, her visit to the doctor's office and her return home. The soft pencil drawings are large, covering at least half of each page, and feature Penny prominently, until the final picture which shows just the top of her head as she curls up, safe, with her parents on the car ride home. The hues of grey and white create a peaceful, non-threatening atmosphere, although certain elements, such as the rather sinister gnarled tree trunks and the stooped, moronic looking nurse, seem jarring and out of place. The rendering of Penny's fall is clumsy and confusing: a two-page spread featuring a sequence of shadowy Pennys tumbling along. Neither the text nor the illustrations are likely to engage a child's interest beyond the first few readings.

Barnaby Bear also revolves around the consequences of careless behaviour, this time in the world of stuffed nursery toys. Barnaby leans too far out of an upper window and lands in a tree. A chipmunk and a robin come along, but neither is able to rescue him from his precarious perch. Through summer, fall, and winter Barnaby remains marooned in the tree until the spring winds of March whirl him up, about and through an open window back into the nursery. Children will sympathize with poor Barnaby's predicament, although Margaret Leon's attempts to humanize him (with a fondness for milk and cookies, for instance) fall short of such memorable stuffed toys as Corduroy or the Velveteen Rabbit. The language is simple and clear, if sometimes predictable, as with the "kerplunk" and "bumpity-bump-bump" that describe Barnaby's fall. The accompanying illustrations, done by the author's daughter, are bright, colourful and eye-catching. Large, simple shapes are outlined in black and filled in with vivid hues, primarily browns, greens, and blues. The occasional use of a sky blue, rather than a traditional white, background adds further interest, as does the varied positioning of illustrations and text on the page. The depiction of Barnaby himself is disappointing; he is a solid, heavy-looking, static shape with a minimum of facial expression – identifiable, but not especially endearing.

The balance between message and plot is uneven in *Legs et Bizou* by Frances

Cherry. Legs is a dancer, Bizou her little dog, and together they set off to Paris where Bizou, who understands only English, gradually comes to comprehend French. At last, the pair returns home to Canada, where Bizou can now understand both official languages. The author's statement about bilingualism overpowers the storyline, leaving one puzzled as to the book's intended audience. To further complicate this problem, the text which begins in English incorporates gradually more and more French as Bizou becomes acclimated to life in Paris, and it is, by the end of the story, entirely in French. Only bilingual children will be able to follow the whole story, although teachers of French immersion classes might find a use for this book with their students. The author also delights in word play, but much of the humour (e.g., l'Arc-de-Folie) will pass over the heads of most children. The illustrations, by Corinne Tounsi, add to the confusion. Her black and white, cartoon-like line drawings, highlighted with a small splash of either red or magenta, are a jumble of detail. Bizou, drawn as a perky little mass of corkscrew curls, is easily identifiable and provides a focal point for each picture. Otherwise, many of the illustrations must be studied at length to decipher them. Again, the humour is sophisticated, such as the depiction of Legs from the waistline down at all times. The pictures and the text on the opposing page are connected, although again it may take some examination to establish all of the links. On occasion, parts of the text are made clear only by the corresponding illustration, as, for example, the necessity for Bizou to travel in a sack on his Métro trips. *Legs et Bizou* is an unusual experiment using the picture book format to explore questions of language and culture. Unfortunately, although adults will find the book amusing, its level of sophistication far exceeds the understanding of most children.

A touching story of growing independence, *A Christmas tree from Puddin' Hill* tells of a quest. Young Timmy is allowed, for the first time, to go on his own to select and chop down the family Christmas tree. On his journey through the winter forest, he encounters a variety of problems before at last returning home with the most beautiful Christmas tree he has ever seen. His unexpected companion, Black Cat, whose impish and independent spirit rivals that of Stéphane Poulin's Josephine, darts in and out to aid and hinder him by turn. The story is well-structured, moving through moments of drama and of humour before reaching a comforting, satisfying conclusion. The appeal of the story is enhanced by Sylvia Hahn's muted grey and white pencil illustrations. As well as being faithful to the plot, they evoke a variety of moods: the comfort of home, the hush of a winter day in the country, the overwhelming sense of being alone in the midst of a forest of tall trees. Like the story, the pictures come full circle, beginning and ending with a scene of Black Cat curled up in a rocking chair. Through the use of perspective, Hahn engages the reader's emotions – the long trail of Timmy's footprints in the snow reflects our sense of separation from the safety of home, and the distant view of his house as he comes over the crest of a hill allows us to share the anticipation of his return.

A Christmas tree from Puddin' Stone Hill offers an exemplary blend of text and illustration, conveying a nostalgic, satisfying story of a boy, his cat, his home, and his forest.

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LA VIE D'UNE SORCIÈRE . . . CE N'EST PAS SORCIER!

Les mémoires d'une sorcière. Susanne Julien. Illus. Hélène Boudreau et François Lachapelle. Saint-Lambert, Héritage, 1988. Collection: Pour lire avec toi. 117 pp., 4,95\$ ISBN 2-7625-4466-1.

D'où viennent les sorcières? Est-ce qu'elles vont à l'école? Est-ce qu'elles ont des parents? Voyagent-elles toujours sur un balai? Qu'est-ce qu'elles mangent? Combien de formules magiques doivent-elles apprendre? Pour trouver la réponse à toutes ces questions, ce n'est pas sorcier . . . vous n'avez qu'à lire **Les mémoires d'une sorcière.**

L'illustration apparaissant sur la jaquette de ce livre m'a semblé des plus ordinaires et m'annonçait, je croyais, une histoire banale de méchantes sorcières empoisonnant les belles jeunes filles habitant les forêts enchantées. En effet, sur cette illustration apparaissent deux sorcières figées, vêtues de noir et entourées d'objets et d'animaux qu'on s'attend à trouver chez toute sorcière qui se respecte; soit la marmite, la chauve-souris, le chat . . . le tout sur un fond orange. Très peu innovateur, quoi!

Heureusement, le titre avait réussi à piquer ma curiosité. J'ai donc ouvert ce livre et me suis plongée dans l'univers de la sorcellerie où j'ai pu vivre au fil des pages les moments importants de la vie d'une sorcière fort sympathique de la naissance jusqu'à l'âge de 92 ans (ce qui, ai-je appris, est relativement jeune pour une sorcière!). Il s'agit d'une narration à la première personne, qui rend le tout très "journal intime" et donne l'impression aux lecteurs que la narratrice nous fait part d'événements et de faits que personne d'autre ne connaît.

Il s'agit donc de la vie de la sorcière Maléfice née d'un père sorcier et d'une mère sorcière en plein milieu d'un orage. On apprend que ce bébé-sorcière dort le jour et reste éveillé la nuit, à la grande joie de sa mère qui, comme toutes les sorcières, n'aime pas la lumière crue du soleil. Cette petite sorcière, en plus de manger du papier, de la boue, des cailloux et des fourmis, possède un dragon vert en peluche qui la suit partout. De plus, elle parle dès la naissance, ce qui ne semble pas surprendre ses parents outre mesure.

À l'âge de six ans, Maléfice commence l'école . . . des sorcières. C'est à sa