

# Rhyme and Reason

MICHAEL DUDLEY

*Sunflakes & Snowshine*, Fran Newman. Illustrated by Claudette Boulanger. Scholastic-TAB 1977. 48 pp. \$1.95 paper.

At first glance, *Sunflakes & Snowshine*, a collection of poems and illustrations, seems an ideal publication for children of grades 3 and 4. Its unusual "hang-up" format (similar to a calendar) makes it unique; its allocated areas for drawing and writing make it functional; its brilliantly coloured illustrations make it attractive; and its subject-matter (Canadian seasons and their effect on children) makes it educational. But despite the potential of its concept, *Sunflakes & Snowshine* largely disappoints.

One problem with the book is its inconsistency. For example, after two double-page spreads (each spread consisting of one poem and accompanying full-page illustration) are given for every month from September to June, the two spreads following June are inexplicably titled "Summer." Then the book ends abruptly. This prompts several questions.

First: why are July and August lumped together under the heading of "Summer"? Although it can be argued that the book is "school-oriented", hence its beginning with September, there is no explanation about this format to the unsuspecting reader. The consequence is confusion: most of the children who discussed this book with me thought that the months of July and August were simply missing.

Secondly: why are only two spreads allotted to "Summer" when this heading represents *two* months? This inconsistency results not only in an abrupt end to the book but in fewer poems and illustrations for the child to enjoy during the summer holidays—that period, ironically, when he presumably has more time!

And this in turn leads me to wonder why the first ten months of the book are each given two spreads in the first place. I suspect that few children will flip from the first spread to the second midway through each month because, surprisingly, no date calendar is included in the book to guide them.

The Kurelek-style artwork of *Sunflakes & Sunshine* is bright and generally attractive, but it does not always correspond to the accompanying poetry text. Consider, for example, the second June spread: the mountains

are described as glowing "Soft, soft, soft" but in the illustration these same mountains are sharp and hard. And the buttercups so lovingly described as shining "Gold, gold, gold" are virtually non-existent! Such disharmony destroys the child's enjoyment in relating poem to illustration. The very nature of the two-page spread lends itself to careful and appreciative scrutiny by the young reader: but here disappointment and frustration will result.

There are also instances of imprecision in the art-work. A robin, for example, speaks the first March poem, but the correlating illustration displays a brown bird which is missing the characteristic red breast that vividly distinguishes the robin from other birds. To children, careless lack of attention to the small but important details smacks of insensitivity.

The text of the poems shows occasional imprecision also. In the first November poem, for example, the final two lines read:

By noon the sky was thick with snow  
As winter left its mark!

The implication that November is a winter month is misleading: technically, November is a fall month. Further, the loose equation that "snow equals winter" is unacceptable in such a vast country as Canada where the weather in any given month can greatly differ from one province to the next.

Still, despite all the problems, *Sunflakes & Snowshine* glimpses success from time to time. The second December spread, for example, combines the best poetry in the book with a perceptive illustration which accurately relates to the verse. The poem's strength lies in its rhythm, clarity, and directness. Consider the first stanza:

It's poring over catalogues  
And looking into stores:  
It's dropping hints to Mom and Dad  
And doing extra chores.

Good poetry, however, is the exception. Too much of the verse is undistinguished and too often the art is handicapped by awkward, stiff figures and distorted perspective.

It is best to regard *Sunflakes & Snowshine* as a promising but unperfected concept.

*Michael Dudley is a published poet who is currently studying English at the University of Guelph.*