

English-Canadian Magazines for Children: An Up-date

MEGUIDO ZOLA

Ahoy, An Atlantic Magazine for Children. Junior League of Halifax, Inc. (Box 3380, Halifax, N.S., B3J 3J1), 1976-. Quarterly. 40 pp., \$1.25 per issue; \$4.00 per year.

Canadian Children's Magazine. Evelyn Samuel, Publisher. (4150 Bracken Avenue, Victoria, B.C., V8X 3N8), 1976-. Quarterly. 48 pp., \$1.25 per issue; \$5.00 for 1 year; \$9.00 for 2 years.

Chickadee: The Canadian Magazine for Young Children. The Young Naturalist Foundation. (59 Front Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1B3), 1978-. Monthly, September-June. 24 pp., \$.95 per issue; \$7.00 for 1 year; \$13.00 for 2 years.

Jabberwocky: A Canadian Quarterly for Children. Leslie Cowger, Publisher (530 Lakeshore Road, Sarnia, Ontario, N7V 2S5), 1974-. Quarterly. 32 pp., \$1.50 per issue; \$6.00 per year.

Magook: Canada's Magazine-Book for Children. Magook Publishers Ltd. (254 Bartley Drive, Toronto, Ontario, M4A 1G1), 1977-. Monthly, September-June. 64 pp., \$1.95 per issue; \$18.00 for 1 year.

Owl: The Canadian Magazine for Children. The Young Naturalist Foundation. (59 Front Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1B3), 1976-. Monthly, September-June. 32 pp., \$.95 per issue; \$7.00 for 1 year; \$13.00 for 2 years.

Pik: A Northern Magazine for Children. The Department of Education, Government of the Northwest Territories. (Yellowknife, N.W.T., X1A 2L9), 1972-. Bi-monthly. 32 pp., Free to students in schools in the Northwest Territories. Sample issues available upon request.

Raincoast. (Box 91603, West Vancouver, B.C., V7V 3P3), 1979-. Monthly, September-June. 8 pp. \$.65 per issue; \$6.00 for 1 year.

Small Times: The Children's Newspaper. Small Times Children's Newspaper Ltd., (6299 Airport Road, Suite 502, Mississauga, Ontario, L4V 1N3), 1978-. 7 issues a year, September-October, November, December-January, February, March-April, May, June. 24 pp., \$5.00 for 1 year; \$9.00 for 2 years; \$3.00 for 1 year special school rate for 15 or more subscriptions.

Toronto Kids: A Magazine for Young People. Toronto Kids. (100 Richmond St. East, Toronto, Ontario, M5C 2P9), 1978-. Monthly, September-June. 32 pp., \$.75 per issue; \$6.00 for 1 year.

The latter part of the seventies has seen the sudden burgeoning of some dozen English-Canadian magazines for children, not to mention our first children's comic in years, and our first-ever children's annual. Since this publishing output was first surveyed (see *CCL* number 10), the intervening two years have witnessed enough developments – new arrivals, a departure and, in most other cases, a good deal of growth – to warrant an update on this thriving aspect of English-Canadian publishing for children.

The most ambitious and, in some ways, artistically the finest and technically the most sophisticated, of our magazines for children, is *Magook* – a hybrid creation, part magazine, part book, as its name indicates. Since an initial experimental appearance over two years ago, and its subsequent review in these pages, *Magook* interrupted publication for a year in order to revise its product – more especially the magazine part of it – in the light of evaluation by its readers. It has since then reappeared as a monthly subscription publication and in significantly changed format. *Magook* remains part book and part magazine but, while the former section remains as it was (a 32-page quality book in full illustration), the latter section is now a twice-as-large, brighter, up-tempo version of its former self, replete with games, puzzles, activities, poems, a comic strip, a bilingual cartoon serial, and an extended story. A typical issue of *Magook* now gives coherence and focus to its wealth of contents through the use of a unifying theme for each issue – for example, a Year of the Child issue contributed almost entirely by children, a Nova Scotia issue, a sports issue, and so on. As a bonus, *Magook* now intends to add yet another 16 pages in which to serialize a novel over 4 issues. Additionally, the publishers have recently created, for various natural groupings of issues, a series of stylish, charming, imaginative activity books (accompanied by brief teachers' guides) that extend the ways in which *Magook* may be used by children. With all of these new developments, *Magook* has now really come into its own as an exciting, vibrant children's publication of the first rank anywhere in the world.

Of all English-Canadian magazines for children, the oldest and most popular is *Owl*. This impeccable, informational periodical that so elegantly combines in its every page the science of teaching with the art of entertaining has undergone no fundamental change over the past two years, except perhaps to widen the compass of its purview so as to include the occasional piece of fiction, more biography (not just of animals but also of people, both contemporary and historical), and articles on a wider span of topics ranging from loppets (or ski races) to gold rushes, from backyard junk bands to treasure islands, from secret codes to booby traps.

Owl's finest achievement of a recent date has been to hatch a younger sibling, *Chickadee*. *Chickadee* is a beginning reader's informational magazine whose over-arching purpose is to foster the young child's understanding of, and appreciation for, the environment, in the widest sense of that term. Outstanding features comprise each issue of this

important new magazine, whose pages abound in some of the most exciting material for children ever produced in this country: a fictional story designed to be read aloud to the child; a lavishly illustrated story-board about an animal – usually a baby or mother and baby – and some of the highlights of its life; an engaging cartoon narrative featuring two children and their magic archeopteryx pet which takes them on such journeys through space and time as visits to an Inuit settlement, a modern-day dairy farm, and a dinosaur haunt in the Badlands of a million years ago; an exciting grab-bag of game, puzzle, and activity pages which relate back to the major contents of that issue; a double-spread featuring readers' own contributions; and, to top it all, a surprise insert which is designed to involve the child in some creative work and play and leave him or her with something tangible to keep and use long after the magazine has been read. All of this wealth is packaged in a 24 page, 8" x 10" full-colour format, printed on high-quality matt stock, replete with purposeful and tasteful illustration, and impeccably designed and illustrated. Reading *Chickadee* is a holiday which furnishes an interlude of pure pleasure with absorbing interest. The writing is quick and sparkling; the illustrations are a kaleidoscopic feast for the eye and the imagination. As one of *Chickadee's* infant subscribers recently wrote, through his seven-year-old amanuensis: "I love Chickadee. I'm glad you are making magazines. I waited a long time for my very own."

Of the remaining English-Canadian magazines for children, *Canadian Children's Magazine* is clearly in a class of its own and has consistently kept that place. It has, all along, shared with *Owl* the virtue of being, in the best sense of that term, a scholarly publication: the difference lies in the way each magazine has won (and worn) that coveted but sometimes cumbersome mantle – with grace and ease in *Owl's* case, but self-consciously if not sometimes almost preciously in the case of *Canadian Children's Magazine*. However, over the past two years *Canadian Children's Magazine* has slowly but surely built on its undoubted strengths. It has accommodated its contents to the interests of a wider range of children; it has increased the variety of format and style of presentation of those contents; and it has continued in its role as an alternative voice in Canadian publishing for children – a voice that is not afraid of raising important issues however difficult these may be to talk about, and a voice that puts forth a fresh and different view. Lastly, one of *Canadian Children's Magazine's* outstanding features, its attractive, tasteful and functional design, is now complemented by a bold enticing full-colour cover that draws the reader's attention to the highlight themes of the issue; furthermore, inside the cover, the pages of *Canadian Children's Magazine* give evidence of a greater emphasis on communicating the magazine's contents more visually.

Ahoy, that somewhat younger, lighter magazine with the Down East look, has undergone a radical face-lift. While preserving its charming, regional local colour, *Ahoy* has slowly begun to look outwards to the rest of

Canada, at the same time drawing more of the country into the magazine. The number of *Ahoy's* pages have been substantially increased, flat-colour printing has been introduced through many of these pages, and the general design of each page has been considerably divested of confusion of display types, cluttered layout, and so on.

A new addition to these general-interest children's magazines is *Toronto Kids* which calls itself an experimental magazine for, by, and about Toronto's children and young teens. It is published by a non-profit corporation funded by a grant through the Federal Government's Canada Works Department, and is distributed free to the city's schools, libraries, hospitals, as well as being sold through retail outlets and on subscription. The contents of *Toronto Kids* embrace a small, tried and true range of typical magazine material: a story; profiles on sports people, artists, and historical figures; features on such diverse topics as children's rights, learning to boogie, kitchen paper-making, and ecology practices; books, theatre and museum exhibit reviews; a cultural events and activities calendar; a kids' news page; a comic strip; and a 'Your Space' double-spread contributed by its readers. The 24 page, 8" x 10" format is printed in black and white on good quality stock, brightened here and there with feature colour pages and a stunning full-colour photograph on the front cover. The magazine's strength lies in the quality of writing – the material is inherently appealing, it is usually well researched and written by experts in the field, and it is judiciously edited. The weakness of the magazine arises from the way the contents are communicated: there is an unrelieved ordinariness, dullness, and flatness of illustration much of which is in the cartoon style; the layout is cluttered; and the overall design lacks coherence and style. In the near future, the magazine is widening its intended audience, increasing its contents (24 pages of magazine plus an 8 page newspaper section) and is to be renamed *The Kids' Magazine*. With its initial problems out of the way, this new young people's magazine has the potential to compete on equal terms with some of the other publications reviewed thus far.

The next two children's magazines, of which only the briefest mention need be made, since neither of these publications has undergone significant change, are *Pik* and *Jabberwocky*, both of them small-circulation periodicals and both of them of severely limited quality. *Pik*, which is published by the Education Department of the Northwest Territories for free distribution to its primary-grade children, has redesigned its cover and introduced a variety of colour into its cluttered newsprint pages made up, overwhelmingly, of reader contributions of all kinds, gathered magpie fashion, seemingly without order or purpose. *Jabberwocky*, the magazine designed for reading aloud to the pre-school infant, has also attempted to improve its look with a new cover, as well as by adding fine full-page drawings by artist Ann Powell. Overall, this periodical is still plagued by the uneven quality of its content and some slipshod editing.

The remaining children's publications to be surveyed here are all more properly newspapers rather than magazines. It is in this category that one must note with regret the demise of *Nous Journal*, the bilingual, quarterly tabloid published by All About Us/Nous Autres, the foundation that has mounted young people's cultural festivals, art exhibits and educational programs, as well as publishing anthologies of young people's poetry. As against this loss, two new children's newspapers have been recently launched. The first is *Raincoast* a privately ventured small paper consisting entirely of games, puzzles, quizzes and activities. *Raincoast*, according to its publisher, is unlikely to live out its first year because it has been unable to find a ready market. The second of these papers is *Small Times*, another privately launched tabloid which appears to be thriving. *Small Times* comprises the usual material to be found in a children's general-interest publication with the difference that most of the contents are written by children. While the children's often spontaneous, lively and even provocative contributions that fill *Small Times'* 20 pages are of generally high quality, the problem here lies in the editor's proclivity for turning all the gold they touch into dross through the manner in which they assemble and illustrate this material. *Small Things* is illustrated largely by means of cartoon art of the grosser and more lurid kind, supplemented, here and there, by dull, banal photographs mostly in police mug-shot idiom. Layout of copy is cluttered and messy. And overall design is about as stylish as that of a supermarket flyer without the latter's eye-catching qualities.

What does the future look like for all these childrens' magazines? At the present time, a publishing effort of such magnitude represents a substantial proportion of the total output of English-Canadian publishing for children. More important, it represents a significant share of that total's quality since some of these magazines – *Magook*, *Owl*, *Chickadee* and *Canadian Children's Magazine* – are among the finest of their kind in the world. It must be emphasized, however, that some of these publications are fighting – in some cases a losing battle – for their very economic survival: for, with only the most token of support from the public purse, and serving only a small possible audience that patronizes them too little and too late, these publications are struggling with severely inflationary times, in a harsh market-place that continues to be weighted in favour of the cheap, low-quality, imported, mass-produced and mass-marketed product.

Meguido Zola, who teaches in the Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, has also written children's books in English and French.