

The Children Are Coming, The Children Are Coming

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Riding An Apple, Facing the Sun, Stories by Kids for Kids. Editors Rick Wilkes and Ann Millyard. Books by Kids, Toronto, 1980. 2 colour illustrations. 64 pp. \$4.50 paper. ISBN 0-919984-29-0.

The Night Sky/Le Ciel de Nuit, Katie Hemblen, Illus. by Angela Wood. Kids Can Press, Toronto, 1980. 2 colour illus., 32 pp. \$3.50 paper. French translation by Danielle Thaler. ISBN 0-919964-27-3.

We Make Canada Shine, Poems by Children. James Lorimer & Company Publishers, Toronto, 1980. 32 pp. \$3.95 paper. \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88862-288-0.

Earth Magic, Dionne Brand, drawings by Roy Crosse. Kids Can Press, Toronto, 1979. Black/White illus. 64 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919964-25-7.

It would appear from a cursory examination of *Riding An Apple*, *The Night Sky*, and *We Make Canada Shine* that the literary world is in danger of being invaded by children who are writing for children. As a teacher, I can appreciate the value of encouraging children to write for other children, so that they can see their work and that of others in "published" form. Knowing their work will be shared provides incentive and a sense of worth. But the drawback with this approach is that it requires a skillful and sensitive editor who can separate the wheat from the chaff.

In the case of *Riding An Apple, Facing the Sun*, the editors abdicated this responsibility. This upbeat collection of children's work was not only written and illustrated by kids, but evaluated, reviewed and chosen by kids. The only function the editors performed was to edit for spelling and grammar. As a result, one gets an overwhelming sense of precociousness run-amok. There is value in allowing children to review and judge each other's works, but in carrying the practice to the nth degree, the editors present readers with a collection which gives the impression that excellence is not a desired end product. The idea of providing a forum is valid in a classroom or school setting

where the children are known to each other, but to legitimize mediocrity in the publishing field is questionable.

If one doesn't get hung up on that issue, and is not expecting excellence, then *Riding An Apple* could be viewed from another position. This volume contains all the creativity, charm and exuberance, as well as the marvelous sense of humour of ten-year olds. Who else could imagine riding in the belly of a giant grasshopper, giving suggestions for bothering a father, watching potatoes take over a household, or having a dust ball for a pet? Many of the short stories and poems will get a giggle and a chuckle from children and adults alike.

There are even a few writers who show a glimmer of sensitivity. Sue Dymont touches upon the theme of transience in her "When I was Lonely", Yeung L. expresses her feelings about her unpronounceable name in "Heidi", and David Chan explores "The Problem" he has at school.

The juvenile appeal of the art work is summed up in Tamar Freeman's illustration which is integrated into "The Problems With My Sister", by Martha Stager. (see Figure 1). If the intention of the collection was to reflect juvenile interests, the editors have achieved their point.

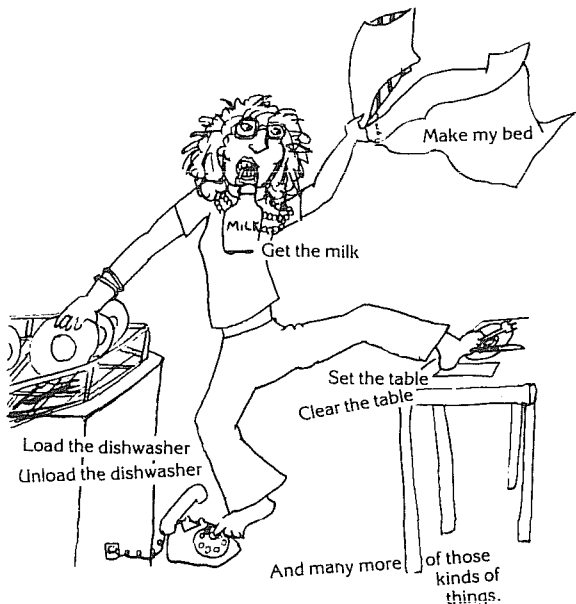


Figure 1

As a vivid contrast, Kids Can Press presents a rather remarkable poem, *The Night Sky/Le Ciel de Nuit*, written by Katie Hemblen, a student in Grade 3. This is a fine example of a search for excellence from children. Miss Hemblen is a gifted young writer and one to keep our eyes on. She has taken a metaphor of night sky seen as a play, and has carried it logically and skillfully throughout the poem. Angela Wood's illustrations enhance the vivid visual images of the poem:

Then she enters.
The Star of the play!
The Moon. (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

Each page contains from one to three of the twenty-nine lines of the poem. French translations share the pages with their English counterparts and with the matching illustrations.

The third book, *We Make Canada Shine*, lies somewhere between the excellence of *The Night Sky*, and the cutesiness of *Riding An Apple*. Its purpose is slightly different from the previous two. Intended for classroom use as one of a set of beginning readers, Lorimer's *Kids of Canada*, the *Lorimer Where We Live* reading series, is unique.

With skillful use by a teacher, or by anyone who works with and understands children, the book's large blank pages, with short poems

tucked into the corners, beg to be filled with illustrations by young creative souls. It isn't often that children are encouraged to draw in or to colour their books, and it is a temptation Lorimer is banking on. After all, what parents can resist displaying their children's art in so enduring a form?

The poems, all written by children, lack much in technique, but make up in the innocence and honesty of their feelings, and by the images they conjure. Nicole and Lena teamed up to produce these lines:

Trees are like brooms
Because when it rains
The trees sweep the sky
until the sky is blue once more.

The children explore their universe and describe it simply, not only in what they see, but in what they feel. As Lisa imaginatively writes:

When I break something
I am always nervous.
The caterpillars turn into
Butterflies turn into bees
When I break something.

Another girl, Sophia, puts her true feelings on the line when she states:

I have a cousin named Lisa
She's a goofball
She's rude
She gets me into trouble . . .
I hate her.

Now that's honesty! What young child could resist the image of a goofball cousin or the idea of a stomach tense with caterpillars, butterflies and bees, or the thought of broom-like trees?

Dionne Brand's *Earth Magic* is in a different class from *Riding An Apple*, *Night Sky* and *We Make Canada Shine*. It was not written by children nor illustrated by them. Miss Brand's poems are recollections of a childhood in Trinidad. The overall tone of the collection, magnified by the black and white illustrations of Roy Crosse is ominous and foreboding. One comes away with a feeling that Miss Brand's childhood did not contain much joy or laughter. The images she conjures evoke the poverty of a simple life tied to the land both physically and spiritually. The illustrations by Crosse, like

the text, release embedded images which emerge slowly but powerfully as one reads:

human cargo
lashed to benches, . . .
no sight of sun
or bird or home,
a ship's dank hole
a song to die
a mute unanswerable
question,
why? (see Figure 3).

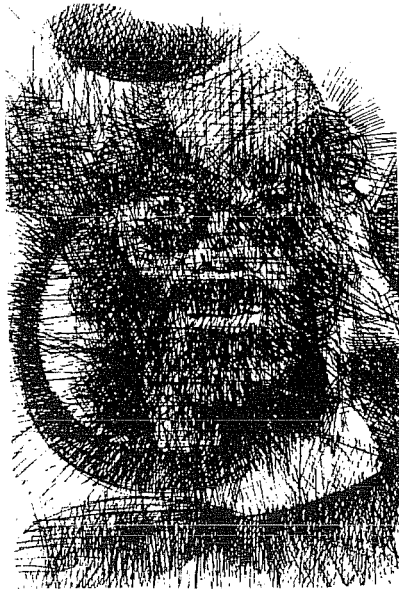


Figure 3

Mrs. Willing, director of Education In Progress, a Toronto Learning and Information Centre, conducts innovative creative thinking workshops for children. Her poetry and articles appear in various publications.