

Monica Hughes: *Writing for Children*

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“One of the functions of a good writer for children (besides, obviously, being entertaining) is to help them explore the world and the future. And to find acceptable answers to the Big Questions: ‘What’s life about? ‘What is it to be human?’ . . . Those are questions that demand truthful answers, not pat ones.” So argues Monica Hughes, author of no less than thirteen novels in the past eight years, winner of the Beaver Award (1980), the Vicky Metcalf Award (1981), and most recently, the Canada Council Children’s Literature Prize for 1982. In addition, her *Keeper of the Isis Light* has just been selected as Canada’s contribution to the 1982 honour list of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People).

As Monica Hughes shows in the following article, her creative life has been essentially an odyssey of self-discovery, a search — sometimes painful, sometimes joyous — into “the darkest places of one’s memory and one’s subconscious” for the “truthful answers” she shares with her teenaged readers. Mrs. Hughes illustrates the ways in which she transforms these truths into exciting adventure stories peopled by wholly realistic adolescents with whose concerns and problems her readers readily identify. No matter what the setting for her novels — many are classified as Science Fiction and take place in the future, others deal with Canadian history and yet others are strictly contemporary — her central concerns are always with the truth of character, with the difficulties involved in coming to terms with one’s own unique adolescence.

In 1980 *CCL* (No.17) published “Monica Hughes: An Overview” which introduced and outlined the eight novels then published. Since, Monica Hughes has completed her epic *Isis trilogy* with *The Guardian of Isis* and *The Isis Pedlar, Ring-Rise, Ring-Set* juxtaposes the adolescence of an Inuit boy with that of a white Canadian city girl during a future ice age. *Hunter in the Dark* is set in modern Edmonton and discussed by Mrs. Hughes below. *The Treasure of the Long Sault* deals with an attempt to recover treasure buried during the battles of 1812-13 along the Ontario-New York border.

The article which follows is based on a lecture delivered by Monica Hughes at Boys & Girls House, Toronto, on 26 April 1982, while Mrs. Hughes was honoured as Writer-In-Residence during the National Book Festival. The lecture was open to the public, but it attracted so many

professional children's writers (including Jean Little, Barbara Smucker, Audrey McKim and Madeline Freeman) that Mrs. Hughes departed from her prepared speech to focus on the interests of her fellow authors. The text which follows is an edited version of the actual speech which I prepared in collaboration with Mrs. Hughes. Following the speech are transcriptions of some of the questions raised by the audience.

Gerald J. Rubio who teaches Renaissance literature at the University of Guelph, has a long standing interest in science fiction.



Monica Hughes