

Attempts to reconstruct the past in fiction are not easy. There is always the disadvantage of looking backward over incidents that have occurred since the event being discussed; there is the danger of romanticizing the event and the characters; and lastly, many writers give their characters little personality, relying on history making the person rather than on the person making history. *A Proper Acadian* reports the event admirably, but falls short of credible character representation. *The Young Privateersmen* spins an exciting tale and will be read by many a young person because it is short, but it is primarily an adventure story and should be judged as such. *First Spring on the Grand Banks* teaches history within the framework of worthy plot and characterization, but some young readers may give up rather than endure long passages describing the technology of the nineteenth century fishing industry.

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Northern Adventures For the Middle Years

DONNA O'CONNOR

A Dog Called Houdini, C. Everard Palmer. Illus. by Maurice Wilson. Scholastic-TAB Publications, 1980. 104 pp. \$1.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-71066-4.

A Puli Named Sandor, Sharon Siamon. Illus. by Jock MacRae. Gage Publishing, 1981. 159 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-6272-1.

Adventure stories and those about animals are popular with readers in the middle grades. Combine the two with convincing characters, and you have the makings for a high interest book. The two titles listed above fulfill these criteria. Each transports the reader to a northern setting, involves him/her in an exciting, uncertain situation, and overcomes problems to the reader's satisfaction. One gives us insight into life in a small northern town, the other into the nature of the wilderness bush. The deep bond that grows between animals and humans is depicted in both books.

In *A Dog Called Houdini*, the reader's emotions are quickly aroused. Mistreated by his first owners, then losing the old trapper whom he trusted, Houdini is forced out of the bush and into the town in order to survive. His instinct and cleverness serve him well. His reputation grows and his superdog status quickly spreads among the students in the town. Enter O'Malley, the animal control officer who is determined to put an end to Houdini. His own son, Red, rescues the injured dog and sets up in a shack on the outskirts of town. A search for the boy on Christmas Eve and new information about the dog's origins contribute to a change in O'Malley's attitude. Once again, Houdini finds a home.

The experience of caring for the Puli named Sandor opens everyone's eyes to the pleasures and frustrations of raising a big dog in the urban apartment setting of downtown Saskatoon. The family heads north past the crowded campgrounds to an isolated campsite where they have the whole lake to themselves. Abby wakes up to find Mike, her seven-year-old brother, and Sandor gone; she too enters the bush, and all three begin a two-day experience neither dog nor child is prepared for.

The personalities of both dogs are well developed. The families we encounter in each story are very different. Houdini is in conflict with a man whose frustration is evident to all around him. Red, his only son, is a loner, and the mother is depicted as a traditional wife, buffering her husband's outbursts. This contrasts to the shared parenting role we see in Sandor's owners. Joint decision-making and open communication with the children are stressed. The male characters Sandor encounters are sensitive and expressive people. This diversified characterization strengthens the storyline.

In each case, the children are realistically portrayed. Red has strong feelings about Houdini and trusts his own knowledge and skill to last the night in the shack at 20 below zero. He is thorough and patient in his treatment of Houdini's injuries. Abby takes on responsibility, and tactfully helps Mike to cope with the ordeal. Throughout the book she shares with the reader her feelings and perceptions about things. Her spirit and her choices are admirable. Her younger brother Mike is typical of many seven year olds, at one moment excited and carefree, at the next a questioning pest. They are all characters the reader can identify with.

A Dog Called Houdini is printed on buff paper, in medium size print, and has a cardboard cover. The binding is not sturdy - a consideration if this title is intended for library circulation. There are fewer illustrations in this book, mostly showing the dog or a setting. There are no drawings of Red or of the happy ending. Both of these

would enhance the immediacy of the plot.

A Puli Named Sandor has large, clear print on white bond. It averages one full-page illustration for every four of print. The drawings complement the text well until the end. The kids and parents, very contemporary in appearance, are well-groomed and calm looking, even after what has been described as a physically and emotionally exhausting experience. A more distraught visual cue is needed.

These titles are compatible with reading levels in grades three to five. Each book has merit. Both offer adventures in a Canadian setting. Read consecutively, they will provide opportunity for the student to compare and contrast the two experiences. To choose one over the other, the librarian is best guided by the interests and needs of the target audience.

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Deux Collections de choix

M.G. HESSE

Les Bergers du voyage. Illustrations de Guy Ameyë. Texte d' Anne-Marie Brisebarre. Berger-Levrault/Fides, 1980. 32 pp. \$9.95.

La Vie au rucher - les abeilles, l'apiculteur et le miel. Illustrations d'Isabelle Raison. Texte de Philippe Marchenay. Berger-Levrault/Fides, 1980. 32 pp. \$9.95.

L'Histoire et la vie d'une chartreuse. Illustrations de Daniele Akmen. Texte de Louis Bec. Fides, 1981. 32 pp. \$9.95.

L'Histoire et la vie d'un château de la Renaissance. Texte de Jacques Durand. Illustrations de Patrice Flori. Fides, 1981. 32 pp. \$9.95.

Les quatre livres indiqués ci-dessus sont les premiers titres de deux collections: "Leçons de choses" et "L'histoire et la vie d'un monument". Dès l'abord les belles couvertures attirent l'attention. En feuilletant on est frappé par la présentation soignée, la typographie