

whom they learn how to tie knots, how to cope with emergencies, how to be resourceful, and how to appreciate the twins. This book, like *Patrick and the Actors*, is an enjoyable light read. Children from elsewhere in Canada will be surprised and intrigued by Mr. McUmphie's wintering alone in a cave, but this makes his hideaway all the more magical.

Both of these books would be best read by children under twelve. *Mr. McUmphie of Caulfeild Cove*, being accompanied by unpretentious but interesting illustrations by Janet Stretham, is more appropriate for a younger age group. Perhaps it is because of the ages of their readers that the authors use domestic strife as the cause of their heroes' quests and see the effect of these quests largely in terms of solution of domestic problems.

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ABC's for the Youngest Canadians

SARAH VANDERBURGH

ABC, 123 The Canadian Alphabet and Counting Book, Vlasta van Kampen. Hurtig Publishers, 1982. Unpaginated \$5.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88830-223-1.

ABC et/and 123, Barbara Wilson. Illus. by Gisèle Daigle. Press Porcepic, 1980. Unpaginated \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-165-2.

The Canadian ABC Book, Roy Peterson. Hurtig Publishers, 1977. 56 pp. \$4.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88830-146-4.

Elfabit, Steve Pilcher. Hayes Publishing Ltd., 1982. 28 pp. \$11.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88625-042-0.

The Great Canadian Alphabet Book, Philip Johnson. Illus. by David Peacock. Hounslow Press, 1981. 28 pp. \$10.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88882-043-7.

Canadian children today are exposed at a very early age to the alphabet. They are bombarded by the psychedelically-coloured letters of television shows, which flash by them at dizzying speeds. They are

mesmerized by cartoons which imprint the words chosen for "today's letter". They are bewitched by fabulous characters who state that "G is for goat and gorilla". They are reminded that Sesame Street has been brought to them today by the letter "G".

It cannot be disputed that with the advent of children's television, youngsters master letters and sounds at a very early age. Educators recognize the importance of language to all learning and the role played by early exposure to this aspect of education. At the same time teachers and parents have also remained aware of the part played by a storytime shared with a parent in giving the child a feeling of closeness. No amount of television technology can bring this feeling to a child. A book that permits both experiences — languagelearning and a feeling of closeness — is ideal. But in the case of alphabet books the quality must be spectacular to capture the attention of a child who is already familiar with the basic content.

This article will review five recently published alphabet books written by Canadians. They vary widely in quality, price, age suitability, Canadian content, and format. Each presents the alphabet in an individual way: three are notable for their Canadian content; one contains French vocabulary; one is informative enough to interest the older school age child; two are suitable for the preschooler. But unfortunately, none has that spectacular quality necessary to retain the attention of children who will return to the television for familiar characters reiterating a familiar concept, or to a story book that keeps its power to charm through countless tellings.

ABC, 123 is a small, hardcover book with a Canadian theme. The author explains, "Every year all the animals have a big wonderful celebration for Canada, the country they love so much. This is the story of their happy party".

The downfall of this book is its complexity — of illustration and text. Each letter is illustrated in black and white in an extremely detailed fashion with animals and objects suitable for the letter. The sentences that accompany the pictures are, unfortunately, equally as complex. For example, for the letter "B" the author writes: "B is for brown bear the beautiful ballerina who brings a bouquet of buttercups and bright balloons, and B is also for beaver, the baker who is busy baking big batches of buttertarts and brownies". The section on numbers is an improvement; for example, Vlasta Van Kampen writes more simply: "9 raccoons decorate the cake with nine ripe strawberries".

The Canadian content is most definite and is perhaps the only redeeming feature of this book. The maple leaf and/or the word "Canada" appear in every picture and Canadian animals and birds are pictured on every page. The complexity of the pictures and accompanying text make this book unsuitable for the preschool or early school age child. Its appeal would be to the imaginative five, six or seven year old with a large vocabulary and an interest in fantastic situations.

ABC et/and 123, in comparison, is outstanding for the simplicity of its author's choice of words and illustrations. Notably, it is the only book reviewed here written in both French and English. Even with the complication of using two languages, Barbara Wilson has kept her format simple. The word she uses for her example is one that is similar in both English and French. For example, the letter "E" is depicted by "l'éléphante" and "elephant" and the number "9" by "neuf pélicans" and "nine pelicans."

The illustrations are, also, kept simple. They are bright and uncomplicated in vibrant blue and one other colour. This book would have a wide appeal for children of the ages three to six. The French content enhances the book for the older child and the simplicity appeals to the younger child. There is, unfortunately, almost no Canadian content in the examples.

The Canadian ABC Book can be noted for the unique quality of its illustrations. As in *ABC et/and 123*, they are simple, brightly coloured and bold. Roy Peterson, the author and illustrator brings to his book the characteristics of his work as a cartoonist. In some instances, he has emphasized a certain aspect of the person or object making it appear anything from grotesque to amusing. The concept of size is distorted in some of the illustrations; for example the goose is several times larger than the grain elevator for the letter "G". This distortion makes it difficult for the child to grasp the meaning of any new word. Two pictorial elements tie the book together: the presence on each page of a mouse named Stubblejumper Zed and a line of rainbow colours that runs from page to page.

The three words the author has chosen for each letter present interesting Canadian vocabulary for study by an experienced reader and for discussion with a younger child. *The Canadian ABC Book* is suitable for ages four to seven.

Two last books in this group, *Elfabit* and *The Great Canadian Alphabet Book*, along with *ABC et/and 123* approach that outstanding quality which can capture children's attention and imagination for countless readings.

Elfabit by Steve Pilcher is the most expensive book. It is also the most beautiful in presentation — a large hardcover book with thick glossy pages and rich colours.

The illustrations are the outstanding feature here: they are imaginative, created by Pilcher from plasticine models reproduced in egg tempera, acrylic paint or coloured pencil. The magic of his work comes from his use of the world of fantasy including leprechauns, fairies, elves and ogres. Unfortunately, no Canadian theme is present. The illustrations are simple, appealing and admirably detailed.

The two facing pages present a rhyming couplet:

"A is for acorn which makes a small boat.
B is for brownies who all like to float."

The simple wording, the rhyming and the standard alphabet formula, "A is for . . .", make this book a treat for very young children and for beginning readers aged three to six.

The Great Canadian Alphabet Book also presents an expensive format. It is a large, hardcover book suitable for children from five to eight years old.

The most impressive feature of this alphabet book is its wealth of information. Each letter is illustrated and annotated in detail with reference to one distinctly Canadian item. These items include natural phenomena, historical events, geographical forms and famous people. The inside covers contain a map of Canada in which the provinces and the places mentioned in the book are shown.

The text for each of the letters includes a wide variety of presentations: poetry, riddles, mirror writing, fill-in-the-blanks, postcards and French phrases are all used to capture the attention and imagination of young readers.

The illustrator has made the book attractive. The pictures are brightly coloured, interesting and artistically presented.

Unfortunately not even this good Canadian alphabet book has the magic combination of qualities that will capture the attention and feed the imagination of the television generation of young children.

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Children's perspective on Ottawa

FRANK M. TIERNEY

History Mystery: The Ottawa Book, Anne Wyse and Alex Wyse. Illus. by Peggy Steele. Herzig Sommerville, 1981. 131 pp. \$10.00 paper. ISBN 09690827-0-3.

This uniquely designed, illustrated, and constructed book is the result of the enthusiastic creation of students from grades three and four under the guidance of two award-winning children's story writers, Anne and Alex Wyse. A refreshing, informative, historical, and contemporary guide and story of Ottawa has evolved; it is of serious interest for visitors to the city of all ages, for elementary and high school teachers, and for professors of children's literature courses at universities — the latter because of its interesting method of communication, its creative process, and its special contribution as an unique Canadian book.