

Animals: Whimsy and History

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Jumbo, The Biggest Elephant in All the World, Florence Burns. Designed by Affie Mohammed. Scholastic-TAB Publications Ltd., 1978. 58 pp. \$1.50 paper.

Giant Dinosaurs, Erna Rowe. Illus. by Merle Smith. Scholastic-TAB Publications Ltd., 1973. 32 pp. \$2.75 paper.

Mighty Mites in Dinosaur Land, Emily Hearn. Illus. by Mark Thurman. Greey de Pencier Books, 1981. 48 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-919872-71-9.

A Hunter On the Humber, Mary T. Smith. Illus. by Mary Anna Smith. Mary T. Smith, Publisher, 1981. 20 pp. \$3.00 paper.

Groundhog Day On the Humber, Mary T. Smith. Illus. by Mary Anna Smith. Mary T. Smith Publisher, 1980, reprinted 1981. 20 pp. \$3.00 paper.

The Naughty Billy Goat, Irma Sanderson. Illus. by Juliette Mayhew Daley. Lydon House Publishing, 1981. 22pp. \$2.75 paper. ISBN 0-920948-05-7.

No Ordinary Pig, Marion Ramsay. Borealis Press, 1980. 23 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88887-044-2. \$13.95 cloth.

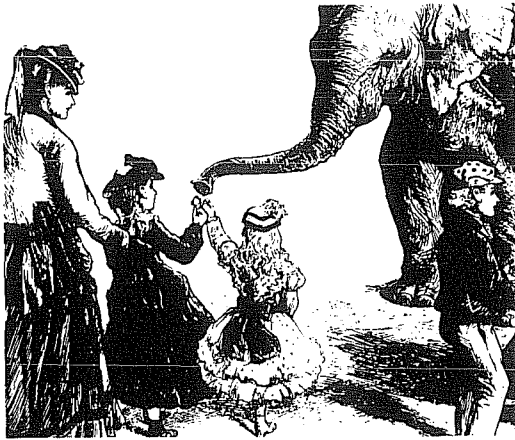
Concern for animals is a theme with which young children readily identify. Animal books published in Canada over the last few years have ranged from authentic reports on real beasts to fantasies about imaginary pets. The group of books reviewed here can put something on the shelves for both kinds of young readers: the embryo naturalist and the imaginative dreamer. They range from fact to fiction, from whimsy to moralizing.

Jumbo, The Biggest Elephant in all the World is a true story of a large mammal that toured Canada in the 1800s. The elephant's name was so widely recognized that it became part of our vocabulary; we still speak of a "jumbo" jet or "jumbo" ice cream cones.

Florence Burns skillfully leads the reader through the life of Jumbo as a baby in the Regent's Park Zoo, England, to his death in St. Thomas, Ontario. Jumbo's special appeal came from his personality. He showed affection for the children who visited him at the zoo and for his trainer, Scotty. He was mischievous, taking flowers from a

female observer; playful, grasping peanuts from children; gentle, allowing passengers on his back; and obstinate, refusing to go to Canada without Scotty. The public bestowed feelings of tender affection upon him. His followers loved him so much that even "Queen Victoria herself" sent an appeal to protest his sale to the P. Barnum Circus in America. The way Scotty talks to Jumbo adds to the story's realism. "They're getting rid of you, Jumbo", he said in a cracked voice. "They're moving you to America", or "Well, we're on our way, old lad", as the two of them head for America. As the story of his life in the circus unfolds, suspense builds until the climax of his untimely death. At this point the reader empathizes with faithful Scotty, who "fell into the sleep of the broken-hearted and the exhausted".

Actual photographs and 19th century engravings contribute charm (see figure 1). Ms. Burns' skillful matching of the text to the etchings,



as well as her choice of this appealing story in the first place, reflect her experience as a teacher-librarian who knows children's interests. Schools will be particularly glad for the story's Canadian content and the references to metric measurement: Jumbo ate "ninety kilograms of hay" per day. This authentic story is intended for students in grades 3-5, but its appeal extends to all adults or young children.

Giant Dinosaurs is a picture story book intended for primary grades. Knowing that young children have difficulty visualizing the actual size of these giant creatures from the past, Erna Rowe has related each dinosaur to artifacts from twentieth century life so that children have an standard for comparison. A trachadon is placed beside a house; a brontosaurus is inside two classrooms; and a tyrannosaurus rex is beside a telegraph pole. These perspectives produce an accurate idea of size. Each name is spelled phonetically, and each dinosaur is identified as an animal-eater or a plant-eater.

The colour in the diagrams is vivid and attractive. Also, the illustrator has added humour to the illustrations: a dentist looks at the 2,000 teeth of a trachodon and says, "I cannot find the one that hurts", a diplodocus creates a traffic jam; a housewife swats a stegosaurus with her broom, and a truck driver's hat rises into the air when he is surprised by a triceratops. Young children will find these images amusing.

At the conclusion of the book, all dinosaurs are related in size to each other. *Giant Dinosaurs*, which offers important statistics on these beasts to young readers in a way that they can understand and enjoy, is highly recommended for any primary grades studying these ancient creatures.

The third book, *Mighty Mites in Dinosaur Land*, provides information to the young reader in comic book format. The Mighty Mites are three kids with extraordinary power to shrink their size and grow big again, float on air, or stay underwater. These exceptional children are touring Dinosaur Provincial Park in the badlands of Alberta. Without warning, the dry desert-like area converts into lush tropical forest and the encounters with prehistoric creatures begin. This fictional comic book is comprised of one dangerous adventure after another. The Mighty Mites ride on the back of a hadrosaur when it is attacked by a tyrannosaurus; they explore the underwater scene on a turtle; they fly in the air on a pteranodon; and they narrowly escape from a shrew. To supplement the story, actual facts on the park and dinosaurs provide a valuable reference at the end of the book. Details include geographical and historical facts about the Badlands, biological information on plants, and an authentic description of the dinosaurs themselves.

Mighty Mites in Dinosaur Land is a valuable resource for the student studying dinosaurs. Again because of its Canadian content, it is especially valuable in Canadian elementary schools. This resource book will not remain on the shelves, to be used only for research purposes, but will constantly be read and reread for enjoyment.

Two stories by Mary T. Smith feature animal adventures near the Humber River. *A Hunter on the Humber* concentrates on the cat "Ivan the Terrible" and the second, *Groundhog Day on the Humber*, revolves around a groundhog, Grimsby, although Ivan appears in the second book as well.

The calligraphy by Brian Dench is large, clear, and distinctive, skillfully emphasizing words and concepts in both books. Grimsby, for example, refers to Ivan as "THAT CAT". The very appealing etchings in black and white by Mary Anna Smith contain a lot of detail in their replication of outdoor scenes of the neighbourhood. Below each is a question or comment appropriate to the text.

A Hunter on the Humber, the tale of a sleek black cat, recounts Ivan's reputation as a fearless predator. Even the neighbourhood cat is afraid to come out. Ivan captures a duck; a neighbour stamps and yells at

Ivan who releases the fowl which flies to safety. From that time forward, Ivan is required to wear a bell to warn his victims of his approach.

Groundhog Day on the Humber tells how the groundhog, Grimsby, wakes up in winter and contemplates going outside. Although the entrance to his home is exposed, he risks basking in the sun and being seen by "THAT CAT". His thoughts and dreams are illustrated (see figure 2). As Grimsby envisions marigolds and other sumptuous delights of the summer, he is startled by his own shadow. Quickly he escapes to his hole in the ground, until spring.

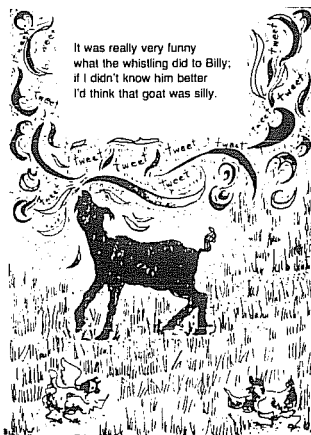
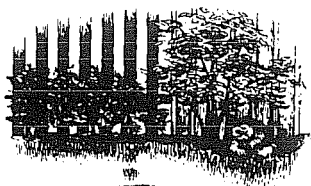
Both stories include subtle humour which is amusing but not obvious. These captivating short stories will be readily consumed by young readers and the small size of the books will make them easy to handle by even the youngest child.

The Naughty Billy Goat is a rhyming tale recounted by a young girl who owns a mischievous pet. She relates how the goat consumes everything it comes in contact with:

He ate the rope we tied him with,
he ate a dollar bill,
he ate three jars of mustard
and he wasn't even ill.

The neighbours threaten to have him taken to a glue factory and eventually do call the "p'liceman". The reader identifies with the young girl who cares for the obstreperous animal, pleading for its safety. The cure for Billy's appetite is a whistle which causes the animal to hiccup. When his diet is restricted to grass and whistles, he no longer consumes everything in sight, nor is he a menace to the neighbours.

This story is creatively narrated through poetry. The rhythm of the tale is reflected in the movement of the illustrations (see figure 3).



Teachers can use this story as an introduction to rhyming words.

Finally, Marion Ramsay offers *No Ordinary Pig*, a story revolving about "Little Albert Porker". At the outset of the tale it is established that this small pig is special: he has the ability to drive a train. Albert is diligent in his work until a sudden urge to ride his train overwhelms him. Both his grandfather and Old MacDonald the farmer disapprove of this irrational behavior. Excitement in the farmyard mounts when Albert gets the opportunity to escape in his train. When he bumps into the farmer at the market, Albert fears for his life, but the tide turns when Old MacDonald convinces Albert to be of use in transporting wares to the market. Once there, Albert is awarded first prize for his unique skill.

The pen illustrations by Ina K. Lee provide adequate detail (see figure 4). The pigs stand on their hind legs and emotion is evident in their faces. However, eleven illustrations may not be enough to hold the attention of very young children.



All children will enjoy the suspense in the story about Albert. Older children can read the text themselves, and these students will find the morals worth discussing. For instance, the story shows everybody has special talents and should be recognized for his/her unique abilities. In addition, the values of work are emphasized: Albert is rewarded for diligence in completing his work on the farm. *No Ordinary Pig* is a delightful tale with a special moral appeal.

Joan Goman is a resource teacher in Souris, Manitoba. She is an author and illustrator of a children's book, Rebecca's Nancy (1978; Reprinted by Scholastic-TAB in English and French).