

## ABC AND 123. . .

*A big city ABC*, Allan Moak. Tundra Books, 1984. 32 pp. \$11.95 No ISBN; *Byron and his balloon*, Children of La Loche and Friends. Tree Frog Press, 1984. 30 pp. \$11.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88967-075-7; *ABC*, Elizabeth Cleaver. Oxford University Press, 1984. 56 pp., \$5.95. cloth. ISBN 0-19-540466-1; *Know your numbers*, Tim O'Halloran. Hayes, 1983. 38 pp., \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88625-045-5; *Woosh! I hear a sound*, Emily Hearn. Illus. Heather Collins. Annick Press, 1983. 26 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-920236-59-6.

Lacking the overall unity and emotional power of stories, alphabet and counting books are nevertheless absorbing as lap books. With a child on the lap and a book in hand, an important element becomes the shared conversation between adult and child which the books serves to stimulate. The first three titles all convey a sense of being in Canada without being parochial. In Cleaver's, for example, the sense of location is conveyed through the use of a loon, of maple leaves and fir trees.

Developed as a project in celebration of Toronto's 150th anniversary, Allan Moak's alphabet book shows a favourite location for kids for each letter of the alphabet. Each page presents a full-colour cityscape peppered with active children and interesting details. Casa Loma, for instance, is painted as a winter scene with dozens of children sledding, throwing snowballs, and building snowpeople (fig. 1). Toronto's ethnic diversity is recognized in pages such as 'd is for deli' and 'm is for market' (Kensington), and traditional landmarks such as City Hall and the CN Tower appear as backdrops to activities which include children. The paintings are crisp, clear and flat with no fuzzy edges, and thus are ideal for the very young (ages two to five) as a visual exploration which stimulates talk between adult and child. The emphasis in the content is on children's participation in an urban centre, so there is lots to chat about with a young child in any Canadian city or town.

The English-Chipewyan counting book, *Byron and his balloon*, was produced by sixteen Chipewyan first-graders in La Loche, Saskatchewan. Using scenes and objects from their environment, the children made pictures illustrating the quantities one to ten. The pictures, using backgrounds of delicate water-colour washes, show chickens and pigs, women washing clothes, pick-up trucks, and children playing ball. Byron, a small boy dangling from a balloon, floats from page to page: David May's text describes what he sees (fig 2). Both an English and a Chipewyan version appear in print, thus respecting the native heritage of these children. The pictures are simple, luminous, and quite lovely. The book is very much a community effort and the process of its production is described on the final two pages and includes a photograph of the children. Seeing his/her painting in a book is a confidence booster for any child, and Lynn



Fig. 1

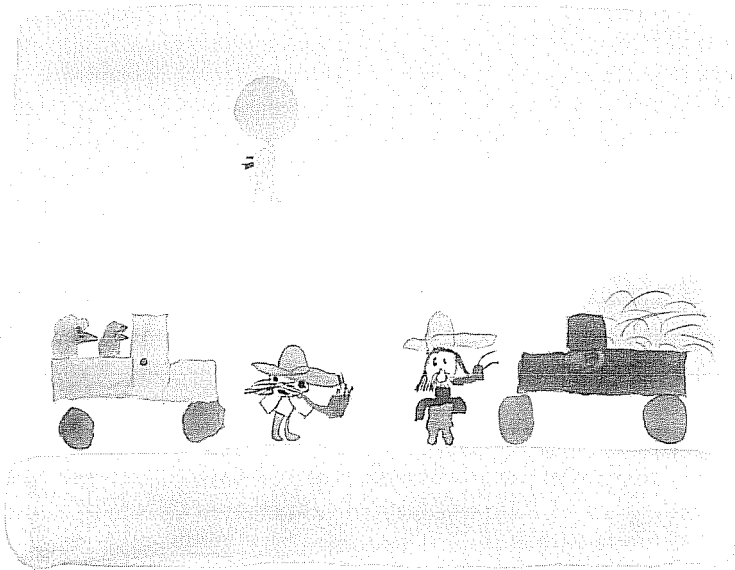


Fig. 2

Atkins, the children's teacher, deserves credit for this constructive effort in building self-esteem.

A small, gentle book for child-size hands, Cleaver's *ABC* incorporates upper case alphabet letters into simple landscape collages, each including four or five objects whose name begins with a single letter. Names of the objects appear in print opposite the pictures. As usual, her cut-out pictures are colourful and inventive, their simplicity arising out of a sophisticated sense of design. I like in particular her zebra leaping through a half-open zipper, and her loon, a reminder of *The loon's necklace*.

Tim O'Halloran's *Know you numbers* goes far beyond the usual one to twenty objects to count and includes picture games requiring the child to exercise certain mathematics skills such as one-to-one correspondence, constancy (or conservation) of quantity as the arrangement of pieces of the set is altered, and addition and subtraction. I assume there must be a math consultant working with him somewhere since our knowledge of these early math skills is based on the work of developmental psychologists such as Piaget. It is not the sort of thing an illustrator customarily rubs up against all by himself. Perhaps he knows this without debt to others. Nevertheless, he does not show the same astuteness in his use of language and it bothers me that the rhymes in the first section on quantities seldom manage to rhyme:

"Fifteen jars of scary berry jam,  
Sixteen bowls of undercooked clams."

The pages at the end of the book on comparatives, telling time, and naming the seasons are "add-ons" unrelated to the careful progression of mathematics skills exercised previously. The style of the illustrations is lively, full of action and detail, with a cartoon-like quality. They will appeal to young children.

The focus in Emily Hearn's *Woosh! I heard a sound* is a series of imaginary sounds heard by a toddler.

"Listen . . .  
do you hear that sound?  
Scratch, scratch.  
What can it be?  
Is it Daddy sweeping the steps outside?  
No.  
It's cat coming to see me."

Three pictures accompany each such set, a picture of the toddler listening, a picture of what could be (but is not) producing the sound, and a picture of what is producing the sound. The pictures by Heather Collins are simple, clear and life-like and nicely appropriate for two-year-olds.

Here is the problem. Picture books depend on two things, sound and visuals. The visuals are there on the page, but the sound comes from reading the text.

To read this book successfully, the sounds must be reproduced by the reader. But the reader does not know what the sounds are supposed to represent until two pages after they are heard. In between, there is an incorrect guess at what is producing the sound. This is much too abstract and confusing for two-year-olds. It would be better to play with the child making sounds with real objects and taking turns to guess what makes the sound, for the small child needs accurate, not inaccurate, feedback immediately. If I used this book with young children, I would eliminate the suggested text and follow the child's lead in constructing something that makes sense of the pictures for the child in the process of acquiring language.

*Carol Anne Wien is an Early Childhood teacher trainer and closet writer. She won the Nova Scotia Writers' Federation 1984 prize for booklength children's writing.*

#### PROBLEMS AND PLEASURES IN PICTURE BOOK FORM

*Emily Umily*, Kathy Corrigan. Illus. Vlasta van Kampen. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated \$10.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-96-0, 0-920236-99-5; *Afraid of the dark*, Barry Dickson. Illus. Olena Kassian. James Lorimer (Kids in Canada Series), 1980. Unpaginated cloth \$6.95. ISBN 0-88862-255-4; *The big secret*, Jed MacKay. Illus. Heather Collins. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-88-X, 0-920236-89-8; *Matthew and the midnight tow truck*, Allen Morgan. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-00-5, 0-920303-01-3; *David's father*, Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1983. Unpaginated \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth paper. ISBN 0-920236-62-6, 0-920236-64-2; *Millicent and the wind*, Robert Munsch. Illus. Suzanne Duranceau. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-98-7, 0-920236-93-6; *Mom and dad don't live together any more*, Kathy Stinson. Illus. Nancy Lou Reynolds. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-92-8, 0-920236-87-1.

Problems expressed, and problems resolved — with wit and humour, with fantasy, with pathos: despite great differences in tone and technique, a concern with the anxieties of young children is the common element in this varied collection of recent Canadian picture books. In some the problems are minor, and are handled in a joking fashion; others give a direct, realistic treatment of the troubles of their young protagonists — fears of the dark, of loneliness and re-