

## STORIES FOR LITTLE CHILDREN

*abc-dabra stories and poems 1, 2, and 3*, Hugh Oliver, Ann Nicholson, Rose Harris, Gerry Tanner. Illus. Donna McClement. OISE Press, 1984. 49 pp., 58 pp., 82 pp. Books 1 & 2 \$6.50, book 3 \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-7744-0282-2, 0-7744-0283-0, 0-7744-0284-9; *My once upon a time book — a collection of rebus stories*, Karen Clark. Braun and Braun Educational Enterprises, 1984. 80 pp. \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-9690605-4-8.

Fairy tales, myths, legends, nursery rhymes and poems are always welcomed by the young set, who constantly beg for repetition of favourites. Hugh Oliver, Ann Nicholson et al have produced an attractive series of three easy-to-read books, *abc-dabra 1, 2, and 3*, in extra-large print and spare style. The vocabulary in the traditional as well as “invented” stories is uncluttered, the level of difficulty of the words increasing with each book.

These books can also serve as excellent handbooks for the storyteller who can use her creative talent to enhance and make the story her own. The traditional “Emperor’s new clothes,” and adaptations of “The Pied Piper” live on in easy reading and several new works are born. In some cases original sources of the contents are not documented (e.g. “The lion and the mouse”, “The north wind”, “How the bear lost his tail”), so that it is difficult to tell which pieces are traditional, and which ones are adaptations or inventions. Some of the delightful poems, which are interspersed with classic works, are written by children, dealing with heartfelt topics such as pets, pollution, allergies and alienation. “But my poem is different, not because of its name. My poem is MY poem, and it will not change,” writes Cathy Crumley, age nine, Regina, Saskatchewan.

*abc-dabra 3* has some excellent original stories with a distinctly Canadian flavour. In “O Canada” each province argues and boasts about its merits, but the Wise Old Man in Ottawa teaches the provinces a lesson by comparing them to instruments in an orchestra, separately quite fine, but in harmony the best.

In Donna McClement’s vivid black-and-white representational classic illustrations her sense of humour winks through on the characters’ faces. Not an elaborate, expensive or colourful set, but because of the simplicity of storyline and easy-to-read format these *abc-dabra* books effectively pass down a part of our culture, the tried and true tales, along with newborn works from Canada’s future young poets.

In Karen Clark’s *My once upon a time book*, six well known and loved children’s stories are retold and illustrated by using pictures to represent the names of people, places and things; hence the sub-title, “A collection of rebus stories.” A rebus uses one or more pictures to stand for a word, but, unlike a true rebus or puzzle, this book offers illustrations at the beginning of each story to help the reader puzzle out the missing words. In “Little Red Riding

Hood”, we find each character, as well as the cottage, cape, basket, goodies, wolf, forest, etc. represented by charming illustrations which the reader can recognize, and so substitute the appropriate word in the story. Because of this preview, the basic challenge to solve the problem may be lost for the more sophisticated reader, but the pre-schooler will delight in sitting on your knee, pointing to the illustrations and saying the words they represent. This is an excellent activity for beginning reading and oral language development. The reluctant reader will enjoy using contextual clues to supply the missing words and to recognize predictable patterns. Since patterning is an important aspect of reading and oral language development for this age group, teachers could use the drawings to teach youngsters the accompanying sight vocabulary. Teachers of special education classes and teachers of English as a second language could also use this little book in a participatory collaboration, where the adult reads the story and the child fills in the appropriate responses until the sequence becomes familiar enough to recognize and repeat more words with each reading.

Karen Clark has created an ideal “homemade” book in primary print instead of type, with clear pictures which may be an inspiration for young authors to create their own rebus books. Little Red Riding Hood, Henny Penny, The three bears, The gingerbread boy, The three pigs and The little red hen with her entourage of duck, cat and pig all ramp their way through the stories in amusing sketches.

One problem is the change in traditional names and rhymes. The poetic spirit is offended when the wolf says, “I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down!” when the well remembered rhyme is, “I’ll blow your house IN” to rhyme with, “the hair on my chinny chin chin.” Adults are more comfortable with “Goldilocks” than with “Golden Locks,” and “Run run as fast as you can, You can’t catch me, I’m the gingerbread man”, instead of the “Gingerbread boy”. The writer can be forgiven for these little transgressions because folk tales can and do evolve as do the folksong and nursery rhyme, but unfortunately, many parents, because of lack of time or television monopoly of the child’s time, aren’t making sure their children know the old tales and rhymes. *My once upon a time book* gives new life to the old stories. With its glossy red cover, it can easily be tucked in a desk, under an arm, or under a pillow for re-reading.

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