

## ABC's AND COUNTING BOOKS

**ABC The National Air and Space Museum**, Florence Cassen Mayers, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987. Distributed in Canada by PrenticeHall Canada Inc. Unpaginated, \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-8109-18595; **The great B.C. alphabet book**, Nicola Morgan. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1985. Unpaginated, \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88902-9768; **A Halifax ABC**, Gordon Roache. Tundra Books, 1987. 32 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 088776-183-6; **Words around us**, Tim O'Halloran. Hayes Publishing, 1987. 47 pp. \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88625-124-9; **Ten little ducks**, Franklin Hammond. Douglas & McIntyre, 1987. 24 pp. \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-052-9; **One, two, three**, Roger Paré. Annick Press, 1987, \$15.95 activity set. ISBN 0-920303-88-9; **The Annick ABC activity set**, Roger Paré. Annick Press, 1985. \$15.95. ISBN 0-920303-78-1.

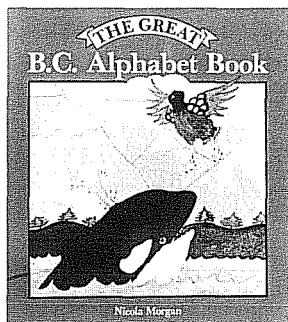
It is very interesting to observe the evolution of the ABC book. Many authors and illustrators take unprecedented steps in the process of advancing young children's literature. Growth involves change and risk and a willingness to try something new. The following books are a reflection of the current state of alphabet publications.

Florence Cassen Mayers' *ABC The National Air and Space Museum* is an excellent attempt to update the traditional ABC book. It is one in a series by the same author based on museums located in the United States, and so is not a Canadian book. However, its photo-illustrations of aviation, from the Wright brothers' flyer to the Blue Angels' jets, from a simple kite to the *Voyager 2*, would hold the interest of a child just beginning to learn the alphabet as well as the older child with a beginning interest in space and technology; and the full colour photos are iconoclastic for an ABC book.

The publishers chose a tower-like (36 cm x 12 cm) shape for this book, visually distinctive, but difficult to hold. Mayers' book suggests the opportunity for another aviation alphabet book incorporating Canadian, Soviet, German, French and British contributions to aeronautics, along with American ones.

*The great B.C. alphabet book*, written and illustrated by Vancouver native Nicola Morgan, has tied the ABC's to special places around British Columbia. This is a rhyming tour guide and may be a difficult concept for young children to grasp, yet the engaging site names such as Keremeos,

Osoyoos and Zeballos may hold their attention. A map of B.C. with these special places indicated by a red dot is located at the end of the book and, at the back, the A-Z poem is presented in its entirety — two nice summarizing features. For each stop along the tour an annotation suggests when and why a visit is worthwhile. Did you know that Castlegar holds its annual sunflower contest every July, or that Easter is rodeo time in Keremeos?



For shared reading, the layout is quite suitable. Presented on the left side is the alphabet letter, one line of the final poem and the travel

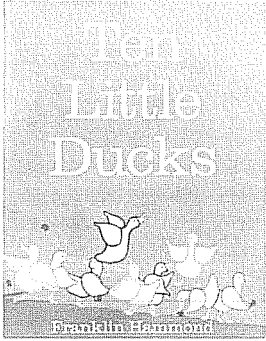
information. The illustration fills the right side of the double page spread. With the exception of the use of flat black accent areas, the watercolours are thin and of the same pale intensity throughout the book.

Morgan's *The great B.C. alphabet book* is a pleasant attempt at expanding the standard ABC book.

If Gordon Roache's *A Halifax ABC* seems familiar, it is because it is Tundra Books' latest addition to their series of other Canadian places including *A Northern alphabet* by Ted Harrison, *A big city ABC* by Allan Mook and *Ah, belle cité/A beautiful city ABC* by Stéphane Poulin.

Unfortunately, this latest Tundra Book ABC falls short of its forerunners. Roache uses the alphabet to link twenty-six scenes of Halifax, and at the back of the book gives a brief description for each plate from A to Z. However, Roache's sombre colours and thick application of paint do not make Halifax an enticing place. Actually, the publication is thinly disguised as an ABC book. Really, it is a collection of Roache's primitive-style paintings. The alphabet focus seems to be an afterthought. The placement on the page, on the inside spine ridge, of the alphabet letter and corresponding word gives them a much reduced importance. The illustrations do not deserve such an elevated honour.

As disappointing as *A Halifax ABC* is, it is not the evolutionary throwback that is Tim O'Halloran's *Words around us, a word picture book*. Words printed directly over the pictures, colouring book-type illustrations, uninteresting backdrops and clutter make for a worn-out approach to young people's literature. Sporadically, there is an attempt to update the content with flashes of non-sexism (a father washing the dishes, a woman representing the police) and current technology (a double page spread of audio/video equipment) but, on the whole, this book does not warrant a young reader's time.

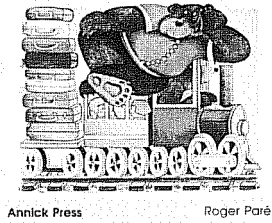


There are many ways to get young children hooked on counting and reading. The following recent publications would certainly assist in the job.

*Ten little ducks* by Franklin Hammond, a deceptively simple one-to-ten counting story, is more than just a compilation of numbers and objects. He's used many subtle techniques to achieve his goal. Soft, nursery colours create a light, airy feeling to every page, and clear, consistent presentation of the number and number word unifies the book. Hammond's way with onomatopoeia ("sip,

slurp, clink, drink," "wash, swoosh, swash, swish") introduces the fun in oral language, and the expansion of the coloured plates from one quarter of a double page for number one to a full double page for number ten is a clever way of demonstrating the increase in quantity as numbers increase.

## ONE, TWO, THREE



Roger Paré's *One, two, three* is a boxed kit containing one easy-to-read book with a short rhyme on every page counting from one to ten, and a 23 piece puzzle that is printed on both sides for an assortment of early-childhood number games. The art work is visually appealing and humorous. For wearability, the book and puzzle are laminated board. Perhaps the only shortcoming of this kit and Paré's *The Annick ABC activity set* is the numerous puzzle pieces

which need careful monitoring. One piece lost and that portion of the kit is virtually worthless.

The *Annick ABC activity set* is a boxed kit containing one ABC book, in a large and small version, and two puzzles. Using the 32 letter puzzle pieces, the child can spell any word contained in the ABC book and play a number of simple word games described in the guide book included in the kit. The ABC book itself is strong enough to stand on its own. The witty illustrations accompany short sentences that are easy to remember. Identifying the individual letter is also made easy by the clear presentation of the letter-symbol, the repeated alliterative letter-sound of the sentence and the delightful depictions of ABC characters performing curious duties.

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