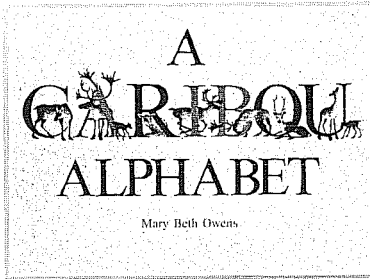


things that fascinate children, such as the fact that the thighbone of a *Ce-tiosaurus* is taller than most basketball players or that a *Tyrannosaurus* could swallow a human in one gulp. The text also shows that paleontology is still a developing science and that we are far from knowing "all" about dinosaurs. For example, all that has yet been found of *Deinocheirus* is a pair of gigantic fossilized arms!

Virginia Van Vliet is a librarian at the Eatonville branch of the Etobicoke Public Library.

A UNIQUE ALPHABET BOOK



A caribou alphabet. Mary Beth Owens. Firefly Books, 1988. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920668-52-6.

As a literary form, the alphabet book lends itself neatly to the exploration of specific subjects or themes. One such recent thematic alphabet book is *A caribou alphabet*, which stands out for two reasons. First, its subject, the caribou, has a definite mystique, with its spectacular migrations, its unique adaptations to its northern environment, and its charming appearance. This majestic yet gentle animal is a symbol of Canada that even four-year-olds can identify, for as every *Sesame Street* fan knows, "A quarter has a caribou on it."

A second reason for this book's exceptionality is its genesis. In 1987, a group of citizens in Maine who had formed the Maine Caribou Transplant Project with the aim of re-introducing the extinct caribou to northern Maine arranged with the government of Newfoundland to airlift 27 caribou from the Avalon Peninsula to a research station at the University of Maine in Orono. By 1988, the nursery herd had almost doubled, and in April 1989 fourteen animals were released into the Maine wilderness. This project directly inspired Pennsylvania-born Owens to produce *A caribou alphabet* as a celebration of international co-operation and a tribute to a remarkable species.

Despite its unusual inspiration and its special subject, this book is visually in the alphabet book mainstream. Layout is traditional, with a vignette illustration centred on each page above a line of text. The language, in rhymed couplets, tends to be telegraphic and allusive at times, but most references can be understood through the illustrations, and specialized vocabulary such

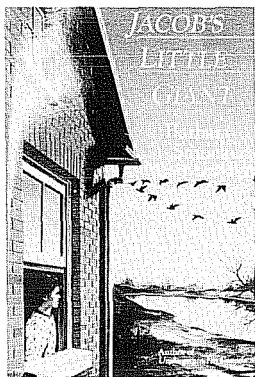
as "ungulates" and "lichen" are helpfully explained in a comprehensive glossary by Mark McCullough, the leader of the transplant project. It was just slightly disappointing to find no explanation of the clicking sound of the caribou's walk, a fascinating characteristic of this animal.

In the illustrations, each letter is presented in upper and lower case, and interwoven with watercolours of caribou. Owens has done her homework; the animals are portrayed with absolute realism and their special appeal is enhanced not by a prettified style but by a speckling technique which adds glow and softness. The northern environment is depicted authentically for the most part, and in naturalistic colours, with the possible exception of the W word, "woodland," which is distressingly shown as completely deciduous; the northern forests of the caribou habitat are of course largely coniferous.

A caribou alphabet has justifiably won kudos from the major American journals of review, as well as a listing in *Parenting* magazine's Top Ten Books of 1988. All children will enjoy and learn from its lively text and realistic pictures; teachers and librarians should not hesitate to recommend it to youthful researchers. And because its subject is the Canadian reindeer, it's going on my list of books to read and give at Christmas.

Cathy Simpson teaches writing at the Community College in Lewisporte, not far by off-road conveyances from the Mount Peyton caribou herd of central Newfoundland.

A LITTLE GIANT ABOUT "LITTLE GIANTS"



Jacob's little giant. Barbara Smucker. Penguin, 1987. 101 pp., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-81651-5.

Jacob's little giant is a story about two little giants – "little Jakie" Snyder, the smallest boy in his class and in his family, and the smallest Giant Canada Goose gosling which he loves dearly. Only 101 pages without the major historic adventures or large external and social conflicts which we find in most of Smucker's earlier work on slaves, Mennonite emigration and life, and native Canadians – this book itself is a kind of "little giant." Its calm simplicity and dignity give it special stature among the books Barbara Smucker has written.

Smucker sets the story in 1969 on the Beavertdale Road near Kitchener-Wa-