

sciously eats the treats as well, leaving zero in the dish. As listening children begin to realize what is happening, they become actively involved in the story, spontaneously shouting out, "He's not going to have any left!" and "Don't eat any more!" This participation helps to reinforce the numbers being taught. All of the numbers to ten are presented in words and in symbols painted by the mouse. The illustrations are full of energy and enhance the text.

A more challenging concept for children is the months of the year. In *Alphonse knows...twelve months make a year*, we are at a New Year's Eve party with the two main characters. To keep mouse awake during the countdown to midnight, Alphonse reviews the previous twelve months in sequence. He links them to the seasons and to special events such as Valentine's Day and picnics. During October, Alphonse reminds mouse of how he ate all the Hallow'en candy. The link between this book and *Alphonse knows...zero is not enough* thrills children and causes them to nod with understanding. They feel as if they have access to some secret information, something just between themselves and the main characters.

Apples, alligators and also alphabets is a colourful, amusing book which teaches letters, their sounds and the alphabet. New vocabulary, such as quail, newt and elk is introduced. Each detailed, plasticine illustration contains several objects which begin with the upper and lower-case letter indicated. The text, however, mentions just a few of the items, such as "Dizzy dinosaurs and Dancing doctors." The children automatically search for the other objects which have the same beginning sound. Some are obvious, while others require more careful observation and thought.

All three of these books invite participation by the audience and this helps children to learn new concepts more readily.

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PREPARING FOR TROUBLE

Playing it safe: Home, summer, and winter street smart activities for children. Barbara and Doug Hall. Illus. Carl Pickering. Firefly, 1990. 96 pp., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-9206668-74-7; **Come sit by me.** Margaret Merrifield. Illus. Heather Collins. The Women's Press, 1990. 32 pp., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88961-141-6.

One of the least pleasant tasks of modern

parenthood is preparing children for the dangers of a sometimes menacing world. Two recent books directed at children – one on neighbourhood safety, the other on HIV and AIDS infection – attempt to help parents and caregivers with this responsibility.

A simply-written workbook-colouring book, *Playing it safe* was designed to be used by children. Nonetheless, its many open-ended questions require adult help. Each subsection presents the young reader with a problem, like being offered money by a stranger to do an odd job, followed by three possible choices and some "Let's talk" questions.

Unfortunately, many adults will be ill-equipped to discuss some of these issues, from how to toboggan and ski safely to the more complex area of sexual abuse, which is over-simplified here. When Andy's friend at camp complains because someone is "touching his body," Andy decides to "tell a safe adult." But who is a "safe adult," here defined only as "a person he can trust"? Child molesters are often trusted friends or relatives. And what about the important distinction between "good touching" and "bad touching"? Background notes would have enabled adults to discuss these issues more confidently.

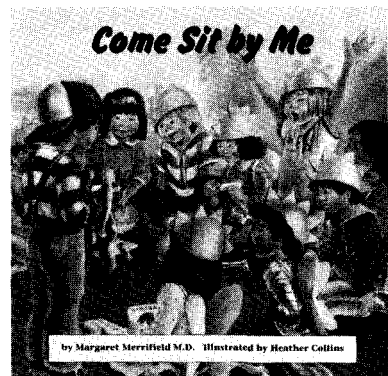
Nor is the book easy to use, especially selectively. Of its four sections – "Street smart," "Home smart," "Summer smart," and "Winter smart" – only one is preceded by a title page, and there is no table of contents. The poor figure-ground distinction in the schematic line drawings makes for a cluttered appearance.

Come sit by me takes a picture book approach to a delicate issue – the presence of a child with AIDS in school. Directed at four-to eight-year-olds, with a three-page appendix for adults, the book employs a simple story to make the point that children incur no danger from contact with AIDS- or HIV-infected youngsters.

Over supper one day, Karen tells her parents, "Sebastian says he can't play with Nicholas anymore [at nursery school] because Nicholas has AIDS." Karen's parents organize a meeting, where the parents are reassured. The next day, Nicholas's arrival is greeted by a chorus of "Come sit by me's." Illustrations on the last two children's pages present sixteen ways that children cannot get HIV or AIDS.

Books that use fiction to deliver a message tend to be heavy-handed, and *Come sit by me* is no exception. Its unconvincing ending evokes American racial harmony books of the 1960's. In real life, prejudice – on the basis of race, religion or AIDS – is not so easily dissolved.

It's unclear exactly where a book like this could be used. The target audience

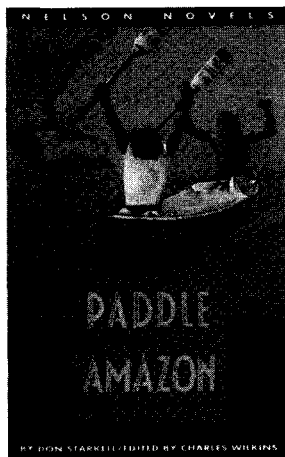


should be parents, not preschoolers; children will follow their parents' example. It is really the book's three-page appendix that may prove useful, with its clear presentations of the medical information and public health issues. Less sensible is the author's suggested explanation, for small children, that AIDS can be contracted by "having sexual intercourse with someone who is infected.... You can explain what sexual intercourse is and that it is for grownups, not children." I trust I'm not the only parent who prefers a less tinged introduction to the idea of sexual intercourse for my youngsters.

Heather Collins's brightly-coloured illustrations capture well the facial expressions of children and the charming details of a nursery-school setting, although her colour mix leaves an impression of disharmony.

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TWO COMPELLING TRAVEL BOOKS



Paddle to the Amazon: The amazing canoe adventure. Don Starkell. Ed., Charles Wilkins. Nelson Canada, 1990. 159 pp., \$4.50 paper. ISBN 0-17-603059-X; **Safari: Journey to the end.** Dave Taylor. Boston Mills Press, 1990. 120 pp., \$19.95 paper. ISBN 1-55046-016-1.

Paddle to the Amazon is the stuff of pure adventure – a two year, 12,000 mile canoe voyage which earned two Canadians a citation in the *Guinness book of world records*. On June 1st, 1980, Don Starkell and his two teenaged sons (one of whom abandoned the project midway) launched the Orellana, a 21-foot fibreglass canoe, in the Red River at Winnipeg. Their destination was the mouth of the

Amazon River.

Starkell's journal of the voyage is compulsive reading. The danger, the excitement, the fear, and the disenchantment are all recorded in unromanticized terms. Moments of high drama, from near starvation to arrest at gunpoint by Nicaraguan soldiers, contrast with more tranquil interludes, such as an encounter with a group of playful dolphins. The relationship between father and son provides an interesting counterpoint to the story. Although punctuated by disagreement, the relationship between Don and Dana develops into one of mutual respect and understanding.

There is an immediacy and directness to Starkell's language which make