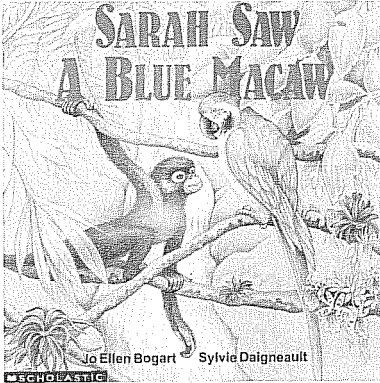


PICTURE BOOKS FOR CHANGE

Sarah saw a blue macaw. Jo Ellen Bogart. Illus. Sylvie Daigneault. Scholastic, 1991. 32 pp., \$12.95, cloth. ISBN 0-590-73809-7; **Warner, don't forget.** Lynn Seligman and Geraldine Mabin. Illus. Linda Hendry. Scholastic, 1989. 22 pp., \$4.95, paper. ISBN 0-590-73143-2.

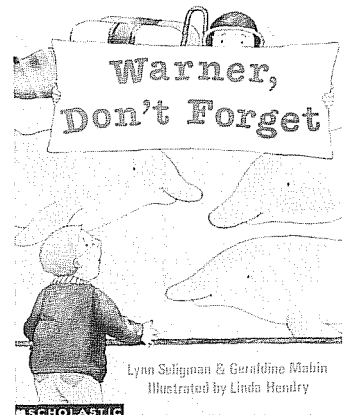


Sarah saw a blue macaw tracks Sarah, a little spider monkey, from day until dusk. What Sarah sees are the animals of the rainforest; the verse on each two-page illustration focuses attention on one of the animals, while others are identified in a "Cast of Characters" at the back of the book. To little children, the book offers the opportunity to find Sarah somewhere in each picture, a predictable question-and-answer structure in the verses, emphatic alliteration and rhyme (internal and end), and a story that culminates at

bed-time when the promise for the next day is more play. But children will need an adult to identify some of the animals in the illustrations and to explore the words that are most delicious in themselves: "marsupial frog," "collared peccaries," "morpho butterfly," "blue-crowned motmot," and the like. Indeed adult readers may have to do some research, as I did to make sure which was the baby skink and which the Brazilian tapir.

It is difficult to exaggerate how beautifully designed a book *Sarah saw a blue macaw* is: flora and fauna, accurately drawn and brilliantly coloured, are set on monochromatic backgrounds, some flat, some textured. The resulting tension between verisimilitude in the representation of the figures and obvious artificiality of the background captures the richly exotic quality of the rainforest. The strange beauty of Sylvie Daigneault's illustrations may well engender support for efforts to protect the rainforests.

Warner, don't forget also strives, albeit indirectly, to bring about change, but it relies on humour rather than on sheer beauty to make its point. Linda Hendry's illustrations, richly detailed right back to the vanishing point, enhance the comedy by capturing the absurdity of an anxious mother's series of disguised appearances, each one used to remind six-year-



old Warner not to forget this or that during the course of a school trip to the zoo. For children, *Warner, don't forget* has the appeal of a detective story: who are all the strange people who warn Warner? And why do they do so? Every picture provides clues, and a two-page picture portrays Warner's solution to the mystery. Children will enjoy the overall comic structure by which Warner turns the tables on his anxious mother; adults might note the aptness of his name – the "warn-èd" throughout the story, becomes in the end the "warn-er".

Whereas *Sarah* romanticizes animal life in the rainforests, *Warner, don't forget* makes it clear that parental anxiety is not altogether a laughing matter. The boy's dreams are troubled by his mother's excessive concern. His involvement in the school trip and his spontaneous laughter are cut short by her interventions. And when she swims up to the front of the dolphin tank with a warning sign, "WARNER, DON'T FORGET TO KEEP YOUR NOSE OFF THE GLASS!" she makes him the odd boy out, the object of quizzical concern on the part of teachers and friends. In short, this perceptive story portrays both the pressures such solicitude puts on children and the irrationality that it produces in adults.

Lynn Seligman and Geraldine Mabin, co-directors of an alternative school in downtown Toronto, undoubtedly have first-hand experience of such anxious parents – and genuine concern for them too. The humour that characterizes *Warner, don't forget* as a whole and in the final picture in particular – one of Warner's mother, exhausted – encourages understanding that could lead to beneficial personal change. Because Jo Ellen Bogart's months in Peru also inform *Sarah*, the political insensitivity of the book is the more surprising. The problem is in the naming: instead of Juan or Domaso or Evita or Esmeralda, the animals are dubbed Maggie and Charlie, Morton and Horton, Sherman and Clyde – as if the Peruvian rainforest were an Anglo-Saxon habitat. In addition to appreciating the humour, subtlety, beauty, and perceptiveness of *Warner, don't forget* and *Sarah saw a blue macaw*, resisting this kind of linguistic colonialism is a good reason why these books ought to be read, and discussed, by adults and children together.

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MUDDY WATERS

Rosette and the muddy river. Diane Carmel Léger. Illus. Pamela Cambi-azo. Orca Book Publishers, 1991. Unpag., \$8.95, paper. ISBN 0-920501-56-6.

Diane Carmel Léger's third storybook is successful as a tale told on two levels. It can be read as the adventures of a young girl uncovering the wonders of her