

cludes an incident in which *From Anna* did make a difference in a young boy's life, but also quotes from children's letters of the "My class has to write to a live Canadian and I got you" variety. Jean Little knows she does not write for everyone; she writes for readers. She does not write for Reluctant Readers, or work up showy car chases or murders that might hook Non-Readers. She does something much more difficult and much more genuine. She writes pleasurable, satisfying books that she would enjoy reading herself.

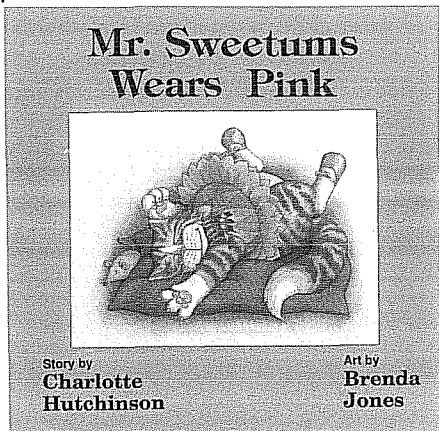
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TWO FABLES

Franklin fibs. Paulette Bourgeois. Illus. Brenda Clark. Kids Can Press, 1991. Unpag., \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-038-5; **Mr. Sweetums wears pink.** Charlotte Hutchinson. Illus. Brenda Jones. Ragweed Press, 1991. Unpag., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-18-7.

The intent of *Franklin fibs* to teach children a moral lesson is evident, but the didactic purpose of *Mr. Sweetums wears pink* is disguised. This difference is reflected in different levels of anthropomorphism. *Franklin fibs* is the story of a tortoise who boasts to his friends that he can swallow 76 flies "in the blink of an eye." Although this feat is beyond him, his actual accomplishments include handling buttons and pastry-making, and he is depicted with decidedly human expressions and standing on his hind feet, so we know he isn't a tortoise we will meet in the natural world.

The hero of *Mr. Sweetums wears pink*, on the other hand, seems a realistic domestic cat. His story of an animal whose authentic nature is under constant attack by the three little girls who own him seems aimed more at the amusement of its readers than their education. The girls love to treat their decidedly unwilling pet like a doll. His ultimate public humiliation comes when they dress him in a pink tutu for a costume party, but he surprises himself by enjoying the children's admiration. He stops worrying about how other cats see him, and is less bothered by being dressed up. He even secretly takes up dancing on his hind legs, thus moving out of the natural world.



As well as helping children understand the consequences of lying and the importance of empathizing with their pets, the writers of these stories make some gentle points to their adult readers. Bourgeois gives us dialogue between Franklin and his parents in which Franklin is not blamed or punished for normal childhood fibbing, and the likelihood that he will repeat this mistake is accepted good-naturedly. Hutchinson's message is more subtle, because it is one that our society tends to reject when made directly. Mr. Sweetums' feelings about such "feminine" qualities as pinkness and frilliness, exemplifies a dominant one of our world. He perceives them as "yucky," and as a threat to his dignity and tomcat-hood. His attitude is precisely that of people who recoil in horror at the idea of dressing a baby boy in pink. This amusing tale attempts to reach across the gender line to show that a tomcat doesn't have to howl on a backyard fence, or be named "Spike," to be a real male. He may even dance in the moonlight.

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SNIPS AND SNAILS. . .

Patrick and the backhoe. Howard White. Illus. Bus Griffiths. Nightwood Editions, 1991. 23 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88971-052-X. **Brendon and the wolves.** Allen Morgan. Illus. Christina Farmilo. Oasis Press, 1991. 32 pp., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-895092-01-9. **The magic hockey skates.** Allen Morgan. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Oxford University Press, 1991. 32 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540823-3. **Christopher's dream car.** Andreas Greve. Annick Press, 1991. Unpag., \$15.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-1169-X. **Stephen's frog.** Barbara Feldman. Annick Press, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-200-9.

It seems what's on the minds of little boys doesn't change all that much; the protagonists of these five picture books are cases in point. Their interests lie with machines, animals and nature, sports, and, best of all, the way all of these things fit into the realm of the imaginary. Some of these five books, however, are much more successful than others at creating a world that children will want to enter again and again.

Howard White's *Patrick and the backhoe* is one of the least successful at doing just that – describing an imaginary place and situation that a child can believe in and come to love. Inconsistencies run rampant, and even an adult must re-read several passages before making sense of them. The story of Patrick, his grandfather, the grandfather's backhoe, and their rescue of a B.C. town from a flood just doesn't feel right.