

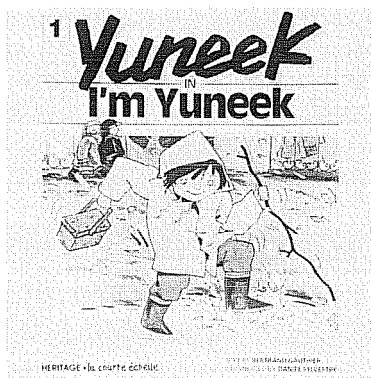
And her mother, busy as she is, becomes more aware of Erin's emotional needs.

For the general 'tween-age audience, this story is engaging. Every kid wants a sibling. Every kid wants a pet. And every kid has something about his/her parents he/she doesn't like. More specifically, for the child with a possible reading difficulty (and there are, sadly, a lot of them for whom to read a complete novel can be a prideful accomplishment), this well-crafted, well-plotted little book makes an excellent choice.

Geraldine Ryan-Lush is a writer and substitute teacher living in Mt. Pearl, Nfld. She has published articles, short stories and book reviews, and her first children's book, *Jeremy Jeckles hates freckles* is on the 1991 publication schedule of *Breakwater Books*.

CELEBRATING THE UNIQUE

Yuneek in I'm Yuneek. Bertrand Gauthier. Illus. Daniel Sylvestre. English version David Homel. *La courte échelle*, 1984. Unpag., paper. ISBN 2-7625-5170-6; **Yuneek in The championship.** 1986. ISBN 2-7625-5171-4; **Yuneek in The winner.** 1987. ISBN 2-7625-5172-2; **Yuneek in The present.** 1987. ISBN 2-7625-5173-0; **Yuneek in The Wawabongbong** 1989. ISBN 2-7625-6308-9; **Yuneek in Camping out.** 1989. ISBN 2-7625-6307-0.



There is a charming pun in this title character's name. As a contemporary, five-year-old, apartment-dwelling, urban Canadian child, Yuneek lives a fairly ordinary life. He likes Helen, his father's sleepover friend and learns to get along with her daughter, Andrea; he helps with the chores; he plays hard on a boy/girl hockey team (*The championship*); he struggles with jealousy for his father's attention (*The winner*) and with anger when he is thwarted over his eating preferences, and deals with having two loving

parents who live far apart (*The present*); he longs for the newest electronic toy, gets lost while shopping (*The Wawabongbong*), enjoys a first tenting trip (*Camping out*), and generally knows the everyday worries and delights familiar to young readers who share his developmental tasks and trials. All in all, Yuneek is depicted as a pretty normal boy, albeit one fortunate enough to have his ideas, feelings, and needs respected and appreciated.

At the same time, in the very ordinariness of this little boy's life, Gauthier celebrates the uniqueness of every child living his or her own great adventure of growing up, and the right of children to see their own lives validated in some of their stories.

Gauthier knows the importance for children of a rich imaginative life, and he deliberately balances the more mundane events of Yuneek's days with the delightful Wawabongbong, a fantastic flying fish that Yuneek first dreams of and then draws. Gauthier develops the Wawabongbong in later stories first into a real toy and then into the central figure in a shopping mall Christmas wonderland, asserting, in this symbolic evolution from fantasy into reality, the creative power of children.

The traditional text arrangement is augmented by cartoon-style speech bubbles which highlight the story line and give insights to character. Sylvestre's illustrations are colourful and energetic. He employs a variety of structures including full-page, double spread, window frame, panel inserts, and unusual perspectives. When Yuneek is lost, a tight square intensifies his frightened face; immense stretches of sand and sky spread across a double page to mirror for the reader Yuneek's wonder at his first seashore visit. As a local child spins a sea monster tale that unnerves Yuneek and Andrea, we see the likeness of the beast forming in the clouds that Sylvestre sends flowing across the top of the picture. His little bits of visual by-play (the occasional humorously-drawn mouse peeking out in the presence of the cat; Yuneek's smaller toys imbued with a frenetic life of their own) dress the less important corners of illustrations, giving the eye additional treats. In the larger, more elaborate scenes (the movie theatre, the hockey arena, the mall) he provides lots to look at but he understands very well his responsibilities as a picture book illustrator to enhance the story without allowing the visual subtext to rise above the heads of the audience or obtrude on the central tale.

Although the six books stand very happily as separate stories, numerous details of text serve to bind them together. Sylvestre also maintains a high degree of visual continuity, in particular through Yuneek's cat who interestedly observes her humans' actions and frequently reinforces the mood with her responses of warm snuggling, shocked-upright amazement, or offended departure.

Children of three to six should love these books newly translated by David Homel. Where demand warrants, buy the original series and introduce young students of French to "Zunik".

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