

*One in a Million*. Nicholas Read. Illus. Chum McLeod. Polestar, 1996. 143 pp. \$8.95 cloth. ISBN 1-896095-22-4.

In *One in a Million* Nicholas Read captures the severe injustices faced by animals in a captivating, and at times moving, tale of a puppy named "Joey" who must find a family who will care for him. Read's love of animals is quite evident in this book, a tale strongly reminiscent of Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe*.

The story is told from the point of view of the spirited puppy. Through Joey, Read discusses issues that are often too difficult to talk about with children: the death of animals due to an owner's cruelty or neglect, the life of a stray, and the incomprehensible occurrence of unwanted animals.

Joey is consistently judged by potential owners according to his size and colour. And though Read tells his readers that you cannot judge a dog by these superficial traits, he inconsistently places emphasis on the appearance of the humans in the book, using this criterion to judge whether they are suitable pet owners. When Joey is adopted for the final time, the woman who is strong and understanding enough to deal with Joey appears decidedly different from the glamorous Mrs. LeClerc. Barbara is dressed in a "Save the Rain Forest" T-shirt, faded jeans and sandals" (112). It is with Barbara that Joey finds a permanent home.

Strangely, the humans in the book seem to know Joey immediately by the name he has given himself. At the pound, he informs his cage-mate Blackie that his name is "Joey" and his owner(s) immediately recognize and use this name for him. As it is doubtful that the man who so cruelly left Joey and his brothers and sisters at the pound actually gave him a name, the immediate adoption of this name seems odd.

However, despite these small inconsistencies, *One in a Million* is a moving portrayal of a young dog who, despite misuse at the hands of humans, remains convinced that there are humans who need and want him in their lives. It is a useful book for any child who wants a pet.

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*Ribbon Rescue*. Robert Munsch. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Scholastic Canada, 1999. 30 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-03871-0.

*Ribbon Rescue* exemplifies the political transformed into story. The protagonist is a Mohawk from Quebec, and the book is inspired by clashes between Native peoples and white regulations. The whites in the book make use of what the Native protagonist freely offers; yet at the end, the Native girl is refused admittance to church (perhaps because her dress is muddy, perhaps because the church has traditionally frowned on Native dress). Yet readers need know none of this darker sub-text to enjoy the narrative's repetition and energy. The theme about helping those around one, and the reciprocal obligations involved, is equally important in the school yard or in the relations between whites and Natives, Francophones and Anglophones.

This is a gentler, less brash, side of Munsch.

Bright illustrations add both energy and humour (the endemic frogs are especially fun!).

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*This Means War!* Bev Spencer. Scholastic Canada, 1998. 139 pp. \$4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12440-4.

A home is more than just a building; it is the foundation that enables families to stay together. Having a home also helps to foster a sense of belonging — a sense of community. In Bev Spencer's pre-teen novel, *This Means War!*, twelve-year-old Laney's family unity is threatened when her family is given notice that they have to vacate their apartment building because their landlord, Mr. Dutton, "wants to turn the apartments into condominiums and sell them" (11). In order to fight the eviction, Laney, who wants to be a "World Famous Reporter" (18), decides to use her newspaper know-how to expose Dutton's plans. In the process, Laney not only grabs the attention of the city papers, but she also gains a community, as neighbours and tenants join together to protest Mr. Dutton's actions.

Spencer's novel clearly demonstrates that the actions of one person can make a difference; however, she also clearly signals that people must work together to enact real change. It is only through the tenants' combined efforts, and particularly their combined financial resources, that the apartment building can be saved — even Laney's five-year-old sister Emma donates a jam-covered "purple dime" (110) so that they do not have to move.

*This Means War!* is an effective novel for exploring the power of the individual, the community, and even the media to enact change within legal boundaries. During a street protest, a fight breaks out between Dutton, Laney, and her siblings. The police officer who responds to the scene informs Mr. Dutton and the children that "the others are too young to be charged [with assault]. Elaine [Laney] is considered old enough to be responsible for her actions'" (70). By including these references to the Young Offender's Act, Spencer signals the responsibility that Laney must accept if she is to become a mature member of the community. Spencer also reinforces the reality that with responsibilities come certain rights since the same police officer states that "Elaine can also charge [Mr. Dutton] with assault" (70). Spencer thus states explicitly that everyone, including children, has the agency and the right to fight for what they believe in, to save their home, and to create their own community.

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