

series books would invite children to discover other books worthy of reading by pursuing the work of a single author – a strategy all readers follow.

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### Pioneer Life in Ontario

*Lamplichter*. Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic Canada, 1987. 115 pp. \$5.99. ISBN 0590713736.

Bernice Hunter's *Lamplichter* offers a benevolent view of late pioneer life in the Ontario of the 1880s. Above all, this novel is a story narrated by a kind-hearted and loving storyteller, much like the main character's grandfather, who on certain evenings opens *Stories for Leisure Hours* and reads to the family by the fireside.

The story centres on William, a boy who has just turned seven, and follows him through one whole year, from July to June, from being the family baby to being a "young man" (110). During the year he and his mother are confronted by a bear, the children are housebound by a terrible blizzard, William falls off a horse and breaks his leg, and there are many other seemingly less significant events, all of which he absorbs and responds to. William also becomes aware of birth and death, the latter through the death of his grandmother and — equally disturbing for the boy — the drowning of kittens, and the slaughter of his favourite turkey (which ends up on the Christmas table). In short, like any boy, he experiences happiness and disappointment as he attempts to redefine his place in the family circle.

Hunter's treatment of setting is often very convincing. Her handling of the blizzard and the anxiety it arouses is one of the most memorable scenes in the novel. However, in her affection for a past world, she tends to romanticize what would have been an often extremely harsh existence. For instance, William's reticent, stern father responds to his wife's wish for a water pump and resignation at having to draw water from a stream, with "it was healthful for the children to fetch water up the hill. It would make men and women out of them" (40).

"Old-fashioned" virtues such as this are central to the novel, and to the title's significance: William decides he wants to be a lamplighter when he grows up in order to help keep the "streets safe for folks" (15). Gradually, as the novel progresses, the repeated but unobtrusive presence of lanterns, firelight, and candles contributes to the feelings of love and caring that this novel quietly promotes.

### Gritty Realism in Mid-nineteenth Century Nova Scotia

*Hannah*. Diana Vasquez. Coteau, 1999. 133 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-550501496.

The community of immigrants working in the mid-1800s Nova Scotia mining settlement where Diana Vasquez's novel is set live a desolate, harsh existence. Young