

ever, the narrator of "The Piano Lesson" sounds like a dispassionate adult who understands Chopin reasonably well and who wants to rehabilitate the image of the protagonist's gay piano teacher, while "Penance" is told in the voice of an adult lost in nostalgia. Despite this, "Penance" remains on my short list of favourites.

The third story on my list is "The Catalyst," because it takes the teenage characters way past the stereotype of science geek forced by her teacher to tutor the pregnant high school drop-out. The story grows into a tale of two girls, associates by happenstance, who gradually look beyond their differing priorities and dissimilar life paths, each with her own regrets and sorrows, abilities and accomplishments. The tension of the story builds due to their mutual selfishness, but the reader is able to see more than either of the girls do, which creates an empowerment that is wonderfully exhilarating to a teen reader.

Incidentally, while a reviewer usually ignores a certain amount of *errata*, when the editor's name is misspelled on the front cover the error is more than "unfortunate"!

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Historical Facts and Fictions

Sophie Sea to Sea: Star Girl's Cross Canada Adventure. Norma Charles. Sandcastle/Beach Holme, 1999. 140 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-404-X. *The Lost Sketch.* Andrea and David Spalding. Brandywine/Whitecap, 1999. 102 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55110-989-1.

These two Canadian junior novels have been written for classroom use, with teacher's guides available. These novels do for Canadian geography and art history what bibliotherapy does for a variety of emotional needs. Each novel contains factual inserts: geographical and historical data on each province for *Sophie Sea to Sea* and historical info on the Group of Seven painters in *The Lost Sketch*. Each insert includes several websites for additional research extensions. In *Sophie Sea to Sea*, each new chapter begins with a one-page fact sheet that includes sets of quick facts and a one-paragraph history of the province in question.

In *The Lost Sketch*, Willow and her brother Rick attend a summer canoe camp. They discover an abandoned boxcar on the old Algoma Central Railway similar to the one used by the Group of Seven painters in the 1920s. Inside they find bunk beds, an old stove, and evidence of artist residents: dried oil paints on a piece of broken china and an oil sketch! Was this the boxcar used by the Group of Seven? Was this an original Group of Seven oil sketch? As the mystery unravels, Willow is adept at searching the net and researches the Group of Seven for information on the use of the boxcar and who might be the painter of the sketch. The book is a fast-paced thriller with spunky protagonists set in a historically accurate context. While

neither the boxcar nor the oil sketch still actually exists the reader is swept up in the era of Canada's finest painters. The non-fiction boxes and the plot blend together seamlessly. Though initially I was prepared to dislike this marriage of fact and fiction, I found myself captivated by it.

Sophie Sea to Sea is the story of ten-year-old Sophie LaGrange and her family's cross-Canada move from Montreal in 1949 to start a new life in British Columbia. Sophie is entranced by her hero Star Girl, a female version of the comicbook hero Johnny Canuck. As the family moves west they stay and visit with relatives in each province. Sophie is a strongly drawn character who has one adventure after another in each province as she crosses the country. She resolves each situation by emulating Star Girl whenever she can. She stares down vicious dogs or takes on bullies who call her pea soup. In each chapter historic and geographical facts are sprinkled through the story. For example, in Alberta we are introduced to oil strikes at Leduc in 1947, western cowboys, and the Drumheller dinosaurs. While there are some well-crafted evocations of landscape in the book, the plot is not captivating. Early on we are introduced to how Sophie feels about her brothers getting to do things she can't. "Boys get to do more interesting things than girls and that's all there is to it. It just isn't fair." We are also introduced to the reason why the family moves west: despite her father's university training, he can't get a good job in Quebec like her friend Marcie's father: "Marcie's father is English. That makes all the difference. All the good jobs are reserved for the English." Neither this depiction of the reality of Quebec in 1949 nor the gender issue are carried through in any way. While Sophie is a strong character, the plot and factual inserts do not work as effectively as in *The Lost Sketch*.

Jerry Diakiw is a retired superintendent of schools with the York Region Board of Education. He recently completed a doctorate at OISE and is currently teaching in the Faculty of Education at York University. He has written on children's literature for Reading Teacher, CCL, and the Globe and Mail. He wrote and initiated a series of teacher documents for UNICEF, the first of which was entitled Children's Literature: Springboard to Understanding the Developing World.

The Routes of War: Three Novels of Distance and Displacement

The Wolves of Woden. Alison Baird. Penguin, 2001. 352 pp. \$19.99 paper. ISBN 0-14-100067-8. *The Road to Chifla.* Michèle Marineau. Trans. Susan Ouriou. Red Deer, 1995. 142 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-129-2. *Flying Geese.* Barbara Haworth-Attard. HarperCollins, 2001. 192 pp. \$14.00 paper. ISBN 0-00-648573-1.

rouit (rouit), *n., v.* — *n.* a defeat attended with disorderly flight... *v.*, to force or drive out... [<<L. *rupta* broken, fem. ptp. of *rumpere* to break]

route (root, rouit), *n., v.* — *n.* 1. a course, way or road for travel... [<<L. *rupta* broken, fem. ptp. of *rumpere* to break]