

TWO USEFUL CANADIAN HISTORY RESOURCES FOR JUNIOR AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Forts of Canada. Ann-Maureen Owens and Jane Yealland. Ilus. Don Kilby. Kids Can Press, 1996. 64 pp. \$19.99 cloth, \$14.99 paper. ISBN 1-55074-316-3, 1-55074-271-X. **The United Nations: Its History and the Canadians who Shaped It.** Desmond Morton. Kids Can Press, 1995. 64 pp. \$18.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-222-1.

Teachers of Canadian history have two new quality resources to draw upon. Both *Forts of Canada* and *The UN: Its History...* are large-format (8 1/2 x 11), generously illustrated books. While the former volume is most suited to Junior schools (grades four through six), the second is aimed at grades seven and eight, and is also suitable as an initial resource for a grade nine study of Canada in a global context.

Forts of Canada presents the history of forts in five chapters, from aboriginal survival buildings to the “Whiskey Forts” of nineteenth-century frontier days. This book engages the reader from the introduction (“Have you ever built a fort?”), and continually speaks to the past in the terms and language of today’s learner. It is full of pertinent analogies which respond effectively to the typical student complaint that history has no relevance to the present. The major strength of this work is that it appeals to all aspects of learning. Textually, the information content is high; the writing is simple but not overly pedantic or silly; the typeface is clear; and the perspective of historical actors is represented. (For example, the section on missionary forts offers fictitious quotes from Huron, Iroquois, and Jesuit figures to demonstrate that historical interpretation is sometimes a difficult task.) Most importantly, the text constantly refers to the historical context of fort-building; it explains the various reasons why forts were built and defended. Visually, the two-colour drawings complement the text, as they are optimally interspersed with it. There are lots of them — I counted 78 — and they richly enhance the reader’s understanding. For the active learner, there are nine different craft activities, such as “make a blockhouse,” “letter writing with a quill pen,” or “the original fruit roll-up” to keep students engaged creatively, physically, and cognitively. As well, the authors have included instructions for traditional games, a semaphore chart, recipes, and a comprehensive list and map of all 65 forts in Canada still open to visitors. The overall presentation of *Forts of Canada* is similar to a user-friendly computer screen, featuring a main theme and one or two smaller “windows” with biographies and other supplementary information. It would make a sound addition to any school or classroom library.

Well-known historian Desmond Morton has provided a useful resource for intermediate-level students to discover the role of the UN and Canada’s role in it. This book begins by comparing the political world to a large neighbourhood with many diverse families. Like the neighbourhood, the world has some disagreements, even some outright fights. What it needs are some common rules, and a respect for the sovereignty of each household. The book then

presents the UN in terms of its organization, history, peacekeeping efforts, development efforts, and human rights declarations. The final chapter examines the future of the UN as one which can and should be more effective. Under the first three headings are accounts of many important events in UN history. In the last three chapters, information is presented with rhetorical questions alongside. These challenge students to consider carefully the complexities of international aid and human rights. The text is further supplemented by over 80 photographs, and sidebars containing biographies of eleven prominent Canadians. Also included are a glossary, a list of UN World Heritage Sites in Canada, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Preamble to the Charter, and photos of all six Secretaries General. The author succeeds in making the UN accessible to those encountering it for the first time; the concepts are easily related to student experience; and the language is appropriate to the twelve to fourteen-year-old. But while *Forts of Canada* provides the teacher with many activities and ideas for enriching their classroom, *The UN: Its History...* is unfortunately bereft of any practical suggestions. As an academic, the author is perhaps unaware that the most valued school resources include strategies for teaching the subject at hand.

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HIGH SEAS DRAMA: AN EMOTIONAL CHALLENGE

On Board the Titanic. Shelley Tanaka. Illus. Ken Marschall. Scholastic/Madison Press, 1996. 48 pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-590-24894-4 cloth, ISBN 0-590-24895-2 paper.

The author's motivation in writing for children is an area of critical interest that is as yet insufficiently explored. Many of those who write for children still appear to be guided in their choice of vehicle by the myth, curiously typical of the Victorian era, that their efforts should be devoted to entertainment and the demonstration of moral values. While these aims are legitimate enough, they should not dissuade writers with larger vision from exploring other opportunities in this specialized field. These opportunities include a very different area of human experience, the response of individuals to crises and the traumatic effects of coping with disaster, both of which are significant factors in the shaping of character.

On Board the Titanic, an excellent example of an opportunity to deal with such reactions, is both a joy to handle and a pleasure to read. To one not unfamiliar with ships and the sea, and well beyond the age limits of the potential readership, it has the ring of truth in its straightforward handling of the practical and emotional aspects of a marine disaster which, at the time of its occurrence, literally staggered the world. The elapsed time between Titanic's collision with