



and stretches it to its utmost ludicrous lengths; cows are usually portrayed as “good” animals because of their milk production, not as monsters. That in itself puts the story into the realm of the absurd, and so the book takes the fear and makes readers laugh at it.

*Something Might Be Hiding* takes a far different tack to fear of the dark and its monsters. A little girl thinks she hears different kinds of monsters in different spaces in her new house, but when things are cleared away, there is nothing there. The story portrays the little girl’s fear seriously without building it up, and in the end, shows her acceptance of it by having her metamorphose it into a secret pet, so she is no longer afraid. The boy in *Henry and the Cow Problem* also learns to accept

his fear of cows and work around it — only the readers laugh at his wild imaginings. Both books are careful not to make light of their subject matter.

The tones of the two books are very different. *Something Might Be Hiding* is serious without being solemn or melancholy. *Henry and the Cow Problem*, on the other hand, is wild and exuberant. Both use dialogue effectively, and both have a sense of mild suspense to them. The illustrations of both are completely different from each other, and match both the tones and the story lines very well. The illustrations of *Something Might Be Hiding* are dark and textured, with lots of warm browns, golds, and oranges, and so are soothing to the eye. Those of *Henry and the Cow Problem*, on the other hand, jump out at you in caricatures with lots of hot pink and purple, in which both people and cows have flat heads, and everything is distorted and warped. Despite the differences, both books make good reading for youngsters afraid of the dark.

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## UNCLE SMOKE STORIES

**Uncle Smoke Stories: Nehawka Tales of Coyote the Trickster.** Roger Welsch. Illus. Cathie Bleck. Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. 93 pp., \$19 cloth. ISBN 0-679-85450-9.

Roger Welsch takes on the daunting task of creating a children’s literature rooted in North American aboriginal culture. In today’s political and social climate this task assumes added significance, because the dominant culture of the Americas

now attempts to treat the First Nation Peoples with honesty and dignity. Welsch's book gives people of all cultures insight into native cultural values in a way that is entertaining for readers of all ages.

The Nehawka are a fictional people invented by Welsch and represent a composite of several Plains Indian societies. Welsch notes that because he is writing in the style of native folktales, he is freed from the obligation of remaining faithful to any one specific culture: he picks and chooses cultural elements from the broader native tradition for his work. As a non-native, Welsch acknowledges his own cultural limitations; at the same time, he demonstrates that his respect for the people comprises the subject of his writings.

The trickster coyote is an archetype present in many cultures. Although the archetype is sometimes represented as a rabbit, fox, raven or other personified animal, for Welsch, coyote represents at once animal, spirit, and man. Coyote embodies many characteristics: sometimes he is sly, sometimes foolish, sometimes brave, sometimes a coward. Thus, as the character Cut-By-Flint points out to his daughter, Coyote is just like us. In short, coyote tales function as subtle morality plays that teach the young reader or listener values that are not culture specific.

Welsch's four stories about Coyote act as the illustrative vehicle through which Uncle Smoke tells his cycle of tales to the fictional people of Big Belly Lodge. Uncle Smoke is at once the storyteller, the elder, the old warrior, the relative and kind uncle figure. It is in his relationship with his community that the reader is shown the cultural traditions of the Native Americans. Welsch depicts the native respect for humility, importance of family, social etiquette, and the wisdom of the elders, values which are not always consistent with European mores.

Welsch is mindful that his work imitates an oral art form. His style lends itself as much to the spoken word as to being read by the young reader. Educators and parents will find that the premise of four stories told over as many nights can be used to pace the reading at home or in the classroom. In addition, the print is large, making this work attractive to younger readers. For those of us who may not be entirely knowledgeable about aboriginal culture, Welsch has provided a useful glossary of terms.

If I have any criticism of this work, it is that it contains only a few ink illustrations. However, Welsch may have intended this because oral storytelling, like reading, requires an active use of the participant's imagination.

*Uncle Smoke Stories: Nehawka Tales Of Coyote The Trickster* is a work which neither enhances the myth of the "noble savage" nor exploits or invents a Native culture for European consumption. Welsch skilfully avoids falling into either of these pitfalls.

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