

Mary Norton. Jon C. Stott. Ed. Lois Kuznets. Twayne, 1994. 158 pp. cloth. ISBN 0-8957-7054-2.

In this first book of criticism on Mary Norton's preeminent contribution to children's literature, Jon C. Stott retraces the recurring patterns of Norton's "improbable fictions." While revealing the congruencies between her life, her times and her storytelling, Stott juxtaposes Norton's bildungromans with those of other literary giants and adopts contemporary theories of narrative including reader response and feminist criticism, to enable his reinterpretation of the timeless qualities of Norton's canon. Thus according to Stott, Norton's innovation in female character development is to portray female experience the way a feminist would. Stott also argues that story and storytelling acquire central theme stature in her novels and readers respond as active co- and re-creators. Further, Norton's use of the frame narrative, her clarification of the relationship of narration to meaning, and her creation of intertextuality between her novels result in superior literature exemplifying Barthes's notions of *scriptible* and *jouissance*. Stott's literary expertise make this critical text an important scholarly reference.

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Scary Science. Sylvia Funston. Illus. Dušan Petričić. Owl Books, 1996. 64 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 1-895688-53-1.

The author starts with a fantastic topic and proceeds to treat it in a fun way. This is a fascinating look at vampires, witches, UFOs, ghosts, and legendary monsters. Scattered throughout are sidebars, whimsical drawings, and photographs packed with interesting tidbits of information. There are a few quizzes to encourage participation, and simple yet effective activities that require minimal equipment. The text encourages a healthy skepticism while maintaining a sense of wonder and curiosity about many of the unanswered puzzles in our world. Particularly well-done are the speculative what-if scenarios and questions, and the use of puns and witticisms. This book is highly recommended as a great read for those eight years old and above.

Space. Bobbie Kalman and Niki Walker. Illus. Crabtree, 1997. 32 pp. Price unknown. ISBN 0-86505-638-2 (library bound), 0-86505-738-9 (paperback).

The hardcover version of this book is sturdy, attractive, and bright. Its high-quality illustrations are enticing. The fact that the captions are printed at the

back of the book, however, is not obvious, unless you read the table of contents first.

The title holds the promise of a glimpse at our next frontier, but the text does not venture much beyond our solar system. Important items are left unmentioned. For example, in the discussion of the Big Bang, only the theory that the universe is eternally expanding is described; the alternative theory that the universe will undergo multiple Big Bangs is omitted.

The text is suitable for a child in the primary grades. It is simple and clear, even though somewhat pedantic. It contains many statistics, but does not project much of the wonder generally inspired by visions of outer space.

The excellent pictures in this book can be a starting point for discussions about the planets and the sun, even though the text may be unable to supply answers to the questions that may be raised.

*Lynne Quon-Mak is the associate editor of **The Annals of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada**. This review was made possible with the aid of Gwyneth Mak, who is in grade two.*