

a taste of its own powers. *Night cars* is, probably deliberately, a thoroughly soothing picture book. But, despite the obvious talent of its creators, I think the work lacks depth, primarily because it fails to provide that threshold which the child, now or later, may recognize and step through "with courage and cognizance."

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CANADIAN NATURE PORTRAITS

The wildlife ABC: A nature alphabet. Jan Thornhill. Illus. Jan Thornhill. Greedy de Pencier Books, 1988. 32 pp., \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920775-29-2; **The story of Chakapas.** Annie Downes Catterson, ed. Penumbra Press, 1987. 32 pp., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-920806-91-0; **The blue raven.** Ted Harrison. Illus. author. Macmillan of Canada, 1989. 32 pp., cloth. ISBN 0-7715-9288-4; **Journey to the top of the world.** Janet Foster. Greedy de Pencier Books, 1987. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-920775-17-9.

Four recently-published children's books compellingly portray the beauty of the Canadian landscape and the living things found within its borders. Although different in format and design, the books all reflect an appreciation for the diversity of Canada's environment and of the people, plants and animals which inhabit it.

For the very young, *The wildlife ABC: A nature alphabet*, written and illustrated by Jan Thornhill, introduces children to a multitude of animals found in Canadian woods, fields, streams, cities and tundra. The rhyming text is certain to please young readers, while the beautifully drawn, realistic illustrations not only depict the animals representing each alphabet letter, but also include a wealth of detail to teach the reader about the habitat and behaviour of each animal portrayed. Representing the letter V, for example, is the text

V is for Vole
Who had better beware!

The accompanying illustration shows a vole in the foreground near a barbed-wire fence, with farm buildings and the rolling hills of the prairies behind. This winter scene includes dried grasses and weeds sticking up through the snow fence showing above the snowdrifts. In the background are two of the vole's natural enemies, the fox and the hawk, as well as a hare which shares the vole's habitat. Ms. Thornhill has even painted the vole's footprints and tail mark on the snow. In some illustrations, such as those of the frog, housefly and raccoon, Ms. Thornhill demonstrates the animals' relationship to the human world. Be-

cause of the rich detail, many of the illustrations tell stories far beyond a simple portrayal of each alphabet animal. The artist has framed each colourful drawing with a border decorated in patterns taken from the main scenes, a device contributing greatly to the beauty of each page.

As an added bonus, the author has included a section of "Nature Notes" at the back of her book, giving factual information about every alphabet animal and naming the other flora and fauna found in each illustration. While this book is aimed at 2 - 6 year-olds, the wealth of informative detail in its illustrations and the additional notes at the end make it enjoyable and educational for older children as well.

For more advanced readers, three books set in northern Canada provide interesting and exciting reading about the environment, lifestyle and beliefs of the native people of the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Northern Saskatchewan. *The story of Chakapas*, edited and illustrated by Annie Downes Catterson, is based upon a Cree Indian legend collected by P.G. Downes during his travels in northern Saskatchewan in the 1930s and 1940s. Reflecting the traditional woodland Cree belief in animism, it tells how the tiny Least Mouse helps the mighty hunter Chakapas free the moon from his snare after all of the efforts of bigger, stronger animals have failed. Typical of many native Indian legends, this one serves to explain why the natural order of things exists as it does. In this case, the reason that the fur of the mouse's stomach is "burned to the grey colour of ashes – and so he will ever be" is because he was burned by the heat of the brilliantly-shining moon as he worked to free it from Chakapas' snare. The "man in the moon" is really the hunter Chakapas with his ax and bag.

Ms. Catterson's striking black and white illustrations do much to enhance the telling of this legend. They provide many details of the traditional Cree style of dress and hunting implements, and attractively depict the rivers, mountains and forests in which the Cree live. The realistic drawings of such animals as the beaver, hare, lynx, otter, goose, wolf, moose, bear and fox illustrate the variety of wildlife to be found in northern Saskatchewan.

In addition to recounting an action-filled tale in a simple, straightforward manner, the author includes some details of the traditional Cree lifestyle. The reader learns, for example, that the men hunted "all sorts of animals" and that "by moonlight in the winter and spring. . . people often travel." This story is suitable for children from 6 to 9 years old.

Ted Harrison's latest book, *The blue raven*, is set in the Yukon wilderness, "where huge snow-capped mountains wear necklaces of shining lakes strung together by threads of babbling creeks." It, too, is based on a theme common to many native legends – the story of a young man's coming of age after overcoming a series of hardships and dangers. On one level this book is an adventure story in which Nik, a young Indian boy, seeks the help of the Great Shaman to free his village from the ravages of a terrible drought. During his

quest, he "escaped the clutches of a large grizzly bear. . . climbed steep gorges with only the tiniest of footholds. . . slept without any shelter. . . saved Taku [his dog] from a flooded creek, and [went] for days with little or no food." With the help of the Shaman and his magical gifts, Nik saves his village and eventually grows to be a great and wise chief.

On another level, Mr. Harrison provides the reader with a great deal of information about the traditional lifestyle and the environment of the Indians who live near the Yukon River. We learn that the landscape of many lakes and rivers, muskegs, high mountains and pine and spruce forests is inhabited by such creatures as fish, otter, muskrat, beaver, dragonflies, butterflies, mosquitoes, geese and ducks, grizzly bears, moose and ravens. Mr. Harrison tells us that the native people "hunted, tanned hides, fished and gathered herbs and berries," passing on their knowledge from generation to generation. He includes many more details about the food, festivals and clothing of the Yukon Indian people. Factual information is scattered throughout the story, enriching the tale and providing the reader with a clear picture of what life is really like in small isolated northern villages.

One of the most appealing parts of any Ted Harrison book is the illustration. As in his previous books, Mr. Harrison's vivid paintings with their bright and unusual colour combinations, celebrate the beauty of the northern landscape. Their dramatic depiction of the story's main events is particularly attractive to children and adds a great deal to the young reader's understanding of the story.

Ted Harrison's rather complex descriptive passages may be difficult for young children to read independently, but even children in the primary grades will enjoy the story if it is read aloud to them. Harrison's book offers older children an opportunity to enrich their vocabulary and broaden their knowledge of the north.

The fourth book, *Journey to the top of the world*, is a real-life adventure story told by Canadian writer and nature photographer, Janet Foster. Ms. Foster describes a journey which she and her husband took from Newfoundland to the northern tip of Ellesmere Island in the high Arctic. From the attention-grabbing title to the last sentence, this is a hard book to put down. An adventure story told in the first person, in straightforward language with many interesting details, it makes the reader feel as if he were actually along on the journey. As Ms. Foster describes their odyssey from helicopter, to float plane, to a Canadian Coastguard ship, and back to a plane again, she introduces us to the surprising variety of physical features and unique flora and fauna to be found in the far north. Contrary to the often-held belief that the Arctic is a barren, frozen wasteland, the reader of this book will soon discover that the north is vibrant with life and beauty.

In addition to providing us with many facts about Arctic plants and animals, Janet Foster introduces us to northern people, from Inuit families living

in both the traditional and modern worlds, to the bush pilots, coast guard crews, anthropologist and scientists who spend several months of the year working in the Northwest Territories. Ms. Foster also looks to the past, giving the history of the Franklin Expedition when she describes her visit to Beechey Island where three of Franklin's sailors are buried.

Just as important as Ms. Foster's fact-filled text are the beautiful photographs found on every page. For those who may never be fortunate enough to visit the high Arctic, John and Janet Foster's photographs bring the text alive and increase the reader's understanding of the northern land. This book, suitable for readers of all ages is a must for every school and public library.

All four books can be recommended to readers with an interest in wildlife and in the lifestyle and traditions of Canada's native people.

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DÉGUISEMENT ET DÉMYSTIFICATIONS

Le caméléon. Chrystine Brouillet. Illus. Philippe Brochard. Saint-Laurent, La courte échelle, 1988. 90 pp., 6,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89021-072-3.

Le Caméléon, tueur à gages protagoniste de ce roman policier pour jeunes adolescents, se déguise et se camoufle de la même façon que le reptile dont il porte et le nom et l'image tatouée au poignet. En fait, il change même de teint, selon les exigences de son subtil métier. Si les fausses apparences se succèdent donc à une rapidité vertigineuse dans cette histoire, ses jeunes héros ne s'avèrent pas moins habiles à les déceler. Ils apprennent en même temps la valeur d'une observation perspicace suivie d'une réflexion avertie et d'une action bien agencée.

Ce deuxième livre pour jeunes de Chrystine Brouillet plaît en premier lieu par son intrigue saisissante et mouvementée qui met en scène toute une série de personnages captivants. Tout d'abord, le chercheur scientifique, père de l'héroïne, qui correspond de façon frappante au stéréotype du scientifique distrait et myope, porteur d'épaisses lunettes. Ensuite, l'assassin, vil maître du camouflage et du déguisement, semeur efficace d'épouvante et de mort. Puis, les parents des héros, justes, parfois sévères, mais nullement étrangers à l'indulgence. Et surtout les jeunes eux-mêmes, en l'occurrence deux filles de treize ans, Catherine et sa copine Stéphanie, et Lôm, leur ami vietnamien du même âge. Ce dernier, tout récemment rescapé de son pays infernal, a emporté avec lui tout un paquet de compétences dont l'utilité se démontre à maintes reprises