

Amie, Terry Stafford. Illus. author. Children's Studio Books, 1984. Unpaginated \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-9691404-1-X; *Feelings*, Joanne Brisson Murphy. Illus. Heather Collins. Black Moss Press, 1985. Unpaginated \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-129-6; *Toilet tales*, Andrea Wayne von Kômogslöw. Illus. author. Annick Press, 1985. Unpaginated \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper ISBN 0-920303-14-5, 0-920303-13-7.

These three books are typical of the many fine picture books being published today which focus on toddlers and their concerns. Two seem moderately self-congratulatory. The third is delightfully amusing.

Amie, toddler in the book named for her, relates the events of her cozy, secure young life. Her daily excursions, accompanied by loving parents and friendly neighbours, are illustrated with softly shaded black and white drawings, highlighted with blue. The toddler's fondness for "milky" (being breastfed) is mentioned, and pictured throughout the book. This repetition, together with the arch sentiment, however true, that "some people can't understand about children having milky" turn the book into a polemic about toddlers and the "Ok-ness" of breast feeding. Indeed, even today, some people will consider breast feeding a private act and will not understand about picture books with illustrations of toddlers breast feeding (fig. 1).



Fig. 1

Another child narrator takes us through the odyssey of his day in *Feelings*. Collins's full page, full colour illustrations add a multiplicity of middle class detail to the journey, detail which children can examine with delight. The focus of the books is, of course, on feelings: the full gamut from elation to frustration, from anger to the contentment of a hug (fig. 2). However, the flow of text of this pleasant book is inhibited by an awkward rhyme, and the unnecessary mildly didactic tag at the end;

It's nice to have feelings
as many as can be
'cause it helps me to know
and to understand me.

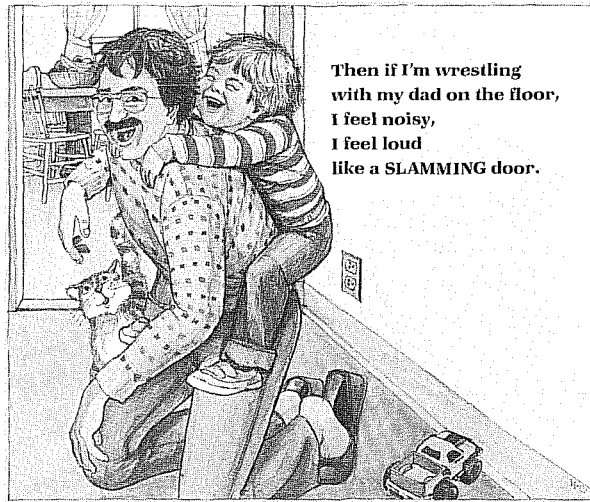


Fig. 2

Both *Amie* and *Feelings* in their respective ways, can help a child to feel snug. In both, the parents are patient and loving. Toys are plentiful. The neighbourhood is friendly and inhabited by like-minded people. However, even though the people in the illustrations are smiling, the tone of both books is so very serious. They lack humour. This trait on the other hand is abundantly prominent in the rollicking *Toilet tales*. Of course, this picture book can be used to encourage toddlers to use the toilet. The last of the pages of amusing colour illustrations, which reflect the text, does indeed picture this. But it's the outrageous fun that sets the tone throughout. The crux of each double page set, text faced with verse, is the exposition of why animals could never use toilets. A giraffe could not fit through the door. An elephant would break the seat. A lion would think it was a throne, and so on (fig. 3). A kid will get the giggles.



Fig. 3

These books are reflections of our middle class 1980s culture and feature a concern for the life of the child — the yuppie way. Their content and gloss are attractive. Each has its own strength. Of the three, *Toilet tales* with its light touch will fit in to story hours with the greatest of ease. *Feelings* too can be used. As for *Amie*, a concern for the comfort of the reader and listener will be paramount. Any and all can be lap books.

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