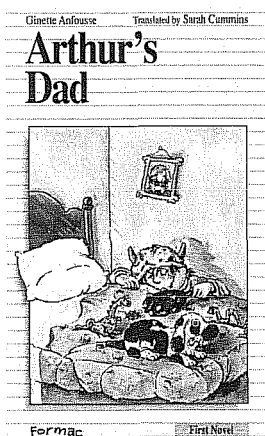


FUN FIRST NOVELS

Arthur's dad. Ginette Anfousse. Illus. Anne Villeneuve. Trans. Sarah Cummins. Formac Publishing, 1991. 59 pp., \$6.95, cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88780-095-5, 0-88780-094-7; **The swank prank!** Bertrand Gauthier. Illus. Daniel Dumont. Trans. Sarah Cummins. Formac Publishing, 1991. 55 pp., \$6.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88780-093-9, 0-88780-092-0.

Children who are eager to try their "reading teeth" on something challenging could be directed to the First Novel series by Formac. These books are *perfect* for educators introducing the novel to their students either by reading the stories aloud, or by encouraging those voyagers with fairly developed reading skills to go out on their own. For the latter, the pages of large crisp print, liberally sprinkled with line drawings, are presented in a trim, slim volume that looks about as threatening as a new kind of chocolate bar. To further entice first-timers, Formac has selected works by award-winning French Canadian writers Ginette Anfousse and Bertrand Gauthier. Humour is the key to getting novice readers to open books, turn a few pages and whammo! before they know it, the training wheels are off and they are *reading their first novels!*

Gauthier's *Swank prank!*, as Julie Leclerc pointed out (CCL, 54, 81) relies heavily on the gag-a-minute approach, and lacks depth. However, uncoding new words can be difficult enough without worrying about the details of a complicated plot. Gauthier introduces the identical twins, Hank and Frank Swank, in an amusing fashion and makes readers anticipate what adventures might await the droll duo.



The more intricate plot of Anfousse's *Arthur's dad* is either more rewarding or bewildering, depending on the skills and comprehension level of the reader. Arthur, left at home while his father goes out on bowling dates, attempts to foil his father's love interest. When the twenty-third in a series of babysitters arrives with her fiendish daughter, Arthur encounters a formidable foe; but the two children realize that together they can engineer a happy ending for everyone. This book is best introduced aloud or handled by students ready for a bit of tricky mental knitting.

The translator of both books, Sarah Cummins, at times fails to understand the purpose of the First Novel series. Cummins takes as many as four short sentences and, through the use of commas, combines them into one long sentence. Unfortunately, while the punctuation change makes little difference when the books are read aloud, it affects first-time novel readers. What may appear to an adult as choppy

sentences seem more manageable to the developing reader. The compensation is that Anne Villeneuve and Daniel Dumont's kooky illustrations star on a greater number of full pages than in the French editions.

Some of Cummins' translations subtly change the meaning of the original text. Arthur's father is called a single parent. True enough, but he is more correctly a widower. The twins pull off a prank which involves one of them "hiding outside the door" of an ice cream shop (19). The accompanying illustration would make more sense and would better duplicate the original if the twin had been "disguised as an invisible man." A difficult thing in translating humorous works is dealing with odd-ball names. Arthur's Dad, called Mr. Belhumeur or Mr. Goodmood by the tongue-in-cheek Anfousse, is mundanely christened Mr. Goodberry by Cummins. The hilarious musicality of the *Swank* prank adults' last names is lost when Va, Za, and Fa become Kaye, Tree, and Symes. The occasional rearranging of sentence order further serves to weaken the initial works' peculiar comic punch. Cummins omits a few sentences—admittedly repeated ones—but they provide emphasis or juvenile appeal. A few brilliantly-translated phrases help balance out the work. Overall, the free-falling comic style of the originals lands on its feet in English with only a barely-visible limp.

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DES ENVAHISSEURS PLUTÔT TORDANTS!

Les tordus débarquent! Christiane Duchesne. Illus. Marc Mongeau. Montréal, la courte échelle, 1991, 62 pp., broché. ISBN 2-89021-161-4.

Christiane Duchesne n'en est pas à ses premières armes en littérature pour la jeunesse. Elle a déjà publié une quinzaine de livres pour les jeunes et c'est probablement sa grande expérience qui nous vaut la qualité, la fraîcheur et la simplicité que nous retrouvons dans son dernier roman, *Les tordus débarquent!*, dans la série Premier Roman à la courte échelle. Cette publication présente la première collaboration à la courte échelle de Christiane Duchesne et de l'illustrateur Marc Mongeau. L'expérience leur a bien réussi et le résultat est fort intéressant: la simplicité et l'humour des dessins traduisent bien l'atmosphère du texte et vice versa.

L'idée de départ est toute simple et tirée d'une expérience que nous avons tous et toutes vécu au moins une fois: les picotements dans la main sur laquelle nous avons déposé notre lourde tête endormie. Les tordus, ce sont cinq petits bonshommes hauts de quelques centimètres. Ils vivent grâce à l'imagination de Christophe qui les a lui-même créés, une nuit où, la main sous l'oreiller, il a ressenti des picotements, comme si des petits pieds, tout petits, lui marchaient dessus.