

Stirling's background again becomes a dramatic bridge. Readers immediately enter his world: "The temperature was thirty degrees below zero as I stood on the cliff in front of my camp ..."(6).

Fourth in the Natural History Series, *Bears* follows *Wolves* (1990), *Eagles* (1990), and *Seals* (1991). Each indexed 64-page volume examines such behaviours as mating, raising young, and hunting.

Striking photographs increase their appeal. In *Bears* more than 40 photographs support the text and show additional information. However, several photographs placed beside text measure less than six centimeters wide. One shows a black bear cub crawling over its mother in a den (30). Another shows a cub hiding in a tree (49). Visual information is difficult to read on these small prints.

Some photographs also seem framed too tightly. One half-page photograph shows a cub crying for its mother (46). The cub *appears* to be hiding in a tree trunk, but we cannot be sure because the print crops out most of the trunk.

Illustrator Dorothy Siemens also expands the text with eleven drawings which demonstrate ideas, such as comparing bears to humans (11). An illustrated world map colour-codes locations of various species throughout the world (22-3). However, it lacks place names, which may force readers to other reference works to identify countries and continents.

While *Bears* provides a useful survey of black bears, polar bears and grizzlies, one wonders why Stirling includes some of the other five species, such as the Asiatic Black Bear. The reader feels only disappointment when told "relatively little is known about it" (19). Also, there is a bit of confusion in the text regarding the eating habits of bears. Early in the text, Stirling states "Among the many carnivores, bears form their own unique family, called the Ursidae" (10). Later, he categorizes bears as more omnivorous, saying that "Black bears and grizzly bears are omnivorous" (41), that panda bears eat 99 per cent bamboo stems and leaves, that sloth bears eat insects, and that polar bears are "the most carnivorous bears" (43-44).

Such confusion extends to the photography credits. Although the cover and title page of *Bears* say "Photographs by Aubrey Lang," the next page credits three other photographers, including author Ian Stirling. It also shows that all other photographs are copyright of Lang and her photographer husband, Wayne Lynch. This makes it impossible to tell which photographs are actually hers. Perhaps Lang would be better described as the book's photo editor.

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#### MANY MYSTERIES: MICHAEL BEDARD VISITS EMILY DICKINSON

**Emily.** Michael Bedard. Illus. Barbara Cooney. Lester Publishing, 1992. Unpag. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895555-01-9.

Michael Bedard's *Emily* is about mystery, but it is not a whodunit. Instead of

seeking answers to problems, as do traditional mysteries, it makes us aware that Mystery, metaphysical magic, pervades life. Based on extensive research, this deceptively simple book presents a fictional slice of Emily Dickinson's life. The unnamed narrator (her identity is another small mystery), a girl living across the street, visits Emily, known locally as "the Myth." Accompanying her mother, who is to play piano to revive Emily's spirits, the girl discovers Emily hiding on the stairs and gives her a gift of lily bulbs. In exchange, she receives a poem, reproduced at the end, which expresses Dickinson's own feeling that we must see the mystery, or "Heaven," all around us.

Out of such seemingly inconsequential material, Bedard creates a celebration of life and creativity. Explicitly linking music and poetry as mysteries that create inexplicable joy, he implicitly links these to spring, blooming flowers, human behaviour, and childhood. He makes some links through conversations, in which the girl's father and Emily use analogies to define poetry. He also employs parallelism, suggesting connections between Emily and the girl, both of whom wear white, by having them separately hide on the stairs while listening to activities below. Bedard concludes satisfyingly with poetic closure: he begins with Emily sending dried flowers, equated to her dying spirit, and ends with Emily planting the bulbs given to her, symbols of renewed life.

Barbara Cooney's detailed paintings, reminiscent of those in her *Miss Rumphius* (1982), subtly signal important changes in the direction of the story through variations in format. The full-page illustrations occupy the left-hand page, for example, only when Emily communicates or when poetic or natural mystery is the topic. In the middle, both pages have smaller unframed illustrations to juxtapose the impending visit and the coming of spring. On two climactic occasions, when the girl meets Emily and when she realizes that "So many, many things are Mystery," the illustration spills onto the adjacent page, suggesting expansion beyond narrow limits of perception.

In his Afterword, Bedard claims that he visited Emily's house, "and she lowered this story to me." This may seem precious or pretentious, but the controlled and frequently poetic text should convince most readers that it contains the spirit of Emily Dickinson. Because it is undramatic and concerned with feelings about art, nature, and life, this beautifully-illustrated book may not have wide appeal. Those willing to linger over it, however, will encounter both Emily Dickinson and the Mystery expressed in her poetry.

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