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COUNTING CONFUSION

One prickly porcupine. Odette and Bruce Johnson. Oxford University Press, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 laminated boards. ISBN 0-19-540834-9; **Number of numbers.** bp Nichol. Black Moss Press, 1991. Unpag., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-230-6.

One prickly porcupine and *Number of numbers* are lively counting books which concretely strengthen mathematical and observation skills. In both books arabic numerals stand out distinctly from the illustrations and are effectively combined with the written text to allow beginning readers to make necessary connections. But each story is distinct in composition and illustration.

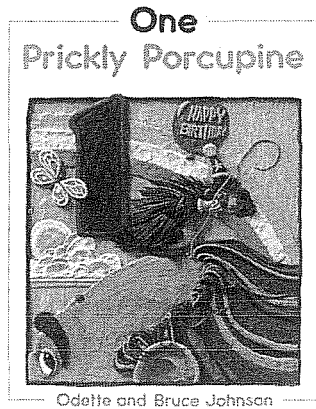
The Johnsons employ the same three-dimensional plasticene technique in *One prickly porcupine* as they used in their previous alphabet book *Apples, alligators and also alphabets*. However, many of the elements which made *Apples* successful are lacking in this counting book.

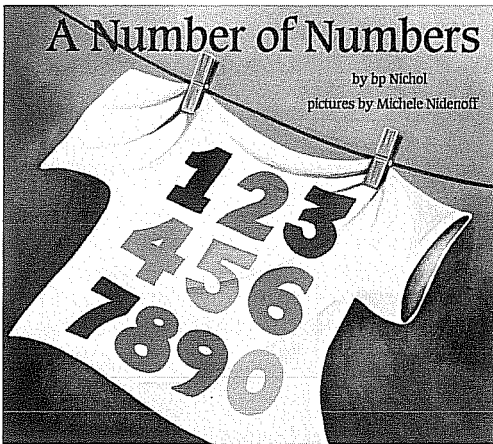
One prickly porcupine is about the upcoming birthday party of "one grinning, gleeful giant" who observes the arrival of one guest, then two, singing, crooning and waltzing on various parts of his body until the final twenty guests arrive and the fun can begin. This is an ambitious story but it is confusing because it attempts to teach too many concepts: counting to twenty, body

parts, alliteration, animals and difficult vocabulary. The most confusing aspect of this story, however, is the illustrations themselves. The plasticene art will amuse young children, but they will miss many of the details due to the brightness of all the colours and the increasingly crowded pages as the numbers grow.

Readers who enjoyed the search-and-find game for additional items that share the same first letter in *Apples, alligators and also alphabets* will be disappointed with this book, which fails to challenge the reader with new searches on each page but rather simply adds one more button, balloon or tooth to the next page.

A number of numbers by the late poet bp Nichol is a more appropriate counting book for its audience. Although it cannot rival the Johnsons' masterful





illustrations and attention to careful detail, it is successful for several reasons. First, children will become actively involved in the reading of the text as they quickly identify the pattern of the story and associate the humorous illustrations with the text. Second, the rhythm and rhyming of the text will draw young children into the story and encourage many to memorize the simple verses. Finally, children will be entertained by the silly antics of the cartoon characters as they “hang round in trees” or “swing in the vines.”

The characters, with their bright numbered shirts, are easy to distinguish against the soft, water-coloured background. Although the simple rhyme of the verses is suitable for primary children, one expects more imaginative lines than “along long tree lined drives” from bp Nichol.

The story is simple and lucid until the final perplexing verse: “Zero times I saw/O zeroes/because you always see/O zeroes/which means I never saw/O zeroes/was what I saw.” This ending will confuse children who anticipate “10 times I saw ...” and who are just tackling the concept of whole numbers. This verse will require explanation on the part of the adult.

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CHILDREN HAVE PROBLEMS TOO

And you can be the cat. Hazel Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press, 1992. 24 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 1-55037-219-X; **Maggee and the lake minder.** Richard Thompson. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Annick Press, 1991. 32 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 1-55037-154-1; **A difficult day.** Eugenie Fernandes. Kids Can Press Ltd., 1987. 32 pp., \$10.95. ISBN 0-921103-17-4.

And you can be the cat is a truthful book that concerns a small boy named Norman, his big sister, and the boy who comes over to play. As revealed in the title of the book, the older children have an efficient method of incorporating Norman into their make-believe words. When Norman realizes that his assignment will never change, he pretends to be an unruly cat, after which the older children ostracize him. Norman’s creative reaction to the disaster leads to the resolution. The surprise ending shows that an unhappy actor may not need a big promotion; he may just need recognition of his talent. The warmly coloured illustrations show how the children