

stylized yet realistic, and text that is descriptive, factual and Canadian in content.

The framed pictures draw the reader into the forest scene as if through a window onto another world. The frames themselves are decorated with the primitive pattern Thornhill employed in her earlier books and which work well with the stylized realism of the art. The intricate compositions bring the eye to the densely-detailed foreground creating a sense of intimacy. The pictures both illustrate the text and go beyond it, revealing relationships between forest creatures which Thornhill does not necessarily explicate in the text. Inset into the frame of the picture is a year date which anchors the tree along a time-line with which the child may identify, and the seasons or the age of the tree is named at the bottom of the page. During the lifetime of the tree, the reader (and the forest) witnesses the gradual escalation of human life in the forest. One drawback of the work is that the humans are idealized; this detracts from the realism and general authenticity of the work.

The text is itself as cyclical as the maple tree. It opens and closes with a maple seed beginning to sustain itself from a dead, fallen tree. This allegory of life coming out of death is reassuringly spontaneous. The continual present tense employed over the two-hundred-year span of the text emphasizes the idea of the earth as living history. Thornhill evocatively identifies the textures, the sounds, and the sensations of the forest and its creatures—her forest lives. The text blends poetic language and a loose narrative following seasonal change with ecology. Botanical terms are clearly defined without dryness and incorporated without intrusion into the text. A child will leave the book feeling self-taught rather than “taught at.”

A tree in a forest is an OWL Young Naturalist Foundation book and is an excellent teaching tool as an introduction to the life cycle of a tree suitable for the eight- to ten-year-old age group.

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