

Baseball bats for Christmas has an Inuit author, and an illustrator who stayed in Rankin Inlet while they worked on the book, so both voice and pictures have the ring of truth about them.

This is Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak's second book with illustrator Vladyana Krykorka, but this time they are without high-flyer Robert Munsch's collaboration, and the difference is immediately evident. The story line doesn't have the mythic undertones of *A promise is a promise*, but it offers instead a glimpse into the contact era of the 1950's in Canada's north. *A promise is a promise* has a contemporary setting with a legendary structure, but *Baseball bats for Christmas* draws on Kusugak's recent memories in a way that will be a welcome relief to Native parents and educators.

Back in the 1940's and 50's, northern bush pilots brought Christmas trees into the new Arctic settlements, a gesture intended to help recently Christianized Inuit feel part of the Christmas spirit. Nobody has ever explored what this well-intentioned gesture meant to Inuit. Kusugak doesn't belabour the fact that the Christmas trees had no significance for Inuit; he simply describes how half a dozen spindly evergreens dropped by bush pilot Rocky Parsons in front of Arvaarluk's hut are ignored until one of the boys realizes that they can be used to make baseball bats.

In the interim between Parson's visit and the first baseball game, the reader gets a vivid picture of Christmas in an Arctic settlement. In recent years, the importance of the bush pilot, the Hudson Bay trader, and the missionary has diminished somewhat, but Inuit have retained the custom of offering one another somewhat unusual, often second-hand, gifts. Arvaarluk's father gives away his only telescope and receives a wild dog in return; the story of how he eventually catches and tames his Christmas present is delightful.

Vladyana Krykorka's illustrations are slightly more subdued here than in *A promise is a promise*; the children's clothing, a mixture of fur and cloth, is not quite so bright but this is appropriate for the time. Her pink and red and turquoise mid-winter skies can compete any day with Ted Harrison's, though.

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TWO SPIRITED TALES

Rebel run. D. Harold Turner. Gage, 1989. (1977 First edition published under title **To hang a rebel**) 262 pp., \$4.25 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7018-X; **Rebellion.** W.J.Scanlan. Stoddart, 1989. 150 pp., \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2271-8.

Well-written children's historical fiction allows the reader to travel back in time to experience an event and an era with an immediacy and degree of in-

volvement seldom offered by history books. These two novels bring to life two seminal occurrences in Canadian history – the Upper Canada Rebellion and the Northwestern Rebellion – for upper elementary and junior high school students.

Rebel run, by Winnipeg educator D. Harold Turner, is an adaptation of his first novel, *To hang a rebel* (1977). The protagonist, fifteen-year-old farm boy Doug Lachlan, finds himself, through a series of circumstances, a guest in the Toronto home of an old family friend, William Lyon Mackenzie. Doug's stay coincides with the culmination of Mackenzie's reform activities and he becomes an active participant in the plotting to overthrow British colonial rule.

In the course of his involvement with the reformers, Doug makes the transition to manhood, resolving the inner conflict between his support for the reform movement and his qualms about its unlawful methods. Doug's turmoil is understandable, yet the overall presentation of his character lacks depth. Apart from his indecision, he is without flaws or quirks; consistently polite, honest, agreeable, he comes across as one-dimensional, a boy too good to be true.

Turner's style is direct and readable, although some of his efforts to incorporate period colloquialisms into his dialogue (such as "collywobbles") seem artificial and may do more to confuse than to convey a sense of the historical era. Generally however, Turner does a creditable job of giving us the flavour of life in 1837 southern Ontario and providing the essential details of the Upper Canada Rebellion without overwhelming the reader with a plethora of facts and details. If he can be criticized, it is for a too black and white presentation of the political facts; the Family Compacters are portrayed largely as villains, Mackenzie's supporters as undeniably in the right.

W.J. Scanlan's first novel, *Rebellion*, also features a fifteen-year-old male protagonist caught up in a major historical event, this time the Northwest Rebellion. Although Jack Rawlins lives in the English community at Fort Carlton, his best friend is a Métis named Pierre Laval, cousin to Gabriel Dumont. Stung into shame by what he perceives as an act of cowardice on the part of his father, Jack defiantly stows away in a sleigh when government forces launch an assault on Louis Riel's followers. Although technically he is taken prisoner, he finds himself among friends in the Métis community. As hostilities escalate, Jack's awareness of the political realities increases and he finds himself torn between conflicting loyalties to the cause of the Métis and the stance of his own people.

As with Doug Lachlan, Jack crosses the threshold to manhood, gaining a knowledge of himself and of the nature of heroism. His road to understanding is much more compelling than that of Doug. He is confronted with the true violence of war and the impact of its destruction, particularly with the death of Pierre in battle. Jack is also a more well-rounded and believable character than Doug. Hot-tempered, impetuous and rebellious, he is credible and sympathetic.

The use of the first-person narrator is especially effective in involving the reader in Jack's story and his quandaries.

In a sense, this is a fuller story than *Rebel run*, blending adventure, humour, romance, and tragedy. The author's prose is unadorned, and his dialogue effective. The teasing banter between Pierre and Jack reflects their affection for one another; the salty language of the angry settlers conveys their anger at the rebelliousness of Riel and his followers.

On occasion, it is difficult to keep the array of characters sorted out, but the events of the Northwest Rebellion are easy to follow. Of particular merit is the author's expression of the subtleties of the political situation. Our sympathies are evoked for the positions of both sides, and we are left with a sense of regret at the human cost of the conflict. There is no romance to the battles and the bloodshed. When Jack shoots a Cree Indian, there is only a profound sadness on his part: "I felt very empty, and I knew the picture of that dead Cree warrior would be with me forever."

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L'UNIVERS DÉPHASÉ DE LA LITTÉRATURE

Un monde grouillant. Madeleine Gagnon. Montréal, Paulines, 1989. 141 pp., 5,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89039-625-5.

Après *Les samedis fantastiques*, Madeleine Gagnon nous offre maintenant, sous le titre très à propos d'*Un monde grouillant*, un recueil de dix nouvelles originalement parues dans *Vidéo-Presse* en 1986 et 1987. Nous sont ainsi racontées les aventures d'une tumultueuse année scolaire de la "bande des seize" (et non pas treize, comme la jaquette du livre l'indique), un groupe d'adolescents et d'adolescentes montréalais brûlant d'une énergie débordante.

La période couverte, de septembre à juin, fait cependant fi des thèmes scolaires; Christophe, Luc, Elodie, Julie, Michel, Valérie et les autres sont plongés dans des préoccupations d'ordre plus personnel. La perte d'un être cher, d'un animal préféré, un accident grave, un anniversaire oublié et des problèmes familiaux sont autant d'occasions pour remettre en valeur la suprême et inaltérable importance de l'amitié. L'auteure se veut également consciente de la présence du "merveilleux" chez l'enfant, utilisant occasionnellement le rêve, les superstitions et les légendes comme véhicules de son message.

Il m'est cependant resté de cette lecture la désagréable impression de lire un autre monde, déphasé de la réalité, un monde d'enfants que l'adulte n'a pas su/voulu voir grandir émotionnellement, où les problèmes psychologiques et les solutions subséquentes sont réduits à de simples équations mathéma-