

## Hidden Life under the Flap

*A New Butterfly: My First Look at Metamorphosis*. Pamela Hickman. Illus. Heather Collins. Kids Can Press, 1997. Unpag. [16 pp.] \$6.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-202-7. *A Seed Grows: My First Look at a Plant's Life Cycle*. Pamela Hickman. Illus. Heather Collins. Kids Can Press, 1997. Unpag. [16 pp.] \$6.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-200-0. *Hungry Animals: My First Look at a Food Chain*. Pamela Hickman. Illus. Heather Collins. Kids Can Press, 1997. Unpag. [16 pp.] \$6.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-204-3.

Veteran naturalist Pamela Hickman and award-winning illustrator Heather Collins have teamed up successfully to produce this new "My First Look" series, aimed at introducing young children to some basic processes in nature. A decided strength of these books are Collins's dramatic and intense illustrations, voluptuously rendered in watercolour and gouache.

In each book, the main text is a cumulative verse, modelled after "This is the house that Jack Built" — hence "This is the seed that Sam planted," "This is the tree that Connie climbs," and "This is the field where Jill plays." In successive spreads, the added new line introduces the next stage in the natural process depicted, e.g. "This is the butterfly / that landed on the leaf / that grows" etc. The cumulative verse pattern was clearly intended to make the non-fiction elements of the books more attractive and memorable to younger readers (the target age is three to nine). But Hickman's text has sacrificed rhythm to the demands of content, especially in *A New Butterfly* where the need to cover the four stages of the life cycle of the butterfly (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, butterfly) quite overwhelms the expected rhythmic pattern: "This is the new butterfly / that came out of the chrysalis, / that was made by the caterpillar...."

The sub-text in all three books is that the most familiar things in nature have a secret and mysterious aspect. To convey this idea of hidden life, each opening has a flap occupying almost two thirds of the left hand page. Looking under the flap, you find illustrated explanations of the hidden aspects of the scene depicted in the main spread. For example, in the main spread illustrating "This is the seed that Sam planted," you see Sam on his knees planting a watermelon seed in a garden sown with beets, carrots, tomato, eggplant, and beans. Beneath the adjacent flap is a cross section of a seed ("Peek inside the seed ...") as well as a series of four illustrations showing what goes on underground during the stages of germination and sprouting of a watermelon seed. Correspondingly, the first flap of the other two books shows hidden creatures under the bark of a tree (carpenter ant, sow bug, tree borer, bark beetle) and hidden creatures that live in a field (garden spider, ladybug, katydid, meadow vole, ambush bug, grasshopper). A major strength throughout the series is the non-fiction information conveyed under the flaps-information which elaborates on aspects of the natural cycle being presented in the main spreads. In all three books, the information conveyed is at the right level of detail for a beginning naturalist who is taking a "first look" at the natural world.

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