

## "There's No Place Like Home": Houses and Homes Around the World

*Houses of Adobe: Native Dwellings: The Southwest.* Bonnie Shemie. Tundra Books, 1995. 24 pp., \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-330-8. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88776-353-7. *Mounds of Earth and Shell: Native Sacred and Ceremonial Sites: The Southeast.* Bonnie Shemie. Tundra Books, 1993. 24 pp., \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-318-9. *Homes around the World.* Bobbie Kalman. Crabtree Publishing Company, 1994 (Crabapples Series). 32 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-86505-609-9. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-86505-709-5. *Nicola's Floating Home.* Bobbie Kalman. Crabtree Publishing Company, 1995 (Crabapples Series). 32 pp. \$20.95 cloth. ISBN 0-86505-626-9. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-86505-726-5.

House and home are significant to all of us. As the centre of our daily and personal lives they can represent us as individuals, yet in their meaning and importance, connect us all. Four books are reviewed, two each from two very different series, aimed at elementary school children (8-12 years old) which present the uniqueness of different homes, and the similarities and connections between people, their homes, and the environment.

The connection is clearly made between the landscape within which native groups lived (and in the case of the book on the Southwest, continue to live) and the construction materials and design of their homes. For example, in *Houses of Adobe: Native Dwellings: The Southwest*, Shemie writes, "If they were near canyons, they took refuge under overhanging cliffs. If they were out in the open plain, they built small huts or set up tents." Scholarly in tone, these books draw on detailed academic research presented in a serious, scientific manner. These are not the sort of books picked up purely for pleasure; some children may find the style and language challenging, others off-putting. As solid reference material for class reports or projects however, these books would excel.

Inventively, Shemie introduces the more factual sections with "vignettes" which reconstruct, at least in words, family life and activities of the past and how they related to the dwellings. However, accompanying illustrations or photographs would have made these vignettes "come alive" much more strongly.

In fact, a general criticism of both books in the Native Dwellings series must be the weakness of those elements which should support the text. Photographs of native artifacts, rather than sketches would better "bring home" the everyday lives of these ancient peoples, and into our *current* reality. Phonetic spellings, especially of words from other languages, would help introduce new terms — *kivas*, *pueblos*, *atlatll*, for example. In addition, while maps are provided on the inside covers, they are poor in the information they provide. The map inside *Mounds of Earth and Shell: Native Sacred and Ceremonial Sites: The Southeast* indicates where in North America the mound sites are found, but they are not identified by name. The map for *Houses of Adobe: Native Dwellings: The Southwest* locates the adobe house sites within the Four Corners area of the Southwest (where Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah meet) but gives no indication of *where* in the United States, let alone in North America, this region is located.

In contrast to these more scholarly books, the two from the Crabapples series by Bobbie Kalman are much more fun and inviting in tone and appearance. Both books are strong in their design and use of colour and photographs to engage children, particular at the younger end of the age range recommended, or those

who need extra encouragement to pick up a book.

*Nicola's Floating Home* is an engaging and interesting look into the life of a ten-year-old girl who lives on an 18-metre sailboat. Girls of similar age may particularly delight in both the similarities and differences between their lives and Nicola's. Family photos showing Nicola growing up on board the *Kirtonia* help the reader feel they have gotten to know this girl and her "floating home." All is not excitement and exotic adventures, however, like swimming with dolphins and diving in coral reefs. The dangers of such a lifestyle are recognized in the example of an accident where Nicola's mother's arms were caught in an automatic winch. One gets a real sense of the *Kirtonia* as a family home, and of a family that works together to maintain and enjoy their floating home. This book will widen horizons on what a home is and how people's lifestyles can be very different, yet very similar, to one's own.

*Homes Around the World* was a disappointment. It might have been better as a picture book, since the photographs are largely left to stand on their own. Captions in a listing at the back, rather than with the photographs, are largely wasted; many children may not bother looking them up. In addition, the existing captions offer little information. For example, there is a photo in the section on Country Homes of a girl holding a pumpkin. The related caption reads, "Some farmers grow pumpkins." Where? An alternative caption might read, "This girl lives in Place X, where some farmers grow pumpkins." Similarly, a beautiful full-page photograph has the description, "A tropical home in Thailand." Not only would more information about the house, for example its building material, be a helpful and useful addition, but so would some indication of where Thailand is in the world — perhaps a map on the inside cover as in the previous series reviewed? In fact, considering the topic covered, the omission of a map is a serious one. Rather than referring children to a globe or atlas, why not superimpose the photographs of children from around the world on pages 28 and 29 onto a simple world map? This book was frustrating in its over-simplification and limited information on children and their homes around the world.

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### The Questions a Child Asks: Scientific Answers

*Who Needs to Sleep Anyway? How Animals Sleep.* Dr. Colin Shapiro. Illus. Sari O'Sullivan. Black Moss Press, 1996. 32 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-281-0. *Why Do Stars Twinkle? And Other Nighttime Questions.* Catherine Ripley. Illus. Scot Ritchie. Owl Books, 1996. Unpag. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-895688-42-6.

As with many a child's book, *Who Needs to Sleep Anyway?* — mainly about sleep and a little about dreaming — resulted from a bed-time story which became a conversation between a professionally knowledgeable Dad and his energetic, inquisitive daughter. The events reported here will be overly familiar to anyone who has ever tried to read a youngster to sleep. Judging by the vocabulary the recipient of the story is much in advance of the delightful illustrations (by Sari O'Sullivan)