

The Squirrel that Saved the Day

Sody Salleratus. Aubrey Davis (reteller). Illus. Alan and Lea Daniel. Kids Can, 1996. 30 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-281-7.

In *Sody Salleratus*, the squirrel saves the day, a plot twist that would appeal to young children, as they too are small and “weak.” This book is storyteller Aubrey Davis’s retelling of “Sody Sallyraytus,” an American-English folktale first recorded by Richard Chase in his 1948 *Grandfather Tales*. Davis’s picture-book version would appeal to children aged two to five.

In the story, Boy goes to buy “sody salleratus,” the nineteenth-century American word for baking soda. He is eaten by a bear who lives under a bridge. Girl, Old Man, and Old Woman meet the same fate. Squirrel escapes by running up a tree: the bear follows and — “BOOM!” — falls and splits open. Everyone emerges undigested.



Davis adds great sound effects to Chase’s version: Boy walks with a “hippity-hop” whereas Old Man goes “crickity-crack.” Davis leaves out much of the American dialect, thus losing some of the authenticity yet increasing clarity for the modern Canadian child. In Davis’s story, the whole family eats biscuits made using the “sody salleratus,” with the squirrel casually lying on the brand-new bearskin rug.

This story is somewhat violent, but I found that while adults might be disturbed by it, children weren’t — at least the children I read it to weren’t. My nephews enjoyed the comical aspect of the story that the illustrations bring out so well: the bear may be toothy, but he also playfully wears Old Woman’s bonnet. Their enjoyment is unsurprising: Davis, a Toronto-based storyteller, credits the students of the Metropolitan Toronto School Board for helping him recreate this story.

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Riding the Ark into the Light

Stephen Fair. Tim Wynne-Jones. Greenwood Books, 1998. 218 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-295-5. *Garbage Creek and other Stories*. W.D. Valgardson. Illus. Michel Bisson. Greenwood Books, 1997. 132 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-308-0.

There is a melancholy to Tim Wynne-Jones’s books that is not merely the natural melancholy of youth. It is the melancholy of life itself, as his young