

longest-serving PM and the only one with a PhD. Complex historical events such as the Northwest rebellion, the Boer war, and the October crisis are explained in simple, direct language. The inclusion of a time line and index at the end of the book provide useful tools for the avid young historian.

Manson's picture book on the life of John A. Macdonald's handicapped daughter provides a touching glimpse of Macdonald's home life and relationship with his wife and Baboo. Although the prose is not particularly gripping for a young child, the inclusion of Macdonald's letters to his daughter remedies this weakness somewhat and brings the subject to life. In fact, they are perhaps the most sensitive part of a narrative which jumps from descriptions of Baboo's home life to Macdonald's knighthood, from her much-prized gift of a typewriter to her father's parliamentary career. Youngsters may not remember these various aspects of life with a prime minister's family, but they will get a good sense of the Macdonalds' love for their child.

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Flights of the Imagination

McCurdy and the Silver Dart. Les Harding. University College of Cape Breton P, 1998. 126 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-920336-69-8.

Many children still respond to airplanes as they did eighty years ago. At the sound of engines in the sky, they bound through the screen door and into the backyard, excitedly speculating on where the airplane might be going. Only later do they lose this sense of wonder, and come to associate flying with lost luggage, crowded departure lounges, and debilitating jet lag. Douglas McCurdy belonged to an earlier age, and Les Harding's charming book reminds us what it was like to live at a time when aviation was regarded with unbridled enthusiasm. McCurdy was the son of a distinguished Cape Breton family whose hometown of Baddeck had the good fortune to become the summer residence of the great inventor Alexander Graham Bell. The Bells grew fond of young McCurdy and, when he returned to Baddeck from university, he was brought into the Aerial Experiment Association, organized for the sole purpose of building a flying machine. In this, the AEA succeeded: McCurdy became the first person to pilot an airplane in Canada, and went on to add a string of other achievements to his credit. When he died in 1961, he was widely regarded as one of the greatest aviation pioneers in the world.

Harding's account is unembellished, and eschews the purple prose

lavished on McCurdy by his contemporaries. This sets it apart from much aviation literature: the plain diction focuses attention away from the text and towards the events themselves, allowing the reader to experience vicariously the excitement that flying generated in its early days. We sense the emotions of the thousands who flocked to air shows before 1914, drawn by the wonder of seeing a human ascend into the heavens (and perhaps also by a morbid desire to see him crash to the earth). We appreciate the sheer inventiveness of McCurdy and his fellow designers, who crafted rickety flying machines out of materials that could be found in most Canadian farmhouses. And we see the intense curiosity of these inventors, who responded to every setback with the question, "What would happen if...?"

The book works so well, not simply because it is clearly written for children (a glossary is added to define the various technical terms used) and full of engaging characters, but because it returns us to a time when flight generated powerful emotions. In the 1930s, aviation pioneers like McCurdy were heroes to a whole generation of youngsters, who saw in flying the potential to improve the human condition. Harding's evocative portrait rekindles that same optimism of an era when many believed that flight could, so to speak, elevate humanity to a higher plane.

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Lessons in the Past: Women's History in Fiction

Janey's Choice. Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic Canada, 1998. 198 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12497-8. *Wings to Fly*. Celia Barker Lottridge. Illus. Mary Jane Gerber. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. 209 pp. \$15.95, \$9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88899-293-9, 0-88899-280-7.

Historical fiction ideally illuminates both the past and the present so that readers can contrast their modern lives with those led by previous generations. Young people, especially girls aged eight-twelve, will be able to engage in this process while reading *Janey's Choice* and *Wings to Fly*. Reflecting on the stories in these books can show them how opportunities for girls have changed over the last few decades, and can encourage them to strive for their own goals. Of course, young readers care more about the story than the feminist message that slides in sideways. A tight, well-told story like the one in *Wings to Fly* captivates the reader while offering instruction on the lives of girls and women on the Alberta frontier in 1918.

Everything is just right in this novel about Josie Ferrier, a spunky,