

able that they fell in love while they were totally drunk—unable even to notice the three students sharing their taxi.

Mildred Sturgeon, the vacuous wife of the headmaster, is annoying in both books. She lives to pour coffee and listen without understanding. Her literary job is to play Dr. Watson, showing us the Fish's thoughts. Can't she also "get a life"—find a hobby, read a book, or say something bright?

Our heroes enjoy their mayhem thoroughly. But they remain very moral. Never mean, dishonest or deliberately destructive, they love their school, accept their punishments, and in this day of the glorified underachiever, like to succeed.

These stories appeal to children in grades four to seven. On lazy holidays, even older readers still curl up with these zany favourites. Mention Gordon Korman, and you'll get a smile.

Gisela Sherman, a former elementary school librarian, now teaches creative writing at Mohawk College. The author of *King of the Class* and *There's a Snake in the Toilet*, she has just written her own mystery/ghost novel, *The Ghost Who Would Dance Forever*.

PLANTING THE TREE OF CORRECTNESS OR WHEN WANGLING WON'T WORK

Ring of Tall Trees. John Dowd. Raincoast Books, 1992. 126 pp., \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920417-15-9.

Ten-year-old Dylan, an "urban refugee" from Vancouver, and his great big dog Banjo go rubber-boot to steel-toe with a Brazilian logging company in John Dowd's *Ring of Tall Trees* and win. As the book opens, Dylan and his family arrive at their newly-acquired farm. Dylan and Banjo go exploring nearby in an old-growth forest and stumble upon a circular clearing of trees where an old man, with no shoes, appears telling him to "use Raven." More concerned that his dog has disappeared than with the peculiar advice of the old man, Dylan leaves. He finds Banjo eventually, with the help of his father, in a Native village where he discovers the old man he met was the spirit "Tamtlutna—Tree Watcher." Dad in the meantime has learned that a Brazilian logging company has plans to clear-cut the old-growth forest that surrounds them all—the Native village and the family farm. Dylan and a group of Native kids invoke the powers of the trickster Raven and eventually topple the logging company. The adults try the more conventional approaches of peaceful activism and legal wangling.

Everything about *Ring of Tall Trees* seems correct: its packaging (acid-free, recycled paper), its political message (save the old-growth forests from the environmental devastation of clear-cut logging), its sensitive portrayal of Native people (and discussion of the negligence of the government in resolving Native land claims); John Dowd takes great care to ensure that no group or individual

is maligned and objectivity is judiciously given to all sides of the logging dispute (except an impetuous Brazilian executive). There are no bad guys as Dylan's dad explains, "They're just ordinary folks making a living. They just do their job and cut the trees the government says they can cut. And that brings money that the government needs as well as making them a profit. But it doesn't take the environment into account or the fact they are cutting trees faster than they are replanting them."

A reader's imagination is forced to take the environment into account. Everything about the book and the story is directed to teaching young readers to appreciate the complex issues surrounding logging and its effect on the environment. *Ring of Tall Trees'* deliberate posture competes, at times, with the imaginative elements of the story. Even when ten-year-old Dylan is participating in his version of a ceremonial dance, expediency is not far away:

Dylan's mind soared, and suddenly he was aloft, wing tip to wing tip with his friends, feathers rippling in the cool night breezes high above the forest. He looked down at the fire burning brightly in the clearing, its column of smoke rising through the old trees. To the west he spotted the line where the forest ended and the mangled remains of the clear-cut shone like bones in the starlight.

Ring of Tall Trees will appeal to ten- or eleven-year-old boys and will be appreciated by those trying to teach and instill environmental values into a young audience.

Paul Lumsden is the father of two boys. In his spare time he is teaching assistant and Ph.D. candidate writing his dissertation at the University of Alberta.

NEW READ-ALLOUD TALES

Stories to Tell. Bob Barton. Pembroke Publishers Ltd., 1992. 66 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-921217-80-3; **Tell Me One Good Thing: Bedtime Stories.** Richard Thompson. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Toronto: Annick Press, 1992. 48 pp., \$15.95, \$7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-215-7; ISBN 1-55037-212-2.

Ten- and eleven-year-olds today readily admit they do not want to listen to a fairy tale—so acknowledges Bob Barton in his introduction to his new book, *Stories to Tell*, a follow-up to his first storytelling guide, *Tell Me Another*, published by Pembroke. In *Stories to Tell*, Barton brings together twelve of his favourite read-aloud tales and succeeds wonderfully in trying to convince the rest of us, parents and teachers, that we too can tell a story and even enjoy doing it.

His second "how-to" book comes loaded with new ideas, suggestions and hints on how to build a rapport with the audience, even before telling the story, and how to, as Barton says, "lift the stories off the page, breathe life into them and transmit them to the students." Each of the stories is prefaced by Barton's comments providing background information on the story itself as well as helpful hints in its retelling—ages best targeted, approximate telling time, a