

Christmas kids' books first class

By Helen Norrie
Special to the Free Press

The Story of Canada: by Janet Lunn and Christopher Moore, ill. by Alan Daniel, 320 pp., Toronto, Lester Publishing and Key Porter Books, \$35.
Seven Modern Wonders of the World: by Celia King, 30 pp., Vancouver, Raincoast Books, \$11.95.
Rapunzel: by the Brothers Grimm, (adapted), ill. by Carol Heyer, unpaginated, Nashville, Tennessee, Ideas Children's Books, \$19.95.
A Prairie Alphabet: by Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet, ill. by Yvette Moore, 32 pp., Montreal, Tundra Books, \$19.95.
Northern Lullaby: by Nancy White Carlstrom, ill. by Leo and Diane Dillon, unpaginated, New York, Philomea Books, \$20.95.
The Sign of the Seahorse: by Graeme Base, unpaginated, Toronto, Sloddart, \$21.95.

ONE OF the more encouraging signs in the current recession is that, in the midst of hard times, children's book stores and children's book publishers appear to be flourishing. Perhaps it is a sign that bargain-hungry parents recognize the lasting value of a good book, or it may simply be a tribute to the expertise, as well as ingenuity, of those who are writing and producing today's books for children.

Among the top contenders for "best books" this Christmas are several widely diverse titles that each manages to star in its own right. *The Story of Canada* is a large (320 pp., 8 1/2" x 10 7/8"), beautifully designed, ambitious book that is probably the best history of Canada for young people that has ever been written. The combination of master

story-teller Janet Lunn (*Shadow in Hawthorne Bay, The Root Cellar, One Hundred Shining Candles*) and historian Christopher Moore (*The Illustrated History of Canada*) has produced an up-beat, refreshing text enlivened with numerous anecdotes and quotes from individuals. Numerous full-color paintings by Alan Daniel are combined with unusual photographs (the incredibly preserved body of the sailor from the Franklin expedition, for example) to make our history come alive for today's visual generation. This book has the added merit of being completely up-to-date (it even records Roberta Bondar's voyage in "Discovery" last January), and of correcting a number of myths about the role of native people in our history. If parents, as well as their offspring, need to be convinced that Canada's history is colorful and exciting, then this is the book that could do it.

Literally at the other end of the scale, in size, price and scope, is a tiny (4 1/2" x 6") board book called *Seven Modern Wonders of the World*. Rather than the coffee table format of the previous history, this intriguing pop-up book falls into the category of a stocking stuffer. Yet it is also a skillfully produced and information-packed volume within its own agenda. Among the "Modern Wonders" which it not only describes, but portrays in three dimensional cutouts, are The Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and the Crystal Palace in London. A Vancouver artist, Celia King graduated from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design and has combined two other miniature books, *Seven Ancient Wonders of the World*, which also display her talents in pop-up art.

For readers who are looking for



Illustration from *A Prairie Alphabet*

more romantic fare, Carol Heyer has produced a strikingly illustrated new version of the story of *Rapunzel*. The acrylic paintings, which even give credits to the live models from which they were drawn, are incredibly evocative, making the prince's infatuation with those sensually beautiful tresses easily understandable. The Grimm brothers' text is toned down a little to produce a happy ending and a minimum of distress.

Another visually stunning book for pre-schoolers is *Northern Lullaby*, illustrated by Caldecott award-winning artists Leo and Diane Dillon. They have taken Alaska author Nancy White Carlstrom's northern images ("Grandpa Mountain" in his "nightcap of new-fallen snow," "Grandma River, Frozen below" etc.) and made wide, sweeping watercolor pictures that cover three-quarters of each page. This is a book that reflects the close bonds between native culture and the natural world, which the author said she came to appreciate after moving to Fairbanks from Seattle. As a "Goodnight" book for young children, it is a book to treasure.

A Prairie Alphabet also grew out of a love of the land — in this case of the Canadian Prairie. An artist from Moose Jaw, Yvette Moore, has combined her talents with those of writer Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet, of Weyburn, to produce an attractive alphabet book. With the pictures all of rural prairie scenes, the book is reminiscent of William Kurelek's *Prairie Boy's Summer*, except that these pictures also cleverly

incorporate plenty of items beginning with the chosen letter. "C", for example, has "Craig sees a combine clearing a crop of canola", but alert viewers can find many other articles beginning with C: crows, a calf, a culvert, clover, cattails etc. The author has tried to portray prairie life through a child's eyes, and the book is a refreshing, if perhaps nostalgic, look at farm life. The author has also managed to treat the "difficult" letters in style: Z, for instance is, "At zero degrees we cover zinnias and zucchinis." Like Ted Harrison's *Northern Alphabet* this A-B-C book is distinctly Canadian, and definitely noteworthy.

Finally, if you are looking for a book that can be enjoyed by seven-to-ten-year-olds, particularly if they are followers of Australian author Graeme Base, *The Sign of the Seahorse* is a good choice. With a combination of rhyming text, an ecological mystery (who is poisoning the underwater reef?) and a tongue-in-cheek cast of characters (Pearl and Finneus Trout and the Soldiercrabs as the heroes; the dastardly Gropmund Gruper as the

villain and the Catfish Gang as "rough diamonds" and Mr. Base's wildly colorful artwork, there is something here for everyone. Not all readers will appreciate the humor of the text, as it requires a certain knowledge of melodrama to savor lines such as "The Soldiercrabs arrive in the nick of time and Corporal Bert pens a note to his truelove, Pearl!" The irony of the plot, in which the gruper deliberately pollutes the reef in order to lure away the fishes to his own inflated lily ("Outstanding Value! Close to Shores!"), might also be lost on some readers, but there is no doubt that they will enjoy Graeme Base's action-packed pictures. Best known for his "puzzle" books, *Animelia* and *The Eleventh Hour*, Mr. Base has a strong following of fans who will welcome this newest release.

With the children's book field receiving increasing attention from artists, authors and publishers not only in Canada but abroad, buyers have a wide variety of quality books to choose from this Christmas. Helen Norrie is a Winnipeg freelance writer.



Capture the moment

Free Press Photo Reprints

Keep the memory alive forever with your own 8x12 color print of any Free Press picture taken by our award-winning photographers. From minor hockey players to Jets and Bombers action, big-time entertainers to local personalities, rising entrepreneurs to your next-door neighbor, anything captured by our photographers can be yours.

Winnipeg Free Press

Reprints by



A. Phone Orders

- Just call us at 697-7345
- Tell us the DATE, PAGE, PHOTOGRAPHERS NAME and SUBJECT of the photo, and how many copies you want.
- The cost is just \$20.00, plus \$2.80 tax, for each 8x12 print.

Payment options

- 1) Visa or Mastercard
- 2) Cheque. Mail to: Photo Reprints, Winnipeg Free Press, 1355 Mountain Ave., R2X 3B6

B. Use this mail-in coupon

Photo Reprint Order Form

Date _____ Page _____ Photog _____
 Subject _____
 Number of prints _____ x \$22.80 = _____
 Name _____
 Address _____
 Phone _____
 Payment method _____
 - Cheque enclosed
 - Visa # _____ exp. date _____
 - Mastercard # _____ exp. date _____

By Michael Finlayson
Special to the Free Press

Lincoln at Gettysburg. The Words that Remained, by Gary Wills, 317 pp., Toronto, Simon & Schuster

"History," said Napoleon, "is a fable agreed upon." In this brilliant essay — which should win the Pulitzer Prize for history — polymath Garry Wills contends that with the 272 words of the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln created a constitutional fable ultimately agreed upon by most Americans.

On the occasion of his Second Inaugural (March 4, 1865), Lincoln elegantly outlined the cause of the civil war:

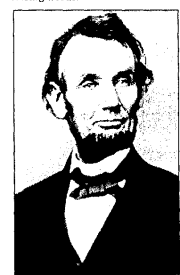
"... four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it — all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war — seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

"One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict territorial enlargement of it."

The Gettysburg Address was delivered the previous November 19, near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania,

months after the battle was over, but when the outcome of the war was still uncertain. About 8,000 people had been killed in the battle, in a war which would leave over 600,000 dead, tenfold the number of Americans killed in the Vietnam War.

Lincoln spoke for about three minutes. Recall the famous opening and closing words:



Abraham Lincoln

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

"It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that for these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a

new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

It was these words, spoken in that setting, against the background of that great war and its conflicting aims that transformed America, according to Mr. Wills. The reference to equality was a reference to the statement in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. In 1776, the words were commonly regarded as meaningless — only that Americans, as British subjects, ought to be entitled to elect representatives to the House of Commons which taxed them. Some 87 years later, Lincoln was reading the declaration literally. It followed that blacks, as men, were entitled at least to freedom. Even if equality was not a fact, it was, Lincoln thought, an ideal to strive for.

Mr. Wills shows how Lincoln's transcendentalism (e.g., his distinction between the ideal and the real) and, in the end, he makes a persuasive case that the address converted the proposition of equality in the declaration into a quasi-constitutional principle, with a meaning substantially different than previously understood, which powerfully influenced subsequent American thinking and jurisprudence.

Anatole France, in his oration at Emile Zola's funeral, said of Zola that "he was a moment in the conscience of man." So, too, it might be said of Lincoln. Garry Wills illuminates that moment.

Michael Finlayson is a Winnipeg freelance writer.

Transforming history