

A SELECT COLLECTION OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Something unlovely has not happened to Canadian children's books; they do not compete with television. Canadian publishers still believe that children are gentle, happy people who have normal attention spans and a zest for life. The books for children eight or older—the ones where the competition with TV is most obvious—do not have plots about child abuse, alcoholism, illegitimacy or general misery. They have varied word choice, adequate length and a normal amount of white space. The stories are lively, entertaining and stimulating. Some bring laughter, some bring thrills, but all have the essential quality: They bolster a child's self-esteem using the time-honoured triumph of the hero or heroine over vicissitudes (but never, happily, over parents).

The best is:

Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang (MORDECAI RICHLER, Illustrated by FRITZ WEGNER, McClelland and Stewart, 1975, (Ages 5 to 10 years).

Richler, that best-selling author of adult books, has turned his narrative skills inside out to give children a shiny bubble of nonsense with some real zingers beneath the surface.

This is the story of Jacob Two-Two, who is two plus two plus two and who says everything twice because he is the youngest of five children and no one hears him the first time. To soothe his sense of injustice, Jacob is allowed to run his first errand; but alas, he meets the overbearing grocer, loses his nerve and runs to the park instead.

With a flip of the page, Jacob Two-Two is transported to a trial for "insulting behavior to a big person." He is sentenced to spend two years, two months, two days and two hours in the prison for children who can't dial the telephone, can't cross the street, can't ride a two-wheeler, and certainly can't run errands.

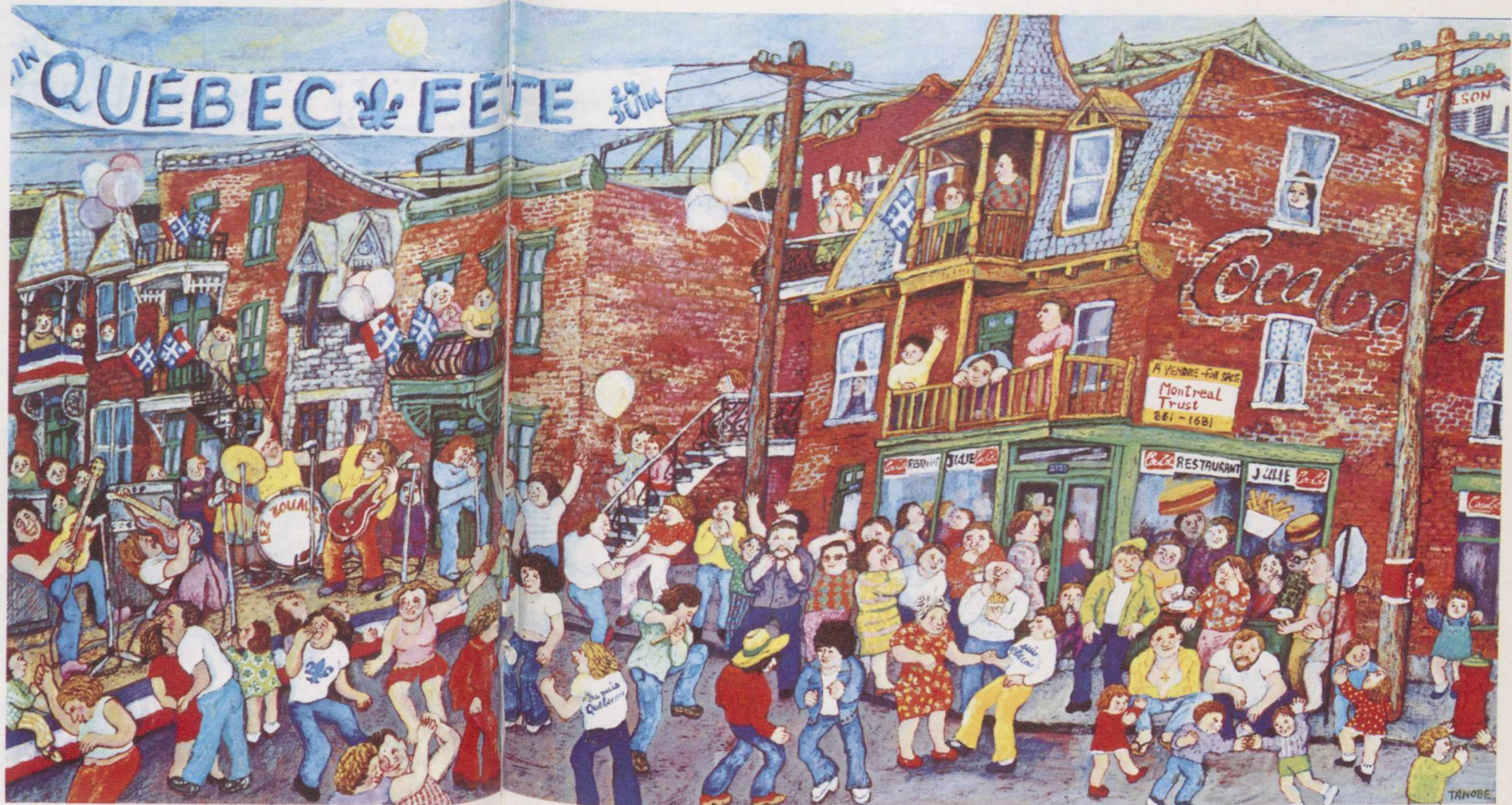
Jacob is rescued by his own cleverness and two splendid children, wearing child power costumes, who look just like his brother and sister.

Jacob Two-Two is a lulu.

Alligator Pie, DENNIS LEE, Illustrated by FRANK NEWFIELD, Macmillan, 1974, (Ages 6 months to 60 years).

Lee, one of Canada's best poets, splices words into wonderful lengths of nonsense. With the unfortunate exception of the use of "splain" (as in explain), Mr. Lee has concocted one of the best read-aloud books ever.

There are tongue twisters, wild Canadian names like Temagami, good nonsense words like gundi-



Festivités de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste/Street Dance on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, MIYUKI TANOBÉ. In her *Québec je t'aime I Love You* (Tundra Books).

boob, mild ribaldry like "a thump on your bum" and even a piece of political doggerel!

*William Lyon Mackenzie King
Sat in the middle & played with string
And he loved his mother like anything—
William Lyon Mackenzie King.*

There are poems about hockey, skyscrapers, the laundromat and even the day care centre:

*I've got a Special Person
At my day-care, where I'm in.
Her name is Mrs. Something
But we mostly call her Lynn. . .*

*I guess I'm going to marry Lynn
When I get three or four
And Lynn can have my Crib, or else
She'll maybe sleep next door.*

Mary of Mile 18, ANN BLADES, Tundra Books, 1971, (Ages 6 to 10 years).

The author, only nineteen at the time, wrote and painted this gem of a book for her students in a tiny Mennonite town eighteen miles from the Alaskan Highway in British Columbia. It is a classic tale of a wistful child, a homeless puppy, a family who can't afford him and the demands of icy northern winters. Survival depends on every member of the family. The girls must lug snow inside for drinking, cooking and washing; the boys have to split wood. Even a wolf-pup must earn his keep—and happily, he does.

Québec je t'aime I Love You, MIYUKI TANOBÉ with MAURICE SAVIGNAC, Tundra Books, 1976, (Ages 7 to 10 years).

If ever a land got a love letter, this is it. There are twenty-one pages of art and seventeen pages of text—one column in French and one in English. Every word and every picture shines with warmth and gaiety. The author, who was born in Japan, has

created not a story book but succinct accounts alongside busy pictures of crooked buildings and lumpy, happy people. There are washday and first communion, St. Jean Baptiste Day and the Quebec Carnival, maple sugaring and ice fishing. Even the mundane seems marvelous.

The Hand of Robin Squires, JOAN CLARK, Illustrated by WILLIAM TAYLOR and MARY CSEREPY, Clarke, Irwin, 1977, (Ages 10 to 14 years).

With her native Nova Scotia and some excellent research as background, Joan Clark has given verisimilitude to the legend of Oak Island's buried treasure. Her fast-paced plot of what might have been involves pirates and two teenage boys—one British, one Indian. As heroes they do not save the day, but at least they escape. Their escape provides a sophisticated explanation of the hand that floats in Oak Island's Money Pit. This gruesome sight, supposedly picked up in 1971 by a camera monitoring the shaft, is an added fillip to thrill and chill young readers (and old ones).