



Book Reviews

Angelina's Baby Sister

by Katharine Holabird,

illus. by Helen Craig

ABC [All Books for Children], London, 1991. 24 pages

Reviewer: Iris Blythe

Helen Craig's illustrations for *Angelina's Baby Sister* may remind readers of Beatrix Potter's illustrations. Perhaps it is because the characters are mice dressed as humans and because the illustrations involve the use of fine line drawings in conjunction with soft pastel colours.

The story deals with the problems that may arise when children find the significant adults in their lives appear to be ignoring or taking them for granted because they are fussing over a new baby in the family.



This book does not need mice to make it relevant or understandable. It would work just as well with characters that were human. There are no references to any behaviour or characteristics that are peculiar to mice. In fact, if the story was printed without illustrations, it would be page six before one realised that the characters are mice and then only because the mother is referred to as Mrs Mouseling. *Angelina's Baby Sister* is a rather stereotyped story. The text, and more obviously the illustrations, portray the characters in stereotypical dress, behaviour and roles. Angelina is pictured in a frilly pink tutu and the female ballet teacher, Miss Lilly, in layers of lace and

dripping with beads. There is a male doctor and when Angelina breaks the china dancer she had received as a prize from the ballet school, it is grandpa who says he will fix it. Angelina had become so angry at all the attention being lavished on the baby that she had begun to throw her soft toys around in her bedroom. Unfortunately, in this release of pent up feelings, the china dancer had been knocked off the dressing table.

There is one instance which does not fit the traditional stereotypical image, for it is Dad who prepares the supper while Mum rests upstairs following the arrival of the new baby. However after a week of Dad's cooking, Angelina is missing the special cheese pies which apparently Mum usually made for her when she came in from school.

The story ends on a positive note. Big sister, Angelina, reads her favourite book to her baby sister, Polly, and tells her that when she gets bigger she will teach her to dance. Books on topics such as this, provide parents, children and teachers with a forum in which to discuss feelings. There is the opportunity to say that it's okay to feel displaced and to talk about appropriate ways of expressing our hurts and disappointments. *Angelina's Baby Sister* is an attractive book that will appeal to some four to seven year olds.

The battle of Sir Cob and Sir Filbert,

by Angela McAllister

ABC [All Books for Children], London, 1991. 28 pages

Reviewer: Iris Blythe

The Battle of Sir Cob and Sir Filbert is a book of contradictions. There are less than one hundred words in the text, a characteristic of some books for pre-school children, and yet it is about two knights in armour and their desire to have bigger castles and more land. A story line that is more likely to appeal to children from the ages of eight to eleven.

The story line reminds me of the biblical parable of the man who desired

bigger and better barns. The knights look out from their respective castles and desire more. A battle follows, their castles are destroyed and they realise that they no longer need more land and in any case it's nicer to share with a friend. The final illustrations depict Sir Cob in his yellow star patterned long underwear and Sir Filbert in his, (blue and moon patterned) stretched out and relaxing along the boughs of a huge tree. Perhaps this story could lead to a discussion of the futility of war.

Angela McAllister's illustrations involve big bold outlines of the knights and their castles. Each illustration covers a double page spread of this 26.5cm x 21.5cm sized book, surrounded by a white 1cm border. This border seems to draw one's attention to the different focus colour of each double page. Angela has used greens on the first page, pinks on the next, followed by blues on the next, and so on through the book. The text, as few as five words to the double page, and never more than two sentences, is printed over a part of the illustration on each page that is in a plain colour.

One aspect of this book that children will enjoy whether they are four or eleven, are the fun words that Angela has used to name the weapons used in the battle. There are bun-blasters, thwackarees, twangsuckers, pickeypoles and conk-bonkers.

The Battle of Sir Cob and Sir Filbert is a book children may enjoy having read to them, or reading for themselves once or twice, but I cannot imagine that it will be one they will want to add to their permanent collection.

