

## PROFESSIONAL

**WRITING PICTURE BOOKS: *What Works and What Doesn't!*** Kathy Stinson; \$8.95 paper 0-921217-72-2, 64 pp., 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 9, biblio., Pembroke, Oct.

There are questions every novice writer of picture books wants to ask, and as any picture book editor eyeing the slush pile will tell you, *needs* to ask before sending a manuscript to a publisher. *Writing Picture Books: What Works and What Doesn't*, manages to survey the fundamentals of picture book writing – finding a story to tell, grappling with problems of genre, plot, pacing, theme, and illustration and connecting with editors, publishers, and other writers – by asking and answering questions as if the reader were part of a cozy tutorial.

Author Kathy Stinson, a veteran of blue-pencil workshops and an established author of such well-known picture books as *Teddy Rabbit* and *Red is Best*, makes it clear that she can offer no magic rules or formulae. Instead, she gives elementary but sage advice about reading

the best in childrens' books before writing one, learning about the market, understanding that moral messages alone do not make good stories, and pointing out that editors are bound to change a writer's work. The tips are practical – don't ask an aunt who draws to illustrate your work, respect the intelligence and dignity of your readers by using language that is rich and meaningful – but the text is rarely anecdotal, and such a slim volume begs for more insights from the author about how she and others struggled and managed to avoid the clichés and pitfalls she details.

Stinson effectively illustrates her points with short passages quoted from picture books and a generous sprinkling of humour. The bibliography is a brief but well-chosen list of picture books for anyone unfamiliar with the rich culture of the genre and anxious to learn more before setting out on the journey of writing. – by Paulette Bourgeois, a children's author whose titles include the Franklin picture books.