

In the Afterglow of Canada Day

By Susan Ramsay

Early Literacy Specialist for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox & Addington 613-354-6318 (ext 32)

I am torn. I am never sure if it is the wagon ride with berry baskets beside me, the feel of warm sun on my skin, or the love of being completely surrounded by acres of sweet juicy strawberries that makes my trip to the berry farm so appealing. Two days after Canada Day I sat on straw between two long rows of berries and began to pick.

“Mommy, look!” I turned toward the sound of his small, high voice. A beige sun-hat bobbed slightly higher than the row of strawberry bushes, his fist clutching and waving a large heart-shaped berry. I scanned the field. In every direction there were child-sized heads with sun hats or pony tails poking like short sunflowers above the bushes. The strawberry field was filled with children – children who were discovering, learning and enjoying the marvels of how food grows.

Summertime is filled with opportunities for children to discover things first-hand. Fireworks, star-gazing, parades, trips to beach, visits to a museum or historic fort, summer fairs, and even road construction are memorable and often awe-inspiring to young children. These personal experiences grab children’s interest and make learning meaningful. Early childhood educators and parents know that it is these personal encounters that trigger children’s curiosity and boost their attention spans.

Children’s books and magazines, both fictional and factual, are great tools for deepening children’s experiences. The little boy from the strawberry field might have enjoyed sharing books in the car or at home that built upon the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures he’d just experienced. He might have developed problem solving skills and an understanding of empathy through the story of “The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry and THE BIG HUNGRY BEAR” by Don and Audrey Wood. He might have practiced story telling by “reading” the wordless Caldecott Award children’s book “The Grey Lady and the Strawberry Snatcher” by Molly Bang. He might come up with new rhyming phrases for “Jamberry” by Bruce Degen or be fascinated by the Cherokee story called “First Strawberries” by Joseph Burchac. He might have learned colour names or how to classify fruits and vegetables with the board book “Strawberries are red” by Petr Horacek, or decided to plant his own fruit garden by exploring the photographic pictures of “Plant Life Cycles: Strawberries” by Robin Nelson.

Whatever outings or events the summer holds, adults in children’s lives can be sure there are children’s books that can stretch and enhance children’s experiences. Librarians and book sellers will have many great suggestions.

As I gathered my full baskets and made my way back to the hay wagon, I asked one of the employees at the strawberry farm why the patch had been closed July 2nd. “The fields needed a chance to rest,” she explained. “Canada Day was crazy! Everyone was here!” In the afterglow of Canada Day, in the afterglow of discovery of all kinds throughout the summer, children are ripe for rooting their knowledge deeply. Books can make that cultivation easy.