Surprises

By Marla Stewart Konrad

On the day I started grade one, I realized I already knew a lot about the world. I was five years old and I could ride a three-wheeler, colour inside the lines, and write my name. I even knew how to read, and on my mom’s list of tricky reading words, I could name every one. So, when I walked into my new classroom, I wasn’t expecting any surprises. “It’s time for some games,” my teacher said, and we all scrambled to the floor in a circle. We all loved games – even people like me who knew so very much. The alphabet games were interesting – but there were no surprises.

The word games were interesting – but there were no surprises.

The reading games were interesting – but there were no surprises.

When the games were over, we stood in a line. “You can all take turns going to pick up your first reader,” she said. Out of the corner of my eye, I spied them. Stacks of bright yellow books on the back table, just waiting to be opened. When it came my turn, I raced to the back of the room. From the
cover of that bright yellow book, the funny face of a jack-in-the-box grinned up at me. At the top of my reader in bright letters was one word: Surprises.

Was it true? Were there surprises inside these books?

I opened the cover and turned the pages. Page after page of children just like me. There was a girl gazing at a doll in a toy shop window. Why was she staring at that doll? If only I could join her to get a better look. There was a boy fishing from a little rowboat. What must it be like to paddle a boat and catch a fish? There were stories about secret hideouts, tree houses, visits to a farm. Scary Halloween poems about ghosts and goblins. Stories about children who lived in houses made of snow. And fairy tales about castles, queens and magic carpets.

By lunch time on the day I started grade one, I learned just how many surprises the world has to offer. I felt the tug of a fish on my fishing rod. I sniffed barnyard smells. I shivered inside an icy igloo. I felt the lurch of a magic carpet as it took off. That morning, my eyes were opened to the magic of books. I learned that when you open a book, if you come with your eyes and ears and senses wide open, you can travel to other places. That if you allow yourself to dream just a little bit, you can travel through time. And that if your imagination is open to the treasures inside, a book will always be full of surprises.

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