



CANADIAN

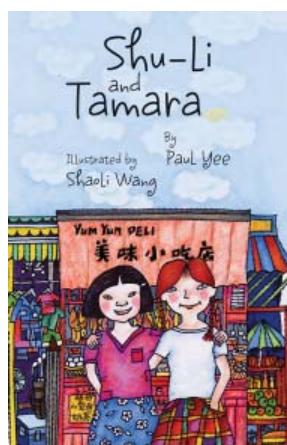
\$4.95

children's book news

BOOK BITS: CHAPTER BOOKS FOR EARLY READERS

Imagination & Immigration

by Brenda Halliday



Shu-li and Tamara

written by Paul Yee
illustrated by Shaoli Wang
Tradewind Books, 2007
978-1896580937 (pb) \$7.95
for Grades 2 to 4

Shu-Li and Tamara is a new stand-alone chapter book by Paul Yee. Yee, who has chronicled the early Chinese immigrant experience so vividly, has recently focused on new Asian immigrants — in his collection of short stories about Asian teens in Canada, *What Happened This Summer* (also published by Tradewind Books) — and now in this welcome chapter book for younger readers. Fourth-graders Shu-Li and redhead Tamara are both newcomers to their school and to Vancouver's vibrant Commercial Drive neighbourhood. Shu-Li watches the colourful activity of the Drive from behind the counter of her parents' Yum Yum deli, longing to be part of the action outside. Shaoli Wang, who collaborated with Yee on the picture book *Bamboo*, captures Shu-Li's experience by revealing the deli from her perspective. A generous helping of Wang's charming black-and-white line drawings enlivens the text and makes the story accessible for beginning readers. Her amusing class photos which wrap up the book reflect the multicultural flavour of this Vancouver classroom.

Shu-Li struggles to fit in and blend her Chinese and North American cultures. She is both embarrassed by her mother's English and fiercely loyal to her when the cool girls from school laugh at her attempts. Though she respects her parents' authority, she wishes to be more independent. Though her teacher encourages participation, she is reluctant to speak up in class unless she has the right answer.

But ultimately this is a story of loyalty and friendship that all children can relate to. Shu-Li and Tamara's friendship deepens as both explore their new neighbourhood and work together baking cookies for a school fair to raise money for Kids Helping Kids. Shu-Li discounts the rumour that Tamara has been stealing to obtain spending money. Even when money is missing from the bake sale and Tamara is falsely accused of stealing, Shu-Li sticks by her until the truth is revealed. This appealingly packaged chapter book provides recipes for the mouth-watering cookies so parents should be prepared to hit the kitchen.

These books prove, like their young readers, that good things come in small packages.