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Walk With a Wolf/Old Coyote

Janni Howker
Janni Howker illustrated by Sarah Fox-Davies
Sarah Fox-Davies, illustrator
Candlewick Press (Aug 12, 2008)
Unknown $8.99 (32pp)
978-0-7636-3875-7

For children, Candlewick Press offers a pair of picture books on canid behavior. *Walk With a Wolf,* written by Janni Howker and illustrated by Sarah Fox-Davies (978-0-7636-3875-7), includes a CD version read by Alan Marriott. The story in verse follows the movement of a family pack through a mountainous area, and on a hunt. This is winter poetry of the far north, of the Robert Service school, aimed at five- to eight-year-olds. Factual asides set off in italics provide information which would've seemed clunky if squeezed into the main text.

Old Coyote (978-0-7636-3886-3) is written by Nancy Wood and illustrated by Max Grafe with an effective suite of soft earth tones and diffused blue night scenes. This book's images and words cross-reinforce a highly meditative account of one final journey at the end of life: "He was stiff and sore, and he had forgotten where he'd left his dreams. 'Ah,' he said, 'I know what that means.'" The title character's graceful calm in facing his natural demise may comfort young readers who've lost a loved one. "'How beautiful the world is,' he said to himself, as he turned from the desert to make his way up into the forest."

Old Coyote is right: the place looks great, and it feels even better to commune with nature in person than it does via television. Shut that hypnosis machine off and get out there between the books. Life is short, get real.
TODD MERCER (January 9, 2009)

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