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# Chapter books accompany dolls

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to produce dolls with the body of a 10-year-old girl.

Creating the doll involved moving from a clay sculpture to a plaster mould, then to a wax sample, a copper mould and finally to a vinyl doll. It was a long process, involving many adjustments, said Avonlea Traditions Inc. marketing manager Claire McGowan.

"Everything from the curvature of

her arm and the dimensions of her limbs, the size of her eyes (was changed) there has been a lot of fine-tuning."

In addition to finding the right look, Ms Morton and her staff wanted to create a doll girls could learn from.

"Kids can retain a phenomenal amount of detail when it is related to a doll," Ms McGowan said.

What they ended up with was a line of four Maplelea Girls — Jenna, Alexi, Brienne and Taryn. Each doll comes from a different part of Canada.

They decided to use contemporary characters with whom girls could identify. For example, Brienne is a prairie girl fascinated by farm life; Alexi is a stylish Torontonian with a flare for technology and art; Jenna is a sports-loving Maritimer; and environmentalist Taryn lives in the Rocky Mountains.

If the company had made the dolls not so uniquely Canadian, there would have been more export opportunities, Ms McGowan said.

"We knew we were minimizing projected sales to the U.S., but we hope, by making the product so Canadian, we will be able to appeal to a large percent of the target market."

Each doll comes with a journal that introduces her, explaining facts such as where she lives, who her family is and what her likes and dislikes are. It also includes stories, activity ideas, trivia, maps and drawings and blank pages for girls to write their thoughts.

The company hired the former head of Stoddard Kids Publishing to recruit award-winning Canadian authors to write chapter books, which will follow the introduction of the dolls.

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Since the high-end dolls have fine detailing and come with journals and other features, they are more expensive to produce and are pricier than the "stock" or mass-produced doll, Ms McGowan said.

As a result, Maplelea Girls will not necessarily appeal to mass market stores, she said. Instead, they will likely be sold at specialty stores and bought as gifts. The suggested retail price is about \$159.99.

The dolls made their debut at Toronto's Toy Fair in January. Reaction at the fair gave Ms Morton confidence the dolls would sell well.

While the dolls are not yet on store shelves, the company has a growing list of people interested in buying, she added.

The dolls are due to be on retail shelves by September. Chapter books will be available by late 2004.

For more information about Avonlea Traditions Inc. or Maplelea Girls, call 905-853-1777.

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