



BfK Briefing ? January 1997

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Books for Keeps asks leading children's publishers which book from last year's crop they wish they had published.

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Klaus Flugge, Publisher, Andersen Press

'**Clown** by Quentin Blake (Cape). I think it's another masterpiece and the absence of text makes it even more accomplished.'

Jane Nissen, Associate Publisher, Penguin Children's Books

I love **The Great Grammar Book** by Jennie Maizels and Kate Petty (The Bodley Head). All those wonderful nouns, verbs, conjunctions, etc. turned into the friendliest of characters and opening up endless possibilities. It's the cleverest, most imaginative book I've seen for ages. And the most fun. Is that grammar?'

Francesca Dow, Publishing Director, Orchard Books

I have to confess to envying Walker's beautiful **My Very First Mother Goose**, edited by Iona Opie and illustrated by Rosemary Wells. Imaginatively and generously designed, each page is such a surprise. Maybe more for the adult than the child, there's no doubt that I would buy it for my own bookshelves!'

Barry Cunningham, Editorial Director, Bloomsbury Children's Books

'**Northern Lights** by Philip Pullman (Scholastic) is an astonishing masterpiece. A brilliant blend of strongly visual fantasy, good gripping storytelling and a serious and far reaching theme. I want a daemon and an armoured bear.'

Fiona Kenshole, Publishing Director, Hodder Children's Books

'Philip Pullman's **Northern Lights** (Scholastic) sent shivers down the back of my neck. I knew I was reading a truly lasting classic. By the end I was trying all kinds of ways not to finish. It's also beautifully edited and nicely produced. The only thing I would change is the cover!'

Chris Kloet, Editorial Director Children's Books, Gollancz

'**The Quentin Blake Book of Nonsense** Stories, selected and illustrated by Quentin Blake (Viking). A wonderfully varied collection, from the silly to the absurd, illustrated in droll line with a wit and seriousness that only the best nonsense deserves. I just love it!'

Ron Heapy, Managing Editor, Oxford University Press Children's Books

'Difficult to choose one title. I like Philip Pullman's **Northern Lights** (Scholastic), Jan Piefrkowski's **Botticelli's Bed and Breakfast**

(Kingfisher) and **Another Day on your Foot** and **I would have Died** by John Agard, Wendy Cope, Roger McGough, Adrian Mitchell and Brian Patten (Macmillan).

Philippa Milnes-Smith, Publisher, Penguin Children's Books

'**Oops!** by Colin McNaughton (Andersen Press). It's economic, entirely child centred, wonderfully unpretentious, and blends the traditional with the contemporary with enviable ease. I love sharing it with children - and their enjoyment is self-evident.'

News in Brief

AWARDS

The 1996 Smarties Award winners, voted for by schoolchildren from an adult-chosen shortlist, are **The Firework-Maker's Daughter** by Philip Pullman (Corgi Yearling) for the 9-11 year category; **The Butterfly Lion** by Michael Morpurgo (Collins Children's Books) for the 6-8 year category; and **Oops!** by Colin McNaughton (Andersen Press) for the 5 years and under category.

The 1996 Kurt Maschler Award has been won by Babette Cole for **Drop Dead** (Cape).

The 1996 Fidler Award for a first children's novel has been won by John Smirthwaite for **The Falcon's Quest**. His prize includes publication by the award's new sponsor, Hodder Children's Books.

The 1996 SEN (Special Educational Needs) Book Award was awarded to Anne Fine for **How to Write Really Badly** (Methuen Children's Books). Special commendation was given to Michael Morpurgo's **The Ghost of Grania O'Mally** (Heinemann).

CONFERENCES

Alternative Worlds: A conference on Children's Literature at the University of Brighton on 10-11th April. Work-shops, lectures and discussions. Speakers include Pat Hutchins, Lesley Howarth and Philip Pullman. Closing date for applications 18th February. Details from Alternative Worlds Conference, Curriculum Centre, Faculty of Education, Sport & Leisure, The University of Brighton, Falmer, East Sussex BN1 9PH.

Where Texts and Children Meet: the Fourth Children's Literature Conference at Homerton College, Cambridge for Primary and Secondary teachers, librarians, publishers [etc. is](http://etc.is) [2] from 5-7th September. Workshops, seminars and entertainment. Speakers include Anne Fine, Michael Foreman, Margaret Meek Spencer, Nicholas Tucker. Details from Morag Styles (01223 507111).

PUFFIN ON THE INTERNET

The first web site aimed at children aged 8-12 has been launched by Penguin Children's Books. Called The Puffin House, the site has lots of 'rooms' to enter where the user can encounter extracts from new titles, authors, a database of information on Puffin books and so on. There are games and quizzes, information about the latest film, TV and video tie-ins and tips on how to become a writer yourself - all at the the click of a button. E-mail responses from children are encouraged.

Updated on a monthly basis, The Puffin House is simultaneously a source of child-related information and entertainment and a marketing device. Check it out for yourself though you may find you have to get a 10-year-old to help. Log in on www.puffin.co.uk [3]

Books for Students - BESTSELLER CHARTS

Jan - Dec 1996

PICTURE BOOKS

1. Elmer and Wilbur David McKee, Red Fox
2. A Quiet Night In Jill Murphy, Walker
3. Ruff Jane Hissey, Red Fox
4. Little Teddy Left Behind A Managan, Magi
5. The Very Hungry Caterpillar Eric Carle, Puffin
6. Horace and Maurice Dick King-Smith, Transworld
7. Peace at Last Jill Murphy, Macmillan
8. Quack! Said the Billy Goat Charles Causley, Walker
9. Five Minutes' Peace Jill Murphy, Walker
10. Jasper's Beanstalk Nick Butterworth, Hodder

FICTION 6-9

1. Toystory: Film Storybook Ladybird
2. Hunchback of Notre Dame Ladybird
3. Babe: Film Storybook Puffin
4. The Twits Roald Dahl, Puffin
5. Happy Mouseday Dick King-Smith, Transworld
6. Miss Dirt the Dustman's Daughter Allan Ahlberg, Puffin
7. George's Marvellous Medicine Roald Dahl, Puffin
8. The Owl Who was Afraid of the Dark Jill Tomlinson, Reed
9. The Hodgeheg Dick King-Smith, Puffin
10. I'm Scared! Bel Mooney, Reed

FICTION 9-12

1. Babe, the Sheep Pig Dick King-Smith, Puffin
2. Goosebumps:The Barking Ghost R L Stine, Scholastic
3. Goosebumps:Cuckoo Clock of Doom R L Stine, Scholastic
4. The Indian in the Cupboard Lynne Reid Banks, Puffin
5. The Demon Headmaster Gillian Cross, Puffin
6. Goosebumps:Escape from the Carnival R L Stine, Scholastic

7. Jumanji Todd Strasser, Puffin
5. Double Act Jacqueline Wilson, Transworld
9. Calf in the Cottage Lucy Daniels, Hodder
10. James and the Giant Peach Roald Dahl, Puffin

LIBRARIES

TOP 10 LISTINGS IN 1996

PICTURE BOOKS

1. Spot Bakes a Cake Eric Hill, Puffin
2. How to Look after your Pet Rabbit Mark Evans, Dorling Kindersley
3. Miss Dirt the Dustman's Daughter Allan Ahlberg, Puffin
4. Nothing Mick Inkpen, Hodder
5. Miss Vole the Vet Allan Ahlberg, Puffin
6. It's the Bear! Jez Alborough, Walker
7. World of Soccer M Nevin, Wayland
8. How to Look after your Pet Guinea Pigs Mark Evans, Dorling Kindersley
9. How to Look after your Pet Kitten Mark Evans, Dorling Kindersley
10. How to Look after your Pet Rabbit Mark Evans, Dorling Kindersley

JUNIOR 6-11

1. Goosebumps: A Night in Terror Tower R L Stine, Scholastic
2. Goosebumps: The Cuckoo Clock of Doom R L Stine, Scholastic
3. Goosebumps: My Hairiest Adventure R L Stine, Scholastic
4. James and the Giant Peach (film tie-in) R Dahl, Puffin
5. Goosebumps: Monster Blood III R L Stine, Scholastic
6. Goosebumps: Ghost Beach RL Stine, Scholastic
7. The Witches (new cover reprint) Roald Dahl, Puffin
8. Goosebumps: Phantom of the Auditorium R L Stine, Scholastic
9. Matilda (new cover reprint) Roald Dahl, Puffin
10. Spooksville, The Cold People Christopher Pike, Hodder

TEENAGE 11+

1. Point Horror: Help Wanted R L Stine, Scholastic
2. Point Horror: Driver's Deed P Lerangis, Scholastic
3. Point Horror: The Boy Next Door S Smith, Scholastic
4. Point Horror: Nightmare Hall - Pretty Please D Holm. Scholastic
5. Point Horror: Night School C B Cooney, Scholastic
6. Point Horror: The Body C Ellis, Scholastic
7. Point Horror: The Mummy B Steiner, Scholastic
8. Point Horror: Nightmare Hall - The Experiment D Holm, Scholastic
9. Point Horror: The Surfer L Cargill, Scholastic
10. Point Crime: The Beast-Smokescreen D Belbin, Scholastic

This listing has been specially compiled for Books for Keeps by Books for Students from their 1996 sales data. Books for Students Ltd is a major specialist book supply company to schools and libraries and the organiser of Readathon in schools.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Labels that Libel

Dear Editor,

I feel I have to write and defend publishers' age ranging after reading Jeff Hynds' onslaught, 'Labels That Libel,' in your September issue.

While my own company wasn't included in the evil league table, we do 'commit' age ranging through the various rooms in our reading house logo AND I'm proud of it.

In fact I've spent years desperately trying to get retailers to follow age or suitability categorization for their customers. Of course individual age ranges can be made fun of, and elitist literary judgements made of the 'suitable for all' type, but this is profoundly unhelpful to the vast majority of busy mums, dads and children themselves who are faced with an impossible choice. These customers, and dare I say a great many teachers, find age guidance vitally necessary in picking a book which their children have a good chance of actually enjoying. Of course any 'expert' can mock language designed to be helpful to ordinary readers, and this insider snobbery is often what comes between people who want to buy books but don't know where to start and the rich pastures of one of the best children's publishing industries in the world.

There is a risk of putting some readers off by limiting the reading category, but of course this is true of the whole idea of 'children's' books in the first place. Originally a marketing invention itself, perhaps.

Barry Cunningham, Editorial Director, Bloomsbury Children's Books, 38 Soho Square, London W1V 5DF

Dear Editor,

As a specialist children's bookseller, I know that parents and other carers need all the help they can get faced with the wealth of children's books published; on the other hand, publishers responding to consumer demand are unwittingly limiting the appeal of some of their best titles in particular in schools and more especially to less able readers. This is

noticeable in the area of picture books suitable for older readers where, as Jeff Hynds points out, any age banding will mean rejection no matter how challenging the content of the book. If teachers are now having to resort to sticking the offending references to age bands, then perhaps the time is ripe for reassessment before those potential readers are lost.

Part of the problem, of course, is the power of the polysemic picture book to deal with serious themes which appeal to a wide audience of both child and adult - why place limitations on the strength of this appeal? I tend to ignore age ranging anyway when customers need advice, preferring to concentrate on the particular stage of development reached by the child or on finding the style of illustration which best suits the shared taste of both child and adult.

Jenny Morris

The Lion & Unicorn Bookshop, 19 King Street, Richmond-upon-Thames, Surrey TW9 1ND

Mr Pleebus

Dear Editor,

Many thanks to George Hunt for his kind words about my first two Mr Pleebus books (Reviews, November issue). Mr Hunt also wrote that he found it 'troubling that the evil forces in the book are depicted as jet-black creatures who struggle against fairer-skinned goodies'. However, he neglected to mention that one of the two main protagonists is a little black girl, Pandora. In these two stories, and the two to follow, she works together with her best friend and next-door neighbour Joey (who's white) to help defeat the menaces they encounter (Hooray!). Indeed, it was very important to me to include background and supporting characters from many ethnic backgrounds, particularly in the school of the second book.

When I came to draw the books I wrestled with the idea of making Subeelp (Pleebus' evil doppelganger) red. The inspiration for these two characters came from ancient archetypes - they're supposed to be yin-yang opposites - but, in the end, it simply came down to a decision about what looked 'coolest' on a black-and-white page of comic strip artwork.

Nick Abadzis, Twickenham, Middlesex

The Marsh Award

Dear Editor,

As the judges of the first Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation, we were surprised at the criticisms levelled at our choice for the award and at **Books for Keeps'** rather narrow interpretation of the kind of book that should have won (**BfK** November '96).

If books are to cross cultural boundaries as they do in translation, then they must not only have the 'distinctive voices and forms and offer (the) varied perspectives and subject matter' that you refer to, but, equally important, they must also speak beyond this cultural otherness to those feelings and experiences that are universally shared.

In reading through the dishearteningly small number of entries for the award which spanned work published from 1990 to 1996, we were indeed struck by the 'otherness' of almost everything we read. The award is not just for a children's book in translation but for the quality of the translation itself: the award is given to the translator. One entry, Feng Jicai's novel about the cultural revolution, *Let 100 Flowers Bloom* (translated by Chris Smith), explored areas beyond any of our experiences, but its telling lacked distinction.

What appealed to us about Christine Nostlinger's **A Dog's Life** (translated by Anthea Bell) was not only its unusual storyline but its social and political satire which works because of the anthropomorphic element which is very different from its British counterparts. This was a distinguished text whose humour made great demands on the translator to convey the letter and spirit of the original while making those leaps of imagination which convey the author's meaning

as faithfully as possible in the language in translation.

If one of the purposes of the Marsh award is to encourage publishers to be more adventurous in looking at books from other countries, then **A Dog's Life** should be just the sort of book to do this: yet no publisher was prepared to paperback it. Children read books in translation quite happily. It is we adults who need to be more open in our publishing, reading and sharing on their behalf. We feel that *A Dog's Life* offers readers an idiosyncratic, ebullient, and upbeat entry into fiction in translation and the other worlds we may find there.

Julia Eccleshare, Elizabeth Hammill and Gwen Marsh

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[3] <http://www.puffin.co.uk>