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Editor's Choice:

Editors Choice

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Big Books, Big Books, Big Books - schools should be tripping over themselves to buy these giant format picture books. **Handa's Surprise**, for example, has been blown up from 215x260mm to 375x455mm. Our children returned to these Big Books again and again. Their success was not only their novelty value - it is because they are accessible to more than one or two children at a time; children at Year One and Two are highly gregarious so poring over a big book with one's mates appeals far more than the somewhat isolating experience of reading to oneself or to one other in the book corner!

In a classroom situation the power of the illustrations in such already popular titles as **Handa's Surprise**, **Six Dinner Sid**, and **The Train Ride** is magnified in direct relation to the increase in size! The children were stunned and delighted

and immediately dashed to compare these large new versions to the smaller editions. The teacher in me is over the moon because at last publishers are giving us what we desperately need at an affordable price - quality books with which we can truly harness the power of group reading and the magic of choral reading. With the new 'literacy hour', using Big Books to the full should be the keystone to building it into a meaningful experience for the children. (For an excellent article on making the most of group reading with big books, see Jill Bennett's piece in **BfK 100**.)

Of the picture book titles, **Six Dinner Sid** (about a greedy cat) proved very successful. The text is beautifully constructed but also superbly laid out on the pages so shared group readings were highly effective with the children able to see the text clearly. The illustrations, stunning in the original size, are breathtakingly enlarged. **The Jolly Witch** (about a school caretaker who is also a witch) was particularly useful with the Year Two children but struggled a bit in the translation to big book. The quantity of text to the page meant that it still seemed cramped for group reading. However, the fact that most children were revisiting an old favourite carried it successfully through the day.

Handa's Surprise, already such a favourite (it's a wonderful visual joke), is now even more so as the children can share together in the delight of being secretly privy to what is happening whilst the heroine of the story is oblivious!

The giant sized version of **Once Upon a Time** (about a 'quiet' day in the country packed with events!) begs to be shared, with children coming out of the group to point out and trace the on-going sub-plots. This has always been a favourite and a superb assessment strategy to ascertain which children have, or have not, had the literary culture of fairy and folk tales. Sadly, increasingly numbers have not! Whilst it was always a good read, if in a somewhat cramped way in its original size - now it is glorious in this bit screen version! The book also leads on to early exploration of the ways stories can be presented differently in a whole variety of books and sometimes even shown from different perspectives.

This Is the Bear and the Scary Night and **The Train Ride** are superb examples of picture books in verse which lead with their rhyme and rhythm to group work on phonics; they also help us to introduce children to the excitement of choral reading and discovering the range of the human voice to create effect with pace, tone, colour and volume.

The Child's Play 'Great Pals' board books set are my least favourite of the collection sent for review, but they were loved by the Reception children (I'm sure they would have translated well into the Nursery too but could not be wrested from the Reception children!), Great Pal **Kitten**, particularly, provided endless amusement and many very effective re-readings! The young children loved the predictability, the fact that they felt they were 'reading', and they were fascinated by the comparison of scale between the big books and the little 'Pocket Pals' companions. American spelling (as in 'We can change color.') is a problem in some of the 'Great Pals' titles. Also available are **Puppy, Panda, Polar Bear, Dolphin, Penguin, and Sea-horse**.

Running Order:

85

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