



Lifeline Library - Part 2: Learning And Listening

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[14](#) [2]

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Elaine Moss chooses books for Learning and Listening.

Elaine Moss continues her five-part series

Part 2: LEARNING AND LISTENING

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There is no stage at which the reading aloud of choice stories and rhymes to children is more important than at the stage when they themselves are hell-bent on becoming readers.

If they are not in a state of terrier-like determination as a hangover from the reading aloud to them of Picture Books (which must of course continue) this may be your last chance for easy 'hooking'.

So the second instalment of **Lifeline Library** (fifty books that every Primary School teacher should not only *know* but *own*) is devoted to the twin arts of **Learning and Listening**, that pleasurable intermingling of endeavour and satisfaction. Learner/listeners can be of any age, of course, so the books of rhymes and easy reading that I recommend have been chosen because they are indispensable standbys from the Infants' Reception class right up to top Juniors.

But the stories read *to* those who are learning to read must change as the learner grows older. Because most children are at what Sybil Marshall has called the 'overlap stage' from 5 to 8, the stories that I have selected for reading aloud here are those whose appeal will be strongest in the Infants School. Stories for reading aloud to older listener/learners will be covered later in the year.

Enormously helpful in learning to read are nursery rhyme collections and anthologies of rhyming verse. I suggest, therefore:

The Mother Goose Treasury

Raymond Briggs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 90800 0, £6.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.088 X, £3.50

This is unlike any other 'Mother Goose' because Briggs has miraculously walked the tightrope, in illustrating the well known and less well known nursery and folk rhymes, between a robust, rollicking earthiness (Old King Cole is such a 'merry old soul' that his face is bright red!) and vulgarity. So this bumper book, with its '408 rhymes and 897 illustrations', many in colour, is enormous fun for the hesitant reader to use at the stage where rhymes, especially known rhymes, are a boost to fluency.

Mother Goose Comes to Cable Street

Sel. Rosemary Stones and Andrew Mann, ill. Dan Jones, Kestrel, 0 7226 5277 1, £3.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.313 7,

Compared with the Raymond Briggs collection above, this is a very slender book (20 rhymes) but it has a special place in Britain in the '80s: the rhymes have been selected to allow Dan Jones full scope to paint illustrations for them peopled by the multi-cultural community of London's East End. 'Three babies in a basket/ And hardly room for two/One was yellow and one was black/And one had eyes of blue'. See them being wheeled to the butcher's stall? Quick eyes will notice 'nice bit of leg' scribbled on the wall. A painterly book - full of visual humour and social comment, too.

The Young Puffin Book of Verse

Comp. Barbara Ireson, Puffin, O 14 03.0410 X, £1.00

Absolutely invaluable for use in any classroom in a Primary School because Barbara Ireson has the knack of including all those elusive poems that teachers half remember, and in addition (the book is divided up into imaginatively titled sections) many that will be welcome new finds.

All these can be on hand for constant use by teacher and child, whilst the following four titles, each part of a good and varied series, are being sampled by children who will find them a welcome and colourful change if they are used to the uniform prosaic reading scheme pamphlets.

The Cat in the Hat

Dr Seuss, Collins Beginner Book, 0 00 171101 6, £2.50 hb; 0 00 171303 5, £1.25 pb

I sometimes think that the zany Cat in the Hat, prancing around in his stripy gear, educating all and sundry with a nonchalant flip of his paw, is the symbol of progressive ideas in education. He doesn't *seem* to be teaching children of all ages to read - but he is, as no doubt you have discovered.

Hullabaloo for Owl

Helen Piers, Magnet, 0 416 58980 4, 60p

Helen Piers is a genius. Her photographs of animals and people are monuments to her patience (how long did she have to wait for an owl to alight on *a telephone?*). And her text, with its insistence on bang-bang, clatter-clack and all the other hullabaloo that stops owl from sleeping, is equally good for simple reading practice and for storytime. One of many books in an indispensable series.

Frog and Toad are Friends

Arnold Lobel, World's Work I Can Read series, 0 437 90074 6, £3.50 hb; 0 437 96019 6, 60p pb

Frog and Toad are two of the most enchanting characters in a child's panorama of storybook people. Yet here they are, the stars of a series of easy readers! With delicious pond-coloured pictures of lively Frog ('The snow is melting, Toad. Wake up.') and sleepy Toad ('I am not here.') the gently humorous, always interesting Frog and Toad stories are of classic quality.

Mr Cosmo the Conjuror

Allan Ahlberg and Joe Wright, Kestrel, 0 7226 5658 0, £2.50; Puffin, 0 14 03.1237 4, 60p

One of the 'Happy Families' series that work in the repetition of words and phrases felicitously, as part of the rounding up of the story. The Cosmos are a family of Indian peripatetic conjurors. Mr Cosmo's hat produces rabbits, pigeons, cakes - and collects the money. Brightly coloured pictures throughout, to help the not quite fluent reader make those

vital inspired guesses.

But though nursery rhymes, poems and the attractive easy to read material might seem to be reason enough to convey to beginning readers that the effort is worthwhile, there is still a missing ingredient - the story that cannot be read aloud to a class at one sitting, the on-going, exciting, willingly entered into other world that can 'grow' in the classroom over a day, a week, a month.

Selecting only three of these (for I am determined not to overstep ten recommendations for the Lifeline Library in each of the 1982 **Books for Keeps** issues) was agony. I look forward to seeing your supplementary suggestions, for the field is rich.

The Bears on Hemlock Mountain

Alice Dalgliesh, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.0582 3, 65p

I chose this because it is everything any teacher could want - an adventure story (*are there bears on Hemlock Mountain? will they attack Jonathan when he is alone up there in the dark?*), and a story in which the whole class will join in with Jonathan as he gives himself courage with his tramping song - **THERE ARE NO BEARS ON HEMLOCK MOUNTAIN - NO BEARS AT ALL**. Also, as the story moves on, Helen Sewell's illustrations are scattered through the text, to intrigue, enchant at every stage. If you don't already know this book- and so many people don't seem to - rush out and buy it before it goes out of print.

Fantastic Mr Fox

Roald Dahl, Allen & Unwin, 0 04 823096 0, £2.95; Young Puffin, 0 14 03.0676 5, 90p

Also an enthralling read which makes one sadly aware of how much more care this author took when writing for children in the late '60s (this book was first published in 1970) than he does in his present wild extravaganza phase. This is a perfectly constructed witty, exciting story about a family of foxes (led by the crafty Fantastic Mr Fox) who outwit three farmers - Boggis, Bunce and Bean - who are trying to starve them out, or shoot them. The audience roots for the foxes all the time - and fantastic Mr Dahl (aided by his illustrator Jill Bennett) holds them breathless. A marvellous book full of memorable spirited characters.

Ramona the Pest

Beverly Cleary, Hamish Hamilton,

0 241 02412 9 £4.50; Puffin, 0 14 03.0774 5, 95p

Chosen from the whole wonderful Ramona canon only because one may as well start at the beginning. (Ramona is a minor character - aged about 3 - in the 'Henry' books, but they are less attractive.) Authors who can get right inside their heroines are rare, but Beverly Cleary has uncanny insight and a marvellously humorous approach. Ramona, a doughty, not-to-be-put-upon, six-year-old younger sister, has the kind of adventures and experiences at home and at school - where she misunderstands much that is said to her by her teacher - that other six-year-olds have. She is therefore ever popular with them, and with much older girls, too, because they enjoy remembering their youth. Don't we all?

Still to come in the Lifeline Library:

3. First Fling and Classics of Childhood

4. Novels

5. Poetry and Traditional Tales

Part 1 of Lifeline Library, **The Picture Books**, appeared in **Books for Keeps 13**. Back numbers are available from the SBA, price 85p including postage.

Page Number:

13

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