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Franklin's Bear

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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The 'Go Bananas' series seeks to build the confidence of early readers (Red and Blue books, Key Stage 1) and newly fluent readers (Yellow books, Key Stage 2) by providing lively stories which also contribute to children's understanding of key topics in the National Curriculum. So Franklin's Bear not only pleases as an exuberant, fast moving adventure story, it also illuminates, in an original way, that difficult concept - electricity. Benjamin Franklin, the inventor - presented as rather a manic if brilliant character - wants to attach a rod to a church spire so that lightning is guided to earth where it will fizzle out, rather than cause the building to burn down. Bear, Franklin's reluctant assistant, bravely files to the tip of the spire, tied to a kite, to put the lightning rod in place. The story form is used well to show that scientific discovery is not always a matter of careful steps towards a solution, but might be the result of flashes of inspiration and exciting, even risky, hypothesis-testing experiments. D'Lacey has a good 'feel' for lively language and imagery. Children will love finding and talking about contemporary words and expressions like 'wrath', 'thy fur', 'dumple' and 'twas nothing'. Scientific vocabulary is well contextualised, for example 'circuit', 'transmitted energy' and 'mains socket'. We have lightning 'zinging' through the air like 'a great blue tongue' and Bear's tummy rumbling 'like a little volcano' when his jam supply is threatened. No dreary attempt to control vocabulary here! The illustrations, reminiscent of cartoons and advertisements, are splendid too, sometimes in the form of diagrams to show how electricity is conducted and sometimes pictures showing period detail - eighteenth-century buildings and dress. The illustrated end pages have extra information about Franklin's discoveries, steps to follow in an experiment to create static electricity using a balloon and some advice about using electricity safely. Purists who hate genre mixing are unlikely to approve. But I find this book original, amusing and likely to make reading and learning highly enjoyable as well as being good value for money.

Running Order:

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