



1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up

Books Reviewed:

[1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up](#) [1]

Issue:

[180](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Peter Hollindale](#) [3]

New to Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

This hefty compendium is not of course addressed to the children implied by its title. It is meant to be, in the words of Julia Eccleshare's Introduction, 'an invaluable guide for any adult who wants to give an informal answer to the conundrum children so often pose - "What shall I read next?" From the cradle to college entrance, there are convenient answers here for every parent and teacher. Its user-friendly format splits the thousand choices into five age-groups: 0-3, 3+, 5+, 8+ and 12+, this last group taking in some novels first published for adults, and some (like Gary Crew's **Strange Objects**) that use experimental narrative techniques and stretch the term 'young adult fiction' to its limits. The book is international in scope. Although the emphasis is on British, American and Australian authors, one of its strengths is to introduce excellent work from many other languages and cultures.

Each section is arranged in chronological order of publication. '12+', for instance, begins with an Italian work which appeared around 1620 and goes on to **Robinson Crusoe** and **Gulliver's Travels** before making a careful trawl of the nineteenth century. It ends with two books published as recently as 2007. The range of the book in space and time is clearly impressive. The trouble, especially with the oldest age-group, is that this even-handed chronological progression includes many books, especially from the middle decades of the twentieth century, that are either hard to find or out of date, and unlikely to appeal to modern children. But a surprising number seem likely to pass the test of a sceptical 21st-century readership. Each book is described in a short review of two to three hundred words, and there is a sizeable panel of contributors. These little essays are by definition recommendations. Most of the available space tends to be given to plot summary, and criticism is usually of the simplest kind, directed at the non-specialist reader.

This is undeniably a very useful book, efficiently packaged for an international market. There is much to admire in its inclusiveness. What it omits is perhaps a matter of more concern. Even a thousand titles cannot find room for every expected name, though a favoured few have four or five entries. (Roald Dahl has six.) But why is there no mention of William Mayne? Have the calamitous circumstances of a personal life erased the merit of books which for decades were hailed as original and distinguished? Have **A Swarm in May**, **Ravensgill**, or **A Year and a Day** been excommunicated from the children's canon? Why is there no Melvin Burgess? Burgess is an inconsistent writer, certainly, but **Junk** is an

unforgettable and unmatched story of drug danger. Where is Gary Paulsen, a boldly masculine American inheritor of the Crusoe tradition? For that matter where is Malcolm Saville, who took many thousands of children beyond Enid Blyton and is still a good read? For all its ambition and utility, there is a certain politic caution and blandness about this book. It aims to please, and does so, but at some cost.

Running Order:

2

Source URL (retrieved on Jan '20): <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/180/childrens-books/reviews/1001-children%E2%80%99s-books-you-must-read-before-you-grow-up>

Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/1001-childrens-books-you-must-read-before-you-grow-up>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/180>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/peter-hollindale>