

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 1998 No.110
UK Price £2.90

the children's book magazine



LITERACY HOUR BLUES? • EMMA CHICHESTER CLARK
WHAT IS 'REAL' DRAWING? • SPRING PICTURE BOOKS

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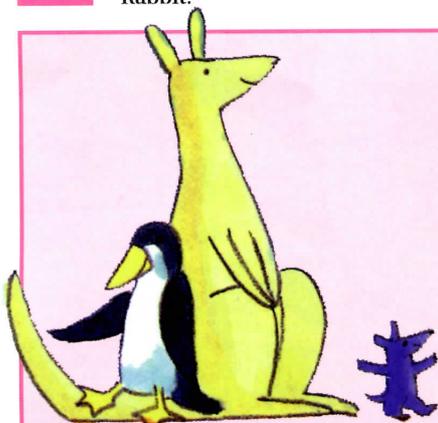
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CoverStory

This issue's cover is from Emma Chichester Clark's new picture book, *More!* Emma Chichester Clark is interviewed by Quentin Blake on page 16. Thanks to Andersen Children's Books for their help in producing this May cover.

EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

Is the new national literacy strategy too prescriptive, in particular for mixed ability classrooms? Jeff Hynds, in his discussion in this issue of *BfK* of the literacy hour (see pps 10-12) thinks it is and points in particular to the nonchalant and non-specific way (amidst so much specificity) that the books required in order to implement the strategy are referred to: 'There is no mention of particular books or authors, or any discussion of the vitally important relationship between quality of text and quality of literacy teaching.' *BfK* will continue to provide readers with just this kind of information about books.

Meanwhile *BfK* reviewer and teacher, Jill Bennett writes in alarm (see *Letters*, page 15) about the way that schools had to rush to spend their £1,000 government book allowance before the end of March, with insufficient time to think about what might best serve their students or find out what is available. The rush also meant that publishers had no time to reprint some of the titles that were most in demand.

Certainly the literacy hour tells teachers what to teach and how to teach it (aside from specifying which books to use). Education consultant Jim Sweetman, writing in the *Times Educational Supplement* (30.1.98) argues that the strategy makes objectives into imperatives with an 'element of regulation and duress'. He continues: 'It has been made unnecessarily detailed and overtly directive so that lazy, incompetent teachers cannot subvert it and their classroom practice will be changed as a result. That immediately disenfranchises and alienates all those creative, hard-working professionals who the education system depends on ...' Others have pointed to a need for teachers to develop phonological awareness so

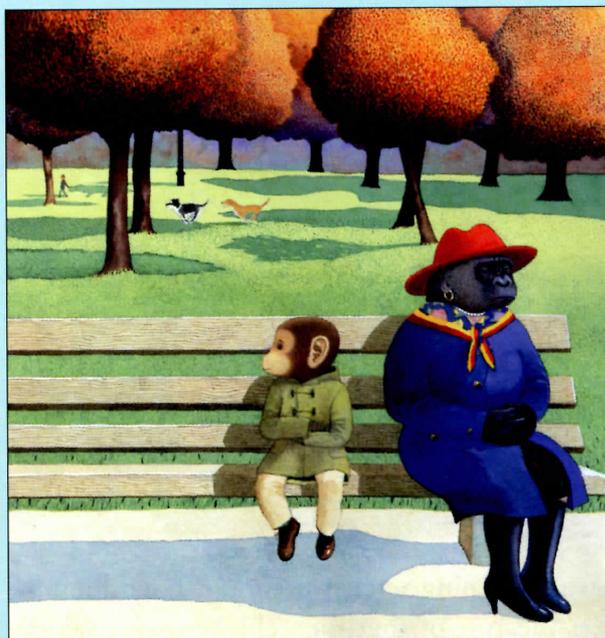
that they understand the theoretical basis of the literacy hour (which cites 11 elements to consider in dealing with phonemes) or have pleaded for the development of learning readiness not to be discounted. The National Association for Primary Education has claimed that the national literacy strategy is unworkable in mixed ability classrooms.

How reading should be taught has always been a contentious issue and *BfK* has commented before on the lack of a common agenda to build a literate nation. It is, however, the case that schools able to show that their approach is 'at least as effective' as the national literacy strategy are not obliged to adopt it. It is also the case that literacy standards in the UK are well behind those of some of our European neighbours. A national strategy to tackle this, for all its faults, provides that common agenda. ■

Rosemary

'When we arrived at the park, I let Victoria off her lead. Immediately some scruffy mongrel appeared and started bothering her. I shooed it off, but the horrible thing chased her all over the park. I ordered it to go away, but it took no notice of me whatsoever. "Sit," I said to Charles. "Here."'

An illustration from *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne (Doubleday), this issue's Editor's Choice on page 22.



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MAY 1998 No. 110

ISSN 0143-909X © School Bookshop Assoc. Ltd 1998
Editor: Rosemary Stones
Managing Director: Richard Hill
Design and Typeset: Rondale Ltd, Lydney, Glos.
Printed: The Friary Press, Dorchester

Books for Keeps can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to Books for Keeps, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. You can also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard) or use the telephone order service on -

0181-852 4953 Fax: 0181-318 7580

E-mail: booksforkeeps@btinternet.com

Editorial correspondence should also be sent to the *BfK* office.

Annual subscription for six issues: £17.40 (UK), £21.75 (Europe including Ireland), £24.50 (airmail)

Single copies: £2.90 (UK), £3.60 (Europe including Ireland), £4.10 (airmail)

Parlez-Vous Picture Book?

How does the Spring 1998 output of picture books in the UK reflect the international market place? Elaine Moss investigates.

As I settle down to write this piece for **Books for Keeps**, children's book publishers *all over the world* are hectically preparing the artwork for what will be 1999's picture books so that they can show it at the Bologna Children's Book Fair which takes place each April. They will not be selling the books as finished books, but the rights in the artwork and the story, so that other countries can use the pictures along with their own translation of the text. Picture books are now big business – for the more countries that sign up to the artwork for a book, the longer the (very expensive full colour) print run can be and, in theory anyway, the cheaper the book.

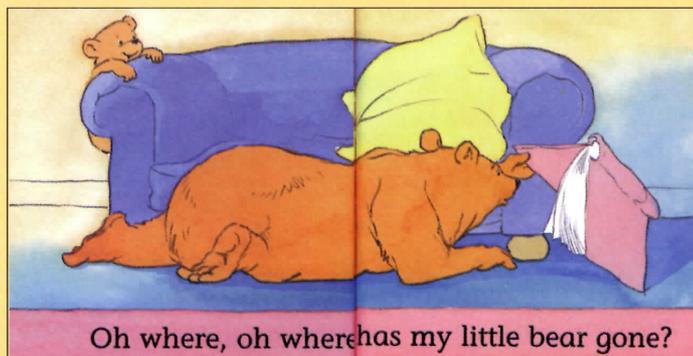
In the days of Beatrix Potter, Frederick Warne, her publisher, did not have to think about whether the Japanese would understand the social standing of Mr. Alderman Ptolemy Tortoise and Sir Isaac Newton in **The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher**. Books for children, the few that were published, were for the home market. Nearly a century after their publication, however, the sale of Beatrix Potter's **Tales** is huge in Japan – but that is because its high quality has earned it classic status. Today some publishers do seem tempted to flatten out the content of picture books offered to them so that their appeal is universal: it is interesting to note, however, that the work of our most popular artists – Raymond Briggs, Anthony Browne, Quentin Blake, Pat Hutchins, Shirley Hughes, Jill Murphy – sells well internationally without being consciously designed to please a global market.

So how does the Spring 1998 output of picture books in the UK reflect the international market place? Debi Gliori's **Are You There, Baby Bear?** is a delightful lift-the-flap book for the very young but in order to obviate the need for too much translation, the newspaper that covers the eyes of Mother Bear when she hides is written in a text that resembles something that comes up on my screen when I am touch-typing with my fingers on the wrong row of keys. Nevertheless the book works as an exciting game to play with a toddler: 'Are you there Baby Bear, up in that tree?' Lift the

Below: From **Are You There, Baby Bear?**



flap on the tree to find two birds – 'There's nobody here but baby and me.' Not the greatest of texts but clear, clever artwork.



From **Oh Where, Oh Where?**

John Prater's two new picture books for toddlers – **Oh Where, Oh Where?** and **Walking Round the Garden** – are based on games of hide-and-seek and tickling played with babies. The pictures are large and full of fun, with the expressions in the eyes of the baby bear and his mother conveying mischief and concern respectively. Despite the well-known English texts (albeit adapted a little), these two books will surely have attracted continental buyers because of the quality of the artwork. In similar small square format (hence the reasonable price for a hardback picture book), Mary Murphy's **Please Be Quiet!** introduces us to a mother and toddler penguin engaged in a battle about noise because new baby penguin must be allowed to sleep. The book thumps and clanks and zooms noisily through bright penguin-spattered pages until finally young penguin discovers he can skip (hush, hush, hush) in his socks.



From **Please Be Quiet!**

The poster-like artwork (reminiscent of Lucy Cousins) will go down well on the international stage whereas Rosemary Wells's **Bunny Money** is a classic example of how 'translation', even from America, where it originates, to England can fall into a deep pit: the bunnies go shopping with what are clearly dollar bills, here called 'pound notes'. When did you last see a pound note? Better surely to have left the currency in dollars and to have adults explain to children how money is different in other countries.

Nobody ever tried to 'translate' the Americanisms of Dr Seuss for the UK market, thank heaven, yet his success over here was, and is, phenomenal. His last book, **My Many Coloured Days**, was a mood book: 'Then all of a sudden I'm a circus seal! On my Orange days that's how I feel.' Each mood colour is used as background to soft chalky illustrations by Steve



The Owl and the Pussy Cat, from *Bisky Bats and Pussy Cats*.

Johnson and Lou Fancher. Of the three British picture books in the learning-to-read-is-fun stakes, the top prize must go to Allan Ahlberg and André Amstutz's *Monkey Do!*, a thoroughly inviting story of a monkey's hilarious adventures on a day out of the zoo. It is told by Ahlberg in addictive jaunty rhyme which positively invites the read-to child to join in the monkey chorus (prompted by what s/he can see in Amstutz's bold, clear funny pictures). 'Mrs Murphy in the morning, Teaching tables, two times two, Puts the sums up on the blackboard, Monkey see, monkey do!' Ahlberg's rhyming texts must cause problems for foreign publishers, but the reputation he, with Janet and others as his illustrators, has built up for ingenuity and excellence means that worldwide these are overcome. For the home market, of course, it is a sure winner. Kaye Umansky and Margaret Chamberlain's *You Can Swim Jim* has a carefree tongue-twister text 'Don't look grim, Jim/ You can swim, Jim', attractively splashy pictures – and a happy ending for the reluctant swimmer. Phyllis Root's *One Duck Stuck* is a cumulative story about how other animals and insects help 'a duck stuck in the muck'; Jane Chapman's bright, inventive pictures and the publisher's innovative page design sugar the pill of this playful exercise in phonics practice (strictly for the English speaking world, one would imagine).

If Edward Lear has been translated into foreign languages, as he surely must have been, and if illustrations other than his own inimitable line drawings are acceptable, then *Bisky Bats and Pussy Cats*, a selection of his animal nonsense verse brilliantly illustrated



'Monkey see, Monkey do!' from *Monkey Do!*

Two of the Best Choose Two of the Best

John Lawrence and Shirley Hughes are two of children's books most distinguished illustrators whose careers span the decades since the 1960s. BfK asks them to nominate the contemporary children's book illustrator they most admire whose reputation has been more recently established.

John Lawrence on Angela Barrett

I very much admire the work of Angela Barrett. Her illustrations have an elegance and grace and an individuality all their own. They are beautifully painted and dramatic in an unforced way. She creates a *picture book* in the true sense of the word which one can climb into, move around in, breathe the air and really inhabit.

Few illustrators today can match her evocation of atmosphere, sense of mystery and her characterisation of people living in their own special place. These qualities are apparent in *The Hidden House* written by Martin Waddell and *Beware, Beware* by Susan Hill. One is aware of heat and cold and feels the wind blowing in the trees. One smells the dust in a neglected house and the clean freshness of a well tended one. There is an attention to detail which is never fussy but always in period and handled with a deft and precise touch.

She also has a discerning wit as seen particularly in her recent illustrations to *The Emperor's New Clothes* translated by Naomi Lewis. The 'Belle Epoque' trimmings are a delight and her dogs are a riot.

Angela Barrett is very much my number one choice and her reputation has been firmly established for some time.

I'd also like to mention here a new young artist, Sara Fanelli, who, in her first books, *Button and Wolf!*, is beginning to open up an exciting new graphic world.

in soberly surreal hard-edged pictures by Matilda Harrison, will be an international winner. Almost as surreal and nonsensical is *What!* in which Kate Lum, ably supported by the continental style illustrations of Adrian Johnson, explores the overnight visit of a boy to his grandmother who (inexplicably) doesn't have a bed for him to sleep in. 'What! She'll have to make one then, - AND a mattress AND a blanket AND a pillow AND a teddy bear. But by now 'It's already morning!' French born Philippe Dupasquier's *A Sunday with Grandpa* is an altogether gentler affair about the way love manifests itself between the very young and the very old on a day in the countryside.

The passage of time in our lives and in Nature is the theme underlying Quentin Blake's new picture book, *The Green Ship*, an enchantment in which an elderly widow, her ageing gardener and two trespassing children engage





From *The Hidden House*.

Shirley Hughes on Clara Vulliamy

In writing about Clara Vulliamy as an illustrator I have to set family affection firmly aside.* (Draughtmanship, like acting and music, tends to run in families, but it is surprising how detached we can be on a professional level.) I admire her wide range, encompassing editorial illustration, a post-feminist strip cartoon in the *Guardian* ('Men – a User's Guide', written by Mark Haddon) and then on to children's books. For the former, she calls forth a sprightly black-and-white line technique within a disciplined progression of small boxes. For the latter, free-flowing water colour washes, applied with apparent simplicity and touches of strong vibrancy to give depth and emphasis. A thoughtful, highly individual style, underpinned by a generous eye.

Why are 'real life' stories for young children so often regarded as somehow easier to illustrate than fantasy? Both need visual invention, but 'realism' is perhaps the more difficult genre. Clara's characterisation is as varied as the texts she has tackled (her own included). She judges her moments, knowing instinctively what a little hand looks like curled around a mug, a child relaxed in sleep, or intent over a drawing or skipping with joy. Achieving this kind of visual narrative with neither a slavish reliance on photography nor an assumed naivety (no cute dots for eyes!) requires an extensive memory bank based on observation. The faces are her great strength. The best, probably, is yet to come.

Left: From *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

Details of books discussed

The Hidden House by Martin Waddell, Walker, 0 7445 1266 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 1797 4, £4.99 pbk

Beware, Beware by Susan Hill, Walker, 0 7445 2500 4, £8.99 hbk, 0 7445 3662 6, £4.50 pbk

The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Andersen, trans. Naomi Lewis, Walker, 0 7445 3755 3, £10.99 hbk (reviewed BfK 109)

Button, All Books for Children, 1 85704 043 0, £3.99 pbk

Wolf!, Heinemann, 0 454 97650 4, £9.99 hbk, Mammoth, 0 7497 2870 1, £4.99 pbk (reviewed BfK 104)

Some titles illustrated by Clara Vulliamy

Danny's Duck by June Crebbin, Walker, 0 7445 4371 1, £4.99 pbk

Bang and Shout (0 7445 3258 2), *Blue Hat, Red Coat* (0 7445 3243 4), *Boo Baby Boo* (0 7445 3242 6) and *Yum, Yum* (0 7445 3259 0), Walker, £2.99 each board

Ellen and Penguin, Walker, 0 7445 2542 X, £7.99 hbk, 0 7445 3658 8, £4.50 pbk

Ellen and Penguin and the New Baby, Walker, 0 7445 4431 9, £8.99 hbk, 0 7445 5252 4, £4.99 pbk

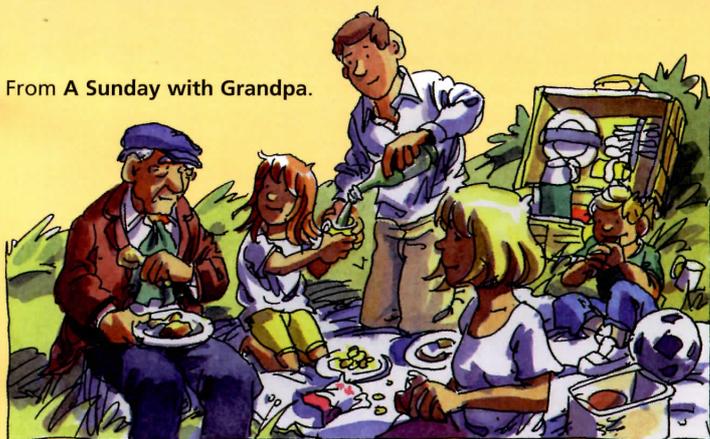
The Collins Mother and Child Treasury, edited by Shirley Hughes, will be published in October by HarperCollins.



'Penguin felt really horrible. He wanted to go home.'
From *Ellen and Penguin*.

* Clara is Shirley's daughter.

From *A Sunday with Grandpa*.



one another in fantasy voyages aboard a topiary boat – to the deep satisfaction of the elderly captain's widow, the gardener Bosun and the 'stowaways'. In the course of their suspended disbelief the children learn skills, visit the tropics and the polar regions and survive a terrific storm (two purple-dark double-spreads slashed with lightning and driving rain). 'And then Mrs Tredegar walked out across the grass and with a long trail of ivy tied up the battered ship as if she had come into port at last.' The book ends with the children revisiting, year after year, a garden in which the green ship is ever more indistinguishable from the overgrown shrubbery surrounding it. Quentin Blake is a supreme picture book artist – a position recognized by his French publisher, Gallimard Jeunesse, who have produced a fascinating monograph about his work, *La*

Vie de la Page, so far without an English publisher. No man is a prophet in his own country, more's the shame.

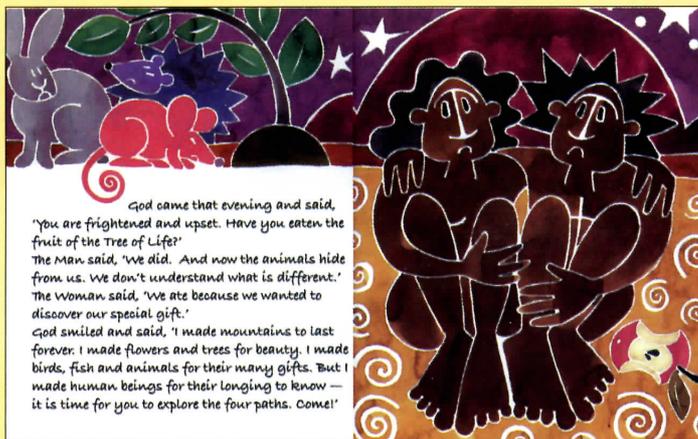
Colin Thompson has left this country and now lives in Australia.

The Paradise Garden, his new picture book is nevertheless firmly set, for all its fantasy ingredients, in Kew Gardens. There, away from his strident mother and the oppressive city hubbub, Peter finds he can live in peace and day-dream to his

heart's content. In spread after spread of frame within frame (this book shows the influence of Microsoft Windows!) the reader is invited to explore in fine details Peter's new animal, flower and insect-filled world, surrounded, on the outer frame, by the noisy city life he has just temporarily left behind. For go back (like Max in *The Wild Things*) he must



From *The Green Ship*.

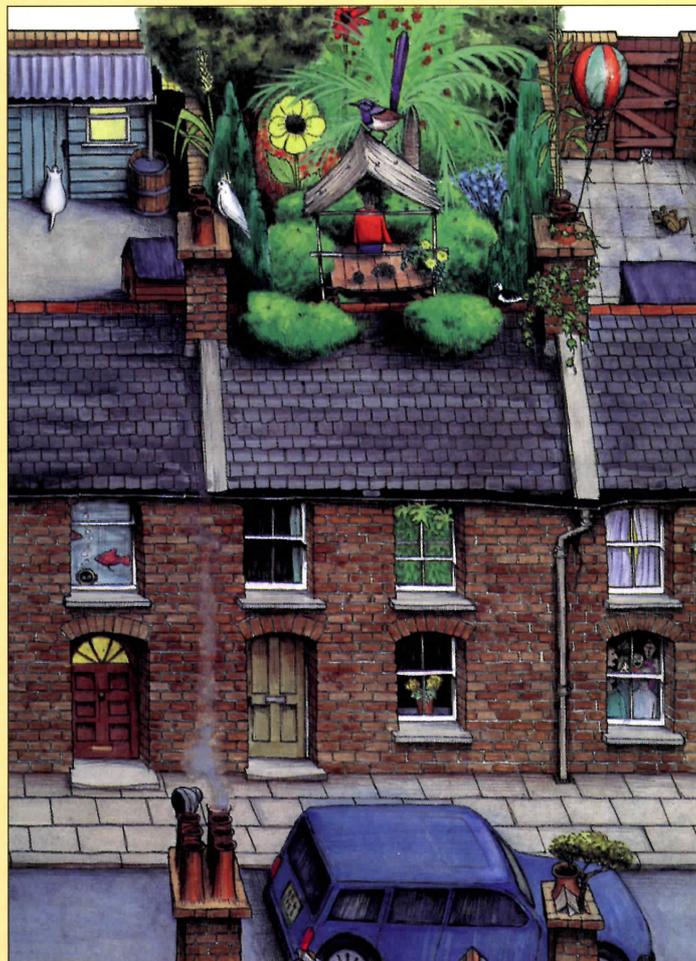
From *The Blessing Seed*.

— but he takes with him, *pace* the Botanical Gardens regulations, a pocketful of seeds that will turn his urban garden into a second paradise. Intricately detailed and deep-hued, Thompson's artwork peers outward towards the Millennium and seems assured of international success.

Folk tales, by their very nature are international, which makes the artwork for picture books based on folk tales a fairly safe bet for the global market. One of these this season is John Agard's re-telling, with Korky Paul's illustrations, of the Brer Rabbit fable *The Great Tug-o-War*. A racy text with vigorous cartoon style pictures conveys the message that friendship is the strongest rope there is. North-South Books re-issue a famous Swiss edition of *The Bremen Town Musicians*, the Grimms' tale of the four ageing and threatened animals — a donkey, a cat, a dog and a rooster — who, to save their skins, set off to join the Bremen town band but instead set up house together having scared the wits out of the resident robbers. Hans Fischer is the artist who made this tale his own way back in 1944 — 32 large pages across which the 'musicians' march merrily and with assurance to domestic bliss: a treat. In *The Blessing Seed* Caitlin Matthews has taken the creation myths, including Genesis, and retold them in a story that replaces the aura of sin with one of love for the Earth and all its creatures including the many facets of ourselves. A lyrical book illustrated with bright African style art work by Alison Dexter. Vivian French's *The Thistle Princess* reads like an old fairy tale in which the aristocratic plants in the royal garden, dictated to by the common thistle, create a cradle for the Thistle Princess who, so much longed for by the King and Queen, becomes



"'What do you see, Greypelt?'" asked the rooster. "What do I see?" said the donkey. "I see a table laid with good food and drink, and some robbers sitting at it enjoying themselves.'" From *The Bremen Town Musicians*.

From *The Paradise Garden* (see page 5).

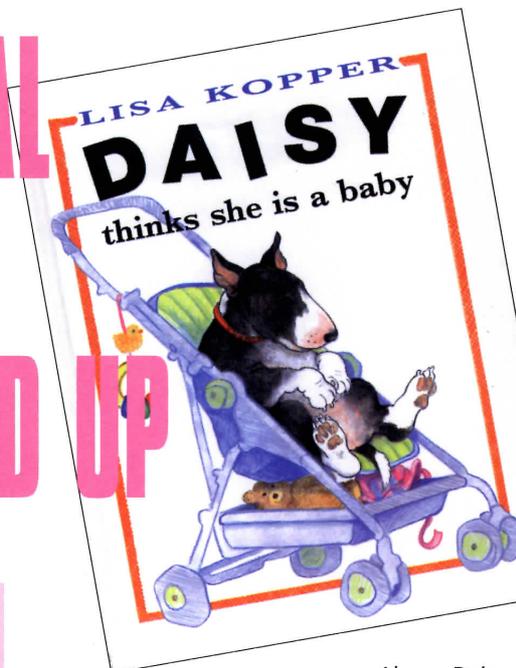
over-protected and in a finally dramatic, almost tragic scene floats away for ever, leaving the King and Queen to nurture the kingdom's children, once barred from the garden, as their own. Elizabeth Harbour's pale elongated artwork, in the Sara Midda tradition, is soft as thistledown. Foreign buyers must have queued up for this whisper of a classic to be at last year's Bologna. Which books will achieve the biggest international success this year? Who knows. But that the race influences what we see in the bookshops, there is no doubt. ■

Elaine Moss, teacher and primary school librarian now retired, was for 10 years the selector of *Children's Books of the Year*.

Details of books discussed

- Are You There, Baby Bear?*, Debi Gliori, Orchard, 1 86059 410 8, £9.99
Oh Where, Oh Where?, John Prater, Bodley Head, 0 370 32296 7, £6.99
Walking Round the Garden, John Prater, Bodley Head, 0 370 32286 X, £6.99
Please be Quiet!, Mary Murphy, Methuen, 0 416 19481 8, £6.99
Bunny Money, Rosemary Wells, Doubleday, 0 585 40926 5, £9.99
My Many Coloured Days, Dr Seuss, ill. Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher, Hutchinson, 0 09 176890 X, £9.99
Monkey Do!, Allan Ahlberg and André Amstutz, Walker, 0 7445 5573 6, £10.99
You Can Swim Jim, Kaye Umansky and Margaret Chamberlain, Bodley Head, 0 370 32452 8, £8.99
One Duck Stuck, Phyllis Root, ill. Jane Chapman, Walker, 0 7445 5600 7, £9.99
Bisky Bats and Pussy Cats, Edward Lear, ill. Matilda Harrison, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 3556 6, £9.99
What!, Kate Lum, ill. Adrian Johnson, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 5054 8, £9.99
A Sunday with Grandpa, Philippe Dupasquier, Andersen, 0 86264 791 6, £9.99
The Green Ship, Quentin Blake, Cape, 0 224 04672 1, £9.99
The Paradise Garden, Colin Thompson, Cape, 0 224 04652 2, £9.99
Brer Rabbit: The Great Tug-o-War, John Agard, ill. Korky Paul, Bodley Head, 0 370 32485 8, £9.99
The Bremen Town Musicians, The Brothers Grimm, ill. Hans Fischer, North-South Books, 1 55858 895 0, £9.99
The Blessing Seed, Caitlin Matthews, ill. Alison Dexter, Barefoot, 1 901225 70 1, £9.99
The Thistle Princess, Vivian French, ill. Elizabeth Harbour, Walker, 0 7445 4464 5, £10.99

WILL THE REAL DRAWINGS PLEASE STAND UP

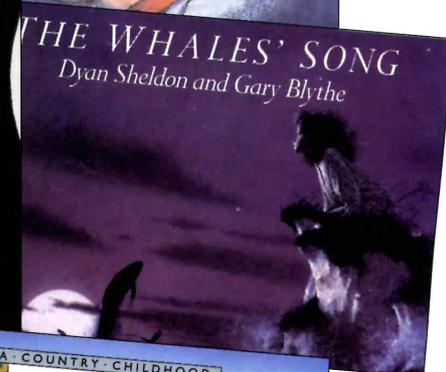
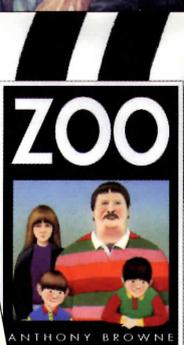
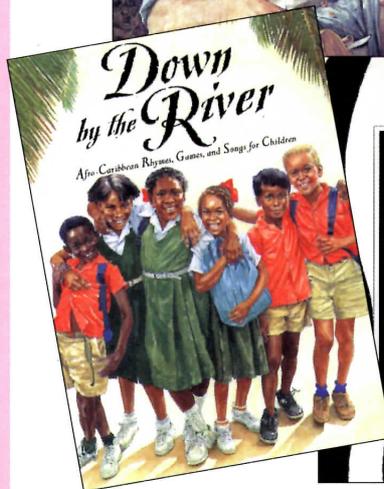
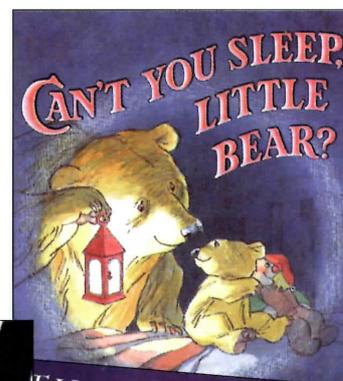
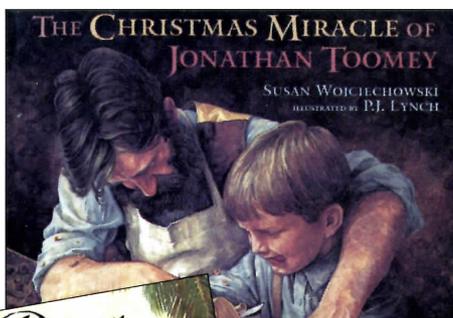


Above, Daisy.
Right, Lisa Kopper with Dolly.

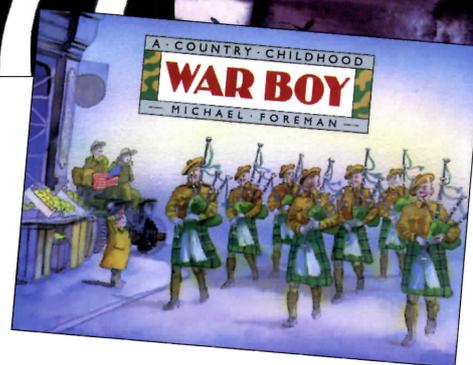
"Look at this! It's almost as good as a photograph.' A group of teachers and librarians are filled with awe and admiration. I go to join them but I can already guess what the object of their enthusiasm is. They hand me a picture book illustrated by one of the ever-growing number of 'brilliant' artists who can 'draw' with near photographic precision. At first glance, it is an attractive book, but one of many on the market of similar style. My hackles start to rise as I scan the atmospherically lit pictures. Do the librarians and teachers really think we are suddenly sprouting a whole generation of Caravaggios?

I feel I just have to say something. 'It looks like a photo because it is one', pops out of my mouth in a rather aggressive way. The group turns and stares at me surprised and puzzled so I proceed to explain how easy it is to use photos, sometimes very cleverly, to make them look like drawings. 'Really! But that's cheating!' is the shocked response of those I have disillusioned. I feel smug and satisfied. Another victory in my one-woman campaign for 'real drawing'."

Illustrator **Lisa Kopper** takes up the cudgels on behalf of 'real drawing'.



Which of these titles, winners or on past shortlists for the Kate Greenaway Medal, use photo techniques?



As a professional illustrator, I have noticed changes taking place over the years which suggest an underlying shift of attitude amongst those who illustrate and those who commission illustration. The photograph as a foundation to illustration has become more and more prevalent. Is this 'cheating'? Or, if the end result works, does reliance on photography matter? I think it does.

The emergence of photo-realism

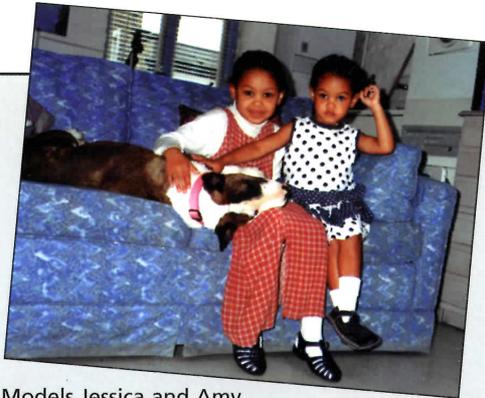
Photo-techniques used to be confined to advertising. Perhaps even then, some clever

book illustrators were using them, but they did not really come into children's picture book publishing in a big way until the early eighties when the need for books which reflected our multicultural society became an issue. Publishers under pressure to produce such books found it difficult to find artists who could draw Black people. There were few Black illustrators (as is still the case today). Cartoon imagery was out as publishers feared they would be criticised for racial stereotyping if the representation of Black people was not

PHOTO-TECHNOLOGY

Lisa Kopper explains how it is done.

In order to demonstrate some standard photo-techniques, **Books for Keeps** helped me set up some simple experiments. Three of us participated: 8-year-old Selda Ramadan, **BfK** editor Rosemary Stones and me. We invited two children, Jessica and Amy Linch, to pose for us. My dog, Dolly, insisted on posing as well. We had ten minutes to draw our models freehand then we each took a photograph of them to use in a photo-technique experiment.



Models Jessica and Amy.



Rosemary's drawing of Jessica and Amy.



Rosemary's 'photo-picture' by overhead projector.



Selda's drawing of Jessica and Amy.

Selda Ramadan – photocopy and light box

I liked Selda's freehand drawing. She got everything in and was especially interested in the models' clothes. We enlarged her photograph on a photocopier. We then put it on a light box and Selda traced her image onto drawing paper. The most interesting thing for me was the way Selda left out the bits she could not see very well like one of the children's faces. She clearly did not fully grasp the content of what she was tracing. Selda said she preferred her tracing to her drawing because it was easier. The tracing took approximately 20 minutes.



Selda tracing her photograph.

Since then Selda has asked if she could do this again using pictures of horses. Her recent tracings have been more proficient and I have noticed her mother praising her for them which was not the case with her drawing. I have noticed in general in schools that copies are also being praised by teachers and original work not considered as good.

Rosemary Stones – overhead projector

Many artists, particularly those who work on canvas, use an overhead projector. Rosemary is not without skill which was obvious from her freehand drawing which was well observed. She later told me that she had considered studying art when she was young. Rosemary's photograph was projected onto drawing paper. She used her photo-image very freely and unless you compared it to her original drawing, you would not know she had used a photo-

aid. But observe the accuracy of the proportions in her projected drawing as compared with her freehand work, also the hands. Rosemary's photo-picture took ten minutes.

Partly in jest, Rosemary said that with some practice using this technique, she thought she might be able to illustrate her own books in future.

Lisa Kopper – computer

I had never worked on a computer before but I had seen demonstrations of what it could do. With the help of a designer friend, I scanned my photo into the computer. We then worked with the Photoshop programme of software. I discovered that by simply pressing certain windows i.e. 'fresco', the entire image would change. Sometimes the distortion would give my photo a drawn look. I then took the background out of my picture and worked creatively

picture books and other solutions had to be found. Some picture book artists turned to photographs and began to produce super-realistic drawn images directly from them: photo-realism. No one could say that *their* Black people did not look like Black people ... they were so good, they looked just like



From top to bottom: Lisa's photo of Jessica; the image changed by the computer; Lisa's 'photo-drawing'.

realistic. Innovative writers and photographers like Joan Solomon partially solved the problem by doing straight photographic books about children from different cultures. These books filled a gap but tended to be information books.

This was not appropriate for the majority of

photographs. In my view this was cheating in a profound sense because the real issue of why it is so difficult for people of one culture to draw people from another, was not addressed. I do not blame the artists for this; they were responding to a demand in the best way they knew how. But, over time, what has emerged



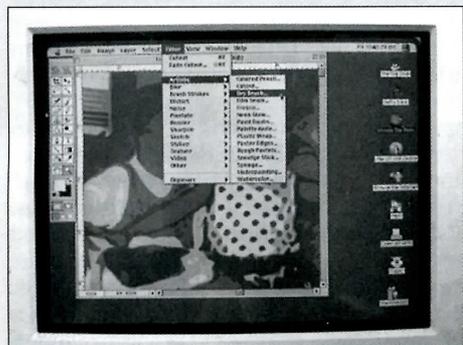
Lisa's drawing of Jessica and Amy.

with some of the computer tools on the image. I found that by using some of the 'tools' creatively, I could quite successfully create a hand-drawn effect that was also an appealing style. The more I enlarged the image, the better the result, so I ended up mostly working on one of the faces. My photo-drawing took two hours from learning to use the machine in an elementary way to final drawing. It was so good it almost looked like a drawing!

The computer is a seductive tool. My friend said that I would be really good at it because I used the machine like an artist, not a technician. However, I soon got bored with the endless process of lassoing bits and filling them in. I quickly realised that if I were going to use the style I created for a whole book, the photo-derived compositions would give it away and soon it would have that 'photo' look. I could, however, see from my short experience, that the computer could be a useful tool for producing or enhancing creative and original work. I would like to experiment more using my drawings as the starting point rather than a photo.



Peter Bonnici demonstrates computer drawing techniques to Lisa.
Below: What he sees on the VDU.



from this trend is a kind of visual apartheid. Today, I would hazard a guess that 85% of children's books depicting Black people use photo-technology of some kind in their image creation.

A short cut to good drawing

But just as the photo techniques did not stay confined to advertising neither did they stay confined to children's multicultural illustration. The steady march of 'photo-drawing' gradually reached every corner of illustration. It is easy to see why. On the surface of things, photography is a short cut to something very difficult to achieve: good drawing.

But there is a price for pursuing the icing rather than the cake, form before content, and that price is the potential loss of a skill which is the foundation of visual imagination. The frightening thing is that it is happening by stealth. There has not, so far as I know, been any serious discussion of how photo technologies are affecting not just children's book imagery, but the very nature of drawing itself – how this skill is taught and nurtured.

Arguably, drawing is one of the purest forms of visual expression – the shortest route between the eye and the paper. To be able to draw freely means to give form not only to what we see around us, but also to what we cannot see ... the depiction of the imaginary.

By its very nature, the photograph is bound to what already exists. In my view, the most excruciating examples of photo illustration are when the artist *does* attempt fantasy and cobbles together incongruous, photo-derived images such as a girl sitting on a flying tiger or such like, with structural conventions such as viewpoint, perspective and harmonious detailing thrown to the winds. The best photo-illustrators often spend much of their time and money setting-up their photos. This can mean dressing and posing models, lighting, travelling to the locations, and sometimes transference of their photos onto canvas, paper or computer disk. Many photo-illustrators are talented photographers and do an excellent job – but why bother to make a drawing of a photograph? Has it become so important to be 'real' because we are losing the skills which gave us the freedom to be unreal? And what makes people think that a photo is so real anyway?

Eye to hand drawing is a means of communication, 'acting on paper', as I often tell school children. It is often the flaws that give a drawing life, movement and character. Sometimes accidental perspective or detail also emphasises the spirit as well as the form of the subject.

A photograph is an instantaneous, two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional object. As the camera only has one 'eye', it already sees the world in a very different way from us. Make a drawing from this photograph, and we move yet another step away from the life and dynamics of the original subject. Thus many 'photo drawings' are curiously static and dead, their subjects frozen in an instant rather than expressing their true nature. It is a process which often cuts the heart and life out of an image. For instance, tracing the photograph of an African person is not the same thing as drawing an African person. One is a simple mechanical activity and the other requires a profound understanding of form and character. Yet there is intense pressure on artists today to produce drawings with photo accuracy. Even illustrators known

for their free drawing and fantasy succumb at times to the 'quick fix' of photo aids.

The role of picture book prizes

This trend is reinforced by the number of prestigious prizes awarded to photo-derived books. Perhaps those who award such prizes know little of the techniques involved? However, the message this sends to young artists is clear: learning how to draw does not matter.

This is not a good message even if some people prefer the style of photo-illustration to free drawn images. Certainly illustrators who *can* draw use photographs much more creatively and successfully than those who cannot and it is immediately obvious to an educated eye which is which. Some artists use limited photo-aids very imaginatively. Cartoonists and comic artists are the least likely to use photo-aids which is probably why much of their work is still so individually creative. People who draw with a mix of realism, fantasy and cartoon fall between two stools.

Understanding techniques

I believe it is important to understand the difference between something that has been created by the skill and imagination of the artist or as a piece of photographic sleight of hand. Perhaps to help with visual awareness, photo-illustration should be described as such on book jackets. But you can also educate yourself. The next time you pick up your favourite picture book look at the shading, the details, the way the hands, hair and clothing are drawn. Are some things drawn in a different style? (Sometimes the artist cannot get photo reference and has to draw one piece of artwork freehand.) Does the picture have accurate perspective or have backgrounds been removed and replaced with something that does not quite fit? Then observe the 'feel'. Is there movement of line and composition? Do the characters have warmth and personality ... do they live on the page? If you look carefully, you will be able to tell if phototechnology was used. If the artwork looks like a photograph, it probably is. This will not necessarily stop you enjoying the book but you will have a better understanding of which skills were employed in its making.

Over the last 150 years the photograph has often been seen as the *benchmark* of reality, but before (and after) photography arrived on the scene, artists were creating their own realities through the sheer skill of their observation and mechanical ability. The realities of Rackham and Shepard transcend the mere representational. They glow with character and the inner qualities of that which they represent. Even if our drawing abilities are less breathtaking we should, I believe, still have the same ultimate objective. We must carefully guard and preserve the skill of drawing for the future, or we risk losing its value for ever. ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Lisa Kopper has been an illustrator working in the children's book industry for 18 years. She is best known for her multicultural work (eg **Jafta: The Homecoming**, Puffin, 0 14 054467 4, £4.99) and her **Daisy** books (eg **Daisy Thinks She is a Baby**, Puffin, 0 14 054826 2, £4.99). As she says, 'No photos used. Honest!'

WILL THERE BE ANY TIME LEFT FOR READING?

New Labour's Literacy Task Force has decreed that, from September, 'the approach to teaching literacy should be based on the National Literacy Project and should be adopted in every primary school'. This centrally prescribed approach will have to be followed by all teachers, 'unless a school can demonstrate through its literacy action plan, schemes of work and performance in Key Stage 2 tests, that the approach it has adopted is at least as effective'. It will, however, be a brave school that chooses to follow this alternative course, particularly as the Director of the Project is on record as declaring that 'it is not feasible for a school to devise its own scheme of work', which is why the Project has produced a scheme 'that all schools can use'.

The Director claims that the scheme incorporates a 'holistic approach, not just a narrow literacy'. The documentation emphasises that 'literate primary children should be interested in books, read with enjoyment and ... know and understand a range of genres in fiction and poetry' as well as 'understand and be able to use a range of non-fiction texts'. To ensure that this is properly covered, particular kinds of texts are specified for each of the 18 primary terms. In Year 1, Term 2, for example, children will read 'traditional stories and rhymes, and fairy stories with predictable and patterned language' and in Year 2, Term 3, they will read 'stories by significant children's authors'. Later it will be

The literacy hour is the major plank of the government's strategy to achieve its goal for all 11-year-olds to reach their chronological level age by 2002.

But is it too prescriptive? And how easy is it for teachers to identify the 'right' books and the 'right' authors?

Jeff Hynds investigates.

'information books on topics of interest with descriptive and explanatory accounts' (Year 3, Term 1), 'stories from other cultures' (Year 4, Term 3), 'realistic novels and stories with contemporary settings' (Year 5, Term 1). In all there are some 30 categories of this kind. Nowhere in the extensive documentation, however, is there any indication of the *quality* of the books the Project has in mind. There is no mention of particular books or authors, or any discussion of the vitally important relationship between quality of text and quality of literacy teaching. Instead teachers are instructed to 'identify the key texts that they intend to use'. With 30,000 children's titles in print, this presents teachers with a monumental task. Which books and which authors? Will any books do? Identifying books to fulfil particular teaching needs is one of the biggest problems of all for teachers of literacy, particularly if those books are to be of high quality.

The right books?

It is not easy, for example, to find 'traditional stories and fairy stories with predictable and patterned language' of high quality suitable for 5- and 6-year-old children. I have spent several years searching out and categorising such books and I find that most of the quality texts of this kind have a language and a sophistication more appropriate for much older readers. Consider Angela McAllister's *The Ice Palace*, or Brenda Seabrooke's *The Swan's Gift*, for example. These are books of real quality, typical of the best in this

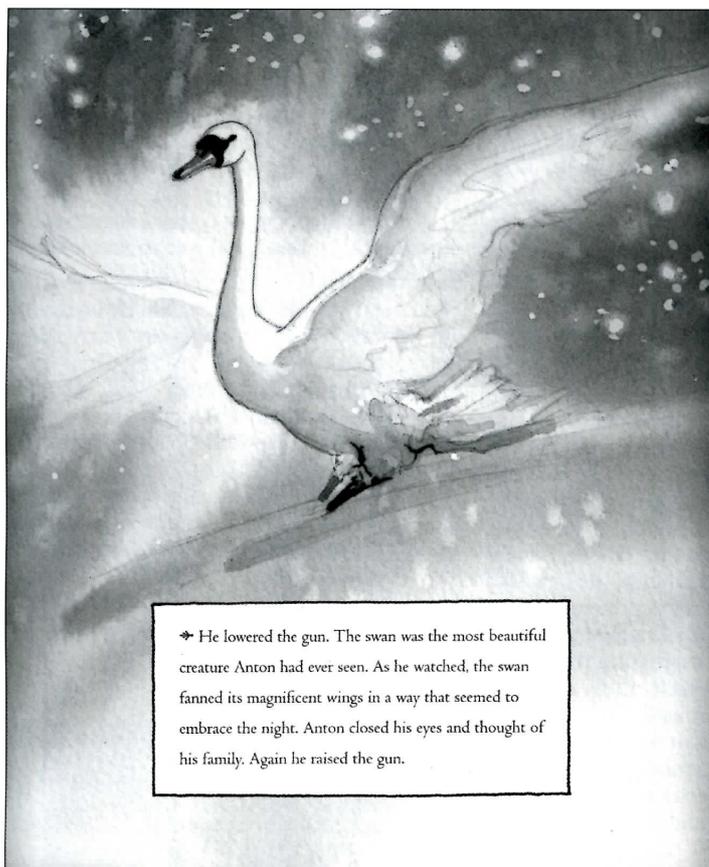
genre, but not immediately accessible to 5-year-olds. There are, on the other hand, plenty of inferior publications. I have in my possession a version of *The Frog Prince*, apparently published with the National Literacy Project in mind (and aimed at 5-year-olds), that is appalling by anyone's standards, though doubtless it could claim to be predictable and patterned. I am told it, and the series to which it belongs, has been selling well in schools. Will it be officially suitable for the National Literacy Project or not? We cannot tell.

The significant authors (and illustrators)?

Then again, when we get to Year 2, Term 3, which authors are we to regard as 'significant'? I know, from talking to teachers about this, that opinions vary widely. Authors as diverse as Roald Dahl, Babette Cole, and James Berry are likely to be mentioned, but would any of them be officially regarded as significant? There is also another element to bear in mind and you have only to look at a picture book like James Berry's *Celebration Song* to realise what it is. Much of the success of this book derives from the dramatic interrelationship between James Berry's text and Louise Brierley's evocative illustrations. So what about significant illustrators? Strangely the National Literacy Project does not appear to mention any, even though, in the making of picture books, illustrators are equally as 'significant' as authors. In fact, amongst all the categories set down for each term, there is no reference to picture books at all! This is a most extraordinary omission. It is widely accepted that the modern picture book has a central part to play in the development of literacy. See, for example, the work of people like Judith Graham (1990), Jane Doonan (1993), David Lewis (1995, 1996), Victor Watson and Morag Styles (1996).

The surface features of literacy

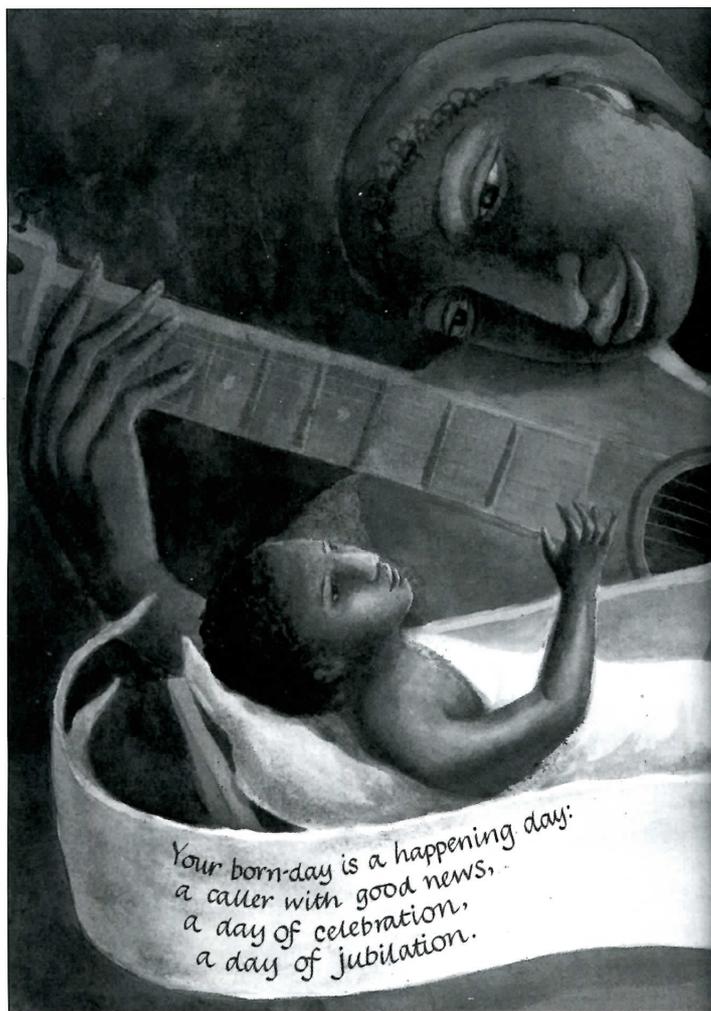
This vagueness about such a crucial matter as the actual books that are to be used in school is surprising in a Project where everything else is prescribed in minute detail. Contrast the airy references to books with the detailed manner in which the surface features of literacy are



✦ He lowered the gun. The swan was the most beautiful creature Anton had ever seen. As he watched, the swan fanned its magnificent wings in a way that seemed to embrace the night. Anton closed his eyes and thought of his family. Again he raised the gun.

From *The Swan's Gift*.

set out. In Term 1 of Year 1, for example, 'pupils should be taught to independently read known familiar simple stories tracking the text in the right order page by page, left to right, top to bottom'. This is called 'text level work'. For work at 'sentence level' they should be taught 'to recognise, identify and locate full stops and capital letters when reading, and name them correctly'. At 'word level' they should be taught 'to begin to use the term "phoneme" to refer to the smallest unit of sound in a word', and 'identify final and middle letter-sounds (phonemes) while pointing to the individual letters (reading left to right)'. In fact, actual readers cannot normally do these things. I have been able to show, for example, that most people, however well they read, are unable correctly to distinguish the separate sounds in spoken words (Hynds 1996). Moreover, these 'teaching objectives' are intended for children *aged 5 and 6*, in their first term after Reception, which seems a remarkably young age to be introduced to the concept of a phoneme (an abstract and notoriously difficult area in linguistic study which I first encountered in my early twenties). I have not picked out extreme or isolated items. Each term has a list of 30 or 40 items like these that 'pupils should be taught'. Possibly the Director, like Alice, uses words to mean what he wants them to mean, but for me this is a *narrow* literacy, with little that is *holistic* about it.



From *Celebration Song*.

Reading aloud? Writing?

Everything laid down must be *directly taught* to the whole class or to a 'focused group' within a daily 'Literacy Hour', and during this hour '100% of the teacher's time must be spent in direct instruction'. With a programme so detailed (over 700 items all told) it might be supposed that everything important would have been covered. This is the next surprise, for the hour is not to be used for reading aloud to children, or for individual reading time with children (for example, discussing aspects of reading in a 'reading conference'), or for presenting books and authors to children, or for periods of quiet reading (like USSR - Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading). Additional time must be found for these, as it must for other vital aspects of literacy teaching like monitoring and assessment. Writing *is* included, but it does not receive anything like the same attention in the



Whole class reading with a Big Book.

Project as reading. Most of the time it is tacked on incidentally to some aspect of reading. There is no discussion of the writing process, and no time in the Literacy Hour for USSW or regular 'writing conferences' or the establishment of writing workshops. Time for such activities must be found elsewhere. Obviously other subjects will suffer. Already there has been an official relaxation of curriculum requirements in areas like the humanities to enable more attention to be given to the so-called 'basics'. One wonders how, next year, teachers will find time to fit in a 'Numeracy Hour' as well.

Pleasure and entertainment?

But above all, and ironically, it seems to me that reading is likely to suffer. The serious omissions from the Literacy Hour outlined above are those very involvements that teach the most about the purpose and function of reading in our lives. With this over-mechanical programme, concentrating as it does mainly on the assumed hierarchical 'skills' of literacy, children are going to be hard put in school to read for pleasure and entertainment, and that kind of self-fulfilment which committed and involved readers regularly experience. Texts in the Project are invariably chosen for 'study', or for 'focused work', not for enjoyment.

It seems probable that the designers of the National Literacy Project have fallen into the same trap that some other literacy 'experts' regularly fall into. Because it is possible to show that there *are* distinguishable skills in literacy learning (there can be no doubt of this, though it is not unusual for some to be imagined, like identifying phonemes), the literacy experts are misled into believing that you have to learn these skills by being taught them separately and in advance of what you actually need them for. This, as every true teacher knows, is a confusing way to teach. You would not teach someone to drive a car by giving them lessons on the accelerator pedal, the windscreen wipers or the cam belt. A far better way to teach literacy, strongly supported by a great deal of international research, is to give children a thorough involvement in the whole experience first, and only later come gradually to investigate the integral parts.

Let me give an example of this kind of teaching.

USING A BIG BOOK

Select a good quality picture book in enlarged format (a 'Big Book') like **Morse's Horse** by Amanda Graham. (In this story, Morse is trying to dump his lugubrious looking horse on one or other of his numerous acquaintances so that he can go away on holiday. But they all manage to excuse themselves, so that in the end Morse has to take the horse with him in his car.)

Read the story to the whole class and enjoy the humour together. Let the children watch and follow as you turn the pages. Add to the enjoyment by sometimes pointing to some of the amusing words or pictures, preferably with a special pointer. Ask them what they think about the book, and why it makes them laugh. Read other books in a similar way.

On another day read **Morse's Horse** again, still pointing occasionally, and discussing one or two features of interest, like the snake that swallowed the bagpipes (!).

When you feel, after a number of readings, that the children are fairly familiar with the book, give a group of them a small (prepared) version of the book which you have divided into separate pages. These you jumble up, and then ask the children, working collaboratively, to put back in the right order. At the same time, other groups are given divided up smaller versions of the other Big Books you have been reading with them. In subsequent sessions, these will be exchanged so that all groups eventually meet all versions.

Later make a copy of the text of **Morse's Horse**, and divide this up into the lines of print as they appear in the book. (You could restrict this to the first few pages.) Make these fairly large. Get children in groups to restore the lines to their right order. They will usually come up with alternative possibilities which can provide useful discussion. And, of course, do the same with other books. It is a help to mount the lines of print on velcro-backed card, and then the children can work round a velcro board, which makes it easier for the group to see and discuss alternatives.

It is possible to go as far as dividing up selected sentences into individual words (or phrases) and this can be an absorbing exercise for more experienced groups. Provided the text is not too long, try a whole book occasionally.

At around this stage use a sliding 'masking device' with the (by now) well known Big Books to highlight and temporarily isolate individual words or phrases from their (already familiar) surroundings. These can be read as sight words or scrutinised for word structure or spelling. Note that these will be 'sight words' already met in action, not decontextualized as with flash cards. Make sure that the words you choose at first are meaning-laden 'content' words, like *bagpipes* or *swallow*, not difficult 'function' words like *as* or *but* or *of*. The advantage of a well-made masking device is that it can be easily adjusted to fit the target word or phrase, and you can use the slide progressively to reveal words or phrases for children to try to predict. With it you can also consider elements of punctuation, different varieties of the same letter, and various other forms and features of print.

Use small pieces of card or plastic with Blu-tack to cover words or phrases in the known text which children then endeavour to read from their memory of the story or the surrounding context.

As time goes on all these activities can be carried out on more taxing and less well known books, not only by the teacher working with a large group but by the children themselves taking turns in small groups. There are many possible variations, for example, separating words and pictures for re-assembly, or writing a text for a wordless book and seeing if others can match it. The activities do not always have to be based on Big Books, of course. Initially some of these materials take time to make, but if they are made quite strongly and laminated or covered in clear 'takibak', they can be re-used many times.

Working in this way I have always found that children learn a great deal about reading (and writing) remarkably quickly. They acquire all the 'skills' within the experience of reading good quality books, and very largely as a direct consequence of the quality, for the books are compulsive and polysemic, and invite re-reading. If activities like these, which I have in fact advocated for years, are permitted in the 'Literacy Hour', they will help to offset the more negative effect that a programme based on the teaching of supposed hierarchical skills is bound to have. ■



Rosemary Quesnel of Lovelace Primary School in Chessington, Surrey, using **Morse's Horse** with her class.

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Morse's Horse, Amanda Graham, Era Publications, Big Book 1 86374 246 8, £16.95; Small Book 1 86374 235 2, pack of four £8.75
The Swan's Gift, Brenda Seabrooke, ill. Wenhai Ma, Walker Books, 0 7445 4070 4, £5.99

Photographs by Richard Mewton

Jeff Hynds is available to run courses on the teaching of literacy which include many practical activities like those described in this article. These courses have now been attended by over 20,000 teachers nationally. His book-supplying organisation, known as Jeff Hynds Books, stocks a wide range of specially selected children's books of the highest quality, grouped into a 'core book' system consisting of 15 teaching categories, each of which has a particular part to play in the development of literacy. Also available are special 'Velcro' Boards (with adaptations these can be used variously as Big Book stands, demonstration or group activity boards, or book exhibition stands). Also stocked are specially designed Masking Devices for use with Big Books. For details of courses, and book services, contact Jeff Hynds Books, 6, Alexandra Road, Biggin Hill, Kent TN16 3NY (Office address), Tel: 01959 572193, Fax: 01959 540162. It is possible to visit the actual Bookstore in Bletchingley which is near Junction 6 of the M25.

NEWS

NEW GOVERNMENT –
NEW INITIATIVES?

BfK invites David Blunkett, Education and Employment Secretary, to explain the thinking behind the National Year of Reading.



I want the whole country to join forces with us to make the National Year of Reading a success story. By working together in partnership we can start to transform Britain into a more literate country ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century.

This campaign, which runs from September, is for everyone – children and their parents, teenagers and adults, avid readers, those who rarely read and those who find reading difficult or inaccessible. We want to transform the nation's attitude to reading. We want to spread the message to every corner of the country that reading is important and enormously enjoyable. And we will not pack up and go home after 12 months. With your help this exciting initiative can make a lasting difference.

Reading is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning – it opens the door to success at school and at

work. The Year is a vital part of our £59 million national literacy strategy to ensure that 80% of 11-year-olds reach the expected standard in English by 2002. It is also a key strand of our policies to promote lifelong learning.

We will publish later details of how we intend to evaluate the Year. But what we hope to achieve is:

- more children being introduced to books from an early age;
- more children and young people reading regularly;
- more families reading together;
- more people reading for pleasure and with increased understanding; and
- more people talking about what they read.

The National Literacy Trust, working closely with the DfEE, is making our plans a reality. The Trust has set up the National Year of Reading Team to take the work forward throughout Great Britain*. It has also published a

special issue of its magazine *Literacy Today*† with lots of ideas on how to make the most of the Year. I know that many of you have asked about how you can get involved and what kind of events you can run. With this in mind we have issued detailed guidance for schools, colleges, libraries and community groups offering specific suggestions and advice for planning initiatives and events throughout the Year.

We want everyone to know what is happening at a national and local level – to be able to pick up and share ideas, to learn about what works and what doesn't. To this end we are launching an Internet Website for the National Year of Reading in May. It is vital that you let the National Year of Reading Team know about *your* plans and *your* events so that they can be included on the Website.

Our planning guide *Getting Ready*# shows just how much we have already achieved. I am delighted with the pledges of support in it from librarians, booksellers, publishers, the media and private companies. There are lots of exciting ideas emerging which we hope to be able to tell you about soon. In the meantime if you are raring to go please share your ideas with others around you, tell us, tell your local authority, get planning and go for it!

Footnotes:

*If you want more information or would like to comment on or submit ideas for the National Year of Reading, you should contact The National Year of Reading Team, National Literacy Trust, Swire House, 59 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AJ (tel: 0171 828 2435, fax: 0171 931 9986).

†Copies of *Literacy Today* are available from The National Year of Reading at the address above.

#Copies of the planning guide *Getting Ready* are available free of charge by calling 0845 60 222 60 or by faxing 0845 60 333 60 quoting reference NYR2PG. Copies are available in Braille and on audio cassette as well as in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

Random
House Sold

In an unexpected move that has rocked the publishing world the German media group, Bertelsman, which owns Transworld in the UK, has acquired (reportedly for £840 million) Random House Inc. and its subsidiaries in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The Random House UK board learnt of the deal just before the press announcement. Random House's children's imprints are Jonathan Cape, The Bodley Head, Hutchinson, Julia MacRae Books, Red Fox, Tellastory and Andersen Press. Transworld has Bantam, Corgi and Doubleday Children's Books. While Bertelsman is thought to favour autonomy for its businesses, economies of scale seem inevitable in the longterm. A narrowing of the opportunities for talented new children's authors and illustrators in favour of the bankable also appears likely.

Scottish Book
Trust

Book Trust Scotland is no more. After 35 years the board has decided to transfer this operation to the newly constituted and totally independent Scottish Book Trust. It will operate from the same offices in Edinburgh. Professor Rory Watson, Chairman (sic) of Scottish Book Trust said, 'We'll continue to work in partnership with Book Trust in London, but we need to meet the challenges of a developing Scottish scene as well, and independent status will help us to do this more effectively.'

A Sponsor for the
Carnegie and
Greenaway

Royal Mail are to sponsor this year's Library Association Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals. The deal will link the awards with the issue of stamps honouring the work of five of Britain's greatest children's writers including C S Lewis and Lewis Carroll.

Piccadilly Press

Piccadilly Press which has made a distinctive name for itself as a zappy publisher of teen titles is celebrating its 15th birthday. Its latest venture is a range of attractive picture books for the very young.

Authorgraph No.110

Emma Chichester Clark

Emma Chichester Clark interviewed by Quentin Blake

I am deprived of the element of surprise and speculation which belongs to the usual interviewer as Emma Chichester Clark has been one of my closest friends for over fifteen years. Might that – I put it to BfK's editor when she asked me to write this authorgraph – in various ways disqualify me for the job? Not so, apparently; someone who does drawing was to write about someone who does drawing.

I know already that if Emma may at times sound apologetic she is in reality quietly efficient (and even intrepid, to the point of sailing a yacht across the Atlantic as half of a crew of two). And that an occasional whirling of the eyes that might appear *dizzy* simply indicates that her brains are working faster than anyone's in the appreciation of the humour of a situation. But there are things to find out that I don't know about – how did she begin, for instance?

'In the first place, as a child, it was pictures of my family with no necks. I drew all the time. I always thought that I was going to draw for the rest of my life; that was going to be the way I earned my living.'

The next significant step in the direction of what Emma does now was with the arrival at her school of a new young teacher who set an actual project to illustrate something. 'I went and chose a poem by W B Yeats, rather a romantic, soppy poem, and did it; and from then on we did it non-stop.'

After leaving school Emma did the foundation course at Bristol, and worked in a chocolate factory, and decided at the last minute not to go to New Zealand and get married, and was

a chambermaid in a hotel and drew red cabbages and other vegetables in her spare time and eventually found herself at Chelsea Art School.

'Chelsea was very strange and we were all in a kind of slump because of the political tensions ... we weren't really asked to do drawing and illustration – we used to do our illustrations hidden in our LCP type books.' The person who battled most for drawing was Susan Einzig, who ran a sort of continuous conversation about Bonnard and Matisse and life drawing – 'Some people would say that Susan had given them practically their entire education.' And among the highlights was Linda Kitson (later to be known as 'Kitbags' since her time as a war artist in the Falklands): 'She came in like a whirlwind and spent time with each person, which no-one had ever done before, and fizzed us all up – made us all want to start drawing and somehow found what it was in each person that was their individual being – found it and made us get enthusiastic.'

After Chelsea Emma joined the Illustration Department at the RCA; because 'everybody wanted to go there' and also because she knew the work of the head of the department*: she could remember poring over a copy of *Mr Horrox and the Gratch* as a teenager in

her bedroom in Ireland, and recognising it as 'something exciting and somehow familiar'.

If you have been involved in teaching, it is possible to feel sometimes that you never taught anybody anything; so I was pleased to be reminded that I had pointed out that the postage-stamp size sketches she was doing for some illustrations to *Jules et Jim* would work perfectly well as roughs; and to discover that it is the method she still uses to start work on her own books.

On leaving the RCA, Emma made a couple of false starts with children's books, and as a result took an artist's agent and became one of the most prolific stars of the bookjacket. 'I think I did about a hundred and fifty in the space of about three years.' But she still wanted to do children's books, and at that point the big break came, with Rona Selby, who had unearthed photocopies of work that had been in the files at The Bodley Head for years – unsuitable in itself because dark and gloomy – and said: 'Do you think you could have a new style for children?' The stories that she offered for the experiment had been gathered together by Laura Cecil, and when it was a success, they were published as *Listen to This*. For that, Emma won the Mother Goose Award,



and she had made her move and unmistakably made her mark.

I am not sure that those years with bookjackets did not leave some useful legacy; let us say, at least, that wherever it came from, Emma has a sense of the dramatic moments in a story, and a control of the range of tones, through from light to dark, in its depiction. When these two come together there are wonderful scenes of storm, gloom, starlight; atmospheric but precise. There is also an ability to allow the funny and the poetic to live together which makes me feel that James Reeve's **Ragged Robin**, for instance, had been waiting for her to illustrate it. Perhaps it is another aspect of this which enables her on occasion to do something that I find hard to define, but which I think occurs in artists that Emma admires, like Bemelmans and de Brunhoff and Ardizzone: of making pictures that have a sort of atmospheric conviction that make you want to go back and look at them for the sense of that moment. In **Tertius and Pliny**, for instance, to take an example almost at random, there are pictures of the monkey and the little dog on the red aeroplane, that give me that feeling of permanence.

And there is also Emma's sense of the weight and shape and disposition of images on the page. Sometimes when a children's book makes that offer of 'decorative' you can forget about the story, and just settle down to appreciate the gold printing. But in **Thumbelina**, for instance, there is both a decorative formality of flowers and leaves, rather like an updated version of Dicky Doyle's fairyland, and a diversity of shape and disposition in the pictures that leads the story along. Or in Gina Pollinger's Shakespeare sampler **Something Rich and Strange**, where the nature of the book invites a whole repertoire of decorative items but there is still enough atmosphere to make a bow to moonlight in Verona and the storm on the heath.

To my surprise I discover that all these books are variations on what is fundamentally the same technique. They are a combination of Dr Martin's inks – which can be very bright (as in **Miss Bilberry's New House**) or diluted and used layer upon layer, and crayons, which may provide the outline, and sometimes goes over the ink to make it deeper or more three-dimensional. The colours for each book are generally worked out beforehand; for **More!** there was actually a collage of pieces snipped from magazines to make a kind of colour chart for reference during work on the book.

Emma's own books are now published by Klaus Flugge at the Andersen Press, and she is obviously relishing the enthusiasm she finds there: the small-scale urgency of the enterprise, the



straightforward love of books.

For Klaus she has already done **Little Miss Muffet Counts to Ten** which drives the familiar nursery rhyme to the point of hysteria with a huge cast of countable animals including her favourite lemurs. **More!** and **I Love You, Blue Kangaroo** (still in production) are closer to warm domestic sentiments than hitherto, but still handled with wit and unexpectedness. (No *brown* Kangaroos here.) Emma believes that books for children should be 'wild – adventurous and imaginative ... something that you can escape into, something that you don't get later on. It might be the only chance. It's the only time when the child is allowed to develop its imagination and it's so porous that it should be filled with extraordinary things, not mundane and boring things.' I think Emma is someone who is going to keep on and find all kinds of extraordinary things for us. Klaus Flugge must be looking forward to it. I am. ■

* Quentin Blake. *Ed*

Some of Emma Chichester Clark's many titles currently available

I Never Saw a Purple Cow, Walker, 0 7445 3077 6, £6.99 pbk

Thumbelina, retold by Jane Falloon, Pavilion, 1 85793 550 0, £9.99 hbk, 1 86205 169 0, £5.99 pbk

Something Rich and Strange, selected by Gina Pollinger, Kingfisher, 1 85697 387 5, £12.99 hbk

Miss Bilberry's New House, Mammoth, 0 7497 2502 8, £4.50 pbk

Tea with Aunt Augusta, Mammoth, 0 7497 1274 0, £4.99 pbk

Noah and the Space Ark, Laura Cecil, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13680 6, £9.99 hbk

The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses, Geraldine McCaughrean, Orchard, 1 86039 109 5, £12.99 hbk

The Orchard Book of Greek Myths, retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, Orchard, 1 85213 373 2, £12.99 hbk

Piper: A Dog's Life, Cape, 0 224 04690 X, £8.99 hbk

Little Miss Muffet Counts to Ten, Andersen, 0 86264 747 9, £8.99 hbk

More!, Andersen, 0 86264 777 0, £9.99 hbk

I Love You, Blue Kangaroo, Andersen, is due to be published in August

Quentin Blake is the illustrator of, amongst many others, the books of Roald Dahl. His own books include the joint winner of the Whitbread award, **How Tom Beat Captain Najork and His Hired Sportsmen** and the Kate Greenaway Medal winner, **Mister Magnolia**. He was Head of the Illustration Department of the Royal College of Art from 1978-1986.

Photographs by Richard Mewton

BfKREVIEWS

Reviews (of both hardback and paperback fiction and non-fiction) are grouped for convenience into both age categories and under teaching range. Within each section, you will find reviews for younger children at the beginning. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest that you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendations for use can often be found within the review.

RATING

Unmissable	★★★★★
Very Good	★★★★
Good	★★★
Fair	★★
Sad	★

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

Brian Alderson is the chief children's book consultant for *The Times*.

Khalida Alvi was formerly a primary and advisory teacher in Ealing.

Gwynneth Bailey is Language Coordinator at Aldborough Primary School, Norwich.

Clive Barnes is Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City.

David Bennett is Senior Teacher and Head of the English Faculty at George Spencer School, Nottinghamshire.

Jill Bennett is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She is Early Years Co-ordinator and teacher at Chatsworth Infant School in Hounslow, Middlesex.

Roy Blatchford is UK Director of Reading is Fundamental and Series Editor of Longman Literature.

Valerie Coghlan is Librarian at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

Robert Dunbar lectures in English and children's literature at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

John Farndon is a non-fiction author and consultant.

Nikki Gamble is Head of English at the School of Education, Anglia Polytechnic University.

Annabel Gibb works as a supply teacher in primary schools in Leeds.

George Hunt is a lecturer in Language in Education at the University of Reading.

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

Andrew Kidd is Headteacher at Burscough County Primary School in Lancashire.

Errol Lloyd is an artist and writer.

Ted Percy, until he retired, was Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

Val Randall teaches English at Mansfield High School, North East Lancashire.

Steve Rosson is Head of Library Resources at Moseley School, Birmingham.

Chris Routh is the Resources Officer at the Reading and Language Information Centre, University of Reading.

Judith Sharman is Head of Hoole All Saints Infants School, Cheshire.

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

	Page		Page
Alberta the Abominable Snowthing	★★	Midnight Fair	★★★★★
Aliens Stole My Underpants	★★★	More Jessame Stories	★★★★★
Angel and the Box of Time	★★★★	"More More More," said the Baby	★★★
Antarctica	★★★	Moses and the Pharaoh	★★★
Arctic Fox, The	★★★★	Nightjohn	★★★★★
Bad Cats Bad	★★★	Nonsense Nursery Rhymes	★★★★
Badger's Bad Mood	★★★	Norse Myths & Legends	★★★
Banana	★★★★	Nuclear Power	★★★
Beaten by a Balloon	★★★★	Playtime Rhymes for the Very Young	★★★
Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945	★★	Puffin Book of Classic Verse, The	★★★
Cleopatra: Queen of Kings	★★★	Pussy-Cat Pussy-Cat and Other Rhymes	★★★★★
Cuddy	★★★★	Rainforest	★★★
Daddy Calls Me Man	★★★	Razia: Warrior Queen of India	★★★
Demon Headmaster Takes Over, The	★★★★★	Reading Under Control	★★★★
Don't Look at Me in that Tone of Voice!	★★★	Red Eyes at Night	★★★
Drug Abuse?	★★★	Rice	★★★★
Egyptian Mummies – a Pop-up book	★★★	Roald Dahl	★★
Fergus and Marigold	★★★	Sarny	★★★★
Fire, Bed and Bone	★★★★★	Sea Piper, The	★★★★
Frozen Out	★★	Since Dad Left	★★★★★
Funky Phantoms	★★★	Smasher	★★★
Green World?, A	★★★	Snakes and Other Reptiles in Action	★★★★
Harry the Honkerzoid	★★★	Someone's Watching, Someone's Waiting	★★★★
History: The Really Interesting Bits	★★★	Stanley Bagshaw and the Frantic Film Fiasco	★★★★
Honey	★★★★	Star Spooks	★★★
How Could You Do This To Me, Mum?	★★★★	Stephen Biesty's Incredible Everything	★★★
How Things Fly	★	Sweetcorn	★★★★
Humpty Dumpty and Other Rhymes	★★★★★	Tigress	★★★
In the Shadow of the Gun	★★	Toots Upside Down Again	★★★★
Inside Story: Extraordinary Buildings Unfolded	★★	Transfer, The	★★★★★
Jaguar	★★★	Trouble for Alberta	★★
Jamil's Clever Cat	★★★★	Trouble With Elephants, The	★★★
Joseph	★★★	Ultimate 3-D Pop-Up Art Book, The	★★★★★
Kirsten	★★	Under Different Stars	★★★
Listmaker, The	★★★★	Voices in the Park	★★★★★
Little Boy Blue and Other Rhymes	★★★★★	War Dog	★★★
Long, Blue Blazer, The	★★★★	Wee Willie Winkie and Other Rhymes	★★★★★
Magellan: A Voyage Around the World	★★★	When I Was Little Like You	★★★★★
Marco Polo: A Journey Through China	★★★	Whistling Thorn	★★★
Mehmet the Conqueror	★★★	Wolf is Coming!, The	★★★★★
Merman, The	★★★★	World of Art, The	★★★
Microlife	★★★		

Books About Children's Books

Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945

NON-FICTION ★★

Edited by Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker, Scholar Press xiv, 167pp, 1 85928 236 9, £39.95 hbk

Children's books are, for the most part, a function of the publishing

industry. 'Twas ever thus, from the day when Benjamin Collins and Thomas Boreman more or less invented the things, and no history can be adequately written without studying the publishers. This is especially true of the cataclysmic period since the second World War, when many established verities have been transformed. Discerning them, and tracing their change, is a complex, but fascinating, task, and

the failure of this volume to confront it engenders dismay – not least because its editors hold posts of some distinction as university lecturers in children's literature.

For much of the post-war period what went on inside publishing houses was fairly uniform and constant, whether the firm was a giant like Collins, publishing children's books from offices in both Glasgow and London, or an

optimistic venture set up by hopeful amateurs employing one secretary and a traveller. Many of the operations involved (editing, printing, marketing, selling books, selling rights, paying authors etc) were in the direct control of individual publishers. (For more detail about this process, BfK readers might care to look at Liz Attenborough's admirable series of 'Publishing Profiles' which began in the January issue of 1997.) But beyond all this were Events, just as important but largely outside publishers' control: acquiring stuff to publish (negotiated commissions, submissions from agents, deals with packagers, happy accidents found in slush-piles), and the effect on markets of a shifting pattern of economic and social pressures.

What all this amounts to is an interlocking group of influences that will govern the nature of the children's books in the market at any one time but will themselves change qualitatively as time, cash, and government fiat flow past. It is the historian's job to clarify these relationships that subsist within and around the publishing industry and to point to the effects as, generation by generation, they feed through to the children. No such clarity or systematic assessment occurs in this history. Hardly any factor noted above is given systematic consideration by the book's editors and when a mention does occur it is so garbled that it makes no contribution to a coherent account of post-war events. *Exempli gratia*: Both editors are obsessed by social change within the second half of the period. They bang on, sometimes repetitively, about changing values, 'the female presence' etc. but they make no effort to trace, or question, the way these issues obtruded themselves upon the publishing industry. There is no mention of the heady events of the seventies with the foundation of the Children's Rights Workshop and the Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative, the publishing venture at Centerprise, the arrival of the infamous 'McGraw-Hill Guidelines', or a move by the Educational Publishers Council to allow itself to be ruled by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

In their own chapters on 'Setting the Scene' and 'Publishing Practices', both editors appear woefully ignorant of the totality of books within their period (Nicholas Tucker gives a preposterous account of the situation in 1945) and they do not seem to have worked through the files of the *Bookseller* or the records

of Book Trust which would have supplied them with more information than they apparently care to have. (Among the most amazing omissions are accounts of the early collaborative work of publishers, libraries and teachers through the YLG and other agencies, of the development of 'Children's Books of the Year', the Puffin Club and of the trade significance of the Bologna fair.

The editors may argue that their neglect of conventional sources is made up for by their use of a 'living archive': recorded interviews with editors etc. (apparently undertaken without knowledge of a similar project being mounted by the Book Trade History Group). Good though the idea be, it has gone off at half-cock. One looks in vain for evidence from such witnesses (men, alas!) as John Bell, David Gadsby, Dick Hough, Robin Hyman, Rayner Unwin, Ron Whiting, and – above all – Antony Kamm.

The chapters from other contributors are presumably intended to fill what the editors perceive as gaps (many of which remain – there is no attempt, for example, to analyse out the vast array of genres into which 'children's books' may be divided). The first of these chapters – inexplicably – is about book prizes. Keith Barker plods a route that he has covered before, but omits all discussion of the effect of book awards on publishers – and, indeed, awards made by publishers. You will learn nothing from him of the Macmillan Prize or the Kathleen Fidler Award, nor that Jan Mark first emerged as an author through the Penguin/Guardian Competition. A similar refusal to place publishing at the centre of an historical account occurs in the next chapter which is a sort of annotated list of famous picture-book artists by Judith Graham. She utters barely comprehensible remarks about printing processes, but has nothing to say on popular movements. Ladybird Books, incidentally, do not seem to be mentioned anywhere at all.

The decline in control evident here is redeemed, in part, in the rest of the book, where Geoff Fox supplies a model account of 'Movable Books', Philip Pullman a small, but barely relevant, monograph on 'Picture Stories and Graphic Novels', and Susanne Greenhalgh a broad chronological survey of 'Children's Books and the Media'. Reading these essays intently one can wrench them into a personal awareness of the events of the period although within

the structure of the book they are little more than dangling appendages. (Incidentally, why is Philip Pullman allowed illustrations and nobody else?) BA

Reading Under Control

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Edited by Judith Graham and Alison Kelly, David Fulton in association with Roehampton Institute, London, 160pp, 1 85346 481 3, £12.99 pbk

Feeling in control is an experience teachers in the present climate have all too infrequently: even more so with the apparent rigidity of the proposals for the literacy hour. If we are to be in any sense in control of what goes on with regard to literacy in our classrooms, we need to be cognisant of the elements discussed in this book.

Its contributors, who represent a wide range of interests and hence knowledge and enthusiasms, emphasise the crucial importance of being in control with regard to reading. For this to happen they posit that teachers need a secure base of knowledge and understanding about children and how they learn (and in this case how reading, in particular, is learned). They also need knowledge about books and resources in order to make an informed choice about what to offer, how to organise the materials and have an understanding of classroom practices through which reading is taught. The question of how best to move children forward entails scaffolding their future learning using where they are as a starting point: hence the importance of assessment as an enabling tool. All these elements and more are explored, examined and reflected upon in the five sections into which this volume is divided.

The book begins with an historic overview (linked to broader theories about how children learn) of the ways the teaching and learning of reading have been approached. The emphasis is on the last forty or so years, and the various researchers and their models of reading offer a wide range of lenses through which one can look at children and learning to read. In conclusion the authors stress that research is a constant dynamic, the aim being to find the very best opportunities for children.

In the section on resources for reading the book acknowledges the National Curriculum's insistence on a wide range of texts and the

underlying recognition of the different kinds of reading these demand, but rightly points out areas of insufficient exploration. These include, most importantly for me, the whole question of literature and its role in developing the affective domain – issues of equality, diversity and challenging assumptions.

The teacher's role in planning for teaching and learning is explored in chapter three which is rich in ideas to reflect on. Planning is helpfully thought of in terms of continuous, blocked and linked experiences. There is a useful checklist for planning a read aloud session (I applaud the insistence on reading aloud throughout KS2) and pointers for using drama and role play as means of deepening children's understanding of texts and related issues and concepts. The whole area of phonics is addressed, including what teachers need to know, how to embed children's learning in meaningful (often textual) contexts, and the importance of rhyme and word play. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, sensitive, appropriate scaffolding and the transactional nature of making meaning underlie both this chapter and of course, the next which discusses the role of, and explores ways of, monitoring, assessing and recording children's reading.

The final chapter focuses on meeting individual needs and its authors are (rightly in my view) dismissive of what they call a narrowed focus on to a 'bits and pieces' approach to underachievement. Reading Recovery is reviewed along with appropriate texts to offer and a discussion of what children who have underachieved need to know about reading.

Those who have contributed to this book represent an extremely strong team of educators from the Roehampton Institute but I feel they fail to give sufficient attention to the importance of dispositions: not only those of the children towards reading, but of crucial importance in my view, a teacher's dispositions: a positive, indeed passionate, disposition towards literature (if teaching is to be inspired), and a disposition towards creating an enabling and empowering environment which embraces children as equal contributors in an open, enquiring, learning community. All in all though, this is a book to be highly recommended, not only to those at the beginning of their careers, but to everyone who seeks a thoughtful, balanced framework within which to set, and reflect on, their practice. JB

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Humpty Dumpty and Other Rhymes

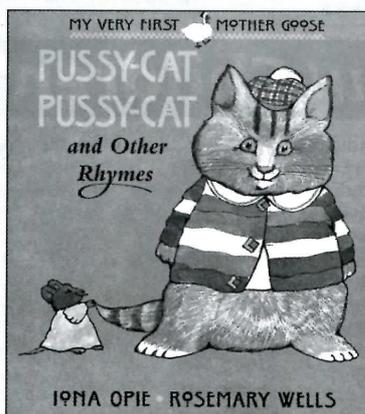
0 7445 5557 4

Little Boy Blue and Other Rhymes

0 7445 5556 6

Wee Willie Winkie and Other Rhymes

0 7445 5559 0



Pussy-Cat Pussy-Cat and Other Rhymes

0 7445 5558 2

★★★★★

Compiled by Iona Opie, ill. Rosemary Wells, Walker, 18pp, £3.50 each board

My Very First Mother Goose, a brilliant large format hardcover anthology published in 1996, has been reused to create these four bright, square board books each of which contains eight nursery rhymes – one per double spread. Board books are no longer seen as only for babies and toddlers: my reception class

readers have spent weeks voraciously devouring and poring over the details in these attractive titles whose robust format means they can stand up to excessive use by enthusiastic readers in an early years' classroom. For those not familiar with Wells's work, she has a penchant for small furry creatures particularly rabbits and mice who frequently 'people' her illustrations. Many of these hint at other goings on than a reading of the rhymes alone might suggest: for instance is the whiskered gentleman in 'Hickety, pickety' really *admiring* the black hen? There are countless opportunities for making stories and if that was not enough, mathematical

potential too, in the form of counting, shape and pattern, and clocks. Add to that the delight of finding you can read the rhymes yourself – what more could any four- or five-year-old want? JB

"More More More," said the Baby

★★★

Vera B Williams, Tupelo, New York (available via Letterbox Library), 34pp, 0 688 15634 7, £3.99 board

A lovely idea for a board book – three toddlers (one white, one Black and one Chinese) each share a loving moment with a special adult (daddy, granny, mummy). The three episodes with their repetitive format are reminiscent of the verses of a poem; however I found the rhythm of the text unpredictable and thus uncomfortable to read aloud. The bright illustrations are painted in gouache. Overall the presentation is attractive, with varied borders and brushstrokes in the backgrounds often serving to focus our attention on the characters but some of the figures and their expressions are a little awkward. AG

Playtime Rhymes for the Very Young

★★★

Selected by Shona McKellar, ill. Priscilla Lamont, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 7124 6, £7.99 hbk

A selection of 22 finger-plays and action rhymes, both traditional and contemporary, pleasantly illustrated and accompanied by photographs of the actions performed by children and parents from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

At first glance this seems a good idea as the photographic sequences are easier to follow while reading the rhyme than a written instruction would be. However many of the rhymes selected are extremely well-known (eg. 'This Little Pig'), and others difficult to illustrate in this way (eg. 'Jelly on a Plate'). The combination of drawings and photographs make the pages cluttered and potentially confusing to small children – although youngsters often respond well to photographs of other children which might give a stimulus to repeating the rhymes.

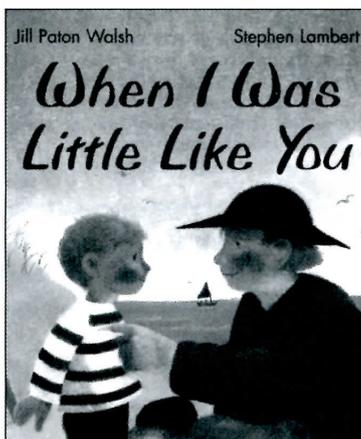
I can see a place for this book on a parents' bookshelf at the library or at toddler group or playgroup, especially where parents are unfamiliar with traditional rhymes, but it is unlikely to be comprehensive enough for playgroup leaders themselves to use. AG

When I Was Little Like You

★★★★★

Jill Paton Walsh, ill. Stephen Lambert, Viking, 32pp, 0 670 86799 3, £10.99 hbk

Paton Walsh's spare text with its repetition and soft lilting rhythms make gentle if somewhat idyllic, comparisons between Gran's childhood and Rosie's. It is complemented well with Lambert's soft pastel illustrations that reinforce the impression of a lazy afternoon in which Gran has all the time in the



world for Rosie. The implicit message, especially important in these times of high tech communication, is that we must not neglect the tradition of passing information from one generation to the next, sharing the cultural changes as well as the things that stay the same, from the landmark lighthouse to the loving relationship between child and grandmother. *When I Was Little Like You* is an ideal gift from grandparents and should also have a special place in classroom collections. JS

The Wolf is Coming!

★★★★★

Elizabeth MacDonald, ill. Ken Brown, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 775 4, £9.99 hbk



The text builds cleverly with repetition and pace in this picture book which has the feel of a traditional tale and the illustrations are stunning. As old wolf approaches, the animals move from hen coop to pigsty, to cowshed and so on until all are crowded into the donkey's rickety old shack – the climax is satisfyingly dramatic and judging from the reaction of children in our school will be one of those books to be revisited again and again! (With some adaptation of the text, sizing of print and separation of print from illustration etc. this title would make a brilliant big book.) JS

Fergus and Marigold

★★★

Tony Maddox, Piccadilly, 32pp, 1 85340 413 6, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 478 0, £4.99 pbk

Fergus the farm pup is anticipating a restful day – until Mrs Coddle's cat Marigold arrives to shatter the peace.

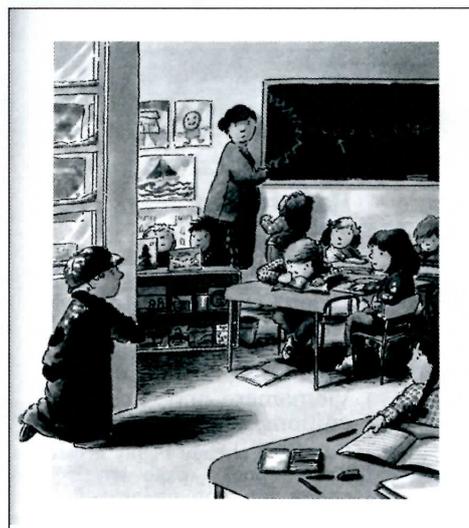
Fergus's search for a quiet spot to sleep, free from 'moggy' interference, seems doomed to failure: Marigold's mischief-making takes her all over the farmyard driving the other animals into the barn looking for suitable hiding places. But the day is saved – or is it? – by a timely encounter with a sheet blowing on the washing line. The ambiguous ending leaves room for readers and listeners to decide for themselves. This is the fourth picture book about the patch-eyed pup who seems to endear himself to the under-sixes through his gently humorous escapades. Certainly not the best Fergus title but Marigold's pranks will doubtless bring a smile. JB

The Long, Blue Blazer

★★★★★

Jeanne Willis, ill. Susan Varley, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 790 8, £4.50 pbk

When first published in hardback in 1987 this picture book was immediately acclaimed as the special book it is so this paperback edition was greeted with delight. Now we can replace our well loved but tatty copies! This is a book that works on many levels – it delights children as even the youngest pick up the clues that the new boy in the class is not quite what he seems! The messages are powerful about accepting differences, about welcoming newcomers who may be feeling



From The Long, Blue Blazer

strange and above all about empathy, yet the touch is light and we do not feel lectured but rather privileged to have been able to share the time that the boy in the long blue blazer spends on earth. JS

Nonsense Nursery Rhymes

POETRY ★★★★★

Richard Edwards, ill. Chris Fisher, Oxford, 32pp, 0 19 910478 6, £4.99 pbk

Arranged as an A-Z, this picture alphabet book contains traditional nursery rhymes – well give or take the odd one here and there – in modern adaptations from a highly accomplished writer of poetry for children. Thus, we are treated to a bungee-jumping Humpty Dumpty and there are shades of Mr Twit in the highly hirsute Jack Sprat, while some rhymes depart even more radically from the originals. T, for example, offers, 'Twinkle twinkle little

frog./Shivering in your puddle./Hop out of the soggy bog –/Come and have a cuddle.' The twenty-six rhymes are each given a full page with its own (almost always) hilarious, action-packed illustration. The final two pages comprise twenty-two alphabetically arranged traditional nursery rhymes – prefaced by the following: 'Do you know any nursery rhymes that begin with A, V, X or Z? No? Well neither do we!' Tremendous fun for browsing and reading aloud, both to and by children from about four up once they know the originals. JB

Daddy Calls Me Man

POETRY ★★★★★

Angela Johnson, paintings by Rhonda Mitchell, Orchard Books, New York (available via Letterbox Library), 32pp, 0 531 30042 0, £10.99 hbk

Four abstract or semi-abstract paintings supply the inspiration for the four short, illustrated poems that make up this attractively produced African-American picture book. Though this fairly sophisticated approach may be lost on the young readers for whom the book is intended, the poems aspire to genuine poetic feeling rather than mere rhyme or doggerel, and the pictures are crisp and expertly executed and portray family life at its most warm and joyous. EL

Beaten by a Balloon

★★★★★

Margaret Mahy, ill. Jonathan Allen, Hamish Hamilton, 32pp, 0 241 13778 0, £10.99 hbk

Sam Appleby is a kindly soul whose parents encourage him to share their gentle passions for balloons, sunflowers and roses, but when a neighbour's son acquires both a sabre and a laser gun, Sam's baser instincts begin to surface. Just as his resolve is breaking, an encounter with a spring heeled bank robber in an attempted heist demonstrates how effective the gentlest objects can be in the service of righteous cunning.

This picture book is one of Mahy's wonderfully condensed miniature farces, thirteen double page spreads telling a short and silly story with the assistance of Allen's vigorous cartoons, while at the same time conveying a humorous, pithy and non-didactic message about a very relevant moral issue.

Highly recommended for independent readers and for reading aloud.

The Trouble With Elephants

★★★

Chris Riddell, Walker, 24pp, 0 7445 5447 0, £4.99 pbk

'The trouble with elephants is ... well,

there are all sorts of troubles ... but the real trouble is you can't help but love them.' There is an entrancing pattern in the text and some quite delightful humour in this picture book from political cartoonist Riddell which has just been reissued after its first publication in 1988. The sheer

folly of elephants riding bicycles, skipping with their trunks, hiding behind slim trees and playing seesaw - all wittily and boldly drawn - is what has made this such a favourite book to share with beginning readers. RB

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Badger's Bad Mood

★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Susan Varley, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 776 2, £9.99 hbk

This new Badger picture book is a prequel to *Badger's Parting Gifts* which deals so excellently with death and how Badger's friends come to terms with it. I was curious about how children who had already shared *Badger's Parting Gifts* would cope with a new book about Badger but found that they took it quite in their stride. Oram and Varley now take on the issue of how one person can deal with another's inexplicable bad mood as the friends try to help Badger cheer up. This book however moves into dangerous territory for, in reality, such interpersonal problems are not so easily resolved. A child trying to translate Mole's plan (to help Badger by celebrating his achievements) into his or her own circumstances could come unstuck - adult mediation is important here. This however is a brave attempt to tackle a topic that is rarely explored with young children. Not an easy book then, but an important one though it does demand careful handling on the part of the adult. JS

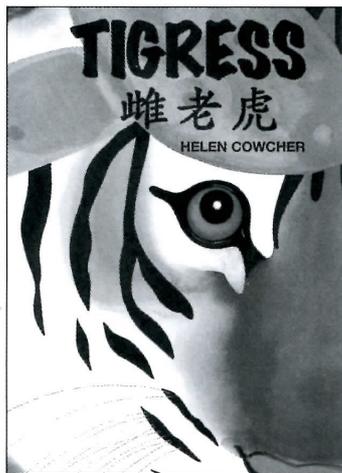
Jamil's Clever Cat

★★★★

Fiona French with Dick Newby, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1209 0, £9.99 hbk

startling spread to the next?

This extraordinarily rich book is one to savour. It will enhance any Primary library, being a good example of genre, and engage interest across both Key Stages. GB



**Tigress
Whistling Thorn
Antarctica
Rainforest
Jaguar**

★★★

Helen Cowcher, Milet, dual language editions available in Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese, and Turkish only editions, 40pp, £9.99 each hbk

Cowcher's already highly acclaimed picture books make an inspired choice for reproducing with dual language texts. Each of the titles features endangered species in their natural habitats and raises important environmental issues about the threat to their survival caused by human presence. The common theme of conservation will appeal to all readers regardless of age or country of origin.

Cowcher's stunning full-page water-colour pictures offer visual delights, by using striking close-ups to suggest dramatic moments in each story and capturing the mood of each setting - for example, the icy blues and greys and greens of the watery world of Antarctica, the warm browns and oranges of an Indian wildlife sanctuary and the vibrant green of a lush South American rain forest.

Superimposing texts on full-colour illustrations such as these presents a major challenge, particularly with the addition of another script. This publisher has to be congratulated for attempting to avoid illegibility by repositioning the English text to make space for the other language. Regrettably, however, the English version always takes precedence and

Editor's Choice

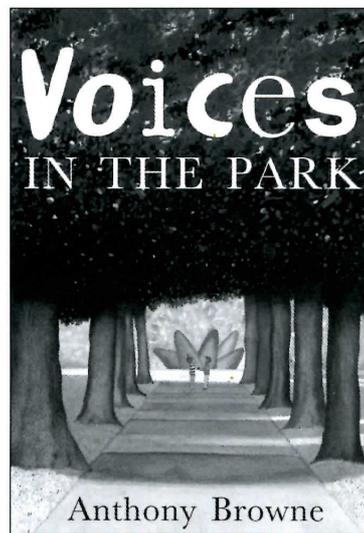
Voices in the Park

★★★★★

Anthony Browne, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 40858 7, £9.99 hbk

Twenty years ago Browne's picture book, *A Walk in the Park*, broke new ground with its depiction of class difference. In this extraordinary new picture book he revisits the park and presents the same events but this time from the different viewpoints of the four protagonists - unhappy, downtrodden, middle class Charles, his snooty mother, friendly, sensitive, working class Smudge and her unemployed father. The families' respective dogs, Victoria and Albert (one of Browne's many felicitous touches), race round together 'like old friends'. Charles and Smudge's tentative contact as they play together is broken up by Charles's mother but they remain in one another's thoughts. The two parents ignore each other.

Browne presents us with a complex series of overlapping triangular relationships which, seen in turn through different eyes, raise profound questions about how we interact with each other, who is to be included or excluded in relationships



and how we can tolerate not being the only one. His surreal style becomes an extension of his text, a visual comment on his characters' inner worlds. This extends to the different typefaces used in relation to each character - Charles's so desperately thin and tentative.

For Charles's mother, the idea that her son might enjoy himself with Smudge is intolerable. Smudge's father appears sunk in depression. What then about their children? Browne leaves us much to chew over in this tour de force. RS

the typeface of the second language tends to be smaller and lighter.

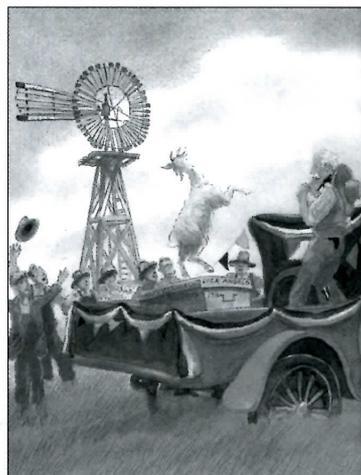
The need for a wider choice of quality children's literature in dual language editions has to override such weaknesses for the time being; and these beautiful and thought-provoking stories certainly deserve to reach as wide an audience as possible. CR

Angel and the Box of Time

★★★★

Michael Foreman, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 778 9, £9.99 hbk

Angel's grandad takes a small travelling show around the cities of the USA, carrying a dancing goat and a mysterious antique chest in the back of his little truck. Angel is delighted to join him for the first time, but she becomes concerned when the dancing goat seems to vanish into the wooden chest. Angel peeks into the chest, and finds that it contains far more than she bargained for: layer upon layer of landscape, charged with visionary traces of centuries of family migration. When Angel emerges from her grand tour of the box of time, she resumes her journey into the future with her grandfather. Foreman's text is brief and embodies a looping refrain



which represents the spirals of family history. His glowing depictions of vast landscapes, heroic voyages and remote communities fill the expansive pages of this big picture book with images as vast as the theme of the story. This is a complex story told very simply; a physically beautiful book which presents a thought provoking narrative for all ages. GH



The marriage of sparse, but quite challenging text, with a radiant mix of paints, pattern and mosaics makes that of the Bengali Princess with the humble weaver a rich experience. French's superb artwork begins with dazzling endpapers which would be a wonderful stimulus for art lessons. The well-known tale unfolds through the illustrations, the text inextricably woven into a wealth of colour. Sardul, the cat, is recognisably our Puss-in-Boots, but who ever saw a cut-out bestriped cat quite like this, 'leaping silently' or 'sauntering' from one

Smasher

★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Mike Terry, Young Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 037797 2, £3.99 pbk

The young puppy of the title is clumsy and ugly, and his future is uncertain until the end of this book. He is more of a freak than a runt, and King-Smith once again weaves a tale around a creature in unfortunate, often humorous circumstances. Of course there is a happy ending, with the fully grown dog having won the affections of both Farmer Buzzard (never a problem) and his wife. The latter was more of a problem!

A good smattering of farm life here, and a fast read for a confident 7- or 8-year-old D.K.S. fan. GB

Harry the Honkerzoid

★★★

Brendan Hook, ill. Jeff Hook, Puffin, 64pp, 0 14 038679 3, £3.99 pbk

Written by a primary music teacher and illustrated by his father in Hoffnung style, this is an introduction to the orchestra, that emphasises the fun in making music. Hook's amusing tale of an inept school band, an eccentric looking and impatient conductor named Mr Kronk and the coming to life of the ultimately heroic Honkerzoid will be of interest to young musicians.

The overture to the story sees Chris, the second clarinetist, confused and humiliated in front of the entire orchestra, and being instructed by Mr Kronk to stay behind after rehearsals to practise his part part for 'The March of the Honkerzoids'. Alone in the hall the instruments take on a life of their own forming a single euphonious 'Honkerphone' named Harry who gives the illustrator a great opportunity to sketch full and half page black and white twisted tubes and horns for the limbs and body of this musical Frankenstein-like creation. Harry the Honkerzoid's musical spell 'Ka Chunka Choonk Ka Chonker' enables Chris to save the day when several disasters threaten to ruin the concert.

The finale is the inclusion of the first and second clarinet parts for 'The March of the Honkerzoids' composed by the author himself. AK

Stanley Bagshaw and the Frantic Film Fiasco

★★★★

Bob Wilson, Puffin, 64pp, 0 14 038024 8, £3.99 pbk

If you have a soft spot for Stanley, Baggy-shorted Huddersfield lad, You'll enjoy 'is latest adventure Even though in it our Stan is quite bad.

On his Saturday trip to t' pictures he thought he was going 'Out West'. But Stanley, once armed with his scissors instead a critic impressed.

By cutting up films into pieces and splicing wherever he thought he created a great new sensation So manager's fears came to naught.

If you've managed to read to this juncture



you've got more sense than I thought So take a trip to t' bookshop for Stan's newest volume – you ought For if comic strip form is your fancy here's one you'll be glad that you bought. JB

Joseph

★★★★

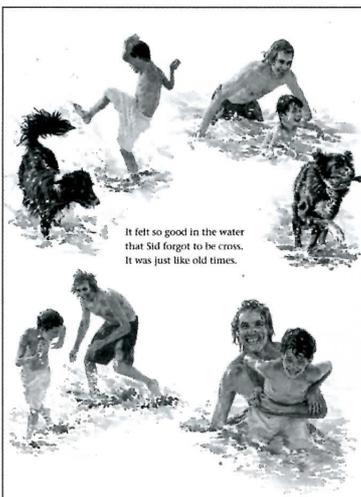
Brian Wildsmith, Oxford University Press, 40pp, 0 19 279018 8, £9.99 hbk

A literally gilt-edged retelling of the story of Joseph and his coat of many colours, with sumptuous illustrations by Wildsmith that are both intricate and spectacular. The double page spreads are ravishing compositions with a wealth of detail and movement. The drama is seen, for the most part, as if by a distant observer, and the central characters are often dwarfed by the luxuriance and opulence of an Ancient Egypt of film set proportions. The striped tents of the Jewish desert herdsmen look plain by comparison, although it is Jacob, the patriarch, in his white robes, who is most powerfully drawn and who dominates the final reconciliation scenes. This is a book to be enjoyed by primary school children, mostly for the pleasure it gives the eye. CB

Since Dad Left

★★★★★

Caroline Binch, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1178 7, £9.99 hbk



Binch has established herself in the last ten years as one of the finest

children's book illustrators. Her naturalistic style is instantly recognisable and she has few equals in her handling of gesture and expression. A Binch illustration can convey, with astonishing subtlety, not only the moods of her individual characters but the relationship between them; and never have her skills been employed to such effect as in this, her latest work.

This is her own text, about a child coming to terms with his parents' separation: and the added interest is that Sid's father is a New Age Traveller and lives in a bender. The Travellers' life shown here is perhaps more idyllic than the reality – rarely do they use a horse and cart rather than a van or have the opportunity to range so freely through the sun-drenched countryside.

But the essence of the book is the portrayal of Sid's loneliness and confusion and his parents' efforts to reassure him of his father's continuing love. You watch the pain distort his features – suddenly sullen or wistful – a preoccupation broken only by his concentration on his beloved drawing or the excitement of a rough and tumble in the river with dad. And you see his parents' patience and concern as they struggle to explain the situation to him.

Binch's technique is photographic and some of the illustrations in her earlier books seemed posed. There is less of that awkwardness here; but where she strives to be more impressionistic – as in the night scene with dad's friends – she is less convincing. For the most part, however, her watercolouring is detailed, delicate and luminous, and carefully characterises a supporting cast of children and adults: so that the illustrator's faith in the resilience and dignity of Sid and his mum and dad shines through as strongly as the summer light in these pages. A must for all primary schools. CB

Moses and the Pharaoh

★★★★

Noura Durkee, ill. Ahmed Jabir, Hood Hood, 56pp, 1 900251 27 2, £7.95 pbk

The author has written this ancient story with a new perspective based mainly on the Quranic reference to the Prophet Moses. This is therefore an unusual religious story in that it not only appeals to Jews, Christians and Muslims but also highlights the ordinary human qualities and virtues which are regarded by all cultures as important.

In order to avoid any possible religious confusion an introduction explains carefully why, where and what has been added to the text in order to make the book more child friendly. There is also a very useful section on English and Arabic names. The full colour illustrations are lively, beautiful and are in keeping with the geographical and ethnic tone of the book. The reader is therefore given a sample of Egyptian culture and civilisation at that time. Typefaces in different colours are used throughout the text; however some illustrations have writing superimposed onto them which in places makes the text difficult to read.

The book is written in a *simple* style, the narrative flows easily and develops the story naturally. The story has the necessary elements of

magic and mystery to capture a child's interest and imagination. Reading it was an enjoyable experience. KA

Alberta the Abominable Snowthing

Ill. John Eastwood, 0 14 038567 3

Trouble for Alberta

Ill. Jacqueline East, 0 14 038568 1

★★★

Tessa Krailing, Puffin, 96pp, £3.99 each pbk

Labelled for 'confident readers', both titles describe the exploits of Alberta, an 'abominable snowthing' who is captured and dispatched from the Arctic wastelands of Canada to Melford Zoo in England. However, due to a mix-up with packages and labels, she arrives at the home of Felix Dobson and his Mum. Alberta is not short of determination and ingenuity. Her efforts to compensate for the lack of snow, fish and hugs from her snowthing family, and Felix's efforts to control the resulting havoc, form the core of these stories. They are characterized by great good humour but various implausibilities, such as Alberta's perfect English (learned in the Arctic wastelands from her Aunt Winnipeg), strain at the reader's necessary suspension of disbelief. VC

Funky Phantoms

0 14 038247 X



Star Spooks

0 14 038246 1

★★★★

Karen Wallace, ill Tony Ross, Puffin 'Creakie Hall', 96pp, £3.99 each pbk

Two tales in a series of four about the 17th-century ghosts of Creakie Hall and their present-day descendants whom they help in times of danger.

These 'easy to read' stories are curiously appealing – the ghosts have kept up with modern life albeit from afar, and their various hobbies prove very useful in averting catastrophes; they also have various magical powers to use when helping the 'flesh 'n' bloods'.

The stories' rapid pace means that they sometimes presuppose knowledge on the part of the reader, or rely too much on stereotypes – however the books are funny and quite well-constructed, with Tony Ross's many illustrations complementing the text well. AG

Snakes and Other Reptiles in Action

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Tanner Ottley Gay, ill. Jean Cassels, Child's Play 'First Science Pop-Ups', 18pp, 0 85953 548 7, £4.99 hbk novelty

How Things Fly

NON-FICTION ★

Peter Seymour, ill. Maria A Fakhoury, Child's Play 'Pop-Up Science', 12pp, 0 85953 288 7, £5.99 hbk novelty

Where would books like *Snakes* be without the Frilled Lizard? This real-life pop-up reptile does his stuff as dependably as ever in this pop-up, with supporting acts from the stand-up Cobra, the long necked Giant Tortoise and the multi-coiled Anaconda. The book treats us to these and other reptilian variety turns, with a non-invasive text pointing up the paper engineering nicely to provide an entertaining introduction to the world of scales.

The object of using three dimensions must surely be to illustrate things that two cannot – so the employment of pop-ups in *How Things Fly* amounts merely to gimmickry for there is nothing here that could not be better shown by drawing in the flat. There is no fun either and this, combined with the misleading statement that 'Helicopters are wingless aircraft' (they are in fact rotary-winged machines) makes the book singularly non-contributory. TP

Banana

0 7496 2801 4

Sweetcorn

0 7496 2803 0

Honey

0 7496 2802 2

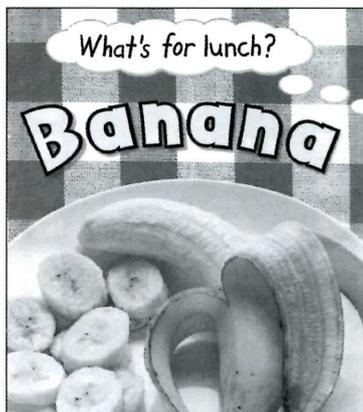
Rice

0 7496 2800 6

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Pam Robson, Franklin Watts 'What's for lunch?', 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

This is a well thought out picture



book series on the story of common foods from seed to table. The photographs used to illustrate the books are stunning and support the text which builds cleverly with repetition and pace. They also help to clarify some difficult concepts. The information is clearly laid out and pitched at infants and lower juniors although some of the vocabulary means that support will be needed.

Different methods of food

production from small family plots to factory processing is shown. Robson carefully covers the main issues including contentious ones such as the uses of fertiliser and insecticides as well as the destruction of wildlife habitat but she goes no further – those reading the books with children will have to develop such topics to the level that they feel appropriate.

The books each have a helpful glossary and index. A big thank you to the publisher for also showing the Dewey classification number – a good teaching point but also so helpful to busy teachers trying to classify in the lunch hour; please note other publishing houses! If future titles are planned it would be nice to have a couple of recipes to round off each book. The photographs of Banoffi Pie, Tacos and Corn Muffins etc. look so enticing that we are trying to find our own simple recipes! JS

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

Someone's Watching, Someone's Waiting

★★★★

Jamila Gavin, ill. Anthony Lewis, Mammoth, 96pp, 0 7497 3106 0, £3.99 pbk



This very chilling book starts with a bereaved mother making a doll like effigy of her dead child and willing it to be part of her family again. Three generations later, Emma is staying with her aunt and uncle and great grandmother at the isolated country manor where the child died, a dismal place echoing with phantoms that only the older woman can see. One day the bored and lonely child discovers an antique doll in her grandmother's room, and soon afterwards becomes convinced that somebody is watching her from a part of the house that no longer exists. Without any of the stock melodramatics of supernatural fiction, Gavin succeeds in summoning up a sense of menace which is rendered all the more powerful by the restraint with which it is described. This is a short, poignant novel, ideal for independent readers who are robust enough to do without happy endings. GH

Red Eyes at Night

★★★★

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Tony Ross, Hodder, 64pp, 0 340 68752 5, £9.99 hbk

On flicking through this book one first notices the three BLACK pages with WHITE text. Scary!

Geraldine (aged 8) is a regular, but loathed, summer holidays visitor. Loathed by Millie (10) who can't bear

her brilliant cousin. Geraldine can play the cello, tap-dance, and do cartwheels, AND she's a show-off. All this perfection demands a plotted downfall, and the ghostly, ghastly mystery of the Red Eyes at Night unfolds.

Morpurgo writes in a direct, chatty style, in the first person. Ross's sketches are witty and full of fear ... or fury ... or fun. Just right for newly independent readers; the type-set is bold, interspersed with lots of pictures, and it reads aloud well. GB

The Merman

★★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Frank Rodgers, Viking, 112pp, 0 670 87132 X, £10.99 hbk

Ten-year-old Zeta, holidaying with her parents in the far north of Scotland, becomes firm friends with a Merman who not only enables her to overcome her fear of water and swim for the first time, but teaches her all about the beautiful world in which she lives. Zeta is disappointed she cannot meet him the following summer as she had planned. The year after, a return to Scotland brings surprises that fill Zeta with both sadness and joy.

King-Smith paints a poignant and beautifully crafted picture of friendship, unbounded by age or time and weaves his extensive knowledge of the natural world into a succinct storyline. Equally successful are Frank Rodgers' subtle and delicate line illustrations. Have a box of tissues handy for the finale. AK

Don't Look at Me in that Tone of Voice!

Brian Moses, 0 330 35337 3

Aliens Stole My Underpants

Edited by Brian Moses, 0 330 34995 3

POETRY ★★★

Ill. Lucy Maddison, Macmillan, 64pp, £2.99 each pbk

Two more titles in Macmillan's crowd pleasing collections of paperback poetry from performance poets who do the rounds of schools and libraries and know what junior school children want. Like many others in the series, *Aliens ...* is edited by Moses, while *Don't Look at Me ...* is all his own work, some of which has appeared in other collections.

The emphasis, complemented by Maddison's bold cartoons, is on fun and the kind of poem that makes an instant impact read aloud. Kids, teachers and librarians will find plenty to make poetry and story sessions go with a swing. Children will like the look and feel of the books.



However, the quality of the poems is uneven and it is rare in *Aliens ...* to find a poem that exploits the subject's potential for mystery and fear, or contemplates the strangeness of life in the universe (and on earth) without playing it for laughs.

Moses's own poems are more varied. He has some rollicking word games and good jokes and there are poems that are more thoughtful even when he pursues crazy notions to extremes, as in his poem about a school's ban on kissing. Perhaps there are too many poems about teachers; and I think it is in some of his quieter moments, like 'The World Record Tree Climbing Contest' and 'The Bonfire at Barton Point', that he seems to get inside a child's experience and you have a real sense of a view slightly askew of the adult version. CB

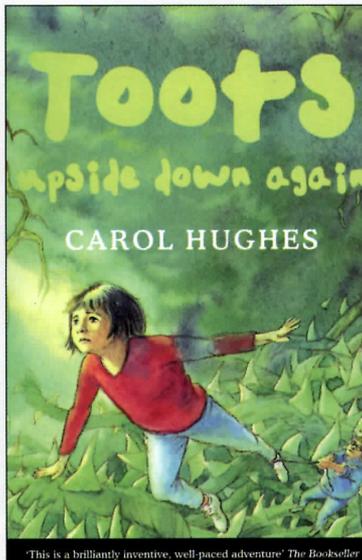
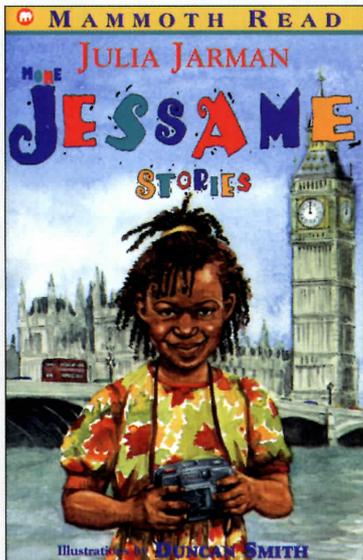
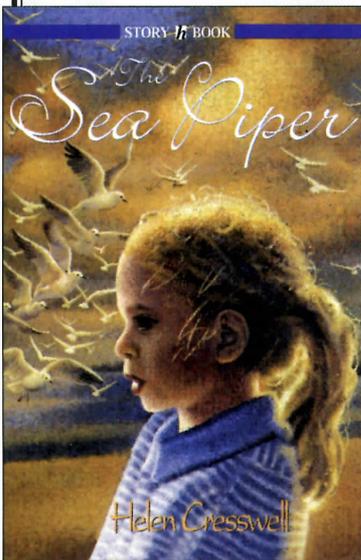
The Sea Piper

★★★★

Helen Cresswell, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Hodder, 96pp, 0 340 68285 X, £3.50 pbk

In this tale of shrimping families, the writing may well rekindle an adult's love of the sea, whilst awakening a young reader's senses to its powerful rhythmic pull. Set in a time when wooden shoes and cartwheels rattle over cobbles, and days start before dawn with a splash under the pump in the yard, disaster strikes when the shrimps just disappear. A lone Piper arises on a misty shore, 'in tatters of grey and blue'. With his sweet music this Sea Piper 'leads a ribbon of gulls into nowhere' ... like the Piper of old. The resolution of the story is lyrical, magical.

The soft, grainy illustrations depict the characters well, and the text runs easily. An historical book for confident young readers, and good for adults to share with children, both at home and in the group read situation. GB



These small slim books, very attractive in spite of their rather flat illustrations, set out biographies of 'Heroes from the East' in plain and readable language. Simplified maps help to contextualise the information. Factually, the books are fascinating, providing plenty of intriguing detail about periods of history and areas of geography that have been much neglected within the National Curriculum. When the writers embellish their historical prose with narrative, problems arise. Did Cleopatra really emerge from an unrolled carpet to seek Julius Caesar's protection, saying 'There's a high price on my head'? And did he really reply 'And what a lovely head it is'? There are also difficulties in presenting as 'heroic' a figure like Mehmet, who had his brother murdered on his accession, and passed a law which encouraged sultans for the next two centuries to copy his example. This fact is not evaded, but it does make the later statement 'As a wise ruler, he deeply understood the true meaning of the word "tolerance"' sound a little odd. These points might, however, provide opportunities for thought provoking discussion of history and how it is represented if children are encouraged to read these useful little books in a critical way. **GH**

More Jessame Stories

★★★★★

Julia Jarman, ill. Duncan Smith, Mammoth, 112pp, 0 7497 2823 X, £3.99 pbk

To call a children's book delightful risks damning it with clichéd praise, but this book really is delightful in a literal sense. Jessame is a young Afro-Caribbean girl who lives with her mother and grandparents in a flat in Bethnal Green. The stories recount a set of fairly mundane urban adventures: a picnic in Greenwich Park, an attempt to bring a reserved refugee out of her shell, a family wedding, an accident at a swimming pool. But Jarman's writing conveys a vivid sense of life freshly experienced; she has an acute ear for the felicities of children's speech, and for the way in which a young imagination can transform a walk to the shops into a phantasmagoria of imaginings. The book is both tender and celebratory of the splendid diversity of everyday life and people, and expresses a warm hearted appreciation of London, particularly the bits that are seldom commemorated in literature. **GH**

Toots Upside Down Again

★★★★

Carol Hughes, Bloomsbury, 192pp, 0 7475 3436 5, £3.99 pbk

The sequel to *Toots and the Upside Down House* in which heroine Toots used her ingenuity to save her house from the evils of Jack Frost, this new title has Toots enlisted by Olive the Garden Fairy and her Group Captain to save the garden from the dreaded Waspgnat to strangle the entire Upside Down garden, in which the Garden Fairy Squadron live.

The Upside Down world is a separate world inhabited by fairies and other strange creatures, into which Toots returns by turning herself upside down on a garden swing. There are shades of Terry Pratchett and Tolkien in this exciting fantasy which will entertain fluent upper junior readers or lower junior listeners. Amongst the entertaining and thrilling adventures is an amusing confrontation with two haughty maggots (who pronounce their name 'Maggo').

Underlying this inventive story is the notion that the evil that has invaded the garden was brought about by wicked human thoughts. **AK**

Roald Dahl

★★

Andrea Shavick, ill. Alan Marks, Oxford 'What's Their Story?', 32pp, 0 19 910440 9, £3.99 pbk

This rather simplified and worshipful biography of Dahl does not even include a list of his books! A reference to *Boy* or *Going Solo* might not have been a bad idea, even if this is KS 2 orientated. As an introduction to non-fiction or biography it will no doubt find a ready audience and have its uses. Yet it feels rather starry-eyed in tone and formulaic in style even down to the bountiful illustrations. Other titles in the series include *Gandhi*, *Shakespeare* and *Captain Cook*. **DB**

Mehmet the Conqueror

Emma Clark, ill. Laura de la Mare, 1 900251 17 5



Mehmet the Conqueror

History: The Really Interesting Bits

NON-FICTION ★★★

Brian Delf and Richard Platt, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 5619 0, £12.99 hbk



THE GOAL IN SIGHT, 1099
The Crusaders marched south from Antioch to Jerusalem. On 13 July, they launched their assault on the city, and the Muslims who held it.

The Crusaders had huge catapults, which used called saps to smash a long bar up against a crenelated. The resulting force could propel a heavy missile over the city walls.

This is world history as cinema trailer: thirteen epoch making events, from the Ancient Egyptians to the Second World War, each presented on a double page spread, either as a map or three or four linear strips, with the emphasis on war, conquest and revolution (but all relevant to the National Curricula!). As you would expect from Dorling Kindersley, the text, as far as it goes, is accurate and the design is clear, colourful and enticing; although to follow the Hundred Years War on a map of France you must disregard the usual rules of reading from top to bottom and right to left.

The maps are an interesting way of examining a subject but the book as a whole is more of an appetite whetting gift than a library or school text and would be misleading without the support of other information. At the risk of it being a little less 'interesting', it would have been good to have at least some aspects of history that were less bloody. **CB**

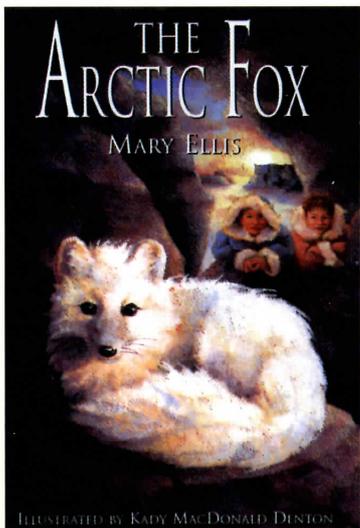
NEW Talent

The Arctic Fox

★★★★

Mary Ellis, ill. Kady MacDonald Denton, Collins, 128pp, 0 00 185675 8, £9.99 hbk

Alex and her explorer father travel to the Arctic to return an Arctic fox to its habitat. Alex makes friends with an Inuit boy, Canny, whose father is thought to have died in the Arctic wastes. However, the Inuit Shaman recognises a link between the whaletooth necklace round the fox's neck and the missing man and hope is rekindled that he may still be alive. Alex, her father and Canny set out to find him. With its Arctic setting into which information about the Inuit way of life and polar exploration is unobtrusively woven, this original and well pitched novel is both an exciting adventure story and a story about a father and son's longing to be reunited. There are some overly



breezy moments (Alex's mother walks out in the first pages and is, it appears, quickly forgotten) but it is a pleasure to find such a talented newcomer to children's books writing for younger readers. **RS**

Cleopatra: Queen of Kings

Abd al-Rahman Azzam, ill. Laura de la Mare, 1 900251 28 0

Razia: Warrior Queen of India

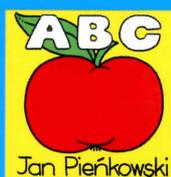
Salman Asif, ill. Kate Montgomery, 1 900251 26 4

NON-FICTION ★★★

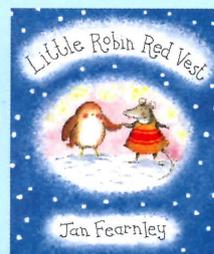
Hood Hood Books 'Heroes from the East', 24pp, £4.50 each pbk



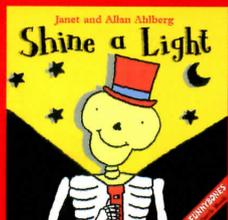
A Dog's LIFE
Sara Fanelli
0 434 80364 2 hb £9.99



ABC
JAN PIENKOWSKI
0 434 80282 4 £3.99



LITTLE ROBIN RED VEST
Jan Fearnley
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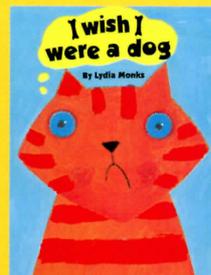


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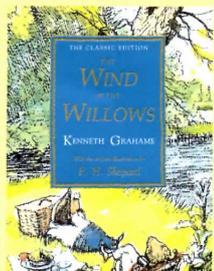
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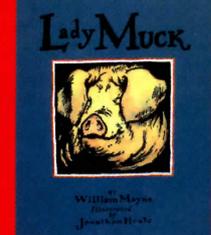


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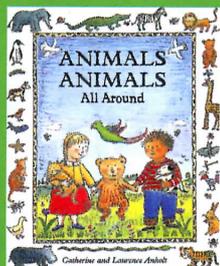


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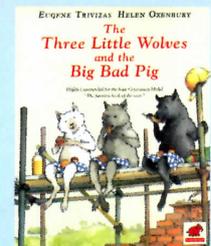
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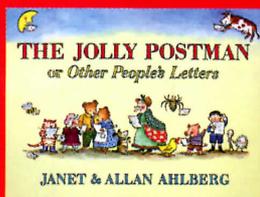
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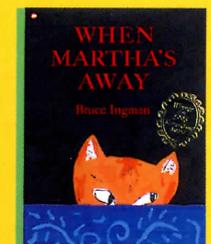


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Marco Polo: A Journey Through China

0 7496 2566 X

Magellan: A Voyage Around the World

0 7496 2565 1

NON-FICTION ★★★

Fiona Macdonald, ill. Mark Bergin, Watts 'Expedition', 32pp, £10.99 each hbk

In what looks like the beginning of a

new series, these two books on explorers use their subjects to explore related topics. Thus, *Magellan* tells you not only about his life and ill-fated voyage, but also about 16th-century ship-building and navigation; and *Marco Polo* looks at Venetian merchants, international trade, and life in the Mongol Empire in the 13th century.

The books are dominated by their format, by the considerations of design and illustration. There are double page spreads with a single headline paragraph on the centre left hand side, a large illustration to the right of that, and then a number of

smaller illustrations in boxes along the top and bottom of the spread, with the majority of the text contained in short paragraphs beneath each illustration; all enclosed by a decorative border.

The text is fragmented and Macdonald does well to hold the information together and link the narrative, particularly as the glossary and index are poor. The visual information is carried entirely by Mark Bergin's illustrations and, because no photographs of documents or artefacts are used, he has to be both historically accurate and able to draw maps, and

occasionally landscape, in the manner of the time. Some of these illustrations are too small to pick out significant detail and many do no more than provide a story board or dramatic visual prompt. *Magellan* inevitably includes a number of interchangeable scenes of ships at sea.

The approach has advantages for junior and lower secondary children who might be intimidated by a continuous text and be attracted to a comic strip style. Both books also have a 'What Happened Next' postscript, which is unusual and welcome. CB

REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary

Norse Myths & Legends

★★★

Philip Ardagh, ill. Stephen May, Belitha Press, 48pp, 1 85561 724 2, £9.99 hbk

Most of this book is devoted to Ardagh's re-telling of seven of the most highly-charged incidents from Norse myth and legend. These are plain and straightforward versions, which convey a good measure of the wild ferocity of the stories; the style and vocabulary are well suited to the readership at whom the enterprise is primarily directed. Additionally, there are four pages of prefatory material which provide brief notes on the different worlds of the Norse universe and on its principal 'gods, giants and dwarfs' (Frigga, 'goddess wife of Odin', is 'the most powerful god in Asgard'). Decorative borders frame the text, which has a full-page, full-colour illustration, fiery and elemental in spirit, for each story. As a basic introduction to its theme this should serve its young readers quite satisfactorily. RD

the face. Needing to win their last two matches against Spurs and the championship chasing Liverpool, City's cause looks hopeless.

As luck would have it, Stanley's mum is a computer scientist who is developing 'cybertelexkinesis', a program which converts neurological impulses into movement. Willpower and computer power are combined to make desire become a reality. Secretly accessing the computer program one night, Stanley creates Lazlo, a genius striker with the combined talents of all the world's great players. His desire for City to stay in the Premiership is so great that by a risky process of mental and electronic energy and by twisting a magic red stud on his boot, Stanley actually becomes Lazlo and gets into the City team, making an astonishing debut and becoming an instant hero.

When the magic stud breaks off the dream turns to nightmare as eleven-year-Stanley is trapped in the adult body of Lazlo. If that was not enough, his football mad teacher Miss Tysoe has a crush on him! (shades of Tom Hanks in the film *Big* here). Eventually Stanley returns to his own body, bringing his estranged parents back together again, and scores the winning goal in the local district primary schools cup final.

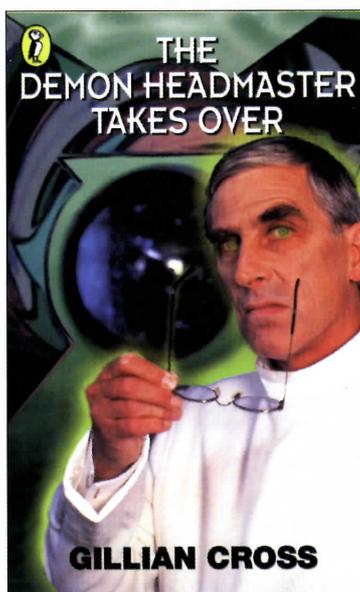
Blacker has written a book that will get reluctant but reasonably able readers into reading. Short chapters and a humorous, action packed plot will sustain the interest. The lack of illustration may be a disappointment to some readers but the high quality writing more than compensates for this. *Blacker* will be a huge hit with Upper Junior children as Nick Hornby has been with adults with *Fever Pitch*. AK

The Demon Headmaster Takes Over

★★★★★

Gillian Cross, ill. Maureen Bradley, Puffin, 176pp, 0 14 130024 8, £3.99 pbk

Cross's prize winning successes with *Wolf* and *The Great Elephant Chase* have been eclipsed by her 'Demon Headmaster' series, subsequently adapted for television by Helen Cresswell. In this fifth book the Demon Headmaster miraculously returns, driven by his lust for power and total world knowledge, having survived being swallowed by the Evolution Accelerator - not a pleasant experience. This time he wants control of the Hyperbrain, a



world wide thinking computer network of such advanced Artificial Intelligence that it makes the internet look like a tin can and string telephone system.

Dinah and the juvenile SPLAT gang have to be at their sharpest to prevent the Demon Headmaster's development, through the Hyperbrain, of Direct Brain Access. After all, as a clone of the original Headmaster, all he needs to secure total world domination is to discover his own name. Rumpelstiltskin-like, he is defeated in this dramatic, fast moving and very readable thriller, crafted in typical Cross style, with an ending that sets the scene perfectly for the sixth book. There are occasional half page illustrations.

Despite the Demon Headmaster's TV success, there are junior children who prefer the books and actually read them *before* comparing them with the TV adaptation. AK

Bad Cats Bad

POETRY ★★★

Roger McGough, ill. Lydia Monks, Puffin, 112pp, 0 14 038391 3, £3.99 pbk

This bumper collection contains no new departures, unless you count the joyously jaded assaults on targets as various as pianists - 'Hear the pianists practising their scales/ Alongside which all noise pollution pales' - and swans - 'I speak not in jest/ For there's no denying/ That swans are at their best/ On stage, when dying'. In fact, there is much

here that he has done before and, in some cases, better.

But there is still plenty to enjoy for children of junior and lower secondary age from a poet of this calibre. His observation is as sharp as ever, 'I polish my grandfather's trousers/ (At the knees where he likes them to shine)'; his word play as inventive, 'food prices can be gastronomic'; and his notions as barmy, 'Went to the cinema/ Friday./ Tried to leave before/ the end./ Couldn't get out./ It was a cling film.'

Occasionally, too, that disturbing, dark McGough poem that taps into a deeper emotional vein: 'From year to year I hear it grow/ the unrelenting list of GO./ That bossy word that rhymes with NO/ Still can hurt. The going pains./ Go/ Go now/ Why don't you just go.' CB

In the Shadow of the Gun

112pp, 0 86121 700 4

Kirsten

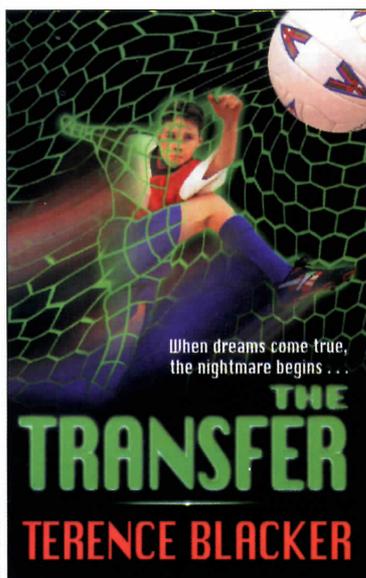
144pp, 0 86121 914 7

★★★

Elsbeth Cameron, Blackwater Press, £3.99 each pbk

Both of these novels take as their starting point the arrival in Scotland of a young teenager from Northern Ireland, forced to leave there because of experiences in the current 'troubles'. For *Shaun*, in *In the Shadow of the Gun*, it is to be a stay of six weeks with his cousins, during which time he learns something of the shared history of his new and former environments and of how that history 'seems one long battle': the overall effect of the visit is that he is sufficiently strengthened by it to return to Ulster able to 'cope', as the book's final sentence assures us. By contrast, for *Kirsten* in Cameron's second novel, the initial experiences she undergoes in her adopted country merely mark the beginning of what will be a permanent stay: for her too, though, this has been strengthening and will equip her to face her new future with more maturity and ease.

Summarised in these terms, both books are useful additions to the already large stock of material in which young protagonists face dramatic change and learn to live through it, with the extra interest here of an insidiously dark backcloth against which new lives have to be created. Cameron, however, is not a particularly subtle writer and the



The Transfer

★★★★★

Terence Blacker, Macmillan, 240pp, 0 333 68970 4, £9.99 hbk, 0 330 35173 7, £3.99 pbk

Written by a football fanatic for football fanatics, this comic fantasy really hits the target. Stanley Peterson, a Year 6 football nut, suffers as his beloved City stare relegation in

plotting is often heavy handed and pedestrian: we are told so much that there is very little left for us to infer. Regrettably, both books show signs of hasty editing, the first of them even managing to include a reference to 'a growing consciousness of the past' on its back cover. RD

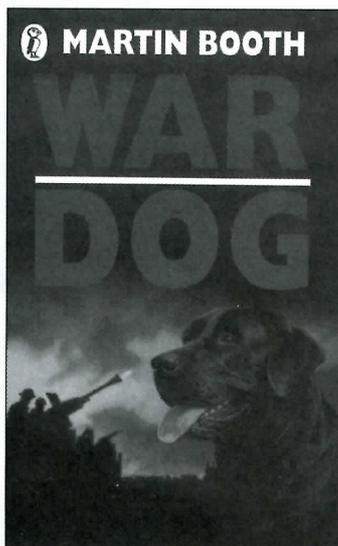
Frozen Out

★★★

Carlo Gébler, Mammoth, 256pp, 0 7497 2874 4, £4.99 pbk

Novelists who effectively tackle the 'Ulster troubles' theme in their writing for children succeed in combining insights into the everyday business of growing up with a sympathetic understanding of the special circumstances affecting the young in Northern Ireland. Gébler's attempt to do this, in a story which sees ten-year-old Phoebe and her family move from Kensington to Co. Fermanagh, concentrates on Phoebe's growing understanding of the nature of friendship and of the way it can be shaken by betrayal. On this level the novel works reasonably well most of the time and there are many shrewd (and often humorous) insights into pre-teenage dreams and disillusionments. But its appeal is diminished by a cast of totally unconvincing adult characters and, even more, by dialogue which never catches the idiosyncratic spirit of its setting. The place may indeed, as Phoebe's father comments, be 'stuck in a timewarp circa nineteen fifty': but its complexities are greater than Gébler allows. RD

her. However, she also wants to impose her idea of order on others. The aunts are wise enough and sufficiently loving to understand, but not so her school mates whose responses are seen, revealingly, through Sarah's eyes. Set against the background of her father's impending wedding and the aunts' move to a cottage in the country, Sarah struggles to maintain her preconceptions and prejudices. As the Australian summer unfolds we see how Sarah's viewpoint gradually shifts to one of realisation that the gifts of love and friendship offered by her aunts and by Corrie, the girl next door, are worth more than the hope of approval from people as self-centred as her father and Piriell. VC



War Dog

★★★★

Martin Booth, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 037860 X, £4.99 pbk

This title is a combination of an affectionate animal story (trustworthy, intelligent, well-trained and wonderfully loyal dog) and a war story (battles in France and Italy with bombs and bullets flying) and has all the ingredients to engage a great many readers of both sexes. Jet starts life as a poacher's dog, alert to every sound and command of her master. When he is sent to prison, she is requisitioned by the Army. Her talents are immediately recognised and she performs heroics in France, is wounded at Dunkirk and returns to this country to rescue bomb victims, before being sent into battle again where she is reunited with her master, rescuing him after he has been badly wounded. AJ

Nightjohn

★★★★★

80pp, 0 330 33604 5

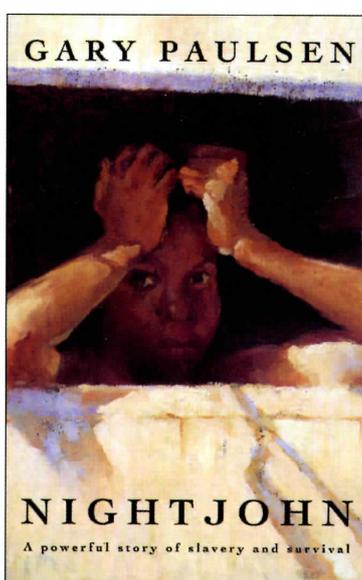
Sarny

★★★★★

224pp, 0 330 35151 6

Gary Paulsen, Macmillan, £3.99 each pbk

We first meet Sarny as a twelve-year-old slave girl on a tyrannically run Louisiana plantation. She becomes fascinated by Nightjohn when he is brought shackled, scarred and defiant to work alongside her comrades. When he reveals a secret mission to spread the forbidden skills of literacy amongst the slaves, Sarny



is immediately pulled into a web of enticing possibilities. Then the discovery of Nightjohn's crusade leads to a harrowing confrontation with the plantation owner. In the sequel we meet Sarny as a ninety-four-year-old, recalling her life as a young widow whose husband has been worked to death. She takes us back to the closing stages of the Civil War, when one of the plantation owner's last acts before Nemesis arrives in the form of a yankee bayonet thrust is to sell Sarny's two children. Much of the rest of the memoir concerns Sarny's remorseless search for her lost children, a grim trudge through burning plantations and along roads strewn with the dead and dying.

In both of these stories, compellingly told in Sarny's dialect, the atrocities inflicted by slavery and warfare are depicted with uncompromising clarity. But the books are also full of tenderness, a yearning for freedom, and a life where fulfilment is possible for everybody. The historical context of Sarny's life is vividly realised, and *Nightjohn* includes a postscript reminding the reader of the role of slavery in the building of America. GH

The Puffin Book of Classic Verse

POETRY

★★★

Edited by Raymond Wilson, ill. Diz Wallis, Puffin, 384pp, 0 14 036816 7, £6.99 pbk

Classic verse in a classic restrained Puffin package, each section introduced by an oval black and white illustration by Wallis, with a hint of Ardiszone.

This is English language verse; so Americans, like Dickinson and Whitman, are included: and it is not verse written for children, although De la Mare and Causley appear.

Wilson does all you might expect in an anthology that aims to introduce children to the heritage of English verse from Chaucer to Patten. Most of the poems could be read and understood by top juniors and lower secondary children. The poets and titles that spring quickest to mind are there (even a fragment of 'The Ancient Mariner'). And there are some interesting selections, like Dorothy Parker's 'One Perfect Rose'.

Wilson is a discriminating editor whose choices convey the passion, delight and wit of English verse. But it

is likely that the format will attract only the most discerning children: and the poems will, as in the past, have to be introduced by teachers. It is disappointing, too, to find poets from the Commonwealth poorly represented. CB

Egyptian Mummies – a Pop-up Book

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Milbry Polk, ill. Roger Stewart, Bloomsbury, 10pp, 0 7475 3592 2, £12.99 hbk novelty

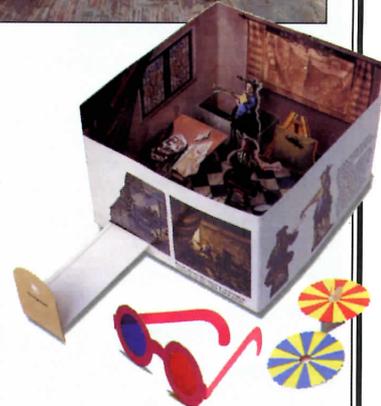
Mummies were preserved very much in the same way as 'home cured' bacon is – after removal of internal organs (the brain being hooked out via the nose). They were then bandaged, casketed, sarcophagized and put in a pyramid. Books about mummification and its significance and processes are still rare and this rarity adds more to the value of this volume than does its pop-up dimension. The text is necessarily sparse to make room for the special effects, but it is informative. I would have scrapped all the paper engineering, which I find unconvincing, imprecise and unlikely to last long, for more detail. TP

The Ultimate 3-D Pop-Up Art Book

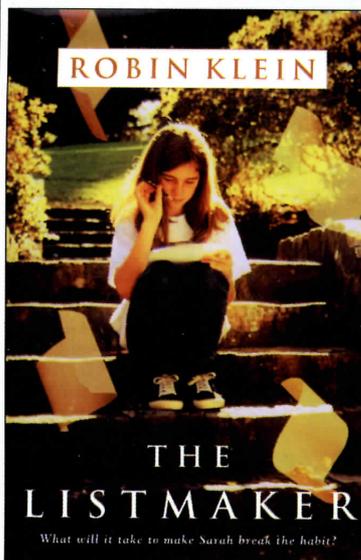
NON-FICTION

★★★★★

Ron Van der Meer and Frank Whitford, Dorling Kindersley, 16pp + 16pp activity book, 0 7513 5733 2, £15.99 hbk novelty



Here is a crash course in some easily identified aspects of pictorial art. Although some bits of it do pop up, the meat of the book is in the flat as it leads us through technique and style, 'real' and illusory painting, light, colour and movement, composition and narrative and abstract pictures. The compilers have been highly selective (who would not be?) in their choice of the '60 great masterpieces' through which we are invited to 'discover art'; they include some thoroughly familiar sampling as well as a delightful element of surprise – eg a D-I-Y Calder-style mobile whose assembly exposes the full intricacy of Tinguely's 'Gismo'. This collection is



The Listmaker

★★★★★

Robin Klein, Viking, 232pp, 0 670 87175 3, £7.99 pbk

When Sarah (12) is not at boarding school she lives with her two happy go-lucky aunts. For her this is, however, an inadequate prelude to the wonderful times that are sure to come when her glamorous, globe-trotting father and his beautiful girlfriend Piriell marry and she moves in with them.

The narrative is constructed around Sarah's compulsive list making through which she attempts, by controlling circumstances, to avoid the uncertainty and disappointment created by her father who regularly fails to honour his commitments to

too full of fugitive parts for library use and perhaps too wacky for readers who always know when they last saw their father (one of the featured paintings), but there is plenty for active households to enjoy discovering. Art Departments might find it (if the concept is not too deadening) useful. TP

Inside Story: Extraordinary Buildings Unfolded

NON-FICTION ★★

Nicola Baxter, ill. Luigi Galante and Simone Boni, Watts, 32pp, 0 7496 2619 4, £12.99 hbk novelty

The discipline of archaeology succeeds for the same reason as 'through the keyhole' TV shows – people fashion their surroundings to reflect their selves and whereas artifacts per se may be of slight interest, speculation about their makers and users fascinates endlessly. So a book showing us – as this one does – expansive detail of other peoples' houses has a head start.

Here we have the fronts of seven buildings – each a symptom of some stage of civilisation – removed to show what goes on inside. Gatefolds feature a Norman castle, a Louis XIV château and a New York apartment block (1958) and double spreads reveal a Victorian London house, an American plantation house (1797), a 17th-century Japanese country palace and a 15th-century Moorish palace in Spain. The devil is in the detail as we observe myriad activities in the many rooms – from dungeon-languishing in the Norman basement to the launderette in subterranean New York. Explanatory texts follow each display and help to instil some character into the somewhat lifeless figures that teem through the pictures each of which repays close study of jigsaw intensity. In fact a set of jigsaws might have constituted a better format for this lot than a bound volume, for although the content illustrates and informs, I find it fails to inspire. TP

Stephen Biesty's Incredible Everything

NON-FICTION ★★★

Richard Platt, ill. Stephen Biesty, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 5616 6, £12.99 hbk

This is the latest in a series of large format books from illustrator Biesty, including the best-selling *Incredible Cross-sections* and the brilliant *Cross-sections Man o' War*. The concept for this book is 'how is it made?', and Biesty's illustrations are harnessed to show the processes involved in making everything from soap to false teeth. It is a nice idea and, as we have come to expect from Biesty, the artwork is consistently brilliant, with all his normal superb eye for detail. It is one of those books that encourages you to pore for ages over every intricacy and discover all kinds of intriguing minutiae about colour matching of false teeth or proving doughnuts. This book is fascinating, informative and attractive – and yet it does not quite achieve the success of Biesty's earlier books. The problem seems to be partly one of presentation. In many

places the quirky humour and human touch that was one of the joys of the previous books (in both the illustrations and Platt's text) seems to have been crowded out, leaving something rather bland and uninformative. This is particularly a problem on the spreads that cover a whole variety of topics. There is also a certain lack of consistency. There are some topics that show a wealth of detail that is clearly the fruit of in-depth research, while others are treated rather cursorily. That said, this is still a wonderful book, and just the big pictures such as Saturn V and the newspaper press make this book worth having. JF

Microlife

NON-FICTION ★★★

David Burnie, Dorling Kindersley 'Inside Guides', 48pp, 0 7513 5595 X, £8.99 hbk

Dorling Kindersley's 'Inside Guides' series is based on photographs of high-quality specially made models. The idea is to show things that cannot be normally photographed, with the same photographic clarity that their 'Eyewitness' series has. *Microlife* focuses on microscopic life – everything from bacteria to bedbugs. The models are often brilliantly made – and simply seeing such things as a stunning model of a microscopic dust mite eating a flake of dead skin blown up 10cm across is quite startling. Looking at a 3D model of an itch mite burrowing its way through skin is enough to make you shudder. The book is attractively and stylishly presented, and Burnie's text is clear and informative. Yet there is something faintly incongruous about the presentation of all these minute dwellers in life's dirt almost as pristine *objets d'arts*. Divorced from their environment, these creatures lose at least some of their intrinsic fascination. The presentation of almost all text as brief annotations means the information is rather bitty and lacking in context. There is presumably some logic to the choice of microbes, but a spread at the beginning reusing the same models does not really draw them together or show how each fits into the real world. This is a beautiful book to look at, and the subject is fascinating, but the design concept is a little too overpowering. JF

The World of Art

NON-FICTION ★★★

Jacqueline Dineen and Nicola Barber, Evans, 96pp, 0 237 51701 9, £14.99 hbk

For 'Art' read 'Western Art' for, apart from a section on art in the ancient world, a nod to Japan and a look at world crafts the book concentrates largely on the great and the good of Europe and the US. In 96 pages it's bound to be something of a quick tour but there is an interesting section on materials and methods, the development of the different styles is succinctly explained and it's good to see photography included. There is also a useful glossary of artists and a shorter one of art terms.

There are plenty of high quality illustrations but constraints of space mean that many are quite small and so lose much of their power and impact. SR



LOOK AT WHAT CHILDREN ARE SAYING AND...

80% SAY DREAMS CAN COME TRUE

"I'd like dreams to mean something ... if there was somebody that you could say to 'what does it mean?' "

**73% SAY SOME HOUSES
HAVE GHOSTS IN THEM**

"I think you can feel ghosts because some people say, 'I felt there was someone there'."

**75% SAY SCIENCE CAN'T
EXPLAIN EVERYTHING**

"Science can't explain human feelings..."

**59% SAY THAT SOME
PEOPLE CAN READ MINDS**

"I think everyone has got some sort of power...everyone has but some have more than others."

**57% SAY THAT ANIMALS
UNDERSTAND HOW WE FEEL**

"I used to have a cat and when I was upset and crying, it would come and sit on my lap".

Childwise Ltd. December 1997



Nuclear Power**NON-FICTION** ★★★

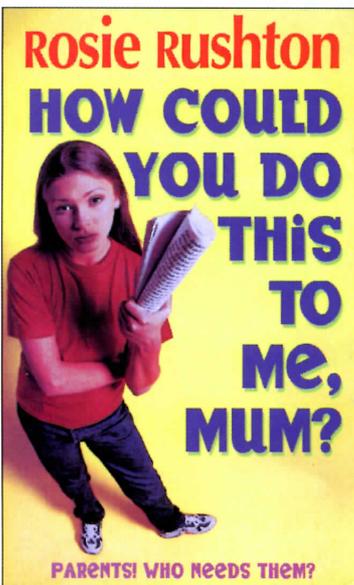
Felix Pirani, ill. Christine Roche, Hodder 'What's the Big Idea?', 128pp, 0 340 69339 8, £3.99 pbk

I have yet to be convinced that a detailed understanding of atomic structure and nuclear physics is

necessary to the appreciation of the benefits and drawbacks of reliance upon a nuclear power industry, so Pirani's well-meant second chapter, which attempts to provide that understanding, turns me right off and perhaps obscures the clarity of the rest of his objective study of the nuclear power dilemma. This provides a neat exposition of growing global energy needs in the face of

dwindling resources, the history of nuclear power development on military and domestic fronts, and – well stressed – the need for and difficulties of its responsible stewardship. Pirani concludes that 'The answer is to have more nuclear power and manage it properly.' As our prevailing winds here come straight from Chapelcross I cannot but endorse the second part of this

statement, but I have yet to be convinced that proper management will ever be as safe and easy as he makes it sound. However – and especially as his consideration of alternative (i.e. natural) energy strategies is but sketchy – Pirani's clearly expressed arguments are certainly informative and may convince others. TP

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary**How Could You Do This To Me, Mum?**

★★★★

Rosie Rushton, Puffin, 176pp, 0 14 038342 5, £3.99 pbk

This is the third book in the cheerfully convincing Leehampton trilogy and it recreates the format of five teenagers preoccupied with their problem parents. Rushton's wealth of journalistic experience and shrewd observations provide a strong factual fabric for credible storylines. The problems encountered by the Leehampton characters will be familiar to most adolescents: divorce, late pregnancy, racism, over-protectiveness.

The narrative moves through an entertaining but reassuring rhythm of problem, resolution, change and support, providing hope for those readers convinced that their problems are both unique and insoluble. Thus readers will be only briefly unsettled as characters work their way to change and renewal.

This book is funny, sharply observed and will undoubtedly be immensely popular with emotionally beleaguered adolescents. VR

Fire, Bed and Bone

★★★★★

Henrietta Branford, Walker, 128pp, 0 7445 4150 6, £8.99 hbk

Henrietta Branford unforgettably captured Viking history in *The Fated Sky*, which was shortlisted for the Guardian Children's Fiction Award. *Fire, Bed and Bone* gives an equally vivid insight into life during the Peasants Revolt of 1381, ambitiously recording events through the eyes of

a family dog. This device neatly sidesteps the trap of sentimentality since events are observed from within the narrow sphere of the dog's needs and preoccupations. The clarity of the narrative is generated by this dispassionate perspective as the cruelties perpetrated during the Revolt are catalogued through the ingenuous bewilderment of the dog who sees her family suffering without understanding the reasons.

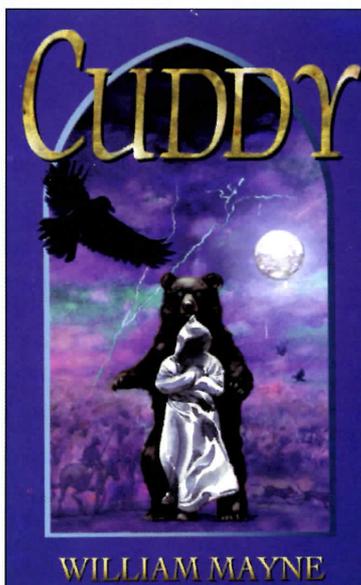
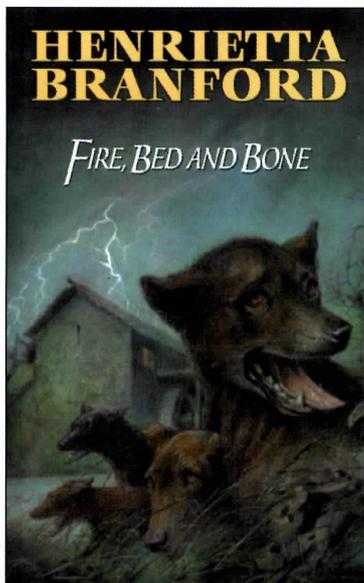
The narrative's reliance on senses less well developed in humans enables Branford to build tension as the King's men close in stealthily on the community. This is a fine book for Years 7 and 8: useful, entertaining; intelligent – and at a price which compares favourably with paperback originals. VR

Cuddy

★★★★

William Mayne, Red Fox, 208pp, 0 09 937121 9, £3.50 pbk

The bell Ange hears is the first sign that St Cuthbert – Cuddy – has unfinished business to be dealt with by the children of the present. Their quest, to assemble all his talismen and finally return him to his island, is the basis of an exciting story but what is remarkable about the book is the fluency of the shifting between times and meanings. Mayne's words create a continually shifting surface which, like the palimpsest of the opening, has past and present, real and imagined, overlaying each other. Bicycles emerge out of 'donkeys bred down to skin and bone' and monsters merge into 'feathered helicopters'. Cuddy, delicately drawn, exudes a power of goodness which tames and heals the wild Northmen of the past and the wild Jude of the present



(abused like Anne Fine's *Tulip in the Tulip Touch*) within a narrative which mixes the everyday and the extraordinary with warmth, wit and wisdom. AJ

Under Different Stars

★★★

Chloë Rayban, Mammoth 'Contents', 128pp, 0 7497 3333 0, £4.50 pbk

First year university student Julia meets Polish Australian Zig, when he enters into a bet to get her 'ice-maiden' attention and win £5. A relationship develops only so far, abruptly foreshortened by Julia's imminent trip to Eastern Australia to join her boyfriend and thence home to England.

A keen tension and suspense is created throughout, mainly by Zig's idiosyncratic and sometimes downright mysterious behaviour. Yet he is always fascinating and unpredictable, obviously falling for the 'ice-maiden', despite what he protests in his share of the split narrative.

A short, very readable love story, worth promoting. DB

Midnight Fair

★★★★★

William Mayne, Hodder Signature, 208pp, 0 340 70434 9, £9.99 hbk

William Mayne is an astonishing writer and this is a wonderful book, a story of love, not lurve, of trying to make sense of self and others and – language. Victoria, short-sighted, in a new place and unsure of so many relationships, writes her diary for this one long day, with continual punning

misspellings so that even words seemed to have moved house. What for her father is 'veridical' is for her 'very dicule – a different reality'. Alongside her story there is Paul's, the shy local boy who has fallen in love with Victoria. To talk with her means losing his Bristol accent, leaving him with 'clean lips' but 'more was taken away than was given'. At the end of a long day of losing and finding, Victoria and Paul are together at the Midnight Fair and she has thrown away her glasses and diary having written: 'I am a new snake, casting off my old eyescales. I can see in and out better. It all adds up, not like mock turtle soup. Things actually happen in a muddle, but all at once you get out of the spaghet-me-knot, and here I am.' AJ

Drug Abuse?

Emma Houghton, 0 7496 2576 7

A Green World?

Nicola Baird, 0 7496 2579 1

NON-FICTION ★★★

Watts 'Viewpoints', 32pp, £10.99 each hbk

Here are two more 'Viewpoints' – collected quotations and pictures sorted into subject-based double spreads as an opinion-forming exercise for the reader. This approach presents a wide variety of views upon inter-related topics but often ends up – as it does here – with each book singing, in Kenny Wheeler's words 'Everyone's song but my own'.

Green World? is about sustainable energy versus economic climate and leads us to consider whether we can ever rationalise the two. The question mark here is properly used – which it certainly is not in **Drug Abuse?** In this less objective and more informative study we are left in no doubt that abuse is abuse, no question about it.

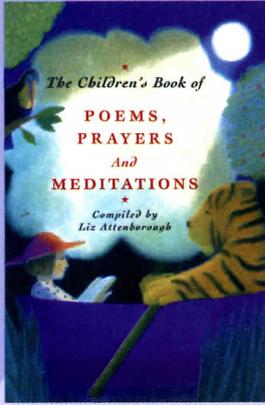
I did not think much of the last titles in the 'Viewpoints' that I reviewed – pulling together soundbites from diverse sources to allow pick 'n' mix opinion-generation is all very well provided the bits are hung on a firm and informative skeleton. Whereas the previous examples seemed entirely spineless, these two appear to be a lot better, with improved illustrational relevance.

Could it be something we said? TP

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

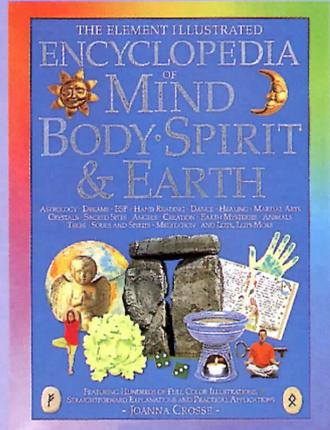
Voices in the Park (see page 22)

Angel and the Box of Time (see page 22)



ISBN | 901881 85 7

The Children's Book of Poems, Prayers and Meditations, Compiled by Liz Attenborough £12.99 OCTOBER 1998



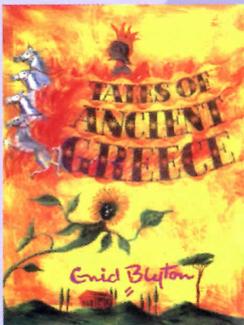
ISBN | 901881 10 5

The Element Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mind, Body, Spirit and Earth, Joanna Crosse £14.99 APRIL 1998

... SEE A BIGGER PICTURE

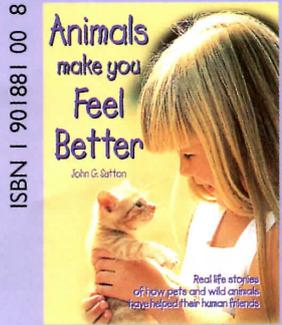


ELEMENT CHILDREN'S BOOKS



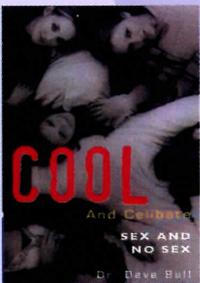
ISBN | 901881 67 9

Tales from Ancient Greece, Enid Blyton £3.99 AUGUST 1998



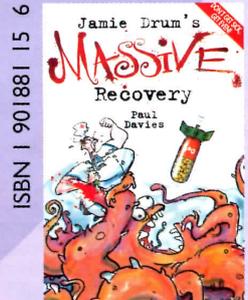
ISBN | 901881 00 8

Animals Make You Feel Better, John G. Sutton £3.99 APRIL 1998



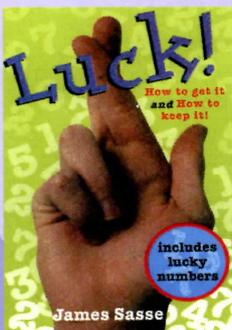
ISBN | 901881 17 2

Cool and Celibate, Dr. Dave Bull £3.99 JULY 1998



ISBN | 901881 15 6

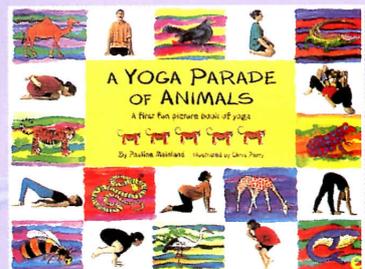
Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery, Paul Davies £4.99 MAY 1998



ISBN | 901881 12 1

Luck!, James Sasse £3.99 JULY 1998

ISBN | 901881 65 2



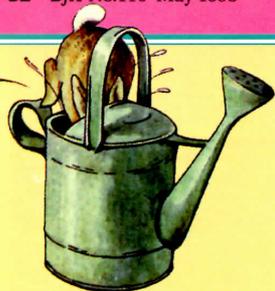
A Yoga Parade of Animals, Pauline Mainland £9.99 JUNE

Distributed by Penguin Books Ltd

CLASSICS IN SHORT No.9

Helen Levene

*Furry ears, a blue jacket and camomile tea?
No, not Peter Mandelson but ...*

**First published:**

1902 by Frederick Warne

Written by:

Beatrix Potter

Genre:

Anthropomorphic tale for young children

Famous first page:

'Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and their names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail and Peter ...'

Recall the story?

Despite a strong warning from his mother not to go into Mr McGregor's garden (Father has been put into a pie by Mrs McGregor), naughty Peter Rabbit cannot resist the temptation. After eating his fill of lettuces, French beans and radishes, Peter has a very narrow escape when he is chased all over the garden by the infuriated Mr McGregor. Peter Rabbit is not feeling terribly well when he arrives home, exhausted, without his new blue jacket and his shoes. So Mrs Rabbit puts him to bed with a dose of camomile tea, while his sisters ('who were good little bunnies') tuck into fresh bread, milk and blackberries for supper.

Peter Rabbit's claim to fame:

Undoubtedly the best known rabbit in the world. Millions upon millions of copies of his book have been sold world-wide, and in more than 25 different languages. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and Potter's 22 other Tales (including *Benjamin Bunny*, in which Peter Rabbit returns to the garden, encouraged by his even bolder and more daring cousin, Benjamin) have entertained generations of children for almost a century, and look set to continue into the next.

The history of Peter Rabbit:

First written in 1893 as an illustrated letter to her former governess's young son, the story was based on Beatrix's own pet rabbit, Peter Piper, which she studied and drew in meticulous detail. A few years later Beatrix tried to find a publisher for her story, but after several refusals she had her book printed privately and gave it to family and friends, selling the rest at a halfpenny a copy. It was an instant success and the 250 copies she produced were quickly sold. Frederick Warne, one of the publishers who had shown an earlier interest in Peter Rabbit but had declined because Beatrix would not agree to colour illustrations (she felt it would make the book too expensive for children), approached her again. After agreeing to the use of colour, Beatrix decided to let Warne take over the publishing. They printed 8,000 copies and sold out immediately. They have been reprinting the title ever since.

Beatrix was pleased with the way Frederick Warne handled Peter Rabbit and she offered them more of her stories. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* became the first of 23 little books, known collectively as the Peter Rabbit books. Beatrix was always very involved in the design and production processes, keeping a sharp eye on the position of the text in relation to the illustrations. The format was important to her too; that the books should be small, for small hands. The distinctive format for the original titles, with their white binding and jackets, still remains the same today. In the early 1990s, after Penguin Books bought Frederick Warne, the first Puffin paperback editions appeared, alongside the originals, reproducing the classic illustrations, text and layout in larger formats.

Why is Peter Rabbit still so popular?

Several factors combine to make Peter Rabbit the world's favourite Rabbit. His appeal lies in his simplicity – a real-life, natural-looking rabbit, personified only by his soft blue jacket and shoes. He is not over-humanized, and remains very much a 'real' rabbit, retaining his rabbitiness and characteristics – lively, quick and bright-eyed. His engaging personality – defiant, rebellious and full of spirit – are qualities small children love and identify with. He has enormous appeal for all ages.

THE TALE OF PETER RABBIT



BEATRIX POTTER

THE ORIGINAL AND AUTHORIZED EDITION

New colour reproductions

F. WARNE & CO

Other classic qualities:

Beatrix Potter had the imagination and the artistic and literary skills to create a microcosmic world within the countryside into which the reader is allowed to venture. This world is one of small, endearing countryside animals, portrayed in human terms but maintaining the natural habits of their species; it becomes a metaphor for the child reader's own exploration of the physical world. Its dangers are not evaded – Peter's father, after all, ended up in a pie.

The language in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and Potter's other stories is simple and direct, but not at all pedestrian. The words used are precisely chosen for meaning, and for sound, and within each story there is pace, tension, drama – an element of danger – and underlying humour. The stories lend themselves well to being read aloud. The details of domestic and social life are conveyed with a distinctive irony via a range of social types and personalities in the guise of animals.

The illustrations, drawn from real life, are delicate watercolours of the English countryside. They are full of detail and relate closely to the text at all times. The Peter Rabbit books have a timeless quality and an enduring appeal, earning them the well-deserved status of classic books for children.

Who was Beatrix Potter?

Helen Beatrix Potter was born in 1866 in London to wealthy, middle-class parents. Her father, a barrister, and her mother



were both accomplished artists, and even as a young child Beatrix displayed signs of having inherited her parents' talents. Her childhood was a rather solitary, typically Victorian one, with only a governess for company. She occupied her time, outside lessons, sketching and studying wildlife. Every summer the family took their holiday in Scotland which gave Beatrix and her younger brother the freedom to explore and sketch the countryside. Over the years, Beatrix became interested in natural history, and produced a fascinating study of lichen and fungi. Whilst in London she began researching and recording a discovery she had made on the germination of spores, drawing her findings in scientifically accurate detail, but the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew were unconvinced by her theory.

Beatrix decided to concentrate on her other illustrative work and had her first commercial success when she sold some rabbit drawings as Christmas cards. In 1902 her first story, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, was published by Frederick Warne, which heralded the start of a series of 'little books' for young children. By 1905 Frederick Warne had published six of her books, and with the money she earned from their sales she bought a farm in the Lake District, an area she had visited with her family at the age of 16. In the same year, her editor, Norman Warne, proposed marriage which she accepted despite her parents' strong disapproval (he was considered beneath her status). Sadly Norman died just four weeks later. Beatrix continued to live and work at Hill Top Farm, often featuring the surrounding landscape in her books, and she bought more land nearby. At the age of 47 she married her solicitor, William Heelis.

Beatrix was a conservationist and she worked closely with the National Trust, helping them to acquire and preserve farmlands. She died in 1943, leaving her acres of land to the Trust. Since her death, many exhibitions of her watercolours have taken place in the major cities of the world, acknowledging Beatrix Potter, not only as the storytelling creator of the Peter Rabbit books, but as an accomplished artist in her own right. There have been several books published about her interesting and varied life, including *Beatrix Potter: Artist, Storyteller and Countrywoman* by Judy Taylor, published by Frederick Warne.

The commercial success of the century?

Undoubtedly, Beatrix Potter was way ahead of her time. She showed commercial initiative very early on in her writing career by producing and patenting a Peter Rabbit doll. Other items followed which led to the enormously successful international licensing industry of today. From gift wrap to wallpaper, plastic cups to fine bone china, Peter Rabbit's instantly recognisable form can be found adorning more and more items, reaching more and more people. There is a plethora of high quality activity and novelty books, baby books, miniature books, anthologies, audio books, giftsets, collections, CD-Roms, published by Penguin Books and Frederick Warne, and a video, *The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends* (animation).

And, taking him into the 21st century, Peter Rabbit even has his own website: www.peterrabbit.com.

Is P.R. P.C.?

It is not Peter's fault that his author gave him the starring role, full of adventure and daring, rather than to one of his goody-goody sisters. Although Peter has all the fun, he does have to pay the price with a dose of camomile! ■

The Tale of Peter Rabbit is available in various editions, including Frederick Warne.

Helen Levene works in publishing.