

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

*the children's book magazine*

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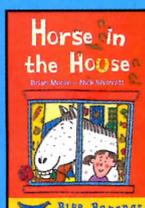


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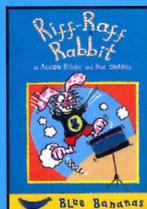
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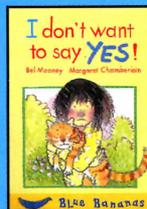
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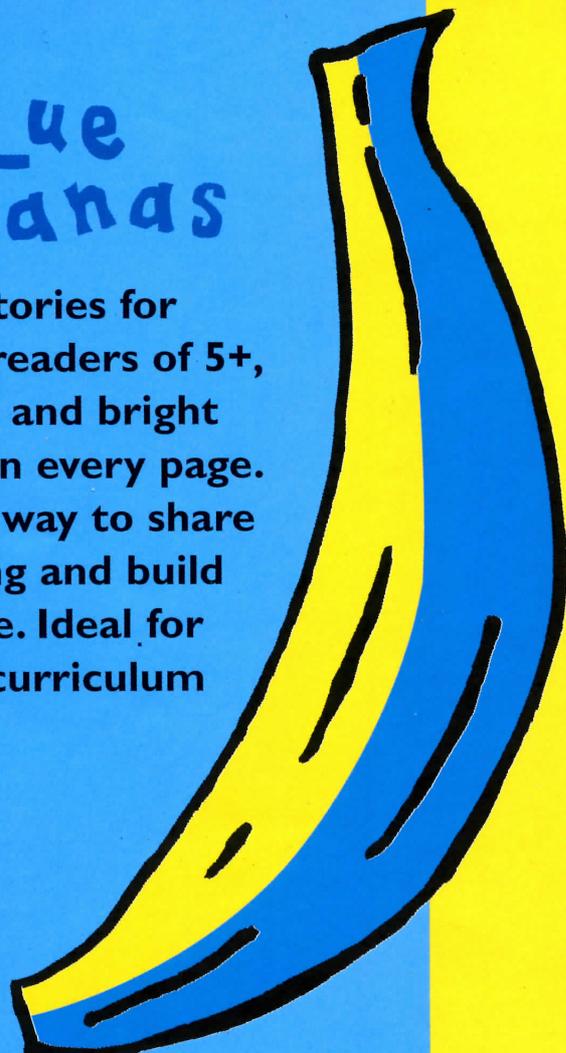
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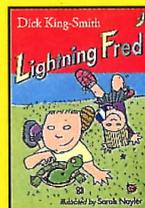


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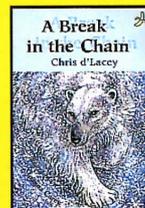


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# EDITORIAL

Published in 1857, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, a novel about Rugby School, has a famous bully, Flashman, who tyrannizes the younger boys. Eventually Tom, and his friend East, come to blows with Flashman with the result that he 'never laid a finger on either of them again'. The novel contains many other instances of bullying. Tom advises a new boy, Arthur, on how best to protect himself from it: 'You must answer straight up when the fellows speak to you and don't be afraid. If you're afraid, you'll get bullied. And don't say you can sing and don't you ever talk about home, or your mother or sisters ... or they'll call you home-sick, or mamma's darling, or some such stuff.'

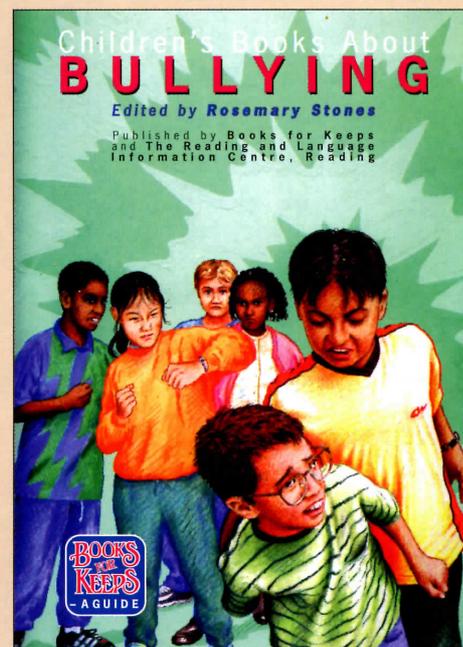
Plus ça change ... In 1996 Childline (the children's helpline) researchers conducted a survey of bullying in schools and found that 'bullying in schools is commonplace, even in schools with anti-bullying policies in place: 64% of primary school children and 45% of secondary children (38% of boys and 52% of girls) said they had been bullied at some point in their schools. Half (50%) of the primary school children and more than one in four (27%) of the secondary children responding said they had been bullied in the last year.'

For some children bullying can be a shortlived, if unpleasant incident; for others it can be a longterm nightmare of persecution which impacts profoundly on the child's ability to trust and to form relationships in later life. Children who bully also need help to find other ways to cope with the painful feelings that they project in others.

In the last few years, children's writers have been responding to the bullying problem creatively with a wealth of titles for children of all ages on the theme of bullying. Using children's books with bullying as a theme is a 'safe' and distanced way of approaching the issue of bullying and some schools have begun using books as part of their anti-bullying strategy.



Rosemary Stones



In October BfK will be publishing a new guide, *Children's Books About Bullying*. This extensively annotated bibliography – the first of its kind – lists the books (fiction, non-fiction, poetry and picture books) alongside articles on bullying and ideas for using the books in schools.

There has been an unprecedented level of interest in this forthcoming *Books for Keeps* Guide which is published in conjunction with the Reading and Language Centre, the University of Reading. Please see the leaflet with this magazine for ordering details, or telephone *Books for Keeps* on 0181 852 4953.

### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE INCREASE

The UK subscription to *Books for Keeps* is to be increased from September 1998 to £18.00 per annum. The overseas rates remain the same.

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## CoverStory

This issue's cover is from Nicola Bayley's latest title, *The Necessary Cat* (© Nicola Bayley 1998). Nicola Bayley is interviewed by Joanna Carey on page 12. Thanks to Walker Books for their help in producing this September cover.

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# non-fiction in the literacy hour

Children's informational reading and writing is energised by strong and interesting contexts. **Margaret Mallett** suggests criteria for choosing non-fiction and looks both at links across the curriculum and the different parts of the Literacy Hour. She also considers how teachers can stick to the Literacy Hour guidelines and still help children enjoy the best non-fiction books and resources.

In the last few years there has been new interest in children and the reading of non-fiction after a long period of relative neglect. One outcome has been a huge burgeoning of reference material in print and on CD-ROM, information books on every possible topic and multi-media packages of videotapes, charts and posters.

## The impact of the Literacy Hour

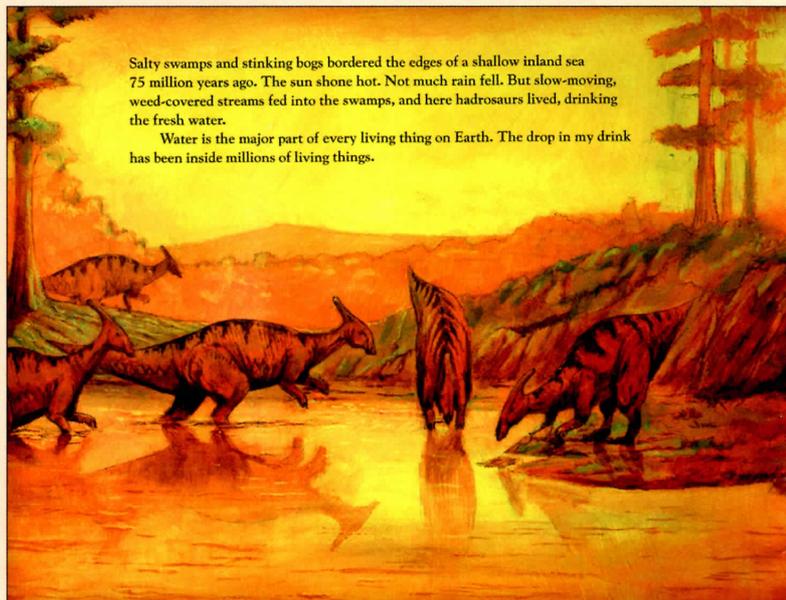
Not surprisingly, the National Literacy Project's requirement that 'children use a range of non-fiction' to meet specific Literacy Hour objectives has further stimulated the market. The sheer volume of publishers' output and the large claims for the books and materials as the answer to resourcing the Literacy Hour can be overwhelming. The speed with which the initiative is being introduced and the highly prescriptive nature of *The Framework for Teaching* are also daunting. But there are several positive things about the Literacy Hour which can be exploited. First, it promotes the use of real texts: teachers can still choose quality resources to suit their classes. Second, there can be a mutually enriching interaction between reading and writing across the curriculum and the Literacy Hour content and vice versa. Third it encourages knowledge and understanding about language and offers a framework for looking at books and resources at text, sentence and word level. There is welcome reinforcement of the importance of teachers modelling appropriate reading strategies – important in non-fiction reading.

Like all classroom initiatives it is the skill, judgement and imagination of teachers which makes the difference between success and failure when using non-fiction to meet the objectives of the literacy strategy. There are some excellent books and literacy materials available but only teachers know what will suit their particular children best. However good a publishing house, it is best to avoid letting any one firm dominate your provision. Within a well praised series there may be some weaker titles; teachers need to inform themselves about the wide range of titles available.

## What is non-fiction?

'Non-fiction' is an umbrella term covering many different kinds of text, but in general we look for books with a clear format and, where appropriate, the headings, sub headings and retrieval devices which help identify a book with the informational genres. Clear language which contextualises new vocabulary is important and an authorial 'voice' showing genuine interest rather than being patronising or remote. We must remember too that the dynamic relationship between writing and illustration gives an information book its vitality. On the social front, there is now more awareness of unwelcome kinds of bias and stereotyping. Not only does knowledge increase, but our attitudes to certain facts and bodies of information change. Thus the point of view of the existing populations in the countries once described in children's books as 'discovered' by fifteenth-century explorers is now included under entries like 'settlers' and 'explorers' (see, for example, *The Dorling Kindersley Children's Illustrated Encyclopaedia*).

In the end what matters most is the vitality and motivating power of a truly original



Salty swamps and stinking bogs bordered the edges of a shallow inland sea 75 million years ago. The sun shone hot. Not much rain fell. But slow-moving, weed-covered streams fed into the swamps, and here hadrosaurs lived, drinking the fresh water.

Water is the major part of every living thing on Earth. The drop in my drink has been inside millions of living things.

Hadrosaurs from *The Drop in my Drink*.

book. Margery Fisher, one of the most respected and inspiring writers on non-fiction, maintained (*Matters of Fact*, 1972) that an information book, however simple, can be 'individual, strong and alive'. The quality of new non-fiction continues to vary but there are some exciting new books, particularly for younger children. I would be inclined to keep such delightful information stories (a category mentioned in the 1995 English Orders) as *Tom's Rabbit: A True Story from Scott's Last Voyage* for appropriate lessons across the curriculum where it can be read in its entirety for sheer enjoyment and inspiration. The contextualising summary of the 1910 journey on the Terra Nova on the last two pages can then be used in the Literacy Hour in line with the requirement that information texts on topics of interest be included in Years 3 and 4.

## Favourite authors and illustrators

One welcome consequence of the new interest in informational materials is that favourite authors and illustrators are emerging such as Claire Llewellyn whose science and mathematics books are enjoyed by younger children. Her *My First Book of Time* can be used to show children how they can make labelled diagrams and charts and there is no reason why this should not be exploited in the Literacy Hour (see, for example, page 9 on making your own calendar. It would fit with 'following instructions', Year 2, Term 1). Look out for Llewellyn's latest title, *My Best Book of Creepy Crawlies*, which includes intriguing details about giraffe weevils, honeypot ants and burying beetles and includes the unpleasant details of these creatures' habits which children like to hear about. As we know, the tame and bland rarely provoke curiosity and questions.

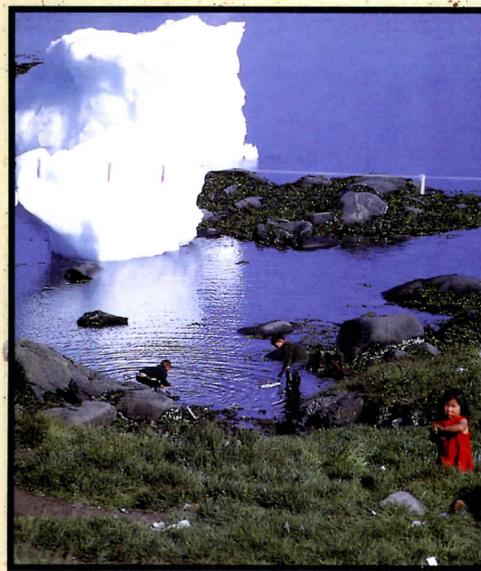
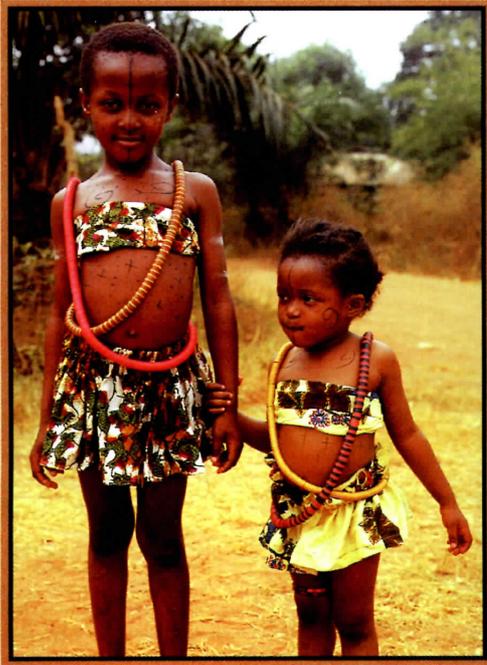
The authors and illustrators of the 'Read and Wonder' series bring a human dimension to non-fiction – how people feel about spiders and pigs and so on, the mysterious and only partially known life cycle of the eel and personal memories of apple trees all feature. These are not conventional information books but they do have some of the features of non-fiction texts – labelled diagrams for example in *Spider Watching*.

Older primary children (and adults!) enjoy Stephen Biesty's books on cross sections – *Incredible Cross Sections*, *Man-of-War*, *Castle* and, most recently, *Incredible Everything* which concentrates on the processes involved in making things (a good link with the requirement for explanatory texts in Year 5, Term 2). The combination of meticulous research manifest in both text and illustration together with quirky humour and a willingness to include the startling and even distressing (medieval tortures are described in *Castle*) makes Biesty's books exceptional and inspiring. While parts of these books can be used as a special focus for the Literacy Hour shared reading time, they also deserve to be read in their entirety in different contexts – including just browsing.

## Links across the curriculum

The danger with too structured and prescribed a programme is that children will spend time on exercises unrelated to their broader interests and preoccupations. It is these which energise non-fiction reading and writing and make it meaningful and enjoyable. A narrow study skills approach to non-fiction is unlikely to inspire young readers.

However, on page 13 of *The Framework for Teaching* there is welcome encouragement to link Literacy Hour activities to what is happening in the rest of the curriculum. '... during the Literacy Hour, pupils might be searching and retrieving from information texts used in science, writing instructions linked to a technology topic, studying myths, autobiographies or stories linked to a study unit in history.' There is every reason to bring books and materials to the Literacy Hour after or before lessons across the curriculum. Meredith Hooper explains the story of water on our planet in *The Drop in my Drink* round Chris Coady's clear and sometimes poetic illustrations. The book has no retrieval devices, only one conventional diagram



Above: 'I is for Icebergs, bigger than houses, floating past in the sea.' From *W is for World*.  
 Left: 'O is for Ornaments to adorn our bodies.' From *A is for Africa*.

A touch of humour is appealing to teacher and children – Hilary Minns' *Snakes* is clearly set out and amusing and I believe Manning and Granström's *Splash, Splash, Splosh!* (about the water cycle) and *What's Under the Bed?* (about the structure and content of the earth's layers) will become much loved big book classics.

Literacy Hour books must, of course, be matched to particular purposes and some consistency of design may be needed – for example to teach about retrieval devices (contents pages, indexes and glossaries). Pelican Big Books provide this in two beautifully illustrated historical books for the 4-7 age group – *Looking at Teddy Bears* and *What Babies Used to Wear*. Several titles in this series are suitable for younger children at Key Stage 2 including *The Human Body* and *You Can Make Your Own Book!* As well as providing an excellent example of how instructional text is organised and illustrated, the latter also reinforces the sound idea of children making their own information books in a range of formats from simple concertina books to the more ambitious pop-up books and waller books with exciting enclosures. Progression is also built into Cambridge Reading's Big Book Literacy Packs. Their books for Reception and Year 1 do not overwhelm with too many retrieval devices all at once. Thus, *Dinosaur* is an information story

at the end and lacks even pagination. Yet the text is an example of inspirational science writing – savour the sheer exhilaration of reading this:

*'The drop in my drink has whizzed across continents, carried by winds. It has howled 10 kilometres above mountains in icy jetstreams. It has been dragged violently up and down through thunderclouds, growing layers of ice, and hurtled to the ground as hailstones. The drop in my drink has been an endless number of raindrops.'*

I would read this to children as part of science at Key Stage 2 and choose some extracts to place on the overhead projector in the Literacy Hour. Discussion with the class could range from the labelling of the water cycle diagram to the new vocabulary which introduces dynamic concepts like trickling, dripping, dribbling, swirling, leaking, condensing, evaporating, recycling, dissolving and polluting. The last page is a plea for protecting water and links well with the requirement for children to experience persuasive kinds of reading and writing.

Joy Richardson's beautifully designed book *Making Faces* has good potential links with both history and art. The double spreads could be used in the Literacy Hour to show how we 'read' illustrations and how writing extends and links with pictures. Two geography alphabet books match well with one of the objectives for Year 2, Term 2 – learning about alphabetic formats. Ifeoma Onyefulu's *A is for Africa* (now in big book format) and Kathryn Cave's *W is for World* introduce interesting vocabulary and ideas in the strong context of the photographic alphabet. Both books explain about our shared world in a warm, sympathetic way and children will enjoy just browsing through them and talking about the photographs.

Sometimes it is necessary to use a text to meet a particular objective which does not happen to link with any other current lesson. Teachers may yet find a way to create a context – perhaps linking the text to the children's interests, to other books they have read or to experiences they may have had.

### Whole class shared reading and writing sessions

As well as an overhead projector there needs to be a stand to support big books, smaller books, pamphlets, charts and large pieces of writing paper and a computer.

### Non-fiction big books

Non-fiction 'big' books (titles published in giant format) have great potential as shared texts for looking at particular aspects of literacy. The big book must be able to sustain children's interest over a few days and, in addition to meeting the criteria already set out (clear inviting language, good match between illustrations and texts and so on), it is important that the typeface is large, clear and sufficiently well spaced to be seen from a distance.

Illustrations need to be sharp and inviting without too much detail or use of very subtle colour. Thus, not every good information book will necessarily make a good big book. The *Stopwatch* series from A & C Black (very well liked science books for Key Stage 1) is one that has adapted well to big book format; it makes particularly good use of photographs in showing animal life cycles.



From *Splash, Splash, Splosh!*



'When children went outside they sometimes wore a siren suit. This was fastened with a long zip.' From 'When grandparents were toddlers, 1950s' in *What Babies Used to Wear*.

### YEAR GRADE AND AGE GROUP

Year	Age
1	5/6
2	6/7
3	7/8
4	8/9
5	9/10
6	10/11

Key Stage 1:  
ages 5-7

Key Stage 2:  
ages 7-11

about one particular species – the Maiasaur – from egg to adult but with information boxes to introduce non-narrative text. The illustrations of the creatures in their environment are most inviting. *Coral Reef*, aimed at the final term of Year 2, features contents page and index and good examples of labelled diagrams.

Older children (9-12) would learn much about genre from Longman's imaginative *World War II Anthology* which combines fiction and poems with non-fiction forms such as telegrams. This would be a book to return to for different purposes in and outside the Literacy Hour.

Use of reference books, as teachers know, is best modelled in context. But I think Pelican Big Books' *An Encyclopaedia of Greek and Roman Gods and Heroes* could be used in history and reinforced and discussed in the Literacy Hour. Their *Words Borrowed from Other Languages* creates its own context and is therefore a particularly interesting and appropriate Literacy Hour choice.

### Extracts from information books, newspapers and pamphlets

So that the Literacy Hour range and specific objectives are covered for each primary school term, extracts from information books featuring recounts, explanation, autobiographical and biographical kinds of writing will need to be presented to the

whole class on an overhead. Extracts from Chris Powlings' *Roald Dahl* and from Dahl's *Boy: Tales of Childhood* could be used to pinpoint some of the differences between first and third person writing.

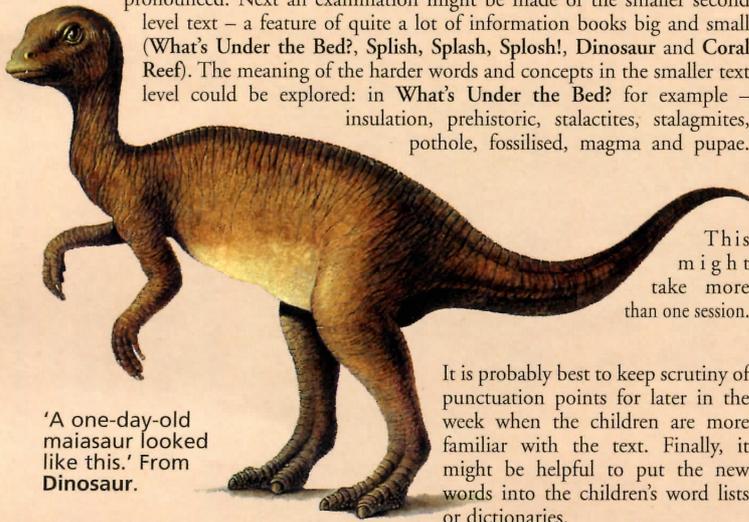
Some kinds of writing will be best taken from newspapers and pamphlets, particularly the persuasive and journalistic kinds of reading and writing to be covered by older children. In Year 6, Term 2, for example, children are required to see the different sides of an argument and be able to distinguish opinion from fact. An extract from a local newspaper on a current issue could serve as the shared reading text and the different viewpoints discussed. This could lead to shared writing tasks and children producing their own letters to newspapers setting out an opinion.

Learning about impersonal language, for example in the passive tense, is an objective for the final primary school term. Children can examine public notices and leaflets as well as write their own.

If whole class shared reading sessions are well resourced and planned, all the children, including children with literacy difficulties, should find the collaboration and discussion round quality texts involving and enjoyable.

### Whole class – phonics, spelling, vocabulary and grammar

At Key Stage 1 a non-fiction big book will usually last a week and the word and sentence level work can take up a different focus each day. The first day's work might centre round new vocabulary and making a joint list – teacher scribing children's suggestions on the overhead. The following day the time might be used to concentrate on the shape of the words, at letter strings and how they are spelt and pronounced. Next an examination might be made of the smaller second level text – a feature of quite a lot of information books big and small (*What's Under the Bed?*, *Splish, Splash, Splosh!*, *Dinosaur* and *Coral Reef*). The meaning of the harder words and concepts in the smaller text level could be explored: in *What's Under the Bed?* for example – insulation, prehistoric, stalactites, stalagmites, pothole, fossilised, magma and pupae.



'A one-day-old maiasaur looked like this.' From *Dinosaur*.

This might take more than one session.

It is probably best to keep scrutiny of punctuation points for later in the week when the children are more familiar with the text. Finally, it might be helpful to put the new words into the children's word lists or dictionaries.

At Key Stage 2, word and sentence level work will include a focus on sentence structure in informational texts, spelling and pronunciation of challenging vocabulary and labelling of more complex charts and diagrams.

### Guided group work – reading and writing

Schools will need to build up their stocks of non-fiction texts for group reading – National Literacy Strategy funding is earmarked for this as well as for shared reading texts. Sets of six are an economic way of resourcing this part of the Literacy Hour. Big book kits often usefully include a set of six smaller books. Some bookshops offer sets of books for both Key Stages chosen for relevance to particular years and terms in the National Literacy Strategy framework (for example *The Madeleine Lindley Bookshop*, 0161 683 4400).

Many publishers are providing detailed suggestions for guided reading and writing. There is nothing wrong with taking up good ideas – who could blame teachers for taking a few short cuts when so much is demanded of them? But there is a danger in letting others dictate too much; our confidence in our own ability to plan appropriate and interesting tasks may be shaken.

Guided group work is an excellent context for teacher modelling of different kinds of non-fiction reading and writing.

### Independent reading, writing or word work

This is an opportunity to practise the skills and strategies covered in the taught sessions. Teachers worry about younger children and older children with special literacy needs being unsupported during this part of the Literacy Hour. Careful resourcing for the three independent groups and clear initial explanation help. Schools will build their own store of resources. Worksheets have a place if they are attractive, imaginative and at the right reading level.

At Key Stage 1 tasks might include putting into sequence broken up parts of a text, making lists of terms and placing them in alphabetical order, labelling diagrams and making simple information books. Appropriate tasks for older children include note taking and summaries of parts of the shared text, writing tasks based on the genre of the week and labelling of more difficult diagrams like cross sections.

If a shared reading text has good illustration, children can write their own explanatory text round the pictures. *Making Faces*, for example, is a good model for successful integration of text and portrait.



This blue-green parrot fish hangs in the water, eating coral.

From *Coral Reef*.

### Plenary

Potentially one of the most positive elements in the Literacy Hour, the plenary provides an opportunity for the teacher to summarise achievements and for children to share what they have done in an atmosphere of constructive criticism. Where the shared text has been informational a cloze procedure could be beamed up on an overhead or written on a board or flip chart and children invited to fill the spaces with some of the new technical vocabulary covered. Links to current topics in history, science or geography can be clinched by adding new vocabulary to class charts – words to describe mini beasts or vocabulary round a history topic like *The Ancient Greeks* or *The Tudors*.

### Enjoying non-fiction

The Literacy Hour provides a framework for teaching flexible reading strategies. But we also need to nurture a positive attitude by making non-fiction reading enjoyable. Student teachers returning from teaching practice concluded that two things help – quality books and resources and the chance for children to talk about and share opinions and ideas. These are enduring principles in a time of change. ■

### Books discussed

#### BIG BOOKS

- A is for Africa*, Ifeoma Onyefulu, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1388 7, £12.99  
*Coral Reef*, Meredith Hooper, Cambridge Big Book Literacy Pack (one big book, six small books, teaching notes and worksheets), 0 521 64959 5, £34.50, Big Book only, 0 521 57695 4, £18.95  
*Dinosaur*, Meredith Hooper, ill. Bert Kitchen, Cambridge Big Book Literacy Pack (one big book, six small books, teaching notes and worksheets), 0 521 64948 X, £20.50, Big Book only, 0 521 56460 3, £10.95  
*The Human Body*, P. Coltman and R Sparks Linfield, Longman 'Pelican Big Books', 0 582 33406 3, £17.99 (pack of six small books, £19.99)  
*Looking at Teddy Bears*, Sallie Purkis, Longman 'Pelican Big Books', 0 582 33349 0, £16.99 (pack of six small books, £19.99)  
*Snakes*, Hilary Minns, HarperCollins, 0 00 301451 7, £15.99  
*Splish, Splash, Splosh!*, Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts, 0 7496 3287 9, £14.99  
*What Babies Used to Wear*, Anne Witherington and Bobbie Neate, Longman 'Pelican Big Books', 0 582 33352 0, £16.99 (pack of six small books, £19.99)  
*What's Under the Bed?*, Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts, 0 7496 3288 7, £14.99  
*World War II Anthology*, various authors, Longman 'Pelican Big Books', 0 582 33383 0, £17.99 (pack of six small books, £19.99)  
*You Can Make Your Own Book!*, Paul Johnson, Longman 'Pelican Big Books', 0 582 33388 1, £17.99 (pack of six small books, £19.99)

#### REFERENCE TITLES

- The Dorling Kindersley Children's Illustrated Encyclopaedia*, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5489 9, £29.95  
*An Encyclopaedia of Greek and Roman Gods and Heroes*, Brian Moses, Longman 'Pelican Big Books', 0 582 33411 X, £17.99 (pack of six small books, £19.99)  
*Words Borrowed from Other Languages*, Sue Palmer, Longman 'Pelican Big Books', 0 582 33410 1, £17.99 (pack of six small books, £19.99)

#### INFORMATION STORIES, AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND BIOGRAPHY

- Boy: Tales of Childhood*, Roald Dahl, Puffin, 0 14 031890 9, £5.99  
*Roald Dahl*, Chris Powlings, Evans 'Tell Me About Writers' series, 0 237 51762 0, £7.99  
*Tom's Rabbit: A True Story from Scott's Last Voyage*, Meredith Hooper, ill. Bert Kitchen, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1183 3, £10.99

#### INFORMATION BOOKS

- The Drop in my Drink: The Story of Water on our Planet*, Meredith Hooper, ill. Chris Coady, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1181 7, £10.99  
*Making Faces*, Joy Richardson, Franklin Watts 'Looking at Pictures' series, 0 7496 2592 9, £9.99  
*My Best Book of Creepy Crawlies*, Claire Llewellyn, Kingfisher, 0 7534 0213 0, £6.99  
*My First Book of Time*, Claire Llewellyn, Dorling Kindersley, 0 86318 784 6, £9.99  
*Stephen Biesty's Cross Sections: Castle, Stephen Biesty, Dorling Kindersley*, 0 7513 5046 X, £12.99 (Also *Incredible Cross Sections, Man-of-War, Incredible Everything*)  
*Spider Watching*, Vivian French, Walker 'Read and Wonder' series, 0 7445 2818 6, £7.99 hbk, 0 7445 4735 0, £4.99 pbk (Other titles include *Think of an Eel, The Apple Trees, All Pigs Are Beautiful*)  
*W is for World*, Kathryn Cave, Frances Lincoln with Oxfam, 0 7112 1260 0, £9.99

**Margaret Mallett** is Visiting Tutor in Primary English, Goldsmiths' College and the author of two books on children's reading of non-fiction: **Making Facts Matter: Reading Non-fiction 5-11**, Paul Chapman Publishing (1992), 1 85396 165 5, £12.95 pbk and **Children's Informational Reading and Writing in the Early and Primary Years**, to be published by Routledge in early 1999.

# ENTENTE CORDIALE

## French for Young children

When Tony Blair addressed the French National Assembly in their own language (and live in front of the world's television cameras), the story hit the headlines – a British Prime Minister who can speak French without making a fool of himself is a rarity. A recent comparison of the proficiency of European teenagers in foreign languages put Britain at the bottom. Can starting to learn early help? **Ted Wragg** investigates.

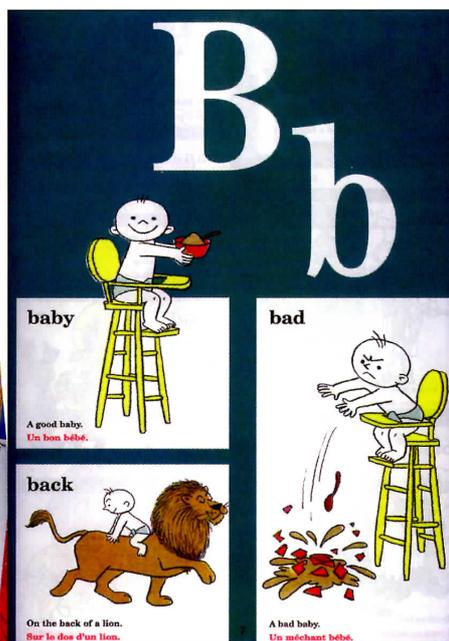
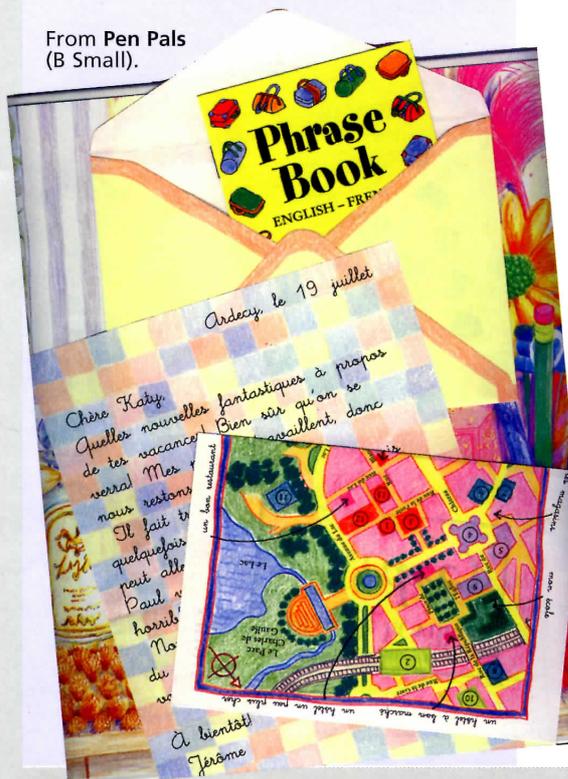
**T**here is no legal requirement in the United Kingdom for schools to teach a foreign language in the primary school, yet most European countries start teaching children another language before the age of 11.

Although modern languages 'officially' begin in the secondary school, there has been considerable interest among parents for French to be introduced into the primary school curriculum, so many schools have started running voluntary lunchtime 'Learn French' clubs. In addition there are parents who teach their children French at home, perhaps because the family is going on holiday to France, or simply because they wish to broaden their children's horizons in this international age. Both parents and teachers are usually looking for ideas that are feasible for children in the infant and junior school age range: simple French dialogues, games, songs, activities that involve using the language actively. Not all are themselves experts. When I was piloting the BBC 'Teach Your Child French' radio series, one of the most enthusiastic volunteers was a father who had himself failed O-level French several times.

### Language acquisition - a driving force

What can be achieved depends on the age and aptitude of the children, and the interests and skills of those who teach them. Children aged from 7 to 11 should be able to handle activities in simple French quite easily, and even 5 to 7 year olds should find few difficulties, provided the material is right and the experience is positive, not dreary. Acquiring language is a driving force in children. They are immensely curious about words and phrases, and very tuned in to learning them. Children around the world have usually become quite competent in their native language by the age of 4. At this stage they have a grasp of 90% of the grammar of it and a vocabulary of several hundred words.

From Pen Pals  
(B Small).



From the Dr Seuss Cat in the Hat  
Beginner Book Dictionary in French  
(HarperCollins).

Noam Chomsky, the American linguist, argued that we are uniquely 'wired' to learn a language. Young children, with their sharp hearing, ability to imitate, natural enthusiasm and lack of inhibition, take easily to learning new words and sounds. Adolescents, by contrast, are often afraid of making a fool of themselves in front of their friends.

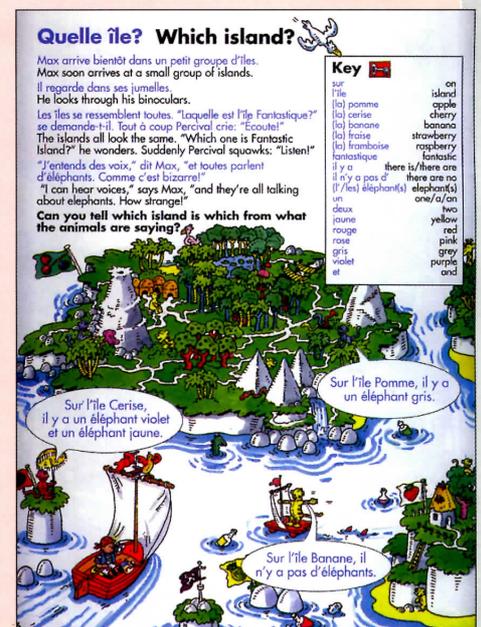
People who learned French in secondary school, as most of us did, often see it as a highly complex activity. Yet most English 3-year-olds would cheerfully say, 'I went to playgroup', even though 'went' is a very irregular past tense. If you speak words and phrases enough times, you soon understand what they mean.

### Necessary Features

Most of the books on the market are colourful and attractive, designed for enjoyment so as to appeal to young first-time French learners. Features often found include:

- conversations about everyday events like eating, shopping, counting;
- games such as 'Simon says' ('Jacques a dit');
- activities like naming colours ('bleu', 'rouge'), or body parts ('le nez', 'la bouche');
- stories, songs and rhymes;
- flashcards, stickers, labels.

The best of these books for the primary age recognise that young children have a shorter attention span than older ones, and that 'little and often' is a better recipe than long turgid sessions. Children under 11 are often at what is sometimes called the 'concrete' stage of development. This means that they learn better by handling an object than by merely hearing about it in the abstract. Good books capitalise on opportunities for using French actively, by naming colours, for



From Fantastic Island (Usborne).

### Un milkshake à la banane

Voilà! Un milkshake à la banane. Délicieux!

**Prends**  
du lait  
deux bananes  
une boule de glace

- 1 Ecrase deux bananes.
- 2 Ajoute du lait.
- 3 Ajoute une boule de glace à la vanille.
- 4 Agite bien. Verse dans un verre.

From Salut Serge (BBC Worldwide).

### Marc's day

Read what Marc does throughout the day, then see if you can match each clock with the right picture. You can find out what the answers are on pages 44-45.

1 Marc se lève à sept heures et demie.	2 Il mange son petit déjeuner à huit heures.	3 A neuf heures moins le quart, il va à l'école.	4 Il mange son déjeuner à midi et demi.
5 A deux heures dix il joue au football.	6 A cinq heures et quart il regarde la télé.	7 A six heures il mange son dîner.	8 Il va au lit à huit heures et demie.

From French for Beginners (Usborne).

### yellow

jaune

From Colours (B Small)

Pêche, pomme, poire, abricot,  
Y'en a une, y'en a une.  
Pêche, pomme, poire, abricot,  
Y'en a une de trop.  
Qui s'appelle Marie Margot?

une poire      un abricot  
une pomme

### Travel in Paris

The Paris underground railway is called the Métro, (short for Métropolitain). The stations are named after famous places and people such as Victor Hugo, a writer.

Some stations have old decorated entrance signs.

A sign shows where to wait to get into a first class car.

There is one first class car.

The trains are quiet because they run on rubber tires.

You use the same tickets on buses and Métro trains.

**Buses**  
The buses in Paris are green and white.

A map at the bus stop tells you where you are on the route and the names of the stops.

Some buses in busy areas have two joined compartments.

Usually you buy a ticket before you board the bus. Punch your ticket in the machine as you enter.

From First Book of France (Usborne).

Part of 'Autour du Marché' from **Un, Deux, Trois** (Frances Lincoln).

example, ('rouge', 'blanc', 'noir'), or pointing out numbers on doors, signs, adverts ('neuf', 'cinq', 'trois').

A group of eight-year-olds were once acting out a very simple scene in French. One child came in and instead of greeting the rest with 'Bonjour', uttered by mistake the only other similar phrase he knew, 'Au revoir'. The rest collapsed in mirth at the thought of him arriving and immediately saying 'Goodbye'. Even from the beginning children can appreciate a joke in a foreign language.

Lively books also draw attention to French in everyday life. Many supermarkets now sell croissants and baguettes. Shelves are full of French food and drink. French clothes designers, footballers, cartoon characters like Asterix, and car adverts (have many children *not* seen Papa and Nicole in the Renault ads?) are shown regularly on television.

A visit to France is a great incentive; and a day trip can be quite cheap at certain times of the year. The best books show some of the 'realia', the real things of French life – menus, shops, bus tickets, cartoons, maps. Most of us remember going abroad for the first time, perhaps on a school exchange, but today's children may live or work in France for a few weeks, a year or even longer, so they might as well become familiar with life there.

### Parents' role

Parents who teach children at home often worry in case they scupper their children's education by acting incorrectly, or cutting across what the school is trying to achieve. Most schools nowadays prefer to work in partnership with parents and welcome their interest. When children begin French in school, they usually start with oral work about everyday situations, and the activities in most of the books encourage that approach.

The two enemies of early years French are (a) boredom and (b) errors. One mother bored her children by insisting that they did everything in French for too long. It became an irksome chore, and before long her children hated French. Young children are so adept at imitating the 'music' of a language that it can be fiendishly difficult to unpick errors later. Cassettes with native speakers are a boon in this respect.

When young children practise a language it needs to be in a context, otherwise they will mechanically repeat without necessarily understanding what they are saying. That is why actively using objects, counting, pointing to things, moving, are all valuable ways of giving meaning to the French.

### A French club

One feature of French learning in the early years is the 'French club'. Good and suitable books are essential for a club to flourish. In one school it was actually two enthusiastic fathers who started the club. It was so successful that the school eventually made it a timetabled activity. In some areas there are Saturday morning French clubs where parents can take their children along for an hour or two of intensive language work. Unfortunately these tend to be mainly in towns, less often in rural areas.

Songs and rhymes are also popular in clubs. A simple French tune such as Frère Jacques can be learned even by under-fives. The combination of music and words has long been recognised as a powerful language learning tool. Well run clubs can often benefit boys in particular. Boys tend to do less well than girls at language activities in school, but they often like language connected to activity.

# A ROUND-UP OF RECENT TITLES

## ● USBORNE PUBLISHING

One of the most comprehensive publishers of French books for young children, with a wide range of attractive options.

**French for Beginners**, by Angela Wilkes, is an attractive 48-page booklet with colourful cartoon-type drawings. Topics include: saying 'hello', eating, travelling, hobbies, telling the time, finding your way round a map of a town, shopping and colours. It also comes in a blister pack with reusable stickers for labelling objects, which have both the words (in large letters) and phonetic pronunciation (small letters), e.g. 'l'école' (laikol). My worry here is over words like 'le bureau', with the phonetic 'luh bew-ro', which is a complete mangling of the pronunciation. Another blister pack includes a cassette with native French speakers using the language in the book, and an English narrator.

Vocabulary control is an important issue with beginners, and Heather Amery's **First 100 Words in French** and **First Thousand Words in French** are attempts to help children learn a basic vocabulary – le train, les biscuits, le chat. Both have large scenic pictures and small pictures showing the individual words. Many young children find stickers to be motivating, and push-out sticker versions of both books are also available.

Readers need to be carefully graded, so children are not overwhelmed with French they cannot understand. Louisa Somerville's **First Book of France** describes French life in English, with just an occasional French word in numerous pictures illustrating themes such as holidays, famous people, things to do and places to visit. Susannah Leigh's stories **Fantastic Island** (L'île Fantastique) and **Mystery Castle** (Chateau-Mystère) have both been adapted as bilingual readers, with the French text in blue and the English version in black underneath each sentence. Vocabulary is included on each page and at the end, and the engaging style of detailed coloured illustration will appeal to children.

Puzzle workbooks offering 32 pages on **Shopping and Eating** and **Meeting People and Travelling** are based on the familiar model of word squares, jumbled letters and picture quizzes to be found on newsagent's shelves and will probably appeal more to older primary pupils. A 128 page **Beginner's French Dictionary** with thematic, copiously illustrated pages (Pastimes, Driving, Sport, School and Education) completes an impressive collection of junior French books from Usborne. It has vocabulary on each page and an alphabetic list at the back.

**French for Beginners**, Angela Wilkes, 0 7460 0054 5, £4.99 pbk, 0 7460 2121 6, £7.99 sticker pack, 0 7460 0582 2, £9.99 tape pack

**First 100 Words in French**, Heather Amery, 0 7460 1174 1, £4.50 pbk, 0 7460 2117 8, £4.50 sticker book

**First Thousand Words in French**, Heather Amery, 0 7460 2305 7, £7.99 hbk, 0 7460 2304 9, £5.99 pbk, 0 7460 3007 X, £4.99 sticker book

**First Book of France**, Louisa Somerville, 0 7460 0322 6, £4.99 pbk

**Fantastic Island** (L'île Fantastique), Susannah Leigh, 0 7460 2374 X, £6.99 hbk, 0 7460 2373 1, £3.99 pbk

**Mystery Castle** (Chateau-Mystère), Susannah Leigh, 0 7460 1981 5, £5.99 hbk, 0 7460 1980 7, £3.99 pbk

**Shopping and Eating**, 0 7460 1346 9, £2.99

**Meeting People and Travelling**, 0 7460 1345 0, £2.99

**Beginner's French Dictionary**, 0 7460 0016 2, £7.99 pbk

## ● B SMALL PUBLISHING

Bilingual readers in hardback are an attractive feature of B Small French books, with English at the top of the page and the French version at the bottom. Text per page is less dense than the Usborne books, at eight words or so, making these likely to appeal to younger as well as older primary children.

**Goodnight Everyone** (Bonne Nuit à Tous) is typical of them. Martha goes to bed with all her toys, elephant, panda, gorilla, rag doll etc., and falls asleep at the end. The type of illustrations and text density are what one would normally expect in children's books in English for pre-school and early infant school children. There are notes for parents and teachers, a picture dictionary at the end and pronunciation hints. What worries me, however, is some of the phonetic pronunciations. Children are such good mimics that if they imitate clueless adults faithfully intoning 'eh bee-yah' (Eh bien) or 'd'moh-dah ma-moh' (demanda maman), they will simply massacre the language.

Other bilingual texts in the same format include **Happy Birthday** (Bon Anniversaire), **I Want my Banana!** (Je veux ma Banane!), and **I'm too Big** (Je suis trop gros). I prefer the ones with animals in them, as the illustrations of these are very appealing. There are also some even simpler bilingual books for the very young, with single words on each double page, English on the left, French on the right, on topics like **Family** (La Famille) and **Colours** (Les Couleurs).

Activity books concentrate again on puzzles and games. **French Fun** has black and white line drawings for children to circle, and dot-to-dot puzzles. Most fun are the press-out boy and girl figures in colour and sets of clothes, all neatly labelled (la jambe, le bras, le pantalon, la jupe) to dress them up. **Pen Pals** is a book for

older primary pupils, but it exploits the appeal of hands-on envelopes with real contents, including actual letters, cards and photos. A French boy, Jérôme, and an English girl, Katy, exchange letters. Translations are offered in the text and there are hints on letter writing and a little phrase book. A neat idea that would be useable even with early secondary pupils.

**Goodnight Everyone** (Bonne Nuit à Tous), 1 874735 70 0, £5.99 hbk

**Happy Birthday!** (Bon Anniversaire), 1 874735 97 2, £5.99 hbk

**I Want my Banana!** (Je veux ma Banane!), 1 874735 03 4, £5.99 hbk

**I'm too Big** (Je suis trop gros), 1 874735 65 4, £5.99 hbk

**Family** (La Famille), 1 874735 76 X, £4.99 hbk, 1 874735 75 1, £2.99 pbk

**Colours** (Les Couleurs), 1 874735 15 8, £4.99 hbk, 1 874735 10 7, £2.99 pbk

**French Fun**, activity book, 1 874735 26 3, £2.99 pbk

**Pen Pals**, 1 874735 17 4, £9.99 hbk

## ● HARPERCOLLINS

The Dr Seuss **Cat in the Hat Beginner Book Dictionary in French** is a wonderful text. The fact that it is nothing more than the original 'Beginner Book Dictionary', with French subtitles in red, is neither here nor there. Children love the crackpot characters and off-beat drawings. The word 'Head', for example, is illustrated by a dotty aunt character standing on her head ('She stands on her head' – Elle se tient sur la tête).

The disadvantage is that the book is purely an English-French dictionary, cheap for the publisher, since it simply superimposes a set of red text translations beneath the original. It would be worth producing a genuine French version, using the same approach, but with more French words in the pictures, in place of 'jam', 'jelly', 'knock, knock' etc. This has been done for the 'months of the year' entry, which does appear in French. Nonetheless it is a very funny and appealing book, for children of all ages up to early teens.

**The Cat in the Hat Beginner Book Dictionary in French**, Dr Seuss, 0 00 195054 1, £12.99 hbk

## ● BBC WORLDWIDE

Based on a television series featuring Serge the monkey, Sue Finnie's **Salut Serge** is another blister pack offering a 40 page book and cassette. It is very much an activity book, with puzzles, games and comic-type cartoon strips (text in English, speech bubbles in French) showing the monkey's adventures.

A cassette symbol in the margin cues children to switch on the cassette for the song, story or text to be spoken or sung by Serge. The book is colourful and the cassette fun. When Serge packs his rucksack with ten objects (un parapluie, un pyjama, des

sandaes), children have to listen to him and then recall the objects, whose pictures are in the book. Good value for a simple multimedia pack.

**Salut Serge**, Sue Finnie, 0 563 38751 3, £8.99 book/cassette

## ● SCHOLASTIC

Anita Ganeri's **Sticky French** makes unashamed use of sticker appeal. There are 98 reusable press-out stickers in the centre of the book and 16 pages of pictures and squares on which to place the stickers. There is no particular rationale, so far as one can see, it is simply a set of pictures of jungle, sea and mountains, with colours and numbers at the front and vocabulary at the back. The characters in the pictures look a little gormless, but the book is cheap and cheerful, though its interest will not last too long.

**Sticky French**, Anita Ganeri, 0 590 13246 6, £3.99 pbk

## ● FRANCES LINCOLN

Rhyme and song are the main features of Opal Dunn's **Un, Deux, Trois** (21 page booklet and cassette). The book portrays the text and pictures of simple popular French children's rhymes and the neat little illustrations are part labelled (un petit poisson, un grand poisson, un paysan etc.). A limited resource, and not sufficient on its own, but a useful adjunct to something else.

**Un, Deux, Trois**, Opal Dunn, 0 7112 1071 3, £8.99 book/cassette

## ● HAMLIN

The **Fun Matching Game** looks complicated at first, but it really is worth getting to grips with. It is very cleverly conceived, being a long narrow book, with notches along the edges and a lengthy piece of string attached to the top. Inside are several 'self-scoring tests', as they would be called in the trade. Turn to a page like 'Clothes' or 'Pets' and you find a set of six colour pictures. Wind the string round the notches to match up the picture with its French name (e.g. le poisson, le chat, la souris), turn the page over and, hey presto, the 'correct' pattern of the string is on the back, so you can check your own solution. Clever, or what? I loved it, so never mind the children. Robust and colourful. Another adjunct for those wanting fun activities.

**The Fun Matching Game**, Stringalong series, 0 600 59766 0, £4.99 board ■

**Ted Wragg** is Professor of Education at Exeter University and author, with Pascale Bizet, of **Teach Your Child French** (book and cassette, BBC Education, 0 563 46096 2, £7.99).



Christine Closier (centre) and Jo Ray (right) with young shadowers at Harrow Way.

# SHADOWING AND GREENAWAY

The National Year of Reading has begun! An opportunity to celebrate the excellent work already being undertaken by schools and libraries'. On the support side, there is not one more project chasing it than the National Year of Reading in order and to mark the occasion BfK asks the Library Association's national campaign gets behind the Library Association's

**W**hat the Year of Reading hopes to achieve – to get everyone's head into a book, young and old, rich and poor – is something that children's librarians and teachers have been striving to do, in a variety of ever more ingenious ways and in the face of dwindling resources, for a long time and with some success. To see what can be done when a national campaign with media attention is backed up by local effort, you have to look only at the transformation in the public awareness of the Library Association's Carnegie and Greenaway Medals.

## No longer niche

Ten years ago, the awards were little known beyond a circle of children's book enthusiasts. But, in the last few years, their fame has spread. Now the winners have space in *The Times*, on the *Today* programme and *Newsnight*. Melvin Burgess's 1996 winner, *Junk*, was propelled into the best seller lists.

Some of this was brilliant marketing from the Library Association, helped by seven years' sponsorship from the library supplier, Peters Library Service, and by the judges' selection of one or two controversial titles. It was also the result of the enthusiasm of librarians and teachers who took the books to children themselves and asked their opinions.

## Shadowing

'Shadowing' of the medal selection process has been happening for some time: Jane Inglis wrote about it in BfK in 1993. It was last year, however, after *Junk*'s success, that the Library Association offered substantial encouragement, backed by a £6,500 grant from the Arts Council, in the form of a promotion pack. This was offered to teachers and librarians (and anyone else) who wanted to shadow the selection of the 1997 winners, which took place between May and July of this year. In the pack there were details of the shortlisted titles and hints on how the shadowing might be organised.

By March 1998, the LA had 300 applications for packs. On May 1, when the shortlists were announced, family reading groups in Norfolk, teenage readers in Camberley and Dundee, secondary students in Bolton and adult students with learning difficulties at Melton Mowbray College, among many others, were waiting for their letters to arrive. By then, over a hundred shadowing schemes were registered with the Library Association, a quarter of them in primary schools. Some schools, like Bideford College, had already begun work with past winners; others had produced their own preliminary shortlists.

The Carnegie and Greenaway shortlists are amenable things. Students discussed the titles

among themselves and with teachers and librarians; in class and out of class. They presented the books to each other, had debates, gave talks, wrote reviews, designed book jackets, made dramas and videos. Able readers worked with reluctant readers, secondary students with primary. Parents and children looked at the books together. The students at Melton Mowbray worked with the Greenaway list and a simplified set of 'tick the box' criteria. They were invited to think of a child they knew and decide which of the books they might recommend. Sometimes the shadowing was carried out as part of the school curriculum, sometimes not.

### Fire, Bed and Bone

'I liked the fact that the story was told by the dog. There were more things observed by the dog than a human would have observed. Also, the dog did not really know the cause of all these problems, so the information was simply presented for you to make sense of with your own knowledge of that time.' (Rachel Stroud, Harrow Way School)

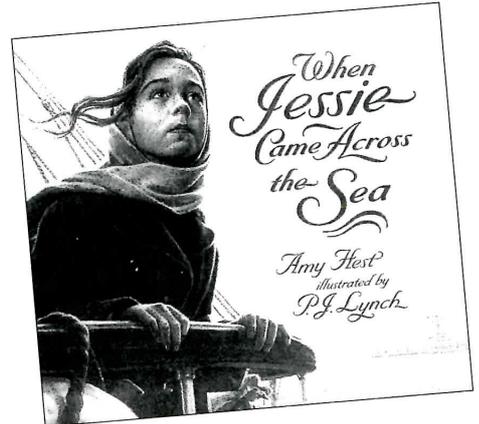
## Different approaches

The two schools I visited, Harrow Way Community School in Andover and Allfarthing Primary School in Wandsworth, illustrate the different approaches that are possible.

At Harrow Way, Christine Closier, the head of English, and Jo Ray, the school librarian, gathered a group of volunteers, mainly from Years 7, 8 and 9 (11–14 year-olds), that met at lunchtimes and passed around the books from both shortlists. The intention was that the students would be asked to talk about their final selections to the whole school.

At Allfarthing Primary, the initiative came from the local children's librarian, Ferelith Hordon of Alvering Library. Ferelith worked with year 6 (10/11 year-olds) class teachers, Sarah Knollys and Sue Chambers, to introduce the whole year group to the Carnegie and Greenaway books through the Literacy Hour. Both schools used a combination of written reviews and discussion.

As an interloper at one of Harrow Way's early sessions, when not everyone had looked at all the books, and at Allfarthing's group presentation, when it was time to listen to the verdicts on each book and count the votes, I was quickly drawn into serious and enthusiastic conversations. Both schools were already keen promoters of reading – Year 7s 'reading kites' dangled from the windows of Harrow Way's library, across from the World



Cup display, and photos of Nick Sharratt's visit were up in Allfarthing's hall – but the Carnegie and Greenaway discussions were adding an extra dimension.



From Scribbleboy.

### Scribbleboy

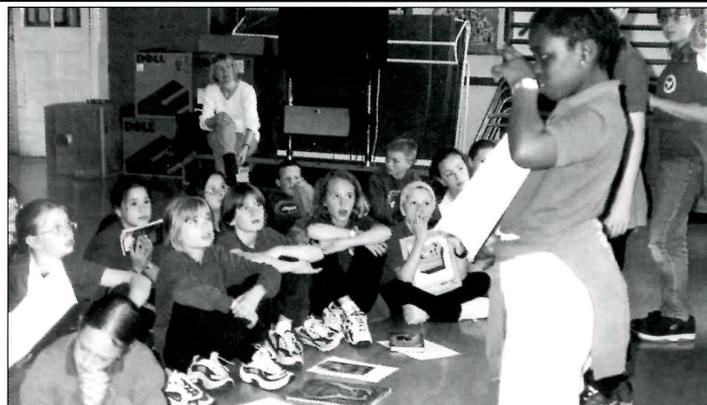
'I ended up skipping nearly a paragraph of repeated speech. The storyline is very good, but many words are deliberately made up, which is as irritating as repeated speech. I wouldn't really recommend this book. If it was written differently, without repeats, I probably would.' (Karen Turner, Harrow Way School)

## Books and the process of their selection

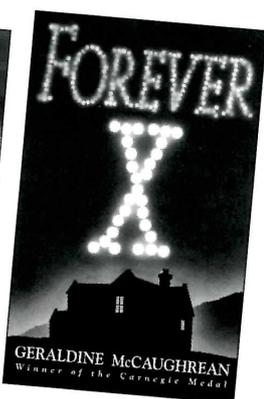
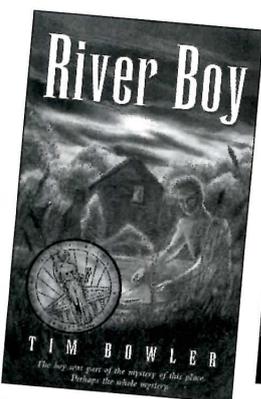
It is partly the books themselves: written for contemporary children and chosen for their quality. Then, it is the selection process: an intensive period which invites participation, generates excitement, and connects children to

# THE CARNEGIE WAY MEDALS

portunity, in the DfEE's words, to 'support and undertaken to promote literacy in schools, colleges a lot of money to go with the fine words: and of Reading Team can afford. But celebration is live Barnes to look at what happens when a ciation's Carnegie and Greenaway Medals.



The Year 6 presentation of the shortlist titles at Allfarthing School, Wandsworth.



process not only gives children a say, it also helps them to become articulate. Granted, their say is still at one remove. The medal winners still emerge from the secret deliberations of the thirteen members of the YLG's judging panel, without any direct child involvement.

Of course the dialogue between adult selectors and children has its difficulties. All of those involved in shadowing recognise the need both to encourage children to make their own judgements and to build bridges between the gut reactions that may be the children's initial response and the literary and artistic analysis that is implicit in the awards' selection criteria.

## Forever X

'There is a nice plot but it jumps around so much that you have to look very deep into the story to grasp what it's really about. This is definitely not a good Carnegie candidate.' (Ben Hunter, Allfarthing School)

## The right answer?

Dorne Fraser, Senior Librarian for Young People's Services in Norfolk, and a former member of the YLG selection panel, has been involved for the last two years in award discussions where librarians and secondary students work in the same groups. She finds that the students need to feel secure enough to stand up for their own opinions and be reassured that they are not being required to find the 'right answer'. At Harrow Way, Christine Closier and Jo Ray prepared a review sheet which asked for the reviewer's emotional response, descriptions of the plot and whether the reviewer would recommend the title to friends: a basis on which more extensive analyses could be built.

## River Boy

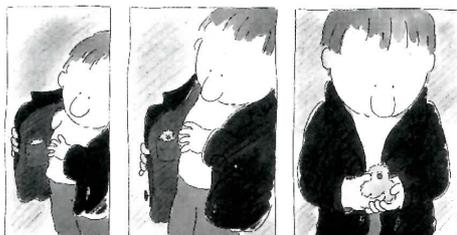
'This book was touching, moving and melancholy but maybe a bit too depressing ... it describes the river a lot and in a way, you know the river better than the characters.' (Alice Wright, Allfarthing School)

## Wider worries

The reaction of librarians and teachers to the children's opinions and how this feeds back into the selection of the shortlists and the winners is

the community of readers of children's literature. There are the parents who are drawn in at home; the teachers and librarians; the other schools and reading groups whose reviews can be called up on the Library Association's website; the Youth Library Group's judging panel who are often involved in shadowing; even the writers and illustrators themselves. Birmingham's 'Going for Gold' Carnegie bonanza brought over a hundred students together, with four authors from the shortlist and a former chair of the YLG selection panel.

Most important, it is the nature of the selection process involved in shadowing. Children are invited to judge the books not just on the grounds of what they like and dislike but on grounds of literary and artistic merit. They may even be asked to consider how good a book might be for a different audience of children, as both Harrow Way and Allfarthing students found when they were looking at books on the Greenaway list, particularly *Ginger*, *Mucky Pup* and *Queenie the Bantam*.



From *Queenie the Bantam*.

## Involving young readers

In an article in BfK ('Going for Gold', BfK 106, September 1997), *The Times* children's book correspondent Brian Alderson moaned that one of the problems with the Medals was that they were selected by one group (librarians) for another (children), who had 'no say in the matter (and who may well not be able to articulate their say if they had)'. The shadowing

also interesting. The wider worries about children's reading have always impinged on the Carnegie and Greenaway Medal awards, whether in terms of the need to make reading accessible to as wide a child audience as possible or to tackle issues of social importance. Is it coincidence that, in a year when boys' reading is on everyone's minds, *Scribbleboy*, *Pig-heart Boy* and *River Boy* should all be on the Carnegie shortlist? Or that one focus of the shadowing groups should be 'Boys and Reading'?

The make up of the shortlist can also affect the shadowing. Another book for older teenagers like *Junk* (now marketed on Penguin's adult list as suitable for 14-16 year-olds) would have posed difficulties for primary and lower secondary students' involvement. As it was, the two titles on the Carnegie list this year which both Harrow Way and Allfarthing students found difficult were arguably the most sophisticated in approach: *Fire, Bed and Bone* and *Forever X*. A book with a more straightforward narrative and using a recognisable genre, like *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, may have an easier appeal.

Curiously, at Allfarthing, the teachers discovered that, in general, the children found it more difficult to assess the titles on the Greenaway list than those on the Carnegie. Perhaps an indication that we are generally more at home talking about text rather than pictures.

As long as these difficulties are recognised and addressed, they can be strengths rather than weaknesses. They reflect the range of children's abilities and experiences, the variety of children's literature and illustration and the social and educational preoccupations of our time. It is not as tidy as Brian Alderson's dream of a 'culture of informed discussion', but it is an acceptance that at the heart of children's literature is a continuing dialogue between children and adults, which, confusing as it sometimes is, must be a part of the selection of the best of that literature.

Royal Mail have sponsored the Medals this year for the first time and, hopefully, there will be a sponsor for next year. Some of the children who have shadowed this year were able to attend the award announcement at the new British Library. Whatever happens, shadowing will continue. It will be, in the National Year of Reading as any other year, an opportunity to carry on talking about books: an activity, as Aidan Chambers has been reminding us for years, that is as important as reading itself. ■

Clive Barnes is Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City

Further information about shadowing the Carnegie and Greenaway Medal selections is available from Karen Bedwell at the Library Association, 0171 636 7543, <http://www.la-hq.org.uk>

# Authorgraph No.112

*Nicola Bayley*

Nicola Bayley interviewed by Joanna Carey

**N**icola Bayley's career took off like a rocket with her very first book. Her degree show at the Royal College of Art (just a few small, distinctive paintings) had caught the eye of publisher Tom Maschler and **Nicola Bayley's Book of Nursery Rhymes** was published by Cape in 1975. Given that illustrated nursery rhymes represent a vitally important first encounter with art and literature for the very young, was it not quite a responsibility for a beginner?

'I didn't think of it like that' she says, nor did she delve into the arcane origins of the rhymes. 'I simply took the Opies' nursery rhyme book and chose my favourites. The imagery was all there in my head.' Illustrated with unusual charm and finesse and an almost enamelled luminosity that was to become her hallmark, the book was a huge success and Nicola, tall and strikingly beautiful, in ankle length Indian print skirts and glossy curtains of long dark hair was the talk of the town.

Now in her forties she has an elegant, enigmatic composure that sits engagingly with a robust sense of humour and an emphatic, Woosterish turn of phrase ...

'Yes I got heaps of attention. Looking back, I realize I was spoilt to bits but at the time I wasn't really aware of what a lucky cove I was – or of how the pace would gradually slow down.' But did early success affect her development as an artist? Did it restrict her to doing more of the same?

'Cripes no! my style was already well defined – I knew exactly how I intended to work.' The illustrator Fritz Wegner who taught her at St Martin's (where she went after leaving her convent school) agrees – 'Nicola always knew just what she wanted to do, but was very secretive – always had screens round her desk – teachers had to request an audience with her ...' and it was the same at the Royal College of Art where Quentin Blake was head of the illustration department. 'Yes, it was rather odd the way she rigged up curtains round herself – but if



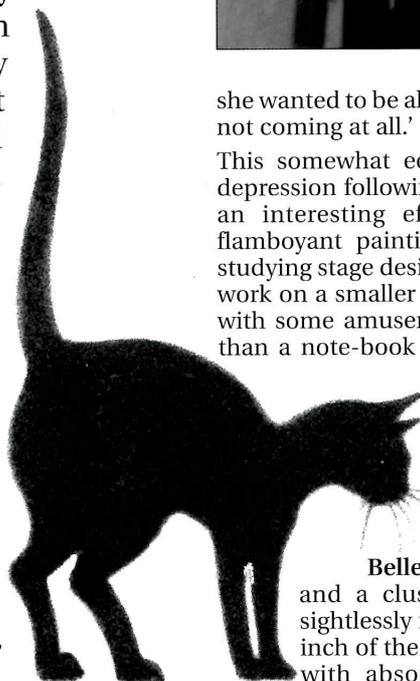
she wanted to be alone, that was fine by me – certainly better than not coming at all.'

This somewhat eccentric isolation (due in part, she says, to depression following an accident that had befallen a friend) had an interesting effect. 'Although I'd previously done large flamboyant paintings (and she had at one point considered studying stage design) I found I was forever challenging myself to work on a smaller and smaller scale' she says. And Blake recalls, with some amusement, that her final folio 'was scarcely bigger than a note-book – she could have kept it in a handbag.' And some of her illustrations were so small they had to be enlarged for printing.

Nicola lives in South London with her husband, and son Felix. She is no longer curtained off, but the house does have a certain fairy-tale air of seclusion ... an atmosphere, perhaps of Cocteau's film *La*

*Belle et la Bête*, with a melancholy statue in the hall and a cluster of 'commedia dell'arte' masks peering sightlessly from above ... As in Nicola's illustrations, every inch of the glorious interior is richly textured and packed with absorbing details – curios, antiquities, shelves groaning with elderly dolls, clowns, cats and crocodiles; marble busts, theatrical costumes, feathery folderols and a bewildering diversity of pictures. It is a hot day and Nicola has been trying to work outside. 'But some huge insect has crapped on my drawing' she says, dabbing at it vigorously with a cloth.

Her studio is downstairs – a cool, dark, booklined room. There is a Cecil Beaton print, a poster for Abel Gance's *Napoleon* and round her desk an army of antiquated (mostly cat related) tin toys, lead figures, puppets and tiny curiosities – a bit cobwebby, some of them – 'but now and again I do a little dusting with a paintbrush' – and the intricate array of pens, pots, quills, nibs and brushes makes it hard to tell which are collectors' items and which are the tools of her trade.



Nicola works in watercolour on thick 'Fabriano' paper that does not buckle and so does not need stretching. Still preferring to work on a small scale – 'any larger, and I just lose it' – she uses a lightbox to transfer her drawing from the rough, then builds up the painting with a meticulous pointillist technique. Like coals glowing in a furnace, the tiny dots of colour jostle one another to create an intense energy, or meld together in gentle diffusion. Form is defined by infinite textural and tonal variety and with the subtle handling of light, each richly patterned composition, however small, has the depth and complexity of a miniature peepshow or theatre. (It is fascinating to enter the very fabric of some of these paintings through a magnifying glass – and easy to see why one critic was inspired to call Nicola 'the sitting room Seurat' ...)

Paintings take three weeks to complete so she is understandably put out when people assume she takes short cuts with an air brush ... And she can be severely critical of her own work – or just plain rude – 'look at this page design' she says of an early book 'what a frightful hotch-potch of fried egg shapes ... and look at that LEADEN cow jumping over the moon! One wonders how it ever left the ground!'

She has worked with an impressive list of authors:

Russell Hoban ... William Mayne ... Christopher Logue ... Richard Adams wrote *The Tyger Voyage* specially for her – how exactly does she so successfully anthropomorphize

noble creatures like tigers without robbing them of their natural dignity? 'I'd certainly never ridicule an animal – I start by drawing them – without reference – sailing, drinking tea or whatever, just to get the effect I want ... Then I study the animal's anatomy, its movement – see just what would be possible – then I can let the information merge with my imagination.'

*The Patchwork Cat* is Nicola's favourite book, probably because the model was her own cat Bella (1974–1992). With her affectionate, intimate observation and subtly heightened naturalism, these illustrations explore every inch of the story. And in Hoban's *La Corona and the Tin Frog*, there is an unusually powerful interplay between words and pictures – so to what extent does she actually confer with her authors?

'Very little' she says, though at Walker Books, her roughs for the *The Mousehole Cat* did lead to discussions with author Antonia Barber who – at first – felt strongly that the fisherman's cat should be a Tabby, not black and white.' But this manuscript really made my spine tingle – and in my mind the Great Storm Cat *had* to be a Tabby – whose wavy markings would be echoed in the waves of the sea, and the sound waves of the storm ... *that* was my way into the story.' She did a lot of local research and drawing in Cornwall and the operatic scale of the story, and the shifting balance between fantasy and reality is perfectly matched both by the wide, imaginative sweep of her seascapes and the reassuring warmth of her domestic interiors. But as I admire her magical use of light ... the lanterns ... the moonshine ... Nicola gazes ruefully at the bearded, silver-haired fisherman on the cover – 'WHY, Oh WHY did I give him that stupid hat? He looks just like that bloody Captain Birdseye ...'



While there is always a gentle element of wit in her illustrations, she admits to feeling uneasy about *Fun with Mrs Thumb* – about a doll trapped in her own home by a predatory cat.' Initially, I was totally beguiled by this, with all the glorious possibilities of the dolls' house interiors ... and the cat, seen so huge through the little windows – but ultimately it was so bleak! The doll had no chance ... there was no element of hope and really, that's just not on ...'

Cats find their way into almost all her work but her latest book, *The Necessary Cat*, is, like its author, entirely devoted to them. A celebratory catalogue of feline facts, fiction, fantasy and folk-lore, its easy-going layout, she says, gave her a chance to 'loosen up', and in addition to her customary miniature paintings, she offers spirited black and white line drawings, silhouettes, delicate plant

studies, witty pastiches, tiny vignettes and, alongside a Wordsworth poem there is a freely drawn pencil sketch of a kitten, which, she says, at 14 inches across is 'COLOSSAL by my standards'. And the variety of styles allows her to pay homage to some of her own heroes ... among them Quentin Blake – 'even as a child I used to snip his drawings out of *Punch*' ... Pauline Baynes whose line drawings for the Narnia Chronicles so entranced her ... and Rex Whistler whose decorative wit and Arcadian vision is clearly so close in spirit to her own. And, of course, Kathleen Hale, the creator of Orlando the Marmalade Cat.

At this point Nicola's own cat enters the room and yawns rather pointedly before settling down. It is clearly time to go. Nicola relishes the solitary nature of her occupation; she listens to the radio while she works – 'or I did until they messed up the Radio 4 schedule – now I mostly listen to James Brown on tape.'

Unfailingly modest, she talks with an entertainingly deceptive nonchalance about her work – 'It's a bit like knitting really – once the drawing's done, there's absolutely nothing I like better than to settle down with a huge area of fur to fill in.' And she does not stint herself – you just have to look at *The Necessary Cat* to see what a very good time she has been having. ■

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### Details of books mentioned

*The Patchwork Cat* by William Mayne, Red Fox, 0 09 998320 6, £4.50 pbk

*The Mousehole Cat* by Antonia Barber, Walker, 0 7445 0703 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 2353 2, £4.99 pbk

*Fun with Mrs Thumb* by Jan Mark, Walker, 0 7445 2534 9, £8.99 hbk

*The Necessary Cat* by Nicola Bayley, Walker, 0 7445 1924 1, £10.99 hbk

Nicola Bayley's *Book of Nursery Rhymes*, *The Tyger Voyage* by Richard Adams, and *La Corona and the Tin Frog* by Russell Hoban, all published by Cape, are now out of print.

Joanna Carey is an author and illustrator and the former Children's Books Editor of the *Guardian*.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

## NEWS

## NATIONAL YEAR OF READING

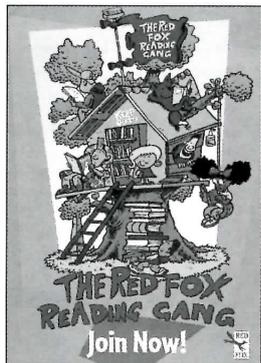


● The DfEE has backed an initiative to send a free **Schools Pack** devised by the Poetry Society to 40,000 schools and libraries in the UK in time for National Poetry Day on October 5th. The Pack features 13 specially commissioned poems by contemporary poets including Jo Shapcott, Wendy Cope, Michael Rosen and Linton Kwesi Johnson. Details from The Poetry Society (0171 240 4810).

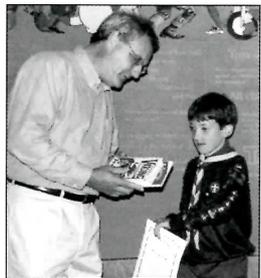
● Random House Children's Books are marking the National Year of Reading by launching **Red Fox Reading Gangs** throughout the UK. Aimed at children between 4 and 12, the Gangs offer ways for teachers, librarians and booksellers to encourage children to read books and enjoy them. Details from Red Fox Reading Gang, P.O. Box 1375, London SW1V 2SA.

● **Books for Keeps** 'Good Reads' column which features reviews by young people of books they recommend, has inspired Hitchin Boys School to publish a guide to around 50 fiction titles, chosen and reviewed by a team of reviewers aged from 11-14. **Really Riveting Reads: Reviews by Boys for Boys** is available at £3.50 (inc. p & p) from Mrs P. Thornhill, Hitchin Boys School, Grammar School Walk, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1JB.

● **Celebrating the Year of Reading** is a conference organised by the Reading and Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, on Saturday 10th October. Speakers include John Stannard (Director of the National Literacy Strategy), Grace Kempster (Head of Libraries, Essex), Sue Ellis (CLPE) and children's authors Chris Powling and Bernard Ashley. Details from the Reading and Language Centre (0118 931 8820).

Really Riveting Reads  
Reviews by boys for boys

Hitchin Boys' School



*Right:* 10-year-old Scout Matthew Ryan, who holds all 30 Scout badges, receives his Writer badge from children's author Jeremy Strong at a recent presentation.

## Levinson finds a home

Levinson Children's Books has been relaunched as part of the David & Charles group. Managing director Neil Page sees the list as one that will 'fit perfectly into the David & Charles portfolio'.

## Children's Division for Simon &amp; Schuster

Simon & Schuster has launched a UK children's division which will publish its first titles next Spring. Martina Challis, formerly of Random House Children's Books, has been appointed Director of Children's Publishing with a brief to build a global list from the year 2000. The focus will be on picture books, fiction, novelty and media tie-ins.

## BBC Worldwide launches new series

BBC Worldwide, publishers of the teen magazine, **Girl Talk**, are to launch two new series, 'Best Friends' and 'Pet Hotel', publishing a new title each month at only £2.99.

Useful Organisations  
No.2: **READING IS FUNDAMENTAL UK**

Based at The National Literacy Trust, Swire House, 59 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AJ (tel: 0171 828 2435; fax: 0171 931 9986)

A non-profit organisation (core sponsor Tate & Lyle PLC) that seeks to inspire children to become strong, motivated readers, particularly in areas where children have little or no access to books. RIF aims to 'create a book-using culture and positive attitudes to lifelong learning within families where there is a pattern of underachievement in literacy.

Founded in the USA in 1966, RIF works by setting up local projects in both school and non-school locations where poverty of aspiration and low self-expectation are endemic. Each local project works with a number of children and young people in the 0-19 age range. Books are given free to children and visits from authors and illustrators arranged. Events and activities aim to motivate family reading. There is an emphasis on the fun and pleasure of reading as well as on the fundamental skills. RIF publishes a number of support materials for its projects

So far 260 projects have been established across the UK and 35,000 new books distributed. Initial evaluation indicates that RIF represents the only source of books that many children have in their own home; it increases the amount of time children spend reading at home and with their families and it leads to greater involvement of parents in their children's reading habits and book choices.

## PEOPLE

Fantasy writer **Terry Pratchett** received an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

**Ian Craig**, formerly Associate Publisher at Jonathan Cape, has been appointed Head of Publishing for Random House Children's Books.



CRAIG

**Anne Marley**, Chair of the Children's Book Circle, is standing down. Her successors as joint chairpersons are **Naomi Cooper** (Transworld)

and **Charlie Price** (Walker Books).

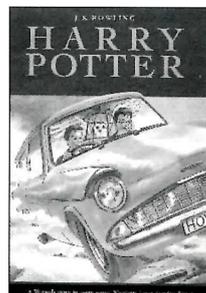
**Justin Somper**, formerly publicity director at Random House Children's Books, is now a marketing and publicity freelance (0181 341 2414).

**Alan Durant** has been appointed 'virtual' writer in residence at Gors Junior School, Swansea. Students will e-mail him with their ideas for stories and characters. The scheme is supported by the Welsh Arts Council.

**Richard Scrivener** has been promoted to Publishing Director, media and popular non-fiction at Penguin Children's Books.

Harry Potter's  
hardback sales

The sequel to **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone**, **Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets** has hit the No.1 slot in the UK hardback bestseller list according to Booktrack. In response to the popularity of the Harry Potter books, Bloomsbury Children's Books has launched The Harry Potter Fan Club. Details from Rosamund Walker at Bloomsbury (0171 494 6058).







# 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

**Gwynneth Bailey** is Language Coordinator at Aldborough County 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 Coordinator and teacher at Chatsworth Infant School in Hounslow, Middlesex.

**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.

**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.

**Lois Keith** teaches at North Westminster Community School. Her first novel, *A Different Life*, is reviewed on page 25.

**Beverley Naidoo** is a writer and visiting Fellow of the University of Southampton School of Education.

**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.

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

**Rosemary Stones** is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

**Nicholas Tucker** is a lecturer in Psychology at Sussex University.

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King Arthur	★★★ 22		
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Laser Quest	★★★★ 23		

## Books About Children's Books

### Living with Eagles. Priest to Publisher: The Life and Times of Marcus Morris

★★★★★

Sally Morris and Jan Hallwood, Lutterworth Press, 312pp, 0 7188 2982 4, £25.00

Every now and again a new figure

bursts into the world of children's publishing, shaking up old practices and producing astonishing results. One such was the Reverend Marcus Morris, founder of the *Eagle* comic in 1950. A heavy drinker, near-bankrupt and occasional womaniser, Morris was also a nervous bundle of energy responsible for the best post-war children's comic ever to hit a grateful young audience. Eagle clubs, cricket coaching, football demonstrations, a junior table tennis

tournament, even an enormously expensive Ballet Scholarship scheme soon followed in its wake. Readers were paid for their contributions, with cartoons from the young Gerald Scarfe and David Hockney among those printed. No wonder older readers look back to all this with nostalgia; it is a long time since anyone else has set out to entertain, educate and generally involve the great mass of children with such success.

This extraordinary achievement came at a certain cost. There were serious fall-outs, including one with the brilliant artist Frank Hampson who created Dan Dare (originally to be known as Lex Christian, a tough fighting parson from London's East End). Morris's children, two of whom have written this biography, remember being left on their own for long periods of time. The house was a tip and there were rats in the garden. But for the most part they recall their charismatic father and other-worldly, actress mother with love and respect.

The Eagle along with Girl, Robin and Swift eventually died following a Daily Mirror take-over. Competition from television and Morris's outside expense account may in time have done for them anyway, but it was an inspired venture well described in this generously illustrated book. NT

**The Children's Book of Books**

★★★

Penguin Books and Random House, 160pp, 0 09 926464 1, £1.00

Produced to coincide with World Book Day 1998, this selection of favourite titles chosen by various celebrities is full of useful tips for young readers today. They can discover who are the most borrowed children's authors from public

libraries (Janet and Allan Ahlberg), and which title was chosen as the nation's favourite story in last year's Waterstone's poll (Roald Dahl's *Matilda*). It is also interesting to see which books and why were chosen by the Prime Minister (*The Lord of the Rings*), Alex Ferguson (*Treasure Island*), Liam Gallacher (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) and Jeremy Paxman (*The Owl and the Pussy-cat*). For those yet to spend the £1 book voucher promised to every school child this year, here is just the title at exactly the right price. NT

**REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant**

**See the Rabbit**

★★

0 670 87952 5

**Doll and Teddy**

★★

0 670 87950 9

**Baby Sleeps**

★★★

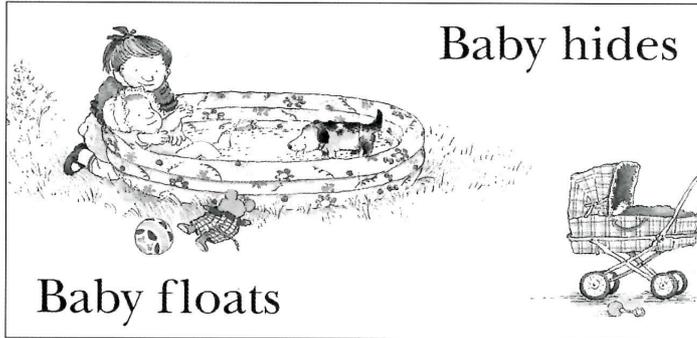
0 670 87949 5

**Blue Pram**

★★

0 670 87951 7

Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Viking, 14pp, £3.99 each board  
These four board books use that



**Baby hides**

**Baby floats**

From *Baby Sleeps*.

unfortunate publisher's trick of pulling images from a well-established book and reworking them into a new format, presumably to increase sales by creating a new audience. *The Baby's Catalogue* has been given this treatment here. For

those familiar with Janet Ahlberg's original pictures, it is initially a delight to see them blown up, losing none of their freshness since first appearing in 1982. For those anticipating a good Allan Ahlberg text to go with them - witty, well-

constructed and apt - prepare for a disappointment.

The books each consist of pictures, selected without reference to the theme of the original volume, and given a one-word or short phrase caption. *See the Rabbit* repeats the irritating 'See the ...' phrase on each page (remember it from reading books of old?) while *Baby Sleeps*, the most successful of the four, has a rhyming text loosely following a toddler's day. *Doll and Teddy* shows a pair of objects or people on each page with no obvious rationale for their selection; *Blue Pram* purports to be a 'colour' book but as the original drawings were not made with this purpose in mind, a young reader might find focusing on the required part of the picture quite difficult.

I am surprised at Allan Ahlberg's compliance with this project - it

**£10,000,000 and going strong!**

READATHON, the children's reading event which raises money for charity, has announced that its 1997 campaign raised over £863,000 for The Roald Dahl Foundation and Sargent Cancer Care for Children. This brings the grand total raised since Readathon's inception in 1984 to over £10.5 million!

With Children's Book Week coming up in October, the Literacy Hour highlighting a whole range of shared book activities, and the National Year of Reading now upon us, there's no better time to get children involved in something like Readathon. It promotes reading, raising money gives readers a genuinely valuable aim - and it's fun too!

"A major thrust of the Year of Reading is that it is for everyone... I'm hoping that it will bring reading and Readathon to the attention of parents... I hope too that schools will encourage parents to actually read for Readathon. Things are looking up for the book, and Readathon looks forward to another year championing that splendid thing - children's reading" - BROUGH GIRLING, *Readathon Campaign Director*.



Readathon®  
Reading for life!

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**PLEASE ENROL US for Readathon®**

(PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK CAPITALS)

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

Approx. number of children doing Readathon:

aged 7 and under \_\_\_\_\_ aged 8 and over \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send my pack for the start of:**

The Autumn Term

The Spring Term 1999

The Summer Term 1999

Name of teacher organising Readathon: \_\_\_\_\_

Simply complete this coupon and return to READATHON:  
Swerford, Chipping Norton, Oxon OX7 4BG.

BFK. 98

**ENROLMENT FORM**

seems an unnecessary abuse of the original concept of **The Baby's Catalogue**, and rather than leading new readers to that classic volume it might well induce a 'done that' reaction. This could have been avoided by a more carefully thought-out selection of images/story-line, and texts which through rhythm and cadence help toddler sharers to get a feel for language and the shape of even a simple narrative.

At £3.99 each these titles compare very poorly with the full **Catalogue** at £4.99 in paperback or £10.99 in hardback – I know which I would buy. AG

### Fiddle-i-fee

★★★★

Jakki Wood, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 0860 3, £4.99 pbk



Wood has taken Fiddle-i-fee, the well-loved, rollicking, cumulative old nursery song, translated it from the vaguely 'olde English' version, changed the noises the animals make, added a twist to the end and turned it into a brilliant picture book full of verve and fun! This title will be superb for 'Literacy Hour' particularly when I get round to typing out the text in 'Comic Sans MS' font to go alongside the book! Is there an evolution in the language of farm animals? JS

### Big Book of Families

★★

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 4959 0, £9.99 hbk

There are families of all kinds featured in this large format picture book aimed at babies and toddlers although it is more weighted to WASPs and my hackles were raised by

some of the descriptions and illustrations which border on stereotyping. However, there is much that is very good in this catalogue of different aspects of family life from getting on with siblings to family holidays. JS

### Barty's Scarf

★★★★

Sally Chambers, Piccadilly, 32pp, 1 85340 501 9, £4.99 pbk



Barty is a determined young sheep who is extremely fond of the blue and pink scarf his grandmother knits for his Christmas present. Even when summer arrives, Barty goes on wearing his scarf and fast becomes a laughing stock! How Barty's scarf comes into its own and saves the day is comfortingly told in this friendly picture book. Chambers' simple story line is satisfying and her illustrations just right for the age range. While this is not a book to set the world alight, it has great appeal. JS

### Harriet

★★★★

Deborah Inkpen, Hodder, 32pp, 0 340 67258 7, £9.99 hbk



On reading the author/illustrator's name, one immediately makes a connection with that other well-known Inkpen, and, yes, this is Mick's wife with her first picture book. Harriet is a pet hamster who finds her

fought-for freedom rather scary. Unlike Harriet, the string of wild creatures she encounters are well-versed in survival skills. Her unfortunate ducking in the pond reduces her to 'a tiny, soggy, cross heap of fur' ... charming match of words and pictures at this point. Of course we had guessed she would end up in the henhouse, and ultimately in the egg basket, from the cover illustration. But a cosy book, especially for young children with experience of rodent escapologists. GB

### Oliver's Fruit Salad

★★★★

Vivian French, ill. Alison Bartlett, Hodder, 32pp, 0 340 70452 7, £9.99 hbk, 0 340 70453 5, £4.99 pbk



A sequel to the highly successful **Oliver's Vegetables**: this time Oliver's visit to Grandpa has included picking and processing many fruits from the garden, all far superior to Mum's supermarket offerings. Oliver's words are carefully chosen so that we are surprised as Mum when we realise that he does not actually like fruit. He is converted by a stunning tropical fruit salad that even Grandpa could not have grown.

Bold, exuberant gouache paintings fill the pages to bursting, with some interesting perspectives. Good fun – and, perhaps, even inspiring to the vitamin-deprived! AG

### A Summery Saturday Morning

★★★★

Margaret Mahy, ill. Selina Young, Hamish Hamilton, 32pp, 0 241 13789 6, £10.99 hbk

Beginning with the glorious end

pages which presage the rumpus to come when dogs meet geese, Young has captured the spirit of freedom and lightness implied in the title of this fresh looking picture book.



She makes full use of its landscape format to present at each opening a bright double spread, bled to the edges, which draws us in to become part of the group of four children, one adult and two dogs winding along the 'wiggly track' to the sea. The dogs chase cat and cyclist without resistance, but get their comeuppance when they meet a goose and her goslings. The party is put to flight by the geese and the smallest child sounds the retreat on his toy trumpet as they dash back up the track. Mahy's economical four-line rhymes at each opening sets the pace for the action, blending word and picture in what is likely to become a well-loved addition to any infant bookshelf. VC

### Granny and Me

★★★★

Penelope Farmer, ill. Valerie Littlewood, Walker, 80pp, 0 7445 4194 8, £6.99 hbk

Six tales of Ellie and her rather self-consciously youthful Granny, who breezes in to help deflect attention from a new baby brother.

Granny gets into minor scrapes (like being naughty at playgroup) and helps Ellie to cope with fears and new experiences and to sort out mistakes. The sequence ends with Ellie realising that baby Adam is getting older and that she is ready to include him in her fun. My only quibble with this simply but sensitively written collection is with its slightly irritating efforts to present Granny as 'cool' – surely no big deal as Grannies go nowadays.

Expressive illustrations complement the text well making this a good read-aloud for 4-6 year olds – I rather doubt that the 'young readers' suggested on the cover would find it interesting enough to read alone. AG

## REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

### Turnover Tuesday

★★★★

Phyllis Root, ill. Helen Craig, Walker 'The Giggle Club', 24pp, 0 7445 5497 7, £1.99 pbk

Bonnie Bumble eats plum turnovers for breakfast and finds that this has alarming after-effects – she turns over! Life upside down is fun at first but trying to do the farm jobs in this orientation has hilarious results! Language is well paced and flowing in this jolly picture book for fledgling readers. The illustrations support the



text well with a dash of humour. JS

### The Best Thing about a Puppy

★★★★

Judy Hindley, ill. Patricia Casey, Walker 'The Giggle Club', 24pp, 0 7445 6085 3, £1.99 pbk

This is a delightful picture book in which a small boy evaluates the good and bad things about life with a puppy. It has a strong and supportive

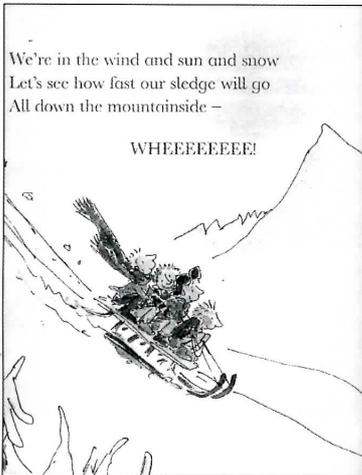
The good thing about a puppy is, he's warm and wiggly.



text which flows and illustrations which are not only appealing but enrich the story by giving the reader strong clues. This title would make a good group or team reader for 'Literacy Hour' with potential for a whole variety of meaningful follow up activities. JS

**All Join In**

**BIG BOOK** ★★★★★  
 Quentin Blake, Red Fox Big Book, 32pp, 0 09 926529 X, £11.99 pbk



Quentin Blake's invocation, which is also the title of the first of seven exuberant rhyming excuses to make a glorious noise, is one of the best and most enjoyable ways I know of learning about sound/symbol associations. Thankfully the print in this big book is well set and sufficiently large to make sure that a whole class can indeed *All Join In*. That and enlarged opportunities to focus on Blake's zany illustrations make this an essential and bargain investment. JB

**Elmer**

**BIG BOOK** ★★★★★  
 David McKee, Red Fox Big Book, 32pp, 0 09 926528 1, £11.99 pbk

McKee's classic celebration of difference in big book format is a cause for celebration in itself: what more could one ask? Well, it depends what you expect the book to do. If you want a whole class to be able to read the print then you will be disappointed as it is far too small. However, there are plenty of other ways of sharing and enjoying this enlarged version story of what must surely be a favourite character of almost every young child I know. JB

**How Do You Feel?**

**BIG BOOK** ★★★  
 Gillian Liu, ill. Jane Green, Evans Early Words Big Book, 24pp, 0 237 51888 0, £14.99 pbk

Big books now abound, but this one, exploring emotions, could fulfil a particular need in the nursery or reception class. The large-typed text is simple, in words familiar to the small child, and the pictures bold. The book is plotted around the days of the week beginning with a small boy's first day at school. In turn he becomes shy, happy, cross, proud, scared, brave, sad, lonely, excited and sleepy. The gentle interaction with adults in speech bubble form helps

the boy express and resolve his feelings. There is a rhyme at the end inviting readers to explore their own emotions. Lots of issues here, and a book which could be useful in helping resolve some of them. GB

**Pawprints in Time**

★★★★

Philippa Butler, ill. George Smith, Viking, 32pp, 0 670 87177 X, £10.99 hbk

In this very attractive book, illustrated in a soft photographic style reminiscent of Gary Blythe's, the 'pawprints' in question are those of Anna's cat, 'a cat with stories to tell'. Each evening Cat disappears, to return in Anna's dreams, dreams of times past and places faraway.



Cat's shadowy presence in scenes from his nine lives - from Ancient Egypt and Rome, the Far East, medieval Europe and pioneering America - invites the sensitive reader to find out more. This is achieved by a concise and gently repetitive text, which together with the illustration creates a romantic evocation of other worlds.

A note on the jacket suggests a readership of 3-8 year olds. Though there is not much text, this book would be appreciated most by children at the upper end of this range and beyond, appealing as it does to the imagination and depending on some knowledge of the contexts for its effect. It might well enthuse and inspire early KS2 children in their search for an understanding of history, while avoiding the didactic approach. AG

**Noah and the Space Ark**

★★★★★

Laura Cecil, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Hamish Hamilton, 32pp, 0 241 13680 6, £9.99 hbk

This conservation book opens with 'Many many years from now Earth was very crowded'. Once children



have absorbed this concept, the idea presented of Earth becoming unable to sustain human, animal or plant life is quite disturbing. Chichester Clark's illustrative style admirably suits this subject, with its mix of past, present and future.

The details about building the Space Ark, Noah's visit to the Build U Self Emporium and an intriguing plan of the Ark itself, absorbed groups in my school for days after the initial read, appealing especially to boys. The connection between the biblical story and this futuristic Noah is cleverly made, and appreciated by children. A wonderful book, but be prepared for the searching questions it will generate! GB

**Four Stories About Our House**

★★★★

Emma and Paul Rogers, ill. Priscilla Lamont, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 6093 4, £4.99 pbk



But Joe has one favourite place. On winter evenings he curls up in the chimney seat. My seat, my tree, our home, thinks Joe. "Welcome," says the house.



Now available in paperback, this book is a 'must' for all infant libraries. Four gentle stories are woven together about the different families occupying one house over a two hundred year span. As well as being a most enjoyable book to share, this title also works on many levels. Our History Coordinator feels this book is ideal as it conveys so much to young children of the changes that time brings whilst still retaining the sense that although children may live in different times and have many different life experiences, there are still the universal experiences of family life and loving.

It would, however, be to underestimate the value of the book if we only saw it as an excellent early history book. The text and illustrations are a masterly combination of subtle understatement - the characters and rooms change styles of clothing and furniture yet the bare bone essentials of the house and family living are retained. While we are offered a superb learning experience about change we still have security, feeling that were we to revisit the house seventy years hence there would be yet another story to tell! JS

**Strawberry Drums**

POETRY ★★★★★

Compiled by Adrian Mitchell, ill. Frances Lloyd, Macdonald Young Books, 40pp, 0 7500 0364 2, £4.99 pbk

'Listen to the music of the poem' says Adrian Mitchell, compiler of this welcome reprint (first published in

**NAMES**

They call you names for the fun of it.  
 To make your insides sear.  
 To figure all your happiness  
 And tell you you're a SIKKI.  
 To them you're totally different.  
 To them you're Lower Class.  
 They'll hit you and hurt you as much as they can  
 Till your insides are eaten at last.  
 They say that you're brown and they hate you,  
 And they never ever go away.  
 They've become a part of your life now,  
 And I fear that they're here to stay.

Kivandep Chahal



1989). From the opening bars of John Agard's 'Who is de girl?', with pieces by the likes of McGough, Edwin Morgan, Blake and George Barker, through to the Navajo Indian 'Nightway' finale, his invitation is hard to resist. Equally irresistible is his invitation to compose. Additional inspiration is provided by the illustrations built up in overlaid blocks of airbrush colour which have a liveness and movement of their own. JB

**Moo Baa Baa Quack**

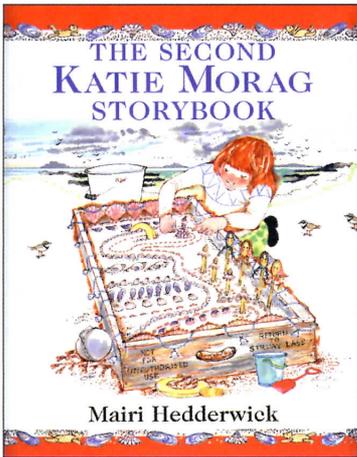
★★★★

Francesca Simon, ill. Emily Bolam, Orion, 80pp, 1 85881 357 3, £10.99 hbk

This collection of seven stories set in and around Potter's Barn has all the makings of a classic. There is a duckling variant on *Rosie's Walk* (and an abundance of other opportunities for making intertextual links), a cookery book chapter wherein the animals' combined efforts at cake making result in a delicious Mish Mash Hash for Belle the musical pig - watch out in your imaginative play area! - and a grand finale of a farmyard concert.



Colourful visual orchestration by way of splodges and waves, stripes and stipples encloses much of the action which BEEPS! SNORTS! and COCK-A-DOODLE DOOS its way free from the frames at appropriate moments as the exuberantly executed animals with pinpoint eyes swim, stroll, scramble, somersault, sneak, even sleep, and finally sing, their way across the pages. Altogether an inspired amalgam of words and pictures: it deserves a place in every setting where there are young children learning to be literate in the broadest sense. JB



## The Second Katie Morag Storybook

★★★★★

Mairi Hedderwick, Bodley Head, 48pp, 0 370 32327 0, £9.99 hbk

If you have not yet met K. M. McColl (Katie Morag), this book will be wonderful to discover. If she is an old friend, then it is a gem. Reading a Katie Morag book is like visiting a favourite holiday haunt. The Isle of Struay has its jetty, Grannie Island's and Neilly Beag's all in familiar places on the endpaper maps.

A bold lass, this Katie Morag! Even the Big Boy Cousins stand amazed at her bravery. Camping near Grannie Island's is one thing, but next to Castle McColl, ancient seat of the Clan Chief Rory of the Flaming Red Beard ...

Meet Granny Island in her dungarees, trundling round on her tractor, and Granma Mainland who allows Katie Morag to experiment with her make-up. A magical collection of stories and poems to pore over. GB

## Rumpelstiltskin

★★★

Retold by Helen Cresswell, ill. Stephen Player, Macdonald 'Classic Fairy Tales', 32pp, 0 7500 2036 9, £8.99 hbk, 0 7500 2037 7, £4.99 pbk

This fairy tale is neither so well-known by children nor easily grasped. But this beautifully crafted retelling rolls off the tongue, begging to be read aloud. Cresswell's use of 'old-fashioned' phrases enables the tale to be set in the mind as one from days of yore. The rich text is to be savoured, and the illustrations both explain and move along the story. Cresswell builds up the tension as the strange little man three times saves the miller's daughter from death. Will

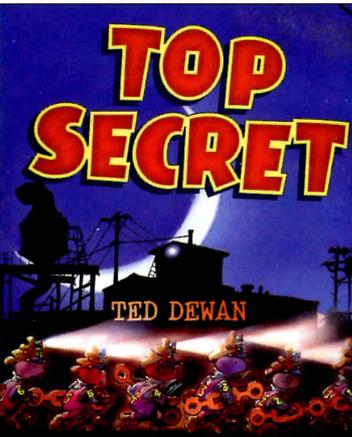
she finally thwart his desire to take her first-born? **Rumpelstiltskin** is one of Macdonald's series of classical tales retold by top children's authors. It is no doubt produced to meet the demands of the National Curriculum, but what a delight to find fairy tales published of such quality. Well worth seeking out. GB

## Top Secret

★★★★★

Ted Dewan, Scholastic, 32pp, 0 590 19806 8, £3.99 pbk

'Fantastic', 'clever', 'brilliant because it make you think about ways to get into places', 'the plans and the machines are ace' - these are just a few of the comments my young reviewers made about this book. If I also say that our Design and Technology Co-ordinator also fell on it and wants more copies - then you get the flavour of the response!



An intrepid band of blobby ('Ninja Turtles without the shells') looking creatures set off with our hero, Number 7, the new kid on the team, on a daring mission. Ingenuity, nail biting excitement, pace and sheer fun characterise this book and build up to a satisfyingly dramatic climax - the twist at the end is a perfect conclusion. The only disappointment was that the publisher put the book information on the last page of the story which detracted from it - could it not have gone on the cover instead? JS

## Beware of the Bears!

★★★★★

Alan MacDonald, ill. Gwyneth Williamson, Magi, 32pp, 1 85430 456 9, £8.99 hbk

It is the fashion to twist old tales, and now it is the turn of the three bears in this picture book version to get nasty and take revenge on Goldilocks. MacDonald's Mummy, Daddy and



Baby Bear are a family of troublemakers looking for an excuse to do their worst. They track Goldilocks to a house in the woods and, while she is out, wreak havoc: tangoing on the table, pelting each other with breakfast cereal, soaking the bathroom and clouting each other with pillows - all to an ironic refrain of 'This table's too slippy', and 'These curtains are too rippy', 'But this sofa's just right'. So ... 'they all jumped on the sofa and did the bossa nova.' Williamson captures the good natured anarchy perfectly.

What a self satisfied bunch of bears they look when Goldilocks comes back and finds the mess. They are not so happy when they find out who the house actually belongs to. As the publisher's blurb might have put it, **A Clockwork Orange** for 7-9s (just kidding). CB

## Let the Sun Shine

★★★★

Chosen by Kaye Webb, various illustrators, Frances Lincoln, 72pp, 0 7112 1247 3, £5.99 pbk

First published in 1992 as **Round About Six**, this is a collection of specially-commissioned stories and poems by well-known authors and illustrators, selected by the celebrated Puffin editor who died in 1996.

Billed as 'a read-aloud collection', the six stories include a fairy-tale by Dick King-Smith, a fantasy by Berlie Doherty and a cautionary tale by Betsy Byars. The stories are interspersed with poems by Ted Hughes, Charles Causley and others. Slightly uneven, as might be expected in a selection of new work, most of these have a fresh appeal about them, with one or two gems especially among the poems, and some exquisite illustrations by, for example, Pauline Baynes and Angela Barrett. A refreshing read for 5-8s. AG

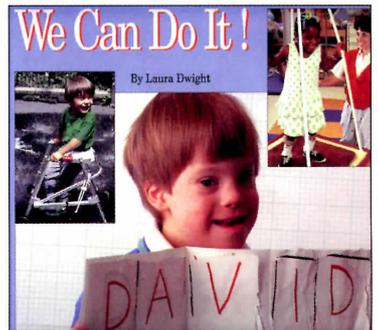
## How Do Your Senses Work?

NON-FICTION ★★★

Judy Tatchell, ill. Maria Wheatley, Usborne, 16pp, 0 7460 2506 8, £3.99 pbk novelty

A lift the flap book for 5-7 year olds.

The flaps do not so much supply surprises as enable extra information to be added to the double page spreads. The text is easy to follow and interesting, and would be good for parent and child to use together, but Wheatley has a problem illustrating some of the concepts. Her cartoons of the nerves as roads along which yellow stick men carry placard-like messages are not helpful; and I would have preferred an accurate, simplified diagram of an ear to show how it works rather than an exaggerated impression. Still, the book does show that it is fun to use your senses. This is something that young children already know but information books sometimes forget. CB



## We Can Do It!

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Laura Dwight, Star Bright Books, 40pp, 1 887734 34 1, £7.99 hbk (available from Ragged Bears Ltd, Ragged Appleshaw, Andover, Hampshire SP11 9HX; tel: 01264 772269; £2 p&p)

**We Can Do It!** is a picture book illustrated with well shot, lively images of five 3-, 4- and 5-year-old disabled children going about their everyday business of being with their families, going to school, playing, helping with jobs and so on. Aimed at younger children with text written in the children's voices, it is very much a 'can-do' kind of book: 'My name is Gina. I am five years old. I have spina bifida, and I can do lots of things.' But the images are all positive and unsentimental. It also does not hesitate to show the ways in which these children are also different. Young readers will learn from the pictures like those of Sarah (who is blind) 'trailing' the wall with her hand so that she knows where she is going, or Gina explaining her wheelchair to her schoolfriends. This title has an excellent glossary and is an important book for primary school libraries. LK

# REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

## Trickster Tales

★★★★★

Retold by Richard Walker, ill. Claudio Muñoz, Barefoot, 80pp, 1 901223 83 3, £12.99 hbk

**Trickster Tales** recount the adventures of those underdogs and eccentrics whose cunning and luck enable them to wriggle out of impossible situations and to surmount insuperable difficulties.

The best known tricksters are Brer Rabbit from the Black American tradition, his African ancestor Ananse the Spider Man, and the Mullah Nasrudin whose adventures originate in the folklore of Turkey and the Middle East. All three of these rogues are represented here by refreshingly lesser known tales. Walker, a professional storyteller, also introduces us to tricksters from Native American, Bengali, Kampuchean, Russian and Swiss traditions, and he opens the

collection with a tale about the ubiquitous Jack, the English representative of the trickster tradition. Many readers will find familiar motifs in the stories: a wizard hamstrung by a vainglorious display of his own magic; a banquet of soup prepared with an old iron nail; an old woman rolling home in a hollow gourd.

The retellings in this collection are vivid and simple, preserving both the clarity and the conversational flourishes of the oral tradition, and

providing a powerful support for teachers who want to try oral retellings themselves, or to encourage younger readers to do so. The book is strongly and attractively designed, and the illustrations brighten the text without upstaging it. GH

## The Last of the Wallendas

POETRY

★★★★

Russell Hoban, ill. Patrick Benson, Hodder, 80pp, 0 340 67830 5, £3.99 pbk

This is a fascinating collection of fifty-two short and haunting poems by the author of such strange and various works as *The Mouse and his Child*, *The Frances Stories*, *Riddley Walker* and the libretto to Harrison Birtwistle's opera *The Second Mrs Kong*. Most of the poems are characterised by a sense of the mysterious in the familiar: the view from the westbound platform at Notting Hill Station is one of distant scenes and centuries; dragons lurk down plugholes and under carpets; glimpses of old masters and seascapes evoke whimsical cravings. The mood of the collection is always one of quirky contemplation, sometimes light-hearted but often yearning and troubled. Eerily mundane corners of London feature strongly, as do monsters of various kinds, naked statues and rhapsodies based on newspaper clippings. One of these is a meditation on the death of Sergei Preminin, a soviet seaman who sacrificed his life in order to avert the accidental launching of a nuclear salvo. In a typically odd and moving juxtaposition, the dead sailor is visited by a viol player and the dead wife he is mourning in a scene from *Tous les Matins du Monde*.

This is a magical collection which grows more and more interesting as one rereads it. GH

## The Forsaken Merman and Other Story Poems

POETRY

★★★

Edited by Berlie Doherty, ill. Nick Maland, Hodder, 176pp, 0 340 68997 8, £11.99 hbk

Adults of a certain age will enjoy the nostalgic appeal of many of the sixty or so poems in this anthology. What a pleasure to be reacquainted with such former classroom favourites as 'The Wreck of the Hesperus' and 'Flannan Isle' and to have their underlying tragic note alleviated by 'The Owl and the Pussy-Cat' and 'Jabberwocky'. Add – among other 'moderns' – a Rosen, a Sweeney and a Causley and the result is an attractive reminder of the power, variety and emotional range of narrative verse. If the genre is to make a comeback, it is difficult to imagine a more eloquent sampling than this one – though today's young reader may need more convincing. RD

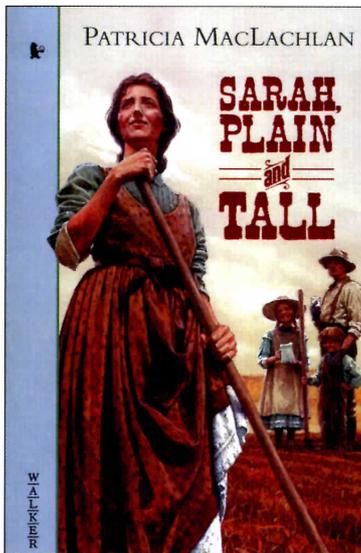
## Sarah, Plain and Tall

★★★★★

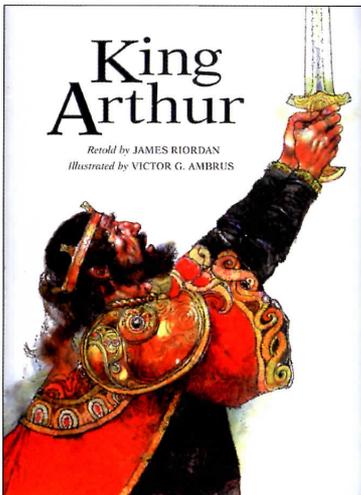
Patricia MacLachlan, Walker, 80pp, 0 7445 6016 0, £3.50 pbk

This well honed narrative tells the story of Anna and Caleb and their father's search for a wife. When plain tall Sarah arrives on their small farm she brings tales of the sea, a collection of shells and homesickness for Maine. Her strong capable presence completes the household, though there are moments of tension when the children wonder if she will return home or stay on the farm.

However, this is not a discordant book and a wedding is arranged



amongst intimations of contentment. The simplicity of this story should not be confused with dullness or predictability: its characters are carefully delineated and settings imaginatively realised. The plot is delicately written, too, with a real feeling for light and shade and the subtle interplay of family feelings. VR



## King Arthur

★★★★★

Retold by James Riordan, ill. Victor G. Ambrus, Oxford, 96pp, 0 19 274177 2, £7.99 pbk

## King Arthur

★★★

Rosalind Kerven, ill. Tudor Humphries, Dorling Kindersley 'Eyewitness Classics', 64pp, 0 7513 7145 9, £9.99 hbk

The reason for the lasting appeal of Arthurian narratives for re-teller and artist is obvious enough. Few traditional tales offer such a heady combination of high courage and base deceit, loyalty and betrayal, colour, intrigue and romance; cruelty and violence abound, but they co-exist with a lofty sense of idealism and an emphasis on chivalrous courtesy.

In terms of content there is little to choose between these attractively produced re-tellings, since all the best known episodes from the original stories are included in both. Riordan's version is more literary, more poetic and features, by way of centre-piece, a vivid rendering of the

Middle English poem 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'. Ambrus's illustrations reflect the passionate vigour of the text but show also the human being beneath the hero: Lady Mary's bedroom visit to Arthur (in the Gawain pages) provides an excellent example. Humphries' illustrations for the Dorling Kindersley volume are more conventionally 'medieval', incorporating a few Pre-Raphaelite (and Hollywood) influences. The supporting information about the stories and their origins results in a book ideal for all sorts of Arthurian classroom projects. Kerven's text, though perfectly readable, is occasionally flat; it does not have Riordan's energy or his sense of pace. RD

## The Boggart and the Monster

★★★★

Susan Cooper, Bodley Head, 176pp, 0 370 32486 2, £10.99 hbk

Five years after the popular *The Boggart*, comes this sequel which links the mischievous invisible sprite, almost inevitably, with that better known, intermittently visible, Scottish phenomenon, the Loch Ness Monster. The idea that Nessie could be a disconsolate boggart, who has lost his family and the power to shift shapes, is attractive, and Cooper enjoys the relationship between the original and irrepressible MacDevon sprite and his glum Urquhart cousin.

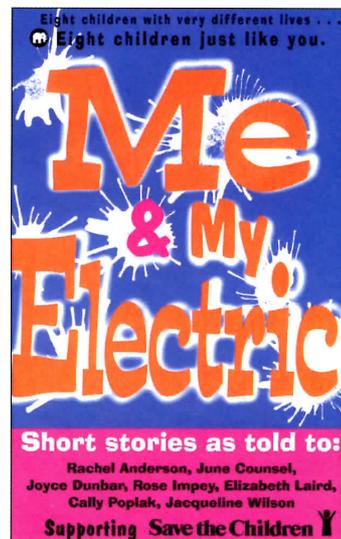
The adventure takes a while to get into its stride, as Cooper reintroduces her characters and adds an obsessed monster hunter and a freelance journalist anxious to make his reputation (the father of one of the child heroes). There is less room, too, for the edgy humour that made the first book fun. However, once the race is on to spirit Nessie away from Loch Ness and restore his powers and personality, the story takes off. Human character and social background take a back seat to helter skelter adventure. This is a *Whisky Galore* Scotland that belongs to the tourist brochures: and Cooper's writing can slip into the Blyton school of character sketching where dogs have 'large soulful brown eyes'. Not that this will matter too much to her 8-11 year old readers, who will revel in her storytelling skills. CB

## Me and My Electric

★★★★★

Edited by Elizabeth Laird, ill. Polly Dunbar, Mammoth, 128pp, 0 7497 2922 8, £6.99 pbk

*Me and My Electric* is an inspired idea for a book. It came out of a Save the Children Fund conference called 'Invisible Children' which was attended by writers, publishers, directors and programme makers who acknowledged the invisibility of disabled children in their work. This book aims to rectify some of that. Seven disabled young people were linked with seven well established children's authors, Elizabeth Laird, Jacqueline Wilson and Rachel Anderson among them, to help them to tell the stories of their lives. The adult reader might be able to glimpse the writer's hand – all the stories are readable and well structured, but the content of these funny, energetic, powerful stories is the children's own. In her introduction Laird quotes a disabled person (I like to think it was



me), saying to her 'We don't want people to say how awful life is for us, or how wonderful we are, but how we are different and how we are the same.' That is what these stories are all about. An essential read. LK

## The War Years: The Home Front

NON-FICTION

★★★

Brian Moses, Wayland, 48pp, 0 7502 2298 0, £4.99 pbk

Moses surveys how British civilians, particularly women and children, fared during the Second World War in this large format title. It is a clear account, suitable for 8-13 year olds, with interesting details and an empathy for the lives of ordinary people in an extraordinary time: a time that brought greater opportunities and put family ties under severe strain.

Much of the story is told by the photographs and posters that surround the text and the quotations from autobiographies and novels within it. Here and there, there is a scrap of a popular song. It is an approach that suits the theme of a 'people's war' and allows a variety of experiences to be represented, including two sections on life in the occupied Channel Islands.

It is a pity that the books to read section is overloaded with Wayland titles. There are occasional errors which should have been corrected between the hardback publication and the paperback: Children's House for Children's Hour, for instance. It would have been good, too, to make clear where Moses was using quotations from children's novels. CB

## How Green Are You?

NON-FICTION

★★★★

David Bellamy, ill. Penny Dann, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 0679 1, £4.99 pbk

This is a chatty guide in picture book format to how even the youngest of us can do our bit for conservation. Some of the facts dotted about the double page spreads will make you stop and think (every year a forest the size of Wales is cut down to provide Britain with paper), but Bellamy is practical rather than alarming. This is a simple introduction to the issues and, helped by bright illustrations from Penny Dann – busy children picking out an organic carrot or building a compost heap – offers encouragement to 7-10 year olds that

they can make a difference.

I like the idea that WHALE stands for the five most important parts of our environment: Water, Habitat, Air, Life and Energy. There are projects here from wearing an extra jumper to building a garden pond (with adult help). And Bellamy does not duck political issues. If you think your local councillors can do more for the environment, write to them.

This is a paperback edition of a 1991 publication. There is an excellent list of environmental organisations at the back, which should have been updated with websites. CB

### The Drop in my Drink: The Story of Water on our Planet

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Meredith Hooper, ill. Chris Coady, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1181 7, £10.99 hbk

Frances Lincoln strikes another blow against all those books with shiny, happy children in ironed tee-shirts discovering the laws of nature with a piece of string, a saucepan and a balloon. If you have seen Hooper and Coady's *The Pebble in my Pocket* (a paeon to the roadside rock), you will know already that the world is big (limitless!), old (ancient!) and marvellous (awesome!); and here is the poetic prose and swirling illustration to prove it.

This picture book is an attempt to convey the significance of water to life on earth, for 8-12 year olds, through a text which strives for excitement in its use of language; and

where meaning comes as much from the movement and music of the words as from their sense. At times it is impressive. The double page spread on water carving out the landscape tells how 'water and ice drag gravel, sand and silt endlessly downwards. Shifting, stripping, scraping, grinding. Eroding, rearranging.' 'All the water we have is all the water we have always had,' is an eloquent injunction to conservation. It would be difficult for most children below the age of 10 to read this for themselves but it cries out to be read to them.

I admire it, but I am not quite convinced. I would have liked a rest occasionally from the significance of it all, when the text and colours might have been less intense. Was there a last minute lack of nerve in the pale description of the water cycle and the list of banal water facts ('a chicken is 74% water') at the back of the book? CB

### The Young Astronomer

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Harry Ford, Dorling Kindersley, 40pp, 0 7513 5649 2, £8.99 hbk

You can do a lot of astronomy without a telescope or an observatory and Ford explains succinctly and in well illustrated detail just how much. An interesting aspect of his presentation is a series of model-making activities which illustrate the principles of the solar system and the nature of some of the bodies within it: it is a thoroughly sensible and practical guide for anyone fascinated by the skies who wants to investigate

them with basic resources. Top marks, too, for the initial cautions to go out at night only if accompanied by an adult and to take a hot drink with you (something adults often forget). TP

### The Caribbean

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Alison Hodge, Macdonald 'World Fact Files', 48pp, 0 7500 2434 8, £9.99 hbk

### The Landscape of St Lucia

0 7502 2218 2

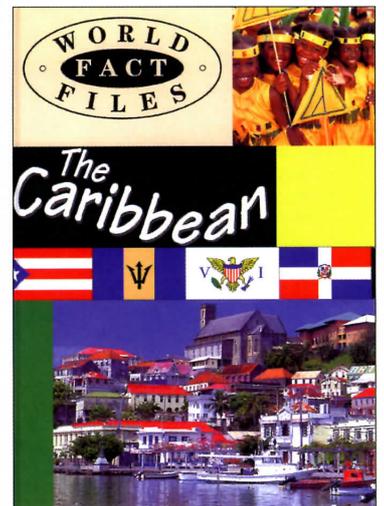
### The People of St Lucia

0 7502 2217 4

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Alison Brownlie, Wayland, 32pp, £9.99 each

The Caribbean is such a physically beautiful region of the earth that it is difficult to produce illustrated non-fiction about it without making the books resemble meretricious travel brochures. These three examples are saturated from cover to cover with radiant pictures of visionary landscapes, smiling children, cornucopious produce, pristine beaches and shining seas. Stagnating monocrop economies, political interference from the bullying businessmen of America and Europe, ecological damage, a burgeoning drugs trade and declining employment are mentioned or at



least hinted at in the clearly written texts, but such grim facts seem to swear at the beautiful (and accurately representative) photographs. Both authors present difficult issues plainly: 'Foreign companies build factories in St Lucia because they can pay low wages here' is typical of Brownlie's straightforward style. There are sufficient allusions in all of the books to such issues to provide ample discussion material for teachers seeking a critical approach.

The St Lucia books are aimed at a younger audience, and include mini case studies about individual lives. *The Caribbean* in the 'World Fact Files' series is heavier on statistics and contains a plethora of pie charts, graphs and histograms. GH

## REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary

### Fire Raiser!

Philip Wooderson, ill. Jane Cope, 0 7136 4783 3

### Ghost Riders

Alex Gutteridge, ill. Barry Wilkinson, 0 7136 4791 4

★★

A & C Black 'Chillers', 64pp, £6.99 each hbk

The 'Chillers' series continues to grow providing short, fast-moving stories with plenty of comic-book illustration for 9-12-year-olds. *Fire Raiser!* has a great cover but the conflagration we see is sadly missing from the text in which Jarvis gets entangled with the ne'er-do-well mother and son who keep the local corner shop. The plot is rather convoluted as the old lady tries to frame Jarvis for a fire she plans as an insurance scam.

*Ghost Riders* has more realistic illustrations as well as some unnecessarily complex page design. As Mum's car shudders to a halt one cold, winter's night on Highwayman's Hill, young Stephen's over-active imagination brings the ghost of the local highwayman and his accomplice to life.

Both books are competent but lacking originality; they feel strangely predictable. SR

### The Headless Ghost

Pete Johnson, ill. Lucy Su, 0 7136 4902 X

### Laser Quest

Mick Gowar, ill. Peter Dennis, 0 7136 4901 1

### Bodyparts

Theresa Breslin, ill. Janek Matysiak, 0 7136 4904 6

### Moving the Goalposts

Rob Childs, ill. Gary Rees, 0 7136 4903 8

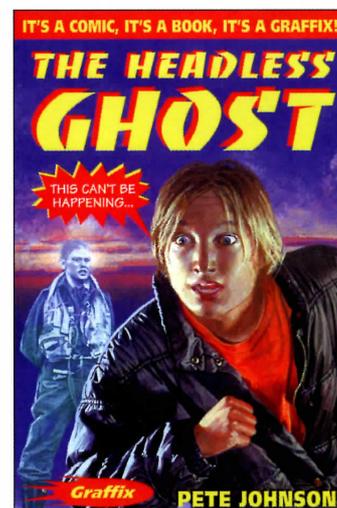
★★★★

A & C Black 'Graffix', 80pp, £3.99 each pbk

With their comic book approach 'Graffix' shout 'pick me up' to their teenage audience.

Grant in *The Headless Ghost* has only a little hearing but can lip-read perfectly. When out ghost-hunting at the local war memorial the ghost of a WW2 airman appears and before his head quite disappears Grant is able to lip-read his warning of danger – an unexploded bomb. Grey pencil shading makes for some nicely spooky pictures.

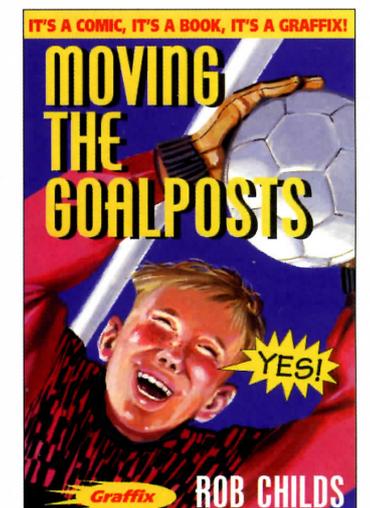
I fancy the readers who pick up a book called *Laser Quest* will be the kids who find these places fun rather than the seedy dive Louise finds it to be as she reluctantly helps to organise kid brother's party. A fault at the computer check in desk presages



the appearance of a mystery man in the game who is playing for real. Only Louise and her pal can save the day.

*Bodyparts* is a futuristic story set in a Genetic Clone Unit where the archetypal mad professor whom no one suspects is dabbling in creating monsters.

*Moving the Goalposts* comes down the age range a couple of years. Sam is a super goalie – but the butt of some unpleasantness from team mates and PE teacher because of his dyslexia. When the goal posts get vandalised and Sam realises he will have to play in adult-sized goals he hits on the idea of building



transportable, adjustable goals. Some inevitable hiccups ensue but Sam is a winner in the end. SR

### Flying Upside Down

★★★★

Malcolm Rose, Scholastic, 128pp, 0 590 54312 1, £4.99 pbk

A very readable story of fascinating contrasts; the brilliant, in-crowd footballer Glynn, who shows friendship to out-crowd, tirelessly bullied, loner Duncan; the poverty penny-pinching of Glynn's homelife, whilst he is in fact sitting on a fortune, and the humorous banter of

the beginning set against the vicious, deadly serious violence and message of the final outcome.

Malcolm Rose has captured a gritty realism in setting, character and language, which makes this a novel that deserves recognition. Through sheer pace and action alone teenage readers will not be disappointed, nor fail to be moved by it. **DB**

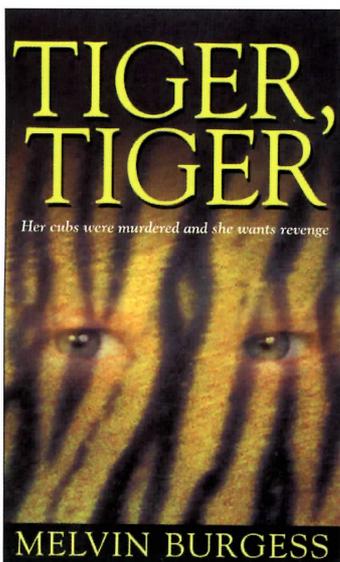
### Harvey Angell and the Ghost Child

★★★★

Diana Hendry, Red Fox, 144pp, 0 09 922052 0, £3.99 pbk

This is the spooky sequel to Whitbread Winner **Harvey Angell**.

Eccentric adults abound in Henry's lonely life and they appear to get even more embarrassing when a holiday is planned at a forbidding-looking house in Fife. Things look up when its ghostly occupant reveals itself and a desolate tale of the past slowly unfolds, embroiling Henry and his guardians in mystery and tension, relieved only by the calming presence of Harvey Angell, the man with skills to 'home' spirits and to connect remaining loved ones to 'the current', which is 'The energy that was love'. Told at a fast, compelling pace and with sly humour, this title is well worth promoting. **DB**



### Tiger, Tiger

★★★★

Melvin Burgess, Puffin, 160pp, 0 14 038339 5, £4.99 pbk

Triad Boss Lee Yung believes utterly in the curative powers of the bones and organs of the spirit tiger and is determined to obtain them to halt the progress of his cancer. His men bungle their raid on Malham Tiger Park. Lila, the spirit tiger, escapes, vowing to avenge the killing of her friends.

12-year-old Steven Hattersly forms a bond with the manifestation of Lila's spirit, a young girl – and together they outwit police, journalists and Triad killers. Lila's relinquishing of her spirit status at the end of the book is a harsh and moving criticism of our need to destroy anything we do not understand. Our sympathies lie with the tigers for their spirituality, their power, their beauty. Burgess holds the greed, violence and insensitivity of the human protagonists as an uncomfortable revealing mirror in front of his readers. **VR**

### Nightmare Stairs

★★

Robert Swindells, Corgi Yearling, 176pp, 0 440 86330 9, £3.99 pbk

Narrated in the first person by thirteen-year-old Kirsty with dramatic directness and a keen sense of drama of the 'If only I'd have known then ...' style of chapter endings, this novel is another junior horror title. Kirsty has nightmares which recall her grandmother's death falling down stairs. The drama unfolds as Kirsty realises that this death was not the accident it seemed. Her nasty Aunt must be to blame and so Kirsty sets a trap to catch her. This novel is not plausible in plot or telling but works in its tabloid fashion making mock horror with narrative naivety. I prefer the Swindells of the teenage books. This one may keep some readers going and set them up for those more solid treats. **AJ**

### Midnight's Choice

★★★★

Kate Thompson, Bodley Head, 176pp, 0 370 32495 1, £9.99 hbk

This is a sequel to *Switchers*, Kate Thompson's first novel for children. A reader who has not read *Switchers* may find it difficult to get beyond the first four pages, but this would be a great pity for here is an exciting adventure allied with a story which presents some profound reflections on human nature. Thompson takes up the story where *Switchers* stopped, as Tess contemplates the decision she must make by her fifteenth birthday. By then she must make up her mind whether to stay in human form or to take the form of another living being for the rest of her life, for Tess has the ability to Switch.



A difficulty presented by the first book is dealt with here. This relates to why *Switchers* always choose to change into relatively benign creatures and why they use their extraordinary power for the benefit of others. *Midnight's Choice* presents the dark side of Switching when Tess meets Martin, for here is a Switcher who glories in the corrupt power which his ability can bring. Martin is not interested in saving life; he can become the ultimate predator. In vampire Martin's company Tess experiences the hypnotic excitement of stalking the streets of Dublin in search of human blood, and she almost forgets that she first met Martin when she needed help to rescue

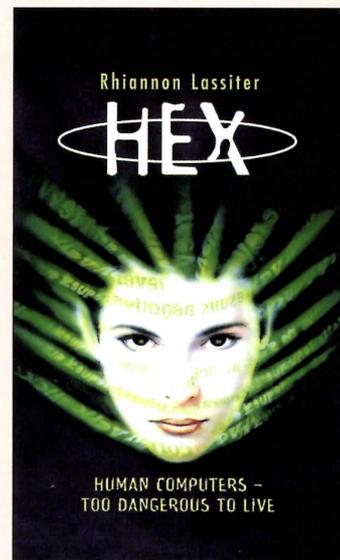
## NEW Talent

### Hex

★★★★

Rhiannon Lassiter, Macmillan, 214pp, 0 333 72647 2, £9.99 hbk

A first novel written when the author was 17, *Hex* is a pacey, sci-fi adventure thriller, both engrossingly written and confidently plotted. It is at the same time a metaphor for the way societies so often deal with those who are different. Set in the 23rd century, it focuses on Wraith and his sister Raven, a girl with a mutant gene that enables her to interact with computers. 'Hexes', as they are known, are being either exterminated or used for gruesome medical experiments. Wraith and Raven discover that their younger sister has been taken away, suspected of being a Hex and they are determined to rescue her, if she is still alive. The book has a bleak edge to it - one Hex who is unmasked finds that her own father is suddenly afraid of her and there are unbearable descriptions of tortured children for whom there is to be no miraculous rescue - the prison that holds them is blown up. Within the conventions of the genre



which allows for rather representational characterisation, this darker element is perhaps less troubling than it might have been. Nevertheless, this book is a considerable debut from a young writer from whom there will clearly be much to look forward to. **RS**

her other Switcher friend, Kevin, who was captured in the shape of a phoenix by the zoo.

Tess struggles between the clashing powers of these two mythical creatures. Through her, quite literally at one point, the old war between darkness and light, good and evil, is again waged, and it is only her hard fought for maturity which enables her to come to a decision which eventually stills the battle. **VC**

### Starlight City

★★★

Sue Welford, Oxford, 176pp, 0 19 271791 X, £5.99 pbk

*Starlight City* is thought provoking science fiction, a challenging mix of fantasy and realism. It is the year 2050. Kari, a sensitive and musically gifted teenager, has lucid dreams about a mysterious group of people. Dream and reality merge when Kari and her friend Jake travel to the City searching for explanations for strange events they have witnessed.

Welford has created a convincing twenty-first century world. The City is reminiscent of *fin de siècle* London but the social class divide is intensified. The Misfits and Drifters have no status and the inner cities are dangerous, ghettoised, 'no go' areas. After pursuit by Zeon's secret police, Kari eventually finds answers to her questions, but her future remains uncertain. A final twist leaves the reader to consider options for the future of our world. **NG**

### Nathan's Switch

★★★

Pat Moon, Orchard, 192pp, 1 85213 855 6, £4.99 pbk

Nathan finds an amazing time switch abandoned in a large yellow skip. After some experimentation he masters the device and uses it to travel back into the past. Unlike most conventional time switches, Nathan is able to visit the past inside the body of someone who lived during that time, experiencing their thoughts and

feelings as well as his own.

Desperate to engineer a reconciliation between his estranged parents, Nathan uses the switch to find clues that might help him. But he becomes obsessed with switching, preferring to escape into the happiest moments from his early childhood.

Moon's treatment of the theme is sympathetic but unsentimental. Nathan's anthem is the Wall by Pink Floyd, and the novel's structure follows the same pattern. Tension increases as each setback adds another brick in the wall and the relief is overwhelming when Nathan is finally able to tear it down. **NG**

## Special Effects in Film and Television

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Jake Hamilton, Dorling Kindersley, 64pp, 0 7513 5359 0, £10.99 hbk

The whole point about special effects is that, to be successful, they should appear to be absolutely real. Any book that attempts to give the game away must be as thorough and attentive to detail as the successful effects themselves.

The mushrooming of films with SFX as a special feature rather than as plot-support has presumably led to an increase in interest in 'How do they do that?' and for those who experience such an interest this book must be a goldmine. We get the lowdown on animatronics, computer generated imagery, prosthetics, split screen, back projections, models, large and small, fires, explosions and battles, and the detail is certainly convincing.

Being no film freak (although I did enjoy the televised *Borrowers* featured briefly here), I cannot tell whether this is a real book or just creates the effect of being one - as so many of this publisher's do. Curious fans, though, should get a lot out of it. **TP**

# REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

## Cheap Street

★★★

Sandra Chick, Women's Press  
'Livewire', 112pp,  
0 7043 4949 3, £4.99 pbk

Realism is the cornerstone of Chick's work. In this new novel Lisa's environment seems designed to demoralise and depress her. Chick creates her setting skilfully: the reader experiences life on an estate through sympathetic engagement with the residents' lives.

Most poignant of all is the cyclical nature of deprivation engendered by the protagonists' inability to take control of their own lives. Lisa's mother was trapped in a brutal marriage by a teenage pregnancy and when we see Lisa engaged in unprotected sex in an effort to assuage her loneliness we realise that she, too, is a victim of her needs. VR

## Second Star to the Right

★★★★

Deborah Hautzig, Walker,  
160pp, 0 7445 2066 5, £3.99 pbk

That this novel first published 17 years ago has been revived is a measure of the concern and bewilderment generated by the increase in cases of anorexia nervosa. Outwardly Leslie seems to have a perfect life with a stable, caring family, a good school, excellent grades and supportive friends. Then she begins a diet which ends in starvation, hospitalisation and isolation.

Hautzig does not take the easy route in simply giving Leslie the excuse of a diet which went wrong. She examines the emotional complexities which lead to a desire to refuse food. In Leslie's case it is the internal voice which takes over control of her life and allows her to claim the attention which makes her uniquely herself and not just a daughter wanting to please loving parents.

The cover picture is startling and provokes as much disquiet as this perceptively written book. VR

## Tenderness

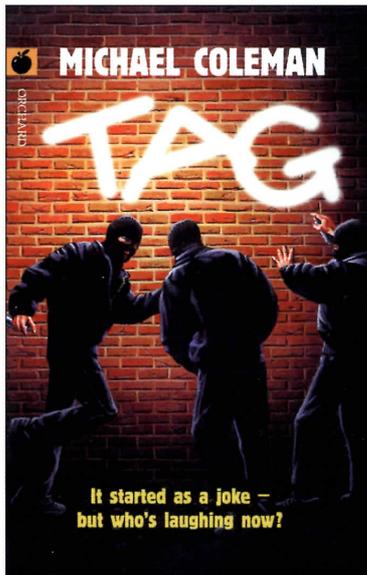
★★★

Robert Cormier, Gollancz,  
192pp, 0 575 06433 1, £12.99  
hbk, Puffin, 0 14 130050 7,  
£4.99 pbk

Cormier's latest novel returns to the theme of damaged adolescents attempting to find a dangerous status quo in a hostile, conformist world.

Eric Poole finds his tenderness with beautiful, dark-haired girls in the first moments after he has killed them. Lori Cranston seeks the tenderness she cannot get at home through her sexual obsessions with strangers – most notably with Eric. Her fixation with Eric saves him from discovery and arrest by his dogged enemy, Lieutenant Jake Porter, as he lures his latest victim to the forest.

The tenderness of the book's title is skilfully rendered as a grotesque parody. Cormier avoids pathos but slides uncharacteristically into predictability: the sting in the tail of the book lacks the unexpected and explosive power of *I Am the Cheese*. VR



## Tag

★★★★

Michael Coleman, Orchard,  
208pp, 1 86039 654 2, £4.99 pbk

Pete and Motto get their kicks from executing daring graffiti raids. The exhilarating 'hit' fuels the craving for a bigger buzz and leads eventually to confrontation with intimidating rivals, the Sun Crew. *Tag* is a tense, tight thriller. Like Coleman's previous novel, *Weirdo's War*, it explores uneasy friendships between leaders and followers and the charismatic allure of the gang.

Pete narrates his story retrospectively, reflecting on events that lead to the chilling climax. Coleman skilfully handles the change in mood from hard-edged tension to sharp poignancy, when Pete finally acknowledges the anger he feels about his father's death.

The moral message in this gripping story is underlined without resorting to preaching. NG

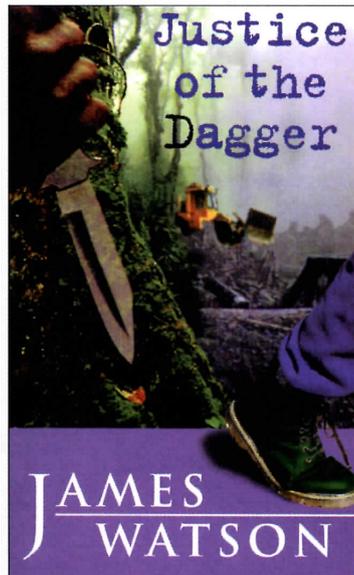
## Justice of the Dagger

★★★★★

James Watson, Puffin, 224pp,  
0 14 130007 8, £4.99 pbk

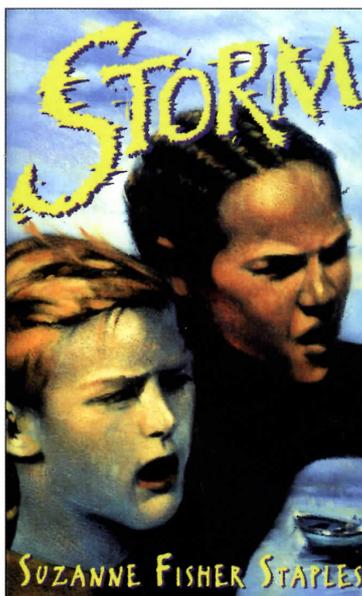
Watson's pedigree as a writer of political novels for young adults is impeccable. In novels still in print, he has written about the Spanish Civil War, Angola and the Junta's Chile. The Indonesian occupation of East Timor is his latest subject; although, as Watson makes clear in an epilogue, *Justice of the Dagger* is by no means a documentary. Rather, it is an action thriller of operatic intensity, whose young heroes – Muyu, the son of an indigenous chief and Lyana, the beautiful, educated survivor of a massacre – suffer and endure in forest nights dark with greed and cruelty.

Watson's characters would not be out of place in *Tosca* or *Fidelio*: Colonel Selim, the brutal womaniser, who meets poetic justice from Lyana's blade; Hans Mueller, the greenbooted pacifist ecologist, whose supposed corpse is displayed by the resistance as a tableau of repression to a visiting United Nations delegation; Benni, the child spy on a bicycle, who sells



information both to the army and the freedom fighters; and finally, Lieutenant Gani, the son of a general, turned from his mission to assassinate Mueller to become Lyana's lover.

Nearly all the violence – there is a lot of it, including the castration – happens off-stage: and, while Watson is determined that the reader should recognise the terror that is taking place, his main intention is to make political points through dramatic set pieces, like the fevered dream in which Hans confronts the world leaders with their complicity or inaction in the situation in East Timor. This is a powerful, intelligent book which uses its chosen genre both to grip and incite its teenage readership. CB



## Storm

★★★★

Suzanne Fisher Staples, Julia  
MacRae, 240pp, 1 85681 524 2,  
£9.99 hbk

'It was dark outside with the storm gathering itself up for another strike, and I felt like there was a darkness inside me, too.' These words, spoken

by Buck Smith, the young white narrator of this complex and absorbing novel, capture the ferocity of the elemental and human worlds between which the action moves. We are on the isolated east coast of Virginia, where for generations Buck's ancestors have worked their farm with the help of generations of other Smiths, the descendants of African slaves. Differences of race and colour have never – apparently – been of much significance. But, as Buck painfully comes to realise, this superficial amity covers a multitude of bigotries, even amongst those adults whose notions of right and wrong, truth-telling and lying, he has never before had to question. This is a brilliant contemporary variation on a Romeo and Juliet theme, executed in a style in which anger and compassion are unforgettably combined. RD

## A Different Life

★★★★

Lois Keith, Women's Press,  
368pp, 0 7043 4946 9, £5.99 pbk

Libby Starling is a North London fifteen-year-old whose life changes dramatically overnight after swimming in the sea on a school trip. She contracts a mysterious illness which leaves her unable to walk. Teenage concerns about school, family and friends – and in particular a boy Jesse – are overtaken by the full gamut of physical, mental and emotional readjustment. In this first person narration, readers are taken through very detailed stages of Libby's progress from initial confusion and despair in hospital to reconstructing her life with a strong equality perspective. By the end, her friends at school have waged a successful campaign to have their headteacher accept her back at her old school as a wheelchair user and Libby has had her first date with Jesse. Libby's family also go through a learning curve. After her father initially immerses himself in a campaign on the dangers of pollution in British waters, both parents gradually learn to tune in more sensitively to Libby's needs. This story reads less like a novel and more like a first-hand, highly informative account. Characters function largely as representatives of particular perspectives on disability issues. Instruction underlies this book and it would have benefited from more editing. But the narrator's voice is engaging and will perhaps encourage readers – in the words of the school campaign slogan – to 'Use Your Imagination'. BN

## Is Anybody Out There?

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Heather Couper and Nigel  
Henbest, ill. Luciano Corbella,  
Dorling Kindersley, 48pp,  
0 7513 5666 2, £9.99 hbk

Couper and Henbest make a great team with an enviable record of good stuff – and here is another good title. The dynamic duo investigate the probability of 'life' – as we define it – on other planets, of possibilities that 'aliens' – as we define them – have visited our planet and the methods

# Editor's Choice

## Same Difference

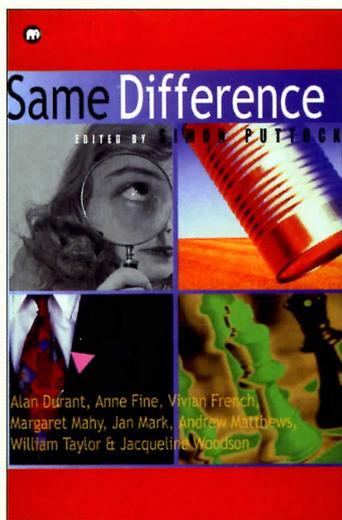
★★★★

Edited by Simon Puttock, Mammoth, 112pp, 0 7497 3031 5, £4.99 pbk

This issue's Editor's Choice is a collection of eight newly commissioned short stories, some from well know names. All of the stories have either gay or lesbian characters or characters who think they may be gay. Thus Gregory, in an entertaining story by Anne Fine, finds a novel way to come out to his mother; Vivian French's rather unconvincing scenario is about a parents' evening at which it is feared that Jude and Cass's parents, a lesbian couple, may be a source of embarrassment; Margaret Mahy's Isa discovers that you cannot tell who is a lesbian by the way she looks while William Taylor's Daniel finds he may not be the only gay in his class – and so forth.

The tone of this collection overall is self consciously bright and breezy. Gay stereotypes are rather too easily seen off, characters quickly sorted in terms of their sexual identity and endings upbeat – 'Maybe, just maybe, things are going to be all right' concludes Daniel who has 'admitted' he is gay while Isa and her lesbian friend Anthea, having reaffirmed their friendship, '... seized with the same impulse ... ran for the blue pool, dived, shimmering for a moment between two elements, still laughing as they dived.'

Full of Educational Intent, this collection rises above its good intentions only intermittently. And yet – AT LAST we have for the first time on a mass market, mainstream teenage list, a book about some of the everyday experiences of the young gays and lesbians in our schools. Until now such books have invariably been ghettoised – only available as a



trade paperback (cf M. E. Kerr's outstanding novel about a young lesbian, *Deliver Us From Evie*) or published by the feminist or gay press. For many young people, whether gay, lesbian, or straight as well as for the many whose sexual identity is still not defined, this collection's educative function will be important. Ignorance and fear about homosexuality and the issues that surround it are ever prevalent despite the probable lowering of the age of consent for homosexuals to 16 and the debates that accompanied this.

One story in this collection causes concern: Andrew Matthews' 'Beautiful People' has a father telling his son how he, as a young man, decided not to pursue his passion for another young man ('... there comes a point in your life when you have to decide who you're going to be.') and then formed a relationship with a woman. This implies that sexual orientation is a choice. Certainly there are as many ways to become gay, straight or bi as there are gay, straight or bi people but 'choice' as presented in this story is dangerously simplistic and could reinforce anti-gay prejudices. The other stories in this collection provide a strong counter to the view presented here. RS

and direction of research into it all. Even to a profound apathetic like myself this is a good, well-grounded and well expressed read. The cardinal point of the text comes on page 42 (of 48) when the authors say: 'The day we detect a signal from extraterrestrial intelligence will be a turning point in the history of the world.' So, for all the theorising and research the answer is still, in Emmett Berry's words 'Nothin' yet'. Let's hope Couper and Henbest are still about to tell us about that signal when it is detected. TP

## Genetics

NON-FICTION ★★

Martin Brookes, ill. Nick Dewar, Hodder 'What's the Big Idea?', 128pp, 0 340 70877 8, £3.99 pbk

## Designer Genes

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Phil Gates, Scholastic 'Talking Point', 192pp, 0 590 19017 2, £3.99 pbk

'Will genetic engineering change us



all?' asks the blurb on Genetics. 'Whatever you think about genetic engineering it's about to affect your future' answers the blurb on *Designer Genes*. These two blurbs set the tone for this tandem – Brookes asks the questions and poses the hypotheses, Gates provides the facts

and proves his points.

Always a Gates fan, I find his objectivity and thoroughness most commendable, the more so as it is combined with a highly readable and lively, often humorous style. Relevant contemporary details illustrate most of his examples and the book provides a good end-to-end read which is thoroughly informative. Of the Brookes book, Steve Jones (presumably the professor not the Wigan striker) says 'can't be bettered'. I beg to differ – Gates has done it and Brookes' frenetic approach – whose effect is often marred by silly pictures – does not satisfy the purposive inquirer. TP

## Virtual Reality

NON-FICTION ★★

Chris Oxlade, ill. Nick Dewar, Hodder 'What's the Big Idea?', 128pp, 0 340 65591 7, £3.99 pbk

Page 13 of this title is devoted to the statement 'Warning! – technophobes will not understand how brilliant Virtual Reality is. Ignore them!' Now, I, being what this book would probably call a technophobe, am profoundly discouraged by this approach. Surely such a book's job is to convert the technophobe, not to reinforce technophobia.

For all I know, page 14 onwards contains a fascinating catalogue of all the things that Virtual Reality can achieve – it certainly mentions a lot of them, but is this a subject about which a book is a sought-after thing? I would rather suppose that VR is more something to do and experience than something to read a flippant text about. However, it has got one thing right – I still do not understand how brilliant Virtual Reality is – so perhaps you'd better ignore me. TP

## The Internet

NON-FICTION ★★

Herbie Brennan, Scholastic 'Talking Point', 192pp, 0 590 19400 3, £3.99 pbk

I am just beginning to approach the Internet and there is no doubt that this hugely expanding dimension of information-spreading will entwine us all before long. The blurb promises that contact with the Net will involve exposure to 'jargon that's absolutely impossible to understand' and you can see its point. Brennan does a good job in avoiding unexplained netspeak and has designed a book which can either be read end to end or 'surf' net style. The chapters are called 'sites'. Hence it functions both as introduction and indulgence depending on where you are coming from.

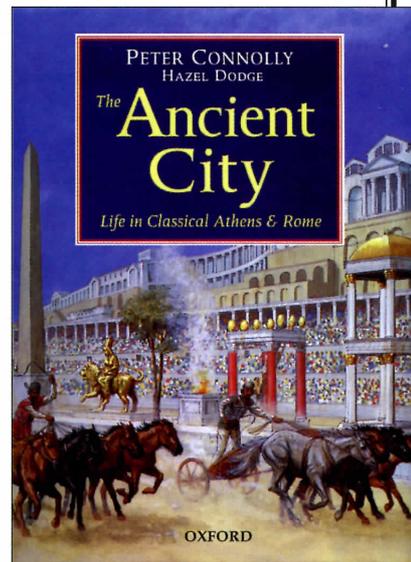
Being at the moment still non-net, I can only observe the thoroughness and steadiness of Brennan's presentation which does not patronise or discourage 'technophobes', for whom this provides a recommendable introduction. TP

## The Ancient City: Life in Classical Athens and Rome

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Peter Connolly and Hazel Dodge, Oxford, 256pp, 0 19 917242 0, £29.99 hbk

Connolly's past achievements in his field of reconstructive archaeology



make him *facile princeps* in it already. Clearly this, his major work to date, is invested with immense authority. As you would expect, it is very detailed, for Connolly's pre-occupation with absolute accuracy touches everything he does, be it words, drawings or photographs.

First we look at Athens. As well as providing a thorough understanding of architecture and daily life, Connolly provides a perceptive look at the Athenian version of the democratic process (probably the world's first?) and demonstrates that this was the spring which drove the Athenian engine to provide such a considerable influence on the ascendant Rome, where the engine began to misfire badly. Connolly's presentation of the changing Roman scenario is masterly – facts and impressions by the gross are effortlessly introduced, and retained, too, in my experience and the whole thing is a complete joy.

You can doubtless visit classical Athens and Rome on the Internet and go for a Virtually Real trip round the Acropolis and Colosseum. That you can is due in no small measure to the scholarship, application and enthusiasm of people like Connolly, but if such electronic experiences generate half the lasting pleasure that this traditionally presented volume does, they will be doing well.

A tremendous acquisition for an interested household, this is an essential library purchase too, even if it is the only thing you can afford for a month – which is only £1.00 a day, after all. An *opus maximus* all right! TP

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

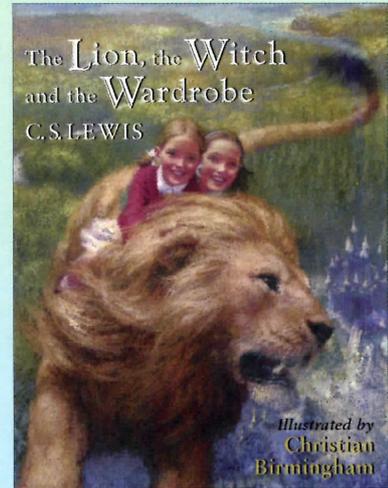
Two editions of King Arthur (see page 22)

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# CLASSICS IN SHORT No.11

Helen Levene

*The Knave of Hearts, the Mad Hatter, the Queen, the White Rabbit.  
No, it's not the Millennium Dome planning committee but ...*



**First published?**

1865

**Lewis Carroll's real name?**

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Displaying his love of word-play, Dodgson translated his first two names into Latin as Carolus Ludovicus, then reversed them and re-anglicized into Lewis Carroll.

**Written for?**

Alice Liddell, one of the young daughters of the Dean of Christ Church college, Oxford, whom Dodgson had befriended. With his own illustrations, he presented the handbound manuscript, entitled 'Alice's Adventures Under Ground', to Alice after first recounting the story to her and her sisters on a picnic boat trip in 1864. The inscription read: 'A Christmas Gift to a Dear Child in Memory of a Summer Day'.

With encouragement from his contemporary, the writer George Macdonald, Dodgson then expanded the tale and commissioned John Tenniel, the *Punch* magazine cartoonist, to reillustrate it. Dodgson then sent it to the Macmillan publishing firm, having re-named it *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

**Claim to fame?**

Alice has never gone out of print and has been translated into almost every spoken language, third only to Shakespeare and the Bible. It is one of the best known children's books in the world.

**Alice's adventures:**

Alice follows a White Rabbit into a rabbit hole, tumbles down into the depths of the earth, and lands in a long dark passageway. As the Rabbit races on ahead, Alice's attempt to go through the tiny door into the beautiful garden beyond, fails, as she has grown extra large from drinking all the liquid in a bottle marked DRINK ME. In a pool of her own tears, Alice finds herself swimming ashore. Still in pursuit of the White Rabbit, Alice encounters all sorts of fantastic creatures and characters along the way, including the Caterpillar, the Duchess, the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, and many others. On her way through the woods she is led strangely back into the long hall, where, after nibbling on her special mushroom, she is able to shrink to the right size to go through the tiny door into the rose garden. Here, packs of cards are busily painting white roses red, and the Queen challenges Alice to a perilous game of croquet. The White Rabbit appears and calls upon Alice as witness in the trial of the Knave of Hearts (who stands accused of stealing the Queen's tarts). Alice, gradually returning to her normal size, boldly dismisses them all as nothing but a pack of cards whereupon she finds herself lying beneath the trees with her sister telling her it is time to wake up ...

**Catchphrases:**

'Curiouser and curiouser'

'Off with her head!'

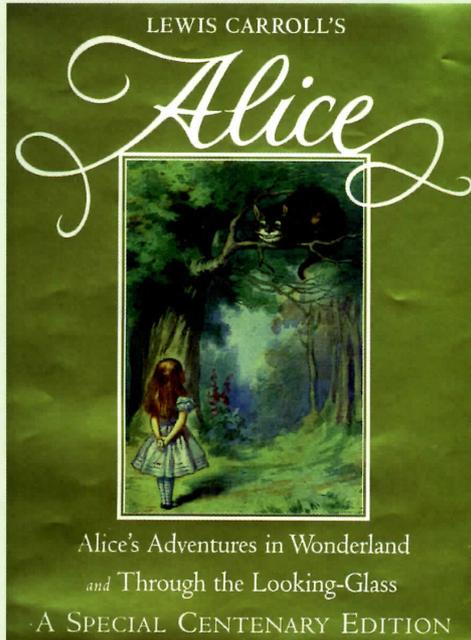
'You should learn not to make personal remarks ... it's very rude.'

**Most yummy description:**

The bottle of liquid DRINK ME - 'a mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pineapple, roast turkey, toffee and hot buttered toast.'

**About the author:**

Born in 1832, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was the oldest boy in a family of eleven - seven girls and four boys. He grew up in a remote rectory in the small Cheshire village of Daresbury where his father, a former Fellow and Mathematics Tutor of Christ Church college,



Oxford, also took in paying pupils to supplement his meagre income after being ordained as a parish priest. His mother was an energetic woman, who ran the household and educated her own children when they were small. Even as a young boy, Dodgson was always full of ideas and invention and loved to entertain his younger siblings with family magazines which display his love of parody, word games and puzzles. In 1846 he was sent to Rugby where, despite being bullied for lack of sports ability and a speech impediment, he worked hard and gained a place at Christ Church. Whilst still an under-graduate he was awarded a Studentship - allowing him life-long residence at the college, provided he took Holy Orders and never married. He stayed on, becoming a tutor in Mathematics in 1855, and although he took Orders, he never went into the Priesthood.

When he was not teaching, he read widely, visited London theatres with friends and began pursuing his earlier interest in photography. He also began to publish comic poetry which appeared in *The Comic Times*, a rival to *Punch*. During 1862 his friendship with the Liddell children flourished, and he took many photographs of them, particularly of Alice.



Dodgson has been described as 'the nineteenth century's most outstanding child photographer'. There was a rift between Dodgson and the Liddell children as they grew up, thought to be initiated by Mrs Liddell to prevent him from forming any ideas about marriage to Alice.

In 1872, some years after *Wonderland* was published, he finally finished work on a second Alice volume - *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, followed by his epic nonsense verse *The Hunting of the Snark* in 1876. He wrote many other books, not all of which were successful. The two 'Sylvie and Bruno' adventures were described as 'one of the most interesting failures in English literature'.

Dodgson suffered from recurring ill-health in his later years and died from bronchitis in 1898. He is buried in the Old Cemetery in Guildford, Surrey.

**Classic qualities:**

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* revolutionized children's literature. An inspired fantasy of loosely connected dream sequences, the book contains brilliant nonsense rhymes and highly imaginative characters, many of whom have been printed indelibly in our memories. There are multiple levels of meaning in particular expressions and turns of phrase, many of which (eg 'curiouser and curiouser') have become part of everyday discourse. The story was created entirely for the amusement and entertainment of children. It was the first of its kind with a storyline which did not attempt to preach or moralize to its readers, but was simply written for fun whilst maintaining a high literary standard of writing. Alice has become an integral part of childhood, a book that works on many levels for children and adults alike.

**The riddle of Lewis Carroll:**

In our post Freudian times, some commentators believe that Dodgson's friendships with little girls were some sort of unconscious substitute for sexual needs, and that he contemplated marriage to some of them, notably to Alice Liddell. But there has been no concrete evidence. However, Dodgson did not maintain his friendships with his young companions into their adulthood and despite being a most accomplished photographer, he gave up his much-loved hobby as being too time-consuming alongside his teaching and writing. It may have been suggestions of impropriety about his photographic work that prompted him to retire from it.

There have been many studies of Dodgson's life and fascinating, multi-sided personality - mathematical genius on the one hand, imaginative, anarchic satirist on the other.

**First adapted for stage and film?**

The first play of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was written in and performed in 1886. It was first produced as a film in 1906.

**Some other Carroll books:**

*Phantasmagoria* (1869), *Rhyme and Reason* (1883), *Collected Verse* (1929). And numerous books on Mathematics. ■

The illustrations are taken from *Alice*, a centenary edition with illustrations by John Tenniel, published by Macmillan, 0 333 72722 8, £20.00.

Helen Levene works in publishing.