

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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the children's book magazine



• HARRY POTTER •
BOOK ADAPTATIONS AND LITERACY
ENCYCLOPEDIAS

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Cover Story



This issue's cover is from JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, the third book in what is already a classic new series. The first two titles were *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Thanks to Bloomsbury Children's Books for their help in producing this July cover. Cover image based on original artwork by Cliff Wright.

EDITORIAL

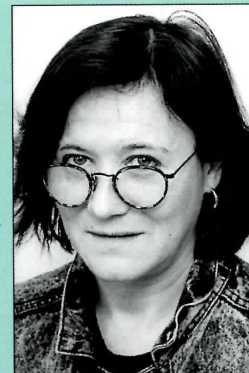
The winners of this year's Library Association Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals, the most prestigious children's book awards in the UK, will be announced on 14 July. The shortlists have been published (see page 13) and I am wondering why my heart sinks when I read them.

Last year the panel made some bizarre choices – the Carnegie Medal went to Tim Bowler's *River Boy*, a pleasant but not particularly original or accomplished novel. The Greenaway went to *When Jessie Came Across the Sea* illustrated by P J Lynch, a fine illustrator indeed but one who had already won the Greenaway only two years before. Thus the outstanding book on the Carnegie shortlist (Henrietta Branford's *Fire, Bed and Bone*) did not win and in the case of the Greenaway, the outstanding book on the list from an illustrator who has never won the Greenaway (Bob Graham's *Queenie the Bantam*) did not win.

The Carnegie/ Greenaway Panel continues to move in mysterious ways. This is known, according to my librarian informants, as 'being true to the criteria'. This year, then, we have a novel from American Robert Cormier on the shortlist of the UK's premier children's literature award. Cormier is not only American but no Spring chicken – he published his finest book, *The Chocolate War*, in 1975. Doesn't US children's fiction have plenty of prestigious awards of its own? Am I alone in thinking his Carnegie inclusion a curious way to promote excellence in children's publishing in the UK? (And shouldn't this be a Carnegie concern if it is not a Carnegie criterion?)

We also have novels on the shortlist of five from two writers who have previously won the Carnegie – Susan Price (1987) and Peter Dickinson (1979 and 1980).

As for the Greenaway... Four of the seven illustrators listed are previous Medal winners – Shirley Hughes, Quentin Blake, Anthony Browne and Helen Cooper. Anthony Browne and Helen Cooper (1996) are recent winners and



Rosemary Stones

Browne has even won twice (in 1983 and 1992). Does it matter? Yes it does when there are so many fine illustrators around who have never been winners. What about Louise Brierley, Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, John Lawrence, Patrick Benson, Ian Beck, Chris Riddell and the previously mentioned Bob Graham. At least Christian Birmingham, Jane Simmons and Emma Chichester Clark have made it to the shortlist despite the enormous, as it seems, handicap of not being previous winners. All are fine artists but my vote goes to Chichester Clark whose witty, accomplished, beautiful work may get even better but it is hard to see how.

Could the Youth Libraries Group stop being 'true to the criteria'? Or at least overhaul them? When there has been a long and distinguished career such as those of Shirley Hughes, Peter Dickinson, Quentin Blake and Susan Price, allowing previous winners to win again could be more clearly justified by making

them ineligible for, say, ten years after their first win and then by stringently determining whether the work can be seen to have grown in some way or taken new directions.

The Youth Libraries Group should act soon to tidy up these anomalies and ensure the continuing credibility of its Medals. ■

Rosemary

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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Life cycles, journeys and historical stories: learning from informational narratives

Children's information books have tended to be organised under topic headings rather than as narrative. But facts, knowledge and ideas can also be powerfully communicated in 'story' form. **Margaret Mallett** discusses recent narrative non-fiction and how it can be used in the classroom both in and out of the literacy hour.

The new non-fiction titles considered here fit into three main categories – life cycles, journeys and historical stories. The life cycles of creatures and plants lend themselves naturally to a chronological or narrative account – from egg or seed through to maturity. Journeys, biography and autobiography are also set in a time sequence and good children's books show us that narrative can analyse and evaluate information as well as recount it.

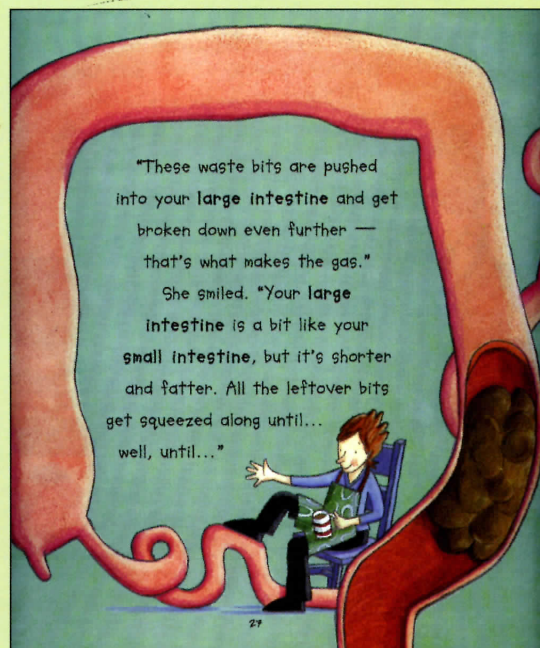
Life cycles

The best 'life cycle' books communicate a strong sense of how living things change and develop in particular environments. They do this by following the life history of one particular creature or family of creatures. The sharing of careful observations and the ability to awaken genuine interest are of course features of quality non-fiction. The first two information picture books in the new 'Animal Lives' series, **The Otter** and **The Barn Owl**, do well on these criteria. Bert Kitchen's drawings capture the nature of each creature in its habitat perfectly. Younger children aged four to six would enjoy hearing the stories read out loud and talking about the pictures while seven to eight-year-olds could attempt reading the text themselves. Sandy Ransford has a natural feel for language and uses interesting and imaginative vocabulary to suggest the movements and characteristics of the otters – 'moving clumsily' and with 'fumbling steps' when on land but 'lithe and graceful' and 'spiralling around' when in water. Children can be helped to understand that it is sometimes the cumulative effect of words that increases our understanding. The required texts for Year 3, term 1 (7/8 year olds) are 'information texts on topics of interest' and these nature narratives would certainly fit here.



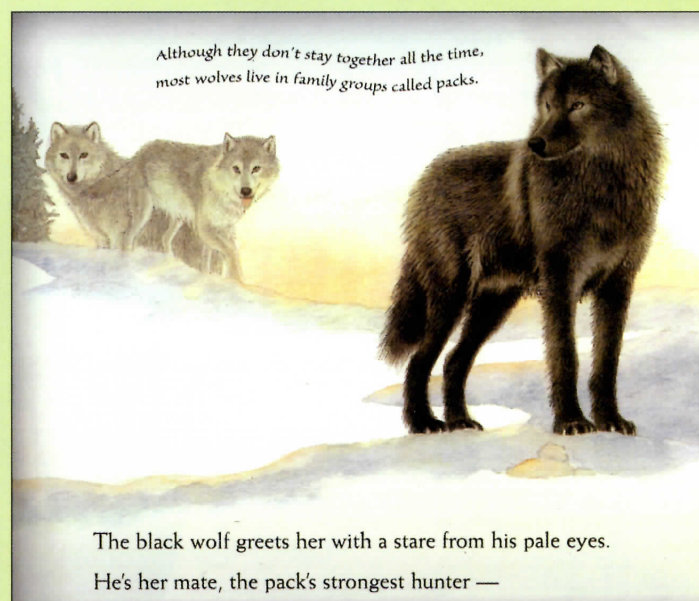
From **The Barn Owl**.

Accounts of processes also follow a sequence of events and the titles in 'Sam's Science' series are structured by convincing child/parent conversations. In Jacqui Maynard's **I Know Where My Food Goes**, for example, we get a down to earth account of what happens to our food. Kate Rowan's **I Know How We Fight Germs** explains the body's complicated system of defence well. Both titles have attractive, humorous and helpful illustrations and would be interesting books to read at home or share at school.



From **I Know Where My Food Goes**.

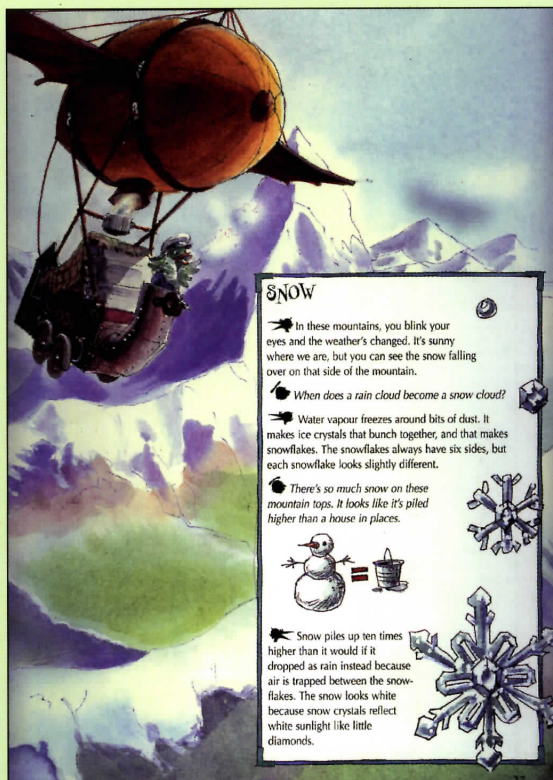
Journeys



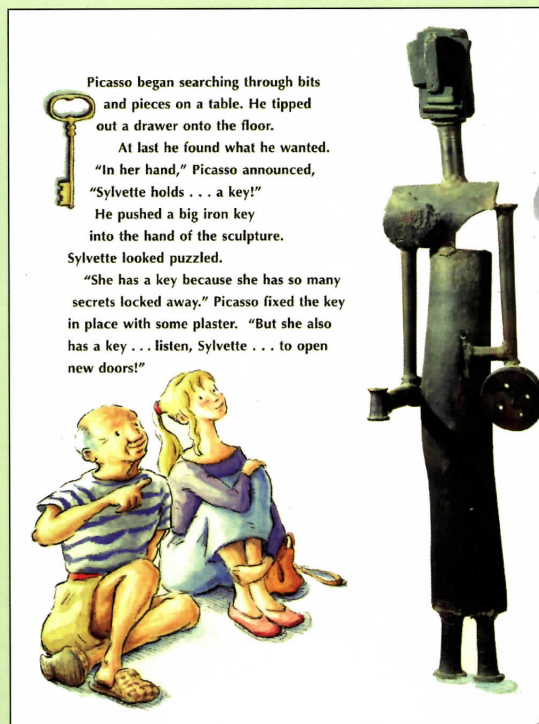
From **Walk with a Wolf**.

Walk with a Wolf by Janni Howker, for the early years, is structured round the journey of wolves to the far, wild north while the illustrations show a changing, harshening environment. This narrative brings alive the reality of a wolf's existence – 'a kick from a moose can break a wolf's ribs' – more vividly than conventional informational prose could have. Young children will respond to the many powerful images – picture and text show the wolves at rest, their heads tucked behind their hind-legs and their noses covered by the fur of their tails. The waves of factual writing at the foot of many pages, a device first used to my knowledge in Walker Books' 'Read and Wonder' series, works well here giving details about number of young and range of prey, but the index is rather slight to justify inclusion. Just reading and talking about the book will be satisfying for young children, while drama work and writing in role would be enjoyable extension activities.

A very different journey is the theme of Ted Dewan's book **The Weatherbirds**. Five fictionalised bird characters on a mission to return an Amazonian parrot to Costa Rica are a device to set much information about weather in different countries within a travel narrative. Those who like their science in conventional format might deplore the mix of genres in the text and illustrations which range from wonderful drawings of the fantasy airship to



From The Weatherbirds.



From Picasso and the Girl with a Ponytail.



carefully crafted and labelled diagrams. Able Year 5 and 6 children (9/11 year olds) would be entertained and able to cope with the sheer range of information – about how clouds are formed, what causes hurricanes and what conditions bring about raining fish. The literacy hour highlights the use of information books about processes for the second term of Year 5 (9/10 year olds).



From Seeing Red.

Biography

The authors of historical picture books for the middle primary years often go to a great deal of trouble to base their work on primary as well as secondary sources. These 'true stories' from the lives of people in history are intended to both inform and entertain. Sarah Garland's *Seeing Red*, for example, tells the story of the Cornish women who used their red petticoats to confuse Napoleon's men who were arriving by sea. Thinking they were the jackets of redcoats, they turned back. Text and illustration in this picture book bring alive the clothes, objects and attitudes of people in the 18th century. The same book can be used in English work, both inside and outside the literacy hour, to consider how the author chooses to tell the story – the patterning of the events leading up to the major incident, the feelings of the characters and the language used.

Laurence Anholt's picture book, *Picasso and the Girl with a Ponytail* shares new information. Anholt tracked down Sylvette David, Picasso's model during 1954, recorded her recollections of that year and looked at contemporary letters and photographs. In my experience children are fascinated by the detail of how information like this has been gathered. The story behind the

big iron key in the hand of Picasso's sculpture of Sylvette is told here for the first time.

There have always been colourfully illustrated, rather less literary short novels based on an historical period and historical characters which introduce a fictional person, often a child, as a device to make history accessible. Macdonald Young Books' historical storybooks: *Tom's Lady of the Lamp*; *Drake and the Devon Boy*; *Mission Underground*; *The Making of Mr Brunel's Splendid Tunnel*, have the sort of light touch which often appeals to struggling young readers. Is the mixture of fact and fiction confusing? Children seem to catch on to the status of the information in this kind of text quite quickly and these books are particularly good at helping them grasp the impact of direct speech. They may encourage children to seek out conventional information books to further whatever interest they have inspired but they tend to serve as forerunners of mature historical fiction rather than as biography.

Two tellings of the Mary Anning story

As a girl, Mary Anning discovered the first complete fossil Ichthyosaurus in the cliffs near her home in Lyme Regis in 1810. These bare bones underpin the tellings in two recent picture books. Both authors end with a short account and assessment of Mary Anning's life and achievements but each has a different way of using the power of story to weave historical facts into a lively narrative. A golden opportunity thus presents itself to compare two versions with young readers. The differences between style of illustrations, use of language and selection of facts to emphasise would all be aspects to discuss. Rather than just saying which version they like best, children, from about nine upwards, could be encouraged to pinpoint the strengths and limitations of each approach.

Catherine Brighton tells the story skilfully in comic strip form in *The Fossil Girl*. The direct speech gives the account both energy and immediacy contrasting with the third person text boxed at the top of most pages. Text and pictures give a strong sense of the excitement of Mary's discovery. A dramatic double spread illustration shows the young palaeontologist on a specially constructed platform easing the huge fossil from the cliffs.



From The Fossil Girl.

Stone Girl, Bone Girl emphasises different aspects of the story. The Philpot sisters are the inspirers of Mary's scientific interests and the little dog (actually shown in a portrait in the other book) is Mary's companion here rather than her brother. The text is poetic – Mary's fossil finds were of 'every shape and size...marble ones as big as mill stones, others straight as stone fingers, or delicate like plants'. This helps young readers make visual images from the words. Sheila Moxley's vivid and highly individual illustrations complement the text perfectly.

I have spent a little time on these two books as I think teachers could use them in a number of ways to inspire children's thinking and writing. The scientific and historical aspects link with the National Curriculum themes at key stage 1. The books would also help meet the National Literacy Strategy objective for Year 4, term 3 (8/9 year olds) – that children should learn about 'texts linked to other learning areas'. Interesting English work at key stage 2 might also be inspired: children could write part of the story in the first and then third person and discuss how the reader is affected by the choice of voice. There is welcome news that the role of drama as a major means of bringing literature alive is to be confirmed in the 2000 National Curriculum English. Children could be helped to improvise round parts of the story and/or to develop a script from their preferred picture book.

Faction

Some younger non-fiction picture books use devices associated with fiction – talking animals and magic machines, for example. (These titles are sometimes described by the rather charmless word 'faction'.) Some teachers may worry that this mixture of fact and fiction will be confusing just when children are building expectations of what they will find in particular kinds of books and software.

My experience, however, is that children are able to move from different ways of looking quite easily. **The Drop Goes Plop** and **A Seed in Need** are, for example, information picture books in which talking seagulls introduce concepts about the water cycle and the plant cycle – and I have lost count of the number of children and teachers who have praised them.

Autobiography, letters and diary entries

Many books for younger children contain letters, anecdotes and diary entries but autobiographical kinds of writing become increasingly important in the later primary years, not least as a primary source in history lessons.

The campaign went from bad to worse. It was decided to withdraw troops from Gallipoli at Suvla Bay, and by Christmas all supplies and many of the troops had been moved out. Evelyn's letter of 20 January 1916 shows that he played an important role:

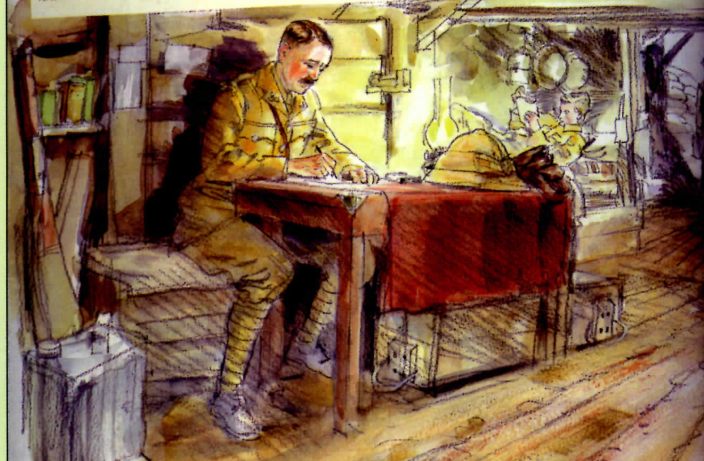
Evelyn spent the next month in Egypt. He wanted above everything else to get some home leave, but it was not to be, and he wrote bitterly on 7 February:

I need hardly say how sick I am about losing my leave – I had set my heart on it – I can't write about it.

Dear Old Girl,

I know I haven't written for the 'ell of a time – they wouldn't let me in case any of the details of the Suvla evacuation should reach the enemy. We did it all right & I had the honour & glory of commanding the last party of 50 men who held the line for a day & a half after the main body had gone & finally the last night held it with 25 men after the Rear Party had gone.

We are now on the "Simla" in harbour at Mudros waiting to go to Egypt – whether for a rest or more endless fighting we don't know – we are all tired and don't care what happens.



Letters to Henrietta is a most interesting history book for the over-nines which includes many different kinds of writing: first and third person narrative, diary entries and, most importantly, the letters Henrietta wrote and received from her brothers during the First World War. Structured

chronologically, it takes us through one family's life experiences, beginning with childhood activities and adventures, schooldays and then each family member's fortunes in the war. Neil Marshall, a member of the family by marriage, used the Jefferson Family Diary 1850-1950 to help structure the account. But it is the letters which show the power of the first person 'voice' in bringing alive events and feelings. The small details and little touches of humour even though the situation is grim come through in a letter from Jack in the battlefields to Henrietta asking for his left handed scissors. '...I have not been able to cut my nails yet, and my fingers are so dirty in trenches I can't bite them, so get a move on'. I cannot think of anything better to help children appreciate the effect on readers of text written in the first as compared with the third person – a National Literacy Strategy objective for Year 6, term 1 (10-11 year olds).

When it comes to children's own writing there are rich opportunities here for writing in role and for scripting parts of the story. Children need extended stretches of time outside the literacy hour for such writing tasks. In their final term in the primary school children focus on the options that face a writer and the reasons for choosing particular kinds of texts. Book based work across the curriculum and focused work in the literacy hour need to be mutually enriching. ■

The National Literacy Strategy and Informational Narratives

The National Literacy Strategy requires teachers and children to consider texts at three levels: text, sentence and word. So far as informational narratives are concerned, some of the things to keep in mind are as follows:

Text level

The global structure of most informational narratives follows a story pattern – setting the scene, covering the main events and then drawing things together at the end. Some feature indexes, with varying degrees of success. More useful are the 'fact files' included at the end of many nature and wildlife narratives and the added biographical details which put historical events in history stories in context. All this provides the basis for a class discussion of the different kinds of writing found within the same book or software item. Children will enjoy finding out how the illustrations in a book identify it with a particular genre – for example, photographs, timelines and paintings all feature in biographical and autobiographical kinds of writing. Talking and reflecting on illustrations has a place in class based elements of the literacy hour and in group and independent work.

Sentence level

The use of tense is of interest here. Some informational narratives use the continuous present. In Sandy Ransford's **The Otter**, for example, we have: 'The cubs flounder around at first, but soon they are doggy-paddling along the surface'. Historical narratives like Catherine Brighton's **The Fossil Girl** and Laurence Anholt's **Picasso and the Girl with a Ponytail** use the past tense but also include a lot of direct speech to capture the vitality and flavour of a particular moment. In this respect they mirror fiction. Often such texts have a literary flavour and use imagery to help understanding and clarity. As they dance their mating ritual in **The Barn Owl**, the creatures 'twist and turn in the air, calling to each other and playing catch in the dark, like ghostly acrobats'. The effects on the reader of tense, voice, punctuation and syntax are worth discussing. Attention is best drawn to them after the children have enjoyed the texts in their entirety perhaps outside the literacy hour.

Word level

Any kind of text for children can be used to develop phonological awareness, graphic knowledge and spelling. New words are usually well contextualised in informational narratives, making them good texts to support the 'vocabulary extension' National Literacy Strategy objective. The new Kingfisher 'Animal Lives' series imparts technical vocabulary with a light touch – **The Otter**, for example, brings in words like 'holt', 'prey' and 'forepaws'.

Books discussed

- The Otter**, Sandy Ransford, 0 7534 0316 1, and **The Barn Owl**, Sally Tagholm, 0 7534 0315 3, ill. Bert Kitchen, Kingfisher 'Animal Lives' (1999), £6.99 each hbk
- I Know How We Fight Germs**, Kate Rowan, 0 7445 6217 1, and **I Know Where My Food Goes**, Jacqui Maynard, 0 7445 6216 3, ill. Katharine McEwen, Walker 'Sam's Science' (1998), £6.99 each hbk
- Walk with a Wolf**, Janni Howker, ill. Sarah Fox-Davies, Walker (1997), 0 7445 6334 8, £4.99 pbk
- The Weatherbirds: An Incredible Journey Through the Weather of the World**, Ted Dewan, Viking (1999), 0 670 87048 X, £12.99 hbk
- Seeing Red**, Sarah Garland, ill. Tony Ross, Andersen Press (1996), 0 86264 623 5, £9.99 hbk
- Picasso and the Girl with a Ponytail**, Laurence Anholt, Frances Lincoln (1989), 0 7112 1176 0, £9.99 hbk
- Tom's Lady of the Lamp**, Jean Willis, ill. Amy Burch (1995), 0 7500 4708 2, **Mission Underground: The Making of Mr Brunel's Splendid Tunnel**, Margaret Nash, ill. Jim Eldridge (1998), 0 7500 2384 8, and **Drake and the Devon Boy**, Rob Childs, ill. Gini Wade (1997), 0 7500 2115 2, Macdonald Young Books, Historical Storybooks, £4.50 each pbk
- The Fossil Girl: Mary Anning's Dinosaur Discovery**, Catherine Brighton, Frances Lincoln (1999), 0 7112 1324 0, £9.99 hbk
- Stone Girl, Bone Girl: The Story of Mary Anning**, Laurence Anholt, ill. Sheila Moxley, Doubleday (1998), 0 385 40984 2, £9.99 hbk
- Letters to Henrietta**, Neil Marshall, Cambridge University Press Cambridge Reading, Extended Reading: B (1998), 0 521 47625 9, £4.95 pbk

Margaret Mallett is Visiting Tutor in Primary English at Goldsmiths' College and author of **Young Researchers: Informational Reading and Writing in the Early and Primary Years**, published by Routledge, Summer 1999.

THE HARRY POTTER PHENOMENON

When children's writer J K Rowling won The Bookseller Author of the Year Award, beating heavyweight adult authors Sebastian Faulks, Alex Garland and Frank McCourt, it was yet more evidence that Rowling had broken through the unwritten rules that prevent children's authors being taken seriously. Readers of all ages, but especially nine year olds, appear beguiled by her creations. So, what is it about Harry Potter that reaches the parts other contemporary children's fiction does not? Caroline Horn investigates.

The launch of the third title in the Harry Potter series, **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban**, has been eagerly awaited by thousands of children, and a considerable number of adults, too. It is unusual for any children's title to attract such a broad spectrum of readers or to be given the level of media attention that its author, J K Rowling, has attracted.

An enticing world

A combination of luck, considered timing by agent Christopher Little, and hard work by publisher Bloomsbury, have contributed to the Harry Potter phenomenon - but above all, the success is a result of the story itself, and the creation of a world of characters and adventures of which its fans, quite simply, cannot have enough. That can be judged by the print run alone which has spiralled from 7,000 for the first run of **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** to an anticipated 75,000 for UK trade sales of **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban**, due to be launched on 8th July.

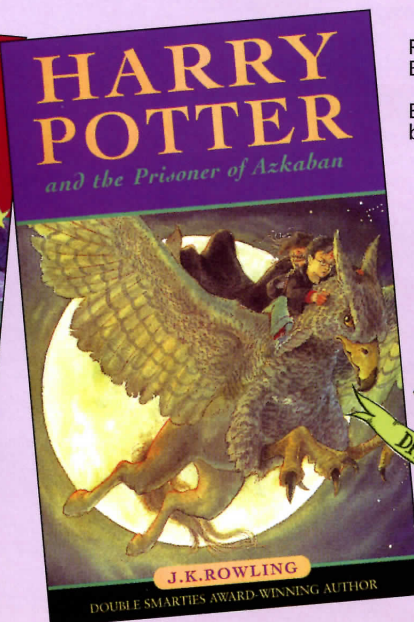
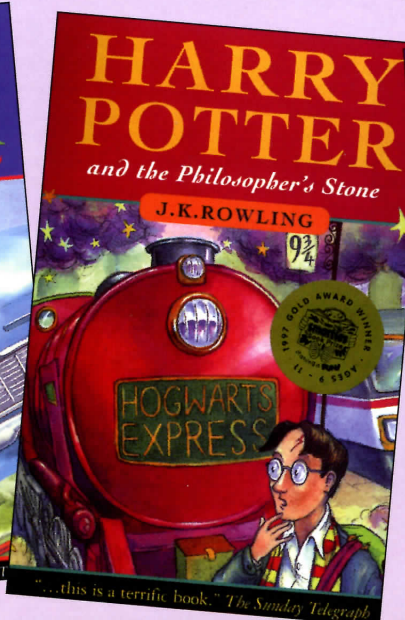
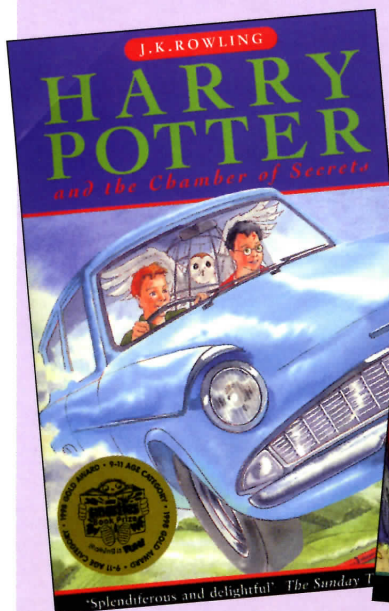
It is hard to believe, then, that a number of publishers and agents turned down the first manuscripts of Harry Potter. Mr Little says: 'I was gobsmacked. I think that people were nervous about its length - it was 60,000 words while most children's books are 40,000 to 45,000 words. I also think that publishers did not feel its subject matter, going away to school, would appeal to the public.'



While Mr Little knew it would be successful, even he could not foresee just how well Harry Potter would do. 'I think its success comes down to the fact that it is a good story, and its popularity grew as a result of children talking about it. That's it. Wherever in the world Harry Potter goes, it gets the same reaction; it is seen as fresh, new, different. Maybe people were just waiting for something like that?' In the UK, **Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets** managed to outsell many adult bestsellers while in the US, **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** has so far spent 19 weeks on the New York bestseller list.

Timing crucial?

As Christopher Little suggests, the timing of the publication was probably important. Harry Potter reached children's book shelves at a time when support for individual authors, like Jacqueline Wilson, had started to grow while, according to some publishers, loyalty to series was on the wane. In the US, for example, sales of Goosebumps slumped dramatically in 1997. Traditional series still remain popular among many young readers but the Harry Potter books offer a very different reading experience. Rosamund de la Hey, head of children's marketing at the publisher, Bloomsbury, comments: 'Perhaps there has been a lot of "dumbing down" in some areas of children's publishing. Harry Potter doesn't do that, it proves that children don't need to be patronised. It has complex plots, fascinating characters and uses good vocabulary. It also appeals to a broad range of readers.'



Photograph of JK Rowling by Bill de la Hey.

Below, Harry Potter's school badge.



Children's reaction

Lindsay Fraser, executive director of the Scottish Book Trust, has seen first hand just how children feel about Harry Potter. 'You only have to see how children react to the author to know how they feel about the books. When Jo Rowling talked at the Book Festival in Edinburgh last year, hundreds of children wanted to meet her. When she came into the room, they all just went really quiet, and then burst into applause. They hadn't done that before. And their questions were so indepth. Jo had a good laugh with them, but she also took their questions seriously. The children have responded to her, and she to them.'

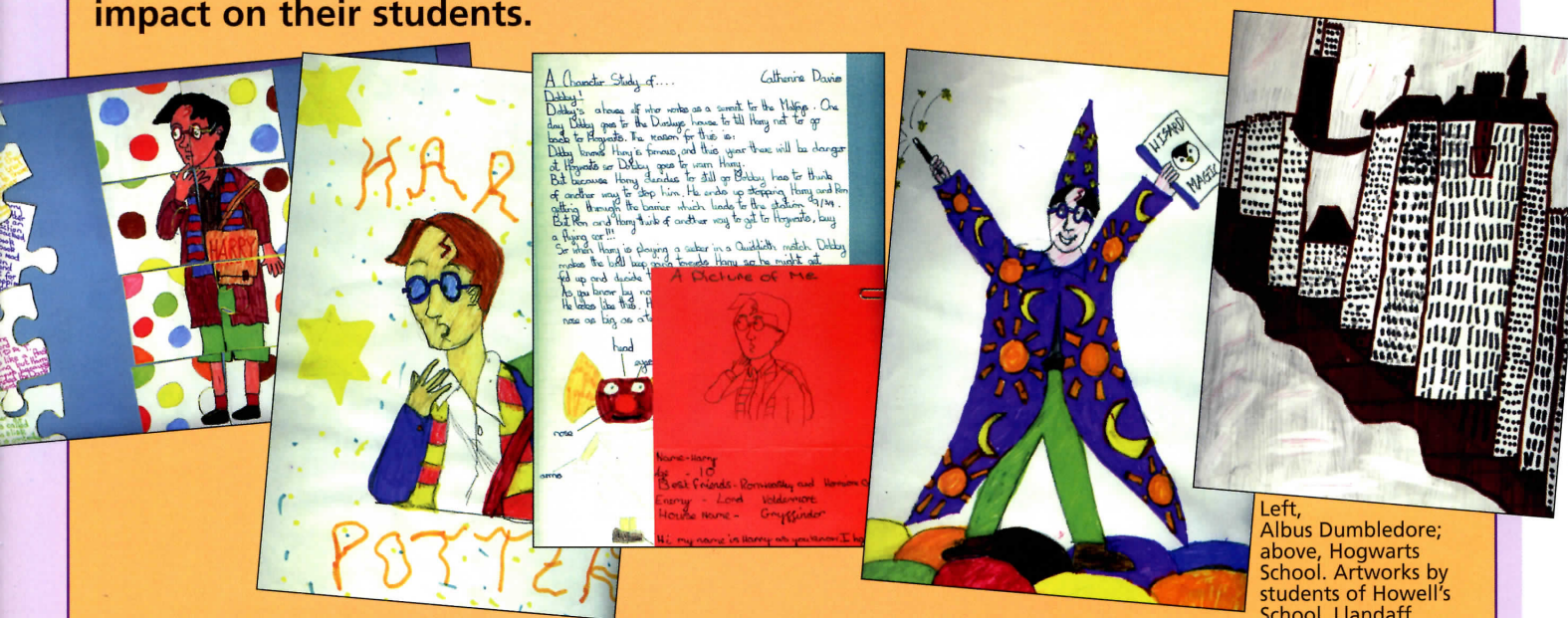
Winning the Smarties

Alongside the influence of the playground, and some very enthusiastic children's booksellers, the extensive media attention and book reviews have also played a part in the growth of sales. Unfortunately, in its early days, media attention focused on the 'single, poor Mum' angle, following the

six-figure sale of **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** to the US - but as Harry Potter started to appear on the shortlists of children's book awards, including the Carnegie and Guardian Book Award, the title itself, and what children were saying about it, started to hold the headlines. While sales at this point were doing well, the major breakthrough came when **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** won the Smarties award in November 1997. Sales, says Ms de la Hey, 'went vertical' and Jo Rowling was left stunned by the media clamour.

There is, however, still room for growth says Mr Little, particularly in crossing further into the world of adult readers. The first two titles are available in adult versions and the **Telegraph** will review the new title in its adult pages. But it is the children who continue to hold the focus of attention. To date, Jo Rowling has received some 4,000 letters from her young fans. As they anticipate the next in the series, she is not about to let them down. ■

Marissa Davis, Head of Junior School and Pat Williams, Head of the Learning Resource Centre, Ysgol Howell (Howell's School), Llandaff describe Harry's impact on their students.



Left, Albus Dumbledore; above, Hogwarts School. Artworks by students of Howell's School, Llandaff.

What is it about the two Harry Potter books by JK Rowling that is so appealing?

Using the words of a ten year old Harry follower, 'With flying cars, mysterious secrets and really original ideas, Harry Potter is a brilliant book which can be read and relished by anyone (yes, including adults).'

JK Rowling's portrayal of Harry's adventures at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is utterly believable and takes the young mind into Harry's world in a totally convincing manner.

Apart from the sheer thrill and enjoyment of reading the first Harry Potter book as one of the Smarties Book Prize shortlisted titles, our Year 6 girls wanted to explore Harry Potter for all it was worth and to delve into the magical realms of analysis from their perspective. Harry became a cult hero overnight and within hours of reading the second book home telephones and faxes were whining with a multitude of ideas being exchanged. The ultimate interview with Harry, an autobiography, reviews, jigsaw puzzles, silk painting, board games, character studies, computer generated posters and fact files were wholeheartedly produced by an excited crowd of girls who just brought Harry alive into their own worlds.

The work culminated in our own showing of 'Harry Potter This Is Your Life'. It was as if the girls not only knew Harry immediately but also almost became Harry knowing every minute detail of his life, his likes, dislikes and every thought.

PW

Very rarely does a teacher find such a stimulus that excites young children into covering so many aspects of the language curriculum from one book and where the children themselves create a range of sophisticated tasks for themselves through sheer enthusiasm. The Harry Potter series is thoroughly recommended as a rich source of cross-curricular opportunities. Its racy style and believable characters totally appeal to children.

Encouraging pupils to read for pleasure is an important role of the school librarian. It is very rewarding to see so many pupils reading the Harry Potter books for sheer enjoyment. They have gained a momentum of their own. Along with novels by such authors as Jacqueline Wilson the Harry Potter books can rarely be found on the library shelves and rather than wait many of our pupils have bought their own copies.

JK Rowling has hit upon a winning formula, which has us all on the edge of our seats. Long may her books continue!

MD

The Harry Potter books:

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, 0 7475 3269 9, £10.99 hbk, 0 7475 3274 5, £4.99 pbk

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, 0 7475 3849 2, £10.99 hbk, 0 7475 3848 4, £4.99 pbk

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, 0 7475 4215 5, £10.99 hbk, 0 7475 4511 1, £4.99 pbk

And on tape, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, read by Stephen Fry, Cover to Cover Cassettes, published 28th October 1999. £19.99 (6 cassettes, 8 hours 25 minutes)

Giving Text a Context: Book Adaptations and Print Literacy

Do film and television adaptations of books and plays kill children's desire to read literature? Professor Colin McCabe of the British Film Institute was convinced that, on the contrary, they could help raise levels of print literacy. The research project he initiated, conducted with King's College, London, has shown that the reading age of children working with screen adaptations of books can be boosted by as much as three years. **Joanna Oldham** explains.

The image and the printed word have always had an ambivalent relationship. In part this has been an argument about high and low culture – 'Shakespeare not soaps' as John Major summarised the debate at a Conservative party conference. But beneath this statement lies the more widespread anxiety that the relative ease with which a film can be consumed has led to children becoming reluctant readers of books. And with this anxiety has come the contingent concern that literacy levels are falling. Leaving aside the truth or otherwise of this latter claim, the arguments are still not quite that clear cut. Hollywood has always recognised the commercial power of both the novel and the novelist. From F. Scott Fitzgerald onwards studio moguls have bought kudos by employing novelists as screen writers. Film rights to novels produce lucrative deals and adaptations of literary texts boost book sales considerably. Even the reading matter of a film's protagonist produces a similar effect, a phenomenon testified to by the sudden popularity of Herodotus after *The English Patient*.

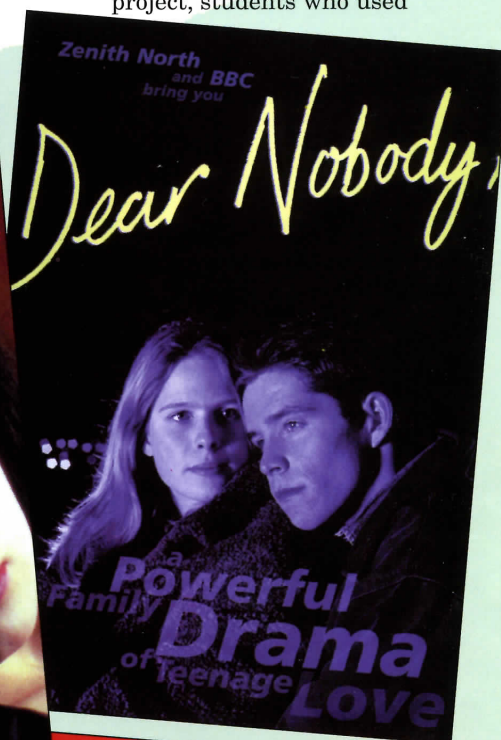
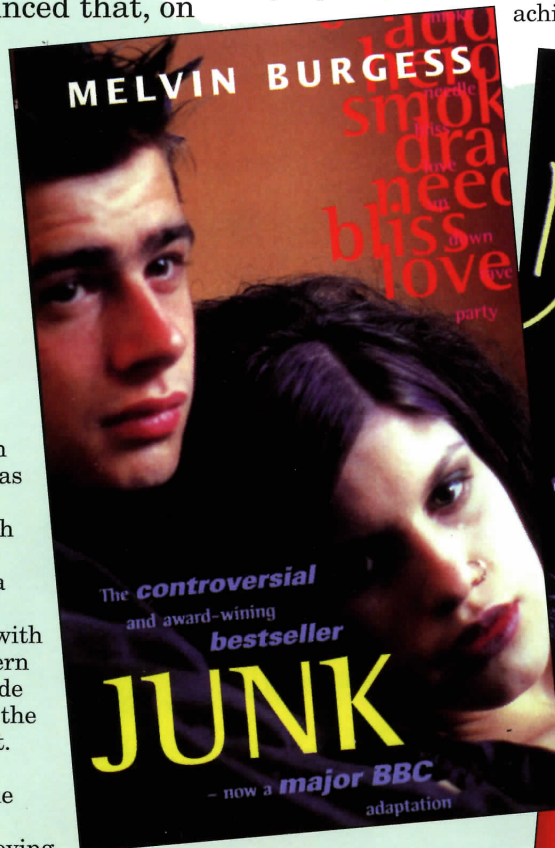
The benefits of using adaptations?

Yet when people read and enjoy a book, the film or serialised adaptation can be disappointing. The director has got the casting wrong or a favourite scene has been misinterpreted or even missed. While this is not an uncommon experience it often limits the debate to whether film, say, can ever recreate the experience of reading the book and this misses the point. The more interesting question for those of us involved in education must be how schools and parents can use this rich resource in the teaching of reading. For many secondary pupils, the first time they encounter classic novels is through watching adaptations shown in school but little research, other than the undoubted motivational effects, has ever been done on the actual benefits of this approach.

And this is the question to which King's College, London, in collaboration with the British Film Institute applied itself. The results were startling. In order to investigate the potential of integrating text and moving-image media for increasing literacy attainment in schools, we conducted a small-scale pilot study, researching two classes of Year 7 students both of whom were studying Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, but only one of which utilised moving-image media in the course of their lessons. This pilot research found a strong positive correlation between the use of moving-image media and the development of print literacy.

Students who were taught using the film adaptations,

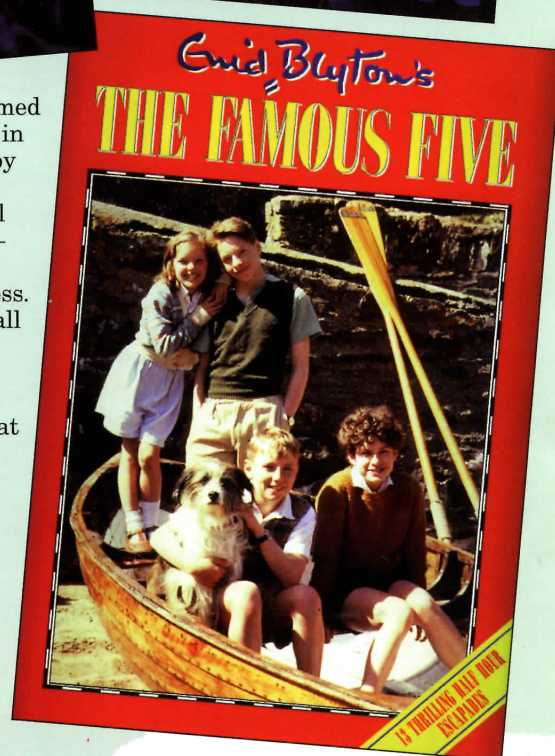
including the David Lean version and the musical, tended to do better at print literacy, as measured by both national curriculum tests and also by independent ratings of their work by experienced GCSE examiners. Controlling for differences in achievement at the beginning of the project, students who used



film outperformed their counterparts in the control group by an average of one-and-a-half national curriculum levels – the equivalent of three years' progress. Because of the small scale of the pilot these results are only indicative but they do suggest that considerable improvements in the literacy achievements of secondary school students (and particularly boys) might be achieved.

The primary end of the project

These findings correspond to earlier work which was carried out by Channel 4 schools. Here the research looked specifically at the use of their early literacy programme *Rat a tat tat*. *Rat a tat tat* uses adaptations of children's books as part of its format but, unusually, prints the words to the text at the bottom of the screen, rather like the Disney sing-a-long videos. This means that not only can children follow the text with the



voice over but that they can join in with it, rather as the group reading of the big book in the literacy hour encourages them to do.

Again this research found that the books used by the programme became by far the most popular in the book corner. But perhaps even more significantly, the four- and five-year-olds read these books with far greater confidence and were far more sophisticated in their understanding of the books that had been televised than they were of other texts.

Both readers and watchers

What both these pieces of research suggest is that reading and watching can be activities that support and influence each other. Neither piece of research advocates simply sitting in front of a television for a spot of passive viewing by the pupils and a respite for the hard pressed teacher. Both are about finding constructive ways of tapping into the knowledge that pupils already possess. Clearly these are very early studies and we need to find out far more about the means by which we can best use the moving-image to enhance literacy levels. For whether we identify ourselves as either primarily readers or watchers, such rigid distinctions fail to acknowledge that, for the most part, people are generally both.

These trends offer good news to worried parents who are concerned about their children's television habits. Children's television frequently generates books featuring favourite characters, be they Postman Pat or the Teletubbies and, as a result, television and film may actually play a part in motivating children to read more. In schools, at both primary and secondary levels, the uses of media are reasonably well-established and arguably, likely to expand owing to new digital technologies. These technologies will not replace print: the ability to read and to write and degrees of correctness are required by information communication technology including email and the Internet. What might change is the widely-held perception that media prevalence in society and schools, use of adaptations when teaching reading in primary schools and English Literature in secondary schools, is responsible for a decline in reading.

If financial backers can see that the book of the film or the film of the book makes good commercial sense, then it is about time that schools realised they may make good educational sense too. ■

Joanna Oldham was a researcher on this King's College/BFI project.

See also **Useful Organisations No.7: Film Education** (p.14) and the review of Gina Pollinger's **Something Rich and Strange** (p.23).

Thanks to Zenith Entertainment for the stills used in this article.

Clearing the Ambiguities . . .

Kathryn Warder on how her class reacted to *Romeo and Juliet* on screen.

It was definitely a bad case of Literature Snobbery which made me avoid the film version of *Romeo and Juliet* when it played at our local cinema. I reasoned with myself that probably the language would be abused, or the choice of such a teenage heart-throb as DiCaprio could only detract from the portrayal of Romeo. The thought of mixing American accents with the poetry of the text sent shivers down my spine, and updating the set could not, I felt, add anything to the truth and tragedy of the play. Luckily for me, my teenage daughter borrowed the video from an already addicted friend. I walked past the TV. I saw Mercutio in drag at the Capulets' party in a kind of Busby Berkeley routine. And from that moment I was hooked.

The copy which I bought to back up my teaching of this text to Year 9 (13–14 year olds) students of a wide range of ability is without doubt the best aid to both teaching and learning I have ever used and I will try to explain why.

Things that get in the way

There are many things which get in the way of teaching Shakespeare. Surely I am not alone in remembering dusty schoolroom afternoons reading from unillustrated text and desperately trying to remember who's who? Then the language: 'doth' is an immensely strange word for your average teenager. And those long speeches! You've forgotten the beginning by the time you get to the end. It takes a highly skilled and practised reader to bring out emotion in the reading of a Shakespearean play and we are not teaching exclusively high ability students. However, the greatest barrier of all is the idea that because it was written in a time which no longer exists, a play's content has no power to move us.

This film breaks down that barrier.

Passion, tragedy, conflict and violence

Using powerful and clever imagery and keeping almost totally faithful to the text, the film evokes the passion, tragedy, conflict and violence of the play. The characters are immediately stamped upon the memory. In the style of a *Dramatis Personae*, each is introduced by name and relationship, cast and costumed to suggest personality and family connections. Excellent characterisation brings out motive and makes the characters' actions seem real, their expressions and actions affording clues to the meaning of the language.

The division between the feuding families is suggested both by racial difference and fashion choice, and their 'like dignity' portrayed visually through material possessions such as cars, jewellery, skyscrapers, evening dress - accessible imagery, and fitting equivalents to mansions with balconies and the masqued ball. Sound is used to stir emotions, with music ranging from street funk to gospel, underlining mood and atmosphere as only music can, and exterior and mechanical sound, such as the helicopter's frantic beating and the scream of a police siren, create the feeling of danger on the streets.

Love scenes are tender, hate scenes are brutal. This is a very black and white production, and melodramatic, if you like, but it is the film's simplicity in its portrayal of the plot, linked with its sophisticated range of techniques which makes it perfect for a teenage audience. It is a film which sets out to engage the emotions - just as plays are supposed to do.

Emotional response

It is this which makes it an excellent teaching tool. Once children start feeling sympathy for a character, or start to judge their actions as unjust or cruel, they become involved. Once they are involved, they have a reason to read on, to watch, to listen. This emotional response is a key to the teaching of literature, because literature is essentially about people - their lives, loves, successes and failures.

Picture, if you can, three 14-year-old boys...one a member of the under 16 school rugby team, the other two, shall we say, fairly lively characters, and not pupils of high academic ability. They are sitting together, following the text of *Romeo and Juliet* as it is performed on the film. They are completely involved. They are curious to see how the language links in with the production. They ask questions, and want to have things explained. They ask to read the fight scene themselves. I ask if they would like to move to a corner of the classroom, and one replies,

'I'll look to like, if looking like move.'

The study of *Romeo and Juliet* is almost without exception the favourite work covered, when you ask Year 9 students to assess their progress over the year. Almost all want to read more Shakespeare and I am convinced that the use of this film has helped to achieve this.

Now what we need is more of this street credible type of production! ■

Kathryn Warder teaches English at Pembroke Comprehensive School.

Authorgraph No.117

Jean Adamson

Jean Adamson interviewed
by Stephanie Nettell

Half a million copies sold last year alone. Still running strong after 40 years. A current total of 21 million copies for 130 titles. If there were any justice, Jean Adamson would be rich and famous. Jean who? You know, the distaff side of the team that created *Topsy & Tim*. Yes, *they* are household names, but it is only recently that Jean has enjoyed a financial security which her husband Gareth never lived to see.

Yet it is typical of this perky little 71-year-old, with a fragile-sounding voice that is wholly deceptive, to say that her life has been one long holiday. We may see years of freelance uncertainty, bringing up three kids in deep Cambridgeshire countryside ('great for being poor'), and sudden shattering widowhood, as stressful, but to her it is earning a living doing something she wanted to do with someone she loved.

Jean and Gareth married in 1957 and had twenty-five years together. But they first met at Goldsmiths' art college, each emerging from a bumpy wartime childhood. Jean, born in south London, was starting at the grammar school the very day war broke out, and instead found herself evacuated 'all in our new winter uniforms in the blazing heat of that September' to a destination only the train driver knew. 'It played havoc with my education, but I was hooked on drawing. Art school at sixteen, just before the war ended, was like heaven – I couldn't believe it, drawing all day!'

Gareth, two years older, left school at fourteen for art college in his native Liverpool. At fifteen he joined his family in Northumberland, where his father was organising a Home Guard group. 'I always think of them as Captain Mainwaring and Pike – in true Pikeish fashion he was climbing the school wall to fetch fish and chips for the fire-watchers when he fell and hurt his back.' Not funny, for he developed ankylosing spondylitis 'which laid him low for many years – he was supposed never to walk again. Yet it *was* funny the way things worked out.

'The end of the war saw lots of servicemen returning to college on big grants, and when Gareth, whose parents could never have afforded the fees, turned up for interview on disability benefit, the Head suggested that since he'd been hurt fire-watching in the Home Guard he could get a 100 per cent ex-Serviceman's grant. Brilliant!'

Both studied illustration; Gareth then joined an advertising agency in Newcastle, and Jean taught Illustration and Design at Goldsmiths' before going into the cartoon film industry. 'I had a lovely time. It was a huge unit in London's Dover Street run by an ex-UPA American – a breakaway doing new modernistic "contemporary" work, stylish amusing cartoons, very unlike Disney.'

She stayed in touch with Gareth, who visited her and then courted her by letter for a year. She laughs now, wistfully. 'He was very witty. His letters were so funny – I kept them but somehow along the way I've lost them.' They married, packed up their jobs and she moved to Newcastle where they aimed to produce illustrated books 'which obviously meant children's. Gareth had taught himself to be an excellent writer while on his back, and was doing all sorts of stuff, while we

earned our real living with advertisements for Fairy, forerunner of Procter & Gamble in Newcastle. Then his agent mentioned Blackie had a slot for a series for young children.

'We'd never drawn for children before. We looked around the bookshops: no need for more animals, which I liked drawing, nor fantasy and magic, which Gareth liked. There was the Janet and John series, which bore no relation to real life: Britain had started swinging, there was a whole new world coming. I'd understood that through my film work, so I suggested we do something about *now*.

'We did a word-count of a *Toytown* book, because I'd adored Beaman as a child. Boy or girl? One of each, and because with two older brothers I'd always been a feminist, they had to be equal, so twins. We were aiming at about three-year-olds; Gareth wanted magic, but I said no, to small



children everything is fresh and wonderful.'

Gareth was the writer. 'He planned one story for every day of the week, with a repeated theme at the beginning on what they saw when they first looked through the window – that was what the story would be about. The first was *Topsy & Tim: Monday Book*: it was raining!' She hunts out the original they sent to Blackie, a perfect miniature

book. 'I hadn't meant it to be so tiny, but I feel happier with that size: the concept is so small you include only what you need.'

This little square was published as 9½ x 7 inches, the foundation for the series throughout the sixties and early seventies, until the oil crisis halved the format and they became 'Handy Books', very like the later Ladybird size. 'In 1960 most children's books were alternating four-colour/two-colour, but Blackie brought out **Topsy & Tim** in huge numbers with full colour on every page – and at 3s.6d [about 17p]. People didn't know how they did it, and it was a *great* success.'



In 1968, after Gareth won a BBC competition for a new playwright in the north-east and seemed on the brink of Big Things like *Z-Cars*, they moved south to be near London; on cue, a political crisis put everything on ice, and they found themselves in fenland Wicken. They each did other books, worlds away from **Topsy & Tim**: Gareth was widely praised for his histories of domestic life and people at work for Abelard-Schuman, which were wonderfully hand-lettered, amusing and packed with detail, and Jean produced picture books, like the story of Ahmed, an engaging tortoise who packed 'em in with his rocking guitar, with *World's Work* and *Chambers*. Gareth developed their habit of collecting old books into an antiquarian book business, tearing off at dawn to man his stall in antique markets. And the debts piled up.

Jean speaks of him affectionately as a walking chaos, hopeless with money, always breaking or losing things, multi-talented but soon bored with any one project. Yet they never fought and she happily followed his lead. He tended to suddenly ditch agents until Blackie suggested they did not need one at all. But Blackie came infuriatingly to take them for granted, changing things without consultation and growing careless with the printing. Then the scene changed, and 1988 brought a new format and a fresh style; it is only recently, however, that Jean's new agent, Sheila Watson, has performed miracles with the contract problems she had been left with.

Gareth's brain tumour was misdiagnosed until it was far too late. They had decided to renovate a derelict 16th-century house in a nearby village, but he did not live to see its splendid beamed glory. With tragic irony, his death and a wise builder freed Jean from debt. As someone who had never even visited the bank, she now took on everything, dealt with the massive rebuilding, their three children (Leo was twenty, Gabrielle eighteen and Kate sixteen – today she has four grandchildren 'whom Gareth would have loved'), and bringing **Topsy & Tim** into a new era with Penguin and now Ladybird, with Gareth's name kept alive. Blackie were relieved – **Topsy & Tim** was their major takeover asset.

Jean has added 39 titles. She had usually done the research, the page roughs and picture layouts, leaving space for Gareth's words. 'It was the writing that made them so popular – *someone* would have illustrated them. Yes, I'd done the spadework, but I found the writing incredibly difficult: to keep titles flowing they had become very informative, and that's hard in one little paragraph per page while telling a jolly story.'

With the '88 makeover Blackie used a new artist and added an outline and bright ink colouring. 'A great lift,' says Jean, though I personally miss the texture and shadows of the originals. Later Penguin would restyle the covers, and add contemporary ideas like nits, dinosaurs, bullying and Jenny in her wheelchair. Jean no longer draws them, but offers what amounts to a storyboard for other illustrators. She has prepared an amazing style-bible, listing and illustrating every detail of the twins' appearance and lives, their house, town, neighbours, friends and *their* families. When she speaks of there being a huge mine of out-of-print **Topsy & Tim** titles to work out, she could add that she has provided the treasure map.

Topsy and Tim are forever young. 'They started off pre-school, went to playgroup for years, then primary school and their fifth birthday, and are now

back in playgroup!' But their world changes. That first **Monday Book** now has coloured wellingtons and a neighbour, not the milkman, calling 'Nice weather for ducks!' – because many people no longer have a milkman, just as the early twins had never seen a motorway. Back in the time of Handy Books, black children in rural Cambridgeshire were sparse, so chancing upon someone who taught in a Gravesend school with 70 per cent Sikh children, Jean spent a day with a Sikh family, visiting Sikh shops and a temple, photographing, sketching and learning to count to five in Punjabi. The result was **Topsy & Tim Meet New Friends**.

Topsy & Tim are also "new experience" books. **Topsy & Tim Learn to Swim** is one of the most popular titles: 'Parents trust them, so if Topsy and Tim go sailing or pony-trekking, their children can do that too.' Thus the one unchanging essence of the whole series is reassurance – the twins' parents will not divorce, but a friend's might. 'Dads in particular tend to think they're a bit tame, suggesting titles like 'Topsy & Tim Stone the Ducks', forgetting how they relate to very young children.' Apparently simple, Jean's stories are also spot on from a psychological point of view, appealing to very young children at a deep level. Thus, in **Topsy & Tim and the New Baby**, the twins and their friend Tony have a drink from the fridge after seeing his new baby sister breastfed; in **Topsy & Tim Visit Granny and Granpa**, they come to understand that their mum was once a child too.

The morning we met Jean had received a batch of charming letters from a Welsh school who had never before had an author visit, but which had some Welsh editions of **Topsy & Tim** from years ago. The twins are apparently too British to travel far abroad (although instructions to the illustrator to avoid steering wheels prove her publishers live in hope). With an old **Topsy & Tim** video still in the Internet's top 50, a new one is planned, 'possibly with those little CD things' – high-tech Topsy and Tim toddle into the new millennium. ■

The Books

Topsy & Tim books are published by Ladybird, now part of the Penguin Group. The following is a selection of those available. As some titles mentioned in the article are no longer in print, contact Ladybird for their catalogue with a full listing.

Learnabout Storybooks:

Start School, 0 7214 2841 X
Make a New Friend (Jenny in her wheelchair), 0 7214 2843 6
Go to the Park, 0 7214 2847 9
And the New Baby, 0 7214 2851 7
Go to Hospital, 0 7214 2853 3
Meet the Police, 0 7214 2858 4
 £2.99 each pbk

Storybooks published in April 1999:

A Special Visit, 0 7214 2041 9
Buckets and Spades, 0 7214 2042 7
Old Shoes, New Shoes, 0 7214 2043 5
Little Shoppers, 0 7214 2044 3
 £2.50 each hbk

Storybook collections published in June 1999:

Growing Up Stories, People Who Help Us Stories and First School Stories, £4.99 each hbk, £3.99 each pbk

There are also Wipe-Clean Books (£2.50 each pbk), Sticker Activity Books (£2.50 each pbk), A Doll Dressing Book (£2.99 pbk) and Book and Tape packs (£3.99 each inc. VAT).

Photographs by Martin Ellis.

Stephanie Nettell is a critic, author and journalist on children's books.

SINGLE VOLUME ENCYCLOPEDIAS: *CHOOSING THE BEST*

Like the proverbial buses, single volume encyclopedias for children have been scarce - and then three come along at once - from Oxford, Kingfisher and Usborne. Extremely useful for ready reference information, single volume encyclopedias have to squeeze a large amount of information into a small space. How accurate and current are they, and what depth of coverage have they managed? John Farndon investigates.

The Oxford and Kingfisher single volume encyclopedias are aimed at the same market and age group (9-12 year olds). They are identical in format and price - big, substantial books clearly aiming to be as comprehensive as possible within a single volume. But the Oxford is considerably thicker than the Kingfisher with 672 pages to Kingfisher's 492.

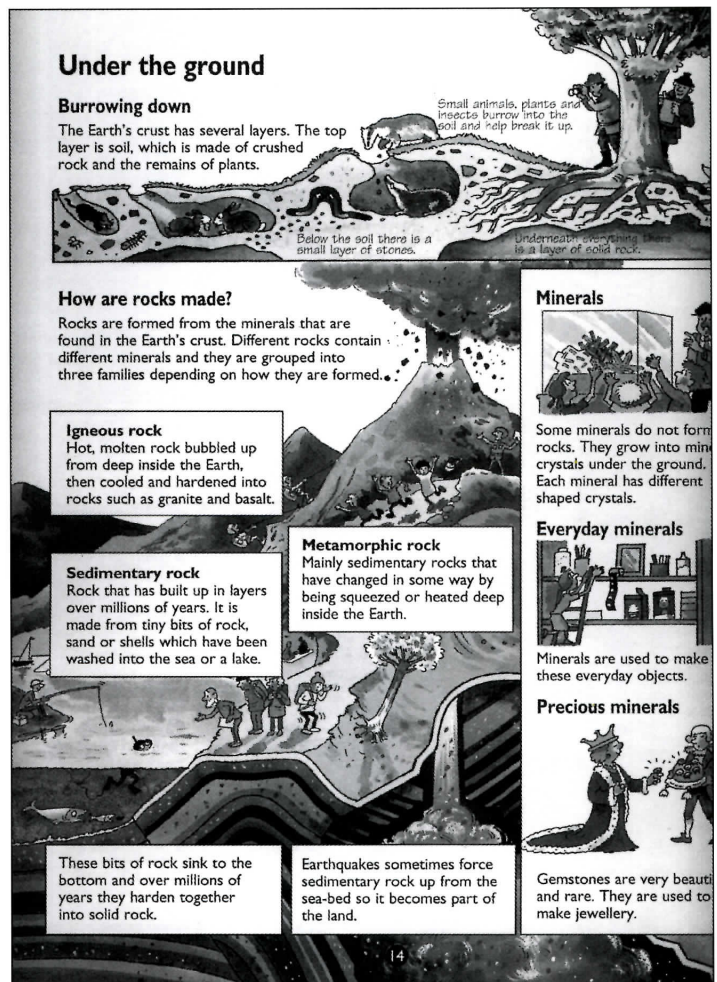
CONSISTENTLY CLEAR AND CONCISE

A huge amount of work has gone into both encyclopedias. In the Oxford Encyclopedia this has been amply rewarded by a book in many ways as good as Oxford's excellent multi-volume encyclopedia. It is organized alphabetically, with 850 articles 300-2000 words long on everything from aborigines to zoos. The balance of topics covered works remarkably well, allowing substantial entries on major subjects, so that you rarely feel a topic has been sold short, despite the limitations of a one volume encyclopedia. Most of the entries are clearly, concisely, elegantly and lightly written, and it is a real tribute to the editors that they have achieved such consistency using such a wide range of authors - almost 70 all told. Neat little chunks of additional information in sidepanels plus a highly effective crossreferencing system make this the kind of encyclopedia a child could get a deal of information from with ease. The design too, while never wildly exciting, is a model of elegance and clarity. Unusually for a book like this, there is rarely a poor artwork and some are very good indeed.

SUBSTANDARD PIECES

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Kingfisher Encyclopedia. They have tried to be far more adventurous visually than Oxford, and sometimes this comes off very well indeed. There are some superb and exciting artworks in here. But they are let down by a cluttered design, a mishmash of artwork styles and a number of substandard pieces. Like Oxford, Kingfisher have organized their encyclopedia alphabetically, with long entries on each topic. But they have imposed a discipline of devoting either one or two pages to every topic, which means it covers only half the number of topics while a large typeface combined with overlarge subheadings and big pictures means many topics are covered in fairly scant detail. While a few entries are well written, all too many manage to be either oversimplistic and lacking in authority - or far too pedantic for a child to easily understand.

On Cells, Kingfisher's introductory sentence reads: 'Cells are the smallest units capable of all the functions of life. Some living things are single cells, while others (such as ourselves) are made up of billions of cells.' That first sentence would be a killer for most children. Oxford's, on the other hand, reads: 'Cells are the building blocks of life. Some very simple plants and animals have only one cell but most living things are made of huge numbers of cells. A newborn baby has about 5 million million cells in its body, and an adult has over 10 times that number. Most cells are so tiny that they can be seen only by using a powerful microscope.'



A single volume encyclopedia page, Usborne style ...



... and a page Oxford style.

The next entry in each Encyclopedia is on Celts. Kingfisher's starts with 'The Celts are a group of people who lived in Europe from about 2,500 years ago. They were fierce warriors who fought frequently.' Oxford's reads: 'The Celts are an ancient European people. They are known as a fierce and warlike people, but this may be because they left no written records and the Greeks and Romans who wrote about them were, for most of the time, their enemies.' Not so concise, maybe, but which would you trust?

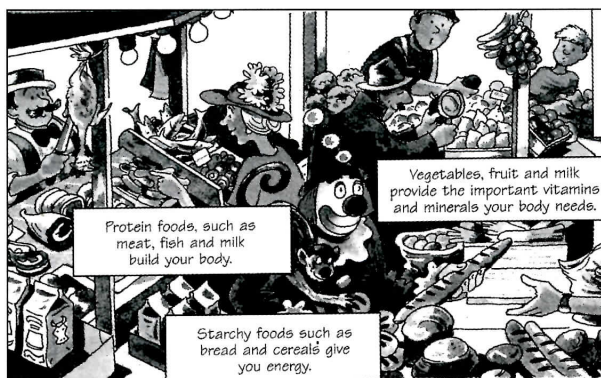
CURRENT?

Both the Kingfisher and the Oxford are dated 1998 and seem to have gone to great trouble to be bang up-to-date. But the more rigorous approach of the Oxford gives it the edge in describing recent events. Kingfisher sums up Bosnia this way: 'Savage civil wars began in 1991, and the former Republic of Yugoslavia broke up. It is now divided into five independent countries.' Oxford says, after explaining about Tito, 'As the Serbs seemed to be trying to take over the whole country, a bloody civil war broke out in 1991. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia became independent states. A cease-fire was arranged in 1995 and United Nations troops went in to try to keep the peace.'

ANIMATIONS

Usborne's Animated Children's Encyclopedia is a very different book from either the Kingfisher or the Oxford, and comes with an 'animated' CD-ROM (which works only on PCs, not Macs). The book is short compared with the others, just 136 pages long. It is much more friendly and aimed at a younger market. It is organized thematically under headings such as Our Planet and Science around Us, rather than alphabetically, and is clearly intended for browsing rather than reference.

Most of the information in the book is presented in the form of comic strips and producing this many artworks must have been a huge task. Although most of the artworks have immense charm and humour and give this book an appeal for younger children they turn out to be simply print-outs of the stillscreens from the CD-ROM. Perhaps this explains why the design lacks the flare of most Usborne books and actually looks quite old-fashioned. Every bit of information in the book is broken down into 30 word picture captions and this means that it is never quite as informative or as witty as we have come to expect from Usborne.



Part of 'Food and Cooking' from the Usborne volume.

It is when you open up the CD-ROM that you see the real joy of Usborne's Encyclopedia. There are literally hundreds of animated sequences, at least one on every one of 250-odd screens and some of the sequences are surprisingly long. Only a few of the animations actually help with explanation, but they are all so funny and charming with a complete range of whacky sound effects that adults and children will simply want to keep on clicking them. And some of these animations are quite exciting - going down beneath the seas to explore ocean trenches, for instance. Very few young children lucky enough to be given this Encyclopedia will not be captivated enough to go on browsing for hours, picking up little snippets of information as they go. While some of the explanations are just a little too brief and bald, many are engagingly simple. This is not a deeply serious reference work, thank goodness, but the information is mostly there, and presented in such an attractive, easy way that young children will pick up an immense amount of knowledge from it. Thoroughly recommended. ■

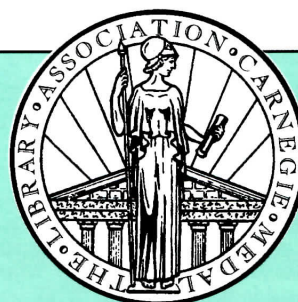
The Oxford Children's Illustrated Encyclopedia, edited Oxford University Press, 672pp, 0 19 910444 1, £30.00

The Kingfisher Children's Encyclopedia, Kingfisher, 492pp, 0 534 0109 6, £30.00

The Usborne Animated Children's Encyclopedia Book & CD-ROM, Jane Elliot and Colin King, 0 7460 3355 9, £19.99rrp

John Farndon is a non-fiction author and consultant.

BfK Briefing



Carnegie/Greenaway Shortlists

The Library Association's Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medal winners will be announced on July 14th. The shortlists are:

THE CARNEGIE MEDAL

Skellig by David Almond (Hodder Children's Books)

Heroes by Robert Cormier (Hamish Hamilton)

The Kin by Peter Dickinson (Macmillan)

Fly, Cherokee, Fly by Chris d'Lacey (Corgi Yearling)

The Sterkarm Handshake by Susan Price (Scholastic)

THE KATE GREENAWAY MEDAL

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, ill. Christian Birmingham (Collins)

Zagazoo by Quentin Blake (Cape)

Voices in the Park by Anthony Browne (Doubleday)

I Love You, Blue Kangaroo by Emma Chichester Clark (Andersen Press)

The Lion & the Unicorn by Shirley Hughes (The Bodley Head)

Come on, Daisy! by Jane Simmons (Orchard Books)

NEWS

Sweet Valley Low

Following a decline in sales, Transworld is to stop publishing Sweet Valley High titles and concentrate on more UK-originated series.

Kipling Wrong Shock

Zoologists at the University of Melbourne have claimed that the elephant's trunk evolved as a snorkel for underwater breathing not, as Rudyard Kipling suggested, as the result of a tug-of-war with a crocodile. A study of elephant embryos has found that the world's biggest land-based mammal may once have lived an aquatic existence and may be closely related to sea cows.

Books for Boys

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has urged teachers to use more 'boy friendly' books to try and close the gender gap in achieving the target level of reading. At the moment nearly 80% of 11-year-old girls achieved it compared to fewer than two-thirds of boys. On David Blunkett's list of recommended titles are 'adventure stories' by authors such as Daniel Defoe, R L Stevenson and H G Wells. BfK readers will find more up to date recommendations in our feature 'Reading for Pleasure - Boys' (BfK 108, Jan. '98).

Mrs Mad's Book-a-Rama

Mrs Mad's Book-a-Rama is a new website for young readers, teachers and parents at www.isnt.co.uk/books. It has reviews of children's books, a chance to contribute your own reviews, an interactive story and links to other useful sites.

Who Next?: a Guide to Children's Authors (1 901786 17 X) edited by Norah Irvin and Lesley Cooper and published by the Library and Information Statistics Unit at Loughborough University lists 400 children's fiction authors and for each author suggests others who 'write in a similar way. By moving from one entry to another children can expand the number of writers they enjoy'. £11.99 (inc. p&p) from LISU, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3TU.

BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BR

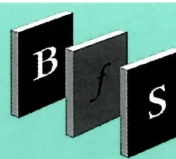
EVENTS

National Children's Book Week is from 4-10 October 1999. Practical resource material to help with book events is available from Book Trust. For a price list contact Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ (tel: 0181 516 2984).

A symposium, **Reading Pictures: Art, Narrative and Childhood** organised by Homerton College, Cambridge with the Fitzwilliam Museum will take place from 1-4 September. There will be contributions from,

amongst others, Jane Doonan, Judith Graham, Margaret Meek and Victor Watson. Further information from Morag Styles on 01233 507281.

The World of Tintin, an exhibition to mark the seventy years since the boy reporter first appeared, will be at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle in association with The Centre for the Children's Book from 15 July to 5 September. Further information from Elizabeth Hammill or Mary Briggs on 0191 274 3941.



Books for
Students

BEST SELLER CHART

TOP 10 FANTASY BOOKS

Nov. 1998 – April 1999

- 1 **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone**, JK Rowling, Bloomsbury, £4.99
- 2 **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, CS Lewis, Collins, £3.99
- 3 **The Iron Man**, Ted Hughes, Faber, £4.99
- 4 **The Hobbit**, JRR Tolkien, Collins, £5.99
- 5 **The Magician's Nephew**, CS Lewis, Collins, £3.99
- 6 **Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets**, JK Rowling, Bloomsbury, £4.99
- 7 **The Horse and his Boy**, CS Lewis, Collins, £3.99
- 8 **The Last Battle**, CS Lewis, Collins, £3.99
- 9 **Mossflower**, Brian Jacques, Red Fox, £4.99
- 10 **The Silver Chair**, CS Lewis, Collins, £3.99

An interesting mix of old and new – the perennial popularity of CS Lewis's Narnia books sees no less than five of the seven titles in the top ten. But the new superstar of children's fiction, Harry Potter, is much in evidence too. It will be interesting to see how Potter and Narnia battle it out once all the Harry Potter books have been published!

This listing has been specially compiled for BfK by Books for Students from their sales data. Books for Students Ltd is a major specialist supply company to schools and libraries.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ILLUSTRATED BOOKS IN FRANCE

Dear Editor

I refer to Dr Cotton's letter (BfK 116) endorsing Quentin Blake's article on French picture books, and her own project, funded by the EU, to help children understand more about each other through picture books.

However admirable this project is, the fact remains that there is no demand for continental picture books in Great Britain.

The latest title on our list reviewed by Quentin Blake in your last issue is a perfect example of this: **And If the Moon Could Talk** originally published by Gallimard in France to great acclaim (winner of the Boston Globe Award and included among the 100 Best Books by the New York Times) once again proved to me that books from the Continent simply don't sell in Great Britain. Our sales for the first four months: 450 copies.

Klaus Flugge

Andersen Press, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA

THE GOTCHA SMILE

Dear Editor

Your recent review of **The Gotcha Smile** by Rita Phillips Mitchell left me quite baffled (BfK 114). My children enjoyed it immensely. There was nothing in the story which was harmful and why this book should be used judiciously is beyond me. Also, the fact that Clarine is a little 'black' girl is irrelevant, this could have been any little girl.

T. Chambers

328 Green Street, Enfield, Middlesex EN3 7SB

Dear Editor

I was extremely disappointed when I read your review of Rita Phillips Mitchell's **The Gotcha Smile**. The book, in my view, deserves a far higher star rating. I do not believe that it was written purely as a guide for children starting at a new school and it is wrong to judge it in that light alone.

Miss Phillips Mitchell's books always have a wonderful 'feel good' atmosphere about them. If they have a therapeutic effect, so much the better. Her story is simply told with great charm. I think it is unlikely to 'make the situation worse'; children do not judge one another in the way adults do.

Vivien Cockcroft

The Old Rectory, Warmington, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX17 1BU

BfK also received letters on this topic from Janet Greenyer of London and D. Lewis of Romford.

There are still far too few children's books published that feature people from minority groups in our society, eg ethnic minorities or people with disabilities. Many BfK readers actively seek out books which will help to redress this imbalance for the children they work with or live with. It is therefore my policy that our reviewers inform our readership when the central character in the book they are discussing is from a minority group even if this is not central to the story. This is not intended to imply that the book in question is not relevant to all children in our society and I do not believe that our readership is so parochial as to make such an assumption. Ed.

BfK reviewer, Judith Sharman, writes:

*On one level the message in **The Gotcha Smile** certainly works – we know that smiling helps to reduce stress and tension and a more relaxed child will probably give off more confident 'vibes' to others. Some of the Year Two pupils reviewing this picture book for me thought it was very good and liked the idea of Grandpa's 'gotcha smile'.*

Other children in the two classes, however, stressed the possible reaction of other children in Clarine's class to Clarine's smile, given the difficult start that had already taken place. They pointed out that they might think that she was 'smirking because she thought she was better than them', 'laughing at them' or that she was 'peculiar'.

It is my policy to listen hard to children's views particularly in the case of books with a 'message'. Books are powerful tools for good and this book certainly sparked off a great deal of discussion amongst the children at our school. As I wrote in the review – the book could prove useful for encouraging empathy in a receiving group of children. It is, though, vital that such books do not promise a solution too easily. Parents and other adults may not be aware of the extent of the difficulties that a child is facing at school. A young child can often not fully articulate the degree of isolation or fear that they feel to adults around them. Were a child being bullied the strategy of the 'gotcha smile' could be misinterpreted and make a difficult situation far worse.

Letters may be shortened for space reasons

PRIZES

THE SIGNAL POETRY AWARD

The Signal Poetry Award has been won by Jackie Kay's **The Frog who Dreamed She Was an Opera Singer** (Bloomsbury). Kay was described by judge Margaret Meek as 'a poet of surprises, vision, being, and the lining of these things'. Roger McGough's **The Ring of Words** (Faber & Faber) was Highly Commended.

THE RHÔNE-POULENC PRIZE FOR SCIENCE BOOKS

This year's Junior shortlist for the Rhône-Poulenc Prize is **Ask Uncle Albert: 100 1/2 Tricky Science Questions Answered** by Russell Stannard (Faber), **Science School** by Mick Manning and Brita Granström (Kingfisher), **The Usborne Complete Book of the Microscope** by Kirsteen Rogers (Usborne), **The Marshall Children's Guide to Astronomy** by Jacqueline and Simon Mitton (Marshall Publishing), **Big Head!** by Dr Pete Rowan (The Bodley Head) and **Stephen Biesty's Incredible Body** by Richard Platt (Dorling Kindersley). The shortlist was chosen by Nick Arnold (Chair), Caroline Horn of **The Bookseller**, teacher and Head of Science Becky Parker, Professor David Phillips of Imperial College and children's writer Jacqueline Wilson. The winner will be chosen by children from 22 schools. The prize is £10,000.

BFC MOTHER GOOSE AWARD

This year's winner of the BFC Mother Goose Award is Niamh Sharkey for **The Gigantic Turnip and Tales of Wisdom and Wonder** (Barefoot Books). Sharkey was presented with a gilded goose egg and a cheque for £1000. The runners-up were Simon Bartram for **Pinocchio** (Dorling Kindersley), Adrian Johnson for **What!** (Bloomsbury Children's Books) and David Roberts for **Frankie Stein's Robot** (Macdonald Young Books).

BISTO/CHILDREN'S BOOKS IRELAND BOOK OF THE YEAR

The shortlist for the Bisto/CBI Book of the Year is **All the Way from China** by Pat Boran and Stewart Curry (Poolbeg Press), **Ride a Pale Horse** by Tom McCaughren (Anvil Press), **An Rógair agus an Scáil** by Gabriel Rosenstock and Piet Sluis (An Gúm), **Tales of Wisdom and Wonder** by Niamh Sharkey (Barefoot Books), **Bert's Wonderful News** by Sam McBratney (Walker Books), **The Gigantic Turnip** by Niamh Sharkey (Barefoot Books), **Dea-Scéala** by Catriona Hastings (Cló Iar-Chonnachta), **The Long March** by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick (Wolfhound Press), **Please Be Quiet!** by Mary Murphy (Methuen) and **The Moon King** by Siobhán Parkinson (O'Brien Press).

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.

Mary Cadogan is co-author of *You're a Brick, Angela*, and a writer, critic and broadcaster.

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.

Anita Ganeri is a freelance writer.

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

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

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

Errol Lloyd is an artist and writer.

Margaret Mallett is Visiting Tutor in Primary English, Goldsmiths' College.

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.

Alan Ravenscroft is Head of Features and Adult Education, Zenith Entertainment.

Andrea Rayner is a freelance book editor and children's book reviewer.

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

Elizabeth Schlenther is the Librarian at Penglais School, Aberystwyth, and the compiler of *Reading Therapy for Children – books for hospital and home*.

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

Helen Taylor works in Community Arts organising arts events and poetry projects in Cambridgeshire.

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Aztec News, The	★★★ 18	Marty Monster	★★★ 20
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Britain at War – Evacuation	★★★★ 23	Odious Oceans	★★★★★ 25
Can We Keep It, Dad?	★★★★ 21	Oil! Get off our Train	★★★★★ 19
Charities – do they work?	★★★★ 27	Otter, The	★★★★★ 22
Child of the May	★★★★ 18	Pawprints in Time	★★★★ 18
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Lady Long-Legs	★★★★★ 21		

Books About Children's Books

Everyone is a Reader: A Handbook to help Children with Reading Difficulties

★★★★

Beverley Mathias, 96pp,
0 948664 20 7

A Handbook on Death and Bereavement (2)

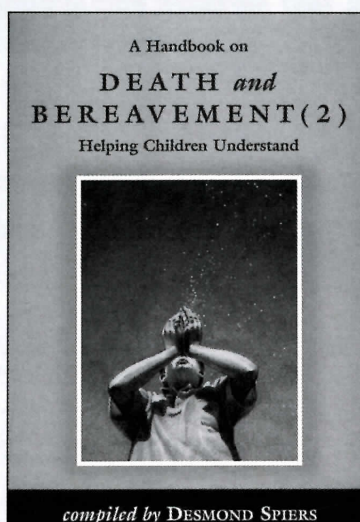
★★★

Compiled by Desmond Spiers,
72pp, 0 948664 25 8

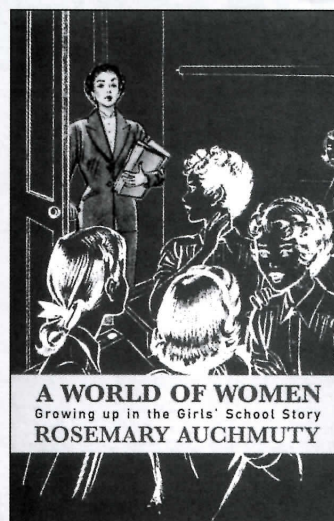
REACH, National Advice Centre for Children with Reading Difficulties, £9.95 each pbk (available from REACH, tel: 0118 973 7575 or fax: 0118 973 7105)

Mathias and Spiers have long worked with children with special needs, and these two handbooks are useful additions to the literature.

Death and Bereavement is an update of a bibliography published in 1992. There are 146 annotated titles in the new edition, mainly British, but material from other countries is also included. The books cover a wide age range and a reading age and interest age are given for each entry. Many of the choices are adult books, intended for those working with children coming to terms with death. An author index, a keyword index and a list of relevant organisations are included.



Everyone is a Reader also has an annotated book list for all age groups, but the material includes cassette tapes, videos, Braille, sign language, Moon, language games and large print items – 150 of them. Mathias makes the point that all these media are legitimate ways of enjoying literature. An excellent introduction includes sections on the conditions that affect reading ability, language development in children and helping a child to become a reader. In this last section some of the techniques used at the REACH Centre are explained. As a short, succinct introduction to using books with special needs children, the handbook could hardly be better. A list of useful organisations is included. ES



A World of Women

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Rosemary Auchmuty,
The Women's Press, 240pp,
0 7043 4538 2, £8.99 pbk

In **A World of Women** Auchmuty delves more deeply into some of the girls' school stories which she stimulatingly assessed in her earlier book, **A World of Girls**. Her main thrust is that the genre, once commonly dismissed as 'all japes and gymslips', in fact positively influenced young readers by its depiction of an all-female society where, unfettered by male competition or dominance, girls inevitably assumed leading roles in

sport, drama, scholastic achievement and community responsibilities.

From stories by three giants of the genre, Elsie J. Oxenham, Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elinor Brent-Dyer, Auchmuty now considers the adult characters – those who are fully fledged grown-ups from the beginning (i.e. teachers and headmistresses) and, particularly, the girls who mature during the course of the series from junior pupils to young women. Seeing these girls-grown-up as feminist role-models, she adroitly backs her argument with quotations and instances from the books stressing the heroines' involvement in careers, education and non-domestic pursuits.

So far, so fascinating! But it would also be possible, by selective quotes and examples from the intriguingly 'curate's egg' mosaic of these stories, to put the differing view that, despite their girlhood independence, these characters generally grew up to accept fairly conformist roles as 'backers-up' of men.

However, Auchmuty writes with punch and persuasiveness and, as well as presenting a sympathetic account of the school-story genre, **A World of Women** provides valuable social insights (for example, into the impact of movements such as Guiding, Guildry and Camp Fire). The book's great value is its accurate conveyance and celebration of female friendships and the essential sisterhood of women and girls, which, often neglected by more elevated authors, have been significantly acknowledged by the so-called 'schoolgirl writers'. MC

Now Out in Paperback

Three, four and five star hardbacks or trade paperbacks previously reviewed in BfK and now published as mass market paperbacks.

Under 5s PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY/INFANT

Queenie the Bantam

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Bob Graham, Walker,
0 7445 6328 3, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 107, November 1997:

"This warm, funny, beautiful book is about change and adaptation to change. Bruno reluctantly but gracefully makes room in his basket for Queenie and her eggs just as Caitlin must accommodate the new baby."

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

Badger's Bad Mood

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Susan Varley, Collins Picture Lions,
0 00 664680 8, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 110, May 1998:

"...a brave attempt to tackle a topic that is rarely explored with young children. Not an easy book then, but an important one..."

Pawprints in Time

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Philippa Butler, ill. George Smith, Puffin, 0 14 056240 0,
£4.99

Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

"Each evening Cat disappears, to return in Anna's dreams, dreams of times past and places far away. Cat's shadowy presence in scenes from his nine lives...invites the sensitive reader to find out more."

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Farm Boy

FICTION ★★★★★

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, Collins, 0 00 675412 0,
£4.50

Reviewed BfK 109, March 1998:

"...the technique is that of the story within the story, a device which here has the effect of reinforcing the central themes of family, continuity and tradition...an evocative, humorous and nostalgic picture of English (Devon) country life over some eighty years...this is an extremely beautiful book."

The Arctic Fox

FICTION ★★★★★

Mary Ellis, ill. Kady MacDonald Denton, Collins,
0 00 675283 7, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 110, May 1998:

"Alex and her explorer father travel to the Arctic to return an Arctic fox to its habitat...both an exciting adventure story and a story about a father and son's longing to be reunited."

10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

The Aztec News

Philip Steele, 0 7445 2876 3

The Egyptian News

Scott Steedman, 0 7445 2863 1

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Walker, £5.99 each pbk

Reviewed BfK 104, May 1997:

"Ancient history presented in a newspaper format – a compilation of 'the stories that really made the headlines'."

Midnight's Choice

FICTION ★★★★★

Kate Thompson, Red Fox,
0 09 925613 4, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

"The sequel to *Switchers*...an exciting adventure allied with a story that presents some profound reflections on human nature."

12+ SECONDARY

Child of the May

FICTION ★★★★★

Theresa Tomlinson, Red Fox,
0 09 969231 7, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 111, July 1998:

"The usual focus on the male camaraderie of Robin Hood's escapades in Sherwood Forest is abandoned here...at the centre of these entertaining episodes is a feisty 15-year-old, Magda, determined to have her share of the action..."

A Girl Named Disaster

FICTION ★★★★★

Nancy Farmer, Dolphin,
1 85881 622 X, £4.50

Reviewed BfK 106, September 1997:

"When cholera breaks out in a remote Mozambiquan village, the orphan Nhamo is blamed...her grandmother encourages her to escape by boat to find her father's people. ...the story is as much about transversing different worlds of spirit, science and culture."

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Wakey-wakey

0 7475 4075 6

Nighty-night

0 7475 4076 4

★★

Dawn Apperley, Bloomsbury, 10pp, £4.99 each board

Rhyming text of the 'Splish-splash/Let's have a wash' variety is illustrated by Apperley's pleasant but unspectacular watercolours of twin bunnies as they get up and go to bed. These board books do not quite work either as straight rhymes or as action poems, and did not impress my young testers. Innocuous but unexceptional. **AG**



"I want to be cuddled," sniffed Teddy.
"But you're hard and cold!" said Prince Peter.
"I know," sobbed Teddy. "But I still want a cuddle.
Everyone needs a cuddle."

Dexter Gets Dressed!

★★★★

Ken Wilson-Max, Kingfisher, 12pp, 0 7534 0233 5, £8.99 hbk novelty



This is an excellent activity book aimed at infants which teaches the dexterity necessary to put on a vest, zip up trousers, button up a shirt and tie shoe laces. What is perhaps the most novel feature of this book is that Dexter is a black child and there are probably few if any other activity or pop-up books which feature black children. **EL**

Has Anyone Seen Jack?

★★★

Tony Bradman, ill. Margaret Chamberlain, Frances Lincoln, 24pp, 0 7112 0728 3, £4.99 pbk novelty

A crazy, utterly light-hearted (despite its weight-lifting villain) reworking of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' which makes effective use of speech bubbles (many addressed directly to readers), flaps, lists, posters and cut pages. Tremendous fun and eminently readable. **JB**

Prince Peter and the Teddy Bear

★★★★★

David McKee, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 926728 4, £4.99 pbk

Each day in the week leading up to Prince Peter's birthday his father and mother alternately suggest

appropriately regal gifts but Peter resolutely refuses them all, requesting instead, to his parents' horror, a teddy bear. The day before the big day the queen relents and Prince Peter is handed a present – a very heavy parcel which contains a golden teddy bear. At bedtime cold, hard ted is placed beside Peter's bed but golden ted has a vital lesson to teach his owner: how a cuddle softens even the hardest exterior.

McKee has fun with the illustrations as well as the story – they are full of patterns, jokes and references to the works of famous artists – Hockney and Monet, to name just two. The pictures abound with opportunities for developing visual literacy; it is a case of the more you look ... **JB**

Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Ill. Rosalind Beardshaw, 0 521 66653 8

The Elves and the Shoemaker

Ill. Margaret Chamberlain, 0 521 66651 1

The Runaway Chapati

Ill. Stephen Waterhouse, 0 521 66652 X

BIG BOOKS ★★

Susan Price, Cambridge University Press, 16pp, £15.25 each pbk

Designed for use with early years children, these three big books form part of the beginning phase of the Cambridge Reading Programme. The choice of the stories is welcome, particularly *The Elves and the Shoemaker* which is not easy to come by in a quality version, and *The Runaway Chapati* (a variant of 'The Gingerbread Man'), a favourite tale for telling but not one I have come across in picture book form.

Price's retellings – as one would expect – lend themselves to being read aloud with verve and feeling and make the repetition inherent in each a natural part of the tale. There are speech bubbles too containing the repeated refrains, presumably for the children to read; these are in bold type but for whole class sessions I feel they could have been bigger. The three illustrators have brought their own originality to the familiar characters: Goldilocks is a thoroughly modern miss with trainer boots,

stripy tights and mini-skirt while the bears are gorgeously shaggy and huggable; Waterhouse's chapati chasers, particularly tiger, are wide-eyed and wonderful.

These books are well worth adding to the class collection regardless of whether or not you use any other materials from Cambridge Reading. **JB**

The King with Dirty Feet and other stories

★★★★★

Compiled by Mary Medlicott, ill. Sue Williams, Kingfisher, 40pp, 0 7534 0003 0, £4.99 pbk



Half a dozen traditional tales by writers whose tellings work very well as scripts for 'performing' to listening audiences thus paying tribute to the oral origins – Indian, Ghanaian, Australian, Guyanese, English and Native American Indian – of the stories. If you are looking for a good selection to get children thinking and discussing, then invest in this collection. Dramatic oil pastel illustrations grace each tale, an added allure for would-be child readers. **JB**

A Cultivated Wolf

★★★★★

Pascal Biet, story by Becky Bloom, Siphano Picture Books (distributed by Ragged Bears), 960 7930 10 X, £8.99 hbk



A skinny wolf is intent upon nothing but dinner when he pounces upon a duck, a pig and a cow on their farm; but the trio just ignore him – they are

engrossed in reading. Wolf is so surprised by the reaction of these cultivated animals that he decides he too must learn to read. His early efforts fail to impress (though some of us are not surprised!!!) despite his being top of the class and spending hours in the library. However, practice and the purchase of his very own storybook pay off and he and his cultivated companions decide to join forces and travel the world telling stories.

Biet's sketchy, almost slapdash line drawings and watercolours skilfully capture the depression, apprehension, contempt, indifference, rapture and contentment felt by the human and animal characters alike in this witty fable about the power of reading and story to transform. **JB**

Borka

32pp, 0 09 940067 7

Simp

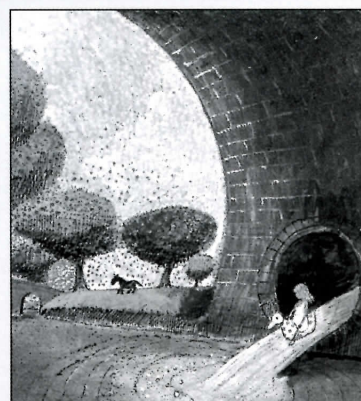
32pp, 0 09 940077 4

Would you rather ...

32pp, 0 09 920041 4

Time to get out of the bath, Shirley

32pp, 0 09 920051 1



Oi! Get off our Train

48pp, 0 09 985340 X

Courtney

32pp, 0 09 966681 2

Cloudland

48pp, 0 09 971161 3

★★★★★

John Burningham, Red Fox, £4.99 each pbk

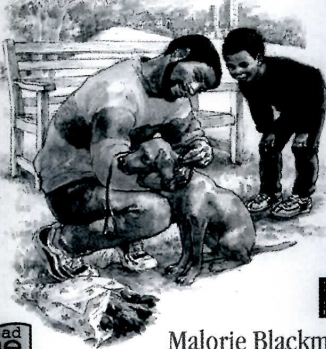
A welcome reissue by Red Fox of a selection of Burningham's works from Kate Greenaway Medal winner *Borka* (1963) to *Cloudland* (1996).

The dominant theme in these picture books is of the child alone – cast out like *Borka* or *Simp* to find a new home and a place in the world, or reaching out to fantasy as a relief from mundane adult routine. *Oi! Get off our Train* adds the issue of endangered species to the child's fantasy.

Burningham's illustrative style includes the use of a wide range of media, often tied together by his characteristic sketchy line-drawn

people. Some of his paintings seem unbelievably rich to be found in a picture book, and his inventiveness seems unlimited. His texts are less sure-footed, as might be expected from one who is primarily an artist, and can indeed be heavy-handed. However, lucky the child who has the opportunity to meet his idiosyncratic and often elusive works. AG

Dizzy's Walk



Malorie Blackman

Dizzy's Walk

Malorie Blackman, ill. Pamela Venus, 1 870516 41 9

Mum's Late

Elizabeth Hawkins, ill. Pamela Venus, 1 870516 40 0

Marty Monster

Malorie Blackman, ill. Kim Harley, 1 870516 42 7

Rainbow House

Vivian French, ill. Biz Hull, 1 870516 44 3

Starlight

Gillian Lobel, ill. Nic Wickens, 1 870516 43 5

Zia the Orchestra

Janet Burchett and Sara Vogler, ill. Lynne Willey, 1 870516 39 7

★★★★

Tamarind, 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

These six picture books published by a black publishing house, Tamarind, have been sponsored by teachers' union NASUWT, allowing it to attract writers and illustrators of calibre. The result is books of a good professional standard. The justification for this subsidy, no doubt, is that there is a need to preserve an authentic Caribbean perspective in children's literature to counter balance the increasing monopoly of white mainstream publishers which produce literature for black children, often written and illustrated by white writers and illustrators. Not that these have been unwelcome or unsatisfactory in the main, but there can be subtle differences of emphasis or subject matter which justifies the existence of publishers like Tamarind.

In *Dizzy's Walk* mum packs off dad and their son Jack to take the family dog, Dizzy, for a walk and to get them away from sedentary computer games. On the way Dizzy creates all kinds of mayhem upsetting tradesmen, shopkeepers and park

wardens to mention a few. An amusing story reminiscent of the classic *Rosie's Walk*, but with a warm human element woven into the narrative.

Mum's Late is about an anxious child waiting to be picked up from school, but portrayed within an increasingly familiar and relevant multicultural context. The wide ethnic range of parents and children depicted should ensure that all children should find some characters in the book to closely identify with on that score, though of course young children are often colour blind.

In *Marty Monster* Danny and his sister June have ten minutes to play before dinner time and set off in search of the Marty Monster who will, Danny fears, also be mighty hungry. All kinds of monsters are conjured up in their childlike imaginations. The pet goldfish becomes an enormous whale, the family cat a menacing tiger, the innocent pup a vicious wolf and so on. The real Marty Monster turns out to be their sleeping dad who wakes up with a roar ... just in time for dinner. A funny, engaging story.

In *Rainbow House* Diandra and her mum pass an old people's retirement home on their way from school each Monday. Diandra longs to pay a visit and gets her chance on an Open Day when her mum takes her to see the occupants. Diandra delights the old people with a book she has made and with a puzzle she has brought along for the occasion. An unlikely story perhaps but it should provide much scope for classroom discussion on the subject of the elderly and their place in society. The illustrations are beautiful – though sadly the illustrator only rates a billing on the title page.

In *Starlight* Rosie's Grandma, priestess-like in her African robe and headgear, gives her a wooden hobby horse for her birthday present. Rosie names the hobby horse Starlight which is prophetic as it turns out to possess magical powers. On successive moonlit nights after she is tucked into bed with Starlight, Rosie is spirited away on magical adventures. A story about enchantment beautifully told with illustrations that perfectly matches its mystical mood.

In *Zia the Orchestra*, Zia eschews conventional musical instruments in her declared intent to be an orchestra in favour of household implements such as biscuit tins, pot lids, left over party blowers, yoghurt cartons attached to a connecting string and the like. A cheerful story which could provide a lead into classroom introduction to the basics of stringed, percussive and wind instruments. EL

The Hedgehog's Balloon

0 00 664695 6

The Badger's Bath

0 00 664692 1

★★★★

Nick Butterworth, Collins, 24pp, £4.99 pbk

Butterworth's gentle and humorous tales about Percy the Park Keeper are established and well-loved. His storytelling skills involve the reader from the start, and the problem presented in *The Hedgehog's Balloon* (balloons and prickles do not go together) is ingeniously resolved.

In *The Badger's Bath* Badger has had a wonderful day digging, but is disappointed when Percy says he is too dirty to come to tea. A bath seems in order, and Percy collects all the necessary paraphernalia, each item beautifully illustrated, matching the text. However, badger, not at all keen on baths, meanwhile disappears. Loathe to waste the tub of soapy water, Percy decides to hop in himself, and is eventually joined by badger in the most surprising circumstances. GB



Sun Slices, Moon Slices

★★★★

Adèle Geras, ill. Karin Littlewood, 0 590 19577 8

Three Cheers, Charlie Dragon!

★★★

Brenda Smith, ill. Klaas Verplancke, 0 590 19899 8

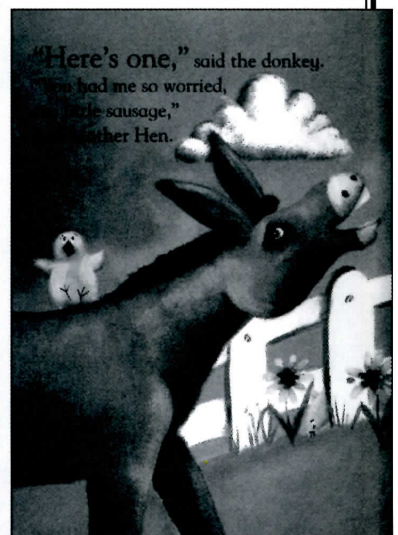
Little Hippo, 32pp, £3.99 each

Two titles from the 'Read with Little Hippo' series claiming 'short, simple texts and supporting illustrations' which 'help beginning readers to follow the stories for themselves'.

In the light of all this, Geras's story is surprisingly complex. Lewis's emotions are tracked as he goes, reluctantly, to his childminder's, plays, eats lunch, and returns home, taking thoughts from his day with him. Littlewood's skilled watercolours are used to give an impression of the story rather than a literal expression of it; she is particularly good at showing emotions.

Three Cheers, Charlie Dragon! is a more straightforward story about toys who wake up to find the rain has washed their colours away. Quick-thinking Charlie saves the day. The illustrations, in cheerful cartoon style, reflect the text much more directly here.

These are fine stories in themselves – and fulfil the part that any well-written, imaginative story plays in the journey towards literacy. Little Hippo's claims, however, should not be taken too literally – these are not 'teach your child to read' primers. In addition, the large Hippo logo forming the frontispiece in each volume sits uncomfortably with the subtle watercolours of the first and the cartoons of the second, giving a confused message about who the intended audience is. AG



Where are My Chicks?

★★★★

Sally Grindley, ill. Jill Newton, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 4117 5, £9.99 hbk

Mother Hen has lost her chicks on the farm. As she retrieves each of her four missing babies, the wise owl counts them on his feathers. In spite of his wisdom, he also counts in Mother Goose's four goslings to leave the surprised hen with eight little ones. This gently ironic story is laid out in double page spreads in bold opaque colours, giving it a modern feel for all the old style farm setting. The farmyard creatures have a rounded look as if they might originally have been modelled in plasticine, and convey a pleasantly scatty aura suiting Mother Hen's quest. VC

The Usborne Book of Everyday Words

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Jo Litchfield, Usborne, 48pp, 0 7460 2766 4, £7.99 hbk

This word book is nicely organised round a world of miniature model characters who are shown at home, on the farm, in the classroom, at a party, on the campsite and in the workshop. Important items are arranged round the border of the pages with clear labels. There are also useful and lively pages devoted to parts of the body, actions, shapes, colours and numbers. Litchfield skilfully includes a large number of objects in each situation without losing coherence in the richness of it all. I very much like the way the objects are presented as part of the lives of human beings. The touches of humour will appeal to children between about three and six and, while not a new idea, the 'count the objects' game on each double spread will amuse. While the emphasis is best on sheer enjoyment there is a lot of opportunity here for matching objects and names and for learning about alphabetical order by looking at the word list at the end. This would be a useful resource for the early years teacher and a good browse for children and parents. MM

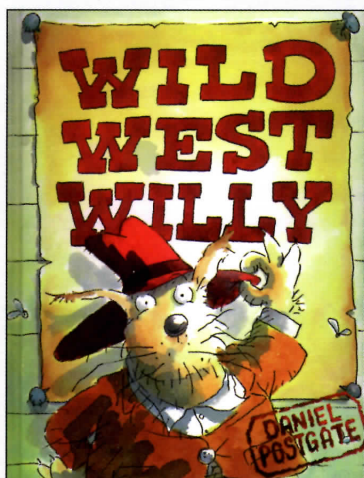
REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

My Brother Sammy

★★★★

Becky Edwards, ill. David Armitage, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 3996 0, £9.99 hbk

Sammy's brother often wishes that Sammy was more like other people. Sammy is autistic, and because of this, their mum says that Sammy is 'special'. But his brother does not want a special brother; he wants an ordinary one. One day he comes to realise that he can be a 'special brother' to Sammy too, and he learns patience and the ability to enjoy some of the things Sammy enjoys. This is an outstanding book. The beauty of the text is matched by quite breathtaking colour-wash illustrations. A book to treasure, particularly by those with autism in the family. ES



Wild West Willy

★★★★

Daniel Postgate, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198317 2, £10.99 hbk

This book is full of fun, and the author/illustrator's humorous cartoon style of drawing fits the story admirably. A small town in the Wild West is terrorised by Big Bad Bear and his gang. Their anti-social behaviour upsets all the locals, and, in turn, Mexican Chicken, Elephant George, Chief Sitting Duck and Wild Cat Kid all try to frighten them off. It is the smelliest, scruffiest dog around who succeeds in scaring away the gang, resorting to drastic measures. The 7-year-olds to whom I read this book loved it, especially the boys, who were keen to reread it, and they pored over the illustrations. With lots of satisfying direct speech and clear characterisation, this tale would lend itself to dramatic performance. GB

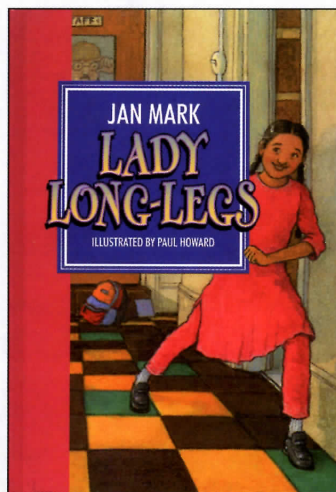
Can We Keep It, Dad?

★★★★

Gus Clarke, Andersen 'Tigers', 64pp, 0 86264 871 8, £7.99 hbk

The 'It' of the title is revealed as a kitten on the front and back covers and title page of this 'Read Alone Book'. The story takes place over one week and is divided into chapters covering the morning and evening of each day. The pencil illustrations flow across each opening and the typeface of the text is clear and well laid out on the pages, encouraging beginner readers to engage with the visual and

textual narratives. Allied to Clarke's ability to draw cats with attitude, the overall presentation is likely to extend the boundaries of the reading experience. VC



Lady Long-Legs

Jan Mark, ill. Paul Howard, 0 7445 5916 2

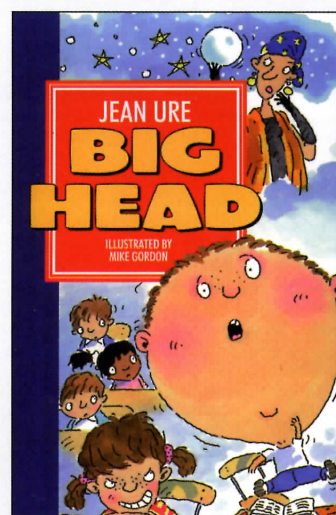
Big Head

Jean Ure, ill. Mike Gordon, 0 7445 4183 2

★★★★★

Walker, 64pp, £6.99 each

Both of these beautifully produced Walker hardbacks address a common aspect of minor bullying or tyranny within school. Teachers and children are sympathetically drawn in both volumes, and Mark's central character and her friends are Asian.



It is good to see such well-written texts for readers in the early stages of independent reading, both managing to convey complex issues in remarkably simple terms. Mark's is the subtler, thus richer, while Ure's is more comic, but both feature confident girls solving problems and learning more about themselves and others in the process; both could be used as starters for class discussion.

Liberal illustrations, from the endpapers on, add to the attraction; these are truly a cut above the average for children at this stage. AG

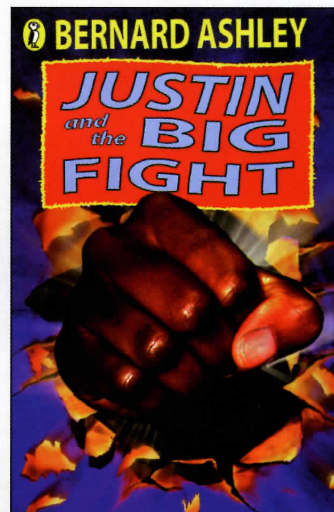
Ballet Magic

★★★★

Harriet Castor, ill. Chris Fisher, Young Puffin, 64pp, 0 14 038479 0, £3.99 pbk

A light and entertaining story to amuse young developing readers. Jess unenthusiastically accompanies her friend, Flo, to a newly formed ballet class. When she realises that stuck-up arch-rival Primrose Pettifer is enrolling too, Jess is even more reluctant to go. However, when she discovers the decidedly witch-like characteristics of the ballet teaching sisters, Angelica and Ethel Twirl, dancing begins to take on a new dimension. The plot engages the reader as Jess and Flo struggle to prevent Primrose Pettifer from spilling the beans about the Miss Twirls' secret to the Community Centre manager.

Printed on glossy paper, there are attractive half or full page colour illustrations on every spread which capture perfectly the mischievous magic of the Miss Twirls. AK



Justin and the Big Fight

★★★★★

Bernard Ashley, ill. Nick Ward, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 038386 7, £3.99 pbk

The ever-popular Ashley, (*Dinner Ladies Don't Count* etc) is a former teacher who knows how to appeal to junior children – especially boys. His customary well-observed writing makes this an enjoyable story – a sequel to his recently published *Justin and the Demon Drop-kick* featuring a black central character, misnamed Justin Perfect. Justin is a cheeky but likable Year 4 boy who falls out with his 'girlfriend', Tanya. Her elder brother, Tyrone, the school bully, decides to teach Justin a lesson by arranging a showdown. Justin, imagining graphically what he will look like after the Big Fight, decides his best bet is to prevent the fight happening at all costs. Ashley combines humour with the serious issue of bullying as he describes Justin's attempts to avoid the dreaded confrontation taking place.

Ward's stylish half and full page illustrations further enhance the dramatic storyline and first class characterisation. AK

Tiny the Terrier

★★★★

Linda Kempton, ill. Chris Chapman, Mammoth, 96pp, 0 7497 3503 1, £3.99 pbk

Tom lives with his parents in a cottage in the grounds of Markeaton Park. Tom's dad is head gardener there. Markeaton Park used to be a big house but is now a museum and park. Many years ago there had been a tragedy in the park, when a giant oak crashed onto a carriage during a storm, killing the lady of the house and the coach driver.

Today, however, Tom's family has its own tragedy. Tom's mum has left home for a while to try and get over losing her baby. But Tom and his dad are missing her very much. Tom plans to surprise her by going to see her on her birthday. However, whilst he is making plans, a small fox terrier appears and starts to follow him around. Tom realizes that this is no ordinary terrier – she does not eat or drink, she disappears and other dogs are afraid of her. This terrier has appeared for a reason but Tom does not know what it is until the fateful night when his mother returns.

Tiny the Terrier is a ghost story, but it is also a story about a family being fractured by grief and a young boy's need for his mother. The book is more complex, being aimed at fluent readers, and it has a strong feeling of place, atmosphere, emotion and suspense. However, its supernatural element is benign rather than frightening for the age range. AR

The Computer Wizard

★

Alex Shearer, ill. Chris Fisher, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 130011 6, £3.99 pbk

Penned by a former children's TV scriptwriter *The Computer Wizard* is a sedentary one-idea book that simply lacks magic. Wanting to spell 'initiative', young Michael gets as far as typing 'SPELLINIT' on his dad's computer. But rather than using a spell checker, Michael has unwittingly accessed a magic spell and is miniaturised then drawn into the computer. Spell: in it. With me so far?

The back cover blurb explains that, 'the trouble is nobody can think of a way to get him out again until the tricky Computer Wizard steps in.' The *real* trouble, however, is that the title character fails to step in until the reader has trudged through three-quarters of the story.

The characterization of the family members is handled reasonably well but it is just not enough to maintain the interest. There are no illustrations to assist in engaging the young reader other than the same repeated one at the beginning of each chapter. AK

I Feel Bullied

0 7502 2358 8

I'm Special

0 7502 2357 X

★★★★

Jen Green, ill. Mike Gordon, Wayland 'Your Feelings' series, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

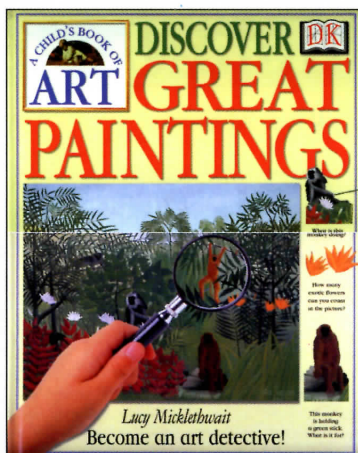
The emphasis in these books is on feelings – how it feels to be bullied, what it is like to be a person with a disability ('special'). Good coping strategies abound in *I Feel Bullied*, and we see that adults can be bullies too. The children in *I'm Special* have various disabilities but are seen to be ordinary in their emotions and needs. We meet special grown-ups too, who live positive and exciting lives. The faces in the bright comic-style illustrations are particularly expressive of the feelings being discussed. Each book has large print, good notes for parents and teachers and a list of further books to read. They will be useful both in the lower primary classroom and with individual children. ES

Discover Great Paintings

★★★★★

Lucy Micklethwait, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 5501 1, £8.99 hbk

Micklethwait's *A Child's Book of Art* dealt with themes, such as 'fruit' or 'action words' where each double spread could exhibit work from a wide range of artists from Toulouse-Lautrec to Hockney. In this new title,



each spread is devoted exclusively to one of thirteen selected artists, arranged in chronological order so as to see them in their historical context. The child can enjoy the painting as a whole by looking at the right hand side where there is also a photo of a child or child's hand to scale next to a mini version of the painting so that the reader can judge its true size. There is an information box about each artist included. The child is invited to take on the role of art detective by looking more closely at the painting for details such as the age of the subjects in Holbein's 'The Ambassadors', the dove in 'Christ in the Carpenter's Shop' by Millais or the brushwork in Hockney's 'Self-Portrait with Blue Guitar'. The left hand page, in true Dorling Kindersley style, has bite-size chunks of information and further details of the painting 'cut out' along with thought-provoking questions about the items

which guide children's own investigations and challenge children to think about what they are seeing.

Do not expect all the paintings to be instantly recognisable. The author has chosen works that will interest the child viewer. A child looks at a painting in a confident, exciting and refreshing way. Unlike an adult viewer the child's response is not affected by whether it is by a particular well-known artist. Ideal for the infant or junior classroom. AK

The Otter

Sandy Ransford, 0 7534 0316 1

The Barn Owl

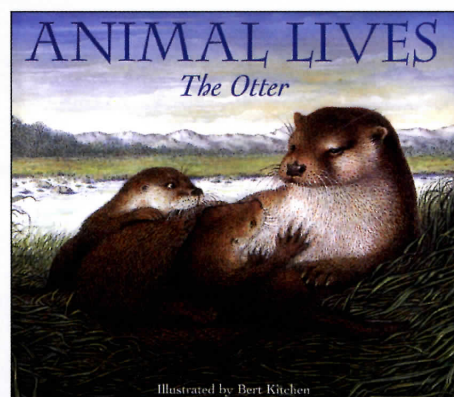
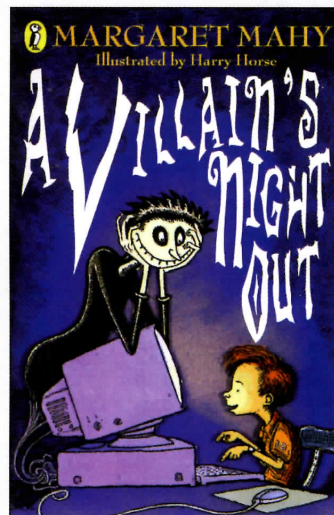
Sally Tagholm, 0 7534 0315 3

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Illustrated by Bert Kitchen, Kingfisher 'Animal Lives', 32pp, £6.99 each hbk

Here are the first two information picture books in a new series about animal life histories. The format for this kind of narrative information book is well established: the 'story' is followed by pages at the end presenting a fact file, glossary, index and details of sources of further information. These books are good examples of the genre, rivaling Walker Books' 'Read and Wonder' series in the quality of information and illustration. The text is clear, interesting and sometimes poetic – the male and female owl

dance their mating rituals 'like ghostly acrobats'. But children learn about things as they really are. In *The Otter* we get a sense of the creature devouring an eel, holding the prey between her forepaws as she chews because it is so slippery. There is nothing cosy either about the description of the owl nest in *The Barn Owl* – 'really just a layer of dry old owl pellets' – with the remains of rodents 'rotting in the straw nearby'. Bert Kitchen's pictures show the carefully observed creatures in their distinctive environments and would give rise to a lot of reflection and discussion. The books are beautifully produced on quality paper and would be a pleasure to own. Children aged about four to six would enjoy hearing the books read out loud by teacher or parent. But there is enough substance to encourage seven to eight year olds to read them by themselves and a genuine interest might be awakened leading to further reading and research. MM

**REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle****A Villain's Night Out**

★★★★

Margaret Mahy, ill. Harry Horse, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 130153 8, £4.99 pbk

Some recent Mahy titles such as *The Horribly Haunted School* and *Tingleberries*, *Tuckertubs* and *Telephones* have been bizarre with plots taking off at tangents, and adult puns that would totally confuse their audience. *A Villain's Night Out* however is an off-beat masterpiece.

Formby Mackinaw's class is given the job of writing books for the school

library after the budget for library books is blown on a coffee machine for the staffroom. Not noted for his great application in schoolwork, Formby is surprised when a villainous needle-toothed character, 'Squidgy Moot', leaps uninvited into his mind. In order to get back on with the rest of his life, Formby must write a story about Squidgy Moot. Unfortunately, Formby has only limited control over what happens in the story. Squidgy influences events but when Formby's little sister, Minnie, starts scribbling the next chapter secretly, the story starts to get out of hand. This rollercoaster of a story accelerates to a breathless pace as the 'real' characters and the story characters struggle to steer the book to a conclusion to suit their particular interests. Three different fonts are used in order for the reader to keep tabs on who is writing. Towards the dramatic climax Formby, Minnie, the evil Count Aspio, Professor Elsilvera Mockery, her brother Professor Waldo Mockery, Squidgy Moot and his sister Nina all engage in a battle of wits to save the story and the world from disaster. Superb entertainment. AK

Mummies and Tombs**NON-FICTION** ★★

Salima Ikram, ill. Riham El Sherbini, Hoopoe Books, 32pp, 977 5325 79 X, £3.99 pbk

The book, from an Egyptian publisher, comes without some of the paraphernalia we might expect in an

information text. The contents page, index and glossary are slight and there is only one, not very helpful, map.

Without a time line, it is difficult to follow the references to different eras of Egyptian history. The illustrations are sketchy. All that said, the text itself, by an Egyptologist at the American University in Cairo, is authoritative and well within the grasp of 8-10 year olds. It is good not only in describing the process of mummification but in stressing the variety of Ancient Egyptian funeral and burial customs and tomb structures; giving space to the poor and middle class dead as well as the rich, and to animal mummification. It offers interesting asides, too, on the fate of mummies in later eras: used as fuel on steam trains, as ship ballast, and as (poisonous) fertilizer. CB

Living with Blindness

Patsy Westcott, 0 7502 2390 1

Living with Deafness

Emma Haughton, 0 7502 2389 8

NON-FICTION ★★★

Wayland 'Living With' series, 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

In these two books we meet children and adults who have learnt to live with disability. The causes and different levels of blindness and deafness are explained, and in colour photographs we see people coping with the help of technology, special

teachers, family and understanding friends. These books will be particularly useful in schools to provide sympathetic, factual information about the problems people with disabilities face. A glossary, an index and a list of organisations and their web sites add to the usefulness. ES

Elephant

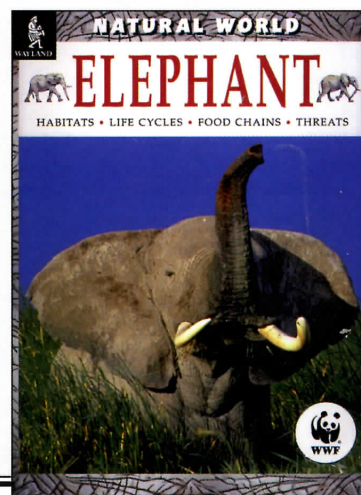
Will Travers, 0 7502 2352 9

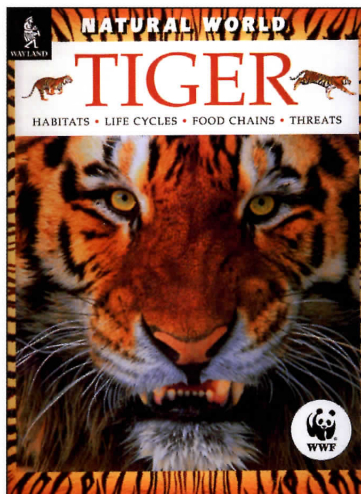
Tiger

Valmik Thapar, 0 7502 2351 0

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Wayland/WWF 'Natural World', 48pp, £10.99 each hbk





Travers is, of course, son of 'Born Free' and Thapar is the charismatic treacle-voiced presenter of TV's excellent 'Land of the Tigers'. The two authors provide friendly and refreshingly unspectacular guides to their animals, using excellent photographs as frameworks upon which to hang their well considered texts. The results are utterly pleasing and reliable introductions to two of our favourite creatures and look realistically at their place in an ever more crowded world, each focusing on the difficulties caused by the shrinking of available habitat in India. These two books are a good example of the sort of thing that Wayland do well – straightforward text, good design, helpful typography and bibliography (websites, too) combine to make satisfyingly whole productions with a wide age/appeal range. School librarians wishing to refresh their 599's could hardly find better. TP

Britain at War – Evacuation

0 7502 2311 1

Britain at War – Air Raids

0 7502 2310 3

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Martin Parsons, Wayland 'The History Detective Investigates', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

These books traverse well covered ground but they do so in a way that genuinely involves children in their learning. Research in libraries to find relevant contemporary newspaper reports and interviews with those who lived through the second world war are encouraged. On the other hand the books can simply be used as a source of information about these particular aspects of the war. The persuasive and journalistic kinds of writing that the National Literacy Strategy requires older primary children to address are well contextualised. A poster in *Evacuation*, for example, urges people to offer their spare rooms for those in need and a newspaper report in *Air Raids* details the punishment imposed on a defendant who had lit matches during the blackout hours. There is a wealth of other kinds of writing and visual material of interest as well, including photographs, official notices, instructions and letters. The very varied experiences people had of evacuation are sometimes movingly related. Some aspects of the topics are quite grim (eg children being parted from their families in *Evacuation* and the constant threat of enemy action in *Air Raids*) so the device of the history detective, a dog called Sherlock Bones, relieves tension with a touch of humour as well as being a useful way into answering the many questions

Editor's Choice

Women in 19th Century Europe

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

1 85561 839 7

Women in 19th Century America

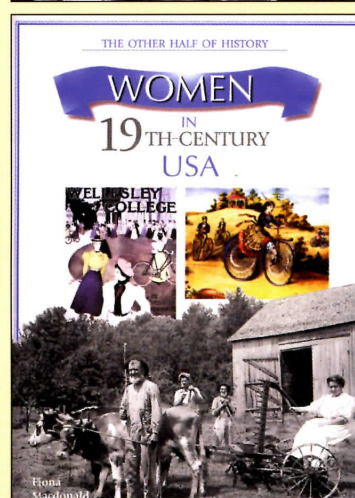
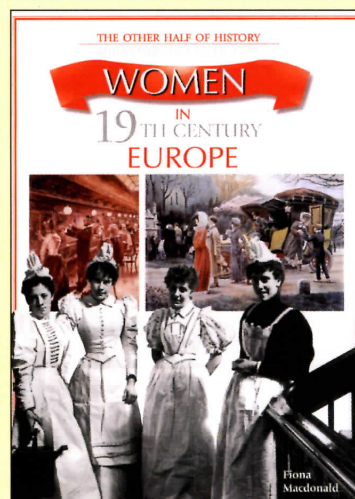
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

1 85561 841 9

Fiona Macdonald, Belitha Press 'The Other Half of History' series, 48pp, £10.99 each hbk

In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft called on men on behalf of women to 'snap our chains'. In 1999 there is still a dearth of books which discuss women's contribution to history and social change. These two clearly written and well laid out books discuss how women's lives had changed by 1900. The role of technological changes and their impact on the workplace is covered as well as the impact of radical movements and women's own struggles for greater equality and freedom, despite the continuing divisions of class and race. Both titles include brief biographies of influential figures and are extensively illustrated with photographs, prints and artworks. *Women in 19th-Century America* is better focused and livelier than *Women in 19th-Century Europe* which suffers from too wide a brief. RS

children will have. These sturdy books give very good coverage of the topics and are likely to be a useful



addition to the history collection for 8-12 year olds for some years to come. MM

REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary

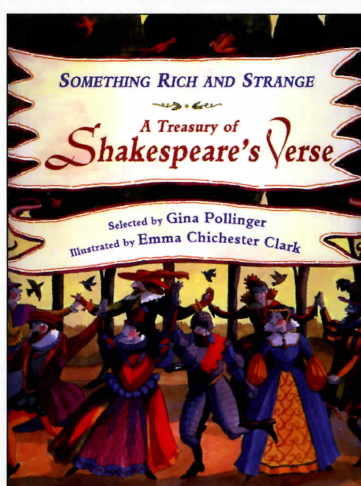
Something Rich and Strange: a Treasury of Shakespeare's Verse

★★★★

Selected by Gina Pollinger, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Kingfisher, 96pp, 0 7534 0295 5, £8.99 pbk

This is a selection of Shakespeare's verse for eleven-year-olds and above, richly decorated with full colour illustrations. The extracts, mainly from the plays but including a few sonnets, are unobtrusively grouped, not only to reveal the beauty of his language and imagery but to explore some of his preoccupations: whether it is the folly of youth, love, political rivalry, the cares of state or the fall of kingdoms. It is so craftily orchestrated, from single lines, to couplets, to songs, to some of the great speeches, and so well in tune with the original works, that it seems a perfect distillation.

If the collection lacks anything, it is the rough and tumble playing to the crowd side of the bard. Chichester Clark's illustrations are beautiful. But they are often contained within cameo frames, and, even in the most violent or tender scenes, her characters look past one another and



away from the reader, distancing us from their passion and maintaining the atmosphere of awed contemplation suggested by the selection's title. So this may not be the book to give to cynical young teenagers to convince them that Shakespeare has something to say to them. CB

Goal-getter

★

Michael Hardcastle, ill. Bob Moulder, 0 7136 4940 2

Hero

★★

Anthony Masters, ill. Peter Dennis, 0 7136 4942 9

Hot News

★

Pete Johnson, ill. Lucy Su, 0 7136 4944 5

Rapid

★★★

Bernard Ashley, ill. Kim Harley, 0 7136 4946 1

A & C Black 'Graffix', 80pp, £7.99 each hbk

Another set of four of the highly illustrated, comic book style hardbacks.

Goal-getter is an eminently predictable teenage football story with a ridiculous fair-ground roller coaster rescue attempt thrown in.

Hero goes for street cred by being set

in the street hockey scene which, in truth, has little real importance in the actual plot in which Bob finds out some unpleasant truths about the older brother he has always idolised.

Hot News is a dismal tale of teenage gossiping and rumour-mongering.

Rapid is the name of the singing foursome who stun everyone at the Taster Day with their song 'Don't get me wrong'. Complications arise as they set out to do a demo-tape and angle for a recording contract especially in the relationship between Jonny and Win. This has much the most emotional depth of the four and some effective characterisation within the limits of 80 pages with substantial illustrations. SR

Soccer Stars

★★★

Rob Childs, ill. Jon Riley, Corgi Yearling, 128pp, 0 440 86361 9, £3.99 pbk

One of six books in a series aptly entitled 'Soccer Mad', *Soccer Stars* is for the true soccer enthusiast. Childs' theme is predictable but his obvious love of the game and his ability to transmit this, in informed detail, to his target audience is considerable.

These books should also appeal to the previously reluctant boy reader.

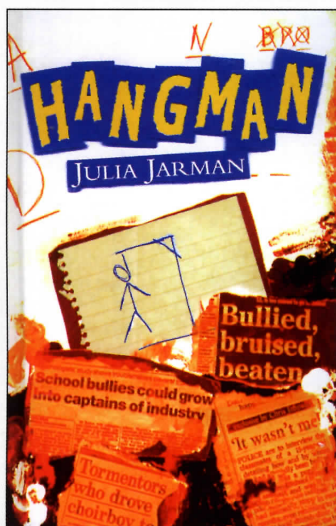
Thirteen-year-old Luke Crawford, a real soccer anorak, is the none too talented player-coach of Swillsby Swifts, whose recent results leave a lot to be desired. An invitation to take part in a charity tournament organised by a former Scottish international sets up Swillsby to be involved in some exciting events both on and off the field. Whilst I was anticipating a plot twist which failed to materialise, Childs' followers will no doubt enjoy every page of this swift paced soccer story. Riley's vivid illustrations are equally dynamic, capturing the movement of the various action packed matches played. **AK**

Breaking the Rules

★★★★

Sandra Glover, Andersen, 128pp, 0 86264 854 8, £9.99 hbk

When Suzie Lawrence's English teacher describes her as 'loud, foul-mouthed, aggressive, bone idle' it may not seem the most promising of introductions. Soon, however, it becomes clear that Suzie belongs in the category of bad-girl-with-heart-of-gold, as we witness the almost breathless enthusiasm with which she embarks on revolutionising the old people's home where her school's work experience programme has placed her. There are numerous (and often hilarious) clashes with authority, especially with the apparently redoubtable Matron – a woman to whose complicated past Suzie is able eventually to bring some illumination. Glover handles serious social issues with a humorous touch, writes lively dialogue and has a sympathetic view of youthful idealism. **RD**



Hangman

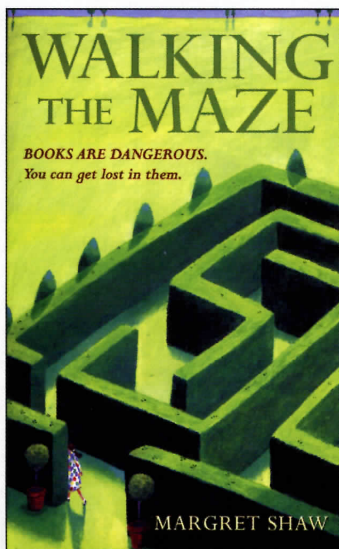
★★★★

Julia Jarman, Andersen, 160pp, 0 86264 866 1, £9.99 hbk

In a note appended to her novel Jarman comments that she has 'used a mixture of real life and imagination to create a fiction which tells a truth.' While the real and the imaginative dimensions to her engrossing and frightening story are not always rigidly separated, the former has more to do with its tellingly observed contemporary school setting, the latter with a trip which the pupils make to the Normandy beaches of the second World War; the truth

which binds both of these is concerned with the nature of fascism and its numerous manifestations.

Focusing on Danny Lamb, a boy whose only crime is to be different, Jarman provides a searing insight into the mindlessness of bullying and the fickleness of so-called friendship. There are a few moments of awkward symbolism but, in general terms, the narrative successfully and convincingly maintains the reader's involvement. **RD**



Walking the Maze

★★★★

Margret Shaw, Oxford, 176pp, 0 19 271754 5, £5.99 pbk

A wonderfully intense novel which takes imagination as its subject and manages, through Annice, a complex shifting between the present and the world within a painting. It is marvellously rich, made more complex by being interwoven into a production of A Midsummer's Night's Dream. The world within the painting is a haunting creation (or recreation) of a family's history, deeply bound up with the garden and the plants within it. The 'painting' world has the intense feel of Tom's Midnight Garden, of time passing and loss (I cannot think of another book which has come quite so close to the sense of being in that garden). It takes complete hold of the reader and moves with accelerating speed through its complex imaginings to a dramatic conclusion. What a marvellous demonstration of what books can do. **AJ**

Annie's Game

★★★★

Narinder Dhami, Corgi Yearling, 192pp, 0 440 86401 1, £3.99 pbk

Jack, 11, and his sister Annie, 5, live with their mother. Jack only vaguely remembers his saxophonist father who left for the USA soon after Annie was born. In itself, this situation creates tensions within the family. The mother works hard to make ends meet and Jack has taken on a supportive role, shielding his mother from disturbing incidents related to Annie. Annie is no ordinary little girl; ferociously intelligent, she cannot relate to children her own age and her friend, the mysteriously invisible Sarah Slade from the 25th century provides a compensation for her lack of peer companionship.

Matters reach crisis point when the children's father unexpectedly telephones from the States urging the family to visit him. Dhami brings a light touch to the seriousness of the issues thrown up in this novel and to its resolution when Jack realises that neither the past nor the future can be shaped by one individual. **VC**

Limbo Lodge

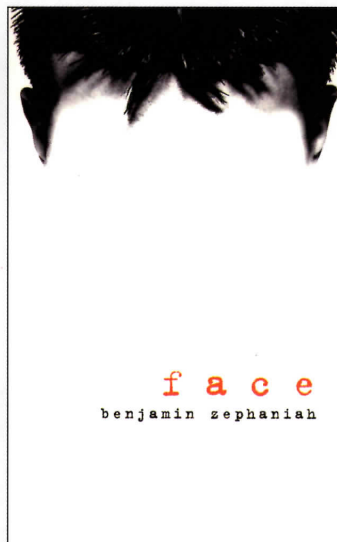
★★★

Joan Aiken, Jonathan Cape, 224pp, 0 224 04664 0, £12.99 hbk

This is the latest in the 'Wolves of Willoughby Chase' saga and finds Dido Twite in the Pacific looking for Lord Herodsfoot on the mysterious Island of Aratu.

A rich blend of imagination, magic and exciting adventure ensues, where the novel ideas come thick and fast as problem after problem is overcome in the quest to defeat the evil intentions of Manoel, who works tirelessly to overthrow his reclusive, ruler brother, John King.

This is not an easy read and will initially require some stickability. But patience will be rewarded once young readers are hooked! **DB**

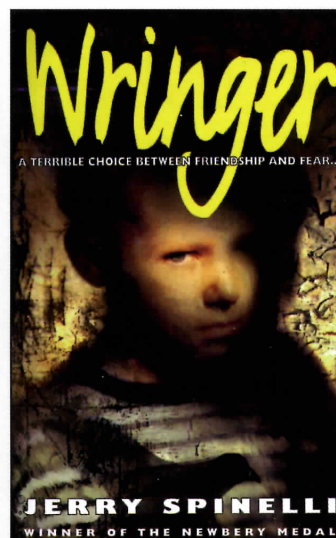


Face

★★★★

Benjamin Zephaniah, Bloomsbury, 224pp, 0 7475 4154 X, £4.99 pbk

Martin with his brown eyes, thick shoulder length brown hair, slim build and mischievous personality is popular with his school mates and the leader of his gang of three. His world is turned upside down when against his better judgement he accepts a lift with some dubious characters and ends up in a serious road accident. His face is badly burnt and, in spite of plastic surgery, he loses his goods looks and in the process his popularity. He is forced to reconstruct his life and in the process to review his own and society's values as far as what constitutes the essential worth of a human being. This is a thoughtful, well written book set against the backdrop of a teeming, vigorous, multicultural London. It is full of insights and offers sound guidance to the young reader – not through sermonising but in the best manner, through the words and actions of the characters themselves. **EL**



Wringer

★★★★★

Jerry Spinelli, Collins, 240pp, 0 00 675417 1, £4.99 pbk

In the small American town of Waymer a boy's tenth birthday brings with it the privilege of becoming a 'wringer', whose function is to break the necks of those birds wounded, but not killed, in the annual Pigeon Day shoot. It is generally regarded as a significant initiation rite, signalling a move from childhood to adolescence. But for nine-year-old Palmer LaRue eager anticipation gives way to painful apprehension, as he attempts to cope with his distaste for what is expected of him. His progress towards selfhood is marked by a series of ugly and violent confrontations with the agents of cruelty and convention, offset by the tenderness of his relationship with the birds. This is a complex, gripping and touching novel, with a memorable young protagonist. **RD**

Hurricane Hamish – The Calypso Cricketer

0 590 63692 8

Hurricane Hamish – The Cricket World Cup

0 590 63694 4

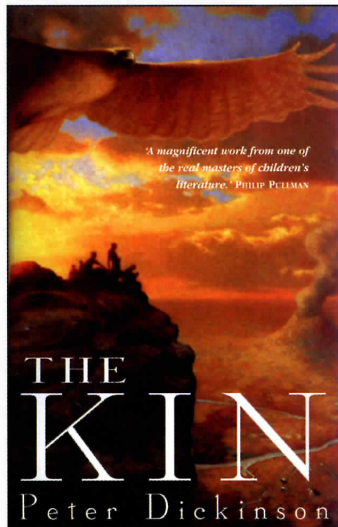
★★★★

Mark Jefferson, Hippo, 256pp, £3.99 each pbk

By the age of 12 Hamish is the tallest person in Jamaica and bowls like the wind. Popular opinion demands that he be included in the Test team to play England but there is much skulduggery afoot involving a crooked captain tied up with some villains in a match-fixing betting coup. The Windies go 2-0 down before the nasty captain is ousted. Hamish takes his rightful place in the side and (naturally) bowls them to a 3-2 series victory – and, for good measure, scores the winning run in the decisive game with his first ever run in any form of cricket. With complete score-cards for every Test and series averages this is rollicking good fun for cricket-mad 10-12 year olds.

The sequel sees Hamish in England where the wet grounds after a soggy April (shades of 1999) cause him no end of problems as he insists on bowling barefoot. More villains have to be defeated and once again Hamish comes good with the help of his secret female admirer.

Jefferson certainly knows his cricket (we even get introductory quotes from C.L.R. James for the cognoscenti) but who chose the dreadful cover illustrations? **SR**



The Kin

★★★★★

Peter Dickinson, ill. Ian Andrews, Macmillan, 640pp, 0 333 73735 0, £14.99 hbk

This handsomely produced book weighs a couple of pounds, costs a lot more and is enormous in conception. In four parts it follows a small group of the first human beings, mostly children, whose parents have been killed, as they journey to find a new 'Good Place'. The characters have limited language and knowledge, so much has to be learnt and the dangers are enormous. There is a geographical intensity of events, from deserts, to marshland, impossible mountain climbs and an escape from an erupting volcano. Within this there is continuous, vivid action and complex threads of emotions and ideas: of learning how to deal with each other and how to make their intelligence outweigh any comparative disadvantage of their size. The painstaking care with which a lion is caught and a band of head-hunters is defeated is fascinating. This is writing of the highest quality. **AJ**

William Shakespeare

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Stewart Ross, Evans 'Writers in Britain', 32pp, 0 237 51741 8, £9.99 hbk

Books on Shakespeare, Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare's theatre are not difficult to find on publishers' lists or library shelves. Here is another that does a reasonable job of covering all three subjects for 11-14 year olds. It does not offer much on any one thing, and a subject like the Renaissance is better left alone if you do not have the space to do it justice; but Ross is accurate and interesting. Perhaps the best part of the book is the last few sections. Ross's overview of Shakespeare's work in the context of his time and its more lasting significance is an accomplished summary. He is also able to warn us about taking some of the illustrations (from Victorian paintings) seriously as historical records. Presumably they were included to keep up the designer's quota of at least three pictures to each double page. **CB**

Evolve Or Die

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Phil Gates, ill. Tony de Saulles, 'Horrible Science', 128pp, 0 590 54282 6

Odious Oceans

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Anita Ganeri, ill. Mike Phillips, 'Horrible Geography', 160pp, 0 590 54374 1

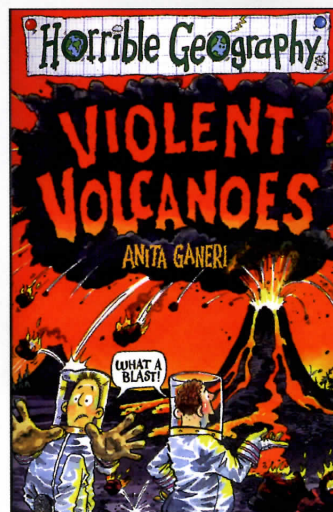
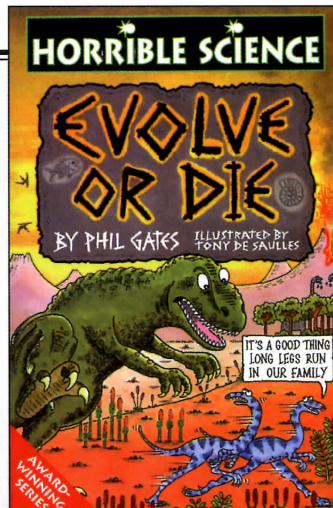
Violent Volcanoes

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Anita Ganeri, ill. Mike Phillips, 'Horrible Geography', 128pp, 0 590 54375 X

Scholastic, £3.99 each pbk

The success of the 'Horrible' approach depends foursquare upon the ability of the author who is providing it and that author's ability to present the subject syllabus in a new light. This is why Terry Deary's Horrible Histories have done so well, Deary having served a long



apprenticeship as a storytymaker before emerging as the '90s' favourite historian. So names like Gates and Ganeri - familiar to all traffickers in information books - betoken confidence. And we are not disappointed. Gates does a thoroughly entertaining and competent job on evolution and cautions us repeatedly about trying to interfere with its progress. His writing possesses, naturally, the necessary attributes for a contributor to this series as he helps us absorb a wealth of good stuff.

Ganeri's geographical ventures represent a definite step forward for this respected writer. *Volcanoes* is a far easier brief than *Oceans* and whereas in the latter, the author's narrative craft tends to wallow a bit and steer a sometimes uncertain course, *Volcanoes* progresses through its subject very satisfyingly and provides a good end-to-end read. Customers buying these on the reputation of previous 'Horrible' ventures will not be let down. **TP**

The Tibetans: Life in exile

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Carol Barker, Mantra, 48pp, 1 85269 453 X, £12.99 hbk

The Tibetans: Life in Exile charts the recent, turbulent history of Tibet since the Chinese invasion of 1950. It follows the Tibetans into exile in Dharamsala, India, where they have established a government in exile, under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, an outstanding example of hope and diplomacy among the crisis.

The book is a highly personal account, researched and written by an author who spent five months living among the Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala. It is full of good things and tells an important story. Yet it is precisely the lack of objectivity which tends to lessen its impact. Constant repetition of the injustices suffered by the Tibetans dilutes their ability to move the reader. The book works best when the author steps back and lets the Tibetans speak for themselves, in the form of interviews with both children and the Dalai Lama himself. Then the story has its greatest impact.

A bitty style of writing, coupled with difficult subject matter, make the background to the crisis difficult to follow without prior knowledge. An extended glossary would have helped. Though slightly old-fashioned in design, this book should appeal to older children with some prior knowledge of Tibet, and to teachers. **AGA**

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

Shadow Man

★★★★★

Cynthia D. Grant, Mammoth, 160pp, 0 7497 2304 1, £4.99 pbk

In a sequence of short chapters this impressive novel relates the consequences of the car crash in which the hero, 18-year-old Gabriel McCloud, is killed. It is a death which affects many in the brilliantly evoked small-town American community, but principally his pregnant girlfriend Jennie, now facing the dual task of coming to terms with a past tragedy and confronting an uncertain future. 'You're born, you live for a while, you die,' she reflects; and rarely, in this particular genre, has this observation been treated with such candour or poignancy. Stylistically and thematically, Grant brings a powerful and distinctive imagination to bear on the well-tried motif of young love cruelly devastated. **RD**



Day of the Dead

★★★★★

Anthony Masters, Orchard, 176pp, 1 86039 657 7, £4.99 pbk

A tense, no easy answers tale of illegal immigration. Alex and his much-absent photo-journalist Dad are on holiday in California attempting to forge some sort of bond. When Dad says he has to go away for a couple of days Alex resents being deserted again, hides in the truck and finds himself aiding Dad smuggling a family across the border for one of Dad's photo-shoots. The appalling life in the Mexican townships, the religious observations (hence the title) and the bleakness of the desert are all well evoked and, although Alex and dad do forge a bond, we are left wondering if things have really improved for Cristina, Maria and Paco. Recommend it to competent Year 8s. Tell Mr Blunkett to put it on his list of 'books for boys'. **SR**

Megan

★★★★★

Mary Hooper, Bloomsbury, 192pp, 0 7475 4164 7, £4.99 pbk

Megan is 16 years old and pregnant after one sexual encounter. Her mother is viciously antagonistic, her best friend Claire anxious to gain kudos by being the first to break the news and Luke, the baby's father, is little more than an embarrassing memory.

Hooper makes no attempt to draw a veil over Megan's problems and the downward spiral of the narrative is soberly convincing. However, she resists the easy options of extremes: there are neither desperate remedies nor reassuring solutions.

Therefore, Megan's final decision to keep the baby is a convincing one - as well as providing a neat lead to an obvious sequel. **VR**

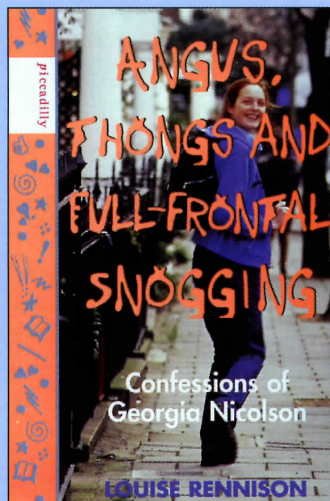
NEW Talent

Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging

★★★

Louise Rennison, Piccadilly Press, 208pp, 1 85340 519 1, £9.99, hbk, 1 85340 514 0, £5.99 pbk

Teenage fiction in diary form has been attempted many times but this uninhibited account of young adolescence is presented with laidback, witty veracity via its 14-year-old narrator. Jokes and plays on words abound creating the feel of an intense, hothouse world in which everything is there to be freshly experienced, thought about and enjoyed. Suddenly a star after unexpectedly seeing off a bully in the toilets, Georgia muses that she is now 'cock of the 4th'. She continues, 'I don't know what the girl equivalent of "cock" is...surely it can't be "vagina". I am vagina of the 4th doesn't have the same ring to it somehow...'. Rennison's narrative has a light touch and is often hilarious about insecurities and doubts around body shape, how to kiss, boyfriends and so forth. It misfires somewhat when



insecurity about sexual identity crops up. There are many references to lesbians – what they do in bed, what they look like and am I one – preoccupations that are left hanging in the air rather than linked to the story's tentative conclusion as Georgia becomes 'nearly Robbie's girlfriend' that it is perhaps the person that really matters. RS

War Poems

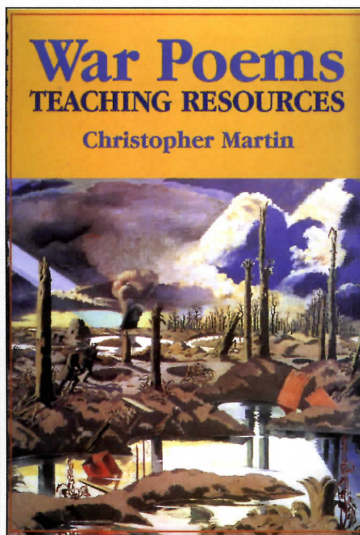
0 00 322238 1, £9.99 pbk

War Poems Teaching Resources

0 00 323075 9, £34.99 pbk

POETRY ★★★★★

Christopher Martin, Collins Educational, 96pp



First published in 1991, War Poems contains poems and background material from the Napoleonic Wars, through the First and Second World Wars ending with a short section on the post-Hiroshima era.

War Poems Teaching Resources has background notes and activities to support the original anthology and an updated more detailed section on late twentieth-century wars. The books are aimed at 14-16 year olds studying for GCSE and can be used for English coursework or the study of poetry as part of the National Curriculum. Poets range from Byron

and Hardy through some less familiar poems and women poets as well as the well known war poets (with a particularly good section on 'Dulce Et Decorum Est'), to the Cold War and then Mitchell, McGough and Ewart. The later sections on Bosnia and the Gulf war are thought-provoking, especially now when it seems increasingly likely that we will be leaving this century in exactly the same situation that we entered it – at war, with W H Auden's chilling statement 'poetry makes nothing happen' ringing in our heads.

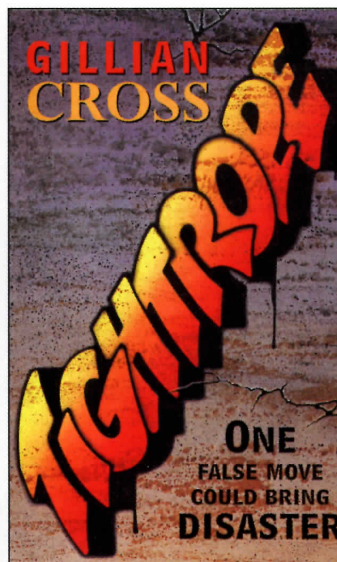
Both books are packed with information on the poets, the period and the history. There are photos, paintings, posters, cartoons and original manuscripts. Teaching Resources contains fresh material with maps and date charts. There are two tiered activities for mixed ability groups which include analysis of the poems, research and questions for close study of the texts. I have two criticisms here, some of the questions become too like comprehension exercises and despite the updating of the later sections I would have liked to see a wider range of British poets and more poets from other cultures represented in the late twentieth-century section. However, Martin has still achieved that rare feat – a school book which should appeal to both pupil and teacher. If you are studying war poems, teaching war poems or just interested, these two books offer an accessible, informative and fascinating study of the subject. HT

Tightrope

★★★★

Gillian Cross, Oxford, 208pp, 0 19 271750 2, £5.99 pbk

An impressive cover starkly captures the strains of Ashley Ward's life. Still at school, she is the sole carer of her bedridden mother and her release comes from night-time graffiti raids



on high and dangerous walls. Her latest problem is to appease the neighbourhood gang leader, Eddie Beale, in order to enlist his help in identifying the man who is stalking her.

Ashley is soon out of her depth, struggling not to be manipulated by Beale in his own vendetta against the local shopkeeper, who has refused to pay him protection money.

As always, Cross delights with her deft interweaving of sub-plots and creation of a wide variety of convincing characters. However, it is her handling of narrative tension which elevates this novel to the first division. VR

The Kingfisher Book of Poems About Love

POETRY ★★★★★

Chosen by Roger McGough, ill. Chloë Cheese, Kingfisher, 224pp, 0 7534 0337 4, £5.99 pbk

This is definitely a good value collection embracing a massive range of material by a diversity of poets. As with all these Kingfisher productions there is no feeling of cramped pages, and the illustrations stimulate the mind as well as augment the poems. Poems from all over the globe and across the ages are arranged into eight themed sections making thought-provoking statements and explorations of all kinds of love, not just the romantic. Well worth a library copy on Secondary shelves. DB

Hold My Hand and Run

★★★★

Margaret McAllister, Oxford, 144pp, 0 19 271769 3, £5.99 pbk

This story of emotional damage, suffering and renewal is set in an undetermined, past time, when Kezia and Beth, half-sisters and daughters of Canon Clare, endure relentless ill-treatment from their aunt.

The Canon, isolated in his grief for his two dead wives, is slow to respond to the girls' terror and they leave, with only a half-formed plan of travelling to Collywell Cross, Kezia's mother's much loved refuge, to request sanctuary.

The journey reveals much of rural English life and more of betrayal, suffering and – eventually – solace at their journey's end.



There are spiritual journeys for Kezia and her father: the reconciliation at the story's end is all the more convincing for its fragility. Both face challenges – he in understanding his daughters and coming to terms with his grief; she in caring for her now bedridden aunt and assuming adult responsibilities in running the household. VR

Getting Somewhere

★★★★

Jenny Pausacker, Women's Press Livewire, 240pp, 0 7043 4959 0, £5.99 pbk

Dinah has always felt inferior to her twin sister Stacy – especially since childhood meningitis left her partially deaf and caused her to miss a year off school.

Now Stacy has left home to study Drama at college and her life seems exciting, adult and accomplished to Dinah, whose only passions are Maths and Kyle, the friend with whom she would like to have a romantic relationship. Slowly, with the support of her family and friends – and a realisation that the glamour she sees in others' lives is too often superficial – she begins to hone her own academic aspirations in the field of mathematics. Here, Pausacker's control of the narrative loosens: rather too much time is spent on expounding and developing mathematical theories.

Her new-found confidence helps her to understand that her listening skills and sound advice are invaluable to her friends and she is able to summon up the courage to begin a relationship with Kyle. The message to young women is clear and welcome: rejoice in your talents and fly as high as you can. VR

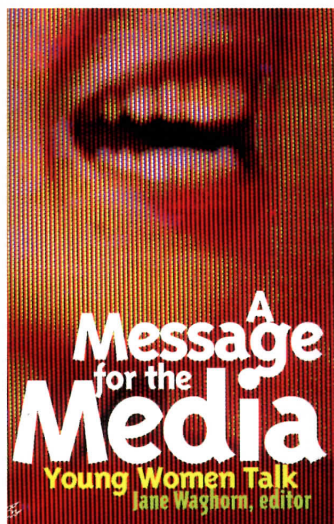
A Message for the Media: Young Women Talk

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Edited by Jane Waghorn, Women's Press Livewire, 112pp, 0 7043 4950 7, £4.99 pbk

This collection of 21 powerful and stimulating essays, written by young women aged 13-22, provides first-rate material for discussions about the impact of the media on young people.

The pieces cover a wide range of topics, including soap operas,



religion, music, magazines, vegetarianism and films. The writing is articulate, persuasive and thought-provoking, tackling head-on issues which have been subsumed into hidden agendas – eg. the treatment of bullying in teenage soap operas – or about which readers may simply have insufficient information – eg. women in Islam.

I would strongly recommend this book as a purchase for a Media Studies GCSE course or as essential reading in a school or college library.

VR

Racism: Changing Attitudes 1900–2000

R.G. Grant, 0 7502 2213 1

Women's Rights: Changing Attitudes 1900–2000

Kaye Stearman, 0 7502 2214 X
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Wayland 'Twentieth Century Issues', 64pp, £10.99 each hbk

Charities – do they work?

Alison Brownlie, 0 7502 2308 1

Slavery Today

Kaye Stearman, 0 7502 2307 3
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Wayland 'Talking Points', 64pp, £10.99 each hbk

These new series from Wayland prove that you can produce 'issues books' for 14–18 year olds that are both good looking and authoritative. Gone are the days when you had to be sombre to be serious (like some of the titles recalled in Kaye Stearman's bibliography to *Women's Rights*) or resort to posed pictures of gloomy teenagers to get a discussion going.

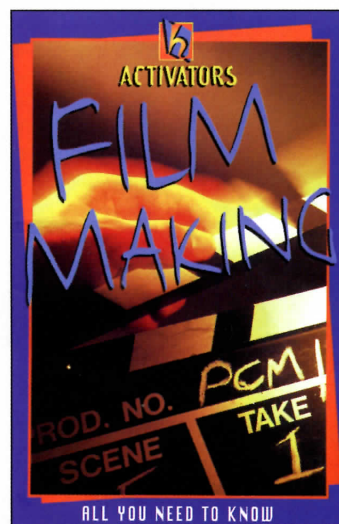
The 'Twentieth Century Issues' series reminds us that we will shortly see a time when the twentieth century is itself history. The two books in this series offer surveys of two of the most contentious social questions of the last hundred years – racism and women's rights, illustrated with well chosen photographs. The authors have been selected for their knowledge of their subjects and backed up with expert consultants. *Women's Rights* is endorsed by Amnesty International. Neither issue can be said to be settled or easy to

untangle. But both authors have a clear point of view and open up opposing opinions where necessary. For clarity, I prefer Grant's approach, which is to group his information by topic, so that you can follow the fate of the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, separately from, but in parallel with, the Civil Rights movement in America. The difficulty with following a more chronological approach, as Stearman does, is that you have to pay attention to developments in several countries at once. Still, it is heartening that, within a series format, with the obligatory 'Key Moment' and 'Opinion' boxes, there is room for difference.

Differences of approach are apparent, too, in the 'Talking Points' series, which, although aimed at the same age group, is written more directly, deals mainly with current situations, and is intended to provoke and support discussion.

Stearman's *Slavery Today* sensibly takes the approach that young people will need a step by step 'case study' guide to the many forms of modern slavery, bringing each situation home with references to particular life stories. Individual chapters of this book could easily be extracted for teaching purposes. Alison Brownlie's *Charities – do they work?* concentrates on more general questions of the role and effectiveness of charities, inviting more reader participation.

All four titles have lists of books to read, glossaries, useful addresses and indexes. The quality of these is variable. *Women's Rights' bibliography* is larger than *Racism*, including a video and games, but its index is a full page shorter. *Slavery Today* has an annotated book list. *Charities – do they work?* has no annotations. *Charities...* is the only title to provide websites for its useful addresses. CB



Film Making

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

James Marsh, ill. David Horwood, Hodder 'Activators', 128pp, 0 340 73631 3, £3.99 pbk

This handy and accessible book takes the mystery out of film making in a very engaging and entertaining way. It uses domestic camcorders in its illustration and is built around the premise that films, like home videos, are a combination of images, sounds, movements and speech that build up

an atmosphere, feel and narrative. It shows how you can be just as expressive and compelling with the family video camera and a group of friends as you can with the services of a Hollywood film crew. From equipment and story to finding a team, production and editing it explains the importance of being organised without making the prospect intimidating. The layout is attractive with cartoons, quotes in boxes and practical tips which demonstrate a real knowledge of the industry. This book works both as a guide for those who want a bit of fun making a home movie and also for those who have altogether more dramatic ambitions. ARav

The Dorling Kindersley Nature Encyclopedia

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Dorling Kindersley with the Natural History Museum, 304pp, 0 7513 5797 9, £25.00 hbk

A large author-editor team has been at work here, cooking up the collective nature-orientated knowledge of DK into what turns out to be a fairly splendid volume. They describe their achievement as providing 'detailed information on every major plant and animal group, arranged in an easy to follow order', and this is exactly what they have done. Moving from the general to the particular we start with what is Life, how do living things work, moving through Ecology and Taxonomy to Plants and then (for 144 pages out of a total of 300) Animals.

The pages teem with facts and pictures, many of the latter highly recognisable from previous appearances in DK productions and often retaining the freedom from scale which characterised these previous appearances. Freedom from scale is fine for teeth, kettles and lavatories but does not help if you want to compare the sizes of the angler fish and the five-bearded rockling (pp.188–9), oh, and the plural of 'pike' is 'pike' if it is fish – 'pikes' were something used in the civil war and at Agincourt.

Occasionally the facts wobble a bit – 'some (sheep shearers) can clip a lamb in less than a minute' may be true in theory but in practice nobody clips lambs – they have not got enough wool. On the other hand the cross-referencing from every spread is very well done and helpful in building up that web of understanding that it must be the book's ambition to develop.

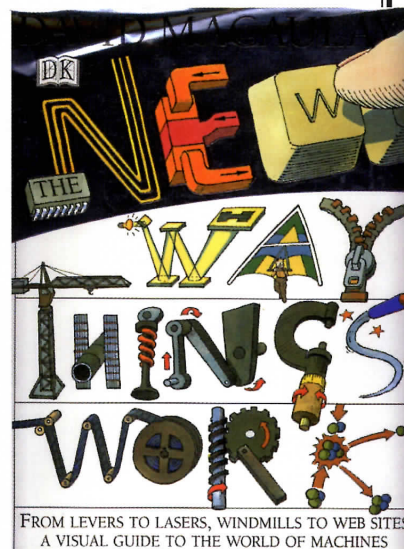
To be worth the price of, say, a weekend at a jazz festival or a Test Match day at Old Trafford, this book has to be both a reliable reference and a bountiful browse. It most certainly is the latter (when did you last see a Binturong (p.259) in full colour?) but purposive fact-finding may be less well rewarded. TP

The New Way Things Work

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

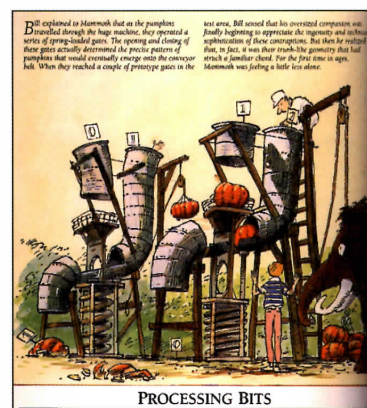
David Macaulay with Neil Ardley, Dorling Kindersley, 400pp, 0 7513 5643 3, £19.99 hbk

When Macaulay's original mammoth volume emerged 11 years ago it was an instant hit and still remains a household favourite. Its total absence



FROM LEVERS TO LASERS, WINDMILLS TO WEB SITES
A VISUAL GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF MACHINES

of ambiguous photographs and 'technical' illustration marked it out as an exceptionally friendly users' guide to the machinery that serves our daily round and assists our common task; and it furnished neatly all we needed to ask it. Authors and publishers must have known then that if this book were any good at all it would need updating before long and here, sure enough is that update.



PROCESSING BITS

It is not, thank goodness, a new 'improved' re-write. Macaulay's original was virtually unimprovable (given that you can tolerate his mammoth *leitmotif*). A new 60-page chunk has been added called the 'Digital Domain' which brings in all the computer-centred developments that illuminate our present way of living. That this is as easy to understand as the rest is due in no small measure to the interpretive skills of Macaulay's co-pilot, Ardley – unsung hero of the first edition but given greater credit here as provider of 'all the technical text'. This means that Ardley really deserves equal billing with Macaulay as the source of everything that makes this so gratifying a read and so welcome a new edition (even if it does not explain the bagless vacuum cleaner).

TP

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers
Discover Great Paintings (see p22)
Something Rich and Strange (see p23)

CLASSICS IN SHORT No.16

Brian Alderson

*Not 'The Borrowers' or 'Honey I Shrank the Kids'?
Then it must be...*



Origins

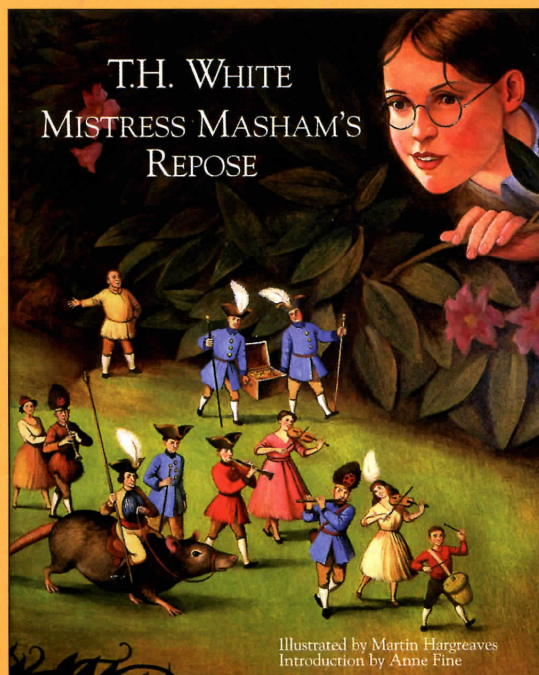
As is well known, Lemuel Gulliver returned from Biefuscu on board a merchantman commanded by Capt. John Biddel, to whom he disclosed something of his adventures. Biddel however shrewdly noted the latitude of the Lilliput archipelago and returned there in order to bring back a collection of the miniature inhabitants. His scheme for showing them at fairgrounds came to naught when they managed to escape from him and they ended up as a secret community dwelling in an island pavilion known as Mistress Masham's Repose in the grounds of Malplaquet House, Northants. (Lady Masham was a woman of the bedchamber to Queen Anne and was on very friendly terms with Capt. Gulliver's acquaintance, Jonathan Swift.) In their retreat, the Lilliputians established a workable economy for themselves which lasted until they were discovered by ten-year-old Maria, circa 1944, the subject of this present work.

What happened then

Maria, the orphaned heir to crumbling Malplaquet, is persecuted by her governess, Miss Brown, and by the vicar, Mr Hater, who have designs on her inheritance. Her allies are the cook and the Professor, an indigent scholar inhabiting a cottage on the estate along with all the necessities for studying 12th-century Latin manuscripts. Maria's discovery of the Lilliputians brings trouble first to herself, since she fails to respect their civilised ways, and second to everyone else when the vicar and Miss Brown discover the secret. Resolution, intelligence, and the farcical involvement of a Lord Lieutenant *ex machina* bring victory to the forces of righteousness while the Lilliputian band strikes up with 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'.

The historian of these events

T.H. White (1906–1964) was the child of a catastrophic marriage and was forever and always His Own Man. After taking a first in the English tripos at Cambridge he taught for a while at Stowe (which supplied much of the topography of Malplaquet) before launching out on a wayward career as huntsman, falconer, flier, fisherman, handyman, dog-lover, and totally professional writer (who also happened to translate a 12th-century Latin bestiary). Fame, and



eventually wealth, came to him through *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), the first volume of his 'Malory tetralogy', and *Mistress Masham* runs that book close in its highly individual craftsmanship.

Publication

Mistress Masham's Repose was mostly written in County Mayo where White (inadvertently? intentionally? accidentally?) spent the years of the Second World War. It was first published in the USA, with illustrations by Fritz Eichenberg, in 1946 when it earned White much money by being chosen as Book of the Month. It was published in England a year later by



Jonathan Cape – an economy edition without illustrations. The book was dedicated to Amaryllis Virginia Garnett, David Garnett's first daughter by his second wife, Angelica, née Bell. Amaryllis was three years old at the time.

A neglected classic

Mistress Masham's Repose had been out of print for some time until the Antique Collectors Club, based at Woodbridge, Suffolk, brought out a new edition, illustrated by Martin Hargreaves, in their series of 'Children's Classics'. Although the gaudy pictures do the book no favours, it would be churlish not to welcome the publisher's confidence in listing the book as one for children. (Even Kaye Webb had her doubts, for her Penguin edition found its way into the 'Peacock' series for adolescents rather than into 'Puffins'.) But there is plenty of evidence that White intended the book for children. He argues the point in some of his letters to David Garnett, while Amaryllis, whether three years old or not, is several times directly addressed by the storyteller within the pages of the book. And the narrative has everything that one could wish for in revealing to children the vivid potential of storytelling in print: pell-mell adventure, dramatic tension, caricature and farce played out beyond the narrow confines that are now regarded as 'relevant' and given a language which can attune their ears to a conversation more engrossing than that found in the usual 'suitable' works. (It is wonderful to read aloud.) White had great faith in the limitless capacities of children, rightly encouraged. One of his 'least promising' sixth-form pupils at Stowe recalled the excitement with which he instilled upon the class Aristotle's *Poetics*, Longinus and Quintilian, I.A. Richards's *Practical Criticism*, and even *The Meaning of Meaning*. Are such texts commended today in the New Curriculum? ■

The illustrations by Martin Hargreaves are taken from the Antique Collectors Club 'Children's Classics' edition, 1 85149 700 5, £12.99 hbk.

Brian Alderson is Chair of the Children's Books History Society and the chief children's book consultant for *The Times*.