

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

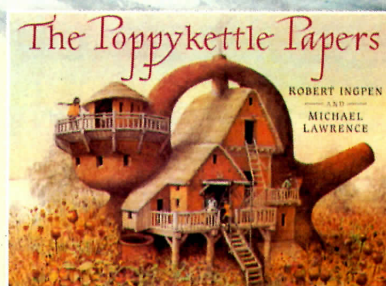
September 1999
No.118 UK Price £3.10

the children's book magazine



Drugs Education • Melvin Burgess • Anthony Browne

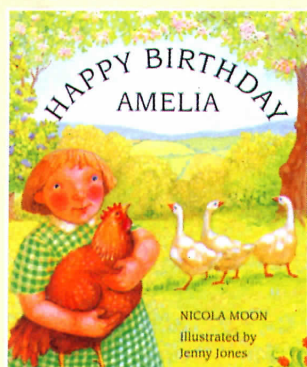
Autumn titles



The Poppykettle Papers
1 86205 282 4 • £12.99



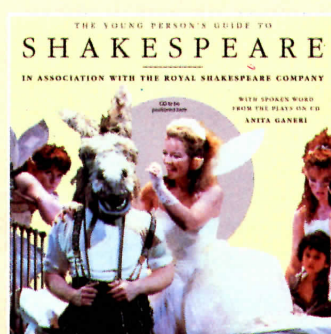
Michael Foreman's Christmas Treasury
1 86205 197 6 • £12.99



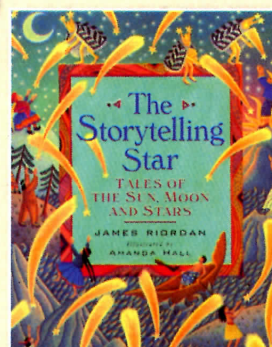
Happy Birthday Amelia
1 86205 208 5 • £9.99



Farmer George and the Lost Chick
1 86205 281 6 • £7.99



The Young Person's Guide to Shakespeare
1 86205 156 9 • £14.99 (inc. VAT)



The Storytelling Star
1 86205 202 6 • £12.99



The Wizard of Oz
1 86205 343 X • £12.99

Hardbacks

The Pop-up Atlas of the World – Francois Michel/Philippe Mignon
The Young Person's Guide to Shakespeare – Anita Ganeri
The Poppykettle Papers – Michael Lawrence/Robert Ingpen
The Storytelling Star – James Riddan/Amanda Hall
Farmer George & The Lost Chick – Nick Ward
Farmer George & The Field Mice – Nick Ward
From the Island of the Amazons to the Indigo Isles – Francois Place
Happy Birthday Amelia – Nicola Moon/Jenny Jones
The Farm – Philippe Dumas
The Wizard of Oz – L Frank Baum/Michael Foreman

Paperbacks

The Nutcracker – David Freeman/Joanna Isles
The Prince's Gifts – John Yeoman/Quentin Blake

“Folklore legend, myths and fairy tales have followed childhood through the ages, for every healthy youngster has a wholesome and instinctive love for stories fantastic, marvellous and manifestly unreal.”

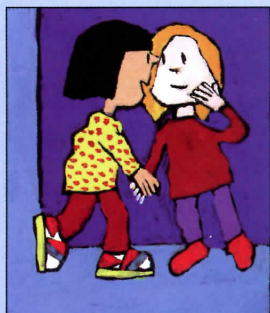
L FRANK BAUM
THE WIZARD OF OZ
APRIL 1900

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Cover Story

This issue's cover is from a stunning new picture book, *Mary's Secret* by David McKee (Andersen Press, 0 86264 909 9, £9.99). An ecological fable about doing without cars, McKee's story with its bright pictures full of well observed detail is set within Mary's cheerful family and at her school. His bold, painterly illustrations use the page so confidently and dextrously that their quirky, decorative perspectives seem entirely natural. Thanks to Andersen Press for their help in producing this September cover.

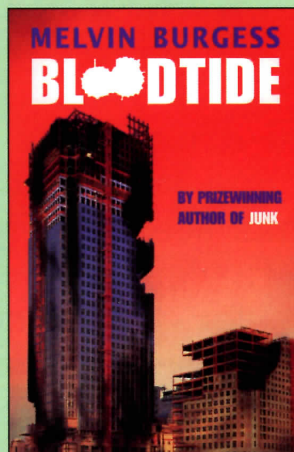


EDITORIAL

In Sendak's classic picture book *Where the Wild Things Are*, Max's famous threat to his mother, 'I'll eat you up!' is not to be. The Wild Things he finds are tamed as he stares unblinkingly into their eyes and his mother survives too. Max has the satisfying consolation of discovering that his rage and aggression will not cause irrevocable damage.

In Melvin Burgess's latest novel for teenagers, *Bloodtide**, which is full of Very Wild Things, there is no such benign resolution. In this dystopian tale, King Val, ruler of half of London, carelessly delivers his daughter, Signy, and her three brothers to the less than tender mercies of their traditional enemy, Conor. In a gruesome scene, the boys are tethered and left to be devoured by a creature who is half pig, half man. Meanwhile, 14-year-old Signy is literally hamstrung by Conor to whom she has been given in a marriage as part of a now betrayed treaty. King Val has already been murdered. Conor then retreats further into his paranoid world which is to end when the one brother who has survived the chomplings of the bumbling pigman eventually appears to exact his revenge.

Burgess tells us that this novel is based on the *Volsunga Saga*, and from this via *Macbeth* to *The Godfather*, the sadistic need to consume the totality of existence in an attempt to keep at bay the terrors of personal dissolution has found many powerful literary expressions. Now we



Rosemary Stones

have *Bloodtide*, a meaty (as you see, it is hard to forget the pig scene) read indeed and one in which sexual ambiguities and betrayals also abound, quite apart from the under-age sex

which does not seem to concern King Val.

Is *Bloodtide* then for teenagers? While there is no looking Burgess's *Wild Things* in the eye, the insatiable tyranny and gross appetites of this powerful mythic tale convey an implicit challenge which teenage readers will respond to – learn to restrain your appetites or, like Conor who would be King, you will consume your own kind.

Rosemary

**Bloodtide* is published by Andersen Press (0 86264 833 5) at £14.99 in October.

Books for Keeps increases its circulation and its subscription price

For the third year in a row *Books for Keeps* has increased its circulation. 1998/99 (September 1998 to July 1999) achieved an increase of just over 2%. Since September 1996, the overall increase is now 5.74%. We are, obviously, delighted that we have so many new readers. One other indicator of the strength of BfK subscriptions and the loyalty of our readership is the renewal rate of existing subscriptions which is now running close to 85%. Thank you all for either coming to us in the first place or staying with us in the second.

Inevitably, however, we still have to absorb a variety of price increases each year from our suppliers and are, therefore, obliged to increase prices. We try our best to keep these to a minimum. For the coming year (September 1999 to July 2000) these increases are as follows:

The UK subscription to *Books for Keeps* is to be increased from September 1999 to £18.60 per annum. The overseas rates are £22.50 (Europe including Ireland) and £ 25.50 (airmail worldwide).

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A Multi-Cultural Guide to Children's Books 0-16+

Revised edition.

Published 22nd October 1999

In 1994 *Books for Keeps* published the second edition of our *Multicultural Guide to Children's Books* in collaboration with the Reading and Language Centre, University of Reading. It sold out within twelve months. We have now updated it with the third edition published on 22nd October.

The Guide includes books for children of all ages from babies to older teenagers that reflect the multi-racial society or the countries of origin of British ethnic minority groups. It includes picture books, books in other languages, myths, legends, folk tales, poetry, prayer books, fiction and non-fiction.

For more details phone, fax or e-mail us (details below) or use the order form which should be with this copy.

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Annual subscription for six issues: £18.60 (UK), £22.50 (Europe including Ireland), £25.50 (airmail).

Single copies: £3.10 (UK), £3.75 (Europe including Ireland), £4.25 (airmail).

Drugs and Teen Publish

Levels of recorded drug abuse in Britain are up to five times higher among teenagers and young adults than in other European countries. The last decade has seen an eightfold increase in drug use among 15-year-olds and a fivefold increase among 12-year-olds. How is this reflected in books for young adults? Colin Chapman assesses non-fiction and fiction titles with drugs as a theme.

Unrealistic ambitions

While books have a part to play in drugs education, drug dependency is caused by a complex array of social and psychological problems. These cannot be prevented by reading a book – although some of the titles currently available for early teens appear to have such unrealistic ambitions.

Non-fiction books on drugs

One such is **Getting into Drugs** by Pete Sanders and Steve Myers which sets out with high ambitions to prevent the reader from ever developing a drugs problem. It takes the form of a briefing about drugs, using posed photographs to depict drug related situations and storylines covering the consequences of encounters with drugs. Drugs are portrayed in a negative light while the photographs reinforce the kind of stereotypes which a balanced drug education is designed to challenge, eg an older woman holding a bottle of tranquillisers and a young man with straw coloured hair handing what looks like a wrap of heroin or amphetamine to a young woman whose bodily stance suggests she has just left the cat walk. The most bizarre juxtaposition of picture and text in this book has a photograph of a family barbecue with adults and children enjoying a glass of wine while the adjacent text reads: 'Drugs can affect all aspects of your life. They could even kill you.' This strange cocktail of photographs and text is further enriched by a cartoon strip storyline featuring wooden characters with names such as Sophie and Bruno, and cringe making voice bubbles. Frankly I cannot imagine any young person taking this book seriously.

This is not true of **A Right to Smoke?** by Emma Houghton which is suitable for 12-14 year olds and starts off on the right footing by treating the reader with respect and offering different points of view on the subject of smoking. The text is balanced and factual with some interesting trivia which goes a considerable way to assist young people

in assessing the impact of tobacco on society. Houghton is not afraid to cite conflicting information about the effects of long term smoking. One pensioner tells us: 'I have been smoking for 30 years and have hardly had a day off sick, but if it's true, so what? We have all got to die of something.' By way of contrast we are told that not even tobacco chiefs are immune from the effects of their product – in 1994 R J Reynolds, grandson of the US tobacco company founder, was the fifth Reynolds to die of smoking related diseases.

This book is illustrated with the posed photographs which seem to be common in books of this kind but there are also other relevant images. In the section on popular culture and smoking there is a still from the movie **Pulp Fiction** of the actress Uma Thurman smoking in a café. There is also a picture of Humphrey Bogart in **Casablanca** alongside the fact that he died aged 57 of lung cancer. There is good use of quotes from smokers, experts, playwrights and journalists giving both sides of the arguments. One commentator rubbishes passive smoking claiming it is merely a propaganda device to make smoking a public evil as opposed to a merely private vice. This well researched book covers all the issues in an accurate, non patronising way, and assumes the reader is able to make up their own mind about this worldwide activity. I thought it excellent and recommend it for school and library use and for classroom work.

Careless use of drugs

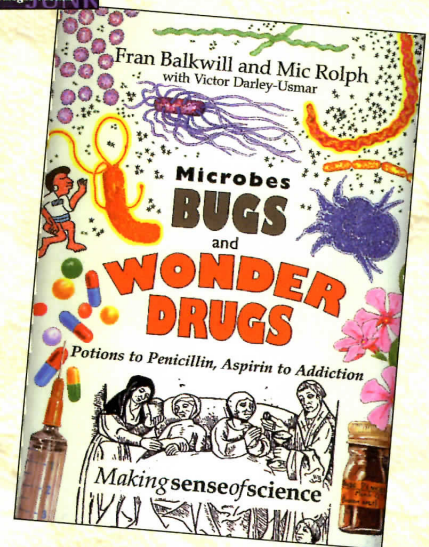
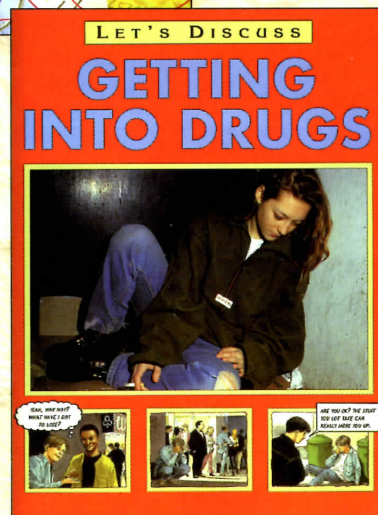
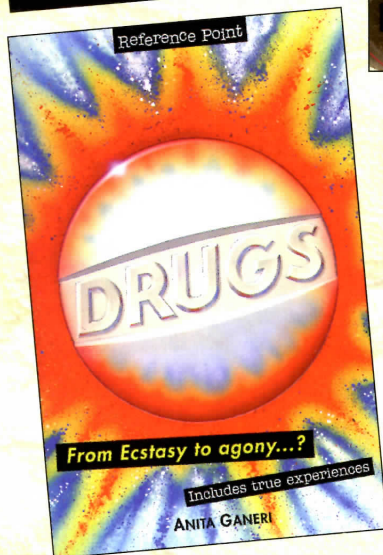
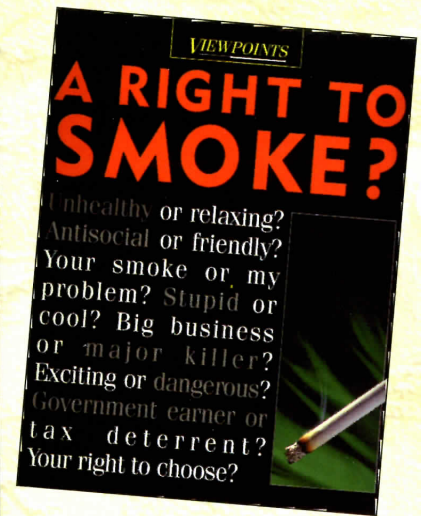
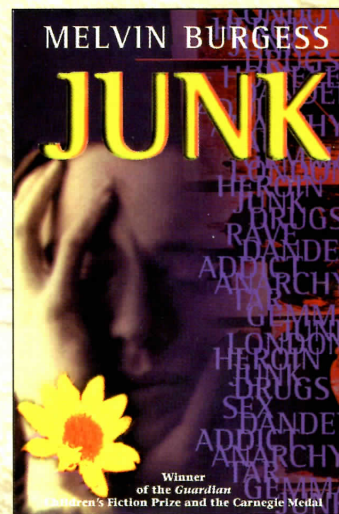
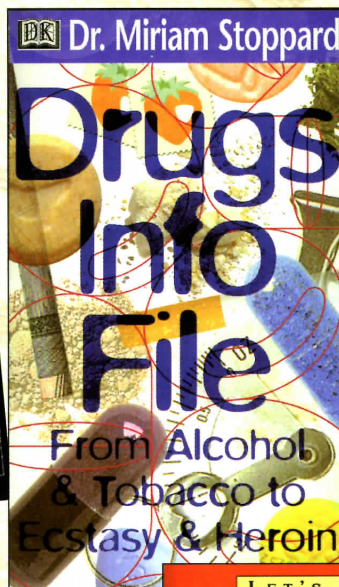
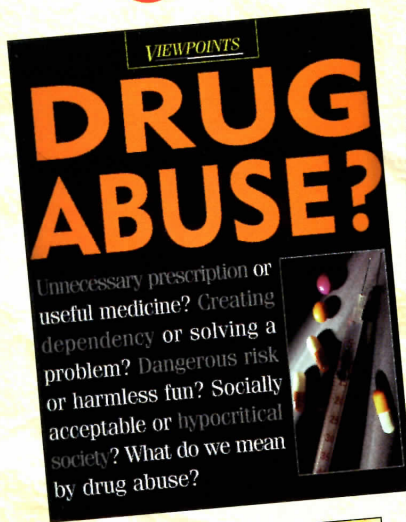
A companion book by Emma Houghton, **Drug Abuse?**, is in a similar style with a mixture of rich quotations, balanced text and relevant illustrations. I particularly liked the section which assesses the value of drug education and anti-drugs campaigns. Posters from the early 1990s are included which have the slogan 'Drugs, you never know what they will do to you' and show shocking images of users in an attempt to dissuade people from experimenting with illegal substances. These are juxtaposed with the evidence of ever increasing numbers of people using illegal substances. Houghton quotes a colleague of mine, Julian Cohen, as saying: 'Such simplistic messages and slogans are fundamentally flawed...when young people eventually find out they have been lied to they will cease to trust adults' resources of drugs information.' Houghton accurately follows the trends in drug education and points to the increasing use of an approach that includes reducing harm caused by the careless use of drugs and the view that it is better to give young people more information about drugs and their dangers so that they can make up their own minds. This is very much the theme of her book and it can be confidently recommended.

A scientific tone is set in a book **Microbes, Bugs and Wonder Drugs: Potions to penicillin, to aspirin to addiction** in the 'Making Sense of Science' series by Fran Balkwill and Mic Rolph. Balkwill sets out to give an uncomplicated biology of drugs. The strength of her text lies in the straightforward explanations given about

how the drugs work on the body. Strip cartoons are used extensively to describe, for example, the history of penicillin – it is a pity that these storylines are spoilt by flat one-dimensional drawings. These pictures



ing: How does it score?



contrast with sometimes bizarre, extremely colourful but often overdone illustrations of biological formations such as cells, viruses and organs. The illustrator in several cases has got completely carried away using a huge amount of colour, festooning images all over the pages in sometimes such a dazzling way that it completely obliterates the usually excellent text and may well put off the teenage reader. This is a pity as there is much fascinating information here about disease, the body's response to it and the drugs used to combat it.

Drugs: from Ecstasy to agony...? by Anita Ganeri in the 'Reference Point' series is a bright and accessible read and acts as a drug briefing for 13-15 year olds. It is well written and will keep the young reader's attention with 'bites' of factual information interspersed with quotes from people involved either as drug users or as professionals responding to drug problems. Ganeri's potted biographies of drug users reveal startling insights into drug related experiences (one story in particular should be read by budding bodybuilders). I particularly liked the section on specific

substances, which is broken up with teenagers' lucid and matter of fact encounters with drugs. One sixteen year old describes his experiences with cannabis and gives advice about safer use: 'You have got to get out of the way if you are smoking cannabis, or you will be caught, whereas with drink you can just go down the pub. We would save it for the weekend, as if you would do it after school you would wake up next morning with sticky eyes and you could not concentrate as well. You don't think straight.'

There are a few inaccuracies, e.g. in a section on terminology a distinction is made between hard and soft drugs. There is potentially no difference. Using any substance runs the risk of ending up as a damaging drug experience – carelessly smoking one cannabis joint in school or at work, for example, could mean exclusion or the sack. Drugs should not be judged solely in the context of the particular degrees of intoxication nor solely on the grounds of health. There are so many other factors to take into account. But this is a minor complaint.

Ganeri also tells us that peer pressure is blamed by users for their involvement in drugs. However, research suggests that this factor is over rated as an influence and that young people tend to identify with the group which most matches their own interests. Some young people may well be pressurised into taking drugs, but for many whom they mix with and what they do is their own choice. The only other concern I have in this otherwise balanced and well organised book is with a section simply entitled 'Help'. It includes a long list of signs and symptoms, many of which could be confused with normal adolescent behaviour – eg wearing sun glasses at odd times; always being broke and trying to borrow money; using slang associated with drugs; taking no care of your personal appearance! While the author warns us not to jump to conclusions, it would have been better to say that if you are at all concerned about someone, you would be best advised to look for subtle changes over a period of time and make gentle enquiries about your concerns. If the person does have a drug problem, they will only tell you when they are ready to.

Pulled as well as pushed

Dr Miriam Stoppard comments correctly in her **Drugs Info File** that drugs are pulled as well as pushed. I found this a welcome relief – so many books for and about young people and drugs fall into the trap of assuming that peer pressure is the predominant cause of young people's involvement. Stoppard rightly states that most people view occasional drug use in the same way as they view the use of alcohol, ie as part of normal life. However, we do have to be careful about stating this unequivocally – some young people are very worried about substance use, especially those who live in communities where drugs are ever present and violence associated with drugs distribution is not uncommon. In a section on why parents worry about drugs there is some helpful advice about alleviating parental concerns. At times, however, Stoppard sounds a bit frantic. She has a section entitled 'Show Your Parents This', but I doubt whether many parents would be pleased to read 'Don't be authoritarian, you'll lose your child.' I'm not sure either whether parents would feel any easier if their drug using children tell them, as Stoppard advises, that they will promise to find out the truth about drugs and will only take drugs when they are with good friends. From this point onwards **Drugs Info File** tends to be too much in your face. It ends with a chapter on 'Do you have a problem with drugs?' I think the problem with addressing young people directly on a sensitive issue such as drugs can be counter productive and may be interpreted by the reader as assuming that they are using drugs. Better, I think, to write in the third person.

A section on handling drugs with common sense has much practical advice on safer clubbing, but what is missing here is information about the after effects of ecstasy which can leave the user withdrawn, anxious and depressed with a gradual deterioration in body weight. While these conditions in users may be temporary, it can be a very alarming experience for partners, parents and friends.

There is much useful information here, but the over elaborate layout may put all but the most determined reader off. There is an irritating style in the section which goes through all the main drugs with different fonts used to emphasise particular words. It



makes each page seem messy and is rather patronising.

Teen fiction with drug using as a theme

There is a paucity of good fiction for teenagers with drug use as a theme.

The setting for Rosie Corrigan's **He Loved Drugs More Than Me** is a middle class family where Alice is pressed into taking ecstasy by Keiran, the singer in her brother's rock band. The story follows a predictable pattern as Alice finds the experience with the drug amazing – but the after effects (feeling gloomy and irritable) somewhat less enticing. Keiran's motive is of course entirely sexual but Alice does not realise this until it is too late and he has abandoned her and she ends up in hospital. Whilst this is formulaic writing, the anti-drugs message is not oppressive with the situation reasonably realistically described. It will appeal to many young teenage girls. One thing that did worry me about this book is the

essentially white heterosexual perspective from which it is written and it does not really delve into the complexities of teenagers growing up in a multi-cultural and morally ambiguous society.

Chris Wooding's **Crashing** is very much an adventure story for boys. We are told that it was written when the author was 19 years old during a summer holiday when he had nothing better to do. I feel that this is a bit of a giveaway and I am inclined to take the same view about reading this book. It contains glorious macho gems such as 'pissed up boys will go for anything with a pulse'.

This is Hollywood transposed to a suburban housing estate. Jay, our tough guy hero, explains that 'today was a special day and I figured my body was young and fit enough to take a pack of 20 B & H without dropping me with a coronary'.

The main action takes place in his house with a party where there are apparently no boundaries, while the final shoot out with party gate crashers occurs in an adjacent derelict industrial site before the hero returns to his home to win the girl of his dreams. **Crashing** is written in a mid Atlantic tone and is rooted in hedonism, drink, smokes and women (all there to be 'cracked') but funnily enough no illegal drugs. The problem with this kind of literature is that it takes itself so seriously when the reader ends up caring little about anyone involved.

Malcom Rose's **Son of Pete Flude** is no better. This implausible novel is about Sebastian, the son of a rock star who gets caught up in the world of ruthless drug dealers. The first notion we get that something is amiss is when the father comes home and reveals that he has been approached to carry 'crack' back from an African tour. The police are onto the gang and persuade Flude to co-operate and snare the dealers. The story then deteriorates into an unconvincing yawn of kidnapping and police incompetence. The parents are killed along the way and Sebastian is injected with a myriad of substances for reasons that are not entirely clear.

Moving and sensitive

Last but not least, Melvin Burgess's **Junk** describes the slow and relentless deterioration of young people into a world dominated by heroin. Tar and Gemma escape from troubled homes to squat together in Bristol. The narrative is spoken from the perspectives of the



different characters caught up in this tragic story. This is a serious, moving and sensitive novel, not written to a superficial formula about adolescent angst but written with deep feeling and emotion as though it took a lot out of the author to describe this relentless slide almost into oblivion. The seriousness of the pair's decline is aptly encapsulated in some moving lines. Gemma observes that Tar has got so cynical when he always used to be so delighted by things: 'He used to get so emotional about I don't know, me, the stars at night. That was all wonderful for him. These days he doesn't care anymore. I don't understand him these days.' On another occasion the pair go to an isolated Welsh cottage for the weekend. This experience is intended to be drug free but Tar finds that he cannot cope without heroin and he hitches back to Bristol to get some. The ease with which Gemma and Tar and their friends are drawn into prostitution and thieving to fund their habit shocks the reader, especially as their drug taking starts out in such a light-hearted way.

The world of employment, mortgages and the middle class lifestyles depicted in the previous novels reviewed above have no place here. Eventually, after

three and a half years' homelessness and prostitution, Gemma ends up in hospital pregnant, nearly losing her life and the baby, and desperate to go home. ■

Books discussed

Getting into Drugs, Pete Sanders and Steve Myers, Franklin Watts 'Let's Discuss', 1996, 0 7496 2494 9, £10.99 hbk

A Right to Smoke?, Emma Houghton, Franklin Watts 'Viewpoints', 1997, 0 7496 2381 0, £10.99 hbk

Drug Abuse?, Emma Houghton, Franklin Watts 'Viewpoints', 1997, 0 7496 2576 7, £10.99 hbk

Microbes, Bugs and Wonder Drugs: Potions to penicillin, to aspirin to addiction, Fran Balkwill and Mic Rolph, Portland Press 'Making Sense of Science', 1995, 1 85578 065 8, £12.99 hbk

Drugs: from Ecstasy to agony...?, Anita Ganeri, Scholastic 'Reference Point', 1996, 0 590 55281 3, £3.99 pbk

Drugs Info File, Dr Miriam Stoppard, Dorling Kindersley, 1999, 0 7513 0623 1, £5.99 pbk

He Loved Drugs More Than Me, Rosie Corrigan, Scholastic 'Point Confessions', 1999, 0 590 63713 4, £3.99 pbk

Crashing, Chris Wooding, Scholastic, 1998, 0 590 54347 4, £4.99 pbk

Son of Pete Flude, Malcolm Rose, Scholastic, 1994, 0 590 55721 1, £3.50 pbk

Junk, Melvin Burgess, Andersen, 1996, 0 86264 632 4, £12.99 hbk, Methuen Drama, 0 413 73840 X, £6.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 038019 1, £4.99 pbk

Colin Chapman is a Youth Service Manager with the London Borough of Redbridge and has a special interest in Drugs Education. His publications include **Drugs Issues for Schools** (Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence, 1995) and, with Ian Clements, **The Really Useful Drugs Guide** (The Early Break Drugs Project and the London Borough of Redbridge, 1997). He is also consultant writer to the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, now the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, for Drug Education Curriculum Guidance for Schools.

Helplines

● The Drugs in Schools Helpline (Release)

FREEPHONE: 0808 8000 800
(open Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm)

A national, confidential service specifically for pupils, teachers and parents concerned about drug incidents at school.

● The National Drugs Helpline

Tel: 0800 77 66 00 (open 24 hours)

A national confidential service which offers information, advice and counselling.

● Adfam National

0171 928 8900
(open Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm)

A confidential service for families and friends of drug users.

Organisations

● Alanon and Alateen Family Groups

61 Great Dover Street

London SE1 4YF

Tel: 0171 403 0888

Information and resources for drinkers and for the families of problem drinkers.

● ASH

102 Clifton Street

London EC2A 4HW

Tel: 0171 739 5902

Information and resources about anti-smoking initiatives.

● Department for Education Publications Centre

P.O. Box 5000, Sudbury

Suffolk CO10 6ZQ

Tel: 0845 602 2260

Free copies of **Circular 4/95, Drug Prevention and Schools** and other drugs education leaflets.

● The Drug Education Forum

National Children's Bureau

8 Wakeley Street

London EC1V 7QE

Tel: 0171 843 6038

An umbrella body which provides a drug education information service.

● Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence (ISDD)

Waterbridge House

32-36 Loman Street

London SE1 0EE

Tel: 0171 928 1211

An extensive library, publications and information on all aspects of drug use.

● The National Health Education Group

103 Northcourt Avenue

Reading RG2 7HG

Tel: 0118 975 6528

Contact for list of leading local professionals throughout England and Wales involved in drugs and health education.

● Release

388 Old Street

London EC1V 9LT

Tel: 0171 729 9904

Provides a helpline and advice. Focuses on legal issues.

● ReSolv

30A High Street

Stone

Staffordshire ST15 8AW

Tel: 01785 817885

Information about solvent abuse.

● Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA)

Waterbridge House

32-36 Loman Street

London SE1 0EE

Tel: 0171 928 9500

Information on counselling services, national directory and regional lists of drugs projects.

● TACADE (The Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drug Education)

1 Hulme Place

The Crescent

Salford

Greater Manchester M5 4QA

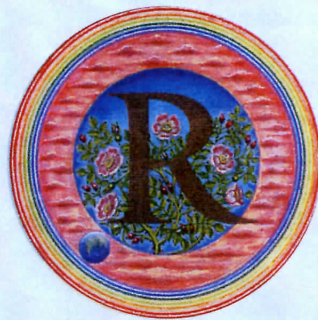
Tel: 0161 745 8925

Educational resource materials and training for schools.

A future issue of BfK will discuss children's books and drugs education for pre-teens.

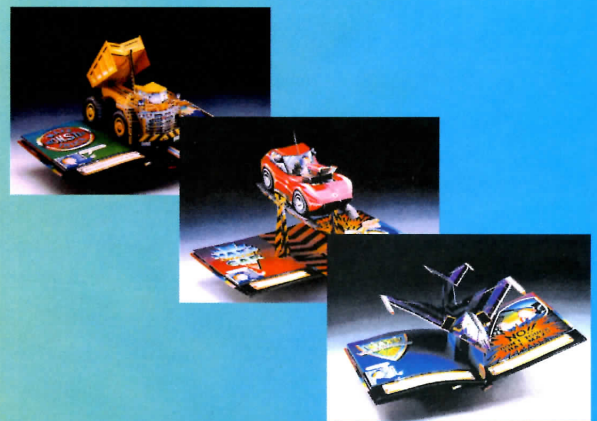
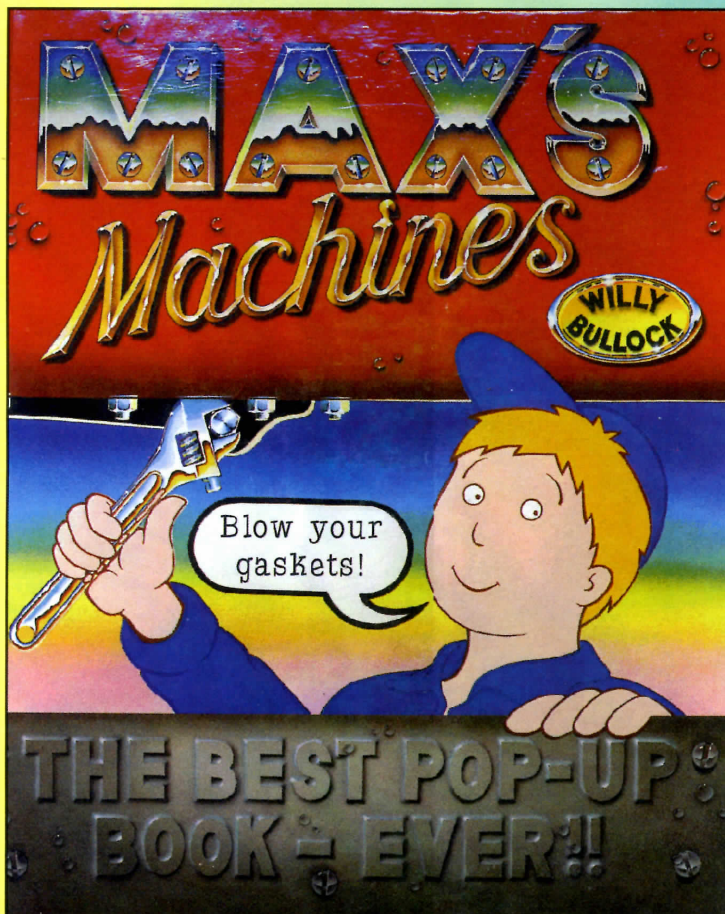
The Blue and Green Ark by Brian Patten

is a poem for the millennium
-celebrating our wonderful
planet earth. Each double page is
illustrated by
one of twelve of
our greatest
contemporary
artists.



SCHOLASTIC

To order telephone:
01926 813910



Max's Machines By Willy Bullock

Is it a Car? Is it a Truck?
Is it a Plane?

No, it's all three in one
amazing all-action
pop-up book.

SCHOLASTIC

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Windows into Illustration: Anthony Browne

Anthony Browne is a writer/illustrator whose words and images are inextricably linked and whose surreal style offers visual comments on his characters' inner worlds. He has won the Kate Greenaway Medal twice and the Kurt Maschler award three times. In this article he explains the techniques and thinking behind his recent picture book, *Voices in the Park*.



Voices in the Park is a reworking of the book I wrote and illustrated in 1977, *A Walk in the Park*. I'd been wanting for a long time to tell a story from the points of view of the different protagonists and this text seemed the perfect vehicle. It's a simple story of a mother and son taking their pedigree dog to the park, and a father and daughter taking their mongrel to the same park. The dogs immediately interact, the adults ignore each other and the children slowly and tentatively begin to play together. A friendship starts to develop but they are abruptly separated by their parents and taken home.

The park she sees is very ordered and tidy (the only litter we see is trapped in the cage-like litter-bin), the trees have been trimmed into comfortably plump shapes, and everywhere we see reassuring, rich autumnal colours. She's annoyed at her son's behaviour so I tried to show her smouldering resentment and burning anger in the tree that seems to have caught fire. As they walk home out of the evening light of the park into dark shadow her son is obscured and insignificant, and they leave a trail of dead leaves.

shadow, and the dominating image of her hat is repeated throughout the scene. The colours are pale and cold with splashes of brightness that are other people and dogs enjoying their freedom and having fun. The blue sky seen reflected in the lamp-posts is possibly a suggestion of hope for the future. (Certainly the sky does become blue later in his story when he meets the girl). Originally all these characters were painted as people, but at some stage I felt dissatisfied and found myself



I decided to tell each character's version of the day through his or her voice, and tried to reflect this voice in the style of painting in each section. This illustration is from the woman's voice and shows her taking home her dog and son after catching him talking to a 'very rough-looking child'. Each character's version of events takes place at a different time of year and her season is Autumn.

and we see the park from his point of view. Instead of my usual water-colour I've used line and wash here with tiny cross-hatching lines drawn with a pen, in an attempt to reflect something of the boy's repressed personality. The season is late Winter/early Spring and I chose a neat, spindly typeface which I hope also tells us something about the boy. He stands literally in his mother's



There was a very friendly dog in the park and Victoria was having a great time. I wished I was.

painting over the face of one of them in an attempt to make it more real, more human and less like a caricature. In front of my eyes as I painted it turned into a gorilla. And it worked. I don't know why... ■

Anthony Browne's books include *Willie the Dreamer*, *Gorilla* and *Zoo*. *Voices in the Park* is published by Corgi (0 552 54564 3) at £4.99. There is an excellent interview with Anthony Browne in which he expands further on the creative process and the nature of the problems he encounters in *What's the Picture?* edited by Janet Evans (Paul Chapman Publishing).

From



to



David Blunkett's stated aim was that the National Year of Reading should involve the whole community and change the culture of the nation. As the Year draws to a close, it is time to reflect on what took place and what should happen now. Has it turned us into a nation of readers?

Liz Attenborough, Project Director, The National Year of Reading, explains what has been achieved during a hectic Year.



Books for Keeps readers don't need me to explain why reading is so important but I will fill in a bit of the background to the Year of Reading. As you know, the Government's Literacy Strategy is designed to raise standards of literacy amongst current and future school children. The National Year of Reading was intended to support that aim by making reading a whole society issue.

The National Literacy Trust, a small literacy-based charity, was given the task of organising the Year. We aimed to create a national framework in order to allow local participation in ways that suited the individual, the business, the library, the college, or the community. We aimed to encourage all sectors of society to think about reading, to celebrate reading, to read more widely and more often, and to support children's reading outside the classroom. This included reading books, newspapers and magazines, and developing the skill to access all kinds of information.

We engaged partners in a wide range of media to talk about reading, and to include reading in their television and radio programmes.

Enthusiastic take-up

The sheer level of activity around the country generated by the Year far exceeded our expectations. The umbrella of a national campaign provided the impetus for all sorts of organisations and community groups to get involved. We have been told over and over again that this or that initiative, activity, connection or event would not have happened had it not been for the Year of Reading.

National initiatives included the Government's highly successful television advertising

campaign, under the slogan 'A little reading goes a long way'. This was expressly designed to encourage parents to take time to share reading with their children, with books but also through such things as shopping lists, sports reports, menus and other reading opportunities outside the home. The accompanying booklet, obtainable from a freephone number and through supermarkets and Post Offices, reached three million people.

The Year has also been for adults and this was a more difficult message to get across. We were helped by Brookside when it ran an adult literacy storyline, accompanied by a video clip encouraging the use of a phone line for viewers with difficulties to be directed towards their nearest adult literacy centre, where they found Brookside-related materials to help in their work.

Business involvement

Businesses, too, played a supportive role in the Year, recognising the value of a literate, well-informed workforce. The Boots Company plc hosted a conference that attracted business leaders to discuss literacy initiatives in the workplace and in the community. High profile initiatives included Sainsbury's £6m two-year sponsorship of Bookstart, and the News International/Walker's Snackfood campaign for free books for schools. Whatever you may think about crisps in school, the value of the stories running day after day in the **Sun** and the **News of the World** cannot be overstated, highlighting the importance of children's reading and of good book stocks in schools. A key audience was reached on a daily basis over many months.

Businesses were also keen to provide employees



For further information, contact the National Year of Reading Team, National Literacy Trust, Swire House, 59 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AJ (tel: 0171 828 2435).



Liz Attenborough

as volunteer reading helpers in primary schools. Companies like W H Smith, Barclays Bank, Lloyds of London, Unilever, Glaxo Wellcome, Boots and McDonald's are amongst many companies who have trained and supported their staff to help in local schools. Other support came in the form of the use of the NYR logo on such things as Tetley tea bag boxes, on Golden Wonder Wotsits snack food packs, and on multi packs of Smarties.

Businesses got involved in other ways with their staff, too. The Ford Motor Company in Dagenham is running a family-based Learning Together project in the workplace, open to employees and their partners and children. They also created workplace libraries for staff and their children. Whitbread extended their work with schools by sending leaflets with hints for helping children with reading to all their staff who are parents. Orange created and encouraged workplace reading groups through the business community, with companies such as Marks & Spencer amongst the first to sign up.

Local authority involvement

At the start of the planning for the Year, the invitation went out to local authorities to take a lead in organising events. They were encouraged to set up cross-sectoral steering groups involving education, libraries, business organisations, arts bodies, voluntary venues such as leisure centres. All local authorities had a local co-ordinator in place, and 11 authorities were able to create that as a full-time post. Libraries took the lead role in the majority of authorities.

Monthly themes

To provide a structure to the Year, and to give us the opportunity to shift the focus to different sectors of the audience, we suggested themes for each month of the Year. These were enthusiastically taken up, and ranged from an early years focus in November, with the BBC running a three-week television campaign targeting books for babies, to March becoming sports reading month, with a variety of football, basketball, rugby and ice hockey stars up and down the country becoming involved in local events.

Grant aid

The campaign also had a fund of £800,000 available to give out as grants to organisations to pilot new reading and literacy initiatives that others will be able to learn from. Amongst the 86 projects funded were a number specifically for young people and their parents. These include:

- Projects to support children visiting their parents in prison by providing books and storytellers; running reading groups in young offender institutions.
- Early years projects such as providing collections of pre-school reading materials in health centres; bilingual storybooks produced by an Asian Elders Centre; a poster/leaflet for parents of pre-school children with known disabilities or likely educational problems, distributed through

social services and health visitors; and the production of tactile books for pre-reading children who will go on to learn Braille.

- School age projects encouraging an entire local council work force to read a story to their town's 25,000 children; a storyteller employed to work in four special schools and train teachers, parents and other carers; and a project designed to teach reading to children who cannot speak.
- Teenagers were encouraged through such schemes as street events, and the production of magazines by teenagers, for teenagers; a project that involved work with graphic novels and illustration and design using ICT; and a project specifically targeting socially excluded 13-16 year olds through work with the National Youth Agency.

And all the while schools have been beefing up their book weeks, adding a reading dimension to many regular activities, and inviting a host of authors, poets and illustrators into schools to talk about reading. We are so grateful to authors for giving their time in this way. Schools were far more involved than we might have expected. With so much going on in primary schools during this particular period we had not expected quite as much activity linked to NYR.

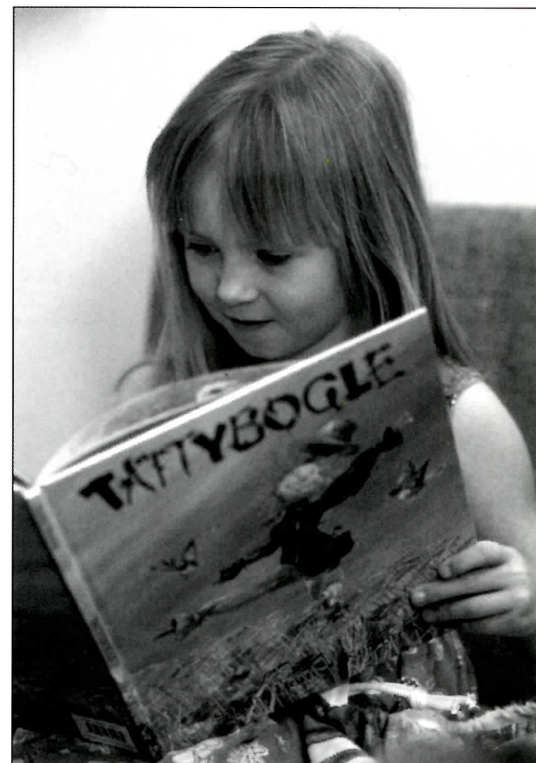
Interconnectivity

So has it all been worth it? Undoubtedly yes, I say. The profile of reading has been raised, the climate is beginning to change, and many, many doors have been opened. The task now is to draw together significant outcomes, and share the best ideas widely, adding value to the work in schools as a consequence of the Year's activities. Businesses have been encouraged to think about their role, and where local authority support was at a high level there have been enormous benefits. I have been particularly pleased to see education and libraries working together, and where good local steering groups are in place there is no wish to disband them at the end of the Year. The interconnectivity of education, library, youth work, literature work, voluntary and business organisations has shown that new approaches to how people learn can have high and long-lasting impact.

Key messages

We are working now on an end of the Year report (available end December), with evaluations and reports from initiatives around the country. Some key messages are emerging. These include:

- Parents know they should introduce books to their babies and they know they should help their children with their reading – but they just do not know how best to do it. We all have a role to play in making people more comfortable in the reading community by sharing ideas and information.
- Reading being high on the national agenda means that all sorts of local initiatives can get off the ground. Contacts have been made and initiatives triggered that will last well into the future.



- Mention reading and people instantly think of children, and of learning the skill. It is much harder to switch the thinking to adults, and to reading for pleasure.
- People did not need much persuasion to start thinking about joining in the Year – it was quickly recognised that there were few downsides to being involved in such a venture. This high profile for reading must be maintained.
- The sharing of ideas has been invaluable – why start from scratch when there are already so many excellent tried and tested ways that might suit your child/school/community/business.

Reading on into the future

Whilst the Year itself has come to an end, the National Year of Reading has been the start of a new beginning for reading in this country. The National Literacy Trust, with support from the DfEE, will continue over the next three years the networking, promotion and information role established during NYR, providing support to the wide range of reading practitioners now in place. To further that aim, we have adapted the logo READ ON, National Reading Campaign. One of our first initiatives is to produce some good practice guides for different sectors, to showcase good projects and offer pointers to new partners.

We must not waste the opportunity we now have to capitalise on the new reading climate – we certainly don't want to see reading slip down the agenda. There is much still to be done to ensure that we truly become that nation of readers. ■

Authorgraph No.118

Melvin Burgess

Melvin Burgess interviewed by George Hunt

We are sitting in the kitchen of the cosy south Manchester house that Melvin Burgess shares with his partner and their children, and he is talking about what for him was the most powerful episode in his early reading:

'I was so completely mesmerised by the Piper at the Gates of Dawn chapter in *The Wind in the Willows* that I read it over and over again when I was a kid. I became so fascinated by it that my parents got me a painting of Pan, and I read voraciously everything I could find about him. He shows up in *The Little Grey Men* by BB but he's simply not godlike enough in that story. Nothing comes anywhere near the chapter in Kenneth Grahame.'

Melvin Burgess is best known for *Junk*, a novel about teenage heroin addiction that won the 1997 Carnegie Medal. *The Baby and Fly Pie*, a nightmarish vision of life in an ultra-Thatcherite Britain where street children are hounded to death by Latin American style extermination squads, was shortlisted for the same award in 1993. Other powerful novels have focused on the persecution of witches in 17th-century Lancashire (*Burning Issy*), the sexual harassment of a deaf girl in a hypocritical village community (*Loving April*), and the plight of a mentally disturbed bag lady who haunts a troubled schoolboy (*An Angel for May*, another Carnegie nomination).

Given the uncompromisingly controversial nature of such themes, it might come as a surprise that Burgess's most formative reading experience was an episode from one of the best loved classics of children's literature: the poignantly wistful account of Ratty and Mole's moonlit boat ride along the river bank in search of a lost baby otter, a quest which culminates in a theophanous encounter with the great god Pan on an Eden-like islet just before dawn.

However, much of Burgess's fiction is imbued with the nature mysticism which underlies *The Wind in the Willows*, and the quest theme of that most mysterious of its chapters is one which features in many of his novels. The

difference is one of scope and context: Burgess's appreciation of nature refuses to evade the redness of tooth and claw, and the Wild Woods he explores are often urban ones.

Burgess grew up in the home counties in the late '50s and early '60s. Apart from Kenneth Grahame, his favourite reading consisted of the animal books of Gerald Durrell, later augmented by a love of Mervyn Peake's 'Gormenghast' saga. He was fascinated by nature, and enjoyed birds'-nesting until it dawned on him that 'if you leave the tap turned on, everything's going to dry up'. His first piece of fiction to be recognised, a school story about a cruelly treated circus horse, reflected his concern for animals.

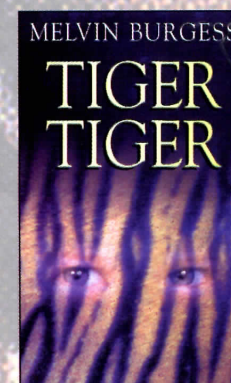
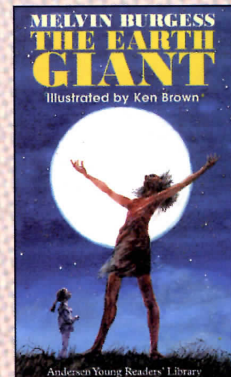
In spite of an obvious talent for storytelling, Melvin left school with few qualifications, and after a brief and unsuccessful brush with journalism, he tried to support his writing through various casual jobs before going to squat with friends in a disused Bristol youth club. This was a life of druggy, anarchistic, skip-raiding Bohemianism, lived amongst characters who are later incorporated into the multiple narrators of *Junk*. Burgess was unemployed for much of this time, though he did manage to qualify as a bricklayer after taking a Training Opportunities course. He was also honing his writing, exploring experimental poetry and the possibilities of radio drama, but he was in his early thirties before he made any serious effort to sell his work.

His first novel, *The Cry of the Wolf*, was published in 1990. Based on the idea that a community of British wolves have secretly survived in Surrey, it tells the harrowing tale of a psychopathic hunter's relentless campaign to extirpate the entire pack. 'I wanted to reverse that stereotype of the wolf as a force for evil, and to turn around the dragon slaying myth,' Burgess says. In the book it is the human being who is the nameless, murdering brute. *The Cry of the Wolf* is a celebration of lupine majesty and beauty, informed by a keen sense of landscape as the survivor wolf treks from southern England to the Scottish Highlands. The climax,

presenting a chilling showdown between the two protagonists, makes no concessions to a happy ending: 'I was writing a novel about extinction, so you can hardly have a neat optimistic conclusion, can you? I also have a bit of resentment against the idea that stories should end with the redemption of villains. Life's not often like that, and sometimes redemption can ruin a character. Look what happened to Mr Toad – he was much more interesting as his old self.' *The Cry of the Wolf* was shortlisted for the Carnegie, and Burgess's career as a successful children's writer had begun.

Burgess had moved to Lancashire by now, and several of his subsequent novels have featured the landscape and people of the county. He was living in a village near Pendle Hill when he wrote *Burning Issy*, a novel based again on persecution and pursuit. The story incorporates the actual sites and some of the miserably oppressed victims of the 17th-century witchcraft trials, but Burgess also includes tantalising glimpses of the chthonic rhapsodies that the old religion might have been grounded in. A witch's declaration that the world will die when the horned man is forgotten seems to echo his own ecological concerns.

An Angel for May was inspired by the ruins of a burned Lancashire hill farm, and the troubling memory of a destitute bag-lady standing barefoot and wretched in the London rain: 'I asked myself what this woman's story could be, how could she have ended up like that?' In the novel, the bag lady is presented as the survivor of a series of childhood catastrophes who seeks to amend the past by summoning another lost child back through time to the farm where she was briefly happy. This is a very strange and moving story, its spiritually powerful but terribly vulnerable central character typical of the charismatic victims who haunt Melvin's books. *Loving April* features another such heroine, a deaf girl living a semi secluded life in a narrow rural community, who takes her pleasure from befriending wild animals as she rows amongst the reed beds and willow





islands of the local estuary. Meanwhile, as a middle class incomer begins to fall in love with her, the village churls plot her rape. 'April kind of follows May; I wanted to look again at how somebody excluded by society might end up being screwed up by everybody. I also wanted to write a love story that would appeal to boys and girls.' Gazing wryly at the incongruous Mills and Boon cover of this sometimes brutally frank book, Melvin mischievously suggests, 'Perhaps it would've gone down better if I'd called it "Screwing April".' He is particularly proud of a scene in this story where April outrages the congregation at the local church by turning up at a service dressed in her mum's slinkiest clothes, and leading a wild swan in a dog-collar up the aisle, a magnificent pagan image rich with subversive suggestions.

The Baby and Fly Pie, written between the April and May

books, shifts to a dystopian urban environment in which street children have become commodities, scavenging on garbage heaps as bonded labourers for exploitative mothers, and being hunted down as vermin if they try to break out: 'All my novels are about underdogs and outsiders and people craving for a decent life, and this was my response to the homelessness and begging issue which was getting worse just about then.' The central character in this book is Jane, a sensitive street kid who has just been sold as a prostitute when her brother discovers a millionaire's kidnapped baby on a rubbish tip. In attempting to deal with the situation ethically, the futility of civilised behaviour in the urban Wild Wood is revealed to her. Her lament, towards the end of the book, 'We just wanted a life, didn't we, Davy?' could serve as an epitaph for many of Burgess's characters.

In spite of the bleakness of this book, he insists that Jane represents an optimistic acknowledgement of the resilience of the human spirit. 'No matter how bad things get, no matter how horribly everybody else is behaving in a situation, somehow you'll always find someone like Jane, someone who just refuses to sacrifice their own integrity.'

Characters like this appear amongst the eleven voices who narrate **Junk**, a picaresque but subtly organised tale of drug taking, shoplifting, partying, sex, pregnancy and self delusion, set in Bristol in the early punk era. The award of the Carnegie Medal to a book in which a breastfeeding teenager injects herself with heroin perturbed some people, including the gentlefolk of the Campaign for Real Education, but Burgess was robust in his response to them. 'We all know who these people are,' he said in his acceptance speech. 'The fundamentalists. The ones who rise up from the front row demanding that things are done THEIR way... These people are, quite simply, bullies. They are educational vandals. They talk in terms of standards but their real aim is ignorance. If you came across a child behaving like this in a classroom, you'd tell them to shut up and respect other people's opinions.'

Burgess stands by this statement now. 'It really is an odd, eccentric, extremist view to think that a 13 or 14 year old reading **Junk** would be automatically corrupted; if you've got a kid that age you know damn well how difficult it is to keep them from worse material. Yet these fundamentalists get so much pandering to, given the weird adversarial media set up we've got. It's a bizarre and hypocritical world. **Junk** couldn't be made into a film because it would have to be an 18 so the people it was written for wouldn't be able to see it, so they made it into a TV programme instead.' Burgess defended **Junk** as educative at the time, but he's more cautious now about didacticism in fiction. 'A book can be informative, but it's up to the reader to take from it what they want, and kids of the age I write for can be trusted to do that and put it in context. I think if you try to teach through fiction you're in for a caning.'

Burgess's latest novel is **Bloodtide**, a retelling of the violent and passionate Nordic Volsunga saga transposed to an urban gangland. It has taken four years to write, and its treatment of themes including murder, vengeance, incest and genetic manipulation promises to reinforce his position at the cutting edge of fiction for

teenagers. He enjoys the scope for experimentation and for mischief that this position affords him, and he is not shy about courting controversy. He cheerfully admits to enjoying the challenge of writing about violence: one of the killings in **Tiger, Tiger** (written at the same time as **Junk**, and depicting the trail of death left by a magical, avenging tigress who escapes the massacre of her pack by Triad gangs in search of raw materials for traditional medicines) is modelled on the shower episode from **Psycho**. He also likes to tease the reader: a scene in **Junk** where an alcoholic teacher falls asleep at a staff meeting and wets himself was put in partly to amuse the high school kids – 'it's quite a gas for them to imagine a teacher doing that'.

This combination of playfulness and serious concern for human predicaments is evident in his current ambition to write for and about 15 to 25 year olds, focusing on their experiences of sex, particularly from a male point of view. 'It'll have to be laddish and rude, of course, but also subtle enough to appeal to female readers, who are so much more advanced than boys in things like emotions and relationships. It'll be interesting to see what I can get away with and what I can't.'

It will indeed. ■

The Books

An Angel for May, Heinemann Education 'New Windmill', 0 435 12444 7, £5.75 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 036981 3, £3.99 pbk

The Baby and Fly Pie, Andersen, 0 86264 461 5, £9.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 036982 1, £4.99 pbk

Bloodtide, Andersen, 0 86264 833 5, £14.99 hbk (October 1999)

Burning Issy, Andersen, 0 86264 381 3 hbk (o/s), Hodder Signature, 0 340 59024 6, £4.99 pbk

The Copper Treasure, A & C Black 'Flashbacks', 0 7136 4938 0, £7.99 hbk, 0 7136 4939 9, £4.99 pbk

The Cry of the Wolf, Andersen, 0 86264 308 2 hbk (o/s), Puffin, 0 14 037318 7, £4.99 pbk

The Earth Giant, Andersen, 0 86264 574 3, £9.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 037444 2, £4.99 pbk

Junk, Andersen, 0 86264 632 4, £12.99 hbk, Methuen Drama, 0 413 73840 X, £6.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 038019 1, £4.99 pbk

Kite, Andersen, 0 86264 737 1, £9.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 130041 8, £4.99 pbk

Loving April, Andersen, 0 86264 527 1, £9.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 036983 X, £4.99 pbk

Tiger, Tiger, Puffin, 0 14 038339 5, £4.99 pbk

Photograph of Melvin Burgess and his daughter by Guzelian Photography, Bradford

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

BRIEFING·BRIEFING·BfK Briefing·BRIEFING·BRIEFING

NEWS

★ **W H SMITH** has acquired Hodder Headline. It will be a separate business within the W H Smith Group and keep the name and those of its imprints.

★ **SPONSORED BY SAINSBURY'S** and administered by Book Trust, Bookstart, the project which aims to introduce new parents and their babies to books is experiencing enthusiastic take-up. Parents attending the seven- to nine-month check-up with their babies are given a free Bookstart pack which includes books and suggestions for further reading material as well as information on how to join the local library.

★ **OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS** Children's Books has launched its own paperback list for literary fiction. It will be publishing about 40 titles a year. This move to vertical publishing will deprive other paperback lists, notably Puffin, of a rich resource.

★ **TWO-CAN**, the children's non-fiction publisher, has sold its publishing division to Zenith Entertainment, a television and film production company. Some tie-in publishing may be expected and there are plans to develop titles for film and tv adaptation.

★ **SOUTHAMPTON UNIVERSITY's** centre for language in education has published a report which claims that glossy non-fiction books are allowing boys with reading difficulties to feign proficiency by talking about the pictures. Further details from 01703 592433.

PEOPLE

Congratulations to **Joan Aiken** who received the MBE in the Queen's Birthday List. **Michael Morpurgo** and **Clare Morpurgo** also received the MBE for their work as co-founders of Farms for City Children.

Congratulations to **John Dolan**, Head of Birmingham Central Library, on receiving an OBE. His commitment to Birmingham Central Library, and especially his support for the unique 'Centre for the Child', has helped to make it one of the biggest and busiest public libraries in Europe. Dolan also worked on secondment to the Library and Information Commission and was instrumental in producing the most important library document of recent times, 'The People's Network'. He did further work for the Commission in devising the guidelines for implementing the 'New Library' plan, published in 'Building the New Library Network'.

The innovative and energetic library marketing consultant **Miranda McKearney** has been appointed to the Public Lending Right Advisory Committee. McKearney's other activities include co-ordinating the Well Worth Reading Scheme and running LaunchPad's national library programme, Reaching Parents.

Gillie Russell has been appointed Fiction Publishing Director at Collins Children's Books.

Contributors: BfK team, Anne Marley. Submissions welcome.

Useful Organisations No.8:



Readathon®
Reading for life!

Swerford, Chipping Norton,
Oxon OX7 4BG

(tel and fax: 01608 730335)

Started in 1984, Readathon is a national sponsored read organised in schools. Part funded by the Arts Council, it is designed to stimulate recreational reading. All the money it raises goes to help very ill children via Sargent Cancer Care for Children and The Roald Dahl Foundation. Schools can do Readathon whenever they want to. Packs containing everything needed for a successful sponsored read, including teachers' instructions, sponsor forms, bookmarks, stickers etc. and plenty of display material, are sent out at the start of each term. Enrolment forms, carrying more details, are available from Readathon at the above address. Schools doing Readathon in the academic year 1999/2000 will have the opportunity to purchase Puffin and Penguin books at half price. Readathon regularly raises over a million pounds a year for charity and it really gets children reading too.

EVENTS



National Children's Book Week is from 4-10 October. Young Book Trust supplies practical resource materials to help schools and libraries with book events. For an order form and price list contact Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ (tel: 0181 516 2984).

Book It! is the children's book festival at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature from 8-24 October. Participating authors and illustrators include Anne Fine,

Jacqueline Wilson, Jane Hissey and Roger McGough. To receive a free brochure with details of events, call 01242 237377.



Northern Children's Book Festival is a regional event across the North East of England involving twelve local authorities. It will be held from 8-20 November and will run free events; 35 authors and illustrators will attend. Further information from Helen Thompson, Darlington Library, Crown Street, Darlington DL1 1ND (tel: 01325 349616).

OBITUARY

Peter Carter 1929-1999

Ron Heapy of Oxford University Press Children's Books writes:

Peter Carter, the distinguished children's novelist, died on 21st July. He was 69. He wrote many fine novels, many of which won prizes both in the UK and on the Continent.

Throughout his books (which include *The Black Lamp*, *Under Goliath* and *Children of the Book*) Peter showed the conflict and collision between wildly opposing societies, which often ended in tragedy. In his work there was a constant theme of social concern and justice for the common man. His heroes battled against life-threatening events and in the end, they were redeemed or damned. He was one of our great writers, and I mean writers. He drafted everything he wrote about six times, and never wrote a bad line. He collapsed in the middle of a sentence on his old typewriter, trying to finish his current novel, *Union Blue*. It remains unfinished.

When asked about what he would have done if he was not a writer, he said he would like to have been a jazz pianist in one of the big bands in New York in the thirties. That fits. Play it again, Peter, play it again.



Chosen by young readers from Years 8 and 9 from thirteen Wirral schools, the 1999 winner is Malorie Blackman's **Pig-heart Boy** (Corgi).

Poetry with punch!

Have you ever been
punched by a cabbage?

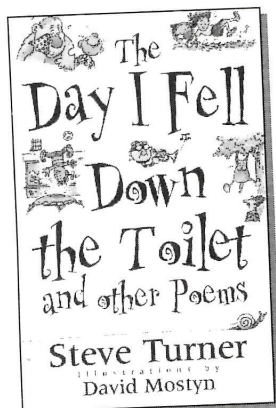
Or fallen head first
down the loo?

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fun with a poem?

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1998 best-seller



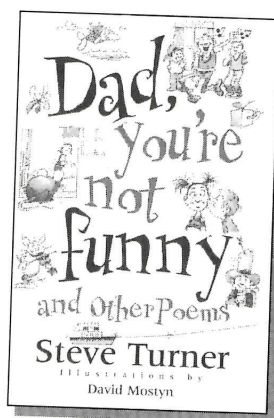
'Steve Turner's first collection of verse for children is full of quirky humour and strong rhymes that kids adore. They'll love this book.'

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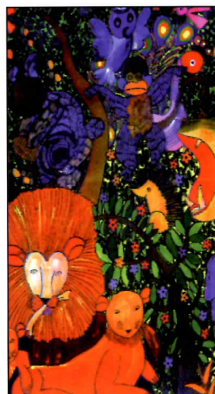


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Children's Books

www.lion-publishing.co.uk

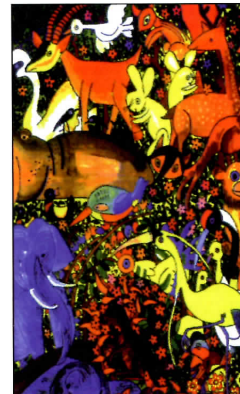
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COMPETITION



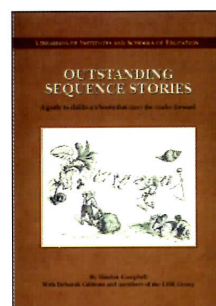
PACHAMAMA

Pachamama, an Inca word which means both Mother Earth and harmony, is now also the title of a handsome book created by children from eco-groups worldwide on the theme of the environment. Illustrated with artworks from children all over the world, the book will be published in October in the UK by Evans in collaboration with the U.N. and Peace Child International. To celebrate this event, a schools-wide competition is to be held which asks schools to come up with the best environmental initiative within their local community. The first prize is a trip for two children to Nairobi to visit the United Nations Environmental Programme and go on safari. For further information contact: Alex Evans on 0171 935 7160.

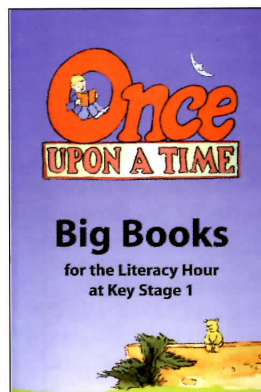


PUBLICATIONS

Outstanding Sequence Stories (0 901922 32 3) by Alasdair Campbell, Deborah Gibbons et al is an annotated guide to children's stories published in progressive sequence (eg the Earthsea quartet, the Moomin Family saga). £11.50 from LISE Publications Officer, c/o Education Library, University of Wales Swansea, Hendrefoelen, Gower Road, Swansea SA2 7NB.

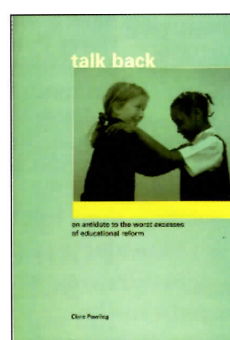
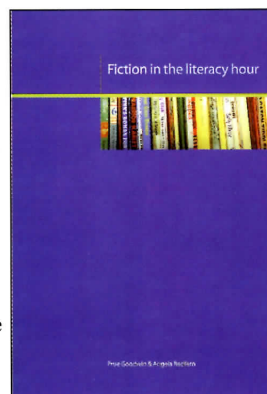


Once Upon a Time: Big Books for the Literacy Hour at Key Stage 1 (0 901354 88 0) by Helen Clark, Jo Brown and Pauline Scott is an annotated guide to suitable titles. £3.50 from Sales Department, Hertfordshire Libraries Arts and Information, New Barnfield, Travellers Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 8XG. Cheques payable to H.C.C.

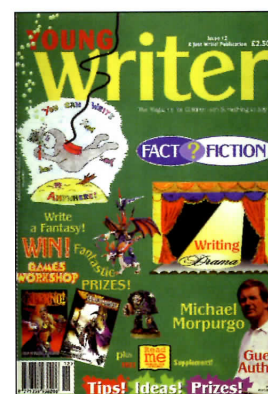


Fiction in the Literacy Hour (0 7049 1268 6) by Prue Goodwin and Angela Redfern offers suggestions for developing reading through fiction based on seven texts (picture books and young fiction). £5.95 from The Reading and Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY. Cheques payable to 'The University of Reading'.

Bookflood Project was a Birmingham Schools Library service initiative involving eight schools whose children were 'flooded' with books for recreational reading with many positive results. Copies of the report are available on receipt of an A4 sae (64p) to Schools Library Service, Ellen Street (off Pittsford Street), Hockley, Birmingham B18 6QZ.



Talk Back: an antidote to the worst excesses of educational reform (0 7049 1269 4) by Chris Powling is a spirited attack on the demands of the national curriculum and a plea for 'good talk' in the promotion of reading and writing. £4.75 from The Reading and Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY. Cheques payable to 'The University of Reading'.



Young Writer is a termly magazine which publishes children's writing. It also offers competitions, information about authors and tips about different kinds of writing. A subscription is £6.50 (inc. UK p & p) from Young Writer, Glebe House, Church Road, Weobley, Hereford HR4 8SD. Elsewhere in Europe add £1.50 for postage; outside Europe add £3.00.

School Stories from Bunter to Buckeridge (1 902743 01 9) edited by Nicholas Tucker is a compilation of conference papers given by, amongst others, Rosemary Auchmuty, Isabel Quigly, Geoff Fox and Mary Cadogan. £10 from Maureen Murdock, NCRCL, Digby Stuart College, Roehampton Institute, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PH.

NEW WEB SITES

Make Friends with Books by Catherine and Laurence Anholt
http://www.anholt.co.uk e-mail: info@anholt.co.uk

WormWorks by Ted Dewan and Helen Cooper
(online end of Sept.)
http://www.wormworks.com

Children's Literature UK

For academics, researchers, writers and publishers who wish to discuss issues of current interest.
www.mailbase.ac.uk

THE STERKARM HANDSHAKE

*"They're ill to waste,
the lonelier man..."*

SUSAN PRICE

Gillian Cross's latest book is *Tightrope*, Oxford University Press, 0 19 271804 5, £10.99 hbk, 0 19 271750 2, £5.99 pbk (see review in BfK 117).



Freddie Scadding

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.

Roy Blatchford is Principal of Walton High, Milton Keynes, and was founding UK Director of Reading Is Fundamental.

Urmi Chana works at the Reading & Language Information Centre, University of Reading.

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

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

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

Anita Ganeri is a freelance writer.

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

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

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

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

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.

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

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

Elizabeth Schlenker 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.

Nicholas Tucker is a lecturer in Psychology at Sussex University.

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Books About Children's Books

The Pictus Orbis Sambo: A Publishing History, Checklist and Price Guide for The Story of Little Black Sambo

★★★★

Phyllis Settecase Barton,
Pictus Orbis Press,
0 9660117 9 1, \$100
(from P.O.Box 787, Sun City,
California 92586, USA)

This year sees the centenary of Helen Bannerman's famous and later infamous picture book *The Story of Little Black Sambo*. Originally written and illustrated for her own children, it was an immediate success on publication, predating Beatrix Potter in its use of a small format with brightly coloured pictures accompanying a minimal but highly effective text. One of the first picture books with a black hero who was both resourceful and ultimately successful, it fell on hard times during the 1960s when the

main character's name and exaggerated Negroid features were accused of fostering racial prejudice. Schools and libraries ceased to stock a title that had become so controversial, and while it remained on sale its popularity virtually disappeared.

For those who would like to read more about the book, its remarkable author and a history of the arguments surrounding it, Barton has now produced a vast, authoritative study of what is still one of the most famous titles in children's

literature. Separate chapters deal with the book's ancestry in terms of other publications featuring black characters and how the story appears in the many different illustrated versions published over the last century. It makes for a fascinating study, but move soon if you want a copy: this edition is limited to only 1000 copies. NT

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

Beaten by a Balloon

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Margaret Mahy, ill. Jonathan Allen, Puffin, 0 14 056282 6, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 110, May 1998:

'Sam Appleby is a kindly soul whose parents encourage him to share their gentle passions for balloons, sunflowers and roses, but when a neighbour's son acquires both a sabre and a laser gun, Sam's baser instincts begin to surface. One of Mahy's wonderfully condensed miniature farces ... while at the same time conveying a humorous, pithy and non-didactic message about a very relevant moral issue.'

The Selfish Crocodile

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Faustin Charles and Michael Terry, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 4193 0, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 114, January 1999:

'This tale has a wonderful simplicity and a pace and rhythm characteristic of the oral tradition at its best. Terry's illustrations are an equal delight ... highly recommended for group story-sharing.'

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

A Baby for Grace

PICTURE BOOK ★★★

Ian Whybrow, ill. Christian Birmingham, Kingfisher, 0 7534 0376 5, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 115, March 1999:

'Grace's baby sibling's arrival seems to bring a lot of prohibitions - "No Grace, let me ..." while the baby's activities provoke an "Ah, yes!" response. Eventually Grace finds a way to get a "yes" too ... the illustrations reflect the text very literally.'

Moo Baa Baa Quack

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Francesca Simon, ill. Emily Bolam, Dolphin, 1 85881 697 1, £6.99

Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

'This collection of seven stories set in and around Potter's Barn has all the makings of a classic ... an inspired amalgam of words and pictures.'

Just Dog

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Lisa Flather, Orchard, 1 84121 099 4, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 113, November 1998:

'This is first and foremost a book that elicits marvellous out-loud laughter from young readers. The double-page illustrations which focus on Just Dog and his friend Midnight the cat are as forceful and bold as can be found in

many a Big Book and lend themselves strongly to group reading.'

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Ruby Red: Tales from the Weedwater

FICTION ★★★

Henrietta Branford, ill. John Lupton, Collins, 0 00 675255 1, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 111, July 1998:

'A collection of five fairy tales with a slightly old fashioned feel to them ... Branford succeeds in creating a miniature world and society.'

Fruit and Nutcase

FICTION ★★★★★

Jean Ure, ill. Mick Brownfield, Collins, 0 00 675149 0, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 115, March 1999:

'Mandy Small is a ten year old with learning difficulties who tells her life story into a tape recorder. It is both funny and sad ... with its touching storyline, empathetic central characters and occasional line drawings, this is an enjoyable read.'

The Drop in my Drink

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Meredith Hooper, ill. Chris Coady, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1182 5, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

'An attempt to convey the significance of water to life on earth

through a text which strives for excitement in its use of language and where meaning comes as much from the movement and music of the words as from their sense. At times it is impressive ...'

10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Hex

FICTION ★★★★★

Rhiannon Lassiter, Macmillan, 0 330 35467 1, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

'A pacey, sci-fi adventure thriller, both engrossingly written and confidently plotted. It is at the same time a metaphor for the way societies deal with those who are different.'

12+ SECONDARY

Dark Shadows

FICTION ★★★★★

Joan Lingard, Puffin, 0 14 038713 7, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 114, January 1999:

'This novel focuses on a representative from each side of the Ulster "troubles" and, through a series of events, takes them closer to mutual understanding. Lingard brings her usual assured and sympathetic touch to the presentation of her heroines' experiences.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Elmer's Day

English/Bengali, trans. Kanai Datta, 1 84059 062 9

Elmer's Friends

English/Urdu, trans. Gulshan Iqbal, 1 84059 074 2

Elmer's Weather

English/Gujarati, trans. Pratima Dave, 1 84059 078 5

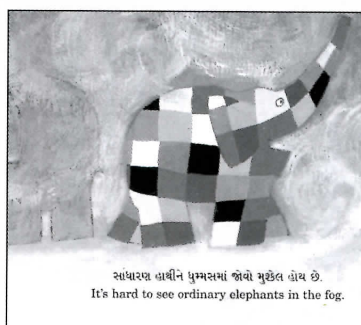
Elmer's Colours

English/Chinese, trans. Li Yen French, 1 84059 056 4

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

David McKee, Milet, 16pp, £3.99 each board

Dual language format for this popular series of board books has been achieved by printing the other language texts above the original English copy. Simpler for publishers and more economically viable, maybe, but compromises often have



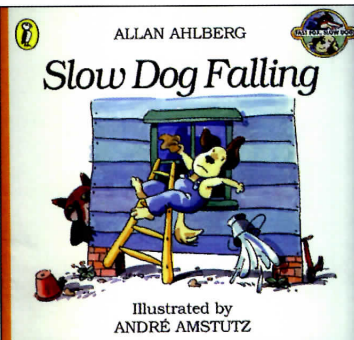
to be made when placing the additional language text in the space available on each illustrated page. Fortunately, these particular titles about Elmer, the colourful elephant, have come out very well. They are a welcome addition to early years resources, for monolingual and bilingual teachers alike, as they provide opportunities for lots of discussion in and about a variety of languages. UC

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Eric Carle, Arabic/English, trans. Sonia El-Nimr, Mantra, 28pp, 1 85269 124 7, £5.99 pbk novelty

This dual-language edition of this popular picture book (also available in Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Somali, Urdu and Vietnamese with English) has an Arabic translation printed above the English copy. On the whole this works well, though there is a little inconsistency in decisions about spacing between the two languages – there are a couple of pages where the Arabic text looks rather squeezed in and others where it is swimming above the English text (at varying heights). UC



Slow Dog Falling

0 14 056398 9

Chicken, Chips and Peas

0 14 056397 0

The Hen House

0 14 056399 7

★★★★★

Allan Ahlberg, ill. André Amstutz, Puffin 'Fast Fox, Slow Dog', 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

The Ahlberg/Amstutz partnership has once again produced an idea for a series of books with all the best story elements to delight young readers and adults alike. These three titles are already proving firm favourites. The skilfully penned main characters appear in all three books, and the children quickly sum them up, gleefully entering into each scenario. There is economy in the magical rhythm and lilt of Ahlberg's text, enabling readers to predict both the outcomes and the wording, as they become familiar with the characters. Fast Fox is always hungry, Slow Dog is always sleepy, Mother Hen is always on the phone, and her chickens are always in trouble! The reader can predict what will happen as sleepy Slow Dog stumbles into each crisis situation for every time it is he who, unwittingly, saves the day. The endings of each book are very satisfying, and each also concludes with a tempting taster from another in the series.

Amstutz's brilliant illustrations tell many developmental parts of the stories with visual clues which enable early development of predicting skills. The artwork is bold, with a clear colour palette, and on every page the match between pictures and text is perfect. The books are therefore brilliant for reading aloud, prior to tempting very early readers to have a go themselves. GB

Maisy's Mix-and-Match Mousewear

★★★★

Lucy Cousins, Walker, 14pp, 0 7445 6917 6, £3.99 hbk novelty

This is a durable and well-constructed flap book in stiff covers, its spiral binding incorporated in the spine. Each page is divided into three to make a head/body/legs version of Maisy. Six sets of outfits make 216 different combinations possible.

Though popular and fun, flipping pages to create new outfits, I felt there is neither enough variety in the types of clothing depicted – ballerina top/flowery shirt/pirate top/baseball shirt/swimming costume are all fairly interchangeable anyway – nor are the outfits well enough differentiated to make many really funny or incongruous combinations. A themed collection – seasonal clothing or dressing-up costumes – might have engendered more possibilities. Nevertheless this will doubtless be enjoyed by Maisy fans. AG

Daisy Says Cool!

★★★

Jane Simmons, Little Orchard, 10pp, 1 86039 904 5, £3.50 board

Page-filling luminous greens and blues illustrate the river in this large format board book where Daisy, a 'little duck with big feet', lives. Exploring on her own she meets various creatures for the first time (or so I surmise):

"Zub! Zub!" buzzed the bee.

"Munch! Munch!" chomped the caterpillar.

Daisy said "Cool!"

Daisy's coos express variously amazement, apprehension and relief, but this is only clear after careful reading and re-reading of text and pictures, eluding all but the most persistent readers. The very word 'cool' is unfamiliar nowadays – none of my testers, young or old, understood why Daisy used it so much. Added to which, it is not an easy word to read expressively, even if one wants to. Perhaps the other Daisy books are more successful – this, while visually arresting in its exuberance and colour, seems to have little point. AG

Splash!

★★★★

Flora McDonnell, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 5586 8, £10.99 hbk

The opening endpapers present a panoramic waterside view of tiger, rhino and mother and baby elephant looking dejected and hot. The simple text confirms that they are 'hot, hot, hot', but it is baby elephant who sets an example by heading to the water. In they all go with accompanying whooshes, splashes, squirts and splashes which are sure to encourage plenty of audience participation. They eventually emerge looking cooler and fresher in the evening light on the back endpapers. The use of endpapers to advance the story is a nice touch in this generously-sized picture book for the very young. The animals and attendant birds are large, filling and at times overflowing the pages, and are slightly stylized giving them a friendly but not

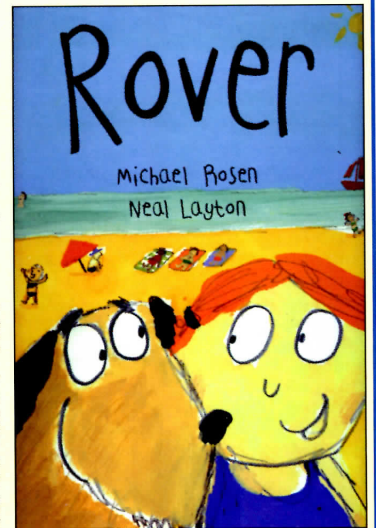
Editor's Choice

Rover

★★★★★

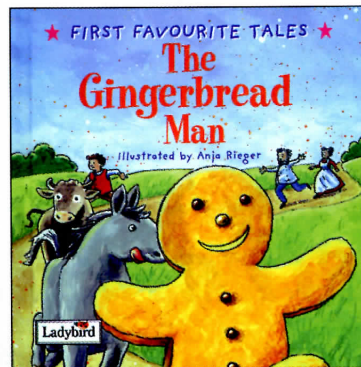
Michael Rosen, ill. Neal Layton, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 4020 9, £9.99 hbk

Told in the first person, this witty picture book is a canine account of life with a pet human. 'Rover' as her owner calls her 'has very weak claws. Her coat only covers her head.' When they go to the park 'she keeps losing the ball but I always bring it back for her.' Having a pet human is a responsibility and when Rover wanders off down the beach leaving her parents distraught, it is her owner who has to fetch her. Layton's wonderfully free scribbled pencil and bright wash illustrations are full of humorous, acutely observed touches that interact well with Rosen's deadpan text. A background colour



defines the contours of each single or double page spread building momentum and moving the story pacy on. Children will love this clever, jokey book. RS

unnatural appearance. McDonnell uses her sweeping brush strokes to convey a feeling of movement, in particular where the animals are cavorting in the water. VC



The Gingerbread Man

Retold by Alan MacDonald, ill. Anja Rieger, 0 7214 9731 4

The Three Billy Goats Gruff

Retold by Irene Yates, ill. Sam Childs, 0 7214 9736 5

The Sly Fox and the Little Red Hen

Retold by Mandy Ross, ill. Marc Chalvin, 0 7214 9741 1

The Elves and the Shoemaker

Retold by Lorna Read, ill. Tania Hurt-Newton, 0 7214 9737 3

The Enormous Turnip

Retold by Irene Yates, ill. Jan Lewis, 0 7214 9738 1

The Little Red Hen

Retold by Ronne Randall, ill. Liz Pichon, 0 7214 9739 X

★★★★★

Ladybird 'First Favourite Tales', 32pp, £2.99 each hbk

This new series of almost square hardback books is bright and



colourful, with text and illustrations working together on every page. The various illustrators tell the tales well, showing action and emotions and disasters yet to come, and the speech bubbles help move the stories along, offering a change of pace. All of these books use ellipses at the end of some pages to encourage a pause and a prediction, and the texts are rhythmic, with opportunities for building confidence and reading independence. Lines of text on each page vary from one to five, three lines only being a good average. The stories read aloud well, and have original additions which hold the reader's or listener's attention. 'Come back here, little ginger feet/face/head/paws' for example, as well as all the familiar expected lines. Whilst the language used may not be poetic, the vocabulary choices tend to be lively and varied.

Whilst Ladybird suggest the series is ideal for reading aloud and sharing with two to four year olds, several of these stories would be suitable for guided reading in the Literacy Hour, and at £2.99 each have to represent value for money.

There are also a further six titles available: Chicken Licken, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding Hood, The Magic Porridge Pot, and The Three Little Pigs. GB

Please, Princess Primrose!

★★★

Vivian French, ill. Chris Fisher, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 6941 9, £4.99 pbk

Princess Primrose is spoilt something rotten by the King, Queen and all the household. Her dismissive attitude to birthday gifts from her doting parents and her constant demands are downright rude. It takes cook's boy and a game of hide-and-seek to make princess and parents change their ways. Primrose's character and indeed, the sycophantic attitude of her parents are eloquently painted providing stage directions as to how to read the story (the coaxing tones and honeyed words used on the princess reminded me of those used by the Queen's courtiers in *Blackadder*) and the seductive layout makes the longish text undaunting. JB

Frankie and Albertine

★★★

Christine Davenier, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 6718 1, £9.99 hbk

When Frankie the pig falls in love with Albertine the hen, he is so overwhelmed that he has to consult the other animals in order to find out how to impress his beloved. In following their advice, Frankie sings like a rooster, dances like a rabbit, dives like a duck and performs feats of strength like a bull, but all to no avail. It is only when despair tempts him into behaving like a pig that he

begins to make an impact.

This is a strong and simple love story, with a lightly imposed lesson about being true to yourself, told in 15 boldly painted pages and twice as many clearly printed sentences. Davenier's farmyard animals are humorously depicted, and the turbid mud-roil which caps the story is a gay rhapsody in brown. This is a good choice for reading aloud, and young children might be encouraged to think about how Frankie and Albertine's romance might progress beyond the pages of the book. GH

You're Somebody Special, Walliwigs!

★★★★

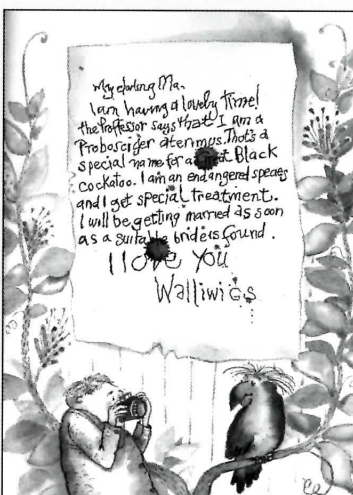
Joan Rankin, Bodley Head, 32pp, 0 370 32318 1, £9.99 hbk

The Little Cat and the Greedy Old Woman

★★★

Joan Rankin, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 935951 0, £4.99 pbk

If you enjoyed Rankin's *Wow! It's Great Being a Duck* (and if you don't know it, do find it, it is an amazing read-aloud) then *You're Somebody Special, Walliwigs!* will also find a place in your heart. The proud mother hen of the cover illustration at last has a chick and she loves it dearly. Walliwigs is in fact a great black cockatoo, but nevertheless, Mum thinks he is gorgeous. He ends up being carried off to the Institute of Ornithology by Professor Beak, where he is told he is an endangered species. From here he writes an



affectionate letter home to Mother Hen, who is heartbroken, inconsolable.

In *The Little Cat and the Greedy Old Woman*, the old woman works hard all day preparing herself a very special meal but she ignores the little cat with the tiny voice who meows for food. When the cat can bear it no longer and helps himself to a teeny tiny taste, he is unceremoniously shooed out into the rain. But suddenly he grows bigger and bigger until ... What happens next is quite strong stuff, and children may love it more than adults, feeling the old woman has her just deserts. This story has the feel of a cautionary tale, and could provide lots of interesting discussions.

Rankin's pictures have an individual

style, with wet paper technique and a soft colour range (the expressions on the hens' faces are hysterical). She uses the page inventively and her different-sized fonts and speech bubbles add an extra layer to her stories. GB

The Perfect Pet

★★★

Peta Coplans, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 873 4, £9.99 hbk

Just the perfect story for any family thinking of acquiring a pet. Hen wants a pet, and pig behind the shop counter suggests all sorts of quiet, cuddly ones, but the foolish hen rejects them and chooses a fox. Fox, of course soon gets up to tricks, and has hen preparing the pastry for chicken pie, but hen manages to



From strength to strength

Boosted by several new initiatives, the children's reading event for charity Readathon raised over £1.1 million for The Roald Dahl Foundation and Sargent Cancer Care for Children during 1998/9. "It's our best result by a mile," said Brough Girling, Readathon Director. "We've certainly benefitted from many things including a vastly improved package provided to schools who took part, as well as initiatives like the National Year of Reading."

Since it began in 1984, Readathon has raised over £11.5 million, and simultaneously raised the profile of literacy in schools. Over 4000 schools took part in Readathon during the last academic year, and

We feel that the children have benefitted two-fold by taking part in this, as they have certainly read more as well as learned to give, and think about those less well-off than themselves.
Ysgol David Hughes,
Anglesey

feedback from them has been extremely positive, especially from those who used it to embellish things like book weeks, book clubs and author events.

The new passport-style sponsor cards proved to be a big hit, and Readathon's market

research shows that 87% of schools were delighted with the updated Teacher's Information Wallet, which is packed with useful ideas on running a successful Readathon event.

We ran a 24 hour sponsored read (yes! even through the night) in the school hall and managed to raise £453
Streftord High,
Manchester

1998/9

£1,150,000

1997/8

£863,000

25%
UP

TO ENROL

Contact: READATHON,
Swerford, Chipping Norton,
Oxfordshire OX7 4BG
e-mail: reading@readathon.org
web: www.readathon.org



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Reading for life!



return fox to the shop and demands another animal in exchange. Her choice this time is even more inappropriate, but it is a huge visual joke which children just love. This wonderfully silly tale is told so well by the author/illustrator, and the colourful pictures are lively and amusing. GB

Zelda and Ivy and the Boy Next Door

★★★

Laura McGee Kvasnosky, Walker, 48pp, 0 7445 5657 0, £9.99 hbk

This beautiful picture book contains three separate stories about the two fox sisters, Zelda and Ivy, and their friend Eugene. The children play wonderful games ('I'm a famous palaeontologist') through which we are aware of the family dynamics between big and little sister. The timing is perfect throughout, and there is always a feeling of fun. The pictures are like photographic stills, capturing the foxes in full swing, and they are packed with details which support and add to the story. A very enjoyable read. GB

Jody's Beans

★★★★

Malachy Doyle, ill. Judith Allibone, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 6212 0, £9.99 hbk

The end-pages announce that the author's favourite sight in the garden is runner beans in full flower, and at one level the book is a simple narrative around springtime planting and autumn harvest of Jody's runner beans. But it is much more about Jody's warm relationship with her Granddad, his imparting of knowledge, and their gentle learning together through the cycle of the seasons. Jody's pregnant mother is a background figure, a presence that gently reminds the young reader that this is, at heart, a tale about the passing of time and generations.

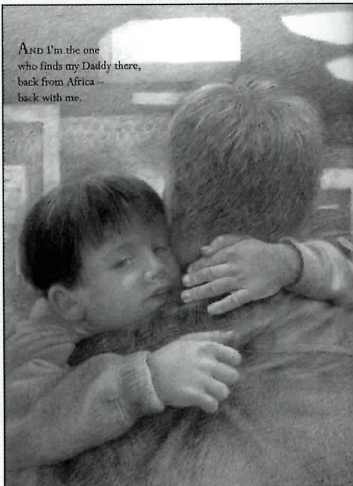
The subtle combination of fiction and non-fiction text is beautifully enhanced by Allibone's illustrations. She is a newcomer to children's books, but her keen sense of colour

and deft, understated drawing of people and places alike suggest she is a name to be watched for in future years. A book for infant classes to share, and share again. RB

Daddy, Will You Miss Me?

★★★★★

Wendy McCormick, ill. Jennifer Eachus, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 017 X, £9.99 hbk



It is rare to come across a picture book featuring a strong boy/father emotional story-line. 'My Daddy's going to work, far away in Africa - without me' is an opening that at once draws in the infant reader and adult alike. Both father and son mark their time apart in different ways. Each day the son puts a big red X on the calendar in the kitchen; the father whispers his son's name to the wind so that it swirls home across continents. While Dad encounters heat, dust and giant African birds and lions, the son looks out on snow and drinks hot chocolate. There is a gentle pace and simplicity to the narrative which conveys their sense of separation with power and pathos, so that their reuniting at the airport on the final page brought tears to the four-year-old with whom I read.

Eachus' soft-focus illustrations offer a stunning backdrop to the text: from

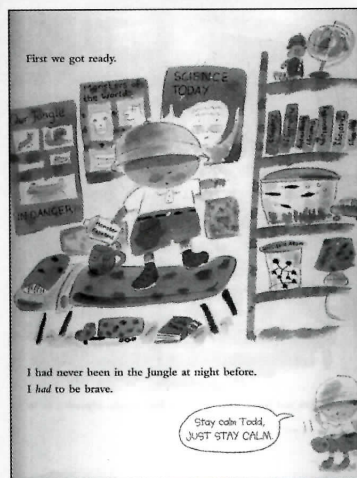
her pictures of the boy alone with his thoughts of distant Africa to the final page of father and son embracing. This is a book that handsomely embodies 'the cuddle factor' of fine picture books and one which every dad and lad in the land should share! RB

Jungle Kids

★★★★★

John Wallace, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198332 6, £10.99 hbk

An Emergency arises when the Jungle Kids gang find that their chocolate rations have been eaten by a monster. Plans are made to lure the interloper to his doom, and after many terrifying moments requiring great courage on the part of the Kids the chocolate thief is captured. Imaginative readers who have their own equivalent of the gang's back garden Jungle Hut will rejoice in the antics of Todd (the narrator), Jamie (the gang's smallest member) and Georgina (a small and bossy black girl).



Delightfully tongue-in-cheek, Wallace's text and illustrations complement each other perfectly. He has both a verbal and painterly lightness of touch. The watercolour illustrations flow over the pages, sometimes in full or double page spreads, sometimes in a series of vignettes interspersed with text.

Asides from the characters, drawn in pencil, add another dimension to this humorous and clever picture book. VC

Cinderella

★★★★

Charles Perrault, trans. Anthea Bell, ill. Loek Koopmans, North-South, 32pp, 0 7358 1051 6, £9.99 hbk

The story of Cinderella is one of the best known of all fairy tales. Telling as it does of the rise from rags to riches of a beautiful young girl, it offers hope to the lowly and proposes that beauty and purity will prevail over wickedness. Retellings of such stories often offer a contemporary spin on the original or else they are full of clichés, both verbal and visual. This presentation of Cinderella lies within the traditional boundaries, while employing many of the techniques of the modern picture book to good effect. The settings and costumes have an eighteenth-century air, but are conveyed with a lightness which renders them timeless, as is a true fairy story. The retelling is in straightforward language and will read aloud well. VC

Where Are You Hiding, Little Lamb?

★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Jonathan Langley, Collins, 24pp, 0 00 198318 0, £10.99 hbk

Opening this lift-the-flap book one begins to wonder just how many recyclings of 'Mary had a little lamb' the children's book industry can sustain. At nearly £11 for yet another tour through Old Mother Hubbard, Goosey Goosey Gander and Hickory Dickory Mouse I seriously begin to question why this text has been published. Yes it has some witty and colourful double-spreads and a handful of flaps to lift that are engaging once. Beyond that, the design is tired and offers no new vista on these time-honoured characters. The group of five-year-olds with whom I shared the text were not impressed. RB

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Out for the Count

★★★★

Kathryn Cave, ill. Chris Riddell, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 0665 1, £5.99 pbk

A rhyming, rollicking adventure which takes a small sleepless child from the traditional counting of sheep (of which there are 7) through a deep, desperate and dark wood, where 12 wolves prowl, to a ship armed for war with 45 fearsome pirates aboard. On goes Tom, barefoot and pyjama-clad, to the South Pole, where the reader can count 54 pecking penguins. Bears, bats, ghosts, tigers and shadows complete the adventure with a count of 100, before sleep finally overtakes the child. The Rackhamesque illustrations have great appeal.

The reader can count the animals drawn on each double spread, and check them rather more easily in the boxed text. Here the animals are

silhouetted in black, grouped mathematically in 10s, plus the odd units. The end papers reinforce counting, displaying a board game where the hazards are represented by the 7 sheep, 12 wolves, 45 pirates etc. This picture book will be useful in raising number awareness in picture books in this coming year when all primary schools introduce the numeracy strategy. Most useful one-to-one, when the child can explore the silhouetted sets of 10, and practise counting large numbers. GB

Magical Mazes

★★★★

Juliet and Charles Snape, Julia MacRae, 32pp, 1 85681 554 4, £4.99 pbk

One of a number of similar titles by the same pair, this delightful book will keep young children amused for hours, as they explore the fascinating world of gnomes, mermaids, fairies

and genies. Each double spread, some given extra width with half page flaps, sets children, and their parents, the task of picking a route through paths, over bridges, up ladders, down steps, across walkways and even along waterways. The mission may be to find a way to the fairy dance avoiding all the Bogey spirits, to retrieve a pair of shoes made by a leprechaun or to collect a beaker before taking part in an evening feast for trolls. The artwork, though somewhat old-fashioned, is brightly painted and instantly attractive to youngsters from pre-school age upwards. Solutions are printed at the back, together with an explanation of the various magical creatures contained in the mazes. AK

Poems about Space

POETRY

★★

0 7502 2436 3

Poems about School

POETRY

★★★★

0 7502 2435 5

Compiled by Brian Moses, ill. Kelly Waldek, Wayland, 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

Poems about Space features rockets and spaceships, the moon, stars and solar system and aliens in a largely contemporary selection of poems. With space as the theme, I searched in vain for just one poem which touched upon the awesome nature of the subject but the majority of those included are very lightweight. Decoratively illustrated, this book will probably give passing pleasure to young readers but there is nothing truly memorable or mind stretching.

Poems about School - with glimpses

of the Caribbean, Africa and India – is a stronger collection. The emphasis is on the lighter side of school life: action rather than reflection with lively chantable rhymes by Ann Bonner and Wes Magee as well as more introspective poems about loneliness by Helen Dunmore and Pauline Stewart. JB

The Changeling

★★★★★

Malachy Doyle, ill. Jac Jones, Pont, 32pp, 1 85902 691 5, £3.95 pbk



Twm and Gwyneth's twins are beautiful boys, and one evening when Gwyneth must go to a neighbour for milk, the fairies come and steal Ifan, the fair one, and leave a changeling in his place. In this beautifully written Welsh fairy story, love conquers all, and Ifan and the changeling are returned to their rightful places. There is magic in both text and illustration, where the comforting ordinariness of family life is surrounded by the mysterious grey fairy world, replete with grotesque goblins, elves and sprites. Quality leaps from every page. An outstanding picture book. ES

Weslandia

★★★★★

Paul Fleischman, ill. Kevin Hawkes, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 4099 2, £9.99 hbk



Despaired of by his parents and tormented by peers, Wesley, flouter of convention, anticipates the summer break. Before long, his rich imaginative life enables him to sow the seeds of, and cultivate, an alternative civilization in his own back garden. As he invents his own systems and rules, he transcends the rejection of his tormentors and to such an extent that they eventually become his disciples. The rich imaginative life in the hero's head is gloriously translated into a verdant back garden world teeming with life and rich in colour. A superb story with countless layers of meaning for anyone from say, top infants, and a 'must read' for everyone like myself,

concerned to preserve, at all costs, the crucial role of the imagination in education. It should be required reading for all those outsiders (politicians etc.) who constantly try to manipulate us insiders (teachers). Brilliant! JB

Zebra Talk

20pp, 0 85953 395 6

Jaguar Talk

24pp, 0 85953 396 4

Tiger Talk

20pp, 0 85953 397 2

★★★★★

Vanesha Vargo, Child's Play International, £3.99 each pbk novelty (also available as a set of three, 0 85953 532 0, £7.99)

A trio of short but fascinating picture books printed on thin card with die-cut pages which depict the perils faced by three vanishing species in the form of conversations between young and old zebras/jaguars/tigers. These conversations provide an account of the factors which have led to near extinction in language which is concise and informative but very child friendly in its naturalness and clarity.

The books are ingeniously designed, the play of shape and colour on the pages providing a palpable semblance of the plights faced by the animals: the jaguars flee through an encroaching forest fire; the tiger glares balefully from the centre pages; the zebra pelt occupying a print-free double spread is peppered with shot. In all of the books the page size dwindles significantly as the heart of the account of decline is approached. The tiger book ends on an optimistic note, but there are gloomier prognoses for the zebra and jaguar. Each book concludes with an admirably crisp information page, and a reminder to the reader of the responsibility we all have for safeguarding the diversity of life on earth. These books are very highly recommended for all readers. The vivid subject matter combined with interesting text structure, brevity and natural language might make them a particularly good choice for beginner readers or children reluctant to read more conventional books. GH

A Thief in the Garden

★★★

Elizabeth Arnold, ill. Allie Busby, Mammoth, 64pp, 0 7497 3598 8, £3.99 pbk

Josh, Connor and their mum go to live with their grandad because he needs looking after. Grandad is getting on and since his wife Florrie died he has started to do some strange things. He pours tea over his jacket potatoes, grills his slippers and has been out in the street in the nude. Josh and Connor are not sure what they think about moving but decide to make the best of it, and they feel much better after exploring the house's extremely overgrown garden. Shortly after they move in, the boys find a stray orange cat in the garden and went to keep it. They call the cat Leo, and the boys and Grandad love him, but, as the vet tells them, he is a very old cat.

This gentle story introduces the concepts of change, old age and death. Grandad is poignantly used as a way of looking at the ageing process

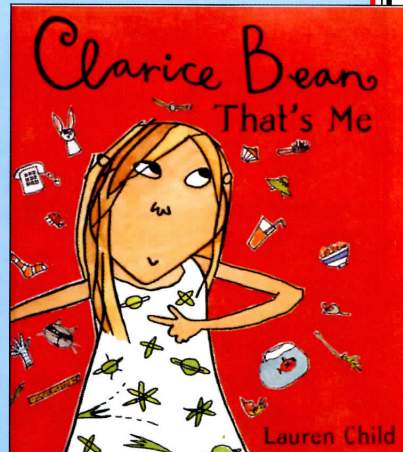
NEW Talent

Clarice Bean That's Me

★★★★★

Lauren Child, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 029 3, £10.99 hbk

Getting enough attention and at the same time enough space for yourself are common preoccupations for children in big families. The third child out of four, 7-ish Clarice Bean, shares a bedroom with her younger brother ('I have drawn a line down the middle. If he puts one toe over my side he is sorry'). Child's spot-on portrait of contemporary family life (we meet Clarice's glamorous older sister, Marcie, who lounges gracefully, reading about boys and brother Kurt who 'says he wants to be left alone' etc) has an anthropological quality reminiscent of Posy Simmonds' Weber family in the 70s. Her scratchy, ink drawn illustrations with collage and a variety of typefaces are exuberantly inventive on the page and yet have a satisfying



coherence. Unusually, the designer (Anna-Louise Billson) is credited on the title page. Only Child's depiction of dad disappoints – with his unlikely kipper tie he looks like a 60s throwback. But this is a quibble about an otherwise inventive, funny book in which Clarice does manage, finally, to get her 'piece of peace and quiet'. RS

and the problems associated with senile dementia. An understanding about death is developed through family discussions about the boys' dead grandmother, Florrie, and through the cat, Leo, dying of old age. And the story deftly uses these themes to answer difficult questions about what happens when a person or a pet gets old and dies. AR

I Know How My Cells Make Me Grow

0 7445 5575 2

I Know Why I Brush My Teeth

0 7445 6218 X

NON-FICTION

★★★

Kate Rowan, ill. Katharine McEwen, Walker 'Sam's Science', 32pp, £6.99 each hbk

Sam and his mum (an androgynous super-parent who imparts knowledge while folding laundry and tidying up – before breakfast) discuss the topics of cells and teeth in these cheerful picture books.

There is plenty of clearly-expressed information, presented as a conversation with both Sam and Mum able to air their knowledge, and some nice analogies to help 5s and 6s with the concepts. Each book contains a few labelled diagrams (such as a cross section of a tooth). The illustrations, with some fun features in a style reminiscent of Oxford Reading Tree, mostly set the scene around chunks of text; visual analogies are provided (e.g. cells being like building blocks).

The end result is a bit earnest for my liking, and dinosaurs, sharks and jokes, intended to appeal to the reluctant young scientist, seem patronising, as is Mum of Sam's remarks at times. A strange slip is the use of Sam's term 'floor stuff' instead of 'fluoride': distracting rather than funny, and unnecessary. AG

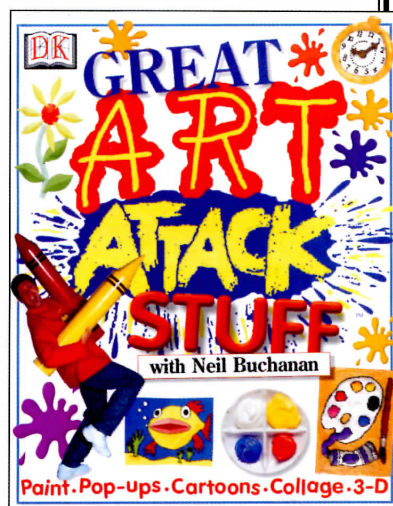
What Do We Think About Adoption?

NON-FICTION

★★★

Jillian Powell, Wayland, 32pp, 0 7502 2492 4, £9.99 hbk

Consciously multi-racial in approach, this book with large print and quality photographs will be useful in classrooms and as a discussion tool with adopted children. Fostering as well as adoption is explained, and while the information is basic, it is also reassuring. Perhaps it could have been made clear that not all birth parents want to meet their birth children – and vice versa. Good notes for parents and teachers, a list of information sources and an index make the book accessible. ES



Great Art Attack Stuff

NON-FICTION

★★★★★

with Neil Buchanan, Dorling Kindersley, 64pp, 0 7513 5809 6, £9.99 hbk

A follow up to the excellent Art Attack, which ties in with the children's ITV programme of the same name, this second title once

again brings a host of art and craft ideas, created by bubbly, Liverpoolian presenter, Neil Buchanan. Each creation whether a Grim Gargoyle doorknocker, a Wacky Watch calendar, or fantasy futuristic flyer, can be made from household junk. On nearly thirty spreads, the clear step by step instructions, supported with typical Dorling Kindersley close-up photos, should inspire and enable children to construct some spectacular models, decorations and pictures. Using newspaper, paint, PVA glue and other bits and pieces Buchanan's aim is to take children through the 'I can't do

that' barrier. My favourite is the ingenious video city - a New York style cityscape in which dozens of videos can be stored. This is a great book to dip into either at home or school, as its author attempts to unlock the creative genius in anyone and everyone. Handy hints throughout the book and at the back give even more support to budding artists. **AK**

Tell Me How Much It Weighs

0 7500 2745 2

Tell Me How Far It Is

0 7500 2747 9

NON-FICTION

★★★

Shirley Willis, Macdonald Young Books 'Buddies', 32pp, £8.50 each hbk

These robust little science books for key stage 1 are structured round the kind of questions children ask and cover basic concepts about weight and distance in an interesting way. They are likely to be a helpful addition to science resources and teachers will welcome the pages with experiments to try and

things to make and do. The books also support children's developing literacy as they include some of the conventions of information texts - contents pages, indexes, glossaries and subheadings. The experiments are enjoyable and also provide an introduction to procedural writing. The buddies, six young friends, are a device to introduce the ideas and activities but, rather oddly, their names are not used except on the back cover. There are a lot of key stage 1 science books on topics like weight and distance but these two compete well with their up to date format and lively text. **MM**

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

The Highwayman

Alfred Noyes, 32pp, 0 19 272370 7

The Lady of Shalott

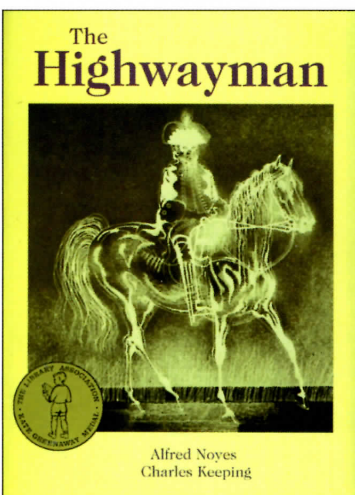
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 40pp, 0 19 272371 5

Beowulf

Kevin Crossley-Holland, 48pp, 0 19 272369 3

★★★★★

Ill. Charles Keeping, Oxford, £4.99 each pbk



Keeping's illustrations are amongst the most powerful images ever to have appeared in children's literature. His intricate line drawings, often inspired by the flow of woodgrain and water, fabric and hair, could depict scenes of both poignant delicacy and shocking violence. This trio of reprints presents a broad spectrum of his work, and gives teachers and parents an opportunity to introduce readers to the achievements of this much missed artist, while at the same time exploring three fascinating stories.

Noyes' poem about the self sacrifice of an inn keeper's daughter who warns her lover of an ambush by shooting herself is a well known classic, but Keeping's fidelity to the passionate undercurrents of the story is revelatory: his depiction of 'sweet black waves in the moonlight' as the victim unbraid her hair for her lover is echoed a few stanzas later in a dreadfully bloody image of her corpse at the climax of the story.

The sedate incantations of Tennyson's narrative about another doomed female are matched by the artist's idyllic pastorals of life on the

road to Camelot, but as the imprisoned Lady of Shalott spies on young lovers, and the dashing Sir Lancelot appears in her magic mirror, Keeping expresses the suppressed eroticism of the poem ever more graphically.

Kevin Crossley-Holland's prose translation of *Beowulf* is a stirring read in its own right, its descriptive passages incorporating the alliterations and kennings with which the Anglo-Saxon bards embroidered their stories. This tale of the Geat hero's struggle against the man eating Grendel and the monster's vengeful mother would seem to offer Keeping an ideal opportunity to open wide the blood sluices, but, amongst the shrieking faces and dismembered carcasses, there is a great deal of subtlety in his images of bleak northern wildernesses: here he abandons the fine line technique, and expresses the gloom of mist and rain drenched stone in nebulous washes of black and grey.

Keeping's drawings dominate these books, but these drawings are inspired by a vivid appreciation of the essence of the three stories. They will fascinate children, but they will also draw them into the spell cast by the words on the page. Be warned that this is strong stuff, but at less than a fiver a book, you would be cheating yourself by not partaking. **GH**

Oliver Twist

★★★★★

Charles Dickens, adapt. Naia Bray-Moffatt, ill. Ian Andrew, Dorling Kindersley 'Eyewitness Classic', 64pp, 0 7513 7074 6, £9.99 hbk

'Eyewitness Classics' is a series that attempts to make classics more accessible to older juniors. This particular title vividly retells the famous Dickens tale alongside bite size snippets of information on a range of matters related to the book, its characters and Victorian life in general, firmly placing the story in context. The actual story, which remains remarkably faithful to the original masterpiece, is illustrated in atmospheric soft focused pencil crayon. Portraits of the characters are introduced on the contents page. In margins to the left and right of each spread are miniature photographs or etchings of nineteenth-century England or of artefacts such as handcuffs, snuff boxes, wheelchairs and pistols. This series will be very popular in schools, which can select from over ten titles, all produced in the unmistakable reader-friendly DK

style. The series includes *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Black Beauty* and *Dracula*. **AK**

Sink the Armada!

0 237 51950 X hbk, 0 237 51951 3 pbk

The Finest Pharaoh of All!

0 237 51951 8 hbk, 0 237 51960 7 pbk

FACTION

★★

Stewart Ross, ill. Sue Shields, Evans, 'Coming Alive', 64pp, £7.99 each hbk, £3.99 each pbk

Two of eight historical 'faction' books which, the publishers claim, put the story back into history.

The author takes the Armada and Ancient Egypt, introduces real characters from those periods and adds fictional characters to weave narratives in an attempt to make the past more accessible and interesting to children. Ross is careful to explain this approach in each preface to avoid any confusion. The books also give useful historical background, a 'What happened next' section and a time line putting the events into historical context.

These books may prove a useful resource for a teacher working with a group or class but the layout and illustrations are simply not lively enough to attract young would-be historians to pick them up off a shelf to study for themselves. Children will be far more attracted to the livelier, and more visually appealing 'Horrible Histories' series. **AK**

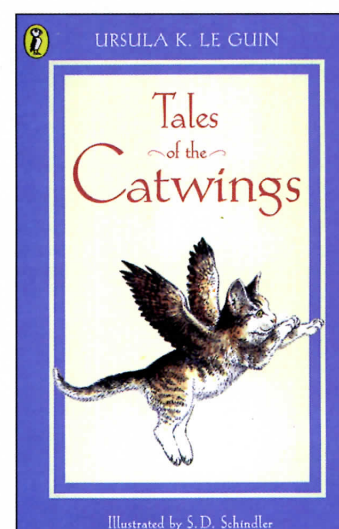
Tales of the Catwings

★★★★★

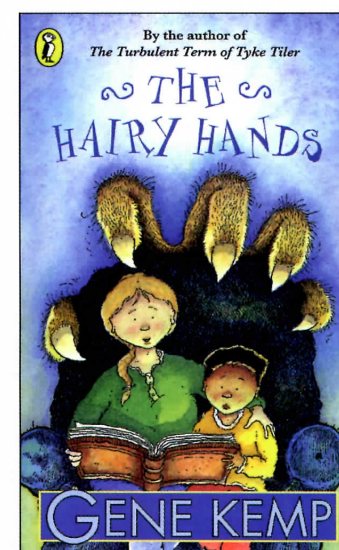
Ursula K Le Guin, ill. S D Schindler, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 130040 X, £4.99 pbk

At first glance this little book may look rather unprepossessing and old-fashioned, but this allegorical tale of youth's need to fly to new experiences is a little gem. It contains two stories, originally published separately in the United States, of Mrs Jane Tabby's four kittens who are all born with wings.

In the first tale, Mrs Tabby realises that the neighbourhood in which they live is no place for beautiful and well brought up children such as her Thelma, Roger, James and Harriet. She urges them to use their ability to fly to escape from the neighbourhood. This they do,



eventually finding a safe home in the country, high up in an old hay barn. The second story tells of the return of Harriet and James to the city to visit their mother. Schindler's soft pencil drawings perfectly capture the tone of the narration. The cats and wild creatures which they encounter are beautifully realised, making it physically credible that cats might fly. **VC**



The Hairy Hands

★★★★★

Gene Kemp, ill. Peter Vickers, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 130278 X, £4.99 pbk

Exploring the theme of racism, mixed race partnerships, and tensions

created between potential stepbrothers and sisters, Kemp, Carnegie Medal winner for her classic *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler*, serves up a feast of a book in *The Hairy Hands*. The story is set against the background of a west country legend, yet the relationships which develop between the characters are as gripping as the ghostly hands from which the book gets its title.

Jessica and Tom Fraser resent their dad's plans to remarry. For Tom especially, the thought of his footballing arch rival at school, Felix Patterson, becoming his stepbrother is hard to stomach. Racial differences complicate the issues as the Frasers are white and the Pattersons black.

A Dartmoor holiday is planned in an effort to enable the children to get to know each other but the whole idea seems doomed to disaster as tensions between Tom and Felix threaten to drive a wedge between Mr Fraser and Mrs Patterson. Jessica is fascinated by the Hairy Hand legend and the reader is kept wondering whether the hands will intervene to destroy or deliver from evil this potential 'happy family'. This is a top class read; a tantalising tale of suspense, mystery and brilliantly observed family tensions, woven together with wonderful imagery and kept moving at a brisk pace. **AK**

Bartlett and the Ice Voyage

★★★★

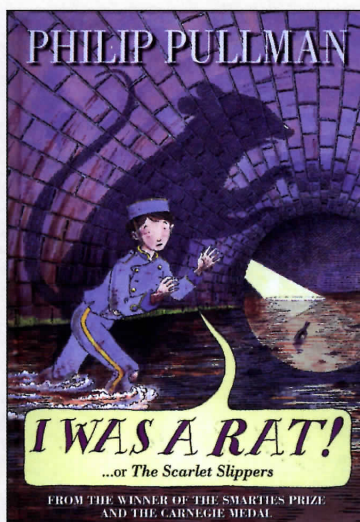
Odo Hirsch, ill. Andrew McLean, Bloomsbury, 176pp, 0 7475 4454 9, £9.99 hbk

A somewhat spoiled young queen learns that in the farthest reaches of her seven kingdoms, there grows a fruit so delectable that anyone who tastes it will want to eat little else. The queen demands that the fruit be brought to her, but melidrops are so perishable that they begin to rot as soon as picked, and the palace is many months' journey from the orchards. Bartlett the young explorer is summoned, and after alienating the court with his honesty and nonchalance, he and his silent colleague set off in search of a solution requiring 'inventiveness and perseverance'. This is a splendid quest adventure, with larger than life but believable characters, natural but humorous dialogue, and a storyline driven by whimsical inventiveness. I was reminded of Joan Aiken, but there is a refreshing originality about the story which should captivate independent readers in search of something novel. This book also provides a well paced and concise read aloud. **GH**

I Was a Rat! ... or The Scarlet Slippers

★★★★★

Philip Pullman, ill. Peter Bailey, Doubleday, 176pp, 0 385 40979 6, £10.99 hbk



One dark night Old Bob and his wife Joan find a mysterious young boy dressed in a page boy costume and they name him Roger. 'I was a rat!' he insists. And certainly his behaviour is strange. The story charts Roger's search for his roots and a new identity.

But what is the Truth about Roger's origins? The Daily Scourge claims to be the guardian of truth and voice of the people. One day its editorial calls for the death of the 'Monster of the Sewers', the next it censures those who have harangued the 'poor innocent child'. Pullman has written an entertaining social satire that challenges the moral integrity of the press and the educational and judicial systems. **Dickensian**

characters, Mrs Cribbins, the uncompromising school teacher, and the unscrupulous fairground showman Mr Tapscrew, contrast with Roger's simple honesty.

Pullman weaves together elements of fairy story and nineteenth-century fiction to produce a tale that will engage and delight children and adults. Bailey's vignettes add a light touch and provide a period context. **NG**

Excuses, Excuses: Poems about School

POETRY

★★★★

Compiled by John Foster, Oxford, 128pp, 0 19 276209 5, £4.99 pbk

This collection of poems about school has been reprinted twice since 1997. It follows the format and pattern of John Foster's OUP anthologies for the 9+ age groups where lighthearted poems are interspersed with a few more serious and challenging poems. There are poems on teachers, pupils, homework, being late, games, bullies and being lonely. There is definitely a place in the classroom, and a market for this type of themed collection but as a reviewer, the anthology is hard to take at a sitting. For the individual pupil or young person, it may well be consumed like a bag of crisps – an enjoyable snack to eat quickly but with too many 'empty calories' and too few of the more substantial poems like 'School Bully' by Mike Harding and 'Duncan Gets Expelled' by Jackie Kay. **HT**

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Picture a Poem

POETRY

★★★★

Gina Douthwaite, Red Fox, 80pp, 0 09 932071 1, £4.99 pbk

This book is an accessible and enjoyable introduction to shape poems, particularly as they now feature in the National Literacy Strategy. The book is A4 size with each page given over to one poem and its shape. There is no illustration apart from the poem itself and the quality of the poetry is integral to the success of the format. Douthwaite writes about a wide and diverse range of subjects and characters. There are poems on football, knickers, houses, sisters, dinosaurs and wood-lice to name but a few. There are characters to meet like 'Normous Norman' or Tim McCann – a tin can who has his heart broken down in the dump by Brassy Brollystand 'who'd led him on then left him for an aluminium pan'. It is all too easy for shape poems to become words written in the shape of the subject of the poem. The delicate balance and interdependence of words and shape is both difficult to achieve and to sustain throughout a collection. These poems repay reading and working around the shapes because of the strength of the language, the humour, the word and shape play. They should also be useful in encouraging children to write their own shape poems. HT

The Crusades

Christine Hatt, 0 237 51868 6

The Industrial Revolution

Stewart Ross, 0 237 51869 4

NON-FICTION

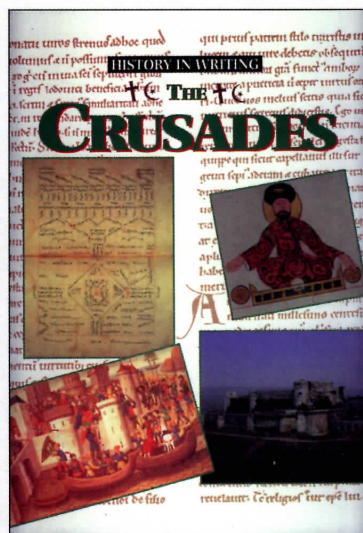
★★★★

Evans 'History in Writing', 64pp, £14.99 each hbk

The Crusades examines the origins, background and outcome of the great battles of faith and fortune fought between Muslims and Christians for control of the Holy Land during the Middle Ages. Using contemporary, historical documents such as diaries, eye-witness accounts and extracts from books, it gives a detailed account of the major Crusades between 1095 to 1270. There is further information about the tactics and weapons used in warfare, the religious fervour which spurred the wars on, and the larger-than-life characters on either side, including the magnificent Saladin and Richard the Lionheart.

The Industrial Revolution uses the same approach, equally successfully, to examine the causes of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, and its extraordinary impact on our world. The book charts the development of the powered machinery and transport which led to the explosion of manufacturing industry, and also looks at how these technological advances created a parallel revolution in the way people lived and worked.

Both titles, as their back cover blurbs suggest, present a fresh and original



look at key events in history. They are well researched and written, and the use of documents provides an accessible and fascinating glimpse of history through the words of those who were actually there. Attractively illustrated with photographs and clearly laid out, they will help bring history alive for older readers. AGa

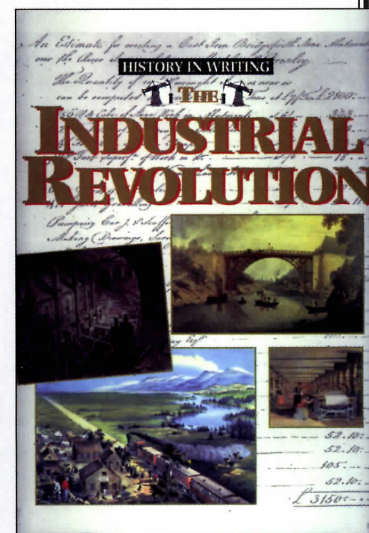
The Weatherbirds

NON-FICTION

★★

Ted Dewan, Viking, 48pp, 0 670 87048 X, £12.99 hbk

Michael Fish says this is 'an interesting and unusual way to explain the complexities of weather'. Speaking as one who finds Mr Fish's



personality pleasant but his forecasting muddled and obtuse I can only respond that this book is to meteorology what Michael Fish is to men's fashion. Professor Stork and Captain Goose pilot their all-weather pram-carrying (Stork – geddit?) airship on an extended transatlantic return trip encountering all kinds of met. conditions on the way which are explained by the professor in an ingenious/hilarious/tedious (depending on your point of view) manner as they go. I find this approach too wacky to be effective in book form, though it could form the basis of an excellent TV show, and about as flat as one of Mr Fish's depressions. TP

REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

Star Quest

★★

Andy Dixon, ill. Nick Harris, Usborne 'Fantasy Adventure', 32pp, 0 7460 2989 6, £5.99 pbk

Another in the long line of *Where's Wally* imitations but without the wit and quality of illustration. Each spread is a different stage in the adventure with things to find in the picture. Needless to say you can progress through the story, such as it is, without finding all the objects. SR

A Secret Place

★★★

Joan Lingard, Hodder Signature, 128pp, 0 340 71662 2, £4.99 pbk

The children described on the cover of Lingard's novel as being 'far from home' are six-year-old Charlie and his eleven-year-old sister Maria. They live in Edinburgh with their Scottish mother, who for two years has been separated from their father, now a flamenco dancer in his native Spain. When one day he appears unexpectedly at the children's school and takes them away with him to his 'secret place', they – and the reader – become caught up in a story of conflicting claims, attachments and loyalties. Lingard writes a pleasantly readable story, essentially a variation on the adventure and chase genre, with the bonus of some attractive local colour in the Spanish scenes. RD

The Crow Haunting

★★★★

Julia Jarman, Collins, 128pp, 0 00 675213 6, £3.99 pbk

Tragic deaths in a distant past exerting a powerful influence on the present lie at the heart of this exciting ghost/adventure story.

Medi and her highly sensitive brother Davey are brought close together through the adversity of their lives. Naturally the boy's fears, plus his diabetes, are a real worry to his older sister. When he suddenly disappears she is frantic and must follow him, even if it means a dangerous journey back through time – back to a tribal, religious dispute 4,000 years ago.

This is quick to read and quite compulsive. Good for readers who require plenty of action and incident. DB

Warpath 1: Tank Attack

0 14 038982 2

Warpath 2: Deadly Skies

0 14 038983 0

★★★★

J Eldridge, Puffin, 144pp, £3.99 each pbk

So here they come off the presses – 'Blunkett's books for boys'. Mind you those of us of a certain age will recognise the fore-runner of these

works; I cut my reading teeth on Rockfist Rogan in the *Wizard* (or was it the *Hotspur*) and the illustrated War Picture Library and it would be nice to think that these books would play a similar part in developing a new set of readers. They are straightforward action stories with little characterisation but plenty of technical detail plus a 'tech-spec' section and other assorted stuff like kit-lists and flying instructions.

I suppose the politically correct response should be to throw one's hands up in horror and decry the glorification of war but boys do like this stuff. I just wish the author had found a little bit of space to deal with the suffering involved. Other titles in this 'Warpath' series are *Behind Enemy Lines* and *Depth-Charge Danger*. SR

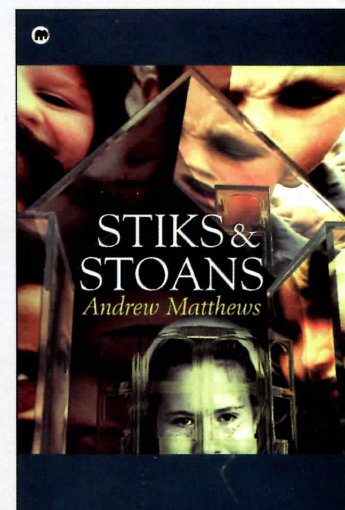
Smiling for Strangers

★★★★

Annie Campling, Dolphin, 144pp, 1 85881 491 X, £4.50 pbk

Nina's story reveals the horrors of conflict in the former Yugoslavia that induce a desperate, young girl to stow away on an aid lorry and enter England on the strength of a letter found in an attic. The new life for which she is so desperate is fraught with fresh kinds of danger, maybe not bombs and armed, venal men, but others, who will take advantage and seek to deceive the easy pickings of a young, naive girl with a fragile grasp of English and scant knowledge of the 'civilised' world.

This is a well-paced read that stretches credibility at times, but nevertheless is worth introducing to readers who like a thought-provoking book. DB



Stiks & Stoans

★★★★

Andrew Matthews, Mammoth, 156pp, 0 7497 3784 0, £4.99 pbk

At the heart of this story is a diary written by a girl suffering from 'dys and glandular' who everybody regards as 'fat, ugly and stupid'. The diary is a harrowing chronicle of her feelings as a gang of local yobs inflict a regime of psychological torture

upon her and her family. The linking narrative is told from the viewpoint of Liam, a new boy at Ella's school, who safeguards his own ego, damaged by the tribulation of his parents' divorce, by becoming one of the persecutors.

This is a very powerful and extremely well written story. All of the characters, including the 'villains', are all too believable in their vulnerability and entrappedness. The outcome of the story is optimistic, but you will notice disturbing parallels with a recent, real life case of persecution which ended in tragedy. Matthews' frank, direct description of the clinically callous strategising which underlies many relationships is particularly striking, and might help to motivate discussion of the issues confronted by this highly recommended book. GH

Huntress of the Sea

★★★★

Alan Temperley, Scholastic, 160pp, 0 590 54334 2, £4.99 pbk

Inspired by Scottish folk tales of mermaids and other marine creatures, Temperley's novel, like many of its genre, is characterised by feelings of loss and yearning. Here, the principal loss is that suffered by 12-year-old Ewan, caught in a passionate tussle for the heart and soul of the father who has earlier succumbed to the allurements of the beautiful, if possessive, Neiraa and now returns to his native environment. But it is not in Neiraa's nature to accept his desertion and the stage is set for a violent conflict of loyalties. It all amounts to a reasonably engaging narrative, though with an ending which will disappoint some of its young readers. RD

Wild Blood (Switchers 3)

★★★★

Kate Thompson, Bodley Head, 176pp, 0 370 32419 6, £10.99 hbk

Coming up to the fifteenth birthday which terminates her ability to 'switch' from human to animal and back, Tess is in a dilemma: which permanent identity will she now assume? Set in a contemporary, but still wild and magical Co. Clare, this novel celebrates the power of tradition and ancestry to influence our heroine's life and traces her understanding of how there is much in that life not susceptible to logical explanation. Thompson evokes the world of Irish myth with real empathy, simultaneously keeping the modern dimension of her narrative clearly in view. Her final chapter, starting with an almost Dionysiac romp on the summit of Ben Bulbin, sees past, present (and future) happily joined. RD

Ticket to Prague

★★★★

James Watson, Puffin, 192pp, 0 14 130008 6, £4.99 pbk

Another challenging read in all senses.

Loosely based on the life of Czech poet Ivan Blatny, this absorbing tale is packed with in-your-face language, issue awareness-raising, a strongly

political stance and a splintered narrative style that demands the reader's close attention.

Headstrong, yet deeply vulnerable, Amy Douglas has enough strife without getting saddled with an elderly Czech poet on her Community Service placement. Yet, in the final analysis, they are each what the other needs and their close friendship leads them to Prague, where the politics and passions of the past are still wounds that require sensitive healing and will ultimately lead both into grave danger. DB

The Illustrated Mum

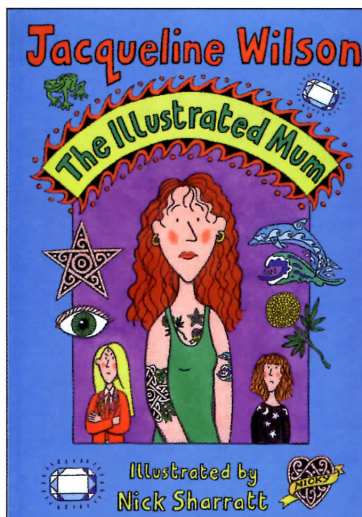
★★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 224pp, 0 385 40888 9, £10.99 hbk

A mother who is, for a variety of reasons, unable or unwilling to care properly for her child or children has been the focus of several recent children's or young adult books. Wilson's Marigold in *The Illustrated Mum* is one such parent. To an adult reader it is soon apparent that Marigold is manic depressive, but this is only stated towards the end of the novel. In common with other novels with a similar theme and, as in life, it is the children who assume the role of carer and who struggle to keep the family together.

Eleven-year-old Dolphin is the narrator and throughout the perspective of a somewhat confused child coping with a situation beyond her proper understanding is skilfully maintained. Dolphin and her thirteen-year-old sister Star, mindful of Marigold's horror stories of her own upbringing in a children's home, have developed a range of strategies enabling them to live in some semblance of a 'normal' family life. Some of these strategies involve keeping Marigold's excesses under control, in particular her penchant for getting herself tattooed.

When Star's father, Micky, reappears in Marigold's life and finds that he has a beautiful daughter it leaves Dolphin more isolated and neglected than ever, as Marigold focuses her attention on recapturing Micky's attention and Star is distracted by her newly found father. Bullied and misunderstood at school by pupils and teachers because of her neglected air and reading difficulties, Dolphin's only companion is Owly Morris, another outsider, and her refuge is the school library. With Owly's help she traces her own father.



This is a development which could be considered somewhat extraneous, but no doubt is included to offer an element of hope at the conclusion, as he and Micky both provide support for Dolphin and Star when Marigold is eventually hospitalised and put on a course of lithium.

Intended for older readers than is usual with Wilson's novels, this plot may seem grim, or even unsuitable. But there are many Dolphins living in our society, and stories like hers need to be told, not only so that children in her position may realise they are not alone, but also in the hope that others may realise that when a child is unkempt and seemingly uncared for there may be a reason. As always, Wilson's style keeps a degree of the grimness at a distance, and the love which Marigold has for her daughters and they for her is evident throughout the story. Sharratt's illustrations also provide a note of lightness and the cover will most certainly attract attention. VC



The Crowlings

★★★★

Louise Lawrence, Collins, 240pp, 0 00 185726 6, £9.99 hbk

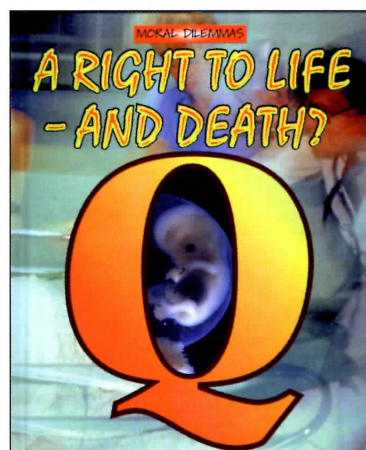
The star people, having spoilt their world, have moved on to a new one. As the book opens, Ben, a native, is forced to abandon his land and his customs. Barely escaping the clutches of the state, his group finally makes it to the reservation. This first section is full of humour but succeeding ones, following the fortunes of later generations, have a harder edge as the central characters strive to be accepted in the 'modern' world. But as they get closer to acceptance that the world is falling apart, the star people are moving on. Linni, the hero of the final section, is left to reverse the movement of the opening and rediscover her roots. This is a moral tale skilfully told. AJ

A Right to Life - and Death?

★★★★★

Kenneth Boyd, Evans 'Moral Dilemmas', 64pp, 0 237 51877 5, £11.99 hbk

Boyd, Senior lecturer in Medical Ethics at Edinburgh University, provides a lucid and objective discussion of the issues surrounding



abortion, fertility treatment, transplantation, decisions about the allocation of health care, and euthanasia. His skill at marshalling an argument, providing apposite examples, and writing with unemotional clarity, make this an excellent introduction to these questions to anyone over the age of fourteen - it made some of them clear to me for the first time. His introduction sets out the problems: of establishing and balancing rights and allocating scarce resources. He writes with economy but takes as long as he needs on each section. His chapter on fertility treatment is fourteen pages and covers everything from in vitro fertilisation to cloning. The following chapter on transplants is but four pages.

Nowhere is there any straining for effect or sensationalism and the colour photographs and quotations that surround the text support his approach. The text is interspersed with question and quotation boxes that offer a spectrum of opinion, invite you to put yourself in other people's shoes and to make your own decisions. There is a poor index to such a good text and no further reading list, but, for the most important part, I cannot imagine it done any better. CB

In Space

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Michael Johnstone, Walker 'The History News', 32pp, 0 7445 6201 5, £10.99 hbk

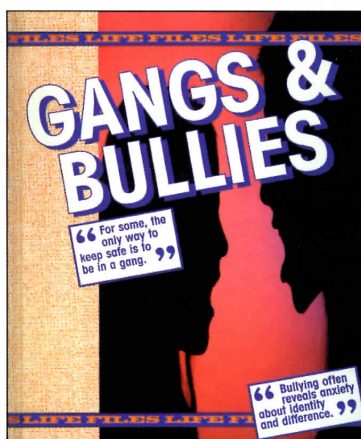
Moon Landing: the race for the Moon

NON-FICTION ★★

Carole Stott, ill. Richard Bonson, Dorling Kindersley, 48pp, 0 7513 5886 X, £9.99 hbk

These are two 'eyewitness' accounts of not so recent events in space. 'The History News' has a far greater chronological scope, starting at Ptolemy and ending up with *Sojourner* on Mars. Signal events are portrayed by 'contemporary' newspaper feature articles so cardinal points are effectively punched home and the temptation to 'now read on ...' is virtually irresistible. Personally I care very little about what goes on out there but this headlines and highlights approach, coupled with occasional intimate insights, as in high class tabloid journalism, had me hooked in no time and the book should more than earn its keep on library shelves.

Moon Landing examines with a far more pedantic approach a smaller sector of the space saga and the DK spread by spread presentation kills the urge to read on pretty smartly, although there is a wealth of information to be had here for those with sufficient personal incentive to seek it out. In their back-flap blurb the publishers say author Stott 'is eagerly awaiting our return to the Moon'. Me too, DK – you've done enough here. I see the book's senior editor is one Scarlett O'Hara which leads me to observe that as to whether anyone buys it or not, frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn. TP



Gangs & Bullies

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Rosemary Stones, Evans 'Life Files', 64pp, 0 237 51809 0, £10.99 hbk, 0 237 51810 4, £7.99 pbk

I tried this one out on our school

bully supremo who was mightily impressed. It is a well set out information book, with plenty of colourful pupil appeal. The fine-tuned information covers a wide variety of aspects and never seems preachy and patronising. If anything it is challenging, with thought-provoking newspaper quotes, celebrity contributions, things to find out and questions to ponder. Strategies to cope and helplines and organisations positively add to its usefulness. A very well recommended addition to the PSE library and the pupil library shelves. DB

Always Inventing – a photobiography of Alexander Graham Bell

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Tom L Matthews, National Geographic Society, 64pp, 0 7922 7391 5, £10.99

'Mr Watson, come here, I want to see you...' Most of us know that Alec Bell invented the telephone and some of us know that this was a result of his being a highly gifted teacher of deaf people. But did you know that this most benign of inventors also pioneered the metal detector (to locate the fatal bullet in US President Garfield), the iron lung (in response to his son's death from respiratory failure) or the hydrofoil, or tetrahedral spaceframes or (hello Dolly!) a strain of super sheep? This superb study of a true polymath tells us all this and much more as we trace the milestones in Bell's career from his early Scottish upbringing to his setting the world water speed record (70.86mph) three years before his death.

The whole book is a beautifully integrated sequence of narrative and photographs, excellently written, designed and produced. As well as Bell archive photography we get to see contemporary cartoons (the first mobile phone), Mark Twain's phone bill (even then you paid extra for an extension) and most precious of all, Bell's own Edward Lear-like sketches for his prototype 'vacuum jacket'. And so, as with all good biographies, we come to have a full-bottomed acquaintance with the man (who was, incidentally, the first person to use x-rays in Canada) and to appreciate the value of his work to a hugely gratifying extent.

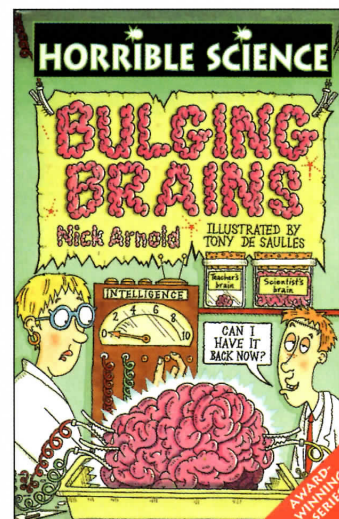
The other great thing that Bell did was to set up the National Geographic Society's magazine, and the Society's current Chairman is Bell's great-grandson, which makes this production very much a family affair. Congratulations to the family for engaging Tom Matthews to provide the narrative – it reads seamlessly from end to end like a good novel and to the design and research teams for producing this example of books at their best. Libraries should seize this avidly and promote it energetically, while avoiding sullying the brilliant endpapers with insensitive date-labels. Me, I'm going to read it again. TP

Bulging Brains

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

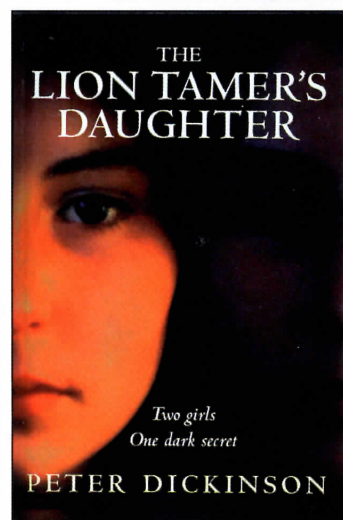
Nick Arnold, ill. Tony De Saulles, Scholastic 'Horrible Science', 160pp, 0 590 11319 4, £3.99 pbk

That the cover design includes the words 'Award-winning series' suggests that the award was won



without the help of this title. I like to think that if the jury were in any doubt then the arrival of this one would have clinched it – for it is an excellent look at neurophysiology and a more convincing contribution to understanding than some of its series predecessors. You need a cool head to explain this sort of stuff – it is a tough test for any writer and Arnold does well, with his 'Horrible' approach needing rather less getting-past than in other volumes. Entertaining, informative and cheap – form a disorderly queue please. TP

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary



The Lion Tamer's Daughter

★★★★

Peter Dickinson, Macmillan, 144pp, 0 333 73951 5, £9.99 hbk Keith had always thought that his friend Melly was a rather ordinary, if dreamy, girl. Then he meets Melanie, her mirror image, and a bizarre chain of events is triggered. Melly and Melanie share the same memories and dreams, and a desperate urge to

discover the dark secret that connects them.

In his essay 'Fantasy: the need for Realism' Dickinson argues for fantasy writing to prove its relevance to life: 'fantasy is fundamentally about ideas, a dead idea is a dead book'. In his unforgettable futuristic fantasy, *Eva*, Dickinson highlights the moral and ethical issues concerned with human transplant and the possible consequences when two minds occupy one body.

The Lion Tamer's Daughter explores the opposite end of the spectrum. Melly and Melanie share one mind but live in two separate bodies. In this tale of suspense and intrigue Dickinson employs magic realism to reflect contemporary concerns about the ethics of genetic engineering. A tightly structured story with a highly charged climax, and satisfying denouement and resolution. NG

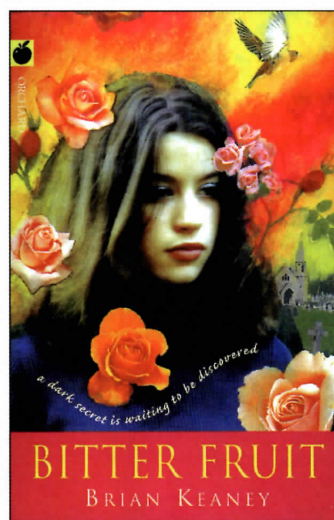
Bitter Fruit

★★★★

Brian Keaney, Orchard, 144pp, 1 84121 005 6, £4.99 pbk

Having thoroughly enjoyed *Family Secrets*, I approached Brian Keaney's latest offering with anticipation – and it did not disappoint me.

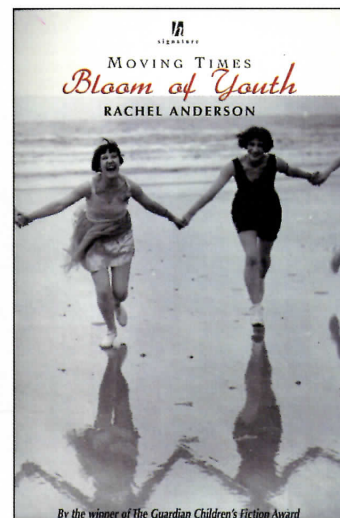
Rebecca's relationship with her father is a turbulent one, a prolonged battle over clothes, behaviour, friends and curfews. After arriving home past the



deadline yet again, tension is at its height and Rebecca, filled with a mixture of resentment and guilt, tells her father she hates him.

These are the last words she ever speaks to him as he is killed the next day in a car crash. As she struggles with her grief and self-loathing she discovers a focus for her negative emotions – her father's mistress. Unable to come to terms with her father's duplicity, she confronts his lover and discovers that she cannot hate her but only pity her loneliness and exclusion from family life.

What is remarkable about this book is Keaney's uncanny ability to delve into the heart of a teenage girl's dilemmas and present them authentically and with clarity. VR



Bloom of Youth (Moving Times 1)

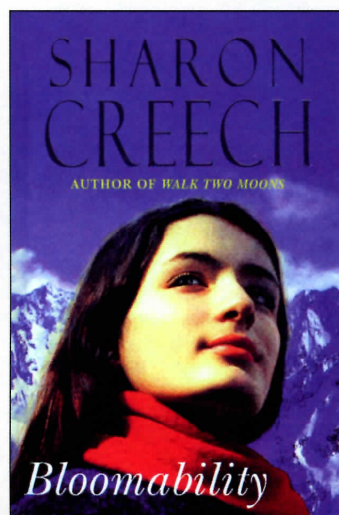
★★★★

Rachel Anderson, Hodder, 176pp, 0 340 73273 3, £4.99 pbk

In this original and entertaining novel, set in the Sussex of the 1950s,

we discover, via Ruth, its teenage narrator, the series of events which see her grow from schoolgirl to young woman on the brink of life and self-discovery.

Ruth's is an endearingly chaotic and eccentric household, with minor literary pretensions. It is presided over by her resilient and resourceful mother, totally undaunted by diminishing family finances. The dreams of childhood and adolescence are caught by Anderson in a most appealing mixture of humour and poignancy, resulting in a book which moves beyond mere period piece into a memorable documentation of youth's bittersweet exuberance. **RD**



Bloomability

★★★★

Sharon Creech, Macmillan, 224pp, 0 333 72202 7, £9.99 hbk, 0 330 35536 8, £3.99 pbk

Bloomability explores the same internal territory as *Walk Two Moons*, Creech's earlier novel, winner of the Newbery Medal and, like that book, deals with possibilities.

Dinnie Doone is 13 years old when her parents consign her to the care of her aunt and uncle and a new life and education in the Swiss school of which her uncle is headmaster. They seek to save her from their chaotic and nomadic life but initially, despite her relatives' warmth and understanding, she wants nothing more than to return to them and travel to each new 'opportunity' – an expression coined by her itinerant father. Gradually, the spell of the mountains, the cosmopolitan mix of new friends, her uncle's wit and sympathy, and her re-acquaintance with her Italian roots brings her a sense of ease and the courage to undertake whatever journey life may present her with.

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers

Clarice Bean *That's Me* (see p24)

Weslandia (see p24)

Zebra Talk (see p24)

Jaguar Talk (see p24)

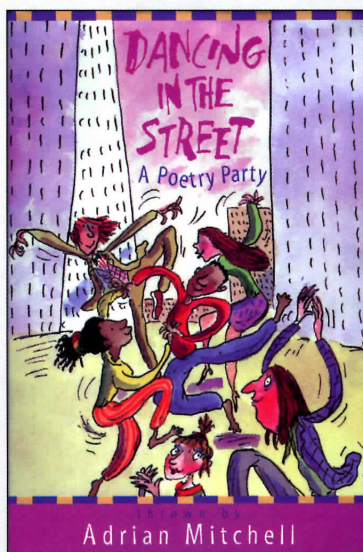
Tiger Talk (see p24)

The Highwayman (see p25)

The Lady of Shalott (see p25)

Beowulf (see p25)

This book is a subtle, sympathetic exploration of a teenager's struggle to discover who she is and why her life has become what it has. Add Creech's own brand of gentle humour and her immensely believable characters and this will carry readers forward from *Walk Two Moons* – or back again to discover more of this addictive writing. **VR**



Dancing in the Street: A Poetry Party

POETRY

★★★★★

Thrown by Adrian Mitchell, ill. Tony Ross, Orchard, 192pp, 1 86039 693 3, £12.99 hbk

When will someone award Adrian Mitchell the Nobel Prize for Literature? Like his hero William Blake he has the conscience, the compassion, the joy and the soul which reaches out to everyone, both in his own poetry and in his anthologies.

Dancing in the Street is a desert island anthology for the 12-90+ age group. A collection of poems and songs for every emotion and every situation. Springsteen, Dylan and McCartney rub shoulders with Shakespeare, Blake, Dickinson and Duffy. Patten parties with John Donne and Brecht boogies with Chuck Berry. You will find the joys of the flesh, wine and song, inequality and injustice, love and loss. The difference with this anthology is that it is marked with Mitchell's humour and anger and his belief in peace and justice. As well as the light-hearted poems and songs there are long poems, brave poems, challenging subject matter. The 'Tears of Rage' section is testament to Mitchell's survival as a protest poet of the sixties who is still angry and still protesting in the nineties. Ross's illustrations (down to the spare corkscrew on the end page) perfectly complement the tone and capture Mitchell's celebration of life, love and the desire for a suit like Miles Davis in the poem 'Jake's Amazing Suit'. William Blake says in 'Auguries of Innocence' – 'Joy and woe are woven fine, / A clothing for the soul divine; / Under every grief and pine / Runs a joy with silken twine.'

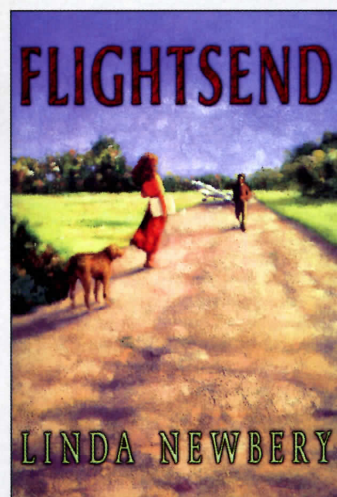
Joy and woe dance together through the pages of this party and like all good parties, you will not want it to end. **HT**

Kerosene

★★★

Chris Wooding, Scholastic, 224pp, 0 590 11358 5, £5.99 pbk
Tinder, Friction, Spark, Fuel, Flashpoint, Flame, Blaze ... Ashes. The chapter headings reflect the narrative shape of Chris Wooding's novel, *Kerosene*, and the emotional state of the book's protagonist. Shy, awkward Cal is fascinated by fire, its intense flame helps to calm his angst. But when he meets Abby things start to get out of hand.

Wooding writes with convincing insight into teen culture, drawing on his knowledge language and the contemporary music scene. The early chapters are particularly lively but I was disappointed with the ending which was rather too neat and unbelievable. A gritty exploration of criminal motive turns into a sentimental love story. And would a policeman really turn a blind eye to arson because the perpetrator reminds him of his dead son? **NG**



Flightsend

★★★★★

Linda Newbery, Scholastic, 288pp, 0 439 01175 2, £5.99 pbk

Linda Newbery has written a deeply moving story about death and renewal. Deeply depressed after the death of her unborn baby, Charlie's mother leaves her home, job and young lover and moves to a quiet village to make a fresh start. The change is not easy for Charlie, who resents her mother's apparent self absorption and lack of feeling for her faithful and considerate lover. Narrative viewpoint is skilfully handled as the reader experiences Charlie's frustration, sadness and anger and with her comes to recognise the complexity and depth of her mother's feelings. The book ends with closure for all parties who finally achieve their Flight's End. This is a compassionate story written with rare insight and moments of startling poignancy. **NG**

I Have Lived a Thousand Years

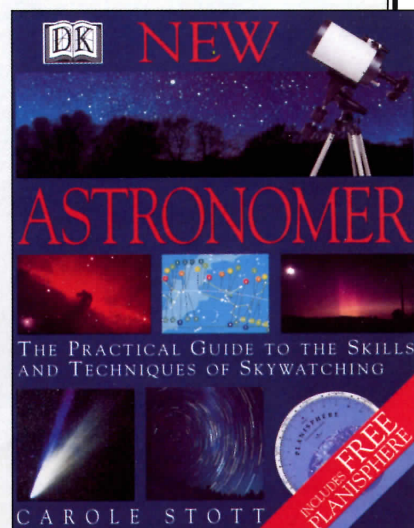
NON-FICTION

★★★★★

Livia Britton-Jackson, Simon and Schuster, 224pp, 0 689 61022 9, £12.99 hbk

A gruelling account of the tribulations faced by a Jewish child and her family during the years of the holocaust. Ellie Friedmann is 13

when the Nazi occupation of Hungary leads to ghettoisation and eventually to Auschwitz. The book is written in the form of a journal of impressions and memories, using a combination of straightforward conversational description and vivid poetic images. The decline of the family and their fellow victims into despair and physical degradation is depicted in sickening detail, but there is also an undercurrent of determination and solidarity which saves the story from becoming simply depressing. This is a disturbing book, but one whose contemporary relevance makes it very valuable reading. **GH**



New Astronomer

NON-FICTION

★★★★★

Carole Stott, Dorling Kindersley, 144pp, 0 7513 0666 5, £16.99 hbk

For the dedicated astronomer here is the complete handbook which can contribute to night-sky study at all levels, from casual back-door-step observations on clear nights, to dusk-to-dawn telescope. Following an introduction to the principals of the craft, its tools and basic practices come portraits of the planets and other solar system bodies and then we visit the stars. Strongest and most helpful features are the sky maps and accompanying commentary and a month by month constellation guide. With the ('free') planisphere and the excellent instructions on its use, there is more here for the 'what star is that?' enthusiast than I have ever found between two covers before. Thanks to its guidance I have been able to identify the Red Garnet star, and you have only to turn to p98 (of 144) to cepheuse self how to find it. I see some illustrations are by 'Shadric Toop' – this is surely an anagram of Ric Poshtoad, whose style is unmistakable. Designed for, and probably most successful in personal ownership, a library copy could be useful, especially if replacement planispheres can be got at your local star shop. **TP**



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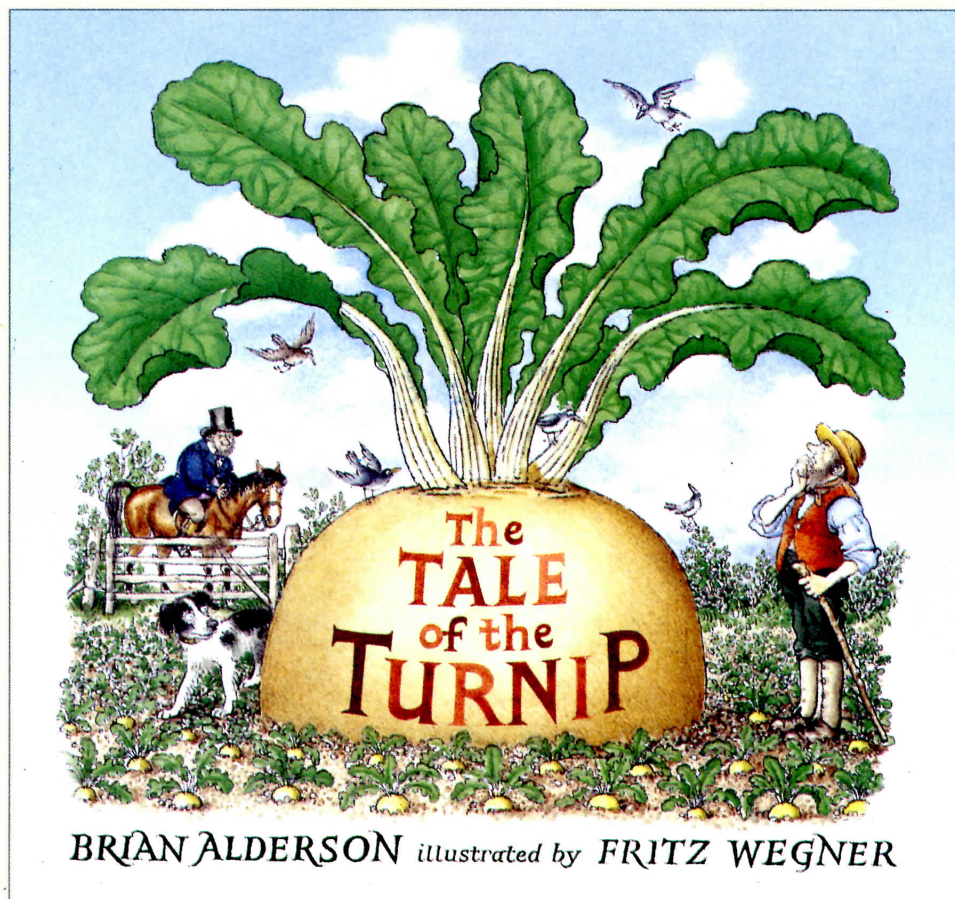
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another gem,
full of wit,
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downs of life."

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CLASSICS IN SHORT No.17

Brian Alderson

In the High and Far-off Times there were the ...



How many stories are we talking about?

Twelve plus two.

Why 'Just So'?

Because they started off as bed-time stories for Kipling's daughter, Josephine (Effie), and 'they had to be told just so; or Effie would wake up and put back the missing sentence ...'

What are they about?

Most of them could fit under the title that Ted Hughes chose for a slightly similar collection: 'tales of the early world'. They are home-made fables about how things come to be the way they are: elephants with long trunks, rhinoceroses with wrinkly skins, absolutely supercilious cats ... Only one, 'The Crab that Played with the Sea', is loosely based on a popular myth – a Malaysian one about why the sea has tides.

When were they first published?

All but one – 'How the Alphabet was Made' – appeared originally in periodicals; the first, 'How the Whale Got his Throat', came out in 1897 in *St. Nicholas*, the American monthly that is arguably the greatest magazine ever published for children. The stories were patchily illustrated by artists well-enough known at the time: Oliver Herford, Frank Verbeck, Cecil Aldin etc.

And the book?

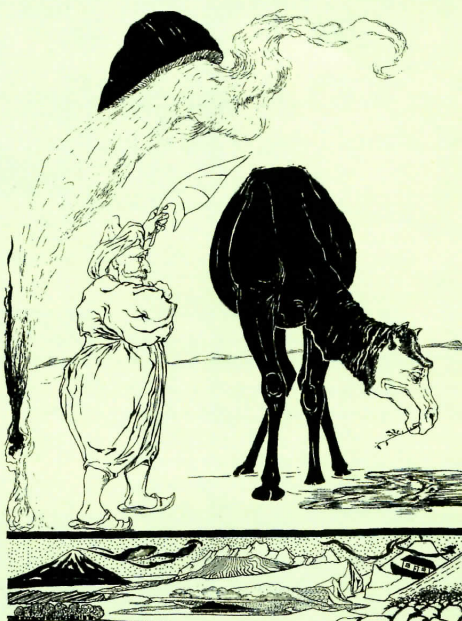
Round about 1901 Kipling decided that he would collect the stories in a single volume. Twelve of them were organised into a coherent sequence, roughly from short and playful to longer and more complex. Verses were written to round off each episode (a favourite, and very attractive, dodge which Kipling employed in much of his children's fiction), and the resultant array was furnished with decorations and full-page pen-and-ink drawings by the author. The book was published as a small quarto by Macmillan in 1902 and has never been out of print, in one form or another, since.

What's 'classic' about all that?

Almost everything – and in a peculiarly indissoluble way. There may not be much unity in the kinds of story that are told – what common ground is there between the mad fancies of the rhinoceros tale and the semi-didacticism of the alphabet one? The dramatic thrust may be uneven: 'Old Man Kangaroo' seems a mite laboured alongside 'The Elephant's Child'. Words, phrases, authorial comments, and even the talk of mummies and daddies, can give offence to people who are on the look-out to be offended. But the



collection as a whole takes on the character of a virtuoso vaudeville performance through the storyteller's revelling in the mastery of his craft. Some phrases are recognised almost universally: the address to the listener, 'Oh my Best Beloved', or the elephant child's misfortune on the banks of 'the great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo River', or the matriarchal jaguar 'graciously waving her tail'; but every page of the book echoes with jokes and elaborate phrases and school-child colloquialisms that are the gift of a consummate storyteller. 'How the First Letter was Written' is not one of the foremost tales in the set, but look at that unreeling of the members of the Tribe



'How the Camel Got His Hump'

of Tegumai with all their accoutrements (p.141 of the standard edition) and relish the author's amazed judgement of what he has found himself saying: 'Aren't those beautiful words, Best Beloved?'

Anything else?

Effie was right enough to demand that the words should always be given 'just so', but – uniquely – this applies also to the illustrations. Kipling's younger daughter, Elsie, remembered 'the immense pleasure' that he took in making his drawings for the book (Effie, woefully, had died of pneumonia in 1899 and is memorialized in the stanzas that follow the alphabet story). These drawings though are not mere representations of events but bring their own contribution of jokes and narrative extras, accompanied by long and often deliciously comic annotations. Thus they become integral parts of the storytelling process itself, without which an indispensable dimension to the performance is lost. There may be 'nine-and-sixty ways of constructing tribal lays', and every single one of them may be right, but where *Just So Stories* are concerned no alternative construction can be justified. Ever since the book came out of copyright in the United States and in Britain (where it has now gone back into copyright again) people have been trying to re-illustrate it, either in collected volumes or in picture-book interpretations of single stories. These attempts are hopelessly misconceived and, for the most part, have been incompetently done anyway. 'Just So' means 'Just So'.

And what about the 'Plus Two'?

Oh, yes – one of these latecomers to the canon was 'The Tabu Tale' of 1903 which can now be found in the complete (but shrunken-sized) edition of the stories published by The Folio Society and The British Library. The second one, 'Ham and the Porcupine' came out in *The Princess Elizabeth Gift Book* of 1935 and is too insignificant to bother about. ■

The illustrations and cover are taken from the edition published jointly in 1991 by The Folio Society and The British Library. Only available by mail order from The Folio Society (tel:0171 400 4200), price £18.95 + £2.95 P&P

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

An article by Brian Alderson, documenting and commenting on the illustrations, has been issued as a 28-page pamphlet, *Just So Pictures*. Copies may be had from Books for Keeps for £5, post free.