

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

November 1999
No.119 UK Price £3.10

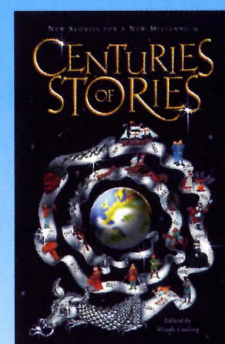
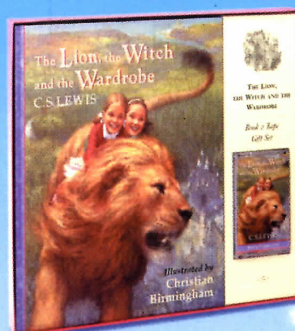
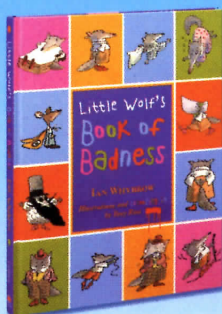
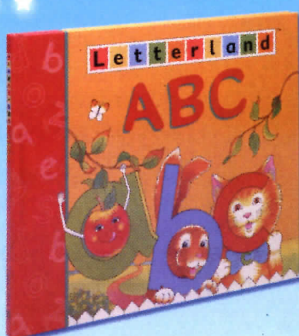
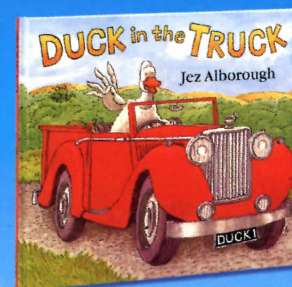
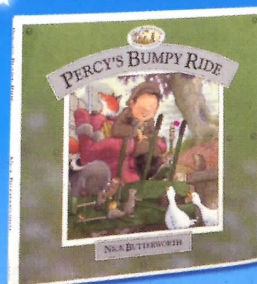
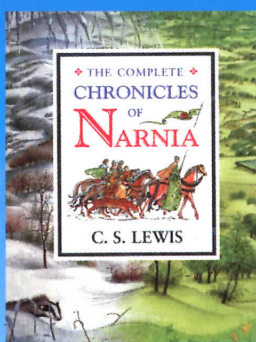
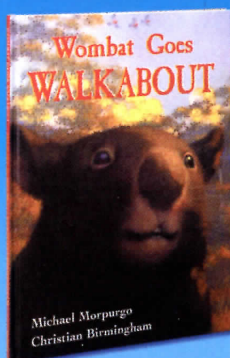
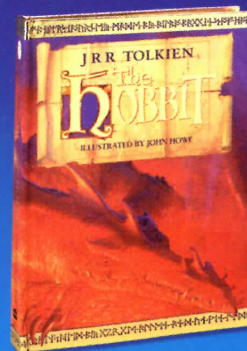
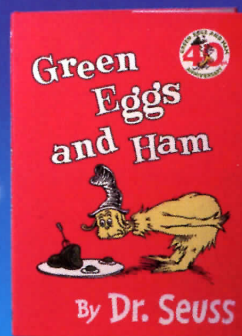
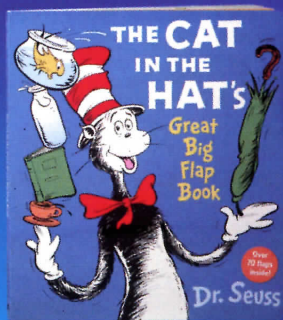
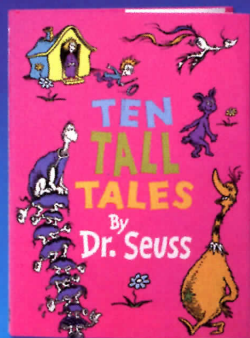
the children's book magazine

PATRICK BENSON • CHRISTMAS ROUND-UP • THE BOOKS OF THE CENTURY



Millennium Issue!

Little Stars at Christmas...



Books To Light Up Your Christmas

Available at all good bookshops or to order, call 0870 900 2050

Visit the booklover's website
www.fireandwater.com

 CollinsChildren'sBooks

Contents

3 Editorial

4 Books for a Real Christmas

Stephanie Nettel recommends books for giving.

8 Authorgraph No.119

Patrick Benson interviewed by Joanna Carey.

10 The Children's Books of the Century

The most important writers, artists, poets and books of the century chosen by BfK's readership.

12 Fin de Sièclism

Brian Alderson on children's books at the turns of the 18th and 19th centuries.

14 BfK Briefing

Prediction Chart • News • Prizes • People • Events • 'I Wish I'd Written' • Letters to the Editor

17 Reviews

Index of Titles and Star Ratings 17
Reviewers 17
Now Out in Paperback 18
Under 5s (Pre-Sch./Nursery/Infant) 19
5-8 (Infant/Junior) 21
8-10 (Junior/Middle) 24
+ Editor's Choice 25
10-12 (Middle/Secondary) 27
+ New Talent 28
12+ (Secondary) 29 + Picture Books for Older Readers 30

32 Classics in Short No.18

Brian Alderson on *Struwwelpeter*.



THE SEA-THING CHILD
RUSSELL HOBAN illustrated by PATRICK BENSON

Cover Story

This issue's cover is from Patrick Benson's new picture book, *The Sea-Thing Child* by Russell Hoban. Patrick Benson is interviewed by Joanna Carey on page 8. Thanks to Walker Books for their help in producing this November cover.

EDITORIAL

Comparisons, comparisons! As BfK readers kept pointing out in their Millennium questionnaires (sent out with our May issue): 'There are a lot of flaws in trying to compile "Best of" lists.' Of course the major one, so far as books are concerned, is that like cannot easily be compared with like even within a particular genre. At least we asked for your 'best of' in a number of categories. But are results like these (see page 10) anything other than random?

BfK readers are not just 'the public' but people who work and/or live with children and young people and their books. The BfK questionnaire thus tell us which authors, illustrator and poets and which titles are valued by those knowledgeable about children's literature. Interestingly, your choices correlate almost exactly with Books for Students predictions (see page 15) for ten titles which might still be read in 100 years time.

Roald Dahl emerges as your 'Outstanding Writer of the 20th Century' and C S Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Tolkien's *The Hobbit* as two of the 'Most Important Novels'. Fantasy then, of a sinister or escapist variety, appears to have been influential in shaping the imaginations of late twentieth century children. But there are signs that a shift away from this has already begun ... Philip Pullman is your 'Favourite Children's Author' and his allegoric trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, is of a quite different and more demanding order. As for *Junk*, in our *Trainspotting* times, teen fiction, both distinguished and undistinguished, continues to push back the boundaries to encompass social realities of an unpleasant or disturbing nature.

The Children's Laureate, Quentin Blake, is both your 'Outstanding' and 'Favourite' Illustrator, a tribute no doubt to the wit and gaiety of his unmistakeable style as well as to his extraordinary versatility, whether it be interpreting poetry or fiction by others or creating his own distinctive picture books.

in the 'heritage' tradition and already an indispensable classic.

The only book in translation amongst your winners is *The Diary of Anne Frank*, indeed one of the seminal documents of the 20th century. Your 'Outstanding' non-fiction author, Terry Deary, is largely responsible for the recent growth of paperback non-fiction of an accessible, often jokey kind, in the wake of his phenomenally successful 'Horrible Histories'.

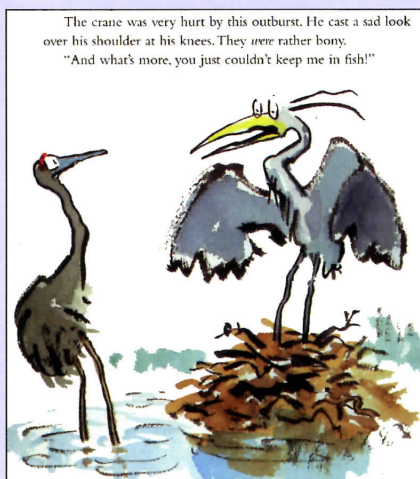
And the 21st century? J K Rowling got your vote. Natch. ■

■



Rosemary Stones

Your choices of 'Most Important Picture Book' and 'Novelty' are both from US illustrators – Maurice Sendak and Eric Carle.



From *The Heron and the Crane* by John Yeoman and Quentin Blake (Hamish Hamilton, £10.99 hbk, publ. Nov. 1999).

For poets, Michael Rosen is also both 'Outstanding' and 'Favourite' while Allan Ahlberg's collection of poems about school life, *Please Mrs Butler*, is your choice of 'Most Important Poetry Book'. Both Rosen and Ahlberg are from the 'populist' tradition of contemporary poetry in which a seeming simplicity of language and accessibility of subject matter is transmuted in the best of such poems into plays on words of great inventiveness and meaning. By way of contrast, *The Rattlebag*, your choice of 'Most Important Anthology', is

in the 'heritage' tradition and already an indispensable classic.

The only book in translation amongst your winners is *The Diary of Anne Frank*, indeed one of the seminal documents of the 20th century. Your 'Outstanding' non-fiction author, Terry Deary, is largely responsible for the recent growth of paperback non-fiction of an accessible, often jokey kind, in the wake of his phenomenally successful 'Horrible Histories'.

And the 21st century? J K Rowling got your vote. Natch. ■

Rosen

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

NOVEMBER 1999 No. 119

ISSN 0143-909X © School Bookshop Assoc. Ltd 1999
Editor: Rosemary Stones
Managing Director: Richard Hill
Design and Typeset: Rondale Ltd, Lydney, Glos.
Printed: The Friary Press, Dorchester, Dorset

Editorial correspondence should be sent to the BfK office, same address as for subscriptions.

Books for Keeps can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to: Books for Keeps, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF.

You can also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard) and order via:

Tel: 0181 852 4953
Fax: 0181 318 7580

E-mail: booksforkeeps@btinternet.com

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).

Books for a Real Christmas

It was Jane Ray's **The Nativity** that prompted my Scroogeish conversion: it has been reissued with a 3-D nativity scene unfolding from the endpapers, with its own envelope of characters. Unlike a child, I can remember the first edition, yet still my heart fairly leapt at its joyful brightness, the few lines of unembellished narration of the familiar story (no injected *feelings*) contrasting with the glory of her paintings. Stylised in Ray's inimitable way in a long frieze, with few perspectives and almost everyone in profile, they are naive yet rich in decoration and detail (such as each wise man's cloak suggesting his knowledge); the continuous sweep is broken by frozen moments, framed like icons – her middle-eastern Mary, suckling her baby under the gaze of an ox, is exquisitely tender.



Left, Jane Ray's Mary from **The Nativity**; right, Michael Foreman's 'A Christmas Carol' from his **Christmas Treasury** and below, an Advent Christmas tree from Lois Rock's **Christmas**.

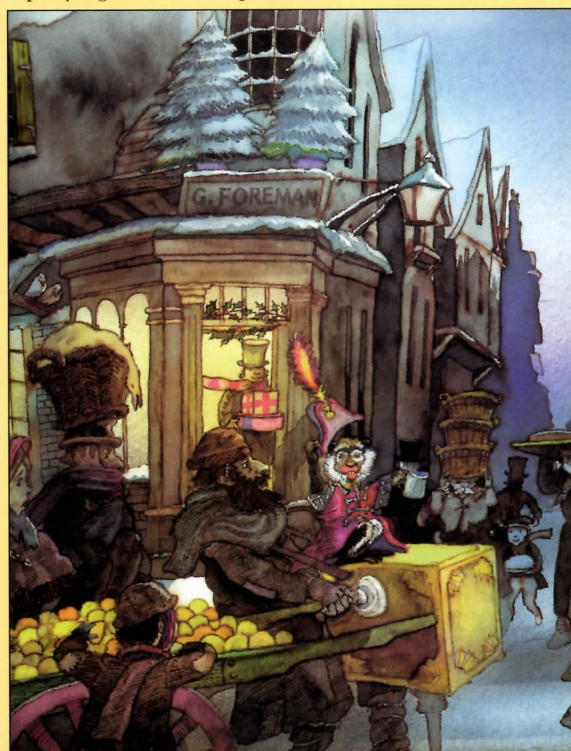
Snowy clichés are replaced by the hope-filled freshness of a Palestinian spring, angels are allowed to be as darkly Semitic as the people of Nazareth. I suppose a thing of beauty really is a joy forever.

Francesca Crespi's style in some ways echoes Ray's, but it is softer, with a pastel prettiness that is more obviously infant-oriented. Her **Advent Carousel** also tells the story simply, but each spread above the words opens into a pop-up scene that includes four or five days of an Advent calendar, the windows opening on to charmingly unpretentious objects and scenes, building to a climactic host of angels. It could become a cherished annual ritual for any family – or classroom – that shrinks from those monstrosities that suggest kids demand a goody in every Advent window. In a Lion series about Christian festivals, **Christmas**, by Lois Rock, illustrated by Helen Cann, also guides us back to simple pleasures. Interleaved with the biblical story are carols and

Just as on the High Street or on the box, there is something about the Christmas season that can bring out the worst in publishers – a phoney holiness desperately straining after the *real* meaning of Christmas, sugary illustrations and sentimental texts smug with cloying symbolism, an unearthing of backlist gems polished into gift books and a jollying-up of out-of-copyright classics. But you cannot keep Christmas, or a good publisher, down, and among it all there is some awesomely good stuff. **Stephanie Nettell** reports.

explanations of traditions, but the book is predominantly a photographic step-by-step manual for creating our own cards and decorations (including a Nativity). It is colourful and ingenious, with results that look enticingly achievable: great for primary teachers, but also for those parents like me, who lovingly set out their children's battered creations years after they have left for their own homes.

Perhaps because of the wartime Christmases of his childhood, this is an especially significant season for Michael Foreman; he has now produced his own **Christmas Treasury** (with a wonderful jacket design), an anthology stamped unusually clearly with its creator's character, since he has illustrated as well as selected its contents. It justifiably contains some of his own writing (the next edition must include **The Little Reindeer**), many oft-anthologised Christmas stories and poems, and several pieces that are more about snowy winter than Christmas – it is a very Foremanishly *blue* book. It is also very beautiful, a pleasure to smell and stroke, brilliantly designed and illustrated – I lingered long over his Dickens pages, and the wild seascape accompanying Stevenson's poem.



Picture books

Now two nicely contrasting picture books. For little ones, much-loved Kipper, Pig and baby Arnold are thinking about trees and presents in **Kipper's Christmas Eve**, with Mick Inkpen's trademark skill in sharing little jokes behind Kipper's back, and ending with yet another utterly charming surprise. And for older readers, a thoughtful allegorical version of a familiar story, **Three Wise Women**. Mary Hoffman almost caresses her tale of three women following their star – a young European with a home-baked loaf, an African girl and her baby, and a grandmother full of tales from the Far South-East – and of the





Above, from
**Kipper's
Christmas Eve;**
right, from **Three
Wise Women.**



baby who received their gifts; and although Lynne Russell's attractively textured figures, suggesting crayons on rough paper, seem stiff to me, they glow with firelight, the moon and the stars.

Anthologies

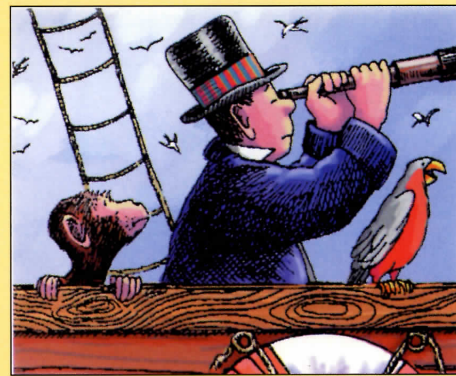
That grandmother gave the baby her stories, and every baby's birthright is a fine collection of fairy tales – given these days, as often as not, by Naomi Lewis. In **Elf Hill** she offers nine sprightly tales by Hans Andersen, illustrated with mischievous affection by Emma Chichester Clark (the princess sensitive to peas under mattresses appears to be in school uniform). Some are old friends, but others were quite new to me. 'Elf Hill' itself is sheer delight, a one-night frolic among mer-royalty, elf princesses and juvenile delinquent trolls. Naomi Lewis's name graces **The Hutchinson Treasury of Fairy Tales** through a foreword and a tale or two, but in fact this is a fat, handsome compendium of twenty-eight mainly already-published fairy tales – traditional, the Grimms, Andersen, Perrault, with a Wilde and a Goethe and a Leprince de Beaumont, who wrote 'Beauty and the Beast' (I never knew that) – illustrated by a whole range of superb artists in a whole range of styles, a few especially for this volume. They are ordered by age, from Goldilocks for toddlers to the savagery of the red shoes for older and tougher souls, but the closing words belong to the hard-won sunshine of 'The Snow Queen', retold by Naomi Lewis herself. A gorgeous gift.

'The Snow
Queen'
illustration by
Angela Barrett
from **The
Hutchinson
Treasury of
Fairy Tales.**



Milly-
Molly-
Mandy
from
**Classic
GIRL
Stories.**

Below, from
**The Story
of Dr
Dolittle.**



of my six-year-old reading it aloud with relish – and surely anyone would be captured by Bodley Head's sumptuous large-format edition of this Hugh Lofting classic? It has an interesting introduction by his son Christopher, some tiny PC emendations, and Lofting's own quirky little line drawings, plus some amazing work by Robin Preiss Glasser, who in a seamless extension of Lofting's style has added large and small colour illustrations.

Retelling a classic

I must admit I do not view Bunyan as a modern (or any) child's first choice of reading, but if anyone can make a rip-roaring adventure from a religious allegory, Geraldine McCaughrean, today's Maestra of the Retold Classic, can. She has stripped the framework of **A Pilgrim's Progress** of its seventeenth-century linguistic dress, shaken it about and completely reclothed it in her own invigorating fashion. (But why 'A Pilgrim' instead of 'The'? She is bold: she melds characters, changes Hopeful to a girl who grows old amid the pleasures of Beulah, re-orders events, brings in the famous hymn from the Second Book,



Christian,
from **A
Pilgrim's
Progress.**

inserts (I think) her own poignant scene about the questions of the dying, expands Atheist's bitter scorn, and has great fun with names – Alec Smart and the Misses Trust and Stake, and if Mr Bendy sounds too like a cartoon Mister Man and I simply do not understand *Owen Bends*, only a McCaughrean could get away with turning 'the black man with the net' into an Irish O'Flattery. Jason Cockcroft's pencil drawings are terrific – I prefer them to his coloured spreads – though it is strange to see Christian as a teenager, knowing he and Hopeful must die to reach the City. This is a thought-provoking work that makes Bunyan's tract as accessible to a child as you are likely to find.

Bunyan created a whole world from his anguished imagination, but it is a planet away from Jill Barklem's, a miniature one entire unto itself, portrayed with incredible and loving detail. Now here is a treat: **The Complete Brambly Hedge** brings all the eight stories since 1980 together for the first time. Simple stories for the very young, illustrations for everyone. What happy hours lie ahead, poring over these amazing pictures, immersed in this ideal mouse-world!



'Educational' fun

More fun from two 'educational' books in brilliant disguise. Blow the trumpets, beat the drums, because **The Magnificent I Can Read Music Book** is exactly what it says – I've never seen a pop-up performance like it! It's jazzy with colour and actions, as its animals jolly along their young pupil from clapping a rhythm to playing scales on the keyboard on the last page. You heard right: an actual in-tune keyboard. By Kate Petty and Jennie Maizels, backed by a fantastic



group of engineers and consultants, it is astonishing value. **Castle Diary**, the Journal of Tobias Burgess, Page, by castle-specialist Richard Platt, is an engaging piece of thirteenth-century social history. An impressively tall book, packed with a million intriguing details, Tobias' simple but accurate account of his daily life is never solemn for a moment (though I hope his noble aunt did not really say 'others who serve your uncle and I'), accompanied as it is by the always spirited Chris Riddell's sly commentary.

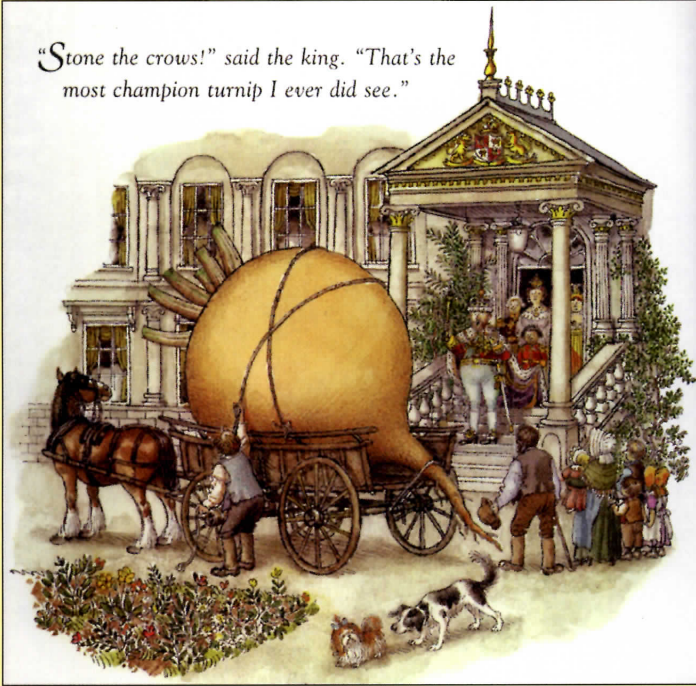


Stocking fillers

All Christmas stockings needs a book, and **The Once Upon a Time Map Book** is shaped to slip down one. Printed on glossy card and looking satisfyingly complicated, it is actually simple enough for very young readers, though they will enjoy their journeys more if they know the original stories. Learning compass points, basic map references and reading keys is part of the fun, as they track down Cinderella's wedding presents hidden in six picture maps of 'storybook lands'. **The Tale of the Turnip** is a slim little jewel of a book, a traditional come-uppance tale neatly retold by Brian Alderson and exquisitely illustrated by that national treasure, Fritz Wegner. There will be tug-of-wars over it on Christmas morning.

Of course this Christmas is the last of the millennium, and two books have been particularly inventive in dodging the yawning qualities of those celebrations. I am quite jealous of Wendy Cooling's splendid idea to ask twenty of our best-known writers each to produce a short story for a different century: **Centuries of Stories**. Aimed at about nine to thirteens, they offer a fine sweep through time, from the long, long period of (it sometimes seems) permanent windswept darkness to a wonderfully suitable millennial tale of magical symbolism from Margaret Mahy. The put-upon orphan and the crippled child who dreams dreams turn up frequently, the settings tilt heavily towards this country, and, pedantically, if we are to be taught the Viking origin of 'berserk' it should be spelled right, but there are nice surprises – Vivian French is in third-century China and Bernard Ashley in twelfth-century Africa; Malorie Blackman in the Deep South of the nineteenth century is touchingly poignant (while defying logic), while Geraldine McCaughrean, with typical ingenuity, tracks down a medieval bestseller all round the known world. Some writers surprise by stepping out of the character we are accustomed to, such as Pete Johnson doing a junior Josephine Tey on behalf of Richard III and

"Stone the crows!" said the king. "That's the most champion turnip I ever did see."



From **The Tale of the Turnip**.

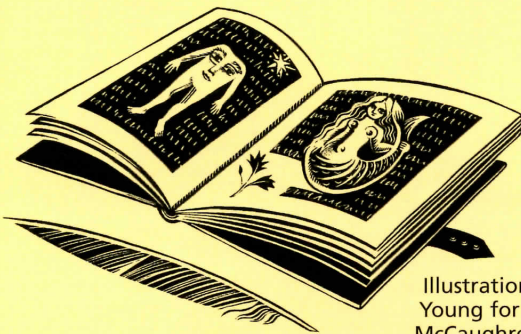
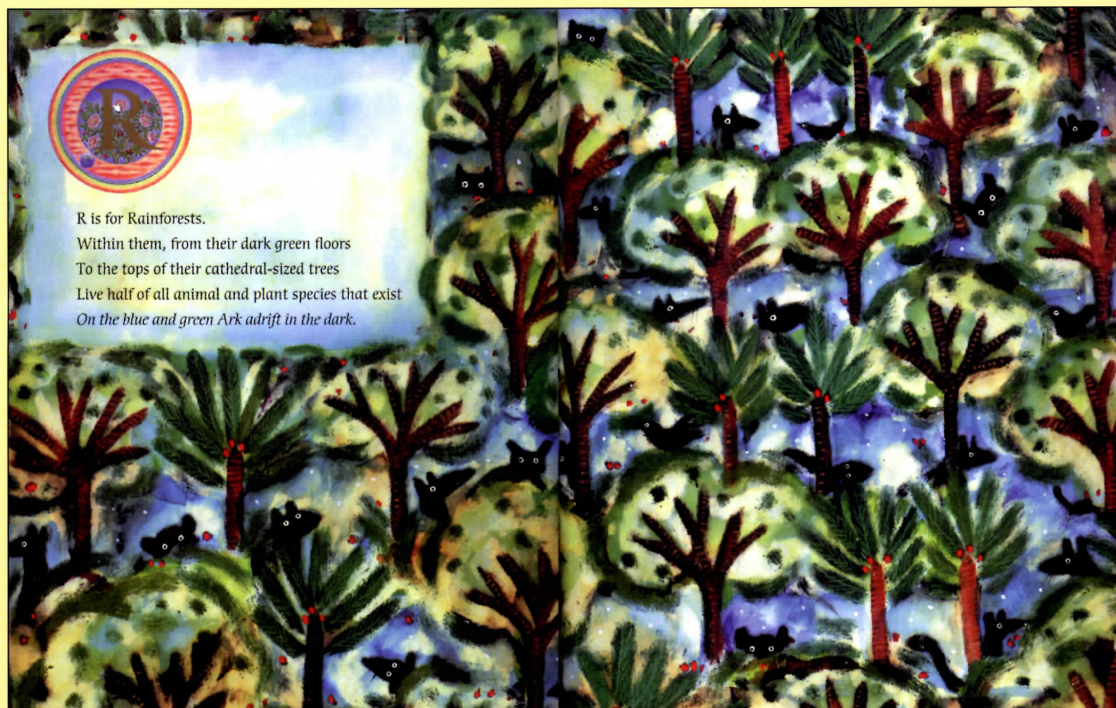


Illustration by Sarah Young for Geraldine McCaughrean's 'Why Would I Lie?' in **Centuries of Stories**.

Illustration by Cathie Felstead from **The Blue and Green Ark**.



R is for Rainforests.
Within them, from their dark green floors
To the tops of their cathedral-sized trees
Live half of all animal and plant species that exist
On the blue and green Ark adrift in the dark.

Jacqueline Wilson suffering for all unwanted girl-children at the birth of Elizabeth. There is humour, too, especially from Annie Dalton's funky angel sent to seventh-century Ireland and Jeremy Strong's Christopher Thrush who almost re-built London. An altogether satisfying collection.

The Blue and Green Ark, Brian Patten's poetic alphabet, celebrates the birth of our planet and the evolution of all its miraculous life-forms, from the blue and green Ark adrift in the dark, to Zero, the futures we will not have unless we cherish that ark. Each letter, with its own internal alphabet, is illuminated by Siân Bailey, and each verse is set into a magnificent spread by artists of the calibre of David Armitage, Patrick Benson, David Parkins and Jane Ray. It is a stunning example of publishing teamwork and the power of verbal and visual poetry, a fit herald of the new millennium. ■

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

Book Details

The Nativity, Jane Ray, Orchard, 1 86039 852 9, £10.99

An Advent Carousel, Francesca Crespi, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1358 5, £12.99

First Festivals: Christmas, Lois Rock, Lion, 0 7459 3907 4, £8.99

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

The Little Reindeer, Michael Foreman, Red Fox, 0 09 940068 5, £4.99 pbk

Kipper's Christmas Eve, Mick Inkpen, Hodder, 0 340 73693 3, £10.99

Three Wise Women, Mary Hoffman, ill. Lynne Russell, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1423 9, £10.99

Elf Hill, Naomi Lewis, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1426 3, £12.99

The Hutchinson Treasury of Fairy Tales, Hutchinson, 0 09 176793 8, £19.95

Classical GIRL Stories, ed. Rosemary Sandberg, Kingfisher, 0 7534 0344 7, £14.99

The Story of Doctor Dolittle, Hugh Lofting, add. ill. Robin Preiss Glasser, Bodley Head, 0 370 32701 2, £12.99

The Complete Brambly Hedge, Jill Barklem, Collins, 0 00 198367 9, £19.99

John Bunyan's A Pilgrim's Progress, Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Hodder, 0 340 69340 1, £14.99

The Magnificent I Can Read Music Book, Kate Petty, ill. Jennie Maizels, Bodley Head, 0 370 32377 7, £14.99

Castle Diary, Richard Platt, ill. Chris Riddell, Walker, 0 7445 2880 1, £14.99

The Once Upon a Time Map Book, B. G. Hennessy, ill. Peter Joyce, Walker, 0 7445 4077 1, £9.99

The Tale of the Turnip, Brian Alderson, ill. Fritz Wegner, Walker, 0 7445 4910 8, £9.99

Centuries of Stories, ed. Wendy Cooling, Collins, 0 00 185715 0, £14.99

The Blue and Green Ark, Brian Patten, Scholastic, 0 590 11389 5, £12.99

Authorgraph No.119

Patrick Benson

Patrick Benson

interviewed by Joanna Carey

The last stretch of my seven hour journey to meet Patrick Benson is on a bus from Edinburgh. There's just one other passenger – a man in a kilt who gets off in the middle of nowhere and vanishes into the drizzle with his bagpipes.

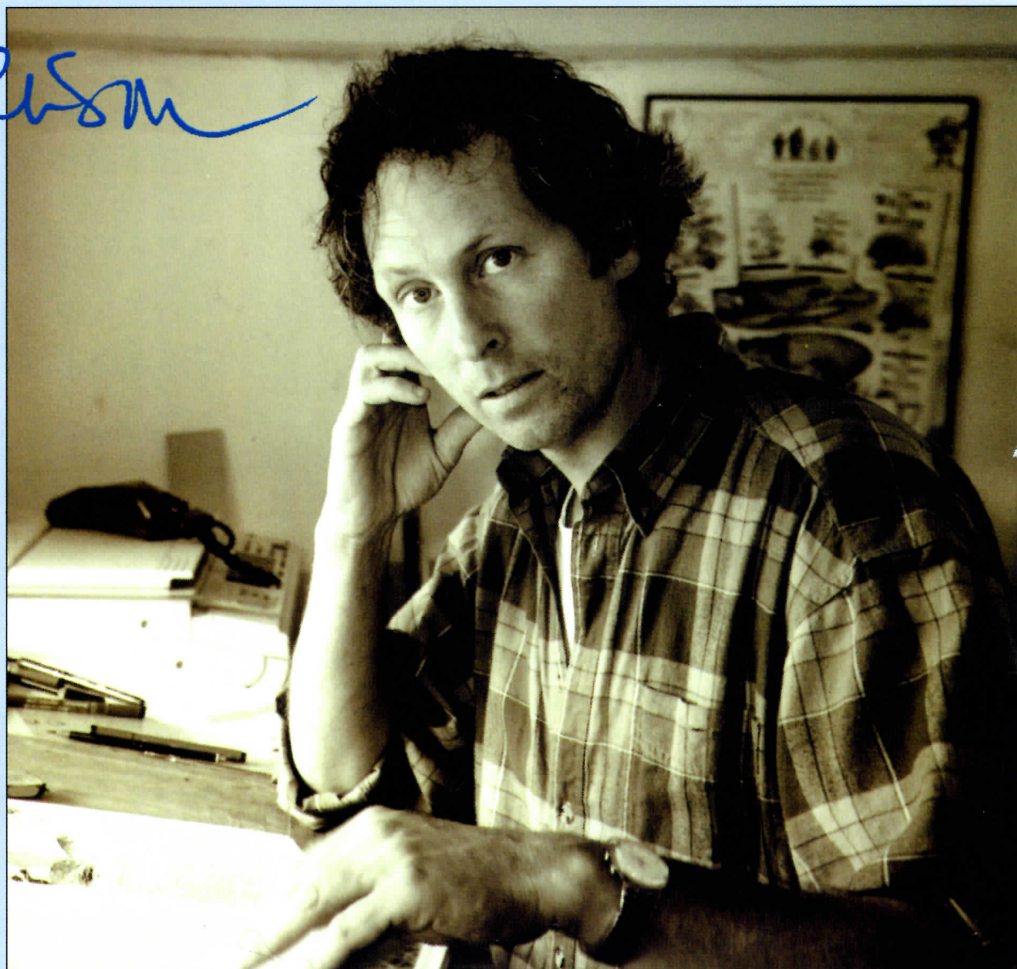
'Yes it is quite remote' says Benson, who meets me at Melrose. 'I used to live in the south but I can now live miles away from London and still be in touch with publishers and editors – thanks to modern technology.'

But the impact of modern technology isn't immediately apparent in the easy-going atmosphere of the rambling home he shares with his partner Augusta and their six year old son Barnaby. Above the kitchen mantelpiece, where teapots, jugs and jam jars jostle for space, are two large clocks – each telling a different time – both wrong. And by the back door Benson proudly draws my attention to a brand-new, but distinctly old-fangled pitchfork – for use in the stables, he says. I don't actually get to see the horses, but there's no shortage of livestock indoors – dogs, tropical fish, hamsters, stick insects and a tortoise in what looks like an intensive care unit. Fishing rods, saddles, heirlooms and gumboots abound.

Benson has a ready wit and an informal but patrician manner. He describes his background as 'landed gentry' and combines a fondness for country pursuits (especially fishing) with a touching ability to lavish tender loving care on the tortoise. And the spaniels, flopping around like fake-fur pyjama cases, are fully trained gun dogs.

He grew up on a farm in the Cotswolds and after leaving Eton, studied classical drawing in Florence, and did a foundation year at Chelsea art school. He then took a year out, painting murals. 'A dreadful business, people are never satisfied ... keep calling you back to add things ... to make it a little more *Tuscan*, for example or to put in a few more urns or peacocks or whatever.' He then got a place at St Martin's – 'though they gave me a hard time at my interview on account of my background' to study graphics, and before embarking on his illustrating career he spent some time in the fashion business with his cousin Arabella Pollen, the designer. 'I was really rather good on the sewing machine.' 'He's multi-talented' says Augusta who's dishing up lunch for Barnaby and a young friend who has come to play.

He may boast about his sewing but Benson is genuinely modest about his successes as an illustrator. He has illustrated over 30 books – and though he talks with passionate enthusiasm about the work, he continually turns the conversation away from himself and towards those he admires



like Fritz Wegner, his teacher at St Martin's. 'He's like a god to me – a wonderful man, a brilliant artist' he says producing, from a slithering pile of books, Wegner's latest – **The Tale of the Turnip**. Illustrators are often reluctant to say which of their peers they admire, but Benson readily reels off a list including Max Velthuis, Lisbeth Zwerger, Quentin Blake, and, in particular, John Burningham ('he's extraordinary – he never puts a foot wrong') and he goes on to acknowledge a wide range of influences; from Ardizzone, EH Shepard ('he really was a genius – he drew SO much better than any of us lot'), Heath Robinson, Tunncliffe, Cecil Aldin, right back to Hokusai, Durer... 'I think we all borrow a little here and there – even if we don't let on; but if you really want to know what initially inspired me, it was these books I was given as a child, by my grandmother. They came from Paris at the turn of the century', and he indicates a collection of books about Napoleon, Frederick the Great, The Sun King – huge books, with spectacular illustrations by Job, and Maurice le Noir.

So as an illustrator, is he on an equal footing with the author? 'Well, it's complicated. I think with picture books, people tend to underestimate the skills of the author. They'll pick a book up attracted by the pictures, read it through, then say Cor Blimey! That must have taken all of twenty minutes to write! But there's a lot more to it than meets the eye. I know, I've done it (he wrote and illustrated **Little Penguin**) but really I don't have enough of the 'whizzy' ideas you need for that – but with people like

William Mayne, Russell Hoban, Adrian Mitchell, Roald Dahl, Martin Waddell, Kathy Henderson, I've been incredibly lucky with authors. And great writing really is of paramount importance.'

So what basically is the function of the illustrator? Is it to interpret the text? To elaborate on it? Extend it? 'The *first* thing is simply to help the child visualize the surroundings in which the story is happening – to provide lots of visual clues, "snapshots", bits of information – to provide "a springboard for the imagination". Sorry about that cliché,' he says, laughing.

But the springboard metaphor is strangely appropriate – right on cue Barnaby reappears to report an emergency: since lunchtime, he and his friend have been exercising their imaginations by leaping about in the bedroom – and the friend's leg is now painfully jammed between the wooden slats on the top bunk. Benson flies to the rescue, but doesn't lose the thread of the discussion.

'I'm always conscious that illustrations can fail. I'm well aware of the dangers,' he says, setting off up the stairs with a screw driver – and a saw just in case, followed by Augusta with a camera, and me with my notebook. And as he wades through a mountain of bedding to dismantle the bed he continues ...

'I know that the wrong illustrations can literally destroy a dream ... and however powerful the text, ultimately it's the images that stick in the mind.'

And as the friend's leg is released, Augusta captures the moment with a snapshot and we go on up to the studio.

It's a scene of somewhat chaotic creativity – various cardboard boxes spill out their contents, suggesting a recent house move – or a small earth tremor perhaps. There's a Spanish guitar on the floor and dog-bed that looks like a baggy trampoline. But neatly laid out by his desk, is an immaculate set of black and white drawings for the latest of William Horwood's sequels to *The Wind in the Willows*. This is the fifth in the series, 'and quite enough!' he says – 'though it's good fun working on something when you know the characters so well ... even if they are bunch of misogynist old codgers ... and the bonus was that I actually got a chance to re-illustrate Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*. The only trouble with that was that I soon found that naturally, Shepard had nabbed all the best scenes. But it was a brilliant opportunity which arose from the fact that my work can sit comfortably alongside Shepard's because I don't really have a strong style of my own.'

Although he makes this point repeatedly, Benson does of course have a very distinctive style – notable particularly for faultless drawing, and for the infinite variety of tonal and textural qualities he creates with his complex system of rhythmical hatching and cross-hatching. Using a wide variety of pens, nibs, rapidographs and brushes, and mixing his own inks, he has a subtle, eloquent line which varies in character from a wistful delicacy to a vigorous, wiry intensity. 'I always work "same size",' he says, 'so I can control the weight of the line.'

He works on Fabriano paper, stretching the paper before applying colour – a combination of watercolour paints, and Dr Martin's concentrated watercolour inks (that come in those little bottles with a squeezezy thing like a medicine dropper). 'The droppers are useful' he says, 'I once used one to feed a baby hedgehog.' And there was that kestrel,' says Augusta, 'the one we had to keep dead mice in the freezer for.'

This leads me on to ask about *Owl Babies*. Were those baby owls drawn from life? 'Well it was dreadful actually. Someone told me about a barn owl that had five babies but when I got there the mother and father owl had eaten them all. Apparently that does happen.' But not in picture books luckily.



From *Owl Babies*.

Interestingly, *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell was an opportunity Benson might well have overlooked – for there's often quite a gulf between the author's intention, and the artist's initial understanding of the text – and here he extols the work of his 'brilliant and perceptive' editors at Walker Books.

'I mean ... look at the text of *Owl Babies*. What exactly have you got? Three baby owls and their mum. Mum flies off, the babies get worried and Mum comes back. Quite honestly, I didn't get it, but my wonderful editor David Lloyd simply said, 'This is the perfect picture book text!' He talked me into it. He was right and it's my most successful book.'

It's an enchanting book, with pictures that tell the simple story with cinematic verve. 'Because it's a night time story I wanted it very dark, but I also wanted rich colours so I solved

Benson spent a long time drawing on the south-west coast of Scotland for this book – and even building 'sea-stone' igloos on the beach with Barnaby, and the poetry of the text is richly reflected in the depth, the sensitivity and the gentle humour of his illustrations. Each successive reading yields further delights – you can almost smell the sea, and hear the pebbles 'clicking in the tide-wash', and you can taste 'the salt night ... in the slap and gurgle of the waves.'

And with Benson's cunning use of scale – fine foreground details, and wide horizons beyond – you really can feel the vastness of the sea and when the little bird boldly launches himself back into the foam, you know he's in his element.

And so, it seems, with these illustrations, is Benson. ■



this by transferring the black and white drawing onto clear film, then, lifting the film, I coloured underneath.' Beautifully printed, the effect is that of stained glass, with the luminosity of the vibrant colours divided by the black 'leaded' areas which have a fine inky sheen.

The new book, *The Sea-Thing Child*, has a very different background. It's a story that Hoban wrote some twenty years ago – Benson came across it and asked if he might illustrate it. The result is a perfect marriage of richly textured words and pictures, with a simple, straightforward layout. Did author and artist work very closely together? 'Not really. I've worked with Hoban before and he knows my work. He looks at the work in progress, but he's very generous – he doesn't interfere. He used to be an illustrator himself, so he knows the business.'

In the story, the little sea-thing child, 'a little dragged heap of fright' that Benson portrays as something like a baby puffin, is washed ashore in a storm. Terrified, he builds a sea-stone igloo and hides. He makes two friends – an anxious crab, who's full of self doubt, scared of the unknown, and a wise old albatross who urges him to spread his wings and take his rightful place in the world. Gradually he gathers confidence to get back to the sea where he belongs. It's a funny, poignant uplifting story accessible at any level of understanding – and open to as much psychological analysis as you care to give it.

The Books

(published by Walker unless otherwise indicated)

The Sea-Thing Child by Russell Hoban, 0 7445 6743 2, £10.99 hbk

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell, 0 7445 2166 1, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 3167 5, £4.99 pbk

Little Penguin, 0 7445 6056 X, £4.99 pbk

The Little Boat by Kathy Henderson, 0 7445 2181 5, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 5253 2, £4.99 pbk

The Hob Stories by William Mayne, 0 7445 4994 9, £10.99 hbk

Herbert: Five Stories by Ivor Cutler, 0 7445 0702 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 4778 4, £4.99 pbk

Trickster Tales by Berlie Doherty, 0 7445 4467 X, £12.99 hbk

Let the Lynx Come In by Jonathan London, 0 7445 4038 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 6041 1, £4.99 pbk

Robin Hood by Sarah Hayes, 0 7445 0746 4, £8.95 hbk

Fred the Angel by Martin Waddell, 0 7445 0832 0, £3.50 pbk

The Minpins by Roald Dahl, Puffin, 0 14 054371 6, £5.99 pbk

Photographs by Joanna Carey

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

The Children's Books of the Century: **BfK** readers choose the very best.

'You've probably done a lot of good with your questionnaire making so many minds think so furiously about children's books' wrote one **BfK** reader in a letter (one of many) attached to her questionnaire. Here then are the results of all that furious thinking – some predictable choices, some quirky ones that added up to tell us what you were thinking and feeling about children's books in the last months of this century and this millennium as you put pen to questionnaire. **Rosemary Stones** explains.

'Do you enjoy reading?' asked the **Books for Keeps Millennium Questionnaire** which was sent out in the May issue of the magazine. 'Dumb question' one of you replied and, as it turned out, we could indeed have taken that one for granted. Other questions were more problematic:

'How can anyone speak for the whole century?'

'You can't just have one favourite author!'

'There are a lot of flaws in trying to compile 'Best of' lists.' (Tell us about it.)

'A stimulating, testing and ultimately impossible exercise!'

'Even by cheating and squeezing in extras I keep thinking of books I left out.'

You sent covering letters and notes, you filled your questionnaires with indignant amendments, passionate afterthoughts, tipp-ex, asterisks, exclamation marks, arrows and lots of wonderfully detailed and personal information about your relationship with books, children and reading.

● Reading generations

Although we had not asked you to tick an age group box, the choices you made gave plenty of clues. Were you an adolescent in those innocent days when teenagers were reading **Oliver Twist** and Malcom Saville ('teenage fiction – what's that?') or one of the **Fifteen** ('it showed teenagers there were books for them specifically') or still later **Junk** generations. Our oldest respondent (so far as we know) is a retired librarian of 95.

● Fiction Choice

'For God's sake not Roald Dahl,' wrote one teacher but Dahl easily came top as your choice of the outstanding children's writer of the century. Philip Pullman, though, was voted your favourite writer, an interesting distinction that you did not make when you voted Quentin Blake both the outstanding illustrator of the century ('It has to be Mr Q. Blake doesn't it. Who else?') and your favourite illustrator. Michael Rosen was also voted both the outstanding poet of the century and your favourite poet.

● Poetry and Non-Fiction

Some of you were less confident about voting for poetry and non-fiction than you were with fiction. **The Rattlebag** emerged from a long and eclectic list and in general non-fiction books rather than authors were known. There was considerable enthusiasm, however, for Terry Deary's 'Horrible Histories' series ('he got my boys reading') while David Macaulay's **The Way Things Work** 'changed the way we look at things'. Dorling Kindersley's 'Eyewitness Guides' were praised by many for their 'sheer quality innovation'.

The non-fiction book that you considered most important, however, is not only one of the key texts of European literature but perhaps the children's book of the century – written as it was by a child. It is **The Diary of Anne Frank**. 'When I read it I couldn't believe that such a thing could have happened to a girl my age,' one of you remembered.

● Influential Books

Sharing appears to have been an important element in some of your choices:

'Untermeyer's **Golden Treasury of Poetry** was significant to me as a family sharing experience across (now) four generations from infancy onwards.'

The emphasis you put on particular books and their significance might lead us to expect a long and disparate list of titles in response to the questions about which books mean most to you. There was plenty of evidence for this:

'I probably read Classics because of liking **Beloved of the Gods**. I certainly learned Norse because of Noggins the Nog.'

'**The Swish of the Curtain** gave me the inspiration to act.'

'**Catcher in the Rye** stopped me biting my fingernails – Holden Caulfield expresses disgust about nail biting!'

'**Watership Down** – stopped eating rabbit; **Talking Turkeys** – made me write poetry; **The Lion, the Witch** – became Christian.'

'I always wanted a ginger cat because of **Orlando**.'

'Aged 25, jobless and directionless, I read Eric Allen's **Latchkey Children** and decided that if children's books were that good I'd better get a job amongst them. I did.'

'**Five on a Treasure Island** turned me from an indifferent reader into a passionate one.'

'**A Pair of Jesus-boots** was a real shock to my middle classness! I'd no idea children lived like this. I read it over and over again.'

'**William** influenced my powers of rhetoric.'

'I identified strongly with Titty in **Swallows and Amazons** – she had individual odd feelings and so did I. It allowed me to be different and individual when I was sent to a rather conformist boarding school.'

And yet, amongst all these important individual reading experiences when you found the 'right' book at the right moment, you mention a handful of books (**The Secret Garden**, **Dear Nobody**, **Homecoming** and **Goodnight Mr Tom**) over and over again. The moral and material transformations of such titles appear to have an especially powerful and inspirational appeal of an enduring kind:

'**The Secret Garden**' consoled me after my mother's death when I was seven.'

'The insight into juvenile feelings in **Dear Nobody** is amazing. I wept when I read both sides of the story by the boy and girl main characters.'

● New Talents?

J K Rowling of **Harry Potter** fame ('brilliant plots, well rounded characters and not afraid to tackle fear, death, rejection etc. within the safety of an imagined but realistic world') was easily your choice for the new talent of the next century. 'She will probably last,' you said, 'but there are too many cheap fireworks about to confuse the eye.' 'I don't think we've seen the new talents yet,' wrote another, 'they're still children. People like David Almond are well known in this century, although quite new.' This is a good point – the reputations of children's writers and illustrators used to build gradually. In our marketing lead days, publishers' resources are devoted to a lucky few whose names are quickly

established. Will such speedily built reputations endure? Some 'big names' of the last decade were notably absent from your questionnaires and it will be interesting to see how the current crop fare in the new century.

Very many thanks to all our readers who took time and such trouble to fill in their questionnaire.

FICTION

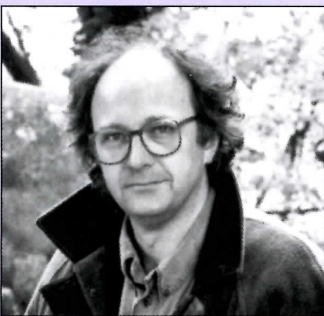
● The outstanding 20th century children's writer



Roald Dahl

Runners-up: Enid Blyton and C S Lewis

● BfK readers' favourite 20th century children's author

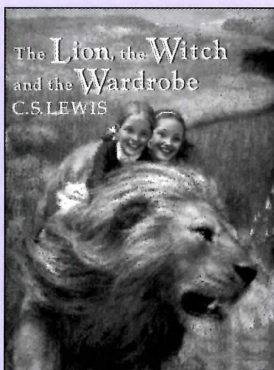


Philip Pullman

Runners-up: Anne Fine and Jacqueline Wilson

● The most important 20th century novel

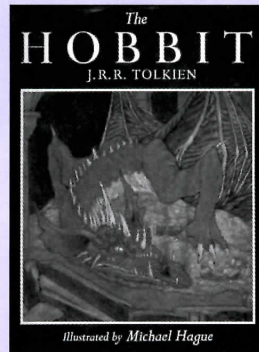
1. For younger readers



The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (C S Lewis)

Runners-up: **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** (Roald Dahl) and **Winnie-the-Pooh** (A A Milne)

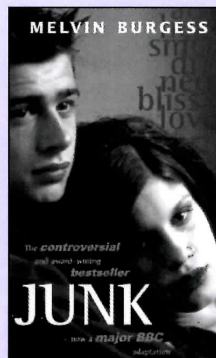
2. For older readers



The Hobbit (J R R Tolkien)

Runners-up: **Goodnight Mr Tom** (Michelle Magorian) and **Northern Lights** (Philip Pullman)

3. For teenagers

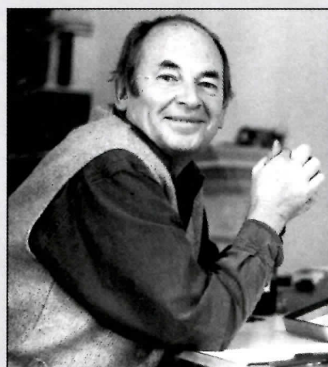


Junk (Melvin Burgess)

Runners-up: **Lord of the Rings** (J R Tolkien), **Forever** (Judy Blume) and **Dear Nobody** (Berlie Doherty)

ILLUSTRATION

● The outstanding 20th century children's illustrator



Quentin Blake

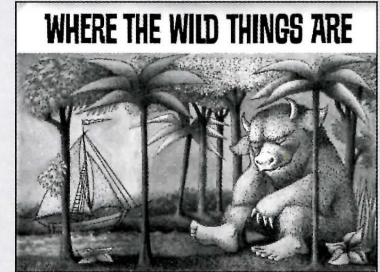
Runners-up: Anthony Browne and Shirley Hughes

● BfK readers' favourite 20th century children's illustrator

Quentin Blake

Runners-up: Shirley Hughes and Anthony Browne

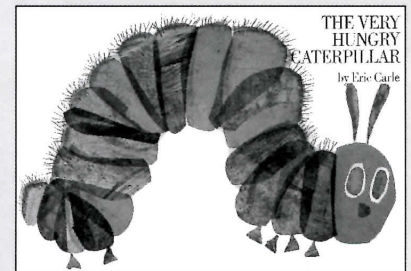
● The most important 20th century children's picture book



Where the Wild Things Are (Maurice Sendak)

Runners-up: **The Snowman** (Raymond Briggs) and **Rosie's Walk** (Pat Hutchins)

● The most important 20th century children's novelty book



The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Eric Carle)

Runners-up: **The Jolly Postman** (Allan and Janet Ahlberg) and **The Haunted House** (Jan Pieńkowski)

POETRY

● The outstanding 20th century children's poet



Michael Rosen

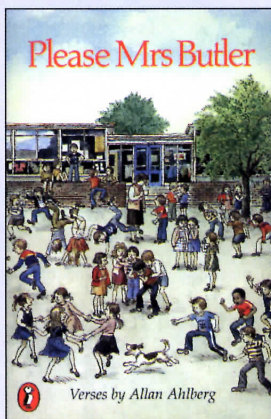
Runners-up: Ted Hughes and Roger McGough

- BfK readers' favourite 20th century children's poet

Michael Rosen

Runners-up: Roger McGough and Charles Causley

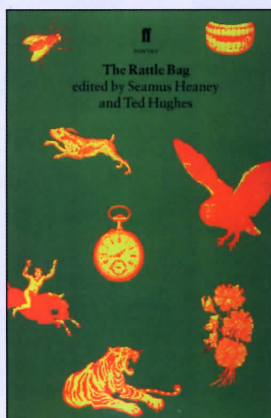
- The most important 20th century children's poetry book



Please Mrs Butler (Allan Ahlberg, ill. Fritz Wegner)

Runners-up: *Heard It in the Playground* (Allan Ahlberg) and *Now We Are Six* (A A Milne)

- The most important 20th century children's anthology

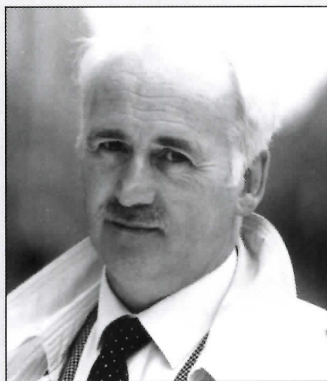


The Rattle Bag (Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney)

Runners-up: *I Like This Poem* (ed. Kaye Webb) and *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (ed. Peter and Iona Opie)

NON-FICTION

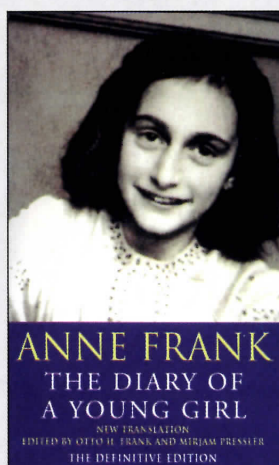
- The outstanding 20th century children's non-fiction writer/illustrator



Terry Deary

Runners-up: David Macaulay and Stephen Biesty

- The most important 20th century children's non-fiction book



The Diary of Anne Frank

Runners-up: *Eyewitness Guides* (Dorling Kindersley) and *The Way Things Work* (David Macaulay)

NEW TALENT

- The new talent for the 21st century



J K Rowling

Runners-up: David Almond and Jane Simmons ■

Fin de Sièclism

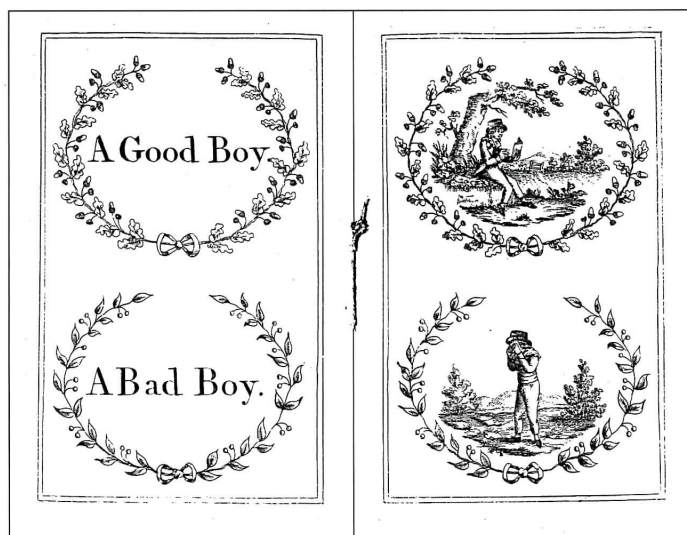
Just as the end of the twentieth century prompts us to look back over the last hundred years of children's books, were our forebears at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries similarly engaged? **Brian Alderson** investigates.

The idea that an arbitrary date on a calendar can influence human affairs seems to me rather a whacky one. People who stay in bed every Friday the 13th, or who make (and keep?) New Year's Resolutions may choose to disagree, but the contrived junketings soon to be upon us look to have far less to do with historical causes than with mountebanks out to sell us kitsch and wreck the fair borough of Greenwich.

So when **Books for Keeps'** editor asked me if the *fins* of previous *siècles* had exerted any influence on children's literature I was inclined to be dismissive. On the other hand though, there is no denying that the end of both the eighteenth and the nineteenth century saw some remarkable, if not exactly revolutionary, events take place. (There is no point in looking back to the end of the seventeenth century since children's literature did not then exist as a clearly defined genre.)

The year 1800

If a single word can be used to describe what was going on around the year 1800 then it might be diversification. Up to the 1790s much of the material produced for children's recreational reading followed a fairly standard pattern, both in terms of content and physical appearance. Around the turn of the century however change and experiment emerge. Authors who – rightly enough – were to become household names for decades to come published their first works: Maria Edgeworth, for instance, with *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), Ann Taylor with her earliest contribution to *The Minor's Pocket Book* (1799). The format and presentation of material took on hitherto unexploited forms, with the anonymous *Picture Gallery for All Good Boys and Girls: beautifully coloured* (April 28, 1801) turning up as perhaps the



From **The Picture Gallery**, for all good boys and girls: beautifully coloured and explained in words of one syllable. Exhibition the First. London. Pub'd April 28, 1801 by John Wallis, N°16 Ludgate Street, pp16-17.

first larger format, hand-coloured picture book (soon to be followed by a veritable explosion of picture books), and with all kinds of new play-way approaches to children's reading being tried, from picture-sheets (forerunners of today's Big Books) and jig-saw puzzles to tiny books put out as 'miniature libraries' in wooden boxes that were got up to look like book-cases. By 1802 the nation even had its first specialist reviewing journal: Sarah Trimmer's monthly **Guardian of Education**, much mocked for its Establishment foibles, but undertaking its critical duties with a vastly more serious demeanour than what little reviewing goes on today.

The year 1900

In its very different way, the end of the nineteenth century also had a distinctive character (and this was, of course, the period that lumbered us with the concept of *fin de siècle*). Obviously the diversifications of 1800 had diversified themselves in many directions over the intervening century so that by the time you get to the nineties the changes may not seem so dramatic, but it is arguable that that period saw the arrival of writers, illustrators, or just individual books, which have held greater sway in the twentieth century than much that preceded them: Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame, E Nesbit, Helen Bannerman, Beatrix Potter, J M Barrie ... And conjoined with them go the 'artistic' picture books like William Nicholson's **Alphabet** of 1898 and Edward Gordon Craig's **Book of Penny Toys** of 1899, premonitions of the gift-book fashion that would soon be exploited by such as Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac. L Frank Baum's **Wonderful Wizard of Oz** (Chicago, 1900) never really caught on in Britain, perhaps because of its reach-me-down text, but if you're looking for revolutionary events then Denslow's illustrations deserve recording as having a manic inventiveness never before seen in a printed book.

Generational cycles

Now while it may be satisfying for *fin de siècle*ists to be able to point to these changes in

the small-scale world of children's literature as evidence of a spirit of renewal, the sense of a beginning, rather than the sense of an ending, inspired by the wholesale change of dates on the calendar, I wouldn't care to argue the point myself. As I see it, the history of children's literature is governed more by generational cycles than by arbitrary dates, although, since these cycles each go on for about thirty years, decade dates can provide rough stepping-stones across the morass. If clearly documentable history begins c. 1740 then it

is quite easy to perceive 30-year transitions right down to the present in both the kinds of book produced and the social/economic/technological factors that govern that production.

Thus, round about 1800, the market for children's books, after sixty years of growth, was sufficiently well-established to offer possibilities to lively entrepreneurs. The two or three publishers who dominated the preceding thirty years were subject to competition that was bound to stimulate new and original approaches, and within a year or two the transformed companies of

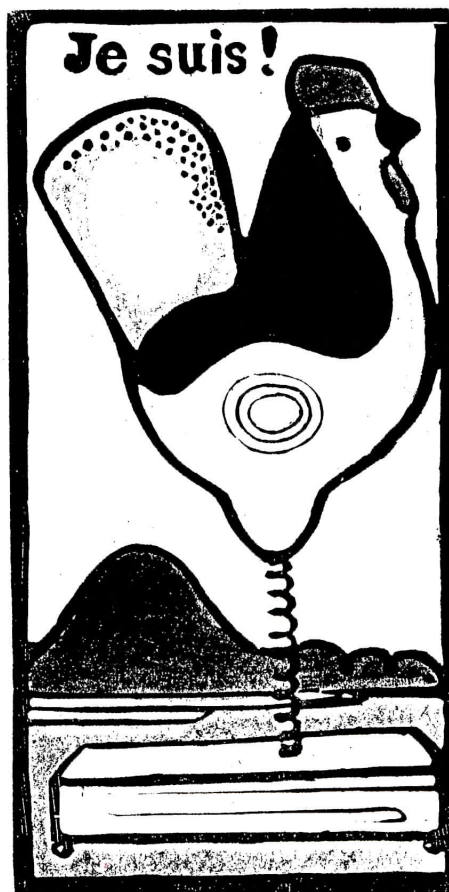
Newbery/Harris and John Marshall found themselves players in a game which included such busy rivals as Darton & Harvey, Wallis, Tabart, Godwin and Dean & Munday (which last only lost its independence circa 1960). At the same time, improvements in print technology, the spread of trade wood-engraving from the Bewick workshop, and above all the use of copper-plate engraving for the making of illustrated sheets and picture books opened up opportunities for much more varied design.

New processes

And, round about 1890 (to keep to the 30-year sequence), a slightly similar set of circumstances is to be found. New publishers with new ideas about children's books emerge: Dent, Heinemann, John Lane, Grant Richards, Martin Secker, Fisher Unwin; established firms furbish themselves up; and new processes – especially involving photo-techniques – are in the offing. (It is possible that the frontispiece to the privately-printed **Peter Rabbit** of 1901 is the first example of 3-colour half-tone to appear in a printed book.) In addition, this period sees rapid changes in the nature of the reading public, brought about by changes in education after the 1870 Act, one feature being the colossal growth in newspaper and periodical publishing. (It is not generally realised today how many of the Victorian and Edwardian 'children's classics' were first published in serial form.)

Today's fin de siècle

Undeniable then the fruitful activity going on in these two turnings of a century, but undeniable too that the dates had nothing to do with it and the evolutionary cycles everything. And that is borne out by today's experience too. We are currently in the generation that started round about 1980 which saw the implosion of the hopes and the excitements of the previous thirty years. Unlike the other *fin de siècle*, the scope for independent publishing has contracted and – in the face of single-issue fanatics – the scope for individual expression too. The economics of book-production are tending to impose uniformity in design and in the use of materials which breeds among historians like myself an admiration for the taste and ingenuity that characterised the hard times of the 1940s and the early 1950s. Above all this though is a change so radical that it is as yet impossible to determine how far it will affect human thought-processes, let alone responses to the written word. The speed of progress (if that is the right word), the complexity, and the apparent uncontrollability of electronic communication may prove so influential during this current cycle that by 2010 'children's literature' may be a thing of the past – but the coincidence of that transformation with the imminent millennium is entirely fortuitous. ■



From **Gordon Craig's Book of Penny Toys**, Hackbridge, 1899, sig B1

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

BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BfK Briefing • BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING

NEWS

NYR impacts on parents

A survey to mark the end of the National Year of Reading reveals that 70% of parents with children aged 5-10 and 80% of those with children under five now read to them every day.

Authors Bite Back

A new imprint, Barn Owl Books has been launched by children's writer Ann Jungman. Described at the launch party as a way for authors to 'bite back' at mainstream publishers who allow their titles to go out of print, the imprint will republish 'worthwhile' children's titles. Barn Owl's first four books are Jacqueline Wilson's *Jimmy Jelly*, a 'charming story for first readers'; Gwen Grant's *Private - Keep Out!* about a working class girl growing up after the war; Michael Rosen's *You're Thinking about Doughnuts*, a 'gripping read for confident readers' and Adèle Geras' *Voyage*, the story of Russian migrants leaving for the USA in 1905. The books are distributed by Roundabout.



Barn Owl Books

Another author who has bitten back is John Rowe Townsend. Following demand for his much acclaimed but OP novel *Noah's Castle*, he has reprinted it himself. Available from Green Bay Publications, 72 Water Lane, Histon, Cambridge CB4 4LR at £4.95.

Meanwhile former Associate Publisher at Penguin Children's Books, Jane Nissen is launching her own imprint, Jane Nissen Books. Her first titles will appear early in 2000. She will be bringing 'forgotten classics' back into print in paperback using the original illustrations. They will be distributed by Ragged Bears.

Blunkett's Non-Fiction

From September 2000 the new National Curriculum will contain an eclectic list of recommended non-fiction authors for 11-14 year olds. Students will be encouraged to study a range of texts, including autobiography, travel writing, essays and reportage. The men listed include Winston Churchill, James Cameron, Alistair Cooke, Samuel Johnson, Lord Byron, William Cobbett, Laurie Lee and John Berger. Women listed include Vera Brittain, Beatrice Webb, Dorothy Wordsworth and Rachel Carson (the author of *Silent Spring* on the dangers of pesticides in farming). The list has been attacked by the former Conservative Education spokesperson, David Willetts, as a 'ludicrous exercise'. He added 'It sounds as if there is political bias in the choices.' Willetts' list of non-fiction authors would have included Roger Scruton, Friedrich Hayek (an economist) and Margaret Thatcher.

Wayland acquired

The children's non-fiction publisher, Wayland, has been bought by Hodder Headline (now part of W H Smith). It will become part of Hodder Children's Books and its titles will be more actively promoted in the trade. Wayland Managing Director, Roberta Bailey, becomes Director of Hodder Wayland. As a result of the acquisition, Hodder Children's Books will have its own specialist children's sales force.

Stories from behind bars

In an imaginative scheme at Winchester Prison, fathers serving long gaol sentences are being encouraged to record bedtime stories on tape for their children. A grant from British Telecom was used to buy books and tape recorders for the prisoners to use.

New lists for Egmont

Egmont Children's Books has launched two new lists. The Mammoth Irish list is aimed at the Irish market, featuring Egmont's existing Irish writers and illustrators, some new talent and titles with Irish settings. The World Mammoth list will launch in June 2000 with titles in translation.

PEOPLE

Klaus Flugge, Publisher at Andersen Press, renowned for his generosity and dedication, has been voted this year's winner of the



FLUGGE

prestigious Eleanor Farjeon Award. This is only the second time a publisher has been bestowed this honour, following Kaye Webb, founder of the Puffin Book Club who received the Award in 1970. Following periods working in Germany, New York and the London office of Abelard-Schuman, Klaus set up his own publishing company, Andersen Press, in 1976, named in tribute to the greatest of storytellers. Since then, Klaus has put together a vibrant and dynamic list that has few equals. The authors and illustrators he has worked with form a rollcall of honour and include such names as David McKee, Michael Foreman, Melvin Burgess, Satoshi Kitamura and many others.

Jane Winterbotham has been appointed Publishing Director at Walker Books. She was formerly Managing Director of Egmont Children's Books.

Congratulations to Christina Dyer, currently Service Adviser for Children's, Youth and Community Services with Leicestershire Libraries and Information Services, who will be taking up a new post from November 1st. She will be moving to work for Nottingham City Council Leisure and Community Services as Service

Manager for Children's and Community Libraries. She will be responsible for children's services across the authority and services through 19 community libraries. Special responsibilities will include Lifelong Learning, Literacy and Stock Management.

Dr Bob McKee is the new Chief Executive of the Library Association. He was formerly Assistant Chief Executive with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and a member of the Library and Information Commission.

Ingrid Selberg has been appointed Managing Director and Publisher of Pleasant, the Publishing division of the US toy company Mattel. Pleasant is to be launched in the UK, France and Germany.

Kate Agnew, manager of Heffers Children's Bookshop in Cambridge, has left the company to pursue a writing career. She plans to work part-time as a bookseller.

Pilar Jenkins has been appointed Managing Director of the publishing division at Hit Entertainment. She was previously Publishing Director at Random House Children's Books with special responsibility for the Red Fox paperback list.

David Morton, Operations Director at Daisy & Tom, has left the company as part of an internal cost saving exercise.

The children's fiction packagers, Working Partners (creators of *Animal Ark* for Hodder Children's Books) has appointed Rehana Ahmed as editor. She was formerly at Macmillan Children's Books.

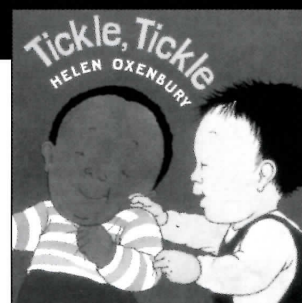
Contributors: BfK team, Anne Marley. Submissions welcome.

PRIZES

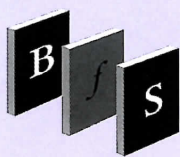
Sainsbury's Baby Book Award

Helen Oxenbury's *Tickle, Tickle* (Walker Books) is the winner of the first Sainsbury's Baby Book Award. The judges felt it to be 'a book which babies and parents alike would be sure to enjoy. It has sturdy pages, plenty of positive multicultural images of babies and a lively rhyming text.' The shortlisted titles were Steve Bland's *Woof!* (Campbell Books), Lucy Cousins' *Humpty Dumpty and Other Nursery Rhymes* (Campbell Books), Debbie MacKinnon and Anthea Sieveking's *Find my Cake* (Frances Lincoln), Jan Ormerod's *Peek-a-Boo!* (Bodley Head) and Nick Sharratt's *A Bear with a Pear* (Campbell Books). The Chair of judges was Wendy Cooling.

The Baby Book Award comp-



lements Sainsbury's £6 million sponsorship of the Bookstart programme which aims to provide parents of every 7-9 month old baby in the UK with a Bookstart pack containing free baby books, advice, information and a library invitation. Sainsbury's Communications Director, Dominic Fry, revealed (to applause) at the Baby Book Award launch that his company decided to sponsor Bookstart rather than the Millennium Dome.



PREDICTION CHART

To mark our last issue of this century, **BfS** have come up with ten contemporary novels that they think might still be read in 100 years' time. In alphabetical order:

Bill's New Frock, Anne Fine, Puffin
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Roald Dahl, Puffin
The Diary of Anne Frank, Anne Frank, Puffin
Goodnight Mr Tom, Michelle Magorian, Puffin
The Hobbit, J R R Tolkien, HarperCollins
The Iron Man, Ted Hughes, Faber
Northern Lights, Philip Pullman, Scholastic
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, C S Lewis, Collins
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, J K Rowling,
 Bloomsbury
The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Eric Carle, Puffin

Any list like this can only be subjective – there would be, of course, still much room for debate about individual titles and authors even if the list were fifty books long! But the above at least represents a selection of titles likely to last for quite some time to come.

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

EVENTS

The Illustration Cupboard (a company specialising in the sale of artworks by children's book illustrators) is holding a Christmas Exhibition from 15-21 November at the Contemporary Art Gallery, 59 Ebury Street, London SW1. Artists represented include Angela Barrett, Fiona French, Satoshi Kitamura, Brian Wildsmith and Babette Cole. Prices start at £100. The company is also open every day of the year for viewing by appointment. Enquiries to John Huddy on 0171 610 5481; e-mail huddy@lineone.net.

Cracking Children's Books: an introduction to writing books for children of all ages takes place on Tuesday, 23 November at 7pm at The Amadeus Centre, 50 Shirland Road, London W9. Speakers include authors Malorie Blackman

and Kara May, publishers Alison Stanley, Margaret Conroy and Janice Thomson, and television producer Peter Murphy. Details from the Writers Guild of Great Britain, 430 Edgware Road, London W2 1EH.

Now We Are Nine, a conference on teaching reading in support of the National Reading Campaign, takes place on Saturday, 13 November at Bovington Middle School, Wareham, Dorset. It aims to explore recent good practice and to provide an opportunity to hear distinguished authors (Anne Fine, Pete Johnson, Robin Jarvis etc) talk about their work. Other participants include Ted Wragg and Morag Styles. Details from DSEC, The Old Rectory, Winterborne Monkton, Dorchester DT2 9PS (tel: 01305 261213).

• OBITUARY •

Lucy Keeling

Janetta Otter-Barry, Editorial Director of Children's Books at Frances Lincoln, writes:

Lucy Keeling, who died from cancer on Tuesday, 8 June 1999, was the commissioning editor for children's non-fiction at Frances Lincoln. She joined the fledgling children's department in 1988, and played a key role in the development of the list, working with authors such as Laurence Anholt, Meredith Hooper, Jakki Wood, Steve Weatherill, Debbie MacKinnon and Anthea Sieveking, and latterly, Kathy Henderson, Opal Dunn and Jacqueline Mitton.

Lucy was a fine editor. Her knowledge of the children's book market was extensive, her projects received immense care and attention to detail, and she guided her authors with sensitivity and quiet assurance. Her gentleness and generosity endeared her to all, and she had a special gift for helping and training the younger editors.

Lucy was fiercely loyal to the company, and I personally owe her my deep gratitude for an enriching ten-year working relationship which I had hoped would long continue. She will be greatly missed as a colleague and a friend.

Random House Children's Books are welcoming in the new millennium in January with a feast of fiction. They are publishing **Space Race** by Sylvia Waugh (see Preview Page, p31), author of the Mennynms series and winner of the Guardian Prize, **Missing Link** by Kate Thompson, author of the Switchers trilogy, and **Buried Fire**, Jonathan Stroud's debut novel. To celebrate they are offering 50 BfK readers a luxury boxed set of bound proofs of the three books. To win a set, send a postcard to **Books for Keeps** offer, Random House Children's Books, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA.

FELLOWSHIPS

The Ezra Jack Keats / de Grummond Children's Literature Research Fellowship Program awards grants to scholars engaged in research projects based substantially on the holdings of the de Grummond Collection. The collection contains books and original materials that focus on American and British children's literature dating from 1530 to the present. Information on the collection can be found at www.lib.usm.edu/~degum. Applications must be submitted by 10 January 2000. Further information and application form from Dee Jones, de Grummond Collection.

Box 5148, The University of
Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg,
MS 39406 5148, USA.

The Eileen Wallace Research Fellowship in Children's Literature invites proposals for research and scholarship using the resources of New Brunswick's Children's Literature Collection. Application forms are available from the Office of the Dean of Education, University of New Brunswick, PO Box 4400, Fredericton, NB, Canada E3B 5A3. Deadline for applications is 1 March of any year, with fellowship to be awarded after 1 July of the same year.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Carnegie/ Greenaway Medals

Dear Editor

Your editorial that centred on the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway medals (BfK 117) raised several points to which I should like to respond.

To limit a writer or illustrator to winning the medals only once would surely be restrictive. Such a constraint would mean that any significant literary or artistic development by an individual, no matter how well established, could not be recognised and rewarded. I do not believe that the writers and illustrators would wish this, let alone their publishers. As you will be aware the medals are made to those titles which are deemed to be 'the best' books. If your recommendation were to be implemented then clearly through exclusion a title would not necessarily be the best.

Whilst the panel of judges work to a set of agreed criteria that embrace literary and illustrative matters, we should remember that they are first and foremost librarians. As such they are able to bring into play their experience (and it is not an inconsiderable experience), and skills as mediators of children's literature. Frequently as part of our debate, the way young people have responded to a specific title, individually or as part of a group, will be raised and discussed. The response of the child and the sensibilities of young people are critical elements of our deliberations.

With respect to your views about

the decisions made by judges on past winners, and the titles which you believed were worthy of consideration; well, they are your own subjective views, and since everyone is entitled to his or her view, I would not wish to comment on them.

The criteria for judging these awards are, of course, not sacrosanct, and the national Youth Libraries Group committee is alive to the continuing need to re-evaluate the judging process and the administration of the awards.

Since their inception, there has been a tradition of criticism levelled at these and, I may say, other book awards. I do think, however, that we should acknowledge the tremendous contribution that they do make to promoting the prodigious talent in the field of British children's literature and also the place of children's writing and illustration within society as a whole.

Ray Lonsdale

Chair, National Youth Libraries
Group

Dear Editor

For a year or two I have been wondering if I am the only person who feels that the Kate Greenaway award has lost its way; your editorial at least reassured me that I wasn't alone. As you point out, a prize is created with a purpose in mind; to reward, enlighten, encourage in a specific way; if it doesn't do this, there is no point in it. This year the KG award jury persists in its habit of giving the medal to a recent winner, and throws away another opportunity to do its work of raising the

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.

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.

Julia Eccleshare is the children's books editor of *The Guardian*.

Anita Ganeri is a freelance writer.

Annabel Gibb lives in York and is a Learning Support Tutor and mother.

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

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

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

Errol Lloyd is an artist and writer.

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

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

Felix Pirani is Emeritus Professor of Rational Mechanics in the University of London.

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

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

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

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

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

TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

	Page		Page
Animal Avengers	★★ 27	Mr Bear's New Baby	★★★ 20
Artists	★★★ 23	Mr Wolf's Pancakes	★★★★ 20
Atlantis	★★★★ 19	Mummy Mummy, Where Are You?	★★★ 22
Aztecs, The	★★★★ 26	My First ABC Book	★★★★ 20
Bad Habits!	★★★ 18	My Granny's Great Escape	★★★★ 23
Bessemer	★★★ 22	My Second-Best Friend	★★★★ 25
Big Brother, Little Brother	★★★★ 20	Noah's Ark	★★★ 22
Big Diss, The	★★★ 27	Old Hushwing	★★★★ 21
Brontës, The	★★★ 29	One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish	★ 21
Bumface	★★★★ 28	P.S. Longer Letter Later	★ 25
Buried Fire	★★★ 29	Pay Up, or Else!	★★★ 22
Case of the Missing Caterpillar, The	★★★★ 24	Peek-a-Moo!	★★★ 19
Censorship: Changing Attitudes 1900–2000	★★★★ 30	Poverty: Changing Attitudes 1900–2000	★★★★ 30
Charles Dickens	★★★ 29	Queen's Birthday Hat, The	★★★ 22
Clockwise	★★★★ 24	Ragga to Riches	★★★ 27
Clothes Book, The	★★ 19	Rainforest	★★ 27
Coming to Tea	★★★ 19	Reading is Fun with Dr Seuss	★★ 21
Dancing Maddy	★★★ 22	Roald Dahl	★★★ 24
Delilah Alone	★ 23	Roll Over Roly	★★★ 22
Does Anyone Round Here Ever Listen?	★★★ 30	Royal Blunder	★★★ 23
Dogblaster	★★ 22	Royal Blunder and the Haunted House	★★★ 23
Doing the Garden	★★★ 19	Runaway Rabbit	★★ 19
Don't Dawdle Dorothy!	★★★ 20	Safe Harbour	★★★ 28
Earth is Like a Roundabout, The	★★★★ 24	Sally's Fantastic Counting Book	★★★ 19
Eclipse of the Century, The	★★★★ 30	School From Hell, The	★★★★ 27
Elidor	★★★★ 25	School Trip, The	★★★ 21
Exploring Ancient Greece	★★ 26	Sighting, The	★★★★ 19
Fairy Tales From Far and Wide	★★ 22	Simply Delicious!	★★★★ 21
Fields of Home	★★★★ 28	Songquest	★★★★ 28
Firework Maker's Daughter, The	★★ 23	Sport and Leisure	★★★ 26
Fitzwizo and the Good Ghost Guide	★★★ 25	Sports Day	★★★ 21
Flight of the Snow Goose, The	★★★★ 24	Starlight City	★★★ 18
Fugitive	★★★ 27	Stone in the Sword, The	★★★ 24
Geraldine's Baby Brother	★★★ 20	Stones in Water	★★★★ 20
Gift of the Gab	★★★★ 28	Storm Seal, The	★★★ 18
Girl Who Went to the Underworld, The	★★★ 24	Summery Saturday Morning, A	★★★★ 18
God's Quiet Things	★★★★ 21	Supermum	★ 23
Going Swimming	★★★ 19	Tell Me No Lies	★★★★ 29
Going to Playschool	★★★ 19	Thing that Came from Jason's Nose, The	★★★ 27
Guns of Easter, The	★★★★ 29	3-D Rocks and Minerals	★★★ 26
Hair in Funny Places	★★★★ 25	Time	★★★ 29
Harry the Poisonous Centipede	★★★ 23	Touch and Feel Puppy	★★ 19
History Detective Investigates Local History, The	★★★★ 19	Travel and Transport	★★★ 26
Hollyhock Wall, The	★★★★ 20	Turning to Stone	★★★ 27
Home and School	★★★ 26	Two Weeks with the Queen	★★★★ 26
How to ... Build a Rocket	★ 29	Virtual Sexual Reality	★★★ 30
How to ... Build a Time Machine	★ 29	Wallace & Gromit: A Grand Day Out	★★★ 25
How to ... Split the Atom	★ 29	Wayland Atlas of Rain Forests, The	★★★★ 27
In the Home	★★★★ 23	We Come from South Africa	★★ 26
In the Street	★★★★ 23	Weather	★★★ 29
Invisible!	★★★ 25	Well Done, Little Bear	★★★ 20
Just in Time	★★★ 29	What I Believe	★★ 27
"Just One More Story"	★★★ 21	Where is Maisy?	★★★ 19
Katie Morag and the Grand Concert	★★★★ 18	Where is Maisy's Panda?	★★★ 19
Leonardo	★★★★ 30	William and the Wolves	★★★ 25
Little Frog	★★★★ 20	Winter of Spies, A	★★★★ 29
Little Ships, The	★★★★ 26	Wish You Were Here (And I Wasn't)	★★★★ 24
Lorax, The	★ 21	Witch of Blackberry Bottom, The	★ 23
MacPelican's American Adventure	★★★ 24	Wolf is Coming!, The	★★★★ 18
Magnificent I Can Read Music Book, The	★★ 23	Wonky Donkey, The	★★★ 22
Maya, Tiger Cub	★★★ 21	Work and Industry	★★★ 26
Mine!	★★★ 21	Writers	★★ 23
Missing	★★★ 27		
Moon King, The	★★★★ 27		

Now Out in Paperback

Under 5s PRE-SCHOOL/ NURSERY/INFANT

Katie Morag and the Grand Concert

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Mairi Hedderwick, Red Fox,
0 09 926275 4, £4.99 pbk

Reviewed BfK 107, November 1997:

'Memories of Hebridean holidays undoubtedly add to the enjoyment of the Katie Morag stories, but those who have not had that pleasure will still relate to the situations portrayed in these classic tales of inter-generational family life. In this latest addition to the series Katie Morag takes part in an eventful concert.'

The Wolf is Coming!

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Elizabeth MacDonald, ill. Ken Brown, Collins, 0 00 664657 3, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 110, May 1998:

'As old wolf approaches, the animals move from hen coop to pigsty, to cowshed and so on until all are crowded into the donkey's rickety old shack. The text builds cleverly with repetition and pace to a dramatic climax in this picture book which has the feel of a traditional tale; the illustrations are stunning.'

A Summery Saturday Morning

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Margaret Mahy, ill. Selina Young, Puffin, 0 14 056327 X, £4.99



Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

'Young makes full use of this picture book's landscape format to present bright double spreads which draw us in to become part of the group of four children, one adult and two dogs winding along the 'wiggly track' to the sea. The party is eventually put to flight by the geese and they dash back up the track. Mahy's economical four-line rhymes set the pace for the action, blending word and picture in what is likely to become a well-loved addition to any infant bookshelf.'

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

Bad Habits!

PICTURE BOOK ★★★

Babette Cole, Puffin,
0 14 056451 9, £4.99 pbk

Reviewed BfK 115, March 1999:

'A cautionary tale about Lucretzia, an uncivilised little monster. Her disgusting habits include burping, farting and swearing, and she kicks and screams if she cannot get her own way. A cure is eventually perpetrated with help from a few friends, and the uncivilised little monster becomes a civilized little angel! Cole's exuberant cartoon style

illustrations and in your face story will either delight or appal, according to taste.'

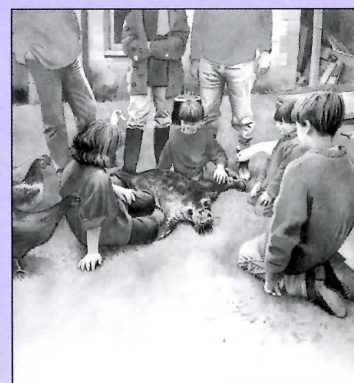
The Storm Seal

PICTURE BOOK ★★★

Judy Waite, ill. Neil Reed, Little Tiger Press, 1 85430 465 8, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 113, November 1998:

'An old sailor teaches the village children to respect the feral nature of animals when a seal pup is washed



up on the beach. Generous use of metaphor in the descriptive passages about the Cornish coast contrast with a more straightforward account of how the seal is looked after. The best of the rather stilted illustrations feature the dramatic seascapes and the wild animals in their natural habitat.'

10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Starlight City

FICTION ★★★

Sue Welford, Oxford,
0 19 275041 0, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

**A MULTICULTURAL
◆ GUIDE TO ◆
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
0-16+**

Edited by ROSEMARY STONES
Bibliography compiled by
PROFESSOR JUDITH ELKIN
with contributions from BfK reviewers
Co-published by BfK and The Reading and
Language Centre, Reading

**BOOKS
FOR
KEEPS
- A GUIDE**

OUT NOW!

Co-published by **Books for Keeps** and **The Reading and Language Information Centre**, Reading.

Edited by **Rosemary Stones**. Bibliography compiled by **Professor Judith Elkin** with contributions from **BfK** reviewers.

Price: **UK - £7.50** (discounts for bulk orders range from 15% to 60% - call for details). **Overseas - £9.50** (airmail only).

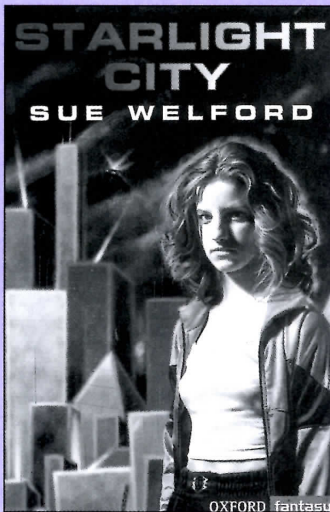
A4, 68 pages. ISBN: 1 871566 05 3. Published October 1999.

One of the recommendations of Sir William Macpherson's report on the death of Stephen Lawrence is that there should be amendments to the National Curriculum to promote cultural diversity and tolerance. We hope that this Guide to children's books which reflect a multi-racial society will have a role to play in furthering these aims.

The main part is a fully annotated bibliography of children's books arranged into sections, each with its own short introduction. The selection of titles has been rigorous - we have chosen the very best. This strong selection is set in context with articles looking at the current state of our multicultural society. Scattered throughout the bibliography are pen-portraits of several authors and illustrators who feature in the Guide.

Phone, fax or E-mail to order your copy today or to receive more details.

Phone: **0181 852 4953**, Fax: **0181 318 7580**,
E-mail: **booksforkeeps@btinternet.com**



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

Atlantis

FICTION ★★★★★

Frances Mary Hendry, Oxford, 0 19 275017 8, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 108, January 1998:

'A very striking fantasy set below the ice of the Antarctic where the people of Atlantis live their highly ordered lives in a complex of caves. This richly imagined world is one we can recognise and understand with its

codes and culture reflecting human aspirations. This is quite exceptional imagining.'

The History Detective Investigates Local History

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Martin Parsons, Wayland, 0 7502 2585 8, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 105, July 1997:

'Many sources are covered in this children's guide: census records and school logbooks, photographs and post cards, the physical fabric and layout of a place and oral reminiscence. A local historian himself, Parsons is unfailingly practical. This is a lively and knowledgeable book that will be useful to secondary school children and to teachers in both junior and secondary schools.'

12+ SECONDARY

The Sighting

FICTION ★★★★★

Jan Mark, Puffin, 0 14 037865 0, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 108, January 1998:

'This novel opens with a funeral at which a deep blood feud is revealed; an old photo-album is unearthed; there are family rumours of ancient UFOs; and two teenage boys embark on a quest to solve just why their respective families have been torn apart by bitterness. Mark is at her best in evoking the Oxfordshire landscape, constantly challenging the reader to complete the jigsaw puzzle of clues one step ahead of her protagonists. The narrative has pace, surprise and is genuinely a tale to keep the reader guessing.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

The Clothes Book

★★

Dorling Kindersley, 10pp, 0 7513 5869 X, £4.99 novelty board

In familiar DK style, this chunky board book features photos of children whose clothes have a real zip, button, bow etc. inserted, purporting to provide a training ground in manipulation for the ambitious toddler. 'Teaches how to fasten clothes' claims the publisher – but I have always found clothes themselves quite adequate in this regard, and any self-respecting tot would rather practise on mum's purse, brother's rucksack or any handy lunch box anyway...

The cardboard teddy to fit into a pocket (very popular with my 18-month-old) got bent easily; the cord-pull on the chunky zip frayed quickly; the cloth surrounding the button hole is stiff to use and has also frayed – 'real' clothes are more durable, too!

Might be useful in a special needs context to bring variety to an often repeated activity. Otherwise, definitely a novelty. AG

Touch and Feel Puppy

★★

Dorling Kindersley, 12pp, 0 7513 5905 X, £4.99 novelty board

A typical DK presentation, consisting of appealing photographs of various puppies and their playthings, arranged on a white ground.

The simple text invites us to feel a fluffy tummy, silky ear, woolly slipper, rubber ball and leathery nose, all of which are represented by appropriate(ish) materials inserted into holes in the photos.

Rod Campbell's *I won't bite* uses this idea successfully – his felt-pen illustrations more easily accommodating insertions. Here the effect is odd at best – and grotesque at worst; the cover, with fake fur protruding through a hole as though part of a puppy's fluffy back, turns to expose more of the same fur, now the chest of the next dog, for all the world like a furry bib.

Some of the materials used give an oddly two-dimensional effect, rendering a ball flat and a puppy's nose strangely sunken. In addition, obviously disparate images put together on a page do not automatically make a coherent illustration, and airbrushed-in shadows give the impression that some of the dogs are half-floating.

While my toddler quickly learned to run her hands over the pages to locate the different textures, little else attracted her attention. The DK format, effective in some contexts, seems badly used here. AG

Peek-a-Moo!

★★★

Marie Torres Cimarusti, ill. Stephanie Peterson, *Ragged Bears*, 12pp, 1 85714 179 2, £7.50 hbk novelty

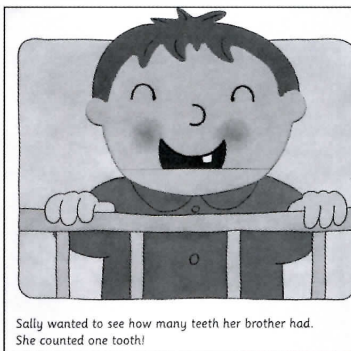
In this novelty picture book for very young children each page features an animal or bird and a flap has to be pulled down to reveal who is hiding behind paws or claws. The images on each page are boldly outlined and stand out against a different solid colour background. The final page shows a baby who is 'you'. This is a pleasant book to share with very young children but it will need adult intervention as the flaps tend to stick to the page and could cause difficulties for little fingers. VC

Sally's Fantastic Counting Book

★★★

Paul Dowling, Andersen, 16pp, 0 86264 802 5, £8.99 hbk novelty

A sequel to *Sally's Amazing Colour Book*, this interactive novelty book is a cheerful aid to developing early number skills. Acetate pictures are superimposed over colourful scenes and when tabs are pulled, Sally is able to count first two, then three rain clouds. Similarly, Sally and her baby brother witness six ducks increasing to seven as pulling the tab reveals a newly hatched duckling emerging. The double spreads are simple, uncluttered with reasonably sturdy tabs to ensure the book remains intact whilst early learners get to



grips with the concept of adding on numbers, counting from one to ten. There are no flaps to be torn off or damaged in any way as all the transformations are behind, or actually on, acetate. Perhaps there could have been an opportunity to have the numerals printed on each but overall a very successful book. AK

Where is Maisy?

0 7445 6919 2



Where is Maisy's Panda?

0 7445 6920 6

★★★

Lucy Cousins, Walker, 16pp, £4.99 each board

These sturdily constructed lift-the-flap board books illustrated with Cousins' characteristic bold colours, basic shapes and thick black outlines afford a cheerful introduction for toddlers to the well-known mouse. A repetitive text – 'Is Panda under the sink? No, not here!' – invites joining in, and odd surprises (like a fish in the loo) add interest for older sharers.

My toddler experienced some frustration when only one side of a pair of double doors opened, but generally these are successful and appropriate for a board book audience. AG

Runaway Rabbit

★★

Ron Maris, Walker, 20pp, 0 7445 6357 7, £3.99 pbk

Rabbit escapes from his hutch and explores the world outside pursued by various animals before being recaptured by his owner with a tempting carrot. Despite the flaps, the rabbit-eye perspective and the abundance of flora and fauna to pore over, this really is not much of a story. Not one of the best in this popular 'Flip Flap' series, nor one of Maris's best. JB

Coming to Tea

0 370 32590 7

Going Swimming

0 370 32580 X

Going to Playschool

0 370 32560 5

Doing the Garden

0 370 32570 2

★★★

Sarah Garland, Bodley Head, 24pp, £3.99 each board

First published between 1985 and 1992 as picture books for nursery/reception children, this familiar series about a mum and her two pre-school children doing various everyday things is now re-issued in board-book form.

A simple speech-based phrase or sentence to each page (and the odd speech-bubble remark from the baby) adds to what can be gleaned from the nicely detailed pictures; the illustrations are cartoony in style and depict a chaotic but nurturing middle-class household, complete with Aga, Morris Traveller and mildly harassed mother. I find them attractive and quirky – though Garland sometimes misses the mark with clumsy depiction of faces or

stance, or inconsistency in the age of the children. The new cover illustration for *Going Swimming* is particularly unfortunate, making Mum look gawky and unlike herself; some of the faces in other volumes verge on the ugly. Loss of the original endpapers, in which the story is introduced and concluded without words, is sad in these otherwise faithfully reproduced board books. On the plus side, 'it's nice to see a pregnant mum' remarked one of my testers. In addition, though they are not explicitly about a single parent, there is no hint of a dad in any of the books, a feature which can be useful, and is fairly unusual in books of this type. There is some ethnic mix especially in *Going to Playschool*.

Who are they for? My 18-month-old has loved her introduction to these books, which I would not otherwise have thought of offering her for a year or so. She has enjoyed the wealth of things to look at and babble about, and they have been returned to over and over again. However, the text, the story and visual jokes and allusions are lost on her – and on anyone of board-book age. In addition the topics, though part of her experience, are sophisticated beyond her comprehension here. Playgroups might find the board edition's durability helpful but otherwise they offer less rather than more than the originals, which still have a place in discussion in nursery or in early reading with older children. Another case of publishers trying to over-extend the market perhaps? **AG**

My First ABC Book

★★★★

Jane Bunting, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 5071 0, £8.99 hbk

This very successful alphabet book now reissued with a new cover has instant appeal, and the mix of brilliant colour photography with very clearly typed text ensures each double spread is attractive. A painted wooden alphabet is used, dominating each page in size, but the layout is such that one can move happily from one object to another with ease. A child is photographed playing with an object from each page, next to the wooden letter, and is surrounded with a variety of interesting, familiar things (over 180 in all). Included are lots of animals, toys and foods, some reduced in size, but some greatly magnified. The wasps are huge in comparison with the child, and the worm gleams as it wriggles its way off its page. A good learning feature is the device of a minibeast, drawn on the title page dragging a truck full of letters. At the bottom of each double spread, he leaves behind the correct letter, so as the book proceeds, so the alphabet grows. A book which has deservedly been very popular in our pre-school library as well as in the early years classrooms. **GB**

Geraldine's Baby Brother

★★★

Holly Keller, Red Fox, 24pp, 0 09 955571 9, £4.99 pbk

There is always room for another story about sibling acceptance of a new baby, and Geraldine (Pig) has much to learn. For the baby she has imagined is far from the reality, who screams all day and preoccupies all

the adults in the household. Geraldine becomes more and more snappy and snarly, until she finally takes herself off to bed in a real grump. When baby brother wakes in the night squawking, it is Geraldine who gets up. She reasons with him, makes friends, and spends the rest of the night sitting beside his cot, reading him stories. Wonderful! The very clear, simple pictures include lots of subtext, where the reader can see what a pain Geraldine is, before she comes to terms with her new brother. **GB**

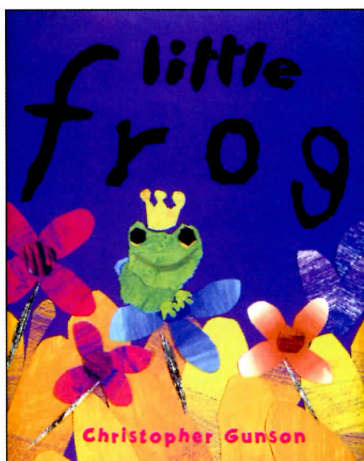
Big Brother, Little Brother

★★★★

Penny Dale, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 6953 2, £4.99 pbk



A gentle book about the affectionate relationship between two small brothers, with its ups and downs. Dale's beautiful drawings depict everyday events in their lives with Big Brother instinctively understanding Little Brother's unspoken needs. The eye contact between the two is carefully drawn, the parents being in the background, not taking active parts in the story. When brotherly love does not run smooth, then it is the turn of Little Brother to set things right. A sensitively crafted book which could become a favourite bedtime story with very young children, but would appeal to school age children too. **GB**



Little Frog

★★★★

Christopher Gunson, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 40785 8, £9.99 hbk

Bright colours and sweeping brush strokes on pre-painted or printed, boldly cut out and torn paper are used to build up the collage illustrations in this story which highlights the transformational power of narrative. Nobody in the jungle notices little frog but then one day he comes upon a golden crown and empowered by the responses he

gets, makes up ever more unlikely explanations about how he acquired the treasure. His imaginative stories win him the admiration of the likes of fish, chameleon and elephant not to mention lion, who as we know, is the real owner of the crown and has eavesdropped on all of Little Frog's fantasies. Infant listeners are sure to be inspired to tell their own tales and create their own collages. **JB**

Well Done, Little Bear

★★★

Martin Waddell, ill. Barbara Firth, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 5590 6, £9.99 hbk



In this fourth gentle and reassuring tale we see Little Bear and Big Bear exploring together. Little Bear is not afraid to climb Bear Rock, bounce on a bendy tree or cross the stream by himself because Big Bear is always there to encourage and when necessary, come to the rescue. The Waddell/Firth magic shows no sign of losing its spellbinding power. **JB**

Mr Bear's New Baby

★★★

Debi Gliori, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 409 4, £9.99 hbk

A new addition to the family inevitably means sleepless nights for Mr Bear's household. Various sympathetic neighbours offer solutions but none will do. Finally it is the wisdom of Small which saves the day – or rather the night – for everyone and brings a smile to the sleeping face of a 'furry starfish' baby bear. There is much for the reader to smile at too in the warm and telling illustrations. I loved all the domestic details and the bleary eyed expressions of sleepless parents. **JB**

The Hollyhock Wall

★★★★

Martin Waddell, ill. Salley Mavor, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 2571 3, £9.99 hbk

If you need just a little magic put back in your life, seek out this amazing book. The text is something special, but it is the illustrator who adds a whole new dimension. Her notes tell us she likes to make pictures out of things she can touch. Mary, the child in the story, is stitched, and her clothes are knitted; the kitchen table is covered in a lace cloth, and the clock on the wall is a wrist watch.

Mary is a lonely child living at the top of a tall house. She longs for a garden, and her mother suggests she makes



one in a pot. 'But somehow, some strange how, something strange happened...' and the play garden becomes real, and we see on the next page variegated ivies, maidenhair fern, helxine and violas, woven into a truly magical garden, peopled by a tiny version of Mary herself and the clay boy she has made. Waddell resolves this story with his usual masterly touch, ensuring the lonely little girl finds happiness. This is surely a book to share one to one with a child who has magic in its soul, or maybe one who needs it. The illustrations stay in one's eye after closing the book, but the story also weaves a way deep into one's memory. **GB**

Mr Wolf's Pancakes

★★★★

Jan Fearnley, Methuen, 32pp, 0 416 19584 9, £9.99 hbk

In the same way that *The Paperbag Princess* presents a classic recasting of a familiar fairy tale, *Mr Wolf's Pancakes* is a delightfully witty attack on all those nursery rhyme animals who have tried at one time or another to give the Big Bad Wolf his comeuppance. This Mr Wolf likes pancakes but none of his troublesome neighbours will help him cook. Chicken Licken, Wee Willy Winky, Gingerbread Man, Little Red Riding Hood, Three Little Pigs – each refuses his gentle advances until it comes to actually eating the pancakes, when they are quick to accept his invitation to supper ... and meet their own untimely ends.

For the keen-eyed infant reader the bright, busy illustrations contain some splendid puns and a landscape dotted with all the animals up to their various tricks. The final pages offer a surprise that ensures plenty of eager rereading. **RB**

Don't Dawdle Dorothy!

★★★

Margrit Cruickshank, ill. Amanda Harvey, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1215 5, £10.99 hbk

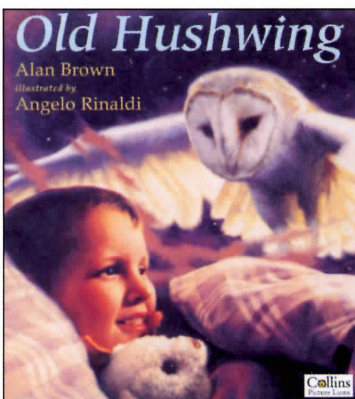
Dorothy is faced with a long walk home after a tiring morning shopping with her mother. As they set off, we are presented with a bird's eye view of the track home as it meanders through a forest, then up the hill, across a field of sunflowers and past a clump of bushes and along a sheep path. It is a daunting journey as Dorothy encounters en route a

wicked witch, a snow queen, an ogre, a bear and a tiger who all echo her mother's enjoiner, 'don't dawdle, Dorothy'. Eventually Dorothy reaches home. The framing of the initial spreads is abandoned as the pictures begin to reflect Dorothy's fantastic journey homeward. Harvey's soft pencil outlines barely contain the energy imparted by the vibrant hues of her palette as they swirl together to give an effect of a breeze blowing through the pages, propelling Dorothy forwards. VC

Old Hushwing

★★★★

Alan Brown, ill. Angelo Rinaldi, Collins Picture Lions, 32pp, 0 00 664649 2, £5.99 pbk



The eponymous Old Hushwing is a barn owl, and in a preamble to the story Alan Brown explains that this is a country name for the species. This note which also explains the genesis of the tale gives it an authenticity which matches the telling and the illustrations.

Billy lives with his parents in a rural valley. Both text and illustration convey the impression that Billy is a gentle, solitary boy, delighting in the countryside and in keeping Old Hushwing's presence in the barn his own special secret. But a new baby in the offing means that the barn is to be converted to a bedroom for Billy, and as a result Old Hushwing's home is disturbed. Even though the builders make a special place for the owl high up in the barn he seems to have vanished for good. As time passes Billy is kept busy helping his mother look after baby Hannah and he only remembers Old Hushwing in his dreams. It is not until the bright spring sunshine prompts him to climb the tree near the owl house that he sees Old Hushwing has returned with Mrs Hushwing. The realism of Rinaldi's commanding illustrations are tempered by the use of soft focus to create a gentle tone suited to the narrative. VC

Reading is Fun with Dr Seuss

★★★

Collins, 176pp, 0 00 172035 X, £12.99 hbk

Four Seuss Beginner Book favourites:

Hop on Pop, Marvin K Mooney Will You Please Go Now!, Oh, The Thinks You Can Think and I Can Read With My Eyes Shut! sandwiched together between hard covers. The rhyming nonsense and wacky illustrations still work their magic but I am not sure about this jumbo packaging; give me and most learner readers the individual bite size editions any time. JB

Sports Day

1 85998 436 3

The School Trip

1 85998 423 1

BOOK AND TAPE ★★★

Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen, read by Roger McGough, 12 mins unabridged, Hodder Children's Books book and tape packs, £6.99 each

Designed to be listened to while following the story in the books, Roger McGough's reading of these two picture books is quite absorbing enough to be heard without the benefit of text or pictures. The highs and lows of any school sports day and the mixed responses to a school trip are given a slightly ironic edge without ever slipping into mockery. Used alone for entertainment and together with the books for developing reading skills, they add tremendous value to two highly successful picture books. JE

One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish

26 mins unabridged,
0 00 100730 0

The Lorax

38 mins unabridged,
0 00 100731 9

BOOK AND TAPE ★

Dr Seuss, read by Rick Mayall, Collins book and tape packs, £6.99 each

The zany humour of Dr Seuss with its invented vocabulary and wacky rhymes is almost impossible to read aloud. Rick Mayall captures some of the ludicrousness of **One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish** but even he has to struggle with the far more inventive **The Lorax**. In an attempt to make them comprehensible Rick Mayall adopts a slow delivery which conflicts with the helter-skelter pace of the text. These are two books best left to be enjoyed through print alone. JE

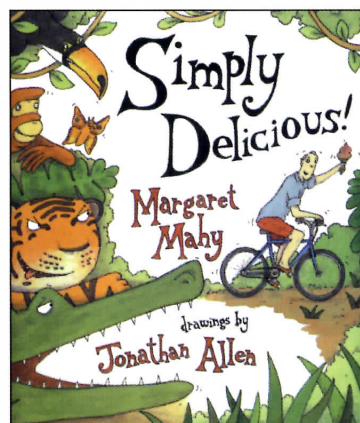
"Just One More Story"

★★★★

Dugald Steer, ill. Elisabeth Moseng, Templar Publishing, 12pp + 4 booklets, 1 84011 066 X, £9.99 hbk novelty

'Just one more story' is a plea familiar to most human parents and

seemingly little pigs are no different in their demands for bedtime tales. This is one of a growing number of books which quite literally contain a text within a text. This time it is in the form of four little booklets, each a porcine version of a well-known tale: 'The Ugly Pigling', 'Pigerella', 'The Pig Prince', 'The Prince and the Porker'. This would be best for children who already know the original stories and could appreciate the visual and verbal jokes contained in the main text and in the booklets. The 'handwritten' style typeface of the framing story contrasts with the traditional roman of the inset stories, and Moseng's illustrations are reminiscent of Colin McNaughton's work. VC

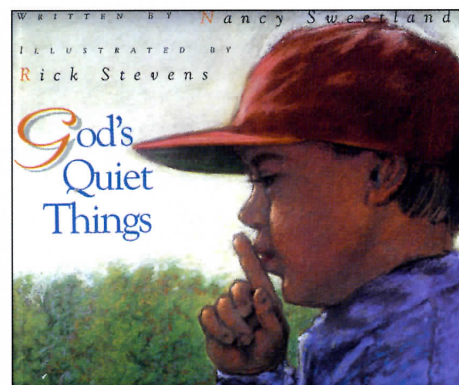


Simply Delicious!

★★★★★

Margaret Mahy, ill. Jonathan Allen, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1424 7, £9.99 hbk

What joy, to see a new publication from this dynamic duo! (See also their titles **The Great White Man-eating Shark** and **The Three Legged Cat**.) We can count on Mahy to bring us the bizarre. She has such a poetic yet wonderfully wacky way with words matched perfectly by Allen's highly entertaining illustrations. The reader opens the book, and is intrigued by the endpaper showing a colourful map, marking Muffin's Corner Shop beside a lumpy bumpy jungle track. Here the adventure begins, with Mr Minky endeavouring to deliver home 'a double-dip-chocolate-chip-and-cherry ice cream with rainbow twinkles and chopped-nut sprinkles' for his son. Simply delicious! Off he goes on his bicycle, down the lumpy bumpy jungle track. How he outwits the many hungry predators en route is revealed page by amazing page, and the accumulative wording as he and the ice cream are chased through the jungle is pure delight. A book to seek out! GB



God's Quiet Things

★★★★★

Nancy Sweetland, ill. Rick Stevens, Lion, 32pp, 0 7459 4268 7, £4.99 pbk

Gentle rhyming couplets invite young children to contemplate the magic of nature in this book that lends itself to developing a sense of awe and wonder in young children. Leading such busy lives at the end of the millennium we all need to be reminded to stop to appreciate the wonders of the natural world. The lyrical and thought provoking text is printed in large font, making this an ideal book for an individual child, or group, to share with an adult. The vibrant yet soft pastel illustrations are truly magnificent examples of the use of light and shade. There is real richness, gentle movement and expert use of unusual perspective in each spread, as the reader is encouraged to 'look and listen high and low. God's quiet things are yours to know.' The various scenes are carefully and unobtrusively linked by a boy, out flying his kite, accompanied by his attentive cat. Simply stunning, these illustrations are so subtle that you really need to study them closely to appreciate their true beauty. AK

Mine!

★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Mary Rees, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 0682 1, £4.99 pbk

Claudia has not yet developed the capacity to share belongings with her peers and she decides not to allow Isabel to play with any of her toys. Pushing Isabel off her rocking horse and snatching away a doll, she shouts, 'Mine!'. Claudia's mum takes the girls to the park where Claudia is determined that Isabel should not ride her tricycle. However, Claudia gets her comeuppance. This witty picture book with its cartoon style artwork will be appreciated by children and adults alike – a useful story to use as a starting point for discussing the concept of sharing. AK

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior

Maya, Tiger Cub

★★★★

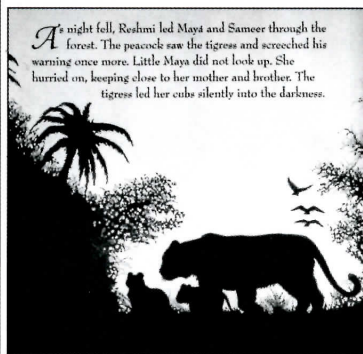
Theresa Radcliffe, ill. John Butler, Viking, 32pp,

0 670 87894 4, £10.99 hbk

The story of tiger cubs Maya and her brother, Sameer, is told in a series of double page spreads in landscape format with bled edges, bringing the

reader into a close engagement with the Indian forest and some of its inhabitants. The type-face too gives an Indian 'feel' to this story of the tiger cubs, their mother and their

escape from danger in the form of a hungry hyena. The illustrations are realistic and texture is skilfully given to the animals' fur and to the grasses and leaves of the forest. The final



spread provides a striking silhouette outline of the mother tiger leading her cubs silently into the protective darkness of the forest. VC

The Wonky Donkey

★★★★

Jonathan Long and Korky Paul, Bodley Head, 32pp, 0 370 32466 8, £9.99 hbk

'You're a donkey that's wonky! You're not worth a bean. You're the worst working donkey that I've ever seen!' This abusive refrain followed by three kicks on the bottom is all the thanks a hardworking donkey gets from one cruel owner after another. He zigzags away, lickety split, from a farmer and a beach hustler before ending up with Sophie. She treats him kindly and he does undonkey things like swing pushing. Finally, when Sophie's life is in danger Wonky Donkey comes to the rescue.

The repetition of structure and rhyme carry readers through the longish text as they zigzag through

the divertingly detailed scenes of donkey's distressing treatment and ultimate sacrifice. Illustrated in Paul's characteristically energetic, caricaturist style. JB

Dancing Maddy

★★★★

Clare Jarrett, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198310 5, £10.99 hbk

Maddy loves dancing. She desperately wants to perform a dance in the forthcoming school play, but is distraught after she fails in rehearsal. Quietly recovering in her garden, she sees a fox floating down, with a rainbow-coloured parachute. Pomeroy the fox is Maddy's 'fixer'.



He tells her he too loves dancing, and together they happily rehearse, then design and stitch her a splendid dress from the multi-coloured parachute. Illustrations abound, showing the emotions of the main characters particularly well. The text is light, conversational, and reassuring.

There is wisdom, encouragement and joy in this confidence-building story and many small performers will recognise Maddy. GB

Mummy, Mummy, Where Are You?

0 237 51953 4

Pay Up, Or Else!

0 237 51952 6

★★★★

Ann de Bode and Rien Broere, English text by Su Swallow, Evans 'Helping Hands', 40pp, £8.99 each hbk

Two new books in a series about problems and emotions. In *Mummy, Mummy, Where Are You?* Jessie gets lost in a big department store and must find help. *Pay Up, Or Else!* is about Robert and his best friend Philip, who is discovered stealing for a gang of bullies. The stories are sensitive and realistic, and the montage style illustrations use a variety of artistic mediums - cartoons, photographs, chalk, torn paper, etc. These add to the emotional impact very effectively. A worthwhile series, particularly for the classroom. ES

Dogblaster

★★

Andrew and Paula Martyr, 0 14 130320 4

The Queen's Birthday Hat

★★★★

Margaret Ryan, ill. Priscilla Lamont, 0 14 038709 9

First Young Puffin, 32pp, £3.99 each pbk

Two from a long list of short stories 'ideal for younger children who are reading by themselves'. Cheerful, cartoony, colour illustrations on every page and a short, though not always simple, text enhance these unremarkable but adequate stories.

Dogblaster concerns an out-of-control computer game provided by a visitor from outer space. Mum saves the day and Dad is shown not to be 'such a computer whizz after all'. Pedestrian in style, and obviously aiming to appeal to computer-game addicts, this is the weaker of the two stories. *The Queen's Birthday Hat* concerns Queen Forgetmenot, who has unusual difficulty acquiring a hat for gardening in. Slightly self-consciously amusing, there is some, clever repetition within the text which would be useful to those newly-launched readers. AG

Noah's Ark

★★★★

Retold by Mary Auld, ill. Diana Mayo, Franklin Watts, 32pp, 0 7496 3218 6, £8.99 hbk

One of six Old Testament stories retold and brought to life with bold and stylish illustrations. Others in the series include *Joseph and His Brothers*, *David and Goliath* and *Moses in the Bulrushes*. The opaquely painted spreads are really eye catching and would appeal particularly to younger children. The text, however, sticks far too rigidly to the original, as the story is retold on a verse by verse basis from the book of

Genesis, using language that is more suitable for older children. Compensating somewhat for this mismatch, there are four pages of background information, a map and a glossary together with thought-provoking questions relating to the story. AK

Bessemer

★★★★

Michael Ponsford, ill. Derek Bainton, Pont, 32pp, 1 85902 649 4, £4.95 pbk

This beautiful picture book tells the very romantic tale of Billy Williams, a steel worker made redundant when the factory closes down. The narrator of the story, a young next door neighbour, watches as Billy becomes depressed and lethargic. Then he is suddenly inspired by a secret project which involves his borrowing a sewing machine from the narrator's mum and begging scraps of red silk from the beautiful Ms Leila who works in the sari factory. But as the project nears completion, Ms Leila comes to tell Billy that her help may have cost her her own job.

It would spoil your enjoyment of the book to disclose the nature of the project, but it creates a strikingly vivid symbol of renewal and escape in the final pages of the book. Bainton's rich, realistic pictures mirror the mood shifts in this brief but moving story: when the steelworks closes, the fiery reds of the opening pages drab down into the blues and greys of Billy's depression, before seeping back into the pages as the project progresses.

This is a lovely book to share aloud with younger readers, but it was also found enjoyable by teenagers who empathised with the troubles of the protagonists. GH

Fairy Tales From Far and Wide

★★

Fiona Waters, ill. Lisa Berkshire, Barefoot, 48pp, 1 901223 65 5, £9.99 hbk

Waters' retellings and Berkshire's illustrations unite to provide a reasonably attractive addition to our stock of fairy tale anthologies - but only 'reasonably': in terms of its cover, typography and general layout, this is a book which can only be described as old-fashioned. Its principal merit lies in its choice of seven stories, only two of which ('The Frog Prince' and 'Little Red Riding Hood') are likely to be widely familiar. The remaining five comprise examples from Sweden, Japan, Ireland, North America and the West Indies, the most engaging of these being the last one, a playful 'trickster' tale. The artwork throughout is colourful, if not always particularly subtle. RD

Roll Over Roly

★★★★

Anne Fine, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Puffin, 64pp, 0 14 130318 2, £2.99 pbk

When Rupert's parents have to attend the funeral of his Great Uncle Percy, he is left for the day with his Great Aunt Ada, a truly formidable lady who talks mainly in proverbs, precepts and rhyming exhortations to good behaviour. Her disapproval for Rupert's seeming unruliness

Do you love books and want to work during school hours?

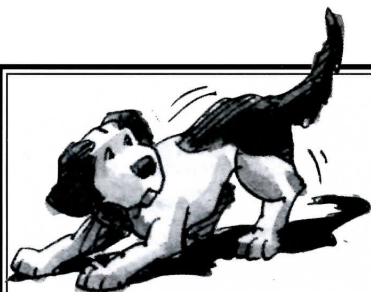


JMS BOOKS SEEKS HIGHLY MOTIVATED, WELL-EDUCATED BOOK LOVERS TO JOIN ITS NATIONAL SALES TEAM



Involved with well known publishers such as Faber, Walker Books, Bloomsbury and Oxford University Press we provide schools with high quality fiction, poetry and drama.

For more information contact Julie Simpson at JMS Books Hillside Farm, Sissinghurst, Kent TN17 2JH. Tel: 01580 713915. Fax 01580 715802



extends to his untrained puppy, Roly. But Roly's life of unrestrained puppyhood comes to an abrupt end when he is trapped in a room with one of Uncle Percy's heirlooms: an aggressive parrot with a repertoire of stentorian commands.

From these ingredients Anne Fine constructs a brief comedy in which, by the time mum and dad return from the funeral, all of the characters except the parrot have evolved in one way or another. This is a very well observed story which might be enjoyed by both children troubled by stern relatives, and the relatives themselves. **GH**

Harry the Poisonous Centipede

TAPE ★★★

Lynne Reid Banks, read by the author, Collins, 1hr 30mins unabridged, 0 00 102526 0, £5.99

The story of the cowardly young centipede who only risks venturing into the dangerous no-top-world when dared by his friend George is read by Lynne Reid Banks in the perfect bedtime manner. Her asides to listeners give a real feeling of intimacy without destroying the excitement of the story of George and Harry's dangerous encounters with furry biters, belly wrigglers and, above all, the dreaded Hoo-mins.

Centipedes are hard to make attractive but Harry and his mother Belinda are remarkably likeable and seeing the world from an insect's perspective is amusing. **JE**

Delilah Alone

TAPE ★

Jenny Nimmo, read by Brigit Forsyth, Cavalcade, 1hr 50mins unabridged, 0 7540 7050 6, £7.99

Delilah, the cat with magical powers, is used to being in complete control but when her owners go on holiday without her, she sets off on a journey to the city that stretches all her powers. If only humans responded to her shrinking powers as readily as dogs, life would be far simpler. Nimmo's cat's-eye view of life is full of appealing and convincing details but delivering cattish observations overtakes the human reader making for irritating listening except for the most devoted of cat lovers. **JE**

My Granny's Great Escape

TAPE ★★★★★

Jeremy Strong, read by Mark Williams, Puffin, 2 hrs unabridged, 0 14 086905 0, £6.99

This romping and original family adventure is excellently read in a quick, up beat way by Mark Williams. The speed is important as it carries some of the weaker jokes by nipping through them rather than labouring them for the laugh. Young

grandparents behaving badly – as Hell's Angels to be precise – make two families reconsider their roles. Liberal Dad suddenly comes all over stuffy when his own mum falls in love with Lancelot, father of his pernickity neighbour, Mr Tug. Mum provides a sensible antidote as Dad and Mr Tug become increasingly ridiculous in their attempts to stop the romantic couple. Very funny with a good narrative voice supplied by grandson Nicholas. **JE**

The Witch of Blackberry Bottom

TAPE ★

Dick King-Smith, read by Prunella Scales, Puffin, 2hrs 10mins unabridged, 0 14 180030 5, £6.99

A pleasant but disappointingly pedestrian story, especially coming from King-Smith, which is not done any favours by a very plummy reading. The strange old lady with a missing eye hidden by an eye patch, living with a pack of dogs in the overgrown and distinctly smelly Blackberry Bottom of the title is not, of course, really a witch. She is, in fact, the daughter of the aristocracy who lost interest in the world after her heart was broken by a callous youth. Shunned by the locals, until a couple of horribly goody goody children move into the nearby cottage, she turns out to have a stash of money hidden away in a milk churn. The attempted theft of the treasure leads to a creaky adventure with a predictable ending and happiness all round. Told largely through dialogue, Prunella Scales works hard at giving everyone a different voice but they are all terribly British and frightfully irritating. **JE**

The Firework Maker's Daughter

TAPE ★★

Philip Pullman, read by Nigel Lambert, Cavalcade, 2 hrs unabridged, 0 7540 7042 5, £7.99

The magic of Pullman's delightful story about the firework maker's young daughter whose bravery, courage and loyalty saves her father and puts her up among the greatest firework makers in the world, is minimised in this over-theatrical reading with too much stage Chinese speak and atmospheric music. Nonetheless, it remains a glorious fairy story with charming modern overtones such as the elephant's side being used as a walking advertising hoarding. The rich visual images that Pullman summons up, especially when it comes to the descriptions of the fireworks at the life-saving competition, dazzle while the complicated puns on names and music work better on tape than in print. **JE**

Royal Blunder

0 439 01019 5

Royal Blunder and the Haunted House

0 590 65829 8

★★★★

Henrietta Branford, ill. Lesley Harker, Young Hippo, 96pp, £2.99 each pbk



There is lots of humour in these two stories about Royal Blunder the ginger cat, whose emerald eyes 'glow like traffic lights' and whose magical powers lead Julie into all sorts of adventures, but also rescue her from some tricky situations. In each book, there are several complete stories. Both books have line drawings on every page, and would be exciting reads for able seven-year-olds who like just a bit of a scare. **GB**

The Magnificent I Can Read Music Book

NON-FICTION ★★

Kate Petty and Jennie Maizels, Bodley Head, 14pp, 0 370 32377 7, £14.99 hbk novelty

Phew! A breathless introduction to the rudiments of musical theory covering everything you can think of in a page or so each, frantically presented with flaps, moving parts, pop-ups, speech bubbles and exclamation marks.

There is far too much information to absorb at the speed with which it is presented – my children were left cold and no-one even went back to try out the electronic piano (with renewable batteries) in the back of the book. Unfortunately, what this book fails to grasp is that though it looks fun, this approach is ultimately frustrating because, in truth, you cannot learn much about music at breakneck speed, and without lots of practice. Of course, children with basic knowledge already might enjoy a romp through the book.

The book is visually confusing and hard to follow – a pity, as some of the paper engineering is excellent. In fact, there are some great ideas for teaching musical concepts in the classroom – but out of this frantic context! **AG**

Supermum

NON-FICTION ★

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts, 32pp, 0 7496 3393 X, £9.99 hbk

This celebration of mothers, animal and human, misses the mark on several counts. Despite a promising start – 'Supermum is everywhere! Swinging, swooping, swimming, scooting', illustrated by pictures of appropriate animals and a Vespa-mounted human – my sympathy was quickly lost. A two-level text for no obvious reason, simplistic information, and an attempt to compare many species of animal with each other and with *homo sapiens*, while at the same time celebrating differences within the human race add up to a jolly but inconsequential book.

Hard information about the animals is held in the 'index' at the back of the book – by the time you get there, you might well have lost interest in what you are looking for. In addition, the very theme is undermined by a caption next to the dedication ('to mums everywhere') asking 'what about superdad?'. And I hope I am not the only reader to be offended at the suggestion that a punk-haired, tongue studded mum might be as scary as a Tyrannosaurus Rex? **AG**

Artists

NON-FICTION ★★★

Jillian Powell, 0 7502 2598 X

Writers

NON-FICTION ★★

Peggy Burns, 0 7502 2599 8

Wayland 'Famous Lives' series, 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

Artists allows Leonardo, Rembrandt, Turner, van Gogh, Monet and Picasso four pages each. Large type and reasonably sized reproductions of four or five of each of their works make this an attractive basic introduction for lower juniors. Particularly impressive is the way the author has tried to explain why they painted as they did, especially in the cases of Monet and Picasso.

Writers is less successful with Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, A A Milne, Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl getting the treatment – simple biographical details, home life, school, the inspiration for the stories and a little on the most famous texts. The appeal of this book lies more with the reproductions from the work of the artists who illustrated their books (particularly Tenniel, Shepard and Blake) than with the writers. Other titles in this series are **Kings and Queens, Inventors, Explorers, Saints, Engineers, Campaigners for Change.** **SR**

In the Street

0 7502 2586 6



In the Home

0 7502 2587 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Kath Cox and Pat Hughes, Wayland 'History from Photographs' series, 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

Two in a series of excellent books, written by former primary teachers, designed to be used as a flexible teaching resource for Early Years history. (Other books in the series consider **Clothes and Uniforms, School, Food, People Who Help Us and Journeys.**) The aim of the books is to encourage children to make 'now and then' comparisons. Each spread has a large photo of modern life which children are encouraged to study first, before examining a

comparative photograph taken many years ago – mainly from the Edwardian era between 1900 and 1920. Street markets, lighting, and post boxes are just three of many snaps used for *In the Street*, whilst *In the Home* considers kitchens, toilets, home entertainment and bath time. Two levels of text are used, a simple large print version and a more advanced and extended smaller print version. Thus the books can be used with early stage readers, older readers needing differentiated texts and non-readers who can simply use the photographs alone. Interestingly, some modern black and white photos are included so that children focus on the photograph, rather than seeing the past as 'black and white'. The books also include a useful picture glossary and background information about the older photographs. It was strange to see a modern photograph of a mother working from home showing a rather ancient computer and mobile phone (circa 1988), but this could be another discussion point with older children. **AK**

much more than just another attractive picture book. It communicates profound insights about what changes through time – the varied landscapes of tundra, forest, lake and valley over which the birds fly, and about those things that are timeless – the amazing journeys 'over thousands of miles, governed by seasons, guided by stars' the creatures make. The illustrations will draw an imaginative response from the young readers. For me one of the most powerful is a simple image of two feathers falling from a blue sky when 'geese fall to the gun'. **MM**

Clockwise: A first look at time

Sam Godwin, ill. Anthony Lewis, 0 7500 2665 0

The Case of the Missing Caterpillar: A first look at the life cycle of a butterfly

Sam Godwin, ill. Simone Abel, 0 7500 2654 5

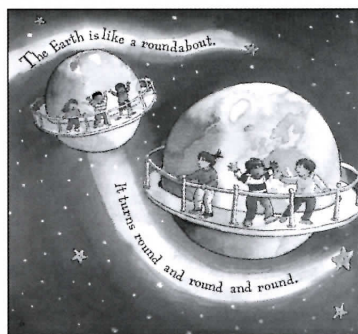
The Earth is Like a Roundabout: A first look at night and day

Claire Llewellyn, ill. Anthony Lewis, 0 7500 2645 6

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Macdonald Young Books 'M.Y.Bees', 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

These new additions to the M.Y.Bees series of information books have the same welcome ability to make children question the world around them. However each book is delightfully individual: the book about the life cycle of a butterfly (*The Case of the Missing Caterpillar*) has insects as mini detectives solving the mystery of metamorphosis. The metaphor of the earth as a roundabout that relentlessly turns is helpful in *The Earth is Like a Roundabout*. Children can cope easily with the notion of a moving roundabout and transfer this understanding to the larger and harder concepts to do with the earth's movement round the sun to create day and night. *Clockwise* is an extremely dynamic introduction to



concepts of time, using a giant watch illustration in the early pages to introduce seconds, minutes and hours. We learn that in one second you can jump once in the air but a hummingbird flaps its wings 78 times. A lot of thought has gone into providing inviting introductions to each topic and the books would enliven science lessons or provide enjoyment at home. Each book is short enough to use in the literacy hour either for class based work or as a focus for guided or independent reading. Only some of the conventions of information texts are introduced – glossaries and diagrams. Contents pages and indexes are missing and would not, I feel, have been helpful for these 'first looks' at phenomena. Children could explore the different kinds of language used including notices, direct speech and report. The books would encourage vocabulary extension and help model glossaries and diagrams. Above all, they are fun and introduce scientific information with a light, humorous touch. **MM**

Roald Dahl

NON-FICTION ★★★

Emma Fischel, ill. Martin Remphry, Watts 'Famous People, Famous Lives', 48pp, 0 7496 3314 X, £6.99 hbk

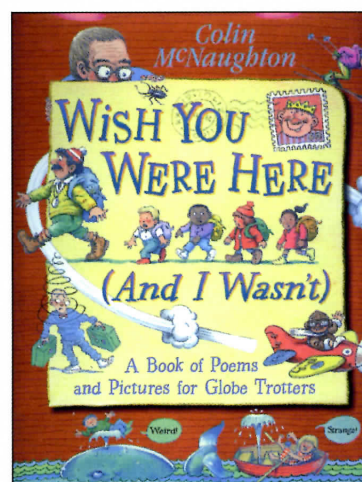
Roald Dahl's life story is told from his birth in Cardiff in 1916 until his death in 1990, in simple language, appropriate for able seven-year-olds upwards, with black and white line drawings on every page. Of course Dahl's novels are mentioned and children will be pleased to read about a favourite, but the point is also made that he was a source of controversy, not everyone liking his books as much as children do. This biography tells of his unhappy boarding school days, and his war experiences. This is

a well-produced hardback but the small format (13 x 20cm), lack of colour pictures and the price may be a drawback. This book is one of a series of 25 to date, featuring people from Elizabeth I to Saint Patrick, from Mozart to A A Milne. **GB**

Wish You Were Here (And I Wasn't): A Book of Poems and Pictures for Globetrotters

POETRY ★★★★★

Colin McNaughton, Walker, 64pp, 0 7445 4970 1, £10.99 hbk



This is top-notch nonsense poetry and rollicking rhymes written and illustrated by McNaughton. We visit the Australian bush, the jungle, space, deserts and go under the sea travelling by trains, boats, planes, cars, camels and even a bath. There are funny poems like 'No Room To Swing a Cat!': 'My hotel room was tiny./ No room to swing a cat./ My cat was overjoyed and said/ "Well, thank the Lord for that!", wordplay – 'Love me Wanda,/ Love me Twoda...' – all the way up to 'Love me Tenda, do!' and a bulging suitcase of characters to unpack – teachers, Frankenstein, the Mega-Ultimate-Space-Beast and the roving eye. I particularly like the way McNaughton echoes traditional songs and poems and gives them a new twist as in 'Row, row, row your bath' and 'I left my heart in San Francisco./ My torso in Nepal'. A very funny and eventful journey through pictures and poems for younger readers and the adults in their lives. **HT**

The Flight of the Snow Goose

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Deborah King, Collins Picture Lions, 32pp, 0 00 664590 9, £5.99 pbk

Children like mysteries and will be intrigued by the ability of the migrating Snow Geese to find their way over huge expanses of land and sea. From about five years children will enjoy listening to the poetic text and talking about the illustrations in this excellent picture book. Older children will be able to read it for themselves and, with some help, benefit from the interesting fact file about migration at the end. This is

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

MacPelican's American Adventure

Scoular Anderson, 0 7445 6349 6

The Stone in the Sword

Deri and Jim Robins, 0 7445 6350 X

★★★

Walker 'Search and Solve' Gamebooks, 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

Taking his whole clan with him, Hector embarks on *MacPelican's American Adventure* to show off ten

of his great new inventions. Children are invited to join him as he travels from New York to Wyoming, Alaska to Arizona and finally to the Grand Louisiana Exhibition. In minutely detailed puzzles, similar to those in the *Where's Wally* series, children are set the task of searching for tiny characters, solving spot-the-difference posers, and identifying sections of the picture looked at from unusual angles. *The Stone in the Sword* is a tongue-in-cheek Arthurian story which sees Leofric, squire to Sir Garderobe, searching for an emerald which was stolen by his mischievous pet monkey after falling from the handle of his master's sword. Each colour cartoon-like spread sets the reader the job of

searching the craftily disguised pictures for various objects and comic characters. Graded into three levels of difficulty, both these titles are from the most challenging level. Although described as fiendish, the books are certainly easier on the eye than the later *Where's Wally* books, whilst being challenging enough to keep young children amused on a rainy day. **AK**

The Girl Who Went to the Underworld and The Girl Who Loved Food

★★★

Retold by Pomme Clayton,

ill. Tony Ross, Orchard, 48pp, 1 86039 862 6, £3.99 pbk

This is one of a set of four books based on retellings of folk tales and myths from around the world which star 'girls with attitude'. The girl who went to the underworld is Anansi's daughter, who makes the descent as part of her quest to save her family from famine. In the course of the trials she undergoes in the underworld, she meets talking potatoes and a lady who eats through her nose and ears, but she endures and comes home with a banquet-breeding drum.

Gretel is the girl who loved food, a proud and devious cook who delights in treating herself to her rich master's



wine and food when he is not looking. She goes too far one day when she devours both of the chickens that she has been cooking for her master and his special guest, licking the last bone clean just as they are coming through the door. Her stratagem for escaping the consequence of her own gluttony is reprehensible, but hilarious.

Here we have two well told tales, brief but action packed, featuring a pair of truly gutsy heroines. The eventfulness, slight nastiness, and well orchestrated tension should go down well with both girls and boys, even though blokes are made fools of in both stories. GH

Wallace & Gromit: A Grand Day Out

★★★★

ill. Bill Kerwin, BBC Worldwide, 48pp, 0 563 38008 X, £6.99 pbk

Nick Park's ever popular plasticine creations get a new outing in this graphic novel. Wallace, cheese-lover and eccentric inventor, builds a space rocket in which to travel to the moon with his faithful and long suffering dog, Gromit. Why? Because there is no Wensleydale in the fridge and the corner shop has shut for the Bank Holiday. Illustrator, Bill Kerwin, is faithful to the original 3D animation which is familiar to most children. For those few youngsters not previously exposed to the dynamic duo, the storyboard layout may not fully explain the plot. For the majority, however, the visually interesting comic book style, very sparingly sprinkled with text, will provide entertainment and rekindle the enjoyment of the TV film. But would children not just prefer to watch the original 3D version with the voice of Peter Sallis giving it yet another dimension? Strangely, creator Nick Park does not get a credit in the book. AK

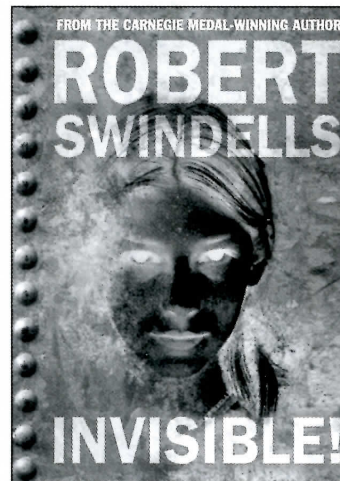
Fitzwizo and the Good Ghost Guide

★★★★

Linda Pitt, Andersen, 128pp, 0 86264 865 3, £3.99 pbk

Fenella and her father Sir Frederick Fitzwizo are ghosts with a touch of wizard. When their castle comes under threat of demolition desperate measures need to be taken to ensure the castle gets listed in the official Good Ghost Guide being compiled by 'Ofspook'. Despite making friends with Mandy, one of the Ofspook team, Fenella has to overcome the

cynicism and outright hostility of Mandy's boss, the formidable Ms Grimwood. Pitt writes in a lively style that is instantly appealing to younger junior children. The short chapters, and perfectly pitched humour enable the reader to be swept along in an entertaining wave of ghostly goings-on punctuated with an abundance of spooky puns. Though an excellent story on its own, the absence of illustrations is odd considering the subject matter. AK



Invisible!

★★★

Robert Swindells, Doubleday, 208pp, 0 385 40855 2, £10.99 hbk

This is an old fashioned barn-storming yarn in typical Swindells' style: an everyday setting in which fantastic events lead to a set of vigorously paced adventures culminating in a grand cliff hanging finale. Here the action is triggered off by a New Age traveller child (Rosie Walk, who has a friend called Peter Rabbit and parents called Mummy and Daddy Bear) sharing the secret of acquiring invisibility with a group of schoolfriends. At first this gift promises merely fresh scope for mischief, but the children soon become embroiled in the activities of a local criminal who also happens to be the school bully's dad. The climax involves a confrontation in the darkness of an old ice house, with a dashing young rock star riding to the rescue. In short, pure hokum, but spiced with sufficient panache to make you and your reluctant readers want to keep turning the pages. GH

William and the Wolves

★★★★

Kathryn Cave, ill. Chris Riddell, Hodder, 96pp, 0 340 71358 5, £3.50 pbk

William, stung to the quick when his parents describe him as unimaginative, becomes increasingly irritated with his little sister Mary's invention of a pet lamb. As the rest of the family humour Mary, and the fictional lamb begins to dominate William's life, he decides to let his imagination rip with some pets of his own. Six wolves, bent on the destruction of the lamb, begin to haunt the family, destroying his sister's tranquillity. However, when the creatures begin to materialise on the streets and in school, William realises that exercising one's imagination can be a dangerous

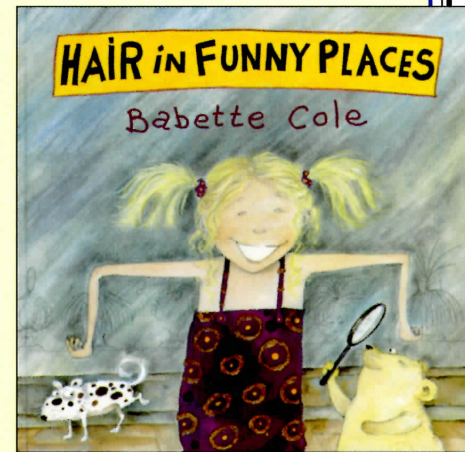
Editor's Choice

Hair in Funny Places

★★★★★

Babette Cole, Cape, 32pp, 0 224 04763 9, £9.99 hbk

The workings of the pituitary gland have seldom had such a wittily upfront version of their activities presented to young readers as in this entertaining picture book. Narrator Ted (a large teddy bear) explains to his (female) owner how her parents would have developed in puberty when Mr and Mrs Hormone ('They are in charge of growing up.') got to work mixing their potions and sending them round their bodies. The resulting 'hair in funny places' and other potentially embarrassing developments (periods, ejaculation, spots etc) are explained in Cole's eminently tactful text so that young readers are both informed and reassured about what Mr and Mrs Hormone have in store for them. At



the same time they will be greatly amused by the wild humour of Cole's portrayals of the sinister Hormones about their business and the way she captures the changes puberty brings. One caveat – while Cole does tell us that 'Mrs Hormone's mixtures do not affect everyone at the same time' she has female development taking place at 'about eleven' and male at 'about eight'. In fact, girls tend to develop earlier and faster than boys. RS

business.

This is an intriguing book, full of light, domestic, humour, but tinged with a more serious feel for sibling rivalry, family tensions and the ambiguities of fantasy. Chris Riddell's intricately detailed drawings capture the feelings of the characters perfectly. GH



My Second-Best Friend

★★★★★

Geraldine Kaye, Scholastic, 128pp, 0 590 54324 5, £4.99 pbk

Bel's family – 'Travellers us, not didicois nor nothing, Romanys' – sets up home next door to Lucy, and the two become 'second-best friends' for a time.

While the welcome Bel receives when she turns up at Lucy's school is rather more enthusiastic than might realistically be experienced in many schools, the author takes the opportunity to give some information about 'gypsies', and about racial tolerance generally, emphasising the value of mingling cultures and their skills. The reality of the transient nature of the traveller's life is handled well, and Lucy is

enabled to accept Bel's inevitable departure by a simple and effective device.

This is an unusual subject, handled well, with the slight tendency to sentimentality kept at bay by realism. Issues are introduced (for example, by asking what alternatives are available to travelling people), but not overstated. Well-written in a detached style, and very readable. AG

P.S. Longer Letter Later

TAPE

★

Paula Danziger and Anne M. Martin, read by the authors, Hodder Children's Book, 3hrs 20mins unabridged, 1 84032 246 2, £7.99

Books in letter form have an immediacy and directness that should translate readily onto tape. With two voices for the two correspondents this should be a marvellous recipe for drama. Unfortunately, the two girls are dull correspondents thumping out heavily signposted 'news' to one another about their families' problems (one is rich, the other poor but fortunes are changing), their friends and their school activities. Activities fare best in the telling, arousing some flickers of interest but mostly listeners will just be relieved that the longer letter has not yet been written. JE

Elidor

TAPE

★★★★★

Alan Garner, read by Robert Powell, HarperCollins, 3hrs abridged, 0 00 102411 6, £8.99

Elidor, only very slightly abridged, is perfectly presented in Robert Powell's clear and intelligent reading. An exceptionally fine fantasy, blending two worlds – a very down to earth Manchester and the sinister twilight country of Elidor – into a seamless whole, Elidor has mystery and magic, dark and light and lots of drama.

Robert Powell makes clear distinctions between the four children without resorting to theatricality and he builds up the spirit of Elidor, infusing the descriptions of its castles and characters with magic without ever becoming overly awesome. JE

Two Weeks with the Queen

TAPE ★★★★★

Morris Gleitzman, read by the author, Puffin, 2hrs 30mins unabridged, 0 14 180073 9, £6.99

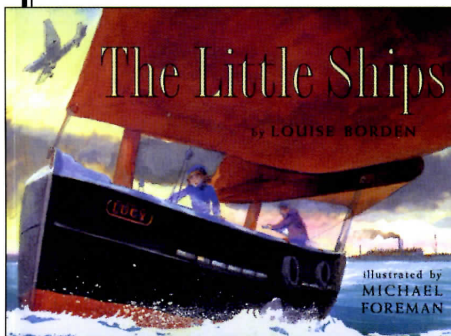
An exceptional book matching humour and sorrow in a perfect but daring balance, *Two Weeks with the Queen* boldly speaks of cancer (and did so long before the recent spate of excellent first person accounts, and in a child) and even more boldly of AIDS. It also takes a look at a gay partnership balancing a child's easy acceptance against the prejudice of many adults. And all this without for a moment sounding like a catalogue of problem-solving advice. Sent to England so as to be spared too much suffering when his brother is diagnosed with cancer, Colin has a simplistic view of how he will get the help that is needed. His crazy exploits first to reach the Queen and then the very best British cancer doctor to make his brother better are quite enough to hold attention absolutely. The contrast between Colin's directness and most adults' obfuscating terror of cancer is refreshing.

Morris Gleitzman's measured reading of *Two Weeks with the Queen* is so well controlled that the full grief of the story hits only at the very end. He never over milks the tragedy but lets it sink in slowly. The upbeat music, presumably designed to stop this being a real sob story, can be a little grating. JE

The Little Ships

★★★★★

Louise Borden, ill. Michael Foreman, Pavilion, 32pp, 1 86205 347 2, £6.99 pbk



The astonishing events of the Dunkirk evacuation of 1940, when a huge fleet of tiny fishing and river craft crossed the channel in order to assist in the rescue of over three hundred thousand trapped Allied soldiers, is here recounted in a fictional narration by the daughter of a Deal fisherman who embarks with her father on the wildly quixotic mission. The mood of the time and of the voyage has been researched by Borden, whose writing is direct, dynamic and occasionally embellished with poetic imagery. Foreman's watercolours capture the quiet atmosphere of the beach at Deal,

contrasted a few pages later by the scenes of mayhem on the beaches of Dunkirk. In between, the pell-mell channel crossing by the ramshackle armada is vividly expressed in text and pictures.

This is a very striking account of an inspiring episode, highly recommended for readers of all ages. GH

We Come from South Africa

NON-FICTION ★★

Alison Brownlie, Wayland, 32pp, 0 7502 2382 0, £9.99 hbk

32 pages of large print and big, big pictures introduce us to seven year old Tshepo and his family who live in Soweto. They are reasonably well off with both parents in government jobs and living in a brick bungalow with all mod cons, so we definitely get a positive view of the improving conditions for black South Africans. The old apartheid past is mentioned briefly – but that is the trouble in books like this that try to cover such a huge topic in such a short space; everything is dealt with briefly and it is the pictures that give us a much better idea of what life is like than the text. As for the Topic Web and Extension activities, any half-way competent teacher could have come up with these ideas (and better) in their sleep. SR

Home and School

1 85561 888 5

Sport and Leisure

1 85561 890 7

Travel and Transport

1 85561 889 3

Work and Industry

1 85561 891 5

NON-FICTION ★★

Neil Morris, Belitha 'Life in Victorian Times', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

You could be forgiven for thinking that this new series from Belitha really does offer all you would ever need for Victorian social and economic history for 8-12 year olds. The four books all come in neat twin subject packages and in different bright coloured covers, so that you can tell them apart on the shelves. Their presentation has a Victorian feel: each page has a line border and at least every other double page spread is confined to black and white illustrations. It is the illustrations that matter most, and they and their captions take up the lion's share of the space. While Morris's text offers three paragraphs on, say, 'work and school', including information on school leaving age, how science was taught, and learning to write with sand trays and slates, four illustrations cover topics as various as school merit certificates, teaching methods and the chemistry sets that wealthy parents could buy for their children to use at home.

The illustrations, which are all Victorian in origin, are well chosen, and the captions draw out their detail (what are those kites for, hanging from the rafters of the schoolroom?) and make broader points. Diana Morris, the picture researcher, has

used only two picture libraries, the Hulton Getty and the Public Record Office, but has found fascinating visual sources, which look at Victorian life from a variety of viewpoints: from social reforming cartoons to proud family photographs. She includes many Victorian advertisements, which, alongside playbills, post-cards and greeting cards, provide the colour in the books. These are particularly successful in putting across Victorian preoccupations and aspirations.

The mixture of the (very) general text and specific illustration is beguiling. But anyone relying on these four books alone for their knowledge of Victorian times, would have only an impression. So much is missed out: not just in the subjects that are covered, but in those that are not. There is no mention of the church in *Sport and Leisure*, for instance. Yet, for many Victorians, religion and religious organisations took up much of their spare time. There is a great deal about the middle classes and the rich. Nearly all of the section on family life in *Home and School* is about the better off and is preceded by a statement – 'Working people had to spend so much of their day earning a living that there was not much time left for anything else' – which is untrue, a poor justification for inadequate research, and is contradicted by much in the *Sport and Leisure* volume.

There is the question of balance between topics: in *Travel and Transport*, should canals have the same amount of space devoted to them as bicycles? Sometimes, individual topics are not related to one another: it is not made clear, for instance, how the development of railways affected the use of canals. There is not a strong enough framework of change and development over the ninety years of Victoria's reign to link together all the disparate topics. There is a short introduction to each volume, but none has any conclusion, although you can infer that if a subject appears towards the end of the book, it probably appeared towards the end of Victoria's reign.

There is a good index to each volume, a sometimes eccentric glossary (entry for 'goggles' but not 'mass production') but no further reading list. Of the four, I have a slight preference for *Sport and Leisure*, which is a topic well suited by this approach, and which brings together information which is difficult to find otherwise. CB

Exploring Ancient Greece

NON-FICTION ★★

John Malam, Evans 'Remains to be Seen', 48pp, 0 237 51994 1, £9.99 hbk

This title charts the rise and fall of Ancient Greece from its beginnings some 4,000 years ago to its conquest by the Romans in 146 BC. With double-page spreads divided into chapters, it combines historical events and figures, with cultural achievement and religious beliefs. Fact Files are used to highlight key topics. While the text is solidly and clearly written the overall treatment is rather predictable with little to capture the imagination either textually or visually. A read of the credits reveals that the book is based on a previous title starring movie character and ace archaeologist,

Indiana Jones. It misses his presence to give it a much-needed lift. AGA

The Aztecs

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Peter Chrisp, Wayland 'History Beneath Your Feet', 48pp, 0 7502 2363 4, £10.99 hbk

Young fans of Channel 4's Time Team will recognise many of the archaeological techniques – from fieldwalking to geophysics – that are shown here. Chrisp's addition to the 'History Beneath Your Feet' series is particularly successful at integrating information about how we find out about the past, whether it is digging or deciphering Aztec carvings and codices, with a description of the civilisation that is uncovered. The subject lends itself to this approach. The Aztec empire flourished for a short time and within a narrow area compared with the other civilisations in this series: the Greeks, Egyptians and Romans. So it is possible to gain a good impression of it from the excavation of one or two sites, principally of Tenochtitlan, which is buried beneath Mexico City. It makes fascinating reading, and not only for 8-11 year olds. The glossary and index could be better, but the further information page and the pronunciation guide are excellent: particularly the recommended websites. The three 'projects' are facile and should have been left out. Once children have read about human sacrifice and pored over a gruesome Aztec painting showing hearts ripped out, they are unlikely to think that a model of the Great temple made of card and glue is adequate, even if they are encouraged to 'put some red paint on the steps, to look like blood-stains'. CB

3D Rocks and Minerals

NON-FICTION ★★

Cally Oldershaw, Dorling Kindersley 'Eyewitness 3D', 56pp, 0 7513 5896 7, £9.99 hbk novelty



This series bills itself as 'A new way of seeing, a new way of learning'. A simple mirror device combines with mirror-image photography to superimpose two images and produce a 3-D effect. It is a gimmick, but a gimmick that works, and here works effectively. Even better the book's introduction explains *how* it works. Now to the content...

We look at various types of rock and rocky landscape and uses of stone. Most are chosen for their spectacular 3-D appearance (fly in amber, tinstone, wulfenite crystals most effective) and give us a geo-sampler rather than a systematic examination of, well, of anything.

And therein lies its charm – its inessentialness means it is entirely

unthreatening and a nice thing for people with a tenner to spare to buy for anyone who thinks 'minerals' are fizzy drinks. A 'new way of learning' it ain't. TP

What I Believe

NON-FICTION ★★

Alan Brown and Andrew Langley, Macdonald, 64pp, 0 7500 2689 8, £9.99 hbk

This is a cheerful guide for 7-10 year olds to the world's major religions illustrated with a mix of photographs and cartoons. There is a consistent approach, which describes the main beliefs, practices and festivals and gives an idea of the variety of faiths within each religion. Shinto and Tao are covered, although not in as much depth as Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The device of eight smiling cartoon children, who take it in turns to tell us about their faith, is unconvincing and patronising: but the inference that all these faiths could be found happily in one playground is welcome. Upbeat as it is, the book has difficulty in dealing with contentious questions, like the position of women. It is all

well and good to have an illustration of a woman Rabbi but the text should be clearer that this is the exception rather than the rule. It would have been realistic, too, to recognise that there are many people who have no religion. CB

Rainforest

NON-FICTION ★★

Kathryn Senior, ill. Carolyn Scrace, Macdonald 'Fast Forward', 32pp, 0 7500 2735 5, £9.99 hbk

The Wayland Atlas of Rainforests

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Anna Lewington, Wayland with WWF and Forest For Life, 96pp, 0 7502 2520 3, £7.99 pbk

Having found quite a lot in favour of the 'Fast Forward' series' *Space Shuttle* title, I looked forward to another pleasant trip with *Rainforest*. Alas, not so. A scappily assembled, scratchily illustrated volume dealing only with *tropical* rainforests (not that you would know,

for not even the equator is marked on the tiny world map that shows their global positions) and employing minuscule type to do it, this must go down as one of the Salariya Book Company's least impressive achievements. The much-vaunted 'Special Split Pages' count for nothing and the whole presentation is an unfriendly turn-off, which is a pity, for the information is undoubtedly, though limited in scope, valid of its type. It is a salutary lesson in series inconsistency though, and in shopping around, because for two quid less something much more useful can be got...

The *Wayland Atlas* is a splendidly complete work. Dealing with temperate as well as tropical rainforests, the *Atlas* introduces us to them in exemplary detail. Not only do we find the flora and fauna but we find people too, and the whole book is driven by consideration of the impact of forest on population and population – native and otherwise – upon forest. Lewington is a key writer on this subject and the book shows why – not only has a lot of knowledge, thought and care gone into its production but the whole volume is



an excellent demonstration of how, when 'through-written', such a work can build up knowledge and understanding and leave the reader not only knowing more but also thinking better as a result of the gentle mental exercise it provides. And the pictures are brilliant – and always to the point, and the materiography at the end is excellently full. Certainly the best 'general' rain-forest guide I have come across, this book deserves, and well rewards, an end-to-end read, after which the urge to dip and dip again is virtually irresistible. TP

REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

The Thing that Came from Jason's Nose!

★★★

Tony Bradman, ill. Martin Chatterton, 0 7497 3655 0

Animal Avengers

★★

Malorie Blackman, ill. Stik, 0 7497 3557 0

Mammoth 'Epix', 48pp, £2.99 each pbk

Slim, highly-illustrated, black and white, pocket-size comic books in the 'Epix' series best avoided by the squeamish. *The Thing* is, of course, a huge, lumpy bogie that Jason flicks down a drain where it lands in the seepage from the Strangeville nuclear power plant and thus transmogrifies into a giant, slimey, slithering mass that threatens to engulf the local school. Our intrepid heroes Verna and Wayne are the only ones who realise what this mass really is and so are able to save the day. Lots of fun if you don't find the subject-matter too revolting – the kids surely won't.

Bits of sci-fi, bits of time-travel and bits of teenage rivalry/romance in *Animal Avengers* which, frankly, I found difficult to follow. The pictures are too dark, the early plotting too complex and I really could not understand why the girl/boy combo had to change into so many different animals. SR

Missing

★★★

Theresa Breslin, Mammoth, 128pp, 0 7497 1856 0, £3.99 pbk

When teenager Andi MacNeil decides to take up a weekend job in her local shopping mall she feels from the outset that 'some part of her that was alert to danger' is 'telling her to watch out'. Whatever the source of these promptings, they turn out to be fully justified. Andi soon finds herself in a sinister sequence of events involving

abducted young women, drug dealing, near-strangulation on a moving staircase, crossbow attacks and a terrifying act of arson. These combine to provide material for a narrative which Breslin manipulates with considerable skill, keeping us in suspense throughout as to where villainy and virtue are really to be found. RD

Fugitive

★★★

Catherine MacPhail, Puffin, 128pp, 0 14 038271 2, £3.99 pbk

Elements of a thriller, school story and family drama all combine in this lively account of Jack's reunion with the father whom he believed to be long dead. Jack and his mother, Big Rose, enjoy a close but bantering relationship in which neither gives the other an inch. Life is not exactly peaceful for Jack – Joe Grady and Lizzie Ferrier make sure that their taunts don't allow Jack to relax too much at school – but he can cope with this, and sometimes give as good as he gets. It is his mother's mysterious visits to the police station and warnings to beware of a man who has viciously attacked an old age pensioner which bother Jack. When he discovers that his father is alive and is hiding in their cellar having escaped from prison, he starts to make connections.

Short chapters ending on a tense note, Jack's engaging character and plenty of humour will keep readers turning the pages – not only to discover the mystery of the man in Big Rose's cellar, but also to see if Jack does indeed don a frock for a part in the school musical, *Calamity Jane*. VC

Turning to Stone

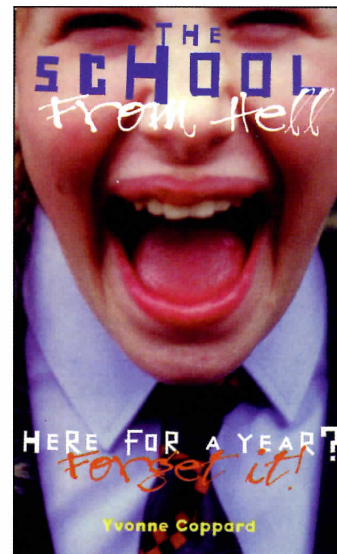
★★★

John Brindley, Dolphin, 144pp, 1 85881 638 6, £4.50 pbk

Through an intriguing, taut, shuttlecock narrative the story unfolds of

Tom and his sister Jazz. Both are short on self esteem – he is out of kilter with his school mates and she has retreated into her own angst-ridden world, riven by the guilt of bulimia.

A chance encounter with a mysterious woman unlocks both children to do something about their predicaments, get a grip and not just remain frozen and inactive, like their parents, who seem oblivious to their children's anxieties. The style is racy and the pace brisk. The reader is not spared the awfulness of bulimia nervosa and should leave this book with plenty to think about. DB



The School From Hell

★★★★

Yvonne Coppard, Puffin, 176pp, 0 14 130186 4, £4.99 pbk

'King Arthur's English Academy had its very own Hollywood film star, Lunatic Lord and resident criminal.' The school story is brought up to date here with the children of pop stars,

lottery winners and minor foreign rulers being fleeced and 'educated' by eccentric staff, chosen for their coiffure and photogenic qualities rather than their teaching ability.

A witty, fast moving novel, full of nutters and blessed with a gang of endearing central characters who unmask the Bursar's fraudulent dirty dealings, which culminates in the delightfully chaotic debacle at the end. Good fun and obviously it is poised for more to follow. DB

The Moon King

★★★★

Siobhán Parkinson, O'Brien, 176pp, 0 86278 573 1, £4.99 pbk

At the centre of this warmhearted novel is the story of nine-year-old Ricky's growth from shyness and silence to confidence and speech. When his home circumstances become such that he moves as a foster child into the rumbustiously friendly Kelly household, he initially finds that accommodation to his new surroundings is difficult. But following his discovery of the beautiful 'Moon' chair in the attic of the old rambling house, he is able, gradually, to shed past traumas and to begin his transformation to newer certainties. Parkinson skilfully blends third-person narrative with occasional stream of consciousness effects, creating an appropriate medium for her account of Ricky's triumphantly imaginative conquest of the many demons by which he is haunted. RD

Ragga to Riches

1 874509 69 7

The Big Diss

1 874509 68 9

★★★

Yinka Adebayo, The X Press 'Drummond Hill Crew' series, 192pp, £3.99 each pbk

These two titles form a part of a series

NEW Talent

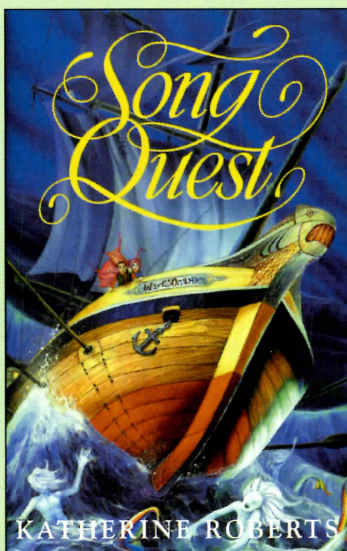
Songquest

★★★★

Katherine Roberts, Element, 240pp, 1 902618 28 9, £10.99 hbk

Rialle is top of the class at school and school, as in the *Harry Potter* books, is not of the usual kind. Rialle is being trained to be a singer, one who can use the Songs of Power which control emotion and memory, to proper effect. When she accompanies the Second Singer on a diplomatic mission to the menacing Karch, her initial task is to persuade the Merlee, half creatures who live in the sea, to give their ship safe passage – but many more adventures await her and her companions as they journey forth. Meanwhile, Kherron, the least popular boy in the class, has run away. When his path crosses Rialle's, will he be friend or foe?

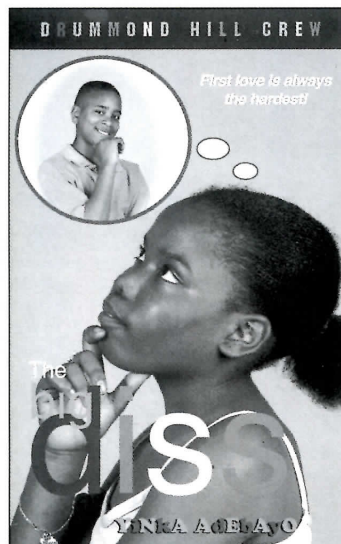
While this fantasy debut is reminiscent of Le Guin, Tolkien, J.K. Rowling et al, Roberts creates a convincing world that is very much her own and one that she is able to use as a metaphor to explore issues of difference, of power and exploitation, of inclusion and exclusion. This novel is also a rite of



passage novel in which Rialle, Kherron and their friend Frenn grow and make discoveries about themselves. Roberts writes vividly and dramatically with an accomplished grasp of plotting that carries the reader along. This novel is described as the first in a new fantasy sequence. If Roberts can maintain the standard of this impressive debut, there will be much to look forward to.

RS

based on five characters, three boys and two girls, who all attend the fictional Drummond Hill comprehensive school in inner-city London. It was devised, according to the author, a teacher in a London school, to give his young pupils 'something they would relate to, something they would enjoy ... something to think about'.



The stories are written with aplomb and unflagging good humour and should make easy enjoyable reading for the difficult 10-13 age range who may otherwise be lost to reading fiction. One word of caution though: the titles, *Ragga to Riches* and *The Big Diss* (fairly typical of the others in the series), promise some window or insight into black youth culture which is curiously lacking from the stories themselves which are in many respects culturally neutral. Apart from the names like Tenisha, Remi, Tunde and the occasional slang word

(a glossary appears at the back of the book) grafted on to fairly standard English dialogue, there is little in the setting or the language to identify the characters as belonging to any specific ethnic group. This of course is not an essential ingredient of stories as one cannot be prescriptive in these matters (freedom from social realism can sometimes allow an author greater scope for the expression of teenage fantasies) but simply a comment on the appropriateness of the titles.

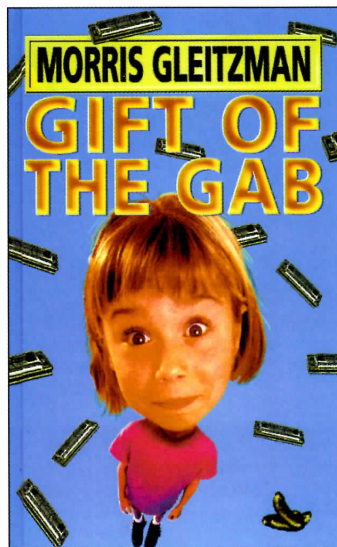
In *Ragga to Riches* the crew find themselves, in the course of a seaside summer holiday (arriving by old camper and red sports convertible respectively), involved in an adventure with the staple ingredients of smugglers' coves, buried treasure, old pirate maps, cryptic clues, a magic quill, a professor of archaeology and a couple of mean villains. Coincidences abound to assemble disparate London residents in this seaside resort, but the author nonetheless does well to marshal a big cast of characters. In *The Big Diss* (though not appearing in the glossary 'Diss' is current slang for 'disrespect') the local Drummond Crew have to face their arch-rivals, the posh Bluecoat school, in a sports tournament with some hilarious consequences. The clichéd public school snootiness of Bluecoat School is drawn with assurance, and the clash, and the events leading up to it, between the two sides of a social divide which both schools represent occupies the bulk of the novel and is of greater interest than the subsidiary love story which the cover would have us believe to be the main thrust of the novel, a picture of a young couple with the subtitle, 'First love is always the hardest ... A canny marketing ploy perhaps.'

EL

Gift of the Gab

★★★★

Morris Gleitzman, Viking, 192pp, 0 670 88836 2, £10.99 hbk



Here is a third book about Rowena, the girl without a voice who does not stop talking – previously the heroine of the marvellous *Blabber Mouth* and *Sticky Beak*. As reporters investigate her father's over-use of crop spray on his apples and Rowena begins to wonder if 'he didn't make my throat turn out crook', her father reveals that her mother died, not in childbirth but – in France in a hit-and-run accident. Cue the trip to France, even more delights of communication, and the hunt for the 'killer' which involves First World War trenches. Gleitzman carries it off in his special, high-paced, narrative style and it is good to follow Rowena again – for the last time apparently.

AJ

Bumface

TAPE

★★★★

Morris Gleitzman, read by the author, Puffin, 3 hrs unabridged, 0 14 180072 0, £6.99

The anxiety of an over-responsible boy is perfectly captured in Morris Gleitzman's brisk reading of this sensitive story. Neither in the reading nor the writing does he allow wallowing in emotions. The plot speaks for itself with the alternating humour and pathos that is Gleitzman's hallmark. Angus dreams of being Bumface the pirate, the hero of his private adventures. Instead he is his screen-star mum's Mr Dependable, trailing his younger brother and sister back and forth from school and nursery. Angus can just about cope with the complicated life he already leads but what if his mother has another baby? How Angus sets out to prevent that happening is hilarious and ridiculous without detracting from the serious underlying message about how children – boys as well as girls – cope with the burdens of responsibility. JE

Safe Harbour

★★★

Marita Conlon-McKenna, O'Brien, 176pp, 0 86278 422 0, £4.50 pbk

Sophie, 12, and her brother Hugh, seven, are left homeless and parentless when their house is



bombed during the London Blitz. Their father is away fighting in the navy and their mother is seriously injured in the bomb blast. There is no option for the children other than a visit to their paternal grandfather who lives in Co. Wicklow in Ireland, whom they have never met. Following an uncomfortable journey on a train full of evacuees to Wales, and then on the boat to Dun Laoghaire, they find their apprehensions about Grandfather are confirmed. Professor Fitzpatrick is indeed an austere and patrician figure, but, somewhat predictably, as the story unfolds they discover that there is a reason for Grandfather's chilly behaviour towards them.

The sights, sounds and smells of London during the Blitz are vividly captured, as are the scenes of bewilderment felt by the evacuees and their red-eyed parents as the train leaves Euston Station. The main characters are somewhat stereotypical, but *Safe Harbour's* strength lies in its evocation of this period of English and Irish history. It would provide good support to a study of World War Two.

VC

Fields of Home

★★★★

Marita Conlon-McKenna, ill. Donald Teskey, O'Brien, 192pp, 0 86278 509 X, £4.99 pbk

This is the third book in Conlon-McKenna's 'Children of the Famine' trilogy, already something of a modern classic in its account of Ireland and the Irish diaspora in the last half of the nineteenth century. The two earlier titles, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* and *Wildflower Girl*, trace the fortunes of three children, Eily, Michael and Peggy as they struggle to survive in famine-stricken Ireland. Peggy goes to the United States to find a better life and Eily and Michael make lives for themselves against a background of agrarian unrest and social upset.

In *Fields of Home* Eily is herself a mother, Peggy is making her way as a domestic servant in Boston and Michael finds that he has a gift for working with horses. Events are viewed from the alternating perspectives of Eily's daughter, Mary-Brigid, Michael and Peggy, giving a picture of two countries going through periods of change. In America those who fled a likely death in Ireland are tempted by the dream of homes of their own if they join the wagon-trains to the west. In Ireland Michael and Eily and her family are beginning to see improvements in

their circumstances, but these are threatened by a rapacious landlord and the destruction of 'the big house'. This all provides drama in plenty in a novel rich in detail of the period which it describes. **VC**

Just in Time: Stories to Mark the Millennium

★★★

Puffin, 192pp, 0 14 130418 9, £4.99 pbk

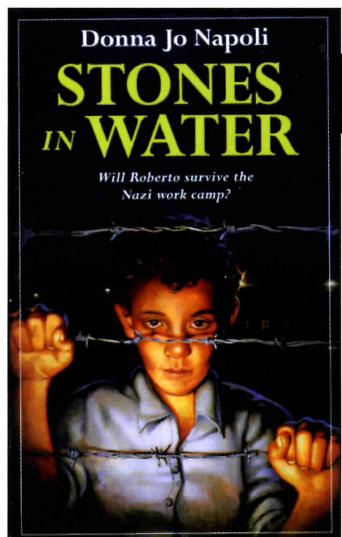
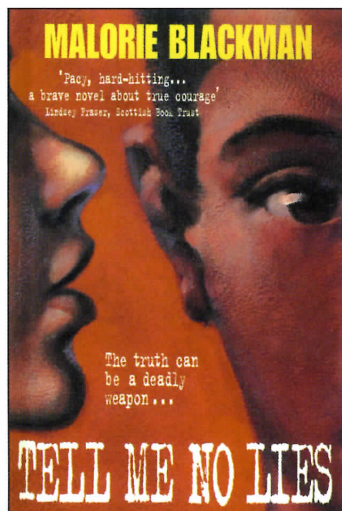
Ten writers have been asked to choose a point in history and to write a tale for the new millennium. This is an excellent value collection for any library.

Not surprisingly Dick King-Smith has given us the amusing tale of Julius Caesar's goat. Beverley Naidoo has taken us to glimpse the racial tension of South Africa when the first black pupils attempted to attend white schools in 1995 and Gillian Cross has created a tale from a small reference in Paul's AD 65 letter to Timothy to request that a cloak be fetched to his prison. Geraldine McCaughrean's contribution is a witty yarn about the change in 1752, to bring the Julian calendar in line with the Gregorian one. Other contributors are Berlie Doherty, Melvin Burgess, Nina Bawden, Josephine Feeney, Nigel Hinton and Katherine Paterson. **DB**

Tell Me No Lies

★★★★

Malorie Blackman, Macmillan, 208pp, 0 333 72645 6, £10.99 hbk



Children bullying and blackmailing other children does not make for comfortable reading. Blackman has bravely created a monster in Gemma yet she is so damaged and abused that we can understand why she feels driven to utilise a piece of amazing serendipity to abuse another damaged and troubled child (Mike) and thereby gain recognition and power for herself.

This fast moving story tells the stories of both children at once. An absorbing and moving thriller, it successfully evokes our sympathy for both of the victims, Gemma and Mike. **DB**

Buried Fire

★★★★

Jonathan Stroud, Bodley Head, 304pp, 0 370 32730 6, £10.99 hbk

With its strong sense of place and its powerful atavistic resonances, this novel explores how the eruption of long-buried forces of evil affects the relationships between two brothers, their older sister and the English village community of which they are part. The tensions and disturbances which fill the boys' lives following their vicar's discovery of the partial remains of an ancient cross are described in vivid and haunting detail, to the extent that (rather like the vicar at one point) the reader 'experiences the difficulty of reconciling the ordinary appearance of things' with the darkness under them. Part detective story, part psychological thriller, this is a genuinely chilling novel, slightly weakened by occasional lapses into over-writing. **RD**

Charles Dickens

Nicola Barber and Patrick Lee-Browne, 0 237 51742 6

The Brontës

David Orme, 0 237 51744 2

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Evans 'Writers in Britain', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

These titles have competent, well-produced background texts which set the writers clearly in their historical context before looking at the major works. In Dickens, the Industrial Revolution, the squalor of the slums and the desperate conditions in schools are all dealt with concisely but clearly and the influence on his work explained. Similarly in The Brontës there is useful material on women's role in society. Modern photos, contemporary pictures and



ephemera and stills from cinema and TV adaptations are well chosen and help to make these highly approachable books for secondary use.

There is a rather perfunctory index and a useful time line with the writers' lives set against important historical events. **SR**

How to ... Build a Time Machine

Ill. Alan Rowe, 0 19 910590 1

How to ... Build a Rocket

Ill. Scoular Anderson, 0 19 910591 X

How to ... Split the Atom

Ill. Scoular Anderson, 0 19 910592 8

NON-FICTION ★

Hazel Richardson, Oxford 'How To', 96pp, £3.99 each pbk

These books are so inaccurate as to do their publisher no credit. For example, in Time Machine, the Gregorian calendar is wrongly described; it is claimed wrongly that in Einstein's theory of gravity 'Space is usually flat' and that the Earth moves in a circle round the Sun; the difference between a black hole and an ordinary star is misrepresented and speculative ideas about wormholes, many-universe theory, and Erwin (not Ernest!) Schrödinger's cat paradox (misdated) are presented in such a way that they can scarcely be distinguished from fact. In Rocket, it is claimed wrongly that the Moon plays a substantial role in protecting the Earth from meteorites, that the Moon moves in a circle

around the Earth, that you cannot tilt the axis of a gyroscope 'however hard you try', and that in 1935 (four years before the crucial fission process was discovered) 'the Americans' were more interested in building the atom bomb than in rocket propulsion. In Atom, it is claimed wrongly that atoms were named after the atomists, and not vice versa, and that fission was discovered in 1932. Otto Hahn did not, as is claimed, share his Nobel Prize for the discovery with Fritz Strassman (not Straussman). The misleading matters: the discovery was made in Germany in 1939; World War II might have been very different if fission had been discovered seven years earlier. The author comments on the dropping of nuclear bombs on Japan: 'This was done to try and speed up the end of the war and save thousands of soldiers' lives.' Only connect this with the statement that 'The first atom bomb...killed and injured over 140,000 people' on the following page. (How to...Clone a Sheep is published in the same series.) **FP**

Weather

Anthony Wilson, ill. Sean Longcroft, 0 340 73624 0

Time

Mike Goldsmith, ill. Christine Roche, 0 340 73625 9

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Hodder 'The Science Museum Book of Amazing Facts', 128pp, £3.99 each pbk

These books are clearly written, well-organized, adequately indexed, amusingly illustrated and comparatively reliable. Each chapter begins with a summary page and ends with a quiz. Weather deals with historical and contemporary extremes, geographical and seasonal variations, scientific background and future prospects. Time describes styles and methods of time measurement and calendar formation. Both books distinguish carefully between fact and speculation. Some errors have crept in, however. Time claims wrongly that 'the nearest [stars] are millions of times further from the Earth than the Sun is'; at least a dozen stars are at less than a million times the solar distance. It asserts, more understandably, that the expansion of the Universe is slowing down; this was thought to be so until 1998, but the contrary is now generally accepted. **FP**

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

Stones in Water

★★★★

Donna Jo Napoli, Oxford University Press, 160pp, 0 19 271798 7, £5.99 pbk

An illicit trip to see a western by Roberto and his Jewish friend Samuele in second world war Venice leads to them being rounded up and deported to a Nazi labour camp. There they struggle to support each other's survival and to keep Samuele's ethnicity a secret. Eventually they are dispatched to the murderous austerities of a camp in the Ukraine, where their friendship and resilience are tested to the utmost limits. This is

a riveting book which combines the compulsive narrative drive of an adventure story with the kind of harrowing reflections on human motivations towards good and evil that remind the reader that this is not an adventure yarn but a fictionalised account of real events with grim contemporary parallels. **GH**

The Guns of Easter

176pp, 0 86278 449 2, £4.50 pbk

A Winter of Spies

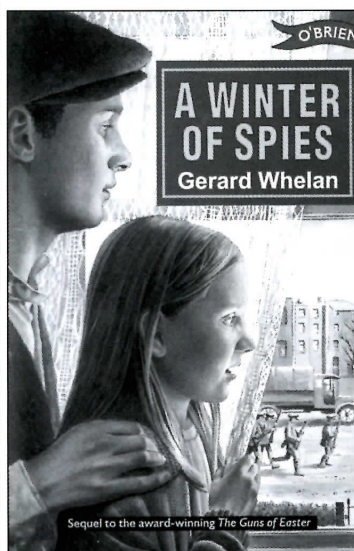
192pp, 0 86278 566 9, £4.99 pbk

★★★★

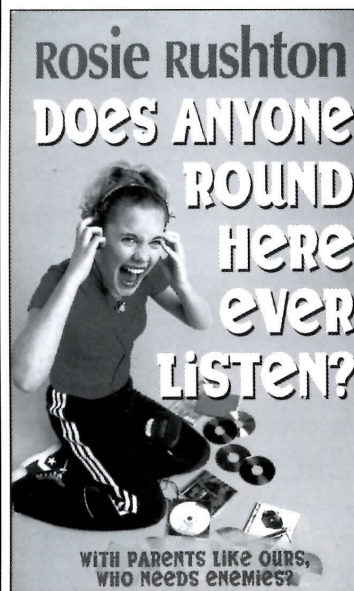
Gerard Whelan, O'Brien

Given the complications of Irish history, it is, perhaps, surprising that so many of the country's children's writers are drawn to its past as a source of inspiration. Some of the attraction may be to explain that past, part to challenge conventional responses to it and, certainly, part to move beneath the abstractions of textbook history to focus on 'ordinary' Irish lives. An ambitious writer such as Whelan responds to all of these challenges, though his primary concern is with the last of them.

Thus, while The Guns of Easter is endowed with a strong sense of the conflicting political passions of the



seminal year of 1916, it is equally remarkable for its portrayal of a credible and likeable hero, twelve-year-old Jimmy Conway, growing up at a time when his country is experiencing its own uncertain moves towards independence: his dilemma is to resolve a situation where a father has enlisted in the British Army and an uncle is prominent in the Rising. The emphasis in *A Winter of Spies* shifts to Jimmy's sister, Sarah, and her initial enthusiasm for the life of the 'rebel' in the War of Independence of the early 1920s: her dilemma is to maintain her ideals in an adult world of duplicity and double-dealing. These are extremely accomplished novels, neither of which shirks the bloodshed and misery which war inevitably entails. RD



Does Anyone Round Here Ever Listen?

★★★

Rosie Rushton, Puffin, 176pp, 0 14 130211 9, £3.99 pbk

This is the fourth book in the Leehampton series featuring five teenagers and their battles with life, love and parents. Gender and ethnicity are equitably represented and the storylines revolve around topical issues.

Rushton has an ear for the nuances of dialogue and her ability to recreate

embarrassing situations is amply demonstrated here. Glibly happy endings are not the order of the day and the harsher aspects of real life will strike familiar chords with beleaguered young people. This book is funny, realistic and reassuring, by turns: the snappy title and affordable price make it an appealing package. VR

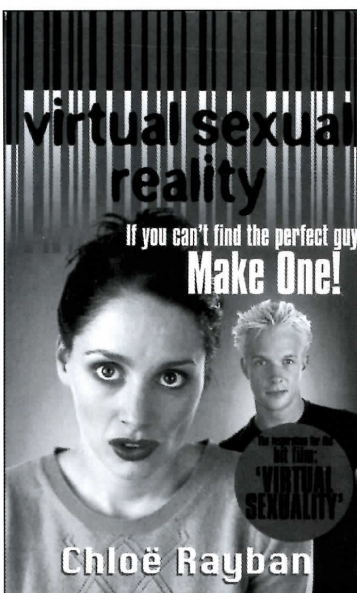
Virtual Sexual Reality

★★★★

Chloë Rayban, Red Fox, 192pp, 0 09 940417 6, £3.99 pbk

Justine visits the Virtual Reality Exhibition in anticipation of getting to know Alex better. However, after a disastrous experiment with an Alternative Reality Machine, she acquires a new identity – as a male; Jake.

The plot twists even more when Jake discovers that Justine still exists in the same dimension and seems to have fallen for him. This unusual slant on gender, reminiscent of a teenage version of *Bill's New Frock* offers some interesting insights into stereotypes and behavioural patterns.



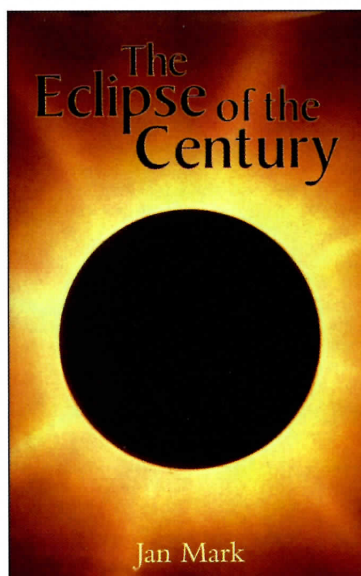
Dialogue is snappy, action is high-key and there is an overall impression of prose flying by the seat of its pants. Eventually, the convolutions of the plot irritated rather than entertained but there are sufficient good moments here to justify a place on library shelves. VR

The Eclipse of the Century

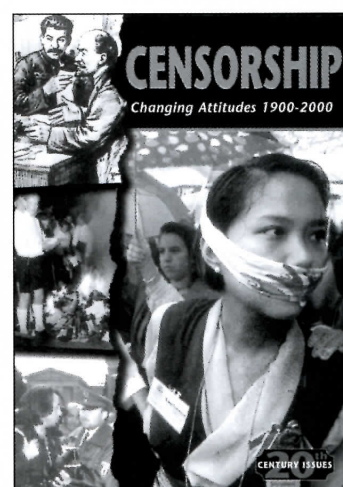
★★★★

Jan Mark, Scholastic, 448pp, 0 590 54467 5, £14.99 hbk

To mark the end of the millennium here is a story with the sense of a dream, and often a nightmare, suggestive of where we are, where we have been and where we are heading for. It is full of endings and set in motion by a near-death experience, where 'heaven' proves to be a real place in Asia, Qantoum, to which Keith then travels. History has washed over it: the Arabs, the British, and the Russians have all come and gone, or mostly gone, leaving the native Sturyat waiting for a promised eclipse when they will move from the city. Keith finally settles in the museum, an appropriate backdrop



with its collection resembling 'an international car-boot sale', and the residence of an assortment of colonials supervised by Ernie Fahrenheit (a woman). In a parody of the nativity, unwise men and women, strange cults, and armies converge from east and west, following an internet promise of a wonder in the heavens. It is a remarkable book, compulsively readable while mysterious ('quantum' literature perhaps) which imbues some of the madness and sadness of the centuries with grim and often surreal humour (the moving, water-filled plants are described as 'itinerant lilos'). AJ



Poverty: Changing Attitudes 1900-2000

Teresa Garlake, 0 7502 2216 6

Censorship: Changing Attitudes 1900-2000

Scarlett McGwire, 0 7502 2465 7

NON-FICTION

★★★★

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

This series is admirable in making an attempt to take a global view of its subjects, and in commissioning authors (and consultants) who are knowledgeable and have a commitment to what they are writing about. McGwire has worked with Index on Censorship and Amnesty International. Garlake is an education officer with Oxfam.

Both these books chart changes in opinion and behaviour through the twentieth century, but they have different strengths.

McGwire's is in her treatment of political censorship. Her three central chapters, on the role of media censorship in democracy, ranging from the influence of owners, through 'news values', to control and manipulation by government for the sake of national security, are particularly good. She is less sure in delineating the argument over what the limits of toleration of opinion and behaviour should be at the beginning of the twenty-first century, leaving her readers with a series of questions to ponder.

Garlake is best in her final chapters where she talks about the politics of international aid, and leaves no one in any doubt about where she stands: 'The rich nations currently use up eighty per cent of the world's resources. Our world is capable of sustaining all its people, but only if we learn to share what we have.' She is less clear about the recent shift in the United States and Europe away from the idea of state provision for the poor.

Poverty has a better glossary and reading list, scoring highly for the teachers' resources it mentions, but both books are a good addition to a series that is proving to be one of the most intelligent and attractive treatments of social issues from a historical perspective for 14-18 year olds. CB

Leonardo

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Andrew Langley, Dorling Kindersley 'Eyewitness Guides', 64pp, 0 7513 6159 3, £9.99 hbk

This is more an introduction to the age than to the man; and mainly an introduction to the arts of the Italian Renaissance. It cleverly ties in economic and scientific development, and political and religious thought, and does not forget northern Europe (Leonardo died in France), but its strength is in its description of the hothouse of genius that was Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is the standard Eyewitness approach: the double page spread and the 'sound bite' text; whose deficiencies are perhaps less important here, because what matters are the works of art. Full marks to the team of art editors and consultants, map and modelmakers, designers and photographers, for selecting (and sumptuously reproducing and realising) the works on display.

The book is put together with the eye of a film editor for the telling visual detail. Individual subjects like the painting and gilding of an altarpiece get extended and fascinating treatment. Suitable for anyone over the age of 14, this is not everyday Renaissance life, but it is a dazzling representation of some of the best of a remarkable time. It is a pity the index is short and pushed into a corner, and there is no further reading list to help you follow up such a stimulating book. CB

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

Bessemmer (see p22)

Wallace & Gromit (see p25)

The Little Ships (see p26)

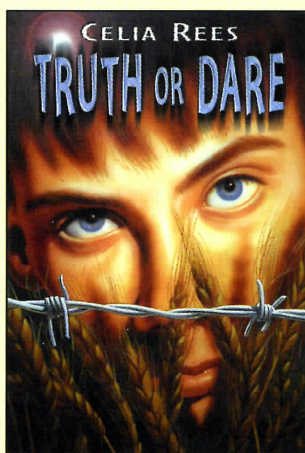
Truth or Dare

Celia Rees, Macmillan Children's Books, 192pp, 0 333 72952 8, £9.99 hbk

13 year old Josh is staying in his dying grandmother's house. Gran's semi-conscious ramblings about her long-dead son, and Josh's discovery of the boy's obsession with UFOs, draw him towards a terrible family secret. Each night his mother writes another chapter of her book, set in the space-race summer of 1959. Is it fiction – or is it the true story of her tragic childhood? And why does Josh's new alien computer game so uncannily mirror his grandmother's home? These strange strands weave compellingly into an unforgettable story that links present and past.

Celia Rees' **Truth or Dare**, her fifth children's novel for Macmillan, is truly outstanding, brilliant in its ideas and thrilling in its storytelling power. Celia's previous books include **The Bailey Game**, now rejacketed to accompany **Truth or Dare**.

Published 7 January 2000



Cirque du Freak

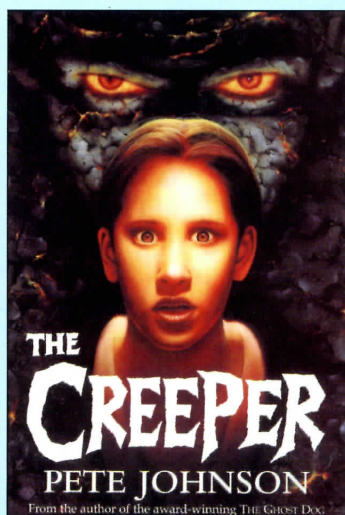
Darren Shan, Collins Children's Books, 192pp, 0 00 675416 3, £3.99 pbk

Darren goes to a banned freak show with his best mate Steve. It's the wonderfully gothic Cirque du Freak where weird, frightening half human/half animals interact terrifyingly with the audience. Darren determines to steal an enormous tarantula so that he can train it to perform amazing deeds. But his daring theft goes horribly wrong. The spider bites his best mate and Darren has to sell his soul to an evil vampire to get the antidote.

An atmospheric, funny, moving and ... terrifying novel, **Cirque du Freak** is the first book in a satisfyingly macabre trilogy, 'The Saga of Darren Shan', for the 10-12 age group.

'Fast paced and compelling, full of satisfying macabre touches – **Cirque du Freak** explores the powerful fascination of the dangerous and unnatural and also, movingly, the obligations of friendship.' J K Rowling

Published 4 January 2000



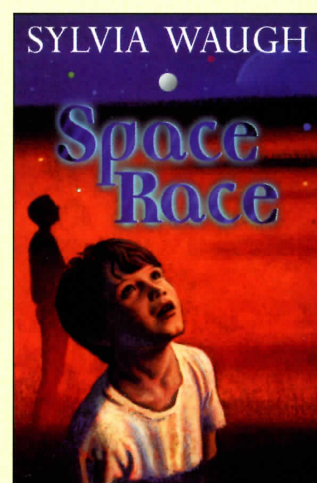
The Creeper

Pete Johnson, Corgi Yearling, 160pp, 0 440 86392 9, £3.99 pbk

Lucy is delighted when she spots the old audio tape in a second-hand bookshop: a spooky story, perfect for listening to at Hallowe'en. But then she and her friend Jack listen to the tape, and Lucy is suddenly really scared. For the story tells the terrifying tale of the Creeper, a horrific creature formed from the ashes of a murdered man and bent on revenge against all wrongdoers. And Lucy has just done something truly terrible to her best friend. Now the Creeper is loose – and he has a new victim ...

Pete Johnson explores the subtle power of the imagination in this new book for 8 to 11 year olds.

Published 1 January 2000



Space Race

Sylvia Waugh, The Bodley Head, 192pp, 0 370 32671 7, £10.99 hbk

For almost as long as he can remember, Tom has lived happily in Belthorp. Then, just before Christmas his father announces that their mission of observing the human race is over, and they must return to their real home, the planet Ormingat. Tom longs to remain on earth with his friends, but he knows he can't possibly stay without his kind and gentle father.

When they set off on their journey to the space ship which will take them home, they are faced with numerous difficulties.

They are separated and neither knows if they will be reunited before time runs out and the space ship departs without them.

Space Race is poignant, exciting and fast moving. Sylvia's debut novel, **The Mennyns**, won the Guardian Fiction Award.

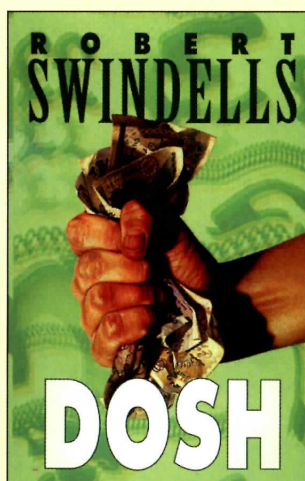
Published 6 January 2000

Dosh

Robert Swindells, Hamish Hamilton, 176pp, 0 241 13936 8, £10.99 hbk

Every kid in the secondary school is trying to earn money, but whether they work in the factory, deliver papers, or what, they must give 10% of their earnings to Push, the school protection racket. Everyone knows Push is run by the Flitcrofts – Charles and Mavis – but no one can prove it. The kids band together to form Pull and refuse to pay. But Flitcroft is about to settle a very big deal and can't let a bunch of kids ruin it. Several kids are beaten up. Pull get wind of Flitcroft's deal – dodgy videos involving children. They infiltrate a party and manage to escape with enough evidence for Flitcroft to be arrested.

Robert Swindells' hard-hitting novels usually carry a message and are particularly directed at teenagers. He won the Carnegie Medal for **Stone Cold**.



Published 25 November 1999

A Multicultural Guide to Children's Books 0-16+

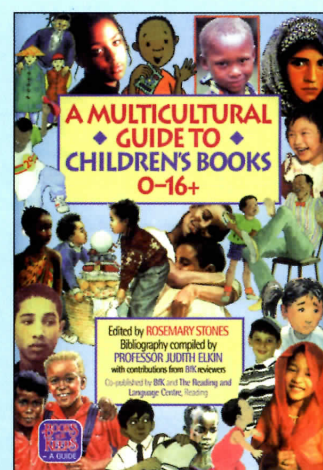
Edited by Rosemary Stones, Books for Keeps and The Reading and Language Information Centre, Reading, 68pp, 1 871566 05 3, £7.50 (UK), £9.50 (overseas)

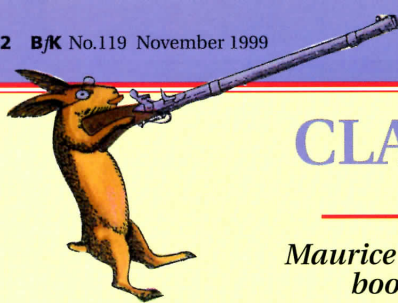
A fully annotated bibliography of children's books with a multicultural theme – twice the extent of the previous edition of this guide published in 1994 and including a new section of books for 16+.

Arranged by age groupings, each with its own short introduction, the selection of titles has been rigorous – we have chosen the very best. The bibliography is accompanied by a number of context-setting articles looking at the current state of our multicultural society and pen-portraits of several authors and illustrators who feature in the Guide.

Phone, fax or email to order your copy today or to receive more details. Phone: 0181 852 4953, Fax: 0181 318 7580, Email: booksforkeeps@btinternet.com

Published October 1999





CLASSICS IN SHORT No.18

Brian Alderson

Maurice Sendak said that it was 'graphically the most beautiful book in the world'. Not the Lindisfarne Gospels, but ...



Well, how do you pronounce it to start with?

Most people here say 'strewel' (to rhyme with 'crewel') and then plain 'Peter'; but it really needs to be given a rich German pronunciation as it were: Shtruwelpeter, with a guttural 'r' and a strong short first 'e' in 'Peter'.

What does it mean?

The usual translation is 'Shock-headed Peter' but (as you may guess) 'Struwwel' has more force to it than that, implying hair tangled up like barbed wire. The word refers to the figure who usually appears on the cover and the first page of the book: Peter, standing on a plinth and glowering at us from under his hair. His finger-nails are a foot or so longer than those of even the most fashionable of today's teenagers.

Who wrote it, and when?

Heinrich Hoffmann (1809–1894), a physician in Frankfurt a.M., didn't care for the heavy moralism and the over-realistic illustration of contemporary children's books. His original manuscript was concocted in 1844 for the enjoyment of some friends and as a Christmas present for his 3-year-old son Carl. One of the friends was a publisher (who also published Marx and Engels's *Die Heilige Familie!*) and he and Hoffmann organised publication of the first edition of what was then called *Lustige Geschichten und Drollige Bilder* for Christmas 1845: six stories occupying fifteen pages, illustrated and decorated by Hoffmann himself, with the text printed letterpress and the pictures lithographed and then coloured by hand. The book was an immediate success and with publication of the fifth edition in 1847 it attained its canonic form: ten stories on 24 pages, with the title now changed to *Der Struwelpeter*, and with the youth himself no longer at the back of the book but presiding over everything immediately after the title-page.

When did it come to England?

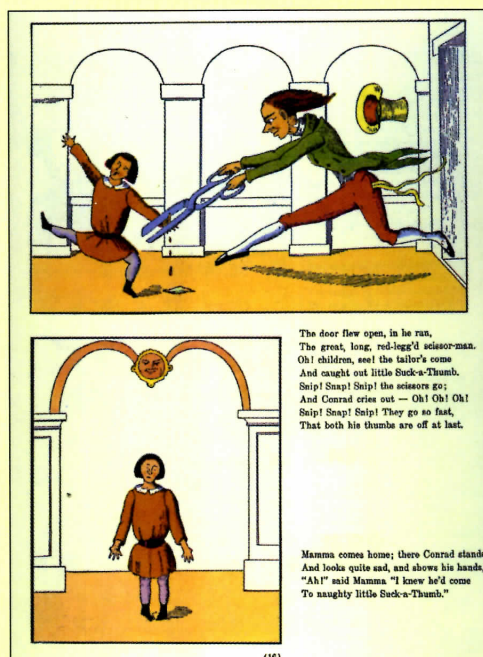
In 1848 under the title *The English Struwelpeter; or pretty stories and funny pictures for little children*. After the Sixth Edition of the celebrated German work. Since it was printed for Hoffmann's publisher, who sold it through agents, it naturally followed the German sequence of stories and used the author's illustrations, which were now printed from wood-blocks with hand-colouring. No one knows who translated the verses, but whoever it was did a very passable job and his text is still found in current editions. These are merely the latest reprints of a work which has appeared in uncountable numbers in this country (often with several publishers putting out editions



at one and the same time), which has been translated into at least thirty languages, and which must hold a world record as the most widely-disseminated text to have been consistently accompanied by versions of its author's original illustrations.

What is pretty about the stories?

Well may you ask. Most of them have to do with foolish, stropky or unbiddable children who meet various come-uppances: Bullyboy Frederick, bitten by a dog; Harriet, playing with matches and burning herself to ashes; three yobbos who taunt a black boy and get



The door flew open, in he ran,
The great, long, red-legg'd scissor-man.
Oh! children, see! the tailor's come
And caught out little Suck-a-Thumb.
Snip! Snip! Snip! the scissors go,
And Conrad cries out — Oh! Oh! Oh!
Snip! Snip! Snip! They go so fast,
That both his thumbs are off at last.

Mamma comes home; there Conrad stands,
And looks quite sad, and shows his hands.
"Ah!" said Mamma "I knew he'd come
To naughty little Suck-a-Thumb."

'The Story of Little Suck-a-Thumb'

dunked in a large inkwell by tall Agrippa; and – most famously – Conrad Suck-a-Thumb who is de-digitized by the Red-legg'd Scissor-man. One story has no children in it and concerns a hunter after hares who falls asleep and is then chased and shot at by his quarry. Opinions differ about all this, with doubts expressed (especially by congenital thumb-suckers) over Hoffmann's motives, and with nods and winks at the fact that he was German.

A case for the defence.

Sky-larking, m'lud. The whole thing was conceived as a joke and a send-up of the *moralités* inflicted on child readers (then, as now) and Hoffmann relishes his chance to have a go at stupidity and pomposity. There is too the graphic beauty admired by Sendak. This has nothing to do with the surface gloss of fashionable painter-illustrators, but stems from Dr Hoffmann's wonderful versatility in giving visual life to his various texts – the more powerful perhaps because of its very amateurishness. *Struwelpeter* makes play with half a dozen graphic devices never before found together in so short a book: strip cartoons, sequential events in a single picture, personified objects, symbolic decorations etc. all cleverly patterned around each page of text.

An inspiration to plagiarists and parodists.

Simple in structure and widely popular among generations of readers *Struwelpeter* has proved a rich source for imitators and satirists. The former are usually hopeless, proving Hoffmann's naive surrealism to be inimitable, but the latter can turn his cautionary episodes to good, if transient, effect (see for instance *The Political Struwelpeter*, 1899; *Swollen-headed [Kaiser] William*, 1914; *Struwelhitler*, 1941; and *Tricky Dick [Nixon] and his Pals*, 1974. Musical settings have also been made, the most recent of which, *Shockheaded Peter: a junk opera*, with music by The Tiger Lillies, is still touring around and is not to be missed. ■

The illustrations and cover are from the Dragon's World edition of 1995, reissued by Belitha Press in 1997 (1 85561 770 6, £9.99).

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

A conference to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first American printing of *Struwelpeter* is to be held during November at the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University, where Brian Alderson will be one of the speakers.