

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 2000
No. 122 UK Price £3.10

the children's book magazine



EARLY MATHS BOOKS • DEBI GLIORI
PHOTOGRAPHY IN ILLUSTRATION

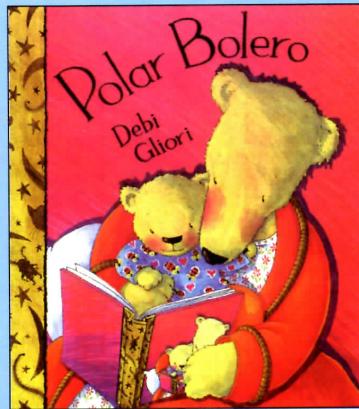
Polar Bolero

Debi Gliori, Scholastic, 32pp, 0 439 01372 0, £9.99 hbk

If you can't sleep, then go to the hill where the wide-awake meet and dance the magical Polar Bolero.

This is the perfect bedtime book for children who are feeling fidgety and can't get to sleep at night. They can join in the adventures of the little polar bear, who finds his friends dancing by the light of the moon in Debi Gliori's dreamy and wonderful book. It won't be long before little sleepyheads will be snuggling deep into their pillows and falling fast asleep.

Award-winning author and illustrator, Debi Gliori, has woven a gloriously magical and lyrical tale which will, no doubt, become a bedtime favourite! A fantastical dream-like story about a young polar bear who can't get to sleep. He goes outside and meets his friends on the hillside. At midnight, by the light of the moon, they dance the Polar Bolero.



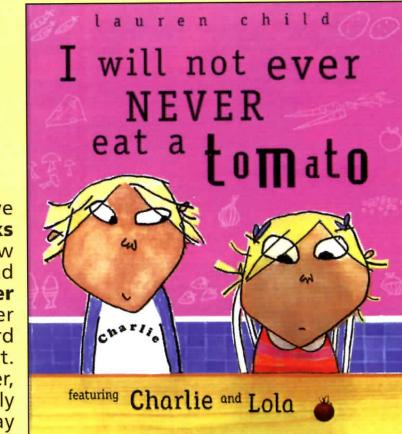
Published 19 May 2000

I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato

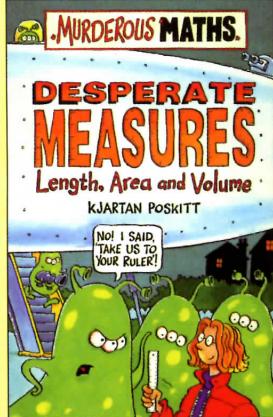
Lauren Child, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 397 7, £10.99 hbk

"Exuberantly inventive and funny" is how Books for Keeps describe new talent, Lauren Child, and *I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato*, her second book for Orchard will not disappoint. Charlie has a little sister, Lola, who is an extremely fussy eater! One day Charlie has to give her dinner but despite Lola's insistent cries of disgust at the food he is serving he succeeds in getting her to eat everything up by persuading her that it is not what it seems.

A delightful and humorous solution to the eternal problem of fussy eaters, this book should find a place at every young family's dinner table.



Published 25 May 2000

**Murderous Maths: Desperate Measures**

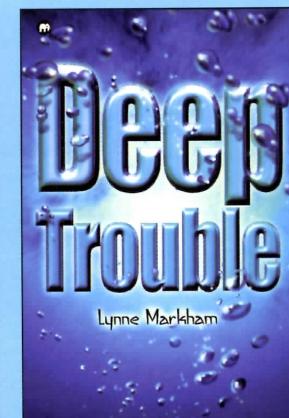
Kjartan Poskitt, ill. Philip Reeve, Scholastic, 176pp, 0 439 01370 4, £3.99 pbk

Is maths making you miserable? Are you vacant about volume and anxious about area? Do you ever feel you're one gram short of a kilo? Then it's time to take Desperate Measures ...

The Murderous Maths series achieves the impossible: these are maths books that are guaranteed to make you laugh. In *Desperate Measures*, Professor Fiendish, Pongo McWhiffy and the evil Gollarks (who are about to destroy the world) tell you all you need to know about length, area and volume – but it definitely won't feel like a maths lesson.

Author Kjartan Poskitt's original, hilarious approach to his subject makes Murderous Maths a must for any child who ever said maths was boring. Is maths making you miserable? Are you vacant about volume and anxious about area? Do you ever feel you're one gram short of a kilo? Then it's time to take Desperate Measures...

Published 19 May 2000

**Deep Trouble**

Lynne Markham, Mammoth, 192pp, 0 7497 4131 7, £4.99 pbk

The day the whale came was the day everything went wrong. For a start I got a red card at school for being late ... For a second start there was Baxter (he'll bash you one as soon as look) ... when I get home there's even worse trouble. The third start. The sort of trouble you couldn't imagine unless it happened to you.

Jimmy lives with his close-knit family in a small town beside an estuary. On the day that Jimmy's lively, fun-loving father has a stroke – a sperm whale swims down the estuary and becomes trapped. He immediately feels an affinity with the whale's grandeur and wildness but has a terrible fear that the whale may not survive and is convinced that unless the whale manages to escape then Dad – trapped inside his stroke – will never break free.

At the core of this book is a captivating, tender and real portrait of an ordinary family coping with tragedy.

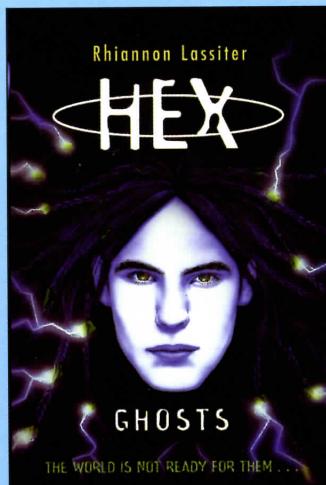
Published June 2000

Hex: Ghosts

Rhiannon Lassiter, Macmillan, 192pp, 0 333 78047 7, £9.99 hbk

Don't miss the final mind-blowing blast of the best-selling HEX trilogy.

Raven is a Hex: a human being with a mutant gene, which gives her an amazing affinity with computer systems. She can control machines with her mind, cruising the internet highways with impunity. This is an incredible power – but a very dangerous one. Hexes are considered an unacceptable security risk, and, whenever discovered, are exterminated by a legitimate government agency. But now, in the depths of the city, a new force is taking shape, a Hex army is planning a new future and they are coming out of hiding. Will they finally manage to defeat those who have oppressed them for so long? This is the fast-moving and hugely satisfying last part of an astonishing trilogy.



Published 5 May 2000

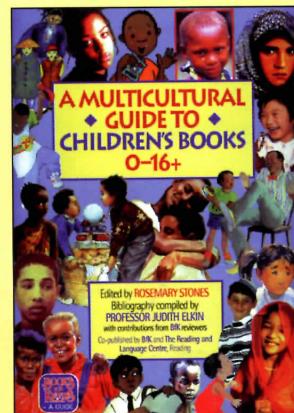
A Multicultural Guide to Children's Books 0-16+

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 e-mail to order your copy today or to receive more details. Phone: 020 8852 4953, fax: 020 8318 7580, e-mail: booksforkeeps@btinternet.com



Published October 1999

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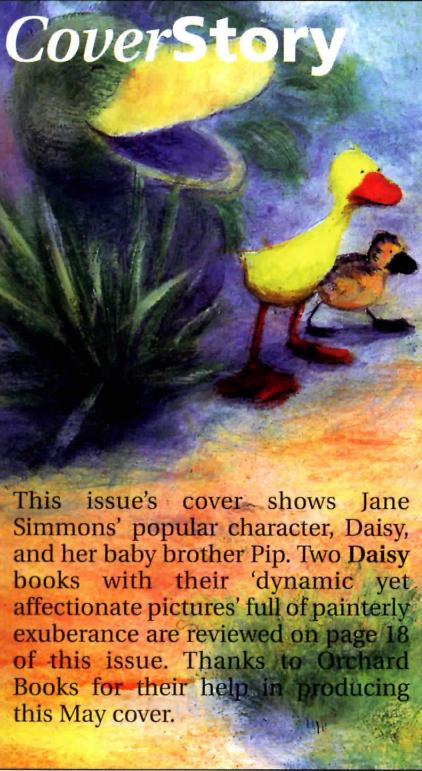
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Brian Alderson on Clever Bill.

CoverStory



This issue's cover shows Jane Simmons' popular character, Daisy, and her baby brother Pip. Two Daisy books with their 'dynamic yet affectionate pictures' full of painterly exuberance are reviewed on page 18 of this issue. Thanks to Orchard Books for their help in producing this May cover.

EDITORIAL

'Family values' have been much in the news again as politicians battle over the proposal to repeal the notorious Section 28 legislation which prohibits local authorities from 'promoting' either homosexuality or the 'acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.

It is extraordinary to what extent the mythical family (husband, wife and children) still dominates our thinking despite the actual changes that have taken place in society. In Britain today less than 30% of families with children involve a male breadwinner, a housewife and two children in a first marriage. The living situation of most adults and children is no longer the nuclear family. About one marriage in three in Britain now ends in divorce and 75% of separated fathers lose touch with their children within three years.

The basis of the family is the union of a woman and a man to produce a baby. We are, therefore, all part of a family, even if it has no more than a symbolic presence in the psyche. Who could not then believe that 'family values' matter. Every child needs a secure and nurturing family, whatever its composition, within which to grow and develop. And few would disagree that children also need to have access to both male and female role models as they grow up – something that is increasingly difficult given the number of single parent families in our society.

Children's authors and illustrators have long been aware of changes in the family and the first 'situation books' to reflect children's new realities began to be published in the 1970s. One of the first was Althea's *I Have Two Homes** about a child whose parents are separated. Since then, there have been books featuring single parent families, children with divorced parents, adopted children and stepfamilies. It has seemed important to have books for children that reflect, in a positive way, all these other family realities.

One of these other realities for a minority of our children is life with a homosexual parent



Rosemary Stones

or parental couple. In 1983 Danish author, Susanne Bösche's *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin** was published in Britain. A photo-picture book about a day in the life of a little girl who lived with her father and his gay partner, it included a picture showing Jenny having breakfast in bed with the two men. The furore caused by this title, and in particular this image, lead in part to the implementation of Clause 28.

It was deeply depressing at the time to see resurrected the old chestnut which associates homosexuality in the public mind with paedophilia. In fact, 95% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by heterosexuals but I cannot recall there ever having been a fuss about picture books which show a child in bed with a heterosexual parental couple. Another chestnut resurrected was that a child who grows up with a homosexual parent or parental couple will inevitably be homosexual. (In that case, one wonders how it is that the children of heterosexual parents can sometimes turn out to be gay.)

For those of us involved with children and their books, it was also depressing that the function of the situation book should be so misunderstood. So far from promoting anything, such books are starting points for discussion with children who may find some pleasure and reassurance in seeing a character in a book whose experience is something like theirs.

* now o/p

Rosemary Stones signature

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10 Books for Children with

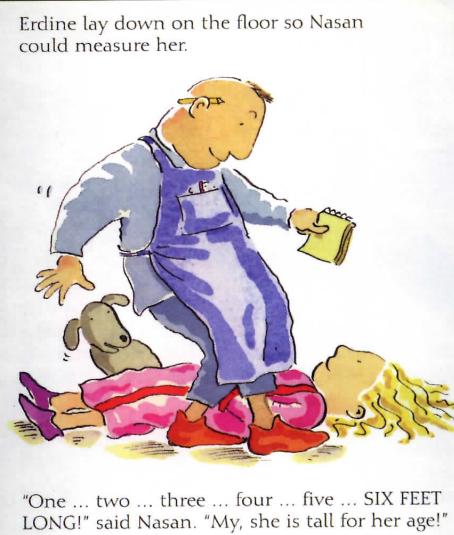
Mathematics education and politics are awash with different theories of how children learn mathematics. Professionals in the field – mathematics co-ordinators, advisors, numeracy consultants, lecturers – work to convince practitioners and parents about the depth and range of mathematical experiences and understandings that children need to become numerate. Politics and the media can trivialise these educational messages, and parents receive mixed and confusing messages about how their children should learn mathematics. Publishers come to their own conclusions about what parents will buy, and often produce the worst possible material for children. Which books really do help to develop mathematical understanding at Foundation Stage (3-5 year-olds) and at Key Stage 1 (infants). **Sheila Ebbutt** investigates.

There is a problem about producing books for children with an obvious educational purpose, such as developing their mathematical understanding. Unless you are very clever at it, the result can be dull worthiness. Children are often polite in their response to such books, but they are not fooled by it, and too much of this kind of thing could put them off both books and mathematics. Nowadays, books are so pleasurable to handle, so bright and colourful and innovative in their design, it can be hard initially to discern the good content from the mediocre.

From the huge pile of books I received for this article I tossed out some of the worst offenders. They included ill thought-out counting books with poor artwork and dull content, dreary stories with an obvious counting moral, books with a mathematical objective in mind that could not be conveyed in that way, and death-by-a-thousand worksheets.

Weighing and measuring

It is not possible to convey to five year-olds an understanding of weight with a pop-up activity picture book. Children learn to weigh by holding small heavy things, large light things, by doing cooking, by balancing objects, by sitting on a seesaw. Now, an ingenious story book can pose problems within the story that draws on these experiences, but this is very hard to write. So, beware of gorgeous books on weight, capacity, length and time, with no decent story line and tedious content, but with a moral educational fervour! Look instead for story books that pose problems about measuring, such as *Six Feet Long* and



Three Feet Wide by Jeannie Billington and Nicola Smeet. Whose feet do you use as a measure when you make a bed? There's trouble if it's the wrong person and the bed's too short! Children love these conundrums, but they have to understand the problem from their own experiences. Books cannot give them the experiences, but they can set interesting riddles in intriguing contexts.

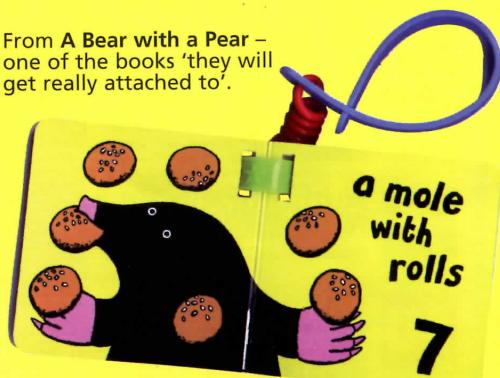
An unfortunate by-product of the drive for higher achievement in numeracy is a proliferation of arithmetic workbooks for children. It is a way of printing money for publishers, but not necessarily a way of helping children learn mathematics. Children who enjoy working through workbooks like doing this sort of thing. Children who don't, don't. There is an element of practice in the narrow sense: practising school-focused skills. There are some books that emphasise a problem-solving approach, but mostly the books look like prosaic school work. I count these books as a means of getting parents to buy school books to help advance their children's arithmetical skills. They very rarely help and mostly hinder children's learning. They certainly will not help children apply the mathematical knowledge they have. Bored children are unlikely to be helped. An analysis of the range of these workbooks available for home purchase would take an article in itself, so I have not included any specific examples here.

Pre-school counting books

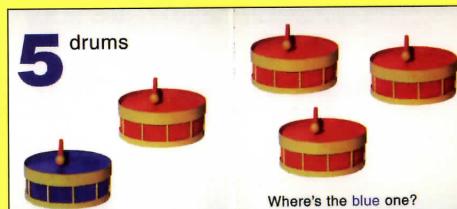
Now pre-school children have their own mathematics curriculum. This is important and positive as long as the interpretation of the mathematical experiences children need is as wide-ranging as possible. The curriculum for the Foundation Stage expects, amongst other things, that children's mathematical understanding should be developed through stories, songs, games and imaginative play, so that children enjoy using and experimenting with numbers, including numbers larger than 10. There is a lot of scope here for publishers!

Toddlers get their own books now, some neatly attachable to the child's buggy. At this age, children need clear and understandable images. **My Numbers** is a 'Buggy Buddy' board book with photographs of babies and things to count, and a mirror at the back. The counting will be beyond the toddlers, but it is a book they will get really attached

From *A Bear with a Pear* – one of the books 'they will get really attached to'.



From *Arthur Counts!*



From *Count with Titch*.

to. *A Bear with a Pear*, another 'Buggy Buddy' board book, is quite fun with bold illustrations. Pop-up books are magic, but some publishers use them better than others. *Arthur Counts!* is not inspired as a little board book, but the flaps will save it because it is always a delight to lift and probe. The counting will be incidental. *Count with Titch* by Pat Hutchins is a perfect board book for toddlers. The photographs of the objects are as clear as they can be, and there is a problem on each page: '5 drums. Where's the blue one?' We count up to ten with *Ten Tired Teddies*, and we count down from ten with *Wake Up! Ten Tired Teddies* – these are quite nice board books, with the teddies doing everyday things like brushing their teeth. *Billy Bunny's 123* has lovely realistic paintings of animals and creatures, full of detail that makes such sense to toddlers. There are seven beetles which are all different and so handsome, and nine hairy caterpillars. You are drawn to spend ages on each page.

Counting books

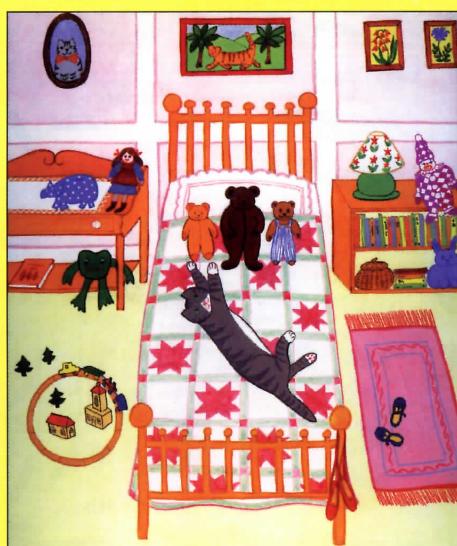
There are countless counting books available nowadays! Some will not stand the test of time because they are not interesting enough. Others will last and last. *Alfie's Numbers* is one of Shirley Hughes's miracles. Her drawings keep both adults and children amused for ages – she really knows what mess and havoc children cause – and she pops children behind curtains and under tables, and her eye for detail is wonderful. The paintings and the language that accompanies them entices you into the problem. You really want to count everything, and then you find more things to count. That's what I call a counting book! I

a Math=mat÷cal Focus

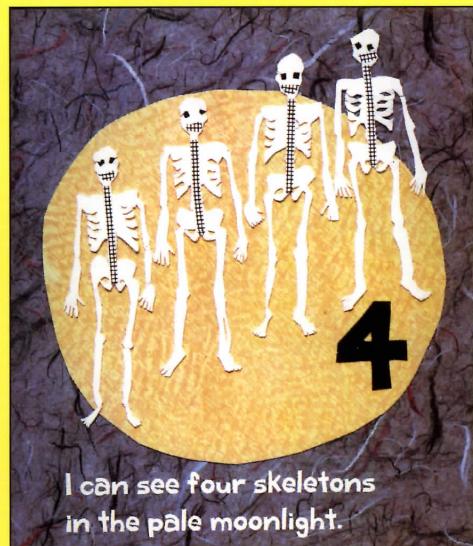


There are **four** people in Alfie's family (not counting Chessie the cat).

From **Alfie's Numbers**.



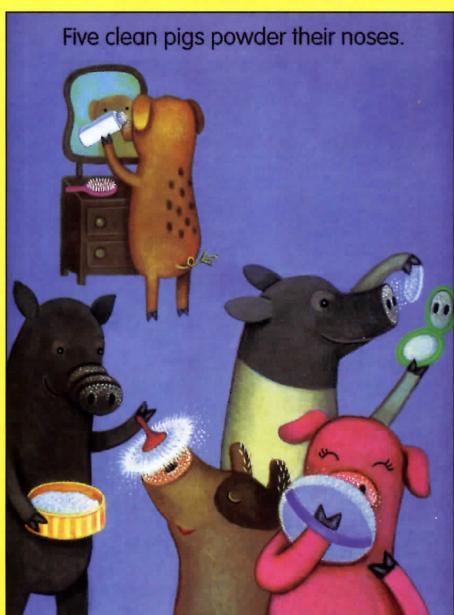
From **When One Cat Woke Up**.



From **Night-Time Numbers**.



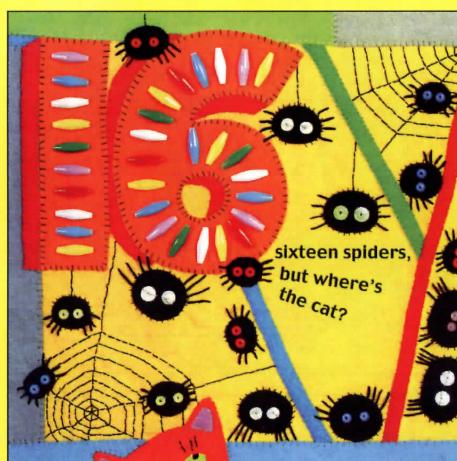
'How many heads does this monster have?'
from **How Many Monsters?**



From **Ten Clean Pigs**.

want to count things in **How Many Monsters?** because I love the monsters, and I love lifting flaps. You lift the first flap and you see one monster's bum. Oh naughty! There is a two-headed monster, and one with three feet. Delicious. **Ten Dirty Pigs** starts at one end of the book, and **Ten Clean Pigs** at the other, so you get a clean counting book and a dirty one. They do amusing things: 'Five clean pigs powder their noses', 'Eight dirty pigs wash creases and cracks', and there is a rhythm of rhymes. **Ten, Nine, Eight** is an old favourite, a real calming-down-at-bedtime book, counting down from ten, and starting with '10 small toes all washed and warm'. I could fall asleep right now, clutching the book to me! I hope this book lasts for ever. **When One Cat Woke Up** has the cat doing mischievous things as we count. She fought with three teddy bears... and unravelled six balls of wool. The illustrations are elaborate, and we are drawn to spot things and count.

Barefoot Books do a range of nicely produced

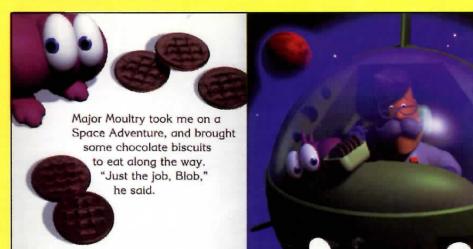


From **One Moose, Twenty Mice**.

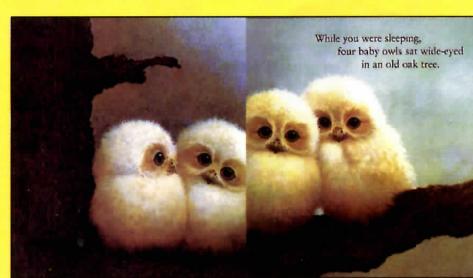
counting books with interesting artwork that would add positively to any child's experience. **One Moose, Twenty Mice** uses photographed felt pictures, and you have to look for the cat on each page: 'sixteen spiders, but where's the cat?'. The counting, unusually, goes up to twenty, which is very helpful for extending children's knowledge of the counting sequence. There are lots of things to count. Each of the twenty mice has

two beady eyes, for example. **Night-Time Numbers** is a collage book, with skeletons and witches and wolves and bats. Perhaps more of a morning book than a night time book, and not for the faint-hearted.

There are other counting books with interesting images, which would make conversation pieces with children. A **Shaker's Dozen** has photographs of things to do with Shakers, such as six Shaker tools and twelve Shaker pies, with information about the Shakers on each page. It is an intriguing book, but the level of the content is beyond the scope of the counting. Another book that misses the age range is **Ten Little Rabbits**. The illustrations are detailed and involved, and the situations they illustrate are complex. The language is sophisticated with rhymes that six and seven year-olds love: 'Five wise storytellers trying to keep warm. Six nimble runners fleeing from a storm'. Yet it is presented as a board book, and the counting only goes up to ten. There is a mismatch with age and expectations here. A board book will not do for the age range, and the counting should involve larger numbers. **Five Chocolate Biscuits** is a counting down book, from five to one. The count down is woven round a space



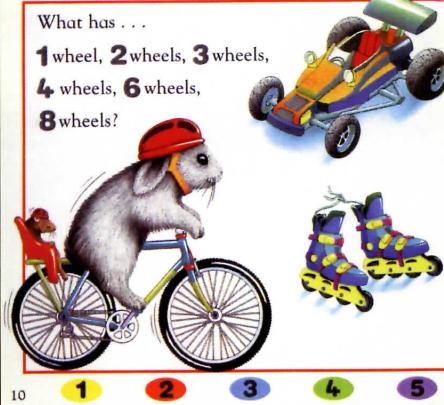
From **Five Chocolate Biscuits**.



From **While You Were Sleeping**. (see over)

While you were sleeping,
four baby owls sat wide-eyed
in an old oak tree.

How many wheels?

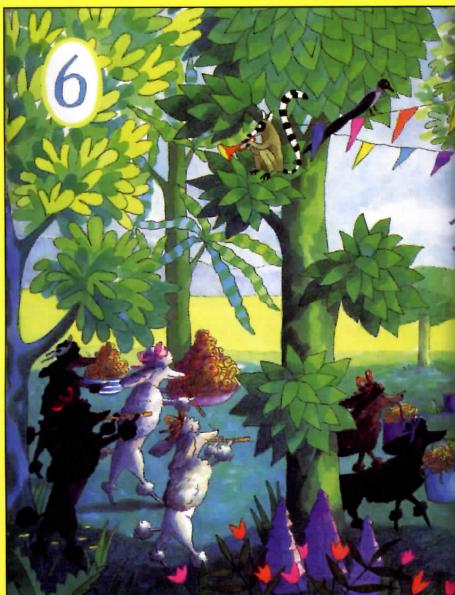


From Little Rabbits' First Number Book.

adventure, and the artwork is airbrushed and modern. Children will like this one. There is more lovely artwork in *While You Were Sleeping*, with detailed paintings of animals. 'While you were sleeping, four baby owls sat wide-eyed in an old oak tree.' The baby owls, cream and fluffy, snuggle together on a branch and gaze out at us over a double-page spread. There are four owls, but only seven eyes, because one owl is looking to the side. There is scope for more sophisticated counting in this book, beyond the text. *Little Rabbits' First Number Book* has clear, detailed illustrations, and the book takes counting further. Each double page has a new set of problems: How many wheels on a pram, roller blades, a lorry...? Which car comes first, second, third? What numbers come after 10? It is a good browsing book to go back to over and again.

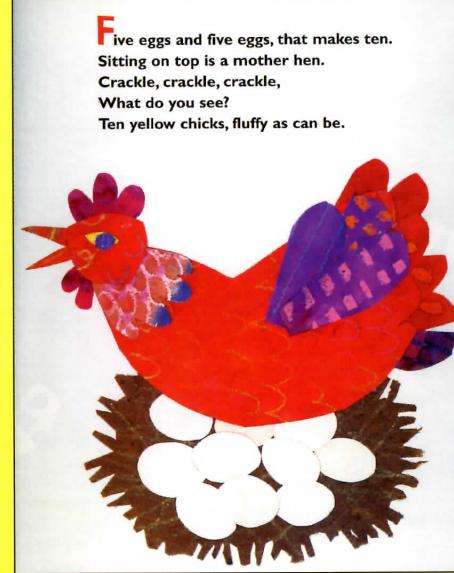
Number rhymes and songs

There are books of number songs and rhymes, and there are counting books presented in rhyme. These have such appeal because the rhymes embed themselves into children's memories from such an early age. Some books take well-known songs and rhymes and turn them into books. *Two Little Dicky Birds* weaves the old finger rhyme in to a pop-up story. The children would be familiar with the rhyme, and they would enjoy the pop-ups. Not much counting, though. *Little Miss Muffet Counts to Ten* takes the nursery rhyme and invents new verses, with illustrations to match: 'When along came six poodles, With oodles of noodles...' I can imagine the whole class



Six poodles from Little Miss Muffet Counts to Ten.

enjoying this together. Over in the Grasslands is a nicely illustrated book of the song. There are two books of *Five Little Ducks*, both from Orchard Books, which is another way of presenting the finger rhyme and song. One is cute and safe for toddlers, and the other shows a wicked fox presenting danger.



From One, Two, Skip a Few!

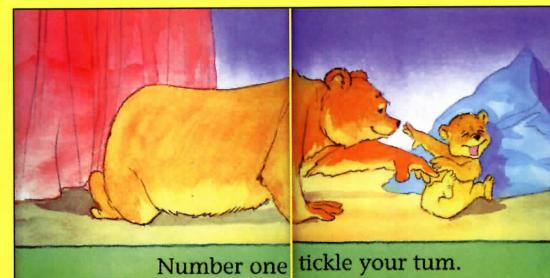


From One Duck Stuck.



From Fred and Ted's Treasure Hunt.

There are books of action and counting rhymes. *One, Two, Skip a Few!* has counting on rhymes, an adding rhyme - 'Five eggs and five eggs, that makes ten'; ordering rhymes - 'Said the first little chicken...', counting back rhymes, and so on. It is useful to have rhymes that represent different situations with numbers. A Caribbean Counting Book is a bookful of

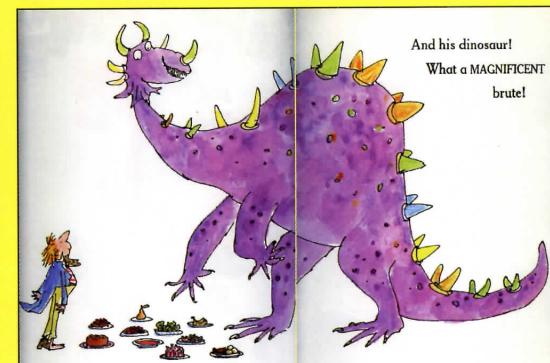


Number one tickle your tum.

From Number One, Tickle Your Tum.

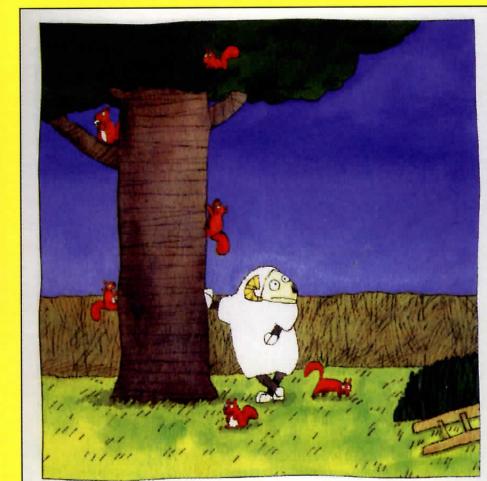
catchy, exciting counting on and back rhymes, and *Fruits* is a counting to ten poem where the context will make more interesting discussion than the counting. There is gloopy mud language as well as counting to ten in *One Duck Stuck*, which makes it all fun, and the pictures make the counting interesting. *Catnap* is a counting down from ten pop-up book - hooray! - but the rhyme is rather dull doggerel. The flaps are fun, and the pictures nice. *Fred and Ted's Treasure Hunt* is an action book, which would get all children whirling round - 'Take eight steps forward and five back again. Whirl round and round while you count up to ten'. Very good fun. *Number One, Tickle Your Tum* is a simple counting and action rhyme picture book for little children, and will help them learn the number sequence as well as making them laugh.

Picture books



From Mister Magnolia.

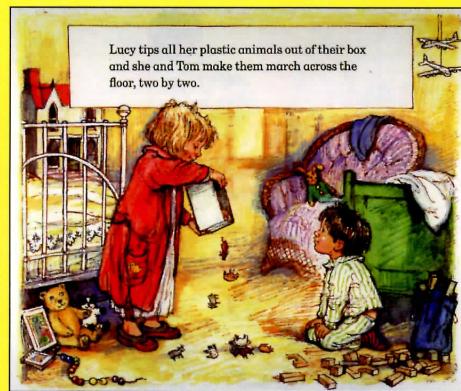
Some picture books involve mathematics and counting, but don't shout about it. One of the best is *Mister Magnolia* by Quentin Blake. Mr Magnolia has only one boot. He has lots of other things, including a dinosaur (what a magnificent brute!), and you want to search for and count them. But you are not invited to.



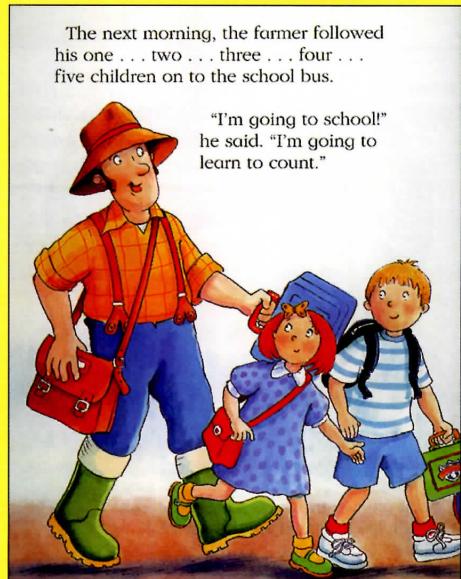
"Try climbing," said the squirrels.
 "Can't," said Woolly.
 "There's a ladder," said the squirrels.

From When Sheep Cannot Sleep.

Mr Magnolia leaps and performs as only Quentin Blake knows how. This book is true problem solving without drawing attention to itself. Whimsy and fanciful language is appealing in a picture book: **When Sheep Cannot Sleep** takes us with Woolly the insomniac sheep through surreal landscapes where there are things to count if you search. We end with counting twenty-two Zs as Woolly sleeps. But counting is not mentioned. In **Lucy & Tom's 123 and ABC** the story involves us in day-to-day lives, but it is the illustrations that encourage us to look and count and check and count again. There is more than counting here, there is putting things in order, discussion of heavy and light, big numbers, solving problems galore, seesaws, Granny's sixtieth birthday... The discussion potential is endless. A more mundane way of putting in lots of mathematics is **Traffic Jam**, which has lots of detailed pictures of traffic and escaping sheep and cyclists, and lots of questions to ask. Children will enjoy poring over the pictures and sorting out what is going on. We help **The Very Clever Farmer** count. He can do everything else. But he can't count. This is such a nice idea, because children love to help a duffer.



From **Lucy and Tom's 123 and ABC**.



From **The Very Clever Farmer**.

The most successful books with a mathematical focus are those that are well written, well illustrated, and do not have apparent worthy intentions. They are books that offer challenges and problems that emanate from the reader – Mister Magnolia only has one boot, but how many parrots has he got in that picture? How many people are at Alfie's birthday party, and where's Alfie? What are all the things on the table, and are there enough? The story engages us and we want to find more things out. These are truly problem-solving books. Nice counting books

are nice, but really and truly good mathematical picture books are very hard to find because they are so hard to write. ■

Details of books discussed

- Six Feet Long and Three Feet Wide**, Jeannie Billington, ill. Nicola Smeet, Walker Books, 0 7445 6837 4, £6.99 hbk
- My Numbers**, Campbell Books 'Buggy Buddies', 0 333 76275 4, £2.99 board
- A Bear with a Pear**, Nick Sharratt, Campbell Books 'Buggy Buddies', 0 333 74497 7, £2.99 board
- Arthur Counts!**, Marc Brown, Red Fox, 0 09 926575 3, £2.50 board
- Count with Titch**, Pat Hutchins, Red Fox, 0 09 928169 4, £2.99 board
- Ten Tired Teddies**, Prue Theobalds, Dutton, 0 525 69074 3, £4.50 board
- Wake Up! Ten Tired Teddies**, Prue Theobalds, Uplands Books, 1 897951 22 1, £3.99 board
- Billy Bunny's 123**, Maurice Pledger, Templar, 1 84011 090 2, £3.99 board
- Alfie's Numbers**, Shirley Hughes, Bodley Head, 0 370 32591 5, £7.99 hbk
- How Many Monsters?**, Mara van der Meer, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1499 9, £10.99 pbk
- Ten Dirty Pigs/Ten Clean Pigs**, Carol Roth, ill. Pamela Paparone, North-South Books, 0 7358 1089 5, £9.99 hbk
- Ten, Nine, Eight**, Molly Bang, Red Fox, 0 09 935441 1, £4.50 pbk
- When One Cat Woke Up**, Judy Astley, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0636 8, £5.99 pbk
- One Moose, Twenty Mice**, Clare Beaton, Barefoot Books, 1 902285 38 4, £4.99 pbk
- Night-Time Numbers**, Susan L Roth, Barefoot Books, 1 84148 000 2, £9.99 hbk
- A Shaker's Dozen**, Kathleen Thorne-Thomsen and Paul Rocheleau, Chronicle Books, 0 8118 2299 0, £9.99 hbk
- Ten Little Rabbits**, Virginia Grossman, ill. Sylvia Long, Chronicle Books, 0 8118 2152 3, £4.99 board
- Five Chocolate Biscuits**, Peter Day, Red Fox, 0 09 926516 8, £2.99 pbk
- While You Were Sleeping**, John Butler, Orchard Books, 1 84121 141 9, £10.99 hbk
- Little Rabbits' First Number Book**, Kate Petty, ill. Alan Baker, Kingfisher, 0 7554 0348 X, £4.99 pbk
- Two Little Dicky Birds**, Nick Denchfield and Ant Parker, Macmillan, 0 333 74540 X, £5.99 hbk
- Little Miss Muffet Counts to Ten**, Emma Chichester Clark, Red Fox, 0 09 925609 6, £4.99 pbk
- Over in the Grasslands**, Anna Wilson and Alison Bartlett, Macmillan, 0 333 74187 0, £9.99 hbk
- Five Little Ducks**, Penny Dann, Little Orchard, 1 84121 103 6, £2.99 pbk
- Five Little Ducks**, Ian Beck, Orchard Books, 1 85213 497 6, £4.99 pbk
- One, Two, Skip a Few!**, ill. Roberta Arenson, Barefoot Books, 1 902285 00 7, £4.99 pbk
- A Caribbean Counting Book**, Faustin Charles, ill. Roberta Arenson, Barefoot Books, 1 901223 86 8, £4.99 pbk
- Fruits**, Valerie Bloom, ill. David Axtell, Macmillan, 0 333 65512 2, £4.99 pbk
- One Duck Stuck**, Phyllis Root, ill. Jane Chapman, Walker Books, 0 7445 6344 5, £4.99 pbk
- Catnap**, Krisztina Nagy, David & Charles, 1 86233 109 X, £6.99 hbk

Fred and Ted's Treasure Hunt, Hilda Offen, Hutchinson, 0 09 176803 9, £9.99 hbk

Number One, Tickle Your Tum, John Prater, Bodley Head, 0 370 52378 5, £6.99 hbk

Mister Magnolia, Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 940042 1, £4.99 pbk

When Sheep Cannot Sleep, Satoshi Kitamura, Red Fox, 0 09 950540 1, £4.50 pbk

Lucy & Tom's 123 and ABC, Shirley Hughes, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 14075 7, £9.99 hbk

Traffic Jam, Annie Owen, Little Orchard, 1 86059 571 6, £3.50 pbk

The Very Clever Farmer, Denis Bond, ill. Steve Cox, Little Hippo, 0 439 01458 1, £3.99 pbk

Sheila Ebbutt is director of BEAM Education, a former LEA mathematics advisor, and a member of the Early Childhood Mathematics Group.



BEAM Education

BEAM (Be A Mathematician) Education publishes over 65 titles for primary, special and lower secondary mathematics teachers, and offers a range of mathematical teaching accessories such as games, number lines, grids, number fans and place value cards.

BEAM books cover all aspects of teaching primary mathematics including lesson planning, mental/oral mathematics activities, photocopiable materials, teacher training handbooks and resources for children to use at home.

BEAM also runs courses and in-school training for teachers, and provides consultancy in mathematics education for other parties, such as government agencies and television companies.

For further information, contact BEAM Education, Maze Workshops, 72a Southgate Road, London N1 3JT (tel: 020 7684 5323, fax: 020 7684 5354, email: info@beam.co.uk, web: www.beam.co.uk).

Authorgraph No.122

Debi Gliori

Debi Gliori interviewed by Lindsey Fraser

Evening in Debi Gliori's household. Freshly bathed small children swathed in towels parade around the sitting room. Older ones joust with each other and their parents over homework, maths tests and ironing. The pace drops; Dad gives a spirited rendition of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, followed by *Mr Bear's Holiday*, an early copy of Mum's latest book. Leaving him encouraging the children on their way to bed, Debi grabs her coat and a torch and heads out into the night, up the garden, towards her studio. Once there, we are surrounded by foreign editions, promotional posters, family photographs, finished artwork, work in progress and overflowing ashtrays. A laptop glows from the table; her drawing board takes pride of place.

She shows me colour photocopies of the artwork for a forthcoming book of rhymes, recently delivered to Dorling Kindersley. We talk briefly about her worries for the publisher [recently bought by Penguin] but Debi's anxiety evaporates as she takes me through the pages. She revels in the work, delighting in her visual interpretations of well-known verses, explaining the research behind her artistic decisions and some editorial negotiations: 'I'm doing a book of fairy tales next and they've told me I can do my own retellings.'

Debi Gliori has come a long way since her first book was accepted after several years 'papering the walls of my studio with polite and not-so-polite rejection slips'.

'I went to Art College in Edinburgh and I loved it. I had a new baby – I do things the hard way – so I didn't have much of a social life, but I felt bad that I was enjoying the work that much.' There followed a postgraduate year and mandatory touting of portfolio. 'I did lots of greetings cards which was soul destroying, lots of incredibly detailed work for ad agencies. Then my work somehow leapt off the slush pile at Walker Books.'

'I was so excited when they told me they'd publish *The New Big Sister* – the only book I know where the mother's throwing up on the first page. The Americans didn't much like that...but they did buy it. My bank manager sent me flowers.' She giggles over the memory. 'I thought Walker was doing me a *huge* favour.' *The New Big Sister* displays many Gliori characteristics. Knowing that parents are likely to read a favourite book hundreds of times, her text makes references which do not compromise the story but acknowledge the adult reader's presence. 'I agonised over that text – it did not come naturally, but I did get confidence from just being published. And having Sebastian Walker ring up to say how much he liked the book. That man was one of the all time publishing Greats to me – I was gobsmacked! I still miss him.' Debi describes the first time she met a child who had read one of her books. 'A friend and I were pretending to be a T-shirt company, exhibiting our wares in St Andrews. A little girl came in, pointed at my display of books and said, "I've read that book." I was over the moon and promised to dedicate my next book to her. And I did. *To Sophie Hicks – a promise kept.*'

Gradually the proportion of advertising work (which had paid the bills) to illustrated book commissions changed. Her output was prodigious. 'My books are real life turned into stories. I use domestic detail shamelessly, and I remember what things felt like when I was a child. Sometimes it isn't until the book is finished and in the shops that I realise where the story came from. I wrote *Mr Bear to the Rescue* when I needed to be rescued, although I didn't know it at the time.'

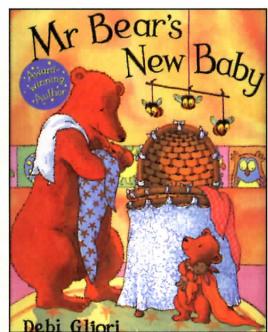
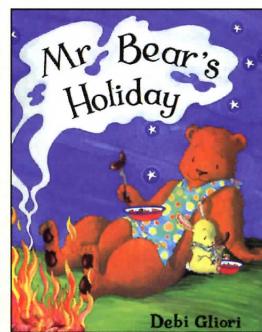
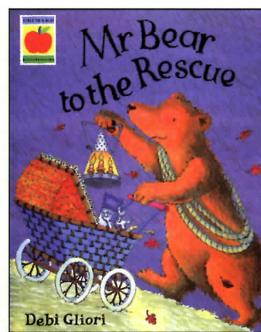
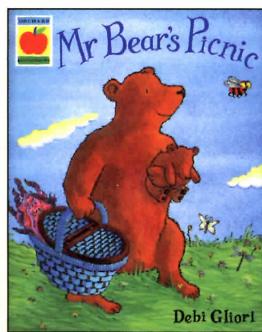
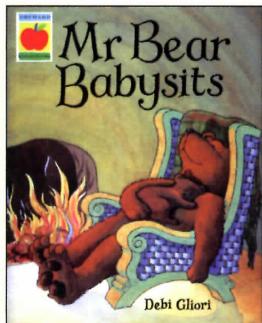
Debi refers to Mr Bear affectionately as 'that ursine chappie' and describes the accidental route which led to the popular series. 'Mr Bear was originally Mr Badger. I'd seen him disappearing down a hole in *A Lion at Bedtime* and wanted to know more about him. But Francesca, my editor at Orchard Books, warned me that Americans



don't like badgers and persuaded me to try bears. I'm not a bear person – never had a teddy bear – but I drew him a couple of times and began to wonder what he looked like from behind. When I drew him I discovered that he had this big baggy bottom and I was smitten!' With a film production company interested and never-ending inspiration within her front room, Mr Bear looks set to stay. 'He's a huge comfort, like getting into a lovely warm bath. And he's unashamedly autobiographical. If you look at the illustrations it's all in there. More than I realise, probably.'

Arguably her most powerful book to date is *No Matter What*. 'I remember sitting down at the drawing board in the late afternoon. It was getting dark. The text just appeared ready-made. I wrote it all down and when I got to the last line – *love, like starlight, never dies* – it said exactly what I meant it to say. I wish somebody had told me that.' It was especially important at the time because the book was inspired by the difficulty Debi's daughter had in accepting her parents' separation. 'She didn't know how to react so she'd take it out on us and then feel terribly frightened. I wanted her to know – *every* child should know – that no matter what, there is love for them.' Debi has received letters from people who have drawn their own comfort from the story. 'When people write to you, you do feel very responsible for everything the book might mean.' Her strong sense of humour lifts *No Matter What* clear of sentimentality. She delights in visual jokes and succeeds in blending emotional depth and humour seamlessly. She is reluctant to commit to another book featuring the foxes, Large and Small. 'I felt bereft when it was finished, but I know where they are. I don't have any great curiosity because they'll be all right. How would I follow that?'

Polar Bolero, due in summer 2000, bears all the Gliori trademarks. It is an elaborate, brilliantly coloured night-time fantasy which aims to dispel any resistance to sleep by the time the little bear returns, exhausted but content, to his cosy bed. 'I'd always wanted to know



who might live in a fridge,' Debi says simply. So when you look at Little Bear's house, you'll see it's a fridge, and a rather elaborate and homely one at that.

She never wants for ideas. Her studio bears the beautiful evidence of a forthcoming book about Flora, a rabbit who began life as a walk-on part in a Mr Bear story. We look at the various babygrows she has appeared in, and the angle of her many siblings' ears as they cope with her temper tantrum. The pleasure is in the detail for Debi because she knows that children will spot it and share in her delight. 'I love the planning, the sketches,' she says, showing off the astonishingly detailed roughs for her forthcoming nursery anthology, 'that's when the hard work is done. I love working things out. People are amazed at the detail but I couldn't do it any other way.' The illustrations are piling up for the Bologna Book Fair where Debi is now a leading player.

But she is currently preoccupied by a project she calls *Opus Umpty*, her first novel. 'I never thought I could write anything that wasn't heavily supported by pictures but I adored writing this book. It's what I do to relax.' Asked if this is a working title she laughs, 'It's a nightmare! I've promised a really good bottle of champagne to the person who can come up with the right title. The publishers (Transworld) keep saying it'll come but I'm getting desperate.' She is very excited about this development in her career. 'I work very hard. People up there,' she points towards the house, 'rely on me. So it's really important that I enjoy what I do.' ■

Lindsey Fraser is Executive Director of Scottish Book Trust.
Photographs by Douglas Robertson.

The Books

FROM ORCHARD:

- Flora's Blanket, 1 84121 555 4, £9.99 hbk (March 2001)
- Mr Bear's Holiday, 1 84121 195 8, £10.99 hbk (May 2000)
- Mr Bear's New Baby, 1 86039 409 4 £9.99 hbk, 1 84121 575 9, £4.99 pbk (May 2000)
- Mr Bear's Picnic, 1 86039 067 6, £4.99 pbk
- Mr Bear Babysits, 1 85213 843 2, £4.99 pbk
- Mr Bear to the Rescue, 1 85213 983 8 £9.99 hbk, 1 86039 474 4 £4.99 pbk
- Mr Bear Says Are You There Baby?, 1 86039 410 8, £9.99 novelty
- Mr Bear Says A Little Hush Please, Mr Bear Says Ticky Under There, Mr Bear Says Can I Have a Hug?, Mr Bear Says Let's Go Outside, large format board books, £3.50 each
- Mr Bear Says A Spoonful for You, Mr Bear Says Goodnight, Mr Bear Says I Love You, Mr Bear Says Peek a-Boo, small format board books, £2.99 each

FROM TRANSWORLD:

- Tell Me Something Happy Before I Go to Sleep, 0 552 54506 6, £4.99 pbk
The Very Small, 0 385 60000 3, £9.99 hbk (September 2000)

FROM WALKER:

- My Little Brother, 0 7445 3612 X, £4.50 pbk
- When I'm Big, 0 7445 3125 X, £4.99 pbk
- The New Big Sister, Walker, 0 7445 3610 3, o/p
- Noisy Poems, 0 7445 6751 3, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 6996 6, £4.99 pbk

FROM DORLING KINDERSLEY:

- The Dorling Kindersley Book of Nursery Rhymes, 0 7513 6695 1, £9.99 hbk (October 2000)

FROM BLOOMSBURY:

- No Matter What, 0 7475 4110 8, £10.99 hbk
- Give Him My Heart, 0 7475 3554 X, £12.99 hbk, 0 7475 4119 1, £5.99 pbk

FROM SCHOLASTIC:

- Polar Bolero, 0 439 01372 0, £9.99 hbk (Summer 2000)



On the Use of Photography in Illustration

There are good, bad and mediocre artists working in every genre of illustration. One instance when the casual observer might find it difficult to judge the quality of an illustration is when the artist has made use of photographic reference. Is this 'cheating' or can the debate be usefully broadened?

P J Lynch discusses the techniques he uses in his work, as well as some of the issues raised when artists work from photographic reference.

The nineteenth-century academic painter, Paul Delaroche, seeing a Daguerreotype photograph for the first time, supposedly exclaimed 'Now painting is dead!' But he was wrong. Many artists continued to paint in a figurative way, some felt threatened by what they thought of as the soulless, mechanical trickery of photography. Many others, however, such as Gauguin, Monet, Mucha and Sickert were excited by the marvellous possibilities of the new technology and embraced it fully as a fledgling art form in itself, and also as a tool to assist in their painting. In fact artists had been using visual aids in their work long before photography as we know it was invented; Holbein and Vermeer are two good examples of artists whose finest work was created using the camera obscura.

American illustrators, Maxfield Parrish and Norman Rockwell came to find that taking photographs of the model in different poses and lighting arrangements greatly broadened the imaginative scope of their work. Inspired by their example, many American illustrators continued to work using these techniques with varying degrees of success, Maurice Sendak being a notable example in the field of children's books.

Artwork of this style has only really begun to appear in British children's books in the last decade, and might possibly still be looked upon with some suspicion as another cultural import from across the Atlantic.

A short cut?

Critics of artists using photographic reference have implied that it is used as a short cut to good drawing*. This begs the question of why any of those artists I have already mentioned would choose to use photography in this way. All of them were natural draughtsmen of the highest standards, and none of them could be described as being too lazy to make their own sketches. It would, however, be true to say that as accomplished artists, confident of their abilities, they were all keen to experiment with a new technology that might in some way aid their creativity.

Practical advantages in using photographs are primarily to do with the freedom to capture models in a great variety of poses,

including awkward unsustainable positions. Different lighting arrangements can be experimented with, and photographs taken from angles from which it would be impossible to draw.

Clearly photography can offer great insights into the understanding of figures in motion. Some of Degas' finest pictures of ballet dancers and racehorses are derived directly from photographs.

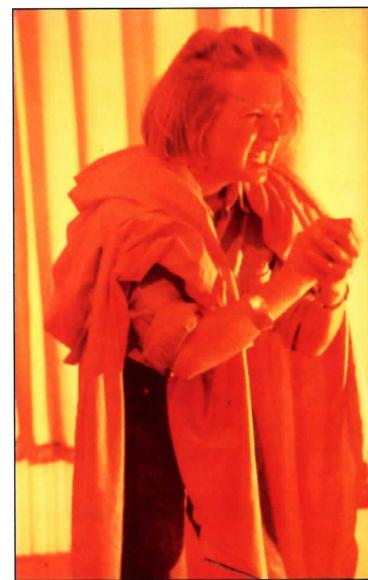
Extending the possibilities beyond the studio, an artist with a camera can record locations, landscapes and props where it might be difficult or impossible to sit down and sketch.

A major consideration also for most artists would be the expense saved in models' fees, as painting or drawing directly from life takes a great deal more time with the model than a photographic session.

The need for good drawing

I am not suggesting that using photography should replace good drawing practice. In fact, to use photographic reference successfully, it is vital that the artist has a good drawing ability and a thorough understanding of form, of light and shadow, and of perspective.

Unfortunately it is sometimes the very people who lack these skills who are attracted to using this technique in the belief that it is an easy way to achieve impressive results. Common weaknesses in their work can be seen in a lack of coherence when the photographically derived elements are integrated with those drawn from a different source, and invented elements may not be drawn well enough. Sometimes the relative scale of characters to their setting will be wrong, or figures might somehow appear not to properly exist in the same space. A laziness can often be detected even in the artist's choice of model, and a static, snap-shotish



Model photographed for a fairytale hag.



Photographed pose and final illustration for **Melisande**, the giant princess.

feel shows that not enough work has been done at the photo-session. At their worst, illustrations derived from photographs can appear artificial and lifeless, especially, when the artist has not used his or her own photographs.

How I use photography in my work

I will happily make use of a photograph from any source for a prop or a background element in my illustration. I feel it is wrong, though, to use someone else's picture as the reference for a major element of a painting. I see this as plagiarism and it is not justified by the fact that it requires some skill and effort to transfer the image into another medium. Until recently many illustrators, particularly in the field of advertising, made a living doing little more than this. I did a few such book covers myself, but I was young when I did those pictures and I needed the money! The advent of new computer technology has made it simple to process any photograph through filters which can make it look pretty much like a painting, leaving the least imaginative of those illustrators redundant and the rest queuing up for computer courses.

The first books I illustrated were fairy tales and the images were drawn mostly from memory and imagination. I would refer frequently to books to check how a prop, or a costume or an architectural detail might have looked. For facial expressions and hand gestures I would pose myself in front of a mirror and draw directly from that.

When I began work on a story called *Melisande* by E. Nesbit, I decided that for the fantasy of the giant princess to work she had to look as convincing as possible whilst still relating to the invented elements around her. I was particularly keen to get the folds in her dress just right, so I posed a friend with a sheet wrapped around her and took a Polaroid. Using this reference I was able to draw up a very believable Melisande and challenged myself then to create a townscape which would hopefully appear to be just as solid.

To remain consistently within a kind of fairy tale unreality, and being very wary of the pitfalls involved in using photographs, I always tried to avoid working too closely from them. Referring to my initial thumbnail sketches I would direct my model and photograph her from various angles, then I would select one or two photos that I would use as a starting point to trigger my imagination.

However, when I was asked to illustrate *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski, I realized that I would have to adapt my usual approach. The story is a very intimate human drama involving only three characters, and it is set almost entirely within a woodcarver's hut. It is a wonderfully moving text and I felt that it required a more subtle use of expression and gesture, and a greater authenticity than I had attempted before. I wanted the reader to really know Jonathan Toomey and to understand his day to day life. To research the book I travelled to the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, where I was able to absorb the atmosphere of various early American buildings, including houses and to take numerous photographs of tables, chairs, windows, doors etc. Back in Ireland I added to this with book research and close study of films set in Toomey's period. Meanwhile I was planning the layout with the designers at Walker

Books and composing the pictures in thumbnail drawings.

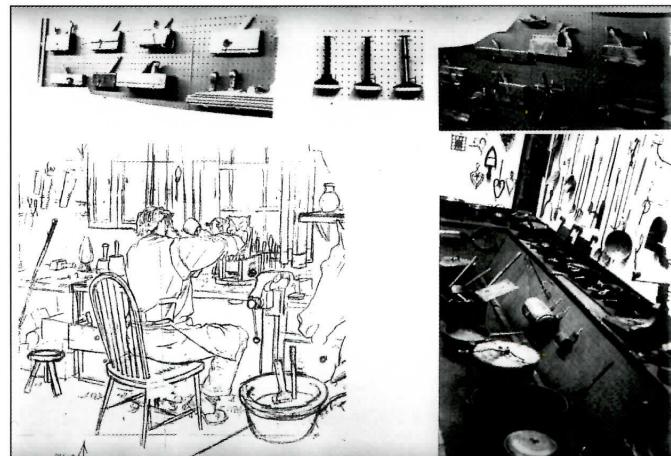
Each of the many photographic sessions had to be carefully set-up and directed. This part of the process is very much like directing a play or a film, trying to coax a performance out of the model, whilst experimenting with lighting and camera angles. It can be very intense, gruelling work for everyone involved. Of the hundred or so photographs taken at each session, I would select only three or four to work from.

The next step is to draw up the composition. In this case I drew the figure working from the photographs and then, guided by all the research I had done, I invented the workshop around him. A few small elements were closely based on photos but everything else had to be drawn afresh for the perspective I had decided for the room, and here it had to be much more naturalistic than my fairy tale books. When I was satisfied with the drawing, I began with the fun part, the painting.

I used watercolour first to build up the image layer by layer, and then, towards the end, I added detail and light effects with gouache, working hard to achieve a unifying quality of finish across the picture. My aim was not to achieve photo-realism, but a kind of heightened naturalism, that would evoke a real sense of a man and a place that only ever existed in an author's words.

To many artists, photography presents an exciting other way of seeing, experiencing and remembering the world around us. Some, without a clear artistic vision of their own, may misuse or be dominated by the photographic image, but others will continue to use it as a wonderful tool to serve their creativity. ■

* see Lisa Kopper's article, 'Will the Real Drawings Please Stand Up' in *BfK* 110 (May '98).



Stages of producing one of the illustrations of Jonathan Toomey at work in his woodcarver's hut.



P. J. Lynch won the Mother Goose Award in 1987 for *A Bag of Moonshine*. In 1995 he won the Kate Greenaway Medal for *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* and in 1997 for *When Jessie Came Across the Sea*. His latest book is *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth* (Walker, 0 7445 5648 1, £10.99 hbk).

Are Traditional Stories Sexist?

The National Literacy Strategy decrees that children must study myths, legends, folk tales, fairy tales and fables almost right through primary school: in Reception, in Years 1, 2, 3 (5–8 year-olds) and in Year 5 (9–10 year-olds). But many teachers, striving to teach the girls and boys in their care mutual respect and equal opportunities, may have strong reservations about this. It is true that traditional stories include many rollicking great yarns; but aren't most of them blatantly sexist? **Rosalind Kerven** investigates.

Many of us worry about stories that disparage female characters as passive, feeble victims, dependent on men and obsessed by vanity, whilst males have a monopoly on strength, cunning and courage, enjoying unlimited access to exciting adventures. Such stories glorify aggression and physical prowess as 'male', whilst females are expected to be gentle and compliant. Characters who deviate from these norms are denigrated as sinister, worthless, dangerous and evil.

But how prevalent are these stereotypes in myths, legends and folk tales? And is it possible to avoid them?

– Familiar stereotypes –

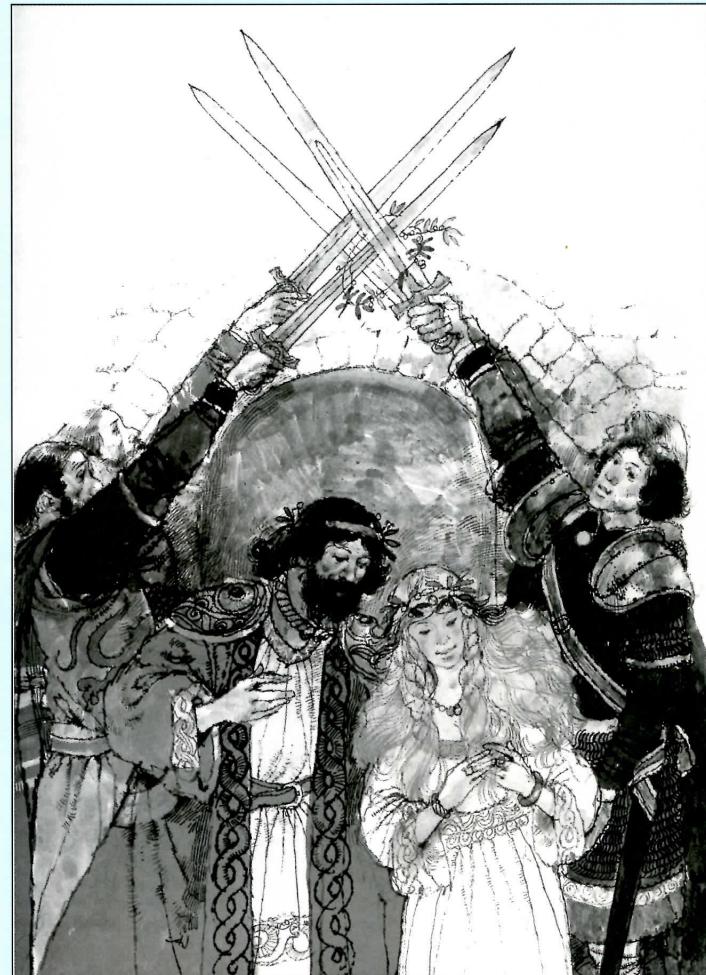
Most children first encounter traditional stories through the well known fairy tales. Stories such as Snow White, Cinderella, The Sleeping Beauty and Beauty and the Beast indicate that for a girl to advance as a heroine she must be both beautiful and sweet natured. When struck down by misfortune, she should not attempt to help herself: instead she must suffer uncomplainingly until a hero arrives to rescue her and guarantee her future safety through marriage. Although other more active female characters do lurk in the background of these stories, their negative qualities subtly imply that as women age and lose their looks, they are likely to degenerate into jealous, scheming stepmothers or dangerous witches. Even the achievement of motherhood is dismissed, since the heroine's mother either dies in childbirth or fades into the background at the beginning of the story.

As they get older, many children encounter the Greek Myths, which present the classical ideal of manhood. Arrogant heroes such as Herakles, Jason, Odysseus, Perseus and Theseus win acclaim by seeking vengeance against enemies, fighting, killing and completing difficult physical tasks. Meanwhile the gods go about ravishing vulnerable women and girls (and occasionally youths), whilst the goddesses idle away much time comparing their beauty. One of the most retold Greek stories is Pandora's Box, which uncompromisingly lays the blame on the female sex for bringing misery into the world.

– Alternative women –

However, this is certainly not the whole picture. Turning away from the most familiar stories and cultures, there are many alternative viewpoints.

One of the most important and memorable characters in ancient Egyptian mythology is the goddess Isis. She is knowledgeable, wise, innovative and resourceful. When the world is young, Isis



The marriage of Arthur and Guinevere from *King Arthur* (Oxford University Press), retold by James Riordan and illustrated by Victor G Ambrus.

teaches women all the skills they need to be productive members of society. She also introduces the institution of marriage, setting the example of a wife who is capable and active as well as devoted. When her husband, the god Osiris, is murdered and his body stolen, she does not hang about weeping helplessly. Instead she undertakes a successful search across the world to find it. Later she uses her knowledge of magic to invent the important art of mummification, thus giving her beloved's spirit – and that of all the Egyptian people – the gift of 'everlasting life'. Above all, Isis enjoys power: in another myth she enhances her own powers through an elaborate trick on the mighty sun god Ra.

Equally admirable goddesses appear in the stories of many other cultures. Indian mythology gives us Durga, a formidable warrior goddess and mistress of shape-changing, who overcomes demons by mounting a lion and wielding ten weapons in her multiple arms. From Polynesia comes Pele, awesome, explosive goddess of Hawaiian volcanoes; and her sister Hi'iaka - of gentle disposition, yet a fearless and daring adventurer.

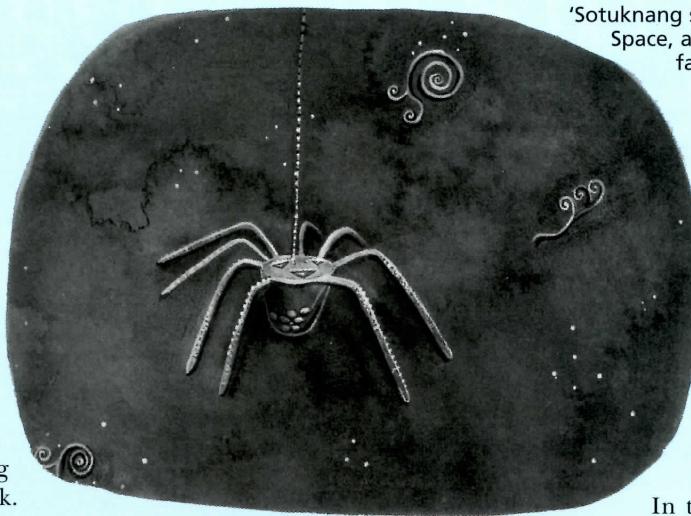
Of course, there are many different kinds of female 'strength'. A Chinese myth about the popular Buddhist goddess Guanyin sets the example of a woman who knows what is 'right', and who courageously refuses to compromise her values. Guanyin is originally born as a princess, whose parents destine her for an aloof life of luxury and an empty marriage. But she throws it all

'Sotuknang shaped the First World, called Endless Space, and into it ... dropped Spider Woman, fat with the eggs of magic. Those eggs hatched into the very first people.'

A Native American myth from Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Crystal Pool* (Orion).

away for a simple lifestyle close to nature, outraging her father and even overcoming the mighty King of Death. Guanyin is a fine role model for self-belief and the potential for spiritual achievement. The Native American deity Spider Woman, the focus of many enchanting stories, fits into a similar outlook.

She rescues both innocent victims and confident heroes from troublesome adventures, but her main role is to provide a moral framework and to demonstrate the benefits of self control and considerate behaviour.



The Long-nose and the lassie who rescues the Prince in *East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon* (Walker), illustrated by P J Lynch (see his article on page 10).

There are also plenty of fairy tales in which girls and women take strong, proactive roles. For example, amongst the lesser known stories from the Grimms we meet an intrepid princess who travels beyond the edge of the world to rescue her seven brothers who had been transformed into ravens. In the well known Norwegian tale, East of the Sun, West of the Moon, a young woman stoically quests to save her helpless prince from bewitchment and the horror of marriage to a female troll. From Scotland comes the tale of Tam Lin, dominated by a duality of both good and evil female characters: it tells how a feisty laird's daughter rescues a youth from the vicious spells of a domineering fairy queen. Even The Arabian Nights yields two unforgettably powerful heroines: Shahrazad, who uses her intellectual prowess and literary talent to tame her misogynist husband; and Farizad, whose calm spiritual strength enables her to succeed on a quest where both her brothers have failed.

- Definitions of masculinity -

But what about the boys? Are there any traditional stories with male characters that avoid the raw macho aggression typical of the

Greek heroes? This is a trickier question. Obviously negative, wimpy male characters will not do: what we need are stories in which men display strength of character, thoughtfulness and compassion as valued aspects of being masculine.

In the myths and folk tales of Native America there are many heroes who balance courage and physical strength with patience, honesty and respect for both other people (particularly the elderly) and the natural world. A number of these stories open with the predicament of a boy or young man who is belittled or bullied by his fellows. He does not react by lashing out in anger or going on a monster slaying binge. Instead he sets out to 'prove himself' in a quieter fashion. He may undertake a long and challenging journey of discovery, as in the story about a bullied orphan who discovers the first horses below the 'Great Mystery Lake'. Or he may embark on a more spiritual quest, like the disfigured youth who wins the love of his sweetheart by seeking out the awesome sun god and convincing him that he is worthy of her. In these stories, laddish qualities such as arrogance, greed and mindless violence are punished, whilst the greatest glory goes to men who have survived ordeals with humility and fortitude.

Closer to home, you may have dismissed Britain's most famous legend, King Arthur, as being dominated by swashbuckling sword fights and damsels in distress. However, in some ways the king and his followers are remarkably like 'new men'. Of course, Arthur initially wins the crown by defeating his rivals in battle: but the key to his continuing success is his love of peace, courtesy, generosity and democratic willingness to 'listen'. He encourages his queen, Guinevere, to play an active role in the court; and even after he is finally betrayed, he continues to act with selfless dignity and to follow the course of justice and the law. Moreover, his Knights of the Round Table are universally admired by the people because they protect the weak and diligently adhere to the code of chivalry.

Another legendary hero of the same ilk is the Irish warrior-chief Finn MacCumhaill, who has a whole cycle of stories attached to him and his men, the Fianna. Membership of this elite band of warriors is attained by passing tests of skill and endurance, but it can only be kept by adhering to strict rules of civilized behaviour. Incidentally, Celtic heroes such as these see no shame in letting a woman lead the way into adventure.

- An open approach -

So the answer to my question 'Are traditional stories sexist?' is a qualified one. It all depends on which stories you choose to study, and also on how you approach them. Certainly if you are prepared to explore beyond the obvious and to look below the surface, there are plenty of myths, legends and folk tales to fit even the most enlightened agenda. ■

Rosalind Kerven has been researching, collecting and retelling world traditional stories for children since 1985 and has written over thirty books on the subject for many leading publishers. Her latest book is *The Enchanted Forest*, ill. Alan Marks, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1352 6, £10.99 hbk. Her handbook, *Traditional Stories - A Practical Guide for People Sharing Books with Children* (0 9537454 0 6) is available at £10.00 (inc. p & p) from Swindonburn Cottage West, Sharperton, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 7AP.

BRIEFING•BRIEFING•B

BfK Briefing

FING•BRIEFING•BRIE

NEWS**Dahl Favourite Children's Author**

In the World Book Day poll conducted in over 4,000 bookshops and libraries, in schools and on the web, over 40,000 adults and children voted Roald Dahl the country's favourite author. J. K. Rowling was in second place and Terry Pratchett in third.

No Dahl Shock

At the end of 1999, Scottish Book Trust asked a cross-section of 'the great and the good' of the book world which three books they would take into the next millennium. Shakespeare, with 5 votes, was the most popular writer on the list; however, R. L. Stevenson was close on his heels with 4 votes. Children's titles were chosen 17 times but, incredibly, only two people opted for J. K. Rowling's immensely popular Harry Potter. Roald Dahl failed to make the list at all.

PLR Boost

Arts Minister Alan Howarth has announced that £51,000 has been awarded to the Public Lending Right Scheme that pays authors a sum according to the number of times their books are borrowed from public libraries. 30,674 authors currently benefit from the scheme.

A Million Potters

The next Harry Potter title is to be published on 8 July and the UK print-run is a record one million copies.

PEOPLE

- Chris Meade has been appointed Executive Director Book Trust. He was formerly Director of the Poetry Society and responsible for setting up the Poetry Places scheme which put poets in residence in all sorts of places across the UK.
- Scholastic has appointed Richard Scrivener as Publishing Director. He was formerly Publishing Director at Puffin for Media and Popular Non-Fiction.
- Penguin has appointed Catherine Bell Marketing Director for Ladybird Books.

• OBITUARY •

Madeleine Lindley

Elaine McQuade writes...

Madeleine Lindley, who died on 11 February, was an important and influential colleague working with enormous commitment and energy in the field of children's books and education. Utterly charming and charismatic and always glamorous, her warmth and positive attitude soon changed professional relationships into real friendships.

In 1988, after 10 successful years as a teacher, she began selling books to schools. Initially working out of the garage at home, she was eventually joined in the business by her husband, Mike. Madeleine Lindley Ltd now has a national and international customer base, a turnover of £5.2m and employs over 30 people at the Book Centre in Oldham.

Madeleine's death from cancer at just 53 seems exceptionally cruel. She was so vital and full of life and bursting with ideas for the future. Madeleine wanted every child to become a



reader and to help teachers provide children at school with the best children's books around. The Book Centre will continue her work. She was a very special person and will be greatly missed by her friends in publishing and in the field of education.

Useful Organisations

No.10: The Puffin Book Club

Penguin Books
Bath Road
Harmondsworth
Middlesex UB7 0DA
Freephone: 0500 454 444;
fax: 020 8757 4090; website:
www.puffin.co.uk

Founded in 1967 by Kaye Webb, the aim of the Puffin Club was to make children into readers. Children who joined in those early days received a magazine, *Puffin Post*, and had the opportunity to go to Puffin Days in London. Relaunched in the 1970s as a commercial book club, the Puffin Club's focus is now on schools with a free book entitlement incentive based on the

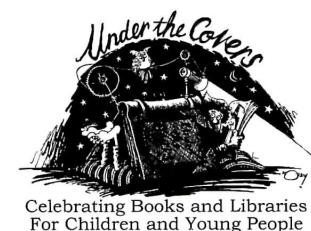


number of books ordered. Titles can be ordered from a list of 'top-selling' Puffins and selected titles from other publishers (eg 'Animal Ark'). Club coordinators can be teachers, librarians, school governors or parents who receive a start-up pack when their school joins.

EVENTS

- Flying off the Shelf is a conference organised by the Children's Writers and Illustrators Group of The Society of Authors. Open to professionals involved in children's books, it takes place on the 23/24 September at Sussex University. Speakers include Ted Dewan, Terry Pratchett, Jacqueline Wilson and Ann Jungman. Details from Enid Stephenson, 9 Garden Terrace, Hebden Bridge HX7 8BL (tel: 01422 843769; email: enid@step9.freeserve.co.uk).

- Rethinking Literacy in an Age of New Media is a one-day conference on 24 June at Froebel College, Roehampton to examine how literacy is defined and the role of literature, film, television and information technology in children's lives. Speakers include Sue Palmer, Gunther Kress, Michael Morpurgo and Helen Cresswell. Details from Wendy Earle (tel: 020 8932 2696; email: wearle@dircon.co.uk).



- Under the Covers is a joint conference for the Millennium from the Library Association School Libraries Group and the Youth Libraries Group and the School Library Association from 6–9 July at Imperial College, London. Speakers include Quentin Blake, Kim Reynolds, John Dunne, Klaus Flugge, Anne Marley and Gillian Cross. Details from The School Library Association, Liden Library, Barrington Close, Liden, Swindon, Wiltshire SN3 6HF (tel: 01793 617838; email: undercover@SLA.org.uk).

- Reading Pictures: Art, Narrative and Childhood is an international symposium from 1–4 September in Cambridge on the relationship between pictorial texts, narrative and childhood. Contributors include Quentin Blake, Eric Carle, Margaret Meek, Brian Wildsmith, Prue Goodwin and Victor Watson. Details from Anne Herriot, Homerton College, Cambridge CB2 2PH (tel: 01223 507136; email: ah284@cam.ac.uk).

BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIEFING•BRIE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Drug Using World

Dear Editor

After reading the article 'Young children growing up in a drug using world' (BfK, January 2000) I really feel moved to write and protest.

Although I don't deny that picture books are frequently deeper and more serious than at first appears to be the case, I find it very sad that an enchanting story such as *Six Dinner Sid* should be used as an example of addiction. I bought this book for myself some years ago because I fell in love with it and because I am a cat lover/owner myself and was bowled over by the insights into the cat mind and the illustrations which made me laugh out loud.

I could be very rude and describe this part of the article as 'pseudo psycho-babble nonsense' but will instead content myself with saying that it saddens me that adults can so lose sight of the innocence and serendipitous approach to life of small

children that they must see a moral crusade in everything or feel the need to imbue everything about them with a weighty and dolorous message.

Does everything for children have to be 'serious' and 'meaningful'? I brought my own children up to love books for themselves not to worry about their 'messages' and as a school librarian, I frequently become involved in lively discussions about books. The children in my school often complain that too many books are written with 'gritty realism' or obvious didacticism especially for teenagers and they prefer the books which they can escape into and relax with.

Incidentally, I feel that the author of your article cannot be well acquainted with many cats! They are ALL in my experience, 'opportunist, persuasive, manipulative and a charmer of people'. This is their stock in trade, the secret of their survival and who would have them any other way?!

Catherine Spalding

Woodcliffe, 58 Baytree Road, Milton, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset BS22 8HW

The Whitbread

Dear Editor

I just wanted to say I couldn't agree more with your editorial about the power of children's books to address themes that continue to concern us as adults (BfK 121, March '00). And with Peter Hollindale's remarks, that you quote, which point out that the texts can lend themselves to responses of various levels of sophistication. A good piece of writing for any audience rewards intelligent analysis, and those who dismiss well-crafted children's books merely because they are written 'for children' draw attention to no one's simple-mindedness but their own.

Nicolette Jones

Children's Books Reviewer, *The Sunday Times* and 1999 Whitbread Children's Novel category judge
Nicolette.Jones@btinternet.com

GOOD READS

Chosen by pupils from Aberdare Girls' School.

Thanks to Elaine Hempstead, School Librarian, and Linda Bird, Cath Cole and Lorna Mackintosh in the English Department.

Strange Brew

B Haynes, HarperCollins 'Bone Chillers', 0 00 675218 7, £2.99 pbk

In the book *Strange Brew* the main character is Tori. She is just bored sick of everything so then one day Tori finds a mysterious notebook and each time Tori opens this mysterious notebook a magic spell appears. Then every time Tori says one of these spells everything starts going haywire and all sorts of silly stupid mysterious things start happening.

I like the book because I like scary mysterious books and this particular book is everything. The part I like best is when Tori is in a café when she says the spell:

'Belch, Burp, Puke,
Slobber, Spit, Spew,
There's not a single thing
That you can do.'

and then everyone except Tori is feeling ill and being sick. I think I would recommend this book to a teenager because the book is fun. Also I would give the book about 10/10 because the book is very good and I would read the book *Strange Brew* again and that's for definite.

Kate Withers, Year 7

The Secret Lives of Teachers

Edited by Brian Moses, Macmillan, 0 330 34265 7, £3.50 pbk

The book that I am writing about is called *The Secret Lives of Teachers*. It is an extremely fun poem book about school and about the teachers but they put it over to you in a funny way.



Clockwise from top left: Kate Withers, Emma Aldred, Lydia Poloha and Alison Ng.



Some of the poems I like but some of the poems I find quite confusing. My favourite poem is called 'Through the Staffroom Door' and it is about what teachers do while they are in the staffroom – all things that you wouldn't expect of teachers. Another one of my favourites is a poem called 'The Headteacher's Flipped Her Lid' and it's all about a headteacher that has gone absolutely crazy and is acting like a child and does nothing but play practical jokes on the pupils and other members of staff!

This book is definitely one to read and I would recommend it to anyone. It is a book that you could read over and over again and still laugh your head off. I would give it a definite 10/10 – it is one to read.

Emma Aldred, Year 7

David Copperfield

Charles Dickens, Penguin Classic, 0 14 043494 1, £3.99 pbk

I found that this book was interesting but very

emotional. The book was about David's life and it starts off with his early years being happy ones with just his Mother and his maid, Peggotty. However everything seems to fall apart when his mother remarries a barbaric, cruel and unjust man. The story tells of his sad teenage years where he is moved from one place to another with no one to care for him. Eventually he finds true love and a family of his own.

The best part of the book was when David Copperfield was married to Agnes at the end. It was very exciting and happy to see them together. Some of the words in this book were hard to understand but most of it was very enjoyable. I would say that this book is for thirteen years plus and that most people would find it very entertaining.

Lydia Poloha, Year 9

Chinese Cinderella

Adeline Yen Mah, Puffin, 0 14 130487 1, £4.99 pbk

Chinese Cinderella is the moving story of Adeline Yen Mah's childhood. The biography tells of her life in which she suffered betrayal from her own family and how she coped with her pain and hardships. The story is captivating yet it also provides the history of China and how her family and herself managed and adapted to their new surroundings.

Adeline was known to be unlucky all her life as her mother died after giving birth to her. This led to her father remarrying and Adeline's stepmother, known as Niang, brought terror to Adeline's life.

The many emotional tales in *Chinese Cinderella* is going to bring a tear to every reader's eye, as it did to mine. The way in which the book was written made me want to keep reading and never put it down.

Alison Ng, Year 10 ■

BfK REVIEWS

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

Audio books are rated for the quality of the reading, not the book.

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

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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 a 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Anita Ganeri is a freelance writer.

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

Robert Hull is a poet and anthologiser.

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

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser - English, West Sussex.

Lois Keith teaches at North Westminster Community School.

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

Errol Lloyd is an artist and writer.

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

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

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

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*.

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

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

Helen Taylor teaches at Homerton College, Cambridge and is the director of The Voices Project - a literature in the community project and festival in Cambridgeshire.

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Now Out in Paperback

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR
Angel and the Box of Time
PICTURE BOOK ★★★★

Michael Foreman, Red Fox, 0 09 940276 9, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 110, May 1998:

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

**The Wise Doll
PICTURE BOOK** ★★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Ruth Brown, Red Fox, 0 09 940286 6, £4.99



Reviewed BfK 109, March 1998:

'Too-Nice is sent by her sisters, Horrid and Very-Horrid, to fetch them a toad from the house of the witch, Baba Yaga. Fortunately for Too-Nice she has a wise doll, given to her by her dead mother, to advise her how to complete the tasks the witch sets her. She not only escapes unscathed but the toad gobbles up her horrid sisters allowing her to stop being too nice and become 'Just About Right'. Children will enjoy and understand this deeply satisfying and imaginative picture book.'

**10-12
MIDDLE/SECONDARY**
The Sailing Ship Tree
FICTION ★★★★

Berlie Doherty, Puffin, 0 14 037952 5, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 115, March 1999:

'This beautifully crafted, elegiac novel operates equally successfully

on two levels – as a work of fiction and as a social document. Set in Lancashire in the years preceding World War One, it moves between the Big House and the cottage in the grounds, linking the destinies of Master George from the former and the Hollins twins, Dorothy and Walter, from the latter.'

Buried Fire
FICTION ★★★

Jonathan Stroud, Red Fox, 0 09 940247 5, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 119, November 1999:

'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. Part detective story, part psychological thriller, this is a genuinely chilling novel, slightly weakened by occasional lapses into over-writing.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Teddy Bear Nursery Rhymes

1 897951 35 3

Teddy Bear ABC

1 897951 36 1

★★★

Prue Theobalds, Uplands Books, 12pp, £3.99 each board. These large, square board books have been taken to meals, to bed and have been cried over when mislaid! When wrested from the pre-schoolers to whom I loaned them in order to try them out in school, the reaction was also very positive. Theobalds' teddy bear illustrations are delightful and have sufficient of the quirky factor to make them appeal to the adults who will undoubtedly be sharing them again and again. The only small quibble was found in *Teddy Bear Nursery Rhymes* where some of the children objected to 'Teddy' being interjected instead of 'Jack' in 'Jack be nimble, Jack be quick'. *Teddy Bear ABC* was particularly popular and the children enjoyed finding the supporting words – the M Teddy with measles was a clear favourite! JS

'Every young child's favourite sing-along action rhyme' (no comment!) is reissued here in board book format (the paperback version was reviewed in BfK 113).

The small size and bus-like proportions of this edition seem appropriate, and the opening spread, filled with the jolly orange single-decker, uses the space well. Best when the illustrations fill the page, some have not made the transition from paperback well, and are fussy and not strong enough to bring coherence to this format.

Sensibly, the print, previously differentiated to show each new activity, has been made uniform with the younger audience in mind, though appropriate speech bubbles legitimately remain. The bus's passengers are of mixed age and race, though predominantly white. AG

Daisy and the Egg

1 86039 655 0, £4.99 pbk

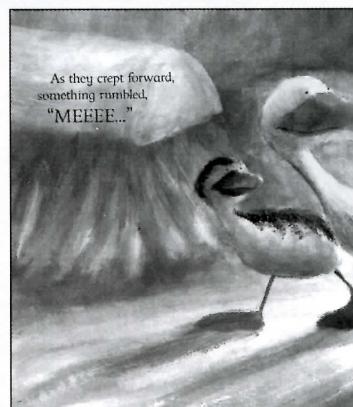
Daisy and the Beastie

1 86039 795 6, £10.99 hbk

★★★

Jane Simmons, Orchard, 32pp

Here are more Daisy books from talented author/illustrator, Simmons, who speaks straight to her audience through her dynamic yet affectionate pictures. Little Daisy's strong personality shines through in *Daisy and the Egg*, where she is determined



to help the last egg of the clutch to hatch. Sitting on it does present problems but Daisy is rewarded by the arrival of a baby brother, Pip.

In *Daisy and the Beastie*, Pip, Daisy's newly hatched brother, decides to help Daisy find 'the beastie' of a story Grandpa has been telling them. There is gentle humour as Daisy and Pip search amongst the farmyard creatures, Pip mimicking the sound of each animal they meet. Just the right amount of tension is created for young readers when the ducklings think they hear the beastie inside a dark shed. Bravely they creep forward, but then turn and flee... A wonderfully happy ending resolves a book where very young children will successfully retell the story by following the delightfully appealing illustrations. GB

The Wheels on the Bus

★★★

Penny Dann, Little Orchard, 18pp, 1 84121 715 8, £3.99 board

Who's Next?

★★★

Sally Grindley, ill. Lydia Monks, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 408 6, £10.99 hbk

Little Red is a member of a group of gentle little monsters who get fed up with being shoved out of the ice cream queue by Big Green and his fellow humungous monsters. At Little

Red's instigation the little monsters work together on a cunning plan that turns Big Green's greed and arrogance inside out. This picture book is a very short and simple anti-bullying morality tale. The text is direct and rhythmic, and the narrative augmented by speech balloons. Graphically, the book is bold and brash, making strident use of bright colours in paint and in dazzling patches of photo montage seemingly lifted from magazines.

This book should go down well with young readers who will no doubt be able to link the plight of these vivid little monsters with their own ordeals in street and playground. GH

Pete and Polo's Nursery School Adventure

★★★

Adrian Reynolds, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 884 7, £10.99 hbk

Pete and his toy polar bear, Polo, are off to nursery school for the first time. Polo is not sure he wants to go, but Pete reassures him that all will be well. The illustrations show us a busy day at nursery, and gradually Polo becomes happier. He also discovers a reason for being glad he is the only Polar bear amongst the children's brown teddies. Children who are concerned about going to nursery will identify with Polo's fears and find consolation in his final enjoyment of his great adventure. They also may learn the rudiments of accepting people who are 'different'. Expressive faces and simple, bright pictures get the point across that nursery school is a positive place to be. ES



Penguin goes to Playschool

0 86264 900 5

Parrot goes to Playschool

0 86264 903 X



★★
Jeanne Willis, ill. Mark Birchall, Andersen, 32pp, £4.99 each hbk

Intended as moral tales with themes pertinent to young children encountering group situations for the first time (sharing, turn-taking, and co-operating with others), these two stories feature dressed soft toy animals at playschool.

Good aspects (children solving their own problems, kindness) are outweighed for me by an insensitive streak which I find uncomfortable. For example, is the ostrich teacher (with her head well-buried in the toy-box) avoiding responsibility as much as delegating it to the children? And when Penguin hogs the slide, is Crocodile's idea of justice (waiting to catch Penguin in his open jaws at the foot of the slide) helpful or another form of bullying in itself?

The Scarry-like illustrations are stiff, poorly composed and unattractive, though I did like chatterbox Parrot's toffee-filled speech bubble when he is at last silenced by a 'very, very sticky' beakful! AG

Little Bear's Grandad

★★★

Nigel Gray, ill. Vanessa Cabban, Little Tiger Press, 32pp, 1 85430 636 7, £8.99 hbk
Little Bear has tea with his Grandad

every week, and they share stories and special times in Grandad's tree house in the garden. One day, Grandad is too tired to tell Little Bear a story, so Little Bear tells him one instead – about their happy Fridays together – after which Grandad falls into the 'very deepest of deep, deep sleep' and dies. Mummy takes Little Bear up to Grandad's tree house and they remember him sadly. Little Bear resolves to be a good grandad himself some day. This is a profoundly moving book. The glowing illustrations provide the perfect companion to the thoughtfully written text. The warmth of family love and a very special relationship is apparent throughout, and, in particular, the poignant picture of Little Bear clinging to Mum after having been told that grandad will not wake up will remain in the memory for a long time to come. ES

Baby Tiger

★★★

Susan Hellard, Piccadilly, 32pp, 1 85340 509 4, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 504 3, £4.99 pbk

Tozie is the smallest cub in the family but the 'quickest at learning things' when mother tiger teaches her triplets to understand sounds and smells and recognise danger. Eventually she takes them with her on a night-time hunting trip. When Tozie gets lost he remembers mother teaching him 'to stop and think, and stay right there'. This he does, looking and listening until she returns to find him. The night-time jungle scene is reminiscent of *The Lion King* backdrop, but there is some inconsistency in the depiction of night-time. This book has a reassuring feel, the colours of the illustrations are bold and bright, and it ends with a fact-file on tigers which many will find of interest. GB



Defnyddiodd frigyn a chortyn ...

Floppy tried a stick and string...

floppy. In the end he comes to accept that is just how he is and that it is not his ear but the funny things he does that make the other rabbits laugh.

As a dual text, this Welsh/English one is a little disappointing; firstly because of the inconsistent manner in which the two texts are placed on each spread, and secondly, because the choice of two differently sized fonts sits uneasily on the page. Presumably this has been done to help distinguish between the two roman scripts, but apart from the fact that it does not then give them both equal weight, it does not look pleasing to the eye. It is to be hoped that the versions in non-roman scripts strive for parity more successfully as this is a pleasing book to add to early years shelves. UC

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior

We're Going on a Bear Hunt

Re-played by Vivian French, from the book by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury, Walker, 0 7445 6112 4 pbk, 0 7445 6851 X Big Book

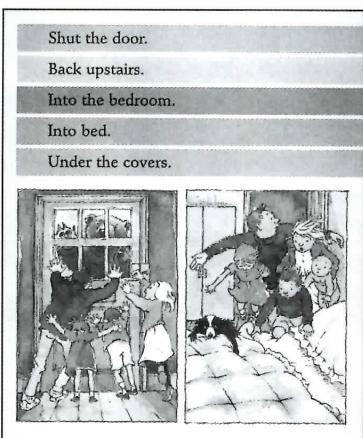
Little Rabbit Foo Foo

Re-played by Vivian French, from the book by Michael Rosen and Arthur Robins, 0 7445 6726 2 pbk, 0 7445 6850 1 Big Book

★★★

Walker, 28pp, £3.99 each pbk, £12.99 each Big Book

When I first saw these 'Story Play' books with their colour-coded lines I was somewhat apprehensive. Surely the publisher would not allow the deconstruction of two of their excellent picture books to meet the prescriptive pedagogy and mechanistic structure some advocate for the literacy hour? I need not have worried. French has brought her skill as a performer and writer for children's theatre to bear to preserve the integrity of these popular picture books based on chants from the oral tradition. Her 'Story Play' versions give purpose to reading aloud, aid and indeed, demand, expressive reading and encourage co-operation and shared performance. The colour coding of lines from the text to



denote different narrators makes it easier for young and inexperienced readers to participate and follow a scripted play structure and, if the Big Book version is used, a whole class can take part. Children are likely to use these books as models for their own original plays or adaptations of storybooks. The potential is enormous. JB

Witches

AUDIO BOOK ★★

Read by Liz Smith, 45 mins adaptation, 0 00 102530 9

School

AUDIO BOOK ★

Read by Paul McGann, 50 mins adaptation, 0 00 102531 7

Pirates

AUDIO BOOK ★★

Read by Adrian Edmondson, 30 mins adaptation, 0 00102529 5

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, HarperCollins, £4.99 each

Excellent witchy sound effects introduce a cackling mixture of jokes, spells and hocus pocus all designed to help you speculate on whether your granny might be a witch. Liz Smith narrates in a suitably witchy but wholly unscary voice while additional voices add a rounded, dramatised effect. The traditional and familiar jokes are pleasingly homely.

Unlike *Witches*, the jokes in *School* are not familiar to contemporary children as they come from an old school-story tradition of inky swots, stinkers and sneaks. That is not to say that such characters do not exist in schools today but their style is markedly different. *School* creaks

along from one hoary chestnut to another with stereotypical children, teachers and situations.

Everything you need to know to become a pirate (which is everything you already know about being a pirate) is cheerfully related in *Pirates* by Adrian Edmondson and his jolly crew. Like *Witches*, a terrific atmosphere is created by the background music, and especially by the creaking timbers of the ship which provide a soothing backdrop. Life aboard sounds hairy and scary and certainly not for the faint-hearted. Good traditional stuff told with a tongue-in-cheek touch. JE

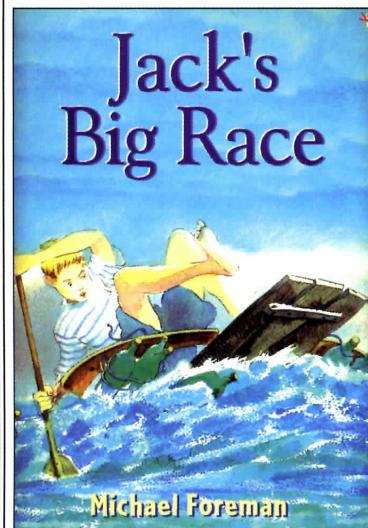
The Seven Ravens

★★★

Brian Wildsmith, Oxford, 32pp, 0 19 272407 X, £4.99 pbk

The seven ravens are seven brothers transformed into birds by their father's impetuous curse after they have neglected their baby sister. When Anna grows up, she sets off on a great quest to free the boys from enchantment. Wildsmith tells this simple but powerful tale in twenty or so paragraphs of clear, spare prose printed in bold type onto pages bright with dramatic imagery. The tale includes motifs that fortunate readers and listeners will recognise from other quests: an epic journey to the end of the world; encounters with personifications of sun, moon and

stars; an enchanted bone that grants access to a glass mountain and its mysterious guardian. These episodes are depicted in a deeply enjoyable blend of kaleidoscopic colour-play and careful, detailed drawings. Anna is depicted as a contemporary child in dungarees and trainers who wanders amongst myths and miracles: an apt symbol of what the book offers the young reader. Very highly recommended for shared and individual reading. GH



Jack's Big Race

★★★★★

Michael Foreman, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 940495 8, £4.99 pbk
The first line of this splendid tale at

once draws in the young reader: 'Jack's favourite place was his grandfather's shed.' The shed in question is an upturned fishing boat perched precariously on the sand-dunes. It is a shelter which gradually unfolds its family history, as Jack's grandfather uncovers objects which show that their ancestors and the sea have never been far apart. The narrative moves on to their building a raft and Jack finally winning the local raft race against all odds, carried over the finishing line as his craft splits dramatically apart.

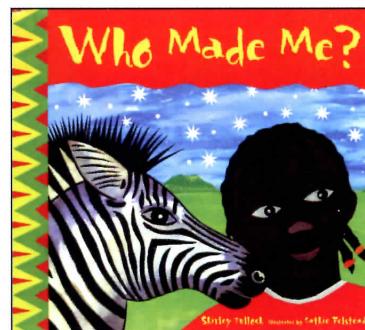
The 'chip off the old block' image is skilfully handled by Foreman's accomplished storytelling and there are one or two narrative surprises which caused a real stir amongst the six-year-olds I read with. The illustrations are, by turns, action-packed and quietly reflective, the use of blues and whites wonderfully evocative of the sea by day and by night. The grandfather-grandson bond at the moving heart of this beautiful picture book is simply a 'must read' for this age range. RB

Who Made Me?

★★★★★

Shirley Tullett,
ill. Cathie Felstead, Lion, 32pp,
0 7459 4163 X, £9.99 hbk

Set in the atmospheric African bush, *Who Made Me?* is an outstanding picture book. At the centre of the tale is Zanele who seeks the answer to her 'big question' by talking in turn to animals in the wild from Baboon to Elephant. The fact that she hears many different answers is – without



revealing the enchanting conclusion – what makes the book such a strong read. Felstead has a distinguished track-record in portraying African and Caribbean landscapes; here her illustrative juxtaposition of people, animals and place is magical.

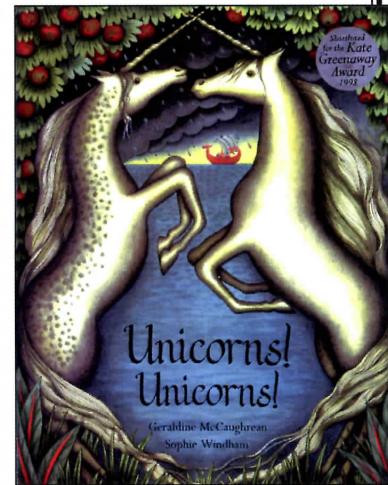
Children of all backgrounds will find a book here that has something powerful and thought-provoking to say to them; equally, parents and teachers in search of words and pictures that treat this ultimate question with sensitivity can pick up *Who Made Me?* guaranteed a fascinating text to share. Please could we have a Big Book version as soon as possible. RB

Unicorns! Unicorns!

★★★★★

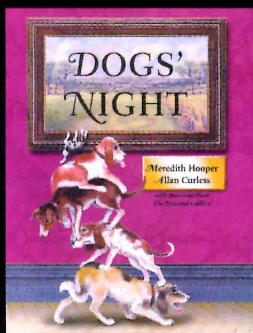
Geraldine McCaughrean,
ill. Sophie Windham, Orchard,
32pp, 1 86039 992 4, £4.99 pbk
From the opening paragraph the reader knows s/he is in the hands of a supreme storyteller: as 'the thunder

clapped and the lightning cheered', the unicorns made their way towards the ark. But, though mindful of the urgency of the summons, each time they find an animal in distress they stop to help and with anguish inevitable, it is they who are left behind. But they are not lost, they live on: 'their children prance on the wavetops, buck, and rear and dance and leap.' Seemingly, each word of this almost unbearably poignant rendition of the Old Testament flood story has been weighed for its effect.

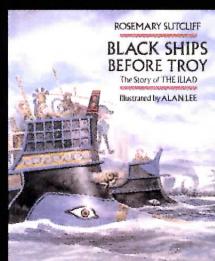


Windham's glorious paintings powerfully evoke the themes of the flood legend – retribution, deluge, chaos and in the aftermath, escape, survival, renewal and hope. She uses wonderful borders to enclose some of her illustrations while others provide

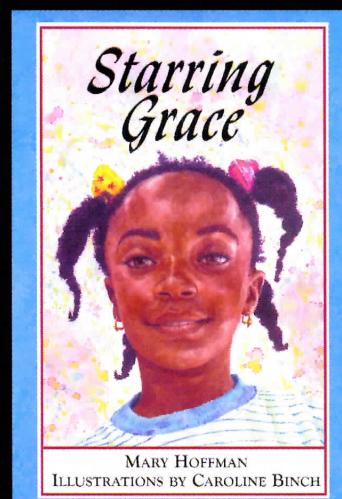
★ FRANCES LINCOLN ★



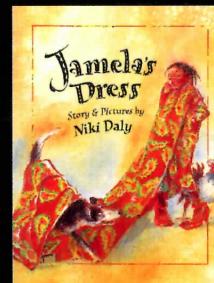
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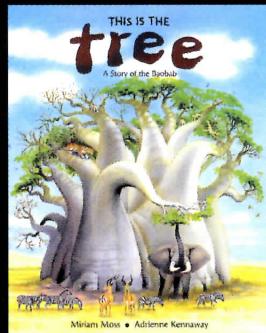
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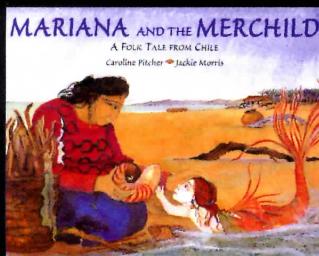
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horizontal or vertical frames for the text – a text that is always enclosed – creating a perfect unity which is much more than the sum of its separate parts. Indeed, each spread in itself is worthy of mention but for me, the most powerful is that of the rainbow of angels' wings arching over the swirling waves in which the unicorns are carried. JB

Just in Time – A tell-the-time story book

★★★

Kathryn Cave, ill. Terry McKenna, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 0520 5, £4.99 pbk

Some of my young reviewers were delighted with the teaching the time element in this lively picture book about Tom's morning rush to get to school. They also enjoyed the antics of the dragon who features in the background. One group said they would borrow it a second time from the library and might buy it. The majority, however, felt that it would be more suited to 'school learning' and it was not one that they would buy. Some of the more enterprising suggested a Big Book format and that it should be used for Literacy/Numeracy Hour as a whole class shared text. Staff definitely welcomed it and would use it in both Literacy and Numeracy lessons. They would also recommend it to parents of children who find learning to read the time difficult. A mixed bag of responses but clearly a very useful book! JS

Samira's Eid

★★★

Nasreen Aktar ill. Enebor Attard, Mantra, English with Arabic, 1 85269 122 0, also with Albanian, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Farsi, French, Somali, Turkish and Urdu, 24pp, £6.99 each pbk. Big Book editions in English, Bengali and Urdu, £17.99 each

This picture book has a dual-text story available in ten languages. The story concerns the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Fitr which follows the holy month of fasting known as Ramadan. It is a very special festival which is of great significance to Muslims and which has a visible impact on the daily routine within an Islamic household. The style of the book is such that it achieves its educational and religious purpose without being over-bearing.

The story develops simply through the dialogue between two children, Samira and Hassan, and their parents. It is based on the actual day-to-day religious duties that occur during the holy month and this highlights the spirit of the festival and simultaneously provides the reasoning behind fasting, Eid prayers and Zakat (charity). This helps satisfy the young enquiring mind at a level which they can easily understand. The story has the genuine warmth associated with a happy family atmosphere and amply illustrates the excitement of this festive period within a typical family. Each page has well laid out text combined with colourful and expressive illustrations. It is a worthwhile addition to any school's multi-cultural library KA

Please, Mr Crocodile!

POETRY

★★★

Compiled by Tessa Strickland, ill. Rosslyn Moran, Barefoot, 40pp, 1 902283 61 9, £9.99 hbk

This full colour, picture book format collection contains some twenty poems featuring animals wild and domestic, large and small in many different habitats. Each one reads aloud well and there is a wide variety of styles and moods: the playground rhyme 'Please, Mr Crocodile!', Joan Horton's bold, direct description of 'Grey Squirrel' as it urgently stocks up food for winter, scary humour in Lord Alfred Douglas's 'The Shark', the nightmare world lurking in Richard Edwards's 'Our Pond', a stark contrast to the 'ittery, skittery' word playing 'Water Striders' – a brilliant poem to inspire dance as is Ann Whitford Paul's 'BABOON'. There is awe, wonder and humility too with Joan Cass's tiger or Frank Collymore's spider.

Moran's paintings of the flora and fauna are well observed, enclosing, extending but never overwhelming the poet's work – fine balance indeed. Interestingly her illustration for Brian Patten's 'Warm Paws' features a rabbit: try reading the poem aloud to children without showing them the illustration and asking them to form their own image: what do they see? For me, the splendid 'Grey Owl', the final poem in the book, sums up the resonant power poetry can have, 'fanning the margins of the mind'. JB

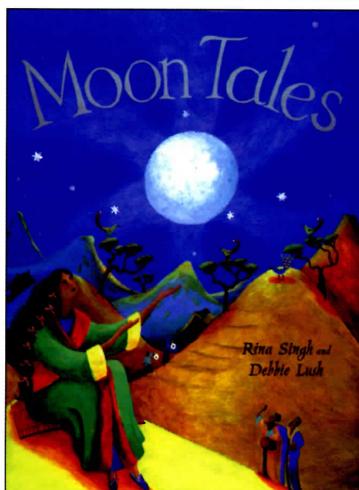
Freaky Tales from Far and Wide

Hugh Lupton, ill. Lisa Berkshire, Barefoot, 48pp, 1 902283 15 5, £9.99 hbk

Moon Tales

Rina Singh, ill. Debbie Lush, Bloomsbury, 80pp, 0 7475 4112 4, £14.99 hbk

★★★



Lupton is a storyteller who has selected seven excellent stories, one each from Indian, English, Inuit, Seneca, Scottish, Russian and Nigerian traditions. They are linked by a humorous, but nevertheless slightly spine chilling sense of the bizarre: a blackbird seeking to free his kidnapped wife conceals a fox, a rope, a swarm of ants and river inside his head; a variety of homeless animals take up residence inside an abandoned skull before being squashed by a bear; England is represented by the gruesome plight

of the gingerbread man and Scotland by the nightmarish tale of the strange visitor who creeps into a woman's living room bit by bit.

All of the stories are beautifully concise; this and the pure clarity of the oral style make them very powerful indeed as read alouds. The book is printed in big bold type and Berkshire's full and half page paintings are bright and dramatic.

Moon Tales is another fascinating collection of themed stories, gathering ten moon myths from Chinese, Jewish, West African, Polynesian, Siberian, Canadian, Indian, English, Japanese and Australian traditions. The storylines are more involved here and the style more literary. Readers who are not yet familiar with the wise elders of Chelm (who try to seal the reflection of the moon in a barrel) or with the adventures of Anansi will find excellent introductions here. The explanatory role of myth is also well illustrated, with fascinating accounts from Canada of why the moon has a blotchy face, and from Australia of why it waxes and wanes. Again, the illustrations are rich and colourful, blending the crepuscular hues of night with the brightness of dramatic episodes and characters. GH

I Spy, Pancakes and Pies

Ill. Anthony Lewis, 1 86039 954 1

Bad Boys and Naughty Girls

Ill. Peter Bailey, 1 86039 956 8

Silly Sons and Dozy Daughters

Ill. John Eastwood, 1 86039 962 2

Ugly Dogs and Slimy Frogs

Ill. Peter Bailey, 1 86039 964 9

Greedy Guts and Belly Busters

Ill. Anthony Lewis, 1 86039 960 6

If Wishes Were Fishes

Ill. John Eastwood, 1 86039 958 4

confusing – though the titles of the individual stories within are shown on the back cover – and why explain that 'Twice Upon a Time' means two stories in one book? However, these are well worth adding to your class library. AG

The Leprechaun Who Wished He Wasn't

★★★

Siobhán Parkinson, ill. Donald Teskey, O'Brien, 80pp, 0 86278 334 8, £3.99 pbk

While the leprechaun has long been a significant presence in Irish folklore, it is only within the past two centuries that he has become a prominent figure in the country's literature, adults' or children's. Contemporary writers, realising the tendency for the more conventional leprechaun story to descend into stereotypical Irish blarney, frequently assume, as Parkinson does here, a much less reverential attitude than their predecessors. She strikes the keynote early when Larry, her leprechaun protagonist, assures the 'humung' being who has befriended him that she has been reading too many silly stories about leprechauns. For 'silly', substitute here 'playful', 'inventive', 'witty' and 'allusive', all of which amount to an offbeat and entertaining little story. RD

Tales from the Old World

★★★★

Kevin Crossley-Holland, Dolphin, 112pp, 1 85881 794 3, £4.50 pbk

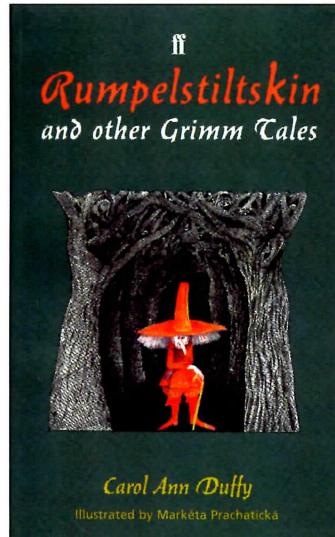
This must count as one of the best anthologies of its kind currently available. Crossley-Holland has selected a tale from each of ten different European countries and, in the process of retelling them, has provided for today's young readers an immediately engaging set of stories. Even the ones most likely to be already known, such as 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin', 'The Ugly Duckling' and 'Arthur the King', attain an unusual freshness, principally through a selectivity of detail and a choice of language which is sharp, focused and stylish. All in all, here is a rich mixture of the mythical, the magical, the marvellous and the mirthful which, at twice the price, would still be a bargain. RD

Rumpelstiltskin and other Grimm Tales

★★★★

Carol Ann Duffy, ill. Markéta Prachatická, Faber, 208pp, 0 571 19631 4, £8.99 pbk

The Scottish poet Carol Ann Duffy brings much of the deft and economical use of language evident in collections like *Mean Time* to these lively and varied retellings of some of the Grimms' famous and lesser known tales. Each tale is addressed in a slightly different way, some highly conversational, others more formal and almost ritualistic. The story of 'Clever Hans', or Foolish Jack as he is better known in Britain, the half wit who keeps making mistakes about how to bring the shopping home, is told almost entirely in dialogue. The tale of 'Two Households' is a page and a half of semi-nonsensical word play. 'Cinderella', appearing here as



'Ashputtel', is told more traditionally, in a version in which the heroine is helped by the forces of nature rather than by any pantomimic fairy godmother. The uncompromising nature of the originals is clear when at the end the ugly sisters have their eyes pecked out, just as the wicked queen in 'Snow White' has to dance to death in red hot iron shoes. Markéta Prachatická's densely detailed pen and pencil drawings emphasise the macabre and the humorous equally well.

This is a collection of good rich reads, and an excellent resource for showing children how folk tales evolve as they travel through time and across a variety of media. GH

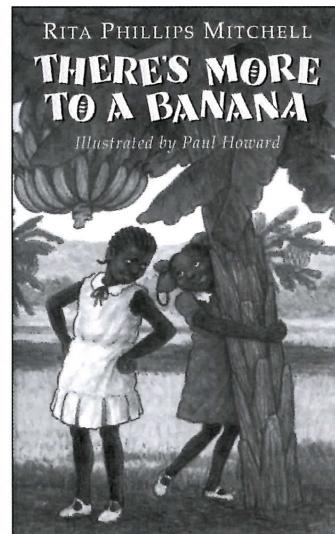
There's More to a Banana

★★★

Rita Phillips Mitchell,
ill. Paul Howard, Walker, 96pp,
0 7445 5935 9, £7.99 hbk

The four stories in this collection are set in Central America, probably Belize on the Caribbean coast, which has a similar history and culture to the Caribbean islands. The stories

feature Melanie and her younger sister Flora, and though they spring from everyday reality, these stories are brought to life by assured storytelling, featuring lively, spirited dialogue and by an infectious delight in the pranks and rivalries of the siblings. Apart from their intrinsic appeal, this book should give British children valuable insights into elements of a different culture.



The stories have a contemporary setting and feel, but the illustrations, whilst not lacking warmth, seem somewhat dated, particularly in the characters' clothes. Also, the banana plants, illustrating the title story, bear only a passing resemblance to the real thing. Banana bunches taper down like an inverted pyramid with the new (upward pointing) fruits or 'fingers' making their appearance at the growing point nearer the ground. For this reason, the larger, established fingers are to be found at the top of the bunch, not the bottom. Yet these illustrations show exactly the opposite. Also the artichoke-like layering of the stem as portrayed in the illustrations is quite inaccurate. It may seem churlish to dwell on these lapses, as the illustrations are a secondary aspect of the book, but they do illustrate a story which sets

out to be educational, providing factual data on the banana plant and fruit, their varieties and uses etc. Ultimately it is the publisher's responsibility to commission illustrators familiar with the subject matter in question, as artists can only do the best they can. EL

telling device of characters 'telling' each other exactly what has happened soon begins to jar. Poor old Mandy comes over as a smug goody-goody. It is hard not to long for something terrible to happen to her. JE

Esio Trot

AUDIO BOOK ★

Roald Dahl, read by Geoffrey Palmer, Puffin, 40 mins, unabridged, 0 14 180135 2, £3.99

Esio Trot, the story of the elderly Mr Hoppy's unrequited love for Mrs Silver who loves only her tortoises, was never one of Dahl's best. The central joke of Mr Hoppy wheedling his way into Mrs Silver's affections by making it seem as if her beloved tortoise is growing, would have quickly worn thin had it not been for Quentin Blake's charming illustrations. On tape, therefore, the story quickly does wear thin and the laborious joke of tortoise language – English spelt backwards – though quite amusing to pore over in print, is reduced to a feeble recitation of 'pu', 'pu' as 'up' is turned around. Guaranteed to produce a titter but not a great addition to the story. JE

MAGDALEN NABB *Josie Smith in Spring*



Make friends with Josie Smith

Josie Smith in Spring

★★★★

Magdalen Nabb,
ill. Karen Donnelly, Collins,
128pp, 0 00 675408 2, £3.99 pbk

Living with her mother, Josie Smith is a sensitive, plucky and resourceful child. In this new addition to the Josie Smith series, Josie takes a great interest in Mr Scowcroft's allotment, and endeavours to create a garden in her back yard. She has to battle against her own shortcomings, not to mention the selfishness of her 'best friend', Eileen, in order to come out on top. Eventually she discovers that real Easter eggs come from broody hen, Mavis, rather than the local confectioner.

Simply told and thoroughly childlike, this book will appeal to independent readers who prefer a gentle pace to their fiction but will also be useful for reading to younger children. AK

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

Never Stare at a Grizzly Bear: Animal Poems

POETRY ★

Nick Toczek,
ill. David Parkins, Macmillan,
64pp, 0 330 39121 6, £2.99 pbk

Let's Twist Again: More Tongue Twisters and Tonsil Twizzlers

POETRY ★★

Chosen by Paul Cookson,
ill. Jane Eccles, Macmillan,
64pp, 0 330 37559 8, £2.99 pbk

A Sea Creature Ate My Teacher: Fishy Poems

POETRY ★

Chosen by Brian Moses, ill.
Lucy Maddison, Macmillan,
64pp, 0 330 39064 3, £2.99 pbk

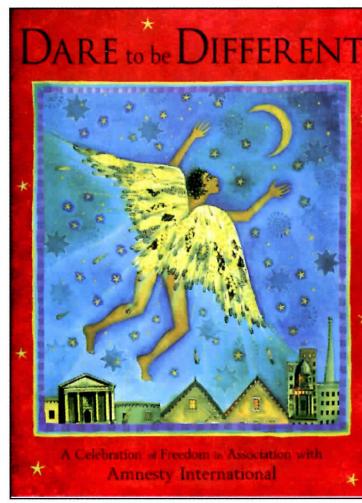
Toczek makes Olympian efforts in *Never Stare at a Grizzly Bear* to use rhyme and wordplay in each and every one of these poems. I was exhausted by the eighth poem where pigs in wigs are swigged by the sea. It's just not clever and not funny enough. *Let's Twist Again* and *A Sea Creature* offer more pigs in wigs and largely unfunny rhyming verses. Apart from the fresh voice of Martin Glynn in the *Let's Twist Again* anthology, these are predictable 'zany' poems which do nothing for the imagination or for poetry. HT

Dare to be Different

★★★★★

Various authors, Bloomsbury/
Amnesty International, 80pp,
0 7475 4021 7, £14.99 hbk

The thirteen stories and poems in this book have been specially selected, and the majority of them commissioned, to provoke reflection on issues of human rights and freedom. The scope is wide, from a



retelling of the story of Pandora's Box to a brief but acutely insightful account of the mental struggles of a child in a swimming pool wondering

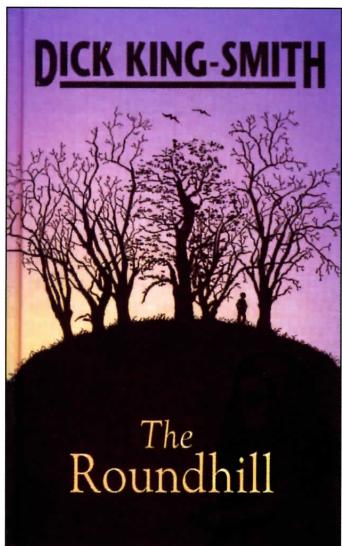
whether or not he should get out of the water to rescue a rather plain looking butterfly that has got itself trapped. Reminders of real life human rights abuses accompany more metaphorical treatments of underlying ethical issues; in the former category, Jamila Gavin's account of bonded debt slavery in India is particularly effective, and in the latter, Geraldine McCaughrean's allegory of a persecuted fugitive being enabled to cross a gulf through the small but cumulative labours of an entire community. Each author is paired with a specific illustrator, and the startlingly variegated results add to the visual appeal of a beautifully designed book. This is recommended reading for all key stages, and the fact that part of the royalties will go to Amnesty International (whose work is described in a very clear introduction) might act as an additional incentive to acquire it. GH

The Egg Thieves

★★★

Joan Lingard, ill. Paul Howard, Hodder, 96pp, 0 340 73263 6, £9.99 hbk, 0 340 73264 4, £3.50 pbk

From a series of 'short novels...for younger, confident readers', this tells the story of an osprey nest in a small Scottish village. As egg thieves attempt to plunder the nest the local children set up a nest-watching campaign. In attempting to meet the needs of the aforementioned readers, Lingard has produced a surprisingly pedestrian text, lacking pace and tension and leaving several untied ends. Practical information about the habits of ospreys and the construction of bird hides is included, at times rather didactically; the softly pencilled illustrations seem better-suited to a more humorous, less worthy text. There is a good mixture of narrative and dialogue, with a few gently Scottish touches, and the friendship between the young boys and girls is well-handled, but all in all it fails to grip. AG



The Roundhill

★★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Siân Bailey, Viking, 96pp, 0 670 88405 7, £10.99 hbk

Evan is a quiet, ordinarily quirky teenager growing up in a bourgeois family in the 1920s. The roundhill is his refuge, an isolated tree capped hill, due east of his bedroom window, which he can behold at a distance or retreat to for solitary meditation. But one summer day he meets a mysterious child on the hill, and once he has recovered from the invasion of his territory he begins to be fascinated by her. But why does she keep disappearing when they are disturbed, and why does she talk in a wise and elliptical manner more typical of an old and wistful lady? AK

This is an excellent, supernatural detective story that culturally aware readers will solve much more quickly than Evan does. The story treats deep themes of mortality and transience lightly but movingly, and the final chapter, when Evan takes his own grand-daughter to the summit of the Roundhill, provides a beautifully effective resolution. Bailey's monochrome pastorals evoke a sense of a world of lost tranquillity. Highly recommended for reading aloud to the class, or for independent readers to read alone. GH

Donkey-ride to Disaster

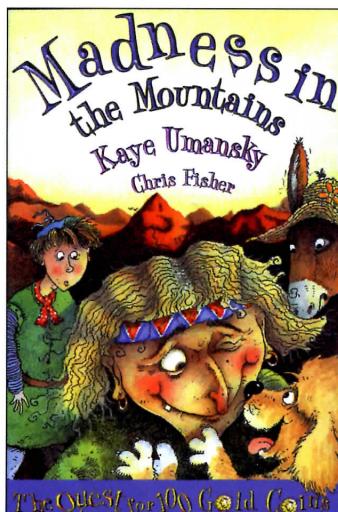
0 340 74374 3

Madness in the Mountains

0 340 74375 1

★★★★★

Kaye Umansky, ill. Chris Fisher, Hodder, 112pp, £3.50 each pbk



These titles are the first two pulsating parts of a four part serial, collectively entitled 'The Quest for 100 Gold Coins'. Humble woodcutter, Nev Niceguy attempts to find the money to pay years of back rent, which his dotty old gran has allowed to build up. Nev's quest, setting out into the big wide world is made more difficult by his fundamental honesty and his habit of feeling sorry for those few characters or creatures who are even worse off than he is.

Donkey-ride to Disaster sees Nerdy Ned getting 100 gold coins from alchemist Dr Hirasmus Baboom only for him to be slung into jail for using what turns out to be illegal currency. **Madness in the Mountains** follows Nev as he is kidnapped by the notorious and diminutive Big Ma Minky and her gang of desperados, including No Soap Nigel and Friendly Fernando. The kidnapping of feisty heiress Marietta Courgette changes all their lives but we still have two more episodes before we discover whether Nev succeeds in his quest.

These are two really well written stories which are superb entertainment. Great fun to read to lower junior children. With wacky characters and delightful comic dialogue, reminiscent of Henrietta Branford's 'Dimanche Diller' series, these books are enhanced by occasional chirpy sketches. AK

All the Things I See: Selected Poems for Children

POETRY ★★★★

Jenny Joseph, Macmillan, 96pp, 0 333 78018 3, £9.99 hbk

The Poet's House

POETRY ★

Chosen by Jude Brigley, ill. Fran Evans, Pont, 120pp, 1 85902 602 8, £5.50 pbk

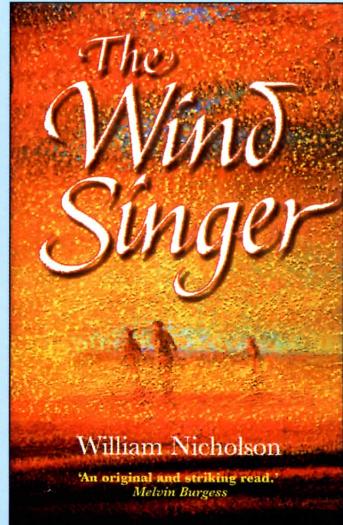
NEW Talent

The Wind Singer

★★★

William Nicholson, Mammoth, 352pp, 0 7497 4196 1, £12.99 hbk

In the walled city of Aramath, the population is controlled by a rigid system of public examinations. Each family member is tested and accommodation and colour coded clothing provided according to which band their results fit into. The Hath family (orange band), however, rebel against the state in their various ways until twins, Kestrel and Bowman are forced to flee the city in search of the wind singer which will restore freedom and happiness to its inhabitants. Nicholson's portrait of the Haths shows how Ira, the unpredictable, prophetess mother, and Hanno, her quiet, learned librarian husband support their rebellious children despite the dangers of the tyrannical state that controls their lives. The closeness and respect that members of this family have for each other is engagingly drawn. Less convincing are Nicholson's forays into Aramath's Stygian underworld and from there into the wider world beyond the city where the twins encounter a bewildering assortment of peoples



and adventures in their quest. There is an unevenness to the quality of the invention here and some occasionally pedestrian writing which strike a jarring note. Shades of the phallicentric adventure genre of yesteryear appear towards the end when Kestrel 'realised as she spoke that she was turning to her brother now, as their natural leader'. Nevertheless, this first novel is a thought provoking and cliffhanging fantasy adventure that young readers will enjoy. RS

the real rare thing, a book that is a poetry.

The Poet's House, sadly, is built on sand and cluttered with junk. There are fine poems by well-known poets, and genuine pieces by others, but the book is primarily devoted to regular spillages of banality, pretentiousness and sheer uncraftiness. It may be true, one would not want to argue, that 'sky is orchestral/ tarmac is helium/ understanding is microdot'. Perhaps it is clear and not fishy that 'Between the ears as a sane sole frets/ The Think works and sits and sweats.' But I think young fans may be somewhat under-thrilled by poems about 'Footballers' Birthdays' with rhymes like 'a defender full of charm' and 'a goalie who did no harm', and with rhythms like 'Franco was born on Friday, /A player whose crosses were deep. /Samuel was born on Saturday, /A full-back whose place would keep. Why not 'sleep', 'bo-peep', 'bleep', 'weep'... Is it important to some of us to keep children patronised, duped, out of the poem's way? My soul is filleted at the possibility. RH

Arthur, High King of Britain

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★

Michael Morpurgo, read by the author, Hodder Children's Books, 6 hrs abridged, 1 84032 233 0, £14.99

From the good jumping-off place of a boy slipping back into the past where he meets the legendary Merlin, Morpurgo launches into his retellings of the great stories of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Young Arthur pulling the sword from the stone; the finding of beautiful Queen Guinevere; the different tests of the different knights and the ultimate betrayal by Lancelot are all covered in this accessible version in which the

stories rather than the complex morality of chivalry and courtly love dominate. Morpurgo paces the stories well and his calm reading of them makes attractive listening. JE

Captain Ming and the Mermaid

★★★

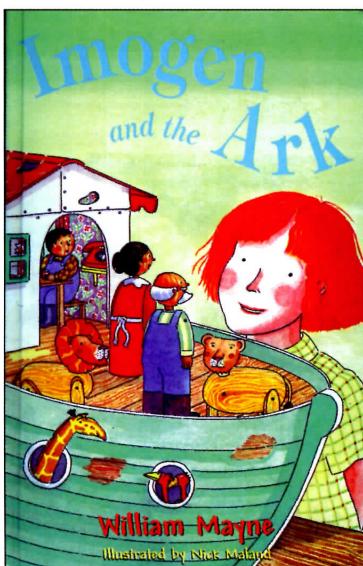
Ill. William Golding, 176pp, 0 340 736771, £3.50 pbk

Imogen and the Ark

★★★★★

Ill. Nick Maland, 112pp, 0 340 74372 7, £10.99 hbk

William Mayne, Hodder



Reading Mayne is always a challenge. The use of words and the shape of sentences are never quite as you might expect. Little can be taken for granted and certainly not the distinction between reality and fantasy. The heroines of both these stories would perhaps not be old enough to be able to read these books comfortably for themselves. They are both still of an age to see things with idiosyncratic eyes and to colour the everyday world with imagination.

Lucy, in *Captain Ming and the Mermaid*, sets off on a real enough adventure, helping to pilot a paddle-steamer down to Glasgow for repairs. There is plenty of excitement, you might have thought, in visits to the engine room, steering 'the puffer', and riding the big wave into the estuary: but there is the prospect of a more extraordinary event – meeting a mermaid, who may lure Captain Ming to live with her. The tale is so finely balanced between matter-of-fact and magic that the reader is kept guessing about whether the mermaid really will appear, and what can be done if she does.

Imogen and the Ark also concerns a voyage. Staying by the sea with her grandparents, Imogen chooses an old wooden ark to buy from the toy shop. During the night, the shop catches fire: the ark, wooden Mr and Mrs Noah and the animals are swept, by the fire hoses, into the drains and out to sea. An amazing tale follows, during which the ark and its inhabitants are shipwrecked, swallowed by a fish, and eventually and miraculously swept back up into the shop, now rebuilt and selling antiques. Here Imogen, who has telepathically kept in touch with the fortunes of Noah's family, reclaims

them. This is a wonderful, enchanting story, with echoes not only of the Bible but also of *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*. Mr and Mrs Noah, with their resolute faith in their eventual salvation, are funny and touching.

Both stories are well served by their illustrators and will be enjoyed by 7-9 year-olds. *Imogen and the Ark* is something special. CB

Blackbird Has Spoken

POETRY ★★★

Poems for children by Eleanor Farjeon, selected by Anne Harvey, Macmillan, 160pp, 0 330 37184 3, £4.99 pbk

It is good to see a new edition of Eleanor Farjeon's poems and in an accessible format for children. Farjeon wrote poems and songs in childhood and throughout her life and these warm, vital poems are worth revisiting. My only criticism of this edition is the prominence of the poem 'A Morning Song' on the book jacket and using the line 'Blackbird Has Spoken' for the title. Farjeon's poems are about anything and everything from cats and dreams to Pocahontas and street names. The title poem could mislead would-be readers into expecting rather old fashioned, faintly religious poems rather than the rich seam of poetry produced by Farjeon. HT

Shopping in Grandma's Day

Rebecca Hunter with Angela Davies, 0 237 52005 2 hbk, 0 237 52006 0 pbk

Grandma's War

Rebecca Hunter with Angela Downey, 0 237 52007 9 hbk, 0 237 52008 7 pbk

NON-FICTION ★★★
Evans 'In Grandma's Day', 32pp, £8.99 each hbk, £4.99 each pbk

This series looks at aspects of life during the 1930s and 1940s through the eyes of women who were children at this time. It is a strategy used often in history books for children to improve coherence and add human interest. Each book includes examples of a number of kinds of writing. War posters, letters, school records and instructions on gas masks feature in *Grandma's War* and labels, advertisements, price lists and ration books in *Shopping in Grandma's Day*. Illustrations in both books include contemporary photographs, then and now' pictures and delightful borders of objects of interest; ration books, gas masks and china dolls, and delivery vans, old fashioned scales and tills and wicker baskets. *Shopping in Grandma's Day* is organised round topics like 'Village Shopping', 'Clothes and Shoes' and 'Rationing' while *Grandma's War* lends itself to a broadly chronological organisation from the start of the war to the return of the evacuees in 1944 and the end of the war in 1945. The latter is the more successful in giving a flavour of what it was like to live through these years.

Both books could be a good starting point for children's further research and writing. The posters and advertisements would be good material for the work on persuasive types of text in Years 5 and 6 (9-11 year-olds) in The Framework for

Teaching – the reference document of the National Literacy Strategy to help primary teachers in England meet objectives in a daily literacy hour from Reception (age 5 years) to Year 6 (10-11 year-olds). I just wonder if the narrative is challenging enough for more mature readers of this age group. MM

Electricity

0 7136 5228 4

Gears

0 7136 5229 2

Levers

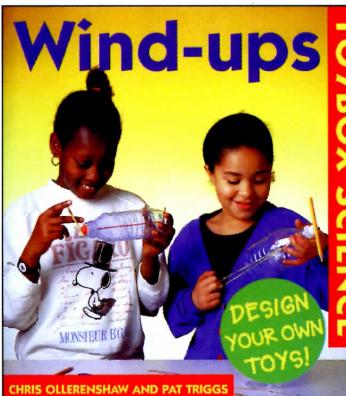
0 7136 5230 6

Wind-ups

0 7136 5231 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★

Chris Ollerenshaw and Pat Triggs, photographs by Peter J Millard, A & C Black 'Toybox Science', 32pp, £4.99 each pbk



We welcomed these admirably explicit physics primers when they first appeared in hardback (eight years ago) and are happy to do so again. A precautionary look for signs of dating reveals them to be as acceptable and useful now as they were originally, dealing as they do with eternal verities and nice, ordinary, plainly dressed demonstrators (who must be grown up now!).

Just to recap – physical principles are illustrated in admirably straightforward photographs – by their incorporation into familiar household gadgets and toys. So Electricity shows active batteries, bulbs and switches as well as dealing responsibly with electrical safety. You have to be careful with Gears too, as the volume devoted to those makes us well aware while we find out about cogs, belt drives, egg whisks, clockwork and lock-work. Levers ranges from pop-up toys through nutcrackers to deckchairs and Wind-ups (as in clockwork, not gripe water) shows us energy storage in springs, rubber bands and raised weights.

Highly interactive this excellent quartet is distinguished by admirably plain text and really sensible notes for parents and teachers, all components working together in each volume like a well integrated set of gears, with no need to get the wind up about their age. Excellent value, too. TP

Why Are You Calling Me a Barbarian?

FACTION ★★

Birgitta Petren and Elisabetta Putini, ill. Lara Artone and Monica Barsotti, trans. Mary

Becker, J. Paul Getty Museum, 60pp, 0 89236 559 5, £13.50 pbk (available via Windsor Books, tel: 01865 361122)

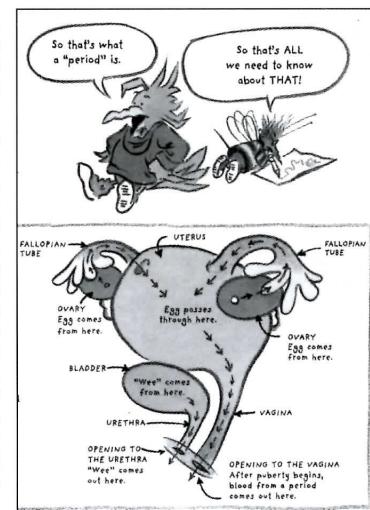
This book offers contrasted accounts of children's lives in Imperial Rome and in Scandinavia in the 3rd century AD. The narrators are two children, one the daughter of a slave in the household of a Roman general; the other the son of a Scandinavian merchant. The text, originally in Italian and intended for 8-10 year olds, is written by two authors and lacks cohesion. It also lacks precision. This arises partly from trying to be true to the view of child narrators, whose knowledge would be limited, and partly from the cartoon illustrations, which do not suit a text that requires that differences in environment and social behaviour be shown clearly. The approach is anachronistically Pan-European: the point being that those whom the Romans regarded as barbarians had civilisations of their own. A good proposition, but an unconvincing way to present it. There is no index and a poor contents page, with inscrutable chapter headings like 'Mosquitoes at War', which makes the extraction of specific information impossible. CB

Let's Talk About Where Babies Come From

NON-FICTION

Robie H Harris, ill. Michael Emberley, Walker, 80pp, 0 7445 4084 4, £10.99 hbk

This well-researched American project provides a comprehensive and up-to-date guide to eggs, sperm, birth, babies, bodies and families. Adopting a matter of fact approach, the authors tackle every aspect of sex education, from chromosomes to contraception and from HIV to homosexuality – if only briefly. Section 28 issues here.



Using brightly coloured cartoon illustrations, each topic sees a gregarious bird and somewhat embarrassed bee providing humorous comments on all the amazing things described in the book.

The book seeks to inform honestly and in an uncomplicated way and it certainly succeeds in addressing common myths and misconceptions. The style, content and layout make it a good book for families to share with their junior aged children. AK

REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary

Winners and Losers

★★★

Trevor Wadlow, ill. Clare Heronneau, 0 7136 5096 6

The Cinderella Principle

★★★

Tony Langham, ill. John Kent, 0 7136 4997 6

Guard Dog

★★★

Philip Wooderson, ill. Dave Burroughs, 0 7136 5114 8

The Haunted Surfboard

★★

Anthony Masters, ill. Peter Dennis, 0 7136 5098 2
A & C Black 'Graffix', 80pp, £3.99 each pbk

Mark in *Winners and Losers* falls head over heels for new girl, glamour puss Melissa only to learn some hard lessons in love finally realising the true worth of class mate and fellow computer gamer Annette who has seen through the spoilt brat from the start.

Every boy in the school has got the hots for Cat Ashley (the author's words not mine I hasten to assure you) and when she finds a single size 10 trainer on her locker she and her friends hatch a plot to find the owner (wake up at the back – it is called *The Cinderella Principle* after all). New boy Josh with the nerdy specs turns out to be the owner and Cat is obliged to date him as part of the plot. Josh turns out to front a rock band and after the inevitable misunderstandings is persuaded (yes you have guessed it) to take off those specs and Cat loses herself in his gorgeous eyes. Cut to final clinch.

'Guard Dog' is both Ryan's favourite Gameboy game and the name he gives to the ugly bruiser he suspects of stealing his dad's market stall stock. Some sleuthing by Ryan and best mate Steve with a little help from video evidence saves the day.

The Haunted Surfboard is the weakest of these four titles as Jack seeks to lay the ghost of Tom who was killed trying to surf over Crab Rock.

I still have not fathomed why the covers to these graphic novels are by different illustrators from those used for the strip cartoons inside. SR

Wanted – One Body!

Maggie Pearson, 0 14 130279 8

Forbidden Game

Malorie Blackman,
ill. Ron Tiner, 0 14 130321 2

Runaway Train

David Belbin, 0 14 130289 5

★★★

Puffin, 128pp, £3.99 each pbk
These three titles by well-known authors are published in the 'Surfers' series, which provides illustrated, large print, fast and excitement-filled yarns for challenged readers in the middle age groups. *Wanted – One Body!* is a lively and comic story about two brothers amateur sleuthing a

murder which they witnessed, but for which there seems to be no body. Their cunning and perseverance pays off, but not without considerable danger. *Forbidden Game* takes Sickle Cell Anaemia into the frame. An outcast lad exerts his right to be normal on a school expedition and proves just how far he is from being the wimp that everyone supposes. A lot rings far-fetched here but the generated excitement makes up for it. *Runaway Train* takes the prize for improbability. A boy escaping by train from his mum's new husband, gets tangled up with a resourceful hard-nosed family springing their cherished felon from custody and a blind girl with a very useful mobile phone. Again it is the pace that carries it along to its satisfactorily moral climax.

My testers have enjoyed these books, especially the boys for whom they seem to be directed, so they are worth stocking to keep youngsters turning the pages. DB

Ship of Ghosts

★★★

Nigel Hinton, ill. Anthony Lewis, 80pp, 1 902260 33 3

Danny's Great Goal

★★★

Michael Hardcastle, ill. Martin Orme, 72pp, 1 902260 32 5

Nicked!

★★★

David Belbin, ill. Liz McIntosh, 72pp, 1 902260 29 5

Eddie and the Zedlines

★★★

Colin Dowland, ill. Phillip Morrison, 72pp, 1 902260 31 7

Barrington Stoke, £3.99 each pbk
Despite all the puff from the publisher about the research they have done into children with reading difficulties, these titles seem strangely old-fashioned.

Ship of Ghosts begins well: 'There is blood on my hands. When I was very young I helped to kill a man. I am very old now, but I can never forget what I did.' It then falls away as it becomes a little over-complex as Mick learns the truth about his hero Captain Glenn. *Danny's Great Goal* is a hugely predictable football tale and *Nicked!* an almost as predictable school based crime story.

Eddie and the Zedlines is the most original and full of zany humour as Eddie manages to save the school newspaper from the threat of closure by the head, Mr Fairman (fair man – get it?). Locked overnight in the paper's 'office', he bangs his head and wakes to find himself gaining the help of the equipment that has come to life and that is horrified at the possible closure. Cue the word play – 'I'm lost for words,' said Crossword. 'It's a very sticky situation,' said the pot of glue. The horoscope let out a terrible moan. 'I see a dark future for us all.' Good comic-book stuff. SR

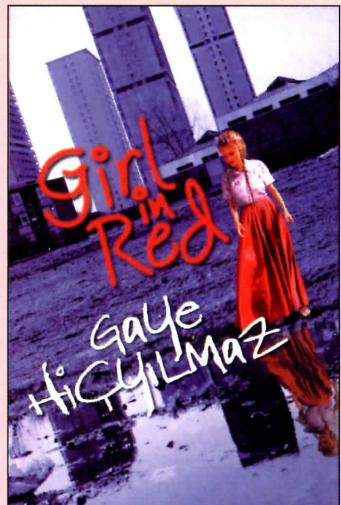
Editor's Choice

Girl in Red

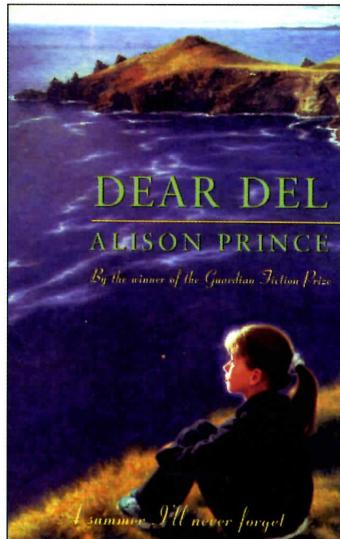
★★★★★

Gaye Hicyilmaz, Dolphin, 192pp, 1 85881 490 1, £4.99 pbk

The sustained tabloid campaign against asylum seekers and the vitriol expressed, in particular, against Gypsies from Romania make Hicyilmaz's new novel eerily topical. Teenager Frankie lives in a run down council block near the sea at Dover. Looking down from the balcony he catches sight of Emilia, a Roma wearing a long red skirt that trails in a puddle. Emilia fills his dreams and when she arrives at his school Frankie continues to idealise her and long to be with her in a touchingly depicted teenage crush. Meanwhile Frankie's mother initiates a campaign against the Gypsies that becomes a focus for the expression of racial hatred. For Frankie, torn by divided loyalties, there is the crushing disappointment of recognising the limited, hateful side to the mother he loves and his longing for 'a warmer place' to



inhabit. This is a many faceted, subtle novel which dares to stay with disappointment and lost opportunities – Frankie's contemptuous dismissal of Lucy, his mum's boyfriend's daughter, as not worth getting to know and the pain of having a bigoted, narrow minded parent, for example, remain unresolved. And for Emilia, who has witnessed terrors in her homeland, there is to be no safe place. RS



Dear Del

★★★

Alison Prince, Hodder, 160pp, 0 340 73678 X, £3.99 pbk

Participating in a children's holiday scheme, Fran and her family find themselves welcoming Del, a young Glaswegian teenager, to their island home for a week. Initially, Fran hopes that Del's arrival will bring some respite from the loneliness which, as a recent island resident, she still experiences. When, however, the visitor begins to indulge in forms of anti-social behaviour which Fran's family cannot easily condone, the sense of loneliness is merely exacerbated. But, as the week passes, some details of Del's upbringing are clarified, which causes Fran to question some of her assumptions and, eventually, to feel a real sadness when Del departs. A low-key, quietly

told story, Prince's novel nevertheless raises complex questions about social background, education and young womanhood. RD

Maddocks, or how to discover America

★★★

Peter Oram, Pont, 176pp, 1 85902 669 9, £4.95 pbk

This intriguing novel overlays two adventure stories. One concerns the Maddocks of the title, an adolescent in contemporary Wales who flees the humiliations of school and family life dominated by a despised stepfather and stepbrother in order to pursue an obsession with what lies beyond the westernmost edge of Europe. The second story is about Madog, a young adventurer in medieval Wales who takes to the sea in order to escape the treacheries of feudal strife and the disappointment at being spurned by his natural father, a brutal, free-seeding warlord. Madog is obsessed with the St Brannen myth, and in both stories, faith in the power of an immaculate Atlantic to salve troubled souls pulls the heroes towards dangers greater but more glorious than those they leave behind.

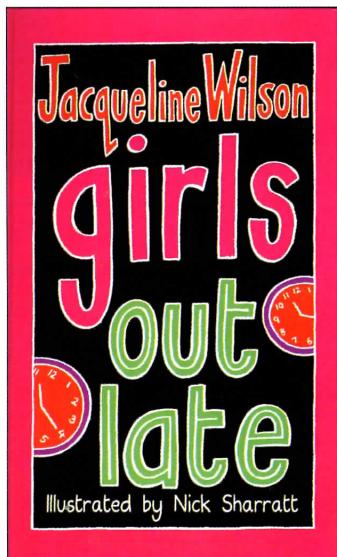
The author makes his prose work too hard. There are frequent shifts of tense and narrator and redundant similes abound. In spite of this and the somewhat improbable emollient resolution, the story is told with effective dash and vividness. It should fascinate every young person with dreams of doing a runner. GH

Cirque du Freak

★★

Darren Shan, Collins, 192pp, 0 00 675416 3, £3.99 pbk

The first title of 'The Saga of Darren Shan' (author and the 'ordinary schoolboy' main character), this novel has some grand horrors, most spectacularly in the Circus itself, and it includes vampires and a deadly and huge spider crawling over people – sometimes with fatal results. The book is dressed to thrill and the simple rate of horrifying scenes will fascinate and terrify many readers. This is comic book stuff, strong on horrors and appearance, but the writing is shallow and thin. AJ



Girls Out Late

★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 192pp, 0 385 40806 4, £10.99 hbk

The plot is simple: girl meets attractive boy, but developments are frustrated by parents and conflicting loyalties to girlfriends. In Wilson's hands, however, layers are peeled away to expose why people, adult and adolescent, act as they do. One of the strengths of her writing is her depiction of adult characters. They are shown as individuals with their own tensions and concerns which may at times lead to seemingly unreasonable behaviour from the perspective of younger protagonists. Ellie is annoyed when she is not allowed to go out at night to meet her new boyfriend, Russell, but events also show that staying out late can be hazardous, when she and her mates, Magda and Nadine, have a girls' night-out on the town. Immediacy and pace and a strong leavening of humour are hallmarks of Wilson's writing, making it accessible to a wide range of readers. This is a sequel to *Girls in Love* and *Girls under Pressure*. VC

Red Hugh

★★

Deborah Lissom, O'Brien, 224pp, 0 86278 604 5, £4.99 pbk
Set at the end of the 16th century, *Red Hugh* tells the story of the kidnap and imprisonment of Hugh O'Donnell by the English colonisers of Ireland. Red Hugh was almost 15 at the time of his capture in 1587 and spent four years imprisoned in Dublin Castle. Hostage taking was not uncommon in the

Ireland of the time, and Hugh's significance was as son and heir apparent to his father, The O'Donnell, an important chieftain whose lands lay in the north-west corner of Ireland. Twice during his imprisonment Hugh escaped. The first time he was recaptured and brought back to the Castle following a freezing January journey across the Wicklow mountains. A year later he again escaped, successfully this time, although he again suffered intense pain in his feet, adding to the hazards of the journey and bringing his captors close.

The 16th century is a confusing time in Irish history. There was intense rivalry between chieftains, who sometimes united with each other against the English, and who at other times united with the colonisers in an effort to seize the lands and weaken the power of neighbouring landowners. Lissom has carried out studious research into the period and the narrative is supported by a map, family trees of the O'Donnells and O'Neill's, a list of the main characters (there are quite a few), and a pronunciation guide to Irish words in the text. The story of Red Hugh O'Donnell is exciting and Lissom has obviously tried hard to animate him as a heroic and likeable figure. While *Red Hugh* would be useful in a study of the period, a form of Hiberno-English imposed on the speech of the characters makes the narrative considerably less accessible than it might be. It is unlikely that many young readers will read this book for their own interest or pleasure. VC

Shadow of the Minotaur

★★★

Alan Gibbons, Dolphin, 224pp, 1 85881 721 8, £4.99 pbk

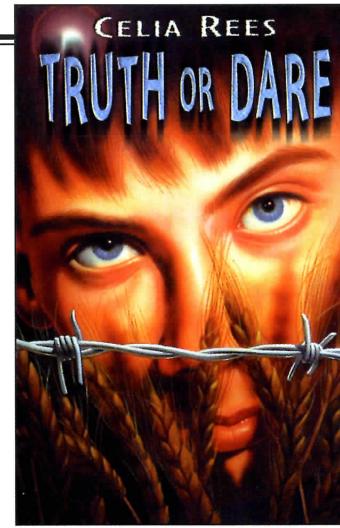
Phoenix is trialling a computer game which allows him to re-enact Greek myths with such realism that he is Theseus trying to outwit the Minotaur or Perseus battling with the Medusa with all the dangers of a first attempt and with no certainty of success. In between there is the plotting of the evil genius behind the software and a story of Phoenix's family. But it is in Phoenix's struggles to change himself from a bullied and weak victim into a virtual hero, capitalising on all his book knowledge of the myths, where this novel comes most vividly to life. Phoenix-like, the myths are suddenly here and now – there are Medusa's terrible eyes and here is the Minotaur's throbbing presence. Wonderful story telling. AJ

Truth or Dare

★★★★

Celia Rees, Macmillan, 240pp, 0 333 72952 8, £9.99 hbk

Josh settles for his uncle Patrick's old room in the attic when he stays at his grandmother's. While he begins to uncover the mystery of what happened to Patrick over forty years ago, his mother is simultaneously reliving the same childhood past as she sits at her computer. Between them, and then through the mirrored details of a computer game, the web of events of a 1950s summer are brought to life. Aliens have such a strong pull on the children's imaginations that everything points to an alien landing in fields nearby. The odd and different Patrick had drawn the actual craft with extraordinary precision. Rees weaves



all these strands together with great skill in what is for some time a story of aliens but which, with a sudden and shocking shift, becomes a story of an awful tragedy, Patrick's autism, his incarceration, and his rescue by someone who discovers the 'remarkable human being' within. This is a very good book, skilfully multi-layered, unputdownable and, finally, very moving and thought-provoking. AJ

The Art of Science

NON-FICTION

★★

Martin Jenkins, paper engineered by Jay Young, Walker, 12pp, 0 7445 6206 6, £19.99 hbk novelty

The review copy of this book arrived with a paper-clip clinging fortuitously to its cover – it has a magnet inside it. It also has a rhythmic paper sculpture, 3-D glasses, a pinhole camera and an 'electronic maze game' (battery not supplied). And that is just about it. The idea is to show that much of the artistic effect that artists achieve has a basis in scientific principles. Nice though it is to know about what principles lie behind a Bridget Riley or a Mondrian, surely the real achievement is that of complete and mysterious illusion. The successful *deus ex machina* is the one whose mechanics do not show. Fragile and not particularly inspiring, this is a most expensive collection of conceits. TP

Potty Politics

NON-FICTION

★★

Terry Deary, ill. Tony Reeve, Scholastic, 128pp, 0 439 01380 1, £3.99 pbk

This is a new edition of a title which first appeared in 1996. Deary's and Reeve's facetious take on (mainly) British politics for 10-13 year olds, has been updated to include Blair, New Labour and Hague. In a series called 'The Knowledge', modelled on the popular 'Horrible Histories', the book offers a jaundiced introduction to political life, dressed up, magazine style, with amusing trivia, quick quizzes and cartoons. There are plenty of bad jokes; it is often patronising – any information that cannot be made into a cartoon is likely to be labelled a 'boring fact'; and there is an air of clever cynicism: but, at the same time, the book is entertaining and informative. It is definitely a great deal more fun than many a po-faced production line text and, with all the clowning, Deary and Reeves make points about the value and working of our democracy. CB

What They Don't Tell You About Vikings

Bob Fowke, 0 340 68611 1

What They Don't Tell You About Ancient Greeks

Bob Fowke, ill. Andrew Mee, 0 340 71328 3

What They Don't Tell You About Ancient Egyptians

David Jay, 0 340 65614 X

What They Don't Tell You About Anglo-Saxons

Bob Fowke, 0 340 70921 9

What They Don't Tell You About Romans in Britain

Bob Fowke, 0 340 70922 7

What They Don't Tell You About World War II

Bob Fowke, 0 340 68612 X

NON-FICTION

★★★

Hodder, 128pp, £3.99 each pbk

A 'Horrible Histories' style collection covering six key historical periods. Straighter in tone than the genuine Horribles (inevitably the two series will be compared), these bright and breezy books are packed with quirky facts and information. They work equally well as books for dipping into at random or as accessible end-to-end reads.

My own personal favourite was *What They Don't Tell You About World War II*. The narrative style, which in other titles sometimes steered an uncertain path, was much surer and tighter here and the straighter tone suited the subject matter. I would have liked to see more about the Holocaust – a single page did not seem enough. As with the other titles, the quiz seemed somewhat tacked on at the end as an afterthought but it was good to see an index.

Overall, a series cheap enough to suit most pockets and cheerful enough to stimulate interest in their subject. And it is always good to learn something new and useful like this Ancient Egyptian warning against the perils of drink: 'Do not indulge in drinking beer lest you utter evil speech and do not know what you are saying.' Let that be a lesson to us all! AGA

What Every Girl Should Know: An A-Z of Health – from Allergies to Zits!

NON-FICTION

★★★

Dr David Bull, Element, 192pp, 1 902618 18 1, £4.99 pbk

This compact health dictionary deals with physical and emotional well-being for girls. It is an attractive package: bright cover, easy-read type face and a variety of formats reassure, inform and entertain. Bold type is used for key words and personal testimonies give a human face to such issues as bullying and teenage pregnancy.

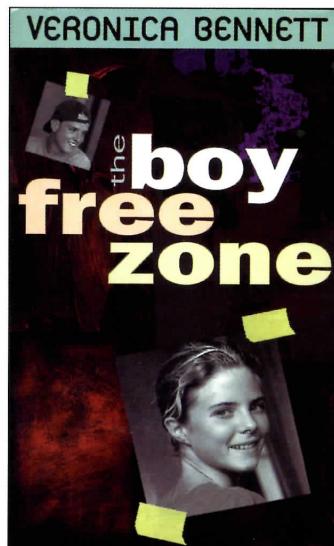
Entries are helpfully cross-referenced and the emphasis throughout is one of optimism, warmth and support. Addresses and telephone numbers of support agencies are included and there is a reading list for those wishing to delve deeper into problems. Information is punchily summarised and this is a useful book both for providing information and encouraging frank discussion. VR

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

Two Moons

★★★

Martha Brooks, Bloomsbury, 160pp, 0 7475 4841 2, £5.99 pbk
It is the summer of 1959 and Sidonie is coming up to her sixteenth birthday and to the first anniversary of her mother's death. She is still struggling to cope with her sense of loss as, in their different ways, are her father and older sister: all of them, she realises, are 'acting as if everything's perfectly fine when everything's quite hopeless'. Set in a lakeside community on the Canadian-American border, Brooks's novel moves touchingly between this present sadness and a happier past, with particular focus on how Sidonie's perception of both is affected by young Kieran's arrival from Toronto. It will be a great read for long summer days when school is out and the world seems tantalisingly full of romantic possibilities. RD



The Boy-free Zone

★★★

Veronica Bennett, Walker, 224pp, 0 7445 5911 1, £9.99 hbk
Bennett's second novel is as subtly developed as her first, *Monkey*, published in 1998. The cover suggests a light-hearted romantic romp but the story unfolds in a rich and unexpected way. The opening chapters will hook teenage readers with their emphasis on the plight of Annabel and Lucy, living in a small town devoid of suitable boyfriend material. The complexion of the story changes dramatically after the arrival from America of 17-year-old Sebastian, the estranged son of a local business man. His presence triggers a bitter rivalry between the two girls and a painful journey of self-discovery for Annabel. She must weather her mother's re-marriage, separation from her beloved father and the knowledge that Sebastian will soon become her stepbrother.

It is her talent for sculpture which saves her and re-unites Sebastian and his father. Her gift of a sculpture of Sebastian's head releases long pent-up feelings in his father and the joy of their emotional reconciliation is matched by Annabel's increased awareness of her own talent and the power which it brings. VR

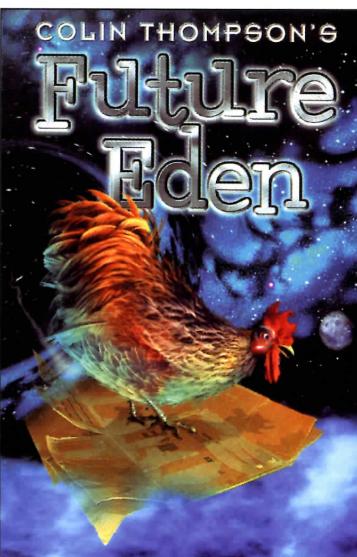
Future Eden

★★★

Colin Thompson, Simon & Schuster, 272pp, 0 689 82774 1, £9.99 pbk

The year is 2287 and Planet Earth is gradually dying. Jay, a young man in his early twenties, decides to leave his reclusive penthouse home to find out what is happening in the world. He is amazed to discover that his pet chicken, Ethel, is an alien from another galaxy. Ethel's mission is to lead humankind back from the brink of extinction in a quest to find the conditions of 'the perfect hour' and the new Eden.

An acclaimed picture book author/artist, Thompson demonstrates a talent for writing in his new novel. *Future Eden* is an hilarious



widowed after only two days, Marnie becomes the victim of suspicion and branded a witch. Raven, a deaf young man, is also an outsider, brutally treated and labelled as mad by the superstitious villagers. Together they invent a system of signing which gives Raven language for the first time and makes him 'whole'. Jordan's treatment of prejudice and ignorance is well done and the historical detail, such as Marnie's trial for witchcraft, is well researched and thoroughly engaging. This is a long book but worth the effort and the exciting ending rounds things up in a most satisfying way. LK

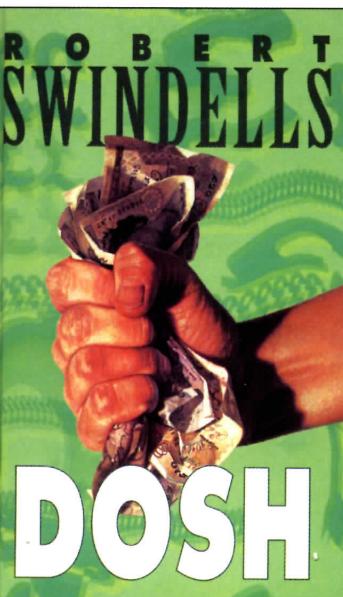
Dirty Planet: The Friends of the Earth Guide to Pollution and What You Can Do About It

NON-FICTION ★★★★

Caroline Clayton, Women's Press 'Livewire', 160pp, 0 7043 4964 7, £4.99 pbk

Air pollution triggers 1 in 50 heart attacks in London. Animal fat is a major source of dioxins. Drinking tap water is better for the environment than drinking bottled. In Denmark the sale of drink in cans is illegal.

This excellent and straightforwardly written paperback is exactly what its subtitle proclaims it to be. In a *tour de force* of practical research and frill-free reportage, Clayton pulls together a spectacular collection of pollution facts and shows us how we can help to reverse the globe-choking spiral that they represent. We can change things reactively, by being selective consumers, and pro-actively by opposing polluting practices and promoting cleaner greener ones, and this book is a practical handbook to doing this most effectively. For such a text to be convincing, it has to be presumed that the situation is not completely irredeemable and that our planet can save itself if we only let it (c.f. David Walker's *A Leaf in Time*, BfK 120). Clayton knows and demonstrates this, so the tone of the whole is upbeat, optimistic and above all practical. The blurb says 'Dirty Planet is the book you need to make the Earth a better place' - I'll raise a glass of tap water to that! TP



Dosh

★★★

Robert Swindells, Hamish Hamilton, 208pp, 0 241 13936 8, £10.99 hbk

Froggy Flitcroft extorts money from young people by organising their more aggressive contemporaries into Push, a gang feared for their violence. Tired of handing over their hard-earned money, the youngsters form Pull, a counter-force to free them from intimidation. Adult thugs are brought into Push and Pull's future looks bleak until the local headmaster takes up their cause. Encouraged – and angered that Flitcroft is now using young people to participate in adult sex parties, Pull mounts a daring plan and succeed in outwitting him. Their temporary solidarity is stimulated by the desire to earn money, not to address social injustice – Swindells' indictment of a materialistic society. His choice of hard-hitting issues is well served by short, action-filled chapters, vivid language and a dramatic cover. VR



The Raging Quiet

★★★

Sherryl Jordan, Simon & Schuster, 272pp, 0 689 82706 7, £7.99 pbk

Set in a mythical past at a time when Christianity and superstition lived side by side, this novel tells how Marnie is forced into marriage with the wealthy lord in order to save her family from ruin. Raped by her husband on their wedding night and

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

Unicorns! Unicorns! (see p20)

Jack's Big Race (see p20)

CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 21

Brian Alderson

A Salute to ... Clever Bill Nicholson



'Sir William, if you please.'

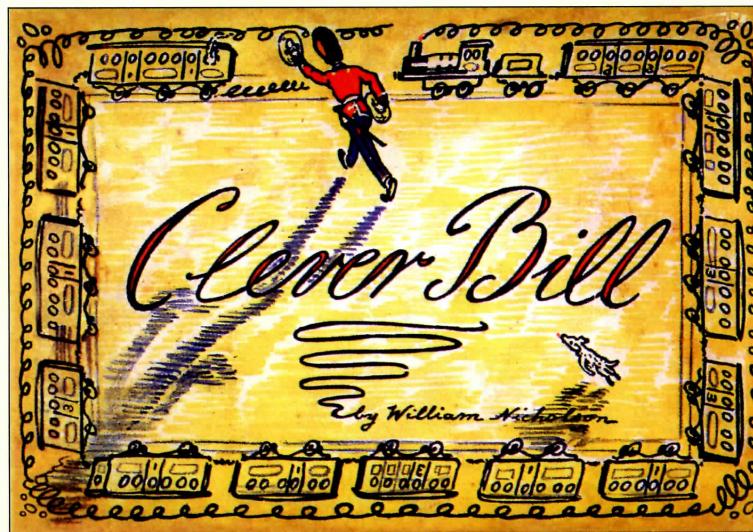
William Nicholson was born in Newark, Nottinghamshire on 5 February 1872, the son of an engineer. Passionate about painting he preferred experience to academics and received only intermittent tuition. His early successes were mostly in print-making, especially through collaboration with his brother-in-law, James Pryde – the two of them working together as the Beggarstaff Brothers, re-inventing the art of the poster. Nicholson never lost his interest in graphic art, but his knighthood in 1936 was gained for his eminence as a painter (particularly portraits and still-lifes) and for his public status, not least as a Trustee of the Tate Gallery. He had five children, his eldest son being Ben Nicholson and his eldest daughter Nancy, who became Robert Graves's first wife. He died on 16 May 1949.

A is for Alphabet.

Work on the posters provoked an interest in wood-cutting and in 1897 William Heinemann (whose 'windmill' device would later be cut by Nicholson) oversaw the final publication of *An Alphabet* (dated 1898) after well over a year's work. It was, at one level, a *livre d'artiste*, appearing in various fancy and expensive get-ups; but at another level it was a ground-breaking picture book, its big, dramatic wood-cut illustrations, with bold, heavy contours unlike anything seen before. These cuts were converted into lithographic plates for the 'popular edition', and since children were seen as an essential part of the audience the Executioner and the Topers were changed to the more acceptable Earl and Trumpeter. X for Xyographer may have been a self-portrait.

And Animals.

The *Alphabet* prompted some other fancy plate-series (for adults rather than children) but in 1899 Heinemann brought out *The Square Book of Animals*, dated 1900. Although lithographed, the pictures originated as woodcuts, most of which were done around the time of the *Alphabet* and they share with it images of a similar power – not much enhanced by some reach-me-down verses by Evelyn Waugh's papa.



And Abject Absurdity.

During the next couple of decades Nicholson was busy with other projects, but during the 1920s he returned to book illustration, first of all with a cover and seven full-page colour illustrations for *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. Later on, as Margery Williams Bianco, this lady was to produce one of the great toy-stories of the century, *Poor Cecco* (why is this not available, with its stunning drawings by Anthony Maitland – vastly superior to the original ones by boring old Rackham?) – but how she came to compose the fatuous twaddle of the rabbit book is difficult to comprehend. It would be nice to think that Nicholson's bracing graphics were the chief reason for its current fame, especially in the United States, but I fear it's more likely due to a taste for marshmallow. (And expensive marshmallow at that. A recent catalogue from an English dealer in second-hand books offers 'a near fine copy' at – wait for it – £15,000!)

And Absolutely Admirable Artistry.

In 1926 and 1929, however, Nicholson



published two unquestionably classic picture books: *Clever Bill* (Heinemann) and *The Pirate Twins* (Faber). He wrote and illustrated these for his youngest daughter and her niece – Nancy's daughter (the Penny and Jenny on the last page of *Clever Bill*) and the books could be seen as *durchkomponiert* as the musicians have it – 'through-composed', with his handwritten text nudging along his graphic ideas and his graphic ideas filling the generous narrative space opened up by his economical prose. (For instance: Mary's exchange of letters with her formidable aunt in *Clever Bill* with Nicholson's famous portrait of Queen Victoria, plus cairn, on the wall in the background; or the 'this / that / and the other' as he runs through Mary's menu for the pirate twins.)

Now, a grand Nicholson Trumpeter is called for to lead rejoicings that at last Egmont (né Heinemann) have brought *Clever Bill* back into print – albeit a little shorn in its page-sequencing, so that there is a reduction in its dramatic climax, but the colour printing is admirable. To follow, we must begin to assemble a deputation of the Great and the Good (led, surely, by our Laureate) to

appeal for the restoration of *The Pirate Twins*. It was hardly their fault, poor things, that they were constructed out of black socks, garnished with button-eyes and earrings – suffering ostracism in consequence (and probably someone will also object to their laddish treatment of Mary). But no less an authority than Maurice Sendak has held these two books up as models of picture-book art: 'seemingly so simple they run through your fingers', and we are all deprived if they don't do the running together. ■

Note: For a recent account of Nicholson *en famille* and the making of these books, see Elaine Moss's interview with 'Penny' in *Signal* 80 (May 1996), pp. 98–104.

The illustrations are taken from the recently re-issued *Clever Bill* published by Heinemann Young Books (0 434 80439 8, £10.99).

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