

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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*the children's
book magazine*

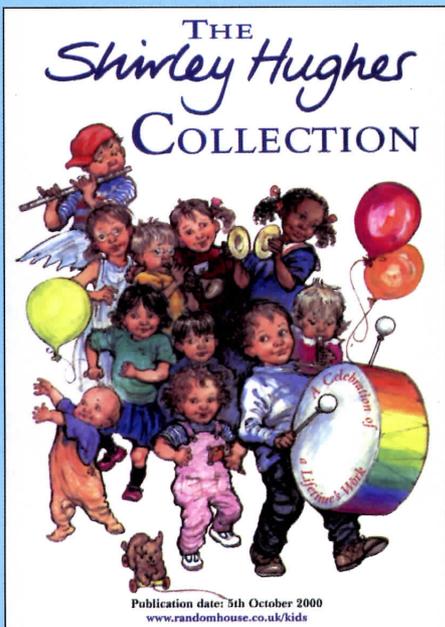
**Robert
Swindells**
**Greeks and
Romans**
Dads 'n' Lads



The Shirley Hughes Collection

The Bodley Head, 352pp, 0 370 32682 2, £19.99 hbk

Shirley Hughes is one of the best known and most popular creators of children's books of all time, with a special place in the hearts of children and adults around the world. **The Shirley Hughes Collection** brings together some of her very best work, available for the first time in one gift volume. It is a celebration of an amazing lifetime's achievements. Within the book you will find some of Shirley Hughes' most endearing and best loved characters; from Dogger and Alfie to Lucy and Tom and the irrepressible Naughty Little Sister. For older children there are longer classic stories, illustrated in rich detail by an artist whose work spans the minutiae of family life and the larger landscape. There are books which are classic favourites, no longer available in their original formats; there is freshly illustrated and never-before published work. **The Shirley Hughes Collection** is an essential title for every family, and each page shines with a warmth, vision and vitality which will make it an enduring classic.



Publication date: 5th October 2000
www.randomhouse.co.uk/kids

Published 5 October 2000

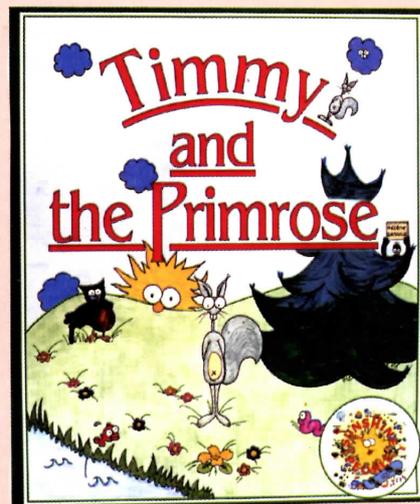
Timmy and the Primrose

Elisabeth Bataille, Sunshine People, 36pp, 1 903271 00 2, £7.99 pbk

Timmy the grey squirrel is sad because his mother has been ill and no longer smiles. His distress is seen by the wise old owl who advises him to go and seek out the primroses and find the one 'whose petals shine like the sun'.

He follows the owl's advice and soon finds a huge bed of brightly coloured flowers, among them the most beautiful primrose of them all. She tells him to pick a bunch of the flowers and take them home. He does so, but finds it hard at first to understand that the flowers will bloom again. However, when he sees his gift bringing a sunny smile to his mother's face, he resolves to visit the flowers again next year. The colourful drawings show the characters very sensitively and reveal the author's love of a natural environment, which will surely not be lost on the young reader.

Published September 2000

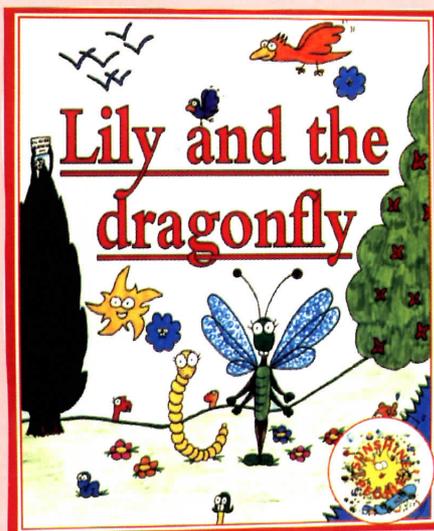


Lily and the dragonfly

Elisabeth Bataille, Sunshine People, 36pp, 1 903271 08 8, £7.99 pbk

This is a tale of friendship, seen through the eyes of Teeny the little dragonfly and Lily, the worm like creature she at first contemplates eating. She is hungry and lonely but when Lily begins to talk about her accidental fall from the tree, Teeny ignores her hunger and befriends Lily instead. They enjoy each other's company, exploring the banks of the stream where they live. Lily emerges eventually as a beautiful butterfly and the story ends with them setting off together to see the world. Young children can relate to this theme and will find the colourful drawings of the two creatures full of character. There is a simplicity of pictorial style which focuses the imagination of the reader. The large format and thick glossy pages make the book a pleasure to handle and the story's length is just right for the attention span before bedtime.

Published September 2000



Guide to Children's Books About BULLYING

An annotated bibliography of books for 0-15 year-olds

Edited by Rosemary Stones

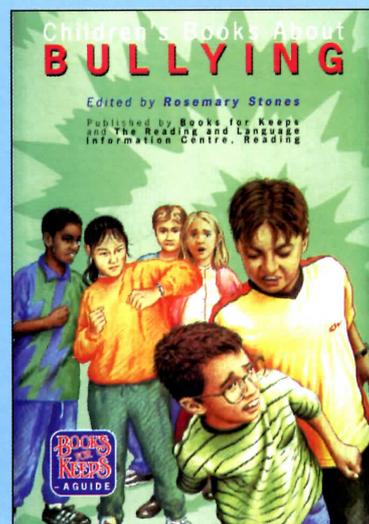
Co-published by Books for Keeps and The Reading and Language Information Centre, Reading

Price: UK - £5.00, Overseas - £7.00 (airmail)

A4, 32 pages, ISBN: 1 871566 04 5

A bibliographic reference tool designed for teachers, librarians, parents and other carers, booksellers - anyone concerned about the issue of bullying and wanting to introduce children and young people to books on that theme. At the heart of this new guide are many pages of annotated entries covering over a hundred books (non-fiction, fiction for different ages, picture books and poetry) which have bullying as a theme. This book section is accompanied by feature articles which provide an essential context for the bullying issue in relation to books.

Phone, fax, or email for more details or to order your copy.
Tel: 020 8852 4953; Fax: 020 8318 7580;
E-mail: booksforkeeps@btinternet.com



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EDITORIAL

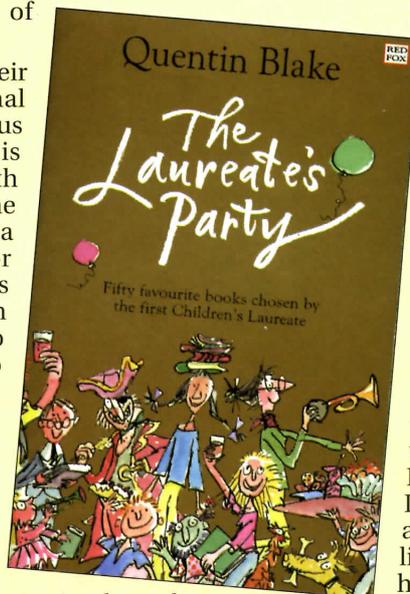


Rosemary Stones

Published to celebrate Quentin Blake's reign as the first Children's Laureate, *The Laureate's Party** is a collection of extracts from 50 of Blake's favourite children's books. From *Little Tim* to *Madeline*, from *Emil and the Detectives* to *Esio Trot*, from the *The Mermaid's Purse* to *Figgie Hobbin*, Quentin Blake conveys, via his choices, a tremendous sense of enjoyment of many different kinds of writing, and, of course, illustration.

His comments, with their friendly, conversational tone, belie his tremendous authority which is effortlessly shared with the reader. Of Josephine Poole and Angela Barrett's *Snow-white*, for example, he notes: 'It has the confidence, both in words and pictures, to behave as though no other version has ever existed.' Of Ted Hughes (who championed the idea of the Children's Laureateship before he died) he writes: 'What impressed me most, when I was younger, were those poems about animals and birds - where you could feel the harshness and energy of nature in the very way the words strained and crunched together.'

There was a good deal of scepticism from some children's publishers when



the idea of a Children's Laureate was first mooted. How could any one author or illustrator, primarily published and marketed by one publishing house, represent and promote children's books as a whole? This inspirational list of favourites for both children and adults is yet another example of the way that Quentin Blake has made the Laureateship command attention for children's literature as a whole in his own unique way.

* *The Laureate's Party* is published by Red Fox at £3.99 (0 09 940762 0).

Books for Keeps announces new subscription prices and increases its circulation

We have had to revise our subscription prices, as we do every year at this time, to take into account increased costs of production. They are as follows:

UK	£19.50 pa
Europe	£22.50 pa
Airmail worldwide	£25.50 pa

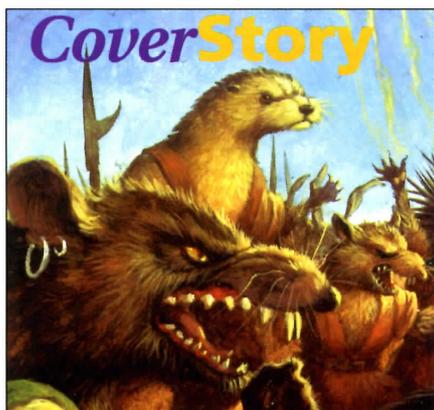
The special student rate which only applies to the UK remains unchanged at £12.00.

For the fourth consecutive year, **Books for Keeps** has put on another circulation increase.

Books for Keeps web site

Some of you have been asking for an update on the **Books for Keeps** web site mentioned in the January 2000 issue. It's coming and should be online some time this Autumn.

Initially it will be a **BfK** presence on the world wide web where you will be able to subscribe, renew, order our guides, see links to other useful sites etc. However it is our intention to add much of our archives onto it including author interviews (Authorgraphs), features, reviews and much else besides during the course of next year. We'll keep you posted...



This issue's cover illustration by Fangorn is taken from Brian Jacques' *Lord Brocktree* (Hutchinson, 0 09 176877 2, £12.99), the thirteenth title in the internationally best-selling Redwall series. Salamandastron, the ancestral home of the Badger Lords, is under threat from Ungatt Trunn, an enemy whose power would seem to be absolute and whose evil knows no bounds. The only hope for survival is the badger Lord Brocktree who is drawn to the fortress by an undeniable sense of destiny. Brian Jacques' masterful storytelling as always spins a web of high adventure that will enthral the reader from the first page to the last. Thanks to Hutchinson Children's Books for their help in producing this September cover.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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Imaginative Time Travel:

THE GREEKS AND ROMANS

While the Olympic Games help to ensure that children retain an interest in ancient Greece, the epic film **Gladiator** with Russell Crowe as the enslaved general with right on his side, has now kindled interest in ancient Rome. With its astonishing state-of-the-art reconstructions of a battle field in Gaul, and its panoramic views of ancient Rome and the Coliseum, this film has certainly inspired children's historical imagination. **Tony Spawforth** assesses recent children's books about ancient Greece and Rome that will build on this enthusiasm.

The marvellous thing about the ancient world is that it has a fairy-tale quality – hence instant kid-appeal. This is true above all of ancient Greece, with its marvellous tall stories about the Greek gods, goddesses and heroes. Publishers have now twigged to this, and currently there is a bumper crop of children's books full of compelling yarns about the derring-do of the strongman Heracles, the cloud-skimming flying horse, Pegasus, Pandora with her fatal nosiness, and scores of others.



The serpent guarding the Golden Fleece, from **Greek Myths for Young Children**.

The best books retell the ancient stories for a young person's ear and eye and are ideal to be read aloud. For juniors there is Heather Amery's retelling of **Greek Myths for Young Children**, with big print, brightly-coloured paper and illustrations, including some wonderful ones of monsters like the serpent guarding the Golden Fleece. Like all the best myths these tales point a moral. Thanks to Pandora's opening the forbidden box, we are told, 'People would now suffer all kinds of terrible things, but because they had hope, they would never despair.' So there.

Two nicely-produced books from Orchard, **Greek Gods and Goddesses** and **Greek Myths**, target a somewhat older age-group,



Hermes and Argus from **Greek Gods and Goddesses** and, below, the Minotaur from **Greek Myths and Legends**.



ready for white paper and smaller type. The stories include favourites like Paris and Helen and 'big baby' (a.k.a. the god Hermes), and writer Geraldine McCaughrean, a winner of the Whitbread Children's Award, tells them with an engagingly light touch, and plenty of chatty dialogue ('You don't care one fig or grape for me,' says Semele to Zeus). Emma Chichester Clark's illustrations are bright and cheerful, and have a classical-cum-Mediterranean feel. **Greek Myths**, by the same team, focuses on some lesser characters in the pantheon. Many of them, as is the way of Greek myth, are in for a rough ride, such as Icarus. Here he is given proudly multi-coloured wax wings which will melt as

he soars too near the sun. In Anthony Masters' **Greek Myths and Legends** the illustrations by Andrew Skilleter have a darker, more Tolkienesque feel, with the monsters (plenty of them) altogether more scary.

McCaughrean and Chichester Clark pair up again on a book of **Roman Myths**. The subject is a surprise on the face of it, as the Romans were generally too busy conquering the world to become ace storytellers like the more 'civilised' Greeks. But McCaughrean captivatingly retells the best of the few Roman legends there are – like that of Romulus and Remus, the abandoned children taken into care by a she-wolf, who grow up to found Rome. And like the Romans, she is not averse to borrowing myths from the Greeks. Here, called 'Kissed by the moon', is the charming tale of the lovestruck moon-goddess who puts the handsome but mortal Endymion into an eternal sleep because she cannot bear the thought of him ageing.



Athena on a silver coin from **Gods and Goddesses**.

For older children (and parents) spurred on to find out the basic facts about this magical galaxy, John Malam's **Gods and Goddesses** provides a nicely-illustrated introduction, enlivened by quotes from ancient Greek writers, such as Homer's description of cattle being sacrificed – not for the squeamish or the vegetarian. This book is an example of the other Big Trend in children's writing on Greece and Rome, towards the didactic. As well as helping out with homework and



'Kissed by the Moon' from *Roman Myths* and, below, women fetching and carrying water from a public well, from *Women in Ancient Greece*.



school projects, this kind of non-fiction book feeds the curiosity which we all have, and children in spades, about What was it like then? and How did they live? It is the type of book which you hope a child might demand

after enjoying a visit to a museum where lots of Greek pots are displayed or which would serve for a classroom project. Scenes from such pots feature tellingly in

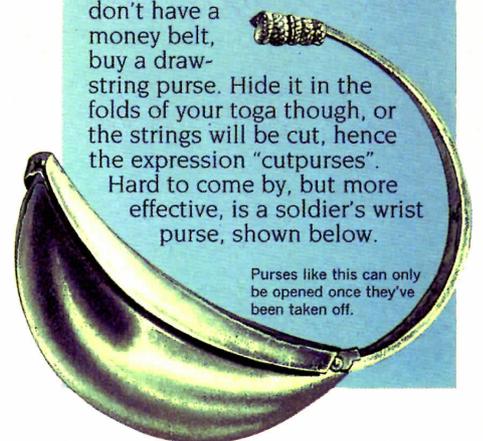
Fiona Macdonald's superbly illustrated *Women in Ancient Greece*. Mothers intent on a bit of feminist consciousness-raising may want to buy this, as it helicopters at just the right height over the main differences, usually much for the worse, between ancient and modern women's lives. The tone is rather grown-up. 'Sometimes she slept with him, but sex was not always part of the arrangement', we read of hetairai, the female entertainers of ancient Greece.

If this all seems a bit much, try Stewart Ross's *Daily Life*. The production is superb, with the high-quality photographs and quotes from ancient writings which are the hallmark of Wayland's 'Ancient Greece' series. Sport is another great way of relating to the ancient Greeks – they invented it, after all, or at least athletics, as the same author's *The Original Olympics* reveals. Here kids can find out how the ancient Greeks did the long jump (weirdly, they used stone weights to help them go further), and, no less oddly to most of us, that they played sport in the buff. Reading this book you could almost imagine yourself in ancient Olympia, of which there are numerous sun-drenched photographs.

TOP TIPS FOR TOURISTS
No. 7: Keep a pocket watch



Like all cities, Rome is full of thieves or "cutpurses". If you don't have a money belt, buy a draw-string purse. Hide it in the folds of your toga though, or the strings will be cut, hence the expression "cutpurses". Hard to come by, but more effective, is a soldier's wrist purse, shown below.

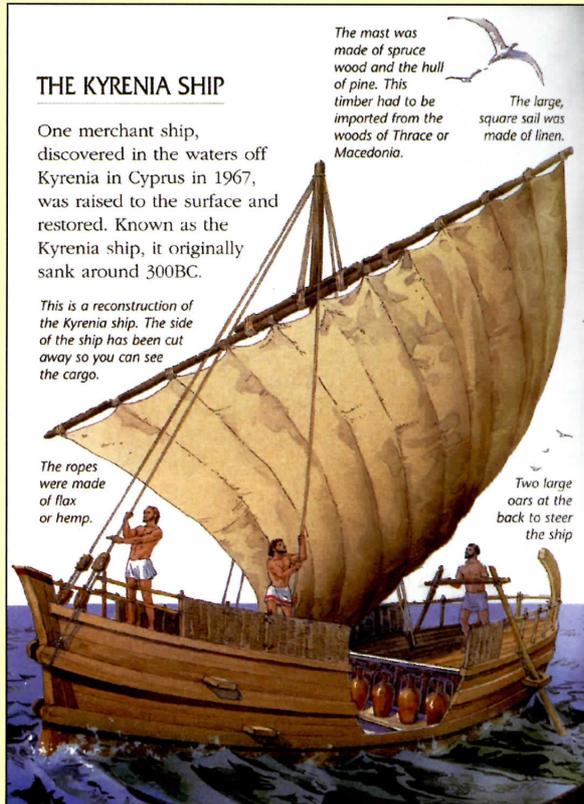


Purses like this can only be opened once they've been taken off.

From *A Visitor's Guide to Ancient Rome*.

Usborne publishers have had the clever idea of formatting a children's book on ancient Rome as if a guide for an ancient visitor circa AD125, replete with map (*A Visitor's Guide to Ancient Rome*). Under 'Useful Information', for example, you learn about numbers in Latin. But can a toga 'trodden in a mixture of sodium-carbonate and a type of clay known as "fuller's earth"' really be said to have undergone 'specialist dry-cleaning'? This is a fun book, with a solidly researched sub-structure – and of course splendid to have if you really *are* on holiday in Italy with the kids.

Another means of imaginative time-travel is offered by 'Look Inside', a series which takes you through ancient keyholes, Richard



THE KYRENIA SHIP

One merchant ship, discovered in the waters off Kyrenia in Cyprus in 1967, was raised to the surface and restored. Known as the Kyrenia ship, it originally sank around 300BC.

This is a reconstruction of the Kyrenia ship. The side of the ship has been cut away so you can see the cargo.

The ropes were made of flax or hemp.

The mast was made of spruce wood and the hull of pine. This timber had to be imported from the woods of Thrace or Macedonia.

The large, square sail was made of linen.

Two large oars at the back to steer the ship

From The Usborne Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece.

Dargie into **A Roman Villa** and Peter Chrisp into **A Greek Theatre**. Unlike David Frost's TV show, however, the intent is to do more than entertain: both books give you solid information about their subjects, not least with the school curriculum in view. The picture-researchers have done their work superbly in both, as has illustrator Adam Hook, whose picture of an ancient actor playing Oedipus after tearing out his eyes does not leave the mind in a hurry.

For kids with boundless appetites for the ancient world, or for ones who just like the pictures, the children's market now also produces some rather good encyclopedias. **The Usborne Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece** is a marvellously illustrated compendium, arranged chronologically, with a thick central section on ancient daily life, and a factfinder at the end. A good buy, in spite of some slips in the captions (e.g. p96 illustrates a tombstone not an altar). The same publishers have also brought out **Ancient World**, again with terrific pictures and reconstructions, offering a whistle-stop tour of all the world's ancient civilisations.

Finally, why are the funny old ancients still relevant today? 'Well, they gave us **Gladiator**' is one answer. Absolutely right. But Anita Ganeri's excellent **Legacies from Ancient Greece** suggests other ways of looking at the question too, as in the lively sections called 'Having a Say', 'Going for Gold', and 'Curtain Up'. There is no over-egging the meringue – we are reminded that women had no political rights in Athenian 'democracy', let alone slaves – but the book leaves you even so with some mind-tickling clues, from the House of Commons to Olympic champion Michael Johnson and our horseshoe-shaped theatres. And if all this sounds a bit earnest, there is always Archimedes in his bath to raise a laugh. ■

Tony Spawforth is professor of ancient history at Newcastle upon Tyne University. He is co-editor of the third edition of the **Oxford Classical Dictionary** (1996), and a presenter of documentaries on Alexander the Great and other archaeological subjects for BBC2.

Books discussed

- Greek Myths for Young Children**, Heather Amery, ill. Linda Edwards, Usborne, 1999, 0 7460 3725 2, £12.99 hbk
- Greek Gods and Goddesses**, Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Orchard, 1997, 1 86039 109 5, £12.99 hbk
- Greek Myths**, Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Orchard, 1992, 1 85213 373 2, £12.99 hbk
- Greek Myths and Legends**, Anthony Masters, ill. Andrew Skilleter, Macdonald Young Books, 1999, 0 7500 2629 4, £9.99 hbk, 0 7500 2631 6, £4.99 pbk (also available: **Roman Myths and Legends**, 0 7500 2628 6, £9.99 hbk)
- Roman Myths**, Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Orchard, 1999, 1 86039 753 0, £12.99 hbk
- Gods and Goddesses**, John Malam, Wayland 'Ancient Greece', 1999, 0 7502 2490 8, £10.99 hbk
- Women in Ancient Greece**, Fiona Macdonald, Belitha 'The Other Half of History', 1999, 1 84138 013 X, £10.99 hbk (also available: **Women in Ancient Rome**, 1 84138 110 1, £10.99 hbk)
- Daily Life**, Stewart Ross, Wayland 'Ancient Greece', 1999, 0 7502 2489 4, £10.99 hbk
- The Original Olympics**, Stewart Ross, Wayland 'Ancient Greece', 1996, 0 7502 2556 4, £5.99 pbk
- A Visitor's Guide to Ancient Rome**, Lesley Sims, ill. Christyan Fox, Ian Jackson and John Woodcock, Usborne 'Timetours', 1999, 0 7460 3064 9, £6.99 pbk
- A Roman Villa**, Richard Dargie, ill. Adam Hook, Wayland 'Look Inside', 2000, 0 7502 2590 4, £9.99 hbk
- A Greek Theatre**, Peter Chrisp, ill. Adam Hook, Wayland 'Look Inside', 2000, 0 7502 2589 0, £9.99 hbk
- The Usborne Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece**, Jane Chisholm, Lisa Miles and Struan Reid, various illustrators, Usborne, 1999, 0 7460 3403 2, £14.99 hbk
- Ancient World**, Fiona Chandler, various illustrators, Usborne 'World History', 1999, 0 7460 2760 5, £12.99 hbk
- Legacies from Ancient Greece**, Anita Ganeri, Belitha Press, 1999, 1 84138 027 X, £9.99 hbk (also available: **Legacies from Ancient Rome**, 1 84138 065 2, £9.99 hbk)

Ancient Greece and Rome: National Curriculum* Links explained by Margaret Mallett

Myths of Ancient Rome and Greece and information texts on these ancient European civilisations are useful resources for both history and English, particularly in the later primary years.

The requirements of the new history orders at key stage 2 (7-11 year olds) include three British history studies, (one example of which is the *Effects of Roman Settlement in Britain*). Useful here would be **A Roman Villa**. Children must also be taught the required 'knowledge, skills and understanding' through *A European history study*; this considers the way of life, beliefs and achievements of the people living in Ancient Greece and the influence of their civilisation on how we live today. Books about Greek myths and legends detailed by Tony Spawforth provide insight into beliefs and values. The information texts mentioned – for example **Daily Life** and **The Original Olympics** – will provide relevant material and support children's writing. Exciting writing tasks might include using the information to create letters, diary entries, recipes and play scripts.

The fiction and non-fiction texts considered are also helpful in meeting the requirements of the new English orders. Myths and legends are listed as important genres for 7-11 year olds to control as readers and writers, as well as being highly enjoyable. Using information and reference texts helps children to learn scanning and skimming skills and how to consider an argument critically – all explicit requirements for English.

Links with The National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching

In addition to following the National Curriculum, teachers in England also work within *The Framework for Teaching* (a reference point for planning and managing the literacy programme). This gives a detailed term by term programme, carried out during a daily literacy hour, to use alongside the National Curriculum. Myths and legends are referred to in year 3, term 2 (7-8 year olds) and year 5, term 2 (9-10 year olds). **Greek Myths for Young Children** would be a splendid starting point for the under eights while older primary children will appreciate the books on Greek and Roman legends. The tales can be a starting point for oral retelling, for creating a story plan for their own myths and for discussion about language and plot features. When it comes to information books in the literacy hour, *The Framework* recommends that texts from across the curriculum be used for class based and group work. Books and other resources can provide welcome links between work in history and the literacy hour. The titles mentioned here would help children understand how information books are structured. **Women in Ancient Greece** and **Legacies from Ancient Greece** would make good discussion texts for older primary children who are expected to tackle argument and persuasive kinds of reading and writing (see for example term 3, year 5 of *The Framework*). The recommended texts are helpful in meeting statutory requirements but, above all, we want young readers and listeners to enjoy the language and illustrations in the books and to delight in the stories and information in the classroom and outside it.

*The National Curriculum: Handbook for Primary Teachers in England (statutory after September 2000).

The following related software may also be of interest:

Ancient Romans (p.c. and Acorn) and **Ancient Greeks** (Acorn) Zig-zag series Longman Logotron. 8-11 years. Tel. 01223 425558.

History of the World, Version 2, Dorling Kindersley. 9-11 years. Tel. 0870 840 4400 or 020 7836 5411.

Become a history explorer, Dorling Kindersley. 5-9 years. Tel 0870 840 4400.

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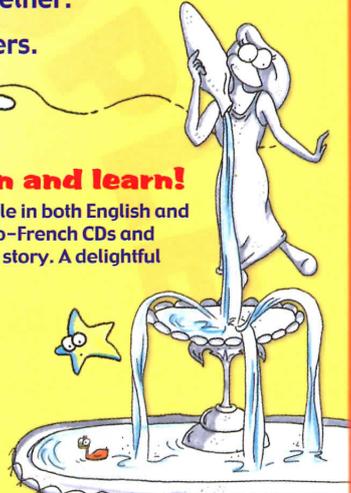
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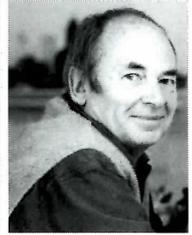
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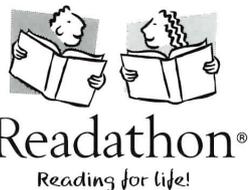
Quentin Blake – Children's Laureate, Readathon's new Honorary Patron

"Please join Readathon. Not only will your pupils be encouraged to read good books, they will help sick children at the same time."

Roald Dahl, Readathon Chairman 1988 – 1990



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2

It's a great addition to a School Book Event!

This year Children's Book Week runs from October 2nd 2000. Many schools use it as an opportunity to focus on books, authors and reading. Some schools will hold Book Weeks at other times of the year. Readathon can be held at any time to fit in with your event, and is an ideal ingredient in any school literacy initiatives.

3

Dads 'n' Lads

Reading Together

How can we encourage boys to read more? **Anne Marley** of Hampshire County Library discusses a project that has got fathers and sons reading together and which provided valuable information about their tastes and preferences.

Towards the end of 1998, Hampshire County Library wanted to produce a booklist suitable for both fathers and sons, to encourage boys to read and enable fathers to participate in an activity with their sons. It was due to be produced during the National Year of Reading. Once we had assembled a list of titles that we – a predominantly female group – had chosen, we realised that to publish it with no consultation with the potential readership was absurd.

So the original idea for the Dads 'n' Lads group stemmed from a need to have a Focus Group that would recommend a number of books from this pre-selected list for reading by Dads and their teenage sons.

As the School Library Service and the public library service are very closely linked in Hampshire with a joint service, it was very easy to consult SLS colleagues to see which schools would be interested in participating. We had no shortage of schools who wanted to take part as the English teachers and school librarians attend regular Fiction Study Groups. We asked four schools to join in. Carefully worded letters were sent home with Year 8 or 9 boys, explaining what we were aiming to do which was to set up a group of fathers and sons to discuss books and come up with a booklist from their recommendations. The teachers had hoped for a good response, knowing their students well, but in the event, only one school was able to drum up four fathers and sons, which we considered enough to start a group.

The reasons for lack of interest were many and varied – the boys already did lots of after school things, the boys were not interested, lack of street cred if their mates found out, the fathers were not interested or were too busy, or there was no father in the home.

So we started with our one school, Test Valley, a secondary school in Stockbridge, a small town north west of Winchester. The Head teacher, Wendy Morrish, was very interested in the project, as were the English teacher, Mark Weeks, and the school librarian, Ruth Crabb, and it is largely due to their enthusiasm and persistence that the group was set up.

The first meeting

Our first meeting was one cold evening in February 1999, to which four somewhat wary

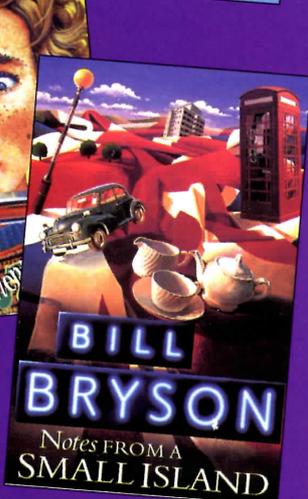
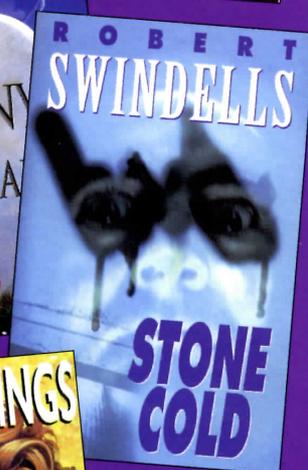
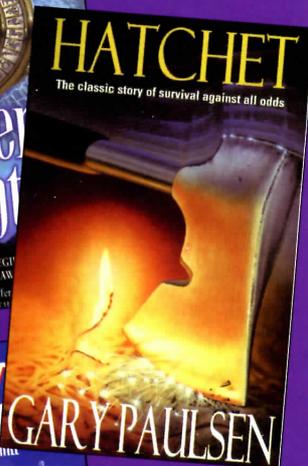
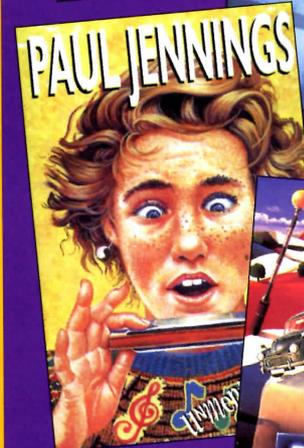
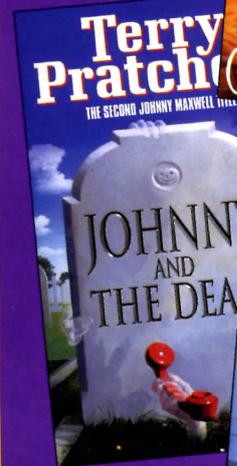
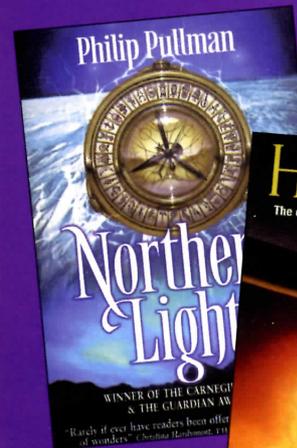
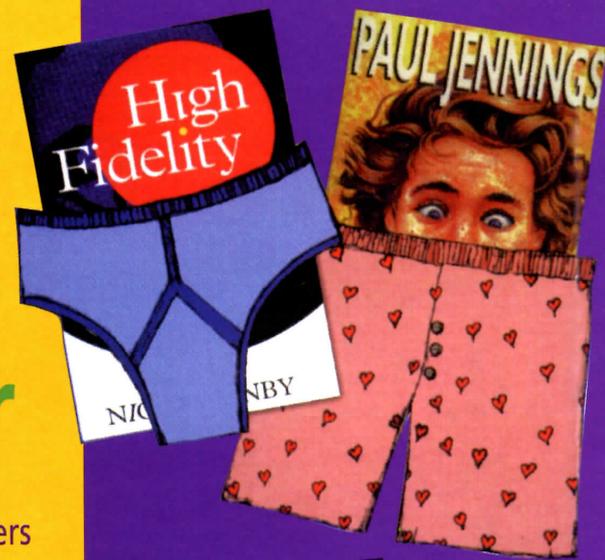
fathers and sons came along. The fathers came for various reasons, but the most obvious one was to support their sons and encourage them in their reading. The sons' reasons were either that their dads had told them to or that they enjoyed reading. Ruth and Mark had targeted their audience quite carefully, wanting to get a mix of enthusiastic readers and boys for whom reading was a bit of a trial, but who were nevertheless keen to read. They obviously approached far more than the four who came along and I think we were very lucky with the ones who came, because we had a wonderful cross-section of readers.

The School Library Service and the public library provided the books from the tentative booklists we had produced and the Schools Librarian, Bridget Rowe, and myself added other titles that we knew from experience went down well with teenagers.

We initially talked to the group, saying what we wanted to achieve and then basically gave a book talk about the titles that were there. We automatically assumed they read by genre, so the books were put on tables by the genres we thought we would separate the list into – horror, biography, fantasy, sci-fi, war, thrillers, sport, travel and computers – all things we assumed men and boys were interested in. We then asked them what books they enjoyed and if there were any authors they wanted us to bring along.

They then selected the books, we made a date for the next meeting eight weeks later and off they went, leaving us wondering if they would be back.

Well, they have been coming back ever since, each time with more confidence and enthusiasm, talking to the group about the books they have read and recommending them to each other. Some books were read solely by fathers, some solely by sons and some by both. Bill Bryson is the most popular author with the group, and **Adrian Mole: the Wilderness Years** by Sue Townsend is the most popular individual title. The group has now grown, with their consent – one or two have dropped out, others have joined, two actually from another school, Harrow Way, in nearby Andover – and so we are up to between eight and ten pairs of fathers and sons.



What has the library service gained from this experience?

Firstly, we have a great booklist, compiled solely from the recommendations of the target audience, which has just been published. We also asked Anthony Browne, award-winning author and illustrator, and his teenage son to contribute their recommendations too.

This, however, is not the most important thing to come out of the group.

The most important was a valuable lesson in co-operation and partnership. By listening to and talking with these men and boys, we have learned a huge amount about what they want from books and reading and how they select books.

Though this is a small group and therefore not necessarily representative of men as a whole

Dads 'n' Lads

Unmentionable!, Paul Jennings, Puffin

Dad: *'This was both funny and spooky – totally unreal, but that was part of the attraction. We both want to read more by him. It's a great book to read in the loo!'*

Lad: *'Very enjoyable, weird and funny short stories – easy to dip in and out of.'*

Hatchet, Gary Paulsen, Macmillan

Dad and Lad: *'Really imaginative and gripping story of a young teenage boy who is left alone in the Canadian wilderness. The light aircraft he is in crashes by a remote lake when the pilot has a heart attack mid-flight and dies. Great survival story – you really feel the horrors the boy feels when he's literally fighting the elements to stay alive.'*

Northern Lights, Philip Pullman, Scholastic

Dad: *'Absolutely gripping fantasy set in a parallel world, where people have daemons (their alter ego/soul) in the form of an animal. An action packed adventure, where Lyra goes to the very edge of the world to try to save her friends from death and worse – the loss of their daemons. The sequel **Subtle Knife** really developed things and brought the story together – I'm looking forward to reading the final book of the trilogy.'*

Lad: *'A bit slow to get into and you really have to suspend belief, but once I'd got into it, I enjoyed it and really identified with Lyra.'*

Johnny and the Dead, Terry Pratchett, Corgi

Dad and Lad: *'Funny and readable. We both loved the ghosts in the graveyard and the fact that only Johnny can see them – his mates all think he's mad!'*

Stone Cold, Robert Swindells, Puffin

Lad: *'Brilliant – I couldn't put it down. Really gripping. I liked the way each of the different characters told their stories, which built up to a really dramatic climax. I've recommended it to all my mates!'*

Notes from a Small Island, Bill Bryson, Corgi

Dad: *'Very enjoyable – pithy comments on aspects of British life, which were both perceptive and very funny.'*

Lad: *'Not too heavy and quite funny – I like the way he makes his way round the country and the comments he makes – almost as good as being there!'*

Quotes taken from Hampshire County Council's Library Service Dads 'n' Lads project leaflet.

(what can be?) they were very clear on several points:

- they don't select by genre – that was made obvious by the second meeting
- they want to have the opportunity to read widely
- they do like to talk about books and listen to recommendations and extracts
- the boys don't necessarily exist on a diet of horror and fantasy
- they want to try new authors
- they like being able to recommend books to other people

We also have noticed a great change in the group dynamics:

- the boys are more confident
- they are talking more in the group, even in front of their and the others' fathers about the books they like
- they are more articulate and enthusiastic in what they say
- the fathers join in – sometimes it's difficult to stop them!
- reading tastes have developed beyond their and our expectations e.g. one father who only thought he liked travel books has now developed a penchant for the Patricia Cornwell novels amongst others
- the fathers have gained in confidence too and are reading more widely and with evidently great enjoyment.

What has been the impact at school?

Mark Weeks – English Teacher

As an English teacher, I have been very pleased to be involved with the Dads 'n' Lads scheme. It is proving of great value in raising the profile of reading among boys and the positive effect upon participating pupils within the English classroom has been clear. By targeting a mixture of confident, wavering and reluctant readers we have managed to create a successful blend, to such an extent that word has spread and we now find ourselves being approached by other parents and pupils keen to be involved.

Ruth Crabb – Learning Resources Manager

The target age for this group was 13 years (Year 8). I was aware that, in this school, this was the age when boys would begin to stop reading/borrowing books. Watching and listening to the group has made me more aware of the types of books this age group are interested in, therefore enabling me to add more appealing books, both teen and adult, to the library stock. I have also altered the way the books were displayed by segregating the 14 to 19 selection. There has been a noticeable increase in pupil borrowing for this age group following the changes that I made. Also group discussions about books read or on display are actively encouraged within the Years 7 to 9 library time. Peer promotion of books, as demonstrated by the Dads 'n' Lads group, has also helped to increase pupils' reading and confidence.

A Father's and Son's perspective – Andrew and Anthony Dines

Father:

I have always been a voracious reader and bedtime stories and reading have been part of family life so far. My son has been a keen

reader, but has found the transition in the last two years from 'younger books' to teenage and adult books to be quite hard. There are so many demands on teenagers these days and factors affecting their opportunities to read:

- length and size of books can be daunting
- the higher level of application and concentration needed to read at a higher level
- distractions of TV/PCs/music, etc which require less concentration
- the fatigue factor in the growth pattern at this age – growing nearly a foot in one year!
- demands of schooling itself

'Dads 'n' Lads' has provided a focal point for reviewing books of many different varieties that would not necessarily have been considered for reading by either of us.

However, more interestingly, it has provided a forum for the discussion of books in which initially Dads, but increasingly Lads are prepared to discuss their reading experiences. This is something that my son has found both very interesting and rewarding.

If boys are to read, then the books must be appealing, interesting, satisfying and help develop the maturity of the reader. Both of us have found the experience of these meetings to be richly rewarding and hope that it can be continued and also widened.

Son:

When I first came to 'Dads 'n' Lads' in February last year, I didn't think I would enjoy it very much and I thought there would be a lot more people there than there actually were.

But I was wrong! There weren't too many people and the evening was very enjoyable. We walked out with a few books to read before the next meeting, most of which I really liked.

We arrived at the next meeting which was even better than the last one! After assembling, we discussed the books that we had read and I found that very interesting because it gave me some ideas for what to read before the next meeting.

I haven't enjoyed all the books I've read in the group, but I have read and enjoyed quite a lot of books that I wouldn't have picked up otherwise. I hope the group keeps going well into the Millennium!

Conclusion

This has been a very worthwhile project, which we are going to introduce into other schools, that now feel able to support it. It shows conclusively that men and boys can and do read for pleasure and are happy to develop their reading and discuss books with others. The 'Dads 'n' Lads' leaflet was published in March and is being used as a promotional tool in Hampshire libraries, backed up with book stock in public and school libraries. The greatest achievement has been in seeing how the individual fathers' and sons' pleasure in reading has been increased as a result of belonging to a group like this and that fathers and sons have shared in an activity that both have enjoyed together. ■

Anne Marley is Principal Librarian, Children's and Schools Library Services, Hampshire.

Authorgraph No.124

Robert Swindells
interviewed by David Bennett

Robert Swindells hates fantasy stories and excludes them from his favourite reading, yet he goes through the wardrobe into 'Narnia' every morning to write his regular two pages or so a day!

The Wardrobe, an MDF affair, has its identical twin at the other end of the short wall in the Swindells' spare bedroom. Open its door and a shaft-like space is revealed with a precipitous ladder leading to 'Narnia' under the eaves, where Bob writes his award-winning stories for younger and older readers. Here the set-up is almost obsessively orderly: the computer, shelves of reference books arranged in very tidy rows and pictures of his family ship-shape on the beams. Pride of place on the wall is his T-shirt from his 'brilliant time' with the anti Poll tax unions.

Now aged 61, Bob didn't begin writing until he was in his final year of teacher training, which he began at the age of 29 after a succession of jobs, including a spell in the RAF. He asked to write a children's novel for his dissertation and was given a reluctant go-ahead. Looking around for an idea his researches found a reference to some archaeological work at a dried-up lake near Scarborough. For ten years an ancient people had visited the lake at winter time and set up camp there on a raft of birch boughs. On the eleventh year they did not return. Why? He added to this his knowledge gained from his great-grandfather, an amateur palaeontologist, and the plot for *A Candle in the Dark* was born. The impressed external examiner suggested he try to get his work published, with a warning that it would be difficult. The first publisher approached snapped it up and it came out in 1974!

Three more historically based books followed; then some space-fiction stories and the big breakthrough was made with the award winner, *Brother in the Land*. Robert Swindells had found a way to voice his strongly held political convictions through his writing, which has been his trademark ever since.

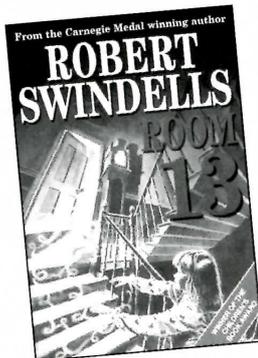
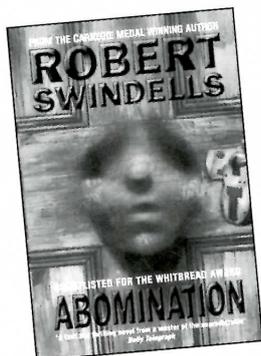
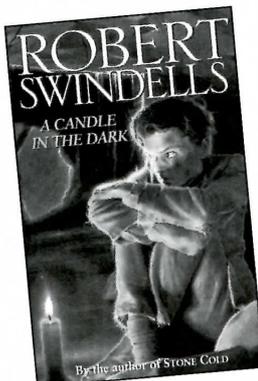
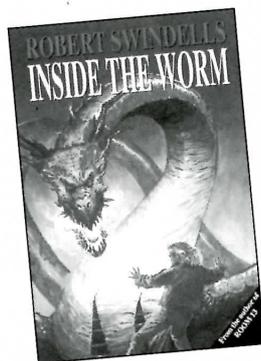
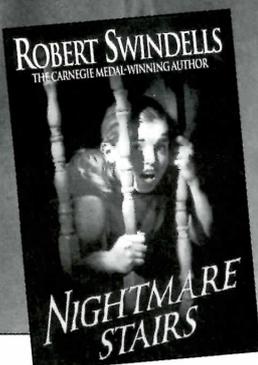
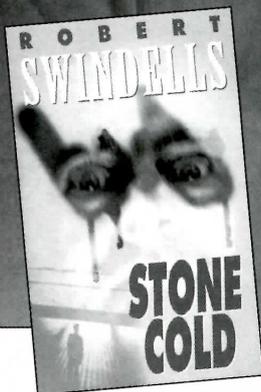
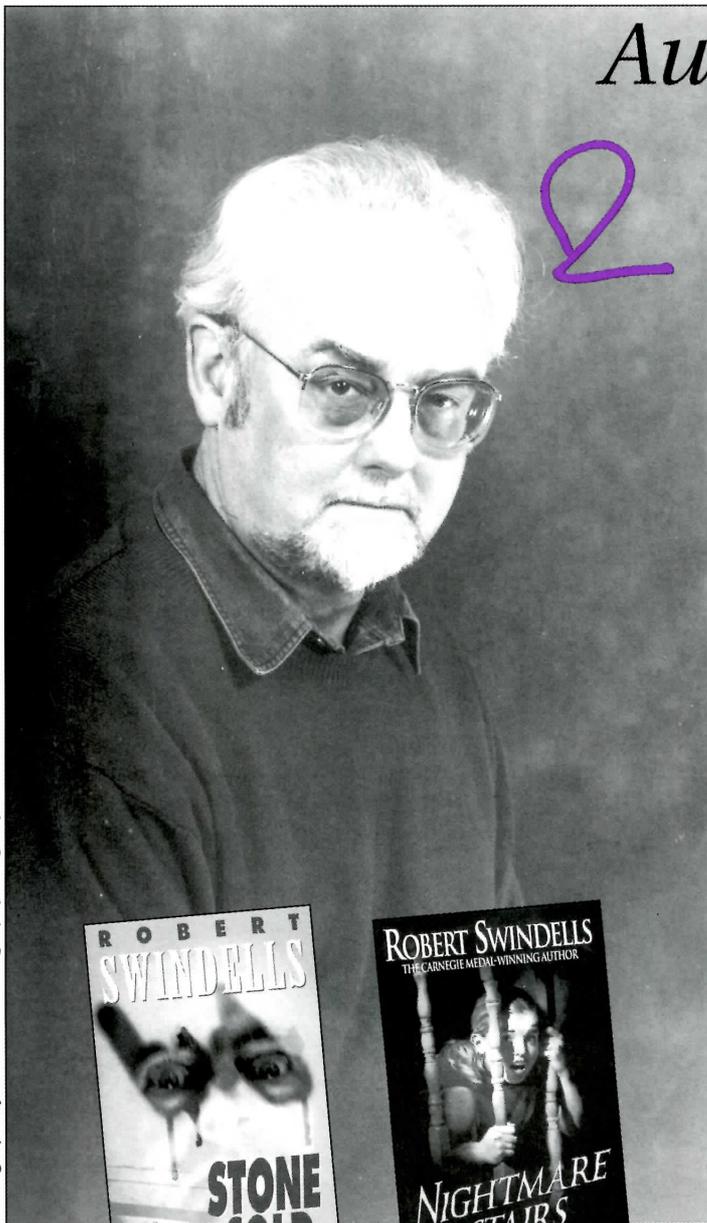
He likes the joke that a friend once characterised him as being a member of the 'Save the Gay, Green Whale Campaign'.

His involvement in The Peace Movement, Greenpeace and anti-nuclear campaigns inspired the post-nuclear bomb theme of *Brother in the Land*, which he considers as potent an issue today as ever; the Cold War might be over but the weapons are still available in the world, many in the grip of unstable regimes.

Child abuse (*Abomination*), exploitation of child workers (*Dosh*), extreme Right Wing political groups (*Smash!*) and famously the plight of homeless teenagers in *Stone Cold*, these are among the issues that he has been willing to explore and take on. This former member of the Workers' Revolutionary Party acknowledges that the novels are unlikely to bring about the socialist changes to society he has actively espoused all his life.

Bob Swindells now feels too old to be an activist. But in the past he and his wife have been enthusiastically involved in 'Sit-ins, die-ins, teach-ins and demos and stuff'. And of the issues of greatest interest, socialism, anti-nuclear and anti poll tax, the former seems to have lost out, there are no demos for the middle one and the latter is over and done with.

Still, he believes and knows that his books can make a difference for the better, no matter how small. Adult readers of *Stone Cold* have told Bob that nowadays they cannot pass teenage beggars by without giving. One reader told how her determined teenage son admitted to having made up his mind to run away to London, but knew it would be madness after he read the book. *Daz 4 Zoe*, a teenage love story set in a class divided Britain, has acquired the status of GCSE recommended set text, which provides gratification to its author. Unlike many novelists he's pleased if any of his books are used in schools. The fact there is a 'York Notes' on it causes him great amusement.



His nine years of primary school teaching make him sympathetic to any strategy to put books in the hands of young readers but he prefers them to want to read rather than being made to read. To this end he writes books in the way that he used to like them: 'When you're competing with video and computer games you have to realise that what kids want nowadays is to get into the story, so you've got to keep it moving.' Short chapters, a variety of type faces, alternative voices, minimum descriptions, a briskly paced plot with plenty of variety of style are the order of the day to avoid reader boredom. He abhors the idea of his readers wanting to skip bits! No holds are barred on the realism of the language if he can get it past his editor. He thinks that it is the adults who have the problems with the details of his chosen themes, not the teenagers for whom the books are written: 'There isn't much young teenagers can't handle nowadays. It's grandma and granddad who can't handle it. My aim is to get as close as possible to total authenticity in people's speech. Nothing ruins a book more than stilted attempted working class language by middle class people.'

To keep his work authentic and up to the minute he seeks the advice of grandchildren, their friends and the teenage children of his friends. For *Stone Cold* he spent three nights interviewing youngsters sleeping rough in London's Camden High Street, without which he feels he would have got the book hopelessly wrong. A young Asian friend of Bob's brother was enlisted to check the finer details of Muslim life for *Smash!*, his hard-hitting novel about racism. He has stopped doing them now, but Bob was very active in author visits to schools and libraries and took plenty of advice and up-to-the-minute ideas from his young audiences.

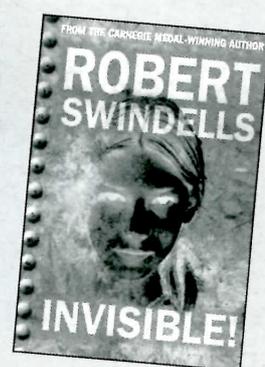
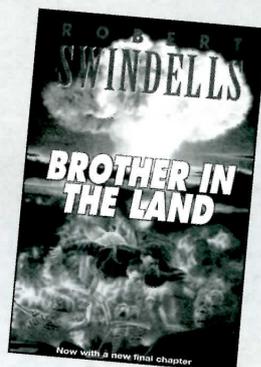
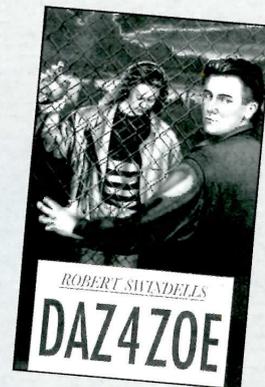
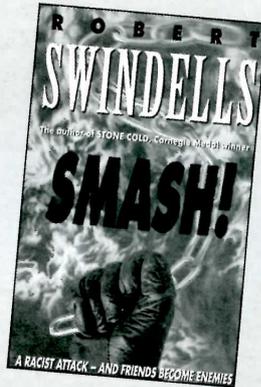
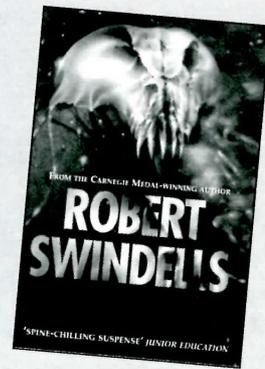
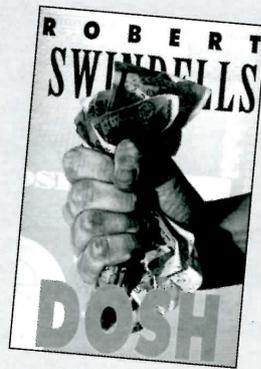
When asked where his ideas come from, Bob Swindells claims that they are to be found in the air during his daily walks on the moors in Brontë country around his slightly gentrified West Yorkshire mill worker's cottage. In the middle of a row, tucked below the road with a reservoir at the back, the cottage is in the same general area where he has lived all his life. 'Where the sun only shines about eleven days a year.'

One of five (three brothers and a sister), he was the odd one out. He could read before he was five and knew he was different from the others. He says he was useless at everything, enjoying reading above sport, except cricket, but good at writing stories and walking the moors day-dreaming. His father didn't like his son's pre-occupations and their relationship was a brittle one. His relationship with his mother was closer. He still remembers with some emotion when he was six and saw the film of *Bambi* and the death of *Bambi's* mother. The realisation that your mother could die affected him deeply. His mother's photo is enlarged and on the beams in 'Narnia' along with pictures of the rest of his family.

An 11+ failure, he left school at 15. He received little encouragement to be anything other than an unskilled worker. In fact his father discouraged reading. He did not understand why his son aspired to the impossible dream of being a fighter pilot, hence the RAF enlistment for three years. After more drifting from job to job, it was an insurance collector who had just been accepted for teacher training, who spurred Bob to take steps towards the same career and to do what he'd secretly always wanted, but rejected as unrealistic – become a teacher. His ambition was never to be a headmaster, which he claims would have been impossible anyway, because he is an atheist and couldn't bring himself to conduct an act of worship.

After eight years Bob retired to write full time. But when you are married to a teacher you get dragged back in. So Bob found himself at Whitby, accompanying a group of his wife's youngsters on a week's study/holiday. The kids were fascinated and excited about the Bram Stoker connection to Whitby and developed the theme of a mysterious room in their hotel, where Dracula lay in his coffin. This room only existed at night. So there was born his personal favourite book for younger readers, *Room 13*, which at the end of the week one child suggested Mr Swindells might like to write. Bob sees *Invisible!*, *Hydra*, *Inside the Worm*, *Nightmare Stairs* and tales like these as his stories purely for spooky entertainment: 'I couldn't find a way to write issue stories for kids of that age group and, being a primary school teacher, I cottoned on to the fact that kids of eight and nine are fascinated by vampires, ghosts, dinosaurs and scary, shivery things like that.'

However, this said, Bob is careful always to suggest peace, co-operation and consideration for others. He draws on his experience of real kids, the way they act and talk to make his characters plausible to his audience, and claims that never having grown up himself he has no problems with knowing what is real to his readers and what they want to read. Of his 54 books, published in several languages, some have been for series, including the 'Outfit Series' for Scholastic, which were not a success. All of them were books he wanted to write, he says. He would not have taken them on otherwise.



The next project is an 'issue book' about teenagers and alcohol. *Wrecked* is another heartfelt issue that has found itself a story: 'It's about young people and alcohol because the media and politicians concentrate far too much on young people and drugs. The people who supply narcotics go to jail and the ones who get them hooked on alcohol get knighthoods. Far more youngsters get their lives ruined by alcohol than drugs.'

He might be in semi-retirement but Bob says that his future plan is to keep on writing until he falls over. Hopefully that will not be on his daily two or three mile 'walking to live for ever' as he seeks 'the ideas that are blowing about out there on the moors that the Brontës didn't get'. He hints there's an issue lurking in the wings, waiting for a story on the wind to give it the Swindells treatment – Beware Sats and League tables! ■

David Bennett is Senior Teacher and Head of the English Faculty at George Spencer School, Nottinghamshire.

Books mentioned in the article

- Abomination*, Corgi, 0 440 86362 7, £3.99 pbk
- Brother in the Land*, Oxford 0 19 271785 5, £5.99, Puffin, 0 14 037300 4, £4.99 pbk
- A Candle in the Dark*, Hodder, 0 340 32098 2, £3.50 pbk
- Daz 4 Zoe*, Puffin, 0 14 037264 4, £4.99 pbk
- Dosh*, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13936 8, £10.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 130023 X, £4.99 pbk
- Hydra*, Corgi, 0 440 86313 9, £3.99 pbk
- Inside the Worm*, Corgi, 0 440 86300 7, £3.99 pbk (reissued October 2000)
- Invisible!*, Doubleday, 0 385 40855 2, £10.99 hbk, Corgi, 0 440 86363 5, £3.99 pbk
- Nightmare Stairs*, Corgi, 0 440 86330 9, £3.99 pbk
- Room 13*, Corgi, 0 440 86227 2, £3.99 pbk (reissued October 2000)
- Smash!*, Puffin, 0 14 038280 1, £4.99 pbk
- Stone Cold*, Puffin, 0 14 036251 7, £4.99 pbk
- Wrecked* is due to be published by Puffin in October 2001.

"I thought I'd start with something easy..."

Is there a difference between writing for children as opposed to writing for adults? In a radio interview the late Rumer Godden (author of, amongst many other books, **Black Narcissus** for adults and **The Diddakoi** for children) described how she wrote a children's book between every adult novel 'because of the discipline'. She continued: 'People write letters to me and say, "I thought I'd start with something easy, such as writing a children's book." But it's the most difficult form of writing next to poetry. And the younger the child the more difficult it is. You've got to hold them every moment. You have got to choose your words. Not basic English or anything like that but you choose words that convey and add to the few words you have, because you have very much fewer words. And also, you can't have a lot of description. Very boring, description.'

How do other 'adult' writers who also write for children perceive the differences? **BfK** explores.



Nina Bawden

After six adult novels, I decided I was old enough to write a book for children. Although I reckoned I would have to make some adjustments – a faster moving story for one thing – it never occurred to me that my *material* need be very different. In **The Secret Passage**, a mother dies in the first chapter, a distraught father disappears and the children of this unfortunate couple go to live with a stingy aunt and a madwoman. The manuscript was turned down by every children's publisher in London as being unsuitable for children. I assumed writing for them must be a specialist occupation.

Then Livia Gollancz, who was starting a children's list, bought the book and did well with it. Encouraged, I went on; writing an adult novel one year, a children's book the next, and sometimes the theme of the adult novel seemed to continue in the children's story and vice versa. The neglected child in **Squib** became the battered child in **Anna Apparent**, and then the evacuee in **Carrie's War**.

When I began **Carrie's War** I intended it for grown-ups. It wasn't until I was writing the first chapter that I realised this was really a story for children the age I had been in the war. In much the same way, an adult novel, **Devil by the Sea**, started off as a children's story but ended up as a thriller for grown-ups because although it was about children, it needed to be seen through an adult eye for best effect. The theme, of betrayal and loss, is suitable for all ages; the way the tale was told depended on whose eyes I was looking through. Children inhabit the same world as adults, but they experience it differently. And so, for me, the main difference between writing for them and writing for adults is the point of view I am looking from.

*Nina Bawden's latest book for adults is **A Nice Change** (Virago) and for children, **Off the Road** (Hamish Hamilton).*



Lynne Reid Banks

When I started writing for young readers, I mixed it up with writing for adults. I used it as an escape, sometimes interrupting a difficult or long adult project to write a children's novel. But I regarded myself basically as an adult novelist. However, since 1985 I have concentrated on writing for children, with just one adult novel in all those years. So I would have to say, I think ultimately one does one or the other. A children's book is not, after all, something one tosses off (excuse the expression) between 'more serious' work. Arguably it *is* the more serious undertaking in terms of its influence.

Children's books leave a mark on the memory and perhaps on the development of a person that the vast majority of adult novels don't, so the responsibility is greater. Nevertheless, children's novels are shorter. They make stringent demands, but they don't oblige the author to dredge up the very stuff of her soul and her life and lay it on the line. The satisfactions of each genre are quite different. Children's writing can bring with it a lot of fun and pleasure away from the desk – school and bookshop visits, trips abroad, etc. Most people don't regard children's writing as nearly as important as writing for adults, it doesn't attract much attention, and that is something the children's writer has to come to terms with. One only feels fully valued among other children's writers, or educators. It's adult writing that gives status among one's peers.

And perhaps – dare I say this? – that's just. I can't deny that on the whole, I have chosen the easier road. I'm proud of my children's books. They have done well for me, and probably spared me a lot of pain. But they have not necessarily fulfilled my full potential.

*Lynne Reid Banks' latest book for adults is **Fair Exchange** (Piatcus). Her latest book for children is **Harry the Poisonous Centipede's Big Adventure** (Collins Children's Books).*

John Mole

I don't really feel there is a difference between writing for children or for adults. I agree with W. H. Auden who once said that 'while there are some good poems that are only for adults, because they presuppose adult experience in their readers, there are no good poems which are only for children.' Auden said this in an essay about Walter de la Mare (one of the very best children's poets) who, himself, said that 'nothing but the rarest kind of best in anything is good enough for children.' When I write 'for children', I am writing out of my own experience as a child, recreating the fears, fun, openness to the world, of a child. For example, my poem 'First Snow' first appeared in a book 'for adults' but was reprinted in a 'children's collection', **The Mad Parrot's Countdown**. Of course, the subjects of many of my poems would mean little to a child, but that does not mean that I preferred writing them.

*John Mole's latest book for adults is **For the Moment** (Peterloo Poets). His latest book for children is **The Dummy's Dilemma and Other Poems**. (Hodder).*

Jill Paton Walsh

The question what difference it makes to be writing for children, compared to writing for adults is a difficult one because the differences are unconscious, more a matter of instinct. The decision as to which kind of book one is writing is made first of all, and feels simply like a sense of appropriateness. A subject lies in that large area of human experience that is shared by children and adults; a story has occurred to one which describes the subject in a simple trajectory – then this is for a young audience.

Of course there are then implications. Working for a young audience one cuts at a different angle and depth, and the narrative has to face forwards; long retrospect, nostalgia, deep regrets are not perhaps appropriate, although having said that I concede at once that making clear that actions have consequences, some of them very long-lasting, is a necessary honesty.

If I had to sum up the difference, I would say that a story for young readers is a moral map made for someone who is about to make a journey; writing for adults is more like discussing a journey with someone who has already made it, at least in part.

The perfect book for children would have poetic qualities; it would be concise, subtle, oblique and clear.

And it does undoubtedly get harder as the writer gets older; to remember youth without a golden glow, which is a distorting light. In youth, as I remember it, hope and faith came naturally, and charity was the hardest virtue, whereas in adult life faith and hope have become hard, and charity easier.

Of course a young reader could benefit greatly by sharing the maturer vision of an adult writer, but that is likely to happen only if the writer can still share the perspective of youth, can still see in the light of morning.

*Jill Paton Walsh's **Knowledge of Angels** (Black Swan) was shortlisted for the Booker and is now an A-level set text. Her latest book for adults is **A Desert in Bohemia** (Doubleday) and for children, **Thomas and the Tinnars** (Macdonald).*

Helen Dunmore

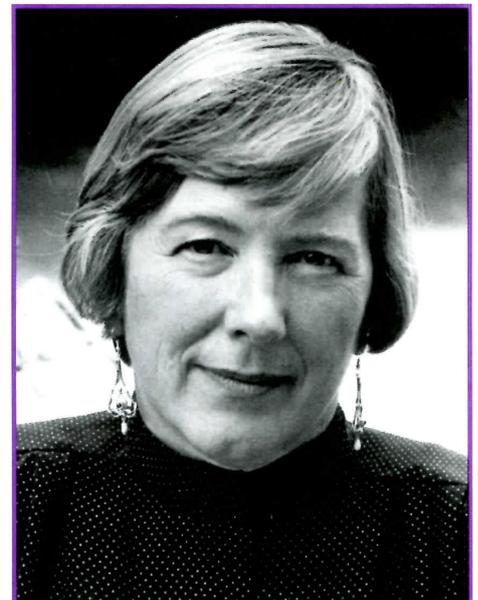
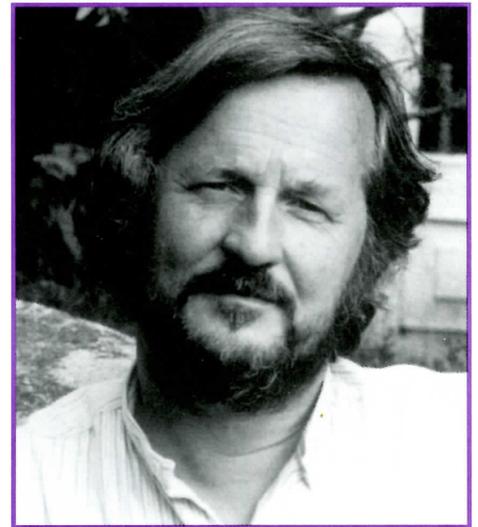
A long time ago, when I was a child, I was told a story which lodged in my mind for more than thirty years before I wrote it down. It was about my great-great-grandfather, or perhaps my great-great-great-grandfather. To prevent his wife and daughters going to church, he would collect up their clothes on Saturday night, put them under his mattress, and sleep deep into Sunday morning so that they could not leave the house.

Suddenly I wanted to retell the story, but not as something that happened long ago, and had no connection with today. I imagined a child listening to the story. She was listening hungrily, because this story held something she needed to know. But why did she need to know it so badly? I kept thinking about this little girl, whose name became Rosa.

Rosa was locked into a stifling 'best-friendship' with another girl, Charmaine, who dominated her and often behaved unkindly towards her. I decided that it would be Rosa's great-grandmother who would tell her the story of the hidden clothes, and the father lying on the mattress. But things would change a little. Great-grandma would tell of how she had been a young girl, longing to go to a dance in the village, wearing the dress her mother had made her. The father forbade it, and stuffed the dancing dress under his mattress. But in the end Great-grandma and her mother overcame their fear of the father's domination, and pulled out the dress while he snored. Great-grandma went to the dance, and Rosa, listening to her story, learned something about courage and resistance.

I think this could have been a story for adults, though it would have been written very differently. But it would have lost the vital possibility that a child, reading it, might feel the same flash of recognition as Rosa did.

*The story described above was published as **Great-grandma's Dancing Dress** (Cambridge Reading, 0 521 63744 9). Helen Dunmore's latest book for adults is **Ice Cream** (Viking) and for children, **Zillah & Me** (Scholastic Press) – see page 25. ■*



NEWS

More Records for Harry IV

J K Rowling's recently published *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Bloomsbury) had a record number of copies printed for its first run – 2.25 million. Bloomsbury has also become the first publisher to exceed the general retail market shares of Penguin, HarperCollins and Random House on the publication of *Goblet of Fire*.

Reading Champions

The National Reading Campaign is focusing attention on projects targeted at reluctant male readers of all ages, linked particularly with sport and other leisure interests. The idea is to find ways of promoting positive role models. Details from Genevieve Clarke, National Literacy Trust, Swire House, 59 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AJ (tel: 020 7828 2435).

Newcastle Millennium Project

The Centre for the Children's Book is collaborating with the Dodgy Clutch Theatre Company on a year long millennium project based in and around Newcastle upon Tyne. Funded by Seamus Heaney, the project will celebrate and reinstate folktales by focusing on their retelling through time and the art of storytelling – oral and written. The Centre for the Children's Book has also received a Year of the Artist Grant which is funding the creation of a book made from recycled materials by a local artist and printmaker. Further information from Elizabeth Hammill or Caroline Paul at The Centre for the Children's Book (tel: 0191 240 3811, fax: 0191 274 7595).

Orion Children's Books in substantial rights sale

Fiona Kennedy of Orion Children's Books has sold the US rights to Kevin Crossley-Holland's Arthurian trilogy to Scholastic, the US publisher of *Harry Potter*, for a significant six figure sum. Scholastic is positioning *The Seeing Stone*, the first in the trilogy, as their key children's fiction title for 2001.

Right to Read

Young people in care often do not have access to books, or the opportunity to share books with adults. Their education can be disrupted by moving placement, and this can seriously affect their achievements. Right to Read is working in partnership with five local authorities; Blackburn with Darwen, Islington, Kirklees, St Helens and Somerset to raise awareness of the vital role carers can play. Right to Read is a joint initiative between The Who Cares? Trust, the National Literacy Association and The Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Further information from Jane Pickerden or Frances Aston (tel: 020 7251 3117, fax: 020 7251 3123).

PRIZES

REGIONAL

Lancashire Children's Book of the Year Award 2000

This award, judged by 350 school students in Lancashire High schools, has been won by Tim Bowler's *Shadows* (OUP).

The Carnegie Medal

This year's medal has been won by Aidan Chambers' *Postcards from No Man's Land* (The Bodley Head). The judges described it as 'exceptional – a book that poses crucial questions and doesn't patron-

ise by giving easy answers.' David Almond's *Kit's Wilderness* (Hodder) and Jacqueline Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* (Yearling) were highly commended and Jenny Nimmo's *The Rinaldi Ring* (Mammoth) was commended.

The Kate Greenaway Medal

This year's medal has been won by Helen Oxenbury's new illustrated version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Walker). The judges described it as 'both contemporary and accessible. What she has done is create a new Alice for a new millennium'. Oxenbury also received the £5,000 Colin

Useful Organisations

No.11: Centre for Language in Primary Education



Webber Street, London SE1 8QW

Tel: 020 7401 3382/3;

Fax: 020 7928 4624;

email: info@clpe.co.uk

Website: www.clpe.co.uk

The Centre for Language in Primary Education is a centre for teachers and other education professionals which has children's literature at the heart of its ethos. Established almost thirty years ago, it has developed a national and international reputation for its work in the fields of language, literacy and assessment. The high quality of CLPE's publications, courses (which include ICT and Literacy), conferences and

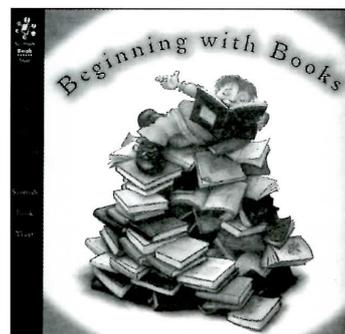
consultancy is widely known and reflects a strong tradition of classroom-based research and development. CLPE has a unique reference library of children's books which includes extensive collections of poetry, traditional stories and picture books, and a teachers' library relating to language and literacy education. Among CLPE's growing publications list are *The Core Book* with its annually revised *Core Booklist*, *Boys and Reading*, and a set of videos *Learning to be Literate*. Forthcoming are publications about book-based games and the influence of literature on children's writing.

PUBLICATIONS

The Best of Carnegie/The Best of Kate Greenaway are two full colour leaflets which fold out into an attractive A2 size poster. They feature the book jackets and other details of the books nominated for these two prestigious awards. Sold in multiples of 50 for £5 (£6 for non-LA members) from The Norfolk Children's Book Centre (tel: 01263 761402; email: ncbc@argonet.co.uk).

100 Best Books 2000 is an annotated list of recommended paperbacks published in 1999 for children from babies to teenagers at £3.00. Materials (posters, bookmarks, stickers) for National Children's Book Week 2000 (2-8 October) can also be ordered. Details from Book Trust, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

Beginning with Books, Scottish Book Trust's lively pamphlet aimed at



helping parents and other carers share books with their children, is now also available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gaelic, Hindi, Punjabi, Scots, Urdu and Welsh. Prices and details from Scottish Book Trust, 137 Dundee Street, Edinburgh EH11 1BG.

EVENTS

Reading Ahead!, the 10th annual Dorset Teaching Reading Conference will take place on Saturday 11 November at Bovington Middle School, Wareham, Dorset. Speakers include Martin Coles, Gillian Cross and Jeremy Strong. Details from Philip Browne, The Dorset School Effectiveness Centre, Bovington Middle School, Bovington, Wareham BH20 6NU (tel: 01929 405059; email: p.browne@dorset-cc.gov.uk).

Mears Award which she donated to the library agency Launchpad. Lauren Child's *Clarice Bean, That's Me!* (Orchard) and Chris Riddell's *Castle Diary* (Walker) were highly commended and Kevin Hawkes' *Weslandia* (Walker) was commended.

The Keith Barker Millennium Children's Book Awards

C S Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was named Children's Book of the Century in this newly established award to commemorate librarian and children's book specialist Keith Barker.

PEOPLE

Many congratulations to **J K Rowling** who has received the OBE for services to children's literature in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

Ron Heapy of Oxford University Press is to be a part-time consultant at OUP following his retirement.

Philippa Dickinson, publisher of Transworld Children's Books and chair of the Publishers Association, has been made Chair of Random House Children's Books.

Christina Patterson has been appointed director of the Poetry Society. She previously ran the Poetry Places scheme for the Poetry Society and has worked as a literary consultant and journalist.

Rob Jones has been appointed to the post of Young People's Services for the Isle of Wight with responsibility for children's and schools' services, starting in September. For the last few years, he has been the Librarian and ICT Manager at Carisbrooke High School and has had a high profile nationally on many issues to do with ICT. He will continue to be the Moderator for the RM/OU Learning Schools Program, looking after the Conference and Website for school librarians who are involved with that particular NOF-funded ICT training provider.

Karen Bedwell, who has been Marketing Manager at The Library Association for the last five years, will be starting a new job at the London School of Economics in October. This is a newly created post of Communications Manager at the British Library of Political and Economic Science at LSE. At The Library Association, Karen was closely involved with the promotion of the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals.

Chris Firth has been awarded an Arts Council Writer's Award for Literature for Young People. He was presented with a cheque for £7,000 by Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion.

Alison Braithwaite has been appointed Head of Marketing at Walker Books. She was previously at Egmont Children's Books.

Contributors: BfK team, Anne Marley. Submissions welcome.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Jean Ure (BfK 123, Letters) is right about the changes in the shortlists for children's book awards, but I think she muddies the water by dragging in the idea of 'literature'. If we assume that the adult book system and the children's book system have much in common then we are making a lot of difficulties for ourselves.

Harry Potter, she declares confidently, is not literature – fun, popular, well-crafted, but not literature. But just let's look at the Whitbread in those terms: two books of fantasy competing. One is long, complex, subtle, highly allusive to past genres, deeply political, reflecting the preoccupations of contemporary culture (surveillance, levels of gaming), while absorbing elemental motivations – and not flinching from disturbing emotions. It is also highly imaginative, intricate, and demonstrably absorbing. The other is a slight, thin, crude fantasy with a plot that no publisher would glance at – and so unoriginal that hundreds of thousands of university students (such as myself) have already translated it. So, which wins?

There's no point in arguing whether one is literature or one is better than the other. The decision was made religiously: that is in terms of faith and belief – not in terms of rational argument. It is not *arguable*.

Thus the real reason why **Harry Potter** didn't get the Whitbread was that if it had, too many people would have had to think. And when **Harry Potter** doesn't win the Carnegie this year – which, on past form at least, it won't – I wonder if it will be for the same reason.

If we are looking for Jean Ure's 'literature', then the Carnegie should go to (logically, without argument) to Aidan Chambers, with David Almond as runner up. They represent a certain kind of book. If Chambers won, we would be sending the message to the outside world – 'You lot might think that **Harry Potter** is children's books: here is something else, something very interesting, which can be valued as well.' Which is a pretty good message, in many ways. But, as Jean pointed out, there has been a change in shortlists, and that change reflects the huge change in the children's novel over the last thirty years. What does Jacqueline Wilson have in common with Philippa Pearce? They occupy different worlds, different ways of seeing the world, different modes of reading, different relations with the media. Giving Wilson the medal would acknowledge this change: it would say – we have our own, different, absolutely and necessarily different standards, and we're prepared to stick by them.

The fact that these books appear on the shortlists for the 'posh' medals seems to me to be totally positive – if it's done for positive reasons. But we mustn't look sideways: giving the Carnegie to Wilson would not be the equivalent of giving the Booker to Bridget Jones's *Diary*: we would not be apparently dumbing down or giving in to the popular. Sometimes it looks like it, of course: if BfK readers, back in November 1999 (BfK 119) voted Dahl as 'outstanding 20th century children's writer', why didn't TLS readers vote Geoffrey Archer as 'outstanding 20th century adult writer'. They seem to be about as equivalent as you can get, in writing terms. But the situation is much more complicated.

The advantage of giving Rowling the Carnegie might be that we can get it both ways: a book that speaks to children over the heads of adults, and that can, if we really, really have to, sustain some 'literature-speak'. We should, anyway be delighted at one of the implications of Harry's success: like Dahl, Rowling is pretty tough on all those couch potato TV-watchers who are obviously buying the books. Giving TV to children is something that adults do to children – as

Dahl said, 'A child can't spoil herself, you know.' Maybe this is more child-power at work, and we should celebrate it, and forget about that ghost – somebody else's idea of literature.

Professor Peter Hunt

West Sundial Cottage, Downend, Horsley, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL6 0PF

Dear Editor

The answer to Jean Ure's anguished query as to why books that cannot even pretend to be literature are turning up so frequently now on even the prestigious prize short-lists is right there in **Books for Keeps'** own editor's article only a page earlier.

'Almond won the Carnegie last year for **Skellig**. Had he not, **Kit's Wilderness** would be vying for my vote for this year's Medal.' And, a paragraph later: 'Thank goodness only one book on this year's Greenaway shortlist is from a previous winner.'

What does this tell us? That it is now something other than the book that's being judged. And once you start down that path, you might as well give up bothering writing better novels and just try and live long enough to get your turn.

Anne Fine

Gray Lane, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham DL12 8PD

Dear Editor

The latest **Harry Potter** book was actively displayed in all our local bookshops, but nowhere could I see a copy of the Carnegie Medal winner, **Postcards from No Man's Land**. Even W H Smith and Waterstones had omitted Aidan Chambers' work. Waterstones checked for me which revealed it was not in stock and would have to be specially ordered. Investigation at my library revealed that in the whole of Trafford, only two copies of **Postcards from No Man's Land** were available, suggesting that in Trafford at least, this book was not expected to be in demand.

I wonder who chose the thirteen librarians to be the final arbiters of the Carnegie award, and what effort was made to find the reaction of potential readers. For me, as someone interested in writing for children, the theme of the winning book is disturbing. I understand it is involved with sexually explicit matters, euthanasia, violence, cancer and more doom and gloom.

Why is it that the **Harry Potter** books, criticised for their lack of a literary style (whatever that is), are so successful? Why have children been sleeping out in order to be first in the queue when the bookstores opened their doors? Is it because J K Rowling is actually writing a story that children – and adults – want to read?

Aidan Chambers is reported as saying that his books have not been good sellers, and I wonder why his publishers continue to print stories that obviously have a limited appeal. Recently I tried out a story on many local primary schools to get a reaction before trying to find a publisher, and think that this avenue is being ignored by both writers and publishers. It seems to me that children are being fed a diet of literature that 'those in the know' have decided they need, rather than finding out what children actually want to read.

In the end, I suggest, those same readers will vote with their pockets, and the pleasure in some quarters that has seen the modest Miss Rowling defeated in this recent award will not dampen the enthusiasm of her readers when **Harry 5** is published.

Brian Lux

342 Oldfield Rd, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4QS

Letters may be shortened for space reasons.

CORRECTION

In BfK 122 in the article 'Books with a Mathematical Focus' we gave the wrong publishing details for Prue Theobalds' **Ten Tired Teddies**. It is published by Uplands Books at £3.99 (ISBN 0 9512246 4 6).

BfKREVIEWS

Reviews (of both hardback and paperback fiction and non-fiction) are grouped for convenience into both age categories and under teaching range. Within each section, you will find reviews for younger children at the beginning. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest that you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendations for use can often be found within the review.

RATING

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

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

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

Gwynneth Bailey is Language Coordinator at Aldborough County Primary School, Norwich.

Clive Barnes is Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City.

David Bennett is Senior Teacher and Head of the English Faculty at George Spencer School, Nottinghamshire.

Jill Bennett is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She is Early Years Coordinator and 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.

Urmi Chana previously worked as a researcher and lecturer on bilingual issues in primary education. She now teaches part-time at Priory Primary School in Slough.

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.

Peter Hollindale was until recently Reader in English and Educational Studies at the University of York.

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.

Rudolf Loewenstein is a Dominican friar working in a London parish.

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.

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

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

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

Sue Unstead was a publisher of children's non-fiction for 25 years and is now a freelance editorial consultant and writer.

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Now Out in Paperback

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

UNDER 5s PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY/INFANT

Splash!

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Flora McDonnell, Walker, 0 7445 7733 0, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 118, September 1999:

'Tiger, rhino and mother and baby elephant are "hot, hot, hot", but it is baby elephant who sets an example by heading to the water. In they all go with accompanying whooshes, splooshes, squirts and splashes which are sure to encourage plenty of audience participation.'

Jungle Kids

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

John Wallace, Collins Picture Lions, 0 00 664687 5, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 118, September 1999:

'An Emergency arises when the Jungle Kids gang find that their chocolate rations have been eaten by a monster. Imaginative readers who have their own equivalent of the gang's back garden Jungle Hut will rejoice in the antics. A humorous and clever picture book.'

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

Jamil's Clever Cat

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Fiona French with Dick Newby, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1345 3, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 110, May 1998:

'The marriage of sparse, but quite challenging text, with a radiant mix of paints, pattern and mosaics makes that of the Bengali Princess with the humble weaver a rich experience.'

Weslandia

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Paul Fleischman, ill. Kevin Hawkes, Walker, 0 7445 7735 7, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 118, September 1999:

'Wesley, flouter of convention, cultivates an alternative civilization in his own back garden. A superb story with countless layers of meaning.'

The Wonky Donkey

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Jonathan Long and Korky Paul, Red Fox, 0 09 926396 3, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 119, November 1999:

'An abusive refrain followed by three kicks on the bottom is all the thanks a hardworking donkey gets from one cruel owner after another. He zigzags away, lickety split, and ends up with kind Sophie. Illustrated in Paul's characteristically energetic, caricaturist style.'

Read Me a Story, Please

FICTION ★★★★★

Chosen by Wendy Cooling, ill. Penny Dann, Dolphin 'Giant', 1 85881 789 7, £9.99

Reviewed BfK 114, January 1999:

'Fifty bite-sized stories catering for all tastes from twenty-nine authors. Many of its delicious fillings are new, and each one has a distinctive taste and special spark.'

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

I Was a Rat ... or The Scarlet Slippers

FICTION ★★★★★

Philip Pullman, ill. Peter Bailey, Corgi Yearling, 0 440 86375 9, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 118, September 1999:

'One dark night Old Bob and his wife Joan find a mysterious young boy dressed in a page boy costume and they name him Roger. "I was a rat!" he insists. And certainly his behaviour is strange. An entertaining social satire.'

10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Hangman

FICTION ★★★★★

Julia Jarman, Collins, 0 00 675418 X, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 117, July 1999:

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

Gift of the Gab

FICTION ★★★★★

Morris Gleitzman, Puffin, 0 14 038798 6, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 119, November 1999:

'Here is a third book about Rowena, the girl without a voice who does not stop talking - previously the heroine of the marvellous *Blabber Mouth* and *Sticky Beak*. Gleitzman carries it all

off in his special, high-paced, narrative style.'

Tell Me No Lies

FICTION ★★★★★

Malorie Blackman, Macmillan, 0 330 36820 6, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 119, November 1999:

'Gemma is so damaged and abused that we can understand why she feels driven to abuse another damaged and troubled child. An absorbing and moving thriller, this book successfully evokes our sympathy for both of the victims.'

Truth or Dare

FICTION ★★★★★

Celia Rees, Macmillan, 0 330 36875 3, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 122, May 2000:

'Apparently a story about aliens, this novel, 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.'

12+ SECONDARY

The Boy-free Zone

FICTION ★★★★★

Veronica Bennett, Walker, 0 7445 7727 6, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 122, May 2000:

'The opening chapters of this novel will hook teenage readers with their emphasis on the plight of Annabel and Lucy, living in a small town devoid of suitable boyfriend material.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Little Suddenly!

★★

0 86264 971 4

Little Boo!

★★★★

0 86264 946 3

Colin McNaughton, Andersen, 16pp, £3.99 each board

Preston Pig marches jauntily through the small format pages of *Little Suddenly!*, apparently oblivious to the wolf's shadow close behind and, despite Mr Wolf's final sudden leap, gets safely home to bed. My two-year-old was unimpressed; she will, I suspect, be well past board books before the convention of wolf as predator is part of her understanding, never mind the ambiguity inherent here: is this a

game or for real?

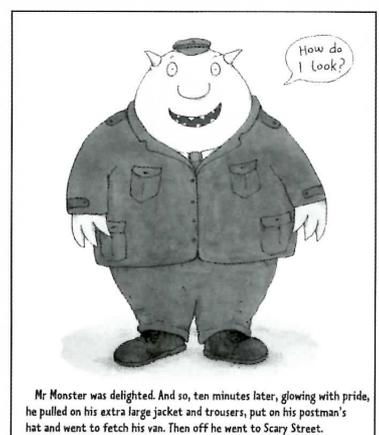
In the companion volume *Little Boo!* Preston and Mr Wolf are best of friends, taking turns to hide and 'boo' each other; this hit the mark and delightedly we read, and read again, joining in with the simple, repetitive text. Despite the inconsistency, these titles are a welcome change from the usual safe board book subjects, and the drawings in McNaughton's familiar jokey style make them a good choice for older toddlers and as a transition to more complex stories. AG

Monster Postman

★★★★★

Jonathan Allen, Orchard, 20pp, 1 86039 873 1, £9.99 hbk novelty

This is a perfect birthday present for the child who enjoys monster stories. A lift-the-flap book with a difference, each flap reveals another beneath, so that each double spread resembles a



Mr. Monster was delighted. And so, ten minutes later, glowing with pride, he pulled on his extra large jacket and trousers, put on his postman's hat and went to fetch his van. Then off he went to Scary Street.



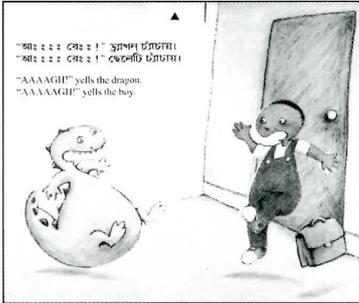
layered scene in a play. Regular postmen are too terrified to enter Scary Street so Monster gets a job as a Postman, delivering parcels to Mr Dracula, Ms Witch, Dr Frankenstein and Mr Werewolf. The flaps lift to show just what each character

receives in their parcels, allowing lots of guessing time. Whose parcel contains a collapsible broomstick for easy storage, some black hair dye, or chocolate Wolfie Drops? As ever, the author/illustrator includes lots of visual jokes, and there is a satisfying Happy Birthday ending. **GB**

Little Dragon

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Riske Lemmens, Mantra, 22pp, English/Bengali, 1 85269 480 7, £9.99 hbk novelty



Lots of flaps to pull in this pop-up book reminiscent of *Where's Spot?* Little Dragon searches for a place to hide in the cupboard, behind the sofa, under the stairs – but all these familiar hiding places are already occupied by other monsters. No matter because when the small black boy gets home, he decides they do not need to be afraid of each other and can play as friends. There is a very uncluttered feel to this book – simple pencil illustrations in warm colours are set against a white background, collage-like, and there is lots of space around both Bengali and English texts which makes the qualities of each script stand out. A lovely book for sharing with early years. Available in 11 dual language versions. **UC**

Going Shopping

★★

Jo Lodge, Campbell Books, 8pp, 0 333 76580 X, £5.99 hbk novelty

One of those 'books' which open up carousel-style to form four pop-up scenes when you turn the covers back to back, this is a pedestrian attempt to inspire interest in shopping.

Tabs to pull add some value – a bunch of bananas registering on a weighing scale and a ginger person disappearing into a bag appealed. There is lots of environmental print to point out to 3-4 year-olds, plus tasks set in the text – counting, colour recognition, etc. The drawings are crude – it is lucky the text mentioned the wolf; we might never have identified it otherwise. **AG**

Daisy and the Egg

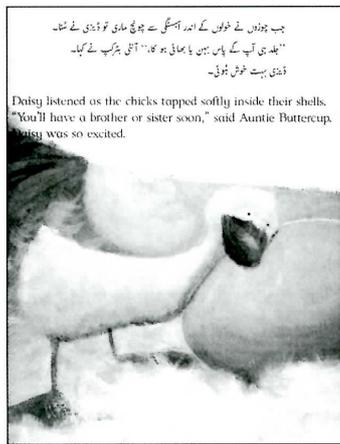
English/Urdu, 1 84059 175 7

English/Arabic, 1 84059 216 8

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

Jane Simmons, Milet, 32pp, £6.99 each pbk

Daisy is excited about the arrival of a baby brother or sister. After watching her aunt's eggs hatching, she cannot wait for Mamma Duck's egg to open. She decides to help it along by sitting on it herself and wakes up the next morning to the sound of Pip, her new brother. This warmly told and illustrated story comes out extremely well in these two dual language



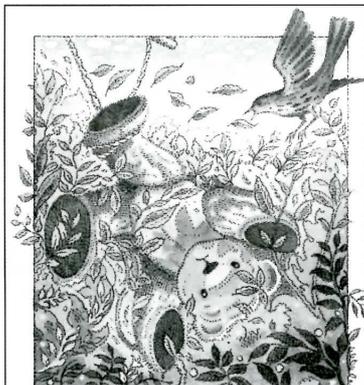
versions. The Urdu or Arabic script appears clearly in a font size and weight which looks comparable to that of the English text below it. This title would lend itself wonderfully to bilingual storytelling at school as well as being a great book to send home for reading with parents – in whichever language. **UC**

Alone in the Woods

★★★

Ian Beck, Scholastic, 32pp, 0 590 54275 3, £9.99 hbk

What looks at first like a rather disappointing trip to Windy Hill for Teddy when he accompanies Lily and Mum on their picnic proves to be anything but. Left on guard while the humans fly one kite, Ted soon finds the other one flying him... above the clouds, past aeroplanes and right into the middle of a real teddy bears' picnic. Then, replete with jelly and honey buns, a somewhat heavier Teddy is relaunched arriving back where he started. And, everything is just as Lily and Mum left it – so it seems – when they return. Readers know otherwise and that is the fun.



Beck's characteristically idyllic watercolour scenes with their blend of nostalgia and fantasy are as delightfully dreamy as ever. Readers of Teddy's previous two adventures will be captivated and he will doubtless win many new friends. **JB**

The Merchant Enticed by the Pearl of Great Price

★★★★

Mary Joslin, ill. Meilo So, Lion Publishing, 32pp, 0 7459 4522 8, £4.99 pbk

This tale is an elaboration of the parable recorded in Matthew, chapter 13, verses 45-46. It has a

Editor's Choice

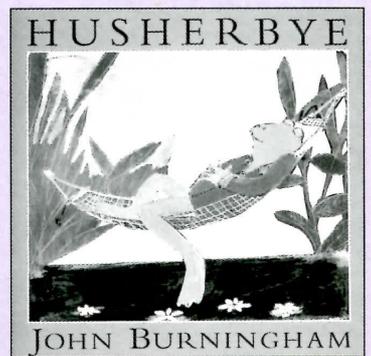
Husherbye

★★★★★

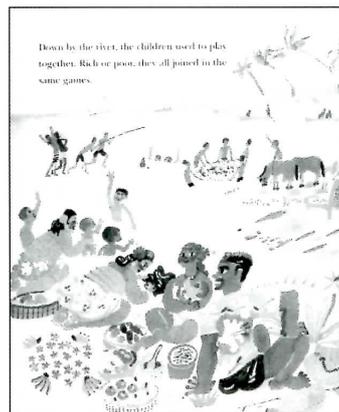
John Burningham, Cape, 32pp, 0 224 04648 9, £9.99 hbk

Sung all round the world to lull children to sleep, lullabies, as Marina Warner points out in her seminal study of the cultural ways we have to keep the bogies at bay (*No Go the Bogyman*, Chatto & Windus), 'imply two narratives at least: the relationship of the singer to the child and, within the words – and to some extent in the melody as well – another story'.

In Burningham's *Husherbye* additional narratives abound in the illustrations to his workpersonlike, quirky attempts at verse ('The baby's been sailing a boat on the sea,/and now needs to sleep./HUSHERBYE'). An exhausted mother cat trudges through the snow with her sleepy kittens, three bears, grumpy with tiredness, climb the stairs, the serene man in the moon is beginning to doze off. Sleep in this lullaby is sometimes a blissful state of consciousnessless ('The baby's



asleep/in the boat that's afloat,/and is rocking on watery waves.') but more often a desperately needed sinking into oblivion after a difficult and strenuous day. The baby, tucked up in a blanket, bottle in hand, sleeps peacefully in her/his little green boat which floats serenely on a smooth pink sea but the exhausted goose sleeps flat out, slumped in a chair. Not all life, not all sleep then, can be simple, easy and blissful, the watcher by the cradle appears to tell us. Just as the baby tumbles down when the bough breaks, so *Husherbye*, within its comforting, tender, sleep inducing words and pictures, does not, like all the best lullabies, altogether reassure. **RS**



modern, fresh appeal and a circular format, the opening of the story being revisited in the final pages. Meilo So's illustrations are rich and colourful, giving rise to great spirit among the many characters peopling the story. As well as pearl-divers there are fishermen, picnickers and children playing beside hot, palm-lined beaches. There are Kings, Princesses and potentates in cities around the world. Tropical birds, fish, flowers and trees flourish on every page, as we watch the central character become more and more obsessed with finding the finest, most perfect pearl. As a rich merchant, he returns eventually to his birthplace, to find friendship outweighing the finest pearl he has ever seen.

A well-constructed re-telling, enhanced by the quality of the pictures. **GB**

I will not ever Never eat a tomato

★★★★★

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

Hot on the heels of her successful *Clarice Bean, That's Me*, comes another witty look at family life from

Child. There are only two characters this time. Charlie has the unenviable task of finding something that his very fussy little sister will eat. But he is up to it. Lola may not like carrots, but what if these carroty looking things were really orange twiglets from the planet Jupiter?

Child dramatises the battle of wits with economy and skill, using a collage of drawn cut outs, photographs and fabric or paper backgrounds. Carrots, peas and fish fingers loom large and photographically realistic on the page, while Charlie's beguiling flights of fancy take us to 'cloud fluff from the pointiest peak of Mount Fuji' and 'the supermarket under the sea'.

Suitable for a child like Lola or Charlie, say from 3-8 years old, this charming tale takes a situation that every child and parent will recognise and transforms it with the magic of imagination and humour. **CB**

Good Girl, Gracie Growler!

★★★★★

Hilda Offen, Happy Cat Books, 32pp, 1 899248 89 7, £4.99 pbk

When her new brother arrives Gracie finds that Tommy is the centre of attention. Despite Gracie's repertoire of acrobatic stunts, all grown-up eyes are on Tommy and his rapid tiger development as he learns to smile, crawl and walk. Tommy, on the other hand, does not miss a trick and when he learns to talk, no one is in doubt whom he thinks is the real star.

Offen's wildly bright illustrations of tigers and lions, clad and acting like humans, have a great deal to say and have to be read with care to appreciate the story in full **JB**

Rosie and Tortoise

★★★★

Margaret Wild, ill. Ron Brooks, Viking, 32pp, 0 670 88960 1, £9.99 hbk

Rosie the hare is so looking forward to her little brother's birth, but when he arrives prematurely and 'only weighs as much as an onion', she is frightened to have anything to do with him. Even after he grows as big as a turnip, she is still afraid. Father helps by telling her a story, a version of Aesop's hare and tortoise, and she realises that Bobby is 'slow and steady' like the tortoise. The lyrical text is matched by equally lyrical illustrations, full of tenderness and soft colours. A beautiful book that will help children come to terms with the fragility of a premature brother or sister. ES

Wacky Wild Animals

POETRY

★★★★

Chosen by Brian Moses, ill. Peter Allen, Macmillan 'Time for a Rhyme', 64pp, 0 333 76588 5, £7.99 hbk

This selection of 'wacky' poems about animals and birds is the fourth book in Macmillan's 'Time for a Rhyme' series. Familiar and unfamiliar poets write knockabout poems more to do with rhyme and wordplay than the animal subjects of the poems. Infants and younger readers will probably enjoy these 'fast-food' poems at the time of reading but I began to long for a bit more substance, something that was not made to be consumed quickly and then forgotten. Notable exceptions are Pie Corbett, and Moira Andrew whose simple opening poem 'Lion King' has a richness which lingers in the imagination long after the page has been turned. HT

Rock-a-Doodle-Do!

★★★★

Michael Foreman, Andersen Press, 32pp, 0 86264 951 X, £9.99 hbk



Rock-a Doodle-Do! is an excellent example of how endpapers and the preliminary pages may be used to full effect in a picture book. A bare, prairie landscape set against a large expanse of sky and occupied only by a barn sets the scene on the opening endpapers of Foreman's adaptation of the Grimms' 'The Musicians of Bremen'. The title page opening leads us into the tale as an old donkey crosses the skyline on his journey to the city to fulfil his dream of

becoming a musician. His master wants to be rid of him and on his journey he meets a dog, a cat and a rooster, all near the end of their working lives. This retelling is highly visual and cinematic in technique and presentation. The action is set against the open spaces of an American landscape and the references to gangster movies while not overstated are marked. The robbers' clothes and shoes place them firmly in the domain of US mobsters and the closing scenes of the joint jumping at the old roadside café, converted to 'Rock n Roll' by the four friends, is quintessentially American. A stream of cars, buses and trucks sweeps across the final endpapers as the story closes to a 'Rock-a-doodle-do ... and do-wop, bam, BOOM!' VC

You're All Animals

★★★★

Nicholas Allan, Hutchinson, 32pp, 0 09 176797 0, £7.99 hbk

When Billy starts school, the other pupils are different from him. They are slimy, spotty, and smelly, or eat strange food with a dribble tongue. Billy wants a friend just like him, so Dad suggests he tries to find one on the computer. They type, MY NAME'S BILLY TRUNK. I'M 7 AND I LIKE SKATEBOARDING. After school next day, Billy dashes to the computer to find a reply from Frank, who is also 7 and likes skateboarding, and is grey with big ears and a long nose.... just like Billy! He and Frank arrange to meet, but Billy cannot identify his new friend in a playground full of smiling, happy creatures. Allan builds up the denouement beautifully, both in text and in simple, appealing illustrations. You will have guessed Billy is an elephant, but what about Frank? Yes, a mouse! A gentle moral tale; judge not by appearances or one might miss out on a good friend! GB

Frog is a Hero

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

English/Bengali, 1 84059 200 1

Frog and the Wide World

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

English/Punjabi, 1 84059 210 9

Frog is Frog

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

English/Somali, 1 84059 212 5

Frog and the Stranger

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

English/Albanian, 1 84059 186 2

Max Velthuijs, Milet, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

I love these stories and the way they tackle important issues, so it is pleasing to see dual language versions of them appearing. However, it has to be said some look better than others as dual language texts, chiefly because of the length of text on each page. **Frog is a Hero** (English/Bengali) comes out best with both scripts looking less crowded and having equal weighting. To distinguish between two languages using roman script, the Somali and Albanian texts are printed larger and bolder than the English

they precede. As each illustration in these two titles is framed in a rectangular border, I can't help wishing each language were printed above and below a centralised illustration. UC

A Treasury of Five-Minute Stories

★★★★

Chosen by Fiona Waters, ill. John Lawrence, Kingfisher, 160pp, 0 7534 0326 9, £4.99 pbk



Teachers and parents will find this collection very useful in the face of pleas for 'just one more story'. Most of the 22 stories are drawn from previous collections, but some of these are quite old and are no longer likely to be on bookshelves. Folk tales such as Julius Lester's 'Brer Rabbit to the Rescue' and Waters' own retelling of a Native American tale are included, and the other stories are nearly all light fantasy with a humorous twist making them very suitable for bedtime or the end of the school day. VC

Hey, Tabby Cat!

0 7445 5692 9

Here Comes Tabby Cat

0 7445 5697 X

Phyllis Root, ill. Katharine McEwen

Winnie Plays Ball

0 7445 5680 5

Winnie All Day Long

0 7445 5660 0

Leda Schubert, ill. William Benedict

Monkey Trouble

0 7445 7312 2

Monkey Business

0 7445 7311 4

David Martin, ill. Scott Nash

★★★★

Walker Books 'Brand New Readers', £3.99 each pbk

Why does Walker Books, publishers of high quality picture books, many of which are appropriate for beginning readers, feel the need to resort to producing a series such as this? These packs, two featuring a cat, two a dog and two a monkey, each contain four eight-page picture books with a single line of text per page and with the same useful general advice for adults on helping a

child to read inside the back cover. If, as I do, we view books as mediators of messages about what reading has to offer, what is there to excite and engage in the mundane prose of these books? An example:

'This is Winnie's ball./Winnie catches her ball./ Winnie rolls her ball./ Winnie kicks her ball./Winnie chews her ball./ Winnie's ball is yucky./ Winnie buries her ball./This is Winnie's NEW ball.'

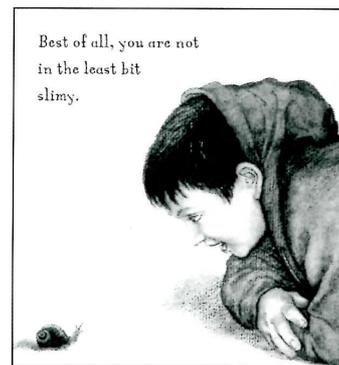
Where are the opportunities to develop visual literacy in the flat, uninspiring pictures which accompany the words? This seems to be reducing reading to a thankless, mechanistic exercise rather than a stimulating and rewarding activity. Are these really the sorts of literary experiences we want young children and their parents to be sharing? 'Brand New Readers WORK' proclaims the blurb on the back of each pack... 'I want a proper story' was the response of one of my five-year-old readers when his mum tried to interest him in one for his book bag. JB

Are you a Snail?

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Judy Allen and Tudor Humphries, Kingfisher 'Up the Garden Path', 32pp, 0 7534 0421 4, £5.99 hbk



Like other books in the 'Up the Garden Path' series this one has a most original approach to a particular creature's life cycle. Hatching from an egg, growing to full size, food, predators and hibernation are all covered in a way that encourages children to look further. The text addresses the young reader or listener directly in everyday language likely to appeal to children aged about three to six - 'You have a big, rough tongue right inside your mouth.' Illustrations and text unite to invite an imaginative response to the snail's physical attributes - patterned shell, eyes on stalks which can be pulled right down into the head and a strong muscular foot. Appealing pictures show the structure of the creatures in clear close-ups. We also get a sense of the environments the snail inhabits. Children will like the humour of the last pages where they are invited to reflect on the differences between people and snails. A final illustration shows a child scrutinising a snail and hints at what is not made explicit - children can study snails but snails cannot study children. MM

Flashing Fire Engines

0 7534 0298 X

Terrific Trains

0 7534 0349 8

NON-FICTION ★★★

Tony Mitton and Ant Parker, Kingfisher, 24pp, £3.99 each pbk

Under fives will like these two exhilarating journeys. **Flashing Fire Engines** takes us along with the crew

to answer a fire alarm. We are introduced to all the equipment – helmets, fireproof trousers and masks – and the fire fighting and rescue procedures are clearly explained in pictures and text. Three lively animals in the roles of the guard, the passenger and the engine driver help energise the story of a train journey in **Terrific Trains**. The sounds the train makes, 'chuff-chuff' and 'whoosh!', are written in distinctive print at the top of the pictures. Track, signals and the parts

of a train are carefully drawn and explained in the text. Children will be able to link their own experience of seeing trains or travelling on them to what they find here. We accompany the train as it goes over a river on a 'big strong bridge', through a tunnel where 'your ears go pop!' and through a level crossing where 'the traffic has to wait'. In this short book the authors manage to give reasons for things – when too many trains share the same track 'the signals and the points have to hold some back'.

They also indicate there are different kinds of train – diesel and steam for instance – and trains have different functions – to carry passengers or freight.

Both books have large, bright illustrations, simple verse with a driving rhythm and picture dictionaries at the end. The animal characters, always on the move, will appeal and the colour, pace and excitement in these books will bring about a lot of talk and enjoyment. **MM**

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior**Carrying**

Trans. Kanai Datta, Bengali/English, 1 84059 123 4

Smiling

Trans. Kim Wood, Vietnamese/English, 1 84059 121 8

Eating

Trans. Fatih Erdoğan, Turkish/English, 1 84059 143 9

Celebrating

Trans. Ahmed Al-Hamdi, Arabic/English, 1 84059 130 7

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Gwenyth Swain, Milet 'Small World' series, 24pp, £5.99 each pbk

Diversity of cultural experiences and the commonality that ties us together are beautifully captured in the photographs that form the basis of these small format picture books in the 'Small World' series. A section at the back of each book tells us more about each picture such as where it was taken. There is also a brief note to adults on the end page about sharing the book with children. The texts in both scripts sit clearly on a parchment coloured background – particularly welcome for dyslexic children for whom print on white paper can be bothersome. All the titles are available in the following dual language editions: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese.

In **Carrying**, we are shown the varied loads that people carry as well as different ways of carrying them. **Smiling** asks what kind of things make us smile, recognising also that nobody smiles all the time – it's fine to be sad sometimes. In **Eating**, we learn about the variety of foods eaten around the world. The collection of photographs illustrates the richness of experiences, both in terms of types of food and ways of cooking and eating. In **Celebrating**, we discover how small and important events can be the basis of celebration, and that there are a myriad number of reasons for and ways of marking special events and feelings. This is an excellent series of books, lovely to hold and share. **UC**

Rainy Day

★★

Emma Haughton, ill. Angelo Rinaldi, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 40981 8, £9.99 hbk

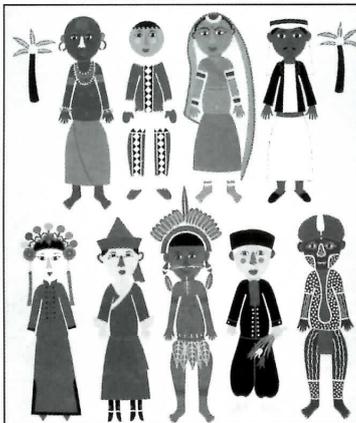
From the opening sentences it is clear that **Rainy Day** focuses on a young boy meeting up with an estranged or at least separated father, the title as much to do with family

relationships as the weather. Father and son spend the day treading wet pavements, the splashy park and wind-swept seafont, exchanging a few comforting words about the grey clouds (and mother) and how things will get better: 'Rainy days aren't so bad. And they don't last for ever' is how the book ends, father and son cuddled against a grey seascape. The illustrations handsomely capture this mood piece though I find the text really rather flat and predictable, and while it is good to come across a text that tackles this subject of father/son separation the pedestrian style is not to be recommended. **RB**

Mama God, Papa God – A Caribbean Tale

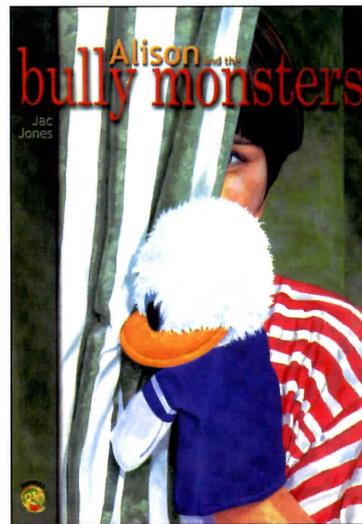
★★★★

Richardo Keens-Douglas, ill. Stefan Czernecki, Tradewind Books, 32pp, 1 896580 24 6, £4.95 pbk



This is a humorous retelling of a Caribbean creation tale, itself based on the familiar Book of Genesis creation story. The main difference is that the Caribbean tale is duo theistic, featuring a male and a female God sharing equal power... well almost. After creating light, the world, flowers, wind, rain, birds and animals, etc. they finally make man and woman in their own image. Not fully satisfied with their handiwork however, they decide to differentiate the people by giving them a range of colours, sizes, shapes, and languages and disperse them to all the corners of the earth.

The celebration of ethnic and cultural diversity which is at the heart of the book, is underscored by the colourful stylised illustrations, with their deliberate borrowings from a range of tribal art, design, costumes and headgear. **EL**

**Alison and the Bully Monsters**

★★★★

Jac Jones, Pont 'Hoppers', 32pp, 1 85902 752 0, £6.95 pbk

Alison never goes out to play, but no one suspects she is being bullied. One day, when she is feeling particularly fed-up, she meets the Bully Monsters, a large, scruffy pair who seem surprised and perturbed at her well-deserved indignation. She learns that if she can stand up to the Bully Monsters, she can handle real ones too. In a departure from his usual world of folk tale, Jones gives us a highly realistic everyday drama with fantasy overtones. The bold, distinct illustrations, seen from interesting angles, make the book ideal for the literacy hour, as does the large format and big print. And the Bully Monsters are a treat! **ES**

Stories from the Caribbean

★★★★

Petronella Breinburg, ill. Syrah Arnold and Tina Barber, Wayland, 48pp, 0 7502 2431 2, £5.99 pbk

This book of Caribbean tales, collected and retold by Breinburg (who was born and brought up in Surinam) has an authentic Caribbean flavour, particularly in the storytelling style. The stories are drawn from a wider ethnic range than usual, and includes the indigenous Arawak Indians as well as the migrant Indian communities from Asia. There is in the choice of stories and authorial comments, an underlying validation and celebration of the cultural retentions, particularly of those people whose

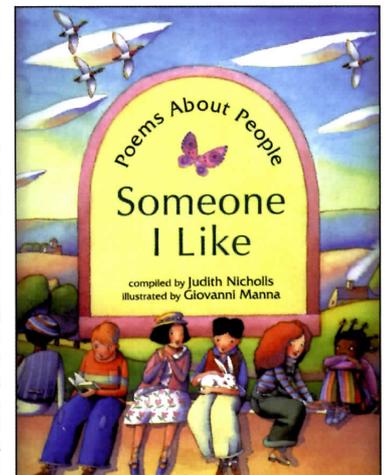
roots lay in Africa and the Americas, in spite of centuries of oppression.

Each story is preceded by a short introduction, a map pinpointing its place of origin in the Caribbean, a short glossary and a section on suggested further reading and activities. The six stories are a mixture of folk tales, myths, legends, and contemporary ghost stories, one or two of which may be too scary for younger children. The book is warmly and imaginatively illustrated, and together with the design and layout make the book 'user friendly' and a valuable classroom resource. **EL**

Someone I Like

POETRY ★★★

Compiled by Judith Nicholls, ill. Giovanni Manna, Barefoot Books, 40pp, 1 84148 003 7, £9.99 hbk



This book is like one of those rarer boxes of chocolates where you find something to savour no matter where you choose. It is a highly individual selection of twenty-six poems (one would expect no less from this compiler who is a respected and popular poet among children) on the theme of family, friends and relationships from different perspectives. They embody a variety of moods – joy, wonder, sadness, pathos, embarrassment. The selection demonstrates how access to the affective area can be made equally effectively through humour such as that in Mary Ann Hoberman's 'Brother' or David Whitehead's 'Kissing Auntie' and the more sober or reflective Kit Wright's 'Grandad' or Charlotte Zolotow's 'Someone I Like' and 'People'. Manna's illustrations in pale watery washes and deeper, mottled shades of ink have a gentle eloquence altogether in harmony with the poems. **JB**

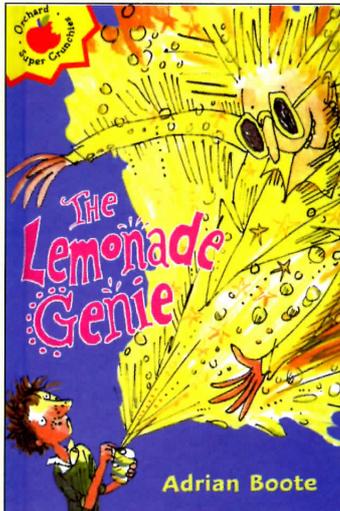
NEW Talent

The Lemonade Genie

★★★★

Adrian Boote, ill. Tim Archbold, Orchard, 64pp, 1 84121 007 2, £7.99 hbk, 1 84121 009 9, £3.99 pbk

Liberal illustrated with Archbold's humorously wild and scratchy line drawings, this hilarious school story is pure slapstick from beginning to end. Colin Crumbly is a walking disaster zone and the least popular boy in class. When he pulls the ring off a can of lemonade he finds he has summoned an even more disaster prone genie of the can called Keith. Colin's attempts to use his three wishes from Keith to rectify his disasters result in the playground being stalked by giant-sized clones of himself committing giant-sized disasters... But Colin is to become the unlikely hero of the day.



A pacey, energetically written story which makes unpretentious use of folk tale devices. It will have young readers in fits. Let's hope Boote has more up his sleeve. **RS**

Big Brother, Little Sister

★★★★

Papa Oyibo, ill. John Clementson, Barefoot Books, 48pp, 1 84148 116 5, £9.99 hbk

Papa Oyibo (aka Ian Thomson) has spent time in Nigeria absorbing the myths, legends and rich oral tradition of the Yoruba people; this enchanting tale of elephant and mouse is a product of that experience. Sharing similarities and differences with Aesop's Lion and the Mouse, this elephant finds herself lost in the deep jungle with a giant thorn stuck in her foot. The mouse thinks she has come across 'a mountain fallen from the sky' when the elephant comes crashing to the ground near her, mistaking the trunk for a snake and leading to ever more confusion for both animals. Mouse removes thorn from elephant's foot and their friendship is secured. In a charming narrative sequence the elephant names the mouse Te Te Oka - my big brother who is very small, reciprocated by Tu Tu Eloka - my little sister who is very big!

Clementson's strong colours and expressive line evoke the African jungle and animal conversations with spirit and a real feel for what the book is seeking to achieve, namely exploring themes and rich traditions from other cultures. This is Barefoot Books publishing ('walk the way of wonder') at its best - and check out their website (www.barefootbooks.com) with any infant/junior classes you happen to be working with. **RB**

Peas in a Pod

★★★

Adèle Geras, ill. Peter Bailey, Corgi Pups, 64pp, 0 552 54667 4, £3.50 pbk

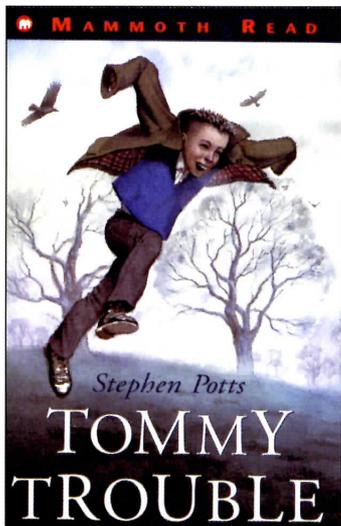
Lily and Jo may seem as alike as peas in a pod, but there are two years between them and they are decidedly different in character. So when Stella, who has baby-sat for them for years, decides to get married, the question of bridesmaids arises. How this affects each child over the course of the story is sensitively related by Geras, who deals well with the world

of hopes and disappointments that young children experience. Bailey's illustrations complement the book in a way that will make it easily accessible to the starting out reader. **RL**

Tommy Trouble

★★★★

Stephen Potts, ill. Stephen Player, Mammoth, 96pp, 0 7497 3952 5, £3.99 pbk



'Tommy Cameron lay awake, waiting. He watched the curtain shadows fade, and the wall between them pinken as another sun struggled skywards. Tommy listened hard for steps in the street below. There'd been no post from Dad for ages. *Maybe today, he thought.*'

So begins this excellent story, set in Scotland, of young loner, Tommy Cameron, rejected by his peers because of his reading and writing problems. The story is told against a background of Remembrance Day as Tommy is befriended by a sympathetic old soldier, Jack, visiting his elderly sister, who is a resident in the town. Tommy is already missing his dad and when Jack too has to leave, Tommy is devastated. As a born fighter, however, Tommy is not the type to surrender.

Beautifully written, this book deals

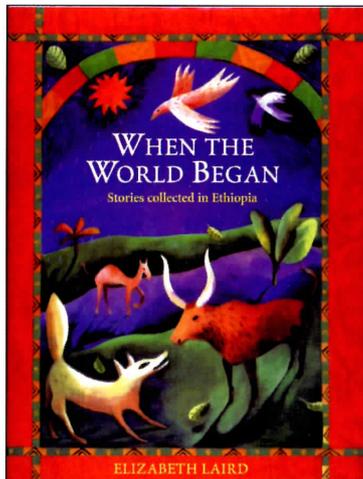
naturally with such subjects as learning difficulties and bonding between young and old people. Potts writes with a sureness of touch, bringing his characters effortlessly to life. This is a warm, rich and rewarding read which is eminently suitable for young fluent readers. Generous double spacing makes it even easier for such readers. **AK**

When the World Began: Stories collected in Ethiopia

★★★★★

Elizabeth Laird, ill. Yosef Kebede, Emma Harding, Griselda Holderness and Lydia Monks, Oxford University Press, 96pp, 0 19 274535 2, £14.99 hbk

Too often the images of Ethiopia which we see are those of a country ravaged by famine featuring gaunt, emaciated people barely able to speak never mind tell stories. This fine collection redresses the balance, for in the face of all the horrendous wars and famine Ethiopia has suffered, a strong tradition of storytelling thrives.



These stories were collected by Laird for a British Council storytelling project. The opening story is a creation myth and the closing one a gentle tale which reminds the reader (listener) that everything on this earth, no matter how bad or good, will pass and change. In between the selection represents humour, wisdom, generosity and most of all insights into the foibles of human nature common to people of all nationalities. Laird first heard these stories told in their original Ethiopian languages. She uses her considerable skills as a narrator to retell them in words which can be read silently or aloud with equal enjoyment.

The four illustrators bring a variety of styles and mediums to the pages which are well-matched with the mood of each story. The pictures range in size from full page colour displays to black ink vignettes and vary in disposition on the pages, creating a visual sense of liveliness and interest throughout the book.VC

Horrid Henry's Nits

AUDIO BOOK ★★

Francesca Simon, read by Miranda Richardson, Orion, 1hr 5mins, 0 7528 1843 0, £4.99

Just for the pinging noise as the nits flit from head to head this tape is

excellent entertainment value. It is a much better joke than the slightly laboured excesses of the eponymous Horrid Henry as he thinks up one ruse after another to do down his simmering little brother, Perfect Peter. But the stories rattle along well enough - if you do not mind the premise of Henry's nastiness - and Miranda Richardson's cheery reading makes the very best of all the jokes. **JE**

Farm Boy

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Michael Morpurgo, read by Derek Jacobi and Michael Morpurgo, Collins Children's Books, 1hr 5mins unabridged, 0 00 100742 4, £6.99 book and tape pack

Two stories in one, *Farm Boy* tells first of the special friendship - and secret - between grandfather and grandson and, in a separate but connected story, of the bet that Grandpa made and won against all the odds. Michael Morpurgo's evocation of a farmer and his community in a far distant past is both charming and wholly convincing while his handling of the secret illiteracy is touching. Read jointly by Morpurgo with Derek Jacobi as grandpa this tape brings out the very best of the stories while the inclusion of the book allows enjoyment of Michael Foreman's illustrations, too. **JE**

The Explorer's Book of Dinosaurs

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Dr Ian Jenkins, Two Can, 48pp, 1 85434 846 9, £7.99 hbk

Why did the dinosaurs die out? Intriguingly, nobody still really knows. Anyway, extinct they may be but their popularity remains undiminished and this highly appealing title brings dino-mania to the forefront once more. Divided into double page spreads, this colourful, large-format book charts dinosaur history in tasty, bite-sized chunks, dispatching tricky technical details with ease. Clearly presented and entertainingly written, it is illustrated with a range of styles - excellent realistic artwork, based on the latest research, good quality photographs and humorous cartoons for snippets such as the dinosaur beauty contest. An ideal book for dinosaur-mad children and, with its thorough glossary and index, an attractive addition to any home or school library. **AGa**

River Story

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Meredith Hooper, ill. Bee Willey, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 2893 3, £9.99 hbk

The journey of a river from source to end has a natural story shape. This allows the creators of this picture book to provide a sense of an entire process. The fast moving and poetic narrative brings across the variety and movement of the river at each stage and provides children with a good context from which to understand the technical terms in the annotated diagram at the end of the book. So, for example, wonderful images bring across the dynamic movement of the water - 'scooping up earth, digging out stones, mining

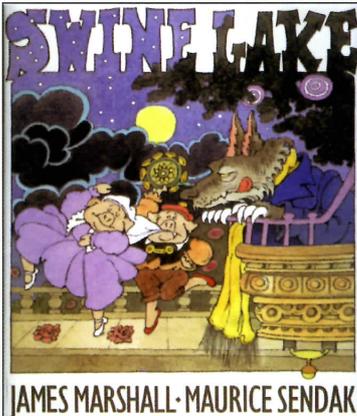
the mountains, wearing them down' – and prepare children for the concept of erosion.

The exceptionally fine illustrations capture the life and interest of the changing river and will encourage reflection and talk. Each section,

introduced by a heading in large print, covers concepts and ideas which could be developed further by the teacher: examples include

currents, mudflats and river traffic. The book would be an exciting starting point for work in geography, science or English. MM

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle



Swine Lake

★★★★

James Marshall, ill. Maurice Sendak, HarperCollins, 40pp, 0 00 198408 X, £10.99 hbk

Any picture book illustrated by Sendak is likely to be an event. His pictures for a tale by the late James Marshall are busy, exuberant and crowded with detail and character. However, Marshall's urbane story, of a down-at-heel wolf who becomes a ballet-lover, proceeds at a leisurely pace. I think you would have to be at least 5 or 6 years old to appreciate how an initial interest in eating pigs could turn to the satisfaction of making an unintentional but critically acclaimed entrance on the stage with the Boarshoi Ballet at the New Hamsterdam Theater. You will need to be much older to notice all of Sendak's visual references, and to appreciate his awful puns, and to realise what a strange conglomeration of fairy tales Marshall has put into the plot of the ballet *Swine Lake*. All in all, the child audience for this homage from one great American picture-book creator to another may be limited, but every page is a joy to look at. CB

Animal Crackers

★★★★

Narinder Dhama, ill. Tony Blundell, Young Corgi, 96pp, 0 552 54626 7, £3.50 pbk

After hitting his head in the playground, everyone Sanjay sees appears to be an animal. The headteacher is a polar bear, and his class teacher is a tabby cat. Unfortunately, no one believes him at all when he tells them what he sees. How Sanjay copes with this, and then turns it to his advantage in dealing with the school bullies makes for an amusing and often thought provoking read. Dhama has once again written a story that portrays the everyday thoughts and fears of children in a clear and easily readable style, and Blundell's humorous illustrations lend well to the text. RL

Dad Alert!

★★★★

Malaika Rose Stanley, ill. Nick Sharratt, Orchard, 96pp, 1 84121 545 7, £3.99 pbk

Football-mad Max hasn't seen his dad, Jerome Dumont, since he was in nappies (Max that is, not his dad). His dad actually left to live in his native St Lucia. When they eventually meet again Max gets a shock. His dad knows nothing about football, let alone Max's beloved Arsenal and is (horror of horrors) a cricket fan.

If that wasn't bad enough, Max sees his dad breaking into someone's house and come out with a mysterious red case. Max turns private eye and with his friend Denizil, attempts to unravel the mystery. This incident packed story is perfect material for illustrator Sharratt, but unfortunately there is only one illustration repeated at the end of each chapter. Pity. AK

The Flood Tales

★★★★

Richard Monte, ill. Izhar Cohen, Pavilion, 80pp, 1 86205 211 5, £12.99 hbk

This is a very unusual and ambitious book which attempts to address a wide range of contemporary concerns through the retelling of a universal myth. The tale of the flood is presented from Noah's perspective, casting the 600 year-old shipwright as an introspective boozey worrywart, hag-ridden by a termagant wife and restlessly perplexed by the ethical and ecological responsibilities inflicted upon him by his mission. As the ark rides the rising waters, the issues agonised over by Noah and his family include global warming, pollution, animal rights, sexism, racism, evolution, and scientific versus religious accounts of reality. At the end of the book, reality itself is questioned as a wine-sodden Noah reclines in his orchard, gazing at the ruins of the ark, or is it just the hulk of a fishing boat?

Monte's prose is both playful and ponderous, as over-stuffed as the ark itself with images, similes and the convoluted rhetorical questions arising from Noah's ruminations. This contrasts with Cohen's serene and charming full page paintings of the saga. So we have what looks like a picture book incorporating a philosophical novella. It requires quite a sophisticated readership: I would highly recommend it to teachers and parents interested in exploring philosophical issues with older children through literature. You won't fit it into the literacy hour. GH

Irish Legends

★★★

Margaret Simpson, ill. Michael Tickner, Hippo 'Top Ten', 192pp, 0 590 54377 6, £3.99 pbk

Fans of books such as those in the 'Horrible Histories' series will have little difficulty in accommodating

themselves to this fairly breathless gallop through the world of ancient Irish stories. Presented in tabloid journalism style as a mixture of retellings and 'top facts', and illustrated in black and white cartoon and comic strip format, this is not, however, a volume likely to appeal to the purist, Irish or otherwise. It is, nevertheless, a tribute to the power and passion of the original stories that, even in versions such as these, some of their magic remains. It is all good harmless fun, though the relentlessly jocular tone is best dealt with in small doses. RD

The Famous Adventures of Jack

★★★★

Berlie Doherty, ill. Alan Marks, Hodder, 144pp, 0 340 77817 2, £10.99 hbk

When Jill goes looking for Jack, she hardly expects a whole genealogy of them, each with a tale to tell. Within a new story of her own, Doherty weaves together five adventures of the great British hero, from Daft Jack to Jack the Giant Killer. She spins her yarns with vigour, mystery and humour.

The characters in her own tale – Mother Greenwood, the cowardly Cat, and Old Feller Storyteller – have the larger than life qualities of a pantomime cast.

Children from 7-10 years old will enjoy this, not least because they already know the most famous Jack story of all, which is just about to begin as the book ends, as Jill follows Jack up the Beanstalk. Once again, Alan Marks's distinctive pen and ink wash illustrations complement the text perfectly. CB

Amber's Secret

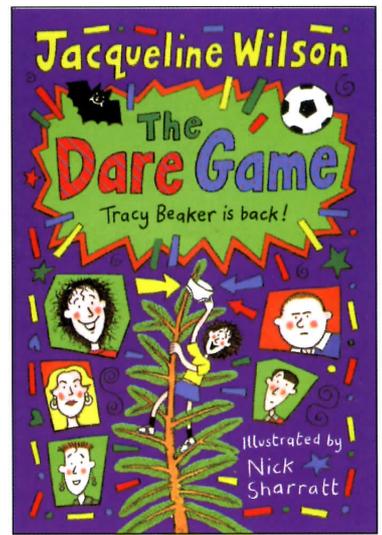
★★★★

Ann Pilling, ill. Victor Ambrus, Collins, 192pp, 0 00 185727 4, £9.99 hbk

Living in the early 1950s in small-town Britain, Sally has been sent to stay next door while her Mum recuperates in hospital. While trying to get the family grandfather clock going again – symbolic of her mother's recovery and the reunion of her family – she knocks it over, causing extensive damage.

The book tells of her quest to restore the clock, which she manages with the help of the many kind people she meets after phoning 'Amber's Secret' number. There's magic in the air here – the magic of benevolent people looking out for Sally and being one step ahead of her as she takes on her huge task, growing in courage and strength as she fulfils it.

I found the old-fashioned (but not dated) feel, in both language and type of story, and echoed in Ambrus's delightful illustrations, refreshing and enjoyable, though I was not always convinced by period detail. Easily read, this is a sympathetic story, gently told yet well-paced. AG



The Dare Game

★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 256pp, 0 385 40901 X, £10.99 hbk

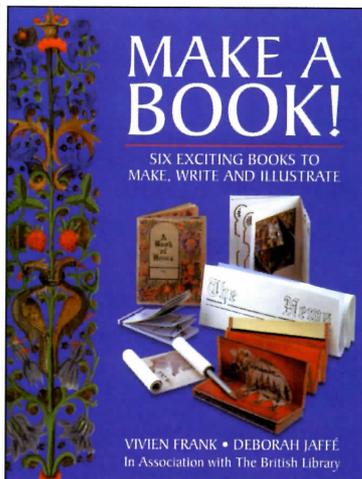
When Tracy Beaker is fostered by Cam, she thinks that life will be 'Happily Ever After'. However, she soon comes down to earth with a bump and has to face up to the reality of living with a foster mother who does not always let her get her own way. Cam's difficulties in this venture are also outlined by Wilson, who does so in such a way that the reader is led to see that there is more than just one side to a problem. One of these problems is school, to which Tracy's solution is to play truant. But before that happens, she also has to face up to meeting her own mother again; and because that does not go entirely as anticipated, it forces her into a more realistic view of life. The growth in Tracy's awareness and issues about fostering, truancy, behaviour in school, friendship, the need for affection, and facing up to things are all skilfully and humorously dealt with in the course of this book. To this extent, *The Dare Game* could become a useful stimulus for classroom discussions. The humorous illustrations by Sharratt complement Wilson's text well. RL

Make a Book!

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Vivien Frank and Deborah Jaffe, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1474 3, £7.99 pbk

An imaginative approach to a topic that is part of the curriculum, this practical guide allows the reader to make, write and illustrate six very different books. Ranging from a Thai folding book and a Japanese scroll to an exquisite medieval book of hours, the sumptuously illustrated pages can be transformed into mini books. There are clear instructions for creating a Victorian-inspired movable book with surprise pictures, as well as a simple flicker book. A template for creating your own newspaper provides plenty of



opportunities for creative writing and with confidence gained from these six examples, children may well be inspired to develop further ideas of their own. The approach is sophisticated, but the results are impressive. At £7.99 this is a relatively high price for a disposable item, but the six little books produced are so attractive that they are sure to inspire budding authors. SU

Dig and Sow!

Ill. Peter Utton and Ann Savage, 0 7534 0427 3

Spish! Splosh!

Ill. Peter Utton, 0 7534 0426 5

NON-FICTION ★★★

Janice Lobb, Kingfisher 'At Home with Science', 32pp, £6.99 each hbk

Science being the investigation of nature, the garden (supposing you have access to one) is as good a place as any to start. In *Dig and Sow!* we look at soil and what it is, how green plants grow, what worms do all day, garden fauna, pollination and seeds in a friendly domestic way. Many easy to find examples are involved and the simple experiments are nicely fail-safe. This is a pleasant introduction and observation-promoter, but to state that 'gardeners use fertilisers, such as manure, to feed plants'

without explaining the nature and origins of manure is to miss a richly nitrogenous opportunity.

Today the garden – tomorrow the bathroom – another good test bed for embryo boffins. Mostly this is all about properties of fluids, but it deviates helpfully to include 'why must I brush my teeth' (including a 'dissolve your own tooth in coca-cola' experiment) and the principles of the symphonic toilet – sorry that should be syphonic. But to say 'remember to wash your hands after going to the toilet' without explaining why is to miss a richly bacterial opportunity.

Probably most successful in the well-appointed family home, this coprophobic couple is not essential to a cash-strapped library. TP

The Secrets of Science

0 571 20261 6

How Things Work

0 571 20401 5

Mysteries of the Human Body

0 571 20406 6

The Wonders of Maths

0 571 20411 2

NON-FICTION ★★★

Barbara Allen and Terry Deary, Faber 'Spark Files Flip Quiz', 40pp, £4.99 each board

The breathless approach of 'Horrible Histories' is here applied to the world of science and maths, but if a child is attracted to the quiz format these neat ringbound stand-up flipbooks will offer a good way to learn and test facts – alone or with a friend. Cartoons, jokes and riddles rub shoulders with cut-out photos and annotated diagrams. The first three titles cover popular science topics, while a fourth on maths is a latecomer for Maths Year 2000. Some of the questions are bizarrely worded (for example 'What is the G that humans do when they change from babies to adults?' Answer: Grow), but as the answers appear alongside the questions (cover them up if you can't resist cheating) your mind is not bogged for too long. There are also a

fair number of true or false questions, which always seem of dubious worth, as well as multiple choice and picture quizzes. The quiz books are a spin-off from a successful series called the 'Spark Files', featuring practical science experiments interwoven into the adventures of the eccentric Sparks family. Opt for the stories if you like your science hands-on. SU

My Best Book of Fossils, Rocks and Minerals

NON-FICTION ★★

Chris Pellant, Kingfisher 'Best Book', 32pp, 0 7534 0442 7, £6.99 hbk

'All that glitters is not gold', but sadly the lasting impression of this new title in Kingfisher's 'Best Book' series has a leaden ring to it. Crystals and gemstones, rocks and fossils inspire a zealot's passion in would-be geologists' hearts. But there is no trace of such enthusiasm here, and unlike the Cullinan diamond there is no sparkle to lift the book from a workaday coverage of its subject. A visit to the Natural History Museum's EarthLab – in person or on-line – would prove much more inspirational. More is the pity that this title uses only artwork rather than the author's photographs to illustrate our earthly treasures. SU

William Shakespeare and the Globe

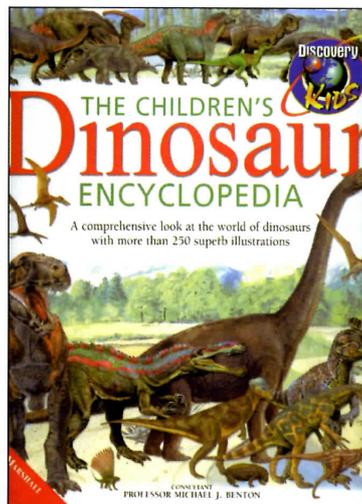
NON-FICTION ★★★

Aliki, Mammoth, 48pp, 0 7497 4175 9, £5.99 pbk

This non-fiction picture book tells the story of William Shakespeare's life and work, act by act, ending with the opening of the reconstructed Globe Theatre. The richly detailed illustrations, backed up by lively and interesting text, bring the story vividly to life, making this a highly accessible introduction. I liked the tone of the text very much, though I am not convinced that presenting it as quasi blank verse works as well as it could. It nearly makes it but not quite. Had it been written in 'real' blank verse – now that would have

been an enviably clever touch.

The book should appeal to children and adults alike, though older (child) readers might find the artwork style and large format rather young. For older (adult) readers, it would seem eminently suitable as the sort of book to be bought as a fact-packed souvenir of a visit to the Globe. AGA



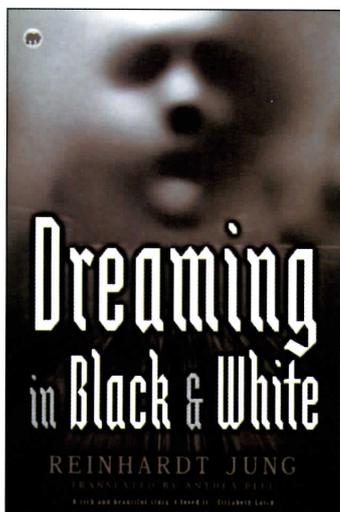
The Children's Dinosaur Encyclopedia

NON-FICTION ★★★

Jinny Johnson, Marshall Publishing, 96pp, 1 84028 267 3, £9.99 hbk

Each double page spread in this glossily illustrated title looks at a different group of dinosaurs, with some spreads focusing on key topics, such as feeding, fossils and family life. The encyclopedic approach works very well, with entries accompanied by boxes giving details of the period they lived in, size, order, range and, usefully, pronunciation of names. Rather confusingly, the book begins with ancient reptiles other than dinosaurs, and it would benefit from a longer, more comprehensive glossary. But, nit-picking apart, it is well-organised, clearly written, and, at £9.99, very reasonably priced. A valuable reference source for older readers. AGA

REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary



Dreaming in Black & White

★★★★

Reinhardt Jung, trans. Anthea Bell, Mammoth, 96pp, 0 7497 4157 0, £3.99 pbk

Second and subsequent readings of this powerful novel will be necessary if its strengths and subtleties are to be fully appreciated. Its hero, a disabled boy called Hannes, is drawn in his dreams to 'back then', the period of Germany's Third Reich, and to an awareness of how, in his disabled state, he would never have survived in a climate dominated by Nazi views of a healthy national body.

Structurally, his story is presented as a series of moves between dream and reality, merging eventually in a painful understanding that the contemporary world has also its problems with accommodating those who are in any way different. This is a

memorable parable of prejudice and the horrific price it exacts in national and personal terms. RD

A Twist in Time

★★★★

Jean Ure, Walker, 144pp, 0 7445 5919 7, £9.99 hbk

Cosy (Cosima) Walker enjoys a close and supportive relationship with her reclusive invalid mother. When her mother is hospitalised for a period of time life changes dramatically for Cosy. Sent to live with a foster family whose two other charges, Jade and Jemma, seem intent on making life difficult for Cosy, her despair is compounded by her inability to cope with maths homework without help from her mother. Gradually, she notices the occasional presence of another girl in her bedroom, a girl from another time with whom Cosy can only communicate through the writing which each of them does in

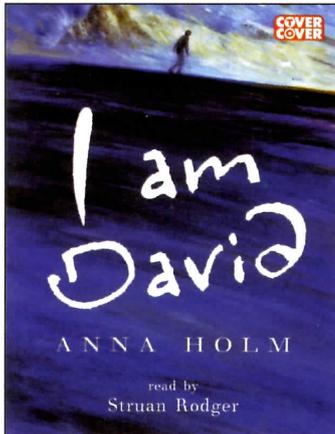
the room. Reading her 'ghost girl's' diary, Cosy realises that Kathleen also sees her and is puzzled by Cosy's modern day clothes. Kathleen's presence provides Cosy with a sense of her own worth. Cosy's ability to modify her perspective about other people changes too, as she matures from the sheltered, over-sensitive and rather self-centred girl she has been. *A Twist in Time* touches on a number of sensitive issues which are handled with a delicate touch. These are woven into an entertaining story of modern girlhood with a 'twist' back to World War Two which gives an added interest to the story. VC

I am David

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Anne Holm, read by Struan Rodger, Cover to Cover, 4hrs 55mins unabridged, 1 85549 347 0, £14.99

The classic story of David's solo



journey from the camp right across Europe to the woman in Denmark is one of incredible emotion. Deprived of warmth in the camp David knows that his survival depends on not getting involved with others but using his wits to sustain himself and maintain his independence. Struan Rodger seems to understand that perfectly so that his reading is flat and observational, feeling the emotions of situations but not containing them exactly as David does himself. The result is that there is no intrusion by the reader, important in a story that is so emotionally charged. Listeners can enjoy the very personal and intimate nature of *I Am David* as they travel with David to his final, tear-jerking reunion. **JE**

Toad Rage

★★★★

Morris Gleitzman, Puffin, 160pp, 0 14 130655 6, £3.99 pbk

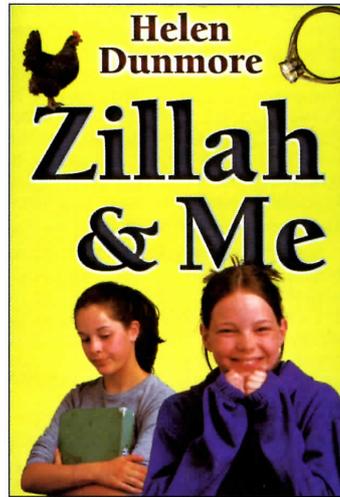
Why do humans hate cane toads so much? Limpy is determined to find out why, and to do something about it. In his attempts to do so, he travels around parts of Queensland, often narrowly avoiding getting killed en route. Limpy's perseverance and growing sense of reality throughout the book is well treated by Gleitzman, who in this warm and frequently hilarious story is not afraid to touch upon more sensitive matters as the occasion demands. The book should appeal to a wide range of readers, but is more likely to be enjoyed by boys. **RL**

Fire, Bed and Bone

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Henrietta Branford, read by Eve Karpf, Cavalcade, 2hrs 40minutes abridged, 0 7540 7086 7, £7.99

A story told by a dog is difficult enough to carry off in print but would seem almost impossible in an audio version. Henrietta Branford achieved the first and Eve Karpf's brilliant reading sweeps away any reservations about the second. Seen through the eyes of the old hunting dog, *Fire, Bed and Bone* brings alive the hardship and injustice that led to the uprising of the peasants in 1381. Corrupt clergy, greedy landowners and their servants and the ravages of disease are all shown as they affect Rufus and Comfort, their children and dogs. Branford fights for the common people against all the forces of oppression while making a long distant past accessible; Eve Karpf's reading adds warmth and humanity. **JE**



Zillah and Me

★★★★

Helen Dunmore, Scholastic, 160pp, 0 439 01298 8, £4.99 pbk

Two very different girls, coping with the loss of loved-ones, are thrown together in a remote part of Cornwall, mainly because their mothers were childhood friends. London-born Katie might seem the weaker of the two, but ultimately it is the seemingly strong, individualistic Zillah, who requires the most support and understanding to emerge from the deep depression and torment she feels. This is a well-written, slowly unfolding story, not very eventful, which will need careful placing. It would be most appreciated by thoughtful girls, who enjoy stories where emotional impact predominates. **DB**

Strays Like Us

★★★★

Richard Peck, Hodder Signature, 160pp, 0 340 74964 4, £4.99 pbk

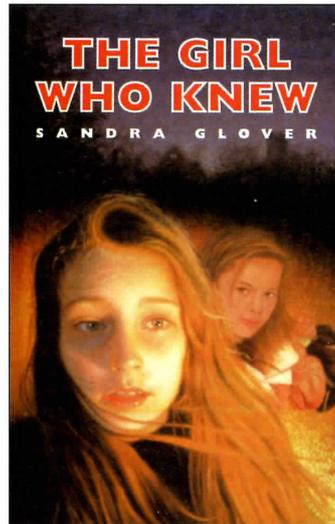
When Molly is sent to live with her Great Aunt Fay in a traditional, small town community she is certain that her stay is temporary. Initially she remains detached, reluctant to make friends or get involved with her neighbours. But gradually she comes to the painful realisation that the days crossed off the calendar are taking her further from a reunion with her mother rather than bring her closer as she had hoped. She learns to appreciate her new family and develops an empathic understanding for Will the parentless boy next door. A fleeting friendship with Tracy who is educated at home by her controlling and over protective mother enables her to understand that even within apparently secure families children can be lonely: 'she was the one with most space around her of all of us and she wasn't even a stray.' Peck tells a convincingly reflective story about the impact of parental neglect on the lives of young people in which there is tension without sensationalism. **NG**

The Girl Who Knew

★★★★

Sandra Glover, Andersen Press, 160pp, 0 86264 962 5, £9.99 hbk

Kits has been injured in a hit and run accident whilst her friend Lisa has been left unharmed. She is furious at her situation and resentful that she has to transfer to a school which is



willing to include her now that she is in a wheelchair.

The beginning of this story seems to be about to deliver a fairly conventional accident story of the 'brilliant teenager hates being disabled but becomes a better, more sensitive person whilst learning to walk again' kind. In fact, the novel quite quickly becomes a gripping page turner written in clear, exciting prose. Kits develops a kind of ESP and realises that her friend Lisa is in great danger from the driver of the runaway car. The mystery element and the thrilling ending help Glover to avoid some of the clichés of this kind of story. True, Kits is described as 'almost totally dependent on others', and the reader is encouraged to hope that recovery for Kits, like her friend Paul, is not too far away. But she is a strong and independent character with plenty of life in her, one who seems able to cope with whatever life throws her way. **LK**

The Holy Terrors

★★★★

Josephine Feeney, Collins, 144pp, 0 00 185745 2, £9.99 hbk

Gary and Robert of *The Dadhunters* are faced with the prospect of broodiness now that Gary's mum and dad are back together. They might think that a baby brother, or, horror of horrors, a sister, is a good idea, but Gary definitely is self-centredly aghast and out to change their misguided minds. Robert is at hand to provide the anti-baby strategies and game plan!

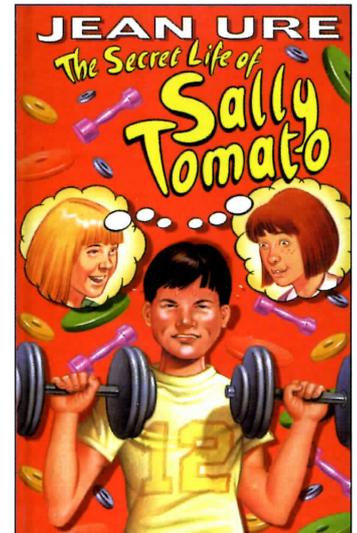
An interesting mix of religion and laddishness here, in a good-humoured, fast yarn that does not take itself too seriously and ought to find a readership among reluctant boys. **DB**

The Secret Life of Sally Tomato

★★★★★

Jean Ure, ill. Karen Donnelly, Collins, 160pp, 0 00 185640 5, £9.99 hbk

This is the book that refuses to bore! 12 year-old Salvatore d'Amato (see title) might be a bit precocious with language and naively nerdy about girls, but he is a boy with ambition – to kiss a girl (preferably Lucy West) before he has completed his book of 'Dire and Disgusting Ditties', based on the alphabet. Rhymes, sauciness, letters, irony, comedy, comic



characters, Ure has thrown in the lot to create a proper little turn-on for reluctant to read boys. Hooray too for Donnelly's humorous black and white drawings, which complement effectively the whole tone and fun of this must-buy book. **DB**



Greg

★★★★★

Dirk Walbrecker, trans. Anthea Bell, Mammoth, 192pp, 0 7497 4156 2, £4.99 pbk

Metaphors for the transition from childhood to adolescence are many and varied in children's books, but one of the most original must be this novel in which Greg, aged thirteen, wakes one morning to find he is no longer a boy but a very large caterpillar. He retains, however, the intellect and emotions of a human. While obviously frustrating and frightening, Greg also finds his new form enables him to behave in certain ways not deemed appropriate for a human of his age, as, for example, in an hilarious scene when he gives her comeuppance to Gina, the ghastly television presenter.

Greg was originally published in German, and is one in a series of books in translation published by Mammoth. At present there is a great deal of translation from English into other languages, but far too few in the opposite direction. Let's hope that *Greg* is the beginning of a trend for inward translation. **VC**

Hex: Ghosts

★★★

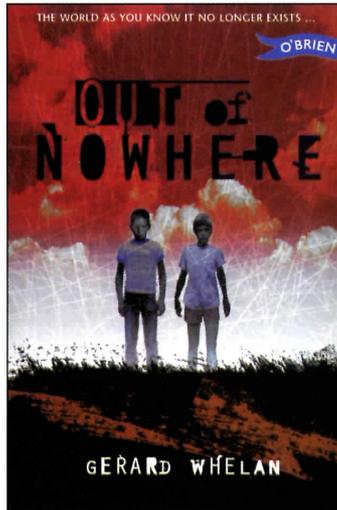
Rhiannon Lassiter, Macmillan, 208pp, 0 333 78047 7, £9.99 hbk

Ghosts is the third volume of a trilogy set in the 2300s; in this case in 2371. In a society more dystopian than utopian, Europe is governed by the European Federation which intends the human race to remain exactly as it was in the early 21st century. Space exploration is forbidden and all scientific progress is tightly controlled. Society is regulated by 'the web', which has become highly organized, and runs along the strict network demarcation lines: the city, England, Europe. Due to genetic experiments in earlier centuries, certain individuals have inherited the Hex gene. This gives them a telepathic ability to navigate and interact with the web. Under the regime of the European Federation, Hexes are feared by the government for their abilities, and consequently driven into concealment. Ghosts are a group of young Hexes dedicated to rescuing their fellow Hexes and to overthrowing the government. The most brilliant and most wanted of these is a young woman: Raven. Much of **Ghosts** pivots on the activities of Drow, a young hacker who discovers he carries the Hex gene. This enables him to establish contact on the web with two other Hexes, Gift and Tally, who have a computer file, the possession of which would give Hexes the power to overcome the corrupt government. Drow's navigation of Gift and Tally to safety via the web and Raven's fight to overthrow the government brings the Hex trilogy to a triumphant conclusion. While **Hex** may be read as a futuristic adventure series, it also provides some interesting reflections on the future development of science and technology on this planet. There is a wide cast of supporting characters and quite a bit of technological jargon which may be more assimilated if the series is read in sequence. VC

Out of Nowhere

★★★★

Gerard Whelan, O'Brien Press, 240pp, 0 86278 637 1, £4.99 pbk
Subtitled 'an entertainment', Whelan's new novel might initially seem merely a Greene-like foray into



less serious domains than we find in his earlier work. But the Greene comparison brings with it darker resonances also. Whelan teasingly provides here, via an extremely arresting narrative, an examination (sometimes playful, sometimes philosophical, sometimes both) of evil, responsibility, guilt and compassion. From its highly atmospheric opening, set in an Irish monastery where two young disorientated people inexplicably find themselves, the story takes an apparently endless series of unexpected turns and plays en route with numerous styles, genres and allusions: truly, as we are occasionally reminded, it's a funny old world. Clever, challenging and engrossing, this is a book not to be read too quickly or carelessly. RD

Youch! It Bites!

NON-FICTION ★★

Trevor Day, Templar, 32pp, 1 84011 024 4, £9.95 hbk

With mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus (surely the first of its kind to be named after a Glasgow thoroughfare) mobilising New York, and tick-borne Lyme disease hitting our headlines at home, biting bugs have never had so good a press since Ronald Ross sorted out malaria. So a look at 'real live monsters up close' would seem to be timely. The 'monsters' portrayed here range from mite-size to sharks, crocodiles and grizzly bears and have in common the ability to be

'dangerous' to humans. A mix of frenetic typography and photomicrography explains how, but never pauses to reflect on how *really* dangerous human activity can be to these so-called 'monsters'. It seems unreasonable to demonise, in the way this book does, creatures to which humankind considers itself superior by virtue of those creatures' supposed lack of reasoning power.

A more objective approach would be much preferable to this misapplied sensationalism. After all, most of us are sensible enough to respect the life styles of 'dangerous' creatures, and, by not interfering with them, remain much less threatened than they. TP

Suffering Scientists

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

224pp, 0 439 01211 2, £7.99 pbk

Shocking Electricity

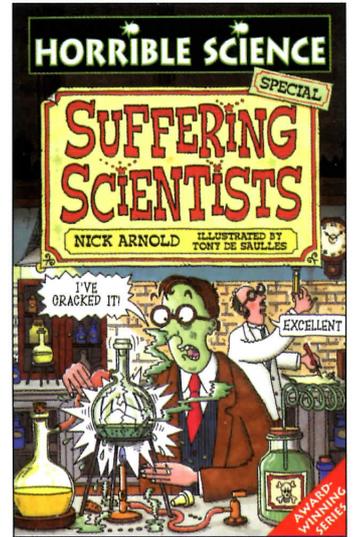
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

160pp, 0 439 01272 4, £3.99 pbk

Nick Arnold, ill, Tony De Saulles, Scholastic 'Horrible Science'

After a while, series (even award-winning series) fatigue sets in. Without checking publication date I could not be sure whether I had seen **Electricity** before or not. Treatment, delivery and jokes are so uniform to the 'Horrible Science' series that its commendable consistency works, eventually, slightly against it. However this rib-tickling intro to sparkology does not take long to engage the reader with facts like 'You can make electricity from farts' and in 1990 a power surge blew up every television set in Piddlehinton. There is much else, too, as this new member joins its predecessors with a warm welcome.

Suffering Scientists, however, is a cut above the rest. As science is driven by human curiosity, so the humans who are driven are curiosities in themselves. Ever since the Eureka Streaker jumped out of his bath, the people behind the principles of science have fascinated their students, mainly because personal details are not *de rigueur* in text books. Here is the 'human story' supplement to much of the history of science as we know it. Find a textbook name (Lavoisier, for instance) and flip through here until you get to him and why he was



imprisoned for so long. Here is a volume jammed with quirky personal details of the men and women whose names are science milestones. A real joy to read, but less so to consult; why, oh why is there NO INDEX? – serendipity is all very well, but if you have got milestones, you need signposts as well. TP

Ireland

NON-FICTION ★★

Terry Deary, ill. Martin Brown, Scholastic 'Horrible Histories', 192pp, 0 439 01436 0, £7.99 pbk

'History,' as the back-cover blurb reminds us, 'has never been so horrible!'

When, as here, the subject is Ireland, it is a reasonable claim, so reasonable in fact that Deary's decision to deal with the country in a format which demands humorous treatment earns immediately some measure of admiration – if not, indeed, amazement: what, for example, can he possibly make of the Great Famine or of 1916 or of the country's apparent obsession with its various 'bloody' Sundays? The humour is generally to be found in the play between the essential seriousness of the content and the essential facetiousness of the style; it is, sometimes, a very precarious balancing act. Young readers will, however, find enough to amuse them without having to worry too much about such niceties. RD

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary**Getting Rid of Kareenna**

★★★★

Helena Pielichaty, Oxford, 112pp, 0 19 271819 3, £5.99 pbk

Fear and secrecy are the bully's most effective weapons, as Suzanne discovers when Kareenna and her friends make her school years miserable. Three years on, when Suzanne's Saturday job again brings her into contact with Kareenna, she realises she must rid herself of this emotional stranglehold.

Unable to confide in her supportive but troubled family, Suzanne must fall back on her own resources. Sympathy is aroused by the graphic description of Suzanne's suffering, but it is Kareenna's father – a violent drug addict – who tempers this with

the awareness that bullies are as much to be pitied as feared. It is this revelation which frees Suzanne from Kareenna's grip and which will offer courage and insight to those in her position. VR

In Black and White

★★★★

Catherine R. Johnson, Oxford University Press, 128pp, 0 19 271829 0, £5.99 pbk

Stefanie Clark, fifteen, lives with her neurotic mother in a run-down block of flats in Stepney. The flats are soon to be demolished and their occupants re-housed. Helped by her school Camera Club, Stefanie has become a keen photographer, and is making a commemorative portrait

folder of the block's tenants, pictured in atmospheric grainy black-and-white, before they all disperse. But this is the East End, with all its racial, social, cultural strains and tensions, where a very different form of black-and-white erupts in ethnic confrontation and violence. The enmities are racially more complex than might appear. When Stefanie discovers the brutally assaulted body of an Asian neighbour, and finds out that the culprits include the brother of her mixed-race best friend, she can no longer seek refuge in comforting pretences, or hide behind her camera as a mere observer, but must accept her own involvement and make painful choices. Stefanie is an attractive character, and her difficult world is well caught through convincing dialogue and believable

relationships. Tough questions are clearly and honestly presented. Unfortunately the writing is patchy, often flat and careless in straight narrative passages. This blunts the edge of what, in its depiction of teenage emotion and cross-cultural relationships, is an incisive and disturbing story. PH

Raspberries on the Yangtze

★★★★

Karen Wallace, Simon and Schuster, 156pp, 0 689 82796 2, £7.99 pbk

From the opening sentence ('It all began the day my brother and I decided to poison our mother') this novel takes us into a childhood

summer past where high drama is mostly the stuff of children's fantasy. Nancy, her older brother Andrew and friends, play in a backwater of the Gatineau River in Quebec, enacting fantasies and swinging on the squeaky, sagging wire fence with wild raspberries on the other side, the fence making its 'Yang' sound – the Yangtze of the title. The misunderstandings, which begin with the opening line, extend into untangling the puzzles of adults and their world. Nancy has already deciphered the facts of life from careful observation and sells a booklet to the less knowing – 'Sexual intercourse takes place in cupboards. That's why all bedrooms have them. That's what cupboards are there for.' The mystery of sexuality surrounds Nancy in cleverly woven strands of plot neatly balanced against the richness of childhood play. A book to hang around with. **AJ**

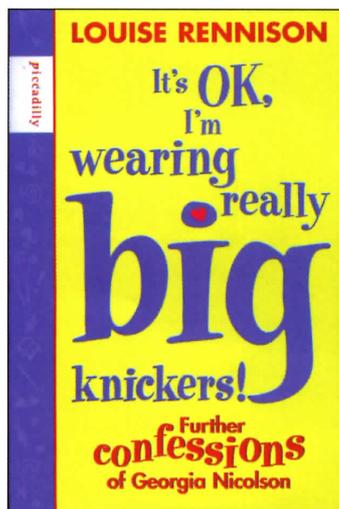
Wising Up

★★

E. A. Blare, Orchard, 176pp, 1 84121 557 0, £4.99 pbk

16 year-old Ritch has nothing in his life until he meets Alex. As ambitious and well-educated as he is streetwise, she convinces him to realise his potential and escape the sink estate on which he lives. However, his long-standing feud with the local gang leader, Ice, leads to an abduction attempt on Alex and Ritch's dreams dissolve when she refuses to see him again.

Despite his determination to change her mind, the bleak narrative offers little hope of reconciliation and Ritch seems locked into another lost cause. The stark realism of events and settings is somewhat diminished by the uncertain tone of the narrative: American street dialogue meets occasionally dated slang in an uneasy alliance. **VR**



It's OK, I'm wearing really big knickers!
(Further confessions of Georgia Nicolson)

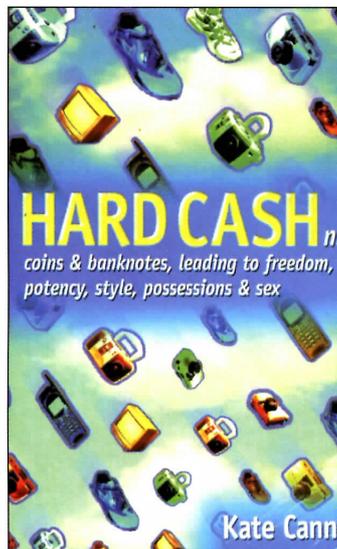
★★★★

Louise Rennison, Piccadilly, 208pp, 1 85340 690 2, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 685 6, £5.99 pbk

This sequel to the Smarties prize-winner *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*, has been predictably compared to Bridget Jones – certainly its idiosyncratic use

of language, deadpan humour and preoccupation with the opposite sex merit such a comparison, but there is none of the world-weariness of Jones. Instead, Georgia Nicolson endears herself to teenage readers with a sense of the burlesque – personified in Angus the cat – and an inability to feel any sort of self-worth.

This is a very funny book within which teenage girls will find much which is reassuring and familiar. I anticipate an entirely new set of catchphrases finding their way into teenage vocabularies! **VR**



Hard Cash

★★★★

Kate Cann, Scholastic 'Point', 320pp, 0 439 01308 9, £4.99 pbk

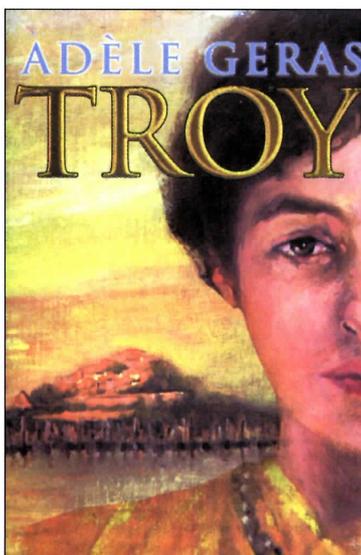
This shrewd, well-paced, enjoyable novel will ring many bells among sixth formers and those soon to join them. Rich Steele's abbreviated first name is ironic, since he is permanently skint. At seventeen Rich is doing his A-levels, or supposed to be. A gifted art student, ahead of him lies Art College if he gets his grades, and his hard-up but supportive parents are ambitious for him. The trouble is Rich's extreme liking for good clothes, beer and girls, and lack of the money to fund them. In desperation Rich sends off a folder of his drawings to several advertising agencies, and when one responds with tantalising prospects of a contract, glamour and undreamed-of quantities of cash, he heads off towards a mirage of success which first gleams brightly but then threatens academic, romantic and family disaster. The college and the glitzy ad-world scenes are vividly caught, and the book is rooted in sound, sane values without being preachy. Rich is an engaging hero, and his first-person narrative is skilfully told in a present tense which is actually not quite present but near-future, near enough to catch the ruefulness, rawness and occasional self-mockery of his retrospective feelings. *Hard Cash* is a good read, closing with a number of loose ends which its promised sequel, *Shacked Up*, will no doubt resolve. **PH**

Troy

★★★★

Adèle Geras, Scholastic, 360pp, 0 439 01409 3, £14.99 hbk

The transition from teenage to adult



fiction is notoriously difficult since young adults have preoccupations rooted in both sides of the age divide. Geras has succeeded in crossing this bridge with *Troy*: the ten year siege propels her young characters prematurely into the adult world of love, death and responsibility.

The story begins resonantly in the Blood Room – graphically named for the wounds endured by Trojan soldiers. It is here, where the horrors of war are most tellingly encapsulated, that the goddess Aphrodite toys with sisters Marpessa and Xanthe, causing them both to fall in love with the same man.

The Olympian gods are never far away – directing events for their own amusement and distraction with compassion or malevolence. Out of the double bind of a prolonged siege and omnipotent gods emerge characters who enthrall and convince because they rise above the constraints of their lives to find their own paths through the ruins of all they have known.

The triumphs and tragedies of *Troy* may be familiar territory but Geras reveals the human stories behind the historical events. Hector and Andromache, Paris and Helen, Priam and Hercules – all are given frailties which reveal the human experiences of love and betrayal and endear the characters to the reader.

Troy is a long and challenging book shot through with the rhythms of speech: the beautifully observed gossip of the three kitchen crones with their commentaries on events past and present; Alastor's transparent – and successful – attempts to persuade Marpessa into his bed; the deeply felt internal dialogue of characters trying to weather the misfortunes which befall them.

The book ends with hope of a new beginning both for those exiled from Troy and those who remain within the shattered city. This affirmation of the strength and creativity of the human spirit transfuses the narrative with a quiet, assured power in which the reader can only rejoice. **VR**

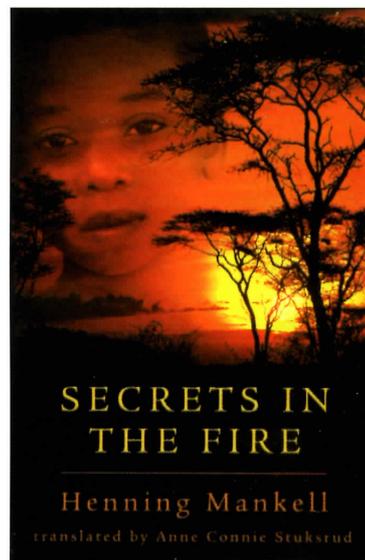
Secrets in the Fire

FACTION

★★★★★

Henning Mankell, trans. Anne Connie Stuksrud, Allen & Unwin (Australia), 168pp, 1 86508 181 7, £5.50 pbk

Ever since Princess Diana's well-publicised African visits to the victims, landmines and their appalling results have been part of public consciousness, but like so many other barbarities they happen in distant places to distant people. A book which makes the horror vivid, personal and intimate has an effect quite different from snippets of film, however shocking. Mankell, a Swedish writer, tells in this book – a novelised documentary – the true story of Sofia, a 12-year-old who lost both her legs when she stepped on a landmine in Mozambique. Her elder sister was killed in the same explosion. Grievously maimed and desperately poor, the child Sofia remakes her life in a story of extraordinary courage and resolution.



Translated into English and published in Australia, poised uncertainly between children's book and adult novel and between fact and fiction, this book will not be privately chosen reading for most children. But it is beautifully written, and an important humanitarian story. It deserves effective distribution in Britain, and a place in schools wherever the developing world is being studied. **PH**

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

I will not ever Never eat a tomato (see p19)

Rock-a-Doodle-Do! (see p20)

Swine Lake (see p23)

The Flood Tales (see p23)



CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 23

Brian Alderson

Dobbin ousted by Findhorn. Can it be ...



Consternation at Lee!

Sitting behind their roll-top desks, green eyeshades at the ready, the BfK team have been impatiently awaiting copy for the back page about a little wooden horse.⁽¹⁾ And now they get this.

Why?

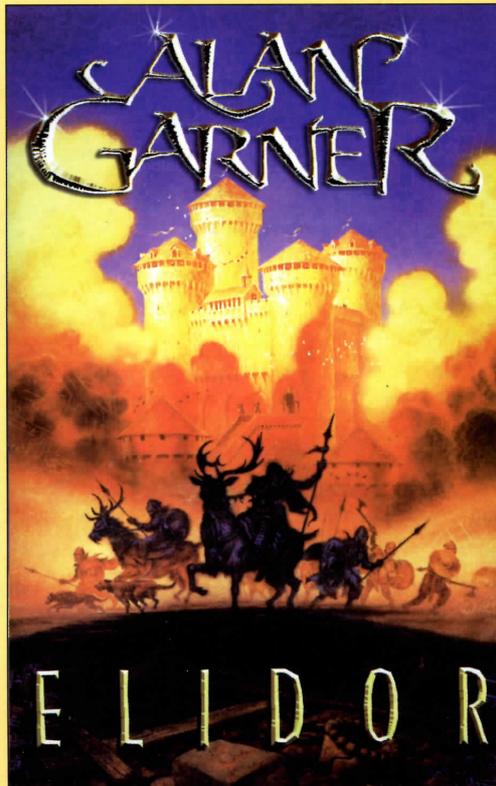
He was confessedly a quiet little horse and he's suddenly been flung aside by Night Waves. Fourteenth of July it happened – first night of the Proms. The back-page man had been listening to the Glagolitic Mass, and when he went to turn off the radio, behold! an excited lady⁽²⁾ was beginning to talk about children's books. Cor! what condescension in so posh a programme. But we are, it seems, living in thrilling times. 'Something has happened in children's literature,' she cried, and wheeled on 'the usual sources' to tell us that the subject had come of age. Dumbfounding? Do queues round the block for Harry Potter IV, or journalists all agog to read *The Amber Spyglass*⁽³⁾, betoken a New Age? Surely the little wooden horse must be temporarily re-stabled in favour of some lustier beast and a sharper rebuttal.

So why 'Elidor'?

It's a pivotal book. Published in 1965 it marks the summation of a period far more thrilling than the present, when intelligent experiment in books for children (rather than for teenagers) was rife, encouraged by creative editors who were not hamstrung by normative edicts or the demands of conglomerate tradesmen. Pivotal too in its author's career: a high Romantic tale, separating those two beginner fantasies that Alan Garner has more or less disowned: *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963) from the contorted narratives of *The Owl Service* (1967) and *Red Shift* (1973).

High Romantic?

Not 'alf. Admittedly four children, marked down to save a Tolkienian secondary world from desolation, may seem a corny plot, but it is underpinned by the verities of myth and folktale: Childe Roland and Elidurus who both broke through to 'fairyland'; the heroic fairies of



Ireland and their Treasures; and Findhorn, the unicorn – emotional centre of the book – dying in the lap of the 'mayde that is makeles'.⁽⁴⁾ The mystery gains potency through contrast with the everyday environs of suburban Manchester ('even the toadstools are made of concrete'), and the fractious children set against the Blytonesque caricature of parents and neighbours.



And also 'Classic'?

What gives the fantasy its classic status (enhanced by Charles Keeping's tremendous pen drawings) is the manner of its crafting. Garner's quick prose attunes itself to both of the worlds that you encounter: Elidor, with its 'air as thick as water', and Dad's back garden, where a startled bird 'braked in the air, shot sideways, and flew back to the chimney'. Undemonstrative quotes perhaps, but declaring a command of diction which convinces right through to the moments of tense drama. Strange to say, the book was only 'commended' in the Carnegie Stakes for 1965 (and who now remembers the winner?) but the fashioning of its story and the energy of its writing stand in happy contrast to the laborious, self-reflexive plod of some of the Medallists *de nos jours*.

And That Goes for Night Waves Too.

A too-limited knowledge of her subject – or malign vibrations emanating from Hogwarts – may account for that lady presenter's distorted understanding; but if such arbiters of culture can bring themselves to attend to children's books with some regularity who knows if they will not improve? And if, before long, they send a microphone down to those hornbeam trees on the Oxford ring road⁽⁵⁾ they should remember that that isn't the first place where 'the shadows broke through'. ■

(1) *The Little Wooden Horse* was to have been featured... (Ed)

(2) Sarah Dunant.

(3) The third part of Philip Pullman's trilogy, 'His Dark Materials', which is published in November.

(4) Thank you to Neil Philip whose book on Garner, *A Fine Anger* (Collins, 1981), is one of the best ever written on a contemporary author. Naturally, it is out of print and I have rarely met anyone who knows of it. (BA)

(5) A significant location in Pullman's trilogy.

Elidor is published by Collins, 0 00 184202 1, £9.99 hbk, 0 00 674291 2, £4.99 pbk. The cover illustration is by David Wyatt and other drawings by Charles Keeping.

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