



BOOKS FOR KEEPS

March 2001 No.127
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the children's book magazine

Quentin Blake
Reluctant Readers
Sharon Creech

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CoverStory

This issue's cover is Sharon Creech's *The Wanderer*. Sharon Creech is interviewed by Suzanne Manczuk on page 8. Our thanks to Macmillan Children's Books for their help in producing this March cover.

EDITORIAL

A recent Children's Book Circle meeting focused on the issue of white writer, black characters – a subject intensely argued in the letters column of BfK in 1997 (Nos 105–107). The consensus amongst our correspondents at that time (who included such prominent black writers as James Berry, Errol Lloyd and Jacqueline Roy) was that 'ethnic origin should not be a barrier' to producing convincing fiction. However, the further and crucial point was made that there should be 'familiarity with one's subject matter'. As Beverley Naidoo put it in her letter: 'The test of any book is in the reading.'

In this issue of BfK, we discuss two recent novels about racism, one by a black writer and one by a white writer, which appear to demonstrate that there is no room for complacency in this debate. Malorie Blackman's important new novel, *Noughts and Crosses*, a powerfully imagined novel about racism with its genesis in the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-apartheid struggle is reviewed

on page 26. We also publish Errol Lloyd's critical discussion of Frances Mary Hendry's *Chains*, a novel about the slave trade, which raises important questions about research and historical perspectives in the writing of historical fiction.

This issue of BfK also introduces a new series, Inspiring 'Reluctant' Readers, in



Rosemary Stones

which two of our readers discuss how a particular book inspired a particular young reader in their class. We invite you, our readership, to let us know (in 500

words) about your experiences – whether you are involved with young readers as a teacher, parent, librarian or other carer. We look forward to publishing your accounts.

Finally, a letter to BfK arrived from a reader who describes himself as a 'newish author'. He continued, 'I am already invited into schools and libraries to do ... well, what, exactly? ... I wonder if you'd consider running an article highlighting some of the best practice.' In response, we have invited

Vivian French, an author much in demand in schools, to share her practical tips for school visits.



Illustrator Ardizzone in typically voluptuous company – a 1956 holiday thank you sketch to Michael Behrens from Edward Ardizzone: *Sketches for Friends* (see p.17).

Rosemary

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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A Sailboat in the Sky

The book at the early planning stage, as yet without a title ... and at the foot of this page a finished spread.

QUENTIN BLAKE ET SES COAINS
Rebecca Brown
John
e f... us ...

A visit to his local library resulted in our Children's Laureate taking part in an unusual picture book project involving the collaboration of eighteen hundred children. **Quentin Blake** explains.

Nowadays I spend part of every year in France, not so very far by road from the town of Rochefort, and it was on one extraordinary visit to the library there (which is another story) that I encountered a group of local teachers, well organised in their research into using picture books in the classroom, LSA 17 (Lectures Source d'Apprentissages). What they were hoping to do next, they explained, was to produce a book in which children collaborated with an illustrator. Oh yes, I said, showing a cautious interest; what was it to be about? 'Sur l'humanisme.'

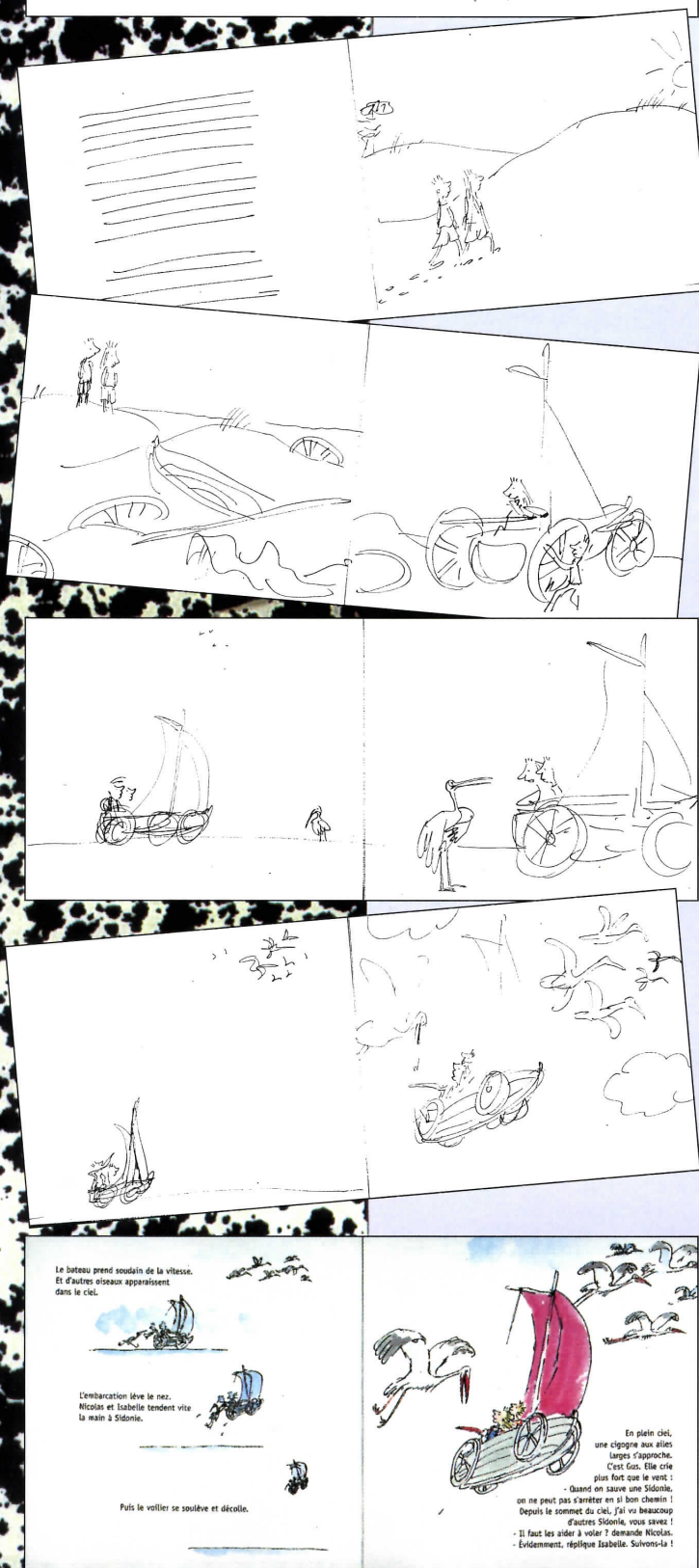
What I found out quite quickly was that we were not talking about Humanism, but about humanitarian problems: of racism, the environment, of how we treat our fellow men and women. My task (how could I resist?), it seemed to me, was first of all to provide a visual pretext or starting-point which could allow a young hero and heroine to encounter a variety of problems. As we were near the sea I thought of a boat. We started with three black-and-white drawings (I would call them roughs) and to offer a range of possibilities I proposed a boat with wheels: one which could be on the sea, on the land, and in addition to that, fly. From these drawings the children set off in search of ideas: amongst which almost everyone went for the possibilities of flight.



Above, La Rochelle teachers selecting work and, below, Quentin Blake talking to pupils in Rochefort.



My local teachers were in touch with the inspector of French speaking schools in Northern Europe, so that soon, via the Internet, they were receiving material not only from the South West but also from Luxembourg, London, Dublin, Oslo and even Singapore. 'Une tempête d'idées.' On the basis of a selection of all



this I put together a complete sequence of rough drawings making up a narrative, and this set was returned to the schools for more work – more suggestions, coloured drawings, dialogues. My job then was to stitch together a sort of patchwork in what I felt to be the most viable form for publication as a book – one which could present itself like any other in the bookshops – and to do the finished drawings.

Perhaps it was only to be expected that the story came out as a linear series of problems – bullying, war, pollution – with the rescue of a single character from each situation gradually filling the boat. The development of the project was supported by meetings, such as a day conference for several hundred children and their teachers in La Rochelle – a group of children from London came specially, and teachers from several cities, and there were readings, sketches, songs – and a gathering of several hundred children at Rochefort. I don't need to emphasise the extent of work and benefits of motivation implied in this activity. In the end, eighteen hundred children took part.



Photocopies of the original artwork hanging at Rochefort Library.

And then to bring our venture to a successful conclusion we needed a publisher. For the past twenty-five years I have been published in France by Gallimard Jeunesse but their advice was that, on this occasion, I should approach Alain Serres who runs a small but noticeable publishing house called Rue du Monde: one which specialises in current issues such as the environment and children's rights. Serres had an initial moment of caution, conscious that a book by children is not necessarily a book for children. However, the premise of this book was that it was by me; though a me putting together children's ideas and fully marinated, so to speak, in their thoughts and reactions. Once that this was clear, Alain Serres became our publisher. First (because he is also a writer) he worked on the text that I had stitched together from the children's words, making it more fluent and acceptable. Then – most impressively – he produced the book in elegant form and got it into the shops by the rentrée in September. Everything had happened within the space of an academic year.

The teachers involved also put an enormous amount of work into an accompanying CD Rom, entitled *Aventure d'une écriture, Ecriture d'une aventure* paid for by the education authority of the Poitou-Charentes region. It shows in considerable detail the writings and drawings of the participating classes as well as film clips of those days when we met together. As a record it is fascinating, but much more important is its potential use as a tool kit for teachers who want to pursue the theme further. By intention, the end of the book, with the friends setting off again in a new improved boat to meet new problems, offers this possibility. It's not only the end but also the start of a story, and of work in school.

The fact that this project happened within the two years when I was having the novel experience of being the first Children's Laureate was entirely a coincidence; in fact, if I had been able to plan it I am sure I would have arranged it otherwise. However, it did give me the opportunity of living something like two differing Laureate lives in parallel. Tiring, but fun. ■

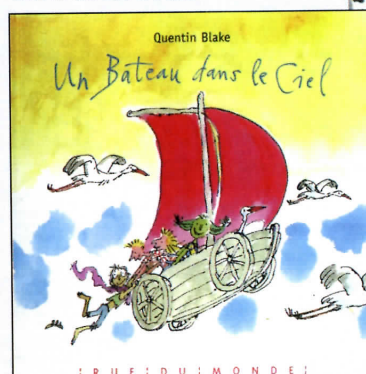
Quentin Blake is the Children's Laureate. *Un Bateau dans le Ciel* is published in France by Rue du Monde (2 912084 30 X).



Drawings by young children for the project.



The finished book.



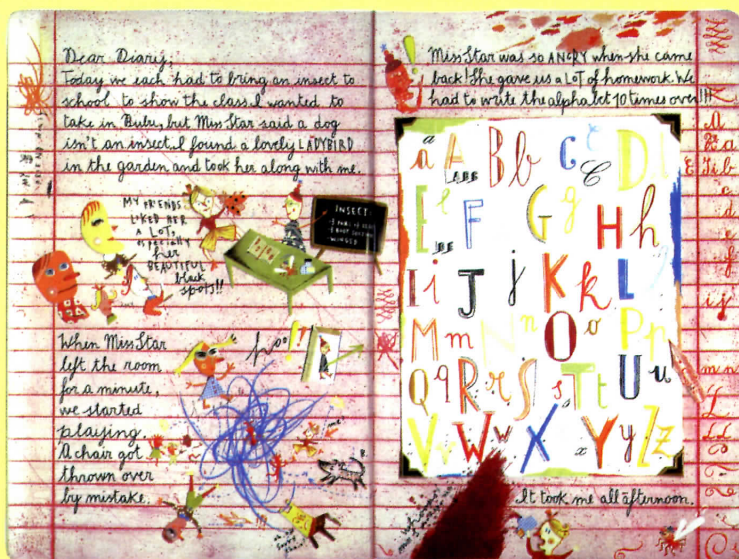
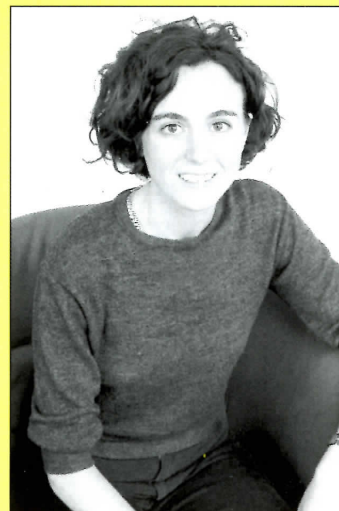
Windows into Illustration: Sara Fanelli

Sara Fanelli's dynamically innovative graphic talent was seen in her first books, *Button* and *Wolf!* Here she explains the techniques and thinking behind her recent picture book, *Dear Diary*.

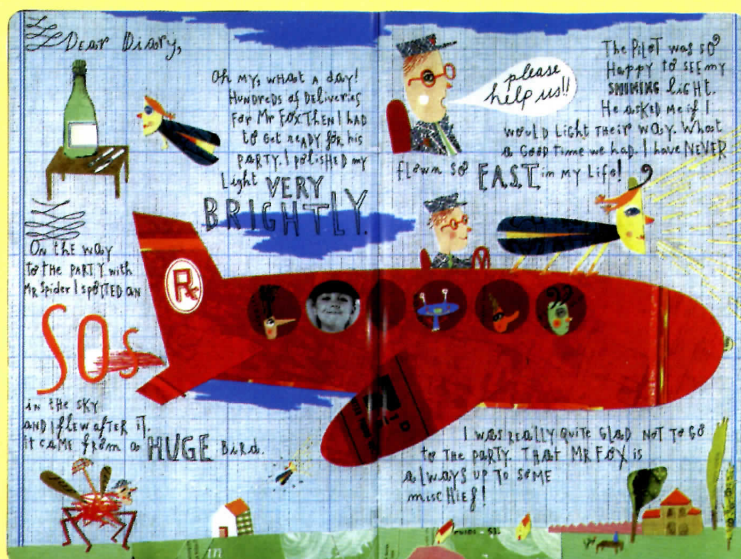
When I am developing an idea for a new book I try to integrate several of my interests. The subject of the story is vitally linked to the sort of image I wish to depict; but the narrative structure which is best to tell the story is equally important to me. In *Dear Diary* I combined a series of short stories – sometimes simple, sometimes more elaborate – using the device of seven

parties going on during the same evening: the party at Lucy's house and the insect party, which we eventually discover is taking place in Lucy's garden.

This subject matter of diaries gives me the



Pages from Lucy's Diary ...



... and from Firefly's Diary.

different diary entries and visually I used graphic elements that relate to diaries, notebooks, etc. The idea was to tell the events of one single day as seen by the seven different characters. Each character describes the same events from its/his/her individual point of view. So each character both enriches the narrative by adding its/his/her details and at the same time reveals connections with the other characters' versions which eventually give the reader the full rounded explanation of the events of the whole day.

A little girl named Lucy is the character around which the day revolves. Her diary comes first and last and all the other characters come directly or indirectly into her day.

Lucy's diary is followed by her dog Bubu's diary. And Bubu's interpretation of the events we have just read about in Lucy's diary is very different.

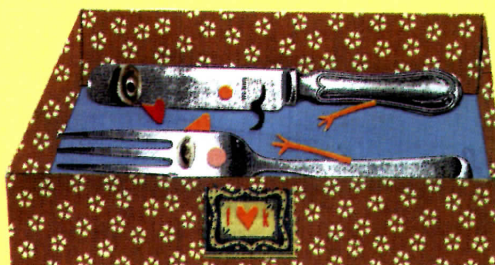
I wished inanimate objects also to have a diary – children often relate to objects (especially everyday ones such as chairs, knives and forks, etc.) attributing to them a personality and making friends with them. So the school chair has its own diary entry, as well as the knife and fork.

The other category of characters comes from the insect world. There are two

chance to exploit my love of ephemera related to old stationery and diaries, note books, handwriting. I have been passionately collecting old papers for a long time – I find these materials perfect for collage, because they have a natural beauty partly given by the sense of time they suggest with their old stains and pale colours – the very papers and labels almost tell a story of their own.

When I was thinking about the story for a new book I tried to create a setting (the diaries) in which I could use as a central motif my collection of old stationery. Each of the seven diary entries has a different colour scheme, a different label and a quotation relevant to the character.

I mostly used collage but also some gouache paint – I find collage is the best way for me to create images. I cut out pieces of paper from magazines, old books,



from paper I first paint, from newspapers, sweet wrappers, tickets and other everyday bits of packaging. I like the richness that each piece of collage taken from a different context brings to the picture.

I also wished to retain the appearance of real diary pages – so I wrote in distinctive handwriting each of the characters' stories – the spider's handwriting is scratchy and inky; Lucy's is like the best efforts of a girl who has recently learnt calligraphy in school; Bubu's writing is large, clumsy and messy; and so on. I added onto the margins of some pages the doodles we find in real diaries – I actually made a feature of these doodles and scribbles on the endpapers of the book.

I hope that this book will be enjoyed as an interesting story with exciting images, but I also hope that it will encourage children to keep their own diary. Because – as the quotation on the title page reminds us – we don't have to wait for amazing adventures to keep a diary, we can find it inspiring just to annotate the everyday events of our lives which can become small adventures in our imagination. ■

Dear Diary (0 7445 6756 4) is published by Walker at £9.99. The paperback (0 7445 8263 6, £5.99) is due in June.

Inspiring 'Reluctant' Readers

At **Books for Keeps** we could not be more aware of the expertise of our readership (you are mostly teachers, librarians and parents) in putting the right book with the right child and of finding ways to inspire in them a love of reading. This is then, the first of a new series of articles in which **YOU** have the opportunity to share your experiences of that special book that switched a 'reluctant' reader you have worked with on to reading.

The Reluctant Reader (Primary)

Gwynneth Bailey, Language Coordinator at Aldborough County Primary School, Norwich, on how **Tell me Something Happy Before I Go to Sleep** clicked for Dottie...

What is reluctance? Reluctant readers often *can* perform the mechanics of reading, but opt not to do so, even at a very young age. They do not usually have specific learning problems. Computer games and TVs in bedrooms tempt children away from reading, from practising a skill that, once learnt, may shape their lives. The role of caring adults is critical, to nurture a love of reading, to confirm a reason for making that effort reading demands.

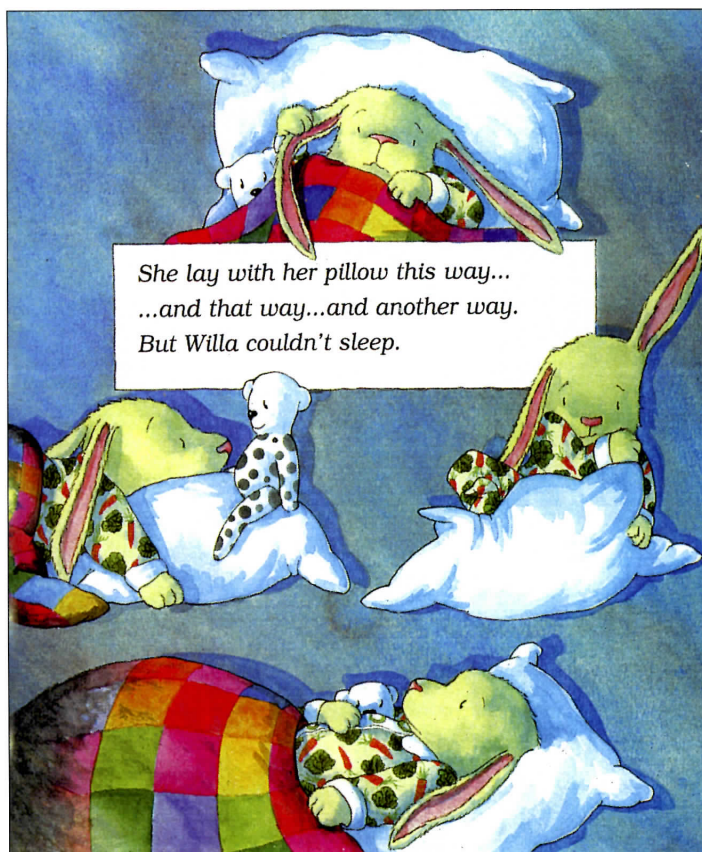
Between ages 5 and 7, Dottie was a reluctant reader. She loved listening to stories, being enthusiastically responsive orally and on paper to involved texts. Her memory for story content was excellent. She was read to at home, and used the home/school reading record. It was frustrating that she made no progress towards independence. Determinedly, she invented text, reading pictures quite accurately, using context clues, but only using the words to 'frame' her telling. Her reading became slow, mechanical, without pleasure when independence and accuracy were demanded.

Then one day I read to the class Joyce Dunbar's picture book, **Tell me Something Happy Before I Go to Sleep**. Dottie was enchanted, and coyly asked to take the book home. Next morning, and for several after, she went straight to the book corner, and started to *read* the text, smiles wreathing her face. I listened and rejoiced. Our termly book sale was due, and having ensured a copy would be available, I

watched as Dottie persuaded her mother to buy it for her. Within days, she was tackling a variety of texts with confidence and glee. This book had given Dottie the motivation to learn to read for herself. We try so desperately to *teach* children to read, but in the final analysis, they themselves have to be motivated to *learn* to read.

We need to continue the search for a 'right fit' for reluctant readers. Format is often the key, (distinctive rhythm, predictable rhyme/text, repetition, bold illustrations, obvious picture clues, humour.) We can help children build up *stamina* by sharing the reading, especially with 7+ readers. Given stories galore, shared one to one with a patient, enthusiastic adult, hopefully their reluctance will be overcome.

Another tip! Invest in an Author! I have found that author visits are such positive encouragement for reading in school. Many authors are performers, the keen competition in publishing obliging them to travel the country promoting their books. Do prepare well, reading the class some of his/her books, providing a range of their work in school, and planning relevant cross-curricular work. The visit will then provide a wonderful springboard for future reading, drawing in reluctant readers and enthusing whole Key Stages to taste more of the splendid literature currently available. Children catch enthusiasm, magnificently so when it is spread between peers.



Gwynneth Bailey's top favourite picture books for the inspiration/motivation of 'reluctant' readers:

Tell me Something Happy Before I Go to Sleep, Joyce Dunbar, ill. Debi Gliori, Picture Corgi, 0 552 54506 6, £4.99

Each Peach Pear Plum, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Puffin, 0 14 050919 4, £4.99

Here Come the Aliens!, Colin McNaughton, Walker, 0 7445 4394 0, £5.99

Winnie the Witch and other titles in this series, Valerie Thomas, ill. Korky Paul, Oxford, 0 19 272197 6, £4.99

My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes, Eve Sutton, ill. Lynley Dodd, Puffin, 0 14 050242 4, £4.99

Cockatoos, Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 996490 2, £4.99

The Gruffalo, Julia Donaldson, ill. Axel Scheffler, Macmillan, 0 333 71093 2, £4.99

The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark, Jill Tomlinson, ill. Paul Howard, Egmont, 0 7497 4178 3, £9.99 hbk

Non-threatening wordless books:

Clown, Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 949361 6, £4.99

The Snowman, Raymond Briggs, Puffin, 0 14 050350 1, £4.99

The Small Miracle, Peter Collington, Red Fox, 0 09 968071 8, £4.99

The Reluctant Reader (Secondary)

David Bennett, Senior Teacher and Head of the English Faculty at George Spencer School, Nottinghamshire, on how *Billy the Kid* clicked for Paul...

Paul was in my class in year 8, escaped me in year 9 and after a level 6 in SATs, came back into my custody in year 10. He's anxious to do well and conscientious with all written work, but obsessively aware of the technical errors, mostly phonetic spellings, that blight his work. He goes for the neat presentation and spell-checker element of word-processing whenever possible, but of course this is denied him in exams.

He's always been fidgety during read aloud sessions and viewed quiet reading like a punishment from on high. His mother has shown anxiety about Paul's failure to read for pleasure and regularly sought advice. She virtually monopolised our annual evening session for parents on encouraging private reading.

Paul claims that he's never, ever enjoyed a book and never found one that interests him. They are quite plainly boring, every one, and he can not get started on a book because all beginnings are a drag and don't motivate him to find out more.

We had a bit of a breakthrough with the Douglas Adams books or dipping into comic poetry in year 8 but my triumph was short lived. We tried the non-fiction/magazine option, with limited success. At least it provided a reading strategy for in-class sessions. However, this was infrequently followed through at home.

Paul said it was eighteen months since he last completed a book voluntarily but he'd have a



go at one I'd just reviewed (*BfK* 126) and wanted him to try. When he returned my copy he beamed with satisfaction, telling me how surprised he was at how much he had enjoyed it, especially the sad ending.

He admits that, although he read it in small doses (total reading time was about an hour and a half), there was a point when he didn't want to put *Billy the Kid* down. He liked the way that it reads like non-fiction, like a very eventful true story. He commented on the fact that the story was about an adult, and not a bunch of kids. Some of the events in the book, like the Holocaust, he'd just been studying in Humanities and it was a pleasant surprise to find that in a story he was just reading.

The sport element helped Paul to engage with the tale, which has the redeeming virtue of being quite short. I'd anticipated some quibble

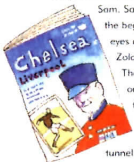
about the near picture-book aspect of the production, but Paul liked the pictures, feeling that they added to the writing. As for the text, that didn't talk down to Paul, which he fully appreciated.

Now it's a case of 'follow that!' Michael Foreman's own award winners about the war, *War Game* and *War Boy*, are obvious choices. I hope this kind of novella length picture book format with an appeal to older readers will surface more and more for lads like Paul, who then told me he didn't think to inform his poor mother that Mr Bennett had actually got him to read a whole book! ■

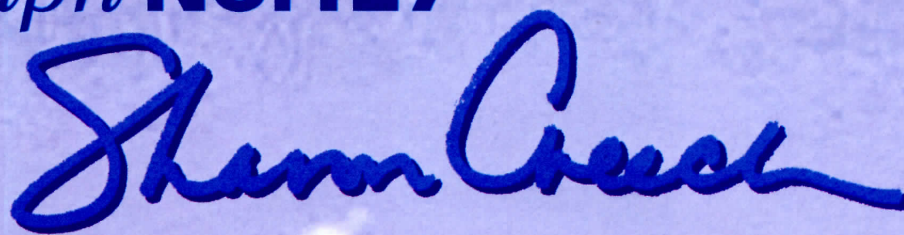
Billy the Kid by Michael Morpurgo, with illustrations by Michael Foreman, is published by Pavilion, 1 86205 361 8, £12.99 hbk.

Readers who would like to contribute to this series are invited to submit an account of their experience (500 words) to the Editor. Please mark your submission 'Reluctant Readers'.

That Gianluca Vialli - I told you about him, best player-manager there ever was, Italian fellow, not much hair - well, he's just come out to meet me. He just shook my hand. I'm not sure what's going on. He's taking me down to the players' dressing room, he says. Always the same smell in a dressing room - embrocation, sweat, boots. They're all clapping me, Joe. They're all here, all my heroes, Zola, Jody, Wiskey, Le Saux, Flo, Sam, and they're singing me Happy Birthday. Sam's given me the match programme. I'm on the front cover! It was Sam. Sam set this whole thing up, the beggar. I've got tears in my eyes and they won't stop coming. Zola's given me the match ball. They want me to lead the team out onto the field. I'm going to be walking out there, Joe, and you're going to be with me all the way, down the tunnel and out into the light, out into the noise. And they're chanting, Joe, they're chanting, 'Billy, Billy the Kid! Billy, Billy the Kid!'



Authorgraph No.127



Sharon Creech interviewed by Suzanne Manczuk

There is a small town in western New York State called Salamanca; when Sharon Creech saw the name on a map, she was struck by its Native American sound and used it for one of her characters in the novel, *Walk Two Moons*: 'I love names, especially unusual ones, and I am intrigued by the way names suggest personalities.' Salamanca Tree Hiddle's name also suggests Sal's connection to the outdoors, tree climbing being one of Creech's favourite childhood activities. Exploring the origins of just one of the names of Creech's characters reveals much about this award winning author.

An intelligent, attractive, and energetic woman, Creech's childhood experiences in rural Kentucky and Ohio ground her novels in reality. She often writes of a warm and boisterous family life, has an affinity to the natural world, and understands the adolescent's search for identity. 'One place often visited (when I was a child) was Quincy, Kentucky, where my cousins lived (and still live) on a beautiful farm, with hills and trees and swimming hole and barn and hayloft.' This setting appears in Creech's novels as Bybanks, Kentucky in *Walk Two Moons* and *Chasing Redbird*, and as Chocton in her next book, *Ruby Holler*. 'Place is important to me. I strongly believe it shapes people. Where we live affects who we are, much as our families and friends and teachers shape who we are. I once heard an educator say young people need and deserve beauty, and I believe this profoundly. We old(er) people need it, too. Perhaps that is why I choose beautiful settings, ones in which I'd like to spend long hours, and ones in which I think young readers would like to spend their time.'

Born and raised in South Euclid, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, Sharon Creech spent her youthful days as part of a rambunctious, noisy family that included one sister and three brothers. The Creech home was often filled with friends and visiting relatives, and, according to Sharon, quietly speaking up at the kitchen table was simply not enough to guarantee that anybody would listen: 'I learned to exaggerate and embellish, because if you didn't, your story was drowned out by someone else's more exciting one.' So her affinity for storytelling developed early. The atmosphere in the novel *Absolutely Normal Chaos* derives directly from Sharon's own family experiences.

Creech's characters, like her own family, have known hardships and sometimes face personal losses in their lives, but they narrate their episodes of grief with a light, philosophical touch, even lashing their troubles with humour upon occasion. Characters may 'process' or work through a problem by embarking upon a journey, as Sophie does in *The Wanderer* or as Sal and her grandparents do in *Walk Two Moons*. In Creech's childhood, her family took an annual summer car trip to Wisconsin or maybe Michigan or even, once, Idaho. Thirty years later, Creech recreated this Idaho trip in *Walk Two Moons* as the journey Sal and her grandparents take to find Sal's mother. In *Chasing Redbird*, Zinny Taylor's journey is one of walking an ancient trail, and her task of uncovering the path is a way for her to confront her grief over losing her beloved aunt and niece. Reflecting upon her teaching days at an American boarding school in the UK, Creech said that it was sometimes her task to communicate news of family illnesses or even death to her charges, comforting them and shepherding them through their emotional reactions. Once again, these real life interactions found their way into fictional stories – as Creech characters Sophie, Zinny, Salamanca, and Phoebe face the loss of dear ones.

Each day, Creech reads over what she has written the day before, so that as the narrative builds, things surface: 'If you've read the first chapters of your novel over and over again, as a writer you begin to be aware of characters and events emerging with lives of their own.' The writing process is a fluid, back and forth, interconnected and messy one for Creech. She listens to her characters' voices and lets them spin their tales, usually not knowing or planning adventures in advance. 'I know that sounds unrealistic,' says Creech, 'but my characters really do take on a life of their own – they lead me!'

Sitting in her third floor eyrie at the headmaster's charming house in the grounds of The Pennington School, New Jersey, Creech is surrounded by shelves filled with books and walls peppered with family photos, posters and art. The view is serene: a small lake bordered with shrubs and trees, a gently rolling lawn in the distance – the back fields of the school's campus. The author sits at her horseshoe-shaped desk ('I cleaned up for the interview today!'), a generous enough surface to accommodate a Macintosh computer and peripherals as well as stacks of mail from avid readers and heaps of papers and books scattered about.

'I've been an enthusiastic writer since elementary school and continued through college days,' says Creech. But it was not until her own children were quite grown up that she had the time to return to the writing that she so loved. Her first two works published were novels for adults – *The Recital* and *Nickel Mally* – printed in the UK and never marketed in the US. Her first young readers' book, *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, was definitely not designed for the adult market, but, Creech says, it was not consciously a children's book, either.

This novel, a journal of a thirteen-year-old girl's summer in Easton, Ohio, introduces readers to Mary Lou Finney. It is a coming of age story with a dash of first love and a smattering of school life. Mary Lou also delves into classical literature, often



finding parallels in Shakespeare or Homer to her own life.

Creech found that she was not finished with Mary Lou and she continued her adventures when she began writing the story of Phoebe Winterbottom. When she submitted this new manuscript, it was suggested that Phoebe's voice was not very sympathetic. 'Humph!' thought Sharon. 'I've just spent two years of my life on this novel and I find Phoebe a fascinating narrator.' Unwilling to jettison the story, Creech then happened upon a fortune cookie that contained the message, 'Don't judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins.' At the same time, Sharon's children were off at college and she was missing them; while musing, a girl's voice popped into her head, saying 'Gramps says I am a country girl at heart' and Salamanca Tree Hiddle's story began to emerge. Sal's narrative gradually took shape, and Creech wove the three girls' lives into **Walk Two Moons**, building on the parallels in their families and using the fortune cookie message's Native American proverb as one of her themes. **Walk Two Moons** also contains two of Creech's most endearing characters – Sal's grandparents – who lovingly dub Sal 'chickabiddy'. 'I was surprised,' said Creech, 'that so many readers wrote to me about Grandma and Grandpa Hiddle – that these

characters became so beloved by readers.' This book was to win the prestigious Newbery Medal.

It was while she was teaching in Thorpe, England, at an American school, TASIS, that Sharon, now divorced, met and married Lyle Rigg, who later became the headmaster of the school. Soon the family was transferred to the TASIS branch in Switzerland, spending two years there before returning to Thorpe. The two years in Switzerland provided the backdrop for Creech's novel, **Bloomability**, in which an American girl reluctantly attends a Swiss boarding school.

Creech's most recent novel, **The Wanderer**, connects to a sailing trip her daughter took after college. Sharon thought she would allay her fears about the trip by learning to sail herself; as a result she truly understood what it meant to travel across the Atlantic in a forty-five foot boat. With a crew of college friends and their fathers, her daughter set sail, midway radioing a message that all was going well. Two weeks later, Sharon received a phone call explaining that the boat had arrived in England, but that the sailing crew had experienced a massive storm that wiped out their communications equipment and left them without sails for three days. Creech used her daughter's journal kept during the voyage as the basis for Sophie's journal in **The Wanderer**. After writing the first five chapters of this novel, she found that the story needed another perspective: Enter Cody, Sophie's cousin, and the parallel voice that describes this journey of discovery. Each of Sophie's uncles, Cody, and Sophie herself have both interior and exterior reasons for signing on for this sea voyage. Sophie, in particular, is drawn to this trip in order to face something about herself and her past. The reader gradually discovers why Sophie is an orphan, and what her adoptive family means to her.

And the future? Unusually for Creech, she is currently working on two new novels – **Ruby Holler**, set in her cherished Kentucky and told by twins (a boy and a girl), and **Love That Dog**, a story narrated by a young boy.

After writing novels, Creech's passions include the theatre ('we attended often when Lyle and I were in London'), and art ('I have no talent, just an interest'). A yearly summer retreat to New York State is a time of renewal for Sharon – kayaking, biking, swimming, walking – this is her interlude of rest and leisure activity, although it is also a dream time. 'I don't write in the summer.' But we know that ideas are always percolating, moving in and out of conscious thought for this active outdoors woman, for, after all, didn't Salamanca Tree Hiddle spring from New York State? ■

Photograph courtesy of Macmillan Children's Books.

Suzanne Manczuk recently retired as a school librarian of more than 30 years. She currently teaches as an adjunct professor at Rutgers University, the graduate library school, and works with a small publisher as an editor and contributor.

The Books (published by Macmillan Children's Books)

For younger readers:

The Ghost of Uncle Arvie, 0 330 34212 6, £2.99

For older readers – all priced at £4.99:

The Wanderer, 0 330 39292 1

Absolutely Normal Chaos, 0 330 39781 8

Walk Two Moons, 0 330 39783 4 (winner of the Newbery Medal)

Chasing Redbird, 0 330 39782 6

Bloomability, 0 330 39784 2

Sharon Creech's web-site is www.sharoncreech.com

Doing a School Visit

You are an author/illustrator/poet and you have been asked to go into a school. The date is arranged, and the organiser has (hopefully) sorted out your time of arrival, transport, lunch, and method of payment. So – all that remains is for you to think what you're going to do. Vivian French makes some practical suggestions.

Probably the first reaction is panic. This is normal. It happens to almost everyone...

The next thing to do is to put in a little preparation. Check with the organiser that the children will have read or listened to at least one of your stories ... or looked at your pictures ... or read your poems. It sounds glaringly obvious, but it does sometimes happen that schools need a little reminder that this is a basic requirement. If they ask you to send them copies of your books (this also has been known) a polite suggestion that they visit the local library is probably more tactful than a demand that they hare off to the nearest book shop. (What you mutter to yourself is entirely up to you.) It is even more helpful if you know which of your book/books they are studying.

Never assume anything

It is also a good idea to check at this stage exactly how many children you are meeting, and how old they are. It's reasonable to assume that you'll be seeing children of the appropriate age for your books ... but my personal rule of thumb is Never Assume Anything. ASK. It saves a lot of embarrassment later. Also find out where the sessions are going to take place ... and if you don't want to talk to more than a class at a time then say so. A cosy session in a classroom with the teacher beside you is one thing; standing up in front of anything up to three hundred children in an echoing hall is a whole different ball game.

One more vital check – make sure you know how long each session is expected to last. It is usual to do two sessions in the morning and one in the afternoon; any more than that and you will be exhausted and you won't remember what you have and haven't said. No session should last longer than fifty minutes to an hour – thirty to forty minutes for the little ones.

When you get to be an old hand, you can decide if you want to go for four sessions in a day – but it isn't like teaching. You'll be concentrating hard, and it's very, very tiring ... but it can also be hugely exhilarating and inspiring.

So – you know who you're seeing, you know the children have some idea of who you are and what you do, and you're on your way to the first classroom. What to do?

Breaking the ice

If the children are six or older then beginning with questions can be a good way of breaking the ice and getting into the swing of things. This works best if you have suggested to the organiser that the children prepare ten questions before you arrive – and it doesn't hurt to remark brightly that of course they should be ten different questions. (I forgot to do this once, and ten earnest little seven year olds each asked me in turn 'Where do you get your ideas from?' Amazingly, the teacher sat at the back of the class and beamed while I floundered badly at the front.)

It may well be that certain of the questions will lead into quite long answers – this is fine. Useful items to take along are any early drafts or rough drawings; children are fascinated by 'before and after' scenarios. You can show



them how the early ideas developed, and let them compare them with the finished work; they always find this fascinating. Ask them why they think you changed it, and which version they prefer and why ... sometimes this can lead to surprising conclusions. (And future confrontations with editors when the children reinforce your opinion that the first version was much the best ...)

You will find you have a lot in common with even little children in school; they also have to draw pictures, to write poems, to write stories. And they have an editor too – their teacher! Compare notes with them; ask them where their ideas come from, how they think of characters ... and then tell them how you do it. Ask them which of your characters they like best, and why – and (if you're feeling brave) which they don't like. Ask them how long it takes them to draw a picture, plan a story or write a poem – and then ask them to guess how long it takes you. (This usually leaves them with a virtuous glow.)

Remember the flip chart

When it comes to illustrations, children are completely dazzled if you are prepared to draw on a flip chart in front of them ... seeing you draw a character from a book that they have read will be a genuinely miraculous experience for each and every one of them. All of a sudden they will realise that pictures are drawn by real people ... and if you make the odd mistake so much the better. It proves you're human, and that is deeply reassuring. It is the same with poets and authors; an admission of problems or failures makes a wonderfully encouraging bond between you and that grubby little urchin in the back row. 'Wow! He can't spell either! Maybe one day I could be a poet too!!!!'

NB – Another couple of points for illustrators. If you're going to need a flip

chart and pens and paper, always ask for it before you get to the school ... and if you do draw, it needs to be BIG. Small detailed pictures will have them fighting to get to the front. And if you're quite certain you could never draw anything in public, do what they do on those kids' TV programmes. Bring your own flip chart paper with a few pre-drawn characters ... but draw them in such light pencil that only you can see them. It's not cheating. It's self help.

Talking to infants

But what about the infants? Those in their very first year at school – and sometimes those in the second year – often don't know what a question is. An invitation to ask about How or What or Where sometimes works – but more often than not results in the confidential whisper 'my Dad's got blue trousers ...' and immediately the whole group wants to explain to you that their Dad has got blue trousers too. Only better. And bigger.

Illustrators have a wonderful advantage with the tiny ones; even a nursery child will watch in rapt silence if he can see someone actually drawing a picture before his very eyes. Try asking them to suggest an animal, and then tell you how it's feeling. Draw the poor sad lion – and then ask why it's sad. An elephant is calling it names? Great ... and here comes the elephant. Magic. Still got time left over? OK. How does the lion look when the elephant says Sorry?

Participation is a great way of keeping the very young ones sitting up and interested; stories with repetition are always a winner, or poems where the children can guess the next word. You haven't got any stories like that? Try out a few rough ideas when you're in the school – it's hugely exciting for children to be told that they are the first ever to hear – or see – an idea. It really could be the start of that prize winning poem ... or sparkling picture book.

It can be enormous fun creating a piece of writing/art work with the very young – and no. They don't do the actual writing or drawing. You do.

(As a point of information I hardly ever get children writing when I'm in a school. It takes too long, they lose their rubbers, they spend half the time writing the date ... and it makes the slower writers feel terribly inadequate. Much better to discuss things orally, where everyone can have a fair chance ... and sometimes those kids who have real problems controlling a pencil have the very best ideas.)

So how does it work?

You set up the situation, and they provide the ideas. You then write them down – or draw them.

Warning! Keep it very simple. It's much



better to keep it short and get a finished piece than to end up with everyone getting bored. (Including you.) If there's time left over read them a poem ... or a story ... or look at some pictures.

Try a numbers theme based around a nursery rhyme ... Sing a Song of Sixpence, for example.

I did this not so long ago with a group of four-year-olds. I began by asking them what they thought the maid was hanging on the washing line ... and this is what they wrote:

Five twinkly golden crowns dangling on the line

Four glittery jingly necklaces swinging on the line

Three blackbirds' black braces twanging on the line

Two queens' violet velvet dresses dripping on the line

And one big sunny sun to shine them all dry.

They were incredibly pleased with themselves, and drew fabulous pictures after I'd gone. And this can work with hundreds of other subjects – the seaside, outer space – whatever you fancy.

One last idea ...

An excellent subject for discussion is the actual look of the book ... especially the covers. Do the children like the front cover? If it didn't have that picture, what would be a good one, and why? What about the blurb? Does it really give the feel of what the book is about? (This can be extraordinarily helpful when thinking about your next book.)

If you're already working on something new, tell them about it – and ask what sort of title would be appropriate, and what the book should look like. What titles have you thought of so far?

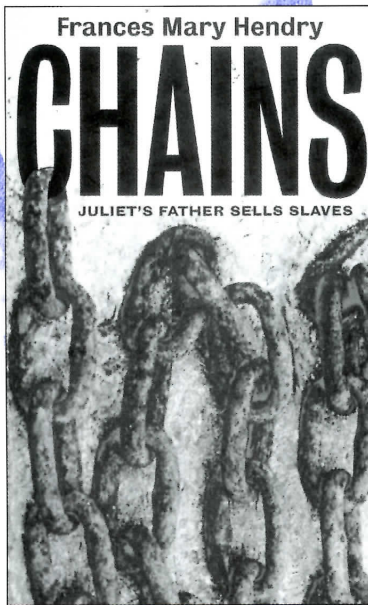
What's your favourite title ... and what is the children's? Can you think of an extraordinary new title that you could leave with the children ... they could write and illustrate the story.

And maybe they could then send a copy to you to thank you for being so wonderful ... together with all the other questions that they didn't think to ask because you were all having such a brilliant time!

Good luck ... and enjoy yourself. ■

Vivian French's latest book is **Singing to the Sun and other magical tales**, illustrated by Chris Fisher (Walker, 0 7445 7852 3, £9.99 hbk).

WHOSE HISTORY? THE



Frances Mary Hendry's *Chains* is a novel about the Atlantic slave trade for which the author claims historical accuracy. But what kind of perspective on slavery, and Africa, is presented here? Errol Lloyd challenges a book that draws, for its sources, on the stereotypes of the past.

Chains is an historical novel written in skilfully crafted 'Links' provided by the four main characters, all young people, caught up in different relationships with slavery and all destined to meet aboard the slave ship, the *Kestrel*, on its journey from Liverpool to Africa and thence on to Jamaica with its cargo of slaves.

The white man's burden approach

Juliet, teenage daughter of the owner of the *Kestrel*, disguises herself as a boy and takes her brother's place aboard the ship on its voyage from Liverpool. As the owner's 'son', Juliet has privileged access to the captain's company and is first exposed to arguments favouring the slave trade. The captain has already been described as respectable, God-fearing, fair minded, honest, and educated. The nobility of his character therefore gives weight to his pro-slavery arguments which can be summarised thus: enslaved Africans are saved from the threat of an early death through disease or war or by being sacrificed to their heathen gods if left to their own devices; without slavery the New World plantations which support Britain's wealth could not survive and the fight against the French would collapse; the trade, whilst legal, is regulated to take into account the welfare of the slave. ('Decent men like myself take care of our blacks, making an honest profit from a vital and respectable, if unpleasant, trade.') When the captain goes on to compare his sort of decency with that of rogue sea captains, 'cramming in as many souls as they can', the second officer, Hunt, berates him:

'Souls, sir? Humanity sir? Niggers, sir? ... Half animal they are, rot 'em, more than half!'

'They are human beings, sir,' the captain reproved him.

Hunt was undaunted. 'Humans don't live like pigs, sir! Skins like leather, don't feel pain. Bare naked an' shameless as animals, men an' women -'

'For the heat, sir?' Juliet suggested ...

'Must disagree, sir! Regretfully!' Hunt smirked. 'Nig-nogs are stupid, vicious, untrustworthy brutes! Even the dem - er - the abolitionists won't have 'em in their societies! Help 'em, like feedin' stray cats, but don't want to cuddle 'em, an' who's to blame 'em? Dem - er - cannibals! Cowardly too, rot me if they ain't! A white man'd die before he'd be a slave!'

Juliet noticed a wry expression on the captain's face. 'You do not agree, sir?'

'That all slaves are cowards and morons? Scarcely. You know Bob Bigtooth, our linguist ...' (p.97)

Here the good captain is able to pinpoint one exception to the rule, thereby validating the rule.

I quote the above passage at some length not to suggest that overtly racist dialogue invariably results in a racist novel, but to give some insight into the sort of dialogue which permeates the book and the feeble arguments offered in rebuttal.

The racial slurs are not confined to dialogue however and some find their way into the narrative suggesting factual reportage. One example deals with Dand, the Scottish boy who is kidnapped aboard another ship bound for Africa and is one of the four 'Links' in the story. (He ends up aboard the *Kestrel* after being sold, in a somewhat unconvincing episode, as a slave in Africa.) Describing his first encounter with the natives, the narrative continues:

The women were wrapped in bright cloth, some shockingly bare above the waist; the men wore breeches or loincloths or even nothing at all, like the children. They were offering the crew strange fruits and nuts, a frothy white beer, brilliant squawking birds and little furry babies, straw hats, carved ivory and seashells.

Here the reference to little furry 'babies' is puzzling till the 'pay off' a couple paragraphs later clarifies:

For an hour he roamed in a glow of wonder amid the happy crowd, staring at the women, playing with the babies. A sailor told him they were called monkeys; the fur must rub off as they grew, for in a sling on a woman's back was a bigger baby that looked normally smooth, though dark brown, of course. He scratched a little boy's skin to see if the colour came off, until the child yelped and jerked free. These folks smelled differently from the sailors, or the Highlanders. And they laughed constantly - that was different too. (p.83)

Another 'Link' is Hassan, 14, a Mali Muslim who sets off down river on an expedition led by his father to buy slaves and ivory etc. for resale to the European slavers. Though seeped in the Koran, he soon descends into brutality at the first taste of power over others, with Gbodi (another 'Link') as the first victim of his whip. After a later skirmish, Hassan is himself accidentally taken as a slave aboard the *Kestrel*. Curiously, given the well documented brutality of the European Atlantic slave trade, it is the black slavers who, in this novel, represent the more barbarous aspects of the trade (in marked contrast to the proclaimed civility of Captain Owens).

The strange-customs approach

Gbodi, 12, the African girl who is captured and, having been purchased by Hassan's group, resold, ends up aboard the *Kestrel* with a contingent of other slaves. When we encounter her, the conditions of her life seem to bear out part of Captain Owens' thesis. She is sore-ridden, hungry, pot-bellied, and lives in a village riddled with superstition and heathen gods. The elders are just about to put to death one of a pair of twins as a sacrifice to the other 'god' twin and to placate the angry gods who have not sent rain. The flesh is to be eaten by the Shaman and used in ritual magic. As Gbodi was married off at birth to the Shaman, who is on the threshold of taking up his carnal duties, she seems an ideal candidate for Captain Owens' brand of Christian salvation when her village is raided by Muslim traders and Gbodi and half her village are taken to be sold as slaves. En route, Gbodi, depicted as calculating

ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

and cold-blooded beyond her years, takes revenge by poisoning the food over a period of time, killing ten people in the process and making many more ill.

What is surprising with this novel is that after more than 170 pages (from a total of 172 pages of text) peppered with derogatory references to Africans, the heroine, Juliet, becomes an abolitionist. This is very much against the thrust of the narrative for not one reasoned argument is presented against the slave trade or slavery in the body of the novel, and apart from the dubious reference to Bob Bigtooth above, all the Africans mentioned are in some way denigrated, as are African society and culture.

Juliet's conversion is based, rather patronisingly, on pity at seeing Gbodi resold in Jamaica and being led off, a rope around her neck, to a life of slavery:

This was wrong. Vile. At last she admitted it to herself. She had been angry when the carter whipped his fallen horse, so many months ago. This was far, far worse. (p.171)

How telling that the comparison is made with an animal.

An abolitionist stance?

For this novel to have any conviction (given the author's aims, discussed below), it should be necessary surely for the author to chart Juliet's conversion from her complicity in the regime of the slave trade to her opposition to it. Yet there seems to be no middle ground, nor does she have any meaningful contact with any of the black characters.

They were merchandise, she told herself firmly. Not people. They'd be better off among Christians than in the jungle. They were absolutely necessary. They'd soon settle down and be content. (p.117)

Juliet also assists in the renaming of slaves aboard ship and teaches them 'Scots/English' in preparation for their new life of servitude.

The only hint of Juliet's impending conversion can be found in the passage where she concedes, more from an attack of conscience than from any firmly held moral conviction or reasoned analysis, that Gbodi is, after all, a human being: to buy Hunt's silence (he has discovered her true identity) Juliet lends him the key to her cabin, not realising that he plans to have illicit sex with the 12 year-old Gbodi:

As the girl rose, smiling as always, he lifted a bottle half out of his coat pocket so that Juliet could see it, smirked and led the girl towards the door to the cabins.

Juliet stiffened again. A girl, and a bottle of rum. To her cabin. Alone ... She knew what Hunt was at – oh yes she knew ... What did a slave girl matter? A little black savage, half animal ...

The youngsters of her class, the women gathering behind them, all their eyes were on her. All the dark faces, watching her, waiting to see what she would do ... And she knew they were people like her, they felt shame and fear and pain like her, they were as human as she was. They were her neighbours. She couldn't, could not, consent to this, not for herself, and so not for any other girl. (p.148)

Juliet resolves to intervene but before she can do so there is an outbreak of rioting by the women slaves which provides the climax of the novel in

which Juliet finally wins her male spurs by shooting dead the leader.

Appalled at her actions she is reassured by Dand:

'Just a blackie, sir.' Dand's voice was comforting. 'That don't count.' Not compared to a white man, he thought ... 'An' she was tryin' to kill you. Ye had to.' (p.154)

Juliet does not distance herself from this sentiment. So much for a change of heart.

Near the end of the novel when Juliet rewards Hassan, who helped save her life during the riot, with his freedom (at least to serve her on their return to England) she does not disassociate herself from his declared plans:

'Ye fetch me to England, ye teach me how speak good, how read, write. I be man, I go to Africa ... I fetch ye many many slave, oil, gold ...' (p.164)

Juliet's late conversion to the abolitionist's cause, thus takes place in a moral and intellectual vacuum. It's as if this ending is a cynical last minute attempt at political correctness to ward off criticism of the foregoing content.

Weak links

In her Author's Note at the beginning of this novel, Hendry puts slavery ('still common throughout the world') in the context of people's inhumanity to people, and in seeking to establish that it is not simply a 'black/white problem' cites slave labour in German factories in the Second World War, as well as the oppression of whites by white in the Scottish Clearances. She also cites black on black slavery, such as the Zulu and Hutu enslavement of other tribes. To this is added the enslavement of blacks and whites by black and brown Muslims.

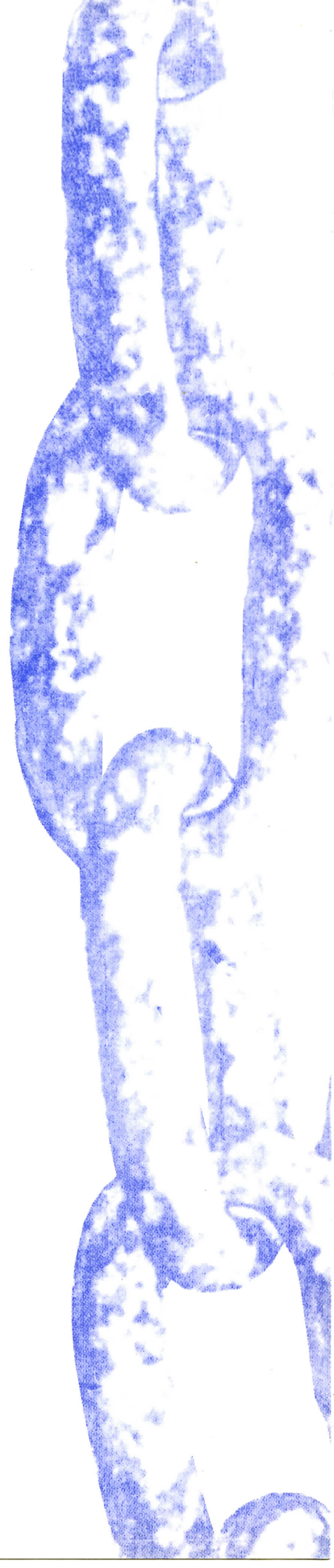
A clue to the general thrust of this book also lies in the material Hendry lists for Further Reading. Not one of the books consulted or recommended is by any of the well known progressive authorities, black and white, on the subject such as Walter Rodney, C L R James, Eric Williams, Hilary Beckles, Ini Kori, Kamau Brathwaite, Herbert Aptker, Michael Craton and Basil Davidson. Most of the texts consulted by Hendry are eighteenth-century accounts by white explorers or accounts seen through the eyes of colonial administrators or captains of slave ships with a view to self justification.

One of the few modern texts listed, *The Slave Trade* by Hugh Thomas (Picador 1997), has been criticised for its one sided analysis. One review of this title ended: 'This bias is felt strongly enough in his decision not to explore the lives of Africans caught up in the slave trade. How unnecessary it was for him to compound it in his appendix of reflections on the slave trade, which is filled with discredited bromides suggesting that the slave trade did more good than harm for Africa.'

When an author equates the Atlantic slave trade, spanning four hundred years and claiming millions of lives, with other oppressions, deplorable though they be, then one has to be on the alert. This may after all be a preamble to an apologist's charter. In spite of the skill that went into its writing and construction, *Chains* could, I fear, do more harm than good for us all. ■

Errol Lloyd is a writer and artist.

Chains by Frances Mary Hendry is published by Oxford University Press, 0 19 271613 4, £6.99 pbk



NEWS

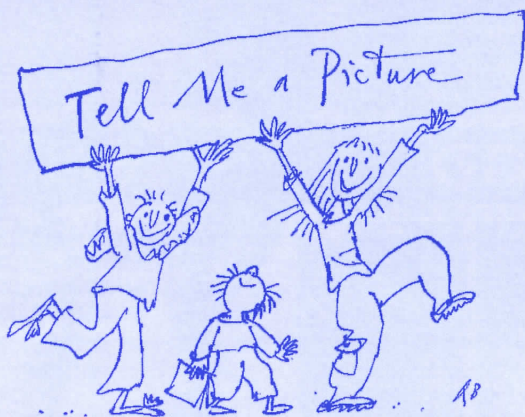
Fickling moves list

David Fickling has moved his list, David Fickling Books, from Scholastic to Random House in both the UK and the US. Titles will be published simultaneously on both continents. Fickling will be publishing up to 20 books a year including picture books, poetry and fiction. His authors include Philip Pullman.

Ladybird leaves Nottingham

Ladybird's Nottingham office is to close and the brand (owned by Penguin) will move to London where it will merge with Dorling Kindersley's creative departments, now also part of the Penguin stable. The integration of DK and Ladybird with Penguin UK has resulted in 300 redundancies.

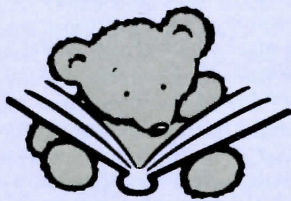
EVENTS



The Children's Laureate, Quentin Blake, has assembled an alphabetical anthology of 26 pictures with a sense of story at the National Gallery. Aimed at younger visitors, the exhibition aims to encourage them to engage with a wide range of imaginative images and explore the relationship between words and pictures in the telling of a story. It includes paintings from the National Gallery's collection from such artists as Uccello and Edward Hopper. Open until 17 June. Admission free. The exhibition is accompanied by a book by Quentin Blake.

The Federation of Children's Book Groups National Conference 2001

This conference is being held in Dundee (the first time it has been held in Scotland) from 30 March to 1 April 2001 at the West Park Centre. The conference theme is 'Freedom', a 'particularly appropriate theme that reflects the new political order in Scotland and is also a good broad subject'. Authors who will be participating include Sharon Creech, Aidan Chambers, Julie Bertagna, Anne Fine, Philip Ardagh, Diana Wynne Jones, Theresa Breslin, Paul Jennings, Berlie Doherty, Debi Gliori, Diana Hendry, Chris de Lacey, Harry Horse, Linda Newbery and Chloe Rayban. Further information from Olivia Menzies or Caroline Beaton on 01738 476200. To book, contact Amanda Hunt, St John's High School, Harefield Road, Dundee DD3 8EY.



Useful Organisations No.14:

YOUNG
WriterYoung Writer (magazine)/
Young Writer Audio (tape)

Glebe House, Weobley,
Herefordshire HR4 8SD

Tel/fax: 01544 318901

e-mail:

editor@youngwriter.org

website:

www.youngwriter.org

Triennial: January, April,
September; annual
subscription £7.50 inc
postage.

Young Writer is a platform for stories, poems and articles by anyone aged 18 and under: young people write 60% of each issue. They also conduct the regular book reviews page and guest author interview – James Berry (January 2001), Allan Ahlberg (April) – and report on literature festivals, conferences and other events. Editor Kate Jones plans the magazine with the National Curriculum's requirements in mind, balancing primary and secondary interests from issue to issue. However,

Young Writer is first and foremost for and by young writers themselves. The full-colour magazine is jam-packed with poems and stories, ideas, information and competitions (many sponsored by publishers) and carries no advertisements. It is presented with vivid, unusual graphics and a change of pace on every page. Young Writer Audio, the taped sister publication, is specially devised for blind, visually impaired, dyslexic and dyspraxic writers – anyone who has difficulties with the printed word. It employs a radio magazine format with a range of young voices, fast-paced slots intercut with music, and sound effects. Teachers and librarians praise both the magazines and tapes for the way they stimulate discussion and inspire new work and approaches.

• Obituary •

ADRIAN HENRI
1932–2000

John Peel writes...

The University of Liverpool's Precinct newsletter wrote of Adrian Henri that: 'For the City of Liverpool and its people he is a powerful symbol of its artistic diversity and riches and, over the years, he has been a splendid ambassador of much that it represents.' All that and more is true but, more importantly, he was also a lovely man. His death has been a reminder, as deaths so often are, that we should treasure those we love more than, perhaps, we do. We should 'phone, e-mail, visit. Adrian was with my wife, Sheila, and I when the first Americans walked on the moon. He was performing, with his band, the Liverpool Scene, at the most frightening concert I have ever attended, a CND benefit in East London in the late 1960s, fearlessly inviting an extremely hostile audience to dance something called the woo-woo as they pelted the stage with bottles, stones and mud. Sheila and I were excited to learn that Adrian was to sit with us at a recent degree congregation but sadly he was too ill to attend. He died the following day. As I said, he was a lovely man.

PRIZES

2000 Whitbread Children's Book of the Year

Coram Boy by Jamila Gavin (Mammoth) is the winner of the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year. The judges, Kate Agnew, Lucy Hughes-Hallett and Michael Morpurgo, who were joined by school students Eleanor Pullan and Adam Usden, described it as 'a far-reaching, totally engrossing historical novel with life well beyond the pages of the book and superb narrative control over the complex inter-twining stories within. Brilliant, moving and ultimately completely compelling.'

On the shortlist were **Heaven Eyes** by David Almond (Hodder Children's Books), **The Seeing Stone** by Kevin Crossley-Holland (Orion) and **Troy** by Adèle Geras (Scholastic Press).

The Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation

This biannual award which aims to draw attention to the quality and diversity of translated fiction has been won by David Grossman's **Duel** (Bloomsbury), translated from Hebrew by Betsy Rosenberg. The shortlisted books were Jostein Gaarder's **The Frog Castle** (Orion Children's Books), translated from the Norwegian by James Anderson; Reinhardt Jung's **Dreaming in Black & White** (World Mammoth), translated from the German by Anthea Bell; and Dirk Walbrecker's **Greg** (World Mammoth), translated from the German by Anthea Bell. The judges were Patricia Crampton, Wendy Cooling and Elizabeth Hammill.



Tam-Tam J'aime Lire 'Book of the Year'

The French edition of Geoffrey Malone's **Torn Ear**, a dramatic and compelling story about the life of a young fox (published in the UK by Hodder Children's Books), has won the Tam-Tam J'aime

Lire 'Book of the Year' for 7-10 year olds, the French equivalent of the Smarties Award. The award gives over 1000 French school children the opportunity to vote for their favourite book. Malone is the first British author to win this award.

REGIONAL PRIZES

Sheffield Children's Book Award

The overall winner of this award, chosen by young readers, is Susan Gates's **Cry Wolf** (Scholastic) which also won the Shorter Novels category. The Picture Books Category winner is Ian Whybrow and Adrian Reynolds's **Harry and the Bucketful of Dinosaurs** (David & Charles) and the Longer Novels category winner is J K Rowling's **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** (Bloomsbury).



North East Book Award 2000



Mary Hooper's **Megan** (Bloomsbury) has won this year's North East Book Award. The winner was chosen by Year 10 students from schools across the North East who exchanged their view by enthusiastic e-mail and videoconference links before voting online and creating a Book Award website to demonstrate the perfect synergy of books and ICT. The runner-up was Carnegie Book Award winner, **Postcards from No Man's Land** (Red Fox) by Aidan Chambers.

PEOPLE

According to *The Sunday Times*, the author of the **Harry Potter** books, J K Rowling, who once lived on £70 a week, has now earned at least £35m from sales of her books. It is thought that they have sold 74 million copies worldwide. Merchandising deals may make Ms Rowling even richer.

Sally Gritten has been appointed Managing Director of Quarto Children's Books. She was previously a consultant for Pleasant Company UK.

Margaret Conroy has been appointed Publishing Director of Hodder Children's Books.



JK Rowling

• Obituary •

CATHERINE STORR

1913-2001

Elaine Moss writes...

Long before the modish terms bibliotherapy and feminism found their way into the critique of children's literature, Catherine Storr, who died in January at the age of 87, introduced these elements quite naturally into her stories for young children and their older siblings. In 1955 Faber published **Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf** and in 1958 **Marianne Dreams**, both of which are now classics of the period and still widely read and enjoyed. A doctor and psychotherapist (she had believed she could never earn her living as a writer) and the mother of three daughters, Catherine wrote about childhood fears and their resolution from a deep experience tinged with delicious humour; the **Stupid Wolf** is consistently outwitted by commonsensical, often compassionate, Polly; and Marianne's drawings and the dreams they inspire arising from her illness as well as her fractious nature, have a 'magic' potential of release. A literary descendant of Mrs Molesworth and Frances Hodgson Burnett, Catherine Storr carried the torch of excellence in writing for children over into its second flowering.

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

Brian Alderson is chief children's book consultant for *The Times*.

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

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

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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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Books About Children's Books

Edward Ardizzone: Sketches for Friends

★★★★★

Chosen and introduced by Judy

Taylor, John Murray, 128pp,
 0 7195 5730 5, £10.99 hbk

'I am not sending you a birthday present as you are to have a bicycle for Xmas. The bicycle will not be

entirely yours ...' Thus the artist to his son Philip c.1948, and in token of what to expect there is a drawing of himself on the machine nearly running over a small terrier. Once he discovered the pleasures of drawing,



From Royal College of Art Cellar Notes, 1956.

Ardizzone never stopped till he died, and this delicious volume displays a little of the huge pleasure that he gave to others by scattering his graphic entertainments among them. Pen sketches might intrude into his letters – those from the battle-fronts, say, when he was an Official War artist, or those dashed off while he was travelling in exotic places. Hand-written, illustrated diaries chronicle damp days boating on the Thames, or a bibulous visit to Dieppe with his brother David and the glorious Barnett Freedman. And during his last thirty years he might produce magical compositions with the text meandering through scenes done in luscious watercolour: 'Dear Michael. I adore the young ladies of Ockfen. Not adolescent and sharp, but deliciously late-picked ...' and there is the artist gazing his fill at the green-glass-bottle ladies on the banks of the Saar.

Much has been done to celebrate the centenary of Ardizzone's birth, but this is surely the one he would have most appreciated. Judy Taylor (who was for many years his friend and his editor) has encapsulated here his geniality, his eye for the small comedies of everyday life, and his affection for all those lucky friends who shared a companionship of which these sketches are a memento.

BA

Footnote: Among the celebratory exhibitions last year was a small but near-perfect one at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. A fine catalogue, with many illustrations in colour and with a perceptive introduction by the artist's daughter, Christianna

Clemence, is well worth getting, and may still be had from the Museum for £3.95 (ISBN 1 85444 144 2).

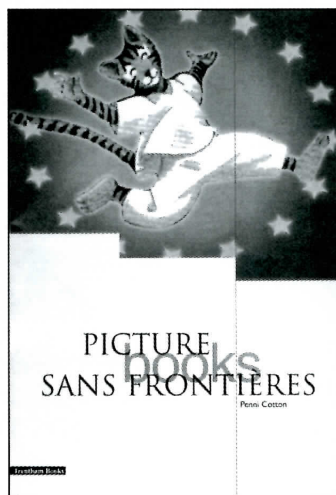
Picture Books Sans Frontières

★★★★★

Penni Cotton, Trentham Books, 152pp, 1 85856 183 3, £14.95 pbk

At the core of this important study is a list of contemporary picture books chosen by experienced critics in each of the fifteen countries that were members of the European Commission in 1995. There are nineteen books on the list: Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the two language communities of Belgium are regarded as different cultures. The books form The European Picture Book Collection (EPBC), designed to be read by children in primary schools throughout the EC, and possibly beyond, as part of the curriculum. The rationale for the selection proposed that each book should tell a story in pictures with minimal word text, within a specific cultural setting and reflecting 'a universal childhood theme'. To give the young readers and their teachers some awareness of European linguistic diversity, a cassette where the story is read in its original language accompanies each book. There is also a summary of the story content in English, and three ideas of how the book might be used.

This project is the brainchild of Penni Cotton, whose proposal won financial support from the Comenius chest of the EC for research involving schools. She assembled the group of book selectors in a symposium, to be followed by two more, thus creating a European network of adherents and a fund of interest and goodwill. She also supervised the trials of the collection in six English schools during 1997. Four teachers in each school volunteered to use the books for a month. The results are both interesting and important. All the teachers said they learned a lot about pictures books and about Europe. They were surprised how little their pupils understood about Europe



before their encounters with the books and amazed by how much they knew afterwards. The European Committee of the International Reading Association gave the EPBC the Innovative Reading Promotion in Europe Award for 1996-7. The work continues. More reports are expected from European countries.

The avowed intent of Cotton's book, in which this project is set out in detail, is to help children in primary schools to learn more about their continental neighbours and fellow Europeans. This is not a new idea; the foundation of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) after World War Two had the same impetus. But the activity instigated by Dr Cotton and her colleagues has shown that much more could, and should, be done to advance European cooperation. Now that the educational networks of the EC, modern transport, travel habits and communication technologies make interactive encounters more common and reading activities more generally shared, it is puzzling why important aspects of European culture in children's books are so little known. Cotton approaches this problem by illustrating the European dimension of children's books since Comenius and discussing their

relevance in some detail. For her own research on this topic, she devised, from the work of other picture book theorists, a framework for analysing the semiotic aspects of the picture books in the Collection, thus revealing by close reading the universal subtlety and art of these texts. The 'universal childhood theme' chosen is friendship. Using categories of visual codes, narrative techniques, David Lewis's taxonomy of types and her distinctions of 'thematic picture book ingredients', all of which are accompanied by clear tables and illustrations from the texts, she makes plain the rich resources of the books. Their effective use begins with the children and the teachers enjoying the stories together. There follows a detailed plan for the use of the Collection in English schools as part of the National Literacy Strategy, with a six-week plan for the 'focus on fiction' segment for Year 5. Were the pupils to read *War and Peas* (N Ireland), *Naomh Pádraig agus Crom Dubh* (Ireland), *Cantr'r Gwaelod* (Wales), then *Un jour mon prince viendra* (France), and *Kees en Keetje* (Netherlands), they would discover how to link the words with the pictures. Then, in the meaning-making, the notion that 'foreign' languages are difficult would lessen. For that is the crux of the matter. As a literate nation we are more isolationist than we believe. Books written in English are sold in thousands all over the world, a matter of national pride. But how can we tell what others are thinking if we cannot read what they say?

Thoughtful attempts to redress the balance with good translations are damped down by economic excuses. Cotton shows the wealth and breadth of what is written for European children to read and suggests straightforward ways of approaching more of it for their learning about others, themselves and the nature of language. To make the ideas and suggestions clear, her publishers have designed a book where the contents are directly approachable by all who care to join in this enterprise.

MMk

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

A Little Bit of Winter

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Paul Stewart, ill. Chris Riddell, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 998 6, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 115, March 1999:

'In this endearing tale of friendship between a rabbit and a hedgehog, the author creates a satisfying circular story, the final page ending with the sentiments of the first. Riddell's expressive line and muted colours add vitality to this humorous tale.'

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Amber's Secret

FICTION ★★★★★

Ann Pilling, ill. Victor Ambrus, Collins, 192pp, 0 00 675469 4, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 124, September 2000:

'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. Easily read, this is a sympathetic story, gently told yet well-paced.'

Space Race

FICTION

★★★

Sylvia Waugh, Red Fox, 208pp, 0 09 940443 5, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 123, July 2000:

'The plot may sound familiar: father and son aliens come to Earth to observe us humans. But the way the story develops is very much Waugh's own. The drama is in the race against time; and will keep 8-10 year-olds on the edge of their seats, as their sympathies swing back and forth, and the outcome remains in doubt to the very end.'

12+ SECONDARY

Terminal Chic

FICTION ★★★★★

Chloë Rayban, Red Fox, 192pp, 0 09 940362 5, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 125, November 2000:

'Cyberbabe Justine Duval returns in this futuristic time-travelling romance. Rayban's witty sci-fi meets teenage angst novel with a touch of parody will not disappoint her fans.'

The Eclipse of the Century

FICTION ★★★★★

Jan Mark, Scholastic 'Point', 448pp, 0 439 01482 4, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 119, November 1999:

'To mark the end of the millennium

here is a story with the sense of a dream, and often a nightmare, suggestive of where we are, where we have been and where we are heading for. It is a remarkable book, compulsively readable while mysterious ("quantum" literature perhaps) which imbues some of the madness and sadness of the

centuries with grim and often surreal humour.'

Postcards from No Man's Land

FICTION ★★★★★

Aidan Chambers, Red Fox,

336pp, 0 09 940862 7, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 114, January 1999:

'Before Jacob's Dutch grandmother dies she has a story to tell and the book's parallel narrative, set at the time of the Battle of Arnhem, reveals love and betrayal of the deepest kind, introducing Jacob to a family he did

not know he had. This is a long, complex book: a challenging read for older teenage readers and adults. Chambers frankly airs the thorny issues of sexuality, euthanasia, the morality of war and the nature of love.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

What am I?

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

Aurélie Lanchais and Alain Crozon, Milet, 14pp, 1 840559 244 3, English/Bengali, £5.99 hbk novelty



A well thought out and clearly produced dual language flap book which would prove popular in any early years context as children will delight in guessing what the close-up picture on the flap is, before lifting the flap to be proved right!

This book has a very pleasing tall, slim format and size for young children to handle. Three flaps on the right of each double page spread show a close-up of the picture underneath, which, of course, you have to guess before you lift the flap. The accompanying textual clues on the left hand side are sometimes in rhyme ('To open the door, just turn me some more' - a key).

The text and bold pictures are linked across the spreads by using a different background colour for each textual clue and picture, which aids left-right orientation. Also available in English, and Arabic, Chinese, French, Turkish and Urdu dual language editions. UC

Ten Little Ladybirds

★★★★★

Melanie Gerth and Laura Huliska-Beith, David & Charles, 24pp, 1 86233 350 5, £7.99 hbk novelty

Holes in the pages of this chunky subtraction rhyme book allow us to touch and count the ten stuck-on plastic ladybirds; with each page turn, the number decreases. The book is well-constructed, the ladybirds resistant to being prised off, the drawings cheerfully whimsical.

Sadly this attractive idea is accompanied by a nonsensical narrative as a succession of unlikely animals contribute to the decline of the ladybird population - 'Ten little ladybirds sitting on a vine, along came a butterfly - and that left ... nine'; 'Four little ladybirds climbing up a tree, along came a turtle - and that left ... three ...'

My three-year-old tester did not

notice the non sequiturs, being intent on the disappearing bugs, but an opportunity has been wasted here. AG

The Big White Book with almost nothing in it

★★★★★

Mike Brownlow, Ragged Bears, 22pp, 1 85714 205 5, £9.99 hbk novelty



Take some blank white pages and develop it into a game of hide-and-seek told in rhyme by the various clown-like inhabitants who hide behind flaps of all shapes and sizes; gutter-snipes creep across cracks between the spreads, gradually revealing themselves as the reader digs deeper into the book.

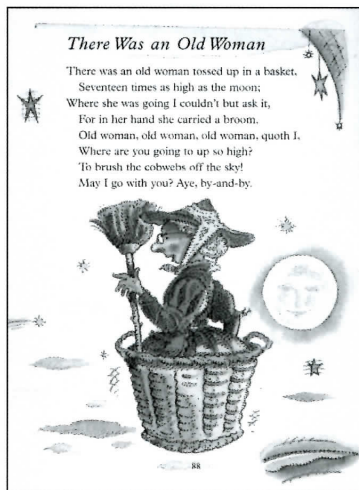
Add a few fonts designed to mirror the shape and size of the particular flap-dweller, a pair of pop-up scissors and the odd book worm to perforate pages. The end result is a confection of a book - big on style but without the vital ingredient: story. Nevertheless, a pleasant diversion and a useful starting point for children's own explorations into book-making techniques. JB

The Oxford Nursery Treasury

★★★★★

Ian Beck, Oxford, 96pp, 0 19 278164 2, £12.99 hbk

There is much here to charm and delight young readers and listeners in this latest in a series of anthologies for younger children selected and illustrated by Beck. A selection of rhymes and verses, some very familiar, but a few less well-known, is interspersed with five familiar tales: 'The Princess and the Pea', 'The Tortoise and the Hare', 'The Porridge Pot', 'Chicken Licken' and 'Lazy Jack'. The retellings are rhythmic and



gentle and real aloud well.

A difficulty in illustrating material as familiar as much of this is to make it appropriate for present-day readers while maintaining a sense of the timelessness of the content. Too often books of traditional tales and rhymes have a stereotypical and unimaginative appearance. Beck, however, succeeds admirably in his task. His watercolours are vibrant yet delicate. Gentle cross-hatching gives a period feel to many of the illustrations, as in the picture of Ragamuffin and her mother who face starvation before they acquire the magic porridge pot, yet the mother and daughter both have a modern air, bringing the story closer to the young reader.

My only caveat about this collection is that by the time a child is old enough to listen to the stories he or she may already know many of the nursery rhymes. But the blurb's statement that there is something for everyone to enjoy may better indicate the intended audience: it would be a good collection to give to a young family or an infant or pre-school teacher to have to hand. VC

Good Night, Sleep Tight

★★★★★

Compiled by Ivan and Mal Jones, Scholastic, 256pp, 0 439 01222 8, £19.99 hbk

22nd

Thanksgiving

Thank You
for all my hands can hold -
apples red,
and melons gold,
yellow corn
both ripe and sweet,
peas and beans
so good to eat!



A collection of 366 poems for bedtime reading, one, with a seasonal or topical flavour, for every night of the year. There are many contemporary writers, including children's voices, among the 168 poets from the UK, North America and other parts of the world represented. The likes of Auden and Agard, Carroll, Causley, Cope and Cowling, through Shakespeare, Stevenson, Tagore, Tolkien to Zephaniah with a sprinkling of anon. and 20 or so poems from the compilers provide a mix of the well-known and new work.

Each month has a different artist including Peter Bailey, Harry Horse, Nick Ward and Ian Beck who decorate the top of each page with bedtime or seasonal friezes as well as small illustrations to many of the poems, all in full colour.

Inevitably in a collection of this size there are a few poems I would not want to read aloud to a child and the emphasis - probably a reflection of the book's prime objective - is on the safe rather than the challenging. Nevertheless, a pleasing collection for the four to eights, not just for bedtime reading but also for anytime dipping, sampling, enjoying, savouring or revisiting. JB

The Rabbit Who Couldn't Say No

★★★★★

Elena Goldoni, Siphano, 32pp, 1 903078 12 1, £8.99 hbk

Marcus the rabbit cannot say 'no', and though this has its positive side, it can also be a nuisance, leading him into mischief. Apparently as a result, his ears grow longer and longer. At last he succeeds in asserting himself and his ears return to normal.

This book tries to give an overly sophisticated, multi-layered message to children too young to interpret it. All children say 'no', after all - rather oftener than one would prefer usually - and while it is important for children to know when 'no' must be said, the didactic approach employed here seems misplaced, and the analogies inaccessible to young children.

In addition, the suggestion that one should say 'no' to mischief seems overly optimistic, and smacks of social control rather than protection from true danger. AG

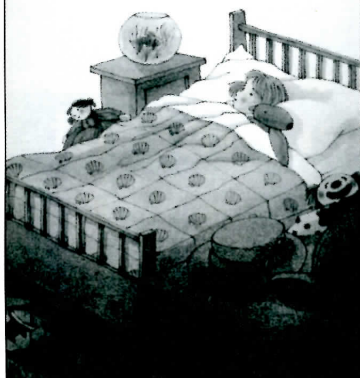
Do Little Mermaids Wet Their Beds?

★★★★★

Jeanne Willis, ill. Penelope Jossen, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 974 9, £9.99 hbk

It is rare for enuresis to be the subject of a picture book - even rarer that the book should be such an enchanting one. Cecelia is a clever four-year-old,

She found she couldn't go at all,
Not even for a sweet,
So she went to bed and worried
On a horrid plastic sheet.



but she has one problem: every morning her bed is wet. In a dream one night she meets a little mermaid, who, after a magical playtime, convinces Cecelia that she will soon be dry. After all, the little mermaid's bed is always wet, being under the sea. Besides, the Queen probably won't her throne when she was only four! Cecelia wakes up dry on the morning after her adventures. Wonderfully dainty, watery watercolour illustrations are an excellent match for the melodic rhymes. The bed-wetting facts are told in small print, rather like a printed whisper. One can only wish that other 'problem' books for children had the same originality and charm. ES

Buri and the Marrow

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Henriette Barkow, trans. Sujata Banerjee, ill. Lizzie Finlay. Mantra, 24pp, Bengali/English, 1 85269 580 3, £6.99 pbk



As part of the 'World Tales Series', this folk tale from South Asia is about an old woman travelling through a forest to visit her daughter and en route, meeting a fox, a tiger and a lion. One by one, she persuades them not to eat her until her return journey (when she will be 'nice and fat'). Her daughter helps her think of a plan to outwit them but the fox has to be scared off in a different way. Although the text looks crowded at times, with little space around it (the Bengali text looks larger than the English and therefore appears even more cramped on a couple of pages) the text and illustrations are well-matched and the book would lend itself to bilingual story telling. Available in 14 other dual language editions. UC

Mei Ling's Hiccups

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

David Mills, trans. Sujata Banerji, ill. Derek Brazell, Mantra, 24pp, Bengali/English, 1 85269 554 4, £6.99 pbk



This is a must for early years classrooms – a wonderful, engaging story with superb illustrations which vividly capture the spirit and atmosphere conveyed by Mills' words. I like the typefaces used for each script and their layout – uncrowded, easy to read and clearly matched to the illustrations. What makes this picture book stand out is the combination of believable characters from different ethnic backgrounds, realistically rather than stereotypically drawn and the way that children's own personal, cultural knowledge (of how to get rid of hiccups!) is so delightfully woven into the story. This is a gem of a book. Available in 21 other dual language editions. UC

Ellie and the Butterfly Kitten

★★★★★

Gillian Lobel, ill. Karin Littlewood, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 721 2, £10.99 hbk

Ellie's mum must go to hospital, and while Ellie loves staying with her Nanna, she misses mum. On a trip to the beach, she and Nanna find a tiny kitten, which they take home. Ellie loves Butterfly and lavishes attention on her. But when it develops that the kitten belongs to someone else, she gives her up sadly, realising that Butterfly, being very small, needs her own mum. Little girls and little kittens are



happiest when with their mothers. Bold splashes and streaks of colour

glow and reflect Ellie's moods, both sad and happy. A lovely production. ES

The Selfish Giant

★★★

Oscar Wilde, retold by Fiona Waters, ill. Fabian Negrin, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 4706 8, 5.99 pbk



This is a simple and effective retelling of one of the most popular and powerful of children's stories. The tale of the giant who seals a permanent winter into his garden by expelling the children who play there before reintroducing the seasons after a change of heart is a moving tale with a clear message, though some readers might find the heart twanging Christian coda a little hard to take. This version is faithful to the original, its clear print and straightforward language making it highly accessible. The illustrations are full of calm drama, more effectively communicating the sunnier aspects of the story – Negrin's giant does look like a good sort from the beginning. GH

Splosh!

★★★★★

Philippe Corentin, trans. Sarah Pakenham, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 599 9, £9.99 hbk

A hungry wolf, having fallen down a well in pursuit of the cheesy lunar reflection, dupes pig into making the same mistake to effect his escape. Pig, with stories of a carrot well, tricks a rabbit family to extricate himself and then along comes wolf ... The book's elongated pages are read vertically and become the shaft of the well up and down which the rope, bucket and gullible animals yoyo in this tale of foolishness and trickery.

The text, translated from the original French, is a 'voices off' commentary to the predictable and inevitable events that gives the reader a satisfying feeling of being in the know. The illustrations need no translation with the expressions of the scrawny wolf and the other protagonists adding to the slapstick. JB

The Kingfisher Book of Fairy Tales

★★★★★

Retold by Vivian French, ill. Peter Malone, Kingfisher, 96pp, 0 7534 0394 3, £14.99 hbk

French gives an illuminating rationale for her choice of seven traditional fairy tales ('Jack and the Beanstalk', 'Hansel and Gretel', 'The Fisherman and His Wife', 'Beauty and the Beast', 'The Elves and the Shoemaker', 'Rumpelstiltskin' and 'Cinderella') to retell in this large, sumptuous book. Her retellings are direct, dramatic, sometimes disturbing and wonderful to read aloud; indeed it is impossible when reading them not to put on a performance.

Malone is not afraid to portray the dark and scary side of the tales in his bewitching collection of double, full, half and quarter page paintings and the oval and jigsaw shaped vignettes that adorn the book. His masterful and painterly style is at once arresting, challenging and haunting.



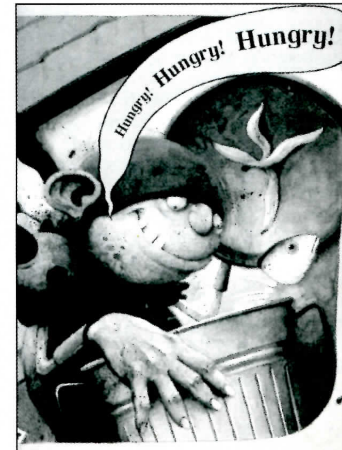
The quality of both text and illustrations make this a book which transcends age barriers: the youngest listeners will relish the opportunity to visit the magical worlds created primarily through French's retellings, older readers can begin to explore the visual landscapes finding they will be drawn to them again and again; there are lessons aplenty for art and theatre students too. JB

Hungry! Hungry! Hungry!

★★★★★

Malachy Doyle, ill. Paul Hess, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 928 5, £9.99 hbk novelty

When a 'grisly, ghastly goblin' comes



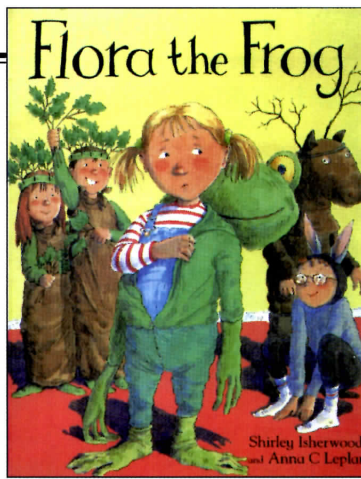
visiting and insistently proclaims his hunger, it is not totally surprising that the young boy into whose house he has come should exhibit some measure of apprehension and alarm. Doyle's text, presented essentially as a dialogue between boy and goblin, plays mischievously with these fears, before eventually resolving them in an unexpected and amusing denouement. But the real frisson here is in Hess's illustrations, colourfully angular perspectives on the apparent comfort and security of the boy's home environment. While not, overall, to be taken too seriously, this is something more than just another 'childhood reassurance' picture book. RD

Flora the Frog

★★★★

Shirley Isherwood, ill. Anna C. Leplar, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 4479 4, £9.99 hbk

When Flora is asked to play the part of a frog in the school play, she is not happy. Her mother enthusiastically makes an amazing frog costume but Flora throws it away, high into a tree, from where the frog haunts her, waving one disconsolate arm. When Flora comes face to face with real frogs in a pond, she realises their beauty, as sparkling, silvery droplets fall from their backs. Her costume is rescued and, with extra spangles



stitched on, we are left to believe Flora becomes a happy frog. The pale pastel pictures are softly compassionate throughout, with lots of humorous details. A story to touch the hearts of all mothers, teachers and child performers. GB

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Why Be Bossy?

1 84234 023 9

Why Be Unfriendly?

1 84234 022 0

Why Fight?

1 84234 021 2

Why Lose Your Temper?

1 84234 024 7

Why Not Share?

1 84234 026 3

Why Tease?

1 84234 025 5

★★★★

Janine Amos and Annabel Spenceley, Cherrytree 'Problem Solvers', 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

Told in the first person, each of these books contains two stories which present realistic scenes between children in explosive situations at school. In each case their teacher becomes a mediator and uses a specific procedure letting the child say how s/he feels, voicing the problem, talking about various ways of solving it, then choosing the way that suits everyone. If this approach can be a little simplistic, there are good coping strategies presented, and the series will be useful for PSHE and citizenship classes. The pictures are expressive and down to earth, and the emphasis is on teamwork. A useful series. ES

Inside Mary Elizabeth's House

★★★★

Pamela Allen, Viking, 32pp, 0 670 89133 9, £10.99 hbk

Like so many of Allen's books, this one, with sparse text and bold illustrations, oozes humour. Little Mary Elizabeth is a toughy, brazenly telling the doubting big boys there is a monster at her house. She says her rough and rowdy monster has red blood-shot eyes and sharp pointy teeth, but the boys just laugh at her. The page-spreads alternate between blood-red (the painted house with the monster straining to get out) and white, for the conversation between

girl and mocking boys. Mary Elizabeth finally calls their bluff, inviting them to her house. 'We're here and we're hungry. What's for dinner?' they yell. Turn the page, and we meet the huge, hairy monster, screeching at the fleeing boys. 'YAAAAAAHHHHH!' The book closes with Mary Elizabeth smugly marching off with her monster. 'Now they believe me,' she says. A very satisfying story, one to snap shut, before re-opening for another read. GB

Katie and the Sunflowers

★★★★

James Mayhew, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 989 4, £10.99 hbk



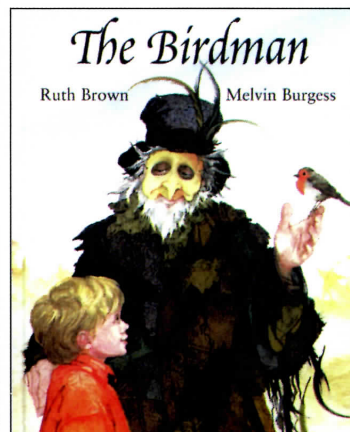
This is the fourth in a series of charming picture books in which Katie goes to the Art Gallery with her Grandma. (Other titles are *Katie's Picture Show*, *Katie Meets the Impressionists*, and *Katie and the Mona Lisa*.) This delightful fantasy story sees Katie visiting the gallery on a rainy day and interacting with five post-Impressionist paintings. She tries to pick sunflower seeds from the Van Gogh painting but knocks the vase over. Mimi, from Gauguin's *Breton Girls Dancing*, helps Katie to pick them up but her dog Zazou comes too and races off with the flowers into Van Gogh's *Café Terrace at Night*. Further complications follow as a Cézanne still life and a second Gauguin come to life. The vibrant illustrations are clever adaptations of the originals and the storyline flows gently from one masterpiece to another until Katie is reunited with her Grandma, who has slept through the episode. Katie goes home, presumably to plant the sunflower seeds which she has collected. (Perhaps a few seeds might have been included with the book?)

We return to reality with a single page giving basic information about the three post-Impressionists highlighted in the story. AK

The Birdman

★★★★★

Melvin Burgess, ill. Ruth Brown, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 976 5, £9.99 hbk



Readers accustomed to Burgess's bleak urban dystopias might be surprised to find his name on the cover of a picture book about a boy's attempt to rescue a robin from a carnivalesque bird seller, but this story is faithful to both Burgess's concern for the natural world and his ability to evoke a deeply sinister atmosphere.

Young Jarvis takes the rescued bird home, intending to set it free, but he is so beguiled by its beauty that he begins to procrastinate. After several postponements of its release, the robin falls to the floor of the cage, and the birdman, now a figure of nemesis, appears in Jarvis's room. The resolution is eerie. Brown's realistic double page paintings surrounding the brief text evoke a sense of vulnerable natural beauty, whose shadows and margins are infested with menacing phantoms.

A short, powerful and visually attractive book, excellent for evoking conversation between younger and older readers. GH

The Lion Book of World Stories

★★★★

Retold by Bob Hartman, ill. Susie Poole, Lion, 120pp, 0 7459 3950 3, £9.99 hbk

A collection of 39 traditional tales from around the world retold in direct accessible language by Hartman who also includes one of his own stories - 'The Generous Bird'. All the tales are short, can be read aloud in a few minutes, and each embodies - as the compiler says in his introduction - 3Ws: 'warmth, wit and wisdom'. The majority are well known and include renditions of 'The Mouse's Bride' from India, the English 'Silly Jack', the Australian thirsty frog (Tiddalik) the Greek Mouse and Lion fable and half a dozen Rabbit and Tiger stories from Puerto Rico. Poole's watercolour illustrations are jolly enough and visually enliven the pages rather than adding anything to the telling of the tales. A useful resource for the infant classroom or for the occasional assembly story. JB

The Phantom Cat of the Opera

★★★

David Wood, ill. Peters Day, Pavilion, 48pp, 1 85793 298 6, £12.99 hbk

Gaston Leroux's tale of a lovesick spectre who haunts the Paris Opera House, seeking to assuage his unrequited love, is retold quite touchingly in this big, handsome picture book. The novelty is that in the vivid, page filling pictures, all the characters are depicted as cats.

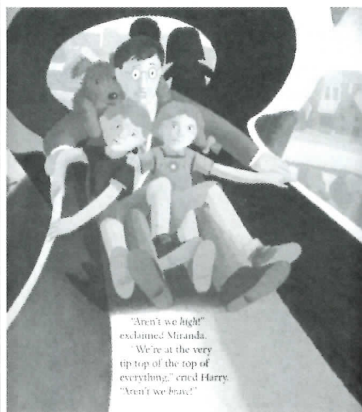
The book is visually striking, with a clear if somewhat advanced text carried in white boxes on dramatic double page spreads. Cat lovers should enjoy it, but I couldn't spot what the felineisation added to the original story. GH

Down the Dragon's Tongue

★★★★

Margaret Mahy, ill. Patricia MacCarthy, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1561 8, £10.99 hbk

The end-pages of this picture book story show an urban park with a mega-slide that any parent would have ambitions to try out alongside their child. The opening page presents Mr Prospero, successful 'can-do' businessman, in control in his office. Once in the playground with twins Harry and Miranda, not to mention Lollop the dog, he is predictably less in control, daunted by the prospect of careering down the slippery slide which 'shone like the bright, long tongue of a friendly giant'.



Against his better judgement Mr Prospero finally makes the descent, 'his tie streaming behind him like a fruit salad that had learned to fly'. He is so excited by the adventure that he returns to the slide again and again, while the exhausted children can only gaze on in amazement. Readers familiar with Ted Hughes' 'Shaggy and Spotty' will find a similar style of tale here, full of aerial wonder and word repetition to convey risky adventure. The pictures skilfully evoke the harum-scarum actions of the whole family. This is a 'must-read' for dads! **RB**

Sitting Ducks

★★★★

Michael Bedard, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 7530 3, £9.99 hbk

This extraordinary picture book is set in a duck factory run by alligator workers. One day a little duck is stolen from the premises by a seemingly friendly but in fact deadly scheming alligator worker set on fattening him up for his own table. Here twists the tale, for Alligator finds Duck's endearing ways so charming that they become great friends. When Alligator reveals the usual fate of the factory ducks, Duck plans to save them. In an alligator-eat-duck world, 'Fly or die' is the get fit slogan, as the ducks fight intended obesity and ... death. The conclusion is skilfully told, leaving lots of opportunities for reflection, discussion and further perusal. Illustrated boldly, in animated film set style, there are jokes and humour on every page. A picture book with a wide age appeal, this has much to commend it. **GB**

The Muddled Monsters

0 7136 5222 5

The Perfect Pizza

0 7136 5221 7

The Posh Party

0 7136 5223 3

The Potty Panto

0 7136 5224 1

★★★★

Scoular Anderson, A & C Black 'Rockets Wizard's Boy', 48pp, £3.99 each pbk

Circle Magic

0 7136 5332 9

Crazy Magic

0 7136 5334 5

Magic Hotel

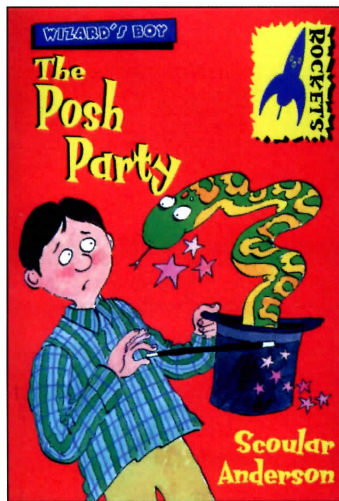
0 7136 5328 0

Mouse Magic

0 7136 5330 2

★★★★

Wendy Smith, A & C Black 'Rockets Mrs Magic', 48pp, £3.99 each pbk



Taking advantage of the current fashion for magical themes, these are two better-than-average sets of books for those 'just-launched' readers.

Anderson's 'Wizard's Boy' series has the edge, featuring an incompetent but well-meaning wizard whose spells suffer from Chinese whisper syndrome, a teaching tool in itself. The stories are inconsequential but entertaining, being lightly humorous with flashes of complete farce. They are liberally illustrated, with jaunty cartoons well-incorporated into the text and including speech and 'thinks' bubbles; these and a small amount of non-jarring repetition add to the readability.

Smith's 'Mrs Magic' runs a magical hotel where the guests never know what to expect next. The stories are not as well constructed as Anderson's, though many of the same characteristics are to be found, and all were enjoyed by my young testers. **AG**

Zeus Conquers the Titans and other Greek Myths

1 84121 891 X

Athena and the Olive Tree and other Greek Myths

1 84121 893 6

★★★★

Retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Tony Ross, Orchard, 48pp, £6.99 each hbk

These two books serve as an enjoyable introduction to the world of Greek Myth. They would suit the newly confident reader, and may also be a helpful supplement to history teaching in the primary school. Thanks to McCaughrean's style of narration, the stories flow along easily; Ross' illustrations, as ever, help the stories spring to life.

In 'Zeus Conquers the Titans', the reader finds out how Zeus came to be the King of Heaven, and how Hera came to be his queen. The other story in this book is 'The Wrath of Hera', and tells how Hera copes with Zeus' unfaithfulness. In 'Athena and the Olive Tree' readers find out how the

city of Athens received its name, as well as how Zeus manages to keep the population of the world from becoming too large ('Who Is the Fairest One of All?'), and how Cassandra became a prophetess ('The Woman No One Believed'). Both books are spiced with the sort of detail that children enjoy reading, and could be a welcome addition to the classroom or school library. **RL**

Start Writing Adventure Stories

NON-FICTION

★★★★

1 84138 207 8

Start Writing About Things I Do

NON-FICTION

★★★★

1 84138 206 X

Start Writing Amazing Stories

NON-FICTION

★★★★

1 84138 227 2

Start Writing About People and Places

NON-FICTION

★★★★

1 84138 226 4

Penny King and Ruth Thomson, Belitha Press, 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

Teachers' Resource Book for Start Writing

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Pie Corbett and Penny King, Belitha Press, 96pp, 1 84138 230 2, £14.99 pbk

Do writing guides help awaken children's imagination or is there a risk of trapping them into a prescribed response? These four books in Belitha's 'Adventures in Literacy' series aim to help young writers in Years 3 (7-8 years) and 4 (8-9 years) to try different kinds of writing. On the whole, I believe successful writing is best embedded in children's activities in every part of the curriculum. But these books are far from dull: the large format is appealing and children will like the delightfully humorous illustrations. Young readers are addressed directly and there is sensible guidance on how to use each book. For teachers, there is detailed guidance in the **Teachers' Resource Book** which makes useful and direct links to the National Literacy Strategy objectives.

I think the approach suits non-fiction best. **Start Writing About Things I Do** gives good advice on writing posters, menus, lists, letters, explanations and advertisements. Interesting examples are given – a huge menu and a splendid 'wanted' poster – and the writing tasks are presented in an exciting way. **Start Writing About People and Places** helps children organise a point of view, write clear instructions and produce clear reports.

I do have some reservations about using guides, even ones as visually

pleasing as **Start Writing Adventure Stories** and **Start Writing Amazing Stories**, when children are just beginning to write stories. However, using these frameworks, as intended by these authors with children between the ages of 7 and 9 years and as one strategy amongst others, may be helpful – perhaps particularly to encourage reluctant young story writers.

There are six story themes in **Adventure Stories**: Desert Island, Aliens are Here, Princess in Peril, Neptune's Kingdom, Rainforest Race and The Marvellous Machine. Children are helped to think of the characters, the setting, the problem and the resolution as they attempt a story under each title. However, I am not sure it is a good idea to tell children to use phrases like 'to my horror' and 'all of a sudden there was a loud...' – children will think of fresher forms of expression themselves.

Amazing Stories provides helpful support for retelling traditional tales from all over the world, for example the well known fable, 'The Fox and the Stork'. Primary teachers, and especially those in the UK who follow the national literacy strategy framework, will find the books a helpful resource, particularly the non-fiction ones. **MM**

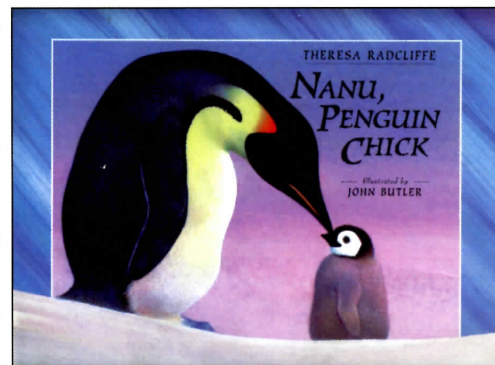
Nanu, Penguin Chick

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Theresa Radcliffe, ill. John Butler, Viking, 32pp, 0 670 88638 6, £10.99 hbk

This is a beautifully, and at times powerfully, illustrated story of an Emperor Penguin's first year of life. The vastness of Antarctica and the severity of a bitterly cold and hostile environment come through strongly in text and pictures. Five to six year olds will enjoy talking to a sympathetic adult as they listen to the exciting story and savour the pictures. Older children, who could read the text themselves, will have



seen harsher realities in nature programmes on television – parenting penguins seized by sea leopards or chicks carried off by marauding skuas. I agree with the judgement here that near misses rather than actual disasters are best narrated for the very young. Perhaps the part of the book referring to 'the cowardly birds' rearing away 'for an easier victim' swings too far towards anthropomorphism. Young children would enjoy possessing this book and would return many times to a thrilling but ultimately reassuring story. **MM**

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

★★★★★

From the story by Robert Louis Stevenson, adapted and illustrated by Chris Mould, Oxford, 32pp, 0 19 272409 6, £4.99 pbk

Stevenson's truly chilling yarn about the suppressed duality of humanity in society is given an admirably accessible new treatment here. Mould has daringly retained the original structure and sequence of the tale, with its complex timeline and multiple narrators, and has presented a chain of rewritten episodes which capture the essence of Jekyll-and-Hyde's ordeal.

The illustrations, set out in graphic novel format, are caricatural, but their crepuscular and slightly lurid richness is an ideal backdrop to this troubled text. The narrative, as in the original, is carried in recollections, letters, dialogue and straightforward storytelling. It is a delight to find a version of this much-abused story which is accessible to younger readers while remaining faithful to the complexities of Stevenson's ground-breaking masterpiece. GH

The Names Upon the Harp

★★★★★

Marie Heaney, ill. P.J. Lynch, Faber, 96pp, 0 571 19363 3, £14.99 hbk

As a visit to any Irish bookshop will prove, retellings for a young readership of the country's ancient stories come in considerable quantity and variety. Few, however, are as luxuriously produced as this new compendium, which has the overall feel of a volume likely to set standards in the genre for some time to come. In her selection of eight stories from this earliest Irish literature Heaney concentrates on the unique mixture of passion and pathos which creates their drama and ensures the immortality suggested by the volume's Yeatsian title; the inclusion of a new translation by Seamus Heaney of a poem attributed to the poetic warrior Finn Mac Cumhaill evinces the literary continuity of the narratives. Lynch's full-page paintings and textual decorations are atavistic evocations of scenes and characters which, in his vibrant recreations, remain to haunt the imagination. RD

Aftershock!

1 86039 830 8

Hurricane!

1 86039 831 6

★★★★★

Tony Bradman, ill. David Kearney, Orchard 'Danger' series, 96pp, £9.99 each hbk

A thrill-a-page earthquake story, *Aftershock!* has step-siblings, Jodie and Matt, on holiday in California with respective dad and mum who are now 'an item'. Jodie is in a terrific strop and determined to ruin the trip because nobody understands her. The rented cottage is in an idyllic setting but while the adults are out picking up some shopping the quake

hits followed by the aftershock. The kids continue their bickering with Jodie determined not to follow any of Matt's suggestions even whilst clinging by her fingertips to a table that is sliding out of the door of the cottage which by now is perched at an angle of 45 degrees over a giant crack in the ground. Needless to say she discovers that Matt has problems with the new parental relationship too and a bond is formed.

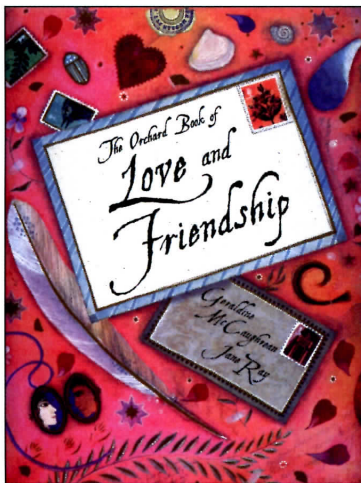
From the same series, *Hurricane!* is set in England and the sub-text is bullying at school as primary age brother and sister feel that Mum and Dad just don't have the time for them any more and are too concerned with working on the restaurant by the sea that they have bought to escape the rat race. The hurricane brings it all to a head and a neat resolution.

These titles are highly enjoyable but what a price to pay for 96 pages of big print – correction about 72 pages of print as there are 20 full page illustrations with another 8 or so half page pictures. With so much space given to the very effective line drawings it is strange that the illustrator, David Kearney, is only credited in 6 point type on the biblio page. Paperback versions are due out this year. SR

The Orchard Book of Love and Friendship

★★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Jane Ray, Orchard, 112pp, 1 86039 493 0, £12.99 hbk



This book presents a dozen stories depicting the occasional pleasures and inevitable pains of being in love. They are culled from a worldwide range of cultures, thus presenting a vivid sense of the universality of the strife and perplexity created by the gentlest and most ferocious of emotions. Familiar tales like those of Tristan and Isolde and Romeo and Juliet are accompanied by rarer gems: a Madagascan creation epic resembling a benign version of the Pandora myth; a poignant little vignette from the Harlequin and Columbine traditions; an old English 'Clever Jack' story which touchingly insists on the necessity of loss and death. McCaughrean's retellings are, as always, radiant in their simple but varied language. The illustrations are appropriately vivid and moving, and fascinating notes on sources are an additional bonus.

NEW Talent

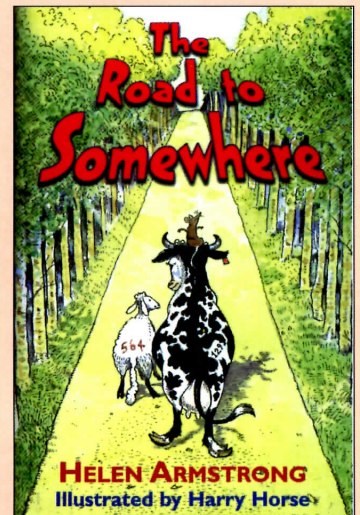
The Road to Somewhere

★★★★★

Helen Armstrong, ill. Harry Horse, Orion, 128pp, 1 85881 845 1, £8.99 hbk

When Cow tells Ratty that farmer is sending her to never-come-back, action is needed. Ratty is known to be a good thinker and he comes up with a plan to leave the farm and find Somewhere-else. As the two friends escape, they are joined by Woolly, a rather grumpy sheep who has no illusions about what it means to have a number painted on his back rather than be given a name. What is to be a picaresque journey begins.

Initially rather arch, this agreeable first novel soon gets into its stride with touches of humour and increasingly engaging characters. Cow proves to be less dippy than Ratty had supposed and she pulls her weight unexpectedly at crucial moments. The animals plan to reach a city farm where they will be safe, but, quite apart from the other



dangers they encounter on their way, they are pursued by the menacing figure of the farmer who is aided by his dog, the Machiavellian Doggo.

Horse's well ordered, beautifully drawn illustrations with their delicate cross-hatching make good use of the page and of the dramatic moments in the story. RS

This book is highly recommended for all ages. Excellent for sharing aloud or reading alone. GH

Ghost at the Window

★★★★★

Margaret McAllister, Oxford, 96pp, 0 19 271847 9, £5.99 pbk

Ewan, born of English and Welsh parentage on the Scottish Borders, describes himself as a Borderer, someone who belongs in two places. This gives him a special affinity with Elspeth, the girl from another time who also belongs in two places. Elspeth died from diphtheria in 1939 but has been unable to make the final transition from life to death. Instead she lingers in what is now Ewan's bedroom (in which she 'died') in the strange old house on the shores of a Scottish loch to which Ewan and his parents have recently moved. Ewan's unconventional background as an only child of highly creative parents allows him to cope with the unusual manifestations in the house and Elspeth's constant presence in his room, and he resolves to help her to pass from one life to the next.

An imaginative supernatural story with an engaging and sympathetic central character. VC

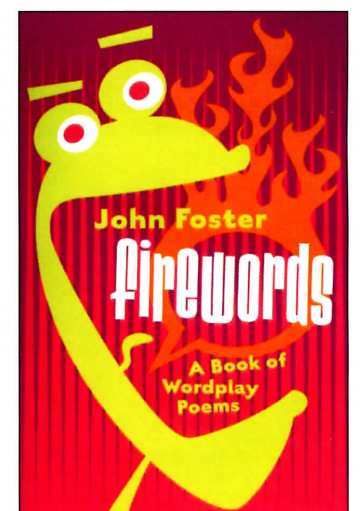
Dirty Rotten Tricks

★★★★★

Simon Cheshire, ill. Hunt Emerson, Walker, 160pp, 0 7445 5953 7, £9.99 hbk

Entry 2448 in Sam Pratt's Secret Book of Worries is 'May have to sleep in bus shelter'. He has written this down as his family is in imminent danger of eviction from their house. He is helped in his misfortunes by Hasty Green, whose father's healthy eating cafe is at possible risk of closure from the activities of local villains Bob and Joe Pitt. They are in turn managed by Nigel Swineway, a man shaped like a

potato doing a bad impression of a pear – who has of course master-minded the potential bankruptcy of Sam's family. Into this mixture of people throw Webber, a girl who is a technological genius from Sam and Hasty's class at school, Sam's Granny who used to fly jet planes, and a myriad of other colourful characters. The result is a hilarious tale for primary children, that will appeal to anyone who likes books with plenty of knockabout humour and unlikely situations. RL



Firewords: A Book of Wordplay Poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by John Foster, ill. Rian Hughes, Oxford, 80pp, 0 19 276244 3, £5.99 pbk

This selection of poems is a bright spark amongst the many other 'wordplay' collections on the market. Foster mixes traditional and contemporary limericks, puns, epitaphs, tongue twisters, shape

poems and riddles to produce a consistently funny and surprising anthology. From Jonathan Swift's rear riddle and John Agard's 'So-So Joe' to Wendy Cope's 'Family Meal', these poems should provide lip exercises and word workouts for every occasion. HT

The Oldest Girl in the World

POETRY ★★★

Carol Ann Duffy, ill. Markéta Prachatická, Faber, 96pp, 0 571 20576 3, £4.99 pbk

The Emperor's Watchmaker

POETRY ★★★

Lemn Sissay, ill. Gail Newey, Bloomsbury, 64pp, 0 7475 4755 6, £3.99 pbk

Points of View with Professor Peekaboo

POETRY ★★★

John Agard, ill. Satoshi Kitamura, Bodley Head, 60pp, 0 370 32623 7, £9.99 hbk

It is very good news that Carol Ann Duffy is writing poems for children. But after *Meeting Midnight*, which was a cracking book, and a challenge, this new collection, perhaps following rather hard on the other's heels, is a bit of a let-down. It has some fine poems – 'A Crow and a Scarecrow', 'The Bridge of Toys', 'Halo', 'Vows', 'Fishcakes', 'The Who?', 'How Emily Mercer (96) Grew Young', and others.

The strength of these poems – as of the earlier book – is in the drive of the narrative, the edgy syntax, the taut wit in the word-play and the rhyme. But too many others are working at a lower pressure, particularly where an idea or phrase is worked through a sequence of verses: as when 'a friend gave me' six things in the six verses. It makes for an 'easier' manner. Is that what's wanted? The rather more challenging and consistently better poet of *Meeting Midnight* was also recognisably the adult poet of *The World's Wife*. That was very exciting, and important. Just as it is important that Duffy keeps writing flat-out for children.

It is good news when Bloomsbury – or anyone – publishes someone's first collection of children's poetry. In Lemn Sissay's *The Emperor's Watchmaker* there are some real poems – such as 'The Emperor's Butterfly Maker', 'When I'm Older', and 'I'm Sorry I'm Sorry I'm Sorry'. And there are fine moments:

Every mother wants a baby / Like you / Every hiccup a comedy / Every fall a catastrophe.

But there are also a great number of words flying around not doing much, in poems where *cats curl cautiously in a corner*, and where a chip is a *salted sire of this sight of style*. I wince a bit being invited to feel welcome in *The wonderful world of wordy / Wicked wild worldly winding / wishful whizzing whacky words!* It is a pity, because this is a first collection, and because there are poems, shorter poems, to be found and written up from what is hidden here, somewhere under the super-charged entertainer stance. My guide would be the genuine, quietly felt 'I'm Sorry I'm Sorry I'm Sorry' – which reveals a voice not elsewhere.

Being a professor, Peekaboo, in John Agard's *Points of View with Professor Peekaboo*, has thoughtful adult preoccupations about the environment, genes, the natural world, and so on:

Green issues / are not to be treated lightly. / And quite rightly. / Or so Professor Peekaboo concluded / as he ponders forests denudded / and fish in rivers oil-slick-doomed / and air all laden with fumes. / So from his bed, he made a leap / and sat upon his compost heap.

I am clear about the message but a bit lost with the rhyme and rhythm aspect. I try to get children to write things like *fatty chips* in preference to *chips fatty* (even though they've a rhyme planned on *scatty*), and *carpets starred with cat-sick* in preference to *carpets cat-sick-starred*. And I hope they rhyme *zoomed with groomed* or even *rheumed* – at least when it sounds like full-rhyme time in the rest of the poem. Is that pedantry? (And shouldn't it be *pondered*? Also, would it be rude or thick to ask why the professor makes this particular leap of imagination?) In sum, is there a poem here?

Questions like this crop up for me throughout the book, though not on every page, not in a nice pair of bathroom poems, or the fine poem about trees:

They stand to attention / for the wind's inspection / They take orders from the sun / and also obey the rain / They salute the skyline / and rustle their green bayonets

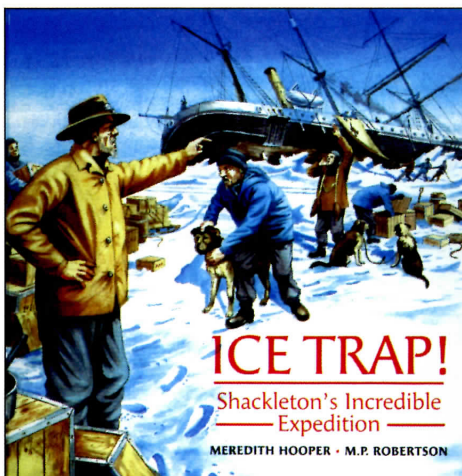
Does the poem need Peekaboo? Does the book as a whole? Do writers need so firmly theming? RH

Ice Trap! Shackleton's Incredible Expedition

NON-FICTION ★★★

Meredith Hooper, ill. M. P. Robertson, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1713 0, £10.99 hbk, 0 7112 1744 0, £5.99 pbk

Interest in Ernest Shackleton, the once forgotten Antarctic explorer, has revived of late. Here the story of the epic journey he made across the ice pack and by open boat to find the means to rescue his marooned crew is held up as an example of fine leadership and total loyalty to the team. Hooper evokes in strong images the cold, the hardship and the isolation faced by the explorers for children from about 8 years upwards. The landscape with its 'thick glaciers' and 'swirling clouds' is the background to a fast moving and dramatic story. M. P. Robertson's drawings not only show the icy landscapes but also reveal in the faces of the human beings the feelings they experience at key points in the story. The maps and annotated time line are helpful. Raw details like the necessary killing of the dogs and eating of 'fried seal' and 'penguin stew' do young readers the courtesy of avoiding a 'cosy' view of events. The book would make a welcome gift but would probably be best shared with an adult in the case of younger children. Often authors choose to give an account like this one in the



first person – a device to draw a young reader in. Hooper does not take this option but still manages to absorb us – not least by careful use of direct quotation. We have the Captain's wonderful simile when *Endurance* is trapped in the ice: 'Frozen in like a nut in a chocolate bar'. In the classroom, there would be time to reflect on the inhospitable environment, on the human will to survive and on the language choices which make all this accessible. Perhaps above all we have in Shackleton an example of commitment to others. The skilful practitioner could use the book as a springboard to drama and writing. MM

Slimy Science and Awesome Experiments

NON-FICTION ★★★

Susan Martineau, ill. Martin Ursell, b small publishing, 24pp, 1 874735 73 5, £3.50 pbk

My 1926 edition of Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopaedia* (diphthongs were in at the time) was liberally sprinkled with educational experiments each designed to illuminate some basic scientific truth. Many of them appear here, although Arthur stopped short of the euphemistically titled 'Balloon Belcher' and of 'Ectoplasmic Gunk' (cornflour and water, really thrilling, I don't think!). As a book of safe and trivial 'fun things to do' this is fine but its lack of proper explanation of the 'stunning' results limits its value to 'wet day amusement' category.

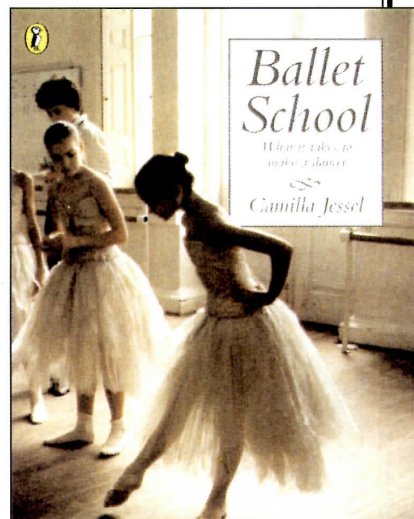
But hang on, one fifth of the 'experiments' involve the gratuitous production (with bicarb. and vinegar) of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide – obviously a marketing ploy to accelerate global warming, produce more wet days and better sales. Irresponsible or what? TP

Ballet School: What it takes to make a dancer

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Camilla Jessel, Puffin, 64pp, 0 14 038609 2, £6.99 pbk

The film *Billy Elliot* (a Northern lad gets to ballet school) is just the boost this Puffin edition of *Ballet School* needs. Jessel takes us through a year at the Royal Ballet School in sufficient detail to help promising young dancers from about 8 years upwards and their parents make a realistic decision about the future. But anyone interested in ballet would



find the book most illuminating; it is elegantly written and beautifully produced. I found the clear glossary most helpful. The access the author was given has made possible copious illustration in the form of superb photographs. Snippets of conversation reveal something of the realities of the school's tough programme. The degree of dedication needed means a young dancer must at the outset be helped to decide if their body is flexible enough and a suitable shape for training as a classical dancer. Then selectors look for musicality and the ability to express feelings through dancing. If a pupil is finally accepted for the Lower School after a demanding series of auditions, excellent teachers provide support through the daily classes which build strength and skill; their advice is quoted throughout the book. For example, when explaining jumps one teacher recommends that one 'think of the floor as a friend who is going to almost push you into the air – a good strong plié is like a long fuse for a rocket – the deeper you bend the higher you jump'. Even after a gruelling programme and relentless practice, there is no guarantee that a young dancer will reach the highest levels of performance and enjoy ultimate recognition and fame. The book combines honesty about the demands of the programme (and the limited chances of being accepted by the Royal Ballet Company) with insight about the beauty of ballet and the delight it brings to audiences. The later chapters bring alive the pupils' summer performances of specially created new ballets. A young person caught by the magic of the dance will enjoy owning this book. MM

The Book About Books

NON-FICTION ★★★

Chris Powling, ill. Scoular Anderson, A. & C. Black, 96pp, 0 7136 5478 3, £8.99 hbk

An interesting, light-hearted but informative book which covers many aspects of publishing, writing, the history of books and also the possible future of books. We are taken on a detailed tour of the world of books and children's literature, including selected extracts from well known novels such as *Madame Doubtfire* and *Harry Potter*.

There are sections on librarians, book prizes, censorship and aspects of publishing which many children may not have considered, such as copyright and ISBNs. That might not

sound particularly inspiring material but the lively text and cartoon style illustrations give a new dimension to seemingly lack-lustre topics. The main body of text is also interspersed with boxes containing book facts. For

instance, did you know that before the Education Act of 1871, the only country where most of the grown up population could read was Sweden? Apparently this was because the Lutheran Church refused to marry

people until they could! One quibble – in the section on censorship we are told that 'the Iranians lifted the fatwah [on Salman Rushdie] in September 1998'. What was actually agreed was that it would not be

carried out – a fatwah cannot be lifted. AK

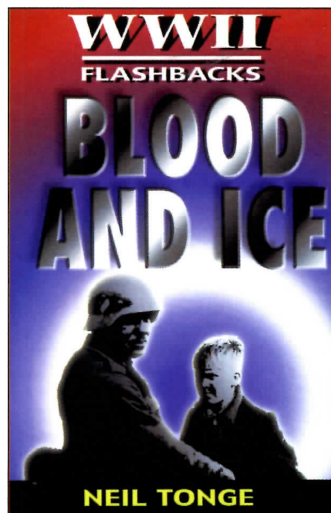
REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

In and Out the Shadows

POETRY ★★★★★

Sandy Brownjohn, ill. Oliver Gaiger, Oxford, 64pp, 0 19 276246 X, £3.99 pbk

Brownjohn's new collection is well designed and presented with dramatic black and white illustrations which draw the reader in and out of her poems. Some are heart-felt – 'The Winter's Tale' is a haunting, affectionate lament for a much missed cat; 'Kyrielle' and 'Traditional Gifts' mourn the passing of youth. There are also poems on more light-hearted matters such as picnics, pigeons and pots. But it is in the more thought-provoking themes that Brownjohn's strengths lie. HT



The Right Moment

David Belbin, 96pp, 0 7136 5416 3

Final Victory

Herbie Brennan, 96pp, 0 7136 5426 0

Blitz Boys

Linda Newbery, 96pp, 0 7136 5424 4

Blood and Ice

Neil Tonge, 80pp, 0 7136 5425 2

★★★★★

A. & C. Black 'World War II Flashbacks', £4.99 each pbk

These short stories stand alone but together form a set of fast-reads that explores the different experiences of four lads in four different countries during the Second World War. The style and format is an obvious attempt to produce eventful books that will both appeal to boys and gently create the safe stimulus of serial reading. Each text has the interesting addition of wider reading suggested by the author and three of them begin with a brief, useful authorial note.

Belbin's boy hero, Jean, is forced to

leave Paris and head for the country, where he realises that all is not as black and white as it seems. When one cousin is in the Maquis and another is dangerously in love with a German officer at the local barracks, Jean is required to make uncomfortable choices and decisions.

Final Victory is set in Germany in the last ranting days of Hitler's rule. The main protagonist is Jurgen Wolf, a twelve-year-old indoctrinated into the ways of Hitler Youth. He fatally believes in his Führer and fails to comprehend that he is being used as a pawn in a game that has been lost by the old men and definitely cannot be won by children like Jurgen.

Newbery's Londoner, Ronnie, combs the blitzed buildings when he should be at school and lives satisfyingly on his wits. Then he meets a strange boy, Dusty, and finds himself questioning what the nature of courage really is, concluding that it comes in many forms and one of them is the fortitude shown by his parents, who defy Hitler just by surviving in the war-torn capital.

Finally the set moves to the Siege of Leningrad, where Vanya is recruited to take a highly symbolic, sacred cross out of the city, through German lines and thence to Stalin himself. The deprivations and desperation of war come across most strongly in this tale, with some heart-rending descriptions as the boy makes his perilous journey. This one also seems to show most poignantly the way a whole generation was blighted and manipulated by power hungry leaders, thinking only of themselves.

These books will certainly teach a lot about the War but gain extra integrity from the moral issues that they present and explore. Well worth adding to Library order lists and slipping into the hands of Humanities secondary teachers concerned about boys' progress. DB

The Unidentified Frying Omelette

POETRY ★★★★★

Andrew Fusek Peters, ill. Chris Mould, Wayland, 48pp, 0 7502 3164 5, £4.50 pbk

Teachers who have sought in vain for examples of some of the more esoteric poetic forms specified by the English National Curriculum may welcome this anthology. Peters has selected examples from a range of (mainly) modern children's poets. Everything from Acrostic to Villanelle is here, with notes on all the different forms at the end. The emphasis is on the humorous and the range of subjects now thought likely to get children's attention – food, football, school life and teenage crushes – and Chris Mould's black and white cartoons fit these preoccupations well. Of course, you need to know how a form was used conventionally before you can appreciate a parody, so some dead poets, like Hopkins, Marvell and Shakespeare, do appear. Nevertheless, the range is restricted, and it may be that this collection

would be used best in conjunction with more traditional ones, when its playfulness and irony would stand out. It would be a pity, for instance, if Peters' example – 'The Bog-Standard Ballad' – were the only ballad that children met. CB

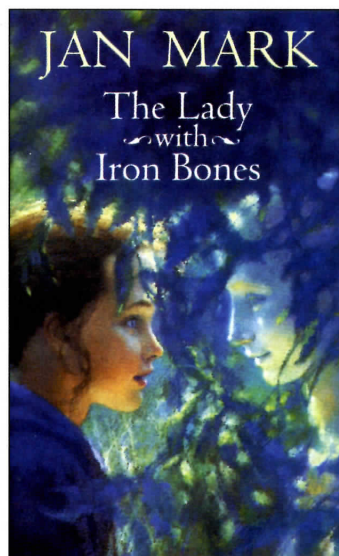
When the Guns Fall Silent

★★★★★

James Riordan, Oxford, 144pp, 0 19 271850 9, 6.99 pbk

Jack Loveless attempts to avert his grandson's questions about his role in World War I by taking the boy on a tour of the battlefield graveyards. But while he is there a memento of the 1914 Christmas truce, when the combatants abandoned their weapons to play football in No Man's Land, brings back suppressed memories of the horrors leading up to and beyond that event.

This book is an attempt to detail those horrors from the point of view of a youth who joined up idealistically at the age of 16 and lost his naivety along with his friends and his youth. The unpolished writing is as jagged and staccato as a fusillade, told in arhythmic stretches of narrative, diary and letter writing. The stupidity, waste and sheer terror of the war are vividly emphasised, as is the pathos of the never-to-be-repeated Christmas truce. GH



The Lady with Iron Bones

★★★★★

Jan Mark, Walker, 160pp, 0 7445 5926 X, £9.99 hbk

Kasey has been beset by family problems all through junior school. Desperate for solutions, she turns to a decaying statue found by her friend Ellen at the bottom of her next door neighbour's garden.

Her gifts and prayers to this lady with iron bones seem to have met with success when her much loved

brother returns home. However, the innocent rituals take a sinister turn when Kasey's hated class teacher is involved in a serious accident which Kasey believes her prayers have caused. Kasey's belief in the statue's powers leave her locked in a cycle of guilt and appeasement and it is only through the timely intervention of Mrs Sayer, the statue's owner, that she is eventually released.

This is an absorbing and thoughtful story whose strength lies in Mark's unerring reproduction of children's dialogue – internal and external – and the unpatronising way in which she debates the issues of guilt and responsibility. VR

Control-Shift

★★★★★

Nick Manns, Hodder 'Signature', 208pp, 0 340 76511 9, £4.99 pbk

There is a cleverly developed ghost story at the heart of this novel and the unravelling of the mystery of his identity and his motives is very well done with the line between the factual and the fantastic blurring in credible and spooky fashion. The family's move into the old house sparks it all off, with the father's software for new fighter planes the catalyst for the ghost's anger; an anger which has festered since injustices of WW1. The framing device of the court case is less successful and largely unnecessary dragging the story too far into the plain light of reality. The writer reveals a talent for the atmosphere of the ghostly real as the past permeates the present. AJ

River Boy

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Tim Bowler, read by Emilia Fox, Cavalcade, 4hrs unabridged, 0 7540 7084 0, £9.99

Emilia Fox makes a superb job of reading this overworked story, making it seem more accessible and enjoyable by reading it lightly and without too much portent. Jess has a deep love for her difficult grandfather and finds it hard to watch his increasingly frailty and approaching death.

Grandfather insists on returning to his childhood home for a last holiday so that he can finish his painting, River Boy. Who is the mysterious River Boy? Jess finds herself caught up in the painting, the scenery and in her grandfather's way of letting go. JE

Year of the Griffin

★★★★★

Diana Wynne Jones, Victor Gollancz, 224pp, 0 575 07046 3, £16.99 hbk

This campus novel is set in an ordinary campus although Wizard's University shares many of the problems of more familiar academic institutions: shortage of funds, lecturers who are inadequately versed in their disciplines, a head

Editor's Choice

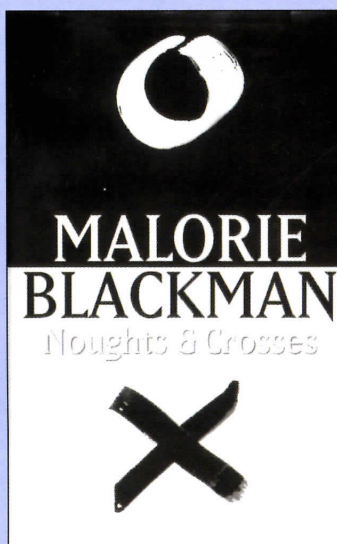
Noughts and Crosses

★★★★

Malorie Blackman, Doubleday, 448pp, 0 385 60008 9, £10.99 hbk

Fifteen-year-old Callum is a Nought, a member of a despised racial group which is also an underclass. Meggie, his mother, works as a servant for the Hadleys (rich Crosses who are members of the racial elite) so Callum has grown up knowing and being friends with their daughter, Sephy. But, now the pair are teenagers, can their friendship survive the strict sexual and racial taboos? So far, so very apartheid South Africa or segregated Southern States of America. However, Blackman's spin on segregation is to have the white people as the Noughts and the black people as the Crosses. Often used in drama workshops, this device is, as ever, startling and provocative – guaranteed to help young readers see events in a different way from the cultural and historical norm with which they have grown up.

Told alternately in the first person by Callum and Sephy, the reader is drawn subtly in as events unfold and both young people come to realise just how fundamentally the regime under which they live has succeeded in affecting their thinking about each other, despite the years of friendship. There are some telling school scenes reminiscent of the enforced



desegregation of the education system in Alabama. That Callum and Sephy's friendship develops into uncompromising love despite all the odds, leaves the reader with some hope, despite the tragic ending.

Blackman is known for her tightly plotted, fast moving fiction. In this novel the theme of alcoholism (Sephy follows in her mother's footsteps by using drink as an escape) is perhaps not sufficiently explored. However, with its powerful theme of racial injustice, *Noughts and Crosses* engages the reader at a greater depth and in a more demanding way than any of Blackman's previous work. I read it in one sitting, reluctant to put it down, and so, I'm sure, will many young readers. RS

preoccupied with his own research. The opening chapter introduces the reader to six first-year students as they embark on the course which is to make them professional wizards. One is a dwarf, one a griffin and the others are human, but with superhuman powers. Despite their differences, they, like most freshers,

find their lecture timetable confusing and getting to grips with the library bewildering. Most of the group have come to the University in the face of opposition from their families, and much of the plot hinges on the efforts of the families to remove the young people, employing magic of various kinds to do so. The pace of events

never falters, and credibility in the magical powers of the various characters is maintained, mainly because magic is shown as something which has to be learned and controlled, and even the most powerful wizards have limitations on their magic abilities.

Year of the Griffin is a wonderfully visual novel, with scenes such as the flock of griffins descending on the University courtyard almost asking to be filmed. Described as a prequel to the previously published *Dark Lord of Derkholm*, it is immensely readable and entertaining with some very funny passages. VC

The Kingfisher Illustrated Animal Encyclopedia

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

David Burnie, Kingfisher, 320pp, 0 7534 0451 6, £25.00 hbk

A sumptuous volume, dense with close-up photographs and detailed artwork of animals in their habitats, this new encyclopedia from Kingfisher will undoubtedly please young animal-lovers. Burnie, well-known and respected author in this field, writes clearly and succinctly for the 10+ age group, but younger less fluent readers will also learn much from the illustrations and captions. As a dictionary of the animal kingdom, the book works extremely well. Animals are arranged according to their scientific classification – invertebrate or vertebrate, and then subdivided into class such as amphibian, reptile, bird or mammal etc. Thus to find an entry quickly, you would need to use either the contents or index. Each entry follows a common pattern – brief description, scientific name, distribution and size. It is more difficult however to learn about more general topics such as animal behaviour, reproduction or adaptation. Apart from a handful of short box features, such information is restricted to the briefest of introductions to each animal group. A reference section with comparative

data on size or geographical location, or signposts to the many wonderful websites accessible to children would have helped to redress the balance. Perhaps author and editor were restricted by a marketing decision on price or page extent or a desire to reach the magic number of 2,000 animals. Nevertheless as an introduction to the rich diversity of the animal world this is an excellent place to begin. SU

The Kingfisher Science Encyclopedia

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Kingfisher, 496pp, 0 7534 0435 4, £30.00 hbk

How do you spell 'didgeridoo'? The index of this weighty work confirms the above version, but in the text we are introduced to a 'digeredoo'. This just goes to show how careful everyone has to be when putting together a mammoth tome like this. But to pick such a nit is not to classify the whole thing as lousy and as a well-expressed reference tool this 'encyclopedia' has much to commend it. The world of 'science' is presented in ten 48-page 'chapters' (although the last one – 'conservation and the environment' – has to make room for eight pages of 'ready reference' as well). So organic chemistry rubs shoulders with organic farming, fibreglass with fibre optics and death-cap fungus with the Dead Sea, as you would expect.

Particularly commendable are the illustrations – photographs are only used when they are truly illustrative and most pictures are carefully drawn to demonstrate what they explain.

Essential to any subject-classified collection like this is a reliable guide to it – and here a well-composed index, useful glossary and plenty of 'see also' references help. All in all this is a user-friendly, approachable and sensible collection of information which will reward the browser as well as the seeker of specific truths. TP

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

The Perfect Journey: Winners of The Guardian/Piccadilly teenage writing competition

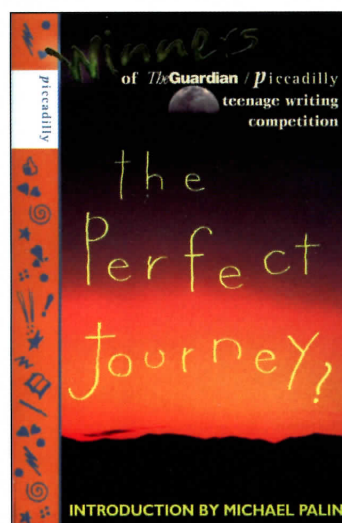
★★★★

Introduction by Michael Palin, Piccadilly, 128pp, 1 85340 691 0, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 696 1, £5.99 pbk

The Perfect Journey is the second short story anthology by winners of The Guardian/Piccadilly competition for teenage writers. The theme has been widely interpreted by the ten young authors whose journeys are as diverse as a suicide jump, deterioration and recovery from eating disorder, and an old man's dying reflections.

The writers demonstrate accomplished control of the short story form; plots are tightly focused, some building then undermining expectation and others working towards reassuring closure.

What is evident in all of the contri-



butions is a sense of rhythm; the ear for a good story well told, which is best developed through rich and varied reading experiences. NG

In Flame

★★★★

Gaye Hicilymaz, Faber, 176pp, 0 571 20278 0, £4.99 pbk

Seven years after the death of a beloved older brother, 14-year-old Helen Kopperburg moves with her troubled family to their holiday home in Wales. This seems to be an attempt to provide a secure environment for Helen, her younger brother and her grandmother, but the coastal landscape is drenched in memories of the dead youth, memories which are shared by the children of a sinister family whom Helen befriends.

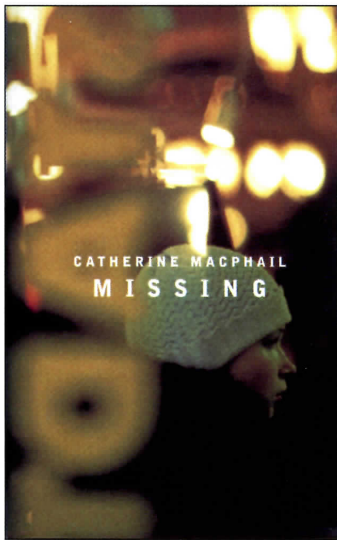
This is a powerful novel, narrated with poignant clarity in Helen's convincingly young but increasingly knowing voice. It explores uncomfortable territory: memory and its distortions, sexuality, possessiveness, family manipulativeness and abuse. It is also about love between friends and siblings, and the pain of losing that love. The ending is moving, but realistically indeterminate. GH

Missing

★★★★

Catherine MacPhail, Bloomsbury, 192pp, 0 7475 4873 0, £4.99 pbk

As a result of bullying at school, Maxine's 13-year-old brother Derek disappears. Almost two years later his dead body turns up in a London squat. The effect of this on Maxine and her parents is graphically described. Maxine is now the age Derek was when he disappeared and is a loner at school. She feels that her parents are preoccupied with Derek, his disappearance and death, and wish that it was she and not Derek who died. Her father's increasing tension as he attempts to cope with his own loss and her mother's increasing withdrawal into a world of spiritualism and seances makes it impossible to confide in her parents when she begins to receive telephone calls, seemingly from Derek. The almost monstrously drawn bully Sweeney is still at work, staking out potential victims and reminding Maxine of his persecution of Derek.



MacPhail brings these elements together in a tense, tautly written novel. Maxine's own anguish, her uncertainties and her guilt at having at times wished Derek dead are skilfully explored. Young people who have been through similar experiences to that of Maxine and her family and who have experienced her mixture of emotions may take comfort in finding that they are not unique. However, there is also a possibility with a book such as this that it may cause fresh pain to those who are or have been in a similar situation. Teachers and librarians may wish to exercise care in providing access to it. VC

The Drop

★★★★

Anthony Masters, Orchard, 192pp, 1 84121 427 2, £4.99 pbk

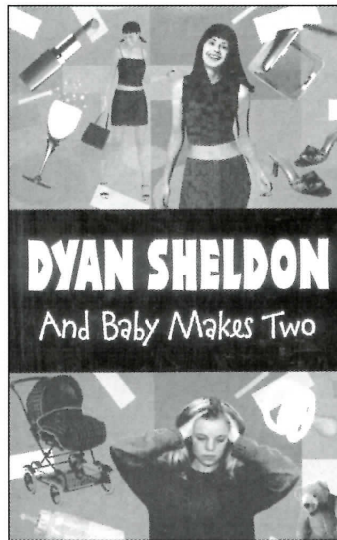
This novel explores the violent underside of inter-gang rivalry in a school and looks at what can happen when a character who is out of control assumes a position of power in a group. Greg, a new boy at St. Peter's, Wandsworth, becomes caught up in tensions between the sporty Sweats and the Geeks, a mixture of outsiders led by Oliver Cole who is more of an outsider than most. 'The Drop' is a potentially lethal form of punishment meted out to their adversaries by the Geeks. Greg, anxious to make friends and establish himself in the school, tries to steer a course between the two factions. Apart from Greg and his family, the characters are somewhat two dimensional, but plenty of dialogue and a plot which moves along at a lick is likely to keep readers, especially boys, engaged right up to the dramatic finale. VC

And Baby Makes Two

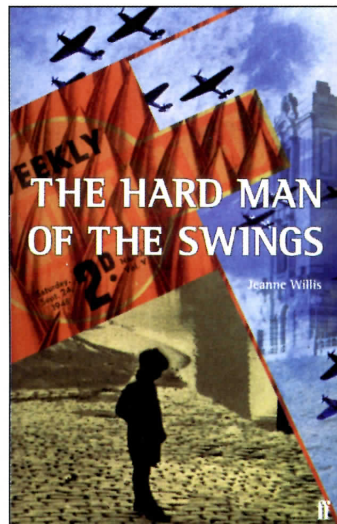
★★★★

Dyan Sheldon, Walker, 240pp, 0 7445 5956 1, £9.99 hbk

15-year-old Lana is fed up with interfering adults and longs for independence. Then on her fifteenth birthday she meets 20-year-old Les and six weeks later she plans to seduce him. The plot of Sheldon's problem novel is predictable. Lust and excitement result in pregnancy and inevitably after the birth the boyfriend loses interest. Lana becomes increasingly isolated but ultimately faces up to her new responsibilities. The didactic intention is overt; 'I couldn't be



pregnant the first time, everybody knows that ... I hadn't had an orgasm and I was pretty sure you couldn't get pregnant without one.' Sheldon's style is engaging, the mood light and witty. A quick and entertaining read. NG



The Hard Man of the Swings

★★★★

Jeanne Willis, Faber, 240pp, 0 571 20515 1, £4.99 pbk

A book which comes with a prefatory note that it 'is based on true events' and which itself begins with the sentences 'I don't know if I've killed my dad or not. I'm not sure a .22 bullet can kill a man.' is clearly one likely to challenge even the most mature 'older readers' whom the back cover blurb sees as its audience: Willis's compelling story will not disappoint in this respect. The focus here is on the childhood experiences of Mick, growing up in the Britain of the late 1940s and 50s, and on the increasingly tragic complications of his relationships with his parents, especially with the man eventually identified as his father. While careful readers may, perhaps, foresee the truly horrific revelations that lie in store in this relationship, their sense of shock will not be diminished when the father's machinations are finally made totally clear.

From this alarming moment onwards, Mick's journey towards destruction is as desperate as it is inevitable. The occasional moments

of black humour apart, this is an extremely harrowing novel, in the reading of which it is sometimes easy (or comforting?) to forget that its hero is not yet in his teens; he has a very considerable price to pay for these premature intimations of the strange ways of the adult world. RD

World War II

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Simon Adams, Dorling Kindersley, 64pp, 0 7513 2876 6, £9.99 hbk

As you would expect from DK, this is not so much a history of the Second World War, as an imaginative and knowledgeable tour around some of the artefacts associated with the conflict. There is a variety of these; from a German ration card and a Vichy lapel badge to an Enigma machine and a U.S. Army Jeep. The emphasis falls necessarily on uniforms, insignia and weaponry, but there are also double page spreads for, among others, women at work, wartime childhood, and life in prisoner of war camps. This approach is excellent for providing the look and feel of the time. Much of the unobtrusive skill in producing this kind of book comes in the selection, arrangement and captioning of the artefacts, so that they are not only intrinsically interesting but come together to tell a story. And Adams and the design team are to be congratulated on how well they have done this. For example, the only double page spread to be arranged as a vertical rather than a horizontal frame is the one about the atomic bomb, a design decision that emphasises, as the mushroom cloud rises over two pages, the appearance of a terrible new dimension in warfare. CB

Causes

Pat Levy, 0 7502 2772 9

The Death Camps

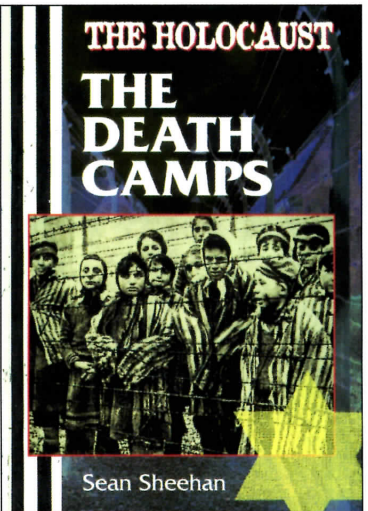
Sean Sheehan, 0 7502 2773 7

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Hodder Wayland 'The Holocaust', 64pp, £11.99 each hbk

These are the first two of a series of four books which examine the subject of the extermination of European Jewry by Nazi Germany; the others are *Survival and Resistance* and *After the Holocaust*. Levy carefully charts the ideological, political and economic currents that came together with such appalling consequences in the Third Reich. She gives equal weight to the character and ambition of Hitler himself, the specific circumstances of his rise to power, and to the deep seated and virulent nature of European anti-semitism. She argues that, because of the latter, the Nazis' persecution of the Jews found ready collaborators in some of the occupied countries and provoked an inadequate response from the Allies. Sheehan's book looks closely at the organisation of genocide in wartime Germany and the experience of the death camps for the prisoners and their guards.

Both books have been written with young adults in mind and address them with informed clarity. Levy's text in particular is a model of lucidity. Much space is given to the actual words of the perpetrators, victims and other witnesses of the terror. Although none of the horror of



what was done is concealed, it is neither dwelt upon nor manipulated for effect. The photographs that support the texts demonstrate to a generation growing up in a new century how, in the last, the unthinkable became, for a time, the commonplace. There are excellent guides to further reading, most of it necessarily adult, including scholarly works, records of personal experience, and web sites. CB

In My Hands

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Irene Gut Opdyke with Jennifer Armstrong, Corgi, 276pp, 0 552 54716 6, £4.99 pbk

Written by Armstrong following 'many, many hours of interviews' with Irene Gut Opdyke, this is the true story of one young woman's selfless fight against tyranny and persecution. Aged seventeen when Germany invades her native Poland in 1939, she immediately decides that if she is to be true to herself and to her ideals she must start to move against her country's oppressors. Her altruism comes gradually to focus on the plight of those Polish Jews whose extermination was part of the Nazi plan. By the time she is twenty, she can reflect, with some justification, that she has seen terrible things and that terrible things have been done to her. But her resourcefulness, resolution and indomitability see her through, allowing her to pass on these memories to a generation for whom the reality of the term 'Holocaust' is in danger of being forgotten or misunderstood. RD

Picture books reviewed in this issue relevant to older readers:

The Kingfisher Book of Fairy Tales (see p20)

Hungry! Hungry! Hungry! (see p20)

The Birdman (see p21)

The Phantom Cat of the Opera (see p21)

Sitting Ducks (see p22)

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (see p23)

The Orchard Book of Love and Friendship (see p23)



CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 26

Brian Alderson

The classic never read by children (Never? Well, hardly ever)



Preamble

Practically nothing from eighteenth-century authors remains current, but **Songs of Innocence** must be excepted – not just one of the greatest of children's books but one of the most original too. But because of the circumstances of its composition and sale it must have reached very few readers in its own time. It then more or less disappeared until a children's edition came out in 1906, re-illustrated by Olive Allen ('very distressing' says G. E. Bentley Jr in his bibliographical history of the book). So what are we talking about and why?

Date of original publication

1789 – and it wasn't the only revolutionary event of that year.

Author

W. Blake (writing backwards).

Publisher

W. Blake, from his dwelling in Hercules Building, Lambeth.

Printer

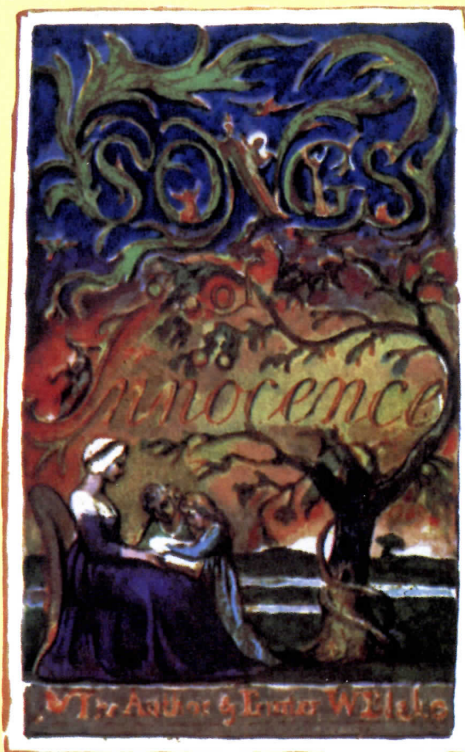
W. Blake, assisted by his dead brother Robert, who came to him 'in a vision of the night', and sundry infernal beasts (see **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell**, plate 15).

What was printed?

A frontispiece, title page, introductory poem and eighteen Songs on twenty-three pages. As a further refinement the poems are all furnished with variegated pictures and decorations around the margins or between the lines. The poems are written with a 'rural pen': lines of an elementary transparency about the Spring and lambs and blossoms, or longer descriptions of children playing, or, more darkly, of city children under rule, or tiny ballads of children lost and found. The simplicity is almost that of a child-author, and this heightens the book's effect as a disclosure of the nature of innocence (later to be rudely subverted).

How?

By a process never completely clarified. From what we can gauge, Blake inscribed the Songs, with reversed lettering along with the decorations on a copper plate using an acid-resistant ink. When the plate was etched his words and drawings stood out in relief and could be printed as single pages (the lettering now the right way round) on a normal hand press. Usually a brownish ink was used, but not always.



What then?

In most instances the pictures and decorations were coloured by hand with watercolours. There was no exact scheme and it is thought that later colouring was usually heavier (sometimes much heavier) than earlier.

What's meant by 'later'?

We don't know how many copies of **Songs** were printed. Up to 1794 the book was issued on its own – perhaps



to order – but after that date it may often have been bound up with a companion volume **Songs of Experience** (which never seems to have been separately issued). Fewer than a hundred copies have survived of these editions and most of those are in institutional collections in North America, some of which possess multiple copies.

Reading 'the text'

With no copies of Blake's original likely to be offered you at below a seven figure sum, and with all re-illustrated substitutes being at worst 'distressing' or at best 'not Blake' what is to be done? For one must be dogmatic and say that only the 'illuminated' text be offered to children – preferably with the contraries of **Experience** alongside ('without contraries is no progression'). Each of Blake's pages is designed as a unit, with words, pictures, and decorations all supporting each other to make a single statement. Each Song is itself. Sometimes ('The Shepherd') it may include not much more than an illustration; sometimes ('The Echoing Green') there may be two pictures with a variety of marginal drawings and decorations (observe the smart young cricketer); sometimes ('The Chimney Sweeper') the text exists within a trellis-work of fronds. Admittedly people find problems. Interpreting some of the naiveties and contradictions has been liable to put the most learned Blakeans into a quandary. But a plain text is pointless – the illuminations are essential. And anyway, is not the tussle over words and meanings half the fun? A bit more stimulating, I fancy, than the 'febrile whimsy' and the 'committed jokiness' that Robert Hull found for us in our latterday poetics described in the last BfK.

Getting copies

Facsimiles are the only possible answer, and fortunately a well-printed one is to be had replicating the colouring in the Rosenwald copy of both **Innocence** and **Experience** in the Library of Congress. And you also get a letterpress printing of each Song with some unambitious notes. ■

The illustrations are taken from the Oxford University Press edition of **Songs of Innocence and of Experience**, 0 19 281089 8, £8.99 pbk.

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