

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

July 2001 No.129  
UK Price £3.25

*the children's book magazine*



Paul Jennings • Jane Hissey • Babies and Books



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## EDITORIAL

The king is dead. Long live the queen! Quentin Blake's triumphant reign as our first Children's Laureate has come to an end and his successor is Anne Fine, the acclaimed author of more than 40 children's books and a maverick and always stimulating commentator on the world of children's publishing.

It's a good choice. Blake's emphasis on the visual, on illustration and thereby (although not entirely) on books for younger readers, is now replaced by an author best known for her astute, comic novels for older readers and teenagers such as *Madame Doubtfire*, *The Tulip Touch*, *Step by Wicked Step* and *Flour Babies*. She won the Carnegie Medal and the Whitbread for the latter title.



Anne Fine, Children's Laureate



Rosemary Stones

Fine's novels are invariably based on the struggle to individuate and become a separate person that is an intrinsic part of growing up. She does it with a sharp eye for comedy that is yet compassionate and empathic – she is particularly good on delineating characters like Tulip (*The Tulip Touch*) who really don't have a hope in hell. Fine is a passionate writer who is committed to real as well as to her fictional children – and to books. This passion is to extend during her reign to challenging ignorance about children's literature, to maintaining high critical standards and to supporting school and public libraries. Children's access to books is very much on her agenda.

At BfK we look forward to hearing more about Fine's plans. We offer her our warmest congratulations and support in her new role.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

**JULY 2001 No. 129**

ISSN 0143-909X © School Bookshop Assoc. Ltd 2001

Editor: Rosemary Stones

Managing Director: Richard Hill

Design: Alec Davis, Rondale Ltd, Lydney, Glos.

Printed: The Friary Press, Dorchester, Dorset

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

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

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

**Tel: 020 8852 4953**

**Fax: 020 8318 7580**

**E-mail: booksforkeeps@btinternet.com**

Annual subscription for six issues: £19.50 (UK), £22.50 (Europe including Ireland), £25.50 (airmail).

Single copies: £3.25 (UK), £3.75 (Europe including Ireland), £4.25 (airmail).



## CoverStory

This issue's cover is from Jane Hissey's *Old Bear's All-Together Painting*. Jane Hissey writes about her approach to illustration in *Windows into Illustration* on page 15. Thanks to Hutchinson Children's Books for their help with this July cover.





# BABIES AND BOOKS

Today we take it for granted that babies need books and that sharing books can enhance the relationship between parent and very young child. But this idea is relatively new. **Harriet Griffey** explains.

**W**hen Dorothy Butler published her book **Babies Need Books** in 1980, her ideas seemed to promote a remarkably new concept. To many at that time, the idea that a child should find books of interest before understanding the value of them would seem to suggest putting the cart before the horse. However, Butler's book was to have a remarkable influence, not least because it was published primarily for a popular market, not for an academic audience, first in hardback by The Bodley Head and then in paperback by Penguin, where it remains in print to this day.

Dorothy Butler's thesis was born of her long observation of young children and their use and enjoyment of books; as a teacher, mother, children's bookseller and reading adviser, and grandmother. And, in particular, her observation of her granddaughter Cushla, born with numerous genetic handicaps, who today would be referred to as learning disabled. Butler's observation and documentation of Cushla's life over her first three years provided the material for her thesis for her Diploma of Education, the basis of an article published by **Signal** in January 1977, and a book published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1979 called **Cushla and Her Books**. This remarkable record of the use of books in one young child's life, from the age of four months, provided exceptional insight to the value of using books from such an early age.

## Pioneering studies

As a study, however, it was not without precedent. Twenty-six years before Cushla's birth another girl, Carol, was born to a children's librarian in New Zealand, Dorothy White. White had already published **About Books for Children** in 1946, and she began a diary of her daughter's use and enjoyment of books from the age of two, later published in **Books Before Five** (New Zealand Council for Educational Research).

The benefit of Dorothy White's earlier observations about the use of books with young children provided Dorothy Butler with something of a benchmark with which to make a comparison. She was not alone. Another mother and former librarian, Virginia Lowe, whose daughter Rebecca was born in 1971, also kept an extremely detailed diary of her daughter's experience of books, which had already begun by eight months old. She also referred to Dorothy Butler's work with Cushla, and Dorothy White's work with Carol, in her article 'Cushla, Carol and Rebecca', published

in **Signal** in September 1977, making comparisons of the similarities and discrepancies between all three experiences. Prior to the work of Butler and Lowe, White's book had been the only available record of a child's literary development and had become accepted as the norm, while today only exposing a child to books from the age of two would be considered quite late.

Although these three studies laid no claim to being statistically or academically representative in terms of their research, each provided unexpected insights to the benefits to a young child's development that were enhanced through the use of books from an early age. These benefits included an ability to focus, listen and concentrate for extended periods of time. In turn language development is enriched through hearing the spoken word, and communication skills improved through the constant verbal

exchange. All this seems par for the course now, but the idea that this process could be started before a child was thought to be of an age to appreciate books, actually in babyhood, was a relatively new idea twenty years ago.

What is interesting to note is that today, in the fuller understanding of the role books can play in early child development, the integration of this understanding has influenced both further research studies, and the application and provision of services for the under-fives. For example, around 80% of all UK libraries offer special sessions for under-fives, while 92% showed involvement with a 'books for babies' project, according to the Library Information Statistics Unit. And certainly the proliferation of children's picture book publishing in the 1980s demonstrated an anticipated emerging market among the book buying public, with new children's book publishers like Walker Books coming into existence, while already established children's book publishers expanded, and other trade books publishers diversified into children's books.



## The Bookstart project

But what of those families for whom books and book buying are low on their list of priorities? Perhaps the most significant contribution to research-based practice over the last 10 years is the Bookstart project, originated by Wendy Cooling at the Book Trust in 1991 and begun with a pilot project in Birmingham in 1992. Bookstart now runs to 30 projects nationwide. Research results over the intervening years have also provided impetus to

# Babies and Books



numerous other pre-school projects, especially during the National Year of Reading launched in 1998. The originating premise of Bookstart, to introduce babies to books, required effective collaboration between those with access to mothers with young babies, health visitors, and those who offered a books service to them, libraries, precipitated by a book pack that included a new, free book suitable for a baby. The pilot project involved 130 babies, whose parents received their Bookstart pack when they visited their local health clinic for a regular check-up at around six to nine months old. The pack contained an age-appropriate board book, a poetry card, an invitation to join the local library, book lists, a poster, a bookmark, and information about local bookshops and other book-related organisations.

What the Bookstart pilot also provided was an opportunity for research, and this was carried out at Birmingham University's School of Education by Professor Barrie Wade and Dr Maggie Moore. Wade's own study, **Story at Home and School**, published by the Educational Review Occasional Publishing, in 1984 had already shown the value of sharing books and stories, so the Bookstart project provided an opportunity for further research. A questionnaire for the Bookstart project was completed at the time of receiving the pack, while a subsequent questionnaire was posted to participating families six months later. Further follow-up research with these families, over the years, has continued to demonstrate the effectiveness of this early intervention. By Key Stage 1, for example, Wade and Moore showed from SATS results that children who had received a Bookstart pack in infancy achieved higher scores when compared to a carefully matched comparison group ('A Sure Start with Books', **Early Years**, Volume 20, Number 2, Spring 2000). The benefit of providing children with early experience of books not only gave them a head start at school entry, but this benefit was seen to persist as their primary education continued.

## Improving literacy?

However, we could be forgiven for seeing books for babies as a means to an end in order to improve the nation's literacy rates, which was probably not part of Dorothy Butler's original intention. Certainly there has been an irresistible challenge in recent years to make books available to families traditionally disinclined to use them with their young children, in order to improve their advantage at school and, by extension, national literacy levels. In a cost-conscious climate, Bookstart could be seen solely in terms of its cost-effectiveness in raising standards.

However, a longitudinal project like Bookstart, and its spin-offs into other areas like library provision could not have come at a more relevant time as more and more families become technologically proficient. Television is a fact of life in almost every home, its viewing capacity extended by video and DVDs. Home use of computers, computer games and the Internet all have their value but can also promote extended periods of passive, isolated and non-verbal activity. For babies and very young children,

however, excessive television use can be detrimental to language development. The visual dominates, but listening is too difficult without the necessary one-to-one contact that encourages language development and other pre-literacy skills. Work carried out by Dr Sally Ward, which forms the basis of her Baby Talk programme, has demonstrated quite clearly the benefits to language development of a 30-minute period of one-to-one communication between a baby or young child and his parent or carer, without background noise. Using this time to share a book, sing songs, and play rhyming games, and listening, talking, taking turns, being close and attended to, benefits a child's language development in a way that is still having a positive impact, according to follow-up research, at Key Stage 2 SATS at age seven.

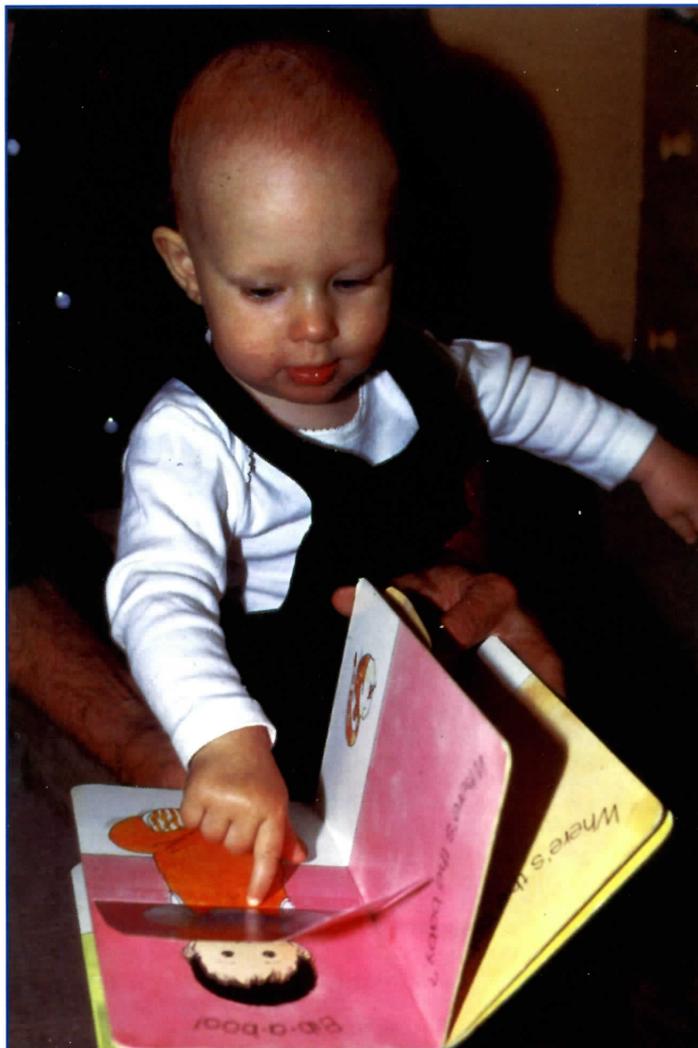
## Sharing an experience

While use of and enjoyment of books from an early age promotes language development and communication skills and, as research has shown, the pre-literacy skills necessary for later success, families are living in an increasingly fast-paced world. What books can, should and do offer is a time to develop a secure and close relationship between parent or carer and child. It is the attentiveness and proximity of an available adult who, as Piaget demonstrated in his work in the 1950s (**The Origins of Intelligence in Children**, International University Press, 1952), provides a child with the resources in which learning can take place. It is also an advantage for a young child if these experiences are stress-free, democratic and warm, creating opportunities for turn-taking, and where adults don't always dominate the proceedings.

So the learning that occurs when babies are exposed to books from a young age is not just about learning to be literate in due course, but also learning how to learn about their expanding world and the emotional and intellectual resources that will make it available to them. Here the parent or carer is paramount, and the book becomes a life-enhancing tool to be shared and enjoyed, something that is fun for its own sake, stimulating imagination and creativity. This shouldn't be forgotten and, all other research aside, brings us back full circle to Dorothy Butler. ■

**Harriet Griffey** is a journalist and writer. Her most recent book, with Professor Mike Howe, is **Give Your Child a Better Start: How to Encourage Early Learning** (Penguin).

Photographs of Ike and Lucy Rogers on pages 4-9 by **Martin Ellis**.



**Signal** magazine is published by The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ.

For further information about **Bookstart**, contact Ann Carty, Ruth Pyner or Rosemary Clarke at Young Book Trust, Book Trust, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.



# Enjoying Books with Babies

What kinds of books appeal to babies? **Rosemary Stones** discusses cloth, board and picture books aimed at our very youngest 'readers'.

In 1954 the psychoanalyst, D W Winnicott, who did much pioneering work with mothers and babies, wrote in a book aimed at new mothers\*:

'Each baby is a *going concern*. In each baby is a vital spark, and this urge towards life and growth and development is a part of the baby, something the child is born with and which is carried forward in a way that we do not have to understand... The baby grows, and you are the mother providing a suitable environment.'

Most parents do indeed want to provide 'a suitable environment' for their baby and enjoy responding to its needs. Nowadays, thanks in no small measure to the work of Book Trust's Bookstart initiative, books are increasingly seen as part of the environment from the earliest months.

Kathy Henderson and Brita Granström's **Baby Knows Best** is a picture book that takes a wryly humorous look at what can happen to our (in this case book orientated) best efforts:

*She's got a rag book about farms  
That's full of ducks and pigs and goats,  
she's got my old book of nursery rhymes,  
and a plastic book that floats,  
she's got books with cardboard pages  
and bright pictures just for her...*

*And what does she want to look at?*

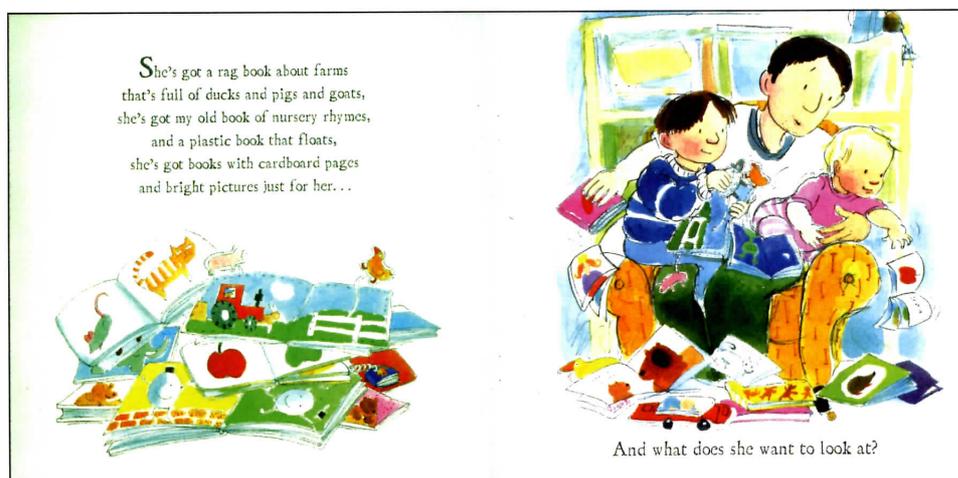
*The newspaper.*

Baby does indeed know best about the excitement of tearing and chewing paper – an important stage in the process of enjoying books. This happy book with its freely expressive illustrations will be greatly enjoyed by parents and older siblings as well as by baby her/himself.

Not all babies are as tactful as this one, of course, in developing tearing skills via newspapers rather than on books themselves. There will certainly be some casualties along the way – babies are surprisingly strong and their curiosity will undoubtedly lead to torn pages. It's not the end of the world and providing old magazines and newspapers can help at the ripping paper stage.

## Mirroring back

The first thing that almost all babies see is their mother's face and reading it is their window into knowing about themselves. Three recent novelty board books develop this theme with lots of possibilities for looking at faces, including the baby's own, as each book includes a little mirror. Jane Cabrera's **Floppy Ears**, illustrated in bold painterly style, has a series of animal portraits, some with small ears (guinea pig), some with big ears (elephant) and so forth. The mirror on the final page reflects, of course, 'your ears!' and affords



And what does she want to look at?



From **Baby Knows Best**.

the baby and parent a delightful opportunity to participate together in putting words to body parts.

Rod Campbell's **Fluffy Kitten** with clear, rather static drawings, is a touch and feel board book about a playful kitten with large expressive eyes that babies will relate to. Kitty likes looking at herself in the mirror and so will baby. The final spread has a peek-a-boo cloth flap behind which baby can find the sleeping kitten. So much can be experienced from this little book – the all important theme of lost and found that is intrinsic to peek-a-boo and to early development, the mirroring of self, and the stroking of the 'kitten fur' that introduces the idea of different textures.

Mick Inkpen and Stuart Trotter's **Kipper's Sticky Paws** is a touch and feel board book about a dog and a pig with sticky fingers and faces that need wiping clean. The sticky paws touch-and-feel is very effective and fun but the mirror in which baby is invited to look to see whether her/his face is clean is disappointingly poor quality. Jan Ormerod's **I Spy You!** is a thin card board



From **Floppy Ears**, with Ike in the mirror.

# Babies and Books



book with peek-a-boo flaps behind which various babies are hiding. The illustrations are rather muted but the repetitive simplicity will greatly appeal.

For slightly older babies Jane Simmons' **Daisy's Hide and Seek** is a picture book illustrated in her warm, painterly style and with flaps of the **Where's Spot?** kind. Daisy and Pip, the little duckling, are playing hide and seek round the farmyard so there are lots of opportunities to identify the animals as well as the excitement of looking for Pip. Dramatic tension in this little story is just the kind of thing to engage a baby even if s/he doesn't yet know quite what it is all about. Why do some publishers think they can get away with pedestrian texts for babies?

David McKee's **Elmer's Hide-and-Seek** is a lift-the-flap book in which the multi-coloured little elephant looks for bird behind the pink rock, orange log etc. Words for identifying colours as well as a variety of animals are thus incorporated into this stylish little book.

## Books as toys

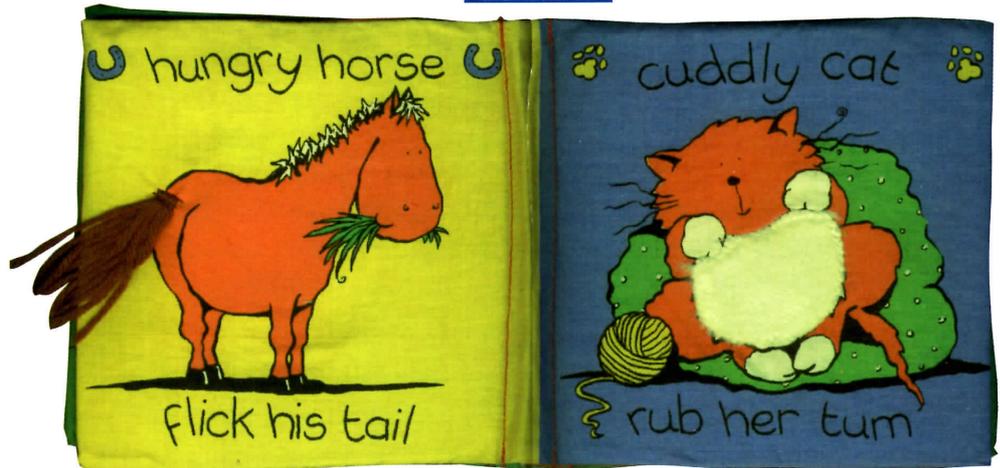
Board and cloth books have of course a double function – toy as much as book – and being chewed, dribbled on or thrown around is par for the course. Such books do, however, implicitly convey to babies how books work. As the adult turns the pages, the baby, in the UK at any rate, is learning that pages are turned from right to left. This is why I find concertina books like Andy Everitt-Stewart's **First Cot Book** less satisfactory for our very new 'readers' despite its decorative patterns and good 'peepo' mirror, safely incorporated. Jo Brown's **Humpty Dumpty Play Book** is a touch-and-feel cloth book (with pages to turn) that introduces the first line of a nursery rhyme on each page. Thus we have 'Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool?' and a jolly sheep picture with touch-and-feel woolly middle. The assumption is, however, that the adult knows the rest of the rhyme and this is, sadly, not an assumption that I think it safe to make. Curiously, it is suggested that this title is suitable for 6-18 months. My own experience is that babies love hearing rhymes well before six months. It doesn't matter if the words are not understood – it's the cadences, rhythms and sounds of the language that they respond to and will begin to mimic as they begin to make their own sounds.

Caroline Jayne Church's **Bouncy Lamb** cloth book has touch-and-feel elements ('baby chick/smooth her wing' etc) and engaging pictures of different animals. Lots of opportunities here for the parent or other carer to put words and sounds to the pictures.

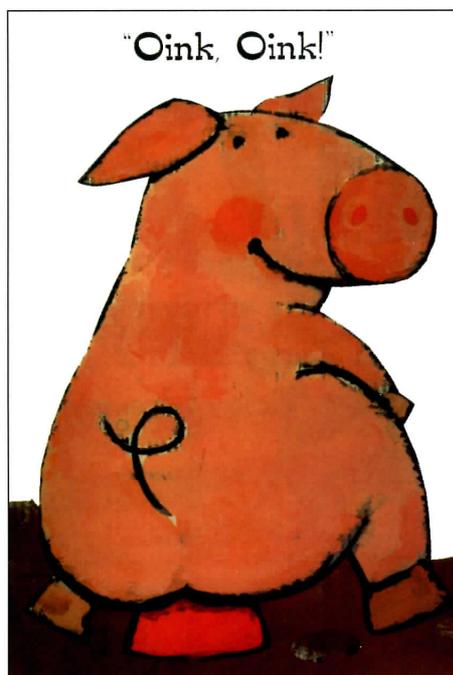
## Lost and found

For older babies, the theme of lost and found continues to be potent and never more so than in stories in which babies are lost, experience anxiety and then the relief of being found again. (Baby 'readers' know a lot about this...)

Anita Jeram's popular picture book with its consummate drawing and fresh, appealing characterisation, **Bunny My Honey**, is now available as a small format



Above, from **Bouncy Lamb**. Below, from **Potty Time**.



board book. Bunny plays with his friends and Mummy Rabbit makes it better 'if a game ever ended in tears, as games sometimes do'. But 'one day Bunny got lost... Bunny started to cry. "Mummy, Mummy, I want my mummy!"' A similar trauma is undergone by the lamb in Kim Lewis's handsome picture book with its soft pastel illustrations, **Little Baa**. In both cases, you'll be relieved to know, mother and baby are happily reunited.

## Favourite things

Shoes, potties and other babies are amongst the things that fascinate older babies. Valeria Petrone's board book **Funny Feet** has a duck called Tilda trying on new shoes. Babies will love the jokes and the bright, bold colours. Guido van Genechten's picture book, **Potty Time**, is also wonderfully funny with animals of different sizes sitting on their potties ("Here's a potty for my round pink botty," said Percy Pig. "Oink, Oink!" and so on). Bold use of colour, outline and collage add to the impact. There is a crying baby in Cressida Cowell and Ingrid Godon's **What Shall We Do With the Boo Hoo Baby?** Babies will be vastly amused by the desperate measures the animals use to

pacify what turns out to be a tired baby who wants to sleep. The repetitive structure and animals noises will be much enjoyed.

Older babies and toddlers also, of course, love stories of domestic life and forays into the wider world and few achieve this better than Sarah Garland. In **Ellie's Shoes** and **Ellie's Breakfast**, mum and dad, respectively, are called upon to find shoes and make breakfast in a comfortably chaotic farmhouse. The small yet big achievements of Ellie finding the shoes in one book and an egg for her breakfast in the other are celebrated in bright illustrations with vibrant line that convey movement and liveliness. What better way to keep in touch with babies than sharing books like these! ■

\* The Child, the Family, and the Outside World

Rosemary Stones is Editor of Books for Keeps.

## Books discussed

**Baby Knows Best**, Kathy Henderson, ill. Brita Granström, Doubleday, 0 385 60070 4, £10.99 hbk

**Floppy Ears**, Jane Cabrera, Campbell Books, 0 333 90366 8, £3.50 board

**Fluffy Kitten**, Rod Campbell, Campbell Books, 0 333 90373 0, £4.99 board

**Kipper's Sticky Paws**, Mick Inkpen and Stuart Trotter, Hodder Children's Books, 0 340 78852 6, £4.99 board

**I Spy You!**, Jan Ormerod, The Bodley Head, 0 370 32633 4, £3.99 board

**Daisy's Hide and Seek**, Jane Simmons, Orchard Books, 1 84121 767 0, £8.99 hbk

**Elmer's Hide-and-Seek**, David McKee, Red Fox, 0 09 941098 2, £4.99 pbk

**First Cot Book**, ill. Andy Everitt-Stewart, Ladybird, 0 7214 9931 7, £3.99 cloth

**Humpty Dumpty Play Book**, ill. Jo Brown, Ladybird, 0 7214 9930 9, £5.99 cloth

**Bouncy Lamb**, ill. Caroline Jayne Church, Ladybird, 0 7214 2838 X, £5.99 cloth

**Bunny My Honey**, Anita Jeram, Walker Books, 0 7445 7583 4, £3.99 board

**Little Baa**, Kim Lewis, Walker Books, 0 7445 7544 3, £9.99 hbk

**Funny Feet**, Valeria Petrone, Scholastic, 0 439 01389 5, £4.99 board

**Potty Time**, Guido van Genechten, Cat's Whiskers, 1 90301 211 2, £4.99 pbk

**What Shall We Do With the Boo Hoo Baby?**, Cressida Cowell, ill. Ingrid Godon, Macmillan, 0 333 73593 5, £4.99 pbk

**Ellie's Shoes**, Sarah Garland, Red Fox, 0 09 969251 1, £4.99 pbk

**Ellie's Breakfast**, Sarah Garland, Red Fox, 0 09 969261 9, £4.99 pbk



# The Great – and the Good

After board and cloth books, which picture books are not to be missed by under fives? Good picture books abound, but which ten, still in print, are the truly great, that no home or school should be without? BfK asked Elaine Moss, winner of the Eleanor Farjeon Award and founder judge of the Kurt Maschler award, to come up with her top titles.

Ten truly great picture books in 800 words? I am going to cheat. Of course!

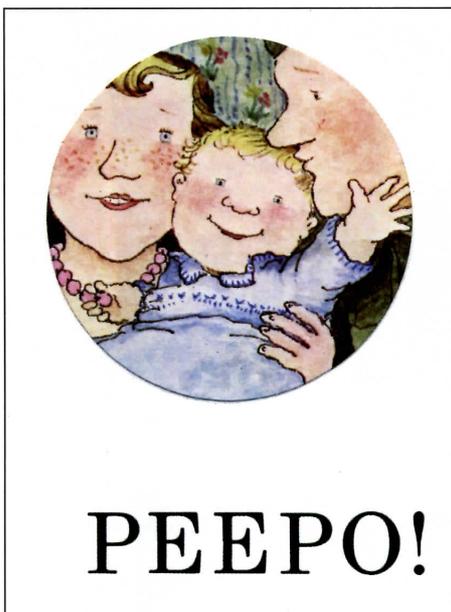
Janet and Allan Ahlberg's **Peepo!** pipped the even more wondrous but difficult-to-keep-track-of **Jolly Postman** with its numerous tucked in letters and tiny books, every child's delight. **Peepo!** is a work of genius with its simple rhymes – 'Here's a little baby/ One, two, three/ Stands in his cot / What does he see?' – and the answer can be glimpsed through a hole in the opposite page: PEEPO! The pictures are crammed full of 1950s-style impedimenta faithfully researched. On every level, a winner – and now available as a board book.

Also in board book format is the ever-popular **The Very Hungry Caterpillar** by Eric Carle, a dramatic recounting page by part-page of the life cycle of a butterfly from egg through (hungry) caterpillar and dull cocoon to glorious multi-coloured maturity. Purists may object to the caterpillar's unlikely Saturday binge on salami, chocolate cake and ice-cream (after a week spent sensibly nibbling fruit) but children find this opening blissful.

The range of Raymond Briggs's picture books stretches from the wordless pristine simplicity of **The Snowman** to the heart-rending picture-strip biography of his parents **Ethel and Ernest** (an adult bestseller), with plenty of political forays in



Above, 'A man stood on a hill and looked at a star.' from **Dinosaurs and All that Rubbish**; right, the wordless end of **The Snowman**.



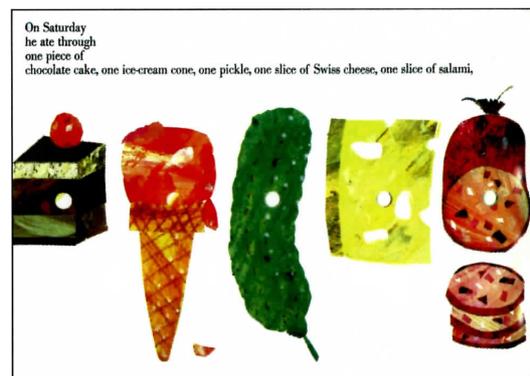
between. In **The Snowman** pale colours and chalky frames of varying sizes tell the simple story of a young boy's exhilaration at waking to find snow, building a snowman, dreaming an adventure with him, then having to confront the sadness of the thaw – an intimation of mortality.

Pat Hutchins' **Rosie's Walk** may appear as simple, with its wooden type farmyard animals, barns and carts, and only thirty-six intentionally pedestrian words, but look! Behind Rosie as she 'goes for a walk across the yard...past the mill' a dramatically different story, told entirely in pictures, is unfolding. Will the fox, in whose path Rosie is (inadvertently?) placing many obstacles, catch her in the end? The child 'reader' asks and answers



for herself many questions posed by this seminal 1968 picture book.

Older still but now brought back into print to delight a new generation is William Nicholson's 1936 **Clever Bill** which Maurice Sendak, no less, considered to be 'among the few perfect picture books ever created'. Lithographed, by Nicholson with handwritten text, it tells the story of Mary who is going away but cannot quite manage to pack all the things she needs into her small suitcase. In the end she forgets 'poor Bill Davis', her favourite guardsman toy, but 'he ran and he ran and he ran' (through forward rushing pages) 'and was just in time to meet her train at Dover. Clever Bill!'



From **The Very Hungry Caterpillar**.

And of course you must have Jean de Brunhoff's brave (because it deals with the death of Babar's mother) and beautiful **The Story of Babar** with its delectable pachydermic absurdity – the King of the Elephants adapting himself to life in a French provincial town – seriously depicted on page after page of impeccably designed (in the 1934 edition) word and image. The same virtuosity of design can be seen in Edward Ardizzone's 1936 **Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain**, the story of a young stowaway who has to earn his passage the hard way but whose bravery in a storm wins the heart of the kindly but stern commander. Alas, the new publisher, Scholastic, has thought it necessary to meddle with the text which is a thousand pities, but the story and the pictures of hard labour and raging seas still capture the imagination. More than thirty years older, but still in print, are the perhaps immortal Beatrix Potter 'Tales', and I refuse to choose between **Peter Rabbit** and **Tom Kitten**, those two endearingly disobedient 'children' who get their comeuppance.



Max of **Where the Wild Things Are**, Maurice Sendak's masterwork, is a later (1967) rampaging boy whose creator treats him with post-Freudian dignity. By sailing *himself* into a world where he can gain control of the monstrous 'wild things' that have taken a grip of him, Max can return to his own familiar room and find his supper waiting for him. 'And it was still hot.' Magical pictures and lyrical text in perfect harmony create a modern work of as yet unparalleled genius.

Of Anthony Browne's remarkable oeuvre I would have chosen **Gorilla** because of the sensitive way in which it deals with the modern disease of divorce and children's loneliness; from John Burningham's, **Granpa** because of its unique use of dialogue in representing the gap between crabbed age and youth; from Shirley Hughes' **Alfie Gets in First** because of its human qualities and its ingenious design; and from Michael Foreman's **Dinosaurs and All that Rubbish** because of its deep concern with the environment. From Quentin Blake's extraordinary range of humorous and emotional picture stories, I choose **All Join In** not because it is his best, perhaps, but because I would like readers to do exactly that in order to discover for themselves just how rich is our picture book field – and how impossible the task I was set! ■

### Books discussed

**Peepo!**, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Viking, 0 670 80344 8, £10.99 hbk, 0 670 87176 1, £4.99 board, Puffin, 0 14 050384 6, £4.99 pbk

**The Very Hungry Caterpillar**, Eric Carle, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 14106 0, £12.99 hbk, 0 241 00300 8, £4.99 board, Puffin, 0 14 050087 1, £4.99 pbk

**The Snowman**, Raymond Briggs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13938 4, £9.99 hbk, 0 241 14103 6, £4.99 board, Puffin, 0 14 050350 1, £4.99 pbk

**Rosie's Walk**, Pat Hutchins, Puffin, 0 14 050032 4, £4.99 pbk

**Clever Bill**, William Nicholson, Heinemann, 0 434 80439 8, £10.99 hbk

**The Story of Babar**, Jean de Brunhoff, Methuen, 0 416 57650 8, £15.99 hbk, Mammoth, 0 7497 3759 X, £5.99 pbk

**Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain**, Edward Ardizzone, Scholastic, 0 590 11417 4, £9.99 hbk

**The Tale of Peter Rabbit**, 0 7232 3460 4, and **The Tale of Tom Kitten**, 0 7232 3467 1, Beatrix Potter, Frederick Warne, £4.50 each hbk

**Where the Wild Things Are**, Maurice Sendak, Bodley Head, 0 370 00772 7, £12.99 hbk, Red Fox, 0 09 940839 2, £5.99 pbk

**Gorilla**, Anthony Browne, Walker, 0 7445 9997 0, £4.99 pbk

**Granpa**, John Burningham, Puffin, 0 14 050841 4, £4.99 pbk

**Alfie Gets in First**, Shirley Hughes, Red Fox, 0 09 925605 3, £4.99 pbk

**Dinosaurs and All that Rubbish**, Michael Foreman, Puffin, 0 14 055260 X, £5.99 pbk

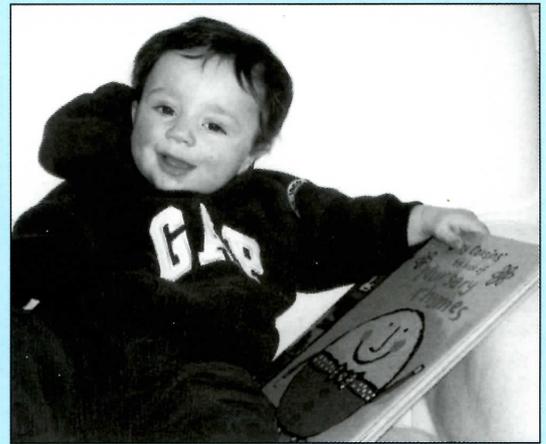
**All Join In**, Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 996470 8, £4.99 pbk

Elaine Moss is a frequent contributor to **Signal** magazine and was for ten years the compiler of the annual **Children's Books of the Year** guide. She was a founder judge of the Kurt Maschler Award and won the Eleanor Farjeon Award for distinguished services to children's literature.

# Jack's First Books

Six-month-old **Jack McKeone** already appears to have firm views about the books he enjoys. **BfK** invited his father, **Gary McKeone**, to trace how Jack's reading interests develop until he reaches his first birthday. Here is the first instalment of this baby book diary.

Jack Ferdinand McKeone was born on 29 September 2000. A Friday. His first parcel of books arrived with the early post on the following Tuesday. I have always loved getting books by post; the padded envelope, the bubble wrap, the feel and smell of the pages. A book is an object, a visual and tactile experience; the typeface and page layout, the dust jacket and boards, they are all, to me at least, part of the pleasure of reading.



When Jack's first package of books landed, it was something of a marker, a rite of passage. There was a new reader in the house now, someone ripe and ready to make an early acquaintance with the world of literature.

Such grand notions quickly fall into perspective when the wailing starts. Then the book becomes a pacifier. Janet and Allan Ahlberg's **Each Peach Pear Plum** may well offer an ironic take on classic tales for children. Jack's approach is more primal. The cardboard pages make a decent thud when he gives them a clout. There are colours to smile at and shapes to dribble on never mind the four corners to chew. A visual and tactile experience.

In his first six months we have plied him with books that are colourful, soft books, hard books, waterproof books, books with just shapes on the page, books that make noises. Has he any favourites? His interest in Eric Carle's **The Very Hungry Caterpillar**, particularly the pages outlining the caterpillar's eating binge, persuade me that the wee man may grow up to be less thin than his father. It's as if he wants to eat the apple, the two pears and the three plums before tackling the salami, the chocolate cake and the ice cream.

Yet with each book I hold in front of him, I'm intrigued to know what it is he actually sees. What do the shapes mean to him? Why do some colours captivate him more than others? One sound will make him smile and laugh while another will not interest him at all. Why? What is going on in that tiny, beautiful head?

Just now, sound is the kernel. Lucy Cousins' **Big Book of Nursery Rhymes** is a bold, bright splash of a book but it is the rhythm of the rhymes, the music of our voices that registers with him. In Brian Friel's play **Faith Healer**, a character recites a litany of place-names for, as he says, 'the mesmerism, the sedation of the incantation'. That eloquent description defines precisely what I see happening with Jack. For all the attempts to eat the books, for all the clouts and slaps and grabbing at the pages, it is the sound of our voices, the rhythm of our reading that makes his emergent antennae twitch. His current favourite is **The Grand Old Duke of York**, especially if his parents perform the actions. We, of course, secretly hope that he'll acquire our Irish accents.

His library grows weekly. **The Giraffe without Spots**, **The Rudest Boy in the World**, **Peepo**, **Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star** are just the start of it. I often carry him into my study and let him look at the books on the shelves for no other reason than that I want him to grow up with books as a natural feature of his personal landscape. But you can't rush these things. On one particularly tearful, early night, I walked him up and down the hall gently speaking the Yeats poem, 'Song of the Wandering Aengus' in an effort to lull him to sleep. He screamed. Perhaps he's going to be a literary critic. ■

Gary McKeone is Literature Director, Arts Council of England.

# Authorgraph No.129

**Paul Jennings**  
interviewed by  
George Hunt

**P**aul Jennings is a quiet and almost diffident man. He gives the impression of being quietly bemused by the fame and success that have been his reward for creating a distinctive fiction combining nightmarish surrealism, hilarity and emotional intensity. In the world he has created through his short, powerful stories, hapless humans face such ordeals as apparent gender changes, the growth of extra organs, or, more mundanely, being sent to a sewage farm to collect a pair of false teeth that have fallen down the toilet. Most of his fiction focuses on vulnerability, a preoccupation he traces back to his arrival at the age of six as a migrant to Australia.

'It was an incredibly brave thing for my parents to do. The culture was totally different, and the English didn't tend to live in supportive enclaves like other nationalities, because they were supposed to be the same as the Australians. I was made fun of because of my accent, so it vanished just like that. But my mother missed England till the day she died, and it made her very depressed.'

Perhaps in response to these tribulations, Jennings took refuge in fiction, and in his own imagination.

'I lived in my head a lot. I didn't like rough stuff like football, and I remember being caned for hiding in the library with books when I should have been at games. But I could tell jokes. They were always getting me to do that on school camps. My father was a Yorkshireman, and I think I inherited his gift for exaggeration and the good punchline.'

This passion for retelling funny stories led to Jennings' first, very traumatic encounter with the publishing business.

'Apart from telling jokes, the only other thing I was ever good at was composition, but I used to think that all writers were elderly and extremely brilliant, so I never thought I'd attain that. Then one night when I was about thirteen I was out camping with a friend, and in the middle of the night we realised we had a tiger snake outside the tent, deadly poisonous and very aggressive. We sat together in the middle for ages, shining a torch around the edges until the batteries ran out. Then I felt something cold and wet touching my

hand. It was an enormous bullfrog. We ran for it, jumped on our bikes and ended up sleeping on the veranda of the post office in the nearest town. I wrote all this out in an old exercise book and sent it to the *Women's Weekly* and they sent it back again. I was mortified. I thought I was no good. I didn't even think about writing again until I was thirty-nine. I often tell the kids in the schools I visit that story to demonstrate two things: just because something funny has happened to you doesn't mean other people are going to be interested in it; and the other thing is not to give up on your dreams too easily.'

As Jennings relates this story, the sense of hurt is tangible.

'When you write, you expose yourself, you make a gift of yourself. You're saying, this is me, what do you think? In a way you are offering your love, and when that's rejected it's devastating. I didn't want to face that again.'

Twenty-six years elapsed between his first rejection slip and the publication of his first book, and Jennings spent most of them in education. Driven by that sense of sympathy for the vulnerable that pervades all of his fiction, he taught primary school children whose lives had been blighted by various traumas: physical disabilities, learning difficulties, and involvement in crime.

'In the Opportunity Classes, as they were called, they would bring the kids to school in handcuffs, shove them in the classroom and expect you to teach them maths. I tried to make it interesting for them. We might lift the engine block out of a car, take it to pieces, put it back together again, try to work some maths out of that, but it was all high stress.'

After several years of classroom and hospital school teaching, Jennings specialised in speech therapy, undergoing intensive training which included a rigorous course in linguistics. When he began to write fiction for children, this experience manifested itself in an analytic sensitivity to the features of written language that control the accessibility of a text to young readers. The immediate catalyst for this was the trouble that one of his sons was having in learning to read. He had been given a 'high interest, low vocabulary' remedial reader to take home.

It did not work for him.

'I remember us sitting there all cosy in front of the fire when suddenly he literally flung the book across the room, and there were real tears in his eyes. He said I'm sick of these piddling little readers, and when I looked at it I could see why. There was no plot. So I thought, I can do better than this.'

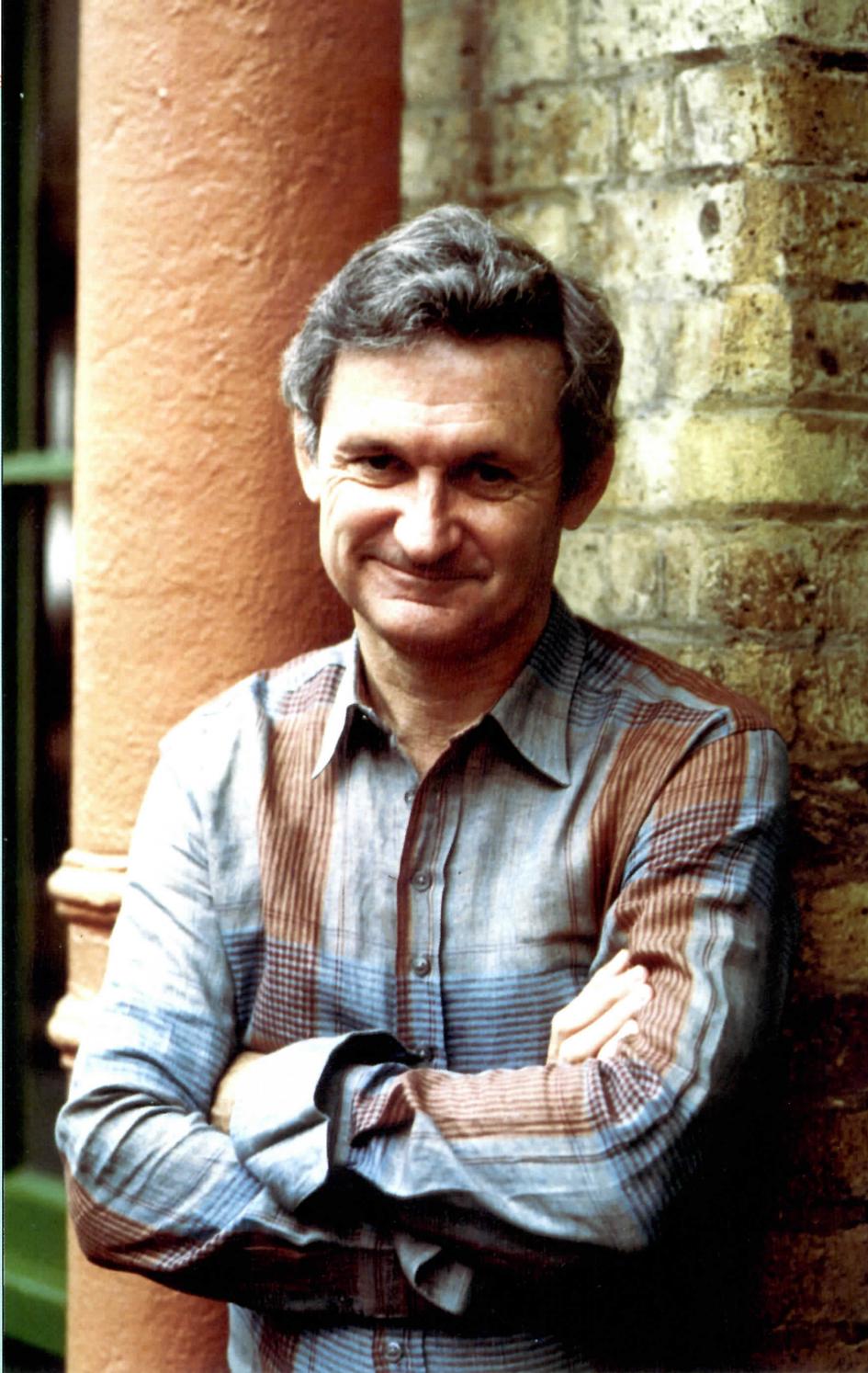
The outcome was *Unreal!*, a collection of eight enthrallingly bizarre stories that set the pattern for the series of similarly entitled books which have followed. All of them are characterised by a radiant clarity based on short, active rhythmic sentences, accessible but varied vocabulary, and tight control of the cohesive grammatical features that carry meaning from sentence to sentence. This produces a spare but powerful prose reminiscent of Raymond Carver, a writer he admires. Jennings' technical control was originally based on research and painstaking construction, but it has now become what Jennings calls his natural voice. It is a voice completely free from condescension and over-simplification.

'I refuse to write down to kids. It's a mantra of mine that there is no such thing as a book for a reluctant reader. That's like saying you can have a book that's specially for redheads. If a story isn't good enough to hold the attention of a good reader, you haven't got a chance of interesting a struggling reader in it. If they don't like something, you'll never get them to read it. If you give them something they like, you can't get them to stop reading it.'

Jennings' stories, and his short novels such as *The Gizmo*, *The Paw Thing* and *Sucked In*, evidently offer what children like. The extravagance of his content, providing a rhapsodic celebration of the absurd and the taboo, is dynamically antithetical to the austerity of his style. Some of the story titles from *Unreal!* might give you a flavour of this: 'Skeleton on the Dunny'; 'Wunderpants'; 'Cow Dung Custard'. His characters shapeshift and change species; they learn to fly, time travel and to adjust their own ages; they are forced to eat flies or titanic quantities of spaghetti; they are invaded by other people's tattoos or by metabolic catastrophes that change skin to scales or cause sudden eruptions of body hair. Embarrassing bodily functions are exposed and ridiculed. Dreamlike episodes of public nudity turn out to be for real. In *Sucked In*, his most recent novella, an excised appendix develops a life, and a voracious appetite, of its own. This is all hilariously done, but the stories also have a serious aspect, describing and providing reassurance for the emotional fragility of childhood and adolescent experience.

'It's all to do with childhood culture, but the main thing about childhood culture is that although there's a lot of kids about, they are powerless. I can remember what it was like to be small and frightened, not knowing what was going to happen next, frightened of getting things wrong.'

Jennings' own experience of being forced to strip for the school showers inspired the story 'Pubic Hare' in *Uncovered!*, a collection which deals more searchingly with adolescent insecurity, the dread of a loss of control as the body runs amok, or the family inflicts brutal embarrassments



on the frail sensitivities of youth. But the resolutions of the stories do provide reassurance or at least resolution. Bullies and pompous authorities are worsted, victims and outcasts achieve their moments of glory. In 'Ringing Wet' from the same collection, for instance, a bedwetter nets the neighbourhood burglar by deliberately peeing on the mattress and setting off her enuresis alarm.

In recent years Jennings has been writing in collaboration with Morris Gleitzman. The first fruit of this partnership between Australia's most eminent children's writers was **Wicked!**, a six-part serial centered on the enforced alliance between two step-siblings whose recently married parents appear to have been eaten by a horde of flesh devouring mutants hatched from the boy's pet worms. The publishers adopted a high risk strategy for this venture. Jennings and Gleitzman wrote alternative chapters, faxing them to each other and

leaving the fantastic complications which end each episode for the other to sort out. The first books appeared well before they had any idea of how the final one would end.

'It was fun getting the characters into terrible fixes knowing you didn't have to worry about getting them out of it, but imagine what would have happened if we'd had a fight; it would have been a catastrophe.'

Accordingly, the latest collaboration (**Deadly!** another six-parter) has been planned in advance. Jennings wrote the first chapter, in which a youth inexplicably finds himself naked in a forest, being pursued by armed, malevolent and dung obsessed toddlers. Later, when he has found a woman's dress to wear, he discovers that he is pregnant.

So Jennings continues to play on archetypal anxieties that are the stuff of nightmare. His ability to generate fantasies that are disturbing yet comical

appears to be effortless, but he has his own anxieties about creativity, and the process of writing is a laborious one for him.

'You start off with a gem of an idea – maybe just a funny image, and that becomes the germ that grows into the story. For example, a novella I've been working on started with an idea about a boy who loses his milk teeth, and when the second set grow they turn out to be luminous. He's an orphan boy who's lost his mother, but every day on his birthday he comes looking for her at the underground railway station where she told him to wait for her. The punchline involves an electricity blackout at the station, and the boy's teeth acting as a warning light to the trains. But to get from the first image to the whole story you've got to stick with it, hour after hour and day after day, and Jeez, it's hard work.'

But the rewards are great. Apart from his worldwide fame as a storyteller, novelist and scriptwriter, Jennings receives copious mail testifying to the paradoxically reassuring qualities of his disquieting fiction. A grandfather now, he is particularly proud of the fact that his grandchildren delight in the tales he began to tell to inspire his son. When asked if his fiction continues to be an expression of the altruistic instinct that caused him to work for years providing therapy for troubled children, his reply is cautious but revealing.

'I suppose it is. It's certainly therapeutic to me; you get an enormous sense of wellbeing from completing a good story. But there's also the point I made about offering your love when you write for people. I was reading something that the Dalai Lama said, that human beings are programmed to give and receive love. The world only works properly if we're kind to each other and supportive of each other, and I think writing can help with that.' ■

Photograph courtesy of Puffin Books.

### The Books

*(published by Puffin at £3.99 each unless indicated otherwise)*

- Quirky Tails**, 0 14 037101 X
- Unbearable!**, 0 14 037103 6
- Unbelievable!**, 0 14 037100 1
- Uncanny!**, 0 14 037102 8, £4.99
- Uncovered!**, 0 14 036900 7
- Undone!**, 0 14 036823 X, £4.99
- Unmentionable!**, 0 14 037104 4
- Unreal!**, 0 14 037099 4
- Unseen!**, 0 14 130515 0, £4.99
- The Cabbage Patch Fib**, 0 14 037769 7
- The Cabbage Patch War**, 0 14 038243 7
- The Paw Thing**, 0 14 037770 0
- Singenpoo Strikes Again**, 0 14 130099 X
- Singenpoo Shoots Through**, 0 14 130609 2
- The Gizmo**, 0 14 037090 0
- The Gizmo Again**, 0 14 037807 3
- Come Back Gizmo**, 0 14 037845 6
- Sink the Gizmo**, 0 14 038148 1
- Sucked In**, 0 14 131199 1
- Deadly!**, with Morris Gleitzman,  
0 14 130912 1, £4.99
- Totally Wicked!**, with Morris Gleitzman,  
0 14 130556 8, £4.99
- Thirteen! Unpredictable Tales**, chosen by  
Wendy Cooling, 0 14 037790 5, £4.99

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

# SPECTACULAR SUMMER READING

## ANNE FINE

*The Children's Laureate*



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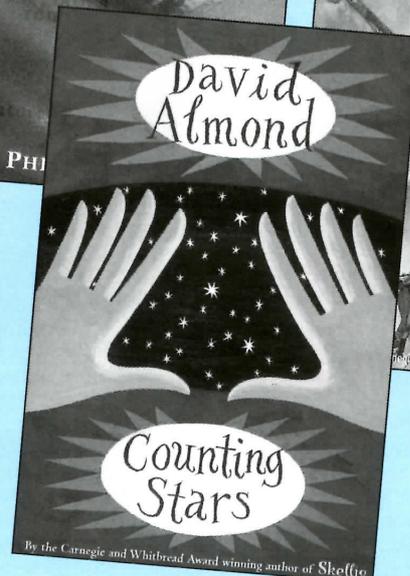
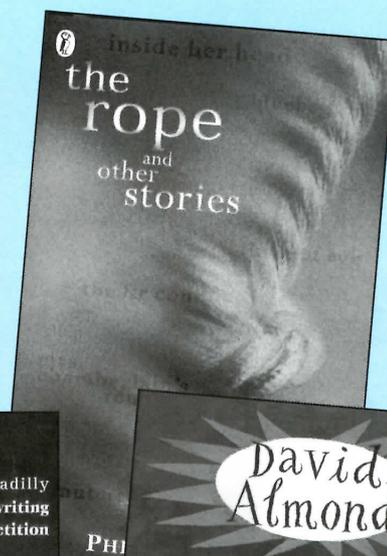
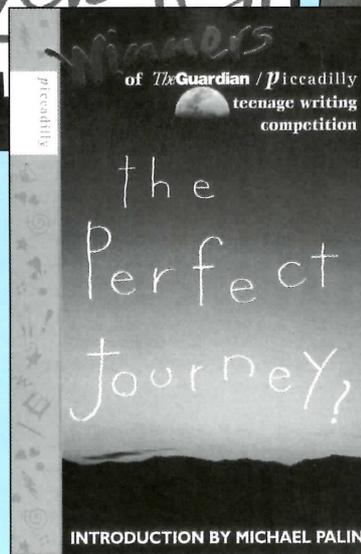
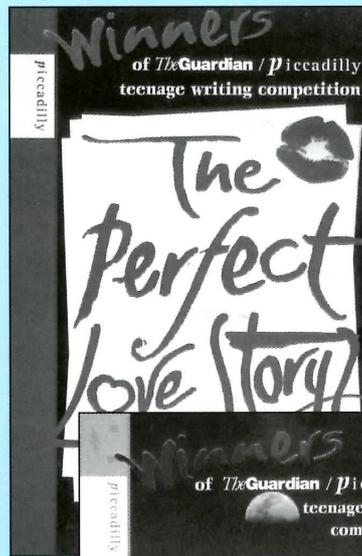
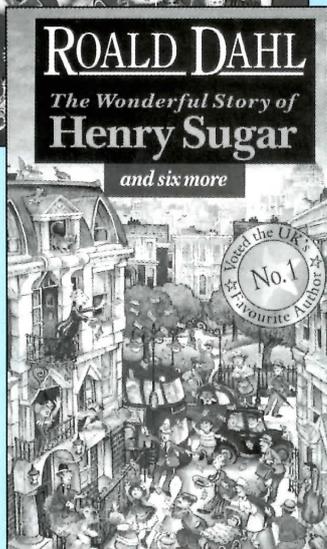
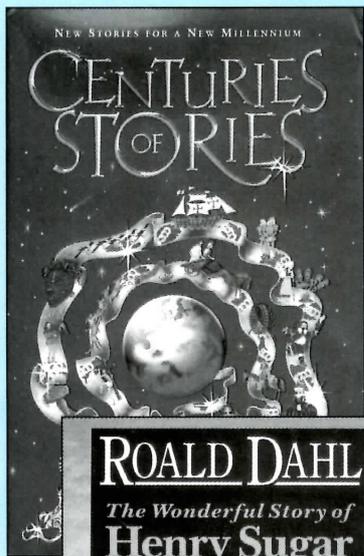
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### The art of anthologising

Short stories are often published in anthologies and children can learn about the art of anthologising by producing their own either from collected examples or their own writing. This activity gives scope for; wider reading and research; producing and evaluating selection criteria; and considering the order of inclusion.

### Stories across the curriculum

By enhancing learning in both the cognitive and affective domains, stories add a valuable dimension to learning across the curriculum. Historical fiction is the focus for Wendy Cooling's anthology **Centuries of Stories** which comprises 20 tales for 20 centuries, providing an opportunity for looking at the way in which history is represented in fiction by recreating momentous events or depicting individual lives. A key concept for consideration is the importance of imagination in the construction history which can be facilitated by exploring what Jill Paton Walsh has called 'the thrilling quagmire of what might have been' and comparing to evidence from factual sources.

A study of environments can be enhanced by reading fantasy and science fiction stories. Andrew Goodwyn's anthology **Fantasy Stories** includes 'The Foghorn' by Ray Bradbury whose skill in transporting the reader to unfamiliar settings is consummate.

Several short story collections focus on relationships notably Janni Howker's **Badger on the Barge**, a reflective book dealing with intergenerational tensions. Miriam Hodgson's anthologies **Mixed Feelings** and **Family Tree** also provide interesting stimulus for discussion in PSHE or citizenship. ■

**Nikki Gamble** is a freelance education and children's book consultant, and project director of Live Writing:Online.

### Books discussed and other suggested collections:

- Badger on the Barge**, Janni Howker, Walker, 0 7445 4352 5, £3.99
- Best of Friends**, Valerie Bierman (ed.), Mammoth, 0 7497 2597 4, £3.99
- Centuries of Stories**, Wendy Cooling (ed.), HarperCollins, 0 00 675415 5, £5.99
- A Century of Children's Ghost Stories**, Philippa Pearce (ed.), Oxford, 0 19 288014 4, o/p
- The Collected Short Stories of Roald Dahl**, Roald Dahl, Penguin, 0 14 015807 3, £10.99
- Counting Stars**, David Almond, Hodder, 0 340 78480 6, £4.99
- Family Tree**, Miriam Hodgson (ed.), Mammoth, 0 7497 3684 4, £4.99
- Fantasy Stories**, Andrew Goodwyn (ed.), Oxford, 0 19 831262 8, o/p
- In Between**, Miriam Hodgson (ed.), Mammoth, 0 7497 2335 1, o/p
- Mixed Feelings**, Miriam Hodgson (ed.), Mammoth, 0 7497 3283 0, £4.50
- The Murders in the Rue Morgue**, Edgar Allan Poe, Pulp Publications, 1 9020 5802 X, £4.99
- The Perfect Journey?**, various authors, Guardian/Piccadilly, 1 85340 696 1, £5.99
- The Perfect Love Story?**, various authors, Guardian/Piccadilly, 1 85340 524 8, £5.99
- Points North**, Lindsey Fraser (ed.), Mammoth, 0 7497 4034 5, £4.99
- The Rope and Other Stories**, Philippa Pearce, Puffin, 0 14 130914 8, £4.99
- Running on Ice**, Berlie Doherty, Mammoth, 0 7497 2873 6, £4.50
- The Story Collector**, Susan Price, Hodder Signature, 0 340 70902 2, £4.99
- A Study in Scarlet**, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Penguin, 0 14 005707 2, £3.99
- Telling Tales**, Susan Price, Hodder Signature, 0 340 70903 0, £4.99
- Ticket to Heaven**, Vivian Alcock, Mammoth, 0 7497 3786 7, £4.99
- Truth or Dare**, Tony Bradman (ed.), Cambridge, 0 521 57552 4, £5.25
- Voices in the Wind**, Robert Westall, Macmillan, 0 330 35218 0, £3.99
- The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More**, Roald Dahl, Puffin, 0 14 037348 9, £5.99

Information about **Young Writer** from 'Young Writer', Glebe House, Weobley, Hereford HR4 8SD.

# The Crossroads of Adolescence

**K**ate Cann writes books for teenagers. She studied English and American Literature at Kent University and went on to work as a copy editor and writer. She decided to become a freelance editor whilst looking after her two children, who are now teenagers themselves. Her first books were written for The Women's Press.

Cann firmly believes that teenagers need literature which caters for them alone. She is aware that adolescence is a frightening crossroads: young people must attempt to determine who they are and then move on to face the challenges to come. Her work demonstrates that fiction is a powerful mediator, confirming identity and preparing for the way ahead. All her protagonists undertake journeys through relationships and into self-discovery.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Coll and Art trilogy: *Diving In*, *In the Deep End* and *Sink or Swim*. Coll has long admired Art from a distance and when he finally asks her out she is both excited and disconcerted at the depth of her feeling for him. The overwhelming sense of commitment she feels when she makes the decision to sleep with him is not wholly reciprocated and after a painful break-up she begins to realise that she can only accept the relationship on her terms. Coll's strength and self-knowledge give Art pause to consider his standpoint – to learn from his mistakes or lose a relationship he truly values but

is afraid to commit to.

Another intriguing facet of Cann's work is her astute and convincing observation of young men in relationships. In *Hard Cash* and its sequel *Shacked Up*, Rich, obsessed with the stunning but vacuous Portia, is finally repelled by her shallowness, realising that he does not like the person he has made himself become in order to ensnare her. The power in the writing lies in acknowledging our capacity for self-deception: further, Rich's dilemma is presented with unwavering realism – the reader is both amused and sympathetic towards Rich's struggles to come to an understanding of his needs.

Reassuring elements of Cann's characterisation are the self-doubt and fear of the unknown which beset her protagonists. These narrative threads clearly give support and affirmation to young readers – afraid that they may be inadequate – and demonstrate the rewards and difficulties of exploring alternatives to the social conventions which we are all so afraid of abandoning.

In *Footloose*, Cann's first book, Kelly rejects her boyfriend's offer to accompany him on a boys-only outdoor pursuits holiday. He expects gratitude and acquiescence but instead Kelly goes to Greece with two friends and works through to a sense of her own identity. This is not easy – the book charts a convincing course through the ebb and flow of Kelly's progress towards emotional integrity and a surer sense of herself.

## Val Randall on the novels of KATE CANN



Cann repeatedly returns to the maxim that it is natural to lose ground emotionally – indeed, that it is a necessary part of knowing what is best for us.

What really marks out Cann as an exceptional writer of teenage fiction is her descriptions of sexual relationships. She conveys beautifully the power and the danger of sex: always poised on the fulcrum of commitment and fear, used both as a weapon and a life-transforming experience. She explores this subject fearlessly and with great sensitivity, giving it an openness and honesty which cut through the myth and confusion surrounding teenage sexuality.

Sex can wound, too. In *Breaking Up*, Fliss is desperate to embark on a sexual relationship with her boyfriend Simon, as a buffer against her sense of isolation and loss, following the break-up of her parents' marriage. After Simon's rejection and a face-to-

face encounter with her father's sexual betrayal Fliss has a nervous breakdown. Its aftermath and the healing process are steered by a familiar motif of Cann's – the strong female mentor. Always supportive, honest and wise, these women provide an emotional anchor without mutual self-recrimination: not unattainable role models but invaluable supports.

Kate Cann's unwavering grasp of what lies at the heart of young people's anxieties about themselves and their world is the bedrock of her fiction. Add to this an unerring ear for dialogue, an array of characters who are instantly recognisable but avoid the cliché of stereotype, and an ability to write page-turning stories which are thought-provoking and emotionally honest, and her appeal to young adults is both explained and assured. ■

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

### Details of books discussed:

From The Women's Press, new editions Sept. 01, £4.99 each:

*Breaking Up*, 208pp, 0 7043 4976 0

*Diving In*, 256pp, 0 7043 4980 9

*In the Deep End*, 224pp, 0 7043 4981 7

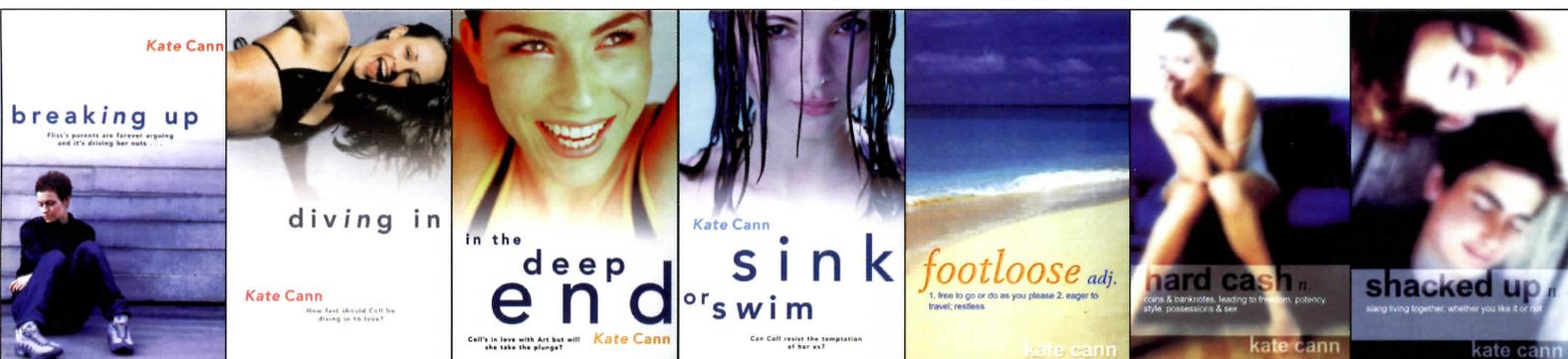
*Sink or Swim*, 224pp, 0 7043 4982 5

From Scholastic, new editions, £4.99 each:

*Footloose*, 320pp, 0 439 01308 9

*Hard Cash*, 320pp, 0 439 99349 0

*Shacked Up*, 336pp, 0 439 99350 4



# Windows into Illustration: Jane Hissey

Jane Hissey's nursery world is depicted from a 'toy-level' viewpoint in sumptuously glowing colours with delicate gradations of line and texture to suggest atmosphere. Here she explains the techniques and thinking behind her recent picture book, **Old Bear's All-Together Painting**.



I always work from 'life' if you can call a load of soft toys and inanimate objects 'life'. In fact I never include live animals or people in my books because they would have to sit still for the 20-40 hours it takes me to complete each illustration. I can take my time with a stuffed toy and they don't object to being pinned in position or suspended from the ceiling! I set everything up in mini still-life groups and draw, first in pencil, then in coloured pencils on smooth watercolour board.

inspired a whole story (eg the box in **Jolly Tall** and the picnic basket in **Little Bear Lost**.)

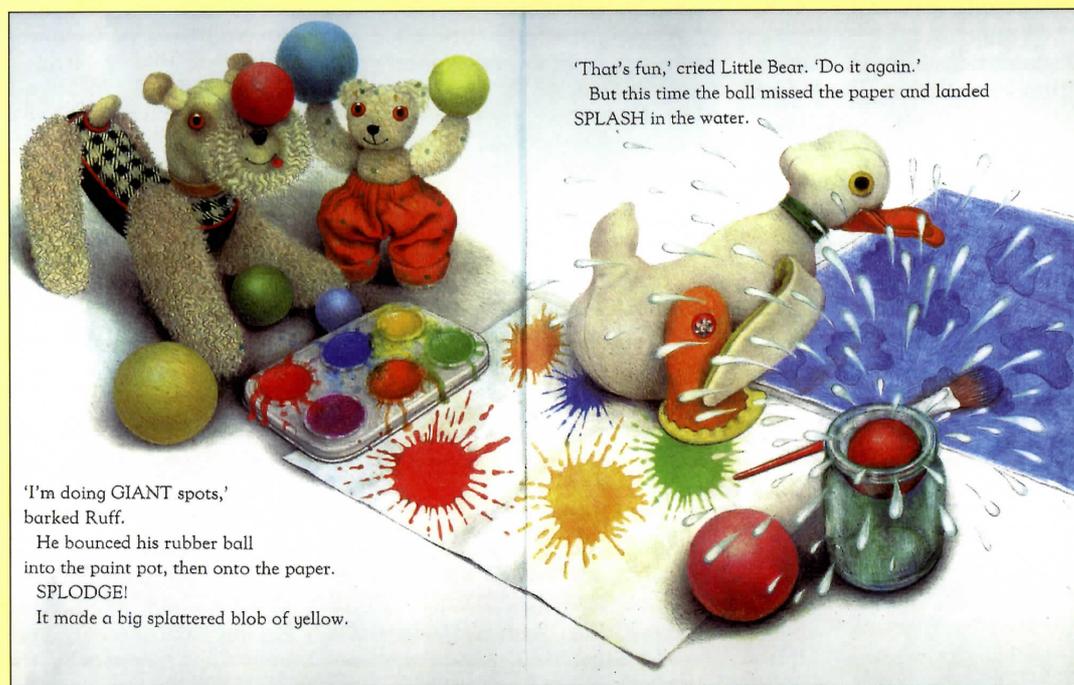
There are plenty of things from my list in this latest book, **Old Bear's All-Together Painting**. In the illustration shown here Ruff the dog is bouncing rubber balls into paint to create splattered blobs of colour. The book is aimed at very young children and I have tried to make it as colourful, lively and appealing as possible.

I don't actually radically alter the expressions of the characters in

my books from page to page. However I am able to make subtle changes to mouths, eyes, posture etc to suggest mood, and that would not be possible in a photograph. Duck looks sad or downcast by his body language in this drawing; drooping wings, lowered head whereas Little Bear and Ruff are cheerful and animated.

The age group I write for will hopefully return to a book over and over again so there needs to be plenty in it to sustain interest. For this reason I try to include things to count, things to discuss and things to make or do (at home or school) in my drawings.

First of all children will look for familiar objects in a picture (dog, ball, water) then they will listen to the story and look for the things or actions they are



I work large (approx. A2 for a single page illustration) which means that most of my illustrations are reduced for the books; because of this it is quite hard to tell what medium I have used. I don't think I am typical of coloured-pencil illustrators in that my drawings are not small, soft and decorative but are large, bold and quite vigorous. I try to make colours strong and saturated when this is required.

Coloured pencils also allow me to go overboard with texture. In fact my cast of animals is carefully chosen, not just for the variety of characters but also for colour and texture.

In the last 15 years (and more than 15 books) I have drawn the same group of toys about 500 times. The reason this has not become a chore is that I have included a large collection of objects and situations that are more of a challenge. Years ago I wrote myself a list of things that I wanted to draw; baskets, wooden toys, cardboard boxes, marbles on Indian rugs, water in jam jars etc. I have been working my way through that list ever since. I regard these things as treats (like a meal out or a weekend break!) to be thrown in when I might otherwise lose enthusiasm. They are dotted regularly throughout the books and sometimes have even

hearing about. Later they may read the story for themselves, concentrating mainly on the text – using drawings to help make sense of the story, and finally they might look at the illustrations to see how they are done. It is a challenge to cover all these stages but to do so greatly extends the life (and value) of a children's book.

The story is about an everyday activity; painting patterns, but it also explores the idea of working together as a team to create a communal effort.

I thought it would be a very loose and free book to illustrate, easy with lots of messy paint splodges, dribbles and splashes to draw – but I didn't really take into account the fact that I would have to repeat all the 'random' dribbles several times because the patterns that the toys create are cut up and pasted together at the end of the book to create a finished picture! Wild and wobbly styles become waves on the sea. They had therefore to look convincingly similar! All part of the fun I guess – a new illustration challenge on every page! ■

**Old Bear's All-Together Painting** is published in August by Hutchinson, 0 09 176957 4, £9.99 hbk.



## EVENTS

### Children's Literature International Summer School (CLISS) and Children's Literature Research Symposium

The summer school and research symposium will be held from 10–18 August at the University of Surrey. Areas of study include 'interrogation of multiculturalism', examining the treatment of disability and work on children's literature in translation. Further information from NCRCL, University of Surrey Roehampton, Digby Stuart College, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PH (tel: 020 8392 3008).



### 2nd Annual National Storytelling Week

The Society for Storytelling announce that this event will take place from 2–9 February 2002 and events are already being planned. For further information about The Society for Storytelling and its events, call 0118 935 1381 or 020 8866 4232 (after 6pm) or ask for Del Reid on 020 7492 8796 (day), or view the website on [www.sfs.org.uk](http://www.sfs.org.uk)



## PEOPLE

The new Children's Laureate is Anne Fine. Her many novels include *Flour Babies*, *Step by Wicked Step*, *The Tulip Touch* and *Bad Dreams*.

Following the uniting of the Random House and Transworld children's publishing teams into Random House Children's Books, Philippa Dickinson has been appointed Managing Director of the new division and Gill Evans Deputy MD and Head of Publishing. Both will continue to report to Group Managing Director, Ian Hudson. The new division will be based at the Transworld site in Ealing. The newly structured sales department is headed by Pat Shepherd and the Sales and Marketing team is led by Garry Prior.

Jeffrey Nobbs has been appointed Managing Director of Quarto Children's Books following Sally Gritten's departure. Sally Gritten has returned to management consulting.

Head of children's literature at Book Trust, Alexandra Strick, has left the charity.

## PUBLICATIONS

The *Children's Book Handbook 2001* is a useful guide to publishers, organisations, publications, prizes, courses and so forth to do with children's literature. £6.50 from Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### CHAINS: 'AN HISTORICAL NOVEL, NOT A REASONED ARGUMENT...'

Dear Editor

Thank you for devoting two pages to *Chains* in your March issue (BfK 127). It is good to see that the book has produced such a healthy debate: that was one of its purposes. It is not our practice to write blow-by-blow rebuttals of reviews and articles about our books. We respect Errol Lloyd's views on *Chains* and thank him for writing. But there are a few points we would like to bring up.

Our author, Frances Hendry, has written 'out of race' successfully and sensitively before. The book was *Chandra*, which, besides winning major awards, has been very popular with, for example, Bangladeshi girls in Tower Hamlets. Frances is white, in her sixties, and Scottish. But more importantly, she is a good novelist and is able to get inside people's heads of whatever colour, race, or time.

We want to emphasise that this is an historical novel, not a reasoned argument. Our author describes the African trade as it was seen by people of the eighteenth century. Many of the characters put forth views that are totally unacceptable today. But it is up to the reader, not the author, to refute such views. The 'racial' slurs are not the author's views, but what a person of the time might have thought. The 'racial' language is used only by people who would be seen as 'baddies' – notably Mr Hunt. He is set up as a target stuffed with ignorance and prejudice, to help our readers flatly to dismiss his language and arguments. In our author's view the work does indeed show Juliet's conversion to

abolitionism. As Juliet gradually widens her experience, so her sympathies also widen. She learns that the white servants around her are not simply inferiors but human beings like herself; and this slowly forces itself past her conditioning to extend to the black people she becomes involved with. By the end of the novel the dam finally breaks, and we can see her sympathy and compassion for all oppressed peoples.

A minor point: Juliet does not 'finally win her male spurs' by shooting the leader of a slave revolt – a rather male way of looking at it? In terror for her life she kills a woman who is attacking her.

We need more books with black characters – many, many more – and then Hassan and Gbodi can be seen in that context; as two of a range of different characters and experience, rather than the ciphers that stand for all black characters. If Dand were to stand for all Scots, he would be a pretty poor specimen. And if Juliet stood for all white girls from Liverpool, then Liverpudlians would be up in arms. We need more good writers like Frances Hendry, telling more and more stories that include a range of races and experiences.

Ron Heapy

Consultant Editor, Oxford University Press

Errol Lloyd writes:

*The 'historical novel' genre does not in my view absolve authors/publishers from restraint or sensitivity regarding the use of racist or offensive dialogue which impressionable teenagers won't always be able to evaluate or refute (even adults are occasionally adjudged to need a lecture on the subject). Though the examples of racist dialogue in Chains may have been typical of the eighteenth century, it is not entirely untypical of the twenty-first (with racist attacks on the increase to boot) and therefore of more than mere historical or*

academic interest.

*Juliet's grandmother (Mrs Smethwick) had promised her a fortune if she successfully completed the voyage disguised as a male, avoiding detection. Her shooting of the slave woman seemed the ultimate fulfilment of the role-play, hence the 'male spurs' reference. The fact that the author had contrived such a situation and outcome (demonising the slave women and losing sight of their real victim status in the process) is an example of the way in which the plot, together with the derogatory dialogue, combined to subvert the author's expressed humanist design.*

### STUCK IN NEUTRAL

Dear Editor

After reading the review for the award winning *Stuck in Neutral* (BfK 128) I was left wondering if the reviewer had actually read the same book as me. I have never disagreed so strongly with another writer's views on a children's book. My colleagues who had also read the proof copy also felt the same and were dismayed at the two star rating it received.

Your reviewer claims that 'most worrying is the book's justification for the killing of disabled children'. Far from justifying it the book successfully argues how wrong this is as the main character actually loves life and encourages the reader to scream 'Don't do it!' at the misguided and rather pretentious father.

Rather than being a story comparable with a racist or anti gay book as your reviewer feels, it instead promotes a positive image of disabled people and its overall message is that we shouldn't judge others by how they appear. It does not 'develop the idea that ... some lives are too damaged to be worth living'; it instead shows us how precious all life is and encourages the reader to embrace it as the hero of the story does. *Stuck in*

*Neutral* is a marvellous novel full of hope and humour and one I would actively encourage 12+ readers to pick up.

Samantha Eels Taylor (reviewer and bookseller)

The Children's Book Company, London W5 5DA

### 'SAD' STARS

Dear Editor

Ever since the system of star ratings for book reviews was set up in BfK, I've been waiting to see if you'd change the word you use to describe books that get only one star: namely, Sad.

But as you still haven't, I'm writing to explain why I object to it.

'Sad' is not a literary judgement. It's an expression of cynical contempt, originally popularised by stand-up comedians who specialise in jeering sarcasm. It's a cruel word, used in the playground to hurt children who are slightly odd, or shy, or lonely. It's a taunt thrown by the successful at the unsuccessful.

In short, it's an expression that looks rather out of place in a journal with BfK's record of sensitivity to issues of bullying. There are books that aren't very good, and it's the job of a reviewer to say so; but I think it would be better to do it without sneering at them.

Phillip Pullman

24 Templar Road, Oxford OX2 8LT

Rosemary Stones writes:

*It has long been my view that the cosiness of the children's book world can detract from literary debate and the 'sad' star was aimed at sharpening discussion. It is, however, sharp in the wrong way and I'm grateful to you for pointing it out.*



# B/K REVIEWS

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

## RATING

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

Unmissable	★★★★★
Very Good	★★★★
Good	★★★
Fair	★★
Poor	★

## REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

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

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

**Jill Bennett** is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She is Early Years Coordinator and a teacher at Chatsworth Infant School in Hounslow, Middlesex.

**Urmi Chana** previously worked as a researcher and lecturer on bilingual issues in primary education. She now teaches part-time in the primary sector.

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

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

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

**Nikki Gamble** is a freelance education and children's book consultant, and project director of Live Writing:Online.

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

**Peter Hollindale**, formerly at the University of York, is now a freelance writer and teacher.

**Adrian Jackson** is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

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

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

**Margaret Mallett** is Visiting Tutor in Primary English, Goldsmiths' College, University of London.

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

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

**Rosemary Stones** is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

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

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

## TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

	Page		Page
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland	★★★★★ 20	Little Bear's Grandad	★★★★ 20
All Change	★★★ 28	Little Turtle and the Song of the Sea	★★★★ 24
Alone in the Woods	★★★ 20	Loudmouth Louis (audio book)	★★★★ 24
Angel Factory, The	★★ 26	Lurgan Champagne and other tales	★★★★ 30
Auntie Ayesha is coming to visit	★★★ 23	Making gender work	★★★★ 19
Bartlett and the City of Flames	★★★★★ 26	Mamy Wata and the Monster	★★★ 21
Beat Goes On, The	★★★★ 29	Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras	★★★ 28
Billy Elliot	★★★★★ 25	Microscopic Monsters	★★★★ 24
Book About Books, The	★★★ 20	Milo's Wolves	★★★ 26
Capitalism	★★★ 30	Missing Link, The	★★★★ 30
Castaways of the Flying Dutchman	★★ 27	My Dad	★★★★★ 20
Caught on a Train	★★★★★ 29	My Friend's a Werewolf (audio book)	★★ 24
Chasing Faces	★★★ 28	My Mum and the Gruesome Twosome	★★★ 25
Cinderella and The Sleeping Beauty	★★★★ 23	Nazi Dagger Incident, The	★★ 25
Damage Done, The	★★★★ 30	Only Human	★★★★ 30
Dead Guilty	★★★ 30	People and Places	★★★★★ 27
Deadly Diseases	★★★★ 24	Pi-shu the little panda	★★★ 24
Deathscent	★★★ 30	Planet Zoo	★★★★★ 27
Dogs, The	★★ 28	Please Don't Chat to the Bus Driver	★★★★ 21
Don't Wake the Baby!	★★★ 20	Poems Then and Now	★★★★★ 28
Down the Lane	★★★ 21	Pure Dead Magic	★★★ 26
Engines, Engines	★★★★ 21	Queen of the Wolves	★★★ 25
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Georgie	★★★★ 25	Rapunzel and Rumpelstiltskin	★★★★ 23
Getting-to-Grandad Bears	★★★ 21	Red Riding Hood's Maths Adventure	★★★★ 23
Hansel and Gretel and The Princess and the Pea	★★★★ 23	Resources and Conservation	★★★★★ 27
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Incredible Journey to the Planets, The	★★★ 27	Space Dog and the Space Egg	★★★ 23
Irish Myths & Legends	★★★★ 23	Space Dog Goes to Planet Purrgo	★★★ 23
Jack and the Beanstalk and The Three Wishes	★★★★ 23	Speak	★★★★★ 29
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Jessica	★★★ 28	Stretford Enders, The	★★★ 30
Joe's Story	★★★ 28	There's an Octopus Under my Bed!	★★★ 21
Just you wait, Winona!	★★★★ 24	Troy	★★★★★ 20
Katie Morag and the Riddles	★★★★★ 21	Twenty-four Hours	★★★★★ 29
Katie Morag's Rainy Day Book	★★★★★ 21	Uncle Billy Being Silly	★★★★ 23
Kensuke's Kingdom (audio book)	★★★★ 24	Wedding Present, The	★★★ 28
Kite Rider, The	★★★★★ 29	When the World Began	★★★★★ 20
Lion Children's Treasury of Classic Verse, The	★★ 24	Wild Robert	★★★ 24
Lion Graphic Bible, The	★★★★ 20	Witch Hill	★★★★ 25
		Young Nick's Head	★★★ 27
		Zulus, Girls and Videos	★★★ 28

## Book About Children's Books

### Making gender work

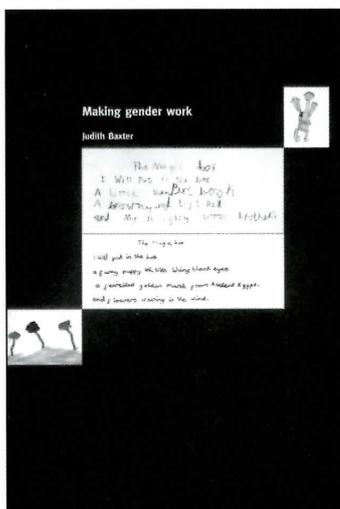
★★★★

Judith Baxter, University of Reading, Reading and Language Information Centre, 24pp, 0 7049 1408 5, £4.50 pbk  
Which is the disadvantaged sex? Are girls feeling that teachers' energies

are now focused more on boys' needs? This excellent short work illuminates these concerns and helps teachers understand the complexity of gender issues, particularly as they affect literacy. Most importantly, it recognises that girls and boys have different learning needs and suggests many useful, differentiated learning strategies for helping both sexes

achieve as much as possible.

In the 1970s and 1980s the emphasis was on equal opportunities and inclusion. There was concern about the disadvantages girls might experience in school and about the stereotyped representation of females in resources, particularly reading schemes. Attention was



drawn to the tendency of boys to dominate class and group discussion, not least in contexts where the computer was being used. By the 1990s the focus had shifted to boys and their underachievement in reading and writing. It has been recognised for a long time that, in general, boys are slower than girls in their language development. The current need for schools to meet demanding targets has brought boys' relative lack of success in literacy assessments to the fore.

Now the stress is on 'difference' and the need to address 'boys' different learning interests, needs and abilities', partly to help raise boys' achievements in the SATs. Baxter notes that both the National Curriculum and the National Literacy Strategy are based on inclusion – on the principle that all pupils regardless of gender, class, ability or culture should participate fully in every part of the curriculum. But also built into

the requirements is the need to differentiate – to provide for children's particular needs and abilities in planning and teaching. It is argued that there should be a whole school policy to monitor each aspect of the language curriculum in every subject with gender difference in mind. When looking at speaking and listening, Baxter suggests we might ask a colleague to sit in on some of our lessons and report back on boys' and girls' responses in and out of the literacy hour.

There are many helpful suggestions about organising the reading programme so as not to favour one gender over the other. The author feels we should value the voluntary choices of individuals while trying to extend their range. For example, boys can be reinforced in their liking for non-fiction while being encouraged to try more fiction. In many, although not all cases, the reverse approach might help girls widen their reading

choices – they may need to be helped to choose non-fiction that they will enjoy and find useful. This is not a new notion of course – but it is explained in helpful detail here.

The observations on gender differences in writing ring true for me. Baxter notes that structured approaches suit many boys. Girls are often much more flexible in their writing activity. When I was working on story writing with some Year 6 children I found the boys liked to have a task which provided the beginning of a story while the girls preferred to get underway on their own. Reflective practitioners and student teachers will welcome this book which sheds light on a difficult but interesting area. It offers clear and imaginative advice on how to create a classroom climate in which the language development of both girls and boys flourishes. **MM**

## 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

#### Little Bear's Grandad

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Nigel Gray, ill. Vanessa Cabban, Little Tiger Press, 32pp, 1 85430 637 5, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 122, May 2000:

'One day, Grandad is too tired to tell Little Bear a story, so Little Bear tells him one instead – about their happy Fridays together – after which Grandad falls into the "very deepest of deep, deep sleeps" and dies. The glowing illustrations provide the perfect companion to the thoughtfully written text in this profoundly moving book.'

#### Alone in the Woods

PICTURE BOOK ★★★

Ian Beck, Scholastic, 32pp, 0 439 99898 0, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 124, September 2000:

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

#### Rock-a-Doodle-Do!

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Michael Foreman, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 940763 9, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 124, September 2000:

'An adaptation of the Grimms' "The Musicians of Bremen". This retelling is highly visual and cinematic in technique and presentation. The

action is set against the open spaces of an American landscape and the references to gangster movies while not overstated are marked.'

### 5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

#### My Dad

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Anthony Browne, Picture Corgi, 32pp, 0 552 54668 2, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 123, July 2000:

"My Dad" eats like a horse, swims like a fish, is happy as a hippopotamus and lots more besides, each phrase of course slipping dear dad into the skin or hide of the relevant animal. But look out for dad recast as a slice of toast – Browne never lets the reader relax. A stunning interplay of words and pictures.'

#### When the World Began: Stories Collected in Ethiopia

FICTION ★★★★★

Elizabeth Laird, ill. Yosef Kebede, Emma Harding, Grizelda Holderness and Lydia Monks, Oxford, 96pp, 0 19 274189 6, £7.99

Reviewed *BfK* 124, September 2000:

'Laird first heard these stories told in their original Ethiopian languages. She uses her considerable skills as a narrator to retell them in words which can be read silently or aloud with equal enjoyment. The four illustrators bring a variety of styles and mediums to the pages which are well-matched with the mood of each story.'

### 8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

#### Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

FICTION ★★★★★

Lewis Carroll, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Walker, 208pp, 0 7445 8267 9, £9.99

Reviewed *BfK* 120, January 2000:

'Oxenbury's Alice so radically and freshly reframes this classic tale that it invites the reader to approach the story anew. Certainly younger readers will be tempted by the accessibility of her interpretations. Unabridged, this splendid new version of Alice is both handsomely and invitingly produced.'

#### The Lion Graphic Bible

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Script Mike Maddox, ill. Jeff Anderson, lettering Steve Harrison, Lion Publishing, 256pp, 0 7459 4598 8, £9.99

Reviewed *BfK* 116, May 1999:

'This version of the bible is illustrated and written by a team experienced in comic strip techniques. They know therefore how to tell a good, pacy story with the minimum of words and in pictures of all shapes and sizes, with different formats separating parables, dreams, and angelic visitations from actuality. Modern dialogue is used throughout.'

#### The Book About Books

NON-FICTION ★★★

Chris Powling, ill. Scoular Anderson, A. & C. Black, 96pp, 0 7136 5479 1, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 127, March 2001:

'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.'

### 12+ SECONDARY

#### Shylock's Daughter

FICTION ★★★

Mirjam Pressler, trans. Brian Murdoch, Macmillan, 304pp, 0 330 48410 9, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 125, November 2000:

'Pressler gives Shylock two daughters: Jessica, the beautiful one that Shakespeare knew, who deserts her religion and her people, and marries Lorenzo; and Dalilah, the adopted daughter, a little above a servant, who gradually acquires the courage to make her own way out of the ghetto. This is an intense novel that moves between the experiences and thoughts of Shylock and his daughters, and allows each their own authenticity.'

#### Troy

FICTION ★★★★★

Adèle Geras, Scholastic, 360pp, 0 439 99220 6, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 124, September 2000:

'The story begins resonantly in the Blood Room – graphically named for the wounds endured by Trojan soldiers. It is here, where the horrors of war are most tellingly encapsulated, that the goddess Aphrodite toys with sisters Marpessa and Xanthe, causing them both to fall in love with the same man. Out of the double bind of a prolonged siege and omnipotent gods emerge characters who enthrall and convince.'

## REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

#### Don't Wake the Baby!

★★★★

Dawn Apperley, Bloomsbury,

32pp, 0 7475 5003 4, £9.99 hbk  
Big, bold illustrations introduce Baby Squirrel and Lily-Lu. Very young children will savour the repeated

language as Lily-Lu mischievously plays a variety of QUIET games around the sleeping baby. As the text gently builds up each fresh scene, the

illustrations shows us disasters about to happen. We turn each page, having made our predictions, and, '... uh oh! Wheeeee! [Or Crash! Thud! Splash!

Whoosh! Shhhhh, Lily-Lu, don't wake the Baby! Five different scenes unfold whilst Baby miraculously sleeps on, and there is a humorous twist in the end. A book that could be a noisy favourite throughout toddlerhood and beyond. GB

### Please Don't Chat to the Bus Driver

★★★★

Shen Roddie, ill. Jill Newton, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5028 X, £4.99 pbk



Young children relish the cumulative mishaps that occur in this picture book as assorted animals, on boarding the bus, ignore the narrator's exhortation, 'don't chat to the Bus Driver!' Eventually Frog's distracting chatter precipitates disaster and the crowded vehicle grinds to a halt. Along comes another bus, on climb the seven animals, but ... Newton uses vibrant oil pastels in bold blocks overlaid with delicate detail to give the characters life and movement.

Superb for audience participation, dramatisation or - with its large and very large print - individual reading. JB

### Getting-to-Grandad Bears

★★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Frédéric Joos, Andersen, 32pp, 0 84270 010 3, £9.99 hbk

Just the book to find to read to little ones before setting off on a journey, whether it be by car, coach, plane or train. Big Bear and Baby Bear set off by train to visit Grandad. Fellow travellers include giraffes, sheep, pigs, goats and crocodiles, allowing lots of talk about the engaging illustrations. ('I wonder what it would smell like in the carriage?' asked one listening child.) Baby Bear is impatient to arrive, and one feels the train has barely pulled away before the first, 'Are we nearly there yet?' Many parents will recognise all the diversionary tactics employed by Big Bear before Baby himself discovers that charging up and down the

corridor, up and down, up and down, actually does make the journey go faster! Grandad joyfully meets them at their destination. A happy book that is lots of fun. GB

### Down the Lane: Sights and Sounds through the Seasons

★★★★

Valerie Greeley, Happy Cat, 32pp, 1 903285 17 8, £4.99 pbk

Each double page spread in this smallish landscape picture book is devoted to a month of the year. Each contains a full page picture and two verses interspersed with vignette illustrations describing the changes in the natural world as the seasons unfold. Although the countryside is somewhat romanticised, the realistic illustrations appear to be very accurate in terms of detailing and colour. Greeley is a talented and accomplished artist, but the book would be considerably enhanced by informative passages about the changes in the landscape rather than the banal verses which accompany the illustrations. The book will be of use in classrooms but would have been even more useful if the format were a bit larger, or even if the illustrations had been bled to the edges rather than surrounded by a white border. VC

### There's an Octopus Under my Bed!

★★★★

Dawn Apperley, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5023 9, £4.99 pbk

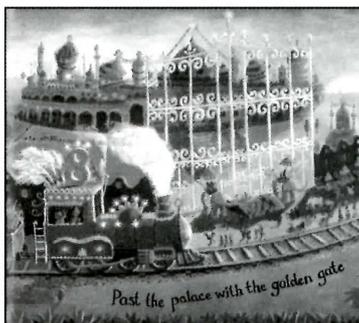
Tidying up is something Molly manages to avoid from Monday to Thursday. However, each time she returns after tea, the mess has disappeared. Molly is increasingly convinced that an octopus must be responsible for the transformation. On Friday she is almost certain she will catch her eight-armed helper but when she does it's none other than her long-suffering mum. So, has Molly seen the error of her ways? - readers can decide for themselves. A theme most young children and their adult carers will be all too familiar with is amusingly portrayed in colour wash illustrations and a straightforward narrative. JB

### Engines, Engines

★★★★

Lisa Bruce, ill. Stephen Waterhouse, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5013 1, £4.99 pbk

This wonderfully illustrated book is a counting rhyme and tells the story of steam engines pulling carriages through the vibrant and varied landscape of India. Each rhyme takes up a double page spread with brightly coloured backgrounds ('Engine, engine number five, Soon at Delhi we'll arrive.')

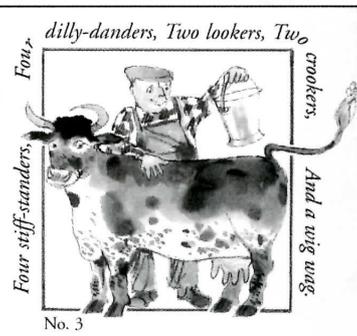


The rhymes are simple and repetitive and suggest the rhythm of the train. Children will also love the numerous pictures of their favourite animals such as elephants and monkeys and will also enjoy browsing through the book on their own. KA

### Katie Morag and the Riddles

★★★★★

Bodley Head, 0 370 32713 6, £9.99 hbk



### Katie Morag's Rainy Day Book

★★★★★

Red Fox, 0 09 940444 3, £5.99 pbk

Marie Hedderwick, 32pp each

It is nearly 20 years since the first 'Katie Morag' book was published and in that time this frisky young Scot and her attendant cast of characters have won many devotees. Set on the island of Struay, based on Hedderwick's own Hebridean home, part of the charm of these books is the seemingly unchanging nature of island life. But time does not stand still in Struay. Comparing the panoramic views of the village and coastline in *Katie Morag Delivers the Mail* (1984) and the same landscape on the endpapers of this latest offering it is apparent that change occurs, even in this seemingly most timeless of locations. A bistro has been built on to the post office, there is a tea room, a craft shop and a new pier. However, sheep and hens still seem to safely wander the street and the closing endpapers depicting the familiar night time view of the village do not indicate that the bistro or other developments are causing any

unruly behaviour in the village.

Here, in a fit of exasperation at an outbreak of squabbling, the Teacher sets his pupils four riddles to solve, and predictably enough the effort of solving them helps to calm the tension. As in the previous 'Katie Morag' books it is not the plot that really counts, but the characterisation and the depiction of a community of individuals with which Katie Morag and her friends interact.

It is interesting to note that newer printing techniques have brightened the colours, giving more effect to the detailing and visual asides at which Hedderwick excels.

The *Rainy Day* book contains a variety of puzzles and other activities, all featuring Katie and her friends. Indeed, one is to 'spot the difference' in the village past and present. It may be that some of the activities are too advanced for the average readership of the stories and will require help from older readers, who will, however, have a good reason to revisit and recapture the magic of the island of Struay. VC

### Mamy Wata and the Monster

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Véronique Tadjo, Milet, 24pp, English/Somali, 1 84059 270 2, £5.99 pbk



This story is told in an engaging way with bold colour pictures in a distinctive style, though it is the story which carries the interest rather than the illustrations. Mama Wata, the queen of all waters, comes to hear of a hideous monster that is terrorising the fishermen, women and children of the surrounding villages. When she goes to investigate, she finds that the monster is in fact a young man under the spell of a wicked witch. Her compassion for him releases him from the spell and so she saves the villagers through her search for understanding the source of their fear. The use of slightly different typefaces (but similar sizes, importantly) helps to distinguish the Somali from the English text clearly but subtly. Available in English only and nine other dual language editions. UC

## REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

### Rabbit's Wish

★★★★★

Paul Stewart, ill. Chris Riddell, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 719 3, £9.99 hbk

This third book about Rabbit and

Hedgehog will join the first (*A Little Bit of Winter*) as one of my favourites on the friendship theme. Both books are also wonderful stories for reading during extremes of weather! Rabbit and Hedgehog are great friends, despite their being diurnal and nocturnal. With lots of gentle

humour, text and illustrations work together moving the tale on as pouring rain speeds Rabbit to his burrow. He spends a happy morning sorting through treasures until rain completely floods his home. Grabbing favourite things, Rabbit tears off, set on finding his friend. He

is dismayed to discover Hedgehog's home is buried by a lake. Meanwhile, Hedgehog desperately searches for Rabbit! Their deep concern for each other is understood by young readers, and it is delightful when, despite both having lost their homes, the two creatures rejoice in each

# SPECTACULAR SUMMER READING

## ANNE FINE

*The Children's Laureate*



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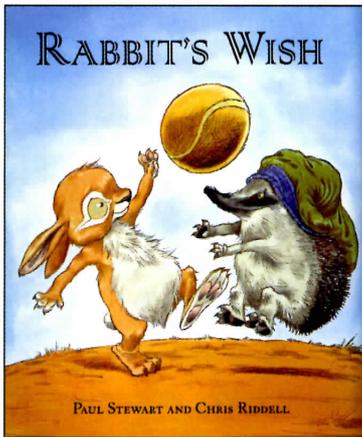
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other's safety, and just PLAY, in the pouring rain! Knowing the first book well, my 6- and 7-year-olds loved this one. **GB**

**Space Dog and the Space Egg**

0 340 78739 2

**Space Dog Goes to Planet Purrgo**

0 340 78738 4

★★★

Vivian French, ill. Sue Heap, Hodder, 48pp, £3.50 each pbk

I had not read any Space Dog books before and my initial reaction was dismissive: they struck me as rather silly and inconsequential, featuring as they do, a spotty 'Space Dog' and his galactic friends and enemies. It was only after reading the books aloud that I began to appreciate the sense of drama (deriving, no doubt, from Vivian French's work in children's theatre). The stories unfold largely through dialogue and though not designed for reading aloud they need that 'voice in the head' which is so characteristic of new solo readers.

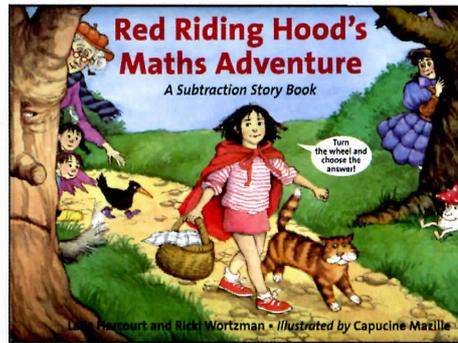
Heap's visual interpretations of the likes of Star Rock Four, the Woopers and the tube worms are as playful as the words themselves and are scattered in abundance throughout the 48 pages. **JB**

**Red Riding Hood's Maths Adventure**

★★★★

Lalie Harcourt and Ricki Wortzman, ill. Capucine Mazille, Frances Lincoln, 24pp, 0 7112 1567 7, £9.99 hbk novelty

This subtraction adventure book works well mathematically. It begins with an instruction page plus a picture of cookies to be traced and used by the readers. Little Red Riding Hood sets off to visit Granny with her basket containing 12 cookies. She meets hungry fairy-tale characters, and each time the reader is invited to decide how many cookies to give away (2, 1 or 0) using the wheel in the book and their own cookies. After some 'play' with the three options presented on each wheel, I found that children quickly interact with confidence. The book presents lots of scope for paired reading in school and supported reading at home. My 6- and 7-year-olds returned to it frequently, making different choices, appreciating the speech bubbles, text and mathematical experience. There is much humour to enjoy in the



rhyiming story. For observant readers, the bold, colourful illustrations reveal the growing band of followers until the story concludes at Granny's house, and, surprise! All the characters have skipped ahead to sing Happy Birthday to 7-year-old Red Riding Hood. **GB**

**Jack and the Beanstalk and The Three Wishes**

1 84121 580 5

**Cinderella and The Sleeping Beauty**

1 84121 574 0

**Hansel and Gretel and The Princess and the Pea**

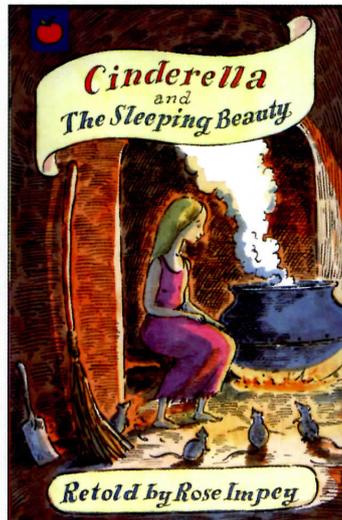
1 84121 578 3

**Rapunzel and Rumpelstiltskin**

1 84121 576 7

★★★★

Retold by Rose Impey, ill. Peter Bailey, Orchard, 48pp, £3.99 each pbk



This series of four books each contains two traditional fairy stories. They were originally published in 1992 in one volume as *The Orchard Book of Fairy Tales*. The author retells these familiar tales, remaining largely true to the originals and yet bringing freshness and gentle humour to each story - Jack, of beanstalk fame, for example, manages to squander his first ill-gotten gains but 'isn't that always the way with money' observes Impey.

A witch and small strange man, respectively, strike up baby adoption deals in *Rapunzel* and *Rumpelstiltskin*. *Rumpelstiltskin* is, unus-

ually, written in the present tense with the exception of one rogue paragraph, which escaped the proof-reader's eye. Cinderella is fortunate to be invited to two balls in Impey's lively version.

Throughout the four books, Bailey's small and simple line illustrations are a perfect accompaniment to the text. These titles are ideal for reading to younger children or to be read by confident young readers. **AK**

**Auntie Ayesha is coming to visit**

★★★

Abu Jamella, ill. Sumayyah Shaheed, Dajo Publishers, 24pp, 0 9540830 0 8, £1.75 pbk



This is the first book in a set of six in the 'Baby Read, Look and Learn' series aimed at elementary readers to encourage them to read for themselves. The story details the exciting adventures of a young boy named Jamal who is awaiting the arrival of his favourite Aunt. It also chronicles the daily activities of the child at home.

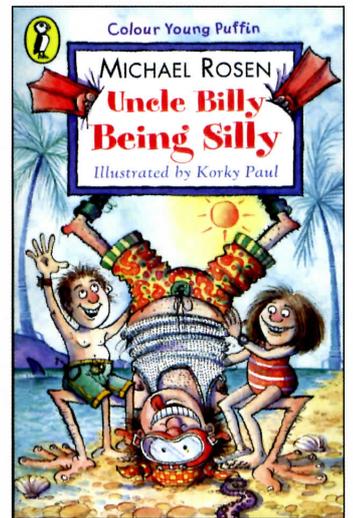
The book is based on the life of a Muslim family in Britain and highlights the important principles of Islam such as Friday prayers, the Haj pilgrimage as well as detailing the practice of wearing the Hijab (head scarf) as practised by some Muslims. Each page is in a different colour with relevant, if rather sketchy illustrations and well laid out text. A glossary is also included to help the unfamiliar reader with some of the terms and religious rituals mentioned. It is a useful and engaging text which will be a welcome addition to any multicultural library. **KA**

**Uncle Billy Being Silly**

POETRY ★★★★★

Michael Rosen, ill. Korky Paul, Colour Young Puffin, 64pp, 0 14 130021 3, £3.99 pbk

A collection of poems from Michael Rosen is always an eagerly awaited event and the publishers obviously had an eye on the schools market with this one. It is described as being for 'developing readers - short stories or chapters, simple words and sentences, pictures throughout'. A mixture of new poems and old favourites roar through the book accompanied by Korky Paul's

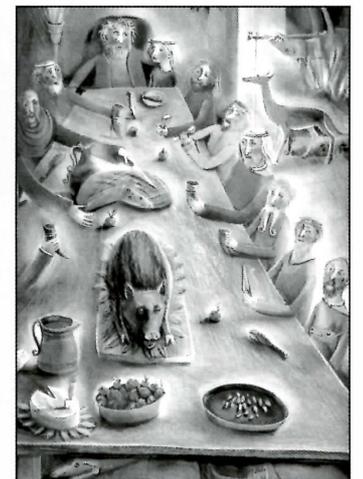


exuberant illustrations. Excellent for KS1 and the four strands within the NC framework but also a thumping good read. **HT**

**Irish Myths & Legends**

★★★★

Retold by Ita Daly, ill. Bee Willey, Oxford, 96pp, 0 19 274534 4, £12.99 hbk



With so many attractively produced retellings of 'Irish Myths and Legends' available, any new entrant to the marketplace requires some measure of freshness. Daly, while drawing yet again on ten of the best known stories from traditional Irish material, manages to invest them (especially in her dialogue) with a pleasantly colloquial tone, which has the effect of humanising some of their more formal attributes. This approach is particularly effective in those stories such as the timeless tragic 'The Children of Lir', where it is important to remain aware of what Queen Aoife calls 'human voices'. Willey's colour illustrations, whether in full-page format or in focused symbolic detail, capture both the poetry and the pain of these enduring narratives. **RD**

**The Ice Cream Cowboys**

★★★

Adrian Boote, ill. Tim Archbold, Orchard 'Super Crunchies', 64pp, 1 84121 013 7, £3.99 pbk

George Dobbs worries about everything both real and unreal, so when his mother sends him out to get three ice creams, he has a lot more on

his mind to cause anxiety. Imagine his surprise when an ice cream van operated by two fairly unusual cowboys turns up, selling such unlikely flavours as Cactus Crunch and Rattlesnake Ripple. The results that ensue once the ice creams are eaten are unpredictable and hilarious, with the local gang of bullies also getting their comeuppance. Archbold's illustrations help to make the book a definitely fun read. **RL**

**Just you wait, Winona!**

★★★★

Jenny Oldfield, ill. Lauren Child, 112pp, Hodder, 0 340 78499 7, £3.50 pbk

This is another in a series of short chapter books in the 'Definitely Daisy' series based around the character of Daisy Morelli and her schoolmates. Here, Daisy and co. take on the unbearably virtuous Winona and try to make her halo slip a little. At times the situations are strained, even within the context of reading at this level, but overall the action rattles along and should keep the pages turning. That the characters come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds is suggested in the text

and shown in the illustrations. These, in black and white, suitably reflect the characters and their activities. **VC**

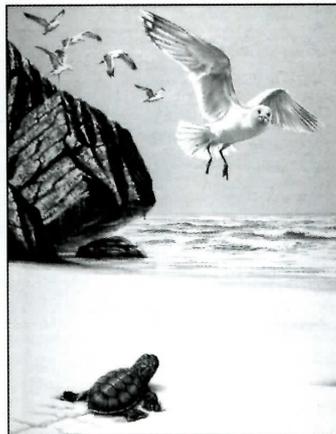
**Little Turtle and the Song of the Sea**

**FACTION** ★★★★★

Sheridan Cain, ill. Norma Burgin, Little Tiger Press, 32pp, 1 85430 620 0, £4.99 pbk

A baby turtle breaks free from its egg and makes its way across the beach to the sea. From these bare bones Cain and Burgin create a story which has all the ingredients to interest children up to about seven – first as listeners then as readers. There is challenge (even pushing away from the egg takes effort as the heavy sand presses down), danger in the form of a predatory seagull and a terrifying crab, and liberation as the young creature, exhausted after its struggle, is wafted gently into the sea at the end. The rhythmic refrain "Come, Little Turtle," sang the Sea. "Come, Little Turtle, come home to me." tells how much it feels the pull of the sea: what better way could there be to help children understand instinctive longings!

The illustrations do full justice to the poetic text creating a strong sense of



place, of a particular environment and a small, vulnerable creature's efforts to find its way in a dangerous world. **MM**

**Pi-shu the little panda**

**FACTION** ★★★

John Butler, Orchard Books, 40pp, 1 84121 747 6, £10.99 hbk

It is never too early to help children to understand what is valuable in our world and how we should protect it.

**REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle**

**Loudmouth Louis**

**AUDIO BOOK** ★★★★★

Anne Fine, read by Stephen Thorne, Cover to Cover, 45mins unabridged, 1 85549 336 5, £3.99

Anne Fine's sharp storytelling is at its best in *Loudmouth Louis* and Stephen Thorne's reading captures the tone exactly. Louis's constant talking impedes everyone in the class but no one knows how to keep him quiet. It's only when all the other fund raising ideas are taken that the idea of sponsoring Louis to remain silent for the day takes off. Fine paces the predictable and unexpected bonuses perfectly, particularly Louis's own dawning awareness of the advantages that silence brings him. Her understated humour entertains effortlessly. **JE**

**My Friend's a Werewolf**

**AUDIO BOOK** ★★

Pete Johnson, read by Brigit Forsyth, Cavalcade, 2hrs 20mins unabridged, 0 7540 7088 3, £7.99

Essentially a cosy story which attempts to scare, *My Friend's a Werewolf* does not have enough substance to hold the listeners' attention for over two hours. Simon seems a nice enough boy when he first moves in next door to Kelly but why does he always wear black gloves? When Kelly accidentally catches a glimpse of his hands she begins to suspect something strange is happening. And then there's the howling she hears in the night. Gradually, and too slowly to pin the listeners to their seats, the story unfolds and Kelly learns the truth. Written to be read easily by unsophisticated readers, this works better in print. **JE**

**The Lion Children's Treasury of Classic Verse**

**POETRY** ★★

Compiled by David Self, ill. Hannah Firmin, Lion, 96pp, 0 7459 3980 5, £12.99 hbk

This large format anthology for the Christian market contains traditional 'classic' poems. The introduction tells us that it is 'a reminder of the ways poets have shown how important God is in this world'. Although there is a good selection of familiar poems and interesting placing of the poems, the editor's commentary at the top of each double spread is distracting. Some brief lines of explanation or questions might have been helpful, but the preaching tone and insistence on learning lessons from poems is extremely off-putting. Far better turn to the joyful anthology *The Sun, Dancing - Christian Verse* compiled by Charles Causley. **HT**

**Wild Robert**

★★★★

Diana Wynne Jones, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, 96pp, Collins, 0 00 675524 0, £3.99 pbk

Illustrated with line drawings by Chichester Clark, this novel has a slice of some of what Wynne Jones does so well. Heather, bored by the arrival of the tourists to Castlemaine House where her parents are curators, takes herself off to the mound where Wild Robert, accused of witchcraft, had been buried. Her cry to Wild Robert has an instant response and from then on Wild Robert deals out punishment to Heather's oppressors, the teenagers running riot in the gardens, and his own ancestors. There is the Wild Robert streak in the novelist herself and her description of the entry of



the fantasy to the everyday can stand for what we see more substantially in the novels she is famous for: 'It was as if the part of the world that was ordinary and possible went slanting away sideways ... For a moment, she was sure she was standing out sideways, somehow, on the slice of ordinariness. Then she found she was on the deeper bit after all.' **AJ**

**Kensuke's Kingdom**

**AUDIO BOOK** ★★★★★

Michael Morpurgo, read by Derek Jacobi, Collins Audio, 3hrs 20mins unabridged, 0 00 710860 5, £7.99

Michael Morpurgo's excellent adventure story in which Michael becomes a latter-day Robinson Crusoe when he falls from the boat he is sailing on with his parents and washes up on an island with only his dog for company, is perfectly read by Derek Jacobi. The family's exuberant

This story of a panda's early weeks and months of life is likely to make children care about the survival of such interesting and resourceful animals. Young children, up to about age six or seven, will love to listen to the story of Pi-shu's journey with his mother; they travel over mountains and snowy landscapes until they reach a valley floor with a stream and a 'lush grove of bamboo' well away from the human beings who threaten to destroy their habitats. The illustrations match the written text perfectly and will encourage much talk about the different animals and environments which are a backdrop to the story. 'Panda facts' at the end will help the adult to answer questions and volunteer information. Children need to go beyond a 'cosy' and bland view of animals and wildlife. But I'm not sure that I would share with a very young child the following information - 'Panda babies are usually born as twins ... sadly the mother normally abandons the weakest, but takes great care of the stronger one.' **MM**

planning of the trip, the thrill of being at sea and Michael's catastrophic fall are recounted with a proper degree of excitement. But, most successful of all, is Derek Jacobi's reading of Kensuke, the old Japanese man who first protects and gradually, once suspicion has subsided, befriends Michael and, in so doing, lays to rest some of his own past ghosts. A story full of insight and mood changes of its own, it scarcely needs the addition of incidental mood music but, fortunately, it is discreet enough not to jar. **JE**

**Deadly Diseases**

160pp, 0 439 01368 2

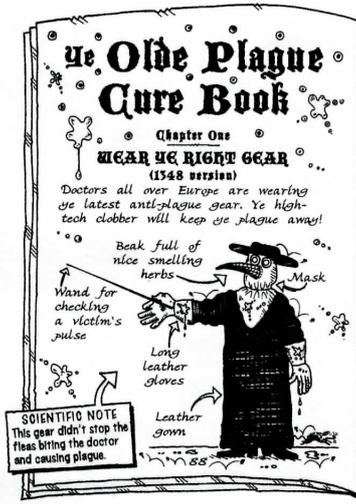
**Microscopic Monsters**

144pp, 0 439 99501 9

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Nick Arnold, ill. Tony De Saulles, Scholastic 'Horrible Science', £3.99 each pbk

And still they come ... yet more horrible titles to sicken you with



gruesome gut-churning contents. Billed as 'science with the squishy bits left in', you need a strong stomach to tackle either of these two titles and certainly *before* eating. (The perfect solution for dieters perhaps – read one chapter to quell your appetite for the rest of the day.) An

over-18s age warning advises that you may be too ancient to really appreciate the corny jokes and flaky cartoons. But if you are addicted to the 'Horrible History/Geography/Science' approach, then these two new titles from Scholastic's ever-popular series, in which Nick Arnold

won the Rhône Poulenc Science Prize with **Blood, Bones and Body Bits**, will surely fit the bill. Diseases, germs and other ghastly things you might catch are amply covered in **Deadly Diseases**, with all manner of quizzes, fact boxes and activities, while **Microscopic Monsters** addresses

smaller varieties of nasty unmentionables (protozoa, microbes, amoeba) to be found between the toes, under the loo seat etc. Please pass me a joke-free information book while I lie down in a darkened room to recover. **SU**

## REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

### The Nazi Dagger Incident

★★

Terrance Dicks, Piccadilly, 96pp, 1 85340 647 3, £4.99 pbk

While it is heartening to see children's fiction tackling important political and social issues, it must be said that this is not a striking example of the genre. Set in contemporary Berlin and dealing with the rise of Neo-Nazism, the novel opens with teenager Matthew Stirling, visiting the city with his professor father (a 'director of Paranormal Studies') and witnessing an ugly racial attack in the Turkish quarter: it is his well-intentioned determination to intervene which results in their involvement in events where the emphasis is increasingly on pseudo-mystical mumbo-jumbo. If the aim is to make Neo-Nazism and its adherents look totally absurd, then the book succeeds admirably, but at the price of any measure of narrative credibility. **RD**

### Riding the Storm

★★★

Susan Holliday, Pont Books, 128pp, 1 85902 870 5, £4.95 pbk

Holliday's novel belongs in that category of children's fiction in which the power of ancient legend seeps through to contemporary life. Here, the principal link has to do with healing. As young Welsh teenager Alun Roberts recovers from the nightmarish experiences which have led to his hospital bed, he, like the reader, is simultaneously drawn into the misty domains of the Lady of Llyn Y Fan Fach and her physician sons. The parallels between real and imaginary worlds are established quite convincingly. But the most haunting presence in the book is less its ghostly backdrop than Alun himself, a boy sadly adrift in his feelings about his parents, the new man in his mother's life and, most dramatically of all, his new baby sister. **RD**

### In the Money

★★★

Helen Dunmore, Red Fox 'Definitions', 144pp, 0 09 941187 3, £4.99 pbk

The Tiernans' new wealth brings changes including a move to a country mansion and, for Paul, the tutoring he will need to get him into a grand private school. There is never any sense of his enjoyment of the change and when he encounters a starving servant girl from a past time he hears of the first owner of the house and his 'bad money' which chimes portentously with the present. There is much sharply observed detail to create atmosphere but there is little magic and, for all the potential of the past and the

mysteries of the modern wealth, the story never quite takes flight. **AJ**

### My Mum and the Gruesome Twosome

★★★★

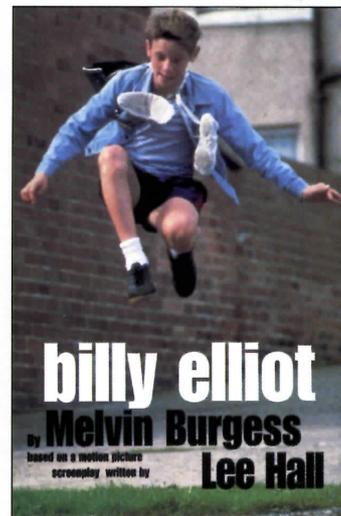
Meg Harper, Lion, 144pp, 0 7459 4567 8, £3.99 pbk

Embarrassment is something that few of us like, so when teenage Kate discovers that her mother (a part time vicar to boot) is pregnant, her feelings go on overdrive. Add to this her best friend Chas developing a friendship with Another Girl, and Kate feels she has much to contend with. Things develop further with various other believable characters (including a male au-pair coming to look after the newly born twins), and the humour with which Harper tells the story is an effective vehicle for getting over many points without the slightest hint of didacticism. **RL**

### Billy Elliot

★★★★★

Melvin Burgess, from original screenplay by Lee Hall, The Chicken House, 160pp, 1 903434 33 5, £4.99 pbk



Told through the perceptions of a range of characters, this faithful book of the film captures the raw energy and political statement of the original, creating a thoroughly readable novel, which will make reading as non-wimpish as Billy made ballet.

Some parents might balk at the realism of the dialogue in Billy's strike-riven, working-class mining village; seeing it written will perhaps offend, even though it is easily overlooked, when heard in the cinema. I hope kids are allowed the chance to get past this into the skillfully told tale of pursuing a dream with dedication and determination, making the most of whatever talent you have and winning despite all the

## Editor's Choice

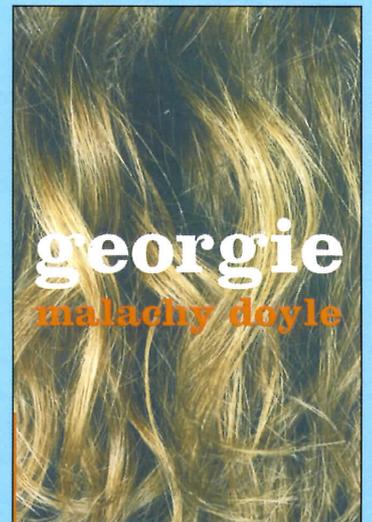
### Georgie

★★★★★

Malachy Doyle, Bloomsbury, 160pp, 0 7475 5154 5, £5.99 pbk

This powerful novel begins dramatically with Georgie, unable to communicate in words, smearing the lavatory walls with his own shit. Told alternately in the first person by Georgie and Shannon, both boarders in some kind of therapeutic community, it tracks newcomer Georgie's slow emergence over six months from the silence in which he has been keeping himself safe.

In his new bedroom Georgie has a mirror where the other Georgie peers out at him – this is the Georgie he has to leave behind if he is to begin to negotiate with the world again. Yet it is also the Georgie he needs to accept within himself. Towards the end of the book we discover why Georgie is so traumatised and begin to understand



the logical way in which he interprets his insecure and terrifying world. Doyle's subtle and perceptive portrait of Georgie's persecutory inner world is told in a daringly understated way that demands much of the young reader. **RS**

odds.

Full marks to Melvin Burgess. My pupils were clamouring for the book once they'd seen it on my desk. **DB**

### Jade's Story

★★★

Helena Pielichaty, Oxford, 160pp, 0 19 271841 X, £6.99 pbk

About to leave primary school, Jade finds herself having to adjust to new family circumstances. Her father, increasingly prone to depression, suffers a nervous breakdown and goes violently berserk, the prelude to a period in psychiatric hospital. It is during the visits which she and her mother make to him there that Jade begins to appreciate those factors in his past which have led to his illness and, more generally, to understand some of the many manifestations of the condition known as 'madness'. Central to all of this is the evolving relationship between father and daughter, a theme which Pielichaty explores with subtlety and originality, helped by an atmospheric setting and by a cast of entertainingly offbeat minor characters. **RD**

### Witch Hill

★★★★★

Marcus Sedgwick, Dolphin, 176pp, 1 85881 883 4, £4.99 pbk

Jamie, traumatised by a fire in his home, is sent to stay with his aunt and 16-year-old cousin, Alison, in a country village. The village has a history predating the English Civil War. Jamie arrives just as the villagers led by his aunt begin to clear the

great chalk carving on a nearby hill (from which the village takes its name). The carving appears to be that of an old woman, not a crown as supposed, and around this hang the central threads of the plot. Events of the past begin to intrude into the present, or so it seems to Jamie, terrified of fire and now beset by grisly nightmares.

Each chapter unfolds another layer and builds up tension and terror in the mind of Jamie. Chapters are prefaced by an extract from an old document which gradually reveals what it is that has troubled the village for so long. With each extract is an atmospheric wood engraving, the work of the author.

While aspects of the plot are left hanging at the conclusion, this is a very readable psychological thriller, in which clever twists maintain the tension throughout. **VC**

### Queen of the Wolves

★★★

Tanith Lee, Hodder, 192pp, 0 340 74659 9, £4.99 pbk

**Queen of the Wolves** is the third book in Tanith Lee's 'Wolf Tower Sequence'. To date the saga has charted Claidi's rise from slavery to royal daughter of the lady Twilight Star; her betrothal to Argul, leader of the Hulta people; her abduction by the agents of the Wolf Tower and her eventual escape. The current volume picks up the story on her return to the Hulta but far from the reunion Claidi anticipates, she finds only hatred and mistrust.

The plotting is fast and furious. Claidi meets many strange characters and is

thrust into new surreal settings which leave her disorientated. She learns to trust no one; what is truth, is a lie and lies are truth. The first half of **Queen of the Wolves** requires a familiarity with the earlier books and even with the summary provided at the beginning, readers may find the rapid succession of references to previously introduced characters and events difficult to follow. This settles down in the later chapters as the reader is drawn into the story.

Lee has produced an interesting twist on the High Fantasy. At one level the story seems to simply transpose the conventional ideology of the genre, which favours male domination, into privileging equally power hungry females. But ultimately Claidi, in a typically wry self-observation, questions the plan to breed a ruling female, and in so doing undermines the ideological pattern that has been established in fantasy writing.

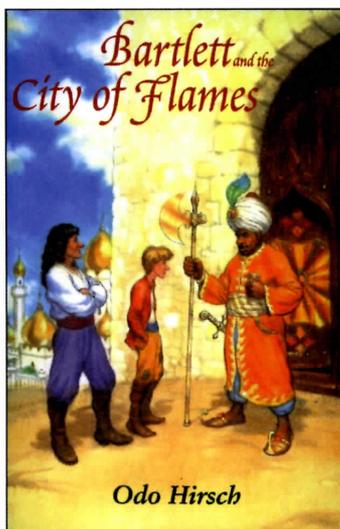
'Am I this dire thing "Queen of the Wolves"? No ... a Sheep in Wolf's Clothing. That's me.' NG

**Bartlett and the City of Flames**

★★★★★

Odo Hirsch, ill. Andrew McLean, Bloomsbury, 208pp, 0 7475 4609 6, £9.99 hbk, 0 7475 5180 4, £4.99 pbk

This novel has a flavour of the Borrowers about it, and also something of Helen Cresswell's early poetic fantasies. In two beautifully rendered landscapes, a stone desert and a network of underground caves,



two peoples live a cat-and-mouse existence with each other, born of mystery and fear. Overgrounders are occasionally kidnapped by the Undergrounders, yet so untraceably that they cannot even be sure that these unseen enemies exist. For their part the Undergrounders, fugitives from persecution in another country, fear attack if their subterranean hide-out is discovered. Into this curious stalemate step the cool, resourceful Bartlett, strong, silent Jacques, and the boy Gozo. This strange trio are Explorers, with their own code of honour and ethics based on the principles of Inventiveness, Desperation and Perseverance. Guided by these qualities, Bartlett and his friends are equal to dangers

both Overground and Underground, finally triumphing as peacemakers before heading for their next adventure. This delicate and appealing comic fantasy is a worthy successor to Cresswell and Norton, and Bartlett especially is a sharp-witted, practical eccentric to equal any of his forerunners. PH

**Pure Dead Magic**

★★★

Debi Gliori, Doubleday, 224pp, 0 385 60154 9, £10.99 hbk

Computers which swallow baby rats and miniaturised baby sisters, e-mailing them across Europe, prehistoric beasts guarding a gothic castle, a proficient witch for a nanny, a fond Dad kidnapped by the mafia ... Gliori, better-known for her many picture-books, has gone to town in this, her first novel for older children, giving a contemporary twist to kidnap and rescue with the creative use of computers and the Web. The result is fast-moving, over-the-top, engaging and great fun.

The Italian-Scottish setting gives an excuse for lots of jokes and puns, some inevitably better than others - I found the punning names of some characters irritating for example. In addition, the book's title has a contemporary connotation in Scotland which it won't have elsewhere. Character development is more by implication than anything else, and having introduced a bunch of assassins, Gliori is very quick to dispose of them almost without us noticing. A jolly good read, despite these deficiencies. AG

**The Angel Factory**

★★★

Terence Blacker, Macmillan, 240pp, 0 333 90072 3, £9.99 hbk

Thomas Wisdom leads an untroubled life - happy at home, successful at school - until his rebellious friend Gip opens a secret file on his father's computer and he discovers details of his adoption. Stunned by his parents' betrayal and convinced by Gip of sinister motives for their actions, he spies on them as they attend their mysterious annual 'business trip'.

Here he discovers that his parents and sister are angels, three of many thousands created as part of the Project, an initiative instigated by the Presence, a force for goodness from a distant galaxy, bent on preventing humankind from causing its own destruction. Thomas is first seduced, then alarmed by the Project and, with his friend Gip, he determines to escape its influence.

The story meanders between the genres of mystery thriller, science fiction and New Age fantasy and while the themes of good and evil, trust and betrayal are minutely - and sometimes thought-provokingly - explored, the narrative becomes saturated with improbable events and cohesion and conviction are strained. VR

**Milo's Wolves**

★★★

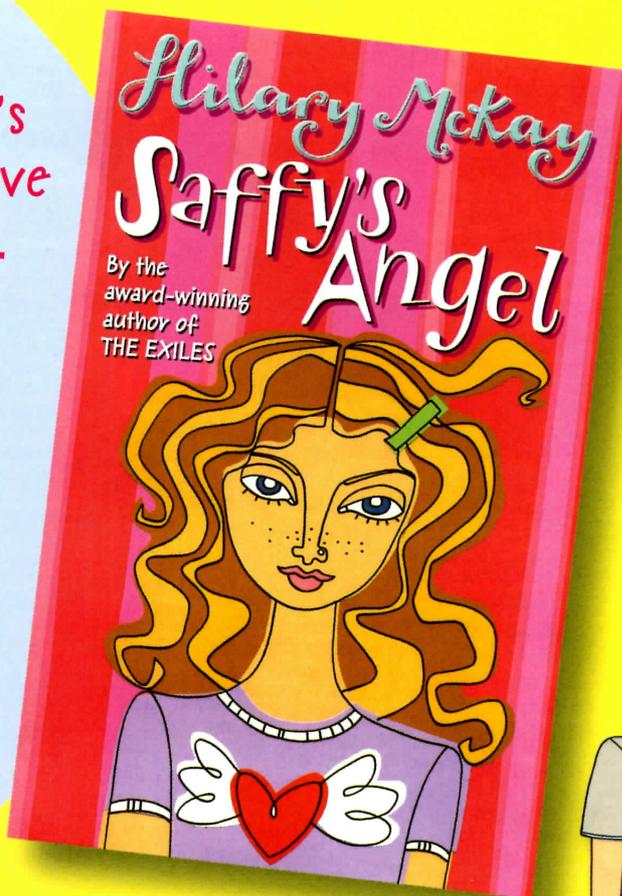
Jenny Nimmo, Mammoth, 256pp, 0 7497 3675 5, £4.99 pbk  
Laura is shocked when she discovers



If you loved THE EXILES, here's the new novel you've been waiting for.

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that Gwendal, a brother she did not know existed, is coming to stay with the family. From their first meeting she is convinced that she has not been told the truth about him. Who is he? Why doesn't he resemble either of her parents? What is the mystery that surrounds his connection with her family? The mystery deepens when Gwendal is pursued by the sinister Nathan Culfire, leader of the Society of Angels, who wants to claim him as 'one of his own'. Forced to leave his 'family', Gwendal seeks the protection of his mysterious sponsor, a wealthy recluse who lives in the isolated French Pyrenees.

Nimmo develops the suspense, adding twists to keep the reader guessing. Like her earlier 'Snow Spider' trilogy, *Milo's Wolves* vividly creates a haunting setting, seeped in legend in which Jean Tisseyre's chateau rises above the Pyrenean village like Castle Dracula.

*Milo's Wolves* is a Frankenstein story for the twenty-first century and like Mary Shelley's earlier gothic novel, raises moral questions about the human use of scientific technology to create life. NG

## Young Nick's Head

★★★★

Karen Hesse, Simon & Schuster, 272pp, 0 689 83508 6, £7.99 pbk

*Young Nick's Head* tells the story of 11-year-old Nick, who flees from the vicious butcher he is apprenticed to and stows away on the *Endeavour*, the vessel which Captain Cook took on his historic three-year voyage around the southern hemisphere.

The book takes the form of a diary in which Nick records the ship's position, its daily routines and his thoughts and feelings about his extraordinary journey. Most fascinating are the relationships he builds with the crew members who are initially antagonistic but later emerge as distinct and personable men. The narrative pace is uneven, however – events are often unusual and engaging – especially the exploits of the botanist Joseph Banks – and the records of strange new foods, plants and animals – but there are somnolent sections where entries are succinct to the point of terseness or record only a lack of activity.

Readers with stamina and a keen interest in history and botany will enjoy this unusual story. VR

## The Illustrated Mum

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, read by Josie Lawrence, Cover to Cover, 6hrs 25mins unabridged, 1 85549 341 1, £14.99

Josie Lawrence's reading of *The Illustrated Mum* demonstrates the problem that arises for some books when they are read aloud. Written in the first person narrative of Dol, the unhappy younger daughter of Marigold, the disturbed 'illustrated mum' of the title, this has to be read in a child's voice and an adult reading a child's voice always runs the risk of irritating. Josie Lawrence's is no exception and, to make matters worse, because Dol's family are on benefit and live in poor accommodation they are given voices to match. Dol is therefore placed by her accent making her someone whom many listeners will

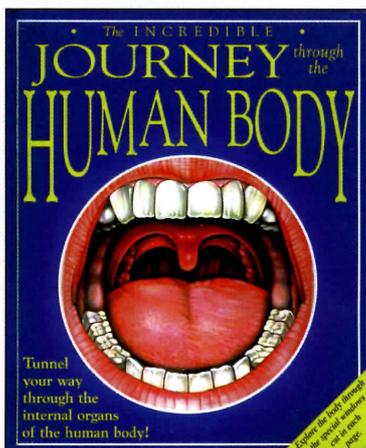
feel distanced from although, if they had read the book themselves, they would have immediately identified with her and her intense and compassionate, if unrealistic, view of her mother. But listeners must overcome these initial difficulties because Josie Lawrence reads Marigold beautifully and because the story itself is so powerful. Marigold's gradual slide into mental illness; Dol's attempt to ignore what she sees by indulging in kind of make believe and her older sister Star's determination to escape are all unfolded with remarkable sensitivity. JE

## Castaways of the Flying Dutchman

★★★

Brian Jacques, Viking, 328pp, 0 670 89925 9, £12.99 hbk

Jacques transfers his storytelling skills from the best-selling Redwall fantasies to a tale of a boy and a dog, immortal survivors of *The Flying Dutchman*, travelling through history bringing help and comfort to those in need. This looks to be an idea capable of indefinite expansion, much like those old TV series (remember *The Littlest Hobo*?) that place familiar characters in new situations with each episode. However, in this book, it does not hold together too well. The 50-page prologue, which concerns the fate of *The Flying Dutchman*, is carried off with panache. But the greater part of the book, a story of a villainous Victorian property developer and a sleepy English village, lacks the same excitement. It is a mixture of comedy and melodrama, loosely structured around a struggle against a gang of bullies and a search for a buried property deed. It is well paced but relies on stock situations and characters that may miss the mark with modern readers. CB



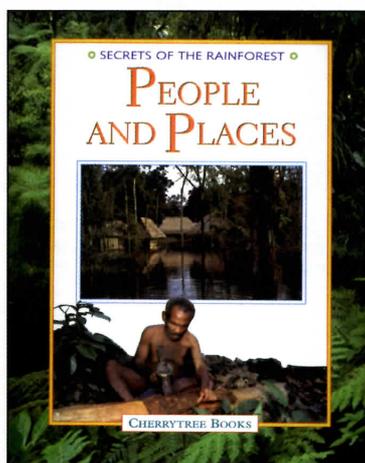
## The Incredible Journey through the Human Body

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Nicholas Harris, Big Fish, 32pp, 1 903174 18 X, £9.99 hbk novelty

With Giuliano Fornari amongst the illustrators and Peter Rowan – whose *Cucumber Sandwich* set the standard for intestinal adventures – as consultant, this handsomely sized volume promises a lot. What it delivers is a series of endoscopes' eye views of gut, circulation, liver, kidneys, brain and eye with pertinent and very readable commentary

alongside. The endoscope effect is achieved by pages with peepholes in, which allows us to dive down our own gullet only to end up swimming in blood to the liver, heart and lungs. How we get out is not made clear – jump out of our own pupil perhaps – but the journey's been good fun. There must be computer set-ups that do all this sort of thing on the move, but do they tell you that 'uvula is Latin for "little grape"'? By no means essential, this is good entertainment and factually OK. TP



## People and Places

1 84234 036 0

## Resources and Conservation

1 84234 037 9

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Michael Chinery, Cherrytree 'Secrets of the Rainforest', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

Here are two members of a six-part set devoted to the ecology (in its widest sense) of our Tropical Rainforests. Used though we now are to the term 'rainforest', we still know very little about them and collections like this one of Chinery's are not only remarkably attractive but of great value.

*People and Places* looks first at the kinds of habitat rainforests provide and the natural conditions imposed on their inhabitants, going on to examine in greater details the forest and foresters of the Amazon, Africa and Asia. Threatening commercial pressures are explained, as is the growing concern for proper conservation.

*Resources and Conservation* shows the forests as universal providers plundered by the hideously self-insufficient 'developed' world or destroyed needlessly by it – monoculture supplanting biodiversity, beef and bananas ousting brazil nuts. A conservation thread runs through this catalogue of missed opportunities and leads to an optimistic final chapter.

The books are distinguished not only by an excellently informed and informative text from Chinery but by a shrewd use of page-space and of truly illustrative photographs. Modestly produced, the effect of this sextet could be considerable. Excellent library source material, these two should be bought widely and their companions – *Partners and Parents, Plants and Plant eaters, Poisoners and Pretenders* and *Predators and Prey* – persistently pursued. TP

## The Incredible Journey to the Planets

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Nicholas Harris, ill. Sebastian Quigley and Gary Hincks, Big Fish, 32pp, 1 903174 17 1, £9.99 hbk novelty

'Jump from planet to planet through the series of windows cut in this book.'

Have a gander at this one after Harris's companion *Human Body* and you will find that what's sauce for it ain't sauce for this one. The holed pages add little excitement to looking at planet after planet, so there is not the added dimension that the series conceptualisers hoped for here – at least I couldn't find it.

It is, however, a useful gazetteer of 'our neighbours in space' and occasionally challenges conventional thought, for instance 'Mercury is the most upright of all the planets'. How can one sphere be more 'upright' than another? TP

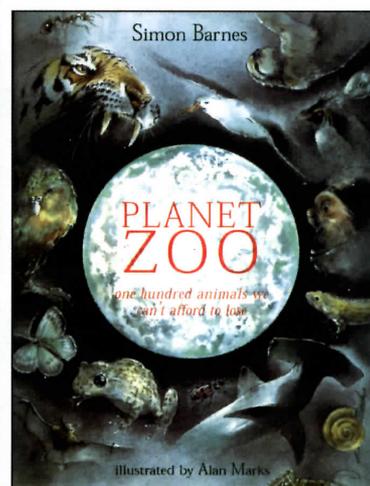
## Planet Zoo

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Simon Barnes, ill. Alan Marks, Orion, 272pp, 1 85881 488 X, £20.00 hbk

Till I read this book I thought a Kerry slug was a particularly effective Guinness-powered knockout punch of the kind I used to see routinely administered (while we in the band played on regardless) at hotel dances in that county in the early '60s. Not so, however – it is a real – and rare – gastropod that lives not only in Ireland (where it's protected) but in Spain and Portugal (where it isn't – it's endangered due to thoughtless habitat replacement). Barnes and Marks devote two pages to this modest creature to illustrate the destructive power of clumsy accident. They approach the hapless slug with as much respect as they also pay to the humpback whale, Arabian oryx, kakapo, Siberian tiger and other stars of the conservation circus.

That they do so illustrates exactly what makes this remarkable book so special. Here are a hundred examples of how the future of our planet depends ultimately upon the creatures that live on it, whatever their imagined status. In his text, Barnes writes, often with excellently restrained passion and always with faultless logic, of 100 animals threatened by extinction and what the knock-on effect of that extinction



will be. With great skill the author imparts his knowledge and his passion to the reader, to whom he presents a work that is at once a hugely informative natural history narrative and a gripping conservation polemic.

This would be a remarkable book if it were brought out unillustrated, on telephone directory paper, but with Orion matching the quality of the text with excellent production and supreme illustration from Alan Marks (nobody does wetter water or mistier mist), it is a thing of great and lasting beauty. It should be put up for all the awards for which it is eligible, read aloud on the radio and at school

assemblies, quoted widely and has all the hallmarks of a classic.

Every so often a book comes along which while comfortable within a genre, at the same time transcends that genre and sets new standards for it. This is one. Buy it for someone you love. TP

## Freaky Peaks

**NON-FICTION** ★★

Anita Ganeri, ill. Mike Phillips, Scholastic Hippo 'Horrible Geography', 128pp, 0 439 99873 5, £3.99 pbk

The 'Horrible' bandwagon rolls on, and, having given History and

Science each a good seeing-to, enlists the hitherto admirably sober Anita Ganeri to present a septet of Geography titles. This is one of them.

It looks in a sidelong way at the geology of mountains (here defined as being eminences of 1000m. or more whereas for me and Coniston Old Man, 2000 feet has always been enough), mountain meteorology (Ganeri's forced alliterations are catching), mountains as habitat and in relation to people – resident or tourist. You can learn a lot if you subscribe to the series' initial assumption that Geography is Boring, and this is where I must diverge. While it may be hard to make

History or Science fun and to produce engrossing 'straight' books for the non-specialist, our shelves (and review columns) abound with glamorous eye-catching entertaining – sexy, even – geography titles which spare us the corny jokes, barely serviceable illustration and rock-bottom (geddit?) production standards that this volume espouses. A peak too far, methinks and I'll be surprised if the bandwagon manages the gradient. TP

# REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

## The Dogs

★★

Mark Morris, ill. Roy Petrie, 112pp, 1 902260 76 7

## Joe's Story

★★★

Rachel Anderson, ill. Nick Ward, 92pp, 1 902260 70 8

## The Wedding Present

★★★

Adèle Geras, ill. Joanna Carey, 84pp, 1 902260 77 5

## All Change

★★★

Rosie Rushton, ill. Ros Asquith, 120pp, 1 902260 75 9  
Barrington Stoke, £4.50 each pbk

These four new titles for teenagers in a reader-friendly format have occasional illustrations and are driven pretty exclusively by narrative. Sub plots do not complicate storylines and the length is very approachable. These are not quite reluctant reader material, but it is a close thing.

**The Dogs** is a horror story, which requires a bit of sussing out because of the substantial time shift. An orphan girl, sent to live with an aunt on Bodmin, convinces herself of the dark forces that are at work in that lonely place. Then her aunt's friendly pair of mongrels disappear and return nine years later definitely not the sweet cherished pets that they once were. So begins the real nightmare for Alice.

**Joe's Story** uses the granddad/grandson formula with the inevitable heartbreak when the old man is taken ill and eventually dies. The love between the two and their pet dog is touching but the story lacks any real excitement and might seem too gentle and flimsy for robust teen tastes.

A box of hand-made crockery is the present of the title in Adèle Geras' unique offering. I don't think I've read any other story for this age group where there are no teenagers. Jane, the main character, single, aged 30, just coming out of a relationship with a married man, discovers her happily married sister is in fact getting over a secret affair, and at the wedding of her niece is breezily swept off her feet by a younger man. It has a serious, wispy charm and should make readers feel that they are being treated maturely.

**All Change** is the pacy, light comedy of the four. Getting super hunk Tim as a boyfriend is uppermost in Gemma's mind. With the not so effective help of friend Lisa, our heroine tarts herself up beyond recognition and is surprised when Tim wants to run a mile. However, the duo do get it together but are threatened with a sundering when mum and boyfriend announce a move to Norfolk ... and would you believe it, at the same time Tim reveals his university place in Norwich! Aaah! DB

## Poems Then and Now: Poetry collection 3

**POETRY** ★★★★★

Compiled by Fiona Waters, Evans, 96pp, 0 237 52127 X, £10.99 hbk

Beautifully produced, with black and white photographs sensitively placed amongst the poems, this collection is accessible and inspiring. Traditional and contemporary poems are arranged in pairs on a wide range of themes. There are opportunities for comparing language and form through the centuries as well as approaches to the eternal themes of life, death, the natural world and war. Many of the pairings are inspirational as in Keats' 'To Autumn' and e e cummings' 'Spring is Like a Perhaps Hand'. Reading the two poems alongside one another throws new light on both poems giving endless scope for thought, discussion and analysis.

This is an excellent anthology for both general readers from 11 years on and for poetry sessions within the secondary school curriculum. HT

## Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras

★★★

Cathy Hopkins, Piccadilly, 144pp, 1 85340 633 3, £5.99 pbk

It is often impossible at 14 years of age to make the important choices that school, home and friends demand and Lucy has yet to decide her direction in life. Her equilibrium has been disturbed by the arrival of Nesta, a glamorous, confident girl who strikes up a friendship with Lucy's best friend Izzy. Lucy's feelings of isolation and confusion are exacerbated when she realises that the boy she has set her heart on is Nesta's brother.

This is the literary face of series fiction: the plot bubbles along but there are nuggets of advice and wisdom along the way – and a hefty chunk of realism to give them a context. At the end of the book, the

reader is left with reassurance and a keen interest in what will obviously be one of several sequels. The lively, modern cover tops off an appealing and entertaining package. VR

## Chasing Faces

★★★

Pamela Scobie, Oxford, 160pp, 0 19 271849 5, £6.99 pbk

Two girls, two mothers, two fathers, two sets of family problems make up the ingredients of **Chasing Faces** which cleverly combines the stories of two families at different times in the twentieth century. The framing narrative is a story of today concerning familial separation and divorce. Milly is 16 and her father has gone off with a 19-year-old young woman. In anger and grief, Milly runs to her grandmother, whose own story of her childhood in England during the General Strike and depression begins to unfold. Stage by stage Milly pieces together the details of the hard times when families could fall into destitution without any social welfare backups and when women enjoyed few rights. Milly's own story shows how young women may still be preyed upon as, in her anger, she narrowly misses making a dreadful mistake when she meets the attractive but unpleasant Dominic. Milly's mother appears only at the beginning and end of the story, but we view her through the eyes of her mother and her daughter.

Scobie's prose is vigorous apart from an occasional tendency to overwrite. Her characters are convincingly portrayed in this story of three generations of women who all deal with tribulation their own way. VC

## Zulus, Girls and Videos

★★★

John Farman, Piccadilly, 160pp, 1 85340 658 9, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 653 8, £5.99 pbk

Eavesdropping in the children's department of my local bookstore, I listened to two male store assistants in their twenties reminiscing about books they had read as teenagers. One comment particularly struck a chord; 'Paula Danziger was great but there was never anything like that written for boys.'

Their comments came back to me as I read Farman's lively, teenage problem novel. 15-year-old Joe Derby and his best mate Merlin are mad about films – and of course girls. But who does Joe really fancy – gorgeous

sexy Jade or dear sweet Lucy? The jocular subtitle 'or ... trying to be COOL in a nearly black suit' signals the mildly ironic tone which is characteristic of the genre. This is Paula Danziger for boys.

I have to acknowledge that my age and gender exclude me from the novel's discourse but this will surely be the appeal to the target audience. NG

## The Starling Tree

★★★★

Julia Clarke, Collins Flamingo, 176pp, 0 00 710514 2, £4.99 pbk

The starling tree attracts birds in search of greenery who do not belong in the city environment. This metaphor signals a novel of alienation and loss: but one of hope and regeneration, too.

Fawn's twin brother Ginna is causing her concern: he's in with the wrong crowd; he's drifted away from the things he believed in. Their father lives in his hippy past, afraid to go out – more a child than a parent. Their harassed and hard-working mother is trying to hold the family together. And then Fawn falls in love – painfully and completely – with her new Music teacher, Ben Thompson.

It is this passion which determines and enables her to explore her musical talent, culminating in a public performance which celebrates both her own triumph and the successful transformation of her troubled school. The most profound and convincing part of the book is Fawn's realisation that first love will never be forgotten: it does not need to cripple, but can instead inform and illuminate the experiences to come. VR

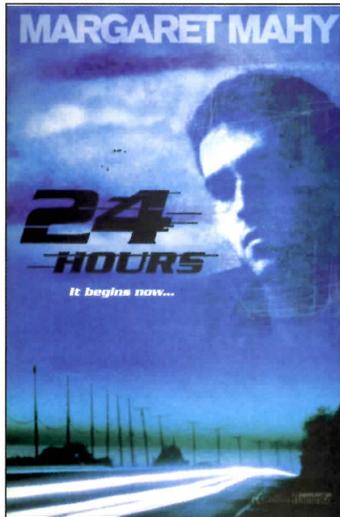
## Jessica

★★★

Rosie Rushton, Piccadilly, 176pp, 1 85340 549 3, £5.99 pbk

This is teenage life seen as roller coaster drama. Jessica's friend has died of meningitis, her mother and father are desperately trying to make ends meet on their farm, she feels stuck in deepest rural Wales, she doesn't have a boyfriend ... and that's only the beginning. There is a bunch of issues, including the state of farming and disability, and there is the course of true love. Rushton makes it all exciting and even makes you care about all these people and the mesh of relationships. This novel, part of a larger series, all named after

their heroines, may be light but it is no waste of time. AJ



**Twenty-four Hours**

★★★★★

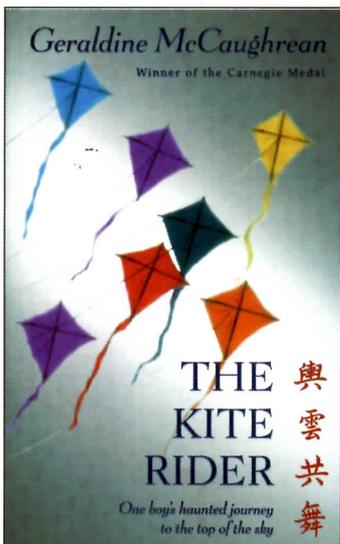
Margaret Mahy, Collins Flamingo, 192pp, 0 00 6755410, £4.99 pbk

At the end of this fascinating novel we leave Ellis, its 17-year-old hero, 'a man sorting through a whole lifetime's experience as he sets out once more into the dangerous world'. The starting point for the odyssey into the twenty-four hours of experience which lead to this denouement is a meeting with Jackie, a fellow pupil from early schooldays. Now in his pre-university year and intending to become an actor, Ellis is wandering his home town, anticipating the adventures which his new independence will bring. But it is not merely a matter of time present and future, since time past intrudes also, both in the guise of Jackie's reappearance in Ellis's life and in the shadow cast by his friend Simon's suicide. Mahy's linking of these circumstances and her delineation of their role in contributing to Ellis's growth, in a novel characterised by its richness of imagined experience and its gallery of colourful humanity, is totally masterly and highly entertaining. RD

**The Kite Rider**

★★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, Oxford, 224pp, 0 19 271860 6, £6.99 pbk



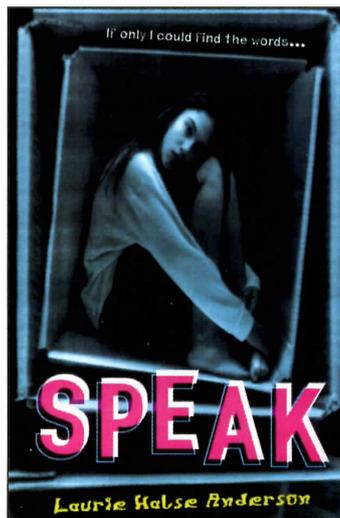
The scene is China, at the time of Kublai Khan's Mongol conquest. Haoyou, aged twelve, has seen his sailor father die when chosen to take part in an embarkation ritual to determine whether a ship's voyage will be prosperous. A man is bound to a kite, a wind-tester, which is flown to supply an augury of success or failure. Haoyou's father is the victim of a corrupt First Mate who hopes to marry his widow, Haoyou's mother. But unlike his father, Haoyou is at home with flight. He is a kite-maker, and to protect his mother from the First Mate's designs and the tyranny of family elders, he becomes also a kite-rider, taking his own dangerous turn to fly among the clouds. His skill and courage take him far into China, first as a new, crowd-stirring act in the Jade Circus, then as 'eyes-in-the-sky', a new reconnaissance weapon for the Khan's army. McCaughrean's novel has two main themes. One is family, the spiritual power of its dead, the often undeserved, misused authority of its living seniors, and the onus of duty and obedience on the young. To protect his family, Haoyou must violate the rigid code of conduct it has taught him. The other theme is the fear and ecstasy of flight, and the wondrous sky-realm of clouds, lightning, gods and spirits. The two subjects blend in an original and exciting story. Time and place are exotic, but Haoyou's tough journey to mental freedom is thoroughly modern. PH

**Speak**

★★★★★

Laurie Halse Anderson, Hodder, 240pp, 0 340 81762 3, £4.99 pbk

I am Outcast. Melinda starts High School wearing the wrong hair, the wrong clothes and with the wrong attitude but something more disturbing is bubbling underneath the surface. What happened in the vacation? Why are her friends freezing her out? Why does she refuse to speak? What is she trying to forget?



Speak is Melinda's personal record of her first year in high school and her coming to terms with trauma. She has to learn to speak out; to break her silence. The novel is an indictment of a school system, inadequate in its ability to see beyond a spiralling deterioration of academic grades and anti-social behaviour but also a celebration of inspired teaching which enables Melinda to find an inner voice and express her feelings. Above all Anderson has produced an outstanding book which invites the

**NEW Talent**

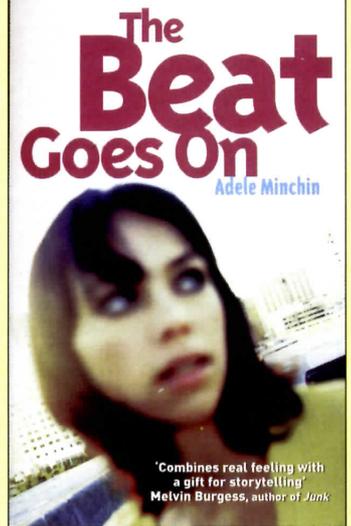
**The Beat Goes On**

★★★★★

Adele Minchin, Livewire, 224pp, 0 7043 4972 8, £5.99 pbk

In Britain until recently HIV/AIDS has been seen as a 'gay disease' despite the fact that worldwide it is predominantly a heterosexual disease. The percentage of gay and bisexual men infected in Britain has recently fallen while the percentage of heterosexual transmissions has been rising and, in particular, amongst the sexually active young. All this to give a context to Minchin's engaged and most empathic novel which tracks 15-year-old Leyla's responses to the devastating news that her much loved cousin, 17-year-old Emma, is HIV positive after a one night stand when she did not insist that her sexual partner use a condom.

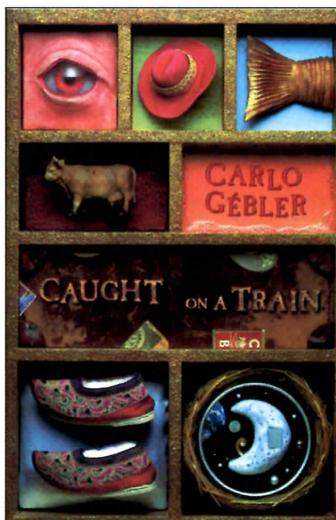
Minchin, who works as a volunteer for Body and Soul, a support group for, amongst others, young people with HIV/AIDS, has constructed a careful fiction in a rather breathless, teen magazine style which yet contrives well to present much useful and practical information about HIV/AIDS - how to go for a test, what support will be available, the impact on family and relationships, the misconceptions and prejudices and so forth - in a way that teenagers will find riveting. This is a considerable achievement, and it is to cavil, yet given the importance of the topic I cannot avoid doing so, to point out that amongst so much excellently accurate information the throwaway



line on page 125 about convincing a boy to 'wear double condoms' is a dangerous one: the friction between the two layers of rubber would risk tearing the condom.

While Minchin's characters have little psychological depth - some are no more than thumbnail sketches - they represent HIV/AIDS issues well. She is particularly good at not being preachy - Leyla is much taken with 18-year-old Darren and, despite knowing the risks, is herself nearly carried away by passionate feelings into having unprotected sex. Teenagers regularly report that their sex education lessons in school are 'too biological, too little and too late'. This tender, if rather orchestrated account of the tragic repercussions of such inadequate teaching, will stay in the teenage mind. RS

reader's admiration and empathy, rather than pity, for her strong heroine, who deals with personal pain without total disintegration of the personality. The power of Speak to evoke a positive response in spite of harrowing realism lies in Anderson's poetic prose and witty first person narration which infuses the narrative with wry humour. NG



**Caught on a Train**

★★★★★

Carlo Gébler, Mammoth, 240pp, 0 7497 4623 8, £4.99 pbk

Caught on a Train consists of three stories with a story. The primary narrator is Archie, 14, in 1899, the

year in which he had the most extraordinary journey from Dublin to Achill, in the west of Ireland. Sixty years later, as he narrates the events of that journey the significance of it all is still difficult for him to grasp.

On the day of the eventful journey, the train, unusually, has only three passengers. Archie, a steward on the train, is invited by the mysterious Mr Cink to adjudicate on the stories related by him and his two fellow passengers. These tales are full of mystery and, as an introductory note states, retold in W.B. Yeats' anthology Irish Fairy and Folk Tales. They are tales of land, sea and air, starting with 'Soul Cages' in which Micky Mealiffe visits the sea bed through his friendship with the merrow, Coomara. The contest continues with 'Bewitched Butter' a story firmly set in rural Ireland, and concludes with the startling 'Daniel O'Rourke' who visits the moon on an eagle's back.

Gebler's prose is fluid and engrossing, whether in the stories or in the framing narrative, which in itself is fascinating, relating Archie's family circumstances in respectable poverty in Dublin. This is a highly inventive use of traditional tales, and the reader, like Archie, will have a difficult time judging the winner, though might be content to forego the dramatic finale to the journey.

The well-designed cover is enigmatic, suggesting elements of the story and will catch the eyes of potential readers. VC

## Dead Guilty

★★★

David Belbin, Five Leaves Press, 240pp, 0 907123 58 9, £4.99 pbk

Jon Crier is the new boy in town so when he is found in the wrong place at the wrong time it is quickly assumed that he is guilty of murder. Even those closest to him begin to lose faith. Was he framed? Can he prove his innocence? Belbin's story moves at a brisk pace although the dialogue is stiff and unnatural in places. An enjoyable whodunnit which plants some red herrings and leaves the real surprises till the end.

NG

## The Stretford Enders

★★★

Trevor J. Colgan, Red Fox 'Definitions', 240pp, 0 09 940927 5, £5.99 pbk

'No one doubted Luke Farrell. Somehow, it seemed as though he was sent to save the Stretford Enders.' And indeed he does, but Stretford Enders, a failing local football team, is also the salvation of Luke (14) who is unhappy and unsettled when he must move to the southside of Dublin city from his beloved northside. He has to leave the successful football team in which he stars, and in his new school he is jeered at and bullied. Colgan imparts a real sense of Luke's discomfort, not only in school, but also at home when Martina, his mother, acquires a new boyfriend. His own burgeoning interest in girls sits uneasily with Martina's friendship with Ronald, whose awful dress sense adds to Luke's unease and embarrassment.

Eventually, Luke becomes involved with the Stretford Enders, and thanks to his ability as a player and as a team captain he reverses the team's flagging fortunes. There are gripping moments on the football field, as well as off, as the team begins to pull together. Colgan has the ability to get inside the mind of a teenage boy, and issues such as Luke's developing interest in the awful Cecilia and the nicer, but initially less attractive Ella are handled with humour and tact.

The problem with this novel is that Colgan attempts to address too many issues, leading to clichéd situations and at times, sloppy writing. Better editing would have improved a promising novel, and it is to be hoped that Colgan will find himself this vital asset and will continue to write.

VC

## The Damage Done

★★★★

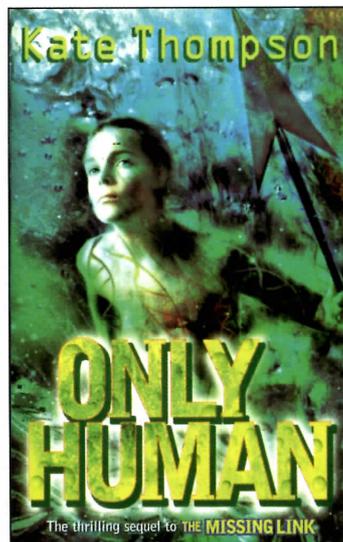
Linda Newbery, Scholastic, 272pp, 0 439 99799 2, £5.99 pbk

Kirsty's world has shrunk to the house she shares with her author father and the stables she runs for her brother Jay. Her solitary and fearful life is abruptly interrupted by the arrival of Dally - a mysterious boy living rough in a cottage in the nearby woods. She begins to trust him, despite his curt manner and silent disapproval of her wealthy friend Lottie.

Their friendship is cemented both by their love of horses and their mutual acknowledgement of the damage done to them by the expectations of those closest to them. Dally rejected his parents' driven, affluent lifestyle in favour of his sculpture and Kirsty is able to define her own needs instead

of supporting her father and brother as they selfishly rely on her to be there.

This is a novel of introspection rather than rapid narrative pace. Relationships are minutely and fascinatingly explored with love and betrayal the pivotal emotions. Those readers familiar with Newbery's fine backlist will not expect neat solutions, but instead a sense of emotional renewal and regrowth. VR



## The Missing Link

Red Fox, 0 09 926629 6, £4.99 pbk

## Only Human

Bodley Head, 0 370 32663 6, £10.99 hbk

★★★★

Kate Thompson, 320pp each

Thompson, author of the 'Switchers' trilogy, sets herself a new challenge in this pair of novels dealing with some of the ethical dilemmas posed by the possibilities of genetic engineering and cloning of animals and people.

In *The Missing Link*, 13-year-old Christie and his differently-abled step-brother, Danny, set off on a long journey to find Danny's mother and discover just what she does in her mysterious lab. They eventually achieve their aim, finding out what Danny's 'difference' really is, and why the animals who help them on their way are able to talk. Many opportunities for personal growth are offered, and, while Thompson shelters her charges from too much danger, she skillfully helps them face more extreme difficulties as their journey progresses. Christie, as narrator, is more explicit about his feelings than we might expect, and helpfully so. This is very secure writing - Thompson has a strong sense of the elements the story needs for its progress, and how to introduce these economically and imaginatively. The story continues in *Only Human* where the boys set off once more, this time with an obsessive scientist searching for the last yeti. Once again, we are swept along by the action, but Thompson's control is less evident here - the wider framework of ethics and the importance of personality in making big decisions perhaps demand a looser hold. The fantasy element is also given free rein, as Danny finds a tribe of mer-people and helps them identify the danger from radioactive waste.

I found these books hugely enjoyable, with many themes explored. My testers, aged 13, found the issues complex but were intrigued

nonetheless, and boys and girls alike were attracted by the book covers. AG

## Slaves of the Mastery

★★★

William Nicholson, Mammoth, 368pp, 0 7497 4152 X, £10.99 hbk

The juxtaposition of 'Slaves' and 'Mastery' in the title of Nicholson's complex novel prefigures the dualities of his fictional landscape. As Bowman, one of the enslaved, expresses it while watching the preparations for the spectacle known as the 'manaxa', 'It was all part of the riddle that was the Mastery: beauty and slavery, civilisation and terror, dancing and death.' From these apparent contradictions Nicholson constructs a fantasy structured on the motif of the quest (here a sister's for her twin brother) and given expression in an ever-changing kaleidoscope of movement, music and colour. There is an exotic cast of hundreds and there are numerous vividly realised set pieces, including a tinglingly erotic bridal dance, the tantarozza. There is also, however, some very unappealingly sadistic violence, particularly in the form of public burnings, and an occasional over-emphasis on male physical arrogance.

RD

## Deathscnt

★★★

Robin Jarvis, Collins, 512pp, 0 00 185702 9, £12.99 hbk

In Jarvis's imagined world, 178 years into the reign of Elizabeth Tudor, animals have been replaced by automata and the sky by a glass 'firmament' over each of the many islands of the realm. When an alien craft crashes through the glass, the people are at first fascinated by the strange, many-nostrilled man found in the wreckage and help him recover. The many smells of this new place delight him, none more than the elusive 'deathscnt' emitted in the seconds after death. This also has the power to reinvigorate him, and after a brief struggle with his conscience, he goes on the rampage through London, wielding his two-bladed reaping hook in an orgy of carnage. Before his own death, he manages to contact his people, opening the way for the next volume of what will undoubtedly be a popular series.

The book's jacket, giving a graphic depiction of the many-nostrilled Brindle, is by Jarvis, as are the chapter-head illustrations. The 14-15 year-olds I showed it to, both boys and girls, felt the illustration gave them clear messages about the story which some were immediately drawn to, while others thought it looked too scary. The book is set in an old-fashioned font, which I found wearisome at first, complementing the somewhat over-blown cod-Elizabethan language.

I enjoyed this book more than I'd expected to. Jarvis builds up the picture of his world well, with many imaginative details and some good characterisation but I found the fight scenes tedious, and the bleak inevitability of the ending made Brindle's moral tussle ultimately unconvincing.

AG

## Capitalism

NON-FICTION

★★★

Reg Grant, Wayland 'Ideas of the Modern World', 64pp, 0 7502 2750 8, £11.99 hbk

Capitalism probably generates most interest at its peaks of boom or bust: when it was down and out in the 1930s, or when greed was good in the 1980s. Yet Grant's readable introduction to the system and its history, goes some way to convincing me that, of the 'Ideas of the Modern World' presented in Wayland's new series, capitalism is probably the most pervasive and characteristic. Grant's skill is demonstrated by an opening chapter that sets out the central questions, offers a balanced view and draws in the themes of wealth generation, political control, social equity, welfare and ecological consequences that inform the historical survey that follows. He uses the familiar topic boxes for short portraits of capitalism's major proponents and critics. These are also used to highlight significant events and conflicts, and sometimes incidentally to demonstrate how, whatever its changing shape, capitalism continues to throw up the same question about how the wealth that it produces can be distributed equitably. If there's anything missing here, it's perhaps a consideration of our own ambivalent attitude to wealth and its creators, something that's touched on in the Resources section, when Grant makes the perceptive aside that 'Few fiction writers have had a good word to say for capitalism!'

CB



## Lurgan Champagne and other tales

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Edited by Kate Fearon and Amanda Verlaque, Livewire, 144pp, 0 7043 4971 X, £4.99 pbk

Subtitled 'real-life stories from Northern Ireland', this is a collection of 26 autobiographical pieces by young women who have spent their adolescence in the province. These adolescents have been lived against the background of what we have come to know as 'the troubles' and it is the wide range of these young women's reactions to this term that gives the book its fascination. In terms of politics, religion, social background and sexual orientation, just about every shade of experience and every degree of involvement are represented, the underlying motif being the play between notions of the 'normal' adolescence and the kind which Northern Ireland particularly enforces. This, not least sociologically, is a valuable book, the reading of which is a humbling reminder of youth's capacity to endure in even the most tragic of circumstances.

RD

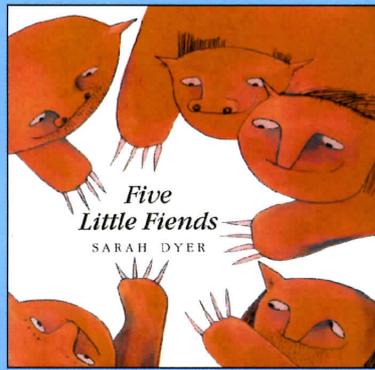
## Five Little Fiends

Sarah Dyer, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5229 0, £9.99 hbk

Five little fiends live in their own little statues on top of a hill. Each day the five little fiends come out to marvel at the world. Each fiend has a favourite thing that they covet and soon the moon, sea, earth, land and wind are snatched up and taken home to be treasured by each fiend forever.

However, soon each fiend realises that one precious earthly thing is nothing without them being part of the earth as a whole – so they decide to put everything back in no time at all. In the process they learn quite a bit about co-operation, sharing and appreciating the world, and its many wonders and beauties on the way.

This is a truly original and wonderfully simple heart-warming picture book by a brand new illustrator who is just bursting onto the scene. Age 3+.



Published July 2001

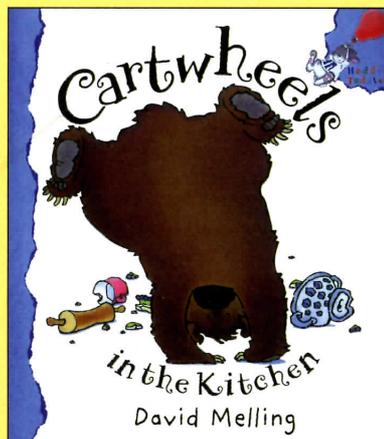
## Something's Fishy, Hazel Green

Odo Hirsch, Bloomsbury, 208pp, 0 7475 5262 2, £4.99 pbk

Odo Hirsch's Hazel, in the first book about this girl with attitude, Hazel Green, showed that she had a brilliant ability to solve a problem and this new novel is just as empowering. When a thief steals two of Mr Petrusca the fishmonger's splendid lobsters and leaves a secret message on the empty tank, he is beside himself with upset, more than anyone can understand. Hazel Green knows there's something fishy going on, but it takes all her ingenuity, and with a little help from her friend Yak, to crack the code and solve the mystery of the missing lobsters. And even once that is solved, Hazel still has important work to do ... as you will find out Mr Petrusca has an embarrassing (or so he thinks) secret that he is ashamed to admit. Hazel helps him through this and hence restores his pride which gets him back to his happy-go-lucky self. Age: 8-12.



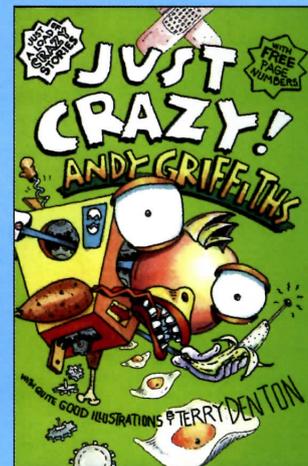
Published August 2001



**Hodder Toddler** is Hodder Children's Books new list for children aged between 1 and 3 years old.

Hodder Toddler books are short and the vocabulary is simple – but there's always lots going on, all of it activities toddlers will understand. Launch titles include: Hello Ducks by Angie Sage,

Flip and Flop by Dawn Apperley, Squeak! Squeak! by Siobhan Dodds, One Too Many Tigers by Cressida Cowell and Andy Ellis, Cartwheels in the Kitchen by David Melling, Little Sunbeam by Lucy Su, What's That Noise? by Francesca Simon and David Melling, and Mouse and Elephant by An Vrombaut. Activity packs, posters and balloons are also available.



## Just Crazy!

Andy Griffiths, Macmillan, 224pp, 0 330 39727 3, £3.99 pbk

Meet Andy. The young boy who wants to be the best at everything – the best at being annoying, funny, stupid and crazy! In these nine crazy new stories, Andy finds himself wearing his Action Man pyjamas in the back of a rubbish truck, is locked out of the house with his father – naked, and (almost) gets together with the love of his life. Mad? Without doubt. These stories encapsulate the most irritating aspects of pre adolescent boys – and they just can't get enough of them!

Andy Griffiths's books are bursting with practical jokes and great tricks. When you get to the end, enjoy them all over again with Terry Denton's illustrative mayhem: there are right (and left) handed flicker pictures on every page, words of wisdom and crazy cartoons. These books will provide hours of hilarity for every reader, whatever their age.

Published August 2001

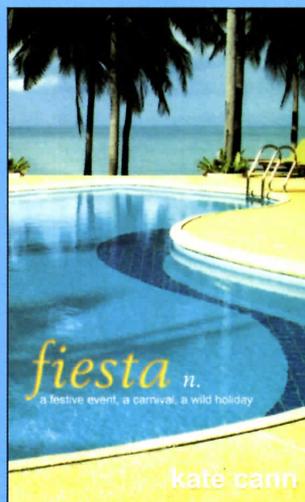
## Fiesta

Kate Cann, Scholastic, 320pp, 0 439 99389 X, £4.99 pbk

New from Kate Cann, Fiesta is the summer read of this year. Three girls set off for sunny Spain on a much looked forward to summer break. There's only one problem – one is bringing her irritating boyfriend.

Being trapped inside a small Astra watching Spain whizz by the car window is not Laura's idea of a good holiday. Then one wrong turn thankfully leaves the tourist trail well and truly behind them. Revealed is a gorgeous Spanish village (not to mention a few of its inhabitants), and plenty of the three 'S's: sun, sangria and sex. Now the holiday can really begin!

Fiesta follows on from the success of Footloose, Hard Cash and Shacked Up all by Kate Cann. It is also part of Scholastic's Teen Rated Promotion.



Published 20 July 2001

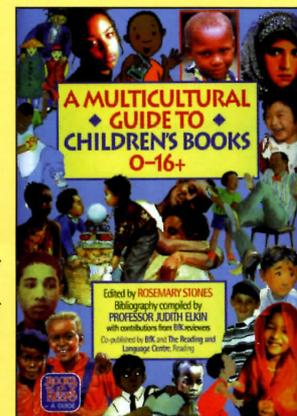
## A Multicultural Guide to Children's Books 0-16+

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

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

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

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



Published Oct 1999

## CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 28

Brian Alderson

'She was not afraid of mice; she loved winter, snow, and ice ...'  
Who else but –

## Memorable incipits No. 1

'Alice was beginning to get very tired ...'  
etc. etc. ...

## Memorable incipits No. 2

'In an old house in Paris / that was  
covered with vines / lived twelve little  
girls in two straight lines ...'

## Well – anyone can do it

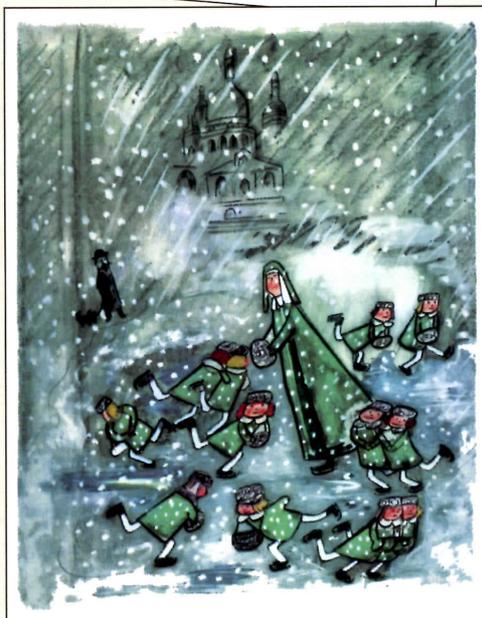
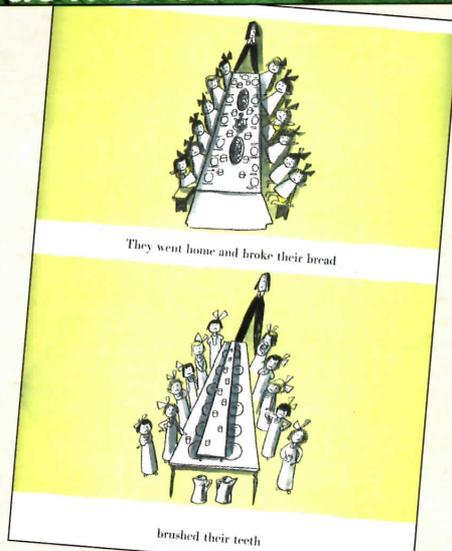
Desk drawers up and down the land are surely stuffed with unpublishable mss. with wonderful opening sentences. The difficult bit comes with trying to sustain the inspiration down to the end. The old house in Paris with its 2 x 6 occupants may never have escaped out of its own gates had not Ludwig Bemelmans succeeded in making Something out of his Almost-Nothing tale. (Madeline gets appendicitis, awakens envy among her eleven school-fellows when they visit her in hospital – 'on her stomach was a scar!' – and they all want appendicitis too.) Construction and execution blend to make an organic whole, enhanced rather than fractured by Bemelmans's quirky mannerisms.

## The text

is not, as is sometimes said, in rhyming couplets but rather follows a wayward progression of rhymes and rhythms that the author adjusts, sometimes disconcertingly, to meet the pace of his story. Those hypnotic opening lines are soon modified to more jog-trot measures which can vary from the famous *accelerando*: '... and afraid of a disaster, / Miss Clavel ran fast and faster' to the Key Stage One plonking of 'Madeline soon ate and drank. / On her bed there was a crank.' But the gears shift with the movement of events and there are subtleties such as the coda reprise of the bedtime verses and the *diminuendo*, both vocal and typographical, of the four closing lines.

## The pictures

seem similarly eccentric, with eight pages of full-colour included in the first half of the book and none in the second. But that too is governed by pacing, since the colour-work is mostly scene-painting (right from the start the publishers presented the book as select *scènes de Paris* as well as a simple storybook – and that dodge was repeated with *Madeline in London*). The line – and wash – drawing though, brightened only by a two-tone yellow, sweeps gleefully along with the action, the apparently casual images containing – as with all the best cartoonists – more subtlety than you expect. (Compare, for instance, the varied treatment of the two bread-breaking and teeth-brushing scenes.)



## Bemelmans's confident amateurism

is the essence of *Madeline's* success – he was his own man in all things, rather than the product of any system. Born in 1898 in the Austrian Tyrol, he was the son of an hotelier (and became one himself for a while, *vide Hotel Splendide*, 1941) and for his first six years he spoke only French. Schooled in Regensburg – the setting for his delicious satirical novel, illustrated, unusually, with colour plates, *The Blue Danube* (1945) – he necessarily learned German, only having to switch to New York English when he emigrated to America in 1914. He claimed to speak no language without a foreign accent, which helps to account for his distinctive style as a writer. His wish, in some measure fulfilled, was to become a painter and part of the fun of his dozen or so children's books (for him and his audience) was the dynamic matching of word and illustration. *Madeline*, first published in New York in 1939 and London in 1952, displays his natural gifts as draughtsman and Dufy-ish colourist, but he couldn't be doing with the technology of the thing and the colour-separating was done by Kurt Wiese.

## Successors to 'Madeline'

were predictable (and there was one precursor, for she appears briefly – with Proustian spelling – along with her eleven companions and Madame Severine, their tutor, in the now vanished Bruges of Bemelmans's richly individual *The Golden Basket*, New York 1936). *Madeline's Rescue* is the best of the sequels, justly winning the U.S. Caldecott Medal for 1953, and it introduced verbal and graphic echoes from the first book – a practice that continued with decreasing spontaneity in four further stories: *Madeline in London* (1953), *Madeline and the Bad Hat* (1958), *Madeline and the Gypsies* (1959) and *Madeline's Christmas* (rechauffé of a magazine story – 1961), all available from Scholastic.

## Miss Clavel meets Barbie

At least two short films have been made of *Madeline* and these, along with the commerce in character-merchandising, have inevitably led to the production of various dolls and doll-dressing kits for separate sale. Miss Clavel features in the range but I know not what lies beneath her habit. ■

The illustrations are taken from the Scholastic edition of *Madeline* (0 590 13337 3, £6.99 pbk).

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