BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 1997 No.104
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the children's book magazine

The Diary Of Anne Frank 50 Years On

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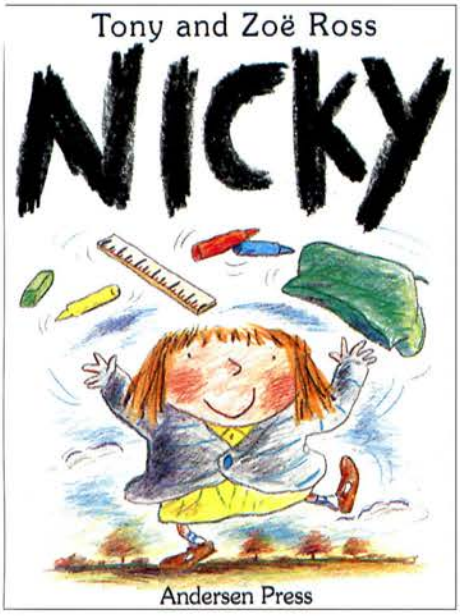

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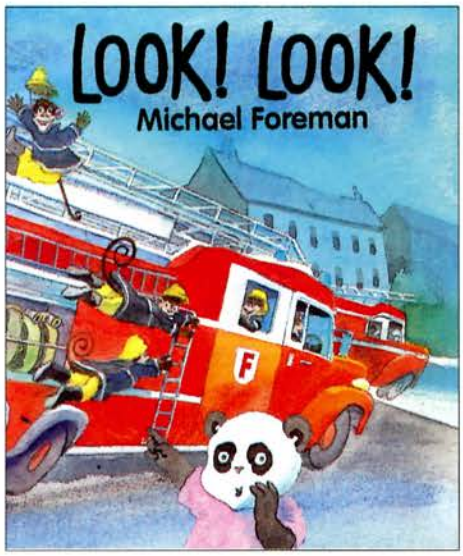

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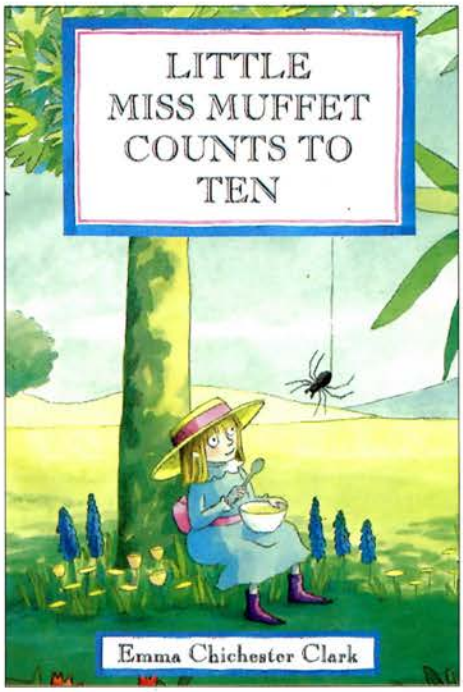

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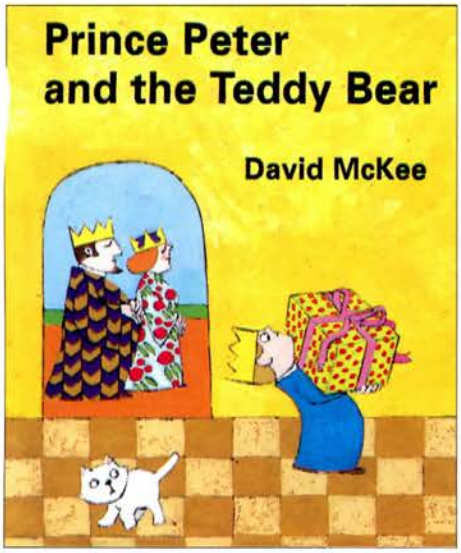

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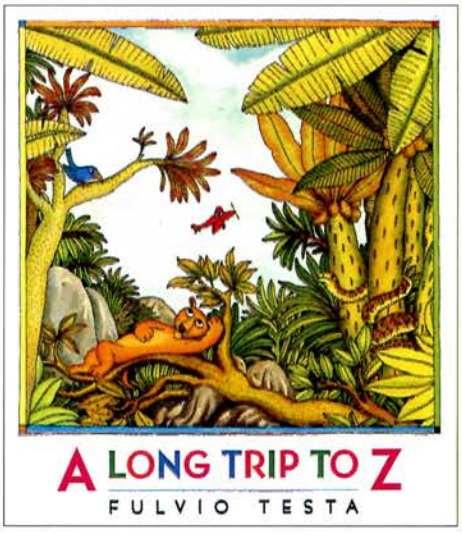

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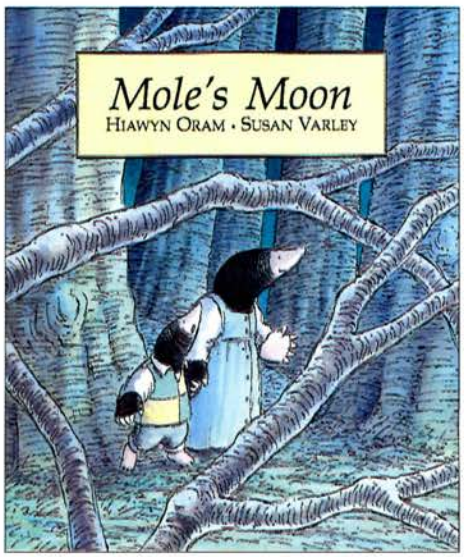

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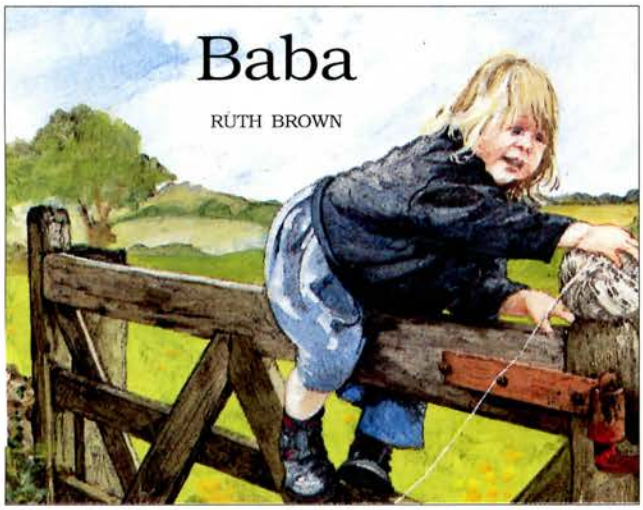

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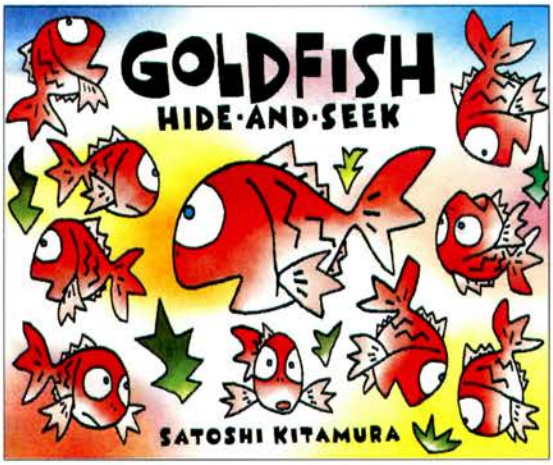

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CoverStory

This issue's cover is a photograph of Anne Frank whose diary is discussed by Michael Rosen on page 12, fifty years after its first publication. Following the arrest of the Frank family and their companions, the secret annex in Amsterdam where they had been in hiding was locked up and everybody forbidden to enter it, since Jewish possessions became Nazi property and were carted away. Before this happened, the young woman, Miep Gies, who had provided those in hiding with food and who had a second key to the annex, risked herself once more by entering it. Miep retrieved Anne's diary from the devastation together with the Frank family photograph album.

Thanks to Penguin Children's Books for their help in producing this cover.

EDITORIAL

Britain's Youth: Racist and Intolerant

Fifty years after the first publication of **The Diary of Anne Frank** in 1947 and despite successive anti-racism education and awareness campaigns, Britain has produced a generation of the most racist and most intolerant young people in Europe according to a survey by Music Television (MTV) published in February. The European Youth Survey was conducted by Scantel in October/November 1996 in face to face interviews with 1,600 16 to 24 year olds in eight European countries.

Almost 30% of young British people disagreed that all races are equal compared with 19% of young Germans, the next most intolerant group. 26% of young Britons said they would never consider dating someone of a different colour. 29% admitted to having committed an act of racism (compared with 30% of other Europeans). Less than half of young British people said they were in favour of immigration although 55% agreed that multiculturalism enhanced national culture. These figures compare unfavourably with other European countries, including those where extreme right wing factions are causing concern.

'They were different, but they got along': the two friends from Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell's outstanding picture book, **Something Else**, winner of the 1997 UNESCO Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance (see p.15).

Tens of thousands of people suffered persecution under the Nazis in prisons, labour camps and concentration camps because of their sexual orientation and yet when the survey examined attitudes to gay people, only 64% of young British people said they accepted homosexuals, compared with 89% in Holland, 88% in France, 82% in Spain, 79% in Germany and 74% in Sweden. 22% of young Britons, amongst the highest percentage in Europe, saw AIDS as a gay disease.

This issue of **BfK** commemorates and celebrates the life of Anne Frank whose diary has become one of the key texts of European literature and a symbol, as Michael Rosen puts it, of 'one of the most horrific and absurd moments in human history'. It is chilling at this time to be again confronted with what appears to be the cyclical nature of intolerance, racism and homophobia. As parents, teachers, librarians, publishers, authors and illustrators it behoves us to consider what role children's literature can play in a social climate which appears to be only too ready to ignore or deny the painful lessons of the past.

Rosemary Stones

Letterbox Library, a book club specialising in titles that promote tolerance and equality (see p.5), considers the breeding ground of intolerance and racism to be poverty and unemployment which have risen dramatically. In their view 'there is all the more need to have as a matter of course, in every school, fiction and non-fiction which mirrors – and celebrates – the diverse ethnic and cultural world within the UK.'

The Diary of Anne Frank inspired many of us to fight against racism and intolerance and it continues to inspire young readers today. In her article, Breaking Down the Barriers (see p.4), Julia Eccleshare discusses some recent titles which also enhance understanding by showing in a positive way people who live differently or who believe different things. As she says, 'Getting under someone else's skin is one of the things that diaries or fiction do best.' Teachers can not only make such titles available but play an important part in helping young readers to find ways to engage critically with what may be a contradictory consciousness between such literary experience and their cultural expectations.

It is also important, if tolerance and understanding are to be allowed to grow in our society, that the climate of ridicule and alienation that has grown up around discussion of equalities issues is challenged. When 30% of our young people do not believe in racial equality and only 64% accept homosexuality, there is no room for cynical complacency.

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BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

Since its publication in 1947, The Diary of Anne Frank has inspired generations of young people to fight against racism and intolerance. Julia Eccleshare discusses recent titles which will also inspire young readers to understand and empathise with peoples who suffer persecution or are discriminated against today.

Children are notoriously prejudiced – within their own tight school or neighbourhood community they form tiny cliques or gangs, finding against others on the grounds of style or other differences – accents, haircuts, clothes, skin colour – matters which can assume giant proportions. Children's need to disparage those who are different or part of a minority in order to be able to value themselves is a form of intolerance. Parents, teachers and others have a major role in helping children to understand and work through this stage. Humans are, after all, one race and difference is to be valued and embraced rather than feared.

Knowledge is one of the keys to understanding other people. Barriers can be broken down by showing people who live differently or who believe different things in a positive way. Getting under someone else's skin is one of the things that diaries or fiction do best.

But writing about minority groups in society is not always easy. If the issue rather than the quality of the writing becomes the sole point of the book, the reader will not be fully engaged. The lasting success of **The Diary of Anne Frank** is dependent on the quality and intelligence of Anne's writing as much as on its content and the circumstances in which it was written.

If content alone were enough, **Zlata's Diary**, ten-year-old Zlata Filipović's account of daily life in war-torn Sarajevo, would command the same responses. Like Anne, Zlata is self-absorbed and preoccupied about the effect of the war on herself and her friends. She grieves for the destruction of her childhood as much as for the large scale destruction of Sarajevo that is going on around her. Such a self-centred view is perfectly appropriate for her age (although her account lacks the warmth and charm of Anne Frank's) but the expression of it needs to be considerably more gripping. Zlata is able to describe the destructive physical manifestations of civil war but little of the emotions behind it.

The horrors of ethnic cleansing or minority persecution at a national level are even harder to tackle in fiction. Dangers of sentimentality and romanticism abound. Elizabeth Laird skilfully treads a fine line in **Kiss the Dust** which explores the plight of the Kurds. Tara and her Kurdish family live prosperously in Iraq but their apparently normal life is underpinned by danger especially as Tara's father is active in the movement for Kurdish independence. The family is forced to flee, first to the mountains and then, when that becomes too dangerous, to Iran where they are refugees. As the war between Iran and Iraq escalates they are no longer safe and must travel on to England on a one-way ticket knowing no one and with nowhere else to go. Though at times Laird comes close to presenting an action adventure, she pushes her story on so that it becomes a book about tolerance and compassion rather than merely a drama.

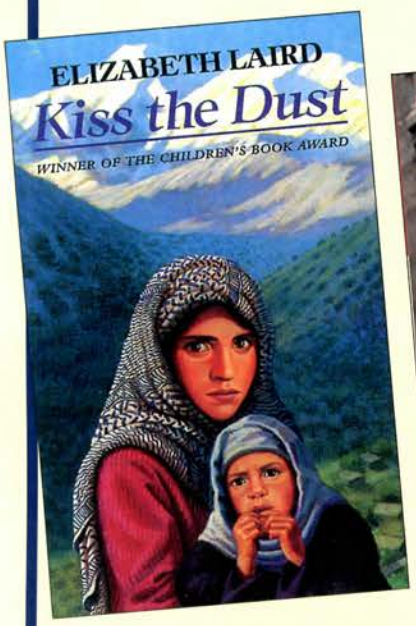
One of the strengths of **Kiss the Dust** lies in the insight that it gives young British readers into the former lives of those who become refugees here. Refugees are usually at the margins of the society they move to but this is not necessarily a reflection of the lives or status they once enjoyed.

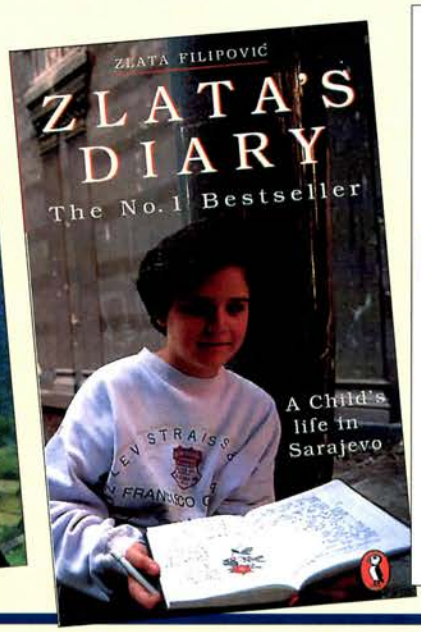
Of less enormity but of no less importance is an understanding of and tolerance towards those who are dispossessed within our own society. The upsurge of social realism in books for children has dealt increasingly with such issues. Jacqueline Wilson's **The Bed and Breakfast Star** gives insights into families surviving homelessness and the breakdown of security within contemporary Britain. Beverley Naidoo's **No Turning Back** presents a bleak picture of homeless children, post apartheid, struggling to survive on the streets of Johannesburg. By using individual accounts as the basis for good fiction, both novels weave stories around an issue, helping readers to see these disadvantaged groups as people, not merely sectors of society.

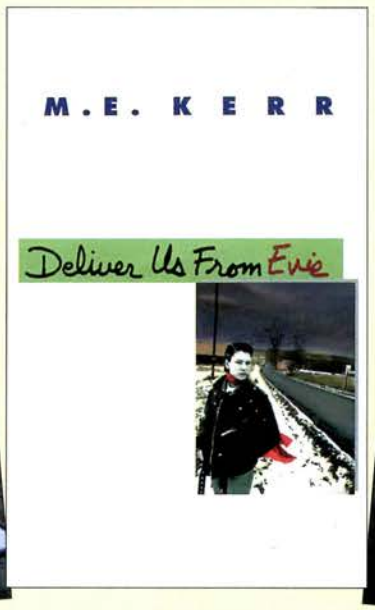
Anne Frank Day

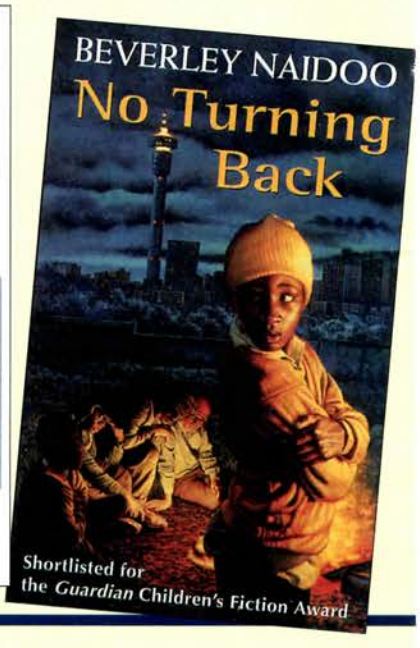
12 June 1997

The Anne Frank Educational Trust, a multi-faith educational charity, has as its aim to carry out Otto Frank's wish that his daughter's diary be used as a general force for good by helping to educate against racism and all forms of prejudice. An information pack containing special assemblies for Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4, classroom activities across the curriculum for all four Key Stages and a full list of learning resources is available from The Anne Frank Educational Trust, P.O. Box 11880, London N6 4LN (tel: 0181 340 9077, fax: 0181 340 9088), price £7.50 inc. postage and packing. Make cheques payable to The Anne Frank Educational Trust.









Not that individuals are immune from persecution. For adolescents, ignorance about the nature of sexuality and anxiety about their own sexual identity can give rise to an intolerant fear of homosexuality. To date there have been few teen novels which tackle homophobia. Bucking the usual trend of boy meets girl, M E Kerr's **Deliver Us From Evie** is sheer delight. Set in a small farming community in Mississippi, it is the story of two girls falling in love and how their community reacts to it. Kerr tackles all the issues of stereotyping head on. Father's disbelief, mother's sorrow, self appointed boyfriend's derision, brother's despair for personal and domestic reasons – through all of these **Deliver Us From Evie** shows how hostile the response to something so apparently threatening can be. As Evie and Patty win through, it also shows that courage and the conviction to stand by their feelings despite what others think, can change attitudes and encourage tolerance to grow.

Harnessing that courage and conviction into fiction can play a significant part in helping our children to be more open-minded and informed about persecuted minorities the world over. It can also help our minority children to know that there are stories in which they are well represented. ■

Julia Eccleshare is a critic, author and broadcaster on children's books.

Zlata's Diary, Zlata Filipović, Puffin, 0 14 037463 9, £3.99 pbk
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Deliver Us From Evie, M E Kerr, Viking, 0 670 86570 2, £8.99

CELEBRATING EQUALITY AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

This autumn, Letterbox Library, a book club offering a range of books for children of all ages which gives opportunities 'to gain in the appreciation and understanding of themselves and the world', celebrates its 14th year as a supplier. B/K went to meet them.

Letterbox Library came into being when two single mothers started to search for books for their children which would accurately reflect the inner city neighbourhood where they lived – and which would give their young daughters images of enterprising and powerful women and girls. Convinced that others had the same needs, they started a book club, producing a quarterly catalogue and newsletters.

Now 11 women are employed part-time at Letterbox's office in Hackney, London – and another 7 women work part-time from home to take the books to schools and nurseries in cities – and rural areas – throughout the UK. The London office is open to visitors and is a popular place to come and browse through a huge selection of books, all of them chosen for the quality of the pictures and text as well as the messages they carry.

The range of books itself has grown dramatically. Letterbox workers pride themselves on a careful selection process whereby every book in the catalogue has been reviewed by teachers, librarians and parents. The books are selected from all those published in the UK, plus many from abroad, and then sold at discounted prices. Books which preach are rejected – finding books which children will enjoy is essential. Letterbox's selection of books has also changed over the last 14 years. Far more books featuring Black children are carried now – but many have to be specially imported from the USA and Canada. They would like to see more books published here reflecting different ethnic groups, in particular Turkish and Asian children (the best-selling paperback **Lights for Gita** has to be imported from Toronto!).

A recent innovation has been a special issue focusing on books on a particular theme: their January catalogue gathered together a selection of books featuring disabled children and parents, others have focused on history, personal safety and, currently, their Spring issue promotes 'green' books for all ages.

Since Letterbox's beginnings there has been the introduction of the National Curriculum coupled with savage cuts to school and library budgets and a gradual dismantling of the network of school library services. In the 70s there was an awareness, often encouraged by education authority advisers working on issues of equal opportunity, of the need to have positive images of children from different cultures and to challenge stereotypes in the children's literature being produced.

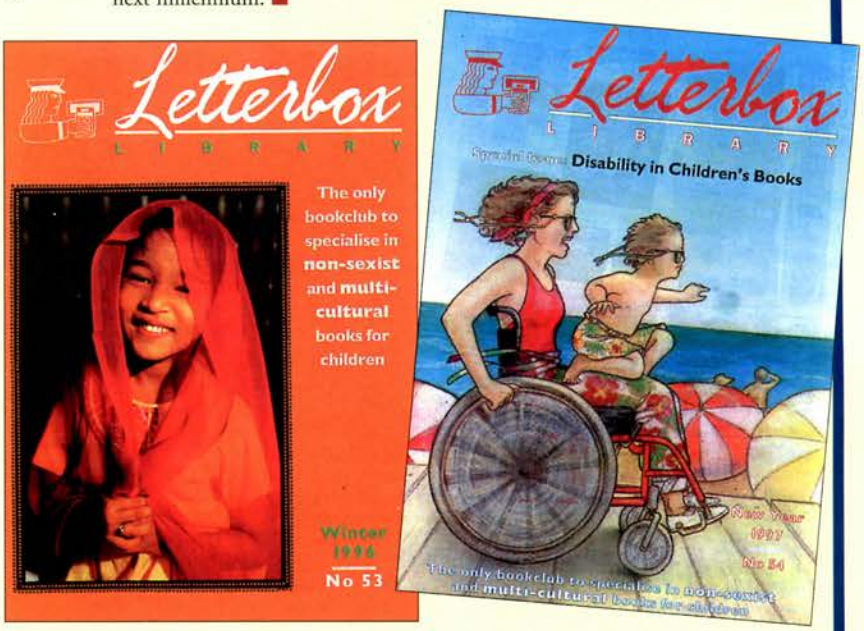
The political climate now is radically different but the need is as great as ever. Recent surveys point to a rise in racist attitudes among young people. Its breeding ground, poverty and unemployment, has risen dramatically. There is all the more need to have as a matter of course, in every school, fiction and non-fiction which mirrors – and celebrates – the diverse ethnic and cultural world within the UK.

Increasingly, however, there is an attitude abroad typified by two Primary Postholders, who shall remain anonymous, from Inner London schools: 'We won't be needing any of that sort of book this year' and 'Well, I suppose those books might be good for issues'. It is an approach, no doubt born of exhaustion, say Letterbox, that fails to recognise that even within the confines of the National Curriculum, there is plenty of scope to use their picture books in all subject areas. Their simple biographies of Black leaders and stories of grandparents are ideal, for example, for Key Stage One History.

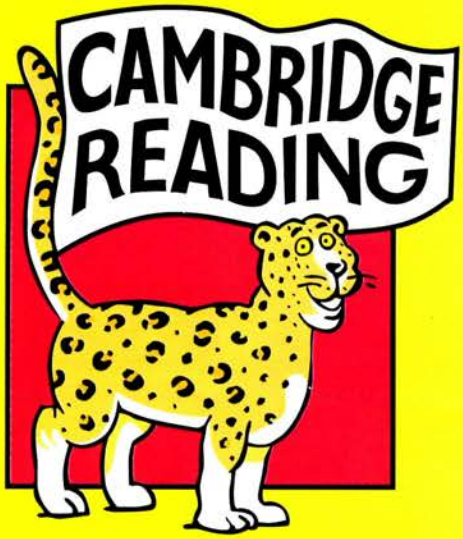
In the English Curriculum, 'texts from other cultures and traditions' are a key element in book provision. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority report, 'One week in March: a survey of the literature pupils read' published in December 1995, found that teachers are not resourcing this area of literature because books 'are not readily available, or because they were thought to be too difficult or unknown to educators'. Clearly Letterbox, with its huge tried and tested range of fiction and poetry from other cultures, has a crucial role to fulfil in making it easy for teachers to find the titles they need.

Letterbox remains firmly optimistic that the climate will change. They have found a growing interest amongst Social Services Departments, nurseries and playgroups, particularly since the passing of the Children Act, which put appropriate resources on the agenda for under-8s. Groups of nursery nurses and trainee teachers are often brought by their tutors to have a brief talk and look at the books. The response is always enthusiastic. Comments such as 'I never knew that such fantastic books existed' are common – and tutors report that one visit does far more to raise awareness and enthusiasm amongst their students than any number of sessions at college.

One last hurdle that has to be overcome is the view that books of the kind that Letterbox supplies are a luxury. Teaching our children to respect each other, widening horizons and creating global citizens is exactly what is needed for the next millennium. ■



Letterbox Library's address is 2nd Floor, Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London N1 3QP (telephone: 0171 226 1633).



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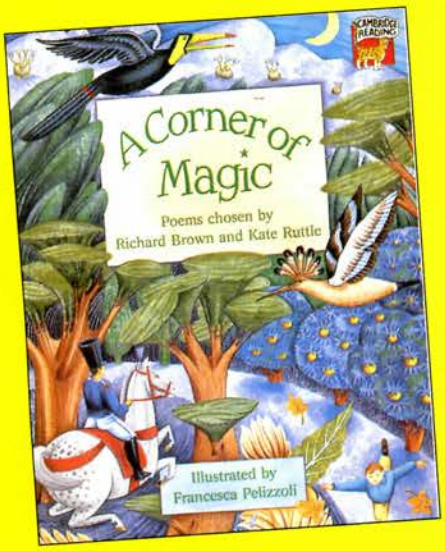

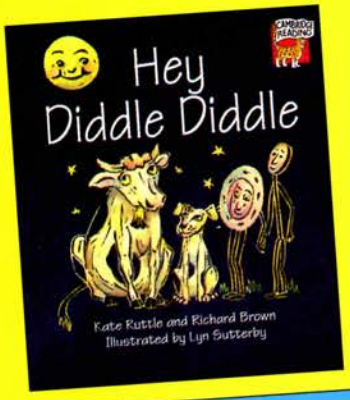

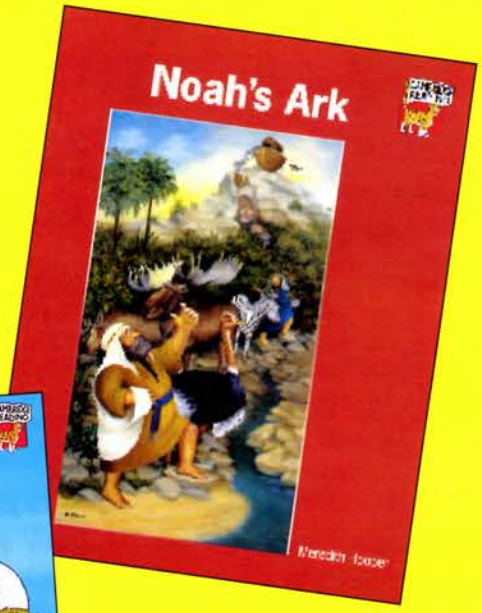

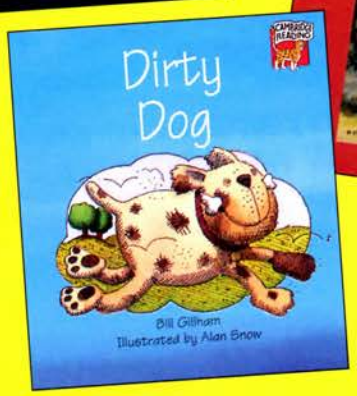

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DOE-EYED AND FLUFFY

Establishing a new mass market series is a gamble. The formula has to be right and investment in enough titles to make an impact is imperative. Without W H Smith, forget it. **Animal Ark** has jumped these hurdles. **Stephanie Nettell** investigates.

It must be something in the air. Blair-air? Family values, self-discipline, good manners, kind to animals … Adults who have been wringing their hands over the Scylla and Charybdis of pre-teen tastes – either shocks, horror and violent death or mind-numbingly repetitive romance – can instead put them together in thankful prayer.

Animal Ark, the runaway series that passed its first million sales in mid-January, is so timelessly decent it echoes the childhood reading of 80-year-olds. What is more, it is British to the core (though the core himself, Ben Baglio of Working Partners who created the series, happens to be American). For once, it is we who are exporting a craze, defiantly unadapted, to the rest of the world – even to America itself.

The series' 13-year-old heroine, Mandy Hope, is an aspirational figure for her primary school readers, the adopted daughter of two vets who run the Animal Ark in a Yorkshire moorland village – shorthand for Herriot, fresh country air, and a close-bonded community. Bright and independent, Mandy is awesomely knowledgeable and even bossy, while being moved to tears by any animal in trouble. She rises early to shower and do her chores for the practice's recuperating animals, does her homework without prompting, pops in to her loving grandparents, is agreeable to grown-ups, including her overworked but relentlessly cheerful parents, learns to understand people's feelings as well as animals', trusts her instincts over breath-holding risks, and invariably saves the day (as well as an animal) from some tragic end – well, even her creators are about to inject some mild disobedience. But kids love her. They *want* her to be like that; they only wish they, too, could be that good.

The set-up is also attractively, and unobtrusively, p.c. Tousled, bespectacled James shares Mandy's passion for animals, and plays a useful role in all the action, but is in the class below her and is very much her side-kick (although he will have a bigger say in future stories set in Africa), while Gary gets the subordinate role in the stories set in Australia; Mandy's mother is a skilled professional who manages a home and a job on an equal footing with her husband, who makes dinner when she is weary; her grandparents, recently retired, are realistically fit and active.

The television adaptation, currently in production, will nudge correctness one stage on by melding Jean, the Ark's receptionist, and Simon, the nurse, into one young black man, albeit something of a heart-throb. Filming has begun, fittingly by the company who made the Famous Five series, and will be shown by ITV in September. To hook boy viewers James has been beefed up into a stronger, more comic figure, but the books' readership splits into a surprisingly healthy female/male ratio of 70:30, despite their emphasis on the doe-eyed and fluffy.

The choice of creatures was crucial. The early covers erred by putting Mandy herself to the fore, before settling on the appealing single-animal portrait by a specialist artist that now identifies the whole series – and leads naturally to pin-up posters, greetings cards and an almost limitless range of merchandise. The balance tilts to furry animals, preferably babies, never frighteningly big but not *too* small (there is a limit to how much suspense a hamster can inspire, although **Hamster in the Hamper** is a respectable seventh in their sales chart, **Kittens in the Kitchen** being first with 84,000); few birds, certainly not fierce-looking ones, and, so far, definitely no reptiles. Favourites, especially pets like kittens, are repeated, and a few wild animals turn up, while decamping the Hopes to Australia (koalas, kangaroos), Africa (lion cubs, baby elephants) and, soon, Florida widens the scope dramatically. The title formula (mostly the **Bunnies in the Bathroom/Shetland in the Shed** line but straying recklessly into **Goose on the Loose**) might seem restricting, but the 70 fan letters a week (mustered on a database and sent a Newsletter in return) contribute a welter of suggestions.

Not that Ben Baglio, the Ark's Noah, is ever short of ideas. Having worked in New York with Francine Pascal on **Sweet Valley High** from its inception 15 years ago, he knows what makes an instant phenomenon. He has been in Britain ten years, working on early readers with Ladybird for four of them. But Ben missed series fiction, and, wanting to set up his own, he produced **The Mystery Club** for Hodder (an 18-title series that went to eight countries, outselling even **Goosebumps** in Sweden, and gave birth to **The Mystery Kids**), which led to Hodder asking him to come up with another idea – two months later **Animal Ark** had shaped up and Hodder were trusting him to choose its writers. March 1994 saw the first title: no. 35 comes out in 1998, making 42 books in total already committed, including four Summer and Winter Specials.

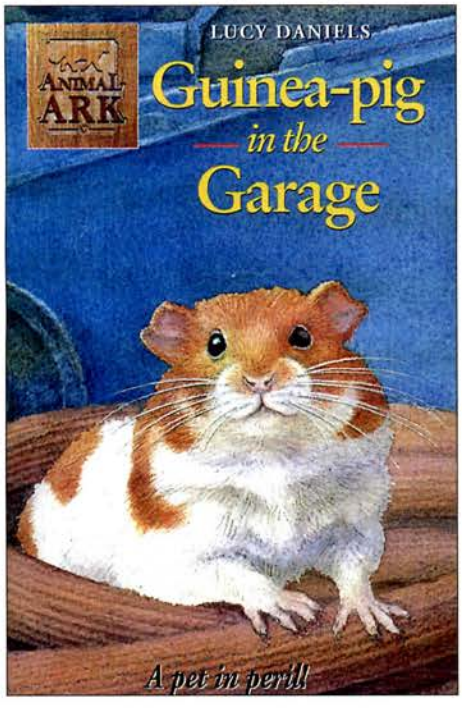
'Lucy Daniels' takes the credit and the fan mail, but, like 'Carolyn Keene' of **Nancy Drew** fame, she is in fact a team, mostly women, some of them established writers offered the chance to write more than in a normal publishing career, others, like one demoralised teacher, given a safety net to write full-time. They are paid on a royalty basis and kept in touch with every move, earning their loyalty and participation; in return they write literate and humane stories in a conventional but unclichéd style that neither sparkles nor grates, managing remarkably gracefully to weave in animal facts (the RSPCA has joined in major promotions) with a thread of human psychology.

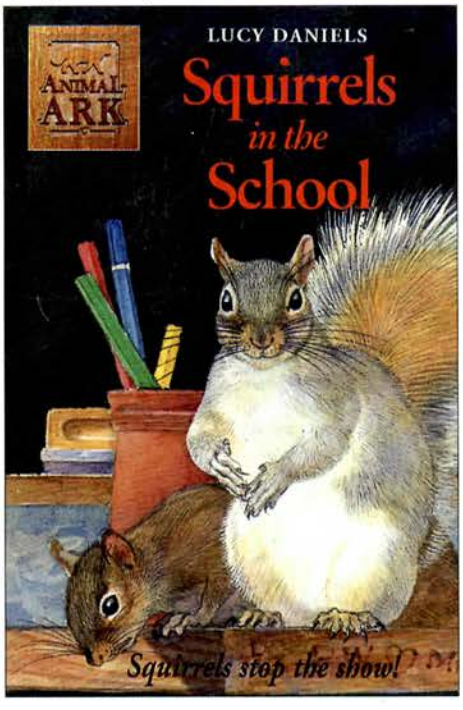
Working Partners is now three strong: Baglio, still the editorial creator who suggests plots and characters, Rod Ritchie, formerly with Hodder's sales and marketing department, and John McLay, with a background at Waterstone's and the Puffin Club. Ark's success has already bred an offspring for under-eights, **Animal Ark Pets**, and, looking ahead, Baglio dreams of sending Mandy and James to vet college 'with romance not out of the question'.

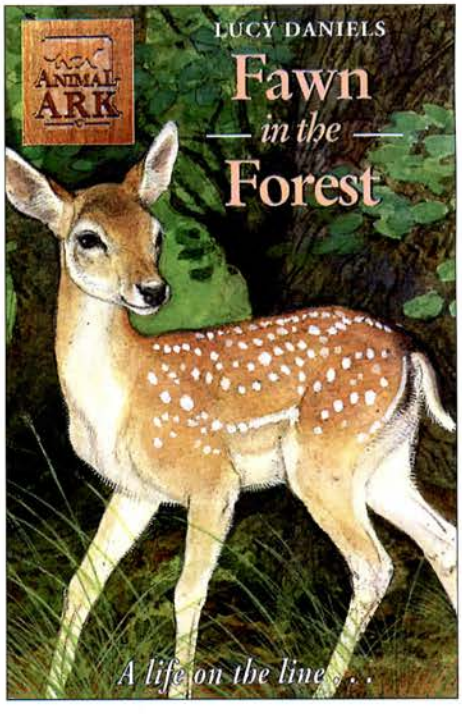
These books' curiously timeless air ('the trick is to avoid its being a fashionable craze') makes plans for six years hence seem almost obvious. BSE is too strong and topical a theme for the Ark's vets, so surely it is just coincidence that a higher percentage of under-11s than ever before are turning vegetarian like Mandy – but, then again, this series may prove more than a good marketing story. ■

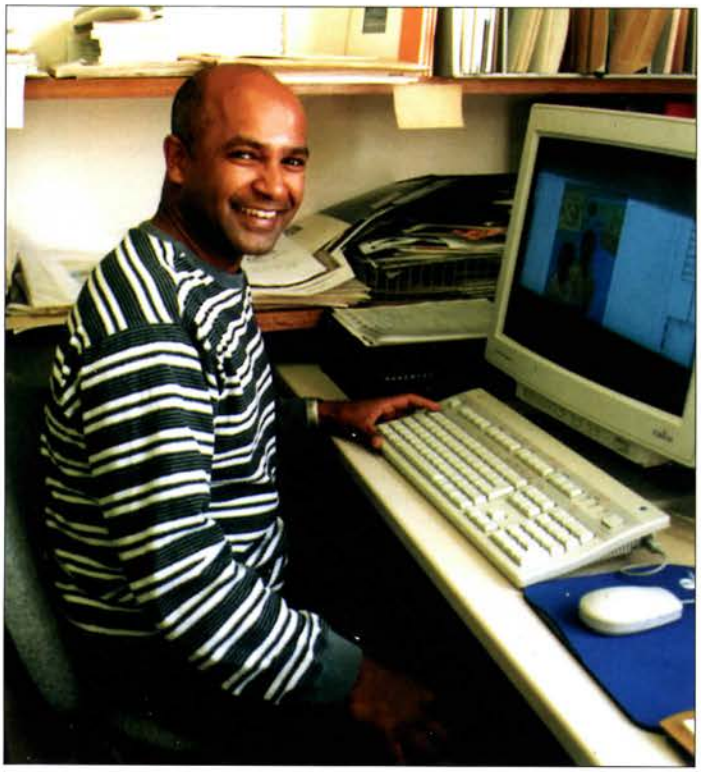
Stephanie Nettell is a critic, author and journalist on children's books.

Animal Ark is published by Hodder Children's Books.









Ken de Silva at Macmillan Children's Books.

Publishing Profiles No.3: The Designer

In the early days of book publishing, the writer wrote the words and the printer printed and sold the books. The printer took on the role of book designer, too, deciding on the type style and organising the page layout. These days that task is in the hands of professional book designers who fulfil a crucial role in the creation of a book, and nowhere more importantly than in the field of children's books.

Liz Attenborough investigates.

To find out what life is like in a busy children's book design department, I talked to Ken de Silva, the Senior Designer of children's books at Macmillan.

Getting Started

Ken started his working life as a tax collector, but says, 'I thought there might be more to life than that.' His cousin was a book designer in a publishing company, and what Ken saw of his cousin's work encouraged him to do a two-year HND Design course. On completing his studies Ken started as a freelance, working on anything that came his way through a number of design studios and advertising agencies, and some publishing companies. Through his freelance work he was offered a temporary design job at Penguin Books. 'I was called in to help with a panic in preparation for a sales conference, and stayed on afterwards as a permanent member of the design team,' Ken remembers. 'I worked on both adult and children's books, on fiction and non-fiction, and dealt with both the covers and the insides. But when the design department split, I was happy to stay with children's books.'

Ken soon found himself working on texts for novels, page layouts for poetry collections and anthologies, large format picture books and early reading books, and covers for both hardbacks and paperbacks. Early in 1995 he moved to Macmillan to work in a smaller department (four people) on fewer books (around 65 new hardbacks and 135 new paperbacks each year) but with the added interest of novelty books and full-colour non-fiction to work on.

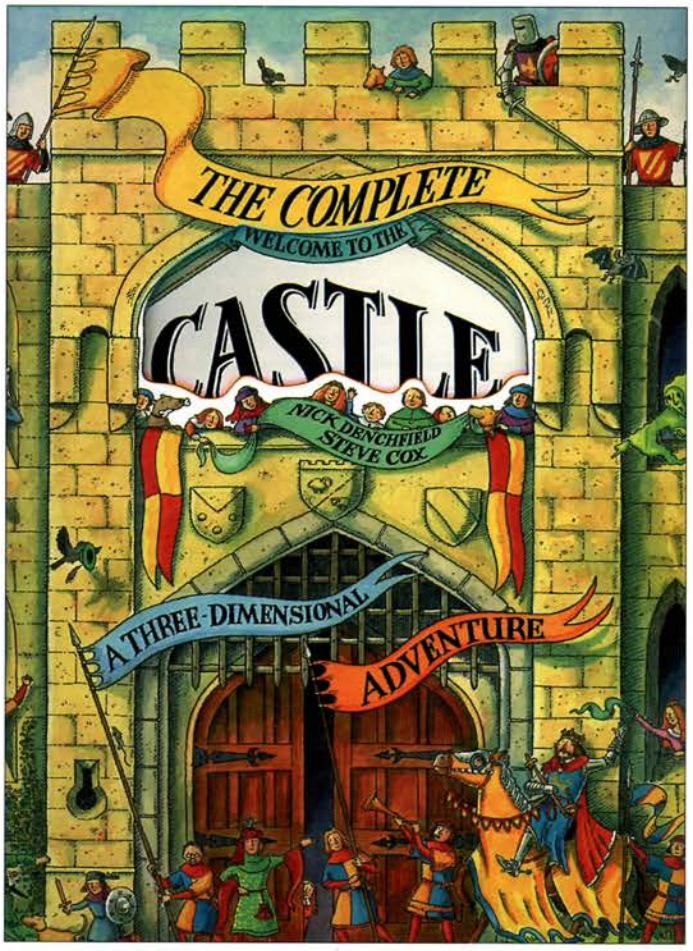
Who Decides?

'The editorial and the design departments work together to decide on the artists they want for particular books,' says Ken. 'I might see three or four portfolios a week from new artists who get in touch, plus there are a number of artists' agents who come in regularly. And of course I have worked with a large number of artists over the years, and like to use the good ones again. I need to have a range of artists to consider for each new project.' Ken gets a detailed brief about a new book from the editor, and will then take samples of the work of the artist he thinks most suitable to a joint editorial/design meeting. 'As well as thinking which artist will best suit the text we have to bear in mind the market to which the book is expected to appeal.'

But decisions are not just about which illustrator to use. 'It's a balancing act,' says Ken. 'We have to bear in mind the age of the intended reader which will have a bearing on the size of type we should be using, but sometimes that is constrained by the number of pages we need to work to in order to keep the costs down. I have to discuss the options with the editor, as there is often a conflict between the length of the text and the desire for a large, clear typeface. The text might need cutting, or we will have to use fewer illustrations than we would like.'

Which Artist to Use?

As well as the artists that come to see Ken, he also visits end of year art college shows. 'It is important to see artists' portfolios, particularly college graduates. Sometimes you recognise a "raw talent" and have the chance to get them on the first rung of the ladder with a commission for a first printed work. It can be extremely satisfying later to see how these



Cover illustration by Steve Cox from **The Complete Castle** with its brilliant paper engineering.

artists have developed and become successes.' A children's design department needs to have contact with artists who can do work that is almost photographic in its realism, as well as artists who can come up with an imaginative response to match, say, a work of fantasy. They also need to have a good range of illustrators who can stylishly illustrate fiction texts with lively line drawings. They keep an eye on what other publishers are doing too as design is in constant change, with styles of typography and illustration coming in and out of vogue.

Interaction with Other Departments

Within the company Ken and his fellow designers' most crucial liaison is with the editors. 'But also as a team it is important that we liaise with our marketing and sales colleagues who have the advantage of dealing directly with our customers and can give valuable feedback as to how our design ideas are being received,' says Ken. Designers also spend a great deal of time talking to the illustrators they have commissioned, discussing the detail of what is required, negotiating a fee for the work (which can sometimes be a one-off sum, or sometimes a royalty per copy sold), and crucially, trying to get the illustrator to stick to the required schedule. 'For picture books a key response comes from the Book Fairs in Bologna and Frankfurt where early samples are shown (in the hope of attracting co-edition partners), so we have to take the views of potential overseas co-publishers into account too. Everybody has an opinion about covers, but they don't always have the same opinion!' Has Ken ever had to go with a cover that would not have been his choice but was thought to be better from a sales point of view? 'Certainly I've had to compromise with ideas, because I have to accept that as publishers, the end result we all want is to sell the books. But it is nice to sometimes break free from traditional designs associated with particular genres and go with something innovative, and find that it worked.'

Easy on the Design

Is good design appreciated? 'People generally aren't aware of the typographic subtleties involved in design, which I think are as important to the look of a book as the choice of illustrator. Ideally a design should complement and enhance a book's illustrations and not overpower them. But I would also contend that design and typography are art forms in themselves and can be appreciated as such.'

New Technology

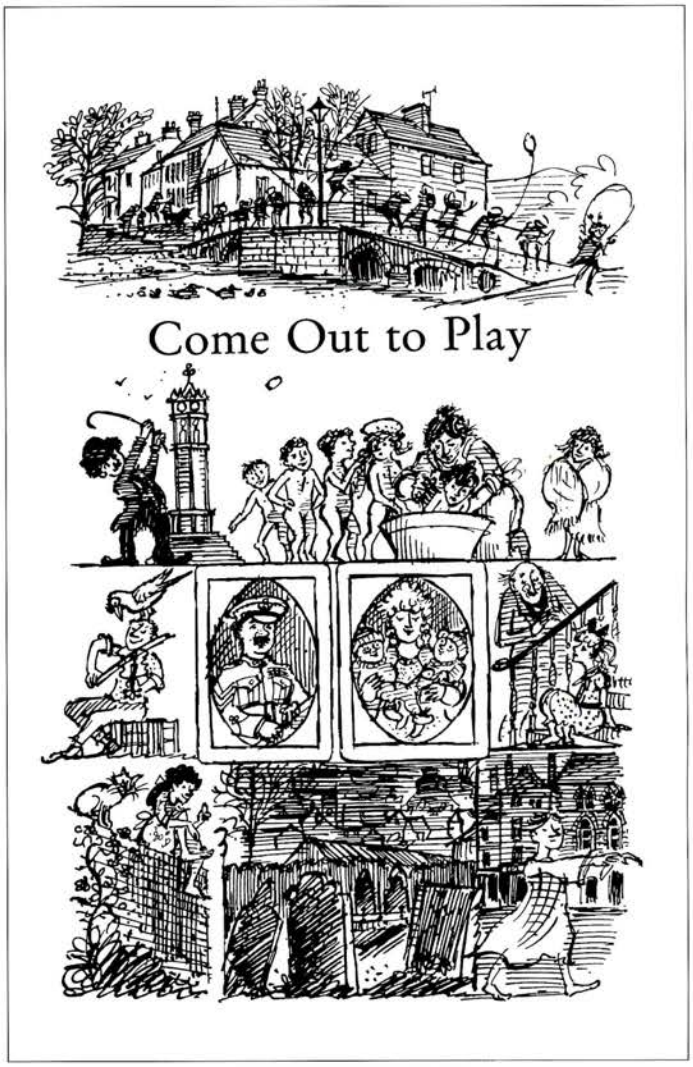
I asked Ken how much things had progressed on the technological front since he did his training twelve years ago. Was he designing with computers then? 'When I started at Penguin we were using scalpels and Cow Gum glue, cutting up bits of type and photocopies of illustrations and making up the page by sticking them down and seeing how it looked. We didn't have colour xeroxes, let alone computers to work on. Publishers started using computers at the end of the 80s. We've all pretty much learned how to use the new technology on the job, and the technology since the early days has changed beyond recognition. When we first started designing on computers it was thought that it would be detrimental to creativity. The programs were fairly basic at the beginning, so there might have been a grain of truth in that then. As the technology increased in sophistication, it freed up our creativity. The design programs we currently use in Macmillan are the most up to date possible, and encourage our creativity to the maximum.' Now Ken cannot imagine designing without using a computer. 'It has changed the way we think about design, about what's possible. We can be illustrative with our use of type, and the speed at which we can try things out is amazing. The job has changed, too, in that we are now doing more of the technical preparation for printing on computer that a printer once did. We can send complete cover art and type electronically down an ISDN line direct into the printer's machine, so we have to be very accurate in what we're supplying.'

How Does it Work?

'Illustrations are scanned electronically so that we can work with the digitized image on our computer screens. We then design on screen using a specific design program, setting the layout of the cover or the pages of the book, and styling the typographic elements to the design. As we are working on computer, we can – if we need to – manipulate images (both illustrative and photographic). For instance, we can change the colours or superimpose one image on to another. We can also manipulate type, stretching or skewing it into different shapes; we can create glowing effects, and much more besides!'

The Future?

So with all this technological capability, where images can be changed on screen and colours altered, how do we know what the illustrator has done and what has been done by the designer and a machine? Ken agrees that the edges could get blurred, but he does not think the range of illustration styles available from artists would ever mean that in-house designers could replace illustrators' work. 'I'm not an illustrator myself, but I'm full of admiration for the creativity of the people I'm lucky enough to work with.'



One of the John Lawrence illustrations to Charles Causley's **Collected Poems for Children** which was 'beautifully produced' and 'well received'.

Proud Projects

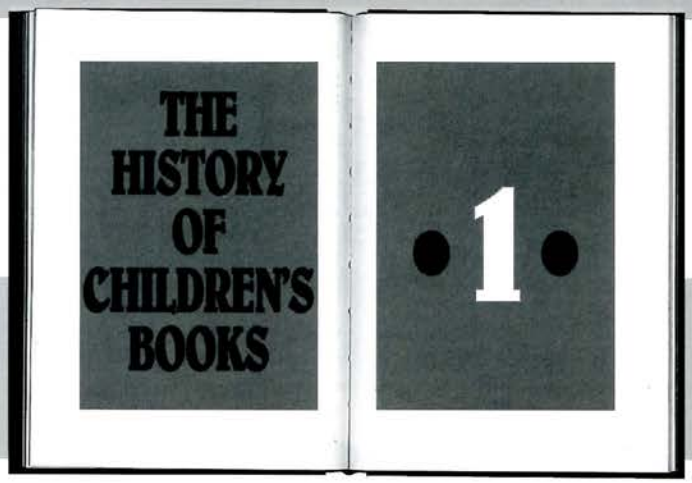
Are there any books Ken has worked on that he is particularly proud of? 'I've worked on a very wide range of books, but **Collected Poems for Children** by Charles Causley with illustrations by John Lawrence, is a beautifully produced book and was very well received, so with hindsight that makes an enjoyable book particularly pleasurable. And the success of the brilliantly paper engineered **The Complete Castle** (by Nick Denchfield and illustrated by Steve Cox) would put it high on the list. Most recently the work I've done on a highly illustrated book of proverbs, **Strange and Familiar Proverbs from Far and Wide** (to be published in October 1997), where I've worked closely with the illustrator Axel Scheffler and the editor Celia Holman has been very enjoyable, and I hope the book will be a big success.'

Best Bits

'I haven't really got a best bit to my job – it's all good, and the variety is exciting. Every project is different.' ■

Liz Attenborough was formerly Children's Publisher at Penguin Books. She now works as a children's book consultant.

Publishing Profiles No. 4
will go behind the scenes in the Sales Department.



How Children's Books Began

Children have not always been seen as a separate readership from adults. Why and how did a literature for children come into being? In the first of a new series on the history of children's books, writer and critic **John Rowe Townsend** explains.

The history of children's books is quite a short one. Books themselves only go back a few thousand years. Printed books go back a few hundreds. Books intended specially for children to enjoy go back about 250. In relation to the length of time that humanity has been on the earth it is the blinking of an eye.

But the story of story itself goes back beyond history into the farthest mists of time. It is hard even to imagine an age when people did not tell stories to each other. The greatest ancient myths were attempts to explain the world by means of story: who made it, out of what, and why; how life started, how humankind arrived on the scene, how events are ordained and by what powers. And it could be said that story is still a means, and an important one, by which we try to understand the world.

Eighteenth-century chapbook illustration of **Sir Bevis of Hampton**.

The Greeks and Romans from whom our civilisation regards itself as descending (though actually it is more complicated than that) saw children as small men and women to be trained for adult life rather than as creatures with their own special needs and interests. Plato, in his **Republic**, put forward some new ideas. He suggested for instance that children's lessons should 'take the form of play'. (He also thought that women should have an equal right of entry to the class of Rulers who were to control society.) But in general his blueprint was for an authoritarian, almost a fascist state.

Plato would have censored art and literature, and kept away from children the great body of Greek myth and legend, on the ground that it brought gods and heroes into disrepute. That same body of myth and legend has been repeatedly raided in later times on behalf of children, but it was not designed for them. There is nothing in classical literature that could be called a children's book in the modern sense. (Aesop's fables were traditional tales from various sources; it is doubtful whether Aesop himself ever existed.)

Britain was a backwater in classical times, and its natives seen as outlandish. The enlightened Roman governor Agricola, in the first century A.D., nevertheless thought highly of 'the untutored Britons', and took steps to 'educate the sons of leading men in the liberal arts'. This meant education in Latin, and in the dark ages that followed the Roman withdrawal Latin remained the foundation of such learning as survived. Its refuges were the monasteries.

By the time of Alfred the Great, in the ninth century, the whole system was in decay. Alfred, our first great force in education, thought it was time children were taught in English, and set up a school in which 'almost all the children of noble birth in the whole country, and even many of humbler birth' learned to read and write in both languages. But for many centuries the literate were a small minority, and the ladder of learning led into the Church.

Chapbook illustration of **Sir Richard Whittington**.

Before the introduction of printing, books were rare and precious, and to produce them for the amusement of children would have been an economic as well as a cultural impossibility. The poor scholar of Oxford who figures in Chaucer's **Canterbury Tales** was notable for having at his bed's head, in spite of his poverty, 'full twenty bookës, clad in black or red, of Aristotle and his philosophy'. That was riches, and it was serious stuff. I do not know of anything surviving from the age of manuscript that could be called a children's story, though there was a good deal of instructional and admonitory material meant for children.

Printing changed everything. The first book that William Caxton produced in 1474 was the **Histories of Trove**, and he followed it with (among others) the **Fables of Aesop**, **Reynard the Fox**, and the **Morte Darthur**. The way was open for the production and sale in quantity of all sorts of popular literature: medieval romances, tales of Robin Hood, traditional stories such as those of Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton and many more. None of this was intended specially for children, and the idea of a story meant only for them would still have been a strange one. A tale was for all.

Writers on education, in Caxton's day and for long after, were inclined to think that stories were actually bad for children. Hugh Rhodes, in a well-known passage in his **Book of Nurture** (1554), wanted children to be kept

from reading 'feigned fables, vain fantasies, and wanton stories and songs of love, which bring much mischief to youth'. And the material which, for two and a half centuries after Caxton, children were meant by their elders and betters to read was far from being entertaining.

First, there were schoolbooks, beginning with primers and ABCs in various forms, intended to lead on to the reading of the Bible and, for the more advanced scholars, large doses of Latin. There were 'courtesy books', which taught children how to behave, and numerous books of moral exhortation from father to son and mother to daughter. And in the seventeenth century, there were the notorious 'good godly books' of the Puritans, praising pious children who died young in a rapture of prayer and threatening the less virtuous with everlasting fire. **A Looking-Glass for Children**, published in the 1670s, contains a verse warning from one Abraham Cheare in the person of a young girl tempted to the sin of vanity:

What pity such a pretty maid
As I should go to hell!

Little Goody Two Shoes.

THE
HISTORY
OF
Little Goody Two-Shoes;
Otherwife called,
Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes.
WITH
The Means by which ſhe acquired her Learning and Wiſdom, and in conſequence thereof her Eſtate; ſet forth at large for the Benefit of thoſe,
Who from a State of Rags and Care,
And having Shoes but half a Pair;
Their Perſons and their Fame would fix,
And gallop to a Coach and Six.
See the Original Manuſcript in the *Vatican* at *Rome*, and the Cuts by *Michael Angelo*. Illuſtrated with the Comments of our great modern Critics.
The THIRD EDITION.
LONDON:
Printed for J. NEWBERY, at the *Bible* and *Sun* in St. *Paul's-Church-Yard*, 1766.
[Price Six-pence.]

The change came in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the belief that children were steeped in original sin, which must be beaten out of them, gave ground to the image of the empty page, on which the right messages could be written. The credit for this new approach is usually given to the philosopher John Locke, whose hugely influential treatise, **Some Thoughts Concerning Education**, was published in 1693; but in fact his ideas had already been in the air for some time.

Robinson Crusoe

According to one modern writer, Penelope Mortimer, Locke 'invented the child'. He suggested that children could be persuaded to 'play themselves into what others are whipped for'. And he thought a child that learned to read should be given 'some easy pleasant book' which would reward it for its trouble without filling its head with 'useless trumpery'. But he found nothing suitable for the purpose except **Aesop** and **Reynard the Fox**, both of which had been put into print by Caxton two hundred years earlier.

There was a vacancy here. In Locke's own day and soon after it, sporadic efforts were made to produce books that would educate by means of play. But it took a commercial genius to exploit the possibilities. This was John Newbery, a London bookseller and publisher who was also a purveyor of quack remedies. The medicines made Newbery rich, but the books were his justification. He was an admirer of Locke, who is referred to as 'the great Mr Locke' in the foreword to Newbery's first publication for children, **A Little Pretty Pocket-Book**, 'intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly'. This appeared in 1744 and was a collection of rhymes about children's games, illustrated with primitive woodcuts.

Newbery continued until his death in 1767 to bring out attractive pocket-sized books for children. They sold in their thousands and were remembered affectionately by literary figures of the next two generations. The best known title is **Little Goody Two-Shoes**, which Newbery published in 1765 and proclaimed with superb cheek to have been printed from 'the Original Manuscript in the Vatican at Rome, with Cuts by Michael Angelo'. Newbery's books had no apparent authors, and he may well have written them himself. Dr Johnson said that 'Newbery is an extraordinary man, for I know not whether he has read or written most books.' He was also a great innovator in marketing techniques: **Nurse Truelove's New Year Gift** was to be 'given gratis to all little Boys and Girls, they paying for the Binding, which is only Two Pence each book'.

The Newbery books are important in the history of publishing for children, but their literary quality was almost zero. Alongside them, for newly literate adults and children alike, circulated the chapbooks: little, crudely-printed booklets sold for a penny or two and containing all kinds of popular and traditional material. These had if anything even less literary merit. The books that were to have continuing influence and to inspire writing for children as well as for adults were three masterpieces of general literature: John Bunyan's **The Pilgrim's Progress** (1678), Daniel Defoe's **Robinson Crusoe** (1719) and Jonathan Swift's **Gulliver's Travels** (1726). Their themes – the perilous quest, the desert island, the miniature or giant world – have been and still are in constant service.

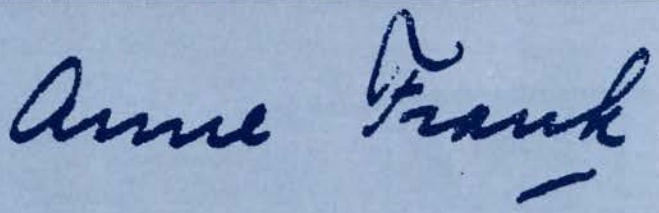
Two Children of the Wood

But to well-meaning adults of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the child as a consumer of literature was seen as a receptacle for information and instruction. Newbery's imitators and successors, lacking his innovatory spark, produced increasingly dreary and admonitory stuff. It took another sea-change of attitudes to bring into being a literature designed for children's pleasure and inspired by energy and imagination. ■

John Rowe Townsend has been writing, and writing about, books for children and young people for many years. Three of his books – Gumble's Yard, The Intruder and Noah's Castle – have been serialised on television. His history of English-language children's literature, Written for Children, published by The Bodley Head at £9.99, is in its sixth and, he says, final edition.

From Morals to Magic: in the next article in this series, John Rowe Townsend takes the story of children's books into the Victorian age.

Authorgraph No.104



'It's an odd idea for someone like me to keep a diary; not only because I have never done so before, but because it seems to me that neither I – nor for that matter anyone else – will be interested in the unbosomings of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl.'

Anne Frank wrote this on 20 June 1942, eight days after beginning what has become one of the world's best known, best-selling books. So she was wrong. Millions of people have been interested in her unbosomings. But this is a fact that is hard to celebrate, for Anne Frank's writing grips us for reasons beyond the text itself. At the very moment that we enjoy the words that Anne writes, we have a sense of sadness or even despair that all this verve and feeling was going to be stamped out.

There are three Anne Franks. There is the real girl born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 12 June 1929, died Bergen-Belsen, Germany 1945. There is the picture of Anne Frank that she herself created on the pages of her diary. There is the Anne Frank that is constructed by a profusion of biographical material, books, exhibitions, documentary films, reminiscences by friends of the family, a museum and, indeed this article. The gap between these three Anne Franks can give rise to troubling feelings. In **Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary**, which fleshes out the background to Anne's journal and includes many family photographs, it can be almost unbearable to be reminded over and over again, that this whole business actually happened.

Here at the beginning of a decade was a middle class German family living a respectable, ordinary middle class urban life and by the end, they have been torn apart, betrayed, transported and only one family member

Anne Frank discussed by Michael Rosen

(Anne's father) has survived. Huge events that have left 55 million other people dead have taken place all around them and there are millions of stories here too. This invites the question, why do we return to Anne Frank?

In an angry outburst someone said to me recently, 'Who puts up the money for the Anne Frank Exhibition?' This is one explanation – it's a Jewish conspiracy, 'hogging the limelight' as this person put it, for victim status in the Second World War. And they get heard more than anyone else because, she went on, 'the Jews have a power base in the media'.

As we know, the first two Anne Franks did not have trouble-free lives, but even in liberal circles amongst London's chattering classes, it seems that the third Anne Frank has problems too. So before looking again at Anne 1: The Life and Anne 2: The Diary, perhaps we have to remind ourselves of what Anne 3: The Symbol is all about.

In some ways, the Second World War was just like any other war. It was the Trojan War with tanks and bombs and guns. People who would in other circumstances have seen themselves as having a lot in common, had become clumped together in opposing nations and so for six years tried to kill as many of each other as they possibly could. They were successful. But in the midst of this banal, customary and quite usual butchery something extraordinary happened. A new invention. A fantasy: the mass elimination of groups of people identified by rulers as belonging to one 'race'. Up until then the human race had devised mass slaughter, persecution, victimisation, enslavement and even genocide through colonisation. But no one had come up with the idea of going round asking people what place of worship they went to, or who their grandmother was and on the basis of the answer, putting them in wagons and shipping them off to a human abattoir.

This is not a Jewish problem. It is not a German problem. Anne Frank 3: The Symbol is a problem for all of us. How could it be that at one moment there could be a superb, highly developed culture with all the apparatus and checks and balances of a democratic society – democracy, justice, freedom of the press, religious toleration – and the next it could create a machine that would put into practice industrialised genocide. Anne Frank 3 may not have the answers to this question. All it can do is say, this is the documentary evidence as to what happened to this mind-blowingly ordinary family. They were not pimps, thieves, rebels, subversives, drunks, victims, tramps or terrorists. They were sober, respectable Germans doing what society says is a good and right thing: building up a family business, obeying the law, teaching their children to be polite, kind and truthful. All the things people do in order to avoid ruin and earn respect. And yet they had to go. This is what Anne Frank 3 teaches us. For her group, her tribe, her clan – it did not help to be ordinary. It was no defence to be mainstream and good. There was no special case just because you were a lively, cheeky, sad, emotional, intelligent, high achieving good-looking girl.

So Anne Frank 3 sends us digging deeper – how did such a thing happen? What were the special ingredients of mid-twentieth century Europe that nurtured such events? How can we avoid reproducing those ingredients in our daily lives so that such events cannot happen

Anne and Margot's room in the secret annex. Anne wrote most of her diary here.

again? There is a hope that by simply getting to know the three Anne Franks it may make us all just that bit more careful and cautious. Though some may use her presence amongst us, to spout just the same sentiments that triggered off the genocide machine last time: 'the Jews have a power base in the media ...'

But what of Anne herself? How does she seem to us? Something we cannot escape from is that she was an excellent writer. So whatever we might have made of her if we had been in hiding with her, one thing we know above all else is that she has that key facility of a writer, which is to work her audience. Quite how she learnt to do that, we will never know. So, though her journal is an intimate diary full of secrets and confidences, it is also full of explanations of the ordinary day-to-day events that in a sense do not need describing if all she was doing was talking to herself. Anne herself realised this ambiguity as soon as she began writing:

'All I think about when I'm with friends is having a good time. I can't bring myself to talk about anything but ordinary everyday things. We don't seem to be able to get any closer, and that's the problem. Maybe it's my fault that we don't confide in each other ... This is why I've started the diary. ... To enhance the image of this long-awaited friend in my imagination, I don't want to jot down the facts in this diary the way most people would do, but I want the diary to be my friend, and I'm going to call this friend Kitty.' (20 June 1942)

And yet ironically, it was precisely because she invented 'dearest' Kitty that she could bear to write down with such detail what she ate, what people wore, what was on the radio that night. But then, in tune with what she is saying in this extract, the diary is remarkable because she ranges over her personal life, her movement of emotions between anger with her mother, love for her father, contempt for, in particular, co-dweller Mrs van Daan and her slowly burgeoning love for Peter. She also takes on issues affecting girls and women – sex education and what a girl or a woman can feel entitled to do in life. She talks about the position of Jews as Jews, in relation to Christians and of course under Nazi persecution. But she also listens to the way the war is going and shares the household's delight when the Nazis are being beaten back. In fact, Anne Frank

was one of those rare beings who see themselves as a personal, social and political creature all at the same time. We are all three and every act she makes and every thought she has is permeated with all three levels of consciousness.

In the new 'unexpurgated' edition of the diary, just published, which includes passages previously thought too personal, it is good to see that the Anne we already knew was 'even more so'. Where she was interested in sex, now she is more open about her discussions with Peter and more frank (!) about her body. She explains to 'Kitty' what her body looks like. Where she was mocking of her co-dwellers in the hiding place, she is now more explicit and, without cross-checking in great detail, I was more aware of her irritation with her mother.

There is no doubt in my mind that Anne Frank's diary in any of its editions is one of the key texts of European literature. It crystallizes one of the most horrific and absurd moments in human history. Anne demands to be read because we want to know more and more about how a young girl and her family lived at this time. But it also demands to be read because we want to ask ourselves the question over and over again, why did she die? Anne Frank cannot answer that question. That is for us to figure out and if we do not, we are all in peril. ■

The Diary of a Young Girl: Anne Frank, The Definitive Edition, new translation edited by Otto H Frank and Mirjam Pressler, translated by Susan Massotty, Viking, 0 670 87481 7, £16.00 (forthcoming Puffin paperback, June 1997, 0 14 038562 2, £4.99)

Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary - A Photographic Remembrance, Ruud van der Rol and Rian Verhoeven for the Anne Frank House, introduction by Anna Quindlen, Puffin, 0 14 036926 0, £6.99

Anne Frank, Richard Tames, Franklin Watts 'Lifetimes' series (1989), 0 86313 890 X, £8.99

Michael Rosen is a poet and novelist and the presenter of Radio 4's **Treasure Island.** His latest book is **You Wait Till I'm Older Than You!** (Viking, 0 670 86729 2, £9.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 038014 0, £3.99.pbk).

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NEWS

THE BIG idea

In the run-up to National Libraries Week in November libraries are inviting children from 4 to 15 to create an advertisement to persuade others to use libraries; it can take the form of a poster, a radio or tv ad or web site. The television category is being run in conjunction with **Blue Peter**. Entry forms are available from libraries or send an A5 sae to The Big Idea, c/o The Marketing Department, Library Association, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE.

For Sale: Reed Children's Books

Winnie the Pooh and Thomas the Tank Engine are two of the strong properties to which Reed Children's Book has rights. Now that Reed Elsevier has sold the trade division to Random House, an early sale of the children's division might have been expected. According to the directors it will be sold 'in due course'; meanwhile interested children's publishers continue to circle.

Public Libraries – Not Boring

The first major government review of public libraries for almost 50 years, **Reading the Future** (free from the Libraries Division, Department of National Heritage, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH) has had a mixed reception. While Ross Shimmon, chief executive of the Library Association, welcomed a government review that acknowledged the importance of public libraries to the information society, he asked where the money would come from for extended hours, better book stocks and new technology. He was also disappointed that the relationship between schools and public libraries was not addressed; the sharp demise in the school library service could not be filled entirely by public libraries which do not have the resources or staff.

Meanwhile the Policy Studies Institute's survey, **Cultural Trends,** reveals that 15 to 25-year-olds are more likely to be regular library users now than they were in 1991. Teens and young adults, despite the popular view, clearly do not find libraries or reading boring.

Conferences

Where Texts and Children Meet

The Fourth Children's Literature Conference at Homerton College, Cambridge for primary and secondary teachers, librarians, publishers etc. is from 5-7th September. Workshops, seminars and entertainment. Speakers include John Agard, Anne Fine, Michael Foreman, Margaret Meek Spencer, Nicholas Tucker. Details from Morag Styles (01223 507111).

Lust for Books

The 1997 Annual Conference of the Youth Libraries Group of The Library Association, will be held at Imperial College, South Kensington, London, from 19th –21st September. Speakers include Aidan Chambers, Brian Jacques, David Lloyd of Walker Books, Kim Reynolds of the Children's Literature Research Centre, Philip Pullman, and Alec Williams of Calderdale Libraries. The conference can be attended on a residential, non-residential or daily basis. Further details and booking form from Karen Usher, 43 Hull Road, Cottingham, East Yorkshire HU16 4PN (tel/fax 01482 875208, E-mail: karen@musher.demon.co.uk).

Apology

A technical problem when text was transferred meant that lines went missing in two places in **BfK 103**. On page 9 the final lines of Peter Hunt's article should have read:

'That may be idealistic – but doesn't it sum up the whole business of children's books? As I said, it is impossible to agree. Good!'

On page 25 the final sentence of Vee Holliday's review of **Superstructures** should have read:

'As a result, the sheer scale and magnitude of the human endeavour involved in building these impressive structures is sometimes lost in the process. **VH★★★**'

Our apologies to Peter Hunt, Vee Holliday and to you, the reader.

People

FEA

LEMAIRE

Valerie Fea, who received the MBE in the new year's Honours Lists, is retiring after eleven years as executive secretary of the School Library Association. Her successor is **Kathy Lemaire**, formerly Principal Librarian of Resource plus, Oxfordshire School Library Service and currently Library Adviser for the Oxfordshire LEA.

Serving on the Carnegie and Greenaway Selection Panel for 1997 are children's librarians **Dorothy Porter** (East Midlands), **Dorne Fraser** (Eastern), **Margaret Sparks** (London and South East), **Tracey Stirrup** (North West), **Liz Bowe** (Northern), **Pat Jordan** (Northern Ireland), **Margaret Patterson** (Scotland), **Lucy Squires** (South West), **Margaret Woodcock** (Yorkshire), **Julia Greenway** (Wales) and **Sheridan Hunt** (West Midlands). As was the case last year, an all female panel; it will be chaired by **Lesley Sim**.

ECCLESHARE

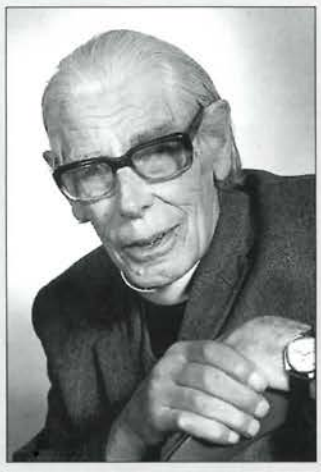
In a surprise move, **Louis Baum** of the **Bookseller** has replaced children's book expert **Julia Eccleshare**, the organ's freelance children's book correspondent for the last five years, with a staff member new to children's books.

Ian Craig, creative director and deputy managing director of the children's division at HarperCollins, has left the company. Recently appointed divisional managing director **Colin Clarke** is putting plans to reduce the forward publishing programme into effect. Agents report a number of contracts cancelled.

Contributors: BfK team, Keith Barker.

Obituary

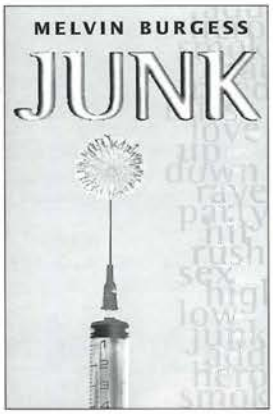
Revd Wilbert Awdry (1911-1997)



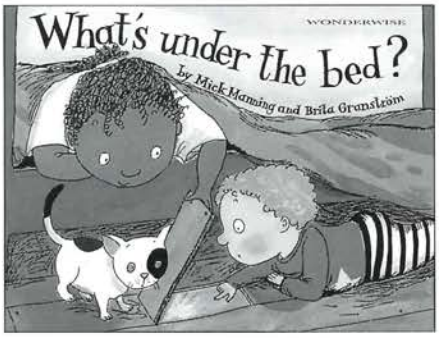
The author of the much loved 'Railway Series' of books about Thomas the Tank Engine and his fellow locomotives, the Revd Wilbert Awdry acquired his interest in railways as a child from his father, also a vicar. When the family moved to a house 200 yards from the Great Western Railways, the young Wilbert would lie in bed listening to the engines and imagining what they might be saying to each other. These stories were later told to amuse Wilbert's son, Christopher, ill with measles. The first book, **The Three Railway Engines** (1945), resulted, the trains depicted with the expressive faces that were to become a characteristic of the series.

'Railway Series' stories, which are all based on facts to do with trains and railways, contain skilfully differentiated characters (e.g. Gordon the boastful bully) and frequently present little homilies ('pride comes before a fall' etc.); a boastful train is sure to fail in its endeavours. After the nationalisation of the railways, the Fat Director became the Fat Controller; more recent privatisations do not appear to have impinged on what are now classic texts. In recent years the series has been extensively exploited commercially with a plethora of face flannels, night lights, duvet covers and a television adaptation.

Prizes



Melvin Burgess' Junk (Andersen/Penguin), a complex and harrowing story about young people in the grip of drug addiction, has won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize (see review p. 27). It was described as a 'provocative, purposeful novel' by chair of judges **Joanna Carey** who was joined on the panel by poet and novelist **Helen Dunmore**, writer **Janni Howker**, last year's winner **Philip Pullman** and lecturer **Nicholas Tucker**. The other shortlisted books were **Creepers** by **Keith Gray** (Mammoth), **The Trokeville Way** by **Russell Hoban** (Cape), **The Fated Sky** by **Henrietta Branford** (Hodder), **Love. In Cyberia** by **Chloë Rayban** (The Bodley Head), **The Butterfly Lion** by **Michael Murpurgo** (HarperCollins) and **Johnny and the Bomb** by **Terry Pratchett** (Transworld).



The **Times Educational Supplement** Junior Information Book Award has been won by a 'clever yet simple' book in which 'lots of disciplines come together including geology, history and technology'. It is **What's Under the Bed?** by **Mick Manning** and **Brita Granström** (Franklin Watts). The judges were headteacher **Paul Noble**, advisory teacher **Tom Deveson** and tutor in education **Mary Jane Drummond**.

The Senior Information Book Award was won by the 'readable and enjoyable' **The World of Shakespeare** by **Anna Claybourne** and **Rebecca Treays** (Usborne) which 'would be invaluable ... to deepen understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare'. The judges were adviser **Mark Williamson**, departmental head **Lynne Marjoram** and deputy head **Andy Schofield**.

A prestigious new prize, The UNESCO Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance, has been awarded to **Kathryn Cave** and **Chris Riddell**'s outstanding picture book with acceptance of difference as its theme – **Something Else** (Viking/Puffin).

On the shortlist for the 1997 Books for Children Mother Goose Award (for a first major illustrated book) are **Richard Kidd**'s **Almost Famous Daisy** (Frances Lincoln), **Clare Jarrett**'s **Catherine and the Lion** (HarperCollins), **Jemma and Tiphanie Beeke**'s **The Brand New Creature** (Levinson Books) and **Nick Marland**'s **Welcome Night** (Cambridge University Press). The winner will be announced in May.

On the shortlist for the 1997 Junior Rhone-Poulenc Prize (for popular science books for the non-specialist reader) are **Miles Litvinoff**'s **Atlas of Earthcare** (Gaia Books), **Caroline Young**'s **The Big Bug Search** (Usborne), **Nick Arnold**'s **Blood, Bones and Body Bits** and **Ugly Bugs** (both Scholastic Horrible Science series), **Nicholas Harris**, **Joanna Turner** and **Dr Trevor Day**'s **The Incredible Journey to the Centre of the Atom** (Kingfisher) and **John Farndon**'s **What Happens When ...** (Macdonald). Selected by broadcaster **Carol Vorderman** (Chair), **Jill Burridge** of **Treasure Islands**, **Professor Richard Gregory** of Bristol University, **Anthony Richards** of the Science Museum and primary school teacher **Debi Kirk**, this shortlist will now be handed to junior panels in nineteen schools who will choose the winner.

BfS Books for Students NEWER FANTASY BEST SELLER CHARTS

TOP 10 LISTINGS INTO SCHOOL BOOKSHOPS

January to March 1997

1	**All Because of Jackson**, Dick King-Smith, Young Corgi
2	**The Terrible Trins**, Dick King-Smith, Puffin
3	**The Ghost Teacher**, Tony Bradman, Corgi Pups
4	**Jack***, B Nadler, Puffin
5	**The Firework-Maker's Daughter**, Philip Pullman, Yearling
6	**Hogsel and Gruntel**, Dick King-Smith, Gollancz
7	**King of the Dark Tower**, Alan Brown, Hodder
8	**Little Wolf's Book of Badness**, Ian Whybrow, Collins
9	**Dreamboat Zing**, Philip Ridley, Puffin
10	**Pinocchio: The Novelization***, J J Gardner, Puffin

* Film tie in

This 'newer fantasy' listing of recently published titles has been specially compiled by **Books for Students** from their sales data. **Books for Students Ltd** is a major specialist supply company to schools and libraries and the organiser of Readathon in schools.

Publications

The Children's Book Handbook (Young Book Trust, 0 85353 459 4, £6.99) lists organisations, publications, prizes etc. to do with every aspect of children and books. From Book Trust, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

The Signal Companion (Thimble Press, 0 903355 48 5, £16.50) prepared by Elaine Moss and Nancy Chambers is a classified guide to the articles which have been published in **Signal** magazine since its first publication in 1970. Grouped under such headings as Classroom Use of Books, Learning to Read, Authors and Writing etc., this is an invaluable guide to twenty-five **Signal** years. From The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ.

The Other Languages: a guide to multilingual classrooms (Reading and Language Information Centre, 0 7049 1065 9, £5.95) by Viv Edwards provides information on the linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds of children whose first languages are those most commonly spoken by children in British schools (from Arabic to Yoruba). An essential and practical guide. From the Reading and Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY. Cheques payable to 'The University of Reading'.

Children's Braille Books (National Library for the Blind, free) is an updated catalogue of children's titles available including recent fiction and new science and history titles. Available in braille, in print and on disc from NLB, Cromwell Road, Bredbury, Stockport, Cheshire SK6 2SG.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Book Fairs – a Circumscribed Range?

Dear Editor

I would like to respond to a couple of points raised in your March editorial. You suggest that the 'range of titles available at book fairs is already circumscribed'. This must be a matter for subjective definition and in any sales outlet – bookshop, club or fair – the choice of product will be driven or 'circumscribed' by the customers that the outlet seeks to serve. It is a strong principle at Scholastic Book Fairs that we offer a broad range of titles from across the spectrum of children's publishers, and certainly our editorial team spend a lot of time meeting suppliers and discussing new titles. Whilst there is obviously very close contact with our colleagues in Scholastic Children's Books, there are many other suppliers with whom the book fair product team have strong and enduring relationships. Success in the book fair business stands or falls on the quality of the book selection and, therefore, it is not in our interest to exclude good children's fiction to simply support our own trade publishing.

In answer to the specific point raised by Adèle Geras concerning author visits, it is not practical for us to support one-off visits unless the title is part of our stock range, which we revise each term. We offer schools a

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high commission rate on book sales, schools can often take one book for every two sold. We do not buy our books on sale or return, and therefore we cannot commit to small quantities of extra titles on an ad hoc basis.

You will be aware that we have been reorganising our book fair business; one major benefit will be the scope to focus more resources on offering a better service to schools. This will include a broader choice of product, and a facility for the teacher organiser to select some of the books that the school receives. We see an open editorial policy and the best possible service to schools as critical to our success.

William Oldham

Managing Director, Book Fair Division, Scholastic Ltd

Dear Editor

School book fairs are only one means of selling books in schools. Most school librarians will have contacts through book suppliers, book representatives, or local Education Library Services and could arrange for a whole variety of different books to be sold when necessary.

I wouldn't dream of inviting an author to the school without ensuring that (a) additional books by the author were available for loan from the library and (b) books were available for sale. To have a book personally signed by an author adds to the occasion and provides great excitement for pupils and staff!

Sue Wood

Librarian, Weaverham High School, Lime Avenue, Weaverham, Cheshire CW8 3HT

Dear Editor

The 'deprofessionalisation' of book provision to which you refer in your editorial (**BfK 103**) takes no account of the independent children's booksellers who need to stay profitable to survive, yet who risk the kind of deep stocking which allows children to choose from the range they deserve. I understand that we are now an endangered species (The **Independent**, 29.3.97), yet who can blame schools for choosing School Book Fairs, for example, as their supplier when education is now profit-orientated?

The situation Adèle Geras highlights is not new though it needs to be addressed, because the influence of organisations such as School Book Fairs can only grow as their near monopoly of this sector of book supply increases. Not only authors and the children they meet in schools come under this influence – many parents consider it is a school's moral responsibility to ensure that books which some of them consider unsuitable for their seven-year-olds, e.g. Goosebumps, should not be made available at a school book event. Yet who can blame a school for opting for School Book Fairs over any other book supplier? I, for one, cannot match their huge discounts and government money now dictates that schools should themselves operate with an eye on the profit motive.

My advice to Adèle Geras would be to try and ensure that the school approaches their nearest independent specialist or one of the more numerous chains to supply her books on a sale or return basis, provided they are willing to trade with the enemy, so to speak (I have done this in the past, but then I'm not proud!). It can happen that a school is genuinely unaware of the rules of the game, but teachers need to understand the politics behind book supply if children are not to be disappointed and discouraged from experimenting beyond the safety of currently popular series.

Jenny Morris

The Lion & Unicorn Bookshop, 19 King Street, Richmond upon Thames, Surrey TW9 IND

Helpful League Tables?

Dear Editor

What a wonder your Star Rating for books is. Like those helpful league tables for schools and those nice prescribed reading lists. Of course I shan't bother with anything less than a three-star book – certainly not one of those 'sad' one-star books. Like Peter Hunt (**BfK**, March 97), I want to know what a 'good' book is. No more doubts now, thanks to your 'experts'.

Authors really must 'try harder' and aim for those five stars. Standard Attainment Targets for children's authors too, why not? (Limit your answers to one side of A4 please.)

Pat Moon

1 Cringleford Chase, Colney Lane, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 7RS

Hardback Reviews

Dear Editor

I was pleased to see a few more reviews of hardback books in your recent issues. We are a large international primary school of 30 classes and 35 nationalities, based on two sites, with two libraries, both with full-time librarians. I try to stock our libraries predominantly with hardbacks rather than paperbacks. The climate here is not very suitable for the long-term preservation of paperbacks as they deteriorate in the high humidity.

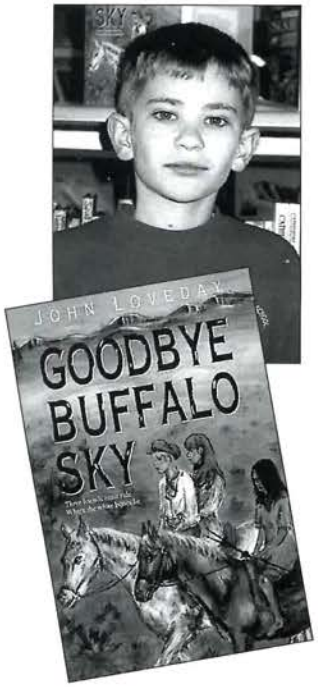
Colin Page

Deputy Principal, Kowloon Junior School, 20 Perth Street, Homantin, Kowloon, Hong Kong

GOOD READS

If your students would like to review their 'good reads', apply to the Editor of **BfK**.

chosen by Class 5 students of Westfield Primary School, Barnes, London



Goodbye Buffalo Sky

John Loveday, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 2329 0, £6.99 pbk

The story is told by two children, a 12-year-old boy called Cappy and his friend Alice, so you have to remember to look at the top of each chapter to see who's talking. It takes place in a settlement called Buffalo Sky in the American West in cowboy times. Cappy makes friends with an artist, Burkhart, and his Red Indian wife, Two Songs. Burkhart gets killed by a Sioux called Long Shadow and then the settlers make her leave Buffalo Sky because they are frightened of what Long Shadow might do to them. Alice and Cappy go with her and on the journey lots of exciting things happen to them.

Although the writer doesn't use a lot of description, you can picture it in your head. It is easy to read because it has quite short sentences and chapters but that does not mean it is childish. It takes a while to get in to the real story but when you're in it, it is excellent. There are some bloodthirsty bits in it as quite a lot of people get killed. I would recommend it to 11-year-olds upwards.

Freddie Powell-Tuck

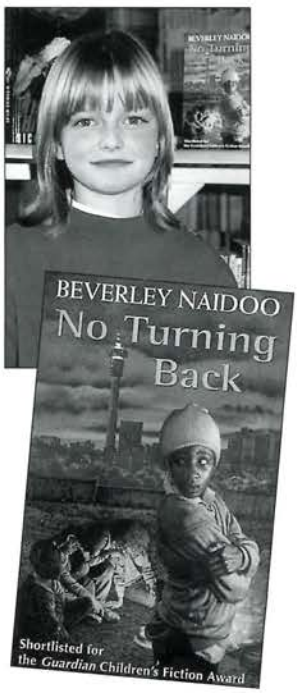
No Turning Back

Beverley Naidoo, Viking, 0 670 85996 6, £10.99, Puffin, 0 14 036948 1, £4.99 pbk

This hard hitting book is about Sipho, a young black South African boy who runs away from his abusive stepfather to live on the streets in Johannesburg. He joins a gang of 'malunde' where he finds friendship but also has to face up to the tough parts of life, like crime and glue-sniffing. Mr Danny, a shopkeeper, takes him to live with his family and work for him but he doesn't get on with Mr Danny's son and when he is falsely accused of stealing he runs back to the streets.

The book is based on true stories and it really hits you. It makes you realise how lucky you are, especially when you're reading it at night tucked up in bed because the cold and misery of life on the streets is described so well. **No Turning Back** is intended for teenagers but younger children who can cope with quite a difficult read will enjoy it. I normally read 'just for fun' books but this one is more serious and I found it stayed with me when I'd finished it. ■

Hollie Chapman



Thanks to Dinah Hall, parent governor, and Kate Massey, class teacher, of Westfield Primary School.

BfK REVIEWS

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

TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

RATING

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

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

Clive Barnes is Divisional Children's Librarian, Hampshire County Library, Southampton.

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 Co-ordinator and teacher at Chatsworth Infant School in Hounslow, Middlesex.

Roy Blatchford is the UK Director of Reading is Fundamental.

Robert Dunbar is the Editor of **Children's Books in Ireland**.

Annabel Gibb works as a supply teacher in primary schools in Leeds.

Vee Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

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

Adrian Jackson is Head of English and Creative Arts at Broadlands School, near Bristol.

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Vincent was Principal Librarian for the London Borough of Lambeth and is now a training consultant in Devon.

Liz Waterland is Headteacher of Brewster Avenue Infant and Nursery School, Peterborough.

Jessica Yates is a school librarian and reviews SF/fantasy for various publications.

REVIEWS Books About Children's Books

The Natural History of Make-believe

★★★★

John Goldthwaite, Oxford University Press, 392pp,

0 19 503806 1, £20 hbk

This history of children's books with supernatural themes, covers the period from Perrault (1697) to Sendak's **Where the Wild Things Are** (1963) mainly from the viewpoint of how one author influences another.

The book's theme is the development of what Goldthwaite calls the 'miracle story' in three genres: nursery rhymes, which lead to nonsense; fairy tales, which develop into fantasies; and beast fables, which lead on to animal fantasies. Each genre is treated chronologically. The line from nursery rhymes to Lear and Dr Seuss is uncontroversial.

When discussing Perrault, Goldthwaite emphasises the role of the fairy godmother in children's

literature. With Rousseau the genre became didactic, and the tutor replaced the godmother. Kingsley was a great innovator in **The Water-Babies**, combining the miraculous with nonsense passages and Christianity. I have always puzzled over how Kingsley's four fairies who all become one person at the end, fit into Christian theology, and I decided that she was Mother Nature, ruling Planet Earth under God, and named by Kingsley 'the great fairy Science'. Goldthwaite's interpretation is that Kingsley's Fairy, Irene's grandmother in MacDonald's 'Princess' stories and the Blue Fairy in **Pinocchio**, are the same entity independently arrived at, a divine being, one of the Christian Trinity, an aspect of the Holy Spirit. Since the personification of Wisdom is feminine in both Testaments, Goldthwaite argues that She is the Holy Spirit. While not accepting all his thesis one must recognise that Christian theology is an essential element in these fantasies.

Goldthwaite proceeds to analyse what the **Alice** books owe to **The Water-Babies**: comparisons to a Cheshire Cat and March hare are made by Kingsley and Carroll's Cheshire Cat and March Hare enter the cast of **Alice** only in the expanded version written straight after **The Water-Babies** was published. Goldthwaite's analysis of **Alice** is really done to death over 100 pages before we reach a celebration of **Pinocchio**, which Goldthwaite considers a masterpiece, regretting the Disney version. More briefly he looks at **Peter Pan** and the **Oz** books before reaching, untypically, a negative critique of Tolkien and Lewis. (**Lord of the Rings**, being written and published for adults, could have been considered off-limits.)

Lewis is criticised for disobeying Christ's teaching on pacifism, and yes, the scene where the children punish the bullies at the end of **The Silver Chair** goes against Christ's teaching about turning the other cheek. However, where war was concerned, Lewis did not believe that Christ counselled pacifism. He took the Old Testament Commandment to be against murder, but not against killing in a just war. Both Tolkien and Lewis believed that World War II was a just war, and this ethos informs the Narnia and Middle-earth fantasies, written during a time when Britons believed that they faced enslavement, massacre and genocide if Hitler won.

Secondary-world, mythic fantasy is described as a 'dead end', though Goldthwaite's mid-60s cut-off point could have allowed a demonstration of how Garner began by echoing Tolkien and then reacted against him to revive the genre with Folklore Fantasy: such writers as Susan Cooper, Ursula Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander and Diana Wynne Jones come too late for his thesis, but the genre is certainly not dead. Moreover, within his chosen period, does not **The Sword in the Stone** (omitted) fulfil his criteria? And he gives E Nesbit very short shrift.

The book concludes with less controversial but still original analyses of the Uncle Remus series and what Beatrix Potter owed to them, tracing descent through Grahame, Kipling and Milne to E B White and some American writers I have not come across before. If Goldthwaite had extended his cut-off point to demonstrate a living tradition of fantasy, he would have widened his potential readership; £20 is a lot to pay for yet another discussion of **Alice** and attacks on Tolkien and Lewis. JY

Focus on the Child: Libraries, Literacy and Learning

★★★★

Edited by Judith Elkin and Ray Lonsdale, with contributions from Keith Barker, Gayner Eyre and Margaret Kinnell, Library Association Publishing, 296pp, 1 85604 109 3, £37.50 hbk

As the authors note, it is over twenty years since Janet Hill's ground-breaking book, **Children are People**, was published, and it is timely to reassess progress made in library services for young people. This book surveys all aspects of the field (librarianship, publishing, book-selling, the child, etc.), and gives a useful summary of the current position, optimistic about the future of reading and pessimistic about the dire state of public and school libraries in 1996, and the demotion of work with children as a specialist area (one reason for this may be the new 'managerialism' – see the chapter by Margaret Kinnell as an example!).

This is a major work which should be widely read, especially for a deeper understanding of the changes in public library services. However, despite its claim to taking a 'philosophical' approach, it does not have the visionary and critical qualities of Janet Hill's book. JV

International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature

★★

Edited by Peter Hunt, associate editor Sheila Ray, Routledge, xv, 923pp, unillustrated, 0 415 08856 9, £85 hbk

As a failed reference-book compiler, I may be the wrong person to write about this 'companion encyclopedia'. A *long* time ago I was commissioned to edit 'The Penguin Companion to Children's Literature', but after I had sported with the project for twenty years, Penguin Books decided that the whole thing was *de trop* and pulled out the plug.

Nevertheless, those twenty years were something of an education – for the editor, if not the publisher – and the experience may possibly validate my assessment of the fat tome that is the subject of this review. Knowing something of the inner technology of the job I am able to admire the fact that so huge a compilation has come into being so speedily, while being unsurprised that it is a tremendous mess.

Mess-potential is already manifest in the book's title, for what the heck is a 'companion encyclopedia'? An encyclopedia is likely to be thought of as a systematically organised body of information providing clear access to the main elements of a

subject or group of subjects. A companion may perhaps be thought of as something similar but without the same formality and perhaps without making the same bid for authority. How therefore can both functions be claimed for the same volume? How far does the juxtaposition of the two terms hint at a fracture in the editorial plan?

In the event, I am sorry to say, the fracture is altogether more seismic and the book turns out to be neither a companion nor an encyclopedia (and, what is more, only intermittently and casually 'international'). This seems to be something that Margaret Meek discovered when called upon to write her Introduction, for she begins with a gallant defence of the work for having 'a certain deliberate untidiness and openness', and in a succession of obliquely worded qualifications she then attempts to excuse the bumpy ride that many users of the book may experience.

Bumpiness is most readily apparent in the book's organisation, which is (*pace* Meek) a 'tour d'horizon'. The contents consist of 86 essays by 84 contributors, which proffer a profile-view of children's literature as seen at present. The essays are divided into five main categories: Theory and Critical Approaches; Types and Genres; Context (i.e. subjects like Publishing and Book Awards); Applications (i.e. things like Librarianship and Teaching Fiction, which apparently don't fit into Context); and The World of Children's Literature.

I don't want to get bogged down in discussing the many unresolved difficulties which the attempt to be 'international' has posed for the editors. Suffice it to say here that this final section is their chief gesture towards such a laudable, but over-ambitious, aim. It consists of 31 main articles which try with varying success and competence to summarize the progress and present position of children's literature in the countries of the world. But there is no consistency in the presentation of the material, and little attempt is made to take account of the international or comparative aspects of topics in the body of the book. That body leans heavily towards British experience, and not even American affairs are satisfactorily coped with, let alone events in places which are not Anglophone.

Quite apart from the lop-sidedness of its emphasis, this anthology approach to Children's Literature makes many problems for itself. The chief of these is what to put where. If (as happens) you decide to have picture books treated theoretically, descriptively (two articles) and as part of several other contributions (Books for Younger Readers; Book Publishing; Book Design; and as part of several historical overviews) then you set up problems of control which may just be surmountable if you are writing the whole thing yourself, but produce nothing but muddle when left to disparate contributors with different abilities and methods and apparently no central guidance.

The structure is particularly difficult to defend when you consider that many users of this book will be so unregenerate as to wish to know about personalities rather than categories, so that spreading the treatment of, say, Maurice Sendak through half a dozen articles will deprive such users of a chance to assess a potent influence on contemporary American, English, and 'world' children's literature. (As it is, what you discover about him is negligible. There is nothing about his immensely important work before **Wild Things**; that book itself is variably dated; there is no assessment of his high-profile post-**Wild Things** malarkey; and as for such great associate contemporaries as James Marshall and Tomi Ungerer, the first gets no mention at all, and the second mysteriously appears in one line in the (dreadful) essay on France.

Some of this muddle could be alleviated by careful indexing, which has not occurred, thus further undercutting any claims for the book's encyclopedic status. And, as it happens, the failure to index properly ensures that a multiplicity of howlers (which a conscientious editor would have spotted anyway) go uncorrected. The **Wild Things** dates are a minor example, but what can be said of the following?

p.146 'The **Contes de Fées** of the Countess d'Aulnoy, translated as her **Diverting Works** (1707) became popular ...' [not indexed];

p.153 'Madame d'Aulnoy's **Contes des Fées** (4 vols. 1710-1715 [i.e. three years after they were said, above, to be translated!]) sowed the seeds ...' [indexed under 'Aulnoy'];

p.719 'We should also mention the publication in 1698 [!!] of several collections: **Contes nouveaux ou les fées à la mode** by Marie Catherine Le Jumel, baroness of Aulnoy ...'[not indexed under any of those names].

All this may serve to raise doubts about the authority of this compilation and these doubts cannot but be reinforced by the extreme variability of the level at which its discourse is conducted and the fluctuating balance of its coverage. (These were the problems that preoccupied me during my twenty years *chez* Penguin.) The most glaring example greets you on entry, where the editor has assembled his most-favoured allies, the critical theorists. For well over a hundred pages we are treated to densely argued (sometimes near impenetrable) accounts of critical postures *anno* 1996, or thereabouts. Some of these are accompanied by huge lists of references – 74 items for Ideology, 108 for Reader Response – supplied in undifferentiated alphabetic wads.

But once you pass beyond this rocky defile, two peculiar things happen: no subsequent article (except 'Metafictions and Experimental Work') is cast in the academy-speak that you met with at the start, and most of the writers on genres etc. appear to have no clue about the very existence of the Theories expounded in Part I. What you get are school-exercises written at varying levels of authority and elegance and exhibiting no consistent effort to achieve a balance between hard information, potted précis, and mindless lists. Contrast Denis Gifford's excellent essay on comics etc. (24 pages of detailed and *readable* exposition) with Marianne Carus's 14 pages of misleading non-sense about Children's Magazines.

Feminist contributors are especially guilty of foolish distortions. 'Most anthologies of the past and present are testimonies to the preferences of elite groups of academically educated men' says Morag Styles in Poetry for Children. Has she never heard of Edith Sitwell, or Eleanor Farjeon, or Janet Adam Smith, or Barbara Ireson, or Naomi Lewis? And how 'academic' were Kenneth Grahame, or Walter De La Mare, or the peerless Charles Causley?

Obviously, with most of today's pundits among the essayists there are bound to be some successful contributions, but discovering them is a hit-or-miss affair. The misconceived design of the book makes it difficult to use and the good bits are negated by a prevailing casualness, tedium, and, sometimes, ignorance. **BA**

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

I like it when ...

★★★★

Mary Murphy, Methuen, 24pp, 0 416 19401 X, £6.99 hbk

At first glance, this picture book about a parent and child (penguins) doing everyday things (holding hands, playing peekaboo, hugging tight) and ending up saying 'I love you too' and 'You're wonderful' seems predictable. What lift the story above the ordinary are the striking double-spread illustrations in primary colours. They are graphically simple, direct and exude tenderness and fun – prompting my two-year-old repeatedly to say 'again, Daddy'. This really *is* a book for quiet sharing. **RB**

Daisy and Jack in the Garden

★★★★

1 897951 17 5 hbk,
1 897951 15 9 pbk

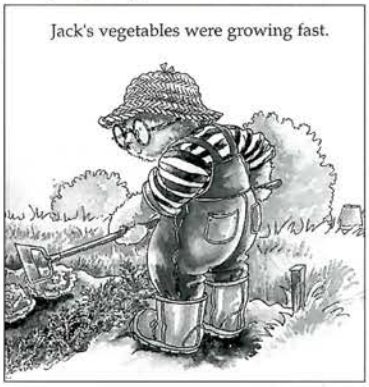
Daisy and Jack and the Surprise Pie

★★★★

1 897951 18 3 hbk,
1 897951 16 7 pbk

Prue Theobalds, Uplands Books, 32pp, £6.99 each hbk, £3.99 each pbk

These small square picture books were shared with a toddler living next door and had to be wrested from her sleeping hands a month later for the reviews to be written! They did not get as far as the Nursery class in my school but I have no doubt they would have met with the same reception! Daisy and Jack, two teddies with very individual personalities, enjoy a surprise pie together and approach gardening in their different ways. My young neighbour knows both stories, which are full of gentle humour, off by heart and she sits by herself and chunners her way through them again and again. Two appealing books for the very young from an author/illustrator who clearly knows her children. **JS**



Planes

★★★★

0 434 80072 4

Trucks

★★★★

0 434 80074 0

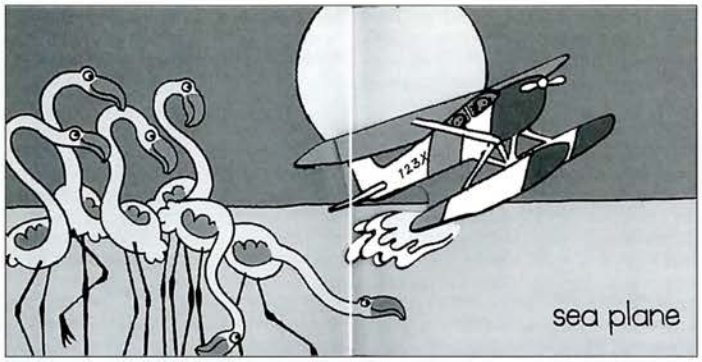
Boats

★★★★

0 434 80075 9

Jan Pieńkowski, Heinemann, 14pp, £5.99 each hbk novelty

Pieńkowski's picture books (**Meg and Mog**, etc.) with their brightly coloured, boldly outlined pictures, are models of clarity and simplicity. These three pop-up titles are in this same style but with paper engineering to add movement to the pictures. There is nothing complicated about the mechanics – just opening the page will cause the boat to rock in the waves or the space shuttle to take off – so the usual disappointments of broken tabs or sticking levers are avoided.



A sea plane takes off in **Planes**.

A variety of boats and trucks is explored in two of the books – the children in my school especially liked the breakdown truck which really lifts the car being towed – but **Planes** is rather a misnomer since it includes a hot air balloon, a helicopter and the space shuttle – perhaps flying machines would have been a better title. Whatever, these are excellent and entertaining books for toddlers learning to name things and thoroughly recommended for Nursery and Reception children too. **LW**

Billy and the Baby

★★★

Tony Bradman, ill. Lynn Breeze, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198230 3, £8.99 hbk

A picture book about a child adapting to a new baby in the family which has a nice twist – while Billy is apparently paying no attention to all the drama that is happening around him he is quietly preparing a special present for the new baby. There have been quite a few books recently on the new baby theme but this one was enjoyed by all the children who assessed it although it did not receive 'rave' reviews. Perhaps this was because it concentrates on positive feelings rather than exploring the deeper emotions involved and therefore did not evoke such strong feelings in the readers; or it could simply have been that the children reviewing it were not in the throes of experiencing the arrival of a new sibling. With its bright cheerful illustrations, this comfortable book will help children in this situation although other new baby titles should also be offered. **JS**

Chicken Licken – A Wickedly Funny Flap Book

★★★★★

Jonathan Allen, Picture Corgi, 24pp, 0 552 14338 3, £4.99 pbk novelty

Universal delight greeted this book – every age group from Nursery through to top Infants were captivated by the story, the absurdity, the brilliant use of flaps, the sense of stalking danger, the clever use of language, the witty illustrations and ... the 'happy ending'. The (more than possibly) pedantic teacher in me would only take issue with this last element: as custodians and 'handers on' of our heritage I feel that we should share and enjoy this appealing picture book BUT present alongside it, the traditional version, with its more realistic ending which has Chicken

Licken gobbled up by the fox. Fables and traditional stories such as this fulfil an important function in that they signal early vital messages of caution, of thinking before we act. These messages are essential to our society, to individual happiness and even survival. **JS**

Grandmother and I

★★★★

0 14 055697 4

Grandfather and I

★★★★

0 14 055698 2

Helen E Buckley, ill. Jan Ormerod, Puffin, 24pp, £4.99 each pbk

'But Grandmother's lap is just right
When you're having a bad cold.'

Two blissful books in which we come to know, through the voices of the child narrators, about the very special relationship that exists between these children and their grandparents.

Grandmother's lap is the special place where this little black girl finds comfort in times of stress: when she is feeling poorly, when a storm rages outside, or when the cat is missing. In **Grandfather and I**, a little black boy tells us about a walk through the woods with Grandfather. The first person narrative is skilfully paced – the leisurely woodland spreads with their repeated sentences are cleverly contrasted with the more hurried descriptions on alternate spreads.

Caring and sharing, tenderness and love shine through from both words and pictures and Ormerod's watercolours capture the emotions perfectly. **JB**

Kitty's Fishy Dinner

★★★

Linda Jennings, ill. Tanya Linch, Magi, 32pp, 1 85430 404 6, £8.99 hbk

Kitty's attempts to get to a plate of fish out of her reach on top of the kitchen dresser are told with bright collage illustrations and a text with a large typeface. The story has a high smile factor and the little mouse, who is not mentioned in the text, is an amusing extra as it tries to help and hang on while Kitty struggles up onto the shelf. Disappointingly, she never does get the fish and has to be rescued rather ignominiously but children enjoyed sharing her adventure. **LW**

From Snowflakes to Sandcastles

★★

Annie Owen, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1079 9, £4.99 pbk

This calendar book give a double page spread to each month. On the left-hand page there is, printed on an appropriately tinted, marble washed background, a wavy list of thirteen objects, animal, vegetable and mineral, which might be seen at that time of year. Below is a series of questions which require close inspection of eighty or so small pictures of the listed objects arranged in lines across the opposite page. The stamp-sized pictures of rainbows, mittens, pancakes, frogs, windmills and the like, are designed to appeal to early years children who would not be able to read the questions for themselves. This book will therefore have to be shared with an adult or older child with the patience and commitment to pose the questions and coax responses. I found it too static to inspire me to do so. Not so much a picture book as a book of pictures. **JB**

Charlie's Checklist

★★★

Rory S Lerman, ill. Alison Bartlett, Macmillan, 32pp, 0 333 65309 2, £8.99 hbk

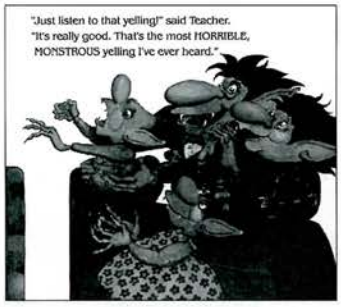
Charlie, a mongrel puppy, is the last of his litter to find a home. He places an advertisement inviting potential owners to write to him, but they all fail to meet his strict criteria (must be kind to animals, etc.). One day a letter arrives from a girl who seems ideal. Luckily, just before he leaves the countryside for the city life he has longed for, Charlie realises that Chester, the boy from the farm next door and his friend, is the ideal person to look after him.

Successful read aloud picture books tend to appeal to adults as much as they do to children. The story is very suitable for young children but the vocabulary is at times too much aimed at the adult audience and when reading aloud to younger children some sentences need to be simplified. 'What is criteria?' Chester asks at one point, an (intentional?) error that remains unhelpfully uncorrected. There is also initial confusion for a young child over just who Charlie is. Chester, the boy from the farm, is shown on the first page but is not introduced by name until seven pages into the story. Despite these reservations, the book is one that children will like having read to them. They will also enjoy the warmth and humour of the bright illustrations, painted in childlike style in vivid acrylics. **AK**

Three-Star Billy

★★★★

Pat Hutchins, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 949391 8, £4.99 pbk



Billy, one of Pat Hutchins' lively monster family (previous titles include **Silly Billy** and **The Very Worst Monster**), is apparently absolutely dreadful at everything when he goes to nursery school for the first time. The joke, of course, is that in Monster Nursery dreadful behaviour is *good* behaviour and the more monstrously Billy behaves the more he is rewarded by his teacher – eventually going home with gold stars for his monstrousness in painting, singing, dancing and screaming. A book that nursery children will thoroughly enjoy – take care, though. Your children may follow suit! **LW**

There's a Monster in my House

★★★

0 7460 2816 4

There's a Dragon at my School

★★★

0 7460 2818 0

Jenny Tyler and Philip Hawthorn, ill. Stephen Cartwright, Usborne, 16pp, £3.99 each pbk novelty

Two engaging lift-the-flap picture books in which Cartwright's stocky children have a pleasant air of being relatives of Charlie Brown – it is the round heads, I think. In the first, Milly is convinced she sees a monster in all sorts of places in the house. Open the door or lift the flap, however, and you can see it is only one of a variety of animals in various tricky disguises. (Although, is that a monster in the last picture, after all?)

In the second title, which I think works even better, the dragon causes all sorts of mayhem in school and the young reader has the chance to guess what he has done before opening the cupboard or flap to find out. Both books have a simple refrain to join in with or to help early readers; large, clear typeface aids this sharing. **LW**

Greetings from Sandy Beach

★★★★

Bob Graham, Happy Cat, 32pp, 1 899248 41 2, £3.99 pbk

What is intended as a peaceful weekend away from it all turns out to be anything but in this picture book full of witty social observation. The girl narrator and her family find themselves sharing what they hoped would be a quiet beach with a busload of kids on a school trip and a motor-bike gang, 'The Disciples of Death'. However, the holiday is not the disaster it might have been for the Disciples are helpful and friendly, and there is entertainment aplenty with the school kids.

The hilarious seaside frolics of the young, and the young-at-heart (the seaside has that effect) are eloquently illustrated by the author. JB

Time for a Tale

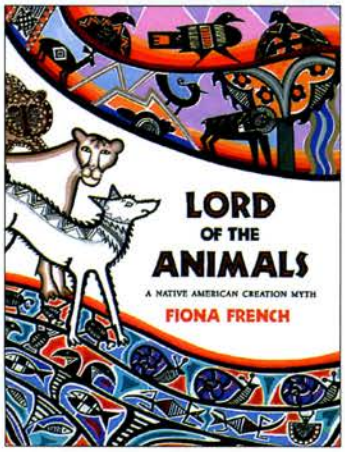
★★★

Compiled by Julia Eccleshare, ill. Rowan Barnes-Murphy, Hodder, 112pp, 0 340 65578 X, £3.50 pbk

Ten stories provide a varied collection of 'bedtime tales' for five- to (perhaps) seven-year-olds. The large-ish print might also make the book accessible to newly-fluent readers in this age-group. The most successful of these tales are those dealing with clever tricksters, such as 'Little Polly Riding Hood' by Catherine Storr. The volume also contains Aingelda Ardizzone's 'The Little Girl and the Tiny Doll', and stories by Joan Aiken and Margaret Mayo.

The best of these stories may provide a good 'first taste' for those who haven't encountered them before, but overall I found this particular collection rather arbitrary and unfocused. AG

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior



Lord of the Animals

★★★★★

Fiona French, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1107 8, £9.99 hbk

Despite the popularity of French's picture book, **Anancy and Mr Dry-Bone**, it was with some trepidation that we approached this new title, a retelling of the Miwok Native Americans' creation myth, for stories which are so strongly anchored in the culture of story telling project their own images and patterns. However, French has had the vision and the skill to produce a book which complements a wonderful myth rather than diluting it. The story has a strong and immediate message: animals created people and, rather than being their slaves, people's power over animals rests on their desire to serve a 'good master'. French bases her artwork on the stylised illustration on ancient pottery from the Mimbres Valley and these images have a vibrancy of their own. Other than for the very young child who will need the support of a sensitive adult to talk through the concepts, such is the power of message and image in this title that there can be no real application of age 'appropriateness' – this is a book that will enrich all who share it. JS

Mouse Creeps

★★★★

Peter Harris, ill. Reg Cartwright, Heinemann, 32pp, 0 434 80033 3, £8.99 hbk

Cartwright's distinctive illustrative style fleshes out this picture book with its circular tale sparingly told in just 59 words presented as rhyming couplets. The action progresses from a peaceful hearth and home, to the farm outside and the wider countryside beyond where two armies are lined up for battle. But the opposing generals are brought down by a salvo of acorns rather than bullets, and pigs, rather than blows. Their discomfiture brings laughter – 'Soldiers roar./End war.' – and the soldiers return, to the hearth and home where the story began.

Each double page spread is built up with crisply defined blocks of colour and has an order and formality that fascinates. Children will enjoy exploring them while older readers will also reflect on the book's anti-war message. JB

Bear's Bad Mood

★★

John Prater, First Young Puffin, 32pp, 0 14 038282 8, £3.99 pbk

Bear gets out of bed on the wrong side and he certainly does not want to play with his friends, Dog, Fox and Mole. But, no matter where he goes, his hiding place is discovered. Fortunately his friends are on hand when he needs them and his bad mood finally disappears.

With appealing watercolour illustrations on every page, this book could prove tempting to those wanting a slightly longer read than that offered by picture books. But it is these illustrations rather than the somewhat ponderous text which provide the greater incentive to turn the pages. JB

Goodnight, Monster

★★★★

Carolyn Dinan, First Young Puffin, 32pp, 0 14 038281 X, £3.99 pbk

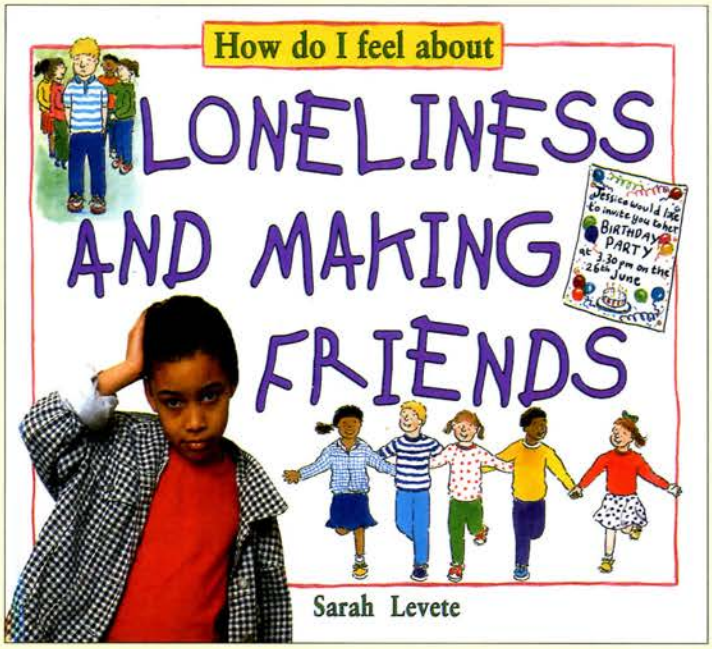
Dan is convinced there is a monster under his bed in this short novel, but, of course, when mum comes in it always turns out to be something harmless instead. Except that, eventually, Dan realises that there *is* a real monster – who is just as frightened of him and his mum as Dan was of the monster. This is not an original idea but it is well written and nicely produced with full colour illustrations. It will be popular with seven- to nine-year-olds beginning to read fluently. LW

Editor's Choice

Loneliness and Making Friends

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Sarah Levete, ill. Christopher O'Neill and Roger Vlitos, Franklin Watts 'How do I feel about' series, 24pp, 0 7496 2492 2, £8.99 hbk

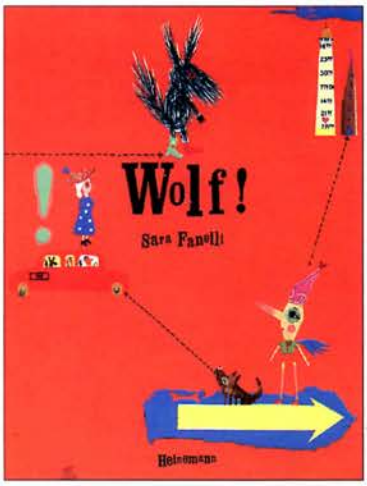


Learning to make friends is a crucial part of their development for children of six years and upwards and a successful (or unsuccessful) outcome of this process can impact hugely on an individual's notion of self worth and ability to form relationships. Many children find making friends difficult and adult help in negotiating this delicate and subtle process is often needed.

This attractively designed and warmly presented picture book focuses on four primary school age children who are friends (one black or mixed race, one Asian and two white – shown in photographs) who discuss aspects of friendship with each other. The book divides into sections called Feeling Lonely, Why Friends are Important, Making Friends, Different Friendships, Difficult Times, and Working at Friendships. Cartoon strips and speech balloons together with a simple text amplify the particular area under discussion.

Practical tips are included ('The best way to make friends is to be friendly, and to be yourself!') and the book also covers such difficult subjects as accepting difference, trying to buy friendship, risking rejection and feeling left out. A final discussion spread called Don't Forget has the four friends reiterating and reinforcing the key messages from their points of view.

Parents, teachers and others will find in this sensitively written and accessible picture book an invaluable way to initiate discussion to which children can safely contribute their own experiences and problems, secure in the realisation that other children have friendship difficulties too. RS



Wolf!

★★★★★

Sara Fanelli, Heinemann, 40pp, 0 434 97650 4, £9.99 hbk

'This is the book, that caused the storm, that made them argue, that made them think, that rocked the school at Hoole.' This clever comment came from two of our Year Two reviewers and it is ... so true! Fanelli's extraordinarily original picture book really defies description. Ostensibly it is the story of a gentle, helpful and well disposed wolf who goes into town to try to find some friends but is met with alarm and aggression. The resolution is satisfying but this is a book which some staff and children found extremely disturbing, some found pretentious but others ranked it as seminal as Sendak's **Where the Wild Things Are**. Fanelli uses a mixture of illustrative techniques in a surrealist fashion – collage, pencil drawing, stylised images with colour wielded almost as a weapon. These images are enhanced by a very clever use ('neat' as a Year Two reviewer put it) of a particular typeface throughout the book which creates mood through differing size, through playing with the text by making it slant, turn upside down, fade and even disintegrate. As a teacher I find this book stunning for how much it challenges notions of difference on all levels. It is not an easy book but one which deserves good teaching for it will leave a lasting impression on all those who share it. **JS**

A Worm's Eye View

★★★★★

Jan Mark, ill. Bethan Matthews, Mammoth, 48pp, 0 7497 2318 1, £2.99 pbk

This is such a very modest looking little book with its black and white line drawings and small format. However, it is without doubt the best book sent to me for review this month. Alice and Tom and their parents have an allotment. They also have a ghastly toddler cousin, David, who is a classic 'terrible two'. One Sunday morning is a disaster when David buries Dad's keys. It is Alice's empathy with a worm's – or toddler's – eye view that finds them.

'Every time he saw a daisy he squashed it.' From **A Worm's Eye View**.

Mark's ability to write about real children is splendid – she also combines thoughtful and tender writing with entertaining, humorous but real life, situations. This is a little gem of a story to read aloud or for young juniors to enjoy for themselves. **LW**

Magic Betsey

★★★★

Malorie Blackman, ill. Lis Toft, Mammoth, 64pp, 0 7497 2637 7, £3.50 pbk

If you are involved with children between five and seven and they have not met Betsey Biggalow yet, then introduce her. There are four Betsey Biggalow titles set in the Caribbean and this is the new one in paperback. Betsy thinks she is no good at running; wants to buy a new blouse to go to the party rather than a present for her best friend's birthday; and has an older brother and sister who always know what is best, until they lose her in a crowded market. Not too hard for new solo readers and easy to listen to, this is a welcome addition to the series. **CB**

All Because of Jackson

★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. John Eastwood, Young Corgi, 64pp, 0 552 52821 8, £2.99 pbk

It is 1842 and Jackson, a young rabbit, longs to go to sea. One day he stows away aboard a sailing-ship bound for Australia together with Bunny, a young doe. Jackson and Bunny are soon captured by a sailor and destined to be turned into rabbit pie. However, their demise is postponed as first the mate, then the captain's steward, and finally the captain himself, claim ownership of the pair. But rabbits can look so appealing, and the intervention of an important passenger, kind-hearted Lady Potts, sees to it that they make a safe landing at Sydney.

Short chapters, plenty of dialogue and line drawings on every double spread make this an inviting and seemingly easy read but the prose is in fact quite challenging for the new solo reader. Perhaps the need for a semblance of historical accuracy is the reason. And although this account of how Australia came to be plagued by rabbits is mildly amusing it lacks the verve and imagination of King-Smith's other stories for younger readers such as **Harriet's Hare**. **JB**

The Monster Story-Teller

★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 64pp, 0 385 40857 9, £9.99 hbk

Sharratt's zany black and white line drawings will instantly grab readers of this latest Wilson tale. The author mines her familiar subject – school life with errant pupils, flabbergasted teachers and off-the-wall monsters. On this occasion, Natalie is doing a class project on flying and rapidly finds herself translated to Monster Planet eating McMonster burgers. The tale unfolds pacily and wittily, with a special visitor to school on the final pages worth waiting for! Wilson knows her young audience well. **RB**

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

Harvey Goes to School

★★★

Terrance Dicks, ill. Susan Hellard, Piccadilly, 64pp, 1 85340 480 2, £8.99 hbk

In this fourth story about Harvey, the highly intelligent St Bernard, he has to help overcome the problem of vandalism at Harry and Sally Smith's primary school, in order to ensure that Pets' Day is not cancelled. By tracking down the vandal, Harvey uncovers a colourful secret about the unpopular deputy head, Mr Green (appointed ahead of the children's favourite, Miss Fielding), and saves Pets' Day into the bargain.

The bubbly pace, style and stock characters make this canine caper eminently suitable for lower junior children to read. The lively text, accompanied at regular intervals by appropriate line drawings, will successfully maintain a child's interest and is just the right length to be read straight through in one sitting. **AK**

Poppy's Secret

★★★

0 7496 2374 8 hbk,
0 7496 2634 8 pbk

The Lost Treasure

★★★

0 7496 2375 6 hbk,
0 7496 2635 6 pbk

Mary Hooper, ill. Lesley Bisseker, Franklin Watts 'Sparks', 64pp, £7.99 each hbk, £3.99 each pbk

These are numbers 3 and 4 in a series of historical stories that aims to bring Victorian Times to life. In **Poppy's Secret**, Poppy, a downstairs scullery maid, is prepared to lose her job with Lord Throckmorten so that she can rescue her injured little brother, George, from one of his Lordship's cotton mills and seek the very rare medical help available to the extremely poor.

The Lost Treasure has Poppy and George eking out a living among the mudlarks and child vagabonds in London. That is until Poppy solves the last piece of the riddle that runs through the series and will prove the key to a brighter future.

These easy read, Key Stage 2 stories just about stand alone and are supplemented at the end by three pages devoted to factual information on the main themes about Victorian times covered in each story. Victorian Working Life is the principal theme of Book 3 and Railways, Homeless People, Christmas and Life on the Streets of London are described in Book 4.

Virtually every page is illustrated with lively line drawings by Lesley Bisseker and these ably and amusingly complement the text in creating an insight into the period. **DB**

Staying With Grandpa

★★★★

Penelope Lively, ill. Paul Howard, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 037032 3, £3.99 pbk

In the hands of less secure storytellers some of Puffin's books for 'developing readers' ('short chapters, simple words and sentences') come across as lack-lustre and formulaic. While the theme of holidaying with grandparents is pretty familiar, Lively's confident narrative is laced with enough unusual incident to hold the junior reader. Her ear for dialogue between Jane and Grandpa and between Jane and her mother on the telephone is assured and gives the book its best moments. Howard's drawings of Grandpa's leaning cake are a highlight. This is the kind of short, finely illustrated fiction that really *can* move on the young reader. **RB**

Kind

★★★

0 7451 5285 6

Fair

★★★

0 7451 5283 X

Reliable

★★★

0 7451 5286 4

Honest

★★★

0 7451 5284 8

Janine Amos, ill. Gwen Green, Cherrytree, 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

There is an interesting idea behind these four attractively illustrated picture books – each volume tells two stories and each of the two stories is then told again but from

the viewpoint of a different character. The stories are concerned with familiar, everyday events for most older juniors – copying homework, lending a bike, promising to feed a friend's pet – and each is written to highlight a moral dilemma from differing points of view. The purpose is to help children from about eight to eleven years old consider motivation, the idea of responsibility or blame, the point of view of others and the difficulty of doing the right thing, even when you know what that is.

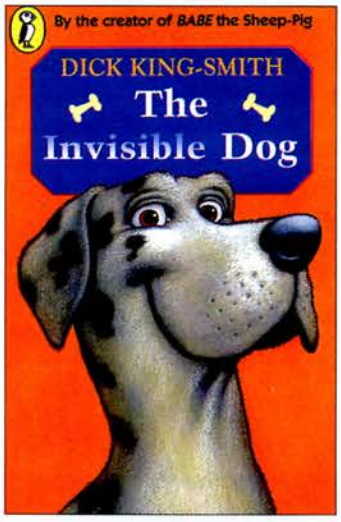
I have a slight reservation about the organisation of the stories – it might have been clearer if the two versions of each story had followed one another, instead of being alternated with the other story in each book. Otherwise, these are valuable contributions to P.S.E. in the school library and they will be excellent teachers' resources for assembly or social and moral education discussions.

Whether children will want to read them for themselves is another matter. I have not tested them with young readers but I just suspect that their obvious worthiness and overt moral agenda might be off-putting. The writing, too, is adequate rather than brilliant and there are many authors whose work is of genuinely literary quality through which children can explore moral dilemmas with more subtlety. **LW**

The Invisible Dog

★★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Paul Howard, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 034994 4, £3.99 pbk



King-Smith's narratives hug the reader like a familiar blanket. In this latest title seven-year-old Janie, remembering a much loved family pet, a Great Dane called Rupert, invents her own Great Dane, Henry, carrying the empty collar and lead round with her. Will she ever be able to afford the real thing? The cocktail for an affectionate, bucolic yarn is winningly delivered – complete with twist in both tail and tale. Howard's line drawings are understated and evocative of the rural idyll so enjoyed by King-Smith and his readers. **RB**

Famous with Smokey Joe

★★★★

Chris Powling, ill. Alan Marks, Mammoth, 96pp, 0 7497 2594 X, £3.50 pbk

This is an idiosyncratic story about an Afro-Caribbean city boy who strikes up a relationship with an elderly, eccentric and charismatic knife grinder while on a rural break from the children's home in which he lives. Smokey Joe takes Zac on as a temporary apprentice, and as they roam the countryside together, the child's underlying emotional frustrations are mollified by his concern for his new partner, and by the discoveries about life and work and people to which Joe introduces him. At the climax of this earthy, craft-inspired, story is a mythical encounter which lovers of folklore will find enthralling. **GH**

Smart Girls Forever

★★★★

Robert Leeson, ill. Axel Scheffler, Walker, 80pp, 0 7445 4144 1, £6.99 hbk

Readers who enjoyed Leeson's **Smart Girls** will need little persuasion to move on to its sequel. This is a collection of six folk tales, each from a different country but united by their having as heroines young resourceful women who brook little opposition in their bid to secure a place for themselves in their various worlds. Leeson takes the original stories, invests them with a contemporary, colloquial idiom (particularly evident in his dialogue) and the result is an assortment of good-humoured and lively re-tellings. Watch out especially for the redoubtable Oonagh, who, in a story deriving from an original by the Irish novelist William Carleton, gives the dreaded Cucullin his come-uppance, thereby ensuring peace of mind for Fin, her long-suffering husband. There is a great deal to be enjoyed here, to which Axel Scheffler's comic drawings provide a pleasant bonus. **RD**

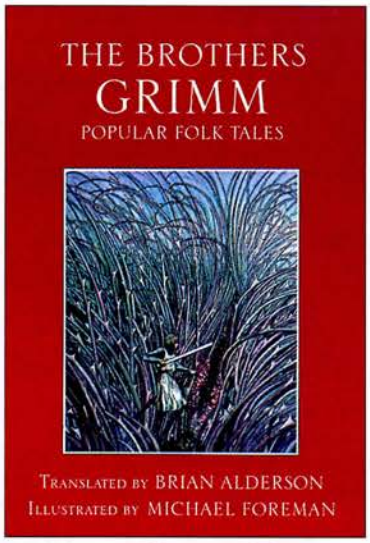
The Brothers Grimm: Popular Folk Tales

★★★★★

Translated by Brian Alderson, ill. Michael Foreman, Victor Gollancz, 192pp, 0 575 06287 8, £7.99 pbk

In an afterword to this handsomely produced selection of tales, Alderson expresses his concern at the sterility of many recent translations of Grimm, and explains how he has attempted to preserve the atmospheric cadences of the oral tradition in which these tales are grounded. He has succeeded. This is one of the most enthralling collections of traditional stories that I have come across in recent years, on a par with the eerily riveting retellings of Susan Price. It has been a pleasure both to read and to share them.

Familiar tales appearing here, such as 'Rumpelstiltskin', 'Rapunzel' and 'Snow-White', are re-enchanted with surreal and grisly little twists, while a clutch of lesser known tales gives us glimpses of bizarre riches still undiscovered (like the tiny, teasing, yarn that concludes the collection). Michael Foreman's full page



paintings and his pencil drawings which head each chapter provide traditional visions flushed with sprightly new vigour, a perfect accompaniment to this new translation. **GH**

Charlie's Eye

★★★

Dorothy Horgan, Hamish Hamilton, 128pp, 0 241 13681 4, £10.99 hbk

When Charlotte 'Charlie' Morris loses her place as captain of the school football team to new boy, Jason Jones, who dismisses her as 'handicapped' because of her glass eye, her world begins to fall apart. Jason Jones becomes the class idol with his skill and speed as a footballer. With the help of another newcomer, a sympathetic boy nicknamed Art Frozzen, Charlie sets out to discover what 'handicapped' means and to prove Jason Jones wrong. The children's love of football leads them to discover that being different is of no consequence. Eventually Charlie and Jason become friends.

This book is suitable for children aged about eight or nine, with its large print and gently paced storyline. The treatment of the issue of bullying children with disabilities is quite simple but is probably just about right for this age range. The characters are very clear cut, strong and speak the language of nine-year-olds today. Certain incidents cry out for a humorous illustration but sadly there are no illustrations in the book at all. **AK**

Keeping Cats

★★★★

Jay Ashton, Oxford, 128pp, 0 19 271581 X, £5.99 pbk

Sophie just cannot let Tracy's dad drown the five kittens that evening. But even when she has succeeded in saving them from this fate, narrowly avoiding drowning herself, there is a steady sequence of further dangers to avoid. This is dramatic stuff but an added pleasure is the humour of the telling and the comedy of events: dad discovers the hidden kittens in his shed and is seen 'not so much holding the kittens as wearing them'. Ashton's writing is stylish and witty and often plays on Sophie's naiveté, involving a host of comic incidents and characters. A funny book and a pleasure to read aloud. **AJ**

There's a Pharaoh in Our Bath!

★★★★

Jeremy Strong, ill. Nick Sharratt, 128pp, Puffin, 0 14 037571 6, £3.99 pbk

An Egyptian mummified Pharaoh, Sennapod (that gives you an idea of the style), comes to life and turns the tables on the evil scientists who have tempted a curse in order to steal his treasure. Carrie and Ben's dad discovers Sennapod, wandering around in his bandages in the rain and, naturally, takes him home where Ben, finding a good use of all his project work on the Egyptians ('See, it is helpful', you can tell your pupils), is able to respond to Sennapod who speaks English and hasn't had his insides removed (all is explained). A romp full of comic nonsense. **AJ**

Ginny's Egg

★★★

Pippa Goodhart, ill. Aafke Brouwer, Mammoth, 144pp, 0 7497 2586 9, £3.50 pbk

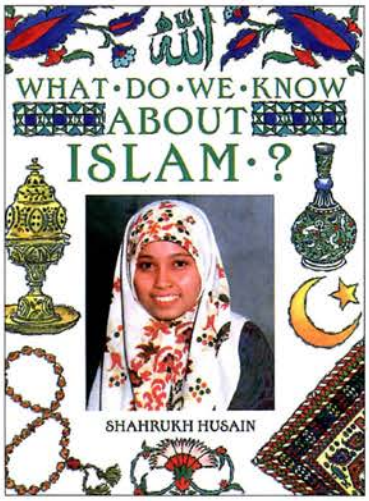
Nine-year-old Ginny finds a shimmering, gold-flecked egg in her Gran's henhouse, and when a baby dragon hatches out, she looks after it until the time comes for it to fly away with its mother, leaving only a shining scale as a memento for Ginny. In the meantime, Ginny's baby brother is born with Down's Syndrome; initially rejecting their baby, her parents eventually come to terms with his condition and bring him home, as Ginny had hoped they would, and as her baby dragon leaves her.

The dragon story-line is attractive and well-told, and Ginny's Gran, who has had a parallel experience at a time of crisis herself, is particularly well-drawn. However, I found the link between the dragon and the new baby unconvincing: Ginny doesn't perceive her brother's condition as a problem, and it is her parents who face the dilemma. I felt Ginny's mum needed the dragon more than Ginny did.

When I discussed the book with the mother of a 10-year-old child with Down's Syndrome, she expressed concern that the story inadvertently presents a negative view of the condition, and might cause problems for children in the same situation as Ginny, rather than helping them. Her 14-year-old daughter found the idea that parents could even think of rejecting their baby upsetting, saying that a child reader in a similar situation to Ginny might worry 'that there was something much more wrong with their sibling than they had anticipated', a view echoed by another consultant, aged 12.

Adult concerns of this sort – presented here in a matter-of-fact way – are perhaps too weighty for the sensitivity and the unsophisticated optimism of the child, raising emotions which are too delicate to be addressed adequately in this form; the story would however have made a good short story for adults, or a radio play.

I hesitate therefore to recommend this book across the board: I think it should be used with care, and although an easy enough read for a fluent reader of 10-plus, it is important that adults read it themselves before deciding to offer it to children. **AG**



What Do We Know About Islam?

NON-FICTION ★★★★

Shahrukh Husain, Macdonald 'What Do We Know About' series, 48pp, 0 7500 1971 9, £9.99 hbk

My Muslim Life

NON-FICTION ★★

Riadh El-Droubie, Wayland 'Everyday Religion' series, 32pp, 0 7502 1300 0, £9.50 hbk

It was a pleasure to read **What Do We Know About Islam?** as it is refreshing to come across a book about religion that is so lively and interesting. With its clarity of style and diversity of illustration (photographs, maps and drawings), this is a book which will appeal to all children. Each double page spread starts with a question on a particular aspect of Islam which is dealt with in a simple yet very informative manner. There is so much in this book that can initiate further discussion and lead to various projects. A useful glossary and index are also included.

Although it is a first introduction to the subject, **My Muslim Life** however does not appear to have the required novelty of layout and design needed to maintain a child's interest. Each page has a box with simple text and a photograph but the teacher will need to elaborate further. The information on additional books to read, glossary, index and notes for teachers are adequate. **KA**

The Dadhunters

★★★

Josephine Feeney, Collins, 160pp, 0 00 185653 7, £9.99 hbk

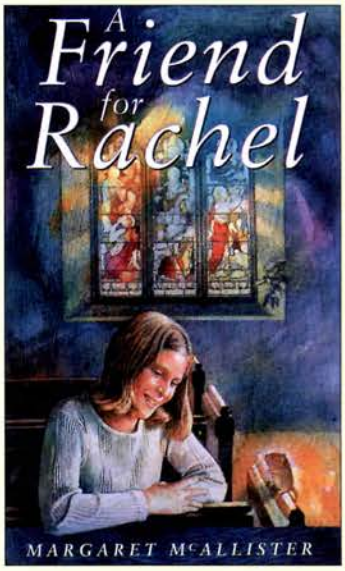
Gary lives with his divorced mum, but the highlight of his week is the Saturday visit to City matches with his dad. When dad announces that he is to remarry, Gary imagines that it is only a matter of time until his mum follows suit, plunging his life back into turmoil. To pre-empt this, he and his friend hatch a clutch of misbegotten schemes, aimed at pairing his mum up with a suitably lad-friendly partner. The subsequent chaos embroils Gary's bachelor teacher, a sad case from a lonely hearts agency, an obnoxiously stellar football player, and Gary's dad's fiancée in a cringingly embarrassing comedy of errors. Though seeming to stray toward Mills and Boon territory, this story's wry humour and its compassionate depiction of Gary's perplexity make it suitable reading for all unsentimental juniors. **GH**

NEW *Talent*

A Friend for Rachel

★★★★★

Margaret McAllister, Oxford University Press, 160pp, 0 19 271745 6, £5.99 trade pbk



Rachel is having a miserable time – her vicar father has moved to a new church where his innovations, and his family, come in for much unfair criticism; Rachel has no best friend at her new school; her pregnant mum feels unwell a lot of the time but when Rachel tries to help she gets shouted at. As Septuagesima, the wise old church mouse, remarks, 'You feel so stretched you could snap'.

The three mice, Timothy and Titus (actually one mouse, named after a church festival), Candlemas and Septuagesima who befriend Rachel reveal to her that, like other children in previous centuries who have lived in this place, she has a task – to replace rot (which is literally found in the bell tower) and rumour (spite from entrenched parishioners) with renewal and reality (vision and acceptance of change). In this Rachel is to succeed in an adventure which links the present to the church's past.

Firmly and enjoyably rooted in the detail of parish life and with hints of social comedy à la Barbara Pym (Mrs Scott-Richard and Mrs Pickles are not keen on a vicar with happy clappy tendencies or a vicar's wife who paints bold posters), this highly imaginative first novel is also an assured and satisfying portrait of a child gaining in strength and inner knowledge as, with the mice's help, Rachel learns to live with problems whose resolutions may not be speedy or necessarily what she would like them to be. **RS**

REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

The Girl in the Blue Tunic

★★★★

Jean Ure, Scholastic, 192pp, 0 590 54228 1, £4.99 pbk

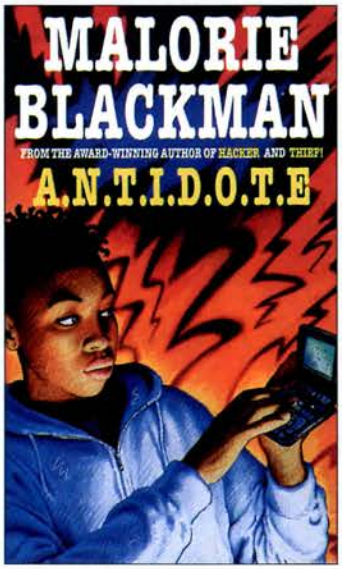
Eleven-year-old Hannah finds herself at the boarding school formerly attended by not only her deceased mother, but also her grim granny. After initial sadness she actually begins to like the place, in part due to her new, swotty, cynical, friend Lucy, and in part due to a mysterious waif-like girl, who flits in and out of Hannah's life. These visitations form the basis of a detective/ghost story, that proves our heroine has a more convoluted family history than she thought.

This is a lengthy novel, but with easy-read print and it moves at a steady pace. Girl readers in late KS2 and early KS3 should warm to it. The characters are identifiably real and the setting modern, not stuffy, the same of which cannot be said about the book's disastrous cover! **DB**

A.N.T.I.D.O.T.E.

★★★★

Malorie Blackman, Corgi, 256pp, 0 552 52839 0, £3.99 pbk



A.N.T.I.D.O.T.E. is a protest organisation concerned with protecting the environment; Elliot's uncle is arrested, and his mother disappears, after they are spotted breaking in to the premises of a local business on behalf of the organisation. Elliot, a young black boy, uses his extensive knowledge and understanding of computer systems to work out who the spy is in A.N.T.I.D.O.T.E.'s camp, and just what his mum is really up to.

The book, reminiscent of a TV spy-thriller in pace and style, is an easier-to-read, less substantial version of Blackman's award-winning 1992 novel **Hacker**, with a child hero able to crack the case against a parent through computer-literacy learned at that parent's knee. The language is fairly simple, relying a great deal on dialogue, and the pace is fast with suspense built up well. I enjoyed it greatly, despite my initial irritation at the colloquialisms and use of contemporary slang – a good read for 10-pluses and less-sure readers, and a good introduction to the thriller genre. **AG**

Gloria's Gramophone

★★★

Akulah Agbami, Mammoth, 128pp, 0 7497 2588 5, £3.99 pbk

When an antique gramophone sent as a birthday present to a bored little girl from a relative in Jamaica swallows its recipient and her friend, the victims are delighted. A tedious, wet, English summer vanishes, and the girls find themselves in the vibrant world of 1920s Harlem, where they join a travelling jazz and tap dance troupe, and have the time of their lives 60 odd years before they are born.

A first novel, this is a pretty wild story, told in an exuberant, gossipy, highly conversational style. The evocation of a romanticised, lost, black America is vivid and exhilarating, and the twisted skein that links this world to the heroines' present is skilfully woven. **GH**

We Couldn't Provide Fish Thumbs

POETRY ★★★★

by James Berry, Judith Nicholls, Grace Nichols, Vernon Scannell and Matthew Sweeney.

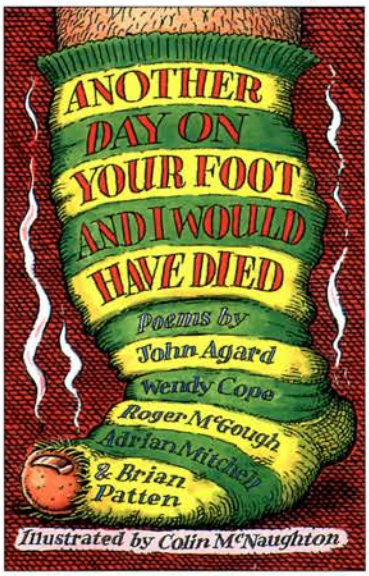
Illustrated by Colin McNaughton, Macmillan, 128pp, 0 333 65405 6, £8.99 hbk

Another Day on Your Foot and I Would Have Died

POETRY ★★★★

by John Agard, Wendy Cope, Roger McGough, Adrian Mitchell and Brian Patten.

Illustrated by Colin McNaughton, Macmillan, 112pp, 0 330 34048 4, £3.99 pbk



Most of the poems in these collections are amusingly illustrated and each is (unusually) signed by the poet at the end, which, along with notes about the contributors, help to reinforce the fact that poets are real people.

The popularity of poetry books at my school's recent bookfair, particularly among boys, indicates that these breezy volumes should prove a hit with readers at Key Stages 2 and 3. With dialect, jokes, rhymes, wordplay, masses of humour and few poems stretching to a second page, children's poetry is seen to be definitely here, now and accessible. Very few of the works are ones endlessly anthologised elsewhere. **DB**

Tongue Twisters and Tonsil Twizzlers

POETRY ★★★★

Chosen by Paul Cookson, ill. Jane Eccles, 0 330 34941 4

Parent-Free Zone

POETRY ★★★

Chosen by Brian Moses, ill. Lucy Maddison, 0 330 34554 0

Macmillan, 64pp, £2.99 each pbk

Here are two anthologies of poems in a series designed to grab children's attention with colourful covers and exciting subjects.

With **Tongue Twisters and Tonsil Twizzlers**, you can put your mouth around some tantalisingly tangled and seriously scrambled stanzas: wanton word play that precipitates pupil participation. And, as anthologist Cookson regularly visits schools, the poems have probably been thoroughly tasted and tested by upper juniors and lower secondarys. Be warned though, relentless rhyming can turn tedious, so enjoy in bite sized bits.

You might think that the poems about fractious parents that **Parent-Free Zone** offers would be likely to keep tedium at bay. Again, be wary. The embarrassing foolishness of the older generation can only go so far. Michael Rosen was doing this brilliantly a long time ago and none of the poems collected here by Moses can rise to the surrealist heights of 'clear the fluff out from under your bed'. They are mostly content to stay at sitcom level.

It is good to see a publisher intent on making poetry accessible and collecting the work of poets who perform regularly for children. But can I ask Macmillan why **Doin Mi Ed In**, a collection of rap poems, perhaps their most adventurous poetry title, and with appeal to secondary age children, is out of print? **CB**

The Barefoot Book of Heroines

NON-FICTION ★★★

1 898000 87 5

The Barefoot Book of Heroes

NON-FICTION ★★★

1 898000 38 7

Rebecca Hazell, Barefoot, 80pp, £12.99 each

'The barefoot child symbolises the human being whose natural integrity and capacity for action are unimpaired.' This extract from the half title pageof **The Barefoot Book of Heroines** encapsulates the spirit of these two beautifully produced books.

Hazell offers a very personal selection of twelve heroes (from Shakespeare to Sequoyah) and twelve heroines (from Joan of Arc to Frida Kahlo), chosen for their ability to bring to bear their own special qualities on life's challenges.

The books follow an identical pattern, summarising life achievements and setting them within an historical perspective, with maps providing relevant geographical information. This format provides a readily accessible structure and would facilitate study for top junior/lower secondary pupils.

Hazell's graceful and stylised illustrations are strikingly rendered in bright, appealing colours.

These two books would make fine additions to a class library and their robust covers will withstand constant use. **VR**

Midwinter

★★★★

Maeve Henry, Mammoth, 112pp, 0 7497 2593 1, £4.50 pbk

Set in a land 'distant in time and place', this is the story of 12-year-old Thomas Ortellus's quest to find the great Sword, stolen many years before by the mysterious Midwinter himself. Thomas's rejection of war and his study of the old ways of the green folk of the forest help him find the sword, negotiate with the raiders and discover his true father.

While not in the class of **A Wizard of Earthsea**, this is a very enjoyable read, containing many of the necessary elements of a good fantasy and only occasionally lapsing into an inappropriately modern tone.

Unfortunately the book is closely printed in a small sans-serif type, and badly laid out with a particularly narrow margin at the top of the pages, making it difficult to read and unattractive to look at. A pity, since these visual deterrents might well put off a reader who would otherwise enjoy the story. **AG**

Best of Friends

★★★

Edited by Valerie Bierman, Mammoth, 112pp, 0 7497 2597 4, £3.50 pbk

This collection with friendship as its theme brings together short stories from a number of contemporary writers whose quality and the range of perspectives on friendship make for an enjoyable sequence. This includes Jan Mark's hint of terrors beneath the mundane and an awareness of the anchored quality of friendship; Theresa Breslin and Ian Strachan showing the friendship of grandchild and grandfather, cutting across generations and helping them to deal with the knowledge and pain of loss; and, from Robert Westall, a terse, sharp moment of uprooting for a child, where the wonders of the new house and independence in the country cannot compensate for the loss of the brick landscape, the landlady and her much loved dog. **AJ**

Truth, Lies and Homework

★★★

Josephine Feeney, Viking, 160pp, 0 670 86317 3, £10.99 hbk

Feeney's first novel, **My Family and Other Natural Disasters**, was a joy. Shrewd observation and a punchy pace made a hugely memorable impact. Alas **Truth, Lies and Homework** – despite its intriguing title – falls short of this high-water mark.

Claire must interview her grandfather about his activities during the Second World War, for a Living History project set by her teacher. Her questions uncover family secrets and Claire must decide what she feels about her grandfather's exploits and how others are likely to react.

Characters are created well but the narrative hangs round a watery central thread: Claire's grandfather's secret is rather mundane and fails to justify the forced drama of the plot. The narrative pace slackens mid-way but a determined reader will be rewarded by a thoughtful ending. **VR**

Lost for Words

★★★★

Elizabeth Lutzeier, Macmillan, 160pp, 0 330 33741 6, £3.99 pbk

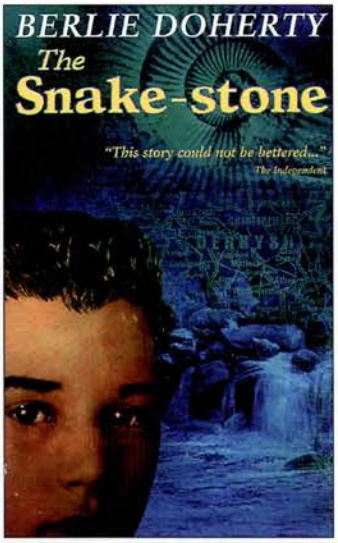
This fourth novel by Kathleen Fidler Award winner, Elizabeth Lutzeier, has taken three years to find its way into paperback. In this well researched and closely observed tale, she brings 13-year-old Aysha from rural Bangladesh to a bewildering and inhospitable East London. Perhaps too many issues are touched on – from racial violence to the malevolent teacher who may be a child molester. But Lutzeier is as convincing writing about family life on the Indian sub continent as she is describing the everyday indignities of a National Health hospital ward. Despite the strength of Lutzeier's feelings about the fate of families like Aysha's, she gives as much weight to character and relationships as she does to environment. Aysha is a clever, feisty and sensitive child, who suffers the anxieties and embarrassments of any teenager; and the novel shirks none of the complexities of her reactions to being caught between two worlds. Although Lutzeier writes from the point of view of a sympathetic outsider, she succeeds in her implicit aim of explaining Aysha's experience to young British contemporaries, who may have only the faintest idea of what it means to be 'Lost for Words'. **CB**

The Snake-stone

★★★★★

Berlie Doherty, Collins, 176pp, 0 00 674022 7, £3.99 pbk

The story of the adopted child who sets out to find her/his 'real' parent is a popular one in children's fiction. Rarely, however, is the theme tackled with such compassion or control as Doherty brings to it. James is a young teenager determined to trace his birth mother and this gives rise to the central narrative of the novel. The details of James's quest are skilfully interwoven with revelations of the circumstances which had led to his being abandoned as a baby; in



turn, these strands co-exist with his growing prowess as a diver, potentially set to win national recognition in the sport. Linking all of these is the talismanic 'snake-stone' which, in both its literal and metaphorical manifestations, comes to cast its significant and compulsive spell on James and reader alike. In its presentation of a fascinating journey of discovery the book represents another fine achievement for its author. **RD**

Special Powers

★★★

Mary Hoffman, Hodder, 208pp, 0 340 62670 4, £3.99 pbk

In real life the Founder and Co-ordinator of the national pressure group CENTRAL (Children's Education Needs Teaching Resources And Libraries), Hoffman presents us in her latest novel with a paean to the power of libraries. Drab little Emily Grey haunts the local branch to feed her need for fantasy fiction and give herself more ideas for her own fantasy existence as K'sedra, Empress-Mage of the Desert Kingdom of Krin. It's here in the fantasy section that she meets Archie (short for Archway) Powers who she just *knows* is going to be her best friend. Archie is part of an eccentric family that has just moved into the neighbourhood and Emily soon realises that they are beings (creatures, forces?) from another planet (galaxy, dimension?) who have beamed down to Earth using the library (that power-house of knowledge) as a gateway.

A council threat to shut the library as a cost-cutting exercise involves Emily, the Powers, elegant Eleanor Everett (Head of English), the spritzer set (her A-level English group) and assorted others in demos and sleep-ins and there is much fun with the Powers' powers (if you catch my drift). All cleverly done but a touch too long – it feels like a short story that has run out of control. **SR**

A Fine Summer Knight

★★★★

Jan Mark, ill. Bob Harvey, Puffin, 208pp, 0 14 036896 5, £4.99 pbk

Grace has a glimpse through a telescope of what seemed like a knight on his charger, on the hill beyond the housing estate. For her own safety she is not allowed to leave the confines of the local streets,

largely ignored by the adults of her family who restore old machines and concentrate on the staging of the annual steam rally. The book enacts a whole series of encounters and relationships: Grace escapes and finds her knight (real but modern, a member of a re-enactment society) and another lonely girl of her own age; their needs connect too and the knight rides to the rescue of Grace's father's Steam Rally. So many connections – of past and present; of people sharing enthusiasms and eccentricities across class divides. A warm celebration of the power of people and words which exceeds the ordinary. AJ

A Spell of Words

POETRY ★★★★

Elizabeth Jennings, Macmillan, 128pp, 0 333 66072 2, £9.99 hbk

The 'Spell of Words' of the title of this volume of over 90 poems by Jennings describes the poet's experience of language as 'a password and a key', opening a door to understanding: '*... and the light is shed,/ The gold of language tongued and minted fresh.*'

Many of the poems, written over a long time-span, return to this image of a spell. Others deal with the power language gives us to name and order our universe, and how this may diminish rather than enhance our wonder at it.

A long series of poems describe individual animals, often by trying to state what the animal might think we think of it, and concluding by reminding us of our responsibility for the animal kingdom. A further theme of the collection is that of the child's world, seen from the distance of adulthood, a distance which lends an evocative, almost wistful, but somehow resigned, air to the work.

Some of the animal poems could, with care, be read with children of perhaps nine-plus, but on the whole the complexity of the ideas expressed (often in deceptively simple language) and their contemplative quality suggest an adolescent or adult audience – I hope the collection does not suffer from being described as 'selected poems for children' as there is much to provoke thought.

This is a beautifully produced volume, its cover carrying an evocative picture by Louise Brierley, and the generously printed poems tone to each crisp cream page – a delight to behold. AG

The Aztec News

NON-FICTION ★★★

Philip Steele, 0 7445 2869 0

The Egyptian News

NON-FICTION ★★★

Scott Steedman, 0 7445 4474 2

The Greek News

NON-FICTION ★★★

Anton Powell and Philip Steele, 0 7445 2868 2

The Roman News

NON-FICTION ★★★

Andrew Langley, 0 7445 2867 4

Walker 'The News', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

In an attempt to put a new spin on well trawled curriculum topic areas, Walker Books have come up with the notion of presenting ancient history in a newspaper format – a compilation of 'the stories that really made the headlines' especially rewritten for a souvenir edition.

Many of these headlines wouldn't look out of place in today's tabloids ('Queen Rocks Nation'), but the 'rewriting' sometimes robs the articles of their 'original' spontaneity by the necessity of having to include so much background data. The accompanying illustrations vary in calibre owing to several different artists having been employed.

The most appealing items are probably the advertisements and the features; which cover all the usual topics – leisure, sport, food and fashion, health and family matters.

On balance, even though some of the 'editors' seem to have had trouble deciding whether they are aiming for a 'broadsheet' or 'mass market' audience, these volumes will undoubtedly find their niche, so contact your 'newsagent' while stocks last! VH

Revolutionaries

NON-FICTION ★★★★

Paul Thomas, Belitha Press 'Rebels with a Cause', 48pp, 1 85561 551 7, £8.99 hbk

This is the first book in a series entitled 'Rebels with a Cause', dedicated to highlighting the lives and struggles of people who have defied the social and political circumstances of their times. The ten biographies in the current volume range from Samuel Adams and Toussaint L'Ouverture to Michael Collins and Mao, and take in local mavericks like Geronimo and the American anarchist Emma Goldman as well as national figures like Lenin and Bolívar. Each life story is accompanied by a sketch of the circumstances against which the protagonists rebelled. The tone here is factual, but the facts of course militate against 'neutrality'.

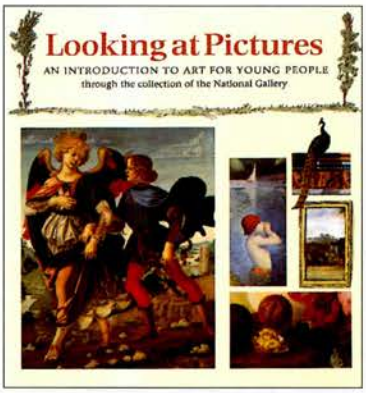
The book is clearly and accessibly written with a stimulating array of contemporary illustrations neatly integrated with the text. A pity, then, that the cover is so drab and with such a wide ranging coverage, I found the omission of Che Guevara, surely one of the most intriguing, inspiring and archetypal of revolutionaries, both puzzling and disappointing. But these are quibbles; this is a useful and welcome book on a much neglected theme. GH

Looking at Pictures – an introduction to art for young people through the collection of the National Gallery

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Joy Richardson, A & C Black in association with National Gallery Publications, 80pp, 0 7136 4685 3, £9.99 hbk

Richardson has risen admirably to the challenge of selecting just a few examples from over 2000 paintings in the National Gallery spanning seven centuries of European art. Furthermore, her expertise and infectious enthusiasm ('Tobias and the Angel' is 'like sweet music for the ears') have combined to produce a lively and very accessible text.



In a concise, yet wide-ranging narrative, she begins with a brief analysis of what paintings (and art galleries) are for and then moves on to discuss the major themes such as narrative paintings, portraits, still lifes and landscapes. Our understanding and appreciation is further enhanced by explanations of some of the techniques involved – colour, composition, perspective, pigments and paint, etc. – and by the inclusion of illuminating quotations from some of the artists featured.

The result is an attractively produced, splendidly illustrated volume which succeeds handsomely in its objective of encouraging children 'to develop their capacities for enjoying and responding to paintings wherever they come across them'. VH

The Usborne Illustrated Atlas of the 20th Century

NON-FICTION ★★★★

Lisa Miles and Mandy Ross, Usborne, 64pp, 0 7460 2498 3, £7.99 pbk

Miles and Ross give a coherent and interesting interpretation of the history of the twentieth century which has seen new nations and previously submerged classes and cultures muscling in on the world stage. When understanding of international and domestic conflict depends on knowing, for instance, the geographical situation of Israel, or how India and Ireland were partitioned, there can be no better way of explaining than with maps. However, in a slim book about world history, things sometimes shrink to the limits of perception. I know T E Lawrence was small; but a map of Japanese influence in Korea reduced, like him, to the size of a postage stamp, tells me little. For the most part, however, the clear prose is matched with well chosen photographs, and with maps that are easy to read. A glossary, and indexes to both text and maps make this a good introduction for secondary students. CB

The History of Emigration from Greece

NON-FICTION ★★

Sofka Zinovieff, 0 7496 2406 X

Africa

NON-FICTION ★★★

Catherine Chambers, 0 7496 2377 2

Ireland

NON-FICTION ★★

Katherine Prior, 0 7496 2376 4

The Indian Subcontinent

★★

Katherine Prior, 0 7496 2407 8

Franklin Watts 'Origins', 32pp, £10.99 each hbk

This is a well-meaning, well-illustrated, well-researched but ultimately disappointing series. 32 pages from contents to index is not enough to do justice to the vastness of the topics covered and there is an inevitable 'broad-brush' treatment with considerable dependence on the reader bringing a degree of background social, political and geographical knowledge to the text; indeed only your most capable students from about Year 9 up are going to make much of these books.

Africa is probably the strongest as the first half is a coherent account of the slave trade with all its attendant atrocities. However, despite the author's assertion that 'the settling of African Caribbeans in Britain has been one of the greatest movements of African peoples in recent times', we are given only just over one page on the subject which leads me to re-state a view I've put forward several times in **BfK** that what is really needed is a series that looks at the 'who, when and why' of post-war migration to this country enabling children and young people from the minority and majority communities to understand how Britain developed into a multi-cultural society. SR

A Punishment to Fit the Crime?

NON-FICTION ★

Alison Cooper, 0 7496 2380 2

A Right to Die?

NON-FICTION ★

Richard Walker, 0 7496 2412 4

A Right to Smoke?

NON-FICTION ★

Emma Haughton, 0 7496 2381 0

Rights for Animals?

NON-FICTION ★

Deirdre Rochford, 0 7496 2414 06

Franklin Watts 'Viewpoints' series, 32pp each, £10.99 each hbk

I generally prefer the description 'information book' to 'non-fiction'. However, with this 'Viewpoints' series, 'non-fiction' fits the bill exactly, for whatever else this quartet may be, they do not qualify as information books.

Each volume observes the same formula – a contentious subject chopped into 13 picturesque double-spread issues each hung about with emotive sound – and sight – bites, the whole set into some sort of sequence by the authorial equivalent of quick-drying cement. An example may help. In **Rights for Animals?** we have a spread entitled 'Kill or Cure?' which is devoted to the use of animals in medical research. Five italicised quotes with sources

ranging from Charles Darwin to the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection establish pro and anti viewpoints, with a semi-explanatory 'text' shoehorned in between them and 'illustrated' by three photographs whose relevance has to be explained by captions. Despite all this effort, the spread comes to no serious conclusion.

The aim, of course, is transparently well-intentioned – to shock, jolt, amaze, emote or otherwise stimulate the formation of young people's own opinions and motivate discussion, debate and a further exploration of the subject leading to the holy grail of 'a better understanding'. The trouble is, though, that although there are shocks, jolts and emotions a-plenty, the books don't offer anything like enough stimulation or support for further research; in fact the nearest each book comes to this is a few 'useful addresses' and a half-page of 'Facts to think about' (it takes longer to train a kosher butcher than a doctor!).

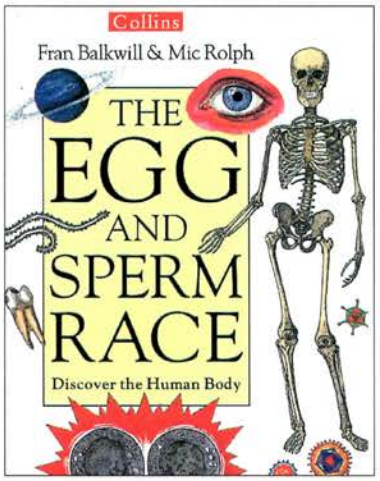
Thus the series runs the risk of defeating its own object in that, by being deliberately inconclusive, its titles may serve only to confirm any prejudice with which readers initially approach them.

The series has no bibliography to substantiate its snatched quotes and authorial assertions – this amounts to near criminal negligence and, had **A Punishment to Fit the Crime?** equipped me so to think, I would sentence **Rights for Animals** to instant remaindering. **TP**

The Egg and Sperm Race

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Fran Balkwill and Mic Rolph, Collins, 128pp, 0 00 196516 6, £7.99 pbk



Now published as a same-size paperback, the hardback edition of this title received a cordial welcome in **BfK 91**, March 1995. It is a remarkably full-fashioned introduction to human biology – from cellular level outwards – which settles early on to its task of being happily and straightforwardly informative.

It achieves this aim with distinction due to the logical planning of Balkwill's text in excellently plain language which meshes consistently with Rolph's entirely apposite illustrations. This results in a fine example of the sort of trend-free synergy that is becoming all too rare in current information books, so many of which seem to be assembled from pre-existing kits rather than written and illustrated from scratch. Come to think of it – **The Egg and Sperm Race** itself starts from scratch – as all favourites should. **TP**

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

In Between

★★★★

Edited by Miriam Hodgson, Mammoth, 144pp, 0 7497 2335 1, £3.99 pbk

Eleven short stories – none longer than about 14 pages – dealing with the moment childhood is left behind. A strong and interesting collection for Year 9 and up. Michael Morpurgo's 'What Does It Feel Like?' is particularly moving as a young Bosnian girl watches the destruction of her village and the 'ethnic cleansing' of her family and neighbours; she manages to survive thanks to the humanity of one of the Serb soldiers. I also liked Ian Strachan's 'The Simple Truth' in which Lucy is attracted to the dangerous biker Alex who runs through girlfriends at a rate of knots. Her long friendship with mentally handicapped Sam is a hindrance to this new relationship but when Alex comes on too strong one dark night in the woods it is Sam who comes to Lucy's aid – but at the cost of the innocence that was the basis of their friendship. **SR**

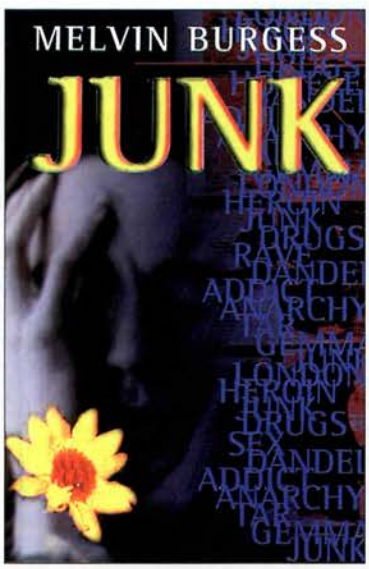
Junk

★★★★★

Melvin Burgess, Andersen, 288pp, 0 86264 632 4, £12.99 hbk, Penguin, 0 14 038019 1, £4.99 pbk

Tar runs away from his alcoholic parents and his seaside town home. Shortly afterwards his girlfriend Gemma, fleeing her own oppressive family, joins him in a Bristol squat. The rest of the book records their descent into drug addiction and moral putrefaction, a relentlessly bleak chronicle whose tone is vividly modulated by the use of different voices to relate each chapter. Sometimes Tar and Gemma and their fellow outcasts speak, sometimes friends and family who are witnessing their debasement from the sidelines. The former chapters make particularly gripping reading; Burgess takes the risk of providing us with long and undiluted doses of the addicts' self deluding psychobabble, but the chill authenticity of their ramblings is frightening. And underlying almost the whole of the polyphony is a seductive, paradoxical sense of the sheer joy of nihilistic rebellion.

This is a complex, multifoliate and tremendously powerful story, that the teenage readers I lent it to found troubling, fascinating and recognisable. **GH**



More Shakespeare Without the Boring Bits

NON-FICTION ★★★★

Humphrey Carpenter, ill. The Big i, Viking, 144pp, 0 670 87201 6, £5.99 pbk

This irreverently titled book encourages readers to imagine how Shakespeare might have treated his stories if he had been writing today. Inspiration taken from recent films and productions is freely acknowledged: most obviously in **Much Ado About Nothing** which is retitled 'Two Weddings and a Funeral'.

There are eight plays in this collection and they receive a variety of treatments: film scripts, musicals, tabloid newspaper articles, agony columns and diaries.

The appeal of this book is its use of contemporary language and the distillation of plot into a simplified form – stripping away excess characters to achieve clarity.

I would feel happiest using **More Shakespeare** as an introduction to the plays proper, giving pupils an opportunity to explore the stories from a familiar angle before plunging into the complexities of seventeenth-century English.

With the study of Shakespeare obligatory for SATS and GCSE students alike, this book and its companion volume, **Shakespeare Without the Boring Bits**, will add another entertaining weapon to the beleaguered teacher's armoury. **VR**

Getting into Drugs

NON-FICTION ★★

Pete Sanders and Steve Myers, Franklin Watts 'Let's Discuss', 32pp, 0 7496 2494 9, £9.99 hbk

I've never been a fan of this series with its wooden cartoon sequences, obviously posed photographs and contrived case studies and this volume does not make me change my mind even though we need to provide our youngsters with all the information that we can on this most emotive of subjects. The only part I can see any of my students using is the spread that has the basic facts on the most common drugs. The authors obviously know their subject and there is a lot of sound advice but it is so difficult to get at amongst all the illustrations that I fear only the most determined of readers will stick with it. **SR**

Drug Trafficking

NON-FICTION ★★★

Jillian Powell, Franklin Watts 'Crimebusters', 32pp, 0 7496 2123 0, £9.99 hbk

If ever there was a prize for tricksy page design, this title would be well up in the running. Pages from notebooks with filing-cards 'paper-clipped' to them, bits of pages 'torn' from books and overlayed 'windows' as though from a computer screen and I can't decide whether I love it or loathe it. There is certainly no shortage of information on the production, transportation and detection of drugs and we are taken off on various side-tracks including the information that in **Candide** Voltaire wrote about a woman who smuggled diamonds by stuffing them inside her body – though a discreet veil is drawn over where. The book is up-to-date enough to include the drugs-related murder of Irish journalist Veronica Guerin in Dublin last June. If I have not quite talked myself into loving it, I can at least see this title's good points. However, I wonder if young people are quite as visually literate as they are often assumed to be – I think they would benefit more from a cleaner, less cluttered page to look at. ■ **SR**

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

Greetings from Sandy Beach
Lord of the Animals
Mouse Creeps
Wolf!

CLASSICS IN SHORT No.3

Helen Levene

Fresh air, ruddy complexions, plain-speaking and weeding? No, it's not ***Gardeners' Question Time*** *but …*

THE SECRET GARDEN

by Frances Hodgson Burnett

First published:

1911. Various editions available.

Who's it for?

Children of nine upwards, gardeners, nature-lovers.

Not suitable for:

Readers who like action-packed adventure.

Who was Frances Hodgson Burnett?

Born as Frances Eliza Hodgson in Manchester in 1849, as a child Frances loved making up stories and wrote many poems and short stories. Her father died when she was very young, and her mother took over the family hardware business. When it ran into difficulties, the family emigrated to America, at a relative's invitation, though they still faced poverty. In 1873 Frances married Dr Swan Burnett. She began to write stories for her sons Lionel and Vivian, and the result was the rags-to-riches tale **Little Lord Fauntleroy** (her first children's book to be published in 1885 which was received with great acclaim). In 1882 she moved back to England with her two sons, setting up an English home in a manor house in Kent. In 1898 she divorced Swan Burnett for failure to support her and the children, and married a young actor, but this marriage was no happier than the first. In 1909, while creating a garden at a new home on Long Island, she began **The Secret Garden**, her best and most important work. She went on to be a hugely successful writer for children and adults. She died in 1924. (Ann Thwaite's biography of Frances, **Waiting for the Party**, is worth reading.)

What secret garden?

At the beginning of the story, ten-year-old Mary Lennox arrives from India to live with her uncle, whom she has never met, in Misselthwaite Manor on the bleak Yorkshire moors – a far cry from the dusty heat of India, the only place she has ever known. Mary is (at least to begin with) an unlikeable, disagreeable child, always sour-faced and cross. She had been spoiled in India by servants who met her every command, and a mother who gave her everything but her time and love. She was lonely, neglected and is now orphaned.

With her uncle away for long stretches of time, and therefore left to her own devices, Mary begins to explore her new surroundings and learns that she is capable of liking people. Her first friend is a cheeky robin red-breast, and it is the bird who leads her to the secret garden which lies hidden within the huge grounds and orchards belonging to the house. Mary discovers that the secret garden once belonged to her uncle's wife, who died after an accident falling off a swing. Her uncle had the door to the garden locked and never wanted to set foot in it again. The garden has been untended for many years. Mary is determined to restore it to its former glory and does so with the help of another new-found friend – Martha's brother, Dickon.

Who she?

The maid, one of 12 children from a very poor family, but you will be glad to know she is always cheerful, as are her clean and scrubbed brothers and sisters and tireless mother. She and Dickon are loyal members of the lower orders who know their place.

It's OK to be poor as long as you wash a lot?

Got it in one.

Any more secrets?

Ever since she arrived at Misselthwaite Manor, Mary has been aware of strange crying noises in the night, but Martha tells her it is only the wind off the moors. One night Mary traces the source of the crying and finds her young cousin Colin, a supposed invalid, also living in the house. Colin is bedridden, unable to use his limbs and, like Mary when she first arrived, he is very lonely and scared, and desperate for his father's love. Mary, Dickon and the magical, powerful pull of the secret garden gradually coax Colin out of his bed, and towards a full recovery. A letter to her uncle persuades him to return and when he does he realises that he, too, has been lonely, running away from his fear that Colin might die, as his wife did. The secret garden, now no longer a hidden place, is the catalyst which changes Mary from a sullen, unhappy child into a fun-loving, kind and caring one; it changes Colin from a lonely, selfish, obnoxious boy into a healthy, friendly companion, and it changes Uncle from a recluse to a true father and Lord of the Manor.

Classic qualities:

The moral and material transformations of **The Secret Garden** have a powerful and inspirational appeal to young readers. It is perhaps the sense of achievement that the children in the story gain which fires readers' imaginations, i.e. you can make things happen if you really want them to, even if, like Mary Lennox, you are not a pretty or agreeable child. The child characters are self-reliant, independent, achieving change and growth without the help of adults, or adult interference – another highly appealing quality. The novel is not steeped in Victorian values or heavy morals, so each new generation has been able to identify with it. With its timeless storyline and richly woven text, this classic novel has been justly described as one of the most satisfying stories for children ever written.

Politically correct?

Apart from the faithful, plain-speaking family retainers? Not quite. Bedridden Colin is always whingeing and sorry for himself until, miraculously, he learns to walk. OK, his 'disability' is an expression of his state of mind but it could be implied that others with disabilities could also walk if they only pulled their socks up … Uncle, who has a spinal deformity (described as a hunchback), is at first portrayed as someone fearful and frightening.

Other books by Frances Hodgson Burnett:

Little Lord Fauntleroy (1885), **A Little Princess** (1905), **The Lost Prince** (1915).

Film versions?

One and very good too. Directed by Agnieszka Holland, it stars John Lynch and Maggie Smith amongst others. A useful classroom study guide is available from Film Education, 41-42 Berners Street, London W1P 3AA. ■

Helen Levene works in publishing.

The illustrations are from the Gollancz edition illustrated by Shirley Hughes
(0 575 05609 6, £7.99 pbk)