

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

September 1997 No.106

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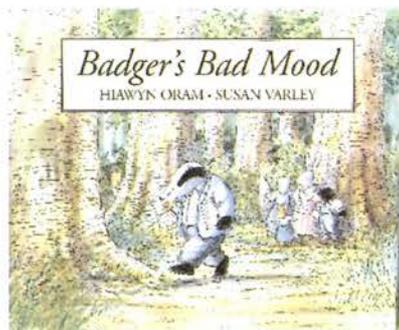
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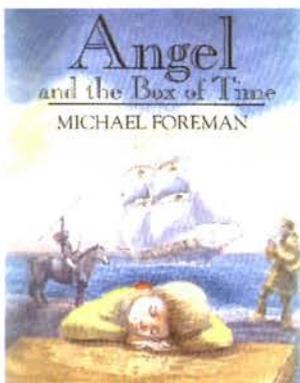
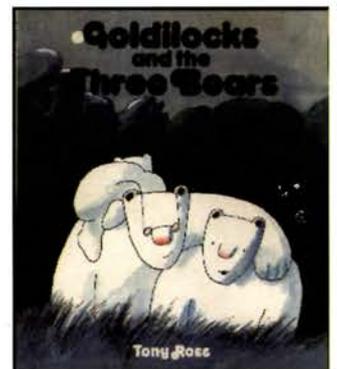
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CoverStory

This issue's cover is from Lynne Reid Banks' novel *Angela and Diabola*, discussed by Stephanie Nettell on page 11. The artwork is by Klaus Verplanke. Thanks to HarperCollins for their help in producing this September cover.

EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

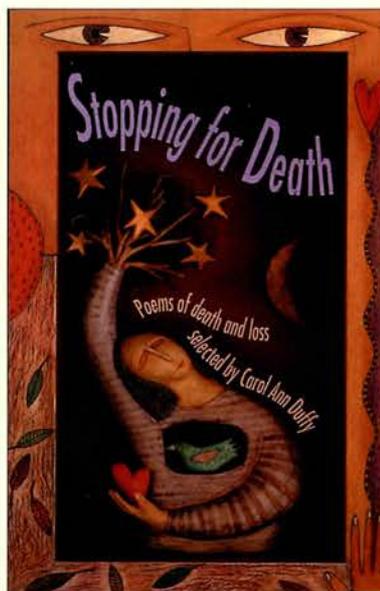
School Standards Minister, Stephen Byers, has told parents that they must share responsibility with teachers for helping their children learn to read. He expects them to spend 20 minutes a day reading with their child.

Parents with poor reading skills will be invited to attend Family Literacy courses to improve their own literacy skills as well as learn how to help their children read. A pilot Family Literacy course in Norfolk has reported dramatic improvements in parents' reading as well as in their ability to help their children develop reading and writing skills.

While it is great to have a government that cares enough about children, books and literacy to tell us to spend time reading with our children, it would have been even more wonderful if the announcement of this important and imaginative measure had emphasised for parents the pleasure and fun to be had from sharing books with their children rather than coming over as a grim diktat.

In this issue of BfK Ross Shimon, Chief Executive, The Library Association, calls on the government to recognise the vital role of school libraries and public libraries in any drive to improve reading and literacy levels needs (see page 16).

A recently published independent review of the school library service by Graham Small found that a quarter of authorities in England and Wales do not operate a service. Budgets have fallen by 18.5% in England and 48% in Wales



Tricia Rafferty's stylish cover for *Stopping for Death: Poems of Death and Loss*, edited by Carol Ann Duffy, the Signal Poetry Award winner for 1997, an 'immensely well-chosen set of poems' ... which 'betrays none of the parochialism displayed by most anthologists for children' (see page 17).

with staff costs down by 11%. There has been an almost 20% decline in the number of staff employed. The report adds that the service has been hit by education budget cuts and local government reform. Some schools failed to buy

into the service following the introduction of local management and the smaller unitary authorities could not afford it.

Creating a new generation of young readers with good literacy skills nurtured by their daily 20 'Byers minutes' reading with mum or dad, will result in additional pressure on the school library service. At the moment the service falls between the Department for Culture, Education and Sport and the Department for Education. Will Chris Smith and Mark Fisher get together with Stephen Byers to halt its dramatic decline?

Rosemary

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Boys Read Less Than Girls: *True or False?*

'Meg found her sister eating apples and crying over the Heir of Redclyffe ... on an old three-legged sofa by the sunny window. This was Jo's favourite refuge; and here she loved to retire with half-a-dozen russets and a nice book ...'

Had the central character of **Little Women** been a boy is it possible that he would have taken refuge in fiction in such a way? For most of us today, the answer would be no, but according to a survey of the reading habits of young people conducted by the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature published last year, a century ago this would have been eminently possible. The problem then, the report tells us, was 'how to *stop* boys from reading' – and in particular from reading novels. A hundred years later, it seems, the situation has been reversed and the question now being asked is, how can we get boys to read more? **Deborah Maby** investigates.

For the NCRCL study a total of 8,854 young people between the ages of four and 16 were questioned on their reading habits, making it the most comprehensive study yet into this subject. One of its key findings concerns reading and boys. It is now universally accepted, we are told, that as a group, boys read less than girls, indeed as many as *twice* the number of boys as girls 'see themselves as "reluctant readers", while correspondingly fewer boys than girls see themselves as "enthusiastic" or even "average" readers'.

The NCRCL findings are mirrored in research carried out by Elaine Millard at Sheffield University at roughly the same time. In an occasional paper published by the National Literacy Trust entitled **Some Thoughts on Why Boys Don't Choose to Read in School** she reports that while researching reading in general in the middle years of schooling she found such noticeable differences between boys and girls that she decided to make this the focus of a further project. In the data she went on to collect, she found that boys, more than girls, are simply put off the 'reading that is required of them throughout the English curriculum'. Even more significantly, she found that far more girls than boys reported reading at



The Parkers: Cody, Chelsey, Susie, Frankie, Jimmy and Shawn.

home and that when boys *did* read, it was an activity they associated purely with school. This, concludes Millard, '... suggests that the reading of fiction is perceived as a female-preferred leisure activity.'

The problem is undoubtedly one of perception: Millard reports that a staggering three times as many girls as boys saw themselves as readers but that both boys and girls saw their mothers, followed by their sisters, as heavy readers. Fathers were mentioned far less frequently in the reading context and when they were

it was often reported that their reading was related to their work. Boys, one must therefore conclude, simply do not value reading as an activity because they do not see the men in their family doing it and it does not therefore confirm their masculine identity for them.

'Real' Readers Read Fiction?

It is at this point that it becomes clear that what we are talking about is not reading per se but

the reading of fiction. Boys and their fathers do read but because they are not reading novels they do not consider themselves to be readers. According to Penny Kenway at the Equality Learning Centre, what motivates boys to learn to read is not stories but a desire to know about things. In reception and infant classes, she says, boys are militated against because reading is mainly taught through stories and very little attention is paid to learning to read for information. This is borne out by a recent study into gender differences at the Institute of Education which found that, 'Boys arrive in school with an interest in information books and are likely to find reading schemes based largely on stories about people harder to get into.'

Boys Do Read

The children's poet Michael Rosen, who has researched the subject of boys and reading in the course of his *Treasure Islands* series on Radio 4, also found that boys do in fact read but that they 'tend not to choose to read fiction'. This he believes is because, 'Men and women negotiate life in different ways. Women in general want a running commentary on life whereas men just want to get on with it. Women have a blanket stitch approach, one step back, two forward, whereas men prefer the plain stitch process of plodding steadily forward.' Rosen sees the 'domesticisation' of fiction in general, which has filtered down into children's books, as part of the problem for boys, who simply have no desire to be drawn into the drama of *The Relationship* in the same way that girls and women do.

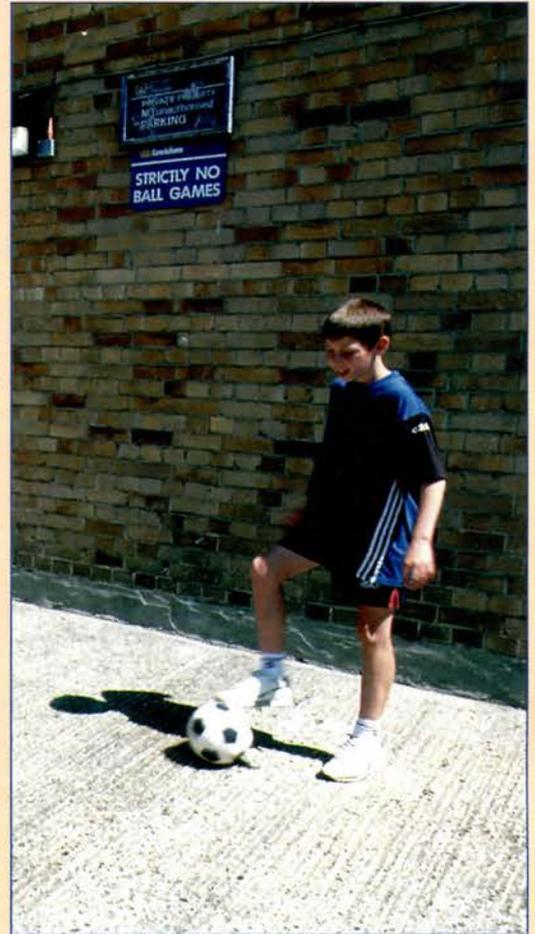
Are boys then simply turned off fiction at some point in their lives by the nature of the books that are on offer to them? There is no doubt that in the very early years girls and boys are captivated in equal measure by stories, but that as they mature girls prefer accounts of lives similar to their own, albeit a glamorised version, whereas boys are drawn into a world of science fiction, fantasy and horror. 'One mother I spoke to, Susan Davenport, told me that her 16-year-old son, William, had always loved 'mythology and fighting fantasies and anything highly

Susie and Shawn Parker live in a south east London council flat with their children Shawn, 10, Chelsey, 6, Cody, 3, and twins Frankie and Jimmy, 13 months. Susie and her husband read a newspaper but 'I only read books when I'm pregnant', says Susie, 'Jackie Collins and Susan Kennedy.'

But if the Parker children do not see their parents reading books, the family has a strong tradition of singing nursery rhymes to the little ones, reading bedtime stories, hearing the older children read and making up stories. 'I'm the storyteller!', says Susie who started making up stories about Mr Crow for Shawn when he was 'really little' to try and get him to sleep. As she soon discovered, the stories had the opposite effect as he wanted to hear more. Now Shawn invents Mr Crow stories (Mr Crow at a football match, Mr Crow finding worms for his hungry family) to tell his younger sisters. Even Frankie and Jimmy are getting to know about Mr Crow as well as about Shawn's passion for football – they get really excited when they see a ball.

Although Shawn also reads stories and picture books to his sisters, he does not see himself as a reader: 'I only like listening to stories.' Shawn listens when Susie reads to Chelsey and he enjoys it when his teacher reads at assembly or at home time. As far as his own reading is concerned, Shawn has enjoyed some of the *Jets* titles (*Harry with Spots On* was a big hit) and he was briefly interested in the *Goosebumps* series following a friend's recommendation, but for him time after school is time to play football. Reading for pleasure and choice is also football related – programmes bought at the match and football magazines. Susie feels strongly that he should not be pushed to stay in and read when he is not interested.

Chelsey on the other hand loves reading. She reads stories to Cody and makes up stories about the Spice Girls ('girls' stories,' says Shawn nicely). Chelsey's favourite books are 'ones with chapters, ones with pictures and writing, and ones with just writing'. 'She is really good at reading,' says Susie. When Susie is busy in the kitchen, Chelsey will sit at the table and read aloud to her. All the older family members read Cody stories, especially at bedtime and now Frankie and Jimmy are also being introduced to books. 'It's like learning to crawl,' says Susie, 'you show them how it works and they soon pick it up.'



Shawn Jr. after school.

imaginative' and 'certainly didn't want to read anything about other people's lives'. Her daughter, on the other hand, 'only really ever wanted to read something if she knew it could be true'.

John Mole, who is head of English at St Albans School, a boys' secondary, was highly sceptical when I suggested to him that boys read less than girls, claiming to see no evidence of this among the boys he teaches. 'It is,' he said, 'simply a question of *what* they are reading – which is probably very different from girls but they are just as enthusiastic about it. They go for Terry Pratchett, for example, in the same way as younger boys love Roald Dahl. Pratchett, and all those X-Files spin-offs, seem to be an extension of the fantasy games they play on their computers.' According to Mole, boys also love anything collectable: the Point Horror and Point Crime series are, he said, hugely popular, and this was corroborated by other parents and teachers I spoke to. In fact the wildly successful Goosebumps series seemed to be one of the few examples of books that appealed equally to both boys and girls. 'Boys, like men, like to order and number the world,' agrees Michael Rosen. 'Boys want to collect things, and compare them and swap them, which is why Goosebumps and Point Horror have taken off in this way.'

Despite the findings at Sheffield and the NCRCL I found few people prepared to admit that boys read less than girls. Time and time again it was said that they simply read different things and with a different approach. 'I think you have to be very careful when you say that boys don't read,' cautioned Lesley Agnew, who runs the Children's Bookshop in Muswell Hill in north London. 'Once they get to nine or 10 they seem to stop reading novels but they still read – sports reports, non-fiction, books about how to make things. They love the Horrible Histories and Horrible Science series.' Agnew sees no evidence in her shop of boys' apparent difficulty in finding books that appeal to them. 'Robert Westall remains very popular and they like Morris Gleitzman because he's funny even though he deals with serious issues. It's certainly true to say that they like fantasy: **Northern Lights** is bought by lots of boys

'It's going to sound freakish, but all three of our boys read voraciously,' say **Antonia and Tom Riviere**, parents of twins Joe and Dan, 13, and Simon, 10.

We don't have a television so it has always been their main source of entertainment. I know it sounds mad, but we still read them all a bedtime story, which is one of the things which we think has kept them going. It's useful as a way of setting them off on something which they then pursue independently. For example we read them **My Family and Other Animals** a couple of years ago, which they loved and they went off and read all the other Gerald Durrell books on their own.

None of them has ever wanted to read any fantasy or horror or any of those sorts of things boys are meant to like. They like things that are real but are written in a novelty sort of way. **The Kontiki Expedition** was a great favourite. At the moment we're reading them Douglas Adams's **Last Chance to See**, which they are really enjoying. Joe reads science fiction, Azimov and so on, whereas Dan is more inclined towards natural history.

The fact that they read so much can't have been to do with role models because their father doesn't read a huge amount. But we think that what counts is whether reading is valued as an activity within the family. Their uncle is a novelist and in some way books for them are part of how you're regarded. At primary school the elder ones had an amazing head teacher who was passionate about children's books and she was so thrilled to find that they were keen on the whole business she used to dig out all sorts of things for them from her own collection. One of the twins had a violin teacher who did the same.

The elder ones are now at an awkward age where they're finding it difficult to find books that are right for them. They're trying out lots of adult fiction and some of it works and some of it doesn't. One of them tried to read **Catch 22** recently but had to give it up. P G Wodehouse and Sherlock Holmes have been good for bridging the gap.'

even though its main character is a girl and she's on the front cover. It's a long read, too, but they like it.'

Bus Ticket Mentality

'He likes anything humorous – all those funny poets like Brian Patten and Michael Rosen,' said many of the parents I spoke to. Rosen believes this is further evidence of boys' rejection of modern fiction. 'Poetry operates at the level of language play so it doesn't have to be about relationships. It's a place you can go where your emotions don't have to be on the line. Also, it is incredibly diverse – which means you can be constantly surprised by it, unlike with realist fiction.' It is interesting, he notes, that over the past 10 or 15 years the most popular writers of poems for children have all been men – Adrian Mitchell, Brian Patten, Benjamin Zephaniah. 'It may be just

a period thing but then 30 or 40 years ago the main kids' poets were Robert Louis Stevenson, Walter de la Mare and A A Milne.' Poetry also appeals to what he calls boys' 'bus ticket mentality' – the thing that makes them like collecting Goosebumps and football stickers and dipping endlessly in and out of books of facts to emerge triumphant with some snippet of information with which to amuse their friends. 'You can take poetry or you can leave it. You can flick read and sample it. You can remember bits of it and repeat it to your friends. I don't want to sound vain but I know my poems get swapped in the playground in the same way as jokes do.'

Gender Typed Role Models?

Must we simply accept, therefore, that boys require different

things from what they read and give them more of what they appear to want? According to Dr Reynolds of NCRCL it is only in the last century that children's books have become specifically designated for either boys or girls and that this is a strategy that has signally failed. Boys have, she believes, been positively deterred by the role models (action heroes and the like) in the books that are supposedly for them. At the same time, boys find it difficult to cross into what they see as the domain of girls' books. Girls, it appears, are very happy to read boys' books but not vice-versa. Indeed, says Dr Reynolds, it is the girls themselves who try to deter boys from reading their books in an effort to preserve the stereotype. There is evidence, she says, that boys in single-sex schools read more widely than in mixed schools and happily take on the monitor roles in libraries and so on that would otherwise be filled by girls.

Fiction As Script

At the end of the day, how much does it actually matter that boys

seem to prefer fantasy to real life, computer games to television sitcoms, sci-fi to Judy Blume? Should we turn the question around and ask whether girls are reading *too much* fiction, in the same way that boys were thought to be doing a century ago? According to the NCRCL report, girls use the situations they read about in novels (family relationships, drugs, bullying and so on) as a guide to tackling things they are faced with in real life – and as a result negotiate them better than boys do. 'You have to admit,' agrees Rosen, 'that reading of all kinds presents you with possibilities of how other people are, and the more you read the more you widen that range of possibilities. Undoubtedly, the more you read, the better you'll do – at school and later. But if you're asking whether reading fiction makes you, ultimately, into a better person, then the answer has to be "No".' ■

Deborah Maby is a mother of two, a journalist and a children's book reviewer.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Further Reading

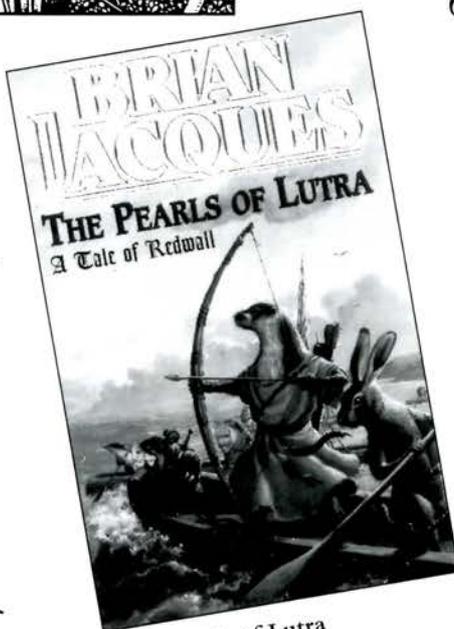
Young People's Reading at the End of the Century (published 1996) can be obtained from the NCRCL, Downshire House, Roehampton Institute London, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 4HT, at a cost of £30 (cheques to be made payable to Roehampton Institute London).

Some Thoughts on Why Boys Don't Choose to Read in School by Elaine Millard is an occasional paper published by the National Literacy Trust, Swire House, 59 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AJ (Tel: 0171 828 2435).

BfK will be following up this article with a list of Books with Boy Appeal.

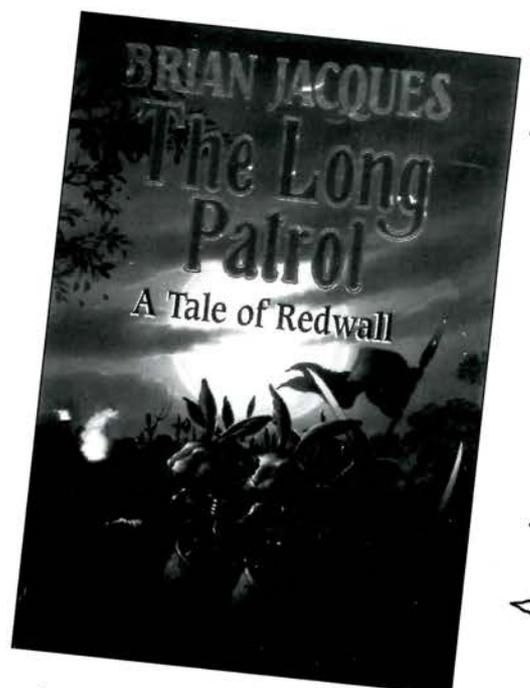


More Tales of Redwall



The Pearls of Lutra
0099638711 £4.99 p/b

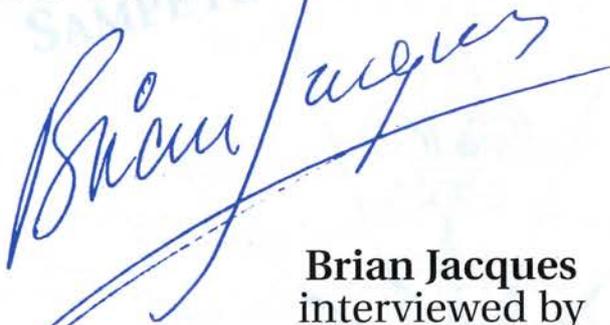
Make sure you read the latest additions to Brian Jacques' award-winning Redwall saga.



The Long Patrol
0091765463 £12.99 h/b

Random House Children's Books
HUTCHINSON · RED FOX

Authorgraph No.106



Brian Jacques
interviewed by
Julia Eccleshare

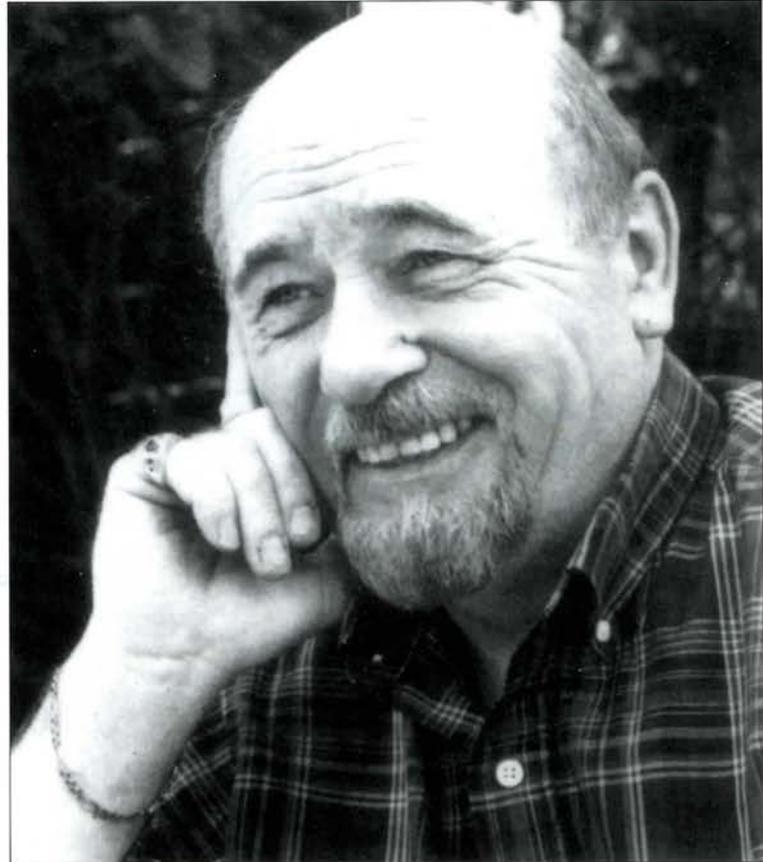
'Do you like tenors, Julia? Do you like them? I've got one of the biggest collections in the North West.' And the large, powerful and totally silent car is filled with the tenor on the tape backed by Brian Jacques' almost equally powerful personal rendition as we cruise past the astonishing bulk of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, through Toxteth to New Lau's Chinese restaurant in an imposingly hideous Victorian mansion overlooking Sefton Park.

Here, Brian knows the owner who greets him warmly. Over china tea and through the smoke of a great many cigarettes, Brian talks. And a great talker he is, too. In conversation, every bit as much as in his writing, he is enormously fluent and has the ability to hold his audience, grabbing attention with a combination of sincerity and pathos – though without a hint of self pity.

And rightly so. For though things were once hard for Brian, for a long time now he has found success in a variety of creative roles culminating in the hugely popular *Redwall* books which are just celebrating their tenth anniversary.

With over 3.3 million *Redwall* titles sold world wide and with favourable comparisons being made between him and Roald Dahl as a writer who gets children to take books off the shelf, Brian has made a significant contribution to children's reading over the last ten years. 'I feel very responsible writing for children,' he says. 'I know how important reading is when you're a kid. I think my books are popular because I write an old fashioned book. Librarians and teachers say they're great stories and they are written properly.'

Though the *Redwall* books were his first published titles, Brian says 'I have considered myself a writer since I was 10. I wrote stories and poems. When I went up to the secondary school we had to write a story. The teacher called me up to his desk and asked me where I'd copied mine from. I told him I hadn't copied it, I'd made it up. He

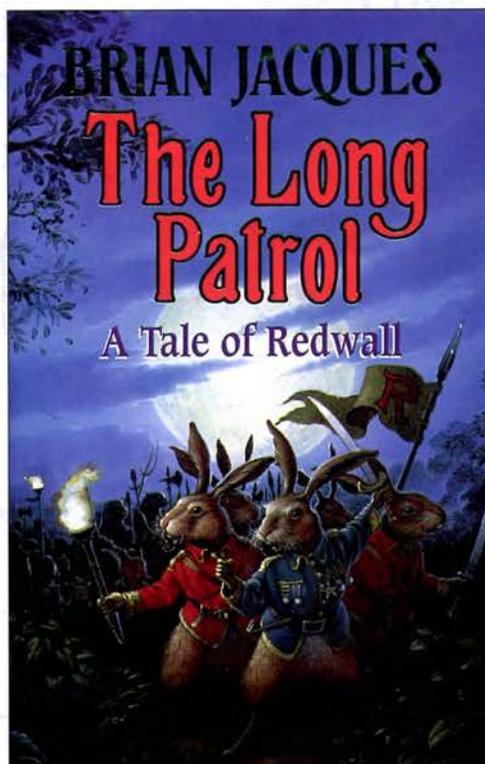


called me a cheat and a liar but it was my own writing. At my little Catholic school there were no books but I went to the public library a lot. I read all the time. Authors with those long names like Edgar Rice Burroughs, Rider Haggard, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I read all the real stories in the comics, too. You could tell the readers from how they read the comics. The *Rover* and *Wizard*, things like that. Some people only read the strips with pictures but I read every word.'

But it was not only the written word that shaped Brian's imagination so deeply. 'The movies were a great influence on me. For twopence you could go to the Garrick and you were in a magic world. The Spanish Main, the North West passage, the Wild West. For me that was the beginning of Once upon a time, far away and long ago ...' The very thing that most drives his *Redwall* writing.

Brian grew up in Liverpool, has spent all of his life there and is passionate about the place but hates to be thought of as 'a professional Scouser'. His family lived behind the docks. All the men went to sea, joining the merchant navy just as soon as they were able. Brian himself left school at fifteen and ran away to sea. From his Irish Catholic background come two powerful influences, the patriotic Irish folk songs, and the church Latin and litany which he can still spout at breakneck speed. 'I was an altar boy. You don't ever forget it.' It is not only the language that has survived. 'Catholic is in the genes,' he says. 'It's the guilt. You can't ever leave it.'

Returning from the sea he worked variously as a lorry driver and a docker. He also did folk singing in the Irish pubs which led to the beginnings of a



performing career in the 1960s which rode on the back of the beginning of the Liverpool beat movement. 'I was part of this group, The Liverpool Fishermen, playing in the pubs and people used to come down from the University to hear us because we were real Liverpool.' Driving a lorry by day and singing in clubs and doing stand up turns, mixing with people like Alan Bleasdale, Roger McGough, Willie Rushton, Brian was in part 'a Liverpool voice' but also supporting a wife and two small sons. His performing break came in the 1970s when he was given a slot on Radio Merseyside. Called *Jakestown* his programme was an eclectic mixture of 'opera, church music, Mexican music – anything I consider to be music. It also had interviews with local people, quips – all sorts.' Very much from the community and for it, the programme and Brian himself adopted The Royal School for the Blind, a charity run home for the blind on the edge of Liverpool. Brian became closely involved with the school and it was from his experience of reading to the blind children that he thought of writing down his own stories.

'I'd written plays, radio plays, music – all sorts. I never used the phrase "I couldn't do that". I keep going by that old thing that my gran used to say: "Never mind, son. As one door closes another opens." I had no aspirations as a young man and no money but I always had my imagination. I could see whole stories and hear the music that went with them.' It was this imagination, prompted by his childhood reading – and especially by the influence of Homer whose *Odyssey* and *Iliad* he had read in adolescence – and film going that powered the book. It took seven months to write, in long hand which is how he still writes.

'When I sat down to write, my first thought was what don't I want to write? I knew I didn't want to write about teenage angst, traffic and all those sort of things. I wanted to write "Once upon a time, far away and long ago". I wanted to be heroic.'

Heroic *Redwall* and its sequels certainly are, and Brian's story telling skills seem to touch his child readers in a quite remarkable way. He showed me a letter from the mother of a nine-year boy who, dying of cancer, had longed only to have time to read *The Pearls of Lutra*. He, and there have been many others, clearly felt an affinity with the characters and their emotions. Brian believes this is because he writes good, old fashioned stuff with villainous baddies and glorious goodies. As someone who sees the world very much in terms of what he thinks is right and wrong, this clear almost didactic approach makes perfect sense.

But there is another side to Brian which also features strongly in the writing and which may be part of why his books have such appeal, especially to boys many of whom seem to have found *Redwall* when they had abandoned all other reading. Pointing to his face, with its less than straight nose, he says, 'I was violent. If I'd been in here and heard someone effing in front of ladies I would have taken him out into the car park. Not now, but it does mean that I can write about violence.' Not pulling his punches when it comes to fighting certainly gives his stories vigour and energy.

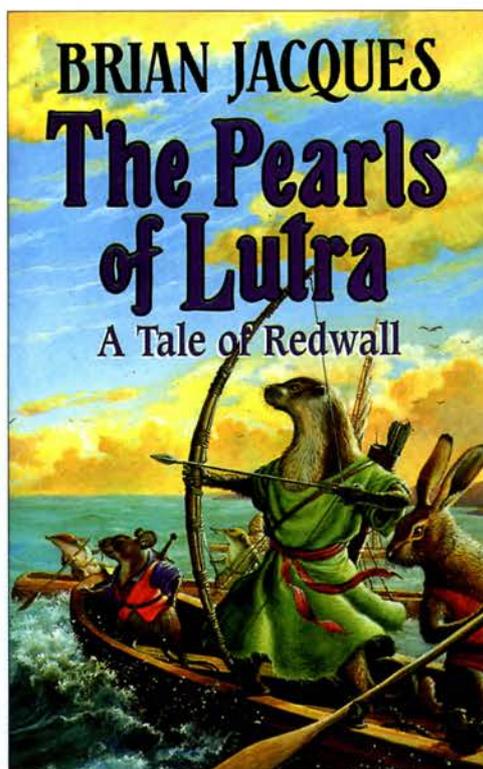
The success of *Redwall* is enormous and it has completely changed Brian's life. The high spots of the last five years include winning the Lancashire

Children's Book Award and the Australian Children's Book Award; being so big in the US that he has to go on tour every year just to satisfy the insatiable demand – he has just returned from an exhausting nine-week tour there; having the money to give to his family and favourite causes, including The Royal School for the Blind; and, above all, his contact with children. He is emotionally generous to all his readers and is more than willing to respond to the demands put on him by the huge crowds that come to his signing sessions and readings.

Luckily for his millions of readers, Brian shows no signs of tiring of *Redwall*. The books are flowing easily. 'I dream *Redwall*. I can take it to bed with me. I get a basic idea for the plot – it usually comes to me part way through the book I'm working on – then I take the dog for a walk and I find I know exactly how it will go.' When Brian is writing, which is only for about four months of the year, he writes all day either out in the garden which is what he likes best, or in an extension to the house that his son built for him. In between writing, he cooks. 'I love cooking – I make the greatest spaghetti in the world. They queue round the block for it. When my sons hear I'm cooking spaghetti they ask if they can come over.'

Brian's relationship with his two adult sons is something he refers to again and again. 'My two sons are the greatest thing in my life. I brought them up as pals.' As we arrived at Liverpool station he proudly pointed out his son's mural which adorns the back of the cinema.

Them apart, good food, good wine and music which, 'I couldn't live without' Brian lists as the most important things in his life but ends gleefully with the best thing of all 'being able to make it. There's nothing like it.' ■



Brian Jacques' books are published by Random House:

Redwall, 0 09 951200 9, £4.99 pbk, 1 85656 296 4, £7.99 tape cassette

Mossflower, 0 09 172160 1, £12.99 hbk, 0 09 955400 3, £4.99 pbk, 1 85656 342 1, £7.99 tape cassette

Mattimeo, 0 09 967540 4, £4.99 pbk

Mariel of Redwall, 0 09 176405 X, £12.99 hbk, 0 09 992960 0, £4.99 pbk

Salamandastron, 0 09 914361 5, £4.99 pbk

Martin the Warrior, 0 09 928171 6, £4.99 pbk

The Bellmaker, 0 09 176622 2, £12.99 hbk, 0 09 943331 1, £4.99 pbk

Outcast of Redwall, 0 09 176721 0, £12.99 hbk, 0 09 960091 9, £4.99 pbk

The Pearls of Lutra, 0 09 176536 6, £12.99 hbk, 0 09 963871 1, £4.99 pbk, 1 85656 378 2, £8.99 tape cassette

The Long Patrol, ill. Allan Curless, 0 09 176546 3, £12.99 hbk, 1 85656 384 7, £8.99 tape cassette

Redwall Gift Edition, ill. Fangorn, 0 09 951200 9, £16.99 hbk

The Great Redwall Feast, with Christopher Denise, 0 09 972501 0, £12.99 hbk

Redwall Collectors' Map, ill. Fangorn, 0 09 925611 8, £3.99 pbk

Seven Strange and Ghostly Tales, 0 09 176364 9, £7.99 hbk, 0 09 987970 0, £2.99 pbk

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

Going for Gold

In the Diamond Jubilee year of the Carnegie Medal, children's books' most prestigious award, Brian Alderson looks at its track record.

If you have a name like Streatfield, or Vipont, or Philippa, you are bound to be misspelt from time to time. And if you publish something called **The Little Bookroom**, don't be surprised eventually to find it called **The Little Bookworm**. What comes hard though is when the people who make these blunders are the ones who once gave you a gilded medal for your genius.

These elementary mistakes all disfigure a list which the Library Association has just put out with the press material that publicizes the Diamond Jubilee of its Carnegie Medal, and they are emblematic of the muddle and thoughtlessness which periodically assail this institution.* At the very start of things H J B Woodfield, in the newly founded **Junior Bookshelf**, complained about selection procedures, and criticisms of the administration have cropped up regularly ever since. Indeed, in 1973 Alec Ellis, a bigwig among the children's librarians, questioned whether there was any need to prolong the existence of the award. So perhaps the chief thing that the Jubilee should celebrate is the doughty resilience of that lady in the nightdress who holds sway on the obverse of the medal.

An account of the award down to 1984 has already noted something of its melancholy history: Keith Barker's **In the Realms of Gold**, published by Julia MacRae in association with the Youth Libraries Group of the Library Association (1986). Barker records such things as the long-running fuss over which officials should judge the award, the contradictions over the interpretations of its terms, and the occasionally disgraceful treatment of its winners – witness what Lucy Boston had to say in her autobiography **Memory in a House** in 1974.

At bottom however, as may be expected, the trigger for much of the anguish has been what critics have seen as the perverse and foolish choices made by the awards panel. That is, of course, an occupational hazard for judges of all prizes (except the Dodo) but where children's books are concerned, there is the complicating factor of the award being chosen by one lot of people for a product which is primarily intended for another lot who – in this case anyway – have no say in the matter (and who may well not be able to articulate their say if they had).

The presence of child readers at the back of things has always worried critics of the award when the 'outstanding' book which the judges are bidden to choose has appeared to them to lack child-appeal. One of the earliest argued objections to choices which 'satisfy a certain ... very professional bookish minority' came from Aidan Chambers

in his **Reluctant Reader** of 1969 where he dismembered the 1965 medal winner, **The Grange at High Force** by Philip Turner. In 1972 the award to **Watership Down** provoked the library profession itself to rebel: '[another] Medal winner whose appeal to children will be limited', '[another] winner which will join the ranks of the great unread ...' And when Robert Swindells' **Stone Cold** was chosen in 1994, a member of the selection panel is quoted as crying out that she wanted to 'recapture the Carnegie for children'. (Incidentally, nowadays, the judges mostly seem to be 'she's'. All eleven were this year.)

These accusations of a too-narrow regard for the readership can be paralleled elsewhere by despair over the selectors' too generous view of what constitutes 'an outstanding book'. The salient example is Dominic Hibberd's rather belated nine-page assault on the 1970 choice of K M Peyton's **The Edge of the Cloud in Children's Literature in Education** (July, 1972). He agreed that the book was enjoyable but adduced multiple reasons for it being over-valued and sloppily described by the selection committee. This drew from the 1970 chairman a brief, but pained, reply in which he sought to gloss more fully what was meant by an 'outstanding book'. This was not apparently to be determined solely by standards of literary criticism, but (in phrases that are a pre-echo of Peter Hunt's relativistic views of 'good' in the March '97 BfK) by a book's 'potential impact on the young reader, its ideas, its chances of being read and its

individual aspects which make it stand out from the rest'.

The question-begging in all that exemplifies how trammelled children's librarians feel in arriving at their decisions, and hence places an onus on them to explain themselves with something of the sustained effort shown by Dominic Hibberd in criticizing them. (One of the reasons for the Carnegie fiasco of 1967 was Janet Hill's revelation that the committee had to make up its mind about 27 submissions in seven days, which obviously left little room for serious argument.) There are however precedents for a convincing procedure. Three of the most satisfying awards ever established for children's books have been the Signal Poetry Award, the TES Information Books Award, and the Other Award,** and these achieved their distinction less through their final choices than through the detailed comparative assessments within which the choices were embedded. (Part of the strength of Aidan Chambers's attack on the 1965 award lay in his comparison of Turner's story with the merely 'commended' **Elidor**.)

Doubts persist though over the capacity of children's librarians to apply themselves at this level. In their short-list selections they persistently show an obsession with fiction (and often hybrid adolescent fiction at that) as if that was all that the Carnegie Medal was about – just as they show an obsession with picture books for the Kate Greenaway Award, which is actually for book

illustration. Poetry, non-fiction, or the perilous craft of drawing do not figure much in their judgments, and rarely do they offer anything but facile accounts of their decisions. For instance, confidence in this year's judging is instantly undermined by the statements in the shortlist that the (aptly-titled) **Junk** has 'sensitive characterization', or that **Johnny and the Bomb** is 'meticulously plotted', while anyone who thinks that **Bad Girls** is 'very funny indeed' has either a defective sense of humour or an insecure grasp of adjectival phrasing.

The clump who recently designated the Carnegie Medal 'the Booker of the Playground' is the one who gives the game away. Desperate for publicity (a persistent weakness until Peters Library Service came along) the Library Association feeds this daft phrase to journalists for use as a headline (and is now tending to select headline-grabbing, rather than 'outstanding', winners to go with it). But what the phrase throws into sharp relief is the fact that works assessed for the Booker Prize and for other adult awards have often been the subject of a varied and perhaps extensive discussion in literary journals and newspapers and that the judges are often versed in the skills of critical reading and may articulate their decisions with a fitting clarity. Where children's literature is concerned there is no such culture of informed discussion and no certain route to a knowledge of anything that was written more than about a decade ago. Little wonder then that the critical powers of a succession of kingmakers have had little chance to mature in all of their sixty-one occasionally glorious years.

Recollecting that someone, a while back, implemented a 'Booker of Bookers', I wonder what sort of a result a 'Carnegie of Carnegies' would yield? With a degree of (surely appropriate) haste and pin-jabbing I am inclined to nominate **The Lantern Bearers** (1959), **Tom's Midnight Garden** (1958) and **Pigeon Post** itself (1936) for the top three slots. ■

* Even the mathematics are skew-whiff. The first medal was awarded in 1937 for Arthur Ransome's **Pigeon Post**, published the year before, so this year sees the sixth-first, not the sixtieth announcement.

** The Other Award was an 'alternative' children's book award focusing on anti-sexist, anti-racist etc. titles. It ran from 1975 to 1988.



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

★ Angela and Diabola ★

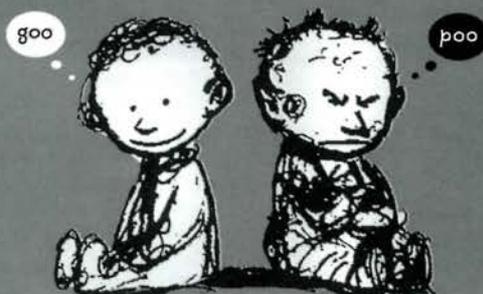
Ever since the first story was told, around a fire that was less for warmth than to keep away whatever unknowns lurked in the darkness, good has been slugging it out with evil, in bedtime tales or classic literature, world religions or comic papers.

But, although good normally triumphs, it is evil that enthralls us, no matter what age we are, even when the prize fight is notched down to good *v* bad, or right down to good *v* naughty. Who lingers in our memory? Long John Silver, Heathcliff, Cruella de Vil, Huck Finn, Toad, Grendel, Fungus, Lucifer, Tom Kitten, The Joker, Mr Hyde? So when Lynne Reid Banks was reading the *My Naughty Little Sister* stories to her six-year-old granddaughter, they were a huge success until they came to *When My Naughty Little Sister was Good*. 'She's boring now,' Emily said.

I know that because Lynne Reid Banks has written an explanatory 'letter' to be sent to readers of the advanced proofs of *Angela and Diabola*, a story for young readers about twin girls, one angelically good and one diabolically bad – no, let us notch it up, *evil*. Their real names are Jill and Jane, but their simperingly conventional parents, the Cuthbertson-Joneses, dutifully abide by the vicar's outbursts at their christening, when, besotted by the one and appalled by the other, he breaks into Latin and Angela and Diabola the twins become.

Already it must be clear that Lynne Reid Banks has produced a very different novel from her usual output – a comic with words instead of pictures. Every character, bit part or major player, is a blatant stereotype, ferocious emotions and violence are recounted with relish but have no reality, the narrative is extremely simple, tongue-in-cheek. (It is *Conrad's War* in reverse.) Angela's nauseating blue-eyed sweetness enchants everyone, from midwife to taxi drivers; Diabola's rage and awesome powers overwhelm everyone, from the same midwife, whose finger she bites to the bone, to her father,

Lynne Reid Banks' new novel deals with extremes of good and evil. Stephanie Nettel investigates.



who does a bunk. Arson, car crashes, attempted murder – Angela has her work cut out to control her twin.

Like all comics, there is a punchline. Diabola is killed – *Splat* – trying to drag her sister over the top of a tower block when Angela is busy saving her, but some of her spirit enters Angela (who becomes normal and likeable), their soft little mother discovers her own strength, and even Daddy knuckles down. Good and evil are balanced as, says Banks, they are in us all. Apart from self-conscious stage accents to denote the working classes (to her credit, Banks once self-critically said she 'may not fully have solved the problem of finding instantly recognisable signals without stereotyping,' and although that's actually ideal in a comic, those accents do jar), the book is a rollicking success. But not to be taken seriously.

So why the explanatory 'letter'? The message is hardly profound or obscure. And what is this publicity handout? For eight to *twelves*? Surely not. *Twelves* are reading R L Stine and watching *Alien* for the umpteenth time. 'As darkly powerful and

controversial as it is funny, [Angela and Diabola] speaks to readers on many levels and will provoke many questions about contemporary childhood.'

So I rang Lynne Reid Banks. Yes, everyone had been very anxious, both here and in the States, and had even suggested upping the reading age to teenagers. It was tried out eventually on nine-year-olds ('a bit old really, I'd say seven'), and American reviews have loved it. Banks continued:

'But you'll notice the word "devil" is conspicuously absent, and I had to be careful with the vicar – exorcism is *out*. Like witches: in America good ladies march into libraries and strip out offending pages.' Not, as I had always been told, because they are old-ladyist. 'If you mention witches, real witches will be summoned! Why do we kowtow to such lunatics? I once got a letter from New Zealand asking why I had

spoilt a good book by having a character who could magically read the future – lady, you're a *teacher*, these things are not *real!*'

And I had been thinking times must have changed. Twelve years ago, when I pseudonymously published some shivery stories originally intended for under-nines, one horrid girl was not allowed to stick pins in a plasticine model of a teacher (she overcooked a gingerbread cutout instead) and the reading age was inexorably raised. Admittedly my settings were supposed to be realistic – and she did eventually bump off the teacher. In *Angela and Diabola* we have a monster child growing up in a cage, with glaring green eyes that zap (you almost see the arrowed line) anyone who gets in the way. As Lynne Reid Banks would say, do me a favour! ■

Angela and Diabola, Lynne Reid Banks, ill. Klaas Verplanke, Collins Children's Books, 0 00 185685 5, £9.99

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

Publishing Profiles No.5: The Publicity Director

Getting into bookshops is only the start of the selling process – the books need publicity to help shift them out of the bookshops and into readers' hands. So is publicity just about free posters and parties?

Liz Attenborough investigates.

To find out more about the publicity side of children's book publishing, I talked to **Justin Somper**, Publicity Director at Random House Children's Books.

Is it party, party, party in publicity?

The first thing I needed to establish with Justin was whether publishers' publicity work is as dilettante as it sounds to the outside world. 'No, there's much more to publicity than organising launch parties. There's a huge amount of unseen work,' Justin explains, 'like initiating and developing relationships with the media and planning for events which build the profile of authors and artists. Such events are far more likely to be conferences for teachers and/or librarians than extravagant launch parties.'

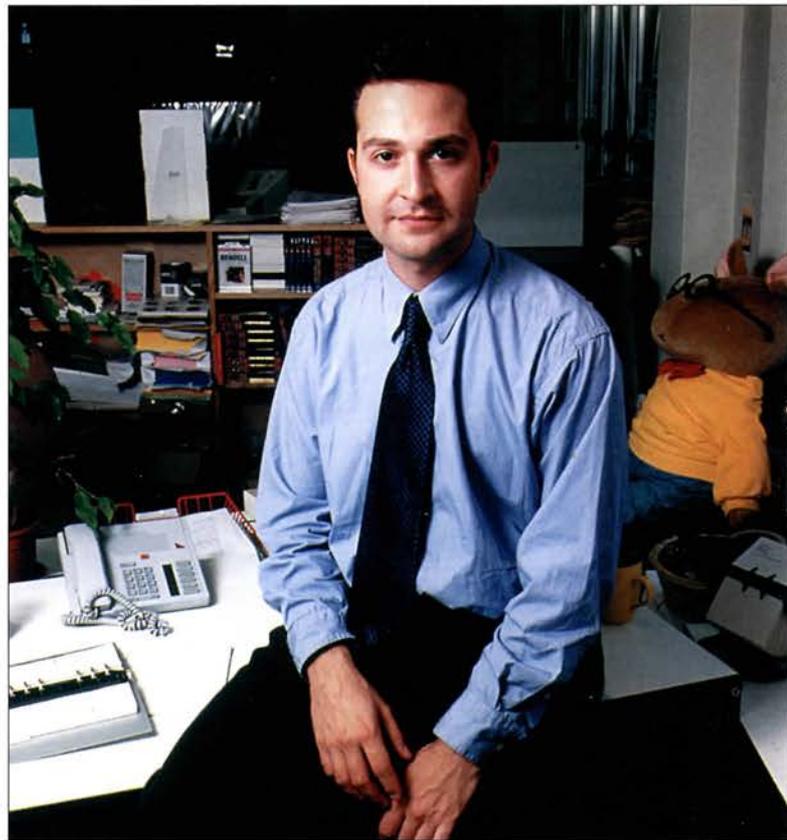
How do you get into publicity?

Like many others, Justin fell into publishing publicity and found that it suited him – but it wasn't an easy entrance. It was two years after graduating, with law articles fixed as an alternative career, when he finally got offered the job of publicity and promotions assistant at Penguin Children's Books. That was in June 1992, and Justin gradually gained promotion, to Assistant Promotions Manager, then Publicity Manager, until he was headhunted in October 1996 to build a new publicity department at Random House Children's Books, initially as Manager. 'Now that I'm in the position of hiring, the candidates I would favour are those who have a genuine interest in publicity and marketing (and do not have a hidden agenda of becoming an editor), are good with people, have strong copywriting skills and aren't going to be embarrassed about hustling journalists for coverage.'

What's the difference between publicity and promotions?

Publicity, promotions, marketing – do they all mean the same thing, or are there differences? Justin agrees there can be confusion about this, and says it really varies from company to company. 'In the places I've worked, the Marketing Director has had overall responsibility for publicity and promotions. The perception tends to be that publicity is free, while you pay for promotions. In terms of key tasks, as a publicist you are mainly concerned with media contact, events organisation, and things like awards. The promotion team are responsible for such things as advertising, producing point-of-sale units (the cardboard that goes into bookshops), catalogues and order forms. As a publicist, you tend to have to be nice to everyone you deal with – after all, you are often courting free coverage.'

Are there any stories that Justin is proud of making happen? 'When we planned the publication of the new edition of John Farman's *Very Bloody History of Britain* we prepared two covers, one with John Major and one



Justin Somper, photograph by Richard Mewton.

with Tony Blair. We got the story into the *Bookseller* magazine, and then it was picked up for a big feature in the *Guardian*. That kind of piece can really influence a reader in a way that a paid-for advertisement rarely can.'

What does a Publicity Director actually do?

Justin says his main role is: 'To maximise exposure for our authors and titles,' and follows that up by saying that his work can broadly be split into three main areas. 'The first is dealing with the media, which might mean taking the initiative and pursuing a journalist or TV

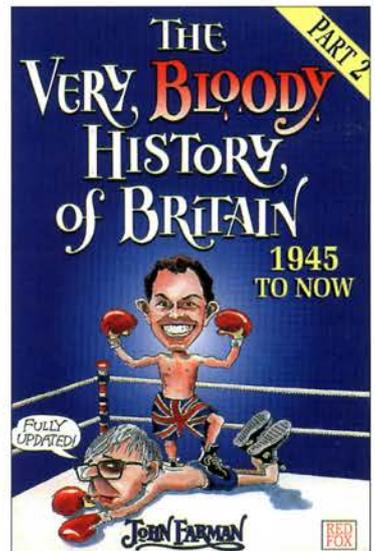
producer to review a book or interview an author. Alternatively, a journalist might call me, because they might be interested in a specific title or author, or looking to me to suggest something appropriate.'

'The second main area I'm involved in is the variety of events our authors and artists participate in. This starts with recommending which events might be worth doing, and soon involves me in the minutiae of making travel and dining arrangements, discussing what the session will consist of and what equipment will be required, who will be selling the books – and a hundred other similar questions!

'But I also have an administrative and strategic role – particularly in terms of planning the overall campaigns for the list and for specific titles, and budgeting of course. We have fortnightly publishing meetings and I give my editorial, marketing and sales colleagues a realistic view of what coverage we might expect for proposed titles.' I asked Justin who his main points of contact are in his day-to-day job, and the list is long: 'Authors, illustrators, agents, teachers, librarians, children, booksellers, all sections of the media and of course the marketing, sales and editorial staff in the company – I'm in touch with them all, all the time.'

Do publicity people like authors?

I wondered if Justin likes the authors and illustrators that he deals with. 'With one or two exceptions,' he says guardedly, 'I greatly enjoy working with the



authors and illustrators that I publicise. I do think it has to be a partnership, and I regard it as a meeting of professionals who are each bringing something to the table. They bring their creation – the book – and I bring my understanding of the network through which we will build awareness of the book. Sometimes, you really hit it off and become good friends.'

Is there a typical day?

Justin laughed at the idea that he might know from day to day what he would be doing. 'Although I have certain objectives I want to meet in any day or week, I'm always at the mercy of the phone, and sometimes have to completely re-arrange my day or an author's day to fit in something good that has come along, for example if a national newspaper wants to interview an author that day. At least three times each week I see one of my regular media contacts, and I'm in touch with my main contacts on an almost daily basis. I meet new authors and agents with their editors, and we plan how we are going to build their profile. I find out what themes magazines might be covering and suggest authors or books that might fit in. This afternoon I'm accompanying a journalist to interview John Burningham, and I'm currently planning for various literary festivals. Almost everyone who phones you wants things done "yesterday" – you have to judge what is really urgent and important.'

When does publicity start on a book?

Justin explains that he likes to be in right at the beginning of a project, even if it's years before the book will be published. 'I like to get to know new authors as soon as they are signed up, but generally speaking, publicity activity starts in earnest six to eight months before publication – that way you don't miss any chances for coverage in magazines that work a long way ahead, or in getting authors slots at important conferences or literary festivals. I need to show the author I'm doing everything to load the dice in their favour, whilst not actually being able to guarantee anything.'

What do people need from publicists?

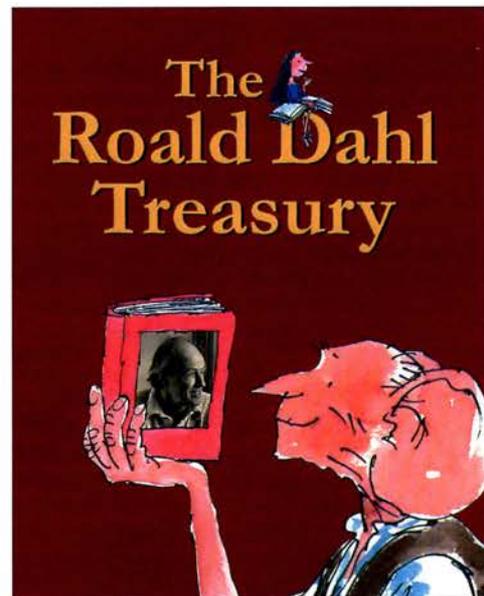
I asked Justin what makes a good publicity person. 'If I was a press person

I think the key thing I would want would be relevant information that had been shaped to suit my particular needs, delivered efficiently. It's matchmaking – the right book to the right media. **Live and Kicking** on BBC1, for instance, is only interested in popular paperback books that will be readily available to their young viewers.'

'If I was an author, I would probably want my publicist to be someone who communicated honestly and consistently with me, getting me the coverage, and making the most of every opportunity. I would expect also to be properly briefed before events, and not get any nasty surprises. For our authors, I will always favour events attended by teachers and librarians, as they are the key audience for building the kind of literary authors and artists that we publish.'

Are author visits to schools useful?

Justin didn't hesitate when he answered this question: 'Absolutely! Big name career authors and illustrators have built their reputations by going into schools and libraries, attending conferences, and meeting both the children and the professionals. It's the sensible way to build a sustainable audience, but it does take time. But the key to the success of an author visit is the preparation and follow up work. Of course it must also be remembered that not all authors are naturals at "performing" in public, and it shouldn't be expected that they can all entertain in person as well as they can write or illustrate. But it certainly helps profile and sales if they can.'



How do you decide how time and money will be spent?

Justin explains that there are some key projects each year which have to work – and work big – to ensure the profitability of the list, and everyone prioritises working on these projects. Marc Brown's **Arthur** earlier in the year, **Redwall's** tenth anniversary, **The Dahl Treasury**, and Shirley Hughes's first new **Alfie** book for eleven years, plus her 70th birthday – all have needed very different things to happen to them, but all have been talked up in the right quarters for several months to get everything in place at the right time. 'That isn't to say that we only work on our star authors – we need to put time into building the stars of the future,' Justin says.

What are the best bits of the job?

Finally, I asked if there are some aspects of the job which are particularly enjoyable? 'I get a great buzz out of a whole range of things,' says Justin, 'but getting TV coverage is tremendously exciting because you know you are going to get an audience of millions for your book or author. For a publicist, that's really satisfying.' ■

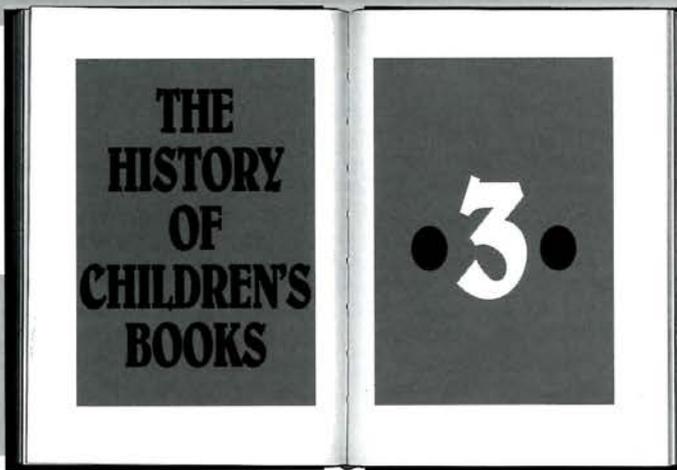
Liz Attenborough was formerly Children's Publisher at Penguin Books. She now works as a children's book consultant.

Publishing Profiles No. 6
will go behind the scenes in the Rights Department.

Arthur even reads
to his little sister, D.W.



From Marc Brown's **Arthur's Reading Race**, an Arthur 'Sticker Book'.



Eminent Victorians

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, children's literature threw out branches in all directions to create what has become known as a golden age. There were adventure books for boys and domestic stories for girls, animal stories and picture books. John Rowe Townsend explains.

Growing populations, increasing prosperity and literacy, and the development of the publishing trade all helped children's literature to thrive. And views on childhood were changing again. The endangered soul, steeped in original sin, had given way in the eighteenth century to the blank page waiting to be written on. Neither of these concepts had been totally abandoned. But there was a new view, to which Wordsworth gave early expression when he wrote of children coming into the world trailing clouds of glory, only to find the shades of the prison-house closing around them.

The romantic clouds-of-glory picture led in the end to late-Victorian sentimentality. But a more moderate belief among enlightened adults that children were human beings with their own needs and interests, and that childhood should be a time of enjoyment, was gaining ground at the time of the Alice books. Older, sterner ideas were still around, and unquestioning obedience to adult authority was still demanded. Nonetheless, Alice can be seen as a celebration of childhood, and children's books tried increasingly to offer a child's perspective rather than that of a parent or instructor.

The Waifs of City Streets

At the same time, concerned adults of the middle and middle-to-upper classes felt increasingly that better-off children should be made aware of the lives of those less fortunate. Charles Kingsley and George MacDonald had incorporated this concern into fantasy, but there were also many realistic stories, which have been described as 'waif novels', about ragged and underfed children on city streets.

These stories were of their day, and did not have the vitality to survive. They were not revolutionary. They advocated sympathy and charity towards the poor rather than change. A constant theme was that poor children had souls to be saved, and indeed, as in the once-famous *Jessica's First Prayer*, by 'Hesba Stretton' (Sarah Smith) in 1867, a poor child might set an example of goodness and piety to its betters. It is all summed up in the words of one writer of the day: such children 'may be street arabs, but they have immortal souls, and they are our brothers and sisters, though we may not own them.'

For the poor themselves, if they were literate, there were tracts and rewards produced by well-meaning organisations with their spiritual benefit at heart. There was also less edifying reading-matter. Until well into the century, catchpenny publishers continued to churn out chapbooks. These were succeeded by sensational serials, penny dreadfuls and comics.

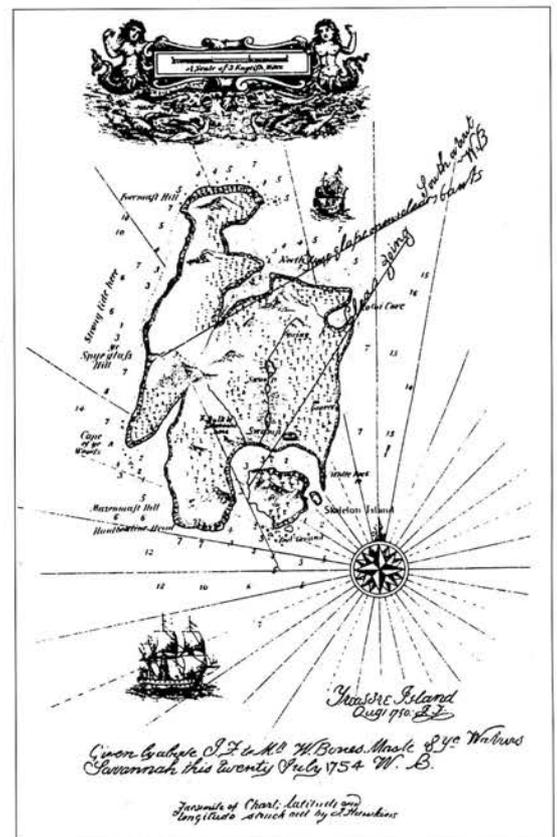
Books for Boys and Books for Girls

Hard-cover fiction for the more fortunate young people increased greatly in quantity, and a division opened up between boys' and girls' books. Stories for younger children did not take much account of gender, since a young child was not supposed to be a sexual creature. But further up the age range boys were expected to be manly and girls to be womanly. Boys' books featured adventure on land and sea, for which an expanding empire gave plenty of scope. For girls' books the domestic scene was horizon enough. Of girls' literature, a commentator wrote in 1888 that 'while it advances beyond the nursery it stops short of the full blaze of the drawing-room.' Not surprisingly, girls of spirit and imagination preferred boys' books.

The main ancestors of the boys' adventure story were *Robinson Crusoe* and the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Captain Marryat, who had published the well known sea story *Mr Midshipman Easy* as a book for adults in 1836, crossed over to young people's literature with *Masterman Ready* in 1841 and *The Children of the New Forest* in 1847. Of the many adventure-story writers



Illustration by unknown artist from an early edition of *Jessica's First Prayer* by 'Hesba Stretton'.



Robert Louis Stevenson's map of Treasure Island, which he drew for his stepson, Lloyd Osborne.



Illustration by E W Kemble from the first edition of Mark Twain's **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**.

who followed, R M Ballantyne is still remembered for *The Coral Island* (1858) and G A Henty for a long succession of action-packed if long-winded stories now recalled, if at all, by great-grandparents. The writer of genius in this field was Robert Louis Stevenson and the great masterpiece was *Treasure Island* (1883), whose high colour, narrative force and memorable characters have kept it as fresh as when written. Interestingly, *Treasure Island* shows no trace of imperialism and precious little of morality.

There were many American adventure stories of the same kind as the British; but the only ones now remembered are Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), which were totally unlike the British model and made it clear that adventure could happen to ordinary youngsters as well as to stiff upper-lipped heroes, and could take place on home ground as well as on a foreign field.

The school story, invariably set in a boys' boarding school, had got under way with Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) and the feverishly moral *Eric, or Little by Little*, by F W Farrar (1858). The boarding school had the advantage, for fictional purposes, of being a world of its own, in which boys were themselves the citizens and might lead or follow, behave well or badly, assume responsibilities, grapple with moral problems, form personal relationships, and of course win or lose sports matches. The outstanding practitioner was Talbot Baines Reed, author of *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* (1887) and other school stories. This genre prospered for the rest of the century, and in a reduced way well into the twentieth, but was fatally undermined by the cynicism of Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co* (1899).

The girls' novel shades off into the family story, since both were set in the home rather than on some distant frontier. The most notable Victorian exponents, as it happens, were American. *The Wide, Wide World*, by Elizabeth Wetherell (Susan Warner) in 1850 and *The Lamplighter*, by Maria Cummins (1854) had huge success in England; and the greatest of them all, *Little Women*, in 1868, was by an American, Louisa M Alcott. The principal British writer of girls' novels was Charlotte M Yonge, whose best book, *The Daisy Chain* (1856), may be seen as a forerunner of *Little Women*. Other writers of domestic stories, well known and regarded in their day but now almost forgotten, were Juliana Horatia Ewing and Louisa Molesworth. But E Nesbit's family stories, beginning with *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, featuring the Bastable children, in 1899 and including *The Railway Children* in 1906, have stayed the course until the present day.

Frances Hodgson Burnett is another writer whose work has lasted. *A Little Princess* (1905) has remained popular, and *The Secret Garden* (1911) is a major classic. Mrs Hodgson Burnett also wrote *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885), about a likeable small boy in a back street of New York who unexpectedly finds himself heir to an earldom. *Fauntleroy* has been derided – unfairly, in my view – as the acme of namby-pamby books. That honour surely belongs to *Eric*.

Humanised Animal Stories

Children feel a natural affinity with animals, and stories about animals run all through children's literature, but the long-term survivors have generally featured humanised animals – 'ourselves in fur' – rather than animals in their actual nature. True, Anna Sewall's *Black Beauty* (1877) is the life story of a supposedly actual horse, but it is told as if by the horse itself, which obviously implies a high degree of humanisation. The reader identifies with the horse. In Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894-5) the animals have their distinctive characteristics but observe, in the Law of the Jungle and their general behaviour, a code of ethics which is clearly human and masculine. Here the reader's identification is not with an animal but with the boy, Mowgli, who is acknowledged by the animals as their leader. And in Kenneth Grahame's much-loved *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Mole, Rat, Toad and Badger are obviously people. They are people of 'our' class, though Toad does rather let the side down. The stoats, ferrets and weasels are the potentially dangerous lower orders of the Grahame world.

Poetry and Verse

Nineteenth-century verse for children did not rise to great heights. William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, probably the first poems of genius to be written with children in mind, had appeared back in 1789, but barely got into the new century's ratings in comparison with the works of Ann and Jane Taylor, authors (among much other verse) of *My Mother and Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. The most lasting Victorian achievements were Robert Browning's *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* in 1842, the poems of Christina Rossetti in the mid-century, the comic verses of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* in 1885.



Illustration by Kate Greenaway for **The Pied Piper of Hamelin**.

The Birth of the Picture Book

The last third of the nineteenth century saw the birth of the picture-book as we know it. It was largely the creation of a master printer, Edmund Evans, who developed the art of fine colour-printing and commissioned three great illustrators to exploit its possibilities. These were the decorative Walter Crane, the vigorous and humorous Randolph Caldecott, and the sentimental and appealing Kate Greenaway. And early in the new century came Beatrix Potter, whose small books for small hands combined the attractions of the humanised-animal tale and the picture-book into small classics.

The half-century between *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the outbreak of World War I has been called the golden age of children's literature. Many years were to pass before its achievements were rivalled; and that was in a different world. ■

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.

In the next article in this series, John Rowe Townsend looks at children's literature between the wars.

NEWS

New Government – New Initiatives?

Books for Keeps invites Ross Shimmon, Chief Executive, The Library Association, to explain what he expects from New Labour:

'Tony Blair, before the election, said that the top three priorities for a new Labour government would be 'education, education, education'. This was, of course, against a background of growing concern about reading standards amongst school children and literacy levels generally. We at The Library Association believe that the vital role of school libraries and public libraries in any drive to improve reading and literacy levels needs to be recognised – not just in fine words, but in positive action. In our *Library Manifesto* published before the election we pressed for:

- a legal requirement on governors and local education authorities to provide high quality libraries in all our schools
- every secondary school to employ a chartered librarian
- local councils to prepare integrated plans for delivering good library services to children through their school libraries, schools library services and public libraries

Campaigns to raise reading standards and literacy levels will founder if children cannot get hold of a wide range of books which amuse, interest, excite and inspire them. So, when we meet Chris Smith and Mark Fisher shortly we shall be asking them to implement these three planks in our manifesto.'



Children's Book Week, 6–12 October 1997

A Full Children's Book Week Pack for schools and libraries wishing to organise an event (price £16.50) and a Basic Pack for families, displays etc (price £8.00) are available from CBW Orders, Publicity Dept., Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ (Tel: 0181 870 9055).

Kaye Webb Collection

The new Centre for the Children's Book (due to open in Newcastle-upon-Tyne after the millennium) has acquired the Kaye Webb archive with money from the National Lottery heritage fund and The Friends of the National Library. The private collection of the respected Puffin editor who died last year, the archive includes manuscripts, artworks and Kaye's personal correspondence with such writers as Roald Dahl.

Madeleine Lindley Ltd

Madeleine Lindley Ltd, a supplier of books to teachers and others, has moved to a newly built Book Centre where more than half of the 10,000 sq. ft Book Centre is

allocated to children's books (picture books, fiction, poetry, folktales, pop-ups and a large range of 'big' books). Information books and general reference sections are complemented by professional academic and resource books for teachers and a multimedia area previews book-related storytapes, videos and CD-ROMs. Staff are on hand to advise on specific titles for curriculum themes and topics and to help create book collections for library, curriculum and literacy projects. Staff will also prepare focused book collections for those teachers who are unable to visit. Madeleine Lindley Ltd, Broadgate, Broadway Business Park, Chadderton, Oldham, Greater Manchester OL9 9XA. Telephone: 0161-683 4400. Fax: 0161-682 6801. Email: m.lindley@zen.co.uk

Marshall Publishing

The packager, Marshall Editions, relaunches itself this Autumn as Marshall Publishing bringing out titles under its own name. The company specialises in visual reference including children's titles.



BEST SELLER CHARTS

TOP 10 IN PRIMARY SCHOOL BOOKSHOPS January to May 1997

- 1 Shocker on Shock Street, RL Stine, Hippo
- 2 101 Dalmatians Duo
- 3 Matilda, Roald Dahl, Puffin
- 4 101 Dalmatians, Disney Read-To-Me, Ladybird
- 5 Fantastic Mr Fox, Roald Dahl, Puffin
- 6 Matilda's Secret File, Sandy Ransford, Puffin
- 7 The Measly Middle Ages, Terry Deary, Hippo
- 8 Squirrels in the School, Lucy Daniels, Hodder
- 9 All Because of Jackson, Dick King-Smith, Young Corgi
- 10 Matilda Activity Book, Alison Graham, Puffin

The prolific Mr Stine continues to dominate the bestseller lists! This list of bestsellers also demonstrates the impact of the cinema, with tie-ins to both *Matilda* and *101 Dalmatians* selling well in a variety of formats – the *101 Dalmatians Duo* is a double pack of activity books exclusive to BfS.

TOP 10 IN SECONDARY SCHOOL BOOKSHOPS January to May 1997

- 1 Shocker on Shock Street, RL Stine, Hippo
- 2 The Measly Middle Ages, Terry Deary, Hippo
- 3 A Kestrel for a Knave, Barry Hines, Penguin
- 4 X-Files: Squeeze, Ellen Steiber, Voyager
- 5 X-Files: Humbug, Les Martin, Voyager
- 6 X-Files: Shapes, Ellen Steiber, Voyager
- 7 Maskerade, Terry Pratchett, Corgi
- 8 Backwards, Rob Grant, Penguin
- 9 The Puffin Book of Horror Stories, Anthony Horowitz (ed.)
- 10 Northern Lights, Philip Pullman, Scholastic

The whole horror genre clearly appeals to a broad range of ages; witness the same 'Goosebumps' title topping both primary and secondary sales. In a list otherwise over-run with the weird and wonderful, the likes of *Northern Lights* and *A Kestrel for a Knave* are holding their own.

These listings have been specially compiled for BfK by Books for Students from their sales data. Books for Students Ltd is a major specialist supply company to schools and libraries.

PEOPLE

Happy Birthday to Shirley Hughes who is 70 this year. An intimate chronicler of familiar childhood experience, her distinctive



HUGHES

and accessible style has enormous appeal to young readers. She won the Kate Greenaway Medal in 1977 with *Dogger*.

Judith Elkin has been appointed Dean of Faculty, Computing and Information Studies at the University of Central England in Birmingham. Professor Elkin was

BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BR

formerly Head of the School of Information Studies. An authority on children's books for the multi-racial society, she was the compiler of BfK's instant sell-out, *A Multicultural Guide to Children's Books 0-12*.



HORN

Caroline Horn has been appointed children's book correspondent at the Bookseller.

Managing director of the children's division at HarperCollins, **Colin Clarke** has resigned. This

follows hard on the heels of the departure (BfK 104) of creative director and deputy managing director, **Ian Craig**. **Kate Harris**, managing director of HarperCollins' education division, has been appointed interim managing director. After the replacement of Random House's managing director, **Martina Challis** (BfK 105) by commercial director, **Ian Hudson**, BfK wonders which children's publisher will be next to replace its editorial grand fromage with a sales or educational one? Meanwhile authors and agents quake as **Anthea Disney**, Chief Executive of HarperCollins, cancels contracts with authors who have failed to deliver on time. No more dog-ate-my-ms excuses, guys!

Contributors: BfK team, Keith Barker. Submissions welcome.

Contacts

Folk tale collector, **Peter Schmitz**, would like to hear from publishers and writers interested in tales from Uzbekistan, Turkestan and Kirgizstan. Contact him at Jurigova nam.1, 841 05 Bratislava, Slovakia.

Publications

Reading Therapy for Children Vol. 2 compiled by librarian **Elizabeth Schlenker** is a supplement rather than a replacement for **Reading Therapy for Children Vol. 1** which is unfortunately out of print. It is an excellent annotated guide to children's books of interest to adults concerned with children's emotional and physical health. Recommended books are listed under sections such as 'Hospital Stories', and 'Health Problems and Disabilities' and include books on many of the problems facing children today from bereavement to AIDS. Send a cheque for £12 (payable to The Community

Delia Huddy, formerly Senior Editor, **Julia MacRae Books**, has been appointed Publishing Director, **Random House Children's Books**.



HUDDY



JENKINS

Pilar Jenkins, formerly Editorial Director, has been appointed Publishing Director, **Red Fox**.

Judith Evans, formerly Junior Editor at **Children's Books**, has been appointed Editor at **Piccadilly Press**.

Justin Somper, formerly Publicity Manager at **Random House Children's Books**, has been appointed Publicity Director. He will coordinate publicity across the five **Random House** imprints - **The Bodley Head**, **Hutchinson**, **Jonathan Cape**, **Julia MacRae** and **Red Fox**.

Rights to **Jo Rowling's** first novel, **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** (Bloomsbury; reviewed in BfK's **New Talent** slot, page 27) have been snapped up for a satisfying \$105,000 by **Scholastic US**.

Care Network) to **Anne Brimlow**, **CCN**, **Special Services**, **Southend Library**, **Victoria Avenue**, **Southend-on-Sea** SS2 6EX.

Hadithi Nzuri (Swahili for 'A Good Story') is a well written and attractively produced annotated bibliography of about 200 children's books for 5-12-year olds set in **Bangladesh**, **Ghana**, **India**, **Kenya** and **Peru**. There is also a useful section on using the recommended titles within the **English** and **geography** curricula. £6.90 from **ActionAid Education**, **Chataway House**, **Leach Road**, **Chard**, **Somerset** TA20 1FA.

Kick-Start, compiled by **Cornwall librarians Tricia Ellis** and **Rebecca Wright**, is a guide to children's books with high interest and low reading ability levels (given for each title) which will appeal to reluctant readers or late developing readers. £2.50 from **The Publications Department**, **Cornwall Education Library Services**, **Unit 17 Threemilestone**, **Truro** TR4 9LD.

PRIZES

THE CARNEGIE MEDAL

The **Library Association's Carnegie Medal** has been won by **Melvin Burgess** for **Junk** (Andersen Press/Penguin). Chair of judges, **Lesley Sim**, said, 'Junk is an outstanding, ground breaking book, an extraordinary mixture of social commentary and gripping drama. It is superbly written, with a subtle character development achieved through a succession of first person accounts of an adventure that leads to addiction.' **Anne Fine's The Tulip Touch** (Hamish Hamilton/Puffin) and **Terry Pratchett's Johnny and the Bomb** (Corgi) were Highly Commended.

THE KATE GREENAWAY MEDAL

The **Library Association's Kate Greenaway Medal** has been won by **Helen Cooper** for **The Baby Who Wouldn't Go to Bed** (Doubleday). **Lesley Sim** commented, 'Helen Cooper has created the ultimate reassuring bedtime picture book. With warm, subtle colours and lyrical text, she beautifully captures the surreal, twilight world of a sleepy child.' **Caroline Binch's Down by the River** (Heinemann) was Highly Commended and **Christina Balit's Ishtar** and **Tammuz** (Frances Lincoln) was Commended.

THE SIGNAL POETRY AWARD 1997

The **Signal Poetry Award** for work published in 1996 has been awarded to an anthology, **Stopping for Death: Poems of Death and Loss** (Viking), edited by the poet **Carol Ann Duffy**. Judge, **Brian Morse**, said, 'This immensely well-chosen set of poems seems intended for teenagers, although older junior children will certainly find much of value and interest among them... As in all good anthologies we enjoy once again familiar poems in an unfamiliar setting and learn about poems and poets we may never have met before... an excellent achievement.'

THE TIR NA N-OG AWARDS

Awarded by the **Welsh Books Council**, there are three **Tir Na N-Og Awards**. The **English Award** was won by **Sian Lewis** and **Jackie Morris** for

Cities in the Sea (Pont Books/Gomer Press), a retelling of a traditional Celtic tale. The **Best Welsh Fiction of the Year** was awarded to **John Owen** for **Ydy Fel**, a teenage novel based in the **Rhondda Valley**. The prize for the best Welsh non-fiction title of the year was awarded to **Gareth N Williams** for **Dirgelwch Loch Ness**, a book about the mystery of the **Loch Ness monster**.

THE MARY VAUGHAN JONES

Roger Boore, owner and founder of **Gwasg y Dref Wen**, a publishing house which specialises in children's titles in Welsh, has been awarded the **Mary Vaughan Jones award**.

RHONE-POULENC JUNIOR PRIZE FOR SCIENCE BOOKS

Two titles from **Scholastic's Horrible Science** series have won this award which aims to improve public understanding of science and technology by encouraging popular science books for the non-specialist reader. They are **Blood, Bones and Body Bits** (on human biology) and **Ugly Bugs** (on the insect world) written by **Nick Arnold** and with illustrations by **Tony de Saullès**. The winning titles were chosen by students at 20 schools from a shortlist selected by the adult judges (see BfK 104).

LANCASHIRE COUNTY LIBRARY CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

In **BfK 105** the **Federation of Children's Book Groups Children's Book Award** was described as the 'only UK award that is chosen entirely by children'. Our apologies to the **Lancashire County Library Children's Book of the Year award** which is also judged entirely by young readers, in this case from 14 **Lancashire schools**. This year's award was won by **Elizabeth Hawkins** for her novel **Sea of Peril** (Orchard).

In its tenth year, the award was this year extended when all the previous winning titles were entered into a **Books Across Europe** competition. School children from **Lancashire** and from their exchange schools in **Germany**, **France**, the **Netherlands** and **Russia** voted for the winning book, **Ian Strachan's The Boy in the Bubble** (Methuen). The chair of judges was **Hazel Townson**.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

White Author/Black Characters

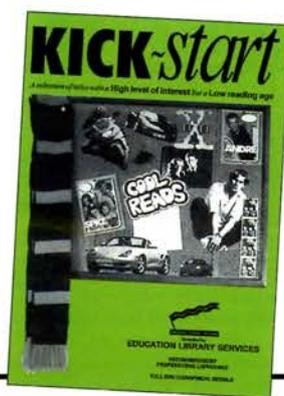
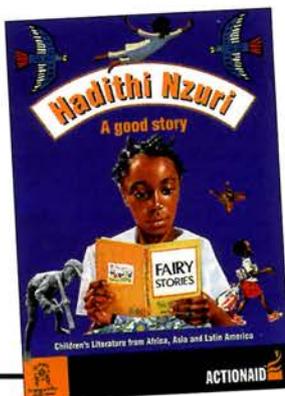
Dear Editor

I am responding to **Jean Ure's** letter (July BfK) about publishers' suggestions that in her proposed book, she would be well advised to change her black characters to white ones. She should do that because: 'A white writer writing about black people is a bad idea.'

So an honest approach to share a different experience through the printed word is again to be dragged onto sidelines, highjacked and dressed in masks and costumes as more acceptable and marketable. How will that do more than celebrate the already

well celebrated, even in the spirit of others? Fortunately, in spite of these helpless ongoing apartheid practices, the spirit of the human family continues to sweep away obstacles and find healthy and honest new vehicles of change and development. And it seems to me that however imperceptible, black and white people are in a continued renewing state of expanded consciousness with each other.

It is understood that every tribe sees itself as God's chosen yet finds itself drawn to mix with different others. Is it that we do sense a security in a balanced, deepened and expansive self, with everybody having a little bit of everybody? If so, strangely, this British editor, who would only consider taking on a book if its black characters were made white, may never have been touched by any common humanity in any black person's experience in a



BfKREVIEWS

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

TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

	Page		Page
Alice's Birthday Pig	★★★ 25	Little Mouse Grandma	★★★ 23
Alice's World Record	★★★ 25	Lizzie's Leaving	★★★★ 30
Baba	★★★★★ 20	Lottie Project, The	★★★★★ 27
Bad Good Manners Book, The	★★★★ 23	Loving	★★★★ 20
Barley Hall: A Day in a Medieval Town House	★★★ 27	Magnificent Mummies, The	★★★★★ 24
Being Friends	★★★★ 26	Master Track's Train	★★★★★ 21
Big and Bulky	★★★ 24	Matthew's Goals	★★★ 25
Big Machines in Town	★★★★ 21	Michael	★★★★ 21
Big Machines on the Farm	★★★★ 21	Mouse Flute	★★★★ 24
Biker	★★★ 25	Mr Bear and the Bear	★★★★ 23
Boys behaving Badly!	★★★ 30	Music on the Bamboo Radio	★★★★ 28
Brown and Furry	★★★ 24	My Pony Ride	★★★★ 20
Bullies Don't Hurt	★★★ 30	Nearly But Not Quite	★★★★★ 20
Captain Hawk and the Stone of Destiny	★★★ 25	Nothing but trouble	★★★★ 20
Carver, The	★★★ 28	Otherworld	★★★ 25
Chandra	★★★★ 28	Owl in the House	★★★ 24
Charlie's Story	★★★ 30	Pig's Book of Manners, A	★★ 23
Closing March, The	★★★★★ 28	Pigs Aplenty, Pigs Galore!	★★★★★ 20
Colourful and Bright	★★★ 24	Pirate Pandemonium	★★★ 24
Connie Came to Play	★★★★★ 20	Pop-o-Mania	★★★★ 26
Dad Library, The	★★★★ 25	Rights in the Home	★★★★★ 29
Delilah Alone	★★★★ 25	Roller Madonnas	★★★★ 25
Delilah Digs for Treasure	★★ 24	Romanichal Gypsies	★★★★★ 29
Dinosaur Roar!	★★★ 20	Runaway Fred	★★ 24
Dog on a Broomstick	★★★★ 23	Sam's Duck	★★★★ 23
Dorling Kindersley Illustrated Family Bible, The	★★★ 28	Scaly and Snappy	★★★ 24
Dragon Upstairs, The	★★★★ 25	School Bag, The	★★★★★ 30
Eastern Europe	★★★ 28	Sea Serpent, The	★★ 28
Family from Bosnia, A	★★★ 27	Short Stay in Purgatory, A	★★★ 29
Family from Ethiopia, A	★★★ 27	Slavery from Africa to the Americas	★★★★ 29
Feeling Angry	★★★★ 26	Sonny's Wonderful Wellies	★★★ 20
Feeling Shy	★★★★ 26	Spider Pie	★★★★ 25
First Bible Story Book, A	★★★ 23	Spring Break	★★★ 28
Fishbourne: A Day in a Roman Palace	★★★ 27	Strong and Stripy	★★★ 24
Forever Amber Brown	★★★ 25	Swap and Other Stories, The	★★★ 27
Freedom of Belief	★★★★★ 29	Swift and Silent	★★★ 24
Freedom of Speech	★★★★★ 29	Tales of St Patrick	★★★ 26
Girl Named Disaster, A	★★★★ 30	Telling It Like It Is: Young Asian WomenTalk	★★★★★ 30
Grandfather's Old Bruk-a-Down Car	★★★ 25	Telling the Truth	★★★★ 26
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone	★★★★ 27	Tex the Cowboy	★★★★★ 24
Help! My Family is Driving Me Crazy!	★★★ 30	There Might Be Giants	★★★★ 20
History of Inventions from Abacus to Atomic Power, A	★★ 29	Topsy-Turvies, The	★★★★ 20
History of Ships from Log Rafts to Luxury Liners, A	★★★★ 29	Tricky Tricky Twins	★★★ 23
How Did I Begin?	★★★★ 21	Viking at School	★★★ 24
How's Harry?	★★★★ 23	Water Wings	★★★★ 27
Incredible Plants	★★★★★ 26	Which way is home?	★★★ 30
Israel	★★★ 28	William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream	★★ 24
It Takes Two	★★★★★ 21	Workers' Rights	★★★★★ 29
Jack and the Beanstalk	★★★★ 20		
Jackmoora and the King of Ireland's Son	★★★ 23		
John Joe and the Big Hen	★★★★★ 21		
Keeping Secrets	★★ 24		
Lighthouse Keeper's Cat, The	★★★★★ 21		
Listener, The	★★★ 25		

RATING

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

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

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

Roy Blatchford is UK Director of Reading is Fundamental and Series Editor of Longman Literature.

Valerie Coghlan is joint Editor of *The Big Guide to Irish Children's Books*, Irish Children's Book Trust, 1996.

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

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

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.

Beverley Naidoo is a writer and visiting Fellow of the University of Southampton School of Education.

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.

Alan Ravenscroft is Executive Producer for Education Programming at Zenith North.

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

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

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

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

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Dinosaur Roar!

★★★

Paul and Henrietta Stickland,
Ragged Bears, 24pp,
1 85714 129 6, £4.99 board

'Dinosaur roar, dinosaur squeak, dinosaur fierce, dinosaur meek ...' This chunky board book about opposites full of rampaging dinosaurs will undoubtedly appeal to dinosaur-lovers everywhere. However, I am not sure who this is aimed at – a rogue extra dinosaur who pops in here and there could prove confusing for the youngest readers who need their 'opposites' clear-cut, and older dino-fans might be frustrated by being unable to identify all of the dinosaurs clearly. The words read quite well, the rhyme ending with a variation of the well known couplet 'gobble, gobble, nibble, nibble, munch, munch, scrunch' with which children will enjoy joining in. (This title was first published as a picture book.) AG

Nothing but trouble

★★★★

Gus Clarke, Andersen, 32pp,
0 86264 754 1, £8.99 hbk

Maisie's day goes from bad to bad to worse – she is woken up by a smelly baby, splashed by paint in art class, finds a caterpillar in her salad and so forth. Younger infants enjoyed and empathised whilst the older ones quickly caught the drift of the sly humour in the illustrations which is well served by the 'tongue in cheek' text. Clarke's parting shot (which I cannot give away) shows the delicacy of his control for he could so easily have blown it all by going over the top at the end! JS

Connie Came to Play

★★★★★

Jill Paton Walsh, ill. Stephen Lambert, Puffin, 32pp,
0 14 055615 X, £4.99 pbk



When Connie comes to play in Robert's house Robert is endlessly possessive of his train, rope, bricks, trumpet, rocking horse and diving set. Connie's way of dealing with this is immediately to imagine herself into another setting where she is riding a *real* train or horse, diving into a *real* deep-sea or building a tower out of *real* bricks.

This intriguingly designed picture book alternates reality and fantasy worlds that are a delight to share with early readers. The expressions on the children's faces and the dreamlike escapism of the fantasy double spreads offer lots of scope for parent and child chat about what belongs to whom. Furthermore, the power of the imagination to take young and old alike into other landscapes is at the golden heart of this book. Composers often talk about the space between the notes; this collaboration of author and illustrator is worth reading both for its economy of narrative *and* the words left off the page! RB

Pigs Aplenty, Pigs Galore!

POETRY ★★★★★

David McPhail, Picture Puffin,
32pp, 0 14 055313 4, £4.99 pbk

This has proved one of the most popular picture books we were sent for review. It features McPhail himself spending an evening peacefully with a book when the room is suddenly invaded by pigs (*Pigs from England/Pigs from France/Pigs in just/Their underpants*) who create pig anarchy, pig greedery and pig pizza heaven. There is a satisfying re-assertion of order by McPhail (the children decided it just had to be him – so Puffin, please don't tell us he is short and fat!). The story is told in verse with bright, bold illustrations. JS

The Topsy-Turvies

★★★★

Francesca Simon, ill. Keren Ludlow, Dolphin, 32pp,
1 85881 332 8, £4.50 pbk

The Topsy-Turvy family live an upside-down life in the midst of '60s-style suburbia – they sleep in the kitchen, get up at midnight, and dress in their pyjamas before dining in the master bedroom. One day their neighbour, Mrs Plum, asks them to baby-sit and they have a busy time making her (rather more conventionally arranged) house 'lovely for her' ...

Nursery/Infant children will enjoy searching the pictures for examples of Topsy-Turvy life, though less-experienced sharers may need some explanation. There is lots to laugh at here and the book also provides good material for discussion of convention and difference. AG

Jack and the Beanstalk

★★★★

Retold by Josephine Poole,
ill. Paul Hess, Macdonald
'Classic Fairy Tales', 32pp,
0 7500 1992 1, £8.99 hbk,
0 7500 1993 X, £4.99 pbk

This picture book version of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' is a straightforward retelling which contains enough elements of conventional fairy-tale language to satisfy, while remaining easy to read aloud.

What makes this version stand out from other retellings are the exceptional illustrations with their unusual perspectives. We look down the beanstalk to see Jack's face and

the cottage far below, or out of the oven through Jack's eyes at a curiously distorted view of the giant in his kitchen amidst his IKEA-style spindly candlesticks!

This book is from a new series of 'Classic Fairy Tales' retold and illustrated in the main by well-known authors and illustrators. The other titles in the series are also worth looking out for, although by no means as well illustrated as this one. AG

Nearly But Not Quite

★★★★★

Paul Rogers, ill. John Prater,
Bodley Head, 32pp,
0 370 32423 4, £9.99 hbk

A story of the trepidation, courage, dogged determination and ultimate survival of a young child on a day's visit to a family which involves playing with older children. It brought instant empathy from many of the older infants who reviewed the book for me. The story line is superbly matched by Prater's illustrations which sensitively portray the younger child's attempts to keep up and how he 'nearly but not quite' succeeds in each of the exploits. Author and illustrator carry the book along with pace and verve through adventures in Sherwood Forest, through wild battles and escapes from the Sheriff of Nottingham's men yet we never lose the smaller child's perspective. Another winner! JS

Sonny's Wonderful Wellies

★★★

Lisa Stubbs, Piccadilly Press,
32pp, 1 85340 369 5, £9.99 hbk,
1 85340 495 0, £3.99 pbk

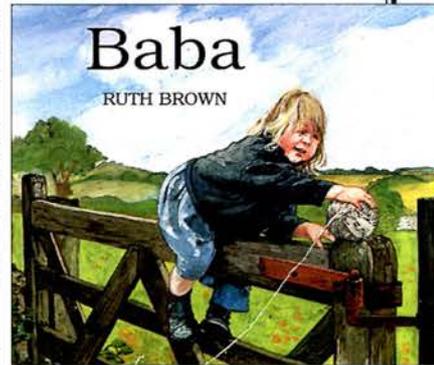
This is a charming looking book from a new author/illustrator, very nicely and cheerfully illustrated and presented which excuses it being a fairly silly story. Sonny is a duck who is given a pair of red wellingtons and will not take them off. He wants it to rain so that he can splash in the puddles and when it does not grandma gets out the paddling pool. LW

There Might Be Giants

★★★★

Hilda Offen, Hodder, 32pp,
0 340 65602 6, £9.99 hbk,
0 340 68149 7, £4.99 pbk

The children in this picture book see all sorts of characters – giants, dragons, wizards – which mum not only does not notice but says do not exist. Are they really there? Or are the children pretending because they are dressed up? This is not an original idea (*There's no such Thing as a Dragon* or *On the Way Home*, among others, have explored very similar themes). However, Offen makes an engaging book with lots to talk and think about for four- to seven-year-olds. There is also some tactful reassurance for children who may be nervous about fairy tale nasties and the straightforward text makes a good choice for young, newly fluent readers to try out. LW



Baba

★★★★★

Ruth Brown, Andersen, 32pp,
0 86264 730 4, £8.99 hbk

This picture book about a big sister reluctantly taking her little cry-baby sister with her on a walk, lends itself well both to Brown's glorious countryside scenes and to her expressive way with the human face. The little girl will bring a smile of recognition to any adult who has had to deal with a whingeing toddler trailing in the wake clutching her comfort blanket and the older children's irritated embarrassment is nicely portrayed. When the blanket catches on a gate and unravels to nothing, however, there turn out to be hidden reserves of strength in the smaller child who, satisfyingly, comes up trumps after all. Small children will, undoubtedly, find much to relate to. LW

Loving

★★★★

Ann Morris, photographs by Ken Heyman, Mulberry Books (available from Letterbox Library), 32pp, 0 688 13613 3, £4.50 pbk

Each page shines with love in this special picture book about families around the world. With each tender photograph of child and parent, we are enriched by a sense of wonder at the sheer breadth and variety of life styles and relationships, of differences in culture, of rich and poor, of young and old that coexist in our world. Running through all the differences is the thread of love which links us all together. The sheer range and power of Heyman's photographs linked with Morris' careful understated text combine to give us a breathtaking experience. JS

My Pony Ride

★★★★

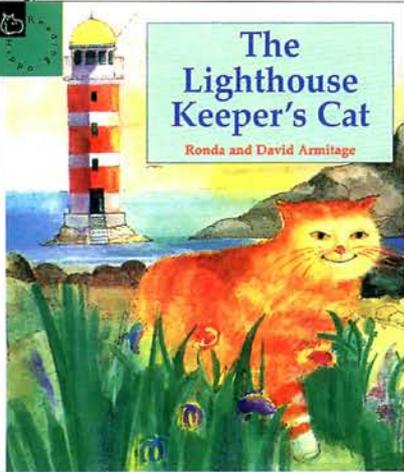
Lisa Kopper, Puffin, 32pp,
0 14 055564 1, £4.99 pbk

This is delightful! A lovely picture book for very young children which follows a child and her father on a gentle pony ride through the country. The pictures are clear and uncluttered in soft colours which let the reader concentrate on the people and animals and their environment. There is no story as such. Instead, two words on each page tell what is happening in a series of opposite statements ('deep ditch, shallow stream; bumpy field, smooth yard') which are wonderful for language

development and descriptive skills. Any young child would be enriched by sharing this book with an adult and many will want to read it for themselves, too, so the bold print is an added bonus. **LW**

The Lighthouse Keeper's Cat

Ronda and David Armitage



The Lighthouse Keeper's Cat

★★★★★

Ronda and David Armitage, Scholastic Reading Hippo, 32pp, 0 590 13260 1, £3.99 pbk

When Hamish, the lighthouse keeper's cat, overhears that his family plan to put him on a diet, he decides to leave home and find another family who will appreciate him better! As with previous 'Lighthouse Keeper' stories, the Armitages' solution to Hamish's problems is to provide a mix of good solid moral values, educational challenge and sheer good fun! There are so many ideas to share and discuss (and wonderful teaching points to develop) that this is bound to join the earlier tales as favourites with children, parents and teachers. **JS**

John Joe and the Big Hen

★★★★★

Martin Waddell, ill. Paul Howard, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 5243 5, £4.99 pbk

Toddler John Joe is inadvertently abandoned by his sibling minders, and finds himself alone in a neighbour's farmyard, confronted by a hen which is easily big enough to

swallow him whole. His flight is followed by a panicky search by his brother and sister, and a rescue by the loyal family dog.

This is a beautiful and accessible book. The Arcadian setting, depicted in gentle but carefully detailed water colours, intensifies its nursery rhyme atmosphere. The repetitions in the text add to the mild tension of the adventure, and should enhance its readability for younger children who will probably want to read it over again on their own. **GH**

Big Machines on the Farm

0 670 87259 8 hbk,
0 14 056209 5 pbk

Big Machines in Town

0 670 87258 X hbk,
0 14 056208 7 pbk

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Steve Cox, Viking, 24pp, £9.99 each hbk, Puffin, £3.99 each pbk

These two useful picture books appealed to many children in my school as an early introduction to the world of machines. Cox's friendly, detailed illustrations of scenes from farm and street life show the machines in context and are full of information and touches of humour. Speech bubbles from busy firefighters or farm workers provide further information. At the end of the book a simple story reinforces the visual information in the picture spreads. There is also an index. This required some juggling around with the book as the children searched for the relevant pages but could in itself be considered a useful learning task.

One criticism from the children was that the names of all the machines were in upper case which made them slightly more difficult to read. The books were popular though, especially with the boys and clearly meet a need for more challenging reference material at the infant stage. **JS**

It Takes Two

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Karen Wallace and Ross Collins, Franklin Watts 'Wonderwise', 32pp, 0 7496 2371 3, £8.99 hbk

How Did I Begin?

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts, 32pp, 0 7496 2421 3, £8.99 hbk

Two new titles in a picture book non-fiction series that has won several awards. *It Takes Two* is about mating and child rearing in the animal kingdom - not about how bodies fit together but the astonishing, amusing and multifarious business of differences between the sexes, how they attract one another and how they arrange for the birth and care of their offspring.

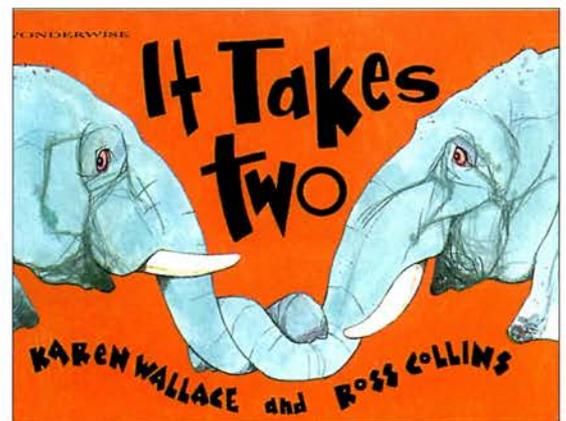
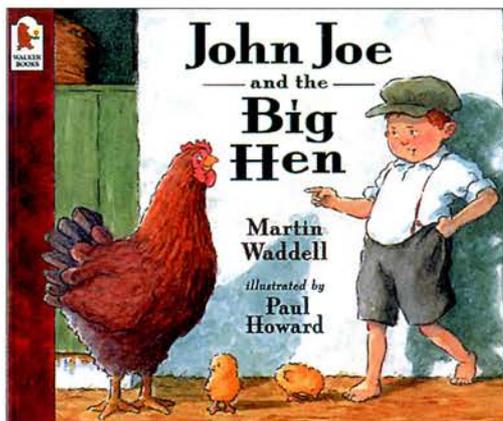
Yes, everybody does it: from the firefly to the mandrill; and sometimes it is the female who plays the largest part and sometimes it is the male. Brilliant, clear illustrations, accurate, vibrant and full of expression, are accompanied by a text that is fun without being facetious. The book is animated by an enjoyment of the variety of living things and will captivate pre-school and infant children.

It's so much fun that it is easy to overlook that it is also encouraging children to take their first steps in scientific observation, to categorise and to compare. This is an information book with the sense of design, the gusto, the colour and the appeal of the best of picture-book fiction.

How Did I Begin? is an appropriately reassuring explanation of the facts of life. We all began with a 'special cuddle' between mum and dad and, although the exact mechanics are hidden beneath the duvet, we are shown a diagram of the working parts in a quiescent state, all properly named. From there we are guided through conception, pregnancy and birth with a simple, direct text and bold illustrations, answering the questions posed by bright children's faces that pop up in the margins of the pages: 'What did I look like?' and 'Could I hear things in there?'

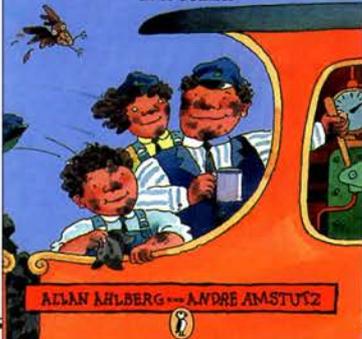
We are introduced to difficult words like chromosome and amniotic sac and these are explained at the right level. But feelings and emotions are not forgotten. I like the idea that being born 'was a bit like squeezing your head through a tight polo neck jumper'.

The book cannot, of course, guess every question that might be asked, and will give rise to more; but it establishes the right mood. It does not assume any particular family arrangement and can be used happily by single and adoptive or foster parents. The author's tone, as if he were talking to a child sat upon his knee, emphasises the unique value of each new life. **CB**



REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

HAPPY FAMILIES Master Track's Train



Master Track's Train

★★★★★

Allan Ahlberg and Andre Amstutz, Puffin 'Happy Families', 24pp, 0 14 037881 2, £3.50 pbk

This latest addition to the 'Happy Families' series sees Ahlberg and Amstutz at their co-operative best. Master Track, one Toby, the adopted son of a train driver and his wife, gives chase and captures the would-be great train robbers, the Creeps (a family who have a book of their own in the series). There is a homage to Oscar Wilde which will amuse adult readers in this multi-layered story which is told through many voices.

Apart from the narrator there are the platform loud speaker blaring announcements, the listening passengers with their questions and exclamations, the bubble talk from the various characters and not least, the illustrations which eloquently expand the text and tell stories of their own. **JB**

Michael

★★★★★

Tony Bradman and Tony Ross, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 759 2, £4.50 pbk

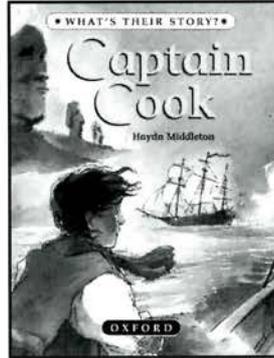
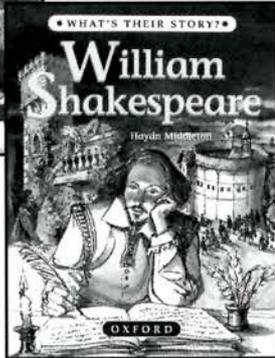
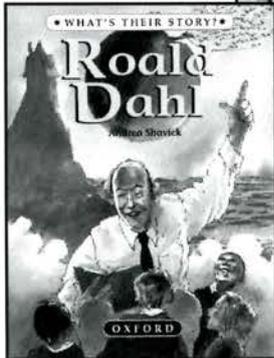
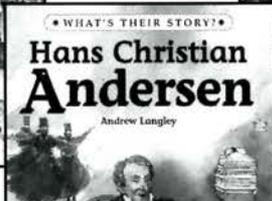
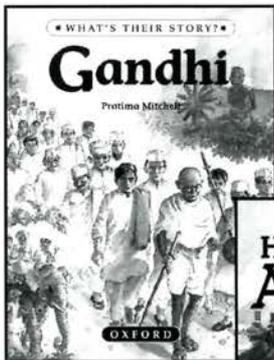
This picture book is a celebration of the waywardness of genius. Michael causes havoc in school in a number

Tony Bradman · Tony Ross

Michael



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of classroom situations, that is when he is not contemplating sycamore spin-drifters and secretly engrossed in the mathematics of flight. Eventually, of course, Michael goes far.

This is a straightforward but stimulating book, and the combination of Bradman's bold, concise and uncomplicated text with Ross' vigorous, witty artwork make it highly accessible to beginner readers who will enjoy thinking about what wonders might be evolving inside the hero's head. GH

The Bad Good Manners Book

★★★★

Babette Cole, Puffin, 32pp,
0 14 055480 7, £4.99 pbk

A Pig's Book of Manners

★★

Nicholas Allan, Red Fox, 32pp,
0 09 953391 X, £4.50 pbk

The subject of manners for children maketh a difficult book to write.

Cole is cleverly light-hearted. Clever because her small child's misdemeanours are taken to such absurd lengths that no readers would feel they could be that stupid. Clever because she covers a range of behaviour from leaving the taps on to telling your mum that she's fat. Clever because she's not concerned with please and thank you but with do as you would be done by. Light-hearted because she recognises that sometimes the best intentions can cause the worst mess. Told in a pleasing rhyme with a short text and cheerfully manic illustrations, hers is the generous approach you would expect from the creator of *Mummy Laid an Egg* and *Doctor Dog*, without the need to be so frank or graphic.

In the past, Allan, like Cole, has sailed triumphantly close to the winds of taste with *Jesus' Christmas Party* and *The Queen's Knickers*. With *A Pig's Book of Manners*, however, he seems to have been blown off course.

Johnny Squelchnose is an appalling child who not only belches, farts and picks his nose ostentatiously in bright green but has a dislike for model citizen Claude Curlytail, who happens to be a pig rather than behaving like one. Johnny reforms, of course, but not before Allan has made the most of him, including a spectacular double page spread in which he does an arching pee in the park pond.

Presumably, Allan's intention is a serious one. But the effect is rather like the tabloid report of a sex scandal. You take the wagging finger for granted but it is the naughty bits you are invited to relish. Warning: do not encourage participation at storytime. The blurb claims 'You can be an absolute pig and learn perfect politeness.' I don't think so. CB

Sam's Duck

★★★★

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Keith Bowen, Collins Picture Lions, 32pp, 0 00 664625 5, £4.99 pbk

There is little extraordinary in the tale of a city boy (incidentally black) spending a week on a farm, rescuing

a duck from the market and bringing it home with him. Except in the telling: and when the storyteller is Morpurgo, whose other life has been dedicated to running such a farm in Devon, you have every right to expect the extraordinary. Nor will you be disappointed. He knows just how much to say and how much to leave to the illustrator. And, through Bowen's paintings, you are there with Sam, seeing and hearing the lumbering weight of the bull, feeling the confinement of the cow in the milking stall and the routine indifference of the animal handlers at the market. This is the country of dark, cold mornings, muck and sweat, from which you learn the value of tending living things: how to be caring but not sentimental. For junior school children who are never lucky enough to meet Morpurgo in his farmer's hat, this will be more than an acceptable substitute. CB

Mr Bear and the Bear

★★★★

Frances Thomas and Ruth Brown, Red Fox, 32pp,
0 09 972611 4, £4.50 pbk

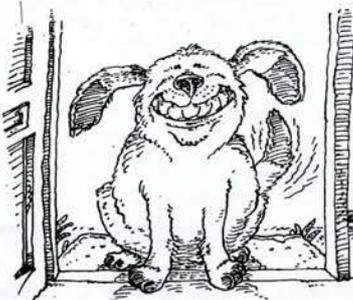
Another variation on the theme of the tender hearted misanthropist, this book tells the tale of a grim, ursine recluse whose warmer feelings are aroused when he wanders into a town fair and sees the cruelty inflicted on a dancing bear. The development of the relationship between two creatures exiled from their own kind is told in direct, unsentimental language, while Brown's rich and autumnally colourful double page paintings gently suggest the thawing of blood and the growth of trust.

I would imagine that most animal loving children of all ages will love this story. They may be further impressed by the fact that part of the proceeds from the sale of the book will go to Liberty, a world campaign for the welfare of bears. GH

Dog on a Broomstick

★★★★

Jan Page, ill. Nick Price, Corgi Pups, 64pp, 0 552 54538 4,
£3.50 pbk



A tale told in four short chapters about a Dog, who wants to break convention and become a witch's familiar (replacing the cat who left her in the lurch to become a cat food tester). The Witch finally accepts him only to find that she herself becomes an outsider at the Bad Spell contest (dogs are against the rules). But just as all seems lost, the Bad Fairy (judge) awards first prize to the unconventional pair.

It is good to see the cat's farewell note and the witch's 'Wanted' notice which she places in a shop window used as part of the story (though why

not make the former an integral part of the opening page rather than an adjunct to the text?) The Dog, as portrayed in Price's liberally scattered line drawings is utterly beguiling and the Bad (punk) Fairy deliciously alternative. Perfect for that potentially tricky new reader stage and especially for those who revel in otherness. JB

Jackomoor and the King of Ireland's Son

★★★★

Bryan MacMahon, ill. Finbarr O'Connor, Poolbeg, 48pp,
1 85371 652 9, £2.99 pbk

Jackomoor, a possessor of magical powers, joins John, the King of Ireland's Son, as he sets out on his quest to find and wed a beautiful princess 'whose hair was as black as the raven's wing, whose cheek was as red as the raven's blood and whose neck was as white as the fallen snow'. This is the stuff of a classic Celtic wondertale, told with considerable gusto and additionally enlivened by O'Connor's spirited illustrations. It will make a good read-aloud. VC

Little Mouse Grandma

★★★★

Julia Jarman, ill. Alex de Wolf,
0 7497 2822 1

Tricky Tricky Twins

★★★★

Kate Elizabeth Ernest, ill. David Mitchell, 0 7497 2752 7
Mammoth, 64pp, £3.50 each pbk

It is interesting to find two such different books within a series for 'building confidence' in new readers. Each has black and white line drawings. Each has four self contained chapters. Each has a controlled vocabulary. But *Little Mouse Grandma* is a fantasy that takes place within the fences (if not the walls) of a British suburban house, and whose hero is a pre-schooler; while *Tricky Tricky Twins* is about the escapades of two junior school age Jamaican country boys.

It is possible that many British children will be less amazed by a grandmother who changes into a mouse than by a world where the church is the centre of social life, moths circle kerosene lamps not light bulbs, and the punishment for mischief may be a beating with a tamarind switch.

Jarman makes simple but exciting adventures out of Matthew's grandma's peculiar compulsion. *Little Mouse Grandma* retrieves his favourite car from under the floor boards and pilots a toy boat around the bath: all within a young child's flights of fancy. The stories could well be read to pre-school children. It may be that someone old enough to read them for herself may already be a little too old for them.

Ernest's *Tricky Tricky Twins* is certainly for older children. The interest is less with the antics of the boys, which, with tin-can walkie-talkies and catapults, do seem old fashioned and innocent. The fascination is with a way of life and a group of supporting characters that Ernest depicts briefly and cleverly, giving a flavour of Jamaican speech as much by word usage and rhythm as dialect.

There is so much less happening in *Little Mouse Grandma* than *Tricky Tricky Twins* that Alex de Wolf has the easier job as illustrator. With marginal sketches, he provides a light commentary on events in the text. David Mitchell, with more space and more to explain, is tempted into trying to squeeze in dramatic scenes, which repeat the text without adding anything and, unfortunately, give the book a school reader quality. CB

How's Harry?

★★★★

Steve May, ill. Philip Hopman, Mammoth 'Reads', 64pp,
0 7497 2830 2, £3.50 pbk



Another series title in the current vogue for 'short novels for fluent readers', this 'Mammoth Read' tells of Kate's wish for a hamster and her gradual realisation of the animal's needs and her role in caring for it. You would have to be a pretty fluent reader for this novel - it is told in the joky style that seems to be prevalent in books aimed at the 'newly fluent' stage, with lots of digs at Mum and Dad, and Dad uses a number of idiosyncratic made-up words - 'I'm dadamant', 'I'll daddle well ...' which might prove confusing to the less experienced reader.

The message about taking responsibility for a pet seriously, and actual basic information about caring for a hamster, come through clearly despite the jokiness, and Kate's determination to prove herself a fit pet-owner is well described. AG

A First Bible Story Book

★★★★

Stories retold by Mary Hoffman, ill. Julie Downing, Dorling Kindersley, 80pp,
0 7513 5480 5, £8.99 hbk

Illustrated in full colour throughout, this book contains retellings of 13 stories from the Bible, seven from the Old Testament and six from the New Testament. There is also a three-page 'Who's Who' of the main characters from the stories.

In her introduction Hoffman says, 'the stories are full of vivid pictures' and refers to images potentially 'disturbing in their power' along with those more 'comforting ones of creation, repentance and salvation'. And yes, her tellings do all read aloud well (some better than others: hence we hear of Jonah going '... down, and round and round ... swirling and tumbling through the water into the dark ...') so it may seem carping to say that I felt less than one hundred per cent positive about them. I want to offer children retellings which have the potential to invoke feelings of awe and wonder and an open, questioning attitude towards the mysteries embedded in stories from world religions, together with feelings of excitement for language.

If language is to invite children to engage with such symbolically conveyed meanings, then one can't help but want a certain richness of verbal imagery which, for the most part, I couldn't find here. Four- and five-year-olds most certainly can engage with, appreciate and discuss (together with the symbolism) such richness of language. One senses (and can sympathise with) the author's concern to make the stories accessible to a very young audience – and she has certainly done so – and parents or others with a slightly different, less demanding, agenda when sharing the stories will, very likely, wholeheartedly appreciate this.

One cannot but ask why only the first part of the Jonah story is told. Surely by omitting Jonah's anger at God NOT destroying Ninevah, and his subsequent understanding of God's all embracing forgiveness – i.e. not just for the chosen (Jewish) people – much of the message and impact is lost?

Aside from this, Downing's slightly understated, watercolour illustrations, while never overwhelming the text, invite exploration of the feelings of the characters portrayed (and thus potentially deeper understandings on behalf of the child audience). Despite my personal reservations this book has much to offer adult readers-aloud and those under-sixes with whom it is shared. JB

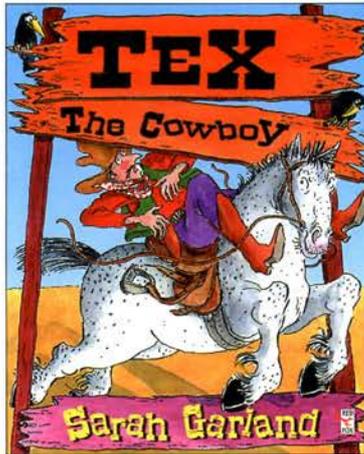
Tex the Cowboy

★★★★★

Sarah Garland, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 926701 2, £4.50 pbk

I seem to recall that Tex first made his appearance in single story pocket-sized Cubs. This large format book brings together six Tex adventures told in the present tense and in comic strips and it shows just how eloquent Garland's illustrations and few words can be. First we learn how Tex, a simple, gullible cowboy, acquired his horse, the overweight, no-nonsense Gloria. Despite their unlikely appearance (Tex is puny and pink-faced with droopy red moustache and Gloria is a spotty grey carthorse) this unlikely duo then manage to outwit the evil Hank Bones time and again thanks mainly to Gloria's many talents.

Simply told, these adventures are highly entertaining and will have particular appeal to individuals who are more confident reading pictures than words. Ignore the publishers age recommendation: readers need

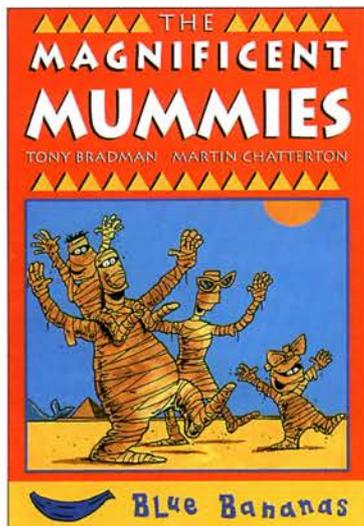


more sophistication than anyone under six is likely to have. JB

The Magnificent Mummies

★★★★★

Tony Bradman, ill. Martin Chatterton, 0 434 97482 X hbk, 0 7497 2767 5 pbk



Mouse Flute

★★★★

Andrew Matthews, ill. Vanessa Julian-Ottie, 0 434 97462 5 hbk, 0 7497 2634 2 pbk

Owl in the House

★★★★

Gregory Evans, ill. Peter Bailey, 0 434 97654 7 hbk, 0 7497 2633 4 pbk

Delilah Digs for Treasure

★★

Rachel Pank, 0 434 97463 3 hbk, 0 7497 2632 6 pbk

Runaway Fred

★★

Rosemary Debnam, ill. Claudio Muñoz, 0 434 97481 1 hbk, 0 7497 2681 4 pbk

Keeping Secrets

★★

Jenny Koralek, ill. Steve Cox, 0 434 97478 1 hbk, 0 7497 2812 4 pbk

Heinemann 'Blue Bananas', 48pp, £5.99 each hbk, Mammoth, £3.99 each pbk

If I see another book with the words 'National Curriculum Key Stage 1' on the back I shall scream (Blue Bananas have them prominently printed on the back cover). Presumably this labelling is meant to entice parents to buy but it can only serve to limit the potential readership of the books. The Egyptian desert setting of *The Magnificent Mummies* (Mummy Mummy, Daddy Mummy, Tut, Sis and the cat), for example, gives plenty of scope for the type of humour that would amuse readers in the junior school. It has used camel salesmen, an eccentric archaeologist and a lost whale masquerading as the Aswan Dam all fleshed out with hilarious illustrations.

Mouse Flute is much more reflective in mood and chronicles the seasons in the life of Mouse and his friends Weasel and Bear. With his flute, Mouse seems to be able to bring to life the world around him so that in Spring, 'trees put out leaves and whispered their Winter dreams to the wind.' The watercolour pictures are beguiling with many touching details to linger over, but it is the carefully chosen words which paint pictures in the mind that will, I suggest, linger longer.

In *Owl in the House*, Owl falls down the chimney and is tempted to stay and become a pet until he smells the outside again and realises he must be free.

The other three titles are less strong although they have some lively female characters. In *Delilah Digs for Treasure* would-be pirate Delilah unwittingly disturbing dogs' bones, a squirrel's store of acorns and tree

roots, not to mention mum's precious bulbs and Spencer the cat's toilet spot in her search. Then finally she does discover something worthwhile. I like the idea of Delilah's treasure being the fruits of the earth (Grandma's potatoes) rather than jewels. *Runaway Fred* is a black and white dog who besides getting up to the sort of mischief one would expect, manages to acquire an impressive collection of cuddly toys. It has a small boy narrator who recounts the escapades of his sister's light-pawed puppy. In *Keeping Secrets* Rosie finds that her cousins Josh and Harry have plenty in store for her. All these titles have full colour illustrations throughout and a liberal sprinkling of speech bubbles. JB

Scaly and Snappy

1 85561 598 3

Colourful and Bright

1 85561 597 5

Strong and Stripy

1 85561 571 1

Swift and Silent

1 85561 576 2

Brown and Furry

1 85561 575 4

Big and Bulky

1 85561 572 X

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Moira Butterfield, ill. Wayne Ford, Belitha 'Who Am I?', 32pp, £6.99 each hbk

A guessing game approach to identifying animals makes an interesting and unusual non-fiction book for infant or lower junior children. The artwork focuses on just one part of the animal's body in order to conceal the identity of the creature until near the end of the book. The left hand side of each double spread has larger typeface and simpler text than the right. Three detailed traditional watercolour illustrations appear on each spread. In *Scaly and Snappy*, I'm afraid I fell for the (intentional?) trap and wrongly identified the American alligator as a crocodile. Once the true identity is revealed, further information about the animal's habitat and its babies is presented along with a quiz and simple glossary. AK

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream

★★

Retold by Bruce Coville, ill. Dennis Nolan, Macdonald, 40pp, 0 7500 2387 2, £9.99 hbk

Shakespearean retellings for children have a distinguished history, taking us at least as far back as the Lambs. This Coville and Nolan version, in full colour picture book format, is, however, given more sumptuous presentation than most

of its predecessors, resulting in a volume which is quite attractive to look at and handle. Inevitably – in spite of the claims of the blurb – a considerable quantity of the 'magic and humour' of the original has to be sacrificed: the antics of Quince and Co. undergo a marked abridgement and Nolan's artwork misses out on the dark underside of the text. There is – for the adult reader – 'a note from the author' which raises numerous questions about the need for, and function of, a volume such as this. It is, we are informed, not a substitute for the original but 'a gateway to the greater enjoyment of it'. There will

be no dispute about the first of these claims; the second remains tantalisingly unproven – and unprovable? RD

Viking at School

Illustrated by John Levers, 0 7136 4435 4

Pirate Pandemonium

Illustrated by Judy Brown, 0 7136 4605 5

★★★

Jeremy Strong, A & C Black

'Crackers', 72pp, £6.99 each hbk

Two relentlessly pacy and very humorous tales that will keep lower junior children chuckling through to the books' chaotic conclusions. In *Viking at School*, Sigurd the Viking sails through a Time-mist, arrives in twentieth-century Flotby with his trusty sword 'Nosepicker'. In *Pirate Pandemonium*, swashbuckling supply teacher, Violet Pandemonium, causes a stir when called into Wits End Primary School. Her unconventional approach to teaching is too much for the straitlaced and severe deputy head, Mrs Earwigger, who fears Book Week being hijacked by the new arrival.

Both titles have a smattering of illustrations which capture well the frenetic moods of the stories. AK

Alice's Birthday Pig

80pp, 0 14 038314 X

Alice's World Record

96pp, 0 14 038315 8

★★★

Tim Kennemore, ill. Alex de Wolf, Puffin, £3.99 each pbk

These two Alice books are perfect family stories for confident young readers. In *Alice's Birthday Pig* 7-year-old Alice is teased by older brother Oliver because she pronounces 'animal' as 'aminal'. When Alice decides to avoid saying the word altogether, she is mortified to learn that her class project is to be 'Farm Animals'. On the school visit to a farm Alice falls in love with a pig with a limp and decides she wants it as a pet but in the end has to settle for one of the traditional 'Guinea' variety - naming it 'Aminal'. *Alice's World Record* is the more satisfying of the two books, dealing with the common domestic problems of long car journeys, family favouritism and losing gracefully. Both stories are illustrated with lively line drawings. AK

Grandfather's Old Bruk-a-Down Car

POETRY

★★★

John Agard, ill. Kevin Dean, Red Fox, 64pp, 0 09 930140 7, £3.50 pbk

Although many of Agard's poems provide a lot more excitement when they are being recited than when they are lying flat on the page, this collection contains enough rhythm, humour and intriguing imagery to provide an effective simulacrum of performance. The unifying theme is that of the favourite object: the jalopy of the title, a haunted rocking chair, an old biscuit tin full of dreams. Many of the poems act as riddles, describing the object in metaphors before revealing the surprise of its identity in the last line. This is a book about the joy and mystery of everyday things, and it should provide inspiration for children to look at their own familiar world afresh. GH

Matthew's Goals

★★★

Michael Hardcastle, ill. Bob Moulder, 0 7136 4560 1 hbk, 0 7136 4706 X pbk

Biker

★★★

Anthony Masters, ill. Gary Rees, 0 7136 4561 X hbk, 0 7136 4711 6 pbk

The Listener

★★★

Elizabeth Laird, ill. Pauline Hazelwood, 0 7136 4522 9 hbk, 0 7136 4709 4 pbk

Otherworld

★★★

Jeremy Strong, ill. Anthony Morris, 0 7136 4569 5 hbk, 0 7136 4707 8 pbk

Captain Hawk and the Stone of Destiny

★★★

Jim Eldridge, ill. Janek Matysiak, 0 7136 4562 1 hbk, 0 7136 4710 8 pbk

Roller Madonnas

★★★★

Bernard Ashley, ill. Kim Harley, 0 7136 4562 8 hbk, 0 7136 4708 6 pbk

A & C Black 'Graffix', 80pp, £6.99 each hbk, £3.99 each pbk

Graffix is a new series of almost comic book stories, highly illustrated with line drawings, which will prove useful with reluctant readers - especially boys.

Matthew's Goals is an entirely predictable, cliché-ridden school football story with Matthew inevitably getting the golden goal winner from the spot. Football fans will probably love it as cliché is the very life-blood of the game - after all 'it's a game of two halves. It's goals that count and the game isn't over till the final whistle blows.'

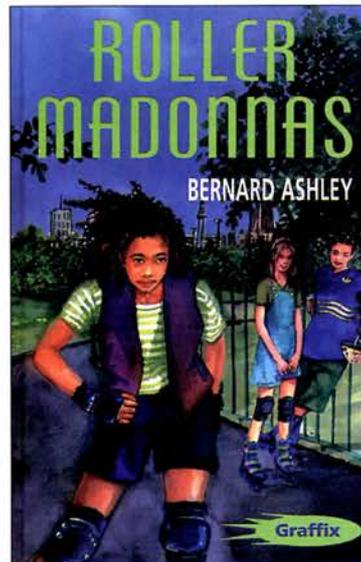
Biker is a run of the mill moto-cross story with problems in father-son relationship as a sub-plot.

Football features again in *The Listener*. Gavin desperately wants to watch Johnny Mason make his debut for United but he has to go and stay with Grandma in her isolated cottage. Gran has a fall on the moors and the nearest house where Gavin can get help is occupied by Johnny and his busty, blonde bimbo of a girlfriend. It is Johnny's deaf sister Shelley, the listener of the title, who helps Gavin and brings about a satisfactory resolution to the tale.

Otherworld is a virtual reality tale where the computer game has strange parallels with real life and Alex rescues his new neighbour Tanya (the Wild Princess) from the attentions of the school bully Biggott (the evil knight Grax) and the control of her domineering mother (Queen Morgreth).

Captain Hawk and the Stone of Destiny is the most highly illustrated title of the set. Hawk is a star-fighter pilot living on his wits with an android side-kick, Xan-X, who looks remarkably like CP3-O in *Star Wars*. Hawk wise-cracks his way out of various impossible situations encountering all manner of intergalactic low-life along the way.

I've left the best till last. As you might imagine Ashley is the most ambitious author in the series with *Roller Madonnas* - both in terms of the language used and the subject matter; though whether it will go down quite as well with the target audience is a moot point; this is the only one of the six series titles to have a female central character. Maria and Mary (one black, one white) are best friends and roller-blading buddies. When Maria has to choose between a date with the gorgeous Danny and attending her dad's leaving-do after being made redundant by Railtrack, she opts for



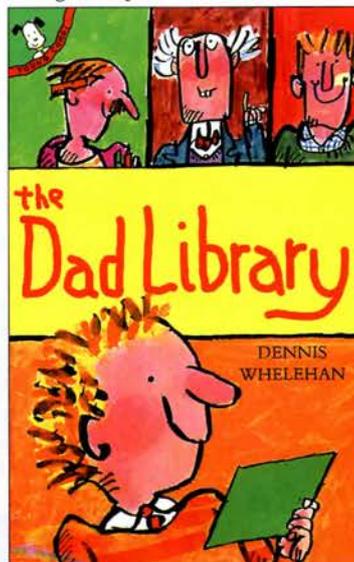
excitement - only to find not all is as it seems; Maria learns some lessons about friendship and loyalty. Ashley certainly has a feel for street-smart, inner-city kids and the text is beautifully complemented by some fine illustrations. SR

Spider Pie

★★★★

Anne Cassidy, ill. Bee Willey, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 037261 X, £3.99 pbk

Jack's mother brings a spider home for the weekend which must be kept hidden from dad who is an arachnophobe. Not only does Jimmy the spider escape but Jack's awful cousin Sarah and his health food freak aunt arrive to stay too. This well-paced book just bubbles along. Suspense, humour, a well constructed plot and likeable characters are further enhanced by occasional line drawings. An excellent book for confident lower junior readers from a teacher who wants to be a full-time writer 'when she grows up'. AK



The Dad Library

★★★★

Dennis Whelehan, ill. Tim Archbold, Young Corgi, 96pp, 0 552 52979 6, £3.50 pbk

I like the idea of extending the concept of a library to a place where dads can be borrowed and changed like books. Joseph in the story, being

cared for by a less than perfect edition while mum is in hospital, is certainly keen to make the most of his discovery, taking the opportunity to borrow, amongst others, an 'Organiser Dad' and a 'Clever Dad'. The problem comes when he needs to reclaim his own first edition who has accidentally become part of the loan stock. But all is well that ends well and we leave father and son pondering the possibilities of a Child Library.

A fun story to read aloud with sixes or sevens and its humour and sheer dottiness should keep those confident enough to go solo turning its 96 pages and smiling along the way at Archbold's line drawings which have more than a hint of Quentin Blake about them. JB

Delilah Alone

★★★★

Jenny Nimmo, ill. Georgien Overwater, Mammoth, 112pp, 0 7497 2825 6, £4.50 pbk

Delilah, the cat with mystical powers (previous *Delilah* books are *Delilah and the Dogspell* and *Delilah and the Dishwasher Dogs*), feels abandoned when her owner, Edward, and his family go off on holiday abroad. Delilah leaves home in a huff and by chance meets up with her long lost sister, Sorayah, and brothers, Isam and Casimir. Delilah's ability to shrink dogs with the powers bestowed on her by the mysterious Mustapha Marzavan enables her to get out of a number of scrapes and earn the respect of her brothers and other downtrodden cats of Summersea harbour. The menace of the villainous Guto Morgan is not so easily overcome.

Humorously illustrated with line and wash drawings *Delilah Alone* is a top class, very satisfying read for fluent readers. AK

The Dragon Upstairs

★★★★

Geraldine Kaye, ill. Colin King, Scholastic, 128pp, 0 590 54285 0, £4.99 pbk

This piece of lively fantasy will appeal to early solo readers and it deserves shelf space for its accessible, imaginative multi-cultural dimension.

Anna Wing arrives in England from Hong Kong where the uncertainties and loneliness of her life are relieved magically by her discovery of a Dragon's egg.

When baby Ching hatches out he opens up a new and stimulating world of activity and language, focused on the roof of Anna's parents' Excellent Take-Away. Disaster lurks when the outside world discovers the miraculous creature and threatens to shatter Anna's private wonderland. DB

Forever Amber Brown

★★★

Paula Danziger, ill. Tony Ross, Heinemann, 112pp, 0 434 97491 9, £8.99 hbk

'I'm only nine years old. It's enough that I have to change and grow up.' Well, it is not quite enough for Danziger's irrepressible heroine, Amber Brown, who has also to cope with the news that her mother, recently divorced, is now contem-

plating a second marriage. It is a well tried theme in writing for children, but one which is given here the typically sparky Danziger treatment: short sentences and snappy vocabulary, a good supply of humorous one-liners, plenty of witty exchanges between adult and child. When we go a little deeper, we find a sympathetic (but totally unpatronising) understanding of what happens when a young child is forced to confront change and to adapt to it. Young Amber particularly comes to understand that the complexities of today's world demand a flexible interpretation of what the word 'family' can actually mean. It all makes for an enjoyable, if undemanding, read. **RD**

Tales of St Patrick

★★★

Eileen Dunlop, Poolbeg, 144pp, 1 85371 438 0, £3.99 pbk

There are many legends about Patrick, patron saint of Ireland. In this volume of stories Eileen Dunlop has drawn mainly on his *Confession*, supported by information from other early Christian sources. Patrick began life as the privileged son of a Christian family living in Roman Britain. Following his capture and subsequent enslavement in Ireland, he felt his calling to convert the Irish people to Christianity. Dunlop presents Patrick as a likeable boy and man, not immune to worldly distraction, and dogged for much of his life by an unspecified sin committed in his boyhood. While these tales should find a ready audience, especially in schools,

around St Patrick's Day, they also have appeal as stories of someone whose faith and strength of character helped him to do many things which he found inherently difficult. The book deserves a better cover. **VC**

Pop-o-Mania

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Barbara Valenta, Hamlyn, 14pp, 0 600 59252 9, £12.99 novelty

An incredible amount of information and examples are packed into the six double page spreads in this comprehensive practical guide to making your own pop-ups. Everything you need to know about steps, flaps and mouths, sliders, spirals and spinners is included in this hands-on, step-by-step handbook. This book might possibly overface the beginner but it is ideal as reference material for anybody interested in card technology. The way different techniques can be combined to produce very original and creative pop-ups is particularly effective. This book not only illustrates all of the well known card technology ideas but encourages creativity and innovation. Children (and adults too) really get hooked on pop-ups. To coin a phrase - once you pop you can't stop! **AK**

Being Friends

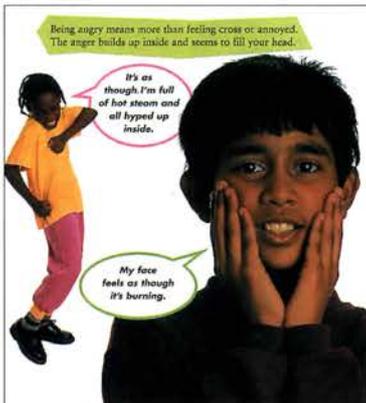
0 7136 4500 8

Feeling Shy

0 7136 4501 6

Telling the Truth

0 7136 4499 0



Feeling Angry

0 7136 4502 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Althea, ill. Conny Jude, photographs by Charlie Best, A & C Black 'Choices', 32pp, £8 50 each hbk

A new series of attractive books by the reliable Althea (author of many 'situation' books) which is intended to help Junior children to deal with some of the common problems they encounter in their emotional and social development. The eminent psychologist, Dorothy Rowe, is consultant to the series and she contributes a useful afterword to each title aimed at the teachers and parents who will mediate these books with children.

Each book focuses on one aspect of behaviour and explores its implications in an honest, if sometimes rather earnest way. There is a non-judgmental feel to the advice and information. For instance, in *Feeling Angry* it is made clear that 'Exploding with anger can cause problems - you can't always let yourself do it.' But possible ways of dealing with the anger are suggested.

Not all the advice is in the adult voice. Quotations from children are used ('It always ends with me being sent to my room!') and this further helps to avoid the danger of appearing to patronise and pontificate. Text is boxed or in speech bubbles, rather in the manner of the photo stories in comics and this gives a contemporary feel to the books, as well as making them easy to read.

This series would make an excellent support for circle time in school, for P.S.E. work or for discussion between children to help develop an honest and helpful debate on some tricky issues. **LW**

Incredible Plants

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Barbara Taylor, photographs by Geoff Brightling, models by Peter Minister Models, Dorling Kindersley 'Inside Guides', 48pp, 0 7513 5499 6, £8.99 hbk

40 years ago I used regularly to cut my thumb preparing the necessary transverse and longitudinal sections that enabled us botany students to investigate the internal structure of our plants. This 2-D approach to a 3-

IT'S A COMIC! IT'S A BOOK!

IT'S A **Graffix!**

Breaking away from the pack!

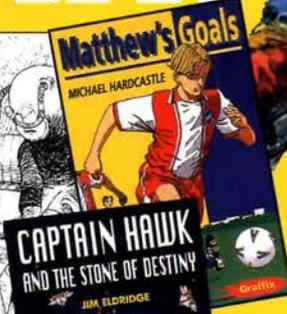
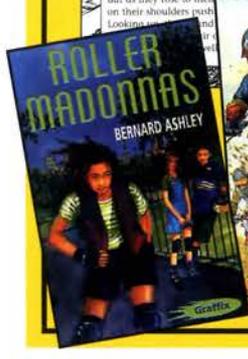
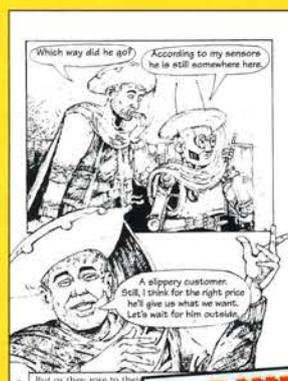
"an excellent new fiction series... ideal for older reluctant readers especially boys"

JOHN CLARE, Education Editor, Daily Telegraph

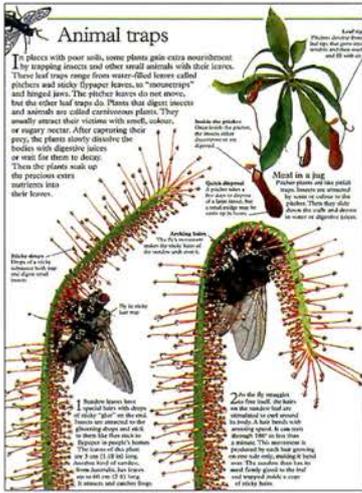


Paperbacks 80 pages £3.99 each

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roots. Fungi and other flowerless plants are included, as are parasites, carnivores and cacti, in a prime collection of botanical excitement. This is a great appetite-whetter and could be a useful teaching tool, so it is one for the lib, one for the lab, and thumbs up all round. TP

Barley Hall: A Day in a Medieval Town House

Charles Kightly, 0 7502 1608 5 hbk, 0 7502 2141 0 pbk

Fishbourne: A Day in a Roman Palace

Tony D Triggs, 0 7502 1609 3 hbk, 0 7502 2142 9 pbk

NON-FICTION ★★★

Wayland 'What Life Was Like', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk, £4.50 each pbk

In 1468 Barley Hall was the home of one of York's most prominent citizens, its Lord Mayor. Fishbourne was also occupied by a VIP, but no one knows exactly who - probably a Briton who ruled this area of West Sussex on the Romans' behalf.

After a brief introduction to set the scene, each author has devised an imaginary day's events for their building, featuring both real and

fictional characters, in order to recreate a taste of 'what life was like'. (Kightly in particular provides a most imaginative scenario!) Some of the original artefacts have been cleverly incorporated into the storylines which are profusely illustrated with artwork and colour photos. There are additional factboxes on some pages.

Despite the authors' best endeavours to bring history 'alive' in this way, however, one is left wishing that a little more broadbrush detail about the buildings and their households could have been included. VH

A Family from Bosnia

0 7502 2024 4

A Family from Ethiopia

0 7502 2027 9

NON-FICTION ★★★

Julia Waterlow, Wayland, 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

An interesting, highly illustrated series for upper primary/lower secondary which aims to show what life is like for a 'typical' family in each country. A map and some basic facts about the country are followed by an introduction to the family by way of a photograph of them outside their

home surrounded by everything that they own (which in the case of both these families is pitifully little). Enlargements of sections of this photo are then used on various pages which encourages the reader to look closely at the pictures.

The Bosnia book has the more unusual subject matter. The actual fighting takes a back seat as the emphasis is on the problems of trying to live some sort of normal life in the middle of a war zone. The Bucalovic family from Sarajevo have about \$25 a month to live on, food is scarce (but supplemented by UN handouts), water has to be brought from 2km away in plastic containers and the electricity supply is fitful.

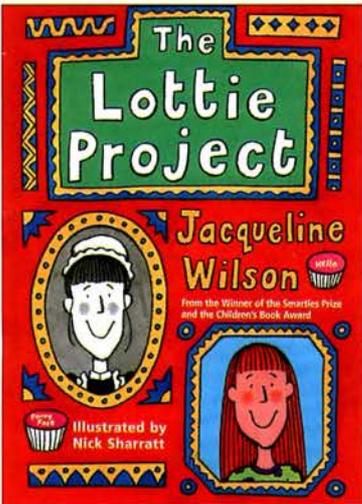
The Ethiopia book has more familiar stuff on family life in the developing world - albeit a country, like Bosnia, that has been racked by war. The Getu family struggle to get by on \$123 a year earned through subsistence farming.

Much discussion material here. The families remain cheerful despite all the problems and the books end on an optimistic note.

Other titles in the series are Brazil, China, Germany, Guatemala, Iraq, Japan, South Africa and Vietnam. SR

D object was everywhere the norm; for A-level purposes plants might as well not have existed in the round. But drawing, model making and photography have come a long way since then; this book synergises all three to tremendous effect as it puts plant structure onto the printed page. We see in great detail and with utter clarity the energy-park that is the plant cell and the powerhouse that is the chloroplast before going on to flower structure, pollination, seed formation, germination and

REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary



The Lottie Project

★★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 208pp, 0 385 40703 3, £9.99 hbk

Charlotte has a lot to cope with; her new teacher, her (single) mum losing her job, having to sit next to Jamie the swot, her friends' silly crushes, and, worst of all, her mum finding a boy friend. Somehow she manages, largely by working very hard on her history project: the make believe diary of her namesake, Lottie, a Victorian servant girl of her own age. The Lottie project mirrors Charlotte's own worries and hopes, as much as her growing knowledge of Victorian life. Readers can see how Charlotte creates a story from her experience and compare the pressures and expectations of Victorian Lottie with modern Charlie.

Charlie and Lottie are typical Wilson heroines: passionate, tough, no nonsense girls who feel a weight of

responsibility beyond their age. They both come close to despair when they feel they have let themselves and other people down, but they find, as such personalities will, help and friendship in unlikely places. Wilson sketches her subjects boldly so that they are recognisable without being caricatured and she gives us a gallery of portraits and a weave of plot and sub plots in two time periods without faltering.

Wilson writes with a faith in children's resilience and good sense. Nick Sharratt's drawings are, as ever, the perfect complement to her upbeat prose and snappy dialogue. This book is intelligent, funny, moving and inviting. Teachers and children should seize on it eagerly. Prize givers should consider it carefully. CB

Water Wings

★★★★★

Morris Gleitzman, Macmillan, 144pp, 0 333 67896 6, £9.99 hbk

Neglected by her busy mother, Pearl transfers her affections to Winston (her pet guinea pig) and newly adopted 'Gran'.

Through her developing relationship with Gran she comes to accept and cope with Winston's death but before the end of the story she must cope with Gran's death too.

Gleitzman tackles the contentious issue of euthanasia and makes it accessible to young readers. Some adults may feel uncomfortable that Pearl takes the decision to fulfil her Gran's wishes and help her to die (though Gran prevents her from seeing this through, and the consequences of such actions are made clear).

If this sounds too solemn it should be mentioned that Gleitzman writes with an eye for the humour in situation

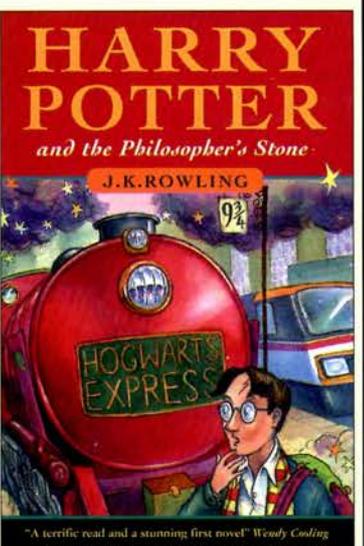
NEW Talent

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

★★★★★

J K Rowling, Bloomsbury, 224pp, 0 7475 3274 5, £4.99 pbk

A school for young wizards and witches has been done before but in this ambitious, many-layered, overlong first novel, Rowling creates a fresh and amusing school of magic in which there are lessons in Potions and the History of Magic and rugby is replaced by Quidditch - a kind of polo on broomsticks. The everyday friendships and rivalries of school life give a realistic base to the plot as new boy Harry settles in only to find himself confronted with the power of the evil magician Voldemort who killed his parents when he was a baby. Voldemort is determined to steal the philosopher's stone hidden in the school, thereby acquiring eternal life and riches. In the ensuing adventures, the themes of bravery and the need to understand the



'desperate desires of our hearts' are convincingly developed. Rowling is a most exciting and vigorous new talent. RS

and incident and opportunities for reflection do not disrupt the flow of the narrative. Unforgettable comic moments include Gran's triumph as carnival queen wearing a pair of orange curtains and a home-made Viking hat.

While Water Wings is centrally Pearl's story it is also Gran's story. It is deeply moving and speaks to readers of all ages, which makes it an ideal book for adults and children to share. NG

The Swap and Other Stories

TAPE ★★★

Written and read by George Layton, Macmillan Audio Books, two cassettes, 3 hours, 0 333 71894 1, £7.99 inc. VAT

First published in the mid-seventies, The Fib and Other Stories quickly established Layton alongside Stan Barstow and Alan Sillitoe as a gritty chronicler of working-class northern lives. At his best, Layton is able to climb inside a child's skin; he knows how a child's ideas of what is important are very different from an adult's.

A prequel to *The Fib*, this latest collection – and it's certainly been a long time coming – mines the same seams, with a particular angle on life at grammar school for Layton's central first-person character. The five stories recorded on this double-tape offer a glimpse into an almost forgotten schoolboy landscape of yo-yo champions, pennies for pocket-money, sadistic male P.E. teachers, headmasters meting out corporal punishment, and grammar/secondary modern tribal warfare.

Indeed there are times when, glimpsed from another era, the tales risk gross stereotype; and on the page they often fail to come to life. But, injected with actor Layton's marvellous Northern vowels and sparkling range of voices, many of his comic sequences will have child and adult listeners chuckling for more.

The packaging from Macmillan is unacceptably sloppy: no indication of the individual stories' titles and running times, and derisory background notes for anyone new to this accomplished writer. **RB**

Music on the Bamboo Radio

★★★★

Martin Booth, Hamish Hamilton, 144pp, 0 241 13715 2, £10.99 hbk

It is 'uncannily quiet': as we look out over what Nicholas Holford can see outside his gate we adjust to the Hong Kong setting, then the signs of destruction and then the sudden appearance of Japanese soldiers. Nicholas is whisked away by his loving Chinese servants with just a brief last visit to the house before a long journey over to mainland China. This war story is full of drama – Nicholas helps rebels blow up a railway bridge, he manages to get into a prisoner of war camp – but it is the detail of his life with the Chinese family amid the constant danger of the Japanese invaders which gives the feel of history. This is a fine book with such a wealth of qualities – nail biting tension, adventure, the drama of the everyday in a richly created Chinese setting and precise historical time – that it will be a real winner with many readers. **AJ**

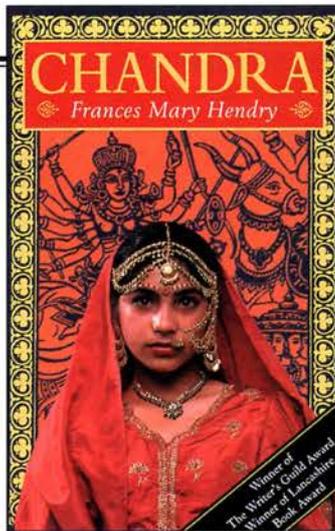
Chandra

★★★★

Frances Mary Hendry, Oxford, 128pp, 0 19 271753 7, £3.99 pbk

Chandra is a bright, 11-year-old schoolgirl living in New Delhi. In Chapter One she is to be married to a boy aged sixteen, an altogether family affair reminiscent of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. By Chapter Four she is married, widowed and enslaved by the dead groom's parents to pay penance for the loss of their son. The remainder of the book charts the feisty and resourceful Chandra's fight for freedom and escape from what she increasingly sees as the shackles of cultural traditions. The closing chapter's flight from India to Glasgow sets the scene surely for at least one sequel from a writer quite practised in the quest-genre.

Chandra is first and foremost a great page-turning adventure story, a fact evinced by a 12-year-old to whom I lent the review copy and who assures me she read it during one break,



lunchtime and on the train home from school! What distinguishes the novel is the way its 15 episodic chapters skilfully evoke the heat and dust of rural Rajasthan, urban Delhi, and the frightening intensity of familial and religious violence.

More than that, there is an energy and originality to the narrative and an attention to detail of place and people that is guaranteed to capture any young teenage reader. The Glossary is a further excellent addition to a superbly researched and crafted short novel. **RB**

Spring Break

Barbara Steiner, 'Point Horror', 208pp, 0 590 19034 2

The Carver

Jenny Jones, 'Point Horror Unleashed', 240pp, 0 590 19036 9

★★★

Scholastic, £3.50 each pbk

It is easy – and sometimes necessary – to dismiss series fiction with its melodramatic plots, thin characterisation and paucity of language. Those of us determined to enmesh children in reading have often found 'Point Horror' to be a useful middle ground between the re-reading of early years favourites and the foray into adult fiction.

The Carver is the better of these two titles, since it narrowly avoids the descent into implausibility. Gareth lives rough in the woods after an argument with his mother but is driven by a former existence and ancient forces to carve puppets full of evil intent, determined to grant the thwarted wishes of the adopted persona.

Spring Break is less convincing, though there is some tension in the repeated motif of the haunted child in the deserted house. Too much is clumsily borrowed from *The Birds* and *Great Expectations* to sustain belief throughout, but there is animation in the characters and a degree of restraint in the narrative.

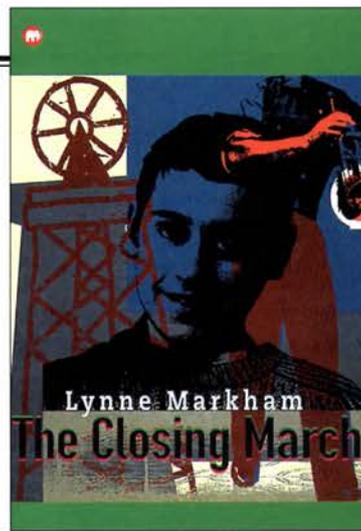
Both titles will delight 'Point Horror' addicts and may entice more reluctant readers: this is 'want to read' fiction – another tool, however basic, with which to build literacy. **VR**

The Closing March

★★★★★

Lynne Markham, Mammoth, 176pp, 0 7497 2876 0, £4.50 pbk

This remarkable novel follows young



Mick Cotton's progress as he strives to learn the cornet in order to take his dying grandfather's place in the colliery band which is to take part in the Closing March – the last parade of miners from the Bilston pit in Nottingham as it closes down.

Mick's real passion is art: his intuitive approach is fuelled by his grandfather's dreams and memories as he struggles to come to terms with his life as it draws to a close. Mick finds himself 'living in someone else's head' and in the pictures he feels compelled to draw from the story of his grandfather's years in the mine.

Markham's writing parallels Mick's art – sensitive, exploratory, arresting. She deals with abstract concepts in a concrete way, rendering them wholly accessible to young readers. This would make a superb Year 7 class reader, with many meaningful spin-offs for other subjects, too. **VR**

The Sea Serpent

★★

Frankie Calvert, Oxford, 176pp, 0 19 271739 1, £5.99 pbk

Ghost actors and a long-ago wartime disaster lend the mystery and suspense to this fairly standard first novel.

Actress Helena is unwillingly manoeuvred into spending time looking after a sombre little boy in an oddly dull coastal village. Things suitably improve when she is offered a part in a play. But then the oddity of the other actors begins to emerge and the knowledge of things past that Helena unearths adds to her unease and uncertainty about what she has got into.

The pace is steady and the characters believable. I just wish the clues to the mystery hadn't been so obvious to all but Helena! **DB**

Eastern Europe

Patrick Burke, 'World Fact Files', 0 7500 2267 1

Israel

José Patterson, 'Country Fact Files', 0 7500 2266 3

NON-FICTION ★★

Macdonald, 48pp, £9.99 each hbk

For the purposes of this series Eastern Europe means Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. No former Yugoslavia, no Albania, no former 'Russian' states, so far less area than the reader might initially expect. However this is not a

country-by-country approach but one based on common concerns, so for all six each time we get chapters on Climate and Weather, Population, Daily Life, Trade and Industry, the Environment, and other matters of like kind. This shows us that the countries have fewer differences than things in common and provides a well illustrated look at the post-independence scenario in a part of the world whose commonest concern is that much of its natural environment has been shot to hell by indiscriminate pre-independence industrial development.

Israel is treated to the same subject-grid. Here Population and Daily Life are particularly interesting, being less exclusively about Jews and Judaism than an outsider might expect. No book on Israel would be complete without Ian Botham-lookalike Yassir Arafat, and, sure enough, his is the last picture in this one.

Both volumes are as near contemporary as is reasonable to expect, but how long they will remain relevant is another matter. Get them from your School Library Service if your authority still has one; if it does not, ask for that instead. **TP**

The Dorling Kindersley Illustrated Family Bible

★★★

Consultant Editor – Dr Claude-Bernard Costecalde, ill. Peter Dennis, Dorling Kindersley, 384pp, 0 7513 5490 2, £25.00 hbk

This lavish, thoughtful, full colour production is more informative than just the usual collection of Bible stories with pictures. Text from the New Internationalist Version is used for the tellings which are each given a double page spread. In addition there are narrative illustrations, commentary, photographs of artefacts and places, additional information and an explanation of the meaning and significance of the text in question.



There are an additional 15 pages on Bible background and characters and a useful contents and index. At £25 this title is not a must but it would make a gift to treasure or a suggestion for a purchase from PTA funds. It could also be the destination of cash raised through competition winnings. **DB**



'This boy's father is an Englishman who became fascinated by wooden wagons, married an Irish Traveller, and now lives with their young family on the road.'

Editor's Choice

Romanichal Gypsies

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Thomas Acton and David Gallant, *Wayland 'Threatened Cultures'*, 48pp, 0 7502 1260 8, £10.00 hbk

The Romanichals (descendants of the gypsies who left North India about 1,000 years ago and the local travelling craftspeople who survived the persecution of 1550-1650 in England) make up more than half of the whole Traveller population in Britain. Other groups include Irish Travellers (Minceir), Scottish Travellers (Nawkens), The Kale from Wales and, since the 1960s, New Age Travellers (whose numbers were increased by the housing crisis of the 1980s).

The complicated and often tragic history of the Romanichals and other Travellers is clearly and accessibly explained but much of the book is devoted to the present-day lives of

Travellers both here and in the U.S. - how they earn their living, their values and religion, their art and culture as well as their often fraught relationship with government and local councils which is putting their way of life under threat. The author acknowledges the help of many Gypsies with this book and it focuses fascinatingly on the lives of these real people - from the Harris family of Thistlebrook Gypsy caravan site whose children go to Boxgrove School to Alex Smith of Thurrock Council's Gypsy site whose father sold horses to the Tsar of Russia.

This is an outstanding addition to a good series (other titles include *Australian Aborigines*, *Rainforest Amerindians* and *Kurds*). Acton is Reader in Romany Studies at the University of Greenwich and a leading authority and activist on issues to do with Traveller People. His book is not only full of clearly presented and absolutely up to date information but it conveys the affection and respect of the author for the people he is writing about and their way of life. Gallant's sensitive and informative photographs complement the text well. RS

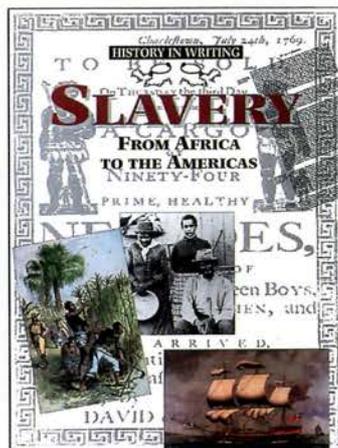
Slavery from Africa to the Americas

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Christine Hatt, Evans *'History in Writing'*, 64pp, 0 237 51621 7, £14.99 hbk

This title begins a new and attractive history series for KS3, with a text based around the close study of documents. Extracts from journals, travel accounts, autobiographies, planter manuals and the transcripts of interviews with ex-slaves are all examined, with marginal notes to explain or expand those parts which are difficult or obscure.

The book includes research into slave community life; description of life in West Africa before the development of the transatlantic slave trade; and treatment of slavery in both the Caribbean and the North American mainland, which allows



students to compare the courses of slavery and abolition in each area. Hatt skilfully deploys the economic, political and social factors which

were involved in 'the peculiar institution', and emphasises how black people survived, resisted and helped abolish slavery.

The only omission is a consideration of the ideology of racism which was used to justify slavery and became so bound up with the identity of the southern United States that it was a hundred years after Emancipation before it could be successfully challenged. CB

A History of Ships from Log Rafts to Luxury Liners

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Fiona Macdonald, 0 7500 1874 7

A History of Inventions from Abacus to Atomic Power

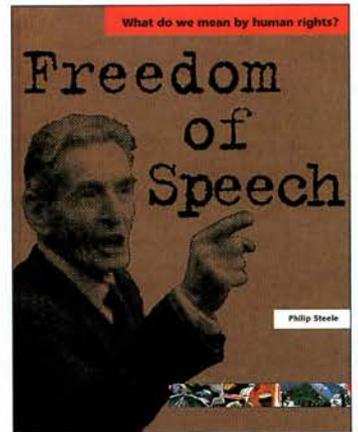
NON-FICTION ★★

Peter Lafferty, 0 7500 1875 5

Created and designed by David Salariya, Macdonald *'Panorama'*, 48pp, £10.99 each hbk

As the author tells us in her opening sentence, ships have one basic purpose - to carry loads through water. A ship-history is therefore fairly simple to compile, being a chronicle of the development and diversification of the floating log. In this title, each spread is illustrated with annotated, dated examples of this arranged strictly in date order, and complemented by a text germane to some of them. At about six examples per spread that is a fair-sized fleet, so amongst the nine dozen there is room for the *Vasa* and *Mary Rose* (too top-heavy to leave harbour), *Monitor* and *Nougorod* (ineffective circular ironclads) and *Turtle* and *Nautilus* (hand-powered submarines) as well as more mainstream developments. The relationship of hull design to propulsion method, intended load, destination and waters is well shown, as is the powerful influence of military expediency.

Lafferty has drawn the short straw here. Inventions, unlike ships, have been mothered by myriad needs and often originate from spontaneous inspiration so they are hard to put into order chronologically. Nonetheless they get the same 'panorama' treatment as the ships and the consequent cavalcade does produce some picturesque examples. The toothless of Europe had only nine years to wait before they too could enjoy a sandwich (1761) thanks to hippo-bone false teeth (1770), but I cannot believe - and neither would Ulysses - that the crossbow ('1100') predated the longbow ('1250'). Overall this story lacks the developmental propulsion of *Ships* and so-wottery pervades its pages. TP



Freedom of Speech

Philip Steele, 0 7496 2378 0

Workers' Rights

Katherine Prior, 0 7496 2379 9

Freedom of Belief

Mike Hirst, 0 7496 2602 X

Rights in the Home

Emma Haughton and Penny Clarke, 0 7496 2603 8

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Franklin Watts *'What do we mean by human rights?'*, 48pp, £10.99 each

The covers of these hardbacks simulate brown paper adorned with scuffed newsprint titles and give these extremely useful books an appropriately robust and workaday look. Each title provides clear explanations of key concepts and historical information related to the type of oppression with which it deals. The core of the series however, is a set of case studies which focus on the struggles of named individuals or groups. The level of iniquity revealed by these stories is appalling, and the anger that they provoke is made the more intense by the fact that the vast majority of them are very recent: the background to the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria is described, along with the persecution and murder of several lesser known dissidents and activists from around the globe. The role of the prosperous world in perpetuating the poverty of those who produce its luxuries is clearly implied.

Incidents which provide grounds for hope are also related, and each book contains a list of addresses of campaigning organisations. The tone of the writing is cool and questioning. Illustrations consist of contemporary photographs with some archival material. This is an excellent, thought provoking set of books. GH

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

A Short Stay in Purgatory

★★★★

Alan Durant, Red Fox, 128pp, 0 09 913781 X, £3.99 pbk

This collection of 12 short stories focus on the special hell which only

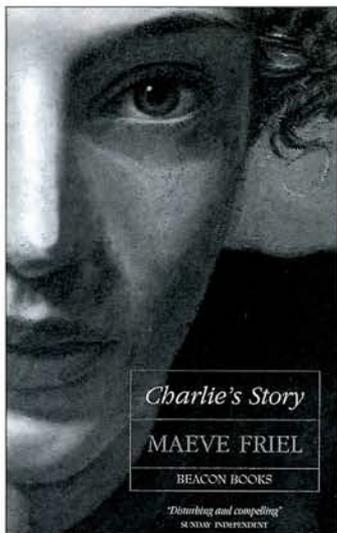
teenage years can bring. They cover a wide variety of subjects from pregnancy to first love, from homosexuality to crime.

The writing is clear and well-focused but the subject matter is uneven in impact and appeal: some protagonists truly find themselves in purgatory - others are subjected to

less rigorous storylines. Careful selection would make this a good collection to read aloud to Upper School classes, since its themes are diverse and many of its storylines thoughtful and entertaining. VR

Picture book reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

Mr Bear and the Bear



Bullies Don't Hurt

★★★

Anthony Masters, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 037484 1, £4.99 pbk

Charlie's Story

★★★

Maeve Friel, Beacon Books, 112pp, 1 85371 183 7, £2.99 pbk

These short, powerful novels use harsh language to focus on physical and psychological bullying. In both of them, a tormented adolescent is driven to the brink of suicide before being rescued by almost angelic intervention, only to find that their problems remain unresolved after this ordeal.

The central victim in Masters' book is a teacher, and nobody from that profession who has been tortured by a hoard of malevolent, foul mouthed, farting, hormone-seeping thugs will fail to recognise the realism of the harrowing opening chapter in which Bill Radford is sent fleeing in tears from his own classroom. However, the ringleader of his persecutors has problems enough of his own, the main one being a reptilian stepfather who is sexually abusing him.

Charlie's Story is set in Dun Laoghaire, where Charlotte has grown up with her father and his family since being abandoned in London at the age of four by her drug addict mother. When the girls at her school discover her past, they subject her to a regime of abuse which intensifies her feelings of self loathing.

These books are dramatically paced and vividly written, the first person narrative of Charlie's Story being particularly effective in conveying the agony of the victim. However, I found the climactic points of both stories, in which the victim is enabled to acquire a more respectable persona through an act of heroism, unrealistically optimistic, as is their central implication that beneath the surface of the calculating young sadist there is a suppressed idealist just aching to burst out and do good. GH

Lizzie's Leaving

★★★★

Joan Lingard, Puffin, 176pp, 0 14 037752 2, £4.99 pbk

Lingard has always reliably entertained – most notably with her Kevin and Sadie titles (the human face of

Northern Ireland's troubles). This new novel tells the story of Lizzie's departure from what she sees as the insoluble problems of home and family (mother, stepfather and stepsiblings) to live with her real father and his family. Inevitably, she inherits a whole new set of problems.

Lizzie's journey from exhilaration to pragmatism is wholly absorbing: there is something very satisfying about unravelling a master storyteller's thread. This is a rich and rewarding book for Year 9 readers and beyond. VR

A Girl Named Disaster

★★★★

Nancy Farmer, Phoenix House, 304pp, 1 85881 386 7, £15.99 hbk

When cholera breaks out in a remote Mozambiquan village, the orphan Nhamo is blamed for provoking the vengeful spirit of a man killed long ago by her father. Destined for a cruel marriage to compensate the aggrieved family, her ailing but wonderfully strong-minded grandmother Ambuya encourages her to escape by boat to Zimbabwe to find her father's people. Surviving through courage, ingenuity and her knowledge of plants and animals, Nhamo keeps herself mentally alive through telling herself stories which engage with the spirit world of Shona myths and beliefs.

While much of the action focuses on the dangers of the lone journey, the story is as much about transverse different worlds of spirit, science and culture. While Nhamo finally feels most at home at a research station with an independent Zimbabwean woman as her role model, she is not likely to turn her back completely on the cultural and spiritual roots of her ancestors.

This is a brave, absorbing book by a 'cross-border' American writer who has not only detailed knowledge of the environment but is able to create a diverse array of believable characters and open up in a sympathetic manner some of the difficult questions that will face Nhamo in her own crossing of borders. BN

Which way is home?

★★★★

Ian Strachan, Mammoth, 160pp, 0 7497 2828 0, £4.50 pbk
"Don't let them push you around," Mum said. "Remember, Toby, it's your life."

With these opening words, Strachan (probably best known for the award-winning *The Boy in the Bubble*) manages to create a book of some power, almost in spite of its many predictable turns and some truly clichéd dialogue: there's even a character called Wheels who, you guessed it, 'burns rubber' and steals Ford Cosworths!

Strachan's description of Toby's mother's death through cancer is a powerful start to the narrative, as is his discomfiting description of life in a children's home. Here Toby meets the superbly drawn character Mazz, a runaway from an abusing stepfather. It is this encounter which gives him the courage to do some of his own action research into the foster families which have been shortlisted to host him. For the adult reader suspension of disbelief is a

clear requirement for what unfolds. For a teenage reader the novel has enough pace, adventure, sexual encounter and soul-searching to guarantee a compelling read. RB

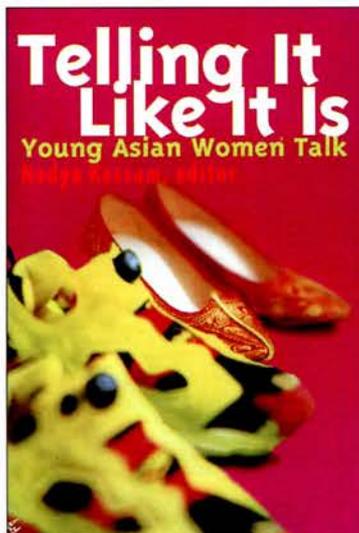
The School Bag

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, Faber, 608pp, 0 571 17751 4, £12.99 pbk

If Heaney's and Hughes' first collection, *The Rattlebag*, was an inspiration, a book to turn the most suspicious 14-year-old on to the parallel world of poetry, this new title is a more conventional anthology for young people wanting to study poetry in a more structured fashion.

The selection includes some American and Australian as well as British work (taking in poems in translation from Old English, Welsh, Irish and Gaelic). It includes many epic poems, established delights and unfamiliar poets to discover and enjoy. A 'personal canon' or 'listening post' with a pedagogical purpose, *The School Bag* displays its editors' extraordinary ability to find the poems that resonate with the events of each age and wrap them about with complementary works that bring the particularity of that age to life. With space for only one poem from each chosen author (no Heaney or Hughes is included), the juxtaposition of the various themes and stages of language should ensure that many of those reading this book will want to explore English language poetry further and discover for themselves those works which have inevitably been omitted. This is a book that will become a lifelong companion to both children and adults. AR



Telling It Like It Is: Young Asian Women Talk

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Edited by Nadya Kassam, Livewire, 144pp, 0 7043 4941 8, £4.99 pbk

In this very aptly named book, 22 Asian women, aged between 14 and 22 and living in the UK, speak briefly and plainly about their lives. The experience of racism and sexism from the dominant society, and the effects of strained expectations of a woman's role from within their own range of lifestyles, are common themes, but expressions of frustration and anger are out-

weighed by those of pride, humour and determination. Each of the contributors describes the challenge of balancing two cultures in such everyday concerns as costume, courtship, work, religion, study and the use of leisure in fascinating detail and the conversational directness of the prose is radiant.

An indispensable addition to your non-fiction collection. GH

Help! My Family is Driving Me Crazy!

NON-FICTION ★★★

Kathryn Lamb, Piccadilly, 1 85340 426 8, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 421 7, £5.99 pbk

It is a brave author who plunges into the mysteries of the teenager's world. Lamb succeeds better than most in unravelling the problems which most beset young people and presenting them in a lively and accessible manner. Her entertaining line drawings assist this process – even the most determinedly sullen adolescent cannot fail to be amused by her shrewdly observed caricatures.

The guide is divided into five sections within which subdivisions are created by problems and suggested solutions. These are forthright and amusingly presented as 'bad', 'slightly better' and 'good', thus pointing up minefields to be avoided.

The book is a handy size, easy to carry and with an appealing and hardwearing cover. It is likely to provide both solace and entertainment to the troubled teenager. VR

Boys behaving Badly!

NON-FICTION ★★★

Jeremy Daldry, Piccadilly, 176pp, 1 85340 456 X, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 451 9, £5.99 pbk

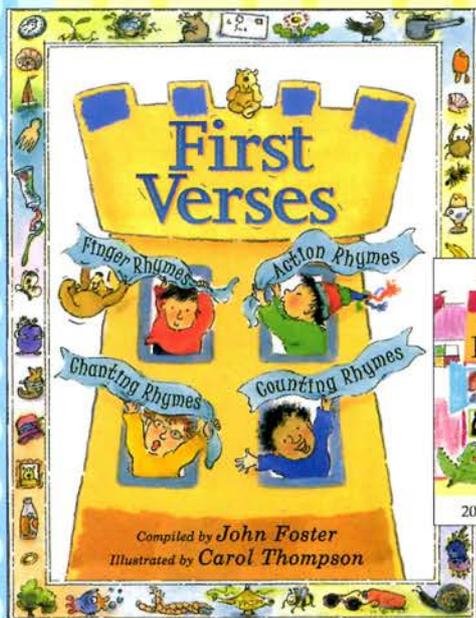
At the heart of this book is a simple, humane message: youth can be blissful and it can be nightmarish, but if you are considerate to people, sensibly hedonistic about sex, drink moderately, talk about your anxieties, and turn your back on violence, illegal drugs and tobacco, you will probably be okay. This message is expressed clearly and good-humouredly, but it is almost buried under a torrential vomituration of graffiti, leering marginalia, scrawls, smears, witless banter and typographical fly shit.



THE ONLY THING
THAT WILL MEND A
BROKEN HEART
IS TIME. + and a snag
from another girl

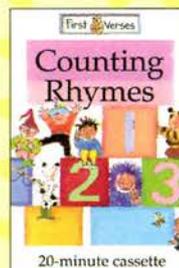
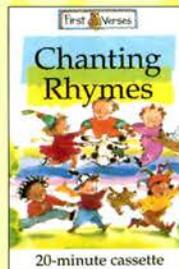
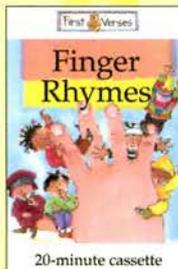
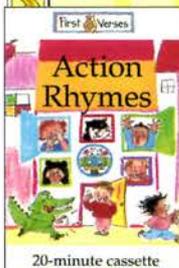
I assume that this has been done to validate the '100% bloke approved' label on the front cover, but the 'blokes' I spoke to about this did not consider it necessary. Also on the front cover, the mock original title, 'Young Gentleman's Handbook', has been struck out and the present title scrawled underneath. This is ironic, since the core text does indeed provide sensible advice on how to become a *gentle man*, but I do not suppose the publishers would allow the author to get away with expressing an objective as nerdish as that. GH

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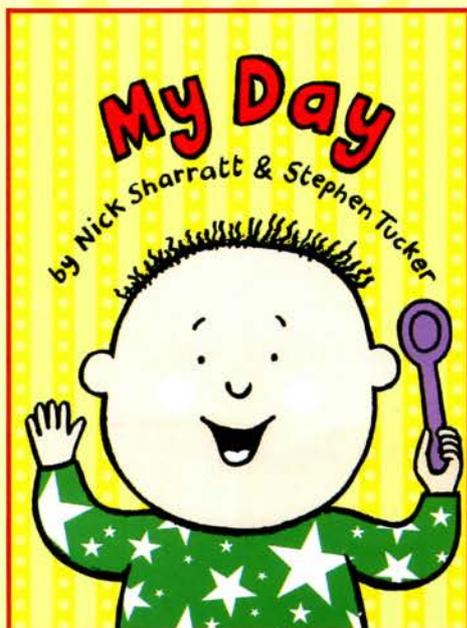
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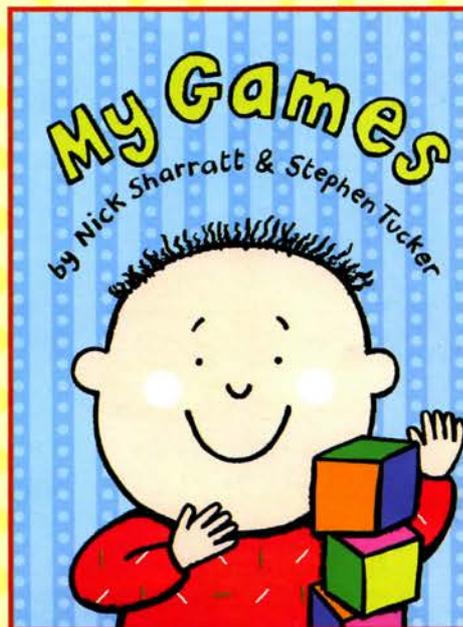
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Oxford Children's Books



CLASSICS IN SHORT No.5

Helen Levene

*Quarantine, a hidden garden, a great frost
and the towers of Ely cathedral, it has to be ...*

Tom's Midnight Garden

by Philippa Pearce



Illustration on the left by Susan Einzig from the Puffin version; above, by Barbara Brown from the Puffin Modern Classic.

First published:

1958.

Genre:

Fantasy time-slip.

Who's it for?

Children of nine upwards, lovers of *The Secret Garden*.

What's it about?

When Peter gets measles, his brother Tom is sent to stay with his childless aunt and uncle who live in a flat which has been converted from a larger house belonging to old Mrs Bartholomew. Without even a garden to play in, Tom is bored and lonely, and by way of compensation is overfed by his dotting aunt. As a result of the inactivity and rich food, Tom lies awake at night, listening to the incorrect striking of the grandfather clock in the hall downstairs. One night, when the clock strikes 13 at midnight, Tom is compelled to get up and investigate. He finds his way out through the back door into a large, beautiful garden belonging to the house. At first he feels cheated by his aunt and uncle for not telling him about it, but he soon realises by the surroundings that the garden belongs to the house only in the Past, and during the day when Tom is awake, there is nothing more than a tiny yard where the dustbins are kept.

What happens next?

Each night Tom visits the garden and there makes friends with Hatty, an orphan 'charity child', one of the Victorian children living in the house. Teased by her older cousins, and picked on by her strict aunt, Hatty, like Tom, is also lonely, and is pleased to have a companion to play with. She is the only one who can see Tom; to the others (with the exception of Abel, the silent gardener) he is invisible. Although Tom goes out into the garden every night, it is not always the next day for Hatty. Sometimes it is months between Tom's visits, and the garden changes with the passing seasons, for it seems that time is moving much more quickly in the Past. Inevitably Hatty is growing older – unnoticeably at first to Tom – but nearing the time Tom has to go back to his real home Hatty is a young woman, barely able to see Tom any more as her attentions turn to a young man called Barty. Tom doesn't want a grown-up Hatty, he wants his friend to stay the same, and always be there in the garden when he visits, to climb trees together, and make bows and arrows, and to build their tree-house. He tries to go back into the garden but to his distress finds he can no longer pass through to her time.

On the very last day at his aunt and uncle's flat, Tom meets old Mrs Bartholomew who always winds the grandfather clock. He recognises that she is Hatty, grown old. Hatty tells him that she has been dreaming of her past – her childhood as an orphan in the care of her aunt, her cousins, and her



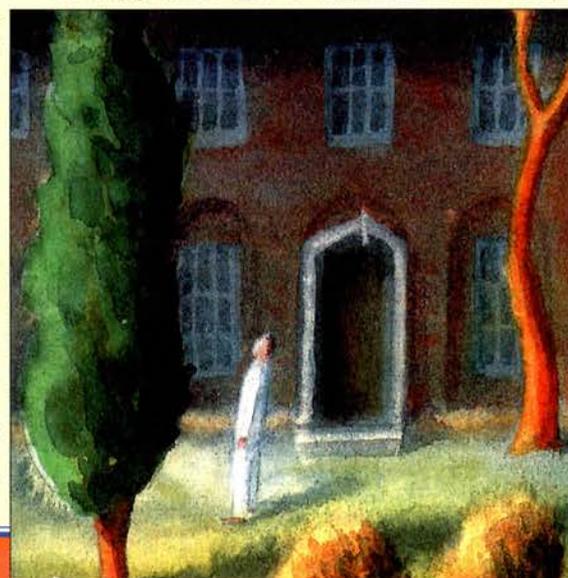
young man 'Barty' whom she married – and in doing so she has been drawing Tom, also searching for companionship, into her dreams. Meeting Hatty again, knowing the rest of her life-story before he has to go back home, helps Tom to come to terms with growing up and change – and to realise that time never really stands still.

Most moving moment?

Aunt Gwen describing Tom saying goodbye for the second time to Hatty, now old Mrs Bartholomew: 'He ran up to her, and they hugged each other as if they had known each other for years and years, instead of only having met for the first time this morning ... Of course, Mrs Bartholomew's such a shrunken little old woman, she's hardly bigger than Tom, anyway: but, you know, he put his arms right round her and he hugged her good-bye as if she were a little girl.'

Classic qualities:

Tom's Midnight Garden has become an undisputed classic of modern children's literature. It is a story with a magical, haunting atmosphere. It is richly imaginative, with a theme and a message that touches the hearts of all those who read it: that of finding ways to keep good feelings alive despite loneliness and loss,



and of the inevitability of time passing and of growing up. Tom's emotional hunger finds new and positive developments in his friendship with Hatty, while she is enabled to break out of the restrictive and submissive role in which she has been cast by her indifferent aunt. Pearce's prose style is deceptively simple, yet her descriptions of the garden are as vivid as if you were there. The accessibility of her writing to children, and the power of the story itself, provide an imaginative entry into the past, 'time no longer', and to the balance of gain and loss involved in the process of change.

Most memorable quotation?

'... nothing stands still, except in our memory.'

Who is Philippa Pearce?

She was born in 1920, the youngest of four children, in Great Shelford, Cambridgeshire. Her father was a flour-miller, and she grew up in the mill house where he had been born and raised, whose garden ran down to the river where she spent most of her time playing. Her childhood was a very happy one, but marred with bouts of illness which kept her from school. But despite a lack of early education, she went on to graduate from Cambridge with a B.A. Hons. in English and History. She first worked as a script writer and producer in the BBC Schools Department, and also in the Education Department of the Oxford University Press. She began writing in her thirties, when she was convalescing after TB, and her mind went back to her happy leisurely childhood days by the river and in the garden. The result was her first book, an adventure story, *Minnow on the Say* (1955), followed three years later by *Tom's Midnight Garden* which features the garden as it was when she was little, before her parents retired and sold up. The novel won her the Carnegie Medal in 1959. She married in 1963 but sadly was widowed two years later, just after her daughter was born. She returned to work in London as a children's editor at Andre Deutsch Ltd whilst continuing to write novels and short stories. She was awarded an OBE for her services to children's literature. Philippa Pearce now lives in the Cambridgeshire village where she was born.

Other novels by Philippa Pearce:

A Dog So Small (1962), *The Battle of Bubble and Squeak* (winner of the Whitbread Award in 1978) and *The Way to Sattin Shore* (1983). ■

Helen Levene works in publishing.

Top colour illustration from the cover of the Puffin Modern Classic, ill. Barbara Brown, 0 14 036454 4, £5.99 pbk; lower illustration from the cover of the Puffin, ill. Susan Einzig, 0 14 030893 8, £4.99 pbk.