

BOOKS FOR KEEPS



JAN, 1983 No.18
UK Price 95p

AUTHORGRAPH:
ROBERT WESTALL

THE MACHINE
GUNNERS ON TV

TEENAGE FICTION

New series on
MULTI-CULTURAL
BOOKS

SBA Services & Publications

How to Set Up and Run a School Bookshop

Our handbook is full of practical advice and information on every aspect of school bookshops. Essential for beginners, useful for old-hands. If you already run a school bookshop, Part 5: 'How to Keep Going' is a much expanded section and may give you fresh ideas!

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with the help of the School Bookshop Association



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For school bookshops, book clubs, book fairs — a savings card scheme can help offset the price of books. We've printed this grid on the back of paperback covers with a space for children to enter their names. There is room in the circle to record how much has been saved so that you know each child's credit at a glance. We try to give a good variety of book covers with each order.

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You may want to take out insurance for your school bookshop. The SBA has arranged a special policy with Commercial Union Assurance Company Limited to provide insurance cover for stocks of books held by school bookshops. This policy is available to all school bookshops in England, Scotland and Wales.

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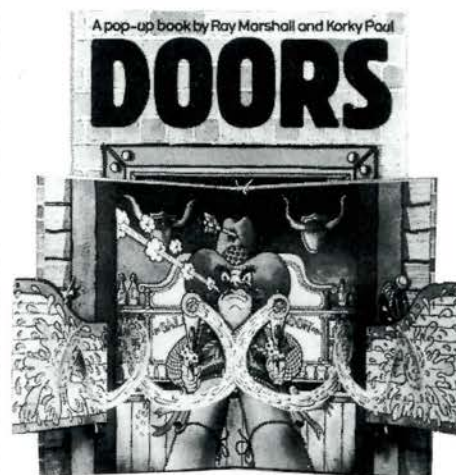
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 ANDRE DEUTSCH

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EDITOR'S PAGE

A new year and some gloomy faces in children's publishing particularly among some of the hardback divisions. Sales of children's books to the home market fell in 1982 more drastically than sales of books of any other kind. The rapid drop in numbers of young school-age children which teachers have become familiar with translated into falling rolls (evocative phrase — it always makes me think of a cascade of small baps tumbling down a mountainside) combined with drastic cuts in school and library book funds are clearly taking their toll. It's the inability of libraries to buy hardback fiction that is having the biggest effect. Our News Page (24) reports the end of Children's books at Chatto and a drastic change of direction at Macmillan, where they will continue to publish about 60 children's titles a year but concentrate mainly on non-fiction. What will not get published it appears are first novels and those of a literary nature — a line confirmed by the fact that Felicity Trotman, editor for novels and picture books, has been made redundant. We all know that publishers have to sell books to stay in business but from the publishers of Lewis Carroll and Rudyard Kipling, of Robert Westall, Diana Wynne Jones, Jill Paton Walsh, Mary Rayner and Grahame Oakley this seems a sad lack of faith in and commitment to imaginative writing.

Ironical that an issue of *Books for Keeps* that celebrates Robert Westall, twice winner of the Carnegie (see Authorgraph page 14), should also be announcing closure or cuts for both his publishers. Interesting to speculate whether if Robert Westall sent his first novel, the excellent and very successful *The Machine Gunners*, to Macmillan today they would take it on. One hopes so; one fears not.

Cover Story

In February *The Machine Gunners* comes to BBC television. An exciting challenge; but thoughts of all those eagle-eyed, enthusiastic fans of the book out there must have been a little daunting. Fortunately the producer of the serial is one of them. For our Sound and Vision pages (page 18 and 19) he talked to Tony Bradman about how he and his director went all out for authenticity, creating wartime Garmouth out of Newcastle 1982. We've departed from our usual practice to put a photograph from the production on our cover. It's a joy to see television adapting a book that will not put-off or disappoint the new readers it will inevitably create. For them Puffin have a new issue with a tie-in cover.

Across the Spectrum

Another new departure in this issue is *Lifeline Two*, Judith Elkin's new series on *Multi-cultural Books for Children*. Judith's expertise in this area is well-established and we are sure that her concern and enthusiasm for books that reflect the many-faceted society we have in this country will interest, inform and entertain all our readers, even those (few) who perhaps (mistakenly we think) feel this has nothing to offer them.

Not mentioned, yet, in Judith's series; are two recently published books which together illustrate the huge range of this subject. *The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai (Heinemann, 0 434 93436 4, £5.50) is a delightful story of a family in a village on the Western Coast of India. Mother is ill, father has no job and drinks most of the time so Lila and her brother Hari have to hold the family together: Lila at home, Hari in Bombay where he goes secretly to find work. All this is played out against a fight (doomed to failure) by some of the villagers to preserve their traditional way of life in the

face of plans to build a vast complex of fertiliser factories where they live. It deals in an accessible form with some of the complex issues that confront the third world. (It's based on fact.) Anita Desai, a superb writer, vividly creates characters and places which involve and engage the reader so that understanding evolves rather than being as it often is crudely packaged and presented for consumption.

Colours of Things by Althea (Dinosaur 0 85122 374 5, 95p, also available in hardback) is from another part of the spectrum. And spectrum is the appropriate word, for the book teaches the names of colours. Althea's new collaboration with illustrator Susanne Gretz (whose Bears are well-loved everywhere) has produced a bright joyful, funny book in primary colours. A group of infants paint a frieze, each other, themselves (literally) and the floor — even the cat gets involved. The children and their helpers are quite naturally a mixture of ethnic groups. Not to be missed.

Sad News

Just as the magazine was going to press we heard the sad news that Jean Russell, co-editor of *Books for Your Children*, has died suddenly. For many years a Children's Librarian, Jean Russell joined forces with Anne Wood in the first days of the Federation of Children's Book Groups and was one of a handful of people who with her infectious enthusiasm, and warm support for all who came to join (including me) literally created a movement out of the air and kept it going and growing. It was Jean who went story-telling in the precincts of Chester cathedral in the days when those sorts of book activities for children were unheard of. Jean had a deep love for and belief in books and children. Her home in Parwich — a village in the Derby dales — where she also bred ponies (her other passion) was open to all book enthusiasts; children dropped in for a chat and a book and, like a lot of us, got guidance they were never aware of. All her life despite disability and recurrent illness she committed herself to things and got on with them. As well as BFYC she lectured, gave talks, wrote, and edited two splendid collections of original stories for Methuen. Through *Books for Your Children* and her regular contributions to *Mother* magazine, she was well-known and respected within the book world and, more widely, among parents for her knowledge and her integrity. Those who were privileged to work with her and enjoy her company quite simply loved her. If Jean will excuse the cliché — the world is a poorer place.

The Voyage continues

In our voyage around the World of Children's Books we have reached Readerland (page 4) — a place we should all recognise. If you've got views about the children's book world, as a reader or as a hopeful creator of readers, write and tell us.

Good wishes.

Pat



Cover Book

On our cover this issue we feature a still from the new BBC TV serial of Robert Westall's *The Machine Gunners*. There is a new Puffin with a tie-in cover, (0 14 03 0973 X, £1.10). We are most grateful to Puffin for their help in using this picture.

The World of Children's Books: Part 5

In a new landfall we follow in the footsteps of the few who have so far explored

READERLAND

The approach to Readerland takes us through the Disseminators Group and past two off-shore islands, Education and Library. Those who live and work in these places hope to see the children of the mainland grow up to become readers.

When we finally reach the land where parents and children are found what do we find? The place is full of Traveller's Tales and folk myths: television is killing the reading habit; the days of the book are numbered; reading standards are falling; only the middle-class from Booklovers Bay buy books any more; Reading rots your brains; it makes you good; it makes you bad; Books are boring; Books are dangerous. And we hear of strange legendary figures: the Reluctant Reader, the Cultural Elitist, the Dreaded Blyton.

Travellers Tales and Folk myths are all very well and by their nature often contain a grain of truth. But what do we really know about who reads, what they read, where they get their reading material from? And there are even larger questions. Why and how do people read? What effect does it have on them? Does it matter what they read? Does it matter whether they read at all? And are there different answers to all these questions if we consider children and young people rather than adults?

The current guide book to Readerland isn't much help. It contains plenty of opinion, gut feel, received folklore, accumulated experience, established practice, but precious little real information. There are more questions than answers because until recently only a few people have been asking them. Finding out about the who, what, why, how much, how and so on of reading is like trying to orchestrate a group of independent-minded, self-obsessed octopuses into a Busby Berkley-style underwater dance routine. Publishers, Booksellers, Librarians, Sociologists, Psychologists, Politicians, Critics, Academics, Teachers, Writers: all have their own particular interests to pursue.

To make a map that will accurately reflect the endlessly fascinating, constantly changing features of this complex land the explorer must travel slowly piecing together information from many different sources.

We start by finding out what, if anything, we know about the book borrowing and book-buying habits of Readerland.

Free lending libraries arose as part of the movement to make the dream of universal adult literacy a reality and owe something also to the British belief in self-improvement. In its 1980/81 report to the Minister for the Arts the newly-named Library and Information Services Council reaffirmed the belief that 'Libraries provide access to opinions and ideas, help to preserve the nation's literary and cultural heritage and serves the needs of education and leisure'. (A fair summary of the generally received view of the value and importance of reading). The report goes on to comment on the 'uneven collection of statistical data' and 'serious gaps in statistical information' which 'makes it difficult to plan for the future'. So libraries don't really know how successful they are in defining and meeting the needs of those who make use of them, and those who don't. Without more research they are not likely to find out, and research is expensive. With libraries facing cuts of 25% in real terms in local authority library expenditure what the library-using part of Readerland increasingly will see is fewer new books on the shelves, fewer mobile libraries in rural areas, reduced services to school libraries, fewer staff to help and advise, and shorter opening hours. The value of reading is difficult to 'prove' and libraries are easy targets when money is short.



Detail from the SBA's World of Children's Books map.

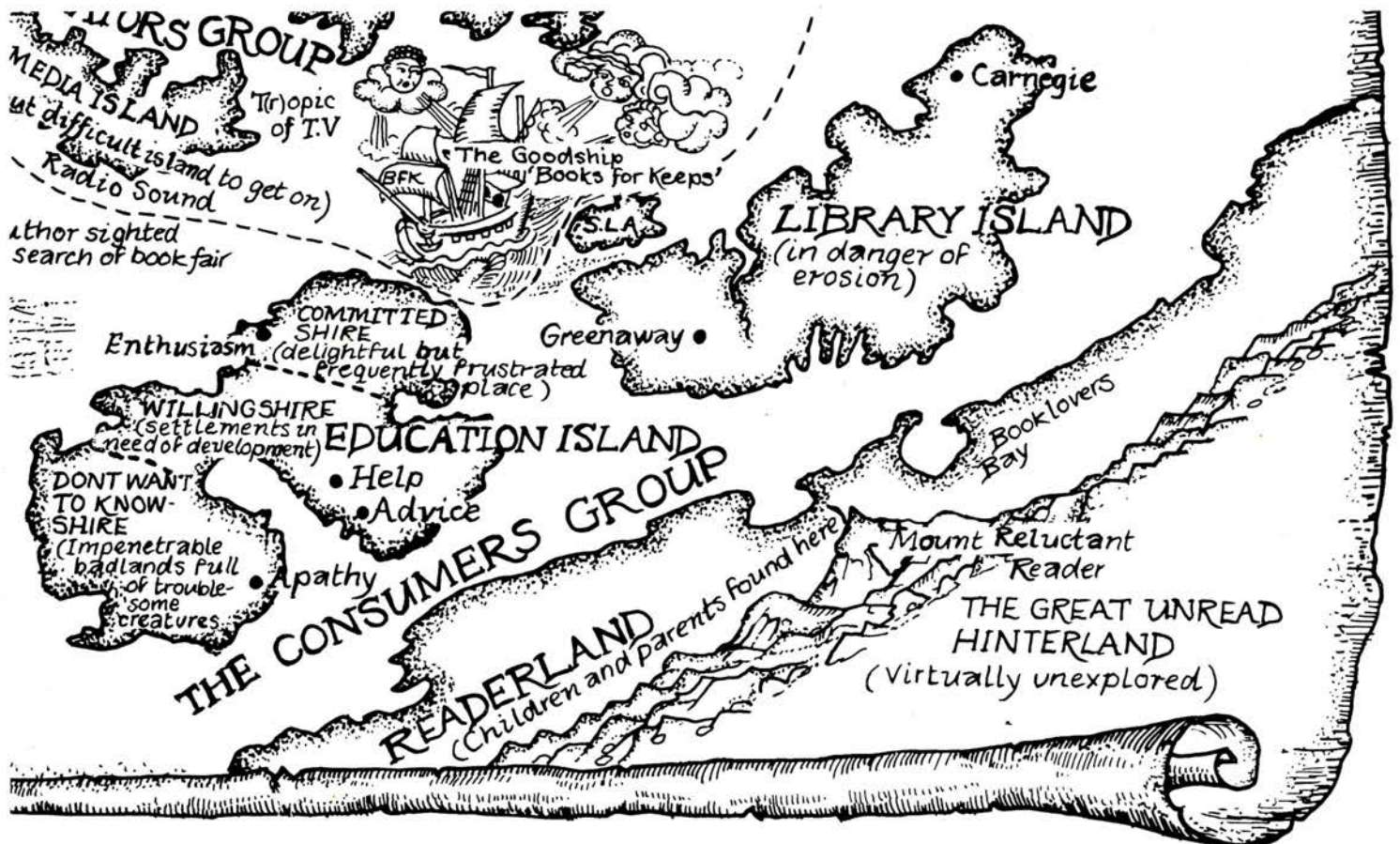
The one thing that libraries can tell us something about — and the one statistic they can use to defend themselves — is their issues. For example three years ago each person in England borrowed about twelve books a year. Scotland averaged out at around 11. Wales 10 and Northern Ireland 8. What we don't know is exactly which books were borrowed (though the new arrangements for paying authors Public Lending Right may throw some light on this) or which people did the borrowing. What is clear is that a lot of people didn't go near a library.

Some children's libraries and schools librarians haven't needed statistics to tell them that. Working on instinct they have recognised how daunting and alien libraries can be for parents and children and have gone out to meet their readers. Story-telling in inner city parks and playgrounds, books on barges, book fairs: all such activities invariably meet with enthusiasm, whether organised by librarians, members of the Federation of Children's Book Groups, or teachers. It 'feels' right to be showing children and their parents that books and reading can be fun, that borrowing and buying books is a natural thing to do. It seems to be effective, evidence in the form of anecdotes is certainly encouraging; but no-one has investigated in detail what the long-term effects are. More people may join the library, more books may be issued; but are they read? What makes a person a reader?

The Schools Council Research Report, *Children and their Books* (1977) points to 'a marked connection between book ownership and amount of reading.' What do we know about how Readerland buys its books? Specialist bookshops, chain stores (like WH Smith), book clubs, school bookshops are the main sources for new books. But don't forget market stalls, jumble sales, school fairs and the Oxfam shop; all magnets for young second hand collectors. At present the inhabitants of Readerland don't seem to be buying children's books as often as they did. In 1982 children's books showed the highest percentage decrease in sales in this country of any type of book. Publishers' and booksellers' explanations range from alarmist fears that television and video have finally killed off the reading habit, through a crisis of confidence about whether they are trying to sell the right books, to a more rational recognition of the effects of unemployment and that, as all teachers know, the number of children in the 5-14 age group has declined drastically, and will continue to decline.

A rational explanation but with a sting in its tail. That shrinking market for children's books will soon be adult. If they grow up not buying or reading books the industry is in trouble. Last July, a high-level conference of representatives from publishing and bookselling met at Nuneham Courtenay to assess the current and potential market for books in the UK. Among a sheaf of recommendations came one 'to make the maintenance and extension of the use of books by children a major long-term priority... and that proposals, research and action should be considered and developed at the highest possible level'. Also implied in the report is the idea that existing and potential book buyers need to be helped, understood and educated. In general the inhabitants of Readerland are perceived as having difficulty in seeing books as value for money. A price of £5 for a hardback or £1.50 for a paperback picture book produces a hesitation that the cost of clothes, tickets for the cinema or a football match, or a round of drinks in the pub never provokes. They need to be lured into bookshops by good displays; like all consumers they can be 'helped' to buy. Booksellers are studying their habits.

Almost half of all sales of books, children's and adult's, are on impulse. Most children's books are bought by women. Men are more likely to buy hardbacks. Older, middle-class people who live in London and the South buy the most expensive books. About a third of the books bought are for presents — but children don't get such expensive books as adults. For whatever reason — increased prices and greater range perhaps — paperbacks are now O.K. as presents; well over half the books given as presents are paperbacks. All these statements hold good if we take as typical a survey conducted nationwide in 1980 on 3,000 people visiting bookshops. The research, commissioned jointly by the Book Marketing Council and the Booksellers Association presents an interesting picture of bookshops and how people behave in them. But what about those who never go near a bookshop? The new Children's Book Action Group,



which is being set up as a result of the Nuneham Courtenay report plans to find out much more about a very underresearched area. We await their discoveries.

Looking at Readerland, the book trade believes that out there in the hinterland of the Great Unread there exists 'an untapped enthusiasm for books and reading that is much wider than the old "literary society" concept.' The evidence of school bookshops, the work of the Federation of Children's Book Groups and the B.M.C's Books in the Community project in Barnsley would seem to support this.

"We must attract the non-bookish members of the public", says the book trade. Who are these non-bookish people? How many of them are there? The Euromonitor Book Readership survey for 1982 gives us an idea. Some 2,000 people aged 16 and over were interviewed during the survey. Of these 45% said they were reading a book. More of the women (51%) claimed to be reading than of the men (38%). Readership according to this survey is closely related to social class: more than 60% of the AB's (middle-class) and CF's (skilled) said they were reading a book, compared with less than 40% of the C2DE's (semi-skilled and unskilled).

So less than half of the population is reading a book of any sort. Why aren't more? For our next step let's find out what we know about children who read a lot and those who don't.

Evidence from Margaret Clark (Young Fluent Readers, 1976). Frank Whitehead and his team (Children and their Books, 1977) Jennie Ingham (Books and Reading Development, 1981) and Vera Southgate and her colleagues (Extending Beginning Reading, 1981) based on investigations across a wide age-range is all remarkably similar. In general children who read often are more likely to be those who found learning to read easy and who have a strong and positive self-image: they own books, belong to the library, are active in lots of things and come from small families where parents read or are seen to value books and reading. Not very surprising, you say. A classic description of the middle-class child. But wait. In a fascinating series of interviews with the parents of some of the children from Bradford middle schools which took part in the Book Flood Experiment, Jennie Ingham showed how much more there is to it than a quick categorisation by socio-economic class or father's occupation.

All the children in her study, she explains, are 'from the same sociological background' (CD in socio-economic terms). What distinguishes the 'avid readers' (who fit the description above very well) from the 'infrequent readers' is the values and attitudes of their parents.

'The main strand that runs throughout all these aspects of the home lives of the avid readers is that they know they are wanted, respected, cared for and considered. The parents of avid readers saw themselves as having considerable control over their own lives and the lives of their children.'

Parents of infrequent readers gave the impression that things happened to them which they could do little about. They felt hopeless and helpless. They had difficulty controlling their children, did not talk with them or spend time with them. Infrequent readers had never had stories read to them and reading played no significant part in their parents' lives. Parents of avid readers read to their children and often valued reading for its own sake and as a way to 'better things' for their children. Often these were values they had inherited from their own parents.

One mother expressed it in this way. 'Well, books are a way of life. You either have books or you don't have books, and I was brought up with my dad, who shoved books under our noses at an early age and said "Look at that beautiful print. When you get bigger you'll be able to read it!"' In one family where the parents don't share the child's enthusiasm for reading and writing they value and encourage the interest because it's his. The son reports 'My mother and father read sometimes. They borrow books off me.'

These families are clear about their values. 'If a sacrifice has to be made it would be made for the child's sake; that's our responsibility'. Their avidly reading children are also avid doers: Scouts, fencing, football, violin, model-making, writing, drawing. (They also watch a lot of television). The infrequent readers 'just play out' on the streets. Even if they were better readers (and many of them desperately wanted to be) it's doubtful whether these streetwise kids would find much to interest them in current publishing. The attitudes and upbringing of the avid readers make a much more acceptable fit with schools and books.

Another theme that runs through all Jennie Ingham's interviews is the enjoyment that the adults and children get from reading. In their study of children from 7-9 Vera Southgate and her colleagues found 'a difference between the child's concept of himself as a reader in school, where he is aware of his lack of skill, particularly in relation to others, and his happy acceptance of reading as a pleasurable relaxation at home.' Is it schools not homes that bring about that phenomenon, the teenager who can read but won't? Mark, a seven year old confident reader might be an early warning system. He was not interested in reading for its own sake, but only wanted to master it, 'so that he could stop it.' How many children get a chance to discover what reading is and what it is for? All studies point to the crucial role that adults, parents, other relations, teachers, librarians, play in this. Government cuts mean not only fewer books but fewer librarians and properly knowledgeable teachers with time to talk and advise. Those in danger of ending up with the unread are even more at risk.

In Readerland the readers and the unread live side by side. But there might as well be a mountain range between them as our map shows. Those on all the other islands who for their various reasons want to break through to the Great Unread Hinterland must find the passes. For that we need to absorb the information which already exists and seek more.

We started with questions. We have found partial answers to some of them.

The exploration will continue. If you are travelling with us, report your discoveries; it's tough terrain. ●

REVIEWS

Nursery/Infant



Houses for rabbits are hutches.

A House is a House for Me

Mary Ann Hoberman, ill. Betty Fraser, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.394 3, £1.50

A rhyming catalogue of dwellings for animals, people and a whole host of other items:

'A book is a house for a story/A rose is a house for a smell./My head is a house for a secret./A secret I never will tell.'

The American origins of the book are apparent from some of the objects and this could provoke an interesting discussion on the different words people use for the same article. A real feast for eyes and ears. JB

Tim Mouse

Judy Brook, Carousel, 0 552 52210 4, 95p

First published in hardcover over fifteen years ago and one of the early Picture Puffins Tim Mouse now appears on the Carousel list. Well chosen words and alternate spreads in colour and black and white relate the air-born rescue by Tim and his friends of the harvest mice trapped in a fast-dwindling area of standing corn with farmers' dogs and cat waiting to gobble them up. In my experience Judy Brook's picture books have delighted many an infant (I've never

understood why no paperback publisher has snapped up her Noah's Ark) and it is good to see this one available again after such a long time. JB

My Ballet Class

Rachel Isadora, Picture Lions, 0 00 662142 2, £1.00

A young ballerina shares her experiences of dancing school with the reader; we see her getting ready, meet her teacher and pianist and learn some of the terms for the steps she practises. The illustrations (black and white with just a touch of colour) are very expressive and capture beautifully the grace of movement of the young dancers. An interesting way of getting information across to young readers. JB

Alfie Gets in First

Shirley Hughes, Picture Lions, 0 00 662051 5, £1.00

A new Shirley Hughes in paperback is always a treat and none more so than this one which introduces the endearing Alfie and his baby sister Annie Rose. In his eagerness to be first home young Alfie gets himself locked inside the house with mum and sister on the other side of the front door. Ingenious design enables us to enjoy the inside and outside story of the rescue simultaneously. A superb book. JB

Reviews of paperback fiction are grouped for convenience under teaching range. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendation for use can be found within the reviews.

Reviewers

in this issue

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1. **Jill Bennett** is in charge of a Reading Centre in Middlesex. She is the compiler of *Learning to Read with Picture Books* and of several anthologies of poetry for infants, Literary Editor of *Child Education* and on the Board of the SBA.

2. **David Bennett** (no relation to Jill) is a former librarian, and currently Head of English in a Nottinghamshire secondary school.

3. **Bill Boyle** teaches in Middle School in Wirral. He was founding Deputy Editor of *Junior Education*.

4. **Cathy Lister** teaches in a middle school in Staffordshire, with responsibility for English and Language across the Curriculum.

5. **Colin Mills** is in the Division of Teaching Studies at Worcester College, where he helps run a Diploma in Children's Literature. He's taught in a comprehensive school, a primary school and worked in radio.



From My Ballet Class

Paddington Goes Shopping

0 330 26626 8

Paddington at the Circus

0 330 26625 X

Michael Bond, ill. Fred Banbery, Piccolo, £1.25 each

Two more paperback editions of the Paddington Picture Books first published some ten years ago. Is it only ten years? The pictures make them look much earlier. Inevitably Paddington becomes the centre

of attraction in the supermarket and as a circus performer. Though I have never particularly liked Paddington's picture book adventures children certainly do enjoy them and will no doubt be much entertained by these too. JB

'Alfie ran on ahead' from *Alfie Gets in First*



Infant/Junior

Pigwig and the Pirates

John Dyke, Magnet,
0 416 24560 9, £1.25

When a pirate ship drops anchor at their seaside resort, Pigwig, his wife Matilda and their nephew Northcliff decide to go aboard and look over the ship. But they and the other visitors are robbed and made to walk the plank and the pirates sail off with Northcliff, playing pirates, still aboard. Pigwig sets off in hot pursuit following the trail of plunder. He finally tracks them down on their treasure island, rescues Northcliff and with a few well-placed Xs on their treasure map, induces the pirates to dispose of themselves and the island. A colourful, amusing adventure, but it is a pity that this paperback is so small: younger readers may well be deterred by the size and density of the print, and in any event, the pictures, which are packed with action and items of interest, are not well served by so great a reduction. JB

Tiggers Don't Climb Trees

0 416 24660 5

Piglet Does a Very Good Thing

0 416 24670 2

Eeyore Finds the Wolery

0 416 24680 X

A.A. Milne, ill. Ernest Shepard, Magnet, 85p each

Each of these paperbacks contains a complete story from **The House at Pooh Corner** and, with the other Piglet paperback books, will play a part in introducing afresh the tales of Pooh, Piglet, Eeyore, Kanga, Roo and the other inhabitants of Milne's world. Young readers and listeners are still enchanted by the camaraderie, the impish songs and the gentle adventures. I'm not sure that the episodes are quite so self-contained as they appear here: **Tiggers**... reads well in this format, but the other two may need previous knowledge of characters to catch all the fun. Show these to children, but let them have access to a good edition of the complete stories as well. CM

Wayfarers All

Kenneth Grahame, ill. Beverley Gooding, Magnet, 0 416 24550 1, £1.25

A haunting and beautiful chapter from **The Wind in the Willows** in which Ratty meets a Seafarer and becomes restless to leave the riverbank. By reproducing it in picture book form, (like its predecessors **The River Bank** and **The**

Open Road) the publisher is trying for "a perfect introduction to a great classic". It's a laudable idea: the power and poetry needs to be read and heard by new young readers. But in paperback the book is spoiled by close, unimaginative text placing, some very clumsy page breaks and for me the illustrations whilst undoubtedly well-crafted, are completely out of keeping with the rustic, dream-like atmosphere of the story. CM

Bobby Brewster's Shadow

H.E. Todd, Knight,
0 340 28044 1, 85p

Eight more stories about the ordinary little boy who keeps having the most extraordinary adventures. Todd's inventiveness seems endless: his special appeal is in turning the everyday (play and domestic life) into a special kind of magic so that shadows, playthings, favoured toys are all ripe for a particular kind of reading fun. The stories are well-crafted without ever being patronising or dull.

They read aloud splendidly and are just the right length for newly-independent 7 to 9's: the title story and **Green Ink** show a master storyteller at his best. CM

Warton and the King of the Skies

Russell Erickson, Knight,
0 340 28639 3, 95p

Another adventure about the two Toad brothers, Warton and Morton, from a writer who combines a strong storyline with pace, wit and a special appeal to children who are beginning to enjoy the *form* of stories. His language is a delight.

In this one, the two brothers are captured by Weasels after a misdirected voyage in their home-made balloon. Their escape makes for a very enjoyable read, (or listen) for 7 to 9's. If you don't know them, catch up on **A Toad for Tuesday**, **Warton and Morton** and **Warton's Christmas Eve Adventure**: same author, same publisher. CM

Littlenose the Marksman

John Grant, B.B.C./Knight, 0 34 28653 9, £1.25

Five imaginative stories about the Neanderthal boy who has been turned into a favourite story character by the brilliant Jackanory tellings. Grant's achievement is to make a world which is humorous, yet real. We read here of the hero's exploits as an inept marksman and as an artist who tries to

raise magical powers. In the **Life Saver** he is captured by the Straightnoses (*Homo Sapiens*) and learns that the enemy is not so bad after all. A rare kind of writing which makes children laugh and gives them a sense of the past is complemented by the author's own rugged, immediate pictures. CM

'The hunting party fled in all directions' from **Littlenose the Marksman**



Toby's Millions

Morris Lurie, ill. Arthur Horner, Puffin,
0 14 03 1474 1, £1.10

A vigorous, articulate, well-written story for 7 ups about Toby, who unearths a private treasure hoard and becomes the richest boy in England. The effect upon his parents, school and community is wittily caught in this smashing novel, one of the best for juniors to come my way for a long time.

Lots of action, involvement, sumptuous description (read aloud the discovery of the treasure and there'll be a stampede for the book shop!) Some wry humour at the expense of the acquisitive adults! The glorious cover and pictures deserve an award. Not to be missed. CM

Professor Branestawm's Pocket Motor Car

Norman Hunter, ill. Gerald Rose, Young Puffin, 0 14 03 1418 0, 90p

Two super new stories in one paperback from a writer with a timeless sense of fun and an eye and ear for the humour that lies in the incongruous. The indefatigable inventor here produces a car that can be deflated and put in pockets, so solving the parking problems in Great Pagwell! The second story involves the community with a clever automatic writing machine.

Hunter's writing is as fresh as ever: he knows how to involve young readers and carry them along. Gerald Rose's pictures (sometimes whole pages) do more than just "illustrate"; they are a part of the zany reading experience. Splendid. CM

From **Toby's Millions**



Junior/Middle

George's Marvellous Medicine

Roald Dahl, ill. Quentin Blake, Puffin.
0 14 03 1492 X, £1.00

Once again, I suppose, Dahl proves that there *is* humour to be derived from the thoroughly nasty and the disgusting! As a squeamish adult, I find this bit of excessive nastiness over the top. If you don't, you'll love this tale of George's exploits in curing his unspeakably nasty Gran of her awfulness.

I try not to let my own prissiness censor books not *meant* for me in the first place, so I used this as a discussion starter with ten and eleven year olds in a middle school. How far can you go in stories? Why are the grown ups in this book so dreadful? How does it compare with *The Twits*? I think that's the kind of discussion central to their growth as readers (not just consumers). Have a try. CM

Winged Magic

Barbara Sleight, Knight,
0 340 26538 8

'Winged Magic' literally wings the reader across the world telling stories of an Australian lyre bird, a French dwarf, Anansi from the West Indies and a Greek myth among many others. These stories of flying creatures, retold in Barbara Sleight's easy flowing style are an excellent introduction for primary and lower middle school children to folk-lore from many countries. It is an ideal collection for reading aloud. The cover illustration of mythical winged creatures was a particular attraction to children who tested this book. CL

Evil Eye

Nicholas Fisk, Knight
0 340 27076 4, 95p

The fourth title in the Starstormer Saga, although it is quite possible to pick up this one and enjoy the fun without having read the previous adventures. There is a brief resumé of 'the story so far' as a preface, but if you feel you'd really like to be involved, better to read *Starstormers*, the first book, which describes how the spaceship was built out of junkyard parts and the journey to Epsilon Cool began. *Evil Eye* continues the feud with the Octopus Emperor, including a crash landing on the planet Moloch (a synonym for the title) and a confrontation with the monstrous forms of life that inhabit there. Racy, undemanding entertainment, with nice touches of humour from Nicholas Fisk, especially in Shambles, a very unsystematic robot, and Fang, a warrior cat who loves kidneys for breakfast. BB



MacPherson's Highland Fling

Lavinia Derwent, Knight
0 340 28043 3, 95p

Paperback version of the 1980 original hardback from Blackie tells an unoriginal adventure of the Glasgow messenger boy. The setting is Glen Bogle in the Highlands and our hero is surrounded by the regular retinue, obviously known and loved by all addicts. Old Skinflint, Big Hamish, Grandpa and Maisie Murphy (her of the Violet Elizabeth Bott lisp) reel in and out of this thin tale. Macpherson fills the stirring, starring role, mouthing exclamations ranging from 'Jings!' to 'Mercy me!' to reveal his changing emotions. Old Morag, playing the witch next door, broomstick in the airing cupboard, adds a touch of (accidental) humour to the text, but even she has to take the silver medal behind Murphy's impassioned 'begob!' on perceiving a thunderbolt from the heavens. Actually, Macpherson is probably laughing up his kilt, as this is doubtless the finest satire since the Goons disbanded — Och ay! BB

Scottish Folk Tales

Ruth Manning-Sanders, Magnet, 0 416 25390 3, £1.00

No author has made the folk tradition so accessible to children as Ruth Manning-Sanders and this book of Scottish Folk tales is a delightful addition to the library or to any child's collection. The author's love for Scotland grew out of childhood holidays with 'Granny Stewart'. Her attachment is fully evident in

these beautifully fluent, totally absorbing stories. In true folk tradition each story of lairds and sea-serpents and fairies has a wholly satisfying ending, a point made by several of the children who tested this book. It is the perfect book for class libraries, families, groups of children anywhere. CL

Goodnight Stories

Meryl Doney, Piccolo,
0 330 26797 3, £1.00

This is a superb book to have on the shelf in the primary and lower middle classroom. As 'Goodnight Stories' it is also a good choice for family reading. Authors range across a century from Tolstoy to Lavinia Derwent, from Oscar Wilde to Jill Tomlinson. The stories are of fantasy and fairy tale with the satisfying assurance that good will triumph over evil and all will be well. Each is introduced with a note from the editor so that it makes the perfect selection for dipping into for an occasion. It was much liked by all those children who had the opportunity to try it. CL



'The Sphinx at Dawn', illustration by Jane Lydbury from *Goodnight Stories*

Middle/Secondary

The Terror Cubes

Granville Wilson, Granada,
0 583 30534 2, 85p

Set in A.D. 2050, the fragile plot revolves around the threat posed by the Terror Cubes (or *terroremkubikos*, for students of dialect) to civilisation. The Renegade Robots (RR in textual mnemonic) have penetrated the defences of Lonyork, England's linear city, with a devilishly cunning expanding crystal, which threatens to destroy everything in its path. Will the antidote be found in time? Will Robodog become a bigger household name than Lassie? Enjoyable predictable with everybody saved to continue their search for a computerised

Utopia. Slight misgivings though about the penny philosophies injected by Granville Wilson, unnecessary surely for a pre-teen audience. BB

Break Point

Jeremy Burnham, BBC/
Knight, 0 340 28084 0,
£1.10

A sensitive story which captures both Barry's struggle to harness his talent for tennis within the framework of adolescent personality problems, and the continuing tensions that exist between the boy and his father. The latter is exceptionally well portrayed, illustrating the despair of the redundant breadwinner, grimly trying to retain his position as

'head of the house' while his dignity and self-esteem daily diminish. Class conflicts surface as father tries to deter Barry from continuing with the game. 'You're stepping out of your class . . . they won't accept you' is a perennial theme in their conversations.

This 'novelisation' of the recent BBC serial, which also features a girl with tennis ambitions, is thoroughly recommended for eleven and upwards. BB

The Tomorrow City

Monica Hughes, Magnet,
0 416 22420 2, £1.25

If you can survive the dated Americanesque slang which decorates the dialogue between the children, 'The Tomorrow

City' is worth persevering with. Not just another 'computer takes over the world' tale, but with rather more to indicate about human behaviour, motivated or mindless than the majority of lighter weight treatments of this theme. With C-Three, the computer, inexorably assuming more and more power over the human population through mind-control, it is left to the children to act. They decide the computer must be destroyed before everyone becomes totally subjugated to its will. How this is to be done makes for an exciting and enthralling story. BB

Mog and The Rectifier

Chris Powling, Knight,
0 340 28046 8, 95p

Who is the Rectifier — he (or she) who "makes adventure something that can happen anywhere, anyday. He (who) can turn ordinary life into a sort of Golden hand"? Brains, the narrator, doesn't really know and certainly snobby, insufferable Howard Bygrave, who "looked like a frog that would never turn into a prince", positively doesn't know. Quite probably Mog, who could conceivably be the Rectifier's apprentice knows — but then again...

A quirky adventure quite likely to appeal to a wide range of kids, especially when they discover more about the rather mysterious Mog, Mog's mother and the sinister Mr. Skin. DB

Mill Green on Stage

Alison Prince, Armada
Original, 0 00 691973 1,
95p

Billed as the 'Great New School Series' — You know Grange Hill now discover Mill Green, this is number 2 in the set, after Mill Green on Fire and more is yet to come!

Toughnut new kid, Marcia, has joined the school's very mature-sounding first years and has adeptly succeeded in alienating practically every one of them with her lies and aggression. When she lands the role of Principal Boy in the forthcoming school pantomime, that caps the lot, especially as far as Cinders, classmate Rebecca, is concerned.

The lively ups and downs are related at a swift pace, with plenty of dialogue and a collection of amiable enough characters, including teachers, who are not altogether stereotypes and whom the kids generally seem to like and try to understand. It's all harmless enough and not likely to create the initial stir (or impact) that its successful forerunner gathered up for itself. DB

Another Fine Mess

Jan Needle, Lions,
0 00 671978 3, £1.25

Jan Needle's zany professor and the long-suffering George and Cynthia are once again thrown into bewildering confusion by the dratted Cheap-Day Transferer Machine. This time it manages to transport them with dread finality back to Elizabethan England. Meanwhile Mophead and Jugears are stuck in the crumbling Yorkshire Farmhouse with the truculent Think Computer and the other eccentric electronic gadgetry and paraphernalia. Confused? This is a follow-up to, but not dependent upon, *The Size Spies*. It's as action-packed and crazy as its predecessor and bustling with the same comic-strip qualities. One serious note is the revelation, found only in this work, that



young Shake-a-Spear was not solely responsible for the plays that bear his name. For a wide audience from junior through to secondary. DB

A Rag, a Bone and a Hank of Hair

Nicholas Fisk, Puffin,
0 14 031917 2, 95p

A fairly demanding, at times disturbing, sci-fi novel set in a future post-nuclear time, when the birthrate is severely reduced and new methods to generate life become imperative. One technique is to re-materialise into full beings scraps and remains gleaned from early graves — reborns. Brin, a gifted youth is enlisted by the Senior Elect to observe these beings in a carefully constructed 1940 scenario. His task is to predict their probable behaviour in the New World that will be so alien to them and which, in their own way, because they have free will, they threaten by their very existence. The experiment develops strangely and Brin finds it harder to play the detached observer.

Younger and less experienced readers may find the tensions and ambiguities of the novel too demanding. Few who read it will remain unaffected by its implications for the future of our own Society. DB

Alien Worlds

edited by Douglas Hill,
Piccolo, 0 330 26817 1,
95p

Offered a selection of books to test, boys, in particular, fought to try this one and there is no doubt that it would be a seller on grounds of cover and title. However, it was as eagerly rejected as selected and for most middle school children the readability level was too high to provide an easy read. On the other hand the sophisticated science-fiction addict recognised the names of specialist authors and praised the book as one of the best collections of SF stories available.

There is no doubt that the stories are well crafted — Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke and C.S. Lewis are among the list of authors. Confirmation that the moon is made of green

cheese, and humans confined in an alien zoo are among the strange fantasies that are related. An excellent choice for the fluent reader who is 'into' adventures on other planets. CL

Nothing to be Afraid of

Jan Mark, Puffin,
0 14 03 1392 3, £1.00

Mice behind the skirting boards and dry rot in the attic are problems that might one day be solved but a newel post that walks is another matter! It is a problem that Martin did not know how to solve and just one of the many mysteries in Jan Mark's book of short stories. In hardback this has been a very popular book with top Middle school children and has been eagerly received in the new paper back version. There is a black humour in many of the stories which are not so much about ghosts as about the cruel tendencies of children and the gruesome fantasies they sometimes have.

Cover detail, *Nothing to be Afraid of*



One story however carries a salutary message for those adults who gain satisfaction from dividing children's loyalties. Many children may recognise their own predicament in *The Choice Is Yours* where Brenda must choose between the hockey XI and the choir. Jan Mark has an uncanny ability to recognise the unspoken relationships between teachers and children. The final sentence of this story should send shivers of recognition through many a teacher. 'Brenda went and sat in the junior cloakroom, which was forbidden in lunch hour, and cried. There was no rule against that.' A story to discuss with the class if you have the courage! The collection offers much for reading aloud and those who are already fans will gain a new perspective on this much admired author. CL

Older Readers

Ghost in the Water

Edward Chitham, Puffin,
0 14 031553 5, 95p

A Pattern of Roses

K.M. Peyton, Sparrow,
0 09 929410 9, £1.25

The influence that people of the past might exert upon people of the present seems to be a favourite area of investigation for many children's authors. These two stories do not break very much new ground and I suspect that the first has only reached paperback after 10 years because of its television dramatisation at Christmas.

It tells a fairly commonplace suspense story of two teenagers who, whilst exploring for their History Club, manage to unearth the true details of events surrounding the intriguing death of 18 year old Abigail Parkes in 1860. Tess and David encounter some neat co-incidences during their search, which centres upon the abandoned canals and pits of the Black Country.

A Pattern of Roses as well as being a straightforward ghost story has an extra dimension. It deals competently with the thorny adolescent problem of finding a pattern, some kind of key to direct one's future. For the uncertain Tim Ingram, just convalescing after a bout of illness and O levels, this was a very pertinent concern. It is, in the end, his own pattern that emerges, not one imposed by his snobby Mother or pushy teacher. Yet in a sense it is dictated, by the ghost of Tom Inskip, a farm hand denied the luxury of choice by the social

climate of his time, who died just before his 16th birthday in 1910. The juxtaposition throughout the novel of Tim and Tom lends depth and reveals insights not often dealt with so cogently. DB

An Inch of Candle

Alison Leonard, Fontana
Lions, 0 00 672134 6,
£1.25

"The prospect of being declared outrageous gave her an inward, warm, suffusing smile". So it was for 16 year old, wildly romantic Dora, growing up in a straight-jacketed, self-consciously methodist household at the onset of World War I. A novel which in its themes echoes Marjorie Darke's *A Kind of Courage*. Conscientious objection, embodied in soppy brother Richard, and myopic jingoism, embraced by much adored Humphrey Bosanquet, tangle and merge to perplex and yet to illuminate the thoughts and emotion of a young girl struggling to comprehend her own emergent femininity and to establish her own separate identity.

The history doesn't seem to matter here, it is the character of Dora that shines brightest and her final conviction that "Death — yes, it was horrifying, nightmarish. But before it came, was not life something to be seized and lived and gloried in?"

This is a novel that will probably be sadly and undeservedly neglected unless we make every effort to commend it, especially to older readers. DB

Lifeline Two

Judith Elkin introduces a new series which offers a Lifeline Guide to

Multi-cultural BOOKS FOR Children

We live in a multi-cultural, multi-racial Britain. This is now a fact of life, to be recognised whether we live in Cornwall, East Anglia, London or the West Midlands. Unless we want our children to develop an inward-looking, insular perspective, educating them for the future must imply educating them to live in and play a positive role in a multi-cultural society, where cultural diversity is recognised and respected and a global perspective assumed.

I believe that books have a vital part to play in a child's developing awareness and understanding. Books can foster racial and cultural understanding and offer children positive role models. Through books, curiosity amongst children about the culture, language and country of origin of their parents and grandparents can be encouraged, so that children can feel pride in belonging to two cultures rather than being lost in the abyss between the two. Books can demonstrate the values of different cultures but also show the similarities between children playing, learning and growing up anywhere. In books which show the current Great Britain, children of different cultural and racial groups can be seen participating as equals and cooperating together. Books can help children to find their true identity, to see their own lives in perspective and as having some significance.

We therefore need books which reflect, naturally and unselfconsciously, the richness and wide diversity of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds currently existing in Great Britain and books which offer a wide range of values and range of norms.

Until recently, there were few books for children which even began to think in these terms. Most children's books presented a world in which all the characters, at least the significant characters were white and of European stock. The message such books inevitably carried was that children of Caribbean, Asian, Chinese, African origin were not the norm, they did not really matter or count. It was quite easy for white children, especially those not in multi-cultural areas, to assume that Black children did not experience the sorts of things that children's books and picture books in particular dealt with: they did not go shopping with their parents or go to the zoo; they did not skip or read about monsters; they did not have birthdays or exist in the role of fairies, clowns or astronauts.

Books which give that impression are seriously misleading their readers. Books have a greater power to mislead where there are no classmates to prove that this is not reality, where there are no local shops to signify that a variety of languages and lifestyles exist in this country today.

The last ten years has seen the emergence of some significant and creative writers who have shown a deep concern for and awareness of the multi-cultural nature of modern British society and have tried to reflect this honestly in their books:

Bernard Ashley with his sensitively written stories, *The Trouble with Donovan Croft* and, for younger children, *I'm Trying to Tell You* (both in Puffin);

Bob Leeson, one of the few writers to blend fantasy with realism in *The Third Class Genie*, as well as taking a historical perspective in *Maroon Boy* (both in Fontana Lions);

Jan Needle who tackles the issues of prejudice and racism head-on, but with deep understanding in *My Mate Shofiq* and *A Sense of Shame*;

Farrukh Dhondy with his collections of short stories, *East End at your Feet* (Macmillan Topliner) and *Come to Mecca* (Fontana Lion) which sympathetically capture the feelings of Asian teenagers growing up in London today;

Geraldine Kaye one of the few writers looking at the Chinese community in Britain;

Nina Bawden, one of the earliest writers in this field who no longer feels the need to stress the existence of black children in her stories: they are there quite naturally.

Even so, there is a dearth of such fiction for the young reader. Peter Dickinson's *The Devil's Children* (Puffin), originally published in 1970, is still one of the most perceptive stories for this age group with its sensitive portrait of a Sikh community. One, I hope significant, development is that more writers who are themselves members of ethnic minorities like Jamila Gavin (*The Orange Tree* and *Double Dare*, both Methuen) and Buchi Emecheta (*Titch the Cat*) have recently begun to fill this gap.

Along the same lines and particularly encouraging have been the number of initiatives at grass roots level, with community bookshops such as Centerprise, Walter Rodney Bookshop and New Beacon Books selling

multi-cultural books, including imports from the Caribbean, Indian sub-continent, Africa and People's Republic of China, as well as promoting local publishing. Much of this local publishing has reflected the thoughts and writings of young people who have grown up in a multi-cultural society and the sense of urgency and vitality of the writing in titles such as *Our Lives* (The English Centre) and Accabre Huntley's *At School Today* deserve recognition and a wider audience than they often receive.

It is interesting to note that one place where such writing is recognised, is in some of the anthologies accompanying various educational television series, such as *The English Programme* and *Middle English* (both Thames). The influence of television programmes which reflect the multi-cultural nature of society is particularly important, and programmes such as *Tomorrow's People* (Yorkshire) and *Everybody Here* (Channel 4) and the accompanying teacher's notes and anthologies can provide useful source material.

Children have the right to a body of literature which truly reflects its whole readership and we have a moral responsibility as teachers, librarians or parents to demonstrate a multi-cultural breadth of vision in the books we are making available to our children. Over the next six issues of *Books For Keeps*, I shall be looking in some detail at some of the above-mentioned books, and others, and offering a *Lifeline* guide to the books I feel ought to be strongly represented in any school interested in offering such a multi-cultural base of understanding. The areas I shall be looking at are:

1. Folk Tales and Legends.
2. Picture Books.
3. Novels for the Primary and Middle Years.
4. Teenage Novels.
5. Anthologies of short stories and poetry.
6. Background Books.



A page from
Everybody Here

Judith Elkin is a past Head of Services for Children and Young People in Birmingham Libraries. She is also the compiler of *Multi-racial Books for the Classroom* (YLG Publications), now in its third revised edition.

I should like to start by highlighting a few books which can help younger children to become more aware of the multi-cultural nature of society.

The Baby's Catalogue

Allan and Janet Ahlberg, Kestrel, 0 7226 5777 3, £4.95

Based on the premise that very young children are interested in pictures of other children and familiar objects in things like the Mothercare catalogue, this delightfully illustrated picture book follows the exploits of five babies in five families through the course of a day and amidst a vast array of baby paraphernalia. It seems perfectly natural that one of the families should be black. The babies are all shown in typical baby poses and positions and the mothers and fathers are seen in non-stereotyped roles — dad doing the washing, mum going to work in the car, etc. A humorous view of life with small babies, and suitable for the very youngest children.

Mother Goose Comes to Cable Street

compiled by Rosemary Stones and Andrew Mann, ill. Dan Jones, Kestrel 0 7226 527 7, £3.95
Puffin 0 14 050.313 7, 80p

A collection of 20 traditional rhymes, some familiar ones like "Girls and boys come out to play" and other less well-known ones, all vibrantly illustrated by Dan Jones and given an inner-city, multi-cultural setting. The detailed, crowded drawings give a refreshingly new interpretation to the rhymes. (See also *Inky Pinky Ponky*, playground rhymes collected by Mike Rosen and Susanna Steele, illustrated by Dan Jones with the same style and dash. Granada, 0 246 11319 7, £4.95)

Everybody Here

compiled by Michael Rosen, Bodley Head, 0 370 30944 8, £3.95

The book is based on the Channel 4 TV programmes (see *Books for Keeps* 17 November 82) and follows the same lively, child-centred, fun-loving magazine programme approach. The stories, things to make, silly things to do, songs, games and photographs all reflect the varied cultural backgrounds of the children involved, with some of the items related in the Mother Tongue as well as English.

The ideas incorporated in this quite slight (64 page) book aim to provide a starting point for a whole range of activities which encourage multi-cultural awareness through the child's own experiences and home background. It is one of the few books so far in existence which takes a refreshingly unforced look at a happy multi-cultural group of children playing and working together in close harmony, whilst obviously recognising the values of differing home backgrounds and languages.



Kazu Katsushima squashing his face on the window, from *Everybody Here*

Terraced House Books

Peter Heaslip and Ann Griffiths, Methuen, several sets available, each set of four £2.75

A series of early readers written with the urban child in mind but suitable for any classroom for they show such wide cultural diversity in the children and families depicted. With clear, colourful photographs, large type and short sentences (only one line per page), they are ideal for children beginning to read or whose English is poor. There are now 4 sets of books (with 2 more planned for Spring 1983) and all titles have familiar everyday settings, for example *My Mum, My Dad, School Dinners, The Launderette, The New Baby, Birthdays, The Market*. The texts are separately available in Urdu and Bengali on adhesive sheets, so that they can be overlaid on, or stuck alongside, the original English text: a commendable initiative.

Fancy Dress Party

Gillian Klein, Methuen, 5 titles plus teacher's notes, 0 423 50920 9, £4.95

A recent series of five books for beginning readers about children from five different cultural backgrounds preparing costumes and food for a fancy dress party at school. This ingenious idea enables the individual child in each story to be seen in his or her own home background using the cultural heritage of the family in preparing for the party. Key words in the Mother Tongues involved are given at the back of the books and there are extensive teacher's notes. The illustrations by Simon Willby are rather crude and disappointing but this remains a valuable set of books demonstrating multi-cultural awareness. A further set (*Scrapbooks*) based on a similar idea (all the children in school have been on holiday to their Mother countries) is due in Spring 1983.

Tinder Box

66 songs for children chosen by Sylvia Barratt and Sheena Hodge, instrumental parts by Leonora Davies, ill. Lisa Kopper, A & C Black, 0 7136 2170 2, £4.95

A lively selection of 66 songs from all over the world, including traditional African, Gujarati, Caribbean and Hebridean songs, a song about Diwali and a Soviet children's peace song, as well as songs by Tom Paxton and Woodie Guthrie, and one composed to teach the Indian hand movements used in dance. Black's series of spiral-bound music books, make a valuable contribution as there are so few collections of songs available for children. They deliberately, both in the illustrations and choice of material, set out to be multi-cultural and international. Other titles include: *Merrily to Bethlehem*, 0 7136 1892 2 (64 unusual carols including Polish, Welsh, French and West Indian spirituals); *Harlequin*, 0 7136 2155 9 (44 songs round the year celebrating different festivals, including Hanukkah, Christmas, Halloween and the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival); *Mango Spice*, 0 7136 2109 5 (44 Caribbean songs), (also available in a words only edition, £1.35).

Strands Series

A & C Black, £2.95 each

A series for 8 to 13 year olds which aims to encourage an understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds. Each title is about a real family and shows the people within the family going about their everyday lives in various parts of Britain. The books are illustrated with attractive high quality photographs which capture very effectively the spirit of the books. The books are factual as well as fictional so that in *Pavan is a Sikh*, 0 7136 1721 7, the reader is shown how Pavan's father ties his turban and his beard and the religious significance of the 'five Ks'. Other titles include *Nahda's Family*, 0 7136 1732 2, *The Phoenix Bird Chinese Take-Away*, 0 7136 1832 9, *Shimon, Leah and Benjamin*, 0 7136 1957 0,

and *Rebecca is a Cypriot*, 0 7136 1921 X. A very useful series showing different cultures within a British urban setting.

Berron's Tooth

by Joan Solomon, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 8978 3, £2.95

The most successful title in a series of books by Joan Solomon again using a photo-journalistic approach. The setting is an inner-city school where Berron loses a tooth, puts it safely in his pocket, loses it and finds it again. A mundane little story but one very familiar to all children. The photographs delightfully capture a multi-racial group of children in very natural situations. Berron, Montrice and the other children appear again in *A Day by the Sea*, 0 241 89782 3, £3.50, and *Kate's Party*, 0 241 89780 7, £2.95. *News for Dad*, 0 241 10215 4, *Bobbi's New Year*, 0 241 10214 6 (both £3.25) are in a similar format but look at a Sikh community and *Wedding Day*, 0 241 10552 8 and *A Present for Mum*, 0 241 10553 6 (both £3.50) look at a Hindu family. As in the Strands series, these last four titles have a strong factual element, taking the opportunity within the story to talk about the religions concerned, and again make a valuable contribution to multi-cultural understanding.

Just out in the same format, also from Hamish Hamilton are *Carnival* by Ian Menter with photographs by Will Guy (0 241 10828 4, £3.50) in which Adrian and Samantha visit the summer Carnival in St. Paul's, Bristol and *A Day with Ling* by Ming Tsow with photographs by Christopher Cormack (0 241 10833 0, £3.50) in which Anne spends a day with her friend Ling.



It's not as easy as it looks! from *A Day with Ling*



'This is Adrian. He is eight years old'. From *Carnival*

Authorgraph No. 18



Love him or hate him, you certainly can't ignore Robert Westall. When his first children's book — **The Machine Gunners** — was published in 1975, reactions were pretty well polarised. There were those who were shocked by its uncompromising realism, its strong language and its firm delineation of the British class system from the inside. And there were those who loved it, among them thousands of kids.

Not a bad debut (especially considering it won the Carnegie Medal) for a man who was 46 at the time. But then you can't keep a good Geordie down, as readers of **The Machine Gunners** will know, and in many ways, Robert Westall is a Geordie from his boot straps upwards. He's like that wonderful first novel of his, too — meeting him, even briefly, is like reading his book; an experience not to be missed.

Of course, he's gone from strength to strength in the eight years since, with novels like **Fathom Five** (a sequel to **The Machine Gunners**), **The Devil on the Road**, **The Watch House**, **The Wind Eye**, and **The Scarecrows** for which he was awarded the Carnegie again in 1982. But he's still got a soft spot for his first book, and that for a number of reasons, one of the main ones being that it's "unashamedly autobiographical".

He grew up in Tynemouth, near Newcastle in the heart of Geordie-land, during the 1930s. "I had a bloody happy childhood, and Tynemouth didn't suffer as badly as parts of the north-east in the Depression because it was based on fish and coal, although it was still pretty tough. But Jarrow was only three miles up the road, and there were plenty of kids there without enough food or shoes on their feet."

It's hardly surprising then that he grew up to be the socialist he still is. "I got my socialism from my Dad, and I painted as true a picture of him in **The Machine Gunners** as I could." But Robert Westall was a bright lad, and used the traditional escape route from the working classes — education. Grammar school, Fine Art at Durham and a spell at The Slade School of Art in London were his entree into the middle classes. He worked as a teacher and a freelance journalist (with two separate spells as northern art critic of **The Guardian**, in 1970 and again in 1980) before settling on what he does now. He teaches art in a Cheshire sixth form college and also does careers work with his pupils. In a sense, his wheel has come full circle — he's now at the sharp end of the business of trying to find work for youngsters in the worst depression since his childhood. Unemployment is currently running at 14.5 per cent in his area. And of course, he writes books.

His relationship with children obviously plays a great part in his writing. "I didn't actually sit down to write a work of literature when I wrote **The Machine Gunners**. It was a family book, for my

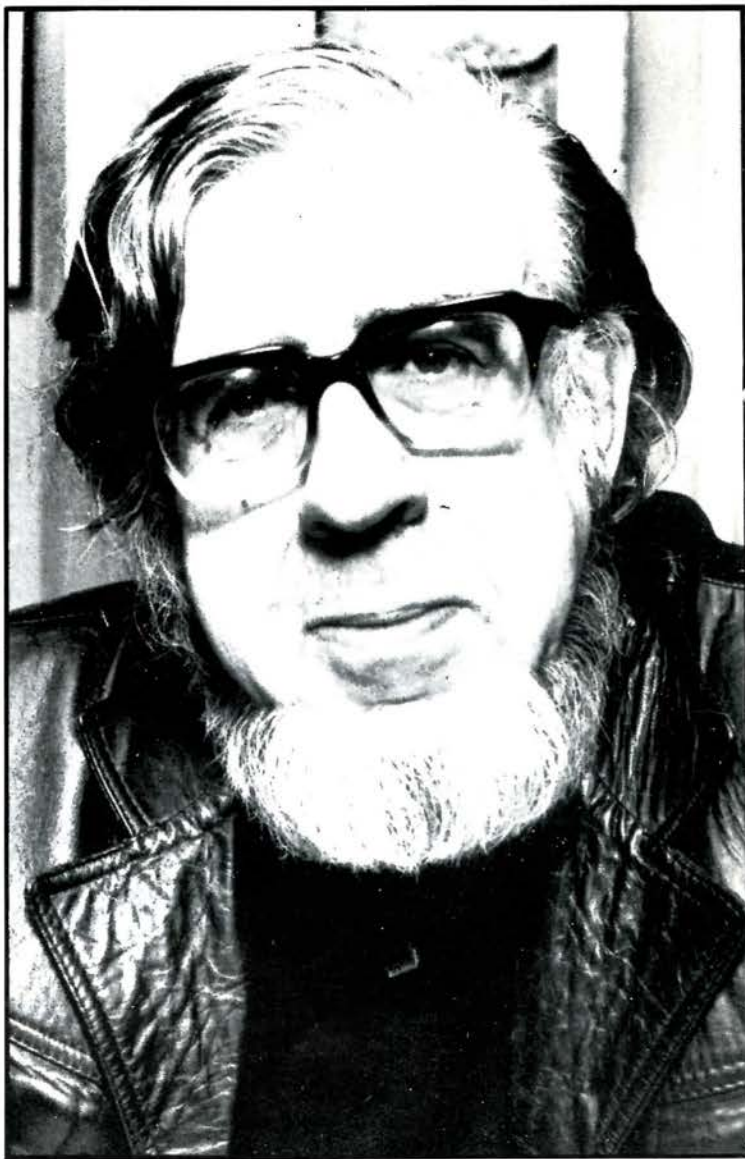


son Chris, who was 12 at the time." The book is set in the winter of 1940–41, when the young Robert Westall was around the same age.

"In a sense I wanted to stand beside him as another 12-year-old. It's like in the old Viking sagas; the main occupation of Dads in those is to go round with their sons and hold their coats when the trouble starts, or give them advice, and one of the greatest honours is to be allowed to go off a-Viking with your son.

"Anyway, Chris decided to let me into the gang he was in at the time, and it was absolutely fascinating. The other kids were a bit like hostile natives at first, but then they started to talk. They'd built their own little place out of scraps, and that's where I got the idea of this little tribe, nicking bricks, sand, sacks and so on.

"The experience I'd had as a teacher helped in the writing, too. It's great having to explain Henry Moore to a roomful of sceptics in 500 words. It helps you keep things *brief*, and to the point. I read Chris what I'd written every Sunday at tea time, and he was great. If he got bored he'd wander off



or start reading the **Radio Times**. Then I knew that I had to change that bit. It hurt, but it was very good for me. I think more authors should be made to read their work aloud, locked in a room with children — especially blunt children. In fact I don't see how you can write for kids unless you're a parent or a teacher, unless you *know* kids."

He feels that Chris's direct criticism and help gave **The Machine Gunners** its pace and readability. But the subject matter gave it plenty of zip, too, and that came direct from his own experiences. "The war was terrific fun for children like me — all those guns and aircraft and enough danger to make you feel like a man but not scare the wits out of you all the time. Chas McGill is Chris, physically — but he's me emotionally."

Sadly, Chris — who was Robert's only son — died in a motorbike accident four years ago when he was 18. "What can I say, but that he died the way he wanted and that he'd had a good life. I still write for him, although after **Fathom Five** the books got more "literary". He never read any of the

others all the way through like **The Machine Gunners**. He reckoned I was going off. **The Machine Gunners** was the easiest of my books to write; the more you learn, the harder it gets. I'm over the grief now, but I still miss him badly."

Chris and his motorbike played a part in the writing of **The Devil on the Road**, a novel where the main character — John Webster — rides off on his motorbike into the Suffolk countryside and finds himself entangled in the witch hunts and Puritanism of the seventeenth century. "Chris really genned me up on all the motorbike terminology for the book — and John Webster is him."

The Devil on the Road is one of several Westall novels to deal with the occult, magic — and relationships between men and women, all of which are connected in his mind. "I haven't ever seen a ghost, but I've had a couple of strange encounters. I'm very sensitive to the atmosphere of rooms and buildings — I've done a fair amount of writing about architecture — and I feel there's a lot in the theory that ghosts are like tape recordings, that violent events linger on in the atmosphere of places where they've happened."

"But as a writer I see ghosts more as a device for going into the depths of a character in an interesting way. In **The Scarecrows**, for example, the scarecrows themselves are a device for dealing with the main character's feelings. If you went into a whole load of philosophy you'd be boring, you'd lose the kids. The ghosts are a way of exploring someone's inner reality. Writing's about resolving tensions, anyway. We write novels because we have tensions we dissolve when we write. All the power of my books comes from the crinkling in my personality when two parts of me move towards each other, like two parts of the Earth's surface moving together to form a mountain range."

The female principle also plays a large part in **The Devil on the Road**; "I suppose that book was my approach to The Female. I think women possess three quarters of the power in the human race — that's why men oppress them. They're magical, but dangerous, a little like those bombers in the war — they're a danger you want to play with, the magic sex; and magic is good."

When he talks about children, the words "magic", "primeval", "tribal", "instinctive" are often on his lips. "Kids are like that, you could see it in the war. I'm doing a non-fiction book about children during the Blitz, and I'm getting my material from interviews with people who are in their 40s and 50s now. Some of the stories of kids stealing rifles from armouries or machine guns from crashed planes are even more incredible than in **The Machine Gunners**. It was tribal, in a way; their Dads were off fighting, so they were learning to fight, too."

He also believes that it's vital to tackle important subjects in children's books. "Children are realists. They want to tackle the big subjects like sex, death, decay, war. They want realism, and on the subject of language I can't do any

more than quote a kid who said to me that a child who doesn't swear today must be a "bloody Martian zombie."

"I see myself as being in direct competition with the stuff kids see and read that their parents don't want them to. I'm endlessly at war against trash, the sort of stuff which means to titillate, exploit, sell. I want to integrate kids' interests, make them think, whereas trash disorganises their thoughts. Enid Blyton won't make them think, and neither will the childhood memoirs of some upper middle class spinster lady."

"I'd like to write a book so compulsive, so powerful, that a kid would turn off **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** on the family video to read it. If you want to do that you've got to be just as bloody powerful and just as bloody compulsive as the trash kids are getting and which keeps them hooked."

Being in education — and especially in careers work — Robert Westall has some fairly strong opinions on what our schools, and our society are doing (or not doing) for today's kids.

"I always remember what Michael Duane said in Leila Berg's **Risinghill**. The ruling classes train the vast bulk of kids to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, but skim off the top 20 per cent of bright children. I feel I was skimmed off, I was one of the bright workers who was brought into the middle class and given enough to make me want to hold on to it. In that way the ruling classes form a protective ring around themselves, a ring around the inner circle which is never really seen but where the power is."

"What worries me is what happens to the rest, that vast bulk who are just getting tossed on the scrap heap at the

moment. It's like a super saturated solution; you put more and more into it, and suddenly the crystals are going to appear before you know it. It could go a lot of ways — it could go super-Toxteth, super-suicidal, super-drug. And the buggers can't see it! They can't see that if you gave people status and meaning in life they wouldn't be worried about money. We don't need to spend money on things, just people. I've written to **The Times** about it, but they don't even acknowledge your letter — so what can you do?"

One thing he's doing at the moment is writing a novel called **Future Track 5** which is set in 2010, when unemployment for the vast mass of the population has become a fact of life. Society is divided into three levels, with the "Unems" being the lowest and herded into ghettos. The ruling classes' final solution is simple — mass slaughter of the innocents.

It might sound very gloomy, and it's certain that Robert Westall himself isn't too optimistic about the near future. But he's still enough of a Geordie to laugh as he's preaching doom, and although he bears a striking resemblance to Captain Ahab or an Old Testament prophet, he's still got plenty of laugh lines just above his iron-grey beard. And one thing he's sure of: the inevitability of a sticky moment on Judgement Day.

"When that last trump goes I know I'm not only going to have to face my Maker — I'm also going to have to face Chris. And I know which one will be hardest to please." ●



Robert Westall

The Books

The Machine Gunners
Macmillan, 0 333 18644 3, £4.95
Puffin, 0 14 03 0973 X, 95p

Fathom Five
Macmillan, 0 333 27385 0, £4.95
Puffin, 0 14 03 1353 2, £1.25

The Watch House
Macmillan, 0 333 23237 2, £4.95
Puffin, 0 14 03 1285 4, 95p

The Wind Eye
Macmillan, 0 333 21187 1, £4.95
Puffin Plus, 0 14 03 1374 5, £1.10

Devil on the Road
Macmillan, (out of print)
Puffin Plus, 0 14 03 1358 3, £1.15

The Scarecrows
Chatto and Windus, 0 7011 2556 X, £5.50

Break of Dark
Chatto and Windus, 0 7011 2614 0, £5.50

Teenage Fiction Award

The winners of the second Young Observer/Rank Organisation Fiction Prize were announced in November.

The judges awarded two first prizes to

Mary Melwood for *The Watcher Bee*

(Deutsch, 0 233 97432 6, £4.50)

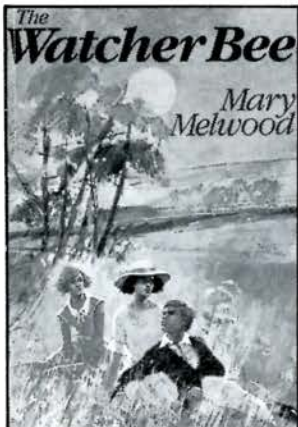
and Jan Mark for *Aquarius*

(Kestrel, 0 7226 5793 5, £5.95)

The Watcher Bee is the story of Kate, growing up in a Midland village in the thirties. "Nothing much happens" said one of the judges "but one is rivetted. It's full of fascinatingly detailed observations of character, place and behaviour and it's utterly convincing. Kate displays all the gawkiness of growing up but it's done completely without self-pity or self-consciousness".

Mary Melwood reveals that *The Watcher Bee* is partly autobiographical. She tells here of how she came to write it.

Mary Melwood, courtesy of the Observer



I am already beginning to forget how I felt and what it was which made me begin *The Watcher Bee*, but I do remember how the first lines suddenly came into my head when I was busy doing something else and I rushed to a pen and paper and wrote them before I forgot them.

That was over three years ago, in October 1979. I don't think I had any clear idea at first of what was going to happen to the two children mentioned in the first lines although usually I 'feel' my characters for a long time, sometimes months, even years before they create themselves on paper.

As the background for my stories — plays too — because I have written more plays than stories — I always 'see' the landscape I knew as a child though it changes — a wood moves here or there, or a river puts in an appearance, and so on. On the whole I haven't consciously used definite events and people but with *The Watcher Bee*, more than with anything else written before that, I deliberately cast my mind back to childhood events and feeling. It was surprising how much I remembered of what I had thought forgotten for ever. Somewhere mixed up in the strange moods and sensations which come to a writer, there was the desire to recapture, however faintly, some of the delight I used to feel in being alive. There was such a joy in Nature — woods, orchards and fields — There was so much space.

Aquarius recounts the fortunes of Viner, a water diviner as he travels from a land of floods where his skill is not needed to a land of drought where his craft assumes the character of a mystery and the King becomes his friend. The appeal of the book for one judge lies "in the powerful evocation of a land that has never been and a time no-one has ever known. It has bleakness but also warmth and humanity. Viner, its strange anti-hero is compelling. He draws you along through the story."

Jan Mark, who confesses to much pain and agony during the writing of *Aquarius* reflects here on her creation, Viner.

The hero of a book is normally the main character. The villain may be, and often is, more interesting, but it is usually possible to tell which is which, even if the reader has serious reservations about the hero's conduct or secretly admires the villain. In *Aquarius* I tried to present a leading character who was not defined one way or the other, leaving the reader to form his own conclusions. Viner may appear to be a hero at the outset, because his behaviour is largely unexceptionable, but as the story progresses his moral attitudes degenerate to the point where I would

have thought it impossible to condone what he is doing. I myself disapprove strongly of his actions, being unable to find anything attractive or admirable in a man who is ready to destroy another in order to gratify his own ambition, and I am intrigued by people who try and excuse him on various grounds, one of these being the dubious assertion that the results of his actions are not quite as catastrophic as he would be prepared to allow.

Viner's progressive disregard for everyone's advancement but his own seems to me to overshadow any other qualities he may have. He

Jan Mark, courtesy of the Observer



possesses courage of a sort, but he is also ruthless, dishonest and brutal; and his tenuous sympathy evaporates when he discovers that it does not pay the expected interest on his investment.

When Jane Austen wrote *Emma* she stated that she was introducing a heroine that no one but herself would much like. I seem to have gone entirely in the other direction by creating a hero whom everyone likes very much better than I do.

Runners-up

The Earth Witch
Louise Lawrence, Collins,
0 00 184205 6, £5.25

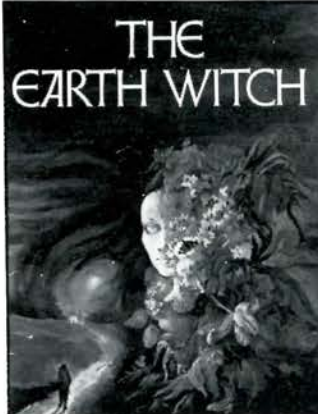
Owen is bewitched by the mysterious Bronwen Davis, caught up in mystical and natural forces which threaten to overpower him. A powerful fantasy set in the Welsh hills.

The Hollow Lane
Jane Gardam, Julia MacRae,
0 86203 023 4, £5.25

Nine linked stories tell a mini-saga of two families. A celebration of the Cumbrian landscape and people, rich in character, incident and humour.

Dance on My Grave
Aidan Chambers, Bodley
Head, 0 370 30366 0, £4.25

Technically innovative and uncompromising in its exploration of the relationships between Hal and Barry, and Hal and himself.



A Tide Flowing
Joan Phipson, Methuen
0 416 21470 3, £4.95

Paul, grief stricken at his mother's death by drowning finds solace and consolation in a friendship with a handicapped girl.

The Fortunate Few
Tim Kennemore, Faber,
0 571 11732 5, £3.95

A witty, cynical look at sport

and life in the not too distant future with anti-heroine Jodie Bell more than a match for the corruption and ruthlessness of competitive league gymnastics.

The Touchstone

Gabriel Alington, Heinemann, 0 434 926736 6, £4.95

The story of Hester training to be a ballet dancer, growing up in the forties, coping with family, friends, success and failure.

Nobody's Perfect

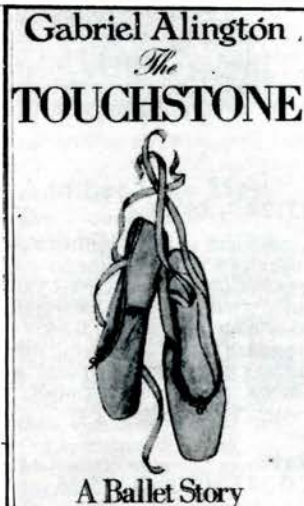
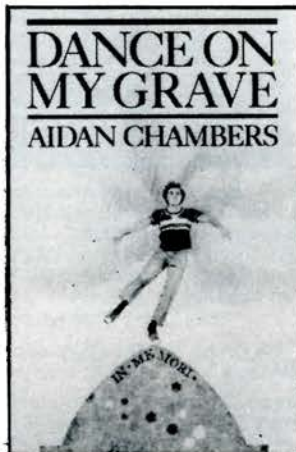
Jacqueline Wilson, Oxford, 0 19 271463 5, £5.95

Sandra, growing up in conflict with her mother and step father is determined to trace her real father with the help of a new boyfriend.

Bad Friday

Norman Smith, Trinity Arts (516 Coventry Road, Small Heath, Birmingham B10 0UN), £2

The life, loves and friendship of a group of black teenagers on the dole in Birmingham. Told in West Indian dialect, this interested and impressed the judges.



Pat Triggs talks to Janet Crumbie about the competition

The aim of the prize, says the press release, is to 'encourage writers and publishers to provide a wider range of reading material for the teenage market'. I asked Janet Crumbie, editor of the Young Observer and one of the four judges, what sort of teenager she had in mind when she was reading the entries. "I started the competition last year very much with the readers of the Young Observer in mind: ten to sixteen year olds who are moving away from children's books but can't find books to read which are for them, which speak to them as teenagers. All they seem to be offered is Agatha Christie or Somerset Maugham."

None of this year's winners or shortlist could really be called an easy read. How did she think the ten to sixteen-year-olds she had in mind would cope? "They are all very bright. The entries we get for our competitions, the letters they write show that. I don't think they'd be put off by something demanding that challenged them. We were looking for a good story, one that gripped and held you. A story you could return to again and again and find pleasure in it."

For this year's judges (Leon Garfield, Anne Schlee and Frank Delaney were the other three) part of that pleasure seems to have been associated with length; several of the shortlist are well on the way to 300 pages. And two of the shorter novels *Nobody's Perfect* and *The Fortunate Few* while highly praised were thought to be too 'slight' to merit first prize. The return read also helped to sort the winners from the rest. 'Powerful' was a word frequently used to describe the immediate impact of a novel but a reread of, for instance, *Dance on My Grave* (which provoked much discussion among the judges) revealed flaws in form and content, which kept it from first place.

In the end the standard was so high and agreement so impossible to reach that two first prizes were awarded and the Rank Organisation who usually give £500 to the winner upped the prize money so each could receive £400.

I asked Janet Crumbie whether she felt the competition was indeed stimulating publishers to fill a gap in the market. "We certainly had more entries this year. 56 novels from 24 publishers, a big increase over last year. And I think it's fair to say that many of the books on the shortlist this year would have won in the previous year." Is publishing reacting? Or is the competition getting established and attracting books that would have been published anyway? Who knows? Being shortlisted might mean a safe library sale or paperback publication (though two are in 'paperback' already). How else are all those Young Observer readers going to get to these titles — even affluent middle-class pocket money stops short at hardbacks doesn't it?

If you are wondering how the needs of all the non-Observer reading teenagers are going to be met if these titles are setting the trend for teenage publishing — you're not the only one. Turn Over.

Peter Carter

Of Anglo-Irish descent, Peter Carter considers himself a 'realistic' writer. Fantasy has no particular appeal for him, although this is merely temperamental and is not meant to be a criticism. Most of all he admires the resilience, humour and irony with which ordinary men and women face their daily lives.

In his books he tries not to blink at the roughness of life.

However, like many other authors, he is prepared to let his books speak for themselves.

Books by Peter Carter:

0 19 271356 6	
The Black Lamp	£3.25
0 19 271367 1	
The Gates of Paradise	£3.95
0 19 271359 0	
Madatan	£4.25
0 19 271438 4	
The Sentinels	£4.75
0 19 271405 8	
Under Goliath	£3.75
0 19 274529 8	
Grimms' Fairy Tales	£7.95

His latest novel, **Children of the Book**, published 2 December 1982, prompted the following:

"The Siege of Vienna by the Turks, in 1683, is the subject of Peter Carter's ambitious and scintillating new novel. "... a book which deeply rewards the effort it asks of its readers."

The Times Educational Supplement
14 January 1983

Children of the Book
0 19 271456 2 £6.95

**Oxford Books
for Children**

Teenage Fiction— another uninspired year

An alternative view of 1982 from Steve Bowles

The Young Observer/Rank Organisation film prize is intended to encourage writers and publishers to provide a wide range of reader material for the teenage market. According to the judge for 1982 the standard of entries was 'extremely high'. They awarded two first prizes, typed as 'popular classics, to be read again and again'.

Do English teachers in secondary schools trying hard to turn pupils who *can* read into ones who *do* read, and desperate for books to help them, take such an optimistic view?

We asked **Steve Bowles** to look through last year's hardbacks.

From where I stand it was an uninspired year. Another uninspired year. Every aspect of the children's book world seems to conspire against the publication of books which capture the imagination of the vast majority of secondary school kids. Why when everyone knows how vital title covers and general visual appeal are, is the standard of packaging (with a few notable exceptions) so terrible? Even ignoring that crucial detail, too often the writing itself is badly out-of-touch with the tastes and experiences of the audience.

I was able to find few books of any use in capturing boys or in appealing to girls on the look out for stories to follow the *Sweet Dreams* series. If the ones I have chosen are 'good', they are good of their kind. In the main you'll find readers for them amongst those who are capable readers and go in for similar stuff already. In conventional school terms the audience for most of them is made up of some of those who'll end up taking 'O' levels. Minority stuff. I can see some of these titles being of use in school — but only if they appear in attractive paperback editions. Quite apart from the turn-off effect hardbacks have on secondary kids, at these prices no English department can consider short sets or even a one-off for the class library.

Nobody's Perfect

Jacqueline Wilson, Oxford, 0 19 271463 5, £5.95

This is the kind of book which would have appeared in a Pyramid or a Topliner a few years ago. Illogically, I find my eyes being drawn repeatedly to the price tag, matching it against the quality of the writing and frowning. "Illogically", because it's one of the more readable books here, dealing with conflict with mother and step-father, sibling rivalry, a blind date, the beginnings of love and Sandra's search for her real father. As usual, one wishes for writers and editors who recognise that those reading books at this level will not, by and large, react when reference is made to Spare Rib, Laura Ashley, Dürer, the Brontës etc. etc. The ultra-tame "daring bits" seem forced, too, but it'll meet with some approval despite its flaws.

Tiger Eyes

Judy Blume, Heinemann, 0 434 92885 2, £4.95

Judy Blume's rapport with her audience is kids' book folk-lore and, though it's 200+ pages, there's no reason why her new one shouldn't prove popular too. Davey's father, a small shopkeeper, is shot dead by an unidentified robber and the novel chronicles the way the family adjusts, helped — and hindered — by a year's stay with Davey's ultra-cautious Aunt and Uncle. Not one of the author's best but, like *Deenie*, it'll be particularly useful at the upper end of the Blume range — Davey has her 16th birthday in the book. Side issues include romance with an outdoors type, a friend with a drink problem plus the usual family wrangles.

Buddy

Nigel Hinton, Dent, 0 460 06089 9, £5.95

This is one of the more interesting teenage novels to emerge recently. Aesthetically speaking, it's a little cluttered; Buddy's problems at home and school begin to expand into "spooky house" and (abortive) "boy hero catches villains" stuff. But this produces the variety lacking in the author's worthy but rather intense and ponderous *Collision Course* where the central character's agonising dominates. There's an interesting jacket (despite the — cost-cutting? — absence of full colour) but the sooner a paperback arrives, the better.

Piggy in the Middle

Jan Needle, Deutsch, 0 233 97481 4, £3.95 (paperback)

Sandra's life-long desire to be a policewoman dims as she sees her superiors breaking the rules to pin Yusuf Mansoor's murder on his son, Noor Allahi, an acquaintance from school. Her relationship with her



journalist boyfriend, who's seeking an NF connection, becomes even more strained and she starts sleeping with an older Jekyll-and-Hyde colleague. It can't end well... Not as useful as *Sense of Shame* (Lions) but arguably Jan Needle's best book. A writer so prolific isn't likely to produce flawless stories but he makes up in power what he lacks in polish. This mustn't be missed; make an audience for it.

The Soutar Retrospective

Ian Strachan, Oxford, 0 19 271464 3, £5.95

Looking at this book's title, I think someone's crazy — when is it ever going to get off a library shelf? The story's about Kate's fortnight in Cornwall where her painter-father is setting up an exhibition. She falls for a sexy local yob who leads her into some tricky scrapes, ending with a climactic fire. Solid stuff — 170 pages of smallish print — and ultimately there's little more in it than in *Nobody's Perfect* but, for some, it could be a useful extension of their linguistic experience; there are stylistic flashes which show Ian Strachan to have considerably more flair than most, even if he doesn't appear to know (or care) much about what most kids can read.

Friends and Sisters

Sandy Asher, Gollancz, 0 575 03124 7, £5.50

Coming from America, this has a little more dash and vivacity than most of its British counterparts. It makes a significant addition to the growing pile of novels with which one hopes to extend the depth of teenage girls' reading. Till Ruthie arrives, Denise is too intent on solving the world's problems and too out of the boys-and-fashion scene to find friends at school. But Ruthie has to cope with her parents' past in the concentration camps of W.W.II, a never-discussed family secret which nearly destroys her. Quite a bit more dense than Judy Blume then, but one you might try with those who've liked Deborah Hautzig, Toeckey Jones etc.

The Green Behind the Glass

Adèle Geras, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10808 X, £5.25

Eight love stories. None has a really contemporary setting or theme — the modern ones seem to be told through a romantically distancing haze and a couple are period pieces. Still, there are some interesting variations on conventional narrative structures and a couple of neatly ambiguous endings. Those tolerant enough to stand the jacket might enjoy them as a gentle way of passing a couple of hours.

The Dark Behind the Curtain

Gillian Cross, Oxford, 0 19 271457 0, £5.95

A ghost story which revolves around a school production of *Sweeney Todd*. The emotions generated by the production "activate" the spirits of



ill-treated Victorian children and disaster nearly ensues. I can't say I believed in the central relationship between Jackus and the evily-glittering son of his mother's best friend but, if you're looking for a trad story and don't demand too much realism in the characterisation, then you could get into this.

Superbike!

Jamie Brown, Heinemann, 0 434 92995 6, £4.95

Over-long, somewhat flat and predictable but its chances have soared had it been decently presented (see Scholastic's **Action Books**). Nevertheless, there is more interest in motorbikes amongst boys than in most other subjects dealt with in fiction and this just might take the eye of some who enjoy books too. It's a standard run through a Canadian boy's acquisition and preparation of a racing bike, followed by his first season's road racing. A little family conflict and romantic interest broaden the appeal.

The Wave

Morta Rhue, Kestrel, 0 7226 5810 9, £4.95

Already reviewed in the last issue of **Books for Keeps** but well worth mentioning again. A fascinating tautly-constructed novelisation of a true incident: a Californian high school teacher starts an experiment to show his history class how the Nazis came to power. **The Wave** — the movement he creates — proves *too* attractive: its mottoes and salutes quickly dominate the whole school; those who resist are pressured to back down. What can the teacher do? One hundred tense pages — start reading and it's difficult to stop. For once an O.K. cover and you won't have to wait for the paperback. It was published simultaneously. (Puffin Plus, 0 14 03 1522 5, £1.25).

School's OK

ed. Josie Karavasil, Evans, 0 237 45653 2, £4.95

Original short stories, mostly about school though some have only a marginal connection. It is a collection for teachers to note because it contains one really good story, Jan Dean's **Woof**, which you may have heard on BBC Schools. It's a tale of a disturbed boy who upsets teachers by pretending to be a dog — till the brutal, old-school metalwork teacher takes a hand and his oddity begins to manifest itself less obviously but much more destructively. Some others here you could use at a pinch but **Woof** is a must.

Ghost After Ghost

ed. Aidan Chambers, Kestrel, 0 7226 5772 2, £4.95

The standard here is rather better overall and, unusually, this is a hardback that's not painful to look at. It also has **The Haunting of Chas McGill** which, despite its length, strange ending and lack of drama, is one that all users of Westall's **Machine Gunners** ought to know. Several others are worth looking at for their endings, notably Joan Aiken's **Old Fillikin** — interesting to compare with Lance Salway's less accomplished **Such a Sweet Little Girl**. John Gordon's **If She Bends, She Breaks** could also be a useful one to know for reading aloud.

War Without Friends

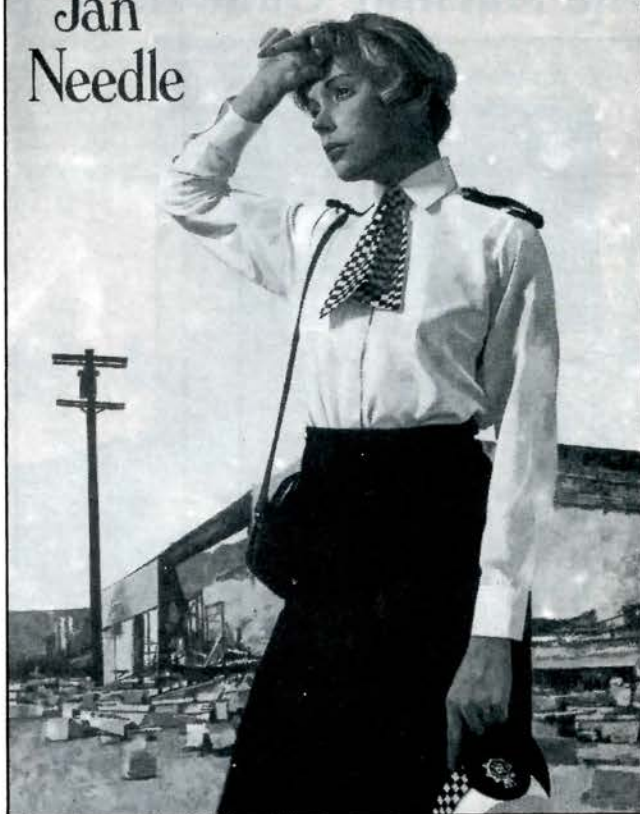
Evert Hartman, Chatto & Windus, 0 7011 2650 7, £5.50

This novel covers a couple of years in the life of a Dutch boy whose father is in the National Socialist party. The episodes cover attacks by other boys at school, brushes with black marketeers, a narrow escape in a British raid and his attempts to become friendly with a girl in his class. Eventually, of course, he comes to see the Nazis as evil. The problems of covering so much time ultimately defeat Evert Hartman but there are lots of powerful incidents. It could be useful for committed readers interested in the war (fans of Hans Peter Richter's **Friedrich** perhaps). The drab jacket might create considerable selling problems, however.



PIGGY IN THE MIDDLE

Jan
Needle



The Isis Pedlar

Monica Hughes, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10834 9, £5.25

Monica Hughes is currently a minor cult with my top-band fourth years so this will be welcomed by those who've already taken the other two **Isis** novels (**Magnet**). The opening is quite ghastly, with a really crude emphasis on the stage Irishness of the con-man who nearly causes disaster by ignoring the quarantine on **Isis**. But this shamrock stuff is either played down or else ceases to be noticed in the flow of events. Fans will not be disappointed, certainly.

Young Legionary

Douglas Hill, Gollancz, 0 575 03201 4, £4.95

One of the exceptions which does reach out beyond a small minority of kids although, like all SF, there are limits to its appeal. Douglas Hill has got nearer than most to writing popular genre fiction which is also good quality — in contrast, for example, to the Terrance Dicks/Roy Brown school where the books are readable but so poorly-written as to be something of an insult to kids. The action of these four stories pre-dates that of the **Last Legionary** quartet (**Piccolo**) and deals with Keill Randor's early years in the Legions of Moros. Like the four novels, they are fast-paced with plenty of violent action. They are to be welcomed as possible ways of extending the novels' audience still further. Any improvement in quality with an SF story usually brings increased difficulty and even Douglas Hill doesn't grab everybody from page one. One of these might be tried as a read-aloud to introduce both this book and the slightly more demanding quartet. For this purpose, I'd suggest **Demolition** in which Oni, the girl who has trained alongside Keill, matches him chop for karate chop and broken plank for smashed table. ●

Cornwall is at it again

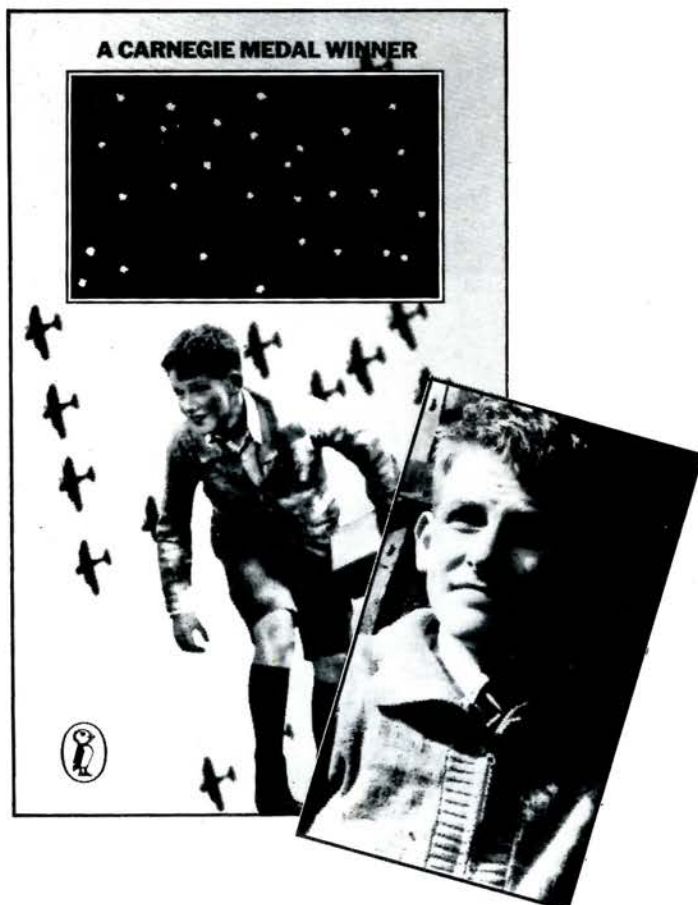
Two years ago the first Cornwall Children's Book Fair was launched. It was massively successful. Twenty authors made the trip West and between them met 2,000 children whose enthusiasm was reward enough for all the effort. Having drawn breath the organising committee is off again and the Second Cornwall Book Fair (as before at the Richard Lander School in Truro) takes place from February 10th-12th.

Already booked are Pat Hutchins, Elizabeth Beresford, Althea, John Ryan, Leon Garfield, Michael Rosen, Bernard Ashley, the Rev Awdrey, Gene Kemp and John Branfield. As well as authors there will be book binding, screen printing, kite-making, and a mass of other exhibitions and activities including a helicopter parked on the school field.

We wish them all good luck.

SOUND & VISION

The Machine Gunners is coming



Chas McGill and the rest of the gang from Garmouth are about to capture our screens in a six part television adaptation of Robert Westall's much-read, award-winning book. It's said to be the most expensive BBC children's project this year. Tony Bradman talked to Paul Stone who produced it.

When the first episode of *The Machine Gunners* goes out at around 5.10 pm on Wednesday, February 23, kids all over the country will finally get what they could have had years ago. The television history of Robert Westall's book reads almost like one of his own plots, with good luck at the beginning, mistakes and a final resolution.

The screen rights to *The Machine Gunners* were in fact snapped up by a television company very soon after it was published in 1975. But Robert Westall wasn't happy with the screenplays he was shown, and the project collapsed before any film was loaded into a single camera.

Then last year, the BBC approached him to write a play, a privilege he declined on the grounds playwriting wasn't up his particular street. But he did mention to Paul Stone (the executive producer of children's drama at the Beeb) that *The Machine Gunners* was still on offer — and Paul Stone snapped it up.

Robert Westall couldn't have picked his man better. "Ever since I first read the book," says Paul, "I'd wanted to run it into a television series. It's absolutely stunning, a book which you can't put down, to use an old cliché. I admired it on every point — the early idealism of the kids which gets knocked about, the tremendously exciting story which has a real bone to it in a drama of ideas, the unsentimental but terribly realistic approach to World War II from a kid's viewpoint. The characterisations and humour in the book are superb."

So the mighty Beeb swung into action to translate Robert Westall's story into television. After the adaptation, by William Corlett (who wrote *Barriers*), Paul's first concern — and also that of his director, Colin Cant — was accuracy. How to recreate wartime Garmouth and its inhabitants?

"We've shot the whole series on location in Newcastle and the area surrounding. I particularly wanted to capture an authentic flavour of the north-east. Both Colin and I felt that we should cast the series from real Tynesiders, and we have chosen our actors solely from the local people. Of course, the adults are all Equity members, but for the children we simply went round local schools. We think we've got some marvellous kids, too."

Authenticity has been the key word of the production, Paul and his crew going to great lengths to get sets, props and costumes exactly right. "We found that there were still some sites in Newcastle which were bomb damaged from the last war, so that helped. The local people have been marvellous, too, especially with things like taking down TV aerials when we asked them to."

"On one occasion we were filming at night and people kept coming out of their houses to give us cups of tea and tell us their memories of the Blitz. One lady told us we'd put our searchlight in exactly the right place — where they'd put one in the war. Another said that she couldn't understand why we were shooting in one particular house. She said we ought to go to Mrs So-and-So's, because she knew for a fact that Mrs So-and-So hadn't changed her curtains since 1944."

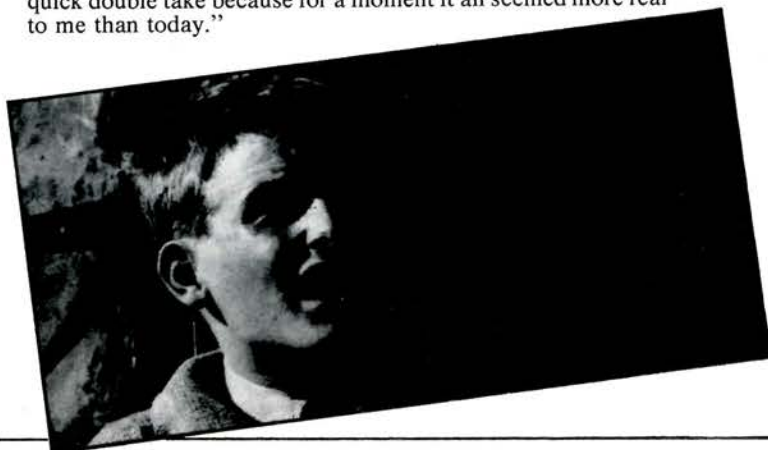
Paul and his team enlisted the aid of The Imperial War Museum, where they found some remarkable film of dogfights in the war and were given much valuable help in other areas. The team also went to the lengths of building their own barrage balloon, which caused quite a stir in Newcastle. At another stage they discovered a real tail section from a crashed German bomber, an essential part of the story — but it was too fragile to move. So the BBC visual effects department simply built a complete, full-scale replica of it for filming.

"The most difficult sequences have been the ones involving planes. The footage we got from The War Museum was excellent, but there wasn't that much, so we resorted to filming some scenes with models. The models are remarkably good but it's a very tricky operation — getting the right scale is extremely difficult."

The machine gun itself caused a few problems, too. "We had two in the end, both exactly the same — but one's real and one's a dummy. The children couldn't handle the real one, it was too dangerous, so they're only seen with the dummy. But we had to fire the real one in several scenes, and that was quite frightening. The noise is absolutely stunning, especially when it was fired in The Fortress which the children build, because it's a very enclosed space. We had to alert the whole neighbourhood and the police beforehand, but we did use blanks. Those are prepared specially by the BBC's own armourers."

Shooting for the series took 12 weeks, and was within schedule despite some nasty autumn weather. Robert Westall himself was able to go along early during the shooting to see how Paul Stone and his crew were getting on.

"I must say I was very impressed with the obvious effort they'd put in to getting everything right," he said. "I found myself walking into the playground of a 1940s school, with all the windows covered in anti-blast tape, sandbags round the doors and shelters; boys with their hair shorn, girls with scarves tied across their chests skipping, everyone with a gasmask. I did a quick double take because for a moment it all seemed more real to me than today."



SOUND & VISION

You and Me — a new direction

A new series of *You and Me*, the BBC TV programme for nursery and infant children starts this term. 'The group of twenty new programmes take us in a new direction' said **Richard Callanan**, the series' producer. 'For the first time we are using books as the centrepiece of half of the programmes. The emphasis is on learning *about* reading rather than learning *to* read. We indicate how a book works and introduce words like 'book', 'cover' and 'page'. By presenting a range of stories — fantasy, traditional tales, stories of 'everyday life' — we aim to make children familiar with patterns of written language they will later read for themselves. We are also concerned to motivate interest in books and reading. The "stars" of the series — two "child puppets", Cosmo and Dibs — are always eager to have stories read to them. And the stories we have chosen to feature are from the best of their kind.

"The books chosen and the methods of presentation reflect the programme's commitment to positive discrimination in connection with race, gender roles and class. We aim to show a variety of form of family, social and working life, a variety of faces, voices and behaviour and encourage respect for them all.

"We hope that children will have the stories reread to them after the programmes."

The books are

Charlie Strong and his Favourite Song Frances Knowles and Brian Thompson, Longman, 1975. (Breakthrough Red Set F) £1.60

Where's Spot? Eric Hill, Heinemann, £2.95

New Blue Shoes Eve Rice, The Bodley Head, £2.25; Puffin Books, 80p

Meg's Car Helen Nicoll and Jan Pienkowski, Heinemann, £2.95; Puffin Books, £1.00

Meg at Sea Helen Nicoll and Jan Pienkowski, Heinemann, £3.10; Puffin Books, 95p

On My Way to School Celia Berridge, André Deutsch, £2.95

The Gingerbread Man (traditional, rewritten).

Maxine's Piano Chris Abuk (specially commissioned for the programme to be published later 1983 by Longmans).

Norton's Night-time Jane Breskin Zalben, Fontana Picture Lions, 90p

Raju's Dream Barrinder Kalsi (specially commissioned for the programme, as yet unpublished).

(*You and Me* runs this term from 10th January to 10th February — Mondays and Wednesdays at 10.00 am. Tuesday and Thursday at 2.00 pm. The series will be repeated in June this year and a further six times in the following four years.

The Dark Crystal — a fantasy for all the family

Not wanting to compete with E.T. fever the distributors of *The Dark Crystal* are keeping it back until the middle of February. **Books for Keeps** took a twelve-year-old friend to an advance showing of this new variation on the classic conflict between good and evil. In this version Jen the only surviving Gelfling (or so he thinks) is charged with restoring harmony to a divided world by replacing the missing splinter of the Dark Crystal at the exact moment of the Great Conjunction of his planet's Three Suns. Against him are the evil Skesis, cruel tyrants determined to retain their power. Among his friends, the wise and gentle urRu who have sheltered and protected him in preparation for this moment. The film is visually outstanding. The characters and the world they inhabit, designed by Brian Froud, have been brought to the screen by Jim Henson — creator of the Muppets. These puppets are extremely lifelike and the outward appearance of each one matches beautifully its role

in the story. The storyline is strong, simple and easy to follow. Only the final moments when the urRu and the Skesis are united once again as the urSkesis may need explaining to the younger cinema-goers.

Our 12 year old's verdict? "Really great. I'm going to tell my friends to see it."

Two book versions are available, both very faithful to the film.

The Tale of the Dark Crystal Donna Bass, ill. Bruce McNally, Macmillan, 0 333 34406 5, £4.95, a picture book, is strong on illustrations, but rather leaden and uninspired in the retelling.

Novelisation by A.C.H. Smith (same title) (Futura 0 7088 2231 2, £1.50) reads well. Good for Secondary pupils who have enjoyed the film or are 'into' the genre.

(For those who just might not have noticed there are also two E.T. books, both from Sphere, both by William Kotzwinkle.)

Watch the Romans

A new series of BBC TV *Watch* starts on January 11th. (Tuesdays at 11.00, Wednesdays at 2.00 for five weeks). It is about The Romans.

Just published is an activity book of cut-outs, drawings, recipes and quizzes which would be useful for follow-up. It is devised by John Reeve and Patsy Vanags of the British Museum Education Service.

The Romans, British Museum Publications, 0 7141 2024 3, 95p.



Also in view

The Boy who Won the Pools

TVS (Executive Producer Anna Home) is making a bid for the Sunday tea-time audience with this ten part serial about Rodney Baverstock, the sixteen year old schoolboy who wins three quarters of a million pounds on the pools, and falls into a world of rock music, video, and big business. Rodney, you won't be surprised to hear, remains totally cool and laid back about all this and about the cast of 'bizarre' and 'zany' characters who surround him. (All that is except girlfriend, Liz, who is a beautiful, ordinary no-nonsense sort of girl with her values in the right place). We are promised 'hilarious lunacy', and no-one has said 'whacky' yet — but give them time.

The books read as if you need to meet the characters first. Tune in at 5.30 on February 20th. In ten weeks it could become a cult.

The Boy who Won the Pools. Gerard Macdonald, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672062 5, £1.00 (Also available in hardback from Collins).

and

Tucker's Luck

That delinquent with a heart of gold, Tucker Jenkins (played of course by Tod Carty) is back with his own series (BBC 1, Tuesday, March 8th at 5.10, for nine weeks).

Bob Leeson has written a book based on the series **Forty Days of Tucker J** (Fontana Lions, 0 00 672176 1, £1.00) published at the end of February. ●



Photos from the cover of *The Boy Who Won the Pools*

MEET THE BORRIBLES

The *Borribles* first appeared in 1976 to a great deal of critical acclaim (shortlisted for the Whitbread Award, and The Other Award, voted onto the American Library Association's Best Books for Young Adults List) and a lot of noisy controversy.

Given that the book has a generous ration of bad language and violence and is morally ambiguous, it's amazing that it was so well received by the children's book establishment from *The Times* to *Time Out* via the *TES*. Nevertheless it didn't get paperbacked — too strong a meat for Puffins? — and the *Borribles* went underground again.

In 1981 the Young Vic staged *The Great Rumble Hunt* with a cast of London schoolchildren, and Bodley Head published a second book *The Borribles Go for Broke* starring the fearless girl *Borrible*, Chalotte. Now Piccolo have released *The Borribles* in paperback.

Who are these *Borribles*? And what is known about the man who invented them?

"Borribles are generally skinny and have pointed ears... They are pretty tough-looking and always scruffy, with their arses hanging out of their trousers, but apart from that they look just like normal children."

The ears are important and *Borribles* always hide them under woolly hats when they are out and about. If a *Borrible* is caught by the police his ears are clipped and he starts to grow like any ordinary child.

"Normal Kids are turned into Borribles very slowly, almost without being aware of it; but one day they wake up and there it is... A child disappears from a school and the word goes round that he was 'unmanageable'; the chances are he's off managing by himself."

The most famous *Borribles* come from Battersea. It was the Battersea *Borribles* who set up the Great Rumble Hunt. The Rumbles (who can't pronounce their 'r's' and refer to themselves as Wumbles!) live on Rumbledon Common. They look like huge moles or deformed rabbits, with long snouts and beady red eyes. They are the enemies of the *Borribles*, who hate them for their riches, their power, their haughtiness and their possessions. When it looks as if the Rumbles are planning to colonize Battersea (what price the rest of London then?) the *Borribles* answer is a plan to smash the Rumble High Command — Bingo, Torrey Canyon, Oroccoco, Stonks, Chalotte, old Uncle Vulgarian and all.

A small highly-trained hit squad (including two girls) set out on a mission that simultaneously draws on and sends up the fantasy quests of *Hobbits* and the rabbits of *Watership Down*, *James Bond*, *The Magnificent Seven* and *The Guns of Navarone*. Excitement, violence, low cunning, class warfare, betrayal, loyalty, solidarity, bravery, exist side by side and are all called in question by a story that remains ambivalent to the end.

The person responsible for all this is Michael de Larrabeiti.

He was born in Lambeth, brought up in Battersea and went to school in Clapham after failing the eleven plus. His father was a Basque from Bilbao who married a girl from Lavender Hill and settled down there.

The ground over which the *Borribles* fight and travel is the territory of his childhood.

"In those lazy days hardly anyone had a car so the grown ups couldn't take you anywhere, they were too busy at work anyway. When I had an adventure I had to invent it for myself. My favourite adventure was the trek to Wimbledon Common and the other kids in my street would sometimes come with me. It

was my favourite because Wimbledon Common was so rough and wild and exciting and you could explore it for hours and never get to the end of it.

"Wimbledon was a long way. Even if we put our money together, and the others never had any, we couldn't raise enough to pay the fares both ways, so we used to walk there and ride back — if we didn't spend our money on ice-creams. A long trip but we used to invent adventures every step of the way. You could break into two groups and one chase the other or run into shops and hoot at people and knock off an apple and have a good laugh if they chased you. Pulling faces was good as well — they just couldn't understand us at all.

"However much we got separated we always waited for each other at Southfields because that's where everything changed. Climbing those steep hills towards Wimbledon felt more strange than anything else. The streets were wider and cleaner, there was no paper blowing about and there didn't seem to be the slightest speck of dust or dirt; just large tidy lawns spreading out before immaculate houses, detached houses too with all those rooms for only one family. I was awed by it and hated it too, I suppose, but in a way you couldn't define.



Photograph of Michael de Larrabeiti by Bernard Mattimore

"Luckily there was something that we could define and that was kids with posh voices. It rarely, if ever, came to physical warfare, but, taking courage from our numbers and fleetness of foot, we saw to it that all Wimbledon children, with or without the protection of their parents, caught the jagged edge of our vulgar tongues. And heaven help any large house, a fortress to our eyes, that had fruit trees visible. In we would dash in a quick breathless foray to scump and steal. It was everything: danger, fear, effrontery, bravado, pride and revenge.

"Once on the common, and if not too exhausted, we would push ahead and explore further. One day we decided that it was time we crossed the whole wild expanse of green, a real adventure, into the unknown. We had no maps and without maps all land is unexplored; all we had was a vague idea that we were on the fringes of known London and that beyond the horizon was a strange country, so strange that it verged on the foreign, it was near abroad.

"We marched on; up and down hills, through woods and across heaths that seemed endless. It was certain that we should have turned back at Richmond Park, but we went on and discovered the deer. Dusk fell and this was a park that we might get locked in and we didn't know which way to go but we carried on. Suddenly it was pitch dark and the younger kids were crying because they were tired and we hadn't eaten much that day.

"I cannot remember what time it was when we eventually turned the corner into our road but all our families were out and they had a policeman with them. They were standing in groups under lamp-posts, watching, waiting, swearing and losing their tempers.

"I got clipped round the ear of course and the neighbours started on me as the ringleader. My mother got so annoyed with the lot of them that she stopped telling me off and told the neighbours that if their kids didn't have the sense to stand the right way up then they should stay indoors and it was their fault and not mine. It developed into a really good row and I enjoyed it especially because it saved me from getting a really good hiding. My mum just pulled me indoors, gave me a good meal, soaked my feet in a bowl of hot water and laughed at me while I ate. After that I always travelled on my own.

"I suppose, though I wasn't to know it for years to come, that was the way **THE BORRIBLES** began."

The Borribles

Piccolo, 0 330 26857 0, £1.50

Bodley Head, 0 370 10898 1, £2.95

The Borribles go for Broke

Bodley Head, 0 370 30413 6, £3.75 (paperback)

Use that book! No.1 **THE BORRIBLES**

Dennis Woodward, headmaster of Broadwater Junior School in Wandsworth, a confirmed Borrible fan, recommends using the book as the basis for work across the curriculum.

"I read the book to the school in serial form. It was the longest story I have ever presented in this way but it so captured and sustained the interest of the children that there was never any feeling of it dragging. The ten and eleven year olds produced a lot of follow-up work in exploring the Wandsworth and Battersea setting of the story and in discussions about friendship qualities and attitudes and group loyalties. Some fine artwork and drama resulted. Many of these older juniors bought their own copies of the book. Now that it is at last available in paperback I hope more people will want to use it in this way."

Here are some ideas for things to do and talk about

Places

There are Borribles in every city — not just London. Where would you find the nearest Borribles to you?

"It was a typical Borrible hideaway, derelict and decaying. Borribles live where they can in the streets of the big cities but they like abandoned houses best of all. When a house is already occupied they will often use the cellar and they camp in schools at night too if they are left empty and unused."

Invent a tribe of Borribles for your locality. What would they be called?

Visit or look at pictures of derelict, decaying houses. Why are they like that? Could you manage to live like a Borrible? What would it be like?

Names

A Borrible has to win a name by going on an adventure. In the Great Rumble Hunt eight Borribles were chosen to get their names. But

"Those who were not known for their bravery kept very quiet for there are Borribles who go right through life without ever earning themselves a name."

Which sort would you be?

Write to Spiff explaining why you ought to go on the Rumble Hunt.

How did Klocker and Spiff get their names? Invent a story. What adventure would you choose to go on? What name would you have at the end of it? Write about it.

Are people's names important? Why do some people get nicknames? Invent nicknames for the class. What do our names mean? Research the origin and meanings of surnames, first names, place names.

Freedom, Rules, Leadership

"Borribles delight in feeling independent and free and it is this feeling that is most important to them. They have no real leaders, though someone may pop into prominence from time to time, perhaps because he has had a good idea and wants to carry it through. They manage without authority and they get on well enough together, though like everybody, they quarrel."

Is this a good way to live? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

How do you think Borribles settle their quarrels?



Act out a Borrible meeting or squabble.

Do the Borribles really have no leaders? What makes a leader? What use are rules?

The Rumbles

Did you feel sorry for them? What, if anything, is wrong with the Rumbles? Could there ever be peace between Rumbles and Borribles?

In The Book

Which Borrible did you like best? Which would you like to be? Describe yourself. What are you like inside? What do you think of the others?

Is the ending the right ending? Would you change it? How? Do you prefer happy endings or sad?

What was your favourite bit?

Do an illustration. Act it out.

Maps

Make a map of the area and the journey from the book. Read a map of London. Make a wall map or frieze with illustrations as the story progresses.

Treasure

Why do people hunt for treasure? How many sorts of treasure can you think of? Find stories of treasure hunting — fact and fiction?

Why did Klocker want the treasure? Why did Spiff? What will the Rumbles do now?

Songs/Poems/Proverbs

"If a Borrible doesn't look alive he's very soon dead" — Vulge

"It's as easy to drown in soup as in water" — Klocker

"He's got more than enough neck to look up his own earhole" — Chalotte.

Make a list of Borrible proverbs from the book. What do they mean? What do our proverbs mean? Find out where they come from.

Write a Borrible song or poem.

Make a Borrible play. ●

Getting Going with Poetry

Every teacher needs a personal bookshelf of anthologies and collections of favourite poets. Every classroom needs poetry in the book corner.

Pat Triggs has been on the look out for useful additions in the Infant/Junior range.

Once Upon a Rhyme — 101 Poems for Young Children
Edited Sara and Stephen Corrin, ill. Jill Bennett, Faber, 0 571 11913 1, £5.25

Two experienced anthologists picking verse for those venturing beyond nursery rhymes. Lots of old favourites and a sprinkling of new friends — all tried and tested in school. Strong rhymes and rhythms and a delight in words and what can be done with them make a good signpost on the road to poetry.

My Family, 0 237 45649 4

Going Out, 0 237 45648 6
Shona McKellar and Jane Badwin, Evans, £1.25 each.

My favourites from the Poems and Pictures series. Selector and photographer quite rightly get equal billing; each poem is matched by a photograph which offers a talking point and a way into the poem for the young reader. Fifteen poems in each, well chosen for reading aloud and as a starting point for talking and writing: **Daddy Asleep**, **Grumbling Mother** and **My Gran Sleeping**, excellent poems from **My Family**, are all written by children. Attractively presented. Good use of colour to add to and reflect the experience of the poems.

(**Ourselves** and **Night** make up the quartet which is also available in one volume **Here We Go**. Evans, 0 237 45590 0, £5.95).

A Bridge

A bridge is a giant on hands and knees
Kneeling down to fill a gap
And let people cross it on his back.

A bridge is a giant of stone or steel
With a back so hard he doesn't feel
The prodding of sticks or hammering heels.

A bridge is a giant who carries the road
And the lorries on it with heavy loads.
A giant who stays there night and day
And never gets up and goes away.



'A Bridge' from **Come Along Again**

Come Along Again
Stanley Cook, ill. Margaret Wood. £1.25 inc. postage.

Primary teachers in the Kirklees and Calderdale Branch of the National Association for the Teaching of English (N.A.T.E.) have been working enthusiastically with Stanley Cook's poems for some time. Despairing of traditional

publishers they decided to go it alone and offer twenty-seven of them to a wider audience. A child-centred look at everyday things and familiar experiences.

(Write to: Studley House, 7 Cleveland Road, Egerton, Huddersfield HD1 4PP.)

A Third Poetry Book
Compiled by John Foster, Oxford, 0 19 918140 3, £3.95

Another in this excellent series. Something for all facets of 8+ life; school, family, friends, football, holidays, animals, jokes, fantasies and moments of pondering on the meaning of it all. Illustrations, by three artists, and photographs draw the reader in and help him or her make connections.

All the Day Through
Collected by Wes Magee, ill. David Shaw, Evans, 0 237 45597 8, £4.95

A poet and primary headmaster whose work increasingly appears in others' anthologies offers his own selection (and has the good sense not to leave himself out). Ninety poems (in groups which follow a child's day from Early in the Morning to And so to bed). From an enticingly varied collection of voices, wide-ranging in form and content. A real teacher's book bursting with classroom potential.

A Packet of Poems
Chosen by Jill Bennett, ill. Paddy Mounter, Oxford, 0 19 276049 1, £4.95

A bookful of poems about that perennially attractive subject — **FOOD!**

Guaranteed to appeal right across the primary range — especially for those who need poetry which creeps up on them when they aren't looking.

Out of the Blue
Chosen by Fiona Waters, ill. Veroni, Fontana Lions, 0 00 671960 0, £1.00

An anthology of weather poems which became indispensable the moment it appeared. As varied as its subject, rich and accessible for all ages.

A Light in the Attic
Poems and drawings by Shel Silverstein, Cape, 0 224 02063 3, £5.95

A delightful, imagination-stretching mix of the ridiculous and the thoughtful from an American poet who is much anthologised. This will grab 'em — as sure as Milligan.

Zoombaloomballistic
John Rice, ill. Jacqui Aphorpe, Aten Press, 0 903633 07 8, £1.50

The Literature Officer for South East Arts has recently found a new audience for poetry reading and performing in junior and middle schools. This collection, his first for children, is the result of this contact. Poems, rhymes, limericks, slogans with the accent on humour. Sometimes he seems to be trying a bit too hard, to reach his audience — but worth having for gems like **Seaside Song** which takes the ad for a famous lipsmackinthirstquenchin fizzy drink as its model.

(Write to 47 Hendley Drive, Cranbrook, Kent.)

Spine Tingle, 0 7214 0748 X

Comic and Curious Verse, 0 7214 0747 1
Chosen by Zenka and Ian Woodward, Ladybird. 60p each

Useful collections with plenty of come-on appeal. Good value. ●

New fiction from Heinemann Young Books

The Village by the Sea ANITA DESAI

The first full-length novel from this prize-winning Indian author is a marvellous piece of storytelling which vividly describes Indian family life.

434 93436 4 £4.95

Contact with Maldonia JASPER and CHRISTOPHER HOOD

A remarkable fantasy written by novelist Christopher Hood with his eight-year-old son Jasper, whose idea it was. The young hero's adventures in the imaginary country of Maldonia ensure a fast-paced story full of dead-pan humour and witty observation.

434 94327 4 £4.95

Warriors of the Wasteland DOUGLAS HILL

Douglas Hill is a leading writer of science fiction for children. This dramatic story, begun in *The Huntsman*, continues Finn's quest to free his family from the evil, alien Slavers.

434 94283 9 £5.50



PECKIN'

The saddest thing I ever did see
Was a woodpecker peckin' at a plastic tree.
He looks at me, and "Friend," says he,
"Things ain't as sweet as they used to be."

From **A Light in the Attic**



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Written for those starting in regular employment for the first time, this contains useful information such as how wages and salaries are paid, how to look after money and how to budget. Suitable for school-leavers, students and teachers instructing in money matters.

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A concise guide to the City of London, its institutions, and how it works, aimed at young people beginning a course in economics or commerce.

Price £1.75

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More cuts in Children's Publishing

As sales of children's books continue to decline more publishers announce cutbacks in their lists.

In the last issue of **Books for Keeps** we reported big changes at Piccolo which included making editor Jill Mackay redundant and cutting back on new titles and originals. Now it's the turn of the hardback houses.

From March 1st Chatto will no longer have a children's list (it has been publishing about twelve children's books a year). All its children's titles will be transferred to its associate company the Bodley Head.

Also reacting to falling sales is Macmillan Childrens Books. Michael Wace, director of children's books, blames the decline in sales to the institutional market. Schools and libraries have traditionally made up between 80 and 90 per cent of Macmillan's sales of hardback novels, and this figure has been badly affected by shrinking book funds. Macmillan's response is to cut back on the publication of novels and picture books. In future they plan to publish only three or four novels a year, and instead to concentrate on books that will sell well through the trade, in bookshops — maintaining the current level of publishing which is about 60 titles a year.

In both cases the children's editors — Di Denney at Chatto, and Felicity Trotman at Macmillan — have been made redundant, emphasising that the cuts will mainly be felt in the fiction lists.

(For editorial comment, see page 3.)

National Tell a Story Week May 7-14th

Each year the members of the Federation of Children's Book Groups organise a week long celebration of stories, story-telling and reading aloud. Groups all over the country read and tell stories in schools, libraries, shopping centres, parks and playgrounds, on barges, boats, trains and even balloons. All this accompanied by events and activities. The theme for this year is **Treasure**, to mark the centenary of the birth of Robert Louis Stevenson.

The Federation extends an open invitation to all enthusiasts to join in the celebration. Help in organising events comes in the form of a handout packed with ideas and suggestions for events, quizzes and competitions, a booklist, balloons (6p each) and stickers (1p each), and a Treasure poster (6p each).

For details contact Sue Cole, Aptonfields, Hounslow Green, Barnston, Near Dunmow, Essex. Please enclose sae.

If you can't manage an event of your own, look out for things happening locally. Or come along to the Grand Launch Day on May 7th aboard the Steam Coaster 'Robin' at St Katherine's Dock, London. 10.30 - 4.30.

Fun for all the family: games by Colony Holidays, a special author appearance by John Ryan, a Bookshop, a Book Bus, and, of course, the permanent collection of historical ships by the Maritime Trust.

Children's Book Week — the future

The National Book League has agreed to take over the running of Children's Book Week from the Book Marketing Council.

Children's Book Week was originated by the Publishers Association and in recent years has been organised by a committee of the BMC made up of representatives from different areas of the children's book world.

With funding from Lloyds Bank (currently about £12,500) increased publishing and

massive, enthusiastic support from schools, libraries and children's book groups CBW has grown and grown. Commenting on the change, Desmond Clarke — director of the BMC — says that the Council's function is largely to promote book sales. The activities of CBW, bringing children and books together through events in schools, libraries and the community he feels fit better into the terms of reference of the NBL, which includes the Centre for Children's Books.

The NBL is very enthusiastic about the idea. We'll keep you informed about developments.

The Whitbread Awards

This year's £3,000 Whitbread award for a children's book has gone to **The Song of Pentecost** by W.J. Corbett. (Methuen, 0 416 24730 X, £5.95)

It is William Corbett's first book, and he's a rather unusual winner. After leaving secondary modern school at 15 he joined the Merchant Navy, was an army PT instructor during his national service and now, at 44, "digs holes in the ground" on building sites and lives in a council house in Birmingham.

The Song of Pentecost is the story of a group of harvest mice (all with very recognisable human qualities) who leave their rubbish dump home and make a hazardous journey to safety. It is set in William Corbett's own local Lickey Hills. Roald Dahl, this year's judge called the book "an astonishing achievement — far superior to most children's books of our time".

The Runners-up were:

The Secret World of Polly Flint by Helen Cresswell. (Faber & Faber, 0 571 11939 5, £5.25)

A story of a girl who can see things others cannot, in particular the people of the lost village of Grimstone who have slipped the net of time.

War Horse by Michael Morpurgo (Kaye and Ward, 0 7182 3970 9, £4.95)

Set in the first World War, Joey a young horse, tells his story of life on a Devon farm, the people whose lives he touches and their struggle for survival in the blasted wilderness of the Western Front.

Books at Breakfast?

The new Independent Television breakfast service — T.V. AM — promises good coverage of books and the arts generally, especially at the weekend. Children's books seem likely to get more than a casual glance from the head of the children's department who is Anne Wood — producer of Yorkshire TV's **Book Tower** series and founder and co-editor of the magazine **Books for Your Children**.

New Bookguides from Signal

Two new Bookguides which offer help with book selection in difficult areas.

Plays for Young People to Read and Perform, 8-18, compiled by Aidan Chambers (0 903355 10 8, £3.25) is particularly welcome. Over 80 playtexts are collected, grouped and given careful critical consideration. The strength of this excellent compilation lies in the way Aidan Chambers deals with the texts: the needs of the reader, the performer, the individual encountering theatre and developing as a person, the aims of the teacher are all skilfully taken up and woven into a splendidly readable whole. There is an introduction sketching a historical background to plays for children and young people which takes in developments in education, publishing and theatre and nicely 'places' the list and its compiler. Useful because this is a very individual and personal review. The compiler's enthusiastic, opinionated voice and stance is clear throughout. Listen, you'll be entertained and informed.

Ways of Knowing — Information books for 7-9 year olds, compiled by Peggy Heeks (0 903355 11 6, £2.25)

Full of good sense as one would expect from the author of **Choosing and Using Books in the First School**.

(Available from The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ. Prices include postage.) ●

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