

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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# Contents

<b>Editor's Page</b>	<b>3</b>
News and comment from the Editor	
<b>The World of Children's Books, Part 8</b>	<b>4</b>
Robert Leeson	
<b>Reviews - Paperbacks</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Authorgraph No. 31</b>	<b>12</b>
Robert Leeson reflects on publishers, teachers and librarians in The Age of Change	
<b>May We Recommend . . .</b>	<b>14</b>
Eric Hadley introduces Penelope Farmer	
<b>The Making of Readers</b>	<b>15</b>
Focus on books for the 7-9s Colin Mills tells us <b>What makes a Good Book for 7-9s</b> . Teachers and children test some books from publishers' series	
<b>Sound and Vision</b>	<b>18</b>
Meet a new video company News of books on film and TV	
<b>Readathon 85</b>	<b>19</b>
Plans for this year's read-in	
<b>Lifeline 3</b>	<b>20</b>
Part 5 of Books for Sharing chosen by Joan Barker and David Bennett	
<b>Awards</b>	<b>22</b>
News of a new award. Whitbread results. Children's Book Award shortlist	
<b>News</b>	<b>24</b>

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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### Cover Story

The illustration on the cover of this issue is from the new Bodley Bookshelf edition of Penelope Farmer's **The Summer Birds**. We think Paul Geiger's artwork catches exactly the magic of that delightful book.

We are grateful for the help of The Bodley Head in using this illustration. For details of the book and more about Penelope Farmer, turn to **May We Recommend . . .** on page 14.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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The Books for Keeps Guide to  
**CHILDREN'S BOOKS**  
for a  
**MULTI-CULTURAL**  
**SOCIETY**

8-12



Compiled by Judith Elkin • Edited by Pat Triggs

**THE BOOKS FOR KEEPS GUIDE TO  
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FOR A  
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## Reviewers in this issue



**Jill Bennett** is currently teaching in a Junior class in Middlesex. She is the compiler of **Learning to Read with Picture Books**.



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



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



**Colin Mills** is in the Division of Teaching Studies at Worcester College where he helps run a Diploma in Children's Literature.



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



**Terry Downie** is the English Editor at the Resources for Learning Development Unit in Avon.

# EDITOR'S PAGE



## Cover Story

Reflecting yet another aspect of the children's book world is the new **Bodley Bookshelf**. Margaret Clark, editorial director at The Bodley Head, is hoping that this move to reprint modern 'classics' from the post-war 'golden age' of children's fiction will bring about the same revival of interest as the Virago reprints did for pre-war fiction. The first six novels on the Bookshelf are by Gillian Avery (**The Warden's Niece**), Jill Paton Walsh (**Goldengrove and Unleaving**) and Penelope Farmer. They are all novels of literary interest and well worth keeping in print. I've always had a particular affection for **The Summer Birds** so it's a special pleasure to have it back in print and to have Paul Geiger's lovely artwork from the cover of the Bodley edition on our cover. Eric Hadley writes about Penelope Farmer in our **May We Recommend . . .** series (page 14).

## World View

What other signs of our infinite variety? The Library Campaign is continuing to draw attention to declining services and disturbing trends; Family and Youth Concern – a society following in the steps of Mrs Gillick – is putting pressure on Birmingham booksellers to remove Jane Cousins' **Make it Happy** (TES Senior Information Book Award winner) and Miriam Stoppard's **Talking Sex** from their shelves; Janni Howker has got onto the shortlist for the Children's Book Award with her first book, **Badger on the Barge** (page 22) and been featured in a **Middle English** programme (page 18). Well deserved attention. If you haven't read her second book, **The Nature of the Beast** (Julia MacRae, 0 86203 194 X, £6.95), put it on your list. It's quite remarkable and very apt for the moment. Hodder and Stoughton have published the first of what we hope will be many large-format paperback picture books at £1.95. First two titles: Leo Lionni's **Cornelius** and Michael Foreman's **Land of Dreams** – Super! Macmillan are hoping to emulate their success with William in reviving Evadne Price's Jane stories. A collection, **Jane and Co.**, will be out in April. They are hoping the feminists will approve. Also with one eye on the feminists – if we are to believe the publicity – were the people at Puffin when they invented **Starlight Adventures** – choose-your-own adventure gamebooks combining romance and career choices. 'We dreamed them up in this very office,' said Liz Attenborough. Thumbs down from me I'm afraid. Nothing liberating here for girl readers. Still they'll probably sell – and along with Fighting Fantasy ensure Puffin's future. It's Swings and Roundabouts in The Age of Change.

Fingers crossed, the buzz is that books might escape VAT, Jason Connery is the new Robin Hood, and you keep writing to us to tell us how much you enjoy **Books for Keeps**, and how useful you find it – even if, as happened to one of our correspondents, you have to wait till you get flu to find time. Hope you're feeling better – and thanks. It helps to keep us optimistic.

P.S. Have you ordered your copy of the Multi-cultural Guide yet?

*Pat*

## It's a Smartie-coloured yummy yummy world

Meanwhile in another part of the garden plans are being made to save children's books from extinction with the help it seems of the entire chocolate industry. Rowntree-Mackintosh are sponsoring the Smarties Award for Children's Books (page 22) hopefully referred to as 'the children's Booker', and the most nausea-inducing press release from Puffin announces A Delicious Dahl promotion, prompted by the fact that it's 21 years since **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** was first published. Puffin are going in for a battery of activities designed to sell yet more Dahl, including what they call a 'wondercrump' joint promotion with Cadbury's and Allen & Unwin – a nationwide schools competition to Design Your Own Chocolate Factory. The winning class gets a trip to Cadbury's Chocolate Factory, a Chocolate Tea Party with Roald Dahl and Willy Wonka, a shelf-full of Dahl books and an armful of Cadbury's chocolates! (Details coming your way soon.) In addition there will be balloons, stickers and T-shirts 'in mouth-watering pink and purple – to spread the tasty message' and a celebration poster 'featuring a delumptions chocolatey birthday cake'. According to Puffin, from April onwards Dahl will be 'the dish of the day'. Sounds a bit like cannibalism to me. Whatever, better stock up with toothbrushes.

Actually, I left out the best bit. There's a new edition of **Charlie** with illustrations by Michael Foreman (when *does* that man sleep?). It's published on 9th May, just after **Shakespeare Stories** – Foreman illustrations and a Garfield text (Gollancz), which is superb.

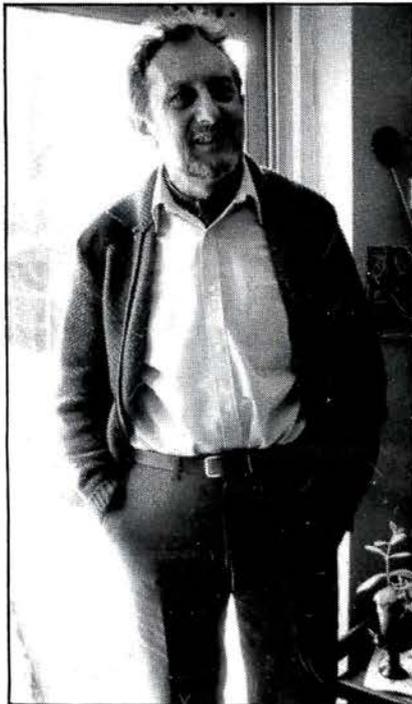
## Help for Parents

Back at Puffin in the editorial office Liz Attenborough is also trying her best to ensure a reading public for the future by devising a new system of categorising and labelling Young Puffins to help, particularly parents, in choosing. 'We're constantly being pressured by booksellers to put age ranges on books,' Liz told me. 'I'll resist that till I'm blue in the face but I do think that at the younger end parents need a bit more help. We asked Jill Bennett to help us and we finally decided on three categories: **Read Aloud** (for reading aloud to younger children); **Read Alone** (first solo reading for building confidence); and **Story Book** (for those with reading stamina). Of course there will be overlap but in each case we decided on the more obvious use. We hope it will make the point that children need different kinds of books for different purposes.'

Forty new-look titles will be out this year. Liz is also on the lookout for more titles for the Read Alone category – always the most difficult to find and yet the most crucial in making a child into a reader. Our survey undertaken by four teacher librarians (page 15) proved most interesting. The children were very conscious of value for money. Their teachers could well look out for titles from these hardback series being snapped up by Puffin, Hippo and Beaver. At £1.95 though, Banana Books are already hardbacks at a paperback price – and in full colour. The children approved: 'These would last and look much nicer on my bookshelf.' She liked the story too, so Judith Elliott, Bananas' editor, is clearly on the right lines and doing her bit to ensure a future reading population.

Spring has hardly sprung but already the children's book world is sending up an amazing variety of shoots which show how wildly different are the blooms and fruits it produces.

One which certainly deserves to flourish is Robert Leeson's new book, **Reading and Righting**: The past, present and future of fiction for the young. In the midst of much apparent madness and not a little absurdity here is a sane and optimistic voice. If you ever pause to wonder what you are doing wearing yourself out, encouraging children to be readers and writers, read this. It will give you a marvellous sense of perspective.



Robert Leeson. Photo by Richard Newton.

Starting with the oral storytelling tradition, the book traces chronologically the evolution of 'literature' and then children's literature. The approach is that of the social historian and commentator, and present concerns and issues are examined as part of the evolving scene. The final chapter poses the question, What future for the book? We are delighted to have an edited extract from this new book as the main feature in this issue of **Books for Keeps**. In **The Age of Change** Bob Leeson looks at the present and in particular at the part publishers, teachers and librarians play in it. His analysis leads him to two clear alternatives which he sets out in the introduction: 'Either we work together to guarantee printed fiction, one great achievement of the modern era, a living future in a vastly changed world, or we accept that it is going into a time capsule for the edification of future archaeologists.' For Bob Leeson, for us and we assume for our readers, the choice is clear. And like him our contacts with teachers, librarians, parents and children lead us to feel optimistic even in the midst of cuts, erosion of services, threats of VAT, philistinism in high places and statements like, 'The USA can provide all the books we can reasonably need'. If your morale (or your consciousness) needs raising, get this book. The amazingly good news is that in paperback it will cost you only £4.95 (hardback £6.95). And as a bonus it also contains a very useful annotated booklist selected by Rosemary Stones.



# The World of Children's Books

## Part 8

**Robert Leeson** is author and reviewer, practitioner and commentator, and a regular visitor to all parts of the World of Children's Books. An optimistic traveller, he pauses to put present time in perspective and sees publishers, librarians and teachers involved in and facing the challenge of

# THE AGE OF CHANGE

**6** Fiction for the young is going through a period of crisis while it works out who it is for. Are the 'powerful privileges of the literary elite', as Margaret Meek calls them, to become human rights – shared by everyone? The future of the literature is linked very much with the expansion of democracy in all aspects of life. Reading, writing and the vote have been linked from the beginning. The future of literature for the young, with fiction at its heart, forms an important part of our striving for a better life for all. So the literature which came into existence to give children a more abundant life cannot now declare that it has no more lessons to teach and that when it says children it doesn't mean children.

Each of the separate parts of what is known as the children's book world, parents, teachers, librarians, publishers, writers and booksellers, has a very real interest in the future success of the literature. History shows that success depends upon the working together of those parts. The potential for this symbiotic relationship is enormous. Crisis, doubts, hesitations have arisen just when the means of making enormous advances had come to hand.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there were complaints of 'too many books'. There never were, though it seemed sometimes 'too many' titles were being published. But if publishers, even when they agreed there were 'too many', never seemed to heed the mournful cries, it was not due to ill-will or stupidity. Economic developments external to publishing caused them to depend upon borrowed money to service the storage and turnover of their incredibly varied produce (does any other trade have 250,000 stock items?). Thus publishers were driven more and more to boost turnover, not simply to raise profits, but to pay the bank. This led to shorter print runs on the one hand and a feverish interest in best-seller flagships for their sales campaign. Those same economic trends fed the belief in business circles that somehow private commerce might flourish if public expenditure could be reduced. For publishers, and for children's publishers especially, this was like cutting the veins to increase the blood circulation. Some publishing directors may privately treasure the high-income bracket tax cuts which have been the 'reward' for all the book budget cuts, the closed branch libraries and sacked librarians. But public sector misfortunes have been visited rapidly upon the private sector. Big cuts in library expenditure have been followed by massive drops in hardback book production.

This has not led, as might be presumed, to a rise in quality. Loss of confidence, sometimes disorientation as publishers look round for alternative markets, do not create an atmosphere in which new talents may be sought and encouraged. Courting the 'conscience' market, or cajoling parents into buying books for their offspring by advertising in child-ware shops, may help. Wild experiments with puzzle books, competition books, computer books, may generate some cash, but will leave the essential future market, an expanding young reading and buying public, insufficiently involved and affected.

One problem is that children's publishers do not sufficiently study nor easily understand this market, going generally by

what has sold rather than what might sell, or even less, by what is wanted. If publishers' editors would sit, for example, in library selection meetings and see the books proffered by the trade, not neatly arranged in exhibition stands, but in piles where the repetitiveness of theme and treatment invites the careful-spending librarian's rejection, they might have second thoughts about their own policies. Consultation between publishers, librarians and teachers is at a fairly low level. Opportunities to meet are lost. The habit, for example, of publishers sending not editors but promotion people to library and education conferences indicates a one-way approach.

Editors by upbringing and education are not automatically in touch with the way of life and thinking of the majority of consumers. This may change over the years, as the proportion of ex-comprehensive pupils recruited rises and that of ex-private school pupils correspondingly drops. But the will to share experience is the main thing and any editor who is prepared to spend several weeks in the year, in classroom or library, sitting in on bookshop sessions at lunch time, observing discreetly what kids pick up and put down, what they say, would gain immense and valuable experience.

There has to be the will to develop lists as part of a literature which aims to appeal to young people right across the spectrum of ability and interest, instead of, as too often, the two-tier approach which puts prime editorial effort into producing potential prize winners and hives off the rest to specialist attention, producing books for the 'reluctant reader' and so on.

The trouble is not all on one side. Librarians and teachers will, or should, admit that they understand little of the problem of finding new writers, for example. Yet it is in this library-school network and through its lines of communication to the community, children and parents, that some of these problems may be most fruitfully discussed and perhaps tackled.

Getting to know the reader sounds a fairly trite aim, but I would hazard a guess that lack of such knowledge is one of the greatest obstacles to giving children's literature a broader appeal. Yet the readers, nearly 8 million of them, from 5 to 18, are there to be met. It is from the school library that two thirds of the children may get hold of a book. A properly run school library should have most children visit it, one way or another.

The school librarian is the most active of all intermediaries, can do the most good or the most harm, in bridging the gap between reading under compulsion and reading for pleasure. Where the school library is connected with, providing room for, or running the school bookshop the influence on taste and choice as well as the knowledge of it is considerable in the best cases. It is an area of knowledge little tapped by those who make books. For the visiting writer, the school librarian is a key figure, particularly if seen as ally and not outcast by the English Department. The modern well-run school library is the ideal place for the writer to meet the reader, and that



Children from Thorpe Hall Primary School in Waltham Forest enjoying 'the perfect example of a successful public/private operation': their school bookshop. Photo courtesy Collins.

goes for other book-makers. The school bookshop is the perfect example of a successful public/private operation. It retains the merit of the market, in that the girl or boy can choose, buy and own the book they wish. But one has to face the fact that it would not exist without public backing. This it gets in the form of funds from school or parents, and a great deal of unpaid work by teachers, school librarians, often pupils and parents.

The opening of 6 - 7,000 school bookshops in a period when some commercial bookshops have closed, and others were kept going only by the dedication of their owners, is a remarkable thing. Even more remarkable is the fact that if one were to ask the MD of the average publishing house, did you know that nearly 7,000 new retail outlets had opened since the 1960's? - the response would be a baffled stare. School bookshops account for some £3 million worth of sales each year, by one estimate. For many young people - and in some cases their parents - they bring a bookshop within reach for the first time. A school bookshop can also be a community bookshop.

The number of school bookshops could double before saturation point is reached, since 'shop' in this context can mean anything from a special room with display stands, to a box of books on a table in the hall of a village school on a Friday afternoon. What limits the potential for development is the failure to take school bookshops seriously - both on the part of many publishers (at top level rather than the children's department) and on the part of many schools. The existence

of the bookshop along with the library is a guide to how seriously the school takes reading. My own observations show, unfortunately, that a number of schools regard books, other than specific texts, as either irrelevant or a positive distraction from the serious business of getting students through the exam funnel. But the same observations (in nearly 500 schools) show that in a sympathetic school the efforts of one or two teachers keen on reading for pleasure can transform the situation. One can assert that until such opportunities to borrow, buy and keep are freely available to all children, no final judgement can be made upon whether books appeal to them or not.

Yet no school on its own can offer the range of books which a properly stocked area library provides, nor the opportunity of linking reading with spare time activity which the club atmosphere of such a library, run by welcoming staff, can give. It is in the area library that the community can best give to all children an equal opportunity to enjoy the widest variety of books, often in association with audio visual material, games and vital information. Librarians who see it as their duty to safeguard books from children are a vanishing species. The librarians who are trying to make the library a place where young people spend their spare time comfortably and enjoyably, increase in number. Here again the cuts have come at a moment of real breakthrough in attracting youngsters beyond the one third who regularly use libraries.

A key question, is, who is the typical library user? Peter H. Mann in his pamphlet **Book Publishing, Book Selling and**



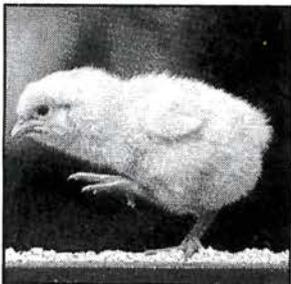
# REVIEWS

## Nursery/Infant

### The Most Wonderful Egg in the World

Helme Heine, Picture Lions, 0 00 662411 1, £1.25

'What you can do is more important than what you look like,' is the message of this story and the pronouncement of the king to the three hens who sought his advice as to which of them is most beautiful. There are jokes, both obvious and less so, from cover to cover of this marvellous book whose tongue-in-cheek humour and beautiful paintings will delight all who have a taste for the slightly off beat. JB



### Here a Chick, There a Chick

Bruce McMillan, Hippo, 0 590 70339 0, £1.75

A trail of chicken feed leads us through this book as we follow a new born chick from its egg to the end of the book and 'togetherness'.

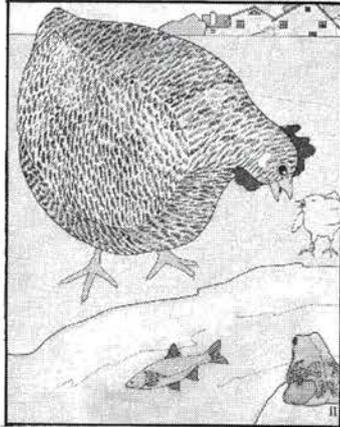
In a sequence of fine colour photographs, shot from a variety of angles – bird's eye view, close up, sideways on, or below – the fluffy ball of yellow moves along the path: 'Straight', 'Crooked', 'Round', 'and Round', 'Left', 'Right' ... to the 'End'.

A smashing book both for beginning readers and for helping children's development of spatial concepts. JB

### Across the Stream

Mirra Ginsburg, ill. Nancy Tafuri, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.436 2, £1.50

Beautifully designed, uncluttered pictures combined with a minimum of well-chosen words show the escape of a mother hen and her babies from a marauding fox. The rhyming text is in huge type, supported and extended by the strong illustrations. The very size of both make this picture book a boon for those just starting to read; and the



question: 'Was it all a dream?' will keep them returning to read it over and over. JB

### Wilberforce Goes Shopping

Margaret Gordon, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.391 9, £1.50

Those who met Wilberforce in his earlier adventure on a family picnic will seize upon this sequel and may well guess what is likely to happen when the young bear is let loose in the supermarket. Framed colour pictures and a single line of text per page, as before, but for me, the mismatch and irony of text and pictures is not so clear and works less well. Nonetheless, well worth having in any infant collection. JB



'Out of the gloom gleamed a pair of yellow eyes and a black body loomed.' From *The Cheesemaker Mike and the Giant*.

### The Cheesemaker Mike and the Giant

Roger Williamson, Hippo, 0 590 70340 4, £1.00

A nicely controlled and paced

story, first published in the 'Blackbird' series, this tale of two mice, is perfect for new solo readers, anxious to tackle their first 'book-shaped book'. It is good to see that it is Mary mouse who is largely responsible for outwitting the Dreadful Giant and contriving the escape of the pair from his den. Numerous line drawings and large type encourages the solo reader, but the story also reads aloud well. JB

### The Troublesome Pig

Priscilla Lamont, Piccolo Picture Books, 0 330 28609 9, £1.25

A most welcome paperback, this is a reworking of a favourite nursery tale whose cumulative text with its natural repetition and highly infectious rhythm, immediately engages learner readers and young listeners. The layout and design of the splendid water-colour paintings echo the textual patterning: a full page illustration alternates with one or more vignettes on the facing page, culminating in an action-packed sequence. JB

### Pearl's Place

Bob Graham, Picture Lions, 0 00 662342 5, £1.25

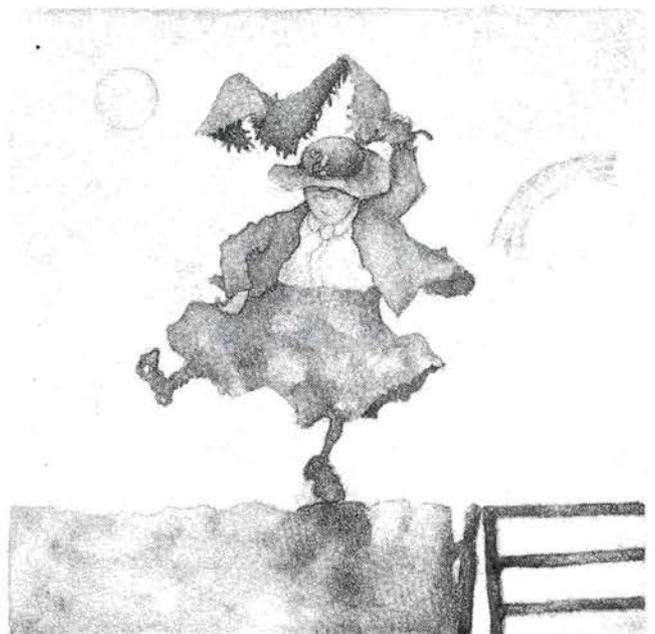
For me, Bob Graham is one of the finds of the eighties. His energetic illustrations are at once casual yet precise in their portrayal of domestic situations and human emotions. Here, there are



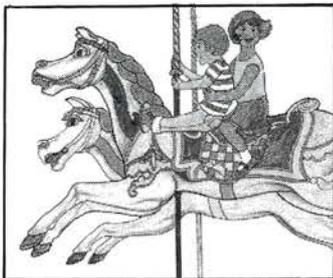
delightful touches of humour in both words and pictures as we meet Pearl, a lady of rather generous proportions (Arthur guessed she weighed about two tonnes) whose place: 'We've got three dogs, two cats, three hundred budgies, and you can throw water bombs off the roof,' is every small boy's – and one boy in particular – idea of paradise. The contrast between the two homes – Arthur's high rise block (which stood like a breadknife against the sky) and Pearl's, with its abundance of flora, is as marked as the difference in life style of the two central characters.

Highly recommended, thought-provoking reading for all ages. JB

'Suddenly the old woman's feet didn't hurt any more. She jumped up and danced a jig.' From *The Troublesome Pig*.



# Infant/Junior



## At the Fair

Helen Herbert,  
0 521 31933 1

## Behind the Scenes at the Rock Concert

David Williams, ill.  
Jane West, 0 521 26901 6

## The Pantomime

Althea, ill. Hilary  
Evans, 0 521 31746 0

## A Visit to the Library

Cherry Gilchrist, ill.  
Maureen Galvani,  
0 521 31931 5

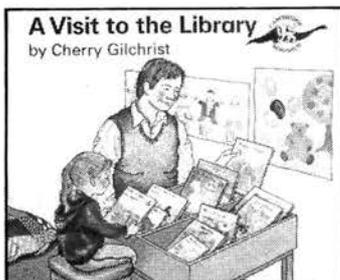
Dinosaur, £1.10 each.  
Each published in  
hardback also

The format and presentation of the **Dinosaur** series make them appealing for school and class libraries. Though I find that the illustrations are variable, sometimes they are too bland, homogenised, the texts are generally well-researched and the authors adopt engaging styles.

In **The Fair**, a potentially fascinating insight is given into the lifestyle and activities of the people who travel with fairs: people we often overlook in the dazzling bustle of their surroundings. The pictures make the world look too safe and sanitised, which is a pity as the author, in her *text*, enters into the spirit of things.

**The Rock Concert**, which will probably attract older children – even middle schoolers – is far more successful in depicting the perpetual motion of the rock group as well as the tacky nature of the agents' offices, the backstage squalor and the general excitement of the gigs.

Althea's **The Pantomime** is the best of this bunch. A real-life amateur troupe put on **Cinderella** and we follow them through casting, rehearsal, performance. We even see things going wrong and first-night jitters. There's clever use of dialogue and it's strong on the kind of technical detail that six to tens like. The pictures, and the reader's speculation, tell the story.



**A Visit to the Library**  
by Cherry Gilchrist

**A Visit to the Library** tied in very well with the work of a group of six year olds making their first trip to the local library. The interesting text encouraged the children to find out more about the micro-fiche and the book selection process. Superbly clear and busy pictures (I liked the beautiful display on dinosaurs). Is the famous author making a visit Ms Braithwaite herself?! CM

## Little Whale

Ann McGovern, ill.  
John Hamberger,  
Hippo, 0 590 70354 4,  
£1.75

Here's that rarity: an information book for the infant-lower junior classroom which works by weaving its (fascinating and accurate) facts into a compelling story form. Generalised information about whales is embedded in specific details and it's full of the quirky knowledge that will

make its young readers want to look at longer, more specialised books – 'When she grows up, she will be almost as long as a bus . . .'

Speculation and reflection is encouraged by the text and the pictures. The ecological note at the end is caring and unobtrusive; the glossary first-rate. Highly recommended.

CM

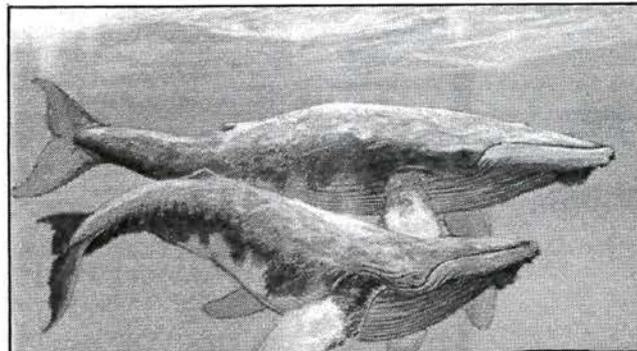
## The Frog Prince

Jutta Ash, Hippo,  
0 590 70337 4, £1.50

This retelling of a Grimm tale, with detailed, stylised pictures in shades of green and brown, will appeal to the over sevens, most of whom will be able to tackle this picture book for themselves.

The text, straightforward in style, is enclosed within a frame and preceded on each page by a black and white vignette.

JB



# Junior/Middle

## Ronia, The Robber's Daughter

Astrid Lindgren, trans.  
Patricia Crampton,  
Puffin, 0 14 03.1720 1,  
£1.50

I'd always guessed that behind the delightful **Pippi Longstocking** stories there was an author capable of both the

lively surface plot and the resonant themes within this book.

The heroine is the daughter of Matt, constantly at war with the rival Borka Robbers: both want to rule the forest. When Ronia befriends Borka's son, we get a vividly-drawn picture of two young people at odds with the world around them. The writing is crisp and poetic:

the gifted translator has taken care to catch the magical elements in the landscape. The fact that it is a translation led the nine and ten year olds I read this with to give the words on the page special attention. The line between fantasy (The Harpies who live in the no-man's-land between the rivals and who frighten Ronia) and reality (Matt's

comical henchmen with names like Noddle Pete) is shady, beautifully reflecting the concerns of both the hero and heroine and the potential readers (eights to elevens, I'd say). A deep, satisfying book, which will make me more confident in introducing Mayne's **All the King's Men** next term.

CM

# Middle/Secondary

## Snowy River Brumby

Elyne Mitchell, Beaver,  
0 09 929230 0, £1.25

## The Broken Saddle

James Aldridge, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1621 3, £1.50

Two Australian 'horse books' but worlds apart in style and intention. Elyne Mitchell makes

her horses more important than the humans and credits them with emotions and thoughts worthy of a super-sensitive life-form. Mary-Anne and her family serve only as fixers for the horses to display their fine qualities, their nobility and their prowess. Nooroo, handsome colt of Buzz and Yarrowa, damages his leg in the hills and needs rescuing. He survives to pursue a bitter

struggle with his fierce adversary, the Black Stallion, confronted at the same time with a choice between wilderness freedom and cosy domesticity on the homestead.

Poor boy, Eric, in Aldridge's book shares the honours with his mad-cap pony and, if anything, is the more triumphant when their tussle for domination ends. The skittish pony comes

unexpectedly as a gift from Eric's often-absent drover father. Despite his long-suffering mother's misgivings, boy and horse set about a bruising struggle to tame each other which makes them wildly inseparable. The writer's insights and the way he allows the boy to reveal himself make this the more worthwhile read; but **Brumby** already has a devoted following and that will

be the story most often taken from the shelves unless some adult makes a point of drawing tactful attention to *The Broken Saddle*. DB

**Me, Jill Robinson and the Christmas Pantomime**

0 583 30598 9

**Me, Jill Robinson and the School Camp Adventure**

0 583 30599 7

Anne Digby, Dragon, £1.25 each

Me, JR tells her own pretty ordinary, undemanding, clichéd adventure stories. Stray doggie, getting the lead part, tyrant prefect's come-uppance, lost in the mist, bully's conversion. Deathly hushes, rounded eyes, fallen faces, frozen tones, lip-biting, forgiving smiles, happy endings. Four in the series to date; hope there won't be too many more; sure to be popular. TD

**Travellers by Night**

Vivien Alcock, Fontana Lion, 0 00 672383 7, £1.50

Charlie and Belle are saving to have the scar on Belle's face removed with plastic surgery. When the circus closes there is a different and more urgent need for their money. The children begin a journey, travelling by night, to a safari park where they are convinced the Tessie, the ageing circus elephant, will be safe from the slaughterhouse.

Vivien Alcock gets behind the usual glitter of circus stories to reveal the struggles, fears and jealousies of the young children who grow up together competing for eventual stardom in the ring. There is stark contrast between Belle's attacking approach to life and Charlie's steady, determined ways. Belle is the ideas girl, the daring acrobat. Surely the eventual star? Charlie is the worrier, the one who encourages and supports. The journey through the nights is, for the children, a time of recognition of their real potentials.

This battle of personalities gives body to what is also an exciting, fast moving story. It offers much to be enjoyed by girls and boys in the middle school. CL

**Dan Alone**

John Rowe Townsend, Puffin, 0 14 03.1626 4, £1.50

Dan has a flighty mother and an absent father. The strongest influence on his life is a pious, scrupulous grandfather who fills Dan's mind with fears, guilt and anxiety. He first tastes genuine happiness in the nest of criminals where he hides, when his mother disappears and he runs away to find her and discover his father.



This is a totally absorbing, heart-tugging tale. Set in a northern city in the twenties it reveals the great gap that then existed between the rich on the hill and the poor in the city's gutters. The penny pinching, pharasaical grandfather and his grasping second wife are in strong contrast to the motherly figure who takes in Dan and supervises her family of criminals. In the end Dan is reunited with his mother and finds his real father; the wif he befriends in the streets turns out to be a stepsister; the heartless are punished, the loving rewarded.

A cosy but genuinely satisfying ending. Quite demanding, certainly thought provoking. CL

**Jane Leaves the Wells**

Lorna Hill, Piccolo, 0 330 28539 4, £1.25

For girls into both ballet and horses could there be a better choice? Well, I gritted my teeth and read to the end. No, I wasn't sick but came near once or twice. 'It was wonderful to be with someone who knew his own mind. Of course, it would have been even more wonderful if he'd remembered that she couldn't eat raspberries because she came out in spots, but after all, spots were a mere nothing compared with the thrill of having lunch with Nigel. He sat opposite her - tall and fair (like a Greek god, thought Mariella rapturously), narrow hiped, with wide, powerful shoulders.' Nigel is the stereotyped swine, Mariella the foolish counterpart. They play their part in a saga of society weddings, hunt outings, visits to the ballet and, because it is the fifties, cocktail parties. Piccolo might have done the children of the eighties a favour by leaving Jane and the Wells alone. There has been so much to offer since. CL

**The Fox Cub Bold**

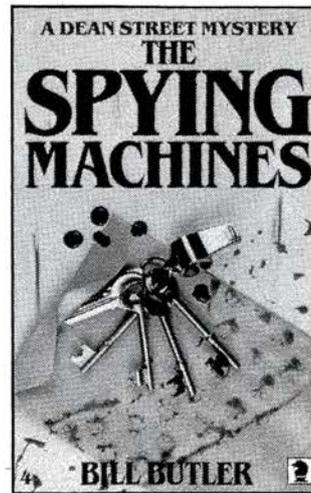
Colin Dann, Beaver, 0 09 937520 6, £1.50

It might be felt by some that the animals of Farthing Wood could now be left to a quiet retirement but Colin Dann has produced another yarn about

their escapades and the fans are ever-ready for more. The gentle, flowing style prevails, with the same mixture of concern, adventure and sorrow.

Bold leaves the protection of the nature reserve, partly out of curiosity, partly to escape the fame of his father, Farthing Wood Fox. He is puzzled by the fear with which animals outside the reserve live. He must turn to some of them for protection and is eventually shot, receiving injuries that eventually bring about his death. Meanwhile he unites with a vixen and takes her as far as he can towards the reserve. There his children are born but not before Whisper has told his family of his plight. They set out to find him and he does not die alone.

There are always plenty of customers for Colin Dann. Often they are the brighter but more reserved children who care a great deal about animals. This fourth in the series will deservedly be read by such fans. CL



**The Spying Machines**  
0 340 36532 3

**The Corridor of Ghosts**

0 340 36531 5, Bill Butler, Knight, £1.50 each

Secret government weapons, terrorists, a strange foreign, weeping teacher, Italian gangsters and a shady private-eye are all sorted out in these two tales of youthful detectives. Anne and Peter Miller and Kate Murphy are the chief investigators. Their principal assistant is Barry Bigley who had been the helpless victim in their first case. The headquarters for these sleuths is a forgotten room in the basement of a London comprehensive school. Sometimes the goings-on are a bit bizzare and I couldn't help wondering if even the author was smiling at the very serious rather cliché-like approach of the young detectives. However, the reality is quite sufficient for young readers not to ask questions and they greatly admired these two new stories,

which are both well crafted and cleverly developed.

Readers of ten and eleven found them very exciting and satisfying. They are a welcome addition to modern school stories and should prove to be very popular. My testers are already looking out for more. CL

**The Lothian Run**

Mollie Hunter, Canongate Kelpies, 0 86241 069 X, £1.75

Late in the story, Gilmour feels gloomy about 'the complex pattern of pursuit . . . Robertson hunting Porteous - himself hunting Robertson and St. Clair - St. Clair also hunting Robertson - the horse-thief, Rattray, hunting young Sandy Maxwell -' I had the same problem by chapter 3. But then Gilmour is a bronzed, athletic, highly educated Customs Special Investigations Officer, pursuing smugglers. He gets them. Young Sandy, main character, helps heroically, determined, by the end, to become a CSIO himself. (Training in law-medicinelanguagesciphers-navigationknifefightingsmall-armsriding required.) It's 1736, Edinburgh and Lothian. They also thwart Jacobite rebels. More adventure than history, I felt; lots of action - one nail-biting escape, our hero disguised as a sheep - lots of detail, but plot at the expense of period. Not an easy read. TD

**Survive**

Molly Perham, Magnet, 0 416 45880 7, £1.25

A dozen, short, true stories with plenty of atmospheric illustration by Tony Watson. The print is rather small but the stories are pretty well-told and there should be plenty of gruesome fascination for those who like it. Plane crashes, shipwrecks, cave ordeals, avalanche . . . TD

**Ruey Richardson at the Chalet School**

Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Armada, 0 00 692439 5, £1.25

'And if things ever get beyond you, Ruey, go to Miss Annersley and ask if you may come and see me and I'll do what in me lies to straighten you out. Goodnight, my Ruey Girl! God bless you and keep you!'

A fair sample from number 32 in the list of Chalet School titles. The parents are dispensed with and the arch enemy discovered by the end of Chapter 1 and from then on it's problems, jealousy and dirty dealing all the way. My test reader was unimpressed. Why does everyone have a nickname? Why does every object need a dozen adjectives to describe it? It seems a trillion years out of date. Why ever do kids go on reading them? DB

**The Cagey Bee Byte**G.P. Jordan, Knight,  
0 340 36529 3, £1.25**Computer Mind Games**G.P. Jordan, Knight,  
0 340 36530 7, £1.25

The Microkidz are here! Whether it's a threat to national security (Cagey Bee Byte - get it? Clever innit!) or biofeedback fractions, the kidz, with their 'high tech computer knowhow' (quote), will bore their adversaries into submission. Do publishers have to advertise their product's shortcomings quite so blatantly, by plugging the sequel in the last line of the preceding book? Without the computer-connection as a luring point for trend conscious youngsters, these books would never see the light of day.

BB

**Piccolo Mystery Solvers 1-4****The Secret of the Disappearing Diamonds**

0 330 28620 X

**The Case of the Chocolate Snatcher**

0 330 29623 4

**The Case of the Computer Game Smugglers**

0 330 28622 6

**The Case of the Imperfect Crime**

0 330 28621 8

95p each

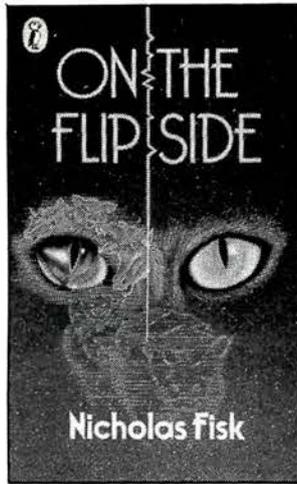
Hawkeye Collins and Amy Adams import their very American detective adventures to a deprived British audience, with the invitation to join them in 'solving a series of baffling mysteries'.

There are four books available to-date, each ground out in the same predictable formula, with a virtually non-existent storyline. Supposed motivation to the readership is presented in the form of 'clues' scattered throughout the text as an inducement to young sleuths to solve the mysteries along with the intrepid detectives. Oh yes, if you're 'real dumb' and can't 'crack the case' the solutions are printed at the back of the book in secret mirror writing 'Wow, Mom. I think someone's got their cookies in a twist, or has an unrealistic opinion of the reading and intellect level of the average British child, if they feel there is a market for this pap.

BB

**On the Flipside**Nicholas Fisk, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1556 X, £1.25

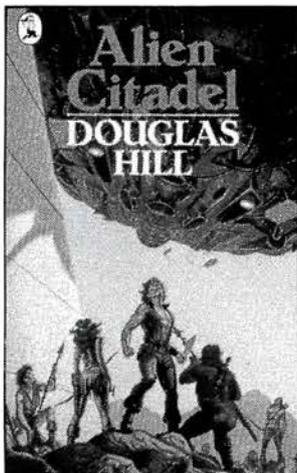
If you haven't encountered Fisk's work previously - earlier opportunities were **Grinny**, **Trillions**, and **Robot**



**Revolt** - try out reaction to **On the Flipside**. I'll be surprised if it's not favourable. Peerless in evoking chilling mystery and cold fear from the most innocuous of opening situations, Fisk's latest evolves from a simple presentation to a compulsive and most original story.

The Blobs are a sinister invading force and Lettice's strange affinity with her pets proves to be an invaluable and effective factor in the struggle to combat them.

BB



**Alien Citadel**  
Douglas Hill, Piccolo,  
0 330 28563 7, £1.25

Douglas Hill is now an acknowledged master of science fiction for children. His previous quartet of novels (**Last Legionary**) was described as the best of its type for children, in the last decade.

**Alien Citadel** is the concluding book of a trilogy about Finn Ferral's attempts to save Earth from the Slavers (also see **The Huntsman**, and **Warriors of the Wasteland**).

Immensely readable, **Alien** sustains interest in a tight tale, averting disenchantment from a slightly predictable ending. Hill has the ability to convince the young reader of the existence of the rugged terrains and conditions of hardship, so necessary to empathise with the struggles of Finn.

BB

**Snake Among the Sunflowers**Joan Lingard, Canongate  
Kelpies, 0 86241 070 3,  
£1.50

A beautiful aunt, a mysterious professor, sidelong tight-lipped looks between parents and grandparents, not to mention a conspiracy of silence amongst the locals in an idyllic, summery French valley - no wonder the Grant children are intrigued. Is there some connection between Grandpa's Resistance work and the German professor? Or was there a fated romance? Joan Lingard squeezes the maximum melodrama out of the situation and puts all to rights in this fairly undistinguished short novel. Lower secondary, probably girls.

DB

When Old Mother Hubbard  
Went to the cupboard  
Her dog for a morsel would beg,  
'Not a scrap can be found.'  
She explained to her hound  
No he bit the poor dear on the leg.

**Wry Rhymes for Troublesome Times**Max Fatchen, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1518 7, £1.25

Publishers' blurbs are usually best ignored in forming opinions about their products, but to describe Max Fatchen as a 'master of the absurd poem' hits the nail in the centre of the head, for once.

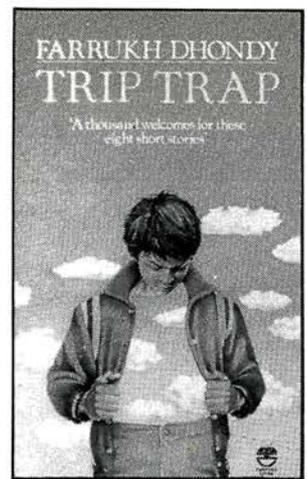
**Songs for My Dog and Other People** was quite superb. As a follow-up, this can be strongly recommended, not perhaps achieving quite those heights, but still very funny and to the point.

The brilliant 'Nothing that's what' will strike immediate chords with anyone who has ever received the irritating reply of 'nothing' to a query. Even the short 'throw aways' are good value. 'Orbit an Aunt' and 'Briny Bits' being particularly short and sweet. Marvellous, out-Milligans Spike for lunatic amusement!

BB

**Trip Trap**Farrukh Dhondy,  
Fontana Lion,  
0 00 672428 0, £1.25

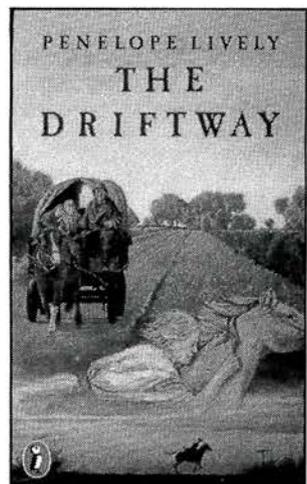
Here are eight short stories for older readers that cover a wide



range of material, often with an Indian flavour in a Capital setting. They are told with the modern voice, the realistic tone that we associate with this author and, as the overall title suggests, they often trip up and trap the readers into expectations, which are deftly dashed at the end.

**The Bride** is possibly the most ordinary, with strange visitations from a now-dead young Indian girl. **Herald**, about a story-writing computer, which branches out on its own and **Homework** are challenging and **The Mandarin Exam** and **Under Gemini** thought-provoking. I was amused by **Lost Soul** and mystified by **The Fifth Gospel**. With such variety I've felt compelled to test it as an upper school class reader.

DB

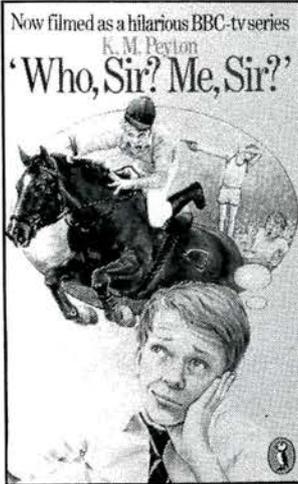
**The Driftway**Penelope Lively, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1497 0, £1.50

This novel would no doubt prove a boon to those colleagues who relish stories that provide opportunities to 'branch out' into lots of non-fiction work, 'centered' on the novel.

Paul and Sandra run away from home and their ill-liked step-mother, heading for their Grandma's, a few miles distant in Oxfordshire. Their route takes them along an ancient driftway, which they travel at leisurely pace with Bill, a very ponderous horse and cart driver. The lad's

highly-charged emotional state enables him to glimpse the shadows of past events cast down on this old drovers' road and as a result get his own feelings into a clearer perspective.

Without doubt this novel does exemplify Penelope Lively's creative and imaginative gifts but I suspect it of being a little too slow for many young solo readers. DB



### Who, Sir? Me, Sir?

K. M. Peyton, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1771 6, £1.75

'Now filmed as a hilarious BBC, TV series'; well, amusing in places and no doubt an excuse for a lively series of programmes. The filming will perhaps eradicate some of the un-subtle social comment and concentrate on the very far-fetched plot, which I must admit is resolved neatly and satisfactorily.

A teacher takes his mini full of kids to a Saturday football match, whilst he gets boozed and then sets up a very unlikely challenge tetrathlon between his dead-end drongoes and an upper-crust crew at Greycoats. The subsequent ups and downs and neat solutions – 'They were all keeping their fingers crossed that Jazz's turban would be allowed as a substitute, as for motorcyclists' – make for a fast read, if not a remarkable one. Lower secondary. DB

### Winter Quarters

William Mayne, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1681 1, £1.50

The mysterious description of names at the onset of this novel is the first hurdle; then there's Friday's (or is it Denah's?) convoluted English, not to mention the unfamiliar customs and lingo of the travelling people. As ever, Mayne has produced a novel which is a significant creation, but lamentably one inaccessible to most Puffin readers.

Issy Skirlaugh, at his mother's bidding, goes in search of the travellers' true chief, long-since mysteriously abandoned by their tribe. His search could affect too the establishment of their disputed rights to their winter quarters. With Lall left at home by Friday's side Issy gradually unravels the strange mysteries and together they solve the seemingly unsolvable with a very surprising outcome. DB

### Tipper Wood's Revenge

T. R. Burch, Knight,  
0 340 34840 2, £1.50

An action-packed adventure – schoolboys versus bank-robber gang – which re-works most of the stock situations and encompasses most of the stock characters – weedy, yet plucky, younger friend, eccentric old ladies and majors in vintage cars, vagrant know-all, sensible female stooge etc. etc. The 'parent disposal factor' is novel though; mother long gone and father now on a solo holiday in Brighton!

Of probable appeal to boys 13 – 15 years and useful to keep them plugged into books – the cover's a good start. DB

## Older Readers

### The Dragonfly Years

Mollie Hunter, Fontana  
Lions, 0 00 672261 X,  
£1.50

The story takes place between 1937 and Dunkirk, dragonfly years for Bridie because her ideas and emotions gleam and dart as she struggles towards independence, maturity and her ambition to write. She works in an Edinburgh flower-shop, lives with strict evangelical grandparents, goes to evening classes, falls in love with a young man who joins the Navy. Bridie's relationships, political and social awareness and self-knowledge are at the centre. The book has plenty of characters, action and outside references. Consider it for the library or book-box. TD

### A Formal Feeling

Zibby Oneal, Fontana  
Lions, 0 00 672291 1,  
£1.50

It's Anne's first homecoming since her father's remarriage; the piano's untuned, dishes unwashed and Dory 'as unlike her mother as anyone could imagine'. Anne's emotions are frozen, locked to memories of her dead mother's beauty and expertise. She is remote from family, friends and reality until, after a painful journey into darkness and doubt, she is able to admit her mother's imperfections. I found the book subtle and strong. It's a private sort of book but it would read aloud well and offer lots of scope for exploring psychological detail. TD

### Candy for King

Robert Leeson, Fontana  
Lions, 0 00 672467 1,  
£1.75

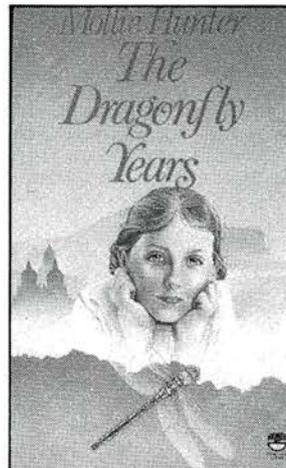
Huge, clumsy, gentle, innocent, the orphaned Kitchener Candeford searches among the writings of Great Thinkers for a Way of Life. Chivalry leads to expulsion from public school; defending the right not to join a union and then to join one causes industrial disruption. He joins the Army, is posted to Sharabia, somehow becomes leader of a local villagers-British Army rebellion which GHQ can only identify as a communist attempt to overthrow the Middle East. Unfailingly, inadvertently, Candy's idealism is misinterpreted and catastrophic. Leeson's latest paperback, set in the 50s, is funny, tender, adult and with short chapters. I'd especially want to tempt non-reading teenage boys with it. TD

### Edith Jackson

Rosa Guy, Puffin Plus,  
0 14 03.1786 4, £1.50

**The Disappearance**  
Rosa Guy, Puffin Plus,  
0 14 03.1787 2, £1.50

This follows **The Friends** and **Ruby** and gives tough and vulnerable Edith her own story. There is a relentless, pin-ball machine quality to the painful events which ricochet Edith from one difficulty to the next – losing her sisters, surviving a series of foster-



homes, seeing through her infatuation with the worthless man who makes her pregnant. She survives, just, perceiving, finally, that each of us is a statistic and also a person but that to be the second takes 'a lifetime of work – and someone in your corner besides'. **The Friends** has had great success as a class book; this sequel will be a must on library shelves.

The same ingredients are found in **The Disappearance** with the same harsh and warm flavours but now a male character, streetwise from Harlem, fostered in comfortable Brooklyn. He is pulled back (?) to his alcoholic mother and forwards (?) to his new family until they cease to trust him, suspecting him of being responsible for their small daughter's disappearance. The plot ends as who-dunnit but the centre of interest is Imamu's learning how to live his complicated life.

In both books, the perspective of being black in a white society and being West Indian in an American society are of particular interest. TD

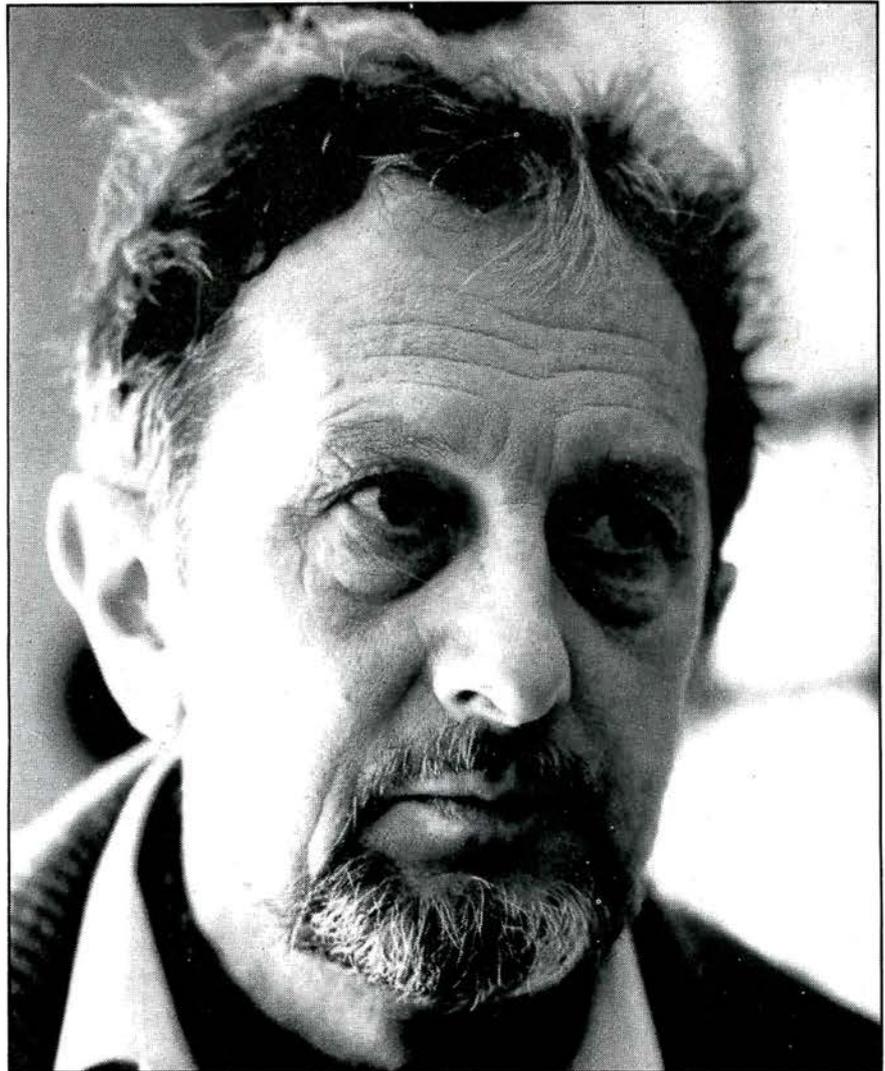
# Authorgraph No. 31

Robert  
Leeson

When Robert Leeson was a young lad in Cheshire, he must have figured in a big way in the County Library borrowing returns. He was a truly committed customer, reading everything and probably exceeding the number of tickets he was really allowed. Now, his own children grown up, he is still committed to books, and in the intervening years has made a major contribution to the children's book world as author, reviewer and commentator.

His book of related short stories, **Harold and Bella, Jammy and Me**, reflects those early years. They are the account of the Saturday afternoon 'doings' of a pre-war, northern childhood. With his brothers and sisters, he lived in a home where reading was encouraged. All four children eventually went to grammar school, something which could not have been easy for his parents. He remembers his mother as a worker. She had been in service before her marriage and continued to work hard after, sometimes doing a fourteen hour day, washing and cooking for others. It taught him early to link work with self-respect and certainly influences the way he sees his female characters. His father, after being a regular soldier, worked in a chemical factory and in both jobs suffered the frustrations of an intelligent man limited by his background. It was for this reason that his parents encouraged the children to stay on at school, seeing education as an escape from these limitations.

At home, there were comics but not books so the young Robert relied on the library and school. He recalls the influence that one or two adults had on him. They were the dedicated teachers who read to him, the interested librarian who made tactful suggestions and did not count the tickets, the English teacher who showed him that his writing was valued although it did not always fit into the form of the conventional grammar school essay. The existence of people like that were important to him and he hopes adults will not underestimate the influence they can have. He read all kinds of books, mainly historical adventures. A real favourite was **Treasure Island**, a



pleasure now extended and shared with the rest of us in the form of his sequel, **Silver's Revenge**. At school, he enjoyed **Winnie the Pooh** though he and his mates derided the Milne poetry. It seems reasonable that the universal concerns of Pooh and Piglet – friendship, courage which comes and goes, food – should have seemed perfectly reasonable while the poems alienated by their very particular middle class background. Similarly, he liked the **William** books, despite the Browns' family life because William was always undermining it anyway. What price afternoon tea on lace cloths if William is also served up with it? He says that Richmal Crompton understood that children are so often in the position of the underdogs and gives them the chance to revolt. He read school stories, too, and remembers in particular a book called **The Boys of Slings Lane** which seems to have been a rare example at that time of a school story set in a council school. He was able to identify with that, and believes that children do notice different backgrounds. They do not necessarily complain about finding nothing to identify with but may believe that the backgrounds and values presented in the books are the *right* ones and that they themselves are excluded. Which brings us back to **Harold and Bella, Jammy and Me**. He wrote it to show children that they have the stuff of stories in their own lives, that their experiences are also valuable.

Robert Leeson spends about one third of his time talking to children and encouraging them to write, which is a generous commitment, and another one third answering letters. He must have visited between 500 and 600 schools, meeting many hundreds of children. He sees himself as part of a movement composed of many authors who work to bring children and books together but he also sees it as a two-way process. He has three sources for his writing. Firstly, recollections of his own childhood. If you want to know how it feels to be 12 years old, you have only yourself and your remembered feelings. Secondly, the childhood of his own children. Thirdly, his contact with the children, aged between 8 and 18 years, whom he meets in schools. He encourages them to write because he wants every child to dignify his or her own experiences by setting them down. He sums up his intentions in working with the children by saying he wants every child to get as much from the enjoyment of reading as he did and he wants them also to 'have the confidence to shape their dreams'.

He recommends the discussion of dreams to any teacher as a prelude to creative writing in view of the rich vein of material which it taps. It makes a link with his own early story making. He had made up his mind at 10 or 11 to be a writer. From 7 or 8, he had been making up stories just

before sleeping, often continuations of the books he was reading with himself introduced as a major character. He has discovered that this is a very common practice among children. At 14, he wrote to a publisher, assuming that authors were 'taken on' as in other jobs, but they explained that to be an author it is usual to write a book first. On leaving school, he began writing as a junior reporter and continued to write for newspapers through the 'sixties, becoming Children's Editor of the *Morning Star* in 1969. It was in 1973 that he wrote his first children's book, *Beyond the Dragon Prow*. Historical novels were riding high at the time and they had been his own favoured reading. He went on to write the trilogy, *'Maroon Boy, Bess and The White Horse*, set in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but he also felt the need to widen his approach and he moved to a story which is a modern school story, spiced with fantasy and domestic humour. This was *The Third Class Genie* which started life as a newspaper serial. The story continues with the sequel, *Genie on the Loose*. His age range is wide. One of his very recent books, *Candy for King*, is a strongly written teenage book about a young soldier, while *The Demon Bike Rider* and *Challenge in the Dark* are two adventures for younger readers. He was not just writing children's books, he was writing for children, with a very specific audience in mind.

Robert Leeson has, in fact, very well formed ideas on children's literature in all its aspects, and he has set them out in his latest book, *Reading and Righting*, subtitled 'The past, present and future in fiction for the young'. His ideas demand our attention because he does not adopt the exclusive 'I write for myself' approach which makes the reader an observer. Rather, he sees children's fiction as being inclusive, part of the social fabric, and in one sense, created by all of us. It is the authors who give it back to us in its particular form but he points out that the greatest changes in the last few years have been due to pressures from the outside. Children's literature, for him, is not a junior branch of adult literature but an entity in its own right. It has its own reasons for its existence. By looking back, his book illuminates the future. He explains how, just as much as in the past, every book has a message and there is little point in pretending that it does not. There is a differential in age and experience between the author and the reader which results in a transfer of information. The aim may not be heavily didactic but children do learn from books. He believes that it is impossible to write a story free of all ethical and moral considerations which puts a certain burden of responsibility on the author – and, surely, on those of us who choose books for children. *Reading and Righting* not only deals with the past and present, however, as he is equally thoughtful about the future.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of talking to Robert Leeson is that he does believe that the book has a future. As the author of many of the *Grange Hill* stories in book form, he does not see television as a threat. No new medium, he argues, has to prove its worth by wiping out the existing ones. He points out that the first 'tie-in' was created in 1828 when an author and a publisher sneaked down to Covent Garden, witnessed the new *Punch* and *Judy*, and smartly brought out the book. Many books start as something else and there is no reason why books and television should not live in a state of



Photographs of Robert Leeson by Richard Mewton.



competitive coexistence. He objects to what he calls 'assessment by category', the kind of criticism which says it must be rubbish because it is on television. In his view, the greatest risk to the future of the book is the kind of person who regards books as possessing a special moral stature and retreats to the ivory tower with them. He illustrates this kind of shortsightedness with the story of the conference delegate who disapproved of presentations on television of Shakespeare, urging that the plays should be returned to the book, 'where they belong'.

One comes away from an interview with Robert Leeson feeling that he is 'one of us'. He is clearly but quietly deeply concerned with children and their reading, and extends a hand to teachers and librarians, hoping that we will all work together. He sees children's books as being crucial. The child readers are the book's future. He thinks particularly that

the most important kind of book is that for the reluctant or unwilling reader. We must go on, trying to widen the base, widen the appeal. To do this he would like to see the class reader rehabilitated. After all, it may be some children's only experience of books. He has already been successful with one of his own books, *It's My Life*, which after being read in class is being bought in the school bookshop and taken home. He is hoping to do it again with his new time travel book, due at the end of the year in the Longman Knockout format. It is called *Time Rope* and presents the reader with three statements: 'know who you were', 'understand who you are', 'decide what you will be'. It will be in four parts so if part one goes well there are three more for the class to look forward to. They probably will look forward to them, for it is certain that their author is someone who has thought long and to good purpose about books for children and always writes with his young readers' needs firmly in mind. ●

## The Books

(available in hardback from Collins and in paperback from Fontana unless otherwise stated)

**The Adventures of Baxter & Co.**  
0 00 184124 6, £4.95

**Bess**  
0 00 672218 0, £1.25 pbk

**Candy for King**  
0 00 184136 X, £6.95; 0 00 672467 1,  
£1.50 pbk

**Challenge in the Dark**  
0 00 671648 2, £1.00 pbk

**The Demon Bike Rider**  
0 00 671320 3, £1.00 pbk

**Forty Days of Tucker J.**  
0 00 672176 1, £1.00 pbk

**Genie on the Loose**  
Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11177 3, £5.95;  
0 00 672294 6, £1.25 pbk

**Grange Hill Rules – OK?**  
0 00 671658 X, £1.25 pbk

**Grange Hill Goes Wild**  
0 00 671812 4, £1.25 pbk

**Grange Hill For Sale**  
0 00 671813 2, £1.25 pbk

**Grange Hill Home and Away**  
0 00 672091 9, £1.25 pbk

**Harold and Bella, Jammy and Me**  
Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10722 9, £5.25;  
0 00 671606 7, £1.25 pbk

**It's My Life**  
0 00 184248 X, £4.95; Collins Cascades,  
0 00 330008 0, £1.75; 0 00 671783 7,  
£1.25 pbk

**'Maroon Boy**  
0 00 672097 8, £1.25 pbk

**Reading and Righting**  
0 00 184413 X, £6.95; 0 00 184415 6,  
£4.95 pbk

**Silver's Revenge**  
0 00 184783 X, £4.95; 0 00 672466 3,  
£1.75 pbk

**The Third Class Genie**  
Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10623 0, £5.50;  
0 00 671633 4, £1.25 pbk

**The White Horse**  
0 00 184925 5, £4.95; 0 00 672252 0,  
£1.50 pbk

# May we recommend . . .

a series in which we feature writers and books we think you might like to know better.

Eric Hadley introduces

## PENELOPE FARMER

There was a time when I would happily lend books to children, students and parents in the sure knowledge that if they weren't returned I could easily replace them. Looking at my shelves now I'm beginning to realise that many of my favourite books are no longer in print and that my booklists speak of a happier past time in publishing history. It's refreshing to be able to report that Bodley Head are launching a new series of reissues in paperback of 'books to be read again'.

The series is entitled Bodley Bookshelf, and amongst the first six titles are two by Penelope Farmer – **The Summer Birds** and **Charlotte Sometimes**. I'm not sure about the publisher's hyperbole of 'modern classics of children's literature'. Penelope Farmer herself was much more modest about **The Summer Birds**, published in 1962 and her first full length novel for children. For her, going back to revise it for this new edition had been 'like reading a book written by somebody else'. It's a book, too, written when she was learning her craft as a writer, written, as she herself says, 'in total innocence'. Growing out of a short story it still has the feeling of a long short story. Its 108 pages deal with one short summer in which a group of children learn to fly with the aid of a mysterious boy who passes briefly through their lives. Like a true short story, it deals with one crucial phase in the lives of the children and particularly that of the story's heroine, Charlotte. Nor does it seem to me accidental that the decision to grow up and so refuse the possibility of endless childhood is central to this early novel by a writer who has spoken herself of her books 'growing up as I grew up'.

It was seven years before **Charlotte Sometimes** appeared – a real novel not simply because of its extra sixty or so pages. The Charlotte of the title may share the same name as the heroine of the earlier novel, and she may well have a sister called Emma, but all similarities end there in my view. The novel, like its central character, is altogether more ambitiously conceived. In 1969, of course, we were all 'into fantasy'. Sixteen years on much of it looks a bit threadbare and inconsequential.

For all its time-shift device, **Charlotte Sometimes** seems to me quite unlike that kind of 'fantasy', just as the blurb writer performs a disservice in harping on the 'hypnotic quality' of the writing. This is a novel which has held up well precisely because it doesn't depend on the trick of lulling the reader's alertness. Unlike the earlier novel it depends less on evocativeness of language and much more on tightness of organisation and plotting. The whole novel is as chilling and sharply realised as is its closing sentence, 'All the remaining pages were blank'. It's not hypnotic any more than it is sentimental or nostalgic. The First World War world Charlotte slips back into is as grim and demanding as her life in the present is dull and monotonous. It is too quite simply a very good ghost story – with a ghost that Charlotte knows but never meets and who



brilliantly is never present though she dominates the thoughts of the chief characters. Indeed the nearest we come to encountering the ghost is not in some spine-chilling set-piece, but in the sordid and cheapjack seance scene.

These are then both very good *children's* books, books to recommend to a new generation of readers. **Charlotte Sometimes** certainly seems to me a novel to place alongside such other 'classic' though rather different 'time-shift' novels as **Tom's Midnight Garden** or **A Traveller in Time**. My emphasis on *children's* is deliberate. Penelope Farmer's later novels **A Castle of Bone** (1972) and **Year King** (1977) both depend more on the hints, clues and allusions which demand a more sophisticated and experienced reader. This experienced reader still doesn't understand the significance of the ending of **A Castle of Bone**. Indeed it's always struck me that there was a good comic novel here which lots of children would enjoy – a cupboard which transforms objects, animals and people – overlain by psychological and mythic interests of an adult nature.

As for **Year King** it too has been reissued but this time under the Bodley Head Teenage Fiction imprint. Like the work of

many writers whose first books belong in the children's section of the library it's hard to place **Year King**. Its major characters are at university and neither their concerns or their lifestyles relate very sharply to the lives of the teenage readers I know.

This is a point about which Penelope Farmer is keenly aware. Knowing that she has an 'adult' novel published by Gollancz this Spring, I asked her if she had any plans for another children's book. There aren't at the moment but she did make the point that she wouldn't try more teenage fiction because of its tendency to 'spill over into the adult work'. That seems to me exactly what has happened with **Year King**.

**Castle of Bone** and **Year King** which both felt very 'contemporary' when they first came out now feel much more 'historical' than the two earlier novels. It's striking how in **Charlotte Sometimes** the social and domestic detail of the First World War period is vividly presented whereas the 'modern' world to which Charlotte belongs is much more sketchily present. In one sense she is of course so much of her own time that she can take it for granted and there is just enough detail – the incessant aircraft noise, her friend's transistor – to make us feel the distinction between the two periods. It is precisely this lack of detail, the timeless 'modern' quality of Charlotte's world, which will make it feel less 'dated' to new readers and help to guarantee it the 'classic' status it deserves.

And now to end on a personal note – could we please see Penelope Farmer's collection of Creation myths, **Beginnings**, appear in paperback? It is outstanding among collections of its kind and it deserves to become a standard resource and reference for teachers interested in introducing their pupils to such stories.

### Penelope Farmer's Books

**The Summer Birds**  
The Bodley Head, Bodley Bookshelf,  
0 370 30822 0, £3.95

**Charlotte Sometimes**  
The Bodley Head, Bodley Bookshelf  
0 370 30823 9, £3.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.0562 9,  
£1.25

**A Castle of Bone**  
Puffin, 0 14 03.0692 7, £1.00  
An edition in Bodley Bookshelf is scheduled  
for later this year.

**Year King**  
Bodley Head Paperbacks, 0 370 30818 2,  
£4.95

**Saturday by Seven**  
A story for 5-7's  
Puffin, 0 14 03.1032 0, 95p

**Beginnings**  
Chatto, 0 7011 2275 7, £4.95

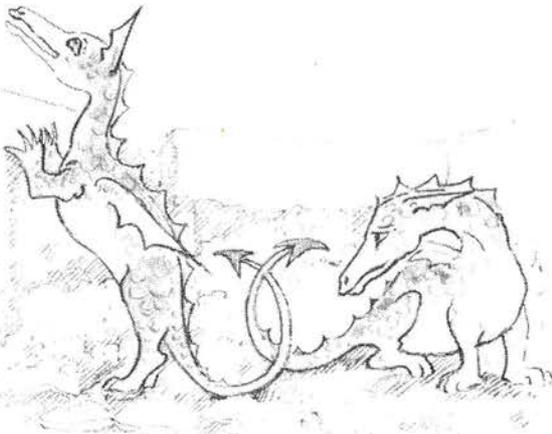
**Coal Train**  
Heinemann, Long Ago Books,  
0 434 94929 9, £2.50

# THE MAKING OF READERS

One of the crucial moments in determining whether children become readers happens some time between seven and nine when they meet their first extended stories. There's a lot of new publishing in this area; time, we thought, to try some of it out. But first we asked **Colin Mills**

## What makes a good book for seven to nines?

Whenever I'm asked that question by parents or teachers, I tend to talk about actual reading experiences that are fresh in my mind. A group of eight year olds in a classroom I've been working in recently have been reading Penelope Lively's **Dragon Trouble** (one of the new Heinemann **Bananas** series). They've been reading it collaboratively: for some of the children in the group it is their first extended text. I've observed the children, listened to the tapes their teacher has made of their discussions, and read their own stories which have come as a result of their story-reading.



From **Dragon Trouble**.

Why is this (and many other) 'reading context' foregrounded in my mind when people ask me the 'good books' question? I think it is because I believe that our observation of how particular books are shared, enjoyed and discussed is still our best guide to what 'works'. I've selected four broad areas which help me in considering books for the age group: continuity; form; content and extending possibilities.

### Continuity

Penelope Lively's book mentioned above – like most successful books for the age group – provides *continuity with prior reading experience*. By this I mean that in terms of character (a young boy and his grandfather); situation (a holiday and a child's imaginary world) and language (the involving style of the writer), the book builds upon the literary experience children have of picture books and of listening to stories and upon their experience of the world. 'Bridging books' is the term I often use when discussing such books with teachers. Some more important aspects of the 'continuity' are:

- **Pictures:** still an important part of the reading process. They can be 'read' and provide important cues to novices who can be overawed by what appears to be acres of text.
- **Meeting characters that provide links with what children already know** can be important. I've met many seven year olds who are captured by the ways in which the Ahlbergs skilfully incorporate fairy tale and nursery rhyme characters into **Jeremiah in the Dark Wood** and **Ten in a Bed**.
- **The power of a good story** is an important motivating drive: 'what happens next' is as important as ever!

### Form

Important at two levels:

**First:** the physical appearance and layout of text and pictures must help the reader through the book. That sounds a truism, but I'm still amazed by some publishers' lack of consideration of line and word breaks in texts. The economics of publishing is, more than ever, giving rise to smudgy pictures and poor quality paper that would not have been tolerated ten years ago. The **Blackbirds** and **Redwings** from the Julia MacRae imprint are models of considerate presentation as are the Fontana Young Lions series.

**Second:** does the form of the book help the young reader develop the literary competence that being a reader involves? Bearing in mind Margaret Meek's point that we learn to read by virtue of the 'untaught lessons' that good texts teach us, I ask myself when I judge a book for the age group:

- Does the author invite the reader in? First pages are important here.
- Is the use of dialogue clear?
- Does the story have a 'pattern' which makes it coherent?

I find that one of the best ways to discover the answers to these questions is to listen to children talking about their reading – what do they find difficult in their first extended texts?

### Content

I'm constantly surprised by the ways in which writers for this group can hit upon original ideas. Here are some features that may guide you in choosing individual classroom collections:

- Stories that look at the seemingly small, but significant, childhood experiences.
- Stories that show how the outlandish and the dramatic lie within the taken-for-granted and the workaday.
- Humorous stories, which build upon this age group's developing enjoyment of linguistic word-play, and the zany pushing out of reality to test the limits of the realistic.
- Books which reflect the camaraderie of friendship, groups and school life.
- Good re-tellings of folk, and traditional tales.
- Books which take stock characters and creatures, but make them three-dimensional.

### Extending readers

One of the key tasks for writers and for teachers, librarians, parents and all choosers for this age group is to let the books have simple-seeming surface texts. That is, they need to tell a story in immediate and accessible ways. *But*, the best can also make reflection and speculation possible.

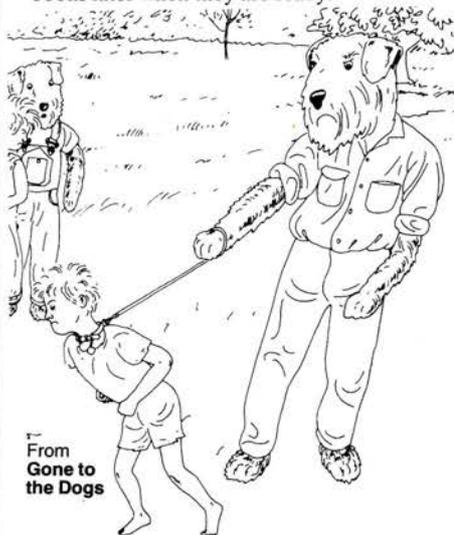
Last, I want to say that VARIETY and the possibility of selecting and choosing is vital. I still sadly remember those children in Vera Southgate's study, **Extending Beginning Reading**, spending up to a term on an uninspiring reading book. Some of the promising series for seven to nines give scope for that choice.

# Testing . . . Testing . . . 7 to 9s . . .

Four teacher librarians tried out books from seven series published for this age range.

## Lesley Zeibecakis has a class of 7-8 year olds in a junior school in Bristol.

The books were received eagerly. Many children in the class could not tackle them as a 'read' but they were still interested. They liked the 'feel' of the books, commented on the nice shiny paper and hard covers. This was a new experience for them, being reared on a diet of paperbacks. They particularly liked the illustrations for **The Moon Monsters**, **Gone to the Dogs** and **The October Animal**. They spent a long time just looking at the books guessing at the stories and playing with them – sorting them into groups according to the publisher's logo, playing bookshops. This was all valuable experience and will provide a stimulus to tackling the books later when they are ready.



From  
**Gone to the Dogs**

About fifteen children in the class were ready and more than willing to start reading the books. Off their own bat they sorted them into two groups according to how difficult they thought they would be. Gazelles, Banana Books, Blackbirds and Kestrel Kites were classed as 'easier' on the grounds of shorter length and larger print. (The larger type-size of the Kestrel Kites seems to have stopped them noticing the 90+ pages. Redwings though shorter were classed as 'harder'.) Books in this group were the most popular and the most widely read. The fact that they could get through a whole book in one session boosted their confidence a great deal and they were quite prepared to tackle any book from this group (though they found **Mr Berry's Ice-cream Parlour** 'too long and boring'). They quickly learned the series logo of the different publishers and were happily looking for Blackbirds and Gazelles in the public library secure in the knowledge that they would be able to read them.

Redwings, Antelopes and Eagles, although attractive, were classed as 'more difficult'. Some children started a book and then gave up, some finished without I fear understanding or gaining much from the experience. Everyone was intrigued by the idea of **Gone to the Dogs**. Only two children – the most competent readers – read all of this group (**Demon Headmaster**, **Little Angel** and **Dogs**) and no title produced any remarkably strong response.

The most popular books were:

**The Moon Monsters**, Douglas Hill, Banana Books  
Particularly welcome as it 'hooked' the boys. (In general the boys were much harder to attract and please than the girls.) Girls liked it to.

**The Ghost Child**, Emma Tennant, Banana Books  
Provoked much discussion about ghosts and a search for more 'ghost books' in the library. We ended up having a ghost week!

**The October Animal**, Denise Hill, Gazelles  
Much sympathetic empathy for the boy who wanted to keep this very appealing animal.

**My Gang**, Catherine Sefton, Gazelles  
The children liked the idea of a gang of girls but the girls in my class weren't so pleased when they found that a small boy gets the better of the gang. Neither was I!

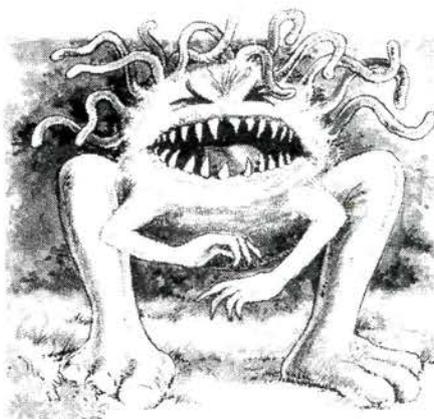
**The Nearly Terrible Birthday**, Delia Huddy, Blackbirds  
Again lots of sympathy for Minty and much pleasure at the happy ending.

**The Little Dressmaker**, Eleanor Farjeon, Blackbirds  
Much enjoyed. 'It's like a fairy story.'

## John Parkins tried out his books with a class of 9-10 year olds in a village near Bath.

I simply put the books in the classroom and stood back to see what happened. The Blackbirds, Redwings and Banana Books drew the most positive response. There was great excitement as the children passed them around and organised a waiting list for themselves to keep track of whose turn it was next. They decided that Banana Books looked 'friendly' and after the reading got going this proved to be the most successful series of all those we were trying out. The Eagles attracted in the main the more literate children (not necessarily those with the highest reading ages!), probably on account of their greater length and general appearance; but the topsy-turvy idea of **Gone to the Dogs** was well-received by everyone and the cover caused much discussion even among those who decided the book was 'too hard'. Karla liked **Little Angel Comes to Stay**. 'I thought it was very funny. I can imagine how little Gabrielle felt in amongst all the other children. I would like to read more stories about Little Angel.'

Our two Kestrel Kites (**Mr Berry's Ice-cream Parlour** and **Rat Saturday**) drew a lot of adverse comment: 'the pictures are very dull'; 'the pictures were boring and when I say boring I mean BORING'; 'I thought it was a good book at the start but when I got to the back of the book it was boring'; 'when you get half way it gets boring'; – are fairly typical remarks. Interesting that they were all made by boys who had been attracted by the covers but perhaps, even at nine, were not as readers up to the greater length and complexity of these titles. Antelopes and Gazelles were generally liked for their layout and appearance and perceived by the children as 'more serious' books.



From **The Moon Monsters**.

Some comments:

**Dragon Trouble**, Penelope Lively, Banana Books  
'I'd like to read more books like this.' (Toni)  
'The pictures go with the writing . . . I was stuck in the book, I think I was Peter.' (Robert)  
'I thought the story was going to be brainy but when I read it it became good (Suzzanna) 'It is exciting, it is funny, it is good.' (Darren)

**Jane and the Pirates**, Jules Older, Banana Books  
'I thought it was great. I liked the way the pictures were drawn and I liked the way the story was set out.' (Karla)  
'I liked it when Redbeard took Jane from his (sic!) mum and dad. I couldn't wait to read the next chapter.' (Wayne)

**The Rag Bag**, Anne Hughson, Gazelles  
'It had things in the story that happen in real life.' (Karla)  
'The pictures are good, they are a sort of sketch. I like things like houses being knocked down. I don't know why but I do think it's the best book I've read.' (Gary)  
'It is silly to go in the place where they knock houses down just for your Gran's bag.'

## Sandy Fletcher's readers are 7-10 year olds in a primary school in Bath.

Our seventeen assorted titles were greeted enthusiastically and most of the class were eager to get reading. Perhaps because I made a point of telling the children that these books were particularly for their age group and I would be interested to know what they thought of them, the books became known as 'the special books'.

Twenty-four of the twenty-nine children in the class read one or more of the books. (I have 10 first-year juniors, 15 second-year juniors and 4 third-year juniors – five children have severe reading difficulties.) The children were obviously recommending books to each other and were good at deciding who would like which stories. For the older and more confident readers whether there were pictures in the books didn't really matter. The story was the thing. The most sought after titles were:

**The Saddle Bag Hero**, Sian Lewis, Antelopes  
Lyn wants a fierce dog for her birthday; she

gets a guinea pig who proves to be not such a bad substitute.

**Bright-eye**, Alison Morgan, Kestrel Kites  
Several children were clearly moved by this gentle story of a girl who hatches a wild duck's egg.

**Mr Majeika**, Humphrey Carpenter, Kestrel Kites  
A funny school-based fantasy in which the class nuisance meets his match.

**Tigers Forever**, Ruskin Bond, Redwings  
A young Indian boy is determined to save a tiger.

**Midnight Pirate**, Diana Hendry, Redwings  
The adventures of a lonely child and a kitten, the midnight pirate.

**Christabel**, Alison Morgan, Blackbirds  
Christabel the goat is expecting kids; Bethan has a particular interest in the outcome.

**Smiley Tiger**, Barbara Willard, Blackbirds  
A beautifully shaped story of a small boy and a tiger rug.

Of these I read **Midnight Pirate** and **Tigers Forever** to the class which resulted in a waiting list to read them. I don't think it's any accident that most of the sought after titles feature animals. Most of the children have pets, some keep goats. (**Christabel** had a good start and this, prompted by me, led to more Alison Morgan, **Bright-eye**.) The books are still being read and talked about.

## Ron Rendall has a class of 36 second-year juniors in Radstock, near Bath.

The arrival of seventeen new books generated a great deal of interest; many children read more books in a few weeks than they would normally tackle and

complete over half a term. Children talked about the books amongst themselves and were constantly recommending titles to one another. I had to institute a 'reservation' system and the requests are still coming in. Was all this enthusiasm simply because the books were something new – a refreshing change from the rather tired-looking titles on our class bookshelves? That was obviously part of it but can't account fully for the lively, interested shared reading experience these books created. The children are regular and keen buyers of paperbacks from our Book Club but I've never seen them so eager to discuss and recommend as they were with this collection. Watching and listening gave me some clues to explain why. 'They feel like real books'; 'some books take too long to read, but you could read these quickly . . . you didn't get bored'; 'they are about the right easiness'; 'the words are big' (she was referring to size of type) 'and not too many on a page'; 'the pictures are nice'. We talked a lot about layout and design; it's obviously crucial for the fledgling reader.

Another important factor in creating this atmosphere, I'm sure, was that every child found something to enjoy. Judgements and responses were varied.

The lack of coloured illustrations in all but the Banana Books was important to some: 'I wish it had had more colourful pictures' (**Your Guess is as Good as Mine**); 'The grey makes it a bit gloomy' (**Mr Majeika**). These were readers happy to read at the length – even thinking 'it's a bit short' – but still needing the support of good illustration. Others, less concerned with pictures, were left wanting more: 'It didn't talk down to you and was believable. I really felt for Dino. I wish it could have been longer.' (**The Christmas Rocket**). The mark of a good read – to be sorry it's over!

In the classroom there was a great sense of sharing and comparing of responses, weighing and evaluating, and the struggle to

put into words however inexactly what had been thought and felt. 'The book is telling us not to want what others have got because they think they like the things.' (**Freckle Juice**). '**Tigers Forever** was exciting but **Freckle Juice** happens in school and was not so exciting but I did enjoy it.'

Opinions varied about all the books but some were top of the pops with everyone.

**Freckle Juice**, Judy Blume, Banana Books  
'Not too many hard words . . . it is very colourful . . . very funny.'

**Mr Majeika**, Humphrey Carpenter, Kestrel Kites  
'The characters are very well thought out . . . it was interesting . . . it ought to be called Hamish Bigmore because most of it is about him . . . I'd like a series of Mr Majeika books: Mr Majeika Strikes Again or Mr Majeika in Trouble . . . I enjoyed it but it should have been longer.'

At the children's request I read **Mr Majeika** aloud. There was total attention and involvement and lots of laughter. The reservation list got much longer!

**Smiley Tiger**, Barbara Willard, Blackbirds  
'It was believable . . . well written and very enjoyable.'

**The School Trip**, Jacqueline Wilson, Antelopes  
'Lots of funny parts . . . I could picture the story in my head . . . it seemed real . . . some hard words, but I could read them . . . I really liked this one.'

**Tigers Forever**, Ruskin Bond, Redwings  
'Comfortable to read – not too hard, not too easy . . . the tiger was a good character . . . I liked the end because there would be more tigers in the world.'

**Tracker**, Mary Cockett, Gazelles  
'A very good animal story . . . exciting to read.'

### Books used

#### GAZELLES

Hamish Hamilton, £1.95 each, stated age range 5-8, 48pp

**The October Animal**, Denise Hill, ill. Jennifer Bailey, 0 241 11252 4

**My Gang**, Catherine Sefton, ill. Catherine Bradbury, 0 241 11154 4

**Something from Space**, Ursula Daniels, ill. Maureen Bradley, 0 241 10918 3

**The Rag Bag**, Anne Hughson, ill. Kate Rogers, 0 241 11367 9

**Goal for Charlie**, Joy Allen, ill. Janet Duchesne, 0 241 11366 0

**Tracker**, Mary Cockett, ill. Maria Majewska, 0 241 11304 0

**Monkey Tricks**, Christopher White, ill. Jennifer Bailey, 0 241 11071 8

**Ursula Sailing**, Sheila Lavelle, ill. Thelma Lambert, 0 241 11247 7

#### BLACKBIRDS

Julia MacRae, £2.95 each, stated age range 5-8, 48pp

**The Nearly Terrible Birthday**, Delia Huddy, ill. Kate Rogers, 0 86203 203 2

**The Little Dressmaker**, Eleanor Farjeon, ill. Charles Front, 0 86203 202 4

**Linda's Lie**, Bernard Ashley, ill. Janet Duchesne, 0 86203 099 4

**The Christmas Rocket**, Ann Molloy, ill. Laszlo Acs, 0 86203 128 1

**Christabel**, Alison Morgan, ill. Mariella Jennings, 0 86203 136 2

**Smiley Tiger**, Barbara Willard, ill. Laszlo Acs, 0 86203 161 3

#### ANTELOPES

Hamish Hamilton, £2.75 each, stated age range 6-9, 96pp

**The Video Affair**, Richard Dennant, ill. Janet Duchesne, 0 241 10621 4

**Jenny and the Wreckers**, Fay Sampson, ill. Vanessa Julian-Ottie, 0 241 11368 7

**Beryl the Rainmaker**, Joan Phipson, ill. Laszlo Acs, 0 241 11238 9

**Burglar Bells**, John Escott, ill. Maureen Bradley, 0 241 11118 8

**A Bit of Give and Take**, Bernard Ashley, ill. Trevor Stubley, 0 241 11301 6

**The School Trip**, Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Sally Holmes, 0 241 11153 6

**The Saddle Bag Hero**, Sian Lewis, ill. Karen Heywood, 0 241 11302 4

**The Money Makers**, Ann Forsyth, ill. Kate Rogers, 0 241 11152 8

#### BANANA BOOKS

Heinemann, £1.95 each, stated age range 7-9, 42pp

**The Moon Monsters**, Douglas Hill, ill. Jeremy Ford, 0 434 93024 5

**Dragon Trouble**, Penelope Lively, ill. Valerie Littlewood, 0 434 93022 9

**Freckle Juice**, Judy Blume, ill. Coral Guppy, 0 434 93021 0

**Jane and the Pirates**, Jules Older, ill. Michael Bragg, 0 434 93020 2

**The Big Stink**, Sheila Lavelle, ill. Lisa Kopper, 0 434 93023 7

**The Ghost Child**, Emma Tennant, ill. Charlotte Voake, 0 434 93025 3

#### REDWINGS

Julia MacRae, £3.50 each, stated age range 7-11, 48pp

**On the Night Watch**, Hannah Cole, ill. Kate Rogers, 0 86203 170 2

**Earthquake**, Ruskin Bond, ill. Valerie Littlewood, 0 86203 182 6

**The Haunting of Hemlock Hall**, Lance Salway, ill. Angelica Verney, 0 86203 157 5

**Your Guess is as Good as Mine**, Bernard Ashley, ill. Steven Cain, 0 86203 134 6

**Kit**, Jane Gardam, ill. William Geldart, 0 86203 132 X

**Midnight Pirate**, Diana Hendry, ill. Janet Duchesne, 0 86203 159 1

**Tigers Forever**, Ruskin Bond, ill. Steven Cain, 0 86203 133 8

#### KESTREL KITES

£3.95 each, stated age range 7-10, 96pp

**Rat Saturday**, Margaret Nash, ill. Maggie Ling, 0 670 80080 5

**Mr Berry's Ice-cream Parlour**, Jennifer Zabel, ill. Patricia MacCarthy, 0 670 80075 9

**The Conker as Hard as a Diamond**, Chris Powling, ill. Jon Riley, 0 7226 5933 4

**Mr Majeika**, Humphrey Carpenter, ill. Frank Rodgers, 0 7226 5907 5

**Bright-eye**, Alison Morgan, ill. Vanessa Julian-Ottie, 0 7226 5906 7

#### EAGLES

OUP, £3.95 each, stated age range 8-12, 64-144 pp

**Gone to the Dogs**, John Rowe Townsend, 0 19 271471 6

**Little Angel Comes to Stay**, Rachel Anderson, 0 19 271472 4

**The Demon Headmaster**, Gillian Cross, 0 19 271460 0

**Going Home**, K M Peyton, 0 19 271459 7

**Jump!**, Ken Whitmore, 0 19 271461 9

**Junk Castle**, Robin Klein, 0 19 271487 2

We shall return to the topic of books for 7-9s in the July issue of **Books for Keeps**. If you are working with children in this age range and have comments, ideas or experiences you would like to pass on, why not get in touch. Ed. (Address inside front cover.)

# SOUND & VISION

## Picture Books on Video

**Pat Triggs meets two people involved in an exciting new venture.**

Reva Lee has twenty years of teaching experience behind her and her husband David has worked for twenty-two years as a cameraman and editor with BBC Television. For a long time they have dreamed and planned of combining their experience and talents in a joint venture, and last year they took the plunge and set up their own company, Reva Lee Studios, specialising in the production of television adaptations of children's picture story books. They realise that to a certain extent they are in competition with the long established and prestigious Weston Woods products but believe that their use of videotape rather than film is more in line with the way things are developing in classrooms: video recorders will eventually be commonplace in schools and the flexibility, adaptability and ease of use of videocassettes will make them much more popular and widely used than film. In addition Reva and David feel they are better equipped to produce material closely matched to the needs and feeling of the British classroom or library.



In choosing which books to adapt they consult librarians and teachers about the quality of the book and the way children respond to it. They are determined to aim for and maintain high standards.

The techniques by which the book is translated to the screen are deceptively simple. David uses a rostrum camera and the illustrations in the book. The eye is led, in a mix of longshots, close-ups, panning moves and dissolves, to explore the pictures while the ear takes in the unabridged and unaltered text. There is no animation. Told like that it may seem unsophisticated set beside computer graphics, split screen effects and other visual experiences currently on offer. I wondered whether visually sophisticated children would find it small beer – so we tried one out.

**The Sparrow's Story at the King's Command** is a long story on the theme of how stories are written and books are made. The sparrow at the centre of the story struggles bravely against impossible odds to deliver a story to the King. The book by Judith Crabtree is beautifully designed and nicely decorated in the style of old manuscripts; the pictures are packed with details and in places strongly dramatic.

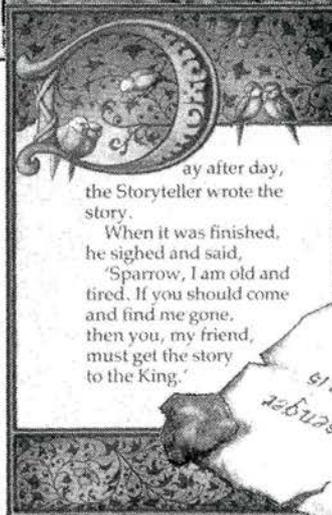
We showed it to a group of first-year juniors, a class of fourth-year juniors and a group of primary and secondary teacher librarians. The response was uniformly enthusiastic. Chris Jonas, the teacher of the top juniors, reported: 'They were very quiet and attentive – you could have heard a pin drop! I think video extends the age range for books like this – my children wouldn't have chosen to read this-book but they were captivated by the video and wanted to see it again and again. No one actually cried but they were definitely moved by it.'

I took it to two classes of seven year olds. They were totally involved, anticipating outcomes, making little noises of delight and concern. After the showing there was free and thoughtful talk about what had happened to the sparrow (he disappears) and groups of children were queuing up to look at the book to relive the story and compare it with the video. For a week the book was pored over and the story explored; images, details, colour, design were located and commented on; a quality of response which I am sure was precipitated by seeing the video.

The teacher librarians enjoyed it too. They liked the pace of the telling, the music (there were some reservations about the narrative voice). From primary, secondary and special schools, they could all see a place in their resource collections for this kind of material – finance permitting!!

So far Reva Lee Studios have four titles available on videocassette (VHS and Betamax):

**The Sparrow's Story at the King's Command**, Judith Crabtree (book from OUP, 0 19 554359 9, £4.50)



From **The Sparrow's Story at the King's Command**.

**Future Story**, Fiona French (book from OUP, 0 19 279778 6, £4.95)

**Gorilla**, Anthony Browne (book from Julia MacRae, 0 86203 104 4, £4.95)

**Greedy Zebra**, Mwenye Hadithi and Adrienne Kennaway (book from Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 32892 4, £5.50)

Each cassette costs £9.95 (plus VAT and p&p). All four stories on a single cassette, £29.95 (plus VAT and p&p).

Details from Reva Lee Studios, 96 Tolcarne Drive, Pinner, Middlesex HA5 2DP. Tel: 01-866 4948.

### Also available on video

**The Snowman**, Raymond Briggs' classic picture book. (Palace Video, £19.95, or hire from video shops)

**The Secret Garden**, Dorothea Brooking's serial dramatisation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's classic, edited into continuous narrative of feature film length. Made in the mid 70s, it is currently being reshowed – a quality production. (BBC Video, £24.95)

## Coming Soon

**The Baker Street Boys** series will be repeated on BBC 1, starting in the first week in May. Tie-in by Brian Ball from BBC/Knight, £1.25.

**A Proper Little Nooryeff.** Jean Ure's funny and observant story of a boy who, at first reluctantly, takes up ballet has been dramatised as a half-hour play for the ITV series **Dramarama**. Transmission likely late April/early May.

**Golden Pennies.** An exciting adventure story by Graeme Farmer of the struggles, joys, friendships and battles of the Greenwood family, settling in Australia in 1851. Already shown on Australian TV, it is due for transmission by ITV on Sunday afternoons from late May. Puffin tie-in will be published in April.

## A Film for all the Family?

Well that's what Penguin are claiming for the latest special effects packed fantasy, **The Neverending Story**, made from the story by German author, Michael Ende.

A lonely boy turning to a book for companionship is drawn into the adventure and the struggle to save the land, Fantastica, from destruction by an all-consuming void, The Nothing. The King Penguin tie-in has been available since last Autumn. To coincide with the release of the film this Easter, there will be a Puffin edition for children.

## Middle English scores a century

Congratulations on 100 transmissions to the television programme that has done more than any other for books and reading in schools. Talking, reading and writing are provoked, stimulated and encouraged by these programmes broadcast weekly during the three school terms. The **Middle Pages** programmes focus specifically on authors and artists. (Elaine Moss is the programme consultant in this area.) Jan Mark, Jan Needle, Nina Bawden, Betsy Byars and Michael Foreman have all appeared to prove beyond doubt that people who create books are flesh and blood and interesting.

From the cover of **A Game of Soldiers**.



This term **Middle Pages** drew attention to a very promising new writer, Janni Howker, whose first book **Badger on the Barge** has already made its way to the shortlist of the Children's Book Award. There has also been a repeat of Jan Needle's challenging and moving TV drama, **A Game of Soldiers**, which concerns a group of island children caught up in the Falklands conflict. The play was nominated for a BAFTA award last year. The script is now available (Collins Educational, £1.75) and Jan Needle has written the story as a novel (Deutsch, 0 233 97744 9, £4.95; Fontana Lions, 0 00 672460 4, £1.25).

**Middle English** issues teacher's notes termly (£1.05) and an annual Pupil's Anthology (£1.00). All well worth having. Details from:

Anne Boyd, Schools Publications Assistant  
The Schools Information Office  
Thames TV Ltd  
Thames Television House  
306-316 Euston Road  
London NW1 3YE.

## In View

**Cockleshell Bay** (Thames). Currently running and continuing for 24 episodes into the summer. New tie-in titles due from Thames/Magnet in May: **The Pirate Seagull**, **Dressing Up**.

**Button Moon** (Thames). The Playboard Puppet Theatre series currently showing and continuing into April. Four tie-in titles by Ian Allen from Thames/Magnet: **Roddy Teapot**, **Shoebus Station**, **Looking for Button Moon**, **Painting the Pipes** (£1.25 each).

**The Wind in the Willows** (Thames). The famous Cosgrove Hall puppets in a six-part series of new stories featuring Kenneth Grahame's characters. Nicholas Jones has produced book versions of four of the stories (by Brian Trueman and Rosemary Anne Sisson): **The Weasels' Trap**, **The Grand Annual Show**, **Alfred and the Caravan**, **Mole's Cousin** (Thames/Magnet, £1.50 each).

# READATHON 85 in aid of the World Wildlife Fund Monday, 20th May – Friday, 24th May



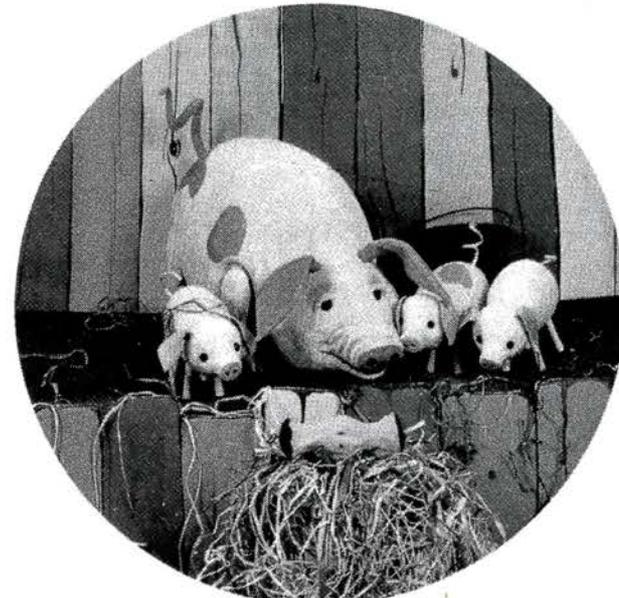
Following on from the highly successful launch of Readathon last year which raised £136,500 for Mencap and got thousands of children reading for enjoyment in a good cause, Readathon 85 is joining forces with the World Wildlife Fund.

This year schools will have some choice in what happens to the money raised. Two special projects have been designated – one for saving the **World's Jungles**, the other for conservation of the **British Countryside**. Another innovation is the provision of two Project Packs (sent to schools enrolling in Readathon 85 as part of the Readathon Pack) which teachers can use to arouse interest and increase understanding before the sponsored reading starts. The packs are devised by the World Wildlife Fund and include short stories (by writers who include Jan Mark) which will provoke talking and writing about the environment and endangered habitats.

It's not necessary to stick to the dates given here. Some schools may prefer half-term and indeed any time in the Summer term will do – though you'll miss out on the national publicity.

Last year nearly half a million books were read by children of all ages. The most distant readers were at La Chataignerie International School in Switzerland; in Scotland at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh 20 children did their Readathon in Braille.

Pamela Pig and piglets, from **Roddy Teapot** (Button Moon).



# LIFELINE 3

## Books for Sharing



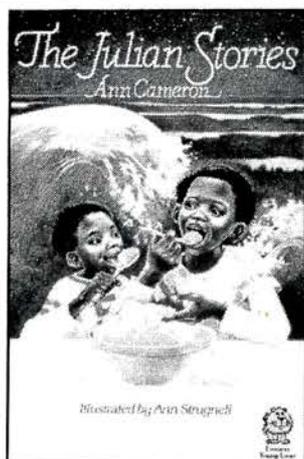
David Bennett

Books for Sharing is a list of books compiled for use as class readers in Primary and Secondary classrooms by *Joan Barker* and *David Bennett*. They are avid sharers of books with their classes and both convinced of the enormous benefits of reading together. Part One appeared in July 1984.

Part 5 offers suggestions for titles for the first half of next term along with ideas for follow-up reading and activities. We hope that readers will try out books wherever they are appropriate to their own school situation and will explore and experiment with some of the follow-up work, ideas for which are not intended to be comprehensive but more to give a flavour of what might be done to further excite and engage the readers who share the texts.



Joan Barker



### LOWER JUNIORS

#### The Julian Stories

Ann Cameron, Fontana Young Lions, 0 00 672227 X, £1.00

Here are six anecdotes of childhood, the memories of Julian and his little brother Huey. They are retold by Ann Cameron, an accomplished storyteller, who uses simple but effective language to relate everyday happenings and turn them into amazing adventures.

The warm relationship which Julian has with his father is apparent throughout the book. The characters of the two boys and their father are very convincing and lower junior children find it easy to relate to their escapades which are dealt with in a firm but loving way.

The illustrations by Ann Strugnell complement the stories and offer ideas for art work by the children.

#### More to Read

##### The Fiend Next Door

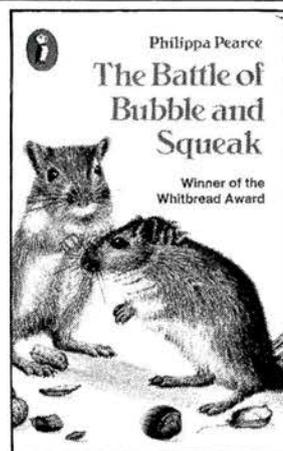
Sheila Lavelle, Fontana Young Lions, 0 00 672082 X, £1.00

##### The Well

Gene Kemp, Faber, 0 571 13284 7, £4.95

#### Things to Do

- Chapter 1. 'My father is a big man . . . shiver to the bottom of our shoes.' Paint a picture or make a collage of Julian's dad or your own dad.
- 'The pudding will taste like a whole raft of lemons.' What is your favourite food? Can you describe what it tastes like? Make up a class food poem.
- Chapter 2. Make a mural of cats helping in the garden or in the house.
- Chapter 6. What five wishes would you tie to a wishing kite? Write them down but don't tell anyone. Make a kite of your own. (Sled kites are guaranteed to fly successfully. See *The Penguin Book of Kites* by David Pelham.)
- Write a Julian story of your own either about Julian and his brother or yourself.



### MIDDLE JUNIORS

#### The Battle of Bubble and Squeak

Philippa Pearce, Puffin, 0 14 03.1183 1, £1.00

Sid Parker's mum detests animals. When Sid smuggles two gerbils (Bubble and Squeak) into the house, she is adamant - they will have to go. Sid and his two sisters, Peggy and Amy, take up arms in the battle to keep Bubble and Squeak. In between the adversaries is Bill, the children's stepfather, who remembers keeping white mice when he was a boy and in his quiet way supports them and gains Sid's friendship.

Philippa Pearce has long been a favourite author of mine and I think that all children should be given the opportunity to encounter her writing. She understands how helpless young people can feel and how persistent they can be in the face of parental opposition.

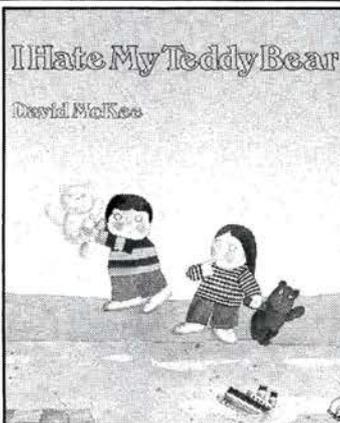
#### More to Read

**The Elm Street Lot**  
Philippa Pearce, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1147 5, 95p

**A Dog So Small**  
Philippa Pearce, Puffin,  
0 14 03.0206 9, £1.10

#### Things to Do

- Design a cage for a pair of gerbils. It can have as many rooms as you like. It needs to have food containers and exercise equipment.
- 'Sid had named the two of them . . . Bubble and Squeak.' Make a class collection of pairs of names that go together.
- Mrs Sparrow advertised the two gerbils for sale. How would you advertise something to make sure that someone wouldn't find it attractive, e.g. a pair of dinosaurs that had outgrown your house.
- Imagine that you have to leave a pet for someone else to look after whilst you are away on holiday. Write out instructions for feeding, cleaning and exercising them.
- 'The night after the dustbin morning was a bad one . . . She was having a nightmare.' Can you remember having a nightmare? In groups talk about it. Write a description or a nightmare poem or paint a picture.



### UPPER JUNIORS

#### I Hate My Teddy Bear

David McKee, Andersen Press, 0 86264 016 4, £4.50; Sparrow, 0 09 937510 9, £1.75

Whilst their mothers have tea together, John and Brenda take their teddies outside to play. Having both announced that they hate their teddy bears, they begin to boast about them. All the time that they are arguing about which one is best, they wander through a park filled with people performing strange antics and everywhere disembodied limbs appear. Several different stories are interwoven in pictures throughout the book.

*I Hate My Teddy Bear* is a classic example of a picture book for older readers (as identified by Elaine Moss) through which they can explore the world and their place in it. It has been criticized as being 'difficult', 'surreal' and 'self-indulgent' but the top juniors that I used it with voted it a winner.

Start by reading the book and showing all the pictures except the last one.

#### More to read

##### Bear Goes to Town

Anthony Browne, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10817 9, £4.95; Sparrow, 0 09 932040 1, £1.75

##### A Walk in the Park

Anthony Browne, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 89397 6, £4.95

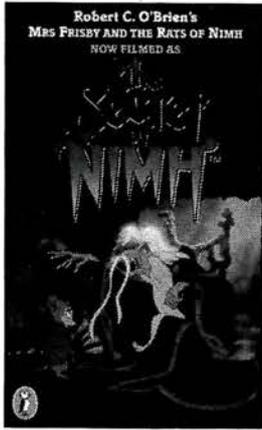
##### Not Now Bernard

David McKee, Sparrow, 0 09 924050 5, £1.35

#### Things to Do

- Write a TV or newspaper report describing the first sightings of the arms and legs. Where had they come from? Interview people for first-hand reports.
- In small groups produce a catalogue for the sculpture exhibition which must have a name, a location and a sponsor. Name at least four exhibitors, write a description of their careers and draw pictures of them. Describe the exhibits including materials and tools used, name them and fix a selling price. The catalogue should also contain advertisements.
- Discuss problems of producing such large sculptures - how a block of stone or wood takes the required form. Write a poem called 'Sculpture'.
- Pencil drawings of arms and legs in unusual positions. Partners used as models and first drawings made on squared paper to aid perspective.
- Picture of Brenda and John's mothers sitting together. Why is Brenda's mum crying? In secret, write the letter that makes her cry. Address it and post in the classroom. Later distribute letters randomly and in groups read aloud and decide which letters would be most likely to make someone cry.

## SECONDARY YEAR 1



### The Secret of NIMH (Mrs Frisby and The Rats of NIMH), Robert C. O'Brien, Puffin, 0 14 03.0725 7, £1.25

I've always suspected that O'Brien was so enamoured with the mouse creation that Mrs Frisby gets rather too much of this book, and so the first sixty-odd pages need dispensing with rapidly in order to get on to the real stars – the rats. I suppose they're 'Super Stars' really, having been rendered extra intelligent and inordinately strong by a scientific experiment, from which they have escaped. When Mrs Frisby seeks their help she learns of their adventurous past, their brave plans for the future and of her dead husband's past involvement in their affairs.

The film version will probably make the contents known to some pupils, but that shouldn't be a deterrent for a class sharing its ingenuity and cleverly paced action and suspense and for exploring the more serious implications, all of which contributed to its Newbery Medal award in 1971.

#### More to Read

R. C. O'Brien's other book is

**The Silver Crown**, Fontana Lions,  
0 00 671005 0, £1.50

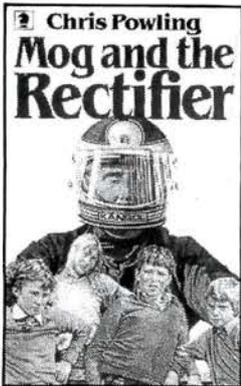
A Picture Puffin version of **The Rats of NIMH**

is available – **The Secret of NIMH Story Book**, 0 14 050.418 4, £2.95 (see also **Books for Keeps 15**).

#### Things to Do

1. The book has a strong message of giving help to others. Explore this in discussion. Then make a pictorial representation for the classroom wall.
2. Two ideas for writing: (a) The adventures of the six mice blown away in the tunnel (p.122); (b) The day Martin persuaded Jeremy to take him to Thorn Valley (p.196).
3. Dramatise the great debate between the Nicodemus Party and the Jenner Party when the idea of Thorn Valley was mooted (p.153). Mount a campaign for each party.
4. Imagine that Rat 17 was appointed Recorder Rat, jotting notes and collecting artefacts for a museum devoted to the rats' adventures. Describe or recreate his collection, which he set up in Thorn Valley.
5. Class attitudes to vivisection, etc. (p.119). This might be tied to parts of **The Plague Dogs**, Richard Adams, Penguin, 0 14 00.5533 9, £1.95.

## YEAR 2



### Mog and the Rectifier

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

Last time I promised a strong female lead, well a Tyke Tiler look-alike dominates this book, only her identity is revealed quite early on. The Rectifier himself is kept fairly secret although the cover of some editions gives too much away. Who is the Rectifier – he (or she) who 'makes adventure something that can happen anywhere, any day. He (who) can turn life into a sort of Golden Land?' Brains, the narrator, doesn't know; Mog, who seems to possess some inside information, might know... but then again...

The story moves briskly and remains steadfastly over the top, which make it well suited for this age range, who often seem bogged down in realism and in need of an antidote!

#### More to Read

Other books by Chris Powling:

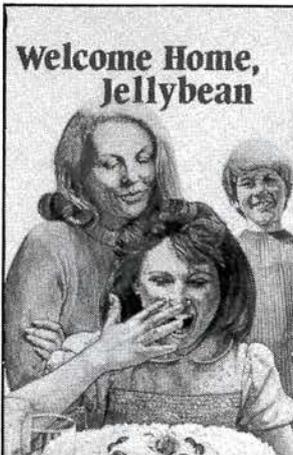
**Daredevils or Scaredcats**, Fontana Lions, 0 00 671897 3, £1.25

**The Mustang Machine**, Knight, 0 340 32101 6, £1.25

#### Things to Do

1. Predict the story from the title and Genius's letter at the onset. After reading the whole story what might Mog's reply be to the letter?
2. Use the class's suggestions of super heroes to examine the appeal of such a phenomenon as the 'righter of all wrongs'. Invent a super-hero, specifying his specialities and powers. Use him for drama, cartoon work, creative writing, news reports, a Rectifier boardgame.
3. Script the discussion between The Headmaster, Sir Edwin and The Chaplain after Howard and Brains have been interviewed at the school.
4. Write Mog's 'Rectifier Training Manual' with full notes and step-by-step instructions or 'Mog's Great Hoaxes' or 'How to be the Complete Bully' by Howard Bygraves.
5. Make an illustrated chart to demonstrate the ups and downs of the rivalry between Mog's Gang and the Bygraves. This will require careful detailing from the whole book.

## YEAR 3



### Welcome Home, Jellybean

Marlene Fanta Shyer,  
Collins Cascades, 0 00 330018 8, £1.65

'Now I've read this I really feel I know a mentally handicapped person and my attitudes have changed.' A telling remark by a third-year girl after her class had thoroughly enjoyed this humorous, lively and challenging novel. The story of Geraldine's adaptation to home and family life after years of being in institutions is told by her brother Neil, who sees his hitherto secure existence collapse under the strain and his own performance at school disintegrate as dilemmas pile up.

The group's initial uncertainty and some silly clowning soon disappear, for a strength of the book is that it evokes seriousness and concern rather than derision and many young readers are visibly shaken by it.

The chapters are very short and read aloud well, with intriguing tasters for the next episode at the end of each. The Americanisms barely intrude because the focus of attention is on Geraldine herself, or Jellybean as she prefers it, whose good humour and journey towards acceptability in a hostile world creates an impact that transcends every other concern or quibble.

#### More to read

Another novel by Marlene Fanta Shyer:

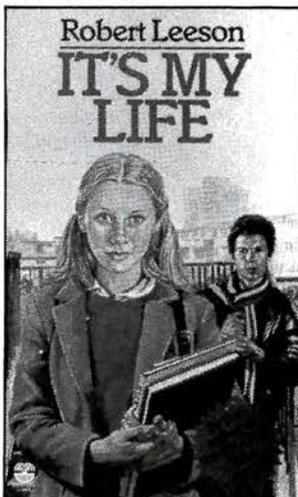
**My Brother the Thief**, Granada, 0 246 11635 8, 95p

– the dilemma of a girl whose brother has taken to petty crime.

#### Things to Do

1. Before the novel starts, discuss class attitudes to the mentally handicapped. Contrast this with a discussion at the end which explores how class attitudes have now changed.
2. You are Mrs Shrub. Mrs Oxley has asked you, at very short notice, to have Geraldine at your home for the weekend. Over a cup of coffee with a cronyn, describe your preparations for the visit and the events of the weekend.
3. Compile the flat owner's dossier on the Oxleys. Include Miss Gropper's letter after Chapter 3, Mr Rasmussen's after Chapters 3 and 11 and Mr Parrish's reports after Chapters 12 and 17.
4. After Chapter 15 record the lengthy and serious conversation between Mr and Mrs Oxley where they talk frankly about their perceptions of their situation. Perhaps introduce a Social Worker.
5. Make up another story about Neil's school life which involves Beef, Joe/Jason, Lady Bowring and Mr Gutttag. Try very hard to keep them with the same characteristics as they have in the book.

## YEARS 4/5



### It's My Life

Robert Leeson, Fontana Lions, 0 00 671783 7, £1.25

Robert Leeson is quoted as saying that, 'class readers can be the kiss of life rather than a fate worse than death', so his own book, with its appropriate title, seems like a good choice for our penultimate novel. Placing it after **Your Friend Rebecca** might seem a little odd, but I value the opportunity to examine the different ways that authors might choose to explore what is essentially the same situation, and if the boys are beginning to feel rebellious promise them something macho for next time. Leeson is of course strongly associated with the Grange Hill stories which is generally a good recommendation to youngsters.

Jan's mother's sudden departure leaves her family emotionally stunned and lost. It seems that brother Kevin and Jan's father choose to gloss over their problems by directly substituting Jan for her mother, but then so does everyone else. When the boyfriend too takes her for granted Jan realises that, like her mother, she must take control of her own life before others do it for her.

#### More to Read

Other books by this author:

**Candy for King**, Fontana Lions,  
0 00 672467 1, £1.50

**Forty Days of Tucker J.**, Fontana Lions,  
0 00 672176 1, £1.00. There is a programme on this book in ITV Thames' 'English Programme' series.

#### Things to Do

1. Begin by predicting the story just from its title and discuss what sort of story the pupils could write if faced with this subject in an exam.
2. A practical way of examining the mother/father, male/female role is to do a parent pursuit – based on observation, like the pupil pursuit carried out in school. Pupils, armed with a checklist, watch their parents for half an hour over the busy tea-time period, ticking every time they perform certain prescribed actions. The results are hugely illuminating!
3. Record Jan's conversation with Mr Donatelli had she gone to see him (p.113).
4. Dramatise Jan calling the Samaritans between Chapters 14/15.
5. Devise a chart to demonstrate the comparisons and contrast of attitudes to life between Jan, her mum, Sandra, Gran and Tina.

# AWARDS

## The Children's Book Award

Chosen by children and members of the Federation of Children's Book Groups, the winner of this award will be announced at the Federation's annual conference in April. Full details in the May **Books for Keeps** but meanwhile here is the shortlist of six books which were exhaustively tested in the final stage.

**Badger on the Barge**, Janni Howker, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 163 X, £6.95  
Collection of short stories about adults and children face to face. Good writing results in real tension. Older children found it a gripping read.

**Brother in the Land**, Robert Swindells, OUP, 0 19 271491 0, £5.95  
Very moving response to this book which never pretends. Children became eloquent about its effect on them.

**But Martin!**, June Counsel, Faber, 0 571 13349 5, £4.95  
Beautifully structured picture book, enjoyed both for listening and own reading. Its deeper significance was not lost on the children.

**The Changeover**, Margaret Mahy, Dent, 0 460 06153 4, £6.95  
Interesting, unusual and powerful book. Absorbing fantasy for the older end of our age range.

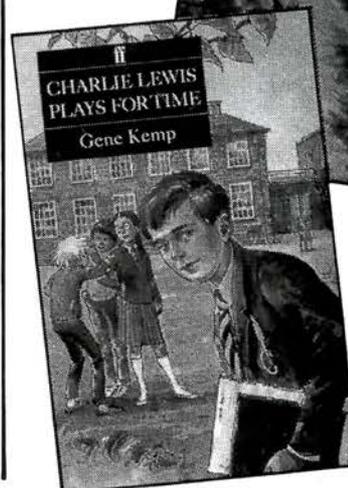
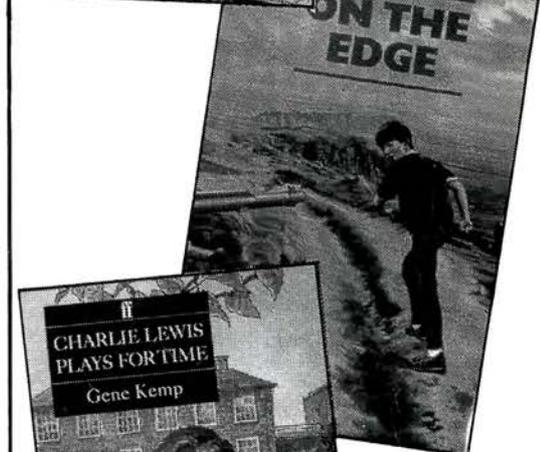
**Letty**, Avril Rowlands, Puffin Original, 0 14 03.1616 7, £1.25  
Lively paperback. Readers warmed to the handicapped main character who is presented in a very positive fashion.

**Lucy and Tom's a.b.c.**, Shirley Hughes, Gollancz, 0 575 03398 3, £3.95  
Imaginatively different approach to the ABC, with friendly text and detailed pictures. Children talked about it endlessly.

## Whitbread Literary Award

Winner of the children's novel section of this year's Whitbread Awards was Barbara Willard for **The Queen of the Pharisees' Children**, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 148 6, £6.25. A story set in and around the Ashdown Forest about a family of tinkers separated from one another by a cruel law.

Runners-up were Gillian Cross for **On the Edge**, OUP, 0 19 271486 4, £6.95, and Gene Kemp for **Charlie Lewis Plays for Time**, Faber, 0 571 13248 0, £5.50.



## A new 'biggest ever' award: The Smartie Prize for Children's Books

Nanette Newman, Peggy Heeks, Sarah Greene and Bernard Ashley.



Later this year we shall be looking out for the announcement of the first winners of the new Smarties Prize. Worth more – in financial terms – than any other children's book award (£10,000 in total) it is sponsored by Rowntree Mackintosh and was inaugurated 'to encourage high standards in books for children of primary school age'.

The awards has three categories:

- books for the under 7s
- books for the over 7s
- books with an innovatory presentation.

The winning book in each category receives £1,000 and a further £7,000 goes to the winner of the overall Grand Prix chosen from those three.

The prize will administered from the NBL and Martyn Goff, the NBL's Director who has been working for some time to find a sponsor for 'a huge

children's book prize – the children's equivalent of Booker', hopes that this will provide the opportunity to draw the attention of a much wider public to children's books and reading.

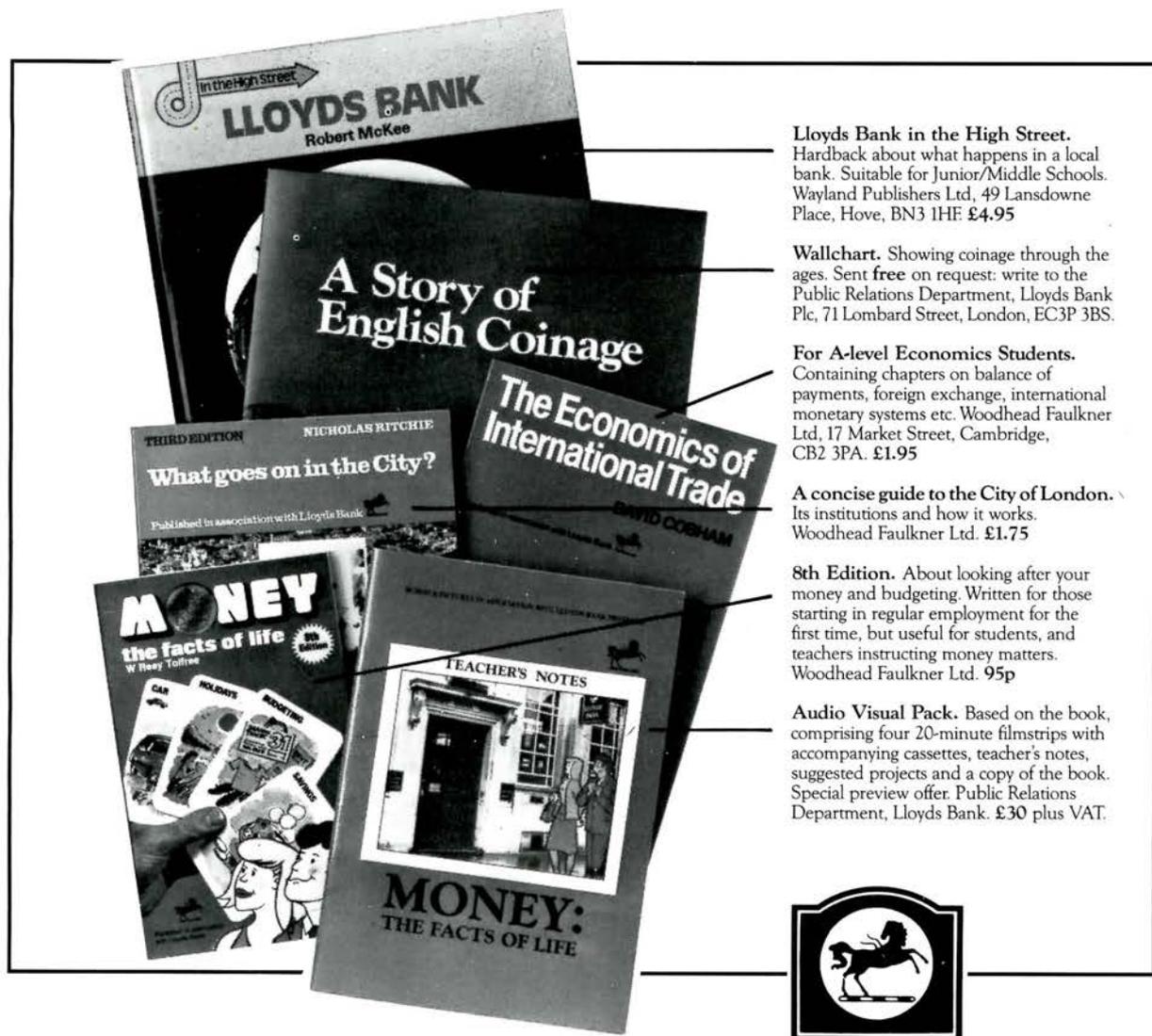
Publishers can submit up to four books in each category for the prize with a list of up to six further titles. The judges may call in additional titles which have not been submitted. Books eligible for this year's award must be first published in the UK between 1st January and 31st October 1985. They must be written in English by a citizen of the UK or an author resident in the UK.

Each year five judges will select the winning books. So far four judges have been named for the 1985 panel. They are, writer and head teacher Bernard Ashley, Sarah Greene, presenter of **Saturday Superstore**, Peggy Heeks, Senior Assistant County Librarian for Berkshire, and actress and writer, Nanette Newman.

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## Lloyds Bank

## New face at the NBL

The new Children's Books Officer at the NBL's Centre for Children's Books, Chris Lee, is busy 'finding her feet and putting names to faces'. Chris, who came to the NBL from the Buckinghamshire Library Service where she was Aylesbury Children's Librarian, has had varied library experience. 'I think they gave me the job because although I'm an idealist and an optimist I've got a strong practical streak. If you work with children and organise events for instance, you learn how important it is to attend to the nitty gritty things like checking where the lavatories are!'

That kind of attention to detail should prove invaluable to the organising committee of this year's Children's Book Week which Chris has joined. The **Children's Book Week Train** project is on and, barring accidents, the train should pull out of Euston Station on 12th October on an eight-day, whistle-stop tour of England, Scotland and Wales. The train carries a bookshop, exhibitions, spaces to meet authors and illustrators. At each station children will be able to visit the train, events will be organised on the platforms and children's book celebrities will leave the train for events organised in the town or city.

But that's not Chris's only concern. Closest to her heart is spreading the word about books for babies and toddlers and she has already commissioned an NBL booklist of Books for the Under-fives. Getting through to the parents she believes is vitally important and she cherishes a dream of a bookmobile, equipped with an exhibition based on the list, which she could drive into the centre of shopping precincts all over the country. All she needs is some sponsorship... Any offers?

For news of Children's Book Week, contact Dorothy Wood at the NBL, 45 East Hill, Wandsworth, London SW18 2QZ, tel: 01-870 9055.

## Meet Miss Massie

Sheila Massie, a children's librarian in West Sussex, is the central figure in the latest of Young Library's **People Who Help Us** series - **Miss Massie is a Librarian**. Here she is at the launch of the book surrounded by the children who also feature in it.



Photo: East Grinstead Courier.

The book is designed to help children understand libraries and encourage them to use and enjoy them to the full. It shows Sheila Massie in a variety of librarian's tasks, including activities with children - showing how the library works, reading aloud and sharing books at storytime, visiting schools - as well as illustrating the range and variety of services offered by a modern library.

**Miss Massie is a Librarian**, Christine Day, photographs by Jane Bowler, Young Library, 0 946003 36 X, £3.95.

## News from Signal Second Edition

**Picture Books for Young People 9-13** has been revised and updated by its compiler, Elaine Moss.

In her introduction to the second edition, Elaine Moss reflects with a typically guarded optimism of the growing acceptance by publishers, reviewers, teachers and librarians that picture books of high quality and challenging content have a great deal to offer to older readers. She writes, 'Three years ago I could find 84 titles to recommend in this area; in

1984 there is no problem in replacing the out-of-print titles and increasing the recommendations to a round 100. Many superficially attractive books with poor texts... were reluctantly cast aside.' Heartening too is the number of picture books for older readers being picked up for paperback editions.

**Picture Books for Young People 9-13**, The Thimble Press, 0 903355 15 9, £2.20 post free. From: Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos. GL15 5EQ.



## National Tell a Story Week: Starts 4th May

The 1985 theme for this annual celebration of books and stories promoted by the Federation of Children's Books Groups is **All Creatures Great and Small**.

The national launch this year is moving out of London - brave move FCBG - to Nottingham. On **Saturday, 4th May, 12.00-4.30 at Wollaton Park** in Nottingham, there will be marquees filled with storytelling, face painting, animal mask making, books to browse through and buy. Children can search for words and hunt for treasure. Also on hand will be David Neville with a clown/mime show, a pet shop owner with exotic pets, the Nottinghamshire Library bus and a display by the Robin Hood Society.

### Going Soft? The future of hardback books for children

Thursday, 16th May 1985 at The Triangle Cinema, Aston University, Holt Street, Birmingham. 10.00-4.30.

Another one-day seminar organised by the British section of IBBY. Speakers include Brian Alderson and Robert Leeson.

Admission is FREE. Details from Dinah Wilcox, 33 Trent View Gardens, Radcliffe on Trent, Notts NG12 1AY.

All over the country other events are being arranged. Schools, libraries and other organisations who would like to join in would be very welcome. Stickers, balloons, and posters are available at minimal cost. Especially useful is the **Activity and Ideas leaflet (6p)** and the **All Creatures Great and Small Booklist (11p)**. For details of what's being planned or how to order material for your own event, send a stamped addressed envelope to Sandra Mack, Cherry Tree Cottage, High Roding, Nr Great Dunmow, Essex. National Tell a Story Week is sponsored by Lloyds Bank.

Representatives from libraries, hardback publishing, paperback publishing, bookselling and the authors will join in. Cost: £14 including coffee, lunch and tea.

To book your place, contact Sheila Ray, Tan-y-Capel, Bont Dolgadfan, Llanbrynmair, Powys SY19 7BB (before 9th May).

## Betty Youngs

### Children's books lose an innovative artist.

Betty Youngs, who died on 3rd January after several years of incapacitating ill health, had a unique talent for needlework which she developed in a series of picture books for The Bodley Head. As a child, she had been told at school she couldn't study embroidery and was therefore diverted into a career as a pharmacist, but she returned to art after her marriage and the birth of her only child, Richard. She then developed her own method of creating pictures out of threads and cloth, making her colours by dyeing her own silks. After selling some small pictures privately, and having some published as Gallery 5 greetings cards, her first book, **Farm Animals** was published by The Bodley Head in 1976. As a board book for babies, it was well ahead of its time. A book of embroidered nursery rhymes, **Humpty Dumpty**, followed in 1977; **One Panda**, an animal counting book, was published in 1980; and **Pink Pigs in Mud**, a first introduction for very young children to colour recognition, in 1982.



Reviewers were unanimous in their praise of her work, commenting on the 'virtually strokable' texture of her pictures, something that made them particularly appealing to children who would spontaneously put out their hands to touch the curly wool of the sheep in **Humpty Dumpty** or the fluffy koalas in **One Panda**. At the time of her death, Betty Youngs was hard at work on a new book, **Two by Two**, based on the story of Noah and the ark. Although not complete in the form she had originally envisaged, all the important scenes of the story had been finished and the pictures are as vibrant in their colour and as original in their detail as anything she had previously produced. The Bodley Head will publish it in September 1985.