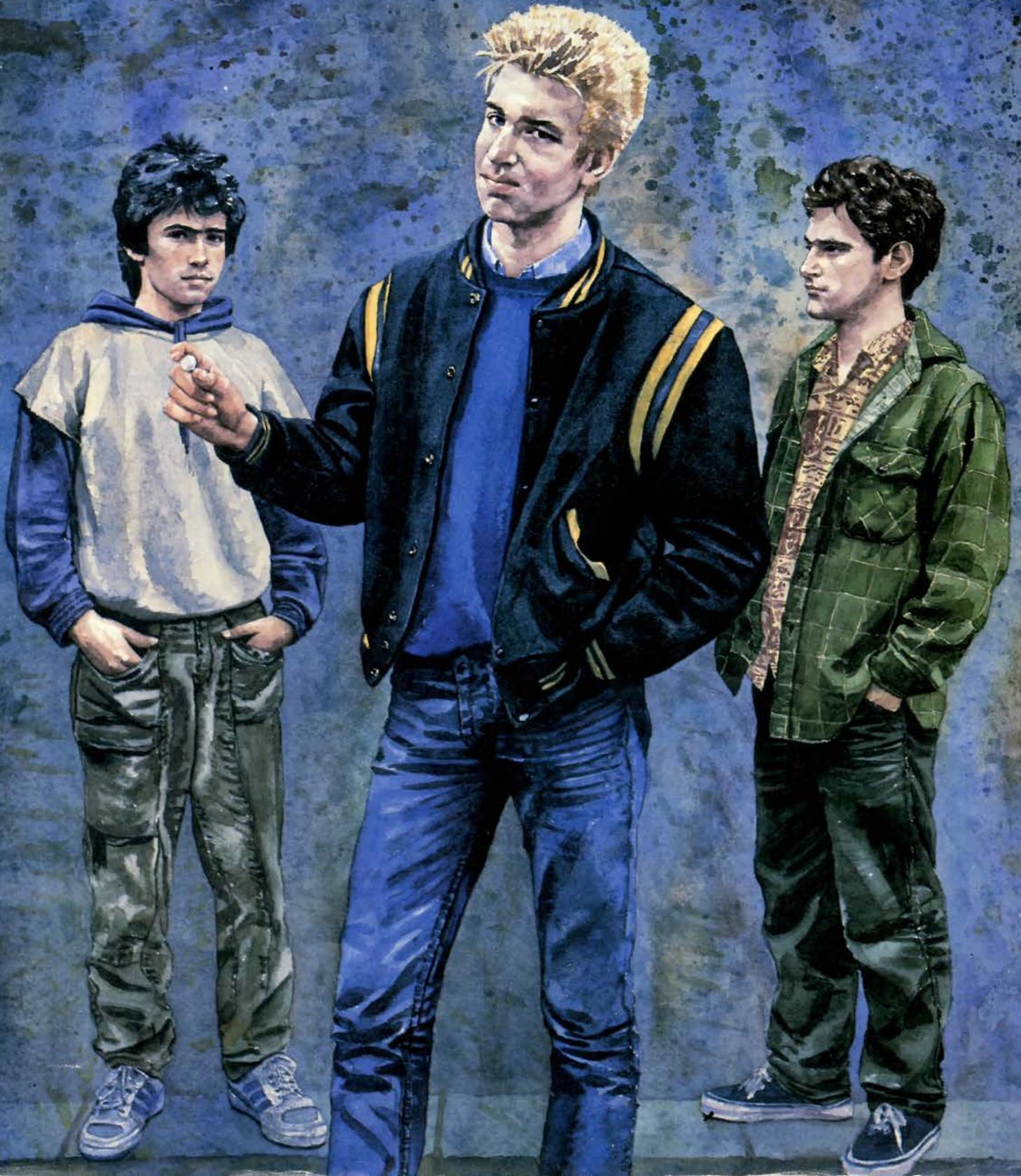


# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

SEPTEMBER 1985 No. 34  
UK Price £1.05

What's New About Reading? • Robert Cormier  
Hugh Lewin • Children's Books in South Africa • Lisa Kopper



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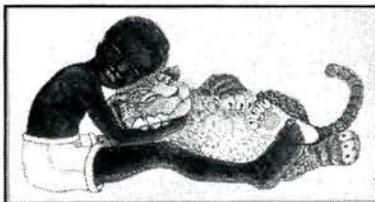
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### Cover Book

The illustration on our cover is from the newly-published Robert Cormier novel **Beyond the Chocolate War**, (Gollancz, 0 575 03711 3, £7.95).

The illustration is by Caroline Binch and shows in the centre Archie Costello, Assigner of the Vigils, holding the white ball which readers of **The Chocolate War** will remember as all important in deciding who undertakes the assignments that are required from certain unfortunate individuals. In this sequel new characters join him and the old return to play out Archie's last term at Trinity High. We are grateful to Gollancz for help in using this illustration.

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

- the magazine of the  
School Bookshop Association

SEPTEMBER 1985 No. 34

ISSN: 0143-909X  
Editor: Pat Triggs  
Managing Editor: Richard Hill  
Designed and Typeset by: Rightline Enterprises Ltd, Lydney, Glos.  
Printed by: Surrey Fine Art Press Ltd, Redhill, Surrey

© School Bookshop Association 1985

**Books for Keeps** can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to the Subscription Secretary, SBA, 1 Effingham Road, Lee, London SE12 8NZ. Tel: 01-852 4953

Annual subscription for six issues: £6.30 UK, £9.50 overseas.

Single copies direct from the SBA: £1.05 UK, £1.60 overseas.

Or use the **Dial-a-Sub** service on 01-852 4953.

Editorial correspondence: Pat Triggs, 36 Ravenswood Road, Redland, Bristol, Avon BS6 6BW. Tel: 0272 49048.

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# WHSMITH

# EDITOR'S PAGE



One of the nicest things about being editor of **BfK** is that you get to meet and talk to so many people who are enthusiastic about books and committed to getting children reading. I keep in touch pretty regularly, for instance, with our teacher reviewers. Last school year whenever I rang Colin Mills we always ended up talking about what he was doing with his 'year off'. By the time I put the phone down I invariably had something new to think about and his enthusiasm was a real tonic. New ideas and an inspirational 'lift' are things we can all do with. So we asked Colin to share his thoughts and experiences in this issue of **BfK** which poses the question What's New in Reading? (page 4). While Colin was collecting his thoughts Liz Waterland's booklet **Read With Me** came out. When I read it I wanted to cheer. It must contain the answer to any, 'yes, but' reservations about learning to read with 'real' books; the warmth, common sense and sheer professionalism that comes off the pages is both challenging and reassuring to the waverer. I was delighted when Liz Waterland and Nancy Chambers, her editor at Signal, agreed to allow us to include an edited extract in **BfK**. (See page 6)

## We're Getting There

When Jill Bennett compiled the first edition of **Learning to Read with Picture Books** for Signal in 1979 the idea that it is books as much as teachers that teach children to read and that involvement of parents and other readers can be very significant was being expressed by a small 'lunatic fringe'. This month the third edition of Jill's list is published - get it even if you've got the others; there are lots of new books included (0 903355 18 3, £2.40) - and those ideas are spreading and growing in strength. In **The Bookseller** recently Hertfordshire's County Librarian reported an increased demand nationally for picture books, stimulated, he suggested by their use in learning to read. And yet - at the same time Educational Publishers are urging us to invest vast sums of money in their everything-you-need, 'total approach' packages for reading. They reassure us that their materials have been compiled with regard to all the latest developments in reading theory and research (while retaining the traditional approach!) Such schemes and packages offer a seductive sense of security - for the teacher. With grading and coding what children learn about, reading has little to do with the pleasure of exploring what an individual writer or artist has to offer. It becomes instead a competition, a race, a status symbol with all the associated risks of failure. Schools and classrooms (and there are many) which like Liz Waterland's have followed the logic of the real books argument can bear witness to the difference in children's attitudes and to the joy of being with apprentice readers who are at home with books.

And we certainly can't complain about a shortage of books. Bill Gillham from the Psychology Department of Strathclyde University has been promoting Paired Reading. In October Methuen publish four Paired Reading Storybooks by Bill Gillham - one or two lines of text per page beneath a jolly Margaret Chamberlain picture, building into a short 22 page story, (£1.95). Included is a clearly set out eight point guide: How to Pair Read. Of course you can use the technique with other books. Ideal for parents - useful for teachers too.

Out this month from Hamish Hamilton, **Cartwheels** is a new series in the Banana Books vein - short texts, full colour illustration throughout, lively varied stories

by writers such as Sheila Lavelle, Linda Allen, Catherine Sefton. Six titles in the first batch, £2.95 each.

Shirley Hughes is a writer/artist who has thought long and hard about children becoming readers. Her latest book, **Chips and Jessie**, Bodley Head, 0 370 30666 X, £5.50 is a brilliant demonstration of how books teach reading. It's worth studying closely to see how many different ways, in words and pictures, she allows and encourages the reader to play the reading game. Brilliant!



## Theme 2: South Africa

The other major theme in this **BfK** is South Africa - though we had no idea when we started to collect material that by the time the magazine came out the situation in South Africa would be so much in the news.

By another of those magical coincidences that seem to happen to us fairly frequently we had just been talking to Hugh Lewin about Africa when Isobel Randall dropped into the **BfK** office on a visitor's fact-finding tour. She told us about her involvement with Ravan Press and about what **READ** is doing in Black schools and soon found herself signed up to write for us. (Page 12). Isobel was visiting this country and the USA with her husband, Peter Randall who had six months leave from Witwatersrand University to research in education.

Peter was one of the three founders of Ravan Press - the name is an anagram of the first letters of their names - and because of his publishing activities he was a banned person in South Africa for five years.

Isobel writes as an editor of her frustrations and problems in publishing for children. Apart from censorship - she seemed as surprised as we were that her 'multi-cultural' **A Visit to the Newspaper** hadn't created more of a stir - there is the problem of finding a market. Hugh Lewin echoed Isobel exactly in talking about the 'academic stranglehold' on the market and he was more outspoken about the out-of-date methods in schools which do not encourage the creation of readers.

'I feel very strongly about the terrible position children's books are in in Africa. Publishing is so much a commercial enterprise that because there is no market, children's books are the last to be taken up and the first to be dropped. We have a desperate need for a children's literature; there is little material available and much of what there is comes from abroad and is either lousy or tied up with our colonial past. We have a responsibility to break the academic stranglehold. Good African writers have never had a chance to write for children; it never occurs to them; they have enough problems getting published anyway. It's got to be changed. We are not just dealing with children we are dealing with the future.'

I'm sure Isobel would agree - though we were pleased to hear that her two submitted books had been accepted as school texts which means Ravan can now afford to publish them and perhaps finance other projects.

## Other Winners

Of the many books we looked at together, Isobel was most enthusiastic about the Peckham Publishing Project's **Our Kids**, one of the winners of this year's Other Award (page 28). She could see something similar being produced in Johannesburg and finding a market not only with children but in adult literacy classes. We seem to be getting more stories which help us to feel what it is like to live with apartheid. Beverley Naidoo's **Journey to Jo'burg** also appears in the Other Award list. Just out, for rather older readers, is Toeckey Jones' **Skindeep**, Bodley Head, 0 370 30507 8, £4.50, which depicts the emotional seesaw that is teenage love in any country but adds the harsh dimension of living in and being inevitably conditioned by a segregated society. It's uneven but packs a powerful punch.

As, predictably, does the new Robert Cormier, **Beyond the Chocolate War**. In a way it's Cormier's answer to all those who accused him of putting out the lights and taking the stars away; but it's as uncompromising as ever and peels away yet more complex layers in revealing the anatomy of a corrupt society.

The summer term after the autumn of the **Chocolate War** ends with Archie inviolate and perhaps triumphant - 'You'll always have me. I'm the thing you have inside you.' and Jerry, also perhaps a winner, his moral courage restored, 'You can only really lose if you fight them. You have to outlast them.' No rosy sunset but maybe a pale gleam or to put it another way something on the other side of the scales this time.

## High Profile

Lisa Kopper who has established a considerable reputation for her ability to 'draw black people' (page 24) also, like Hugh Lewin, faces a moral dilemma: what is the position of the white artist or writer depicting a black world? But one book in which this wasn't a problem was **Coming Home**, a true story of a dog's struggle to survive. Lisa was herself involved with the dog's rescue and some of the illustrations are self portraits. A different kind of moral stand by Walker Books led to a children's book making the national news on both BBC and ITV - not a usual occurrence. But this wasn't a children's book; it was of course **The Children's Book** in aid of Save the Children Famine in Africa appeal and it was being launched by Princess Anne. Still, prime time coverage; good for books and reading, good for Walker Books, good for the Famine Appeal. If the Children's Book Week train does as well Tom Maschler of Cape and of the CBW Committee will be pleased. For him the £70,000+ promotion 'is not about selling books, but aims to attract for children's literature a media interest such as has never been seen before.' He's off to a good start with ITN News at One running a weather slot with illustrations by Foreman and Browne - and that we are told is only the tip of the iceberg.

Are you meeting the train? Let us know what happens if you do.

It's going to be such a frantic, noisy week. I don't suppose anyone will be able to do much reading!

See you.

# Readers, Books & Classrooms

Colin Mills, one of our regular book reviewers, spent the school year 1984-85 on sabbatical leave during which he worked in classrooms where teachers were making innovations in their practice concerning reading and literacy. He also spent time in the English Department of the London Institute of Education, where he was lucky enough to work with Margaret Meek, Harold Rosen, and Professors Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, who spent time as visiting lecturers in the department. We asked Colin, who said he'd enjoyed the space to 'talk, listen and think', to sum up for us what he thinks are the most significant new directions in relation to readers, books and classrooms. What follows is a personal view, though he draws upon conversations with the gifted teachers with whom he's worked this year.

I'd guess that the first thing to say is that this year has taught me what I thought I knew and what any of you could have told me at the beginning: in-service education is important! It's vital to have the time to look afresh at what we all think we know well and see things clearly, as if for the first time. The main focus of my work this year has been to look at changes in the teaching of reading in primary classrooms. I've been particularly interested in the role that 'real books' have to play in the development of readers, and the ways in which classrooms reflect views of literacy. In this 'review', I've drawn upon observations, conversations, my work in classrooms to point **Books for Keeps** readers towards what I think are new directions.

## Readers and books

Often, during the year, I've thought back to a conference I attended a long time ago as a probationary teacher. The title, I think, was **Children's Books and Reading**. I remember somebody saying to me: 'Are you a books person or a reading person?' I've recalled that question so often as I'd like to think that it would not be asked of a young teacher today. One of the most exciting things that has happened in the last decade is that teachers, and those responsible for the development of children's reading, have realised that books are not rewards one gets for having learned to read but are essential to the process of becoming a reader.

This realisation has come about largely through the work of teachers such as Margaret Meek, Cliff Moon and Jill Bennett, who asked in the very first issue of this magazine 'Is your reading scheme really necessary?' Liz Waterland has now joined the pioneers and has shown in a very practical and humane way how good books and the guidance of a skilled teacher make committed readers. This shift of emphasis from a view of reading concerned with skills and drills, with code breaking, owes much to the insights and writing of linguists such as Frank Smith and Kenneth Goodman. It was Smith who persuaded teachers to question the traditional view of reading as a process best learned from the 'bottom up', that is to say, from learning letters, to words, to sentences, usually in specially simplified patterns. Rather, a 'psycholinguistic' view teaches us that children approach reading from the 'top down', seeking for meaning from the beginning, as they do when they learn oral language. Children, from the

start, need to learn to 'behave like readers', just as in learning to talk, they behave like active talkers. Smith always reminds us that children learn to *talk* not in artificial or 'practice' situations, but in meaningful and real contexts. Goodman's insights further showed us how children draw on a vast range of linguistic knowledge which they learn as *talkers* (word order, meanings, and what is likely to make sense in a sentence, or a story) when they are becoming readers.

On his recent visit to England, Goodman was impressed by the ways in which teachers he met had accepted these views of reading: 'The key to a linguistic view of reading seems to lie in the operations children make upon the books and stories they read,' he explained. His wife and co-worker, Yetta Goodman, whose extensive research has been focused on the early reading development of children from varied cultural groups in the USA, was 'bowed over by the presence of so many real books' in the English classrooms they visited. . . . 'It is books with a real sense of story which actually enable the sense-making and the prediction which children need to do in reading.' They both told me how the presence of so much lively and involved reading in classrooms they visited here was a culture shock after working in so many 'structure-ridden, scheme-laden' North American schools.

## From Listening to Reading

What exactly does it mean when we say that it is books (and authors and artists who are concerned with the *pleasure* of reading) that teach children to read? For one thing, these books tend to build upon the storytelling that children do naturally, as part of their play and their imagination. In one of Margaret Meek's stimulating seminar discussions on culture, we were all staggered by how much children actually learn from the little stories they are told about the world. This storying, this use of narrative, is one of the ways in which children pattern their thinking. They soon become adept at shaping these narratives, taking on different roles and building upon stories they have been told as models. Carol Fox's fascinating work shows us a great deal about the early competences of pre-school children and Harold Rosen writes persuasively and thought-provokingly about the power of story in all our lives. New research shows that children hearing stories read aloud is



Reading Time – when the whole school stops to read at Brindishe Primary School in London. Photos by Richard Hill.



still an important part of the process of learning to read. Henrietta Dombey's work, for instance, makes clear how children use the storyteller's voice patterns, intonation and responses to questions to understand the meanings of the story being told – a competence which they can carry over to their own independent reading.

### Behaving Like a Reader

What part do good books play when children come to learn to read in classrooms? Let one example from my year's work try to illustrate this. Wendy is six, and she is reading to me from the first few pages of *Tilly's House* by Faith Jaques (Picture Lions). It is one of the first extended texts she is reading; she is beginning to read fluently and independently. I have been working in her classroom for two terms and have observed her progress through picture books with some text, to books like the present one where the text begins to be more important. Wendy's teacher has adopted an 'individualised' approach to reading, within which she places carefully sequenced books from the best of currently available picture and story books. She keeps records and notes on all the children's reading. There are two or three storytelling sessions within the day, as well as many opportunities for the children to browse, share stories and poems, and read independently.

The teacher spends time during the week on certain strategies for reading such as letter sounds, combinations and interesting words, but this is always clearly within the context of pleasurable reading. During our reading sessions, I observe how Wendy uses her knowledge and experience as a language user and a reader when she comes to words she has not met before.

On page two she meets the word 'scrubbed'. 'She cleared the breakfast table, made the beds and swept and cleaned and scrubbed and polished all day long.' Her first strategy is to sound it out – she knows about 'sc' and 'ed' – but she can't get it. She looks at the picture (which is full of cleaning equipment) and back at the text. 'Is that "scrubbed" – that's like scrubbing; it's cleaning.'

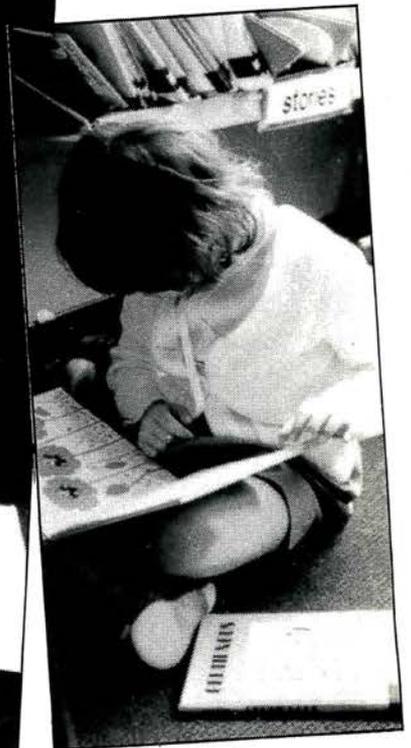
On page four she reads 'wearily' in "Nothing will ever change," she thought wearily, as 'worrying'. Then she stops; clearly that doesn't make good enough sense for her. She looks hard at the picture of Tilly sitting on her bed, evidently worn out. 'Is she tired? Oh yes, I know. She's weary.' Wendy re-reads inserting 'weary' which she quickly changes to 'wearily' as she realises she needs another part of speech. The story itself has given her the word.

Even in these two brief examples Wendy shows that she has a bundle of reading strategies acquired from rich and varied learning experiences with language and books. Her behaviour as a reader illustrates vividly for me the validity of all that the researchers mentioned here have written and said.

Some extracts from my notes of the reading session show how it is the book itself which helps Wendy progress and how it builds upon her competence and experience:

#### Page One:

She looks carefully at the picture of the dolls' house, seeming to 'place' the setting of the story. 'That's the Daddy's room . . . that's the kitchen . . .' This is a behaviour I've seen her teacher encourage in many previous story-sharing sessions: eg, a twenty minute discussion on the 'map' of the story at the beginning of the Ahlberg's *Each, Peach, Pear, Plum*.



She is doing exactly what Henrietta Dombey has observed children do when they listen to stories. She is grasping the overall sense of the situation and giving that understanding concrete meaning by fitting in the details. It is the particular quality and combination of Faith Jaques' text and pictures which makes it possible; an 'unreal', sterile text would not have created this space for the reader.

#### Page Three:

She looks at the picture of the old Cook, Tilly's boss, and says 'She looks bossy and grumpy'. Wendy is learning to read situations and characters in a way that is developing from many previous discussions of stories, picture books and real classroom events. This 'hunch' of hers about the Cook is confirmed by the text.

#### Page Four:

Wendy begins to read: 'She climbed the stairs to her little room in the attic and sank onto the bed . . .' She then looks closely at the picture, and tells me a story about the characters in *Cockleshell Bay*, one of her favourite TV programmes – 'They have a new baby in the family now, so their house is very cramped.' This aspect of reading, the relation of known stories from diverse sources to new texts, is another feature of teacher-led story sessions that I have observed a great deal.

I recall Harold Rosen as I observe Wendy bringing her accumulated experience of story to this new reading. Interesting too

how easily and naturally Wendy links her story experience from television with books – the majority of the associations she volunteers in our sessions are from television.

Later on in the reading, Wendy 'sorts out' from the text, the pictures and her talk around them both that Tilly is much smaller than the 'real' children in the book. That is one of the central ideas you have to grasp before you can understand Tilly's tale. All this happens through Wendy's predicting; talking about the ideas in the story; relating the story to others she has read (eg *Sally's Secret* by Shirley Hughes). She is gaining in confidence and competence; the text and the time given to it are supporting her development.

### Classrooms and Teachers

Time is given to such activity in Wendy's classroom. Her teacher, Kay Morgan, gives each child in the class a chance for extended contact with her and a book as often as possible. She uses parents and any other willing outside helpers to enable this to happen. This emphasis upon the context and the settings within which children learn to read is a significant new direction. To Frank Smith's reminders about the meaningful nature of children's oral language acquisition, we can now add the wealth of evidence from Gordon Wells' Bristol-based study of pre-school language development: *language is learned by children as it is purposeful and central to their intentions*. What implications does this have for our classrooms as places where children learn literacy? One of the features of the language learning situation that Wells draws attention to is that language is meaningful for *all* concerned – those learning it and those modelling its use. Kay Morgan, inspired by the work and writing of Jill Bennett and Liz Waterland, has tried to create a real *reading* environment in her classroom:

'When I was taught about the teaching of reading in College, I rather got the idea that it was a dull and mechanical routine. In my first classroom, children learned to read with staid and dated reading schemes. As I got more confident, and to know more about the wealth of good books available, I realised that learning to read *had* to be pleasurable and meaningful for children. We now use picture books and story books, and, although it's taken time, energy and explanation to win over parents, the children *enjoy* their reading and make fantastic leaps in their learning.'

There is a space, each Tuesday morning, when children can talk about, or paint pictures about their favourite books read during the week. Other teachers from the area visit the school regularly to see her work in action and having to argue for her methods keeps her 'on the ball' and critical and evaluative. But, she says, she feels 'more involved than ever' and she really enjoys seeing the reading process happen. Sharing in Kay Morgan's involvement, together with all the talking, thinking and reading I've been able to do this year, has led me, I feel, to a fuller understanding of the way reading develops in young children. The kinds of competencies Wendy was using in just the brief situation described here shows that she is building upon what she has heard her teachers do, what she has been encouraged to do herself and, perhaps most importantly, what the books themselves allow space for. This year has made me more confident than ever in my belief about how readers are made. Two things are crucial: first, the quality of the books we offer which themselves teach children about reading; second, the awareness and attitudes that we as teachers model for children in our classrooms which show them how readers behave.

If my report of this year does nothing else I hope it will encourage other **Books for Keeps** readers to reflect on and perhaps even to talk, write about and share their experiences and observations.

### More reading and sources of ideas

**Awakening to Literacy**, Hillel Goelman and others (Eds), Heinemann Educational (1984), 0 435 10818 2, £12.50

Collection of fifteen articles which represent current high points of thinking and research on early reading acquisition and its links with culture and intellectual development. Particularly good is Yetta Goodman on the development of initial literacy. Frank Smith writes on the creative achievement of literacy. Jerome Bruner argues for stories, or 'guided dreaming', as central to reading development. Hunt out in the library, or get a staff room copy.

**Learning to Read**, Margaret Meek, Bodley Head (1982), 0 370 30154 4, (currently reprinting)

Still probably the best account of reading development which takes the intentions of the learner and the role of books into account. Very recommendable to parents, to whom it is addressed.

**Opening Moves**, Margaret Meek (Ed), Bedford Way Papers, Number 17 (1983), 0 85473 161 X, £2.25 to personal callers at the Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London; £2.45 by post from The Sundries Department, Heinemann Ed, Windmill Press, Kingswood, Tadworth, Surrey KT20 6TG

Carol Fox's article **Talking Like a Book** shows the kinds of previously unexplored competences that very young children have involving their knowledge of stories and narrative. Henrietta Dombey's work on the awarenesses children acquire during storytelling sessions is also reported here as **Learning the Language of Books**.

**Practical Ways to Teach Reading**, Cliff Moon, Ward Lock Educational (1985), 0 7062 45687 7, £4.95

A splendid collection of practically-focused pieces on ways of putting theory into practice.

**Children Reading to their Teachers**, NATE (1984), £1.30 inc. postage, from NATE, 49 Bromsgrove Road, Sheffield, S10 2NA

Six very practical articles on approaches to classroom practice. Specially good is Anne Baker's discussion of a reading session with a nine year old. Cliff Moon has a clear and helpful piece on the ways in which children's miscues when reading aloud can be made use of: a realistic application of Goodman's ideas mentioned in the article above.

**Stories and Meanings**, Harold Rosen, NATE (1984), £1.75 inc. postage from NATE

Two articles and a short autobiographical story which convey in a compelling way this writer's commitment to the role of narrative in our lives. Highly readable. Suggests starting points and reading for teachers who want to pursue ideas.

**Joining the Literacy Club**, Frank Smith, (1984), 0 7049 0913 8, £1.70 inc. postage, from the Centre for the Teaching of Reading, London Road, Reading (this is a new address from the end of September)

One of four sturdily produced booklets which is a good summary of this writer's powerful ideas on the links between language learning and literacy learning. ●

# Read with Me

That phrase, rather than the more conventional 'Read to me', is the essence of Liz Waterland's approach to teaching reading.

Here she describes how she organises her day for what she calls learning by apprenticeship.

If we wish to help children to learn by apprenticeship we need to consider three elements of experience: the parents', the child's, and the teacher's role. How is this to be organised? This is the general pattern of my day within which we can be flexible. It works for me but other teachers will find their own answers; nothing here is prescriptive or definitive.

When children begin arriving, mothers and fathers stay to read a story, or admire a picture until register time. The children put their book bags – named plastic bags for taking the books home – in the box for attention later. We talk. Then the business of the day begins: a quota of work for each group, individual or group maths, sentence maker, painting or cutting out, tracing, handwriting practice. Each day a selection of 'formal' work to be done when a child wishes; the rest of the morning is the child's own, to write, to read, to talk. Every day a group has direct teaching, depending on what is needed by them. The book corner in the morning is often in the hands of a parent helper; she reads to, with and alongside any child who wishes, just as she does with her own child at home. She also keeps a helping eye available for those who want to read to themselves or to friends.

By lunch time the children have completed their quota and anything else that needs doing.

The afternoon is my book corner time. A parent often helps to supervise the rest of the class; they may do anything that does not require direct teaching; in other words, anything that the children can do by themselves or with only a little help that any friendly adult can give.

I am based in the book corner. 'Today is red group's reading day.' Each child comes to choose a book, published or home-made. 'Shall I read or shall you?'

We talk about it, predict, look at the words and take our time. I watch, assess, plan and encourage each step the child takes. I can just manage ten minutes or so each.

This reading with me is the core of the approach and its greatest pleasure. 'Come and read with me'; that single word change, from the conventional 'Read to me', encapsulates the 'feel' of what we are doing. As a colleague said, 'Once I started saying that, I felt the whole atmosphere lighten and improve.' Even more delightful is to hear the children saying it to me and to each other.



The little children sit on my lap when they read with me so that they are offered literally physical support, are relaxed and comfortable and can see and follow all the text. They are allowed to bring any book they choose, however 'easy' or 'hard', and at first I read it all to them. Later, with some books the children read a little, and later yet a child may read it all. But still, throughout the years, the book and the support are one unit. There is no control other than the child's wishes as to how much or how little is read; if someone wants to read the same book with me every day for a week (and many do), I grin and bear it, for here is a book that is speaking to that child. Later, I ask children 'Will you read, or shall I?' and respect their decision even when it disappoints me. Who is this reading for anyway, the teacher or the child?

The final job of the day is for those children who wish to change their book-bag book to take home. Sometimes they choose to take home a book we have read together, sometimes a new one. The choice is theirs.

Other reading activities are frequently child-instigated: the free use of my big sentence maker by the children; the very frequent use of the book corner by individuals or groups to read to themselves or their friends, to rest, to browse, to potter; the public reading session, when one or two children volunteer to read a story to the class. Sometimes they read from a published text, sometimes from their sentence-maker or other home-made books, which – once they are finished and 'bound' with tackyback – are added to the bookshelves along with the published books. Children enjoy reading each other's work, and it is great motivation for the writers. 'It's good being an author – everyone likes books.'

Another popular activity is group reading. Five or six children take turns reading books. They dramatize, discuss, share jokes and argue about the plot. They help each other, suggest possible interpretations and share the reading, perhaps a page each. For older children this approach allows each child to share a longer text, before they have the stamina to tackle it alone.

I also deliberately instigate two or three fifteen-minute 'quiet reading sessions' during the week, when we all read (or 'read') together, to ourselves, a book we are interested in. These periods have several advantages: they throw the children on their own resources and encourage them to puzzle out text without an adult; they also show reading as something that can and does give private pleasure. Probably because the books are worthwhile, and because the

children assume that they are readers and know how to behave like readers, even a group of reception infants can sustain 'private reading' with great confidence. In many ways it is here where the adult is *not* encouraging and supporting that the success of this approach is demonstrated; in the truest sense there are no non-readers; no child fails to show interaction with a book.

The children, of course, are reading throughout the day; they may only have two planned sessions on my knee each week but reading (and its reflection, writing) goes on in many different forms. Once literacy becomes taken for granted it never has to be forced into use. The book corner is never empty.

What do the parents think of all this?

Not one parent fails to support us, or to read regularly with their children. They come into school to see the books and talk about the ones their child most loves. No one asks, 'When will he get a reading book?' or 'Why can't she read yet?' Whether their child is mature or immature in her/his response, the parent sees and feels the confidence and pleasure in books the child feels. They are wiser than we think. But then they not only see their child's progress, they create most of it. They enjoy taking part. 'I love to read to her', 'We enjoy it very much', 'We fight over whose turn to read it is', 'Please let her bring *The Elephant and the Bad Baby* again. We enjoyed it so much'. 'Please help him to find a different book – we can't stand *The Hungry Giant* again!' It all gives a new meaning to parental involvement.

The children all believe they are readers; reading is not something they will do 'one day' but something they do now – at whatever level. They all, however mature or immature, believe themselves to be readers and behave like readers. Helping them, reading to them first, does not make them lazy. It increases the drive to try for themselves because it increases their confidence and removes the fear of failure.

They love books too. Most experience over a hundred books in a year. Those who are reading, to whatever extent, independently made the step with one book that seemed to help them to break through to the next stage. These break-through books vary from child to child, but all have the same characteristics: the child cares enough about the text to be determined to make it his or her own. It does not matter about sentence length, size of print, typeface or any of the other details teachers' manuals are so dogmatic about. All that matters is that the child wants to read the story. The drive is the child's.

The role of the sentence maker, of their own language, is vital. Here in their own stories are the words children have absolute power over. They have learnt so much by using it: the relationship between speech and print, the word as a unit, the way sentences work; how to say what they want to say. Even more, the children feel in control of written language: it is their own, what shall they make it do?

Children do not fail to read back their text days, even weeks, after it has been composed. They read their books to me, to parents, to anyone who comes in. Many of the words they use with their sentence maker crop up in the published text too. It must help their response to books.

And how they respond to books!

Hannah, aged four, brought *Fat Cat* to me four days running, each day needing less help. 'I'll read it all tomorrow,' she said. And did.

Daniel walks round clutching *Spooky Old Tree* (his break-through book, the one that he first read), reading it to all his friends and, when they tire, reading it to his old comforter, Snoopy.

Colin calls to David, 'There's a good bit here, listen,' and reads the passage where the big red ball is kicked over the wall, 'and that was the end of the big red ball', and shutting the book with a satisfied smack. 'It served him right.'

James knocks my hand away as we open *In a Dark, Dark Wood*. 'No, me,' he says. 'I can.'

Heidi is listening to *Good-Night, Owl!* (she loves all the noises). Triumphant, on every page she chants, 'and owl *tried* to sleep'. Her finger charts the words, her voice mirrors Owl's exasperation perfectly. I suppose I know that she is 'only' memorizing, but Heidi knows she's reading: reading is the page coming alive, and it certainly does that for her.

No classroom using this approach to reading will ever be quite the same again. However the day is organized, whatever the age and ability of the children, if we reach out for the parents, the child and the books and bring them together, we are improving the quality of life – ours and theirs – as well as the quality of our teaching. ●

Liz Waterland is now deputy head of an infants school in Peterborough. She began developing the approach described here while teaching at Northborough School, also in Peterborough.

This article is an edited extract from an excellent *Signal* booklet in which Liz Waterland describes her growing dissatisfaction with the customary methods of teaching reading, outlines the theoretical basis for changes in her classroom practice and describes fully how she operates the new approach, including approaches to parents, record-keeping, organizing the day.

Adopting the same philosophy as Jill Bennett in her *Signal* Bookguide *Learning to Read with Picture Books* (third edition due soon), Liz Waterland believes in the importance of using real books with children who are 'not just learning to read but becoming readers'.

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# Hugh Lewin Talking

**Hugh Lewin** is best known in this country as the author of the **Jafta** books. The events that led to the writing of these stories are less well-known and are closely linked to Hugh Lewin's own life and to the recent political history of South Africa.

He talked to us about these events, about his books for children and about working with **Lisa Kopper**.

## Talking about his life

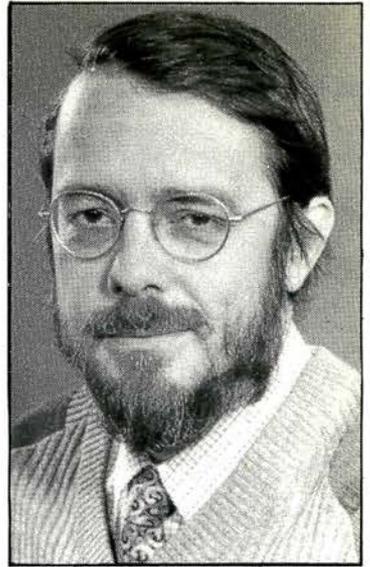
Hugh Lewin was born in 1939 in the East Transvaal where he grew up. His father was an Anglican missionary priest so he had what he calls 'the usual good white education - private schools with 50% off the fees'. In the fifties, towards the end of his time at school he became politically involved for the first time through his Sunday visits to Trevor Huddleston's mission in Sophiatown - one of the black townships near Johannesburg, demolished when the government moved all the black population to Soweto. Suddenly he realised that there were blacks in South Africa and began to understand something of their situation. As a student at Rhodes University he was active in the academic freedom campaign in

opposition to the government's Separate Universities Bill which went through in 1960 and completely changed the nature of Fort Hare - sister college to Rhodes - which had until then been the main black university in South Africa.

He associated himself with Alan Paton's Liberal Party which was open, non-racial and stood for universal franchise. After the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 it declared itself strongly for non-violence; but the 1960 emergency produced a different response from other political groups banned at this time. Years of passive resistance on Ghandian lines had produced only further repression; the armed struggle was born and the armed wing of the banned African National Congress was formed.

After Rhodes University, trying to complete an Honours degree, Hugh Lewin taught for a time in a prep school and then moved into newspapers working on a black township tabloid and on **Drum** magazine, the main black magazine in South Africa. In 1962 he was approached by a friend and asked to join an underground group involved in protest sabotage - blowing up electricity pylons, railway lines, creating social disruption without directly attacking people. His response was unequivocal. 'The fact that I had been considered sufficiently trustworthy to be approached meant that I didn't have any option. Because someone has approached you they have laid themselves on the line; you could go and report them and they would go to gaol. There wasn't really any question; I had to join.'

It was a small group which he describes as 'totally amateurish, a bunch of intellectuals'; unusually it was multi-racial. They had a number of successful attacks, pausing only in 1963 during the period of the trial of Nelson Mandela and other African National Congress leaders who were finally sentenced to life imprisonment. Shortly after the trial another wave of sabotage activities led to mass arrests by the police. The national organiser of Hugh Lewin's group was arrested in Cape Town and began to give the



police names. News that people were being picked up came at night to Johannesburg with a friend who had escaped from Cape Town. They spent the night getting groups out to Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Swaziland. At four in the morning there was an opportunity for Hugh Lewin to go too. 'I didn't feel I could leave. I was alone; I had no ties. Other people were in gaol; I thought I should stay too.'

He was arrested, detained under the ninety day law and tortured by the security police. During his detention another saboteur planted a bomb at Johannesburg station which killed three people. 'It was exactly the kind of thing we had been working against; we didn't want loss of life.' The fact that he and his fellow detainees could not have been involved in this action didn't prevent the Special Branch from retaliating by inflicting terrible beatings on them. In December 1964 he was charged under the Sabotage Act and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He describes this sentence as 'very light in the circumstances. What happened to me was like getting a parking ticket compared to the experiences of other whites and the blacks and coloureds on Robin Island.' Nevertheless his matter-of-fact account of his time in prison does not make comfortable listening.

Because of his father he was able to secure a British passport and, with the help of Helen Suzman, at the end of his sentence he secured a Permanent Departure Permit and left South Africa at the end of 1971. Arrived in England he met a friend from home working here as a lawyer. Within a year they were married and now live with their two daughters, Thandi (11) and Tessa (9) in Zimbabwe, where Hugh Lewin, as well as writing, is involved in training journalists and editing manuals about publishing. He supports the armed struggle in South Africa as the only way in which freedom is going to come. The experience in Mozambique and Zimbabwe he believes make it an unfortunate but inevitable reality.

It is with a nice sense of irony that he reports on the publishing history of the **Jafta** books in South Africa. 'I wasn't banned before I was arrested and because I was leaving the country they didn't ban me when I came out of prison. The **Jafta** books have been published there in English for some time; there were plans to release them in paperback in five languages but that seems sadly not to be happening now. However they are being done in *one* other language – Afrikaans.'

## Talking about books Starting to write for children

**The Jafta books in one way are a direct result of Hugh Lewin's time in prison.**

'At one point my wife, Pat, said to me, "Some time you are going to have to explain to your children that you were in gaol not for being a rapist or a murderer or a thief but for a particular reason." And when the kids were about three or four I began to think of some ideas about how to put this across and scribbled down some stories about a character who has to explain why his father who is a political prisoner is in gaol. I called the character Japhta after a student friend of mine from Fort Hare. He was not very political but being president of the Student Council at a time of political turmoil he was driven into a position where he had to take a lead. After he got his B.Ed he was hounded by the Special Branch, even when he went to teach in Lesotho. In the end he committed suicide. That's one of the crimes of apartheid, it forces so many people into

unnatural situations. My friend Japhta's father was a herdsman and he grew up in a village. A missionary took him up and gave him an education. I admired him tremendously – the books are a kind of memorial to him.'

## Working with Lisa Kopper

**The Jafta books might never have been published had Hugh Lewin not met Lisa Kopper.**

'The anti-apartheid movement did a book to describe something of what it is like to be a child in Soweto. Lisa did a set of beautiful black and white etchings to go with the text. I got involved with the printing of it. I'd just begun to scribble down ideas for the Japhta stories; Lisa was doing her first book with Evans and she took my stories to Josie Karavasil, her editor. Josie suggested a series of four books about a family, mainly on the strength of some superb illustrations that Lisa had done for the stories. The books were to have twelve double spreads each with 28 words of my text. The three of us worked very closely together. It was very useful for me as an apprentice writer to work with Lisa. If the text didn't work in terms of the drawing we needed she would scream at me and make me find something else. That was fine. Particularly with books where the essence is really the illustrations the writer shouldn't feel proprietorial about the words. Text and pictures need to tie up so closely that the artist is as important and often more important than the writer even though the writer has the original idea. I found it very challenging to write the **Jafta** stories, much more so than writing, as I had, about my prison experiences which was just chipping away at a mountain of recollections. Having to tell the story in 28 words per spread was an exercise in writing poetry – trying to distil down into a basic essence. That means that a lot of what is in my mind is implicit in the text; Lisa manages to express it completely in the pictures. What is even more exciting is the way she takes the text and works in all sorts of other ideas herself with a tremendous amount of humour. She's amazing – she's never been to Africa, everything she's done had been from references but she's very knowledgeable and she's got tremendous empathy and understanding.'

## More about Jafta

'In the end the prison story never appeared in the **Jafta** books.

Right up until just before the books were published there was a spread in which the father was away in gaol and a political prisoner. The problem was that the books are for very young children and contain fairly simple concepts. Everyone said there wasn't enough material in the book to explain to the children what this was all about nor to make it possible for adults to explain the situation to children. Eventually I caved in and said, "Right, we'll make him a migrant worker in the city." And in a sense that became a far more general universality in the South African context in wider political terms than people being in prison for political reasons.



Publishing **Jafta** at all was very courageous. The idea was to give some flavour of life in Africa to young children. I find writing for children is difficult. I don't approach it from the point of view that children are not going to understand things. They are very receptive to new ideas and concepts. I try to



Illustrations from the **Jafta** books.

write about things that will interest and engross them. I've been criticised by teachers for not using language in ways they approve. But my experience is that children are tremendously excited by language; they are not scared of the new, it's adults who are scared of the new.

I think children like patterns and I've tried to give each **Jafta** book its own pattern; in **My Mother** it's a day, sunrise to sunset; in **My Father** it's the four seasons; **The Wedding** is a week and **The Journey** is different forms of transport.'



## New books and future plans

### Hugh Lewin's latest book is *An Elephant Came to Swim*.

'This is very much a Zimbabwe story. The idea arose out of a tale we were told while staying at a broken-down motel near Kariba on the northern border of Zimbabwe. One day an elephant had strayed into the hotel, got into the swimming pool, had a high old time and disappeared back into the bush. I suppose it's unlikely but it *could* happen in any slightly remote place in southern Africa; there are signs on the roadside, Beware Elephant. I've given my story a romantic happy ending but with this book and the **Jafta** books I've tried to make the characters real, true to their setting and to show them as people with problems, reactions and feelings. Lisa has done the pictures again. It's been more difficult now that we are thousands of miles apart but she understands that being Zimbabwe it looks very different from South Africa. Her drawings are magnificent, full of warmth and liveliness. This book is in full colour which I'm afraid will make it expensive for Africa - **Jafta** is in duotone, dark and light brown which makes it much cheaper to produce.

There are two more **Jafta**'s planned. Bell and Hyman who took over Evans want to continue with the series. There is still a great deal that needs to be told about life in South Africa. I'd also like to write a story about an older African girl showing some of the realities for women in Africa. And I still haven't written the book which will explain about fathers being political prisoners! Probably because I do other things I don't think of myself as a children's writer and I've been criticised as a white person writing about black Africa. I think looked at in one way it *is* racist. But I'm concerned about

presenting the African experience to my children and to other white children like them. What they have to realise is that Africa is a majority black continent. What I'm doing by writing about the lives of a large number of black friends of mine is describing something of just that.' ●

### Hugh Lewin - the books

**The Jafta series** - published in hardback by Evans/Bell and Hyman (£3.50); in paperback by Dinosaur (95p).

**Jafta**, 0 237 45543 9, (hbk);  
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# Publishing Children's Books in South Africa



## Isobel Randall, Children's Book Editor at Ravan Press, describes her experiences

South Africa has a total school population of approximately 7 million children, of whom about 5 million are African (and of the latter nearly 85% are in the primary classes); but there is still an overwhelming reliance on books produced abroad, at least as far as library and 'supplementary' reading matter is concerned. The established South African publishing houses concentrate mainly on the school prescription market – subject to government control – leaving the more uncertain area of supplementary and out-of-school reading material to others. These include certain newspapers, voluntary organisations, and a few small publishing houses, of which Ravan Press is probably the leading example.

There are several explanations for the apparent neglect to date of indigenous children's book publishing in South Africa. An obvious factor is the competition posed by the big British and, to a lesser extent, American publishers, whose large print-runs and co-editions generally enable them to produce good quality books at a relatively low unit cost, and who have access to a vast pool of expertise and resources including writers, illustrators, book designers, editorial and sales personnel. The South African publisher entering the open children's market faces financial risks, uncertain profits, underdeveloped or non-existent markets and difficulties of promotion and distribution. All this applies particularly in attempting to reach readers in the black communities. The townships have virtually no bookshops, few libraries, and most homes do not have books and magazines, while book-buying is not an established habit outside the relatively privileged white sector.

There has recently been a strong move towards monopolisation in South African bookselling where the controlling groups often demand discounts from publishers of up to 50%. At the same time the publisher, already faced with a low print-run, must attempt to keep selling prices to a realistic level in relation to the financial resources of most black families. Inevitably, publishers attempt to seek large orders from institutions like library services and education departments. In the South African political minefield however, this can create particular problems; the education departments are unlikely to approve of any books whose content appears even remotely at variance with official state policies.

My own experiences as children's book editor at Ravan Press since January 1982 (after a career as a primary school teacher) may help to illustrate some of the general problems already mentioned, that face the small South African publisher attempting to produce books specifically for local children.

By 1982 Ravan Press had published six children's books: *The Mantis and the Moon*; *Once at Kwa Fubesi* and *The Bushshrike* by Marguerite Poland; *Tutti and the Magic Bird* by Julia Boyd-Harvey; *Under the Marula Tree* by Patti Henderson; *Mboma* by Mboma Dladla and Kathy Bond. Marguerite Poland's books had achieved local acclaim and *The Mantis and the Moon* had won the coveted Sir Percy Fitzpatrick award for children's fiction. Her books remain good sellers on the Ravan list. The three other

books were doing moderately well. I intended to build on the foundations laid by these books and I began my new job with enthusiasm and vigour but little real expertise in publishing, and with a very limited budget.

I began by trying to research the market. I talked to and worked with organisations like READ, SELRP (Sowetan English Language Research Project, then being conducted by the University of the Witwatersrand), ELTIC (English Language Teachers' Information Centre), SACHED (South African Committee for Higher Education), booksellers, librarians, teachers, principals and, most important of all, black school children. It seemed that the need for relevant, local books covered all fields. There was no shortage of ideas, which came from almost everyone I spoke to.

'What about a series based on local people in sport, the arts, or famous local leaders?' suggested a librarian.

'We need factual books,' said one of the principals. 'Stories are fine, but we also need books that teach the kids about technical things.'

'Folk-tales are needed,' said a primary school teacher. 'We're going to lose them because we don't tell them any more. When I was a child my granny told me wonderful stories.'

And one ten-year-old boy, in a library lesson, said simply, 'This is a book specially for me!' He was referring to *Joyce's Day* by Joan Solomon which depicts a day in the life of an African child. (Sadly, this book is now out of print.)

My search for local writers and artists met with many promises but little in the way of actual manuscripts. The unsolicited manuscripts that arrived were usually pale imitations of Marguerite Poland's excellent animal stories. Few dealt with people. Those that did were often patronising in tone and contained racial and ethnic stereotypes.

After six months I decided to try to begin to fill at least some of the gaps by writing a series of factual books based on the extra-mural experiences of some Sowetan school children. I tagged along with classes of children visiting the Gold Mine Museum in Johannesburg and the local zoo. I visited *The Star* to see what children learnt about newspaper production, and I accompanied children to a local bakery. Arising from these visits I made rough mock-ups of some small books. I based the design of the books on the Ladybird Series, which are popular with black school children: the text on the left hand page is illustrated by a full-colour photograph on the right. Each book had a glossary at the back, as English is a second language for most African children and few of them have access to a dictionary. I tested the manuscripts by having classes of Sowetan children read them. They were a critical and helpful audience, and I modified each manuscript following their suggestions and those of their teachers. Their enthusiasm was encouraging, but Ravan didn't have enough money to publish the books.

Eventually, after a time-consuming and

Ravan Press was founded in 1972 and publishes a range of books – History and Social Studies, fiction, poetry, children's – which relate to the particular concerns of black Africa and in particular offers a voice to black writers. Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee are just two Ravan writers whose names will be familiar to British readers. Ravan was first to publish Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* which won the Booker prize in 1983.

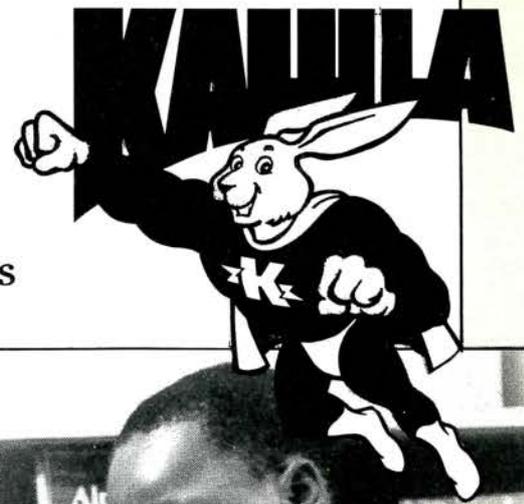
Ravan is non-profit making and administered by a Trust whose members include Nadine Gordimer and Bishop Tutu. Isobel Randall is one of eighteen workers who currently run Ravan as a co-operative. Ravan books are distributed in this country by Third World Publications, 151 Stratford Road, Birmingham B11 1RD.

frustrating struggle to find funds, *Lindi and Jabu Visit the Gold Mine Museum* was sponsored by the South African Chamber of Mines and appeared in 1983. Teachers and children liked it. But criticism – sometimes harsh – came from some reviewers who took a political view of my minor publication and saw it as propaganda for the gold-mining industry. Despite this the book sold moderately well. *A Visit to the Newspaper* was sponsored by *The Star* and *TEACH* (Teach Every African Child). The four children in the book are Salma, an Indian girl, David, a white boy, and Thabo and Zinzi, two African children. This must be one of South Africa's first attempts at a multi-cultural book! It has been moderately successful, and in spite of its multi-racial cast it has had a quiet reception, presumably because it is located in a less sensitive area than gold-mining. The manuscripts of *A Visit to the Zoo* and *A Visit to a Bakery* have been completed, and if I can find the necessary energy and sponsorship, they may see the light of day yet.

Children's books have low status and low priority in the South African publishing scene. Vernacular languages occupy a similar position. It follows that publishing children's books in vernacular languages – although they are desperately needed if literacy and the reading habit are to be extended and established – appears to many a strange and foolhardy enterprise. It's just such an enterprise that has occupied much of my time in the past year: preparing for publication two children's picture books with texts in vernacular languages. The first, *Our Village Bus*, is a 'first' in South African publishing history. It is written by Maria Mabetoa and illustrated by Mzwakhe, both South Africans, and my hope is that its appearance will stimulate other local black writers and artists. It is a large format, full colour, picture book and deals with a situation familiar to most rural African children. The story in the second book, *Ntombi's Song*, is by Jenny Seed, an established South African writer. It was published first by Hamish Hamilton but is now out of print (like Jenny Seed's longer story, *Canvas City*, which Ravan published in 1983 in a revised and updated edition). I liked the story which is set in KwaZulu and reflects many different aspects of South African society. The new Ravan edition has full colour illustrations by Anno Berry.

Both these books have been undertaken in conjunction with Hodder and Stoughton. Our hope is that they will be approved and ordered in substantial quantities by the relevant education authorities – each book can be produced with a text in one of eight different vernacular languages. If we break through into the schools market we will simultaneously publish an edition in English. We might even achieve a profit on the venture which could then be channelled into some of the other similar books at present waiting in the pipeline for lack of funds. ●

# Learning to READ in South Africa



## A report on the activities of READ, a voluntary organisation working in black schools and colleges

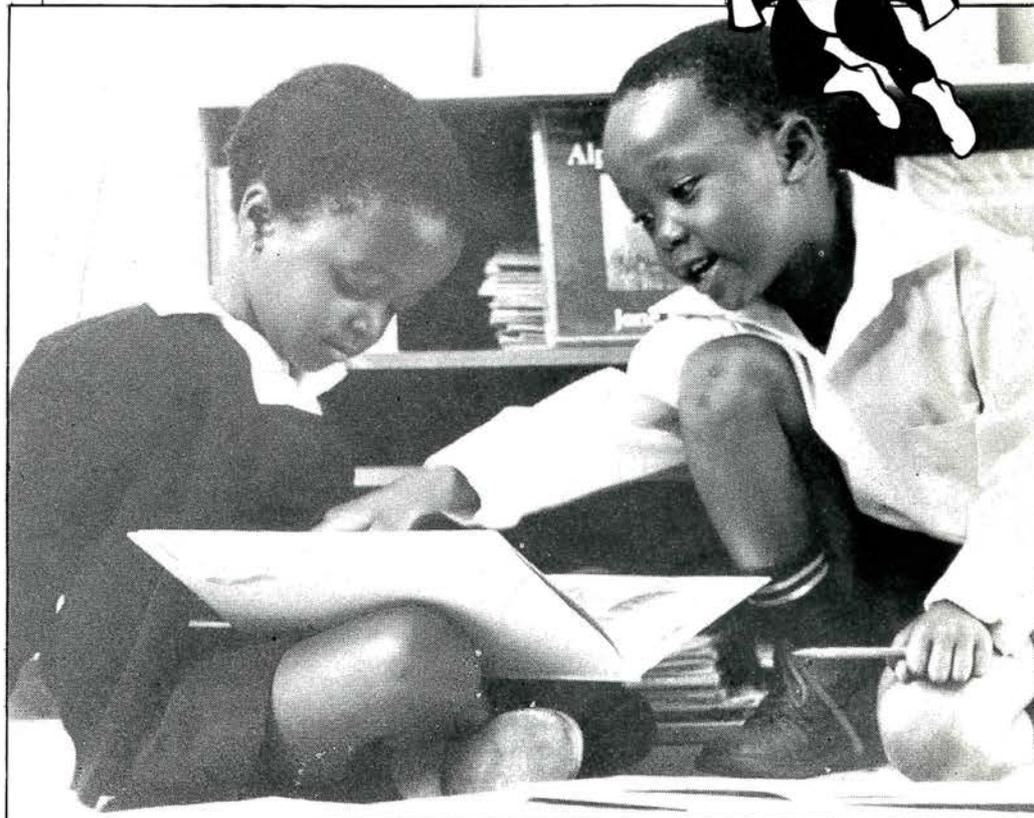
In line with the policy of apartheid African, or black, education in South Africa is segregated by the state and suffers from a long history of neglect and discrimination. This has resulted in gross disparities between the educational experience of black children and white children. Per capita expenditure by the state on black education is still approximately only one tenth of that for whites. An immediate consequence of this is an inadequate supply of books and materials in African schools. In addition, because compulsory education for black children was introduced relatively recently, a large proportion of the parent population is illiterate and many school children come from homes without books, magazines or newspapers. Book buying and reading are not common features of African family life; in Soweto (the complex of African townships near Johannesburg) which has a population of over two million there is not a single bookshop worth the name.

For many reasons there is a high drop-out rate in African schools with approximately three quarters of pupils leaving before the secondary level, and many of these before they have achieved functional literacy in any language. English is the medium of instruction most favoured by Africans, especially by those staying on in education. This is usually a second language for them and the shortage of books and teaching material in English is a major hindrance to them.

Out of this gloomy situation have come a number of voluntary efforts vigorously attempting to reduce the enormous discrepancies in the quality of education available to the different race groups in South Africa. One of these initiatives, known as READ, addresses itself particularly (as its name implies) to the development of reading among African children by providing suitable material in English to compensate for the paucity of the state's provision.

READ began with Cynthia Hugo, a librarian at St John's College in Johannesburg. She persuaded individual businessmen and companies to finance the purchase of books for school libraries in Soweto. Since its inception READ has gained the sponsorship of more than 300 companies and individuals whose donations in cash or in kind total approximately three million Rand (the equivalent of £7½ million). READ now operates through a national committee and a series of regional committees involving more than 100 committee members. It has grown phenomenally over the past five years. Its activities include:

- the provision of libraries for more than 300 schools and colleges throughout the country
- the development of a portable box library system for rural schools and primary schools, both urban and rural, where a suitable room to house a library is not available
- the development of training courses for teachers inter alia in basic librarianship (to date these courses have been



attended by more than 700 African teachers)

- the organisation of conferences on literacy and librarianship
- the compilation of lists of books found to be most suitable in stimulating reading in the black community
- the identification of suitable and available reading matter in the technical and commercial fields and in maths and science
- the establishment of careers guidance reference sections in African school libraries
- the organisation of projects and competitions in science, biology, literature, art, drama and youth leadership
- the promotion of the Adopt-a-School programme. This is done in collaboration with the TEACH (Teach Every African Child) fund of the Johannesburg daily newspaper **The Star**, and with leading companies – notably those American firms which are signatories to the Sullivan Code on equal opportunities. The Adopt-a-School programme assists African schools to obtain funds and/or equipment, and seeks to establish lasting relationships between the schools and the donors. To date more than 250 schools have been involved in this programme.

A Box Library System at the Ngwekazi Lower Primary School in Soweto, Johannesburg, excites two young children.

Above: Kalula, the wise hare of African folklore has been updated by READ into a super hero symbolising the power of education.

These are commendable achievements but at a more general level any attempt to build up libraries in African schools faces the problem of a lack of suitable and relevant reading material in either the vernacular languages or in English. Like any children, South Africa's black youngsters need to be able to relate at least some of the time to the characters and situations in the books they read. They cannot gain full enjoyment from their reading if they associate books only with children of another colour or culture or a country other than their own. To be really meaningful, reading must become an integral part of their lives, not merely a school-associated activity. This calls for more books by indigenous writers and artists, and although there are now attempts to help fill this need, by publishers like Ravan Press, it is a slow process.

The work of organisations like READ can represent only a mere scratching at the surface of the problem. Until such time as there is a major redistribution of the state's provision in favour of black education however, this work is of great significance for those concerned with the quality of African community life in South Africa. ●

# Authorgraph No.34

Robert Cormier

Tough, outspoken writing for young readers has caused particular controversy, yet the novels of Robert Cormier are banned from various American schools as an argument. It's not so much the detail in his atmosphere of decay and disillusion that adolescent readers have no problems getting rare to find a Cormier novel half-read. To his reputation with only five books for young readers mean achievement, and in addition there are his titles. So how has he managed it?



A brief outline of each story may help answer this question, given that his basic plots always deal with powerful fantasies of conspiracy, persecution and victimisation – strong meat for all readers, but particularly so for adolescents with their new-found self-consciousness and occasional dives into morbid introspection. **The Chocolate War** describes how a young boy is destroyed by fellow pupils with the collusion of the school staff through his refusal to take part in the annual fund-raising chocolate sale. **I am the Cheese** is a first person narrative featuring an adolescent whose family was forced to take on a new identity after testifying about corruption at the highest level. By the end of the story we learn how the parents were killed off, even so, and that the same sinister organisation is soon to eliminate the boy too. **After the First Death** is about the hijacking of a school bus by terrorists – an act that fails, but only after the boy narrator has been duped by his soldier father into acting as decoy. His reward is torture at the hands of the terrorists plus a terrible sense of failure; the other main character, the heroic girl student driving the bus, is killed by the youngest terrorist before he makes off to create further havoc elsewhere.

Not many laughs so far, and the next novel, **The Bumblebee Flies Anyway**, tests even the most determinedly cynical teenager's power of endurance. Set in a grim experimental hospital it features a group of terminally ill young patients who are little more than pawns for medical research. The self-induced group death that concludes this story is a blessed release from the suffering that precedes it, and almost makes Cormier's latest novel, **Beyond the Chocolate War**, seem light relief by comparison, even though this once again deals with relentless bullying, corrupt authority and the final victory of brute force at its most menacing.

This, then, is the score up to now. A reader or interested commentator might well wonder why a 59 year old American journalist, happily married with 4 children, should produce novels centring almost wholly on illness, murder, suicide, betrayal, terrorism, brutality and corruption. Cormier's present abode in New England could hardly be more tranquil, and by his own account neither he nor his family have ever suffered anything nearly as bad as the wretched, tortured character in his books. As a part-time journalist, Cormier has been responsible for a regular 'human interest' newspaper column; he has also devised

ers today no longer causes any  
 Robert Cormier continue to be  
 d over here still cause strong  
 s books; it's their overall  
 ffends many adults, although  
 ng through his books – it's  
 have achieved this  
 readers in ten years is no  
 re soon to be films of two of

commercials for a radio station, again with predictably up-beat messages. Yet once he starts writing for children light turns to dark and hope fades into fatalism. Why?

Cormier puts the record straight in a manner both mild and friendly. As a newspaper reporter he has seen increasing government encroachment on private citizens; to portray the same thing in his books he suggests is surely quite permissible. The small town where he lives, for example, is right outside an army installation containing a secret agency. This has always been something of a brooding presence for him; exploring the possibilities of such agencies is something he long wanted to do. As for the trials of the boy in *I am the Cheese*, there is in fact an American government Witness Relocation Programme, designed to give complete new identities to key figures at risk after spilling the beans in court, just as there are experimental hospitals for terminally ill patients, young and old. Where school is concerned, he went to a fairly tough Catholic school himself and later on his own son was once asked to sell chocolates to aid school funds at a similar establishment. He refused and this was accepted, but Cormier couldn't help wondering what might have happened had the headmaster been less understanding and the other pupils as nastily conformist as they have sometimes been in the past. Such things need to be teased out in novels, especially those written directly for children. Providing nothing but happy endings is a betrayal of the young; something Cormier wants to have no hand in at all.

Does this mean that Cormier is himself a pessimist about human affairs?

'Oh I'm much more hopeful than you might think. I would hate to be judged solely by *The Chocolate War* and if children only read that and other books like it I would be seriously worried. All I'm doing is warning them that when they get out into the world it's kind of tough out there, and that's something hardly any other book or TV show is doing for kids at the moment. Children really appreciate having some of their own realities confirmed in my novels; they write and tell me so themselves in large numbers.'

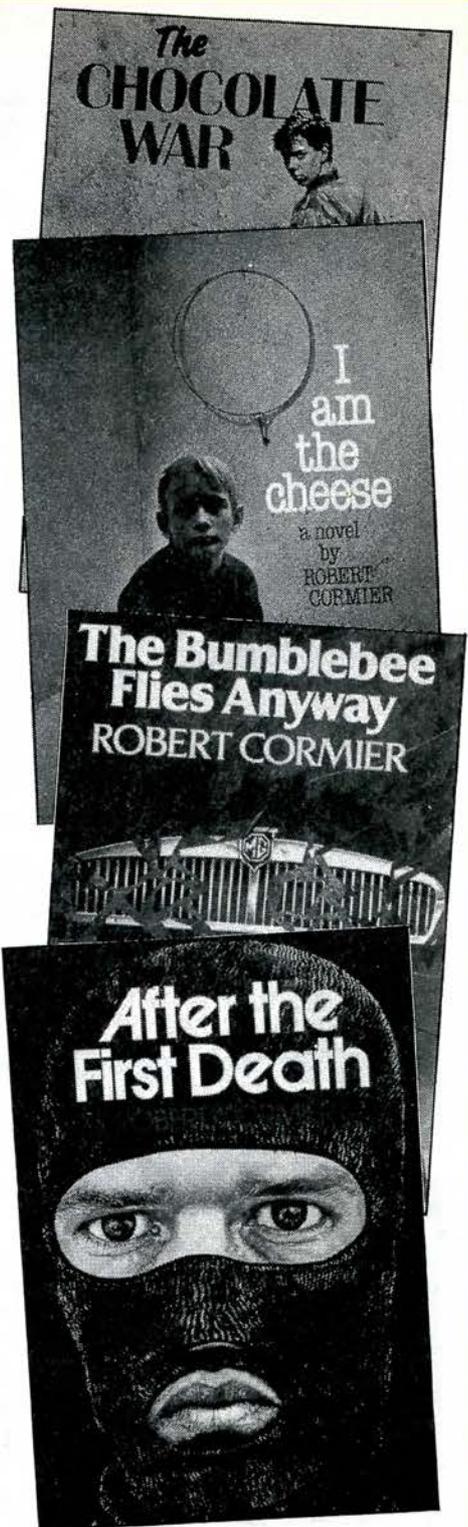
So is it something of a crusade, then, picturing the world to children in all its depths as well as heights?

'I don't know about a crusade. As a writer, I have to be true to myself. I

would love to have happy endings to my stories – I too become attached to my characters and wish for the best for them. But as I write, imagining the different possibilities as I go, I have to follow the ones that suddenly click, which means I then know exactly how it has to be. Don't ask me why it happens like that, but it does. Ironically, I'm quite optimistic myself about the future, precisely because of the young people I come across. They're far more idealistic today than they were in my time. The future rests with them, and on the whole I'm happy to trust them with it.'

For some adults, teachers and librarians especially, Cormier's novels are a strange way of expressing such optimism, so determinedly dark themselves it's possible they could occasionally help dash just those idealistic hopes in the young necessary for a better future. But while this might be said about his earlier novels, the later ones do show small but important changes in tone. In *The Chocolate War*, for example, the defeated hero's final message is never try to do your own thing; instead, 'Play ball . . . don't disturb the universe.' In its sequel, written eleven years later, the same hero now refuses to give in and even though badly beaten up, as before, preserves his moral ascendancy. *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* also shows that even the most desperately handicapped children can still cooperate to achieve something positive in their lives, despite horrendous opposition.

In all this, however, Cormier remains a sombre writer, offering all sorts of painful messages to his audience. Adults who wish to protect children from these must consider very carefully what their own motivation is here, since merely to keep children's literature as a repository of cosy, sentimental set pieces is to serve no-one's interests. As it is, children already know something of the darker side of life if only from the evidence of their own playground squabbles or the sudden hatreds that can flare up at home. Cormier can hardly be faulted for raising such matters in his novels, and by putting them on occasions into a political context can help children to realise that governments too can sometimes behave like school bullies. Politics in children's literature is still something comparatively new, unless one counts previous lack of political discussion as itself a political act, preaching unthinking acquiescence to the status quo. But after reading a Cormier novel children can not only see some of their own realities reflected, albeit in a somewhat one-sided way. They might also be stimulated to ask hard questions about the society in which they live. Cormier hopes they will and the evidence in letters to him from readers suggests they do. Whether they get straight answers is another matter, but hardly something that can be laid at Cormier's door. ●



## The Books

**After the First Death**  
 Gollancz, 0 575 02665 0, £6.95  
 Fontana Lions, 0 00 671705 5, £1.50

**The Bumblebee Flies Anyway**  
 Gollancz, 0 575 03327 4, £6.95  
 Fontana Lions, 0 00 672358 6, £1.75

**The Chocolate War**  
 Gollancz, 0 575 01926 3, £7.95  
 Fontana Lions, 0 00 671765 9, £1.50

**I am the Cheese**  
 Gollancz, 0 575 02372 4, £6.95  
 Fontana Lions, 0 00 671766 7, £1.50

**Beyond the Chocolate War**  
 Gollancz, 0 575 03711 3, £7.95



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# REVIEWS

## Nursery/Infant

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

### Super Adam and Rosie Wonder

0 552 52269 4

### Rosie's Wonderful Dances

0 552 52268 6

Lyndsay Thwaites, Corgi, £1.50 each

Two everyday stories featuring Rosie and her brother, Adam, as they indulge in typical make-believe play. In *Super Adam and Rosie Wonder* the pair dress up as Superman and Wonderwoman and try their hand at flying despite mum's warning. Inevitably cuts and bruises are the result giving Rosie the chance to play doctor.

*Rosie's Wonderful Dances* are inspired by an LP whose tracks see her as a flower, a clown and a big spider; then, joined by her brother, the two perform as washing machines, thunder and lightning and floating clouds. I particularly liked the illustrative interpretation executed in crayon in this book whereby we are shown the real situation juxtaposed with the imaginings of the performers. The delights of Rosie and her brother are best shared with the under-6s, individually or in a small group.

JB



Mario the sailor, from *Ju-Ju and the Pirate*.

### Juju and the Pirate

Louis Baum, ill. Philippe Matter, Magnet, 0 416 51810 9, £1.50

Juju, the parrot, leaves home in the jungle in search of a

pirate and after a series of adventures he finally finds – or rather, is found by – one of sorts anyway. A not particularly exciting story but enlivened by richly coloured scenes and some distinctive silhouette pictures. These and the patterned text could make this a book worth trying with learner readers but it is unlikely to grip an audience in a story-time session.

JB

### Teddybears Go Shopping

Susanna Gretz, Hippo, 0 590 70406 0, £1.50

Susanna Gretz's favourite bears and their dog take a trip to the supermarket armed with a shopping list. But as they go their separate ways the list is overlooked and the end result is total confusion about who is to get what. Fortunately the situation is saved by Andrew whose coming home presents supply the missing items. Unlike the bears, young readers or listeners will be quicker to spot both the whereabouts of the missing list and the forgotten purchases, and will relish the glut of ice cream along with the bears. Great fun.

JB

### The Noisiest Class Goes to the Beach

Pauline Hill, ill. Joan Beales, Hippo, 0 590 70332 3, £1.50

Not a book to promote a positive image of teachers or children. I found the frenetic scenes with the crudely caricatured 'multi-ethnic' class and the limp text which is peppered with feeble attempts at rhyme totally off-putting. Certainly not a book I would recommend.

JB

### Be Brave, Billy

Jan Ormerod, Picture Lions, 0 000 662259 3, £1.50

The feelings and emotions of a sister and brother are explored through a series of questions about everyday activities, the answers to which are in the superbly observed illustrations. From this very sensitive book we discover that we all, children and adults alike, have our own particular anxieties and fears. This is Jan Ormerod drawing at her best. A book to share with the very young and for slightly older readers to share with a friend perhaps.

JB



'Who's feeling anxious? Nurse Billy? Poor old Monkey? Or Doctor Jilly?' From *Be Brave, Billy*.

### Harriet's Recital

0 14 050.464 8

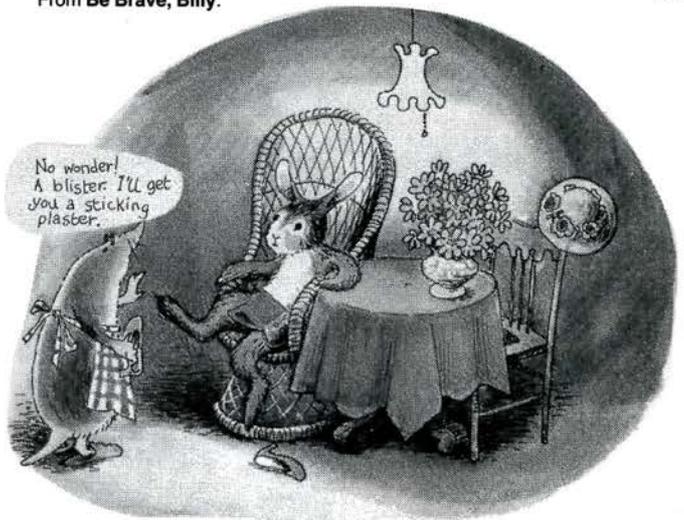
### Harriet and the Garden

0 14 050.466 4

Nancy Carlson, Picture Puffin, £1.50 each

Two further episodes featuring the canine heroine, Harriet. In the former she experiences first-night nerves and imagines all the things that could go wrong before her dancing performance. 'Honesty is the best policy' is what Harriet discovers in the latter title wherein she owns up to ruining a neighbour's garden. Originally published in the USA, these two easy-to-read stories have a slightly old-fashioned charm about them.

JB



From *Seven Little Rabbits*.

### Seven Little Rabbits

John Becker, ill. Barbara Cooney, Blackie Picture Paperbacks, 0 216 91742 5, £1.50

A favourite nursery counting story first published in this country some ten years ago and now, happily, re-issued. It tells of seven little rabbits who set out for toad's house and, on the way, come upon a cosy den built by mole where they fall asleep one by one. The rhythmic nature of the text has a gently soothing feel to it making this a delightful bedtime sharing book for the very young and a good one for novice readers. The detailed pictures have a charm which just manages to escape being whimsical: all in all, a beguiling little book.

JB

### Some of Us

Ljiljana Rylands, Dinosaur, 0 85122 434 2, £1.25

### When I'm Near Water

Colin Christmas, Dinosaur, 0 85122 432 6, £1.25

**Know the Time**  
Althea, Dinosaur, 0 85122 421 0, £1.25

Althea Braithwaite's *Dinosaurs* have a deserved reputation for quality and value for money as well as for acknowledging that we live in a multi-ethnic society and this latest batch is well up to standard. 'Vive la difference' is the theme of *Some of Us* wherein we see just a small proportion of the ways people are different: in shape and size, colour, occupation,

Some of us are short and fat,



From *Some of Us*.

habits, eating preferences and so on. The happy tone of the book is reflected in both the brief rhyming text and the jolly pictures.

In *When I'm Near Water* the dangers of water, be it swimming pool, pond, river, canal or sea, are sensitively explained through a narrative style text which is not over didactic and there is some sensible advice for adults at the back of the book.

*Know the Time* introduces children to the language of time through a sequence of their everyday experiences which are illustrated and augmented with bubble talk thus extending the main text. A very useful little book for infant classrooms and for home reading.

JB

### Wake Up, Bear . . . It's Christmas!

Stephen Gammell,  
Methuen Moonlight,  
0 907144 85 3, £1.50

As autumn turns to winter a brown bear settles down for his winter sleep determined to wake up, this year, in time for Christmas. His clock wakes him on Christmas Eve and he goes off into the snowy woods where he finds a 'nice little pine tree'. Having decorated the tree and hung his stocking, Bear settles down with his guitar to enjoy a cosy evening alone. However he receives an unexpected visitor with a white beard and red coat. Together the pair spend a happy time and decide to make it an annual event. Obviously readers will know the identity of the bespectacled visitor although of course bear does not. A splendid read aloud in its original large hardcover edition, this story, whose text alternates between prose and verse, can now be enjoyed by solo readers in the much smaller Pocket Bear format.

JB

### Spot's Birthday Party

Eric Hill, Picture  
Puffin, 0 14 050.495 8,  
£3.50

Little needs to be said about this one: Spot continues to win numerous friends among

young listeners and learner readers as well as teachers and parents who know that Spot flap books mean hours of enjoyment and a powerful incentive to learning. Make sure this one is added to your collection if it isn't already there.

JB

### Changing Books

0 423 51310 9

### Home in Bed

0 423 51450 4

### No School Today

0 423 51460 1

### Twin Talk

0 423 51310 9

Peter Heaslip, Methuen,  
£1.50 each

Four most welcome titles in the new 'Next Door Books' series which present children from different ethnic backgrounds – here, Asian and West Indian – going about their daily life. Illustrated with colour photographs and related in an easy-to-read text, these books give young readers and listeners an insight into how other families live and should prove popular with both children and teachers. I look forward to further titles in what should be an excellent series.

JB



"Look at the time," said Ahmed. "Come on, we mustn't keep Dad waiting in his taxi." From *Changing Books*.

## Infant/Junior

### Two Admirals

David McKee,  
0 907144 84 5

### The Little Hare Book

Janosch, 0 907144 86 1

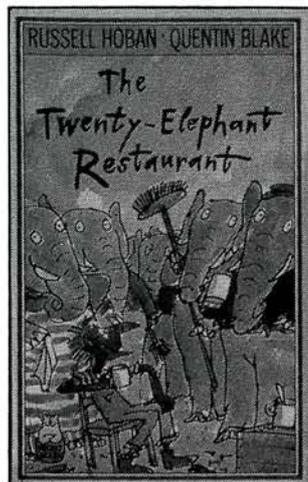
### The Twenty Elephant Restaurant

Russell Hoban and  
Quentin Blake,  
0 907144 90 X

Pocket Bears (Methuen),  
£1.50 each

Three more from the enterprising and always-interesting Pocket Bears series. McKee's fable about the two old men who retire to a village and fight it out as to who is best has characteristically splendid and kaleidoscopic pictures which sixes-up will enjoy. Older children will understand the idea at the heart of the book.

Janosch's is a collection of fourteen poems, rhymes and fables. Stylish pictures and sensitive placing of text in relation to them will guide readers from five to eight. Invitations to readers to be in on the writing of the book are a good idea, but the format of the book made it difficult. Some of the counting rhymes are fun and will be useful for

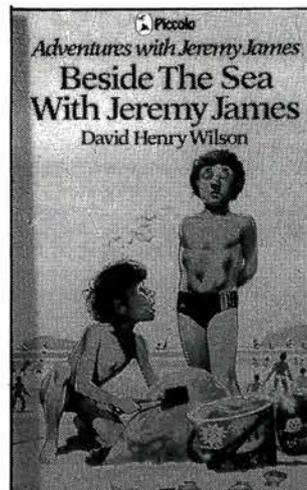


read-aloud and sharing sessions, but, on the whole, the contents don't match the promising 'look' of the book.

Surreal text and pictures in the Blake and Hoban collaboration. Surface text tells the story of the old couple who open a restaurant; eight-ups who've been brought up on *Mr Magnolia* and *Not the Nine O' Clock News* will read it as the rich, extended verbal joke that it is. What happens to language when you stretch it as far as it will go? As with some other books in this

series, I sometimes missed the expansiveness I think the pictures need.

CM



### Beside the Sea with Jeremy James

David Henry Wilson,  
Piccolo, 0 330 28695 1,  
£1.25

I have never really understood the attraction of the Jeremy James stories. It seems to me that the author is laughing 'at' rather than 'with' children whom I feel may well find his

style patronising. The ten episodes in this volume relate incidents in a week's holiday of Jeremy and his family. Presumably they are intended to be read aloud but the humour strikes me as being too adult for a young audience.

JB

### Eloise

Kay Thompson, ill.  
Hilary Knight, Young  
Puffin, 0 14 03.1783 X,  
£1.75

A winner, and not just for those 'first solo readers' Puffin have packaged it for. The heroine is a gem of a six year old who lives in a posh hotel and spends much of her time causing mayhem to the chagrin of her staid English nanny. The tone of the text is very effective, especially when the observant little girl, who tells the story throughout in the first person, picks up the grown-ups' words: 'Nanny says she would rawther I didn't talk talk talk all the time'.

Super use of the form of book to tell the tale: a moveable page when she goes up in the lift to the 15th floor; a six page spread when she has a temper fit. A real coup for Puffin (it was first published 30 years

ago in the USA). Teachers and librarians must ensure that eights to tens (who'll love it) get past the colour coding.

CM

### Cup Final for Charlie

Joy Allen, ill. Joanna Worth, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1857 7, £1.25

Two free-standing stories about a football-mad little boy. In one, he's taken to a Cup Final and that is good on atmosphere and excitement. In another, he gets a new pair of football boots. There's a cleverly crafted fishing trip with his uncle and in general the family relationships (the bond with the uncle; younger brother getting the hand-me-downs) are well done.



Inviting cover and well-placed pictures: this one will appeal to sevens to tens especially those who are football fans and/or need a boost in their reading.

CM

### The Wild Baby

Barbo Lindgren, ill. Eva Eriksen, Hippo, 0 590 70409 5, £1.50

Special bond between harassed Mum and her rumbustious baby, Ben, is beautifully depicted in vivid and hilarious pictures and witty versifying. Fives up to eights should enjoy the exploits: frightening Mum in the middle of the night; playing hide and seek; falling down the loo. Lovely spacious pictures give the appearance that the toddler is *everywhere* and the young reader will soon get that message.

CM

### Pooh and the Honey Tree

0 590 70410 9

### Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too

0 590 70411 7

### Pooh and Piglet Go Hunting

0 590 70412 5

Trans. Anthea Bell, Hippo, £1.50 each

Three independent stories (based on the Disney version of Milne's classic) with an

interesting linguistic history; they've gone the full cycle and been translated from German editions: Anthea Bell is the writer, which ensures crisp language and some intelligent and lively shifts of narration. There's humour in the telling, as Christopher Robin says (in *The Honey Tree*), 'I must have known Pooh for at least fifty years!'

Clever pacing of pictures gives the reader the rhythm of the stories. The pictures themselves are cinematic, Disney characters, missing out on the quirkiness of the originals, but gaining perhaps in that the very young can identify and recognise the characters? Vivid backgrounds make the Hundred Acre Wood earthy and real; I prefer the wood of my childhood imaginings suggested in Shepard's pictures. That said, my co readers of 5 and 7 enjoyed these sturdy editions as introductions to the tales and there's a place for them – though I'd still want the originals in any infant classroom.

CM

### Birds in Town

Peter Gill, Dinosaur, 0 85122 436 9, £1.25

### Growing Plants at Home

Althea, Dinosaur, 0 85122 502 0, £1.25

*Birds in Town* points out how similar urban habitats like gardens, canals and playing fields are to country hedgerows, rivers and meadows, and this in part explains why so many different birds may be seen in the town. Over 7s should find the text informative and the colour illustrations really useful aids to identification.

*Growing Plants at Home* gives practical advice on how to do just that, from house plants such as Busy Lizzie to the fun of planting pips, seeds and nuts – even peanuts as well as cacti, bulbs and making a terrarium: lots of ideas for children, teachers and parents here. Clear, accurate pictures accompany the straightforward text.

JB

### Gerbils' Secret Place

0 416 53180 6

### The Gerbils' Outing

0 416 53160 1

Helen Piers, Magnet, £1.50 each

Two gerbil adventures from Helen Piers wherein she uses her unfailing formula of superb colour photographs and a patterned, story-telling text. Here she introduces a new character, Suko, who in the first story tries, unsuccessfully at first, to find somewhere that nobody else will discover to make her nest and, as we eventually learn, to have her babies. In the second

story Suko, having lost her four offspring one by one on a walk round the garden, is finally reunited with her family and gains an extra charge, though this one is somewhat different. Ideal books for apprentice readers of all ages.

JB

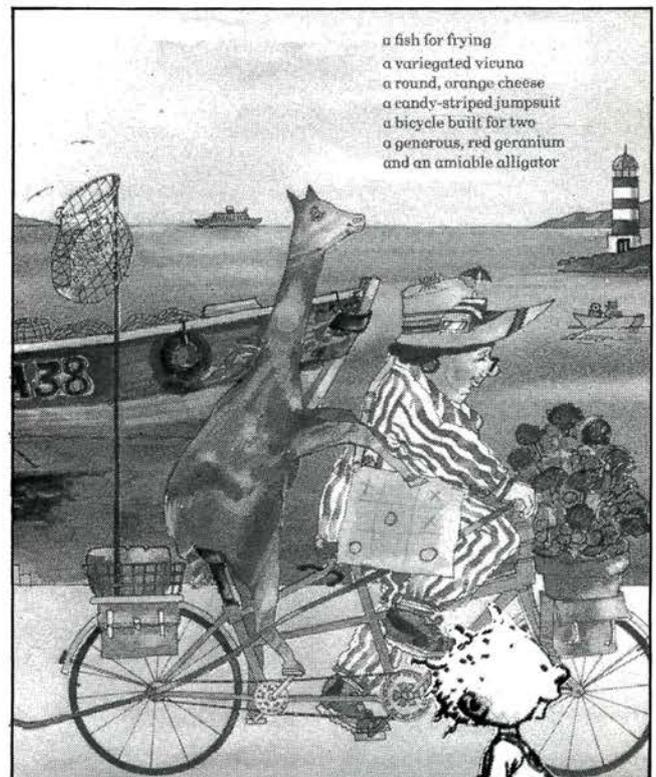
### Grandma Goes Shopping

Rhonda and David Armitage, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.460 5, £1.50

I must admit that this splendid book is one I failed to appreciate fully when it appeared in hardcover. Essentially it is a cumulative game which begins with 'an amiable alligator' and continues through some very strange purchases including 'a

variegated vicuna' and a 'bicycle built for two' on which Grandma finally returns – just – sporting a candy-striped jumpsuit and a porter's cap. All this is humorously depicted but the illustrations show much more; in fact there is another story taking place for unbeknown to gran she has a small passenger, a mouse, accompanying her, and we can see his various activities as she pedals along. A close look at the pictures will also reveal a whole host of nursery characters juxtaposed with the ordinary, a game of noughts and crosses taking place on gran's shoulder bag and lots of other interesting items: see what you and your children can discover. Definitely one of those books where the whole is far more than the sum of its parts.

JB



a fish for frying  
a variegated vicuna  
a round, orange cheese  
a candy-striped jumpsuit  
a bicycle built for two  
a generous, red geranium  
and an amiable alligator

From *Grandma Goes Shopping*.

*The Wild Baby*



From *Gerbils' Secret Place*.

# Junior/Middle



From *Get Lavinia Goodbody!*

## Get Lavinia Goodbody

Roger Collinson, Hippo,  
0 590 70351 X, £1.25

Cousin Lavinia is just too perfect. Swimming, violin and ballet medals can be tolerated, but when she excels at football too. Well really, that's enough to drive any red-blooded lad to desperate deeds. Even if that includes putting out a contract to kidnap her with the notorious Basher MacIntosh gang. Lavinia doesn't exactly fulfil the typecasting for 'damsel in distress', as the hooded gang discover when they attempt to carry her off. Even when finally overpowered, Lavinia proves too hot to handle and makes her own deal with the Kirkston mafia! Not exactly the Godfather, but a mildly funny tale with a comfortable ending all round. BB

## Raging Robots and Unruly Uncles

Margaret Mahy, ill.  
Peter Stevenson, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1817 8, £1.10

This writer's work is always stimulating as she takes her young readers' pleasure seriously. Here, as in her superb collection *The Chewing Gum Rescue*, she is in the business of playing with and upturning some story conventions. The sons of



Jasper, trained to be nasty and named after villains, decide to be good. Prudence, their cousin, wants not to be an old-fashioned heroine but a computer designer.

Nines to elevens (and maybe older secondary students) who have been nurtured on the Ahlbergs and Briggs know the visual equivalents of the verbal fun to be had here. Others will need a lively re-enactment which many teachers will enjoy providing. My ten year old co-readers enjoyed the bits from *One Thousand Improving Little Tales for Progressive Little Minds* by Nanny Gringe. Hope nobody is put off by the small print and the generally 'cramped' look of this edition. CM

## The Song of Roland Smith

Jenny Koralek, Magnet,  
0 416 52470 2, £1.50

Roland must write a poem for homework, a self-portrait. The result (Is it blank verse? Perhaps it is a dirge?) tells of the dullness of his existence, which he feels is in strong contrast to the life of his parents, off taking photographs of Mount Everest. The ensuing story involves a 'borrowed' puppy, a blind girl called Percy and, inevitably, awakening and happiness for Roland.

It is a brisk but touching tale. A good read for able children of eight years or more with possibilities as a read aloud story. CL

## Here Be Dragons

Mark Ronson, Beaver,  
0 09 935350 4, £1.25

An interesting collection of part-fact, part-fiction, which will be of 'browsing merit' to anyone who has always wanted to know the truth about... Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, Jack the Giant Killer, King Arthur, and many others. Among the categories of 'mystery' investigated, with varying degrees of scholarship, are dragons, worms and serpents; giants and giant killers; outlaw heroes; and fairyland people. Well, I don't know whether it will actually help anybody to determine whether they've got fairies at the bottom of their garden, but it's a nice idea, and will make a neat addition to a miscellany corner in a library. BB



## The Little Gymnast

Sheila Haigh, Hippo,  
0 590 70407 9, £1.00

Anda is the only child of parents who have opted out of the rat race and are surviving on a subsistence farm. There is hardly money for the competitive world of gymnastics in which Anda becomes involved. Tears may well be shed as the reader becomes involved in Anda's determination to prove herself and win the essential

scholarship to cover the costs of her expensive hobby. An easy read for middle school children, probably girls hooked on gymnastics, who will skip over the confused middle class ideals in pursuit of an engrossing story. CL

## Dear Mr Henshaw

Beverly Cleary, ill.  
Paul O. Zelinsky, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1797 X, £1.50

Warm, witty book from a versatile writer and a well-deserved Newbery Medal winner. The external landscapes of Leigh's life could be grim: nagging teachers, uncaring absent Dad, tired and nervy Mum. But his life is lightened by the writing he does: school stories, diaries and the correspondence with the famous writer of the book's title. This is one of those rare books where one feels the author has given over the telling to the child in the tale. Leigh constructs it through his different ways of writing and there's a superb lightness of touch.



The boy learns that growing up is, amongst other things, coming to terms with the perspectives of the grown ups; readers learn that writing and storying is one of the ways in which you can do this. A special treat for middle to top juniors: not to be missed. CM

# Middle/Secondary

## The Present Takers

Aidan Chambers,  
Magnet, 0 416 51000 0,  
£1.50

Taking, rather than receiving, presents is the method by which Melanie Prosser conducts her reign as blackmailer and bully girl. Eventually the rest of the class work out a very subtle way of ending her rule.

This is a tough, harsh book, containing much truth about what goes on where the teacher's eye cannot see and, indeed, does not wish to see. Aidan Chambers recognises the sensitivities of young children and highlights just how easily they can be undermined. He also recognises how willingly adults turn a blind eye to the protests of children if looking too deep might cause trouble.

It is also an amusingly tender story in its development of the relationship between Lucy, chief victim, and her friend Angus and in the children's response to the final outcome of their plan.

A book to share. I have read it with success to a group of twelve/thirteen year olds. There is much dialogue so the reading aloud is not easy but the level of response from the

children is well worth the effort. CL

## A Little Fear

Patricia Wrightson,  
Puffin, 0 14 03.1847 X,  
£1.50

Good to see this Australian Children's Book of the Year and Observer Teenage Fiction Award winner in paperback. Apart from the vivid humorous

language I like two things in particular: the main character is a resilient old woman, and the minutiae of the natural world are central to the story. Mrs Tucker escapes from Sunset House to live on an isolated cottage. Her companion is a wistful stray dog, her enemy is the Njimbin, an old, sly spirit determined to protect the territory he squats in and lives off, by mobilising rats, ants, frogs and midges against her. Their battle of wills is the plot and opens up imaginative possibilities for the reader; but what stays with me is her relationship with the bush, her self-doubt and her dignity. 'Gnarled and ancient, a small angry power of the land', the Njimbin apparently defeats her; but Mrs Tucker has her own final victories. I hope this book is read by, to, and with a lot of children. 12+ TD

**Voyage**

Adele Geras, Fontana Lion, 0 00 672409 4, £1.50

It's 1904; we are on a ship bound for America, full of Jewish refugees each with a past to hanker for or relinquish and a future to hope for or fear. The story time is the journey and the book is crowded as the ship is with people of all ages. We travel mainly with 14 year-old Mina but the thoughts and feelings of passengers around her are revealed throughout, in short

glimpses, piled upon each other and threaded together. Not a book to share aloud but worth offering to 13 year-olds for the way it conveys a sense of the emotional baggage of its displaced characters. TD

**The Edge of the World**

John Gordon, Fontana Lion, 0 00 672249 0, £1.75

We are in Fenland with some kids and suddenly the landscape becomes purple-skied desert with a horse-skulled menace. Tekker can make it happen. Kit sees it too. Because of it her brother becomes desperately ill. It's something to do with an old man in love, back in the First World War, with Stella, whose jealous sister imprisons her in this other land. The story of Kit and Tekker's dangerous journey to save the brother and Stella is quite fast-moving and atmospheric. I have a lot of time for writing which explores contiguity of times and spaces but that isn't what happens here. A pity. Here the reliance is more on special effects for which I haven't much patience. TD

**The Far Side of the Lough**  
Polly Devlin, Magnet, 0 416 51820 6, £1.75



Stories about 'the real people who surrounded me when I was a child growing up', sounds like a recipe for 'syrup', and usually is. In this collection, the converse is true, thankfully.

Polly Devlin's seven tales 'from an Irish childhood' live. From Mary-Ellen, wearing men's stockings, with a store of reminiscences of life in Ardboe, on the shores of Lough Neagh, to the

neighbours calling in for a 'crack' or chat around the evening fireplace, it lives and is believable. A superb book, not even out of place or quality for adult readership, but a remarkable introduction to 'story' as it should be written, for top junior/middle range. BB

**An Open Mind**

Susan Sallis, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.1837 2, £1.50

'You make me sick. No good ... What good is anyone come to that? You make people nicer than they were before, Bruce ... me, for instance.'

Self-styled yobbo, reluctant schoolboy Dave, finds himself befriending the spastic boy who, coincidentally, is the son of the woman Dave's divorced father wants to marry. (At this time his own mother is having a hysterectomy by the way!) A very positive, sobering friendship evolves which would have stood more exploration in this, at times, refreshingly honest novel, which is nevertheless altogether too busy with problems and issues with which the principals have to cope. In a sense both boys are handicapped; Bruce literally and Dave through an understandably impaired view of the people around him.

Well worth a read for thoughtful older readers. DB

**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.

**Celebrations**



Each book in this new, colourful photographic series looks at a special occasion and shows how it is celebrated at home and shared by children at school.

Publication October £3.95 each

**Dat's New Year**

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**New Baby**

Judith Baskerville  
0-7136-2645-3

**Diwali**

Chris Deshpande  
0-7136-2643-7

**Sam's Passover**

Lynne Hannigan  
0-7136-2646-1

**A & C Black**

# SOUND & VISION

## The Black Cauldron

Copyright Walt Disney Productions 1985.



The Disney Studio's 25th full-length animated feature film is the result of yet another raid on children's books. After *Pinocchio* and *Bambi*, *Alice and Winnie-the-Pooh*, *The Sword in the Stone* and *The Jungle Book*, the latest subject for Disney fiction is Lloyd Alexander's *The Chronicles of Prydain*. This five book mythological Tolkien-type fantasy was first published in the United States in the sixties. The final volume *The High King*, won the Newbery Award (the American equivalent of the Carnegie Medal) in 1969, and the second book, *The Black Cauldron*, was a runner-up in 1966.

Disney bought the screen rights to *The Chronicles* in 1971 and throughout the seventies several writers tried their hand at an adaptation. Joe Hale was appointed producer in 1980 and set about producing a script himself. 'Eventually,' he says, 'we came up with a narrative that neatly capsulized Alexander's sprawling story.' To achieve this Joe Hale confesses, 'We had to take a few liberties with the plot.' For instance? 'The Horned King is a minor character in the series but since he had so many interesting possibilities when animated we expanded his role. He's actually a composite of several characters from the books.' Purist Alexander devotees, you have been warned. But young Taran, the assistant pig-keeper, is still the central character in search of a heroic adventure, and Hen Wen, the magical pig, and Princess Eilonwy are two from the books who make it to the screen. Condensed to screen length we have a quest adventure in which Taran and friends have to prevent The Horned King getting his evil hands on the black cauldron whose power will enable him to rule the world.

The film was five years in production using the latest techniques in animation which

incorporate video and computer technology. Twenty-five million dollars went into the project; 'the most ambitious animated production since *Pinocchio*.' Producer, Joe Hale, asserts that the result retains the blend of high adventure and humour which characterises the books: 'We tried to remain true to the author's vision.' We shall see.

The film has its first showing at a Royal Premiere on October 11th and will be on general release throughout the country by the Christmas holidays.

Hippo are publishing two book-of-the-film Storybooks, both illustrated with full colour stills from the film and written by Alison Sage.

Both are entitled *The Black Cauldron*: large-size (0 590 70419 2), £2.50; condensed version for younger readers (0 590 70506 7), £1.50.

The original *Chronicles of Prydain* are available in Fontana Lions. *The Book of Three* 0 00 670592 8, £1.25; *The Black Cauldron*, 0 00 670593 6, £1.25; *The Castle of Llyr*, 0 00 671128 6, £1.25; *Taran Wanderer*, 0 00 671498 6, £1.50; *The High King*, 0 00 671499 4, £1.50.

Graeme Farmer's *Golden Pennies* (ITV) an eight-part Australian series originally scheduled for May will now be shown in the weeks running up to Christmas. Tie-in Novel from Puffin.

## A New Jan Mark



On October 1st Thames Television's *Middle English* programme shows the first of a new three-part play by Jan Mark.

*Interference* is about a family – three children, two parents whose marriage is disintegrating. They take a country cottage for holidays and weekends. Strange things happen: electrical equipment

goes on the blink, the phone won't work – but only when the very aggressive father is in the house. Is this a ghost story? An account of a family breaking up? A comment on a technology-dependent society? Watch it and see.

We understand that *Interference* will probably appear in book form as a novel – with lots of dialogue!

## Take it From the Top



Judy Garland sang about being born in a trunk in the Princes Theatre in Pocatello, Idaho; William Worthington was born in a trunk on Frinton Station during an air raid in 1942. William Worthington (Bill Odie, thinly disguised) is the anti-star of Central Television's new series, *From the Top*, written by Bill Odie and Laura Beaumont, (starts September 23rd) and of the Magnet book-of-the-series by the same authors.

The series tells William's story: abandoned at eighteen months by his jazz musician

mother, expelled from the Home for Really Unwanted Boys for 'putting on the show right here', self-made swot, graduate of a posh university, family man, rich and successful bank manager who at forty-three remembers that what he really wanted to be was A STAR. He plunges into a rock-crazed delayed teenage, is thrown out by his family, reunited with Mum and enrolls as a 'mature student' at The Jolly Theatre School – which turns out to be a far cry from its counterpart in *Fame*. (Don't put your son on the stage Mrs Worthington?).

It's an Oddie-flavoured concoction – Bill's wife appears to share her husband's sense of humour – and on screen it may be child-centred enough to pass; but on the page much of the humour will probably appeal most to jazz lovers of a similar age to Worthington/Oddie whose experience encompasses early Hollywood musicals – note the Garland parody – and the *Swinging Sixties*. But I could be wrong; I'd like to think I might be, Oddie fun is an innocent and engaging thing.

*From the Top*, Bill Oddie and Laura Beaumont, Magnet, 0 416 51160 0, £1.50.

### In View Soon

A new series of *Tucker's Luck* (BBC 2) starts on October 23rd. Jan Needle's *Tucker in Control* will be available from Magnet. (See BfK 33)

Repeats are scheduled for:

*Danger – Marmalade at Work* (ITV) from November 13th. Book by Andrew Davies in Thames/Magnet

*The Box of Delights* (BBC 1) will be repeated in three hour-long weekly episodes in December. Abridged editions of the John Masefield original in paperback from Fontana Lions and in hardback from Heinemann. (See BfK 29)

## New Autumn titles from Magnet



### FROM THE TOP BILL ODDIE and LAURA BEAUMONT

Published to coincide with the ITV series starring Bill Oddie, the hilarious story of William Worthington, who can't sing, dance or act—but who wants to be a STAR!

£1.50 416 51160 6

### TUCKER IN CONTROL JAN NEEDLE

Based on the BBC TV series *Tucker's Luck*

Tucker's life changes the day his father walks out. Helping his Mum through the crisis, looking after his little sister... how can he keep up his old style and find time for the things that matter most: Girls, Money and Fun? A book for older readers from the highly acclaimed children's author.

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### Forbidden Gateway Series TERRORS OUT OF TIME

416 52520 2

### WHERE THE SHADOWS STALK

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### IAN and CLIVE BAILEY

A new dimension in adventure gamebooks—using the best elements of fantasy, detective and horror stories to create an intricate and compelling adventure. From two experts in the Fantasy Games field.

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The acclaimed historical biographer brings these great tales to a new generation of readers, recreating the age of chivalry and romance with unusual vividness.

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Laura knows that her brother may die. Must she 'change over' and use her remarkable powers to save him? A powerful story of romance and the supernatural from the author of another award-winner, *The Haunting*.

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### Plot Your Own Horror Stories ESCAPE FROM HIGH DOOM

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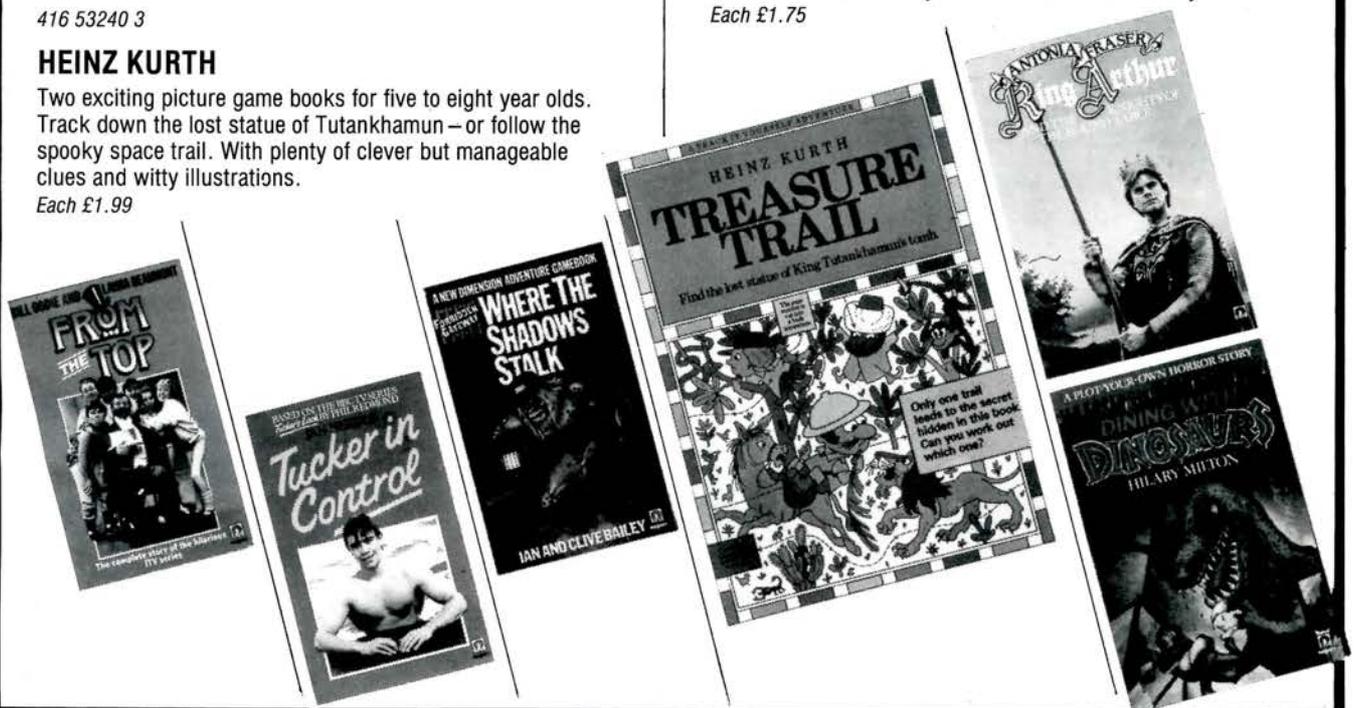
### DINING WITH DINOSAURS

416 53400 7

### HILARY MILTON

Two new adventure stories for children aged 8 and over where the reader must outwit the enemy—to avoid the wrath of a deadly dinosaur, or a gruesome end in the Wild West at the hands of Knife Nelly and Murderous Brown Billy.

Each £1.75



# A Question of Images

## Lisa Kopper thinking aloud about 'drawing black people'



Multi-cultural books for children are a complex issue. Even the words 'multi-cultural' rankle. Nobody really knows what to call anything in this sensitive area – the 'correct' phraseology is always changing. I'm an illustrator and involved with images so I'll just call it drawing black people, Indians, East Asians or whom so ever I am depicting.\*

I'm forever being asked two questions about this field of illustration: Why can't people draw black people and why aren't there

more black illustrators? Now, as the 'multi-cultural' book becomes a more established part of children's literature, I think there is a third question: What is the role of white artists and writers in the production of books about black people?

I'm a white artist but have done a number of books about people from all parts of the world. I often wonder whether I am right to do this work when more and more books are being published but, in percentage terms, fewer and fewer are illustrated by black artists.

When I was first asked in 1979 to illustrate a children's series about an African child, my response was, 'But don't you really think a black artist should do this?' The publisher replied, 'We can't find them.' I did the books (the **Jafta Family** series) and the

experience was wonderful for me; it opened up whole new worlds literally.

When I consider how my career came to take this direction, it wasn't really an accident. I was made aware of social issues, poverty and discrimination early in life because my parents were involved with the emerging Civil Rights Movement in the United States. In the late fifties you never saw a black face anywhere in the media; not on TV, not on posters and in only one picture book and we all know what that was! Later I had a book for older children about a black girl growing up in the South. I remember looking and looking at the small

\* For the purposes of simplicity, I will mostly be talking about black people in this article but much of what I say also applies to Indians, East Asians and other groups.



'I think I'm going to like my other grandparents, after all.' From **Amber's Other Grandparents**, by Peter Bonnici (The Bodley Head).

line and wash drawings – they weren't very special but they were the first pictures I'd seen that attempted to portray black people in a sympathetic way.

In the mid seventies, I did some work for the Anti-Apartheid Movement in this country. Despite my awareness of the bad representations of black people, I found it difficult to draw the kind of image I wanted. It was hard for me to see what was good and what wasn't. The old stereotypes just kept sneaking onto the paper. I decided that I would have to make gradual progress and go for a good 'feeling' before fine drawing as I was having problems with features. I used a lot of silhouette and did my first small book (*Children of Soweto*) in woodcut – strong and effective but without detail.

I started thinking about the kind of difficulties I was experiencing and why I was so uncertain of my images. After all, artists draw many things they don't know intimately – elephants, tigers, outer space . . . It was then that I realised that I, and probably most other children, had learned to draw both familiar and unfamiliar things from looking at pictures. That's how I knew that girls on horses had long flowing hair and they certainly didn't wear glasses or have big noses. But what pictures had I seen of black people? Virtually none. So if children learn to draw and see not so much from life as from other people's drawing, then we were a whole generation grown up on *Little Black Sambo*.

We all learn from our own visual traditions. It's the same for black and white children and worse for black artists in many other parts of the world where our shoddy traditions have replaced their own. Many African illustrators continue to draw themselves in the distorted way they learned from the books we made for them.

When I tackled the *Jafta* series, I was determined to break the pattern of my learned imagery. I decided that my child had to be as beautiful and appealing as I could possibly make him. I looked at photo after photo, spoke to numerous people from that part of Africa and made more mistakes for every finished piece of artwork than anyone could imagine. I can still see things I'd like to change, more as time passes, but I like to think my work is progressing with every book. *Jafta* will always be special to me because it really taught me how to draw. It also helped me to see in a less superficial way. People have looked different since then – more individual.

Then and now I always work with an author who knows his or her subject well. Not only does this help me to authenticate my drawings but, being something of a traditionalist, I still believe that the words are the heart of a book no matter how simple.

I hope that some of the books I have done will encourage other artists to break the mould in their own way so that we can establish new and varied images. I believe that what we see when we are very young is firmly fixed in our subconscious and hard to change. This is why picture book images are so important. People can't draw black people because they haven't had the visual resources to learn from. And perhaps also black people do not take seriously a profession which has represented them so badly. Most talented African artists select to do painting or sculpture which are more firmly rooted in their own traditions. I suspect the same might be true here.

To try and find out what happens to black art students, I did a telephone survey of the design and illustration departments of a number of London art colleges and polytechnics. The results were fairly grim. Again and again I was told, 'We do not

operate a discriminatory policy, we simply don't get the applications from black and Asian students. We would welcome more.' Some percentages were too small to count. Even in predominantly black colleges, the art departments were white ghettos. The few black students that there were (almost always boys) frequently did very well and several were prize winners. These, however, did not generally choose book illustration as a profession but opted more for fashion, design and advertising. Many teachers thought there was a class problem and black children were not getting the support they needed at home. Those students who actually chose to do children's book illustration tended to be white, middle class girls.

All agreed that art college stage was too late – children needed to be encouraged and made aware of career possibilities at O and A level. I have always believed this and think some effort must be made to reach younger people. I spoke with a couple of black art students and they seemed to feel that regardless of their colour, they were not encouraged to develop as book illustrators and were given very little information about this field and the opportunities. My own advice to young gifted black people is to be

artists first and make the effort to get into the system, no matter the problems and however painful it is. The black artists and writers I know agree with me on this. We don't want arts apartheid; it won't help anyone in the end.

For those of us who are white and working in this area, we must tread softly. There is a danger that we could become literary colonialists. All things being equal, it wouldn't matter who wrote or drew what but unfortunately all things are not equal.

I can understand how black people must feel when so many of the books about them are done by us. Any group in a similar situation would feel uncomfortable and angry whether Jewish, Irish, Scottish or whatever. So we must guard against any feeling of doing books for 'them', of bestowing a favour. It is not, and no black person would see it as such. I personally feel privileged to have been able to travel around the world through my art and when what I have done is accepted by those people as good and right, I am honoured. We must always remember that we are guests in someone else's culture. But I hope the day will come when we don't even have to consider these issues, then we'll know there's real integration. ●



'Everybody cheered and shouted – and the music and dancing started.' From *Jafta – The Wedding*.

**Lisa Kopper** was born in Chicago in 1950 and moved to Britain in 1970 after studying painting and sculpture at Carnegie – Mellon University in Pennsylvania. Her first picture book was published by Evans in 1979; since then she has worked for a number of publishers; her work is much admired and in demand. Lisa is a thoughtful, articulate and outspoken member of her profession. She has a clutch of new books out this autumn.

**The Books** – a selection of in print books with Lisa Kopper illustrations.

**The Jafta Family series** (1981-83) – with Hugh Lewin. (See page 10)  
**An Elephant Came to Swim** (1985) – with Hugh Lewin  
**Katie Moves House**, Victoria Whitehead (1982), Dinosaur, 0 85122 385 0, £1.10 (pbk); 0 85122 386 9, £2.95 (hbk)  
**Rebekah and the Slide**, Christine Parker (1983), Dinosaur, 0 85122 389 3, 95p (pbk); 0 85122 390 7, £2.95 (hbk)  
**Small World Series**, with Leila Berg, Methuen, **Dogs**, 0 416 44020 7, **Bees** 0 416 44050 9, **Worms** 0 416 44040 1, **Blood and Plasters** 0 416 44030 4, (1983), £1.50 each, **Rainbows** 0 416 52380 6, **Vacuum Cleaners** 0 416 52590 3, **Ducks** 0 416 52610 1, **Cars** 0 416 52600 4, (1985), £1.95 each  
**The First Rains**, Peter Bonnici (1984), Bell and Hyman, 0 7135 1457 4, £3.50  
**The Festival**, Peter Bonnici (1984), Bell and Hyman, 0 7135 1458 2, £3.50  
**Coming Home**, Ted Harriott (1985), Gollancz, 0 575 03583 8, £4.95  
**Ambers Other Grandparents**, Peter Bonnici (1985), Bodley Head, 0 370 30671 6, £5.50.

# May we recommend . . .

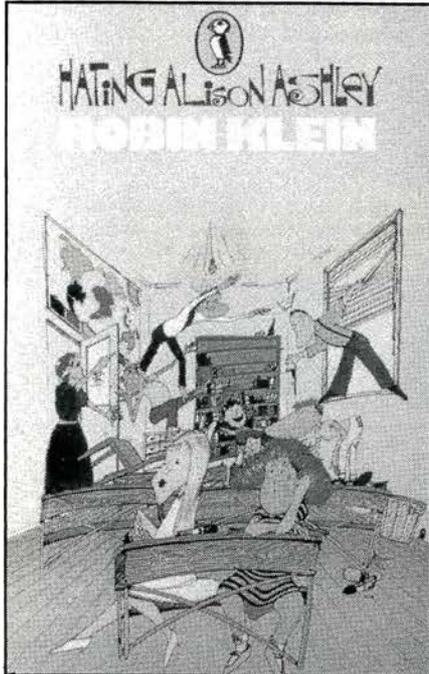
## Stephanie Nettell introduces

# Robin Klein

Robin Klein believes fiercely in three things: tolerance, laughter and children. You don't need to hear her talking in her amazingly fast, self-deprecating Strine to know this, for the message is clear from her nine books that have appeared over here. In all of them, the world is seen to be a cheerier place when everyone, old or young, is free to be his or her harmlessly quirky self, and in all of them she reveals an uncanny empathy with children.

'My kids say it's a case of arrested development, but I happen to like things that children like. I like to stare and listen - I never read on public transport! I was hopeless as a teacher because I never kept order: they'd come and put an arm round my shoulder and we'd end up with a chat session. It's quite possible to have an involved philosophical discussion with even a small child - adults forget that it's a privilege to be with children. I'm really sorry mine are now grown up' - she has four, the youngest seventeen.

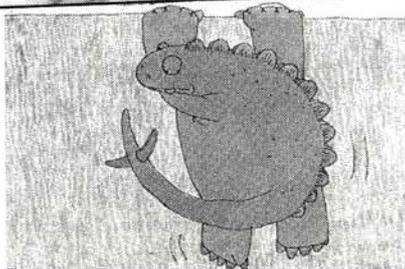
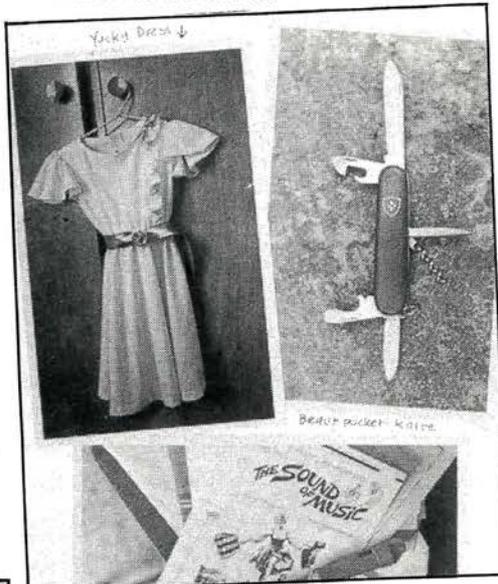
She is a marvellously gutsy writer who relishes the drama of everyday life. For her youngest readers, it's no holds barred as her central characters fight off their pompous, snobbish, egotistical, boringly conventional enemies with joyously unorthodox tactics. **Thing**, a loving little dinosaur with a self-protective ability to freeze into other shapes, is totally content to live with Emily and her taxi-driver mum, watching TV in the flat while they're both out, and even the youngest reader can somehow see that it is his and Emily's innocent integrity that wins round the no-pets landlady and defeats the loathsomely spoilt Stephanie Strobe.



**Junk Castle** is a paean to the triumph of the imagination over stultifying gentility, to the revitalising of dead urban scenes, to the rejuvenation of the spirit. Is that a pile of old rubbish on the Beatrice Binker Reserve

(a tiny triangle of cropped grass in a jungle of concrete), or a glitteringly exciting castle? This is a favourite theme of Klein's, a sort of personal war on tidy suburbia - perhaps because 'I used to live in a ghastly middle-class suburb that I absolutely loathed. Now I live miles from anywhere out in the bush, in a tolerant, dotty area.'

She aims not to obliterate the enemy but to liberate them, to show that appearances aren't everything. So the tough-talking Erica, who escapes from her own uncertainty into brazen fantasies, learns to her humbled surprise that nauseatingly perfect **Alison Ashley** turns out to have her own griefs as well as valuable talents.



Erica is in the **Penny Pollard** mould. We watched Penny finding out about life in, first, her **Diary** (as she touchingly discovers that old people are not all tedious wrinklies but individuals with fascinating memories and passions), then her **Letters** (which reveal that babies may not be as boring as she thought, and, in postscripts, a grudging but growing interest in a certain Alistair who can't help his name); and soon we'll share her experiences as a monstrously reluctant bridesmaid, to be followed by a visit to England. There will, I hope, be no stopping our Penny. She's a sturdy, delightful character, with a message for girls in particular that 'you don't always need Daddy or big brother to solve your problems - she can solve her own problems, though she's not tough all the way through. All the little boys in Australia are in love with her, and write to her as if she exists.' Deluded, no doubt, by Ann James's magically recreated photographic effects for illustrations.



It's an irony of the can't-win situation of a writer that while it's been hard work importing Penny into Britain, and even harder into the States, because of her Australian background and slang, my own reviewer on the **Guardian** complained at the lack of good strong Aussie details! In fact, children aren't as fussed by either as editors imagine, as long as the characters and plot bowl along.

Penny and Erica are classic Klein, writing in the voice of an engagingly anti-social tomboy who nevertheless conceals an intelligent and affectionate soul. A sort of wise-cracking, female William. I can think of no contemporary writer who does it better: Klein herself wishes she could write like Jan Mark, and one can respect this, for the affinity is clear, but in her ability to speak directly in the child's persona, with no apparent sophistication, and still allow a young reader to see the joke or the pathos from the outside - in this she can stand alone with pride.

Her one novel for over-elevens so far is **People Might Hear You**, a powerful story of a girl imprisoned, quite literally, in a sinister household obsessed by religious fanaticism, told with a controlled simplicity that heightens both the emotion and the suspense: it was a strong contender for the 1984 **Guardian** Award. She is struggling now to complete another serious work for Puffin, one she feels must be written, on drug addiction (a criminal offence in Australia), both inspired and hampered by the agony of seeing her own beautiful and gifted 22-year-old daughter's harrowing fight with heroin. 'I could have come to terms with it more if I'd had a child with leukaemia,' she says, and for one fleeting moment even Robin Klein is not laughing. ●

### The Books

**Giraffe in Pepperell Street**  
Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 22731 1, £5.95

**Thing**  
Oxford University Press, 0 19 554330 0, £3.95; 0 19 554549 4, £1.95 pbk

**Thingnapped!**  
OUP, 0 19 554574 5, £3.95

**Junk Castle**  
OUP, 0 19 271487 2, £3.50

**Penny Pollard's Diary**  
OUP, 0 19 554415 3, £4.95

**Penny Pollard's Letters**  
OUP, 0 19 554575 3, £4.95

**Ratbags and Rascals: Funny Stories**  
OUP, 0 19 279810 3, £4.95

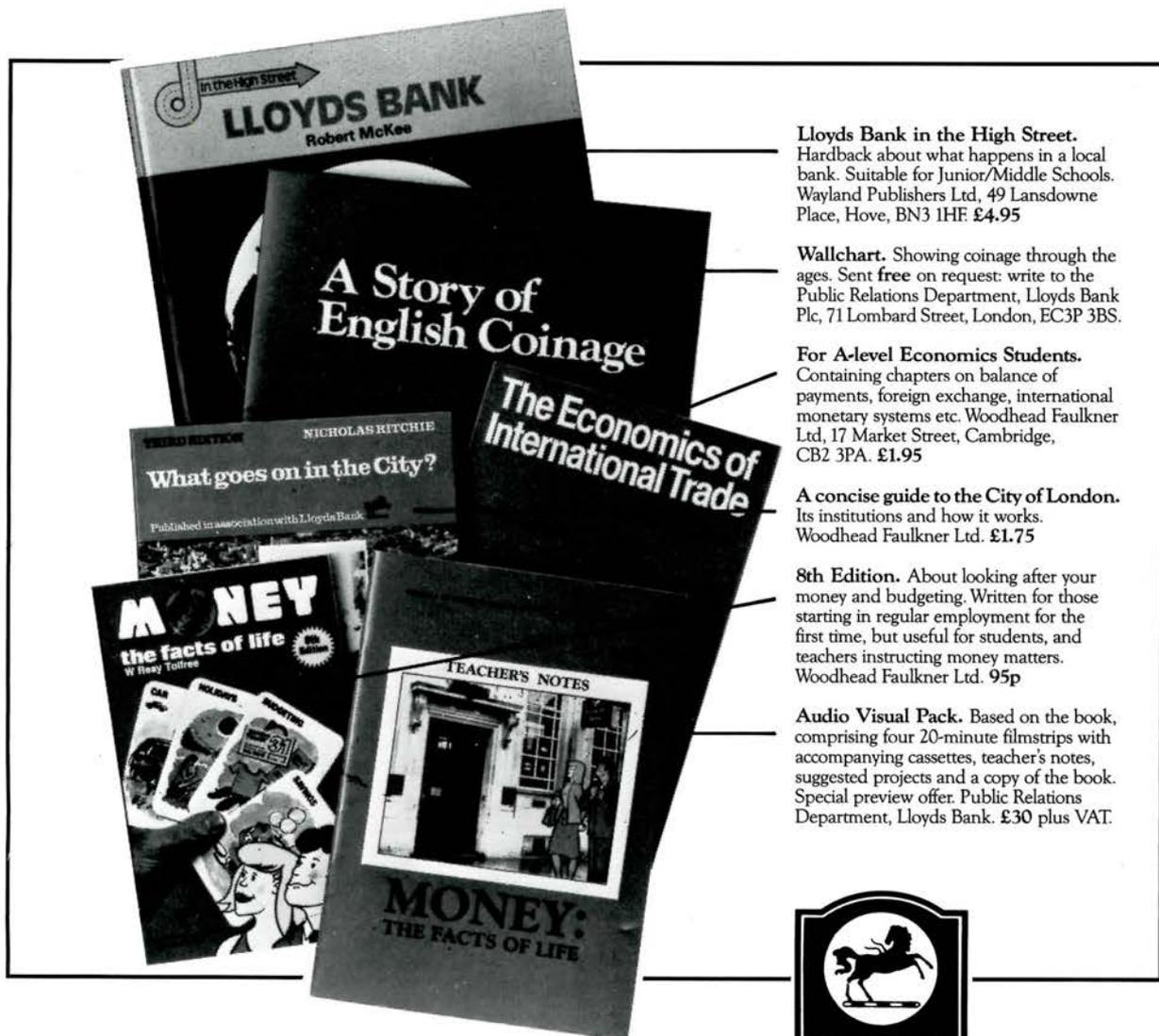
**Hating Alison Ashley**  
Puffin, 0 14 03.1672 8, £1.75

**People Might Hear You**  
Puffin, 0 14 03.1594 2, £1.75

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## Lloyds Bank

# The Other Award '85

This is the eleventh year of the Other Award for 'progressive books of literary merit'. Books are commended each year which 'offer children a wider and more accurate representation of human experience and situation' with particular reference to 'groups of people usually ignored, patronised or misrepresented in children's literature'.

This year the panel, Peter Griffiths, Grace Hallworth, Mary Hoffman, Bob Leeson, Andrew Mann, Rosemary Stones and John Vincent, made six commendations.



Bathing the baby. A lovely snatch of family life in South London from **Our Kids**.

## Our Kids

Millie, Audrey, Verna, Selina, Pearl, Carmen Rhona, Mary and Elaine, photos. by Blackfriars Photography Project, Peckham Publishing Project, 0 906464 12 9, £2.25

A photo-story book for the very young with no words, **Our Kids** is a series of colour photographs of Black South London children involved in everyday activities – on the swings, helping to bath the baby, buying new shoes, going to the laundrette, etc. Produced co-operatively by the mothers of the children in the pictures, a community photography project and a community publisher, **Our Kids** is an outstanding example of alternative anti-racist publishing for young readers.

## Journey to Jo'burg: a South African Story

Beverley Naidoo, Longman 'Knockouts', 0 582 25208 3, £4.25 (hbk); 0 582 20514 X, £1.10 (pbk)

Frightened that their baby sister will die, thirteen-year-old Naledi and her younger brother Tiro run away together to Johannesburg to find their mother who works there as a maid, and bring her back. The places and events they see on the way and the people they meet – a pass raid, separate buses for white and Black, the white Madam's opulent house, Grace who lives in Soweto – reveal at every turn the grim

realities of the apartheid system. Through this story of two Black South African children, Beverley Naidoo shows the monstrous injustice of apartheid in terms that young readers will be able to understand. 7-10

## Comfort Herself

Geraldine Kaye, Deutsch, 0 233 97614 0, £4.95

Half-English and half-Ghanian, eleven-year-old Comfort Kwatey-Jones spends the year, after her mother's death, travelling – from England to her father in Accra and to her grandmother in Wanwangeri village, and back to her other grandparents in Penfold, Kent. 'You get pulled apart belonging to two places', Comfort's Ghanian father tells her but this warm and sensitive book tells how Comfort draws on the differences and the similarities of her rich cultural heritages to develop 'an eagle's heart and friends everywhere'. Packed with the detail of people and lives in Accra, Wanwangeri and Penfold, Geraldine Kaye's deftly narrated story not only dispels ignorance about cultural differences but celebrates the lives and heritages of mixed race children. 8-12

## Vila

Sarah Baylis, Brilliance, 0 946189 95 1, £8.95 (hbk); 0 946189 90 6, £3.95 (pbk)

Medieval Russia and Nina and

Masha live in a village where 'traditional' sex roles and superstitious beliefs rigidly define how they can lead their lives. When Nina and Masha are swept away in the river (thought to be the home of a malevolent spirit) they are rescued by Vila, a strong and fearless woman from a different community and, under her influence, their futures begin to look different. This pacily written, exciting adventure story, full of well differentiated female characters, breaks new ground in feminist fiction for teenagers. 12+

**Motherland:** West Indian Women to Britain in the 1950s  
Elyse Dodgson, Heinemann Educational, 0 435 23230 4, £3.95

The testimonies of twenty-three Black West Indian women, make up the core of this illuminating and accessible study of Caribbean migration to Britain in the 1950s and reveal movingly just what it was like to be a Black woman immigrant at that time. The difficulties of finding somewhere to live, the pressures on family life, earning a living, hostility from the host community etc. are vividly described in a series of powerful accounts enhanced by photographs from the period. The school project on which this book is based also inspired a play and the script is included here. An excellent stimulus for sensitive and imaginative engagement with recent Black British and women's history. 12+

## Coalmining Women

Angela V. John, Cambridge Educational, 0 521 27872 4, £2.15

The task of putting 'herstory' into history books for young readers is one that feminist historians have begun to address in the last few years. Cambridge Educational's 'Women in History' series is helping to make such innovative research available in a form accessible to secondary school readers, and **Coalmining Women**, their third title, is a particularly impressive and welcome contribution to both women's and working class history. Angela V. John's lively and detailed account of working conditions for women miners and attitudes to them, is a story not just of suffering and exploitation but also of independent women with strength and self-respect. 12+

## Baby's Best Book

The winner of the Best Book for Babies award sponsored by Parents magazine is Janet and Allan Ahlberg's **Peepo!** The jury described it as 'a book in which all its elements combine to create a unique reading experience for both child and parent.'

The award which carried a prize of £1,000 will be presented annually.

## Book Events Ahead

**Scheherazade** – a travelling book event is part of this year's Bristol Festival for Children, October 3-23.

Aware that cash for school trips is in short supply the organisers of **Scheherazade** have wisely decided to take the book event to the children: it will appear at six venues around Avon. A specially devised puppet show, stories, dressing-up sessions, activities, competitions are all designed to encourage reading and writing. A careful selection of books specifically linked to activities at the event will be on sale 'for those who *might* like to buy.' The event is free and all ages can be catered for. Phone Bristol 277157.

## Northern Children's Book Festival 1985

A genuinely regional event involving six local authorities – Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Northumberland and Durham – based on cooperation between schools, libraries, bookshops, publishers and voluntary groups – all sharing a wish to promote children's literature.

The Festival was launched in 1984 and proved to be extremely successful, with 6,000 children plus parents taking part. This year promises to be even bigger and better. From 4th-8th November, children in the participating authorities will have the opportunity to meet a wide variety of authors and illustrators including Nina Beachcroft, Patrick Benson, Rod Campbell, Peter Dickinson, Gwen Grant, Shirley Hughes, Mary Rayner, Hazel Townson, Martin Waddell and Jill Paton Walsh. There will also be puppet shows and Book Safaris.

On the 9th November, a 'Super Saturday' Event takes place in Newcastle's Shopping and Recreation Centre, Eldon Square. As well as authors, there will be a book 'surgery' with Elaine Moss, crafts and pop-up bookmaking, videos and an extensive publishers' book exhibition. Postman Pat and Spot the Dog will be around, too!

It's all **FREE** and everyone is welcome.

Contact: Elizabeth Hammill, The Bookhouse, Ridley Place, Newcastle upon Tyne. Telephone: 091 616128.

## Jury Complete for Smarties Prize

TV presenter Michael Aspel is to be the fifth member of the judging panel for the £10,000 Smarties prize. He joins Bernard Ashley, Sarah Greene, Peggy Heeks and Nanette Newman.

A shortlist of five books in each of the three categories of award (-7, 7+ and 'innovatory presentation') will be announced in October and the 15 titles will be displayed. the CBW Book Train.