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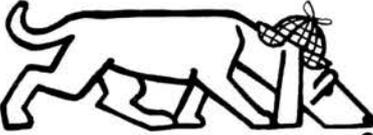
The Guide to Children's Books for a Multi-cultural Society: 0-7

We hope to be going to press (getting it printed) at the beginning of April which means you should get copies towards the end of April. Sorry to have slipped a month but our policy all along has been to get it right rather than get it quick.

And yes, we are breathing easier - nearly 1500 copies ordered in advance so far. Many thanks from us at BfK.

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Cover Story

The illustration on our cover is from **Ben and the Bear**, written and illustrated by Chris Riddell (0 7445 0480 5, £2.95), a title from a new series of **Fun-to-Read Picture Books** published by Walker Books. We are grateful to Walker Books for help in using this illustration.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

– the magazine of the
School Bookshop Association

MARCH 1986 No. 37

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 1986

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: £6.60 UK, £9.50 overseas.

Single copies: £1.10 UK, £1.60 overseas.

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

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Books for Keeps is published by the School Bookshop Association Ltd with the help of **Lloyds Bank**, six times a year.



EDITOR'S PAGE



Pat

A six page feature on anthologies? Whatever is there to say about that old hat kind of publishing? Well, quite a lot as we found when we set Pat Thomson investigating the past, present and future of story anthologies. Poetry anthologies burgeon and flourish but about collections of stories publishers have very different opinions as you will see (page 4). So do the compilers (page 6) especially when they are giving hundreds of children a chance to choose their 'best stories' (page 8).

Reading is Fun

If reading *isn't* fun it won't be the fault of Allan Ahlberg and Colin McNaughton. Their eight **Red Nose Readers** must be the best possible introduction to reading anywhere. 'Keywords', 'controlled vocabulary' and 'caption text' acquire a whole new meaning when Ahlberg's ideas are matched with McNaughton's fast-moving, inventive and very funny pictures. As one of their famous word sums might say: Ahlberg + McNaughton = genius. (Illustrate that!) Which is one of the reasons we are particularly pleased to feature Colin McNaughton in our Authorgraph (page 12). And also why it is very good news that **Red Nose Readers** are coming out in Yellow and Blue. You can read all about it in Cliff Moon's review of the rapidly increasing number of series for beginner readers which are coming from mainstream publishers. Are these in danger of becoming reading schemes writ small? Or can they retain that vital quality of 'real' books? (see page 20).

On our cover this issue we feature an illustration from **Ben and the Bear**, one of a new series from Walker Books, Fun-to-Read Picture Books. The stories, while offering just the right kind of support for beginner readers are without a trace of 'formula' writing – which is exactly what you would hope from writers like Jan Mark and Dick King-Smith who are among the authors who appear in this promising list.

Only Connect

Terry Downie reports for us on the one-day Children's Book Conference: Finding Facts and Fighting Fantasy, at which I was one of the speakers (page 10). It was a very interesting day and I could have listened to a lot more especially from Ann Parker and Margaret Marshall who, like me, were charged with talking about Trends and Opportunities.

At one point the conference was in grave danger of 'blaming it all the teachers' which would have been perpetuating another fantasy. Michael Marland's criticisms of teachers who don't read are indeed shocking if he is talking about secondary English specialists. But it is quite unrealistic to expect all primary teachers to be equally devoted to keeping up with the latest research and information about books and reading. The classroom teacher in the primary schools is trying to keep up with the latest moves in *all* curriculum areas – Maths, Science, Environmental Studies, Movement, R.E. etc., etc. For most teachers except for those who have a special responsibility for leading and supporting colleagues in that area, Language and Reading is just another subject, and often the one with the most pressure associated with it because of parents' anxieties. Not a situation that makes for experiment and innovation.

Publishers and booksellers often accuse teachers of not understanding the economics of the book trade. (We expect books to be cheap, or free!) The book trade has to understand the realities of being a classroom teacher – and perhaps put its mind to ways of making it easier for teachers, the enthusiasts as well as the dutifully interested, to become more knowledgeable and better informed about books. In turn as Terry suggests, teachers could find time to tell publishers more about how their books are being received, to protest when a book goes out of print, to suggest how the gaps might be filled. Whether a book or a writer or an artist 'takes off' is often a matter of chance. If 'the grapevine' had got hold of Willi Baum sooner we might all be able to decide whether we share Eric Hadley's enthusiasm (see Talking Point, page 22). As it is, sadly, we hear that Willi Baum has stopped doing children's books. The word didn't spread fast enough. Now we can only borrow, not buy.

Challenges, Challenges

The conference inevitably touched on more issues than our report could cover. Michael Marland trailed his coat by describing teachers who decided that the available books were too difficult or too middle-class for their working class pupils, as 'anti-book'. He referred ironically to their belief that their own resources 'written in the odd evening' and produced by the reprographics unit were superior. Challenged by Robert Leeson to explore the situation in more detail Marland side-stepped neatly and the conference passed on. Condemning the resources teachers have made doesn't necessarily make the books they rejected any more acceptable. The wrong book is of as little value to pupils as a worksheet or booklet that encourages them to 'circumnavigate print'. Teachers are constantly in search of books that more closely match their pupils needs and this search will intensify with the introduction of GCSE and the spread of curriculum initiatives like CPVE and TVEI. As Ann Parker pointed out this is a challenge and an opportunity for publishers. (PS. I completely agree with every thing Michael Marland said about libraries in schools!)

Another challenge to publishers has come from senior librarians, members of the Working Group against Racism in Children's Resources. Actually it was more of an invitation to co-operate than a challenge, though the librarians did mention their combined spending power of £40 million a year as an inducement to concentrate on the issue! The group is campaigning for 'the recognition and combatting of racism in children's books' and wants to 'encourage the production and dissemination of books that promote a more positive view of all ethnic and cultural communities'; a first meeting between publishers and members of the group representing Library Services from all over the country was held recently. We hear it was a productive session and look forward to the results it should bring.

Meanwhile we'll concentrate on bringing you our special Picture Book issue of **BfK** in May. ●

ANTHOLOGIES

Past, Present and Future

Pat Thomson investigates

Surveying the Scene

Anthologies are a well-established form in children's reading. In early children's books we-know-best adults enthusiastically seized the opportunity to gather together improving pieces for the moral edification of the child reader. Many of today's adults have childhood memories of Christmas morning treasure chests of stories, puzzles and poems, and the post-war years saw many books and series which are still useful, although some are now available only in libraries. Margery Fisher's two collections of extracts, **Open the Door** and **Journeys**, were designed to give a taste of pleasures to come, the mixed anthologies of Noel Streatfeild to enhance holiday time. Anne Thwaite's **Allsorts** was something to look forward to each year and M. Hodgkin's **Young Winter's Tales** continue to be a sound resource. Large sections of school libraries are still taken up with Ruth Manning-Sanders' versatile collections of folk and fairy tales, Oxford's stories from around the world and Hamish Hamilton's 'A Book of just about everything.

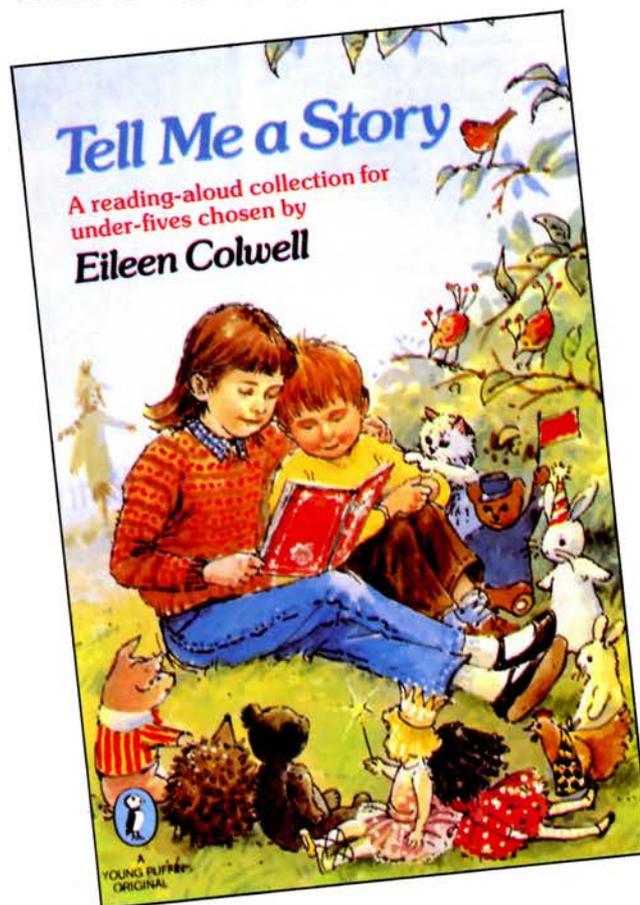
The annually produced collection of mixed prose, poetry and pastimes seems to be disappearing, but the anthology form still provides the vehicle for a special production. Some are unusual and useful. Dorothy Butler's **What the Magpie Said**, apart from giving us some good stories, was a window into New Zealand's literature. Gillian Avery's **Red Letter Days** provided us with a series of nineteenth-century contemporary accounts of special occasions, some true, some fiction. They added a touch of insight into the world of those children which enhances any history lesson. The Federation of Children's Book Groups' second anthology of stories thoroughly tested on hundreds of children is just out.

Sometimes, one person is able to put together a collection so sensitively that it becomes a permanent resource. James Reeves did this with **A Golden Land**, now revised by Judith Elkin as **The New Golden Land Anthology**. Most of the material is retained in the new edition and the stories which have been omitted seem to be those which have dated in social terms. Judith Elkin's main task has been to bring it up to date by adding the work of good modern writers. Philippa Pearce, Joan Aiken, Jan Mark and Bernard Ashley are now represented, as is the poetry of Michael Rosen and Roger McGough. It is still a 'lucky dip' to be tasted at random and grow with the child. For primary and middle schools, it remains one of the best 'staffroom shelf' books assuming, of course, that the children have access to another copy.

Two spectacularly large anthologies appeared last year, Hamlyn's **Illustrated Treasury of Modern Literature for Children** and **The Puffin Children's Treasury**. Even Fat Puffin could not take off with the 4½lb of this book and neither should be dropped on anyone in the Reception Class. The Hamlyn volume at £7.95 is, like Margery Fisher's **Open the Door**, an introduction. Twenty-six authors are included, each with a brief biographical note and titles for further reading. The books chosen are all well-known, **Flambards** for K. M. Peyton, for example, and **Ballet Shoes** for Noel Streatfeild. The pieces are all extracts, usually one or two chapters, plentifully illustrated. The ideal reader, one imagines, is someone who likes reading but doesn't know what to read and hasn't got anyone to ask! In schools it might be useful for classroom browsing – with the full versions readily available in the library.

The Puffin Treasury is difficult to place. The introduction has a scholarly air and it would be invaluable as a reference tool, especially as it includes some older American material which is not readily available now. It attempts to cover the whole field of children's literature, starting with nursery rhymes, encompassing myths and legends, poetry, traditional stories, picture books and extracts from novels. It seems to be the personal choice of an American, Clifton Fadiman, who has been associated with children's books for 75 years. It reminds us of nearly-forgotten authors and illustrators and introduces those who have always been better known in the States. The picture books, however, seem uncomfortable in this setting. Perhaps Beatrix Potter knew what she was doing when she insisted on a little book for **Peter Rabbit** and most children would rather take **Mr Gumpy's Motor Car** to bed with them in a more manageable form. Beautifully illustrated and printed as it is, schools would perhaps be advised to accept it as a gift but to look at it carefully before parting with £15.95, even if the caretaker does leave you a legacy.

In the early days of the 'modern' anthology in paperback, it was



Puffin which led the way. Eleanor Graham, Puffin's first editor in the 1940s, asked librarian Eileen Colwell to put together a series of anthologies for younger children – a section of the reading population not very well served at the time. These Puffin originals – **Time for a Story**, **Tell Me a Story**, etc. – are still in print, still a model of their kind and a useful resource.

The paperback revolution, hand in hand with the expansion of television, has brought 'spin-off' anthologies. The BBC's **Jackanory** and **Play School** have generated material of a very diverse nature – from folk tales to the Jubilee – all neatly timed for reading aloud. A newcomer, the puppet Pob, has just put his name to a collection of original stories for young children with a very starry cast of authors. In reality the commissioning and collecting was done by Anne Wood, following Jean Russell, Aidan Chambers and Peggy Woodford in this relatively recent approach to anthologising.

When Eleanor Graham commissioned Eileen Colwell she had identified a gap that needed filling. With the huge expansion in children's publishing, is there still a place for anthologies? Paperback series for older readers – mainly of the ghost and horror variety – still apparently flourish. The Corrins and Eileen Colwell sell well in Puffin. But sales of hardback anthologies are falling off, though teachers still claim to find them invaluable. Increasingly 'classic' collections are appearing in full-size paperback editions but very few hardback publishers are still committed to the form. If we value them, perhaps we had better make our support known.

Ideas about what constitutes an anthology seem to be changing. Modern collections are less recreational. They are no longer the thinking child's annual. Instead, they are purposefully directed to particular age groups or themes. It is true that some of these thematic collections lend themselves to being produced in large series, much in them being of doubtful quality but it is equally true that a good modern anthology is something very good indeed.

Ideas about anthologies are changing and in some quarters there seems to be a degree of uncertainty about their future.

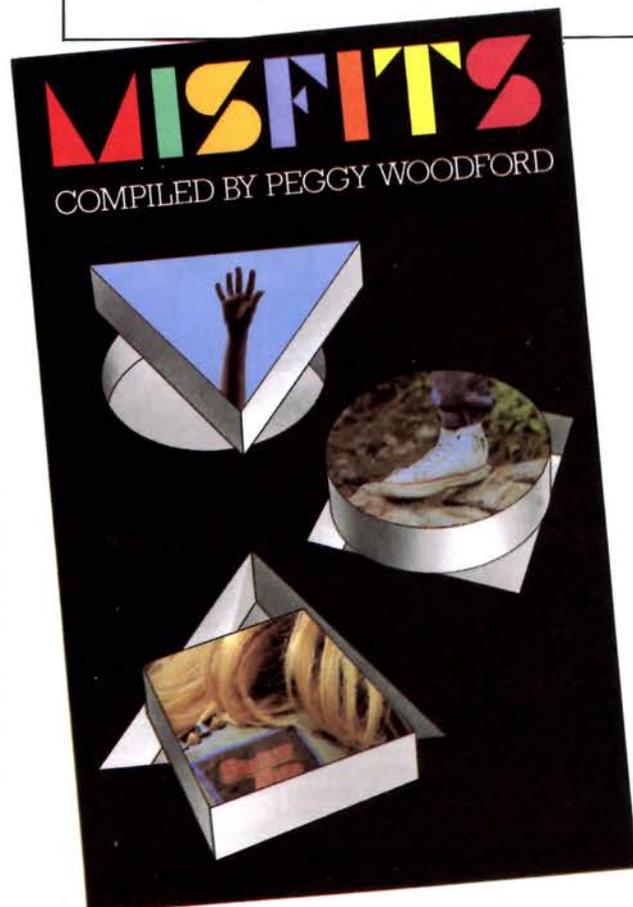
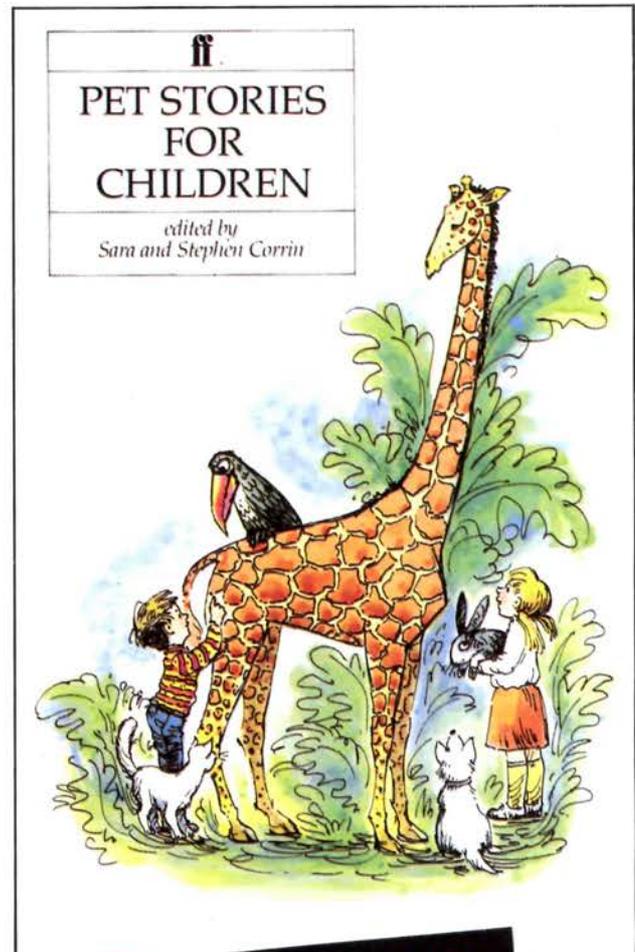
Talking to Publishers

At Dent, editor Vanessa Hamilton sees anthologies as 'a difficult area'. Eight or nine years ago, they were very popular and sold well. Dent, of course, have a link with the old tradition in that Noel Streatfeild's **Holiday Books** are still in print. (Careful searching in them reveals remarkable gems to support project work, such as Rumer Godden's account of a hot Christmas in India.) Dent have also published eleven 'horror' collections by Helen Hoke, an American publisher who turned to anthologising in retirement. Senior Citizens in the United States clearly have nerves of steel. The twelfth collection, however, will not be published here because of falling sales. Today, Vanessa Hamilton favours short story collections by single authors and this policy has given us the excellent work of Margaret Mahy. She has also commissioned Rhodri Jones, well-known to English Departments, to do a collection entitled **A Fine Mess You've Got Us Into**. This looks promising news as it is a collection of comic disasters. If there is anything a class likes better than a disaster, it is a funny disaster. As far as anthologies are concerned, she has some doubts but is keeping an open mind for the future.

One publisher who not only has a commitment to anthologies but to high quality anthologies is Faber. With the work of compilers like Barbara Ireson, Kathleen Lines and the Corrins, they cover the full age-range. Their editor, Phyllis Hunt, sees anthologies as being a good first introduction to various kinds of literature. They offer a way into reading for those who will not immediately tackle a long novel. She feels that the old 'lucky dip' collection is less popular but is confident that purposeful anthologies, tailored to particular needs will continue to be successful. She begins by choosing a compiler who may then work with an age-range or a theme. It may then take two years to put the anthology together. Permissions have to be negotiated and, in extreme cases, fees may affect the choice of material. Titles are usually a joint decision and there is consultation on illustration but covers have become a very complex affair between editor, compiler, illustrator and designers. Like most people involved in modern anthologies, she does not favour too much in the way of editorial notes.

One particularly valuable service which Faber performs is to bring back good collections in paperback form. **The Faber Book of Greek Legends**, edited by Kathleen Lines, is to reappear, as are stories from **Tales of Magic and Enchantment** in a new setting. The new version will be called **The Faber Book of Magical Tales** and is interesting because of the unusual interpretation of the term magical, part being fairy tale and part being taken from the old Romances. Also in paperback is Barbara Ireson's **Faber Book of Nursery Stories**, a welcome return. This compiler's two good hardback collections **Fantasy Tales** and **Tales Out of Time** were joined last year by an anthology for upper and middle schools called **In a Class of Their Own**, school based stories from writers who range from Norman Hunter to Iris Murdoch. Paperback anthologies for children to gobble up are still in good supply, but we rely on publishers like Faber to provide us with varied collections of a high standard. Clearly, if we want them, we must let them know by buying them.

At The Bodley Head, they are also committed to high quality anthologies, particularly for eleven to twelve years and over. In their case, they no longer publish mixed anthologies; instead they ask their compilers to commission original short stories from different authors. This policy has resulted in quite stunning collections from authors who have been challenged to produce a short story although they might not normally write in this form, or indeed for children at all. The editor, Margaret Clark, says that this takes a long time because they are all original commissions but her compilers are full of praise for the speed with which the Bodley Head manage things. They also publish in their own original paperback so the books are quite quickly accessible to schools. Margaret Clark sees the value of these collections as being the inherent values of the short story form. They are indeed short. They can be picked up at odd times. More than that, a short story is in many ways open-ended, it leaves questions. What happened before? After? She feels strongly that there should be no editorial notes. At most, there may be a note about the author, but no 'schoolish' bits. She works with her compilers on the details like titles and covers, also referring to the complexity of the cover problem. These days a great number of people are involved. The most fascinating aspect of The Bodley Head approach is that they are offering writers an opportunity to write in a form that used to be quite usual but is now too little encountered outside women's magazines. It is a very demanding but particularly rewarding form, and through these anthologies children may meet authors they know quite well, plus others like Trevor Story whom they may not yet have read, exercising high level writing skills. These collections not only provide compelling private reading but are rich in implications for shared exploration.



Talking to the Compilers

Eileen Colwell is a compiler who gracefully spans the whole post-war period and whose collections – both the Storyteller's Choice series and the books for Puffin – remain as enjoyable and useful as ever.

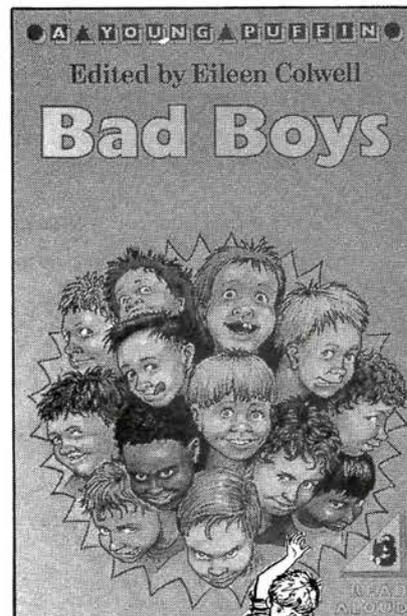
Her choices for the first Puffin collection were informed by real experience as she was beginning story hours in her library and was telling the stories herself. Her material was personally 'tried and tested'; she knew very well how these stories would read aloud and how they would be received, and this is the secret of their enduring usefulness to teachers and parents. Each of her collections has a particular age range in mind but she aimed to include a little 'stretching' material, and always some traditional stories. As an accomplished story teller, she naturally uses her own retellings, and it is this practical background that led her to mix prose and verse, aware that changes of pace and opportunities to participate hold the audience.

Compiling anthologies, like all publishing, is subject to economic pressures. Eileen Colwell's contract required her to put the collections together *and* obtain permission to reprint from the copyright holders, paying the fees out of her royalties. Some material, as always, was just too expensive and regretfully had to be left out. The illustrations were not her concern, however.



She says a fairly autocratic line was taken over such matters! More recently, she has put together a collection called **Bedtime Stories** for Ladybird.

Some of us are lucky enough to hear Eileen Colwell 'live' at book events but we can all benefit from her long and rich experience in her collections.



Sara and Stephen Corrin are best known for their anthologies which are directed to particular age groups. Reassuring for parents and providing a guide for teachers, *Stories for Under-Fives* right through to *Stories for Tens and Over* has proved a successful set of varied collections. Sara Corrin, herself a teacher, knew what it was like to 'rummage through lots of books' to find just the story which is needed. Every time she read a story she liked, she made a note of it and, gradually, as the collection grew, certain groups fell together into relationships which laid the foundations for the different anthologies.

Although the stories are collected individually, Sara has interesting views on the value of an anthology as a whole, something which adds to the value of each separate part. For example, the stories range widely over different cultures, drawing on the folklore of the world. There are fascinating differences of detail, but beneath there are many parallels. They convey a feeling of our common culture and she hopes this strikes the children, too. She also aims for a collection which reflects the balance of human feelings – humour, sadness – a range of emotions. From experience, she knows that a story can appeal to their intuitive feelings. When story telling she learned that children can respond to motivation in a quite subtle way from an

early age. She makes the very important point that stories can make the abstract accessible to very young children. She also values anthologies for their particular usefulness in introducing books to younger children. The short stories demand a less concentrated effort. Favourites can be recaptured more easily. She recognizes that special stories stay with the reader and become precious. She hopes the collections contain what she calls 'keepies' to which children can return again and again.



In putting the collections together, the first criterion is to find a story with a really strong, colourful story line which will make an impression. A successful short story has one central dramatic episode, a complete emotional experience. She has a good example of how powerful such an experience can be in describing one child's retelling of **Rumpelstiltskin** to his father. Having first apologised for not taking his father on his lap (clearly the correct arrangement for story-telling), he punctuated his narrative with reassurances that, of course, the Queen *did* keep her baby in the end. She is aware

that such stories bring out deep feelings and looks for those which relate to 'some aspect of the human condition'. These may then be arranged by age group – although the titles acknowledge that age banding can only ever be a general guide – or by a particular theme. **A Time to Laugh**, for example, brought a spice of humour or a funny twist to each story. **Round the Christmas Tree** is a collection for younger children and so concentrates on the excitement of Christmas and the benign feelings engendered. **The Faber Book of Christmas Stories** is intended for slightly older children and thus concentrates more on the old legends and the atmosphere of sharing, loving and giving. The most recent Corrin collection is **Pet Stories for Children**. Pets mean a great deal to children, Sara feels, and demonstrates it by a reference to a child who was being consoled for the death of a pet by an adult with the words, 'It's not as if it was one of the family.' The child replied, 'He was one of the family.' The stories range from real-life accounts to Joan Aiken's **Arabel's Raven** and a wonderfully complicated Russian story about the school pets. The latter are both the sort which seem improbable but prompt adults to cross their fingers just in case. The Corrins prefer complete stories but do use extracts if they stand on their own. Being a story teller, Sara uses her own retellings when necessary but if the original is particularly beautiful, she prefers not to tamper with it. They are fortunate in that they can use Stephen's own translations for the Andersen stories. They are also involved in the practicalities, seeking their own permissions and cooperating with editor and illustrator on titles and illustrations but the main task is to create a collection, balanced in content, mood and length, of stories which will mean something to children. For the future, they promise this year an anthology of '15 fantastic tales' called **Imagine That!**

Aidan Chambers' interest in anthologies is directly related to his strong feelings about the short story. He sees it as a very important form for children, having a special place in schools. It has a practical value, being short enough for children to enjoy, giving them the pleasure and satisfaction in managing it all in one go. It has more than manageability, however. As one of The Bodley Head compilers, their policy of commissioning original stories permits him to approach some of our best children's authors, not all of whom normally write short stories, and get from them some of their best work. The quality of the resulting anthologies shows that the authors have responded to the challenge of this exacting form in both structural and imaginative terms.

Aidan Chambers clearly enjoys this opportunity. He asks writers whose work he admires and describes the sort of story he requires, having a particular theme in mind. The latest collection, *A Sporting Chance*, started from the thought that, despite its popularity, there are few sports stories for children. As the idea developed, sport became a metaphor for life. It is possible, he explains, to write stories which include, focus on, involve sport but which at the



same time, illuminate something else. The authors understood him very well and writers like Jan Mark, John Gordon, Philippa Pearce and K. M. Peyton have used sports as diverse as tennis and greyhound racing as a background to stories of young people taking a chance on life. Having assembled the stories, the compiler's job, in Aidan Chambers' view, moves into its second important phase. To turn a collection into a good anthology, the arrangement must be so managed that the sequence and juxtapositions add an element of their own. The analogy he uses is that of a picture gallery. Each picture must have qualities of

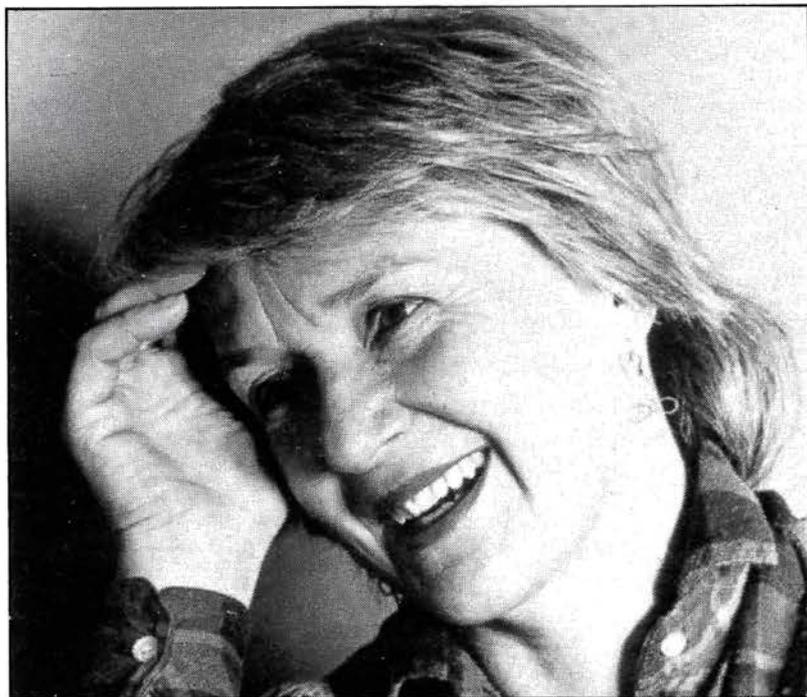
its own but if skilfully hung, the whole can add up to a special exhibition, having qualities in its own right. Not everyone will read a collection in this way, but he feels that extra level must be there for those who can see it.

He stresses that he feels that it is a considerable privilege to work with the authors. Some, like George Mackay Brown, he has never met. Others, like Jan Mark, share with him thoughts about the special qualities of the short story form. He sees himself almost like a manager in a repertory company, valuing the chance to see how his talented actors work. All his authors have a strong stylistic voice and although he uses popular themes, they are often interpreted in unconventional ways. In *Ghost After Ghost* (sparsely and elegantly illustrated by Bert Kitchen), the stories are linked by the theme of child hauntings. In *Out of Time*, the ideas are not the usual SF ideas, but rather of the relationship of time to now. The stories are enjoyable at an immediate level and perhaps demonstrate that good authors are particularly accessible in the short story form.

Aidan Chambers sees that there are changes in the pattern of publishing anthologies, in his view due to economic worries and production problems. He, too, asks whether children actually like short stories. He is nevertheless totally convinced of the particular value of the form. His personal wish is to do an anthology which experiments with narrative, one where the form is of principal importance – but the publishers have yet to be convinced! His next collection will be more ghost stories for The Bodley Head. If you have not used these collections yet with secondary and upper school groups, try them. The collaboration between this particular compiler and some of our leading authors should not be missed.

Peggy Woodford writes excellent novels for teenagers but she also compiles anthologies for older readers. The three she has done for The Bodley Head amply justifies their policy of commissioning original short stories. They are *The Real Thing*, *You Can't Keep Out the Darkness* and *Misfits*.

She has full control of the commissioning and starts by approaching writers she personally thinks will be good in this particular context. They need not be famous authors, indeed John Blake is published for the first time in *Misfits*. She also uses authors who do not normally appear on children's lists. The result is an intriguing diversity. After her romantic novel, *Please Don't Go*, her collection of love stories, *The Real Thing*, followed naturally. Her own contribution connects directly with the novel. *You Can't Keep Out the Darkness* is a set of stories, all different, but linked by a single theme – the loss of innocence. Here, she brings together authors with a recognized reputation for writing for adolescents, like Robert Westall and Jan Mark, with more daring choices, such as William Sansom and John Wain. In approaching authors in this way, she knows that she takes a risk. There is no guarantee of the result. Where necessary, she does not hesitate to edit, feeling that she is responsible for the whole and it is her job, she says, to get the balance right. Her third collection, *Misfits*, is unexpected. All the central characters have difficulty 'fitting in'. Sometimes they deal with a single adversary, sometimes with the whole system and sometimes with themselves. The stories are immensely subtle in comparison with the average



teenage 'love or rebellion' writing, yet they are compelling in their introspection. They will take the teenager reader further than most books of this kind.

With themes like these, it is no wonder she feels strongly about covers. The subtlety of the content could so easily be torpedoed by a 'romantic' cover. Everyone talks about this problem with a faint air of despair but Peggy Woodford is realistic about the difficulties. She has taken covers into schools to show her teenage audiences and

although they usually groan in the right places, they will often approve of one she thinks especially inappropriate! The problem is crucial but not easily solved. She does not make any claims for the special value of anthologies, unless it is to introduce authors whom readers might not otherwise meet. In Peggy Woodford's case, imaginative and skilful selection does ensure that her readers meet particularly interesting and different authors and her chosen themes are very close to the concerns of her teenage audience.

Which Stories?

A question five thousand children helped their parents and teachers to answer in the preparation of . . .

An Anthology with a Difference

In April Hodder and Stoughton publish *Our Best Stories*, a collection of fifteen stories specially selected for reading aloud and ranging in age-appeal from 4 to 12 plus. Anthologies, of course, are published every year. What is different about this one is the way the stories were chosen; children, not adults, gave their views and reactions all along the line, and this unique collection reflects their preferences one hundred per cent.

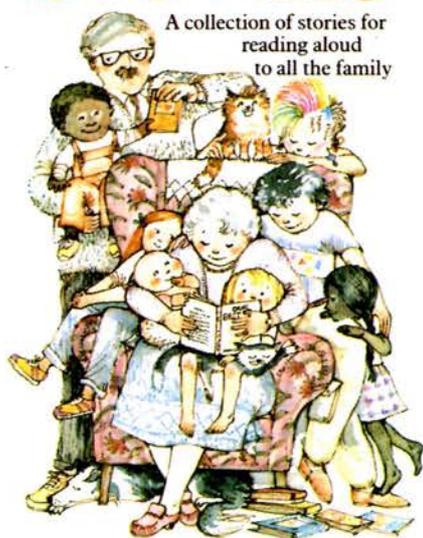
A glance at the list of contributors shows that children know a good thing when they see one – Ted Hughes, Bernard Ashley, Philippa Pearce, Terry Jones and Michael Rosen all came out 'on top'. But arriving at the fifteen 'best' stories, choosing an illustrator and deciding on a format was a long and complicated business, and took over three years.

A book with two editors (Anne Wood and Ann Pilling), a 'steering committee' and over five thousand children busy giving their plain, unvarnished reaction to the dozens of stories read to them by parents and teachers, may sound like a recipe for disaster. But if *Our Best Stories* was going to be a genuine 'Children's Choice' it was obvious that this rather unwieldy mechanism could not be dispensed with. Anne Wood founded The Federation of Children's Book Groups in 1968; Ann Pilling, a children's writer, had been a member for ten years. In May 1983, after a meeting with Hodder, they set the first wheels in motion: a questionnaire was sent out to every group in the Federation (over seventy groups, as far apart as Ipswich and Kirkaldy), and to some forty individual members, from Banbury to Blyth.

The replies established that everyone was keen to have a new anthology (*Stories for Children*, edited by Anne Wood, was compiled by the Federation in 1977). While opinions varied about content, age-range and format, it was unanimously agreed that the new book should improve upon the old. It must be bolder, brighter, better planned, and it must not reflect a certain (undeserved) Federation 'image', that of a group of earnest literary ladies, solemnly discussing what children *ought* to read, while the kids themselves are gleefully glued to a TV screen.

Using the nationwide network of members the editors and their committee worked for several months, seeking opinions and suggestions, having material tried out, and noting children's reactions at every stage. Initially the groups were asked to send in their own 'best' stories. The first list, though long, was conservative and among the tried and tested favourites there was a dearth of new names, almost certainly reflecting cuts in library and school spending which mean that many new books have not been widely available. More letters went out and members came up with more suggestions.

OUR BEST STORIES



EDITED BY ANNE WOOD & ANN PILLING



Some 'golden oldies' were circulated, Victorian pieces, popular in their day; more animal tales were added, and more humorous stories. Nationwide testing started in earnest, and the reports came pouring in.

The committee had its problems. Stories thought to be sure-fire favourites by one or another (William and the Show, Kevin Crossley-Holland's haunting tale *The Dead Moon*, Mrs Craik's *Prince with the Nose*) were all given the thumbs down. Out they went, the committee firmly reminded itself that the book was not their choice but the choice of children all over the United Kingdom. It also emerged that some titles had not been tested at all, because of adult 'reservations'. David Henry Wilson's hilarious *A Death in the Family* was one example. A plea was sent out for groups to read *all* the stories offered, though the test report forms did allow for reservations to be aired, and adverse comments were not taken lightly.

As work progressed the children's remarks on what they heard were collected, and many of these are published in the anthology. 'It would have been more exciting if she'd drowned' says one child, of *The Woman Who Always Argued*. 'He won't do that again in a hurry' comments James, of *The Balaclava Story*.

The stories which survived this rigorous process and made it into the book are arranged in three groups of five: 'Young', 'Middle' and 'Older'. Against each title the time taken to read aloud is given, and at the end of the collection each author chosen is described briefly, and a list of their other books is supplied too. Every story reads extremely well and the final choice certainly reflects the fact that a really good tale can cross age barriers, for these are all stories to share. The 'Frog and Toad' books are often used as early readers, yet *The Lost Button*, in its tender good humour, is as heart-warming to read aloud as it is fun to hear.

There is no substitute for a book, shared on the lap, or curled up on a bed. Mairi Hedderwick's endearing cover drawing illustrates this perfectly. Never before has the reading habit been so threatened by TV, video recorder and home computer. In such a climate this new anthology is important, and a look at the top fifteen stories is cheering. Not only does the choice indicate a consistent appetite for really good writing but many of the favourites, both modern and traditional, have a strongly moral flavour. In spite of the confused world they live in it really does seem that the children who made this book want good to triumph.

One hopes the story is not true of the Children's Editor who once found a small boy sitting in her office and ran out screaming 'A child! A child!' Nevertheless, there is some justification in the view that the 'kiddy lit' experts are not always in touch with the children they serve. In compiling this anthology the selectors went for guidance straight to those the book was meant for, and in doing so set themselves a long and complicated task. But they trust the title of the collection explains it all.

It was arrived at only after lengthy discussion of endless possibilities. 'Lift Off', 'Hear Hear', 'How Does This Grab You?', 'Switch On Your Ears' and many others all eventually hit the waste paper basket, and *Our Best Stories* emerged as the one to go for. How often does a child talk of its 'best', meaning its 'favourite' things? The word does double duty here: the children chose their favourites, and their favourites were their *best*.

Ann Pilling joint-editor with Anne Wood of *Our Best Stories* has been a member of the FCBG for ten years. She also writes for children under her own name (*Year of the Worm*, *Henry's Leg*) and as Ann Cheetham (the *Black Harvest* series for Armada).

Our Best Stories, edited by Anne Wood and Ann Pilling, is published by Hodder and Stoughton (0 340 35998 6) on April 7th, at £5.95.

THE FEDERATION OF CHILDREN'S BOOK GROUPS is for parents who are interested in knowing more about children's books. There are 72 groups throughout the United Kingdom, and many individual members. Further details may be obtained from: Janet Wilde, 32 Howard Road, King's Heath, Birmingham B14 7BD (Please enclose SAE).

A list of anthologies

(Compilers in alphabetical order)

Aidan Chambers

A Sporting Chance, Bodley Head, 0 370 30668 6, £3.95 pbk

Out of Time, Bodley Head, 0 370 30532 9, £3.95 pbk

Shades of Dark, Patrick Hardy, 0 7444 0019 8, £5.95

Ghost After Ghost, Viking Kestrel,

0 7226 5772 2, £5.95;
Puffin, 0 14 03.1461 X, £1.75 pbk

Ghosts That Haunt You, Viking Kestrel,

0 7226 5605 X, £5.95;
Puffin, 0 14 03.1428 8, £1.50 pbk

Eileen Colwell

(Paperbacks mentioned all published by Puffin)

Bedtime Stories, Ladybird, 0 7214 7521 3, £2.75

Bad Boys, Kestrel, 0 7226 5027 2, £5.95;
0 14 03.0530 0, £1.50 pbk

More Stories to Tell, 0 14 03.1062 2,
£1.50 pbk

Time for a Story, 0 14 03.0282 4, £1.25 pbk

Tell Me a Story, 0 14 03.0159 3, £1.50 pbk

Tell Me Another Story, 0 14 03.0210 7,
£1.50 pbk

A Storyteller's Choice, Bodley Head,
0 370 01051 5, £4.95

The Magic Umbrella and Other Stories,
Bodley Head, 0 370 11020 X, £3.25

Sara and Stephen Corrin

(All in Faber hardback and Puffin paperback unless otherwise listed)

The Faber/Puffin Book of Modern Fairy Tales, 0 571 11768 6, £6.50;
0 14 03.1546 2, £1.75 pbk

Stories for Under-Fives, 0 571 10371 5, £6.95;
0 14 03.1100 9, £1.50 pbk

Stories for Five-Year-Olds and other young readers, 0 571 10162 3, £5.25;
0 14 03.0839 3, £1.75 pbk

Stories for Six-Year-Olds, 0 571 08114 2,
£5.95; 0 14 03.0785 0, £1.95 pbk

Stories for Seven-Year-Olds, 0 571 05823 X,
£4.50; 0 14 03.0882 2, £1.75 pbk

More Stories for Seven-Year-Olds,
0 571 11196 3, £5.95; 0 14 03.1347 8,
£1.75 pbk

Stories for Eight-Year-Olds, 0 571 09332 9,
£5.50; 0 14 03.0975 6, £1.75 pbk

Stories for Nine-Year-Olds, 0 571 11409 1,
£5.25; 0 14 03.1342 7, £1.75 pbk

Stories for Tens and Over, 0 571 10873 3,
£4.50; 0 14 03.1364 8, £2.25 pbk

A Time to Laugh, Faber, 0 571 13416 5,
£1.95 pbk

Round the Christmas Tree, 0 571 13151 4,
£4.50; 0 14 03.1777 5, £1.50 pbk

The Faber Book of Christmas Stories,
0 571 13348 7, £5.95

Pet Stories for Children, 0 571 13642 7, £5.95

Helen Hoke

(All published by Dent)

A Chilling Collection, 0 460 06988 8, £6.95

Venomous Tales of Villainy and Vengeance,
0 460 06163 1, £6.95

Tales of Fear and Frightening Phenomena,
0 460 06118 6, £6.95

Terrors, Traumas and Torments,
0 460 06853 9, £6.95

Thrillers, Chillers and Killers, 0 460 06885 7,
£6.95

Barbara Ireson

Fantasy Tales, Beaver, 0 600 20056 6,
£1.10 pbk

The Faber Book of Nursery Stories,
Faber, 0 571 13278 2, £4.95 pbk

In a Class of Their Own, Faber,
0 571 13474 2, £5.95

Kathleen Lines

The Faber Book of Greek Legends, Faber,
0 571 09830 4, £6.50; 0 571 13920 5,
£4.95 pbk (May 86)

The Faber Book of Magical Tales, Faber,
0 571 13648 6, £3.95 pbk

Noel Streatfeild

The Noel Streatfeild Summer Holiday Book,
Dent, 0 460 05850 9, £6.95

The Noel Streatfeild Christmas Holiday Book,
Dent, 0 460 05849 5, £6.95

Peggy Woodford

The Real Thing, Collins Cascades,
0 00 330002 1, £2.35

You Can't Keep Out the Darkness, Bodley
Head, 0 370 30293 1, £4.50

Misfits, Bodley Head, 0 370 30824 7,
£3.95 pbk

Other anthologies mentioned

The New Golden Land Anthology, edited by
Judith Elkin, Puffin, 0 14 03.1521 7,
£2.95 pbk

The Puffin Children's Treasury, selected by
Clifton Fadiman, Viking Kestrel,
0 670 80505 X, £15.95

The Illustrated Treasury of Modern Literature for Children,
Hamlyn, 0 600 30911 8, £7.95

Pob's Stories, edited by Anne Wood,
Fontana, 0 00 672638 0, £1.50 pbk

What the Magpie Said, edited by Dorothy
Butler, Puffin, 0 14 03.1480 6, 95p pbk

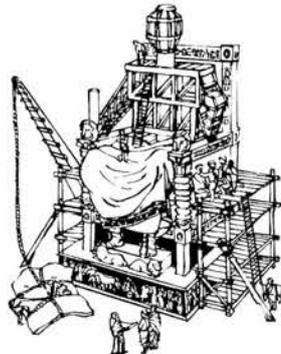
Stories for Children: For Reading Aloud by Parents,
edited by Anne Wood, Hodder
& Stoughton, 0 340 21386 8, £4.50

Play School Stories, BBC/Knight,
0 340 28086 7, £1.25 pbk

Play School Stories 2, BBC/Knight,
0 340 34843 7, £1.50 pbk ●

ANTHOLOGIES

Cambridge books for children



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I'm trying to connect you . . .

Terry Downie reports on a one-day Children's Book Conference organised by the Children's Bookselling Group of the Booksellers Association and the Children's Book Circle

Books in Schools: Finding Facts and Fighting Fantasy – that was the title. And just in case we didn't get the message that we were to spend the day dispelling myths about what's happening to books in schools (and not attacking Puffin's hugely successful adventure series) the theme was spelled out in the programme. Ten years after Bullock, what is the picture now? What are the new trends in education that the children's book trade must respond to in order to keep pace with the changing needs of children in schools? The conference aim: to tackle these issues from all sides – teacher, librarian, bookseller and publisher.

Over 200 delegates included 14 librarians and 21 teachers (mostly from teacher education and LEA Advisory and Support services). There were nine speakers in three sessions.

● What's Happening Now?

Lord Bullock, having re-read his committee's report, was struck by how much of it is still appropriate and how in some areas – like the discussion of education in a multi-lingual society – it was ahead of its time. Its major concerns are still with us: pre-school experience and parents' involvement; language across the curriculum; continuity of experience; teachers' attitudes. Mastery of the arts of language and communication gives power, a way of making sense of experience. The information revolution does not mean the disappearance of books, nor of the Arts and Humanities. The report's stress on fiction and poetry in schools was right. Education is not just 'skills to cash'; in market-place education it is more than ever our task to keep social and interpersonal communication at the centre.

John Welch (previously ILEA Staff Inspector, now Director of the National Association for Gifted Children) picked up the reading theme. Research in recent years shows children in primary and secondary schools reading only in short unconnected bursts. 'Poor' readers are extracted from classes to do exercises, not to read books. There is no time to learn the language of texts. Saturation in reading is needed and reading to and with other children, mums and dads, not 'experts'.

Michael Marland, a member of the Bullock Committee (now Head of N. Westminster Community School) was in pessimistic and aggressive mood. Teachers don't read. Worksheets and teacher-made resources create an anti-reading curriculum, encouraging children to circumnavigate print rather than confront it. The loss of faith in learning from books is misconceived. Across the curriculum we do not teach children to use books and to understand the nature of different kinds of texts. The LISC (Libraries in Schools and Colleges) report shows our deep failure to understand what a library is for; the problem is not one of resources but the use we make of what we have. If there are no library-using pupils it is because we lack 'library-intelligent' teachers.

As a parting shot Marland challenged publishers to respond to our multi-lingual society, to the richness of the 'other languages of Britain' and the bilingualism of our children.

● Trends and Opportunities

Pat Triggs recognised the crisis of morale among teachers, the growing pressures from all sides; but chose to highlight some significant and encouraging developments. The information-led curriculum makes us examine the process of learning. Libraries are becoming more central: infants are being seen as active enquirers; GCSE will demand new patterns of learning.

Changing attitudes to reading and the spread of school bookshops are blurring for teachers the division between 'educational' and 'recreational' books. We are valuing children's encounters with and responses to the books more highly; we have a better understanding of why some children stop reading and how our teaching methods may be a key factor in this. We see the essential role of story and understand that books not teachers teach reading. 'Real' books and responsive, informed adults are what children need. In the primary school two markets for books – parents and teachers – come together. By and large the books we need already exist; the challenge for publishers and booksellers is telling teachers about them and making them available. Information about books takes a long time to reach the majority of teachers, by which time books are out of print. Publishers have two chances: keep books in print longer or speed up the process by which we find out about them. (They may also have to think about price and producing more in paperback.) Talking to teachers is very different from talking to booksellers. Publishers must

learn how to do it, perhaps learn from and support those (like BFK and Signal) who have shown how and have influenced attitudes and practices. More teachers recognise the need for a wide range of books, fiction and non-fiction; they also recognise their own lack of knowledge. Publishers must think long-term and initiate and support moves to reach teachers more effectively.

Ann Parker (Senior Assistant County Librarian, Hertfordshire) pointed to agents of change which can have negative effects – the blitz of curriculum initiatives, centralised funding, national projects imposed from outside education – and suggested positive ways to harness these to better provision and use of resources. When money is short, books go first but massive sums are available for librarians and teachers to tap. We must show that TVEI/TRIST and CPVE need books. Multi-cultural initiatives and Special Needs mean books. CDT work requires wide-ranging information gathering – more books. TV creates a huge demand for books among primary children – do producers and publishers liaise enough to meet this? Children need better illustration, accuracy, indexing, line breaks, clues to support them through texts and no print on shaded/deckled backgrounds. Books are being used and promoted in new areas: **Rosie's Walk** and **Meg's Eggs** in Maths, Briggs' and Foreman's picture books alongside war novels at 14; and exam questions such as 'What sort of books would you choose for a 2 year-old and how would you read them?' appear in Child Care courses.

Margaret Marshall (Specialist in books and handicapped children) mentioned the irony of the 'remedial' children not being allowed to use the library 'because they can't read'. One in ten children has a disability of some kind – and they need books to enjoy and read on their own. Partially and profoundly deaf children, partially and unsighted, brain-damaged, maladjusted, mentally and physically handicapped children have particular needs but it is usually by accident rather than design that these needs are met. Integration into mainstream education must be resourced (and has implications for teaching styles). Margaret Marshall saw the dire results of under-resourced integration in the USA in 1979. Often minor adjustments can make mainstream books suitable for handicapped children. Checklists of technical, visual and conceptual aspects to consider are available from the National Library for the Handicapped.

● The Response from the Book Trade

John Welch (MD Heffers) **Eddie Bell** (MD Collins General Books) and **Brough Girling** (Consultant to Books for Students) looked at schools and asked a lot of questions.

How can booksellers involve and assist children, parents and teachers? Could there be closer links between schools and their local bookshop? Are booksellers too daunting? Too stuffy? A few children's bookshops are very successful – what's their secret? Why do educational publishers trawl schools but not publishers of 'real' books? Was the Book Train just an ego trip for promotions people? TV programmes like Book Tower have much more effect. Why doesn't TV promote books like pop music? School bookshops are a kind of TV set publishers have been slow to switch on; they now spend less time (and money) talking to teachers and librarians than to co-publishers, chain stores, supermarkets and the retail mass markets. Money is used to impress the industry rather than create readers. Are teachers to blame when homework leaves no time for voluntary reading? Why is reading associated with 'work' when it is really play? Why do adults think books always have to be 'improving'? Why do they only give books from their own childhood? How can a school teach reading without a school bookshop? Why do so many adults get in the way of children's reading? The Book Trade, in short, lacks knowledge. There are too few facts and too much fantasy.

From all this (and I've missed out the anecdotes, the stories, the poems) what else? Lord Bullock's remark that when we use the word 'basic' we are usually short-changing someone; the anonymous inspector quoted by John Welch: 'We found the poison cupboard open and the library locked.' Marland's criticisms rang a bell; but it's more complex than he suggests. I hope to spread the word about 'booksharing books' in which parents and teachers of infants tell each other about their children's reading. Ann Parker showed me ways forward – are we making sure the DTI software funding includes spending on programs that demand books and other resources? I'll get Margaret Marshall's checklists and look more critically at resources I see or produce.

It was fascinating and instructive to talk to so many publishers. It should happen more often. As individuals and collectively teachers should be making their voices heard. Lots of people are ready to listen. At the moment a few switchboard operators are doing a good job connecting us up. But remember you can dial direct as well these days. ●

SOUND & VISION

Victorian London on Screen



Garfield style

The *December Rose*, Leon Garfield's latest story, begins on BBC 1 on March 12th and is soon to appear simultaneously in Kestrel and Puffin.

Set in the 1860s on the waterways between London Docks and the Medway it promises to be a Victorian melodrama in Garfield's best Dickensian style. Murder, intrigue and embezzlement are all part of the adventures of Absalom Brown, climbing boy of a bullying chimney sweep master. Barnacle – as he is nicknamed because of his 'amazin' powers of holdin' on' – falls literally into a conspiracy and into danger.

The producer of *The December Rose* is Paul Stone (*Box of Delights*, *Who, Sir? Me Sir?*) who most recently worked with Bernard Ashley on *Running Scared*, also an original screen play and novel.

The December Rose, Puffin, 0 14 03.2070 9, £1.75; Viking Kestrel, 0 670 81054 1, £6.95 (pub. March 27th).



Spielberg style

From the same Spielberg production stable as *Gremlins*, *The Goonies* and *Back to the Future* comes *Young Sherlock Holmes*, described as 'an affectionate speculation' about what might have happened had the famous detective and his chronicler, Watson, met during their school days. It has been made they say 'with respectful admiration and in tribute to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his enduring works.'

The screen writer for the film, Chris Columbus (*Gremlins*, *Goonies*, and currently concocting the screenplay for the third Indiana Jones adventure) spent nine months immersed in the Holmes stories and all things Victorian. He also admits to being influenced by the RSC's *Nicholas Nickleby* and David Lean's films of *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*. 'I set out to get that flavour back into films,' he says.

So back we go to 1870. Holmes is sixteen and attending the Brompton School in South Kensington (scenes filmed at Eton where Nicholas Rowe, who plays Sherlock, is an old boy). He, new boy Watson and the beautiful Elizabeth are plunged into a mystery which involves ritual murder, an evil Egyptian cult, roof top chases, dark doings in even darker alleys, and duels to the death.

The film goes on general release on March 14th. There are two tie-in books from Dragon Grafton.

Young Sherlock Holmes, a novel (200 pages), Alan Arnold, 0 583 30942 9, £1.95; a large format Storybook with full colour stills from the film (same title), 0 583 30966 6, £2.95.

HEAR TO READ Rachel Redford introduces her new list of stories for listening

Hear to Read is the first of its kind! It is a Guide to 100 children's audio cassettes published by The National Book League on March 12th. The exciting and now vast children's cassette market deserves far wider review coverage than it has had and after almost 10 years' reviewing children's cassettes, I am delighted to be its author. It is the first publication to collect together so much information and guidance on the subject.

A 'Guide' suggests a catalogue with a sentence or so after each title; *Hear to Read* is much more than that. Ten thousand words long, some idea of the content, quality, appeal and value of each title is given. Cassettes for children are very far from being merely the crudely illustrated packages, derivative of the worst American television cartoons, which dominate the racks at the supermarket checkout. The best are excellent and it is these which are in *Here to Read*. The variety is immense.

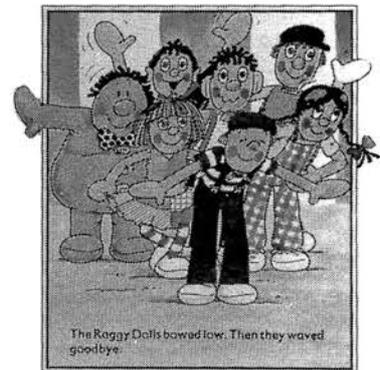
They appeal to toddlers with titles like *Dancing Songs and Rhymes* and *Postman Pat* each packaged with a colourful book, through to teenagers – and adults – with James Herriot and a powerful dramatisation of Raymond Briggs' *When the Wind Blows*. Enhancing sound effects vary from the stereophonic bubbling of Meg's cauldron, to the realistic sounds of sea, storm or birdsong, to the full exploitation of song and all kinds of musical instruments. As well as narration by actors and authors in various accents, there is dramatisation, song and poetry – the sort of verse that is fun like Roald Dahl and Jack Prelutsky. Stories are set in different parts of the globe and all over Britain as well as in lands of the Imagination.

All the cassettes are book related. I firmly believe that listening and reading are complementary. Toddlers can turn pages and follow a story on tape by the pictures in book and cassette packages – a valuable preparation for reading. Children are encouraged to widen their reading after hearing a 'difficult' book like *Wind in the Willows* or *Alice in Wonderland* on tape. Cassettes can introduce them to unusual and rewarding books like Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*. Unabridged readings of good contemporary writing like *Stig of the Dump* are incentives to turn to the book. Reluctant readers are given that vital stepping stone to independent reading. Read-along books-and-cassettes provide entertaining reading experience for beginners and remedial readers, as do 'structured learning programmes' like the *Puddle Lane* series.

Cassettes are obviously a boon to busy mothers. Their constructive uses in hospitals, convalescence, holiday journeys, school runs, playgroups, schools and so on are generally acknowledged. But they are also valuable in classrooms. The habit of listening and absorbing is a skill which many sixth formers have never acquired. Cassettes teach it through fun at a very early age. Still further, they can instil a love of reading and listening for pleasure: a precious gift to give our children.

Hear to Read, Rachel Redford, available from the Centre for Children's Books, National Book League, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ, price £1.50 incl. p&p (NBL members £1.25).

RAGGY DOLLS

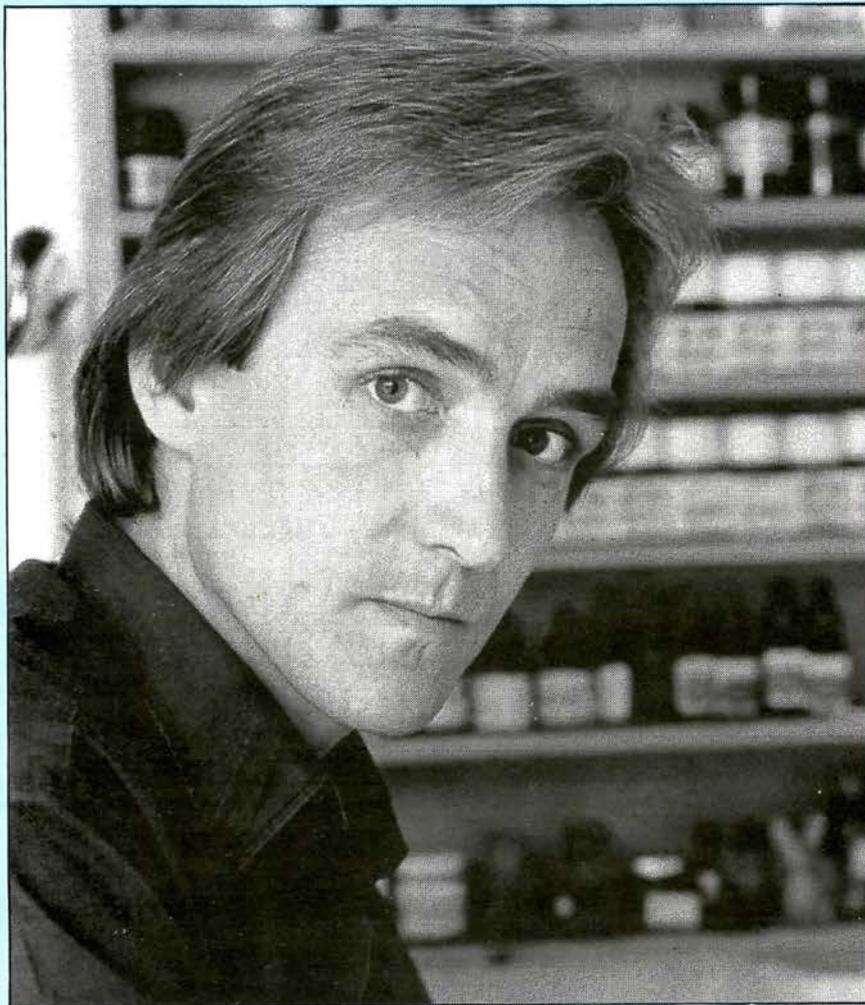


A new series from Yorkshire TV will be screened in early April. Animated films feature seven rag dolls, tossed into the reject bin at Mr Grime's toy factory. Princess, in raggy clothes and with multi-coloured hair; Back-to-Front, a handyman doll with his head stuck on the wrong way round; Lucy, whose arms and legs drop off when she gets excited; Hi-Fi, a talking doll who stutters; Dotty, who is paint stained; Sad Sack, a sample no-one wanted; and Claude, a French doll who got left behind. The less-than-perfect dolls have lots of adventures.

The series will go out on one day a week at 12.00 and 4.00 pm. There are seven programmes in the first series and six more planned for the autumn. Tie-in titles from Mushroom Books will be available (£1.95 hbk; £1.25 pbk) and there will be massive merchandising in the shape of dolls, games, bags, pencil cases, aprons etc. Look out too for audio tapes of the stories if your pupils look as if they might be giving up Care Bears in favour of Raggy Dolls.

Authorgraph No. 37

Colin McNaughton



Photos, Michael Ann Mullen

'The older I get the more I realise that my sense of humour is exactly the same as it was when I was four years old – it hasn't changed at all!'

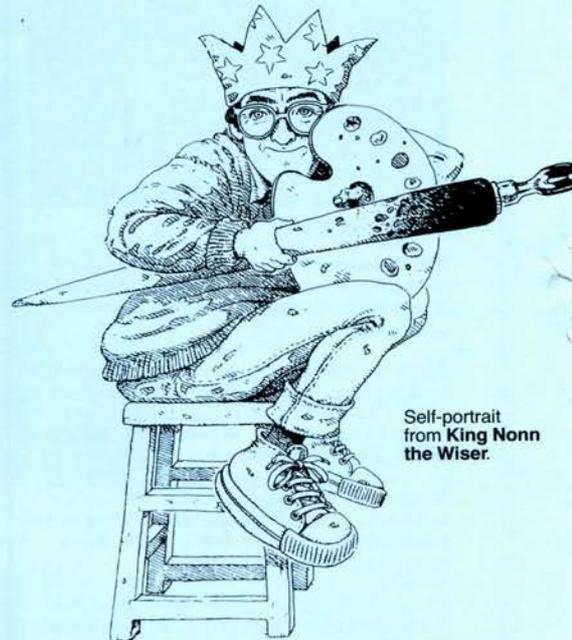
Which may explain how Colin McNaughton is right there with his young readers – it was kids themselves who so quickly made **Football Crazy** a standard classic of humour and wish-fulfilment. He is admired and well-reviewed, but he has never been a fashionable darling of the critics, and he notes, somewhat ruefully, that his books are not 'award' books. On the Mother Goose panel for his fourth and last year, he has never won an award himself, yet there can be scarcely a child in the land who hasn't identified with his tumbling anthropomorphic animals and boisterous, chubby humans. And for someone who says drawing has never been easy ('always honing, honing, till eventually it comes right – I'm so jealous of people who can just pick up a pen and draw'), he's done an awful lot of books.

Most of them are in colour. 'I love black and white work, but it's difficult to make a living out of it – you're expected to do a book for £100. Till recently artists have had a raw deal, and often been expected to do a picture book for £500: you're patted on the head and told to run away, sonny, for six months and live on £500. That's what it was like for me till five years ago, when I met Sebastian Walker. What it means is you do

things very quickly – and end up with not very good books. Then someone will come along who's spent the last five years on a book, and of course it's wonderful, and it sweeps the awards and everybody says what a wonderful illustrator this person is – and you've done eight books that year because you *have* to. It can be a terribly frustrating business in that way: you knew all the time you weren't doing the kind of work you were capable of simply because you had to make a living, you had a family to keep (it's different if you're on your own).

'The result is there,' pointing to his shelves, 'stacks and stacks of books with nice bits in them but... Ten years and 40 or 50 books – crazy! – should have been ten or 15 books to do the quality I'd like. This is the first year I've been able to sit down and do a picture book to the best of my ability without a deadline. It'll probably be awful, but –!'

Although there were no books at all at home as he grew up ('I never read **The Iliad** at four or was weaned on Dickens'), there were always comics, and the Christmas annuals like **Beano** and **Dandy**: they were his formative literature and their knockabout slapstick has been a lasting influence. He was among the first to weld words and images on one page.



Self-portrait from **King Nonn the Wiser**.

'I've been talking about the comic format for years, along with people like Shirley Hughes and Jan Pienkowski. It's been rejected, looked down on, scorned, thought of as being cheap – and now the case has been proved, with more and more work of that kind being commissioned. France has had a fantastic tradition of comic strips – not only is it a wonderful way of telling stories but it's the modern way for today's children: it's about movement, the step between film and the book.'

He speaks in the Geordie accent of his native Wallsend upon Tyne, though softened by 15 years of making allowances for Londoners. He was born in 1951, one of three children of a pattern maker, a highly skilled craftsman in the shipyards: the other two were normal people, he says, and there's an extra spice to his present success because he used to be the black sheep of the family.

'I left home at 16 – my mother has it that she threw me out; I have it that I walked out – either way I must have been pretty obnoxious. But I took care to stay close by in Newcastle, and went home with my dirty washing for Sunday lunch.

'Up there, if you had five O levels, it was art school or teachers' training, otherwise your main chance of work was the shipyards, or 'The Ministry' as it's called at Newcastle. I opted for technical college because it offered more freedom than the sixth form, but I even made a mess of getting in there – I'd applied wrongly and when I turned up for registration they'd never heard of me! I must have looked a real cartoon character, walking away, head down, weeping... So I got different jobs for a year, including six months as a sign writer before they realised I was left-handed – you're not supposed to be able to write signs if you're left-handed. It was in a high-class gentleman's tailors, Isaak Walton's – we used to get these elegant tuck boxes to paint boys' names on.

'How do you drift into certain areas? I was introduced at school to a Youth Theatre by

one marvellous teacher (it was the only good thing about school – I *detested* school, hated it so much I've only recently been able to talk about it) and this led me into areas of artistic expression that were totally alien to my working class background and friends. Acting, costumes . . . Marvellous, absolutely marvellous if you've never known that kind of ability to express feelings before. It enabled me to break out of the scheme of things that had seemed set for me – when you follow your father into the shipyards and so on.'

After a year's foundation art course in Newcastle, he studied graphic design for three years at the Central School in London ('Michael Foreman persuaded them to take me, and was my first real tutor – I've never forgiven him – no, I still love him, he's a lovely man'), going on to specialise in illustration for three years at the Royal College. He sees the benefit of art schools solely as places to make contacts, plus the inevitable influence of fellow students: he himself taught part-time for six years in Cambridge and found it enormously frustrating ('full-time might be better, for then you can keep track of people').

His first books were published while he was still at college, after Timothy Bunn saw his second-year exhibition, and his degree show was made up entirely of published work. 'Publishers now tend to hang around the major colleges, scared they'll miss some new talent ever since Tom Maschler discovered Nicola Bayley!'

He tried working in all sorts of advertising and editorial areas but didn't like any of them, finding, like so many others, that the people in children's books – publishers, writers – are somehow more agreeable. 'The money in advertising is better, but you have to change everything eight times, go through 15 committees and an awful pecking order. In children's books they give you some money and leave you alone to do the book, and at the end of it there it is, a book on the shelf, not like a newspaper in the gutter. In fact, once you start thinking about it, it's a smashing job!'

He married at 19, and Françoise – an older woman at 21 – supported him through college and still handles his financial affairs. They met in a pub: she and her cousin, escaping small-town France together, had met a friend of Colin's in London and hitched to Newcastle – and her cousin

married his friend. The McNaughtons have shunted through ten different London flats in 15 years, the last seven around Covent Garden. Ever since it was built four years ago, they've lived at the top of an award-winning block whose little private yards and giant balconies are alive, even in mid-winter, with greenery and worm-hunting blackbirds, with Ben, who's eight, and Timothy, six. The boys' main feeling about their dad, far from pride or surprise when his name pops up at school, seems to be one of embarrassment at his continuing to wear jeans . . .

His present ebulliently successful partnership with Allan Ahlberg in the little **Red Nose Readers** stems from Ahlberg's choice of McNaughton as one of his **Happy Families** illustrators for Kestrel. Is it true that the wildly funny Ahlberg is in fact quite a melancholy bloke?

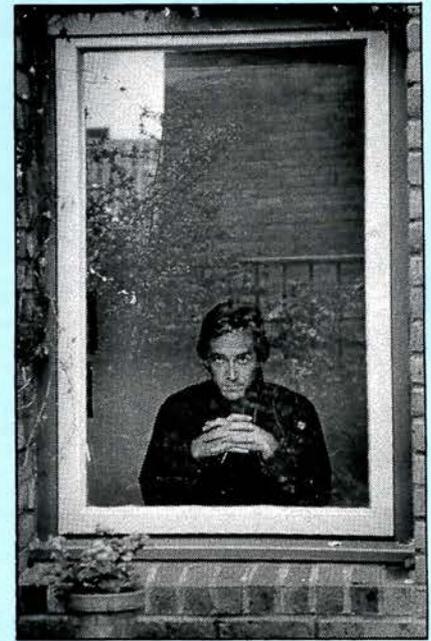
'That's a good description actually – we often sit together over a drink getting depressed about life! To me he's one of the best picture-book writers in the world, a wonderful communicator, with drawerfuls of ideas – anything you think of, he's thought of it already. A partnership is much easier than working on your own, it takes a lot of responsibility off your shoulders – you're only the piano player, you're not writing the piece – and we do spark each other off, even on the phone when we're not meant to be working.'

The future? He doesn't look more than a couple of years ahead, but his horizons are widening. A 50s rock'n'roll musical for children based on his story and illustrations for **Fat Pig**, 'The Story of the Pig who Wanted to Marry Cochonette' (Miss Piggy?), is in its third year in Paris, is showing in Vienna and all over Germany and Sweden, and is coming soon to England, while there are also plans afoot for an English production of his **Rat Race**.

And he wants to write – even though he finds it as hard as drawing and cursed just as much by his inability to be satisfied; 'That really *isn't* very pleasant. Even now, after all the hundreds of drawings I've done, looking back I can only see the mistakes.' He's been spurred on by his two verses in **The Children's Book** for the famine appeal. 'I got more of a buzz out of seeing those in print than out of all my books: it's a different pleasure, and words always have a pathetic appeal to artists of awful Respectability

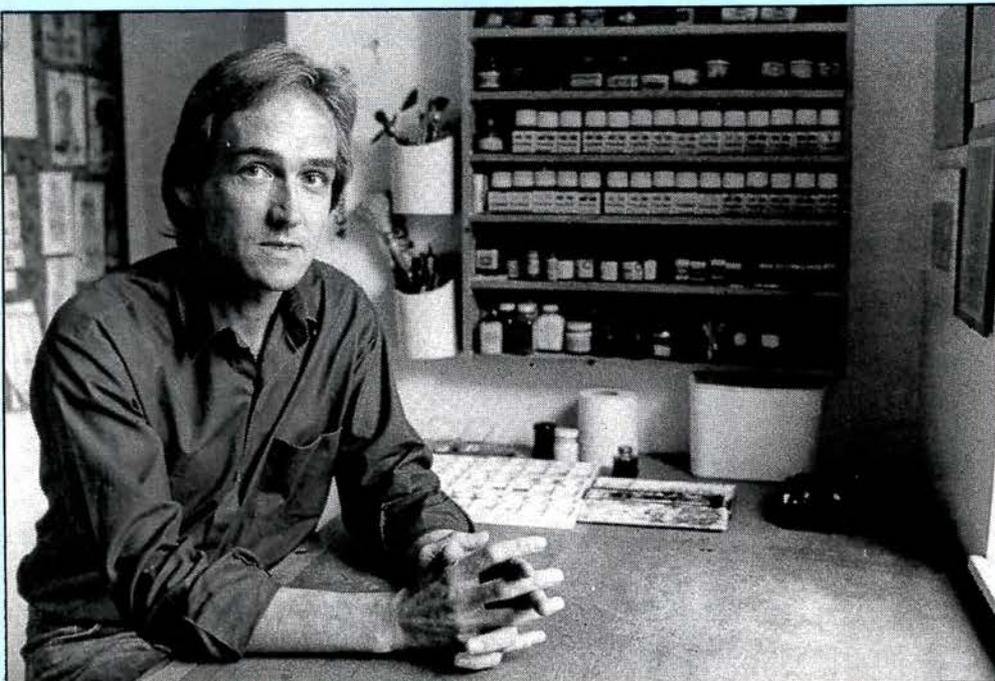
which pictures never have. I'm writing a book of poems now for Walker – well, not *poems*, humorous doggerel – it's a kind of reward for doing so many books for them in the last five years' (16 Readers in the last two years, and a joke on every page).

He gazes dreamily at something far away. 'I wrote a poem yesterday about a little girl I was at school with called Pauline Crawford . . .'



The Books

- Crazy Bear**, Heinemann, 0 434 94992 2, £5.95
Cowboy Crazy/Snow Crazy, Piccolo, 0 330 28223 9, 95p pbk
Pirate Crazy/Rock and Roll Crazy, Piccolo, 0 330 28453 3, 95 pbk
Football Crazy, Heinemann, 0 434 94991 4, £5.95; Piccolo, 0 330 26747 7, £1.50 pbk
Great Zoo Escape, Heinemann, 0 434 94989 2, £5.95
King Nonn the Wiser, Heinemann, 0 434 94990 6, £5.95; Pocket Bears, 0 907144 34 9, £1.50 pbk
Walk, Rabbit, Walk (with Elizabeth Attenborough), Heinemann, 0 434 94988 4, £5.50; Pocket Bears, 0 907144 51 9, £1.50 pbk
Fat Pig, Benn/A & C Black, temporarily out of stock
The Pirates, Benn/A & C Black, 0 510 00053 3, £3.95; Piccolo, 0 330 28291 3, £1.25 pbk
Rat Race, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.311 0, £1.50 pbk
The Great Fruit Gum Robbery (with Russell Hoban), Methuen/Walker, 0 416 05790 X, £3.50
Foldaways (with Allan Ahlberg), Granada, £2.95 each
Circus, 0 246 11785 0; **Families**, 0 246 11784 2; **Monsters**, 0 246 11782 6; **Zoo**, 0 246 11783 4
Seasons Board Books, Walker, £1.50 each
Spring, 0 7445 0082 6; **Summer**, 0 7445 0083 4; **Autumn**, 0 7445 0084 2; **Winter**, 0 7445 0085 0
Red Nose Readers (with Allan Ahlberg), Walker, £1.95 each
Help!, 0 7445 0250 0; **Big Bad Pig**, 0 7445 0251 9; **Make a Face**, 0 7445 0252 7; **So Can I**, 0 7445 0253 5; **Jumping**, 0 7445 0254 3; **Bear's Birthday**, 0 7445 0255 1; **Happy Worm**, 0 7445 0256 X; **Fee Fi Fo Fum**, 0 7445 0257 8
(Another eight titles coming in 1986)



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.



The Three Friends

Susanne Kubler, Hippo, 0 590 70375 7, £1.50

Beguiling water colour pictures and a straightforward narrative relate how adventurer Cat's vivid imagination almost proves his undoing. But thanks to some lateral thinking by his two loyal friends, Duffel, the bear and Sam, the hare, the penitent raconteur's honour is saved and his storytelling prowess turned to good effect. Food for thought here for young listeners and solo readers in the infant school. JB

Jump, Frog, Jump

Robert Kalan, ill. Byron Barton, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52311 9, £1.50

What marvellous value: a quality, full size paperback edition of what is a superb book for reading aloud to the under fives and for beginning readers. The cumulative text builds up in the manner of **The House that Jack Built**, the action being carried forward by the repeated question, 'How did the frog get away?' and the inevitable answer contained in the title. Children love to join in with this one and Byron Barton's bright, bold pictures add to the fun. JB

New Clothes for Alex

Mary Dickinson, ill. Charlotte Firmin, Hippo, 0 590 70446 X, £1.75

When mum suggests going shopping for some new clothes Alex doesn't want to go; he hates shopping and anyway he likes his old clothes just fine. However, a bike ride and the promise of a cake are sufficient inducement. But the trip looks like ending in nothing but frayed tempers and failure until Alex spots the perfect 'new' outfit. An everyday situation accurately and wryly observed both in the telling and in the humorous illustrations. JB

Happy Birthday, Moon

Frank Asch, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52262 7, £1.50

A hugely satisfying, easy-to-read story of a bear's friendship for the moon and his desire to give him a birthday present. The conversations which take place in the mountains are brilliantly constructed so that bear's echoed words provide moon's wholly apt responses; and the sequence of illustrations wherein the moon finds and wears his birthday hat in the branches of a tree are, to echo bear's words, 'just right'. Altogether simply perfect. JB

The Surprise

George Shannon, ill. Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey, Picturemacs, 0 333 39293 0, £2.25

Squirrel just cannot think of anything to send his mother for her birthday except a birthday card, but then he has a brainwave and a huge parcel duly arrives on his mother's doorstep. But inside the parcel is another parcel and another and so on until we discover exactly why squirrel told his mother 'Be sure to open it right away'. Unmistakable Aruego/Dewey illustrations – strong clean colours and animals whose facial expression tell all – and an easy to read text together make a delightful package. JB

The Trouble with Jack

Shirley Hughes, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52306 2, £1.50

It's good to see this old favourite repackaged under the Corgi imprint. The revamped Corgis look to have the makings of a first class picture paperback series: first rate stories and high quality printing which retains the freshness of the artwork, and splendid value for large format softbacks.

Jack and trouble seem to be inseparable so much so that older sister Nancy's birthday party is almost ruined before it even gets under way – almost but not quite. Here as always we see Shirley Hughes capturing the ups and downs of family life with her unerring eye and turning everyday situations into memorable stories. JB



Mr Fox.

After Dark

Louis Baum, ill. Susan Varley, Magnet, 0 416 51800 1, £1.75

Mum's evening trip to the shops disturbs her young daughter who feels all alone even though 'Pete's in the cellar fixing his bike'. So we follow by turns mum's progress through the town back home in the gathering gloom, and the little girl's more hesitant progress from bed to doorstep as she anxiously awaits her mother's return. The twilight scenes have an almost 'other world' quality and sympathetically and delicately reflect the small girl's subdued mood and complement a text which, with its directness and repetition, creates a calming atmosphere out of what could otherwise be a rather upsetting experience. JB



Mr Fox

Gavin Bishop, Piccolo, 0 330 29245 5, £1.75

A traditional story of a greedy fox and his capacious sack told in straightforward prose and striking pictures set in present day suburban Australia. Unusual viewpoints and imaginative use of colour will hold an audience's attention as they listen to the familiarly structured tale. JB

Postman Pat's Thirsty Day

John Cunliffe, ill. Celia Berridge, Hippo, 0 590 70416 8, £1.25

The latest paperback – and one I know many youngsters will want to own – in the ever popular Postman Pat series. This is certainly one case where television definitely does encourage children towards books and reading, at least that has been my experience. JB

Lucy goes to playgroup

0 356 11432 5

Lucy helps in the garden

0 356 11431 7

Sam's visit to the zoo

0 356 11433 3

Sam goes shopping

0 356 11434 1

Ben's birthday party

0 356 11435 X

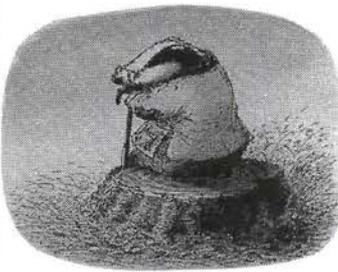
Katy goes to the seaside

0 356 11436 8

Rosemary Border, Macdonald, 99p each

This 'Out and About' series tries both to tell a story and to embrace the mathematical skills, counting, sorting and shape recognition, but to my mind it does neither satisfactorily. At the end of each double page spread a question is posed, for example: 'Find three things with which you dig the garden'. Such questions only serve to interrupt the flow of the story and positively militate against the development of reading fluency whether used by child and adult or child alone. The illustrations are uneven; those of people somewhat crudely executed whereas those of plants and animals are much better. Not a series I would want to use or recommend. JB

Infant/Junior



Badger's Parting Gifts

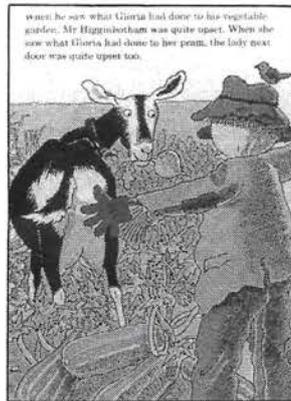
Susan Varley, Picture Lions, 0 00 662398 0, £1.50

This gifted young artist has made a poignant and special picture book about Badger, who dies, leaving his friends with fond memories and 'gifts' he has left them. There are clever reverberations of *The Wind in the Willows* and other childhood tales. Is the writer/artist giving the pastoral tradition a crisp contemporary edge?

The writing is humane, gentle, poetic; the pictures are integral. The telling is slow and not at all morbid. One not to be missed from a talent whose work could become significant. CM

Gloria

A. Vesey, Magnet, 0 416 52070 7, £1.50



When Mr Higginbotham buys a goat called Gloria, the verbal and visual fun is gentle. Lovely vivid and busy pictures mesh in with a text which is spare, understated – yet one which will appeal to six to nines.

The ending where Gloria has to be sold, having eaten washing, vegetables and caused a stir with the baby next door, is not sentimentalised. CM

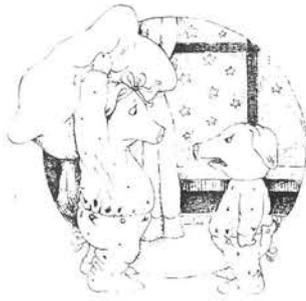
The Crow and Mrs Gaddy

Wilson Gage, ill. Marilyn Hafner, Hippo, 0 590 70432 X, £1.75

In this amusing sequel to *Mrs Gaddy and the Ghost* it is Mrs

Gaddy who finally gets the last laugh in her battle with the marauding crow against whom she has been pitting her wits. Splendidly comical pictures in blue and sepia extend the lively text of this trickster's treat of a book for new solo readers in the infant and junior school. JB

Just then,
Oink turned around.
He looked mad.
He looked as mad
as Pearl felt.



Oink and Pearl

Kay Chorao, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1801 1, £1.75

Four delightful episodes for novice readers; little brothers can be very irritating, at least so Pearl thinks; but when Pearl is on the receiving end of unkindness from older children then it is Oink who provides the comfort she needs. Then, in turn, it is Pearl who makes the right noises when a visiting aunt is just too overpowering for young Oink to stand. Another winner in the *I Can Read* series. JB

Angelina Ballerina

Katherine Holabird, ill. Helen Craig, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.553 9, £1.75

Angelina's obsession for ballet dancing means that she has time for nothing else for she is dancing almost every waking moment and even in her sleep. But surprisingly, when her parents send her to ballet lessons, the young mouse confines her balletic activities to their proper place. The rather ordinary story is redeemed somewhat by charming illustrations of young Angelina gavorting through the pages. Clearly aimed at small girls who share the heroine's passion for dancing. JB

From *Two Little Nurses*.



Jimmy's Boa Bounces Back

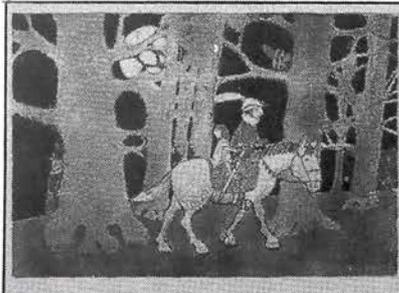
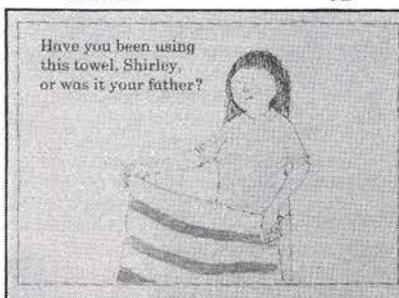
Trinka Hakes Noble, ill. Steven Kellogg, Hippo, 0 590 70445 1, £1.50

Meg's account of the gardening club tea paints an ever more outrageous picture – at least in Jimmy's eyes – as she answers his questions as to the goings on. Both Jimmy and Steven Kellogg allow their imaginations full rein in this tale of the chaos caused when Jimmy's real live boa constrictor is worn by Meg's mum for the occasion. The sheer dottiness of the story and the crowded action-packed illustrations should make this one highly entertaining but best enjoyed read solo. JB

Time to get out of the bath, Shirley

John Burningham, Picture Lions, 0 00 662393 X, £1.50

It has taken a long time for a paperback publisher to take the plunge with this splendid book wherein we share a real and imagined bath-time sequence with a little girl and her mother. While mum talks at her daughter with such comments as 'This was clean on this morning and look at it now', Shirley is somewhere entirely different as we see in the brighter than life illustrations on the right hand page of each spread. This juxtaposition of real and imagined can be enjoyed by all ages but at different levels. A must! JB



Two Little Nurses

Sian Victory, ill. Catherine Brighton, Magnet, 0 416 54400 2, £1.50

The cover of this one is deceptively twee as it's a lively

and well-told story of two girls who play at nurses. When one actually gets the mumps the game becomes real. Some very observant dialogue and the adults are well-drawn. The idea is rather stretched to fill a full-length novel – I suspect that the children to whom it will appeal (sixes to eights?) will not manage the length and language. But the writer has a good gift in catching the talk of the young when playing together and I'd like to hear more of her. CM

Heggerty Haggerty and the Great Running Race

0 590 70436 2

Heggerty Haggerty and the Amazing Loaf of Bread

0 590 70437 0

Heggerty Haggerty and the Day at the Farm

0 590 70438 9

Heggerty Haggerty and the Flying Saucer

0 590 70439 7

Elizabeth Lindsay, pictures by Peter Rush, Hippo, £1.50 each

The Yorkshire television series has made popular these tales of the benevolent witch and her aids, Broomstick and Blackcat. The patterns within the stories tend to be similar: a problem arises (there is no bread; Farmer Giles is ill), the Book of Spells is consulted.

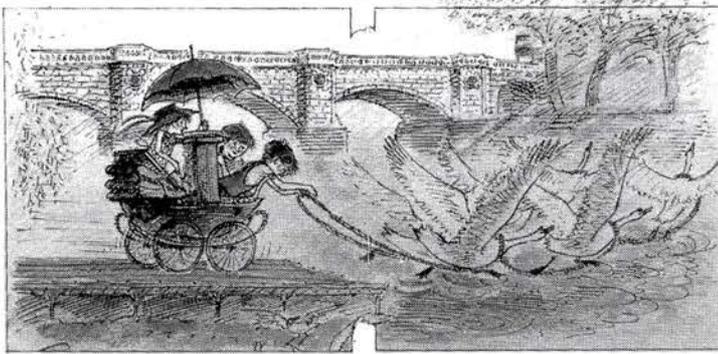
A solution, which nearly goes wrong, is found; all ends well. But that's not to underestimate the vigour and the wit of Elizabeth Lindsay's writing. She's at her best here when the bewitched tractor ploughs up the whole village (in *Day at the Farm*) and when the villagers have a marathon race as part of a jogging, keep fit drive.

The pictures will help readers of six to nine through the text, though the water-colour look of them tends to become monotonous and lacking in movement. But I'd order one or two of them for the bookshop. Although I'd have wished for less text on each page, they will make a useful bridge between picture books and extended text. CM

Mabel's Story

Jenny Koralek, ill. John Lawrence, Picture Puffins, 0 14 050.518 0, £1.75

This is one of those too-rare books for fives to nines which validates the kind of storying they instinctively do themselves.



In the garden, at twilight, Mabel spins her attentive Grandpa a tale of her fantastic day in which with her (imaginary?) friends she has visited the King of the Snow (in a converted pram).

The dialogue between young child and old man is splendidly patterned and is an imaginative device. The pictures are a treat: subtle contrasts between the here-and-now and the child's secondary world caught

in film-like pastels. One to be shared – and copies in the bookshop, please. CM



Junior/Middle



The Shrieking Face
Hazel Townson, Beaver,
0 09 941310 8, £1.25

More surreal entertainment from Hazel Townson who here presents us with the incredible Lang family: a dog who chews anything that passes or lies still long enough for teeth to engage; chaotic Kevin who is continually bandaged after one mishap or another; and Angus, whose painting causes it all to happen.

He'd only meant to paint the shrieking face of the nagging Mrs Crane, his teacher, but things develop at an unwelcome pace. Peace competitions are all very well, but what Angus wants more than anything is a peaceful life!
BB

The Gift Horse
Alexa Romanes, Arrow/
Beaver, 0 09 943750 3,
£1.50

Upper-junior horse 'buffs' will enjoy this well-written tale of the girl who desperately wanted a horse of her own. Even the precis underlines the empathy factor for a potential audience; add to that a well-researched grasp of 'horsey' facts and artefacts, and an easy facility in writing about the subject. Nice integration, without being unctuous or sanctimonious, of details about Riding for the Disabled, in a way that unifies sympathy and admiration. Besides which, who can resist the ugliest horse that ever was, with his head too large and his eyes too small? Yes, this definitely falls into the 'little bit special' category.
BB

Harriet and the Haunted School
Martin Waddell, ill.
Mark Burgess, Hippo,
0 590 70441 9, £1.25

Characteristically witty writing from this popular writer. Fast moving action and lively girl characters in this tale of Harriet's efforts to get her friend a horse. The dialogue is very funny, and the teachers and the children at Slow Street Primary School are convincingly drawn.

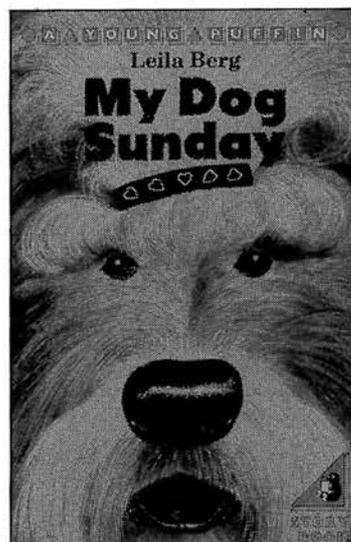


It reads aloud well, and the humour matches the kinds of jokes that sevens to nines tell themselves.
CM

My Dog Sunday
Leila Berg, ill. Peter
Edwards, Young Puffin,
0 14 03.1083 5, £1.25

I know of few writers who can enter into children's imaginative lives so well. Here, the hero longs for a dog. What could be an echoing of Pearce's *A Dog So Small* is made fresh and vital by the writer's way of telling. Conversations between children are beautifully caught; the boy's friends and family are presented to us through his eyes.

I'm always reading the same author's *A Box For Benny* to nines to elevens. I'll now share this one too. A stimulating cover, and cleverly-integrated pictures.
CM



Sick!
Susan Stranks, Magnet,
0 416 54080 5, £1.50

'Sick is yellow, sick is thick, sick can come up awful quick.' So begins this short volume by Susan Stranks (of television's *Maggie* fame), and continues in similar vein with treatments of mumps, chicken pox, measles, whooping cough, gastric flu and warts, to name but several. 'Don't get nits, you'll go out of your wits', is one of the choicer pieces of 'medical' advice offered. It's such a gruesome book that kids will doubtless adore it and it will sell by the thousand! 'Gastric flu, just isn't funny, it's much, much, much, much, much, too runny.'
BB

Escape from Blood Castle
Jenny Tyler and
Graham Round,
Usborne, 0 86020 950 4,
£1.75

Intrepid Ivor is faced with the chilling prospect of unlocking the evil secrets of Blood Castle. The only problem is that you, the intrepid reader, are required to help him in this daunting task. Quite amusing distraction for middle, possibly upper, juniors on a wet afternoon in the middle of February, although I'm not too sure about even that. The humour is not humorous

enough, the jokes aren't quick and clear, and the idea of anyone helping to solve anything from a non-existent plot is difficult to swallow. Still, someone has taken a lot of time and trouble working out intricate little plans and drawings.
BB

The Little Vampire Takes a Trip
Angela Sommer-Bodenburg, Hippo,
0 590 70408 7, £1.00

If you are friends with a vampire, then it will certainly liven things up in Nether Boggsbottom. Mind you, knowing the creature's interesting eating habits, you'd be forgiven for making sure that it was full up before you went out to play! There is one logistic problem though. If Tony wants to take his vampire friend on holiday, how is he going to solve the tricky puzzle of transporting his friend's residential coffin? This problem pales into insignificance when Thelma the Thirsty, William the Wild and Sabina the Sinister, to name but several other vampires, all get involved in the action. However everybody survives and the whole is quite fun. There are four other titles in the series if you get 'bitten'.
BB



The Hermit and the Bear
John Yeoman, ill.
Quentin Blake, Fontana
Young Lions,
0 00 672549 X, £1.50
Literate and clever fun when a Hermit befriends and tries to teach a Bear. Much verbal play comes from the fact that

the creature takes all instructions literally. The pacing of the tale and the length of the cleverly-divided chapters make it just right for the eights to elevens who'll read this.

As always with this imprint, a high standard of presentation, attention to spacing of text and pictures. They are by Blake and, naturally, tell their own stories. **CM**

The Return of the Antelope
Willis Hall, Fontana
Lion, 0 00 672550 3,
£1.75

The book of the TV series recently shown on Sunday evenings. Watching the series I found myself captivated by the filming but disappointed in the weakness of the characterisation. The book allows all the characters to be

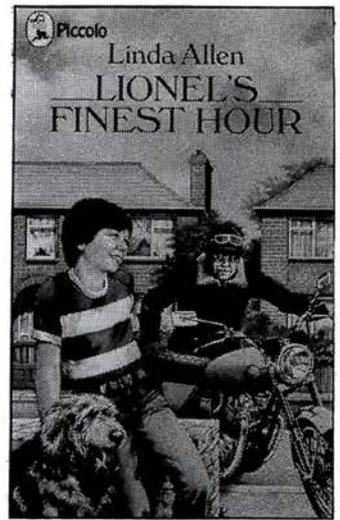
more themselves: more evil, more frustrated, more eccentric, and somehow more real. The little people from Lilliput are genuinely distraught, less foot-stamping and toy like.

Three Lilliputians, retracing the voyage of Gulliver in the *Antelope*, are wrecked on the rocks of the seaside town where Gerald and Philippa are on holiday with their eccentric grandfather. The children, aided unknowingly by grandfather, outwit the evil Mr Mincing who is determined to make his fortune by capturing the tiny explorers for a freak show.

The story is well established in the Victorian period with early vacuum cleaners, steamships and grandfather Garstanton's photography as evidence. There is adventure, tension, intrigue and the battle between good and evil, satisfyingly won by the former. A most enjoyable tale. **CL**

Lionel's Finest Hour
Linda Allen, Piccolo,
0 330 29097 5, £1.25

Lionel's father is an anthropologist of TV fame. He and Lionel's mother are abroad in search of more evidence and Lionel and his elder sister are cared for by Grandfather, a totally unflappable motor bike fiend. He encourages Lionel in his every dream, particularly of what he wants to be when he grows up. Just now Lionel wants to be a bodyguard and is determined to practise on everyone from the next door neighbour to the queen. He gets his chance in both those cases and is aided by the most undisciplined Irish Wolfhound imaginable. Each chapter is another fantastic and highly amusing episode in Lionel's eventful passage through life. A most enjoyable book for the 8+ brigade and possible as a read aloud for a younger age group. **CL**



Middle/Secondary



Flying Backwards
Barbara Giles, Puffin,
0 14 03.1844 5, £1.50

Superior 'I want a BMX' story, raised onto higher plane by lively Lin Tobias' illustrations, which even transcend the set-in-Australia 'Gee Pug, Hello Bruce' dialogue. Adidas runners. We call them 'trainers'. 'Stuck with your old grid, mate'. Even some rudimentary editing would have made this comprehensible to the good old Pommie youth – then perhaps someone in little old Manchester, Sheffield, or even Earls Court, might have bought a copy. As it is, I doubt whether enough will be sold to keep the dingo from the door. **BB**

The Duck Street Gang
Denis Marray, Magnet,
0 416 53730 8, £1.50

Duck Street is a school with a history – thanks to the Luftwaffe, not to mention Councillor Nathan Tight. However, on the plus side, it's in Liverpool, so although it's rebuilt after the bombing and called St. Balaric's, everyone knows it as Duck Street. There's also 2D. You know, the sort of class you have to remind that there'll be no strippers or go-go dancers at the Christmas Party and frisk for hand grenades after a day trip out. It makes fun reading,

and I suppose consenting adults get a kick out of it, but the use of kids and schools as parody punchbags is wearing a bit thin. Possibly this school report might say 'Try harder'. **BB**

You Remember Me
Nicholas Fisk, Puffin,
0 14 03.1656 6, £1.50

Granny returns in a Mark 2 version, a sinister superwoman machine with a built-in generator, fronting a moral-re-armament movement gone bananas. However, in her new beautiful package as Lisa Treadgold, Granny is aiming once again to take over the world and make hypnotised slaves of the earthlings. Fortunately, as with last time, Beth Carpenter has her sussed and, against the odds, wrecks the BIG EVENT.

I remember a bit of dissent about the violent ending to *Granny*. I suppose it's a sign of the way things have developed that this is violent throughout, not just at the end. The variety of narrative styles and the novel introduction of the author himself as a character makes it worth considering for older readers. **DB**

Norby's Other Secret
Janet and Isaac Asimov,
Magnet, 0 416 51580 0,
£1.50

'Norby is just a mixed-up little robot with talents he doesn't understand or know how to use very well.' Those talents include anti-gravity, hyperdrive, time travel and any other SF/Star Wars cliché you can think of – he's even an R2D2 look-alike.

This is a lively, good humoured, crowded sequel to *Norby the Mixed-up Robot*.

It's light-hearted and good fun as the incompetent, unique machine and his partner, Jeff, blunder from one planet to another, through one time leap and another, closely pursued by the Inventor's Union and then the weird and terrible Mentors. Harmless enough material for 9-13s. **DB**

The Fire in the Stone
Colin Thiele, Puffin,
0 14 03.1360 5, £1.95

Recently televised, this is the story of a lonely boy's survival in the harsh landscape and lifestyle of Australia's opal fields, his friendship with an Aboriginal boy and their hunting of opal thieves. Adventure, nature, and also an evocative, challenging story of human frontiers – 'man against nature, and man against man, and, hardest of all, man against himself.' (Women don't figure much.) It's quite long, with a painful ending known to the reader but not yet to the hero. I'd recommend it to people of 12+ and hope they'd share Ernie's insights into Australia's treatment of Aborigines. **TD**

The Boys who Disappeared
Margaret Potter, Puffin,
0 14 03.1918 2, £1.50

David was born in India but remembers nothing of the country, nor of his father. His origins come flooding back when, at twenty-four hours notice, he finds himself in the heat and bustle of Delhi. David's mother is to go into hospital unexpectedly; his stepfather, a surgeon, must fly to India to perform an emergency operation. There is only one thing to do with David – take him to Delhi.

Arrived, he finds a new friend, Hari, who shows him the Delhi beyond the international hotel, and leads him into mysteries and confusions; there too he is kidnapped by his natural father.

For the most part the story is plausible, exciting and also touching. However, the seedy Steve, David's real father, and his even seedier wife (ex-drug addicts?) living as servants to an Indian prince are a little over-drawn. Not surprisingly David realises the true value of his mother, stepfather and new twin step-brothers. On the whole a pleasing read. For the 10+ group. **CL**

Trapped in the U.S.S.R.
J. J. Fortune, Armada,
0 00 692426 3, £1.50

Number 8 in a minor epidemic of *Race Against Time Adventures*. They're a kind of B-Movie of the children's book world – all stereotyping, masses of far-fetched melodrama, speedy action to mask creaky plots and goodies triumphing by the merest whisker.

As an inestimable insight into Russia and her people – forget it! This is strictly the American – 'all Russians are grim-faced, deeply suspicious, K.G.B. controlled, unfairly hospitalised' version. My librarian colleague and I predicted most of the Russian Christian names (Igor and Natasha are there!) and foretold most of the plot even before I'd begun to read it. So, it'll not be any great loss if you don't stock it, unless you are desperate for something undemanding for less confident, reluctant readers. **DB**



From King Arthur's Sword.

The Wooden Horse

ill. Mike Codd,
0 416 49570 2

King Midas and His Gold

ill. Mike Codd
0 416 49580 X

King Arthur's Sword

ill. Susan Hunter
0 416 49590 7

Joan of Arc

ill. Robert Taylor
0 416 49600 8

All retold by Catherine Storr, Methuen (Great Tales from Long Ago) £1.95 each

The idea of getting a good storyteller to present these stories to children in an accessible narrative form is a good one. Despite some variations in the artistry, I think they should definitely have a place in class and school libraries. Individual bookbuyers may want them for their personal libraries, too. In *The Wooden Horse*, the pace and vigour of the original is caught and it's good that Ms Storr gives her sources (here, Graves' *The Greek Myths*). I wish that the artist had not given us the Hollywood version. I'm sure it's Charlton Heston on the cover – and with so many imaginative possibilities too!

Again, some rather garish pictures in *Joan of Arc*, which is a shame as the writing is a model of clarity – the heroine is set in an historical context with a skill that all writers of history for the young could learn from.

The story of *King Midas* seems to best fit the writer's poetic style. It's unfolded in a vivid and compelling way. Again, the source is Graves; once more, I wish the artist had

matched the writer's inspiration. The cover is a send up!

Susan Hunter's pictures in *King Arthur's Sword* marry much better with the text. Drawing upon rich and diverse sources (I'd love to think that the young will still find their way to these), Ms Storr spins this strange tale and rightly lets it hover between fantasy and history. The pictures match the crispness of the telling. CM

The Witch of Lagg

Ann Cheetham,
Armada, 0 00 692458 1,
£1.75

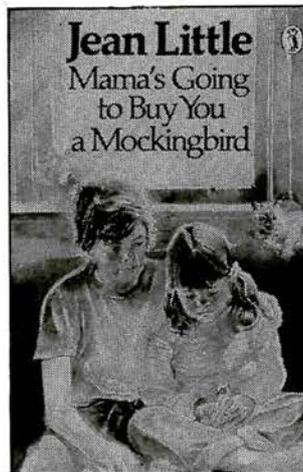
Recipe. Spend the first chapter qualifying everything and everyone with masses of background information. Then let it roll with all the standard ingredients of the horror/suspense armoury. Wrap it in a half skull/half alluring girl jacket design and hey presto – another very busy, pacey and predictable book for youngsters!

Colin, Prill and baby sister Alison accompany their painter father to an eerie Scottish castle and are joined fortuitously by bossy aunt Phyllis and her sensitive, boffin son Oliver. Whilst dad wrestles with the portrait of the mysterious, malicious owner, the kids get themselves haunted, tormented and frightened witless by a good spook and a revengeful spook – in the same series as *Black Harvest* and *The Beggar's Curse* by the same author. DB

Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird

Jean Little, Puffin,
0 14 03.1737 6, £1.95

A painful and yet calming book. We are closest to Jeremy whose Dad is in and out of hospital dying of cancer



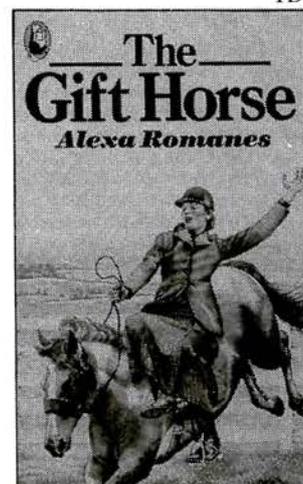
for the first half of the book. Through Jeremy, we also understand his mother's and small sister's experience of this, and how the family gradually recover in the following months. The subject is beautifully treated and the book won two Canadian awards.

It has vitality and humour and strong characterisation. I had to read it in one go and I look forward to reading it again. TD

But Jasper Came Instead

Christine Nostlinger,
Beaver, 0 09 941940 8,
£1.50

Not up to her Conrad standard. Jasper is made in England and inflicted on a German family for the summer. A horrendous dirty growling slob, the product of divorces and boarding schools, he causes chaos, concern for his hosts' health and sanity – and of course, concern for Jasper. They come to love him. Well, sort of. 'Hilarious . . . close to Judy Blume' the cover promises. Well, sort of. (I'd have quite liked reading about the Mittermeirs without Jasper.) TD



The Gift Horse
Alexa Romanes, Beaver,
0 09 943750 3, £1.50

A gift for the horse besotted! Young gels who prefer 'jods' to dresses, lingering longings for a beast of one's very own,

a tyrant horse who breaks good in the end, soap stars, posey circus performing, comas in canyons: all this *and* riding for the disabled.

Really nothing *has* to happen for such tales to succeed with our blinkered equine freaks; so, brace yourselves and tuck it into their saddlebags – it bored me rigid!! DB

Shivers

Jane Ferguson, Hippo,
0 590 70311 0, £1.25

Six supposedly spooky stories packed into seventy-five pages, with barely discernible illustrations, on shoddy paper. Children do like the feel of good quality paper when they are reading. Unfortunately, this is doomed from the start as second-rate and nothing in the text requires one to amend that judgement. In fact, it is impossible to avoid the feeling of déjà vu redolent in the majority of them.

Have you ever had that creeping cold, numbing feeling that puts the brain into shock, and sends chilling waves surging up and down your spine? Well, if you have, you'll be wasting your time looking for it here. BB

Catch your Death

John Gordon, Magnet,
0 416 54540 8, £1.50

Ghost stories to curl the toes of the junior child – preferably those with good eyesight, as the print is a wee bit tiny. A good set, this one, well presented by John Gordon. All the usual fears are trotted out, beautifully re-dressed to look like originals. The doom portent of the black dog, howling optional, always bigger than a human, two humans, three humans? You only have to see it and you die. Strong stuff, which the youngsters will relish, probably being disappointed only by kind teacher, Miss Mary Birdsall. Naturally ye olde black dog wouldn't harm her either. It probably couldn't believe that she was for real!! BB

The Adventures of Professor Challenger

Sir A. Conan Doyle,
Target, 0 426 20216 3,
£1.60

I think I'm right in saying that this book was never intended for children in the first place, so why inflict it on them now? The busy cover hides a collection of passé stories told in complicated language – 'It seemed to me that a slight oleaginous mist was still hovering round the chair', and I know there are better stories around if the kids want high adventure. Unfortunately the author's name will sound safe enough to present-buying parents and some poor kids will get stuck with it in place of books far better and more appropriate. DB

Older Readers

Devil on my Back

Monica Hughes,
Magnet, 0 416 52010 3,
£1.50

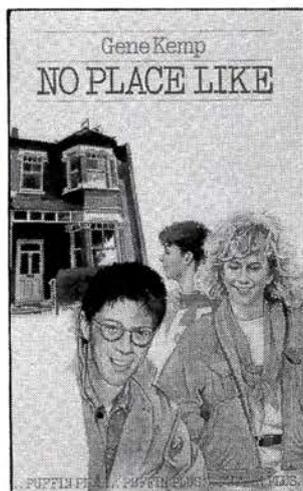
I'd share this with Third Years – their imagination and thinking will be gripped by it. Tomi is a Young Lord, 14 and eligible to begin accessing all knowledge through infopaks implanted in his neck. During a slave revolt, he ends up outside the City of ArcOne, washed many miles down river. Neither his privileged status nor his infopaks are of any use now. His rescue, learning of survival skills and more importantly of the nature of ArcOne, his growing self-knowledge and the shaping of his mission make compulsive reading. The ending, with some surprises for Tomi and the reader, moves towards 'real dreams – of how they might reach out and risk and learn to live, to make Earth green and beautiful once more.'

LeGuin's *The Word for World is Forest* would be a useful partner text. Both are well-made science fiction, speaking through other times and places about here and now. TD

No Place Like

Gene Kemp, Puffin
Plus, 0 14 03.1773 2,
£1.50

The first person narrative, fast and funny in a Moleish way, of a 16-year-old wimp starting Sixth Form College with one CSE. Larger-than-life family and friends whirl around the thick, wet hero – who isn't, ultimately, of course. Once or twice the humour overtries, and Sixth Form Colleges don't have 7000 students but, minor grumbles aside, it's an enjoyable book which should attract 14+ male readers, hooray. It's for girls too, good enough for book boxes and short sets – and highly tempting to read aloud. TD



A Pitiful Place

Jan Needle, Magnet,
0 416 50400 0, £1.50

Bitter, bleak, brutal stories to disturb and provoke. The longest has a teenager losing access to her baby. There's the letter Wally will never send from Belfast to a teacher who urged him not to join the army. After VSO in Africa, Dru's maturity reassures her parents but she cannot tolerate for long their 'smug consensus'. Young Milly is proud to be in a Paki-hating gang – 'We're the Master Race' – but she is the one left with the injured Polish Jew.



The pitiful place is a South Atlantic island where the crew of an assault boat die, unsung and not even heroes. 'Cutting sailors' throats, old son. That's what we were going to do, for the glory of old England.' It's also Britain, now. TD

Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom

Katherine Paterson,
Puffin Plus,
0 14 03.1735 X, £1.95

Bonnie Dundee
Rosemary Sutcliff,
Puffin, 0 14 03.1721 X,
£1.75

Two lengthy and demanding novels where the young heroes become part of religiously/politically inspired insurrections which shape their lives and thoughts forever.

Wang Lee in the Paterson epic is a Chinese peasant who rises to be a sergeant in the rebel Taiping forces, fighting to establish their own fanatical brand of christianity in Manchurian China during the 1850s. The impossibly high moral standards, preached but not necessarily practised by the religious leaders, and the blindingly vicious and violent face of the struggle to establish the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace comes across strongly and meaningfully but the very

unfamiliar history and motivations will defeat all but the doughtiest reader.

Bonnie Dundee, a recent work by this author, is complicated history too, set in seventeenth-century Jacobite Scotland, where Hugh Herriott breaks away from his mordantly dissenting family to join Colonel Graham of Claverhouse. Despite divided loyalty at the onset Hugh progresses from stable boy to soldier and, when maimed by war, to painter. Throughout he is as dogged a follower as his own hound Caspar; one of those for whom their purpose in life is found in the service and shadow of great men – such as 'Bloody Claver'se'.

Hugh's retrospective narrative bears all the hallmarks of Rosemary Sutcliff's rich and evocative style and the benefits of her extraordinary sensitivity to history, but regrettably I don't doubt that readership amongst the young will be sparse. DB

Martini-on-the-Rocks and other stories

Susan Gregory, Puffin
Plus, 0 14 03.1762 7,
£1.50

This should be quite a popular and useful collection. Eight stories of schoolkids with a good mixture of dilemmas and interest for boys and girls. I found it a bit Grange Hillish at first (sorry, fans) but I came to like the boy gets girl stories

and Cindy's defiance of her doting elderly parents and fat Kelvin, gaining popularity by forging merits for others but then finding he actually likes to win them by his own hard work. Certainly buy a single copy – you might even want a set. TD

Healer

Peter Dickinson, Puffin
Plus, 0 14 03.1746 5,
£1.75

'... The world was nothing but a great machine for cheating people – men and women smiling while they thought how to do each other down ...' So believes the angry Bear side of loner Barry Evans. His other gentler, human side cares deeply about the fate of a ten-year-old girl, Pinkie, who is owned, used and abused by her step-father. Her gift of healing becomes a gift to him of ready cash, or does he really believe in the Foundation of Harmonic Energy, 'cells in a co-operative organism, a creature of the new age'?

The story unfolds at a steady rate and complex notions of forces, personal energies and harmonies are set out fairly clearly alongside a healthy, balanced scepticism. I doubt whether it will enjoy a very wide older readership, but it's worth stocking a copy in the library. 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.

Trends in Reading

Cliff Moon examines the growth of the series as an aspect of the move to 'real books'. Are they just mini-schemes in disguise?

We are currently witnessing one of the most interesting periods in the history of the teaching of reading. For nigh on fifteen years researchers and commentators from a wide spectrum of academic disciplines have been casting doubts on traditional resources for *teaching* and suggesting instead that *learning* is where the action is. And studies of how real children actually learn to read demonstrate that the process is far messier than the scheme-designers ever envisaged. In a nutshell, children tend to learn to read much as they learn to do anything else – by attending to what it means and how relevant it is to their accumulated experience of the world.

As a consequence, many reading schemes have been criticised for their irrelevance, meaninglessness and painstaking build up of subskill on subskill, word on word and level on level at the expense of even a hazy reflection of what reading can offer. This rising crescendo of condemnation has resulted in three distinct developments, the first and most obvious being the design of new reading schemes which aim to eliminate the earlier problems but maintain the educational publishers' hold on a fairly substantial market. Examples of these new-look schemes published in recent months include **Open Door** (Nelson) and **The Reading Tree** (O.U.P.). The general aim seems to be that if you look in every direction at once you will be all things to all readers. Hence the story books use natural language, are non-sexist and multi-cultural, involve parents as reading partners; yet here also are the word-counts, the flash cards, the phonic worksheets and a teacher's guide of such mammoth proportions that one wonders whether it is they, rather than the children, who are being taught to read!

The second development is that a growing number of primary schools are eschewing schemes altogether and simply stocking their classrooms with a variety of picture books and children's fiction culled from paperback bookshops and children's libraries. There are teachers in these schools who have sufficient knowledge of their children's reading tastes, the books which are available and the reading process in general to feel confident that they can go it alone (or frequently with parental cooperation) because they've learnt that it is schools who

need reading schemes, not children. What is an organisational necessity to one school is a straitjacket to another. People like Jill Bennett (**Learning to Read with Picture Books and Reaching Out**) pioneered this movement and more recently Liz Waterland's **Read With Me** (Thimble Press, 1985) has tackled all the practicalities involved. Some book suppliers have seized the opportunity to service such schools by providing boxed selections of children's books with an approximate guide to readability for those who feel they need it. The two brand-leaders are **Individualised Reading** (Scholastic) and **Kaleidoscope** (Books for Students).

The third development has been around for some time but is enjoying something of a revival. This is the trend among mainstream publishers of children's books towards producing a recognisable series of books, often by different authors, and assigning them either to one or a limited range of difficulty levels. Singly it is often difficult to separate the books from any *ad hoc* collection of children's books but as a set or series they can serve to provide coherence and security to teachers and schools who are unwilling or unprepared to throw out what they see as the baby with the bathwater. More often than not such series are used in all kinds of schools – as 'supplementary' readers to an established scheme or as titles in their own right alongside mixed 'children's book' resources. In one sense their publishers are hedging all their bets. They stand to gain either way if the difficulty grading is consistent, reliable and clearly shown *and* if their literary quality puts them comfortably alongside library books, Fontana Lions, Puffins, and other 'real' books.

Well-established examples of this publishing genre include **I Can Read** (Worlds Work/Kaye and Ward, some in Puffin), **Read for Fun** (Burke), **Hopscotch** (Hodder and Stoughton), Collins' **Bright and Early** and **Beginner Books** brought in from the USA (Dr Seuss and The Berenstains) and **Readalong** (Arnold/Wheaton). More recently, for 7-9 readers, we have seen **Banana Books** (Heinemann) and **Kites** (Viking Kestrel) join the long running **Gazelles** and **Antelopes** (Hamish Hamilton).

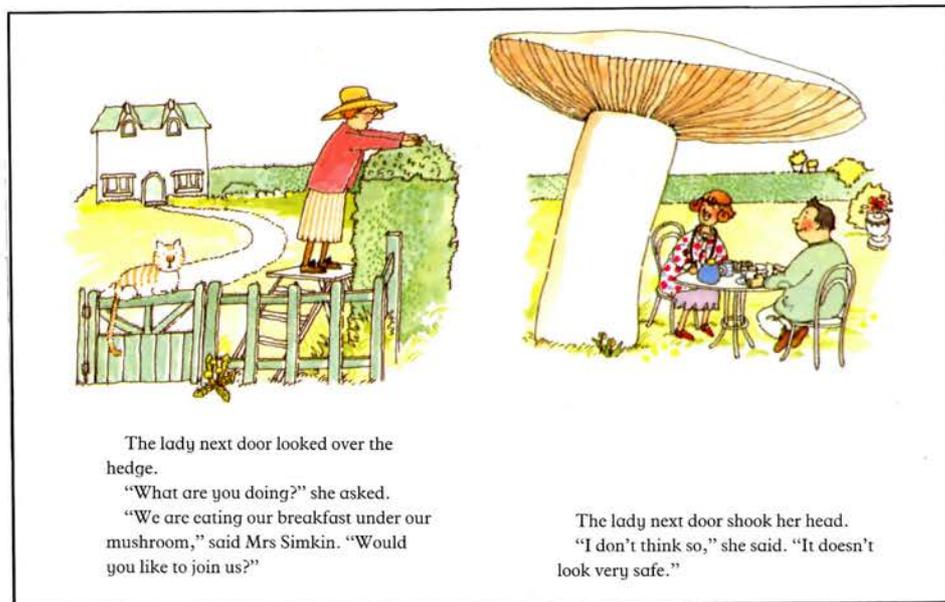
What follows is a round up of some of the newer series for beginner readers, including two due for 1986 launches.

Bodley Beginners, various authors, Bodley Head, £3.75 each.

To date this series boasts twenty titles by authors like Pat Hutchins, Eve Rice and Jean Van Leeuwen. With 48 pages and a fair amount of text, they are suitable for novice readers. Some, like **The Crow and Mrs Gaddy** by Wilson Gage, are continuous stories whilst others present a sequence of short episodes. An example of the latter, **Fox All Week** by Edward Marshall, shows Fox missing school on Monday, throwing away sandwiches on Tuesday, being evicted from the library on Wednesday, smoking cigars on Thursday, sampling Mum's cooking on Friday, giving away granny's chocolates on Saturday and playing on Sunday. Altogether there are four **Fox** books in the series.

Cartwheels, various authors, Hamish Hamilton, £2.95 each.

The first six titles were published in 1985 and three follow this year in this precursor to the well-established **Gazelle** and **Antelope** series. There are two Sheila Lavelle stories (one about **Ursula**) and a Rosemary Sutcliff variation on an old theme: **The Roundabout Horse**. A recent addition, **Mrs Simkin and**



The lady next door looked over the hedge.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"We are eating our breakfast under our mushroom," said Mrs Simkin. "Would you like to join us?"

The lady next door shook her head.

"I don't think so," she said. "It doesn't look very safe."

From **Mrs Simkin and the Very Big Mushroom**, Hamish Hamilton.

the **Very Big Mushroom** by Linda Allen, is a delightful tale about how a giant mushroom serves as a sunshade, a bird-table, and an umbrella before culminating in enough mushroom soup to feed the entire street. The general quality of this full-colour series is consistently high.

Fun-to-Read Picture Books, various authors, Walker Books, £2.95 each.

Sixteen books in this major new series are being launched between March and September 1986. Authors were commissioned to produce simple texts which were then tested in schools and assigned to one of three approximate readability levels, unobtrusively denoted by the colour of each spine. The advantage of this procedure is that the books can stand alongside general library and reading-corner picture books in their own right or provide the support many teachers need in their reduced reliance on a traditional reading scheme. A surprising range of authors have contributed, among them Jan Mark, Charles Causley, Dick King-Smith and Colin West. The variety is endless – from hilarity in **The Sneeze** by David Lloyd to the startling illustrations in **Big Baby**. Causley's offering is, in fact, a picture-book version of his poem 'Quack!' said the Billy-Goat whilst Jan Mark's **Fur** has got to be the shortest story she has yet produced.

Paired Reading Storybooks by Bill Gillham, Methuen, £1.95 each.

Deliberately aimed at parents, these books include guidelines for the kind of 'paired reading' found to be so successful in numerous home reading projects since the early eighties. Four titles were published in 1985 and a further four follow in May 1986. Of those already available, two are about naughty children and reservations have been expressed about them, especially concerning their treatment of pets and their inherently sexist bias. **Candy's Camel** is, however, outstanding. Most young children have an imaginary friend and Candy's accompanies her everywhere. This is just the kind of thing with which children can identify and which is rarely, if ever, found in reading schemes.

Reading is Fun, various authors, Collins, £1.50 each pbk; £3.50 each hbk.

This inexpensive series was launched with six titles in 1985 and four more follow in September 1986. The new quartet perfectly illustrates the variety of reading level inherent in the series – **Wise Dog** by Ruth Craft and Nicola Smee tells of family relationships between Rumble the Dog, Vernon and his mother (both of whom are Afro-Caribbean) in pictures and a spare caption-text whereas the **Olaf the Viking** books (**The Dark Forest** and **The Long House in Danger**) are more wordy, albeit amply illustrated. Variety is nevertheless the hallmark in this attempt to present reading as an enjoyable and satisfying experience.

Red Nose Readers by Allan Ahlberg and Colin McNaughton, Walker Books, £1.95 each.

This sensibly priced series of eight hardback books, all at the same readability level, presents reading to beginners as the problem-solving activity it actually is. Each book includes three or four zany sequences which are sometimes picture/caption stories and sometimes 'word sums' like 'balloon + pin = bang'. Apart from their light touch the greatest strength of these books is the close match between text and illustration – a feature which encourages children to accurately predict words from the company they keep.

New additions to the **Red Nose Readers** series are the **Yellow Books** and the **Blue Books** published in June and September.

The **Yellow Books**, **Crash! Bang! Wallop!**, **Push the Dog, Me and My Friend** and



Candy loved her camel.



But one day she lost it.

From **Candy's Camel**, Methuen.

Then the sheep came back,



the police went away,



a door went 'slam!'

From **Crash! Bang! Wallop!**, Walker Books.

Shirley's Shops feature sentences. Lively illustrations extend the story and support the text, with lots of use of speech bubbles, varied type styles and weights. The reader predicts, and at the page turn predictions are confirmed often with a verbal or visual joke. There is a picture dictionary at the end of each book. The **Blue Books**, out in September are stories in rhyme. All books are £1.95.

Step into Reading, various authors, Corgi, £1.50 each.

These are anglicised versions of American books in three levels, called Steps 1, 2 & 3. Ten titles will be published from April 1986 onwards and they include a short note of guidance to parents, encouraging them to first read aloud and then invite the child to join in – a shared reading approach. They range from **A Dozen Dogs** by Harriet Ziefert (Step 1), a picture plus caption counting story, to **Deputy Dan and the Bank Robbers** (Step 3) by Joseph Rosenbloom which will delight seven and eight year olds who appreciate puns and the misunderstanding they lead to. Quality is somewhat patchy but it is well worth selecting the better titles at this price.

Umbrella Books by various authors, Oxford University Press, £3.95 each.

This series of eight titles, which has been slowly accumulating since 1982 under the editorship of Jill Bennett, includes as author/illustrators William Stobbs, Tomie

de Paola and, this year, Val Biro with **The Donkey that Sneezed**, a three-by-three folk tale about three brothers who seek their fortunes and are tricked by a crooked innkeeper who inevitably gets his come-uppance. All the books are superbly illustrated and the stories memorable. **Giant** by Nick Ward is probably the uneasiest with its explicit scenes of violence but it has an eerie Gulliver-like atmosphere about it that is hard to resist. Two outstanding titles were published in 1985: **Teeny Tiny** by Jill Bennett and **Skipping to Babylon** compiled by Carole Tate. The first is a scary story with the most natural repetition in the world, the second demonstrating that children's skipping and playground rhymes have always been multi-ethnic. ●

Cliff Moon who popularised Individualised Reading while working as a primary teacher is now a Senior Lecturer in the Teaching of Reading at Bulmershe College of HE. Cliff writes extensively on reading and has acted as a consultant to many publishers in assessing the reading level of books; he worked with Walker Books on the testing of the **Fun to Read** series.

Because of the large number of titles featured we have been forced to omit ISBNs from this feature. Publishers of series you like the sound of will be happy to provide catalogues on request.

Whatever happened to Willi Baum?

Eric Hadley wonders —

Like most avid readers I suspect, I have a long list of writers that I would like to meet. At the top of my list, at the moment, is the writer/illustrator Willi Baum. I would like to say to him — ‘Mr Baum, thank you for the pleasure I’ve had from your books. Thank you for the conversations and stories your books have provoked amongst the many children (and adults) with whom I’ve shared them. But, tell me, Mr Baum. Why can’t we get hold of your books? Why is only one of them, *Stagecoach to Town*, in print?’

Willi Baum’s books (so far as I can tell — I’ve never seen a complete list) fall into two categories: non-text picture books — *The Expedition* (published in the mid-seventies by Blackie), *Sense and Nonsense* (Dent), and illustrated stories — *Angelito* and the Jack and Pete cowboy series of which *Stagecoach to Town* is one (all Dent again). As far as I know, none of them has ever gone into paperback nor has his work attracted a great deal of attention. The Dent catalogue quotes a review from the *Primary Education Review for Stagecoach to Town* — ‘... a welcome addition to any library. The illustrations are clear and colourful, and the story precise and well written.’ Is it that kind of automatic reviewing which partly accounts for why books sink without trace? If I concentrate on Baum’s non-text picture books I think I may be able to suggest some other reasons.

Sense and Nonsense contains four picture stories in different styles or rather four pictorial fables. In one story, *Two Flags*, Baum takes sixteen frames to illustrate the follies and roots of conflict which lie in territorial obsessions, technological insanity

and man’s urge for self-destruction. I should perhaps explain that the account I’ve just given is what a group of my students — all of them in their early twenties — thought it was about. The infant and junior pupils I show it to see it differently. One infant wrote — ‘At the end the two men are kneeling down together to pray to God to be friends.’

My students want to see the twenty frames of another story *The Flower* as representing the choice mankind has to make between a materialist technology and Nature. An infant pupil ends her story by saying — ‘And the man went back to the *flower*’ and to show that she understands she writes ‘*flower*’ three times as large as every other word in the story.

What unites these two apparently disparate groups is that these illustrated stories have prompted them into making up their own narratives and accounts. They have all been involved in acts of judgement, interpretation and criticism — seeking for significance in what they see. The lack of text is what creates the room for this kind of speculation. Isn’t what I’ve just described what we mean when we talk about ‘learning to read’? (In this respect many of my students have also still got a long way to go — they’re likely to exercise their intelligence more with Willi Baum than their normal diet of Jeffrey Archer and the *Sun*).

Rather to my surprise, neither of Baum’s non-text books are mentioned in Jill Bennett’s *Learning to Read With Picture Books* or Elaine Moss’ *Picture Books for Young People 9-13*. I’m surprised because Elaine Moss alerts us to one of the reasons why, I suspect, Baum’s books haven’t achieved greater currency — ‘... there is a curious belief among many parents and teachers that ... during the years of “serious education” the relevant picture books have no place.’ Certainly Baum’s books would meet her avowed aim of choosing picture books which ‘examine various aspects of life openly, controversially, often humorously’. Children recognise that this is what he is doing and they match the economy of his representations with the compactness of their own judgements. Here is a pupil of junior age writing about *The Expedition* — ‘The story represents greed and selfishness.

It is like people taking animals out of their natural habitat. There is lots of greed in this world and lots of arguments. The man in the story looked as though he thought he was very important and lots of people in the world are like that.’

The argument that Elaine Moss makes has still not gained general acceptance. It’s acceptable for children to paint and draw (within limits and less and less as they grow older) but we’ve yet to assert the need for an expansion of visual education — if we see the ‘visual’ (illustrations, paintings, photographs etc.) as educative at all. In the meantime, Willi Baum is unavailable and other obvious starting points like the work of Mitsumasa Anno remains available mainly only in expensive hardback. One might add to this list the work of fine artists like Peter Spier and Alice and Martin Provensen.

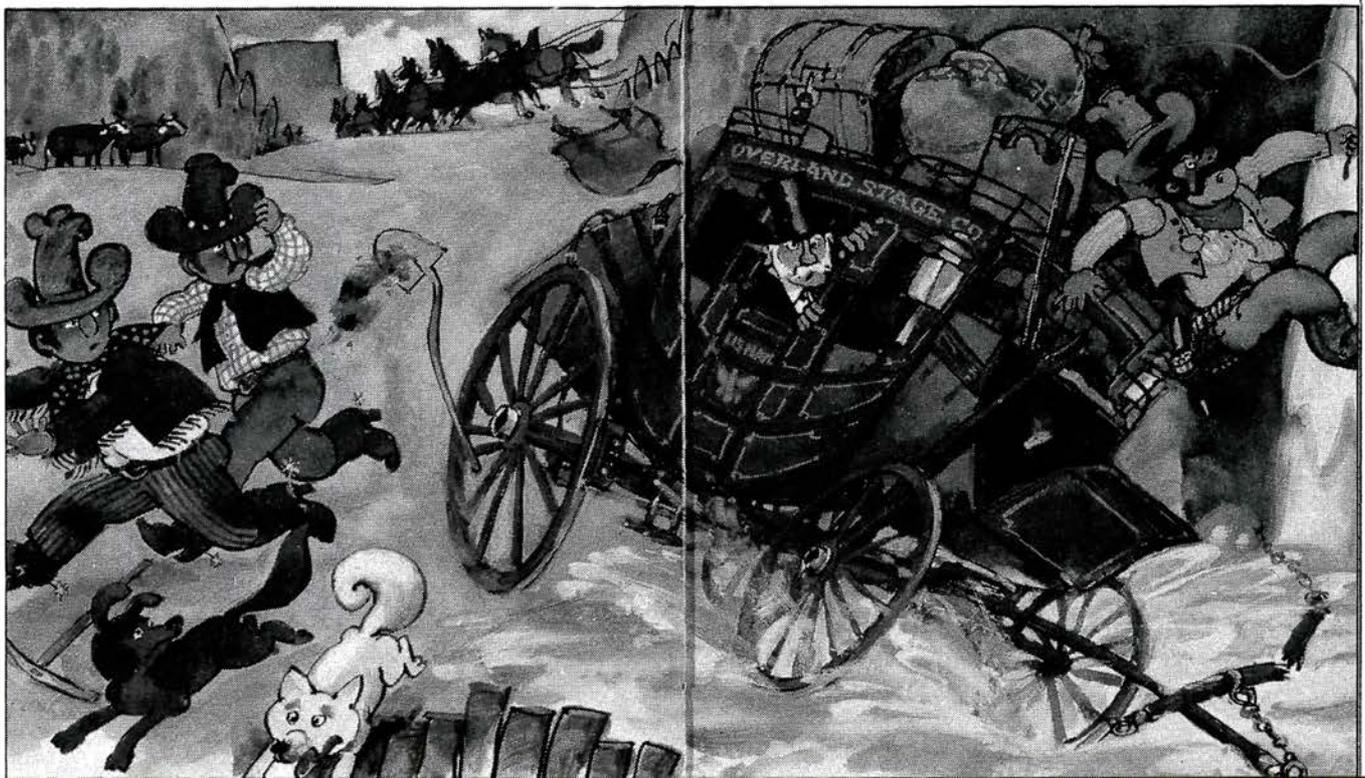
I suspect in the end that one of the problems with Willi Baum’s work is that it doesn’t fall easily into any of the categories through which books become packaged or noticed. His range of appeal is too wide and undefined. If he were to move to producing non-text material for toddlers there would be no problem — anything goes in that area. His picture stories are political and socially aware yet without becoming solemn or sentimental — so you don’t feel button-holed by the message and I’m afraid he doesn’t fit in easily to themes or topics. Perhaps his worst fault of all is that he keeps on changing his style to suit his subject — no one is going to say ‘Oh, it must be a Baum’ as they will for, say, Quentin Blake or John Burningham.

In fact, Baum displays a boldness of conception and design which ought never to be out of fashion. Look at *Angelito* with its vibrant colours, the sinuous lines of the vertiginous Peruvian landscape matched by the convolutions of the South American baroque church interiors — and I haven’t said anything about the story yet! But I forgot — you can’t look because it’s out of print. ●

Eric Hadley works in the Education Department of The South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education.

Stagecoach to Town, Willi Baum, Dent, 0 460 06996 9, £5.50.

‘The shaft snapped and the horses broke loose’. From *Stagecoach to Town*.



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BfK at the Bookspace

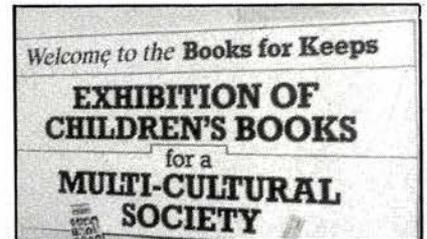
When Rosemary Stones, Manager of the **Bookspace** at the Royal Festival Hall, asked us if we would like to mount an exhibition based on our **Guides to Children's Books for a Multi-Cultural Society** (0-7 and 8-12) we took a deep breath and said yes. On January 19th as an exhausted team put the last book in place ready for the opening next day they looked round at the carefully displayed books, the eye-catching graphics and blown-up photographs, at in fact a very professional exhibition and decided it had probably been worthwhile. Ten days later when the exhibition closed we were sure. Over five and a half thousand people had visited the exhibition; the book shop, run by Soma, had sold thousands of pounds worth of books; we had taken hundreds of advance orders for the 0-7 Guide and practically sold out of the 8-12.

Putting on an exhibition of this size when BfK has only *one* full-time employee is no small undertaking. Richard and Angie Hill, Jan Powling, Alec Davis and his team at Rightlines did a fantastic job in a very short time: designing and creating stands to suit the lovely space overlooking the Thames, collecting copies of all the books, arranging the publicity, attending meetings of the GLC committee which funded the event, coping with the last minute changes and the inevitable traumas. Work on the production of the 0-7 Guide had to be suspended but Judith Elkin did a splendid job quickly finalising the choice of books so that

the complete selection was in the exhibition.

Among the thousands of visitors it was a particular pleasure to meet many of our readers. Librarians, teachers and parents came to the exhibition, and not only from London and the Home Counties. Those who looked after the exhibition and ran the much-used Information Desk reported conversations with subscribers from Manchester and Humberside, Birmingham and Hampshire (to name but four). We had over two dozen enquiries from people wanting to put on the exhibition in their region. There's clearly a great deal of interest all over the country; our 8-12 Guide has sold well over 7,000 copies and we are just about to go into a second reprint.

The **Bookspace** is an excellent addition to the Festival Hall and a long overdue place for book things to happen and be seen. Rosemary Stones has organised a marvellously lively and varied programme of events - for adults as well as children - since she took over. During the exhibition she organised a seminar on dual language books at which mainstream, minority and community publishers talked of their philosophy and their approach to this sort of book. This provoked some lively discussion of issues and practicalities among the 200 or so people who attended. Sadly the fate of **Bookspace** is in the balance with the disappearance of the GLC. Almost certainly it will have to move from its present very



attractive location; but with luck it will survive in some form and with its new bookshop continue as a vital focus for books in London.

While everyone at the **Bookspace** is keeping fingers crossed for the future, the workers at BfK are figuring out how to put the show on the road. We'll let you know if it is coming your way.

A new publication

Youth Library Review

The Youth Libraries Group are launching a new bi-annual journal. The **Youth Library Review** will be published in spring and autumn and will report on initiatives and developments in both children's librarianship and the children's book world. 1986 is the Golden Jubilee of the Carnegie Medal and the **Youth Library Review** will be outlining plans to celebrate the occasion as well as including acceptance speeches by last year's Kate Greenaway and Carnegie Medal Winners, Errol Le Cain and Margaret Mahy.

The **Youth Library Review** will go direct to members of the Youth Libraries Group and will also be available on subscription. For further details contact: Philip Marshall, 021 552 1966.

Book Events Ahead

Got the Message?

A one-day IBBY seminar for librarians, teachers, publishers, authors and parents on the theme of culture, ideology and politics in writing for children.

Speakers include James Watson, Bob Leeson and Peter Hunt. Date: May 15th, 10.00-4.30. Place: The Triangle Cinema, Aston University, Birmingham.

Details from Sheila Ray, Tan-y-Capel, Bont Dolgafan, Llanbrynmair, Powys, SY19 7BB. Tel: 06503 217.



Puffin Carnival

Friday March 28th-Tuesday April 1st.

The annual Puffin jollifications are being held this year at the Bookspace in the Royal Festival Hall, London.

There will be Fairground Games, Competitions, a Spook Book Walk, a Fun House, Clowns, Magic, Spot's House and Erik the Viking. Visiting authors include Bernard Ashley, Raymond Briggs, Roald Dahl, Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Roger McGough, Brian Patten, Jan Pienkowski, Mike Rosen, Tony Ross, Bob Wilson, and

(of course) Jackson and Livingstone.

For the first time ever admission is FREE.

Details from Eunice McMullen, 01 759 9767.

National Tell a Story Week

May 3-10.

A week of storytelling and reading aloud, games, craft activities and many other book-centred activities promoted by the Federation of Children's Book Groups and sponsored by Lloyds Bank. All over the country children will meet authors and illustrators and join in with book events which are designed to encourage them to feel at home with books and enjoy the magic of stories.

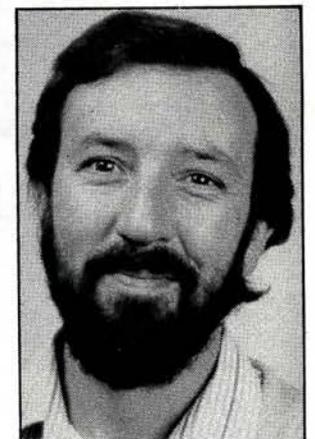
The theme this year is Magic and Mystery.

Details of how to get involved, ideas for activities etc. from: Sandra Mack, Cherry Tree Cottage, High Roding, Nr Great Dunmow, Essex (please enclose s.a.e.).

The Grand Launch this year will be in Birmingham. Details from: Jenny Blanch, 30 Senneleys Park Road, Northfield, Birmingham B31 1AL.

Children's Book Week

A new co-ordinator, Bob Cattell, has taken on the job of organising CBW 1986. His association with the Greenwich Book Boat and the Book Bus means that Bob is no stranger to book events and understands the need for good organisation and planning.



He's not willing to go public yet on his plans for CBW this year. His only comment about the 1985 Book Train etc. is, 'You can't go backwards; you've got to develop.' He's promised he'll have his ideas ready soon and will let BfK readers in on what's happening in our May issue. ●