BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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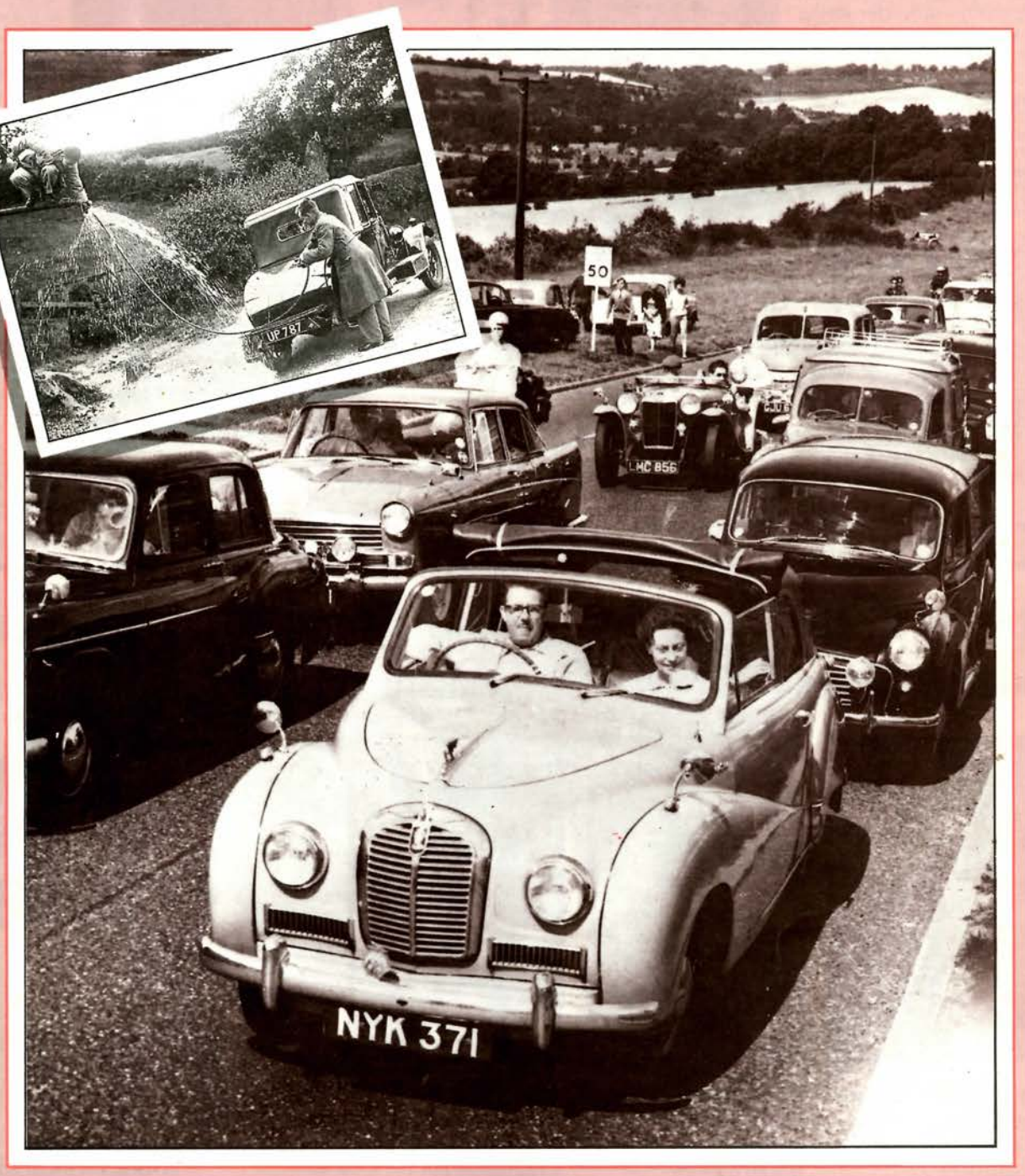

INFORMATION BOOKS: SPECIAL FEATURE
BERNARD ASHLEY ON TV REALISM
MEET KATHERINE PATERSON
COMPUTERS IN THE LIBRARY

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BOOKS FOR KEEPS
– the magazine of the School Bookshop Association

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EDITOR'S PAGE

Pat

It's Spring and Information Books are bursting out all over this issue of **BfK**. Our cover picture 'Holiday traffic on its way to the coast, August 1960' may evoke nostalgia, interest, curiosity or speculation. Whatever the response, if it encourages close looking that is what Penny Marshall had in mind when she selected for **Cars** (0 356 11393 0) in her **The Camera as Witness** series for Macdonald (see pages 21-23). Investigating the use of photographs in information books has revealed a lot more to discuss. We shall be back. Another of our themes – Thinking Globally – (pages 4-7) coincides with the publication in April of the report of the World Commission of Environment and Development which has been working since 1984. Its themes, and ours, are reflected in **Only One Earth** a 14 part series which begins on BBC2 on April 27th. The series reveals the extent of the crisis and looks at different human initiatives in the Developed and the Third Worlds that try to come to grips with it. A companion book by Lloyd Timberlake who was an advisor for the series (BBC/Earthscan 0 563 20549 0, £6.95 pbk) details the experience of individuals like Anna Ngwerume who with her friends and neighbours runs a gardening group in Zimbabwe, or the Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka who advises his villagers about tree planting, or the British couple farming organically in Somerset. It's an ideal resource for teachers who want to make the issues real and understandable for their pupils. Children's publishers should be encouraged to be more adventurous in this area; there are many gaps to be filled.

One publisher very much aware of this is Christine Baker, editorial director of Moonlight Publishing whose **Pocket Worlds** series is enthusiastically reviewed by Terry Hyland (page 5). These little books were originally published in France by Gallimard. Christine Baker, a French woman married to an Englishman, has been responsible for much productive cross channel children's book traffic. It was Christine who in 1983 brought us the Pocket Bears series (also from Gallimard) as a joint Methuen-Moonlight venture (see **BfK** 22). Somehow these lovely books never reached their market so it's good to see them being relaunched in April as **Pocket Puffins** – an indispensable source for any teacher promoting learning to read with real books.

Winter Visitors

In February four Canadian children's authors paid a lightning visit to this country. If you were in the right place at the right time you might have had the pleasure of meeting or listening to Monica Hughes, Jean Little, Kathy Stinson or Camilla Gryski. One stopping place on their tour was organised by Enid Stephenson of the Hungate bookshop in Norwich and we were delighted when Enid's husband, Chris, agreed to write a May We Recommend feature about Jean Little (page 26). Jean is partially sighted and was accompanied on this trip by the distinguished American writer Katherine Paterson. Both writers have tackled the difficult subject of death in their stories for children. **Bridge to Terabithia**, Katherine Paterson's award-winning novel was written from powerful first-hand experience as Stephanie Nettell's account of her meeting with the author shows (Authograph, page 14).

Points of view

Censorship of children's books is making news again. Literary agent Gina Pollinger started it in **The Bookseller** last November. By February it had surfaced in the **TES** and the rumblings are still audible. Quoting letters from editors turning down her authors' books Gina Pollinger spoke of 'hard pressed editors being leant on by bully persons with an ulterior motive', 'a task force from the alternative society' with 'the new perspectives of the "loony left"', interested only in '"gritty realism", the cliche of the decade' and with 'scant respect for the storyteller's ways and means.' Questions of literary merit have she says been shelved because of 'the schemes of extremists for change in our society' hatched by 'the pedlars of poison.'

It's difficult to respond to such venomous prose, particularly as the (few) extracts quoted from editors' letters seem to be in the main fairly mild requests for characters, settings and storylines which more closely reflect the experiences of most young readers. To analyse this in political terms – and if the 'loony left' is the villian then virtue must reside with the 'right' – is a gross distortion of reality (a phrase Gina uses herself about what she sees as the pressure to remove hope, optimism, compassion etc from the teenage novel). Like many others I have used my voice in support of a literature which has genuine meaning for the children I am trying to help to become readers. The so-called 'middle-class world' of many children's books does not reflect the lives of *any* children I know – of whatever class. Some writers who are being published depict a world which they seem to be unaware has vanished, if it ever existed. I'm not asking for gloom and horror either; just an approximation to reality. It's hard to believe too, that we are being denied really outstanding books because editors are afraid to exercise their own literary judgment. The debate will of course continue. Read Nat Hentoff's **The Day They Came to Arrest the Book** (Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.2138 1, £1.95) which tells the story of a school where some parents and students decided that **Huckleberry Finn** should be banned. Then note a recent Bookseller report that Reinhardt Books is planning to republish the **Little Black Sambo** books, withdrawn by The Bodley Head after complaints – not from extremists – but from some of its authors and illustrators. And for a view from a writer of 'gritty realism' who is also taking on the challenge of television read Bernard Ashley on TV Reality (page 16). What's your view?

New directions

Things have moved on since we reported on Computer Books in 1983. Different sorts are now in demand (page 24). And the computer, at least in some schools, is moving into new areas. Two teachers tell how they are using it to help pupils find books they want to read (page 18). All teachers, with or without computers in their libraries, will be interested in **Library Alive!** a handbook for promoting reading and research in the school library (A & C Black, 0 7136 2900 2, £5.50). By Gwen Gawith, a New Zealand librarian, it contains ideas and activities which you can photocopy and use direct from the book. For several years I've shared my Australian copy with teachers who fall on it enthusiastically so I was delighted to be asked to co-write the introduction to the UK edition. I recommend it unreservedly.

At **BfK** we have a new project due for publication this summer – a guide to Poetry in Schools, with a bibliography selected by Morag Styles. To find the time to edit this I've put the May edition of **BfK** into the very capable hands of guest editor Chris Powling. I'm looking forward to getting my copy.

Until July – good wishes.

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

THINKING GLOBALLY

Terry Hyland explains the ideas which have led to a search for books with a global perspective.

Colour illustration from the front cover of **The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management** (Pan).

Geography helps children make sense of their surroundings and understand the complex nature of the world in which they live. That is the message of **Geography 5-16**, the latest in the **Curriculum Matters** series from HMI. The paper, produced by HMI as the basis for discussion by teachers, goes on to suggest that as well as studying the local environment children 'should be helped to develop a global rather than a parochial view of their environment' and learn to recognise 'how their own lives influence and are influenced by conditions and events in other parts of the world'. Geography is more than learning where places are; it's about the relationships between people and environments.

Teachers in primary and secondary schools who have been involved in World Studies will be pleased to read this. The central objective of World Studies is to foster a global perspective, an appreciation of the interdependence of cultures and countries by examining how other ways of life are both different from and similar to our own. What is taught in our schools is still frequently very insular; pupils of all ages learn to view the world from the (dominant and superior) perspective of white Europeans. And this in spite of the fact that the origins of World Studies (or Global Education as it is called in America) lie nearly 70 years ago in initiatives which followed the horrors of the First World War. The International Committee of the League of Nations took on the task of training 'rising generations in a spirit of peace and goodwill' and furthering 'mutual understanding between nations'.

Many schools took up the challenge in the inter-war years and the movement received even greater support after 1945 with the UNESCO initiatives. In 1974 the British Government, along with many others, signed the UNESCO recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding committing the signatories to implementing 'an international dimension and a global perspective in education at all levels'. The idea has received longstanding support in DES publications. The recent Swann Report **Education for All** (1985), for example, which was concerned with the education of ethnic minority pupils, recommended that a 'good education' should provide pupils with the means to function effectively in the 'interdependent world community' of which they are members.

In recent years we have had the World Studies Project (1973-80) funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the DES. This work was continued in the Schools Council/Rowntree project, **World Studies 8-13** (1980-83) which produced ideas and materials for teachers interested in working in this way.

Lately World Studies has been under attack for its so-called 'political' stance. It is not always easy to respond intelligently to such extreme and belligerent criticism, but I would claim that work in this area follows no distinctly 'political' line, unless it is 'political' to encourage children to think of themselves as citizens of a world in which all our futures are dependent upon a common natural environment, humanity, economy and spirituality. The values which underpin this approach are moral not political and, moreover, they are values which go to make up the universal moral code that informs all the world's major religions.

World Studies initiatives are to be found in a growing number of LEAs. Like any other area of the curriculum, this approach needs to be supported by a variety of resources, books and maps in particular. Unfortunately far too many reference books, information books and text books still display the parochialism and bigotry to which teachers implementing this curriculum are so opposed. It is ironic, when faced with so many (even recent) publications which are Eurocentric and culturally and ethnically biased, to reflect that the first concern of the League of Nations back in 1918 was to eliminate racist, cultural and nationalist bias in school textbooks. The power of viewpoints fostered in the classroom was clearly understood.

Many publishers now actively seek to provide a 'global perspective' in their books. The point of view is ostensibly objective and neutral. Yet somehow a bias remains – not intentionally perhaps, more because prejudices lie so deep and remain so unexamined that there are omissions or forms of words that betray our conditioning. Or maybe, even though aware, a writer underestimates the slipperiness of the English language or the inability of the inexperienced reader to respond to subtleties of tone.

From Aztecs to Zulus: Inside the Museum of Mankind (British Museum Publications, 0 7141 1678 5, £1.95) published in January is in effect a guide to the museum, giving background information on work behind the scenes and highlighting some of the exhibits. Technically competent, with excellent photographs and illustrations, activities and quizzes designed to capture the imagination of children, the book often appears relentlessly Eurocentric. The introduction begins by referring to 'some of the *artificial curiosities* from far-off places' which tickled the curiosity of the British Museum's first visitors in the eighteenth century at a time when 'large areas of the world were still unexplored by Europeans'. We may be intended to be amused at the ignorance of the eighteenth-century view, to see an irony in the italics and the 'tickled curiosity'; but for young readers this needs to be made much more explicit. Later we are told that the people of the Pacific Islands 'did not learn how to use metals until they came into contact with Europeans'. The way this information is expressed suggests a lapse into the cardinal sin of judging other cultures and civilisations solely in terms of the norms and standards of our own. For the sake of our children and their future we must try harder to avoid being misleading.

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

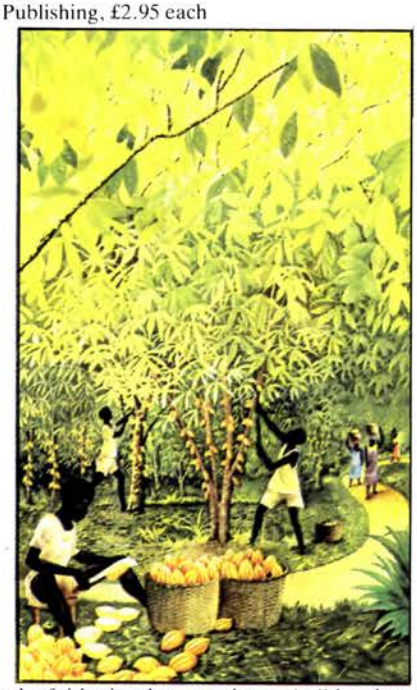
A look at some recent series

Where Does it Come From?
Macdonald, £2.95 each

Sweater, 0 356 11553 4
Water, 0 356 11551 8
Lego Brick, 0 356 11552 6
Banana, 0 356 11554 2

This series seeks to extend the understanding of younger primary pupils beyond the idea that everything originates in the local supermarket. However, the four topics chosen – sweater, Lego brick, banana and water – do not take us very far beyond these naive conceptions and, moreover, give little indication of our dependence upon the products and labour of other countries. The **Banana** book is perhaps the most seriously deficient. Although children are told that bananas have travelled a long way before they get to the shops, our total dependence on banana-growing countries could have been given more emphasis. More importantly, there is no mention of the fact that the people working on the 'big farms in some of the hottest countries in the world' are often callously exploited. 'Banana story' in **The World Studies 8-13** handbook provides background information on the industry and explains that, for every £1 we spend on bananas from the Caribbean, only 11½p goes back to the people who grew and harvested them. Even very young children are able to appreciate such simple economics. If we are attempting to provide factual information for children, why not make it as full and accurate as possible?

Pocket Worlds
Moonlight Publishing, £2.95 each



From **Chocolate, Tea and Coffee** (Moonlight).

The first batch of titles in what promises to build up into a very useful series for all ages. (Moonlight suggests 6+; secondary teachers have been enthusiastic about putting those with 'older looking' covers into the library for use by less able readers.) There are sub-divisions within the series: World of Food, Animal World, World of Nature, Human World, World We Use. Together they offer well-designed and sharply written accounts of a diverse range of topics (Bread, The Potato, Crocodiles and Alligators, Air, Eskimos, Paper, for example). The treatment of other people is sympathetic and **The Story of a Grain of Rice** (1 85103 001 8), **The Story of Paper** (1 85103 015 8) and **Chocolate, Tea and Coffee** (1 85103 002 6) make it clear that many of the everyday items and products we depend on were first introduced and developed by non-European peoples (though here too economic issues are left out). The books are informative and beautifully illustrated and there is a distinct conservationist line in evidence (e.g. 'crocodile skin looks better on crocodiles'). For teachers interested in fostering a global perspective from many angles the series provides useful material.

The Macmillan World Library

How People Live Series, £5.95 each

Published this year, this is another useful series combining detailed factual information about different countries and cultures with an imaginative sensitivity to our shared environment. **On the Move** (Tessa Potter, 0 333 42622 3) is concerned with human migration of all kinds from the Bakhtari nomads of Iran to migrant workers of Turkey and South America to circus travellers and touring musicians of Europe. The concept of migration is sympathetically handled in a way which challenges younger pupils to compare their own ways of life and surroundings with those of other peoples. Jenny Vaughan's **Families Around the World** (0 333 42626 6) is a superb source book from which to organise a topic with tremendous potential. Beginning with the idea of a family group, comparing human with animal families, the wide variety of family units and their diverse social and cultural backgrounds is comprehensively illustrated with sections on housing, recreation, religion, social customs and work. The idea of sharing and the need for mutual cooperation is stressed throughout, and is an ideal vehicle for highlighting the values associated with a global perspective. Designed for the 8-12 age range, other titles in the series are: **Life in the Tropics**, **Farming**, **Living by Water** and **The Crowded Cities**.

Our World: How? What? When? Why?
Ernest and Helen Lucas, Lion, 0 85648 948 4, £4.95

This single volume attempts to answer the fundamental questions of science in an extremely novel way. Obviously inspired by the fundamentalist drive in America to include creationism alongside evolutionism in science teaching, the book presents scientific explanations of the origin and nature of life on earth in tandem with Christian interpretations of the same phenomena. The result is interesting if not entirely successful. Although it is true that a Christian (or any other religious) perspective can accommodate scientific theories of the origin of the world, it is not quite correct to say that the Bible account remains intact in the face of secular explanations. Similarly, it is naive to suggest that the Genesis story can be completely reconciled with the theory of evolution. If children are to be presented with alternative explanations they need to know the difference between scientific knowledge and religious mythology, and the authors do not deal adequately with this distinction. However, teachers of top juniors may find some useful material in certain sections, and the concluding recommendations about tomorrow's world could be shared by teachers of all persuasions.

Atlases make statements too

The Illustrated World Atlas
David and Jill Wright, Piccolo, 0 330 29896 8, £2.95

is comprehensive and well illustrated with colourful maps and photographs. Suitable for top juniors and the early secondary years, it provides succinct descriptions of countries including facts about population, physical geography and the economy. However, in spite of its emphasis on the technicalities of map-making (very useful for primary pupils), on measuring distances and on the relative size of countries – 'Europe is a smaller continent', 'France is the largest country in Europe', 'The USSR is the biggest country in the world' – the atlas surprisingly reproduces in its introduction the traditional Mercator projection of the world which gives a distorted Western European impression of the relative size and importance of different countries. The **Peters Projection** (UNICEF) of the world accurately shows different countries in proportion to their surface areas and actual relative size. Using this map, pupils can see at once that Europe really is very small compared with India, Africa or South America, and is also a long way from the centre of things. I would have thought that this should be amongst the first geography lessons taught to young pupils.

The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management
Norman Myers (ed), Pan, 0 330 28491 6, £9.95

is a lavishly illustrated account of the current state of our fragile planet. There are sections on the oceans, the forests, the animal and human population, and our present stage of evolution, each written in a clear and concise style by a leading expert in the field and text is supported by excellent photographs and beautifully constructed diagrams. David Bellamy's introduction clearly establishes the conservationist perspective which informs the books, but this always manages to avoid the extremes of naive optimism and negative doom-mongering. The central message is clear: if we continue to live as we are doing at present, squandering natural resources and threatening the natural and human environment, then our precious heritage might well be lost for ever. A superb reference book for a whole range of subject areas, **The Gaia Atlas** should be on the shelves of all school libraries. ●

For more information

World Studies 8-13: A Teacher's Handbook, S. Fisher and D. Hicks, Oliver and Boyd, 0 05 003845 1, £5.50

There is also a **World Studies Journal** published by the Global Education Centre at York University.

The Southern Examining Group has approved a GCSE Mode III syllabus in World Studies.

Terry Hyland was Education Worker at the Lancashire Development Education Centre, teaching and developing World Studies in schools. He now teaches in the Education Department of Bristol Polytechnic.

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

Books about Countries

Also thinking globally, **David Wright** applies his criteria for selection to some recent titles.

Children's books about countries are very important. If the UK is to break down its long-established insularity, we need to start with young children and persuade them that the rest of the world really exists and that it is exciting to find out more about it.

This is a popular area for publishers so there is lots of choice. How do we decide which to use? What makes a book about a particular country a 'good book'?

I was briefed by the editor of **Books for Keeps** to make this article short, accessible and enjoyable to read. It's excellent advice. But if *we* need those qualities in our reading, think how much more vital they are when the readers are children. Some other qualities need adding, too, for children. The books need to be simple in language and simple (but not simplistic) in content, in concepts and in choice of themes. (They will be used and read by all children – not just the keenest and brightest.) They need to be accurate, avoiding bias, and with empathy for and understanding of the country. These qualities are all vital – but they conflict with one another. And therein lies the problem for the writer.

If you are brief, you are not so likely to be interesting: the interesting topic has to stop just after it starts. If you are accurate you probably have lots of use for 'usually', 'often', 'in general' – and there's no better way of killing interest and enjoyable reading! If you are simple, you have to miss out vital things about a country ('too complicated'). If you make the book attractive, it will be labelled a tourist-eye view. If the warts show, you may be accused of lack of empathy. If you strive to get the balance exactly fair, it will be labelled bland or dull or lacking in enthusiasm.

So it is easy to criticise. And it is very hard to do well. If you don't believe me, try! I have crossed out more words more times in writing children's atlases and children's books about countries than in any other writing. I've enjoyed it all (well, almost all), but it is the hardest thing I have ever done.

Books about countries will be used in a great variety of contexts. In schools, they will be used for 'World Studies' in one school; 'Geography' in another; and 'Social Studies' or 'Topic' in others. In libraries, they will be 'for my project', or for general interest, or maybe for a Brownie 'Friendship Badge' or because an overseas holiday is planned. So they need to be flexible and easy to explore. They all need indexes, but indexes that really *work* and have been well thought out from the point of view of the potential young user. So what can be said about this batch of recent 'countries' books? Let's start with the generalisations.

They all have excellent printing – full colour and sharp definition of good photographs. 'Black and White' (i.e. 'grey and grey') has finally vanished, and not before time. The maps are all poor, except for the Macdonald books. (Maps deserve a whole article in their own right.)

None of these books are really bad – and that's quite an achievement. But all could be so much better.

To get further than the generalisations, we need to look at each series in turn. I did so in the company of a group of 10-11 year olds who provided some devastatingly perceptive comments.

From **Let's Go to Sri Lanka**.

Let's Go Series
General Editor – Henry Pluckrose, Franklin Watts, £4.50 each

Let's Go to Cuba
Keith Lye, 0 86313 498 X

Let's Go to East Germany
Keith Lye, 0 86313 497 1

Let's Go to Sri Lanka
Dhanapala Samarasekara, 0 86313 500 5

Let's Go to Yugoslavia
Keith Lye, 0 86313 499 8

Do you remember 'painting by numbers' kits? This 52-volume series, of which these four are the latest titles, is 'writing by numbers'. If it is page 10, it will say, 'This picture shows some stamps and money used in X' – even if the picture doesn't show any money (Cuba).

'I like the picers (sic); I dislike the writing because it is babyish and dull' (Alison).

Yes, the photographs are excellent: colourful, interesting, varied, up-to-date. The big print and short sentences may make the writing *look* babyish to Alison and others, but much of the text is abstract and difficult. We would love to know what the farmer is doing with his tractor and trailer; instead, we read, 'Agriculture employs . . .' (yawn). Elsewhere we read 'Because of its varied population . . .'; 'Leading industrial products include . . .'; 'a major industrial and cultural city'. Andrew writes, 'the information is a bit dusty' – a superb summary! Each book gives the feeling that it was written in a hurry, by a grown-up who has not chatted to children for a long time. The format is for very young children; the vocabulary is for adults. Even so: 'If they were in the shop, I think a lot of people would buy them' (Lisa). How true!

Passport to . . . Series
Franklin Watts, £6.95 each

Passport to Australia
Susan Pepper, 0 86313 439 4

Passport to Mexico
Carmen Irizarry, 0 86313 440 8

This series has an inspired title and the basic concept is excellent. Four 'Factfile' spreads complement the 17 'text and picture' spreads. The books feel cheerful – until you start reading them: 'the writing is too small and too confusing' (Richard) – this is putting it mildly. For example, 'The distribution of Mexico's economic activity' (map title page 36). Why not 'Mexico: farming, mines and factories'?

'The supply of adequate amounts of fresh water is a continual problem' is heavy, verbose, unnecessarily difficult and very dull. Why not 'Water is the biggest problem in Australia'?

I don't entirely trust these books. Mexico seems as middle-class, suburban and prosperous as Australia. And I don't trust the blurb: '. . . photographs have been especially commissioned . . .' looks 80% untrue. 'I dislike the photographs because you can see the people are posing for the cameras' (Richard again), though at least there are people in most of the photographs. The series could have been so good – it is one of the great might-have-beens in children's non-fiction which might yet improve as many more books are promised.

Macdonald Countries Series
Macdonald Educational, £5.95 each hbk, £4.95 non-net pbk (all new revised editions)

China: The Land and its People
Anna Merton and Shio-Yun Kan, 0 356 11510 0 hbk, 0 356 11511 9 pbk

France: The Land and its People
Chantal Tunnacliffe, 0 356 11512 7 hbk, 0 356 11513 5 pbk

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

Great Britain: The Land and its People
Anna Sproule, 0 356 11532 1 hbk,
0 356 11533 X pbk

United States of America: The Land and its People
Valerie Schloredt, 0 356 11534 8 hbk,
0 356 11535 6 pbk

In 1974, this series broke new ground and had many excellent features. Some of the books in the series have now been revised and relaunched, with a 35% cut in length and a higher price. The worst elements – the stereotypes and cartoons – have gone. The new text is difficult: strong on complex history but weak on motivation ('A balanced and stable society depended on subordination' – wow!).

'I don't think that children would understand the writing' (Lisa).

'I hate this book because the writing is so small' (Catherine).

On the other hand, there are plenty of good, detailed photographs; 'I like the big beautiful colourful picture in the inside cover' (Emma).

'I like the pieces of writing under the pictures because you can get the whole idea of the pictures' (Leo).

The emphasis is on the urban middle-class: 'I dislike the way they put (a photo of) people at their dinner, because if you are unemployed you would feel that you were being treated unfairly' (Joanna).

The books are worthy and good for reference; but I wonder whether a new series with flair and creativity would have been a better bet. By contrast, **Living at the Poles** by Bernard Stonehouse (0 356 11187 3, £5.50) in the **Just Look at . . .** series by the same publisher, has a lively, fresh and positive feel about the whole book.

Focus on Series
Hamish Hamilton, £5.95 each

Focus on Holland
Christopher Hunt, 0 241 11829 8

Focus on India
Shahrukh A. Husain, 0 241 11823 9

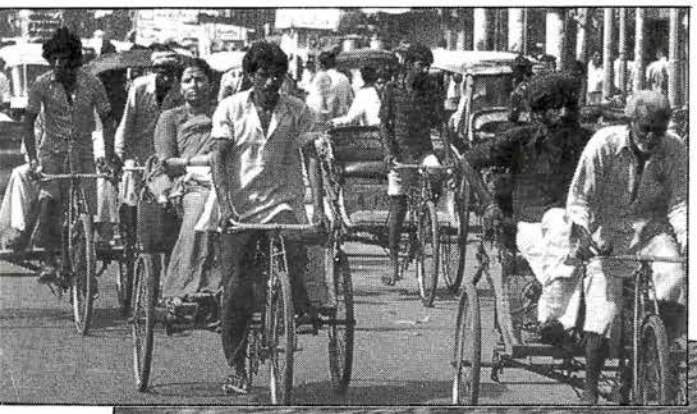
These two books exude quite a cheerful view of the countries concerned. The format is safe and unadventurous, but the two-column layout produces a feeling of variety, nevertheless.
Focus on Holland (why not 'The Netherlands'?) has good air photos: 'I like the pictures because they are taken from above' (Debbie). It is a pity that the captions are so brief. The text is much closer to what 7-11s can cope with and enjoy: 'I like what it says because it helps you to lern (sic)' (Debbie again). There are only a few lapses, e.g. 'Indian thought and philosophy has (sic) also influenced Western attitudes'.

The coverage emphasises positive achievement. **Focus on India** ducks the problem of how to discuss poverty. The Calcutta photograph shows a huge slogan 'Life Assurance for Security'; Mother Theresa seems a million miles away.

The blurb claims the books are a perfect introduction. Perfection is too much to hope for, but these two books would be a useful addition to a library.

None of these books is a disaster – they are all worthy. All are worth having in a library and – if funds permit – in a classroom. But none of them is really exciting or creative. There is still scope for a publisher to do much better – and to cut the price as well. That would be a winning series, without any doubt at all.

To return to the criteria at the start of the article, the books get good marks for brevity and attractiveness. But the text of most of them fails on accessibility, and they all fail on the vital criterion 'enjoyable to read'. We should listen to the children more. ●



Left, from **Focus on India**; below, from **China, The Land and its People**.

David Wright teaches in the School of Education at the unversity of East Anglia. He is involved regularly with middle and secondary schools and has himself written several information books for chlidren.

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

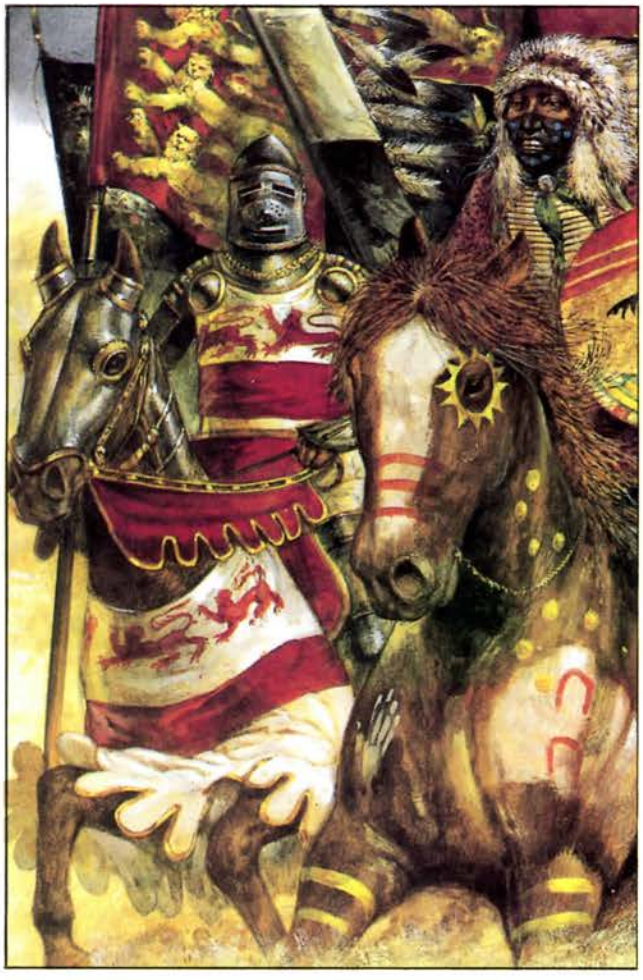
What's New in Information Books?

Keith Barker looks at some innovations.

For some years there has been a tendency in the publishing of information books for children to try to find a new angle in design and presentation. Parts of the body have popped up from the pages, tadpoles have become frogs before our eyes, frogs have trapped flies, bees have danced, as publishers explored the possibilities of exploiting paper engineering to teach and inform.

There have also been interesting developments in the way child readers have been made aware of the way the information presented to them has been gathered. The Halsteads in their books in prehistoric creatures were some of the first to realise the possibilities of blending fact and fiction.

However, whether these newer methods are used or not, there are still important principles involved in the presentation of information to young people: the information should be accurate and up to date, it should be presented in a clear and concise manner and it should be immediately attractive. Does this recent batch of innovative information books stand up to this test or are they merely old stuff tarted up in new clothes?



The Horse Soldier
Martin Windrow and **Richard Hook**, Oxford, 0 19 273157 2, £7.95

The Legend of Odysseus
Peter Connolly, Oxford, 0 19 917065 7, £7.95

Winner of the **TES** senior information award, this is clearly an outstanding way of presenting Greek mythology. Homer's story is intertwined with facts on life at that time and on where modern Greece fits into the fable. The book is attractively and clearly illustrated, the particular success being the monsters (the Scylla bears comparison with Dr Who creations). Unfortunately the dialogue in the story part of the book too often sounds like soap opera with, for instance, Zeus pontificating like a public school head ('Any god that I catch interfering . . . will get a good thrashing and will be expelled from Olympus').

The Horse Soldier
Martin Windrow and Richard Hook, Oxford, 0 19 273157 2, £7.95

Gloriously illustrated, this celebration of horses in battle is similar to Peter Connolly's **Odysseus**. Information on the use of horses in wars from pre-Christian periods to World War One is interspersed with wordy fictional accounts of the lives of ordinary soldiers of the time. Given the proviso that some adults may well feel that this type of information should not be brought to the attention of young people, **The Horse Soldier** does provide its information in an immediately accessible and attractive way while also supplying enough of the gruesome detail which many children relish.

The Vikings: Fact and Fiction
Robin Place, CUP, 0 521 30855 0, £4.25

Using the same technique as the Halsteads in their dinosaur books, Robin Place has created a fresh approach to a well worn topic. The left-hand page of each double spread is devoted to the factual side of life among the Vikings, with easily comprehensible facts, clearly linked to black and white illustrations, and observations on how archaeologists have discovered these facts. The right-hand page tells the fictional story of a group of Vikings throughout a year. A further volume on the Romans is planned for later this year.

Evolution
Raymond Hawkey, Michael Joseph, 0 7181 2725 0, £9.95

A pop-up factual book in the manner of **The Human Body**, **Evolution** shows its true nature on the first double spread when a volcanic eruption spills over and obliterates part of the text. The pop-ups are indeed impressive from the aforementioned volcano to the astronaut who leaps from the moon. The paper engineering is also most successful in its depiction of the catastrophic effect of a meteorite dropping on New York. However, this technical brilliance does tend to push the words into second place although the author is not done a great service by the publishers who often chop the text about to accommodate the illustrations.

The Train
Ray Marshall and John Bradley, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 81322 2, £7.95

In the same series as **The Plane**, winner of the first Smarties innovation award, this is also a good example of successful paper engineering. Happily though, the text and the pictures are more successfully combined with the flaps showing, for example, how power travels from an electric pylon through to an engine to make it move. The writers are able to convey their information in a clear and interesting way with aspects of the subject succeeding each other in a totally logical way.

Outside-in
Clare Smallman, Macdonald, 0 356 11819 3, £5.95

Designed for younger children, this lift-the-flap book shows the inside parts of the bodies as children breathe, eat and move. The concept is laudable although often the flaps are designed so that small fingers cannot manage them very successfully. The illustrations are bright and colourful if not particularly outstanding while the text is clearly written. However, this book still does not replace my favourite body book of all time, Judy Hindley's **How Your Body Works** (Usborne, 1975).

Body Plans
John E. Llewellyn-Jones, CUP, 0 521 31711 8, £1.95

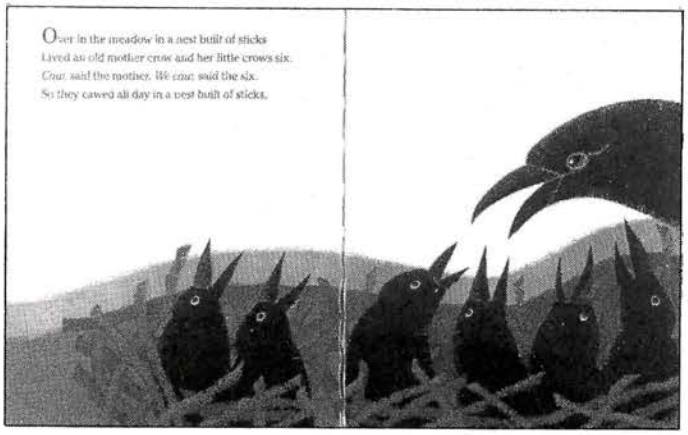
Animal bodies to colour, cut out and stick together so that each model creates a 3-D effect. The list of animals ranges from a snail to a rabbit so that ranged alongside each other, the models do create a problem of perspective! Some are more complex than others while the binding of the book means that some are difficult to cut out (perhaps photocopying or tracing would be better solution and would give the book a longer life?). Whether the idea of creating a model will give young readers the incentive to read the page of dense information accompanying each animal is somewhat doubtful. ●

Keith Barker is Deputy Librarian at Westhill College, Birmingham.

REVIEWS

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.

Nursery/Infant



Over in the Meadow

Olive A. Wadsworth, ill. Mary Maki Rae, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.606 3, £1.75

Learning to read and learning to count come hand in hand in this picturebook rendition of the favourite rhyme. Each of its ten stanzas is strongly rhythmic and there is a predictable pattern with words and phrases repeated throughout. The verses tend to imprint themselves on the memory once heard so youngsters should be able to read the book for themselves once it has been read to them. Mary Maki Rae's illustrations, too, have a strength, the flora and fauna of the meadow being executed in bold blocks of acrylic colour against a textured background. Make sure you get this one. JB

The Little Red Hen

Margot Zemach, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.567 9, £1.75

Another visual interpretation of the ever popular traditional tale. Here the unwilling helpers are cast in the shape of a roguish looking cat, goose and pig whose favourite occupation seems to be playing cards. Both young listeners and apprentice readers will enjoy the natural repetition and the anticipation of the inevitable ending as well as Margot Zemach's water colour illustrations. JB

Wilberforce Goes to a Party

Margaret Gordon, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.472 9, £1.75

It is the irony of the mismatch between the deadpan text and the chaotic scenes of Wilberforce's preparations for, and attendance at, his girl cousin's party which make this book such fun. I suspect adults and older children may appreciate this aspect of the humour best, but the ghastly party dresses, unsuitable presents, house wrecking games and antics of the young guests, and the demolition of the party fare will ring true with every child party goer.

Margaret Gordon's illustrations are exuberance itself; the faces and bodies alike of her many bear characters are alive with vigour and animation. JB

It's Your Turn, Roger!

Susanna Gretz, Picture Lions, 0 00 662577 0, £1.75

Here Susanna Gretz turns her artistic talents from bears to pigs, setting out the nub of the tale in the first few pages and engaging the reader's attention by talking directly to him or her: '"Roger, it's your turn to set the table." That's his sister calling.' Young Roger's reluctance to do his share of helping out leads him to call other occupants of his block of flats (more pigs of various shapes and habits) before he comes to a final realisation of the error of his selfish ways and the appreciation of his own lot. JB

I'm playing with Papa!

Shigeo Watanabe, ill. Yasuo Ohtomo, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.575 X, £1.75

The eighth book no less to feature the lovable bear cub whose escapades continue to amuse young readers. The format is as before with the one or two short lines of large print opposite each illustration and the hero acting as narrator. Here, we share the alternately boisterous and tranquil moments of a typical fun-filled play session between father and son. Not the very best of the series but doubtless the playful pleasures depicted will strike a familiar note with many young readers. JB

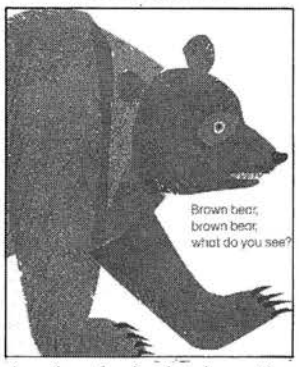
Mog in the Dark

Judith Kerr, Picture Lions, 0 00 662774 9, £2.25

This book has been specially written for beginner readers using only fifty words but I have to admit I found the text disappointingly stilted. In my experience many children tend to alter the words in places to make the story flow to their satisfaction presumably, but they all certainly enjoy Judith Kerr's splendid illustrations of one of their favourite characters and his 'family'; Mog's expressions in particular are sheer delight. So, yes I have reservations but the book is still worth having for the pictures alone. JB

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?

Bill Martin Jr, ill. Eric Carle, Picture Lions, 0 00 662578 9, £1.75



A series of animals take up the question 'What do you see?' each one introducing a new colour. The book is cleverly constructed so that the questions keep the reader turning the pages to find the answers through to the final spread showing smaller versions of each animal appropriately portrayed in its named colour. Carle used a cut paper technique to illustrate Bill Martin Junior's rhythmic, repetitive predictable text. Just the thing for beginner readers for whom I believe the words were originally written. However, the difference between this book and so many others specially constructed is that this one really works and is read over and over by its intended audience. JB

May We Sleep Here Tonight?

Tan Koide, ill. Yasuka Koide, Magnet, 0 416 61630 5, £1.75

Soft crayon illustrations, strongly outlined and shaded to give them a textured effect, give readers a feeling of warmth and empathy for the lost animals in this story in which mice, rabbits and racoons lose their way in the fog and come upon an empty house wherein they discover a cosy looking bed. Their peace is temporarily shattered by a large looming shape but this turns out to be a friendly bear who offers tasty stew and finally his protective company for the night. The fine artwork and gentle, patterned text will give pleasure to learner readers and young listeners who will find in it a reassuring bedtime tale. JB

Arabella the Smallest Girl in the World

Mem Fox, ill. Vicky Kitanov, Hippo, 0 590 70574 1, £1.50

I found this book something of an oddity: Arabella's miniature stature allows the artist and reader to observe familiar objects as larger than life whilst the short text listing the articles has a pleasing pattern and rhythm and rhyme but the pictures tell a far more imaginative story. So, a soap dish becomes a boat with cotton wool stick oars, and ice cream becomes something from which to build a snowman. But the final picture showing Arabella standing in the palm of dad's hand between his and mum's large smiling faces, and captioned with 'She had a story just like ours, with an ending – oh so fine.' I found rather puzzling. JB

Junior/Middle

Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp
Shirley Greenway, pictures by Linda Garland, Piccolo Picture Classics, 0 330 29571 3, £1.75

Hiawatha's Childhood
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ill. Errol Le Cain, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.562 8, £1.75

A disappointing version of Aladdin in the often-interesting Piccolo series. The language is too staid and prosaic to give the young the essential magic of the tale: 'In fact, Aladdin's head was completely turned.' Page layout makes for a very cramped text and the pictures are idealised – the East Gilbert and Sullivan style.

Much more heartening is Picture Puffin's handsome issue of Le Cain's Greenaway winner. The extract from Longfellow's poem is enriched, deepened, illuminated by the detailed and numinous pictures. The artist's interpretation of the sections where the moon rises from the water, of the episode where the owls talk in their native language are enchanting. I've read this with sixes up to elevens and encouraged them to illustrate their own favourite poems. CM

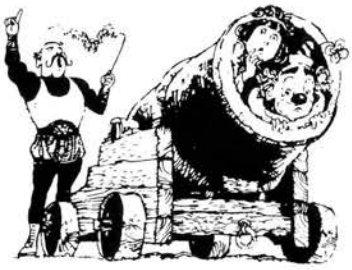
Buttons
Linda Yeatman, ill. Hugh Casson, Hippo, 0 590 70562 8, £1.25

A moving and imaginative story of a dog who is adopted by a little deaf boy. The tale will evoke empathy and understanding, yet it is never patronising. The difficult bits about the disability aren't dodged. Lots of information about the Hearing Dogs for the Deaf, to which a percentage of the profits will go. CM

Princess Polly to the Rescue
Mary Lister, ill. Ron Hanna, Magnet, 0 416 00572 1, £1.50

A lovely, readable and imaginative story about a princess who rescues her boyfriend after braving incredible hardships in order to defeat a wicked witch's magic.

Here is a story for younger juniors to enjoy, with good, old-fashioned witches, ogres, wizards and sorcerers to contend with. No great psychological/philosophical meanderings here, just good humour and a viable storyline. Not that Mary Lister is guilty of rehashing old fairy tale formats, for she does attempt to be innovative – and, feminists please note, the princess rescues the prince!



I love the humour – the ogre 'Sheamus O'Gre', the sorceress 'Cuppandsorceress', all add colour to the tale. Best I like the strong opening chapter with Haggis the witch and 'Zoroaster' her pet dragon in their dishevelled kitchen. The reader is caught and hooked for the story's duration. I will be using this with my class to make a play. Certainly worth including in the school library and/or bookshop. NS

Nonstop Nonsense
Margaret Mahy, ill. Quentin Blake, Magnet, 0 416 00552 7, £1.75

An apt title for a book of nonsense this and, like the author's **The Birthday Burglar**, it is knee deep in awful alliteration. Mediocre verse, but gems of stories in 'When Anna Hung Upside Down', 'The Insect Kingdom that didn't Get Started' and 'Frightening the Monster in Wizard's Hole'.

These pithy tales take simple actions and caricature their performers in a clever, benign yet sardonic manner. An

original vision and an unsentimental view of human nature: in 'The Insect Kingdom', the spider and the fly resolve to live in mutual harmony whilst danger lurks, yet, when this passes, natural dispositions see all resolves falter (shades of Aesop here); in 'The Monster in Wizard's Hole', the herding instinct is strong, as is human optimism.

An acquired taste, to be enjoyed at different levels depending on the individual. Quentin Blake's idiosyncratic illustrations are certainly relevant. For 9-year-olds upwards. NS

A Packet of Poems
Selected by Jill Bennett, Oxford, 0 19 276066 1, £2.50

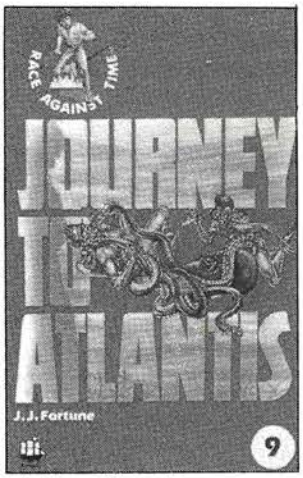
'I'm lost among a maze of cans, behind a pyramid of jams, quite near asparagus and rice, close to the Oriental spice . . .' Ramblings among the supermarket shelves get this excellent collection of poems about food, a novel idea, off on a good footing. Some consciously clever ('Say Cheese' by Kit Wright, 'O Sliver of Liver' from Mary Livingston), but the majority mainly 'fun' poems, both to delight and amuse youngsters. Some old favourites, like 'Through the teeth/And past the gums/Look out stomach/ Here it comes,' and the evergreen anthem of doomed youth, school dinners, 'If you stay to school dinners/Better throw them aside/A lot of kids didn't/A lot of kids died. BB

Journey to Atlantis
0 00 692649 5

Danger due North
0 00 692648 7

J. J. Fortune, Armada, £1.75 each

Some authors spill out stories at a seemingly never-ending pace. Like the 'Hardy Boys' series, each book by J. J. Fortune mirrors the others. They portray dastardly deeds committed by archetypal crooks, who are overcome by American super sleuths. With



A-Team 'finesse' no-one gets killed, and implausible situations are always surmounted. Easy to read, middle school material – pure escapism! NS

Hocus Pocus
Comp. Leslie Young, ill. Babette Cole, Magnet, 0 416 52450 8, £1.95

Another book spawned by/for the current 'in' craze for ghosts, witches and such trivia. If witch recipes, portraits of the 'wee people', superstitions and mediocre poetry strike some dismal chord, then this is the book for you.

Illustrations for **Hocus Pocus** caricature their subjects successfully, but the picture book format may encourage the younger reader to expect an easier text. NS

Sleuth!
Sherlock Ransford, Hippo, 0 590 70573 3, £1.50

This is no classic of fictional writing, but a confederacy of 20 mediocre 'whodunnit' crime stories, which might appeal to a Top Junior age child.

Basically, one has to pit one's skill against the perpetrators of a whole range of dastardly deeds, using clues to solve the cases. Some clues employed are informative, and involve semaphore, cypher, Morse code, etc., but some are mundane. The cartoon-type case studies are especially crude in their drawing and 'plot'.

The concept behind the book is laudable, but the quality is questionable. I don't feel I'd stock it in the school bookshop. NS

Reviews in this issue by:
David Bennett, Jill Bennett, Bill Boyle, Terrie Downie, Colin Mills, Nigel Spencer and Val Randall.

Middle/Secondary

Shepherd's Flock

Elizabeth Gowans, Magnet, 0 416 95900 8, £1.75

A tale about a ragamuffin Scottish hill farm family of five children, who enjoy a number of adventures ranging from befriending an old 'witch' and helping an orphan, to tackling a heather fire and discovering sheep rustlers. This is a sedate adventure book for Top Junior children, and needs patience to be fully appreciated. Whilst it is interesting to follow the development of the various characters, there is a lethargy about the style which lacks an immediacy of impact. For the well motivated reader this is tolerable; but I suspect there will be many who will not stay the course. NS

The Carpenter and Other Stories

Susan Price, ill. Barbara Brown, Puffin, 0 14 03.2049 0, £1.75

A singular, melancholic collection of stories, certainly different from the usual type of magical fantasy. Here are fiends, bogeys, elves et al – but not in the same way that recognised storytellers like Ruth Manning-Sanders would be enjoyed.

I would recommend this book for the discerning teenager, for although the odd tale would be suitable for younger children, some would be hard to comprehend. Well, how do you explain to a young child why the Pope in one of the stories wears a lady's slipper, or why in another Christ commanded half a woman's family to become the Hidden People?

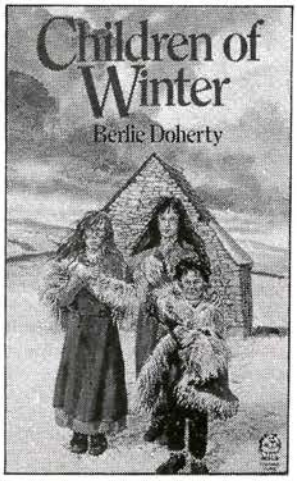
Confused? Intrigued? Well, buy the book; it's an acquired taste which might well have cult appeal. Highly enjoyable . . . in a gothic sort of way! NS

Children of Winter

Berlie Doherty, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672583 X, £1.75

Jill Paton Walsh having covered the plague in Eyam, Berlie Doherty has deftly centred her Derbyshire plague story on another, unspecified village. The tragic events of the past vividly superimpose themselves on three modern-day children sheltering in an old cruck barn. Their receptivity is heightened by their likely kinship to three ancestors, who used the barn in 1666 as a refuge from the pestilence and barely survived to tell the tale.

After the creaky start the tale within the tale slowly unfolds with a strong sense of

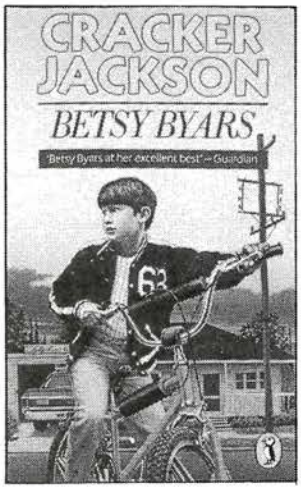


Derbyshire, but not too much of history. For readership in the upper junior/lower secondary range. DB

Cracker Jackson

Betsy Byars, Puffin, 0 14 03.1881 X, £1.75

Jackson Hunter's mother is an over-protective nag and his father a cloud-cuckoo-land fool. Little wonder ex-babysitter Alma figures so largely in his affections. She gave him instinctively all that was lacking elsewhere – love, adventure and a pet name. Now Alma is in deep trouble with her bully husband Billy Ray. It looks as though only Jackson and his friend Goat can help, but that takes desperate measures . . .



Distinctively Betsy Byars, this should please her many devotees. I was struck by a strong sense of déja vu. DB

Screaming High

David Line, Puffin, 0 14 03.2052 0, £1.75

This takes fifty-odd pages to get under way and then becomes a swift-moving, exciting, adventure yarn in the **Run for Your Life** mould. This one centres on Amsterdam drug dealers and two lads, one a minder to a highly volatile trumpet prodigy – a novel angle!

David Line has a sure touch with first-person teenager narratives but some of the solutions to his characters' dilemmas involve fiendishly complicated mechanisms, which take a bit of visualising. I hope this and the initial slow pace doesn't deter less-determined readers seduced by the cover blurb. DB

Sandwriter

Monica Hughes, Magnet, 0 416 95520 7, £1.75

Duneish. Loved the Kroklyns (see cover). Spoilt Princess Antia learns to love the island desert life of Roshan, whose secret is imparted to her by the ancient Sandwriter. Can she safeguard it from her scheming aunt, Queen of Kamalant? Will she marry Jodril, heir to Roshan? The sequel(s) will tell us. TD

Dragon Dance

John Christopher, Puffin, 0 14 03.2056 3, £1.75

To follow **Dragon Dance** effectively, you really need to have read the two earlier books in John Christopher's 'Fireball' trilogy: **Fireball** and **New Found Land**. In précis, Brad and Simon, the heroes, have had a bewildering time since passing through the fireball, a mere two and a half years ago. They've covered over eight thousand kilometres, and now find themselves in the middle of a civil war in China. Or could it all be a dream? Perhaps, Brad hints, it's hallucination induced by indigestion. 'That's the trouble with Chinese food.' Well, there are extracts from authentic Chinese philosophy, doubtless taken from the mottoes in authentic Chinese crackers, to add realism. Sample. 'At night all cats are grey.' I'm sure that line was in an old Charlie Chan film. BB

Asimov's Extraterrestrials

0 583 30986 0

Asimov's Monsters

0 583 30987 9

Asimov's Mutants

0 583 30967 4

Isaac Asimov, Martin Greenberg and Charles Waugh (ed), Dragon Grafton, £1.95 each

You see whiz-readers and plod-readers with such collections. I'd invite both to pull the books around, physically even. Fine tough binding, big print but not insulting, deep line-spaces. Curious story intros: *Children often use their parents' behaviour as a model for their own actions; In acquiring followers, it is not always wise to depend on blind faith; Carl Jung's speculations about ancestral memories may have inspired this poignant little tale.* Where and why first published? (1934-1982) Why selected here? Would you put the stories (about a dozen in each) in this order? Would you edit? What are the arguments and values of Asimov's introductions? Are they the thinking of the eighties? Or invitations *not* to challenge commonsense science and morality? Am I taking a few SF anthologies too seriously? Well, as Asimov says: 'What is important about human beings is their enormous brain.' And what is important about SF is that 'we have the fun of temporary fear.' TD

A Pair of Desert Wellies

Sylvia Sherry, Puffin, 0 14 03.2041 5, £1.95

It's worth re-reading (or reading) Sylvia Sherry's earlier **A Pair of Jesus Boots** before starting on this sequel. They are all here again – Rocky O'Rourke, the Cats, Chick's Lot, Mrs Flanagan, and company – to remind us why the first book was so popular, before 'Scully' or 'The Blackstuff' made Liverpool settings acceptable on a literature menu. 'Ellen-from-upstairs' baby', 'the drifting smell of fish and chips', and Rocky's murky mates, who are all 'good skins', effortlessly contribute to the authenticity of the writing. Welcome home Nabber, Beady and Little Chan. In your own ways you have a lot to say, so don't let anyone tell you to 'shurrup'. BB

Thomas and the Warlock

Mollie Hunter, Magnet, 0 416 51770 6, £1.50

Thomas the Warlock, or Thomas Thomson to give him his full name, was the blacksmith in a little village in the Lowlands of Scotland. He enjoyed poaching, and generally treated life as fun, until, one day, he had the misfortune to meet the tall stranger. Shades of Tam O' Shanter in chases through dark woods, with the scent of menace and superstition heavy in the pages. 'He cast no shadow – no shadow at all.' When the strange woman comes to the smithy and requests an iron pot to be made by Thomas, events move swiftly towards conflict between the powers of Good and Evil. BB

Bridle the Wind

Joan Aiken, Puffin, 0 14 03.1896 8, £2.50

This is a further adventure of Felix Brooke, hero of **Go Saddle the Sea**; this time in the company of a deceptive, poetic waif-fugitive, Juan, whom he rescues from a lynching. Their adversaries as they make their perilous Pyrenean journey are the forest brigands and a malevolent devil-incarnate Abbot, Father Vaspasian. Fortunately God seems to be on the side of the angels and as usual He wins!

There aren't too many recent stories around like this – set in the old-fashioned high-adventure mould. I hope that there are some modern kids around who don't judge a book by its number of pages and have the stamina to stick with the lengthy twists and turns, right up to the final marvellous surprise – which means don't read the last few pages until you've read the rest. DB

Gargling with Jelly

Brian Patten, Puffin, 0 14 03.1904 2, £1.50

Full marks for the most original title of the year in 'kiddie-lit' for this amazing new collection from Puffin. Brian Patten, original Mersey Poet of McGough, Henri & Patten, Sixties Liverpool boomtime fame, now established writer/playwright/author, presents a memorable assortment of poems for 'children'. Comic inventions (The Maggitflew), fantasy (Billy Dreamer's Fantastic Friends), and nonsense (I've Never Heard the Queen Sneeze), rub shoulders with more serious, message poems (The Children's Fall-Out Shelter). Room for one sample please? The PE Teacher Wants to be Tarzan (and we all remember one of those!): 'The PE teacher sits and dreams/ Of swinging through the trees/ Of taking jungle holidays/ And crushing pythons with his knees.' BB

Older Readers

A Solitary Blue

Cynthia Voigt, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672683 6, £1.95

I am a self-confessed Cynthia Voigt addict and have been known to re-route new editions before they reach our school library shelves. Here is another fine literary experience in the story of Jeff Greene, alternately deserted and betrayed by his mother, Melody, and finding a way out of his self-imposed emotional isolation in the shape of the Zillerman family. Through them – and Dicey in particular – he comes to the realisation that he can accept that doing the right thing sometimes means hurting the people he cares about. More than this, he finds the courage to come to terms with the range of emotions necessarily felt as a result of committing oneself to others.

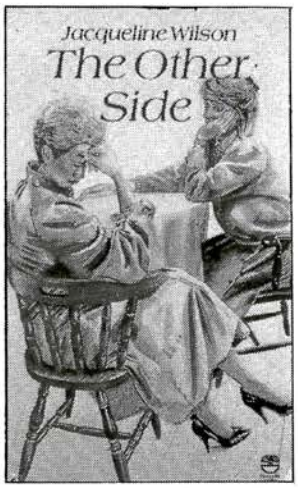
Although **A Solitary Blue** is officially a sequel to **Dicey's Song**, it can also be offered independently of it: insist that top third-years and capable fourths and fifths read it! VR

The Other Side

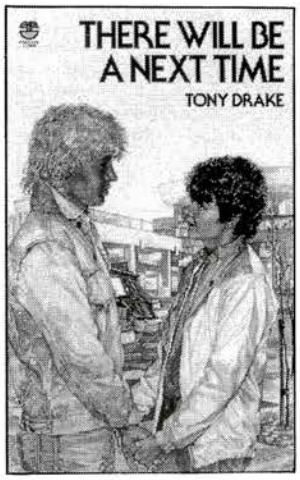
Jacqueline Wilson, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672596 1, £1.95

Her seemingly indomitable mother's nervous breakdown shocks Alison to the core, but worse is yet to come when she is forced to stay with her father, his new wife and step-daughter. The whole sequence of traumas, that really began with Gran's death, makes Chrissie, Alison's six-year-old brother, escape by reverting to babyhood, but for Alison release comes through vivid fantasies that prove nearly fatal.

There's a lot of anger and pain in this book. Ms Wilson has managed to convey very convincingly just how the breakdown of relationships



leaves only victims in its wake, no winners. A moving novel for mid-late secondary readers. DB



There Will Be a Next Time

Tony Drake, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672594 5, £1.95

A thinking teenager's love story about responsibility. Jennie and friends build a 'protect and survive' nuclear shelter to demonstrate its uselessness. Living in it, in the town square, raises tensions between and within people and their beliefs. She falls for drifter Lou, nearly leaves with him but decides: 'There were too many things she had to do with her life, and running away was not one of them.' Recommendable: lots of side issues to discuss. TD

Biker

Jon Hardy, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.2037 7, £1.50

A fine first (children's) novel, which I've enjoyed twice and will re-read. Interesting involvement trick – can you find the narrator's name? Could be read as five stories (blurb suggests) but I'd say novel. Hardy has a very sure hand with story, voice and style. Language is instantly available, and respects readers. Voice is consistent and credible. Story holds you by its drive and with lightly-trailed openings for more stories. Don't let my totting-up put you off or turn you on to mere usefulness: work/no work and class, parents, friends, police; mystery, humour, danger, tragedy. The teller likes bikes, dislikes office work, becomes a despatch rider. He sees, thinks, comments, feels, survives. My only quarrel (as reader not reviewer) is with the last page – does it open or close? I'd recommend this book to almost all teenage readers I can think of; hope you do. TD

The Other Side of the Clyde

Edited by David Drever and Liam Stewart, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.2051 2, £1.95

Is this the book of the cultural city of the year? How will it go down and who with? It describes itself as a collection of the voices of Glasgow, including poems by Douglas Dunn, Edwin Morgan, Liz Lochhead and stories of very varying lengths and subjects, Alasdair Gray among the writers. (Showing my ignorance: which of the others are known/unknown?)

Different bits will appeal to very different readers: gritty short story; compressed, allusive poem . . . If you can interest them in bits they like, will they also sample the unfamiliar territory? The writers in some sense represent Glasgow but I can't see that having much significance to the readers. Unless they're Glaswegian. There's some splendid writing but I think you'll have to try hard to sell it. TD

Going Back

Penelope Lively, Puffin, 0 14 03.1974 3, £1.50

Puffin *Plus*, I'd say; buy lots, now you can. It's short, very accessible and takes you in dozens of directions – family, class, gender, place, time . . . Narrator revisits childhood house. A few pages establish the present and then we're early WW2. Childhood, people, landscape, the war years are beautifully made real. The hard centre is father, seldom present, always life-threatening (not physically) to daughter and son, which is why they ran away. Recalling this is the book's flow and 'reason' – to explain to the narrator's husband. So: layers of interest and of writing. Three for the library, 30 for the 4th year. Take them on from **Carrie's War**, through to Jane Gardam, with poetry on the way. TD

Authorgraph No. 43

Katherine Paterson

'The best advice to a writer – at least the best I took because you only take the advice you want – is from Dickens: "Make 'em laugh, make 'em weep, and above all make 'em wait!" I go through the full circle of human feelings in the course of a book.'

She certainly does – a Katherine Paterson novel is a tough emotional experience for anyone. She is a gutsy lady, whose full life has known sorrow but whose laugh is positively boisterous. 'My theory is that your book is you – you're revealing yourself willy-nilly. So it's not that I insert hope artificially because I believe you should for young readers; it's because I'm basically a hopeful person that it will come out that way.

'As everyone points out, I write the same book over and over: the story of the child on the outside trying to get in.' She has been that child. Her parents were missionaries who had already lived in China for nine years when she was born. Her father, unlike most foreigners, was deeply interested in Chinese culture, and they lived in the walled compound of a boys' school with the only other foreigners some miles away in the town, so that her early years completely absorbed the Chinese way of life.

'In those days there were always revolutions and things, but the summer I was four, while we were away in the mountains, war broke out in earnest. My father returned to our home, but had to cross alternately Chinese lands and Japanese lands and bandit country, while my mother waited for weeks with us five small children for news of him. A year later, in 1937, the children were sent to America (via Japan and England: 'I used to say I'd seen every zoo in every port-city in the world'), but after Japan had occupied great expanses of China and the country seemed stabilised, they returned.

'My mother was teaching us then because we lived out of Shanghai, so we'd have mixed feelings when the Japanese came to interrogate my parents – it meant school would be let out, but although they were only sitting in our living room drinking tea and asking questions, it was still pretty edgy.'

Eventually, in 1940, they all came home to America. She grew up in various parts of the South, but it took time to make her way as an American child: 'I had this British accent from my schooling in Shanghai, and I was weird anyway from this Chinese upbringing . . . I have no real roots at all!' Her father was a pastor but at first had no job. 'We were refugees, really, and lived with my aunt – a wonderful, good-humoured artist who made an awful situation bearable. Later we moved house all the time, sometimes four in the same city; after the war we were all ready to return to China – packed, shots, the lot – when the situation deteriorated badly.' Her parents never saw China again.

This was the child who played games in her head, the private and secret games she sees now as the direct parallel of the first draft of her novels. 'I'm only really happy when I've got a good book going, but it has to come from something I care about – until an idea takes root I don't feel whole, yet it often takes so long I think I'll never write another book. That's when my family suffers!'

She took her first degree in English, with an advanced degree in Bible studies; at 24 she went to Japan for four years, before returning on a fellowship for another degree at Union Seminary, New York. John Paterson, a graduate of Union, had returned on a three-week programme for ministers who had been out for some years, and she met him just the night before he left. He, like her father, is a pastor, and she is the only one of her own family who has remained professionally linked with the Church.

The price of success in the States is the demand for lectures and public speaking. 'It leads to total schizophrenia, because what makes you a writer is not what makes you a public person! It was after such an event, fuming over the way she had been turned into *the* Katherine Paterson – 'either a thing or a god, but not a human being' – that she remembered a school in Virginia she had been to when she was 13. 'All the children from outside the system were put into one "misfits" class, and with me was Anita Carter, from the famous Carter family who were among the first to record country music – every Saturday night she sang on a live radio programme with her sisters and mother. So here we had this little celebrity in our class, but she was extremely shy and, because of all the touring, behind her work, and I was asked to tutor her. I'd like to say I was kind to her, but in truth I was always awkward around her, and we never treated her like one of us. She was always something else just because she was on the radio. And I thought, if it's hard for me now, what must it have been like for a child?

'And that was the germ for **Come Sing, Jimmy Jo** – not the music, which arose only because it was the one medium where there wouldn't be the money to go with the fame. So my family had to hear country music all the time while I learnt about it! I did have fun with that book, composing take-offs of country-style songs. I haven't much training, but I love to sing.

Even more of an outsider is the great Gilly Hopkins, that rascal who is a match for everything the world throws at her except real love – more splendid lump-in-the-throat stuff, in spite of being intended as her funny book. 'I thought Gilly would be my little orphan child, because she came after the National Book Award for **Master**

Puppeteer and the Newbery for **Terabithia**, but no, she got the Newbery honour book and the National Book Award!' Two of the Patersons' children are adopted: their elder daughter, now 24, was rescued from the streets of Hong Kong when she was a few weeks old, and their younger, at 18, is a full-blooded Native American. In between come two sons of 22 and 20, and an outstandingly handsome bunch they all are in the photograph she proudly passes over.

Had she been trying to draw in two other 'outside' children to the warmth of belonging? 'I've never thought about it that way. We were nearly 30 when we married, and it was the fashion then to worry about adding to the world's population, so if we wanted kids . . . It turned out well for us, they're all lovely children.'

The realisation that many adults remain crippled by childhood jealousies bred **Jacob Have I Loved**. 'I always want to say to them, let go of it, don't be crippled for the rest of your life by the true or imagined hurts of childhood! Louise and Caroline are twins because I've always wanted to use the Jacob and Esau story – if you need a potent story the Bible's a good place to go. It probably calls for the oldest readership of my books, and I'm appalled when I hear of young ones reading it.'

But, strong though the idea was, she couldn't move until it had its own place, its own setting. 'A friend gave me a wonderful book called "Beautiful Swimmers", which is the Latin name for the crabs of the Chesapeake Bay, and I suddenly knew my setting. The island people are still fiercely independent and very interesting, still speaking an archaic so-called Elizabethan dialect. I shifted the story back to the war so a woman could be allowed to do men's work on the boats, and to increase that sense of isolation.'

Jacob Have I Loved brought her a second Newbery Medal. The story of the first, of how **Bridge to Terabithia** was born out of her own peculiar hell, is as devastating as the book itself. **Terabithia** followed her Japanese novels, the first two of which were well reviewed in Britain but didn't sell, so that the last, **The Master Puppeteer**, was turned down, though it went on to win the National Book Award in America.

'I was working on **Master Puppeteer** when I was diagnosed as having cancer. Then my son's best friend, Lisa, was killed. By lightning. One child on a sunny beach. It was too bizarre to happen in a book! Lightning to a child – to any of us – seems like the Hand of God. So here are my children thinking that their mother is going to die, and David's best friend is killed. He was eight. It was a dreadful autumn, for him, for all of us – he was a wreck. He said to me one night, "I finally figured out why God Killed Lisa. Lisa wasn't bad – he killed her because *I'm* bad. Next He's going to kill Mary, then you, then Daddy, then John" – and he went on down the list . . . God was going to knock us off one by one.

'Well, the reason the *book* got written was because at that time we were living a block out of Washington D.C., in Maryland, and I belonged to a group called the Children's Book Guild of Washington, and at one meeting someone said casually to me, how are the children? It just pushed a button in me, and out it all poured, all about David's grief, and when I finished, an editor from New York, whom I'd not met before, simply said, "You should write that story."

'Lisa had died in August, and this was February, so it was still too close, but I thought it might help me to sort it all out. I kept coming at it, round and round, writing on the backs of envelopes to pretend I wasn't really doing a book, sneaking round the subject . . . When I thought I was ready, I tried a typed draft, but I became stuck just before the chapter where Lesley dies. I couldn't stand that – the only way to keep her alive was not to write it.

'Then a close friend said to me, "I don't think it's *Lisa's* death . . ." I hadn't put that together at all, but I knew then that if it was my own I had to face it. I had to. I can feel it right now: goosebumps and sweat pouring down while I forced myself to finish that book, knowing it was no good but that it was simply an exercise in *finishing*.

'I sent it to my editor absolutely terrified, sick – it was so personal, so *me* – for *she* didn't know anything about the cancer or the death or anything. Then she called me on the phone: "I laughed through the first two-thirds and cried through the last. Now let's make it a real book!"

'I had had the catharis, and after that painful, awful first draft the re-writing was the happiest experience I've ever had! I sent it off with the note, "I know love is blind, because I've just sent you a flawless manuscript!"' – and she leans back and shouts with delighted laughter. It's as if the tension of that nightmare had been broken all over again.

That was thirteen years ago. Today, though the cautious check-ups continue, good health and vitality beam out from her, and the talk drifts easily enough to other topics. She regards **Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom** as her hardest book, because of the sheer complexity of its subject, the Taiping rebellion in nineteenth-century China. Her first stories were set in eighteenth-century Japan and, like writers in Britain, she had been told children don't read historical novels. 'I thought we can't know that until they're in paperback, because that's what children themselves buy. Now they are, and they sell.

'I believe in historical fiction, because part of the problem in the States, and maybe elsewhere, is that children have never understood what history is for – why bother about it? One of the reasons America is in such a mess is because Reagan never read history. The tragic story of the Taiping is exactly the story of our nation: here is a country founded on these wonderful ideals, not discovering them on the way but founded on them, and we'll *kill* anyone who doesn't agree with us.'

She is 'a very active member of the Democratic party', and fiercely loyal to her fellow Southerner, the maligned and misused Carter, yet touches only lightly on the struggle of blacks in her novels. 'I'm white – I'd be crucified if I tried. Eventually maybe, but not now. But I hate to pretend there are no black children in the States . . . I was nervous about tackling Eleazer Jones in **Jimmy Jo**, but some of my children's friends did talk like that – you can't spell it as it is or it will be as unintelligible as Uncle Remus, but you must get the sound, the rhythm, in the reader's head – and there are such black kids who are outlaws, whom teachers half-fear, half-hate.'

The emotional turmoil of her books inevitably produces letters from children with problems of their own, which she finds scary. 'It's one thing if you've got your arm round a child right there with you, another thing if the child's thousands of miles away.

'There's a lot of Blume-bashing among the literary elite of America, but the truth is that they're probably jealous of the response she gets from children. She was the centre of a particularly celebrated case in Michigan where three of her books were removed from the shelves, and our Authors' Guild asked me to sign a protest letter – six of us signed – and she wrote thanking me, saying how isolated she had felt. (And she is, simply because her sales are so far beyond everyone else's, and people like to think, "Oh, I'm a better writer than she is".) But she made a point I have quoted over and over, it's so important: when we remove a book from the shelves we have to look at what we're saying to children, and that is, "If you don't like someone's ideas, get rid of them!"'

A rootless outsider maybe, but the child Katherine grew into a passionate writer, a fighter for truth, and a generous, tolerant woman. ●

Katherine Paterson was interviewed by Stephanie Nettell.

Photograph courtesy of Gollancz.

The Books

(published in hardback by Gollancz and in paperback by Puffin)

Bridge to Terabithia, 0 575 02550 6, £6.95 hbk; 0 14 03.1260 9, £1.75 pbk

Come Sing, Jimmy Jo, 0 575 03737 7, £6.95 hbk; 0 14 03.2176 4, £1.95 pbk

The Great Gilly Hopkins, 0 575 02587 5, £6.95 hbk; 0 14 03.1302 8, £1.50 pbk

Jacob Have I Loved, 0 575 02961 7, £6.95 hbk; 0 14 03.1471 7, £1.75 pbk

Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom, 0 575 03329 0, £6.95 hbk; 0 14 03.1735 X, £1.95 pbk

Star of Night: Stories for Christmas, 0 575 02886 6, £6.95 hbk

SOUND & VISION

TV Reality – The Dangers and the Opportunities

Bernard Ashley considers the issues facing the writer of television for children.

'My dad hit my mum against the wall and made the cat miaow.' That's a seven-year-old girl giving her news to a teacher in school last week. 'She's got a big mark down her face.'

I heard about 'Peter', who had scalded his hand. He was doing something for his mother. For the past five years since her divorce he had lived with her and his doting grandparents; he was pouring out her hot water bottle. His hand slipped. 'Serves you bloody-well right!' his new stepfather told him. 'Teach you to be more careful.'

Two incidents for two children in the same week, between bouts of watching the television. Behind the front doors of their homes some children see things and hear things and have things done to them – as the world increasingly knows – which we would prefer to think don't happen.

They are 100 percent members of our society, not a part of some protected minority sect. In my own childhood, while we read our adventure yarns, the bombs missed only the children who had been evacuated from the cities, as they killed children indiscriminately in Tripoli less than a year ago. And was Auschwitz for the over-sixteens?

Are we, the creators of story for children, in the business of evacuation? Making sense of the world requires repeated experiences. We can classify only when we've had experience of several or many. Even real experiences, on their own, are an impossible base for generalisation. Daddies hitting mummies are not the way things are when it happens only once (children hitting children is much more of a truth) but repeated and repeated and repeated – and the paper pattern can be cut out in the steel. The view of the world we grow up with is the one we grow up among. And the nearer television comes to home, the more similarities there are and the closer to reality they come, the more those television images will form part of real life 3D experiences, and the more they count in the growing process. And the older the child, the clearer the television experience, the more crucial it becomes.

From about the age of 12, when the mind can classify and generalise, the young take stances. They begin to decide where *they* stand, and are beginning to see why people are what they are. They see things from other people's points of view. This ability is a marker of beginning to be mentally mature. And some people – and they can't always help it – never ever reach that intellectual stage.

This is the stage of child development with which I'm particularly concerned in this context. With these older children we will want to share ideas and experiences, argue a case, show what evil is before it's conquered by good. Not to do so is to deny their needs. It isn't what we include, I suggest, it's *how* we include it.

Going back to Peter who was scalded and his stepfather. I am sure that Peter hates that man as Patsy Bligh hated her stepfather, Eddie Green, in my **Break in the Sun**. So I explored in the book, as Alan England reflected in the television dramatisation, why that man was what he was. In a moment of reminiscence, to which both book and television had built, he told of his childhood and of his own hateful father.

'It was like this – an' you might cotton or you might not, but this is 'ow it went –' Eddie Green leant forward with his hands dangling across his knee. 'My old man and me, we didn't 'it it off, right? Weren't the best of friends. I was a bit on the small side, an' 'e was a great mountain of a man.' Eddie Green snorted. 'No one ever 'ad an argument with my old man on 'is own. So I didn't come off too strong, you know what I mean? The old lady stuck up for me now and again, but there's no two ways about it, to 'im I was bad news. An' like it 'appens, the more I tried, the worse I got . . .'

His eyes were half closed, and now he could have been telling all this to Kenny, or just explaining some memory to himself.

'. . . We're digging the garden an' I can't keep my end up, I get one row done to 'is ten. So 'e ain't pleased. 'E gets me painting the ceiling while 'e's doing a door, and I can't keep going fast enough to keep the edge alive. It ends up all blotchy. Again, 'e ain't pleased. The van won't start an' I'm no good for pushing, an' my feet don't reach the pedals for letting in the clutch. All that sort of thing.' His voice went very low. 'Some days I 'ated 'is guts so much I was planning 'ow I was gonna kill 'im in the night. I'm praying to God for the strength. But I know 'e'd wake up an' 'ave me. So I got used to letting it out in other ways . . .'

Kenny sat with his head back and tried to keep an expressionless look on his face.

'. . . Yeah, after one of those do's I'd clear off on my bike an' do stupid things – like deliberately go swimming when the water was dangerous, or go chasing across the railway line so close to a train I can't risk a slip – or I go up the towers an' jump till I feel better.' He tapped Kenny on the knee as if he thought he wasn't listening. 'See, the way them towers was built, a little kid could jump across near the middle, where they nearly touched: the jump next to the gangway's only about two feet across. But as you go further sideways so your jump 'as to get bigger an' bigger to get you over. Some days when I was in a real state I'd jump along the three of 'em, hell or nothing, as wide, or wider, as I reckon I can push myself, where it's over on to the next one or down fifty feet to the ground. An' I've proved something, see? So I feel a bit better, just being alive, I s'pose, an' off on my bike before the foreman catches me . . .'

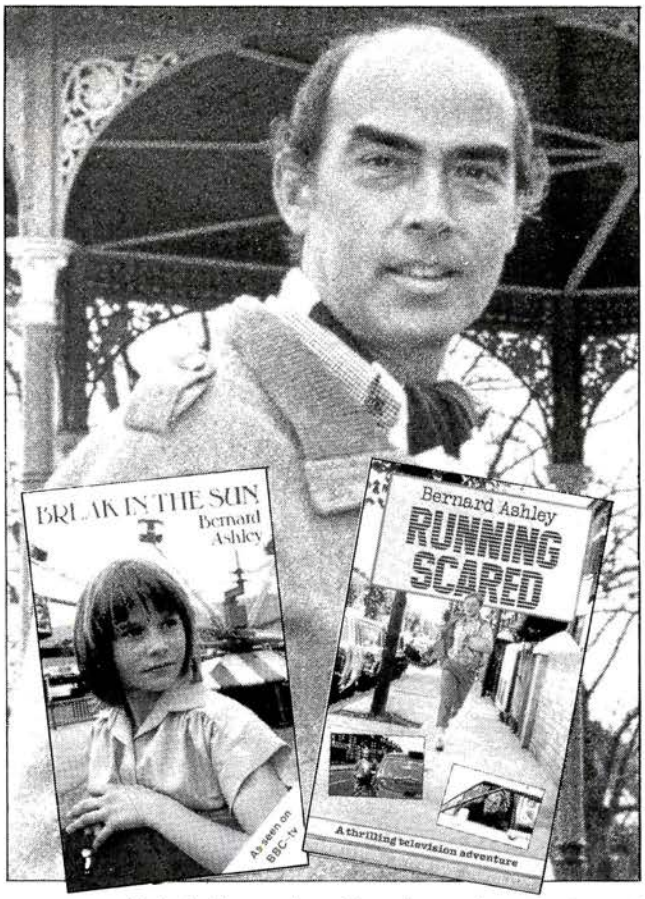
Kenny measured the towers inside his head – Eddie Green would definitely have killed himself if he'd missed his jump.

'. . . See, I'm so bloody miserable I'm either gonna kill myself doing it, or prove to myself it don't matter a toss what my old man thinks of me, because I've got guts . . .'

Kenny's chins concertina'd in a slow nod. Eddie Green wasn't on his own. He could think of more than one who felt like that . . .

The character who changed the most in that story *was* Eddie, because Kenny, by understanding him, helped the man to understand himself.

What we're getting away from in realistic television is the stereotyped image of goodies and baddies, suggesting instead that people behave in certain ways for certain reasons. But none of this works if it's written as medicine. The issue must emerge from the story, not the story from the issue. Patsy Bligh didn't wet the bed to bring comfort to bed-wetters (although she did), nor did Eddie Green have a poor childhood to help my Peter at school. Both issues arose out of the needs of the story. The other way around and it's a bit like the BBC's famous 'Grove Family', the first British TV soap, when government advice was written into the scripts (and I've seen some pretty heavy 'messages' on **Brookside** and **EastEnders**). I really don't know whether the **Grange Hill** drug-taking issue grew naturally out of the story or not; but drug-taking exists – and that's another point. Children at this mature stage of mental operations know when we're pretending things *don't* exist. Sometimes they accept the pretence. Sometimes children welcome us not knowing about the secret



Bernard Ashley.

moments of their lives. At other times they don't, and perhaps we lose our credibility as programme makers and writers when we leave it to soaps like **EastEnders** to show things sort-of the way they really are. Two hours in the early evening is all that separates **Grange Hill** from **Coronation Street**. And **EastEnders** regularly features in the top three of children's viewing, five to fifteen. The fiction is very 'real' for some. As another seven-year-old said in school (having watched Angie's attempted suicide on **East Enders**), 'She took all them tablets, like my mum did when my dad run off.' Having lived through the real thing, is that child any worse off for seeing it on television? One part of me says she might draw comfort from it; another says the reality of both real and television situations still isn't understood; yet another says I'd be happier if we could *shape* that experience for her to enable her to grow from it.

I believe it's vitally important that story should not shirk the realities of life, majority or minority life. Like the caveman, everyone needs to rehearse life's strategies; we all need to pre-hear the voices. But we must always shape – in hope. When, in **Running Scared** the horrible Brian threatens, or Elkin himself, when we've seen the effect their criminal ways of life have on themselves and on others, we need to know, if society is to survive, that there is a Detective Inspector McNeill who has a voice as well.

'It's a weird thing how people's first reaction isnae "murder-polis!" but "keep it quiet, keep it under y' hat". An' I never can figure out why. People think the villians o' this world hold all the aces . . .' And here he stretched his palm, like a boy for the strap – 'But you show me a wee handful o' guts, a small enough dose of courage to sit on a kiddie's hand, an' I can do the rest.' And his hand went to his heart, meaning it. 'That's a solemn promise, mae friends.'

But McNeill's message is meaningless – and this is the point of shaping-in some earlier menace – unless we've got something to compare it with. You can rarely draw any satisfaction from 'good' conquering 'evil' if you don't know what the evil is. As with plants in the soil, you won't get sturdy growth without getting your hands a bit dirty.

Growth, too, is about realising something new. Not only seeing something from another person's point of view but beginning to understand it. And that, of course, isn't only for the young. When I read this scene from the last episode of **Running Scared** to parent audiences I always sense a new awareness; Narinder and Paula are on a class visit to the Thames Barrier.

'I feel really proud of that!' Narinder started, as they glided between two Barrier piers.

Paula came back from wherever she'd been herself. 'Eh? Proud of what?'

'Of that.' Narinder pointed at the visible parts of the huge circular gates, already covered in green to the high water mark. 'This Barrier.' She shifted on the bench to look at Paula. 'Think of all them coaches parked next to ours. People come from all over the world to look at this – an' we can see it any old time from the top of our school, you know that?'

Paula nodded. 'Yeah, I s'pose it is something.'

'You *s'pose* it is?' Narinder was too loud, had to drop her voice. 'Listen, girl, sometimes coming back from the cash 'n carry over Hounslow I go past the Houses of Parliament in my dad's van, past Downing Street, round Nelson – and I look at all the people who've saved up *years* to see all that – things I can see any old day of the week . . .'

'Yeah?' Paula looked surprised.

Not for the first time Narinder felt like taking hold of her friend's shoulders and shaking the daylight out of her. 'See! Even you!' she explained. 'You still don't think of me as belonging here, do you? Not really. When's your birthday – August i'n it?'

Paula was listening now: definitely surprised by Narinder suddenly going off like this. 'August the second,' she said.

'Right! Well, mine's the first of June.' Narinder let it sink in for a few seconds, stared into Paula's bewildered eyes. 'Which means I've been a Londoner two months longer than you! Never thought of that, have you?' It was one of those rare moments, with Paula staring, and slightly shaking her head. 'It's still bloody hard for you to get hold of, isn't it? Same as most of these . . .' Narinder waved her arm around the cabin. 'What is it? This?' She jabbed a finger into the skin of her cheek. 'Or this?' – waving a flat, wrapped chapati from her packed lunch.

Still Paula was staring, thinking. 'I dunno,' she said at last. 'Both, I s'pose, bein' honest. But you're my mate!' she suddenly threw in, as if that made it all right.

Narinder felt her eyes blaze, she stabbed her fingers as she made her painful points. 'Paula, there's people that side of the river won't have nothing to do with people this side, there's the East End and South London always at one another's throats –' she dropped her voice to little more than thinking aloud – 'but wouldn't they join hands quick, some of 'em, to see me shut up in that plane to Jullunder? Eh?'

Paula shrugged, tried to excuse herself from the implications of what Narinder was saying.

'Can't you see, Paula, I'm not here courtesy of them – or because I'm your mate. I'm here because I *belong*!'

'All right!' Paula shouted back.

'It's not courtesy of no-one! This is my Thames Barrier an' all!'

Paula laughed, the old laugh. 'Oh, do leave off! You just heard how much it cost?' A try at a laugh, part of what the long friendship had always been about.

But Narinder gave it no more than a wiped smile: because somehow they were past all that, they weren't in the business of covering cracks any more.

One in three children between five and fifteen in the U.K. saw that episode of **Running Scared**. For that scene alone I'm glad I made friends with the box. Unlike television anywhere else in Europe our children's programmes take life on, deliberately don't pretend there is no racism, no villainy, no depths. How angry we were when adults spelt the letters of words we knew across our faces. 'Has he been d..r..y..?' The children of that generation, the parents and the grandparents of today, have got their country in the worst social mess Britain has ever seen. But it's not too late to help today's children growing up, is it?

One of the dangers in all this business is claiming to *know*. All I have to offer is my opinion – I haven't a penn'orth of proof. The way people turn out is far too subjective a concept to assess. And is that our business anyway? We, the people who write books and scripts can only hope to shape reality and lay it before our readers as the stuff from which growth might come. And then, please, not as medicine: never talking in doses, only ever in rich, generous helpings.●

This is a shortened and edited version of an address given by Bernard Ashley to the bi-annual workshop of the European Broadcasting Union in Paris.

Break in the Sun (Puffin, 0 14 03.1341 9, £1.95) was adapted for BBC Television by Alan England in 1981. Bernard Ashley wrote both the television series (BBC 1986) and the book version of **Running Scared** (Julia MacRae, 0 86203 238 5, £7.50 and Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.2079 2, £1.95).

HOW TO . . .

That's another story . . .

Two teachers describe how they set about using the computer to help people find the books they want to read.

Brenda Swindells who teaches in a middle school in Bradford has her system

UP AND RUNNING

A one-year secondment to work for a diploma in Professional Studies gave me the opportunity to link my main line of interest – fiction for children – with something I was totally ignorant about – computers.

I had always promoted the use of fiction in school and produced booklists for staff recommending titles to use with different age groups. I was frequently asked to suggest a suitable story to match a particular topic. The booklists were often lost and sometimes ignored because it was quicker to ask me. If I was going to research literature across the curriculum it seemed a good idea also to investigate using the computer which is so good at storing and organising information and making it easily accessible. If I could make it work, the computer would obviously be more efficient than either my memory or my booklists at meeting my colleagues' needs.

First of all I had to select a database. The one which best suited my purpose was INFORM which is available from Nottinghamshire Schools Education Centre. It is easy to learn to use, versatile and bug free, and I was soon involved in making decisions about how to organise the information I wanted to put into CHIBOO – short for children's books – the name I gave my file. I decided to store information in nine fields: Author, Title, Publisher, Reading Level, Interest Level, Categories One, Two, Three, and an Annotation.

To decide which categories to use and how many, I consulted staff in my school and in eighteen other middle schools in Bradford about which 'labels' they would find useful when searching the file for books. I also talked to children about the sort of words they used to catergorise books. After four drafts I finally settled on twenty-two categories and gave each one a letter for quick reference (see table).

Each book entered on the file can be allocated up to three categories. Category One is the main theme of the story: perhaps adventure or ghosts, school, science fiction, war, fantasy, etc. The second category is the secondary theme. For example it may be a school story which also has an element of fantasy or adventure. The third category may be used or not depending on the book.

You can probably imagine the difficulties when deciding on a category for a particular title. Is **Tyke Tiler** principally about school, or relationships, or is it humorous? It's all three. I finally chose school for Category One, humour for Category Two and read aloud for Category Three. Another difficult one was **Donovan Croft**. I opted for E (Family/Friends/Relationships) as the first category, with L (multi-ethnic) and K (contemporary problems) as the second and third. **Watership Down** was categorised B, A, K. I decided Natalie Babbitt's **Goody Hall** was chiefly historical and secondly a mystery. Some may disagree. In the end the categories are *my* decision; when searching I always search all three categories so as not to miss any titles.

To find books to include I went for those which had been tried and tested and came well recommended as 'good reads'. I asked teachers, parents and children for suggestions, went to book lists and journals, and used my own experience. Some books were given star ratings by the pupils in my school and these were included on the disc. The program allows me to write an annotation of approximately 90 characters, about two sentences.

Researching the reading level, I started by using Fry to assess the readability level. The results I got didn't always seem to match with my experience of children reading the books so in the end I decided that the reading level and interest level would be a rough guide only, based on the collective experience and instincts of me and my colleagues.

All of this took a very long time to complete. The file now contains 365 books which when cross-referenced can come up with 1,000 titles. I am about to start a new disc. The computer is located in the library and the program is mainly used – as I intended – by teachers looking for books to support a project or titles to recommend. But it is also being used by some children and I'd like to see more of this happening. When a search is made the teacher searcher is usually sure of the category and the reading and interest level needed. The program will search quickly through all the entries and display a list of titles on the screen. The screen cannot carry all the information which is stored so we usually ask the computer for a printout which contains all the information, including the annotation.

As you can see some categories were difficult to fill. I could find very little to support work on industry, transport and, in particular, the industrial revolution. I have just been asked by a colleague for a list of titles on migration. I think this is going to be a popular area but all I can offer are the titles in N and O or possibly H. I now doubt the usefulness of the categories 'anthology' and 'read aloud' so I may create a new file for my second disc.

I have found the whole experience extremely interesting and informative. Apart from giving me confidence with computers, it's made me think about books, what we have (and have not) got available, and how we can help the readers to find a way to books they will enjoy.

Categories for CHIBOO

Code	Category	Number of Titles
A	Adventure/Mystery	97
B	Animals/Pets	40
C	Anthology	58
D	Fairy/Folk/Myth/Legend	35
E	Family/Friends/Relationships	127
F	Fantasy	82
G	Ghost/Supernatural	18
H	Historical/Living in the Past	59
I	Industry/Science/Discovery	11
J	Humour	73
K	Contemporary Problems	65
L	Multi-ethnic	35
M	Picture Books	45
N	World about Us	34
O	Journeys/Travel/Transport	17
P	Poetry/Jokes	24
R	Read Aloud	69
S	School Stories	46
T	Science Fiction/Fantasy	16
V	Hobbies/Games/Activities	5
W	War/Peace	36
Z	Famous People	5

```
SWINDELLS ROBERT          A CANDLE IN THE DARK                  09-10     09-13
   KNIGHT             H      I      O     Set in the days of children working in coal
 mines this story is a dramatic and moving account of Jimmy Booth's tragic attem
pt to help a prisoner in the pit.     :175

WILKES MARILYN Z          C.L.U.T.Z.                            09-10     09-11
   GOLLANCZ           T      I      J     Combined Level Unit Type Z does his best bu
t unfortunately he is almost human. Some interesting futuristic technology.
                                        :198
```

John Snedden, a teacher librarian in a secondary school in Gloucestershire, reports on

WORK IN PROGRESS

Six thousand volumes, one quarter fiction and mainly hardback. Non-fiction poorly used by the departments. Teachers rarely seen in the library. Library capitation inadequate even to maintain the present level of stock. In other words an average secondary school library of the eighties.

The Letter arrives. County Hall is offering grants for library-based projects. A chance to break out of the depressing downward spiral. I apply for a grant for a computer, disc drive, monitor, modem, printer, a year's subscription to Prestel and a word processor.

Primary purpose: to bring external databases into a library with a reference section which predates the Beatles and mini-skirts.

Secondary purpose: to create databases from the library catalogue for use by the pupils in selecting fiction and non-fiction.

Ulterior motive: to change the image of the library as a dusty book cupboard.

Prestel, with its half million pages of changing information, catapults the library into the limelight as a place where THINGS ARE HAPPENING. Teachers who wouldn't dare admit their ignorance of Dewey flock to learn about Prestel. I turn my attention to the creation of tailor-made databases. I decide we need a database to help pupils become more successful and more adventurous about choosing fiction.

Problems: What is the best programme to use? What should I put on it? Where can I get the help needed to put it all on disc?

Finding the database

The account of my search may illustrate the reluctance of school computer departments to allow computers and their own expertise to escape from a tiny corner of the school. It may also show that there is as yet no programme designed specifically for a school library.

My first conversation with the computer department suggests that the creation of this database is a) impossible and b) not worth the time and effort.

I visit a neighbouring school librarian who is putting his whole catalogue onto disc using a BBC micro (like mine) and the PROTOKOL programme. He plans to fill 16 discs. He has full-time clerical help; I have an hour and a half a week. My feelings that a very selective approach is required are confirmed.

The PROTOKOL programme has many good features: each letter of the alphabet can be used and defined as you choose; up to four words can be used to describe each book. Sounds promising as a way of answering questions like 'What's a good funny book, sir?', or 'What's the latest science fiction, miss?'. But I have doubts about page format and the ease of editing the programme. After two weeks' one-way communication with an answering machine trying to get more information, I decide to look elsewhere.

I hear about INFORM. Gloucestershire has a licence to use it in all schools, which sounds promising. Now, at last, the computer department is prepared to talk. INFORM will be difficult for our pupils to use because it has limited fields; it's not very powerful and it has a different format from the one the computer department is teaching them. Why don't I use VIEWSTORE, the database the computer department is adopting?

VIEWSTORE, says the computer department, has an improved screen layout, so it's more user friendly. You have a choice of spreadsheet or record format. It's a chip so it's more powerful. Lastly it's already well researched and documented in school. So after a three-month search I find the answer on my doorstep. I settle on

VIEWSTORE. If you are just starting, the magic formula to open the computer department's hearts (and minds) seems to be: 'What database are you using in your teaching?'

Deciding what to include

Well, I won't need ISBN or publisher – just title, author and as many relevant codes as possible. If I limit myself to 40 spaces for each field I can include 800 books on each disc.

Which books should I choose from our 2,000 strong fiction section? By deciding to include only *one* title from authors like Walter Farley, Willard Price, Ian Fleming, I can do it without selection.

What categories? I ask the English department to carry out market research on the genre words our pupils use to describe books. The exercise provides few insights and very few useful words! Off to bibliographies to find the 'approved' labels. I make a provisional list of fourteen:

> Adventure – Historical – Family Life – School Background – War and Spies – Sci-Fi – Ghost – Crime and Detection – Myth, Legend – Sporting – Romantic – Animal Interest – Humorous – Fantasy.

Vague? Huge gaps? Unusable? You can do better, of course you can. Please send me your list!

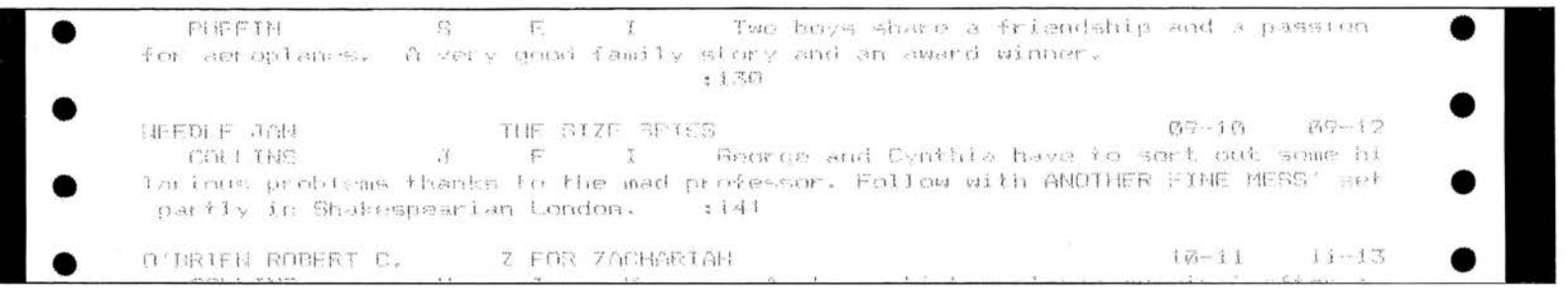
Fixing up to four of these category codes to books came next. Have you read every book in your library? By reading bookjackets, skimming, asking pupils, reading reviews – and, yes, actually reading far more fiction than I have since I was ten, I manage to select codes for 800 books that seem convincing to me.

P.S. IT WAS FUN.

Putting the data on the disc

My present supply of clerical help (1½ hours a week) is just about enough to keep new books coming onto the library shelves after a month's delay. I need extra help. It may be possible . . .

Before the end of the school year, I hope to have the system running, revised and refined. Meanwhile, it's work in progress. ●


PIFFTN S F I Two boys share a friendship and a passion for aeroplanes. A very good family story and an award winner. :130

NEEDLE JAN THE SIZE SPIES 07-10 09-12
COLLINS J F I George and Cynthia have to sort out some hilarious problems thanks to the mad professor. Follow with ANOTHER FINE MESS' set partly in Shakespearian London. :141

O'BRIEN ROBERT C. Z FOR ZACHARIAH 10-11 11-13

fw Franklin Watts

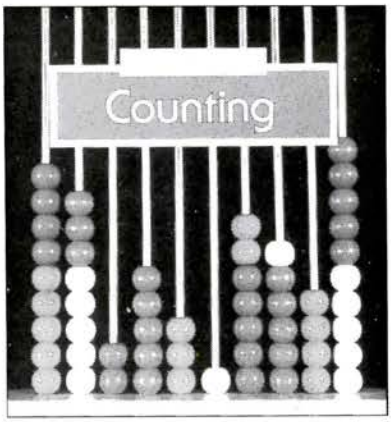
Knowabouts

HENRY PLUCKROSE

A simple introduction to basic mathematical concepts for young children, backed by superb colour photographs.

Counting *506 4*
Numbers *507 2*

June 220 × 220mm 32pp £5.25



Life Guides

BRIAN WARD

A topical series which covers the practical aspects of health education, stressing the positive steps we can take to look after our own bodies.

Diet and Nutrition *452 1*
First Aid *453 X*

246 × 189mm 48pp £5.95

Already available:

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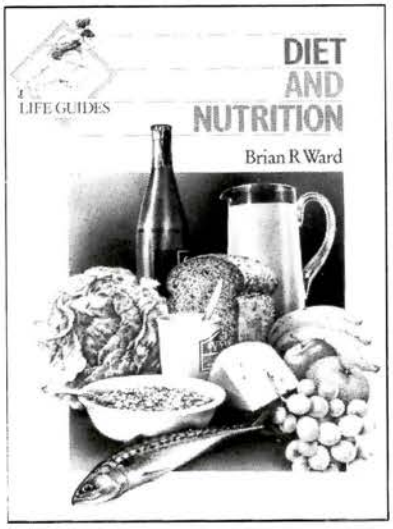
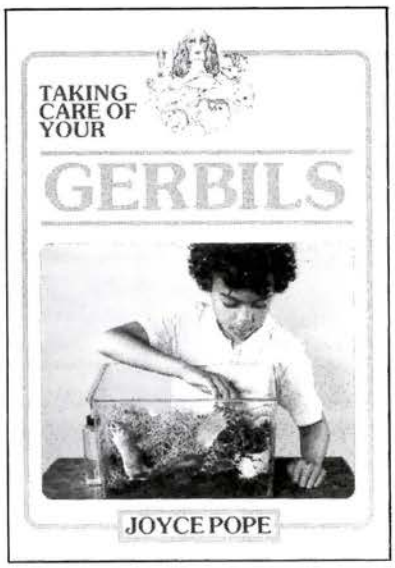
Smoking and Health *401 7*

246 × 189mm 48pp £5.95





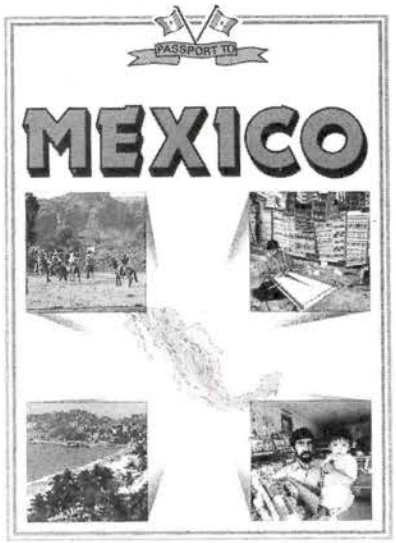
Taking Care of Your Pet

JOYCE POPE

Two new titles in this established series of practical and realistic pet-care books.

Gerbils *414 9*
Rabbit *413 0*

June 246 × 189mm 32pp £5.25



Passport

Two new titles in this series which offers a comprehensive insight into life in different countries.

Australia
SUSAN PEPPER *439 4*

Mexico
CARMEN IRRIZARRY *440 8*

284 × 216mm 48pp £6.50

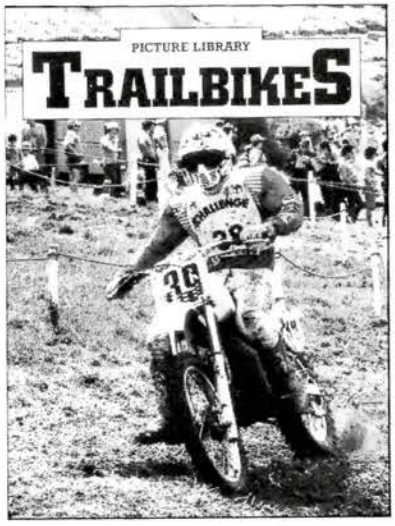
Picture Library

NORMAN BARRETT

This series of visual reference books uses exciting colour photography to illustrate topics of popular interest.

BMX Bikes *489 0*
Dragsters *490 4*
Custom Cars *491 2*
Trailbikes *492 0*

246 × 189mm 32pp £5.25



Survival

A topical new series which tackles important environmental issues and looks at possible solutions to the problems.

Animal Rights *541 2*
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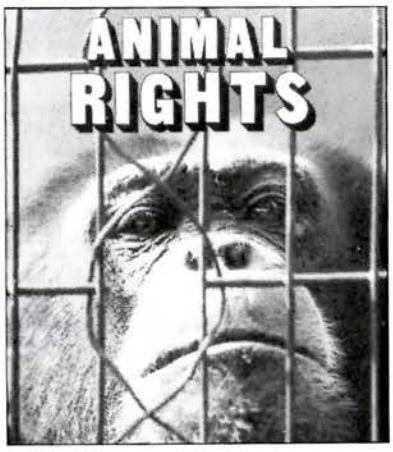
284 × 216mm 32pp £5.95



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INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

Images and Issues

Terry Downie considers the use of photographs in information books

Photographs are an invaluable resource. They alleviate and illustrate text, they attract children to books, they have impact, they convey impressions and information. I looked at how a number of recent books use photographic images. The books fall into two groups: social history books and those dealing with current issues. I also looked at the text and the juxtaposition of images and text, including captions. The interplay of these elements and the size and positioning of images all affect our reading of the information and the photographs. I put it this way because, though one series' main aim is to convey information visually, I felt that all the publishers saw *text* as their central means of informing children. Gutenberg rules, fair enough, we *are* talking about *books*. But I think two opportunities are missed here. One is for children to discover information by questioning, sifting evidence and talking about photographs. The other is for them to explore how we are led to take particular meanings from visual images, through the ways in which they are constructed and contextualised. Plenty of scope for teachers who agree with me to get to work on these books with children – in ways the publishers maybe haven't thought of.

Cars, 0 356 11393 0
Clothes, 0 356 11395 7
Entertainment, 0 356 11396 5
Rivers and Canals, 0 356 11394 9
Penny Marshall, Macdonald, The Camera as Witness series £5.95 each

These books, the last four titles in a ten-book series, contain a wealth of photographs, with time charts, booklists and interesting 'things to do'. They usefully recommend museums, libraries and record offices for local searches. They also have a glut of text. We're told in the introduction that 'although many of them were never intended as such, all the photographs are important documents in our social history.' The main clause is where Penny Marshall's interest lies; she is rarely concerned with issues raised in the subordinate clause (are you noting this linguistic analysis, Mr Baker?). Who took the pictures? For whom? Who saw them? Where? Why have they survived? It's left to us to pose such questions. On the other hand, to study social history, we're told to 'look closely at the photographs and to draw conclusions'. The accompanying text talks us through each picture with a great quantity of valuable information. So much so that we have little need to pose questions and, frequently, readings are imposed upon us when the author tells us the feelings and relationships of people in the pictures. I showed the book to primary and secondary teachers who warmly welcomed the photographs as a resource, liked the 'let's look together' style and the activities but regretted the lack of space for children to interrogate the pictures for themselves. 'I would have liked unanswered questions in places', one of them said. The books are arranged chronologically, with some cross-referencing in the text. Using the index, children could work thematically on, say, shoes or children's clothes, schoolbooks or girls' education. And ways could be found to study the pictures without or, at least, before consulting the text.

Family in the Fifties
0 7136 2703 4
Family in the Sixties
0 7136 2704 2
Alison Hurst, A. & C. Black, £5.95 each

The books follow a family, maybe the author's, we're not told, from the 1947 marriage of Eileen and Edward to their daughters' 1969 hopes for the future. Family members, friends and neighbours are frequently quoted, remembering and commenting. Curiously, the tone and style of their speech is not really distinguishable from the author's words. Equally odd is the use of photographs clearly marked as family 'snapshots', hence *different* from other photographs, of which there are lots. The family pictures are credited to Hurst in the fifties book, to nobody in the sixties one. If they're her family, why not say so? Uncredited, they lead us to distrust the reality-base of the book.

Anyway, it's a nice idea which could run and run. After the family warp (no disrespect) the weft is thematic: home life, school, work, travel, fashion, entertainment . . . both covers signal that decades are differentiated by the last two. There are short reading lists and double spreads of facts and figures, including world events, though these don't figure much for the fifties' people. Sputniks happened, not Suez or the Cold War. Cuba, Kennedy's death and Vietnam impinge on them in the sixties. But these are domestic books in several senses; chatty, quite fun to read, with no real stance on any topic except that almost everything seems to get better. Why do A. & C. Black call them reference books? You can look up a few things through the index but not all subjects are listed and two entries are for a 'family' name and place of work.

The Tactics of Terror
Philip Steele, Macdonald, Debates series, 0 356 11617 4, £5.95

The 27 double spreads are mostly headed with questions: 'Terror on the streets?', 'The state as terrorist?', 'Using the media?' Much of the text is also in question form and I felt rather battered by it. 'Interrogation techniques' (glossary entry) '– often harsh, they are intended to force the captive to reveal information against his or her will.' Or perhaps, in this case, to have an opinion. Each section has a large heavy title, black and white photographs with captions, overlaid with black boxes carrying quotations. A powerful impact. (Oh, and the binding is strong. I had to brutalise it to read centre margins.) The book is packed with information but little of it is available in the photographs which are more for decoration or impact. And somehow it's not the information I want. What do I do with dates and numbers? Can I debate terrorism, its causes and responses to it, in general? What level of debate am I capable of without some knowledge of particular ideologies? It's assumed we know who the Contras are. They're referred to twice: 'June 6, USA Senate agrees aid for Contras', 'Soviet and American accusations might be entirely reversed when considering the Nicaraguan Contras.' There are three pictures of Red Brigades and we're told they were Italian leftists. What were their objectives, their context? To be fair, many other organisations are more fully described. But is alphabetical order best for the list of organisations? I'm glad the glossary explains 'irredentism'. Do we need 'hijack' and 'hostage'? Does 'legal acceptability' clarify 'legitimacy'? There's a fine reading list with films and addresses, and a huge index which enables you to collect bits of information from lots of pages. The final message is that the solution lies in 'a breakdown of international hypocrisy and a willingness to listen to the oppressed . . . If an injustice is resolved, the motivation for terrorism goes with it.' I hope the book will stimulate debate about this; I suspect that, to inform such debate, we need additional resources.

The Palestinians
David McDowall, Franklin Watts, Issues series, 0 86313 484 X, £5.25

The author has studied the Middle East and worked for relief and development agencies. The series describes itself as 'opinion books' which 'seek to identify problems and who or what has caused them; they are realistic and do not minimise the size and extent of these issues.' I think that's true. Information is attractively presented in double spreads which look at history – Jewish settlement, partition, dispossession – then focus on groups and aspects of the conflict – refugees, the

Left, from **The Palestinians**; above, from the front cover of **Let's Discuss Violence**.

A striking and emotive image from **The Revolution in Iran** which in the book bears no caption nor textual reference.

PLO, Israeli attacks and so on. There is a chronology and a guide to some of the organisations involved.

The large, often colour photographs are for the most part low key. They do not dominate the text, being illustrative rather than informative, and are complemented by clear diagrams. The use of colour blocks on some pages (camp wire, the Palestinian flag, for example) is striking but inevitably intrudes to a degree on reading. But text almost always catches your eye before pictures. Quite a marathon of page-turning is required by the index because the term are general ('refugees', 'labour', 'Jordan') but it pays off. I investigated 'USA' and easily found eight clear pieces of information. The book reads well and its language is very well controlled, without condescension. The target readers are perhaps 10-12. I think older children will find this a useful resource, if they don't mind the 'young' presentation.

Let's Discuss Violence
Doreen May and David Pead, Wayland, Let's Discuss series, 0 85078 868 4, £5.50

This will resource older pupils' debate of some issues. It looks at war, terrorism, sport, violence against women and children, crowd and street violence, and suggests a socio-political context for examining these strands. It offers a range of positions: 'two distinct schools of thought . . . it is argued . . . however, another way of looking at . . .' There are eight sets of questions and statements (Discuss) referring to the text and beyond it, and four 'case studies'. I find that dipping via the index fractures the overall context and argument; it needs sequential reading by a group. At £5.50, that may be difficult.

The eye of the casual page turner will be caught by some very powerful images which dominate the dense-looking text. But captions do not invite further investigation; only four ask questions, the rest make statements of varying kinds, some questionable but not presented as such. There's a glossary and reading lists of non-fiction (adult popular and children's) and fiction (including Ashley, Dickens, Forster and Needle).

The 36 illustrations and captions sometimes challenge but 'many girls are still brought up to believe a woman's place is in the home' should not accompany a photograph of minority ethnic group girls. The 'Group Violence' chapter focuses on football hooliganism, then links Mods and Rockers with 1980s' city disorders. Elsewhere, the media are discussed fairly; here we're told 'gangs copied what they had seen on television'. Scarman is quoted: the riots were 'an outburst of anger and resentment by young black people against the police'. We aren't invited to consider why. The police head the list of Helping Agencies; there is no debate about their role. Violence against the black community isn't mentioned, nor are industrial disputes. I would find this astonishing, except that the authors are Police Review journalists. They stick to 'safe' issues and, on these, do well. We must look elsewhere to resource their omissions.

The Conflict in Afghanistan
John C. Griffiths, 0 85078 778 5, £6.25

The Revolution in Iran
Akbar Husain, 0 85078 779 3, £5.75

Wayland, Flashpoints series

For 16+ and demanding at that. I know too little of Afghani or Iranian history to comment on accuracy and selectivity. I think the analyses are reasonable; the balance rather depends on how you use the books. A quick flick focuses on images, which in the Afghan book gives a strong impression of military aggression. Captions (bar two) use 'Soviet' whereas the text also uses 'Russian'. You cannot directly access American involvement in the region via the index nor, in the Iran book, can you immediately find British interests. War images here suggests Iran suffering Iraqi aggression. Those of the last Shah ascribe to him land reform, women's emancipation, primary education and 'bringing Iran into the twentieth century'. The text, however, supplies counter-readings. Both books have a glossary and adult reading list; Iran has a chronology 622-1980 – has nothing happened since? How to read the books? Dipping is unproductive; the language is complex and dense, there are backwards and forwards references and a large number of subject-specific terms. You really need to start at the beginning with the 1979 'flashpoints' – invasion by Russians, return of Ayatolleh. Both books then follow a pattern, plunging through history, picking up from 1979 in chapter 5, querying the future in chapter 7. Latest references are the 1985 Irani budget and Gorbachev's troop-withdrawal in 1986. Selective skipping might be recommended by a teacher who knew the books thoroughly. Could the wide margins housing captions also have been used to key readers into paragraphs? Perhaps there was an editorial decision against clutter. I was informed by both, occasionally worried by the Afghan book. This is most kindly described as tourism: 'The Afghan and the Pathan in particular, has a remarkable capacity for combining exaggerated individuality with the ability to co-operate . . . with other members of his community.' The Foreign Office gave me this kind of garbage before I went to SE Asia in 1966. Has Russian 'barbarity' in Afghanistan outclassed American 'ferocity' in Vietnam? I'd like to know the credentials and stance of these authors. ●

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

The Camera as Witness

Meet **Penny Marshall** whose ten-book series of photographic books is now complete.

Two people really 'looking not glancing'. This photograph, taken in 1907, appears in the Introduction to all **The Camera as Witness** titles. For Penny Marshall it sums up the enjoyable concentration photography evokes.

Penny Marshall has worked in publishing since leaving school. For the last five years she has been a freelance editor and it was in this capacity that Philippa Stewart of Macdonald approached her with the idea for a series of books for schools which would take 'everyday' subjects and examine their history through photographs. The original brief stressed that 'the visual element must be strong'. As managing editor for Focal Press Penny Marshall had taken many illustrated books on technical subjects through the publishing process; this, together with her knowledge of 'old' photographs, made her a good candidate for the project. The first contract was for four books only: **Going Shopping**, **School Days**, **Houses and Homes** and **Holidays** appeared first in 1984. The success of these initial titles encouraged Macdonald to commission six more titles. **The Royal Family**, **Railways**, **Cars**, **Rivers and Canals**, **Entertainment** and **Clothes** are now all available and the series is complete.

The series' subtitle is 'A history in photographs, 1850s to the present day'. Penny Marshall confides that she finds this 'rather presumptuous'. In forty-eight pages there was no way she could do more than give an outline impression of over a hundred years of change. She would have preferred 'A picture history' and speculated whether the 'weightier' choice of title implied that publishers were wary of an attitude in educational circles which still considers images much less seriously than written texts.

Decisions about defining an age range for a target audience are always to the fore in information books. For this series Penny Marshall had the eleven to thirteen age group in mind, although she had hopes that younger and older children might also find them stimulating. It was assumed that their main use would be in the school or class library where they would be a substantial resource for topic-based project work.

That decided, the next thing was to research, find and select the photographs. Such a huge task needs help. On each book Penny Marshall worked with a picture researcher who made an initial 'trawl' of images. **The Camera as Witness** series acknowledges an unusually wide range of sources for the photographs – far removed from the usual recourse to picture libraries. The County Record Offices and local museum collections were used wherever possible. At the outset this was to avoid the often highly priced royalties on picture library material but these less well-known sources revealed a wealth of 'unhackneyed' pictures and as a bonus also helped in achieving a spread of geographical locations.

Other criteria for selection were gradually evolved: there should be a balance of male and female figures in the pictures and a mixture of general views with more intimate portraits. Pictures with people in them, especially children, were a priority. It was particularly difficult, Penny Marshall explained, to find material of this sort for the **Rivers and Canals** book. In addition because this was a historical series there had to be a set number of images for each decade. The 1920s often proved difficult here though she has not particulary considered why this might be.

The emphasis was very much on finding pictures which contained 'a wealth of information'. It was sometimes tempting to include 'mood' pictures, but most important were those photographs which showed something new for that particular time – like the one selected for the 1960s in **Cars** of a forest of parking meters – or those which seemed to be typical of an age.

The text which accompanies each photograph Penny Marshall says, 'formed in my mind as I selected them'. Her long experience as an editor of illustrated books has led her to very clear opinions on the relationship of image and text: 'The words must add more information to the picture, or else it's just a waste of space.'

Above all, though, she has an enthusiasm for 'old' photographs. She talks eagerly and expressively about how they have made history come alive for her, something she obviously wants to share with others. How would she like to see pupils using her books? 'Oh, I want them to look,' she says, 'not glance.' ●

Note

Local sources of photographs are largely unknown to the majority of teachers and so they remain a major resource which has not yet been fully used. One project which *is* exploring this field is based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Here a teacher on a one-term secondment is researching photographic archives in the area and aiming to open up their use in schools. Further details from: John Bradshaw, Film and Photography Officer, Northern Arts, 10 Osbourne Terrace, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 1NZ.

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

What's New in Computer Books?

Pat Frawley looks at some new titles in an area which is developing rapidly in school.

Educational computing has come a long way very fast. The last few years have seen main developments in software.

Teachers now have available powerful open-ended tools, such as databases, wordprocessors, adventure games, complex simulations, LOGO implementations, graphics systems, communications packages and control technology systems. As a result of this there has been a shift away from the use of drill and practice programs and home-grown software in primary schools, and a parallel shift away from the teaching of programming in many secondary schools. This process of change will continue as more teachers are trained to use the more recent software, and even greater changes are afoot as the cost of sophisticated hardware continues to fall, making fully professional computers and programs available to schools.

All this means that books which explain real computer applications in terms which can be understood by children are at a premium, as are books which successfully link the use of the school computer with a substantive topic which children can investigate themselves. Less sought after are books which teach programming and those which deal in excessive detail with the technicalities of the design, manufacture and operation of microelectronic components and systems. Books which offer a general background to computing will have a more restricted market as children begin to gain an increasing amount of this kind of knowledge through first-hand experience. There will still be a place in the classroom for the best of these, though.

Background Books

Working with Computers
Keith Wicks, Orbis, Colour Library of Science, 0 85613 934 3, £5.95

A well produced, large-format book for the secondary range. It begins promisingly with a warning to the reader not to take extravagant claims for computers too seriously, and photographs depicting people from a variety of racial backgrounds and of both sexes using computer equipment. The rest of the book, however, is full of technical descriptions of particular items of hardware accompanied by illustrations depicting, in the majority of cases, white males in control of the machines. The book falls short in its attempt to illustrate *ways of working* with computers: there is too much coverage of the technical detail and too little about the tasks with which computers can assist. This is likely to put off youngsters of both sexes who are embarking upon their first investigations into computer applications.

The book does give plenty of detail about the major specific applications of computers. In addition, an acceptable glossary and reasonable index will assist the casual enquirer. And if you have a number of experienced computer users who are eager to add to their technical knowledge, then this book which has plenty of detail of this kind might prove useful; otherwise, something less technical and easier to read would be a better investment.

A niggle. I find it irritating and perverse of the author to refer to 'disk units' when everybody else in the world calls them 'disk drives'! There are one or two further instances of this kind of 'misinformation'.

Microchip Magic
Robin Kerrod, Grafton, Dataworld Series, 0 246 12710 4, £4.95

'The astonishing thing about integrated circuits is that they can be made unbelievably small.'

The really unastonishing thing is that this kind of hyperbole and condescension in books for children will endear this author to neither teachers nor pupils. In fact, of course, most children find microelectronics unremarkable and they do believe in it because they have grown up with it.

Microchip Magic tries to cover too much technical ground in a slim, primary style format, and generally fails to exhibit any knowledge of the ways in which children's brains work. The book also relies on too many standard publicity photographs, supplied by hardware manufacturers. Pictures of smart men and women operating expensive hardware in offices with acres of virgin Wilton on the floors do little to help the majority of children relate computer applications to their own experience of the world.

'The engineer in this picture has been told by a head teacher that cars are driving too fast past a school, and that it is dangerous when the children are coming out in the afternoon.

There are four sets of traffic lights along that road. If they are all showing green at the same time, cars go faster and faster as they go along the road. The engineer has decided to program the computer so that, in the afternoon, the lights don't all go green at the same time. Then the cars won't drive so fast or so dangerously.'

Text with this picture in **Traffic Computer**.

Drawing at head of article from **Hands On: Hands Off**. (A & C Black).

INFORMATION PLEASE ABOUT . . .

Computers in Action Series
Dick Fox-Davies and Pamela Fiddy, A & C Black, £4.50 each

Traffic Computer, 0 7136 2725 5

This book is excellent in every respect, explaining simply and clearly the principles of traffic control and the ways in which computers can help the process. It sets out the case for automatic traffic lights and pedestrian crossings and follows this general discussion with a case study of the traffic system in part of Southampton.

The case study features a young woman engineer who is in charge of the central computer, which she uses to control the traffic. The reader is shown how the computer can deal with different situations. Also illustrated are the limitations of the computer system and the engineer is shown altering the instructions to the computer to cope with new requirements.

Clear, readable text and excellent photographs combined with cartoon type drawings make this a particularly attractive book to use. There is no gratuitous technical description, but there is a comprehensive and detailed coverage of the topic. This book could generate a real enthusiasm for getting out of the classroom to study the local traffic control scheme, and could also stimulate the control technology work which is beginning to become established in primary schools.

A must for every primary school. Secondary schools would find it a useful addition to the library, too.

Pilot's Computer, 0 7136 2804 9

Clear, succinct, but detailed descriptions give a comprehensive view of the way airline pilots are trained using computerised equipment such as full scale models of airliner flight decks and full flight simulators.

Like its companion titles, this book takes a real training base as a case study and reveals the ways in which the computer assists with many of the problems associated with pilot training, such as simulating aircraft faults, dangerous weather conditions, etc.

Already published:

Supermarket Computer, 0 7136 2652 6
Travel Agent's Computer, 0 7136 2653 4

and due in April:

Library Computer, 0 7136 2884 7
The Domesday Project, Alistair Ross, 0 7136 2857 X

Computers in the Classroom

My First Computer Library Series
David Marshall, Macdonald, £3.95 each

Living with Animals, 0 356 11578 X, **Colour and Shape**, 0 356 11576 3, **Growing Things**, 0 356 11577 1, **Me and You**, 0 356 11575 5
(BBC B versions listed but RML 480Z versions also available)

An attempt to embrace classroom use of the computer and a particular topic in one package. As a series they gets lots of things right, but don't succeed as fully as they may have wished.

The series is aimed squarely at the top infant/lower junior section of the market. The text is well laid out, uses clear typefaces and has selected words printed in bold type. These words are listed in a glossary at the back of the book. The level of reading difficulty is right for the target reader of average ability or above. The illustrations are of good quality and a pleasing feature is the way in which aspects of a variety of cultures are presented in positive ways.

The main failings of the books are the computer programs (on separate Computer Activity Cards) which accompany them. The relationship between the programs and the subject matter of the books is at best contrived and at worst simply irrelevant. It also seems pointless to ask children to type in programs which contain examples of bad programming practice (specifically, no input checking for upper and lower case and no error trapping) and which do not contribute anything substantial to the learning process.

A computer program (in **Colour and Shape**) to try to create red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, on a monitor screen which only reproduces red, yellow, green, blue, cyan, magenta, black and white seems particularly perverse. It would have been better to point children towards existing published software of a good standard. Branch, Animal, Front Page, etc. are all available in many schools and could be used to provide a genuine extended activity.

It is a pity that the series editor didn't decide to commission just two or three computer programs and to issue them on disk or cassette. This would have made it possible to produce some really good and relevant programs for classification, graphs, word lists or simple simulations. As they stand, these programs may mislead a few teachers and parents into believing that six to nine-year-olds should be able to comprehend this sort of computer code:

```
210OSCLI"*KEY 0 "+STR$(280+(5%*10))+"DATA
"+W$+":M205%- "+STR$(5%+1)+":MRUN:M" (Growing Things).
```

The series is a genuine attempt to marry the use of the computer to primary school topic work, but I don't think it is the right direction in which to move. If you are working with middle juniors, using a really good information book with a well produced database or classification program will result in better computer related work than is possible with the programs on these cards. If you are working with younger children, two titles are worth considering.

With **Growing Things**, start by throwing away the program cards and finding some suitable classification programs from the MEP packs. Get the children involved in actually growing things and then use this book to provide relevant reading material and explanation.

Me and You is the best book in the series. The content is cohesive and well balanced. The text is accessible and the illustrations are well chosen and, in places, humorous. Children should find that most of the subject matter can be related to their own experience but the book takes some care also to include material from a variety of cultures and geographical locations. Sadly, the computer programs are no better than in the companion volumes, but this book can be used equally effectively in classrooms with or without computers.

Computer Club Series
David Burgess, Macdonald, £5.95 each

This series is a much more successful attempt to combine a topic with relevant computer programs. Certainly the fact that the text and programs are by the same author has helped to give greater cohesion to the books as a whole. Suitable for the upper junior/lower secondary age groups and, as the series title suggests, it would be ideal as the basis for projects undertaken during a school computer club.

The programs (for BBC Model B) are well written and are, for the most part, designed to provide quite sophisticated illustrations of the ideas discussed in the text. Best of all, they are available on cassette or disk (at extra cost), which saves all that pointless typing. The series is growing slowly – so far only five titles are available: **Birdwatch** (0 356 11021 4), **Volcanoes** (0 356 11122 2), **Robots** (0 356 11123 0), **Navigation** (0 356 11124 9) and **Comets** (0 356 11025 7), published to coincide with the visit of Halley's Comet so without the information discovered about it while it was being observed.

The series has the same editor as the **My First Computer Library**, so it is rather difficult to understand why this formula was not adopted for these later books. I hope the editorial team don't take the attitude that it is less important for younger children to be provided with high quality materials.

Software: Programs available for BBC Mode B and RML 480Z (cassette and disk) and for Spectrum 48K (cassette only). For details apply to the Marketing Manager, Macdonald Educational, 3rd Floor, Greater London House, Hampstead Road, London NW1 7QX.

Hands On: Hands Off
Christopher Schenk, A & C Black, 0 7136 2707 7, £7.95

This is a superb book crammed with excellent ideas, from an author with impeccable credentials in educational computing. It isn't aimed at children, but teachers will be able to pass it over to competent readers who are involved in one of the suggested projects.

The book has three sections. The first concentrates upon general uses of computers and the activities away from the computer which contribute to the selected topics. Simple programming, text manipulation, mathematical investigations, simple games and simulations are all included. Section B gives a comprehensive view of Turtle Graphics and LOGO, while Section C cover all the major aspects of information handling. The text constantly refers to published computer programs, many of which are available very cheaply or at no cost through local authority advisers.

This book avoids deep technical explanations and concentrates on the learning experience which can be provided using a computer to extend the curriculum. It certainly provides teachers with a comprehensive view of what they ought to know about the practicalities of educational computing for the primary and lower secondary age groups.

Unlike many computer books, **Hands On: Hands Off** will not date rapidly, so that teachers need not fear that their £7.95 might be a short-term investment. One might hope that the second edition will have a fuller treatment of Control Technology, which is beginning to gain favour in many schools, but the activities in this edition will remain valid for many years to come. ●

Pat Frawley, as a primary deputy head, was involved in introducing computers into primary classrooms in Oxfordshire. He now teaches in the Education Department at Bristol Polytechnic where he is involved (among other things) with in-service work on computers in education.

May We Recommend . . .

Chris Stephenson's choice is

JEAN LITTLE

Apart from admiration, my immediate reaction after reading Jean Little for the first time was to wonder why it took so long for her to be published over here: she has, after all, been writing successfully for more than twenty years. But things are looking up. Since 1985 three novels (**Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird** and **Lost and Found** in paperback; **Different Dragons**, just out, in hardback) have appeared here, so now children in the U.K. can enjoy the work of this excellent Canadian writer.

All her life Jean Little has suffered from partial sight and latterly her vision has become even worse. Her writing is now done with the aid of a specially designed talking computer salled SAM. She types onto a keyboard and the computer talks back what she has written. Literally: 'Open quotes Wake up comma Ben comma close quotes Dad said period'. Truly a perfect relationship between Human and machine!

During her recent whirlwind tour of parts of England, in the company of three of her fellow Canadian children's writers, Jean Little spoke openly about her handicap, then deftly changed what could have been a solemn discussion about disability into a joke. 'As a child,' she said, 'I always went around with a black smudge on my nose from the ink, from holding the book so close.' That remark sums up her approach to writing: a no-nonsense ability to face stern facts, coupled with a strong, 'fiesty' underlying sense of humour.

In Different Dragons the hero, Ben, goes to stay with his Aunt Rose, a children's writer. Ben is not sure he wants to stay with her, even though it's only for a weekend, for, to a young child, a weekend can seem like an eternity. Besides, he tells himself, 'Her books are all about boys who run away from home to fight dragons and find treasure'. He is not that kind of boy – and Jean Little is not that kind of writer. Certainly there are dragons in her books, but not the traditional variety. Her dragons do not breathe fire and flex their claws. They evolve from recognisable domestic, everyday situations – fear of dogs and thunderstorms; or from a sense of displacement – new homes, new neighbours. But the dragons she writes about are just as terrifying as the mythical monsters, simply because they do arise from the known, domestic environment.

In conversation, Jean Little made the point that, given the circumstances, 'a trip to the supermarket to buy milk can be very important'. For the children in her books – and this applies particularly to Lucy in **Lost and Found** and Ben in **Different Dragons** – 'small' events take on the complexity and magnitude of the epic. When Ben's aunt asks him to whip the cream he is sure he knows how. At first he feels great, 'standing there, in charge of the whirring electric mixer'. He knows he mustn't over-whip – but he does, and the cream becomes full of 'queer little yellowish flecks'. Then comes the dilemma – 'Should he tell Aunt Rose?' – and, in spite of his aunt's kindness, the sense of shame.

Or take the case of Lucy, just moved to a new house in a new district, who finds a stray dog and wants to keep it, even though she knows she should be doing all in her power to find the owner. Not only does she have to contend with her parents who, with all the best intentions, want the dog restored to its rightful home, but with Nan, her new acquaintance, who is determined to play the detective and find that home. For Lucy life now becomes full of complexities: 'She wanted to tell her father that right now Nan Greenwood was nothing but a pest. She wanted to say she would only like Nan if Nan would stop playing detective' – yet she knows that both her father and Nan have right on their side.

Both books reach calm and satisfying resolutions – Ben conquers his fears; Lucy gains new friends (and a new dog) – which the young reader experiences with the characters. But in each, the resolution arises out of the situations and the events surrounding them; it is not imposed from above like some magical, healing matrix. It is Jean Little's unerring ability to dramatize children's fears and frustrations, allied to her sheer story-telling powers, that make these books so involving and – yes – exciting for the reader.

In **Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird**, a book for the slightly older reader, the subject-matter is more profound. The central event – and literally so, for it occurs at exactly the halfway-stage – is the death of Jeremy and Sarah's father. But, as Jean Little emphasises time and again, the book is not about Death, it is about Life.

The first half concentrates on the children's reactions to a Dad who, because of his illness and medication, is the same Dad yet different; a Dad who can no longer play with them as he used to, but who can still share playful moments; a Dad who moves differently now, 'Slowly, carefully, as if he were afraid he might break'. After Dad's death the family – Jeremy in particular, for his sister, being younger, 'doesn't really understand' – struggles to come to terms with the loss and with the need to make a new life. At the same time the book traces the developing friendship between Jeremy and awkward, sensitive, illegitimate Tess – another of Jean Little's 'displaced persons'. The moment of resolution for Jeremy comes early on Christmas morning, when he realises he can actually feel joy again, 'a more difficult joy than he had known other years', and can now look 'back to the man he no longer wanted to forget' and look 'ahead to this Christmas which was now, at last, fully his'.

Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird won the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year for Children Award. It is written without a trace of mawkisness or sentimentality. It is very moving, often very funny, and very positive. As with all of Jean Little's books, the problems presented and resolved are faultlessly woven into a strong narrative fabric and perfectly attuned to the understanding of the readers.

Long may Jean Little's computer talk back to her! ●

Jean Little: the books

All titles in hardback by Kestrel, in paperback by Puffin

Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird
0 14 03.1737 6, £1.95 pbk

Lost & Found
0 670 80835 0, £5.95 hbk; 0 14 03.1997 2, £1.50 pbk

Different Dragons
0 670 80836 9, £5.95 hbk

Chris Stephenson is a bookseller. With his wife Enid he runs the Hungate Bookshop in Norwich.

Videos for Schools sponsored by

Lloyds Bank

YOUNG NATIONAL TRUST THEATRE VIDEO BRINGS HISTORY ALIVE

The Young National Trust Theatre is a professional theatre-in-education company which aims to involve children directly to help them learn about the past. The actors, who are usually also trained teachers, take the principal roles, but the audience of schoolchildren (aged 9-16) take part in the drama. In this way they learn about life and behaviour in past centuries, including music, dance, language and etiquette. Detailed notes are sent to every school taking part so that preparations may be made for the performance.

The video 'HISTORY ALIVE' (25 minutes) shows schoolchildren re-enacting history with the YNTT in sequences from a Royal Progress by Queen Elizabeth I, staged at Knowle (Sevenoaks), Charlecote Park (Stratford-upon-Avon) and Montacute (Yeovil). All are historic National Trust houses associated with the period.

Its particular aim is to bring the work of the YNTT to the attention of teachers of History, Drama and English, and the growing number of educationalists who value theatre-in-education as a way of bringing to life subjects which children tend to consider dull. It will also appeal to members of the public interested in heritage and conservation.

Copies of the video 'HISTORY ALIVE' are available for a refundable £10 deposit from Sandra Sheppard (administrator of YNTT) 8 Church Street, Lacock, nr Chippenham, Wiltshire (Tel: 0249 73569).

The video was made for the National Trust by Kadek Vision, directed by Avril Lethbridge and Mike Bennett, produced by Paul Rutherford. As well as the Royal Progress sequences the video includes John Hodgson, the Trust's education adviser, discussing the work of the YNTT with its administrator, Sandra Sheppard, artistic director Andrew Dickson, and researcher Adrian Tinniswood.

In addition to the above, Lloyds Bank has also sponsored other schools videos – a series of three Shakespearean workshops dealing with the Tragedies, Comedies and Roman Tragedies, and a video made for Ballet Rambert for use by students of CSE, 'O' and 'A' level dance.

Further information from: Sponsorship Section, CCD, Lloyds Bank Plc, 152/156 Upper Thames Street, London EC4R 3UJ.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

Guardian Children's Fiction Award

This year the **Guardian** Children's Fiction Award is twenty years old. To celebrate the occasion Kestrel is publishing **Guardian Angels**, a collection of original short stories edited by Stephanie Nettell, Guardian Children's Book Editor, and written by fifteen of the past winners. Ted Hughes, Leon Garfield, Barbara Willard, Anita Desai, Peter Dickinson are just five of the contributors who have all created different variations on the theme of the word 'guardian'. The collection – like the word – will find most readers in the 10-16 age-range. Good for reading aloud too.

Guardian Angels, 0 670 81077 0, £6.95.

Stop press

The winner of this years Guardian Award is James Aldridge for **The True Story of Spit MacPhee** (Viking Kestrel, 0 670 81213 7, £6.95. To be issued in Puffin Plus in 1988). James Aldridge is the first Australian winner of the award. This book – for the top of the age range – is about a young boy in a small Australian settlement fighting his grandfather and all his neighbours for a say in his destiny.

The runner-up is: Catherine Sefton's **Starry Night** (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11795 X, £5.95). Another story for older readers of growing up, family life and divided loyalties on the borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic. **Starry Night** has already been named as one of the winners of The Other Award.

Ferdinand is Fifty

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the publication in this country of Munro Leaf's delightful story of Ferdinand the Bull.

The story of the little bull who would rather smell flowers than fight was written in forty minutes on a rainy October afternoon in 1935. Munro Leaf had in mind the creation of an amusing story for his friend and neighbour Robert Lawson to illustrate. Together they submitted their work to the children's book editor at Viking and on 11th September 1936 **The Story of Ferdinand** was published in America. It was published in the UK in the following year by Hamish Hamilton.

This tale of a peaceful animal who could not be goaded into violence appeared at a time when the eyes of the world were focused upon Spain and the civil war being fought there. Although neither Munro Leaf or Robert Lawson intended **Ferdinand** to be anything more than a story for children, this little bull, who would rather sit under his favourite cork tree and smell the flowers than fight, was thrust into international prominence. He was idolised, psychoanalysed and merchandised, as well as being turned into the subject of a Walt Disney film, a stage play and a pop song.

Gradually **Ferdinand** settled down. Fifty years later he is still going strong and has been translated into more than 60 languages. An exhibition to mark this anniversary is being held at The Children's Library, The Barbican Centre, London, from 7th-28th April.

The Story of Ferdinand, Munro Leaf, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 90177 4, £4.95 hbk; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.234 3, £1.50 pbk.

Twenty years of Wild Things

On 6th April 1967, The Bodley Head published a picture book by an American artist which – despite the fact that it had been published in New York three years before and had won the Caldecott Medal – had been turned down by every publisher in London. Why? Because a great many adults feared that its characters would induce nightmares and encourage their children to behave badly.

Reactions to the announcement of the appearance of Maurice Sendak's **Where the Wild Things Are** on The Bodley Head's list were so strong that the book became the subject of a late-night TV discussion programme. Controversy raged in the press. The **TLS** reviewer, when criticised on the letters page by a reader who objected to the negative review, replied:

'I did not think the book deserved a long review. I find the creatures pointlessly coarse and brutish, and I would not dream of paying 18s. for it to give anyone'.(**TLS**)

Other critics thought differently:

'A piece of audacious fantasy.' (Naomi Lewis, **Observer**)

'This picture book could hardly be bettered – though its price is also handsome.' (**Books & Bookmen**)

'A beautiful book, recommended to all those who believe that critics can be mistaken about what frightens children while real artists never confuse fantasy and horror.' (Margaret Meek, **School Librarian**)

From the cover of **Guardian Angels**. Fifteen new stories by winners of the Guardian Children's Fiction Award.

Twenty years on **Where the Wild Things Are** is an udisputed children's classic – acclaimed for its perfect blend of text and pictures.

To celebrate the anniversary The Bodley Head are publishing **Posters by Maurice Sendak** (0 370 31038 1, £12.95), a collection of 22 full-colour prints, some never before published, designed originally for book events and theatre productions. The prints are large size and suitable for framing – a real treat for Sendak lovers of all ages.

A Quest for a Kelpie

Last year BBC Scotland, the Scottish Library Association and Canongate Publishing Limited joined forces in a quest for a new work of fiction for 8-12 year olds. The competition was open to all residents of Scotland and anyone of Scottish birth and it was assumed that their experience of Scotland would be reflected in any entry.

Frank Delaney headed a panel of judges consisting of Elaine Moss, Mollie Hunter, Mary Baxter (Director of Book Trust, Scotland) and Joan Morrison (Children's Fiction Buyer, W. H. Smith), and in the autumn the winner was announced. By sheer coincidence, the winning title was **Quest for a Kelpie**, the first book by Frances Hendry who lives in Nairn where the book is set at the time of the battle of Culloden.

The prize was publication by Canongate both in hardback (0 86241 128 9, £6.95) and in the paperback Kelpie series (0 86241 136 X, £1.95), and dramatisation on BBC Radio Scotland. The author herself has adapted the book for radio in six parts due to start on Wednesday, 29th April in the afternoon.

Canongate were delighted with the quality of Mrs Hendry's book and are about to launch their next 'Quest' with the winning title being published in hardback in 1988.

National Tell a Story Week 2nd – 9th May

The theme for this year's annual celebrations of stories, promoted by the Federation of Children's Book Groups, is time and space.

During Tell a Story Week groups all over the country – libraries, schools, playgroups, book groups – organise events and activities to demonstrate the magic of stories and storytelling. Many authors and illustrators will be taking part and anyone who shares the Federation's aims for the week is invited to join in.

The Federation has a tradition of holding the launch outside London; this year the national launch of Tell a Story Week will be in Steeple Ashton, Wiltshire.

For further details contact: Jan Sanderson (NTASW Publicity Officer), 15 Shadwell Grove, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham NG12 2ET.

The IBBY Seminar 1987

Stuck for Words: the case for dual-language books for children.

It will be held on 21st May at the Triangle Cinema, Aston University, Birmingham, 10.00-4.30.

Details from Sheila Ray, Tan y capel, Bont Dolgadfan, Llanbrynmair, Powys SY19 7BB (tel: 06503 217).●