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JULY 1988 No. 51
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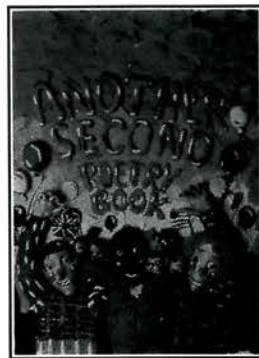
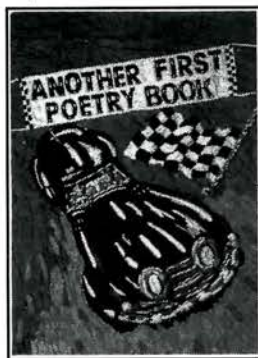
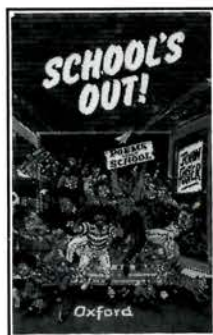
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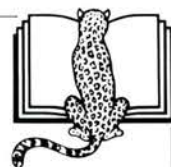
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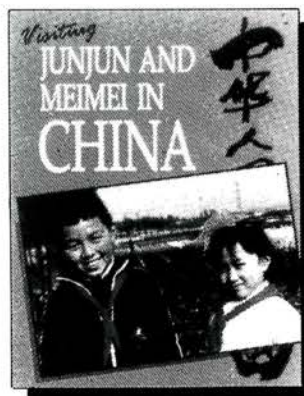
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Cover Story

The illustration on our cover is by Andrew Tiffen from a new collection by Michael Rosen, *The Hypnotiser*, published by André Deutsch (0 233 97929 8, £5.95).

We are grateful to André Deutsch for help in using this.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

— the magazine of the
School Bookshop Association

JULY 1988 No. 51

ISSN. 0143-909X

Editor: Richard Hill
Designed and typeset by: Rondale Limited, Leyland, Glos.
Printed by: Surrey Fine Art Press Ltd, Redhill, Surrey

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

Annual subscription for six issues:
£7.20 UK; £10.50 overseas surface mail
Single copies:
£1.20 UK; £1.75 overseas surface mail
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Or use the **Dial-a-Sub** service on 01-852 4953.

Editorial correspondence: Books for Keeps, 1 Effingham Road, Lee, London SE12 8NZ. Tel: 01-852 4953.

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



EDITOR'S PAGE



So here I am, Ed. of **BfK** for the next two issues, the *only* job I haven't undertaken so far in the **BfK/SBA** repertoire. I've been, done, and still do virtually everything else — budgets, computers, marketing, despatch and endless coffee making ... but Editor, that's the big one! Hold tight, Richard, and here goes.

Poetry, at Last

The central theme of this issue is Poetry because we're about to launch our long-awaited **BfK** guide to poetry, **Poetry: 0-16**. It's been, for a small outfit like ours, something of an epic two-year pregnancy — which books to include, which to leave out, getting the structure of a very large bibliography right, which poets to feature — but what a baby this looks like being! Now it's just the design, artwork, and print stages to go ...

At the start of the project I knew next to nothing about children's poetry. Now I'm an ardent convert. A bit like Val Downes who gave us our first feature on page 4, discovering the power of modern children's poetry. This started life as part of a much longer essay on a DPSE course but has the authentic voice of the classroom and echoes exactly the objectives that lie behind **Poetry: 0-16**. Talking to Val, I shared a great sense of identity with her about the joy of discovering children's poetry for the first time and in the best of all possible ways, with children themselves. My thanks to you, Val, for that and all the help you gave.

Who better to have as our poet Authorgraph than Mike Rosen? Mike has a new collection out from André Deutsch (0 233 97929 8, £5.95): *The Hypnotiser* is vintage Rosen — go out and buy it this instant! You'll recognise it straightaway because we've got it on our front cover. And who better to have done the interviewing than Morag Styles? Besides being immersed in our Guide with Pat Triggs, she's also been busily preparing, with Helen Cook, *There's a Poet Behind You* (A & C Black, due in September) in which Mike and four other poets (John Agard, Grace Nichols, Adrian Mitchell and Gillian Clarke) talk about poetry in general and their work in particular. Written for children (8 to 13), this will surely be of interest to teachers and librarians too.

Crisis at CBF

Dear, oh dear. Eunice McMullen, Director of the recently (only last October) inaugurated Children's Book Foundation at Book Trust, has gone as she arrived, in a blaze ... or something. She resigned at the end of May to the astonishment of us all. This is a personal misfortune for Eunice, but a much larger blow to the children's book world. What has gone wrong? Why the explosive and damaging departure? Rumour suggests a row, of fundamental proportions, about commercialism and culture, involving funding and management style, that has done the greatest disservice to children's books I can ever remember. The CBF was to have been the most important thing to have happened in the children's book world with the promise of huge resources, dedicated to the promotion of books and reading. Now what? Can it become properly independent, not only of big publishing and bookselling

interests but also of academic and educational ones, whilst retaining the full financial and intellectual support of both? Can it conceive a coherent, balanced, appropriate and very broad philosophy of children's book promotion? Commercial strategies, important though they may be, are simply inadequate to the task. Finally, and most challenging of all, can it find a leadership with a vision of the future that we can all share, an understanding of how the children's book world has evolved and works (without which there can be no vision) and the courage to keep it free from any and all of the vested interests? The Chinese word for crisis is made up from the symbols for danger and opportunity. Which is it to be? Can Book Trust be trusted to make the right choices?

Lifeline 4: Projects and Topics

I still have, running around inside my head, part of a conversation from my last meeting at the CBF, just days before the McMullen detonation, about the necessity of *also* assaulting that legendary citadel of the supposedly great unread, the *Sun* readership, but I fancy that what Pat Thomson (page 14) has to offer our slightly more modest circulation is probably more valuable and practical. You need to have been a **BfK** reader for quite a long time to remember our last Lifeline series (May 1985 to be exact). It's an occasional series we like to run offering busy teachers an accessible yet authoritative gathering together of the best of available book resources on a particular theme. I'm delighted that Pat has taken on this somewhat daunting task for the next seven issues.

Loving Encounters

It's nearly ten years since the best book for teenagers on sex, Jane Cousin's *Make It Happy*, first appeared (recently revised and reissued). Things have moved on apace. Not least AIDS. Despite the big publicity campaigns there is still surprisingly little street-wise information we can offer our teenagers. So I welcome the publication of Rosemary Stones' *Loving Encounters*, not only for the excellent way she deals with that problem but also for her sensitive yet uncompromising approach to all sexual relationships. Inevitably this kind of publishing attracts controversy that can obscure the caring and responsible attitudes that such a book is attempting to propagate. Helen Boothroyd and Anthony Tilke put the book through its Section 28 hoops on page 18.

Finally, the Winner

Remember we offered a year's free sub to the person who found the most errors in *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* listings in our May issue? Well done, Heather Noble of Barry, South Glamorgan. But you still didn't quite get them all!

My thanks to all our contributors, reviewers and especially Jan and Chris Powling for helping us make it. Have a good summer. See you all in September. ●

Richard.

Discovering poetry for the first time, especially when it opens the way between teacher and class, is exciting. **Val Downes**, a primary school teacher, describes her experience of . . .

COMING TO POETRY

I don't suppose I should have been surprised. After all I'd seen it work before in my old school. The Rosen, Wright, Patten, Ahlberg magic enticing, and then entrancing, children. There it had been an easier, familiar, friendly commuter-land school and, looking back, of course I remember it working.

Changing schools last Autumn produced one of the most traumatic moments of my teaching career. My new school was a city school with a wide social catchment area though not one with all the problems you can get in the inner city. I was faced with 29 strange third-year faces and any reputation I might have built up in my previous school counted for nothing. It was like starting out all over again, even if I did have a six-year running start. That first morning was a big confidence knock. I knew they'd had an unsettled previous year; I was, for them, yet another new teacher but I hadn't been prepared for the 'we-aren't-going-to-listen-to-you' hostility that greeted me the minute I stepped into the room. By the end of the morning I was feeling awful.

I had a copy of **Quick, Let's Get Out of Here** but no particular intention of using it that day. The afternoon began with a long, unbroken, two-hour session with the morning problems persisting. After about 45 minutes I was at the stage where I badly needed my new class to listen, to hear me. I reached for Rosen, sat them down on the carpet and launched us all into 'Eddie and the Gerbils'.



. . . and suddenly I hear
'Hallo gerbils.'
'Uh?' Ignore it. Munch munch munch.
'Hallo gerbils.'
Better have a look.
Oh no.
He's got a dead mouse in his hand.
Clutching it.
Head poking out the top of his fist
tail out the bottom.
And he's stroking it.
The dead mouse.
And he's going,
'Hallo gerbils hallo gerbils hallo
gerbils.'



Instant attention! I had to read it again and again, and then the bits that stuck, once more. We moved on to other Eddie poems; more bits stuck.



'Time for the cream, Eddie.'
And he goes,
'No cream.'
So I say,
'Yeah, cream,'
and I blob it on
and he goes, 'Oooh.'
You imagine what that would feel like.
A great blob of cold cream.
It would be like
having an ice-lolly down your pants.

That's how it started; quite unexpectedly, through poetry, I began to build up a relationship with my new class – and through the poetry of Michael Rosen in particular. Most days we'd try a new one and always go back to 'favourites'. A momentum slowly began to build over the first half of term. I had to read them over and over again until the children knew parts of them off by heart. The word spread; I would catch them reading to the dinner ladies or sharing them with a friend in a corner of the playground. **Quick, Let's Get Out of Here** became and still is one of the most sought-after books in the school.

Having tasted success, I felt confident to move on to other poets. Brian Patten's **Gargling with Jelly**, Allan Ahlberg's **Please Mrs Butler**, and Rosen and McGough's **You Tell Me** quickly joined the ranks of firm favourites. They started borrowing books, reading them and then telling me which poems I should read to the rest of the class.

*My little sister was truly awful,
She was really shocking,*

*She put the budgie in the fridge
And slugs in Mummy's stocking.*
(from **Gargling with Jelly**)

They even made up little sketches which they enacted whilst one child narrated the poem, usually from memory. The final triumph was watching children choose poetry books, not mentioned by me, as their library books and knowing that at least a third of my class read poetry during quiet reading periods.

After half-term, realising that something special was happening, it became very important for me to discover more about what had occurred, how they set about sorting and selecting material, and what their criteria were for deciding upon a 'good' poem. Borrowing an idea from Andrew Stibbs*, I presented the children with an even wider variety of material and left them to browse. They had to select three poems: one which they would like to copy out and keep, one which they would be happy to read aloud to the rest of the class, and one which they would recommend to their friends.

I gave them 45 minutes, expecting considerable disruption from pupils I thought would not be particularly enthusiastic. A hushed calm fell on the room; complete absorption! For most of the children, 45 minutes was not long enough. I had to extend it.

What they all had in common was a desire to share the poem which they had chosen themselves. Although I didn't particularly need them to do this, it seemed so important to them that it would have been terrible to have denied them the very pleasure I was encouraging.

Their biggest difficulty was in choosing only three poems; there were so many they enjoyed. To understand a little more about why they had made their choices, I devised a questionnaire for them to complete. I deliberately kept it very short to avoid confusion or boredom. This produced rather limited but nevertheless interesting results. Only five children selected poems that were new to them and these five were from right across the ability range. I somehow expected this to come from the more able readers. The majority of the children included at least one poem that they were familiar with and many, not surprisingly, selected poems that were by poets that they knew and liked.

I asked the children to give reasons for their choices. Practically every child in the class said they enjoyed humorous poetry. No surprise here that children enjoy writing that portrays familiar playground wit. This is something Roald Dahl achieves so well and both **Revolting Rhymes** and **Dirty Beasts** figured very highly amongst the children's favourites.

*The small girl smiles. One eyelid
flickers.
She whips a pistol from her knickers.*
(from **Revolting Rhymes**)



Another major reason given for their choices was that they liked the author. Many children in my class really feel that they know Michael Rosen and are delighted by the fact that he shares stories about his son Eddie with them. Some have even taken the trouble to find out biographical details about Rosen which they then connect with individual poems. Having this familiarity, the children believe in Rosen and read his poetry as true accounts of actual happenings.

Some children said that they liked it when all the poems in one book were by the same author because they were then able to read a collection as a complete book. In contrast to anthologies, which seemed to require a more complex response, collections more readily provided the children with narrative. This was underlined by the popularity of Roald Dahl's **Revolting Rhymes** because they tell a story.

Children's comments also revealed that they identified with certain characters in poems. Everybody at some time has either been, or has suffered, a naughty little brother or sister. Brian Patten's 'The Trouble with my Brother' and 'The Trouble with my Sister' were very popular.

*Thomas was only three
And though he was not fat
We knew that there was something
wrong
When he ate the cat.*



Other reasons given were not quite so universal, but nevertheless interesting. For example, the illustrations and visual presentation were important for several children, especially poems written in the shape of the subject. They enjoyed poems that rhymed, many thinking this to be 'clever'.



*The teachers can sit in the staffroom
And have a cosy chat.
We have to go out at playtime;
Where's the fairness in that?*
(from **Please Mrs Butler**)

Some children were concerned about the actual subject of the poem; some particularly liked animal poems and those that deal with people.

It's difficult for me to draw concrete conclusions as yet; I'm still learning.

I'm now planning to interview small groups of children in much greater depth. It would also be very interesting to repeat the whole experience but using a different group of poets and perhaps being slightly less 'accidental'! The important thing for me, however, was that when I read that first Michael Rosen poem to the children, they were captivated. They hadn't heard the poems before and they didn't know me, and yet almost instantly they responded in a positive way. Given the circumstances, if the children hadn't immediately liked what they had heard, they would not have listened and would have quickly made their feelings known. Rosen was the first step for me and my class in the exploration of many similar exciting poems. Even at this end of the year, they still listen to the same poems and are searching out new ones.

It's been as big an adventure for me too. I came to poetry with and through my children. It's hard to imagine a better way. I'd used and knew some poetry but the light hadn't quite dawned. Charles Causley says that he remembers little poetry before the age of 11 and Joan Aiken recalls being given it as a punishment. Not such bad company.

If poetry is given low priority in schools by teachers, it is perhaps due to their own lack of knowledge of, and exposure to, poetry, and not having the confidence to introduce and encourage it. Children too have been put off poems – often used only as a basis for comprehension work where pupils were literally asked to dissect them. Today, a wide range of material is available and it is fun for the teacher to discover the delights of modern poetry along with the children. Modern poets are able to communicate with children. It is in the interest of promoting this kind of sensitive communication that schools and libraries have an obligation to provide children with access to such books, so that they can extend their own personal reading experience and their enjoyment of poetry. Because of such poets and indeed through them, I was able to communicate with a new and hostile class. For that I am grateful and, as a consequence, my class and I will continue to explore new and exciting fields of poetry. It has become important to us. ●



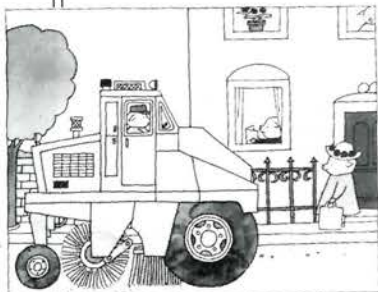
* Andrew Stibbs, 'Poetry in the Classroom', **Children's Literature in Education**, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1981.

Val Downes is the language post-holder at Staple Hill Primary School in Bristol.

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



Cars

0 14 050.691 8

Big Wheels

0 14 050.690 X

Anne Rockwell, Picture Puffin, £1.95 each

These books were devoured by my younger infants. They fill a gap in the market for accessible non-fiction picture books for the very young. Both books rarely returned to the shelves being passed from hand to hand – predominantly by the boys (despite all my efforts). *Cars* illustrates the different uses to which cars are put and the simple text beautifully matches the pictures allowing for good easy reading. *Big Wheels* was the more popular, depicting as it does the mammoths of the road simply yet with enough detail to allow for a wealth of discussion. JS

The Mixed-Up Chameleon

Eric Carle, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.642 X, £1.95



It's good to see this popular picture book in paperback – the classic story of the chameleon who, bored with himself, wants the excitement of borrowed plumage, but ends up with the ingredients of ten different creatures, only to discover the universal truth that the grass is definitely not greener! The magic of Carle's illustrations, storyline and simple thumb index hasn't lost its appeal. JS

Max and the Magic Word

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.568 7, £1.95



The Hawkins combination of zany illustration with the ability to pinpoint absurdity is a potent mix. Max, a rather unpleasant dog, demands turns, toys and treats from his friends, and I defy any class not to enter gleefully into the final chant of 'Please!' JS

Puffin First Picture Dictionary

Brian Thompson, ill. Celia Berridge, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.777 9, £2.95

Actually, this isn't a dictionary at all; it's an alphabet book. The difference being that a dictionary suggests more than four or five words (and pretty arbitrary words at that) to each letter and some attempt at definition or provision of context. By those criteria this is very disappointing. It is, however, a very nice alphabet book. The pictures, as we might expect from Celia Berridge, are interesting and clear and the words chosen are ones that are within children's experience and are often unexpected.

My class enjoyed leafing through the book playing 'I-Spy' or just naming things and it was a useful addition to our alphabet and phonic resources. LW

Three Naughty Little Rabbits

Ruth McCarthy, ill. Marie H Henry, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52475 1, £2.25

Echoes of *Peter Rabbit* in the beginning of this book made me think that if Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail had *not* been 'good little rabbits' this story might well have resulted. These three little rabbits are left alone in the house and then behave exactly like any small children: they squabble over a toy, try to be helpful, break a cup and chase round the house, until the baby-sitter



arrives and restores calm. The irritating little sister is particularly life-like. This is a slight tale but was very popular with the domesticated younger children in the class who found its attractive watercolours and well spread text welcoming to listen to or to read for themselves. The more robust or sophisticated elements in the group found it rather beneath them, however, so one for the younger age range I think. LW

Bill and Pete

Tomie de Paola, Oxford University Press, 0 19 272187 9, £2.50

This large paperback is a real treat! In his customary manner Tomie de Paola has given us a set of pictures to enjoy: decorative, full of pattern and painted in beautiful colours. He has also given us a very good story, especially good for 3-7s, about crocodiles with marvellous teeth which they know they must look after (a splendid lesson to be going on with). They go to school to learn to read and write but then the Bad Guy appears and captures the crocodile hero, Bill, to make him into a suitcase. Rescued by his friend, Pete, Bill then causes the Bad Guy to flee for his life. Great stuff. Buy one today; it's a great read! MS



Where is Monkey?

Dieter Schubert, Beaver, 0 09 955360 0, £2.50

A wordless picture book about a mother and child with his toy monkey going for a cycle run to the woods. They feed the ducks and geese but, in their haste to escape from a rain storm, leave the monkey behind. Rats and hedgehogs play with it until it is stolen from them by a crow and then, falling from the crow's nest, it is caught by a fisherman who is also a toy mender. The child sees his monkey all mended in the fisherman's window and claims it back. This has all the requirements of an excellent picture book: homely and warm at beginning and end, with interesting adventures in between. It would make a very welcome addition to a small person's library. MS

Arthur

Amanda Graham, ill. Donna Gynell, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.780 9, £1.95

I loved Arthur! This is the first book for some time that has made me laugh out loud, at both pictures and words. I'm pleased to say it had the same effect on the children. Well, you see, Arthur is a dog (possibly a relation of What-a-Mess but certainly from the wrong side of the blanket) who lives in Mrs Humber's Pet Shop and wants a home. Unfortunately ordinary brown dogs are out of fashion; everybody wants a rabbit. So Arthur practises being a rabbit until he is *sure* he could be one. By then, however, the trend has changed and everyone wants a pet snake. So Arthur practises hissing and slithering and sliding and looking cool until he's *sure* he could be a snake... but by then it's fish that are in...

Arthur's attempts to turn himself into whatever animal is wanted are gloriously illustrated and genuinely funny. There is also an underlying feeling of pathos in his attempts to curry favour which adds depth to the book. The happy ending (a little girl has been watching all the time and has an indulgent grandpa) is as satisfactory as the book. Highly recommended. (Winner of the Children's Book Award in 1986.) LW

Infant/Junior

Hank Prank in Love

Jules Older, ill. Lisa Kopper, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2126 8, £1.50

I know many classes of older infants, younger juniors, who enjoyed **Hank Prank and Hot Henrietta**, and here again there's a spicy humour in the writing. Hank falls in love with a little girl called Linh Tran. The messages are never pushed, but there's some wonderfully perceptive episodes in which the multicultural class learn to live together.



The classroom scenes are observant and funny. Unusually in writing for the age group (six to nine), the characters are well rounded, real-sounding with big feelings. There's never a hint of twee-ness, and the grown-ups are three-dimensional, too. Worth exploring if you don't know this writer's work. An appealing cover and pictures. CM

A Book of Dragons

Compiled by Joan Cass, Beaver, 0 09 954830 5, £1.99

An enjoyable collection of stories and poems for solo readers or for teachers to share with their classes. It includes some predictable favourites: 'The Tale of Custard', a 'Melric' story by David McKee (the illustrator of 'St George and the Dragon' by the compiler as well as other less obvious material. If you don't already have the hardback in your collection, get hold of this one and stock up the school bookshop. JB

Pomily's Wish

Eleanor Nilsson, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2316 3, £1.50

Pomily mouse's curiosity about cats almost proves her undoing; but it is her storytelling ability (acquired through her Great Uncle Bernard) that saves her from the jaws of the friendly stranger who emerges from the shadows of the forbidden



garden. The line drawings on every spread extend the story nicely and should add to the enjoyment of young readers tackling the book alone. They may even like to add to Pomily's store of stories by writing some themselves. JB

Dilly Tells the Truth

Tony Bradman, Magnet, 0 416 96510 5, £1.50



Four more stories about Dilly - 'the world's naughtiest dinosaur': here he suffers an attack of measles, interprets his mother's exhortations to tell the truth rather too literally, becomes a gold medalist, and has an eventful trip to 'MacDinosaurs'. Enjoyable nonsense for established fans and an enticing book for newly independent readers. JB

The Bird Garden

Gerald Rose, Magnet, 0 416 06122 2, £1.95

A garden full of exotic birds belonging to a Sultan... what could be more enchanting?



Sadly all is not well with this bird community as they fight

between themselves. When the myna bird arrives, who is not at all beautiful but certainly clever, he entertains the Sultan and his family; the other birds want to talk too, so the myna bird obliges. Unfortunately he teaches them to insult the Sultan who then kicks them out of the garden. After that there are no quarrels and the birds settle down to live peacefully together.

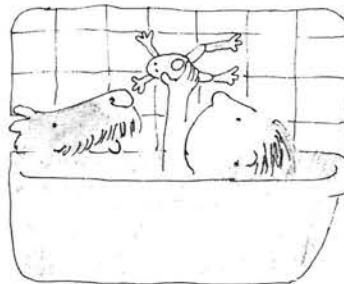
This book is beautifully decorative and the pictures make much of the simple story with its underlying morals. A winner! MS

Here comes John

0 416 08582 2

Where is Sarah?

0 416 08612 8



Bathtime for John

0 416 08602 0

Here comes Theo

0 416 08592 X

Bob Graham, Magnet, £1.50 each

This series is absolutely wonderful! Bob Graham books have always been favourites with the children I teach, but these eclipse the lot. The adventures of two young children and their dog, in everyday situations, are beautifully portrayed: poor Sarah hiding in the long grass, long forgotten by her seekers; Theo the dog who always greets the children with a flying leap and the licking treatment; and John who can't walk... or can he? The most popular has to be **Here comes John** in which a snail, trying to make his way up the garden path, survives the hazards inadvertently put in his way by our friends, until he is spotted by John who 'likes to feel and... taste everything!' JS

Princess Smartypants

Babette Cole, Picture Lions, 0 00 662798 6, £1.95

This is the story of a young lady who, being a modern sort of person, likes to do her own thing. Getting married to a Prince is not in her plan, so when various Princes turn up to seek her hand she sets them the most impossible tasks; all of them that is until the final one, Prince Swashbuckle. He



succeeds where the others have failed and only when our heroine changes him into a frog does he depart, in his sports car and looking extraordinarily cross. Strong female characters are hard to find in children's books, but here's a good one in a story that's both unexpected and amusing. Highly recommended! MS

The Angel and the Soldier Boy

Peter Collington, Magnet, 0 416 07522 3, £2.95

A very attractive, wordless picture book in the genre of **The Snowman** and with much the same style of soft pastel colouring. This has a more specific plot to it, however, and there is less scope for interpretation of the action. This, to be honest, and perhaps philistine, makes it easier to use in a busy classroom since the time needed to 'read' it is less. **The Angel and the Soldier Boy** will be best enjoyed at home or by children on their own in private reading at school; I found myself hurrying children through it and it deserves better than that.

The story concerns two tiny toys belonging to a little girl, and the villainous pirate who leaves the pages of her story book to steal the pound coin from her piggy bank. The soldier boy embarks on a brave attempt to defeat the pirate, but is then taken prisoner himself, leaving the angel to mount an almost SAS style rescue operation. What would happen when the pirate wakes up to find his treasure and prisoner gone, we hardly dared think! LW



Junior/Middle

Wolf Pie

Andrew Matthews, ill.
Tony Ross, Magnet,
0 416 02562 5, £1.50
A surreal, fast-moving (sometimes breathless!) story, in which the fairy tale elements are combined with a contemporary quirkiness. When the King and Queen want a change in the menu, and the apprentice chefs are sent out into the land to collect new delicacies, nothing (and nobody) is safe.



There's a lovely sense of irreverent greed to the whole, and a rumbustious cast of characters. When, at the end, the wolves jump out of the pie and eat the monarchs, it's a blow for democracy and a daring piece of theatricality. The writer has talent – and it's a smashing read for eights to elevens. Ross's pictures are perfectly integrated, and essential to the plot. CM

Radio Reporters

John Escott, ill. Elaine McGregor Turney,
Puffin, 0 14 03.2211 6,
£1.50

I like this writer's ability to keep many aspects of a plot moving. Many sevens to tens enjoyed *Radio Detective* and they'll not be disappointed by this lively tale, based again around the local radio buffs. Here, they help in solving a robbery. Good local colour, and some deftly written relationships between the young and the old. Not over-demanding, but a satisfying read for the newly-independent. CM

The Magic Mango Tree and other stories

Rita Capella, ill. Glynis Yexley, Merlin Books (Braunton, Devon),
0 86303 353 9, £1.95

We need many stories from diverse cultures, and this collection features three tales with their roots in Sri Lankan folklore. The telling is lively, and the writer can control and pace her stories. The themes will make for interesting discussion with children of eight upwards. Encourage them to look for resonances in the tales they already know.

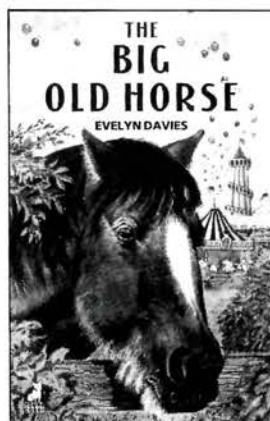
Talking animals, young humble men who capture princesses, powerful musical instruments are here. There's an attractive directness to the plots: no morals are drawn. It's good to review a book for the young from a non-mainstream publisher. We should hear more from the writer. CM

Pilkie's Progress

Hazel Townson, ill.
Tony Ross, Beaver,
0 09 956360 6, £1.95

Clever re-working of *Pilgrim's Progress* into zany, contemporary episodes about Benny Pilkington's adventures. Though this writer sometimes gets over-complex in plotting and ideas, she has the offbeat sense of humour that appeals to eights to elevens.

Shortish episodes help the newly-independent. Some stirring full-page pictures from Ross. As so often happens these days, the book's attraction is not helped by too-cramped format. CM



The Big Old Horse

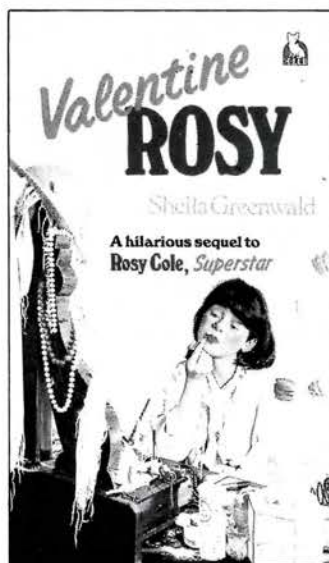
Evelyn Davies, ill. Terry Riley, Young Corgi,
0 552 52471 9, £1.75

A poignant, poetic and well-crafted tale, in which an old horse finds himself neglected as a result of the garish fairground horses coming to town. There's not a great deal of action, but it's a good example of a miniature plot being drawn with sensitive brush strokes. A good read for eight/nine year olds, ready to go it alone, and able to manage a slow, thoughtful reading experience. CM

Valentine Rosy

Sheila Greenwald,
Corgi, 0 552 52372 0,
£1.75

This sequel to *Rosy Cole, Superstar* continues the humorous, revealing insight into the fortunes of 11-year-old



Rosy, as she tries to cope with life which becomes more complicated as adolescence approaches. We see our heroine experimenting with make-up, coming to terms with the unspeakable Boys, and at the same time stepping across that boundary between superficial and more meaningful friendships with her girl peer group.

This American book probably does reflect an American girl's attitudes and behaviour patterns but I'm not sure whether her British counterpart might be so 'forward' or emotionally 'aware'. I'd recommend this to 11-year-old girls, and leave the final comments to them. NS

Truant from Space

Brian Ball, ill. Maureen Bradley, Young Corgi,
0 552 52472 7, £1.75

Large clear print, pertinent and plentiful b/w drawings, short chapters, characters and situations with which children can easily identify, plus a fair mix of creative imagination, all help to make this an interesting sci-fi book for lower juniors.

Young Corgi recommend the book for those who have just mastered basic reading skills



but I would query some of the vocabulary used: space robots who were 'bursting with ... self righteousness and virtuous triumph'; 'discrimination'; 'anxiously'. An easier language might have better suited the young reader here. NS

Which Animal are You?

Anthony Smith, ill. Jan Brychta, BBC,
0 563 20637 3, £1.75

Imagine a mix of Ted Hughes' *How the Whale Became* and Kipling's *Just So Stories* and this may give you a hint as to the nature of this book's contents. Here the name of each animal is at stake, and in several chapters we learn how camels, hamsters, robins and ants all earn their names.

Many of the stories are fanciful and wordy, yet they have charm and do attempt to address the young reader in his/her own language. They were good enough to be read on *Jackanory*, and are worth perusing by young juniors. Some of the tales are worth sharing aloud, and the black and white pictures are entertaining, especially those depicting elephants. One for the school bookshop and the library. NS

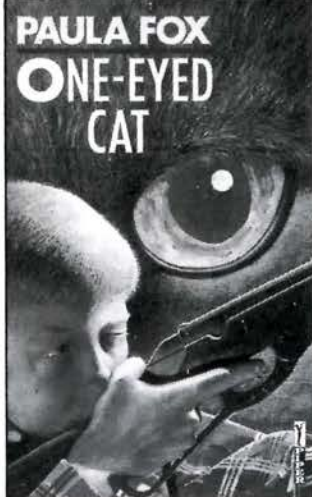
Bambi

Felix Salten, ill. Maurice Wilson, Pan Piper,
0 330 30105 5, £1.99



Bambi was first published 80 years ago, from a German text, yet reading the story now one is struck by the freshness and contemporary nature of the style and vocabulary. No wonder Walt Disney seized it for such a successful cartoon. True, top juniors upwards will need to have a reading fluency but their reward will be a rich one, for the book is so fulfilling, so true to life, and an example to those critics of children's fiction who might be over-dismissive of good old classics! Stock it! NS

Middle/Secondary



One-Eyed Cat

Paula Fox, Pan Pipers,
0 330 29646 9, £1.99

This book would make an excellent class reader for 11-13 year olds, complementing well *The Midnight Fox* by Betsy Byars. It is set in America in the 1930s and tells the story of 11-year-old Ned, the only child of the Reverend Wallis and his invalid wife. Ned receives a gun from his uncle for his birthday which his father forbids him to use. Ned, usually obedient, defies him and tries out the gun in the dead of night – and is convinced he has partially blinded a cat as a result. The book explores Ned's anxiety and guilt in a wholly realistic way – here is an author who really knows how children think and feel. Ned's relationship with his parents is a central theme of the book and here, as elsewhere, the writing is peppered with small wisdoms and gentle insights. The cover, unfortunately, is dreadful, belying the real nature of this beautifully crafted book. VR

Witness

David Johnstone,
Magnet, 0 416 07462 6,
£1.75

With a name like Redemption Greenbank the main character deserves to be an orphan hounded by a murderous psychopath! Our doughty waif witnesses villainous Jacob Slattery murder Sol Rim in a graveyard and earwigs some other incriminating info: enough to necessitate his adventurous flight for the rest of the story, eventually ending up in London, where Inspector Trumper proves to be a reliable cop after all. There are far better historical adventures admittedly, but this one might prove more readable to those with less than it takes to get through the likes of Leon Garfield. DB

On Loan

Anne Brooksbank,
Puffin Winners,
0 14 03.2572 7, £1.95

I was pleasantly surprised by this book. The rather tasteless cover and the uneven quality of the 'Winners' series lowered my expectations somewhat. My apprehensions proved ill-founded as a carefully handled story of the traumas of adoption unravelled.

Lindy, a Vietnamese girl, was adopted when she was three by an Australian family who believed that both her parents were dead. On her fourteenth birthday Lindy's father contacts her and makes it plain that he wants her to join him in Vietnam. Lindy's internal struggle is clearly and simply documented and there is a real attempt to deal with the issues raised by the situation. My criticism is that other tensions – race and colour – are never really discussed, and yet they form an integral part of Lindy's dilemma. Offer this selectively to interested children from the second year upwards or use it as a basis for sensitive discussion about adoption and its attendant problems. VR

Yatesy's Rap

Jon Blake, Penguin
Plus, 0 14 03.2107 1,
£1.95

The book is attractively packaged and it's labelled as 'Music Biz Drama' but older teenagers are going to find this thin stuff. The main characters are 12 years old, committed by a lie to setting up their own band and performing at the Christmas concert. It's a little different that they are unusual characters for a group and quite interesting that the ineffectual teacher is a good and kind man but this doesn't sustain the story. The one element that might, the outcast Yates and his tortured expressions of deep feeling expressed in the rap, is unfortunately not dealt with in any detail. It might keep some readers occupied but it's unlikely to sustain them. AJ

Bike Run

Diane Wilmer, ill. Anne Magill, Young Lions,
0 00 672806 5, £1.95

Sensitive, well-written story of a girl who wants an expensive bike, and takes on a paper round to get it. Authentic school scenes and banter; well-managed family episodes. The girl is Asian, and the prejudices in a Northern town are finely caught. The harsher edges could have been pushed more, for this writer has the skill to involve the young in the issues she touches upon. Older juniors, younger secondary children will talk about this one. CM



The Duck Street Gang Returns

Denis Marray, Magnet,
0 416 04562 6, £1.75

Here is the welcome return of the infamous Class 2D, mayhem makers and dreaded destroyers, immortalised in the original 'Duck Street' saga. School stories, particularly of the sub St Trinian's standard, are two-a-penny, but 'Duck Street' transcends this, having a certain something that others in the genre miss by a mile. This time round a television company is filming a children's programme at the school. Needless to say, filming isn't the only activity going on there! BB

Guardian Angels

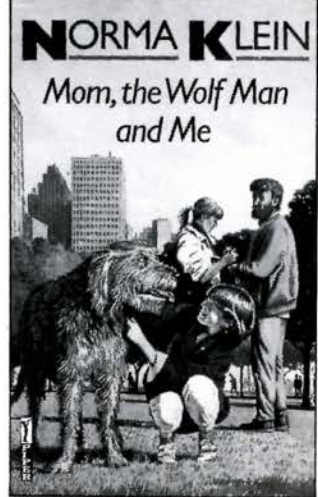
Edited by Stephanie Nettell, Puffin,
0 14 03.2076 8, £2.50

This anthology was originally published to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Guardian Fiction Award – the new stories written by authors who had been previous winners of the Award. The collection is edited by Stephanie Nettell, Children's Books Editor at the *Guardian*, and is generally of a high standard. To my mind, the one absolute stand-out amongst a galaxy of famous names including Aiken, Desai and Hughes, is Peter Carter's 'A Speck of Dust' which pulls no punches in unravelling the inhuman threads and tentacles of the laws of apartheid. The merest chance, a shadow in the night, sparks a chain of events which climax in the inhuman justice of the South African state, with its power of life and death over every aspect of coloured life. BB

Mom, the Wolf Man and Me

Norma Klein, Pan Piper,
0 330 29655 8, £1.99

Judy Blume apparently loves this book and it's not difficult



to see why. This is her own territory with the individual voice of Brett giving us her perspective on home, school, growing up and life with Mom and the boyfriend – the Wolf Man (after his wolf-like dog). The attempt to be engagingly direct and comforting is mostly successful and the child-perspective can be thoughtful and humorous. It's the kind of book to help promote understanding and a sharing of growing up but it's one of many now and it doesn't stand out sharply from the rest. AJ

A Secret Friend

Marilyn Sachs, Corgi,
0 552 52454 9, £1.95

Readers familiar with *The Fat Girl* will anticipate well-crafted writing with a relevant – but painless – message apparent. They will not be disappointed by this offering. Aimed at first or second-year secondary pupils – probably girls – it tells the story of Jessica's efforts to find a special friend after being deserted by her best friend Wendy.

The book has moments of great poignancy during which Jessica's feelings are sensitively discussed. Slowly, the book reverses the supportive role of Jessica's mother until it is Jessica herself who is the support. During the course of the book Jessica is compelled to examine her own criteria for friendship and the book's ending is both unexpected and pleasing.

Do find a space for this in the library or the bookbox – it will furnish many valuable ideas for contemplation and discussion. VR

The Freedom Machine

Joan Lingard, Puffin,
0 14 03.2369 4, £1.95

If you can believe Mungo's rather pally relationship with his bike, Gulliver, this is a satisfying enough read. Boy and bike make a break for



freedom when it looks as though a stay with the vitriolic Aunt Janet is in the offing. They finally hole up in an abandoned mansion with a dubious history, where everything turns out as well as expected and they even see a ghost.

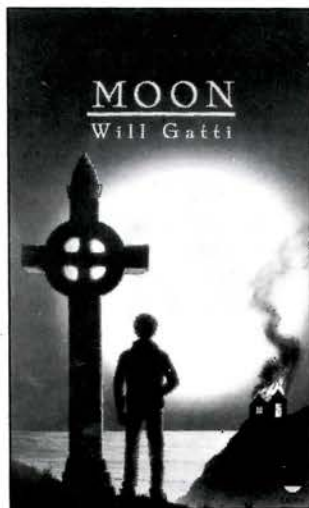
Joan Lingard adds a deeper dimension with the imprisoned father to produce a story worth stocking for older junior/lower secondary readers. DB

Berry Moon

Will Gatti, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672749 2, £1.95

A passionate and murderous revenge in a highly embittered backwater village of County Mayo is the theme of this tale, which perked up after a slowish start. Sean Moon and his younger brother Michael, local policeman's sons, are the latest in a line of Cain and

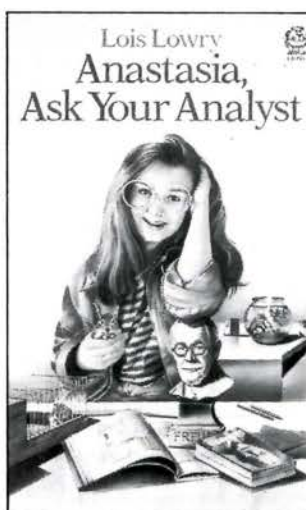
Abel figures to be influenced and near-destroyed by the relentless repetition of history. The previous generation was represented by their father and his wild brother Berry, who, 15 years later, has returned full of hate for the men and village who drove him out in ignominy. His bitterness, stirred by the malevolent Mrs Dane, festers sufficiently for him to exact a deathly and bloody retribution against those who accused him the night his daughter Emer was born and his lover Mary Dane died. Sean and Michael are merely pawns in his spiteful plans. Worth a library copy in the secondary school. DB



Anastasia, Ask Your Analyst

Lois Lowry, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672870 7, £1.95

There seems to be something wrong with parents and child,



or so the child thinks. No it's not her name, it's adolescence. Anastasia begins a Science Project on gerbils (extracts of which are repeated annoyingly at intervals through the book) but ends up analysing herself. Lois Lowry has a gentle and sometimes sharp touch and the best parts are the conversations with Freud – in bust form, the escape of the gerbils and the attempts to help younger brother Sam cope with the dreaded Nicky Coletti. It's all good fun and sometimes thoughtful too. AJ

A Deadly Game of Magic

Joan Lowery Nixon, Corgi Freeway, 0 552 52370 4, £1.95

It took a little time for the *Psycho*-like background to take effect but once moving this is an intense and quite satisfying suspense story. The mechanics (literally) of the

four teenagers ending up in the large, strange house in a thunderstorm at night barely matters. They're stranded and the house begins to reveal its tricks. That Lisa is an amateur magician might seem improbable but it's convenient here. The four of them are being played with by, as it turns out, a murderous magician whose unfolding character is one of the strengths of the book. The education of the characters is thin but the suspense is good strong stuff and not easy to resist – just right for many readers in this age-group who will be attracted by the cover and will not need much help from there on. AJ



Older Readers

Lizza

Wendy Robertson, Knight, 0 340 41421 9, £1.95

Set in a Durham village in 1926 against the backdrop of a miners' strike, here is the story of 15-year-old Lizza who is sent from home to Bradford to work in a textile mill. In those first three months she experiences the intense pain of both separation and rejection, but eventually she can enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that she can make it on her own, away from the dominance of her mother.



Now she realises what the elder woman knew – 'that away from here you'll bloom and staying here'd make you a one-sided bloom.'

The technique of telling parts of the story in letter form is an added bonus to a well-crafted, worthwhile story for older readers, probably girls. DB

Rainbows of the Gutter

Rukshana Smith, Methuen Teens, 0 416 08572 5, £1.95

A book of this calibre is always welcome – the more so when it deals sensitively with the problems confronting ethnic minority groups in Britain today.

Philip Browne is the narrator and the story he tells is about his immediate family and friends. Browne is an artist, his sister, Colette, a journalist on a radical black paper. He takes us from their early childhood to maturity,

detailing the tragedies which befall his family with clarity and restraint.

Those qualities are the hallmarks of the book. The writing is graceful and intelligent and never seeks to overwhelm with sensationalist detail but instead offers experiences and leaves the readers to draw their own conclusions. After reading the book I felt as if I had been compelled to stand back and examine my own preconceptions: it does not leave the reader feeling comfortable. Thus, it is highly recommended as a wider reading text for more able GCSE students. VR

The Girls in the Velvet Frame

Adele Geras, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672879 0, £1.95

This is a lovingly careful story, yet less a story than vividly created sections from part of a family's life. The story, set in

the early part of the century, is the attempt by the Bernstein family, mother and five daughters, to trace Isaac who left them and Jerusalem for New York. Within this frame we have the lives of the family as individuals, the tight community of their large house, friends and relations. Adele Geras has a special gift for making this Jewish life something to savour, a past caught in the emotional detail of human lives. It has the feeling of something delicate, textures, light, warmth and feelings, of the past itself.

In the characters of the daughters, caught at their separate points of growth, and in the vivacious Aunt Mimi, we feel the continuities of relationship, of love and friendship, of youth and age.

I'm not sure how easy teenagers will find it. If they've enjoyed her other novels (like *Voyage*) or are taken by the carefully created cover they will pick it up at least. It would be good to see

such books becoming part of GCSE work – in talk as much as writing. AJ

Kill-a-Louse Week and other stories

Susan Gregory, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2151 9, £2.25

Bottom set third and fourth years a problem? Get a set of this book: that's not to devalue what is a rich source of amusement and discussion for 14-16 year olds.

One of the book's strongest points is the sharpness of its observations of school life – I winced and laughed out loud by turns. The title story is particularly good but the book exhibits a remarkable evenness of quality. The stories deal with a wide variety of topics likely to *really* appeal to teenagers – love, unfairness, jealousy, insecurity – all set against a vivid school backdrop peopled with easily identifiable characters. The way to a class's heart is through its sense of humour – tickle it with this collection but don't ignore the book's other good qualities: there are many. VR

Bury the Dead

Peter Carter, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672877 4, £2.50

It's difficult not to admire Peter Carter for the way that he creates such a substantial and satisfying novel without making any concessions to his teenage audience. It's substantial in size, over 350 pages, and very powerful. It begins with a Prologue – two older men discussing a problem of incriminating files from a murky past, someone attempting blackmail. The novel proper switches to East Germany and the Nordern family whose conventional life is disturbed by the appearance of Uncle Karl, presumed dead in the war some 40 years before. The connection with the Prologue is made with little fuss and the dramas of the visit in both its ostensible and real forms dominate the final sections. For much of the novel we are engrossed in the lives of the family, in this place, created with a wonderful sense of accuracy, and the strong drama of the 15-year-old Erika's attempts to become a high-jump champion.



Through all this is threaded the detail of pre- and post-war German life, values and history. As so often, Peter Carter blends the complexities of history effortlessly with the fictional lives of his characters.

It's full of drama, especially in its marvellous twist of an ending – now that should provoke discussion. The cover is very well done: teachers, history teachers too, just need to do their bit in bringing book and reader together. AJ

Quest Beyond Time

Tony Morphet, Puffin Winners, 0 14 03.2573 5, £1.95

The Dream Catcher

Monica Hughes, Magnet, 0 416 05202 9, £1.95

Breaking Glass

Brian Morse, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2359 7, £1.95

This trio explores the future, the first two with imaginative flair and the last with chilling prescience.

The first has been made into an Australian TV film and the typography denotes an audience of older readers who need a fast-paced tale and plenty of encouragement. Mike ('I come from a time when everyone's solo. All single units. Sure it gets rough here, but everyone's got a place.') hang-glides through a Time-Discontinuity, 500 years into the future, into a barbarian post-holocaust Dark Age. The people welcome him as the prophesied saviour from the skies, who will deliver them from the Great Sickness. His dangerous adventures in the company of clanswoman Katrin serve to highlight his own longing for kinship.

In a similarly fanciful vein *The Dream Catcher* whisks us six generations on into a peaceful isolation following the Age of Confusion. Ruth, on Ark Three, is suddenly receiving messages through dreams of another civilization, where there is pain and fear. Who are Tomi and the girl with red hair? Can 20 envoys from Ark Three use their highly developed psychic powers to assist Ark One, somewhere beyond the Eastern Mountains? At last, in chapter six, the mission begins to approach the city of fear, where sleep is induced by drugs, slaves obey masters who rule through dread and dreams are programmed by computer. After a very slow start this eventually proves quite an exciting read, with some interesting futuristic notions to mull over.

By far the strongest reading challenge is *Breaking Glass*, a very bleak and depressing post-nuclear novel with the refinement of the Red Army dropping a searingly nasty germ bomb on the Midlands, effective for 200 years and creating a no-go area inside which brutal,

survival-fixated gangs roam. Here Darren is as much a loner as before the crisis; fatso son of a disliked father, actively hated by the neighbourhood thug, passively loathed by a former buddy, Alex. And it is the latter's long-borne grudges and bitter complexes which signal the end of the whole painful struggle to survive and belong. This is a very tense piece of writing, which will probably require more than a single reading to be fully appreciated. Definitely one for older, experienced readers. DB

Granny was a Buffer Girl

Berlie Doherty, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672792 1, £1.95

A Carnegie Medal winner, this, and it's easy to see why. 18-year-old Jess is about to leave for a year in France and on the eve of her departure she is woven the web of family stories and secrets which she has long wanted to share. The 11 stories include her own where she comes to terms with her own impossible infatuation with an older, married man.

The stories are *real*, the characters entirely believable: by the end of the book the family are well and truly alive – and the reader has become compulsive! Buy and read this book with third-years upwards – you'll be richly rewarded by the experience! VR

8 Plus 1

Robert Cormier, Fontana Lions, 0 00 673057 4, £1.95

This stunning collection of short stories is essential for anyone involved in the study or enjoyment of literature. The stories deal with relationships – a first love, a daughter leaving for college, a son seeing his father as a man with human failings for the first time.

The book has a double strength – the flawless writing typical of Cormier is there in abundance and, equally important, there is an author-written preface to each story. These give the reader a fascinating and sharply etched insight into Cormier as a writer. He explains the creative process involved in conceiving and writing each story and thus provides a thrilling glimpse into the world of the writer at work.

This collection is a highly recommended purchase for a fourth or fifth-year (or top third-year) class as a set text. If you really can't do that, shoot your Head of Department and buy this for library and/or Wider Reading bookbox. VR

Summer Spectacular

SANDRA BOYNTON

Chloë and Maude

Three rib-tickling stories from the top author/artist in which best friends rule OK – mostly ... £2.95

PETER MAYLE and ARTHUR ROBINS

Footprints in the Butter
The Further Adventures of Chilly Billy

More excitement featuring the little man who lives in the fridge (you know, the one who rushes to turn on the light when you open the door ...) £1.95

CATHERINE SEFTON

Shadows on the Lake

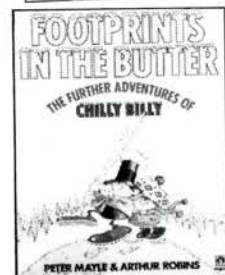
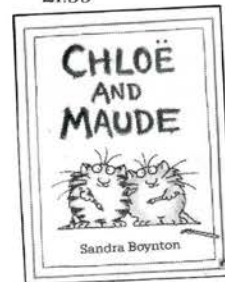
After her mother's death, thirteen-year-old Annie must take charge of the family. Things become really difficult when she begins to suspect elder brother Baxter of thieving ... £1.75

Edited by MIRIAM HODGSON

The Teens Book of Love Stories

In a specially commissioned collection, love is portrayed with realism and humour in all of the many ways it affects quite ordinary people. £1.95

Teens



MAGNET

Michelin House,
81 Fulham Road,
London SW3 6RB

Authorgraph No. 51

Michael Rosen

*You may think I'm happy, you may think I'm sad,
You may think I'm crazy, you may think I'm mad,
But hang on to your seats and listen right here
I'm gonna tell you something that'll burn your ear.*

*A hip. Hop. A hip hop hap.
I'm givin' you all the Michael Rosen rap.*

(from *The Hypnotiser*)



Enter Mike Rosen, a large affectionate bear of a man brimming with exuberance, warmth, and humour. 'I'm a bit of a kid myself,' he confesses. He loves a joke, a good story, a bit of the latest gossip from the children's book world. Without pausing, he'll suddenly regale you with a poem 'hot off the press' with exaggerated gestures as if he were performing to an audience of hundreds. His room is awash with letters (especially from children – he allows about a day a month to reply to these), manuscripts, and masses of books. He's just moved his study and there are books, in piles and in boxes, all over the room.

Mike has been collecting books for as long as he can remember. He buys most anthologies of poetry for children, black British writing, community publishing, poetry from all over the world. His other passion is anything relating to the oral tradition – street rhymes, popular songs, folk stories, working-class history and the like. Having taken a degree in English, he's got all the standard literary texts, but he is currently far more interested in a shelf full of unusual, quirky volumes. 'Australian joke books nestle side by side with feminist poetry, 'The Unwritten Song', Chinese Nursery Rhymes and the lyrics of John Cooper Clark!

In the last couple of years Mike has treated Australia, Canada and Singapore, as well as British schools, to the Rosen magic leaving school children, teachers, students and librarians clamouring for more. It's not just that he makes them weep from laughing at his mad antics or that he is a superb performer of his own poetry, with every gesture and nuance captured to perfection; the talent he displays might be termed 'the common touch'. He *knows* how children tick, he communicates directly and naturally with them and they respond, how else but directly and naturally. Add to that the fact that his poems are true to life, well crafted, often extremely funny, and involve a messing about with language, and you have a winning combination. As well as 'reading' his poems, he jokes with the children and encourages them to join in. He tells stories about himself and his children in a way that his audience can relate to.

Of course 'the touch' is two-way. He gives but, as he'll tell you, he gets just as much back. And that's what makes him one of the most significant figures in contemporary children's poetry. He was one of the first poets of his generation writing for the young to draw closely on his own childhood experiences (the child in him) and to 'tell it as it was' in the ordinary language children actually use. Up till then (his first book was published in 1974), most children's poetry was rather more formal and dominated by poets (often very good ones) who chose

subject matter more remote from children's lives – funny rhymes, the natural world, cautionary verse, magic and the like mainly written in traditional verse forms. Of course such poetry has its place, but the advent of writers like Rosen has added another dimension and, in so doing, has changed the face of children's poetry. Now it's commonplace to find poetry written from the child's point of view about everything and anything; street and school life is explored realistically; unmentionables are mentioned; humour is the real stuff of the playground.

Mike Rosen played an important part in opening up the range of poetry available to children in the early seventies and has been continuing to do so ever since. Perhaps his special place in this exciting development is three fold: first there is his belief in and respect for what children say, think and feel in their talking and writing. Then there's the forms: the long narrative poem, dramatic monologues, conversation pieces, jokes and word play. He writes about the little events that make up our lives – having an argument, not being picked for the school team, what it feels like to be teased, unfair treatment by brothers and sisters, fears, uncertainties, hopes, dreams, fun... And finally the language: he writes about these ordinary things very often in a 'free verse' that captures natural speech rhythms. In this way he dignifies and gives status to children's everyday lives. The young reader gets the message that it's desirable not only to read this poetry but also legitimate to write about experiences and concerns themselves and that other people will be interested.

The lighthearted nature of much of his work, his use of real speech rhythms, his refusal to make poetry anything other than 'down to earth' has not led to unanimous critical acclaim. His detractors tend to neglect the more serious, substantial poetry which has always been a feature of Rosen's work especially in collections for older children and teenagers – for example, his anger about the neglect of his dying mother by friends who presumably couldn't face the ravages of cancer:

Mum

*What held them away
from our door?
Was it the dark rooms?
The rows of bottles of tablets?
The heavy scent of her perfumed cushion?
Or the sight of her shiny skin
stretched over the bones of her skull?*

*They kept their distance
they kept their place
they left her for dead
months too soon.*



Or:

For them I was just Jew.

*I was the Jew that it was
OK-to-say-all-the-foul-things
you-want-to-say-about-Jews-to.*

*And I played along with it,
I thought it'd stop them hating me
But all it did
was make it easier for them
to hate all Jews.*

(from *When Did You Last Wash Your Feet?*)

Mike is the son of two very distinguished educators, Connie and Harold Rosen. He was very close to his mother. She was somebody who passionately believed in child-centred schooling and he says he still looks at classrooms through the filter of his mother's views – the centrality of first-hand experience, self-discovery, real writing, learning through talking – a holistic view of primary education. Connie Rosen features lovingly in many of Mike's poems and he remembers her best as the mum who fired his passion for books by reading to him every night. Her sing-song voice lulled him to sleep and initiated him into the wonderful world of stories.

Harold Rosen, much loved and highly regarded in the English teaching world (as Emeritus Professor of the London Institute of Education) was, and continues to be, a powerful influence on Mike. His memories of childhood are of his father as a raconteur with a comic touch; an enthusiastic singer who loved playing folk music; the person who read aloud the *whole* of *Guy Mannering* and *Little Dorrit* on family camping holidays. When Mike was in his early teens, Harold Rosen gave him some good advice which in turn Mike now passes on to children he meets: 'don't write in generalities, write about what you know, concentrate on the particular, the personal.'

When Mike was growing up his parents were both teachers leading a busy, sociable life. Evenings were spent with colleagues (many now well-known in educational circles) swapping stories and enjoying conversation.



'Yakking was a legitimate activity in our family.'

His brother Brian, who now holds a senior position in the Natural History Museum, is also a reference point in many of Mike's poems. As the informal recorder of Brian's antics which include a great gift for mimicry: 'I haven't done him justice yet.'

This loving and stimulating childhood provided a security and warmth for Mike that is evident in his poetry. In this respect Quentin Blake was a perfect choice as illustrator, as he is so good at capturing the amusing, sometimes tender view of the child's world. The Rosen/Blake partnership is particularly successful in the books for younger children. However, Mike's poetry also touches on the painful side of life and in his work for an older readership deals with social injustice. In his often hard-hitting collection for teenagers (*When Did You Last Wash Your Feet?*) Tony Pinchuck's inventive, cartoon-style art work complements the text most effectively. Overall, the strongest flavour in Mike's work is that of a basically happy family life with its ups and downs.

As a boy, Mike wanted to be an actor ('I got the acting bug at about ten!') – or a farmer. He was writing plays, acting and directing while at Oxford – and had his first play performed at the Royal Court in 1968. Back in his teens Mike temporarily turned his back on 'the arts' and spent two years studying medicine. But nature would out and he transferred to an English Literature degree in 1966. In fact he found literary study at Oxford disillusioning. He disliked the narrowness of the course he followed which he describes as 'novels, plays and poetry mainly by middle-class white, male writers'. When he was studying ballads, he became interested in working class ballads – the ones still being sung! He encountered resistance from his tutors in what was seen as a radical course of study. Like many students of the late sixties, Mike got involved in the protest movement and this has matured into a powerful commitment to anti-racism, anti-sexism, the rights of children, trade unions, anti-poverty and the working classes ever since. 'The way I write is consistent with my political beliefs.' He believes that our society stifles people's creativity and is keen that working-class experience, in particular, is valued by promoting the culture of ordinary people through personal writing, autobiography and the oral tradition. 'People possess culture. You start with people's own culture, not assume they don't have any.'

After Oxford Mike spent three years as a BBC trainee working on *Play School*, *Schools Television* and *Radio Drama*. Although he enjoyed his time there, 'the Beeb patriarchy got to me. I was fed up having to direct rubbish. Their view of "educational" was narrow. The machine had decided this was the direction to take. Your own creativity was down the spout.' But he got the opportunity to work with some good people and has since put this experience to good use as writer/presenter of programmes like *Middle English*, *Talk, Read and Write* and *Everybody Here*.

In 1973 he joined the National Film School which he describes as 'the freakiest set of people I've ever met'. He didn't always see eye to eye with his tutors there either. 'I've never believed in exercises. You do it for real.'

All in all it added up to 11 years as a student, living an abstemious life with very little money for luxuries like clothes! 'I have a nightmare that I'm 41 and still have no degree! I've decided to change to a History course, I haven't done any revision for the exams and I'm older than everyone else ...'



Around this time, although he didn't realise it, he became ill with what was eventually diagnosed, in 1981, as a hypothyroid condition. Mike gradually became, over ten years, a sluggish, large, puffy-featured man until doctors put him on a course of drugs which changed his life. He likens the experience to the Rip Van Winkle effect – all of a sudden he began to shrink into a lively, attractive, energetic person. The transformation happened over a period of months and had a profound impact on him. In terms of his writing, his work has gone from strength to strength.

Mike had begun writing poetry, based on childhood memories, before he went to university. His mother thought the poems promising and showed some to Joan Griffiths, a BBC Schools Radio producer. Joan immediately recognised their potential and used them in a *Living Language* programme in 1971 and commissioned three further programmes – a great boost to his

confidence. Later publisher Pam Royds at André Deutsch recognised that no one since R L Stevenson had written poetry so directly from the child's point of view. In 1974 *Mind Your Own Business* was published and Mike has been busy writing for children ever since.

He now leads a hectic freelance existence, interspersing writing with television and radio work, performances, running poetry workshops, talking to teachers and compiling anthologies. His energy and versatility is astounding: few writers produce stories and poetry for such a wide age group (four to sixteen plus), anthologise both poetry and fiction, perform, work regularly with pupils and teachers, and do regular broadcasting. And there's the small matter of being married with a combined family of five children as well. His books sell like hot cakes and even if the 'children's literature establishment' doesn't always appreciate his work, his young readership certainly does. Mike gets irritated with the 'self appointed priests of the world of children's poetry who are appalled at new developments and who have definite ideas about what poetry ought to be. You know, nonsense rhymes and beautiful imagery, all winter snow, wind and adjectives, copy-cat stuff. Poetry isn't all about beauty! It ignores all the modern movements in poetry – free verse, concrete verse, dialect, black poetry ... I'm much more interested in poetry that gets at kids' experience, so they write what *they* think and use the words people actually speak.'

And how does he do it himself? 'I often jot down a word or phrase to remind myself to write about an incident that's happened to me. If you looked at my desk right now you'd see "toenail". This is a little note to myself to remind me of the time I lost my big toenail. Sometimes I play with a word for days or even weeks; I've been trying to make a tongue twister about Houdini:

*Who done Houdini in?
Dan done Houdini in.
Who done Dan in?*

The message he gives to children is their entitlement to own and control language. 'Language is not something that's fixed and controls you. You can control language and you can use other people's language, their sayings and make it your own.'

Let Mike have one last word. 'If anybody out there is still worried about whether it's poetry or not: don't worry about it. Don't call it "poetry". I don't mind. Did the people listening to *Beowulf* worry about whether it was an epic or a saga ... or did they just listen to a bloody good story?'

Michael Rosen was interviewed by Morag Styles.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Some of Michael Rosen's books

Poetry collections:

The Hypnotiser, ill. Andrew Tiffen, Deutsch, 0 233 97929 8, £5.95

When Did You Last Wash Your Feet?, ill. Tony Pinchuck, Deutsch, 0 233 97859 3, £5.95; Lions, 0 00 672676 3, £2.95 pbk

Don't Put Mustard in the Custard, ill. Quentin Blake, Deutsch, 0 233 97784 8, £4.95; Picture Lions, 0 00 662677 7, £2.50 pbk

Mind Your Own Business, ill. Quentin Blake, Deutsch, 0 233 96468 1, £4.95; Young Lions, 0 00 670959 1, £1.95 pbk

You Can't Catch Me, ill. Quentin Blake, Deutsch, 0 233 97345 1, £4.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.380 3, £1.95 pbk

Quick, Let's Get Out of Here, ill. Quentin Blake, Deutsch, 0 233 97559 4, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1784 8, £1.75 pbk

Fiction:

Hairy Tales and Nursery Crimes, ill. Alan Baker, Deutsch, 0 233 97708 2, £3.95; Young Lions, 0 00 672675 5, £1.75 pbk

You're Thinking About Doughnuts, ill. Tony Pinchuck, Deutsch, 0 233 98082 2, £5.95; Lions, 0 00 673044 2, £1.95 pbk (November 88)

Nasty!, Puffin, 0 14 03.1599 3, £1.50 pbk

Anthologies (as editor):

A Spider Bought a Bicycle, ill. Inga Moore, Kingfisher, 0 86272 286 1, £6.95

The Kingfisher Book of Children's Poetry, Kingfisher, 0 86272 155 5, £7.95

Speaking to You, with David Jackson, Macmillan Education, 0 333 36360 4, £2.95 pbk non-net

That'd Be Telling, with Joan Griffiths, Cambridge University Press, 0 521 35302 5, £4.95

LIFELINE 4: PROJECTS AND TOPICS

Pat Thomson introduces a new seven-part series

Putting a project together ideally begins with an unhurried survey of all the resources, and then a drawing together of the elements which most suit the age and ability of your particular group of children. If time seems short and information about resources seems less accessible than you would hope, **Books for Keeps'** new Lifeline series may help.

For the 5-12 age range, each section will cover one major topic and suggest non-fiction books, stories and poems related to the one theme. The addresses of organisations which offer help and material to schools will also be included. The result should be a broadly based range of options which remind you of good material, inform you about new books and maybe even suggest new approaches within the chosen theme. If they won't give you a research assistant, use **BfK** instead!

Other themes to be covered in the series include Water, Food, and Clothing.

PART 1: HOUSE AND HOME

The age range covered here is 5-12 years but these titles have been chosen because, used imaginatively, they offer possibilities to a wider range than dictated by reading age. Some of the illustrations are information sources in their own right across the age range, and some of the picture books touch on issues which are valuable discussion starting-points for children older than the format traditionally suggests. **The British**

Kitchen, mentioned below, is a good example. The pictures are ideal for identifying mysterious household objects on historical house visits. The text will be inaccessible to all but the most able readers but teachers will find it uniquely valuable. Series are mentioned when it is worth investigating other titles in those series. Some titles are out of print but have been included as they may still be available through libraries.

INFORMATION BOOKS

Moving House, Nicky Daw, A & C Black 1987, 0 7136 2849 9, £4.50

Picture book, suitable across the younger primary age range because it raises a number of discussion points which affect older children too. Moving house involves emotional as well as physical factors.

Construction and Design

Building a House, Byron Barton, Julia MacRae 1981, 0 86203 051 X, o/p; Picture Lions, 0 00 662265 8, £1.95 pbk

Captioned picture book which traces very simply the major stages in building a house.

Building a House, Hannah Jacobs, Hamish Hamilton 1985, 0 241 11555 8, £4.95

The same processes covered in more detail for junior and lower middles.

Working on a Building Site, Andrew Langley, Wayland 1983, 0 85078 284 8, £5.50

gives a closer look at all the individual trades involved.

Pipes and Wires, Rosemary and Charlotte Ellis, Bodley Head 1975, 0 370 01588 6, o/p

The domestic services, like water and electricity, looked at in a way which can lead to simple scientific experiment.

Windows, 1975, 0 370 01587 8, o/p, by the same authors and publisher, is an intriguing juxtaposition of the practical and the aesthetic. Ventilation, temperature and the construction of windows leads the reader into a consideration of viewpoints, the picture from the window.

The House that Science Built, Michael Pollard, Cambridge University Press 1987, 0 521 33237 0, £4.95

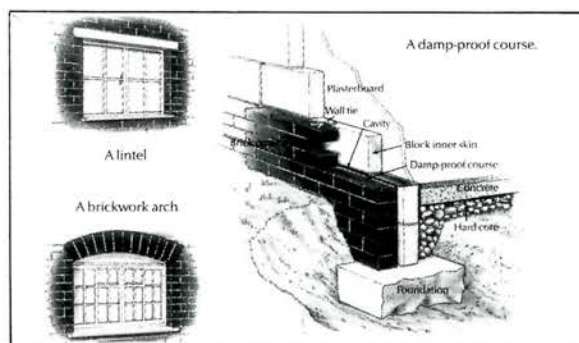
This looks at the house, the services and the materials found in a home in terms of modern technological innovation.

Building Homes, Graham Rickard, Wayland 1988, 1 85210 186 5, £5.75

Written by an author whose special interest is building techniques, this book pays particular attention to materials and methods across the world. Useful glossary, as it clarifies the technical terms used by builders.



From **Building a House**, by Hannah Jacobs.



From **Building Homes**, by Graham Rickards.

Investigating Homes, C B Green, Arnold-Wheaton 1985, 0 560 26530 1, £1.95

Part of a field-work series (**Investigating** series) which offers activity-based workbooks. This one covers types of homes past and present, geographical and environmental considerations and construction. There is also a section on data collection and the arrangement of classification sheets.

How It Used To Be

The Ideal Home, Fulvio Testa, Abelard 1982, 0 200 72768 0, £5.95

A playful, pictorial representation of people's ideas about homes from caves to skyscrapers. Anachronisms spotlight points of interest.

Homes in History, Molly Harrison, Wayland 1983, 0 85078 310 0, £5.50

The home through the ages, each double spread illustrated by a contemporary painting, full of domestic detail. Useful picture source list.

Looking at Houses, Audrey Gee, Batsford 1983, 0 7134 0845 6, £7.95

An historical look at the house as a whole and its component parts. Good details on domestic equipment.

Exploring Buildings, Ralph Whitlock, Wayland 1987, 1 85210 002 8, £5.95

The historical view, based on observation. Includes non-domestic buildings but helpful on the principle that we can start to study homes in history by going out and looking at what we have in the local area.

Houses and Homes, Penny Marshall, Macdonald 1985, 0 356 10145 2, £5.95

Part of the **Camera as Witness** series. Revealing contemporary photographs, covering the period 1850 to 1960s.

The British Kitchen, Doreen Yarwood, Batsford 1981, 0 7134 1430 8, £14.95

For only the most able readers but an excellent reference source for the teacher and full of pictures and drawings which are accessible to all.

In the Kitchen, Harry T Sutton, Longman 1983, 0 582 39231 4, o/p

A 'Museum Puzzle-Picture Book'. The puzzle element draws attention to the differences of period detail.

Houses and Homes, Anne Mountfield, Macmillan Education 1988, 0 333 43940 6, £6.50

Double spreads on both standard areas and the less well documented, such as stairs and lifts, locks and bolts, and pipes and drains.

An Edwardian Household, Stewart Ross, Wayland 1986, 0 85078 621 5, £4.50

Shows the Edwardian home and social life.

For more recent changes, the **How We Used to Live** series (A & C Black) and **Into the Past** series (Longman) both use a well illustrated text to show homes and home life through the twentieth century.

Different Kinds of Houses and Homes

How Do People Live?, Philip Steele, Macdonald 1985, 0 356 11158 X, £3.95

A brief text to accompany large, colourful pictures which tour the world. They point up especially the materials used to build homes and the aesthetic element.

Houses and Homes Around the World, Josephine Karavasil, Macmillan 1973, 0 333 34549 5, £5.95

Features big double spreads of colour photographs.

Houses and Homes series, Alan James, Wayland 1988, £4.95 each

A varied series on this theme which includes thematic surveys, like **Homes in Cold Places** (1 85210 193 8), **Homes in Hot Places** (1 85210 192 X), and **Homes on Water** (1 85210 187 3) which covers, diversely, life in Ho Chi Minh City and on an oil rig.

The **Beans** series, A & C Black, £4.50 each

focuses on particular families and their home life, simply presented. **Turkish Village**, Bernard McDonagh, 1987 (0 7136 2923 1), and **Elena in Cyprus**, Ruth and Neil Thomson, 1987 (0 7136 2922 3), for example, give insights into family life while implying wider issues outside the family.

A Farming Family in Wales, Robin Gwyndaf, A & C Black 1979, 0 7136 1919 8, o/p. Nearer home, the family-centred idea is continued in a less exotic setting, or so the black and white treatment suggests.

At Home and Abroad series (Macmillan) is more detailed and includes suggestions for activities and discussions. It demands a more sophisticated reader to cope with the fragmented presentation which is a mixture of straight text, conversation, picture captions and information boxes. However **Ellen and Alan**, Steve Harrison, 1986, 0 333 38611 6, £5.00, certainly conveys an intimate sense of actually being in Barbados and meeting people there.

Living in Makkah, Shadiya Sugich, Macdonald 1987, 0 356 10327 7, £5.95. Part of the **City Life** series, this book also deals with wider issues and is particularly good at portraying the range of buildings in this Moslem city.

Wayland's **Original Peoples** series presents a complete contrast and looks at the worlds of groups like the **Aborigines of Australia**, Robyn Holder, 1985, 0 85078 419 0, £4.95, and **Eskimos: the Inuit of the Arctic**, J H Greg Smith, 1984, 0 85078 420 4, £5.50.

To remind us that not all homes stay in one place, **On the Move**, Tessa Potter, Macmillan Education 1987, 0 333 42622 3, £6.95, looks at Nomads from the Kalahari to Gerry Cottle's Big Top, and two well illustrated books which bring us back to Britain are

A Traveller Child, Jose Patterson, Hamish Hamilton 1985, 0 241 11573 6, £4.95, and

Gypsy Family, Mary Waterson, A & C Black 1978, 0 7136 1813 0, £3.95.

In all this variety, there is still a place to talk about the homeless. **Children Need Homes**, Harry Undy, Wayland 1988, 1 85210 105 9, £6.95, shows us what happens when people do not have homes, for whatever reason, and in doing so reminds us that homes are more than buildings or constructions. It is part of **The World's Children** series, for whom the consultant is the Save the Children Fund.

On a lighter note, and just in case you thought you were alone, **The Wildlife in Your Home**, Terry Jennings, Young Library 1984, 0 946003 17 3, o/p, and **Animals in Your Home**, Pat and Helen Clay, A & C Black 1985, 0 7136 2590 2, £3.95, offer yet another intriguing, if itchy, facet of the subject.



From **Homes on Water**, by Alan James.



From **Aborigines of Australia**, by Robyn Holder.

FICTION AND POETRY

A mechanical 'have you got a poem to go with...' approach is not an inspiring way to use literature but children beginning to look below the surface of a topic, as a result of a project, can be in exactly the right frame of mind to receive this particular poem or that story. It takes a poem like Colum's 'Old Woman of the Roads', for example, to extend thought beyond the practical facts, and hint at why home and simple possessions might mean so much. Literature can add to the functional but then offers us a further dimension.

Picture Books

Miss Brick the Builder's Baby, Allan Ahlberg and Colin McNaughton, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 80580 7, £3.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1242 0, £1.95 pbk

Despite belonging to a builder's family, Baby Brick does what all babies do with bricks!

I Can Build a House!, Shigeo Watanabe, Bodley Head, 0 370 30965 0, £4.50; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.458 3, £1.50 pbk

Little Bear's building operations finally result in a cardboard box house. Very simple text.

Home Sweet Home, Maureen Roffey, Bodley Head, 0 370 30481 0, £4.50; Piccolo, 0 330 28454 1, £2.75 pbk

A guessing game about animal homes. Peep through the cut-outs and see where everyone lives.

Better Move On, Frog!, Ron Maris, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 083 8, £5.95; Picture Lions, 0 00 662266 6, £1.95 pbk
Frog looks for a suitable home and finally finds the right habitat. Short text.

A House is a House for Me, Mary Ann Hoberman, Viking Kestrel, 0 7226 5522 3, o/p; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.394 3, £2.50 pbk

A rhyming picture book which assigns a home to everyone and everything.

Billy on the Building Site, John Talbot, A & C Black, 0 7136 2658 5, £3.95

Good pictures of the site and equipment but perhaps better used to introduce the idea of safety on building sites.

Once There Was a House, Greg Reyes and Judy Hindley, Collins, 0 00 195626 4, £4.95

Starts as a picture book and finishes as a blueprint for building a cardboard house.

Oscar Mouse Finds a Home, Moira Miller, Methuen, 0 416 52560 1, £5.50; Magnet, 0 416 07182 1, £1.95 pbk

Oscar searches until he finds the perfect place.

House by Mouse, George Mendoza, Magnet, 0 416 25510 8, £1.25 pbk

Mouse creates just the right environment for all her friends. Interesting design implications in a simple form.

Stories

arranged chronologically, starting with the youngest:

What Size is Andy?, Moira Miller, Methuen, 0 416 45270 1, £5.95; Magnet, 0 416 52490 7, £1.50 pbk

A collection of short stories about Andy and his family, including the one about Gran's new house. Just right for reading aloud to infants.

Carrot Top, Nigel Gray, Orchard, 1 85213 054 7, £6.25

Short chapters which stand alone, and one of them shows how some dads are just no good at decorating at all.

Charlie and Elly Stories, Frances Farrer, Gollancz, 0 575 03966 3, £6.95

Ten-minute stories. 'Charlie and Elly and Mick' describes what happens when the roof has to be repaired.

M and M and the Haunted House Game, Pat Ross, Young Lions, 0 00 672595 3, £1.75 pbk

Mandy and Mimi turn their room into a veritable haunted house and frighten themselves to death. Lively easy reader.

The House that Sailed Away, Pat Hutchins, Bodley Head, 0 370 11021 8, £5.50; Young Lions, 0 00 671452 8, £1.95 pbk

Short novel for seven/eight and up; the funny story of a family which sails away in a flood, house and all.

Callie's Castle, Ruth Park, Angus and Robertson, 0 207 15187 3, o/p

Callie longs for a room of her own, somewhere to escape from the confused feelings engendered by her changing family. The room in the turret becomes her own territory, her castle. Short novel.

The Great House, Cynthia Harnett, Methuen, 0 416 51220 8, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.0351 0, £1.25 pbk

A splendid new house is to be built, worthy of the eighteenth century which is about to dawn. Absorbing and detailed story of the architect's children and the change from old styles to the new. Good class book; lots to discuss.

The Stones of Green Knowe, Lucy Boston, Puffin, 0 14 03.1061 4, £1.75 pbk

Roger is the first of the Green Knowe children and in AD 1120 he watches the stone manor being built. There is a time-slip element and adventure but the house itself is always part of the story.

Dream House, Jan Mark, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 80189 5, £6.95

Hannah loves the old Manor House where her mother works. For others, the dream lies in the famous people who come there. For her, the magic is in the house. An expertly characterised story, amusing because it is so well observed.

Poetry

A selection of poems for which just one location is given. As they also appear in other collections, try your own shelves first. The last two are complete collections.

'Obituary on the demolition of a house in Grove Lane, Camberwell' by Maria Dawson in **Delights and Warnings**, John and Gillian Beer, Macdonald, 0 356 11212 8, £5.95

'Bramblepark' by Charles Causley in **Jack the Treacle Eater**, Macmillan, 0 333 42963 X, £7.95

'Willowherb' by Richard Church in **Poemcards 1**, David and Elizabeth Grugeon, Harrop, 0 245 51018 4, o/p

'The Old Woman of the Roads' by Padraic Colum in **Wordscapes**, Barry Maybury, Oxford, 0 19 833138 X, £3.25

'Houses' by Rachel Field, 'House Coming Down' by Eleanor Farjeon, 'House' by Leonard Clark, and 'Wanted' by Rose Fyleman, all in **The Possum Tree**, Lesley Pyott, A & C Black, 0 7136 2706 9, £6.95

'Building a Skyscraper' by James S Tippet in **Once Upon a Rhyme**, Sara and Stephen Corrin, Faber, 0 571 11913 1, £5.95; Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1639 6, £2.25 pbk

'The Building Site' by Gareth Owen in **Song of the City**, Collins, 0 00 184846 1, £4.95; Fontana Lions, 0 00 672410 8, £1.95 pbk

'The House on the Hill' by Wes Magee in **The Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse**, Roger McGough, 0 86272 217 9, £7.95

The Young Puffin Book of Verse, Barbara Ireson, 0 14 03.0410 X, £2.25 pbk

A substantial section devoted to homes and houses.

The Parrot in the Garret, Leonore Blegvad, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 049 8, o/p

Short verses, each depicting in some way, a home for an animal.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

The following organisations offer information or materials suitable for schools. The items mentioned are those which are free or cost a nominal sum, but other materials may be available at a reasonable charge (e.g. films, slides, etc.). Enquiries to these addresses:

Building Societies Association

Schools Liaison Officer
3 Savile Row
London
W1X 1AF
(Colour booklets, charts)

Commonwealth Institute

Kensington High Street
London
W8 6NQ
(Exhibitions)

Council for Environmental Education

Information Officer
School of Education
University of Reading
24 London Road

Reading
RG1 5AQ
(Resource list)

London Brick Company

P O Box 259
Marston Road
Marston Monteyne
Bedford
MK43 0YD
(Information sheets)

National Trust

Junior Division
P O Box 12
Westbury
Wiltshire
BA13 4NA
(Booklet listing resources)

Royal Institute of British Architects

66 Portland Place
London
W1N 4AD
(Resource lists)

English Heritage

15-17 Great Marlborough
Street
London
W1V 1AF
(Information pack)

Glass and Glazing Federation

44-48 Borough High Street
London
SE1 1XB
(Information pack)

Halifax Building Society

Advertising Services
P O Box 60
Trinity Road
Halifax
West Yorkshire
HX1 2RG
(Project box)

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Cannon House
The Priory
Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6BS
(Charts) ●

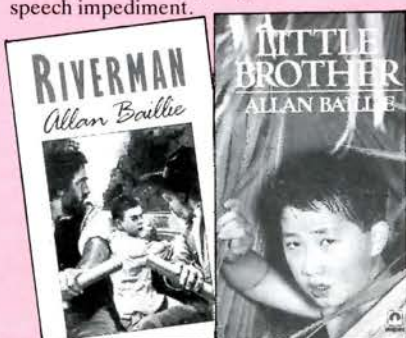
Pat Thomson is Professional Studies Librarian at Nene College of Higher Education, past chair of the Federation of Children's Book Groups, and author of the 'Share-a-Story' series from Gollancz.



It's not often that a relative newcomer writes a string of unputdownables. **Val Bierman** caught up with this exciting Australian author on a flying visit to the UK.

Anyone reading Allan Baillie's books will quickly realise that he has his own distinctive style; a flair for creating suspense, an uncanny knack of understanding an emotional crisis in children, and all revolving around a search, either for adventure or, more often, for identity.

Born in Scotland in 1943 but emigrating to Australia seven years later, much of his own character, either unwittingly or by design, frequently surfaces in his books. His obvious sympathy and understanding of disability stems from an accident at the age of 21 which left him semi-paralysed and with a speech impediment.

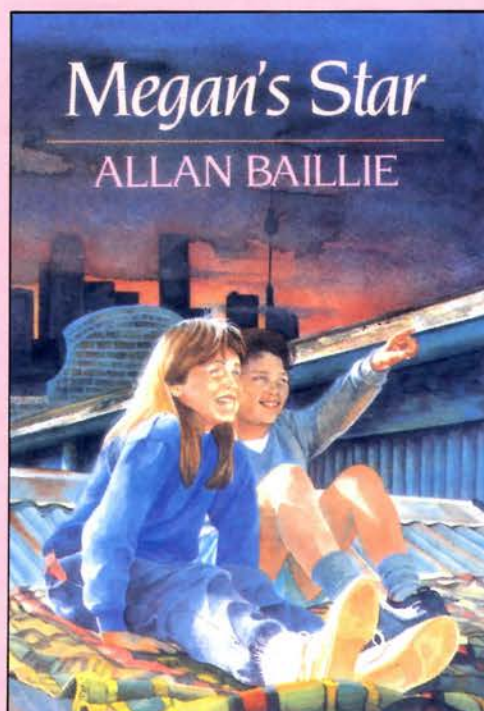


His writing career began when he worked as a journalist and published some short stories. After reading about the newly founded Kathleen Fidler Award, he decided to submit a manuscript of a children's novel; **Adrift** went on to win the Award. As with all Baillie's books it was based on fact. His wife Agnes had given him a newspaper cutting about four Lebanese boys and their dog being washed out to sea on an old raft. This spark of an idea grew into a full-length novel having as its core characters, Flynn, his young sister Sally and, a nice touch, their cat Nebuchadnezzar. As in all good adventure tales it begins with a holiday. But here similarity ends.

'Flynn turned and saw something angular and black moving on Sally's shoulder. There was blood in the water. He kicked until he could breathe and tried to lift the cat off Sally but the cat was sinking its claws into her head. Sally had closed her eyes and was whimpering from the pain. She screamed when Flynn tried to pry a claw from her head. The cat made a sound he had never heard before, like a snake about to strike, and then bit his hand. Sally screamed until water flooded into her mouth.'

The three manage to scramble aboard their crate and as the shoreline recedes further into the distance, Flynn reflects that they are in trouble – big trouble. It says much for the author's skill as a storyteller that the tension between two children and a cat sitting on a drifting crate remains for the entire book.

May we recommend



The next book resulted from his years covering the Vietnam war, a deeply disturbing experience for Allan Baillie. He had toyed with the idea of writing an adult novel for years, then realised that perhaps the horrors of war could best be conveyed through the eyes of a child – to give a child's innocent view which often has a clarity and understanding lacking in adults. **Little Brother** is based on a chance meeting with a 16-year-old boy he found bandaging the wounds of a Khmer Rouge soldier. The boy had lost everything – family, friends, home – and lived a fearful existence in the jungle. The boy's experiences were used as a background to the character Vithy, separated from his elder brother while fleeing from the Vietcong. **Little Brother** means a great deal to Baillie. It is his favourite book – a gem which deserves to become a classic, if only to demonstrate to children the futility and cruelty of war.

Then two books followed in rapid succession. **Riverman** takes the reader back to 1912, to Tasmania where Tim's dad has been laid off from the smelter and has gone to Queenstown to find work. On his return they've planned a trip up the river to find the Thunderer, a huge waterfall that no-one has ever seen. Then there is a fire in a mine – and Tim's Dad is down there.

'In the afternoon, a long rope was lowered into the mine with a lamp, a board and pencil attached. It snaked through the heavy smoke, past the jammed cage 600 feet from the surface, past the still glowing fire round the blackened pump at 700 feet then down past silent tunnels in the rock until it stopped at 1000 feet, the bottom of the mine. The lamp moved in the deep shadows on the walls as it swayed in invitation. It was not touched.'

His childhood comes to an abrupt end and Tim is determined to prove that although he is derisively known as The Shrimp, he can take his place with the men. He journeys up river with his uncle, copes with the scorn of the others, and draws on an inner strength to overcome the deep pain of his father's death.

Eagle Island, a racy thriller and Allan Baillie's most Australian novel, is set on an

ALLAN BAILLIE

island in the Great Barrier Reef. Lew, the hero, is deaf. Col, his most hated enemy, picks on him at school because of his odd way of speaking. Lew's one pleasure in life is his catamaran, which his parents had been against at first. 'How can he sail something like that?' she said, or he thought she said ... 'He'll drown.' How can he *not* sail it? Here's something he can do as well as other kids. Lew was going to forget about Col for two weeks as he set sail for the distant Whitsundays; he could almost forget about being deaf. The trip is vividly described and the word pictures of the wealth of wildlife make fascinating reading. (I defy anyone to read of Lew cooking a coral trout without their mouth watering!) This idyllic life is rudely interrupted by the appearance of Col, and their encounter turns into a deadly game of hide and seek. **Eagle Island** should be lapped up by older readers.

1988 sees the latest Baillie offering, **Megan's Star**, no doubt his most challenging and complex work so far. For the first time the central character is female – Megan, who reluctantly has to look after her small brother Walter, otherwise known as Goblin. Their mother works all day and their father has walked out on them.

'One sunny afternoon she had bounced up to her father's cupboard in search of an old tennis racquet. And found it totally bare, as if he had never existed at all. She had found a message in the kitchen and had to phone Mum at the library. Megan could still feel the dead desolation of that afternoon.'

Set in the 21st century **Megan's Star** is an interesting mix of science fiction and traditional adventure story. It reveals yet another layer of Allan Baillie's talent.

There's more to come. He has a picture book on the stocks in Australia – hopefully it will be in the UK soon. Here is a first-class writer with the power to stretch children's imaginations and make them think. His books deserve to be far more widely read – this is a writer well worth discovering. ●

Allan Baillie's books are published in hardback by Blackie and in paperback by Magnet:

Adrift, 0 216 91424 8, reissue 1989;
0 416 06442 6, paperback 1989

Little Brother, 0 216 91616 X, £6.95;
0 416 08302 1, £1.75 pbk

Riverman, 0 216 91861 8, £6.95;
0 416 06452 3, paperback 1989

Eagle Island, 0 216 92096 5, £7.50

Megan's Star, 0 216 92390 5, £7.95

Valerie Bierman is organiser of the Children's Fair of the Edinburgh Book Festival and children's books reviewer for the **Scotsman**. She was given the Eleanor Farjeon Award in 1987.

Out from behind the bike sheds . . .

When **Loving Encounters: a book for teenagers about sex** by Rosemary Stones arrived a few weeks ago, it demanded our attention. Here was a new book about sex with a clear and uncompromising voice.

We asked two Hertfordshire librarians, **Helen Boothroyd** and **Anthony Tilke**, to talk to colleagues and local schools for their reactions and to see how the book stands up against the current DES circular (**Sex Education at School**) and the recent controversial legislation, in particular, Section 28.

'The aims of a programme of sex education should be to present facts in an objective and balanced manner so as to enable pupils to comprehend the range of sexual attitudes and behaviour in present-day society; to know what is and is not legal; to consider their own attitudes and to make informed, reasoned and responsible decisions about the attitudes they will adopt both while they are at school and in adulthood.'

This is the pivot of **Sex Education at School**, a DES circular, which gives schools guidelines for policy and implementation of sex education courses. These are pertinent guidelines for school and other library services offering information to teenagers on sex, although librarians also need to be aware of other relevant legislation.

The past decade has seen the publication of several titles written specifically for teenagers on sex education, some of which have experienced controversy and criticism for the extent of coverage, advice and difference in style from the more biological approach of previous books.

Make it Happy, Make it Safe is now generally regarded as taking a straightforward attitude which is not patronising towards its readers, explodes various myths connected with sexual acts and offers practical advice. Now, in a revised edition, it also offers the latest information on sexually transmitted diseases and birth control.

Talking Sex has also been the cause of controversy on how freely advice may be given. Nevertheless, it advocates individuals taking responsibility for relationships and campaigns for the right of young people to have information on such topics. It certainly has 'street credibility' as it includes a section answering issues raised in a questionnaire amongst teenagers.

Sex and You may be more descriptive than advice-giving but is again aimed at young people. It is an illustrated guide and sets sex in a societal context; it also incorporates a section on sex and the disabled.

In introducing **Learning about Sex**, the author makes clear his values about human sexuality. While sexual feeling has potential for a good deal of pleasure, this is accompanied by a degree of responsibility - '... in making decisions about sex, all of us must consider the sexual values of those people who are important to us, the values we have learned from religion and education, and the values of our community and the larger society around us.'

Loving Encounters: a book for teenagers about sex by Rosemary Stones is the latest title claiming to tell teenagers all they ever wanted to know ... Through its nine sections the book frankly discusses, amongst other things, body and emotional changes, responsibility and sexual practices (intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, for example), AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, sex and the law, and an extensive list of organisations which can provide help and advice. As in Rosemary Stones' previous

book, **Too Close Encounters**, the approach is direct and very readable; the presentation is clear, providing the facts and discussing options in an accessible way. The language is not over-complicated, explaining biological terms and using 'street language', as appropriate, to ensure understanding - faeces/shit/turds; urinating/peeing. The uncompromising use of language will no doubt cause more anxiety to some adults than to the intended audience. But how does **Loving Encounters** stand up against the recommendations of the DES circular?

'Teaching about the physical aspects of sexual behaviour should be set within a clear moral framework in which pupils are encouraged to consider the importance of self-restraint, dignity and respect for themselves and others . . . Schools should foster a recognition that both sexes should behave responsibly in sexual matters.'

Although some sections of the book may appear rather clinical, as sexual activities are clearly explained in order to inform and to dispel myths, teenagers are actively encouraged to think about sexual development as a part of their personal development, to approach sexual relationships in a responsible, caring way and the presentation is such that it does not assume certain information is the prerogative of only one sex. There are warnings against exploitation and pressure with two useful checklists included, adapted from the author's earlier work **Too Close Encounters: and what to do about them**.

'Schools have a responsibility to ensure that pupils understand those aspects of the law which relate to sexual activity.'

This aspect is covered in detail including contraception, abortion, marriage, rape, homosexuality and paedophilia; teenage rights are explored and practical advice given as appropriate.

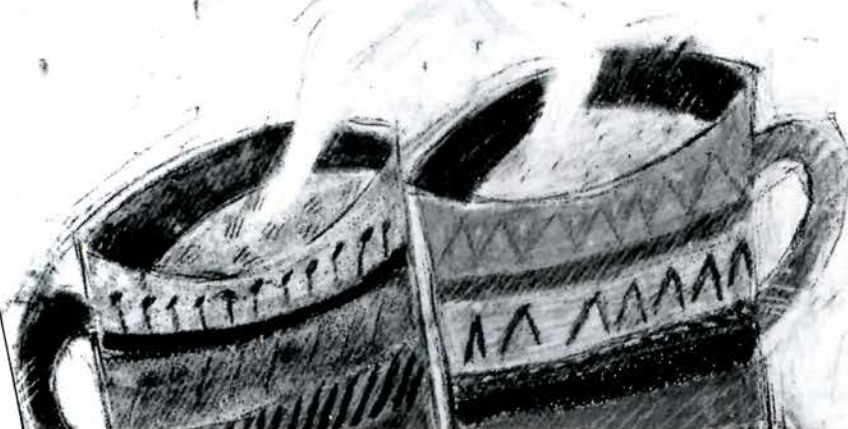
'Schools cannot, in general, avoid tackling controversial sexual matters, such as contraception and abortion, by reason of their sensitivity.'

In keeping with this recommendation, balanced and factual information is presented, although a minor criticism is that possible side effects from long-term use of the Pill have not been highlighted. The other major controversial area, as a result of the Local Government Act 1988 which came into force on 24th May, is the promotion of homosexuality. Section 28 states that homosexuality shall not be intentionally promoted by a local authority nor that teaching should present homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. However, it also states that nothing in the legislation should be taken to prohibit actions which treat or prevent the spread of disease.

The DES circular mirrors these statements and two strengths of **Loving Encounters** are the treatment of homosexuality and information on AIDS. Homosexuality is not presented as 'the norm' nor promoted but is discussed as a fact of life. The acquisition of HIV is simply explained and procedures for safer sex are described through a high, medium, low or no risk rating being given to the sexual behaviour described. A commonsense code for living is advocated such as not sharing razors or toothbrushes. In these respects it admirably meets

LOVING ENCOUNTERS

A Book For Teenagers About Sex



the DES guidelines. From ministerial statements made during parliamentary debates, it is clear that provision of a balanced library stock will not in itself be unlawful, although it is possible that Section 28 may be used by those who advocate censorship. All librarians should read the Library Association briefing paper, which provides helpful information to resist this type of pressure.

One area highlighted in the DES circular but not covered in detail in **Loving Encounters** is 'the value of family life'. However, there is a danger of being prescriptive and this area may be dealt with more effectively through discussion, an approach which is certainly promoted in the text. Indeed, although suitable as an individual read (shelved in teenage collections in the public library!), it is equally suitable for use by teachers – one judged it to be the best of the genre he had seen. Schools will need to decide on the age at which to make this title available – one felt that the 4th year (14/15) would be the appropriate age whilst another considered the end of the 1st year (12) would be acceptable. In fact, the parent of a 1st-year pupil hoped it would be read and discussed by the whole family.

The underlying principle for school librarians, in the selection of sex education materials, is that they need to reflect and support both individual school and LEA policies. The introduction of a National Curriculum may bring new strictures, but what is surely required is a range of appropriate, relevant and appealing material to suit the varying and individual needs of teenagers – keeping the subject out from behind the bike sheds. ●

Health Education from 5 to 16

Curriculum Matters 6, HMSO 1986, 0 11 270592 8, £2.00

Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material

Library Association 1988, free

Sex Education at School

Circular No. 11/87, DES 1987, free

Make it Happy, Make it Safe

Jane Cousins-Mills, Penguin revised 1988, 0 14 01.0713 4, £3.95 pbk

Sex and You: an illustrated guide to the facts of life for young people

A Gunn, Macdonald 1986, 0 356 10926 7, out of stock but probably available in libraries

Learning about Sex: the contemporary guide for young adults

G F Kelly, Barrons 1986, 0 8120 2432 X, £4.95

Talking Sex: a book about growing up

Miriam Stoppard, Piccolo 1982, 0 330 26752 3, £1.75 pbk

Too Close Encounters: and what to do about them

Rosemary Stones, Piccadilly 1987, 0 946826 69 2, £5.95; Magnet, 0 416 03162 5, £1.95 pbk

Loving Encounters: a book for teenagers about sex

Rosemary Stones, Piccadilly 1988, 1 85340 005 X, £5.95

Helen Boothroyd is Secondary Resources Co-ordinator for Hertfordshire School Library Service. Based in Welwyn Garden City, she manages the resource centre which provides a wide range of materials for secondary school use.

Anthony Tilke is Divisional Schools Librarian (Secondary) for East Hertfordshire and has produced an annotated stock revision list, for the county, on sex education materials aimed at children and young people.

AWARDS

AWARDS

AWARDS

CARNEGIE AND GREENAWAY:

Philip Marshall describes this year's winners and runners-up.

The 1987 winners of the Library Association's Carnegie and Greenaway Awards are Susan Price for **The Ghost Drum** (Faber, 0 571 14613 9, £6.95) and Adrienne Kennaway for **Crafty Chameleon** (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 40681 X, £6.50). Once again, the panel found it no easy matter to choose from an excellent shortlist which reflects the current healthy state of the children's book world.

The Carnegie Medal is given for 'an outstanding book for children', a description which fits Susan Price's **The Ghost Drum** in every way.

A sustained, imaginative and, at times, almost poetic folk tale set in the frozen wastes of Russia, here is a fantasy which is totally compelling. The tyrannical Czar Guidon locks his son Safa in a tower room and nothing, it seems, can save him until Chingis, a witch-girl, hears his cries. She sets out to rescue him and also to pit her wits against Kuzma, the shaman of the north, who is becoming increasingly jealous of her powers. The haunting, atmospheric narrative holds the attention from first page to last and creates strongly visual images in the reader's mind. A story which plays on the emotions and will remain long in the memory.

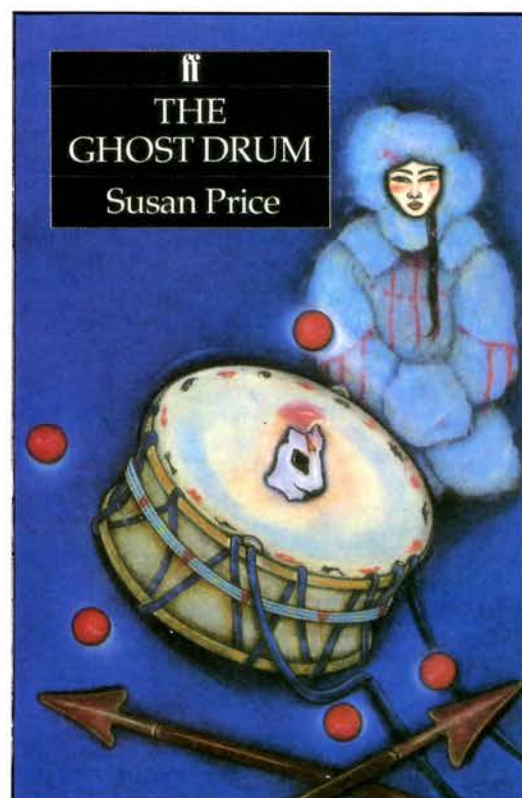
Highly commended is Margaret Mahy's **Memory** (Dent, 0 460 06269 7, £7.95), a beautifully crafted story with superb characterisation. Still feeling a sense of guilt following his sister's death, Jonny sets out to find the friend who witnessed the accident. He meets up, however, with Sophie, an elderly recluse who has senile dementia. As a temporary outcast, Jonny takes refuge with Sophie and as his life becomes bound up in hers, he begins to feel a responsibility

not only for her but increasingly for himself too. The blend of past and present, the power of memory both real and distorted, and the developing relationship between the two main characters are convincingly portrayed in what is, by any standards, an exceptional novel.

Three novels are commended. Eileen Dunlop's **The House on the Hill** (Oxford University Press, 0 19 271565 8, £6.95) combines excitement, adventure and a dash of the supernatural. Central to the plot is a mysterious chink of light which shines under



Susan Price, photo by Guy Waley.



THE GUARDIAN CHILDREN'S FICTION

News of this award was just too late for our May issue. But since it has a habit of picking 'winners' and to make our proper amends – the 1988 Award was won by Ruth Thomas for **The Runaways** (Hutchinson, 0 09 172633 6, £6.95), her first published novel.

Ruth Thomas, now retired, spent her war-time childhood and schooldays in Somerset, where her father was a head teacher. This family tradition led her to take a diploma in education, following her graduation from Bristol University with an English degree. She has since spent the greater part of her life teaching in primary schools in London.

This dual background – city and rural living – forms the vivid backdrop in **The Runaways**, which combines classic adventure-story excitement with some familiar 1980s themes. Ruth Thomas explains, 'it is a book about two not-very-likeable London children, Julia (white) and

Nathan (black), who, rejected by their peers, find adventure and comradeship together. Their experiences' – on the run across the country to Exmoor where they finally give themselves up – 'bring out the best in them and eventually they become much more pleasant people.'

Stephanie Nettell, children's books editor of the **Guardian**, adds: '**The Runaways** was a popular winner for this 21st award. The book is essentially a love story... Nathan and Julia are already at 11, social outcasts, scorned and shunned by everyone. They know only rage, misery, and above all impotence. It tells how a crisis brings this unlikely pair together in mutual dependence, and how from this enforced companionship grow strength, pride and something infinitely tender. The shrewd affection with which Ruth Thomas portrays these kids, their triumphs, their funny moments and their sorrows, is irresistible.'

Anne Fine's book **Madame Doubtfire**



Ruth Thomas reading **The Runaways** to a young child.

DS AWARDS AWARDS

THE 1987 WINNERS

the door of an empty room in an old house on the suburbs of Glasgow. Intrigued yet disturbed, Philip and Susan start to investigate and as they dig deeper and deeper into the past, they begin to uncover some of the many secrets the house has long kept. The novel builds up to a tense climax and is notable for the author's expressive use of words, particularly the host of vivid metaphors which capture the atmosphere, place, time and period with unerring accuracy.

With Monica Furlong's **Wise Child** (Gollancz, 0 575 04046 7, £7.95) we move to the island of Mull in the seventh century. Abandoned by her parents, Wise Child is taken in by Juniper, a woman shunned by the locals as a witch. As time passes, the young girl comes to love Juniper and to learn from her the art of white magic. But danger is at hand in the form of Wise Child's true mother, the evil enchantress Maeve, and more seriously when a long, hard winter brings famine and disease. A memorable story and an intriguing fantasy which comes to life through the strong yet sensitively portrayed characters.

King of the Cloud Forests (Heinemann, 0 434 95201 7, £7.95) by Michael Morpurgo tells of the flight of Ashley and his Uncle Sung in the face of an advancing Japanese army. In the mountains of Tibet they meet a Holy Man who foretells that Ashley will soon become a king. King of the Cloud Forests, an omen that astonishingly soon comes true. An original and very moving story in which the strong characterisation is matched only by the vividly descriptive settings that the author skilfully evokes.

The Kate Greenaway Award is presented each year to an artist who has produced the most distinguished work in the illustration of children's books. This year's winner is Adrienne Kennaway for her illustrations in Mwenye Hadithi's African folk tale **Crafty Chameleon**. Some Weaving

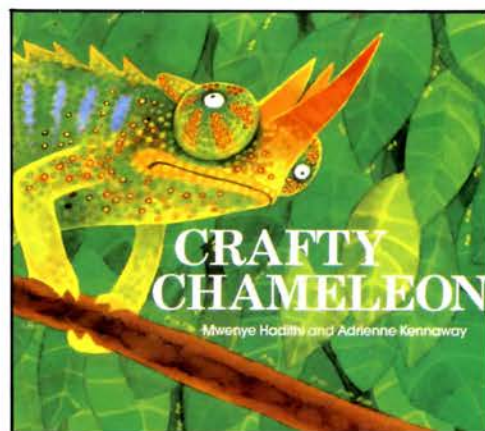
Birds, a rope made of convolvulus vines and his own ingenuity enable a small but crafty chameleon to teach leopard and crocodile a lesson they won't quickly forget. The bold, clear and colourful double-page spreads are a perfect foil to the text of this enjoyable and satisfying tale.

Three titles are commended. Loosely based on the traditional story of Cinderella, role reversal is the name of the game in Babette Cole's **Prince Cinders** (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12138 8, £6.95). Confined to chores and drudgery while his three brothers sample the delights of discos and princesses, things look black for Cinders . . . until a grubby fairy falls down the chimney and grants him three wishes. Even then, however, things don't quite go according to plan! Visual delights abound in this humorous book which is illustrated in Babette Cole's deliciously witty and uniquely distinctive style.

Jill Murphy's **All in One Piece** (Walker, 0 7445 0749 9, £5.95) heralds the return of the Large family. It's the night of the office dinner dance and Mr and Mrs Large struggle to get ready despite the close attentions of their beloved offspring. The use of elephants gives ample opportunity for visual humour, the pictorial characterisation is good, and the clean, clear layout, imaginative use of colour and continued attention to detail add to the book's appeal.

Errol Le Cain does full justice to Antonia Barber's **The Enchanter's Daughter** (Cape, 0 224 02399 3, £5.95) with his richly coloured, ornate illustrations which have a strong oriental flavour and which capture well the mood and atmosphere of the text. Imprisoned in a palace, the young girl longs to escape. But first she must outwit the wily enchanter . . . a feat that will not easily be accomplished.

The Carnegie and Greenaway Awards are administered by the Youth Libraries Group on behalf of the Library Association.



Adrienne Kennaway.



Philip Marshall is the current chairperson of the YLG and Assistant County Librarian (Education and Children's Services) with Nottinghamshire County Libraries.

AWARD

(Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12001 2, £7.50) was runner-up. Stephanie again: 'It's an outrageously cheeky comedy about the ruthless way parents turn their children into weapons in the background of modern marriage . . . a sophisticated treat for over-12s, shrewd, poignant and very funny.'

The judges for this year's award were authors Dick King-Smith, Douglas Hill, K M Peyton and Ann Schlee, and Stephanie Nettell.

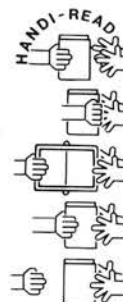
(See page 9 for a review of **Guardian Angels**, a collection of specially commissioned short stories by previous **Guardian** Award winners.)

THE ELEANOR FARJEON AWARD

presented by the Children's Book Circle and sponsored by Books for Children, is one of Britain's most prestigious and is given for outstanding services to children and books.

The 1988 Award has been given to **The National Library for the Handicapped Child** — an interesting departure from previous years when the Farjeon Award has always been presented to an individual, rather than to an entire organisation.

Established in 1985, the Library offers a range of services including a Reference Library with books, reference books, periodicals, audio-visual equipment, computer equipment and information files on handicap books and reading; an Advisory Service; an Enquiry Service; a Meeting Place; Publications including a catalogue and lists of books suitable for children with reading disabilities; and the opportunity to liaise with interested bodies in the UK and overseas. In addition, the Library offers guidelines for publishers on matters such as



**NATIONAL LIBRARY
FOR THE
HANDICAPPED CHILD**

book and page design, text and pictorial content, as relative to the particular needs of children with handicaps.

Perhaps most important in meeting the needs of children with a handicap, the Library has provided a focal point for all those with an interest in helping them learn to read and experience the pleasure of books. And because of this unique contribution, the Children's Book Circle commends the Library itself rather than any individual member of staff, although suggests that all those who work in such a dedicated manner will be seen to share the honour. Congratulations! ●

SOUND & VISION

As any publisher will tell you, getting hard, concrete information on film and TV tie-ins is mighty difficult – 'it's scheduled for the Autumn' (don't try to pin them down to which Autumn), 'they've just started/finished filming', 'it was coming last year, now it might come next', 'they're still talking' – forget it. It's whispers, rumours and mentions until suddenly, like a greyhound coming out of its box, the film and TV companies unleash their product and all its attendant publicity, for the publisher, the wrong side of the last minute. For BfK we have the added bonus of getting it out of our publishing friends – it's amazing what they can omit to tell us. Even so my sympathy is with them; it's a dodgy business not least because the book and the screen work on entirely different timescales. So stand by with your salt (forget pinches, have a shovel handy) because here's the best update we could manage for the coming Autumn and beyond.

Narnia

Coming this Autumn from BBC1 and made by the doyen of children's serializations Paul Stone, this big production will be using all the latest graphic and animation techniques we saw in *A Box of Delights*. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Collins, 0 00 183180 1, £6.95; Lions, 0 00 671663 6, £1.95 pbk) will come first though not all the books are being filmed. The last episode is proposed to be screened on Christmas Eve. If possible we'll follow up with more information in September.

Simon and the Holiday Club

Margaret Stuart Barry, Collins, 0 00 184922 0, £4.95; Lions, 0 00 673262 3, £1.75 pbk (both to be published in October)

More engaging stories about the cantankerous, badly behaved witch and Simon are being screened by BBC1 starting on 14th November, twice a week for six weeks in the 4.00 to 4.30 slot. Elizabeth Spriggs as the witch, and Hugh Pollard as Simon.

The Nature of the Beast

Janni Howker, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 194 X, £6.95; Lions, 0 00 672582 1, £1.95 pbk

This multi-award winning novel (Winner of the Young Observer Teenage Fiction Prize, the Whitbread Children's Novel Prize and Highly Commended for the Carnegie Medal) will, when it comes, be seen on Channel 4. Starring Paul Simpson, Tony Melody and Freddie Fletcher with the screenplay by Janni Howker herself, this must be one to watch for. The fact that Lions already have this tie-in cover suggests that filming has been completed and it's just a matter of fixing a transmission date.

Granpa

John Burningham, Cape, 0 224 02279 2, £5.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.841 4, paperback in the summer

A Christmas '88 screening by the makers of *The Snowman* and *When the Wind Blows* of this award-winning Burningham picture book. Keep an eye open for this one.

Marianne Dreams

Catherine Storr, Puffin, 0 14 03.0209 3, £1.95 pbk

A feature-film, retitled for the screen as *Paperhouse*, with an October release date. No other information to hand.

The Watch House

Robert Westall, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.1285 4, £2.25 pbk

The BBC have this scheduled for six half-hour slots starting December '88.

The Witches

Roald Dahl, Cape, 0 224 02165 6, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1730 9, £2.50 pbk

Winner of the Whitbread Award in 1983, wish we knew more about this one. It's TV but don't know which channel. It's got Anjelica Huston, Mai Zetterling and Rowan Atkinson on the cast list plus the might of the Jim Henson organisation (The Muppets etc) behind it. The book has nearly sold 700,000 copies and is one of a clutch of Dahl

titles coming up for screening over the next year. There is also a special tie-in edition but we haven't seen it yet.

The BFG

Roald Dahl, Cape, 0 224 02040 4, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1597 7, £2.50 pbk

A feature film originally for this Christmas but now postponed until 1989.

Danny the Champion of the World

Roald Dahl, Cape, 0 224 01201 0, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.0912 8, £1.95 pbk

As far as we can gather it's still at the 'they're still talking stage'. Not next year, more like next decade!

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase

Joan Aiken, Puffin, 0 14 03.0310 3, £1.95 pbk

A feature film lined up for Christmas with Mel Smith (huh?).

Pippi Longstocking

Astrid Lindgren, OUP, 0 19 271097 4, £3.25; Puffin, 0 14 03.0894 6, £1.95 pbk

Another long-term project but the BBC are interviewing Astrid this summer – it's her 80th birthday – and sending our very own Chris Powling to Sweden as part of a special programme later this year.

TEEN
R
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JANNI HOWKER

*The Nature
of the Beast*





Ossian Roberts and Sian Phillips in *The Snow Spider* (photo courtesy of HTV Wales).

Willow

According to Pan this has been sweeping the States in a BIG WAY and elicited wild applause when shown at Cannes at the end of May though I don't recall Barry Norman mentioning it in the Filmmight he devoted to the Cannes shindig. The trouble is we really know very little about it or, at least, nothing that doesn't have the slight aroma of hype. It's a '30 million dollar fantasy adventure epic' with George Lucas (*Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*) as writer/producer. Will keep you posted.

The Snow Spider

Jenny Nimmo, Methuen, 0 416 54330 0, £5.95; Magnet, 0 416 06492 2, £1.75 pbk

A Smarties Prize winner to be networked on ITV from November or December, it stars Sian Phillips as Nain and Ossian Roberts as Gwyn.

The Whipping Boy

Sid Fleischman, Methuen, 0 416 12512 3, £5.95; 0 416 08812 0, Magnet paperback due early 1989

To be broadcast on *Jackanory*, date not known. I only mention this because Sid's our September Authorgraph, and the book is an absolute winner running off with the hugely prestigious Newbery Medal in America earlier this year. We'll track it and other *Jackanory* information for you as and when we get it.

Why the Whales Came

Michael Morpurgo, Magnet, 0 416 97090 7, £1.75 pbk

Filmed on location on the Scilly Isles for general release at Christmas. It stars Helen Mirren and Paul Scofield.



Barney

Peter Bonici and Lisa Kopper. Magnet

I've got a PR handout from the production company in front of me and it looks very nice but regrettably no books to hand to see what they've got in mind. I have a feeling that Magnet might be hoping for a rival to Spot and even Postman Pat – there's ambition for you but with Lisa Kopper on board this might be interesting. There's merchandising plans afoot (wall-paper, china, toys, jigsaws, stationery, lunch-packs), a strip cartoon in one of the nationals, and the BBC are talking about giving it 13 five-minute slots starting probably just before Christmas. Two Barney titles to come in October this year, followed by two more next year.

Now where's that shovel? ●

Teachers, parents



and especially children
will all love



STARTING SCHOOL

by

Janet and Allan Ahlberg

An exquisite new picture book which warmly and humorously depicts the day to day activities and events of a first term at school.

A must for calming anxieties and firing enthusiasm in all pre-school children.

Published July 1988 0670 816884 £6.95



Charles Keeping died on Monday, 16th May 1988. He was one of the most revered and respected illustrators of the last twenty years. Technically in a class of his own, he brought insights into his subject matter that were unique because of the man he was.

Ron Heapy, his editor at Oxford University Press, remembers what it was like



WORKING WITH CHARLIE

'Once I got the window, I was okay. Yes, thanks, I'll have a bottle of beer. I always come here 'cos the fish is good. I love fish.' And there it was – **The Highwayman**, all stuck together in miniature, in the amazing little concertina Charles always did for his books. 'You must get the horizon line consistent through the book, and print it in warm black. At the end of the book, just reverse it out. Saves work.'

That was the pattern for all our first meetings on a book. Always a bottle of beer, always fish, the concertina, and descriptions of where Charlie had eaten fish on the weekend. Anyway, we printed **The Highwayman** in warm black – brown and black actually – and Charles got the Kate Greenaway Medal. 'Yes, it was good to get into black and white again. Stopped me doing my fruit salad effect. But don't ever ask me to draw mice with clothes on.' 'No, Charles, we won't.'

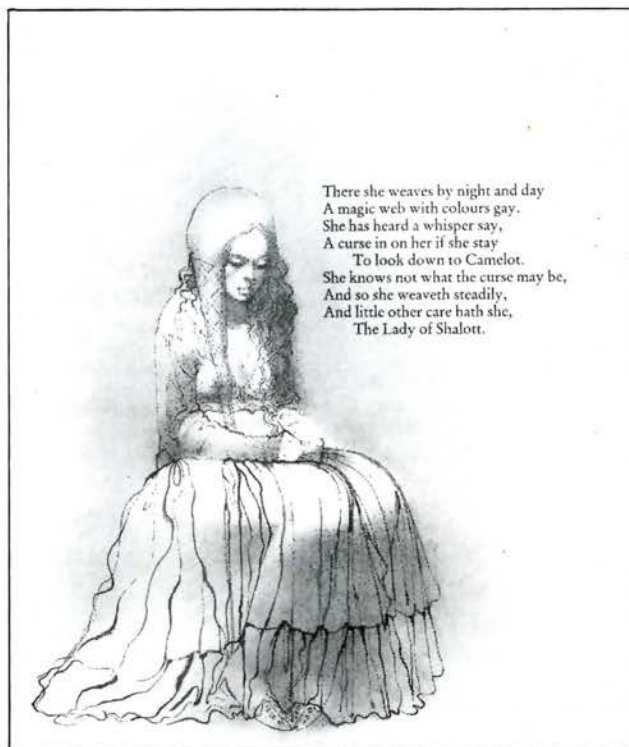
In fact we asked Charles to do **Beowulf** next. For all his Cockney manner, Charles was the most intelligent and perceptive artist I've ever worked with. He would get right through to the heart of a text and bring out something unique which no one had ever thought of or will think of again. On **Beowulf**: 'I've got to make the monsters sympathetic, especially the mother. I mean her son's just been bloody killed! No wonder she's angry.' When things went wrong, he was quick on his feet. 'Charles, your concertina hasn't worked. We've got three blank pages here.' 'Don't worry, Ron. Here's what we'll do.' And no one ever spotted the joins in the book.



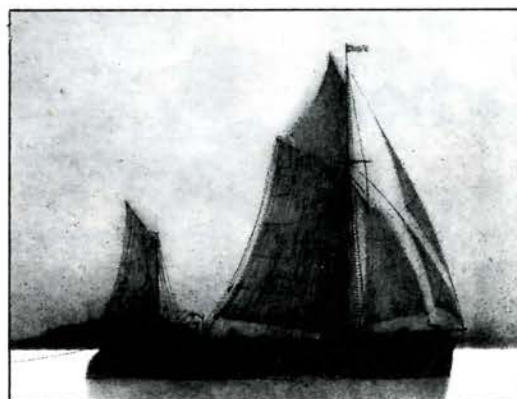
The idea of **Sammy Streetsinger** had been around for a while, but it wasn't quite right as Sammy was a film star throughout. 'Charles, why not turn him into a rock star? Try watching **Top of the Pops** for three months.' Charles did and hated it, but caught the style and atmosphere of rock and conveyed his hatred in the tone of his words. He had a good ear and we never had to alter his words. That's Charlie's voice in there. In fact the problems he had in the book weren't to do with the rock world. 'I'm sick of drawing bloody tiles, Ron. I've been down in this underpass for weeks, just drawing tiles. And then there's all these bloody heads as well. Two hundred and fifty of them.'

Once he'd got the vision of a book and knew what he wanted to do, he was away and would dig in quite fiercely if he thought you were wrong or didn't understand him. On **The Wedding Ghost**: 'What's that, Charles?' 'That's a barge, Ron.' 'Sorry, Charles.' But at the same time he was flexible and open to suggestions which he thought made sense. We had some good arguments over **The Lady of Shalott**. 'What's with this falling rose effect, Charles?' Back comes a completely new framework. 'It's like a strip-tease, sort of. She's lonely and vulnerable. There she is, sitting in that lonely tower, without a stick of furniture.' The book showed Charles's great draughtsmanship and also showed the sexual undertones which could appear in his work, which bothered some critics. 'I always draw the figure nude. Then I put the clothes on.' But again he got right to the heart of the poem.

We argued over the cover of **Shalott** but in a good humoured way. 'I think we need a colour, Charles.' 'Yes, a sort of damson,' he said. 'Let's look at all these women's dresses and pick one.' (All this was happening at the Kate Greenaway Award which Charles, to his disgust, didn't get for **Sammy**.) So we prowled round eminent lady librarians together, looking at their dresses and raising suspicious glances. Eventually we found the right shade of damson on a lady called Viv. 'Can we borrow your dress a minute?' She took it well.



There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse in on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.



Above, from
The Lady of Shalott.

Left, from
The Wedding Ghost.

Charles always had a great passion for the sea and was working on a large 48-page version of **The Ancient Mariner** when he died. This could have been marvellous and now we'll never see it. I was looking forward to our usual arguments over it. 'What's that, Charles?' 'That's an albatross, Ron.' 'Sorry, Charles.'

Ironically, just after he died, the artwork for his new colour book, **Adam and Paradise Island**, came back from the designer with the type on, all ready to go. I sit surrounded by Charlie's artwork and keep on reaching instinctively for the 'phone. There's a problem on the cover and I need to talk to him, but he's not there. The sense of loss I feel for this dear, warm man is appalling and I don't know what to do. I only hope that wherever he is, they serve fish. Good-bye, Charlie, and Amen.

The Highwayman, Alfred Noyes, 0 19 279748 4, £4.50; 0 19 272133 X, £2.50 pbk

Beowulf, Kevin Crossley-Holland, 0 19 279770 0, £5.95; 0 19 272184 4, £2.50 pbk

Sammy Streetsinger, 0 19 279782 4, £4.95

The Wedding Ghost, Leon Garfield, 0 19 279779 4, £5.95

The Lady of Shalott, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 0 19 276057 2, £4.95

Adam and Paradise Island, 0 19 279842 1, £6.95 (Spring 89)