

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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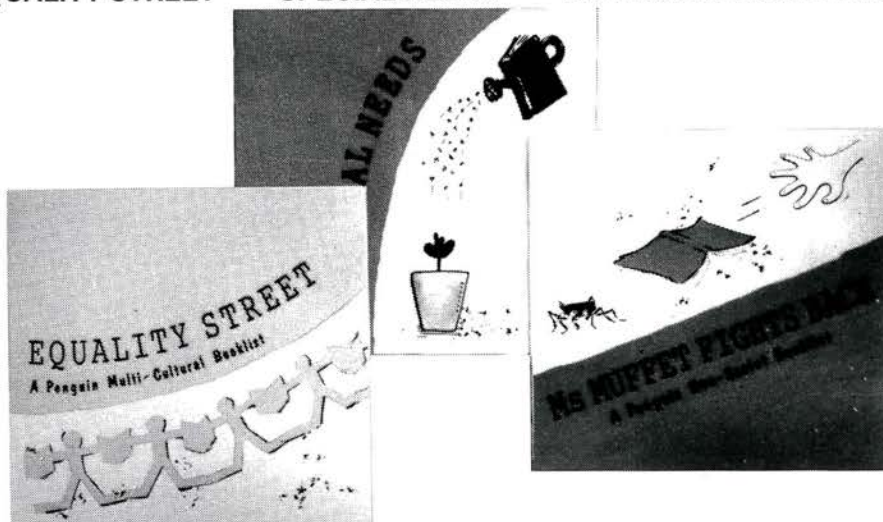
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Cover Story

The illustrations on our cover are taken from **Starting School** by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, published by Viking Kestrel (0 670 81688 4, £6.95).

We are grateful to Viking Kestrel for help in using these illustrations.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

— the magazine of the
School Bookshop Association

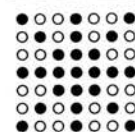
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Books for Keeps

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EDITOR'S PAGE



Another summer almost gone and no break this year for the **BfK** team — there's been too much going on. For a start there have been the merger negotiations . . .

Welcome BBN Children's Books

I am delighted to announce that, as from this issue (Sept 88), British Book News **Children's Books**, the magazine published by The British Council, has merged with **Books for Keeps**. We had much in common, not least readers (around half of BBN **Children's Books** subscribers are **BfK** readers too) and, although the style, tone, content and philosophies were slightly different, we were close enough for it to be a fairly painless (and in the event pleasurable) process to come together. You may ask, so where's the difference? — this issue of **BfK** looks and feels like the previous 51. Well, that's the first thing to say. **BfK** will remain unchanged philosophically and, as ever, utterly and unashamedly independent. The changes, a long time abrewing but given a marvellous impetus by the merger talks, will take many issues to unfold and are to do with more pages given over to wider reviewing, improved design, more colour and more book world information. A bigger, better magazine in other words. One thing we shall incorporate from BBN **Children's Books** is their advance publishing listing to start from **BfK**'s March 1989 issue (publishers, please note: we shall be looking for fulsome and unstinting support on this, okay?). All in all, it's very good news, we think, for children's books. And credit (plus thanks) where credit's due — to the Children's Book Foundation who helped set the ball rolling in the first place. Finally, and not least, our thanks to the team at The British Council who were so helpful, imaginative and far-sighted throughout.

If you are/were a BBN **Children's Book** subscriber, I welcome you to **BfK**. We shall be in touch with each of you explaining how we shall be extending your **BfK** subscription during this coming Autumn. Good to have you on board.

Then there was

Pogress?

That's our computer file name for tracking where we're at on — can you guess? — **Poetry: 0-16**. By the time you are reading this issue of **BfK**, our poetry guide will have been delivered by our printers and we will have begun packing all the advance orders, ready for despatch on publication date of 29th September. And oh, you lovely readers! Haven't you done us proud? Within a few days of sending out our first **Poetry: 0-16** leaflet, bang come back hundreds of orders! If that's not a vote of confidence, I don't know what is.

And on to

This issue of BfK and the next . . .

Slight qualms back in July at taking up the editorial reins without an inkling of how much I would actually enjoy it. However, editing **BfK** is like being on the best children's literature course in the world. You get to talk to and work with children's book people from every quarter and at every level.

Like Jeff Hynds, the first person I ever heard juxtapose the linguistic technicalities of learning to read and the role of children's books in the same lecture. He did it, and still does on his 'Roadshows' now booked

through to 1990, with great clarity and much entertainment (in private he's one of the funniest people I know) — a combination in presentation that ensures the message sticks. Here he lays out some of the current issues within the Great Debate about Reading (page 4) which has been on the agenda almost since the onset of modern education and shows no sign of coming to an end. It's a debate that goes to the very heart of what we consider to be learning itself. It's technical, ideological and evokes both intellectual and emotional responses — two human faculties that can confuse as much as they can complement each other. Hence the fervour that flavours the discussion and divides the participants on occasions. **BfK**'s role is to reflect and give space to as many aspects and points of view as possible and with as much objectivity as we can muster.

Not just to the theorists either. In 'Books to Make Readers' (page 24) that dedicated and pioneering practitioner, Jill Bennett, who was working with real books long before most of the experts started theorising, recommends some recent publishing that aptly complements Jeff's piece. At the end of the day, it's the practitioners par excellence who mould the real landscape and who ultimately are the more convincing and influential whichever way they do it. None more than Jill.

Or, the Ahlbergs, on the cover and on page 20 with their new offering, **Starting School**, and a unique interview with the illustrating half of this award-winning duo, Janet. Allan himself thought it was an excellent idea — 'I always do the interviews' — and both were delighted that it was Judith Elkin, who has known the Ahlbergs from their earliest days (before fame struck) doing the interview and who brings sensitive and perceptive insights to an equally sensitive and perceptive artist. And **Starting School**? What I particularly liked is the way the book engaged *me* as an adult reader and as a parent. It's not just that I *know* that that's exactly how it is or that it makes me smile ('Kate *thinks* about climbing') but that they manage to make the sharing of this book with small listeners such an easy pleasure. Another winner, is my bet.

And, not forgetting Sid Fleischman (page 14) who flew in from his Californian home during the summer. 'Would you like to interview him?' — asked one of the best children's publicity people in the business. *Would we?* Drop everything, arrange for Stephanie Nettell to do the words, and go with Richard Mewton (he's probably photographed more children's book people than anyone else in the world by now!) to get the pics. It turns out to be one of those occasions when you *know* you adore what you're doing. Sid is urbane, charming, funny but also has a rare touch of wisdom and kindness that beguiles and which is so evident in **The Whipping Boy** (Methuen, 0 416 12512 3, £5.95) first published in 1986 and winner of the 1987 Newbery Medal in America. The pity is that Sid has only four titles in print here in the UK (there are six or seven times that number available to publishers). He deserves more.

So that was our summer. With just a little sense of relief I hand over to Chris Powling for the November issue of **BfK**.

THE GREAT DEBATE ABOUT READING

The Great Debate about reading seems to be in no danger of subsiding. On the contrary, I find these days that just a mention of it is quite capable of generating educational apoplexy, or even unleashing unsuspected savagery. For example, it is common to find newspapers, teachers' journals and magazines carrying articles or letters which passionately support or utterly condemn some 'approach' or other (usually referred to as a 'new' approach, or even *the* new approach). Recently an educational psychologist, writing in the national press, roundly denounced those 'dedicated followers of fashion' whom he saw as promoting 'developmental' reading, the 'real books' approach, 'emergent', 'shared' or story-book' reading (Turner 1988). In his excitement he lumped together every fashionable term he had heard of, of course, as if they all meant the same, and in his view, of course, they were all wrong.

Then again, another expert, this time in a teachers' journal, found himself able to assert quite confidently that 'there are many enthusiastic and able readers in the world who learned to read through reading schemes'. The term 'real books', he added, was unsatisfactory because apart from anything else fiction cannot be real (sic!), and the term 'apprenticeship approach' was 'another unfortunate slogan' devised by 'zealots' (Beard 1987).

I was in trouble myself earlier this year for daring to express, semi-publicly, a few fairly well-known views on reading.

In pursuit of a little

The London Borough of Bromley, aided and abetted by the Directorate of Thames Polytechnic, got into a fine frenzy about it. For being so bold as to suggest that the process of reading was really quite complex, and that reading tests in general were over-simple and thus unreliable, I was declared a 'misguided individual' and for my pains had myself reported to the Secretary of State for Education and Science. According to press articles I had apparently been advocating a 'new-fangled way' of teaching reading which was, in the view of Bromley's Chief Inspector, in danger of becoming a 'new orthodoxy' (Hynds 1988).

Misunderstanding about reading

What I think I detect in all this – amid the emotion and hysteria, and occasional note of venom – is *misunderstanding*. Reading, I suggest, is much misunderstood. What it involves, what it means, what it can be like, is commonly taken for granted and widely, even wildly, underestimated. Too many people, including many of the so-called experts, make too many assumptions about reading, and jump to too many quick conclusions. Not, of course, that they *realise* they are doing this, and therein lies the source of considerable difficulty for everyone. For some of those who do not realise their own misunderstanding are in positions of authority in education. And, even worse, some wield political power. I do not think reading should be in the hands of politicians anyway; if they do not actually understand it, then the situation is doubly unfortunate. And so, in the pursuit of a little more understanding, I offer these few thoughts.

What's 'new'?

The word 'new' appears frequently – 'new' approach, 'new' fashion, 'new-fangled' way. In fact, there's nothing very new about what is happening in reading. We have some new knowledge nowadays, it is true, but it is new knowledge about *age-old processes*. The way children learn, indeed the way any of us learn, the nature of written language, the processes of literacy – none of these has changed over the years. It is simply that recently we have been finding out more about these things. It's like the circulation of the blood. We didn't always know a great deal about that,

and maybe there's still more to find out, but it's always been circulating. Sometimes what we *thought* we understood we didn't understand all that well. We might, as a consequence, have applied inappropriate treatments. Is this blood or reading I'm talking about? It's both. Both have always been the same for a very long time.

But this century, in fact since the 1870 Education Act, we had a problem. We suddenly found we had to bring literacy to the masses. Perfunctorily trained teachers, with huge classes, needed foolproof methods and materials, or so it was believed. Ignoring countless examples of successful learning that lay all around, education panicked, and turned to the newly developing 'science' of psychology, in particular to that branch of psychology called *behaviourism*. Psychologists had been studying the behaviour of animals (like rats) in controlled situations, and observing how they seemed to learn. By taking things a little bit at a time, and by constant repetition, the animals could be trained. Surely this must apply to children too! And so education put its faith in experimental psychology, and thereby backed the wrong horse (Smith 1988).

This is largely the reason why today the teaching of reading is thought of so narrowly, particularly of course by educational psychologists, and why there are so many misunderstandings. It is not that reading itself has changed. It is the same for us as it was for Shakespeare and Bacon, for Jane Austen and Dickens, for Robert Louis Stevenson or Laura Ingalls Wilder. What has to go on, when we read now, *used to go on* when people read years ago. We just know a little more about what goes on. We have been helped by ethnographic studies of children's learning, by psycholinguistic investigations into the processes of literacy, and by the insights of modern literary theory. At least we should have been helped. It's hard to help anyone who is blinkered by behaviourism.

'Look-and-say', phonics and reading

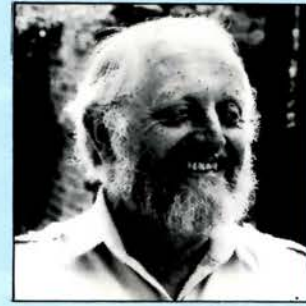
It is still very commonly believed that learning to read basically consists of (a) 'learning' or 'knowing' or 'remembering' words, and (b) learning 'phonics' or 'sound-symbol correspondences'. There used to be a Great Debate about which of these was

'More happens, on one brief walk, to Rosie and to those who



understanding . . .

By Jeff Hynds



more important, but nowadays the two are combined. Beginning with 'whole words' (or 'look-and-say'), and then moving on to phonics, is still the most widespread method of teaching reading in our schools. Whatever else, whatever 'new ideas' come along, many teachers, indeed many reading experts, feel that *this is what reading ultimately depends on* – knowing your words and being able to do your phonics.

Recently we have seen the growth of the 'real books' movement. But it is not always well understood. I have met many teachers, themselves declared advocates of a 'real books approach', who subconsciously regard it as simply an alternative way of teaching what really counts in reading – whole words and phonics. It may perhaps be more chancy, but it will be 'more fun'. It will 'take longer' perhaps, but the effect will be more lasting. Naturally, they assume, when you don't learn your words on flash cards, or do phonic exercises (the really safe way to learn to read except that it's so boring), then these skills will take longer to acquire, but it will be worth it in the end because children won't have been put off reading. They will have enjoyed it and will hopefully go on enjoying it, etc., etc.

This would be a persuasive enough reason for 'using real books', except that it is wrong. Whole words and phonics are *not* fundamental to reading. They are not 'the basics'. They, in fact, are ancillary. And if anything 'takes longer', then there is obvious misunderstanding all round.

Reading schemes and learning

Thinking of the rats, well-intentioned educationists (rather than readers), backed up by less well-intentioned publishers, devised reading schemes. Here children's learning could be 'controlled'. Start with something 'easy', repeat it constantly, and then when it's 'learnt', go on to the next bit. (You will not be surprised to know that behaviourist psychology also gave us brain washing!) In fact no-one learns, in any real sense, like this. If you 'control' a learner's learning, you stop the learner doing the learning. The learner has to do the controlling, otherwise the learner does not learn. Think of children learning to recognise other people, their mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, numerous friends. No educationist

controls this learning, yet at a very early age indeed babies and young children demonstrate amazing 'visual discrimination' in recognising people, and 'auditory discrimination' too when they recognise them by their voice alone. Even more spectacular is the way children learn spoken language, which is highly complex, extensively rule-bound, and involves huge feats of memory. (For example, four-year-old children regularly learn about 20 new words *every day!*) No-one controls this, no-one programmes it. No parent goes out and buys a Talking Scheme.

How do children learn then? They learn because they make sense of the evidence, and construct a theory which informs their understanding and their subsequent learning. If they don't make sense of the evidence in the first place, they don't learn. Reading is an extremely complex activity, but no more complex than learning spoken language, which all children seem to manage. If they are to learn it properly, then they need to experience and make sense of reading as it functions fully and meaningfully in the contexts of their own lives. It is the task of teachers to make sure that these experiences happen, and this is no easy task for those teachers who, under the influence of behaviourism, think they have to teach children one decontextualized bit after another. This is how *not* to teach them. It results in children learning only mechanically, which really means not learning at all.

So will reading schemes do the job? Undoubtedly some reading schemes, up to a point, do teach a kind of reading. But we should not be satisfied with it. We should be very wary indeed of assuming that, if you can read a reading scheme, you can therefore read and that's it. This is a reductionist view of reading and it omits the crucially important dimension of *how* you read. How you read, and how you *will* read in the future, is profoundly affected by *what* you read, even from the very beginning. Learning to read with reading schemes teaches you to cope with the demands of reading schemes. On the whole the demands are not great.

Real books and real reading

Some kinds of reading make far greater demands on readers than do most of the books in reading schemes. I think few would disagree with me if I

suggested that quite considerable demands are made on the reader by the novels of Virginia Woolf, the poetry of T S Eliot, or the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. But it might come as a surprise to some if I suggested that very complex reading behaviour is required to read children's books like McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*, Oram's *In the Attic*, or Burningham's *Granpa*. The demands made are the same, in principle, as those made by Woolf, Eliot and Russell. Books like these – I would be happy to call them 'real books' – make demands that go far beyond the surface text, beyond mere 'comprehension', and of course way beyond remembering the 'words' and the 'phonics'. More happens, on one brief walk, to Rosie and to *those who read about her*, than happens to Roger Red Hat in a lifetime. In other words, what is involved in reading the complex and multi-layered texts and pictures of many children's books, those by accredited writers and artists, is what is ultimately needed in *reading* in any real sense of the word.

If children are to develop into accomplished adult readers, the 'enthusiastic and able readers' that Beard refers to, but which in my view no reading scheme could ever produce, then they need to begin by being accomplished child readers. They need to meet, from the very start, those real books 'where the words mean more than they say' (Meek 1988). These books are the only possible teachers of real reading. ●

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Jeff Hynds was formerly Director of the Diploma Course in the Teaching of Reading and Writing at Thames Polytechnic. He is now a freelance lecturer and writer, and each year thousands of teachers and others attend his courses at various venues throughout Britain. His forthcoming book, *Real Reading*, will be published by Tadpole Books Ltd later in the year.

See Jill Bennett's 'Books to Make Readers' on page 24.

read about her, than happens to Roger Red Hat in a lifetime.'

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

Ride a Cock-Horse

Sarah Williams, ill. Ian Beck, Oxford University Press, 0 19 272152 6, £2.50

This is a really lovely collection of nursery rhymes, a delightful present for any young child and a 'must' for any reception class. Attractively illustrated and well set out with only one rhyme to each page, it is immediately appealing to children. The selection is particularly good – old favourites interspersed with some I've not met before.

My only criticism is the inclusion within the text of instructions to the adult which I found rather distracting. Although these were in themselves a very useful feature and did not appear to trouble my older infants, I feel that some of the early learning at home, chanting and following the text, might be jeopardised. It seems a shame they weren't placed at the bottom of the page below some sort of appropriate border or decoration. JS

I Wish I Could Fly

Ron Maris, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.735 3, £1.95

A very simple and attractive story for very young children, beautifully illustrated, about a tortoise who envies the other animals. He wishes he could fly like the bird, jump like the frog, climb like the squirrel, run like the rabbit . . . but when it rains the tortoise is safe and dry under his shell.



An excellent book for increasing vocabulary and understanding about different sorts of animals, and told in a way which children will find amusing as well as informative. MS

King Rollo's Spring

0 09 955740 1

King Rollo's Summer

0 09 955750 9

King Rollo's Autumn

0 09 955760 6

King Rollo's Winter

0 09 955770 3

David McKee, Beaver Picture Books, 99p each

Four sensitively written little books featuring the characters in King Rollo's household. Full of fun and simple detail, the stories tell about each season and its peculiarities through the freshness of David McKee's approach, using his King Rollo character whom he shows as curious and innocent but who is informed by the cook, the wizard and the queen.

The simple storyline and the clear, attractive pictures make these an excellent first series for very young children finding out about their world. Highly recommended. MS

The Great Big Enormous Turnip

Alexei Tolstoy, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Picture Lions, 0 00 662874 5, £1.95

Welcome again to this lovely old story. Its charm is in its simplicity and humour when all the family try to pull up the turnip . . . and eventually succeed when the mouse helps too.



Helen Oxenbury's pictures are such fun . . . there's the old man with his large wellies and curly beard; the granddaughter high in the patterned tree nonchalantly reading, her arm hooked round a branch; the black dog draped over the settee looking bored; the crosspatch of a cat, claws and all, keeping her eyes out for the birds then looking into the mouse's hole asking for help . . . definitely a delight! MS

Hangdog

Graham Round, Beaver Picture Book, 0 09 956790 3, £1.99

There seems to be a lot of books around at the moment about lonely/jealous/friendless creatures. A sign of the times, maybe? This is another one to add to the list. Hangdog is a rather charming hound in a big jumper who, despite his best efforts, 'can't seem to make friends however hard he tried'. The book describes his journey, on a rather nice boat made out of an old grandfather clock, to see if there is a friend 'somewhere in the world'.

He does find one and an unlikely one too, and the story ends happily. But it lacked conviction somehow. As Keir said, 'if he was as nice as that he would have had lots of friends'. This is an adult view of the world, I think, and didn't quite work for my sociable and friendly children. Worth a try, though. It is interesting and we liked the pictures very much. LW

My Cat

Jonathan Allen, Picturemac, 0 333 46259 9, £2.50

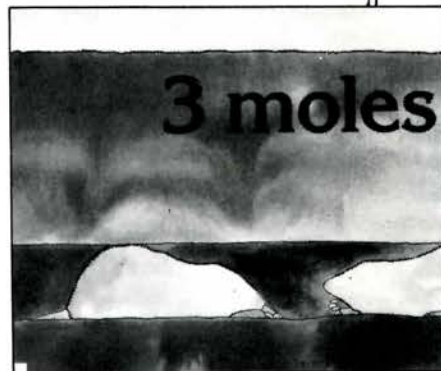
A cat book for young children, featuring a rather charming tabby cat. It shows the reader all the habits and moods of a family cat and might provoke thoughts and conversations about other cats and different pets. A large book, with a picture on every page conveying information and fun. Definitely to be recommended. MS

Who's Counting?

Nancy Tafuri, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.712 4, £1.95

The difference between a child's ability to recite numbers parrot-fashion and his/her ability to understand what each number actually means is a perennial problem for people trying to bring children towards the beginnings of mathematical concepts. Tools to aid this have changed in form and style over the years and this beautiful picture book must certainly help.

One squirrel, two birds, three moles right through to ten puppies fill each page, showing every animal, fish, flower or bird vividly. The book becomes a story when the reader catches a glimpse of a puppy on each page, until at the end all ten puppies are happily united with their



parents. A lovely book. Picture Puffin at its very best. MS

Frogs' Holiday

Margaret Gordon, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.569 5, £1.95

At first glance I thought 'What fun'. At second glance I wasn't so sure. The frogs are funny and adventurous, and the book is entertaining, colourful and well produced. It's also a little outrageous, slightly confusing and even a bit frightening. Do young children, I wonder, feel concern for launderette ladies who need to take a holiday? Might they be alarmed at the thought of naughty children climbing inside washing machines? Could a small baby be left in the care of a bunch of chaotic creatures brandishing nappie pins and scouring powder? I wouldn't buy it. MS

Loudmouth George and the Fishing Trip

Nancy Carlson, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52437 9, £2.55

We rather liked Loudmouth George in his last book, **Loudmouth George and the Big Race**, but this one seemed rather flat and predictable. It was so obvious that George's boasting would end in ignominy that the only interest really was how, and my children decided it would either be that 'he catches an old boot or that he catches a very little fish instead of a big one.' I won't spoil it for you by telling you which but you've got a 50/50 chance of getting it right!

However, George is the sort of character that the more self-publicising elements in the class can identify with and so the book has been fairly popular. Not a wonderful book, but a good addition to the reading collection. LW

I'm Going on a Dragon Hunt

Maurice Jones, ill.
Charlotte Firmin,
Picture Puffin,
0 14 050.711 6, £1.95

We used to do this book when I was a Brownie, only then it was about a little Red Indian boy who went for a walk 'through the long grass, *swish, swish*; through the mud, *slerp, slerp*; etc. etc. until he gets to a cave, finds a bear and runs home through all the obstacles in reverse.

In this version of the old game, it's a little boy who is hunting dragons, otherwise the format is the same. He travels through, up, over and across a variety of terrain with a variety of sound effects required until he comes face to face with . . . yes, the dragon. It is great fun, easy to read and interestingly illustrated. The sort of book, in fact, that is re-read and re-read just for pure fun. Very successful. LW

Bad Boris and the New Kitten

Susie Jenkin-Pearce,
Beaver Picture Book,
0 09 951300 5, £1.99

A familiar theme for this one of the long-time pet who feels displaced and jealous when a new, cute pet arrives. Originality is provided by the fact that the jealous one is a baby elephant and by the nice little twist in the end which leaves the question of a happy ending interestingly open.

The pictures, especially of the elephant, are full of character and reflect the text well. There is real humour in Boris' attempts to get back into favour and the whole book bounces along very well. Not a great book but liked by the children and a popular choice for nearly independent readers. LW



The Vain Teddy, and other Teddy Bear stories

Compiled by Lance Salway, ill. Robina Green, Corgi,
0 552 52458 1, £1.75

A delightfully eclectic collection of short stories and poems, linked by their teddy bear theme. There's 'Us Two' from Pooh, a Dorothy Edwards story, the title tale is by Rose Fyleman. There's a splendid Ursula Moray Williams, and more modern stuff from Margaret Joy and from Marjorie Darke (my favourite). A lovely starting point for a reception class, I've found. Put this collection with Anthony Browne's and Jill Murphy's picture books, and get the children's own stories going . . .

Though I'd have loved to have known more about this gifted anthologist's choices, it's a generous, well-balanced collection. CM

Wake Up, Bear

Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.790 6,
£1.95

A group of animals attempt to wake up their friend, a hibernating bear, when Spring arrives. Each creature tries in his or her own way without success, until a bee passes by and its association with honey filters through bear's deepest slumber and does the trick! JS

Sixes and Sevens

John Yeoman and
Quentin Blake,
Picturemac,
0 333 46119 3, £2.50

This zany number book collaboration between Yeoman and Blake is tremendously successful. Verse and illustration complement each other with delicious absurdity. As Barnaby sails on his raft down to Limber Lea, he picks up an extraordinary collection of creatures and people. It is only by ingenuity and with the aid of the amazing contents of his red box that all arrive almost intact at their destination. JS

Corduroy

0 14 050.173 8

A Pocket for Corduroy

0 14 050.352 8

Don Freeman, Picture Puffin, £1.95 each

These two books have hardly touched the shelves since I first read them aloud, passing from hand to hand and definitely looking well loved!



Corduroy is a small teddy bear with a missing button who resides rather despondently in a department store until he is spotted by Lisa. Her mother refuses to buy him because he looks tatty. That night he sets off in desperation, braving all sorts of dangers in the pitch black store to search unsuccessfully for his button. Returned ignominiously to the toy department by the store detective, all seems lost when . . . JS



'BONK went the acorn, but it didn't bother bear.' (Wake Up, Bear).

Infant/Junior

The Two Admirals

David McKee,
0 14 03.3125 5

The Little Hare Book

Janosch, 0 14 03.3126 3

The Bear's Bicycle

E W McLeod and David McPhail, 0 14 03.3124 7

Bob and Bobby

Tomie de Paola,
0 14 03.3123 9

Pocket Puffins,
£1.95 each

It is good to see picture books of this calibre produced with obvious attention to the quality of illustration. Inevitably there is a lessening of the impact with any reduction of size from the original hardback but this is more than compensated for by



their greater accessibility due to the low price. A real plus is the author information at the back of the books.

Two arrogant admirals cause havoc in their village eventually leading to mass

evacuation by half the inhabitants. Just as we feel secure and reassured by the success of the innkeeper's plan to turn them into model citizens, two famous generals move in . . . !

The Little Hare Book is the usual mixture of nonsense and folklore Janosch is so good at producing. The translation is a bit stiff in parts and awkward to read aloud but following my reading it was widely borrowed (mainly by the lower juniors) and, according to their reviews, greatly enjoyed.

The Bear's Bicycle is a gorgeous book in the tradition of *Rosie's Walk*, with a delightfully naughty teddy bear doing all the wrong things on his bicycle while his friend virtuously shows the reader just how it should be done, totally unaware of the chaos

that is following him. The dreamlike feel of the book is further enhanced by David McPhail's illustrations with the unrepentant bear reaching enormous proportions as his wrongdoings escalate only to return to his real size in time for his friend (still oblivious to the mayhem in spite of all the clues) to take him to bed.

Bob and Bobby is a very powerful story about the relationship between a young boy and his grandfather. This develops through Bobby's early dependence on his grandfather to the loneliness, fear and revulsion he feels when his grandfather is so drastically changed by a stroke. Through love they conquer these feelings and build an even stronger relationship in which, though the roles have been reversed, the respect shown by his

grandfather originally is echoed in Bobby's way of helping. The story and illustrations have all the magic associated with de Paola's work, from the sensitive line drawing down to the subtle use of colour, described by one of my children as '... just right - sort of soft and sad'.

JS

Mr and Mrs Pig's Evening Out

Mary Rayner, Picturemac, 0 333 46118 5, £2.50

How lucky children are now! Who could fail to want to read when there are books like this about? This awful warning to parents to vet the person they leave their children with is so enticing, so funny, so hug-yourself-with-gee-ish that no primary classroom should be without it.

Surely Mrs Pig will realise that it is a *wolf* she has invited in to babysit? Will Mr Pig fit into his smart shirt which Mrs Pig liked him to wear 'because she thought it made him look thinner'? Will Garth be eaten? How will the piglets rescue him? New readers start here.

And start here they often do. This large format book with manageable quantities of text to each page and highly predictable natural language is perfect for the nearly independent reader, one of whom responded to the list of the ten piglets' names with a little gasp of effort and then read: 'And then there were ten piglets. They were called . . .', (small pause) 'ten different names.'

LW

The Mice Next Door

Anthony Knowles, ill. Susan Edwards, Picturemac, 0 333 44977 0, £2.50

Brilliant. In the most deadpan, funny manner, Anthony Knowles explores the possibility that a family of mice would build a house next door to an ordinary suburban family and be accused by Dad of 'lowering the tone of the neighbourhood'. Everyone knew that mice were smelly, noisy, only interested in having a good time, wouldn't get planning permission or teach their youngsters how to behave. What's more the smell of cooking from next door is an unpleasant nuisance. Yes, it is a satire on racial intolerance, but done with such charm, wit and jollity that even the youngest child will absorb the 'moral' while having a wonderful time. The illustrations are exceptional and I can't suggest too strongly that you read it for yourself and for your children. A sane, humane and very, very funny book.

LW

The Lighthouse Keeper's Catastrophe

Ronda and David Armitage, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.663 2, £1.95

The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch has long been a favourite of my children's. This second adventure did not disappoint them either. Mr and Mrs Grinling have to face the ultimate catastrophe when he is shut out of the lighthouse. Storm clouds are gathering. How will the light be lit before a ship is wrecked (or Hamish the cat starves)? With true heroism the problem is solved but not before there have been gasps of horror and dismay.

A very rewarding and satisfying story . . . whether for children to listen to and talk about or for reading independently. Highly recommended.

LW

Mr Creep the Crook

Ill. Andre Amstutz, 0 14 03.2345 7

Mrs Jolly's Joke Shop

Ill. Colin McNaughton, 0 14 03.2347 3

Miss Dose the Doctors' Daughter

Ill. Faith Jaques, 0 14 03.2346 5
Allan Ahlberg, Puffin, £1.95 each

The 'Happy Families' series seems to be the exception to the general rule that, on the whole, the more books there are in a series the more feeble they become. I have no idea how the Ahlbergs do it but everything they do is magic and these three books by Allan Ahlberg are winners all over again.

Mr Creep the Crook is not only a funny and clever story written with both simplicity and sophistication but it has references back to other books in the series which make young readers feel very well read as they recognise them. Andre Amstutz's illustrations are just right for the cartoony sort of characters involved.



Mrs Jolly is a wonderful joke in itself since the whole plot, if

that's the word I want, is based on awful old jokes. If your heart sinks when your six-year-olds say, 'Do you want to hear a joke?', then don't buy this book . . . it's full of them!

Miss Dose is another of Allan Ahlberg's resourceful and ambitious female characters, saving the day when the whole family, in fact the whole town, goes down with spots.

LW

Varenka

Bernadette Watts, 0 200 72936 5

The Magic Paintbrush

Mischa Damjan, ill. Janosch, 0 200 72938 1
North-South (Blackie), £2.95 each

Two admirable picture books in this attractive North-South imprint reflecting valuable work, much of it from overseas. **Varenka** is the tale of a Russian woman's steadfastness in the face of invasion by an occupying army. The pictures are generous, expansive, and catch the spirit of community within the tale. Though the language is wonderfully poetic, the illustrator has the courage to let her pictures point the story's climaxes: see the breathtaking double-page spread in which the soldiers struggle through the snow.

Janosch's pictures in **The Magic Paintbrush** are bolder, more child-like, an imaginative feast. The story of the little boy whose magic brush enables his wilder imaginings to take shape is splendidly served by the artist. Those pictures illustrating the hero's dreams, taking revenge on the bossy adults, touch chords with sixes up to eleven-year-olds. The series is to be commended: sturdy formats make them excellent value, my school librarian co-readers think.

CM

Dorrie and the Goblin

0 14 03.1989 1

Dorrie and the Birthday Eggs

0 14 03.1987 5

Patricia Coombs, Young Puffin, £1.50 each

Dorrie, the little witch whose hat is always on crooked and who wears odd socks, has long been a favourite with readers just beginning to go solo, so it is good to see that Puffin have re-issued these titles with improved covers.

In the first story a goblin emerges from the laundry basket and proceeds to create havoc throughout Dorrie's house where a special Magic Show is to be held. Only the Short High Sorcerer can 'spell' it away but he is nowhere to be found - or is he? All comes right in the end as it does in **Dorrie and the Birthday Eggs** wherein the young Dorrie comes up against Thinniever Vetch, the trouble-making witch.



The illustrations in these books are a delight. Readers who cut their literary teeth on 'Meg and Mog' have here another endearing witch for the next stage.

JB

Say Cheese!

Carolyn Dinan, Magnet, 0 416 60600 8, £1.95

This is indeed a 'warm and funny picture book' as the blurb on the back tells us. It's about a boy called Bill who wants very much to be like everyone else in his school class. They are beginning to lose their baby teeth but Bill's are taking longer than most. However, after one or two adventures and attempts to get a tooth to come out, he finally manages it thanks to a sticky 'brownie' baked by his friend Daisy. Content at last he is able to bring home a photograph of the whole class saying 'Cheese' and grinning to show various gaps in their teeth - including Bill's.



This is a pleasant book about normal family living and it has a very satisfactory ending. Definitely a good buy.

MS

When Sheep Cannot Sleep: the Counting Book

Satoshi Kitamura, Beaver, 0 09 950540 1, £2.50

Despite its subtitle, this is a very unobtrusive counting book; it's perfectly possible to read the whole thing without counting anything at all if you don't want to. This is because it also has a story, about an insomniac sheep, which doesn't mention numbers and which therefore extends the book's appeal beyond the stage at which counting to 20 is an interesting activity.

The pictures are entertaining (the sheep's expressions are wide-ranging and shown entirely by the one line that delineates his mouth . . . very economical) and the story has that unexplained arbitrariness which children's writing and dreams can have. It was

popular with the children, despite the rather unsatisfactory ending . . . what is going to happen when the owners of the house come home and find a strange sheep in bed? Shades of Goldilocks!

LW

Mike's Magic Seeds

Alexander McCall
Smith, Young Corgi,
0 552 52476 X, £1.75

Mike's discovery that his bargain from a closing down sale is nothing more than a few seeds is a great disappointment; but the seeds turn out to be anything but ordinary. Mike soon becomes the centre of attraction with his constant supply of delicious sweets – until the spell is broken.

I must admit I was surprised at the enthusiastic response to what I thought was a rather run-of-the-mill story. But the theme is a mouth-watering one and, since its initial read aloud, the book has been in constant demand with my seven and eight-year-olds. JB

Jerry and the Monsters

Allen Saddler, Magnet,
0 416 08472 9, £1.75

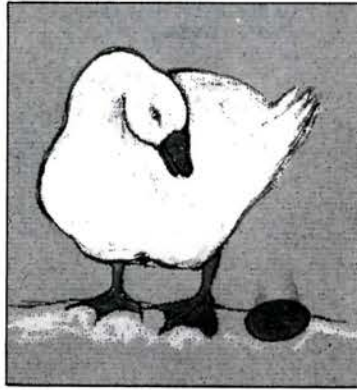
There are all kinds of monsters in this book of nine short stories: a monster pie (shades of **The Piemakers** here), a clockwork monster, a word-eating monster and a plastic monster, to name a few; all harmless but they do create some rather embarrassing moments for young Jerry and his family. Fun to read aloud to the over-sixes and for fluent readers to tackle themselves. JB

JB

The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg

Geoffrey Patterson,
Picture Piper,
0 330 30153 5, £2.50

Apart from the natural desire of the children to sue the publishers of this book under the Trades Descriptions Act (*real* golden eggs, indeed!) and my wanting to take issue with them over the suggested age range (3 to 6 is too young for the complexity of this tale) this is a lovely book.



A faithful retelling of Aesop's fable with very attractive illustrations, apparently done in pastel and ink on brown wrapping paper, this was much liked by 6 and 7 year olds. They were old enough to discuss the moral and the motivation of the farmer and his wife, and to feel the waste of the poor goose's end.

The story reads aloud well and is written clearly enough for children to read themselves with the interest of the occasional challenge to their vocabulary, particularly 'curious', 'spritely' and 'hoarding'.

LW

Holiday with the Fiend

Sheila Lavelle, Young
Lions, 0 00 672787 5,
£1.95

Charlie Ellis and her dad spend a seaside holiday with best friend, Angela, and her dad. Despite Charlie's initial reluctance, the two girls have a fun-filled week in Somerset without actually getting into too much trouble – well almost. Established fans will love this and I can see Charlie and Angela making many new friends. Try reading some to your class and I bet they'll be queuing up to borrow or buy the book. JB

JB

The Boy Who Bounced and Other Magic Tales

Margaret Mahy, ill.
Shirley Hughes, Puffin,
0 14 03.2468 2, £1.95

New Zealander Margaret Mahy has written an interesting collection of stories but the standard varies greatly. Some seemed rather banal but there were also gems like 'The Merry Go Round', 'The Witch Doctor' and the delightful 'Looking for a Ghost'. The stories are rooted in folk lore, with plenty of description and interesting twists at the end. Certainly juniors would enjoy them, though the *simple* tales would suit top infants better.

Anomalies like flowering foxgloves at Christmas might be noticed, but the New Zealand link is not that obvious. Shirley Hughes' illustrations enhance the stories so on balance I would stock this. NS

NS

Melric and the Balloon

David McKee, Magnet,
0 416 01282 5, £1.95

Another funny and warm-hearted book from David McKee. Children who know Melric will always want to know what he's up to . . . and will enjoy meeting Kra the wise man and Mertel the witch, who is so domesticated! In this story the Royal Balloon is to the fore as the King plans changes to his kingdom . . . until Melric grows alarmed and convinces him that everything's all right just as it is.



Introduce Melric to a child today and you'll both be delighted. There's much to look at and plenty to consider in this thoughtful tale. MS

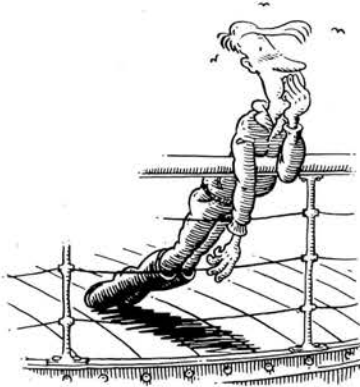
MS

Junior/Middle

The Stowaways

Roger McGough, ill.
Tony Blundell, Puffin,
0 14 03.1649 3, £1.75

McGough's voice is always immediate and accessible to readers of seven-up. Here, the antics of the narrator and his childhood friend, Midge, are shaped into interlinked stories. They gatecrash Midge's big sister's party; they try to stowaway; they discover Viking treasure. In each, there's humour, word play and the action is skilfully woven into memories. I always wonder at McGough's language which is both poetic and robust. His stories teach reading as excitement, and he will encourage children to find language powerful. Better than 100 grammar lessons is his passage on the months of the year: 'It was October, and a bullying one. It wore a grey frown and kicked the leaves about. It shook the trees and it banged on the window-panes. But it was mainly bravado.'



Witty illustrations; readers of **The Great Smile Robbery** will love this one. CM

CM

The Story of a Red Deer

J W Fortescue,
Canongate Kelpies,
0 86241 174 2, £1.95

This story is 90 years old and is rather Victorian in its outlook. Clearly the publishers have taken a gamble republishing

it, in the hope that the ageless nature of the subject and its life will outweigh the rather ponderous and anachronistic style of the prose.

Success is partial. On the one hand there is the thrilling insight into Exmoor wild life as seen through the eyes of a developing stag, on the other is the pedantic use of vocabulary and large chunks of indigestible Devon brogue. Top junior animal lovers may remain faithful to the story, but for many the book may prove too challenging. NS

NS

Red Letter Day

Alexa Romanes, ill.
Krystyna Turska, Young
Puffin, 0 14 03.2080 6,
£1.75

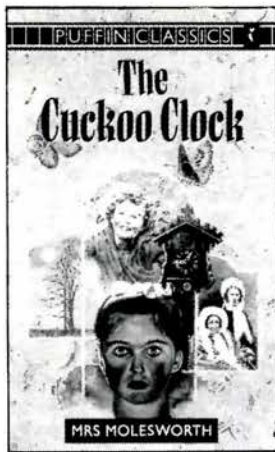
A simple story, ideal for the young reader who needs extending with a more detailed novel. The adventure itself is hardly of the material from whence come great classics, but the tale of a school's involvement with a summer



fete is plausible and the characters believable. There are heroes and heroines, good triumphs in the end, and all's well that ends well . . .

The illustrations are pleasing and the cover is drawn by the same artist (Hooray – no inconsistencies!). The large typeface is a great boon too. Lower juniors should experience few difficulties with this book – and enjoy the odd chuckle. NS

NS



The Cuckoo Clock
Mrs Molesworth, Puffin
Classic, 0 14 03.5093 4,
£1.95

A pleasant, old-fashioned story from the days when children were seen but not heard, did exactly what they were told, and were expected to keep to their station in life. This tale of lonely Griselda, who is befriended by a caring, didactic cuckoo, encapsulates the flavour of the Victorian children's story which was considered acceptable for young minds. It is written in the same vein as **The Railway Children** or the poem 'Matilda told such dreadful lies' and is full of advice e.g. 'Grumbling . . . does not always do good, furthermore an ill-tempered child is not . . . likely to be loved as much as a good-tempered one.' Mature readers, top juniors upwards (especially girls) might read this. I'd buy a copy for the school library but then I have a penchant for things old-fashioned!

NS

A Gift of Squares
Edel Wignell, Young
Corgi, 0 552 52498 0,
£1.75



The setting is Australian, the feelings universal. Young Emma is suddenly faced with a new home far from her English friends - 'her' family as she sees them rather than those Australian relations, her grandparents and aunts and uncles. Her loneliness is almost overwhelming until she suggests making a friendship blanket for their teacher who is returning to England: the ideal present and a means to ending Emma's loneliness. A warm, feeling-centred short story.

JB

**The Beautiful
Take-Away Palace**
Geraldine Kaye, ill.
Glenys Ambrus,
Magnet, 0 416 06462 0,
£1.75

Sensitive and gently told story of how a Chinese boy's past life reverberates through his first weeks in a new English school. The writer skilfully shows a child reading a culture. Good for us all, as teachers, to read about the judgements we still too readily make about what counts as a 'special need'. The central girl character, who befriends Kai Cheng, may be one-dimensional, but the gifted writer gives readers time to reflect on the children's prejudices and mild racism.

CM

Josh's Panther
Fay Sampson, ill. Jill
Bennett, Young Puffin,
0 14 03.2485 2, £1.75

A finely-crafted tale, reminiscent of some early Philippa Pearce work. A boy 'invents' a panther in the woods by faking a paw print and has to live with, and through, the implications of a deceit. The ideas are deep; the surface story accessible. There's some splendid characterisation: not least, the hero's sister, Cindy, and the well-depicted community. The adults are unusually well-rounded in their foibles. I liked the teacher who wants to turn everything into a 'theme' and the brash TV professionals who sniff out a scoop whilst ignoring people's feelings. A fresh, lively storytelling voice who appeals to eights to elevens; super cover and pictures, too.

CM

Mister Tinker in Oz
James Howe,
0 14 03.2446 1

**Ozma and the
Wayward Wand**

Polly Berends,
0 14 03.2447 X
Young Puffin,
£1.50 each

Two shortish tales: new adventures based on the original Oz stories specially written for younger readers.



Presumably the intention behind these is to provide accessible stories for those who have seen the films but are not yet ready to tackle the full-blown originals. For full enjoyment, some knowledge of Dorothy's previous

adventures is needed and those who have this could well take to these books.

JB

**Tales for the Perfect
Child**

Florence Parry Heide,
ill. Victoria Chess,
Magnet, 0 416 07162 7,
£1.95

Think twice before putting this subversive book in your classroom, for here are seven easy lessons on how to get your own way while seeming to be perfectly well behaved. Ruby, for instance, wants to visit a friend but mother insists she 'watches' younger brother Clyde while she takes a bath. So Ruby does just that as he wreaks havoc right through the house. The likes of Arthur, Bertha and Harriet similarly get the better of their parents. These 'perfect' children are thinly disguised (or rather fatly) as furry animals - rather evil-looking ones - by Victoria Chess whose illustrations on every page are the 'perfect' complement to the deadpan tales.

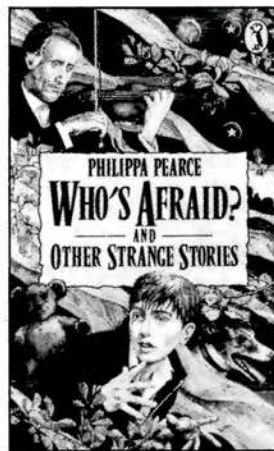
JB

**The Sound of
Propellers**

Clive King, Puffin,
0 14 03.2106 3, £1.95

This is a superbly well constructed tale of espionage and intrigue, mixed within a captivating scenario of thirties Britain, seen through the eyes of a child. Murugan has just arrived at boarding school in England from India, and naturally finds life rather complicated. Is it a place where the children sleep on boards? What is a dormitory? A kind of camel? Somehow, while making Murugan's character believable, indicating the latent or blatant racism of the time, King still manages to keep the plot ticking over. His **Stig of the Dump** became a classic; I wonder . . .

BB



Who's Afraid?
Philippa Pearce, Puffin,
0 14 03.2057 1, £1.75

Fear is an ideal subject for children's fiction. Youngsters are all afraid of something - even if they won't, bravado-

like, admit it. So, if you can capture these feelings of spine-tingling tension, or just blind panic, then you've got them hooked! Philippa Pearce (of **Tom's Midnight Garden** fame) has produced a gripping collection of 11 stories, covering the full range of the emotion. The supernatural, the ghostly, the just plain evil, they're all here, to torment and terrorise, and to send to bed looking furtively over the shoulder. Yes, that was just the wind rattling the window. Honest!

BB

**The Mysterious
Mr Ross**

Vivien Alcock, Lions,
0 00 672890 1, £1.95

Felicity, brought up by the sea, is used to its ways, its twists and sudden turns of mood. Used to it, but never trusting it. The Grey Gulls are particularly treacherous, certainly not the place to find a man dressed in a 'city suit', trousers rolled to the knees, trying to cross the racing currents. Although Felicity manages to rescue the 'mysterious Mr Ross', there is something strange about him.



'She had saved his life and that made a sort of bond between them . . . whatever Miss Pepper said about not trusting him.' Vivien Alcock grabs your attention and interest all the way through this tightly constructed tale; not quite the 'tales of the unexpected', but genuinely spine-tingling in its own way.

BB

The Persuading Stick
John Rowe Townsend,
Puffin, 0 14 03.2131 4,
£1.50

Beth, Sarah and Katherine seem quite normal schoolkids. They take turns at ignoring each other in the tradition of 'I'm not your friend today'. One day, when it is Sarah's turn to be ignored, she finds the 'persuading stick' in a clump of reeds. The power and strength of the stick immediately becomes obvious - it soon puts Sarah's 'mardy' mates in their place. Lots of comic possibilities immediately present themselves, most of which the author ignores, choosing instead to concentrate on fantasy and symbolism. However, it's a nice idea and it makes a passable story.

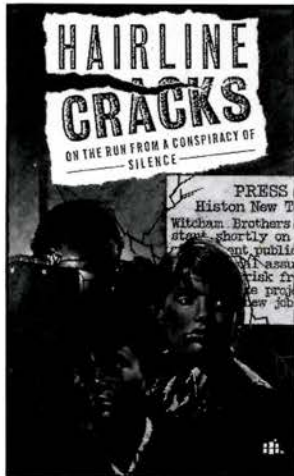
BB

Middle/Secondary

Degrassi Junior High – Exit Stage Left

William Ptasnak, Puffin,
0 14 03.2866 1, £1.95

This clearly has a life of its own and the book allows the television creations some room of their own in a different medium. The uninitiated might find it hard to get into with its ready-made characters but it's comfortable stuff, a genial, younger *Fame* in this story, as the 'gang' attempt to stage a play with various extra dramas of relationship, pre-production crises and performance. Something to fill idle moments between television episodes perhaps. AJ



Hairline Cracks

John Robert Taylor,
Armada, 0 00 692959 1,
£1.95

This very fast-paced thriller adventure ought to provide a welcome addition to the armoury when it comes to reader-appeal amongst mid-secondary boys. There's no let-up of action and suspense as Sam Lydney and his friend Mo try to solve the mystery of Mrs Lydney's sudden departure, ostensibly for a deserved rest. Even Sam's father seems to be implicated in the conspiracy of silence that appears to be controlled by the disfigured Mr Witcham, wealthy entrepreneur. He has lodged a planning application for a lucrative development deal which Mrs Lydney handled at the local council offices. It's a good yarn worth recommending. DB

A Pistol in Greenyards

Mollie Hunter,
Canongate Kelpies,
0 86241 175 0, £1.95

This reissue (originally Evans 1965) unearths a gem of a story written about a long forgotten, brutal historical event in Scotland in the 1850s. The clearances of the Highlands for 'the invasion of the lowland graziers with their

great herds of sheep' had been going on for some time. Now, in March 1854, it was the turn of the tenants on the Greenyards estate to be turned 'out of our farm as thousands had been before us, to die of hunger or be driven miserably into exile in the Americas.'

Mollie Hunter slips social commentary naturally into the flow of the story, the exploitation both of men and natural resources that gradually drained the lifeblood from the Highlands, to suit the then Government's purposes. 'It was the government and not the chief who ruled in the Highlands,' despotic overlords, yet not above 'taking our young men in the regiments raised when it needed fighting men.' Superb but sad commentary on a period of shame in our commercial past. BB

The Last of the Fianna

Michael Scott, Magnet,
0 416 07812 5, £1.75

At a time between when the new Christian God is taking over from the older Celtic ones, Colum is taken to Tir na nOg where he meets the legendary Oisín. In bringing Colum back, Oisín is forced to face what Tir na nOg has allowed him to ignore. This has the wonderful simplicity and often brilliant clarity of a well-told legend. The creation of the magical journey to Tir na nOg and the land itself has a lovely imaginative freshness and the return to the real world is a sharp and poignant contrast. The final juxtaposition of the two worlds, the two ages, is very effective: the one, magically colourful, the other, less brilliant but more solidly ours.



It's an easy read, lovely for reading aloud or losing yourself in, quietly. AJ

Frank Boulderbuster: The Last of the Great Swagmen

Doug MacLeod, Puffin,
0 14 03.2474 7, £1.95

'All swaggies are ratbags. Dirty old blokes carrying their homes around on their backs.' Frank Boulderbuster, the Last of the Great Swagmen, is Crocodile Dundee Incarnate, a veritable amalgam of Paul Hogan, Richie Benaud and a crate of Fosters, all purveyed through an amber hue! Great fun for the reading, following the Life of Frank through his adventures with the Smiling Shingleback, the Box Ghost and the Cologne Ranger. The action moves faster than the Oz slang, which demands a glossary all of its own. What! Can't follow the story? You've got to be a drongo and a nong! BB

Picture Me, Falling in Love

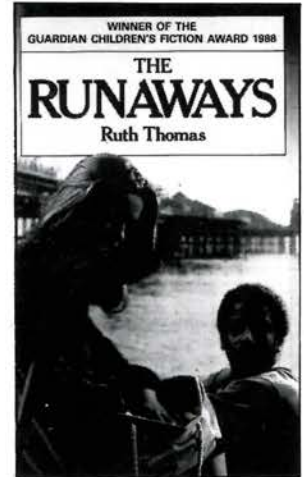
June Foley, Methuen
Teens, 0 416 12022 9,
£1.95

A New York, teenage love story written in that conversational, chatting-to-a-friend style the Americans use so easily. The opening word, 'Shoonck', suggests that the book will not rely on clichés and with main characters called Alexandra and Heracles that's just as well. First love for Alexandra but Heracles already has a girlfriend. It's tied up with his father's determination to control his life, local girl plus family shop equals future sorted out. Both main characters have to confront their (single) parents about their futures in ways that will appeal to teenage readers. The lightness of touch and the gently humorous way of dealing with issues makes digestion easy. Book boxes for third-years but younger ones will probably want this too. AJ

The Runaways

Ruth Thomas, Beaver,
0 09 959660 1, £1.99

Winner of the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Award this year and a nicely fat book for this age range. The story is a simple one but it's handled very well, very skilfully and very satisfyingly. The portrayal of Julia and Nathan as friendless isolates in their school is deft and the discovery of money is both good adventure stuff as well as the means by which the two are brought together, at first in mutual distrust, and then gradually in a gently created relationship. The mix of solid adventure – the discovery of the money, running away, a series of dramatic escapades, such an amount of money – and the creation of the



relationship makes the book special. Read it aloud, its series of dramatic episodes makes it ideal (it could make a good class set for first-years) and put it into book boxes. AJ

Manka, The Sky Gypsy

'B.B.' (D J Watkins-Pitchford), Swallow,
0 86267 222 8, £2.25



A demanding read, partly from length and style which takes a little getting into but the story of Manka, the snow white goose, gradually grows on you and is finally sad. Perhaps the style and some of the sentiments date this now but the careful detail in the creation of the life of the geese is engrossing and the story of the duel between Manka and Foxy the poacher, albeit done in clichés at times, carries the reading through to the dramatic climax. There's some work for teachers to do in helping pupils into the book – something that television would do very well – but those who read it will be natural salespeople. AJ

Shots

Nigel Gray, Knight,
0 340 42393 5, £1.95

This book was shortlisted for a phenomenal number of awards; I suspect due to its head-on approach to racist behaviour and realistic attitudes to a house-person father, who no sooner rids himself of one live-in girlfriend than he's taking on another, after the briefest acquaintance. Mr Gavin's liberal views and caring attitudes to his fellow men, whatever race, are sometimes drawn a bit heavy handedly but his fatherly devotion towards Sarah and Joe are very sensitively shown. As literature to make youngsters think, this will take some beating; I just wish it was a bit better written – maybe that's why it never won! DB

Howl's Moving Castle

Diana Wynne Jones,
Methuen Teens,
0 416 07442 1, £1.95

Here is another of this author's fast-paced novels, full of exuberance, ingenuity and fun, which will intrigue young readers from beginning to end.



Poor old Sophie Hatter, the eldest of three girls, seems set to get nothing right and then, to cap it all, the Witch of the Waste magic her to the age of 90 before her time. As if that's not enough, her sisters have each swapped places and Wizard Howl is trundling his

castle around the neighbourhood looking for maidens' hearts to break. Throw in a Fire Demon and an assortment of the zaniest characters and double-crossers, and you have a fine feast of fairy tale fantasy. DB

Older Readers

Taking Terri Mueller

Norma Fox Mazer,
Methuen Teens,
0 416 07422 7, £1.95

A good example of a book which while plain and unremarkable in many ways poses and provokes some fascinating questions. Terri and her father have lived together and on the move through America since she was four. It is only now that she begins to ask questions about her past and her mother who apparently died in a car crash. Gradually she discovers that her parents had divorced, that her mother was on the point of taking her abroad with another man when her father kidnapped her. The intriguing questions of right and wrong are set off as Terri is reunited with her mother and 'lost' relations and begins to resent her father's denial of this rich family life. Neither of the parents is seen as being good or bad; it's felt to be an awful problem with the father's unforgivable but understandable action and the mother's deep hurt at the eight-year loss of her daughter. Terri is left having to decide which one of her parents to stay with in a way which is satisfyingly honest. AJ

Misfits

Edited by Peggy
Woodford, Methuen
Teens, 0 416 09672 7,
£1.95

Many teachers will welcome the paperback edition of this collection of short stories – my hardback version has been a component of GCSE Wider Reading for some time.

The eight stories in the collection are all about outsiders or people who do not readily fit into society's often rigid categories. I particularly enjoyed the contributions from Penelope Lively, Jane Gardam, Emma Smith and Frances Thomas but found the rest of the collection rather uneven. The title of the John Wain story 'Jack, Vince, Jo-Ann and the Raving Revvers' dates it somewhat but its message is still relevant today. The stories are wide-ranging, dealing with the theme in an imaginative way and the book is a useful one for fourth and fifth-year – perhaps even brighter third-year pupils. VR

The Other Side of the Fence

Jean Ure, Corgi
Freeway, 0 552 52466 2,
£1.95

Occasionally Jean Ure's sure touch falters slightly but that is certainly not the case here. Richard, a shy history graduate from a wealthy background, and Bonny, a compulsive liar and veteran of several children's and foster homes, meet when they both strike out to try and broaden their horizons.

Richard's precipitous departure from his home is a result of his father's reaction on discovering his son to be homosexual; Bonny's a desire to establish herself away from her relationship with the work-shy and hypocritical Jake. Bonny and Richard are good for each other and Ure explores various facets of relationships – hetero- and homo-sexual.

This is a book well worth having in a third or fourth-year book box and it really should have a place on school library shelves. VR

Amber

Jacqueline Wilson,
Fontana Lions,
0 00 672767 0, £1.95

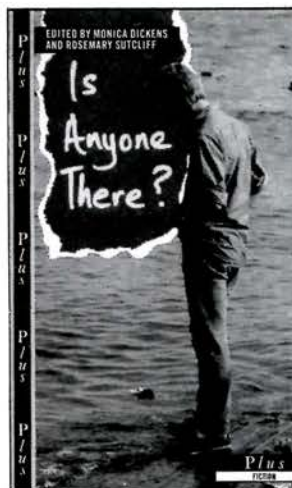
How are the adolescent inheritors of the sixties and seventies hippy scene coping with the aftermath of their parents' free-wheeling attitudes and values? If Ms Wilson is correct, very painfully, with a desperation for orthodox conventionality that is manifested in anger and neurotic despair, anorexia, insecurity, an inability to relate to others, sexual naivety – this is the price that early parental liberty exerts. It doesn't make a pretty read!

Amber's suspected pregnancy at 15 focuses her mind on all the damage that Jay, the mother, has heaped on her daughter and brings home to everyone the mess of lives that the hippy experiment created. A well-written, thought-provoking read for mid-teenagers. DB

Is Anyone There?

Edited by Monica
Dickens and Rosemary
Sutcliff, Penguin Plus,
0 14 03.2544 1, £2.50

Ten years old but well worth re-presenting. I'd forgotten



just how good a collection this is. Published in aid of the Samaritans, these stories (and a few Patten poems) explore various issues/problems of adolescence and, being fiction from a fine array of writers (Mark, Dahl, Westall, Gardam, Susan Hill, to name a few) all on good form, there is a continual release of understanding and engagement. With careful, helpful and brief introductions from Monica Dickens, this is a book to have around, good value as a set for GCSE (excellent for reading and dipping into, good starters for talk, thinking, wider reading and writing) and certainly for book boxes. Worth having copies for teachers too; there are some gems here. AJ

The Moves Make the Man

Bruce Brooks, Pan
Horizons, 0 330 30236 1,
£2.25

Wonderful, engrossing and wise, full of sharp scenes which I keep wanting to tell other people about. Impossible to do justice to the plot and describe the way that basketball moves and, to a lesser extent, baseball moves (practically meaningless to me) feature so centrally in story and meanings. Playing the game is a solitary activity for the two main characters involving not just skill but also integrity, and their moves are set against the wider context of their relationships. Jerome Fox, the single, token black boy in the white school, begins the book attempting to track the mystery, the truth of Bix Rivers, another intense game player who could not make the

right moves in life, who could only play fair, keep to the truth. It's a special book but there's work to be done to help most pupils past the language of the sports. AJ

Can't Stop Us Now

Fran Lantz, Penguin
Plus, 0 14 03.2372 4,
£1.95

An all female rock band as the basis for gathering an assortment of different characters together and having the problems of exploitation to deal with. A nice idea and the obvious enjoyment of making music is nicely conveyed but the clichés, the sexual exploitation and the way rich daddy solves the problems at the end are a disappointment. The cover is disappointing too, one of the girls is black but while there are pictures of four girls represented none seems to be black. Some mistake...? AJ

Also Known as Sadzia! The Belly Dancer!

Merrill Joan Gerber,
Pan Horizons,
0 330 30377 5, £2.25



'Whose life should I take personally, if not yours?' is a fair indicator of how crushingly asphyxiating Sandy's Jewish mother is. Her obsession with the creation of a svelte daughter who can attract a boyfriend is utterly compulsive and only results in a battle of wills. Then Sandy blunders on a trump card. If your mother's obsessed with the size of your thighs and midriff, why not revengefully take up sexy Arabian belly dancing, where such ample proportions are an asset? The tables turn and the battle evens out in an amusing and lively story, which wryly ridicules the body-beautiful cult and looks sympathetically at mother/daughter relationships. My pupil tester couldn't stop talking about it. DB

Cambridge
books for
children

Picture Books

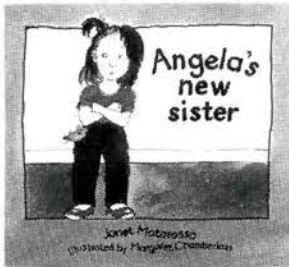
— new from Cambridge

Andy: An Alaskan Tale

Susan Welsh-Smith

Based on the true story of an Old English Sheep-Dog who arrives at an Eskimo village in the Arctic. People and dogs are delightfully portrayed by well-known Alaskan artist, Rie Muñoz.

Available October



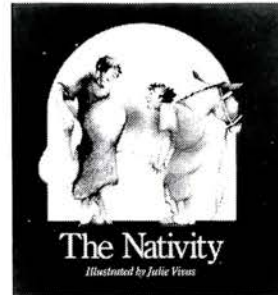
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Illustrated by Julie Vivas

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Cambridge University Press

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A fresh and funny picture book from Sucie Stevenson
looking at a problem common to most families.

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Ainslie Pryor

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Douglas Hill

Illustrated by Paul Demeyer

Colin's camping holiday turns into a surprise party...

A Goblin Party! From the popular sf writer for
children, Douglas Hill.

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Gollancz

Authorgraph No. 52



'Bashevis Singer said that every writer had to have an address – where their *fiction*, their *imagination*, is at home. So I have to work my way west of the Mississippi, even if I've started my story in Boston or the east coast.'

Like one of his stories, Sid Fleischman was born in Brooklyn but grew up in San Diego, 'about as far south as you can get in California', in a first-generation immigrant family – his father came from Russia in 1905 and his mother's family from Leeds in 1916. Sid was the first even to finish high school, and there was certainly no literary tradition: 'As a writer, I'm a product of the free library system.'

But those early borrowings were not fiction. 'From fifth grade on, I knew what I would be – a magician. I must have been a pretty dogged kid. San Diego had no schools for magicians, no magic shop, so I taught myself sleight-of-hand entirely out of the library.' At nineteen he published his own book of magic; the seed was sown but he still didn't see himself as a writer.

'I had no model – like most kids, I assumed all writers were dead! I was in my early twenties before I ever saw a writer: during the war, when I was in the Navy, I stepped into an elevator in New York and recognised this man from his pictures. It was Carl Sandburg – not bad for a first. He was perspiring in the heat, and that was the first clue I ever had that authors were like the rest of us. Humans.

'That's why I visit schools now. It may

occasionally turn someone on to writing as well as reading.' But he takes his magic with him. 'When the kids have had this build-up for six weeks before your visit, and they're expecting Shakespeare to walk in, it helps to loosen them up if you start by sawing someone in half . . .'

Magic in vaudeville and night clubs paid his way through college. Because of the war he graduated late, and with two books but no money became a political reporter. He loved the life, and when his paper suddenly folded set up a weekly news magazine with two colleagues – the sort that uses subscription money to pay the printers and has none over for salaries. He'd married a fellow student early in the war, and with a family imminent he sold his share in 1950 and wrote his first novel. 'I didn't write a line of fiction when I was in newspapers, so it turned out the best thing that ever happened.'

For us, Fleischman is synonymous with humour, but there were few signs of it in his early adult novels of mystery and suspense or his parallel career as a screenwriter. Only when he wrote *Mr Mysterious & Company* (1962) did comedy take over. 'Every father wants to make his kids laugh – that's how I discovered I had a facility for humour.'

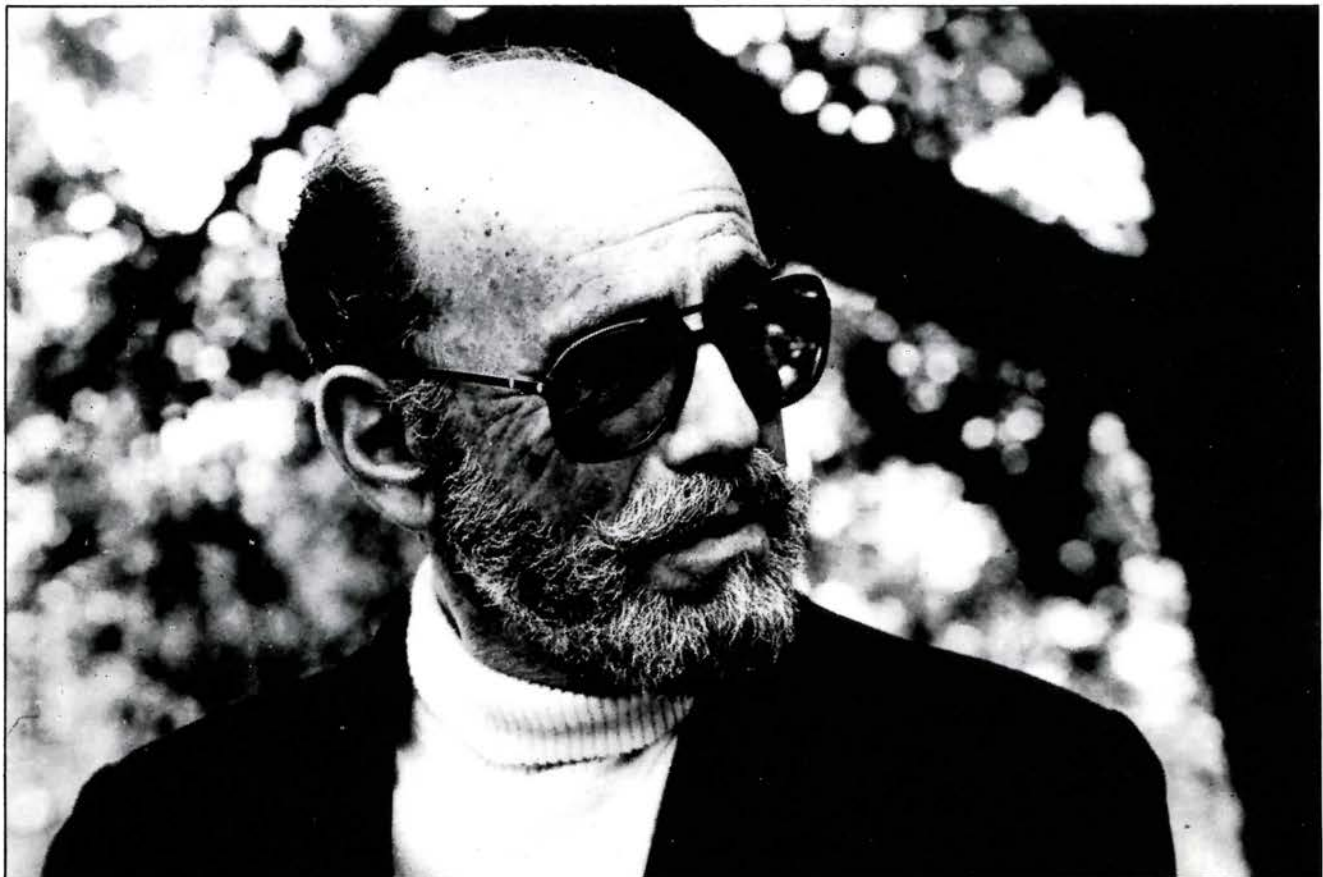
The exuberance of that humour, the cheeky riot of ideas and imagery running amok, the impression of logic stretched to snapping point, seem muscularly American, but he points out that the tall tale came from

Europe and the likes of Baron Munchausen. With America it simply hit fertile soil, and when it hit the Mid-West – wow! it sprouted to the sky like the seeds of McBroom's wonderful one-acre farm.

'They had *nothing* but terrible problems – it was so hot, so cold, so windy, and the grasshoppers so bad . . . They were great storytellers. They had to be, that was all there was. Now they're a traditional part of the culture of the times.

'The McBroom stories are comic fantasies that have to observe all the laws of fantasy while being based on reality, or else they become sheer nonsense, which they're *not*. They're reality blown way up, and that's agonisingly difficult to write.

'Although there's plenty of humour for babies, starting with *Mother Goose*, it then does a vanishing act, leaving a handful of intelligent humorists like Beverly Cleary or Joan Aiken. And funny books don't win awards: *The Whipping Boy* (latest winner of the Newbery Medal) is not my most comic novel.' *The Whipping Boy* took ten years, on and off, to gel, partly because he perceived it as a picture book, which gave him no elbow room, and partly because – although he has always recognised Twain's influence – he was inhibited by its Prince-and-Pauper element. 'But you can't avoid such echoes if you want the fun of traditional stories, if you want to entertain and turn kids on.



'And I want to give them even more.' Like all humorists, he's kept an essential seriousness. 'The real subject of humour is tragedy, else it is trivial. Humour is tragedy wearing a putty nose, tragedy with its shirt hanging out – give me time and I'll think of more. War always produces comic novels, from Schweik to MASH, because humour's a way of accommodating ourselves to the tragedy of life.'

Accustomed to parallels with Twain, he was taken aback by my positing a Jewish strain in his work, an affectionately mocking quality, an emotional largesse that allows people their quirks.

'Well, it's true that humour is a great equaliser – in the same way a gun made a little psychopath like Billy the Kid six feet tall – and gives you power over your adversaries. There is a certain dynamic in the kind of character a writer selects, and I suppose I am drawn to the disenfranchised, people at some social hazard like Praiseworthy, the butler in **Chancy and the Grand Rascal**, or Jemmy, the whipping boy. Like Garfield, I write the sort of history, the real history, that doesn't get into the history books. That's not *only* a Jewish trait, but it's specially strong in Jewish writers. Of course, now I'm aware of it I may stop doing it!'

The Newbery crowns a cluster of awards, including the Boston Globe/Horn Book for **Humbug Mountain**. He has written thirty-one books, and cares nothing now for the adult novels – 'The only letters they brought were finding fault.' A steady seven-day-a-week writer, his fiction has provided a living even without his film work, now also slanting towards children.



His first novel bought for the screen was **Blood Alley** (1955), 'a John Wayne movie that turns up on US television all too often'. This was the McCarthy-tormented period in Hollywood, and, noting the visual quality of his work and its natural divisions into dramatic scenes, they sent for Fleischman to check that he was not, in fact, a banned screenwriter. A professional career followed, usually adapting his own novels but also whatever fell into the scope of a contract, ranging from 'a beautiful dog story by James Street, **Goodbye My Lady**,' to the latest, a western so awful 'I couldn't believe they'd got that picture out of that screenplay.' He pities screenwriters who have to suffer impotence and frustration from work ruined by others without the safety valve of writing their own novels. 'If my ego were entirely involved with motion pictures, I'd be a basket case – as it is, it's in children's books.'

He is barred by a screenwriters' strike from one film he cares deeply about: it's his extension of a 400-word story by his old friend, Don Freeman, an animated musical directed by Taylor Hackford (**An Officer and a Gentleman**; **White Nights**), who will also direct, with actors, Fleischman's own adaptation of **The Whipping Boy**.

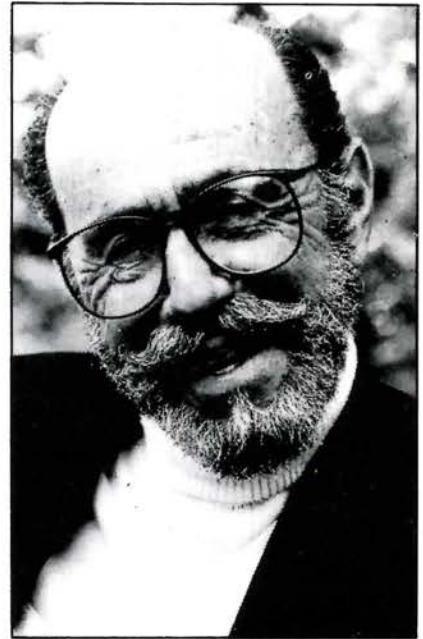
The showman-magician still lurks in this soft-spoken man. 'Lewis Carroll, Dickens, Van Loon (popular in the twenties) were all magicians; O Henry's stories were magic turns.' A devotee of the short story, his first writings were short shorts, like Maupassant, and **The Scarebird**, his latest title, has actually won an award as a best short story. Through them he taught himself to write as he had taught himself magic, with secrets gleaned from books. He combined a need to dazzle and surprise and a passion for cunningly intricate plots with painstaking attention to detail and craft.

'I had to learn what I was doing wrong. The function of a central character is to solve the problem – I was letting Dr Watson solve the crime. Once you know the conventions you can manipulate them – that was my breakthrough.'

'The magician in me is always looking around corners for surprises. I improvise daily: if I tried to work out all the problems in advance I'd never drive myself to the typewriter. Scenes pop out and amaze me!'

'I spend a lot of time getting the length and rhythm of a sentence right. A short McBroom story can take three months, day in, day out; a full-length novel – one, two, three years. No first drafts, looking this or that up later: I must have the security of knowing each page, each chapter, is just right, doing it fifteen times if necessary, before I can go on. My desk may be a disorganised mess, but I'm a compulsively tidy writer, tying up every loose end.' It's the neatness of expert sleight-of-hand.

His characters' names – Master Peckwit, Hold-Your-Nose Billy, Captain Scratch, Step-and-a-half Jackson, Bigler and Cooke's Colossal Circus and Congress of Wild Animals, not to mention *Willjilhester-chesterpeterpollytimtommarylarryandlittle-clarinda* McBroom – ring with Dickensian bravura. Small wonder there is no writer he admires more than Garfield. 'I'm comfortable win the nineteenth century because I like highly individual, eccentric people. It's a century of fantasy, where my imagination can go crazy.'



Perhaps that's why he's remained in southern California, in a large antique house (a couple of years older than himself!) within sound of the Pacific of his childhood. 'There's a lot of madness in California, and someone from the east built this house with a New England-ish roof for snow.' Instead of snow, he cherishes twenty-seven fruit trees bearing everything except cherries. 'When I get serious I get serious, and I got serious about gardening fifteen years ago. I taught myself grafting' – yes, out of the library – 'and now I've got trees that don't know what the hell they are.' He's glad they've kept the big house, for there have been three grandchildren in three years – welcome dedication candidates, for 'when you've been around for as long as I have, you run out of friends and relatives.'

He regards himself as an old warhorse, with the writing future belonging to Paul, his middle child and only son, of whom he's immensely proud. He, too, is a Newbery author, a unique family coup. 'Paul has had the advantage of a role model, but it's meant a struggle to find his own voice – he has a wonderful sense of humour but doesn't show it in books because he doesn't want to compete. But it's fun to have someone around to discuss problems.'

'Children's writers are special: I've been in the picture business since the fifties, and have, say, two close friends, but among children's books I have ten, fifteen, twenty I can call on when I'm in town, whose company I enjoy. In that, too, we're like magicians.' ●

Sid Fleischman was interviewed by Stephanie Nettell.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

The Books

Ghost in the Noonday Sun, Puffin, 0 14 03.0443 6, £1.95 pbk

McBroom's Wonderful One-Acre Farm/Here Comes McBroom, Puffin, 0 14 03.1053 3, £1.75 pbk

The Man on the Moon-Eyed Horse, Gollancz, 0 575 02837 8, £6.95

The Whipping Boy, Methuen Pied Piper, 0 416 12512 3, £5.95

ff
faber and faber

The Adventures of Sam Pig

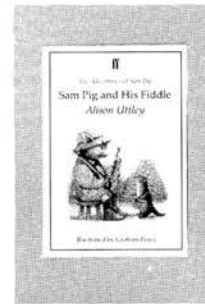
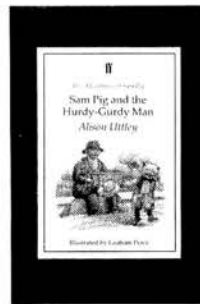
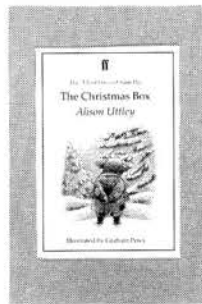
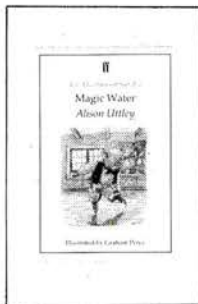
by Alison Uttley

Illustrated by Graham Percy

Since his first appearance in 1939, Sam Pig has been one of Alison Uttley's most well-loved and enduring creations. Mischievous and endearing, often lazy, always inquisitive, he is the central character of numerous magical tales about four little pigs and their wise guardian, Brock the Badger.

Now, for the first time, these classics of children's literature are to appear individually in bright new hardback editions with wonderful full colour illustrations on every page, delighting a whole new generation of young readers.

The first four titles in this enchanting series are to be published on 19th September 1988 at £2.95 each.



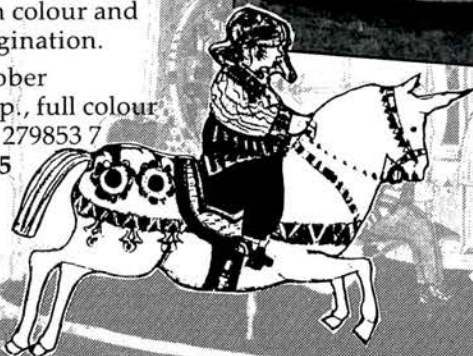
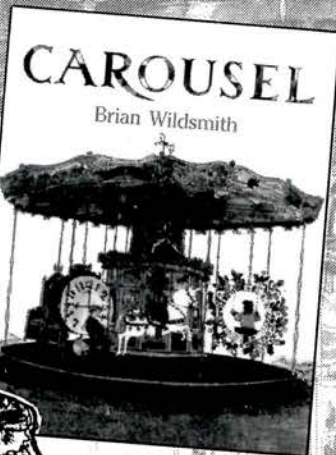
A Winner by WILDSMITH!

CAROUSEL

Brian Wildsmith's new picture book is a whirlwind fantasy about a little girl who is ill, and is made better by a magical carousel.

The story starts off with small pictures of jewel-like intensity, followed by a dream sequence painted in big, double-page spreads bursting with colour and imagination.

October
32 pp., full colour
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£5.95



OXFORD BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Autumn Fiction Favourites

Rebecca Devine

by Bess Kaplan

Rebecca's life is turned upside down when her family circumstances dramatically change.

192 pp.,
0 19 271609 3 £6.95

A Map of Nowhere

by Gillian Cross

A quest game suddenly explodes into danger for everyone concerned.

Chartbreak by Gillian Cross was shortlisted for the 1987 Carnegie Medal.

160 pp.,
0 19 271583 6 £7.95

This Girl

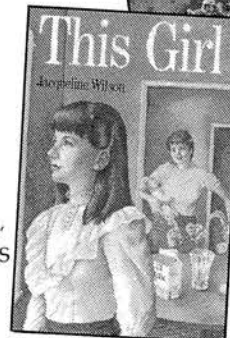
by Jacqueline Wilson

A compelling novel about growing up.

About her latest novel:

The Power of the Shade: 'a striking narrative technique'

192 pp.,
0 19 271611 5 £7.95



TES

LIFELINE 4: PROJECTS AND TOPICS

Pat Thomson continues her 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, this **Books for Keeps** 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 Food, and Clothing. Previous themes covered: House and Home (**BfK** 51, July 88).

PART 2: WATER

The theme of water can be approached from several angles so the books are arranged in

INFORMATION BOOKS

A simple overview is provided in picture book form by **Water in the Where Does It Come From?** series, Kathy Henderson, Macdonald 1986, 0 356 11551 8, £2.95, taking us from the spring to the tap.

The brightly illustrated **Let's Imagine: Water**, Tom Johnston and Sarah Pooley, Bodley Head, 0 370 30867 0, £4.95, is similarly all-encompassing in a lively primary years format.

For junior and lower middle, **The Book of Water: a way of seeing**, Benn 1980, 0 510 00072 X, o/p, probes into more subtle watery byways. A good resource for teachers 'doing water' yet again, with suggestions for unusual activities, but a good browsing book for children, too.

Water and the sciences

Science from Waterplay, part of the **Teaching Primary Science** series, Macdonald 1976, 0 356 05071 8, £4.50 non-net, is a useful starting point. Not only what to do, but why. Plenty of simple experiments.

The Magic Fountain, Alison Alexander and Susie Bower, Collins 1986, 0 00 184946 8, £4.95, provides science activities for the 4-8s, many related to the properties of water.

Science Scenesters offers six sets of bright experiment cards, one of which is **Water**, British Gas Corporation 1986, Catalogue No. 79, £33.00 for all six sets. No SBN but you do get stickers with these, as well as a teachers guide. Enquiries to British Gas Education Service, P O Box 46, Hounslow, Middlesex TW4 6NF (Tel: 01-759 4611).

Science Horizons, the **West Sussex Science 5-14** scheme, Macmillan Education 1981. See especially **From Rain to Tap**, 0 333 31299 6 (Level 1), **Floating and Sinking**, 0 333 28536 0, and **Water in the Home**, 0 333 32155 3, both from Level 2a, £7.50 each.

The theme of water in the home (see also **House and Home**, last issue) can be continued with the invaluable **Wash and Brush Up**, Eleanor Allen, A & C Black 1976, 0 7136 1639 3, £4.95. Water supply and sanitation in all its gory detail is given the historical treatment.

Watery Environments and Man

Exploring Rivers, Derek Cullen and John Murray-Robertson, Macmillan Education 1987, 0 333 43949 X, £6.95, concentrates on early exploration. The text is straightforward for those who can cope with the names, and it shows how the great rivers were roads to the interiors.

In **A Journey Up the Nile**, Laurie Bolwell, Wayland 1984, 0 85078 403 4, £4.95, the river provides a connecting thread between the nine rivers it flows through. Although there are obvious digressions (the Pyramids for example), the dominance and importance of the river is demonstrated in words, pictures and diagrams.

related groups. The age range is approximately five to twelve. The final age selection will, however, rest with the teacher as some of the experiments and illustrations will be applicable across the age range.



From **Wash and Brush Up**.

Lake and River Peoples, Terry Jennings, Macdonald 1987, 0 356 13215 3, £5.95, continues the theme of the importance of water to human life but takes a broader view, looking at both communities and the economic use of waterways.

Living by the Water, Jacqueline Dineen, Macmillan 1987, 0 333 42625 8, £6.95, does the same in more detail, including leisure use and waterborne communities like the crew of an oil rig.

Rivers and People, Tom Browne, Wayland 1982, 1 85340 952 8, o/p, using a more demanding text, is part of a series which relates humans to the landscape, emphasising the geological aspects and our responsibility for our rivers.

Canals, Graham Rickard, Wayland 1987, 1 85210 090 7, £4.50, looks back briefly, then reviews modern canals and their traffic. The glossary is useful for technical terms.

For real photographs, **Rivers and Canals**, Penny Marshall, Macdonald 1986, 0 356 11394 9, £5.95, shows us mainly barge dwellers and their lives, as part of the **Camera as Witness** series.

In the **History Explorers** series, **Canals**, David Woodlander, A&C Black 1983, 0 7136 2275 X, o/p, is a handy little book, with useful diagrams and pictures, which invites you to go out and look for your own evidence.

Right up to date, **Car Ferry**, Andrew Langley, Watts 1983, 0 86313 037 2, £4.95, is a tour in large print and photographs of the floating world many children have experienced on holiday.



From **Canal people**, Anthony J. Pierce, A&C Black 1982, 0 7136 1811 6, £4.95.

Building a . . . Container Ship, Michael Moore, Hamish Hamilton 1985, 0 241 11675 9, £4.95, is more demanding reading and traces a cargo ship's journey, showing all the processes and personnel involved.

Travel by Water, Michael Pollard, Macmillan 1986, 0 333 40940 X, £6.95, covers these and other areas in less detail, from dugout to hydrofoil.

And if it is not tactless, **The Sinking of the Titanic**, John Dudman, Wayland 1987, 1 85210 163 6, £5.75, provides a well-illustrated dramatic account.

Watery Environments and the Natural World

The River, Vanessa Luff, A & C Black 1981, 0 7136 2198 2, o/p, is a beautifully illustrated picture book showing all kinds of creatures which live in and by the river. Minimal text but key diagrams of each scene are provided at the back.

Pond Life, *Science Horizons* again, Level 2b (Macmillan Education 1986), 0 333 34917 2, £7.50, is an all-action guide to get you observing and recording.

In a similar mood but more 'scenic', see **Pond Life**, Terry Jennings, Oxford 1986, 0 19 918210 8, £1.95 non-net or 0 19 918211 6, £3.95 net, and for a useful identification guide **Pond Animals**, Irene Finch, Longman 1969, 0 582 18161 5, R£3.95, deservedly still in print, is a comprehensive list.

FICTION AND POETRY

Picture Books

Splash Harry, John Moore, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 32893 2, o/p. Harry enjoys splashing everyone until victims take their revenge.

Mr Gumpy's Outing, John Burningham, Cape, 0 224 61909 8, £5.50; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.254 8, £1.95 pbk. A river trip which ends in the water when the unusual boatload won't sit still. See also this author's **Come Away from the Water**, Shirley, Cape, 0 224 01373 4, £4.95; Picture Lions, 0 00 662147 3, £1.95 pbk.

The Pond, Nichola Armstrong, Dent, 0 460 06172 0, £5.50. A cautionary tale about a family of frogs but accurate information in the careful illustrations and identification chart endpapers.

An Evening at Alfie's, Shirley Hughes, Bodley Head, 0 370 30588 4, £5.25; Picture Lions, 0 00 662484 7, £1.95 pbk. Water in the wrong place is definitely a Bad Thing, as Alfie's babysitter discovers when the pipes burst.

Mr Archimedes' Bath, Pamela Allen, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11968 5,

Moving to the seaside, **The Seashore**, also *Science Horizons*, Level 2b (Macmillan Education 1982), 0 333 32158 8, £7.50, provides more activities demanding close observation.

Coastlines, Sheila Padget, Wayland 1983, 0 85078 296 1, £5.50, takes a grander view, looking at the coast as the battleground between land and sea.

Coasts, Keith Lye, Wayland 1987, 1 85210 037 0, £6.50, also looks at this aspect but includes plants, animals and man. Fishing, pollution, tourism and the new technology are briefly considered in double spreads.

Further afield, **Exploring the Oceans**, Derek Cullen and John Murray-Robertson, Macmillan Education 1987, 0 333 43950 3, £6.95, covers early exploration from the Phoenicians to contemporary women sailors. A cheerful quiz is included.



From **The World of Sharks**.

The World of Sharks, Andrew Langley, Wayland 1987, 1 85210 094 X, £4.50, will cause appropriate sensations with its close-up photographs but it does point out that most sharks are not harmful whereas man is a considerable risk to a shark.

And Thinking of Safety

Safety Near the Water, Dorothy Baldwin and Claire Lister, Wayland 1987, 1 85210 082 6, £4.95, is simply and directly addressed to children with the message 'don't fool around near any kind of water'.

£5.95. An incredible assortment of animals take a bath, thus demonstrating the Archimedes Principle and a wet floor.

The Sultan's Bath, Victor Ambrus, Oxford, 0 19 279677 1, o/p. In a country where water is precious, even bathwater can be stolen.

A Mermaid's Tale, Fiona Moodie, Hutchinson, 0 09 159280 1, o/p. Fisherman Tom bravely rescues his wife from the mermaids' underwater world. The pictures are especially enjoyed.

Princess Gorilla and a New Kind of Water, Verna Aardema and Victoria Chess, Bodley Head, 0 370 31180 9, £5.50. The gorilla king decrees that whoever can drink the 'new kind of water' can marry the princess. Re-telling of an African folktale.

Rain, Peter Spier, Collins, 0 00 195165 3, reprinting 1989. A rainy day – a wordless book full of atmospheric pictures.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice, Felicity Trotman, Methuen, 0 416 53710 3, £5.50. Goethe's poem, Dukas' music, Disney's film: this is the story behind them all. The Apprentice fills the cauldron by means of magic and then cannot stop the spell.

The Gift, Doreen Roberts, Methuen, 0 416 50340 3, £5.95. A deeply touching story of a boy who shows his great love for his grandmother with a gift from the sea. Effective over a wide age range.

Short Stories

Supermarket Thursday, Jean Chapman, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 36637 0, £6.95. Series of short stories about ordinary events for the youngest. In 'Wet Blanket', a blanket covered in purple painting water gets the full washing treatment.

I Don't Want To!, Bel Mooney, Methuen, 0 416 51710 2, £5.95; Magnet, 0 416 03212 5, £1.50 pbk. . . . but she usually does in the end and 'I Don't Want to Wash' turns out to be quite an interesting experience.

Rain and Shine, Paul Rogers, Orchard, 1 85213 060 1, £6.25. In 'The Castle', while trying to build one in the flooded stream, the children dam the flow and cut themselves off. A mini-adventure with Acorn, the dog, as the rescuer.

Winnie the Pooh, A A Milne, Magnet, 0 416 23910 2, £1.95 pbk. Remember Chapter Nine 'in which Piglet is entirely surrounded by water'? Floating messages and unorthodox sailing vessels play their part while it rains incessantly in an English sort of way.

The Disappearing Cat, Thelma Lambert, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2027 X, £1.50 pbk. 'No swimming for Sam' is the story of trouble-prone Sam, banished to the side of the pool - which is where he sees the toddler heading for the water . . .

The Kingdom Under the Sea, Puffin, 0 14 03.0641 2, £2.50 pbk. There is rich imagery in the title story of a fisherman and his visit to the Sea King's palace.

What the Neighbours Did, Philippa Pearce, Viking Kestrel, 0 7226 5262 3, R£5.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.0710 9, £1.95 pbk. 'Fresh' is a perfect short story about the finding of a fresh-water mussel and the feelings which it generates between two boys.

Novels

Baxter by the Sea, Anne Forsyth, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 38607 X, £4.50. Story of a seaside holiday - but Baxter is a cat. Younger juniors.

The Drowning Valley, Mary Cockett, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 22598 X, o/p. The new reservoir means a whole valley must be flooded.

The Revenge of Samuel Stokes, Penelope Lively, Heinemann, 0 434 94889 6, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1504 7, £1.95 pbk. When the new estate offends the eighteenth-century shade of Samuel Stokes, he causes the old lake to re-find its original bed. Good fun, and a sideways look at landscape archaeology.

The Song Under the Water, Jean Morris, Bodley Head, 0 370 30825 5, £6.95. A fantasy in which water plays a powerful role. The story is full of the sound and feel of it as the adventure unfolds.

The Village by the Sea, Anita Desai, Heinemann, 0 434 93436 4, £6.95; Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2505 0, £1.95 pbk. Completely convincing story of a family in an Indian coastal village and the community who live there.

and don't forget -

The Great Flood, Peter Spier, World's Work, 0 437 76512 1, £6.50. The story of the ark in humorous, cartoon-strip style.

Trouble in the Ark, Gerald Rose, Magnet, 0 416 54330 8, £1.95 pbk. Lots of animal stories, reflecting the chaos below deck.

And in the Revised Standard Version, **Noah and the Ark**, Methuen, 0 416 02662 1, £5.95, wonderfully illustrated by Pauline Baynes.

Poetry

Just one location for each poem is given so try your own collections first. The first four poetry books all have substantial sections devoted to water as a theme.

Seeing and Doing: an anthology of songs and poems, edited by Rosalind Farrimond, Thames Magnet, 0 423 00850 1, £3.95 pbk

The Possum Tree, Lesley Pyott, A & C Black, 0 7136 2706 9, £6.95 pbk

You'll Love This Stuff!, selected by Morag Styles, Cambridge, 0 521 32130 1, R£5.25; 0 521 31275 2, £2.95 pbk

Out of the Blue, Fiona Waters, Lions, 0 00 671960 0, £1.95 pbk. Good selection on rain and storms.

'Fishes Evening Song' by Dahlov Ipcar in **Noisy Poems**, Jill Bennett, Oxford, 0 19 276063 7, £4.95

'Launderama' by Iain Crichton-Smith, 'Hotwater Bottles' by Peggy Dunstan and 'The River' by Clive Riche, all in **A Very First Poetry Book**, John Foster, Oxford, 0 19 916051 1, £4.95

'Our Pond' by Daniel Pettward in **Seeing and Doing: a new anthology of songs and poetry**, edited by Rosalind Farrimond, Thames Magnet, 0 423 00660 6, £3.95 pbk

'Moor-hens' and 'Willoughby' in **Jack the Treacle Eater**, poems by Charles Causley, Macmillan, 0 333 42963 X, £7.95

'Learning to Swim', 'Sea Dream' and 'Mary Celeste' in **Midnight Forest**, poems by Judith Nicholls, Faber, 0 571 14807 7, £2.95 pbk

See also **Poems 1**, Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark, Oxford, 0 19 834266 7, £2.95 pbk non-net, which has a varied selection of poems from 'Washing-up' to 'The Cataract of Lodore', some of which will be suitable for this age range, and **Pictures and Poems: Water**, a series of poems printed on separate sheets and each accompanied by an A4 photograph. These are produced by Philip Green, 112a Alcester Road, Studley, Warwickshire, B80 7NR. There are two sets: **Water 1 (A25)** and **Water 2 (A26)**.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

The following organisations offer information or materials to schools. The items mentioned are those which are free or cost a nominal sum but other materials may be available. Enquiries to the following addresses:

Your local **Water Authority** - look in the local directory.

British Petroleum
BP Educational Centre
P O Box 5
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7EH
(Folders, booklets, etc.)

British Waterways Board
Press and Publicity Officer
Melbury House
Melbury Terrace
London
NW1 6JX
(Brochures, sheets)

CFL Vision
Chalfont Grove
Gerrards Cross
Bucks
SL9 8TN
(Free films)

Council for Environmental Education
Information Officer
School of Education
University of Reading
24 London Road
Reading
RG1 5AQ
(A4 sheets)

Inland Waterways Association
114 Regents Park
London
NW1 8UQ
(Leaflets)

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food
Information Division
Whitehall Place
London
SW1 2HH
(A4 sheets)

National Maritime Museum
Educational Services Section
Romney Road
Greenwich
London
SE10 9NF
(Reading lists)

Royal Life Saving Society
Mountbatten House
Studley
Warwickshire
B80 7NN
(Booklists)

Shell Educational Service
Shell-Mex House
The Strand
London
WC2R 0DX
(Posters, charts)

Trinity House Lighthouse Service
Public Relations Officer
Trinity House
Tower Hill
London
EC3N 4DH
(Charts, leaflets) ●

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 is now some years since we 'Authorgraphed' the Ahlbergs (May 1982). Janet Ahlberg herself rarely gives interviews. **Judith Elkin**, who has known Janet for many years, talked to this singular illustrator . . .

Janet Ahlberg



If asked to name the Top Ten children's book illustrators who have made the most significant contribution to children's books over the last ten years, then very high up on my list would be Janet Ahlberg.

Exquisitely detailed pictures, busily peopled scenes and visual images which capture both atmosphere and nostalgia to perfection, whilst continuing to appeal to the child's sense of humour and fun, have appeared in more than a dozen memorable and highly original picture books. But in addition, in Janet and Allan Ahlberg we also have that rare combination: an author and artist who perfectly complement each other's talents.

It is no great surprise to find the intimacy so evident in all of their work together, reflected in their working environment. They live with their eight-year-old daughter, Jessica, in a large Victorian house overlooking the Leicestershire countryside. The warmth of the family is obvious from the moment that Jessica, in work apron, opens the front door. Jessica is painting papier mache puppets in the kitchen, where the green walls and large windows blur the division between house and garden, and create a feeling of spaciousness and creativity. Pieces of artwork by Jessica cover the walls. Jessica is a bright, imaginative child who has influenced her parents in their work and in return is greatly stimulated by them.

Janet herself came from an artistic family: her father was a painter and her mother taught art. Janet has always drawn, apart from a period in her teens when she got 'horribly concerned with perspective' and stopped. She went to teacher training college to study English as a main subject, but switched to Art, where she rediscovered drawing and painting and met Allan. She realised that she could never become a teacher, lacking the ability to impose discipline and hating the thought of being exposed in front of a class of children.

Back in her home area of Leicestershire, Janet studied graphics at Leicestershire Polytechnic before moving to London to work as a freelance illustrator, working on advertisements and non-fiction books. The earliest books she remembers, and prefers on the whole to forget, are some books by Felicia Law on craft activities using card and junk. Although she enjoyed these at the time, she really wanted to illustrate stories, preferably fiction and ideally with no people, because she was not terribly confident about drawing people: 'sympathetic faces are very difficult'. She asked Allan, then working as a primary school teacher, to write some stories for her. **The Brick Street Boys**, a parody of 'Janet and John', and full of people, was the result. It was accepted by Collins and a further five titles requested.

There followed a lean period. They were not short of ideas: **The Old Joke Book**, **Burglar Bill**, **Jeremiah in the Dark Woods**, **The Vanishment of Thomas Tull**, and **Two Heads** were all in embryo, but publishers were slow to take up these ideas until, finally, three publishers accepted work almost simultaneously, and they were in business. From then onwards, Janet has found enormous pleasure in doing what she likes and counts herself as extremely lucky to do something that she loves and which pays her.

What is the secret of their unique working relationship? Janet feels that it is something to do with their finding the same things funny, having similar attitudes to many things and having the advantage of a close emotional relationship. Working at home together, in a converted hayloft, with Allan carefully insulated from the noise of Janet's radio, they are able constantly to interact and interrelate about their work. They also both have a strong commitment to quality - in their own individual work and in its production. They want to do things well; they do not want to produce second best. They may spend many hours worrying over tiny details in proof copies, being very fussy about colour and register whether it's a new edition, a reprint, a paperback or overseas edition. They feel passionately that if they have worked hard on a book, then they do not want anything less than the very best for the child who will finally read it.

Janet is the quieter half of the partnership, with a tendency to underestimate her own artistic merit. She does not see herself as an innovator. She feels that she has changed gradually and that her drawings of people have improved, now looking less 'as though made of planks of wood'. As a reviewer who has always found her illustrations exquisite, I find it difficult to understand that this quietly spoken, self-deprecating artist does not see herself as being specially talented and is constantly striving to do better.

Where do the ideas come from? Perhaps it is inevitable in such a workable partnership that extricating one person's work from the other's is impossible. Janet claims that most of the original sparks come from Allan. He runs a lot and often arrives back at the house, dripping with sweat, breathless with ideas: 'Just a minute' rings regularly around the house, as he jots things on scraps of paper, before speaking to anyone. The kitchen table is littered with ideas! From his experience of working with children, he can often recognise more easily than she can, what would make a good book. Janet finds she needs something to bounce her own ideas off, although she does claim responsibility for **Funnybones** and for the more recent **Starting School**. Once the idea has taken root, stimulus comes from both of them, normally with Allan writing the text first and then collaborating throughout, continuously checking and double checking. Janet 'would not dream of altering any of Allan's words, unless the book is not working properly.'

Janet loves originating books which children can enjoy and share with others. She wants them to get pleasure from reading and pleasure from looking. She sees detail as being important in the child's imaginative development: 'the more you see, the more information about the world you get.' There are no heavy messages: 'We do books for ourselves. If others like them, that's really good.' Are there any anti-racist or anti-sexist intentions? Janet believes that children learn from example. She hopes that her books express equality in their illustrative detail but not in any heavy-handed way. She *does* believe that it is important to reflect a multi-cultural society: 'Black children need to see themselves as part of society, whilst retaining things culturally of their own, and within a common understanding of society.'

Janet has always worked slowly. For some years, she has suffered from back trouble, which severely limits her output. She is now able



Some of Janet's own favourites: above, *Cinderella plus hidden Three Bears* (*Each Peach Pear Plum*); below, *The Cinderella Show*; right, *Dinner and Dad* (*The Baby's Catalogue*).



to produce only one book per year. This has demonstrated to her very clearly that health is not guaranteed and there is only a certain amount of time left in which she may be able to illustrate. She now thinks hard and chooses very carefully what she wants to do. She and Allan have a fairly strictly controlled priority order for their forthcoming projects, which they largely agree upon.

Their most recent book, *Starting School*, was stimulated by Jessica's starting school. The headteacher prepared a letter in book form to be sent to each child, individually addressed, and a friend suggested that Janet might illustrate it. She liked the idea of working on a book which broke down some of the barriers and alleviated many of the fears that children starting school often display. Janet talks passionately about her experiences in preparing this book and demonstrates forcibly her enormous commitment to children and belief in them. This was the first time that she had felt she wanted to do a 'useful' book, because starting school was a milestone for all children. She spent time in the local school, taking photographs and observing the infant classes, loving their 'worldly wiseness and their shy innocence'. She wanted to show that school could be fun; it was not all 3 Rs, it was also play. The book had to be entertaining, yet show that the things that worried many children, such as going to the toilet, were possible at school. It took some time before she came up with the idea of having a cast of children and their families appearing throughout the book. Thus in the book 'Gavin and Errol and Sophie and Sushma and David and Kate and Robert and Alison are starting school.' This pattern of names is repeated regularly, as they do everything together, sometimes happily, sometimes nervously, sometimes rather reluctantly, but always perfectly captured in detailed and humorous pictures which will comfort and encourage many children as well as their parents.

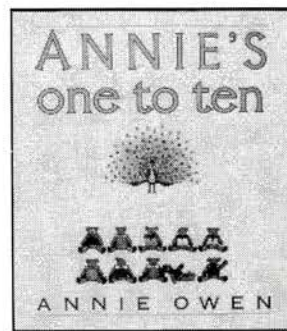
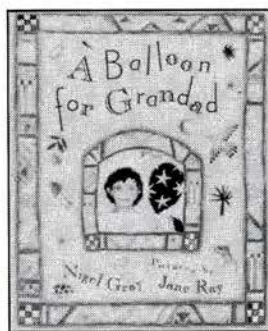
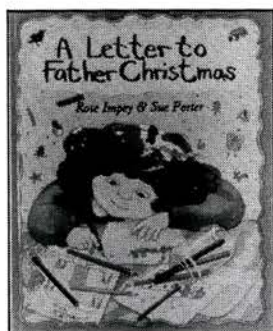
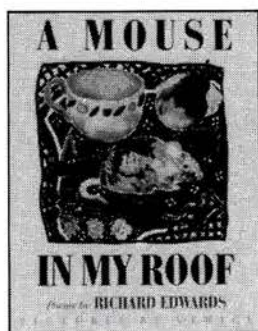
Which of their books are Janet's own favourites? *The Clothes Horse*,

The Baby's Catalogue, *Starting School*, *Each Peach Pear Plum*, *The Jolly Postman*, *The Cinderella Show*. They are both delighted by the reception that *The Jolly Postman* received. It has stimulated more letters than any other book to date, some from children with their own inventive ideas for extra 'letters' – an eye appointment, letter to the hairdresser, etc. They are pleased to see how such a simple idea can extend the child's imagination and stimulate, even help, individual children, including less able older readers.

Janet's illustrations have received many accolades. Which awards have meant the most to her? Totally in character with this child-centred person, it is the Federation of Children's Book Groups Award to *The Jolly Postman*, because 'it is an award chosen by children', but also the Emil Award for the same book because the Emil is 'awarded to a book for words and pictures together' – recognising as she does the value and importance of seeing a book as an entity. Whilst it was a great pleasure to receive the Kate Greenaway Award, perhaps the most prestigious, she questions the concept of an award for pictures only, without regard to the text.

The final image of this delightful artist can be captured in her desire to be 'just an ordinary mother'. She hates the idea that anyone at Jessica's school should know that she has famous parents, or ask for autographs, much preferring to keep a low profile and play a normal part in school life. Her work is not allowed to interfere with her pleasure in, and commitment to, the family and her wish to stimulate her bright, active, intelligent daughter. But how lucky are the thousands of other children who have grown up, comforted, succoured, amused and beguiled by some of Janet's wonderful visual inventions. Long may she continue to delight us all. ●

Judith Elkin is Senior Lecturer in Librarianship and Information Studies at Birmingham Polytechnic.



Books for keeps from Orchard Books

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Pictures by Peter Melnyczuk

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For more information please contact: Linda Banner, Promotions Manager, Orchard Books, The Watts Group, 12A Golden Square, London W1R 4BA. Telephone: 01-437 0713.

SOUND & VISION

— an update on the latest information

Narnia

The latest date for the start of this major serialization is now Sunday, 13th November at 4.15pm in six 30-minute episodes. This expensive production is using all the hi-tech graphic and animation devices that bewitched us in **A Box of Delights**. We're still hoping to talk to the Producer, Paul Stone, in time for our November issue.

On 6th November there'll be a programme about the making of **Narnia**.

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)

To be screened by BBC1 starting on 14th November, twice a week (Mondays and Tuesdays) for six weeks at 4.20pm. Based on the new book by Margaret Stuart Barry, **The Witches Holiday Club**. 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, with screenplay by Janni Howker herself, still has no transmission date from Channel 4. Pity because this must be one to watch for.

Granpa

John Burningham, Cape, 0 224 02279 2, £5.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.841 4, £2.25 pbk

Screening of this award-winning Burningham picture book by the makers of **The Snowman** and **When the Wind Blows** has now been delayed to Easter 1989.

Marianne Dreams

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

A feature-film, retitled for the screen as **Paperhouse**, now with a Winter '88 release date.

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 some time over the coming Winter.

The Witches

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

In July we had no transmission information. There's now talk of Summer '89.

The BFG

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

Latest launch information for this feature film is now Spring '89. Stars the voices of David Jason, Amanda Root, Mollie Sugden and Frank Thornton. Produced by the Dangermouse team in association with Thames TV. There's a special **The BFG Film Story Book**, 0 14 050.856 2 to be published in Spring '89.

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase

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

A feature film with Mel Smith now with a Spring '89 date.

Pippi Longstocking

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

A release date of Spring '89 has been given for the UK opening of **The New Adventures of . . .**, a feature film already showing in the US, and directed by Ken Annakin (**Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines**). There's to be **The New Adventures of Pippi Longstocking Movie Book** available later.

The Snow Spider

Jenny Nimmo, Methuen, 0 416 54330 0, £6.50; Magnet, 0 416 06492 2, £1.75 pbk

This Smarties Prize winner is to be networked on ITV at peak viewing time on Sundays at 4.30pm starting 27th November in four 30-minute episodes. It stars Sian Phillips as Nain and Ossian Roberts as Gwyn. The book will be mentioned after each programme.

The Whipping Boy (see this issue's Authorgraph)

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

To be broadcast on **Jackanory**, some time during this coming Spring. We'll be carrying this and other **Jackanory** advance scheduling information for you, hopefully in our November issue.

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.

The TV Adventures of Mr Majeika

Humphrey Carpenter, Puffin, 0 14 03.2664 2, £1.95 pbk

Six 30-minute slots for screening Spring '89 on ITV. Stanley Baxter stars.

Woof!

Allan Ahlberg, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 80832 6, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1996 4, £1.75 pbk

Four 30-minute episodes with Liza Goddard from ITV. No dates yet.

Abracadabra

Vol 1: Space Travel, 0 7474 0206 X

Vol 2: Oceans, 0 7474 0207 8

Vol 3: Earthquakes and Volcanoes, 0 7474 0208 6

Vol 4: Lasers, 0 7474 0209 4

Sphere Books with Channel 4, £3.99 each

The original theme-based, character-led science and technology series for 8 to 14 year olds coming around again for the third time in thirteen 30-minute slots at the peak viewing time of 5.30pm this September on Channel 4 followed by thirteen new programmes. 'It starts where Sesame Street leaves off . . .' and it's an independent, all-UK product too.

Boudicca

If you got totally hooked by that dazzling piece of storytelling from Tony Robertson (Baldrick in **Black Adder**) on **Odysseus** two years ago (as original and innovative as you can get), then watch out for his version of **Boudicca** over the Christmas break. With Toyah Wilcox. No book and only one half-hour programme but if it matches his virtuoso telling of 'the greatest hero of them all', we're in for a short, sharp treat. ●

BOOKS TO MAKE READERS

A selection of recent titles

Jill Bennett recommends some books, published over the last three or four years, which she has found 'work' well in the context of learning to read with real books . . .

When I first wrote **Learning to Read with Picture Books** it was relatively easy to decide which titles to include; I had comparatively little choice in the matter – the number of appropriate books was fairly small. However, since that time – almost ten years now – there has been a positive explosion in the market with many publishers including in their lists picture books which can be used with children in the earlier stages of their reading apprenticeship.

This in itself must be something to welcome, indeed to celebrate, although I have to say that I do have reservations about the number of 'manufactured' series for early reading, many of which seem to me to be bandwagon publishing. Indeed, very few of the titles I have included in this selection of some of the best published in the last three or so years (since the last edition of **LTR**) are from such series, the vast majority being one-off titles which are first and foremost good books in their own right and only incidentally 'learning to read' books.

One of the criticisms levelled at an approach to learning to read based on picture books is that the apparent lack of structure means that beginner readers do not experience the repetition of words met through more traditional approaches. However, those of us working with picture books do recognise and value books whose patterned language helps beginners: traditional tales and rhymes, for example, and the picture books which use those same structures.

One such with simple predictable repetition is Ron Maris' **I Wish I Could Fly**. There's very little poor tortoise can do; his attempts to 'fly like a bird', 'dive like a frog' and 'climb like a squirrel' all end in disaster. Then down comes the rain and tortoise discovers something he can do better than anyone else.

In **This is the Bear**, Sarah Hayes uses the same rhythmic pattern as 'The House that Jack Built' in her easy-to-read rhyming tale of the bear 'who fell in the bin'. Everything is right for beginner readers – the text printed in large clear type and marvellously expressive, beguiling pictures by Helen Craig.

The Cake that Mack Ate goes one stage further; it uses both the rhythm and the cumulative structure of 'The House that Jack Built' and tells of the making of a mouth-watering birthday cake and its consumption by Mack (dog). The anticipation is brought to a satisfying though unexpected conclusion in the last two double-spreads which belie the deadpan 'This is Mack/HE ate the cake.' Delicious!

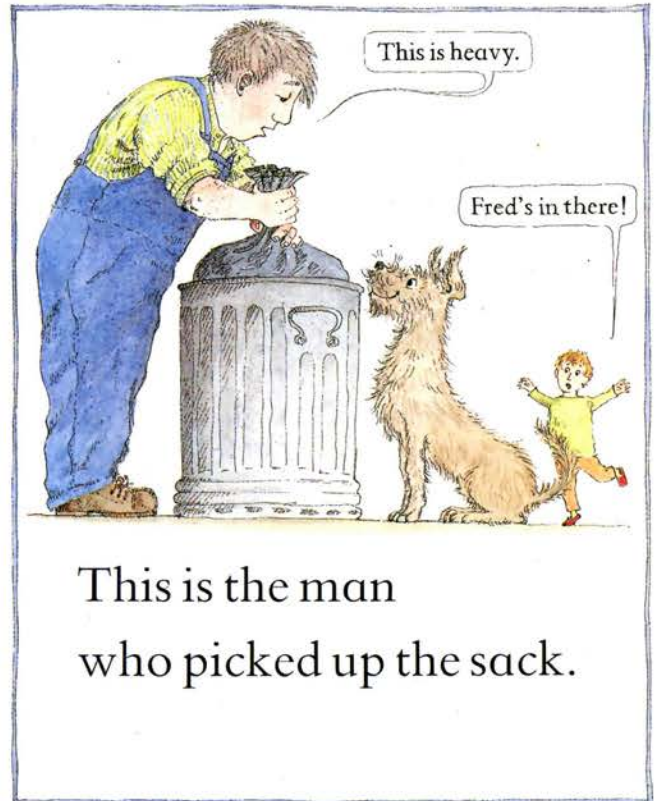
Sri Lanka is the origin of Joanna Troughton's **The Quail's Egg**, a lively cumulative tale in the vein of 'The Old Woman and her Pig'. Again the book has natural repetition, vigorous illustrations and a wholly satisfying concluding chain reaction, here culminating in the release of quail's egg from the crevice.

Mouse's Marriage is another folk tale, this time from Japan, and tells of an elderly mouse couple's search for the 'best and mightiest' husband for their beloved daughter. A succession of would-be suitors is rejected in turn as each is supplanted by a yet more mighty candidate. The mouse parents' exhortation to each suitor supplies the natural repetition – just one of the pleasures of this inviting and beautifully designed book.

More natural repetition comes in Mem Fox's **Hattie and the Fox**, a splendid variation on more familiar fox versus hen stories.

Anthony Browne has created many successful books but in **Knock, Knock, Who's There?** he joins forces with Sally Grindley whose text uses the familiar and much loved 'Knock, knock' joke form to create a sort of imaginary game, one the reader shares with the little girl tucked safely in bed with her teddybear. Many readers will enjoy the guest appearance of Browne's gorilla who, along with a variety of fantasy figures, comes to visit. This is a book with many possibilities: it is ideal for sharing between beginner and experienced reader, with a group or as a jumping-off point for further imaginative expression.

Mortimer is one of those immediately appealing and involving books that children want to read over and over. Mortimer refuses to sleep when his mum takes him up but instead sings his 'clang, clang, rattling-bang-bang' song much to the increasing distress of his family. Both the song and the pattern of feet as they thump up and down the stairs to try to silence Mortimer are oft repeated and carry the reader through an enormously enjoyable romp.



This is the man
who picked up the sack.

From **This is the Bear** (Walker Books).



From the cover of **Where's Julius?** (Piper Books).

'It's a bit like **Bears in the Night**' was the instant reaction to Pamela Allen's **A Lion in the Night** and indeed the structure is similar, so too is the energetic nature of the book. Here we have a baby astride a lion on the rampage pursued by the inhabitants of a castle, the pace of the chase being altered by skilful use of the double-page spread. Children will make links with other books too.

Also with a night-time setting is **Goodnight Goodnight** which tells in amusing rhyme printed in enormous type how the animals in the ark prepare for night; they wash, put on clean pyjamas, clean their teeth and perform their daily exercises before gently rocking to sleep. A real winner.



1 One rich rajah, elephant riding.

এক ধনী রাজা হাতী চড়ে যায়।

Ack dhōny rājāh hāty chōrh-e jāi.

From *One Rich Rajah* (Andre Deutsch).



From *Five Minutes' Peace* (Walker Books).

Eric Hill's 'Spot' titles are enduring favourites but a most welcome, fairly recent development is their appearance as dual-language texts. This is particularly valuable when a home/school reading programme is in operation: adults literate in, say, Punjabi can share a story like *Where's Spot?* with their young children, as well as those learner readers being able to have the opportunity to read a story their classmates love in a language that may well be more familiar than English. Other dual-language favourites with one of my children (an Urdu/Pushtu speaker of seven) are *Not Now*, *Bernard*, *Rosie's Walk*

and *One Rich Rajah*, all available as English/Urdu editions.

Extremely popular in my experience has been *The Trouble with Gran*, one of a quartet of 'trouble with' titles. Here the trouble is that Gran is an alien (in secret of course). But the trouble Gran causes on the Old Age Pensioners' seaside outing is far from secret: she cheats in the Glamorous Gran competition and causes uproar in the amusement arcade before finally transporting the whole party to her planet. Both the visual and verbal humour delight learner readers and will most likely send them in search of more *Trouble!*

From bears Susanna Gretz turns her attention to pigs, notably one Roger, who is the subject of several titles, a favourite being *Roger Takes Charge*. Here Flo from next door tries throwing her weight about when mum is out; however Roger's timely decision to take things in hand succeeds in making bossy Flo look somewhat foolish. Bubble talk is a distinctive feature in all the 'Roger' stories.

Jill Murphy is another artist who has turned her attention from bears to other animals, this time elephants; a firm favourite with learner readers being *Five Minutes' Peace* wherein Mother elephant endeavours to get a brief respite from her demanding young family – a situation adults will be all too familiar with.

There are many things apprentice readers will learn through picture books, not only the messages both verbal and visual contained within the stories but also, through the bond with the author, a hugely important aspect of what reading actually is. The makers of such books – the authors and artists – are the real teachers of reading for it is they who show children how each particular book should be read.

Who better than John Burningham in *Where's Julius?* to teach children something about ambiguity. Here Mr and Mrs Troutbeck, Julius's parents, prepare one tempting meal after another but for Julius there is more to life than mealtimes. He is too engrossed in such all absorbing occupations as 'Riding a camel to the top of the tomb of Neffatuteum which is a pyramid near the Nile in Egypt'. However, his flights of fancy engulf his somewhat staid-looking mum and dad as one or other delivers the next meal to the site of Julius's current expedition. Burningham's pictures nicely juxtapose Julius's fantasy journeys with the straight-laced reality of his parents, thus offering an unspoken explanation for the boy's behaviour.

One of the bonuses of using picture books with learner readers is that they are not so anxious to 'get on to the next book' that they never have time, or indeed wish, to return to a book they have already read. Many books are read over and over and those that can be read on several levels are especially valuable. David McKee's *Two Monsters* certainly can; this fable has two monsters (one red and one blue) living on opposite sides of a mountain and having opposing views on dawn and dusk. Inevitably conflict results and the two hurl first abuse and then missiles at one another. The size and ferocity of both increase until the mountain is levelled and then the pair come to see each other's viewpoint. Such insults as 'And you're a bandy-legged, soggy cornflake' delight young readers; older readers may see the whole thing as a political statement; in between, there is great potential for discussion and all will enjoy the deftness of McKee's touch.

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie is an unassuming little book that could all too easily be overlooked. A glass of milk to have with a cookie is just the beginning of a whole string of demands made of a little boy who attempts to satisfy the tiny mouse he finds at his gate. The pictures show the full implications of the apparently innocent words as they are unfolded by the narrator. It's one of those stories you help to create as you read and its circular nature means that readers will very likely re-create it several times before letting it go.

If I had to pick just one book I couldn't be without from the past few years, it would have to be the Ahlbergs' *The Jolly Postman*. Initially this can be seen as just a novelty but it conveys a valuable message (and indeed one rarely found in books for younger readers): the envelopes and their contents delivered by that Jolly Postman, and an integral part of the story, powerfully demonstrate some of the varied purposes for writing. In addition, by their use of familiar fairy tale characters such as Goldilocks and Cinderella, the Ahlbergs reinforce and build on the literary knowledge of young readers. I've seen this book act as inspiration for many writers as well as readers.

It seems that it is at the stage of just going solo that series books excel. The 'I Can Read' series remains for me the leader in the field and two recent titles, *In a Dark Dark Room* and *Surprises*, are well up to the standard one has come to expect from the series; in both, the layout is impeccable. One of the best things about *In a Dark Dark Room*, a collection of seven wonderfully scary tales, is that it is suitable for a wide age range. Though aimed primarily at those in the fairly early stages, it will equally be enjoyed by everyone, such is the strength and excitement of the tales, from the familiar title one to the somewhat bizarre 'The Green Ribbon'. Also excellent is *Surprises*, Lee Bennett Hopkins' collection of poems whose subjects include animals, the weather, moods and feelings, and bedtime. Not in the series but from the same publisher (Heinemann) and in similar format, are two Amanda Pig titles: *Tales of Amanda Pig* and *Amanda Pig and her Big Brother Oliver*.

From *Ging Gang Goolie, It's An Alien*.

New to the field of solo readers is a most exciting series called 'Jets'. There are six titles to date, published simultaneously in hardcover by A & C Black and in paperback by Fontana Lions. All the books have a highly attractive format with text and illustrations fully integrated; clever use is made of cartoons, diagrams, maps and bubble talk, yet all of them further the story and enjoyment of the books and, at the same time, offer different ways of reading within a single story.

There is a real feeling of author speaking to the reader in all the stories and it is difficult to single out any particular one (indeed I had two sets in my class of seven and eight-year-olds and, in response to demands of 'Where are the Jets?', kept discovering that individuals

had taken the whole set, secreting five away in their trays while reading one); my favourite has to be *Ging Gang Goolie, It's an Alien*, Bob Wilson's hilarious tale of a scouting hero, Gary Wimbush, and his encounter with Grot, the Grobblewockian alien, though the children all seemed to have their own favourites. Incidentally some teachers may recognise Helen Cresswell's *Two Hoots* from a number of years back. The two owls are still as daft as ever but the story is different and the telling much better.

You are certain to need several sets of these in every class where there are readers, no matter what their age. Let's hope this high standard can be maintained. ●

Details of books mentioned (alphabetical by title)

The Cake that Mack Ate, Rose Robart, ill. Maryann Kovalski, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 81516 0, £5.50

Five Minutes' Peace, Jill Murphy, Walker, 0 7445 0491 0, £5.95; 0 7445 0918 1, £1.99 pbk

Goodnight Goodnight, Sandra Boynton, Methuen, 0 416 97350 7, £5.95

Hattie and the Fox, Mem Fox, ill. Patricia Mullins, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 42337 4, £6.95; 0 340 48519 1, £9.95 large format pbk

I Wish I Could Fly, Ron Maris, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 254 7, £5.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.735 3, £1.95 pbk

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, Laura Joffe Numeroff, ill. Felicia Bond, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 39238 X, £5.50; Knight, 0 340 41095 7, £2.50 pbk

The Jolly Postman, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Heinemann, 0 434 92515 2, £6.95

Knock, Knock, Who's There?, Sally Grindley, ill. Anthony Browne, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11559 0, £5.50; Magnet, 0 416 96060 X, £1.95 pbk

A Lion in the Night, Pamela Allen, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11556 6, £6.95

Mortimer, Robert Munsch, ill. Michael Martchenko, Oxford University Press, 0 19 279844 8, £3.95

Mouse's Marriage, Junko Morimoto, Blackie, 0 216 92386 7, £5.95

Not Now, Bernard, David McKee, Andersen, 0 905478 71 1, £4.50; Sparrow, 0 09 924050 5, £2.50 pbk; and also published by Ingham Yates in Bengali, Gujarati and Urdu dual-language versions, £5.95 each

One Rich Rajah, Sheila Front, ill. Charles Front, Andre Deutsch, 0 233 98101 2, £5.95; 0 233 98252 3, £2.95 pbk; paperbacks also available in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu dual-language versions, £2.95 each

The Quail's Egg, Joanna Troughton, Blackie, 0 216 92397 2, £6.95

Roger Takes Charge, Susanna Gretz, Bodley Head, 0 370 30778 7, £5.50

Rosie's Walk, Pat Hutchins, Bodley Head, 0 370 00794 8, £5.50; also available in Greek, Turkish and Urdu dual-language editions, £5.95 each

Tales of Amanda Pig (0 434 94715 6) and **Amanda Pig and her Big Brother Oliver** (0 434 94713 X), Jean Van Leeuwen, ill. Ann Schweniger, Heinemann, £5.95 each

This is the Bear, Sarah Hayes, ill. Helen Craig, Walker, 0 7445 0482 1, £3.95; 0 7445 0969 6, £1.99 pbk

The Trouble with Gran, Babette Cole, Heinemann, 0 434 93296 5, £5.95; Picture Lions, 0 00 662873 7, £1.95 pbk

Two Monsters, David McKee, Andersen, 0 86264 122 5, £4.95; Beaver, 0 09 945530 7, £2.50 pbk

Where's Julius?, John Burningham, Cape, 0 224 02411 6, £5.95; Picture Piper, 0 330 30168 3, £2.50 pbk

Where's Spot?, Eric Hill, Heinemann, 0 434 94288 X, £5.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.420 6, £3.95 pbk; also published by Baker Books in Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Turkish dual-language versions at £6.95 each

I Can Read series, Heinemann, £5.95 each:

In a Dark Dark Room, Alvin Schwartz, ill. Dirk Zimmer, 0 434 94403 3

Surprises, collected by Lee Bennett Hopkins, ill. Megan Lloyd, 0 434 94404 1

Jets series, A & C Black, £3.95 each; Fontana Young Lions, £1.50 each pbk:

Desperate for a Dog, Rose Impey and Jolyne Knox, 0 7136 2980 0; 0 00 673007 8 pbk

Free with Every Pack, Robin Kingsland, 0 7136 2983 5; 0 00 673005 1 pbk

Ging Gang Goolie, It's an Alien, Bob Wilson, 0 7136 3000 0; 0 00 673004 3 pbk

Hiccup Harry, Chris Powling and Scouler Anderson, 0 7136 2981 9; 0 00 673009 4 pbk

Mossop's Last Chance, Michael Morpurgo and Shoo Rayner, 0 7136 2984 3; 0 00 673008 6 pbk

Two Hoots, Helen Cresswell and Colin West, 0 7136 2982 7; 0 00 673006 X pbk



Jill Bennett is currently working in the junior department of a primary school in Heston, Middlesex. She is a widely respected anthologist and author of the immensely influential **Learning to Read with Picture Books** (0 903355 28 0), which is being reprinted this autumn and includes a fresh selection of books published during the last three years. It will celebrate its tenth anniversary next year and cannot be recommended highly enough. It is available direct from The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos. GL5 5EQ (tel. 045 387 3716) for £3.00 inc. p&p.

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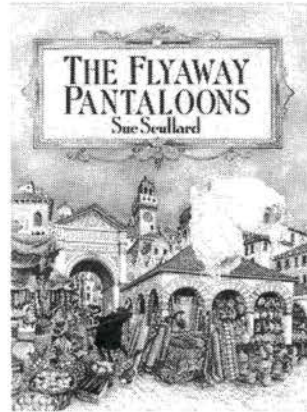


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BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS



The Earthworm Award was set up in 1987 by Friends of the Earth to encourage the writing of children's books which reflect concern about environmental issues, books to celebrate the wealth, variety and beauty of our earth while highlighting the many threats to our natural world.

Fiona Waters, one of the judges, reports on this year's winners.

The winner of the 1988 Earthworm Award is Jeannie Baker for her powerfully imaginative picture book **Where the Forest Meets the Sea**, published by Julia MacRae. The panel of judges was unanimous in its praise for this unique book which conveys its message so subtly, and simply. It also admirably fulfils the criteria that the prizewinner should reflect 'green' thinking in the broadest sense, rather than be a didactic study of conservation.

A small boy sails with his father, in a boat tantalizingly called **Time Machine**, to a deserted island where only birds and animals rove in the lush tropical rain forest. The father tells the boy there has been a forest on the island for over a hundred million years and, as the child explores, shadowy images appear among the trees – dinosaurs, crocodiles, lizards and strange flying creatures. He realises how magical the forest is, but also sadly that Mankind will ruin it all with development and this time the shadowy images are of ghastly high-rise hotels, pleasure boats and sunbathers. **Where the Forest Meets the Sea** succeeds at all levels – it is an appealing and accessible picture book with a strong child central character, the production is excellent and the message stark in its simplicity.

A runner-up was also selected this year for a special prize – **One-Eyed Cat** by Paula Fox, published by Pan under the new Piper imprint. This beautifully written book impressed everyone both with the excellence of the writing (Paula Fox has won many awards for her novels including the Newbery Medal) and with the moving quality of her theme. A young boy fires a single shot from a forbidden air rifle then later discovers a cat blinded in one eye, and so is haunted by the fear that he may have inflicted this injury on the animal. His guilt eats

into his heart as he tries to provide for the cat throughout a severe winter, and forces him to lie and particularly to deceive his much-loved, gentle mother. He befriends an elderly neighbour who, by example, teaches him much about acquiring wisdom and compassion. An intensely emotional read, the judges felt **One-Eyed Cat** deserved special mention and recognition – a book everyone should read, adults and children alike.

Two further titles, markedly different from each other, were also commended: **Bird** by David Burnie, one of the Eyewitness Guides published by Dorling Kindersley in association with The Natural History Museum; and **Island of the Children** compiled by Angela Huth, published by Orchard Books.

Bird is that rare thing, an information book that is *interesting* and attractive. Children are fascinated by facts and detail and all too often this is lost sight of in the welter of books of the 'this-book-tells-me-more-about-penguins-than-I-want-to-know' genre. **Bird** is one of a series of beautifully designed and instantly attractive titles in the planned Eyewitness series which will build into a unique encyclopaedia. Illustrated with full-colour photographs and line drawings, the book methodically looks at all aspects of bird life from dinosaur to bird, through eggs, nests, beaks, pellets, etc. Irresistible, and pleasing to have a publisher recognise the need for excellence in the face of designer-conscious children!

Island of the Children may not seem an obvious choice at first – it is an anthology of specially written modern poetry. The title poem by George Mackay Brown symbolises the whole collection: its awareness of our heritage and the need to preserve our environment. Another beautifully produced book, this is a joy to handle and look at, and the judges felt strongly that it should be noted for its contribution through a medium not often used.

Overall, there was an interesting range of books in this year's submissions, but the gaps were huge and obvious – most clearly in the range of fiction for both younger and older children. This may be to do with the perception of the Earthworm Prize, or perhaps it is a failure to recognise that more than ever before the current younger generations do care passionately about their environment and the future of this earth – their future, their earth. It would be nice to see next year's judges deluged with entries, but then think of all those trees! Perhaps it would be better to see fewer, but more relevant books.

The judges for the Earthworm Award 1988 were Hayley Mills, Philippa Pearce, Caron Keating, Robin Hanbury-Tenison, Michael Marland and Fiona Waters, with Jonathan Porritt, Director of Friends of the Earth, in the chair.

Where the Forest Meets the Sea, Jeannie Baker, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 317 9, £6.95

One-Eyed Cat, Paula Fox, Pan Piper, 0 330 29646 9, £1.99 pbk (also in hardback from Dent, 0 460 06186 0, £7.50, and Collins Educational, Cascades series, 0 00 330037 4, £2.85)

Bird, David Burnie, Dorling Kindersley, 0 86318 270 4, £6.95

Island of the Children, compiled by Angela Huth, 1 85213 062 8, £7.95

Three New Puffin Booklists

This month Puffin publish what they describe as 'three new booklists': **Equality Street** (multicultural listings) and **Ms Muffet Fights Back** (non-sexist listings), both compiled by Susan Adler, an Equal Opportunities Librarian in an Education Resource Centre; and **Special Needs**, compiled by Beverley Mathias, Director of the National Library for the Handicapped Child. It is the last, **Special Needs**, that's really new, the other two having been around in previous editions for a number of years. Worth sending off for – they are free, independently compiled and an intelligent, well-designed piece of promotional literature even if they are restricted to the Penguin, Puffin, and Viking Kestrel lists.

Available from: Ann Ayton, Children's Marketing, Penguin Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ (01-938 2200).



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