

MARCH 1990 No. 61

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BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

Scary Books • Information Books • Kit Wright

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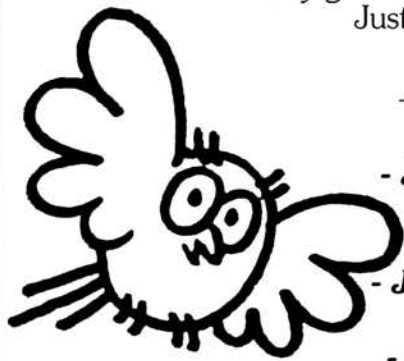
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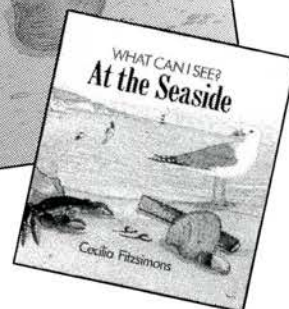
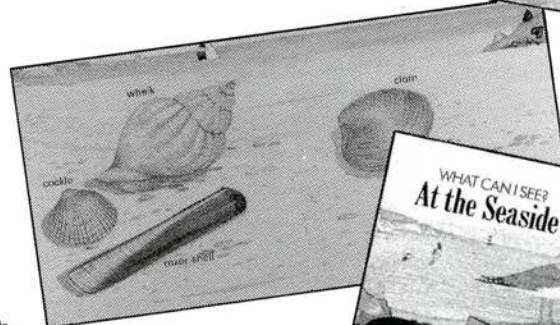
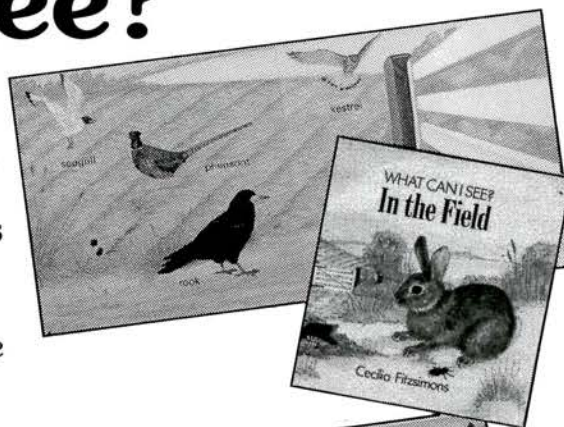
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Cover Story

The illustration on our cover is taken from **The Ankle Grabber**, written by Rose Impey and illustrated by Moira Kemp (1 870817 07 9, £5.50). The book is published by Ragged Bears and is one of the **Creepies** series (for full details see page 4).

We are grateful to Ragged Bears and Rose Impey for help in using this illustration.

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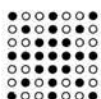
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EDITOR'S PAGE



At a party recently I was asked, 'what exactly are your *aims and objectives* for **Books for Keeps**?' Yes, it was that kind of party. Naturally, I mustered as polite a reply as I could and headed smartly for the drinks table.

Not that **Books for Keeps** lacks aims and objectives, I hasten to add. It's simply that these days I feel beset with the MacGregory things – laid low, or at any rate level, by all the attainment-targeted, assessment-tested kerfuffle, that now passes for curriculum development. What a missed opportunity, though! For the reply I should have made – in fact, the reply I *would* have made if I hadn't been so offput by the snappishly Samsonite phrasing of the question – came to me long ago as a free gift from a couple of kids I used to teach. 'We can always tell when you've got a new book to share with us,' they told me, 'because you get all starry-eyed and over-excited.'

I knew what they meant. For me books do indeed have a fatal glamour. I like everything about them – size, weight, smell, look and probably the taste too if I ever cared to check it out. Even before I open the first page I'm hooked. And once I'm reading, the odds are I'll be trapped till I reach the end. **BfK's** prime aim, objective, attainment-target and assessment-test, it seems to me, is its ability to help grown-ups pass on to kids the sheer *thrill* of literacy. Certainly at some stage we must mobilise the full apparatus of Lit. Crit. to further our cause... but that comes way back in the ring-binder. Celebration is the most crucial aspect of what we're about. If we can communicate even a whiff of the *fun* reading provides, we're in business. Otherwise, however impressive the rest of the balance-sheet, effectively we're bankrupt.

The Townson Technique

One person who doesn't need reminding of this is Hazel Townson. After one of her famous sessions at a Bookfair, the most unlikely kids clamour for her stories. To find out how she does it, read her article 'The Manageable Book' on page 16. When this first arrived in the **BfK** office it was half its current length – the main ideas minus the examples. 'Why don't you show readers how you put your principles into practice by referring to actual passages in your books?' I asked. Hazel was horrified. 'They'll think I'm such a bighead,' she protested. This made me smile because Hazel is easily the most unassuming author I've ever encountered. I took quite a while to persuade her that quoting herself wasn't rampant megalomania!



Creepies

Rose Impey was also cajoled (eventually) into commenting on her own work – in this case the series she wrote for the new and exciting publishing house, Ragged Bears. All four of the **Creepies** carry a built-in gooseimple guarantee, thanks to the inspired matching of the Impey prose with the panache of illustrator Moira Kemp. Mind you, they're the kind of books no adult should tackle unless accompanied by a child. Reviewing them in the **TES** when they first appeared, Andrew Davies was reduced to near hysterics. In 'Too Scary for Children?' (page 4), Rose Impey explains what she was about. Personally, I think Andrew Davies would have coped perfectly well with the **Creepies** if he'd remembered to hold hands with Marmalade Atkins.

Information '89 and After...

Bookshops and libraries are congested these days with teachers seeking out appropriate information books to meet the demands of You Know What. On page 20 Eleanor von Schweinitz, our non-fiction editor, surveys last year's crop and touches on the likely future relationship between publisher and pedagogue, now that so much of a teacher's thinking is to be done for her... a worry that's also raised by Jill Bennett on page 23 in her critique of recent contributions to the Real Books debate. **BfK** readers, of course, with their quaint commitment to thinking for themselves, can be relied upon to make up their own minds as they savour these and our regular assessments of the latest fiction (page 6), tapes (page 15) and non-fiction (page 18).

Identi-Kit

The subject of this issue's Authorgraph is also someone unashamedly sceptical of received opinion. Kit Wright even lifts an eyebrow at the pretensions of verse itself...

*When they say
 That every day
 Men die miserably without it:
 I doubt it.*

The extract comes from his poem 'Poetry' in his latest collection for adults, **Short Afternoons** (Hutchinson 1989, 0 09 1713607 2, £6.95). See Morag Styles' interview with Kit on our centre-pages – an account of a poet whose work for youngsters is just as wise, funny, clever and unorthodox as his work for grown-ups. Here, I'll bet, is someone who's never lost the ability to get starry-eyed and over-excited about books. 'Poetry' goes on

*I like what vamped me
 In my youth
 Tune, argument,
 Colour, truth.*

Not a bad recipe, I'd say, for writers and readers of any age. ■

Chris

Left, not the Editor 'persuading' Hazel Townson, but an illustration from her book, **The Seige of Cobb Street School**.

Too Scary for Children?

Rose Impey, the author of the *Creepies* series, writes about her approach to the age old problem of fear in children's books.

Whenever I visit schools to read my work I've been in the habit of asking children which kind of stories they like best. Almost without exception they tell me they prefer funny or scary stories. Certainly for a writer there can't be much greater satisfaction than seeing a class of juniors falling around laughing at something you've written, except, that is, to see them absolutely silent and wide-eyed, balanced on that knife edge between pleasure and fear.

Let me say that this isn't the perverse satisfaction of someone who takes delight in frightening children. It comes from knowing that you've tapped into something which is deeply felt, which strikes a chord with all readers. It's at such times that you fully appreciate the power you have as a writer and realise the responsibility of it.

Of course it's a far more risky business than writing humorous stories. When a writer chooses to confront uncomfortable issues she immediately opens herself up to the criticism of putting unpleasant ideas into children's heads where they didn't exist before. The assumption seems to be that children are all entirely happy and at peace with themselves until you come along to upset them. But as Bruno Bettelheim tells us in his important book *The Uses of Enchantment*, a psychological study of the significance of folk and fairy tales, even young children's minds are full of unpleasant thoughts and deep conflicts, which originate in their primitive drives and violent emotions.

He suggests that certain fears are central to the business of growing up in a society where children are relatively powerless in the face of adult strength and authority. Yet happily for most children what goes on in their heads is far more frightening than the reality of their lives.

Any teacher who has given children the opportunity to talk freely about their feelings, and in particular their fears, will be aware of this. It can be like a floodgate, which once opened is very hard to close. The sense of excitement as they clamour to tell you their individual fears, and the relief they gain from sharing these feelings, is surely evidence of their need to externalize them.

Unfortunately, as Bettelheim says, many adults responsible for the care of children, believe that children should be diverted from what upsets them and only exposed to the sunny side of things. They believe it's better to distract the child, rather than discuss her worries. But evasive tactics like this can appear to deny those feelings which increase the child's sense of isolation. If, on the other hand, her fear is acknowledged and openly discussed then the child at least knows that this fear is being taken seriously.

A good place for this dialogue to take place is in the context of a book. Through the right story the child can connect with those inner feelings and have the opportunity to resolve them, providing of course that the story is *safe*.

There are a number of factors which I think contribute to that feeling of safety. I was particularly aware of these when I was writing the *Creepies* series – four simple stories about young children and their bedtime rituals and fantasies.

First and foremost the fear must be resolved – not necessarily in a happy-ever-after, all-ends-tied-up way (even young children recognise that to be less than truthful) but in such a way that the terror is controlled. In all four books this was possible because the fear is created by, and so ultimately is in the control of, children themselves.

... there can't be much greater satisfaction than seeing a class of juniors falling around laughing at something you've written, except, that is, to see them absolutely silent and wide-eyed, balanced on that knife edge between pleasure and fear.

Secondly, I think it helps if the fear is overt, so that children can see clearly what it is they are being frightened by. I suspect problems arise when it is too subtle, when it is more a question of tone and atmosphere, vague horrors hinted at, rather than what actually happens in the story. Then there's a danger of leaving children

disturbed in a way that they cannot understand. While I think it's fine to frighten children, I wouldn't want to depress them – the point Nicholas Tucker made about some teenage fiction in his article 'Which Books for Which Children' (*BfK* 58, September 1989).

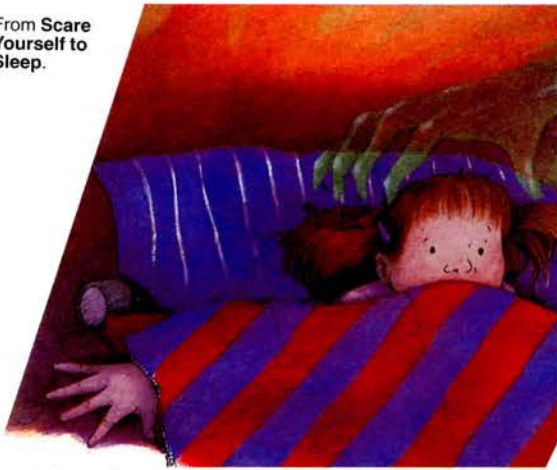
Also I think the story should increase the child's sense of her own power. Providing the fear is resolved, then the reader, along with the hero/ine of the story, experiences the moments of triumph and is strengthened by them. Like the hero/ine, the child begins to feel that she has the resources to deal with difficulties, that she can be in control, which is the best contradiction of powerlessness I can think of.

When a child experiences a story where her own fears are acknowledged, and so validated, she gains the comfort of knowing that she's just the same as everyone else – that others share her fears and worries too. Whenever I read aloud from one of the *Creepies* I am interrupted by children's cries of recognition.

'That's like me.'
'That's what I think.'
'I do that!'

This realisation helps children to feel less alone and isolated. It's surely worse to feel that fears are personal to us and not shared by other people.

From *Scare Yourself to Sleep*.



In stories where there is a mixture of humour and fear, the humour can provide a helpful balance. The young child will often see the humour before the more frightening implications of a story. Sometimes by being encouraged to laugh at her own fears she can be helped to overcome them. There's a Nightmare in My Cupboard by Mercer Mayer (Dent, 0 460 06782 4, £6.50) and The Monster Bed by Jeanne Willis and Susan Varley (Andersen, 0 86264 127 6, £5.95; Beaver, 0 09 955320 1, £2.50 pbk) are good examples of this for the very young.

However, when I set out to write the Creepies I was writing for a slightly older audience and even though I chose to employ humour, I intended the books to be frightening, within the limits I've already mentioned. So I was particularly pleased with the way the illustrations managed both to exploit the humour and yet heighten the drama. Moira Kemp, the illustrator, and I were in agreement that while the books should be very clearly on the child's side they should also offer the reader a sort of challenge.

It's perfectly evident that even if we avoid all the material we think might frighten them, children will still find ways to frighten themselves. They will actively seek them out. The image of a child watching Dr Who through parted fingers has become something of a cliché. We know that there's no point in saying, 'If you don't like it, don't watch it.' It isn't that simple. What I think is happening is that the child is seizing a situation in which she can test herself out. She *wants* to deal with her fear and she's making it safe for herself to do so. This is exactly how children use some books. By allowing them access to suitable material we can actually help them to do that.

If, on the other hand, we prevent children from experiencing any books which might threaten their peace of mind, or we fear may do so, we're in danger of over-protecting them, which can be as emotionally damaging and potentially dangerous as physical over-protection. We allow them no scope to learn to judge their own limits.

While I was aware of all these considerations when I wrote the Creepies series, I have to admit that my main motivation was to write some stories which would be scary but fun. I felt confident that you could scare and amuse children at the same time.

Most children, like many adults – evidence the popularity of horror films – do get some pleasure from being scared, just enough. Many of the letters I receive following visits to schools confirm this. They include the words, 'The best bit was when you frightened us. It was brilliant!', or similar.

Unfortunately some adults seem to have difficulty with this idea. I've met a few people responsible for the selection of books for children who've told me they consider my books *too* scary. Quite properly they're exercising their right and sense of responsibility as librarians or booksellers not to make my books available to children or their parents. This doesn't make me wish we'd produced different, less controversial books. It just means I must accept that it will take longer for children to discover them.



The Flat Man.

Usually when I've asked these adults exactly what they object to in the books, they relate their objections back to their own childhood fears. The stories seem to have re-stimulated some old distress, which may be unconscious but I feel may be colouring their judgement. As Nicholas Tucker suggested in his article, sometimes when adults reject books for their children it's perhaps their own pain which is being protected.

A friend who used to visit me with her young daughter would choose from my bookshelves books to read at bedtime. Frequently she'd find something in them to criticise. She'd become more and more agitated as she dramatised their bad points and predicted the effect they'd have on her daughter, often within her daughter's hearing. If she ever did read anything she considered risky, inevitably she communicated this and so, as she'd predicted, her daughter wouldn't be able to sleep that night.

Similarly Bettelheim tells us that many parents are often shocked and surprised when they return to folk and fairy tales, which they've loved as children, to find them so harsh and cruel. They often prefer to read them in softened, bowdlerised versions, or actually edit them themselves in the reading. But what they don't realise is that children react differently from adults. They're neither as literal nor as squeamish. The child who reads of the wolf's stomach being cut open doesn't literally imagine this in the way that an adult, who may know the realities of abdominal surgery, might.

And children also have a more simple and clear-cut sense of right and justice. As G K Chesterton said, 'Like the simple folk of fairy tales children are innocent and like justice, whereas most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy.'

Is this why we feel happier to have the wicked queen in *Snow White* forgiven, or merely banished, rather than be forced to dance to her death in red hot shoes? Is this why we as parents find *Hansel and Gretel* so painful because it connects us with our deepest fears that we might one day reject our own children? Inevitably as adults we're looking at stories from a very different perspective and we need to be aware of that.

If, even for the best of motives, we continue to deny children's fears, and distract where we ought to discuss, then we in fact *disable* them, rather than *enable* them to come to terms with those fears. If as adults we were more able to stay clear of our own unresolved fears we might give our children the confidence to learn to deal with theirs. ■

The Creepies series is published by Ragged Bears at £5.50 each:

The Ankle Grabber, 1 870817 07 9

Jumble Joan, 1 870817 08 7

Scare Yourself to Sleep, 1 870817 06 0

The Flat Man, 1 870817 05 2

REVIEWS

Nursery/Infant

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

Janine and the Carnival

Iolette Thomas, ill.
Jennifer Northway,
Little Mammoth,
0 7497 0010 6, £2.50



A little girl going to her first Notting Hill carnival with her dad gets lost in the crowd. Her excitement, involvement, fear and relief are mirrored in charming and absolutely believable pictures and text. Everybody responds naturally and normally and the moral, about not going off on your own, is slipped in without any effort. Any young children would enjoy this and would be reassured and supported by it. Highly recommended and much enjoyed. **LW**

Minerva Louise

Janet Morgan Stoeke,
Picture Lions,
0 00 663381 1, £2.50

Minerva Louise is a big fat white hen who explores a house looking for a new nest . . . and eventually decides that the best place is on top of a newly baked pie. The bright simple pictures and text make this a fetching book for small children who will find a lot to talk about as the hen tries out all sorts of places inside the house. Another fun story for little ones to enjoy and very much up to Picture Lions' usual high standard. **MS**

No Jumping on the Bed

Tedd Arnold, Picture
Piper, 0 330 30043 1,
£2.50

When Walter hears his friend Delbert in the flat above jumping on the bed, he decides to do likewise despite his father's prohibition. His act of disobedience has the direst of consequences with Walter rapidly dropping in on Miss Hattie, Mr Matty, Aunt Battie, Young Patty and Natty, Mr Hanratty and Maestro Ferlingatti by turns as he descends through the sixth

floor to the basement of his New York apartment block.

This cumulative tale, for Walter collects both people and their possessions on his journey, has a neat final double twist and offers its readers the chance to enjoy the unusual perspectives and viewpoints in Tedd Arnold's robust, detailed illustrations. **JB**

There's Something Spooky in My Attic

Mercer Mayer,
Picturemac,
0 333 47347 7, £2.99



Confronting and thereby conquering her bedtime fears of the strange noises coming from the creaking attic of her new house, the brave heroine, armed with cowboy hat, boots and lasso, routs the monster only to have him sneak away just as she is about to show him to her parents. Not very sporting, but the monster asleep clutching her teddy promises to be fun rather than frightening in the future. **JS**

The Great Zoo Escape

Colin McNaughton,
Little Mammoth,
0 7497 0102 1, £2.50

A jolly story with a strong anti-animals-in-captivity message. A nondescript bird called Ruffles is captured and taken to the zoo where he's very unhappy. His friends rescue him and set all the other animals free as well. Very simple, but well told and illustrated and worth discussion afterwards. For reading aloud or fairly experienced young readers. **LW**

Bertie and the Bear

Pamela Allen, Picture
Puffin, 0 14 050.972 0,
£2.50

This tale of a frightened boy being hotly pursued by a ferocious bear is a rowdy celebration of the chase. The

various noises of a growing army of would-be rescuers are expressed visually in shape and colour: 'Blah' blasts forth in vivid red from the King's trumpet and 'Ooh' plops heavily in purple from the Captain's horn, while the General's flute exudes an elongated yellow 'Toot, Toot'.



So delighted is the bear that he finally leads the whole host in a merry dancing procession. Great fun for apprentice readers and listening audiences who delighted in participating in this vigorous romp. Certainly in my experience one of the most read and best enjoyed picture books of the eighties. **JB**

Ten in a Bed

Mary Rees, Little
Mammoth,
0 7497 0045 9, £2.50

Success is guaranteed with this re-working of an old favourite, and Mary Rees' detailed illustrations of the exciting activities of those booted out of bed only add to what is already a winning formula.



The twist to the end of the song gives great scope for hilarity, but is inclined to add complications to singing sessions – it's worth it though! **JS**

It's Mine!

Leo Lionni, Picture
Knight, 0 340 50709 8,
£2.50

A joy to see this in paperback at last! It's been a successful assembly standby for many years. An island is inhabited by three quarrelsome frogs who all feel they have dominion over one element of it. How they come to realise that they must share, and indeed actually need each other, makes for a good tale. Leo Lionni manages to deliver a modern fable with such a light touch and with such beautifully appropriate illustrations one is left warmly satisfied rather than feeling chastened or lectured. **JS**

There's a Sea in my Bedroom

Margaret Wild, ill. Jane
Tanner, Picture Puffin,
0 14 050.464 4, £2.50

A deceptively simple story with illustrations that are hauntingly evocative and capture the mood beautifully. David is frightened of the sea, but with a little mysterious help from a conch shell he discovers its gentler aspects and conquers his fears. **JS**

Has Anyone Here Seen William?

Bob Graham, Walker,
0 7445 1339 1, £1.99



Another winner from Bob Graham providing much needed material for the younger age range. What can one say other than that with his unerring eye and gentle humour he seems to be able to capture the essence of toddlerhood? Escapee William will bring an instant gleam of identification from any young child while this parent at least felt a rueful sympathy for Mum and Dad! **JS**

Amy's Place

Marianne Stafford,
Picture Puffin,
0 14 050.998 4, £2.50

An Australian import opening vistas into another world. Amy's father builds her a treehouse, but much as its construction, furnishing and the subsequent tea party fill the reader with delight, it's Amy's discovery in the middle of the night of a mother and baby possum who come to share the treehouse that gives us a refreshing sense of wonder. A really good book.

JS

Joe on Sunday

Tony Blundell, Picture
Corgi, 0 552 53505 7,
£2.50



This book is just great fun – Joe's powerful imagination conjures up a different persona for his family each day of the week. The riotous consequences wrought by his transformations demand an exuberant response from any self-respecting infant!

JS

The Witch's Shopping Spree

Carolyn Dinan, Picture
Puffin, 0 14 050.866 X,
£2.50

Poor Joe is an unwilling accomplice to the witch's illicit 'shopping' spree. Using one of

her nefarious spells she steals all that appeals to her. Things go from bad to worse and disaster seems to face Joe. The witch herself resolves the situation as, through her own carelessness, she mistakenly sends everything to its rightful home – including Joe, who's very glad to get there! It's a good yarn, but the resulting discussions on morality are what really give the book a right to a place on the classroom shelves.

JS

Mog's Amazing Birthday Caper

Judith Kerr, Picture
Lions, 0 00 663383 8,
£2.99

For those children who've known and heard Mog in his various adventures this just might be a disappointment. Instead of a story it's an alphabet book around which the pictures and story are constructed. Because of this it's not as satisfactory, in story terms, as those which have gone before.

MS

One Bear in the Picture

Caroline Bucknall,
Picturemac,
0 333 49354 0, £2.99

A story about a bear who knows he has to keep clean for the school photographer, but finds it difficult... The book is large and has clear, bright pictures, but despite being attractive the tale doesn't quite come off.

MS

The Wizard's Cat

Colin and Jacqui
Hawkins, Walker,
0 7445 1389 8, £1.99

Have a bit of fun with the words and read this book aloud to any 3-5 year old! The cat wants to be more

interesting so the wizard obligingly changes him into a sailor, a monkey, a bumble-bee, and a rabbit – but nothing suits him, so he decides that being a cat is best after all.

MS

Hello, Goodbye

David Lloyd, ill. Louise
Voce, Walker,
0 7445 1348 0, £1.99

A charming book with shiny bright pictures telling the simple story of a bear, a tree and the creatures who live in the tree. It will undoubtedly entertain and delight adult and child together, while explaining 'hello' and 'goodbye' to very small children.

MS

In My Garden

Ron Maris, Walker,
0 7445 1347 2, £2.50

The birds, plants and children who enjoy the garden in this title are a delight. Ron Maris once again makes use of half pages to double the value of each spread.

MS

Goodbye House

Frank Asch, Picture
Corgi, 0 552 52547 2,
£2.50

Moving house is never easy, whatever your age, but it's most worrying for young children who've never had the experience before. Reassurance is here as the furniture is loaded onto the van and the listening child can see all possessions are safely on board. The sad moments, too, are faced as the family say goodbye to every room in the empty house. A good treatment of a difficult time. Definitely one to recommend.

MS

Some day
my baby brother
will be grown up –
just like ME!

**Just Like Me**

0 7445 1345 6

Our Ollie

0 7445 1342 1

Silly Goose

0 7445 1344 8

Jan Ormerod, Walker,
£1.75 each

Three books about comparisons. How often grown-ups tell children that they are like someone else in the family! In *Just Like Me* an older sister comes to terms with the fact that her little brother *does* look just like her. Charming pictures help provide a useful explanation. New baby brothers or sisters can be funny to look at – and they make strange noises. In *Our Ollie* the baby is compared to a cat, a hippopotamus, a cockerel, a hedgehog, a parrot and so on. Altogether a set of amusing comparisons.

The little girl in *Silly Goose* compares herself to various animals as she tells us, 'I swing like a gibbon', 'I hop like a flea'. Full of lively vocabulary and very entertaining.

MS

Infant/Junior

The Boy with Two Shadows

Margaret Mahy, ill.
Jenny Williams, Picture
Lions, 0 00 663070 7,
£2.50

Margaret Mahy has the knack of being able to take fantasy and make it seem everyday; through no fault of his own, the boy is selected by a witch as being suitable to take care of her shadow. The witch's shadow, predictably, gets him into trouble and finally scares away the boy's own shadow, but throughout the bizarre happenings others around appear to accept the situation and he is left to cope as best he can. It is an interesting book and drew mixed reactions from the children: some (be warned) found it very frightening but all were fascinated.

JS

**Super Dooper Jezebel**

Tony Ross, Picture
Lions, 0 00 663150 9,
£2.50

Tony Ross conjures up wonderfully ghastly anti-heroes again and again – his Jezebel is a classic! All the children I tried this book with groaned at her perfections and

crowed delightedly as, following the rules to the letter and still telling everyone else what to do, she meets her downfall in the form of a hungry crocodile escaped from the zoo.

JS

Bathtime for Garth Pig and other stories

Mary Rayner, Picture
Lions, 0 00 663391 9,
£2.50

Three tales featuring Mr and Mrs Pig and their ten piglets. The first two situations will be similar to those experienced by many a human family: there's Benjamin digging in his trotters and doing only what he wants; Mrs Pig putting in a firm bid for equality of the sexes; and the title story sees the return of the wily baby-sitter from the original *Mr and Mrs Pig's Evening Out* in the guise of a party guest whose



intentions are anything but honourable. Readers who've already made the acquaintance of Garth and his family will approach these stories with justifiable anticipation. Those new to their delights should relish them too.

JB

Patch the Pirate Cat

Andrew Martyr and
Paula Lawford, ill. Paula
Lawford, Picture Corgi,
0 552 52493 X, £2.50
Captain Blackeye Finnegan was the smartest pirate with



the finest ship and the cleanest crew in all the Seven Seas. His one disappointment was Patch, the dirtiest, scruffiest, smelliest cat in the Seven Seas. When the Captain decides to clean up the ship's cat, a fierce battle ensues, culminating in Patch's capture and transformation into everything his master wanted of him – well, for a time anyway.

An entertaining tale, vigorously illustrated in appropriately bold watercolours.

JB

No Peas for Nellie

Chris L Demarest, Picturemac, 0 333 51038 0, £2.99

Young Nellie hates peas; there are plenty of other things she'd much prefer to eat – a furry spider, a slimy salamander or a salted water buffalo, for instance. But the rule is – no peas, no dessert!

A well-known situation is transformed into a highly diverting fantasy by Chris Demarest's splendidly amusing, larger than life illustrations. Appetising fare to share with a young audience or for beginners to devour for themselves.

JB

Boo to a Goose

Judith Stinton, Walker, 0 7445 1403 7, £1.99

One of the 'Read Alone' stories originally published in the Julia MacRae 'Blackbird' series and characterised by a clear type-face, well-spaced lines and an illustration on every double spread.

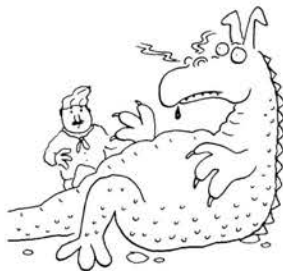
On her way to school every day, Alice (quite grown-up in some ways) has to pass a gaggle of geese and she's terrified. The manner in which she and friend Peter – also bothered about the birds, but less willing to admit it – overcome this fear doesn't go exactly as they'd planned, but nonetheless is a resounding success. Lively dialogue and a story-telling session from Gran help make this original, reassuring story into a book which is well worth reading and re-reading.

JB

King Tubbitum and the Little Cook

Margaret Ryan, Mammoth, 0 7497 0031 9, £1.99

Reducing the king's weight, guessing a dragon's favourite food, curing a princess of



insomnia – no matter what the problem, the Little Cook uses just the right mixture of culinary skill and down-to-earth common sense to solve it. Seven very short stories featuring a not very bright ruler and his entourage, just right for reading aloud to the under-sevens or for young solo readers to enjoy for themselves.

JB

Smiley Tiger

Barbara Willard, Walker, 0 7445 1402 9, £1.99

Every summer Ben spends part of his holiday with old Mrs Merryfield. The two friends agree about pretty well everything, though there's one thing about which they differ; she likes large animals, Ben likes small ones. One summer Mrs Merryfield plays a joke on Ben and he's determined to play one back. However, this determination also has disastrous consequences for the friendship, but all ends happily and Ben learns a lesson or two.



Barbara Willard's sure touch as a story-teller for all ages is evident in this credible, enjoyable book for new solo readers.

JB

Dragon Water

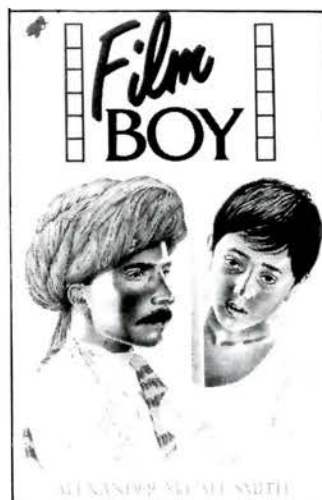
Ann Ruffell, ill. Andrew Brown, Young Corgi, 0 552 52532 4, £1.75

Gribble is a popular character with newly independent readers who should enjoy this, the fourth adventure in the series, featuring the lovable dragon and his less endearing associate, Cadwallader. In this story, Gribble wakes from his winter sleep to find water in his cosy mountain cave. There's water outside too – enough for giants to bath in – at least that's what Gribble



imagines. The irascible Cadwallader won't help so Gribble has to beat the 'giants' alone.

JB



Film Boy

Alexander McCall Smith, Mammoth, 0 7497 0062 9, £1.99

Prem is a little boy who works on a sweet stall in Bombay. The money he earns pays for his passion: cinema-going. One day his favourite film star stops to buy sweets at the stall and overpays. Prem sets out to return the change, gets into the film star's house and almost lands himself in a lot of trouble.

A lively, shortish story which should have a wide age appeal. It's unfortunate that many of the line drawings seem to have reproduced so badly.

JB

Let's Go Swimming with Mr Smartypants

M K Brown, Picturemac, 0 333 49352 4, £2.99

I like the big format Picturemac books and this odd story uses the picture space inventively. There's virtually no narrative, instead the story is told through Mr Smartypants' thoughts which are hand lettered within the picture frame. Mr Smartypants is a Monty Python sort of character who is about to take up swimming lessons but is frightened of the water. He

has a terrible dream in which he experiences all sorts of underwater problems. When he wakes he decides that reality can't be so bad after all and learns to swim happily. (Or at least, we suppose he learns to swim; we don't actually see him doing it which is disappointing.)

An enjoyable story. Mr Smartypants has potential for further adventures, I think.

LW

Cat and Canary

Michael Foreman, Picture Knight, 0 340 49907 9, £2.99

A quirky tale about a cat whose best friend is a canary and whose ambition is to be able to fly like him. The cat's owner however, just wants to be able to lie about all day like a cat. Only the canary is totally happy at the start of the book. The cat does get his wish, in a rather *deus ex machina* sort of way (the poor human never makes it!) and the relationship between the cat and his friend is even closer as a result.

The story is satisfying; the pictures, of course, striking, with remarkable effects of flying and space and rich colour. Well worth possessing.

LW

High Days and Holidays

Edited by Eileen Colwell, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2300 7, £2.50

This is a good, workmanlike collection of stories and poems loosely based round the theme suggested by the title. There are some well-known names among the authors – Ursula Moray Williams, Russell Hoban, for example – and some new ones. The items are all well chosen to give a rich variety of material for birthdays, new babies or Christmas to name but a few.

Good material for young fluent readers or, of course, for an adult to read aloud.

LW

Old Belle's Summer Holiday

Philippa Pearce, ill. William Geldart, Deutsch, 0 233 98176 4, £2.95

Old Belle, the veteran ratcatcher of the flour mill, has her latest litter when the mill owner is away on holiday. After her explorations disclose comforts undreamed of, she transfers her kittens to the sumptuous luxuries of the deserted mill house. But something menacingly cold and scentless lurks in the bedroom, and she retreats at last to the old mill, with the reassurance of its 'little thrilling currents of rat smell'. Flawlessly written, beautifully illustrated and completely unsentimental, this book tucks the reader so snugly inside the skin of the cat that you'll find yourself craving for mousemeat.

GH

Junior/Middle



Billy and the Man-eating Plant

Mick Gowar,
0 333 46285 8

Alexander and the Star Part

Dick Cate, 0 333 46265 3

A Flight of Angels
Geoffrey Trease,
0 333 46689 6

The Orange Pony
Wendy Douthwaite,
0 333 46263 7

The Talking Car

Nicholas Fisk,
0 333 46261 0
Macmillan 'Firefly',
£2.99 each

Five contributions to the 'Firefly' series providing books for readers of seven and upwards. Eye-catching covers and paperback format, which sadly could be stronger at the spine (mine fell apart while reviewing!). These are however 'real books' for newly independent readers looking for material that will grab their imaginations and stretch their reading skills. Authors producing exciting material such as this can only enrich our library shelves at an end of the market that has only of late received attention; they will be warmly welcomed.

Billy, Alexander and Flight of Angels are all school stories. **Billy** zips along at a terrific pace; it's a rip-roaring yarn full of awful disasters and appalling messes, mostly at the teacher's expense. Brimming with vitality, it appeals to the naughty in all of us. **Alexander** is wonderful for the run-up to Christmas and reminiscent of every teacher's early morning nightmare that comes with shuddering regularity the night before the big performance. **A Flight of Angels** is more difficult but fascinating and compulsive reading. If only every topic would take off like this one.

The Orange Pony is a traditional horsey story and

will be loved by the girls. Its approach is a bit dated but it provides good reading nevertheless. Giving diversity of style to the collection, it tells a good 'what happens after that?' story at the same time.

This leaves **The Talking Car**. My qualms at Rob's cheekiness to his father in the opening chapters were totally overwhelmed later by the rib-clutching hilarity of the car's personality and feelings and the difficulties it encounters with us humans. I dropped everything to rush off and wash and wax mine at once, just in case! This was my personal favourite even if I did regret the irregular spelling in the car's conversation.

These were exciting and varied offerings which could be read either in isolation or as part of a structured scheme.

PH

Win or Die! The Making of a King

Rolf Harris, Knight,
0 340 51617 8, £2.99

This story, in rollicking yarn tradition, handsomely illustrated by the author, will provide children of ten and over with an enjoyable read. A dastardly plot hatched by the evil Count Tzlenko ousts the young, pampered King Alonzo from his throne. Alonzo, fleeing in disguise, finds himself not only reputedly dead but also, in his peasant role, accused of the murder of an old beekeeper. He's befriended by Romanies and taught various survival skills, amidst much authentic detail of swordfighting. The climax of the book sees him challenging Tzlenko to a duel and regaining his kingship. They all lived happily ever after.

LN



Julia's Mending

Kathy Lynn Emerson,
Lions, 0 00 673393 X,
£2.25

Set in the United States one hundred years ago, this is about the twelve-year-old

daughter of missionary parents who's sent to live with cousins on a farm. Snobbish, prissy Julia considers her cousins 'bestly and dreadful', and her gloom intensifies when she breaks her leg and is confined to bed. Later, she recovers enough to attend the village school, where a series of events draws her into closer relationships with the cousins. The pace gets out of hand towards the end, with rather far-fetched incidents hurtling towards an unconvincing close, but the book will probably be enjoyed by 1st and 2nd year girls.

LN

Dangleboots

Dennis Hamley, ill.
Tony Ross, Young
Lions, 0 00 673246 1,
£2.25

Material that's ripe for the football-loving, book-hating individual who inhabits that muddy, grass-infested, stick-littered corner in every classroom somewhere. Enough football to get them going and a lively twisting story line to keep up the interest. Not being a football expert, I passed it over for consumer-friendliness-testing and authentication to Jenny, aged twelve years, our unchallenged expert. It was consumed in one sitting and pronounced smashing!

PH

Follow that Pharaoh

Derek Sampson, ill.
Philippe Dupasquier,
Mammoth,
0 7497 0063 7, £2.25

As you'd expect after a 3000-year rest in a sarcophagus, Pharaoh Ozymandias has difficulties in adapting to the twentieth century. Accustomed to absolute power, he has problems with the Kensington rush hour. Nevertheless broom held aloft, power and bewilderment on his face, he confronts technology head on. Josie and Martin, mystified about how they broke Ozzy's spell, find that once alive again he can terrify and charm the socks off Aunt May, bully and betwitch the neighbours, and out-magic any fairground charleton.

A very successful mixture of fun, laughter and Egyptology, not on the face of it a propitious blend, but it works excellently and must be the most painless way into Egyptian history.

PH

Martin's Mice

Dick King-Smith, ill.
Jez Alborough, Puffin,
0 14 03.4026 2, £1.99

Life for a lady mouse can be hazardous, especially when you're expecting babies any day. Unless, of course, like Drusilla you have a minder – especially when he's a kitten

like Martin. Despite inheriting mouse-hunting, moggy instincts, Martin won't eat mouse meat, but keeps Drusilla as a pet. He copes well until Drusilla vanishes and he's sold!

A devastatingly witty blend of totally logical kitten behaviour and deliciously comical reasons for it, subtly reminding us of our pet-owning responsibilities. I loved every very funny minute of it.

PH

Grandma and the Ghowlies

Ursula Moray Williams, ill.
Susan Varley, Puffin,
0 14 03.2637 5, £1.99

One of the funniest ghost stories I've read for ages. Mrs O'Pheeley sensibly decides that her old house is too big and she plans a move to a smaller bungalow, alone. She has, however, not taken the wishes of the Willarbees into account. Her four totally friendly, resident ghosts need a home and want to stay with her. Winty, the fifth, has poltergeist connections and it shows – his mischievous mayhem discourages estate agents and prospective buyers.

An enchanting story, full of comfortable warmth from Granny Pheeley and finely drawn emotions in the ghowlies, from Winty's turbulent rebelliousness to Beth's need for love. End stop chapters make for easy reading aloud and a totally captivating ending leaves Granny Pheeley, ghowlies and readers all very happy about how things work out.

PH

Charlotte Shakespeare and Annie the Great

Barbara Ware Holmes,
Macdonald,
0 356 16883 2, £2.99

Attainment target 3, level 3, sub-section V: Charlotte's got it! The first three chapters show it all, revising, drafting, reviewing partners, it's all there and more; how sly can we be in teaching writing skills? Will 'they' notice if I order 30 copies? Another in the series starring Charlotte Cheetham. Here we have our heroine writing the school play and exuding confidence to her friend Annie so that she can out-act Tina and be the star.



Faith and perseverance, yet niggling self-doubt from Charlotte; terrific psychology and lots of love from Dad; and courage beyond our wildest dreams from Annie.

PH

Middle/Secondary



Keeping Henry

Nina Bawden, Puffin,
0 14 03.2805 X, £1.99

A wonderful book. The author, with her brothers and mother, is evacuated to a farm on the Welsh borders during the last war. The central focus is Henry, the young squirrel, made homeless too, who gradually takes over their lives and their belongings. He's a marvellously vivid creature and children will love the sections which describe his antics. The book has a remarkable quality of suggesting the running threads of lives and place. Buy lots of copies. It's one of the rare books which can sustain whole class reading, and will itself teach many things about what books can do. **AJ**

Under Siege

Elisabeth Mace, Corgi,
0 552 52563 4, £1.99

Bleak mid-winter in many ways. The false Christmas cheer and Morris's parents' rows and separation are the surface and dour reality, against which is set Morris's growing fascination with a medieval war game, the latest toy of his Uncle Patrick who's found that the way to deal with people is to withdraw from them. It's a possibility for Morris too until he's drawn into the lives of the characters in the model landscape, resisting Patrick's cold reason and becoming deeply enmeshed in the ties of human feeling. **AJ**

The Return

Barry Faville, Puffin,
0 14 03.2830 0, £1.99

A growing unease which many of the inhabitants of the small village begin to feel is sparked off by the arrival of Karl and his 'mother'. They look strange and, in chapters of their own, we understand that they're aliens on a mission. What seems at first to be standard science-fiction fare becomes more interesting through some strong characterisation and a shift in the formula which allows for good, and even interesting, aliens. **AJ**

Dr Chill

Thomas Hoobler, Piper,
0 330 31260 X, £2.50

Don't be misled by the title and cover; this is no simple

formula novel. It's about telekinesis and telepathy, but put away all ideas of Stephen King. The children who are assembled at the doctors for their special gifts have all suffered deep emotional hurts because of them. The young and apparently autistic Timmy 'can tell what everybody around him is thinking... he can't shut it out except by withdrawing completely.' At this level, where the extraordinary helps to reveal the ordinary in a special way, the book works well. Many readers will enjoy the excitement, too. **AJ**

Boat Song

Frances Ward Weller,
Macmillan Limelight,
0 333 46293 9, £3.99

The rather unappealing cover design may result in this book being overlooked by young readers – a pity, because Frances Ward Weller's story of a boy at odds with his demanding father is well worth reading. Jonno, on a Cape Cod holiday with his family, meets and befriends an elderly Scottish piper. The friendship is discouraged, but becomes increasingly important to Jonno; the tensions between son and father are convincingly portrayed, and the climax is both moving and believable. **LN**

The Empty Sleeve

Leon Garfield, Penguin
Plus, 0 14 03.2686 3,
£2.99

In this engrossing story, the twin apprentices Peter and Paul gradually come to terms with their dreams and each other. Working for a locksmith, the surly Peter quickly uses his access to keys to accumulate the wealth which will allow him to escape to sea. He's thwarted, as an ancient ship's carpenter prophesied, by supernatural forces released at his birth on the stroke of midnight. Peter is implicated in the murder of the wife of the corrupt Lord Mariner, and the story reaches an exciting climax among the wintry streets of old London. The gripping pace and characterisation will appeal to readers of 11+, although the semi-ironic voice of the narrator will also be enjoyed by many adults. **LN**

The SkyrifTERS

Clare Cooper, Sprint,
0 671 69724 2, £3.95

Although stylistically and morally confused, the sheer pace of this semi-science fiction adventure will appeal to many readers of 11+. After the abduction of his journalist father, twelve-year-old Sam is left to fend for himself in a society destroyed by war. He



finds a nest of mysterious eggs from which hatch carnivorous lizards; these turn out to be well-intentioned aliens who, through symbiosis with selected humans, will rid the earth of pollution. The earth-healing SkyrifTER programme begun by Dr Walker under the guidance of the aliens is completed by Sam during the climactic final pages.

In this exciting story it's unfortunate that the morality and logic of the SkyrifTER idea receives as little attention as the emotional responses of the principal characters. **LN**

Monster Maker

Nicholas Fisk,
Mammoth,
0 7497 0049 1, £2.50

Out of Chancey's workshop chaos come the legendary special effects monsters that Matt has watched and admired for years in films. Appraising their technical demands and with a genius at things electrical, Matt longs to work for his hero, Chancey Balogh. His dreams become reality, but once inside the reality becomes blurred. Breathing the rarified air of unbridled and brilliant technical enthusiasm is too much for Matt. The monsters take on a life of their own, obsessing him. When vandals attack, the monsters seize their chance and Matt cannot fight back.

Spine-tingling, totally convincing and brilliantly put together – one of Chancey's monsters? Nicholas Fisk's tale, too! Heady stuff this with enough oozing venom, fire-breathing and thrills spilling out from every page to satisfy the most demanding Sci-fi enthusiast. **PH**

Second to the Right and Straight on Till Morning...

Lance Salway,
Macmillan Limelight,
0 333 51649 4, £3.99

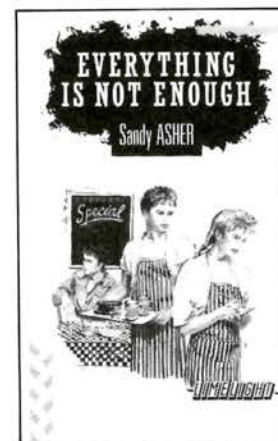
Simon is in a children's home

as a result of his aggressive behaviour towards his new stepmother. Mrs Jessop is consigned to an old people's home by a family too busy to look after her. She shares Simon's need for an escape route and so they go to Wales – by highly unconventional means – to see the mountains.

Mrs Jessop is marvellous – larger than life and the wonderfully objectionable old lady most of us would love to be. Simon's initial sullenness thaws into protective affection for Mrs Jessop as they both come to terms with their situations. 1st and 2nd year secondary will enjoy this hugely. **VR**

Everything Is Not Enough

Sandy Asher, Macmillan
Limelight, 0 333 46350 1,
£3.99



Michael Paeglis insists on taking a summer job at the 'Jolly Mackerel' forsaking his privileged, pampered, restricted rich-boy life for a dish mop and bucket. Seeing how the other half barely survives removes his blinkers and re-routes his life away from that pre-set by his parents. The romance interest lightens a rather heavily-scored message and dogged pace. **DB**

Homecoming

Elsa Posell, Mammoth,
0 7497 0050 5, £2.50

This might make a class reader. It's an instantly absorbing story about persecution and oppression in the earliest days of the Russian Revolution, which might serve as a starter for what happened to the Jones family after the animals took over in *Animal Farm*. It is lent added poignancy because it's partially autobiographical and, of course, by recent events in Eastern Europe. I was a shade suspicious of the rather convenient chance meetings towards the end, but all in all I'd like to see it used instead of *Silver Sword*, which seems rather difficult to get off the ground nowadays. **DB**

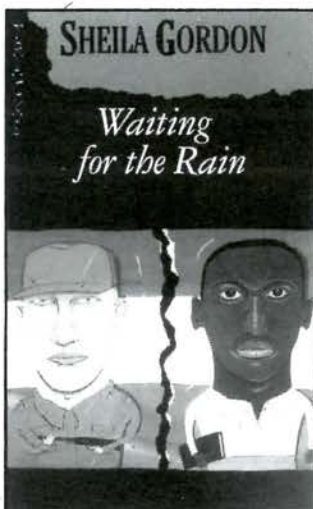
Older Readers

Say Goodbye

Jean Ure, Corgi
Freeway, 0 552 52430 1,
£1.99

Kate and Danny, at the end of their college courses, determine to try for places in drama schools. They are unsuccessful but are invited to join a touring street theatre group. Kate's mother, resenting Kate's refusal to go into a 'safe' building society job and her continuing friendship with the black Danny, decides to punish her by selling the family home.

This book, third in the trilogy (*Trouble with Vanessa* and *There's Always Danny*), has all the positive qualities of its fellows: strong characterisation (Kate, in particular, changes and matures in a most believable way), punchy dialogue and a carefully structured storyline. Issues like prejudice and family relationships are clear-headedly explored and this would make a satisfying bookbox read for 3rd or possibly 4th year students. VR



Waiting for the Rain

Sheila Gordon, Lions
Tracks, 0 00 673389 1,
£2.50

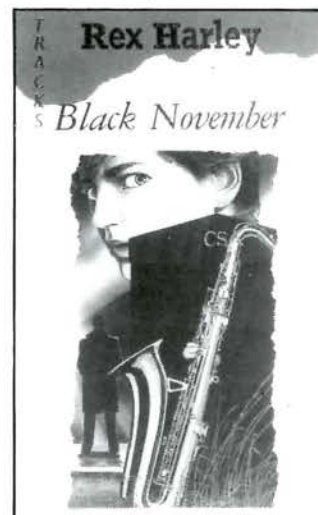
Childhood friends, Frikkie and Tengo, draw apart as Tengo leaves the farm owned by Frikkie's father to attend school in a black township. Their differences develop further in adolescence when Frikkie joins the army and Tengo becomes increasingly aware of the social injustice which is part of everyday life. The end of the book, in a situation of increasing violence, brings them briefly and unexpectedly together.

The carefully-handled tension and sensitive characterisation will make this an absorbing book for discerning teenage readers. LN

Say Goodnight, Gracie

Julie Reece Deaver,
Macmillan Limelight,
0 333 47609 3, £3.99

Morgan and Jimmy have grown up together. As older teenagers it's hard for them to separate love and friendship. That's half the book. The rest, after Jimmy's death in a car accident, concerns Morgan's attempts to cope. The cover gives away the plot, but the death is still a shock. The almost volcanic nature of what's being held down by Morgan, with little observable on the surface, is harrowing and intense. My only worry is that Morgan has such stable and sympathetic support – including a wonderful aunt who's a psychiatrist. How could others cope? AJ



Black November

Rex Harley, Lions
Tracks, 0 00 673332 8,
£2.50

Those readers who've begun to enjoy Harley's books will recognise the neat, mysterious, narrative shifts and not be surprised by the bleak violence which he can't seem to resist. Simon buys (is almost given) a saxophone at a second-hand shop. The instrument brings with it its own history of murder and deception and Simon is forced to become a part of this in his desire to hold on to the saxophone and the memory of the musician who played it. AJ

Dragons and Warrior Daughters

Edited by Jessica Yates,
Lions Tracks,
0 00 673179 1, £2.50

A superb collection of role reversal fantasy stories, written by women writers as diverse as Diana Wynne Jones and Tanith Lee and featuring mythical heroines: healers, warriors or exceptional personalities.

There are stories in this collection of nine which are

fractionally weaker than the rest, but overall there's a richness of language and structure and a level of expertise and commitment that young readers should, ideally, be exposed to.

Buy this for 3rd years upwards and be glad that this sort of quality exists! VR

The Callender Papers

Cynthia Voigt, Lions,
0 00 672983 5, £2.50

Jean Wainwright travels from her aunt's school, where she's been raised as an orphan, to the house of Mr Thiel – a stubborn and uncompromising man – in order to catalogue papers belonging to his dead wife's family. Thiel's brother-in-law provides the empty and dangerous charm which almost leads Jean to her death, but instead reveals that Thiel is her father.

A fine book with strong characterisation – the interplay between Jean and Thiel is particularly compelling along with the precision of plot Voigt always provides. Ensure that it's offered to 14-16 year olds. VR

Now Then, Al

David J Fleming, Lions
Tracks, 0 00 673334 4,
£2.50

An awful cover and bizarre title detract from the steady, even style of an author concerned with the problems of teenage boys: unfamiliar territory for many writers.

The storyline is simple – Alan and Foxy, disenchanted with city life, low job expectations and poor examination results, hitch to Scotland to stay with Alan's uncle on hiscroft.

The author avoids the trap of offering this as a solution to their problems, but does allow the boys to gain a new and more positive perspective.

Alan fades rather as the book progresses, but Foxy retains an appealing impact throughout. A useful and worthwhile read for 4th and 5th year boys. VR

Bad Fun

Roger Mills, Lions
Tracks, 0 00 673432 4,
£2.50

Albie, on the dole and at the mercy of the insularity that unemployment brings, is angered at the death – during a left-wing demonstration – of his friend Nicky. He determines to discover the identity of Nicky's murderer, but – used by Pope, a radical lawyer, and Gaughan, a tabloid reporter – he discovers the inexorability of the political machine he'd previously ignored.

The book is uneven and would have benefited from editing,

but it's often abrasively accurate in its observations of political factions and police corruption. A promising read for 4th/5th year GCSE book-boxes. VR

I Never Told Her I Loved Her

Sandra Chick, Women's
Press, 0 7043 4912 4,
£2.95

Frankie's mother has just died, her father is grief-stricken and over-protective. She's confused – should she try to fill her mother's place? Can she accept her father's new girlfriend without feeling disloyal to her mother? Can she help her friend Marlene with her problems when she's so preoccupied with her own? Sandra Chick raises a number of issues of direct relevance to girls' lives and this is a very welcome addition to GCSE book-boxes. The introspective style might irritate less able readers, but will illuminate the thinking of more able pupils. VR

The Abduction

Mette Newth, Sprint,
0 671 69993 8, £3.95

This won an award in Norway for literature for young people, even though seventeenth-century Norwegians are portrayed in a cruelly barbaric light as they abuse two young Inuits, who've been savagely snatched from their icy homelands. The girl, Osuqo, was violently raped many times and the boy, Poq, humiliated and foully degraded.

The message is movingly, poetically relayed – 'Reason listens openly and without prejudice, and admits mistakes. Unreason always wants to use power to enforce injustice.' It'll take mature readers to get the most out of this story, which has tremendous integrity. DB

We, the Haunted

Pete Johnson, Lions
Tracks, 0 00 673160 0,
£2.25

Caro and Paul fall for each other at first sight and form an intense relationship within days. Their brief time together is cut short by Paul's fatal accident. Caro's recourse to spiritualism helped by Dean, Paul's friend, takes her into another, more self-destructive dimension of grief, which itself looks fatal for her, unless she can get unwelcomed help.

This is an absorbing, accessible, deep-felt tale which is well-worth stocking, but be aware of some Christian parents who might object to the spiritualism element. DB

Authorgraph No. 61

My first acquaintance with Kit Wright came through the story of another poet, Clive Wilmer, who described how he and Kit had gone to give a poetry reading in a village outside Cambridge. The Literary Officer of the local Arts Association was the only person with any transport: unfortunately for them he had an M.G. sports car with only two front seats. Clive related in hilarious detail how Kit, probably the tallest poet in Britain, had to squeeze himself into the tiny space between the seats, his knees in the air and his legs folded into an almost impossible position. To add to his predicament, the roof had to be rolled back to make space for Kit's contortions and this was a day in coldest January! What came over in this anecdote was Kit's obliging nature and his tremendous sense of humour. When I finally met him I was not disappointed. Kit Wright is funny, humane and terribly good company, just as you'd expect from his poetry books for children. Kit is, of course, as well known for his adult poetry. His latest collection, **Short Afternoons**, has been highly acclaimed, as were his three other books.

Kit got bitten by the 'poetry bug' through contact with other poets and some very good teachers. First and foremost was his father who was both. Ronald Wright was a prep. school master, a dedicated teacher who loved literature and had a gift for instilling this pleasure in others. He was not a published poet, but he enjoyed writing light-hearted verse and did so throughout his life. The whole family took pleasure in books: Kit's mother read regularly to the children and Kit's uncle, an eccentric character, was a clever humorist who could make up a rhyme about anything. So Kit and his older brother were encouraged to read and write voraciously and it's unsurprising that the two lads turned to literary pursuits as adults. (Kit's brother is a successful publisher.)

At thirteen Kit went to Berkhamsted Public School where he was lucky enough to encounter more excellent English teachers. He revelled in the camaraderie of lots of mates and developed a passion for cricket (like many young lads, he aspired to play for England) which he was very good at. Childhood is never undiluted pleasure; Kit was actually quite self-conscious about his height and hid his feelings by becoming the joker who could make everyone laugh. Kit continued writing poetry at school: he had done so since he was about six; it seemed perfectly natural to express himself in verse in his family.

When he was seventeen he met the poet, Vernon Scannell, who influenced him enormously. 'What changed everything was meeting Vernon. He was very encouraging... he didn't like what I'd written much, but he could see something in it. Until then I thought poetry was written by people like Wordsworth. Yet here was Vernon, whose poetry I greatly admired, so interesting to talk to. He introduced me to other writers and was abrasive about famous poets.' This was heady stuff for Kit who had started to read young

contemporary poets like Ted Hughes. **The Hawk in the Rain** (Hughes's first collection of poetry) and other early Hughes had a particular charge. 'The poems were electric - I thought the most interesting thing in life was poetry.' Soon after, in 1965, Kit set off for Oxford with a scholarship under his belt to read English.

At Oxford he continued to write but not successfully. 'Many of us keen on poetry at Oxford were unsuccessful at writing it at that period. It took us ages to have confidence in ourselves and write with authority. Craig Raine was one of the group - we told him his poems were brilliant, but he wouldn't believe us. I think we were very intense... overwrought with critical theory. We practised our fierce, embryonic powers of criticism on ourselves, almost before we had let ourselves speak.' In fact, Kit didn't publish his first collection (with two others in **Treble Poets 1**) until he was thirty, so the Oxford experience does seem to have had a detrimental effect on his writing.

After a brief encounter with teaching which he didn't enjoy, Kit went off to Canada for a couple of years to teach English at South Ontario University. When he got back to Britain in 1970, he got a job with The Poetry Society as Education Officer and was also involved in chairing meetings, fundraising, etc. Meanwhile, Kit had several poems published in literary magazines, did some reviewing, and his first full-length collection, **The Bear Looked Over the Mountain**, appeared in 1974. In 1975 he was made redundant from The Poetry Society and his freelance career began, living by 'the pen and the feet' as Kit put it. In 1977 he went to Cambridge where he spent three years as Creative Writing Fellow at Trinity.

Kit started writing for children in the seventies. 'When I started writing, most poetry for kids was about nature -



things rural - there wasn't much about that was urban. Now it's the opposite.' Kit had always liked kids and enjoyed his role as surrogate 'uncle' to a great number (see the dedications of his books!). 'I'm a bit of a kid myself,' Kit admits, so it was natural to turn to writing for a young readership. He takes his writing for children very seriously, applying the same high standards he expects of his adult work. He doesn't mix up the two, as some writers do. 'I put on a different pair of shoes when I write for children. I often write it in a great block - a poem every day. I have to get into it.' Here's an example from his latest book:

*There's nothing I can't see
From here.*

*There's nothing I can't be
From here.*

*Because my eyes
Are open wide
To let the big
World come inside,*

*I think I can see me
From here.*

That's the first poem in **Cat Among the Pigeons** and it represents a strand of Kit's poetry for children which isn't always recognised: one that is introspective, sensitive, thought-provoking and serious. There's a

terrific emotional charge in 'The Frozen Man' in **Rabbiting On**:

*Here in a snug house
at the heart of town
the fire is burning
red and yellow and gold:*

*you can hear the warmth
like a sleeping cat*

*Breathe softly
in every room.*

*When the frozen man
comes to the door,*

*let him in,
let him in,
let him in. (an extract)*

And long before most of us were thinking 'Green', Kit wrote the moving 'Song of the Whale' in **Hot Dog**:

*In the forest of the sea,
Whale, I heard you
Singing,*

*Singing to your kind.
We'll never let you be.
Instead of life we choose*

*Lipstick for our painted faces,
Polish for our shoes. (an extract)*

Kit believes that children can 'take some stiffening' and has chosen topics not often tackled in poetry, like a Down's Syndrome child cheering up passengers waiting for a train ('Useful Person'), a lonely blind lady returning from Bingo ('Mercy') and the death of a loved grandfather ('Grandad'):

*He'd got twelve stories.
I'd heard every one of them
Hundreds of times
But that was the fun of them:
You knew what was coming
So you could join in.
He'd got big hands
And brown, grooved skin
And when he laughed
It knocked you flat.*

*Now he's dead
And I'm sorry about that. (extract)*

It's easy to miss this side of his work, because the humorous ones attract

more attention. And you can see why with poems like 'Dave Dirt's Christmas Presents' from **Cat Among the Pigeons**:

*Dave Dirt wrapped his Christmas
presents
Late on Christmas Eve
And gave to his near relations
things
That you would not believe.*

*His brother got an Odour-Eater –
Second-hand one, natch.
For Dad he chose, inside its box,
A single burnt-out match.*

*His sister copped the sweepings
from
His hairy bedroom rug,
While Mum received a centipede
And Granny got a slug.*

*Next day he had the nerve to sit
Beneath the Christmas tree
And say: 'OK, I've done my bit –
What have you got for me?'*

Not surprisingly, this piece can be relied upon to go down well when Kit makes one of his frequent visits to schools (he's a great admirer of the dedication and professionalism of teachers – especially primary teachers). 'I always tell children I was thinking of myself at that age,' Kit replies when asked who Dave Dirt was modelled on! One of the delicious pleasures in reading Kit Wright's poems, especially for younger readers, is their slightly subversive lack of propriety. Apart from the utterly revolting and irresistible antics of Dave Dirt (chewing gum under the table, being sick, picking scabs, sticking things up his nose, blowing his nose on tube tickets . . .) he catches tellingly kids' horror of being slobbered over by soppy relations in 'Hugger Mugger' and even uses knickers and a bra in 'Pride'.

Kit is currently working on a new anthology for children and has two already in print. He's keen to bring to his young readership's attention some of the best poetry of the past which he felt was in danger of being forgotten. 'Generations of children are growing up not knowing . . . the tried and tested winners.' So old favourites like 'The Highwayman' and 'The Train to

Glasgow' sit side by side with contemporary poems.

Writing can be a solitary life for a gregarious person, so Kit will sometimes write the first draft of a poem amidst the hubbub of the pub. The rest is hard work back at the desk to 'hack it about': he's a skilled and meticulous craftsman and it often takes a long time before he's satisfied with his work. No word-processor for him – it's a pen, hardback book and ancient typewriter!

Kit now lives with his partner, Penny, and three adored cats, in north London. He was quite upset when we last spoke because George, a small female cat, had been out all night in the January storm and he didn't know where she was. This affection for cats is evident in some of the poems in **Cat Among the Pigeons**. Here's a bit from 'Granny Tom':

*For the cat is growing old
In the yard, in the yard,
And the pigeons leave him cold.
He has starved
In his youth in many chases,
When he put them through their
paces.
Now he knows just what his place is
In the yard.*

Kit is refreshingly non-elitist about poetry and has no time for those who would be precious about it. He loves a wide variety of poetry from Shakespeare ('I'm still dazzled by what an extraordinary genius he is'), Sir Thomas Wyatt ('"They flee from me that some time they did seek" is one of my favourite poems of all time') and some of Blake ('there's also some rubbish in the prophetic books') to contemporary British and American poets, along with poetry from other cultures in translation.

However, he can't help admiring the arrogance of the distinguished poet, Brodsky, who, on being asked whether he wrote fiction, replied: 'No, it isn't enough.' Those would probably be Kit's sentiments, too. 'I think so highly of poetry that I've dedicated my life to it. It's the most important thing to me.'

Kit Wright was interviewed by Morag Styles. Photographs by Richard Mewton.

The Books

For adults:

Kit Wright Poems, 1974-83, Hutchinson, 0 09 173743 5, £7.50 pbk

Short Afternoons, Hutchinson, 0 09 173607 2, £6.95 pbk

For children:

Rabbiting On, Lions, 0 00 671342 4, £1.95 pbk

Hot Dog and Other Poems, Puffin, 0 14 03.1336 2, £1.99 pbk

Cat Among the Pigeons, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 81711 2, £5.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.2367 8, £1.99 pbk

Poems for 9 year-olds and under, (ed.), Puffin, 0 14 03.1490 3, £2.50 pbk

Poems for over 10 year-olds, (ed.), Puffin, 0 14 03.1491 1, £2.50 pbk

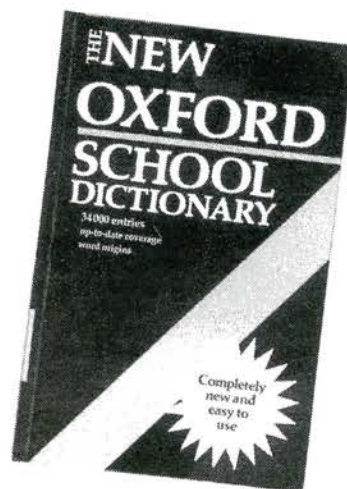


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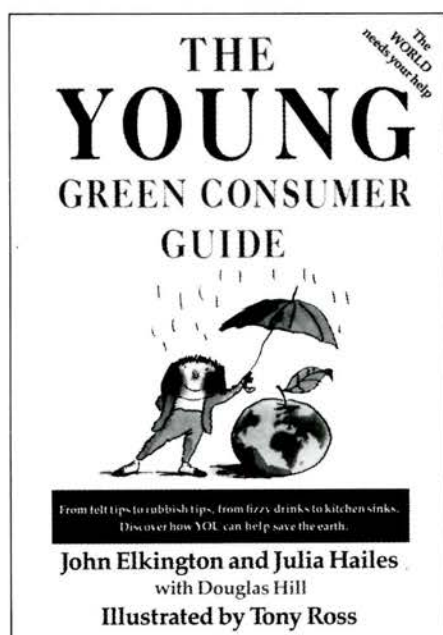
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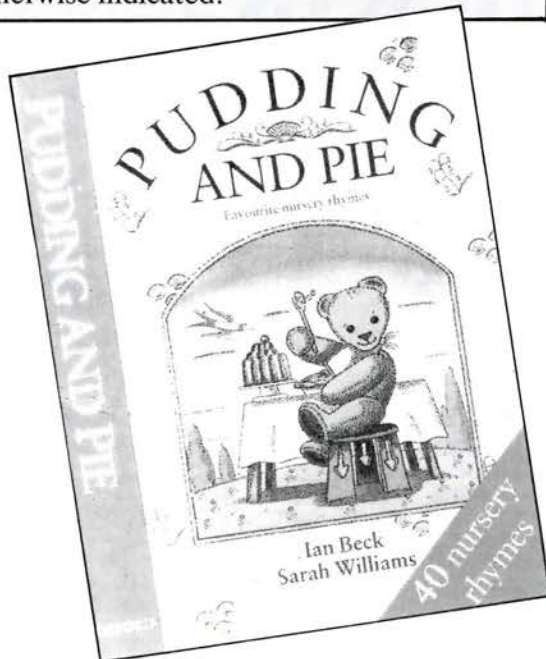
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£9.95 Hbk 0 575 04760 7

Audio Tapes

Reviews are listed in roughly ascending order of listening age. Prices include VAT unless otherwise indicated.



Pudding and Pie
Ian Beck and Sarah Williams, sung by Julie Moon, Robert Johnson and others, Oxford, one cassette, 1 hour, £3.50

Forty nursery rhymes are presented here with imagination and flair. There's a variety of musical arrangement from the different pace of the slow, lyrical 'Mary, Mary' and the rousing 'Lion and the Unicorn', to the impressive fiddles on 'Old King Cole' and the miaowing cat on 'Ding-Dong Bell'. This is Oxford's fourth cassette for the under-fives. As with **Ride a Cock Horse, Round and Round the Garden and Oranges and Lemons**, a complementary book is available separately with the text interwoven by Ian Beck's distinctive illustrations, available from Oxford at £2.50 pbk, £5.95 hbk.

Huxley Pig at the Circus

Rodney Peppé, read by Martin Jarvis, Tempo, 16-minute cassette with 24-page Fantail publishing book, £2.99
Huxley Pig, a new television favourite, loves living in a world of his own. When he finds the Clown's outfit in his Granny's dressing box, he juggles with eggs, until he drops them, and walks the tightrope on his dressing gown cord, until he falls off. He uses his bedspread as a Big Top and drifts into a wonderful daydream. But when he wakes he's not sure it was a

daydream. This is an attractive package: a well-produced book illustrated with the ITV stills and a professional reading of a short, simple story with turn-over tone and sound effects.

Tales from Lavender Shoes

More Tales from Lavender Shoes
Alison Uttley, read by Jill Shilling, Tellastory, unabridged, 55 minutes, £3.99 each title

Characteristic Alison Uttley stories: the real world never impinges on these gentle, innocent tales of human animals. The Little White Hen makes sweet smelling lavender shoes for the fox cubs to protect them from the dogs. Little Tim Rabbit flies like a kite in a cloak of leaves he made for his mother... perfect reassuring bedtime stories for young children. Pre-readers can follow the story by the pictures in the books available separately from Faber. Escape with Mother!

The Railway Stories
More Railway Stories
Rev. W Awdry, read by William Rushton, LfP Argo, two cassettes, 3 hours, £6.99

These are two of the Argo recordings now taken over and re-released by LfP. The stories have delighted children for more than a generation and still retain their appeal.

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent story tapes.

William Rushton, with his inimitable characterisation of the Fat Controller and the different half-human engines, is a tremendous narrator. The stories are also available in colourful packages of a Ladybird book and half-hour cassette read by Ringo Starr in Pickwick's six titles in the **Thomas the Tank Engine** series at £2.99 each. With only a few lines of print on each lavishly illustrated page, they're good for new readers.

Fantastic Mr Fox
Roald Dahl, read by John Baddeley, Tempo, one cassette, unabridged, 1 hour, £2.99

Roald Dahl is always a winner, of course. It's hard to believe that this story of the super-meanies, Boggis, Bunce and Bean, is now twenty years old. Mr Fox and his family escape all the farmers' sly efforts to trap them and the story ends with that wonderful celebratory feast and Mrs Fox's toast: 'My husband is a *Fantastic Fox!*' The cheers and the clapping are heard on the sound effects and the story ends with the relentless rain soaking Boggis, Bunce and Bean as they wait in vain for Mr Fox. John Baddeley characterises the voices well on this good value cassette.

The Water Babies
Charles Kingsley, read by Sarah Greene, LfP, two cassettes, abridged, 2hrs 30 mins, £5.99

Sarah Greene's lively narration and the skilful abridgement makes this very moral fable, one of Queen Victoria's favourites, accessible to a new generation of children. The story of Tom's escape from his cruel Master Sweep across the bleak grouse-moors to the idyllic Vendale, and of his transformation into a Water Baby in the limestone stream amongst the silver trout, retains its charm. On cassette, Kingsley's multi-layered moral message, such as Mrs Be Done By As You Did's punishment of offenders like schoolmasters who beat their pupils, is part of a still appealing story and not over-intrusive moralising.

The Whipping Boy
Sid Fleischman, read by Kerry Shale, Chivers, two cassettes, unabridged, 1 hr 30 mins, £9.25 + VAT

'His Royal Awfulness' Prince Brat is spoilt and stupid, but it's Jemmy, a poor rat catcher's son, who has to take the beatings as Royal Whipping Boy. Poor Jemmy looks as though the Devil has run over

him with spikes in his shoes... so when the Prince runs away, Jemmy goes too – and life gets even harder, though more exciting. There are chases through the City sewers, adventures with Hold Your Nose Billy, the vicious highwayman, and with an escaped Dancing Bear – also a happy ending. Unusual, racy, and dramatically and entertainingly read, this Newbery medal winner is not to be missed.

The Peppermint Pig
Nina Bawden, read by Carole Boyd, Chivers, three cassettes, unabridged, 4 hrs 22 mins, £11.25 + VAT

The Peppermint Pig is Johnnie, the little runt that Poll's mother bought from the milkman for a shilling. This is a homely story brought to life with Carole Boyd's warm narration. It's not just about the characterful Johnnie who sleeps in a shoe box, but also Poll's mother's brave struggle for her family after her father takes the blame for another man's crime and goes to America – and Poll herself growing up, her long illness and her fears that her beloved Johnnie will be turned into pork to feed the needy family. It appeals on different levels to a wide age group.

The Diddakoi
Rumer Godden, read by Lynda Bellingham, Chivers, three cassettes, unabridged, 3 hrs 30 mins, £11.95 + VAT

Lynda Bellingham reads this touching story with appropriate warmth yet with a vitality to match that of Kizzy, the little traveller girl. After her granny dies, Kizzy has no home and only the old horse, Jo, for a friend. The 'authorities' send her to school where she's teased mercilessly for being a diddakoi, for wearing odd clothes and smelling of wood smoke. The children's victimisation has frightening consequences, the authorities' attempts to make Kizzy conform are disastrous, but with the patient, understanding love of Miss Brook and Admiral Twiss, Kizzy survives. It's a moving story, tender and enduring.

Rachel Redford is a well-known authority on audio tapes and compiler of Book Trust's **Hear to Read** (1986, 0 85353 403 9, £1.50 non-members, £1.00 members, inc. p&p), available from the Publications Dept., Book Trust, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

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THE
MANAGEABLE
BOOK

Hazel Townson on how she sets out to
entice the reluctant reader.

In my days as a children's librarian, I was much perplexed by the problem of why some children who are perfectly capable of reading feel unattracted to books. I decided one reason must be that those children have not met in their leisure reading what could be called the Manageable Book. My search for Manageable Books at that time produced very few, so I decided to try to write some.

A Manageable Book needs to *look* manageable, for the first hurdle is to have it lifted from the shelf. It has a bright, exciting, tempting cover which has been displayed face-forward. (No amount of decoration on the spine will ever be enough to attract a reluctant reader.) It has a snappy, intriguing title suggesting it can compete in entertainment value with other media. (Some of the titles I chose were *The Shrieking Face*; *The Great Ice-Cream Crime*; *Danny - Don't Jump!*; *The Choking Peril*.) Most important of all, it's a very slim volume. To this end, I decided that after writing my books I would cut them drastically to about one-third of the original length, including much of the description. The background work has been done, so I know my scenario and can hint at it economically. In any case, it's better for readers to use their imaginations.

Illustration

Once the book has been lifted from the shelf it must immediately prove to be manageable. A quick flick through the pages must reveal decent-sized text; lots of clear, lively illustrations breaking up that text on almost every page; short chapters with tempting headings - e.g. 'A Body Vanishes'; 'The Shock in the Cellar'; 'A Magic Purchase' - and an attractive feel from good-quality paper.

I've been lucky with my illustrators. For instance, Philippe Dupasquier and Tony Ross both have the exact measure of childhood, felicitous touches of humour and an apparently total recall of their own early days. Each of their illustrations can be dwelt upon lovingly to extract from it more and more delicious detail - such as one of Tony Ross's illustrations for *Terrible Tuesday* which shows gunmen threatening a bank manager on the steps of his bank. Not only does the bank manager have his hands up in surrender, but also the passing baby in its pram and the statue in the road outside. Even a dog has raised its front paws, and the birds their wings. And Philippe Dupasquier's covers for the Lenny and Jake adventures cunningly

suggest a comic paper format, more acceptable to a reluctant reader.



Public Library scene by Tony Ross, for
Pilkie's Progress.

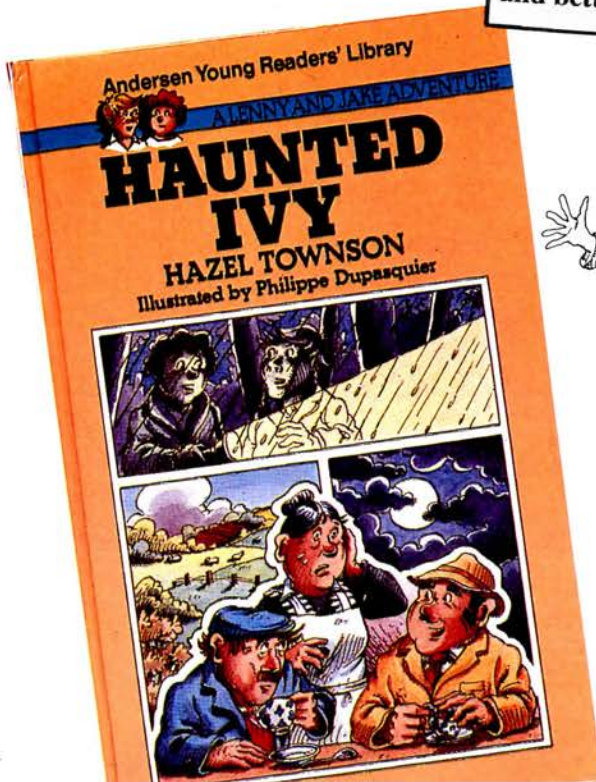
Getting Started

Now, after the quick flick through the pages, comes the moment when hopefully the eye will actually make contact with some of the text, probably the first few lines of Chapter One. So these lines must draw the reader instantly into the story. They are the most vital lines in the book and should contain the promise of an exciting plot, a character with whom to identify - even if this is an animal or inanimate object rather than a person - and a glimpse of escape into a satisfying world of fantasy. (For example, *Haunted Ivy* begins: "What your Aunt Ivy needs is a ghost," said Lenny Hargreaves to his friend Jake Allen. "That would pack the customers in.")

By this time, if all these requirements are satisfied, the eye should have begun to travel further, actually giving the story a chance. So if the pace is fast, the

action continuous, the interest constantly sustained, then there's a fair possibility the reader will stay with the book. Touches of humour will enhance that possibility a hundred-fold, and if that humour puts some adult authority figure into a ridiculous situation, so much the better, as when the headmaster in *The Speckled Panic* eats some Truthpaste and then, at the school prize-giving, proceeds to tell the truth about his sub-standard school.

Where reading is concerned, reluctance is resistance. We have to break down that resistance by offering pleasure without pain, and by making that pleasure so easy to recognise that nobody can miss it. Once the Manageable Book has done this, then hopefully the reader, no longer reluctant, will move on to bigger and better things.



Gary horrified at being mistaken for Claude, from *Gary Who?*

Cover of *Haunted Ivy* (Andersen).

A crucial moment comes at the end of Chapter One. Will the reader now lose interest after all? What's needed here is a cliff-hanger ending to draw the reader forward into Chapter Two to find out what happens next (e.g. 'A hand fell heavily on to his shoulder and a voiced cried, "Caught you!"'). In fact, every chapter in a Manageable Book should end this way, and the final chapter should have such a cleverly unexpected twist in the tale that the reader will be bound to admit, with a sigh of utter satisfaction, 'I really enjoyed that!'

If this crafting of the story is skilfully done, there should be no need for over-simplification of vocabulary; in fact, 'writing down' is one of the best ways to put children off books for ever. If the reader comes up against an unfamiliar word or phrase he can always guess from the context, ask, look it up, or simply skip it and read on. In fact, there ought to be, in the simplest Manageable Book, some progression, some way of stretching the reader as painlessly as possible – even a second level at which the book can be read again later and more experience and enjoyment extracted from it than at the first attempt. (*The Shrieking Face*, besides being the simple tale of one boy's dilemma when he wins a prize by mistake, is also a send-up of the Art World which callously allows artists to starve in garrets, then sells their pictures for millions as soon as they're

dead.) This discovery of the 'second layer' may take its time, but its revelation will create, however unconsciously, a deeper sense of satisfaction in the reader, even triumph at his discovery.

Far from being put off by new and complicated phrases, children actually like to meet them, and will happily go around chanting them for days afterwards, as happened with Margaret Mahy's *The Great Piratical Rumbustification*. I also heard of an infant class which read a picture book called *The Sorely Trying Day*, and then proceeded to talk about such things as a 'sorely trying' shoelace that wouldn't stay fastened, or a 'sorely trying' pencil that wouldn't draw the right kind of picture.

Familiarity

Once the first Manageable Book has been read, it's helpful if this is part of a series about the same characters, so that the child will move on with confidence to the next book, knowing it will be similar and that his prospects of enjoyment are at least as high, if not higher. But it is essential that these characters should speak realistic dialogue, behave consistently and have strong personal appeal. Which makes it also essential that the author should visit schools and libraries as often as

possible to meet, talk to and listen to children.

Humour

A humorous approach is of enormous value. There are so few really funny books for children and this is such a good way to gain their confidence. If the author can take a child's problem and make him laugh at it, by giving that same problem to the hero or heroine, then the child may feel soothed as well. For instance, one childhood problem is hypochondria. I suffered mightily from this in my own childhood, especially once when I swallowed an orange pip and my cousin told me I would get appendicitis and die. So I wrote a book called *Pilkie's Progress* in which a boy called Benny Pilkington thinks he has a bad heart, checks in on the Test-Your-Heart machine which promptly falls off the wall, and thinks he's about to have a heart attack. His reactions are so exaggerated that the reader is bound to feel superior.

Another problem is nagging. Every child suffers from nagging at some stage, and it can be pretty awful when you can't answer back. In *One Green Bottle* the boy hero is nagged at constantly for not coming up to his family's expectations, but at the end of the book he triumphs by inventing a board game even better than Monopoly, which is going to sweep the world and make his fortune.

I've also used the problem of yearning to be popular (*Danny – Don't Jump!* in which the hero tries so hard to be popular that he gets into all sorts of trouble); loss of identity (*Gary Who?*, where the hero is mistaken for another boy by his teacher, called Arthur by his grandma because he looks like his dad, mistakenly recognised as Claude by the milkman . . . and so on); and exploitation (*The Moving Statue*, where the hero is made to deliver papers against his will because his parents keep a newsagent's shop). ■



Hazel Townson, a frequent visitor to schools and libraries, is the author of over twenty children's books, published in the Andersen Young Readers' Library series in hardback and in Beaver paperback.

REVIEWS — Non Fiction

Let's Visit a Fish Farm

Sarah Doughty and Diana Bentley, Wayland (Let's Visit a Farm series), 1 85210 806 1, £4.50 (INFANT/JUNIOR)

Farmed trout have been on the slab for over two decades now, while information books have continued to reiterate the same misleading picture of fish-supply by stopping at trawlers and drifters and the magic of the cod-end. This sunny glimpse of a Scottish troutery shows all the basic stages from fry to frying pan and does something to update our knowledge of how we get our fish.

Other members of the series pay visits to, for instance, beef and fruit farms which are more familiar territory and so are perhaps less significant, but although this is a superficial 'infant text' there's been nothing quite like it before. TP

Clay

Jeannie Hull, Franklin Watts (Fresh Start series), 0 86313 898 5, £6.95 (JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

What a refreshing change to read a craft book which is not only a lucid introduction to its subject, but which also displays such a supportive attitude to the complete novice.

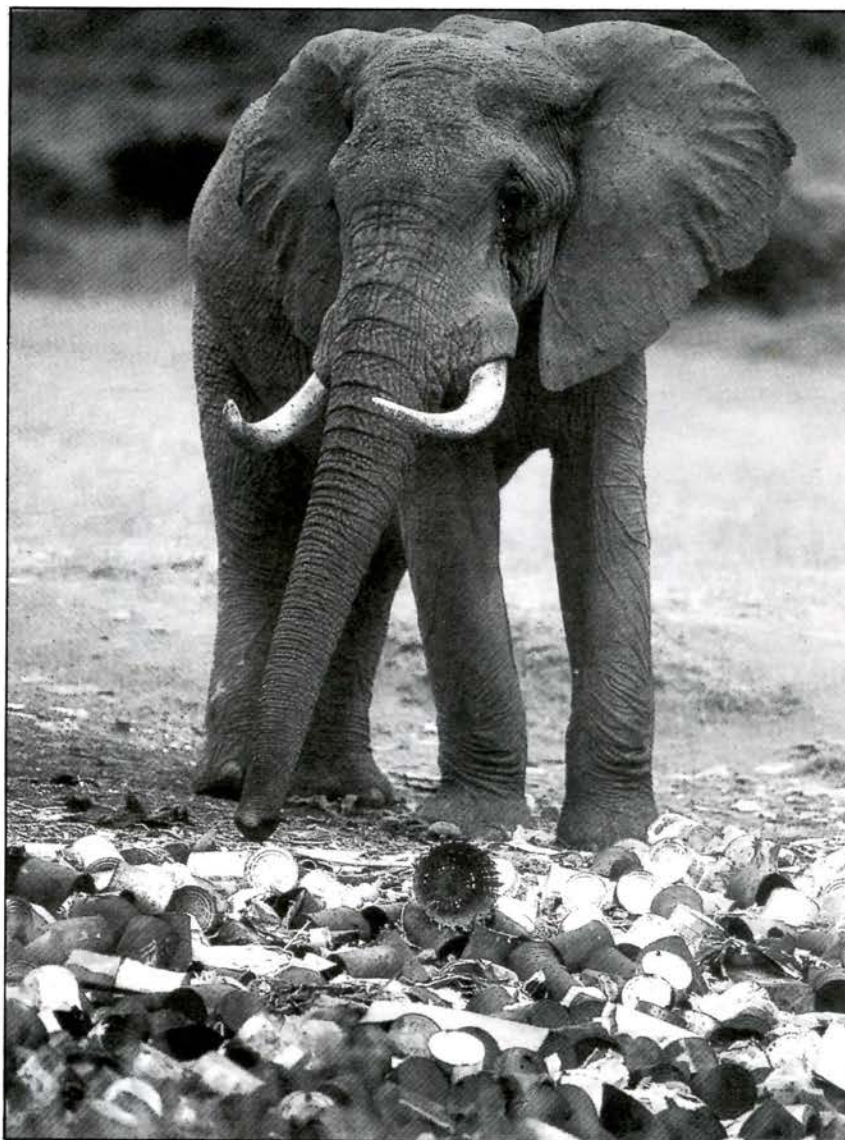
FRESH
START



Jeannie Hull

Clear step-by-step instructions are given for making thumb, coil, and slab pots, together with impressed and applied decoration on tiles and methods for preparing, firing and glazing clay. The text is supported throughout by helpful colour photographs and Jeannie Hull constantly reassures her readers that when one is a beginner some things can be difficult to get right first time. She explains what may go wrong and how to avoid making such mistakes.

The book concludes with an interesting two-page history which discusses how pottery 'finds' have helped archaeologists reconstruct the lives of early peoples. One or two illustrations could have been usefully included in this section, but this is my only quibble about an otherwise excellent production. VH



'Deprived of its natural food, an elephant finds an easy meal at a rubbish dump. In Rwanda, the government had most of the elephants killed. There was no space for them to live.' From **Elephants**.

Elephants

0 7496 0070 5

Humpback Whale

0 7496 0069 1

Michael Bright, Franklin Watts (Project Wildlife series), £6.95 each (JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

Picturesque subjects make the most obviously pressing conservation issues, so plenty has already reached us about these two. However, beautifully presented and up to date, here comes something a cut above the average. We get needle-sharp photography, well-designed maps and a balanced look at the various influences contributing to the decline of these giants and to their preservation.

Ivory poaching gets a good going-over, and its ramifications are the main burden of **Elephants**. Pollution, protection and research occupy most of **Whale**. There are sensible looks at the future of each species and the last six pages of each volume are devoted to a 'Fact file' containing not only routine statistical stuff but engaging information about the species' all-important social behaviour.

Heathcote Williams almost certainly approves. TP

Early Twentieth Century

Ruth Thomson, 0 86313 872 1

World War II

Neil Thomson, 0 86313 873 X
Franklin Watts (When I Was Young series), £7.95 each (JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

Can there be a more stimulating way of learning about the recent past than straight from the horse's mouth?

These fascinating books are each based on the recollections of a living person – 83-year-old Nancy Emery, one of nine daughters of a Yorkshire cattle dealer, and 56-year-old Charlie Jones from Stoke Newington, North London who still lives not far from his birthplace. Although their eras and backgrounds are very different, the common preoccupations of childhood – family life, friends, school, entertainment and, eventually, work – are mutual themes explored through entertaining and informative narrative.

The inclusion of personal family photographs in addition to a well-chosen selection of contemporary archive material further enhances the individual perspective, whilst recent photographs of significant locations and buildings provide an interesting up-date

to the memoirs. The rather cluttered page layouts seem in keeping with the family album approach.

Each book concludes with a glossary, a photospread of newsworthy events of the period, and suggestions as to how young readers might conduct similar research

amongst their own families and neighbours – inspired perhaps by such poignant reminiscences as Charlie's first encounter with tapioca after he was evacuated to a strict convent school in Letchworth: 'It was so horrible seeing it for the first time.' VH

Focussing largely on the achievement of British women (both amateur and professional) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the text examines their work from popularising and data-collecting to experimental and theoretical discoveries in such specialised fields as X-ray crystallography. By examining the reasons for the differing opportunities available to women at different periods in history, the author shows how social conventions have led to a variety of restrictions and prejudices. She curbs any incipient complacency in the reader by a final chapter on 'Lost Contributions 1950s-1980s'.

The text uses an effective mixture of description, biographical detail and quotation. The achievements of Hildegard of Bingen, medieval writer on astronomy and medicine, are nicely placed alongside Martin Luther's assessment of women: 'Take them from their housewifery and they are good for nothing.'

Black and white illustrations – using contemporary portraits and rather dim photographs of twentieth-century women scientists at work – produce a dull, grey effect, but this lack of visual impact should not deter schools from making a useful addition to their library shelves.

GB

Aid in Action

Alistair Ross, A & C Black (Currents series), 0 7136 2926 6, £6.95

(MIDDLE/SECONDARY)

An increasingly important feature of the heightening profile of the big aid agencies is their role in education – not only in giving aid in the form of education but their education of donors about what happens to their money and how and where aid is delivered. A new non-commercial respect for the donor is developing and (thanks not least to Bob Geldof and Princess Anne) we are being shown and told more. At the same time the agencies' respect for the recipients is more clearly seen as they move away from pure crisis-alleviation towards the encouragement of self-confidence and self-sufficiency through long-term education and development.

This excellent book shows us this trend very clearly by concentrating mainly on the work of Save the Children – from volunteer collector through the directorate to the field-worker and recipients. Alistair Ross provides a very readable and straightforward text which evolves naturally with its subject and allows its readers room to manoeuvre and to develop their own opinions, nourished by his presentation of facts. In particular, his distinction between starvation (an acute physical state, possibly accidental) and poverty (a chronic condition with identifiable social and political causes) is brilliantly made and abundantly justifies his emphasis on the social and educational work done by the agencies – which often takes second place in the public imagination to the more picturesque short-term belly-filling.

The text is punctuated by fact-supplements and 'What do you think?' boxes which, unlike most such features, actually ask sensible and interesting questions so that the reader really *does* think. Black and white photographs actually illustrate the text rather than, as is often fashionable, subjugate it, and the whole is a good end-to-end read.

TP

Geoff Brown is a Divisional Coordinator with Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.

Veronica Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

Ted Percy is a Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

Non-fiction Reviews Editor: **Eleanor von Schweinitz**

Arthur George
1872-1930

Mary
1873-1922



May 1893-1984 Swannie 1895-1973 Marjorie 1897-1985 Kathleen 1899-1975 Hillic 1901-1925 Sylvia 1905-1987 Nancy b. 1906 Joyce b. 1907 Mary b. 1911

Part of Nancy Emery's family tree, from **Early Twentieth Century**.

AIDS

Pete Sanders and Clare Farquhar, Franklin Watts (Let's Talk About series), 0 86313 939 6, £5.95 (JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

A subject as topical as AIDS needs a primer to provide basic information and dispel anxieties bred by gossip and false rumour before they become traditionally held beliefs. One of the main stumbling-blocks in understanding the whole business is the difference between AIDS and HIV, and that's where this book starts, with a simple explanation going on to show how HIV spreads from person to person and, importantly, how it doesn't, alleviating fears about infected lavatories, cups, mosquitoes and kisses.

Needle-sharing and sex are cited ways of transmission; the authors stress the need for personal responsibility in these particulars but continually reassure the reader that 'you can go on doing most of the things you usually do, when having fun with your friends'. This is the book's strength, it is neither frightening nor frightened. Of course, on its own it is not enough, it craves conversation like apple pie does cheese, but its simple text and positive attitude could make it very helpful in primary schools as well as putting it within reach of those who are less able but are sexually and socially mature.

TP

Women and Science

Brenda Clarke, Wayland (Women in History series), 1 85210 390 6, £6.95

(MIDDLE/SECONDARY)

Women and Science is a commendable and committed attempt to set straight the record of women's scientific achievements. Starting with the premise that everyone knows Madame Curie but could not name many other female scientists, the book takes a chronological and wide approach covering contributions from Hypatia, mathematician of antiquity, to Kathleen Lonsdale, twentieth-century professor of chemistry.

'Kathleen Lonsdale, first woman Fellow of the Royal Society saw the need for scientific knowledge to be used in the service of humanity.' From **Women and Science**.



INFORMATION '89 AND CURRICULUM '90

Eleanor von Schweinitz looks through the non-fiction books we received last year at **Books for Keeps** with half an eye on the emerging National Curriculum.

What strikes me first when browsing along the shelves of information books published in 1989 is just how many come from only two publishers. Of the 760 books we received at **Books for Keeps**, over 45% were published by Franklin Watts or Wayland, and I can't help wondering whether this is a very healthy state of affairs for the consumer of children's information books.

As usual the new titles from Watts showed a lively awareness of the gaps in current provision – **Bullying**, for instance, was recently added to the 'Let's talk about' series. Watts' market research is as professional as their products and they are prepared to chance their arm with books that tackle contentious issues and cater for special needs. It will be interesting to see how far this commitment can withstand the pressures generated by the National Curriculum as it starts to come on stream in 1990.

Science

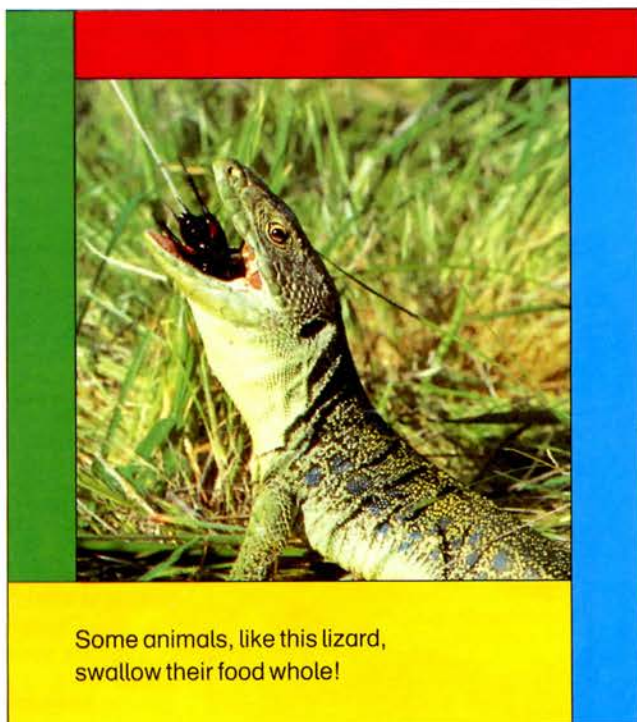
The National Curriculum has already had a huge impact on science in the primary school, and school library support services have been reporting an unprecedented demand from infant schools for books on such topics as light and electricity. Just how difficult it is to create successful science books for the top end of this age group was illustrated by Oxford's 'Into Science' series and Watts' 'Science Starters'. Oxford's weakness lay principally in a laboured 'narrative' text and Watts' in glossy photographs which, despite their apparent clarity, too often failed to convey their message adequately. There was a wider choice published for the junior/middle years, ranging from Cherrytree's 'Secrets of Science' series – a miscellaneous collection of activities and experiments which inadequately related to underlying principles – to the carefully structured blend of activity, experiment and explanation in Watts' 'Hands on Science' series. All books placed a strong emphasis on experimentation but there was often a lack of clarity as to the purpose served. Means and ends were not always clearly distinguished – and doesn't the experiment lose something of its essential purpose if the instructions spell out the 'correct' outcome?

Books on the life sciences were the largest single category of material in 1989. Books about animals outnumbered those on plants by 6 to 1, most of them relying very heavily on visual appeal. We have come to expect excellent colour photography in books about living things. A and C Black didn't disappoint us in 1989 with six new 'Stopwatch' titles – but these books are so much more than mere collections of beautiful photographs; the careful interaction of text and image and the well-judged pacing of it all are the key to their success. Equally breathtaking colour photography came from Kim Taylor and Jane Burton in Belitha's 'Secret Worlds' series. **Too Fast to See** and **Too Slow to See** in particular made excellent use of high-speed or time-lapse photography using magnified images of great clarity. But, despite chatty and informative texts, these books amounted to little more than collections of memorable gobbets of information.

A much more coherent use of the thematic approach for infants/juniors was made by the 'Look at Nature' series from Watts. Examples include Henry Pluckrose's **Paws and Claws** and **Skin, Shell and Scale** and Ruth Thomson's **Teeth and Tusks**. These link apparently dissimilar creatures through common characteristics, the text and illustrations posing questions about such crucial matters as why different animals have very different kinds of teeth. A pity that Watts have chosen to frame the photographs in brightly coloured borders



From **Secret Worlds: Too Fast to See** (Belitha Press).



Some animals, like this lizard,
swallow their food whole!

From **Look at Teeth and Tusks** (Franklin Watts).

– putting a visual emphasis on the irrelevant in a series where considerable attention seems to have been paid to the interaction of visual and verbal. For the junior/middle age group Hodder and Stoughton's lively 'Young Naturalist' series added **Animal Movement** by Tony Seddon and **Signals for Survival** by Jill Bailey. The latter covered such fascinating

matters as daily, lunar and seasonal rhythms, internal and biological clocks, migration and hibernation. Attractively presented, these books are imaginatively cross-referenced to encourage the follow up of related material – and they have good indexes too!

Environment

Environmental concern was the most obviously pervasive element to be found in 1989 – being the focus of a number of good titles (some of which were recommended by Ted Percy in our non-fiction review pages) and also featuring to a greater or lesser degree in books on plants, animals, health, food, technology, living in towns and cities, and peoples and countries of the world. But it was somewhat disappointing that Wayland's 'Let's visit' series on farming should remain impervious to environmental issues at a time when they were launching their 'Conserving our World' series for older children. Hamish Hamilton's *Spring/Summer/Autumn/Winter on the Farm* also passed over some obvious opportunities to touch on environmental questions.

Design and Technology

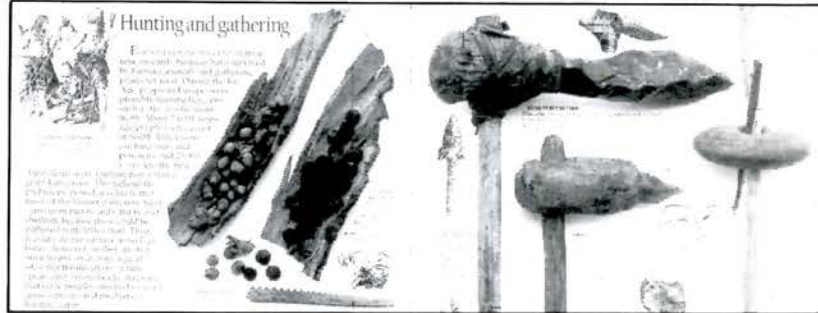
Infant teachers confronting Design and Technology will welcome Watts' 'Ways to' series (*Cut it!*, *Join it!*, and so on) by Henry Pluckrose. These titles are full of thought-provoking questions and challenging ideas. This is another Watts series in which a rather strident page design doesn't always make the most of good photographs. For junior and middle age groups there was a range of craft books, the majority of which were concerned with 'how to do it'. There was also a sprinkling of books using a thematic seasonal approach to practical activities and craft work – though these seemed a rather thin, glossy and expensive prompt for the tired junior school teacher who had run out of ideas for things to do. Better value for the Technology curriculum was *Plastics* in A and C Black's admirable 'Threads' series – especially welcome because there is so little on this subject for juniors. For secondary schools *Design* in Wayland's 'The Arts' series was concerned with social and aesthetic questions – and this was also true of *Photography* and *Architecture*.

History and Geography

Several publishers added titles to their lists of countries of the world. Watts with nearly 80 countries already covered in their series for juniors had the misfortune to publish *Let's go to Panama* (an invitation that George Bush and the Pentagon found impossible to resist). More serious problems could arise with titles looking at the Eastern Bloc countries, where change is momentous, on-going and unpredictable. Just what risks an enterprising publisher can face when tackling a rapidly changing situation is demonstrated by John Bradley's *Soviet Union – will perestroika work?* (Watts/Gloucester Press, 'Hotspot' series). Published in August, it included a page identifying the main centres of 'potentially explosive' nationalist tensions – with a separate double-page spread at the back listing the fifteen republics in the Soviet Union with a few lines of useful information about each. But for those who want to understand the situation in the Soviet Union now, a much more detailed explanation of the historical background of the republics is needed, together with an explanation of their distinctive ethnic, religious and economic roots. However, I hope this experience won't deter Watts/Gloucester Press from venturing onto more thin ice – even when overtaken by events such books can provide invaluable background to our understanding; indeed, John Bradley's discussion of perestroika and glasnost remains informative and thought-provoking.

Publishers are on safer ground when dealing with more distant historical events. We had a small spate of books about the First and Second World Wars. Childhood reminiscences of 1939-45 in an international collection *Children at War* from the BBC (to accompany their Landmark series on TV) were especially interesting because they included the perspectives of children far from the battle front (South Africa) or living in countries whose viewpoint is rarely considered here such as Finland and Eire (a hilarious piece this!). But Michael Foreman's *Warboy* was in a different league and served to remind us of the gulf between competent documentary recording and vivid creative writing. Two well produced

volumes originally published in France were edited for Wayland by Stewart Ross. They were very much more immediate and readable than most of the British products – and had the additional benefit of providing an unusual perspective on events in World Wars I and II. Well chosen imports of this kind might make a valuable contribution to 'understanding points of view' – which is one of the attainment targets of the History Working Group. Of course, if the National Curriculum persists in excluding the two World Wars, far fewer schools will decide that they can afford to purchase these stimulating books. The same fate may befall Nathaniel Harris' *Hitler* in Batsford's 'Reputations' series. This is one of those rare (and welcome) books that will stretch able 15-17 year olds, constantly challenging them to consider the evidence behind different interpretations of Hitler's career.



Archaeology

The value of archaeological source materials was the focus of a number of books in 1989 – notably the 'History in Evidence' series from Wayland. The use of such materials was superbly demonstrated in Dorling Kindersley's *Early People*, one of the 'Eyewitness' guides which continue to be in a class of their own – the ultimate in coffee-table information books for browsers of all ages. If the National Curriculum continues to stress the analysis and evaluation of source materials in history then authors will need to be far more meticulous in their treatment of sources, both in the way source materials are used in the text and illustrations, as well as in their proper identification. Nor will the hotchpotch of undifferentiated primary and secondary sources listed in bibliographies be acceptable any longer. Wayland's worthy 'Witness History' series have generally been quite responsible in their use and citation of sources – and this is where Batsford, otherwise noteworthy for the consistent drabness of their production standards, could teach most other publishers a thing or two.

The new Firefly list (aimed at 3-8 year olds) got off to a prolific but rather disappointing start in 1989 – perhaps we should defer judgement in the hope of greater variety and individuality in the coming year.

The Shape of Things to Come . . .

If we glance briefly ahead to 1990 there are some ominous clouds on the horizon. LMS seriously threatens to cut support for centralised library support services – which account for a very high proportion of purchases of school library books (especially in the primary sector). Publishers whose information books have been targeted at this market are bound to feel the draught. And then there is the inexorably emerging National Curriculum and the long-anticipated details of assessment and testing. We can expect to find the new jargon creeping into publishers' catalogues – some of it no more than emperor's clothing for the old backlist titles but some of it heralding material that really has been designed with specific attainment targets in mind. We are constantly being told that the National Curriculum will raise educational standards – let us hope that it will effect a similar miracle in the world of information book publishing in the 1990s. ■

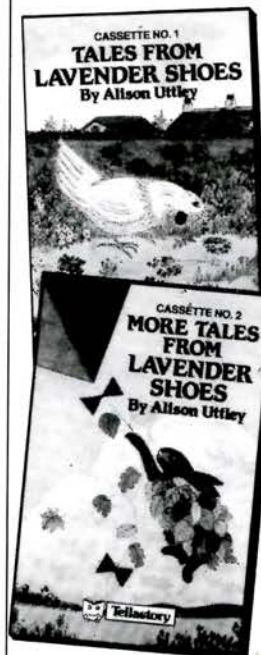
Ideas for this article were contributed by Geoff Brown, Veronica Holliday and Ted Percy – who all regularly review for us.

Eleanor von Schweinitz is Non-fiction Editor of *Books for Keeps*. She has specialised in School Librarianship and was one of the founder judges of the TES Junior Information Book Award. Currently, she's engaged on a research project which she calls 'thesaurus construction'.



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For the Staffroom Bookshelf . . .

. . . which these days means brief, unpretentious and to-the-point publications to be consulted on-the-run between National Curriculum documentation. Teacherly time won't be wasted by these three:

The Children's Bookroom



Dorothy Atkinson edits pieces by, amongst others, Marjorie Darke, Pat Avann and Gillian Klein. Contributions do vary a bit in quality, but there's a compensating breadth-of-vision in this book about books (and why they matter). Andrew Davies' drily dyspeptic account of *Writers in Schools* is worth the purchase price on its own – £9.95, from Trentham Books, 0 948080 24 8.

Traditional Tales

Compiled by Mary Steele, this Signal Bookguide is an apt reminder that a crucial ingredient in children's fiction is *story*. It reviews more than 150 current books of traditional tales published for children – an updating exercise which points back to the oral tradition from which these tales came. 'In printed form,' Mary Steele writes, 'the traditional tale is really a script for a storyteller speaking, performing, *acting* the story.' Amen to that. From The Thimble Press, 0 903355 29 9, £3.25 post free.

Children's Book Research

Another Thimble Press publication (0 903355 32 9, £3.50). Tessa Rose Chester offers an unfussy, economically written and above all *practical* guide to the techniques and sources her subject demands. Yes, it's a specialist book, but more and more teachers and students are taking up the specialism. They could do a lot worse than start here.

. . . or the School Library

Twentieth-Century Children's Writers

Here's a brief description of a children's poet instantly recognisable to all readers of this issue of **BfK**:

' . . . there is an infectiously joyful quality about his attitude to his subject matter that is likely to serve as an inspiration to all aspiring writers, whether they be young or old. The manic exuberance reminds me at times of the work of Lewis Carroll – as if the desire to crack yet another joke in the poem, to add one more crowning pun to the puns that are already there, simply cannot be resisted. There is also a use of cumulative repetition that is somewhat reminiscent of his great predecessor.'

It's Kit Wright, who else? Check the extract with Morag Styles' account in our Authorgraph. The quotation comes from the third edition of **Twentieth-Century Children's Writers** (0 912289 95 3) published by St James Press in January. At £55, it's not cheap . . . but where else would you go for a brief biography; a complete bibliography; details of other published bibliographies and location of manuscript collection; a list of critical studies on the writer; in many cases, comment by the writer on his/her own work . . . and a signed critical essay as well? Edited by Tracy Chevalier, the new edition comes in a larger page size with more than 800 writers covered – including 150 new entries. Ideally, every school should have a copy but if funds don't run to this then at least make sure your local library stocks one. It's the perfect First Word on just about every children's author writing in English since 1900 . . . and it'll take quite a few more **BfKs** before our Authorgraphs have caught up! ■

APPRENTICE TO JOURNEYMAN

Jill Bennett, a pioneer of teaching reading without a formal scheme, assesses the latest contributions to the 'real' books approach.

1989 gave us little cause for celebration in education, what with the finalisation of a number of National Curriculum subject documents including English Key Stage 1. For no matter what the content – and we can debate that endlessly – it still seems to me an insult to caring, thinking teachers (like those writing in the books under review) that the Government feels the need to impose something from above.

In the light of this it's enormously refreshing to see no less than three new publications all written by teachers who seek to further the cause of real books and the apprenticeship approach to reading. It's a cause that for some fifteen plus years has been very dear to my heart.

This Book's Brilliant: teaching reading without a reading scheme is a 28-page booklet written by a group of twelve East Sussex teachers which arose out of a part-time inset course at Brighton Polytechnic. Essentially this adopts a straightforward pragmatic approach dealing with the subject through a series of questions and answers, interspersed with line drawings by young children. The questions asked cover the main areas of concern: why real books?, the teacher's role, assessing progress, involving parents, making it work.

Being a group enterprise, the booklet has no distinctive voice. It comes across as a rather dispassionate piece of writing that's unlikely to persuade anyone unfamiliar with the real books movement and the philosophy behind it. However, I can't fault the wealth of practical advice and book-related information on offer and anyone considering starting out should find it invaluable.

Building a House of Fiction: children becoming real readers, a 42-page booklet, was written by a group of Nottinghamshire teachers who've met regularly for three years to support one another in the development of 'real reading'.

There's an introductory piece from David Allen, a member of the Advisory Service, validating the approach and making it clear that there are strong education arguments for using real books rather than schemes. The contributions from teachers are all written from their own experience. There are case studies from different kinds of schools: an urban EPA infant and nursery school, an inner-city infant school, a suburban nursery/infant school and a rural primary school. Questions most frequently asked by visiting teachers about books and the role of the teacher are answered by a headteacher; the application of the approach with second language learners is also discussed, as are 'what is meant by real reading?' and book selection. The piece about parental involvement includes examples of comments written by parents and highlights the vital importance of good two-way communication and co-operation. What's clear is that there are bound to be some difficulties: you cannot convince every parent any more than you can convince every teacher. But the subsequent questions and strategies show how one could further the cause of real parental involvement, and Jack Ousbey's final piece sets out what cognizant parents (and grandparents) can do to help children's learning.

I found Pauline Davies' piece, in which we're given a detailed glimpse of a primary teacher working with a class of reception and middle infants, probably the most telling. Both the enthusiasm and commitment of the teacher and the chil-

dren's delight shine through. Here is someone who so clearly has trusted the children and, of course, the books. I suspect that anyone seriously contemplating using real books would be persuaded to take the plunge having read this totally honest account.

Apprenticeship in Action is a more substantial volume comprising contributions from some forty teachers around the country, interspersed with comments by Liz Waterland who, in *Read With Me*, invited a sharing of 'experiences, concerns and successes in apprenticeship reading development'. Here she collects and orders a selection of responses under five main headings: schools approaches, parents, keeping records, special needs and county initiatives, and a summary.

These snapshots of schools' practice show the variety of ways teachers have responded to the challenge of apprenticeship, but the editor has placed herself in something of a dilemma for, as she admits, not all the pieces included truly further the cause. This leads to a certain lack of cohesiveness. Still, it's very evident that many children are being enabled to become readers through the real books/apprenticeship approach.

I found the record-keeping section particularly interesting with its extensive extracts from the 'comments booklets' used by the Waterbeach Community School where parents' and children's reactions to the books were vividly documented. I also like the way the common roots and interdependence of reading and writing are illustrated by the literacy flowers used by Caroline Matusiak, then at Braeburn Infants School. But the piece I feel does most for the apprenticeship cause is the final letter, some three-and-a-half pages, written by an anonymous headteacher: 'Learning About Learning to Read', the account of her journey from apprentice to journeyman. It's a road none of us will ever really complete. ■

From **This Book's Brilliant**.



This Book's Brilliant: teaching reading without a reading scheme, Brighton Polytechnic Literacy Centre (Falmer, Brighton BN1 9PH), £1.00 inc. postage

Building a House of Fiction: children becoming real readers, Nottinghamshire County Education Service (available from Janet van der Colff, 11 Mount Pleasant, Keyworth, Notts. NG12 5EP), £3.50 inc. postage

Apprenticeship in Action: teachers write about Read With Me, edited by Liz Waterland, Thimble Press (Lockwood, Station Road, Woodchester, Stroud, Glos. GL5 5EQ), 0 903355 31 0, £4.75 inc. postage

Jill Bennett is Deputy Head of a junior school in Hounslow, Middlesex.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

From the CHILDREN'S BOOK FOUNDATION

Bookfax and More

If you're after information about children's books, what's the best way to spend £28.75 – apart, that is, from three-and-a-bit subscriptions to **Books for Keeps**? Well, membership of the Children's Book Foundation looks like a good bet. For this subscription you'll receive

- * a pack of book publicity material
- * the current edition of **Children's Books of the Year**
- * a membership card and window sticker and **Bookfax** . . .

Bookfax?

This is the brainchild of Anne Sarrag. It contains more than 80 information sheets on every aspect of children's books together with a list of current authors and illustrators willing to make school visits plus a copy of the new **Bookweek Handbook**. Everything a hard-pressed teacher or librarian may require, that is, already sorted out for action . . .

Anne Sarrag, formerly of Bodley Head and Cape, says 'the idea behind **Bookfax** is simple: to collate information in a logical, user-friendly format relevant to all those working with children and books. It'll give them all the details they need from telephone numbers of bookclubs to which book won Prize X in the year dot.'

As the centre-piece of Children's Book Foundation membership, **Bookfax** looks like a welcome initiative – not least because it arrives in a smart ring binder. Just the thing to remind you that something *nice* can take that form as well as National Curriculum bumph. Contact The Children's Book Foundation at Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ (tel: 01 870 9055).

Apple Tree Award

No, not just another award for creative writing – this one is the first for children whose disability affects their means of communication. That's why entries (due at the end of the Easter term) may be in braille, in sign language, on video, taped, on computer, hand-written or whatever. The award will be given in two sections (for children 5-11 and 12-16) with a prize of £100 and a hand-carved wooden apple in each section plus up to ten commendation certificates. Judges for 1990 will be Judy Corbalis, Ruth Craft, Beverley Mathias, Chris Powlow and Christine Thomas.

Entry forms are available from the National Library for the Handicapped Child, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

IN OUR MAY ISSUE . . .

- Michael Foreman on his new 'green' Picture Book
 - Douglas Martin on Picture Book Design
 - Ralph Steadman asks 'What is a Child?'
 - Jeff Hynds' Picture Book Round-Up
 - Penny Smith on Big Books
 - Helen Oxenbury in Authorgraph
- . . . and reviews, reviews, reviews

CLAI

Who? The leprechaun in the crook of the Capital L is the giveaway. CLAI is the Children's Literature Association of Ireland, now in its third year and thriving. In December CLAI launched the first issue of its magazine, **Children's Books in Ireland**, price £1.25 but free to members. With contributions from Maeve Binchy and Paul Durcan among others, the journal already has a strong sense of its own identity judging by this lively debut. The best of luck, says **BK!** For CLAI membership details, contact Valerie Coghlan at The Library, Church of Ireland College of Education, 96 Upper Rathmines Road, Rathmines, Dublin 6, Ireland.

Irish Fiction

Since we're on the subject, it's perhaps worth mentioning that the Irish are by far the largest minority group in this country – yet are commonly overlooked when it comes to multi-cultural provision. Now, there's no excuse where children's books are concerned. From Camden Libraries comes a list of 140 titles, with annotations and reading levels, all offering positive Irish characters or sympathetic references to Ireland. And it costs only 50 pence. Send cheques or postal orders only (made payable to London Borough of Camden) to Aidan Flood, Swiss Cottage Library, 88 Avenue Road, London NW3 3HA.

The Borrowers and the Borrowed

What have these people in common?

Jean and Gareth Adamson
Joan Aiken
Rev. W Awdry
Val Biro
Judy Blume
Enid Blyton
Michael Bond
Dick Bruna
John Burningham
John Cunliffe
Roald Dahl
Terrance Dicks
René Goscinny
Hergé
Eric Hill
Shirley Hughes
Pat Hutchins
Carolyn Keene
Penelope Lively
Beatrix Potter



Well, according to Public Lending Right estimates, they were the twenty most borrowed children's authors in Britain's libraries during 1989 – a significant list since, presumably, the children were choosing without the usual constraints of pocket-money and parents. All twenty will have received a fat cheque last month – £6,000 at its heaviest scaling down to a modest fiver or so for the bulk of the 17,000 writers on the PLR register.

Full information – including the fifty most borrowed titles – from the Registrar of Public Lending Right, Bayheath House, Prince Regent Street, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland TS18 1DF (tel: 0642 604699).



Beyond the Kitchen Table . . .

Finally, here's the posh new-ish frontage, not to mention the equally posh new-ish behindage, of a certain children's book magazine. After ten years of squatting chez Hill, it's moved at last into premises of its own. The smug smiles just off-camera belong to Richard and Angie who, for the first time in a decade, have an empty flat surface adjacent to their cooker and an equally empty sitting-room adjacent to their front door. Of course, now they have to walk to work . . . ■