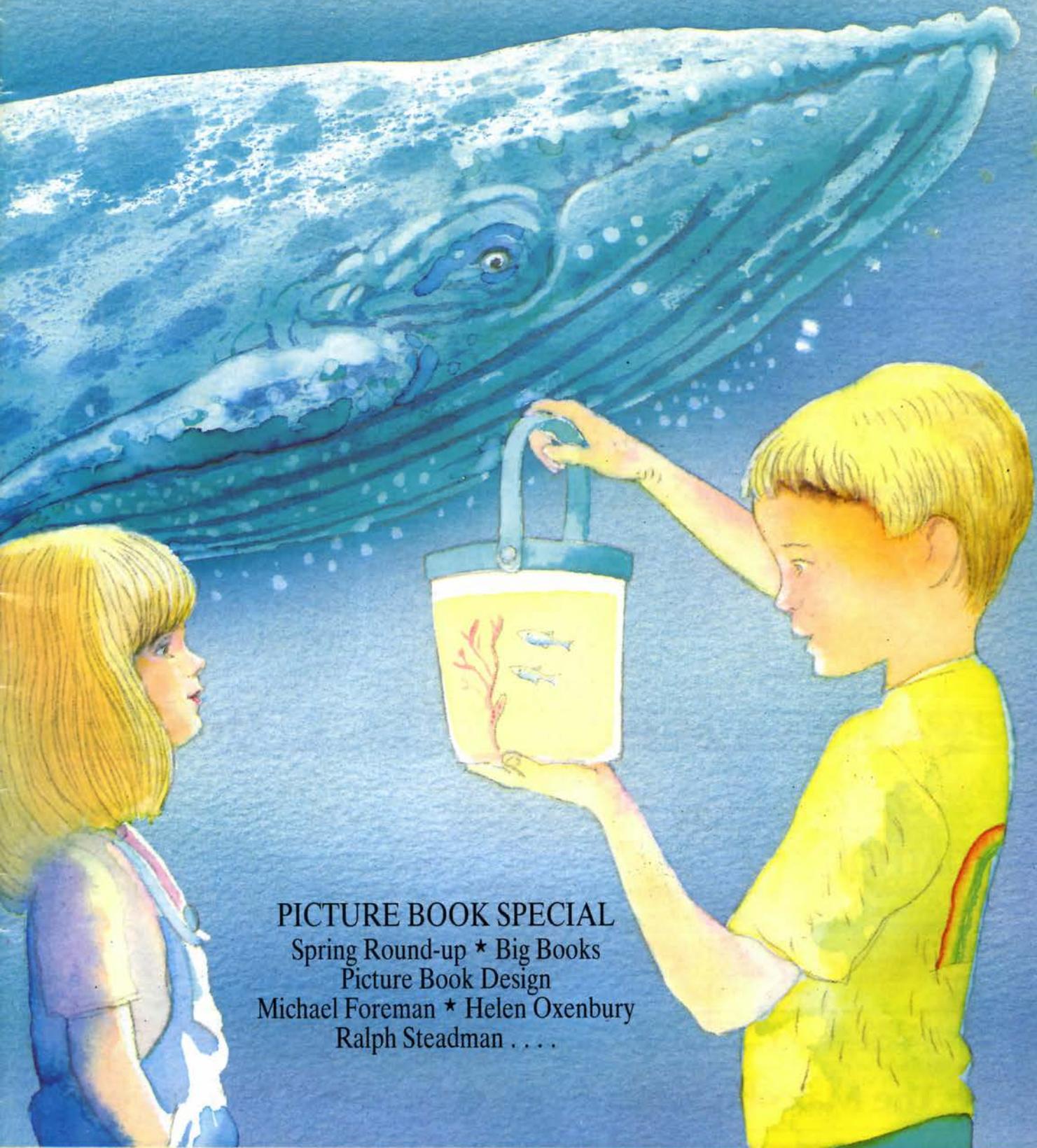


# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 1990 No. 62  
UK Price £1.55

the children's book magazine



PICTURE BOOK SPECIAL  
Spring Round-up ★ Big Books  
Picture Book Design  
Michael Foreman ★ Helen Oxenbury  
Ralph Steadman . . . .

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**READATHON 90**  
*In Schools*

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**The Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children**

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## Cover Story

The illustration on our cover is taken from **One World** by Michael Foreman, published by Andersen Press, (0 86264 289 2, £6.95). We are grateful to Andersen Press for their help in using this illustration and to Michael Foreman for the article.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

**MAY 1990 No. 62**

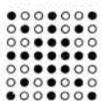
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# EDITOR'S PAGE



How does a picture book come about? Do words arrive first? Or images? Or something story-ish bursting to be explored by both? For Michael Foreman's approach, see his article on page 4. The subject arose when we were discussing his memoir **War Boy** featured in our January issue. 'What next?' I asked him. '**One World**,' he said. But it was the relief in his voice, as much as the title, that caught my attention. 'Birth of a Book', Michael's account of the slow, unpredictable progress of an idea in search of the right text and illustrations to embody it, brings a rare glimpse of the artistic process described by an insider.

## A Picture Book Conspectus

According to Douglas Martin, the modern period in picture books 'can be dated conveniently from the appearance of Brian Wildsmith's **ABC** in 1962'. Underpinning what's distinctive about contemporary publications is *technology* – the early sixties seeing the replacement of letterpress printing methods by the standard four-colour offset press. In 'A Designer Looks at Picture Books' (page 8) Douglas Martin examines the current set-up, looks back at what was replaced, and makes some informed guesses about the future. As a practitioner himself, he's also able to explore the contribution of that much underestimated figure, the Book Designer. It's a contribution few illustrators would deny. Hence the remarks of Helen Oxenbury in our Authorgraph (centre-spread) about Amelia Edwards, design director of Walker Books.

In the rest of our May issue, Penny Smith discusses Big Books on page 7. Elaine Moss and Stephanie Nettell assess this year's winners of the Mother Goose and Guardian Awards (page 31) and Ralph Steadman (on page 25) poses the question all adults working in the world of children's books must ask themselves: 'What Is a Child?' His own answer is distinctly idiosyncratic, humane and – dare I say it – ringbinder-proof.



## Forever William

The same could be said of William Brown, who was described by Richmal Crompton as her 'Frankenstein's Monster'. Does 1990 really mark the centenary of her birth – not to mention the sixty-eighth anniversary of William's first appearance, aged 11, in 1922? It never fails to amaze me that, in chronological terms, William is actually a half-dozen or so years *older* than that rather different literary image of twentieth-century childhood, Christopher Robin. Both characters were more than a match for their creators. A A Milne was never reconciled to the fame his children's books diverted from his adult work, while Richmal Crompton once wrote:

'... for many years I looked on William as "my character". He was my puppet. I pulled his strings. But gradually the tables have been turned. I am his puppet. He pulls the strings. For he is resolute, indomitable and inclined to be tyrannical... He refuses to co-operate in some plots. He makes fantastic demands on others.'

The quotation comes from Mary Cadogan's introduction to **What's Wrong with Civilizashun and other important ritings by Just-William** (Macmillan, 0 333 52656 2, £7.95) which, along with her **The William Companion** (Macmillan, 0 333 51184 0, £14.95) has just been published to celebrate

the Crompton centenary. In support, at a mere £2.99 and also from Macmillan, comes a facsimile edition of the very first William book, **Just William** (0 333 53408 5), with Thomas Henry's marvellous and inimitable illustrations. Readers still unconvinced of William's classic status should buy this as a matter of urgency – and take a look, perhaps, at **BfK 28** (September 1984) where the case for William is argued. For my money – and a William book, back in the fifties, was the first I ever spent my money on – the blessed Outlaw is as significant a figure in children's books as Alice, or Long John Silver, or Toad or Peter Pan.

## Reviewing Reviewers

Mind you, what price my opinion? Every so often at **BfK** we're sent a letter which puts us firmly in our place. This, for instance:

Dear Editor,

*In your latest issue you gave a rave review of **Super Dooper Zezebel** by Tony Ross and panned **One Bear in the Picture** by Caroline Bucknall, the exact opposite reactions to those of myself and my kids aged 4, 10, 11 and 14, having borrowed both from the library. **Zezebel** we thought was illogical in its ending while **One Bear** was satisfying, true to life and tongue in cheek – and I went out and bought a copy, thus putting my money where my mouth is. Are we out of tune with your reviewers?*

Yours sincerely,

P E Elias

To which the only appropriate answer is 'apparently'. Or 'vice versa, perhaps'. Far be it from us to suggest that **BfK** reviews, redoubtable though they are, should be treated as the Last Word on a book. That's why, however short, they're always signed and sealed with an individual a stamp as space permits. Of course, given the experience of our reviewers – all directly involved with children as well as books – we're pretty confident of their quality as a First Word. But we'd be horrified at the thought that we left no room for disagreement. So more power to the Elias elbow, say we... especially since, when we spoke to Ms Elias, she told us 'I always devour **BfK** cover-to-cover and love it when sometimes I disagree with you!'

A typically personal review can be found on pages 27-30. It's Jeff Hynds' round-up of Spring picture books. Jeff took the precaution of including first-hand consumer research in his assessment – which is not to say he saw eye-to-eye invariably with his co-opted kids. Both life and books, thank goodness, provoke a more complex and interesting response than that.

## Dept of Dropped Clangers

Finally, a word of apology. In **BfK 60** (January '90) we backed up Margaret Lowman's and Georghia Elinas-Lewis's recommendation of **Curtis, the Hip-Hop Cat** (Papermac, £2.95) with a colour-spread from the book... and then forgot to credit the author/illustrator. It was Gini Wade. Sorry Gini! ■

## Michael Foreman on the slow emergence of One World

Sometimes a book demands to be born. You wake up and there it is, slipping out like a baby dolphin, ready-formed and heading for the surface.

But others aren't so smooth. They start as a smidgeon of something with an idea beating inside. You pick it up, tickle it and breathe on it, then tuck it away, kangaroo like, until it needs attention again. Other adventures become more demanding, but all the time the smidgeon clings on, close to your heart. Incubating, tugging at you.

# The Birth of a Book

*Land of Dreams* took 14 years before it saw the light of day. My new book, *One World*, took seven years from conception to finished book, and in the beginning it was quite a different creature.

Several years ago I realised that children were much better informed and more concerned about what was happening in the world than many adults.

For the first time ever, through their access to television, children were able to see what was going on, and know about it directly, as it happened, not the edited text book version or through the filtering process of parents. And not just from excellent children's programmes, like *Newsround*, but also the regular news and current affairs programmes which are part of the home environment.

I see our young sons laying on the floor amid lego and crayons when an item on the six o'clock news suddenly catches their attention, and sometimes their imagination.

'What's that, Dad?'

'What does that mean?'

'Why are they doing that?'

I remember as a teenager in Suffolk painting 'Ban the Bomb' on the police station. The mother of a friend of mine told me I'd 'grow out of it' and that as I got older I'd understand the ways of the world.

Today's parents are different. The teenage Aldermaston marchers are today's middle-aged. The flower children and young anti-Vietnam protestors are today's parents. They don't tell their children to grow out of it. Many adults have kept faith with their youthful ideals.

It seemed to me that there was a small group of very old people making decisions on behalf of a vast number of other old people which would affect the lives of very young people for a very long time. The short term plans to comfort the demise of these old dinosaurs would put a blight on the lives of those too young for a voice and with most to lose. Now that children had access to the news, I hoped they'd find a voice.

I decided to do a book which would raise issues children could in turn raise with adults, at home and in the classroom.



During the summer of 1983 I began the first draft of a story that was eventually to become **One World**. The first draft had the working title of 'Hey! I am Me'. It contained a brief history of the world and the growth of the industrial revolution and the industrial/military complex, plus a quick tour of the planet and its journey through space – all in 32 pages. Needless to say it was confusing and didn't work.

The book was peopled by the old leaders. Only one still holds office, and she needs no introduction. Multitudes of children swarmed through the pages of the book proclaiming 'Hey! I am Me', and demanding answers to their questions about their inheritance – the world, and the threat of its destruction.

The book contained scenes of mediaeval war machines and huge industrial machines consuming vast amounts of energy. Armies of men, women and children toiled in appalling conditions, and generations of children asked 'Why?'

They were told, 'Sshsh! It's always done that way. Wait till you're grown up. You'll understand.'

I did many versions over the next four or five years but just couldn't get the balance right. It was either too didactic and angry, or too diffuse and the point was lost. There were too many points, I was hitting out in all directions. Publishers ducked. It contained everything I wanted to say, but was too difficult to grasp. All spouts and no handle.

Then came the Reykjavik Summit. A world leader did what General Jodhpur had done in my first book, **The General** (published 1961). He turned his back on the arms race. The other leaders (who'd been leaning on him) had to step back or fall over. They had to step back and re-think. The bogie man wanted to boogie.

History went into overdrive. Parts of the book that had given me such problems were suddenly out of date.

Sometimes a book comes out ahead of its time. It comes out and nothing much happens. The already converted notice, and everybody else ignores it. Then something happens in the world which prompts similar books and forms a minor genre in which the earlier book can find a place.

While visiting a school in Germany earlier this year, I was told that **Dinosaurs and all that Rubbish** is more important now than when it was first published in 1972. Wrong. It just gets more attention now.

And much of that additional attention came after Chernobyl.

At 1pm on the day of Chernobyl, I brought the family in from the garden. I didn't fancy eating our picnic while the clouds went over.

At 3pm three-year-old Ben said 'Let's play. Daddy you be the bad cloud and I'll be the picnic.' During the course of an afternoon a catastrophe had become part of a child's imaginative play.

The threat from the arms race faded beside the accelerating spread of pollution. Even the old leaders made green noises. But only noises.

I started again, and this time I determined to keep the book simple.

I always write the first draft of a story in whichever notebook I'm carrying around at the time. When travelling I never take anything to read to fill the long hours of enforced idleness. Train journeys are great for daydreaming. Delayed flights are good times for people-watching, and the long limbo hours of night flight, when all you love are a thousand miles away, and you feel weightless, stateless and probably legless after a few airline drinks, are rare opportunities for the brain to float, unfettered and de-ranged, into the soup of ideas.

Anyone with a young family will know how rare such moments of real self-indulgence are.

When I'm back home and I feel the story is getting somewhere, I make a little dummy book of folded paper, usually 32 pages in length. I write the story through the pages to see how well it fits, leaving space for pictures, and seeing where the breaks come in the text.

When the text is broken up by the act of page turning it reads differently. Turning the page becomes an extra bit of punctuation. Writing several sentences on a page is like several quick cuts in a movie. Turning the page acts as a kind of dissolve. Like the end of a stanza in a poem. So I find it necessary to work and re-work the idea through a series of blank books rather than sheets of flat paper.

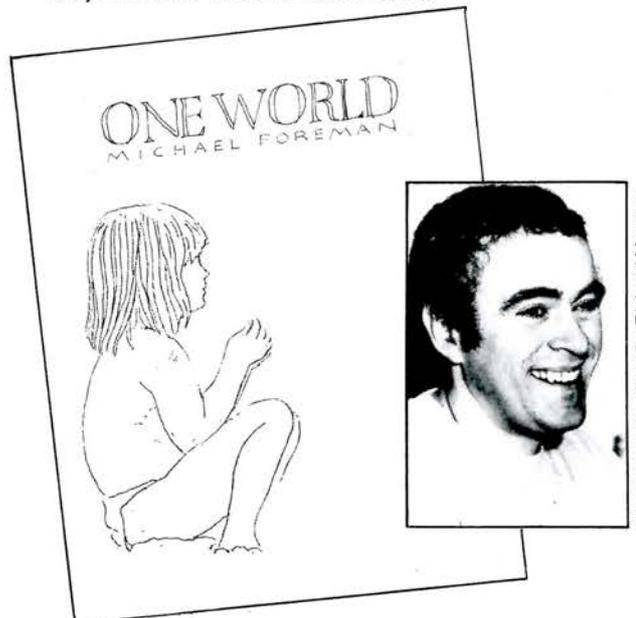
Of course, I'm visualising the pictures all the time and deciding how much of the idea can be told visually.

At this point I know if it's going to work smoothly or become a case for lengthy incubation. However, even if I think it works well, I'm always in the middle of another book which has to be finished first. So there's always a delay, maybe of months, before I can begin pictures for the new idea. This enforced delay gives time to re-think, and often when I pick up the idea again I find it has lost something – maybe even its life.

So then the initial idea, the spark, lies buried in its notebook. Another spark, another journey, might make a connection, like Frankenstein's monster and the lightning, and the idea begins to twitch again.

This time it wasn't lightning, but a Cornish beach. During the summer of 1989 my sons spent a lot of time exploring rock pools. Suddenly, there it was. A rock pool. A microcosm of the world. Its beauty, its life and its fragility. The simple approach.

'Hey! I am Me' became **One World**.



**One World** with one child and one small part of the planet. Several versions later I realised it needed a touch of dialogue and introduced a second child.

Of course, there are echoes of the wider world, and beyond. I wanted to keep a sense of the enormity of space and time, and the right of every living thing to its own little bit of that space and time.

It's not the book I set out to write seven years ago, but it's close to what I wanted to say! ■

**One World** is published by Andersen Press, 0 86264 289 2, £6.95.

# *New Picture Books from Blackie*

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Joy Fitzsimmons

A humorous rhyming tale about Maude, the farm hen, who is constantly misplacing her eggs.

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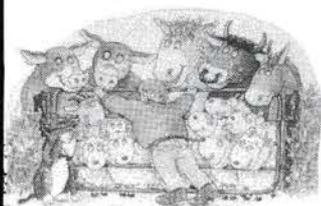


## **RAVI AT THE FUN-FAIR**

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Sonia Devons

Illustrated by Shoo Rayner

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## **THE AGE OF ACORNS**

Robert Ingpen

Beautiful illustrations depict the adventures of a toy bear who is left alone and forgotten in the garden after dark.

0 216 93009 X £6.95 May



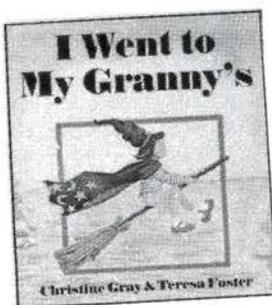
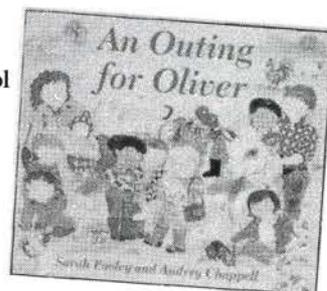
## **AN OUTING FOR OLIVER**

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**THE HAT** 0 216 92969 5

**I WENT TO MY GRANNY'S** 0 216 92970 9

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Illustrated by Teresa Foster

Two delightful picture books with humorous rhyming texts, about mum who orders a hat and receives some very surprising packages, and a young witch who visits her granny for a very stange meal!

£4.95 June



## **SIMON BUILDS A ROAD**

Laurence Pringle

Illustrated by Leslie Holt Morrill

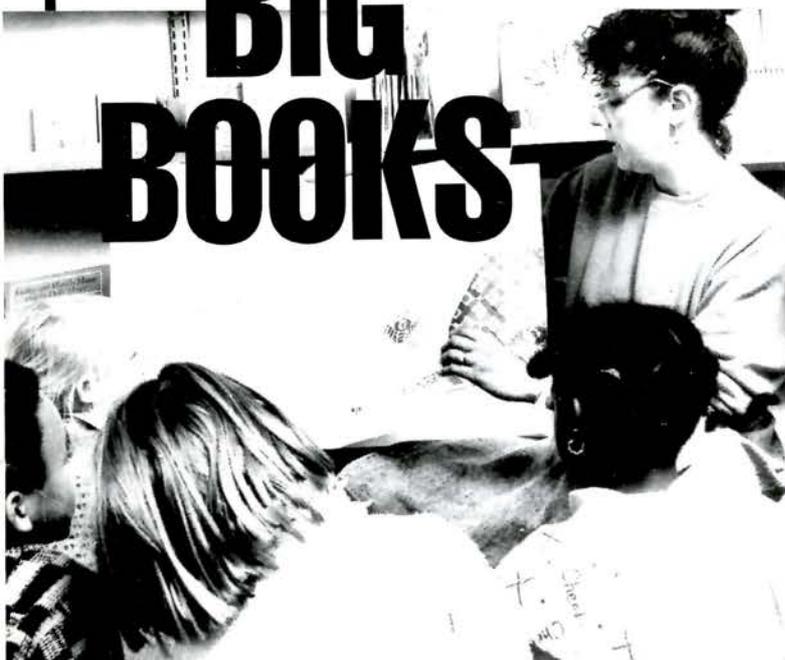
Simon's world of make-believe comes alive when his toy trucks are transformed into full-size machines!

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# BIG BOOKS



## Penny Smith takes a step back to look at why, how and which . . .

Big books range in size from 30 x 36 cms to 50 x 36 cms. The text and illustrations in these books have been significantly enlarged so that both can be fully appreciated by children sitting at a distance. As a result the children can experience the same close involvement they enjoy with normal format books – indeed the large size of the book and its impact on young children has the effect of ‘sucking’ them into the story in a way that could be paralleled with an adult getting lost in a film on the big screen.

### Using a Big Book

Before each new big book is read, discussion with the children can centre around the title, possible storyline and other books written by the same author or on similar themes or topics. During a first reading the teacher may ask the group to look at the illustrations as cues to the storyline or to predict, from their own previous experience or knowledge of books, how the text might develop. Hence the sessions are not only a pleasurable way of sharing books with children, but offer the teacher a means of demonstrating some of the strategies children can draw upon in their independent reading.

The first reading of a book may be by the teacher, but afterwards, when the book is re-read, the children can readily join in with repetitive phrases or key words.

The greatest advantage of the big book over its conventional-sized counterpart is that once the text is familiar to the children it provides the teacher with a way of discussing publicly how we go about working with print and inducing the children to participate in the problem-solving process.

By pointing carefully to the text as s/he reads, the teacher demonstrates the left to right orientation of the print and talks naturally about the spaces between words and punctuation. The children can be asked to pick familiar words or phrases and shown how to use a variety of strategies for working out unfamiliar words, e.g. re-reading, reading on or looking at the initial letter.

Big books also present a very efficient way of making a range of texts known to children which later they can tackle independently. Most of the publishers producing big book

material offer books in a small format for individual reading sessions, either at home or at school, together with tapes which the children not only enjoy listening to but which consolidate their knowledge of the text.

### Big Book Options

Initially the ‘Storychest’ range of big books (from Arnold Wheaton) was one of the few sources of such material. A number of these are very popular with children, but they all follow a similar format and style. Today there are more and more publishers producing enlarged texts reflecting greater variety in content, style and genre. Worthy of special attention are ‘Storytime Giants’ (from Oliver and Boyd) and ‘Tadpole Books’ (from Kingscourt Publishing Ltd).

‘Storytime Giants’ are enlarged versions of already established and well-loved picture books with 12 titles available in the present series including **Each Peach Pear Plum** by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, **Alex’s Bed** by Mary Dickinson and **The Lighthousekeeper’s Lunch** by Ronda and David Armitage. The stories are, of course, excellent, well-written and beautifully illustrated since they are by some of the most prominent authors/illustrators currently working in the field of children’s books. They’re of a significantly higher quality than some of the other big book materials which have their origins in a theory about ‘shared reading’ rather than a tried and tested children’s picture book.

The print in some of these enlarged format books is still too small (e.g. **The Big Sneeze** by Ruth Brown) or too dense (e.g. **The Bossing of Josie** by Ronda and David Armitage) for whole class reading and this is something the publishers should consider when reprinting. In the meantime they’re still valuable for four or five children to pore over as a group. Particular favourites with most children are **Oscar Got the Blame** by Tony Ross and the Ahlberg’s **Each Peach Pear Plum**. But, competitively priced at between £7 and £8, all are worth their place in the classroom.

### Non-Fiction Big Books

The more expensive ‘Tadpole Books’ now offer the widest range of big book material including stories, traditional tales, poems, rhymes (traditional and modern) and, perhaps of most interest, non-fiction big books. The non-fiction books are informative, clearly laid out under headings and illustrated with high-quality colour photographs. Topics covered include **The Life of a Duck** by Josephine Croser, **Tadpole Diary** by David Drew and **A Checkup with the Doctor** by Katherine A Smith. As well as providing a starting point for discussion and further study by the children, these books can be used by the teacher to demonstrate the use of a contents page, index and glossary of terms. Tapes of non-fiction texts, although not presently available, would also be useful in helping children to read the books independently and aid their retrieval of information – publishers, please note!

As an invaluable aid for the teacher of beginning readers, **BIG BOOKS ARE HERE TO STAY. I**

Penny Smith is a Lecturer in Language at Thames Polytechnic, London.

### Details of the books mentioned

‘Storytime Giants’, Oliver & Boyd:

**Each Peach Pear Plum**,  
0 05 004406 0, £7.50

**The Lighthouse Keeper’s Lunch**, 0 05 004387 0, £7.50

**The Bossing of Josie**,  
0 05 004388 9, £7.50

**Alex’s Bed**, 0 05 004389 7,  
£7.50

**Oscar Got the Blame**,  
0 05 004405 2, £6.95

Further details from Oliver & Boyd, Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex CM20 2JE.

‘Tadpole Books’, Kingscourt Publishing Ltd:

**The Life of a Duck**,  
0 947212 31 0, £13.95

**Tadpole Diary**, 0 454 01461 9,  
£14.95

**A Checkup with the Doctor**,  
0 947212 29 9, £13.95

Catalogue available from Tadpole Books, London House, 271-273 King Street, Hammersmith, London W6 9LZ.

# A Designe Picture

**Douglas Martin** reflects on the past, present

Prior to the beginning of the modern period (which can be dated conveniently from the appearance of Brian Wildsmith's *ABC* in 1962), the work of illustrators was so highly individualistic it was difficult to think of picture books as making up a distinct genre at all. Only a handful of titles was available when compared to today's plenty. The diversity of format and style was further emphasised by the variety of techniques in which artists were encouraged to produce their own separated drawings for the number of colours available and the printing process in use. This represented a great economy for printer and publisher, but was laborious and often restricting for the illustrator.

*Tales from the Arabian Nights*, illustrated by Brian Wildsmith (Oxford University Press 1961, reproduced by courtesy of Brian Wildsmith).

## New Technology

Once it would not have been exceptional for an artist, dissatisfied with the printed effect in ten colours, to draw for an eleventh plate! Much of the attractive, almost folk-art quality of early children's books results from the artists' direct involvement with the intricacies of imperfect processes. Some of the equipment in book printing houses and binderies had survived from Victorian times into the early 1960s, but, with the scrapping of the formerly dominant letterpress printing method, out went all those ingenious machines for adding optional extras and finishing touches, in favour of the standard four-colour offset press and automated binding line. The ensuing rationalisation affected books of all kinds, but a recognisable formula soon emerged for picture books, or 'flats' as they're called in the trade.



# r looks at Books

and future of what the book trade calls 'flats'.

The panache of early Wildsmith was exactly right for some of the early trials, for he worked as a painter, and his artwork was originally sent to printers specialising in fine art reproduction to establish what standards could be expected in terms of fidelity to colour, texture and detail. Of course photographic colour separation was nothing new, but in the children's book field it had rarely reached the heights of Wildsmith's plates for *Tales from the Arabian Nights* (Oxford, 1961).

## The Rise of the Co-edition

It soon became clear that offset lithography was the future path for colour printing, and that it would become progressively cheaper as technology improved and demand increased. The international co-edition was born at this time out of a need to share the high colour origination costs between as many language editions as could be mustered. The notion of shopping round the globe for the cheapest colour printing also came about and remains an equally burning issue today – where the artist's freedom to create fresh effects often results from the revival of labour-intensive operations and obsolescent processes in places as diverse as Taiwan, Malta or Colombia.

The first generation of illustrators to enter this new field had the pick of the subject matter, and there are still some excellent alphabet and counting books, and collections of fables and rhymes, reprinting and selling steadily after almost twenty-five years. Later, in order to make the product acceptable in as many countries and languages as possible, editorial and pictorial standards levelled. This led to the bland suppression of local detail and national character. After an initially high level of creativity, some mediocre and commercially motivated exploitation was only to be expected as publishers deliberately used artists with less talent to keep pace with rapidly rising publishing output. Just a few years ago it was beginning to be felt that a limit to expansion had been

reached and that there was a real risk of over-production, but shorter print runs and lower shelf life are realities which have enabled far more titles to see the light of day recently, and for the best of them to reprint frequently.

Moreover, every three years or so each age group has effectively renewed itself. In any case the age range formerly assumed for the picture book seems to have been an unduly narrow and hypothetical one. It now seems that this could be developed virtually without limits from the cradle to the geriatric ward, with such books as Raymond Briggs' *Snowman* at one end of the spectrum and the same author's *When the Wind Blows* at the other.

## Back to the Future . . .

The cross-fertilisation of picture book and comic strip approaches has added to this potential for growth, and the phenomenal success of the *bande dessinée* (initially cult books for adults, notably *Asterix*) demonstrates the versatility of this medium in spanning gaps in readership and interest ages. So-called novelty books have never been long out of favour or supply. It's been shown that cut-out and pop-up books can yield results of lasting worth in the hands of such dissimilar artists as Faith Jacques and Jan Pieńkowski. The re-establishment of metallic printing and blocking techniques and also those which have come to be known under the specialised heading of 'paper engineering' have been intriguing features of the past decade, and the process of rescuing forgotten skills is far from over.

Look for instance at the historical and collecting attention that has been focused on Victorian and Edwardian gift book bindings and the dozens of stages in their elaborate manufacture. It would surely be possible to restore some of the more effective of these operations so that designers could have scope, not by any means to copy the past, but to produce effects in contemporary terms which would create an equivalent sense of wonder. All this is more than mere gimmickry. To the child the book is an object or a toy. At its best it has always contained surprises of these kinds, and designers may have become too dogmatic in their routine advocacy of sans-serif and similar typefaces, and too blinkered in going along with unadventurous binding materials and styles.



Perfectionism behind the scenes – the first four ideas are eminently attractive and marketable, but only the final version has that extra originality which comes after all the more obvious solutions have been eliminated. (Roughs for the jacket to the Ahlbergs' *Starting School*, Viking Kestrel 1988, reproduced by courtesy of Janet Ahlberg.)



The miniature dummy in which the layout of words and pictures has been worked out and established in pencil. Although the finished drawings in colour have yet to be started, there are unlikely to be any major changes from now onwards. (Janet and Allan Ahlberg, *The Baby's Catalogue*, Kestrel 1982.)

## Holography and After

Holography is on the horizon for book production, and in the 1990s may be one of the more over-exploited resources for the mass paperback cover – just as metallic foil blocking serves at present. But this should not preclude its imaginative use in the design of books for children. It's at an interesting remove from photography (which has had surprisingly little to contribute to children's fiction), and I'm convinced that it will be combined with illustrative styles in all sorts of imaginative ways. It's now simply a question of who gets there first and at the right artistic level.

So prospects and resources for the future of the picture book are set fair, and I would suggest that the technical means of production will become more, not less, responsive – and that's leaving aside the question of computer-aided illustration which will no doubt have its own contribution to make.

## Input from the Designer

I've left until last the question of what the designer can bring to the making of a picture book. Often little more than a critical eye and an ability to judge the precise style, weight and placement for the text: but also at rare times an awareness of the alchemy of the interaction between images and words. This is an immensely absorbing area, where the picture book originator can be helped by an editor or a designer who's sensitive to both.

The choice of size and design of typeface is critical to a picture book's success, and this is generally governed by a sensitive reaction to three common sense factors:

- 1) the character of the artwork
- 2) the format of the book
- 3) the number of words in a line or on the page

No one can legislate or prescribe beyond that – even the age of the readership, be it infant or adult, can seldom be conclusively established. This isn't always understood within the structure of the publishing world itself, where there is a curious assumption that the child is perpetually in the state of learning to read. This may be true for about 5% of childhood's span, but scarcely for more on average, and my growing conviction is that the child can cope with all sorts of possibilities in the right setting – from the smallest size of type on a cereal packet to the largest in the supermarket display – just as soon as the journey towards reading proficiency has begun.

Admittedly we do not know *which* 5% is currently and individually involved. It may be prudent to allow that certain, if unspecified, damage could occur at any stage in acquiring reading skills, but experienced designers will ascribe these dangers mostly to bad spacing and arrangement of type rather than to the features which educationists will latch onto, such as nominal type-size or preferred forms of the letters 'a' and 'g'.

## How will the Book be Read?

Of greater interest to the designer is the reading position and focal length likely to be adopted. Insufficient research seems to have gone into this topic. Simply: if we make a volume such and such a size, will this encourage the book to be held with one or both hands or to continue to be read from its place on the floor, bed or table? It seems to me that Janet and Allan Ahlberg or Anthony Browne invite a quite different focal distance from that posed by, say, Brian Wildsmith or Quentin Blake. This may be just a matter of physical make-up, the artists' as well as the readers', but it's the sort of consideration from which the designer must set out in judging the size and weight of type. The concentration and time duration demanded by any illustration is a similar issue that can't be measured objectively, but nevertheless it's one on which most people must have a fair idea in the case of specific works of art. This too can be important to designers in judging the pace of text assimilation in relation to the pictures which run in parallel. If that sounds like the abstruse side of book design, then think of it all as a process of discerning and making a trail to be followed. The author/illustrator has accomplished nearly all of the important work – it only

remains for the designer to inspect and, where necessary, add signposts and other features which make communication viable.

## The Picture Book Process

The ways in which picture books come about and how the originators present new ideas to their publishers is a fascinating study in itself. Usually there's a preliminary rough or story-board which communicates all the editor and designer need to know in order to assess the market and the strategy for a given title. This will be followed through methodically in preparing the finished drawing for each spread of facing pages, unless of course there's a basis for a serious critique of concept or construction. The late Charles Keeping used to submit each forthcoming title as a concertina fold that could be opened the length of the room to show the impact and planned variety in colour and progression. Of course the map could then be folded down again so that the cumulative effect of turning the pages could be assessed. This sense of almost cinematographic flow is all-important, but comes more easily to some illustrators than to others.

Again, some artists can manage their words brilliantly, others need to have them managed for them. At the lunatic extreme, I recall working with one editor who felt so strongly about the visual/verbal divide that he was in the habit of commissioning picture book texts of 150 words or so from eminent writers at vast expense in order that we could then rack our brains deciding whom to persuade to illustrate them! The whole situation has changed greatly over the years so that the craft of picture book making is now well understood. Alas, though, the risk which follows from such a complacent admission is that routines and formulas can emerge which tend to suppress idiosyncrasy and originality. Kathleen Hale's *Orlando* (recently reissued), for example, is allowed to ramble on in a way that would attract immediate editorial attention today; but as a child I loved this uncondescending verbiage: there was something there for reading to unlock.

## Coming Full Circle

Years of involvement in the design of children's books have taught me to be wary of most adult views on the kinds of illustrations and typefaces which are supposed in general to be suitable for children – particularly those expressed in training colleges for artists, teachers and librarians. For the practising designer all decisions must be taken in the light of the unique circumstances which surround each individual job. No golden or prescriptive rules can be applied. The approach to book design for adults differs from that for children only in that designers and illustrators share a visual outlook with the child. Sadly, this is one which most adults suppress. It reasserts itself again in parenthood. The pattern for modern parents is that they grew up used to looking and being read to, but lost interest in the counterpoint of words and pictures soon after they could read independently. Then, after a gap of two decades or so, they return to the children's library to recognise many an old favourite as well as many a colourful new creation. This would have been unthinkable in former times. ■

**Douglas Martin** is a practising freelance book designer. He is also the author of *The Telling Line: Essays on Fifteen Contemporary Book Illustrators*, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 333 0, £35.00 and *An Outline of Book Design*, Blueprint Publishing with the Publishers Association, 0 948905 40 9, £19.95.

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- ABC**, Brian Wildsmith, OUP, 0 19 272122 4, £3.95  
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**When the Wind Blows**, Raymond Briggs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10721 0, £5.95; Penguin, 0 14 00.9419 9, £3.95 pbk  
**Asterix** titles published by Hodder & Stoughton in hardback and by Knight Books in paperback.  
**Orlando the Marmalade Cat Keeps a Dog**, Kathleen Hale, Frederick Warne, 0 7232 3650 X, £9.99  
**Orlando the Marmalade Cat: A Camping Holiday**, Kathleen Hale, Frederick Warne, 0 7232 3648 8, £9.99

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## REVIEWS

## Nursery/Infant

**Little Miss Muffet**

Ian Beck, Oxford, 0 19 272215 8,  
£2.50

Superb illustration and a clever storyline  
combine to give us this delightfully  
tantalizing book. It's guaranteed to have  
every young child leaping up and down in  
anticipation convinced that this time it really  
will be the spider who'll creep up on Miss  
Muffet and not one of the host of other  
bizarre characters who decide to drop in. JS

**The Cake That Mack Ate**

Rose Robart, ill. Maryann  
Kovalski, Picture Puffin,  
0 14 050.687 X, £2.50

A variation on **The House That Jack Built**,  
climaxing to a grand finale when we discover  
just who Mack is! This was a great success,  
partly because of the cumulative text, which  
works well for both those listening and  
novice readers, but also because of the jolly  
illustrations which match and reinforce the  
bouncy rhythm. JS

**Who's Afraid of the  
Ghost Train?**

Frank Rodgers, Picture Puffin,  
0 14 050.850 3, £2.50

Using humour to help children come to  
terms with their irrational fears of household  
monsters, such as the loo and the vacuum  
cleaner, Frank Rodgers provides us with a  
valuable addition to the class collection.  
Robert's Grandpa gives him a wonderful  
strategy - to imagine the monsters as babies  
dressed in nappies. Having previously  
always been the butt of his friends' jokes,  
Robert, to their amazement, is the only one  
of the gang who remains unmoved in the  
ghost train! JS

**Jamaica's Find**

Juanita Havill, ill. Anne Sibley  
O'Brien, Little Mammoth,  
0 7497 0190 0, £2.50

Jamaica visits the park on her way home and  
finds a red hat, which she hands to the  
park-keeper, and a love-worn stuffed dog  
which she takes home. Her family's  
reactions make her realise what she knows  
inside herself - that she should have handed  
the dog in too. Next day she takes the dog  
back to the park-keeper and makes another  
find - Kristin, 'the girl who belongs to that  
stuffed dog'.

The artist's illustrations are as eloquent as  
the author's sensitive text, reflecting the  
emotions and feelings of the characters and  
thus extending this highly moral story. JB

**Andrew's First Flight**

David McPhail, Picture Puffin,  
0 14 050.867 8, £2.50

It's good to have a book about something

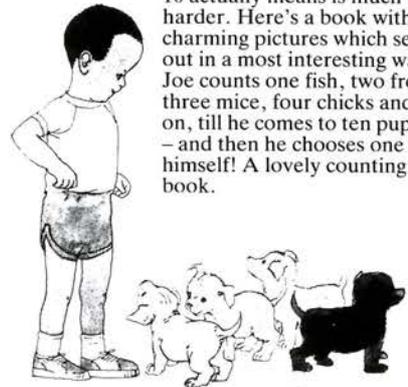
which might worry or frighten children.  
Here Andrew takes an air-trip to see his  
grandmother and has a wonderful time.

I think this book is intended for small  
children, so I wish Andrew had had the  
company of another adult, rather than a big,  
brown bear. Yes, the bear is fun and rather  
endearing, but young children may find fact  
and fantasy difficult to untangle. If the book  
is intended to reassure, the bear may get in  
the way of this being possible. MS

**Joe Can Count**

Jan Ormerod, Walker,  
0 7445 1343 X, £2.50

Learning to count to 10 is an  
achievement, but learning  
what each number from 1 to  
10 actually means is much  
harder. Here's a book with  
charming pictures which sets it  
out in a most interesting way.  
Joe counts one fish, two frogs,  
three mice, four chicks and so  
on, till he comes to ten puppies  
- and then he chooses one for  
himself! A lovely counting  
book. MS

**Moon Jump**

Mustapha Matura, ill. Jane Gifford,  
Little Mammoth, 0 7497 0070 X,  
£2.50

Inspired by a real boy (the author's son) this  
story is fun to read. It's all about a boy who  
*jumps* everywhere - into the bath, into his  
trousers, into his shoes, all over the house in  
fact - and then one night he jumps all the  
way to the moon. After meeting a  
moon-man, more jumping on the moon and  
a tea-party, he jumps home - straight into  
his parents' bed and then to his own. A  
joyful book with a safe and happy  
ending. MS

**The Big Red Bus Ride**

Peter Curry, Picture Lions,  
0 00 662895 8, £2.50

Bright colours and simple pictures help tell  
the story of the big red bus ride! From  
half-past-eight on the clock at the start to  
nine o'clock at the finish the bus goes  
through the village collecting people all the  
way.

A pleasant read-aloud for very young ones  
and a good first-read for those just mastering  
the art of reading. Definitely recommended. MS

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.

**Storytime**

Marjorie Newman and Christine Wright, Scripture Union, 0 86201 606 1, £2.50

This is a collection of Bible stories for reading aloud to children under six. They're well written and good to read.

However, I personally would hesitate to use all of these with children under six. It's hard to convey to very young children

a notion of God, a loving father, when they're in the process of coming to terms with their own family and surroundings. Surely to be loved and cared for at home is enough. Bible stories and the understanding of time and Deity can come later when the richness of the stories can be more appreciated and enjoyed.

MS

**Come to Town**

0 7497 0158 7

**In Our House**

0 7497 0157 9

Anne Rockwell, Little Mammoth, £2.50 each

Colourful, clear and direct pictures show us what the bears do every day. In **Come to Town** they're shown at school, in the supermarket, at the office and in the library.

Similarly in **In Our House** the bear family are shown doing lots of different things in their own home.

Parallels are easily drawn with humans, and children are given information and additional vocabulary with plenty to talk about. With an adult in attendance, these two could act as a very first dictionary!

MS

# Infant/Junior

## The Oddjob Man and the Thousand Mile Boots

Jean Kenward, ill. Val Biro, Oxford, 0 19 272212 3, £2.95

A light, amusing yarn about a village oddjob man who decides to explore the world, but wants to be home in time to sleep in his own bed.

Disaster strikes, however, when he wakes from his lunchtime nap in the jungle to find the magic boots he borrowed from the village giant have vanished. Biro's quirky illustrations really make the book – the children were, typically, most fascinated by the giant's toe nail clippings that were as big as bicycle mudguards!

JS

## The King of Kennelwick Castle

Colin West, ill. Anne Dalton, Walker, 0 7445 1414 2, £2.50



Anne Dalton's illustrations are superb – reminiscent of Greenaway and perfectly matched to the genre of cumulative story. The layout of the text fairly races along and sends the reader galloping through a tongue-twisting tale which I'd defy any adult to read faultlessly – especially after teaching all day! It causes great hilarity and is bound to be frequently demanded by my sadistic class.

JS

## The Smelly Book

Babette Cole, Picture Lions, 0 00 663330 7, £2.50

Brilliant, zany and totally

subversive. Babette Cole captures the grotesquely ghastly things that Infants and Lower Juniors find most appealing. **The Smelly Book** ranges from a dedication to the 'smelliest dog in the world', through the gunge at the bottom of dustbins to letting off stinkbombs in class. Tremendously popular and a real winner when trying to woo reluctant readers.

JS

## Animal Characters

Jean Christian Knaff, Faber, 0 571 14234 6, £3.50

An alphabet book aimed as much at adults as children. Children either loved it or hated it and it warrants a place on the classroom shelves even if only because it causes children to argue and defend their views. Knaff is an original and highly talented artist and the rugged treatment of the alphabet book format matched with sophisticated humour make it refreshingly different and challenging to all readers.

JS

## Fancy Nancy in Disguise

Ruth Craft, ill. Nicola Smee, Young Lions, 0 00 673610 6, £1.99



Fancy Nancy, that lively and resourceful young lady, has been enjoyed by our children ever since the first book came out. This set of stories has been in hardback for some time, but is now, at last, in paperback. They're ideal for reading aloud or for young fluent readers and are especially popular with girls. Realistic, but entertaining situations, together with likeable lively characters, notably Nancy herself, make these musts for children around six and seven.

LW

## The Little Peacock's Gift

Cherry Denman, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52548 0, £2.50

A very decorative version of a Chinese folk tale about an unselfish little peacock who is rewarded by the Peacock Fairy for his generosity. It's based around the Chinese Spring festival and, apart from the rather odd impression it gives that Spring follows Summer in China, is very charming.

There are not enough stories from other countries in mainstream book lists (as opposed to specialist or education lists) and this is well worth having both for its artistic merit and its message which is conveyed in a lively and entertaining way.

LW

## Barnabas Walks

William Mayne, ill. Barbara Firth, Walker, 0 7445 1352 9, £2.50

This title requires a very high level of reading experience, not because it's full of long words, but because its language is complex and sophisticated.

Written in the present tense, it tells of a school guinea pig who is left behind by 'the scholars' at holiday time and of the perils he encounters as a result. I didn't find it easy to read; it's very idiosyncratic, with an odd, stilted style which needs an ability to read between the lines to understand the action. I liked it, but wish Walker hadn't made it look like their easy reading books. Both text and illustrations deserve to be independent of a format which gives quite the wrong impression of the kind of book it is.

LW

## Going Out with Hatty

Jenny Koralek, Mammoth, 0 7497 0072 6, £1.99

Cheerful, lively stories about a little girl called Laurie Lee and her baby sister, Hatty Star. They're believably unbelievable, written in a natural style and good for reading aloud or for fairly independent readers. Jenny Koralek has a good ear for dialogue without resorting to

slang and I enjoyed the gently described situations.

LW

## Albertine, Goose Queen

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Shoo Rayner, Young Lions, 0 00 673510 X, £1.99



Another in the jokey, comic book style 'Jets' series. With lots of drawings, speech bubbles, split text and mix of hand lettering and print, these are ideal for older reluctant readers, since they look very 'user friendly'. This is an enjoyable story in which Albertine persuades the wicked fox to spare her goslings by her bravery in standing up to him and she then saves *him* from the hounds. Indeed 'a Queen among geese!' Good fun.

LW

## Over the Moon and Far Away

Margaret Nash, Puffin, 0 14 03.2716 9, £1.99

An interesting story about a strange girl who comes to school for a short time and changes everyone's life until one day she disappears. Elements of the supernatural, of strange crystals and communication powers are mixed with a conservation theme . . . all of which sounds rather fey. The story manages to avoid this and is quite convincing. Worth reading.

LW

## The Magic Camera

Adèle Geras, Young Corgi, 0 552 52559 6, £1.99

On a train journey to her relatives, Kaye finds a peculiar



readers, without the stamina for a full-length novel. Generally, the print is largish and the text well split with line drawings and with chapter divisions. As a genre it's relentlessly jokey, full of slang, exclamation marks and Capital Letters and with lots of Authors' Asides in brackets. Children often enjoy them very much and they certainly encourage confidence. The stories can be very one-note, however, and these are nothing special of their kind.

The first is about an elderly vampire who settles for weekly black pudding when he realises he's too decrepit to catch the heroine. The second is about a lonely little boy who has a magician for an uncle and the third is one of the currently proliferating butch-princess-doesn't-marry-prince stories.

They'd make popular, cheap material for the class library, but I'd hope that a teacher was careful to offer some quality reading as well. **LW**

**Anastasia Morningstar**  
Hazel Hutchins, ill. Julie Tennent, Puffin,  
0 14 03.4025 4, £1.99

Our heroine is an elfin sorceress, disguised as a shop assistant, whose secret is discovered by two junior high school kids when they see her turning the local job into a frog. Sarah and Ben investigate and Anastasia draws them into a drama of enchanting epiphanies. The climax is the liberation of a crystal butterfly, symbolic of the magic repressed in everyday life.



Don't dismiss this one as New Age hokum. I found it an intriguing and deftly written book, whose feyness is tempered by some well-observed realism. Highly recommended for independent readers, and for reading aloud to others. **GH**

**Mrs Circumference**  
Catherine Storr, ill. Jill Bennett, Deutsch,  
0 233 98455 0, £2.95

A ballad in comical doggerel about the bulky heroine's remorseless expansion, and

the way it was checked by a nightmare ride on the Circle Line. I enjoyed the shifting rhythms of this book, but it would probably be a good idea to assess the sensitivities of your stouter readers before offering it for general consumption. **GH**

**Wagstaffe the Wind-Up Boy**  
Jan Needle, ill. Roy Bentley, Lions,  
0 00 672976 2, £2.50

A smelly, malicious snotgobbler, deserted in disgust by his repellent parents, is squashed by a truck on the M62, then resurrected with clockwork viscera by a maverick surgeon who allows the nurses to take the mangled umbles home for stew. Bereft of the heart he was born with, Wagstaffe discovers finer feelings when he hears of the plight his mum and dad are in. This book is as repulsive as it sounds, and the most entertaining read I've had in weeks. The nasty bits might appeal to otherwise reluctant readers, but don't let their parents catch you recommending it. **GH**

**Matilda**  
Roald Dahl, ill. Quentin Blake, Puffin,  
0 14 03.2759 2, £3.50

Sneered and snarled at by her philistine family, humiliated and enraged by a sadistic headmistress, the gentle book-loving Matilda wreaks a vengeance which evolves from guerilla pranks with bleach and superglue to the discovery of an invincible psychic power.

This is a magnificent wish-fulfillment fantasy for sensitive learned underdogs, and a marvellous read as well for the big bossy thugs who try to run their lives. **GH**

**Maid Marian and her Merry Men**

**How the Band got Together**  
0 563 20808 2

**Robert the Incredible Chicken**

0 563 20809 0  
Tony Robinson, ill. Paul Cemmick, BBC Books,  
£3.99 each

These highly enjoyable books reconstruct the Chronicles of Sherwood to the rapped out rhythms of a Rasta narrator. The luridly silly cartoons seethe with hectic nonsense, demented inhabitants of court and forest spilling from the frames as if to escape the hurtling slime and excruciating jokes.

Maid Marian is the rebel leader in this version of the legend and Robin Hood a foppish wimp who only ends up in the forest because of his attachment to King John's underpants.

Though the historical authenticity of this account is open to question, it presents a combination of verbal and visual anarchy so irresistible that several of my least bookish children remained happily involved in it for days on end. **GH**

**The Adventures of Brer Rabbit**  
As told by Julius Lester,  
ill. Jerry Pinkney, Piper,  
0 330 31375 4, £2.99



The first volume of Lester's retelling of the Uncle Remus stories presents 48 of these splendid narrative miniatures rendered in an easily comprehensible dialect. I missed the creole cadences of Joel Chandler Harris' original collection, and found some of the modern references jarring, but I agree with the author's argument that the strength of these immortal tales is that they're adaptable to the speech and the circumstances of whoever feels like telling them. 'The Tar Baby', 'The Moon in the Pond' and 'Brer Rabbit and the Mosquitoes' are all here (the latter with a lubricious reminder that the originals weren't necessarily intended for children), and the entire collection provides an invaluable resource for browsing, sharing and retelling. **GH**

**The Devil's Storybook**  
0 571 12108 X

**The Devil's Other Storybook**

0 571 12112 8  
Natalie Babbitt, Sunburst, £2.99 each  
Ten tales a book, each with an illustration as elegant as the polished prose, tell of the Devil's adventures on Earth and in Hell. In either realm, he's an almost likeable prankster; most of the people who fall foul of him had it coming anyway, and he's easily outsmarted by goodness.



The stories are told with radiant clarity, yet they embody ingenious little twists of plot that surprise and delight the reader. Wonderful books for reading aloud to older children, and for independent readers to enjoy for themselves. **GH**

**A Visit to Folly Castle**  
Nina Beachcroft, Mammoth,  
0 7497 0164 1, £2.25

Like so many children's fantasy stories, this book deals with the presence of another world alongside our own. The world inhabited by Cassandra Spellman and her weird relations (who unfortunately begin to resemble the Addams family) is more vividly realised than the thinly-drawn home life of the main character, Emma. The morality of the book is somewhat ambiguous - we're expected to dislike and fear the Spellmans for their child-stealing activities and their lack of concern for ordinary mortals, and simultaneously to revere them as the last survivors of a nobler race. Nevertheless, in spite of these flaws, the book is exciting and different enough to be enjoyed by upper juniors. **LN**

**Taking Root**  
Edited by Anthony Masters, Teens,  
0 7497 0059 9, £2.50

'In this collection each author has shown the joyful power of a multi-racial society - a joyful power that can be liberated if we are all outgoing, despite the problems.' Masters sums it up really in these stories by 11 different authors. There's an impressive, challenging blend across many cultures, including the travelling people, and it demands a place on library shelves in any school no matter what the racial mix. Most of the stories should read aloud well too. **DB**

**The Tripods: When The Tripods Came**  
John Christopher, ill. Fred Gambino, Puffin,  
0 14 03.2602 2, £2.25

Setting the scene for the subsequent Tripods trilogy, Lawrie and Andy are witness to the first landings of these dominating and terrifying, mechanical creatures. Media attention makes the event exciting initially, but when the minds of the population warp to Tripod will and 'Capping' begins for all those over 14, Earth looks on course for Tripod domination. Many convolutions of plot and setting lead us to an end with some hope for the future, albeit small.

The analogy with the Triffids was always obvious and although the story was a good read in its own right, I was aware at odd moments of an adult voice intruding with analytical, philosophical comment. **PH**

**Ally, Ally, Aster**

Ann Halam, ill. Paul Finn, Puffin, 0 14 03.2924 2, £2.25

Following the intricacies of this plot needed a literary compass. Just as I thought Laura and Richard were safe, another twist revealed yet more hazards and dangers for the Pledge family at the so aptly named Cauld House. Ann Halam's sensitive, atmospheric images reveal an inward-looking local community suffocating in its rejection of strangers.

Shadows of witchcraft, magic, mystery and sinister lurkings make for a fantasy that had me hanging on for the next happening. Compulsive reading. PH

**Hetty's First Fling**

Diana Hendry, ill. Nicole Goodwin, Walker, 0 7445 1419 3, £2.25

A fun story from beginning to end. The Scots dialect sounds authentically wonderful from the first utterance and is cleverly managed, despite

standard spelling, so no problems for the fledgling reader. Pen pictures of each character are endearingly detailed, from Hetty's longings for a kilt to the playfulness of Great Uncle Fergus at his 75th birthday party. I enjoyed every moment of it. PH

**Best Friends**

Anthony Smith, BBC Jackanory, 0 563 20892 9, £1.99

Friendship is the theme of five short stories all set around Noah's Ark and the Great

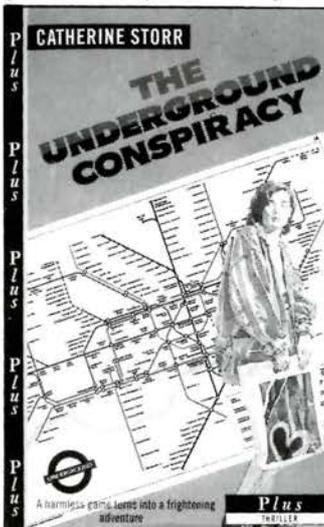
Flood. Each features a different pair of animals and looks at the nature of, and reasons for, their particular relationship. Equally suitable for solo reading or reading aloud, these humorously told stories offer good starting points for discussion on such issues as co-operation and tolerance to a wide age-group. JB

## Middle/Secondary

**The Underground Conspiracy**

Catherine Storr, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.4011 4, £2.50

There are some good ideas in this thriller yarn; it seemed a let-down really to use them on drug-smuggling. However, I'm circulating it amongst my staff to assess its class-reader potential – 3rd year secondary?



Jass entertains herself in the holidays illegally riding the London Underground trains, becoming quite the expert on its routes, nooks and crannies. Little does she know that she's being watched by someone who has far more massively illegal designs on her underground competence and intends to use Jass as an innocent-looking courier with a plastic bag! DB

**Great Comfort**

Geraldine Kaye, Mammoth, 0 7497 0193 5, £2.50

The sequel to *Comfort Herself* with the quest for identity developed further as Comfort returns to Ghana two years on. That too is changing, caught between old and new ways just as Comfort is caught as before between the cultures of her mother and father, her two grandmothers, and now between being a child and an adult. Uncertainty gives way

to strength. 'I am a chameleon,' she says at the end, revelling in the richness and variety of her life and her ability to adapt. Worth buying in bulk, it has a lot to teach and is wise and witty about cultural and historical differences. AJ

**The Other Darker Ned**

Anne Fine, Teens, 0 7497 0185 4, £2.50

A somewhat uneventful plot is redeemed by Anne Fine's engaging style and the clever and likeable Ned, who is a friend of the main character, Ione. Ione (whose age is never made quite clear) sees a vision of 'the other darker Ned' (an imaginary figure struggling for survival in drought-ridden India) and decides to raise money to buy a bullock for an Indian village. She and Ned hold a village jumble sale, helped by Ned's initially vain and self-centred wife, Caroline – a rather flat character whose transformation is too abrupt to be convincing. Oddly, the cover illustration gives no hint of the book's theme. LN

**Max All Over**

Marilyn Kaye, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2844 0, £2.50

A group of American teenagers, indistinguishable from each other except by name, encounter a boy from another planet. The friends are curiously uninterested in the alien's culture and experiences; instead, they're more concerned that he doesn't immediately take to ball-games, discos and dating. The alien makes one or two mildly amusing remarks in the style of *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*, but American middle-class values aren't challenged at all. When the newcomer begins to be a nuisance, the friends arrange – by a most unconvincing contrivance – to get him beamed back to his own planet, so that they can continue to enjoy their cheerleading, fashion-shows and movies unencumbered by someone who won't fit in. LN

**Hard and Fast**

Linda Newbery, Armada, 0 00 693249 5, £2.25

This light-hearted delve into raising cash for Oxfam and 5th-form romances scores some very good points on world-food distribution and the chronic waste of food in the developed world, whilst so many others are starving in places like Africa. The main character, Melanie, is admirably suited to motivate her gang into action and then pulls off a massive coup by suggesting a scheme that will appeal to her detractors, who find fasting a little too passive – a sponsored parachute jump! It's not great literature, but it's not a bad read either. DB

**Race Against Time**

Rosemary Hayes, Puffin, 0 14 03.2975 7, £2.25

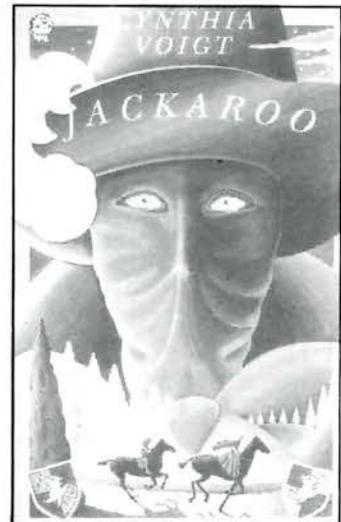
A good, old-fashioned adventure story, cleverly paced and with a stirring mixture of ingredients – a mystical cross, supernatural forces of good and evil, time running out . . .

Livvy and her brother, Steve, must return the cross to its rightful owner, but they are pursued by ancient forces of evil. Tension is maintained throughout, characters are credible and 1st- and 2nd-year children will love it. VR

**Jackaroo**

Cynthia Voigt, Lions, 0 00 673611 4, £2.75

Set in centuries past, the legend of Jackaroo tells of a masked outlaw avenging wrongs, and championing the poor against the heartless rich. Gwyn, the innkeeper's daughter, is too busy to heed such legends until, isolated in a snowbound cottage with her charge, the Earl's son, she discovers Jackaroo's clothes hidden in a cupboard. As the story races on, it becomes apparent that Jackaroo is as much a state of mind as a romantic hero.



Gwyn learns much about herself, and finding the courage to flout the conventions of the times, finds peace with them. Rich, stimulating – marvellous for 3rd-year readers. VR

**Sammy Streetsinger**

Charles Keeping, 0 19 272209 3

**Snow White in New York**

Fiona French, 0 19 272210 7

Oxford, £2.95 each

The Perils of Theatrical Life! Here are two picture books that could easily sit on secondary shelves. Keeping's familiar

# Authorgraph No. 62

Helen Oxenbury

'I can't tell if being a mother has influenced me. I know I love the shape of little children. I can stare at them for hours – I love their little limbs, little arms, little bums.'

But it was in fact the birth of Helen Oxenbury's own children that directed this much loved best-seller of the nursery towards book illustration of any kind. She was expecting her first child (now 24 and herself at Manchester School of Art), watching husband John Burningham doing *Borka* and its successor, needing money and wondering what on earth to do, when a friend of theirs – who happened to be Jan Pieńkowski of Gallery Five – suggested she did some Christmas cards.

He followed up with the notion that she might tackle a book – 'an ABC or a counting book, where you don't have to worry about the text, something you can do at home.' *Numbers of Things* was at once accepted by Heinemann, and she's never stopped since. (John won the Kate Greenaway with *Borka*; five years later so did Helen, with illustrations for Lear and Margaret Mahy.)

Such small-scale, table-top work was a far cry from her earlier life. Her architect father became town planner for East Suffolk, and she was brought up in Felixstowe, on the Suffolk coast. 'We still have a boathouse right on the estuary: a lot of people think it's bleak, but I love that scenery – the clear light, the strip of land, the huge sky, the wheeling birds and the mudflats – oh, it's wonderful! The freedom that I and my brother, three years older, had was idyllic compared with today's children – we'd leave home in the mornings and not be seen or worried about till the evening meal.'

Only weekends and holidays like this allowed her to survive her Ipswich school – prim, all girls and very Victorian. 'I was absolutely miserable: they didn't like me and I didn't like them.' Her parents had struggled to send her there; a few miles away, her future husband (all unaware) was at A S Neill's Summerhill at Sizewell, which she's sure she'd have loved. (Could there be something about this coast to have produced, simultaneously though unknown to each other, Oxenbury, Burningham and Michael Foreman?)

'That school never caught my interest academically – perhaps art was the only thing I was good at. But Ipswich Art School was a whole new ballgame. It was like square-bashing – my goodness, you had to work – but I enjoyed it enormously: you were treated like an adult. And every holiday I used to do



the menial tasks, like mixing paints and putting on base colours, in the Ipswich Repertory Theatre workshop. I loved it, and after two years thought I'd specialise in theatre design.

'I applied to the Central School in London, but didn't enjoy it like Ipswich. I had to do costume design – needlework, and how things are cut to get the look of the period – but I always got involved in how the people would look, and used to concentrate on their faces! One tutor said, "This is hopeless, you know. You ought to go and do illustration – you're more interested in the character and we don't know who's going to play the part!"

'It didn't click even then. I struggled on, sold on all the jolly times I'd had in the theatre at Ipswich.' After two years she became an assistant designer at Colchester Rep. at £7 a week. 'Now that was hard work – a play a week, a new set for each – but very interesting. We did the actual painting in a huge great warehouse: used to get frozen!'

But at the Central she'd met John. He'd gone out to Israel, where she now joined him as an au pair and teaching English conversation. 'I got work as assistant to the designer at the Habimah Theatre in Tel Aviv,



unbelievably new and splendid. There wasn't that much competition then in Israel for set designers (I bet there is now), and I was given whole sets to do, with huge backdrops – it was I who had the assistant then!'

She was in Israel three years, off and on, and returned to a brief nine months with ABC TV at Teddington. Shepperton film studios followed – great fun. 'It was Judy Garland's last film – *Carry On Singing*? No, hardly... (actually, I *Could Go On Singing*) – and though I was totally insignificant, one of a huge team, I loved looking into the studios.'

She married John, and that was the end of the theatrical design. Exit huge backdrops; enter books for babies' hands.

'I began with pen and crayon because they're so easy to carry around (what a terrible reason!); when my first two were little we had a tiny flat, and a box of crayons, a pen and a bottle of ink take up little space. I did *Pig Tale* in gouache, then moved on to watercolour; I want to try something else now, and am experimenting to see what I'm comfortable with.

'The difficulty with watercolour is that by its very nature you can't work on top

of it – if you go wrong you have to scrap it and start again.' We spoke of the new problem confronting illustrators who like to work on card – watercolourists particularly, because of its effect on paper – when modern printing processes demand that the paper layer is peeled off. 'For Brian Alderson's **Cakes and Custard** I used crayon and pen on "fashion-plate" board (very shiny so won't take water), and when the shiny paper was peeled off it wrecked the whole thing. Might as well write it off. I shan't do that again!'

Analyse an Oxenbury face and it seems just eye-dots and a line, but this results from a thousand trial-runs. 'I enjoy trying to get expression with the minimum of line, though my early stuff was much more detailed – lips, eyelids, shading and hatching. Neither style is necessarily better – I may even change and go back. I love black and white line, but you come up against the sales force, who always want colour. You should have heard the "Oh-what-a-shame-it's-black-and-white" for **Bear Hunt**: if you do a cover that's limited in colour or black and white, they say it must be colour to stand out – but of course everyone else is in colour. Because the design team at Walker are brilliant, and they were all for having it as a drawing on the cover, we succeeded between us – but there was quite a resistance.'

Like so many who feel Sebastian Walker changed the whole climate for artists (and not only by his rates of pay), she slips easily into a paean of praise.

'They *listen* to you at Walker – I can't tell you what a breath of fresh air it was to be able to thrash things out with a designer! Nothing is too much trouble for Amelia Edwards, the design director. I can go in with an idea, or two, or three, and she'll say, "Helen, we'll try each way and see how they look." So often publishers say, "That's it," and off it goes to the design department; and you don't see it till it comes back, and then it's "Well, it's done now – sorry . . ."

'Sebastian has always said it's his artists and writers who make the books – without them there is nothing. I believe he's even started a crèche for his young mums. Simply, he's a genius: he's got it right!'

The Burningshams live on the edge of Hampstead Heath, having 'circulated around the area' since John's student days, in a splendidly idiosyncratic house that feels part baronial, part sunny farmhouse, overlooking a vast un-London garden. Like his older sister, their son is also at art school (Winchester), though they have great hopes that 11-year-old Emily will do something else . . . She'll have to be very determined, sandwiched between John's studio at garden level and Helen's up at the top of the house.

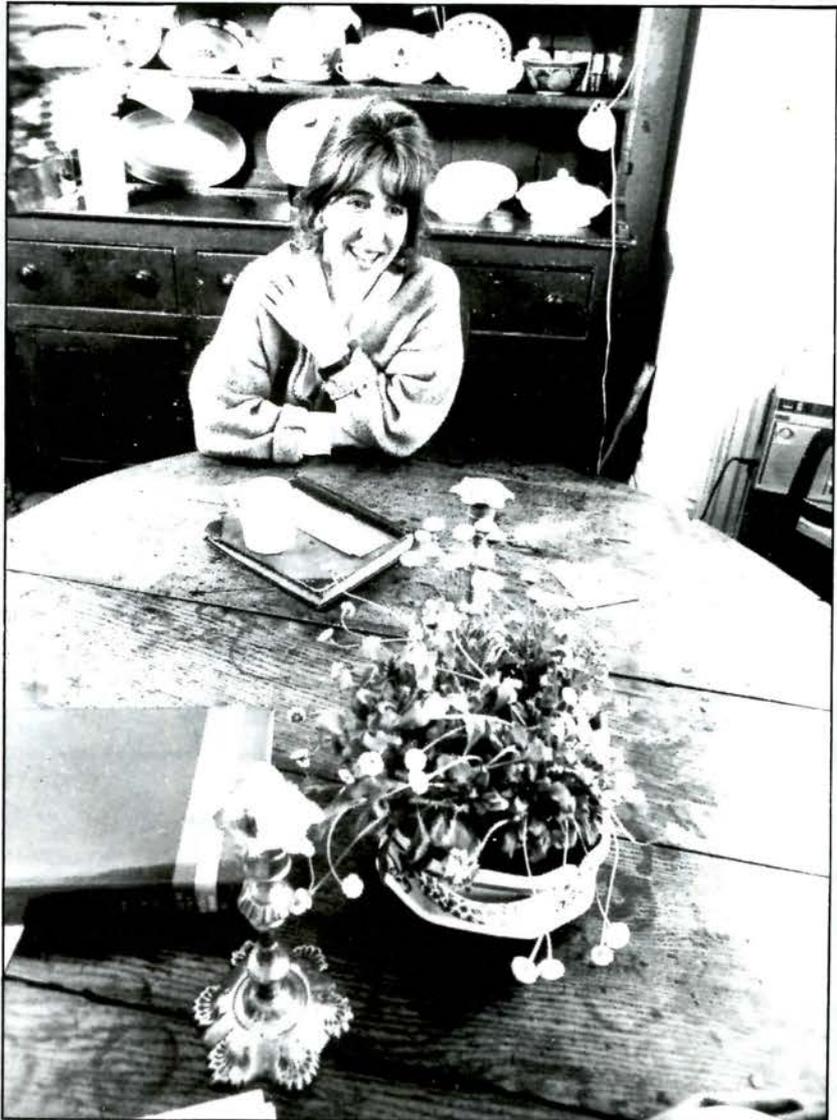
'It's John's flair that has made the house amazing. You see it now and you think, cor blimey!, but when we bought it, about 12 years ago, no one would have given tuppence for it. He loves

architecture, goes to demolition sites, etc. and totally transforms everything.'

They were about to fly to France that afternoon, where a soft toy of Pippo, after years of problems and discussion (horrible velvet or washable, cuddly towelling? how to get the eyes sewn on straight? should the head be moulded?), is drawing near to actual production. Tom and his little monkey Pippo originated when the French, great magazine readers, for the first time started one for tinies, and asked her to create two characters, one of

the sense of exuberance, of the joyful muddle of everyday life, in her work. She recognises at once a text she'll be comfortable with, rejecting hundreds on the way. The recipe also applies to her own books.

'It must have humour and be true to life – it can deal with a child's fantasy and still be rooted in things that are true. Above all, I look for warmth and humour – and characters that aren't absolutely wonderful and lovely! And that's a recipe for not only a good book, but a good mum, too. ■



which would become a toy. Her five pages for the magazine turned easily into a book, and the series has become phenomenally successful. The same French company is talking of involving her in an animated film: very exciting.

She's open to any future idea, child or adult, and wistful that Emily's age group is now out of illustrated books. She enjoys working on texts by other writers, but couldn't work *with* them. 'The last one, **Bear Hunt**, was marvellous because it gave the illustrator so much – the characters were never defined in the text – but I had never met Michael Rosen until the actual Smarties Prize party. We know a few people from our world, but we're not "clubby".' Indeed, she's well-known as a quiet soul who shrinks from self-exposure, a reputation at odds with

Helen Oxenbury was interviewed by Stephanie Nettell.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

### Some of Helen Oxenbury's many books

**Numbers of Things**, Heinemann, 0 434 95595 7, £6.95; Picture Lions, 0 00 662783 8, £2.25 pbk

**Pig Tale**, Heinemann, 0 434 95599 X, £5.95

**Nursery Story Book**, Heinemann, 0 434 95602 3, £8.95; Young Lions, 0 00 673382 4, £3.99 pbk

**We're Going on a Bear Hunt**, Michael Rosen, Walker, 0 7445 1135 6, £9.95

**Tom and Pippo** titles, Walker, £5.95 each hbk; £2.50 each pbk

**First Picture Books**, Walker, £3.95 each hbk; £1.99 each pbk

# Springtime offerings from OXFORD!

## People Poems

Compiled by Jill Bennett

Illustrated by Nick Sharratt

A fun-filled collection of poems about all sorts of amazing characters, coupled with the jolliest illustrations you'll ever see.

32 pages 0 19 276086 6 £4.95



New in paperback!

## Blackbeard the Pirate

Victor Ambrus

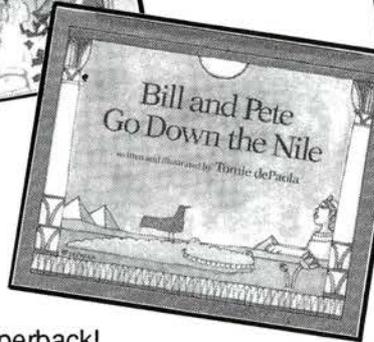
The sea-story to end all sea-stories.

Ambrus at his best!

*"captivating from start to finish."*

## Bookquest

32 pages 0 19 272220 4 £2.95



## The Magic Vase

Fiona French

An intriguing tale of magic and greed, painted in glowing colours in patterns derived from the Pueblo Indians. From a Kate Greenaway Medal winner.

32 pages 0 19 279875 8 £6.95

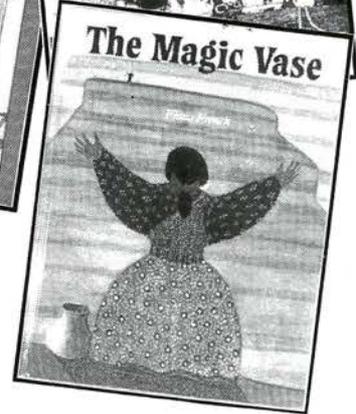
New in paperback!

## Bill and Pete Go Down the Nile

Tomie de Paola

Enjoy the thrills and spills of Bill (the crocodile) and Pete (his best-friend and toothbrush) as they get mixed up with a ruthless jewel thief. The sequel to the popular **Bill and Pete**.

32 pages 0 19 272216 6 £2.50



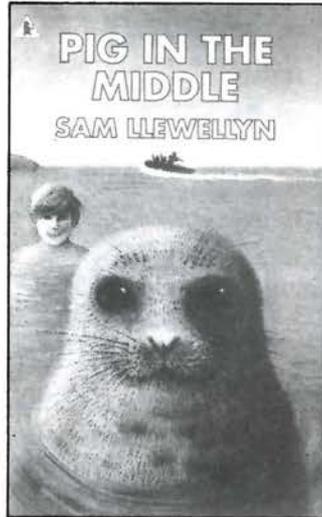
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



draughtsmanship wittily recounts the bitter-sweet fable of the transient rise to stardom of street-musician, Sammy, his attendant exploitation, numbing disillusion and final return to the subway. It's a sad picture book, especially where the lad's life's work is reduced to a tiny video pack like a tombstone on an arid landscape.

Snow White fares marginally better in the Jazz Age. Now the traditional dwarves become jazzmen in a band, with whom the heroine achieves stardom to the chagrin of her wicked step-mother. She's the self-styled Queen of New York, reader of the 'New York Mirror', whose reporter plays Prince Charming and marries the heroine when the poisoned cocktail cherry is dislodged from her throat. Fiona French won a Kate Greenaway Medal for this witty, visually

stimulating update, full of menacing images counterbalanced by dazzling lights. DB



### Pig in the Middle

Sam Llewellyn, ill. Michael Trevithick, Walker, 0 7445 1420 7, £2.50

Community feeling, environmental awareness and the need for local knowledge hold together this tale with a strong conservation theme. So many 'green' stories fail as a good read. This one stands tall in both camps.

Nails were bitten as I worried about 11-year-old Alec emerging from some really foolish sea-born escapades while protecting Pig, the seal pup. Perhaps it's the absence of a moralising tone that appealed to my 12+ audience, along with the comfortable and surprising ending. PH

### Bianca

Joan Hipson, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2598 0, £2.50

Bianca, fleetingly materialised out of the mist over a lake, becomes linked with Emily, Hubert and Paul in this touching study of 'Precarious emotional balance'. Not a common theme in young fiction!

Joan Hipson unveils the plot slowly, allowing the storyline to centre around individual main characters, showing how each is touched and altered by events that precipitate the shock, stress and rejection that lodged in the girl's mind and found expression in Bianca's irrational actions. Stickability required by would-be readers. DB

## Older Readers

### Secrets Not Meant to be Kept

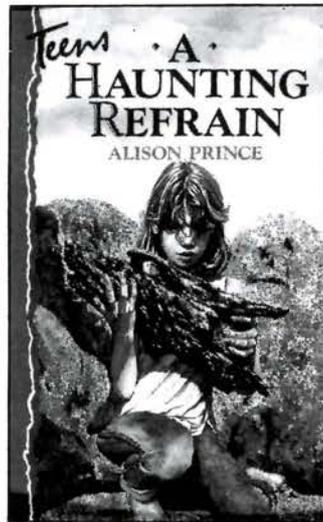
Gloria D Miklowitz, Lions Tracks, 0 00 673223 2, £2.50

There's much sensitivity in this socially-conscious novel, which charts the behavioural symptoms exhibited by children who are involved in sexual exploitation and abuse. Adri is now a teenager, but recently deeply-buried images from her pre-school years filter into her consciousness, often triggered by her younger sister, who attends the same pre-school. When a fuller picture emerges Adri sees what her parents, especially her teacher-mother, refuse to contemplate, that Treehouse School is run by perverted adults who are gratuitously exploiting the children. There's a lot of unsprung tension in this moving book which I passed to an experienced pastoral colleague, who was greatly impressed. DB

### After the Dancing Days

Margaret Rostkowski, Piper, 0 330 30953 6, £2.99

American soldiers return from the war, maimed and scarred, to people who want only to ignore them and preserve heroic notions of warfare. Annie's father continues to work as a doctor with the worst of the wounded, the new lepers, and Annie fights her initial revulsion and visits and talks with the men. Her friendship with one man and what they learn from each other is the core of this powerful story set firmly after the first world war, but clearly echoing more recent events. AJ



### A Haunting Refrain

Alison Prince, Teens, 0 7497 0069 6, £2.50

The title neatly shows the link not just of the supernatural, but of music too in these seven short stories. The settings and characterisation are various, but there's a running thread of music in the delicate shifting between real and unreal, past and present, life and death. Carefully crafted writing will take many readers beyond the conventions they're used to. Worth buying as small sets for 3rd- and 4th-years with single copies for class, school and department libraries. AJ

### Someday My Prince Won't Come

Compiled by Rosemary Stones, Lions Tracks, 0 00 673443 X, £2.25

A follow-up to *More to Life than Mr Right*. Seven 'more stories for young feminists' which tackle a variety of issues such as inequality, stereotyping and lesbianism in ways which are often

thoughtful and revealing. Two very different stories worth following up could be the bleak 'Different Rules' by Sandra Chick and 'Three Fables' by Sunita Manjoshi – a reshaping of traditional stories in a witty, knowing style which could be enjoyably parodied and explored. AJ

### Roscoe's Leap

Gillian Cross, Puffin, 0 14 03.4013 0, £2.25

Strange to find this as a Puffin. It's unsettling from the offset and there's no safety until the final lines. It seems to be just about the rediscovery and mending of a giant toy guillotine, but this toy has created its own terror and it is human lives which need mending. The pun of the title is typical of this many layered novel. Lots to share for 3rd-years up. AJ

### Double Take

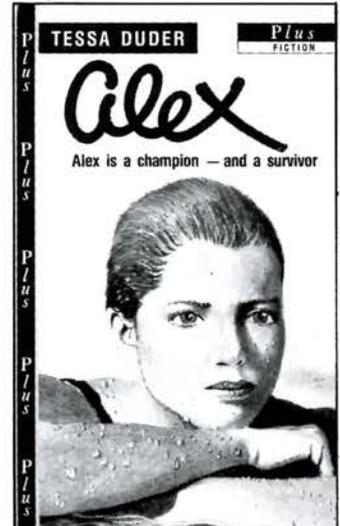
June Oldham, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2597 2, £2.50

This uses devices not usually found in teenage novels and forces the reader to turn detective and follow not only plot, but technique and ideas. Olivia, an unemployed actress, briefly acts as a double in a television reconstruction of a girl's disappearance. This simple action becomes a focus for a series of events and ideas based on doubles: the relation of actor to character, fiction to reality, stereotype to truth, and finally the relation of men to women. A book which will act as a satisfying bridge to a range of demanding adult novels. AJ

### Alex

Tessa Duder, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.4056 4, £2.25

Tessa Duder's book has



already won two awards in her native New Zealand, and it's not difficult to see why. The year is 1959, and Alex, a talented swimmer, hopes to qualify for the Rome Olympics. For all her numerous achievements, Alex has self-doubts and anxieties enough to make her a thoroughly sympathetic and likeable character. Whereas a lesser writer would have gone on to show Alex winning an Olympic Gold, Tessa Duder leaves her at the qualifying races with a sense of having overcome her personal tribulations – a satisfying end to a moving and engrossing book. LN

### Out of the Sun

Peggy Woodford, Macmillan Limelight, 0 333 49288 9, £4.50

Based on autobiography this novel traces the life of Nancy in the paradise of Assam before her forced return to the post-war cold of Guernsey. Nancy's life in both places is created vividly through sharply observed brief scenes, and the

final section where she begins to find new roots is matched by the dramatic return of her uncle, missing and presumed dead. Worth including in collections for 4th-years if the cost doesn't put you off. AJ

### Love All

Compiled by Aidan Chambers, Pan Horizons, 0 330 31052 6, £2.99

The candyfloss packaging is likely to restrict this book's readership to young females in search of the traditional girl-meets-handsome-hunk formula. This is a pity, since the stories are wider ranging than the title and cover suggest, and several of them deal with the boys' anxieties and insecurities. The quality is somewhat uneven, but the contributions by Margaret Mahy, Jan Mark and Toeckey Jones are worth recommending to teenagers of both sexes. LN



### Me and Luke

Audrey O'Hearn, Pan Horizons, 0 330 31031 3, £2.99

Matthew becomes a father at 17, but his girlfriend, Lorene, wants to sign the child away for adoption – she wants a life without responsibilities.

Matthew takes his newborn son, Luke, from the hospital and flees to his grandmother's. The story of his struggle to keep Luke is occasionally short on realism and has a degree of extraneous drama to hold the reader's attention. However, this is a pacy read from an unusual standpoint – allowing adolescent boys to see that it's acceptable to have emotions! VR

### Holding Me Here

Pam Conrad, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2931 5, £2.50

Robin's mother takes a lodger, Mary – lonely, unhappy and quiet. She arouses Robin's curiosity, and Robin searches Mary's room for clues to her problems. Caught up in her discovery of Mary's husband's

brutality, Robin clumsily tries to reunite the family to compensate for her own parents' failed marriage. A potentially interesting exploration of a delicate subject, this degenerates towards the end into a sub-Lowery Nixon melodrama. VR

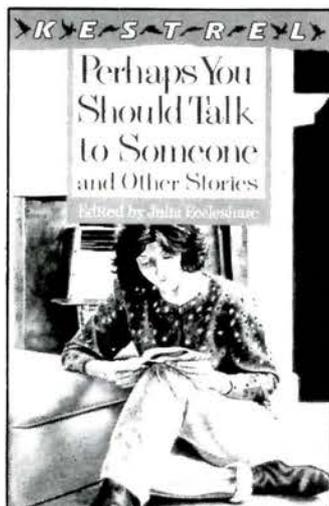
### The Masque of the Red Death and other stories

0 670 82927 7

### Perhaps You Should Talk to Someone and other stories

0 670 82451 8

Julia Eccleshare, Viking Kestrel, £5.50 each



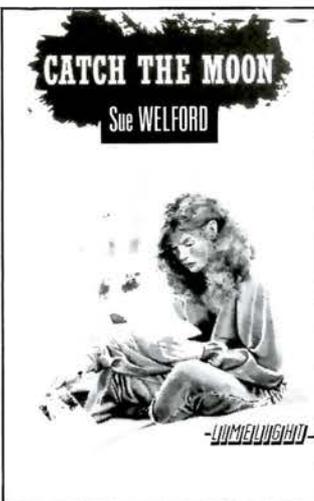
LMS means less money than ever for schools and puts these two excellent collections out of reach of all but the most privileged classrooms. I prefer the second collection – ambitious, memorable, original. The first collection is rather too predictable – 'Snedri Vashtar' again?

Both collections provide spirited responses to the breadth of literary study and analysis recommended by the Cox Report. Useful for either GCSE or A-level work. And both – because of their price – are, sadly, likely to remain on bookshop shelves. VR

### Heartache: A Book of Love Stories

Edited by Miriam Hodgson, Methuen, 0 416 15032 2, £4.99

Eight short stories about the hurt caused by love, written by an impressive collection of writers. The standard of contributions is reasonably consistent, though I found Johnson and Strachan least convincing of the authors included. A very useful source book for this often badly handled topic – but far too expensive. Perhaps a couple of copies for the GCSE book box? VR



### Catch the Moon

Sue Welford, Macmillan Limelight, 0 333 48481 9, £3.99

Rina's father's remarriage brings the expected tensions of a stepmother, but, to make up for all that, it brings Stephen, the boy to whom Rina feels at last she can surrender her virginity, so strong is her love for him. Regrettably the bliss turns to tragedy and their love is revealed as unwitting incest – '... how many lives ruined because people insist on doing what they believe to be the right thing?' Sue Welford handles this tricky dilemma sensitively and without hysteria in this short (overpriced?) tale for older girls. DB

### And I Heard a Bird Sing

Rosa Guy, Penguin Plus, 0 14 03.2861 0, £2.50

This thinking person's thriller completes the trilogy begun with *The Disappearance* and *New Guys Around the Block*. Imaru's struggle to rehabilitate his alcoholic mother and to get away from his street-kid background sees him, a black delivery boy, getting tangled up in the affairs of the high-class, white Maldoon family on their vast estate. A demanding novel that will not be hurried. DB

### The Troublemakers

Roger Parkes, BBC Books, 0 563 20865 1, £2.25

An earthy East-end setting gives this gritty, city-wise story gutsy appeal. The times are hard and the language is worse, there's enough forgery, breaking-in, harassment and thuggery to keep the Met. going for weeks. It'll need careful pre-reading before releasing it into book collections in more gentle climes. Its derring-do appeal, however, will make it cult reading with the over-14s, especially if they missed an episode on TV. PH



### So Long at the Fair

Hadley Irwin, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 82988 9, £5.99

Ashley is a rich, gifted, influential teenager who agonises about her life and where it's leading. She tells her similarly advantaged friend, Joel, 'You don't need a reason for doing something. You need a reason for *not* doing it', and in her case she can't find a reason to go on living. Perplexed Joel is left with the grief of his best friend's suicide, which he attempts to subsume in a fairground escapade that doesn't necessarily come up with the answers but at least confronts him with the questions.

It sounds heavy! In fact it's a very satisfying and sensitive story, the many layers of which linger in the mind long after the last page. DB

### Goodbye and Keep Cold

Jenny Davis, Lions, 0 00 673386 7, £2.50

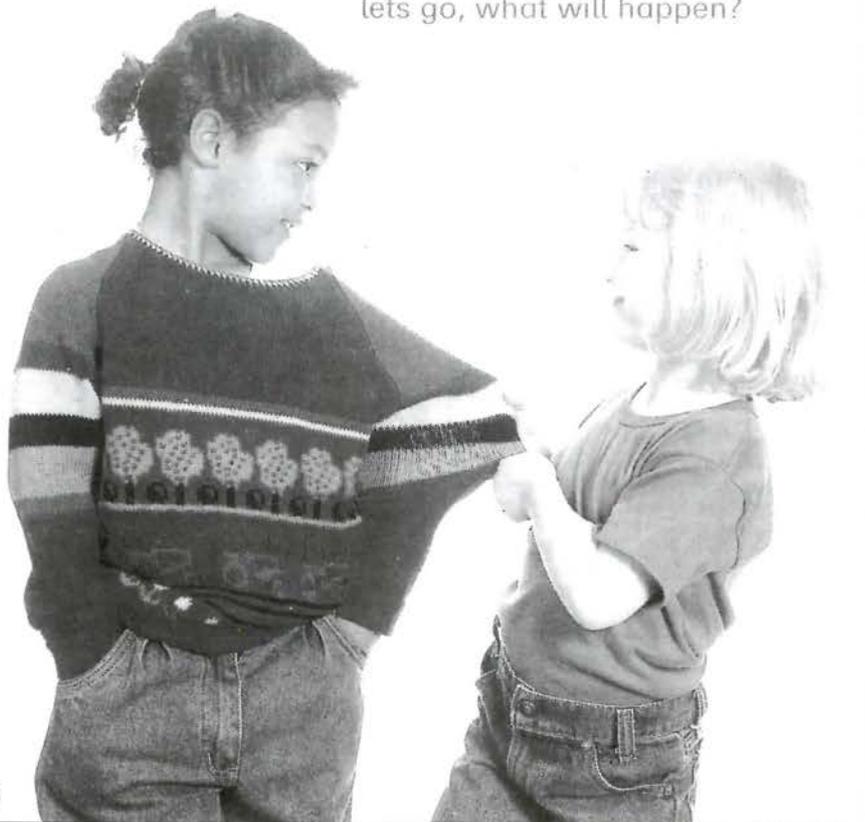


From the perspective of an adult, Edda Combs sits in her beach house and reflects on her turbulent childhood from the day news came that her father had been killed in a mine accident. The intervening years, dominated by the emotions of her highly-strung Mama, are a time of learning too prematurely about relationships and the struggle to survive.

This is a long, gradual novel for serious, sensitive, older readers with reading tenacity. DB

# REVIEWS – Non Fiction

My jumper can stretch. If Emily lets go, what will happen?



8

From *My Jumper*.

### My Apple

Kay Davies and Wendy Oldfield, 0 7136 3200 3

### My Boat

Kay Davies and Wendy Oldfield, 0 7136 3201 1

### My Cake

Sheila Gore, 0 7136 3202 X

### My Jumper

Robert Pressling, 0 7136 3199 6  
A & C Black (Simple Science series), £4.95 each  
(NURSERY/INFANT)

The neat response that this series constitutes to the early science demands of the National Curriculum does nothing to spoil its enjoyability. Cheerful children explore the properties and capabilities of apples, toy boats and a woolly jersey, and father helps son make his birthday cake. The blend of concept and brilliantly clear and well-composed photographs (Fiona Pragoff, who nearly won a Kate Greenaway medal for this sort of thing) shows best of all in *Boat*, where in one short sequence, refraction, reflection, Newton's Third Law, Archimedes, balance, logic and racial equality can all be observed.

Two things distinguish this series – the absence of 'rubbing it in' learning pressure and the abundance of answers, in text and pictures, to the questions involved (other publishers please emulate). The activities shown are well within the range of the earliest attainment targets, so it's a pity that the parents' and teachers' notes at the back don't emphasise this, for everything looks, and is, very enjoyable and easy. TP

### A Family of Tortoises

Elvig Hansen, A & C Black (Animal Families series), 0 7136 3218 6, £5.95  
(INFANT/JUNIOR/MIDDLE)



The story of how wild tortoises survive on a Greek hillside, all done in ravishing colour by one of our favourite photo-authors (in fluent translation by Janet Sutton) forms the body of this excellent addition to Black's German-bought 'Animal Families' series. Walking, feeding, fighting, mating, laying, hatching, hibernating – we get to know them intimately here in a detail which is all the more valuable now that tortoise traffic is, thankfully, illegal.

Other members of the series deal with more familiar subjects – frogs, gorillas, donkeys, bats, owls and guinea pigs, and very nicely too, but a good tortoise book is something of a rarity and deserves special mention. TP

### Castles, Pyramids and Palaces

Caroline Young, ill. Colin King, Usborne (Beginner's Knowledge series), 0 7460 0464 8, £5.95; 0 7460 0463 X, £3.85 pbk (JUNIOR/MIDDLE/SECONDARY)

This popular introduction to architecture is well served by the familiar Usborne approach – pages crowded with colourful drawings with snappy captions and brief supporting text. The balance of visual and verbal is nicely judged – with the focus on famous buildings of our heritage that children should become familiar with, ranging from Skara Brae to Versailles, Ankor Wat to the Pompidou Centre (the latter following on neatly from the Crystal Palace and the Eiffel Tower).

#### Krak des Chevaliers

Between 1096 and 1291, Christians and Muslims

fought for the Holy Land in wars called Crusades.

Enemies can be seen from every side of these round towers.

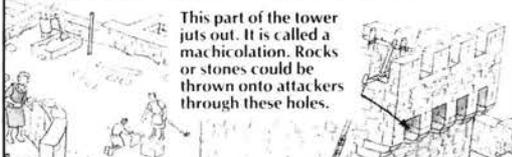
An aqueduct carried water into the castle.



This windmill ground grain for bread.

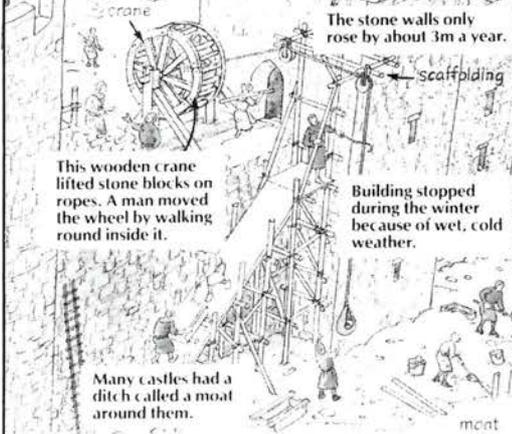
Both sides built castles. The Christian knights built this one in Syria. It is called Krak des

Chevaliers. It has steep outer walls and was very difficult for enemies to conquer.



This part of the tower juts out. It is called a machicolation. Rocks or stones could be thrown onto attackers through these holes.

The stone walls only rose by about 3m a year.



This wooden crane lifted stone blocks on ropes. A man moved the wheel by walking round inside it.

Building stopped during the winter because of wet, cold weather.

Many castles had a ditch called a moat around them.

Carpenters built a frame of poles, ramps and ladders called scaffolding as the stone walls grew higher.

When all the stone work was finished, the carpenters added wooden floorboards, furniture and wooden roof beams.

Part of a large illustration from *Castles, Pyramids and Palaces* showing the building of a medieval castle.

The large format allows some impressive visual set pieces with cut-aways revealing interiors and active little figures busy building, emphasising the processes and problems of architecture. The architectural vocabulary is reinforced in the text and pictures, supplemented by a two-page glossary (helpfully illustrated). There is an index and a timeline of the major buildings but both here and in the text the problem of how to refer to dates has not been satisfactorily resolved.

A map of the world locating the main buildings would have been a helpful

addition, and also a bibliography (to list such books as David Macaulay's **Cathedral** and **Pyramid** which have had some influence on the illustrations in this book). The text is rather predictable, but it is laced with several memorable facts: Ivan is said to have blinded the two architects who built his St Basil's Cathedral!

The overall result is an attractive book for Junior age children to leaf through or refer to. Groups of younger children would enjoy discussing the pages, although the small scale would make it difficult to see the detail from any distance. Secondary age children without the stamina for a lot of text might find themselves reading more than they meant to. SM

### Down the Plughole

Thompson Yardley, 0 304 31776 4

### What a Load of Rubbish

Steve Skidmore, 0 304 31773 X

### Poison Beware!

Steve Skidmore, 0 304 31774 8

### Worm's Eye View

Kipchak Johnson, 0 304 31775 6

Cassell (Spaceship Earth series),  
£5.95 each

(JUNIOR/MIDDLE/SECONDARY)

The trouble with most information books is that they are *typical*. Although their facts are right, their purposes laudable and their pictures amazing, their texts exhibit a zest-free dullness that can only inform the purposive fact-finder and fail to mesh with minds that have been left in neutral. Sometimes, however, a new title or (rarer) series comes along to grab the mental gear lever and engage uncommitted interests in fast-forward discovery. This clutch from Cassells could be such a phenomenon. United by a blend of pleasing cartoons and excellent technical drawings by Thompson Yardley, refreshingly direct text and simple language, they provoke a good deal of thought and tickle lots of ribs – oh yes, and provide a lot of information too.

**Plughole** pulls together facts about personal dirt, plumbing, sewage and sewerage and leaves the reader in no doubt as to 'What would it be like if you flushed yourself down the toilet . . . /loo/w.c./jakes/bog etc.'

'The main thing wrong with rubbish is . . . most people think it's rubbish' and we are encouraged to analyse, recycle and compost our own rubbish, of which, we learn, the average family will throw away one and a half tonnes annually – 'that's like throwing away half an elephant every year!' (Cue for picture of elephant half in dustbin.)

**Poison Beware!** starts with 'accidental' toxins (plant, animal and household) and ends with intentional ones (narcotics, alcohol, tobacco and food additives) before going on to infected food. There's not so much room for joking here, but Skidmore's style adapts well, with punchy truths like 'Keep your nose on its toes! Smoke and gas can kill!', and he doesn't preach. Good first aid advice too.

**Worm's Eye View** encourages us to devote a corner of our habitat to ambient mini- and midi-beasts and enjoy the rewards of observation. 'Animals live by eating plants or each other' we're told, despite which 'Your toad could still be around when you've grown up. Toads live for up to 40 years.'

From new names and an unexpected source these books are brilliantly untypical of anything, even of themselves, and, although they're not all that physically robust and the typography and layout wobble a bit, their content and environmental responsibility are strong. Simplicity and attractiveness will cater for a wide age and ability range and, as estate agents say, 'early inspection is advised'. TP

What would it be like if you flushed yourself...

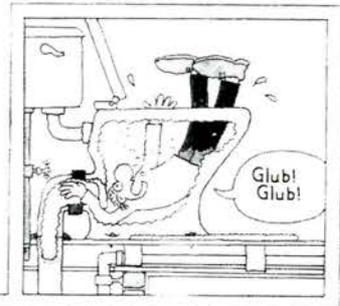
## DOWN THE TOILET???



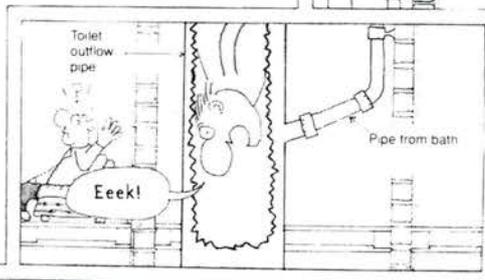
The bend is full of water to stop smells from coming back up the pipe.

1. FIRST..

You'd go round the bend!..



2. Then you'd go down the toilet outflow pipe...

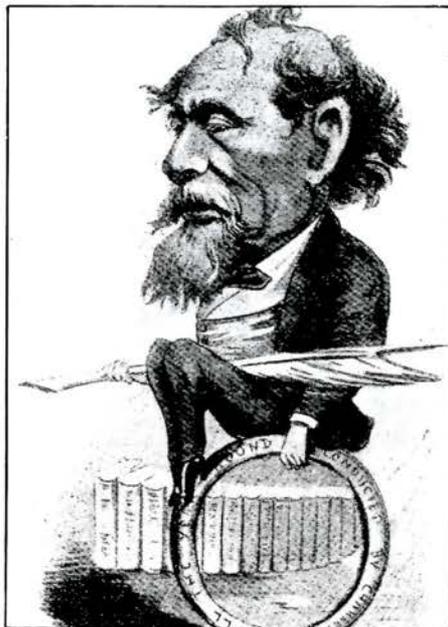


3. Then you'd get washed out into the sewer pipe under the road outside.

Here, you'd join the waste from other people's houses... and it smells terrible.

18

A page from **Down the Plughole**.



'A cartoon mocking Dickens's pious statements about his broken marriage.'  
From **Charles Dickens**.

### Charles Dickens

Christopher Martin, 1 85210 677 8

### D H Lawrence

Neil Champion, 1 85210 422 8

Wayland (Life and Works series),  
£7.50 each

(SECONDARY/OLDER READERS)

Young people addicted to television soap operas will be intrigued to learn that 150 years ago when **The Old Curiosity Shop** was first serialised in a magazine, crowds lined New York pierhead to implore the crew of the ship carrying the relevant issue to tell them 'Is Little Nell dead?'

In his very accessible introduction, Christopher Martin ably recounts why Dickens' works gained such universal popular and critical acclaim during his lifetime, and charts the development from shorthand reporter to celebrated novelist against the social and political background which so greatly influenced his choice of material.

Neil Champion has chosen a different approach for his study of D H Lawrence, one which will appeal more to the committed Eng. Lit. student. After sketching in biographical details, he concentrates almost entirely on a critical analysis of the writer's oeuvre, exploring three major books in some depth, to show how Lawrence broke new ground in the crafting of the English novel. Lawrence's values and beliefs, revealed in much of his work, are also examined in some detail.



There is a judicious blend of quotations, both literary and biographical, in these two books and they are copiously illustrated – the selection of photographs and line-drawings in the Dickens' volume being the far more illuminating. A glossary and list of dates is usefully included, and there is a selective bibliography of biographical and critical works, though neither bibliography is annotated. Filmed versions of Dickens' novels available on video are also mentioned.

Charles Dickens as an 11-year-old in Warren's Blacking Factory.

VH

### The New Oxford School Atlas

Patrick Wiegand, Oxford University Press, 0 19 831678 X, £7.95; 0 19 831650 X, £5.95 pbk (SECONDARY/OLDER READERS)

Atlases used to be given by honorary aunts to deserving, but often unappreciative, boys and girls. They vied with dictionaries as the least welcome Christmas presents.

Nowadays an atlas is becoming an essential reference at all levels of education in response to the 'locational knowledge' aspect of what will become known as national curriculum geography. This vividly new Secondary atlas from Oxford University Press arrives absolutely on cue, not only for said aunts seeking refuge in safe gifts but for school librarians and teachers of geography.

There is much to commend the publication. Its clear topographical maps, attractive and constantly varied lay-outs, ingenuity of titles in its thematic sections, and its highly contemporary concern for environmental issues, all set it apart as a volume that demands attention.

Its pages are crammed with fascinating detail: the disputed boundaries between Pakistan and China, the arrangement of streets in Moscow, the intriguing cross-section through the Antarctic ice sheet, the location of Fiji in both Poly- and Melanesia. Of particular value to students of geography and not browsers through atlases, is the abundant economic, population and other statistical detail, particularly of the United Kingdom. Average house prices in 1985 have a hollow ring and the weather summary for 1988 will soon be dated, but these are niggles. This is a great atlas. Buy it. ■ CH

**Colin Harris** is Adviser for Environmental Education, Hertfordshire County.

**Veronica Holliday** is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

**Stephanie Morland** has been a practising architect and a primary school teacher.

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

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

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Jeremy Strong

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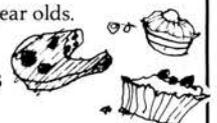
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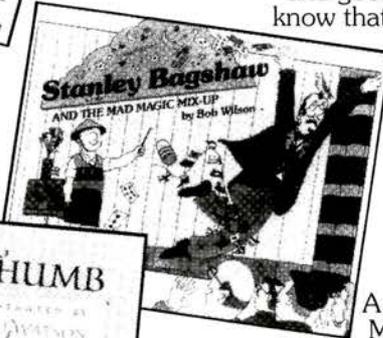


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# What is a Child?

## ... and what is a children's book?

Ralph STEADMAN

takes a personal view.

The Penguin English Dictionary

**child**, n. (pl. children). Young human being, boy or girl, (*this c. sl., I, me; from a c., from childhood on*); unborn c. (*with c., pregnant*); childish person; son or daughter of (or with *my &c.*); descendant or follower or product of (*c. of the devil, nature, love; fancy's c.; cc. of iniquity, the wicked; c.-bed, -birth, parturition; c.'s-play, easy task; c.-wife* (very young).

**child** /'child/ n, pl children /'childrən/ 1 an unborn or recently born person 2a a young person, esp between infancy and youth b a childlike or childish person c(1) a person not yet of (a legally specified) age (2) sby under the age of 14 - used in English law 3a a son or daughter <left the estate to her ~ren> b a descendant <the Children of David> 4 one strongly <a ~ of the depression> 5 a product, result <dreams, which are the ~ren of an idle brain - Shak>

The Pocket Oxford Dictionary

The above descriptions are just about everything a child is not. They're the lack lustre, unimaginative, authoritarian views of someone who either never was a child or has forgotten what it was like to be one.

Each child has a unique view of our world. Our world that is, for now.

In the meantime we have a duty, a clear duty to help sustain the openness of a child's pure vision and its wholesome acceptance of what it sees and feels in the world around it and within its own private world. Children can't choose the set of circumstances that decide their immediate situation but their immediate situation is of vital importance to us all. To ignore it is to ignore all the futures to come.

A child will listen to anything you have to tell it if you tell it with a sense of suspense and impending surprise and humour. That's the danger. You're pouring your own ideas onto blotting paper, and those ideas may dominate a child's experiences.

Children's books are one of the first experiences for a child if they are lucky enough to have parents who think it important to bring books into the home (presuming that the child has a home). In whatever context you find the child, its need for visual and verbal stimulation is paramount and 'parental guidance' is in some ways a dreadful misnomer and sometime curse on those children unlucky enough to have parents who neither love it nor consider imaginative stimulation a necessity and a right.



Equally, to cosset a child in a soft, puerile cocoon of safety, far from the realities of our world, is certain to dull the vital senses common to all. All faculties left unused and inert wither and sink beneath a blizzard of other influences.

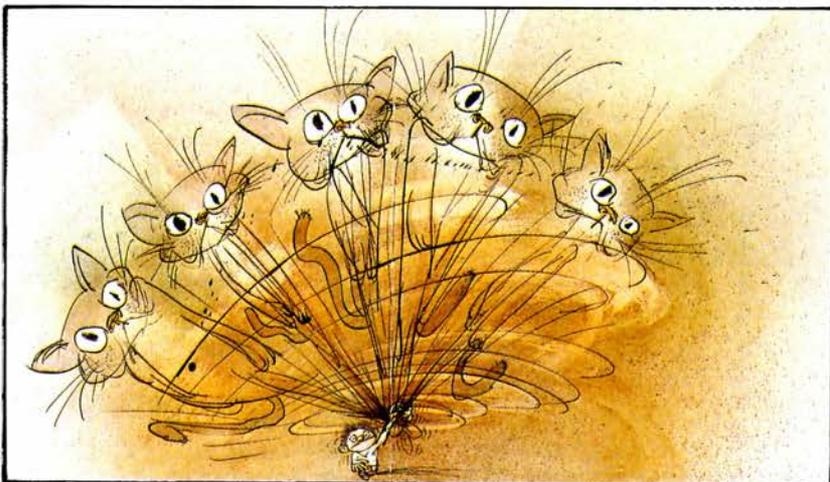
In a child, we're presented with the raw material, the clean slate, the possessor of potent senses, the ready absorber of the slightest whim. We must realise that every confrontation, every spark of human intention and every touch, is registered by this miracle, and the life force within it will use whatever it can grasp to further the motives of a tender captive mind.

I am proud to be among the 'disreputable few' who believe a child has the ability to sense something genuinely unpleasant and insidious, and reject it under normal circumstances, i.e. amongst adults who are still children themselves and perceive and appreciate the make-believe world of a child. We should never forget that all mischief is a natural attempt to soften disciplines which are often too harsh and insensitive to be coped with in a conventional way. Frequently imagination is invoked to help bear the unbearable - including coming to terms with the inescapable reality that there are some things we must not do.

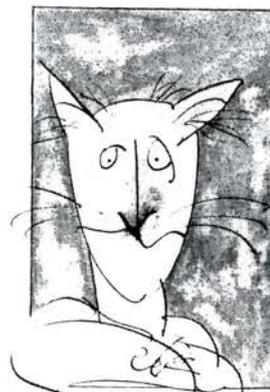
Every child from nought to ninety knows hippopotamus can dream in mud, leaves can sprout wings and fly to the moon, elephants can do somersaults on an egg and somewhere in your bedroom there is a secret door which you can only enter if you believe what is on the other side.

The best of children's books are secret doors and it can be easy to find them. They are readily available with a child to help you and yet inaccessible if you spurn the child's natural delight in the possibility of everything impossible.

I would never insist that such a door exists but I would invite everyone to look for it. It can become a journey inside yourself, an examination of how you really feel and the awakening of the hero or heroine in you who has been asleep for a hundred years. Before the clock strikes twelve we can have the time of our lives. And most important of all, although we may not be able to live happily ever after, we can help to make the ever after a wonderful possibility. ■



From *No Room to Swing a Cat* (Andersen).



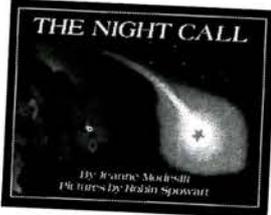
Self-portrait of the artist

The illustrations on this page come from Ralph Steadman's latest book for children, *No Room to Swing a Cat*, published last Spring (Andersen Press, 0 86264 241 8, \$5.95).

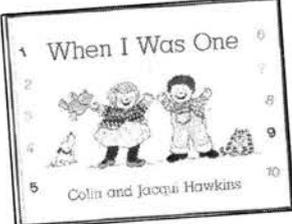
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# Spring Colour!



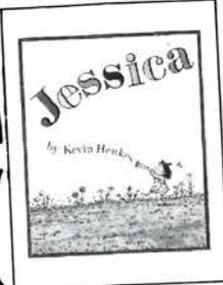
**THE NIGHT CALL**  
by Jeanne Modesitt  
Illustrated by Robin Spowart  
Late one evening Starman, the keeper of the stars, sends out a night call - a star has fallen from its place in the sky, and Rabbit, with the help of Mr Bear, Giraffe, Donkey and Pup, must help to retrieve it.  
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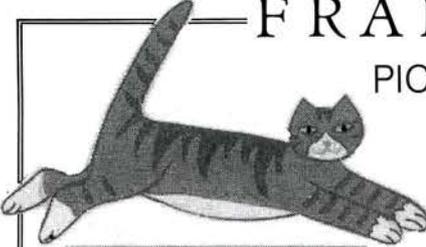
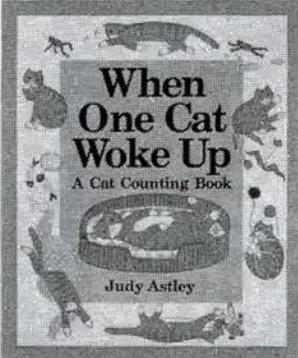
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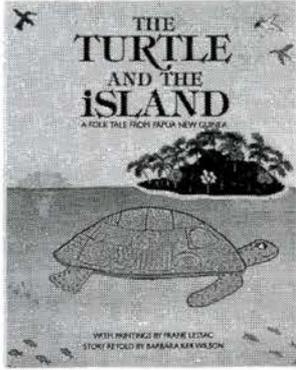
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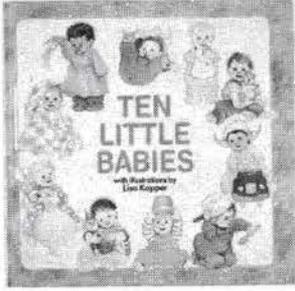
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# ON THE LEVEL



Jeff Hynds, photo by Richard Mewton.

**Jeff Hynds, with a little help from his young friends, assesses this year's Spring picture books.**

I remember, at a parents' evening a few years ago, someone said to me: 'Are you showing us the books *you* like, or the books children like?' It's a difficult question – far too difficult for me to tackle here. For a start I'd have to discuss ponderous matters like the Cox Report's main, and virtually only, criterion for selecting books: 'they should be capable of interpretation at a number of different levels' (7.12). And, then again, I'd have to consider what these 'levels' are supposed to mean, and indeed whether there's not a great deal more to it than 'levels'. In the end, of course, I *can* only choose the books I like and hope children will like them too. Still, it does no harm to get an opinion from the actual customers sometimes, so I thought I'd ask a few children to help me. Would we all like the same ones? And how would we get on with those levels? Not too well, to begin with . . .

## The Wolfman and the Clown

Helen Ganly, Deutsch, 0 233 98504 2, £5.95

A group of children have seen strange happenings through the window of the house, and they run to tell Mrs Ray, a neighbour. They've seen a 'wolfman' and a 'clown' and heard 'weird wailings and moanings'. We can look, too, through windows cut out from the pages and there, sure enough, are the wolfman and the clown whirling round in the middle of a room. A passing policewoman dismisses all this as a figment of the children's imagination, and says they've probably frightened old Mr Kelly, *who lives entirely alone*, by peering in through his window. So Mrs Ray takes the children to apologise to him. Mr Kelly was evidently once connected with the theatre and shows the children, to their delight, old photographs and posters, and lets them dress up in theatrical costumes. The children, by now, seem to have forgotten the mysterious wolfman and clown, but Mrs Ray remains 'thoughtful'.



My young helpers were excited by this beautifully illustrated picture book and found it 'a scary story'. I very much enjoyed it too, and also sensed the uneasiness. But with the advantage of my National-Curriculum-level consciousness, I was soon able to see that this was *really* a book about growing up, and about learning to trust adults or, moving up a few levels, about the contract between uncontrolled childish imagination, and the more sophisticated imaginative creations of the theatre. Given time I might have managed even more! *But then I found out*. The book is *actually* about the struggles of the dissident movement in pre-liberation Czechoslovakia! If you were familiar with all the symbolism and other indications in the book you'd be able to interpret at the right level straightaway, otherwise you need explanatory notes to work it all out. President Václav Havel, in short, would have the advantage of us. (He is in the book, incidentally, along with many associates.) It is thus highly esoteric, a bit like reading T S Eliot or James Joyce. What price our levels now? Well, not completely daft, for we did know there was something going on. It was 'scary' even if we weren't sure why. This is because a book like this can 'communicate before it is understood' (to use Eliot's own words). But this is certainly an unusual picture book where there's plenty to read, look at, feel and think about. And it repays study. Satisfaction grows as you learn more. Did I mention James Joyce . . .

## The Cat and the Devil

James Joyce, ill. Roger Blachon, Moonlight, 1 85103 091 3, £6.95; 1 85103 092 1, £3.50 pbk

Joyce wrote this story in 1936 for his four-year-old grandson, Stephen Joyce,



whose recent interesting letter accompanies this new version, with illustrations by the French artist, Roger Blachon. The story is, in fact, set in France, in Beaugency, where the Mayor enters into a pact with the Devil, and then gets the better of him by a sly trick. A seemingly simple tale, though full of Joycean innuendo. Some familiarity with the other works of one of the towering literary figures of the twentieth century would help you with your levels here, but this didn't bother my team. They, and I, had more trouble with the Devil's bad French (and strong Dublin accent).

## The Ducks' Tale

Dave and Julie Saunders, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0608 2, £2.99 pbk

## So Slow Sloth

Charles Fuge, Macmillan, 0 333 51705 9, £5.95

## Why Can't I Fly?

Ken Brown, Andersen, 0 86264 263 9, £5.95

## Prehistoric Pinkerton

Steven Kellogg, Macmillan, 0 333 51866 7, £5.95

## Mrs Goat and her seven little kids

Tony Ross, Andersen, 0 86264 253 1, £5.95

## Peter and Cat

Sumiko, Heinemann, 0 434 96543 X, £6.95

More cats and other animals in these stories all of which have a twist in the tale, or alternatively tail. In **The Ducks' Tale**, it's a cat's tail (if you see what I mean) that causes the problem. Striking paintings by Dave Saunders in this book, and by Charles Fuge and Ken Brown in **So Slow Sloth** and **Why Can't I Fly?**, counterpoint admirably the 'try, try again' themes common to these three books. For all his slowness, Sloth ultimately achieves success, and in **Why Can't I Fly?** Ostrich too does eventually manage it, or so it seems, but my young panel were unanimous in believing he'd be quite upset if he knew what had really happened. Obviously I must have been on a different *level*, because this hadn't occurred to me. So maybe Ken Brown, in this his first →



"Maybe your neck is too long," suggested the Sparrow. "The flamingoes have long necks and they can fly," replied the Ostrich, "so why can't I?" From *Why Can't I Fly?* (Andersen).

picture book, needed to show the same sensitivity towards the ostrich's feelings as he clearly does towards the African landscape, which he depicts in radiant watercolours.

We're all fans of Pinkerton, that incorrigible Great Dane puppy, and here is yet another adventure. In *Prehistoric Pinkerton* we have Pinkerton teething, with a dinosaur or two thrown in, and the result is a form of mayhem that only Pinkerton can achieve. Kellogg's drawings, and dialogue, are as witty and irresistible as ever. Something of the same irreverence regularly pervades the work of Tony Ross. His latest, *Mrs Goat and her seven little kids* is an outrageous parody of a traditional folk tale, as you would have doubtless guessed from the awful pun in the title. I thought it hilarious – the illustrations are truly madcap – but my young assistants were a trifle lukewarm. At their level they didn't care for all the gobbling up and spitting out. I suppose I'm more used to it.

With *Peter and Cat* we're back to cats, or rather to just one cat in an otherwise human world. Peter tires of his idyllic life with Cat and seeks his fate, as well as a travelling child called Laura, 'in the town that lies beyond the hills'. At one level this is a touching love story, simply told and charmingly illustrated.



At another level it's a journey to self-discovery. (I'm getting quite good at these levels.) We're really into journeys with the next batch . . .



From *Tikkatoo's Journey* (Blackie).

#### **Tikkatoo's Journey**

Amanda Loveseed, Blackie, 0 216 92781 1, £6.95

#### **The Sleeper**

David Day, ill. Mark Entwisle, Piccadilly, 1 85340 059 9, £8.95

#### **The Turtle and the Island**

Barbara Ker Wilson, ill. Frané Lessac, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0624 4, £6.95

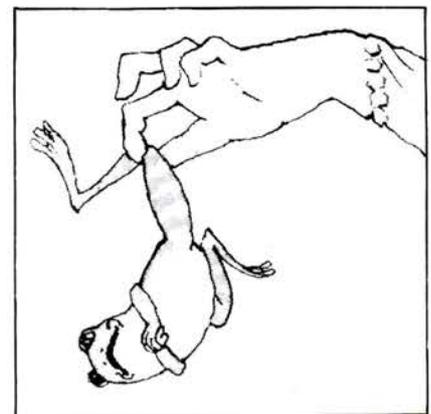
#### **The Frog Prince**

Jan Ormerod and David Lloyd, ill. Jan Ormerod, Walker, 0 7445 1287 5, £6.95

#### **Borrowed Plumes**

Geoffrey Patterson, Deutsch, 0 233 98406 2, £5.95

These are all very attractive retellings of traditional tales. *Tikkatoo's Journey* is based on an Eskimo folk tale, in which Tikkatoo volunteers for a dangerous journey to save his dying grandfather. Negotiating many perils, he finally succeeds. This is Amanda Loveseed's first book, which she's illustrated beautifully. Indeed, all the books in this section are notable for the quality of their illustrations. *The Sleeper*, from an ancient Chinese legend about a monk whose lone journey saves his country from self-destruction (would China had such another!), is sumptuously illustrated in dramatic colour washes. The bright



Detail from *The Frog Prince*.

'primitive' paintings of *The Turtle and the Island* are a perfect complement to this Papuan folk tale about the creation of New Guinea. Award-winning Jan Ormerod illustrates the tale of *The Frog Prince* (first recorded by the Brothers Grimm) in Art Nouveau style, and in *Borrowed Plumes* award-winning Geoffrey Patterson has produced a richly textured set of paintings to accompany the fable, from Aesop, of the dissembling jackdaw. We enjoyed all these books, so artistically made, and so full of levels that National Curriculum buffs could have a field day.

**Look Out, Patrick!**

Paul Geraghty, Hutchinson,  
0 09 174035 5, £6.95

**Meet Me at the Eiffel Tower**

Elzbieta, Faber, 0 571 14303 2, £7.99

**Once Upon a Time: A Prince's Fantastic Journey**

Graham Oakley, Macmillan,  
0 333 51532 3, £6.95

Three more journeys, all very comical. Mind, Patrick the mouse is only strolling home in **Look Out, Patrick!** but it is a stroll like **Rosie's Walk**. Danger threatens his every step, though he is all oblivious; on each occasion it's only averted by some coincidental happening. Tickle-Sparkle and Chickadee undertake a longer journey in **Meet Me at the Eiffel Tower** and at one stage get lost. This spacious picture book has engaging childlike illustrations. 'I like the big all-together pictures,' said our five-year-old group member. But the really spectacular journey is that of the (faintly familiar?) prince in Graham Oakley's latest offering, **Once Upon a Time**. Undertaking a quest, reminiscent of Henry's in Oakley's earlier **Henry's Quest**, the prince sets out with his page (who is also the narrator), to prove that he's clever and brave, and at the same time to find himself a future queen.

The world he enters is the eternal world of fairy tale. They become entangled in six or seven of them, before returning in unexpected triumph to the royal palace. The whole thing is skilfully woven together and, as any devotee of the 'Church Mice' books would expect, cleverly tongue in cheek. It's a true picture book, too, in spite of having over 3,000 words of text, for much of the action, and many of the jokes, are



From **Meet Me at the Eiffel Tower** (Faber).

in the carefully detailed illustrations themselves. There are lots of levels in the pictures here, in more ways than one, as you will see.

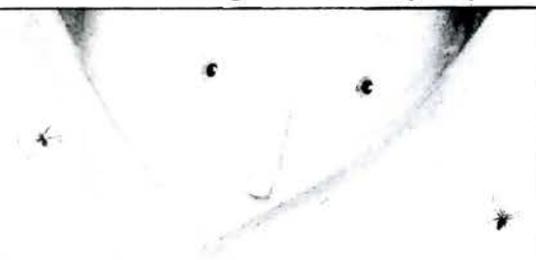
**The Hidden House**

Martin Waddell, ill. Angela Barrett,  
Walker, 0 7445 1266 2, £7.95

**A Close Call**

Amanda Harvey, Macmillan,  
0 333 52388 1, £5.95

In these books, both by award-winning authors, there's a more serious tone. My young team thought them 'a bit creepy'. With **The Hidden House** it's hard to say why, for it's a touching story, very elegantly illustrated in browns and greens. Sombre, perhaps.



From **The Hidden House**.

**A Close Call**, however, is quite frightening, and reminded us of Sendak's **Outside Over There**. It similarly involves the stealing of a baby, in this case while the nurse sleeps. Did she only dream it? Perhaps. These are powerful books, handling the themes of death and regeneration – to die, to sleep, perchance to dream. Indeed, it is to dreams we turn next.

**Goodnight, William**

Alan Baker, Deutsch, 0 233 98438 0,  
£5.50



From **Goodnight, William**.

**The Sandman**

Rob Shepperson, Andersen,  
0 862624 265 5, £6.95

These may be dreams, but they're full of action and colour and illustrations of the highest quality. There are interesting parallels (and a few levels) in the stories too, like the elaborate sandcastle construction. Both books invite young readers to re-read. I've already lost count of the number of times our five-year-old has perused **Goodnight, William**. She can easily read it independently herself now, though she's not supposed to be able to read yet. (At school she's on Ginn pre-reading.) **The Sandman** is a triumphant picture book debut for Rob Shepperson. From dreams to harsh reality!

**The World that Jack Built**

Ruth Brown, Andersen, 0 86264 269 8,  
£5.95

Ruth Brown is a wonderful artist who produces gentle, delicate picture books for the very young. Now here's a truly savage book from her about the destruction of the environment. My young readers were rather shocked. But if I were one of those competition judges I'd award this book top marks for content, artistic impression and anything else going. It has so many qualities in addition to the powerful paintings, for example the intelligently adapted wording of the nursery rhyme, the ironic motif of the black cat and the symbolism of the blue butterfly (cat and butterfly are on every page), and the coherent artistry of the whole. I think this is Ruth Brown's best book so far.

**The Jacket I Wear in the Snow**

Shirley Neitzel, ill. Nancy Winslow  
Parker, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 442 6,  
£5.95

**It's a Perfect Day**

Abigail Pizer, Macmillan,  
0 333 51450 5, £5.95

**The Calypso Alphabet**

John Agard, ill. Jennifer Bent, Collins,  
0 00 191312 3, £5.95

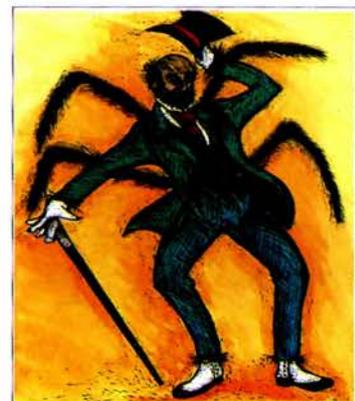
**Wherever Can I Be?**

Mike Dickinson, Deutsch,  
0 233 98402 X, £5.50

**Houdini the Disappearing Hamster**

Terence Blacker, ill. Pippa Unwin,  
Andersen, 0 86264 250 7, £5.95

Here's a collection of jolly books! **The Jacket I Wear in the Snow** and **It's a Perfect Day** are both cumulative texts which would appeal to the youngest of children. The latter is not unlike Pat Hutchins' **Good-Night Owl!** though it lacks her ingenious ending. I'm not a particular fan of alphabet books, but the poet John Agard's **Calypso Alphabet** has converted me! It's a riot of Caribbean words and colour. We had lots of fun with **Wherever Can I Be?** and **Houdini the Disappearing Hamster**. You have to search each picture to find the missing creature. In Houdini's case this is quite hard. These are not just frivolous games, but artistically constructed books with linking story and witty observation. They are the 1990 descendants of **But Where is the Green Parrot?** which first appeared an almost unbelievable 25 years ago.



From **Calypso Alphabet** (Collins).

**Little Monster**

Barrie Wade, ill. Katinka Kew, Deutsch, 0 233 98409 7, £5.95

**Princess Janine**

Iolette Thomas, ill. Jennifer Northway, Deutsch, 0 233 98421 6, £5.95

**Jamaica Tag-Along**

Juanita Havill, ill. Anne Sibley O'Brien, Heinemann, 0 434 94211 1, £6.95

**Poonam's Pets**

Andrew and Diana Davies, ill. Paul Dowling, Methuen, 0 416 15122 1, £6.95

**Ruby and the Dragon**

Gareth Owen, ill. Bob Wilson, Collins, 0 00 195406 7, £4.95

Books with girls, positively portrayed as central protagonists, are rare enough. Books with black girls in the

leading roles are even rarer. These five are therefore particularly welcome. They're all well illustrated, attractively presented and enjoyable books, and each one has a pertinent underlying message of one kind or another. The first three offer well-observed comment on family relationships, but our favourites were **Poonam's Pets** and **Ruby and the Dragon**, both in school, rather than family, settings. Poonam is the classic 'mouse that roared' and has unsuspected depths to say the least. Ruby, too, is the unlikely leading character (in every respect) in Gareth Owen's cartoon-style picture book about the school play at St George's Primary. I found myself laughing out loud as I read it. In fact we all did. (I did wonder what level laughing out loud would be.)



From *Jamaica Tag-Along*.

**A Robot Named Chip**

Philippe Dupasquier, Andersen, 0 86264 266 3, £6.95

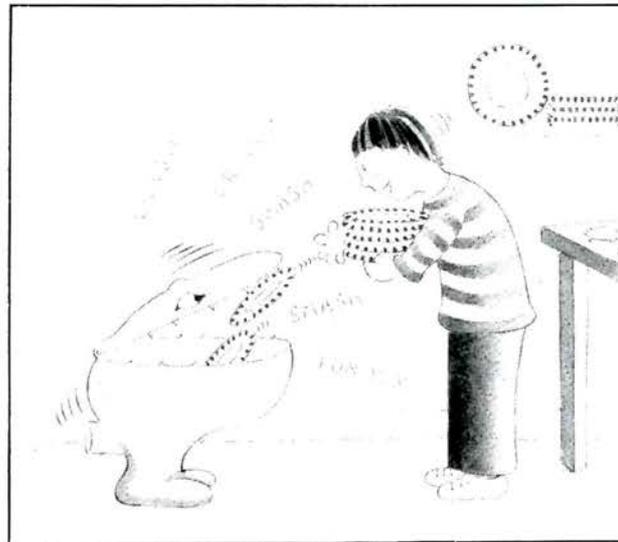
**The Incredible Bed**

Bill Tidy, Andersen, 0 86264 268 X, £5.95

**The Magic Lavatory**

Nicholas Allan, Hutchinson, 0 09 174154 8, £6.50

Three more excellent cartoon books involving respectively science-fiction, dream-fantasy and a mobile lavatory. Dupasquier, famous for many superb picture books, here goes galactic; Bill Tidy, popular television personality, devises his own version of the flying bedstead; Nicholas Allan, not known at all, cocks a snook (or something) at good taste and emerges flushed with success, though after this he'll probably remain unknown for ever. Lavatory humour, of course, is at a very low level. Plumbs the depths, usually.



From *The Magic Lavatory*.

It also looked hungry.

Jeffrey gave it some bread. But it didn't like that, so he gave it some of Aunt Julia's plates which it did like - *very* much.

**Is that you, George?**

Kate Oliver, Blackie, 0 216 92784 6, £6.95

**Eddie and Teddy**

Gus Clarke, Andersen, 0 86264 285 X, £5.95

**Abigail Goes Visiting**

Felix Pirani, ill. Christine Roche, Collins, 0 00 1911368 9, £5.95

Three most agreeable books that toy with the line between fantasy and reality to make serious points about family life. **Is that you, George?** and **Eddie and Teddy** are variations on the **Not Now, Bernard** theme (it didn't really happen, did it?) while **Abigail Goes Visiting** is a real *enigma* variation. We all thought we 'got' the first two, hopefully at more than one level, but we're still arguing about Abigail. I may send it to the Cox Committee.

I've selected these books from the scores that I and my young helpers looked at. Inevitably, I have had to leave out some that I would have liked to include. There are certainly many outstanding books this year, with particularly good offerings from Andersen Press and André Deutsch. If there is a fault, it's that sometimes an otherwise excellently illustrated and



From *The Shepherd Boy*.

designed book can be marred by a banal and even babyish text, making it seem false and patronizing. Children neither want nor need childish stories in childish words, even in picture books. I haven't included any such in this selection. But I *have* left out some good ones. So finally, as examples of the rich field I've left ungarnered, let me mention **Never Say Macbeth** (Charles and Sheila Front, Deutsch, 0 233 98454 2, £5.95), a fine foray into the Edwardian theatre - lots to learn

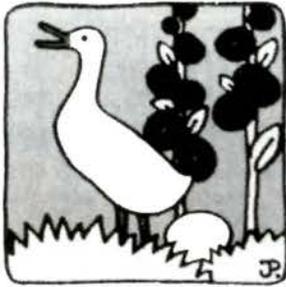
about here; **The Shepherd Boy** (Kim Lewis, Walker, 0 7445 1502 5, £7.95) - warm and touching with stunning pictures; and **Gorilla/Chinchilla** (Bert Kitchen, Cape, 0 224 02782 4, £6.95) - strange animals, quirky rhymes and outstanding art work. Last of all, I must quote the words of the writer Ann Pilling (author of the award-winning **Henry's Leg**). She has just tried her hand at a picture book called **The Donkey's Day Out** (ill. Sheila Ratcliffe, Lion, 0 7459 1618 X, £5.99). It is, as you might have guessed, about a donkey. At one level, that is. At another level it's an allegory of the Easter story. Of it Ann Pilling writes:

'If a story is going to have lasting quality, it has to have additional levels like this, even if the reader isn't aware of them.'

Professor Cox didn't say anything about not being aware of them. The wolfman and the clown did, though. ■

**Jeff Hynds** is a major figure in the movement to promote 'real' reading. After retiring from Thames Polytechnic in South London, where he ran a famous reading course, he began a new career as a freelance lecturer and is now much in demand for in-service work with teachers all over Britain.

# AWARDS



## MOTHER GOOSE '89

### Elaine Moss gives the judge's verdict . . .

Unusually for the Mother Goose, it was easy to see early on who the winner was going to be: David Hughes for **Strat and Chatto**, a picture book with a text by Jan Mark (Walker, 0 7445 1107 0, £6.95). We thought the book as a whole (and what is a picture book if it doesn't work as a whole?) offered rare delights – the virtuosity of the drawing, the humour, the exciting page design. From endpaper to endpaper (architectural elevations of the upper storeys of an urban street) there are visual surprises that carry the eye back and forth, unwilling to miss any of the fun. The story is about a penthouse cat with mouse trouble, who is helped by a wily basement rat to come to terms with so small an irritation. We did wonder whether this book might be a one-off for David Hughes who's already made his name in other corners of the art world, but decided that the exuberance he shows must have given him so much pleasure he'll want to repeat the process, often.

Over the runners-up we had much more trouble owing to the evenness of some of the better entries. Everyone was agreed, though, that Peter Utton has made a marvellous start with **The Witch's Hand** (ABC, 1 85406 039 2, £5.95), a genuinely scary, but perfectly resolved, story. Wonderfully fluid water-colour pictures, full of witchy terror, integrate perfectly with the text right through to the denouement when the father (a Mike Rosen look-alike) tells the little boy that the hand is really a shrivelled leaf.

## The Guardian Award Stephanie Nettel reports

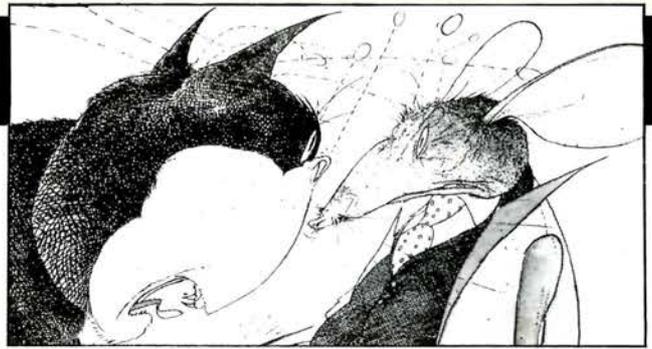
The choice for the 1990 Guardian Children's Fiction Award ought to please those who had come to fear that comic novels never won awards, that unpretentious, accessible books for the junior-to-middle age range never won awards, that the authors children actually enjoyed never won awards, that authors who've already been around for years to general acclaim somehow never . . .

Like so much of Anne Fine's work, **Goggle-eyes** is a bright, funny treatment of a potentially bleak (and increasingly familiar) situation. It offers solace and hope to those who suffer impotently when their lives are turned upside down by adults – as happens when a divorced parent falls in love with a (to the child) patently unsuitable, not to say loathsome, object.

Why is Kitty the one to be chosen to comfort Helen when she rushes from the classroom to sit, swollen-eyed and sodden, in the lost property cupboard under the cloakroom stairs? Then it dawns on her: Helly's mother is going to marry that grey-haired man Kitty saw in Safeway! This is certainly something Kitty knows all about. She proceeds to tell Helly of the evolution of her feelings for the dreadful Gerald Faulkner with such ebullience, such ferocious wit, and such understanding, that Helly and we are captivated and comforted.

But this is more than a simple family story. Anne Fine prompts her young readers into thinking about the place for

Strat  
and  
Chatto.



There was great admiration from those judges who sit at their drawing-boards for the virtuosity of Nicki Palin who produced a set of unusually golden and fiery illustrations for Geraldine McCaughrean's **St George and the Dragon** (Oxford, 0 19 279793 X, £5.95). This is technically excellent art work, an example to those publishers of myth and legend who are generally content with illustration of a far lower standard.

We were impressed by the start Ken Brown, a talented water-colourist and accurate observer of wild life, has made in **Why Can't I Fly?** (Andersen, 0 86264 263 9, £5.95) – a witty, animal story in which an ostrich, determined to fly like all the other birds, builds himself flying machine after flying machine, but can still only manage to stay aloft with their connivance.

Cliff Wright's **When the World Sleeps** (Hutchinson, 0 09 174078 9, £5.95) struck us all as being an extremely brave first attempt at a picture book, since it tells a fantasy story entirely in pictures, apart from a five-line introduction. What's superb about this artist's treatment of a magic night in which the moon came down to earth is his ability to suffuse his pictures – and his readers – in moonlight.

Once again we wondered why publishers hadn't submitted any information books to us. There was also adverse comment from the artist judges about the ways in which photography is increasingly being used by young artists as a guide to their brushes. This was far from true of our winner!

The Mother Goose Award is sponsored by Books for Children Ltd.

Elaine Moss, herself a librarian, critic and writer, was one of the judges on this year's Mother Goose panel.



Detail from  
cover of  
**Goggle-eyes**.

political debate (here, anti-nuclear) in everyday life, about tolerance and emotional security. Once again, she has made sense of, and offered hope for, a painful part of many youngsters' lives, and given them laughter.

The runner-up is topical in a different way. **The Lake at the End of the World**, by New Zealander Caroline Macdonald, is a poetically evocative SF adventure set in a post-holocaust world of the near future – a world destroyed by pollution.

A generation ago a group of the most aware scientists set up a custom-designed underground refuge, now degenerated into a ruthless dictatorship bent on surviving at any cost. Young Hector, who has never seen sunlight or smelled the air, escapes and meets the boldly energetic Diana, whose parents had almost believed they were the last souls on earth. How the two young people rediscover hopes for themselves and the earth makes a thrilling story. ■

**Goggle-eyes** by Anne Fine is published by Hamish Hamilton (0 241 12617 7) at £7.99.

**The Lake at the End of the World** by Caroline Macdonald is published by Hodder & Stoughton (0 340 42721 3) at £8.95.

Stephanie Nettel is Children's Books Editor of the **Guardian**.

# NEWS

## The Green School Competition



At last, the long-awaited **Young Green Consumer Guide** by John Elkington and Julia Hailes (Gollancz, 0 575 04722 4, £4.99 pbk) has just been launched.

It was produced in response to demand from teachers and parents who had attempted to use the amazingly successful adult version, by the same team, with children and who now wanted an edition more relevant and accessible to youngsters. No bones about it, it has achieved all its objectives and we now have available the best green guide for children yet published. By relating green concerns to children's direct day-to-day experience, offering easily understood information and then encouraging children to take positive action, the authors have produced a book that should be in every junior and lower secondary school classroom and in every home.

As part of the promotion, Gollancz are also mounting an interesting competition to unearth Britain's greenest school. A Green School Audit lies at the heart of the competition (closing date 30th November 1990) sponsored by Varta UK, manufacturers of Britain's first mercury-free battery and other environment-friendly battery initiatives. The competition asks schools to submit environmental assessments (or audits) of themselves using as a model the audit laid out in **The Young Green Consumer Guide**. In addition, the judges, including John Elkington and Julia Hailes, will want to know what green initiatives the school has already made or is planning to make.

Entry forms are available from your local branch of W H Smith or by sending an SAE to The Young Green Consumer Guide Competition, P O Box 53, Littlehampton, West Sussex BN17 7EH. The prize for the winning audit team is £2000 plus a 3-day environmental trip to West Germany (max. 20 people, including teachers). There's even a prize for entering but you'll have to get the entry form to find out what it is.

And where does **Books for Keeps** stand in all this? Well . . .

### The BfK Green Guide to Children's Books

. . . we're about halfway towards publishing our own Green Guide to Children's Books this coming Autumn. Following the successful formula of our **Children's Books for a Multi-cultural Society** (now in the process of being updated and regrettably out of print at present) and **Poetry 0-16** (very much in print and selling well!), the Green Guide will have a large bibliography divided into Fiction, Poetry and Information Books, plus feature articles linking children's books, education and green concerns, and a further information section. Watch this space for more details on what we hope will be another useful **BfK** resource for teachers, librarians and parents.



## Paying by Plastic

You can now pay for your **BfK** subscription or other **BfK** publications by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard). Our new **BfK** order form (available from 6 Brightfield Road, London SE12 8QF) includes a credit card section and we can also accept credit card orders by phone (081-852 4953).

## The Earthworm Award



Another distinguished panel of judges has agreed to take on the task of looking for books which highlight the many threats to our natural world and celebrate its richness, variety and beauty. Each judge is responsible for one

category and the winners of each category will make up the shortlist. The 1990 judges are: Quentin Blake (Infant Picture Book); Brough Girling (Innovation); Geoffrey Lean (Senior Non-fiction); Michael Morpurgo (Author); Jenni Murray (Infant Non-fiction); John Rae (Junior Non-fiction); Fiona Waters (Junior Fiction).

The award covers fiction and non-fiction books published between 1st June 1989 and 31st May 1990, with the winners to be announced in September. Prize money for 1990 has been substantially increased to £2,000 plus the large wooden bowl for the winner, and £250 for the three runners-up.

For further information about the award, contact Claire Harrison or Charmian Davies, Vikki Stace Associates, 26 Westbourne Grove, London W2 5RH (Tel: 071 221 3754).

## CONFERENCE IN CAMBRIDGE

Inside Story: A conference about children's books

This conference will explore and celebrate books, poems and stories for children through a programme of seminars, workshops and lectures by well-known writers and educators. There will also be opportunities to enjoy storytelling and poetry sessions as well as the chance to browse around exhibitions of books from publishers, books by student authors and books by children for children.

The conference is being organised by tutors in the Language Team at Homerton College. Sessions, workshops and lectures will be led by them but will also include contributions from well-known speakers, broadcasters and writers with a particular interest in children's books. These will include John Agard, Helen Arnold, James Berry, Margaret Meek, Grace Nichols, Jan Ormerod, Philippa Pearce, Chris Powling, Michael Rosen, Morag Styles, Liz Waterland and Victor Watson.

Write to: Carole Bennett, Homerton College, Cambridge CB2 2PH.

### Conference in Worcester

Worcester College of Higher Education Summer School: Children's Literature and the National Curriculum

The Summer School covers the world of children's books linked to the new perspectives of the National Curriculum. Speakers this year include Aidan Chambers (author); Catherine Brighton (illustrator); representatives from publishing and television; plus expert knowledge from an educational adviser and resident lecturers. Visits to places of interest with regard to children's books have also been arranged as well as seminars and workshops.

Write to the Director, Summer School, Worcester College of Higher Education, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ.

### Babar and the Ivory Ban

Babar plus elefriends are at the centre of a Spring promotional campaign by the Collins Publishing Group - a campaign incorporating storybooks, videos, audio cassettes and the release of **Babar - The Movie** this summer, all aimed at alerting children to the slaughter of elephants by ivory hunters. The campaign is scheduled to run till Christmas 1990. ■