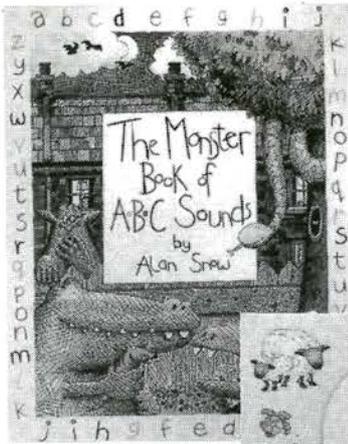


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

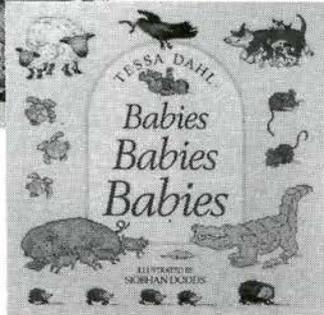
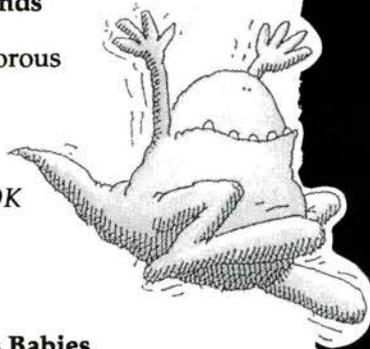
the children's book magazine

March 1991 No. 67 UK Price £1.70

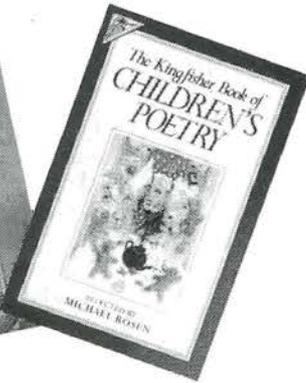
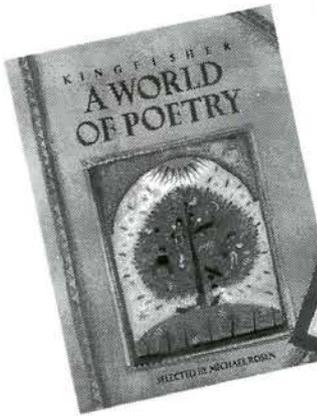




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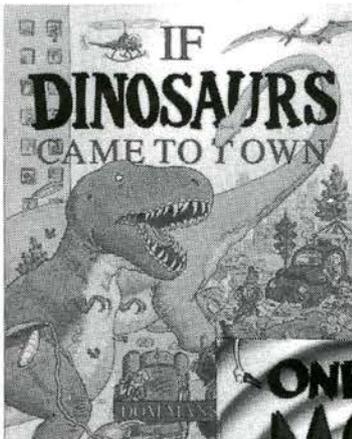


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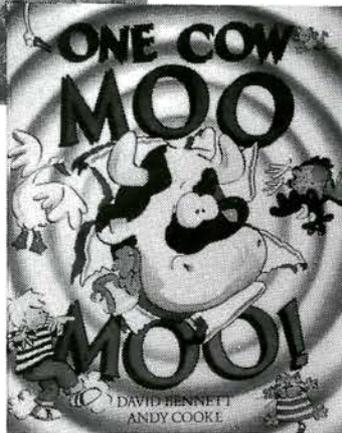


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Cover story

The illustration on the front of **BfK** this month is the cover of **The Secret of the Indian**, by Lynne Reid Banks (see Authorgraph on page 12 for details).

The book is published by Collins and we thank them for their help in using Graham Philpot's illustration.

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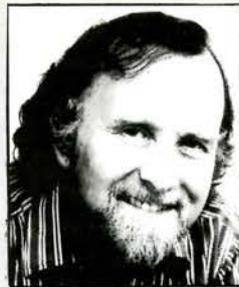
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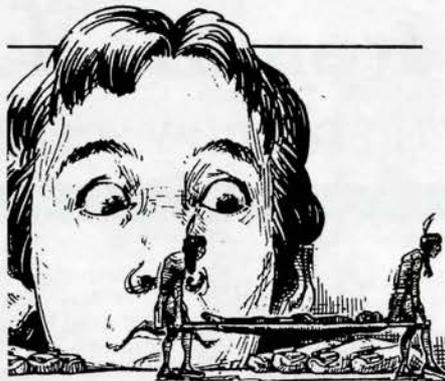
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EDITOR'S PAGE



What is a 'classic' children's book? Should adults or children decide... or some combination of the two, perhaps, assisted by that most unpredictable of literary SATs, the Test of Time? We'll be considering 'classic' status and what it entails for a text in a special issue of **BfK** later this year. The reason I raise the matter now is that Lynne Reid Banks, the subject of this month's Authorgraph, may well have written one.

No, not **The L-Shaped Room**. Hugely popular in schools though this continues to be, is it really a novel for *children*? A much better case could be made for **The Indian in the Cupboard**, first published in the UK in 1981 and now re-issued in paperback by Collins along with its sequels, **Return of the Indian** and **The Secret of the Indian** (see our front cover).



Omri had been drawn in. He'd found himself acting out his own part in these destinies, which would never have been possible but for the magic of the cupboard... and the key.

The key turned any container into a kind of body-shrinking time-machine. His seaman's chest had taken him and Patrick back to the eighteenth century, to Little Bull's time and place... Omri had not had time, so far, even to begin to think about the possibilities of that.

Now he scanned the seed-tray and saw that two of the Indians who had not been injured were carrying another body out of the longhouse and into the little paddock Patrick had made with miniature fencing, for the ponies, and which was now a makeshift morgue.

Margaret and Michael Rustin, writing about the trilogy's first volume in their **Narratives of Love and Loss** (Verso 1987), insist it's 'of a quality to stand with the very best classic children's books' and go on to tell us why. It's a pretty convincing argument. For a more down-to-earth view, though, see our centre pages where Lynne Reid Banks discusses this, and her other fiction, with Stephanie Nettell. 'Writers work intuitively,' she points out. 'When I read long treatises about Omri being a substitute parent, enabling children to recognise the responsible caring role, I'm *pop-eyed!* I've discovered I do include messages in my books only because teachers are always looking for them, but I simply aim to keep the narrative moving and the characters developing.'

Still, as our Authorgraph makes clear, there's a teacherly side to Lynne Reid Banks as well. Perhaps it exists in all children's authors, even those who deny it most hotly. Certainly a growing number of teacher-writers (or are they writer-teachers?) produce much eye-catching poetry and prose for today's youngsters - from established talents like Wes Magee to comparative newcomers like David Leney or **BfK**'s own Linda Newbery. So what's the link between the two occupations? Do they feed off each other? Conflict with each other? Simply, or complexly, overlap?

Perhaps the best-known figure to lead this arduous double-life is Bernard Ashley. For an account of what's involved, and how he copes with it, see pages 4-5 which give the background to his new series called 'The Dockside School Stories'. Writers and teachers will find plenty there they recognise.

They'll also recognise the force of Peter Dixon's argument on page 21 where he exercises his 'Writer Reply' concerning an issue that's beset children's books from their very beginning: do they exist to enlighten or to entertain? Anyone who knows Peter's own verse for children, or who has attended one of his famous courses on Art Education, will have encountered the Dixon Doctrine at first hand. Others had better be warned - especially if they're of a nervous disposition.

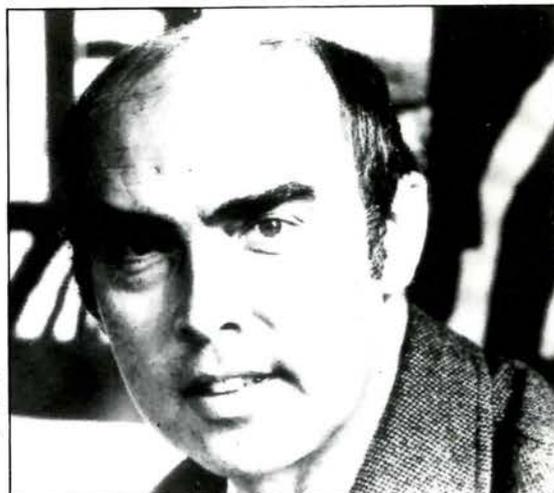
Chris Sutcliffe and Steve Rosson are also familiar with what might be called the rude-in-tooth-and-claw aspect of childhood. On page 22, Chris writes about his pupils' experience of judging last year's Smarties Prize, with its attendant trip to the Big City, and the impact this had not just on his secondary school but on its 'feeder' primaries, too. And on page 23, Steve lays out the sort of information about being a school-librarian which *never* appears in a job advertisement. I first read this with a steadily arching eyebrow... till, halfway through, I realised... well, find out for yourselves.

Apart from their sense of humour and relish for children as they really are, Messrs Sutcliffe and Rosson share one other attribute that's dear, I hope, to all readers of **BfK**: an uncomplicated love of books. So does the BBC's Joan Griffiths. Teachers everywhere praise her hugely successful 'Listening and Reading' series on Schools Radio - but do they ever wonder what lies 'Behind the Microphone'? Joan explains on pages 16-17.

Puffin's Liz Attenborough rather likes books, too. Better than most, though, she knows they don't grow on trees or spring fully-formed onto the shelf unencumbered by prior expenditure. That's why she wrote in protest to **BfK** about our reviewers' occasional carping at current prices. 'Do they realise the costs involved?' she asked. 'Maybe not,' replied your trusty Editor. 'Why don't you tell us?' So she does, on pages 18-19. It's essential data for everyone who chooses to confront the ever-shrinking book-budgets in our schools and libraries and the ever-handy alibi that it's new books themselves which are somehow to blame.

Mind you, there are now fifty-or-so picture books which will have no trouble at all returning a profit, albeit, in some cases, belatedly. Bookshops everywhere report bonanza-time for the NFER's tried-and-tested, or do we mean try-on-and-soon-to-be-tested, Ready Readers for the National Curriculum. Yes, **BfK** does have a view on this matter. And no, we're not rushing to judgement before the official package arrives in March... but watch this space.

Chris



Reflections from Dockside School

Bernard Ashley on his new series of school stories

There won't ever be a meet-the-author session without someone asking where characters and stories come from. For me it either precedes or follows, 'How do you manage to do your job and also write?' – the quick answer to which is that I couldn't continue with the job I do if I didn't have my *Way of Escape* (Graham Greene).

As to the other questions, plots come from the life around me and, like every writer who has ever put pen to paper, I also draw characters from the people I know. Reading biographies from Dickens to Hemingway bears out the universality of that. So I don't blame anybody for asking me if I get my child characters from the children I teach: but what I'm always at pains to point out is that no-one is lifted whole as a character and nobody's situation is taken complete; no-one is ever *used*. Writers don't work like that, if only because of the laws of libel. Like a doctor or a lawyer, I have a strict code of professional conduct which includes a meticulous regard for the pupil's and the parent's (and the teacher's) right to confidentiality.

Perhaps the nearest to a 'lift' was when I wrote *The Trouble with Donovan Croft*; but I had first gone to the parents of the six-year-old white elective mute girl for permission to create my ten-year-old black male. There are hundreds of situations which are the stuff of school life that can legitimately be used without the charge of dishonouring confidentiality: bed wetting; running off; not being picked; being picked on; being betrayed; being shamed; living with one parent or no parent; having a disability: all common elements of life in school, and fair sources for the writer so long as individual confidentiality is preserved. And real children are the stuff of story if only because they lead such dramatic lives. When were you last chased into the lavatory? But there must be no disguise: disguise thick or thin is against the code: what I use are the elements of a recognised situation and characters created from combinations of attributes. And before anyone asks, no, I don't carry on teaching for copy.

Dockside School

... is child of Clipper Street. Judith Elliott, who had created the renowned Banana Books at Heinemann,

sought to repeat her success when she set about the first list of her own, Orchard Books: calling her series of 5,000-word complete stories 'Orchard Story Books'. Within this format several authors were commissioned to write their own mini-series. Mine were the Clipper Streets; but because Jean Ure was doing the Woodside School Stories I was asked to avoid too much school. Later, Julia MacRae asked me to do a similar series for her: but away from Orchard I could actively go for the school situation – so Dockside School came about: and since I hadn't moved from south London, I set my school not too far away from Clipper Street, just a few miles down the Thames from Greenwich, where Henry VIII had created his dockyard at Woolwich.

I had my brief and I had a series of deadlines: and to spur me on, I had a good advance.

I know Dockside School. It has elements of all the primary schools I've ever worked in; and it looks like Meridian Primary School in Greenwich, an old London three-decker with narrow staircases and a small exercise yard under high walls, just along the road from where they filmed *The Krays*: in other words, like something out of Dickens, and with great dramatic potential.

Boat Girl

Many Vietnamese families have led dramatic lives, and there are Vietnamese children in many of our schools. Some have learned English better than their parents; and without lighting on an individual it was this thread which I first sought to unravel in *Boat Girl* – that frustration some children feel when their parents appear not to understand. I remember the annoyance of some Sicilian children in Hertfordshire when they had to do running translations of *Coronation Street* for their parents. ('I can't be bothered: I only tell her some of it,' was a typical admission.) Many of us have conducted parent interviews through the language skills of the children being discussed, so I began this story with the central character, Kim, having to translate for her father at a school meeting, sitting alongside him in the hall and whispering to him only some of what she thought he hadn't understood.

The other main element in the story comes from my meeting an adult Vietnamese at the other end of the language scale: someone who had come to Britain in that terrifying exodus and had, against enormous odds and



considerable prejudice – but also with a great deal of caring and with skilled help – qualified as a primary teacher. I interviewed her in her home, where much of the background to **Boat Girl** emerged; and I could never have invented so dramatic and moving a story. I introduced some common experiences of *School Journeys* – the bedroom groups and the children who don't get letters from home: but most of it is Think's and her husband's and their children's. And I knew, as I typed the final draft, that it would be a story I would always feel privileged to have written.

So, put at its crudest, I had a strong lead story to the series, and now I needed a second to partner it, since Julia MacRae intended to publish in twos.

The Ghost of Dockside School

I can still remember the summer when I was eleven, the final year of primary school. It was hot, and we were allowed to take individual P.T. mats out to the playground to sunbathe on. (In the winter the caretaker used to hose the playground to make slides for the big boys, a most accommodating school!) But that summer we weren't really interested in a tan. Since Easter there had reared a sudden interest in the opposite sex, and Bernard Ashley would have settled for his mat being in the shade if it still put him next to Maureen Vickery. Part of the writing pleasure is that trance at the desk as the mind occupies territory where the body once was, and as I write I'm in the playground, smelling the sisal of those green and red swirled mats, feeling their hard ridges, and hearing myself agreeing with everything Maureen Vickery said. Love can hit young and surprisingly hard: so why not in a story for those who are as seriously struck as I was?



There are two other well-known ingredients in **The Ghost of Dockside School**, and no need for disguise. One is the ghost herself. Surely every school with an upstairs has a ghost, lurking in the furthest room. My previous job was in a 1902 three-decker with towers and turrets, and my wife and I know the room the ghost inhabited: it was mine. From our jobs before that, and the old village school log book, I know how the ghost in my story died. I needed only to change her name. The second ingredient is the school play. At my present school we build into our drama curriculum a 'theatre experience' in Year Six, with scripts and scenery and technical talk of 'stage right' and 'stage left'. It's the time when children

play the men and women, and someone a boy has ignored for seven years can suddenly put on make-up and turn his stomach inside out. No-one is ever quite the same after the play. And thus, neither is Lee, who had both a softer and a braver heart than anyone had thought.

Size-ism

We fight a regular battle in school against racism and sexism. Our institutions are the most effective of any in society in pursuing equal opportunities. Now a new word is creeping in, and perhaps it should always have been there. Sizeism. 'Fat' and 'short' and their synonyms are arguably the first two words of contempt children employ, and two of the deepest causes of unhappiness in school. 'Fat' seems worse on the surface, but being short brings insidious insults often disguised as affection: again a common problem, which I used as the basis for **Getting In**, where a mix of created child and my real maternal grandparents performed for me in a 'step' story (one tactic being tried, then another, then another: a favourite structure in picture books but not used greatly in older fiction): in this case successive attempts to get into the gang.



The Caretaker's Cat

Finally, special needs. I wonder if there are any schools without a Miranda Finch from **The Caretaker's Cat**? She wasn't invented although she isn't anyone specific, she just *is*; and I know her and despair of her and love her. She's the one central character from the four books the publishers thought more stories should be focused upon: single-minded, unpredictable, disturbed in subtle ways, recognised by peers and teachers alike.

In this last book our school in Charlton comes the closest to being recognised. Elsie Lennox, the illustrator, suggested it might be appropriate to draw me as the headteacher, Mr Holt, and I vainly went along with the idea. But when Julia MacRae saw the jacket rough she vetoed it – and quite rightly – as ego-centric, so Elsie gave me some hair in thin disguise. She had also taken photographs of our caretaker and our secretary to base her pictures on, and they remain. But Miranda? She's certainly single-minded: Elsie Lennox herself, drawn younger.

There are writers who retire to folds in the Sussex Downs or to their second homes in France, some who go on to write maybe one or two valid novels about their London lives. But if they stick with contemporary fiction, before too long the books will need to be about Sussex and France if they're to have the ring of truth: who ever wrote a contemporary, gritty Sheffield story after years in the Seychelles? When I leave teaching, my books won't be about school any more, I promise, they'll be about where I am. Meanwhile they'll go on reflecting my life like the most polished mirrors I can find. But that's not why I stay doing the job: *really*. ●

Bernard Ashley's **Dockside School Stories** are published by Julia MacRae, priced £3.95 each

Boat Girl, 0 86203 445 0

The Ghost of Dockside School, 0 86203 446 9

Getting In, 0 86203 463 9

The Caretaker's Cat, 0 86203 464 7

REVIEWS

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

Nursery/Infant

A Surprise for Oliver

Audrey Chappell, ill.
Sarah Pooley, Picture
Lions (Sept 90),
0 00 663508 3, £2.50

Please let us have more books about Oliver, Batwoman Jo (especially Batwoman Jo!), Errol and the rest of the Nursery School gang. A simple story set in an attractive nursery school, it's ideal for any child entering this stage. The characterisation is delightful and the insight we're given of everyday nursery school life stimulates interesting discussion. The use of speech bubbles strongly reinforces the concept of print bearing a message - every child listening wants to know, and at once, what their favourite character is saying. JS

Sebastian: The tale of a curious kitten

Vanessa Julian-Ottie,
Little Mammoth
(Nov 90), 0 7497 0446 2,
£3.50

Sebastian is one of four kittens. He goes off through the cat flap to explore and this book tells the story of what he finds. He meets hedgehogs, a duck, a goat, some frogs, a mouse and a horse, and has a narrow escape from a large, barking dog before heading home for warmth and safety. Each animal is introduced through a hole in the page, giving the child a clue, helping her/his anticipation and imagination, and then showing the whole answer. A book which will certainly be enjoyed very much indeed. MS

First Nursery Rhymes

Rodney Peppé, Little
Mammoth (Nov 90),
0 7497 0447 0, £2.50

A charming book of nursery rhymes with delightful pictures full of patterns and colours. Highly recommended and most suitable for small children and their adults. MS

The Bears' Bazaar

Michelle Cartlidge,
Little Mammoth
(Oct 90), 0 7497 0438 1,
£2.50

I'm not enthusiastic about busy bears all dressed up and lots of pictures on the pages... it's much too fussy and confusing for the small child. However, my Nursery Nurse students enjoyed the book because it's full of things to make! There's a recipe for

Gingerbread Bears and Mustard Men, instructions on making paper dolls... good ideas, in fact, for people about to be working with children. But I'm not so sure it's suitable for the children themselves. MS

Where's the Fish?

Taro Gomi, Picturemac
(Nov 90), 0 333 53652 5,
£2.99



A completely satisfactory book for very young children because it's bright, clear and simple. It makes a game out of looking at every picture to find the same fish. Alternately asking 'Where's the fish?', and answering 'There's the fish', adult and child travel along, noticing much on the way, until a safe and happy conclusion is reached. MS

Jojo's Revenge!

Mick Inkpen, Walker
(Nov 90), 0 7445 1709 5,
£2.99



Learning to live with a messy baby isn't always much fun, but this lively story will undoubtedly help both parents and children smile. Jojo, discovering what can be done with food, manages to distribute it all over himself and then tries it on Granpa's head! Funny, beautifully coloured illustrations and a clear, simple text make it extremely worthwhile. MS



Rosalie

Joan Hewett, ill. Donald
Carrick, Picture Puffin
(Nov 90), 0 14 050.872 4,
£2.99

A pleasing book about having a very special dog in the family... this must be a true story. Rosalie is an old dog, but still joins in everything the children do and seems to enjoy it all. Fun, whether you have a dog or not. MS

Stanley in the Dark

M Christina Butler, ill.
Meg Rutherford, Simon
& Schuster (Oct 90),
0 7500 0220 4, £3.50

Stanley, the mouse, loves cheese - any kind of cheese - and one night he sees a large, round one ahead of him. We're allowed to gloat, with our superior knowledge that it is, of course, the moon, while the little mouse tries hard to get at it. A splendid story with soft, beautifully drawn pictures of animals at night. It's not at all frightening, even for the smallest person, to listen to at bedtime. MS

When I Was a Baby

Catherine Anholt, Little
Mammoth (Nov 90),
0 7497 0316 4, £2.50

A little girl is watching her mother getting out her old baby clothes ready for the new baby. She asks what she was like and what happened to her when she was newborn, and so her mother tells her about the everyday incidents in her life as a baby...

My doubts about it are that the pictures lack clarity and there's no context for the incidents. An adult is needed to put in a great deal of explanation. If this is the case, it's a good trigger for talk and thought. LW

Polly's Puffin

Sarah Garland, Picture
Puffin (Dec 90),
0 14 054.155 1, £2.99

A large-format book with admirably clear type, telling more of a story than many of Sarah Garland's titles which are often episodic rather than narrative. She's caught a pleasant idea - the loss of a loved toy turned into a simple, but interesting, I-Spy. The toy puffin has dropped into the hood of a man's duffle-coat and he's left the café - where can he be? We follow the trail, often spotting him when the characters can't, until the happy ending. All right, it does rely on a whacking great coincidence at the end which might worry adult readers but, as Polly says, 'it was like magic, wasn't it?'. And which adult reader would deny magic in stories! LW

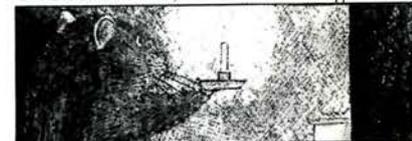
Two Terrible Frights

Jim Aylesworth, ill.
Eileen Christelow,
Picture Puffin (Nov 90),
0 14 050.865 1, £2.99

A 'really neat' story was the consensus of the class after I read it to them. A tiny mouse and a little girl make expeditions from their cosy bedrooms to the kitchen for late-night snacks. Their encounter is equally traumatic for both of them and the parallels, as they run to their mothers, are heightened as each becomes aware that the other was probably just as frightened. JS

A Scary Story Night

Rob Lewis, Simon &
Schuster (Oct 90),
0 7500 0459 2, £3.50



What is it about the human psyche that demands we should deliberately set about scaring ourselves silly? Rob Lewis explores this phenomenon when his hero, Rat, refuses an invitation from Mouse and determinedly reads frightening stories alone in the house on a stormy night. The build-up, as his imagination creates monsters out of a branch tapping at the window and other similar noises, brings him to a state of terror when he hears banging at the front door! A spine-tingling thriller for the very young with a twist at the end to leave them wondering! JS

Infant/Junior

The Monkey and the Crocodile

Retold by Farhat Shah, ill. Ferial Shah, 0 9512640 0 1, £3.50

A re-telling of an Indian fable, one of the Jatakas (tales relating the former births of the Buddha in a variety of animal guises). The theme is a universal one: the quick-thinking of the trickster outwitting the evil intentions of the attacker. Here, the monkey is tempted by tales of riper fruit onto the crocodile's back, but just when it looks like crocodile will get his longed-for juicy meal, monkey has other ideas.

The story is presented in dual-language (Bengali and English) and illustrated both with colour and black-and-white spreads. The English text reads aloud well, though the final sentence is something of an anti-climax and would have been better omitted. A welcome addition to the still too small collection of books for children (and their parents) who are literate in languages other than English. JB

Dig Away Two-Hole Tim

John Agard, ill. Jennifer Northway, Picture Knight (Oct 90), 0 340 50616 4, £2.99



A beautiful combination of Caribbean colour in words and pictures about a small Guyanese boy and his fascination for holes: keyholes, crabholes, tunnels and hidey holes to name but a few. John Agard's writing, especially his poetry in dialect, is now well-known and much appreciated by young listeners. It's good to see one of his earlier books finally available in paperback. JB

Mr Wolf's Birthday Surprise

Colin Hawkins, Little Mammoth (Oct 90), 0 7497 0284 2, £3.50

If you liked the other Mr Wolf books, this is in a similar vein but, beware, it's much longer and denser than the previous titles and requires a fairly sophisticated reader of picture-clues to get the most from the surprise ending. For this

reason it's more inclined to the upper end of the age-range, I think. The story of Mr Wolf's frustration and incomprehension, as all his friends refuse to play with him because they have parcels to deliver or are going out to tea, gave a great deal of pleasure to newly-independent readers, all of whom were very generous in explaining to me what the joke was! LW

The Adventures of Dudley Dormouse

Judy Taylor, ill. Peter Cross, Walker (Oct 90), 0 7445 1727 3, £3.99



A super book, this, and one that deserves to become a classic in the upper infant library. In a new format for Walker (very small, sturdy, square, beautifully printed on high quality paper) these four little stories of Dudley are literate, amusing and full of things to talk about. I wasn't very impressed by the previous Dudley story, *Dudley Bakes a Cake*, which seemed to mismatch writer and artist. This time, however, the two complement each other wonderfully and the text and pictures tell the witty stories in perfect tandem. LW

The Tin Can Band and Other Poems

Margaret Mahy, ill. Honey de Lacey, Picture Puffin (Nov 90), 0 14 054.188 8, £2.99

Few writers can make language sing and dance, and show children and adults the way in which dull, everyday words have treasures waiting within them. Margaret Mahy is one such writer. This collection of some of her poems is full of lovely things – unexpected, funny, poetic and lively. From the drollery of

Goodness gracious fiddle dee dee!

Somebody's grandmother out at sea!

to the magic of

When I was but a little boy and played beneath a tree

Seven kings and seven queens there came to talk with me.

the range of subject and voice is wide.

No one, I think, could fail to find something to like and remember here. There are echoes of folk song and nursery rhyme, of fairy tale and philosophy, and some beautiful lines which stay in the mind. Yet, best of all, nothing is beyond the enjoyment of a young child. Truly a book to grow up with. LW

The Sandal

Tony Bradman, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Picture Puffin (Dec 90), 0 14 054.173 X, £2.99

A book in which the pictures are as important as the text in the telling of the story. It begins, intriguingly, with pictures only telling of a little Roman girl who loses her sandal in a river... it has gone forever. Or has it? The book moves to the words of a modern girl's big brother. They visit a museum and there, in a glass case, is a sandal just like his sister's. Where did it come from? And what will happen to little sister's sandal when she drops it in the river on the way home? We move to 2250 AD... and beyond.

Fascinating and thought-provoking. I recommend this highly to teachers interested in giving 6, 7 and 8 year-olds a sense of history... as well as a real literary experience. LW

Little Sister Big Trouble

Mildred Pitts Walter, ill. Pat Cummings, Simon & Schuster (Oct 90), 0 7500 0453 3, £3.50



Daniel finds it hard work amusing his younger sister, Gina, for the day, so his Mum can prepare for her evening 'get-together'. A straightforward domestic story, but what lifts it above the ordinary is the quality of portrayal of the black family; their expressions speak louder than the words which are themselves refreshingly un sentimental. JB

Snow Lion

David McPhail, Little Mammoth (Nov 90), 0 7497 0448 9, £2.99

When Lion discovers the joys of the cold, white fluffy stuff

he finds in the hills, he wants to share it with his friends back in the jungle, but when he opens his suitcase all he has is a small puddle. Elephant, baboon and the others think he's mad until he persuades them to come and see for themselves what fun it can be playing in the snow.

This is a longish picture-storybook (some 40 pages), but the text is very readable and young readers will be amused by Lion's initial ignorance of the properties of snow and the sight of the jungle animals' frozen frolics. JB

The Last Dodo

Ann and Reg Cartwright, Red Fox (Nov 90), 0 09 962230 0, £2.99

King Glut's conversion to conservation isn't brought about by his rescue from shipwreck by a friendly whale, or by the captain of the Green Dove protection vessel: right to the last minute the corpulent king, with a passion for eggs, seems determined to eat the last dodo egg. But this egg hatches and a peck on the nose from the dodo is enough to make the king change his mind.



Reg Cartwright's stylised illustrative technique is as unique as the dodo: green consciousness came too late to save real dodos, but this tale with its lavish jungly scenes is a pertinent reminder of mankind's greed and its potential destructiveness. JB

The Park in the Dark

Martin Waddell, ill. Barbara Firth, Walker (Oct 90), 0 7445 1740 0, £3.99

A beautiful picture book with a wonderful, rhythmic text about what a group of toys gets up to at night. This recommendation comes with a word of warning to those whose children find getting to sleep difficult, for this book, despite its reassuring ending, is definitely scary! MS

Junior/Middle



Maid Marian and her Merry Men

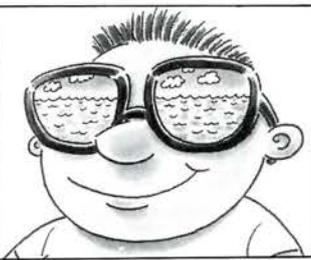
The Whitish Knight
0 563 36040 2

The Beast of Bolsover
0 563 36041 0

Tony Robinson, ill. Paul Cemmick, BBC (Oct 90), £3.99 each

These two are stupendously funny, brilliantly illustrated and complement, if not outshine, the television series. In comic format they tell the 'real truth' about Robin Hood, the story of which, incidentally, the reader needs to know first. Maid Marian, it transpires, was the true leader who assembled her Merry Men (a rather unimpressive bunch of twits) in battle order to fight King John and the Sheriff of Nottingham. Somehow, mistakenly, Robin got all the credit and MM hardly a mention. In setting history straight, Tony Robinson has given us books that have achieved cult status in my classroom and gone to the top of the hilarity scale. If all books had this appeal, we'd have no reluctant readers! PH

Sea in My Mind **POETRY**
Ill. Alan Rowe, Puffin (Nov 90), 0 14 03.4520 5, £2.50



An outstanding testament to the wealth of talent that's not going unnoticed in our schools. Comprising a selection of entries from the **Observer** National Children's Poetry Competition, there's insight and sensitivity on each and every page.

I especially liked 'When I am happy' and could visualise the 5-year-old poet being a 'proud tree' standing 'still and straight'. 'Welard', the 16-year-old toughie whose ambition at GCSE is 'get'n A in bein ard', needed pre-reading several times to stop the giggles from spoiling the rhythm. My favourite was the sad, despairing tears of 'Two old Rocking Horses' left abandoned and forgotten in an attic - poor things! PH

Saving Grace

Nick Warburton, Mammoth (Oct 90), 0 7497 0294 X, £1.99

When a young and tiny Grace Gordon goes in goal during a back street football match, nobody expects her to save a penalty against the hammer-footed Sammy Swift. Least of all Reg Quint, talent scout for the local professionals. When Grace intercepts the ball with ease, Quint assumes it was Sammy's save and signs him up. Media hype makes Sammy a big star, but who can save him when he eventually has to go in goal for the cup match?

Here we have a brisk and highly enjoyable farce. Each episode of gathering chaos has an appropriately silly tabloid-style headline. Excellent, light entertainment for independent readers. GH

Timepieces: a year in the life of a Suffolk village

David Leney, Puffin (Nov 90), 0 14 03.4397 0, £2.99

David Leney, headteacher at a Suffolk primary school, has drawn effectively on his experience in this collection of twelve stories of school and rural village life; one story for each month of the year. The main character of one story appears as a minor figure in others, giving a pleasing sense of interlocking lives. The stories - affectionate, humorous and reassuring - would be ideal to read aloud to primary classes and would work well as a basis for children's own writing. It's a pity, though, that the cover illustration does nothing to convey the flavour of the contents. LN

Streets Ahead

Edited by Valerie Bierman, Mammoth (Oct 90), 0 7497 0297 4, £2.50

Ten stories here that have the city as backdrop. Valerie Bierman has coaxed contributions from the likes of Gene Kemp, Berlie Doherty, Ann Pilling and Joan Lingard (what, no Jan Mark or Robert Westall?). One is ghostly, one is sporty, one historical, another eerie; along with all the rest, they make this a useful contribution to the short story repertoire. Good for reading aloud. DB

Green Machine

Michael Hardcastle, Mammoth (Oct 90), 0 7497 0289 3, £1.99

A sequel to earlier motorcross novels, this sees Lee Parnaby fêted by Namura, anxious to offer their bike - and attendant publicity - to a promising young rider.

The usual mix of family rivalry, accurate race descriptions and cliff-hanging chapter endings will speed all but the most reluctant readers through this short (122 pages), but entertaining, book.

Girls feature, too - to widen the audience or as a nod to equal opportunities? The illustrations, however, are awful - childish, and detract from what is otherwise a carefully marketed package. VR

Dodos Are Forever

Dick King-Smith, Puffin (Nov 90), 0 14 03.4044 0, £2.25



An audience of 8-year-olds enjoyed this story which begins with a description of Dodo island before the humans arrived - a haven of limitless leisure and plenty, where the Dodos had all the food and security they needed and no enemies. The author invents a charmingly anthropomorphised group of Dodos who are just beginning to relish the joys of family life when the existence of their entire race is threatened by a plague of humans and rats. However, these creatures defy their historical destiny by fleeing to an uninhabited island under the guidance of an escaped ship's parrot.

As an adventure story, the tale lacks tension since we know well before the end what the outcome will be. As a wish-fulfilment fantasy, it's both poignant and amusing, leaving the reader with a childlike longing that the story should be true. GH

Starchild and Witchfire

David Henshall, Firefly Plus (Nov 90), 0 333 53351 8, £4.99

Snowdrifts and Childirakes, an evil witch with her entourage and flying dragons all contribute to a complex

and twisting saga of good against evil. Jamie and Fern's endeavours to return the 'heart' that their mother has had since girlhood to the land of Mithaca, where it truly belongs, throws us into a fantastic adventure. In the Tolkien genre, this provides sound beginnings for the more able reader who is going to enjoy progressing to **The Hobbit** and **Lord of the Rings**. It's long, it's complicated and I enjoyed every moment I spent unravelling the wealth of detail. PH

A Mouse in My Roof

Richard Edwards, Puffin (Nov 90), 0 14 03.4241 9, £2.50



A collection of light, quirky poems, many on everyday themes, to which Richard Edwards brings a fresh view of such mundane things as creases in jeans and even boredom itself. A very approachable book for juniors, particularly those who've already come to know something of this poet's voice from **The Word Party** or **Whispers from a Wardrobe**. JB

Catching the Spider - Poems for Children

John Mole, Blackie **POETRY** (Oct 90), 0 216 93011 1, £4.95

John Mole's latest anthology is a treasure chest of memories and reflections, tales in rhyme and rhythm, verbal photographs and nimble word games. Nine riddles at the heart of the book exemplify its rich integration of lightheartedness and emotional depth. In spite of the price, it might be worth buying several copies for distribution throughout the school, but keep one by your own desk - whatever age you teach, you'll use it. GH

Mr Browser and the Space Maggots

Philip Curtis, Puffin (Nov 90), 0 14 03.4394 6, £2.50

Grass shrivelling in spite of unnaturally regular rain, the disappearance of a nature reserve warden and the bizarre message he leaves behind, all herald the arrival of Space Maggots, alien invaders infiltrating Earth through a hole in the ozone layer, and poisoning the planet through corrosive pollution. Three pupils from Chivvy Chase School and their teacher are the only ones who take the



threat seriously, so they unite to track down the maggots.

This good, old-fashioned school adventure story is given a modern twist by its indeterminate ending involving a police and government slip-up. A useful piece of fiction to feed into school environmental discussions and for lovers of sci-fi to read on their own. **GH**

Adventure on the Knolls

Michael Dundrow, ill.
Margaret Dundrow,
The Book Castle
(Oct 90), 1 871199 55 7,
£2.99

Coming just at the moment when my Y4s are 'doing' Invaders, this is one of those books that's going to find a niche in the National Curriculum reading enrichment lists. True, it's a fairly predictable format with the convenience of an accidental fall leading not to the bottom of the chalk pit, but back 2,000 years. The story is, however, well-researched, lively and exciting. It provides factual details that children relate to easily and can use elsewhere in their own writing. Thank you 'The Dundrows' - are there any more in the pipeline? **PH**

Dr Monsoon Taggart's Amazing Finishing Academy

Andrew Matthews,
Mammoth (Nov 90),
0 7497 0319 9, £1.99



Arabella's indulgent parents feed her till she reaches truly mountainous proportions, but starting school and the arrival of the slim, athletic Fawcett children next door make her realise that things aren't as they should be. On her tenth birthday she announces that she'd like to be ordinary and

shortly afterwards a mysterious letter arrives from Dr Monsoon Taggart inviting her to become a pupil at his Academy.

A very funny, thoroughly moral tale with excellent dialogue and entirely appropriate line drawings from Tony Ross to add to the delights. **JB**

Pictures in the Cave

George Mackay Brown,
Kelpie (Sept 90),
0 86241 318 4, £2.50

This is a series of linked short stories all set in the author's native Orkney. Sigurid, truanting from school, ventures close to an enchanted cave and discovers the stories it conceals. The ensuing tales illustrate various periods of Orcadian history, from the Stone Age to the Second World War and beyond, evoking the triumphs and hardships of a traditional, but ever-changing way of life. **LN**

Middle/Secondary

Dream Time

Edited by Toss
Gascoigne, Jo Goodman
and Margot Tyrrell,
Puffin (Dec 90),
0 14 03.4261 3, £2.99



The Children's Book Council of Australia commissioned this collection, giving the theme of 'dream time' to award-winning authors. The interpretations are far-ranging and ingenious, from Mary Steele's humorous 'Aunt Millicent' about an imaginary aunt who threatens to take over the family, to Victor Kelleher's vivid, allegorical 'River Serpent', which is surely inspired by 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Excellent value for sixteen stories. **LN**

Night Maze

Annie Dalton,
Mammoth (Nov 90),
0 7497 0322 9, £2.50

A new family for an orphaned boy; a beautiful but cold Elizabethan house; a formidable grandmother; a family cursed with unhappiness; a forbidden Maze which holds long-standing secrets: these ingredients combine in a fantasy story which has a firm and satisfying base in real-life family relationships. The strong characterisation and the controlled but vigorous style lead to a willing

suspension of disbelief as the logic of the Maze works itself out. An enjoyable read for fantasy fans... and for others besides. **LN**

The Chestnut Soldier

Jenny Nimmo,
Mammoth (Oct 90),
0 7497 0150 1, £2.50

This is the conclusion of the **Snow Spider** trilogy. Gwyn, now 13, accepts that he's inherited supernatural powers from his ancestor, the magician Gwydion, but is reluctant to use them. When an ex-soldier comes to stay with his friends, Gwyn recognises that an old legend of hatred and bitterness is about to be re-enacted, and is forced to intervene.

Suspense, legend and a strong sense of Welsh rural life are skilfully combined in this engrossing finale. **LN**



Downhill All the Way

K M Peyton, Puffin
(Nov 90), 0 14 03.4165 X,
£2.50

The writer maintains her own balance beautifully in a story

that hurtles along veering between comedy and seriousness. It's a school skiing trip, a gallery of strongly differentiated types, but all nicely earthbound, who experience skiing for the first time. The parallel stories of the boy who has to pretend to be the son of the owner of Harrods at a dinner party and the two who have to survive a skiing accident typify the crafted blending of elements. It's good fun. **AJ**

Quest for a Maid

Frances Mary Hendry,
Kelpie (Sept 90),
0 86241 315 X, £2.75

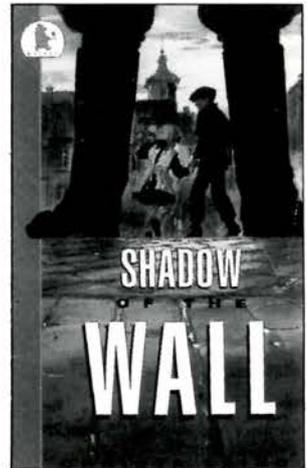
A recreation of Scottish history in the kind of writing which makes its historical setting live and breathe. The death of Alexander III caused a power struggle which the intended marriage of his grand-daughter, the Maid of Norway, to an English prince might ease. The characterisation is vivid and the plot is action-packed with high drama, witchcraft and a language which seems tuned to the voices and place. There's a strong female central character, and Sir Patrick Spens too. **AJ**

The Golden Journey

John Rowe Townsend,
Puffin (Dec 90),
0 14 03.2891 2, £2.99

An heroic, classical story of quest which gains power from its use of jarring, newer elements. The hero is a girl whose language continually challenges the ornate and pompous style of the men in power around her. The islands suffer the autocratic demands of a king bent on waging wars. Eleni is both the prophesied messenger of change.

reasserting the old spiritual realities, and a new voice of realism and directness, demonstrating the power of the individual to challenge and change. **AJ**



Shadow of the Wall

Christa Laird, Walker
(Oct 90), 0 7445 1759 1,
£2.99

A very moving story set in the Warsaw ghetto in Spring 1942 and based, partly, on real characters. It centres on an orphanage and shows struggle, hardship and resourcefulness. They cope with lack of food, illness and the Nazis who have walled them in and whose savage and brutal acts continually break into their lives. The scene where the Doctor leads the children onto the train for Treblinka is etched in my mind. Some way on from **The Silver Sword** for a slightly older age group, with Primo Levi not too far ahead. **AJ**

Park's Quest

Katherine Paterson,
Puffin (Nov 90),
0 14 03.4076 9, £2.50

Parkington Waddell Broughton V wants to know more about the dead father his mother refuses to discuss. This overworked plot is here given a new, if predictable, twist when Park meets his father's family and discovers Thanh, his Vietnamese half-sister. The irony of this child, as the product of a union with a member of the race which caused his father's death, is not lost on Park and yet his acceptance of her is carefully and convincingly handled.

This book shouldn't work, but its Arthurian parallels and Thanh's quirky humour give it an irresistibility which carries the reader along. Third-year secondary readers of both sexes might warm to this one.

VR

The Charlie Barber Treatment

Carole Lloyd, Walker
(Nov 90), 0 7445 1488 6,
£2.99

Simon finds his mother suddenly and unexpectedly dead at home. He copes with his shock and grief by isolating himself from everyone except his closest friend, who has family problems of his own.

When Charlie comes to the village to stay with her grandmother, Simon is at first uncommunicative but then attracted by her unconventional approach – initially, she makes all the moves.

This is a remarkable book – not least for its portrayal of boys as vulnerable, emotional and sensitive. Buy it as a class text for third-year secondary and hope that this is a direction which teenage novels will be

unafraid to take. I hope there's a sequel to this stimulating book soon! VR

Home from Home

Susan Price, Faber
(Nov 90), 0 571 14316 4,
£1.99

Short for his age, intelligent but misdirected, Paul Menton attracts the attention he lacks at home by being a pain in the butt. A change of direction comes about unexpectedly when he's lumbered with a community service at school. His old lady, Mrs Maxwell, brings out his more sensitive side through needing him, appreciating his gifts and giving him the love and kindness he craves.

Good in patches, especially when Paul and Mrs M are together, this is showing its age (1977) a bit, but it's worth a glance for the library. DB

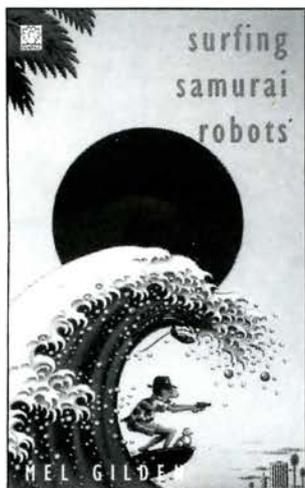
Bagthorpes Liberated

Helen Cresswell, Puffin
(Dec 90), 0 14 03.4428 4,
£2.99

After their eventful ghost hunt abroad (Wales), the whole disastrous tribe is back on home ground wreaking havoc once more at Unicorn House. Mrs Bagthorpe's decision to create an equal-opportunity household could be said to be at the root of the trouble, but then Mrs Fosdyke, infatuated by a squatter itinerant, and Daisy, emptying pints of curdled milk into Henry's pond, add their quota to the mayhem.

Number seven was to be the last in the outrageous saga, but an eighth is in preparation. Fans young and old will not be disappointed. DB

Older Readers

**Surfing Samurai Robots**

0 14 09.0179 5

Hawaiian UFO Aliens

0 14 09.0183 3

Mel Gilden, Fantail
(Dec 90), £3.50 each

What do you get if you cross Raymond Chandler stories with science-fiction? In this case, Zoot Marlowe, an alien with a knowledge of life on Earth based on Chandler stories. He comes to a slightly futuristic California to play his hero, wearing the appropriate clothes and trading the wise-cracking dialogue. He's four foot tall, with a two foot nose and a robot duck called Bill for an assistant. These books run in sequence, establishing Zoot's arrival then detailing the two 'cases'. It's tongue-in-cheek parody, outrageous yet also Chandler for a new age and probably an excellent introduction to the real thing. It could have a cult following. Invite potential readers to classify them just by examining the covers. AJ

Cityscape

Frances Thomas, Teens
(Oct 90), 0 7497 0206 0,
£2.50

In this fantasy novel, a lonely London teenager slips inexplicably in and out of a future city governed by a harsh authoritarian régime. She joins a group of the oppressed underclass and finds that her literacy makes her a phenomenon in this Orwellian state where books are forbidden; she's welcomed by the charismatic leader, Cal, who ultimately organises a revolution. Gradually, Debra's attraction to this purposeful existence fades as she realises that Cal has exploited her for his own ends, and she returns to 'real' life with changed values. This easy-to-read, yet thought-provoking book will be enjoyed by teenagers. LN

Peta's Pence

Christine Purkis,
Livewire (Nov 90),
0 7043 4923 X, £3.50

Peta is a rebel riding a motorcycle, refusing to go on dates, dreaming in trees. Her defiances ensure that she and her mother, Frances, do not get on. Frances still grieves for her dead son, Peter, and is almost unable to overcome the antipathy and distance from reality generated by Peta's birth.

Gradually the story of Frances' mental illness emerges – while Peta works as a volunteer in the same mental hospital where her mother received treatment. The plot is sometimes confusing and the dated timeslips occasionally confuse rather than illuminate. However, throughout there's a sense of exploration of characters and of insights into parent/child relationships. Offer to female readers of 14 and above. VR

Just Like the Movies

Patricia Windsor, Firefly
Plus (Dec 90),
0 333 52224 9, £4.50

You begin to wonder whether Andy Smith's life is really a soap-opera for which she, herself, is writing the script. 'That's the difference between real life and the movies. The trouble with real life is that you have all these realities to cope with.' This rowdy, pacey, gangster spoof has all the components to keep you reading right up to the last dramatic episode and then to leave you still wondering... DB

The Flawed Glass

Ian Strachan, Mammoth
(Nov 90), 0 7497 0151 X,
£2.50

This makes an absorbing read leaving the reader with much to ponder. With great sensitivity and skill, the author tells of handicapped Shona's life on her remote Scottish island, capturing her further isolation because she's trapped inside her own palsied body, unable to speak intelligibly. Carl, the new Laird's son, arrives and gradually he breaks down her barriers, practically in terms of her handicap and emotionally in terms of her approaching womanhood.

I ended up a bit limp and soggy at the end so it must've been a good read! DB

No Time to Say Goodbye

Tony Drake, Teens
(Oct 90), 0 7497 0205 2,
£2.50

... he's nothing more than a petty thief with a big mouth. And as for Cathy Rosser ... Bennett's opinion of Martin's new-found associates earns

him a broken nose. That's just the start of Martin's troubles at school and at home culminating in a re-assessment of exactly where he's at, brought about by tragic circumstances that land him in a hospital bed. The strands of this tale don't quite seem to jigsaw together comfortably, but nevertheless it makes a recommendable read for teenagers. DB

The Broken Bridge

Philip Pullman,
Macmillan (Nov 90),
0 333 52221 4, £4.99



Pullman's **The Ruby in the Smoke** excited a good deal of positive comment: this will do the same. Ginny believes her Haitian mother dead, but when she discovers the existence of a white half-brother, she realises her father has concealed much from her. She struggles to make sense of her family situation and of apparent contradictions in her personal relationships. This book is ambitious and well-crafted, offering readers a challenging chance to explore areas of sensitivity for young adults. VR

Audio Tapes

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent story tapes.

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

Rock-A-Bye Baby Songs

Sung by Jane Romer, Collins, 60 mins, with accompanying hardback illustrated by Emma Chichester Clark, £9.99

This is a lovely package, soothing and gentle to babies and their fraught parents. Jane Romer is a professional singer as well as a mother and her lullabies are beautifully sung and accompanied. Each lullaby is sung and then the musical accompaniment alone follows for the parent to sing along with to the child. Songs come from all over the world including France, India and Africa and are sung in their original languages. The book is illustrated with a good sense of detail and colour, and includes all the words and music. It's a generous length cassette and the package would be an ideal gift for a new baby.

Paddington's Birthday Party

Paddington on the River

Michael Bond, read by Michael Horden, Collins, 12-min. cassette with accompanying 32-page Carnival hbk, £3.49 each

These are simple, short adventures of Paddington based on the TV programmes, not the original quite substantial books. Sir Michael Horden is, of course, a superb reader, but he deserves a better package. The cassettes, at an average six minutes a side, costing £2.59 (the book is priced at 90p), are not good value. There's no indication of cassette length on the packaging. The sound effects, such as the jarring, unnatural laughter on 'Birthday Party', merely detract from the story. The illustrations are not the originals, but crude look-alikes. The names of Paddington and Sir Michael Horden on the cover lead a buyer to expect something better.

Burglar Bill

Cops and Robbers

Funnybones

Janet and Allan Ahlberg, read by Bernard Cribbins, Collins, 20-min. cassette with accompanying 32-page Little Mammoth pbk, £3.99 each

These Ahlberg book and cassette titles have just been re-released and re-packaged with a boxed cassette. Inventive sound effects. Bernard Cribbins' creative



ROCK-A-BYE BABY SONGS

The Ghosts of Hungry House Lane

Sam McBratney, read by Christian Rodska, Chivers, two cassettes, unabridged, 2 hrs 15 mins, £9.95 + VAT

This story is full of humour, exploited by Christian Rodska's characterisation of the awful Sweet family from London who lease Hungry House. He dramatises effectively the children's tantrums and quarrels and the parents' bad-tempered self-absorption. The children realise the house is full of gentle, previously contented ghosts and, unknown to the disinterested parents, they make the spooks' lives miserable by opening up the house as a tourist attraction. But it's the ghosts who turn the tables on these insensitive, materialistic children, bringing them – through terror and humour – to greater wisdom. Full of ideas for around 8-12s.

The Chocolate War

Robert Cormier, read by Frank Muller, Chivers, four cassettes, unabridged, 5 hrs 38 mins, £16.95 + VAT

In Robert Cormier's introduction, he explains how the germ for this story was his own son being asked – and refusing – to sell chocolates for his new school's funds. His books, he explains, deal with the 'what if...?' of life and **The Chocolate War** explores the development of victimisation as new boy Jerry Renault refuses to conform to his school's dubious practice of selling thousands of boxes of chocolates. On the one hand, in its appropriately pacy American delivery, its psychology and plots are deep and exciting; on the other, it's a serious comment on the high price which is exacted from those who stand by their principles. Interesting issues for what Cormier calls that 'wonderful, lacerating time' – adolescence. ●

narration and the superb Ahlberg illustrations, make for excellent products, even though the cassettes are short. The story including sound effects is on one side; on the other is the same story with turn-over tones for reading practice.

Burglar Bill is a favourite. He marries Burglar Betty, they become reformed characters and provide a home for Betty's baby who cries and laughs so realistically on the tape. Full of zip and humour.

Cops and Robbers is a story, told in funny verse, of 'this peg-legged, baby-faced, villainous crew / Who'd pick the pocket of a kangaroo'. Bernard Cribbins makes the most of the raucous rhythm, refrains and punchy full rhymes – a good way to show children that verse can be fun.

In **Funnybones**, the big skeleton, the little skeleton and the dog skeleton set out to find someone to frighten. With its repetition – 'Down the dark, dark staircase, there was a dark, dark cellar. . . . – it's a great story to be read aloud. The spooky narration and sound effects – like the big skeleton scratching his skull

for inspiration and the hooting owl – add atmosphere and humour. The simplicity of the vocabulary and clarity of the text, along with the irresistibly attractive artwork, make this a particularly good package for reading practice.

Mr Majeika

Written and read by Humphrey Carpenter, Chivers, two cassettes, unabridged, 1 hr 30 mins, £9.95 + VAT

Humphrey Carpenter makes an excellent, lively reader of his own story – from the weeping Melanie to the brat Hamish Bigmore. The story has immediate appeal for 8-12s, with the new teacher. Mr Majeika, an out-of-work wizard, giving brat Bigmore vampire teeth and turning him into a frog for days on end. Hamish steals Mr Majeika's flying potion in revenge, intending to make him fly away for good, but it's the Headmaster who drinks it by mistake . . . Packed with incident, and the narration really does make the children come alive.

Authorgraph No. 67

Talk flows out of her. Memories, opinions, anecdotes, all vivid with facial expression and character-voices: Lynne Reid Banks is a compulsive storyteller. The clear voice, hair drawn back ballet-style, and a joyous love of colour and pattern echo her early ties with the theatre, while the comfortable figure and seething emotional energy now appear uncannily Jewish, mystically born of that youthful commitment to Israel, spiritual though not religious, which was to mould her entire adult life.

She was born in Barnes, one of the Regency houses in Castelnau her home-base until her mother left it in 1978. Now transformed, it was on the market at £685,000 just the week before our meeting and Lynne had sneaked a nostalgically covetous viewing: even the garden had been wondrously redesigned, removing an 'awful old garden shed' – and into her mind crept the magic of her sixth birthday and a brand new Wendy house . . .

The house was leasehold. Her father was a GP in a poor area of Hammersmith, lumbered with lifelong debt from his own father who'd bought the practice; her mother (clearly a power in Lynne's life) had been a well-known and beautiful actress who forever regretted dutifully giving up her career to become the good little doctor's wife. She sent Lynne, at nine deemed by her aunts a spoilt only-child, to a Catholic boarding school – oddly, since she wasn't religious and actually anti-Catholic – and then found a typically lateral solution to her daughter's desperate homesickness by herself moving into a cottage in the grounds and becoming a much-loved adjunct to the school.

In 1940 she fulfilled her patriotic duty to future generations by taking Lynne and a boy cousin as evacuees to the Canadian prairies; by the time their lawyer host, alternating lecherous benders with tedious remorse, had made their mistake clear, it was impossible to return. They eventually found independence in a little house on

the wrong side of the tracks, and came home at the end of war. Lynne was 15, and influenced profoundly. Yes, she'd had an amazing time, but neither her own nor her mother's relationship with her father ever truly recovered; there was the cruel contrast of Canadian plenty with the grey grimness of post-war Britain, and the bitter fuel-less cold of 1946-7; more vitally, there was the sense of having missed something important of her country's experience. This acute sense of loss – of absence, guilt, whatever – was complicated and heightened by newsreels of Belsen and Auschwitz which so affected her that in the years to come she became engrossed in, captivated and fascinated by, Israel and its destiny and all things Jewish. Though not apparent at first, it marked out the path her life was to follow.

Heart set on the theatre, she refused to go back to school, though a resented secretarial training has ever after proved its worth. The Italia Conti was followed by pre-RADA in Hampstead, then RADA itself: unpublished short stories and plays were the by-product of five years in rep, but at 24 she was able to appear in her own Yorkshire family comedy, *It Never Rains But It Pours* . . . Her father's sudden death a year later, leaving a leased house and no income, redirected her to more profitable jobs, culminating in research secretary to Wolf Mankowitz – a wonderful time, on the fringe of all sorts of things like *A Kid for Two Farthings*.

Then a call from BBC Television proved to be for her: her play was to take the prime-time Sunday drama slot. The ensuing work and diversions ended her job; the ensuing crucifying reviews ('It Never Rains But It Bores' from a friend) ended dreams of playwriting fame and sent her blundering into journalism. 1955 brought burgeoning freelance opportunities, and an extraordinary crossed-wires moment (she was interviewing Aidan Crawley, editor of the ground-breaking *News*, while he thought she was after a reporting job) led to her becoming one of the first two women reporters in television. 'We pioneered vox pop interviews in the street – most men thought you were soliciting and sheered off.'

Not that these trailblazers were given the hard-news stories (and industrialists tended to assume they were warm-ups for the real interview later), but one roving report was significant – Israel in 1960. Nervous of fulltime writing, she continued working for six years while writing in the quiet moments of the news service – 'Half of *The L-Shaped Room* was written on ITN stationery'. Publication, a film, and that was it.

A turning-point in every way, for by then she had met Chaim Stephenson, an Israeli sculptor on study-leave in England ('the kibbutz can't stand bachelors, so he was probably meant really to find a wife – well, he found me'), and, in a decision that must have felt preordained, returned with him in 1962. From a Liverpoolian background, Chaim had gone to Israel in 1948, fought in the war, and helped found a kibbutz in the north. 'I fully intended to take him out of there – me? (she sounds like Miss Piggy) doing dirty farmwork in the country? – but, eight years later, dot dot dot. I loved it.' Their three sons were born there in quick succession; Adiel and Omri are bible names. Gillon is a modern Hebrew name from 'gill', meaning joy. She has since written extensively on Israel, giving Israeli settings to four novels, and in 1979 published *Letters to my Israeli Sons*, an ambitious historical survey for her teenage boys that was both challenging and touching.

And in Israel, teaching English instinctively as a medium for self-expression – at a time when this was almost a crime ('"Never let them make a mistake" was their fundamental rule') Lynne discovered a lifelong joy. Now, wherever she is in the world, India, Tanzania, Nepal, as well as here and America, at the first opportunity she prowls into startled classrooms, hungry for the thrill of setting young minds alight.

Back in Britain to pick up both their careers, she published *One More River* (1972), which she's now in the process of rewriting for an older age-group in America. True, many of the suggested changes – like removing the preachy, authorial voice – are absolutely right for 20 years on, but American publishers do tend to underestimate the capabilities of their readership. I know, because I've been into hundreds of schools and seen these bright kids: their teachers want *stretching* writing and (a quoting voice) vocabulary enrichment. That's why, when they finally took *I, Houdini* (1978 in UK) to please me, so I'd go on turning out the *Indian* books, it then sold brilliantly, although it had been rejected by every American publisher because the words were too long. In fact there's a greater commitment to reading and literature in the States than here: they do more reading aloud in class and at home, and have all sorts of conferences and gatherings of teachers and librarians (*wonderful* for writers – a word-of-mouth recommendation for a teacher can mean 30 copies of a book!).

'I get about 500 letters from America for every one from Britain – hardly a post when letters don't come. I read



them all, but I can answer only very special individual ones – if one letter answers 30 children then it would be criminal not to reply, and fan letters are of course part of your bread and butter, but after 2,000 you do get a bit fed up.'

It took three years from finishing *The Indian in the Cupboard* (1981 in UK) for fan mail to begin. It was a surprise: 'I thought *Houdini* was a better book, I'd been sure I'd hit the jackpot with *Letters* which absolutely *bombed*, and *Sarah and After*, still my favourite book, is one of the few out of print. But one night a long-distance call said the paperback rights for *Indian* had fetched a large sum at auction, so I thought, maybe they know something I don't – and they did! It took off, won awards, and it's made my fortune.' Success brought not only its two sequels but reissues from her unknown days, like the charming fantasy *The Farthest-Away Mountain* (1976, though written before she'd published anything).

How she invented a bedtime story for eight-year-old Omri, to counter his complaint about a grotty tin medicine cupboard ('There's no magic about new things, Omri'), about him, their house and his real-life friend Patrick, and how, when she was desperate for ideas years later, he reminded her, is now an established routine that takes about an hour. 'The Indian is in a long line of stories about miniature beings, and to avoid just another Pinnocchio, I had to give him a real life somewhere else, so that he had a ready-made personality as soon as he appears.

'Teachers in Alaska point out that he is a stereotype, but if he had been too unlike everyone's idea of an Indian, especially children's, he wouldn't have had the impact.' She waves away my assumption that the cowboy-and-Indian stereotype was deliberate to allow them to break out into real, complex, feelings. 'You credit me with too much subtlety. Writers work intuitively –

when I read long treatises about Omri being a substitute parent, enabling children to recognise the responsible caring role, I'm *pop-eyed*! I've discovered I do include messages in my books only because teachers are always looking for them, but I simply aim to keep the narrative moving and the characters developing, and to do that I must *like* the protagonists and believe in them – so they can't be too black or too white.

'When I look at books I wrote years ago I find stereotypical aspects I never intended. I myself seem to have been a victim of my upbringing, for now I blush at some of the things I said about the black guy in *The L-Shaped Room*, and *My Darling Villain* (which I'd even wanted to call "Kate and the Class War") may not fully have solved the problem of finding instantly recognisable signals without stereotyping.'

Anyway, what's real and what's a stereotype? A best-selling novelist lives in a low-beamed cottage in rural Dorset, vibrantly cluttered with world-wide folk art and the magnificent bronzes of her sculptor-husband, walking 'neath gnarled apple trees across a yard full of hens and ducks to the farm-building that houses her study and his studio . . . Oh yeah? Believe me, Lynne Reid Banks is very real – and very much alive. ●

Lynne Reid Banks was interviewed by Stephanie Nettell.

Details of books mentioned in this Authorgraph:

The L-Shaped Room, Penguin, 0 14 00.1913 8, £3.99 pbk

One More River, Vallentine Mitchell, 0 85303 149 5, £9.95; Plus, 0 14 03.2509 3, £3.50 pbk

I, Houdini, Dent, 0 460 06873 3, £8.50; Lions, 0 00 673363 8, £2.25 pbk

The Indian in the Cupboard, Dent, 0 460 06992 6, £8.50; Lions, 0 00 673051 5, £2.50 pbk

Return of the Indian, Dent, 0 460 06239 5, £8.50; Lions, 0 00 673052 3, £2.50 pbk

The Secret of the Indian, Collins, 0 00 184746 5, £6.95; Lions, 0 00 673505 3, £2.75 pbk

The Farthest-Away Mountain, Lions, 0 00 672998 3, £1.95 pbk

My Darling Villain, Bodley Head, 0 370 30723 2, £4.50 pbk

Letters to my Israeli Sons and *Sarah and After* are out of print.

Other novels include:

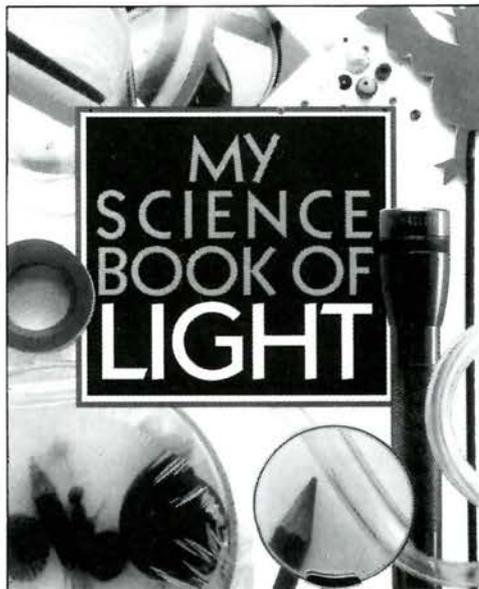
The Fairy Rebel, Lions, 0 00 673220 8, £2.25 pbk

The Writing on the Wall, Puffin, 0 14 03.1479 2, £2.25 pbk

Maura's Angel, Puffin, 0 14 03.1842 9, £2.50 pbk

Melusine: A Mystery, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12548 0, £7.95; Plus, 0 14 03.2793 2, £2.99 pbk

REVIEWS – Non Fiction



My Science Book of Air

0 86318 510 X

My Science Book of Colour

0 86318 508 8

My Science Book of Light

0 86318 509 6

My Science Book of Water

0 86318 507 X

Neil Ardley, Dorling Kindersley,
£3.99 each

(INFANT/JUNIOR)

The weight of air, hydraulic upthrust, the difference between colours in pigment and light, specific gravity, fibre optics are all difficult concepts to grasp until directly experienced. Ardley's books offer, in squeaky-clean Dorling Kindersley colour, direct experience of the explaining sort by way of clearly illustrated experiments. That these are performed largely by highly dextrous disembodied hands calls for adult co-operation of a sort from which all such books benefit.

Good fun and good value.

TP

My First Science Book

Angela Wilkes, Dorling Kindersley,
0 86318 451 0, £5.99

(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

Plastic bottles and sticky tape they may not have had, but the late Victorian educators knew a good experiment when they saw one and crammed their 'Science for Boys' books with them. The trouble was that the reader couldn't see the detail in the pictures without the aid of a substantial lens (not supplied). And there is little here that the 1890s wouldn't recognise – the difference is that the huge spreads allow full size, full colour pictures which make the prospect more inviting and the process easier. Each experiment has a full size, colour equipment inventory, so we know exactly how thick a rubber band or short a pencil will work best. Explanations are full enough to allow individual use, but the book's attractiveness will make peers and adults hard to fend off. You need a big table though.

TP

Amazing Air

0 7445 1457 8

Henry Smith

Light Fantastic

0 7445 1459 2

Philip Watson, Walker (Science Club series), £3.99 each pbk
(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

When Walker's 'Science Club' first opened in 1982, its members were hailed enthusiastically by children, teachers and the librarians who supplied them, and it was sad to see them go out of print. What distinguished this small series of practical science books was the soundness of their initial concept, the imaginative selection of experiments and activities, and the extremely well specified and illustrated list of equipment and sequence of events. We knew what we were doing, and it almost always worked. There was also a refreshing absence of science theory, which made us real scientists – discovering phenomena first and explaining them after, rather than just following famous footsteps.

All that was good about the originals has been retained in these new full-size paperback editions, the only difference being that some procedures and instructions have been modified to make them even safer than before. Membership of the Science Club is once more available, and very welcome it is.

TP

Liquid Magic

0 7445 1458 4

Super Motion

0 7445 1460 6

There are clear concise instructions covering a range of topics from how to build up a panoramic photograph to creating storyboards, photo diaries and family trees. In addition there is a brief section on how to avoid common mistakes, and tips on photographing different kinds of subjects, such as landscapes, people and animals. Many pages also feature useful 'top tips' – it's a pity these have been printed on a grey background as it makes them difficult to decipher. This is the only flaw in an otherwise thoroughly attractive user-friendly book which will help to remove the fear and put the fun into owning a camera.

VH

Stamps

Brenda Ralph Lewis, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 0230 1, £8.99
(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

Young collectors will undoubtedly find their enjoyment in an absorbing pastime enhanced by this excellent introduction to the world of philately, whilst anyone not yet bitten by the stamp bug could well find their immunity at risk. Whether devoured at a sitting or sampled at frequent intervals this is a book to feast on – and there are 95 pages for consumption.

The text is unfailingly lively, interesting and informative and there are numerous well-chosen and relevant illustrations throughout. As well as much pertinent advice on how and what to start collecting and useful items such as the 'philatelic' maps which show all the places that issue stamps, there are fascinating cameos about aspects of stamp lore including famous collectors, forgers, odd mails, cinderellas and what it means to be philatelically terminated!

If all this isn't enough, the book concludes with details of how to find out even more (magazines, clubs, museums) about one of Britain's best organised hobbies.

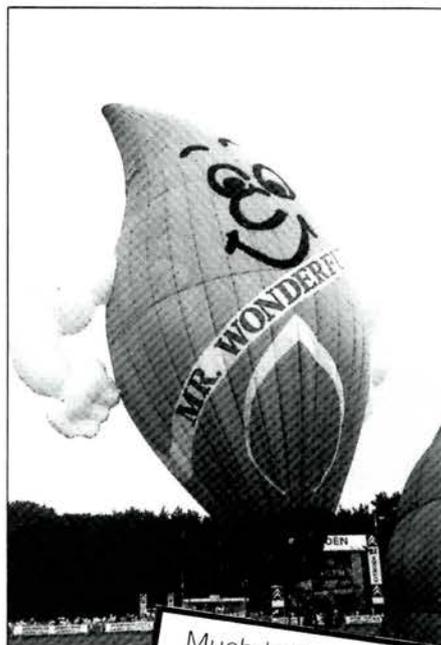
VH

Creative Photography

Russ Malkin, Kingfisher,
0 86272 569 0, £4.95

(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

Aimed at children who are just beginning to take an interest in photography, this practical and informative book is a welcome addition to the very few titles available for this age-group. Refreshingly free from too much technical detail, it concentrates instead on simple but effective ideas designed to stimulate the young tyro into becoming more than just a random snapper.



Much better: The balloon fills the frame and there is nothing else in the shot to distract.

Bio Energy

1 85210 979 3

Graham Houghton

Geothermal Energy

1 85210 944 0

Solar Energy

1 85210 904 1

Water Energy

1 85210 905 X

Wind Energy

1 85210 943 2

Graham Rickard, Wayland
(Alternative Energy series),
£6.95 each

(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

Alternative energy? Who are they kidding? The wind has always dried our washing, the river taken our rafts downstream, the sun turned our grapes to raisins, Old Faithful has always spouted and fire damp always exploded. It's a strange reflection, then, that regards these basic and enduring energies as 'alternative' while new-found coal, gas and oil about whose dangers and dwindling we worry so incessantly are dubbed 'conventional'. But if you accept the name, Wayland's new 'Alternative Energy' series provides an excellent and up-to-date look at renewable power, its getting and using.



'This camel is carrying a fridge full of medicines across the Sahara desert. The fridge is powered by solar cells.' From **Solar Energy**.

Solar, Water and Wind are relatively familiar territory, but Graham Rickard succeeds in beating new paths through it so that, aided by effective diagrams that are a feature of this series, we learn about turbine-driving solar chimneys, the principles of Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (usually obscure in other treatments) and the great variety of wind turbine designs.

Bio and Geothermal are the first monographs on their subjects accessible to the primary age range, which makes them even more valuable. In **Geothermal** the author looks at the heat beneath our feet – not just geothermal power stations but hot springs (which supply 80% of Reykjavik's domestic warmth), the curative thermal sands of Ibusuki, and the current hot dry rock experiments in Cornwall.

Bio Energy deals mainly with fuelwood, fuel alcohol from sugar, and methane from landfill and farm waste (four and a half million digesters in China alone). The technology of biogas is particularly well shown, and it's interesting to find the world's biggest methane digester is in Puerto Rico, where it fires the Bacardi plant – as an alternative to coke, presumably. TP

Global Warming

Laurence Pringle, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 53587 3, £6.95 (MIDDLE/SECONDARY)

There was this chap who, having heard of the dreadful effect it was having on the ozone layer, went round and smashed his neighbour's greenhouse. You can't blame him, going by some of the shock tactics used by journalists and information writers to make simple copy out of a diffuse and complex situation. But the earth is getting warmer – the 1980s were the warmest decade on record – and the likelihood of another ice age at 12000 AD isn't much comfort when we realise this warming is artificial, caused by human activity filling our atmosphere with heat-retaining gases.

Laurence Pringle shows carefully how this is happening before using 'dirty crystal balls' to predict the effects of this warming – basically sea higher, land drier, but by no means that simple. Now if this situation is of human creation, is human control possible? Pringle thinks it is, and also that human activity must adapt to the coming changes that it cannot influence. However this is done – mainly by cutting down gases and planting more trees – Pringle warns that it needs international co-operation on an unaccustomed scale to allow the survival of our planet to be a benefit to its inhabitants.



The result of a sea level rise of just fifty centimetres, from **Global Warming**.

Pringle writes with a modest authority to produce the most readable and understandable 'young' text on global warming that I have yet met. The publishers have wisely chosen to hold back on fancy layout beloved by many of their competitors and to give the words the space they deserve. The result is an entirely rewarding experience which makes this book essential for middle and secondary school libraries and, if you value your greenhouse, for your neighbours as well. TP

Family and Friends

1 85210 794 4

Moods and Feelings

1 85210 795 2

John Coleman, Wayland (Teenscene series), £7.95 each (SECONDARY)

Aiming at 'the visual appeal of a magazine with factual information to provide a valuable guide to adolescence', these volumes in the Teenscene series work quite successfully. Information is divided into neat 'chunks', the design is good and the choice of photographs (a mixture of 'posed' and agency shots) useful and attractive. Common sense advice and information is provided with emphasis on listening, compromise, assertiveness, discussing problems and trying not to ignore them.

Both books will be useful in schools and should have an immediate appeal to younger teenagers, although their attraction will wane as the fashion shown receives the same disdain as do flares and platform heels today. More importantly the books can only be an introduction to the various physical and psychological factors which affect teenage years. Adolescence is seen as exceptional and, by implication, adulthood free from troublesome emotions. Again, they concentrate on internationally common themes and do not attempt an in-depth consideration of, for example, social, cultural or sexual mores. Information from the useful address lists and bibliographies may be better for satisfying these needs. GB

Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?

0 7134 60768

USA/USSR Superpowers in Decline?

0 7134 60776

Charles Freeman, Batsford (Questions of Today series), £9.95 each. (OLDER READERS)

Good design and full colour illustrations are often quoted as important features of the best non-fiction for teenagers. Neither is a factor in this excellent new series dealing with major world issues.

There is much to admire in these volumes not least the style of writing which is informative, analytical and clear. Issues such as Iran-Contra, or relationships between factions in the Middle East, are explained concisely without undue simplification. Case studies, 'talking points' and 'focus on' sections help to exemplify and develop the text. Both books are current to July 1990 and each includes an annotated bibliography (a rare and welcome feature!).

Superpowers in Decline? chronicles events in both the USSR and the USA and how their relationship has altered. The huge changes and economic revolution faced by the USSR and American financial difficulties and social problems are compared, as are the relative strengths of Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush. **Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?** develops from a consideration of its title to an assessment of the effects of terrorist action. Despite the subject and its sometimes harrowing coverage, the author puts terrorism into context and suggests possible ways of reducing terrorist power. **Superpowers in Decline?** also has a positive note that the end of the cold war provides an opportunity for discussing 'fundamental problems like the global environment'.

Neither book has great immediate appeal but both are rewarding and they should prove valuable for able older teenagers. GB●

Geoff Brown is a Divisional Coordinator with Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.
Veronica Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

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

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

The headteacher is trying to think of a story. Exuberant children race around the school hall, clutching bags of treats given by the owner of a Chinese supermarket. It's the end-of-term prize-giving party at the Harrow Chinese School, and my last chance to find a story for a dual-language broadcast in Cantonese and English.

'What about this one?' she asks. 'A farmer worked in his field every day growing food for his family, until one day he saw a rabbit run into a tree, knock itself out, and fall down dead. That night his family had rabbit for supper. So after that he spent every day watching the tree instead of growing his crops; his family starved.'

'The moral's clear,' I reply, 'but isn't it a bit short?'

'Well, then, how about this one: there was an apothecary, a businessman and a teacher . . . collecting money for a temple . . .' Five minutes later, I've lost the thread: 'Isn't it going to be a bit long?'

We start to leave. In the corridor, she suddenly says, 'There's a story about water displacement. It's about the first elephant that ever came to China. It was so huge, the Emperor insisted on knowing how heavy it was, but nobody could think of a way of weighing it, till this little boy had a bright idea. It's a true story from history . . .'

Behind the Microphone

And it turns out to be just right for a ten-minute **Listening and Reading** broadcast, which we call **How Do You Weigh an Elephant?** – even though water displacement doesn't come till a much later Key Stage!

All our stories have to be the same length to fit a regular weekly broadcast slot of ten minutes, that's about twelve hundred words. It's not an easy length for folk tales: too long for a proverb, but too short for the adventures of three princes, or the slaying of many monsters.

Each broadcast is recorded onto a cassette and printed in a book. Children can listen to the story separately first, gaining a context and clues before starting to read the book straight afterwards. Many children find they can tackle texts after hearing them with a success that seemed dauntingly remote when they were confronted with just marks on a page. The pace is designed for listening to, rather than for reading along with. Spoken and written words match, with additional clues from lively coloured pictures.

Each of the twenty-eight stories is different, with its own different writer, illustrator and broadcaster. They are grouped into three sets for age and difficulty (**One** for 5-7s, **Two** for 6-8s and **Three** for 7-9s) but without rigorous grading of vocabulary or structures. These are real books, offering the strategy that triggered most of us who have become successful readers: being read to in front of an open book that we'd chosen to hear again and again because we liked it. Repetition over a period of time is vital, but it has to be for pleasure.

How are the stories chosen? – On the advice of teachers, through our series consultants Ruth Ballin, Myra Barrs and Sue Ellis of the Centre for Language in Primary Education, Southwark. About a third of them are already well-loved in longer versions, in collections or in books out of print. Our format can make them accessible to a wider range of children. About two-thirds of them are new, specially commissioned from writers already popular, such as Rose Impey, Douglas Hill and Catherine Storr. There's wide variety, including

school stories, animal fables, a pony story, folk tales, stories about everyday life nowadays and poetry.

Poetry works particularly well, as it gives readers the support of rhyme, rhythm and repetition in short complete bursts, without requiring them to follow one thread through the whole ten minutes. James Berry and Michael Rosen each present a broadcast of their own new short poems about everyday family life. The voice tunes are easily echoed by children – but is this too limiting? Does Michael Rosen's stress on 'I don't *like* custard', which they mimic with relish, pre-empt their ownership of the line as 'I don't like custard' or 'I *don't* like custard'? He hopes not, and was delighted to hear that a poem he wrote for the series ten years ago, **Bath Times**, was received with explosions of rapturous laughter by hundreds of teachers when Jack Ousbey read it to the UKRA Conference last summer. On the other hand, George Layton insists on always reading his **Northern Childhood** stories such as **The Fib** and **The Balaclava Story** himself.

Both these popular authors came into children's writing through radio, both writing in the first person for their own strongly individual voices. When I was handed Michael Rosen's early poems in his mother's kitchen while he was still a student, I couldn't see what they were. They were too different from what we had already. Only when heard could they be recognised, like clothes taken off the peg and put on. George Layton I heard in my own kitchen as I was ironing to **Woman's Hour**. 'Might children enjoy that story about a Gang Hut, too?' I wondered.

Joan Griffiths, producer of BBC Radio's **Listening and Reading** series, on how the programmes are made.



Joan Griffiths in studio.

From the Asian oral tradition came Beulah Candappah, who has so often opened her mundane shopping-bag on the studio floor and poured out an enchanted landscape of little figures for children to handle as her story unfolds. Her wide classroom experience shows in her dramatic pauses, leaping rhythms, cunning dialogue and convincing animal voices.

But choosing actors to read what others have written can be a challenge. **How Do You Weigh an Elephant?** was easy – a Chinese voice, obviously, and who better than David Yip, TV's Chinese detective? But what about **The Nung Guama**, a piece of chinoiserie that has delighted children for years, in a radio dramatisation of Roger Lancelyn Green's version, to be found in a collection so long out of print that it could only be read in the British Museum Reading Room? Stephen Fry's latest play had closed unexpectedly. I grabbed my chance. In his fastidious Jeevish tones, the eponymous monster sounds even more galumphingly horrible and Mabel Yeung assures me that it's not much like the hairy Wild Man in the original, anyway. The Teacher's Notes suggest that any Chinese children in the class be invited to tell it as they know it: a story to be shared as well as owned.

This choice of reader is typical: a voice familiar on the television at home – a friendly voice. But when **Listening and Reading** was started twenty years ago by Philippa Pearce and Moira Doolan, their choice couldn't have been more different. It had to be 'the voice of the words on the page': anonymous, easing the children into the story with unobtrusive skill, never interposing a personality to be noticed. **A Lion at School** is the best known of the stories Philippa Pearce wrote for the series then, and as reader they chose the consummate radio actor John Hollis.

Nowadays, famous voices are a powerful way of harnessing the colossal pull of the media into the service of reading: Phillip Schofield of **Going Live**, Bruno Brookes of **Top of the Pops**, Timmy Mallett of **Whackaday**, Nerys Hughes of **Bazaar** – all stars, but stars children feel comfortable with.

Gender has to be watched, of course. I was going to try for Michael Crawford of **Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em** to read James Riordan's folk tale **The Nagging Husband**, about an accident-prone house-husband, when I was reminded that this must have been a tale told by women, either to their menfolk or about them. So I asked Thora Hird instead. And I had to call back David Yip to record **How Do You Weigh an Elephant?**, again, after Mabel Yeung pointed out that we'd referred to 'workmen' throughout, ignoring the proud tradition of strong women doing all kinds of tough work in unisex blue trousers.

Class is a particular hazard when stories are to be read aloud. Contrary to the BBC stereotype, we shun Received Pronunciation, especially in favour of accents as expressive as the Black Liverpoolian of Craig Charles. Children find regional and transatlantic accents warmer and slower. Bob Barton was recorded for us by CBC in Canada and Diana Wolkstein by our BBC studio in New York (where she tells stories sometimes at the foot of Hans Andersen's statue in Central Park). I joined in the recording sessions by telephone, sitting in my office. But when it came to **The Porcelain Man**, Alan Bennett's voice seemed to suit exactly its quirky, wry, wistful mood, even though it was written in the United States. We were already in the studio when Mary Rayner suggested that her dragons at the dentist in **Open Wide** could be Welsh red dragons. Luckily, Welsh dragons are well within the astonishing vocal range of Miriam Margolyes.

Each ten-minute story takes about an hour and half to record. I sit in a cubicle with the equipment, the studio manager who drives it, and my production assistant who times every page with a stopwatch and keeps an eye on the text. In the studio, on the other side of a soundproof glass panel, sits the reader, whom we can contact by hand signals, over an intercom if we press the key, or by flashing a green light on and off. Most of our time is spent making sure the voice sounds as if it's talking to you quite naturally at home. Some actors like to record the story straight away to keep the freshness of the first telling, and then re-record any retakes for editing in afterwards, if necessary. Others prefer to rehearse a few times before recording. Some arrive with scripts in which they've highlighted every character in a different colour, to remind them when to switch accents.

Sound effects are added separately afterwards. We used to put in a signal for turning the page. It was surprisingly effective: the sound of a page turning. But now that we know, from Ruth Ballin's classroom research, that it's best to listen first without reading, we've left it out, except in the dentist's waiting room. Elsewhere, there's just a pause.

Not many of the stories have sound effects, largely because 'Crash' and 'Cor' and 'Grrr' and 'Meow' are fun to read. But some writers have deliberated created opportunities for sounds, such as Kathleen Hersom in her story of a class visit to a farm, or Hilda Offen in her story of a magic baby's rattle that turns a traffic warden into a duck and magics the sweets to fly out of the sweet shop (hail slowed down and played backwards). Dick King-Smith has written songs for two competing choirs of cats, created by multi-tracking the single voice of Bill Oddie. I'm wondering, if we vary the tape speed, could it sound even more excruciating? The voice of Martin Jarvis playing a gamut of characters from an old woman to a cliff to a sailor, his boat and a graveyard full of dead people, has been speeded up to sound like a bell and then sent to the Radiophonic Workshop where it was turned into a haunting evocation of sea, sky, past and present for Kevin Crossley-Holland's new prose poem **Sea Tongue**, which closes the series in the summer term . . . ●

Listening and Reading can be heard on Thursday mornings in term time on Radio 5 MW for Schools at 9.35 – 9.45, repeated the same night on Radio 3 at 1.35 – 1.45 night-time. They'll be repeated next year.

Books and cassettes can be ordered by schools from BBC Educational Publishing, P O Box 234, Wetherby, West Yorkshire L23 7EU (tel. 0937 541001). Or they can be bought in bookshops as **Read and Listen** books and cassettes. (Reviews of some of these cassettes appeared on the Audio Tapes page of **BfK 66**, January 91.)



Alan Bennett reads **The Porcelain Man** (photo Mike Howarth).

IS THE PRICE RIGHT?

Liz Attenborough, Publishing Director of Puffin, reveals the economics of publishing

Is there any likelihood that children's book prices will come down?

Are **BfK** reviewers right to criticize those prices as if publishers are wilfully hiking prices up for their own greedy purposes?

My answer to both questions has to be no. The prices are not going to come down and, whilst reviewers should of course comment on prices in relation to their opinions of a book's total worth, it is pointless to speak as if the price has been fixed arbitrarily and a figure plucked out of the air for no particular reason.

Publishers are all too painfully aware of the difficulties faced by teachers, librarians and parents with limited budgets and increasing prices. After all, publishers want to sell as many books as possible. Perhaps I can explain a few points from a trade publisher's point of view. (I am not dealing with non-net text books here.)

A book's cover price can be divided into its various constituents (see diagram). As can be seen immediately, the money from the sales of a book is accounted for in a number of ways. The average discount claimed by the bookseller, or library supplier, to pay their own costs and expenses is the most substantial part and this is a figure which booksellers, in particular the chains, are constantly trying to increase. The publisher takes the initial financial risk, and if copies of books are returned from customers, it is the publisher who bears the cost.

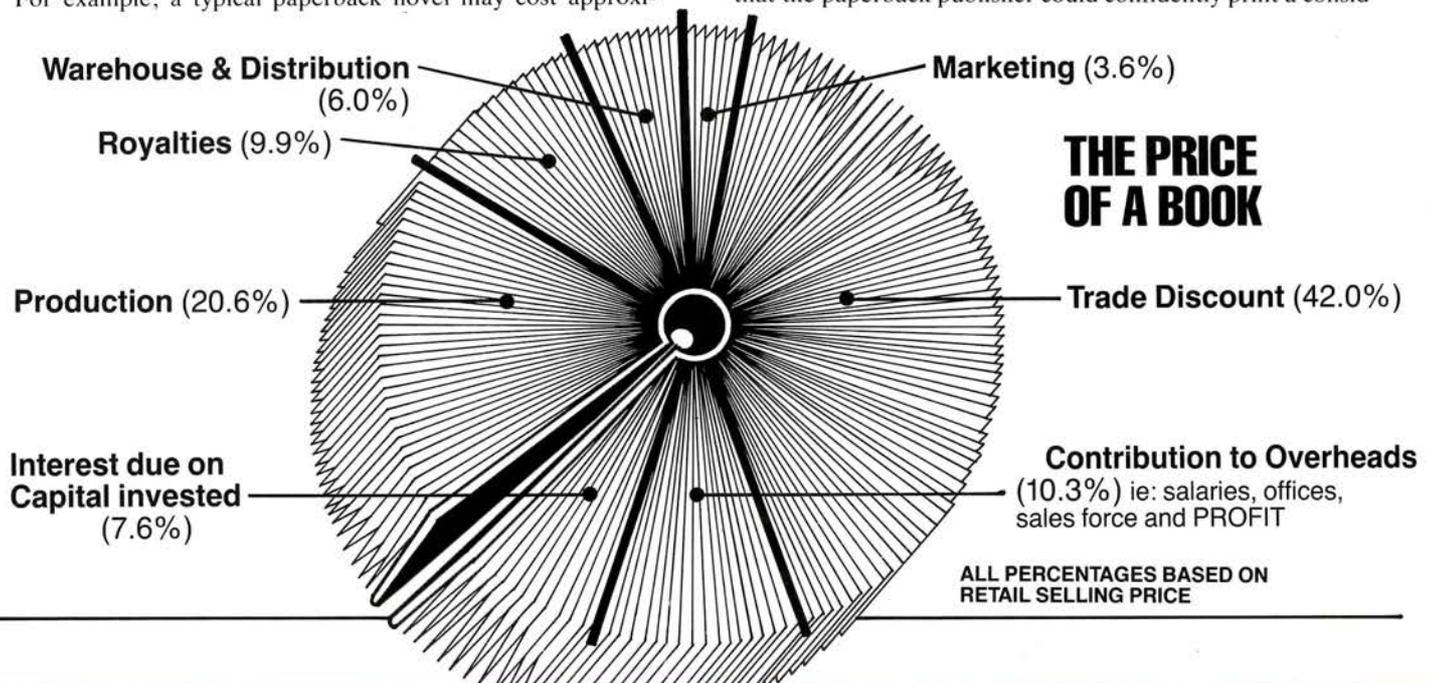
Another major factor in the pricing of a book is the size of the print run. In common with the manufacture of any mass produced consumer goods, books carry both a fixed cost and a running cost. In the case of books, fixed costs are referred to as origination costs and principally are the one-off costs such as typesetting, artist's fees, the colour separation of illustrations (a complex and costly procedure), and the production of the printing plates or film. All these costs have only to be borne once. Running costs are those which vary depending on the number of copies printed and include paper and royalties.

It is the origination or fixed costs of producing a book which have the most bearing on the current concerns. The more copies of a book that are printed in a run, the lower the share of the origination cost that each individual book has to carry. For example, a typical paperback novel may cost approxi-



mately 35p to print when the total is 15,000 copies, but more than 70p when that print run is reduced to 7,000 copies. Full colour books work on a much higher origination cost, of course, and that is where British publishers' skills at securing overseas co-editions come in, to spread that origination cost over longer print runs by including foreign language or American printings. By no means every picture book benefits from this, and a large percentage have their full cost borne by the UK edition alone.

In the long ago days when sales of hardbacks were substantially more than they are today, the price of a hardback was sufficient to cover all the origination and the storage costs of a long printing. A paperback was thus simply a reprint and bore none of the origination costs. This, combined with the fact that the paperback publisher could confidently print a consid-



erable quantity because of the demand created by the hardback publication (and perhaps because there were fewer paperbacks around), enabled the price for a paperback to be set at the levels the public have been accustomed to for decades. A popular misconception has been that it is the paperback binding alone which makes it cheaper than a hardback: these other factors are equally significant in achieving the price.

But consider this:

- * Not every hardback that is published becomes a paperback. The hardback has to be a testing ground for new works, new writers.
- * Publishers have to try all kinds of new things – Roald Dahl was a first novelist once.
- * If paperbacks were all brand new books with no track record, no reviews, no 'testing' period, the sales of the paperback would be so slow that all the necessary economies achieved by long print runs would be eroded by the even longer storage times in ever-decreasing warehouse space with ever-increasing running costs, with the probable result that the publisher would have pulped the stock of the book before everyone had even heard about it.
- * If paperback books begin to be published in hardback quantities on first publication, paperback prices will shoot up and up.
- * Publishers genuinely do not and cannot predict infallibly which books will find favour, sell well, or disappear without trace.

Some booksellers ask why we should expect them to stock more children's books for such a low return on their own investment – a children's paperback costing £2.50 takes up as much shelf space (and as much warehouse space) as an adult novel costing £3.99, but the bookseller will get a considerably smaller amount for selling that children's book. That equation, of course, feeds through to the publishers too. There is less profit for everyone (authors as well!) but publishers

continue to invest in new children's books and continue to believe that there should be that price differential.

The situation today is complex. With the decline in hardback sales in recent years, it has become more and more difficult for publishers to cover all the origination costs with the paperback print run, without either raising the cover price to an unacceptable level for the market or printing more than it can reasonably expect to sell. In fact publishers not infrequently set prices below what they need to make a reasonable return in the hope that future books of a similar nature or by the same author will be successful on the back of the current publication.

An alternative to publishing a book in hardback first is to publish what is known as a trade paperback edition. This, from a publisher's point of view, is a cheap hardback. Printing a slightly larger quantity to that of a hardback and using similar quality paper, a publisher is able to cut the production cost enough to enable a price of, for example, £6 instead of the £8 that a hardback edition would need to carry. Unfortunately, these paperback editions are all too frequently seen by buyers and reviewers as very expensive paperbacks without realising that they are an alternative to hardbacks. They are low run, original editions carrying all the costs of brand new publications. The trade paperback format is a response from publishers to attempt to lower the price of brand new titles, but it is rarely acknowledged as such.

All publishers wholeheartedly support the concerns of teachers and librarians at the level of funding they get, and the need to get the best possible value for the money they have. My aim here is not in any way to dismiss that concern, but rather to explain that in reality children's book prices will not come down and there has to be an acceptance of that, and to make the point that the publisher, in the whole process, takes a huge risk upfront – the greatest risk of all – in making as wide a variety of children's reading material available as possible. The battle for more funds has to be based on the real cost of producing the wide variety of quality writing and illustrating that we are lucky enough to enjoy today. ●

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There's a world of information to be found (with fun!) in the new (and expanding!) range of Young Puffin Fact Books.



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Quiz books, puzzle books, fun books, and fact books, - colourful, informative, original...there really (truly!) is a book for everyone, and every occasion, in the Puffin Non-Fiction range.



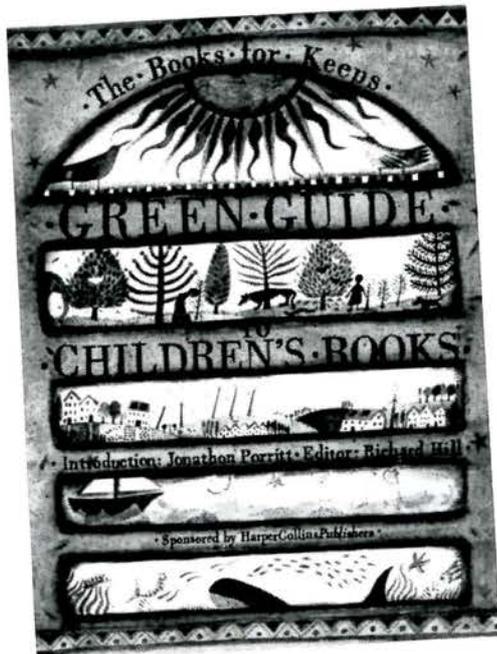
Puffin Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, Tel: 071 938 2200

MEMO: To all Books for Keeps readers...

COMING IN APRIL 1991

The Books for Keeps Green Guide to Children's Books

Edited by Richard Hill Sponsored by HarperCollinsPublishers
Introduction by Jonathon Porritt Price £6.50

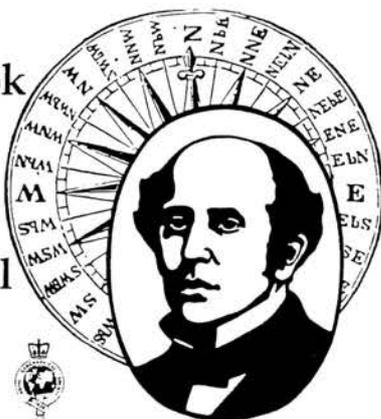


A major children's book resource describing over 400 titles from the best children's fiction, poetry, and non-fiction dealing with most of the environmental issues facing the Earth. In addition there are a number of articles discussing environmental education, the National Curriculum and classroom ideas. The focus of the Guide is one of concern for and care of the environment. Books included are for children of all ages, from pre-school to sixth-form.

'To flick through the pages of this Guide is to realise not just how rich material has always been (again, there's nothing new in wishing to do right by one's fellow humans, by one's fellow creatures, and even by future generations), but to revel in how many new and inspiring books have become available over the last few years.' *Jonathon Porritt from the Introduction*

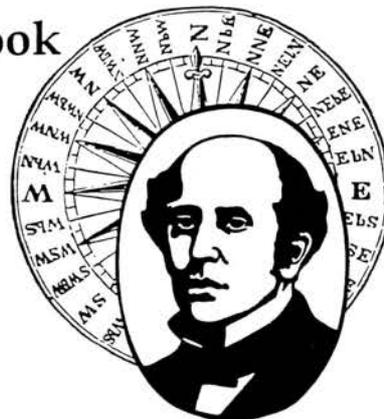
If you order the Green Guide before 31st May 1991, BfK is offering its readers a 20% discount on the cover price of £6.50 (i.e. £5.20). You should find a special advance order form in this issue; if not, phone through your order on 081-852 4953. Most major credit cards are accepted.

Thomas Cook
and
The Royal
Geographical
Society



1991 - The 150th Anniversary of Thomas Cook's First Tour

Thomas Cook
Young
Travellers
Poetry
Awards
1991



1991 - The 150th Anniversary of Thomas Cook's First Tour

Schools Travel Awards 1991 £1100 IN PRIZES

There will be three awards of £500, £200 and £100 in Travel Bonds and £100 to each winner's school for the best three descriptions of a personal journey or visit, in under 2,000 words typed on A4 paper and securely bound.

Winners will be announced in January 1992.

Schools wishing their pupils to compete are asked to send the name of a person to act as co-ordinator who will collect the entries and select the two best:-

For further information write to:- Edmund Swinglehurst,
The Thomas Cook Archives,
45, Berkeley Street, London W1A 1EB.

Entries by 1st October 1991

£450 IN PRIZES

There will be three awards of £100 in Travel Bonds in each of the following categories:-

Up to 6 years of age - 6 up to 11 years
11 up to 15 years

and awards of £50 for the winners' school libraries.

Poems should not exceed 100 words and may be serious or comic.

Awards will be presented at the Young Travellers Afternoon,
Saturday, 27th July 1991, at the Barbican Library,
Barbican Centre, London EC2.

Enquiries and entries to:- Edmund Swinglehurst,
The Thomas Cook Archives,
45, Berkeley Street, London W1A 1EB

To arrive by 1st June 1991

WRITER
REPLY

LET'S GO TRESPASSING...

Peter Dixon reminds us of what kids are really interested in . . . and what adults prefer to give them.

“Let's go trespassing . . .”
declared William.’

I heard these words read again by Martin Jarvis on a recent programme about Richmal Crompton, and not for the first time my heart gave a small leap of expectation.

Please note that William did not say he intended to go and watch the men digging up the road, or the farmer reaping the corn . . . he said, ‘Let's go trespassing’.

Albert was a similarly adventurous lad who, armed with a stick with a horses head handle, entered zoos and poked it into sleeping lion's ears.

David (Deuteronomy 6, verses 5-16) threw stones at adults and a small boy with loaves and fishes somewhere else in the great book wandered round the countryside offering them to strange men.

I love that kind of thing – kids who break a few rules and get adult bores ‘Tut-tutting’.

Danny did it in Roald Dahl's **Danny, Champion of the World** . . . just fancy actually stealing your father's car and motoring off without so much as half a driving licence. And how about the ethos of encouraging children to steal valuable items (in this case, pheasants from your neighbour)?

All heads stuff!

Not long ago I was asked to write some short stories for a well-established publisher – two were returned. One for a sensible reason. One for a daft reason.

In the first story I had inadvertently made the ‘male’ character the boss and the ‘female’ his secretary, but that was soon changed.

In the second I had written about three children who were drifting across a town in a hot air balloon. During the course of their travel they'd amused themselves by dribbling dribbles – hoping that an unfortunate viewer would receive an eyeful! I was asked to alter the passage so that the children ‘sprinkled lemonade’ on the crowds below.

As I wanted the cash I complied – but knew (still know) that the story is wrong. Children do not sprinkle lemonade . . . they dribble. I dribbled, I still do dribble, and so do my readers.

I have *never* sprinkled lemonade on anyone.

Nor do publishers sprinkle lemonade on people, they dribble as well.



So, William went trespassing and in those few words Richmal has us in the palm of her hand. Illegality, trouble, rows, chasings, adventures nod and grin before us.

This brief piece is an attempt to jog a few of today's children's writers back into the reality of children's likes, dislikes and real lives. It's an attempt to place children's genuine interests on a par with publishers' adult obsessions with cleanliness and safety.

Yes! Yes! Yes! I *know* we don't want children hurting themselves as a result of the stories they read, but how true is it to suppose this happens anyway?

Do William's outbursts really encourage groups of children – far and near – to climb over BR fences and balance along electrified rails in order to go ‘trespassing’ themselves. Personally, I don't think so.

An author acquaintance of mine was gently reprimanded for writing about children ‘climbing into’ a swimming pool for illegal swims at night, but I'm certain he wouldn't have been questioned if the children had climbed to the very top of a huge old oak tree. The author's problem is that climbing to the top of an oak tree (even if it is 99ft high) is really rather boring, whereas breaking into the posh man's

garden to swim in his pool whilst he's asleep is real bed-wetting stuff. Particularly if he's as fierce as Robby Coltrane.

So – please authors – will you spare the time to read back through your William books?

William, in my memory, once went round the village stealing babies in order that he might win a baby show with one of them. He broke into people's houses – including the vicarage – more than once, yet I remain convinced he was in no way responsible for an outbreak of baby-snatching, World War Two, or an increase in national juvenile crime.

We're now subjecting ourselves and our children to a new form of education entitled The National Curriculum.

Whatever it is, or is not, one thing is certain. It's mostly boring and unrelated to children's *real* lives. Good teachers can enliven the most distasteful areas of study, but such energies as our teachers have (or had) are now dispersed into hours of rote Attainment, target box ticking and interminable form-filling.

Dull topics upon ‘Magnets’ and ‘People Who Help Us’ proliferate. Topics about things that are MUCH MORE interesting to children diminish, e.g. why can't we have a topic about ‘People Who *Don't* Help Us’.

It seems obvious to me that the magic, the sunlight, the fun and joy of primary education is going to depend even more firmly than before upon the quality of our children's stories. It is in this land that they can dream their dreams and trespass their fields.

But please can it be THEIR muddy field, complete with cows' poo!, stinging nettles and trouser-ripping barbed wire . . . rather than the green astra turf of the adult imagination? ●

When he's not dribbling, Peter Dixon is a poet, a teacher and a tireless promoter, throughout Britain and Europe, of the notion that learning can be fun. His books include:

Grow Your Own Poems, 0 333 44599 0, £4.00

I Heard a Spider Sobbing, 1 873195 00 0, £3.50

Big Billy, 1 873195 01 7, £3.50

They can be obtained direct from him at 30 Cheriton Road, Winchester, Hampshire, or through your local bookseller.

Illustrations on this page are from **What's Wrong With Civilization** and other important writings by Just William by Richmal Crompton, published by Macmillan, 0 333 52656 2, £7.95.

STORIES, SMILES AND **Smarties**

Chris Sutcliffe



Paula Danziger with the Hereford School Young Judges.

The lift-doors on Level 5 of the Barbican Centre in London move swiftly and silently.

On the day of our visit to London they moved too swiftly and too silently for me. They shut at exactly the wrong time. Inside were ten children, the Smarties Young Judges; outside were Julie and me, the two teachers who had accompanied the children from The Hereford School in Grimsby to the 1990 Smarties Book Prize presentation in London.

So it was that instead of being carried slowly but decorously up to Level 8 under the watchful gaze of their teachers, the children were whisked down to the basement, up to Level 8, and back down to the basement. And again. And again.

Caught in a smooth, fast, internal roller-coaster, they did what all 11-year-olds do. They screamed. Loudly. After all, they were having fun.

The neighbouring lift-door opened. A lady swathed in fur stepped out, frowning with acute distaste.

'Excuse me,' I said. 'I wonder if you've seen any children?' I asked. 'They are in uniform,' I added hopefully.

'I have not seen them, young man,' she replied à la Bracknell, 'but I have *heard* them.'

And she swept off . . .

The story had begun, as some stories do, with the gift of a book. My mother had given my daughter a copy of the 1989 Smarties Book Prize Winner, **We're Going On a Bear Hunt** by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury. I had written a short pastiche (never a parody) of it as an entry in a competition run by Book Trust to find

a school to read all the shortlisted books, travel to London and present their own awards. In short, to be Young Judges.

I posted my entry and then forgot all about it. So I was astonished, some weeks later, to discover I'd won.

Matters were now a little complicated as I was to start working at a new school in September. Yes, my new headteacher knew of the Smarties Prize. Yes, he was delighted for his students to be Young Judges. Yes, we could take the books on visits to Junior schools. Yes, we could go to London.

It was when I told him the final part of our prize that he balked slightly. Every student in the school would receive a free tube of Smarties. Did I know how many students were in the school? I wasn't quite sure. 1,040. I promised I'd tell Book Trust.

I think it was at this point he decided to let me get on with it.

Whilst only ten Young Judges would go to London, they would be representatives of the 240 children in Year 7. After the twelve short-listed books arrived (bright, shiny hardbacks – an unheard of luxury these days), it soon became apparent they shouldn't just be used with Year 7 classes.

Thus, I've seen strapping 16-year-old lads entranced by Inga Moore's tale of **Six Dinner Sid**; watched sophisticated 16-year-old girls fall under the spell of Peter Collington's exquisite pictures in **On Christmas Eve**; and heard both groups join together to delight in the rhymes of Quentin Blake's **All Join In**.

People were talking about the books. I was cornered in corridors and told the story of Roald Dahl's **Esio Trot** a



Six Dinner Sid.

hundred times. Did I have a recipe for star-gazy pie? (After Antonia Barber and Nicola Bayley's **The Mousehole Cat**.) Where could you buy a Fidchell set? (Catherine Fisher's **The Conjuror's Game**.) Can you really fill a hot-air balloon using smoke? (Pauline Fisk's **Midnight Blue**.)

I was in danger of becoming carried away on the wave of excitement.

On our first visit to a Junior school, I took five of the Young Judges. Each Young Judge sat at a round table with six Juniors. They introduced themselves and then spread out the books, twelve of the best of the three hundred entered for the biggest prize in the country. Still bright and shiny – surely irresistible.

All of a sudden I stopped worrying about which particular books might win. That wasn't really important any more. What was important was that I'd sold the idea of being a reader; the enchantment of books.

So we read and discussed and argued and enjoyed. Classes throughout the school voted. Teachers contributed their opinions. The Young Judges made their trophies, a perspex H on a wooden S, embellished with Smarties. Finally they made up their minds. Then we went to London.

And, after the children had escaped from the lift and walked up every step from the basement to Level 8, what a day we had!

Some hours later I stood next to Helen on the concourse at King's Cross. She



From **Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids**.



The Mousehole Cat.

had lost her purse, made a speech to 300 adults, chatted to a succession of famous authors and illustrators, been pushed into a pond on the roof garden by her best friend, been photographed, discovered a liking for fishy things wrapped in vine leaves, been interviewed for Radio 5 and television, and presented Paula Danziger with an inflatable haddock (but that's another story). 'You know,' she said to nobody in particular, 'it's been a memorable day trip.' For an 11-year-old, she had a remarkable power of understatement.

Another memorable day was to follow. We had an extra prize. Three weeks later we were visited by three of the shortlisted authors: Inga Moore, Jamie Rix and Pauline Fisk.

Once again the school was alive with talk of books. All the excitement and enthusiasm generated by an author visit was ours, threefold.

At the end of the day we had our own, much shorter and less prestigious presentation in the school hall. But it was, perhaps, just as important. Instead of presenting trophies to winning authors, the Young Judges presented sets of the twelve shortlisted books, even now still bright and shiny, to other children from eight Junior schools. These books have enchanted us, they said, may they now enchant you.

Then the moment passed, the bell rang for the end of school and 1,040 tubes of Smarties were opened.

The first presentation? The Hereford School Young Judges Awards were won by **Six Dinner Sid** (0-5 years), **The Mousehole Cat** (6-8 years) and **Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids** (9-11 years and the overall winner). I don't think that matters very much. Books, all books, had won. That's what counts. ●

Details of the Young Judges' winning books are:

Six Dinner Sid by Inga Moore, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 0297 2, £6.99; 0 7500 0304 9, £3.50 pbk

The Mousehole Cat by Antonia Barber and Nicola Bayley, Walker, 0 7445 0703 0, £9.99

Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids by Jamie Rix, ill. Bobbie Spargo, Deutsch, 0 253 98531 X, £5.95

TWENTY THINGS THEY NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT BEING A TEACHER-LIBRARIAN

Steve Rosson tells all . . .



1. The only time the Head will visit the library will be to hold meetings there (staff, parents, governors, TVEI partnership, etc.), because, 'It's a nice big room and it's bright and attractive.'
 2. The only time most of the staff will visit the library will be to check up on the fourteen Shakespeare play titles that don't include a character's name. It was part of the blockbuster question in the previous night's quiz context.
 3. The only time most of the pupils will visit the library will be when it's coming down like stair-rods outside. Even then, they'll only want to check the paper to see at what time the horror movie starts on ITV that night.
 4. The only time most of the Sixth Form will visit the library will be for the pre-exam lunchtime buffet they like to hold there because, 'It's a nice big room and it's bright and attractive.'
 5. Three weeks after the lunchtime buffet, you'll find a half-eaten vegetable samosa lurking behind the books on Ancient Egypt.
 6. During one break-time, all thirty members of tutor group 1.7 will ask whether you have any information on Scarra Brae. By dint of questioning worthy of the Spanish Inquisition, you'll discover that it's an Iron Age village in the Orkney Islands now studied in the First Year 'History as Evidence' course. Naturally, there's nothing in the library.
 7. You'll admit utter defeat on another day when a First Year boy asks for 'a book with some knowledge in it'.
 8. Whatever way you arrange your shelves, you'll find the books on the Human Body will be in the furthest corner from the issue desk and you'll be constantly dispersing groups of boys intent on 'improving' the diagrams and pictures.
 9. You'll stop buying books on cricket when you find they have a shelf life of approximately three days before mysteriously disappearing.
 10. You'll fall into the pit of despair when a colleague on the teaching staff is heard to say, 'He needs to get rid of all this fiction and buy some GCSE Chemistry texts.'
- BUT**
11. You'll meet some of the pleasantest children in the school whose enthusiasm for reading will help you through the dark days of curriculum audits and development plans.
 12. You'll be able to wander round bookshops, choose books to your heart's content and *someone else will pay*.
 13. One day a colleague you'd long ago deemed to be an irredeemable Philistine will corner you and say, 'You know, you've got some marvellous books in this library.'
 14. Every time you put up a display of latest acquisitions, your heart will lift as each new group of borrowers comes in and says, 'Ah great. New books.'
 15. Some of the children you teach will actually learn to spell 'Library'.
 16. You begin to realise your efforts have been worthwhile when someone who's borrowed a book that you've selected for the library returns it and says, 'That was brilliant. Have you got any more like that?'
 17. You'll be able to poke your nose into everything that's happening at the school as the library can embrace all curriculum areas and all out-of-school activities.
 18. Slowly, but surely, you'll come to realise there are others on the staff who value reading and are concerned about information skills; they're just too snowed under with other matters to make this a priority. *You* can be the person who makes things happen.
 19. The people you meet in the Public Library Service, the Schools' Library Service, on library INSET courses and in bookshops will prove to be some of the nicest people imaginable, so confirming what you already know: books can have an enormous influence on those who read them.
 20. By becoming a teacher-librarian, you'll be entering the magical world of children's books. You'll read books that'll make you laugh out loud and books that'll make you cry. You'll see the world in new ways through the quality of illustration in the best non-fiction books. By insisting that only books of the highest quality are allowed shelf space in your library, *You* will help so many youngsters enter this magical world, too. ●

Steve Rosson is a teacher-librarian at Moseley School, Birmingham.

THE BEST OF GREEN

With the imminent publication of BfK's **Green Guide to Children's Books**, we've selected four of its best and more recent titles from a total of 400+ entries. Not just representative but flavoursome, a taster . . .

Two picture books to begin with:

Watch Out for the Giant-Killers!

Colin McNaughton, Walker (1991),
0 7445 1542 4, £8.99

This is certainly a green book. The richness of the colour leaps from the depiction of dense foliage on every page. Created from the foliage, but by no means dense when it comes to green matters, is the giant. A small boy meets him in the Amazonian forest and, when they have got over their mutual surprise, the giant tells how he was driven from other parts of the world. He was assisted by the giant of the seas, the whale, to travel to this wonderful forest where he has made his new home. But, he fears that such places are shrinking. They part good friends, leaving the little boy thoughtful.

Colin McNaughton

WATCH
OUT
FOR THE
GIANT
KILLERS!

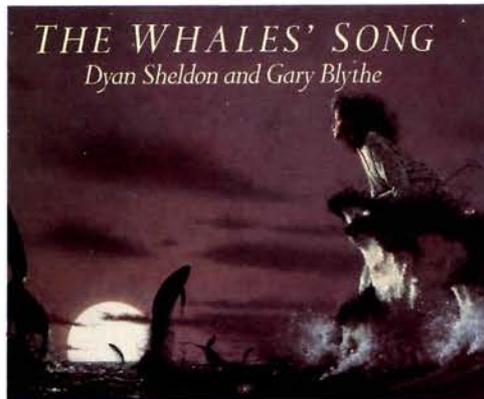


The book has lush illustrations, lots of jokes and cartoon-style sections. It is, however, a serious book. Not inappropriately, it has roots. The giant is descended from the Green Man who was so much part of our culture. Clever, diagrammatic illustrations show clearly how he faded from our consciousness as land use changed and the population grew. The explanations to the child, though amusingly done, expose the human species' effect on its habitat and the long-lasting consequences. The book is neither smug nor hectoring. It works by creating imaginative links. It provokes the thought that our concern for the last wild places, although they are far away, is genuine and right, because perhaps all our roots are there, retreating to the final refuge with the giant. There is more to this book than lies on its surface.

The Whales' Song

Dyan Sheldon and Gary Blythe,
Hutchinson (1990), 0 09 174250 1, £6.99

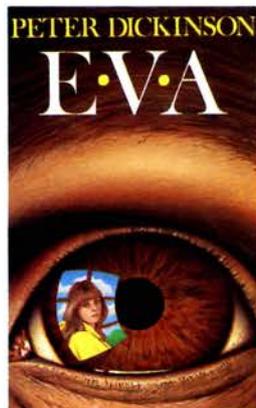
Grandmother remembers the time when the ocean was filled with whales' and once or twice she heard them sing. Lilly longs for the same experience, despite her uncle's disapproval. 'Tell her something useful' he snaps, meaning that whales are important for their bones and blubber and the rest is nonsense. Nevertheless, the whales take possession of her dreams and she throws a yellow flower into the ocean as a gift. That night, she hears the song of the whales, sees them leap and even hears them call her name.



THE WHALES' SONG
Dyan Sheldon and Gary Blythe

The quiet elegance of the words weaves a spell which is matched by the exceptional paintings; pictures which do not merely illustrate but deepen the reader's experience. Perhaps the book may even stand as an example of why fiction may be included in a guide like this. The uncle's facts are real and necessary but, compared with the way in which Lilly and her grandmother come close to the whales, his experience is only partial. Without imagination, our understanding is impaired and we are incomplete.

and a novel for older readers:



Eva

Peter Dickinson, Gollancz (1989),
0 575 04354 7, £8.95

This is an original book, triggering an imaginative response from the reader. The opening pages build to the first climax which should not be prematurely revealed (reviewers who have done so are not easy to forgive). The climax adds immeasurably to convincing us of the hypothesis which Dickinson is about to offer.

For Eva, coming out of the coma is quite unlike anyone else's experience. She has changed and must learn to adapt to what she has left after the accident. She can only survive if she accepts her new situation, and her adaptation, made successfully, has implications for the future - everyone's future.

The Earth is in decline. People have lost the will to search for the new home in space. Eva has been brought up with her father's chimpanzees in his research unit and they, too, live in an artificial environment. There is, however, still a small area of natural forest which would support a colony. Because of her special relationship with the animals, Eva is able to interact with them in a way which sets them on a path towards an evolutionary transformation. The book is fascinating. It raises the question of animal rights as a central theme and, consequently, the question of

human values, but not only in relation to animals. Human social structures are exposed. Who deserves to inherit the Earth?

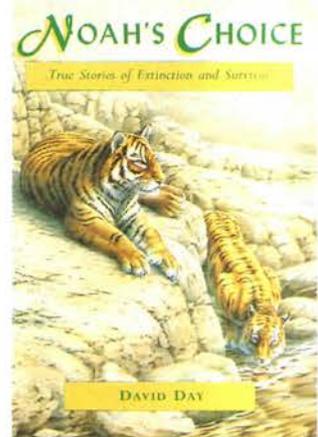
The book is valuable for several reasons: the technical implications, the moral issues, the animal interest. In schools, an absorbed reading can only be the beginning.

All three reviews above are taken from the fiction bibliography, compiled by Pat Thomson.

Finally, we include a review of one of the very best non-fiction titles published last year, taken from the information book bibliography, compiled by Ted Percy.

Noah's Choice

David Day, Viking Kestrel (1990),
0 670 80669 2, £7.99



David Day's obvious concern for his subject and his eloquent prose style combine to produce a distinguished collection of stories of animal extinction and survival, giving us the bad news first. So horror stories, like the fates of the passenger pigeon and Steller's sea cow - memorials to human stupidity, precede the more hopeful histories of 'Operation Oryx' and the legislation-assisted revival of the sea-otter. Such is the author's skill that interwoven with his accounts are many potent lessons for today. Exquisitely written to be as readable as any novel, this highly informative and gently persuasive book will form and change attitudes for the better. ●

The Green Guide to Children's Books will be published in April 1991. See the special order form with this issue of BfK, or phone BfK (081-852 4953) to secure a 20% Readers' Discount in advance of publication.

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Barbara Firth in Authorgraph
The Mother Goose Award
. . . and reviews, reviews, reviews