

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's
book magazine

May 1991 No. 68 UK Price £1.70

PICTURE BOOK SPECIAL
Quentin Blake • Barbara Firth
Margaret Meek • Betty Root
Martin Waddell

WHY THE RIGHT BOOKS MATTER...

WHY YOU CAN RECOMMEND BFC

More than a dozen years ago, BOOKS FOR CHILDREN realised that caring parents with limited time, money and expertise, were looking for ways to help their children prepare for, and do well at school.

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We offer information books – offering knowledge at its most accurate, up-to-date and attractively presented. We look for picture books – nowadays not just an aid to literacy but a whole Art Curriculum in miniature. We look for fiction – the form in which humanity has always cast its wisest attempts to understand itself and communicate that understanding.

And who selects these books?

The BFC selection panel is:

ANNE WOOD, editor of the magazine *Books for Your Children*, a producer of children's television programmes, and holder of two literary awards;

CHRIS POWLING, who is a tutor in English, a former head teacher, a writer and broadcaster;

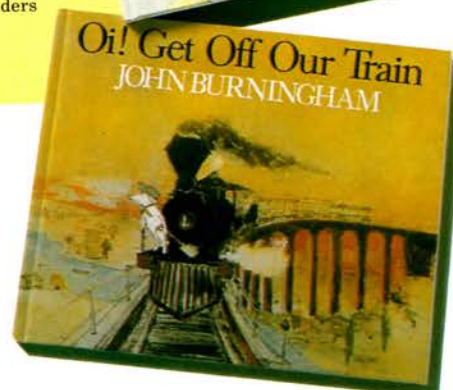
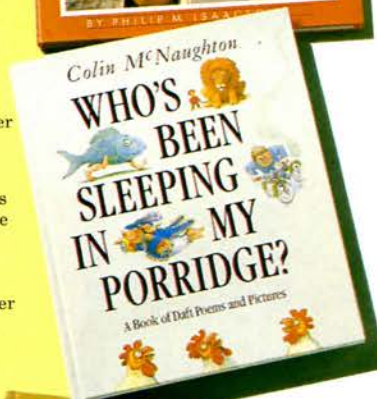
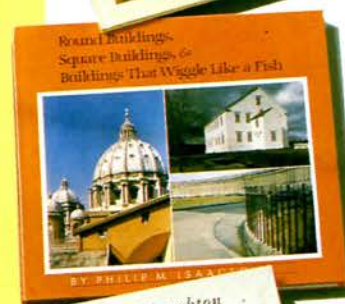
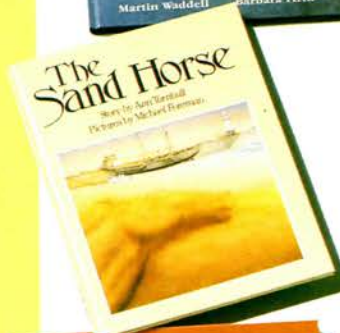
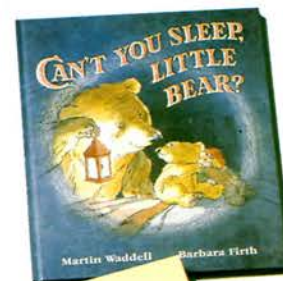
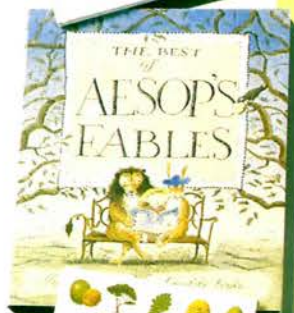
MARGARET CARTER, who is an expert in child development, former editor of 'Mother' magazine and a writer and children's book reviewer;

SALLY GRINDLEY, who is editorial director of BFC and a writer of children's books.

You only have to look at this page to see the calibre of books they have recommended over the past few months. And they are all offered at savings which range from between 20% to 50% off the publishers' prices.

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We hope, too, that after reading this page you will want to recommend us to other parents, teachers, playgroup leaders and PTAs.



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Contents

Editor's Page	3
News and comment from the Editor	
The Box of Delights	4
Quentin Blake on setting up a picture book exhibition	
Reviews	
Fiction paperbacks	8
Non-fiction	20
Authorgraph No. 68	16
Barbara Firth, interviewed by Stephanie Nettell	
Blind Spot	24
Margaret Meek on <i>The Wind in the Willows</i>	
Writing Texts for Picture Books	26
Martin Waddell	
A Retirement Honours List	28
Betty Root	
News	30
Editor's Choice	32
New hardbacks	
Guardian Award	32
Stephanie Nettell	

Cover story

The illustration on the front of **BfK** this month is from *Let's Go Home, Little Bear* by Martin Waddell and illustrated by Barbara Firth (see Authorgraph on centre pages for details).

The book is published by Walker Books and we thank them for their help in using this illustration.

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EDITOR'S PAGE



'Paradoxically,' says Margaret Meek, 'adults believe that readers need help with texts as words but assume they will understand pictures without instruction.' The remark, along with umpteen others equally thought-provoking, comes from her new book *On Being Literate* (Bodley Head, 0 370 31190 6, £8.99). It's a perfect quotation to launch our May issue which focuses on picture books. Martin Waddell, for instance, on pages 24-25 reflects on his own practices as one of our most successful generators of picture book text – and the extent to which he must accommodate shared control of the book as a whole. For the illustrator's viewpoint, turn to our Authorgraph (centre pages) where one of Martin's best-known collaborators, Barbara Firth, talks to Stephanie Nettell about her life and work.

And who knows more about the magical merging of word and image than Quentin Blake? When, recently, he was invited to help prepare an exhibition of children's book illustration, his first response was to be thrilled. 'What a lovely job, I thought. Only later did the problems of choice begin to emerge!' See pages 4-7 for Quentin's account of what was involved and the solutions he came up with. Problems of choice were also encountered by Betty Root when she tackled our Spring Round-Up of new picture books (pages 28-29) drawing on her years of experience as Director of the Reading Centre at the University of Reading, from which she retired recently... if 'retired' is quite the right word for someone who seems to be as busy as ever. Exuberant as her piece is, though, one of her concluding remarks has a sadly familiar ring. 'Why is it,' she asks, 'that almost all the children in these books have white faces?' Some battles, it seems, must go on and on being fought.

Perhaps we should expect this. According to Margaret Meek, 'Literacy, however defined or acquired, or used or sought is never static.' She goes on, 'as language and art, it changes and is changed by those who find uses for it and who, like the artists who create new books for children, actively seek to play the games of reading and writing and to change the rules.' Margaret herself has always been sharply aware of how provisional rules are – not least the rules by which a book is promoted to 'classic' status. Her personal response to *The Wind in the Willows*, one of the most celebrated and variously illustrated of all children's books, can be found on pages 26-27. It's the start of an occasional series which, with **BfK**'s tongue very much in its cheek, we call 'Blind Spot'.

Net Book Disagreement

Last month, in a local high street bookshop, I was invited to sign a petition urging the

government to 'bring to an end' the Net Book Agreement – the voluntary arrangement which, in the words of the National Book Committee, 'enables publishers to determine minimum retail prices for their titles to encourage booksellers to buy and display a wide range over a period of time, by preventing discounting by other outlets which undercut the margins'. In this case the outlet concerned was Hatchards, owned by Terry Maher's Pentos Group.

Nothing illegal about the Pentos tactics, of course... why should they draw the public's attention to what it could lose in a discounting war? Why should they point out that the NBA is supported by the majority of the UK book world – including readers (as represented by Book Trust), librarians (as represented by the Library Association), writers (as represented by the Society of Authors), not to mention over 90% of booksellers (as represented by the Booksellers Association) and over 70% of publishers (as represented by the Publishers Association). After all, it's not up to Terry Maher to let you in on the fact that ten out of the twelve European Community members allow resale price maintenance for books.

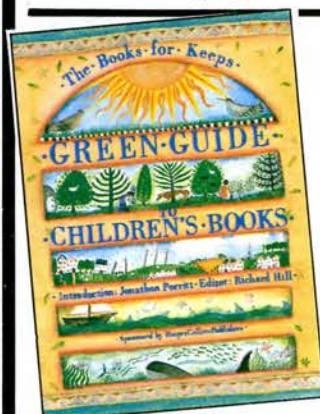
Maybe it is up to journals like **BfK**, though. So we're sure Terry Maher will be delighted if we remind our readers that there is another side to the argument, as they'll find out if they contact the National Book Committee on 081-870 9055. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the Net Book Agreement, and plenty who support it don't think it's perfect, the issues involved are far too complex to be resolved by a mere pile of signatures beneath the bald assertion that the NBA operates 'against the public interest'. No, I didn't add my name to the list.

Reviewers, Reviewers

Speaking of lists, the article on 'Golden Rules for Critics' we carried in our January edition (**BfK 66**) brought a small avalanche of requests to join our reviewing team – along with some splendid examples of what the applicants can do. Lovely... except we have no vacancies at all at present. We've added the most impressive offers to what's becoming an increasingly fat file so no more for the time being, please. Nice, though, to have our suspicions confirmed that **BfK** readers are a talented bunch!

Enjoy the issue. ■

Chris



UPDATE ON The Green Guide to Children's Books

... thought you might like to see Jane Ray's splendid front cover to *The BfK Green Guide to Children's Books* – this time in full colour. Apologies for a slight delay to the hundreds of you who have ordered copies in advance of publication. We've had a last minute hiccup in production which now means *The Green Guide* will be published towards the end of May. Trust us, it's well worth waiting for! If you haven't done so, order your copy straightaway on the enclosed form to secure the 20% reader's discount.

THE BOX OF DELIGHTS

Quentin Blake describes the principles behind the travelling exhibition of artwork he helped set up.

The Box of Delights: or as they call it in Italy, Lo Scrigno delle Meraviglie. I happen to have this information ready to hand because a year ago I was at work on a set of ten illustrations for an Italian translation of Masefield's extraordinary book. It was about this time that the Wales and West of England branch of the Association of Illustrators asked me to help with the preparation of an exhibition of children's book illustration. The show was to be put together by Sue Shields and the staff of Newport Museum and Art Gallery. I was to select five artists from the AoI membership in the west who would show their work, and to invite fifteen other illustrators of my own choosing to take part in the exhibition. I knew from experience that it's nice for an exhibition to have a title but to find one that's suitable can be very difficult. Masefield's title looked as though it might serve us too and, hoping that we weren't being too optimistic in offering delights, we snapped it up straightaway. More about that later.

There was to be room for about sixty frames of work, and to limit ourselves to twenty artists seemed to give us a reasonable sample of each. At my suggestion we also encouraged the exhibitors to restrict themselves to two or three books, rather than a scatter of drawings from various works.

Of course, no sooner had I embarked on the pleasure of deciding whom I would like to take part than I discovered the distress of having to come to terms with the idea that there were others whom I would have to leave out. Twenty names does not give you much room to manoeuvre, particularly in such a varied field. And the principle of selection could not be, I was sure, to establish the twenty best, twenty most celebrated or twenty anything else.

The best analogy I can find for my procedure, I think, is that of arranging a dinner for your friends. The idea of the meal we offer in the exhibition is not a smidgeon of everything tasty in the larder. It's a selection of good things which I hope go together. It may entail choosing salmon and not sole, without prejudice to sole; or pheasant to rabbit, without prejudice to rabbit; or broccoli to parsnips, and so on. Many things that one would like to have in, on another occasion, are left out.

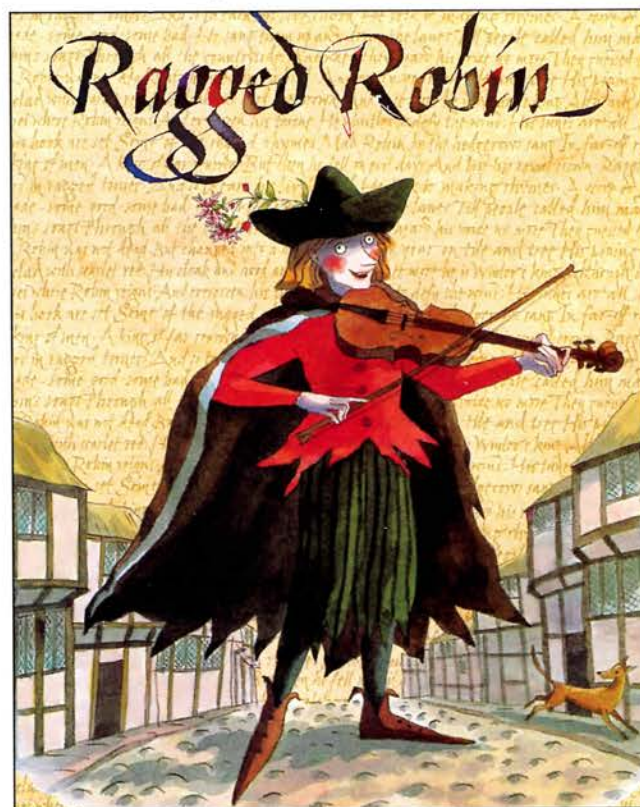
One thing I knew I wanted – returning from food to artists – was as wide a range of age and experience as possible. I was fortunate to have my invitation accepted by Harold Jones and C Walter Hodges, both in their eighties, and both still with pen in hand; which gives us the opportunity not only to salute them but also to emphasise the continuity of achievement in illustration.

The artists who get most showing in this exhibition, however, are those of a new, or at least new-ish, wave; even though many of them are already well-established. That they should take the limelight is, I think, quite natural; but my choice is reinforced, I suppose, by the fact of my having spent twenty-five years teaching at the Royal College of Art. I can remember seeing big drawings by Nicola Bayley, for instance;



and I can remember that, after her work had taken on the miniature detailed character which we now know as hers, Nicola was able to produce a tiny portfolio of work from her handbag. In addition to her ability to do this trick, what I've always admired about Nicola's work is not only the detail in itself, but also the striking effects she is able to bring off with it; and, perhaps most of all, that while performing these ingenuities, she doesn't lose her sense of the identities of her characters. In a similar way Angela Barrett has developed a very carefully-worked style that is able to evoke an atmosphere of edginess, of strangeness.

For some reason I associate in my mind three of these illustrators: Charlotte Voake, Emma Chichester Clark and Patrick Benson. I think it may be that each of them has a sense of humour which appeals to me; a sense of humour which doesn't exist in isolation but gives a zest and edge to the richness of the work. Charlotte Voake is wonderfully lively and elegant at the same time. It's as though she had been taught by Edward Ardizzone and Jane Austen; and she always seems to know where to dispose everything on the page; design just runs out her pen. Emma Chichester Clark, with a not unsimilar stylishness and humour, enriches her images in strength of tone and colour, but they don't forfeit their vivacity. She can start off in nonsense and bring to it atmosphere and poetry. James Reeves' *Ragged Robin* seems to have been waiting for her to illustrate it.



From *Ragged Robin* by James Reeves, illustrated by Emma Chichester Clark (Walker, 0 7445 1108 9, £10.95).

Patrick Benson embraced what must have been a very congenial subject when he took on the exploits of Baron Munchausen. The vein of wild humour and straightfaced

detailed handling that he brings to it have striking affinities with a version of perhaps forty years earlier by the painter and illustrator Brian Robb. In fact in some ways Patrick Benson seems to have inspirational messages flowing to him direct from the thirties; but they produce not pastiche or nostalgia, as with many of his contemporaries, but the real thing. We shall soon see *The Minpins*, Roald Dahl's last story, illustrated by Patrick in full colour. Unusually for both author and artist, humour is not the main feature of this story, and it's interesting to see Patrick Benson without it, bringing off some effects of wonder and complexity that few other illustrators could cope with. And if you want a change of mood from these three artists, look at John Watson. He lives on the street more than they do; runs up and down it, in fact, making terse wry comments. Perhaps no one has yet established the best form for channelling all that dark Scottish energy. But watch out.

As a result of this emphasis on relative newcomers, the artists least well served by this exhibition are those of (roughly) my own generation. But these are the ones, I imagine, who are the most well-known anyway. The few such illustrators I have invited – Fritz Wegner, John Lawrence, Justin Todd, Michael Foreman – offer, I believe, interesting contrasts of treatment and approach.

At one early stage of selection I have to admit that, in addition to a range of British illustrators, I wanted to ask one or two illustrators from other countries, to emphasise that connection: Philippe Dumas or Puig Rosado or Claude Lapointe from France; The Tjong Khing from Holland; and so on. Clearly it was mad to attempt it within the limits of this exhibition, though enjoyable to think about. Axel Scheffler, whom we are passing off as British for the purposes of this exhibition because he lives in England and works for English publishers (among others), happens really to be German. So at least we have one gesture across the Channel, if not across the Atlantic.

The second element of the exhibition is the catalogue, which we have tried to make not only a list of the exhibitors, but something worth looking at in its own right. The illustrations are not those in the exhibition, but drawings which, whether intended for publication or not, are black and white. There are also comments from the artists. Some are about the artist's attitude and relationship to the book; Angela Barrett, for instance:

Setting a scene, furnishing it, whether with trees or chairs of my choosing, and trying to create the right atmosphere for the yarn. I've never attempted to illustrate a densely populated story. I like a close circle of characters and the presence of animals all in a place where I'd be happy, or at least interested, to go.

Or Catherine Brighton:

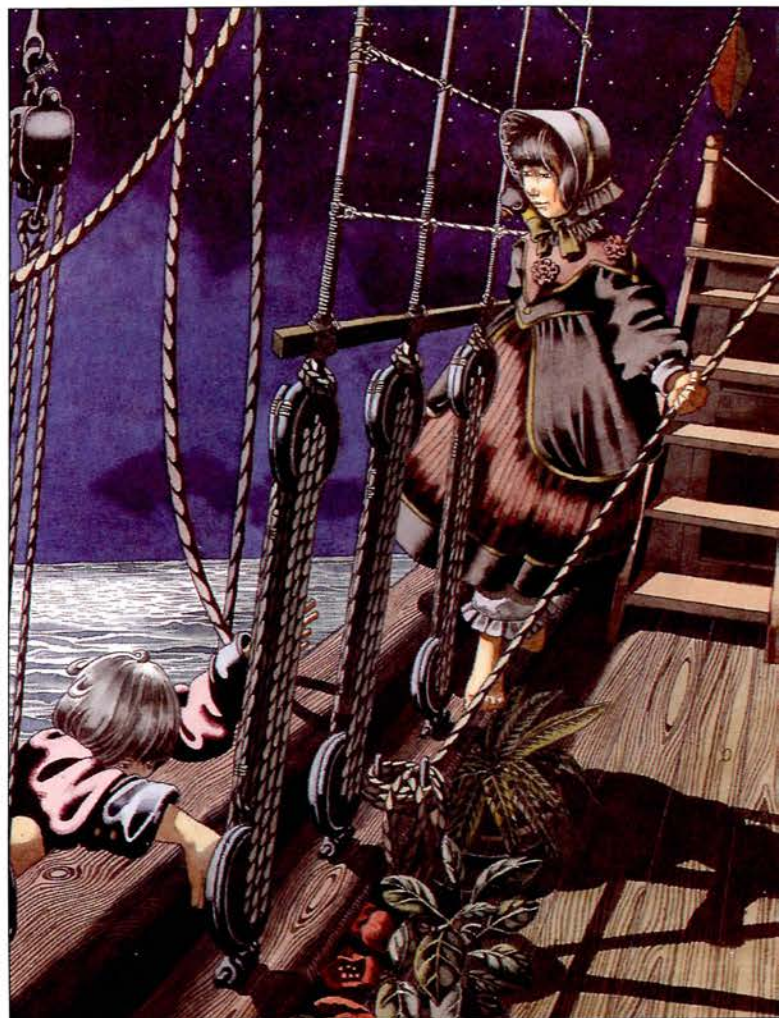
All my books are concerned, one way or another, with our vulnerability in childhood.

*What fires me is the creation of an inner landscape, the landscape of the children in each of the books. Sometimes they are historical figures as in *Nijinsky* and sometimes my own imaginative creations as in *Dearest Grandmama*. In them I see my own childhood fears and pleasures. I choose historical figures, the story of whose lives and times resonate.*

Nijinsky describes a child's world very different from my post-war London childhood but the quality of events and what children make of them are not so very different. The small boy in the shaft of light, cold with fear, is me. Nijinsky's father was deserting the family, for me it was a different trauma.

While Catherine Brighton's work calls for a generous trawl of reference material, Penny Dale depends on drawing and observing children:

... particularly my daughter and her friends. They often influence the way characters in the stories behave. Children's gestures and movements are unselfconscious, transparent and expressive. The tilt of a head, the amount of lower lip with a frown, all sorts of small inflections contribute to the feel of a moment.



From *Dearest Grandmama* by Catherine Brighton (Faber, 0 571 14068 8, £7.99).

If it's my own story, I often have a particular child in mind while the ideas are developing. When it's someone else's text, I find it a good test of whether or not I will be able to illustrate it if I know, fairly early on, of a child who will fit and belong to the story. Almost like casting a play or film.

And while some illustrators are clear about the fact they don't even *think* about children while they're at work on a children's book, others, like Lucy Cousins, obviously find help from being near them:

Before my daughter was born last summer I illustrated several children's books. Now there's not much time to work, but lots of time to enjoy looking at books with her. As I turn the pages of my own board books, she carefully studies each picture, smiles and then reaches for the book. After staring intently at the bar code, she then sucks the spine until it begins to go soggy.

Some write about their technique and their materials, which can be in themselves a stimulus. Charlotte Voake, for instance, thinks that her best drawings are the ones she does on the backs of envelopes, but for *The Best of Aesop's Fables*:

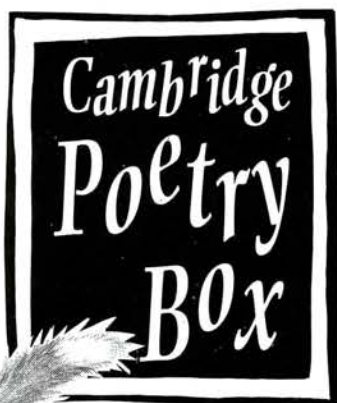
All the drawings... are done on a wonderful French watercolour paper with rapidograph, and painted with Schminke watercolours, which I find clear and fresh.

and for John Lawrence wood-engraving is a direct link with tradition:

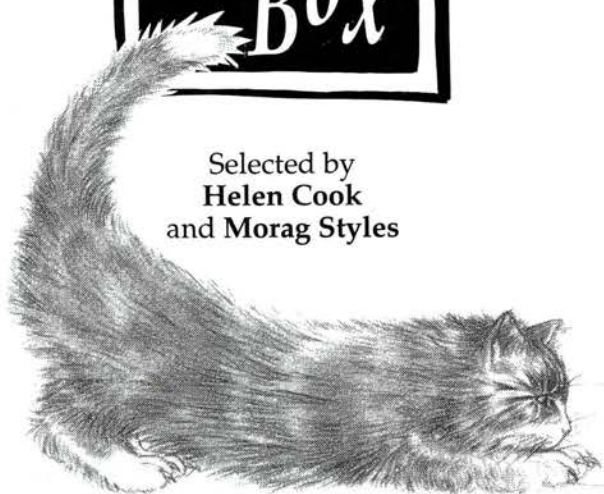
The whole history of children's books grows out of the engraving tradition of chapbooks and Victorian juvenilia and I'm still fascinated by it. I very much enjoy drawing directly but when the right book comes along, there is an added pleasure in collecting the wood from the blockmaker and sharpening the tools with a feeling of anticipation and promise. It can be nerve-racking insofar

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BEWARE OF BOYS

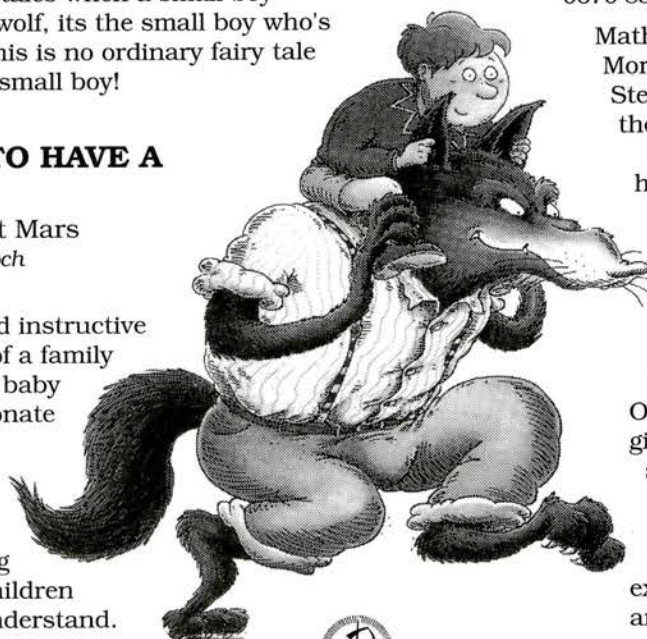
Tony Blundell
0670 829250 June

In ordinary fairy tales when a small boy meets a big bad wolf, it's the small boy who's in trouble. But this is no ordinary fairy tale and no ordinary small boy!

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A BABY

Dominique de Saint Mars
Illustrated by Serge Bloch
0670 838489 June

This entertaining and instructive book tells the story of a family which is expecting a baby and takes an affectionate and humorous look at the often puzzling process of pregnancy and childbirth, explaining the facts to young children in a way they can understand.



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Tom Price
0670 830992 March

Maths can be fun! Let Morris Minus, Even Steven and the rest of the Calculators show you

how to work it out!

MAN MOUNTAIN

Martin Waddell

Illustrated by
Claudio Munoz
0670 828148 April

Oscar was the last of the giants. He lay down and slept while a forest grew on his beard and a village was built between his feet, until Rose went exploring on Man Mountain and woke him up.

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as one can't afford too blithely to restart a complicated and expensive block, but perhaps this is sometimes the edge one needs when it is all important to stay on the tightrope.

We get some comments too on the job itself. Justin Todd shows one aspect of it:

... chained to the drawing board, day after day, obsessively, painting pictures which are sometimes quite good but never good enough.

Michael Foreman takes a more cheerful view:

What I usually fail to get across when talking about illustrations is that it is FUN. A daily delight. A wallow in dreams.

Somehow I think those two accounts of it aren't altogether incompatible, and that most of us who do the job are familiar with both.

In addition to the illustrators' own notes and comments, the catalogue contains three pieces specially commissioned (as well as an introduction by me, but by the time you have read this you will know everything I say there). First, because Walter Hodges had responded in such an enthusiastic and interested fashion to the suggestion that he take part in the exhibition, we took the opportunity to lay another burden on his shoulders and asked him if he would write an extended piece about being an illustrator. He observes, reflecting on the relative natures of painting and illustration:

It has been a great purpose of painters for more than a hundred years to try to escape from this tyranny of explicit subject matter and use their art more and more to express the varieties of individual human perception, even into what might be called forms of visual music. Yet in all the time before this, it was precisely for their value as illustrators of the world and its persons, places and events, real or imaginary, that all artists were supposed to be used and trained; and so in my time, rather backwardly perhaps, was I.

Walter Hodges' training was 'under one of the last great Victorian illustrators', Edmund J Sullivan; so that he represents, in the context of our exhibition, a tradition continued. Albeit, I think one has to add, a tradition of the depiction of incident and the conveying of information now rather seriously eroded. Part of the reason for this is undoubtedly the enormous proliferation of the mechanical image; but the mechanical image can't do everything, and another contributory factor, I suspect, is the unwillingness or inability of publishers to pay for black-and-white illustrations. Or is it just that novels for children no longer have illustrations? At one time it was possible for a talented illustrator to be discouraged enough to give up the game altogether by the hopeless inadequacy of the fees offered for black-and-white illustrations. Nowadays, with the advent of international editions in colour, an illustrator has a better chance of making a decent living; but perhaps one of the training grounds for draughtsmanship has disappeared.

The background to this situation – the economics of book production – was sketched for us in a piece by Ron van der Meer. Ron van der Meer has red pointed shoes and a Dutch accent and is very good at telling jokes; even more to the point he is an illustrator, a graphic designer, a book packager and a paper engineer. His brisk review of the elements in the production of a book (books are born in some ways very much as babies are born, he suggests) is, in my view, not only interesting in itself but helps to explain why many books look the way they do.

When Russell Hoban agreed to write something for us, I thought – perhaps at that stage we both thought – that it would be about what it is like to be illustrated, and perhaps something about how text and drawings work together. In the event it proved to be more unexpected and more moving: in a reminiscence of the books of his youth, he suggests the importance of illustrations; even, what it is like to look at them. Of **Treasure Island** he says:

I haven't seen those drawings for forty-eight years and I can't recall every one but the look of them is vivid in my

mind and brings back the cosiness, the delight, the sheer well-being I felt when I first read the book, sitting in our wild cherry tree in the summer when I was ten.

And of his long-lost **Arabian Nights**:

*The illustrations were all brush and ink by an unforgettably exuberant draughtsman whose name has vanished from my mind; wild they were every one and rumbustious with life – some were full-page, some were vignettes, some took up part of a page and the type ran around them ... I've read somewhere of a Chinese or Japanese god of ink, and those drawings were certainly blessed by that god. The paper was coarse and thick, the ink lived in it with a strong life. That book was a treasure, my thrown-away **Arabian Nights**, gone for ever.*

He goes on to say that

making books with pictures is a natural function of the human animal – we need them because the world in our eyes is not enough, it has to be imaged in other ways and other styles, it has to be brought into the what-iffery of the mind where everything is more so and where anything can happen. Illustrated books for children help to furnish the mind and improve the crucial faculty; they help lookers become perceivers – most of all they simply give more world to the reader all through life.

I have suggested that the exhibition consists of two elements, the original works and the catalogue with its comments. Russell Hoban's observations about books bring us to what is in effect the third element of the exhibition: the return to the books themselves, where we encounter the pictures in their intended sequence and scale; reflecting the text; helping to unfold the story; leading us to turn the pages.



From **A New Treasury of Poetry** edited by Neil Philip, illustrated by John Lawrence (Blackie, 0 216 92889 3, £14.95).

Here I'm already quoting from my own introduction, and perhaps I can conclude with its conclusion:

Purloining Masefield's title was initially ... a piece of opportunism; but as our work on the exhibition progressed there seemed to unfold from it an appropriateness that I hadn't envisaged. I had thought of our box as something to take things out of. Masefield's is not like that. The small flat rectangular box with the worn shagreen cover given into Kay Harker's care by Cole Hawlings, the travelling puppeteer, is a box with magic properties; it allows the holder to go small, go swift. It's a box, as Kay discovers, to look into and to enter, through which to travel in space and go back in time, into winter and into the heart of summer. Portable magic. The nearest thing we have to it is a book. ■

The Box of Delights Exhibition opens at the Newport Museum and Art Gallery, Gwent on 4th May 1991 and runs until 15th June.

It then goes on tour to:

Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood in London	17th July – 25th August 1991
Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter	30th November 1991 – 5th January 1992
Oriel Mostyn in Llandudno	24th January – 7th March 1992

A possible venue may be Glasgow, Kelvingrove in 1992, but dates have yet to be agreed.

The exhibition also includes the original drawings for Dylan Thomas' **A Child's Christmas in Wales** by Edward Ardizzone and a selection of Quentin's own illustrations for Masefield's **Box of Delights**.

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

The Chocolate Touch

Patrick Skene Catling, Mammoth (Oct 90), 0 7497 0306 7, £1.99

John Midas has a passion for chocolate which governs his entire life. One day he discovers a strange coin and spends it at an equally strange shop selling the most chocolatey chocolate in the world. John's subsequent tendency to turn everything he touches with his mouth into chocolate should be a dream come true but, of course, it's a nightmare.

A brilliantly told story where the hilarity of John's predicament is consistently underscored by its intensifying horror. The children may laugh as the sweet, brown, sticky sludge accumulates, but not without a quiver of anxious guilt. Highly recommended for reading aloud and for independent readers of all ages to enjoy on their own. GH

Family Scramble

0 7445 0708 1

Fantasy Scramble

0 7445 0709 X

Maureen Roffey, Walker (Jan 91), £3.99 each

There are, apparently, 98 hilarious combinations in each of these mix-and-match books, ranging from the debunking of Uncle Ben who is forced into wonderfully undignified positions, to Baby Tom who delicately sits knitting. These books are a must for every Nursery and Infant book corner; will inevitably lead to trouble as the children argue over who is going to borrow one or the other; and should be issued with a Teacher's Health Warning as they're guaranteed to start a riot. Read them aloud, if you dare! JS

Superbabe II

Deborah van der Beek, Little Mammoth (Jan 91), 0 7497 0307 5, £2.99

The story of Superbabe, the very mobile baby who acts at speed and on impulse to fit as much as he can into an afternoon, leaving Mum and big sister fairly tired. Certainly a useful book to reassure big sisters and brothers, experiencing problems with younger siblings who demand too much attention and energy. Very much a fun book to read together. MS



Mrs Goose's Baby

Charlotte Voake, Walker (Feb 91), 0 7445 1495 9, £2.99

An enchanting picture book for very young children about Mrs Goose who finds an egg, hatches it, looks after it carefully and never realises it is a baby chicken! A comfortable story offering information and amusement with plenty of visual treats for 2-4 year-olds. MS

I Like Books

Anthony Browne, Walker (Jan 91), 0 7445 1476 2, £2.50



The text of this book is simply a list of different kinds of books being read by a chimpanzee... 'I like books / Funny books and scary books / Fairy tales and Nursery rhymes' and so on. As you'd expect, though, this rather uninteresting recital is given added interest by the illustrations. Thus, for dinosaur books the stegosaurus has half-open books for fins, the shadow of the armchair forms the monster in the scary book and the song book has open mouths. It is, I suppose, a small child's introduction to the surreal world of Anthony Browne's more complex titles. Most picture books for the very young are bland and obvious so the twists of meaning in this are welcome. Nonetheless, I'd rather give nursery and infant children **Bear Hunt**, for instance, than this diluted version of Anthony Browne's capabilities. LW



Jack the Carpenter and His Friends

0 7445 1758 3

Jill the Farmer and Her Friends

0 7445 1760 5

Nick Butterworth, Walker (Jan 91), £1.99 each

Two books from a series (let's hope there are more on the way) which offer useful information to young children. On each left-hand page is a statement and picture (e.g. Jack is a carpenter) and, on the opposite page, a question and picture (what does he use?). Highly recommended for 2-4 year-olds. MS

Willoughby Wallaby
Jez Alborough, Walker (Feb 91), 0 7445 1484 3, £2.99



A fast-moving, probably funny-to-children, rhyming story about a wallaby and his friends, hedgehog and rabbit, who help him when he can't hop for a while. Teaching the meaning of words like 'up' and 'down' through the enjoyment of the story, this is certainly one to be recommended. MS

Infant/Junior

Here Come the Twins

Beverly Cleary, Young Puffin (Oct 90), 0 14 03.2884 X, £2.50

A collection of happy little stories about a set of twins growing up in middle America, enjoying each other's company and coping with the trials of being four.

I found the repetitive diction, presumably designed for 'easy' reading, somewhat stilted and

jarring at first, but after a chapter or two it seemed to acquire a rather eerie, Pinteresque verisimilitude. I enjoyed the book more than I expected to, and it's provided a confidence-boosting read for a couple of my fledgeling readers. GH

Tilly's House

Faith Jaques, Little Mammoth (Oct 90), 0 7497 0449 7, £2.50

This welcome reissue of Faith Jaques' classic story of Tilly, the little wooden doll, is perfect as a read-aloud to infants or for young, fluent readers to enjoy for themselves. The story is so convincingly worked out, and the ways Tilly overcomes her

problems are so cunning, that the whole thing is completely engaging. The detailed pictures of how Tilly puts yoghurt pots and a Smarties tube to work are delightful and interesting (surely she's an infant teacher in the making!). The message – that friendship, independence and ingenuity can overcome the worst of obstacles – is not a bad one to pass on, either. LW

Pongwiffy

Kaye Umansky, ill.
Chris Smedley, Puffin
(Oct 90), 0 14 03.4221 4,
£2.50

A very smelly witch with truly grubby habits, Pongwiffy adores living in her filthy hovel in the middle of the rubbish tip, fighting her sometimes best-friend Sharkadder. When she needs a familiar the only applicant is 'Ugo the 'amster from, of course, Amsterdam. Embarrassing Pongwiffy beyond words, Hugo refuses to hide discreetly in his mistress's hat and quickly becomes the darling of Pongwiffy's coven.

The most exuberantly funny book I've read for ages with lots of different voices and bags of action. My Year-4s loved every minute, especially the talent contest. PH

Jonathan's Ghost

Terrance Dicks, ill.
Adriano Gon, Red Fox
(Nov 90), 0 09 968730 5,
£2.50

Jonathan moves house, house is haunted, Jonathan meets ghost. Fairly standard stuff, but wait... Dave, the ghost, is utterly 'real'... you can shake hands with this ghost. Dave, a Second World War doodlebug victim, gets bored in heaven and comes back to Earth for some fun. He helps his new friend show talent at art, arithmetic, football and fighting and Jonathan becomes a hero. Teachers are a suspicious lot, though, and so many strange happenings start them questioning.

A splendid introduction to ghost stories and a good read in its own right. PH

Patrick's Perfect Pancake

Caroline Crossland,
Walker (Jan 91),
0 7445 1603 X, £2.99

I'm in two minds about this book. The story is entertaining – about a chef who takes up farming and whose animals, being free-range, produce such wonderful milk and eggs that Patrick's pancakes win the Queen's competition for the best in the land. Well told and nicely illustrated, the anti factory farming message is not too unsubtle. It is, however, over simplistic: profit and productivity are the villains, free-range food is described as 'happier tasting' (whatever that is) and at the end all the baddie farmers let their animals loose and everyone lives happily ever after. Is this an entirely fair message to pass on to young children? Surely, even organic farmers have some concern for profit and productivity? LW

**Poor Little Mary**

Kathryn Cave, Young
Puffin (Feb 91),
0 14 03.4105 6, £2.50

Any teacher who behaves like Mrs Macintosh deserves the chaos which ensues on the afternoon of the class end-of-term party. The problems she creates for herself will, however, amuse apprentice readers of about the same age as those in the story (sevenish), especially her soaking in the school pond and her confrontation with the headteacher. JB

Patrick's Dream

Cynthia and William
Birrer, Walker (Feb 91),
0 7445 2006 1, £3.99



A skilled re-telling of the Patrick myth; his capture, escape and return to Ireland, and his tournament of magic against the Druids would provide a sufficiently fascinating story. This account is further enriched by the beauty of the surrounding illustrations. Each page resembles an expanse of intricately embroidered tapestry, bordered with labyrinths of Celtic knotwork, within which the struggle between pagan and Christian magic is enacted. This book is a visual delight which children will want to touch and explore. GH

Blossom Comes Home

James Herriot, ill. Ruth
Brown, Picture Piper
(Feb 91), 0 330 31471 8,
£3.99



A beautifully produced picture book with the quality of illustrations one would expect from Ruth Brown. The story is slight; about an old cow being sent to market, but who brings herself home and is kept on by the farmer who can't bear to part with her after all. Like all of James Herriot's stories, this tells of times long gone, before batteries and sow crates and BSE. It's none the worse for that, however, and has a charm and gentleness which is welcome in these grittier times. LW

A Sudden Puff of Glittering Smoke

Anne Fine, Mammoth
(Jan 91), 0 7497 0254 0,
£2.50

When Jeanie liberates a genie from a half-millennium of captivity in the ring she's found, her first wish is that she should be able to astonish people. The genie obliges by ventriloquizing his own visionary memories of the Orient through Jeanie as she sits in her workaday classroom. Throughout the school day, the genie's literal interpretation of Jeanie's wishes enables him to express his homesickness amidst his dismal surroundings. This is a short and entertaining tale, presenting a cleverly written variant on a well-worked theme. GH

Ted and the Chinese Princess

Jan Mogensen, Picture
Corgi (Jan 91),
0 552 52612 6, £2.99

Ted's trip in his pram to the park with Jack and Mary turns into quite an adventure for the toy bear. First he jumps in the lake, is rescued and unwittingly marooned by a friendly duck. Then he meets a Chinese princess and her dragon who, in reality, turns out to be less frightening than either a hedgehog or a butterfly prove to be in Ted's imagination. The real charm of this rather slow-moving tale lies in the muted water-colour

illustrations of Ted and his adventures. The dreamy island scenes hold a particular fascination. JB

Pog

Peter Haswell, Walker
(Jan 91), 0 7445 1766 4,
£3.50

This is a very odd book indeed. I'm reminded of Arnold Lobel's *Mouse Tales* and *Mouse Soup* by its dotty view of the world. Pog is a pig who is always asking questions about the simplest things (what does a banana do? how can you take a hole home?) and coming up with the most unusual answers. Written in very simple sentences, the language, like Pog's questions, suggests far more than is obvious at first sight and opens all sorts of lateral thinking possibilities.



The layout is wonderful for youngsters – big, clear print, a few lines on the page split up by lots of little pictures. For children used to thinking about what they read and hear, this is a lovely book and highly recommended for the sheer fun of looking sideways at the everyday world. LW

Mrs Pinny and the Blowing Day

Helen Morgan, ill.
Shirley Hughes, Simon
& Schuster (Jan 91),
0 7500 0402 9, £2.99

A re-issue of Helen Morgan's 1968 fantasy about the adventures inflicted on a village washerwoman by a puckish wind. The description of an idyllic rural day and its disruption is sung in a style which shifts between poetry and prose. Almost every line is loaded with rhyme and rhythm, assonance and alliteration. The result is a language-loving rhapsody with a strong and simple story at its core.

Read it aloud so your listeners can enjoy the mingling of imagery and melody. Shirley Hughes' illustrations provide an appropriate counterpoint. GH

1941-1991

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Poetry Special with Anne Harvey on Radio 2 16th June

Major **AUTHOR TOUR** July

Puffin's **BIRTHDAY PARTY** at ALTON TOWERS 7th August

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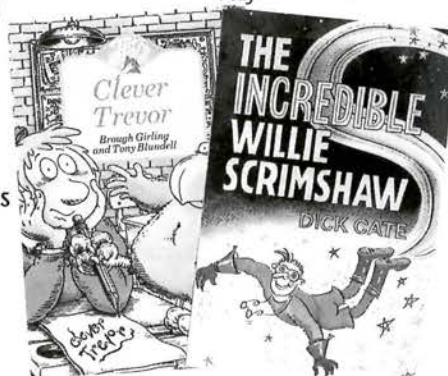
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May



Granny Fairy and Grandma Witch

Beatrice Rouer and Peters Day

Finders Keepers

June Crebbin, Young Puffin (Feb 91), 0 14 03.4073 4, £2.50

When Hannah finds a white rabbit in the snow, she thinks her wish to have a pet has come true; 'Finders Keepers' she says. Dad has other ideas though and she finds that looking after a rabbit isn't easy. Nevertheless, when Thumper's real owner turns up to claim him, she is disappointed. All ends happily when Dad presents her with a pet of her very own. A sensitively written story for young solo readers. JB

Sit on the Roof and Holler

Adrian Rumble (ed.), Young Puffin (Jan 91), 0 14 03.4349 0, £2.99

A collection of poems for children of around 8 and younger. None of the poems is 'difficult' or great literature, but there's plenty of variety, from Trad. Anon. to Christina Rossetti and Carl Sandburg with plenty of unknowns on the way. It's arranged in broad topics with interesting headings such as 'Now put this parsnip on your nose' and 'No one loves a Christmas tree on March the twenty-fifth', which intrigue and entice. Several real gems and no real rubbish make this well worth adding to a poetry bookshelf. LW

Mr Dunfilling and the Toothy Monster

Rob Lewis, Simon & Schuster (Jan 91), 0 7500 0600 5, £2.99

A lovely joke is the basis of this entertaining story. Mr Dunfilling is a dentist who is asked, by the zoo keeper, to cure the toothache of an animal with *ten thousand teeth*. He makes elaborate preparations, rumours spread and a protest movement grows to prevent this vicious brute from being let into the surgery. Life is chaos until the animal actually arrives... well, I won't reveal the twist. Just see if you can guess what the animal is! Recommended for lower juniors who like surprises. LW

My Great Grandpa

Martin Waddell, ill. Dom Mansell, Walker (Jan 91), 0 7445 2011 8, £3.99

Dom Mansell's sympathetic, but unsentimental, illustrations complement Martin Waddell's joyful yet uncompromisingly truthful portrayal of old age. There's a magic here. The special relationship between the old man and his great-granddaughter is delicately drawn, allowing us to share in the clarity of her wisdom. She values him, accepting him as he is and recognising that the quality of his life should not be dismissed because he has



moved onto a different phase. From the mouths of babes and Martin Waddell... JS

Annie and Moon

Miriam Smith, ill. Lesley Moyes, Picture Puffin (Jan 91), 0 14 054.206 X, £2.99



Few books tackle the problems of adjustment that follow the break-up of a family with such a sure, but light, touch. Tight and powerful illustrations, together with strong, uncompromising and economical writing, give this book a biting edge which can be disturbing. Obliquely, through the relationship between Annie and her cat as they struggle together to come to terms with their new lives, we are drawn closer and closer to Annie's feelings. One of my older infants wondered whether Moon was real or was he 'how Annie feels'? At whatever level you read this - it's special! JS

Mouse Mischief

Margaret Greaves, ill. Jane Pinkney, Picturemac (Mar 91), 0 333 52176 5, £3.25

Sumptuous illustrations lift this catalogue of disasters into a higher league. The mice lurch from mayhem to catastrophe at an alarming rate, but Jane Pinkney's Victorian costumes provide us with a remarkable number of talking points about the differences between then and now... and the chance to dream of lace and ribbons and floating gowns! JS

The Bunk-Bed Bus

Frank Rodgers, Picture Puffin (Jan 91), 0 14 050.849 X, £2.99

Granny's favourite sayings include 'You are only as old as you feel... and I feel great!' and 'You are never too old to learn'. Her philosophy on life might be exhausting, but it's never dull. Frank Rodgers gives us a snooty next-door neighbour, an art competition and all the ingredients to make for a satisfying ending. JS

The Shepherd Boy

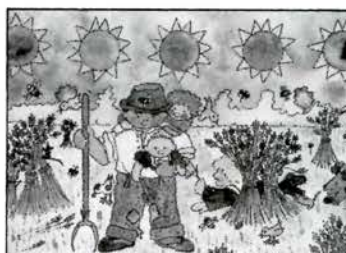
Kim Lewis, Walker (Feb 91), 0 7445 1762 1, £3.99

Some books send a frisson of anticipation down your spine as the first few pages are turned. This one not only lives up to, but exceeds, its initial promise - with illustrations that make you want to stroke the page, and a story of such family warmth and country charm, you're left with a warm glow of gentle contentment. A book to return to again and again. JS

When I Was Little

Marcia Williams, Walker (Jan 91), 0 7445 1765 6, £3.99

When Granny comes to stay, she brings with her a wealth of sayings and stories to share with the family. Here is a book to savour from start to finish - from the whimsical details of the illustration to the gentle humour which works on so many levels. The children in my class couldn't help bouncing up and down as they heard Granny saying things they recognised from their own grandparents, and one even leapt up to find *When We Were Very Young* to tell us that she knew why the bears waited at the corners of the street in the olden days!



It never rained in the summer



and every Christmas was a white Christmas.

A treat for everyone who can remember cuddling up to a beloved grandparent or parent and saying 'Tell me again about when you were little'. JS

Judy the Bad Fairy

Martin Waddell, ill. Dom Mansell, Walker (Jan 91), 0 7445 1764 8, £2.99

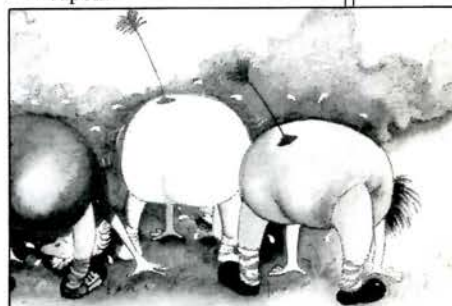
Judy is a bone-idle drop-out of a fairy who prefers vegetating in a hammock to meddling in the real world. The Fairy Queen's attempts to start her on a career are greeted with reluctance, and then a crafty enthusiasm which unleashes all manner of strife and carnage, guaranteeing her an early retirement.

The storyline of this book is slight, but entertaining. The vigorous illustrations provide splendid panoramas of the anarchy created by a very resourceful heroine. GH

Cupid

Babette Cole, Picture Lions (Feb 91), 0 00 663996 8, £2.75

A delightful book for paired or group reading, even though the format is small. The simple, humorous storyline shows a chubby, pink Cupid wreaking a chaos of romantic naughtiness on Earth. A snapped bow string only serves to increase his powers for causing trouble when Dad makes him a more potent weapon.



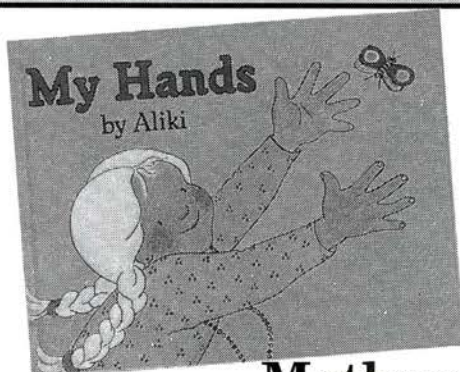
Lots to discuss when looking and reading. The facial expressions are priceless, especially those of the beauty contestants. The expansive leotard-clad bottoms of the keep-fit ladies raised the biggest laugh - they would, wouldn't they! PH

The Country Pancake

Anne Fine, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Mammoth (Jan 91), 0 7497 0567 1, £2.50

A wonderful, sunshiny book where scrumptious Miss Mirabelle steps daintily in with her high-heeled shoes, painted nails and frothy blonde hair to take over Lancelot's class in Wallisdean Park School. It's love at first sight for Lance. He's willing to do anything to 'save' the lady in his life from the frankly envious headmistress who *disapproves* of the teaching, the nails and especially the shoes! Trouble looms with Open Day and it takes all Lance's ingenuity to come up with an idea so irresistible that Miss Mirabelle can't refuse, and so outrageous that no-one will ever forget it. PH

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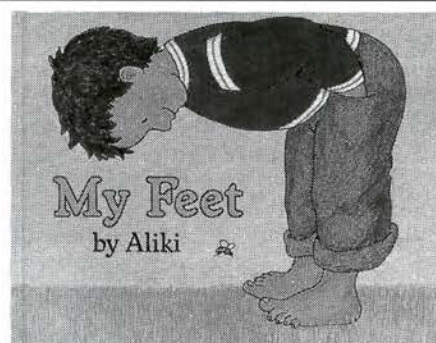
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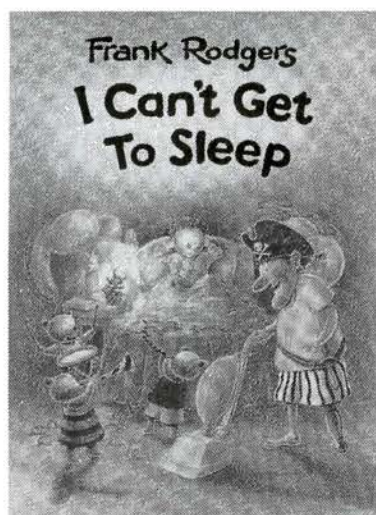
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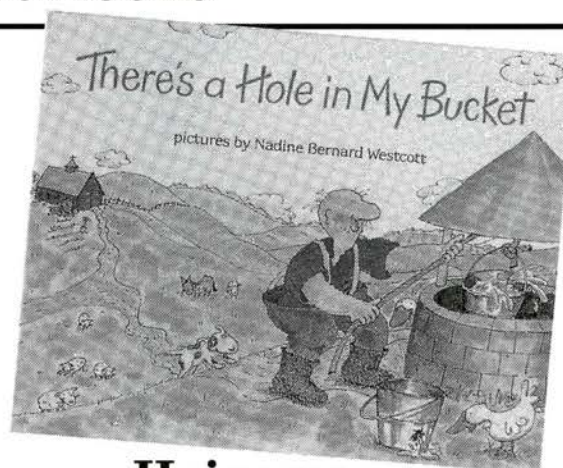
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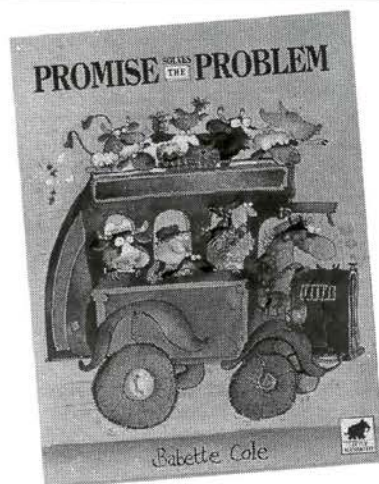
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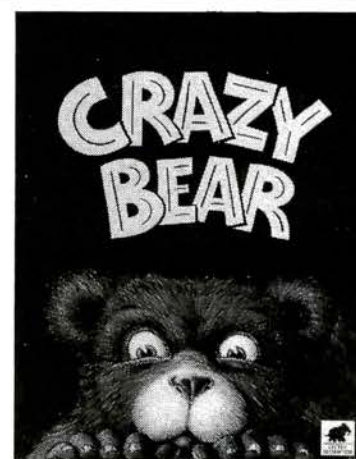
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Babette Cole



**LITTLE
MAMMOTH**



OCTOPUS CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Junior/Middle

The New Boy

Ruth Thomas, Red Fox (Oct 90), 0 09 973410 9, £2.99

This is the texture of *The Runaways* with more humour and a quite complex pattern of loyalties. Donovan, the new boy in the top Junior class, shows a stubborn inability to be much more than a little devil. He steals whatever seems to come his way, crashes a car, disrupts the class and makes life hell for the teacher. Yet we have pupils mothering the teacher, a headteacher whose good nature seems never to see criminal intent, despite obviously knowing Donovan's background, and Amy who can't help being fond of Donovan despite the fact that he abuses her friendship. There's a tough desperation underlying the good humour and the optimistic resolution has been hard earned.

This is a long, but very rewarding read. Worth sharing in sections with whole groups or classes. **AJ**

The Ravens

James Dyer, The Book Castle (Oct 90), 1 871199 60 3, £2.99

Written by a professional archaeologist, this book is set in the south-eastern Britain of 54 BC. It relates the adventures of two young Britons as they follow the older warriors on their way to repel the Roman invaders under Caesar. Adam and Marik manage to infiltrate the enemy camp and, in doing so, learn of a betrayal and a secret plan to destroy their own community.

The story is well-paced with some interesting details about life in Ancient Britain, though the sometimes wooden dialogue made me flinch occasionally. The author glosses over the nastier aspects of warfare, so the book might appeal to older juniors who like to view combat from a safe distance. **GH**

Animal Numbers

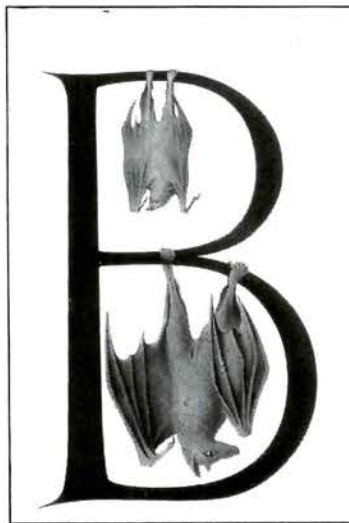
0 7445 1780 X

Animal Alphabet

0 7445 1776 1

Bert Kitchen, Walker (Jan 91), £3.99 each

These large paperbacks are pure picture books, apart from a final page of animal facts in the former and the alphabetical list in the latter. Both are superbly executed collections of paintings set against large calligraphic symbols. Watch out, though – in the case of the counting book, you must only count the baby animals, for example, the five baby lizards crawling over the adult reptile. Neither



is a first counting or alphabet book and I feel they're probably appreciated by adults rather than young children. **JB**

Run with the Wind

Tom McCaughren, Puffin (Feb 91), 0 14 03.4487 X, £2.50

A group of foxes sets off in search of the secret of survival, eventually to find that the only secret is their own cunning. The rather flat characterisation and undistinctive dialogue are redeemed by an eventual plot; the foxes' journey is punctuated by a series of hazards which illuminate the relationship between man and the natural world. The story will appeal to environmentally-aware youngsters and those who enjoy animal stories. **LN**

Night Windows

Marjorie Darke, Piper (Feb 91), 0 330 31871 3, £2.99

Marjorie Darke skilfully and affectionately develops this story from the simple premise that children's drawings can come to life. Ben creates Zeke and his dog Lugs as characters in a classroom mural of an old mill. The technically-inclined Zeke visits and explores Ben's modern world, ultimately saving him from the 'wreckers'. Children of 9-12 will be captivated by this accessible story. **LN**

Penelope's Pendant

Douglas Hill, Piper (Feb 91), 0 330 31772 5, £2.99

The treasure found on the beach brings unexpected bonuses for Penny when she realises its magical properties and then encounters its shadowy maker and guardian, the cobold Glumdole. Of course things can't be allowed to go totally smoothly and our heroine is faced with choices

about how to use her powers sensibly and positively in the face of personal danger. It makes for a quick, lively read, without too many demands – good for fledgeling solo readers. A shame the cover gives so much away about the end of the book. There's a strong whiff of a sequel or two to follow... **DB**

Melisande

E Nesbit, ill. P J Lynch, Walker (Jan 91), 0 7445 1485 1, £3.99

This large-format, picture storybook with lots of words comes with an excellent pedigree. Placed in the right hands in the primary school, its inventiveness and intriguing magic shouldn't fail to delight. Just a century old, it retains motifs from much earlier fairy fantasies, re-worked and embellished with fresh, masterly detail. The distinctively detailed full-colour illustrations are a feast for the eye and contribute to this highly successful production.



Our 13-year-old, in-house, reluctant reader took it to bed and pronounced it good. **DB**

Bertie Boggin and the Ghost Again!

Catherine Sefton, ill. Jill Bennett, Puffin (Jan 91), 0 14 03.4321 0, £2.50

Phantoms aren't always scary. Bertie Boggin's ghost is as warm and amiable as any you're likely to meet. Bertie's best friend is a full family member and looks forward to the arrival of their new baby almost as much as Bertie himself. Bertie and ghost share most things, until the baby arrives, that is, and in the flurry of visitors our family spectre feels ignored and neglected, and threatens to go off in an enormously human huff. Mum comes to the rescue and baby Florence charms him back to the dubious comforts of his coal-dubed home. All ends happily and very humorously. **PH**

No Room to Swing a Cat

Ralph Steadman, Red Fox (Jan 91), 0 09 968060 2, £3.50

Ecstatic confirmation of Ralph Steadman's place in the world of children's books. He gives us brilliantly funny and perceptive drawings with a richness of detail that begs to be talked and laughed about. The wild, swirling, frenzy of colours, characteristically Steadman in style, swish and twirl about the page with a dynamism that leaves others looking wooden. The colours are vibrantly alive and yet manage subtlety at the same time. My Y4 8-year-olds were wide-eyed at Tom's attempts to tell his mother how big he wants his room, with the giraffe getting a special encore. **PH**

Dakota of the White Flats

Philip Ridley, Lions (Feb 91), 0 00 673469 3, £2.75

A jewelled turtle kept in a crumbling tower block by a green-haired Haversham; a hypochondriac romance writer holed up in a fortress of broken glass; a polluted canal choked with supermarket trollies and mutant mean-eating eels... This enthralling fusion of dirty and magic realism, recounting an urban treasure quest by the trouble-seeking Dakota and her hapless sidekick, Treacle, glitters with startling imagery and disconcerting episodes. Pungent dialogue and a wealth of intriguing sub-plots add to the fascination.



Wherever Medusa went she pushed a rusty supermarket trolley in front of her. The trolley was piled high with blankets and cabbage leaves.

My class of 8-year-olds is currently enjoying every moment of this story, which is ideal for both read-aloud serialisation and solo enjoyment. **GH**

A Taste of Blackberries

Doris Buchanan Smith, Puffin (Feb 91), 0 14 03.2020 2, £2.50

The first chapter of this book describes a close friendship

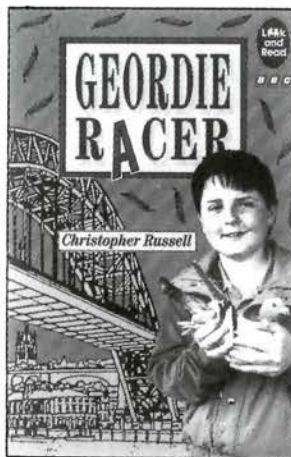
between two boys in a nostalgic evocation of shared adventures and fleeting quarrels. Then, very unexpectedly, one of the boys is killed and the rest of the book is an account of how his companion reacts to the tragedy. He endures successive stages of grief; shocked disbelief, anger and then anguished realisation. At the end of the book, he begins to realise that the worst of the pain is over.

Although there's a certain textbook neatness to the process described, this is perhaps necessary to convince the young reader that the catastrophe of bereavement is finite and survivable. An honest and engaging book which manages to be reassuring without being at all sentimental. GH

Geordie Racer

Christopher Russell, ill.
Aileen Raistrick,
BBC (Jan 91),
0 563 34770 8, £2.50

Spuggy Hilton and his dog Plod are back from 'Look and Read' and this time find themselves unwillingly involved in a series of robberies in and around Newcastle. Spuggy's family has two passions: road running and racing pigeons. It's the vocabulary and atmosphere of the racing of both kinds that gives this book its richness, depth and colour. We live the



excitements of despatch night and the despair at the apparent non-return of Blue Flash. Following the mysterious sequence of events with fresh clues on almost every page is enthralling – Does Blue Flash return? Are the robbers caught? My Y4s had seen it on television, but promised not to tell until I'd finished! PH

Woof! The Tale Gets Longer

Andrew Norriss, Fantail
(Jan 91), 0 14 09.0321 6,
£2.50

For those who've missed meeting Rachel and Eric on television, the title comes from Eric-the-dog. It's the only way he can say 'yes' when he's not Eric-the-boy.

Heralded by a small itch on his neck, the change to part-time 'doggy' status gives Eric a few difficulties, but also some distinct advantages. Rachel helps, not only with the practicalities of gathering discarded clothing at appropriate moments, but also with the scheming and plotting of their madcap adventures.

End-stop chapters made serialisation easy and every page caused ripples of laughter during daring 'doggy' deeds. I shall view all dogs taking the morning air more respectfully in future and remember the awesome fate that befell Brian and Len. PH

Granny Apple

Margaret Tufton, ill.
Neil Reed, Puffin
(Jan 91), 0 14 03.4059 9,
£2.50

Anxiety to discover the outcome of Granny Apple's desperate predicament rather spoils this for me. I worried about the moral implications of Matt's behaviour all the way through. The outcome did little to relieve my concern and I was left wondering how much personal discovery had taken place.

A disturbing book that is vivid and tense, demanding an emotional response from the reader. Brilliantly crafted it will provoke much thought and discussion about the vulnerability of, and the caring

for, elderly members of the family in society. I admit I appreciated its plot and structure more, the second time I read it. PH

What is a Kumquat?

Sue Cowling, ill. Gunvor Edwards, Faber
(March 91),
0 571 16065 4, £3.99

One of the miraculous qualities of this collection is that the poems are all about the familiar, everyday things we think we know well. There the familiarity stops. Sue Cowling changes them subtly, but assuredly, and pares them away to their true inner being.

Pollen
*Makes my nose wrinkle
And my eyes pinkle –
Lucky for me
I'm not a bee!*

I adored 'Pollen' – no easy matter to write a very funny poem about a sneeze in just four lines totalling fifteen words! All my disgust at the ivory trade welled up again when I read 'The Elephant Child', a harrowing account of the bull calf left behind after the traders butcher its mother. My all-time favourite was the very clever 'Caterpillar Conversation'. Defying quotation and reading aloud on sight, it is complicated simplicity in its purest form. PH

Middle/Secondary

Murdo's War

Alan Temperley, Kelpie
(Sept 90), 0 86241 316 8,
£2.95

In the far north-east of Scotland, Hector and Murdo indulge in a little wartime whisky smuggling. When they're tricked into transporting German weapons by the same route, Murdo realises he must somehow warn the authorities of the imminent invasion.

What follows is a beautifully written account – exciting and often harrowing – of his attempts to succeed. The pace may be too slow at the beginning of the novel for all but determined readers, but perseverance is rewarded by rich detail, skilful plot and yet another first-rate book from the Kelpie list. VR

The Empty House

Claude Gutman (trans. from French), Turton & Chambers (Mar 91),
1 872148 45 X, £4.95

This moving, powerfully-written novel is set in Nazi-occupied Paris. The narrator, 15-year-old David, a Jewish boy, has settled with his parents in France in the hope of avoiding persecution. However, David's parents are

taken away and he finds himself passed from place to place in a succession of refuges. By the end he is left alone trying to cope with his feelings of loss and guilt. The style is deceptively simple, making the book accessible to readers of all abilities. Highly recommended and worth placing alongside *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Friedrich*. LN

Midnight Blue

Pauline Fisk, Lion
Publishing (Feb 91),
0 7459 1925 1, £2.99

This novel, Pauline Fisk's first, won the Smarties Prize and was short-listed for the Guardian Award. Bonnie escapes from her unhappy urban life via a hot-air balloon into an idyllic parallel world, where she finds counterparts of her own family. Problems recur, however, when her domineering grandmother reappears as a sinister witch-like figure. Eventually, to save her new family, Bonnie is forced to return to real life, where she finds that matters have been resolved – somewhat unconvincingly – in her absence. There is an abundance of stock-in-trade fantasy elements – a necklace with supernatural powers, underground caverns, mythical

guardian-figures, a magical mirror – and too many disparate threads for a satisfying whole. The evocative description will appeal, though. LN

The Message

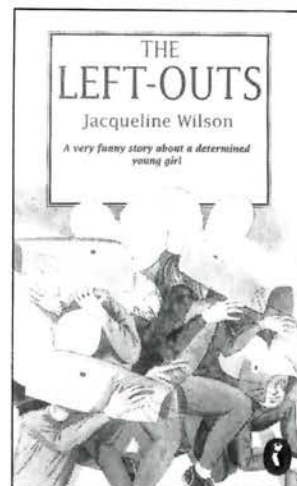
Judith O'Neill,
Mammoth (Jan 91),
0 7497 0525 6, £2.50

An Australian teenager runs away from home after a family dispute, and is taken in by a group of young people who seem, on first acquaintance, to be leading a life of idyllic self-sufficiency. Don is welcomed, but finds that all is not as it seems; he becomes aware of tensions in the small community, and learns that gullibility and idealism can be exploited. Unsensationally told, and the stronger for that, *The Message* is compellingly original. LN

The Left-Outs

Jacqueline Wilson,
Puffin (Feb 91),
0 14 03.4419 5, £2.50

Joan is energetically awful, deflated temporarily by her father's refusal to have her live with him and the discovery that he has a girl-friend. When she's turned down for a speaking part in the class



production of *The Pied Piper*, she finds a new companionship with the rest of the 'left-outs', cast as rats, who develop their own play and become a formidable force against the taunts of other children. The way these left-outs flourish and develop is both funny and moving. AJ

High Hopes

Ursula Dubosarsky,
Puffin (Feb 91),
0 14 03.4380 6, £2.50

12-year-old Julia takes it upon herself to look after her father and help him through such

embarrassing difficulties as his poor command of English. She secretly arranges for him to have English lessons, and then finds him kissing Anabel, the teacher. Julia feels her whole life threatened and embarks on a comical attempt to murder Anabel which results in her father being unable to resist a 'poisoned' cake because it smells so good. There's a lovely confidence in the storytelling and a clever blending of the comic and serious. AJ

Hatchet

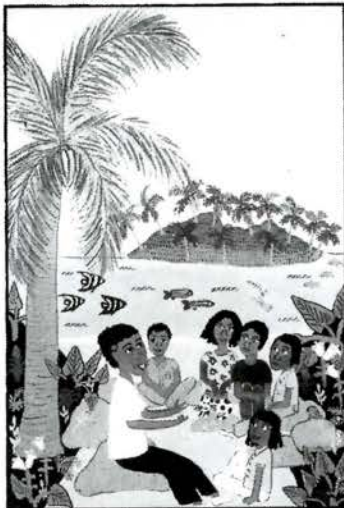
Gary Paulsen, Piper (Jan 91), 0 330 31045 3, £2.99

This is all-action writing, full of the intensity of surviving against impossible odds. 13-year-old Brian watches the pilot of a small plane have a heart attack and then flies the plane until it crash lands in the Canadian Wilderness. With nothing, except a hatchet, and no experience, Brian attempts to survive nature and a series of calamities – attacks by porcupine, skunk, moose and tornado. Nature has to survive him too, with his constant need for food. By the end, after spending a painstaking day getting the survival kit from the plane, and now with all the 'comforts' he's previously lacked, he's rescued. It's the first touch of anything like humour. AJ

Under the Storyteller's Spell

Edited by Faustin Charles, Puffin (Jan 91), 0 14 03.2751 7, £3.50

Fourteen storytellers contribute to this collection, which represents many of the linguistic and cultural strands contributing to the rich polyphony of Caribbean folklore.



The eighteen stories depict a dangerously enchanted world in which the human, natural and supernatural realms are restlessly slithering into each other. People shapeshift into animals, gods woo women, succubae seduce men, children

are hunted by goblins and devils. Ordinary people embark on journeys to paradise, and the earth is scattered with the secret outposts of heaven and hell. The book encompasses a broad range of voices and interest levels, making it a versatile source for classroom re-telling. GH

Backlash

Nicholas Fisk, Walker (Jan 91), 0 7445 1331 6, £2.99

A planet with all things artificial – robots, houses, landscapes, emotions: Argosy IV. The robot Doops were an experiment that went wrong; created to serve human beings, they started to think and act for themselves and so were removed to this desolate planet.

This is thought-provoking on all kinds of levels and strongly laced with the familiar dry Fisk wit. A strong story which is recommended to readers from Year 7 upwards – it would be interesting and illuminating to read it in parallel with an earlier Fisk, *A Rag, A Bone and A Hank of Hair*. VR

Anywhere Else But Here

Bruce Clements, Faber Sunburst (Jan 91), 0 571 12120 9, £2.99

Mollie Smelter lives with her father, whose printing business

has just failed, and her Aunt Aurora who is about to marry Shelby Bissel, the 'worst man in the world'. The story revolves around Mollie's attempts to get her father to leave and make a new start. Her plans are thwarted by the arrival of the appallingly self-centred Fostra Lee Post and her emotionally disturbed son, Claude.

I enjoyed getting to know Mollie and warmed to the relationship between her and her father. There are plenty of interesting sub-plots to keep the reader's attention and a colourful collection of characters offering a good deal of variety in tone. This will sit well on library shelves and would be likely to interest Year 7/8 girls. VR

Thicker Than Water

Penelope Farmer, Walker (Feb 91), 0 7445 1366 9, £2.99

Into Becky's life comes a cousin, Will, she didn't know she had. With him arrives both the disturbance of his actual past and a ghostly voice from history. In intertwining narratives, Becky and Will tell the story and add their versions of each other's telling. In this way we have a double bearing on the ghost – the spirit, it

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CONTINUED ON
PAGE 19.**

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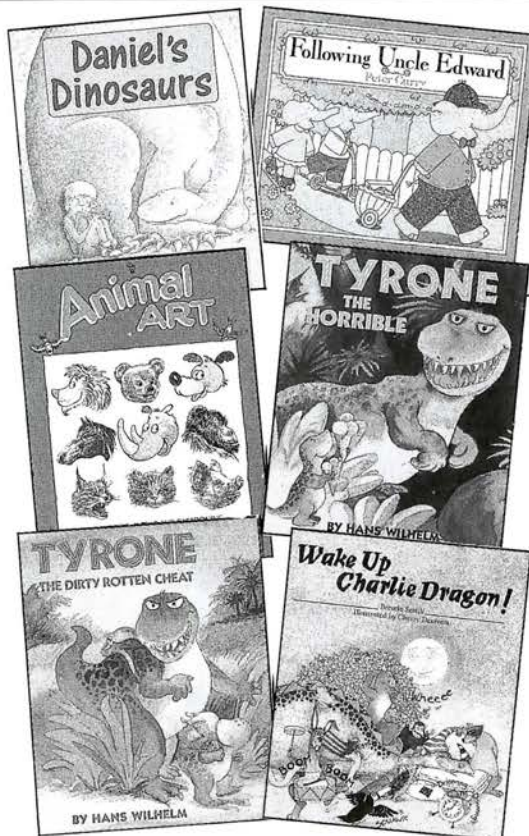
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Authorgraph No. 68

Barbara Firth

Once, long ago, Patrick Campbell told me no one talked in semi-colons, though a week later I decided Robert Robinson did. Some, like Babette Cole, talk in exclamation marks, and nearly all of us talk in dashes.

Barbara Firth talks in dot-dot-dots. The tracks of her sentences fade and break off, leaving her suspended for a moment before leaping on board a thought coming up from behind, riding with it briefly before it too trails away as it senses a stronger idea approaching, a back-up explanation, a flashback . . . Not incoherent (for the listener, without conscious thought, fills in the gaps), it is somehow endearing to hear the falls of her northern voice hang softly in the air.

There is gentleness all about her. A specially set bird-pudding greets a robin making his regular visit into the kitchen, before it is unmooned on a shed roof for the sparrows; every sill of the little semi-detached is crammed with plant cuttings; upstairs a dog, predominantly Airedale, soulfully complains at being kept out of the way; two Elizabethan-ruffed budgies, whose chirpy gossip fills the house, have the freedom of what must have been once the dining room, shared only with Waldo, a tortoise of sixty-plus years emerging for spring into a carefully lamp-warmed run together with two fellow refugees – no one could be convinced that Barbara and her sister long to be rid of the lot of them but people insist on rescuing them and bringing them round.

She is unassuming to a degree, the only artist I've met who has nothing whatsoever of her own work on her walls – 'I would have thought they'd seen enough of it by the time they'd finished'. Only her bronze Emil stands quietly on a sideboard ('I love the back of his head').

She frets over her blocks. 'I'm confident about all the stages of pencil-work, but suddenly the day comes when you must put the water-colour on. Well, if you make a mess of that you've got to redraw the whole thing – so I'm pretty well stuck, and find I'm tying up plants in the garden. That's what has just happened with the dummy for **Sam Vole and His Brothers** for Bologna (the international children's book fair, and another collaboration with Martin Waddell). I managed to get the sketches together, but reached the stage when I had only two days to finish a couple of examples of artwork, and still I left it till I had just 24 hours and I *had* to go upstairs, wishing I could go back to knitting diagrams.'

Knitting diagrams, or the like, have

taken up most of her working life, with picture book illustrating a late

flowering in what might otherwise have been a plain kitchen allotment. 'I don't believe in "creativity". Everything throughout life goes into little filing drawers in your head, and nothing *new* comes out – whatever you do is a product of what you are. I have a basic idea of what I want to do when I'm drawing, but it seems as if I'm just watching what happens, and it's more a process of rejection: the pencil, maybe by accident, goes in a certain way – it's nothing I've done – and it's quite remarkable, you recognise that's the expression you wanted. Whatever you do, whatever paper you pick up, has its own rules: you have to obey what the paper wants, what the pencil or brush dictates. The drawing happens because



your body's used to the technicalities of working, like using any kind of tool, but all the time I'm only watching what's happening, perhaps rejecting and discarding but it's nothing to do with me – sometimes I laugh, really laugh, at what's happening.

'Acting helps – I belonged to a good group at the YMCA Central – where you can imagine emotions or your own body making certain movements. When Barnabas (in William Mayne's **Barnabas Walks**) was reading E, I was going "Ee-ee-ee" into the mirror – so many people liked that drawing I had to keep doing it and giving it away! As I work characters become more real, start to get set in their own situation and behaviour, and things around them become more possible – like the man-toy of Little Bear.

'Mysterious, quiet places, the contrast of light and dark, move me. On a school visit – no, I don't do many, no one's wanted me before! – a little boy in a crowd round my feet said, "How do you draw dark?" I thought that was marvellous. Children love any kind of drawing and the wonder on their faces makes me feel humble – that sounds soppy, but kids focus on me as the source of a magic that's nothing to do with me.'

As a child Barbara drew all the time, but, unassertive as ever, came crabwise to art as a career. She proudly relishes her family background, strong Yorkshire stock of farmers and blacksmiths. Born in 1928, growing up in Hyde, Cheshire, where her father, brought down by the Depression, had taken a secure job on the railways, she recalls the blacksmith's behind their railway house, frequent visits to uncles' farms, and vast Sunday walks into Derbyshire. 'It's amazing what you take in of work action and movement – the movement of animals attracts me more than anything, and I probably started drawing them because of my father's love and knowledge of horses.'

Her father, her junior school and secondary art master all encouraged her drawing, but the Head would not even allow Art among her leaving exams. Following her friends, she parroted 'Civil Service' as a career choice, but after six months joining telegrams in Manchester fled to join Marks and Spencer in London, first junior clerking in Head Office, then training in cutting, design, patterns and show cards.

She stayed seven years before 'I got too big for my boots and went in search of greater things' with a studio designing displays for outside cinemas, painted heads and excerpts from films. She was not there long – 'Let's put it bluntly, I was awful and got the sack after six months.' Answering a **Vogue** ad for an art assistant, 'which I thought very peculiar – not something you see every day', she was taken as a junior in the production department, where 'with one thing and another', she stayed 15 years, by the end doing a lot of freelance knitting and crochet instruction diagrams on the quiet. 'Soul-destroying, but a skill in its way,

for you do have to know what you're doing.' Off and on she took night school classes, suddenly deciding at 40 on a four-year foundation course that introduced much-needed discipline to her instinctive art.

The editor of **The Vogue Knitting Book**, Pam Dawson, in 1970 joined Fabbri, an Italian firm doing art repro books in Britain which moved into partworks of crafts like knitting, later evolving into Marshall Cavendish's **Golden Hands**. Barbara followed with a few diagrams, and found that 'if you take trouble and finish on time, put up with what they want and not be temperamental, you get recommended'. Her parents had come to live in this present Wealdstone house; when her widowed mother became ill, she and her sister moved in until her death in 1979 – and are still there, muttering about the lack of space (not surprising, given the wildlife) – so it was essential to continue freelancing, in spite of a permanent offer.

'Throughout life, there's a balance in what you do and what you want to do that turns out right. Nursing my mother proved most revealing of myself; I drew her a lot, and much of my observation of the figure came from her. One always tends, especially in fashion drawing, to go for beautiful things, and then you're made to look at the figure of a helpless person, or perhaps someone old, with twisted hands, and there's this marvellous shape you would never ordinarily have seen.'

Advanced dressmaking for **Golden Hands** was followed by **Crafts** and **Grow Your Own** magazines ('planting beetroot, etc'). Soon people leaving Marshall Cavendish were calling from all over the place, among them art director Amelia Edwards, who was now working with Sebastian Walker at his Highbury home, producing books on nature, on growing herbs, or kites. Barbara stayed with Walker as he expanded from one converted factory to the next, specialising in lifelike, very tight, drawings of pot plants, insects and small animals, researching Mexican orange-kneed spiders in a hot backroom of the London Zoo or pickled tarantulas in the Natural History Museum.

A nudge in direction produced **Park Animals** and **Country Animals** in the Zebra series, and then came an offer to

illustrate the **Great Escape** stories of David Lloyd himself ('a wonderful editor'), resulting in her favourite picture – Jack the dog saying goodbye to Angel. 'My style started to get more lively: now I can be too exuberant, but once I'd found it was acceptable to draw in that way, there was no holding me. It worked, didn't it?' she adds with wonder.

Yes, it did. **Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?**, Smarties and Emil prizewinner, works in 18 languages, and, though neither she nor Martin Waddell believed there should be another ('you don't get that sort of truth too often'), it works again in **Let's Go Home, Little Bear**.

And it worked in her own favourite, **The Park in the Dark** – a book which, although 'whatever Martin gives me to do allows all sorts of hidden things to come out' (writer and artist converge only indirectly through an editor), proves to owe more to her than any reader could guess. The Three (Me and Loopy and Little Gee – 'three aspects of one child') had been at first children, then squirrels ('my heart sank – three of anything's bad enough to characterise, but specially furry things – I've got three voles at the moment!'). Toys? Finally home-made toys, suggested by an ancient pair she'd bought at a church jumble, not bearing to think of them separated. The monster is never stated ('drops me in some terrible messes, does Martin'): what could run beside them all the way home? Dog, old tramp? But children must be able to say, Silly old things! Deciding on a train led to hours in a field by South Kenton station with her camera, catching the right angle on the archway – 'The drivers must have thought I was mad.'

And now? 'A book takes about six months, and I can only think of one at a time. I need to feel a big space inside that's undisturbed, so I try not to think about what's happening tomorrow – even doing something that evening destroys the space in my mind. I've not thought about the future, any more than I thought in the past about what might happen: I just live life as it presents itself.' ■

Barbara Firth was interviewed by Stephanie Nettell.

Photograph courtesy of Walker Books.

All the following books have been illustrated by Barbara Firth and are published by Walker:

Barnabas Walks, William Mayne, 0 7445 1352 9, £2.99 pbk

'Quack!' said the billy-goat, Charles Causley, 0 7445 0479 1, £5.99; 0 7445 1442 8, £2.99 pbk

The Munro's New House, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, 0 7445 0567 4, £5.99; 0 7445 1452 5, £2.99 pbk

The Grumpalump, Sarah Hayes, 0 7445 1506 8, £7.99

We Love Them, Martin Waddell, 0 7445 1278 6, £6.99; 0 7445 1774 5, £2.99 pbk

The Park in the Dark, Martin Waddell, 0 7445 0716 2, £7.99; 0 7445 1740 0, £3.99 pbk

Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?, Martin Waddell, 0 7445 0796 0, £7.99; 0 7445 1316 2, £3.99 pbk; 0 7445 1931 4, £2.99 mini edition

Let's Go Home, Little Bear, Martin Waddell, 0 7445 1912 8, £8.99

Sam Vole and His Brothers is scheduled for publication in 1992.

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FICTION REVIEWS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15.

turns out, of a boy lost in the local mines and now desperate to be laid to rest. It's splendidly developed right through to the climax in the midst of snow and Christmas. A rich fantasy for independent or group reading. **AJ**

My Name Is Not Angelica

Scott O'Dell, Viking Kestrel (Jan 91), 0 670 83468 8, £5.99

A book which takes black Africans from their native land to the plantations of the West Indies where so-called civilization metes out barbaric treatments and deals in despair, degradation and death. Told in a simple style by the young slave Raisha, betrothed to Chief Konje, this is a fairly sanitised history

lesson, easy and quick to read, which might attract some youngsters to explore further. **DB**

Getting Even

Mavis Jukes, Teens (Jan 91), 0 7497 0330 X, £2.50

An American, pre-adolescent school story which covers some of the usual terrain – anxious, separated parents – but centres on the revenge which Maggie and inventive Iris plot against Corky Newton. There's a clever mix of the thoughtful and the farcical, with the revenge bringing unforeseen complications. Beneath this wickedly ingenious plotting runs a gentle and affectionate sense of people and their relationships. Amazing how American writers carry this off with so much liveliness! Ideal for book boxes and those pupils who need to extend, or even go beyond, Blume reading. **AJ**

Where It Stops, Nobody Knows

Amy Ehrlich, Lions (Feb 91), 0 00 673498 7, £2.99

Nina Lewis and her mother lead an itinerant life, moving from town to town in search of the perfect place. The reader is led convincingly through Nina's many and brief relationships as she attempts to integrate herself into the various schools and communities she encounters. The end of the novel should shock, but is perhaps foreshadowed too bluntly and dealt with too abruptly, without the chance for introspection by characters or readers.

Girls of around 13 might enjoy this – there's much familiar territory here for adolescents, which is sensitively handled. The cover, however, does nothing to tempt the reader – it is artificially posed and conveys little of the appeal of this eventful novel. **VR**

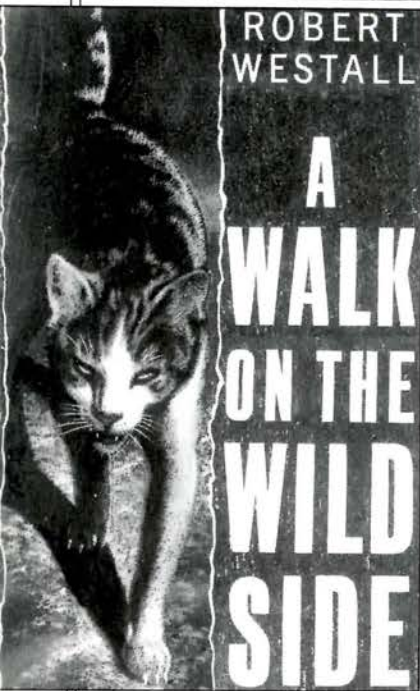
A Good Hiding and other stories

Wim Hoffman, trans. Lance Salway, Turton & Chambers (Mar 91), 1 872148 40 9, £5.95

These eight stories describe ways in which ordinary children attempt to escape the social and emotional bleakness of the adult world around them. A child beaten viciously for refusing food sets off in search of happiness; a boy and girl hiding shoplifted treasure help a dying man found in a squalid ruin; a group of children create a bug-filled shoebox Ark for the nuclear shelter they are building.

Flight from cruelty and enactments of fantasy are recurrent themes in this poignant and occasionally disturbing collection. This is not a book for light entertainment, but a fertile source for discussion and reflection. **GH**

Older Readers



A Walk on the Wild Side

Robert Westall, Mandarin (Feb 91), 0 7497 0147 1, £2.99

Nothing but the best in this cat-centred collection of short stories from Westall. Avid Westallians will recognise two stories from earlier publications, but the rest are all new – and gems they are. Chewy prose and compelling storylines make long, satisfying reads: a class set for able Year 9s or for GCSE groups. One of Westall's gifts is his ability to peel back the top layer of experience to produce the unexpected. Prepare to be persuaded! **VR**

A Light in the Black

Chris Westwood, Plus (Jan 91), 0 14 03.4075 0, £3.50

Our society is geared to wish-fulfilment, so when mysterious Mr Stands arrives in the dying mining town of Eastfield claiming 'I can do anything you want', his promise is eagerly seized upon by the dispirited population. This gratification has a darker side – manipulation and control. Stands feeds on the uninhibited imaginations of children and is only destroyed when Laurie – who gave him a psychological entry to the community – learns that she must reject him.

Here we have powerful writing, avoiding the garish traps stumbled into by inferior writers of this genre. 14-year-olds upwards will enjoy this and the compelling cover assists its cause. **VR**

Follow a Shadow

Robert Swindells, Plus (Feb 91), 0 14 03.4016 5, £2.99

At 15, Tim South's life really couldn't get much more depressing. Brief forays into booze and drugs prove no real solution to problems at home and at school. His internal fantasy world needs summoning more and more in an attempt to handle reality. If this reminds you a little of Branwell Brontë, so it should! Swindells has created a gripping past/present tale where present pressures on youngsters are convincingly portrayed and the connection with the past easily swallowed. Well recommended. **DB**

Going Up

Peter Hunt, Walker (Feb 91), 0 7445 1364 2, £3.50

This follows the separate narratives of Tom and Sue from their completion of UCCA applications to their arrival at the same university and through the dramas of first-year student life. We know, of course, that they and their narratives are destined to meet, but it's witty, well-crafted writing with hints, like university life itself, of something more thoughtful and lasting beneath the extravagance of youthful socialising. The mixing of typefaces in the opening sections, the intercutting of narratives and the emotional range of Tom's life show the skill and inventiveness of the writer. **AJ**

The Singing Bowls

Jamila Gavin, Teens (Feb 91), 0 7497 0332 6, £2.50

Rich, evocative storytelling about an Anglo-Indian teenager seeking to resolve the mysteries of his ancestry, which moves steadily towards a powerful climax. Sensitive, tenacious reading is required to handle the strong mysticism element – embodied in the three Tibetan meditation bowls that a native girl in the 1920s lugged with her sick baby to Henry Saville, when she herself was dying of smallpox. Two generations on, Ronnie, her grandson, seeks to unravel their mysteries and searches India to find his lost father and resolve his own true identity. **DB**

A Dangerous Education

Jenny Davis, Tracks (Jan 91), 0 00 673447 2, £2.99

What happens when a teacher decides to flout convention and teach sex? Mrs Fulton takes the chance, and Livvie and David become involved in a sad situation which they can hardly handle. Whilst their teacher has been de-sensitising them to sex vocabulary and harnessing embarrassment, they are getting up to their neck in the other part of the course – caring.

Forget 'Sweet Dreams'. This is an intelligent novel that avoids sensation and has many valuable, wise thoughts to pass on to adolescents. It is well-crafted to keep readers turning the pages right up to the numbing conclusion. Needs careful reading before you recommend it. **DB**

Words on a Faded T-Shirt

Norman Silver, Faber, 0 571 16127 8, £4.99

I liked the humour in this collection of poems. I didn't like the self-conscious wordplay and the annoyingly gratuitous obscenities in the centre of otherwise acceptable writing. Particularly successful were 'Bibble' – a rewrite of the Old Testament, and 'Macho' – a cringemaking indictment of a teenage boy's sexual swagger. The knowing asides and references to contemporary teenage sub-culture alternately entertain and irritate. £4.99 is a lot of capitation to invest in such an uneven collection. **VR**

POETRY

REVIEWS — Non Fiction

I Can Play Football

0 7496 0424 7

I Can Ride a Bike

0 7496 0421 2

I Can Roller Skate

0 7496 0423 9

I Can Swim

0 7496 0422 0

Sheila Fraser and Lisa Kopper, Franklin Watts (I Can . . . series), £4.99 each

(INFANT)

Like many adults, I can remember the magic moment when I first rode a bike. I suddenly realised that my gran couldn't still be holding it. She didn't run that fast. I fell off but I could ride and I loved it. This series captures such moments for four skills: riding a bike, swimming for the first time, playing football and roller skating unaided. The pleasure is apparent but safety is not forgotten (the series is produced in consultation with ROSPA).

Each book combines simple tips (how to stop when roller skating, checking armbands at the pool, and so on) with a brief story. This is not an easy format to bring to life and the storyline is sometimes strained. But the books do achieve a balanced mix of difficulties and delights alongside sensible support.

Lisa Kopper's softly-coloured illustrations show children practising with their friends at home, pool, playground and park. Adults help mainly by ensuring a safe setting and reliable equipment. Brief notes for parents are given on the final page. Children will recognise many familiar experiences: avoiding larger children on bikes, the taste of pool water, the disappointment when the football has a will of its own. This is an attractive series set at a good point in children's development to make safety a habit.

FB

Bears

0 7496 0202 3

Pandas

0 7496 0491 3

Seals

0 7496 0201 5

Tigers

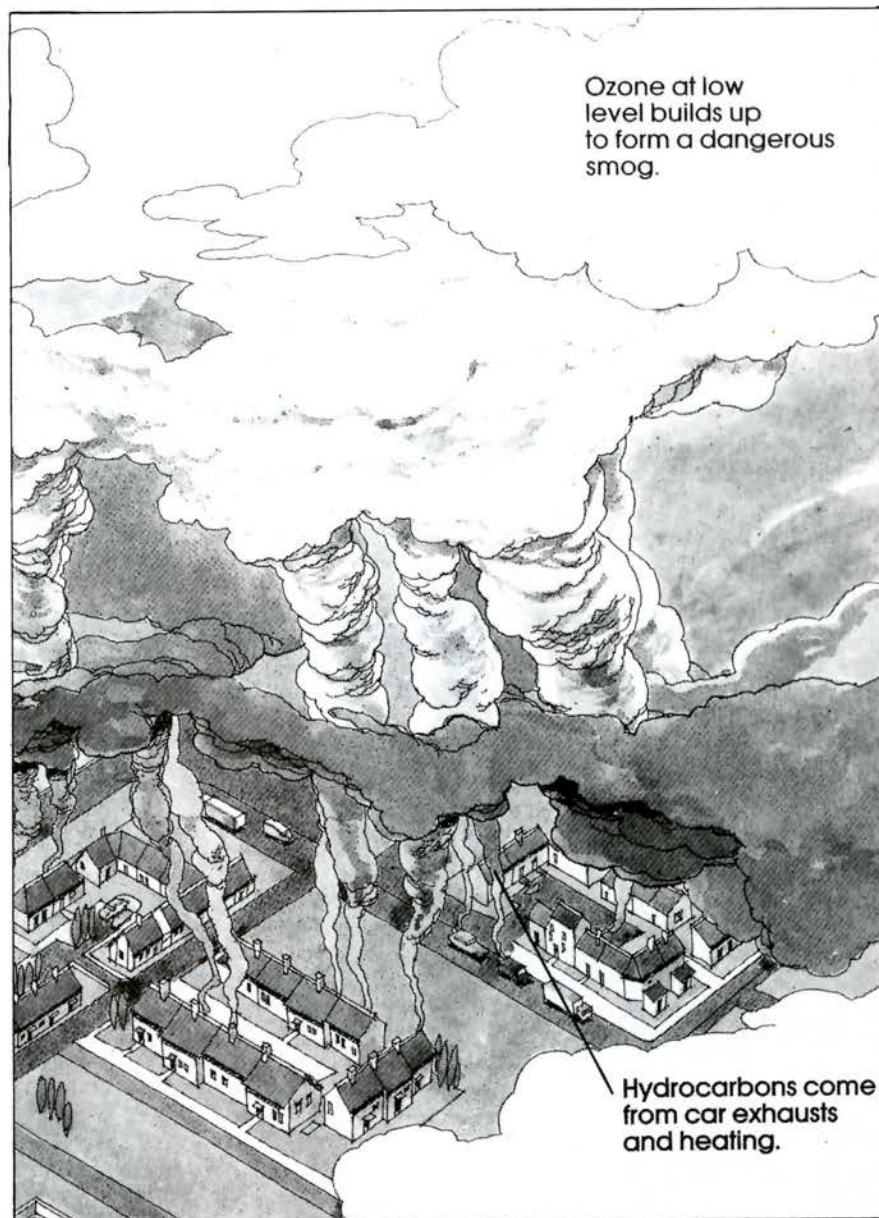
0 7496 0200 7

Kate Petty, Franklin Watts (Baby Animals series), £5.95 each

(INFANT/JUNIOR)

Polar bear cubs don't learn to swim until their second year, whereas young tigers can manage the shallow end at six weeks – almost as soon as they can walk. Walking takes the young giant panda three months, but then it starts life 1000 times lighter than its mother, who must eat bamboo for fourteen hours every day to maintain her weight . . .

At first sight a series of cute and cuddly picture books, this clutch uses infancy to provide an introduction to adult lifestyle – a pleasant if not unfamiliar device. None of the four, however, start and stay with just one baby – a wide variety of families and (apart from giant pandas) species is involved, allowing the reader to build up a better picture of what is a bear/seal/panda/tiger than would an individual biography. A mix of paintings and photographs illustrates the friendly text into which the author's skill allows her to introduce bizarre facts without



'Other pollution' from Acid Rain.

hamming it up – so we find out that seals sleep vertically afloat and that the noise of a sloth bear sucking up termites can be heard a furlong away.

'Baby animals' is so often a cop-out for the 'anything does for kids' school of publishing, that it's refreshing to find this series offering so much more. Definitely shareable.

TP

Acid Rain

0 7496 0495 6

The Greenhouse Effect

0 7496 0494 8

The Ozone Layer

0 7496 0493 X

Tropical Rainforest

0 7496 0492 1

M Bright, Franklin Watts/Gloucester Press (World About Us series), £5.99 each

(INFANT/JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

That short texts and basic vocabulary have not reduced the messages in these four

'Green for infants' titles below intelligibility level is a measure of this author's skill as an environmental interpreter. Each one takes a popular green issue and examines it by means of well-chosen examples which leave ample room for the conversation so essential as an accompaniment to such texts.

Acid Rain's bird's eye view of our choking, smoking world is particularly effective in showing how atmospheric acid poisons the land it falls on, and the same aerial perspective adds the global dimension to **Greenhouse**. The paradox of ozone being poisonous at street level (where air pollution helps it form) but protective in the stratosphere (where pollution destroys it) is well handled and the image of rainforests being destroyed at the rate of one football pitch per second initiates a penetrative study of their virtual irreplaceability.

This is a very useful quartet around which to build the complex web of ideas and information that constitutes an understanding of current global eco-problems. It should be welcomed by teachers and school librarians catering for a wide age range, for the whole approach is, although simple, essentially mature and respectful of curiosity.

TP

Coral Reef

0 7496 0435 2

Flightless Birds

0 7496 0408 5

Norman Barrett, Franklin Watts
(Picture Library series), £6.95 each
(INFANT/JUNIOR/MIDDLE)



△ An X-ray of a kiwi shows its huge egg compared with its own size.

It's surprising how many well-known birds can't fly – penguin, ostrich, emu and kiwi feature strongly amongst lesser-known earthbound species, demonstrating that, although flightless, they are all expert swimmers, runners or kickers thanks to specialised feet.

Coral Reef comes out on cue to show us what the Gulf War has so grievously damaged. Good simple explanations of the nature of corals and their function at the base of unique marine eco-systems are rare, and this introduction fills the gap most attractively.

The success of this long-lived series has depended on excellent photographs of popular subjects supported by spare but usefully planned texts. This formula provides quick appeal across a wide age-range, and as the subjects become less commonplace the value of individual volumes increases, so these two are particularly welcome.

TP

Death and Dying

Pete Sanders, Franklin Watts
(Let's Talk About series),
0 7496 0431 X, £6.50
(JUNIOR/MIDDLE/ADULT)

Presenting the idea of death to young children, most of us tend to talk round the point before getting to it. The difficulty is that although nearly all children who watch television will have seen images of death, they may still find it hard to realise that

dying is part of the life-cycle for all of us. Sanders establishes this point early on, but the heart of his thesis concerns grief at the death of others. Ways of expressing understanding and coping with grief – both ours and other people's – are hung on such common questions as: 'Why don't people always tell the truth about death?', 'Do people ever feel better after someone dies?' and 'Why is death so difficult to talk about?'

The author wisely avoids dogmatic answers and religious digressions, and his frequent use of 'maybe', 'perhaps' and 'some people' amply justifies his own assertion that 'children can cope with grief better than many adults think they can'. I was left feeling that despite the author's positive tone he has made heavy going of a terrain where such as Varley's **Badger's Parting Gifts** and Waddell's **Grandma's Bill** pass with an easier grace, and although this book is written for children who may not know where to stop, it will be most helpful to adults who don't know where to start.

TP

Diet and Health

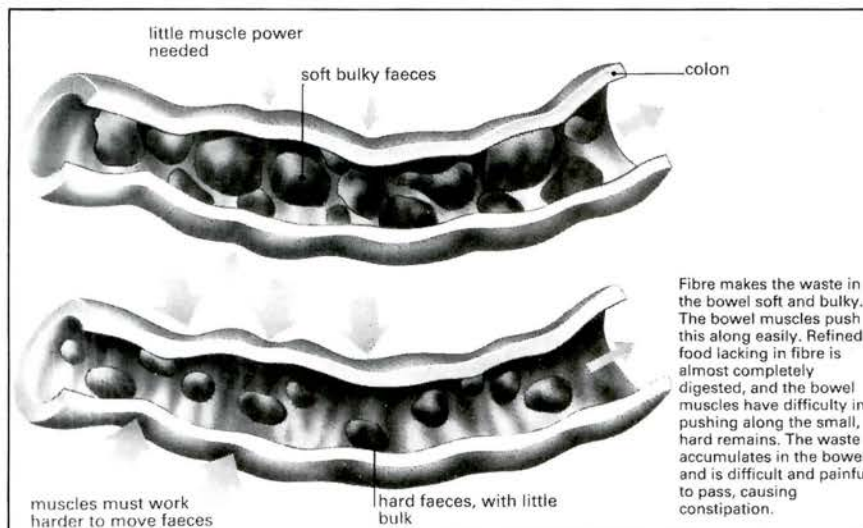
Brian Ward, Franklin Watts
(Feeling Good series),
0 7496 0342 9, £7.95
(MIDDLE/SECONDARY)

Children's perceptions about diet are slowly moving towards an appreciation that some food is healthy and some isn't, and this new nutrition book typifies the health-based approach to diet that starts off from such an understanding. So the introduction stresses that 'most of us' (us who read the book, presumably) eat far more than we really need, and fibre takes its place among the more predictable dietary ingredients – its benefits graphically described. Room is also made for statements which only a few years ago would have been regarded as heterodox or not regarded at all – 'Fish oils... are particularly good for the heart' and 'a well-planned vegetarian diet can be a perfectly healthy one'.

Particularly welcome is the way in which the book takes diet out of physiology and relocates it in everyday life, so that many of the observations offered are not just biological facts but life skills waiting to be adopted. Another significant break with convention is provided by the discussion of food hygiene, the ill-effects of its avoidance, stomach upsets and eating disorders, all of which help to show diet is an active pursuit and best done sensibly.

The book's self-conscious design (by K and Co) incorporating many meaningless coloured rectangles on each spread, and oddly tilted photographs, does nothing to impede its straightforward message, nor anything to reinforce it.

TP



From **Diet and Health**.

Boys about Boys: the facts, fears and fantasies

Nick Fisher, Piccadilly Press,
1 85340 091 2, £8.95
(SECONDARY)

Nick Fisher, agony uncle on **Just Seventeen**, wanted to write a book specifically for boys that answered the questions they frequently asked. His book is sensitive and helpful and gains authenticity from the replies of the two hundred respondents to his questionnaire.

Boys about Boys is rather like a more readable, updated version of Pomeroy's **Boys and Sex**.

Chapter headings reflect the weekly postbag – adolescent changes, shy and macho behaviour, relationships with girls, masturbation, before sex, the sexual act, contraception, homosexuality and... what girls wanted to know about boys – all very sound stuff but the order is a little odd and an index might have been useful. The author avoids preaching but does express his opinions (particularly about macho men). He uses an unselfconscious mixture of technical and 'common' language and offers practical and realistic advice.

Perhaps, though, the book is made by the contribution of the boys themselves: from Michael confused by giggling girls, 'you don't even know if they fancy you or think you're duff', to Colin who is 'alright having a laugh and a skit with girls but I don't know how to talk for a long time, like'.

So, a book of good advice for teenagers and a reminder for adults of how little adolescent concerns change. A paperback edition would be useful as this hardback at just under £9 will deter many potential buyers.

GB

Abortion

Jenny Bryan, Wayland (Points of View series), 1 85210 655 7 £7.95
(SECONDARY)

Abortion is not an easy subject for balanced debate but this useful volume in the Points of View series attempts a dispassionate analysis of the issues. It covers religious and social aspects of the debate and considers the comparative rights of the mother and father of the unborn child. It also focuses on the attitudes of doctors and nurses and the emotional trauma for the woman choosing abortion. The most successful chapters, however, deal with the rights of the unborn child, ownership of embryos in the laboratory and the question of the post coital pill (which can be regarded as an abortifacient rather than a contraceptive). These tackle complex ethical issues very clearly, albeit briefly.

The book is carefully balanced and makes good use of reports from a variety of sources (including the national press and medical journals) to develop arguments both for and against abortion. It will be useful for classroom discussion. Only in the conclusion is the author's opinion expressed – and in an eloquent way – 'Each case is different, each woman a person with her own needs, her own hopes and her own dreams. Who are we to judge her when she makes what must be the hardest decision of her life? And who is to say whether she was right or wrong?' ■ GB

Frances Ball has been an infant teacher and currently works with pre-school children.

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

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

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

EAGLE

THE NEW NAME IN CHILDREN'S

FIRST REVIEWS:

OUR PLANET

This series of complementary titles would make an excellent addition to any school library. The text is clear and informative and uses technical terms sensibly. The illustrations are striking and the diagrammatic explanations most informative. Each book starts with an explanation: 'How mountains are formed', 'The life of a river', 'Volcanoes in action', which sets a knowledge base for the rest of the book. The central chapters are concerned with key aspects of the topic which a child is likely to have heard about: the Rockies, the Sahara, Waterfalls, the San Andreas Fault. In almost all of these sections, the geographical facts are related to the way of life of local residents. Interdependence is well explained, deforestation in the Himalayas leading to flooding in Bangladesh, for example. Similarly, where possible, connections to our own life-style are clearly made; the greenhouse effect is seen as the consequence of cropping forests. This concept of global interdependence and a green awareness is paramount but not presented in an overpowering, propagandist manner. Each book closes with a double-page 'Fact file'.

SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

NOVEMBER 1990

by Nicholas Hunt

NATURE CLUB - OUR PLANET

"Hot off the press (I received these books the day after I had written my column, but I was so impressed with them that I was willing to revise in order to include them) are the NATURE CLUB and OUR PLANET series. The NATURE CLUB series is for ages 8-10 and has 5 titles. (*Trees and Leaves, Birds, Ponds and Streams, Insects, and Seashores*). Each book is loaded with accurate content, but over half of each page is taken up with beautiful full-colour drawings. As a result young readers will not feel overwhelmed by the amount of reading. Important words are italicized and there are a glossary, a table of contents, and an index.

The OUR PLANET series includes *Deserts, Rivers, Mountains, Volcanoes and Earthquakes, Weather and Forests*. Designed for ages 9-11 these books have more text than the Nature Club books and are illustrated both by photographs and colourful drawings. The captions in this series are unique because they are usually fairly long and provide a wealth of additional detail. Each book has a "Fact File" loaded with interesting tidbits such as the largest deserts, creeping deserts, highest temperatures, and dust storms.

THE READING TEACHER

OCTOBER 1990

NATURE CLUB

"There are several purposes which these books can serve, including introducing children to the great variety of living things both in habitats which they can study for themselves and in others beyond their direct observation. Generally this is well done, particularly in moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar with the simple message that there is variety in living things and usually a reason for the variety; the BIRDS book is very good in this respect."

"... Another purpose would be to help with identification. This is played down in the declared intentions of the books, which are to be found in the NATURE CLUB NOTES at the beginning. The notes in SEASHORES (one of the best of the series) are the most helpful in turning light on exactly what the Nature Club is: "Anyone can join it. To be a member you just have to be interested in living things and want to know more about them." These notes go on to give hints about studying, and respecting, living things, how to use a lens and a notebook and some precautions to take. Thus it is implicit that the intention is for children to be active in studying the living things around them."

THE TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

SEPTEMBER 1990

By Professor Wynne Harlen - Professor of Education at the University of Liverpool

OUR PLANET

"The six titles in the OUR PLANET series, designed for nine-year-olds and above, are most attractive and would be inviting to all children from the most reluctant to the avid reader. Indeed they are likely to be books that children will want to return to, having enjoyed the pictures and captions on a first visit, to study the information provided in more detail. For this reason they would be appropriate on the home bookshelf as well as the school library..."

"... The text is helped by a combination of excellent colour photographs and drawings, a mixture which works particularly well when the drawing helps the understanding of a photograph of the 'real thing' (as in RIVERS) and when the photographs are pleasing and spectacular (as in DESERTS and FORESTS)"

THE TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

SEPTEMBER 1990

by Professor Wynne Harlen - Professor of Education at the University of Liverpool



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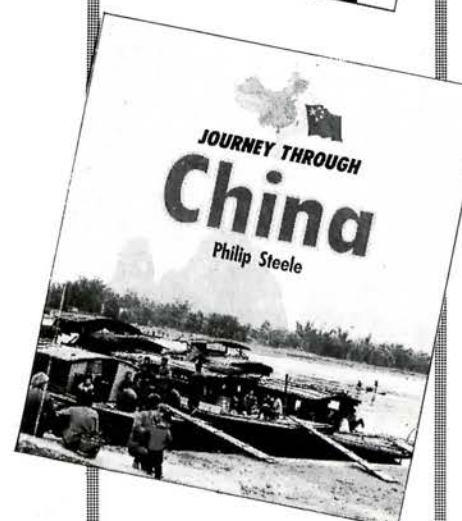
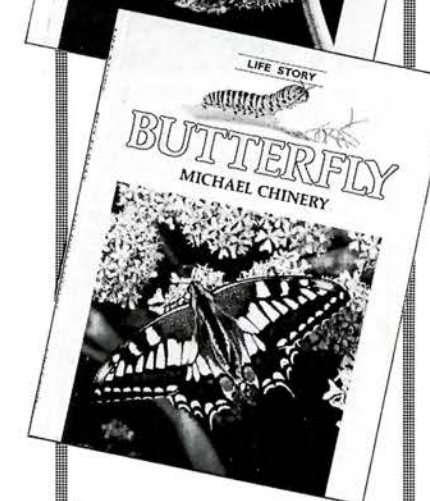
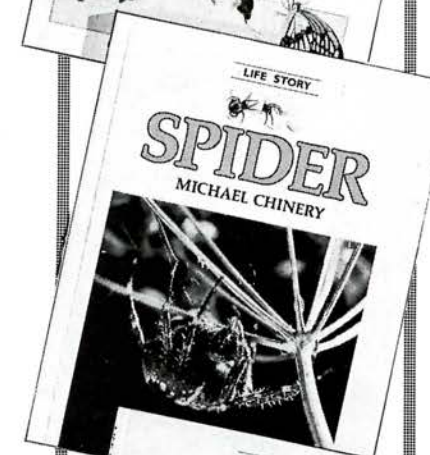
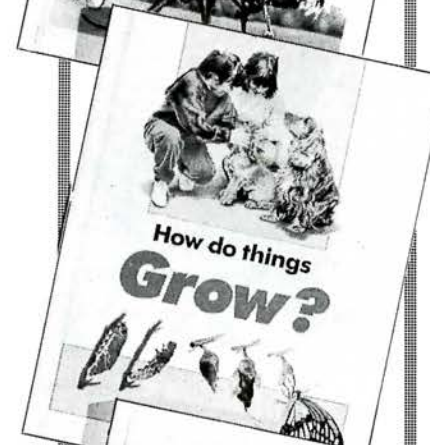
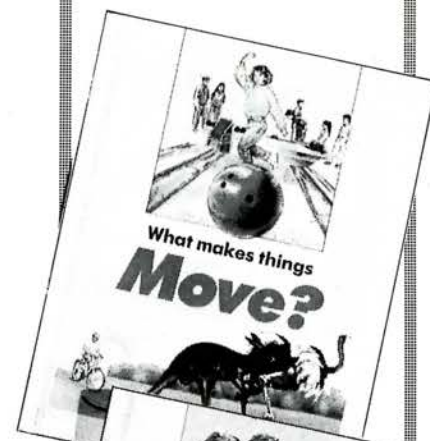
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BLIND SPOT

Must we love 'great' books? Should the acknowledged quality of a text preclude personal dislike? **BfK** launches an occasional series in which established figures in the

children's book world admit to... well, a blind spot. We begin with one of the most celebrated of all children's classics, **The Wind in the Willows**.

The Limits of Delight

Margaret Meek



My long drawn-out unease about **The Wind in the Willows** stems from the same roots as the pleasure of more discerning readers. Those who tell me they like the book, and many genuinely love it, praise the very features of it which give me a frisson of mild disgust. The prejudices which survive my every re-reading, (I try hard, once a decade) reveal the boundaries of my conscious awareness of reading as *desire*. So, let me confront the limits of my delight in books for children, remembering always, that both author and reader are subject to the laws of the unconscious, where time doesn't exist.

Bordering the garden of the house where I lived until I was 12 was a small but fast-moving stream – a 'burn' in my dialect. To play on the bank was forbidden, therefore always attractive. In summer, when the water level was lower, crawling along the branches of an overhanging elder, and catching minnows in jam jars were tolerated activities. Raucously bad-tempered ducks sometimes appeared, but for the most part the burn belonged to skinny, slimy boot-button eyed water rats who darted and scrambled out of holes with noises like soup-slurping. I was fascinated and appalled. I recall the nauseous horror of their presence in a second. I cannot love a rat, nor can I imagine one as the wise, tolerant, poetry-writing, picnic-provisioning hero of this particular arcadian novel.

Perhaps I could have grown into a tolerance of the bizarre behaviours, the language and snobbery of Rat, Mole, Badger and Toad had I met them in the early days when I enjoyed the naughtiness of Peter Rabbit, the bad temper of Squirrel Nutkin, and the vague menace of Mrs Tiggy-Winkle. Or, when, as an adult, I first admired the matter-of-factness of **Charlotte's Web** and the fabulation of **The Sheep Pig** I should have taken the trouble to understand more of the late adolescent boys' attachment to Toad, Winnie the Pooh and The Hobbit. I *could* have found my way into the world of the River Bank and the Wild Wood if I'd followed Jan Needle's retelling of the tale as a social satire, but none of these options takes away my feeling of utter exclusion from this fictive universe. True, I was reading boys' comics and Elinor Brent-Dyer when the librarian offered me a fine, clearly unread copy of **The Wind in the Willows** as a special treat. But it was already too late. Not even the enchantment of Ernest Shepard's drawings could entice me into that world. I knew exactly how Badger in his long dressing-gown and down-at-heel slippers would smell. At no time did I

want any of that male company; it represented too many kinds of social exclusions. Three bachelors of a certain (or rather, uncertain) age, free from any real responsibilities, spending their days messing about in boats, and gossiping about the intolerable social habits of Toad whom they consider to be their friend just made me embarrassed. I knew what boys did in corners. They formed exclusive clubs, discussed girls whom they looked at sideways without turning round, and taught each other how to exploit the superiority they recognised as theirs by right.

The world of the River Bank is a men's club, with Fortnum & Mason picnics for luncheon, and suppers in warm kitchens underground without the problems of shopping or washing up. When the Otter child goes missing, his father 'lonely and heartsore' watches by the ford where he taught the little one to swim. Mrs Otter appears only as the 'they' of 'the Otters', who insisted Rat should stay to supper, and 'keep it up late with his old comrade'. To believe in the artistic success of **The Wind in the Willows** one has to enter this enchanted circle of friends. Grahame's careful, devoted biographer, Peter Green, and his most important and discerning apologist, Humphrey Carpenter, do this well.

So my readings of **The Wind in the Willows** are those of a pagan, an outsider. I can't believe in the Piper at the Gates of Dawn, but I have learned a great deal about the embarrassment suffered by agnostics. The more I read about Grahame as a person, the more I see in this text the psyche of its author. The words open up an adult's longing to be a child granted an adult's freedom to do what he likes.

As for the famed humour of Toad's adventures, they are more irresponsible

than funny. Most enthusiasts don't recollect the details of the text, but remember well-staged versions of **Toad of Toad Hall**. When John Betjeman explored, on television, the delights of going up the Thames Valley by rail, I caught a glimpse of irony and nostalgia that reminded me of Toad's social upstartness. But I'm not enticed by any commentator's attempt to turn the story into an allegory or social fable. It hasn't the required depth. So Toad remains a creature of stagey pranks (what my parents called 'carrying on'), which seem now a kind of fin de siècle buffoonery, like charades. I wonder if the laughter they provoke is ever less than caustic. Far from sustaining the illusion of an animal world that is preferable to that of humans, or even of one that, post Aesop, judges our frailties, Toad simply highlights his creator's ambivalences about the relations of animals and people. He is a pantomime personality. This is not the case with any of Beatrix Potter's subtler creations. I am never afraid for Toad, but Jemima Puddleduck provokes every scrap of my protective instinct.

My perpetual difficulty is with the actual language of the text, not the quotations, references, allusions, all of which stroke any reader's sensibilities with prideful pleasure at knowing a little Latin, nor yet the 'ornateness and wit' that Humphrey Carpenter says makes it difficult for the young. There's a hollow tone in the way the author handles the implications of social distinctions that is different from Lewis Carroll's steely shots. For example, Rat rummaging in Mole's house for things to eat encourages Mole to explain 'how that was thought out, and how this was got as a windfall from an aunt, and that was a wonderful find and a bargain, and this other thing was bought out of laborious savings and a certain amount of going without'. You can hear the rise and fall exactly, the implication being that Rat's tact made up for Mole's bad taste, when in fact Mole's lack of subtlety is exposed quite



cruelly. Grahame knew as well as anyone about these economic devices, but here, as elsewhere, disdain wins out. The sentimental nonsense of the Piper at the Gates of Dawn put me off for years. Compared with my genuine panic in deep Highland forests, this rural deity makes me turn the page to avoid what now comes across in Shepard's illustration and Grahame's text as an advertisement for shampoo. Rat's longing to go south, repressed by Mole's fisticuffs, makes it seem that the author is, in this scene, being too hard on himself. Gauguin had already made such a trip respectable.

My particular interest is in the kind of reading experience **The Wind in the Willows** provides for children who have little contact with Victorian children's books and are outside the charmed circle of the author's friends. Humphrey Carpenter suggests that younger children like the 'story parts' and read the book 'for themselves with complete enjoyment [my emphasis] in adolescence'. His case that the River and the Wild Wood are 'more than adequate symbols for the deepest level of the artistic imagination' is, I think, over-generous. The book, as a whole, offers an image of childhood, as does **Peter Pan**, but not a general account of all childhoods. I guess it creates for some readers in each generation, notably those boys of quietist taste who are tentative about growing up, a place of reverie. Grahame was clearly ambivalent about adulthood, so his

escape was to revisit this alternative world where he was safe from the responsibilities and demands of the everyday (his wife and his duties at the Bank of England), as he told the stories to his son. The much vaunted wisdom of the characters is too uncomplicated, so the book is less mature than is often claimed. It also has, for me at least, deep deceptions, which careful scholarship may even perpetuate as examples of poetic skill.

Carpenter's view that **The Wind in the Willows** is 'the finest achievement of children's literature up to the date it was written and perhaps afterwards' seems excessive, although by now my limitations as a critic of it are clear. In the small, enclosed, excluding and exclusive world of the River Bank and the Wild Wood, even allowing for Toad's outbreaks and the threat of the ill-mannered weasels, and accepting the mock-heroic endeavours of Rat and his friends to emulate the champions of old, young readers meet a storyteller of distinct verbal felicity, in parts, but of clearly limited range for modern children. The excitement of reading is a dialogue with their future. Here they encounter the author's imagined past. For a time it may prove delightful, even re-creative. But this arcadian world is neither brave nor new; it has too few people in it. To meet them is to encounter the same person, the author, variously disguised as a Rat, a Mole, a Badger and a Toad, all equally egocentric and self-regarding. Pity. ■



Margaret Meek has a worldwide reputation for her books on reading. Her latest, **On Being Literate**, has just been published – see Ed's page for details and comment.

The biography by Peter Green mentioned in this piece is **Kenneth Grahame** (Murray, 1959); see also Humphrey Carpenter's **Secret Gardens** (Allen & Unwin, 1985). Sadly both titles are out of print but may be available in libraries.

The Wind in the Willows was first published in 1908, but Shepard's famous illustrations weren't added until 1930. It is one of the most re-issued and re-illustrated of all children's books and is available in a large variety of editions.

Methuen Children's Books have recently published four small versions of stories from this much-loved classic. They are abridged and form an ideal introduction for young children:

The River Bank and The Open Road, 0 416 16712 8

The Adventures of Toad, 0 416 16722 5

The Return of The Hero, 0 416 16692 X

The Wild Wood and Mole's Christmas, 0 416 16702 0

The illustrations accompanying this piece are taken from the above books, which cost £2.99 each and are excellent value for such delightful miniature hardbacks. Despite Margaret Meek's 'Blind Spot', we recommend them to you.

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A picture book tells a story, at least mine do. Storytelling is what interests me, because I am a storyteller.

The working difference between writing a story and writing a picture book is that when I write a story and finish it, it is finished. When I write a picture book text I am just at the beginning of a long process, in which the whole structure and meaning of the story will be re-interpreted by someone else, an artist who deals in images.

I once boasted to David Lloyd, my editor at Walker Books, that I wrote 'in images'. 'You do,' he replied, 'But you are very bad at it!' It was a neat put-down, but also true. I am a writer, not an image-maker. The danger of thinking you write 'in images' is when it leads to the expectation that the artist will faithfully reproduce *those* images... will 'illustrate' the story you have written.

This is the way to produce a *bad* picture book, because the images have been imposed on the artist by a non-specialist – someone who writes. I know this to be so from my own experience, but it is still difficult to come to terms with.

A case in point is *The Hidden House* recently published by Walker.

I began the story in a bedsit above the Conservative Party Offices in Ladbroke Grove in 1958 (this is not a political statement, I just happened to be camped there). I was in bed with a heavy case of 'flu, and the 'Dollmaker' idea came to me. Out of bed, off with the 'flu, on with the story, back to bed. It was then called 'Dominic'. The manuscript is lost to me, but I suppose it lies within whatever vault holds the rejects from Hutchinson New Authors Ltd, an imprint from which I received great encouragement, short of being published. An old man makes dolls to keep him company, that was roughly the story.

Twenty-five years later, walking up a lane from Tipperary woods towards the Mournes, I discovered the Dollmaker's house, choked with weeds and ivy, grimy windows still intact.

Glorious moment... the thing is a picture book text, full of images! White heat stage... lovely... the story was written in about an hour.

'Good story!' David Lloyd said.

Happy puffs on pipe from cheery author, expecting big... well, biggish... cheque.

'You got the end wrong,' he added. 'If it isn't the end, it's something else.'

Distressed puffs on pipe, then excitement. We tweaked the story here and there, working and re-working, until it came right, and it was still *my* story, *my* possession.

'Angela Barrett,' Amelia Edwards, Walker Art Director, said. They showed me *The Snow Queen*.

Two reactions: 'She is good. Very good.'

'What has she got to do with *my* story?' Big Question Mark. (Note the possessive adjective.)

I agreed nervously to go ahead.

Moment of maximum pain. The first pictures laid on the desk, with David and Amelia doing their David-and-Amelia Act, gazing at me gazing at it, and waiting for the pipe to twitch.

Oh God! I have been nearly thirty years getting *my* story right, a story full of ideas about warmth and togetherness and love and renewal, and look-what-this-woman-has-done-to-it! A strange image, an old child-scaring man on a bench with three huge elongated dolls. Help me somebody! What do I say to them?



From *The Hidden House* (Walker).

'Oh-er,' or words to that effect.

Pipe clenched, while over-heating brain clicks. What is this *Angela* doing? This image is something from inside her, not anything to do with me. Get rid of it! I don't want it in *my* book.

David: 'I think it is brilliant.'

Pipe puffed furiously.

Amelia, defiantly, as the smoke ascends: 'It is brilliant.'

Crushed Author: 'Y-e-s, it is, but...'

Chorus (What a double act): 'Look at it, Martin!'

And I did.

I looked for a long time.

It is brilliant. It is how the book should be, not as I saw it. As I saw it, it would have been a safe book about cuddly dollies, albeit dealing with life and death, but this book is altogether different; it has a whole new dimension. It *works*.

My story became *our* book... a picture book, not just a text. 'A perfect blend,' somebody was nice enough to say, but it wasn't just a blend, because blending conveys intermingling, and there is more to it than that. A picture book grows somewhere in the process. In the end it doesn't belong to either the writer or the artist, but both together, and *them*... the people whose names are not on the cover: editor, designer, whoever chose the paper, all the people who add the little bits that make it work.

The writer's sense of possessiveness is the first great danger to a picture book. I am, and always will be, very possessive about my picture book texts, but this can be taken no further than protecting them against the 'wrong' artist. This means the artist who is plain bad, or the artist who is technically good, but brings nothing of his or her self to the story.

The key moment is when you realise that the artist has taken over... unfortunately that is usually the moment when the possessive writer feels most hurt. It's a funny mix of feeling, because the hurt is mingled with a feeling of joy and a sense of wonder. 'Look what has happened to it!' followed by, 'It works!'

'And then the THING comes! YAAAAA AAAIII OOOOOEEEEEEEE!' From *The Park in the Dark* (Walker).



More and more I am writing now without indications to the artist that come from my own sense of image . . . it is an inferior sense, it only gets in the way.

The Park in the Dark is an example of the right way to do it.

'Me and Loopy and Little Gee.'

Editor to Writer: 'What are they?'

Writer to Editor: 'Don't know. Just words.'

Neither of us needed to know, we are wordsmen. The toys in **The Park in the Dark** were in Barbara Firth. They came from her own childhood, they belonged to her, and so when she drew them, she felt them, and that feeling comes over in the pictures.

So the writer just writes little stories, and after that it is all up to the artist, and the design department? Not so . . . not 'little' stories; a picture book is often much more than that. A really good picture book is a 'big' story, written in very few words, often layered so that many meanings lie within it.

What does 'big' mean? It can mean 'about-something-that-matters': ideas like the wheel of life, as in **Once There Were Giants** (a terribly difficult book for Penny Dale to make work); ideas like fear of the unknown as in **Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?**. Those are big 'adult' ideas, we recognise them as big easily, and the craft of the thing is to render them comprehensible to very small children.

How about 'Justice'? Children say, 'It isn't fair!' and they mean it, it matters to them.

*There once was a duck
Who had the bad luck
To live with a lazy old Farmer
The duck did the work,
For the farmer stayed all day in bed.*

Justice for the Duck! And the right artist! Helen Oxenbury is doing **Farmer Duck**.

There are other 'big' ideas, which are big for the very small. How about splashing? The sheer joy of splash-splash-splashing in cool water on a warm day . . . a big celebration of a very small thing that children love.

*One day Neligan went into town.
It was hot. It was dry.
The sun shone in the sky.
Neligan's pig sat by Neligan's pond.*

A fat, steamy pig. A duck and goose splashing in the pond, teasing the pig with quacks and honks of pure pleasure then . . .

SPLAAASH!

*The pig's in the pond!
The pig's in the pond!
The pig's in the pond!
The word spread about,
Above and beyond,
At Neligan's farm,
The pig's in the pond.*

Pig in the Pond. Jill Barton's pig now.

Noise . . . that's another celebration one. 'Tum-tum-te-tum, diddle-diddle-dum, ratta-tat-tat-boom!' **The Happy Hedgehog Band.** Jill again.

So big ideas can be small from an adult point of view, but then an adult point of view is not very helpful. A 'big' idea is something which instantly interests a child, and if you can shade in some more subtle themes alongside it, so much the better.

I work on the principle that the eventual book will usually be read one-to-one, a shared thing, often at the end of a difficult day. The day may have thrown up barriers between the adult and the child, and the picture book, particularly the old familiar picture book, can bring them together again. It may even open the possibility of airing whatever the matter is.

A picture book text is a script for performance by the reader, performing to a very personally involved audience that wants to stop, ask questions, look, and point things out. There should be words to work on for that performance, lots of rhythm and rhyme and alliteration and fun and jokes and things happening, a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, a story that often says something about loving relationships between 'big' and 'small'.

No problem! You have three to five hundred words to do it in, ideally less.

Finished?

Get it to the *right* artist. ■

Martin Waddell's (and his illustrators') books mentioned in this piece are:

The Hidden House, 0 7445 1266 2, £7.99

The Park in the Dark, 0 7445 0716 2, £7.99; 0 7445 1740 0, £3.99 pbk

Once There Were Giants, 0 7445 0484 8, £7.99; 0 7445 1791 5, £3.99 pbk

Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?, 0 7445 0796 0, £7.99; 0 7445 1316 2, £3.99 pbk

Farmer Duck and **The Happy Hedgehog Band** will both be published later this year, but you'll have to wait until 1992 for **Pig in the Pond**.

All published by Walker Books.

★ cats, chaos and colour ★

White Bear's Secret

★ Martine Beck
★ Ill. Marie Henry
0241 131022 £7.99

What is White Bear hiding from Brown Bear? Just why is there such a rush to rebuild their home after the avalanche? Find the answers to these questions and more in this sequel to Brown Bear's Wedding.



Keeping House

★ Margaret Mahy
★ Ill. Wendy Smith
0241 130964 £7.99

Lizzie Firkin's house is in a real pickle! You can't even walk across the floor for the mess! Will Robin Puckertucker save the day or will she be buried under clutter for ever?

★ Miaaaow! ★

Beeswax the Bad's Noisy Night
Andrew & Paula Martyr
0241 129117 £7.99

Miaaaaaaow! Beeswax the Bad is back! The craftiest cat of them all plots to steal the garden gnome. Oh No! Something is bound to go wrong!



HAMISH HAMILTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS





Betty Root retired recently from the Reading Centre at the University of Reading, which she helped to make famous. Typically, she now works harder than ever. Here's her selection of picture books from the many published this Spring. Happy Retirement, Betty!

The sheer joy of it!

Piles of books to be read and time to do it properly. My novel 'retired' status does bring some rewards, especially when it enables me to help busy teachers and parents. You all realise, I'm sure, that it's impossible to select the 'best'; choosing books is a very personal matter and complete objectivity unachievable.

More than anything I want children to read with enjoyment, and to bring this about we must provide variety so that all potential readers will be enticed into the magical world of books. Consequently, I have made my comments brief and succinct to include as many titles as possible.

Our own enthusiasm for books, engendered by familiarity, will light a flame in young readers. With some, not all, it will never be extinguished.

Window

Jeannie Baker, Julia MacRae, 1 85681 010 1, £8.99



A wordless picture book with a 'save the forests' theme. Definitely for older children who will most certainly appreciate the amazing collage constructions which tell the story. It is an 'awareness' message concerning the changing view from a particular window. Each child will see something different – that's the joy of the story.

Willy and Hugh

Anthony Browne, Julia MacRae, 1 85681 030 5, £6.99

'Hurrah!' we all say. Willy is back to delight us. Friendship is the essence of this tale – dear to the hearts of all young children who dread being left out. The real joy is that it's a book for adults as well youngsters. I for one was quite happy to be seen reading it on the train.

The Magpie and the Star

Stephen Lambert, Hutchinson, 0 09 176369 X, £7.99

A truly haunting story about a magpie stealing a star. Pol, a solitary selfish fellow, is determined to retrieve it and through his adventures learns to appreciate other people and creatures. There's much to return to in this story and the pastel illustrations feed the imagination.

Busy! Busy! Busy!

Jonathan Shipton, ill. Michael Foreman, Andersen, 0 86264 310 4, £6.99

A simple, poignant story rich with the 'feel' of everyday life. It tells of an affectionate, sensitive child who shows his mother how to cope with a bad mood. This could so easily have been sentimental slush, but it isn't. Quite lovely.

Everybody's Different

Allan Langouant, Blackie, 0 216 93049 9, £6.95

'The thing about people, it's perfectly plain, that whatever they are, they're not all the same.' Not a story, but a book which is most certainly entertaining and hilarious. It's a thought-provoking topic and one we all need to consider. This book will be pored over and should be the starting point for much discussion.

Willy and Hugh.



Amanda's Butterfly

Nick Butterworth, Collins, 0 00 191321 2, £6.95

A little bit of magic which will entrance young readers. Nick Butterworth's direct and delicious illustrations tell the story without text. Sometimes this mode can be very daunting – especially for tired adults! Not so, **Amanda's Butterfly**. As usual Nick Butterworth has got every aspect right and that's not easy.

Cats in the Sun

Lesley Anne Ivory, Collins, 0 00 1911392 1, £6.95

Again, not a story but an exquisite account of cats in warm, sunny places. There's much information both in text and pictures. Young and old cat enthusiasts will find this book irresistible. Outstanding, without a doubt.

The Fish Who Could Wish

John Bush, ill. Korky Paul, Oxford, 0 19 279890 1, £6.95

The rhythmic text with supportive illustrations make this book accessible to many children. Poorer readers will enjoy all the fun and for a fish who gets everything the ending is most appropriate.

*He wished for a castle
He wished for a car
But one day he wished
Just a little too far . . .*

Beeswax the Bad's Noisy Night

Andrew and Paula Martyr, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12911 7, £7.99

Beeswax the cat turns up again in another profusely illustrated story. The minimal rhyming text about his night-time quest to steal the garden gnome will carry even the poorest of readers along.

The Snow Country Prince The Cherry Tree

0 19 279886 3 0 19 279895 2

Daisaku Ikeda, English version Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Brian Wildsmith, Oxford, £6.95 each

This is where my vocabulary of superlatives proves to be inadequate. These books are just breathtaking . . . stories of surviving winter hardships and hope engendered by the coming of spring. Even if only half the words can be read, the illustrations transport the reader to a magical world. They truly lift the spirit and shine through the day.

Buried Moon

Retold by Margaret Hodges, ill. Jamichael Henterly, Little Brown, 0 316 36793 1, £7.95

First published in a collection of Folk Lore (1891), this East Anglian legend is a haunting tale full of scary moments to captivate older readers. In the end, good triumphs over evil and the moon is restored to her rightful place in the sky. Atmospheric illustrations fill the imagination and reflect the gloom and glory of an ageless story.

Sorochintsy Fair

Retold by Sybil Countess Schonfeldt (from Gogol), trans. Patricia Crampton, ill. Gennadij Spirin, Ragged Bears, 1 870817 70 2, £7.95

Gogol's Ukrainian story, the inspiration for Mussorgsky's opera of the same name, is illustrated here by a Russian artist; no wonder picture and text work so well together to provide an uplifting experience for older readers. Credit must also go to Patricia Crampton whose translation of this re-telling manages to be both colloquial and up-to-date, yet retains the rumbustious, traditional feel captured so splendidly in the pictures.



From *Sorochintsy Fair*.

Something Nasty in the Cabbages

Retold and ill. Diz Wallis, Ragged Bears, 1 870817 58 3, £7.95

A twelfth-century tale, conventional in form – the cockerel survives the fox with cunning – but unconventional in presentation. The details in the illustrations are incredible and it won't matter if young readers can't manage all the words. This is Diz Wallis's first book for children – I offer many congratulations to her!



From *Something Nasty in the Cabbages*.

Cock-a-Doodle-Do

Venice Shone, Orchard, 1 85213 269 8, £7.99

Some may disagree, but I feel there is a dearth of suitable books for babies. You could happily share this one with a nine-month-old. The animals are easily recognised and familiar, while their activities present good opportunities for talk.

Our House

Emma and Paul Rogers, ill. Priscilla Lamont, Walker, 0 7445 1251 4, £8.99

Definitely for my never-to-be-lent-out-in-case-it's-not-returned-shelf! Two hundred years of social history are conveyed through the occupants of one house. This will spark the imaginations of young readers and build many bridges between the old and young. Congratulations to all three creators.

Wheels

Shirley Hughes, Walker, 0 7445 1541 6, £6.99

How does she do it? Not a particularly original storyline, yet this has that sparkle and magic Shirley Hughes can elicit even from a well-worn theme. The familiar illustrations provide confidence and expectation in young readers used to her work. They won't be disappointed.

That New Dress

Malorie Blackman, ill. Rhian Nest James, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 0442 8, £7.99; 0 7500 0443 6, £3.50 pbk

It's always tempting when selecting a list of books to include everything which takes cognizance of the society in which we live.

That New Dress is chosen because it's a good story and not because the main character, Wendy, is black. It needs to be read aloud to make the best of the rhythmic text. Simply lovely!

Pins and Needles

John Talbot, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 0376 6, £7.99; 0 7500 0377 4, £3.50 pbk

An elephant with pins and needles in his trunk immediately engaged my young readers. This is hilarious throughout – look out for some wonderful touches of humour in the illustrations.

Evan's Corner

Elizabeth Starr Hill, ill. Sandra Speidal, Viking, 0 670 82830 0, £7.99

All children feel the need for privacy sometimes and adults need to be reminded of this. This story, first published in 1967, is set in a crowded apartment. The new illustrations enhance but don't overpower the narrative. To be shared, initially, but I feel sure competent readers of seven years old and above will want to return to it on their own.

Hurrah for Ethelyn

Babette Cole, Heinemann, 0 434 93293 0, £6.95

Babette Cole has, and deserves, many devoted followers. Children recognise her style and warm to its familiarity. This is a zany, hilarious story about a clever rat who wanted to be brain surgeon. The humour is spot on.

Two in a Pocket

Robin Ravilious, Heinemann, 0 434 95942 1, £6.95

A gentle, happily resolved country story about a dormouse and a wren. Sympathetically illustrated and providing much to pore over in the abundant pictures. A clear and important message for young readers.

Sam and the Swans

Colin Robinson, Viking, 0 670 82869 6, £6.99

Narrative information is a much neglected area, so this delightful book will be warmly appreciated. Many beautiful, clear illustrations with lots of clues to relate the story. There's also a welcome minimal text for those adults who find 'no words' hard work at the end of a trying day.

Can Piggles Do It?

Frank Rodgers, Viking, 0 670 83200 6, £7.99

Are we never allowed to escape from our own guilty consciences? I ask you – slimming pigs! But it all works. This is a happy good-for-a-laugh book that's not too demanding – unlike slimming, in my experience.

The Kitchen Knight

Retold by Margaret Hodges, ill. Trina Schart Hyman, Oxford, 0 19 279894 4, £6.95

A King Arthur story – part of the exciting Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney. Meticulously researched, this book provides a wonderful introduction to the ancient legend. The

illustrations are outstanding in detail, form and colour, and certainly conjure up the romance we associate with the time.

Tyrone the Dirty Rotten Cheat

Hans Wilhelm, Scholastic, 0 590 76535 3, £5.95

A light story which will remind many children of television cartoons and should therefore have much appeal. Putting down the cheat and the bully is always popular, especially when achieved without violence. A strange choice of typeface . . . but my young readers didn't comment on this.

You're It

Sally Grindley, ill. Merida Woodford, Kingfisher, 0 86272 796 0, £6.95

A rollicking, rhythmic, cumulative story which rolls off the tongue making it a joy to read aloud. All great fun – especially with these apt illustrations as back-up.

Babies, Babies, Babies

Tessa Dahl, ill. Siobhan Dodds, Kingfisher, 0 86272 581 X, £6.95



Expectant mothers with other young children will be hugely attracted to this book. It broadens the subject of human birth to include a variety of familiar animals. The facts are fascinating and enquiring minds will be satisfied and intrigued.

Nellie's Knot

Ken Brown, Andersen, 0 86264 324 4, £6.99

Nellie the baby elephant ties a knot in her trunk, but can't remember why – 'I'm not going to untie this knot until I do remember,' she decides. Well, that decision obviously makes life very difficult for a young elephant. A friendly, happy jungle story full of love and fun.

Flyaway Pantaloons

Joseph Sharples, ill. Sue Scullard, Macmillan, 0 333 47105 9, £5.95

It's interesting to note that the illustrator is named on the cover of this book and not the author of the verse. Why? Gloriously detailed pictures depict the adventures of a pair of pantaloons as they fly over a medieval Italian city. Lots to learn as well as enjoy.

LAST WORD

I know this has been said before, but since so few seem to have taken note it must be repeated. Why is that almost all the children in these books have white faces? Admittedly 50% of the books I was choosing from had animal characters (with a preponderance of cats) – could this be an attempt to avoid the issue? ■

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

FOR THE STAFFROOM BOOKSHELF

The arrival of **Hooked on Books** (Harcourt Brace, 0 7466 0050 X) could hardly be more welcome – a fact file, plus teacher's book, pitched precisely at the upper junior/lower secondary age-range when so many children lose their interest in fiction. At £35.00, the materials may seem expensive but don't be put off. More than 300 titles are fully annotated, assessed and set in the context of real kids in real school situations. The teacher's book, called **Children Reading Fiction** (0 7466 0051 8, £8.95) is worth buying on its own, but I'd recommend the whole package for its sharpness, lack of pretension and the splendid sense it gives of books being considered on their own terms yet presented within a coherent, practical and forward-looking framework. That's not to say I'd agree with every single critique on offer . . . but who cares? Warmest congratulations to Chris Luttravio who led the contributing team and to Harcourt Brace who took over this project after the ILEA was abolished.

Pie Corbett and Brian Moses bring a similar enthusiasm to **My Grandmother's Motorbike** (Oxford, 0 19 919069 0, £6.95). It's subtitled 'Story Writing in the Primary School' but is steeped in books from first page to last – a handy antidote to those teachers who ask children to write from their own experience yet overlook reading as a crucial part of that experience. Corbett and Moses lace their text with anecdotes, personal testimony and first-hand evidence so we're constantly reminded of the wider language context in which writing is best fostered. As a result, deep in your bones, you *know* you can trust their approach.

Stuart Marriott's **Picture Books in the Primary Classroom** (Paul Chapman Publishing, 1 85396 144 2, £9.95) plods a bit and never properly gets to grips with the contribution picture books can make to a school's Art curriculum (including film and television). There are plenty of compensations, though. He places picture books firmly within current reading theory, for instance, and wisely bases his argument on particular, favourite examples. Best of all, despite his admirable determination to raise teacherly awareness of what can happen when words and images interact successfully on the page, Stuart Marriott never lets us forget that the only *essential* outcome is delight. CP

VIVA VIDEO!



Susanna Gretz.

Rumour reaches **BfK** that the Authorbank videos launched by the Children's Book Foundation earlier this year are selling splendidly. We're not surprised. Directed by Sue Collins and produced by Bob Cattell, all five are lively, informative and perfectly judged to support school book events – whether or not the celebrity concerned is paying a visit. Currently available, at £11.95 each, are **Shirley Hughes**, **Colin and Jacqui Hawkins**, **Dick King-Smith** and **Paula Danziger** with **Roger's Book: The Story of How a Book is Made**, featuring Susanna Gretz, at £12.95. The next batch, due in September, offers **Jill Murphy**, **Jan Pieńkowski**, **Tony Ross** and **Martin Waddell**. And after that? Who knows . . . but on the evidence so far the CBF Video Show will run and run.

Details from CBF Videos, Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

Congratulations also to the London Borough of Camden for their six-minute film, **Checking It Out**, which encourages 5-11 year olds to use local library services. This won a national 'Video 90' award and has been shown extensively throughout Camden primary schools as part of LINK, the library promotional vehicle. Enquiries to John Wilkins, St Pancras Library, 100 Euston Road, London NW1 2AJ (tel: 071-860 5572).

Steve Bowles

12th January 1950 to
27th March 1991



'Make sure you write a celebratory piece,' one of Steve's closest friends advised us. 'He gave such a lot to so many people.' No one will disagree with that. Steve taught in comprehensive schools in Gravesend, Sheffield, Telford, Dagenham and Havering before joining the staff of North Westminster Community School last September. After his involvement with that splendidly spikey and idiosyncratic journal **Reviewsheet** in the seventies, he became a regular and much respected contributor to **BfK**. He also wrote two books of his own, **The Power of Hoodoo** (Evans, 1979) and **Jamie** (Gollancz, 1981), as well as editing 'Twisters' and 'Choices' for Collins. Despite intermittent chemotherapy for the last five years, Steve never missed a day's teaching and most of his friends were astonished to discover how ill he'd been. This was typical of him. So is the fact that he was working on a new anthology right to the end – due from CUP next year with the provisional title of **A Stench of Kerosene**. He loved kids and books about equally and treated both with flair and integrity. Not a difficult life to celebrate.

Farewell, Steve.

We don't all live with Mum and Dad . . .



. . . is the title of the latest guide from the National Council for One Parent Families. It's an alphabetical list – briefly annotated and organised by subject – of fiction and picture books that reflect some aspect of living in a one parent family. Though not claiming to be comprehensive, the guide is very reasonably priced at £3.50. With more than one family in seven currently headed by a single parent (1.6 million children in all), can any school do without it? Contact Sui Wan Goody, Information Office, National Council for One Parent Families, 255 Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2LX (tel 071-267 1361).

Worcester College of Higher Education

Children's Literature Summer School 1991

29th July – 3rd August

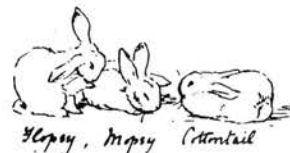
This year's programme combines aspects of Children's Literature with a mini Library and Information Skills course. Speakers include Geoffrey Trease, Julia MacRae, Lisa Kopper, Chris Kloet and David Buckingham, plus specialists from librarianship and bookselling, as well as a poetry workshop by Maggie Holmes. Details from: The In-Service Office, Worcester College of Higher Education, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ (tel 0905 748089).



Puffin 50th Birthday Launch

How better to launch Puffin's anniversary celebrations than a Giant Cake Sculpture . . . especially when it's been designed by Jan Pieńkowski, no less! On show at the Victoria and Albert Museum from 21st May – 7th July, and then at the Edinburgh Book Festival from the 10th-26th August, the cake has five wedges, each depicting scenes from famous Puffin stories and is topped with 'chocolate' frosting. The V & A also offers an accompanying series of special events for children of all ages. For your slice of the action, ring their Educational Services on 071-938 8638.

PS from Peter



Also at the V & A is the original picture letter which inspired the world's bestselling children's book: **The Tale of Peter Rabbit**. Reprinted over 250 times and translated into 15 languages, the book began as a note to Noel Moore, the son of Beatrix Potter's former governess. Some note! Purchased earlier this year for £82,500 by Pearson plc, the signed letter, with its pen-and-ink drawings, will now be housed in the museum's Beatrix Potter Collection. ■



ANDERSEN PRESS

Tony Ross

DON'T DO THAT!

In the tradition of his much-loved bestseller *I Want My Potty*, Tony Ross has created an hilarious new story that will strike a chord with children and parents everywhere. Nellie has a pretty nose. So pretty in fact that she is given a part in the Christmas play. But then, Nellie does something she's been told never to do . . . she puts her finger up her nose, with unforeseen and disastrous results.

Tony Ross's last book, *The Happy Rag*, was praised by the *School Librarian* as "the most complete and satisfying picture book for some years."



0 86264 344 9 230 x 200mm
32pp in full colour
£6.99 (3-6) March

Jonathan Shipton and Michael

Foreman

BUSY! BUSY! BUSY!

Mum has so much to do she doesn't know where to begin, and she has no time to spend with her little boy. In this touching portrait of the mother-son relationship, the traditional roles are reversed and when things become too much for her, it is the son who comforts the mother with a Great Big Kiss.

Jonathan Shipton's poignant story with Michael Foreman's evocative watercolours combine together to make the perfect book for sharing.

0 86264 310 4 230 x 200mm
32pp in full colour
£6.99 (3-6) February



Max Velthuijs

FROG AND THE BIRDSONG

One autumn day, Frog finds a blackbird lying motionless in the grass. Frog is worried and asks his friends Pig and Duck to explain what's the matter. It is Hare who arrives on the scene and explains to them all that the bird is dead and that they must bury it. Very gently the animals begin to understand the meaning of death and the beauty of life in this poignant and moving story.

Max Velthuijs is an internationally renowned Dutch artist. His first book, *Frog In Love*, was acclaimed by *TV Guide* as "a charming picture book".

0 86264 321 X 230 x 200mm
32pp in full colour
£6.99 (3-6) February



Max Velthuijs

Frog and the Birdsong

ANDERSEN PRESS

Ruth Brown

A FOUR-TONGUED ALPHABET

A is for ark, but also for arche, Arche and arca in French, German and Spanish. In Ruth Brown's ingenious new alphabet each letter is accompanied by a dramatic illustration whose subject is translated into the four languages underneath, with each word beginning with the letter in question. *A Four-Tongued Alphabet* will help children expand their horizons and gain a glimpse of these four major European languages. The beautifully painted and richly coloured illustrations for each word are vivid and unforgettable.

The World That Jack Built, Ruth Brown's last book, was described as "a striking book: the story is clear to very young children; the pictures are dramatic," *Observer*.

0 86264 327 9 230 x 200mm
32pp in full colour
£6.99 (4-7) May

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THE GUARDIAN CHILDREN'S FICTION AWARD 1991

Stephanie Nettel reports

When a writer has won two Carnegies and a Smarties, and already been shortlisted four times and runner-up once for our own award, it is almost a relief, and certainly a great satisfaction, when the right moment, the right judges and the right book finally slot perfectly into place.

I am content now to have waited so long. **The Kingdom by the Sea** offers the best of Westall – vigorous action with a page-turning grip; unashamedly ferocious passion, emotionally and physically; tenderness for the vulnerable among us, children, animals, the lonely or grieving. Like **Blitzcat**, but for a younger audience, it is a journey of discovery, this time set in the Westall-land of Tynemouth in the last war, and portrayed with touching simplicity from the viewpoint of a skinny 12-year-old of unquenchable spirit.

When Harry loses his home and family in the bombing, he sets out down the coast, alone except for Don – dog, companion and fellow outcast – to face a capricious adult world, in turns caring, potty and brutal. Geographically he doesn't get far, but spiritually and intellectually he discovers a kingdom of beckoning horizons where he knows he could be himself.



The expected happy ending is tipped on its head with a painful allegiance to truth: we know that one day Harry will inherit his kingdom, but the reader is being warned not to expect life to stick conveniently to the rules. Yet it is an uplifting book: the pick-yourself-up courage with which Harry faces each adventure is wonderfully cheering, offering child and adult readers alike the splendid indulgence of a good cry.

While Westall's novel takes young readers back to another time, runner-up **Against the Storm** by Gaye Hıçılmaz (ill. Mei-Yim Low), takes them to a distant country – both books demonstrating the universality of human needs and emotions. Mehmet's family have always dreamed of a better life in the city, but, settled in the shanty town on the hills above Ankara, they find urban poverty has a callous cunning they are ill-equipped to tackle. Mehmet, like Harry, is cheerfully resilient, a survivor, but the story of his battle with the way fate deals with the poor is one of haunting pathos, albeit described with gentleness and even humour. It is a fine debut for a writer who must surely have prizes to come. ■

The judges this year were James Aldridge, Russell Hoban, Ann Pilling, Ann Schlee and children's books editor of the *Guardian*, Stephanie Nettel.

The Kingdom by the Sea, Methuen, 0 416 15662 2, £8.95

Against the Storm, Viking, 0 670 82960 9, £7.99

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Chris Powling on three newly issued hardbacks

The Nonsense Poems of Edward Lear

Illustrated by Leslie Brooke, Little Brown, 0 316 88874 5, £9.99



Some would argue that Lear's own illustrations are the only proper accompaniment for his inspired and quirky verse. It's undeniable that the comedy of the original books seems to depend equally on words and pictures. Like Lear himself, though, Leslie Brooke was a specialist in drawing animals and birds – along with Beatrix Potter and J A Shepherd perhaps the best of his generation – so this elegant bringing together of work from **The Pelican Chorus** (1899) and **The Jumbies** (1900) should be of interest even to the purist. Me, I was enchanted. The sensitive but wonderfully firm line-drawings and the pastel delicacy of the colour-plates had me lingering over page after page.

The Velveteen Rabbit

Margery Williams, ill. William Nicholson, Heinemann, 0 434 97265 7, £9.95

An old favourite – did it really first appear in the same year Richmal Crompton produced **Just William**? – firmly rooted in the more leisurely age of J M Barrie who might easily have written 'when a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with but



really loves you, then you become Real'. The illustrations, though, with their hand-drawn borders and hand-written captions brought a revolutionary breeziness to the picture book. Nor have they ever looked quite as they do here since William Nicholson loved to re-work his pictures – in this instance, apparently, while reading the book to his daughter. So whether or not you're already acquainted with Marjorie Williams' justly celebrated Pinocchio-piece, don't miss this sparkling re-origination in its deluxe slipcase.

Kiss the Dust

Elizabeth Laird, Heinemann, 0 434 94703 2, £9.95

No, not a picture book. Some texts are so timely they demand immediate attention. Elizabeth Laird's tale concerns the Kurds – in particular Tara, whose loss of her comfortable home, sanctuary in the Zagros mountains, retreat to Iran, period of internment and final flight to Britain mirrors

the fate of countless others . . . except hers, comparatively, has a happy ending.

Cleverly, the author frames her story between schools – in Sulaimaniya and London – but Tara's experiences set her apart from her age-group:

Why couldn't she talk about clothes and make-up and parties any more? She had an awful desire to shock . . . to tell . . . about the arms and legs she'd seen flying through the air in the bombing raids, and what it felt like to swept down a flooded river in the dark, and how tired you felt after months of eating only the basic kinds of food, and how the camp latrines stank so much you wanted to be sick and how the man in the cabin next to theirs had screamed and screamed in the night.



Elizabeth Laird writes with breathless indignation as if she can't quite believe her own meticulous checking of the facts. For teachers of 10-14 year olds, this fierce, compassionate narrative doesn't just open up the reality behind the news reports, it's the perfect vehicle to outflank the Secretary of State's crass objection to history-as-it's-happening. ■

IN OUR JULY ISSUE . . .

LIZ WATERLAND ON SAT'S • VERONICA HELEY ON WRITING CHRISTIAN FICTION • TERESA GRAINGER ON USING BfK IN THE CLASSROOM • ANNE FINE, 1990 CHILDREN'S WRITER OF THE YEAR, IN AUTHORGRAPH • ANTHONY BROWNE ON THE MOTHER GOOSE AWARD • PLUS REVIEWS, REVIEWS, REVIEWS . . .