

BOOKS for KEEPS

July 1991 No. 69
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the children's book magazine



END OF SCHOOL YEAR
ISSUE

If you want to keep up-to-date with children's books on a regular basis and have not yet come across ...

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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● News

Every issue carries up-to-the minute news from across the children's book world.

Books for Keeps is a working magazine for everyone involved with children of all ages and books of all kinds. Several pages are in full colour, the whole of the magazine is highly illustrated. It comes out six times a year in January, March, May, July, September and November.

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We also publish ...

POETRY 0-16

A BfK guide to children's poetry by Morag Styles and Pat Triggs

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'Properly employed you couldn't have a better language and literacy development programme than Poetry.'

(From the Introduction of Poetry: 0-16)

Poetry: 0-16 is designed as a major bibliographic resource for teachers, librarians and parents. **Poetry: 0-16** is a large, fully annotated bibliography divided into helpful sections by age range, type of book, genre and/or theme. The other major part of the Guide is what we have called Poetry in Practice, consisting of several feature articles looking at ways in which poetry can be used in the classroom; included are suggestions for a DIY In-Service Baker Day and ideas on creating a more poetic classroom. Throughout, wherever possible, there is an emphasis on the multicultural context and women poets. The whole is topped and tailed by an overview of the state of children's poetry in the main Introduction and by an Information and Index section at the end.



Cover – an original poem by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Quentin Blake.

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To order an annual subscription to **Books for Keeps** (we are happy to send sample copies of the magazine to help you decide), or **Poetry: 0-16**, or additional copies of **The Green Guide**, write to or phone the **BfK** office. Credit card orders are accepted.

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Cover story

The illustration on the front of **BfK** this month is the cover of **The Book of the Banshee** by Anne Fine (see Authorgraph on page 16 for details).

The book is published by Hamish Hamilton and we thank them for their help in using Derek Brazell's illustration.

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the children's book magazine

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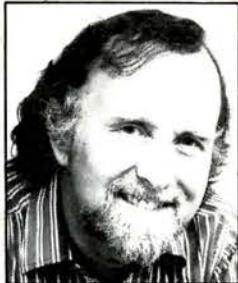


The British Council



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EDITOR'S PAGE



Have teachers ever looked as burnt-out as they do at the end of this school year? Probably, yes. That edgy, sunken-eyed, bump-into-the-furniture weariness seems to go with the season. Other occupations bring exhaustion too, of course. Last month, for instance, while visiting the splendid Nottingham Children's Bookfair, I came across some happy but pretty worn-out librarians. Nevertheless, though I'm as busy these days as I ever was and still spend plenty of time with children, I haven't felt as tired-as-a-teacher since . . . well, since six years ago when I last worked full-time in a school. It's very much an occupational hazard. Another is trying to get non-teachers even to recognise the phenomenon.

Till now, that is. For I've just read a book – actually written by a non-teacher – which opens up for everyone the exhilarating, side-splitting, gloriously unpredictable and totally knackered day-to-day reality of classroom life. It's by Tracy Kidder and it's called **Among Schoolchildren** (Picador, 0 330 31817 8, £5.99 pbk). The book simply follows Chris Zajac, a real-life teacher of 10-year-olds through a complete school year in an unlovely city in the East Coast of America?

Don't let this put you off. However unfamiliar the details, the essence of Kidder's narrative checks out with classrooms the world over.

What's extraordinary about the book – apart, that is, from having a Good-Word-or-Two for the teaching profession on almost every page – is that the portraits of the children in her class are just as warm, just as convincing as that of Chris Zajac herself. Damaged and infuriating though so many of them are, they emerge as worth all the effort she expends so generously on their behalf . . . and not always successfully, let it be said. At the end of the year, Chris admits to being defeated by the odd, deeply disturbed Robert. "He's my failure, I guess. Him and Clarence." Just so we know where he stands, though, Tracy Kidder's final two sentences read 'She hadn't given up. She had run out of time.'

Imagine, if you can, such an endorsement from Ken Clarke. I'm thinking of sending him a copy of **Among Schoolchildren** – with a note pointing out the only significant difference between Chris Zajac's class and that of countless equally committed teachers in Britain's state schools: it consisted of only twenty children! The next time you hear that ritual gripe 'what on earth do they do in schools these days', recommend this book. It's essential reading not just for educational insiders but for outsiders too – not least those of us whose own line of work is heavily dependent on teacherly input.

Prizes Galore

For the children's book world this is the season of prizes. Our Authorgraph (centre-spread) celebrates the writer who – deservedly and not before time – has scooped quite a number in recent months: Anne Fine. On page 21, Michael Rosen reports on the BfK/A & C Black Nonsense Song Competition and on page 25, Anthony Browne describes this year's judging of the Mother Goose Award. Anyone who suspects prize-panels merely rubber-stamp foregone conclusions should turn to Tony's

piece at once! See also our News pages, 30-31, for an update on the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals, the Children's Book Award, the Macmillan Award, this year's prize for a children's book on science, and an account of 1991's Eleanor Farjeon Award which goes to one of the most distinguished of all translators of children's books, Patricia Crampton. Congratulations to all winners and runners-up.

End of Term Tales

The rest of this issue celebrates, if that's the right word, the end of the school year 1990-91. On pages 4-5, Liz Waterland's 'SAT Upon' predicts the demise of you-know-what (let's hope she's right) and on pages 22-23 David Bennett discusses class readers in the secondary school. Both are regular reviewers and feature writers . . . but Teresa Grainger is a newcomer. Earlier this year she wrote to us suggesting a piece on using **BfK** in the classroom. 'By children?' we asked. 'Exactly,' came the reply. 'I've been doing it for ages.' See pages 26-29 for Teresa's article. Teachers everywhere, we hope, will spot possibilities there for work with their own class. In fact, we're banking on it. For some time we've been discussing the possibility of a **BfK** schools' competition with our sponsors, **Books For Children**, and Teresa's project concentrated our minds wonderfully. So tuck her article in a safe place, perhaps a lesson-preparation file, for the new school year. And consult the foot of this column for another gentle hint about plans we have afoot. All will be revealed in our September issue.

Another piece that sprang from a letter – see where writing to us gets you? – is Veronica Heley's on page 14. She sent a note complimenting one of our reviewers on his remarks about a novel of hers with a Christian message. This led to a 'phone call and the request for a full-scale description of the way in which Veronica's religious faith reinforces or compromises her needs as a storyteller. It's a theme Alan Brine picks up on our back page with his discussion of books, new and not-so-new, which have a religious dimension – not, of course, necessarily Christian. Nor, necessarily, making this dimension explicit. Assembly-takers, please note.

Gone Green

. . . at last! Our long-awaited **Green Guide to Children's Books** is now available. See page 8 for full details. And see the corner of our London office for a slumped but grinning Richard Hill who led the team that brought it together. What was I saying about teacherly burn-out? All in a good cause, though. We think the Guide has the future written all over it but tell us what you think.

Have a good summer! ■

**Need an idea for Children's Book Week next term?
 Keep this issue safe . . . and watch this space in September's BfK.**

SAT UPON

Liz Waterland

'SuperSAT'?

Alexander spotted it straightaway. 'Are you doing our tests?' he said with interest. 'What tests are those?' said I. He explained he'd heard on the telly that all seven-year-olds were going to be tested 'for the government' and he'd been waiting to have his. Well, I had to come clean and admit that there would be some tests and that this time when he read with me I would be looking out for how many words he could read without my help. What, I wondered, did he think of the idea? He smiled engagingly . . . 'It seems a bit silly. I've read with you lots of times; you ought to know how I can read by now I should think.'

And so, of course, I do. I know Alexander's reading very well. I know he has a taste for the quirky and unusual; he had just read *Tales of a One Way Street* and admired the way the stories seem ordinary and then 'sort of turn round and surprise you'. I know he reads a book a day and an extra one on Saturday 'because I read one at the library while Mummy does the shopping' and I know that he reads fluently and skilfully . . . especially when reading silently which he prefers because it's quicker.

He read beautifully, as I knew he would, and gained his Level Three label with ease. Good old Alexander! A few more like him and I could tackle the Level Twos. Let me think . . . half an hour or so for each Level Three, say fifteen minutes for each Level Two, an open-ended amount for Level One. I should have SAT on them all in about fifteen teaching hours. It's a good job I'm not the class teacher with all those Writing, Spelling, Maths and Science assessments to make as well. At least it's only the admin. that's going to the wall, not children's learning.

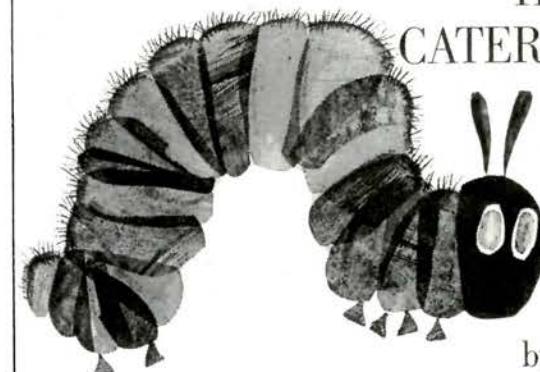
What's it all in aid of? It isn't for the children's benefit that normal service was suspended for five weeks; they're having their most lovely term snatched away from them. The summer term of their top infant year, when so many of them grow up before our eyes and revel in their new powers, the term of outings and trips and drawing cowslips and ladybirds, the term when just a bit more teaching will give little Zoe (summer born and struggling) the confidence to read for herself and will teach David to skip at last. All this is wasted and lost . . . the time that for us and our 'big children' will never come again.

Certainly it can't be for the teachers. Run ragged by the need to respond to every bright idea Elizabeth House dreams up, peering out from under expensive heaps of files and booklets, told how to do their jobs by people whose only contact with teaching is that they once went to school, trying to do it all in thirty hours (less administration, form-filling, oh yes, and the reading SATs). Would we have chosen this as the culmination of our children's precious infant schooling, the way we'd want to remember April, May and June and the children whose company we're privileged to have shared?

For the parents then? For their 'right to know'? Parents who've been in and out of school since their child started with us? Who have a knowledge of their child down to the number of teeth he's lost and what are his favourite songs? Are they really to benefit from being given a number which is supposed, by the time it's been 'resolved' and averaged and weighted and summated, to tell them all about their child's abilities in the complexities of language and science and maths? We might as well sort them by their zodiac signs. At least that would give twelve categories instead of only three. 'Your child is a Two in English' has all the



THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR



by Eric Carle

subtlety and nuance of assessing the bouquet of a bottle of wine by smashing it over the waiter.

I think Alexander had it bang to rights when he described it as being 'for the government'. What the motivation is, I'm not sure. Is it to be seen to be *doing* something about something? Is it to discredit teachers? Is it to keep parents quiet about resources? Is it even, out of genuine concern for small children? I don't know. But I do know that it's cost a fortune which could have provided another teacher in every school, or extra books or computers or visits to museums. I do know it's taken up time which could have been spent on reading books or sewing or learning how to write in *italics*.

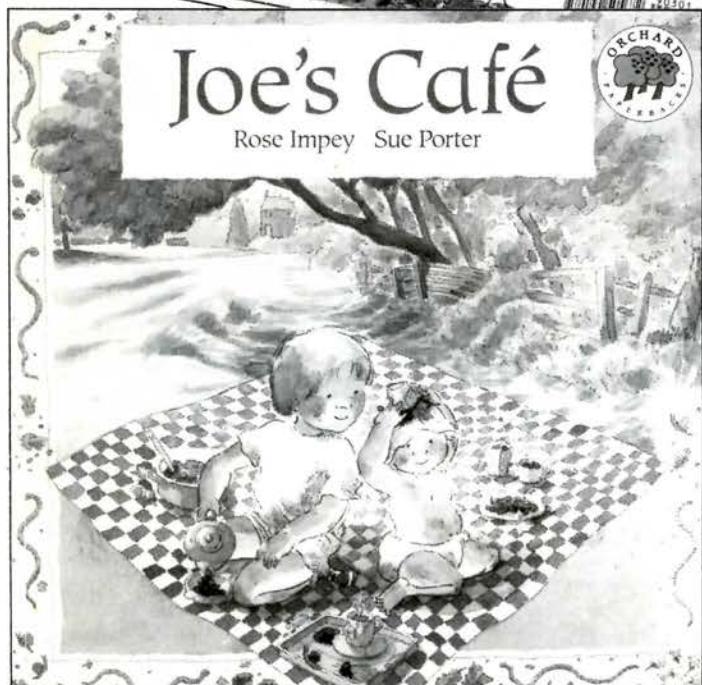
And yet, surely, *something* can be said for it all?

Well, of course, the choice of books is interesting. If your child has spent two years working her way through *Gayway* or *Ginn 360* it will be a shock to be presented with the readerly requirements of much of the literature of SATs. (We actually had a different problem at Level Two. So many of the books were familiar to our children, I had a job to provide some of them with a choice that would fulfil the need for a book they didn't know well.)

Joan Aiken

A NECKLACE OF
RAINDROPS
and other stories

Pictures by Jan Pienkowski



Yes, the books were, on the whole, all right. What we were asked to do with them, however, was very odd. The idea that, say, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* was only suitable for the emergent reader and couldn't be offered to a child at the independent reading stage, while *The Little Red Hen* is presented as only suitable for Level Two readers, is exactly the opposite of the apprenticeship model of reading, in which a good book is seen as valuable at any of the levels of reading development. Surely Level One can be assessed with *The Little Red Hen* and Level Two works just as well with Eric Carle? That, after all, is what multi-layered books such as these are so good at, enabling all children to interact with them and to show what they can do. The notion of books as rungs on a ladder which you leave behind as you progress past them is exactly what we've been fighting against for so long. Here it is again pretending to be valid for telling about a child's reading ability.

Still, the SAT has put a model of reading assessment into every school which is certainly better than using the Richter scale approach which might have been chosen. (This, of course, is the system in which the assumption is made that knowing a child's reading age tells you something about his reading development, attitudes and skills. It's about as meaningful as thinking that knowing what an earthquake measured on the Richter scale will tell you what it was like to live through it.)

Even then, though, this small benefit has been spoiled by the sloppiness with which it's been organised. The child who can read and understand *Little Bear* is a quite different reader from the one who can tackle *The Sick Cow*. The ability to read *Joe's Café* is no indicator of an understanding of *A Necklace of Raindrops*. The skills needed, the sophistication, the vocabulary are not the same. Should we choose to test the children on the easiest option offered to us so they can do their best, or should we use it as a learning experience and challenge them? (You must be joking . . . we want good scores for our school!)

Sloppiness even characterises the marking system. 'Errors' are only counted if the teacher intervenes to tell the child what the error is. Keep Quiet. No 'Teacher tolds', no failure. It's a good job we're all honest and conscientious and wouldn't dream of allowing a child to read nonsense for the sake of claiming another Level Two.

Not to be too grudging, though, I admit to reading about a school which took part in last year's trials. The staff were so taken by the miscue analysis model of assessing reading, they've carried on using it ever since. Certainly, if it is really new to a school, it can't help but be a good thing for the teachers to be introduced to the notion of looking at a child's strategies and behaviours as a way of learning about them. Just as it must be a good thing for reading schemers to be introduced to the notion that you don't need one to help a child learn to read.

I suppose, too, there's even some good to be found in the pathetic sight of parents fighting to buy the government approved books. Anything which gets parents into bookshops and Maurice Sendak into children's homes can't be all bad. (Even if I had to find out what books I was supposed to use for the SAT via a crumpled cutting from a parent's newspaper. Contempt for the professional can hardly have been more clearly expressed.)

Despite all this, however, I do know that very soon, perhaps not next year but certainly soon, the whole thing will disappear. It will have cost billions and it will be ended. There is no way in which this farce can be sustained year after year. It's too expensive, too impractical, too pointless. We shall have the dubious satisfaction of being in on the largest and most costly failed experiment in education ever. When the collapse comes and the statutory orders are withdrawn and the SATs are no more, we'll go back to asking teachers to know about children and tell what they know to parents. We may be more definite about how we know it and how we are going to tell it . . . but that is no bad thing. We may have new insights into the good, the bad and the ugly of assessment and reporting . . . that won't be bad either.

What we will have returned to, though, is what Alexander knew all along – the idea that the only way to know a child is to work with him and alongside him while he learns and that the only way to say something about a child's reading is to read things with him. All we can ask is, 'How long, Lord, how long?' ■

Liz Waterland is no stranger to regular readers of *BfK* – she's one of our reviewers and Headteacher of an infant school in Peterborough. She's also author of *Read With Me* (0 903355 17 5, £2.85) and editor of *Apprenticeship in Action: teachers write about Read With Me* (0 903355 31 0, £4.75). Both publications are from Signal at Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, Woodchester, Stroud, Glos. GL5 5EQ. The prices given include postage.

REVIEWS

Nursery/Infant

Animals Galore

Patricia McCarthy,
Picture Knight (Apr 91),
0 340 53764 7, £3.50

As grown-ups we forget how difficult English can be... Here is a book to remind us and help children learn the less common expressions used for collections of things. Beautiful pictures show 'a pride of lions', 'a herd of elephants', 'a colony of penguins'. The listening, looking child will enjoy a rich learning experience. Certainly recommended for 3-5s. MS

My Little Book of Numbers

0 7445 1473 8

My Little Book of Colours

0 7445 1474 6

Jan Ormerod, Walker (Mar 91), £2.50 each

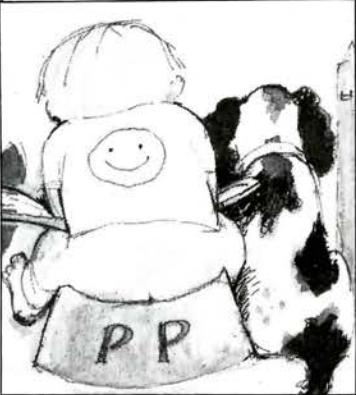
These titles with their sensitive and interesting pictures create much to discuss. The counting book has the unusual idea of showing a child on its birthdays from one to ten, with a party theme for each.

appeal to the traditional song with its familiar words so that the child returning to the book can look again at all the things belonging to Old MacDonald and enjoy repeating the words. MS

Peedie Peeble's Summer or Winter Book

Mairi Hedderwick, Red Fox (Apr 91), 0 09 975290 5, £3.50

'Peedie' means small if you live in Orkney... and can be used as a term of endearment.



So we have a real island flavour with this picture book about a toddler who turns the house upside down. We see what he gets up to in both summer and winter by a 'Lift-the-Flap' system which turns each right-hand spread into a full height picture. Unlike many books using this technique, here's one which won't get instantly dog-eared and torn. MS

Early Days

Penelope Rippon, Dent Ducklings (Mar 91), 0 460 88086 1, £2.99

Talking about babies is something many children want to do and here's a lovely picture book with soft pastel illustrations about a baby going through a normal day. Good for increasing vocabulary and language practice, as well as being very reassuring. MS

One Potato

Sue Porter, Picture Puffin (Mar 91), 0 14 050 993 3, £2.99

Goat, cow, sheep, pig and goose all want to eat the very last potato. They get into a complicated argument over it, during which ten little mice eat it all and the greedy animals end up laughing. A story, about five big animals and ten

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.



little ones, which may help children work out what is and isn't fair. MS

Me and My Dog

0 14 050 967 4

Me and My Cat

0 14 050 966 6

Maureen Galvani, Picture Puffin (Mar 91), £2.99 each

Two books in the same series - the first about a girl and her dog and the good times they have together, making a mess and generally playing. The second title is about the activities of a boy and his cat and their visit to the vet (a woman). Both have simple plots, much to discuss and plenty for small children to identify with. MS

Time to Get Up

Susan Hellard, Little Mammoth (Mar 91), 0 7497 0745 3, £3.99

A rather unlikely romp of a tale, told in rhyme, about a cock, a lark, a sheep and some mice who are all to be found under flaps in this book. Treated carefully, this will surely provide tremendous fun as the various animals are discovered. It may also enhance enjoyment of language as the pleasure of linking rhyming words is put into practice. MS

Let's Go, Ben!

Tony Bradman, ill. Honey De Lacey, Dent Ducklings (Mar 91), 0 460 88085 3, £2.99

Ben's mum wants to go out shopping. Where are the car keys? She turns the house upside down to find them. We know where they are, of course. A story just right for young children who'll enjoy the joke Ben is playing and recognise the everyday detail of the pictures. They're less likely, though, to recognise

the ending. What mum after wasting hours looking for those keys would be merely amused to find that her child had them all along? LW

Babar the Pilot

0 7497 0689 9

Babar's Day Out

0 7497 0697 X

Babar Goes Camping

0 7497 0688 0

Babar and the Doctor

0 7497 0696 1

Laurent De Brunhoff, Little Mammoth (Mar 91), £2.99 each



Reading these books will be as much of a self-indulgence for many adults as it was for me! I was curious to see whether the appeal for children has lasted, considering the undoubtedly superior competition available nowadays. It has! The books leap from everyday situations to bizarre adventures without a pause for breath, but The Royal Elephant family brazen it out without turning a hair and today's children accept it all - just as I did! JS

I Wish I Liked Rice Pudding

Joyce Dunbar, ill. Carol Thompson, Simon & Schuster (Feb 91), 0 7500 0776 1, £3.50



Small children sometimes learn their colours by noticing that different objects can be the same colour. The colours book shows one child getting dressed from his vest and pants to his thick outdoor clothes... on each opposite page is another object of the same colour. Shrewd stuff. MS

Old MacDonald Had a Farm

Prue Theobalds, Blackie (Mar 91), 0 216 93093 6, £2.99

Lovely pictures add fresh

Glorious glowing illustrations matched with scrumptious text make this a book guaranteed to have children and adults purring with satisfaction. It's delightful to have a charming new heroine to grace the bookshelves, who's not particularly pretty, not especially good, brave or clever – but very lovable. JS

Knickerless Nicola

Kara May, ill. Doffy Weir, Picturemac (Feb 91), 0 333 55132 X, £3.50

This, predictably I suppose, must rate as one of the most popular books this year, according to the borrowing rate and the number of children who've chosen to write glowing reviews. Nicola is a wonderfully subversive heroine, deciding in a number of very public places that knickers are not for her. After several hilarious events convince her that she should wear them, it's on her own terms and in her own good time that she deigns to do so!



No heavyweight this one, but great fun! JS

The Twins in France

0 09 971720 4

The Twins in Greece

0 09 071730 1

Sally Kilroy, Red Fox (Apr 91), £2.99 each
Two books intended to be read aloud to young children – they tell of the adventures of globe-trotting twins. The holidays are exactly those which children can expect to have when their families go on a package trip and they're described very simply, without any hint of the 'funny foreigner' attitude and often with a nice eye for the child's viewpoint ('Mum points out the tiny church but we can't wait to get onto the sand'). The illustrations capture the flavour of each country rather well.

Good for reading and talking about, both before a visit to give an idea of what is to come and afterwards to enable discussion of the child's experiences. LW

Suzy's Shoes

Susan Hill, ill. Priscilla Lamont, Picture Puffin (Mar 91), 0 14 054 241 8, £2.99

Suzy liked her shoes on, but most of all she liked to take them off. Everyone gave her reasons why she should wear them, but Suzy didn't see it that way as the gentle detailed illustrations show. It takes a pair of shiny new shoes with bows, and a visit to the Queen to convince her that shoes are best kept on – or are they?



"Your feet will get cold."

A highly enjoyable story where the mismatch between the text and what is revealed in the pictures is a reading lesson in itself. JB

Dorothy's Dream

Kady Macdonald Denton, Walker (Mar 91), 0 7445 1782 6, £2.99

Dorothy is a little girl who doesn't like sleeping in case she misses something and because her dreams are not very nice. One night, however, she has a good dream and, presumably, sleeps happily ever after.

The illustrations are attractive, fluid watercolours and the print clear and well-spaced. The story is rather fey for the tastes of young children, perhaps, and the implication that one can choose one's own dreams is odd. Parents might like the possibility of saying 'Go to sleep and you might have a nice dream like

Dorothy', but I don't think it would work! LW

We Love Them

Martin Waddell, ill. Barbara Firth, Walker (Mar 91), 0 7445 1774 5, £2.99

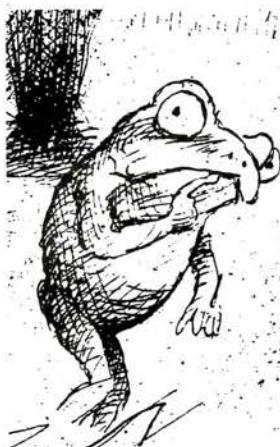
Another 'coming to terms with death' story which just manages to stay the right side of sentimentality. The children, who live in an idealised countryside, find a little rabbit which is looked after by their old dog. When he dies they find, with a fortuitousness one can only envy, a little puppy for the rabbit to look after. It's a little pat to an adult view, but I must say my children enjoyed it . . . except for the child who said, 'What if the puppy belonged to someone? They've stolen it!' LW

The Teddy Robber

Ian Beck, Picture Corgi (Mar 91), 0 552 52595 6, £2.99

A very good value, large-format picture book with an original theme of a giant who is seen by the hero, Tom, as a robber who steals Tom's teddy. When Tom follows the giant to get his teddy back, however, he discovers the giant is not the baddy he seems and is only stealing teddies in an attempt to find his own lost teddy. The pictures are bold, the text brief, interesting and clear.

An exemplary tale of how deprivation can cause criminality. I'm surprised the Home Secretary hasn't had it banned! LW

**The Great White Man-Eating Shark – a Cautionary Tale**

Margaret Mahy, ill. Jonathan Allen, Picture Puffin (Mar 91), 0 14 054 187 X, £2.99

Norvin's imitation of a Great White Man-Eating Shark is wholly convincing: each time he straps on his dorsal fin, the cove becomes entirely his for a few days. But when his acting attracts the attention of an amorous lady shark, it's Norvin who has to leave the water.

Margaret Mahy's unfailing talent for wordcraft and storytelling are matched by Jonathan Allen's depiction of Junior Jaws Norvin and the panic he causes in this diverting piece of nonsense. JB

Henry Pond the Poet

Dick King-Smith, Knight (Feb 91), 0 340 54595 X, £2.50

Henry Pond the toad is determined to impress the

charming Victoria Garden-Pool, but she scorns his poetic efforts preferring instead 'toads of action'. So when Larry Lake, his rival for the lovely Victoria, threatens him with a good hiding, Henry has to draw on his hitherto undiscovered agility to win his lady's heart. Once again Dick King-Smith demonstrates his ability to create real literature for newly independent readers. JB

Infant/Junior

Awkward Aardvark

ill. Adrienne Kennaway, Picture Knight (Apr 91), 0 340 52581 9, £3.50

The peace of the night forest, with its star-sprinkled purple sky, is shattered by Aardvark's awful snoring. Spurred on by Mongoose, all the animals co-operate in an effort to put a stop to the row; however, it's not lion's roar or rhino's brawn that brings night-time

peace. Instead, the tiny termites finally provide the solution and Aardvark changes his habits and becomes a nocturnal animal.

Adrienne Kennaway's animal illustrations are superb. The unusual viewpoints and close-ups of the animals make them all the more dramatic, and the yellows, browns and purples convey the sultry atmosphere of the African setting. JB



'this superb compilation will be enormously useful to all who work with children and books.'

Jane Inglis - The School Librarian
Anne Rowe - Formerly of the Reading Centre, Reading

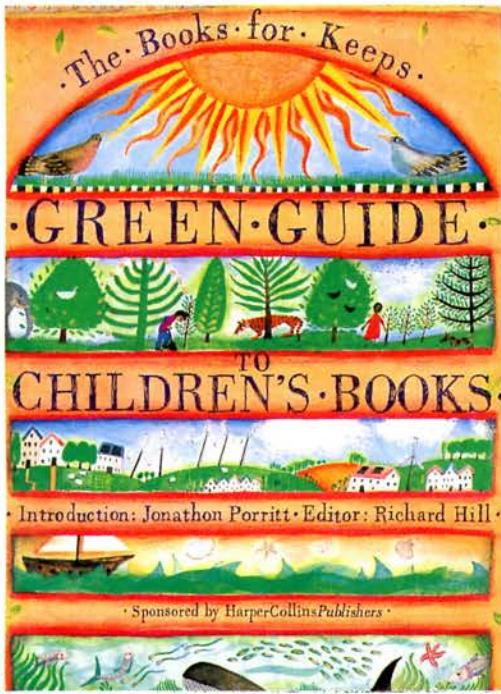
'I knew it would be, I knew it! Great!'

The GREEN GUIDE TO CHILDREN'S BOOKS

'Absolutely brilliant... a superb resource for teachers, librarians and parents. Every school and home should get one.'

John Howson, Education Officer, Friends of the Earth

A BfK Publication Edited by Richard Hill Introduction by Jonathon Porritt



THE COVER

Designed by award-winning artist Jane Ray, the Green Guide cover encapsulates the dilemma and the dichotomy of our beautiful but endangered planet. Of course you will have to buy a copy to see the second half of Jane's message on the back!

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The Contents

It's a bibliography, a fully annotated listing of the best 'green' fiction, poetry and information books for children currently available, compiled by three outstanding children's book critics. Plus feature articles, authors talking and much, much more...

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by Jonathon Porritt

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SHADES OF GREEN

A collection of feature articles about the environment, education and books.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Resource Packs (compiled by John Howson)

Further Reading (compiled by Sue Greig)

Useful organisations

AUTHOR/TITLE INDEX

Dilly the Dinosaur, Superstar

Tony Bradman,
Mammoth (Mar 91),
0 7497 0431 4, £2.50

This is the eighth collection of short stories featuring the ever-popular Dilly, the world's naughtiest dinosaur. Here, he acquires a pet, is talent-spotted by Rex of the Rockosaurs, learns an important lesson and gets a 'child' minder. Doubtless Dilly fans will be delighted by his latest escapades which should also win him some new friends among young apprentice readers.

JB

Willie Whiskers

Margaret Gordon,
Young Puffin (Feb 91),
0 14 03 4068 8, £2.50

Four short stories revolving around a greedy little mouse who lives with his family at a house in Orange Blossom Avenue which they share with a human family, Henry, Jenny and their mum and dad. The stories centre on Willie's constant search for food and the scrapes this gets him into. The action is seen both from the human and mouse viewpoints, and the numerous line drawings integrated with the large-printed text add to the fun.

JB

The Sneeze

David Lloyd, ill. Fritz Wegner, Walker (Mar 91), 0 7445 1784 2, £2.99

A hat, a seat, a hall, a girl, a dog, a man, a newspaper and a suitcase – the ingredients of this story are captioned on the first page. These are then put together in amusing and unlikely combinations on the right-hand pages in answer to a series of questions as the story unfolds on the left. But what is in the suitcase? The clue is in the title. This book, which is at once a game and a lesson in storymaking, is given an attractive and old-fashioned setting in Fritz Wegner's illustrations.

JB

Walk Rabbit Walk

Elizabeth Attenborough and Colin McNaughton, Little Mammoth (Mar 91), 0 7497 0580 9, £2.99

The quickest way to Eagle's house isn't necessarily by car, balloon, helicopter, motorbike or even roller skates as bear, fox, pig, cat and donkey discover. Rabbit's views on the joys of walking take on a new significance in these days of green consciousness and give this popular story, first published in 1977, an added dimension.

JB

The Hefty Fairy – The Tale of a Tooth Fairy

Nicholas Allen, Red Fox (Mar 91), 0 09 967550 1, £3.99

When the Hefty Fairy finds a twenty-pence-piece, she decides to try and exchange it for a child's tooth. Despite her arms and legs as thick as mushroom stalks and a body the shape of an egg, she succeeds. The trouble is none of the other fairies believes her – except the most important one of all – the Fairy Queen.

Being fat can be anything but fun and there are few positive images in children's picture books so it's good to have a fat heroine in this longish story.

JB

My First Picture Joke Book

Shoo Rayner, Picture Puffin (Mar 91), 0 14 050 925 9, £2.99

This book is bound to be a sure-fire success – hoary old jokes with catchy illustrations. There's a queue a mile long to borrow it in my class and it's a relief to be able to respond (albeit ad nauseum) to jokes that have an ending!

JS

Python's Party

Brian Wildsmith, Oxford (Mar 91), 0 19 272229 8, £2.95

You sup with the devil at your peril and Brian Wildsmith's brilliant animal fable illustrates this perfectly. Only through the chance appearance of the elephant are the foolish animal guests rescued from being Python's party tea! A Wildsmith revival is long overdue and the stunning quality of this work hasn't been in any way diminished in this edition. Oxford are to be congratulated!

JS

Amy Said

Martin Waddell, ill. Charlotte Voake, Walker (Mar 91), 0 7445 1779 6, £2.99

This is a real 'Oh, no!' book. The children in my class bounced up and down with gasps of, I like to think, genuine horror as two children reduced their grandmother's house close to ruin during the course of an unbelievable day! The enormity of the devastation is only enhanced by Charlotte Voake's understated illustrations. Being rather literal-minded, I was trying to work out how the mess was to be cleared up and it was interesting that more than a few of my pupils were similarly disturbed by the story. Gran would seem to be either masochistic or aiming for sainthood!

MS

Ears and the Secret Song

Meryl Doney, ill. William Geldart, Picture Knight (Apr 91), 0 340 54657 3, £2.99

A good book for discussing life and death, which encloses these heady themes within the simply told story of a harvest mouse's year. Perhaps a little precious in its style, it's nevertheless honest and clearly told and the pictures are charming. Quite what your average urban child will understand without help I'm not sure, but if support is forthcoming there's a real experience here for many children.

LW

Grandma's Bill

Martin Waddell, ill. Jane Johnson, Simon & Schuster (Feb 91), 0 7500 0307 3, £3.50

A very attractive book indeed which deals with a difficult subject. Grandma shows her little grandson the photo album in which the family history is stored. 'My Bill' is not grandson Bill, but the Grandad he never knew. A combination of black-and-white and colour drawings points the contrast between photo, reality and memory, and the fashions and habits of the past are interestingly portrayed. It's a difficult concept well put over and will provide much discussion and interest for children old enough to deal with the complexities of family history and relationships.

LW

Josie Smith at School

Magdalen Nabb, ill. Pirkko Vainto, Young Lions (Jan 91), 0 00 674123 1 £2.50

**It's Not Fair!**

Bel Mooney, ill. Margaret Chamberlain, Mammoth (Feb 91), 0 7497 0575 2, £2.50

Josie Smith and Kitty in *It's Not Fair!* come from an honourable line of realistic, funny and warm-hearted little girls which began with Milly-Molly-Mandy, went on to My Naughty Little Sister and is now represented by such as Melanie Brown and Fancy Nancy. These stories are entirely convincing, often very funny (I especially liked the chaos at the school concert in *Josie Smith at School*) and will be instantly enjoyed by 6 to 8

year-olds who'll recognise both Josie, the well-meaning, and Kitty, the cheeky. And their schools!

LW

Cloudy

Deborah King, Red Fox (Mar 91), 0 09 980870 6, £3.99

The artwork is superb. The activities of a little grey cat throughout twenty-four hours are depicted in beautiful watercolour in which the light has a life of its own. A sparse text gives the words of the cat as she describes her day . . . and night . . . and the language is demanding, with words such as 'stalking', 'lurked', 'prowl', and 'dusk' which will stretch many young children's vocabulary.

Well worth adding to the book collection for more thoughtful literary moments.

LW

The Tale of Peter Rabbit

0 14 054 295 7

The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck

0 14 054 297 3

Beatrix Potter, Picture Puffin (Mar 91), £2.99 each

Ever since the ghastly mess Ladybird made of the Beatrix Potter books, the idea of anything other than tiny, hardbacked books published by Frederick Warne as vehicles for her writing has sent shivers down my spine. However, Puffin have simply taken the original text and paintings and enlarged them to conventional paperback size. This means they're much easier to read to groups of children – the print is now big enough to be shared with young children as are the pictures.

However, much has also been lost. The little books have a place of their own; child-size, intimate, special, they've been part of so many warm close storytimes and have enticed so many children to want to hold and read them. This is entirely missing in these editions.

The answer, of course, is that children should have both. These are not a substitute for the originals, but certainly will enhance them, especially in schools.

LW

Fifty Red Night Caps

Inga Moore, Walker (Mar 91), 0 7445 1783 4, £3.99

A retelling of the traditional tale of how Nico lost his Nan's knitting to a horde of monkeys while on his way to the market and of how he regained it. The story is shiningly simple, a few brief paragraphs placed amidst pages of vividly depicted sprawling jungle. This book is delightful to look at, to read alone and to share.

GH

The Fizziness Business

Robin Kingsland,
0 00 674172 X

**Almost Goodbye,
Guzzler**

Helen Cresswell and
Judy Brown,
0 00 673881 8
Young Lions (Jan 91),
£2.25 each

Two entertaining additions to the 'Jets' range. In **The Fizziness Business** two escaped convicts attempt to steal the Crown Jewels with the assistance of a dastardly crow and a couple of ingenious concoctions. Unfortunately, their plans fail to allow for their own spectacular stupidity.

Evening, Wimpy

Jimmy O. T. Caw.

Almost Goodbye, Guzzler is a variant on the theme of the perverse fulfilment of wishes granted by genies. Schoolkid Guzzler relishes becoming invisible, but when he achieves this state his clothes remain visible, causing an apparent plague of hallucinations in his neighbourhood.

In both books the usual 'Jets' blend of extravagant humour, cartoon dialogue and bold illustration works its reliable magic. GH

The School Trip

Nick Butterworth and
Mick Inkpen, Picture
Knight (Apr 91),
0 340 54719 7, £2.99

A beautifully illustrated and handsomely printed book describing a class visit to the Natural History Museum. Most children will find something to recognise and enthuse over in the text or pictures – nausea on the bus, awesome exhibits, the teachers' ancestral output of corny jokes and vapid tasks. But aren't most school trips more rife with catastrophe than this one, or have I just been unlucky with my outings?



A bit more chaos would have added a touch of realism to a somewhat bland storyline.

GH

Henry and the Sea

Joe Buffalo Stuart and
Alexander Stuart, Puffin
(Feb 91), 0 14 03 4433 0,
£2.50

A sick child convalescing at the seaside falls into conversation with the sea. They get on so well together that the sea decides to accompany Henry on his visit to a London hospital, hiding itself in an old paper cup and leaving the world devoid of oceans.

The political consequences of this phenomenon are amusingly described and the stormy relationship between the sick boy and his awkward new friend provides some poignant moments. This touching story was the idea of the author's 5-year-old son, a cancer patient, who died before the book was published. GH

The Summertime Santa

Hugh Scott, Walker
(Mar 91), 0 7445 1725 7,
£2.99

Caireen and Edward decide to investigate when the disappearance of their toys coincides with the arrival next door of a group of suspiciously wrinkly children singing melancholy songs. When they discover that Santa has declared himself redundant after failing to receive any gratitude for his efforts, they strive to redeem the situation with the help of a mountain of stolen socks.

This is a strange story, told in odd, jerky prose which may make an interesting excursion for independent readers in search of the offbeat. GH

Junior/Middle

Rhinestone Rhino

Adrian Henri,
Mammoth (Feb 91),
0 7497 0111 0, £2.50

Several of the poems in this collection provide light entertainment. Some, such as the haiku and the ironically prosaic 'Wartime Child', work much more hauntingly. Although others evoked no more than a shrug of the shoulders in my audience, this is a very appealing book providing access to a range of moods, from the flippantly comical to the elegiac. GH

Roseanne and the Magic Mirror

Virginia Ironside,
Walker (Mar 91),
0 7445 1723 0, £2.99

Roseanne, an unhappy schoolgirl isolate, gets the chance to abandon the dingy ordinariness of herself when a magic mirror separates the saintly and sinister aspects of her character, requiring her to choose between them. After experimenting with both personas, Roseanne manages to integrate her selves into a state of enriched mediocrity.

Here is a book full of humorous incidents with a sense of serious dilemma at its core, and a sense of sympathy for the troubled children represented by the heroine. GH

Spitfire Summer

Terrance Dicks,
Red Fox (Apr 91),
0 09 968850 6, £2.50

Jonathan shares his life with the ghost of a child who died in World War Two. When he is summoned to a remote village to visit his great aunt, another wartime phantom draws him into perilous re-enactments of the Battle of Britain.

A well-knit thriller, somewhat blemished by the Bigglesque swash of the battle scenes. It should appeal to ghost story enthusiasts in search of something light but intriguing. GH

The Spell Singer and Other Stories

Beverley Matthias (ed.),
Puffin (Feb 91),
0 14 03 4398 9, £2.50



Each of these ten stories features a disabled child. Notably Alison Prince's 'The Pigeon', Vivien Alcock's 'The Crossing' and Allan Baillie's 'Mates' enable the reader to share vividly in the experiences of the main characters; these three, with low-key realism, show disabled children being valued and appreciated. More negative notes are struck by

the two stories in folk-tale tradition, Michael Morpurgo's 'Gone to Sea' and Joan Aiken's 'The Tinker's Curse'. The first, in its depiction of a lonely club-footed boy who foregoes human company to join a seal colony, reinforces ideas of rejection and separation. In the second, the father of a deaf girl who gains her hearing finds 'that she was not like everyone else' and regrets his former unkindness to her; this would surely let down a deaf reader very badly indeed.

A mixed collection of which the best are to be highly recommended while others require more caution. LN

A First Golden Treasury of Animal Verse

Mark Daniel (comp.),
Macmillan (Mar 91),
0 333 55191 5, £4.99

A most attractively produced book with many colour plates and line-drawings but disappointing in its range. It's very traditional in approach (there's nothing here that couldn't have been anthologised 50 years ago). Along with favourites from Hardy, Yeats, Blake and Emily Dickinson go a great many undistinguished and sentimental jingles, resulting in a narrowness of focus and an over-emphasis on twee anthropomorphism. LN

The Island of Horses

Eilís Dillon, Faber
(Apr 91), 0 571 16197 9,
£2.50

Eilís Dillon's adventure story set on the west coast of Ireland, first published in 1956, retains its appeal. The story of two teenage boys who are attracted by the secrets of the Island of Horses is fast-paced and exciting – also very well written with vivid detail and description, convincing characters and a real sense of maritime community life. Recommended for able readers. LN

Rescuing Gloria

Gillian Cross, Mammoth
(Feb 91), 0 7497 0106 4,
£2.50



Following his move to an inner-city area, Leo is lonely until his chance adoption of a goat, Gloria, brings friendship and amusing adventures. Engaging and sensitively written, the underlying values of community and racial equality, combined with the happy outcome, create an uplifting story which will be enjoyed by junior readers. LN

Henry Goes Green

Maureen Stewart, Puffin (Apr 91), 0 14 03.4507 8, £2.50

This book – the third in a series involving Henry and his Greek girlfriend Voula – consists of a series of letters between the two, Henry having moved away from Melbourne with his mother and her environmentally-aware boyfriend, Jake. In fact the 'green' theme is dropped by the end and there's little development of plot or character. Jake, in particular, is crudely stereotyped. LN

A Gerbil in the Hoover

Jerome Fletcher, Corgi (Mar 91), 0 552 52588 X, £2.99



A collection of the most weird and wonderful poems I've read for ages. Each is hilarious in its own right and, read from cover to cover, the book is going to receive the ultimate accolade – being loved to death. I adored 'A maggot' with the letters of support from other minibeasts and the poem that couldn't find an empty page to rest on. Just the thing for the reluctant poetry reader. All my Y4s want is 'the rude book'! PH

The Return of the Baked Bean

Debra Oswald, ill. Matthew Martin, Puffin (Apr 91), 0 14 03.4424 1, £2.50

The Terrific family – yes, they really are called that – have been going strong since **Me and Barry Terrific** which was, well, terrific! Enough! Gina's best friend deserts her after stardom in a TV commercial and Dad's in love with a rodeo-riding policewoman. Gina decides that running away with the Baked Bean is the answer. DB

Our romantic solitary wanderer is quickly joined by Waxhead, an inland surfer searching for the sea. Together their adventures sweep along perilously like the Bean in the flood itself. Plenty of opportunity for characterisation so it makes a great read-aloud and the terrific title (*Ooops!*) ensures it stays off the shelves. PH

Winjin' Pom

Terrance Dicks and Richard Carpenter, ill. Graham Higgins, Piper (Mar 91), 0 330 32089 0, £2.99

A spin-off from the TV programme. When I read this to Y4, I really worked on my Gullagaloona 'Strine' – that's what it does to you. You need to follow the action carefully and read slowly since things happen very fast and the pages are densely packed. Some of the puns are a bit obscure for younger readers. Having said that, it's hilariously funny with some excruciating jokes that had me winjin' and groanin'. As a television related book it works well but without the visual support I'm not sure it will stand alone. PH

Spaceboy at Burlap Hall

Virginia Ironside, Walker (Jan 91), 0 7445 1351 0, £2.99

This yarn gushes with all the tacky whackiness of a B-movie cartoon strip. The maelstrom of detail could irritate readers wanting to get to the end. The stereotyped pupils and staff of the benighted school are forced to reckon with not only a vindictive schools inspector (on a bike?), but also a pair of prankish space boys with hypnotic powers and scaly skin. No wonder the Head drinks whisky out of his ink well! Only buy it if you've got cash to spare and the prequel, **Vampire Master**, took off. DB

The Glass Bird

Enid Richemont, ill. Caroline Ansley, Walker (Mar 91), 0 7445 1730 3, £2.99

Glittering, winking and

sparkling, the glass bird beguiles Adam into the strangest of surreal adventures. It's a wonderful secret for Adam who feels isolated at school because of his gentle Quaker life-style. The bird soon looks unwell and Adam's concern forces him to share his secret with a friend. Although posing a problem for both boys, its magical powers bring them something even more wonderful.

As a read-aloud or a read-alone, this sensitive story also provides a good way to introduce different religious beliefs without an obvious manipulation of the story. Some lovely word pictures of Adam and the bird. PH

presenting a fresh view of people who might well live next door.

PH

Warboy

Michael Foreman, Puffin (Mar 91), 0 14 03.4299, £2.99

With 'History' making a more visible presence via the National Curriculum, this is one way it could be learnt as Michael Foreman tells us about his childhood in wartime Suffolk. I loved all the minutiae that brought a fresh perspective on a world that's now past – the beauty of the gas mask for making rude noises and the other boys' fathers saying goodnight to a little boy they wished was their own, for instance.

A vivid fresh look into a well covered story that's as good as sitting on grandad's knee. The paperback format lacks the space and colour of the original hardback but don't let this put you off.

PH

**Laughter is an Egg**

John Agard, Puffin (Mar 91), 0 14 03.4072 6, £2.50

I doubt whether readers would get the most out of this poetry collection simply by dipping in. This is an exploration of laughter through four dozen poems, riddles and rhymes that slowly build up a picture of what the poet is getting at. Youngsters will possibly find them mysterious and quizzing rather than side-splitting. It's well worth stocking for kids who want to think. DB

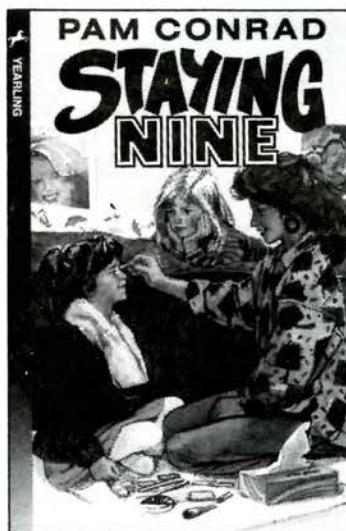
DB

Monstrosities

Charles Fuge, Red Fox (Apr 91), 0 09 967330 4, £3.50

A collection of poems about monsters, many with comically strange names, by a range of mostly well-anthologised poets: Hughes, McGough, Patten, Nash and Tolkien. Fuge's black-and-white drawings emphasise the childishness of the monsters, playing the fool with strange shapes. Darker meanings are suggested by Hughes' 'Ghost Crabs' and the haunting drawings that accompany it. AJ

AJ

**Staying Nine**

Pam Conrad, ill. Chris Molan, Yearling (Mar 91), 0 440 86273 6, £2.50

Heather loves being nine and doesn't want to be ten. By using all the delaying tactics she can muster – no party, no presents, no candles and even no cake – she feels that nine might be able to go on forever. At an unbirthday party, however, Rose Rita makes Heather an irresistible offer: can her resolve hold out or will she crack?

I loved the story with all its attention to details that made the Fitzes such a loving, warm family. A well-paced book



Middle/Secondary

South by South-East

Anthony Horowitz, Lions (Mar 91), 0 00 673821 4, £2.99

This spoof spy thriller continues the adventures of Nick Diamond and his gormless brother Tim, Private Detectives. Unwillingly recruited by MI6, they find themselves involved in a desperate trip to Amsterdam to foil an assassination attempt. Fast-paced, tongue-in-cheek and delighting in

word-play, it's enjoyably different – ideal for enticing reluctant teenage readers into the library. LN

The Game of Life

Norma Howe, Pan (Mar 91), 0 330 31424 6, £3.50

What may appear at first to be a random sequencing of events disguises a carefully worked-out structure with several complementary threads. First-person narrator, Cairo,

struggles with the consequences of her own and other people's actions and tries to make sense of it all: first love, her aunt's unhappiness, her sister's rash engagement and her own sense of guilt over a cousin's accident. More thoughtful than you might expect from the teen-romance packaging. LN

Potts: The double life of E W Potts schoolboy

Jim Eldridge, ill. Ann Johns, Red Fox (Apr 91), 0 09 974560 7, £2.99

Edward Potts, owner of a brain described as that of a 'paralysed chicken', dreams his way through an entire week at school. Falling far short of paralysis, Ed's brain is a feverish, ferment of activity. Every detail of school routine

sparks off a wild sequence of cerebral events, usually flattering to Ed of course! Only life's harsh reality grounds his flights of fancy but, encouraged by eternal optimism, even this has compensations.

Experience of formal exams is needed to understand some of the jokes, but this is a very funny book for competent readers who enjoy giggling at the more ludicrous side of school life.

PH

Unbearable!

Paul Jennings, Puffin (Apr 91), 0 14 03 4476 4, £2.99

Eight bizarre tales that'll get their kudos from poo, vomit, licking squashed flies and disgusting feet, if from nothing else. They make a quick, highly engaging read which, no doubt, will take off as meteorically as the other collections by this author. There's a cleverly orchestrated anticipation as you wait for the surprise ending that you know will come but you can never quite suss out!

DB

The Middle of Somewhere

Sheila Gordon, Orchard (Feb 91), 1 85213 298 1, £4.99

This quiet South African story tells of the fears and hardships of black 9-year-old, Rebecca, as she anticipates her family's enforced removal from their village to the utterly inhospitable and inconvenient Pofadderloof Township. There is less anger than sadness in the novel and an impressive under-scoring of the unity between the villagers in the face of blatant injustice. Politically it ought to provide sound food for thought about the apartheid issue.

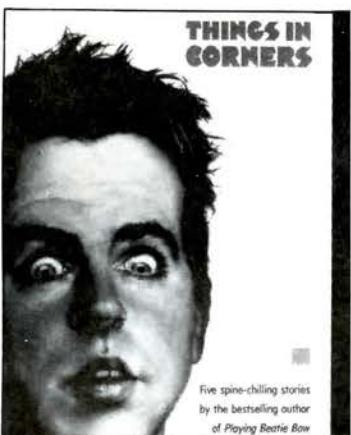
DB

The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle

Avi, Orchard (Feb 91), 1 852113 300 7, £4.99

A re-creation of life on a nineteenth-century sailing ship with a well-known cast of character types and dramatic happenings: inhuman captain, rebellious crew, attempted mutiny, murder and a storm at sea. It's well done, full of careful details (with helpful facts at the back) and, to give it a dash of novelty, the central character is a lone girl passenger who takes up with the crew and casts her dresses and tresses aside.

AJ

**THINGS IN CORNERS**

Five spine-chilling stories by the bestselling author of *Playing Beatie Bow*

Things in Corners

Ruth Park, Puffin (Feb 91), 0 14 03 2713 4, £3.50

Children who go straight for 'spine-chilling' titles are often disappointed. The real interest in these five long stories is the way that strange happenings transform children's lives. There's a range of settings and unusual incidents (my favourite is the flying old lady), but the focus is on the children who are caught up in

the loss or separation of parents and cope with the frustrations of relationships and try to cement new ones. An impressive lightness of touch here.

AJ

Our Kid

Ann Pilling, Puffin (Feb 91), 0 14 03 2974 9, £2.99

Frank's life is dogged by lack of cash, a manic elder brother, no mother and a father who takes a lot of watching over. As this lengthy tale slowly wends its way from beginning to end, Frank starts to appreciate that his problems are relatively unimportant and that love will resolve most difficulties if you'll let it.

The notion of writing about aspects of caring love is a noble one. I'm not sure that in this case it makes an enthralling read. Perhaps the message is too weighty for the medium.

DB

Tug of War

Joan Lingard, Puffin (Feb 91), 0 14 03 4323 7, £2.99

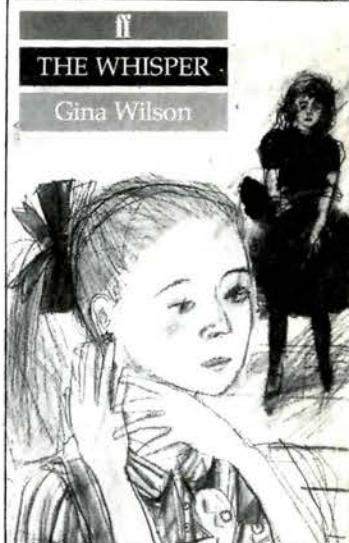
This would complement or replace the oft-used *The Silver Sword* in providing 2nd and 3rd-year secondary readers with an occasionally sentimentalised, but gripping, account of the hardships of refugees in the Second World War.

The Petersons are forced to flee Latvia to escape Russian occupation. Their eldest son, Hugh, becomes separated from them and, believing his family dead, reconstructs his life. There's the inevitable reunion but events are largely handled crisply and sincerely. Consider this for a class set – and certainly stock it in the library.

VR

THE WHISPER

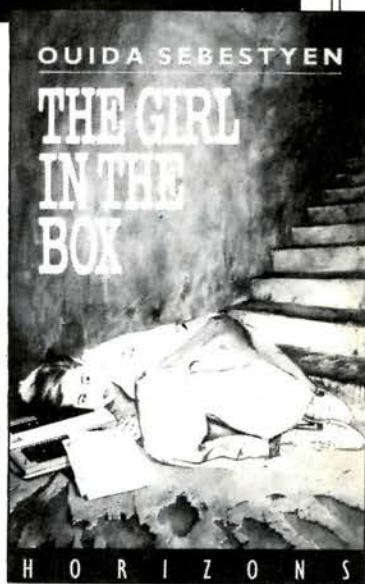
Gina Wilson

**The Whisper**

Gina Wilson, Faber (Apr 91), 0 571 16198 7, £2.50

The childishness of the cover illustration belies the seriousness of the issues dealt with in this book. The Fry family take in Marie; orphaned, musically gifted and good-natured, she unknowingly presents a threat to the Frys' daughter, Lily, who defends her position in family and community by starting rumours. Having succeeded in driving Marie away, Lily realises how close they might have been and regrets her actions. Her repentance at the end is too self-indulgently complete to be wholly realistic, but 2nd and 3rd-year secondary girls will find this a thoughtful and absorbing read.

VR

OUIDA SEBESTYEN**THE GIRL IN THE BOX**

depth of what she is recalling. Out of the darkness comes a determined attempt to hold on to life and an achingly brave

Older Readers

The Sandman's Eyes

Patricia Windsor, Pan Horizons (Mar 91), 0 330 29749 X, £3.50

Michael Thorne returns to his home town from two years at a special school where he was sent after being implicated in the death of a girl in the local park. The story follows his attempts to come to terms with his return and track down the real murderer. The murder mystery is cleverly bound up with Michael's own search for identity as the novel heads to the inevitable (and literally) chilling climax. This is one for book boxes.

AJ

mentor Irene Stark, who believes 'Women have to band together, because when it comes right down to it, our women friends are all we have'. The feminist message is inescapable throughout but it's not necessarily preachy – in fact, in many ways, the most strident protagonists attract little sympathy, more deserved dislike and distrust. Definitely a novel to make adolescents think. It's a shame males are unlikely to pick it up.

The Silver Kiss

Annette Curtis Klause, Doubleday (Apr 91), 0 385 40154 X, £6.99

This gripping thriller/suspense tale is a notable achievement for a first novel. The story of Simon, the tortured, undead vampire who 'looked like an angel in a Renaissance painting', captures the reader with its poignant, imprisoning sadness, just as he holds Zoe

in thrall. She too is a being who knows pain and suffering and commands our sympathy. Death and loss, life and love are explored with compelling artistry and sensitivity. Rather costly for schools at £6.99 (but it is a paperback original). So far it's my book of the year!

DB

The Girl in the Box

Ouida Sebestyen, Pan Horizons (Mar 91), 0 330 31032 1, £2.99

A remarkable book. Jacklyn McGee, kidnapped and shut in a dark cellar, writes a monologue of letters looking, at first, to guide those who would rescue her. The letters take us back through the apparently motiveless kidnapping to the details of her life. Her words create understanding of what's happened, driven by the increasing urgency of time passing and the increasing

acknowledgement of the realities of existence. A book to teach with and to share. AJ

Just Be Gorgeous

Barbara Wersba, Pan Horizons (Mar 91), 0 330 31101 8, £2.99

Parental expectations can be difficult things - Heidi struggles against the images conjured for her by her divorced parents. When she meets Jeffrey, a dancer busking for a living, she realises that what other people think doesn't matter.

Jeffrey is gay, unconventional and misunderstood: what Heidi comes to understand is that this last is true of many people. Her growing self-awareness will strike chords with many teenagers - particularly girls. Barbara Wersba has produced another absolute winner! VR

Some Other War

Linda Newbery, Armada (Dec 90), 0 00 693614 8, £2.99

The horrors of the Great War have been graphically - if voyeuristically - described on many occasions. Linda Newbery's characters engage the reader's sympathies and engender a clear awareness of the horrors of warfare, undulled by sentiment.



Brother and sister, Jack and Alice Smallwood transcend their class to work and fight as equals with their social superiors. Insights into the traumas of battlefields and the Women's Suffrage Movement are offered in this powerful anti-war message. A long and stimulating read - highly recommended for 3rd-years and above, of either sex. VR

Man in Motion

Jan Mark, Puffin (Apr 91), 0 14 03.4029 7, £2.99

I laughed out loud on several occasions while reading this book. Jan Mark has undoubtedly mastered the polished one-liner. The trouble is that the whole book is imbued with the same high gloss and the social comment - racial discrimination - emerges as a carefully veneered package.

However, this short, snappy story about Lloyd's enforced removal to a town far away from familiar places and childhood friends, and his eventual absorption into his new life, will entertain more literate males in the 3rd and 4th years. VR

Audio Tapes

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent story tapes.

The Tiger Who Came to Tea

Judith Kerr, read by Geraldine McEwan, Collins, 16-min. cassette with paperback, £3.99
A simple and appealing story which really lends itself to being read aloud, much to the delight of young children. On one side is a dramatised version with the sound effects of the Tiger who invites himself to tea at Sophie's house, gulping down all the milk in the jug and crunching up all the tins in the larder, as well as talking to himself. The other side is a straight, crisp narration in impeccable Geraldine McEwan style, which can be listened to with the quality book, by following either the words or the irresistible Judith Kerr pictures.

Little Bear Lost and Other Stories

Old Bear and Other Stories

Jane Hissey, read by Anton Rodgers, Random Century Tellastory, each title one 29-min. cassette, £3.99 each

These stories about Old Bear, Rabbit, Duck and Little Bear are the sort of secure, cosy Teddy Bear tales which very young children listen to over and over again. Nobody finds Little Bear during Hide and Seek; there's a winter picnic and a slide down the hill in the picnic basket and threadbare Old Bear is rescued from the attic in a handkerchief parachute. Anton Rodgers gives the animals great personality and is admirably unpatronising. The cassette is well-produced with varied intermittent music by Terry Trower, including some delicate piano in 'The Bunny Dancer'.

The Space Boat

Book 3 of 'Read With Me', read by Carole Boyd and Richard Bebb, 42-page Ladybird book with Pickwick 30-min. cassette, £3.49

This scheme's six books introduces 800 words with the 15 key words of Book 1 repeated and carried forward in each one. The stories are Kate and Tom's adventures in make-believe lands with their dog, Sam, whose 'woof' serves as a turn over tone. Carole Boyd talks about the pictures on each page, introducing counting and colours, whilst

Richard Bebb reads the text - e.g. 'Look at the fish in the water' - first at reading pace and then at normal speed. There are five book and cassette packages in this 'Read With Me' series, including a pre-reader, and they make very good structured practice for learners.

Vanishing Cream and Friends

Written and read by Johnny Morris, Craftsman Audio Fiction (PO Box 38, Stevenage SG1 2SP), 50-min. cassette, £3.99
Narration in Johnny Morris's unmistakable style: the friendly involvement of the listener - 'You know what a trombone is, don't you?' - and an inimitable range of voices. Combined with the startling, special music, the sound effects make the stories a remarkably exciting listening experience. The Chinese-speak of Little Boy Green when he gets carried away reading about China, Pah Pah Gefluegel's trombone and the haunted cry of Shifty the removals horse who hates going backwards are just a few. Imaginative and great fun for round-about-fives.

Lion at School and Other Stories

Philippa Pearce, read by Jan Francis, Chivers, two cassettes, unabridged, 2 hrs 6 mins, £9.95 + VAT

These are leisurely but exciting, home-centred stories for young children. The Lion insists on going to school with the Little Girl and frightens off the school bully. Judy's crooked finger gives her everything she points at, which makes for trouble when she points at the sweet shop; whilst the Great Sharp Scissors cut anything - and that means the table and the sofa legs. Jan Francis is an expressive reader with convincing characterisation and these nine stories, combining security with flights of imagination, make good bedtime or Infants' storytime listening.

The Last Slice of Rainbow and Other Stories

Joan Aiken, read by Carole Boyd, Random Century Tellastory, 1-hr cassette, £3.99
Typical Joan Aiken magic: highly original ideas with vigorous, descriptive language. There's a bath full of spiders

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



which all turn into handsome men when rescued; young Queen Christina whose hair screams and screams after she cuts off her cat's whiskers; and the key-shaped leaf that fits the lock in the goblin's stomach and makes dreams come true. Carole Boyd is a warm, accomplished reader and her varied tones and the bars of carefully interspersed, complementary music enhance this quality cassette.

Billy Bunter Gets the Boot

Frank Richards, read by Christopher Biggins, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £5.99

Christopher Biggins' narration subtly exploits the farce and pantomime of the rotters' and beasts' wheezes at Greyfriars. Billy Bunter is 'egg-spelled' for refusing to take the flogging he doesn't deserve and goes home gleefully - only to find life at home with his uncaring, disciplinarian father is even worse than at school. It's when he tries to return to Greyfriars that the fun really starts. Superficially a good romp, from a 1991 perspective it's also interesting social history. Well abridged, no sound effects and read at a smart pace with a range of voices effectively captured.

The Children of Green Knowe

Lucy Boston, read by William Franklyn, Chivers, three cassettes, unabridged, 4 hrs 10 mins, £12.95 + VAT

It's hard to believe that it's nearly 40 years since the publication of Lucy Boston's book. The idea has been used many times since, but this is a classic. Tolly thinks he will be lonely living with his grandmother in her old house, but gradually he finds that the house is full of children. Although they had died in the Plague, the rocking horse still rocks as the children play on it and carry on their happy lives of which Tolly becomes a part. William Franklyn creates credible, realistic, lively children and a knowing, wise Granny Oldknow through skilful narration. ■

For Example, Take a Good Book

VERONICA HELEY ON WRITING CHRISTIAN FICTION

A question from a child:

'Mummy, why did my cat have to get run over?'

She wants to know the meaning of life, the world, the universe and everything in it. She doesn't want to hear that she'll understand when she grows up. She wants to know NOW.

Way back in the Dark Ages, an English king called his men to a meeting in the big hall, to discuss whether or not to allow the word of God into their land. Someone said that his life seemed to him as fleeting as the passage of a bird flying out of the darkness, through the lighted hall and out again into the night. Anything which casts light on the mystery of our lives on earth, must be worth hearing. And Bede says that's how Christianity came to Kent.

I don't suppose they'll be quoting from my books in a thousand years time, but I, too, am a storyteller and a Christian. I had twenty books of adult fiction published before I started to write for children and teenagers.

My adult books were enjoyable to write, and though at the time I was not aware of it, there was a pattern of good against evil. I started with thrillers, mostly written in the first person from a woman's point of view. I like thrillers. I read them all the time. I like police procedurals. I like an ending in which the villains get their come-uppance, and the hero or heroine gets his/her man. I don't like it when the ending is fudged in an attempt to make it more like 'real' life, with broken relationships all round, and everything and everybody feeling tacky. I like to identify with the hero or heroine. I hate it when I get to know and like someone in the first chapter, only to find they've been killed off in chapter two.

After some years I moved on to historical fiction, writing as Victoria Thorne. I felt comfortable in this genre because my own convictions of right and wrong could be reflected in the moral issues of the day. My first books of this type were set in the Baron Bashing early Middle Ages, for which I did a lot of enjoyable research. Then I took a dive forward in time to the 1880s, and afterwards went back to the 1740s. I was published in America and Australia, and translated in Scandinavia. It was all extremely pleasant and I thought it would go on for ever.

Then the ground rules changed. Suddenly every heroine had to experience sexual gratification through ten pages of anatomically impossible foreplay. Morals became unfashionable. There was only one Commandment, and that was to seek 'fulfilment'.

Heroes also changed, becoming cardboard tyrants or domestic despots. I couldn't produce that kind of work because I didn't believe people ought to live by those rules. I thought my writing career was over, and that I'd better learn a new trade, like knitting Aran sweaters or making lace.

Then a friend asked why I wasn't writing Christian fiction for children and teenagers. I tried it and was hooked. It satisfies my craving for good/bad confrontation, and for trying to sort out some of the problems I see around me.

So much of what is written for young readers is morally dubious. I, and others like me, aim to provide a good read which is also wholesome fare.



I don't write my stories by technique out of thin air. I have considerable contact with children and teenagers. I run a youth club, for instance, and almost every person in it has some problem or trait of character which suggests a storyline.

Take school bullying, or fear, or anti-social behaviour. Why had they developed in that particular place, and happened to that particular boy? Why does this girl survive neglect and that one become anorexic?

Usually boys will only read stories about boys, but to my amazement I've discovered that when I managed to hit a trouble spot accurately, boys will buy the book even though it's about a girl (the quest/mystery *Fire!*).

Of course I don't copy any one child, or even any one character trait exactly. Whatever idea I start with, it gets altered on its path through the storytelling process and comes out looking different.

Sometimes the story comes to me from one breath to the next, and at other times I have to picture various incidents that might be usable in a story, and let the whole story stew. Then one day – probably while I'm steaming gently in the bath, or working on the allotment – the various elements drop into place and I can see how to write the story.

I write fiction for Lion and Scripture Union, record radio interviews where required and do a fair amount of lecturing. I go into schools to talk about story writing and to stimulate the children's own abilities in that direction. I supply articles for several magazines, and am trying to develop my black and white photography to keep up with the demand for pictures to accompany my words.

I write for all ages from six upwards, so have to bear in mind the extent of experience of each age group, the 'buzz' words, the clothes, the favourite TV programmes.

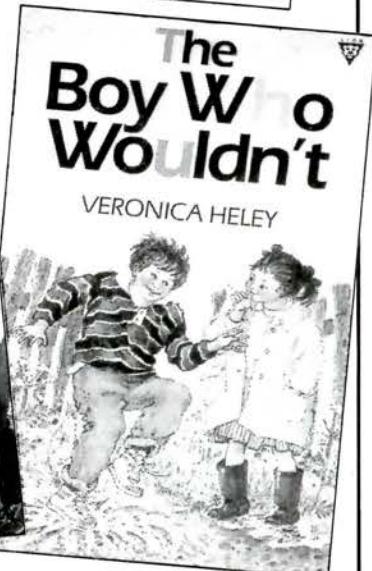
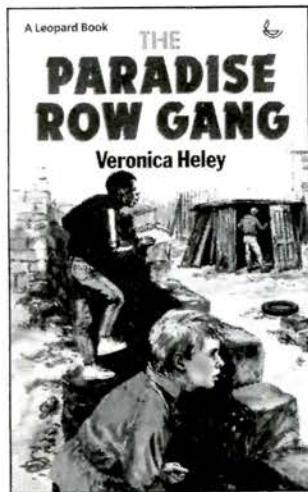
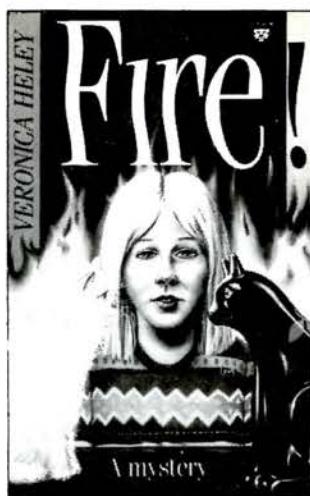
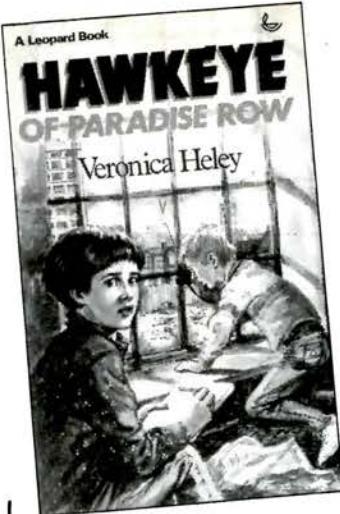
Whatever the storyline, first and foremost it has to be compulsive reading. Forget long descriptions, bring on the action, and get the reader identifying with the hero or heroine.

I don't go in for 'little saints you wouldn't believe'. Boringly perfect kids are out; far from perfect ones like Natasha and Pod are more my style. Girls who seem perfect to grown-ups are probably not so nice inside, viz. my favourite villainess, Cousin Emmy, who has a lot of money spent on her by her parents, but very little time.

Being in touch with so many youngsters, I get a lot of feedback on my writing. I can be standing at the bus stop thinking about an awkward bit of dialogue when I feel someone is looking at me. About waist high. I look round and there is a small girl smiling up at me. Her hand is on my coat, but so lightly that I haven't felt it. I have to bend down to hear what she wants to tell me, but it's worth hearing.

She mentions one of my books and says, 'That's my very favourite book.' She's telling me a lot about herself. That she's a timid creature, full of fears, and that my book has helped her to cope. The book is *Good for Kate!* I nod gravely at her. She nods back at me, and we're both satisfied. There are a lot of compensations in writing books for this market.

I aim to put across the message simply but clearly, with an emphasis on a loving God. Of course there are 'don't do this'



warnings – like Don't lie to your friends, or you'll end up without any – but the main thrust of the Christian message is a positive one. Love God. Love your neighbour. God loves you.

In my latest book for Lion, *The Boy Who Wouldn't*, the blind man tells Joe that no matter how awful he is, there is someone above who sees everything and always loves him. Joe imagines that someone lives in the attic above his bedroom, who loves him and who looks just like the blind man, except that he can see. Joe finds this a very comforting thought. Now we know that Joe hasn't got it quite right, and of course he has to have it sorted out for him later in the book. But when I tell this story to the kids, I can see a 'Click!' in their minds, and maybe the next time they're in trouble, they'll remember that God really does see everything and does love them, no matter how bad they are.

Before I start on a book, I have to be clear in my mind exactly how the Christian content is to be woven into the story.

Basically, I set up a crisis situation and show how Christian teaching can help resolve it. Usually, though not always, I quote from the **Good News Bible**.

The Christian content can come from a parent, a sibling, or a teacher, but I like it best from a friend. Wherever it comes from, it must arise naturally, and be in character. For instance, in Scripture Union's 'Hawkeye' series, most of the Christian teaching comes through a large black boy called Fats, who wouldn't know an aspirate if he heard it. But Fats is a Christian, and when he sets his spray can to work on a building, he's as likely as not to come up with the legend 'Jesus Lives, OK'.

The editor knows best. Well . . . we do argue occasionally. I see bad things happening to kids and I'd like to write about them as I see them, warts and all. That's not always practical, according to the editor. I want to write a book on child abuse, but can't place it in the form I want it to take. Not commercial enough, they say. On the other hand, I have just finished a book about a dyslexic teenager which I very much wanted to write (*The Penguin Theatre*). You win some, you lose some, and getting published is the art of the possible.

Some publishing houses want more overt Christian content than others. Implicit teaching is often more effective than hammering the message home, but sometimes an editor believes it appropriate for the hero/heroine to reach the stage of commitment to Christ.

Editors sometimes say, 'That bit of dialogue's got to be toned down, it might offend . . . teachers, parents . . . because it's too harsh.' So I have to sweeten my realistic dialogue with a spoonful of sugar.

I like slang. I listen to what people say, and joyfully squirrel the odd phrase away to be used later. My husband came in out of the rain saying, 'It's coming down in stair-rods!' Marvellous stuff. I hope to use it soon.

As I see it, endings should be 'happy ever after' for an under ten, whereas a teenager knows the world is not perfect, so the ending can be more realistic. But always up rather than downbeat.

Sometimes I am asked why I no longer write adult fiction. One answer is that my time has been mopped up by the Christian market. But perhaps a better reply is that Lion and Scripture Union children's lists publish the kind of books which I like to write.

Veronica Heley's books mentioned in this piece are:

Natasha's Badge, 0 86201 397 6, £1.50; **Natasha's Swing**, 0 86201 451 4, £1.30; and **Natasha the Brownie**, 0 86201 625 8, £1.50

Good for Kate!, 0 86201 421 2, £1.75

Hawkeye of Paradise Row, 0 86201 543 X, £1.75; **The Paradise Row Gang**, 0 86201 570 7, £1.75; and **Hawkeye Hits the Jackpot**, 0 86201 660 6, £2.25

The above titles are from Scripture Union and those below from Lion; all are paperback editions.

Fire!, 0 7459 1851 4, £2.50

The Boy Who Wouldn't, 0 7459 1967 7, £2.25

The Penguin Theatre will be available in Spring 1992.

Authograph No. 69

It's a long, hard climb to Anne Fine's top floor flat in Edinburgh's New Town (a misnomer if ever there was one – it simply means it's newer than the Old Town). Once inside, you're met with elegant clutter, a grand piano, two cats, a golden retriever and a tantalising glimpse of the waters of the Firth of Forth and the hills of Fife through curtains of rampant green plants. The dog departs, as does Anne's younger daughter and we settle down to record this interview. Halfway through the afternoon, we discover the wrong button has been pressed so it's back to square one with three-quarters of an hour of blank tape . . .

Born in Leicester, one of five girls, Anne was admitted to school two years early when the Education Authority took pity on her harassed mother after the arrival of triplets. She rapidly learnt to read, but decided that listening to a story was too slow and preferred to read alone, a view later shared by her daughters. Reading was varied and unstructured with little interference from home or school. Trease, Geoffrey, and Treese, Henry, were devoured as was Buckeridge, Lucy Fitch Perkins 'Twins' series, *Swallows and Amazons* and her great hero, Richmal Crompton's 'William', whose anarchic antics can be glimpsed, one suspects, in some of her own creations.

A degree at Warwick University and marriage to academic Kit Fine was followed by 'a decade of camp-following my husband'. It was when he took up a Professorship in Philosophy that she found herself in her present flat with a baby a few weeks old. 'The flat had no central heating and faced north, we had no furniture and I was in my "green" phase and painted all the walls that colour which made it look even colder. I was so lonely, so miserable away from my family and friends, I went into a depression which would now be diagnosed as post-natal.'

She's still unable to explain why she began to write and what led her to produce what she terms her 'only truly sunny book', *The Summer House Loon* – a gentle story of Ione (named after the new baby), her blind father and the delightful student Ned Hump. The book's birth was not swift. It was sent to two publishers, both of whom returned it with encouraging but rejecting letters so it was consigned to a Jiffy bag and shoved under the bed to gather dust for three years whilst its owner went off to sunnier climes in Palo Alto, USA. However, just before leaving, she had the foresight to ask a neighbour to post it after her departure as an entry for the *Guardian/Kestrel Best Novel* by an Unpublished Writer Competition. This was duly done and to her surprise she found she'd come joint third to Jan Mark's winning

Thunder and Lightnings. The trip to London for the prize-giving lunch yielded £50 which was promptly invested in a typewriter. The Fines were still on the move, now in Canada where their second daughter, Cordelia, was born and there they remained for nine years. Eventually Anne decided to leave Kit and returned to Edinburgh to the same (but warmer!) flat.

Some twenty books later, these years provided her with much of the background experience which often surfaces in her novels. Subjects sometimes controversial, certainly unconventional, are always shot through with a wonderful black humour which lightens the gloomiest situation. She makes few concessions to children.

'I don't underestimate children, especially those who read a lot. They will have come across many ideas through books and through talking with intelligent people. They are more sophisticated and advanced in their thinking even though they may not be able to articulate these ideas. Just because they can't reproduce ideas at an adult level is no reason to think they can't take them on board.' Recurring subjects are divorce, and animals which often come to a sticky end, but Anne Fine has a totally reasonable explanation:

'Every child who has a garden has an entire graveyard buried down there. If you ask in a primary school who's got something they love very much buried at the bottom of the garden, a whole forest of hands will wave at you. If you added up all the animals in my books who come to a grisly end and compared them to the animals who come to a grisly end in Britain every year, I'd probably end up statistically very accurate.'

With a divorce behind her, she again has a logical explanation over the realism that is her hallmark:

'If I'm writing about divorce, I know what parents say in anger in front of the

children. I know children know what's going on. I don't kid myself that everyone lives in cotton wool.'

Her ideas are borne out brilliantly in *Madame Doubtfire*, the hilarious story of a family trying to stick together post-divorce and to the unconventional method of housekeeping resorted to by their father. Other books have also grown from observations of those closest to her like *The Granny Project*, which came from watching her mother look after three old people in succession until their deaths, and seeing the effect those twelve years had on her. But this book, too, has its hilarious moments as the four children try to prevent their parents putting granny into a home. One particular evening, during an important dinner party, granny decides to join the assembled guests and comes downstairs from her bedroom:

'As Mrs Harris struggled with her hatpins, a shower of blue feathers shimmered through the air and landed on the pretty china dishes heaped high with fresh peach sorbet. Picking one more than usually moth-eaten specimen off his own serving, Henry's headmaster said "Have you come very far, Mrs Harris?" "No distance at all," Henry's mother assured him. "The shortest of walks, I can do it in no time." "That's wonderful." The chorus was spontaneous. The talk all at once was on what a marvel Henry's mother must be to make her way at eighty-seven through that perplexing labyrinth out there of Circles, Crescents and Closes and still arrive in time for dessert.'

But Anne Fine sees her skill as being able to take a serious situation and make it funny:

'High comedy comes out of high emotion. High emotion comes out of tension-filled situations between people who matter to one another. You can't really get emotional fireworks at a cocktail party. If someone gets on your nerves, you simply fade away, say excuse me, go and get another drink or go to the loo. It's only in families that you're locked up with people you can't get away from.'

No doubt a psychiatrist could advance some sort of theory as to why her characters frequently pour out their feelings from the confines of a cupboard, as in *Goggle-eyes* or her adult novel *Taking the Devil's Advice*. *The Stone Menagerie* is also set in a confined space, that of old animal cages in the grounds of a mental hospital. It's another happy, if unconventional, plot which sparked off criticism on publication in 1980 over the suitability of the setting for a children's book. But the background came from ideas hatched after visiting several acquaintances in mental homes over a summer, and the result was a lighthearted, ingenious book with serious overtones.

An avid collector of newspaper cuttings which can reveal the germ of a plot, she relished the one describing a fête where



the fund-raising depended on gambling on the placing of a cow pat. This resulted in **The Country Pancake** – a wondrously euphemistic title! And reports on bullying gave rise to her award-winning **Bill's New Frock** which tackled this subject around the framework of a young boy waking up one day and finding himself changed to a girl. This book triggered off Anne Fine's remarkable coup of scooping the pool of awards in 1990, including a Smarties Prize, the Guardian Fiction Award, the Carnegie Medal, and the whole topped off by the awarding of a 'Nibbie', a kind of writer's Oscar in the shape of a large bronze nib given by the Booksellers' Association for the Children's Author of the Year.



I was curious to discover if her writing technique was as imaginative as her plots but there's no state-of-the-art technology here, no word-processor lurked amongst the greenery.

'Definitely not. I hate machines – even the vacuum cleaner because it clogs up. I have to write in absolute peace and quiet. I use a soft pencil, a rubber and a pencil sharpener. I write a sentence, rub out and go over it again and again until it's absolutely right. Then when it is, and it could be hours or months, I move on to the second. I never do a draft. Every single sentence hangs on the one before – I make no changes. I can't think ahead (I can't play chess). I follow the feelings of the characters.'

Teenagers and the trials of families riding out the storm of adolescence are a favourite preoccupation. One is at the centre of her latest novel, **The Book of the Banshee**, published this summer. Will Flowers picks up an old journal at a library second-hand book sale. It's written by a boy not much older than himself who describes life in the trenches in World War I. William Saffery writes of the battles around him. So does Will Flowers. His combatants are himself, parents, small sister Muffy and his teenage sister Estelle. As he writes of their clashes, he sees a parallel with the life of long dead William Saffery and feels a bond between them. But it's the descriptions of the cut and thrust of teenage warfare that will strike a chord in the hearts of fellow sufferers, in particular the state of those creatures' bedrooms.

'Together they peered in. I didn't need to come any further to know what they were seeing. I've been in Estelle's room often enough sifting through the mess trying to find things of mine. I once cut my toe on a tin of condensed milk on my way across to my best denim jacket'

through piles of abandoned woolies and her old tight droppings. And Muffy's mouth organ was lost in here for a week under a drift of knickers . . .'

A civilised calm is now returning to her own household with Ione studying at Oxford and Cordelia in her last year at school but the scars obviously are deep! If she ever runs out of ideas – a highly unlikely thought – she will consider founding her own organisation for parents – 'Victims of Obstinate Moody and Irritating Teenagers'. There will probably be a rush to join. At least the acronym will look good on letter headings. ■

Anne Fine was interviewed by Valerie Bierman.

Anne Fine's books mentioned in this Authorgraph are:

The Summer House Loon, Mammoth, 0 7497 0184 6, £2.50 pbk

Madame Doubtfire, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12001 2, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.2633 2, £2.99 pbk

The Granny Project, Mammoth, 0 7497 0186 2, £2.50 pbk

Goggle-eyes, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12617 7, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.4071 8, £2.50 pbk

The Stone Menagerie, Mammoth, 0 7497 0343 1, £2.50 pbk

The Country Pancake, Methuen, 0 416 14982 0, £6.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 0567 1, £2.50 pbk

Bill's New Frock, Methuen, 0 416 12152 7, £6.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 0305 9, £2.50 pbk

The Book of the Banshee, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13114 6, £8.99

Her adult title mentioned is **Taking the Devil's Advice**, Viking, 0 670 83191 3, £12.99; Penguin, 0 14 01.3107 8, £4.99 pbk.

REVIEWS – Non Fiction

Counting

0 86318 532 0

Sorting

0 86318 531 2

Dorling Kindersley (*My First Look At* series), £3.99 each
(NURSERY/INFANT)

Counting and **Sorting** extend the range of mathematical themes in this attractive series. **Numbers** is already available. The usual format is retained, and each subject is examined using a range of brightly coloured photographs set against a white background. The text is kept to a minimum, mainly introducing simple questions such as 'Which shoes go together?' Although few children live in the visually stunning surroundings depicted in these books (eight socks from our house would not provide the exotically patterned, crease-free sample seen here!) the range of items will fall within the experience of most young children.

Counting introduces the numbers from one to ten using groups of fruits. This works well and every item can be seen clearly. The remaining pages provide various counting activities, mainly using everyday objects. Most of these are clear and uncomplicated, though shape is also a factor in one activity which is a pity.

Sorting keeps closely to its task and provides examples which could easily be extended at home or school. Apart from a page about a garden which may be outside some children's experience, the sorting concerns toys, clothes, and simple differences of pattern, size or colour.

FB

Wood

Sue Dyson, Wayland (*Links* series), 0 7502 0153 3, £6.95
(INFANT/JUNIOR)

Books on commodities and materials are always in demand to support the curriculum but they often tend towards the worthy rather than the stimulating. **Wood**, in the new 'Links' series, manages to avoid this pitfall. It works through an informative, well-targetted text showing rather than stating that wood is vital and exploring the attraction of wood (its grain, warmth and so on). The design is good, diagrams clear and photographs relevant and informative.

There are some weaknesses. I'm not sure that the 'Projects with Wood' section contributes much – do the end products justify the time taken to make them? And does the magnified drawing to demonstrate the difference between hard and soft woods reveal the answer? But these are minor points in a useful – dare I say it – enjoyable book, which is ideal for the primary school library.

GB



A comma butterfly's camouflage, from *Amazing Butterflies and Moths*.

Amazing Butterflies and Moths

John Still, 0 86318 549 5

Amazing Crocodiles and Reptiles

Mary Ling, 0 86318 546 0

Amazing Fish

Mary Ling, 0 96318 548 7

Amazing Monkeys

Scott Steedman, 0 96318 547 9

Dorling Kindersley (*Amazing Worlds* series), £3.99 each
(INFANT/SECONDARY)

Over forty years ago, one of my bedtime favourites was Frank Buckland's *Curiosities of Natural History*. A prodigiously energetic late nineteenth-century naturalist, Buckland was a gifted communicator, whose simple prose brought his 'curiosities' to life as he explored everything from hippopotamus' teeth to the behaviour of a porpoise during a hansom cab ride. Led on by the bizarre and revelling in Buckland's lack of didacticism, I absorbed a lot of extra, more conventional information, for his enthusiasm was infectious and, angler that he was, he had me hooked from page one.

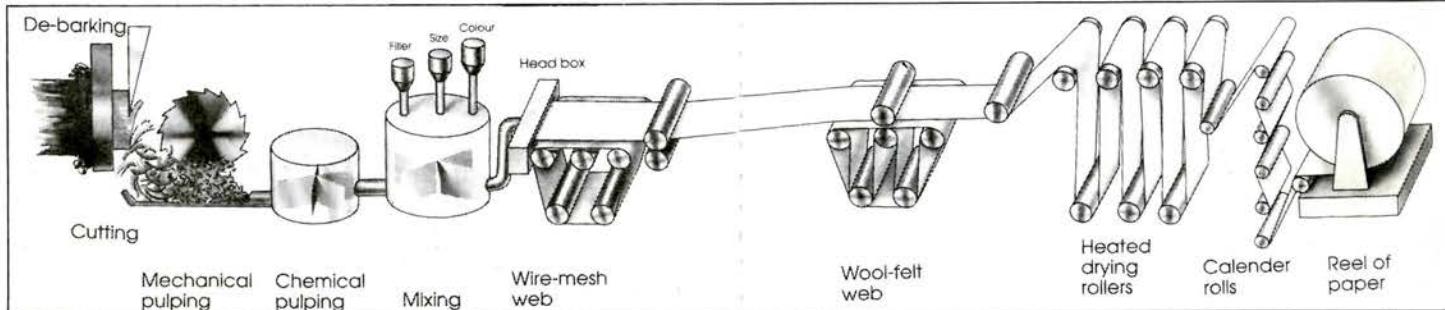
I now find 'Amazing Worlds' doing the same thing, but the difference is that where Buckland used eloquence, Dorling

Kindersley use the talents of Jerry Young, who has done all the photographs here. The formula is simple – a stunning Young photo on each of twelve spreads illustrates a lead paragraph and is surrounded by related satellite pictures and paragraphs.

Monkeys includes apes and other primates (no George Carey jokes, but plenty of other humour and never at the animals' expense). **Butterflies** deals mainly with the enormous variety of shapes, colours and behaviour, being a wonderful introduction to camouflage and mimicry. **Crocodiles and Reptiles** introduces tortoises, turtles, snakes and lizards as well as crocodilians (did you know that crocodiles swallow stones for ballast or that freshwater turtles have webbed feet?) **Fish** reaches the same conclusion as Buckland about mermaids – they're all fakes or imaginary.

The appeal of this series is enormous and will embrace a wide age and ability range in school and at home. True, there is little mention of the endangered status of some species featured and the index to each volume is as vestigial as an orang's tail, but then these books are intended for entertaining browsing, not research. Amazing is a word to be careful with, but it fits here, and Frank Buckland would have loved this lot.

TP



How wood chips are pulped and pressed to make paper which is then put on to reels. From **Wood**.

Garden ecology from **How Green Are You?****How Green Are You?**

David Bellamy, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0661 9, £6.95 hbk; 0 7112 0679 1, £3.99 pbk
(INFANT/JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

As an entertaining informer, Frank Buckland's closest living relative is, of course, David Bellamy whose latest 'Green awareness' book is aimed directly at families by way of young children. Bellamy is essentially a friendly man and here he introduces us to his alter ego the Friendly Whale (Water, Habitat, Air, Life, Energy) who sails through his action guide showing us how to live more greenly under these headings.

In dustbin, garden, kitchen, supermarket, neighbourhood and bathroom scenes we get helpful hints towards greener behaviour, like 'H.E., Save plastic bags to use again for shopping' and 'A.E., Leave the car at home and walk... especially to and from school'. We also get explanations of green terms and concepts (e.g. 'What is recycling') and plenty of 'Do you know?' features where crucial facts and quantities take us by surprise.

The basically sound 'do it yourself' ideas are somewhat under-explained, so they will gain greatly from being shared with a responsive adult - but that's all right because, above all, this is a book which will help whole families go greener.

- Babies**
Jenny Wood, 0 7136 3353 0
- Christmas**
Tim Wood, 0 7136 3350 6
- Keeping Clean**
Eleanor Allen, 0 7136 3352 2

- Rubbish**
Gill Tanner, 0 7136 3351 4
- A & C Black (Turn of the Century series), £5.95 each
(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

Titles published under a series imprint are so often uneven in quality that it is heartening to report that these new volumes maintain the standards set by their predecessors (see **BFK 64**, Sept. 1990).

The lively approach and attractive format will be especially welcomed by teachers seeking stimulating National Curriculum resource material, whilst young people should find the comparisons with life at the turn of the century equally appealing. Any smugness they might feel about advances in hygiene and child-rearing, however, should be offset by the sobering thought that even if Grandma wouldn't be too dismayed at the commercialism of Christmas she would undoubtedly be appalled by our casual attitude to waste materials and rubbish which she recycled so efficiently.

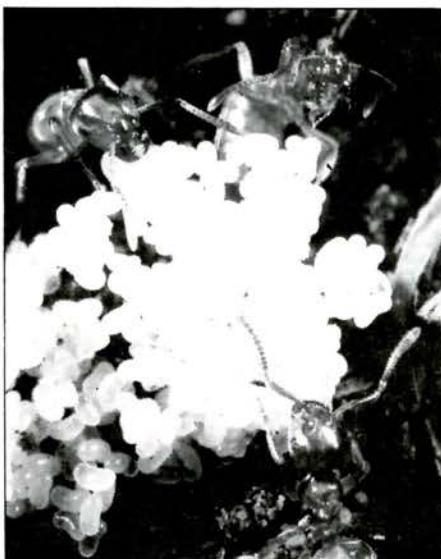
VH

- Ant**
1 85511 005 9
- Shark**
1 85511 008 3
- Snake**
1 85511 010 5
- Spider**
1 85511 009 1
- Michael Chinery, photography by Barrie Watts, Eagle Books (Life Story series), £6.95 each
(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

This new series from Eagle combines the well-tried talents of Chinery and Watts in some very pleasing treatments of standard items from the horror stock-cupboard. The refreshing absence of formula - other than the convention of photographs on the right, words and drawings on the left - has freed the author to present each subject differently. So with **Ant** we get a straight account of the cycle from egg to August-flyer, whereas **Snake** introduces us first to the nature of snakiness as exemplified by the American Corn snake (which eats rats whole because no snake can chew anything) before getting round to eggs and hatching on page 20. **Shark** parades a whole variety of species, some vicious, some viviparous and one with a penchant for eating overcoats (minus occupants) and **Spider** starts with eggs and spiderlings, watching them grow into instinctive websters.

This quartet's uncluttered straightforwardness is supported by fine production; not only is the paper of a quality complementary to the photographs but print and layout are an object lesson in effective simplicity. Added to this a strong cloth hinge and sturdy lamination - all done in Worzalla, USA - will prolong the attractive life of books whose subjects won't go out of fashion.

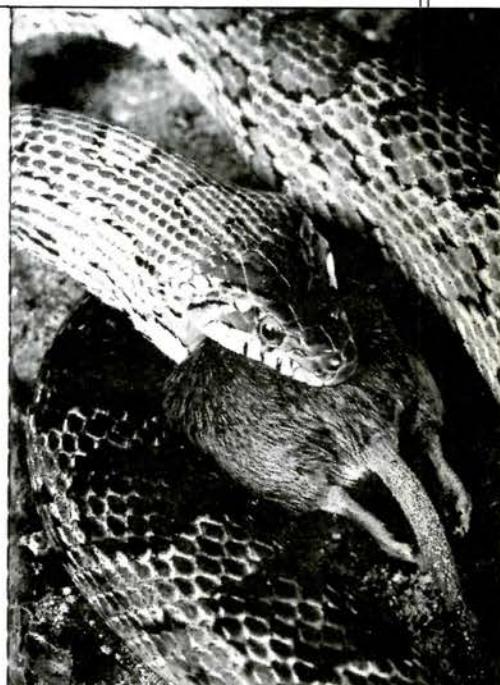
TP

Left, ants tending eggs; below, the American corn snake devouring a rat. From **Ant** and **Snake** in the Life Story series.

16

The snake's prey looks much too big to be swallowed, but snakes have very unusual jaws. They can easily swallow animals fatter than themselves. The jawbones are only loosely joined to each other, and the skin around the snake's mouth and throat stretches easily. This lets the snake open its mouth very wide.

Using its backward-pointing teeth, it slowly drags the prey into its mouth. The prey is usually swallowed head first because it goes down more easily that way. The snake can take an hour or more to swallow a rat.



The Living House

Nigel Hester, Franklin Watts
(Naturewatch series), 0 7496 0182 5,
£7.95
(JUNIOR/MIDDLE)

The ordinary des/res houses a lot more besides the people that pay its mortgage. The older the house the richer the variety of plant and animal cohabitants (welcome or otherwise) it is likely to entertain – and then there's the garden and the shed.

This new addition to Watts reliable 'Naturewatch' series takes a long look at the house as wildlife habitat, discovering snails, spiders, swallows, starlings, barn owls, butterflies and bedbugs to name but a few.

The book's principal value is that of a well-illustrated list, but what holds it together is the repeated demonstration of the mutual advantage that we creatures derive from living together. The wren nesting in the ivy-clad wall removes hundreds of destructive caterpillars, the barn owl culls the mice, loft-dwelling lacewings mop up garden aphids and the harmless silverfish devour our discarded newspapers. So, indirectly, we learn a lot about the tolerance of other life-forms in our living space.

This is a must for all confirmed cobweb cleaners and spider-squashers – and its facts and messages will fit lots of school projects.

TP

Experimenting with Technology and Invention

Alan Ward, Dryad, 0 85219 7649,
£9.95
(MIDDLE)

Experimenting with Technology and Invention is quite a dramatic title and may conjure up images of full colour illustrations, cut-aways, photographs of inventors in serious mode and neatly packaged double-page spreads of information. The unpretentious reality has double-page spreads but these are geared to practical exploration of the problem to be solved and the mechanical theory involved. The inventors portrayed are smiling cartoon children with frizzy hair, demonstrating to the reader what to do. The whole thing is rather fun.

This will be a useful source of ideas for the teacher developing technology in the curriculum (as well as the 1990s version of the kid who used to mess about with meccano). It's not a book to read straight through but to read a bit, pause, think and ... invent. Warnings are given for any dangerous activities, with the only possible danger being that the reader is so clearly told what not to do!

The incredible "Dick-Dock Duck"

Gravity pulls a ripe apple off a tree, especially when its branch is pushed suddenly by a wind. Pushes and pulls (and combinations of these, called 'twists') are known as forces. Gravity stops you from whizzing sideways off the spinning planet Earth.

A girl I knew invented a "Dick-Dock Duck". It was a timer for 3 seconds – but not exactly a "tick-tock"! Its body contained a winding plastic pipe. If you put a steel ball into the duck's beak, the ball was pulled down inside by gravity, and came out of the duck's rear end – to "ping" a little bell 3 seconds later. I appreciated her naughty sense of humour, but I liked her technology even more. Can you build a similar timing machine?



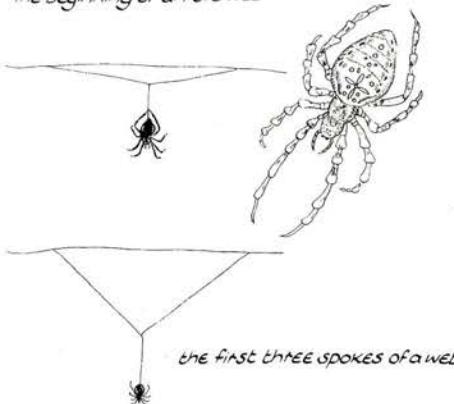
I do have one or two quibbles, for instance I don't find testing a snail's pulling power using a harness and pulley really acceptable (even if the snail is treated gently). On the whole, though, not a lot can be wrong with a book with such a grand title but which includes advice on how to make the incredible 'Dick-Dock Duck'!

GB

Small Wonder – a new approach to understanding nature

Mari Friend, Blandford,
0 7137 2202 9, £14.95
(SECONDARY/ADULT)

Every so often a book comes along which seems not so much to have been written specially but to have evolved naturally. Edith Holden's **Country Diary** was one such, so was Tony Soper's **Bird Table Book**, and now here's another. Mari Friend was discouraged in her early attempts to become a naturalist on the grounds that it was something 'only vicar's daughters' did. Having succeeded, though, and having become an experienced natural history teacher and wildlife gardener, she has produced very much the sort of book an Edwardian vicar's daughter might have, just at the time when her kind of approach to her subject is coming back into fashion. For the strength of the 'vicar's daughter' attitude to natural history is that it studies the whole natural community rather than isolated bits of it and starts not with the exotic and amazing but with the familiar and homely – which is where the re-greening of our planet, if it is to happen, has to start.

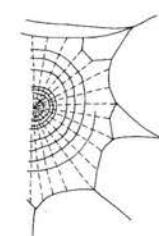
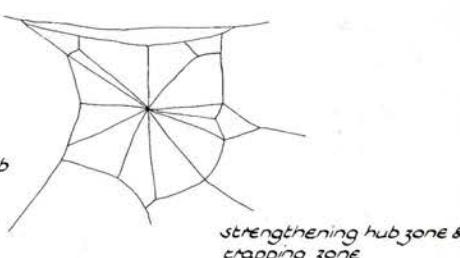
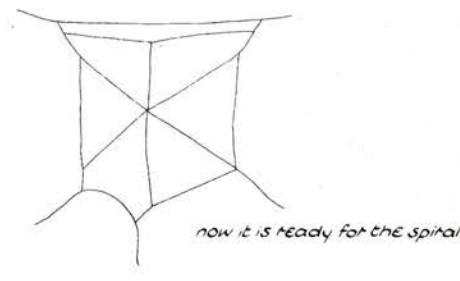
The beginning of an orb web*Stages of building a web, from Small Wonder.*

Below, timing by gravity from **Experimenting with Technology and Invention**.

The author begins by describing eco-networks which lead naturally to a discussion of the interaction between plants and insects and pave the way for a detailed consideration of wildlife gardening and animal homebuilding. Further chapters deal with the ecology of freshwater, fields, hedges, woods and seashore – and a short passage entitled 'Winter survival' shows brilliantly how hibernation, seed formation and leaf loss are all ways of combatting cold.

This is in every way a personal book. It is informed by the author's considerable experience at Bracken Hall Countryside Centre, to which she often refers in anecdotal detail, and it is illustrated by her own profuse and precise paintings and drawings. Pictures are, throughout, text-led and the book's overall design serves rather than determines its content, all of which factors help to make a very real book, crammed with observable examples. The text reads smoothly from one end to the other, developing ideas as it goes – a far and refreshing cry from the capsular presentations beloved of so many information publishers.

As the author addresses the reader on equal terms, this is a book for the mature (but flexible) mind; it will be at its best in the staffroom of any lively school or on the bookshelf of any lively family. Public Libraries, V1th forms and, especially, vicar's daughters would be silly to miss it. ■ TP

*'Come into my parlour,' said the spider to the fly*

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.

Veronica Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

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

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



•SONSENSE•NONGS•

The BfK/A & C Black Nonsense Song Competition
Michael Rosen reports



The right to be silly is not one of the human rights in the UN Charter but perhaps it should be. I've always seen it as a sign of health. One of the ways many of us are silly is to sing silly songs. I can't think of how many times when I was young I must have pleaded with my dad to sing 'Suzannah's a funniful man'. Pause for a moment - have you or have you not ever sung, whistled or hummed any of the following: 'John Brown's baby's got a pimple on his chest', 'Does your chewing gum lose its flavour on the bedpost overnight?', 'Lost a peanut . . .'? No doubt anyone reading this could quickly add a few more, and yet surprisingly there isn't an easily available book of silly songs. In spite of this, for some years now, my act in schools has been peppered with various chants and nutty jingles that I've picked up from children.

With this sort of thing in mind, some months ago I approached A & C Black with the idea of a silly song book. They needed no coaxing and added on the proposal of a schools' competition linked with Books for Keeps - write your own silly song, come up with a title for the song book and send us some artwork too.

So now try and imagine a committee of grown-ups sitting round a table trying to measure silliness. The judges were Sheena Roberts, Music Editor at A & C Black; George Hunt, who teaches at a South East London primary school; and myself. We wheeled in a piano for Sheena to bash out the tunes on, set up a tape recorder to play the tapes of those who were kind enough to record their numbers and got down to some seriously silly listening. We very quickly realised just how hard it is to write a silly song. What is the vital ingredient? Something illogical? Some kind of inversion of normality - with either the world or language turned upside down? The kinds of titles we were offered will give you an idea of what people went for: 'Are you Pink and Green?', 'The King of Cannelonia', 'Jig a dig a dance'. Titles for the book were such things as: 'Flapdoodle Whatsit' and 'Flatter Splatter Soggy Batter'.

Among the runners-up for songs were: 'Nell and Ned' - a Noah's Ark farce involving elephants: 'Left side went low/Right side went high/Shot the other animals/Into the sky'; 'Snuggle Uggie Buns' - 'they taste funny/Snuggle uggie buns/in my tummy'; and again on the yummy theme - 'Yummy Scrummy' - 'I found a dead rat in the cellar the other day' . . . and yes we eat it!

The winner though was a piece called 'The King of Gunerania's Wedding Cake'. One thing the title did to me, before we got down to considering the song, was remind me of 'The King of

Verse

The King he baked a wedding cake up - on a sun-ny day, The
King he baked a wedding cake it was in the month of May, The King he baked a
wedding cake he filled it with old cloks, A cab-bage, and an oct-o-pus, some
chorus
app-les and red socks. He mixed - it he whisked - it, he threw it on the
floor, He crushed - it, he mashed - it, and it slithered out the door.

The King he baked a wedding cake and the glue he used was runny
The King he baked a wedding cake with spiders and some honey
The King he baked a wedding cake filled with rusty nails
He crocodile, a felt-tip pen, and a pinch of whale's tails, ...
He folded it, he moulded it, he squeezed through his toes
He sliced it, and diced it, till the flour went up his nose

The King he baked a wedding cake he added rice bananas
The King he baked a wedding cake it was striped like his pyjamas
The King he baked a wedding cake it was sixty-one feet high.
It weighed 10 tons, it squashed his thumbs, which made the poor King
cry.
He iced it, he creamed it, he packed it with black slugs,
he covered it in monkey mess, and a crust of orange bugs

The Winner - 'The King of Gunerania's Wedding Cake.'

Caractacus'. Surely that ought to go in the book? Come back Rolf Harris, all is forgiven. The King of Gunerania's cake, meanwhile, is a disgusting affair filled with spiders, rusty nails and the like. What we liked about this (the song, not the cake) was that it worked as a story, it was suitably revolting and absurd. But it had something extra that swayed us: the sound of the words works well, there's a good strong rhyme at the end of the lines, plus a nearly perfect internal rhyme scheme. This ties up a silly song, making it have a very neat, complete feel about it: 'he mixed it, he whisked it, he threw it on the floor/he crushed it, he mashed it, and it slithered out the door.' Very infectious.

The winning title for the book, by the way, was 'Sonsense Nongs'.

So the runners-up were:

Josie Cohen, Moss Hall Junior School, Finchley, London, for 'Yummy Scrummy' and book title 'Sonsense Nongs';

Christopher Clegg, Gareth Entwistle and Robert Pretty from Ponteland County Middle School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, for 'Snuggle Uggie Buns';

and Mrs Morag C Blance and Primary 4S from Papdale Primary School, Orkney, for 'Nell and Ned'.

The winner was Robert Soulsby and 1S from Brookvale Junior School, Runcorn, for 'The King of Gunerania's Wedding Cake'.

Thank you all for your silliness and may it long continue. ■



'Snuggle Uggie Buns', Newcastle-upon-Tyne.



'Jig-a-Dig-a-Dance', Uig School, Isle of Skye.

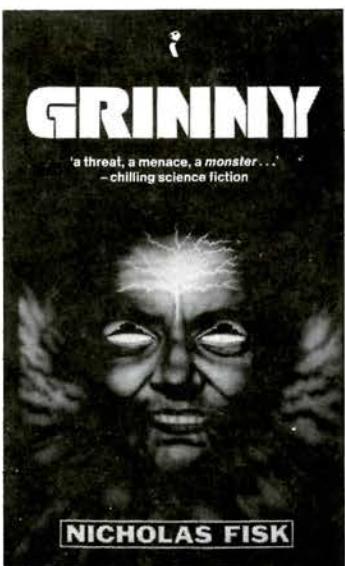


THE DESCENT

UP TO THE

TOP SHELF

David Bennett
reflects on
choosing
novels for
class sharing.



Stock cupboards up and down the land must have their piles of immovables – those sets of texts that some enthusiastic colleague persuaded other teachers would be 'just the right thing for a class reader'. After the first flush of enthusiasm, the set got used less and less and now it gathers dust out of most people's reach on the top shelf. My first school had so many discarded **Men and Gods** that I seriously wondered whether the former Head of English had shares in Heinemann.

Choosing texts for class readers is far from an easy matter, as I'm sure most readers of **BfK** will appreciate. There's the persistent spectre of tightening budgets to contend with for a start. Maintaining current stock in reasonable repair and adequate numbers gobble up allowances before you begin looking around for new titles . . . and then there are all those piles of abandoned books, gathering dust and weighing on your conscience. For good or ill, I took the chance to off-load some of mine recently on a charity looking for reading material for deprived countries. Even as you read this, some Polish child could be savouring the delights of **Rogue Male**, which we readily ditched with the demise of the GCE set books syllabus. There's an irony there if you think about it.

In 1984/85 Joan Barker and I produced 'Books for Sharing – Lifeline 3' in **Books for Keeps 27-32**. We worked on the premise that book sharing should be central to language activity in the classroom. The shared experience leads to greater enjoyment and provides much that is socially worthwhile for pupils. A book well read can encourage pupils into texts for which they would normally lack confidence or stickability and generally introduces them to titles and authors they might not otherwise discover. Then, importantly, there is the opportunity for a wide variety of book-based work that arises out of the sharing. That's important in itself, but more crucially underpins the creation of a positive reading excitement and pleasure that can permeate the whole school.

I still believe these are worthwhile enough reasons for using class readers. What has changed since 1984 is the basis for choosing what to invest in, and that is due to a variety of new factors.

Firstly, what factors haven't changed? In Years 7 to 9 we aim to programme an overall balance. A variety of writing styles is essential; the diary form of Nicholas Fisk's **Grinny**, the poetic prose style of Rosemary Sutcliff's **Dragon Slayer**, the turn-and-turn-about narrative of Paul Zindel's **The Pigman**, Ian Strachan's **Bang! Bang! You're Dead!** the entire action of which takes place in 24 hours, and finally the short story collection **Nothing to Be Afraid Of** by Jan Mark, are

good examples of what we mean here. Where we can, we try to break the beginning/middle/end narrative which characterizes so much else of what the children read and watch on TV.

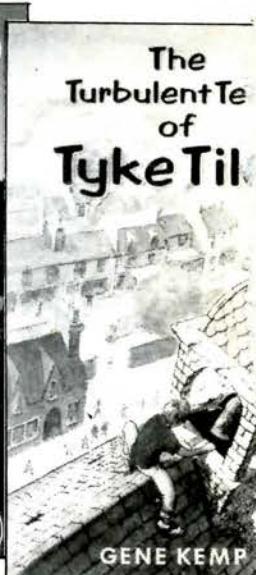
NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF

Jan Mark



The Turbulent Te of Tyke Til

GENE KEMP



Another consideration is to provide a wide spectrum of story types: Sci-Fi, animal stories, adventure, fantasy, social realism, historical, etc. Where possible we go for a variety of lengths and levels of difficulty and try to cross-reference an author's work across the age groups. So, Chris Powling's **Daredevils or Scaredycats** turns up in Year 7 and then **Mog and the Rectifier** is included in Year 8. Nicholas Fisk's **Highway Home** used to be in Year 9 to follow **Grinny**, but the former has now departed to languish on the sagging top shelf! We also seek to ensure that the boys don't get it all their own way. There are tales with very strong female characters. Then we purposely cover important areas like multi-cultural (Susan Gregory's **Martini on the Rocks** is a popular recent addition), disability (**Welcome Home, Jellybean** by Marlena Fanta Shyer seldom fails) and the environment, etc. I must say we've borne these issues in mind for years and they're now a prescribed feature of the National Curriculum Cross-Curricular Themes. Finally, and here's the rub, we're after a good story, well-told and capable of being shared.

Chris Powling Mog and the Rectifier



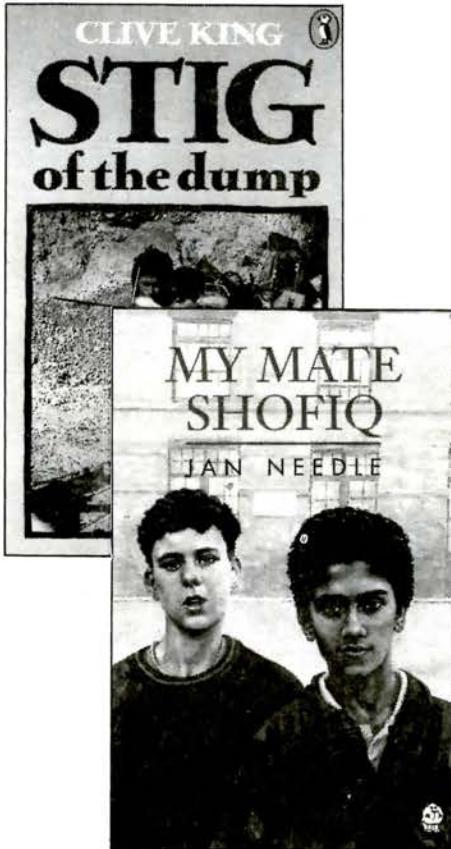
When we're looking for suitable material it's no use splashing out on a set of books just because we as adults enjoyed a particular novel and feel we'd like to introduce it to our pupils. As a reviewer I read dozens of books a year, many of which I thoroughly enjoy, but only a minute fraction of those do I ever consider for whole class use, and a large number of those my colleagues and I finally reject. Very few books manage to meet all our requirements for what is, after all, orchestrated mass consumption. Most children's novels, in point of fact, are essentially the author to ONE reader at a time. There is, I feel, a personal relationship intended between author and reader, which should not and cannot stand the intervention of a mediator. That is why I can never bring myself to share more than the shortest extracts of **Cider With Rosie**; it's not a mass-consumption-in-total work of the order of, say, **Animal Farm** or **Lord of the Flies**. Most books are for recommending, sharing and encouraging one to one. Ideally this will take place in an atmosphere generously created by the whole group, who, at the same time, will be sharing with their teacher those rare works that really do manage to meet all that is required of them and are consequently adopted as class readers.

In a nutshell, besides the aforementioned, they must be easily serialised and not too complicated to read aloud or to follow when listened to. I expect the language to be rich, and where appropriate humorous and inventive, and the characters and their actions believable within the context of the story. Not much to ask is it?

As I've already indicated, at the present time even more factors are affecting our choices and must be taken into account. My experience is that since 1984 pupils are being exposed to more material in Primary school that formerly we in Secondary could call our own. Betsy Byars' **The Eighteenth Emergency** is a case in point. There is something to be said for selecting familiar texts in the first half-term of Year 9 – the literature of security – but titles like **The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler** by Gene Kemp and **Stig of the Dump** by Clive King are moving rapidly towards the dusty hell of the top shelf! I'm not exactly complaining; the same is happening in other areas of the curriculum and anyway we must expect some stories to date. The worst case of this which we have is probably Jean George's **My Side of the Mountain**.

Alongside this children are manifestly more worldly at an earlier age. The delights of **Charlotte's Web** seem somehow out of kilter with eleven-year-old pupils who use 'condom' in everyday conversation (not whispered and sniggered in private huddles) and openly speculate whether they might turn out to be gay or not. The loss at an earlier age

of what was formerly regarded as innocence must have a bearing on what pupils will readily accept as 'suitable' class reader material. The new, thin veneer of teenage sophistication has meant that in recent years many of our sets have drifted down through the age ranges. Jan Needle's **My Mate Shofiq**, for instance, went from year 11 to 9 in one move. Similarly Nigel Hinton's **Buddy** and David Line's **On the Run**.



I'm afraid that I suspect television, and more especially soap opera, has some bearing here. Pupils perceive the rent-a-crisis/event-infested lives of the characters as what real life really is. We've a gang of pupils at school who conduct their lives like soap operas for which they themselves are writing the script. (Their pastoral tutors are the ones who look aged beyond their years.) It's a struggle to get these youngsters to make an effort with the class sharing of James Vance Marshall's **Walkabout** or **A River Ran Out of Eden** when real life is embodied in **EastEnders**, **Neighbours** and **Brookside**.

Lastly, lest we forget, there's the National Curriculum. Essentially it hasn't changed our literature-based approach much so far, although we do acknowledge that we need to make a conscious effort to find suitable books for sharing that are acceptable non-fiction. There's talk of bringing one of the James Herriot 'Vet Books' down from the top shelf, and looking at the Dahl autobiographical books more closely to see whether they're a possibility. Literature from other cultures is also under investigation, with James Berry's stories in favour at the moment. I'm keen to introduce more

folklore material into our repertoire so Kevin Crossley-Holland's **British and Irish Folk Tales** is doing the rounds of colleagues for a consensus of approval; a single personal enthusiasm is not enough to warrant the expense.

And then there's pre-twentieth-century reading – admittedly not something we've emphasized till now other than with Years 10 to 13. We've generally felt that there's such good, recent prose material written specifically for the age-group with which we are dealing, why inflict upon them long, difficult novels, usually intended for adults in centuries past? The odd extract maybe, but not the whole bang-shoot! We're aiming to keep them open to print, not turn them off. Specific personal recommendations are more in order, not **Wuthering Heights** for all, ready or not. Nevertheless, we're on the lookout, as ever, for the rarity that meets every diverse requirement and might, just might, make a successful book for sharing, not another expensive mistake, a one-hit wonder that rapidly descends to the top shelf! ■

Paperback details of the books David Bennett suggests are suitable for 'orchestrated mass consumption' . . .

- Grinny**, Puffin, 0 14 03.2164 0, £1.75
- Dragon Slayer**, Puffin, 0 14 03.0254 9, £2.25
- The Pigman**, Tracks, 0 00 671768 3, £2.50
- Bang! Bang! You're Dead!**, Mammoth, 0 416 13192 1, £1.75
- Nothing to Be Afraid Of**, Puffin, 0 14 03.1392 3, £1.99
- Daredevils or Scaredycats**, Lions, 0 00 671897 3, £1.75
- Mog and the Rectifier**, Knight, 0 340 28046 8, £1.99
- Martini on the Rocks**, o/p
- Welcome Home, Jellybean**, o/p
- Animal Farm**, Penguin, 0 14 01.2670 8, £2.99
- Lord of the Flies**, Faber, 0 571 05686 5, £2.50
- The Eighteenth Emergency**, Puffin, 0 14 03.0863 6, £2.25
- The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler**, Puffin, 0 14 03.1135 1, £2.50
- Stig of the Dump**, Puffin, 0 14 03.0196 8, £2.50
- My Mate Shofiq**, Lions, 0 00 671518 4, £2.25
- Buddy**, Puffin, 0 14 03.2717 7, £2.50
- On the Run**, Puffin, 0 14 03.0337 5, £2.50
- Walkabout**, Puffin, 0 14 03.1292 7, £1.99
- A River Ran Out of Eden**, Heinemann Windmill, 0 435 12110 3, £3.25 non-net
- British and Irish Folk Tales**, Orchard, 1 85213 265 5, £2.99

David Bennett is a senior teacher responsible for the English and Modern Languages Faculty at George Spencer School, Nottinghamshire. He is a regular reviewer for **Books for Keeps**.

Alice has totally withdrawn from the world. Isolated in her bedroom and unwilling to talk, her only form of communication is an old notebook. In this she describes the family legends surrounding her birthday, and the connected events leading up to the traumatic event at her eighteenth birthday party, which caused her breakdown.

This is the story of a young girl's struggle with deep emotional turmoil and distress. It is loosely linked with the fairytale of the Sleeping Beauty, and shows Adèle Geras at her strong and sensitive best.

Watching the roses is the second in the 'Egerton Hall' trilogy and is the sequel to *The Tower Room*.



WATCHING THE ROSES

by Adèle Geras
0241 13109X £8.99



NEW FICTION FROM OUTSTANDING AUTHORS



THE BOOK OF THE BANSHEE

by Anne Fine
0241 131146 £8.99

HAMISH HAMILTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Will Flowers is living in a war zone. His sister Estelle is constantly fighting with their parents - EVERY day, it seems, some new plan of attack is carried out. Then Will's favourite author visits school. "You can write about anything," she tells him. Will is inspired to turn war reporter and writes down his account of the 'battles'. The result is a hilarious and penetrating record of the worries and struggles of adolescence seen through Will's eyes.

Anne Fine portrays the trials and tribulations of the Flowers family with conviction and compassion and the liveliest possible sense of humour.

gripping reads

FROM VIKING CHILDREN'S BOOKS



PERSONAL EFFECTS

by Chris Westwood

0670 838799 £5.99

When Leigh Taylor receives a mysterious letter promising love and romance it all seems too good to be true. But suppose someone out there really did care, really did want her...someone like you, the letter said. Then she posts a reply, and the terror begins! When the first victim is dragged from Poole Harbour, her body gruesomely withered like that of an old woman, as if all the life had been sucked out of her, Leigh can't believe that it has anything to do with herself... or the letter. But what if it has?

IN BLACK AND WHITE

and other stories

by Jan Mark

0670 831522 £7.99

A collection of stories of the unexplained. Frightening, poignant and sometimes humorous, these stories all display the skill which singles out Jan Mark as perhaps the most gifted writer of short stories. Among many awards, Jan Mark has won the Carnegie medal twice for *Thunder and Lightning* and *Handle*, and this immensely entertaining collection, can only enhance a formidable reputation.



UNDER THE HAWTHORN TREE

by Marita Conlon-McKenna

0670 837741 £7.99

Famine has struck Ireland and rather than suffer the misery and degradation of the workhouse the three children run away. So begins a long and painful journey and a struggle for survival in a devastated countryside. This intensely moving story introduces an outstanding new writer.

'...a sublime story...I don't know any child who will not find this book enthralling...' Clodagh Corcoran, *Irish Times*



It's
HORRIFYING

how good these books are

VIKING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Mother Goose '91

Anthony Browne, one of the judges, reports on this year's winner and runners-up in the prize for 'The Best Newcomer to British Children's Book Illustration'.

It's a peculiar business, judging books. I've been on the Mother Goose panel for four years (this is my last year). And this one has been the most difficult, and I suspect, the most controversial.

We all agreed on one thing – that this year's entries were the best ever. But then we always do. Many of the illustrators who weren't on the final shortlist will surely go on to become well-known names of the future.

Gus Clarke with **Eddie and Teddy** (Andersen, 0 86264 285 X, £5.95) has produced one of the funniest books of the year. It's also one of the best. This is a typical Andersen Press book (and I mean that as a great compliment) – it's witty, bright, with coloured line drawings rather than paintings and a wonderful punchline. Most picture books, particularly by first-time illustrators, have some weak pages – a few illustrations that are there to fill a space, or that just don't quite work. But not this one; like *Teddy*, the book is small, concentrated and brilliant. Shades, perhaps, of Tony Ross and David McKee (not bad role models), but ultimately very Gus Clarke. We all look forward to many more books from him.

Squeak-a-Lot (written by Martin Waddell, Walker, 0 7445 1907 1, £7.99) illustrated by Virginia Miller is a wonderfully accomplished book that in another year could easily have won the Mother Goose Award. Mice have been drawn so often in children's books that it must be very difficult to come up with an original approach. Virginia Miller has done just that. She's used a superbly flowing drawing style, warm muted colours that are never dull, and produced a lithographic quality that looks like no-one else. The design of the book reminded us of Sendak, and is stunning – never design for its own sake, but as a tool to tell the delightful Martin Waddell story. A lovely book.

The panel was in complete agreement on these two books. The difficulties arose with the other two. Unfortunately there were six judges and we were decisively split right down the middle on our choice of the winner. Most uncomfortable!

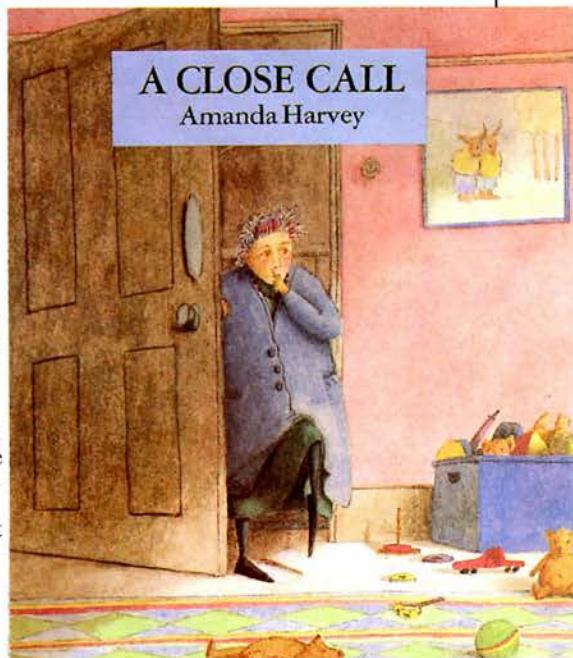
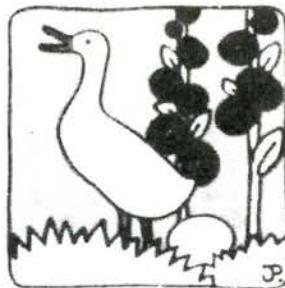
The Whales' Song (Hutchinson, 0 09 174250 1, £6.99), illustrated by Gary Blythe and written by Dyan Sheldon, must be one of the most amazing entries ever for the Mother Goose Award. Everyone on the panel could see the tremendously accomplished technique that Gary Blythe possesses, but this in some perverse way seems to have been a disadvantage with some of the judges. Criticisms were made of the girl's face – 'Too pretty' (!), of the use of photographic reference (like Ingres,

Frith, Manet, Corot, Millet, Turner, Delacroix, Courbet and Degas), of the 'chocolate-box' sentimentality, and the slickness of the technique. I hope I'm not being too unfair to some of my fellow judges, but I found comments like these about illustrations of this quality amazing. The Mother Goose Award is given to the most exciting newcomer to children's book illustration, and I believe Gary Blythe to be one of the most exciting newcomers to children's books of the last twenty years.

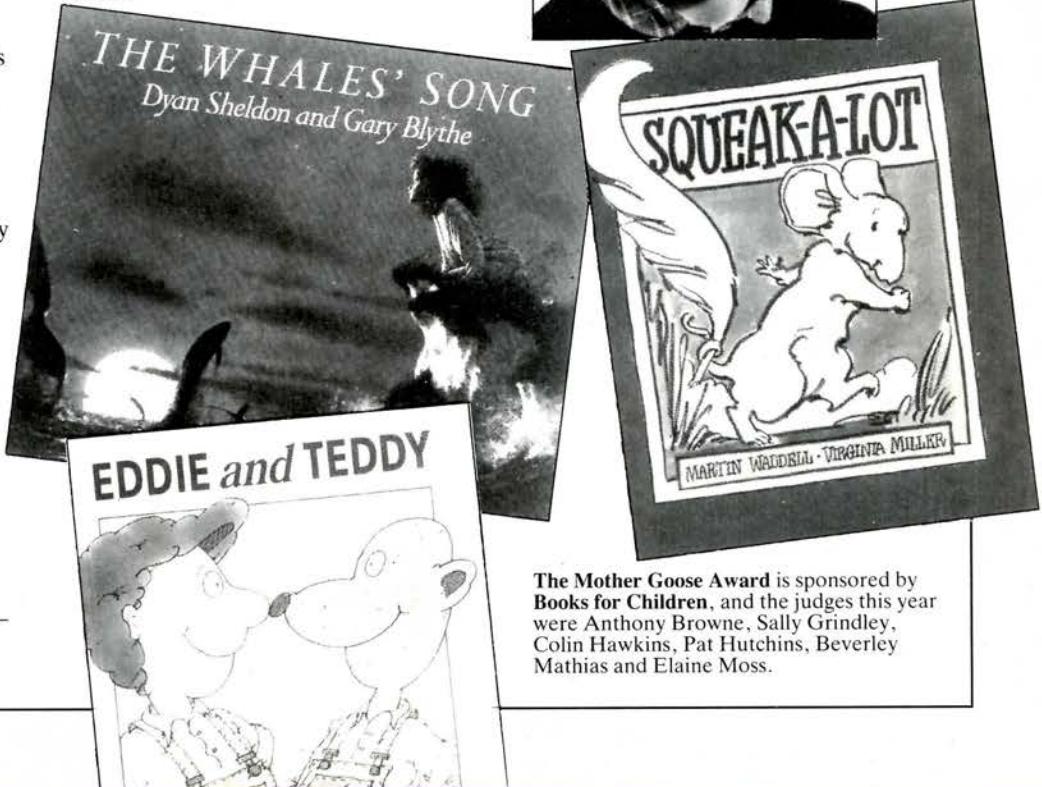
His illustrations are large oil paintings, but they don't have any of the precious 'one off' feel that paintings can have in picture books. They are true picture book illustrations, full of mood and emotion, carrying the story beyond the words in a way that only happens in the very best picture books. If some of the paintings have a slightly sentimental feel, then that is only reflecting the text and shouldn't be seen as a criticism of the illustrator.

I hope this doesn't seem unfair to the excellent winner, **A Close Call** (Macmillan, 0 333 523881, £5.95) by Amanda Harvey. If it does, then I must apologise. This is also a brilliant debut, a creepily worrying story, superbly reflected with delicate watercolours in sombre shades, spiky figures and dreamlike landscapes. We again liked the design of the book, the use of different shapes and sizes of illustration, the way the illustrator had closed in on details, and the nervous loose edges of each painting. A perfect match of text and images, the book itself is a lovely object and a very worthy winner.

Yes, it's a peculiar business, judging books.



The 1991 Winner:
Amanda Harvey



The Mother Goose Award is sponsored by Books for Children, and the judges this year were Anthony Browne, Sally Grindley, Colin Hawkins, Pat Hutchins, Beverley Mathias and Elaine Moss.



Teresa Grainger

USING BfK IN THE CLASSROOM

Teresa Grainger

'Books for Keeps – Keeps You Going for Weeks'

I joined a Year 5 class recently (on my weekly treat away from teacher training and in-service work), to explore again the multitude of ways BfK can become a learning resource within the classroom. 'What's in your box today then?' Gemma asked enthusiastically... The answer: a substantial pile of BfK magazines dating back to 1983 hoarded in teacherlike fashion, well worn, used and fingered in a number of classrooms over the years.

Our Own BfK... Check Out Books

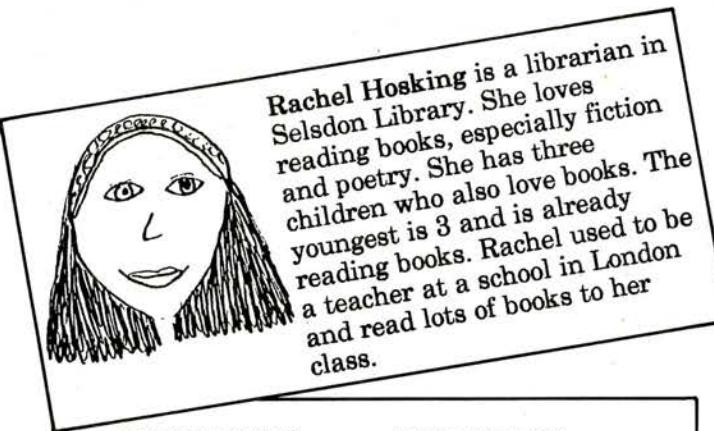
We intended to produce our own BfK-style magazine, reviewing books recently arrived and those written in school, writing articles, information sheets and autographs on our own young writers, as well as getting advertising to cover costs and so on. We had five brief mornings together, a publishing deadline, a talented class teacher, a decent word processor and 33 pockets of enthusiasm in this literature-loving class of nine-year-olds. The children perused, swapped and read my back copies of BfK, then listed the range of contents and common themes, finally agreeing their own aims and the title of their publication: **Check Out Books**. They then joined teams who took particular responsibilities for sections within our magazine, so the ideas that follow were generated by children and staff and became part of our final book review magazine (which sold out in seven days at the bookshop!).

I wanted to enable the children to take up a variety of 'expert' roles within the production process, including reviewers, authors, editors, designers, publicity agents and readers. I then offered them the opportunity to extend and reinforce those roles through drama and writing, thus widening the available learning contexts. For in assuming roles, children are gaining access to linguistic resources which might otherwise never be tapped.

Children as Reviewers

Book reviews can be done to death in the classroom it's true, but when the books are mostly new to the school, available in the bookshop or published internally, then reviewers have both a reason and a responsibility to share their views, 'so that parents don't waste their money in the bookshop, or buy something that's too hard perhaps', as nine-year-old Ian told us. Working on reviews of fiction, non-fiction and class books, the children wrote in pairs having read the book, made some notes, discussed it and read the BfK review of that text (where available). We worked hard on opening lines and collected other texts by the same author (establishing author discussion groups about publishers, illustrators, price and themes, etc. and setting questions for other groups). We found we had teachers, librarians, parents, a headmaster and even publishers reviewing our books, and they clearly took their roles as book reviewers seriously.

In such roles the children began recommending texts and asserting their opinions with confidence.



Rachel Hosking is a librarian in Selsdon Library. She loves reading books, especially fiction and poetry. She has three children who also love books. The youngest is 3 and is already reading books. Rachel used to be a teacher at a school in London and read lots of books to her class.

❑ HAIRY TALES AND NURSERY CRIMES
Michael Rosen and Alan Baker. Fontana Young Lions.
0006726755 £1.75

Michael Rosen has brought together 24 well-known fairy tales and nursery rhymes and re-written them in a hilarious tosey-turvy, silly and swervy sort of way.

Goldieocks and the Wee Bears is one of my favourite hairy tales and is sure to be one of yours.

Alan Baker has drawn tummy-tickling drawings for each of Michael Rosen's wonderful hairy tales and nursery crimes. The price of this brilliant book is great because it will give anyone from ages 7 and

❑ THE ANGEL AND THE SOLDIER BOY
Peter Collington. Magnet.
0416075223 £2.95

This is a lovely book about a soldier boy and an angel. A wicked pirate comes from one of the girl's books and steals the girl's money. The soldier boy gets kidnapped and the little angel tries to save him.

This lovely book has no writing in it so anyone can look at it. The pictures are drawn in a lovely way. The colour of the halo on the angel changes when she becomes alive from a boring grey to a shining light.

This book is rather like "Snowman". It has detail in everything you see but the loveliest picture is the boat on the piano.

This book is published by Magnet. You can read it again and again and again. It is a very good book because it encourages children to look at books.



over hours of enjoyment.
I'm sure you'd enjoy this book.

Rachel Hoskin & Victoria Graveling



I recommend this book for children of 3 and up. The money you pay for it is very worth it and I think anyone would enjoy it. The colour in the books is very light and it suits this sort of book.

Shelley Howes & Jessica Groom

Their perceptions, insights and ability to summarise styles and capture the essence of a text were remarkable. The review of **The Angel and The Soldier Boy** above was particularly significant, written by a pair, one of whom is an



**Check
Out
Books**

June 1991 No. 1
U.K. Price: 50p

(CoB) *(CoB)*

(CoB) *(CoB)*

(CoB) *(CoB)*

Check Out Books

(CoB is Great!)

- Authorgraphs
- Pick of the Poetry
- Top Ten Books
- Explore the World of Book-making
- Reviews, reviews, reviews

(It's all inside)

(Books Books and more Books)

extremely inexperienced reader who had only recently mastered this wordless picture book. The role of the reviewer had given them the authority to share their views with perspicacity.

Children as Authors

This is not a new role, but how often do we review the children's own books, interview our young writers on chat shows or radio programmes and write authorgraphs based on this information? The status this gave our own writers was considerable, enabling them to comment upon and revisit their collected works, as well as rediscover their poems and short stories which had appeared over the years in school anthologies and class publications. Some writers took imaginary roles as mothers, performance artistes and in one case an isolate who wrote in his garden shed (*à la Dahl?*). These roles enabled the children to project character traits and invent careers and families, although many remained themselves.

AUTHORGRAPH No.1

RACHEL HOSKINS

Rachel likes reading stories which inspire her. She only likes writing when she has a good idea.

She can't stop writing when she has started. She likes writing fiction because she can do more with the characters.

She would like to be a photographer, a cook or on a holiday programme. She has known Lisa Couchman since she was a baby.

She went to the Forum then Courtwood and she might go to Selston High or St. John Rigby. She has written My Shadow and Other Poems, Kate and the Weather Machine, the Diary of Melanie Locket, Disasters and the Ghostly Wardrobe.

Her favourite author is Roald Dahl because it has lots of disgusting things in it. Her favourite book is Witches and second Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

She likes reading poetry books. Her favourite poetry books are I Heard it in the Playground and Please Mrs. Butler. She also likes reading comics and her favourite comic is Funday Times. She reads it weekly and is a member.

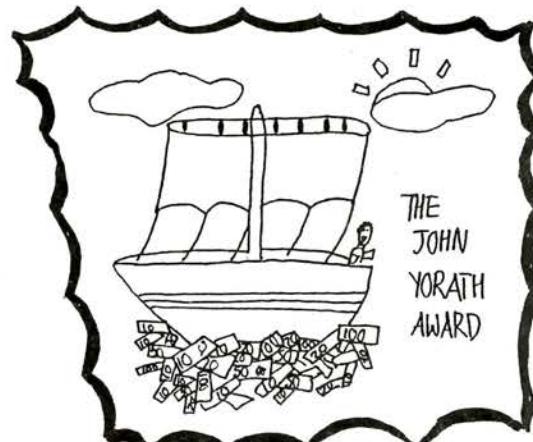
Jessica Groom

Unpublished works also became a feature of these interviews, with children listing future publications and ambitions as well as sharing their writer's notebooks with their interviewer –

who often stayed in role as they added their perspective to the authorgraph: 'I first met Dawn Prender at a book exhibition in Kent several years ago and was struck then by her sense of humour. She enjoys life still and wants her readers to laugh with her.' And in another example: 'Ben Williams told me that he prefers writing about animals, perhaps he will follow in the footsteps of Dick King-Smith and specialise in animal tales in the future, we will have to wait and see.'

Children as Designers

'We've two photos, that diagram and then the reviews with sub-titles; do you think we can have the centre page spread, we want to balance the title?' Lisa explained patiently to the Editor, as the poetry committee and the news page teams were presenting their planned layouts. The paste-up process was an illuminating one for all concerned, and the advertising team were frequently called upon to fill gaps, until financial restraint came into play. Justifying their designs and promoting their article with the editorial team called for some creative thinking; several groups were even told to resubmit their work when alterations had been made! We also ran a front cover competition and designed logos for book awards and our sponsors; however, the high cost of colour production remained prohibitive.



Children as Publicity Agents

Who would pay to advertise and cover costs? 'We can't afford to give it away, you know. Can't we get sponsors?' Stefan enquired hopefully. Our publicity team asked us to compose marketing slogans and TV adverts which were fun but – as we agreed – our target audience was schools. So, in role, COB personnel met 'teachers' and attempted to persuade them to purchase the magazine. 'Many of your local schools have had a subscription with us for years, they've certainly found that they enjoy reading it and it's worth the money'... 'But I've already spent stacks of money on books'... 'Aah, that's where we can help you spend your money more wisely, and select the very best for your children. We have a special offer on at the moment: if you pay for this edition, the next will arrive free!' Even subtle forms of flattery were intelligently employed: 'I can see you're the kind of teacher who cares about what your children read – well, I've got just the thing for you...' and to a parent, 'How often have you felt that you've wasted your money on books that aren't any good? Our book reviewers are all experts – teachers and librarians – and let me tell you they know a good book when they read one...' Posters, sandwich boards and leaflets were also suggested to promote real sales in school. These children as salesfolk were experts indeed.

COURTWOOD BOOKSHOP



opens
Tuesday, 24th
April 1990
3.15 - 4.00 p.m.

Choose from a large selection of paperback books, old favourites as well as newly published.
Save up for a book using the Bookshop's very own savings scheme.

Also on sale - everything you need for school: notebooks, pencils, rubbers, rulers, pens and much, much more.
Bring mum, dad, aunty, grandad. We accept cheques.
It's your Bookshop - Support it!

E.S.O.S.
Every Sort Of Story

provides a unique range of services for teachers, parents and children.
These include:

A MOBILE PAPERBACK BOOKSHOP

We have approximately 45 minutes to set up a bookshop in school halls so that teachers and children may choose for classrooms and libraries from our unrivalled range of picture story books and paperbacks for children and young adults.

To support schools' book weeks and festivals etc. a selection of stock may be borrowed on a sale or return basis.

We also provide up-to-date educational publications of special interest to teachers attending conferences and literature festivals.

Books may be purchased on local or County orders and retained at time of selection. A 10% discount is given.

Children as Readers

Again, nothing new for these children, although reading informational texts such as *BfK* aimed at teachers was a different experience. The principal function of reviewing and sharing children's books was easily observed, but the form and purpose of the articles in *BfK* remained much harder for the children to grasp. If, as Gunther Kress has argued in *Learning to Write* (Routledge, 1982, o/p), the mark of a mature writer is their control of different genre, then perhaps we need to extend children's access to a wider range of written prose and include *BfK* on our classroom shelf. During ERIC (Everyone Reading In Class) time, I have known many children choose *BfK* to peruse, mostly dipping into the review section and skimming the Authorgraphs for snippets about their favourite writers. That their knowledge of written language is derived from reading was particularly evident in the non-fiction reviews undertaken; the power of imitation is strong and is itself a creative process, as Amy demonstrated clearly.



CHECK OUT BOOKS

KNIGHTS AND CASTLES

Judy Hindley
Usborne Books
ISBN 0860200671

Knights and Castles is a non-fiction time-traveller book written in a fun cartoon style. This history book makes learning about knights and castles an exciting experience. A book that children can refer to again and again.

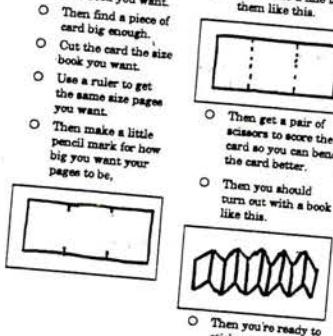
When travelling through time with the Usborne Time-Traveller Knights and Castles book children discover how ladies dressed, where the cooks would have slept and many other facts. I would recommend this book for 7 to 12 year olds.

Amy Simpson

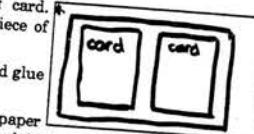
The National Curriculum

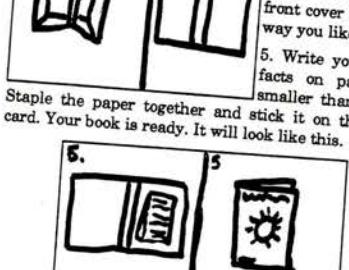
We reviewed our production process against National Curriculum demands; in having a clear sense of purpose and audience, some choice in areas of responsibility and lots of literature available, we were able to work towards and cover many PoS (Programmes of Study). Most notably these centred around the various forms of non-chronological writing, knowledge about language, collaboration in groups, and justifying your views and fiction preferences. Aspects of the Design Technology demands were also experienced.

MAKING A ZIG-ZAG BOOK by Fiona Griffiths

- First think of what size book you want.
 - Then find a piece of card big enough.
 - Cut the card the size book you want.
 - Use a ruler to get the same size pages you want.
 - Then make a little pencil mark for how big you want your pages to be,
 - Then get a pair of scissors to score the card so you can bend the card better.
 - Then you should turn out with a book like this.
 - Then you're ready to stick your pages in.
- 

MAKING A BOOK by Rachel Hosking

1. Get two pieces of card. Lay them flat on a piece of paper like this.
 2. Fold the sides in and glue them down.
 3. Stick two pieces of paper (the same colour as you laid the card on to) on the other side of the card. It will look like this.
- 

4. Your book will fold in half. Decorate the front cover in whatever way you like.
 5. Write your story or facts on paper a bit smaller than the card. Staple the paper together and stick it on the piece of card. Your book is ready. It will look like this.
- 

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

Patricia Crampton



Eleanor Farjeon '91

Past recipients of the Eleanor Farjeon Award include Margery Fisher, Kaye Webb, Margaret Meek, Naomi Lewis, Shirley Hughes, Robert Leeson . . . and **BfK**'s Jill Bennett, last year. Sponsored by Books For Children, the award has been made 'for distinguished service to the world of children's books' since 1965. The 27th Award, just announced, goes to Patricia Crampton.

Best known for her work as a translator, Patricia has helped to make Anne Holm, Rudolf Frank, Helme Heine, Janosch, Alf Prøysen and Astrid Lindgren firm favourites with English language readers – during the last thirty years she's translated more than 160 books from Danish, Dutch, French, German, Norwegian and Swedish! Twice she's won the Mildred Batchelor Award for Translation, twice her skill has been recognised as the IBBY Honour Book for Translation and she was the first winner of the Astrid Lindgren Prize.

Less well known, though, is her work at conferences, on committees and for a variety of international associations, institutes and literary panels promoting children's books and the contribution translators make to them. She served on the International IBBY executive from 1982-6 and was a highly influential chairperson of the Hans Christian Andersen Jury – insisting, for instance, that all jurors read the work of all candidates (about 120 books from 20 countries). The Children's Book Circle, whose members nominate Eleanor Farjeon winners, speak of Patricia as 'an ambassador and representative in the wider world of books where she has been a consistent, informative and independent voice for all of us working in children's publishing'.

She's also a very nice person. Readers may remember her article in our November '89 issue (No. 59) when, speaking of Astrid Lindgren, she wrote 'I am very glad . . . of her humour and kindness and her ability to bring back "the intensity with which we experienced it all when one was new to this earth".' This might easily be a description of Patricia Crampton herself. **BfK** congratulates her.

SEBASTIAN WALKER

11th December 1942 – 16th June 1991

The Sebastian Walker I'll remember was a true perfectionist. If he did something, he had to excel at it. His two great passions were playing the piano and publishing children's books. He played the piano for several hours every day and reached concert standard. And virtually single-handedly he changed the face of children's book publishing in this country. Under his visionary leadership, Walker Books have revolutionized the long-ingrained attitude that you can't publish profitably for the under-fives. They've taken hold of picture books and showed how much greater attention to design and production can result in a quality hitherto mostly lacking. They've never been afraid to try something new, to push out the boundaries that have often stifled creativity in the past, to nurture new talent, to offer authors and artists realistic financial rewards for their work, and to give proper attention to the marketing of their books both here and overseas.

The Sebastian Walker I'll remember was devoted to the cause of bringing real quality to children's books. He was incredibly generous, despairing of narrow-mindedness, intolerant of mediocrity and disloyalty, and truly brave in the last months of his life. He was hugely talented, and the children's book world will be a poorer place without him.

I'll certainly miss him.

Sally Grindley

CARNEGIE AND KATE .

Gillian Cross

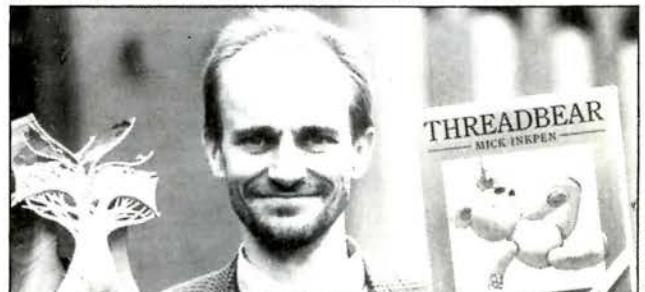


With sponsorship from Peters' Library Service matched by the Government under its Business Incentive Scheme – plus a smart new logo designed by Tony Ross – the Library Association hopes to raise the profile of its prestigious Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards even higher.

The Carnegie Medal's previous holders include Arthur Ransome, C S Lewis and Eleanor Farjeon. Edward Ardizzone, John Burningham and Quentin Blake are amongst former recipients of the Kate Greenaway. So this year's winners – Gillian Cross for her novel *Wolf* (Oxford, 0 19 271633 6, £7.95) and Gary Blythe for illustrating *The Whales' Song* (Hutchinson, 0 09 174250 1, £6.99) [see also pages 25 and 32 in this issue] – join a distinguished company. Best wishes to both . . . and good luck to the Library Association and its sponsors for their bravery and initiative in keeping alive the rumour that children's books really do matter.

Well . . . to one of this year's sponsors, anyway. That the generosity of Peters' Library Service should be supplemented

AWARDS ROUND-UP



Mick Inkpen

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD

Organised by the National Federation of Children's Book Groups, the 1991 award involved 10,247 children from all over Britain who 'tested' more than 647 titles.

The Winner: Mick Inkpen for *Threadbear* (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 53129 0, £6.95) receiving a silver and wood oak tree valued at £7,000.

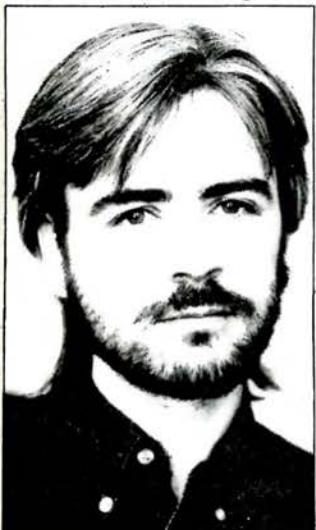
SCIENCE BOOK PRIZE 1991

The Under-14 section was won by Fran Balkwill and Mic Rolph who share £10,000 for two titles:

Cells Are Us (0 00 191163 5, £4.95; 0 00 196306 6, £2.95 pbk) and *Cell Wars* (0 00 1911674 3, £4.95; 0 00 196307 4, £2.95 pbk), both published by Collins.

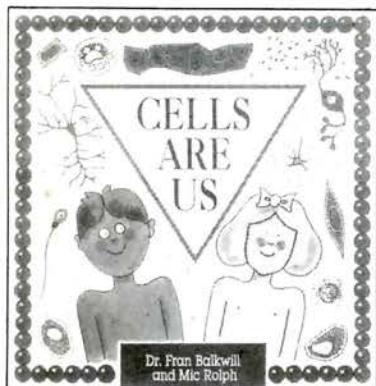


Gary Blythe and detail from *The Whale's Song*.



with government money is deeply ironic at a time when library services everywhere have been cut or are under threat. This isn't lost on Gillian Cross herself who, in her acceptance speech at the Awards Ceremony in London on 25th June, declared, 'I am angry and outraged at what is happening to libraries and this gives me the chance to express it.' She went on to point out that 'libraries are tools of freedom – the only way people can get information, and fiction, not fed to them by broadcasters or journalists. IF WE WANT TO KEEP THEM, WE MUST SHOUT NOW.'

award is for the best picture book submitted to Macmillan by an unpublished illustrator. This year's judges included Shirley Hughes, Pat Hutchins, Tony Ross and Colin McNaughton. The winner for 1991 is Selina Young from Anglia Higher Education College with her book *My Grandpa's Big Pockets* which will be available later this year.



Nick Ross, chairperson of the judges, commended the books as a 'contribution to encouraging more people to make friends with some of the wonders of the world around them'.

THE MACMILLAN PRIZE

Now in its sixth year, this

On the Teaching of Reading

This is the title of a new publication by the Language and Literacy tutors of the Brighton Polytechnic Faculty of Education. The booklet arose out of evidence presented to the Select Committee for Science and Arts in connection with its enquiry into Standards of Reading in Primary Schools. It's a balanced, well-organised account reflecting balanced, well-organised courses – a

Letters to the Editor



As you indicate in your excellent editorial note (BK 68, May '91) writers do emphatically support the Net Book Agreement – not only those in the Society of Authors but those in the Writers Guild as well.

As well as being highly organised in TV, Film, Theatre and Radio, the Writers Guild has a strong book section. Many of its active members write for children – in all the media.

When the Net Book Agreement was being weighed up by the Office of Fair Trading (is it a 'fair' practice?) a Guild Delegation met officials from the OFT and strongly argued for the continuance of the Net Book Agreement.

We made several points of which the following are the main ones.

Books are not a commodity of the same sort as shirts or steel ingots. A 'freer' market does not confer automatic benefits. The book trade is unique in having 300,000 stock items at any time (including 30,000 children's book titles). Each item is individual, each item has a different producer. Variety is the essence – and experience shows that unrestrained competition is the enemy of such variety.

The independent stock-holding bookseller, backbone of the book trade, and especially of the children's book trade, would go to the wall in any 'free for all'. Along with the (mainly small) bookseller, would suffer thousands of less known authors who depend upon sympathetic individual selling to reach public notice. Most immediate benefit of any abolition of the NBA would fall to the top one per cent of bestselling authors and those outlets able to handle large quantities of 'cheaper' fewer titles.

Authors would be adversely affected in another less obvious way. Authors' royalty income is normally based on a percentage of a known retail price. If the retail price is up for grabs, neither author nor publisher will know what might be expected by way of return. In such an incalculable situation, publishers would become more cagey about authors' advances. An atmosphere of uncertainty (which I can assure you is hostile to creativity) would have further disagreeable effects on the author.

There's more to be said, but that'll do for now. Anyone who values variety and quality in books will see how important it is to maintain the Net Book Agreement. Robert Leeson, Broxbourne, Herts.

I was somewhat disturbed to see in the March issue of Books for Keeps (No. 67) in the article by Liz Attenborough, the misleading information that trade discount on books is 42%.

Technically, the average discount to the Trade across all types of outlets probably is 42%, but for many small bookshops, like myself, our discount is only 35%. It is more annoying that Books for Keeps is mainly read by teachers who expect to receive a 10% discount when buying through their schools via the Education Licence scheme which I feel is very unfair to smaller shops. If teachers feel we get 42% discount, they will assume that 10% of that is not too bad, but 10% of 35% together with our costs leaves us very little profit. Even less profit on school text books where we only receive 17.5% discount and still have to give 10% discount to schools.

In the present economic climate, booksellers find it hard to make ends meet and schools have tighter budgets. Not a happy situation for children's books.

Carole Files, Bookseller and Chairman of School Governors, Duddon Books, Millom, Cumbria.

I bet you that hundreds, if not thousands, of your readers are longing to have a go at writing books for children and could be very good at it. Why not run a BK competition for writing a children's book? You could run a fascinating series of articles by a panel of judges – a publisher, a teacher, a bookseller, a parent, a librarian, a child and an illustrator – each explaining what they would look for in a text. I don't think that there is currently any other competition for new children's writers, is there? I'm sure that you'd discover some exciting new talents for all the different categories of children's books. Why not give it a go?!

Pippa Goodhart, Leicester.

Actually there is such a competition – it's the Kathleen Fidler Award which was set up in 1980 to encourage both new and established authors to submit their work for the 8-12 age group. It's sponsored by Blackie publishers and administered by Book Trust Scotland. There's a cash prize and a trophy... plus, the real pay-off, subsequent publication by Blackie. Even if BK could muster the resources for such a competition, we couldn't guarantee the latter. Ed.

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to Books for Keeps, The Old Chapel, Easton, Nr. Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1EG. We reserve the right to shorten letters received for publication.

world away from the approaches the popular press erroneously suggests are widespread in our schools and teacher-training institutions.

Also, mercifully, it's short. Highly recommended. For copies, priced at £2.00 inc. p&p (with a discount for bulk orders), telephone Pam Blackman, Literacy Centre Co-ordinator, on 0273 643387.

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B A N K
V D O T O

FAITH IN STORY

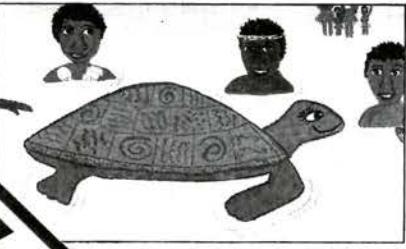
Alan Brine, County General Inspector, RE, for Hampshire, assesses some new – and not so new – texts.

Religious books for children! The idea can bring a glazed look to the eyes. Alas it's still the case that, for many, Religion + Children = Bible Stories. So let's start there – knowing we need to go further.

How to choose a book of Bible stories? The cry of 'Bible stories are part of our culture so children ought to know them' is familiar enough – and *not* good enough. We need to take account of a crucial question. How can we offer the stories in a way which helps children appreciate their imaginative, creative power and avoids a cosy, preaching literalism?

Tomie de Paolo's **Book of Bible Stories** (Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, 0 340 50131 6, £8.95) captures this imaginative quality. It combines simple, witty drawings with the direct, accessible text of the New International Version of the Bible. His background as a painter of Church murals gives the pictures a medieval feel which focuses the reader on the mythical, dignified quality of the text. The idea of the picture as a 'silent teacher' works well, enhancing the text by drawing out the symbolic storytelling quality of the Biblical tradition. His choice of material is both wide-ranging and imaginative. Popular Old and New Testament stories are woven with extracts from some of the best loved poetic passages in the Bible. He avoids trying to create one long story from the Bible, as if it were a history book, and concentrates on the power and meaning which each story offers. His treatment of Jesus is particularly good. He doesn't stress the difficult parables and miracles but focuses on those episodes which emphasise the humanity and mystery of the person.

Lion are issuing a new edition of their popular **Lion Children's Bible** retold by Pat Alexander (Lion, 1991, 0 7459 1939 1, £7.95). This contains revamped illustrations by Carolyn Cox which are a great improvement. They replace the monochrome and rather static pictures of the 1981 edition with lively, powerful colour. The new pictures have an energy and directness which will make the telling of the stories much more imaginative. It's perhaps a pity that they didn't also revamp the text which remains rather prosaic and literal – but the new pictures certainly help.



From *The Turtle and the Island*.

Abraham and Isaac by Michael Foreman ...

... and by Tomie de Paolo.

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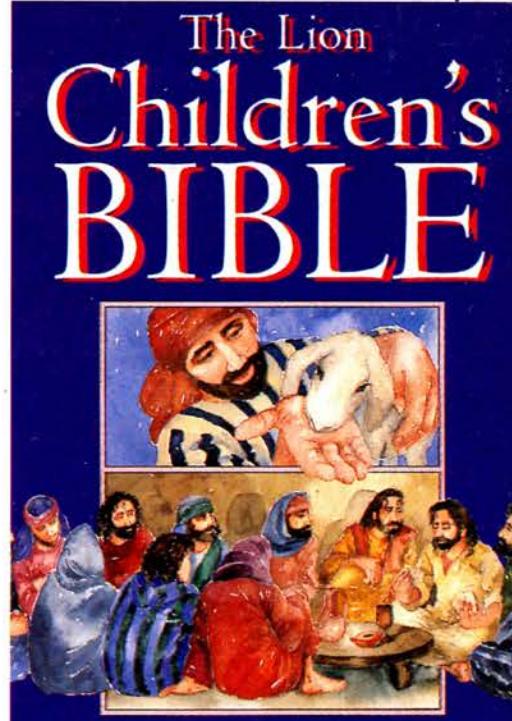
For me, however, the best text, particularly for older children, remains the rather under-valued **City of Gold** by Peter Dickinson (Gollancz, 1980, 0 575 02883 1, £8.95). Michael Foreman's magical illustrations combine excellently with the off-beat retelling of the major Old Testament stories. What makes this the benchmark for good quality is the way in which Dickinson creates a sense of a time before the text was set in stone, when it still lived as part of the Jewish storytelling tradition. The book conveys superbly the sense that the stories have been told, re-told, interpreted and re-created. The Red Sea story is told by a peasant fisherman to an Egyptian official some hundred years after the Exodus – in front of a monument to Pharaoh's great victory! Who has the truth?

But let's widen our horizon. Any book which stimulates the creative, questioning imagination of the child will enhance her religious or spiritual sense. Maybe all good books have this quality. Certainly, we should mention **The Whales' Song** by Dyan Sheldon and Gray Blythe (Hutchinson, 1990, 0 09 174250 1, £6.99) – reviewed in **BfK 67** (March 1991). [See also the reports in this issue on *The Mother Goose Award* and the *Kate Greenaway Medal* . . . Ed.] If you want to help children appreciate the wonder and mystery of our place in the natural world – what could be better? Is it heretical to suggest this might do more for a child's religious sensitivity than most Bible stories?

Four other recent publications deserve praise for enlarging the scope of 'religious' story material.

Jenny Koralek and Pauline Baynes' **The Cobweb Curtain** (Methuen, 1989, 0 416 13462 9, £6.95) extends the imaginative approach to religious tradition by recounting the legend of the Spider's Web – the origin of our use of tinsel on the Christmas tree. The book is beautifully illustrated and conveys the sense of the magical quality of the Nativity in an original and compelling way.

Barbara Ker Wilson's retelling of **The Turtle and the Island** (Frances Lincoln, 1990, 0 7112 0624 4, £6.95; 0 7112 0697 X, £3.99 pbk) is based on a creation myth from Papua New Guinea. The story is beautifully told with delightful native-style paintings by Frané Lessac. It offers a powerful sense of the harmony between humankind and the environment with ancient wisdom vested in the figure of an earth-mother – the great sea turtle.



The World's Greatest Story Retold for Every Child

In similar vein, but for older pupils, Collins have combined with the Worldwide Fund for Nature to produce **Worlds of Choice** by Joanne O'Brien (Collins, 1990, 0 00 322205 5, £4.95 pbk). This is a fascinating combination of stories and case studies exploring the ways in which people throughout the world have sought to find and create harmony in nature. The focus is on the ways belief and action come together in a number of different situations – Aboriginal, Buddhist, Christian, Socialist, Central American Indian, etc. The book is beautifully illustrated and lures the reader into appreciating the variety of ways in which the environment has become an appropriate place of reverence in our modern world.

Finally, Angela Woods' **Faith Stories for Today** (BBC/Longman, 1990, 0 582 05946 1, £3.95 pbk) is a selection of the author's favourite stories from the major religious traditions. As she says in the introduction, 'Faith stories are for asking questions, not really for telling answers. My pet name for them is "Why?" stories.' This hits the mark. The ten stories are imaginatively told and explore the five themes of Worship, Nature, Relationships, Right and Wrong, and Beliefs. The stories tease and puzzle the imagination. To quote her again:

'Another thing I like about this kind of story is that it reminds me of a sweet – one you can suck for ages and even when it is all gone, you can still taste it.' ■



IN OUR SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Jack Ousby on Reading and the Imagination
John Fines on Books, History and the National Curriculum
Mary Worrell on the new Oxford Junior Encyclopaedia
Fiona Kenshole and Scoular Anderson on the 'Jets' series
Stephanie Nettell interviews Kaye Webb
Val Biro in Authorgraph
The launch of an exciting new BfK/BFC competition . . . plus reviews, reviews, reviews