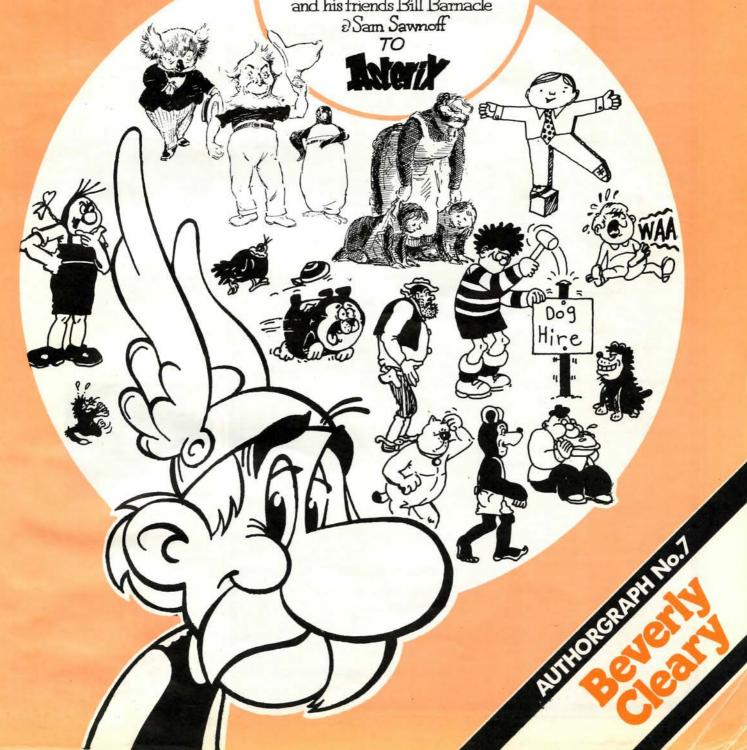


# The issue

FROM Burryip Bluegum and his friends Bill Barnacle Sam Sawnoff



# Contents

### **Editor's Page**

News and comment from the Editor

Whatever Makes You Laugh

Lance Salway talks about humorous books and recommends titles to raise some necessary laughter

### Reviews

Paperback Nursery/Infant

Infant/Junior Lower Junior Junior/Middle Middle/Secondary

Hardback

New titles for new readers

Asterix and his Creators 12

Anthea Bell talks about Translating Goscinny and Tony Bradman meets Uderzo

Authorgraph No. 7 Beverly Cleary

Stock your 17 How to Bookshop

Brian Joyce recommends learning from the customers

If I had some money I would 18 buy this book

Children look at non-fiction

Is Everything Dandy with 20 Beano?

Brian. Walsh and Nicholas Tucker consider comics

News

22

Opinion

Steve Bowles swipes at Celebrity Snares

Sound and Vision

News and views about books on radio, TV and films

You Tell Me

Roger McGough and Michael Rosen prove that poetry can be fun too

28 SBA news

# BOOKS NEEDS

- the magazine of the School Bookshop Association

### MARCH 1981 No. 7

ISSN:

7

11

14

24

25

26

0143-909X Pat Triggs

Editor: Designer:

Alec Davis Typsetting by: Curtis Typesetting,

Gloucester Printed by:

Surrey Fine Arts, Redhill Surrey

Editorial correspondence:

Pat Triggs 36 Ravenswood Road Bristol, Avon, BS6 6BW

Tel: 0272 49048

Subscriptions and advertising:

Richard Hill 1 Effingham Road

Lee, London, SE12 8NZ

Tel: 01-852 4953

©School Bookshop Association 1981

No. 7 March 1981

Registered office:

National Book League, Book House, 45 East Hill, Wandsworth, London SW18.

All photographs, unless otherwise credited, by Richard Mewton.

BOOKS NEEDS

can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to the Subscription Secretary, SBA, 1 Effingham Road, Lee, London SE12 8NZ. Tel: 01-852 4953

Annual subscription for six issues: £4.50 UK, £7.50 overseas. Single copies direct from the SBA: 75p UK, £1.25 overseas.

Published by the School Bookshop Association with the help of Lloyds Bank, six times a year.



### LOOKING AHEAD

In the May issue we are going to town on Poetry and Picture Books.

Plus news, reviews and all our regular features.

# Reviewers



### Jill Bennett

Jill is an infant teacher, currently on a course at the Institute of Education in London. She is Literary Editor of Child Education and on the Board of the SBA.



### Steve Bowles

Steve was a secondary English teacher and co-producer of Reviewsheet until it ceased publication. He is now writing full-time.





### Colin Mills (left)

Colin is in the Division of Teaching Studies at Worcester College, where he helps run a Diploma in Children's Literature. He's taught in a comprehensive school, a primary school and worked in radio.

Bill Boyle (right)

Bill teaches in Middle School in Wirral. He was founding Deputy Editor of Junior Education.



### Cathy Lister

Cathy teaches in a middle school in Staffordshire, with responsibility for English and Language across the Curriculum.



### David Bennett

David (no relation to Jill) is a former librarian, and currently Head of English in a Nottinghamshire secondary school.

Front cover illustrations: Bunyio Bluegum & friends, Nurse Matilda and Flat Stanley, see pages 4 & 5; Dandy, Beano and Topper characters, see pages 20 & 21; Asterix, pages 12 & 13.

# **EDITOR'S PAGE**

You'd think producing an issue of the magazine on the theme of humour would be one long laugh. I should have known — they say humour is a serious business. We've hovered between disaster and farce (more about the farce later); but as in all good stories it all came right in the end, and here's Books for Keeps No. 7 with lots of ideas, information and comment.

What about comics? Have you noticed that children invariably read them with dead pan faces? Not a smile in sight. Adults still get steamed up about them. Only a few weeks ago a contributor to the Sunday Times suggested that the glorification of naughtiness and anti-social behaviour in comics was having a bad effect on kids. We asked Nicholas Tucker what he

Still contemplating comics we discovered that Uderzo, the man who draws Asterix, was making a rare visit to this country.

We despatched Tony Bradman, who claims to speak fluent French (Is there no limit to the man's talents?) to interview him. (See page 13).

thinks. (See page 20)

Asterix has millions of fans, not least of which, we hear, was the late President De Gaulle. He enjoyed Asterix so much that at one cabinet meeting in the Elysee Palace he called the register of ministers (something he did at every meeting; they had to say 'present') using the names of characters from the Asterix books. Uderzo says a minister who was present told him the story. I've been wondering how they worked out who he thought was which!

One person who has no trouble with language is Anthea Bell. I've long admired her translations and was delighted when she agreed to write about Translating Goscinny. (Page 12) Unfortunately there wasn't space to include anything about Nicholas, a Goscinny character who never fails to make me laugh.

It says for 7–10 year olds on the books; but that didn't seem to stop 150 parents and teachers appreciating the jokes in Dad Makes the Decisions (the first chapter of Nicholas on Holiday) when I read it to them recently. There's also Nicholas and the Gang and Nicholas and the Gang and Form Beaver.

● A Family Favourite
Going to meet the author of a
favourite book is always a little
worrying. What if he or she turns
out to be everything you hate?
Wouldn't it be better not to know?

When the author is someone who has united your whole family in helpless laughter there is somehow more at risk; so my feelings about meeting Beverly Cleary were certainly mixed. I needn't have worried. She was delightful. (How could I have imagined the creator of Ramona would be anything else?)

Full of humour, she is also perceptive and thoughtful, especially about children and what we are doing to them. She talked about a recent visit to New Zealand. 'I left there feeling that we don't do well by children in the USA. In New Zealand they were such good listeners. When I talk with children at home they are so busy thinking about themselves and their questions that they don't listen to the answers.' That sounded all too familiar. Then there was her story of meeting children fishing for minnows by the Thames. When asked what they were doing, the boys were friendly and forthcoming, keen to explain; the girls' response was, 'We're not doing anything wrong, Miss.' Food for thought? Beverly Cleary wrote the Henry Huggins books in the Fifties but they have only recently been available here. In April Hamish Hamilton publish a third title, Henry in the Clubhouse, and Fontana Lions promise Henry and Beezus in the autumn. There's also a new Ramona book on the way.

• New in this issue Opinion (page 24) is a new feature which we intend to run regularly. Space to blow your top is what we offer. We shall be inviting people to contribute but if you have something to say just sharpen your pencil (or your stiletto) and get writing. Who better to start us off than Steve Bowles?

• Getting started . . . Keeping going New too, and now available is the completely re-designed and rewritten SBA Handbook, How to Set Up and Run a School Bookshop. We think it's pretty good (well, really fantastic actually) and we know it's full of good, practical ideas because we got them from people who have made them work. Every bookshop should have one. (For details see page 28) Coming soon for those just getting going, Starter Lists with suggestions for your opening stock.

Or so it seemed when I spent the best part of a week in February not meeting Roger McGough. (I said we'd get to the farce later.) The first time there was I ringing the bell of his flat in the Fulham Road; there was he sitting around at Penguin hoping someone would tell him what he was there for. The second time he was in his flat; but I was stuck at the printers — and so it went on. In the end he went to Australia. But he did send a letter 'I must oil my digeridoo and put on my kangaroo repellent lotion', and promised to write for us later in the year. So watch out.

We wanted to talk to him about You Tell Me (page 26) and also his smashing new anthology of poetry Strictly Private (Kestrel, 0 7221 5697, £4.95) which he hopes will speak 'to the ninety-nine percent of kids who do not come top in English'. It's certainly worth a try.

Pat



Available in hardback

Ann Thwaite wrote to us about another anthology, her own All Sorts of Poems, recommended in the Magnet paperback edition in Books for Keeps 6. 'I think I should point out, in justice to the publisher who took on the book in the first place, and to help any school librarian who can actually afford hardbacks, that it is also available in a rather sumptuous edition with sepia illustrations from Angus and Robertson at £3.95.'

In the same article Bill Boyle also mentioned Hist Whist!, out of print in Piccolo but still available in hardback from Evans.

In our next issue

All of which brings me very neatly to the next issue which is about Poetry and Picture Books. Michael Rosen, Quentin Blake, Eleanor Farjeon, David McKee are just a few of the people featured. To whet your appetites three first-class picture books are published this month. The Most Amazing Hideand-Seek Counting Book (Kestrel, £4.50) is Robert Crowther's follow-up to his Alphabet book, and is, if possible even more inventive. In the same pop-up, move-around style is Eric Carle's The Honey Bee and the Robber (Julia MacRae, £4.50), a story/information book in the same tradition as his Very Hungry Caterpillar. The extra large pages of Peter Spier's People (Worlds Work, £4.95) are literally crammed



with all sorts and conditions of people. A super book which celebrates the sheer variety of human kind.

Happy Easter



# WHAT IS AUMOUR?

# Lance Salway suggests it's simply

# Whatever Makes You Laugh

Ogden Nash, in one of his wry poems, once observed that 'In this foolish world there is nothing more numerous / Than different people's senses of humorous.' This is very true, of course, but there is nothing more numerous either than attempts by psychologists and philosophers (Freud and Kant and Aristotle among them) to define and explain humour, and to establish exactly what it is that makes people laugh, and why. As far as I know, no one has yet succeeded in nailing down a convincing explanation of humour but Alvin Schwartz, a noted American folklorist, has offered a definition that is as good as any: 'Humour is the comic quality in a person, experience, or idea that makes one laugh.'

To children — and adults, too — this 'comic quality' can vary enormously. They will laugh at anything, from trick conundrums ('What is yellow and dangerous?' 'Shark infested custard.') to rude limericks ('A musical student from Sparta . . . '), and from sly pain-inflicting rhymes ('Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me') to so-called sick jokes ('Mummy, mummy, why do I keep on walking in circles?' Shut up, or I'll nail your other foot to the floor!' They will even fall about at the sound of a single word -'knickers', for example - if it is uttered in an unsuitable place by an unlikely person. But although these varied comic stimuli may provoke a humorous response, they do not provoke it equally. We do not all laugh at the same things. Only television studio audiences do that. Why is it then that a stand-up comedian or a film or a book will make one person laugh but not another? Why does Frankie Howerd make me laugh but not my wife? Why don't I find Laurel and Hardy amusing, and why does the humour of P.G. Wodehouse leave me cold (mind you, I loved his books when I was twelve or so)? What do people see in Max Bygraves?

Why is there such a gap between 'different people's senses of humorous'? Whatever the reason (and I don't intend to suggest an explanation), a wide variety of humorous children's books exist to satisfy the human need for laughter. Most picture books for young children contain a degree of humour, for authors and artists are well aware that comedy is an easy way to capture the attention of the child and to illustrate the idea that books can mean enjoyment. It has been suggested, though, that few small children really recognise humour as such. A child who is meeting conventional language and experiences for the first time will lack the ability to distinguish the congruous from the incongruous, or to separate fact from fantasy. Young children take stories seriously, and the adventures of, say, the elephant and the bad baby or naughty Nancy, the bad bridesmaid, may seem exciting and strange to them but not particularly funny. And, of course, much of the visual and verbal humour in many picture books is aimed over the child's head at the adult reader-aloud, or is included as a private joke of the artist or author. Without such jokes, though, the mind of the strongest parent or teacher might well buckle beneath the sheer banality of many books for the younger child.

It is when they reach seven or eight years old that children begin to properly appreciate the wealth of humorous books available to them. Beginning with the robust comedy of Paddington Bear and The Magic Pudding, and moving on to the hilarious adventures of human



hoto by Alex Law, Sherbor

Lance Salway trained as a librarian and worked as a children's and schools librarian in North London before going to Longman's Young Books as an editor. He is now a freelance writer, editor, translator, and reviewer of children's books.

Recently out in paperback is Forgers (Puffin, 0 14 03.1114 9, 95p), an information book for juniors about famous and remarkable frauds, counterfeiters, fakes and deceivers, taking in the Great Barnum, Piltdown Man, Van Meegeren, and Major Martin, the man who never was.

Lance Salway lives in Sherborne, Dorset, with his social worker wife.

Humorous Books for Children is a Signal Booklist, recently revised in a second edition. It is available from The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 5EQ, and from the NBL, Book House, 45 East Hill, Wandsworth, London SW18 2OZ. Price £1.10. Also available is an NBL touring exhibition of the books on the list. Details from the NBL.

characters like Nurse Matilda and Jacob Two-Two (Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang, Mordecai Richler) and Josh McBroom, (McBroom's Wonderful One-Acre Farm, Sid Fleischman) a rich variety of amusing writing awaits their enjoyment, culminating in the more subtle, sophisticated — and mainly transatlantic — comedies of Betsy Byars and Judy Blume, of Anne Fine and Paul Zindel.

Yet, despite their popularity with young readers - or because of it? — funny books are not really respectable. They never have been. It is not for nothing that the most popular and despised reading matter for children is called a comic. And it is all too often assumed that if a story is amusing then it cannot possibly be Worthy or Improving or Good Literature. Funny books do sometimes win awards (Penelope Lively's The Ghost of Thomas Kempe, for example, and E.L. Konigsburg's From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs Basil E. Frankweiler) but not very often. As Marcus Crouch once observed on this subject, 'Our self-conscious concern for Children's Literature either as a vehicle for social theory or as an art form, gets in the way.' Every now and again Children's Literature and Humour do combine to splendid effect look at The Strange Affair of Adelaide Harris and The Eighteenth Emergency and The Piemakers (Helen Cresswell) — but all two often the twain do not meet. If some of our more prestigious children's writers could be persuaded to amuse their readers for a change, then we

would have better funny books and funnier good books.

Compiling a descriptive list of humorous children's books, as I have done, can present unusual problems. Other book lists, whether they be of multi-cultural books or learningto-read books or fairy tales or award winners, are all based on easily defined and easily recognised criteria of selection. But opinions differ as to whether and to what extent any book is funny, and the degree to which children will be amused by it, if at all. All I had to guide me was my own enjoyment of the books I chose, and my own experience or estimation of their effect on young readers. Humorous Books for Children is therefore a personal choice of amusing reading, intended for those parents and teachers who are looking for funny books to recommend or read aloud, and for those people who, like me, feel that humour has for too long been neglected as a significant factor in children's enjoyment of books.

Children's senses of humorous may well be numerous but then so are children's books. Difficulty only arises when one attempts to match one with the other. With any luck, Humorous Books for Children will help with this. At the very least, I hope that it may be a step in the right direction. After all, laughter is one of the necessities of life, and it is only right that it should be one of the necessities of reading too.

# Some Necessary Laughter

From his list Humorous Books for Children Lance Salway has chosen twenty books with assorted kinds of laugh appeal.

Books for younger children come first; but we have resisted grouping them by age of reader/listener because the great thing about funny books is that at their best they cross all age barriers. That's why they are good for sharing.

Up and Up, Shirley Hughes, Bodley Head, 0 370 30179 X, £3.50. A small girl finds that she is able to fly and proceeds to lead a mob of astonished adults a merry dance around the town until she comes to earth with a bump. An enchanting story, told without words, and illustrated with humorously detailed drawings

Benjamin and Tulip, Rosemary Wells, Kestrel, 0722652534, £1.95. 'Every time Benjamin passed Tulip's house, she said, "I'm gonna beat you up." And she did. Benjamin gets his own back in the end, though, in a very simple story about two raccoons.

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, Judith Viorst, illustrated by Ray Cruz, Angus and Robertson, 0 207 95485 2, £2.95.

The succession of disasters which overtake Alexander on one awful day will be familiar to all children who, like him, quarrel with their best friend, go to the dentist and have beans for dinner when they hate beans.

Father Christmas, Raymond Briggs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 02260 6, £3.50 (Picture Puffin paperback, 0 14 050.125 8, £1.10).

A day in the life of the old codger, told in bright comic-strip style. A glorious picture book that young children return to again and again.

The Wild Washerwomen, John Yeoman, illustrated by Quentin Blake, Hamish Hamilton, 0 240 89928 1, £3.95.

A raucous tale of seven washerwomen who rebel against their tight-fisted employer and run joyfully amok all over town until they settle down with seven jovial woodcutters.

Two of the 'Wild Washerwomen'

How Tom Beat Captain Najork and his Hired Sportsmen, Russell

Hoban, illustrated by Quentin Blake, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 00999 0, £3.50 (Picture Puffin paperback, 0 14 050.244 0, 70p).

Tom's iron-hatted maiden aunt tries to tame him by sending for Captain Najork and his hired sportsmen, but they are no match for Tom, the greatest fooler-around and mucker-about that there is. The magnificent nonsense of the story is ideally matched by Blake's wild and wonderful

Flat Stanley, Jeff Brown, illustrated by Tomi Ungerer, Methuen (Read Aloud Books), 0 416 80360 1, £3.25 (Magnet paperback, 0 416 57290 1, 55p).

Young Stanley Lambchop is squashed flat when a bulletin board falls on

his bed one night. Much of the humour in this splendidly idiotic story lies in the matter-of-fact way in which his family accept Stanley's mis-

Ramona the Pest, Beverly Cleary, illustrated by Louis Darling, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 02412 9, £3.95 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.0774 5, 75p).

The story of Ramona Quimby's first days at kindergarten, and the comedy and confusion which she causes there and at home. Not a book for Ramona-aged children but one for their older brothers and sisters who will appreciate the maddening logic of a lively five-year-old.

Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf, Catherine Storr, illustrated by Marjorie-Ann Watts, Faber and Faber, 0 571 18011 6, £3.25 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.0312 X, 70p).

Short hilarious stories about an enterprising small girl and how a stupid wolf's attempts to catch and eat her are always foiled by his own incompetence.

My Uncle Podger, Jerome K. Jerome, adapted and illustrated by Wallace Tripp, Dent, 0 460 06782 6, £3.95 (Currently out of print). Wallace Tripp has raided the third chapter of Three Men in a Boat for the story of bombastic Uncle Podger's disastrous attempts to hang a picture, and transformed the characters into late Victorian rabbits in the process. Jerome's humour hasn't dated at all, and Tripp's pictures are hilarious.

The Magic Pudding, Norman Lindsay, Angus and Robertson, 0 207 94392 3, £4.50 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.0098 8, 60p). A fast and furious Australian classic in which Bunyip Bluegum, Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawnoff attempt to protect a magic pudding called Albert from 'puddin' thieves'. Good for reading aloud, but only if you can manage the accent.

The Fox Busters, Dick King-Smith, illustrated by Jon Miller, Victor Gollancz, 0 575 02444 5, £3.25 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.1175 0, 75p).

A refreshing comedy set on a farm about a running feud between chickens and marauding foxes. The account of how the foxes are finally defeated by a blitz of hard-boiled eggs laid by dive-bombing hens in midflight is highly ingenious and very funny.

The Great Ghost Rescue, Eva Ibbotson, illustrated by Simon Stern, Macmillan, 0 333 17625 1, £3.95.

Humphrey the ghost is a disappointment to his loathsome family (his mother is a Hag smelling of unwashed armpits and very old feet) but it is he who saves the day when the ghosts of England are driven from their familiar haunts by modern progress. Do not on any account miss this hilarious book.

Nurse Matilda, Christianna Brand, illustrated by Edward Ardizzone, Hodder and Stoughton, 0 340 03702 4 £2.50 (Knight paperback — August 1981, 0 340 17462 5, 85p).

A classic comedy about a vast Victorian family of very wicked children (thirty-six, all told) and how they are brought to heel by the ferociously ugly Nurse Matilda. Ideal for reading aloud.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, Barbara Robinson, illustrated by Judith Gwyn Brown, Faber and Faber, 0 571 10593 9, £3.50 (Beaver paperback, entitled The Worst Kids in the World, 0 600 34526 2, 60p). The sharp and hilarious account of a large family of deprived children who, following a misunderstanding, take over the main parts in the annual nativity play. Something different to read aloud at Christmas.

The Eighteenth Emergency, Betsy Byars, Bodley Head, 0 370 10924 4, £2.75 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.0863 6, 70p). A sympathetic study of a boy faced with real fear (attack by the biggest boy in the school) who summons up the courage he needs to face the situation. The story is told with all the humour and understanding that are typical of this fine American writer.

Wilkins' Tooth, Diana Wynne Jones, illustrated by Julia Rodber, Macmillan, 0 333 14548 8, £3.95 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.0765 6,

Frank and Jess start a small firm called Own Back Ltd. ('Revenge Arranged') in order to supplement their pocket money, and are immediately drawn into a tangled adventure. A highly original, highly enjoyable comedy for top juniors.

The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler, Gene Kemp, illustrated by Carolyn Dinan, Faber and Faber, 0 571 10966 7, £3.95 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.1135 1, 75p).

Authentic school setting, dialogue and situations distinguish this very funny story about Tyke's last term at primary school. And there's a stunning twist in the tail, too.

The Strange Affair of Adelaide Harris, Leon Garfield, illustrated by Fritz Wegner, Kestrel, 0 7226 5095 7, £3.15 (Puffin paperback, 0 14 03.0671 4, 60p).

An elegant and complex comedy, set in early nineteenth-century Brighton, about the confused train of events caused by the disappearance of the infant Adelaide. Still Garfield's most enjoyable book

The Summer-House Loon, Anne Fine, Methuen, 0 416 86180 6, £3.95 (Magnet paperback, 0 416 87650 1, 65p). An example of that rare literary species: the funny British teenage novel. An engaging and original story of two young people whose erratic courtship is helped along by the daughter of a blind professor.

# presents A New Selection



MUSIC WORKSHOP, Dorothee Kreusch Jacob, illus. Hans Wallner. Pub. date 23rd April. £4.25 net. 0560 74516 8

ARTHUR'S EYES, Marc Brown, Pub. date 21st May. £3.50 net. 0560 74517 6

COME INTO MY NIGHT, COME INTO MY DREAM, Stefan Mahlqvist, illus.Tord Nygren.

Pub.date 23rd April. £3.75 net. 0 560 74510 9

A QUEST FOR THE PAST, TUDOR PALACE 1587,

Felicia Law, illus. Charles Front. Pub. date 21st May.

£3.75 net. 0560 74511 7

DOMES: A Project Series for Young People,

Anne & Scott MacGregor Pub. date 21st May. £3.95 net. 0560 74512 5

SPILLINGTON AND THE WHITEWASH CLOWNS,

Anthony Curtis, illus. Rosemary Bullen.

Pub. date 23rd April. £3.50 net. 0560 74513 3

MISS MOUSE, THE COSMIC TURTLE,

Dave Cash, illus. John Farman.

Pub. date 21st May. £3.75 net. 0560 74514 1 THE BEAST IN THE BATHTUB Kathleen Stevens, illus. Ray Bowler. Pub. date 23rd April. £3.25 net. 0560 74515 X

For more information/catalogue, please contact:
Ian Morgan, UK Trade Sales Manager, Pepper Press, Butterley Street,

Leeds LS10 1AX. Tel: 0532 442944.



# reviews

# PAPERBACKS NURSERY/INFANT



Mog's Mumps
Helen Nicoll and Jan
Pienkowski, Picture
Puffin,
0 14 050.357 9, 90p
Having just recovered from an
attack of mumps — or was it
indigestion? — Mog, in
reckless mood, goes joy-riding
on Meg's broomstick with
catastrophic results. . . The
long-awaited paperback of this
established favourite will
satisfy vast numbers of Meg
and Mog addicts. JB

Clotilda's Magic
Jack Kent, Hippo,
0 590 72055 4, 75p
Readers will laugh at the
exploits of Clotilda, a rather
dumpy fairy godmother, who is
determined to prove her
identity to an unbelieving
small boy who insists that she
is a bug. She has to resort to
somewhat desperate measures
but all ends satisfactorily
thanks to the wishes of
Tommy's friend Betty — and
of course, her fairy godmother.
But, as Clotilda's song shows,
there is more to magic than
spectacular tricks.

I hope others will get as much pleasure from this gently humorous fantasy as I did. Strongly recommended for sharing with a class or for individual consumption.



Drawing by Jack Kent from 'Clotilda's Magic'

Doodle's Homework
John Ryan, Picture Lion,
0 00 661756 5, 85p
Learning by doing has long
been advocated as the means
of solving mathematical
problems, at least for younger
children (and Dodos?).
However, practical methods do
not always work, especially
when Fuddi-duddi-dodo is in
charge of the operation. So it
is just as well that Doodle was
able to solve the problem
aided only by his blackboard
and chalk. Definitely not
amused was the reaction I got
to this rather silly story.

JB



Fuddi-duddi-dodo from 'Doodle's Homework' by John Ryan

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.

**Splodges** Malcolm Carrick, Picture Lion, 0 00 661706 9, 85p I had a strong feeling of déjà vu when reading what seems to me, an unnecessary contrivance which I presume is intended to encourage children to experiment with techniques of using paint. In my experience young children do this sort of thing all the time in schools where their artwork is encouraged and valued and materials are always readily available. However, where this is not the case, Malcolm Carrick's creations could well be a source of inspiration for teachers and children alike. JB



'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' from Jannat Houston's 'Nursery Rhymes'

Nursery Rhymes Illustrated by Jannat Houston, Piccolo Picture Classic, 0 330 26335 8, 80p In the dozen or so rhymes she has chosen to illustrate in soft, muted colours, Jannat Houston evokes the fantasy qualities of the material but not to the exclusion of the elements of reality which are part and parcel of nursery rhymes. There seems to be influence of Nicola Bayley and possibly Richard Doyle in this new-to-me illustrator's work; but it is none the worse for that. The rhymes (lesserknown ones in the main) and the warm, detailed pictures are so presented that the book is likely to appeal to a wide audience.

Rapunzel
The Brothers Grimm,
illustrated by Sandy
Nightingale, retold by
Shirley Greenway,
Piccolo Picture Classic,
0 330 26245 9, 80p
A disappointing rendition of a
favourite tale, all the more so
since there are so few picture
book versions available. The
spiritless prose and sub-

Rackham illustrations failed, for me at least, to bring the tale to life. JI

# Desmond and the Monsters

Althea, Dinosaur,
0 85122 285 4, 60p
A second edition of the one in
which the friendly dinosaur
placates the monsters who
invade a French town. The
illustrations by Althea are
vivid, immediate, and the text
is lively: young readers can
have a complete story in a
short time. There's now help
from Dinosaur for slotting
these books into Cliff Moon's
'Individualised Reading' stages;
use this or follow your own
hunches. Many 'de-scheming'
teachers I know fit the 'Althea'
books into their collections.CM





A Special Swap
Sally Wittman,
illustrated by Karen
Gundersheimer, Hippo,
0 590 70040 5, 85p
Right from the time she was in
her pushchair, Nelly and old
Bartholomew were always
together — 'ham and eggs'
their neighbours called them.
This mutual friendship grew
and developed so that just as
Mr Bartholomew had been
there to help Nelly when she
most needed him so Nelly was
able to offer a helping hand
when her old friend was most
in need. This small book
touchingly portrays the unique
relationship that can develop
between the old and the very
young.

JB

# INFANT/JUNIOR



Laura, Alice's New Puppy \_

Philippe Dumas, Fontana Lion, 0 00 671770 5, 80p A splendidly appealing translation of a French story about the mischievous pet puppy of Alice and her brother Emil. After some hilarious mishaps, the lovable Laura proves her worth by saving the children's lives.

It's a super bridging book for the six to eight-year-old between the 'picture book' and the longer book; the imaginative, Ardizzone-style illustrations, some with cartoon 'bubbles', play a major part in telling the story. How's this beginning for building up a super bond with the author for young readers: 'If Alice's grandmother hadn't given her a little dog that could swim, the story that you're about to hear might have ended differently...

Here's Sam Dorothy Edwards, illustrated by David Higham, Magnet, 0 416 89520 4, 80p

The Magician who Kept a Pub, and other stories Dorothy Edwards, illustrated by Jill Bennett, Fontana Lion

Bennett, Fontana Lion, 0 00 671785 3, 90p Dorothy Edwards' stories read well aloud and she knows how to spin a tale for the five to nine-year-olds; but Here's Sam is a rather mishandled attempt to bring her very personal 'Naughty Little Sister' style up to date. Sam lives on an estate with his Mum, Dad and bossy sister and the adventures will ring true with many readers though the stereotypes are pretty thick on the ground. How's this for a multi-cultural readership?

'There are lots of boys and girls at Sam's school. Some are like Sam, but there are black children too, and quite a lot of brown ones. The black children have easy names, but some of the brown children's names are hard to say. Sam can't understand what the brown ones are talking about. That is because they are still learning English. Sam's Gran says they will soon pick it up. She said they may sound funny, but that is because they come from over the sea where people don't speak English all the time like we do.' The choice is yours.

Miss Edwards is more at home with the modern fairy tales of the second book: fantastic situations in very real contexts. My favourites are The Witch who lived on the Motorway and the title story. The magician's daughter in the latter is a contemporary heroine, who's told that when she marries she can sit all day brushing her moonbeam hair and replies that she'll be far too busy dictating letters to her secretary! Well worth a try with six to nines.

Panda

Susan Bonners, Hippo, 0 590 72054 6, 85p Pandas, with their cuddly appearance and characteristic markings, seem to have a universal appeal. This appeal is successfully caught in the oriental style white and blueblack illustrations of Panda. They are also very topical so this straightforward account, in clear calligraphic print, of the life cycle of a wild giant panda has arrived opportunely. I found it fascinating. If only



more non-fiction books for young children were of this standard.

JB

Tim and Ginger 0 19 272113 5

Tim and Charlotte 0 19 272118 6

Tim's Friend Towser 0 19 272112 7, Edward Ardizzone, Oxford University Press, £1.75 each

Three new paperback editions of the classic stories about Tim and his seafaring friends with the characteristic Ardizzone seascapes and bubble talk. The appeal of these adventures seems as strong as ever; worth having in any primary classroom.

JB

# LOWER JUNIOR

The Otter Who Wanted to Know Jill Tomlinson,

Jill Tominson, illustrated by Joanne Cole, Magnet, 0 416 89460 7, 85p I'm constantly being told by seven to tens how much they like this writer's work. This one is an 'otter's eye view' of how Pat, a young female otter, is transported to a special island, her adventures being punctuated by her constant questions!

It's witty, fast-moving with some engaging characters (the bossy Gaffer, the solicitous Bobby); there's a sure sense of story, yet lots left to the imagination. James Hodgson's cover is attractive and characterful. I know one teacher who's read all these 'Animal . . . Who' stories, then led nine-year-olds to Ted Hughes' How the Whale Became.

Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the Stolen Diamonds
David A. Adler,
illustrated by Susanna
Natti, Hippo,
0 590 70030 8, 75p
First in a series about transatlantic heroine with a photographic memory. In this one, she helps catch a jewel

Grasshopper and the Unwise Owl

Jim Slater, illustrated by Babette Cole, Dragon Books,

O 583 30368 4, 75p Small boy takes magic sweets which enable him to shrink and so make friends with assorted wildlife: Sam Snail, Billy, the rabbit poet, and Jacob, the owl who is unable to answer questions anymore!

Add all this to a dastardly landlord who needs outwitting, and there's a fast moving, but sometimes confusing, plot. It all seems overcrowded: there are lots of characters introduced who don't play a part and the chunks from 'Children's Britannica' just don't add anything.



thief with the help of sidekick Eric. Some racy writing with the kind of humour that American writers deal well in; eights to tens may enjoy it but I wonder just how many plot variations the idea can take!

The Fastest Gun Alive and Other Night Adventures David Henry Wilson,

Piccolo, 0 330 26053 7, 85p Twelve short stories involving the children of Wimpleford Junior School and their dreams. I find it a mixed collection. The title story, a pastiche of every TV Western you've ever seen, is hilarious; The Boot is a witty, pun-loaded adventure, indulging in a linguistic joke which is the stuff of life to most nine-yearolds. But in too many of the stories, the writer forces rather stern, moralistic messages: in The Carnival Princess, for instance, a little girl is 'rewarded' for vanity by dreaming that she is hideously deformed. For me, the tone of these didactic stories spoiled the pleasure of the good ones

A detail from one of Susanna Natti's drawings in 'Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the Stolen Diamonds'

# JUNIOR/MIDDLE

The Three Musketeers Retold by Joan Cameron, Ladybird, 0 7214 0633 5, 50p

A Journey to the Centre of the Earth Retold by Joyce Faraday, Ladybird, 0 7214 0596 7, 50p Two more titles in the Ladybird Children's Classics series follow the well-trodden Ladybird path to successful selling. Ladybirds are available at every conceivable outlet from post office to chemist through corner shop. Should not this very availability, accessibility, popularity, be used to inculcate in their readership an appreciation of quality and style? To put out these bowdlerised, skeletal versions under the heading of 'Children's Classics' seems somehow to miss the point of



Mouldy's Orphan Gillian Avery,

illustrated by Faith Jaques, Puffin, 0 14 03.1269 2, 75p A winner from a writer who knows how to involve her readers gently. A rich tale of a young girl in 1890's rural Oxfordshire who, influenced by her reading of Froggy's Little Brother, decides to help a real life orphan. She learns that doing the right thing leads to domestic disharmony. Although there's some painful learning, this is portrayed through a warm domestic atmosphere. There's a strong sense of time and place, evoked in the writing and in Faith Jaques' exquisite pictures. A splendid addition to the work of one of our best writers for the young.

Star Ka'at World Andre Norton and Dorothy Madlee, Knight, 0 340 26459 4, 85p

Star Ka'ats and the Plant People

Andre Norton and Dorothy Madlee, Knight, 0 340 26111 0, 85p These are the second and third adventures in the Star Ka'at series. I feel these books are either a gentle tongue-in-cheek satire on the science fiction worlds of Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers and Dr Who or an elaborate joke by two excellent writers of this genre to capitalise on the popularity of this subject with youngsters.

Star Ka'ats are 'a super intelligent race'. In their world, 'robots do all the work'. You can join Jim and Elly Mae (orphans, naturally!) in their adventures with these wildly exciting and creative creatures; unless, of course, you've become so absorbed in the chapter describing the thrilling details of the 'kitten food' machine! The illustrations, production and presentation seem to lack enthusiasm.

There is already sufficient imaginative and entertaining sci-fi on the market for anybody to waste their money on this series.

BB

Coyote the Trickster Gail Robinson and Douglas Hill, Piccolo, 0 330 26263 7, 95p A superb little story book, taking as its source the legends of the North American Indians, imaginatively retold and reworked. It's different, it intrigues, informs and amuses, and each of the twelve short tales is a gem.

Without claiming parity to Aesop's Fables, these stories share the ability to examine the foibles of human nature; highlighting our penchant for cruelty and kindness, stupidity and cleverness, bravery and cowardice, either alternately or all at the same time! Try them with your class, any ages from nine upwards; I guarantee that you'll be pleasantly surprised by the reception they get. BB

Kick Off
Michael Hardcastle,
Armada,
0 00 691757 7, 80p
This is number six in the
'Mark Fox' Football Books.
At least two games are
recounted in loving detail and
the school boy dream of being
signed for a top league club is
realised, where our hero scores
a goal in his first game — no
less!! The popularity of
anything with a Hardcastle
ticket should ensure success in
the bookshop. A female tester
liked the book 'because it was
just like being at a real match'.

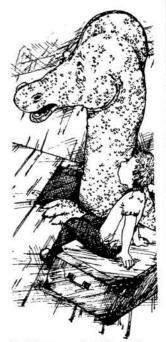
Dancer in the Wings Jean Richardson, Knight, 0 340 262605, 95p This sequel to The First Step tells of the ups and downs of Moth and her Australian cousin, Libby as they progress through ballet-cum-theatre school. The theatrical background seems carefully researched; but I wonder why Jean Richardson needed to describe the story of the Nutcracker Suite as 'rather feeble'. She's also a bit cavalier about geography. 'Libby had gone back to Australia for the summer and her postcards were all about sun and swimming.' English summer holidays mean Australian mid-winter, when the only attractive beaches are in the tropical north, hardly the place to find a busy international pilot (Libby's father) and his family! Perhaps this is splitting hairs, but considered writing avoids such pitfalls. However this is not likely to perturb the child seeking a cosy predictable read. This should find an eager audience.

### The Quicksilver Horse

Anne Digby, Granada, 0 583 30219 2, 75p This is the second horsey' book written by Anne Digby, better known for the Trebizon series. Emma Kenner lured by the prize money, risks her future as a circus star to ride as a jump jockey on her horse Silver because this seems to be the only answer to saving her father's ailing circus. The decision grows into a living nightmare as her fear of racing increases along with her determination not to give in. Emma's predicament is embellished by family jealousies and rivalries at the stables. All, of course, is finally resolved. There are some moments of real tension in an otherwise blandly presented tale. Another book which guarantees an easy but successful read for girls of the top junior/middle school age

### A Dinosaur called Minerva

Tessa Krailing, Hippo, 0 590 70031 6, 70p
An amusing tale of Peter
Simon Richard Ogden, Sprog
for short, who is obliged to
spend his Easter holidays with
an absent-minded, eccentric
aunt. When he discovers and
befriends a dinosaur with
toothache his holiday takes a
turn for the better. The story is
full of delightfully larger than
life characters including the
bemused, very feminine
Minerva, whose troublesome
tooth is removed by
prosperous dental surgeon, Mr.
Spruce. His professional
reputation comes to depend on



'A Dinosaur called Minerva'

the public believing his story. Sprog realises that Minerva's centuries of peace depend on her presence remaining secret. His ingenious and hilarious plans bring all to a satisfactory conclusion. Tessa Krailing is new to me. This first book is one that should bring a lot of pleasure. I look forward to the next.

# The Boy in The Bible

Lavinia Derwent, Piccolo, 0 330 26264 5, 95p The Gospel writers tell little of the childhood of Christ. Whether or not Jesus led the life of an ordinary child in the village of Nazareth or whether he was already aware of his divine nature is a question discussed by serious theologians but also asked by children. Lavinia Derwent has written a gentle narrative of village children, Ruth and Jude, and their friendship with Jesus. She builds a framework around the biblical record of Jesus becoming 'lost' in Jerusalem and being found in the temple and creates a story of love and caring. It was read with considerable satisfaction by children of around ten years and could be read aloud to a younger group.

There are some that would disapprove of any distortion of the recorded bible stories. I suspect, however, that this book may not only answer questions for some but lead to the asking of more by a thoughtful child. If it does neither it will still stir the imagination of many and provide a rewarding read. CL

# MIDDLE SECONDARY

### Crisis on Conshelf Ten

Monica Hughes, Magnet, 0 416 89990 0, 90p
This book signalled a promise which Ms Hughes still displays five novels later, despite one disaster and an also-ran. Secessionist talk in her native Canada probably helped her treatment of wrangles between greedy Earth and the lunar colony, whose problems are shared by the people in the submarine Conshelves. Kepler, Moon Governor's son, must scotch the extremist gillmen's violent plans if Dad is to win the UN vote. The adventures might begin too late for the story to galvanize the back row — serious S.F. often demands too many ideas and details early on for that — but try it with aficionados, unless they're politically radical. SB

Take the Long Path Joan de Hamel, Puffin, 0 14 03.1257 9, 85p Sheep-farm life is more bearable for David because penguins nest nearby. The arrival of an understanding old Maori doubles the secret places' attraction. We know he's a ghost but David only suspects as tribal history gradually unfolds and he grows curious enough to ask his school friend Hemi about Maori customs. Learning why Old Tama has returned leads David to important self-discoveries. Maybe the supernatural accounts for this appearing on Puffin's increasingly profit-conscious list but it's atmospheric rather than scary; landscape description and Antipodean vocabulary will deter some and the storyline is too vague early on. Minority stuff. SB

The Lost World Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Puffin

O 14 O3.1385 O, 95p
Now Conan Doyle's been dead fifty years, The Lost
World is no longer copyright and is probably a reasonable bet for steady back-list sales
— after all, everybody knows the title from film clips on telly and you can put a dinosaur on the cover. However, it won't endear Puffin to the antisexist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist lobby. The expedition is slow to get under way and, although Prof.
Challenger is extravagantly amusing early on (later, he is caricatured into a buffoon), only very competent readers will cope with the 1912 vocabulary and style. You might try one copy for earnest traditionalists.

SB

Tig's Crime T.R. Burch, Lions, 0 00 671748 9, 90p First novels usually contain lots of rough edges but, by



brazenly adapting clichés from private eye stories, T.R. Burch has produced a thriller in which the strangeness and tension outweigh the faults. One foggy night, 14-year-old Tig witnesses a robbery and finds a body — but when he tells the law, the corpse has gone. Though Tig, rather than the plodding policemen, sorts it out, the book retains a fair degree of authenticity and is in no way a Kiddie Lit detective yarn like Terrance Dicks' series, the Baker Street Irregulars, or Burch's own Shane McKellar books. Worth pushing in secondary schools.

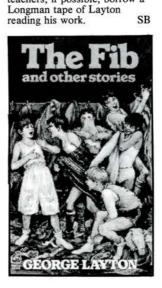
Stormy Jim Kjelgaard, Carousel, 0 552 52127 2, 80p Another in Kjelgaard's canine series. Set in northern U.S. lake country, it's about Allan's adventures with the eponymous hound after his hunting-guide father has been jailed for clobbering neighbour Torrance. Episodic, easy to read, various tensions Stormy's 'outlaw' past, blizzards, the Torrance feud, a murder — and backwoods lyricism fairly well controlled; all the ingredients to please kids who find dog stories irresistible (a sizeable number in my experience). Emphasis on action, precluding the harshness of the Survival genre, boosts its potential readership and, though Allan seems more man than boy, it's convincing enough for most.

Lassie Come Home Eric Knight, Puffin, 0 14 03.1239 5, 95p The first appearance in paperback of the 1942 classic by Eric Knight, which has delighted successive generations of 'dog crazy' children (and adults). The tale of Lassie's trek from Scotland to find Joe Carraclough has been popularised and glamorized on film and television during the intervening years, besides being a consistent seller as a hardback.



Judging by the reaction of the group of twelve-year-olds to their first hearing of the story, Lassie is still as popular with the youngsters of the eighties as she ever was with those in the forties. Lovely subdued chapter illustrations by Marguerite Kirmse, but a totally unimpressive cover. BB

The Fib George Layton, Lions, 0 00 671808 6, 90p You may know these ten stories from BBC Schools or two Longman Knockouts. Several repeat a pattern — boy needs something (e.g. a balaclava, fireworks, new football kit) to keep in with the lads, Mum says no, trouble ensues — but they read aloud well. They're mainly amusing, though there's a melancholy last outing with Grandad before he dies. Seven form a block - primary/early secondary schooldays (with the join difficult to spot). The rest, adolescence, are slightly different in mood and more noticeably dated. Northern setting, late forties to mid fifties. Standard equipment for teachers; if possible, borrow a



Midshipman
Alexander Kent,
Sparrow,
0 09 915200 2, 80p
Topsails, belaying pins,
halliards and bulwarks
positively creak and splinter
throughout this stirring tale of
British grit and determination,
as Bolitho joins the fight
against pirates who threaten
trade routes off Africa's west
coast. Despite the handicap of
a clutch of lieutenants who
hate him, especially Tregorren,
who detests his family

connections, our hero midshipman pursues honour and promotion with honour

and devotion.

It's My Life

Richard Bolitho -

The story moves at a surging pace, the characters are securely black or honourable, never both at the same time; and the whole book is awash with battles, blood and adventures. Most probably a book for lower secondary boys.

DB

Robert Leeson, Lions, 0 00 671783 7, 95p
No masterpiece, but a nicely readable account of Jan's predicament when her Mum inexplicably leaves home and job. (Though looking after Dad and Kevin (7) has her eventually screaming, 'The only thing that amazes me is why she waited so bloody long...') Romance with a sixthformer leavens homework/ 'O' levels drudgery — and widens the sex-role theme.
Intermittent home/school conflicts, a pregnancy scare, "new eyes" insights also counter reality's flatness and break up passages of internalised agonising. Ace cover (cheapened by an 'Author of the Grange Hill stories' flash), neither long nor

difficult - schools need lots

more from this mould.

Landings Dennis Hamley, Granada, 0 583 30422 2, 75p Perhaps the best things people do are when they are afraid . Everything becomes clear when you've got to do it.' These are important conclusions that are reached by 14-year-old Philip Eastham and his elder brother Reg, spurred on by the ghostly promptings of their dead grandfather, enshrined in his own bloodstained World War 1 diary. Reg is deserting from the Suez draft of 1956 and Philip faces discovery as an Philip faces discovery as an under-age, would-be glider pilot whose fear is of landings. Dennis Hamley has just the right amount of relevant period detail which never detracts from the lively pace and direct style of this well-plotted tale, where even the difficult ghostly encounters are not allowed to stretch credibility too far. This is a must for middle/upper secondary boys and their fathers.

# **JARDBACK**

Anyone concerned with getting five to eight-year-olds reading is on the look out for good material. Julia Mac Rae's Blackbird series (5-8) and Heinemann's Easy-to-Read Books (reading age 6-7) are recent offerings. We sent these with some new titles from the Antelope, Gazelle and Ladybird series to Sue Harte to try out with her class of lower juniors in Bath.

### HEINEMANN **EASY-TO-READ** BOOKS

Fox Tricks Aidan Chambers, illustrated by Robin and Jocelyn Wild, 0 434 93163 2

Penny and the **Piglets** 

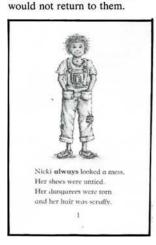
Ron and Atie van der Meer, 0 434 97100 6

Dennis and the

Flying Saucer Brian Ball, illustrated by Margaret Chamberlain, 0 434 92830 5

Nicki Eileen Browne, 0 434 92990 5 All £2.95

The colourful covers and the lively pictures immediately attracted the children to these; they still enjoy picture books and expect plenty of illustrations, preferably in colour in all they read. Here there's a picture on each page with an average of six lines of text in large clear type. All my class, including the more able readers gobbled up these books and many made a point of reading all four titles. They were unimpressed when I pointed out that they had just gone through £11.80 worth of books; but on that ground I had some reservations. Although attractive, instant reads, three of the four books had little more to offer than many cheaper books in reading schemes. I felt the children



I also tried them out with infants who were equally enthusiastic. Fox Tricks which

was least popular with the juniors was liked by the younger children although their teacher felt that the over-simplified language tended to diminish the subtlety of the fables with the result that the book turned out to be too much like many others for this age range. The idea of a granny with a pet pig called Otto (Penny and the Piglets) also amused them. Dennis and the Flying Saucer was pronounced 'funny' by infants and juniors alike; but it was Nicki that was loved by all who read it. The title was obviously instantly inviting and many readers became hooked on this story of a scruffy tomboy who becomes a TV star after a producer is attracted by her unkempt appearance. Some teachers were worried about the moral: untidy rebels have all the fun! But the children took the story at face value and enjoyed the touch of adventure and excitement it offers.

**HAMISH HAMILTON** GAZELLE BOOKS The Rug that Grew Adele Geras, illustrated by Priscilla Lamont,

0 241 10533 1 **Dragon Earth** Ann Ruffell, illustrated by Nicole Goodwin, 0 241 10532 3

HAMISH **HAMILTON** ANTELOPE BOOKS

Both £1.80

The Bugbear Catherine Storr illustrated by Elaine McGregor Turney, 0 241 10549 8

The Year One Jenny Seed, illustrated by Susan Samsome, 0 241 10550 1 Both £2.25 I'm sure Gazelle Books don't reach many children who would enjoy them, primarily because their covers have not caught the attention of the browsing book selector, especially if they are shelved among more colourful paperback books. These two remained relatively untouched by my class. Those that did dip into them commented unfavourably on the 'thick

paper' and had little to say about the stories.

Dragon Earth is meant to be a funny story about a dragon who unearths a treasure hoard and has difficulty keeping it a secret. The language is rather advanced and some silent readers might find difficulty in sorting out some of the long complex sentences. The Rug that Grew has the core of a good idea. Children rescue an old rug and clean it up to reveal an intricate pattern of plants and flowers which, after a little 'magic', grows into a garden. But somehow the fantasy does not really work. It's told in a chatty readable style, but is slow to get moving and lacks a strong, what next pull - a big drawback for new readers - alone.

The Antelopes have more colourful covers and were instantly more attractive. Bugbear is the story of a large, hideous pink bear, an unwanted Christmas present. Each member of the family tries to get rid of it; but it's the youngest who finally succeeds. The children liked the family and the touches of humour. The easy style and short episodic chapters were just right for building up stamina for longer reads. The Year One appealed more to the eights and over. It's about a family of new settlers in South Africa last century; historically informative and readable.

JULIA MACRAE BLACKBIRD BOOKS The Tale of the Crooked Crab Delia Huddy, illustrated by Linda Birch, 0 86203 022 6

**Bridget and William** Jane Gardam, illustrated by Janet Rawlins, 0 86203 012 9

Flames in the Forest Ruskin Bond, illustrated by Valerie Littlewood, 0 86203 027 7

Dinner Ladies Don't Count

Bernard Ashley, illustrated by Janet Duchesne, 0 86203 017 X All £2.75 each

These also have bright coloured covers and look more like 'real' books than a series. The books are aimed at five to eight-year-olds but the language and story content seem more suitable for the upper end of this range, at least in my school. In Flames in the Forest two boys in India race to escape from a forest fire. The story builds well and there is an exciting climax. Bridget and her pony William live on an isolated northern hill farm. The story of how together they brave the snow to fetch the doctor to pregnant Mum is predictable, but Jane Gardam's telling makes it distinctive and, ironically, difficult for inexperienced readers. In Delia Huddy's story Captain McCorkell takes a holiday, leaving his inept crew in charge of the Crooked Crab. Chaos results. It's good fun and the illustrations are a nice complement. My personal favourite is Dinner Ladies Don't Count, a very believable school story. But does it appeal more to teachers than children? I'd like to hear more children's views on this one. Neither it nor the other Blackbirds caused a particular stir in my classroom. I feel I would have to read them aloud (they are good enough for that) before the children could really get to grips with them. But then that's defeating the object of the series.

Would I buy any of these?

The children were not inhibited by the thought of price and clearly responded well to the layout and design of the Heinemann books. But struggling with my meagre book fund I don't think I could justify paying that much just for attractive packaging. Obviously you don't need to buy every book in a series. Blackbirds are a worthy attempt to provide good writing for this age. I'd like to try the Bernard Ashley and the Delia Huddy. But can I afford to risk £5.50? I'm afraid in the present circumstances I will be combing Jill Bennett's Reaching Out booklist for paperbacks for my particular six to eight-year-olds.

Reaching Out

A Signal Booklist compiled by Jill Bennett and edited by Nancy Chambers, £1.25.

Available from The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 5EQ or from the NBL.

# and his Creators all the women's monames ending in -a. Melodrama, paired.

Asterix made his first appearance in 1959. He is now an international institution, beloved and collected by adults and children alike. He's been translated into thirty languages and over 140 million copies of the books have been sold throughout the world.

Goscinny and Uderzo, his creators, seemed an eternal combination but, sadly, René Goscinny died last year. Asterix fans mourned and wondered if that was the end. It wasn't. Who better to take on the writing than Albert Uderzo, the man whose drawings first gave such distinctive and definitive shape to Asterix, and the characters we know as Getafix, Obelix and Vitalstatistix. This month his first solo title, Asterix and the Great Divide. is published.

It is translated, as are all the other Asterix titles by Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge. To mark the occasion and in modest commemoration of René Goscinny —

### Anthea Bell tells us about

# Translating Goscinny (and Uderzo)

Of all the tricky assignments that may come a translator's way, I think a funny book is the most perilous. Humour is so elusive anyway, so hard to define. Can it be transplanted from its native soil? A dozen years or so ago, when Derek Hockridge and I were beginning the translation of Asterix the Gaul, we certainly wondered.

That was the first book in the Asterix saga. Twenty-five albums later, we're too close to Asterix, Obelix and the other Ancient Gauls to know how far we personally have succeeded, but at least we've heard English children laugh at the stories. And you can't force a child's spontaneous laughter.

Asterix works on several levels, and for the first you don't need any language at all, which gives a translator a good start. Before any of the titles in the series were translated into English, I saw and shall always remember a group of English children, aged about four to eight, totally absorbed in a pile of French Asterix books. Most of them could



hardly read their own language yet, let alone French, but the detailed, action-packed drawing was enough to engage their attention and give them the gist of the stories.

But, we've been asked as translators, when we get to the words isn't Asterix too Gallic for his flavour to come across? I think not: after all, the basic theme of cunning and good humour outwitting brute force is fairly universal. (Surely Odysseus is everyone's favourite Greek hero, leaving Hector and Achilles and the rest of the muscle-men nowhere in the ratings.) Goscinny and Uderzo set that theme in a totally coherent world of its own; such a coherence of atmosphere seems to me a pre-requisite for making humour work (look at P. G. Wodehouse). Ancient Gaul, as inhabited by Asterix and his friends, has its own rules and sticks to them. For instance, there's never any blood: you can safely laugh at the biffing and the bashing because it is quite plain that the Romans, comically battered as they are, will live to fight another day - though preferably not to

Then, however, there is the more complicated verbal level of the Asterix stories, the level involving topical references, literary quotation, cheerful puns and extended wordplay. This is the difficult bit for the translator. As explaining a joke obviously kills it stone dead, it's necessary to think of parallel English jokes here.

There are the intricately comic French names. The Gaulish village chief, in French, is Abraracourcix. If you attack someone à bras raccourcis, you are attacking him violently. The chief was renamed Vitalstatistix for English consumption: a stroke of luck, as it turned out, since later on there came a French title (Asterix and the Chieftain's Shield in English) in which the character goes off to slim at a health farm, making our English name apter than we had known.

Topicality has its hazards. We named a Briton Selectivemploymentax, and where is S.E.T. now? On the other hand, Ekonomikrisis (a Phoenician merchant) is still with us. There are a few names like Stratocumulus which will do as well in English as French, but not many: such is the ingenuity of Goscinny and Uderzo. Ironically, there's a perfectly good Anglo-American word used as a name in the French original of Asterix and the Great Divide, and we can't use it in English. It belongs to half of a Romeo and Juliet set-up Fanzine, who incidentally is an answer to those who claim that Asterix is anti-feminist, since she's clever and sensible as well as pretty. We can't use her name because it is our now well-established convention to have

all the women's mock-classical and Gaulish names ending in -a. So she becomes Melodrama, paired with her young man Histrionix (Comix in French).

By now, the number of proper names we have had to invent for the English versions of Asterix is close on three hundred. We've got a little list. And another list of songs, since characters are inclined to break into parodies of French popular ditties. And another of Latin words and phrases in everyday use, since even they may be different in English; you can't absolutely count on an English reader's recognizing the Latin motto of the city of Paris.

Some of the French historical or literary allusions would be lost on most English readers, and again we look for English parallels. It's lucky that we share with the French the distinction of having been invaded by Julius Caesar, so we know about him all right. Admittedly, I shall never, never be able to take the historical Caesar seriously again, but then there always was something faintly ridiculous about him in the irreverent English schoolchild's mind. 'Julius Caesar the Roman geezer, caught his nose in a lemon squeezer,' didn't he?

In the end, however, it all depends on the wholeness of Goscinny and Uderzo's imaginary world. The soil of that world is rich enough to cling to the roots of the joke and keep it alive even when it's transplanted to another language. Or so it seems, on the evidence of the children who write us letters about Asterix. I felt sure Asterix was a very good joke when I first read him in French; I think you just can't keep a good joke down.

# Tony Bradman describes Meeting Uderzo

Albert Uderzo and Rene Goscinny were born only six months apart, Goscinny in 1926 and Uderzo in 1927. But it wasn't until 1953 that they met each other in the Paris office of a Belgian Press agency, where they were both working independently as author-illustrators of comic strips for various newspapers and magazines.

That meeting sparked off a working relationship which was to lead six years later to the creation of one of the most popular cartoon characters ever — Asterix the Gaul. Uderzo himself thinks that it was the cosmopolitan aspects of their respective backgrounds, and Goscinny's especially, which formed the basis of their joint creation and his runaway success.

"Many of my generation were heavily influenced before the war by American cartoon characters. We almost took in Walt Disney with our mothers' milk."

Uderzo's mother and father were (ironically enough for the man who was to spend most of his working life making fun of the Romans) Italian, as his name indicates, and only arrived in France in 1922. He was born in the beautiful Cathedral city of Rheims, and his family moved to Paris when he was two, where he spent most of his childhood. At about the same time, Goscinny's father — a chemical engineer — was moving his family and the two-year-old René to Argentina, from where they moved on to spend seven years in the United States. It was there that he too came under the influence of the ubiquitous Walt Disney.



Albert Uderzo with Obelix, photo by Pierre Vauthey

Independently, both Goscinny and Uderzo had decided that they wanted to create cartoon characters and comic strips. ("It was a disease I caught very young.") They had both gravitated to the Belgian press agency because "at that time Belgium was the home of comic strips on the continent, with characters like Tintin." Their partnership began as "a marriage of convenience."

"Goscinny felt happier just writing scripts than with drawing, and I felt happier just doing the drawings, so we decided to work together. We did several other things before Asterix, like a series on Oumpah Pah the Indian. But it did develop into a real friendship, and I miss him terribly."

Uderzo showed how deeply he had felt the tragedy of Goscinny's unexpected death by going on to talk about him at great length. Interestingly enough, even when talking about trying to find the idea which was to become Asterix and the Great Divide, his first completely solo effort, he still constantly used the first person plural—"we found an idea in the end".

"Goscinny was an extraordinary man, and it would take me days to explain him properly. He was a man for whom words were a religion, and he was always as funny in life as he could be in his Asterix stories. He always loved to tell jokes and have people around him to whom he could tell funny stories. Humour was a way of life for him.

"As far as I'm concerned, he brought to France a completely new form of humour which, because of the American influence on him, was more Anglo-Saxon than Latin. It's difficult to explain, but it comes down to the fact that the Anglo-Saxon way of cracking a joke is different from the Latin way, and his sense of humour had a dash of roguishness. It's influenced two generations of comic strips already."

Where did they get the idea for Asterix? "It was very simple, really. In France the first thing children learn about history is 'our ancestors the Gauls' and particularly Vercingétorix, the leader whom Caesar defeated at the battle of Alesia. It's a national obsession. We simply thought it would be funny to do it.

"When I was doing some preliminary

sketches for a character, I thought at first of someone big, strong and ugly. That's the way Vercingetorix is always depicted, anyway. But Goscinny said, no, that wasn't his idea. At that time, all the editors we were working for wanted characters just like that, like the American characters and particularly Superman — all big and strong. They were always going on at us to make heroes who were real heroes, and we were so fed up with that sort of pressure that we wanted to do something completely different. It was Goscinny's idea to create an anti-hero."

Success came quickly. Asterix first saw the light of day in the magazine Pilote in 1959, and the first book — Asterix the Gaul — appeared in an edition of 15,000 which quickly sold out. From then on, it was like Topsy, and each edition just grew and grew, from 30,000 copies to 300,000 and more. In France many people thought it was successful because it "symbolised" the French national spirit, and particularly the age of De Gaulle, even drawing parallels between the latter's name and the first title — Asterix the Gaul. Uderzo denies this strongly

"We never wanted it to be nationalistic, and we were even very pleased when it was successful in other countries, because we thought that proved it had more than just a nationalistic sentiment. Why was it so successful? If only I knew! I think it's impossible to say for definite. Success usually comes if you arrive at the right time, at the right place with the right idea, and I think that's what happened. People have said that it was because it's about the 'indomitable minority' fighting back against the 'great machine of state'.

"There's an element of that, of course, and it's based on the contrast which we tried to emphasise between the rigid, rectilinear Romans with their roads and laws, and the anarchy of the Celts. But it's a lot of other things too, and the fact that its appeal is so wide means to me that there must be more than just that in it.

"We wrote it originally for children, but we never aimed it at a specific age or audience. We realised at the beginning that adults would probably like it too. The spirit in which we started was very simple. We wanted to amuse ourselves, and we weren't surprised when adults liked it as much as they did — we liked it, and we're adults, after all.

"I think humour is universal, anyway. It doesn't need to be too intellectual or too simple, it's just got to be good. In the end, either it's funny or it isn't. There are no other rules. Our sole aim at the beginning — and it hasn't changed — was very simple. We wanted to give people enjoyment."

Uderzo says that actually working with Goscinny on a new title was "marvellous. We used to spend ages trying to think of a new idea — which was always the hardest part — and once we had one, we used to get together and bounce ideas off each other. It was almost like playing verbal tennis. Neither of us knew any Latin, but we did plenty of research, and in France there's a marvellous dictionary of Latin phrases which we used to consult whenever we needed one.

"Then Goscinny would go off and write the script. He always used to write it out completely, with all the gags and puns. Goscinny loved puns. In fact once the translations started to appear, he had to restrain himself for the sake of the poor translators."

Once Goscinny had completed his script, he sent it to Uderzo so that he could actually start drawing. This made Uderzo, as he says, "the first reader of each new title", which, he admitted, "always had me in fits. I used to laugh a lot less when it actually came to drawing the strips, though." Then the two

of them used to get back together to discuss what Uderzo had drawn, and Uderzo says Goscinny was always kind enough to say that he thought the strips were "exactly what he had had in mind when he had written the script."

Asterix really took off in 1966 and 1967 in France, when the whole "Asterix industry" began to boom, with all sorts of spin-offs, from hats and scarves to socks and bags. "At that time, nearly every region of France was claiming that the village of the Gauls had been in their particular area, and one village in the Pas du Calais was very definite about it. But if you look on the map at the beginning of each book, you'll see that it's sited very firmly in Brittany. I didn't have the heart to disillusion them." Uderzo says he put the village in Brittany because he had spent some time there in the war, and the people there — some of whom were real Breton-speaking Celts — "were extraordinary."

When Goscinny died, Uderzo was shattered. He says that he thought "with Goscinny gone, Asterix too is finished." But under the pressure of letters from fans all over the world, he began to ask himself whether he shouldn't try to carry on. "The letters all said, 'What has happened to Asterix? You must carry on! They said that Asterix didn't just belong to me, he belonged to everybody and he hadn't got the right to die. So I thought about it, and talked to Goscinny's wife, and I decided to try and carry on in the same spirit."

Uderzo in fact works very hard at what he calls his "profession". He's totally dedicated to Asterix, and spends 8 or 9 hours a day, seven days a week, working on a new title for up to 8 months. He draws the strips in pencil, then inks them in, and he now has someone to fill in the colours. He's working on the 26th title now, and working so hard that when I met him his drawing hand was swollen and painful. He says that finding a new idea gets harder and harder, but he intends to carry on.

Unlike Goscinny, who spoke fluent English, he's at a disadvantage when it comes to checking the translations of Asterix titles — which now include Japanese and Icelandic. He says that there was even a possibility of a translation into Romansch, which is an ancient language spoken only by 10,000 people in an inaccessible part of the Swiss Alps. But the three Romansch speakers who got together to talk it over couldn't agree on which dialect to translate it into, and so gave up.

But Uderzo has had all the translations re-translated into French literally so that he can check them, and he's full of praise for Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge, Asterix's English translators. "They really have a lot of talent. Translating Asterix is a thankless task, and they do it really creatively. You can't translate most of the puns and gags literally, but they manage to convey exactly the same spirit as we intended without losing any of the flavour."

Albert Uderzo has the air of a man who is completely happy in what he does, and he says that there is only one thing he would like to do apart from producing one new Asterix a year. He wants some day to set up one company to control the "Asterix empire" as a whole, both publishing and merchandising. "I can't try on every new pair of Asterix socks to see that they're all right, but I'd like to have more control over it."

And what about the future of Asterix in book form? "I just want to keep the continuity and the spirit in which we started going. Do I like Asterix? Of course I do—I'd be very ungrateful if I didn't, after all, he feeds me and my family. But in the end, it's difficult to explain just how attached to him I am. I do like Asterix. And I hope he likes me."

Authorgraph No.7

Beverly Cleary telling mostly write.
write



When she was twelve Beverly Cleary knew exactly what she wanted to be when she grew up.

'Reading meant so much to me I wanted to be a librarian and a writer.' In the nineteen thirties she qualified as a children's librarian and got her first job in Yakima, a small town in Washington state (one of those which last year got covered in volcanic ash from the St Helen's eruption). She stayed there only a year and four months. 'But those were amongst the most important months of my life.' Once a week a group of small boys from a nearby school came to visit the library. 'Their teacher felt that they weren't enthusiastic about reading because of their school books. She wanted me to help them find books they would enjoy. There was really very little in the library that those boys wanted to read. They wanted funny stories and stories about the sort of children they were. The library had nothing about children like them - lively, mischievous but not malicious, liking to play baseball."

Years later, after the second world war, she finally got round to finding out if she was a writer. 'I had always thought that when I began to write I would write the usual novel about the maturing of a sensitive female who wanted to write. But when I started I thought of those little boys and they prevented me from writing that book."

What she did write was a story about an eight-year-old boy's efforts to bring home a stray dog on the bus. 'Dogs are not allowed on buses unless they are in a box, so he gets a carton from a store and puts the dog in. It's raining and while he's waiting for the bus the cardboard collapses. Then he shifts the dog into a shopping bag with something on top. But on the bus the dog gets out and causes havoc.

That was the first chapter of Henry Huggins, and the book quickly found a publisher. The time in Yakima played a part in that first book in another way. As a fledgling librarian Beverly Cleary had to build up a repertoire of stories for telling. In sixteen months she learned sixty stories mostly folk and fairy tales. 'I think that's how I learned to write. When I started Henry Huggins I didn't know how to write but I knew how to tell stories. So I thought out each chapter and mentally told it to my old story-hour audience. I don't work that way any more but that's what got me started.' It probably also explains why all her stories read aloud so naturally.

In Henry Huggins as well as Henry ('he's always trying to do the right thing, but trouble just comes along') there is Ribsy, his dog, Beatrice Quimby (Beezus for short) and her little sister Ramona. Ramona, in fact, has one line — she's there simply to explain Beezus' unusual nickname - but in later Henry Huggins books she became increasingly prominent until she had such a hold on the author's imagination that she had to have a book to herself. There are now five books about Ramona and the Quimby family and she has grown from kindergarten to second grade (71/2).

Beverly Cleary's books are very funny and the humour arises from a warm and precise observation of how people, especially children, behave. Like many other features of her writing she traces this back to her own childhood. 'For the first six years of my life I was brought up in the American counterpart of an English village, where I felt wild and free and loved by everyone. Then we moved to the city. I came off the farm and was plunged into a class of forty children. I was an only child. I didn't know how to play with children or how to get along. The teacher would tell us to form a line -I didn't know what that meant. I'd never formed a line on the farm. So I became a very quiet child — and I think observant because I didn't want to do anything wrong in school.'

But it's more than observation. Beverly Cleary seems to have a direct line to what it feels like to be a child - the uncertainty, the fears, the intensity and immensity of things which to adults seem trivial and irrational. She has vivid recall of her own childhood. Her family moved to the city, Portland, Oregon, to find greater prosperity. But the Depression was coming. Her mother could find little work. When she was twelve her father lost his job.

'I remember one period in particular. My mother had got some work soliciting magazine subscriptions over the phone at home. Listening to her tired voice, knowing how discouraged she was, I was very troubled. I wanted to hear her say she loved me.'





Ramona's need to be reassured that she is loved by a worried, preoccupied, working mum lies beneath the survace fun of Ramona and her Mother. It's a need shared by children who write to Beverly Cleary: 'I think everybody feels like Ramona. When my mother tells me she loves me, I always feel sort of relieved."

But Beverly Cleary is not writing books for therapy. 'I am not a person who tries to write about social problems. Children need to be free to discover what helps them. During that time I found great comfort in the story of Persephone. And I'm sure no one would ever put that on a list of books that would 'help' children. It seemed to me that the long, wet cold Oregon winter that I was living through would end and everything would be beautiful and that my mother was really looking for me. It's very presumptuous of adults to try to decide what's going to help children."

Beverly Cleary now lives in California but all her stories are set in Portland, Oregon. 'It's a city, about three or four hundred thousand people. The families in my stories are lower middle class. They live in a stable neighbourhood; it's changed very little since I grew up there. The houses have a front lawn, and a back lawn; there's a place to play. The only changes I see when I go back are the number of television aerials and the number of cars. Oregon, unlike Washington and California, is slow to change its ways. Portland is still not a violent place. It's peaceful. The houses are well-built. I think that makes a difference.' Stability and security: two gifts you feel Beverly Cleary would give all children if she could. 'A lot of children are going through it today. Life is growing very tense. The world was not so dangerous when I was growing up.'

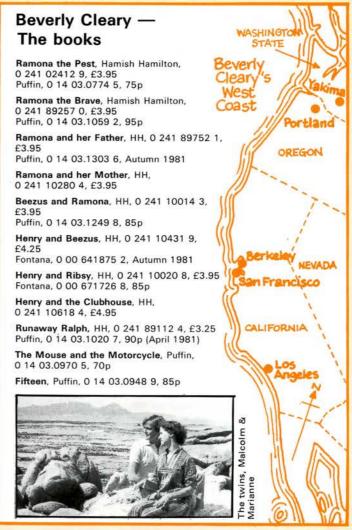
She writes about families, and 'families are very important to children. I was encouraged to write Ramona and her Father because so many letters from children express a terrible longing for fathers.' One boy who had read The Mouse and the Motorcycle (about a mouse called Ralph) wrote, 'I had a father named Ralph once, but my mother divorced him and now we live in Texas.' Another wrote, 'My father ran away and now it's just my mother, my brother and me.' For Beverly Cleary, 'That's one of the saddest sentences I have ever read."

Beverly Cleary had written five books before she had children. 'I was a housewife, and for the first time I had peace, quiet, a place to work - and time.' Then the twins were born. Twins to order, she claims, having left it so late she was determined to be efficient and have two at once! She went on writing. Facets of the children's childhood became entwined with Ramona's, and a new character was

One of the twins, Malcolm, had difficulties with reading. 'By the time he was eight he was disgusted with books. He could read but he hadn't learned to enjoy it and he began to say he was stupid, which he wasn't.' His mother could sympathise. 'My first teacher was a woman who should not have been a teacher at all, much less of small children. I had a really dreadful time learning to read. Fortunately the next year I had a kind, gentle teacher and by the third grade (8) I had discovered, with my mother's help, that reading was fun. From then on I was the library's best customer. If children don't discover that reading is pleasure by the time they are ten, they may well be lost to reading and become television watchers instead. I think these are the most important years for childhood reading.' Malcolm clearly had to be convinced that reading was fun.

That summer the family was on holiday in England. August Bank Holiday found them in a hotel in Exeter that was being re-modelled. 'There was no carpet, the corridors echoed, doors slammed. There were hardly any guests.' That night Malcolm had a frighteningly high fever. The doctor wouldn't come and there was no aspirin. After an anxious night, aspirin was found and all was well. That experience and the sight of a convalescent child lost in the fantasy of playing with his toy motorcycle and ambulance on the stripes of the bedspread was the genesis for The Mouse and the Motorcycle. It was an immediate success, with Malcolm and children generally, as was the sequel, Runaway Ralph. 'Every post brings letters from small boys asking for another book about Ralph. I have one in mind; but I haven't felt like writing it. For one thing Ralph doesn't have the nuances of character that appeal to me in Ramona. But they were lots of fun to write.

Not all of Beverly Cleary's books are published in this country. Of her four books about older children Fifteen, written in the fifties, is available and popular. 'I don't really know why I wrote it. I just felt like it and I enjoyed the change of pace. Jane, the central character, is really one of



my college friends. We were at the University of California at Berkeley. She lived two ferry boat rides across the bay in Marim County. I used to go there for weekends. The book is my guess of what she would have been like at fifteen.' Does she think the book has dated? 'It was dated when I wrote it. It was a period piece set in the thirties. I think that at some stage every girl wants a steady boyfriend. That's when they read it. I get letters about Fifteen from girls from eight to eighteen. I haven't had a problem with the women's movement about it.'

But she has no patience with editors, using extracts from her books, who insist that Ramona is not allowed to call her teacher 'pretty' (that's sexist) and that Mrs Huggins shouldn't wipe her hands on her apron (that's stereotyping). Her observer's eye and heart reject that kind of superficial tinkering. Like so many humourists, she's thoughtful and caring, critical of much of what she sees that disturbs her. But it's the positive values and the glint of laughter, never far from her eyes, which come through in the books.

She is modest, even self-effacing and, when it comes to telling how she came to write her first book, almost ashamedly apologetic. 'I've told this story so many times . . . After world war two we bought a house. The back bedroom had no furniture, just a kitchen table. And the former owner had left a pile of typing paper in the linen closet. I said, "I guess if I'm ever going to write a book I'd better do it. Either do it or put it out of my mind forever." My husband said, "Why don't you?" I said, "Well we never have any sharp pencils." So he went straight out and bought a pencil

Lucky he did. Or Beverly Cleary would never have been able to disprove what she was taught at library school - that children don't like reading about children younger than themselves, and that boys will not read about girls. And we would have been deprived of a set of books that really get children interested in reading.

# Exciting new children's books

# Flambards Divided

by Kathleen Peyton

The eagerly awaited sequel to the award winning trilogy 'Flambards'

0 19 27 1452 X

£5.95

272 pages,  $21.5 \times 13.5$ cm

March 26th

# The Happy Prince

by Oscar Wilde

An exceptional version of Oscar Wilde's charming and well-loved story.

0 19 279750 6 40 pages, 24 × 32cm £4.50

March 5th

# Atkil's Big Swim

by Inga Moore

A charming story about a mouse, born in Dover, who swims the channel.

0 19 554250 0

£3.95

32 pages, 28 × 21.5cm

February 12th



Oxford Books for Children

# **HOW TO... Stock your bookshop**

Brian Joyce who runs a bookshop at St. Thomas More Catholic Primary School suggests it's important to

# Learn from your customers

open the bookshop every day and ever since it started in September 1978 I have kept a record of every sale in a file. I enter not only the title of the book but also the date, price, sex of child and classroom number.

This was, as it turned out, an extremely useful piece of forethought. Using the details I can work out sales trends over the terms using pie graphs. Although using cold figures and percentages with children can be dangerous, it is most effective as a source of information on what the children want and what the children think they want but later discriminate against. General patterns are visible and it is evident that the teacher when ordering should listen to this silent voice. Teachers tend to choose well-proven literature for fear of failure and to show to outsiders that their bookshop maintains a high standard of stock. Both these views should be looked at closely. Children must have a chance to choose 'poor' literature as well as 'good' so that they can through a process of years learn to praise, criticise and discriminate.

By studying the graphs you will notice a gradual decrease in fiction until it reaches a plateau of 20%. The first term's stock reflected my choice but gradually through the terms the children have dictated the choice of fiction and other categories. By the fifth term, for example, the sale of religious books has multiplied enormously — prayer books, missals and bibles mainly. We are a Roman Catholic school and therefore have our specific needs. Each school serves a community whether it's geographical, social or religious, and each teacher must understand those needs and then allow and cater for them with bookshop stock and books

Looking through the sales file once more I noticed a sudden spell of sales of TV/film tie-ins; these sales petered out until the very popular Grange Hill and Worzel Gummidge series. To discover why, I asked the children buying these books a few questions. The results to the questionnaires were unexpected. 36% of the tie-ins sold were not read or not finished. The reason? The stories did not live up to the expectations of the film of social which the film of the of the film or series. Although the film or TV series reached a wide age range, the books were usually limited to a higher reading age

Running a school bookshop has helped us to eradicate waste. We can browse through new paperbacks, discuss their values, both educational and cost. And by monitoring sales, talking to the children and listening to their comments, we are learning something about our children's interests

19

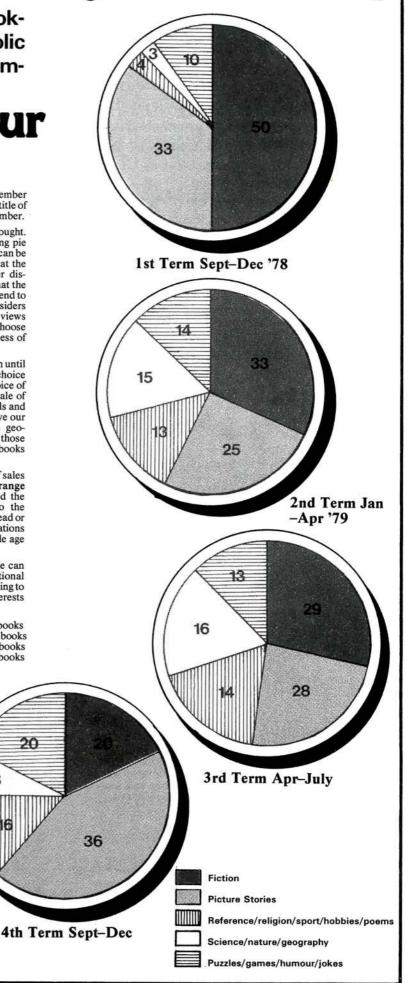
Figures on graphs are percentages.

15

5th Term Jan - Apr '80

1st Term 550 books 2nd Term 530 books 3rd Term 201 books 4th Term 470 books

20



# If I had some money I would buy th

With school bookshops reporting big sales for non-fiction, we thought it was about time we took a closer look at what is currently available and got some consumer reaction.

We sent a batch of recent titles intended for pocket-money buying to Cathy Lister, David Bennett and Bill Boyle to try out in their schools.

The comments that came back from three very different schools reveal these particular bookshop users as having quite a lot in common when it comes to choosing non-fiction.

● Am I interested? Do I need it? Is it useful? are the first questions. The answers are those of sophisticated book buyers.

'I might buy this book if I was interested in the things inside, but I aren't, so I wouldn't.' 'This book is useful if you don't know a lot about gardening. This book is not useful to me because I know a lot about it already.' 'If I could get a similar book in the library I'd still buy it because you can't keep library books.' 'A Guide could give you this information and give you a more accurate view of what being a Girl Guide is like.' 'I don't know anything about Chess. If I wanted to learn I think I could use this book.'

● Presentation — layout, illustration, design — evokes a more varied response.

'Too many pictures and diagrams', 'Very helpful, clear diagrams.' (Beginners Guide to Playing Chess, Usborne)

'If you looked at the cover you would think it was easy but there are too many complicated diagrams and some are hard to understand.' 'The pictures are easy to understand and it is clearly written.' (Whizz Kids Chess, Macdonald)

They are wary of covers: 'The front cover looks good, but it should be the same inside.'

The universal thumbs down is for 'small print'; but even that is ignored if the enthusiasm is strong enough. 'The print was quite small but with a magnifying glass I could see.' (Playing Chess, Usborne)

Response to illustration is very personal. But if there is no interest or willingness to be interested no amount of colour, detailed illustrations, funny drawings or beautiful design can help a book escape the damning, 'Boring'.

What they are prepared to be seen enjoying appears to be important for some who have an 'image' to keep up. On this evidence the new Carousel series may be dismissed by some overelevens unless it gains acceptability or 'cult' status.

● Value for money is clearly a concern. But it is interesting that these new book buyers are free of the memory of much cheaper books four or five years ago. 'It's only 75p', 'It isn't very much money' (85p). Indeed compared to the current price of records (a pop single retails at £1-£1.20) books must look good value—if you really want to buy one.

To give a more detailed look at the reactions of the children and their teachers we've grouped some of the books they saw under three headings.

## A new series

Amazing Facts about Prehistoric Animals ill. Bobbie Craig, Carousel, 0 552 57046 X, 95p

Amazing Facts about Your Body ill. Bobbie Craig, Carousel, 0 552 57045 1, 95p

Amazing Facts about Our Earth

ill. Penny Simon, Carousel, 0 552 57047 8, 95p

Amazing Facts about Animals ill. Bobbie Craig, Carousel, 0 552 576 44 3, 95p

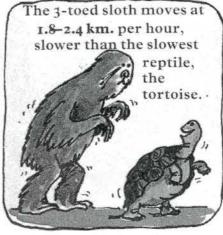
Bill Boyle: 'I am sometimes suspicious of the 'zappy' approach; but there's no doubt that in this case it appeals to the audience it's aiming at. The kids thought it was marvellous — a hands down winner. Language is correctly aimed and explanations clear and exact. Illustrations are superb, especially in the prehistoric book — without them the considerable amount of 'heavy' data would have been indigestible.'

Cathy Lister: 'The boys particularly were intrigued by these books. Although they were at times disparaging about the cartoony illustrations it was difficult to prise the books away from them. The 12–13 year olds dismissed them as 'babyish' and 'boring' but I think that was because they didn't want to be seen taking seriously anything that looks like 'kids' stuff'. They were in fact much more interested than they were prepared to admit. Younger children were fascinated and truly 'amazed'; they spent hours with the books. A great catalyst for talk.'

The children agree . . . mostly. 'A serious subject looked at with a sense of humour, which made it interesting and enjoyable for me. I probably wouldn't have read it if it had been too serious,' (Joanne, 12). 'This book is great. The illustrations help to make it so interesting that I could sit for hours reading it. Great value.' (Helen, 11). 'I

Illustration from 'Amazing Facts about Animals'





love the brightness. I hate doctors, dentists and hospitals, but this book tells you about your body in a way that doesn't frighten you,' (Linda, 11). 'This book is GREAT. It tells you all you want to know about animals. The pictures are ace. It is very cheap. It is worth it,' (John, 11). 'I thought it was great because it was funny. It is very easy to understand. I did not know many of those facts about the earth,' (Andrew, 12). 'I like the pictures but there is not enough writing. It is not worth 95p,' (Peter, 11). 'I like this book because it is easy to read and it's a big book and it only costs 95p,' (Stephen, 10). 'I wouldn't put this book on a shelf. I would look at it day and night. There is enough information in these books,' (James, 10).

# is book...

### Pets

Puppies and Dogs Sheila Alcock, Macdonald Whizz 0 356 06332 1, 95p

Learn about Training Your

Wynter Weston, Ladybird, 0 7214 0644 0, 40p

Kittens and Cats Michael Findlay, Macdonald Whizz Kids, 0 356 06331 3, 85p

Cats in Fact and Legend Adele Millard, Piccolo, 0 330 25816, 90p



The two Whizz Kids titles (and others in the series we tried out as well) were well received. 'Very interesting' was the most frequent phrase and the children liked the design and layout: 'clear and helpful diagrams', 'good illustrations', 'the cover made we want to read the book.' The two books appealed particularly to pet owners or would-be pet owners. 'Jam packed with advice. All the information you need to know on keeping your own pet,' (Joanne, 12). 'My dog has just had a litter of eight puppies and it gives me a lot of information,' (Stephen, 11). 'Our dog is ready for pups so it would be useful to me,' (Robert, 10). 'A super book for someone who has just had a dog. It is very helpful,' (Susan, 11).

Value for pocket money? 'Worth every penny,' (Susan). 'A great buy for not a lot of money,' (Joanne).

Bill Boyle could see a place for this series in the classroom too. 'The books are visually quite attractive and the readability level is about right for average 10+ children. There are no large areas of text to encourage the pointless exercise of copying huge chunks of verbiage without the faintest idea of meaning. Plenty of practical suggestions for activities with some point and relevance to the subject. Useful reference sections: glossary, booklist, places to visit, useful addresses and open-ended suggestions for continuing the project. Good value (especially compared to some of the worthless fiction we are asked to pay almost £1 for).

The Ladybird learnabout was also commended.

'I think the pictures are beautiful enough to make anyone buy the book. Well worth the money, (Joanna, 11).

David Bennett agrees. 'Well illustrated with photographs and not those rather lack-lustre drawings that used to characterise Ladybirds. I'm going to pass this one to my wife who is doing battle with our own dog of very little brain.

Cats in Fact and Legend goes beyond 'practical hints for pet owners' and aims to be of general interest. David Bennett: 'I'm a cat addict but it didn't do much for me. The child giving a talk or doing a project will find less common information here than in more standard books."

'Interesting and unusual. But 90p is quite a lot of money compared with other 'fact' books you can get on cats. I'd put it at about 75p. There are some words I don't think anyone younger than eleven would understand, (Michelle, 12).

## Ghosts and Horror

David Lambert, Piccolo Explorer (Mystery Series), 0 330 26356 0, 75p

**Devils and Demons** Eric Maple, Piccolo Explorer (Mystery Series), 0 330 26357 9, 75p

The Beaver Book of Horror Daniel Farson, Beaver, 0 600 31395 6, £1

I've Seen a Ghost Richard Davis (ed), Granada, 0 583 30426 5, 95p

David Bennett: 'Kids relish horror and there are a vast number of titles that cater for this. I've Seen a Ghost trades on the 'personalities' ticket famous or near-famous have been invited to relate their chilling experiences. Fortunately most of the contributors are introduced. The Beaver Book of Horror will probably sell better. There are some good photographs and it is set out in a methodical way. For the older child who wants information rather than a vicarious scare this would be a good buy. Relatively little information is contained in Devils and Demons but the illustrations are suitably horrific to raise bad dreams. I can never be sure what age-group Piccolo Explorers are aimed at. The appearance and format suggest a picture book, yet the content and language indicate that an older audience is intended.

Bill Boyle agrees. 'The Piccolo Explorers left me feeling like saying, 'So what?'. The text was lifeless and the one-dimensional illustrations failed to 'lift' the pages at all. Readability is 11-12 at least (and I'm probably being generous) for the text is quite demanding of concentration and the print is small. We know that colour printing is expensive — but 24 pages for 75p? Lack of value for money is made all the more obvious by the minimal amount of information on some of the pages."



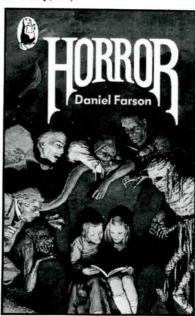
Page illustration from 'Devils and Demons'

Do the children agree?

Ghosts. 'The glossy pictures make the stories more exciting,' (Joanne, 12). 'I thought the words were too small and I could not understand some of them, (Robbie, 10). 'I would have liked stories better. These are more like bits and pieces of information,' (Melanie, 11). 'I liked the scary cover,' (Debbie, 11).

'Are ghosts really true or is it the mind playing tricks? The book didn't really answer that question for me. It tells a lot about what happened in houses and left me with a lot of questions,' (Helen, 11).

Devils and Demons 'Good pictures. really weird. It doesn't take long to read though because it doesn't cover things thoroughly enough. The cover is misleading because the pictures inside are not as horrific,' (Jonathon and Anthony, 12).



Beaver Book of Horror 'The front cover was very impressive and well thought out. The stories were exciting and some weird. The quiz was good, but I hadn't heard of some of the people like Bela Lugosi and Edgar Allan Poe. My mum liked it too. A good book for the price,' (Jennifer, 12).

I've Seen a Ghost 'The cover was very impressive. It's so interesting. I think any boy or girl would enjoy it,' (Andrew, 12). •

# IS EVERYTHIE Dandy

# Brian Walsh and Nick Tucker consider the question from two points of view.

The first issue of Funny Folks appeared on 12th December 1874. A lot has happened to comics since then but the funny papers have remained with us. How are the titles of 1981 facing up to competition from vampires, monsters and aliens from other worlds?

### Brian Walsh went round to the corner shop to find out.

Out of forty-six titles on the racks only a measly four were 'funnies': Beano, Dandy, Topper and Jackpot. That's discounting some of the papers for the youngest children like Pippin, Jack and Jill and Playhour which set out to amuse in a pasteurised way and some of the stories in the girls-only weeklies like Tammy/Misty, Tracy and Mandy which have been known to bring smiles to the faces of readers (though it sometimes seems to me that the main aim of this group of comics is to move kids on to the love-interest, pop music and problem pages of the new photo-realistic Loving, Love Affair and Photo-Love, and ultimately to addiction to women's magazines.) Of the rest, four, significantly, were new publications from Marvel Comics, with titles like Future Tense and Savage Action, featuring characters like Man-Thing, the most awesome swamp creature of all, and Molecule Man, a spectre from the past.

Like any other, the world of children's comics is subject to change, specially since it's still big business. Geoff Fenwick writing in 1977 estimated that ten million comics were sold weekly in Britain bringing in something like £20 million, much of that shared between the giants IPC and D.C. Thomson. New titles appear while others merge or sink with hardly a trace. It's a hard world, the world of comics.

Anyone looking back over the history of comics will find two distinct traditions. In America comics have always been produced with an adult readership in mind, although they are, of course, read by kids (hence the fuss about horror comics in the fifties and the publishers' agreement on standards in the Comics Code Authority.) The new Marvel titles are in this line. The British tradition of comic publishing is founded on comedy and on adventure for boys. The latter begins with The Gem and The Magnet and The Boys Own Paper, living on through the famous four, Wizard, Rover, Adventure and Hotspur, of which sadly



Winker Watson, Korky the Cat, a Jock, Desperate Dawg & Desperate Dan, from 'The Dandy'

only the last survives today and in much altered form at that. Once packed with solid-print stories that read like chapters in books, about a whole range of experience — sport, war, school, exploration — a recent issue is nothing but picture-stories with the verbal content cut to a minimum. The featured sport is golf, would you believe, several stories are set in America and the lead item is a blatant sell-out to the 'space-invaders', featuring King Cobra who metamorphoses from mild-mannered Bill King at the zip of a scaly suit. There's even a problem page: 'If you have a problem you want advice on send it to Andy...' What Rockfist Rogan would have thought of that I shudder to think.

The adventure comic has narrowed in number and range to a few, mostly about war, like Battle, Warlord, Sub-mariner and 2000AD. Are we seeing the slow extinction of the 'funny'?

To find out I went into a local junior school and asked 142 kids between the ages of 7 and 11 what was their favourite comic. Of the 105 who had comics, over a third (43) named one of six 'funnies', with Beano way out in front (29 mentions). Girls-only comics got 38 mentions with Tracy, a relative newcomer out in front (13 mentions). The 'space-invaders' such as The Empire Strikes Back trailed in with 24 assorted mentions. So Beano lives on, now well past its two thousandth number and thriving: the current issue recognisably the same as the first in 1937.

There's nothing more doomed to fail than an analysis of humour though some have tried to account for the appeal of Beano and Dandy, describing the Bash St. Kids as 'instruments of anarchy' and Dennis the Menace as 'a malign demon'. Well, maybe, but after looking through the current issue I'd like to think the secret lies in its consistency of point of view and style, not to mention value for money. For a mere 9p you are offered no less than seventeen short comedies, or expanded gags, each drawn in the characteristic graphic line and each presented consistently from the child's perspective, even if it features the mobile canine ink-blot, Gnasher, or the anthropomorphic mice, The Nibblers. The sense of solidarity is further increased by the open invitation to join the Dennis the Menace Fan Club, including Gnasher's Fang Club, with badges (one hairy with moving eyes) and readers' jokes and letters which, if printed, win extremely covetable Dennis tee-shirts.

Some of these features are shared by other 'funnies' like Dandy, Nutty and Whizzer and Chips, but for me Beano, as the kids I saw confirmed, is still out in front. No wonder the local library keeps it under the desk with items on restricted loan. Dandy and Beano survived the intense competition of television in the Fifties and Sixties. Interestingly, some of the work of current TV favourites like Bill Oddie, Michael Palin and Rowan Atkinson seems to have links with the humour of children's comics. In books, Raymond Briggs makes links between his art and that of comic books, mentioning Asterix, Tintin and Rupert. But I suspect there's more than a hint of Desperate Dan and some of the unmentionable habits of Minnie the Minx behind Fungus the Bogeyman and his dreadful wife.

Watch out, Shandra the She Barbarian of Space, Dennis and his pals are fighting back, and I and a few million kids have got money on them to win the next round in the battle of the comics.

Brian Walsh taught for twenty years in schools and colleges before becoming a LEA Adviser.

# BEANO?

Adult attitudes to comics range from nostalgia to suspicion. There are fears that comics are subversive, calls for censorship. Are comics harmful? Do the funnies have a part to play in growing up? We asked **Nicholas Tucker** for his opinion

For a small child, almost every book, together with most educational comics, will be bought for him or her by someone else. Such 'parentbuys', of course, can often be loved very much, but there is rarely quite that absolute freedom to stuff them into pockets, cut out bits from them, swap them with friends, or simply throw them away when finished. Such valuable freedom, though, usually obtains in the case of comics that children have bought for themselves. That is why the extraordinarily cheap price of the 'funnies' is still one of their most significant aspects for the young. Here, after all, is something that for only a few pence can either arrive importantly each week with the family newspaper, or else be bought with all the deliberation of those first genuine financial transactions with otherwise impersonal newsagents.

Once at school, young readers will find that other children may also be reading the same comics, and they will therefore be able to swap stories or casual references with each other as easily and confidently as their own parents sometimes rehash the contents of last week's Sunday papers when conversing with their friends. Social inclusion is important for all of us, but especially so for the infant or junior striving to keep afloat in the hurly-burly of the school playground. It may well be that references to last night's television now heavily outweigh any conversation about Lord Snooty or Dennis the Menace. But even so, comics are still very popular with children, and have so far shown no signs of being killed off in the way that was once predicted when television viewing first became wide-spread.

Equally, it is hard for most television programmes to rival, at least for long, the immediate intellectual and emotional accessibility of the funnies for most children. For the young, the world is often a highly confusing and arbitrary place, but in the comic strip everything soon becomes crystal clear. Every main character, after all, will act in a few, very stereotyped ways. Once it is learned, for example, that Desperate Dan has super-human strength and a vast appetite, it will simply be a question of seeing how these particular characteristics will be deployed each week. There will be no possibility that Dan will ever develop as a character in the way that Long John Silver, for example, changes from being a total villain into someone harder to judge and pin down (a phenomenon known to American literary critics as 'role-drift'). Similarly, the people Dan meets will be as clearly advertised as if they had slogans written on their chests. Mayors, for example, always bear chains of office, convicts wear suits decorated with broad arrows, burglars disport black masks and bags of swag, and dentists tend to have names like 'I. Pullem' plus window-displays of what look like sets of plumbers' tools. Such characters will also act in utterly predictable ways. Goats, for example, will either butt or else eat tin cans, teachers will usually cane, and absent-minded professors will invariably come into contact with examples of wet

The fact that such stereotypes may be completely foreign to a child's actual



Gnasher, Billy Whizz, the Nibblers, Dennis the Menace, Lord Snooty, the Bash Street Kids' teacher & Minnie the Minx, from 'The Beano'

experience of life is neither here nor there. In comic-land, everything works to rule, and once you have learned the few rules that apply there, you can simply sit back and enjoy it all, without ever being brought short by that tedious and sometimes disheartening experience of not being able to understand. Even if a few of the words are difficult, there will always be pictures to help out with before and after contextual cues, so important when it comes to the business of trying to make sense of any written down or illustrated story.

Ease of comprehension, although pleasurable in itself, is also a means to an end, whereby children can arrive in easy stages at the heart of what the funnies are really about. Looking at the repetitive examples of aggression, greed, mess, lying and stealing that run through such comics, one can only conclude that as in so much art, the funnies chiefly celebrate those things that most of their readers are otherwise learning to put to one side in real life, or else. In this sense, the funnies enable children to let off steam, just as romantic novelettes or James Bond stories allow older readers to taste the delights of unlikely, often dangerous adventures in the safety of the imagination. Children's books offer this sort of opportunity too, of course, but seldom in such a whole-hearted way as in the comics. So if you sometimes resent Mum and Dad or the teacher's authority over you, or else daydream about beating up the school bully, it is comics that will show you how this might be done and what it might feel like. And as the characters in the funnies look like grotesque caricatures rather than recognisable people, it is possible to watch them put to a great deal of pain and anguish without ever having to feel guilty about enjoying the spectacle.

The diminishing number of parents and teachers who continue to object to such comics, therefore, are surely missing the point. The funnies may show children things they would like to see, but only in a comic strip, and even here most trangressions are usually punished in the last frame, either by Dad wielding a slipper or by teacher with his omni-present cane. At the same time, comics always steer well away from the genuinely seamy aspects of childhood, such as the racial insults sometimes heard in the playground, the whispered smut in the lavatories, or the experiments with gluesniffing or whatever else may be 'in' at that particular moment for inner-city children at risk. In this light, the funnies can seem deeply conventional and often highly moralistic beneath all that show of aggressive energy, and if children find them amusing and entertaining as well, who should worry?

Nicholas Tucker teaches in the University of Sussex and has written widely about children and children's books.



This new award for young Scottish writers of children's fiction is a memorial to Kathleen Fidler who died last year, aged 81.

Kathleen Fidler was the author of over eighty books for children, and over five hundred broadcasts for BBC Children's Hour and Schools Broadcasting. She was born in Leicestershire, and educated in Lancashire where she eventually became one of the youngest headteachers ever when she took over Goose Green School in Wigan while she was still in her twenties.

In 1930 she married and moved to Edinburgh where she began writing and became a much-loved figure in the children's book world. She was much in demand as a speaker and her friendly style and sense of humour ensured her a warm reception from everyone she met. She loved books and did a great deal to encourage adults and particularly children to share that love. Her story Flash the Sheep Dog was made into a prize-winning film and Haki the Shetland Pony was adapted for television.

The award, a rosewood and silver trophy and a prize of £250, is for an unpublished novel for the 8-12 age group. Authors must be under 30 and of Scottish parentage or resident in Scotland. It is sponsored by Blackie & Son Ltd (Kathleen Fidler's publishers) and will be administered by the Edinburgh Children's Book Group and the National Book League in Scotland.

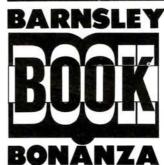
As part of the selection procedure, shortlisted manuscripts will be submitted by the judges to a panel of young readers (including Catriona Goldie, Kathleen Fidler's granddaughter) whose views will be taken into account. Details from NBL Scotland, 15a Lynedoch Street, Glasgow G3 6EF.

The winning entry will be announced on 12th February 1982, the anniversary of the publication of Kathleen Fidler's last book, The Ghost of Sandeel Bay, an adventure story in which a group of resourceful children on holiday in Scotland outwit some sinister smugglers (Blackie, £4.95).

### The Children's Book Award

Another new award, this time for the book, published in 1980 which children have enjoyed most. The award is made by the Federation of Children's Book Groups and this year's winner will be announced on 3rd April in Cambridge at the Federation's Spring Conference.

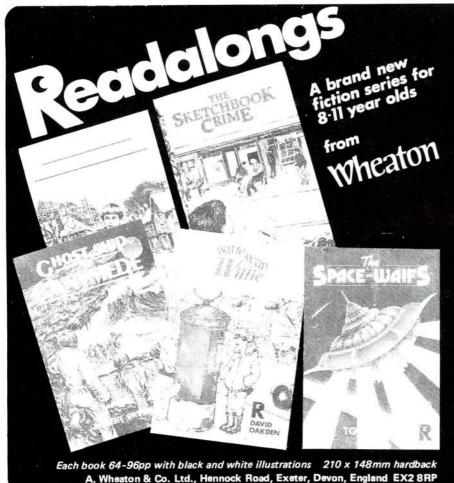
Adults and children have been 'testing' books during the year. Reports have been collected from all over the country and a shortlist has been re-tested. The final selection will be made in March. The award which is unusual in that it takes children's response into account will be made annually. We shall publish the results in the next issue.



New Dates 5th-13th June

Plans are well in hand for nine days of book-based events culminating in Children's Day on 13th June, with a fancy dress parade, author appearances, story-telling, and a grand prize-giving.

There will be competitions in schools as a run-up to the Bonanza and throughout the week a Book Hunt, starting at the Junior Library, which will involve following a trail around displays in local shop windows and finding answers to booky questions. The logo design for the Bonanza is also the result of a local



# THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS EVE David Rees (Winner of the 1978 Carnegie medal) Based on a true event, this compelling story links the desperation of an escaped prisoner on Dartmoor and the initiative and daring shown by a young boy in his attempt to resci

0 08 025006 8 £2.50

### **GHOST SHIP TO GANDYMEDE**

Robert Swindells

The Space-Mad Three stow away on a spaceship and arrive, not at an orbiting space station, as they expect, but on the distant and dangerous planet of Ganymede, where they are faced with a battle of survival.

0 08 025007 6 £2.95

Robert Swindells' previous book 'The Moonpath and Other Stories' was shortlisted for the 1980 National Book Award for Children's Literature.

### THE SKETCHBOOK CRIME

Helen Morgan

The Stuart children are excited by the prospect of an Easter holiday in London, but hardly expect to be caught up in a real adventure — a jewel robbery and a kidnapping. 0 08 025608 2 £2.50

### THE SPACE-WAIFS

Tom Tully

How Brian and Brenda befriend the little creatures from a real space-capsule who for their part are able to do a good turn for the Barrington family.

0 08 025612 0 £2.50

### **BUTTERCUP WILLIE**

David Oakden

Wilhelmina Amanda Smith alias Buttercup Willie is a little girl full of good intentions who somehow only succeeds in leaving a trail of chaos behind her. With her hilariously odd family, she becomes involved in a series of amusing

0 08 025005 X £2.50



Althea Goes Mobile

Aside from her involvement with Dinosaur Publications Althea has joined her husband, Edward Parker, in a new venture - a mobile bookshop. Althea's Bookshop is housed in a 22ft long caravan pulled by a Land Rover and is stocked with books from Dinosaur and Penguin. The bookshop hopes to visit schools, playgroups, book events; and, as there are plans for storytelling and competitions, it could be seen as an 'event' in itself. The idea is to co-operate with and complement local booksellers and school bookshops in East Anglia. For more information contact Beech House, Over, Cambridge (Tel: 0954 30324).

A New How To...
How to Organise a Children's Book Fair has been revised and updated. The new version of this useful booklet is available from the Book Marketing Council, 19
Bedford Sqare, London WC1B 3HJ. Details from Michelle Oberman (01-580 6321).

Happy Birthday Babar
The first Babar the Elephant
book by Jean de Brunhoff was
published fifty years ago this
year. After Jean's death his
son, Laurent, continued the
stories and there are now a
string of Babar stories
published in this country by
Methuen. Fifty is still quite
young for an elephant — it's
also a good excuse for a party.

Or so it seems On 23rd A

Or so it seems. On 23rd April Knight will publish two new Famous Five Adventures. On the covers (all we've seen so far) no author's name appears

– just the numbers 1 and 2. Apparently this strange practice doesn't mean that EB has found a way of sending yet more manuscripts from 'the other side'; merely that an as vet anonymous French person has taken up the Famous Five where she left them. Anthea Bell (see page 12) has done the translations. We will have to wait to see how these Gallic adventurers compare with the originals. Meanwhile, addicts eager for a new fix should be warned they are not actually getting the genuine article, just books by numbers.

The genuine article ... .

Book Events Ahead 27th April-4th May Lancaster Literature Festival,

this year includes a minifestival of children's literature. Details from Margaret Eddershaw, Bath House, Bath Street, Lancaster.

1st-5th June Cambridge Children's Poetry Week. ●



Exciting enough to be among the first pupils at the School on the Moon, but even more exciting to foil a plot by an unscrupulous Middle Eastern tyrant who plans to take the Moon over and hold the Earth to ransom. A gripping adventure story by the masterly Hugh Walters.

THE SCHOOL ON THE MOON

by HUGH WALTERS A Red Grasshopper 95p (paperback) for 6-8 year-olds ISBN 0 200 72743 5 Also available in hardback (£3.50) ISBN 0 200 727443 Trouble is brewing at Pine Street. Bully Bert Clay is plotting trouble — his former crony, Reg Ditton, after saving Samantha's life, is not only a member of the Pine Street Gang, but a hero as well. To cap it all, Bert's painting is rejected for the Pine Street Mural. Bert is determined on revenge. Samantha saves the day — but only just!

— but only just!
THE PINE STREET
PROBLEM

by MABEL ESTHER ALLAN A Blue Grasshopper £1.25 (paperback) for 8-10 year-olds ISBN 0 200 72740 0 Also available in hardback (£3.95) 'The signs and portents were much too strong. Added to which, and no less a portent as it happened, Bessie's thumbs had begun to prickle . . .' It is All Hallows Eve; the wicked Marcia and her coven are determined that this year the White Council will not foil their attempts to gain possession of the Mallyon Jewel. And again it is Bessie and her grandchildren Sophie and Hugh whose task it is

TO TRICK A WITCH
by MARGARET ELLIOT
A Green Grasshopper 95p
(paperback)
for 10-11 year-olds
ISBN 0 200 72748 6
Also available in hardback
(£3.50)
ISBN 0 200 72749 4

Everything children (and adults) need to know about raising a puppy, told as a delightful story for young children. Full colour illustrations. The book is endorsed by the PDSA and has a section for adults at the back.

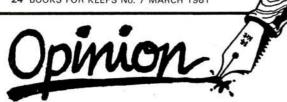
SASHA
by CONSTANCE MILBURN
illustrated by
Frank Rodgers
£1.95 (paperback)
ISBN 0 216 90966 X
Also available in hardback
(£3.95)

ISBN 0 216 90861 2

Great Children's Books From Blackie & Abelard



THIS WAY TO THE SCHOOL ON THE MOON



Have you got a bee in your bonnet about any aspect of books? Do you sometimes feel like handing out bouquets or brickbats to booksellers, publishers, authors, illustrators, teachers, librarians . . .

Here's your chance.

Steve Bowles starts off with a swipe at



# 'Celebrity Snares'

Next time you hear the old sob story about all the dreadful unsolicited manuscripts which children's book editors receive, save the paper hankies and ask yourself why so many people believe their scribbles worthy of a publisher's attention. Could these aspiring authors regard a lot of published material as little better than the uninspired, unoriginal dross they write themselves? I wouldn't argue. Maybe they write that way because of things they see published.

Reasons for the low standards of kids' fiction are legion: nepotism, various problems with 'established authors', reliance upon Classics or folk tales. But one major factor encouraging people's belief that any idiot can write stories for children must be the growing trend of publishing books by Celebrities. Take The Old Man of Lochnagar. I know HRH wrote it for family amusement, that royalties go to charity, but one expects a future King to have a little pride. Perhaps worthy causes outweighed personal considerations? Yet a sponsored leap from Beachy Head would produce just as much cash. And if, like most sponsored activities, this wouldn't constitute an outright public good, at least it wouldn't be a positive mischief. Chances are, anyone reading Lochnagar could do better themselves and that can only harm the general standing of children's literature.

This one-off wouldn't signify if Celebrity books didn't corner so much publicity, hog shelf-space in shops and divert money from worthwhile titles. Written by nobodies like you and me, many would never be published. Consider Harry Secombe's Nurgla. It's not Lochnagar awful; at least there's a developing story of sorts, although the plot's disjointed progress can confuse kids. It makes no attempt to touch their inner lives or social preoccupations as it strains to entertain, relying exclusively upon inclusion of a monster for any effect it achieves, a device which has been slave to thousands.

It shows no stylistic invention, occasionally makes references inappropriate to its audience. Yet this quintessence of mediocrity swarms in my local Smith's.

The inescapable Frank Muir's What-a-mess books show more awareness of the relationship between humour and style — but this can result in convoluted sentences which seem out of place in picture books. Compare the simplicity of a quality children's author like Rosemary Wells. I wouldn't give Muir many marks for ideas, either; reincarnating Mr Pastry as an Afghan puppy hardly warrants acclaim. Laborious, boringly repetitive, what success the books have with kids is almost entirely attributable to the artist, Joseph Wright. (The way artists can compensate for the story's deficiencies probably accounts for Celebrities congregating among books for littlies — along with small matters like amount of time the work requires and £-per-minute return.)

Recent books by John Noakes, Clement Freud, Jilly Cooper, Pam Ayres, Nanette Newman and others could be criticised similarly. (What happened to the respect for literary standards which editors invoke so eagerly when facing demands for more working-class, multi-ethnic or anti-sexist stories?)

In hard times, temptations to take or invite books from Celebrities are difficult for some publishers to resist. Publicity is a major problem with kids' books. (Yes, the present system needs improving but even so...) Famous Name Authors catch the public/booksellers' eye. Publicity creates bestsellers. But, long term, such retrograde steps will no more create a mass market than gimmicks like Masquerade. Moles tell of refusals for some outstanding children's books before they eventually reached the light. Logic insists that other good stories must disappear for ever.

If YOU have something to say, write it down (max. 500 words) and send it to the Editor (address on page 2).

# **SBA Services and Publications**

Qua	intity	£	p
* I wish to take out a subscription to Books for Keeps (six issues) commencing with Issue No.—£4.50 (or £7.50 overseas) for six issues			
* How to Set Up and Run a School Bookshop £1.20 per copy			
* Badges 10p each (minimum order 5 badges) Books for Keeps OK O Piccolo Guess What O I'm a Sparrow fan O			
* Penguin Paper Bags £1.20 per 100			
* Authorgraphs 40p each No. 2 Penelope Lively O No. 3 Malcolm Saville O No. 5 Pat Hutchins			

	Quantity	L	þ
* Poster Packs 90p each Primary O Secondary O			
* Book Bank Savings Cards 5p each (minimum order 20 cards) Primary O Secondary O	o		
* DIY School Bookshop Unit Plans £1.00 per copy	t		
Total			
Please make cheques/posts	al		

Please make cheques/postal orders payable to the School Bookshop Association.

Return this form to: SBA,

1 Effingham Road, Lee, London SE12 8NZ.

# ORDER FORM

All prices include postage and packing.

For more details of items listed on this form, turn to the back page.

# **Little Lord Fauntleroy**

# The film of this Victorian classic goes on general release in March. How faithful is it to the original? **Barry Cunningham** went along to a preview to find out.

The book has been filmed twice before — in 1922 with Mary Pickford playing the boy and his mother, and in 1936 with Freddie Bartholemew in the long curls and lace collar which have become associated with the name Fauntleroy. But this film, as the Director, Jack Gold, is quick to point out, is the first in which Little Lord Fauntleroy has been accurately cast as a genuinely American inheritor of his English grandfather's Earldom.

But why the remake? What is Little Lord Fauntleroy to today's audience? Rereading the book it is easy to see its natural screen attraction. The story, which lacks the stodginess of much contemporary work, progresses through set pieces, lightly moving back and forth as the boy's artlessness exposes the kindliness buried beneath his grandfather's cantankerous exterior. Humour and pathos come and go like sunshine and showers, and the open-hearted little boy with the beautiful blond curls carries all before him.

The film retains this grand optimistic progress, skilfully managing to avoid the sentimentality which for a modern reader lurks in the book, by bringing out more of the fun inherent in the various formal confrontations. The sentiment of the original it rightly retains and its ruthless manipulation of the heart strings, using much of the dialogue from the book, strikes enough chords to keep the shareholders in Kleenex crying happily into their paper profits. This is largely thanks to the careful and restrained performances of Alec Guinness as the Earl of Dorincourt, Ricky Schroder as the boy and Connie Booth as his mother, Dearest. Add to this dazzlingly talented package some beautiful photography of the English countryside at Belvoir Castle and a selection of lovable characters: old retainer (Eric Porter), folksy Yank (Colin Blakely), and numerous adoring down-trodden poor, and Little Lord Fauntleroy will surely have the whole family captive and enchanted.

Of course that's what it's all about, enchantment. A fairy story as distanced from fact as that of Luke Skywalker and the Princess. The message of benevolent autocracy may be literally too big a pill to swallow — but the coating is delicious.

Don't think, just weep and smile, and you and your children, your granny, her granny, your mother's best friend, Aunty Edna, Snotty Edward will enjoy the film and the book immensely. The Penguin tie-in editions are illustrated by the beautifully atmospheric set drawings which introduce and end the film, gradually drawing you into and releasing you from the fantasy. The film accurately retains all the atmosphere, character and emotion of the original; and the book's enduring power is reconfirmed. Like **The Secret Garden**, a comfortable classic.





Little Lord Fauntleroy, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Puffin, 0 14 03.1411 3, 85p (and, inexplicably, in Penguin at 95pl)



a new hero for the under fives

The latest character to appear in books and on television, Yok Yok, is the creation of Etienne Delessert and will be seen in a weekly programme for younger children which starts on 3rd April (ITV).

There are six books about Yok Yok from Moonlight Publishing. Each one has four simple stories and full colour illustration. The books are aimed at two to six-year-olds, for sharing with adults and early reading (£1.50 each).

### IN VIEW SOON

The Bagthorpe Sage Don't laugh. They say it's going to start on Wednesday, 25th March. I'll believe it when I see it. (New subscribers puzzled by that remark might like to know that have been announcing the imminent arrival of Bagthorpes on TV since last March. Ed.)

### Vice-Versa

A family serial in seven episodes from ATV based on F. Anstey's classic story of a father and son changing bodies (Puffin). First episode 5th April.

Bertha and the

Racing Pigeon
We hear Pam Ayres will
feature her book on her BBCTV Special show the day
before publication of the
Arrow paperback.

### IN PROSPECT

A new series of Smith and Goody from Thames. An adaptation of Stig of the Dump in September (Thames). Also in the autumn we may have The Coral Island (Thames) and The Day of the Triffids (BBC).

Flambards Sequel

Planned to coincide with a rerun of the very successful Flambards series (Yorkshire TV) comes Flambards Divided, Kathleen Peyton's sequel to her Flambards trilogy (OUP, £5.95).

Film Tie-ins

Hippo have three books on films in the pipeline: My Bodyguard (February), Herbie Goes Bananas (March) and Oh Heavenly Dog (May). In April the paperback tie-in for the new Popeye film is due from Fontana (£1.95).

# Lord of the Rings on Radio 4

The 26-part serial starts in March with a very starry cast of voices including Michael Hordern and Robert Stephens.

# **YOU TELL ME**





Roger McGough

Michael Rosen

In 1979 Kestrel produced a collection of poems by ROGER MCGOUGH and MICHAEL ROSEN. That collection, YOU TELL ME, has just come out in paperback. Teachers who haven't met it before should take note. If you want to convince your pupils that poetry isn't just boring stuff about daffodils, written by people who are now all dead—this is for you.

Roger McGough and Michael Rosen know that poems to be read by children (and that doesn't mean poems specially written for children) have to be immediately accessible and about things that mean something in their lives. Here there are poems about friends, relations, football, school. And they are all funny: sad funny, odd funny, wild funny, clever funny, smile funny and laugh out loud funny.

Some of McGough's best-known poems of the Seventies are included: the sagas of P.C. Plod the famous Liverpool copper, and Nooligan, where at the end of each verse the tough, aggressive voice changes as it adds a disarmingly honest qualification. Here's two verses:

I'm a nooligan got a nard 'ead step out of line and youre dead (well, bleedin)

I'm a nooligan I spray me name all over town footballs me game (well, watchin)

It's the last line of the last verse that makes you think as well as smile.

First Day at School recalls for anyone over eight the incomprehension of that bewildering time. Here's a few lines

> What does a lessin look like? Sounds small and slimy They keep them in a glassroom Whole rooms made of glass. Imagine.

You Tell Me, Puffin, 0 14 03.1286 2, 75p

In our next issue, Poet in School reports on Mike Rosen working with a group of Juniors.

Mike Rosen's tone is conversational; the humour lies in the particular way he records the details of everyday existence, especially the 'battleground' between parents and children, teachers and children, and friends. It's all there in the story of Mart, 'my best friend' and the woolly hat, and in his account of swallowing the leg of an alarm clock. Like Roger McGough, he also enjoys playing around with words. Here's the title poem, You Tell Me

Here are the football results:
League Division Fun
Manchester United won, Manchester City lost.
Crystal Palace 2, Buckingham Palace 1
Millwall Leeds nowhere
Wolves 8 A cheese roll and had a cup of tea 2
Aldershot 3 Buffalo Bill shot 2
Evertonill, Liverpool's not very well either
Newcastle's Heaven Sunderland's a very nice place 2
Ipswhich one? You tell me.

Making kids laugh is a good way into poetry. It disarms opposition, breaks down barriers. Mike Rosen thinks it's something else as well. 'I find it slightly disconcerting when people, because they have laughed at the things that I have written therefore assume, either that I'm not serious as a person, or that poems that make you laugh aren't serious'

Children don't go about analysing the fun to find the seriousness, but it's there to be absorbed. He goes further. 'Most poetry is in some sense political because it is about social relationships. When it's one to one it doesn't appear immediately; but if you're talking about anything to do with organisation of human beings and what they do to each other, then it's a political thing.'

This one's about teachers.

Rodge said,
"Teachers — they want it all ways —
You're jumping up and down on a chair
or something
and they grab hold of you and say,
"Would you do that sort of thing in your own home?"

"So you say, "No." and they say "Well don't do it here then."

But if you say, "Yes, I do it at home." they say, "Well, we don't want that sort of thing going on here thank you very much."

'Teachers – they get you all ways,' Rodge said.

A good book for junior or secondary kids, in school or out.



# Lloyds Bank

# is pleased to support The School Bookshop Association

# MONEY – THE FACTS OF LIFE 5th edition by W. Reay Tolfree

As part of a continuing programme of educational sponsorship this book has been produced by the Bank, in association with the publishers, Woodhead-Faulkner Limited, 8 Market Passage, Cambridge.

Written for those starting in regular employment for the first time, the book contains useful information such as how wages and salaries are paid, how to look after money and how to budget. Suitable for school-leavers, students, and teachers instructing in money matters.

Copies from booksellers or, in cases of difficulty, direct from the publishers.

Price 90 pence.

# MONEY – THE FACTS OF LIFE Audio-Visual Presentation

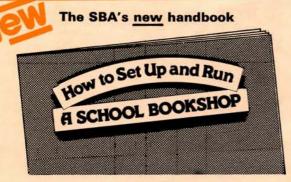
A new audio-visual teaching pack based on the book has now been produced, comprising four 20-minute filmstrips with accompanying cassettes, teachers' notes, suggested projects and a copy of the book.

Specifically for classroom use, the filmstrips trace the early working lives of two cartoon characters, Zack and Zelda, through numerous drawings, photographs and charts, combined with a lively informative soundtrack.

Each pack costs £30 plus VAT and is available under special preview offer from Public Relations Department (FS),Lloyds Bank,71Lombard Street,London EC3P3BS.

# **SBA Services & Publications**

Our intention is to build up gradually a range of items which help you help children come to books with interest and pleasure.



At last our completely rewritten and updated handbook will be available in February. If you're thinking of setting up your own bookshop in school, this handbook is essential. If you already run one, the new section on 'How to Keep Going' is full of ideas and suggestions. It's laid out logically and sequentially to take you from start to finish in the most practical way possible. Sections include:

Part 1 What is a school bookshop
Includes information on the school bookshop movement itself.

Part 2 Why set one up

Educational, cultural, social and simple, practical reasons to convince either yourself or, if need be, others too.

Part 3 How to set one up

Includes the planning stage (eg. what kind of bookshop, the site, how much time and money is involved, etc.) and putting plans into operation (eg. your book supplier, choosing stock, furniture, etc.).

Part 4 Opening a school bookshop

PR and publicity, inviting authors, opening ceremony.

Part 5 Running a school bookshop (How to keep going)
Publicity, creating the 'atmosphere', encouraging sales, special
events, activities and competitions.

Part 6 Profiles of school bookshops

Infant, Junior, Middle and Secondary school bookshops described by teachers who already run their own school bookshop.

Part 7 Useful sources of information

Price £1.20



### The SBA's DIY School Bookshop Unit

If you can't afford the price of commercially produced units and you have a competent Do-it-Yourselfer to hand (a willing dad, a helpful secondary school woodwork department, etc.), our detailed, professionally designed plans may be the answer. At present day prices you should be able to build your own five-shelf, lockable (and if you want, mobile) school bookshop unit for between £30 and £35 (assuming no labour charges). That's about a third of the cost of a ready-made unit. Our plans include full assembly instructions and materials list. Price £1.00.

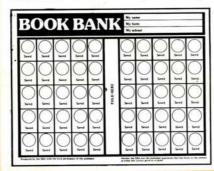
## **Authorgraphs**

This is the centre-fold author profile from **Books for Keeps** which can be used as an author display piece.

author display piece.
Authorgraph No. 2 Penelope Lively
Authorgraph No. 3 Malcolm Saville
Authorgraph No. 5 Pat Hutchins
Price 40p each.

# Book Bank Savings Cards

For school bookshops, book clubs, book fairs — indeed anywhere books are sold to children — a savings card scheme can help offset the price of books. Most schools use the idea. We've printed this grid on the back of paperback covers with a space for children to enter their names. There is room in the circle to record how much has been saved so that you know each child's credit at a glance. There is a good variety of different book covers, for individuality, and each card costs 5p. Minimum order 20 cards (i.e. £1 in all).



### **Poster Packs**

These are proving to be extraordinarily popular as an easy way to brighten up and create lively, colourful book atmospheres in book corners, libraries and school bookshops. We have two packs, one for primary, the other for secondary schools, made up of about a dozen publishers' posters. We change the contents of each pack roughly every four to five months as we obtain new material from the publishers. If you have a special request (eg. a girls' school, a nursery class, a middle school, a special event), let us know and we'll try to oblige. It all depends on what we have available. We charge 90p each which covers postage, folding and packing. You could of course write to a dozen or so publishers and get your publicity free but when you add up the cost of stamps and bear in mind that you may or may not get suitable posters, it's probably easier, quicker and cheaper to write for our packs.

## **Badges**

From time to time we have on offer metal badges from publishers and others which aren't generally available elsewhere. At present we have

Books for Keeps OK (55 mm diameter)
Piccolo Guess What (55 mm diameter)
I'm a Sparrow fan (45 mm diameter)
Price 10p each (minimum order 5 badges).





## **Bags**

Real Penguin paper bags to add a bit of authenticity to your bookshop. Price £1.20 per 100.

# **Advisory Service**

We try to answer any question put to us about children's books. Apart from school bookshops themselves which we know quite a bit about, we like to think we're a good place to start with if you have a problem or a query. If we can't answer your enquiry straight off the top of our heads, we'll put you in touch with someone who can.

If you want any of these items, please use the order form on page 24 or write to the SBA at Lee. All cheques and postal orders payable to the School Bookshop Association.