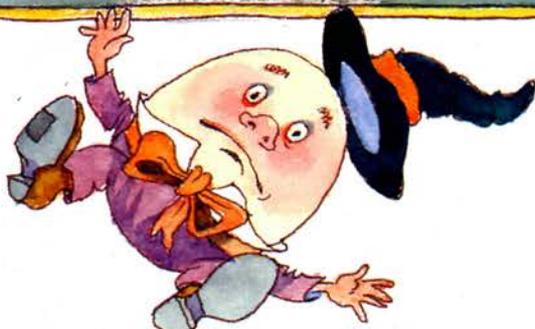




BOOKS FOR KEEPS

September 1991 No. 70
UK Price £1.90

the children's book magazine



READING AND THE IMAGINATION
VAL BIRO • AUTUMN COMPETITION FOR SCHOOLS
HISTORY IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

WHY THE RIGHT BOOKS MATTER... WHY YOU CAN RECOMMEND BFC

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

Teachers, educationalists and government committees all agreed: a love of reading and an aptitude for learning go hand in hand. For reading is a key factor in developing the language potential which still remains the best predictor of educational success.

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

And who selects these books?

The BFC selection panel is:

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

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

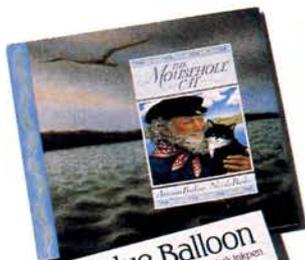
MARGARET CARTER, who is an expert in child development, former editor of 'Mother' magazine and a writer and children's book reviewer;

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

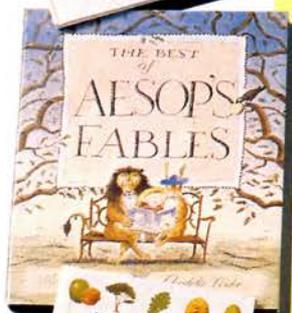
You only have to look at this page to see the calibre of books they have recommended over the past few months. And they are all offered at savings which range from between 20% to 50% off the publishers' prices.

So the benefits of Club membership are very real, very tangible and very valuable. Anyone wishing to become a member of Books for Children should simply write to us at the address below and we will send full details and our introductory offer.

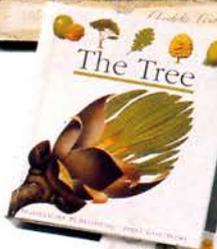
We hope, too, that after reading this page you will want to recommend us to other parents, teachers, playgroup leaders and PTAs.



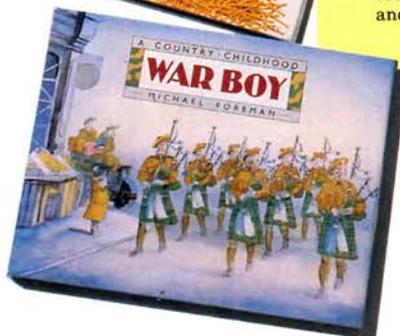
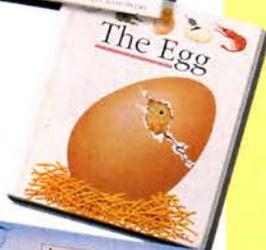
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Nick Inkpen



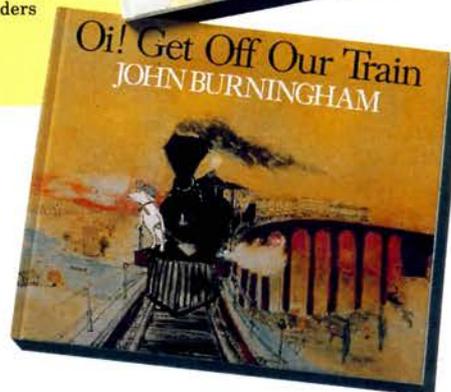
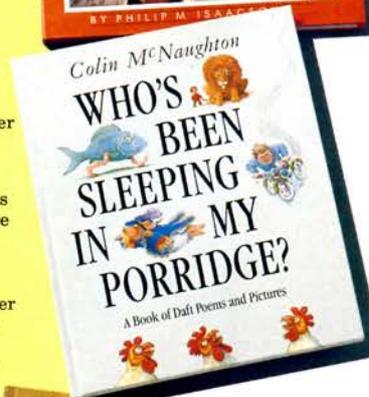
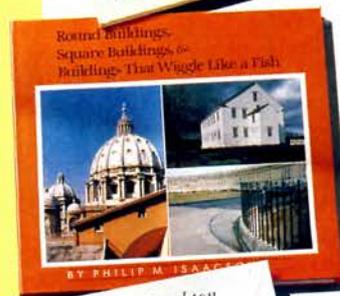
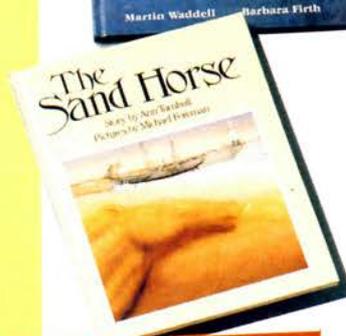
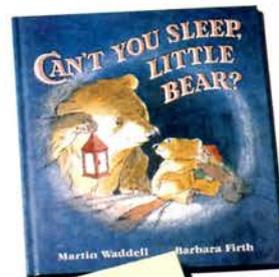
The Best of
AESOP'S
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A COUNTRY CHILDHOOD
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Cover story

The illustration on the front of **BfK** this month is from **Rub-a-Dub-Dub: Val Biro's 77 Favourite Nursery Rhymes** (see Authorgraph on centre pages for details). The book is published by Blackie and we thank them for their help in using this illustration.

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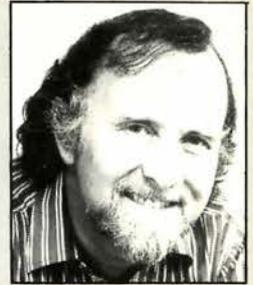
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EDITOR'S PAGE



Do you know of a school or schools who'd welcome the chance to win £2,500-worth of brand new hardbacks and paperbacks while meeting a whole clutch of National Curriculum attainment targets in English? If so, turn instantly to page 23 of this issue. There we announce **Books for Keeps for Children**, our autumn competition.



The idea first came from our sponsors, Books For Children, and was pondered for several months till – quite by chance – we were approached by Teresa Grainger, Director of the Literacy Unit at Christ Church College, Canterbury, suggesting an article about classroom activities uncannily similar to those we had in mind. Who says there's no such thing as Zeitgeist? We ran Teresa's piece in July, **BfK 69**, dropping heavy hints about what was to come. Now, with the details spelled out in full, over to you . . . please see that we're overwhelmed with entries! Could there be a better activity for Children's Book Week?

The rest of this issue covers every age and stage of reading, we hope. The subject of our Authorgraph (centre-spread) is Val Biro, doyen of the school visit, whose lifetime of illustration has done so much to persuade youngsters that books can be fun. Anyone who's appeared on the same bookweek bill as Val knows what a hard act he is to follow. I've never forgotten the notice I encountered a few years ago draped across one infant school lobby. 'Goody-Goody-Gumdrop' was all it said. I didn't have to ask about favourite picture books in that establishment.

It's the next step, though, that many young readers find difficult. One solution comes from A & C Black whose 'Jets' series – ingeniously combining word and image in a way now much imitated – is discussed by its originator, Fiona Kenshole, on pages 24-25. She's assisted by Scoular Anderson, a popular contributor to the series. The question of accessibility in the context of non-fiction is raised by Mary Worrall, who describes the new **Oxford Children's Encyclopedia** on pages 28-29, and John Fines, on pages 20-21, who recommends approaches and texts for the teaching of history. Both make it clear that there's no easy answer. Quality in children's books, as in every other human endeavour, is hard won. No one knows this better than Kaye Webb, legendary former editor of Puffin Books now in their fiftieth birthday year, who is interviewed by Stephanie Nettell on page 27.

What kind of readers, then, do we envisage when we strive to bring children and books together? It's this fundamental issue which is addressed overleaf in Jack Ousbey's leading article, 'Reading and the Imagination'. Jack backs up sharp, powerful argument with a not-so-secret weapon we book enthusiasts should deploy more often: rich, well-chosen quotation. Of course, some people may find such fare a little too rich. Along with his article, Jack sent **BfK** a poem which makes his own position clear. Now, I'm not saying you should *hide* what follows when you encounter your next Government Minister on a literacy fact-finding mission . . . but you'd be advised to make it available *tactfully*.

Building a House of Fiction *

*Last night I finished The Mousehole Cat,
Today it's The Iron Man,
Tomorrow I start on The Shrinking of
Treehorn –
I'm reading as fast as I can.*

*I started on Miffy before I was one,
And Gumpy was one of my friends.
I went out with Rosie on her famous Walk –
I just love it, how that story ends.*

*And I love Russell Hoban, the Ahlbergs
as well,
Anno, Frank Asch, Shirley Hughes,
The Toucan and Elmer by David McKee –
And the magic of Lavender Shoes.*

*Last week I read Bridget and William,
And poems by Ted Hughes and Kit Wright,
Some hilarious tales by Mike Rosen –
And, Where Does the Sun Go at Night?*

*So now I have finished The Mousehole Cat,
And completed The Iron Man,
I hope I'll soon start on The Shrinking of
Treehorn –
I'm reading as fast as I can.*

*Yes, I'm reading as fast as I possible can,
I'm reading as fast as I can.
I want the absorption, the fun, the delight,
The fears, the sorrows, the tonics.
I want all the things that a real story brings –
'Cos tomorrow I start on the phonics.*

Thanks, Jack.
Enjoy the issue! ■

* **Building a House of Fiction** is an account of real teachers, teaching real children to read real books, with the approval and support of real parents. It is published by The National Association for the Teaching of English (0 9515803 0 2, £3.10 members, £3.50 non-members, inc. p&p).

Subscription price increase to Books for Keeps

As from 1st September 1991, we are raising the annual subscription to **BfK** as follows:

- * UK and Ireland: £11.40
- * Overseas surface: £16.80
- * Airmail: because there are two rates (depending where you are in the world) you will have to ask us which one is applicable to you. They are either £21.30 or £22.50.

These new prices will remain in effect until 31st August 1992.

READING AND THE IMAGINATION

• JACK OUSBHEY •

Sally Abbott is a character in John Gardner's novel, *October Light*. At one point in the book she is sitting in a room in the house reading. At first she reads without commitment, but, imperceptibly, she is drawn into the story and then:

'the real world lost weight and the print on the pages gave way to images, an alternative reality more charged than mere life, more ghostly yet nearer, suffused with a curious importance and manageability . . .

By degrees, without knowing she was doing it, she gave in to the illusion, the comforting security of her vantage point, until whenever she looked up from her page to rest her eyes, it seemed that the door, the walls, the dresser, the heavy onyx clock had no more substance than a plate-glass reflection; what was real and enduring was the adventure flickering on the wall of her brain, a phantom world filled with its own queer laws and character.'

Gardner is describing here the sort of reading which occurs when the story is good enough to engage the imagination of the reader. Clearly what is happening to Sally is powerful, absorbing, influential, creative. It is the kind of reading which, once experienced, sets a standard for all other types of reading.

Dictionaries tell us that the word imagination comes from the Latin, *imaginare*: to form an image of; to fashion; to represent. Psychologists and philosophers appear to be both puzzled and entranced by the notion of imaginative activity. They suggest that we acquire knowledge of the external world by a kind of snapshot process which involves the production and assembly of brief images. They indicate that we achieve an orientation in space through the working of the imagination, and that we establish for ourselves sets of personal symbols by the same means. We have to turn to a poet, Ted Hughes, to get a direct and more certain view about the imagination and how it functions:

'The word "imagination" denotes not much more than the faculty of creating a picture of something in our heads and holding it there while we think about it. Since this is the basis of nearly everything we do, clearly it's very important that our imagination should be strong rather than weak. Education neglects this faculty completely.'

Mary Warnock believes that the images we form are also ways of thinking about the world in which we live. It is plausible, and convenient, she says:

'to give the name imagination to what allows us to go beyond the barely sensory into the intellectual or thought-imbued territory of perception.'

Evidence of the influence of stories on the imagination in early childhood, is not easy to find. It is harder still to define the nature of the interaction when an adult reads aloud to a young child. Consider what is happening to young listeners as they encounter, for the first time, Antonia Barber's story, *The Mousehole Cat*, and reach the part of the tale where Old Tom, the fisherman, and his cat Mowzer put out in their small boat to face a terrible winter gale, lashed up by the Great Storm-Cat:

'All day they fished in a seething sea. The waves were so



From *The Mousehole Cat* (Walker Books).

high and the clouds so low that they soon lost sight of the shore.

And all the time the Great Storm-Cat played with the little boat, striking it and then loosing it, but never quite sinking it. And whenever his claws grew too sharp, Mowzer would sing to him to soften the edge of his anger.

As evening came down they hauled in the nets. Into the belly of the boat tumbled ling and launces, scad, hake and fairmaids; enough fish for a whole cauldron of morgy-broth; enough pilchards for half a hundred star-gazy pies.

"Mowzer, my handsome, we are all saved," said Old Tom, "if we can but bring this haul home to harbour."

But Mowzer knew that the Great Storm-Cat would strike when he saw them run for the shelter of Mousehole.

She knew that the game serves only to sharpen the appetite for the feast to follow. It is his meal or mine, thought Mowzer, as she looked at the floundering fish in the belly of the boat. Blue, green and silver, they glistened in the greyness.

It made her mouth water to look at them.

As she thought of the morgy-broth murmuring on top of the range, the star-gazy pie growing golden in the oven, Mowzer began to purr.'

When we read a good story the experience is powerfully creative. The reader or listener is called on to process the text as it unfolds, not only to make sense of the chunks of language as they are read, or heard, but also to place the story, and all it consists of, on his/her personal map of experience. In the case of *The Mousehole Cat* much of what is encountered – the setting, the linguistic constructions, the literary conventions, the imagery, the vocabulary – will be new to the listener and will mean that the map has to be extended or re-drawn. One commentator, Michael Benton, has investigated the way in which the operations of the imagination come about:

'If the reading experience is an amalgam of individual associations and memories mingling with more precisely traceable reactions provoked by the text, how does the infinite variety of this world manifest itself? The commonest answer, but not the only one, is by way of mental imagery – pictures which form in the reader's head.'

What are these pictures that crowd into the mind's eye, and of

what use are they to us in our daily lives? Are they passive, evanescent phenomena or something much more crucial to our status as human beings? Dr David Weeks, neuropsychologist at the Royal Hospital in Edinburgh, believes that visual imagery is absolutely essential to the creative process, and that each image is capable of working on other abstract ideas to form new concepts. If David Weeks is right, then what he describes is the mainspring of all human capacities – the ability to think, consider and re-shape ideas; the power to build up those notions and categories we call concepts; the talent, in fact, to handle symbols. How well Alan Garner fuels such activities in his marvellously crafted **The Stone Book Quartet**. Here is Mary climbing the spire of the village church:

'Mary hitched her frock and put the knot of the baggin cloth between her teeth and climbed the first ladder.

The ladders were spiked and roped, but the beginning of the steeple was square, a straight drop, and the ladders clattered on the side. She didn't like that.

"Keep fast hold of that tea!" she heard Father call, but she didn't lift her head, and she didn't look down.

Up she went. It felt worse than a rock because it was so straight and it had been made. Father had made parts of it. She knew the pattern of his combing hammer on the sandstone.

Up she went.

"Watch when you change to the spire!" Father's voice sounded nearer.

At the spire, the pitch of the ladders was against the stone, and Mary had to step sideways to change. The ladders were firmer, but she began to feel a breeze. She heard an engine get up steam on the railway. The baggin cloth kept her mouth wet, but it felt dry.

The spire narrowed. There were sides to it. She saw the shallow corners begin. Up and up. Tac, tac, tac, tac, above her head. The spire narrowed. Now she couldn't stop the blue sky from showing at the sides. Then land. Far away.

Mary felt her hands close on the rungs, and her wrists go stiff.

Tac, tac, tac, tac. She climbed to the hammer. The spire was thin. Father was not working, but giving her a rhythm. The sky was now inside the ladder. The ladder was broader than the spire.

Father's hand took the baggin cloth out of Mary's mouth, and his other hand steadied her as she came up through the platform.

The platform was made of good planks, and Father had lashed them, but it moved. Mary didn't like the gaps between. She put her arms around the spire.

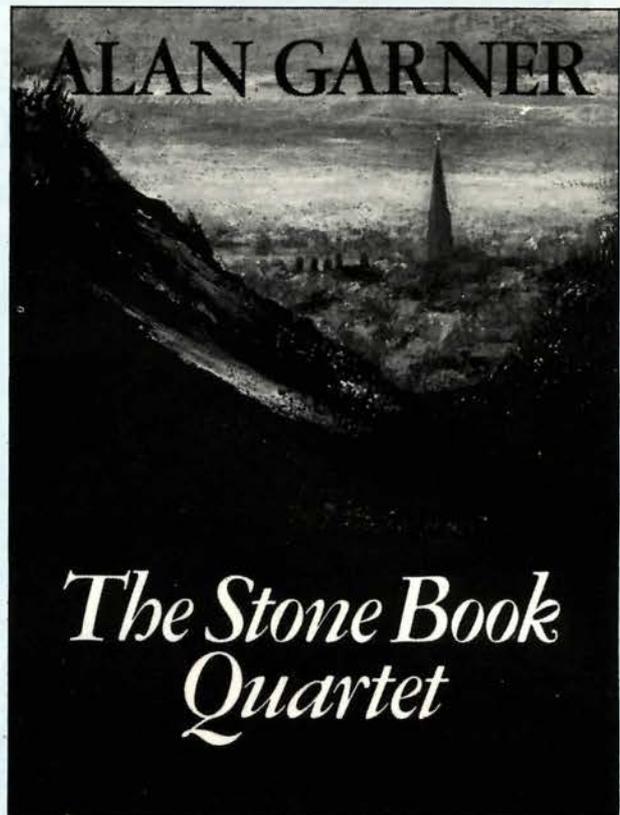
"That was a bonny climb," said Father.

"I do hope the next baby's a lad," said Mary.'

What happened to you as a reader, when you went with Mary up the ladders to the platform at the top of the spire? What kind of pictures did you make inside your head? What sort of experiences, attitudes, emotions did the reading nudge into life? And where were you as you allowed the power of the tale to exercise its magic? You entered, I believe, like Sally Abbott, the phantom world of story, and what was real and believable for those few minutes was 'the adventure flickering on the wall of the brain'.

Being a committed reader of this kind is not just a matter of our willingness to enter this secondary world: the quality of the story on offer always affects the nature of our involvement. There is no greater barrier to entry than non-stories. Certainly the basic readers of reading schemes, with their jerky rhythms and emotionally threadbare situations, are unlikely to provide much of a draw. A good story enables the reader to enter the secondary world, and anyone who has shared a real story with young children knows with what ease and delight they do this, and how eager they are to collaborate in the experience.

So what sort of stance are we to take on the question of choice? When it comes to selecting stories for children, is our commitment to those books which will nourish and sustain



the imagination? It seems reasonable to me that this is the fundamental issue which any debate on reading must address. What kind of books? What kind of reading? What kind of readers are we promoting when we teach children to read?

That doesn't mean that reading has to be dull or limited. Michael Rosen is a brilliantly funny writer whose work rarely fails to trigger imaginative responses. His 'Bathtime' is a wonderful, comic tale, evoking that sense of childhood which all good teachers retain:

*'I step over and in – how's that? Owah!
as hot as feet can bear.
I kneel down
as hot as knees can bear. Oh!
Down a bit, down a bit
as hot as bottom can bear. Oooph!
Sit for one moment in the water world
with my last dry thing still on –
then, vest off, over the edge, out of sight
and I slide the rest of me into the water.'*



This owes its success to its familiarity as well as its humour. We share the experiences with the child in the bath, having played all of those games ourselves, and we re-assert our sense of what it is to be human as we encounter them again. Children need opportunities to do that – to know that they think and behave like other people; to see that their pleasures and problems are shared by the larger communities outside of home. They encounter in stories, too, experiences and attitudes which are new to them, some of which may, indeed, allow them to look for better things from life than those they have met so far.

One of the main differences between listening to a story being read by someone else, and reading it for oneself, is the flexi-

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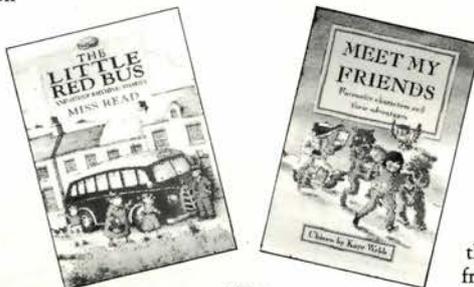


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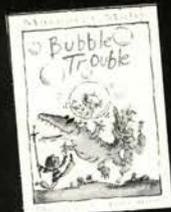
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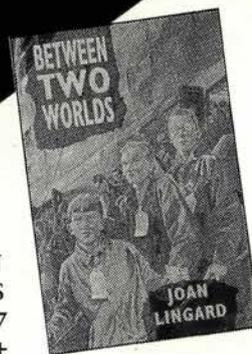


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'bility which silent reading allows. We can pause whenever we feel like it, turning back the pages to check on some detail which caught our attention earlier, or we can reflect on what has happened and consider what might occur next. Sometimes these strategies are deliberate: sometimes they occur sub-consciously as we move through the text. As soon as children become independent readers they operate on stories in this way, and stories, in turn, operate on them. The urge to find out what is going to happen next, generates a nervy flow in the busy traffic of the imagination, enabling us to hold the story separate from all the other stories we know.

Ask yourself, as you read one of the best opening passages in children's literature – Leon Garfield's *Fair's Fair* – how the story works on you, and you on it. How do you place it in time? What experiences do you bring to the events of the tale? What is it about the language the author uses which drives the reader forward? Why are we so keen to find out what happens next?

'Jackson was thin, small and ugly, and stank like a drain. He got his living by running errands, holding horses, and doing a bit of scrubbing on the side. And when he had nothing better to do he always sat on the same doorstep at the back of Paddy's Goose, which was at the worst end of the worst street in the worst part of the town. He was called Jackson, because his father might have been a sailor, Jack being a fond name for a sailor in the streets round Paddy's Goose; but nobody knew for sure. He had no mother, either, so there was no one who would have missed him if he'd fallen down a hole in the road. And nobody did miss him when he vanished one day and was never seen or heard of again ...'



By inclination I am a list-maker. I'm not sure how useful summaries are to anyone other than the maker, but a review of the key features of reading and the imagination seems to be worth stating:

- imaginative activity involves holding and inspecting pictures inside the head;
- this is the basis of everything we do;
- the images we shape can be re-called and re-organised;
- the activity is symbolic and thought-imbued;
- visual images are much more important than other forms;
- good stories create pictures on which the imagination can operate;
- children are better at 'picturing' than adults;
- all children have the ability to receive and process stories;
- conceptual learning arises when images, and the ideas they sponsor, work on each other;
- skilful story-makers create secondary worlds;
- children enter these worlds easily and naturally;
- inside this world we encounter familiar and new experiences;
- as we read we check, reflect, picture, compare, consider, confirm, speculate, anticipate and extend our understanding;
- children need to encounter stories which extend, challenge, puzzle and engage their attention;
- good stories deal with the fundamental categories of human experience.

In 1987 Brunto Bettelheim made some profound comments about reading – so wise are they that those influential,

strident and ill-informed people who sound off about the teaching of reading, should be made to acquire them by heart:

'The time is long-gone when learning to read was directly related to learning about the supernatural and magic, about the dangers of sin and the hope of salvation. That is why many children, although they have the requisite intelligence for learning to read, fail to do so. Even if they do learn, reading remains emotionally empty and unappealing to them. For them reading is not supported by its power to stimulate and satisfy their imaginations, in respect to what, to them, are pressing and urgent issues; nor has it created a strong appeal through its magical meaning. If it has not become attractive during the child's formative years, it may never seem attractive, even when its practical value is recognised.'

I suspect that we would all agree on which are the formative years in a child's development – those years before, and immediately on entry to school. If the child is fortunate he/she will have parents who know about stories and their importance, and will then go to a school where reading appeals through its magical meaning: if not, if the parents don't bother with stories, and the school puts its efforts into those anaemic formulations which masquerade as stories, society will continue to deplore the decline in standards. More importantly, the failure to link reading and the imagination will be ours. ■

Jack Ousbey has taught in primary and secondary schools, was a Senior Lecturer in a college of education and a Senior Inspector with the Nottinghamshire Education Authority.

He will be contributing a fuller account of 'Reading and the Imagination' to a publication on the teaching of reading planned by Routledge for 1992.

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The Mousehole Cat, Antonia Barber, ill. Nicola Bayley, Walker, 0 7445 0703 0, £9.99

The Stone Book Quartet, Alan Garner, is being re-issued by Collins in April 1992.

Quick, Let's Get Out of Here, Michael Rosen, ill. Quentin Blake, Deutsch, 0 233 97559 4, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1784 8, £2.50 pbk

Fair's Fair, Leon Garfield, ill. Brian Hoskin, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 0333 2, £6.99; 0 7500 0334 0, £2.99 pbk

POETRY 0-16

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REVIEWS

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

Nursery/Infant

The Fat King

Graham Jeffery, Walker
(Apr 91), 0 7445 1786 9,
£2.99

Aided and abetted by the fat King and Queen and their fat children and animals, a little bird eats and eats until he is fat too . . . this is an amusing story for small children and a visual treat with its soft-coloured drawings and decorative pictures giving the listening child a chance to learn another category - that of fat and thin. Definitely recommended for 3-5 year-olds. MS

My Brown Bear Barney

Dorothy Butler, ill.
Elizabeth Fuller, Picture
Knight (Jun 91),
0 340 52583 5, £2.99



A book with genuine, old-fashioned charm about a little girl, her Brown Bear Barney and the things they do together. The text is rhythmic and neatly repetitive, the pictures are clear and detailed and there's a deft pay-off when the bear's owner shows she can make her own decision about taking bear to school. MS

The Wheels on the Bus

Maryann Kovalski,
Picture Puffin (Apr 91),
0 14 050.875 9, £2.99

Two children go shopping for their winter coats with Grandma and she teaches them to sing the song about 'The Wheels on the Bus'. A chummy sort of book with good pictures to discuss and a song to go on singing. Fun for 3-5s. MS



All Gone

0 14 054.131 4

Oh No!

0 14 054.130 6

Sarah Garland, Picture
Puffin (May 91),
£2.99 each

Both books have enjoyable and entertaining illustrations giving the listening child lots to look at and plenty of words to practise. **All Gone** deals with a baby learning to say and understand the concept of 'gone', whether it's a toy, something to eat or the dog running away. **Oh No!** shows the baby making a mess - tangling the knitting wool or putting a plate of spaghetti over his head, for instance. This might well help older children come to terms with the problem of having a messy baby about. Certainly worthwhile books to have in any collection. MS

Wake Up, Dad!

0 7500 0881 4

Can I Help, Dad?

0 7500 0882 2

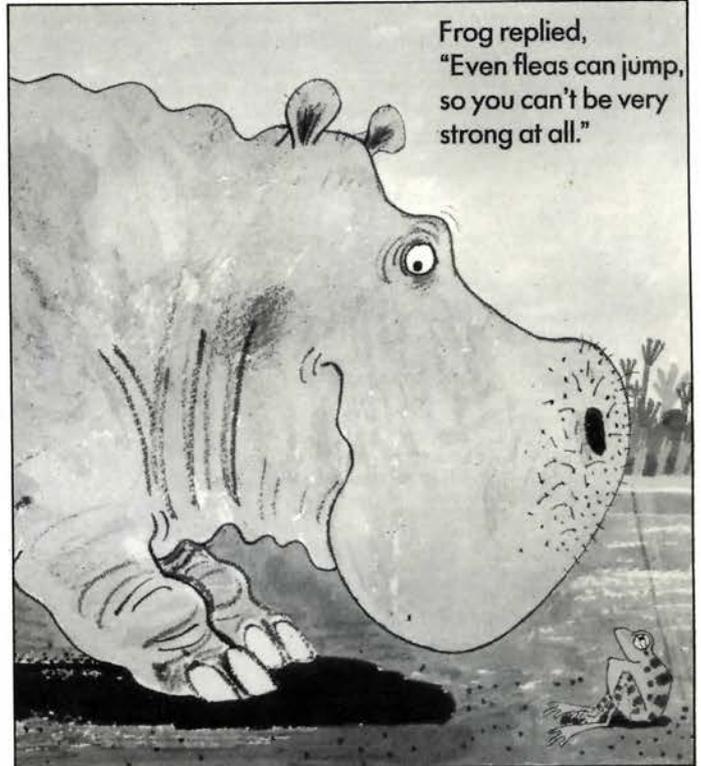
Sally Grindley, ill.
Siobhan Dodds, Simon
& Schuster (Apr 91),
£3.50 each

Two delightful books about the joys of life with small children in the house!



Wake Up, Dad! (Winner of the Best Book for Babies Award, 1989) must have been written from real life or maybe bitter experience. It deals with the subject of sleep - or lack of it - as the early riser (aged 3 or 4) comes through determined to waken Dad. It's resolved comfortably as eventually the child is persuaded into bed with Mum and Dad.

Can I Help, Dad? is about a Dad who's doing his best to decorate a room with a helper who is enthusiastic but causes havoc. Both books are highly entertaining, hilariously illustrated by Siobhan Dodds and great fun for all the family. MS



Frog replied,
"Even fleas can jump,
so you can't be very
strong at all."

Can Hippo Jump?

Gerald Rose,
Picturemac (Jun 91),
0 333 56064 7, £3.50

This is a really worthy successor to "AHHH!" said Stork. Frog and each of the animals ask Hippo why he can't jump. Finally he decides to try, practises all night and inadvertently proves to an ultimately rather flattened Frog why Hippos aren't really built for such action! JS

That New Dress

Malorie Blackman, ill.
Rhian Nest James,
Simon & Schuster
(Apr 91), 0 7500 0443 6,
£3.50

With a birthday party on the horizon, Wendy longs for a special dress hanging in the shop window, but is told by everyone in the family that she'll have to wear the one her mother's making for her. The powerful rhythm of Malorie Blackman's poetic language conveys the build-up of Wendy's rising frustration and anger. Rhian Nest James' illustrations brilliantly portray the disagreeable, sulking and hurting Wendy, but also give us the joyful outcome as a celebration of colour and fun. P.S. How could Simon & Schuster produce a book with such obvious care and then completely break the mood by

placing a wedge of advertising alongside the delightful last page? Make sure you cut it out before you share the book with children. MS

Go Tell It to the Toucan

Colin West, Walker
(Apr 91), 0 7445 1785 0,
£2.99

Another Colin West special that's bound to be as popular as his others. Old Jumbo can't find Toucan to broadcast an invitation to all the animals to join in his birthday shindig. He asks Tiger to pass the message on to him but Tiger can't find him and asks Warthog to pass the message on to Toucan, but . . .

Splendid cumulative fun to read aloud and wonderful for a fledgeling reader. JS

Busy a b c

Colin and Jacqui
Hawkins, Picture Puffin
(Apr 91), 0 14 054.246 9,
£2.99

The Hawkins pull off another winner! If my three-year-old's reaction is anything to go by, this will give any Nursery child hours of fun as well as a lot of incidental learning. The alphabet book format is used as a vehicle for the child characters to act in a wonderful variety of ways allowing the child readers to giggle and piously 'Tut-tut' from start to finish. JS

Infant/Junior

Once There Were Giants

Martin Waddell, ill. Penny Dale, Walker (Apr 91), 0 7445 1791 5, £3.99

An easy-to-read, first person narrative of a female child's changing perceptions of the world around her as she grows from baby to motherhood. In a series of snapshot illustrations, we see the transition from the time when her world seemed full of Giants to the time when the narrator herself becomes one of them. Turning the pages of this book is like looking through a family photo album.



Penny Dale's watercolour illustrations are both realistic and sensitive and, as a bonus, offer a history lesson documenting the changes in family life and dress over a generation: look carefully at the first and final illustrations.

JB

The Secret in the Matchbox

Val Willis, ill. John Shelley, Picture Corgi (May 91), 0 552 52568 5, £2.99

Reality rapidly gives way to fantasy in what begins as a seemingly ordinary day in a multi-cultural primary school. At first no-one is at all interested in what might be in Bobby Bell's matchbox – not until his teacher confiscates it anyway. The dragon hidden therein escapes at lunchtime and during the afternoon becomes so large that finally even Miss Potts is forced to take notice.

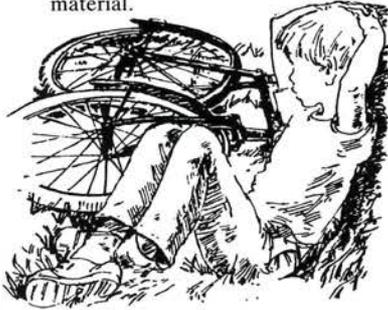
A book which should have wide appeal. There's much pleasure to be had in a re-exploration of the richly coloured and decorated illustrations and in particular the borders – borders which contain a wealth of characters from the main story as well as insects, animals and Celtic-style devices.

JB

Boneshaker

Paul and Emma Rogers, ill. Maureen Bradley, Puffin (May 91), 0 14 03.4069 6, £2.50

A lovely 'real book' for the new independent reader. The large text and uncomplicated vocabulary have a storyline strong enough to make the reader want to get to the end. More fluent readers would enjoy this as a dip-in when in need of some less challenging material.



The old bicycle doesn't look the world's best buy yet, with Oliver's affection and Grandad's faith, *Boneshaker* can and does work wonders. Hidden under her peeling paint and rusted chrome is a personality that's all her own. The four lively stories are full of races, Mum's desperate mercy mission and a spectacular night time rescue.

PH

The Frog Prince

Jan Ormerod, Walker (Apr 91), 0 7445 1787 7, £3.99

A very attractive retelling of the traditional story. As one would expect, the illustrations are arresting, formal in style and moonlit in colouration, with interesting borders to each page. This princess moves from the haughty and cold to the warm and childlike in the process of the telling and in so doing makes explicit to the adult reader the sexual connotations of the story. The princess must marry the frog prince because 'three times, yes, three times, she had allowed the frog to sleep with her' and both the words and the pictures enhance the ambiguities of the situation. The language is formal and the total effect quite spellbinding for children.

LW

The Saracen Maid

Leon Garfield, ill. John Talbot, 0 7500 0796 6

Khumalo's Blanket

Iain Macdonald, ill. Rhian Nest James, 0 7500 0888 1

Simon & Schuster, £2.99 each

These two books are reviewed together as excellent examples of the Simon & Schuster

'Storybooks' imprint – highly attractive stories for the slightly older, newly independent reader – which are notable for the quality of the writing and of the production; they read aloud well, too. With plenty of full-colour illustrations, clearly printed on smooth white paper, both are truly enticing.

In the first, Leon Garfield has written an entertaining story, set in medieval times, about Gilbert Becket, the young man who is saved by a Saracen maid from imprisonment in Tyre. Intelligent, humorous and rewarding for readers of all ages, it finishes on an intriguing note... 'They had a daughter called Agnes and a son called Thomas, who became a saint.' Thomas A'Becket? Can this be true...?

The second book is equally good. An African story this time, about Khumalo and his quest to restore the water to his village. Brave, lively and full of the sounds and atmosphere of a folk tale, this story, too, indicates the high standard Simon & Schuster have set for this series.

Both highly recommended.

LW

The Flyaway Pantaloons

Sue Scullard, verses by Joseph Sharples, Macmillan (May 91), 0 333 55209 1, £3.50

Eighteen rhyming couplets neatly encapsulate the adventures of a pair of bloomers whisked off a clothes-line by the wind.

The real glory of the book are the illustrations of a breathtakingly beautiful medieval city. These provide a fascinating experience for readers of all ages, and the richness of detail in every square inch should provide an inexhaustible source of discussion for children. Highly recommended for all age ranges.

GH

Benjamin Pig and the Apple Thieves

Annabelle Pig and the Travellers

David McKee, Young Piper 'Flippers' (Jun 91), 0 330 31866 7, £2.50

David McKee at his best with two witty stories ideal for fledgling readers or to read aloud. Benjamin Pig manages to con the apple thieves into picking his apples for him before they're forced to retreat, victims to a clever 'sting', and Annabelle discovers that home is where her heart is. Two familiar themes, yet David McKee

offers them to us with freshness and verve that keeps the reader and listener spellbound from cover to flip-over cover!

JS

The Royal Huddle

The Royal Muddle

Michael Rosen, ill. Colin West, Young Piper 'Flippers' (Jun 91), 0 330 31867 5, £2.50

Rosen's play on language and his zany plot is matched by Colin West's illustrations in this hilarious Pythonesque romp. In *The Royal Huddle* the King's advisers suppress the news of his death while they desperately try to find an heir and *The Royal Muddle* sees the acceptance by all and sundry of a frog as Queen. The awful discovery that she's not actually the legitimate monarch and the cover-up that ensues is only eclipsed by the trick ending. This is a must for top infants, lower juniors and any adults who can lay their hands on the book!

JS

Messy Maisy

Maisy's Measles

Sheila Lavelle, ill. Thelma Lambert, Young Piper 'Flippers' – two books in one (Jun 91), 0 330 31869 1, £2.50



Maisy is a delightful heroine and the gloriously awful disasters that follow in her footsteps are safely set in a loving and amazingly supportive family. The 'Flipper' format of two stories back-to-back was very popular. Sadly, though, the books themselves aren't robust enough to cope with their popularity in our classroom, but they're a must for parents to buy!

JS

Monster Hullabaloo!

Andrew Matthews, Mammoth (May 91), 0 7497 0453 5, £2.50

Domestic life monster-style makes amusing reading in this tale of a Father Monster who takes on the cooking and baby minding and a Mother Monster who prefers carpentry, not to mention Granny Monster who certainly comes in useful for a bit of baby-sitting. Twelve shortish episodes which are fun for sharing or for confident young solo readers.

JB

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The Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children



Junior/Middle

Why, Charlie Brown, Why?

Charles M Schulz, Ravette Books (Mar 91), 1 85304 332 X, £4.50

This book is an unusual venture. Written specifically to explain and reassure children about childhood leukaemia, it tells of Charlie Brown's friend, Janice, and what happens when she falls ill with the disease – both to her and to those around her. It's well written and doesn't evade reactions such as the jealousy of her sisters at all the attention Janice receives, and the bully boy who teases her about the loss of her hair.



Having taught a child who died of leukaemia, I recognise the truthfulness of these responses . . . we don't all become saints when faced with others' illness.

Inevitably, something of the loony fun of Charlie Brown's world is missing, although Snoopy in role as the World Famous Surgeon is entertaining. Charlie Brown and Snoopy have never shirked life's serious problems and this is no exception. Sold in aid of the Malcolm Sargent Fund, this hopeful, but honest, book could well help children to a greater understanding of a difficult subject. LW

Oddly

Jon Blake, ill. John Farmer, Puffin (May 91), 0 14 03.4078 5, £2.50

The first three pages here really grab the reader's mind and there's no chance of escape with a sprint-start story like this one.

Oddly is what I've always needed, a robot butler, programmed to 'buddle' to perfection. All goes well, even after he's given away, until Darren's friend Jackie interferes and changes Oddly's behaviour by pushing a few buttons. There are amazing repercussions – Oddly has feelings and things go very awry.

A clever reminder that we should treat everyone to the consideration and respect we enjoy ourselves. This zany funny story moves to its conclusion at a frenetic pace. PH

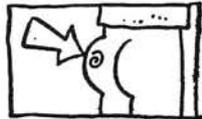
The Hypnotiser

Michael Rosen, ill. Martin Chatterton, Lions (Apr 91), 0 00 673261 5, £2.99

Another collection of splendid goodies from Michael Rosen.

THE GRINNERS BOOK OF RECORDS

The world's most interesting freckle was discovered on Simon Wrigglestones bum in 1954...



'Horrible' minutely documents the horrors of eating pizza on a train. Waves of sympathy went out to the teacher in 'The Outing' struggling through child-driven distractions to tell his class they must behave in the Science Museum. The world's most dangerous snail? You'd better look it up in 'The Grinner's Book of Records'.

Rosen's joy in language is always evident. It's the fun he gives and gets playing with words that makes the appeal of his poems so enduring and endearing. PH

New Kid on the Block

Jack Prelutsky, ill. James Stevenson, Mammoth (May 91), 0 7497 0602 3, £2.99

One of the wittiest and most humorous poetry collections I've read for ages. I adored the poem of the title and the surprise in the tale's end. I was mesmerised by the insistent rhyme in 'Nine Mice' on their icy tricycles. I sympathised with 'An Alley Cat with One Life Left' and his regrets at having squandered the others so recklessly. However I regret the American spelling which so easily could have been adjusted without spoiling the sheer, delicious fun of it all. PH

Winning Words

Selected by Ted Hughes, Faber (Jun 91), 0 571 16156 1, £3.99

The winners of the Faber and Faber Write-A-Story Competition for children were selected according to which entries appeared to have been enjoyable to write. Consequently, the book provides much in the way of light entertainment, but this rather bland collection of mainly escapist fantasies reflects little of the storymaking of children living in a real world of personal and social strife.

Still, there are some gems here. My class particularly

enjoyed 'Naughty Mr Nip Nip' – a chilling miniature narrative by six-year-old James Granger. May his pen never rest. GH

In the Doghouse

0 7497 0669 4

The Sleeping Party

0 7497 9670 8

Jan Needle, Mammoth (May 91), £2.50 each

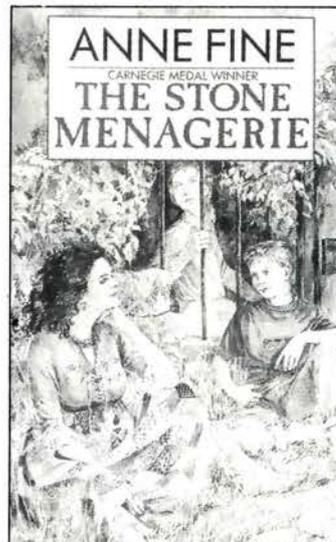
The adventures of the mischievous twins, Springy and Sam, in the suburban B & B run by their struggling mother, continue on their entertaining course.

Fiddleface, their demented teacher, and Uncle Jock, their pleasantly enigmatic old lodger, appear again as the children pry into the mystery of a houseful of starving dogs in the first story, and the obnoxious behaviour of a misanthropic guest in the second.

Jan Needle still likes to steer close to the wind – at the end of *The Sleeping Party*, the villain is baked in effigy as a pig-shaped cake into which the children plunge their knives – but the overall impression left by these two books is of the reassuringly familiar world of the serial. GH

The Stone Menagerie

Anne Fine, Mammoth (Mar 91), 0 7497 0343 1, £2.50



Visiting his aunt in a mental hospital, Ally discovers an amiable pair of squatters – about to become a trio – in a deserted menagerie in the grounds. Ally thinks about zoos, circuses and vegetarianism; assisting at a birth brings his introspective aunt out of her years-long silence; jobs and accommodation are found for the new family. The ending avoids unrealistic end-tying by leaving Ally to explain himself to disapproving parents. Anne Fine's penchant for articulate

eccentrics is well to the fore in this engaging tale. LN

A Summer Ghost

Ruth Tomalin, Faber (Jul 91), 0 571 16221 5, £2.50

A beautifully written vignette, delightfully anachronistic, centred around a quiet rebellion by 11-year-old Arabella over a French holiday. She prefers the family cottage in Sussex to which she successfully escapes.

She must remain hidden and finds an unexpected ally in Ran Atkins, son of the family's cleaning lady. Ghosts, horses, disguises, and a touching and intriguing link with a long-dead girl make this an absorbing read for top juniors or first-year secondary classes. VR

What Would You Do with a Wobble-Dee-Woo?

Colin West, Puffin (May 91), 0 14 03.4618 X, £2.50



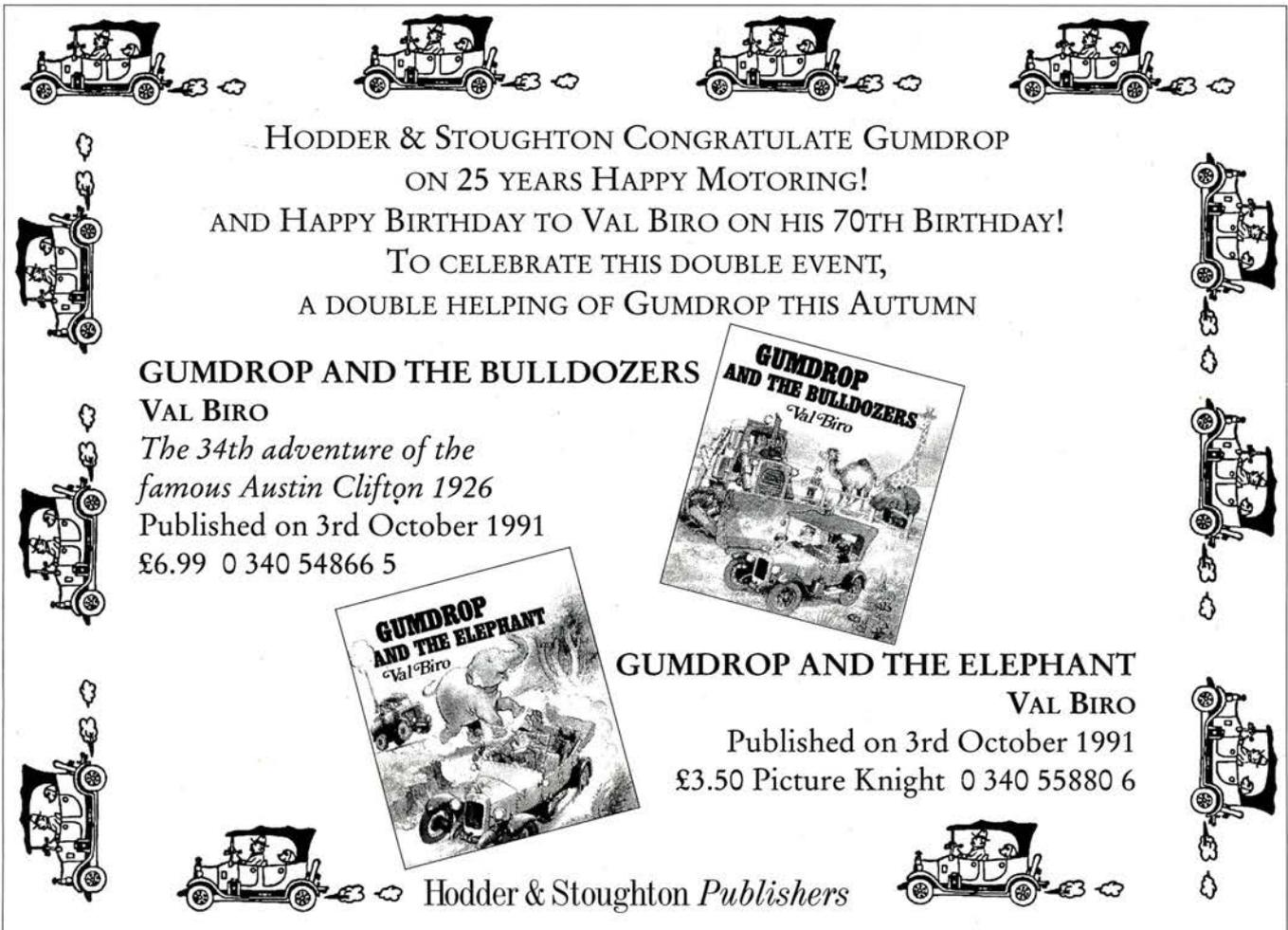
At first sight this is yet another book of comic rhyming couplets pretending to be poetry. However, there's more to this collection. Within the usual format of verse and cartoon drawing is much food for thought about life, the universe and everything. Here children and adults will find a rather unusual view of the everyday. I wish Colin West had the courage to break out of the comic verse strait-jacket and offer as much interest in the form as in the content. LW

A Box of Ogres

Tim Healey and Charles Fuge, Simon & Schuster (May 91), 0 7500 0441 X, £3.50

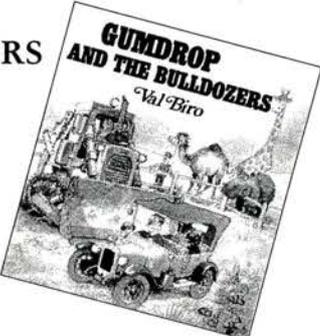
When Johnny gets bored, his Mum sends him shopping for groceries . . . and a box of ogres. They escape, of course, and it takes some quick thinking to ensure that their voracious appetites are diverted from human flesh.

A marvellously quirky story with stridently vivid illustrations; my class loved the classically hideous ogres. This Gremlins-like tale would be a particularly useful stimulus for reluctant readers and writers. GH



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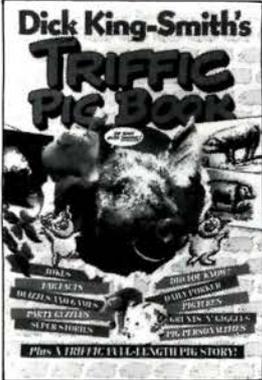
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<p>DICK KING-SMITH'S TRIFFIC PIG BOOK</p>  <p>The first and only all-encompassing porcine extravaganza from Britain's favourite children's author £4.99 hardback Published 3 October</p>	<p>NAPOLEON'S TOYSHOP</p>  <p>Roger Nannini The first ever book-cum-toyshop £8.99 hardback Published 26 September</p>	<p>A POCKETFUL OF POSIES</p>  <p>Roy Gerrard Gerrard's first pop-up book £4.99 hardback Published 31 October</p>
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GOLLANCZ

Middle/Secondary

Thunderwith

Libby Hathorn,
Mammoth (May 91),
0 7497 0423 3, £2.50

Lara's grief after the death of her mother is compounded by a new, harsher life on a remote farm with a stepmother who refuses her any sympathy and, worse still, bullying at school. Her discovery of what she takes to be a fantasy dingo, which she names Thunderwith, gives her the comfort she craves. She is able, slowly, to come through metaphorical and real thunder and fire and confront the reality of her fears. The scene where she holds the dead dog (in reality a broken down farm dog) and howls her grief through the rain is deeply moving. Another powerful, dramatic and thoughtful Australian novel for teenagers. **AJ**



needed to be read fairly quickly and the children had to listen very, very carefully) to the shorter poems which, for me, were the funniest. Try the one about the infant elephant in such an embarrassing predicament with a rusk and 'My Yellow Jumper' about an extremely athletic banana with a will to win.

My favourite has to be 'A Cat called Slumber' – a 'day shy tabby with collapsible ears'. The indigo illustrations blended with the text perfectly giving the feel of the cat's mystery and independence. **PH**

Maybreak

Frances Usher, ill. Alun Hood, Mammoth (Apr 91), 0 7497 0411 X, £2.99

Mark, Eric, Alex, Judith and Corcas all come from different backgrounds yet their lives are linked one May Bank Holiday weekend. The girls have been left spending the holiday at their boarding school and the boys from the Approved school next door have absconded intending to find Mark's Dad, Eric's home and a bit of fun.

Each child feels parental neglect for one reason or another and coincidences abound. The boys manipulate and lie trying to escape and the girls get drawn into this complex web. The social differences between them are worthy of discussion but the storyline, although fast-moving in the latter part of the book, is only just strong enough to get the reader past a rather slow beginning. Try to persevere though, it's worth it. **PH**

The Outside Child

Nina Bawden, Puffin (May 91),
0 14 03.4304 0, £2.50

'All grown-ups were the same; all equally bad when it came to cheating on children.'

When she reached the age of

13, Jan accidentally discovered that the adults in her life had been conspiring in secrets all along. At first the emergence of step-siblings brought expectations of contentment, but the adults' complicity soon led her to adopt devious means, which were attended by dubious consequences.

Nina Bawden's touch is assured, the seriousness lightened with gentle humour. The child's all-too-common confusion about belonging when adult partnerships swap and re-align is treated with compelling sensitivity. **DB**

The Whitby Witches

Robin Jarvis, Simon & Schuster (Apr 91),
0 7500 0581 5, £3.99

My pupils have devoured the Deptford Mice trilogy and this book offers the same lengthy, absorbing read with an attempt by Ben, Jennet and their unusual (92-year-old) foster mother Aunt Alice, to stem the flood of evil influences threatening to overwhelm the quiet town of Whitby.

There are the familiar Jarvis creatures here – black witches and dangers to be faced and conquered. His coherent and fluent style carries the reader along swiftly. An essential purchase for library or classroom for Years 7, 8 and 9. **VR**

The Haunted Sand

Hugh Scott, Walker (Apr 91), 0 7445 1427 4, £2.99

Hugh Scott makes his readers work – here characters are word-sketched and clues are scattered in the text, piecing together to make the whole picture. The reader struggles alongside the characters to unravel the mystery of ancient relics found in the sand – a detective on the inside of the case is a detective wholly participating!

This is a contemporary story of confusion, guilt, greed and death with parallels in the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries: motive and message are echoed over five centuries and neither lose their potency. An unmissable book for Years 8 and 9 – buy a class set. **VR**

Anneli the Art Hater

Anne Fine, ill. Vanessa Julian-Ottie, Mammoth (May 91), 0 7497 0597 3, £2.50

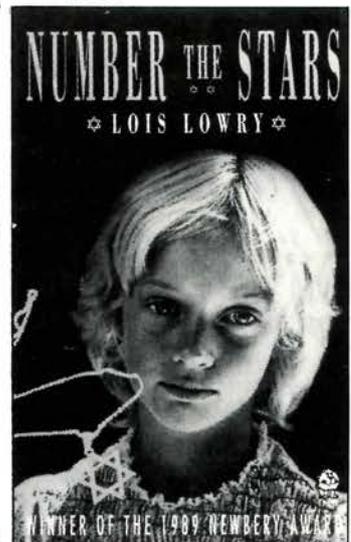
As one who loved art at school I find it difficult to understand Anneli who hates it wholeheartedly, until she crawls under the bed and explores behind a little door in the attic where she finds a painting that scares her to death. The story it leads to fascinates her beyond words,

far more than splashing about with colours ever could.

Intrigue, persuasion, mystery, forgery and the delightful Mrs Pears all blend together producing a remarkable story about the art teacher's family and their elegant, yet illegal, past. It took me ages to 'discover' the secret that Tom had painted in the picture. **PH**

Number the Stars

Lois Lowry, Lions (Apr 91), 0 00 673677 7, £2.99



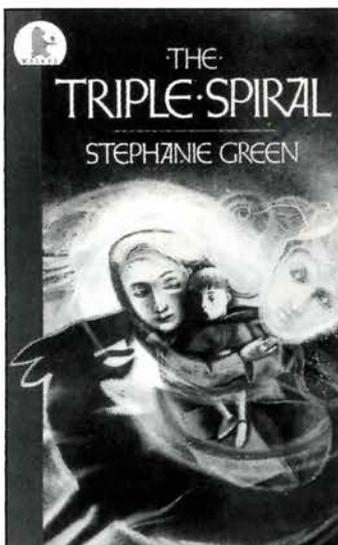
The easy naturalness of the writing and the description of childhood life are the bridge for modern readers into darker times when the Nazis occupied Denmark. Through her Jewish friend, Annemarie is made aware of the fragile safety of their lives and the secret bravery of those around her. She too plays her part in a marvellously tense scene where she's confronted by the Nazis while carrying a new secret 'weapon'. It's simply told and moving. One of a number of recent novels which have brought these times to life for a new generation. **AJ**

Mel's Run

Anthony Masters, Mammoth (May 91),
0 7497 0110 2, £2.99

The complicated web of deceit, distrust and dislike woven by the adults revisits itself on the present generation when Mel and his sister are compelled to hole up with their parents, on the run from a bunch of hoods. From then on, life is nothing if not unsettling and littered with the inexplicable.

There's a very busy pace to this tale and bits of the plot seem under-developed. However, it's a good book to recommend to reluctant male readers. **DB**



The Triple Spiral

Stephanie Green, Walker (May 91),
0 7445 1799 0, £2.99

Dark legends are brought to life against a background of rural Norfolk (where the locals are deeply superstitious and deeply suspicious of newcomers) and the break-up of Sonia's parents' marriage. The fantasy veers towards contrivance but the scenes of drama are powerful. Having the battle of the fantasy force enacted through Sonia's baby brother, Robin, is particularly effective and the climax in a great flood is nicely sensational. **AJ**

All My Own Stuff

Adrian Mitchell, ill. Frances Lloyd, Simon & Schuster (Apr 91),
0 7500 0447 9, £3.50

An amazingly varied collection of poems from just one poet! There's something for everyone here from 'Rat It Up', a bouncy rhythmic rat rap about rats looking for a 'ratting good time tonight' (this

POETRY

Older Readers

Eva

Peter Dickinson,
Freeway (May 91),
0 552 52609 6, £2.99

This remarkable and absorbing book defies categorisation. Fantasy? Science fiction? Adventure/animal story? All those and more. After undergoing a unique form of transplant surgery, Eva learns to face the opportunities, limitations and responsibilities of her new role. Questions are raised about the ethics of scientific research and the ways in which humans exploit animals and each other. Compelling and provocative.

LN

Among Friends

Caroline B Cooney,
Teens (May 91),
0 7497 0095 5, £2.99

Setting: high school in Connecticut. Characters: six teenagers keeping diaries for an English assignment. Theme: the pressures imposed by family and peer group, and the value of friendship. Jennie, best at everything, is endlessly praised by tactless teachers and proud parents until she cracks under the strain of always having to succeed; fanciable Paul has a family which everyone wants to discover. An undemanding, warm-hearted read for teenage girls.

LN

Chinese Handcuffs

Chris Crutcher, Pan
Horizons (May 91),
0 330 31314 2, £3.50

The subject-matter – sexual abuse, animal abuse, self abuse through drug taking, and their effects – may deter librarians from making this title available to lower secondary readers. Partly through the contrivance of letters to his dead brother, Dillon explores his reactions to the latter's involvement in drugs and eventual suicide, but becomes overwhelmed by outrage at the plight of a friend, Jennifer, who is being sexually abused and blackmailed. Jennifer's predicament is sympathetically handled. Although the immediate problem is solved by the end, it's clear that the psychological damage will endure.

LN

Almost Japanese

Sarah Sheard, Faber
(May 91), 0 571 14863 8,
£2.50

This is a gem of a book, both delicately crafted and down to earth. It's an ideal bridge between teenage fiction and that wide world of adult novels – not much of a jump to Margaret Atwood from here. Emma becomes infatuated with a Japanese conductor and then with all things Japanese.



Her rites of passage take her through two other relationships observed with a lovely dry wit before she finally makes her journey of love to Japan. She meets her conductor in Tokyo... but I'll not spoil the ending. This is special and worth attention.

AJ

The Promise

Robert Westall, Pan
Piper (Jun 91),
0 330 31741 5, £3.50

Bob begins visiting Valerie, the daughter of his father's boss. Her fragile health is belied by the force of her personality and her feelings for Bob. The relationship is built up with illicit pleasures – the forbidden delights for Valerie of walks in the world beyond her garden, through the town, by the docks (it is, once again, wartime North-East). Her sudden death is followed by insistent reappearances to Bob demanding that he honour a vow to find her if she were ever lost. There's a tremendous climax involving a German plane. Westall may repeat time and place but he's always original and compulsive reading – and not just for teenagers.

AJ

Girls Are Powerful

Edited by Susan
Hemmings, Plus
(May 91),

0 14 03.4522 1, £3.50

A selection from *Spare Rib* and *Shocking Pink* written by young women aged from 7 to 22 – the title says it all, really. Articles are arranged in sections spanning looks, school, work, friends and lovers, etc. and a further information/contacts list is given at the end. Used in the right way, it could form a valuable contribution to pastoral discussion. Scanning it before recommending is advised – some parents might blinkeredly object.

DB

Jan Alone

Robert Leeson, Tracks
(Apr 91), 0 00 673180 5,
£3.50

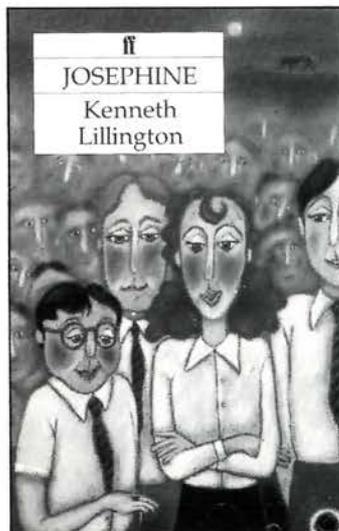
The Jan Whitfield of *It's My Life* has left school and become a PA at a local firm. The problems and tensions are as yet unresolved at home and the world of work simply piles on more angst, particularly when she begins a doomed affair with her boss. Strong and sensitive on the role conflicts of women, this makes for an absorbing, issue-raising read. It's well-paced and unpatronising. I read it in one sitting.

DB

Josephine

Kenneth Lillington,
Faber (May 91),
0 571 16118 9, £2.50

More than just a riveting school story spoof, this humorous novel relates the story of the only girl in a boys 1930s' boarding school. The effects of her one term's presence makes men out of boys and boys out of men. Her female commonsense and intuition brings St Chauvin's the level of unsettling psychoanalysis that it needs to sort itself out.



Mainly for a sophisticated readership, *Josephine* could be developed to the status of a cult if placed in the right hands. The 1930s datedness only adds to the quirky comic effect and is efficiently explained by author intrusion into the text.

DB

Plague 99

Jean Ure, Teens
(Apr 91), 0 7497 033 4,
£2.50

Last year's winner of the Lancashire Library Book of the Year Award now appears in paperback, making it an affordable and welcome addition to GCSE stock cupboards.

Shahid, Fran and Harry are survivors of a plague, which has swept across London. Through their contrasting characters and attitudes, Jean Ure presents the reader with thought-provoking discussion points, most notably in Fran's diary. She debates the foolishness of allowing others to take responsibility for your life – the warning is that plague will be the result, or one result, of this desire to opt out.

A new beginning emerges at the end of the book but the message is undiluted by easy answers.

VR

The Room With No Windows

Gene Kemp, Faber
(May 91), 0 571 16117 0,
£2.50

A departure in style for Gene Kemp with the story of Mitzpah, dominated by an emotional grandmother and a guilt-ridden father, invited to spend her first holiday with a new and unexpected friend.

Mitzpah runs the gamut of emotional turmoil – first love, betrayal, deceit and inadequacy accumulate to drive her back home and into emotional collapse. All is well – bridges are built, friendships rebuilt in a more honest way, and this cleverly titled book will offer a good deal to boys and girls from Year 9 upwards.

VR

Silver

Norma Fox Mazer,
Teens (Mar 91),
0 7497 03237, £2.99

When Sarabeth Silver, from a single-parent family on the trailer park, is befriended by the designer-jeans BMW set at her new school, one can appreciate her inner tensions. However, far from being a cinderella, she's a richly endowed princess when it comes to commonsense and being honestly down-to-earth. No wonder Patty, the most aloof of the new crowd, brings her terrible secret and pleads for help.

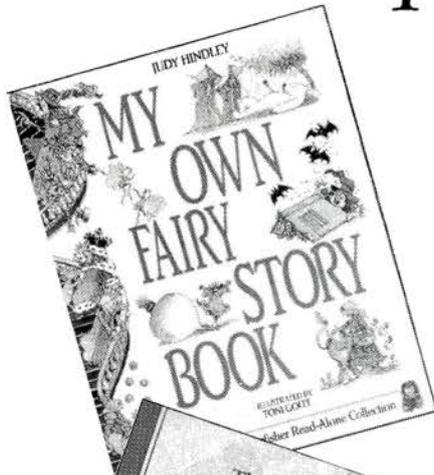


The keenly observed details of female teenage culture should cross the Atlantic well, but the whole book is leisurely-long which might deter less tenacious readers.

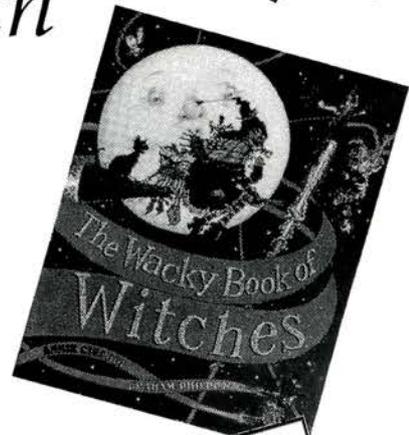
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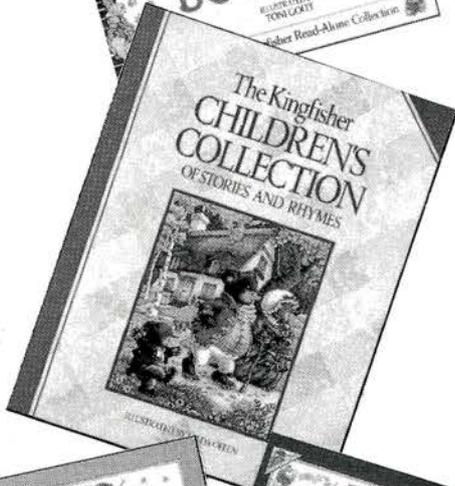
Turn Over A New Leaf This Autumn



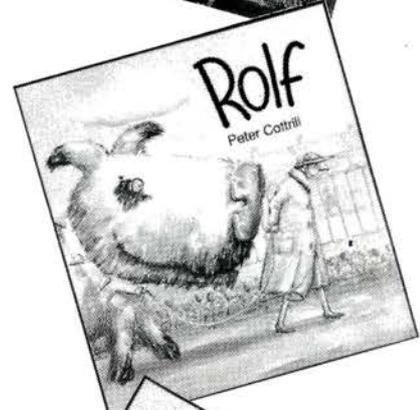
MY OWN FAIRY STORY BOOK
Judy Hindley
Illustrated by Toni Goffe
£7.95 Published August



THE WACKY BOOK OF WITCHES
Annie Civardi
Illustrated by Graham Philpot
£7.95 Published September
A KINGFISHER/BENNETT BOOK



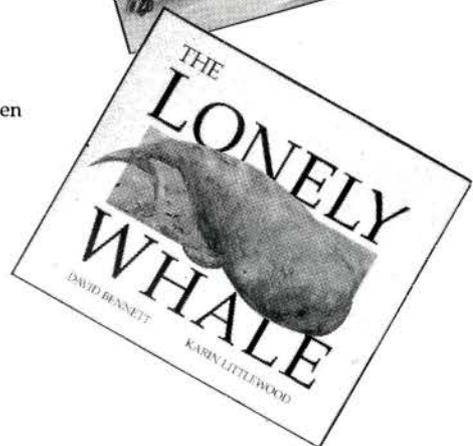
**THE KINGFISHER
CHILDREN'S COLLECTION
OF STORIES AND RHYMES**
Illustrated by Hilda Offen
£12.95 Published August



ROLF
Peter Cottrill
£6.95 Published September
A KINGFISHER/BENNETT BOOK



A TREASURY OF STORIES
Selected by Edward and Nancy Blishen
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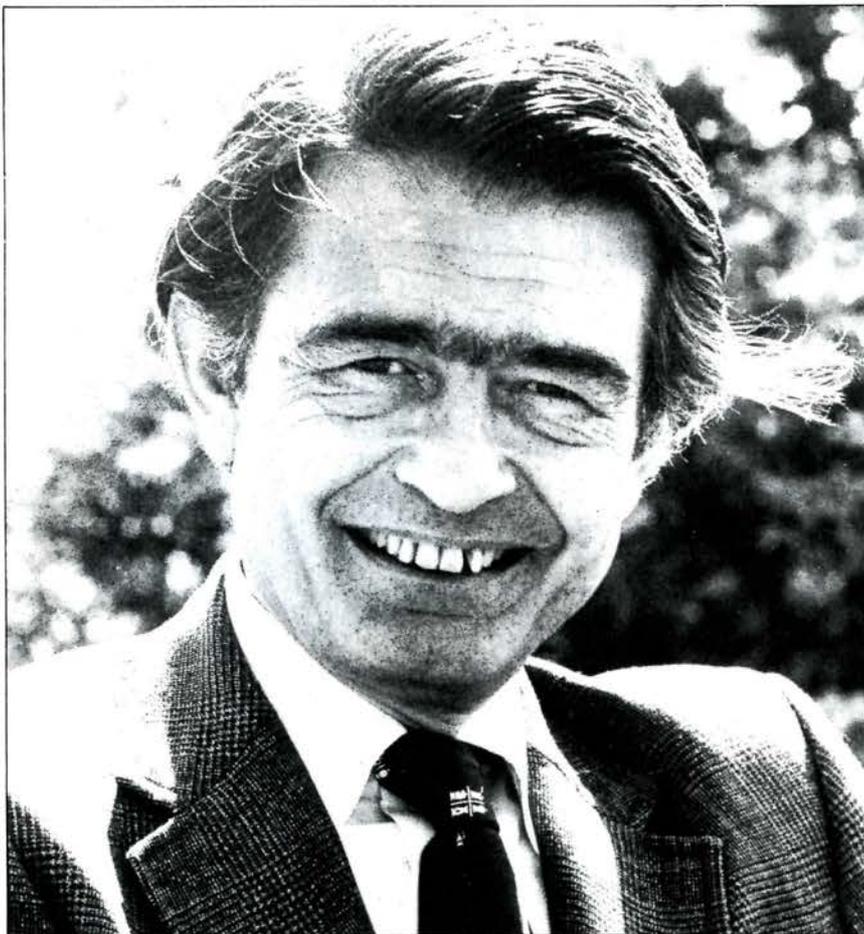
THE LONELY WHALE
David Bennett
Illustrated by Karin Littlewood
£6.95 Published August
A KINGFISHER/BENNETT BOOK



NEW Picture Books and Story Collections from



Kingfisher Books



It was a flawless evening when I went to talk to Val Biro, possibly one of the only truly perfect evenings this summer. The brilliance and vivacity of Val's study was a delight. The long room with its clear Northern light was crammed with pens, paints and pictures, a mouthwatering array of his books and a wonderful fragrance of freshly made coffee. A loud and enthusiastically barked greeting from Hector, Horace's successor, completed the welcome.

Born in Budapest, Hungary in 1921, Val Biro was the younger of two children. He and his sister, Lilla, and their parents lived 'in a big flat overlooking the Houses of Parliament . . . the law courts and, glory of glories, a fire station'. With an eye for detail that was going to be so effective later on in his life, he 'watched the firemen for hours as they polished every bit' of their equipment – a fascination that was to emerge again in war-torn Britain. Val, newly finished from art school, found that as an 'enemy alien' he was banned from joining the armed forces but the ambulance service or the National Fire Service were open to him. There was no question in his mind – 'before long I was kitted out with helmet, uniform, boots and an axe'. So began a wartime double life of publisher's assistant during the day and fireman on most nights.

When not fireman watching, the young Val drew cartoons even in his earliest school days. His first drawing was published in an Hungarian national newspaper when he was 17. A talent for catching funny, facial expressions brought him unwanted attention from one of his school masters who predicted he would go far, but not in his lessons! How could they have realised the truth amid the political uncertainties of that

1939 summer so long ago? These may have contributed to Mr Biro senior's decision to send his son to London to further his studies in art. To our enduring pleasure he stayed.

At the Central School of Art in London, Val found there was more to art than funny faces. Experimentation in many media left him feeling that wood-engraving was his first love. It still is. Oils were also rewarding to use but time-consuming when working 'against a commission and up to a deadline, which is always yesterday, so in the end it came down to watercolour . . . with gouache and other things'. Enjoying the contrasting opacity and transparency, Val has adapted his style to many things. 'At one time in the sixties I must have designed more dust jackets in a year than any other artist,' he says. 'Each author needed to be differentiated from the others and the subsequent change in artistic style each time became a sort of game. What to use now – 1, 2, 3 or 4?' I began to wonder what the real Biro style was – and never really found out – but, as I suspected, 'Gumdrop is very, very near to me'.

Looking back at some of the recent Gumdrops – **Gumdrop For Ever**, **Gumdrop and the Elephant** and

Authorgr

Gumdrop and the Secret Switches – I've become increasingly sensitive to the 'sharper image and brighter colours' that he feels are needed in picture books for children. As we were talking, I found myself distracted by the assembled sheets of his latest partly finished commission. Casually propped up at the back of the desk were pictures that had the uncomplicated harmony in their arrangement artists can achieve: the no-matter-where-they-put-it-it's-going-to-look-wonderful syndrome. The new book is about dinosaurs. They glow beguilingly with an intensity of colour that's irresistible. This is going to be 'a sideways book because it requires wide, prehistoric landscapes. I've never done an oblong book before . . . I really am enjoying this one.' It was then that I began to realise the enthusiasm and joy that went into each and every picture.

Val took the pictures down and as we went from one to another the dinosaur world began to peel back layer by layer. The pencil sketches with their spontaneity and freshness are faithfully copied to capture and freeze the moment ready to have life-giving colour applied. The story unfolded through the images and visual action. There were 'little ancillary dinosaurs who pop up on each page, each one silently commenting on the action'. My response, I found, was exactly that of the children. Looking closer, there they were, peeking around trees, hiding in bushes or behind the huge legs of the main characters. The facial expressions reveal their true thoughts. Was I hearing Val's words correctly when he maintained that 'animals are only humans in disguise'? But here, with each one doing its own animal thing, there was no anthropomorphic change, no one had 'made them talk' but it was only too evident that they could certainly speak quite clearly. The secondary plot was there for the children 'to discover for themselves' while the main story bounced along quite happily in the text. The technicalities of wet-on-wet, gouache or sub-plots were forgotten in the enchantment that Val Biro wove around his pictures.

The text and the pictures integrated perfectly and I wondered aloud how close the rapport was between author and artist. Val told me of the close collaboration that had flourished between himself and H E Todd, who died a couple of years ago. 'He would often show me his text before he would

Graph No.70

mb



Photo by Mimi Biro.

send it to the publishers, then he encouraged me to make any suggestions for improving it before it became a picture book. This rare co-operation produced 14 books in all and is certainly a time which has left many rich memories he still treasures with affection.

Eventually we got around to talking about Gumdrop. I'd been waiting for the moment like the last cherry in a cake. In fact 'I'll show you Gumdrop before you go' was a surprise! I realised I was beginning to catch the magic when I answered as promptly as a seven-year-old, 'Oh lovely, yes please!' Val saw him for the first time in 1961 at an old-fashioned corner garage in Hardwick when he was on the way to view another car in Oxford. The name came from an unconscious remark by his wife. 'A stroke of genius, really' he acknowledges. The stroke of genius stuck. High in personality and low on top speed – '40 miles per hour is a comfortable top' – Gumdrop is an Austin Clifton Healey 12/4 and was around for four years before, accidentally almost, he turned the first corner to becoming a legend. It is a 'he' by the way. After lunch with a publisher when Gumdrop had been the subject of what Biro suspects might have been a rather one-sided conversation, 'because once you have a car like that you can't stop talking about it', the casual question arose 'Why don't you go and write a story about this car?' This question 'changed my direction'. The drive home was spent planning the outline of the first story: **Gumdrop, the Adventures of a Vintage Car**. Feverish writing occupied the next two days or so, this and the early sketches were sent off and promptly accepted, then a contract was in the post. Gumdrop was born!

The apparent ease of this astonished me, having been led to believe in school days by fervent teachers of Eng. Lit. that the best stories were born only of suffering, starving and the penury of attic habitation. 'Mind you it was because because the publisher asked for it', Val says. Now, about 38 stories and 25 years later, his appeal endures and thrives. There's a new Gumdrop this year and another for next year is being pondered. The story doesn't always happen easily, though, I was assured. Often it comes when other

things are going on, 'cleaning my teeth or something'. The initial conception happens very suddenly. 'It literally strikes your head.' Those of us old enough to remember the earliest Gumdrops will have noticed the subtle changes that have come about with the passage of time. Val Biro acknowledged easily that 'Mr Oldcastle has changed too. Mr Oldcastle, let's face it, is me, because you can't write about a man who is roughly your age without him becoming you. It's more convincing if you think it's yourself.' Some of the other characters are real, too, although this doesn't always happen. Bernie Denton in **Gumdrop For Ever** is a family friend who appears in the book, along with his children, complete of course with his re-built yellow Renault 'Reggie'. He's very proud to be in the book; so, no doubt, is Reggie. After all, he did win the race.

Other real-life episodes in Gumdrop's long history pop up in the books too – the day a modern Jaguar ran into the back of Gumdrop at a zebra crossing demolishing the radiator grille of the Jaguar but leaving Gumdrop unscathed, for instance. Austin Clifton Healey 12/4s, it seems, are a strong breed and well able to resist unwelcome advances from brash newcomers. The episode in the book is blamed upon the ever present Horace who 'lurched against the handbrake in his clumsy way'. They collaborate to persuade Oldcastle that selling Gumdrop must be the worst idea he's ever had. For most readers it's unthinkable that Gumdrop and Oldcastle should be parted. In reality, the affinity is strong too and this is only partly because Val's had Gumdrop so long. 'Gumdrop is so considerate I hardly ever break down unless I'm almost home or very near a telephone box.'

The latest Biro is **Rub-a-Dub-Dub; Val Biro's 77 Favourite Nursery Rhymes**, the publication of which is timed for his 70th birthday. 'It's a book I've wanted to do for 20 years perhaps.' Originally

starting life as a smaller collection of 20 rhymes, it has had a long period of gestation, changing radically in the process. A change of publisher and an expansion in content has given us the 64 pages of rhymes, some of which are 'great ones' and many of which are 'the subtle ones which demonstrate the joy of language and sheer fun'. Confessing to be on the mouse's side anyway, I found 'Six Little Mice' terrifying with the huge cat's face crowding the tiny mouse-sized window. The hickory-dickory clock in the book I noticed was ticking away in the corner of Val's study.

The chiming of this reminded me that my visit to Val's world was drawing to a close. Our short walk down the winding garden path led me face to face with Gumdrop gleaming 'bluely' in the garage, spotless and ready for a journey to London the next day. It was to be an early start for Gumdrop and Val so reluctantly I knew that I'd have to go. I must admit, though, I've never felt more like thumbing a lift. ■

Val Biro was interviewed by Pam Harwood.

A selection of Val Biro titles:

Rub-a-Dub-Dub; Val Biro's 77 Favourite Nursery Rhymes, Blackie, 0 216 93016 2, £8.95; 0 216 93091X, £4.95 pbk

Golem of Old Prague, written by Michael Rosen, Deutsch, 0 233 98519 0, £7.99; 0 233 98518 2, £3.99 pbk (an example of Val's wood-engraving)

Tobias and the Dragon, Blackie, 0 216 92652 1, £6.95; Hippo, 0 590 76284 2, £2.25 pbk

Miranda's Umbrella, Blackie, 0 216 92840 0, £6.95; Hippo, 0 590 76424 1, £2.50 pbk

Gumdrop titles mentioned in the Authorgraph:

Gumdrop For Ever, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.911 9, £2.99 pbk

Gumdrop and the Elephant, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 52650 5, £6.95

Gumdrop and the Secret Switches, Picture Knight, 0 340 52762 5, £2.99 pbk

... there are, of course, many more published by Hippo, Hodder and Puffin.



REVIEWS – Non Fiction

My Car

0 7136 3366 2

My Drum

0 7136 3364 6

Kay Davies and Wendy Oldfield

My Magnet

0 7136 3367 0

Robert Pressling

My Shell

0 7136 3365 4

Lynne Patchett

A & C Black (Simple Science series), £4.95 each

(INFANT)

If you're thinking about the science curriculum, and the ways children can start investigations using familiar objects, then take a look at 'Simple Science'. It really is simple – but strictly to the point. The children's activities fill about twenty pages of each book, followed by two pages of information which suggests ways to extend the activities and check that children are observing the relevant details. Headings such as 'sliding down slopes' or 'floating and sinking' relate to attainment targets but the material could also be developed in other directions.

My Car uses toy cars, wooden blocks and different surfaces to introduce friction, gravity and related concepts. The photographs show children with the materials and have a few words of text such as 'in dry sand my car gets stuck'. The teachers' pages provide additional information, such as the differing effects of wet and dry sand or rough and smooth surfaces.

But in damp sand, the wheels roll along easily.



They make tracks in the sand.

My Magnet follows a similar pattern, mainly using a horseshoe magnet but also showing others. This time, the final pages suggest ways of comparing the different strengths of magnets, examining magnetic poles, and testing materials for magnetic reactions.

My Drum is concerned mainly with sound levels and vibration, and drums are made to examine these. **My Shell** looks at patterns and properties of sea shells, eggs, nuts and other examples.

All the books are clearly and colourfully illustrated with the children's text providing simple clues to appropriate observations.

FB

A Seaport through History

Xavier Hernandez and Jordi Ballonga, illustrations by Francesco Corni, Wayland, 0 7502 0134 7, £10.95

INFANT to ADULT

This is an essentially Italian production, second in an excellent series, which takes the history of a type of place through the ages from earliest times to today – giving a large picture of it at every stage of development and lots of ancillary information, conveyed again mainly through pictures. These books are backed by substantial research and the artist has worked with great assiduity to display all so clearly. The bird's eye view is not an easy one, but here one does feel like a bird but flying through time instead of space.

Any child of any age could look with benefit at this book, teaching the concept of change through time as effectively as it does. It needs patience and persistence, but it is rewarding in every way. In National Curriculum terms I suppose it is most appropriate for Ships and Seafarers at Key Stage Two, but it could slot in on many points of study (the treatment of destruction in the Second World War is particularly good, for example). One reservation: this is about European ports, most particularly Hanseatic and Netherlandish ones, and although there are many points of comparison with British ports, there is quite a lot that doesn't apply here.

JF

Recycling

Barbara James, Wayland (Our Green World series), 0 7502 0135 5, £7.50

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Cookery writers would call this series a 'neat little reduction' of the publishers' 1989 'Conserving our World'. Main ingredients – arrangement, pictures and message – remain the same, so, although lots of words have evaporated, this is still a well organised book about the type of waste we create, the problems it causes and how we are trying to resolve them.

Most important, the flavour of the book is still the same, and this must be because it still has the same author. So many 'easy reading editions' are the products of insensitive filleting by the dead hands of 'reading experts' – ending up spineless, gutless and tasteless, but this is an entirely superior product. Shorn of excess verbiage, facts and messages stand out more clearly and are easier to take up than in the original – effectively widening the age and ability range of a valuable contribution. And what a pleasure to see that the bibliography has been updated.

TP

The Greeks

0 431 00566 4

The Romans

0 431 00565 6

Jacqueline Dineen

The Incas

0 431 00567 2

Sarita Kendall

The Vikings

0 431 00564 8

Hazel Mary Martell Heinemann (Young Researcher series), £9.95 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

No one knows for sure where the Incas came from, nor how the Vikings navigated on the open sea, but we do know a great deal about these ancient civilizations, partly from surviving features such as buildings and, increasingly, through the evidence of archaeological discoveries.

The National Curriculum states that 'pupils should be able to recognise that historical sources can stimulate and help answer questions about the past'. In this new series each title reveals the wide range of material which helps us to interpret the way of life, beliefs and achievements of societies.

Throughout each 64-page volume, information is served up in bite-size portions using double-page spreads, but this format is not, as in so many cases, to the detriment of the narrative. Each topic is introduced logically and lucidly, using an uncomplicated text in an attractive typeface and with well-chosen, skilfully captioned illustrations. Where relevant, the same page-headings appear in each title, enabling comparisons of such universal themes as Family Life, Clothes and Appearance, Trade, Transport, and Farming.

A time line summarises important dates, and there is a useful glossary, but what a pity that having whetted the appetite and enlivened the text with some fascinating facts (Did you know the nursery rhyme 'London Bridge is Falling Down' is about an attack by Vikings led by Olaf the Stout?) there is no list of further reading or suggestions of places to visit.

VH

Archimedes

Peter Lafferty, Wayland (Pioneers of Science series), 0 7502 0063 4, £7.50

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Most people know about the Greek streak's leap from the bathtub and his subsequent exposure of King Hieron's fraudulent goldsmith but few realise how nearly this never happened. For so intense a scientist was the great man, that it was only on the rarest of occasions that he could be persuaded to take a bath – and even then he would let the water go cold while he drew geometrical patterns on his tummy.

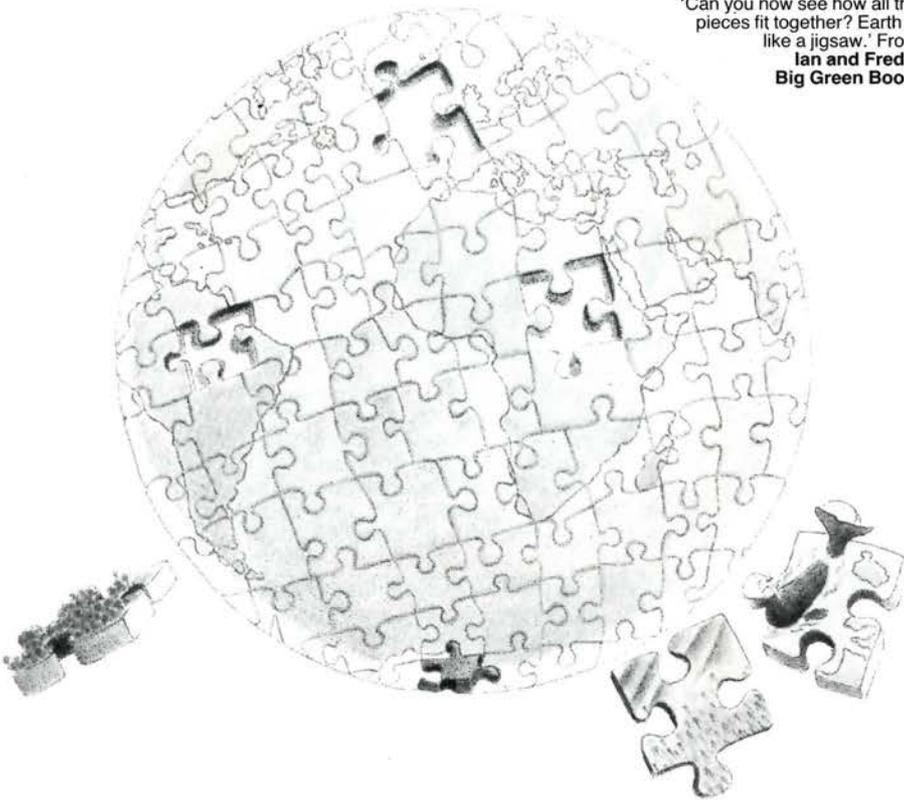


Presenting Archimedes as 'the most knowledgeable man of his time', Peter Lafferty's very readable sci-biog sets him firmly in that time, when logic and experiment were new to science. His cardinal mechanical contributions – screw, lever and pulley, are all chronicled here and explained – as are the Principle itself, his evaluation of pi and his construction of the first hydraulic planetarium (with the earth as its centre, mind, so he missed that one). His spirited application of his discoveries in defence of his native Syracuse is also well recounted, and his ignominious death at the hands of a Roman squaddy.

It's been a long while since 'The Radium Woman' won the Carnegie Medal and sci-biog is due for a comeback. This enjoyable account of how many bits of our National Curriculum got there is a good example of the genre, and prime stuff for the beefing up of maths and mechanics projects.

TP

'Can you now see how all the pieces fit together? Earth is like a jigsaw.' From **Ian and Fred's Big Green Book**.



Ian and Fred's Big Green Book

Fred Pearce, illustrations by Ian Winton, Kingfisher, 0 86272 661 1, £7.95

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

'Pity there isn't a children's book out yet that deals with the Gaia thesis' writes Richard Hill, preambing our Green Guide. Well, Sod's law must be so called because of its affinity with turning up chunks of green earthy stuff, for here comes the very thing we were looking for.

James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, which he explains in an influential foreword, maintains that Earth – the whole ensemble of air, biosphere, water and rocks – works like a living organism to keep itself as a balanced and constantly nourishing environment for its inhabitants. Pearce takes this further by likening our planet to a global jigsaw whose integrity depends on the presence of every piece. Trouble comes when Homo Sapiens starts ripping out and throwing away bits of the jigsaw. The classic responses of a living organism to irritation are either to move away or to destroy the irritant – so although Gaia will survive and nature will survive, if humankind goes on destroying and polluting, then humankind will have to go.

Pearce's catalogue of human folly in the exploitation of the planet convincingly reinforces the validity of Gaia. He makes some arrestingly good points too, for instance about population: 'People worry about the extra numbers of children being born in poorer countries, but one child in an industrialised country consumes as much as 10 children in a poorer country.'

Winton's pictures are genuinely contributory and not without humour. His style is gentle and his recurring portrayal of the globe in different guises – wearing the sunglasses of the ozone layer, the blanket of the greenhouse gases, for instance – is particularly effective, relieving the necessary gloominess of the text and justifying the book's over-large format.

This is a personal book, best regarded as a letter from Ian and Fred. Like a letter it's best read from beginning to end in one go, like a letter it should be passed round the family and reread, and, like a letter, it's written with love. TP

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

John Fines – see footnote on page 21.

Veronica Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

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

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



'Dad (on the left) as a machine gunner', from ...

My Childhood in Nazi Germany

Elsbeth Emmerich with Robert Hull, Wayland, 0 7502 0077 4, £8.95
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Wayland are to be congratulated on producing this excellent and, in its own genre, important publication. They were wise to get such a skilled writer as Bob Hull to help, and his quality shines through, though at all stages he seems to respect the material on which he is working. The book is well produced with some very well-chosen illustrations (not just those personal to the author). The text is easy on the eye, the design of the page good.

But more important than that, this book gives a genuine child's eye view of the war. At first one feels that it isn't going to work – the prose seems childish and sentimental in tone, but then, reading on, one sees that this is in fact just right – this is a little girl in an ordinary German family in 1939 and we are seeing things anew through her eyes. And such things! We see the hero of the book, a German soldier in Russia – not apologised for, but deeply regretted as a real loving and cruelly taken away and finally dead Daddy. We see a rich and confident community crumbling under the impact of bombing into a ruined world full of dreamers slowly

awakening to reality. Above all we see survival and the regret for those who didn't make it. A different vision, through the eyes of a child.

Congratulations to all involved. JF

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We asked **John Fines** to tell us how books can support the history curriculum and to recommend some titles for Key Stage Two.

There's a real difference in learning styles between being told and finding out, but this is seldom observed in the information books I have looked at for this article.

Of course, not all children are capable of finding out, even though they have questions in mind. Some are very literal minded about the process – if the answers don't hop off the page with blinding obviousness, they're prone to say 'the answer isn't here'. One reason they cannot succeed is that they find scanning a very difficult art. Searching widely and roughly, selecting and rejecting on the basis of relevance seems like a kind of reading they have always been told *not* to do.

Teachers, of course, can help by framing questions with reference processes in mind: 'Find as many Roman Emperors as you can in this book and try for their dates, as we want to make a time-line – just ignore all the rest.' But books should be helping too. Information should be easily found, using a rational presentation with good headings and pointers not just relying on an ill-thought-out index bunged in at the last minute (a child looking for 'Emperors' won't notice 'Hadrian', dear indexer, and will give up).

Every history text should take seriously the requirement to set the subject into its context of time and place, make clear the role and nature of significant actors in the main events, demonstrate the nature and extent of changes and the forms and workings of their causes, consider what's significant in all this and why, pay attention to different interpretations . . . and above all *explain*. All this, of course has to be done with access in mind so that young readers can get quickly and easily at relevant material.

Change and causation are hard to deal with and may need explaining along a developing scale, from simple to complex. Thus we might start with a straightforward answer to the question 'What changed, from when to when, how, affecting whom, and why?' This simple statement might be followed by an enlargement that gives a more sophisticated, multi-faceted approach which could satisfy the needs of an abler pupil, or of the Oliver Twist who simply wants more.

Some of the problems of dealing with issues like significance and interpretation can be best tackled in terms of layout, so that the student can physically see the argument laid out on the page. One side of a spread, for instance, might show an Anglo-Saxon view of the battle of Hastings, whilst the other shows a Norman view. Texts should provide fuel for debate as well as simply answers to questions.

How much text should there be? Well, we must remember that History is an information subject, it lives off its facts, however you define them, and there is never an end to the need to know – everything within the field of study could prove to be relevant. Since I very firmly believe in accessibility, though, I think what we should be doing is what I have been hinting above – presenting information on two levels, a short form and a follow-up form.

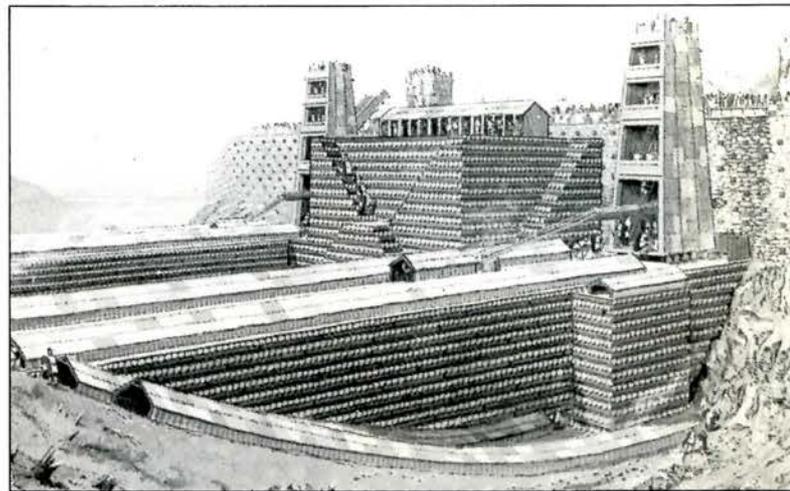
In the majority of books I've seen, documents and pictures have been used as illustrations. Now if we are to induct pupils into the rules of and use of evidence in teaching History, we must reform our practice here. Illustrations and documents should explain or prove, or be the sources of explanation or proof, which requires their full integration within the text as an active part, something the pupil must tangle with. Of course they must be interesting and appealing as well, but far too often pictures and documents are chosen merely for their surface glamour.

HISTORY IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Finally the vexed problem of language. This should be keyed to the reader, which means getting the pace rather than the level of difficulty right. I feel strongly that proper language should be used and explained within the body of the text, reserving the glossary for technical language only. Books should build vocabulary not restrict it – all good texts should be an induction into better, more professional use of language, but few find the space, anxious as ever to rush on and cram in just that little bit more 'History'.

Seventeen publishers were kind enough to send me copies of their publications for this review but few met the criteria I've outlined above. I first divided them according to the topics in Key Stage Two and then attempted to select one or two titles to recommend in each category.

Ancient Greece is not very well served but Anton Powell's **The Greek World** (Kingfisher, 0 86272 284 5, £8.95) is very good. Full yet light, scholarly yet not overblown. The pictures are not bad either. Much better on pictures is Peter Connolly whose many books on the Romans are probably better suited to Key Stage Three, but whose **Roman Army** (Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 0055 4, £8.99) would be very useful on an Invaders course. The illustrations are superb, particularly those that are geared to explain some complex arrangement. The text is scholarly and gives real history, unbowdlerised, but is too full, and not well suited to the child reader.



Caesar's siege works at Avaricum, from **The Roman Army**.

Exploration and Encounters is represented by quite a good range of books but there is little on those explored. **The Aztecs** (1 85434 052 2) by Rob Nicholson and Claire Watts for Two-Can is a useful text at, surprise, a really reasonable price – £2.99 pbk. See – it can be done!

Surprisingly there's little to recommend on the Tudors and Stuarts but there is a host of good books from which to service a study of the Victorians. One of the nicest books of all I received was in this group – Tony Triggs' **Victorian Britain** (1 85210 582 8) from Wayland's 'History in Evidence' series. It is interesting throughout with exceptionally well-chosen illustrations and good simple prose. Above all it is restrained – not overpacked but showing everything in a roomy and uncluttered setting. It has a list of places to visit and books to read further, both really useful. At £6.50, this is a model text.

There are lots of good books on specific topics. Alison and Michael Bagenal's 'Music from the Past' series may seem an

odd choice for an information review, but **The Victorians** (Longman, 0 582 18829 6, £2.99 pbk) in this series is not just full of songs for singing – they illustrate Victorian life and attitudes so well they are also a research source (the accompanying cassette costs £10.99). Ruth Thomson's **Washday** (0 7136 3183 X) for the A & C Black 'Turn of the Century' series is beautifully done. Again it has a list of places to visit, and (a feature of this series) an outstanding example of a time-line. Good value at £5.95.



Drying clothes at Shugborough Hall, restored as it would have been at the turn of the century. From **Washday**.

There are so many books on Britain in the 1930s and after that I found it difficult to make a choice. Perhaps half the books in this pile were about the war, and there seems to be an unhealthy interest in this topic, but it shouldn't be avoided. My favourite was a book by Neil Thomson in Franklin Watts' 'When I was Young' series about Charlie Jones, young in **World War II** (0 86313 873 X, £7.95). These books are very rich in sources, superbly presented (I even approve of the index!) with good big print and simple language. Above all they encourage the notion that you can listen to History, and it can be Grandad telling it, or the lady next door.

Another excellent series is 'The Home Front' (Wayland, £6.95). They're a bit pricey for 32 pages with not much colour, but their very interest carries them through – I would particularly recommend **Rationing** (1 85210 975 0) and **Prisoners of War** (1 85210 976 9), both by Fiona Reynoldson.

Coming a little more up to date (bravely defying the snarls of the Secretary of State for Education) there are some good books on social topics. Batsford have two useful series on fashion which include coverage of the recent past: 'Costume in Context' (all by Jennifer Ruby, £9.95) and the much more designer-magazine style 'Fashion of a Decade' (£9.95). Yvonne Connick's **The 1960s** (0 7134 6437 2) in the latter series, is over full but it does tie the subject into the history, and is interesting throughout. I know I'm obsessive, but what's the point of an index entry that reads 'Mashed potato 29', especially when there is no reference to the subject on page 29 that I could find?

The worst served unit of National Curriculum History at Key Stage Two is undoubtedly Local History – I suppose publishers think this is too individual for them to cover, and leave it to teachers to manage on their own. This might be the best course in truth, but there are one or two helpful books. As an example I have chosen John Porter's **History in Landscape** from Oxford's 'Presenting the Past' series (0 19 913348 4, £4.95 – a good price). This only comes through to medieval times, and tends to show famous sites

rather than those that could be found anywhere, but it's a useful beginning.

Evacuation

"They wanted to adopt me"

I'd only just started school when the war began and the Government decided to send all the children out of London to escape the bombing. My school, Princess May, was officially evacuated to Letchworth, in Hertfordshire.

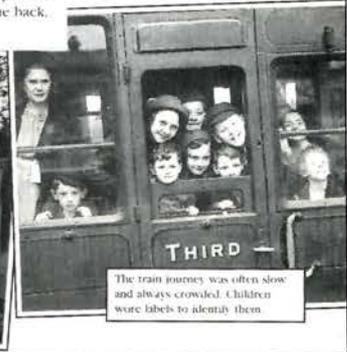
It was the first time I'd ever been on a train and it felt exciting, like going on a holiday. Most of us had never been out of London before. I think the parents worried more than the kids. The day after I had been sent away, my brother Fred cycled out to Letchworth to see that I was all right. I stayed with an oldish lady and her husband. They wanted to adopt me, but my mum said she wanted me back, so I wasn't there long.



In the first week of September 1939 almost one-and-a-half million people left the cities in the official evacuation. Most children left without their parents.



"In Letchworth, I think we'd been to a wedding"



The train journey was often slow and always crowded. Children wore labels to identify them.

A page from **World War II**.

There are some excellent books to help in dealing with thematic studies (though not all stretching 1,000 years, thank God!) All through this review I have spoken of pictures and we often learn our information best from pictures. Just occasionally a book uses illustrations in an especially creative way. Outstanding amongst all the books I've been examining is **A Town through History** (1 85210 991 2, £9.95), a Wayland version of an Italian publication which traces in 14 huge and meticulous drawings, the changing face of a town from the 4th century BC to the future. An able child, and patient less able children, could work for hours from this outstanding quality resource.

For the final unit, on ancient civilizations, with a commitment to teaching archaeological method there are some useful general books. Catherine Charley's **Hunting for Treasure** (Salamander, 0 86101 513 4, £6.95) tells the story of some remarkable discoveries, and illustrates them well. She deals with recent finds not just the more famous. Mike Corbishley is rather more sure-footed in **Secret Cities** (Evans, 0 237 60277 6, £8.50) and one hears the voice of the archaeologist here. The illustrations and design are good but the price is high, as with another book in the same series, Margaret Berrill's **Mummies, Masks and Mourners** (0 237 60276 8), which faces the fact that archaeology is mostly about digging up graves.

Key Stage Two presents many challenges, and although one could complain at the work load they entail, there are positive gains. Much more History will be taught in Primary schools. It will be based on a commonly agreed rationale. It will be assessed and reported on in roughly standard ways. To achieve these goals entails a lot of hard work from teachers . . . and they will need help from publishers. We need books more focused on the attainment targets, with material that not only attracts the able but copes with the whole range of pupils. Above all we need more real history reference books that answer questions and supply the right sort of detail for good work to be done. Also, if I may finish where I began, we need more books that recognise the difference between being told and finding out. ■

John Fines is an academic historian and a classroom teacher. He's spent 30 years doing both, much of his career being based in teacher training. He is Director of the Young Historians Scheme of the Historical Association and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

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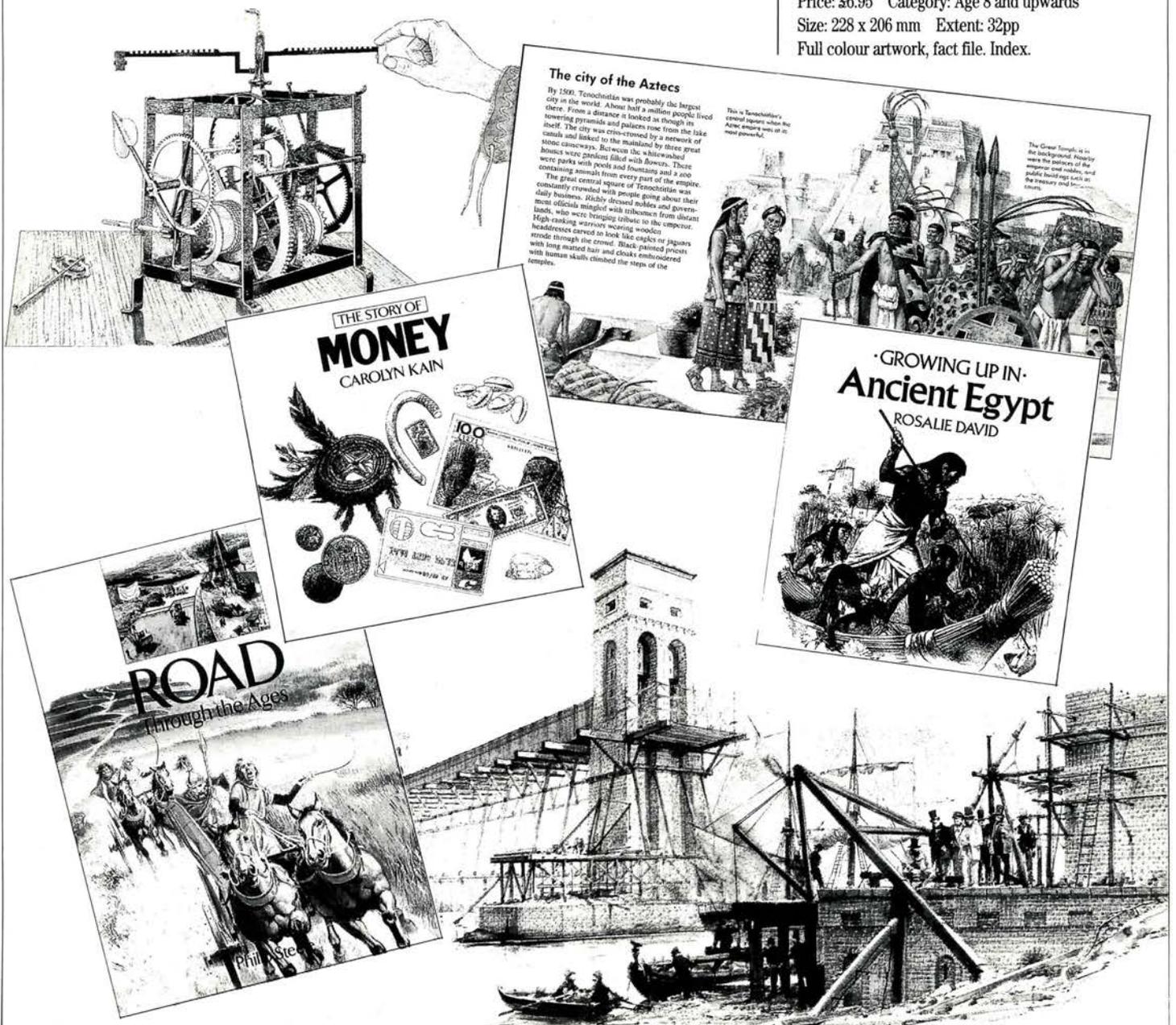
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Price: £6.95 Category: Age 8 and upwards
 Size: 228 x 206 mm Extent: 32pp
 Full colour artwork, fact file. Index.



The city of the Aztecs

By 1500, Tenochtitlan was probably the largest city in the world. About half a million people lived there. From a distance it looked as though its towering pyramids and palaces rose from the lake itself. The city was constructed on a network of canals and linked to the mainland by three great stone causeways. Between the whitewashed houses were gardens filled with flowers. There were parks with ponds and fountains and a zoo containing animals from every part of the empire. The great central square of Tenochtitlan was constantly crowded with people going about their daily business. Richly dressed nobles and government officials mingled with tribesmen from distant lands, who were bringing tribute to the emperor. High ranking warriors wearing wooden headdresses carved to look like eagles or jaguars strode through the crowd. Black painted faces with long matted hair and cloaks embroidered with human skulls climbed the steps of the temples.

This is Tenochtitlan's central square where the Aztec emperor was at his most powerful.

The Great Temple, it is the background. Hereby were the statues of the emperor and nobles, and public buildings such as the treasury and the courts.

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The Rules

CLOSING DATE: 30th December 1991

ELIGIBILITY:

Any group of children within the specified age categories (minimum group-size six, but no upper limit) working with or without adult guidance – the extent of the latter to be indicated briefly with the entry.

CONTENT:

To be decided by the children themselves based on their favourite fiction and/or non-fiction (not necessarily current). Use **BfK** for guidance, focusing either on one or an assortment of our features. Feel free, though, to offer book-ish aspects and angles we've missed.

SIZE:

One double-spread of **BfK** – that's two adjoining A4 pages. Entries need not be submitted to our exact size, but *must be reducible to our size* for possible publication. Yes, we will look at a whole magazine *but the actual spread being offered must be clearly indicated*.

FORMAT:

Again, use **BfK** for guidance. You may also like to consult Teresa Grainger's article 'Using **BfK** in the Classroom', **BfK 69** (July 91), though don't feel constrained by this. Entries may be hand-drawn or written, typed, computer-set or some combination of all three . . . let the children choose. Entries in colour are permitted but must be suitable for black-and-white reproduction.

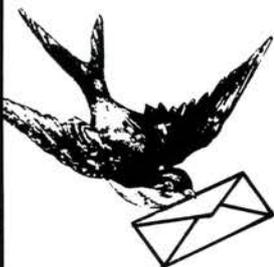
PLEASE NOTE:

With your entry, we need to know

- * The address and telephone number of your school, along with the name of the supervising teacher.
- * The age-category you're entering, i.e. Infant, Junior or Secondary (primary schools may submit two entries).
- * A *brief* account of adult input, if any.
- * The actual double-spread being entered if you're sending us more than two pages.

Alas, we can't return entries since the postage involved might bankrupt us! Competition judges will be Teresa Grainger – Director of the Literacy Unit at Christ Church College, Canterbury; Sally Grindley – Editorial Director of **BfK**; Richard Hill – Managing Director of **BfK**; and Chris Powling – Editor of **BfK**. The judges' decision will be final.

PLEASE SEND YOUR ENTRIES TO: **Books for Keeps**,
6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. ■



GNEEEEOOOOW!



THE STORY OF JETS

Fiona Kenshole explains... with help from Scoular Anderson

'Jets' first appeared in 1988 – when no one quite knew what to make of them. Bob Wilson put it most clearly: sometimes the narrative is carried by the text, sometimes by the pictures and sometimes by the irony in the

difference between what the text says and what the pictures show. Not comics, but with the same appeal. They are enormously enjoyable to read, and great fun to work on – and it shows!

THE GENESIS OF THE JETS SOME YEARS AGO, WHEN I WAS A BOOKSELLER IN STROUD, I NOTICED 7 AND 8 YEAR-OLDS COMING IN AND HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE BOOKS WITH THE BIG PRINT.



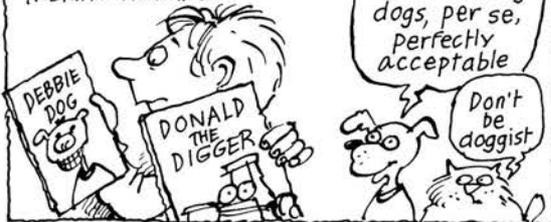
THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH THEIR EYESIGHT...



... BIG TYPE AND LOTS OF PICTURES SEEMED TO GIVE THEM CONFIDENCE.



BUT USUALLY ALL THEY COULD FIND WERE BOOKS ABOUT TALKING ANIMALS.



Personally, I find talking dogs, per se, perfectly acceptable

A few years later...

As an editor, I was amazed to discover that many authors and illustrators who produced beautiful books together had never even spoken to each other, let alone met. This seemed all wrong. So the idea for a series of books was born, where authors could have a say in how their book was illustrated, where illustrators could cut or add to the text. Where the type was clear and large with careful letter spacing and line breaks. Where the stories and pictures were integrated to include all the varieties of text a new reader comes across – maps, letters, newspapers, adverts.

Where you might have to turn a page round to read it...

Where a chapter could just be one page with two words and a picture of a toilet.



THE BEST WRITERS ... THE BEST ILLUSTRATORS

The most important thing for a series such as 'Jets' is that the author and illustrator like and respect each other. Finding authors was great fun – they were all excited by the idea of something new. For some stories, choosing the illustrator was easy: Helen Cresswell had always wanted to work with Colin West (so had I) so an exciting partnership was formed with **Two Hoots**. For other stories, it wasn't so easy. Michael Morpurgo wrote a sweet farmyard story about an elderly cat. A realistic illustrator seemed the obvious choice. But I wanted 'Jets' to be tough not twee, and on the whole I'm not a fan of talking animals. I looked at lots of illustrators – many couldn't cope with the freedom of being given a blank page to play with. They'd

become used to putting a square picture under a lump of text. For Michael, Shoo Rayner was the perfect partner. He took the stories and added his own dimension – a silly sheep became positively deranged, while sweet old Mossop, from **Mossop's Last Chance**, is now a Machiavellian character with a sinister eyepatch. Whole sub-plots evolved in the stories without any reference in the text. This is commonplace in picture books – but it's also perfect for the beginner reader. A lot of children who aren't comfortable with text are visually very literate and respond to different layers of meaning in the pictures.

Series books don't have a good name in some circles, but I'm a great

believer in series publishing – children like designer labels and collectability. And it's reassuring to read one, then pick up another knowing it will be just as accessible. I deliberately wanted a mixture of authors for 'Jets': well-established writers whom I've always admired, and first-time authors off the unsolicited reading pile who would carry the torch for the future. The same with illustrators. Some are old favourites, some just out of art school. I wanted a balance of male and female writers, and stories that were without gender stereotyping and which reflected our multicultural society. Most of all they had to be brilliant stories. And... they must make me laugh. As an editor you read texts over and over countless times. So it helps if you like them a lot.

PUTTING JETS TOGETHER



When a good story comes in, it's a wonderful feeling. I rush round the office waving it at everybody. Once illustrator and author have been matched, we all sit round the table and talk about it. With Chris Powling and Scouler Anderson, the ideas get dafter and dafter – it was Scouler's idea that the **Wishing Well** in **Harry With Spots On** should be a toilet. (There seem to be a lot of toilets in 'Jets'...) Rose Impey, Jolyne Knox and I sat down at 10 a.m. with sandwiches at the ready and mapped out **Desperate for a Dog** page by page, virtually line by line together. The ideas just bounced off each of us. We didn't finish till gone 9 p.m., and Jolyne's family called the police she got home so late.

It was Shoo who showed how to use integrated text and picture together to vary the pace of the book – strip cartoon to speed the action along building up to a huge double-page picture for the climax. Writer-illustrators like Bob Wilson and Robin Kingsland have a different approach – each word is carefully placed in relation to the illustration – and their books are very funny.

At roughing out stage, a story can change drastically. Scouler cut out a page of manuscript with just three brilliant pictures – showing how Harry does a handstand and sets off the school alarm! The best 'Jets' are cinematic in approach, using close-ups and panning across wide-angle landscapes, with lots of sound effects. But I hope I'm not sounding as if the illustrations are the most important part. These stories are for many children their first experience of independent reading so the stories have to be good. Otherwise the visual excitement is just a gimmick. The enthusiasm generated by the author-illustrator partnerships goes on after production of the book as most people want to do sequels.

THE RIGHT NAME

My local librarian thinks most series' names are pretty pathetic. In the editor's defence – it's not easy! A friend swears the best way is to sit down with a bottle of whisky and write down the first thing that comes into your head. 'Jets' started as 'Squibs'. But can you imagine the field-day reviewers would have had – 'damp squibs', etc? And the production manager kept calling them 'Squids'. So they became 'Conkers' – which was fine. Until at the eleventh hour someone pointed out there are no conkers in Australia. Back to the drawing board. Everybody was cajoled into producing ideas. One author was very keen on 'Burps'. In the end the publicity manager came up with 'Jets' which was perfect. It still gave reviewers a field-day (jokes about crashing, etc). Any suggestions for new series' titles gratefully received...



DEVELOPING JETS

The first books were very successful. People liked them, they sold to other countries. They even got some reviews. But I didn't want them to rest on their laurels. With a series there are opportunities for pushing out boundaries. Rachel Anderson and I are both involved with mentally handicapped children, and most of the books for them are called things like 'I have a Mental Handicap' which is boring if you already have one. Rachel wrote **Jessy Runs Away**, and Shelagh McNicholas, the illustrator, and I spent an afternoon playing with a little girl who has Down's Syndrome, to get the pictures right. It's a story that any child who's run away and got lost can sympathise with, but not a 'message' story.

Other new directions. Children love spoof and parody. Which, if you think about it, is a sophisticated



genre. Remember the Carling Black Label advert which sent up other kinds of advert? Children loved it. One of my favourite 'Jets' is **Pesters of the West**, a spoof western. It was Lisa Taylor's first book, and I was away when she and illustrator Tony Blundell first met. I was terrified – they both had such wildly anarchic imaginations I was afraid the book would be way over the top. In fact it is inventive and original and totally unpatronising. 'Jets' now take in spoof history, with **Cowardy Cowardy Cutlass**, and parody gangster movies with **Private Eye of New York**.

In **Clever Trevor** there is a complete plot line running literally beneath the ground and shown only in pictures. This book is truly multi-layered with several different points of view carried simultaneously. Children who watch soap operas are used to this and understand how to read them. It is also very funny.

'Jets' are now nearly up to 30 (and so am I). They aren't going to go on for ever. There are other new and exciting directions to take. They have broken new ground. They are great fun to work on. But best of all, from the letters all of us involved in the series have had, for many children it's a book in the 'Jets' series that gets them hooked on reading. That's why we do it and it's the best feeling of all. ■

Fiona Kenshole first flew hardback 'Jets' as an Editor at A & C Black, who continue to originate the series. She's now moved to Collins as a Senior Editor, where she can also keep an eye on the paperbacks.

'Jets' are published in hardback by A & C Black and in paperback by Collins. Details of those mentioned:—

Two Hoots, 0 7136 2982 7, £4.95; 0 00 673006 X, £1.99 pbk

Mossop's Last Chance, 0 7136 2984 3, £4.95; 0 00 673008 6, £1.99 pbk

Harry With Spots On, 0 7136 3224 0, £4.95; 0 00 673884 2, £2.25 pbk

Desperate for a Dog, 0 7136 2980 0, £4.95; 0 00 673007 8, £1.99 pbk

Jessy Runs Away, 0 7136 3059 0, £4.95; 0 00 673293 3, £1.99 pbk

Pesters of the West, 0 7136 3114 7, £4.95; 0 00 673345 X, £1.75 pbk

Cowardy Cowardy Cutlass, Robin Kingsland, 0 7136 3112 0, £4.95; 0 00 673346 8, £2.25 pbk

Private Eye of New York, Nigel Gray and Clive Scruton, 0 7136 3360 3, £4.95

Clever Trevor, Brough Girling and Tony Blundell, 0 7136 3302 6, £4.95

Fiona sends apologies to all the other 'Jets' authors and illustrators – she's sorry she couldn't mention everybody!



HAPPY BIRTHDAY PUFFIN!

The Story of Children's Books 1941-1991

Fifty years ago Puffin Books began to offer young readers the very best of children's books in paperback. Since 1941 we've published many of the biggest names in children's literature and introduced children to many of the world's most famous characters.

We're celebrating Puffin's 50th Birthday in style, with a series of wonderful Puffin competitions and events and the publication of some very special anniversary products!



A selection of TV and Film adaptations of Puffin titles will be touring the country in local arts cinemas, during September and October. A reference guide for teachers is available. For more details contact, Puffin Film Festival, Children's Marketing Department, Puffin Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London, W8 5TZ.

Commemorative Poster

A special poster commemorating Puffin's fifty years of publishing, will be mailed to every school during the autumn term.



HOW A BOOK IS MADE

'How a Book is Made' is a new interactive resource pack for schools, which takes children into the real world of publishing.

Ideal for Bookweek.

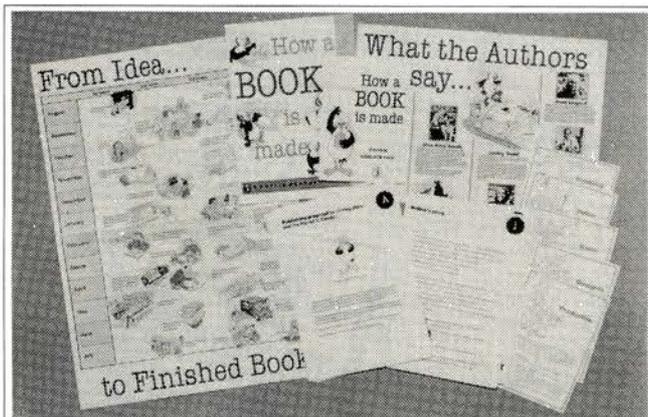
Role Play Game – as editors, designers, production managers, the children assess a new project and decide whether and how it should be published.

Two full colour posters depict a publishing schedule and comments from renowned authors and illustrators.

The pack contains all the elements in the production process, including galleys, manuscripts, page proofs and book jackets.

"Puffin's package contains a host of good material which will enable pupils to produce work in all four profile components - Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing...I have no hesitation in recommending 'How a Book in Made' to pupils or teachers."

Mike Myers, Curriculum Area Head, Brune Park School, Hampshire.



'ENGLISH EXPRESS'

PUFFIN WRITING COMPETITION

Winners will receive £250 worth of Puffin books for their school, as well as £50 worth of books for themselves and the chance to see their story on TV. Entry forms are available, when you order a set of English Express Teachers Notes, from the BBC Schools TV Annual Programme. Closing date is 11th November 1991.



New Puffins

In this very special year we have published some great titles by outstanding Puffin authors, including Janet & Allan Ahlberg, Michael Rosen, Margaret Mahy, Betsy Byars, Nina Bawden, Pat Hutchins, Posy Simmonds, Michael Foreman, Shoo Rayner, Kaye Umansky, Brian Patten and many more. Contact your local School or Library Supplier for more details or write to Pauline Cooke, Children's Marketing Department, Puffin Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London, W8 5TZ

'How a Book is Made' ISBN 0 140 03.4742 9 is available on approval.

This means that after 30 days consideration the books must either be: 1. Purchased at list price – £11.99 inc. VAT
2. Returned in perfect condition along with the invoice

All orders to : Puffin Approval Service,
PO Box 11, Falmouth, Cornwall, TR10 9EN.

Name _____

School _____

Address _____

Postcode _____



KAYE WEBB AND PUFFIN'S 50TH

Stephanie Nettell

It's a kind of immortality. She was, and always will be, their Kaye. Long grown up Puffineers stay in touch, send flowers, come to lunch, and for all of them books have remained central to their lives: today they're journalists, publishers, novelists, poets, playwrights, teachers, education officers, mums and dads . . . still reading, still scribbling away publicly and privately. Tiny notices in the *Guardian* and *The Times* seeking the Club's founder members brought over 400 immediate responses, sending outlines of their now-adult hands decorated in the old style, recalling their excitement at *Puffin Post*'s arrival, their competition hopes, the books they still treasure, their Colony holidays and expeditions with Kaye.

The first time I ever talked to Kaye Webb was for *Books and Bookmen*. She was celebrating Puffin's 25th birthday (our headline of 'Queen Puffin', then a still obvious echo of King Penguin, has since become her very own): she had been their editor for five years, raising sales from 700,000 to two million, with a 32 percent rise that year alone, and was publishing as their 250th title *The 22 Letters*, by one of her own discoveries, *Stig of the Dump*'s Clive King. The Puffin Club was in the future, but she was already fretting about the middlemen-barrier of booksellers and parents that come between children's books and their audience.

As she says now, 25 years on, the club humanised everything: 'They felt able to write to me, Kaye - Tony Lacey dropped the editor's name from the books, and I'm still urging Liz Attenborough to reintroduce it. If I'd been "only" an editor, we'd be sitting here talking about sales figures and titles, but because of the club we're talking about people.' People like Charlotte Cory, who designed the founder members' V & A party and whose first (adult) novel is published this autumn: 'I remember how her mother used to bring her to all the parties!'

And also the people who are no longer here to celebrate this fiftieth birthday, in particular artist Jill McDonald, whose comic genius and chunky-swirly style became the absolute embodiment of the club despite her own self-effacement - it was Jill's throwaway line, 'Fat Puffin loves you', which brought such a roar of affection from readers, 'We love you too, Fat Puffin!', that it propelled Fat Puffin into existence.

Sadly missing, too, is Puffineer Philip Geddes, son of a baker ('it really wasn't



all middle class') whom Kaye had once helped research for some exam, and who, when he discovered other club members at Oxford, invited her for a special Puffin Menu dinner at Teddy Hall ('with dinner jackets, because they thought I'd have pictured them with short trousers') and carted her off next morning to Radio Oxford. He went straight into national newspapers, and was currently with the *Express* that Saturday morning he visited Harrods with his girlfriend - when the bomb warning came, even off-duty, he felt he ought to stay behind. He was killed, and in his memory Oxford now offers an annual award to a promising journalist.

Kaye herself comes from a family famous for generations in printing, journalism and the theatre, and had been long established in print and television when she interviewed Allen Lane at a health farm - and accepted his invitation to stay the rest of the week. Like her, he enjoyed people. It was this background of contacts, expanded by her marriage to Ronald Searle, that stood her and her

Puffineers in such good stead. She seemed to know everyone, and noone could resist her vivacious coaxing, so that miracles emerged from low budgets - helped by some imaginative quick thinking.

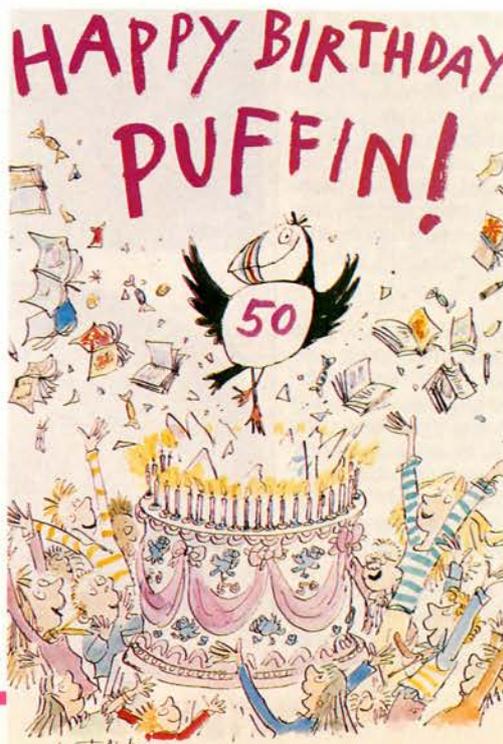
'We always had some crazy competition for non-literary children, and I usually said "the first ten correct answers out of the hat" and so on, but I forgot this time and so there were about 600 answers which *could* have all got prizes. I had a rough night! But next morning I rang some seed people and asked if they could print me up special little envelopes and I bought some sunflower seeds (*Interviewer: You really are a genius . . . Kaye, giggling: Yes, I am a genius in some ways!*) and the next part of the competition was for who could grow the tallest sunflowers. There were a lot of extra sunflowers in gardens that year.

'Of course things were always going wrong, especially at exhibitions. One was burgled, and there was the girl who had her nose broken in a big, blown-up Colour Space thing, and the boy who tore a muscle doing something backwards - he was in Great Ormond Street for three weeks - and at the launch of a National Book League exhibition a little boy cut his finger off. It was a party for the press, not children, and he was mucking about with an old-fashioned printing machine; a printer's wife who was a doctor took him and the finger straight to hospital and it was sewn on again.

'Our very first competition offered a trip to Lundy Island to see real Puffins. That was awful - so rough, and in an open boat. The boatman had phoned and said, "Seeing as how you're not here, we'd better call it off," and I'd said, "no, no, we're all here, we're coming now" - and then I'd had to rope them in at the bottom of the boat, white and sick, promising I'd never do anything again if only we were safe!' Turned out the boatman had been astonished at her bravery when he'd tried to warn them, 'seeing as how it's not clear . . .'

During our first interview she had dashed about breathlessly, slotting it into a chaotic morning; now she is painfully immobilised by arthritis. But the bright edge of her voice still sparkles, the energy, pride and warmth still glows, the alert interest in my life and open frankness about her own is unchanged. It will take more than time to dim the essential Kaye all Puffineers remember. ■

Kaye Webb, as Stephanie Nettell reminds us, is 'Queen Puffin'. She took over as editor of Puffin in 1961 from Eleanor Graham. During Kaye's time the list became probably the most famous of all in children's publishing. She won the Eleanor Farjeon in 1969, was made an MBE in 1974 and was one of the first woman directors in British publishing. Her own Puffin publications include the anthologies *I Like This Story* (0 14 03.2000 8, £3.99) and *I Like This Poem* (0 14 03.1295 1, £3.50). In July her new anthology *Meet My Friends* (Viking, 0 670 83794 6, £8.99; 0 14 03.4216 8, £2.99 pbk) was published (see our back page for a review).



CREATING THE OXFORD

Mary Worrall, Managing Editor,
Children's Reference, reports

The idea of developing a new children's encyclopedia had been in the air ever since the **Oxford Junior Encyclopedia** went out of print in 1978. When market research was first undertaken in 1979, it became clear that the real need was for something quite fresh, designed for the 8 to 13 age group rather than for teenagers. This is the age of maximum curiosity as well as of investigative project work at school and it's a stage when children may still accept and even read books chosen by adults – something they are less inclined to do as the teenage years wear on.

Once we had settled on a seven volume extent, solid enough for a serious work but compact enough to result in a selling price that would not break the family budget, we addressed the question of organization.

THEMATIC OR ALPHABETICAL?

Parents, children, librarians and teachers were unanimous in advising an alphabetical arrangement. A thematic set presupposes that you know where to start looking. Are railways listed under engineering or communications? Is radio included under technology or entertainment? Are viruses categorized as part of the living world or as science or even diseases? Children of primary and middle school age have not yet got to grips with the generalized concepts that adults may take for granted. Indeed you might argue that an encyclopedia, if intelligently constructed, can help young readers to make connections from the disparate bits of knowledge that intrigue them. The choice of an alphabetical sequence of articles made the planning stage a lot more complicated but results in a reference work that is easy to use.

DECIDING WHAT TO PUT IN

The question that comes up most often from people both inside and outside publishing is 'How did you decide what to put in?' and by implication – what do you leave out?

I invited specialist consultants to draw up lists of headwords in obvious categories but since the ultimate consumers will be children I wanted to know what they were interested in and what kinds of words they would use for their research. We also had to resolve the dilemma faced by all compilers of reference books: whether to be a lumpers or a splitters. In other words do you have separate articles on granite, limestone, chalk, etc. or lump them all together in a general article about rocks? In order to throw some light on the problem, we distributed over 70 notebooks to parents, schools and public libraries all over Britain, to places as diverse as Belfast, Edinburgh and Leicestershire. The brief was to record *in the child's own words* every request for information over a three-month period. When the lists from the notebooks were collated and analysed, the results were heavily weighted to the sciences, especially zoology and technology, and very sparse on literature and the arts. Moreover, in the sciences children could pinpoint pretty exactly what they wanted to look up. In contrast, mentions of the arts were much more vague.

The solution, arrived at after a good deal of debate, was to plan the arts articles around larger categories than the science articles. For instance there is one six-page article under the heading 'Paintings' which mentions impressionists, surrealists and abstract art but does not approach painting from the perspective of genre or historical school as an adult encyclopedia would. Likewise comedy, tragedy and melodrama are explained within the article headed 'Drama'. Cross-references to painters, playwrights and actors in the Biography volume extend the range well beyond the child's starting point.

For the life sciences we worked the other way round. Children tend to know the names of species and some families but they do not know how species, families, orders and classes relate together; so we built in a classification framework by cross-

referencing and marginal charts. The same kinds of thought went into planning hierarchies of headwords under Earth sciences: for instance 'Mountains', plus shorter articles on the 'Himalayas', 'Andes', 'Alps' and 'Rockies'.

The final headword list emerged from a trade-off between what the consultants recommended and what the children expected; we were ambitious enough to include articles beyond the intellectual range of most children: 'Relativity', 'Superconductivity' and 'Geological time'. So there will be occasion to return to the more demanding articles over years of use.

APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE

As well as drawing up the lists of headwords, the consultants also put their minds to considering the best ways of approaching the subject matter. A group of scientists met under the chairmanship of Professor Charles Taylor and agreed that the starting point for technology articles should be how things (cameras/helicopters/washing machines) work rather than when they were invented. The historical information should be placed at the end, with cross-references to relevant biographies. Another significant feature of many articles on the physical world, such as 'Air', 'Bubbles', 'Cosmology' and 'Crystals' is a section describing 'Something To Do', an activity rather than an experiment that will illuminate the concept.

The history debate was interesting. At an early meeting of the history sub-group, contributors argued that it would be impossible to tackle long periods such as the Anglo-Saxons, Tudors or Victorians. But the research showed that these were precisely the kinds of headings children would look up. So the next debate centred on whether the content should be organized on narrative lines or focus on a social description of the period;

Paintings

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Paintings

▼ **Still Life by Luis Meléndez 1716-1780**
This picture gives a feeling of harmony and security as it is painted in a 'colour family' of browns, yellows, greens and oranges. The background is very dark, and there are bright touches of white and yellow. Yet it remains a warm and gentle mixture of colours, with no harsh contrasts to disturb the eye.



The astounding variety of paintings in the world are all made of paint, put onto all sorts of surfaces with the aid of tools, and, of course, with inspiration. Paint is made from pigment (colour) mixed with a vehicle, a substance that makes it fluid and able to stick to the surface. For instance, pigment mixed with linseed oil makes oil paint.

Since prehistoric times, people have made pigments from red, yellow and brown earths. As time went on new

pigments were found, such as vermilion, made from the mineral cinnabar, and a brilliant and very expensive blue made from crushing a rare stone, lapis lazuli. In the 20th century, many more bright colours have been made from dyes.



◀ **Detail from Road with Cypress and Star by Vincent van Gogh 1853-1890**
This shows a thickly painted surface covered with excited and vigorous brush strokes. The lively texture of the paint creates its own patterns and movement, and is an important part of our pleasure in the picture.

▼ **Names of the colours in Meléndez's palette are:** titanium white, lemon yellow, cadmium yellow, yellow ochre, raw umber, burnt umber, burnt sienna and cadmium red. These are the modern equivalents of the colours Meléndez would have used. In his day it was not possible to buy tubs of ready-made paint; artists had to make up their own colours by hand.



CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

and how, within such constraints of space, could the notion of change within a period be conveyed. World history, which did not figure significantly in the survey of interests, was to appear either as a flashback section at the end of an article on a country: 'Austria', 'Iraq', 'Nigeria', or, for major countries or cultures, as a separate article: 'China's history'.

The biography volume, which is Volume Six and the only thematic one, goes far beyond names the children listed: typically Mother Teresa, Mrs Thatcher, The Princess of Wales, Mr Gorbachev and a selection of ephemeral pop stars. We hope that the cross-references from the main articles will lead children on to read about the lives of scientists, artists, musicians, writers and a host of historical characters. The decision to group all the biographies in one volume rather than interspersed among the other articles was a pragmatic one: there is no difficulty in remembering that a person will always be found in the biography volume.

FITTING IT ALL IN

The next stage was to work out a page plan. Each article had been coded according to importance and length, ranging from **** signifying three pages or more for such major subjects as 'Evolution', 'Musical Instruments', 'Roman Ancient History', 'USSR'; *** stood for a double-page spread ('Cats', 'France', 'Theatres', 'Vikings'), and so on down to quarter-page slots for concepts such as 'Civilization', 'Civil Rights', 'Classics'; small countries and some species of animals and diseases.

The designer, Richard Morris, and I spent much of the summer of 1987 shuffling index cards in an old shoe box until every article fitted. John Brown, who was at that time Gloucestershire's advisory teacher for libraries and resources, ensured



Mary Worrall at work on the Oxford Children's Encyclopedia.

The design, which went through several stages of testing on children, colleagues, librarians and a book club before we were satisfied with the typography, column widths, disposition of captions and treatment of headings, proved flexible enough for a variety of page layouts. The demands on our authors were considerable. They worked out synopses for every article of a page or longer. Richard Morris then turned this into a page layout, and text and artwork were commissioned to fit and complement one another. Many articles, particularly those on technology, started with a brief for the illustration.

COMBINING DIVERSE SKILLS

Some wonderful authors produced text that fitted the space exactly and needed minimal editing. They also supplied the detailed briefs for illustrations and/or references to photographs, reproductions of source material and artworks. I had started the search for authors with high hopes of commissioning writers who were both experienced communicators to children and also expert in their fields. This combination of skills is not so easily acquired and in some areas of knowledge is thin on the ground. In general, non-fiction publishing for children is not in the same class as children's fiction and there is not such a large pool of writers to draw from. I invited several well-known writers of historical novels for children to contribute biographies but none accepted the commission. Nor were established textbook writers always successful in communicating information. The fashion for 'starting where the child is', 'involving the reader', and 'provoking enquiry' can result in text that tells you little that you did not already know. So the normal processes of revising, reshaping, adjusting length, checking facts, ensuring that there was not too much overlap and that the cross-references worked, was carried out by a team of freelance editors as well as by the hard-pressed in-house staff of two, reduced to one when the assistant editor went on maternity leave.

Academics acted as consultants, advisers, checkers and occasionally as authors. Colleagues in OUP's branches overseas enlisted expertise and recommended authors. Finally the project's treasure, Richard Jeffery, copy preparer, proof reader and master of an astonishing range of knowledge, picked up errors which the most assiduous academic had missed.

that we did not lose the overall balance. An attempt to work out a basic page planner failed electronically because the computer was not as intelligent as the designer whose contribution to the process of planning and conceptualizing was enormous. The thorough planning did work though there were hazards and a need for flexibility when, for instance, countries changed their names. Kampuchea reverted to being Cambodia thereby creating a gap in the Ks and requiring a revision of Camels to make a slot in the right sequence. Germany reunited and so did the two Yemens, making their respective maps obsolete as well as most of the text.

The credits listed over 100 authors, 60 or so consultants and several trial schools. Teachers were generous in giving their time to try out articles and all this has helped to produce text that we hope will make sense to children. Information is useless if it's incomprehensible. Our policy has been to construct articles that offer a coherent explanation rather than pile in too many facts and to provide a network of cross-references that will lead children on in an endless discovery of the wealth of human knowledge. ■

The Oxford Children's Encyclopedia (0 19 910139 6) in seven volumes is published this September. Until 31st December 1991 it costs £100 net and from 1st January 1992 the cost will be £125 net.

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Paintings

Tools of the trade

Artists use different tools to create different effects. A palette knife can be used for mixing paint, but it can also be used to apply paint directly to canvas in large flat shapes. Brushes are usually made from animal hairs. Badger, donkey, cat, ermine, mink and camel are some that have been used. Bristle brushes are made from tough, hard-wearing hair from pigs. They are used for oil painting. Sable brushes are fine and soft, made from hairs from the tail-tip of a mink. They are best for water-colour painting. Many modern brushes are made of nylon.



Surfaces

Painters paint on walls, wood, canvas and paper. (Also sometimes on metal, glass, ivory and slate.) All surfaces must be properly prepared. Otherwise, in time, the paint will simply fall off.

Canvas, a rough linen or cotton material, is the most popular surface for oil paint. It is usually sized (covered) with rabbit-skin glue. This protects the canvas from rotting and ensures that the canvas does not absorb too much paint. It is then primed with white paint.

Water-colour painting needs a heavyweight absorbent paper with a slightly textured surface.

Something to do

Choose a collection of objects you like and group them together. Try to paint this 'still life' group in three entirely different ways. Use quite different techniques. In the end, you will work out a style and technique which is your own.

It is fun as well as good practice to try to paint in the style of others. If you would like to do something different, use animals or the sky and sea as your subjects. You might also try to paint portraits in this way, using different techniques. Does it make a difference to how the people look? How?

A Greta Bridge by John Sell Cotman 1782-1842

This painting is a water-colour by one of the greatest British water-colourists, J. S. Cotman. Water-colour is a mixture of pigment (colour) and a water-soluble binder. Water-colours often have a delicate, subtle appearance, because the paint is transparent and applied in thin washes one over another to build up depth and intensity.

See also

Cave paintings
Frescoes
Icons
Illuminated manuscripts
Portraits
Renaissance



Audio Tapes

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent story tapes.

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

Postman Pat and the Letter-Puzzle and other stories

John Cunliffe, read by Ken Barrie, Random Century Tellastory, 48 mins, £3.99

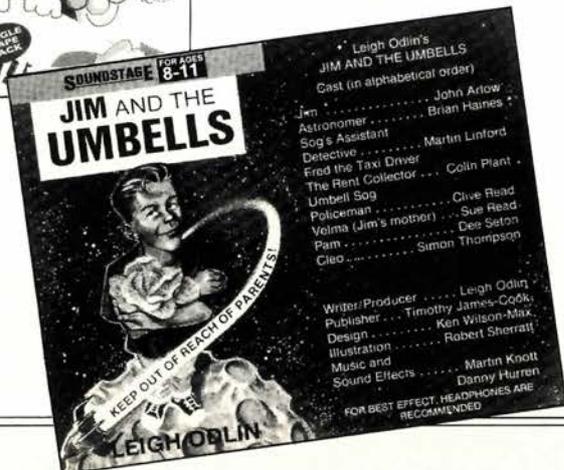
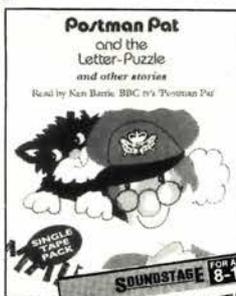
This is one of four Postman Pat cassettes from Random Century read by BBC TV's Postman Pat, Ken Barrie. It includes the Postman Pat song with lyrics by Bryan Daly. The simple stories feature the popular characters and make ideal, secure listening for children of 2 and upward. Postman Pat and the villagers spend a long time piecing together a letter which the baby has chewed up and are rewarded by finding that it's an invitation. Listening to these well-produced Tellastory titles, children can become immersed in Postman Pat's safe, friendly village idyll.

Ace

Dick King-Smith, read by Nigel Lambert, Chivers, two cassettes, unabridged, 2 hrs 9 mins, £9.95 + VAT

Here we have a brilliant reading by Nigel Lambert. His creation of Ace, the special pig, is totally convincing with his cheeky character and his piggy squeals and snorts. Farmer Tubbs has a lovely country accent and Nanny, Ace's goat-friend, has the fluting, aristocratic tones of a Dowager. Farmer Tubbs saves Ace from slaughter because it seems the curiously marked pig can understand every word that's said to him. The truth is, he can, and he's soon insinuating his clever way into the farmhouse.

Another funny and absorbing Dick King-Smith story to add to those already recorded by Nigel Lambert for Chivers.



A Child's Garden of Verses

Robert Louis Stevenson, read by John Sheddon and Harriet Buchan, Whigmaleerie (7 Main Street, Balerno, Edinburgh EH14 7EQ), 40 mins, £3.99

These 24 poems are those delicately illustrated by Erik Blegvad in the Picture Lion book, which is available separately. Unashamedly of their time:

'A child should always say what's true
And speak when he is spoken to . . .'

they are a charming evocation of what childhood used to be like.

What makes this recording special are the Scottish voices – sometimes in rhythmic unison, the atmospheric music appropriately underlying the various rhythms, the striking sound effects and the fact that it was recorded at a studio close to Stevenson's birthplace in Edinburgh.

Also available from Whigmaleerie is the set-to-music **Scottish Nursery Rhymes**.

Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator

Roald Dahl, read by Jonathan Cecil, Chivers, three cassettes, unabridged, 3 hrs 40 mins, £12.95 + VAT

Charlie is on his way in the Great Glass Elevator with his parents, grandparents and Mr Wonka to claim the Chocolate Factory. Something goes wrong and the Elevator is in orbit along with an American spaceship, and the chaos is heightened when the monstrous, rippling Knids attack them. It's great Dahl excitement and Jonathan Cecil's reading is splendid. He races for the action and has a wide vocal range and accents encompassing the US drawl of the President, the gurgling threats of the Knids and Charlie's grandparents' querulous complaining.

Jim and the Umbells

Leigh Odlin, Soundstage Full Cast (Craftsman Audio Fiction, PO Box 38, Stevenage SG1 2SP; tel: 0438 743280), 1 hr, £3.99

This 'audio fiction' for the 8-11 age range is certainly different! Jim's mum locks him in a high-rise flat and goes off to Bingo after he refuses to eat his greens. An hour-long adventure follows when the Umbells, slimey green inhabitants of the Green Planet, burst in and take Jim away on their giant cabbage spaceship. The sound effects are outstandingly inventive and varied – a child wearing headphones, with unearthly sounds and multi voices zapping him stereophonically, is actually *with* Jim. An exciting exploration of the audio cassette medium by a whole cast of characters.

Five Minute Thrillers

Bernard Jackson and Susie Quintanilla, 16 stories with 16 (8x13cm) books, LDA Hi-Lo (Abbeygate House, East Road, Cambridge CB1 1DB; tel: 0223 357744), four cassettes, £8.95 + VAT; eight cassettes + 16 books in storage box, £32.95 + VAT

LDA Hi-Lo are high interest, low reading age books for pupils with special needs – 'books that all your pupils will want to read and all your pupils can read'. LDA's first eight Five Minute Thriller books were so popular that eight more titles have been added, along with all 16 on eight cassettes – one five-minute story read by anonymous professional actors on each side.

All the thrillers manage to combine arresting, suspense-filled mini plots with convincing characterisation, as well as an interest level of 9-16 with a reading level of 7-8. Pupils can read along with the cassettes, feeling the satisfaction of having read 'a whole book', whilst the endings encourage lively discussion. The stories feature an outwitted arsonist, a mysterious woman hitch-hiker, a terrorist with a human face, a child's pet that seems to eat humans, eyes with special powers, a boy who is a rock-star lookalike . . . all familiar scenarios made strange and eerie. They're attractive and undaunting, and are certain to interest their intended readership and audience. Cassettes and books together would be a great asset to any Special Learning Department.

Thunder and Lightnings

Jan Mark, read by Andy Crane, Chivers, three cassettes, unabridged, 4 hrs 15 mins, £12.95 + VAT

This is a gripping story about the growing friendship of Andrew and Victor and how the latter's obsession with Air Force planes makes him vulnerable when his idolised Lightnings are to be scrapped. It's full of the realistic details Jan Mark is so good at, like the different atmospheres of Victor's super-clean home and Andrew's easy-going one, and Andrew's reactions after living in Kent to his new home and school in empty Norfolk.

Andy Crane serves the story well as narrator. He reads at a good pace and, because he sounds as though he's telling the story not just reading the book, he involves his listeners.

I'd Rather Be Famous

Pete Johnson, read by Jo Croydon, Once Again (2 Lovell Close, Hitchin, Herts SG4 9LB; tel: 0462 452925), four cassettes, unabridged, 5 hrs 30 mins, £11.99

For adolescents, listening to Jo Croydon reading is like listening to their best friend. The story speaks with a unique colloquial immediacy to teenagers, hooking even those – girls and boys – who don't normally listen or read. Sixteen-year-old Jennifer is trapped in a dreary job with a steady boyfriend, but knows she deserves more. As Jade, she determines to win a TV talent show. The story constantly surprises and satisfies, avoiding cliché and the obvious, and unobtrusively tackling a range of contemporary moral problems – plenty of discussion material for GCSE. Follow-up activities for schools, produced by Pete Johnson, are also available from Once Again.

This company now has four unabridged Pete Johnson novels on cassette. They're all reasonably priced and addictive listening for teenagers. ■

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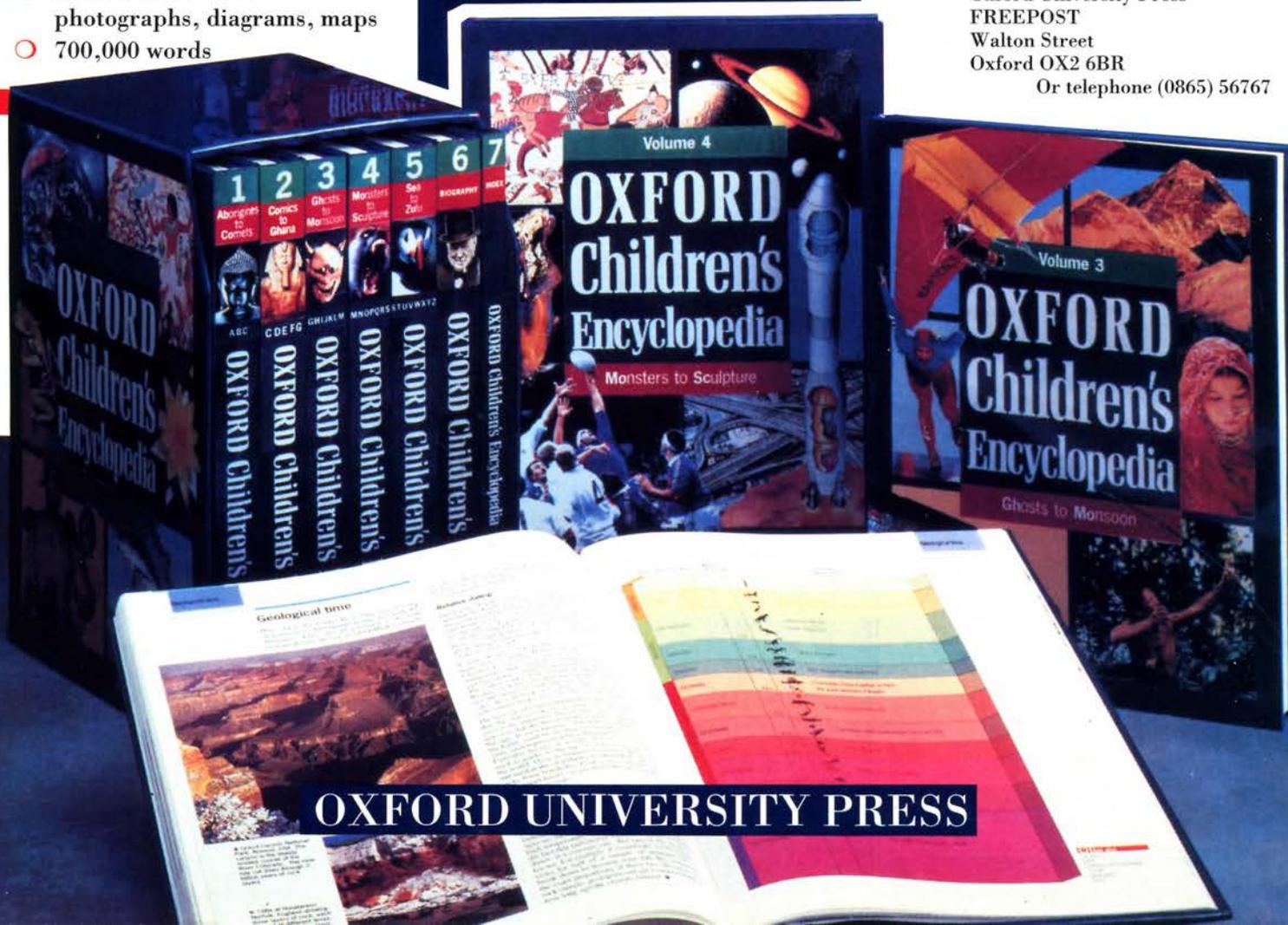
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HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US . . .

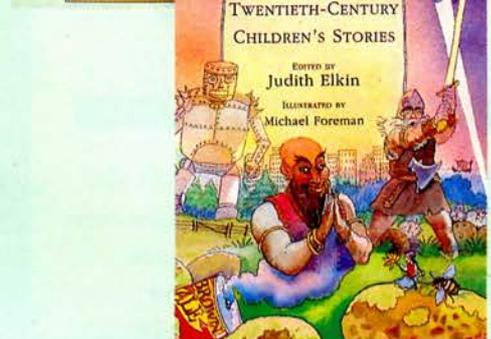
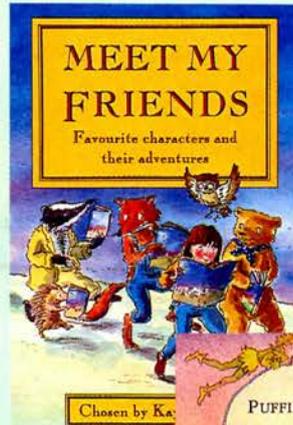
Chris Powling looks at three publications to mark Puffin's Fiftieth Anniversary.

Given her sheer presence as Editor of Puffin books during the 1960s and 1970s, it's fitting that Kaye Webb remains pretty Colossus-like in the way she bestrides her new celebratory volume called **Meet My Friends** (Viking, 0 670 83794 6, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.4216 8, £2.99 pbk). Every extract is topped, and in many cases tailed as well, by her commentary – bringing background, setting the scene, nudging the reader upward and onward. You're never allowed to forget that this is her personal choice.

Quite right, too. Just as a person is defined by his or her friends, so critics (and editors) are defined by their literary enthusiasms. In presenting us with her 'favourite characters and their adventures', Kaye Webb also provides something of a self-portrait. When she declares in her introduction, 'although you won't enjoy all of them exactly the same amount, I hope you'll find at least ten friends who will stay with you for the rest of your life', perhaps she means Ramona and Mrs Pepperpot and Milly-Molly-Mandy and the Worst Witch and Clever Polly and quite a number of other strong females most of all . . . a neat counter to those who might otherwise complain this selection is overly traditional. Certainly, her sense of what her 'younger' reader enjoys best – humour in a variety of forms – is unerring and her claim that what she offers will 'last for ever and ever, or at least long enough for you to read them to your children' seems pretty indisputable. In fact, I've only one minor quibble with this delightful collection. Almost every extract is decorated with black-and-white pictures from its source – in most cases so vividly that it's hard to separate their impact from that of the text. Is it word or image that first springs to mind when we recall Pugwash or Moomintroll or Teddy Robinson, for instance? No problem with these three . . . their authors were also their illustrators. Most of Kaye Webb's 'friends' are made real for us by separate talents, though, and she might well have alerted young readers to the drawing as well as the writing which makes each of these figures so memorable.

Judith Elkin's **The Puffin Book of Twentieth Century Children's Stories** (Viking, 0 670 82056 3, £12.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.2549 2, £4.99 pbk), for readers aged 8-14, solves the problem of illustration with one bold stroke: Michael Foreman does it all. Since it's rare to be offered an alternative interpretation for any text except an Acknowledged Classic, this is reason enough to buy the book. For range alone, his performance is astonishing. Compare Foreman teamed with Laura Ingalls Wilder, for instance, with his response to Mary Norton or Bernard Ashley. Mind you, even he shrinks from some challenges. Here you won't find a Foreman equivalent of Thomas Henry's William Brown or E H Shepard's Pooh. This said, you can open the book almost anywhere to come across vibrant, virtuoso line-drawing. His creepy, cricket-like image of a hand and an eye in tandem for the first chapter of **The Iron Man**, for example, is enough to make you look afresh even at this familiar text.

And all this is before you get to the words which are there in plenty: more than five hundred pages of them plotting the course of children's books generally from Kipling to Anne Fine. Since, very sensibly, Judith Elkin orders her extracts



chronologically between 1902 and 1989, what we have here is nothing less than a conspectus of the best writing for children so far this century – at any rate as identified by this particular compiler. So hackles are bound to be raised by what she includes, and what she doesn't and by the overall balance she achieves. Even more sensibly, the Editor shrugs off the paranoia this might easily have induced, makes accessibility her 'overriding concern' and plumps for writing with what John Rowe Townsend called the 'wild blood' of storytelling in it. As a result, she comes up with a superb series of 'trails' for the books she chooses. Time and time again, as I browsed on, I found myself scouring my shelves to find the full-length version. That, of course, is exactly what Judith Elkin is after. Blame her for my failure to review, as intended, Brian Patten's companion anthology **The Puffin Book of Twentieth Century Children's Verse** (Viking, 0 670 81475 X, £12.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.2236 1, £4.99 pbk). This will come in a future issue of **Bfk**.

Of course, celebrations often involve games as well as gifts. Puffin's offering here is **How a Book is Made** (0 14 03.4742 9, £11.99), a resource-pack of information, work cards and material, from manuscripts to page layouts, which sets out to involve children in every aspect of book production – as editors, designers, production, publicity and sales personnel. Though intended for mixed ability groups of a half-dozen top-juniors, the pack is so flexible and open-ended it's readily adaptable up to GCSE level. Come to think of it, used in conjunction with the recent video, **Roger's Book** from the Children's Book Foundation (see **Bfk 68**, page 30), the pack amounts to comprehensive initial training for anyone contemplating a career in children's books. Clearly, whatever the next half-century brings Puffin, they see competition as the least of their worries. ■



November's Bfk brings . . . THE CLASSICS

- * Victor Watson on The Idea of a Children's Classic
- * James Riordan on Updating Gulliver
- * Naomi Lewis interviews Lewis Carroll in Authorgraph
- * Shirley Hughes on The Illustrators of Treasure Island
- * Julia MacRae on Treasure Island: a blindspot
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- * Margery Fisher on Classics Old and New
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. . . plus classic news, classic reviews, classic choices.