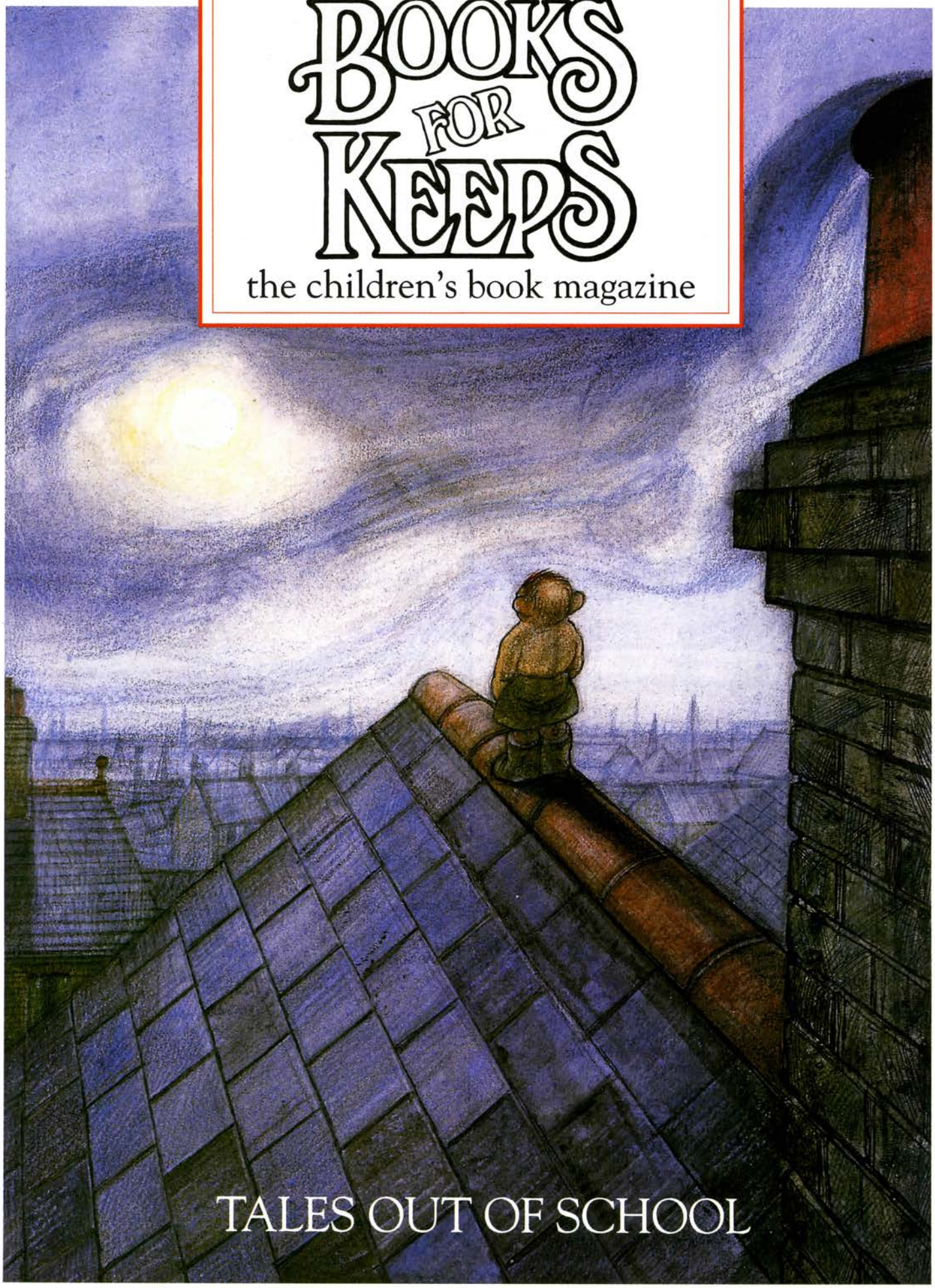
BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine



TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

September 1992 No. 76

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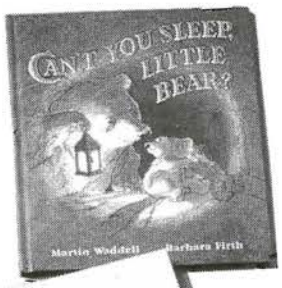
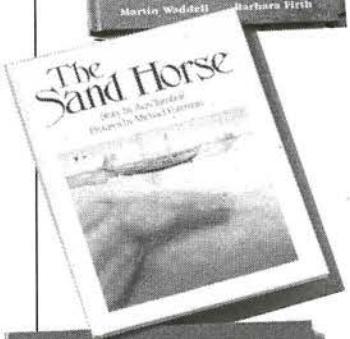
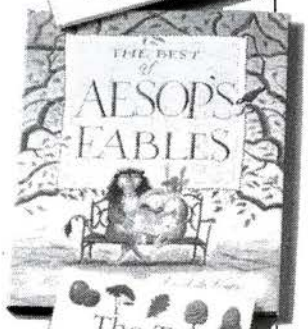
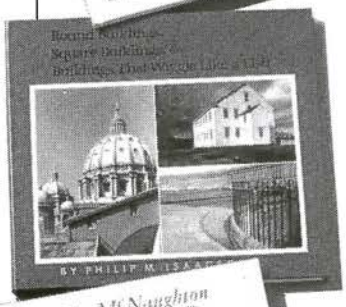
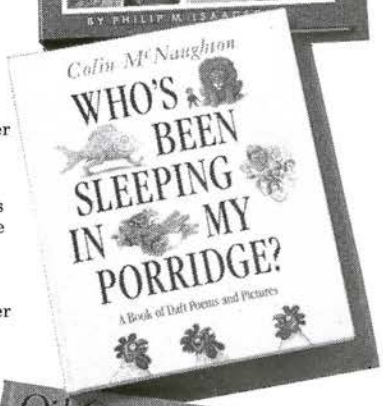
WHY THE RIGHT BOOKS MATTER . . . WHY YOU CAN RECOMMEND BFC

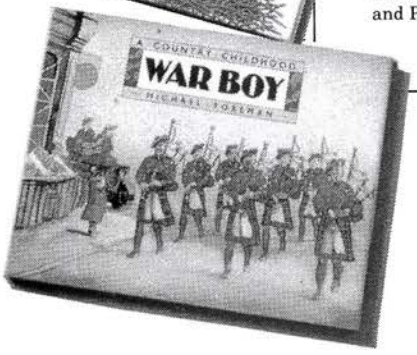


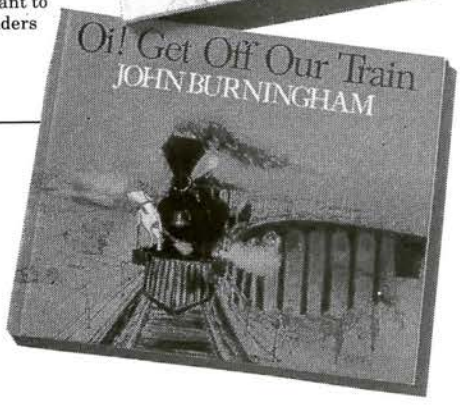












More than a dozen years ago, BOOKS FOR CHILDREN realised that caring parents with limited time, money and expertise, were looking for ways to help their children prepare for, and do well at school.

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.

This is where homes that own books have such an advantage. They provide the perfect context not just for reading, but for re-reading – the enjoyment, over and over again, of some encounter with print so happy it leads to more and more encounters.

So, where does BFC come in?

BFC is a children's book club. But it's a book club with a difference. Our trademark is quality, and we never offer a book just because it is a money-spinner. We aim to screen all the new hardback children's books before they are published, and offer our members only the very best of them.

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.

BFC Limited, PO Box 70,
Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 7BR.

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Cover story

On the front of **BfK** this month is the cover for Raymond Briggs's new book, **THE MAN** – see our back page for details. It was published by Julia MacRae on 20th August and we thank them for their help in using this illustration.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

If you were asked to name 20 current authors and illustrators whose work would 'focus' a promotion of children's reading – taking account of such variables as quality, variety, accessibility, age-range and so on – who would you choose?

Well, here's one list: *Joan Aiken, Lynn Reid Banks, James Berry, Raymond Briggs, Eric Carle, Ann and Reg Cartwright, Charles Causley, Helen Cresswell, Anita Desai, Leon Garfield, Jamila Gavin, Sheila Lavelle, Margaret Mahy, William Mayne, Colin McNaughton, Jan Ormerod, Ann Pilling, Maurice Sendak, Bob Wilson and Paul Zindel.*

What's that? You see some glaring omissions? Okay, I'll try again: *Vivien Alcock, Val Biro, Ruth Brown, Beverly Cleary, Babette Cole, Berlie Doherty, Nicholas Fisk, Adèle Geras, Susanna Gretz, Russell Hoban, Janni Howker, Robert Leeson, Roger McGough, Michael Morpurgo, Grace Nichols, Graham Oakley, Philippa Pearce, Hazel Townson, Brian Wildsmith and Kit Wright.*

Still not satisfied? In that case, maybe you'd plump for the following: *Victor Ambrus, Nina Bawden, John Burningham, Betsy Byars, Robert Cormier, Kevin Crossley-Holland, Philippe Dupasquier, Alan Garner, Grace Hallworth, Pat Hutchins, Penelope Lively, Errol Lloyd, Michelle Magorian, Jan Mark, David McKee, Helen Oxenbury, Brian Patten, Robert Swindells, Jean Ure, Robert Westall.*

Sorry? You're not happy with these, either? Fair enough. How about settling for . . . no. Let's stop right now. The sheer arbitrariness of this kind of selection must be obvious already. Yet, under pressure from booksellers anxious to use Children's Book Week (3-10 October) to point purchasers in particular directions, that's what Wendy Cooling, Director of the Children's Book Foundation, has had to provide. Being a sensible lady, her first thought was to consult actual kids – who, being just as sensible, produced a list about as long as all the above put together. This Wendy whittled down to the score of names you'll find on our News Page (31) . . . yes, another set altogether!

It's easy, of course, to condemn the sheer daftness of such an exercise. Also, let it be said, its riskiness. In this age of attainment-targets, assessment tasks and prescribed texts, any concession to those only too eager to dictate children's reading seems ill-advised. Faced with the current profusion of children's books, though, how is the attention of the uninformed to be focused? Wendy Cooling was under pressure, she points out, to nominate 20 *titles* for Children's Book Week. By opting for names, at least she keeps several hundred books on offer so perhaps we'd better be grateful.

The Problems of Profusion

Quite how we best cope with the recent upsurge in publications for young people isn't a simple matter to resolve. Yes, it is harder than ever to 'notice', and thereby keep in print, titles that deserve a longer shelf-life than the average. Many good books do disappear all too quickly. Some critics, though, seem to regard the increased volume of their reading as some kind of affront to their craft rather than confirmation of its relevance. Probably we should just keep our nerve and enjoy the glut. Heaven knows, with the recession continuing and the Net Book Agreement vulnerable, it's all too likely to be temporary.

Sounding Out Series

One way to increase enjoyment, not to mention discernment, is to provide the best possible information. That's why we're more than happy to pass on an offer from Nancy Chambers to send our readers a free photocopy of the recent **Signal** piece on series she wrote with Elizabeth Hamill. To this, you may recall, Steve Rosson took great exception in our last issue. For Nancy's and Elizabeth's follow-up, along with Steve's characteristically robust rejoinder, see Writer Reply on page 23. My own doubts about the original **Signal** article concern its treatment of the terms 'format' and 'formula' as though they were interchangeable. This, it seems to me, greatly confuses the argument. You'll certainly need both texts if you want to make up your own mind.

Back to School

No doubt the summer holidays are already a distant memory for most **BfK** readers. This issue also returns to school – at any rate as reflected in books. Robert Leeson celebrates the twists and turns of the school story, Maurice Sendak describes his own horrific schooldays, Chris Lutrario assesses recent publications on bullying, Pat Clark asks some pertinent questions about school bookselling, a team from Oxford offers advice on handling information books in the classroom and our Authorgraph is Berlie Doherty . . . interviewed by three of her own young readers. This piece was in fact an entry to the **BfK/BFC** Competition for Schools, which we described in our March issue (**No. 73**) – and came very close to winning. For details of this year's competition, organised in conjunction with our sponsors, **Books For Children**, turn to page 30. There are major prizes to be won.

THE MAN

Every school has at least one outsider, however. In keeping with this, we include one article that has *absolutely nothing* to do with school. Mind you, Raymond Briggs's new creation, **THE MAN**, encountered on our front and back cover, does have strong feelings about learning:

> 'There's nothing worse than being uneducated. You miss so much in life. It's like being only half alive.'

Few of us will disagree with that. Enjoy the issue.

Chris

School for Ever!

Robert Leeson, no mean contributor to the genre himself, writes a mid-term report on the school story.

The school story lives. Three anthologies hot off the press lie on my desk plus new series and even a new-ish book about Jennings!

Yet the genre was pronounced brain-dead 50 years ago. When George Orwell made his celebrated attack on Frank Richards' **Greyfriars** in **Horizon** magazine (1940) he was thrashing a corpse.

So, what has happened? What Frankenstein, what energy pulsing through the electrodes, brought it back to life?

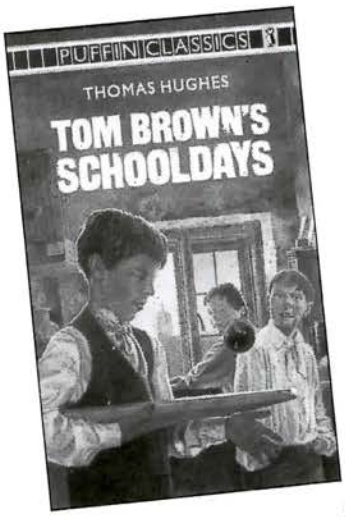
Well, one has to say, with due respect to Anthony Buckeridge ('Please Sir, Happy 80th Birthday, Sir') we are not talking about resurrection. We are talking about a transformation so complete that for clarity one must speak of the *old* school story and the *new*.

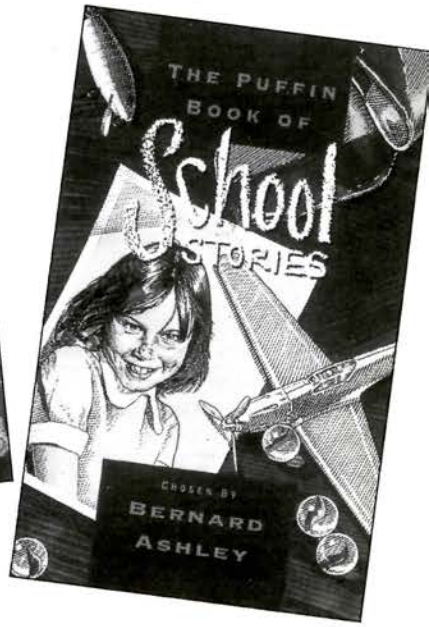
School stories are not unique to Britain. You find them in **The Arabian Nights**. But the old school story is peculiar to this country, based on that peculiar institution, the fee-paying boarding school.

Ours is no totalitarian society. But this was a totalitarian genre. You could have tragic, high-dramatic, comic, farcical stories, provided they were set in boarding school, Mummy and Daddy paid for it, and boys were kept away from girls.

Such was the conformity that normally intelligent critics would review school stories, even banal ones, 'sui generis', which is Latin for 'I know it's rubbish but it makes me feel at home.'

Apart from one-off tales, we begin in the 1850s with **Tom Brown's Schooldays**, by Thomas Hughes (hearty rectitude) and **Eric, or Little by Little**, by Dean Farrar (passionate goodness). Unlike Charles Dickens's account of Dotheboys Hall in **Nicholas Nickleby** (thank you, Bernard Ashley, for including this in your **Puffin Book of School Stories** to be published in September, 0 670 83737 7, £8.50), these two tales, though they dealt with corruption, were not intended to expose it, but rather to proclaim the reforming virtues of the boarding school to combat it.





'**Tom Brown**' and '**Eric**' were all about the shaping effects of school-days on a boy's character. But they could not constitute a genre in themselves. That came about through the tremendous growth of boys', and girls', story magazines from the 1870s onwards, which continued in full flood until television arrived in the 1950s.

Books may explore ideas, themes, settings. But to blend all these into a genre you need weekly, monthly journals whose appetite for serials causes the elements of the story to be established, popularised then turned out in endless permutation.

Boy's Own Paper, **Girl's Own Paper** (1880s) **Chums**, **Captain** (turn of the century) **Gem** and **Magnet** (early 1900s) **School Friend**, **Schoolgirls Own**, **Hotspur** et al (between the wars) fostered the school tale, kept it going at high pitch and eventually ran it into the ground.

On **Boy's Own Paper** it was Talbot Baines Reed (Liberal Dissenter, day school boy, typographer) with **Fifth Form at St Dominics** and other rattling good yarns, who deployed the basic elements of the genre – new boy problems, rival gangs, hero worship, stolen exam papers, gambling debts, unfair suspicions, bad redeemed by good, friend/enemy saved from drowning.

The embarrassment of cliché might have proved fatal, but Reed had the saving grace of humour. He even jokingly listed the public school types. Thirty years later in his 'Mike' stories, P G Wodehouse picked up the wheeze: 'Are you the Bully, the Pride of the School or the Boy who takes to drink . . . ?'

Hughes and Farrar wrote for people like them (and sons). Reed gave the school story popularity among thousands who would never go to boarding school. Wodehouse and (more brutally) Kipling brought a knowing, cynical touch at variance with the lofty code – 'play the game'.

With Greyfriars (**Magnet**) and St Jims (**Gem**) the genre was set for self parody and flight from reality. With them the serials resemble a TV sit-com, where endless repetition, even idiocy, is accepted if the characters please – 'sui generous' as the critics say.

As girls' education followed boys', so did their stories. L T Meade and Evelyn Everett Green shadowed Reed and Harold Avery et al. By featuring the 'pickle' or engagingly naughty girl they helped on

The Greyfriars games master deals with the cad who came back to disgrace his alma mater – The Magnet

Classic Billy Bunter!

'God save the King!' A characteristic B.O.P. cover (1888)

the genre in the same direction. The fictional school was converted from one you ran away from to one you wished you could go to.

In the 1900s, Angela Brazil, Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Elinor Brent Dyer and Enid Blyton put their stamp on the girls' school yarn and kept it alive when the boys' story flagged.

The girls' story had a bad press until Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig (**You're a Brick, Angela!**) rescued it from the condescending 'jolly hockeysticks' label. They reveal incidentally that most of the magazine stories came from male writers!

In addition to the fun and freedom in exotic locations offered the pre-war boy reader (like myself), girls' stories offered the reader vigour in action often denied in real life and a bigger range of female characters than conventional children's fiction.

So the school story (four per cent of kids – 99 per cent of stories) gained an audience which outgrew the setting. By popularity's paradox ('give 'em what they like') it grew more conservative, stylised, ossified, while the fictional schoolkids never agreed. As Orwell wrote of Greyfriars: 'The year is 1910 or 1940, it is all the same.'

The contradiction between characters and audience in a genre can be exploited for escapist purposes. But the contradiction remains. In the end it undermines the genre itself.

But the school story did not die only of overwork. Why should a genre with high ideals end up an object of derision? Did later writers abandon the ethos? Or was the ethos itself flawed? Reed set it out: 'The strong fellow must look after the weak, the sharp must look after the duffer.'

The rise of the boarding school story coincided with the reform (1860s to 1880s) of the old public schools/grammar schools and the rise of the new 'private' school ('paying four per cent' as Stalky and Co put it).

The charitable foundations for poor scholars were clung on to while the scholars themselves were pushed out as 'totally unsuited to a classical education'. In their place came fee-payers. While the 'strong' kicked out the 'weak', the 'sharp' were busy altering the laws to sanctify the misuse of the charitable funds.

A common feature in the school story was to be the odd-one-out status of the day or scholarship pupil. Derided or victimised, or heorically winning acceptance, they were seen as exceptional in schools where they had been the rule. The term 'cad', used to describe the badly behaved, became a generic description for hostile townees outside the school. Down the peck order, behind day pupils and cads, came 'the remaining scum of the earth' as a Dutch correspondent satirically wrote in **Captain** magazine (1908).

The schools, as Isabel Quigly (**The Heirs of Tom Brown**) says were 'training grounds for sahibs' to rule the Empire (the second and world-wide act of robbery).

Harold Avery (the football pitch) and Henry Newbolt (the cricket pitch) saw the school's ethic leading inevitably to the desert/jungle battlefield. By 1917, Angela Brazil's 'Patriotic Schoolgirl' thought the entire Army was composed of ex-public schoolboys.

The contradiction between Newbolt's 'you cannot stand by while the weak are bullied by the strong' and an empire fostered by chicanery and held by force, could not be ignored. Surely it was not just over-repetition that led to Newbolt becoming sick of hearing 'There's a breathless hush . . .'

Kipling the intellectual imperialist knew imperial realities. In one poem written not long after leaving school he says:

> *'Two thousand pounds of education*
> *Fall to a ten rupee jezail.'*

But, in another poem, we hear that a hundred Burmese heads are the price of a white officer's life.

So Stalky and his friends don't want to talk about 'The School', 'The Empire'. They certainly don't want an outsider haranguing them about it. Feelings are best hidden. You don't run an Empire with your heart on your sleeve. The scene in **Stalky & Co** where bullies are tortured – in a good cause – is a classic end-and-means situation. Do what you have to, don't make speeches.

The genre is following the classic course – from assertion to assumption. But even the assertion was flawed from the start.

As the genre lost credibility, the counter-attack came. 'Sodden with imperical illusions,' said Orwell in 1940. But by the 1950s even the **Boy's Own Paper** letter columns were scathing in their denunciation of 'unreality' in the school serials. (Though they also said, in effect, bring back T B Reed!)

The rest was nostalgia and collectors' items. Though Billy Bunter, victim-triumphant, survived into the TV era when his tormentors were forgotten. And via radio, Anthony Buckeridge (1947) gave us the inimitable Jennings of Linbury Court Prep. But exceptions only proved the rule.

Blyton, Brent Dyer still sold. But of new input was there none. The critical 'Golden Age' of children's writing (1950s, 60s) was conspicuous for the lack of school stories.

Yet life itself was changing. Post 1944, millions of working-class kids, for whom real secondary education after 14 had been as much a fantasy as Greyfriars, began to fill the upper schools. The day-school pupil *had* to rise above the Plimsoll Line of Literature.

In 1949, Geoffrey Trease, pioneer of the new historical novel, after a discussion with day school pupils, wrote his trail-blazing Bannermere School series. Teachers in the new school system, like Wallace Hildick, conscious of the fact that pupils could not 'see themselves' in the school story followed suit.

Progress was slow, publishers reluctant. I was told in the 1960s that 'they' (you know who) don't want to read stories about themselves and their lives. As one person (best unknown) told me, 'let's not rub their noses in it'.

The first signs of real change came in the 1970s, with more teacher-writers like Gene Kemp and Bernard Ashley. Ashley's message that pupil does not mean white, was later pushed home by Farrukh Dhondy.

Gene Kemp's **Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler**, 1977 (Puffin, 0 14 031135 1, £2.50), with its catch ending, was an interesting case. Its vigorous girl central character carried out her pranks not in a girls' school but in the much different setting of a co-ed.

At first critics were often grumpy. The new school story was dreary and didactic, artificial, not significant in literary terms. They failed to see that the new was at the assertion stage. The assumption was just around the corner.

Then in 1978-79 **Grange Hill** came. Suddenly most school pupils (and many teachers) were eating their tea glued to the TV screen, watching a saga about themselves. It was a literary and a political turning point. As writer of four original novels accompanying Phil Redmond's TV stories, I got the full flavour of the controversy in 100 meetings and interviews during 1980-81.

> *'So this is what Comprehensive Schools are really like?'*
> *'The language! The violence!'*
> *'You, sir, are alienating the child from the teacher, the child from the parent.'*

What me, sir?

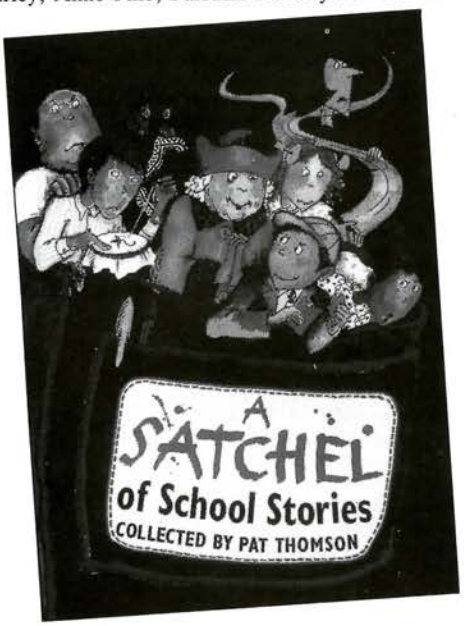
Significantly most hostile critics had never read nor watched **Grange Hill**. They did not have to. We were talking about a social phenomenon.

The bad language? There was none in the series. The BBC would not allow it. But to the hostile it was enough to hear the accents of the young actors. What were street children – who *must* use bad language – doing representing the *child* in our culture?

The first big chance in the new school story was personnel. *All* kids were there, as in real life.

Comparing **Chalet Girls in Camp** and **Grange Hill Goes Wild** in her unpublished thesis, Valerie Milner contrasts the Chalet pupils and staff 'of a type . . . the same class, educational standards . . . attitude . . . and privileged outlook', with Grange Hill's 'mixture of race and class'. Both books she saw as strongly moral. But the Chalet School's cloistered virtues – ideals much admired by adults – contrast with the Grange Hill kids who are 'not the embodiment of a childhood innocence . . . but often stubborn and self-willed'. Like Chalet pupils, Grange Hillites come through, but 'not before they have a chance to reach a deeper understanding of human actions and motives . . .'

In the old story, sexes are segregated, town out of bounds to school. In the new, the expression 'all in' means what it says. And the same is true of the new literature (one must now say literature rather than genre) of the 1970s and 1980s. Just read the short stories of, say, George Layton, Jan Mark, Jean Ure, Pete Johnson, Berlie Doherty, Rex Varley, Anne Fine, Farrukh Dhondy. All human life really is there!



Within 'school' literature we get the romance, the fantasy. Pat Thomson's new collection **A Satchel of School Stories** (Doubleday, 0 385 40288 0, £8.99) is strong on the wildest fantasy. (As a card-carrying social realist, I've written three fantasy novels and a series set in school.) We have school detective series, stories about bullying. Tony Bradman's **Good Sports! A Bag of Sports Stories** (Doubleday, 0 385 402325 5, £8.99) is mostly school-set. Exotic locations – space schools. Exotic pupils – dragons, etc. You name it.

As a parting shot the critics have complained that the new wants to banish the old, that boarders will be deprived of their corner in the story. But this is a revolution devoid of destruction. We have a variety of schools in Britain – always have had. Now we have the complete range of stories to go with it. Literature has caught up with life and not before time.

New and old share common elements, though. The most important is friendship. Sheila Ray says of Blyton's tales: 'They appeal to children at a time when the peergroup are important and membership of a gang is most children's ideal.'

In the 1890s, Avery's Diggory and Rats 'fall into each other's arms', at Greyfriars, D'arcy and his chums do likewise, hooting with laughter. In Rob Child's **The Big Hit**, 1991 (Corgi, 0 552 526622, £2.25), Andrew and Chris 'danced off the pitch together, their arms clumsily locked around each other's shoulders'.

Other common features: a recent book of Pete Johnson's offered 'baiting masters, taking the mickey out of swots', as well as 'keeping up with your own and everyone else's love life'.

Brian Doyle writes of the 'death, disgrace, bullying, sin and tears' in **Tom Brown** and **Eric** . . .

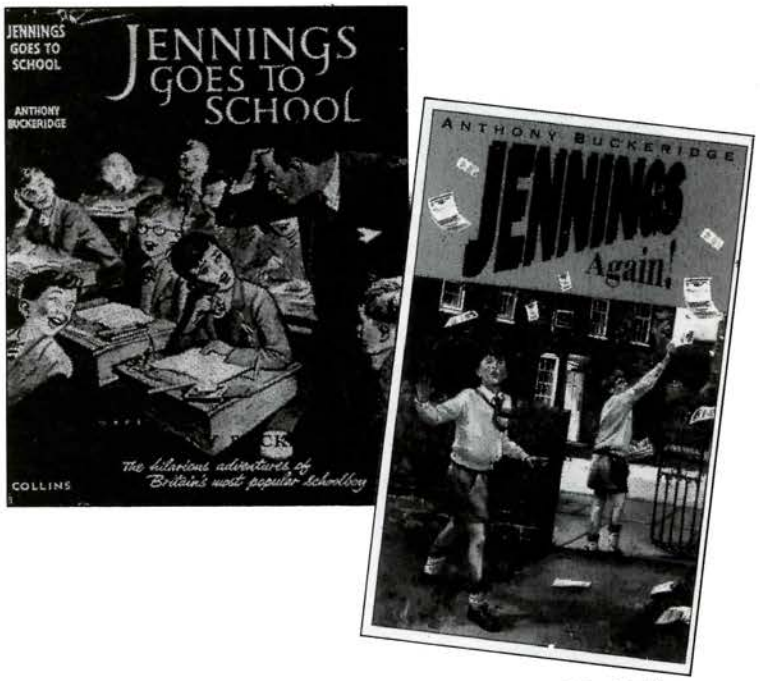
Last year some third-years, wanting to help me, sent me this list of obligatory items for 'better school stories':

> *Rivalry over girl/boy friends, skiving, smoking in toilets, weird hairstyles, teachers beating up pupils, fights after school, glue, drugs, gas, sex, bitchy fights between girls, back chat with teachers, police, really big fights, children picked on, swearing at teachers, no school uniform, no games kit, love affairs, vandalism, school competitions, sponsored walks, friends helping each other, nowhere to go.*

Human relations are constant: the humour, the pathos, the ongoing hysteria of children and adults penned up together most of the year, with the rest of the world eyeing them suspiciously.

As we said, we now deal with real people. Farrukh Dhondy's pupils are a million miles from Greyfriars' Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. But then the amiable Frank Richards thought 'foreigners *are* funny'. That won't do now, sir.

The ethos of the school has been brought back into synch with the real world. Buckeridge's Linbury Court, where staff and pupils never age, is sometimes held up as an example of the eternal appeal of the old story.



I will venture an alternative opinion. When Jennings and Darbishire first appeared in 1947, not only were they part of the sunset of the old but also the dawn of the new. For all their deliberately archaic jargon, their attitudes are not archaic. They do not regard the towns folk as 'cads' and if you asked either of them, 'What is a "master race"?', they'd answer without batting an eyelid – 'Staff three-legged event on Founder's Day, sir.'

Plus c'est la même chose, plus ça change! ■

Sources quoted:

You're a Brick, Angela!, Mary Cadogan, Patricia Craig, Gollancz (1985), 0 575 03825 X, £4.95

Reading and Righting, Robert Leeson, Collins (1985), o/p

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Boys Will Be Boys, E S Turner, Penguin (1976), o/p

Thesis on 'Popular School Stories', Valerie Milner, Leeds Polytechnic (1988)

Tom Brown's Schooldays, Collins, 0 00 693705 5, £2.25; Puffin, 0 14 035022 5, £2.99

Eric, or Little by Little, o/p

Chalet Girls in Camp, Collins, 0 00 691136 6, £2.25

Grange Hill Goes Wild, o/p

Jennings titles are published by Pan Macmillan.

Greyfriars titles are published by Quiller Press & Hawk Books. Facsimiles of original **Magnet** editions are published by Howard Baker.

Robert Leeson is the author of 42 books for children and young people. He also writes for radio, theatre and TV. His latest school book is **No Sleep for Hob Lane**, published by Hamish Hamilton as an 'Antelope', 0 241 13180 4, £4.99. Inexplicably, his **Reading and Righting** (see above) is now unavailable . . . a case for reprinting, perhaps?

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Series Editor
Anne Harvey

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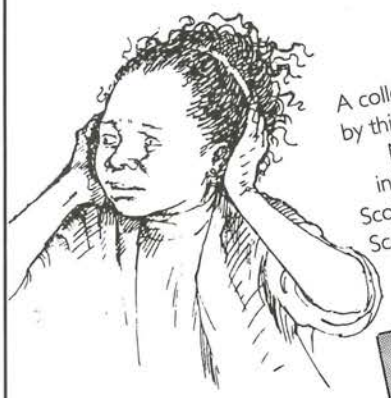

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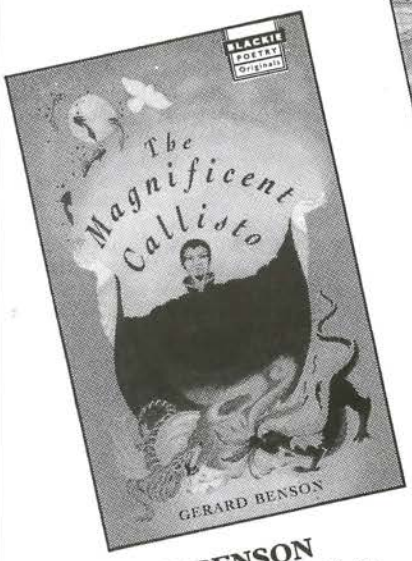

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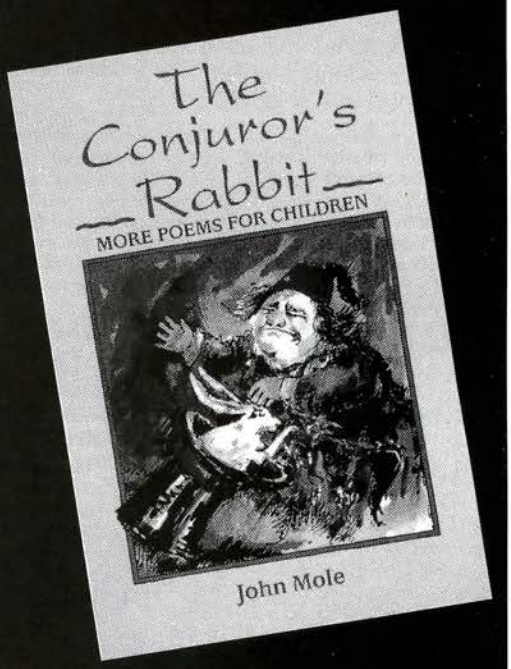

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REVIEWS

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

Harvey's Ark
Robin Kingsland, Puffin (Mar 92), 0 14 034922 7, £2.50

There's still relatively little Science Fiction for younger readers so it's good to see this zany tale of a rather unusual space pilot and his animal crew. Not an easy read despite its appearance, this seemingly madcap account of a visit to Phungus 5 has an important ecological message for everyone. JB

Words and Pictures
Siobhan Dodds, Walker (Apr 92), 0 7445 2385 0, £3.99

Softly coloured drawings bring this very first picture dictionary/storybook to life allowing adult and child to discuss and enjoy topics and experiences connected to home. Useful for 2-4 year-olds. MS

Kipper
Mick Inkpen, Picture Knight (Apr 92), 0 340 56564 0, £3.50

Kipper is a dog and this is the story of his search for a better place to sleep because his own basket is so smelly and horrid. He wonders about being a duck, or a frog, or a sheep, or a rabbit, but finally has to return to his own familiar basket which he decides isn't so bad after all. A good, secure, happy ending makes this a splendid book for 3-5s. MS

When We Went to the Zoo
Jan Ormerod, Walker (May 92), 0 7445 2318 4, £4.99

I think this is the very best work so far from this well-known and talented illustrator . . . a truly beautiful book which takes us through the zoo and introduces a variety of creatures in a most original way.

Each double-page spread has a different layout, rich in colour and detail. The children in the book are fascinated by the zoo animals they meet, and by the sparrow *they* finally spy at the end. Lucky the adult who shares this title with children. MS

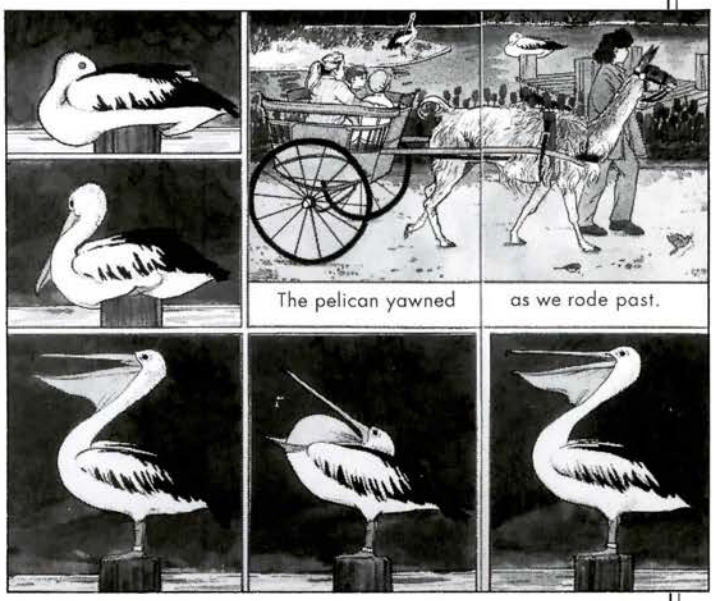
Can Do
Joyce Dunbar and Carol Thompson, Simon & Schuster (May 92), 0 7500 0770 2, £3.99

Being the youngest or smallest isn't always easy, but here's a good picture book to help with the problem. The child in the illustrations is wishing . . . to fly like a bird or swim like a tadpole, but soon realises this isn't possible. So he/she decides to do what he/she can do . . . hop, skip, jump, which leads to whistling a tune, spinning a web like a spider, or catching the tooth fairy – all interesting wishes and ones within a small child's perspective. I like the attitude of this book – it shows empathy for the feelings small children may experience. MS

Crocodile Beat
Gail Jorgensen, ill. Patricia Mullins, Red Fox (May 92), 0 09 997370, £3.99

A really satisfying book that I know I'll read again and again. The mean and hungry crocodile is waiting to catch his meal – Gail Jorgensen's rhyming text builds to a climax as the animals come to the water hole to drink, but the King of Beasts sorts him out!

The rhyme form gives it power and an African heartbeat, while Patricia Mullins' collage illustrations make one itch to feel a texture. Congratulations to Red Fox for the generous size and sumptuous quality of its production. JS



From Jan Ormerod's **When We Went to the Zoo**.

It Was Jake!
Anita Jeram, Walker (Apr 92), 0 7445 2310 9, £2.99

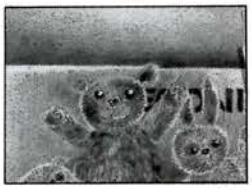
This is a story about a boy (Danny) and his dog (Jake). What fun they have playing together, although they do get into a bit of a mess and Danny's mother is cross . . . so he blames Jake for things that are his own fault. A good plot for 4-6 year-olds tussling with rules and learning social skills. It's funny, too, because at the end Jake *does* do something which Danny finds a bit unfair. MS

The Little Man
Graham Jeffery, Dent (May 92), 0 460 88069 1, £3.50

A simple, delightful story about a wee boy and his Dad drawing a picture together, and putting in all the things they have – each other, Mum, their house and garden and objects in them. Attractive, detailed pictures give the looking child a visual treat. MS

Ruby
Maggie Glen, Red Fox (May 92), 0 09 986550 0, £3.99

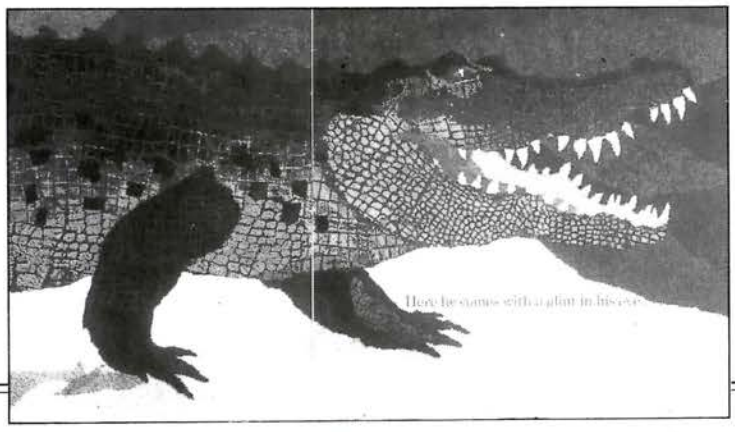
In Ruby, a teddy bear discarded by the factory as a 'second', we have a charming new heroine fighting for the individual's right to be different. She proves that the 'S' stamped on her paw actually does stand for 'special' as she had originally thought.



There are some powerful hidden agendas in this story, and while all the children agreed it was a good story, a number reflected later on how it made them think. JS

But No Elephants
Jerry Smath, Picture Puffin (May 92), 0 14 054375 9, £3.50

This title has been a firm favourite in hardback form so it's good to see it in paperback at last. Grandma Tildy's gradual acquisition of pets is always accompanied by her adamant refusal to accept the elephant, but when he's abandoned at her door she finally comes to accept him with hilarious consequences. Super to read aloud, but has also worked well with fledgling, independent readers. JS



INFANT / JUNIOR

The Midnight Feast

Hannah Cole, Walker (Apr 92), 0 7445 2306 0, £2.99

Four girls and their mothers form the entire cast of this highly credible tale of friendship and sisterhood.

Rose and Shireen plan to celebrate their new friendship by holding a secret midnight feast, but Rose's older friend, Tanya, is excluded from the evening, and her bossy big sister gatecrashes when Rose falls asleep. This very simple plot carries a frank and accessible account of emotions and relationships. A warm, unsentimental book whose straightforward style should appeal to younger readers.

GH

The School Cat

Anne Mangan, ill. Jolyne Knox, Young Knight (Jun 92), 0 340 56884 4, £2.99

One of a series of attractive stories for those children who are newly fluent, but haven't the stamina for 'chapter books'. The print is clear, the paper smooth and white, and there are lots of excellent, coloured pictures. What's more, the story is good too (despite some oddities; few primary schools have a 'science room' or a 'craft teacher'?). Fred is a kitten adopted by the children in the school. He runs away (from an unusually bad-tempered teacher) and the finding of him leads the headteacher to discover something new about her shyest slow reader.

Highly recommended in all respects.

LW

Wellington and the Blue Balloon

0 7445 2154 8

The MacWomble's Pipe Band

0 7445 2152 1

Elisabeth Beresford, ill. Edgar Hodges, Walker (Apr 92), £2.99 each

It comes as a bit of a shock to realise that these Womble stories were first published in 1975. Both new editions are bright, full-colour picture books (one story per book) with big print and a flash across the cover 'Now seen on TV'. This suggests the Wombles films are staging a revival which should help the popularity of these reprints. They're best read to infants, I think, as the language and content are complex for young children to get into alone. Older children rather scorn the babyish aura of 'Kiddies' telly' that hangs about them. A welcome return, however, and attractively produced.

LW

Jack and the Beanstalk

Val Biro, Oxford (Apr 92), 0 19 272249 2, £2.95

Val Biro has made a niche for himself producing traditional tales in a form easily digestible for younger age groups. This is a well-written book, appealingly illustrated in a style which distances the children from the more horrific elements of the story. It's an excellent introduction to this tale, but I'd hate to think it was the last experience a child would have of such a powerful story . . .

JS

Gertie's Gang

Margaret Joy, Young Puffin (May 92), 0 14 034303 2, £2.50

Both infant teachers and their children will immediately recognise and respond to the scenes so delightfully and realistically portrayed in these six short stories which feature Gertie and friends in Miss Parry's class. Perfect for sharing with those around six and for those just starting to read solo.

JB

The Moon Jumpers

Janice May Udry, ill. Maurice Sendak, Picture Lions (May 92), 0 00 664079 6, £3.50

Some books send a shiver of delight through the reader and this is in that class. It has an almost unearthly quality about it that reaches into one,

drawing out long-forgotten images of childhood, yet it also seems to have just as powerful a link with the child reading it afresh today. The Moon Jumpers (the children of the story) are out in the summer night and are at one with the night – Udry's writing and Sendak's illustrations create an unforgettable evocation of childhood.

JS

The Thing in the Sink

Frieda Hughes, ill. Chris Riddell, Simon & Schuster (May 92), 0 7500 1171 8, £3.50

In contrast to many other publishers who seem to be going to the cheap and nasty end of the market, Simon & Schuster are producing some excellent, high-quality titles in their 'Young Books' series. This is one of them.

A funny story of Peter who has to do a school project (quaintly called an essay, which might need explanation) about his pet. Only he hasn't one – until the Thing in the Sink turns up! The lively, comic illustrations support this original and well-written short novel admirably. So long as your children are old enough not to be frightened of what might be down the plughole in the bath, this will be a hit – whether read aloud or for independent reading.

LW

A Nice Walk in the Jungle

Nan Bodsworth, Picture Puffin (May 92), 0 14 054127 6, £2.99

There's a surrealistic quality to this book which is disturbing and yet incredibly compulsive. The children returned to it time and time again. Miss Jellaby takes her class for a walk in the jungle and is so intent on pointing out things of educational interest, that she misses a great deal of what the children see. Most importantly, though, she's totally oblivious of the fact that her class is being eaten, one by one, by a boa constrictor. She also ignores Tim's attempts to draw this to her attention.

Miss Jellaby does rescue the children, with satisfying panache which was hugely enjoyed by my class. Some of the younger ones were worried by the whole book and a very articulate child said that though she liked the book she 'didn't like it that Miss Jellaby didn't listen and notice what was going because that was what teachers *should* do!' Out of the mouths of babes!

JS

Little Pig's Tale

Nigel Gray, ill. Mary Rees, Walker (May 92), 0 7445 2317 6, £3.99

A splendid book for infants and destined to become a classic, I suspect. Little Pig's attempts to fulfil his grandiose plans to make a present for his mum's birthday will bring an affectionate smile to any adult who's dealt with the disappointment of children attempting something beyond their materials and abilities. The children, too, were really involved in his trials. Little Pig does find a lovely present at the thoroughly satisfying end of this large-format, high-quality picture book.

LW

Joseph and his Magnificent Coat of Many Colours

Marcia Williams, Walker (Apr 92), 0 7445 1788 5, £3.99

There can be few children or adults who don't know every detail of this familiar bible story thanks to the Rice/Lloyd Webber musical. Here, in strip cartoon presentation, Marcia Williams matches the colour and verve of the stage production, each page being framed within a proscenium arch or borders decorated with animals, patterns and hieroglyphs.

JB

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

Aunt Augusta's Elephant

Geoffrey Trease, Piper (Mar 92), 0 330 32276 1, £2.99

A nicely paced, short adventure story which mixes the precise detail of its Bath location and the historical facts of the Fabergé eggs. Nicola and Tim are the only ones available to clear out their great-aunt's flat. They have begun to sort what they want to keep when an apparent friend of their great-aunt turns up and then disappears with the beautifully crafted, jewelled egg with its wonderful mechanical elephant inside. The chase and regaining of the egg are exciting without ever being drawn out, which will make this an easy and worthwhile read for many children. AJ

The Tunnel

Anthony Browne, Walker (May 92), 0 7445 1792 3, £3.99

An outdoor-loving extrovert brother and a book-loving introvert sister are always arguing, but their mum sends them off together to play. He finds a tunnel and wants to explore; she doesn't, but when he fails to come back, she goes searching for him despite her fear. Inside the tunnel and Browne's illustrations is a world drawn from her imagination and the fairy tale, a world which has to be explored. How much of this world the reader discovers will depend upon powers of observation and his or her own imagination and knowledge of fairy tales. This is Browne at his most haunting. JB

The Magic Skateboard

Enid Richemont, ill. Jan Ormerod, Walker (May 92), 0 7445 2322 2, £2.99

A bit late to catch the skateboard cult, this is a sparkling story anyway. Just before Christmas, Danny and his mates are reluctant to leave after a smashing end of term panto. On his way home, a weird woman in black 'borrows' his skateboard and not only outperforms him with her skill and tricks but lends him her magical powers for a

while. The sky is no limit and his imagination, once encouraged, knows no bounds. It's a sizzling, pacy adventure with lots of short episodes. PH

The Magical Bicycle

Elana Bregin, Mammoth (May 92), 0 7497 0939 1, £2.99

The South African background to this story is sketched with a light touch. Tom, a young black boy whose mother is employed in a wealthy white town, is aware of the struggle for freedom; for him, though, freedom is the bicycle he's always wanted, provided for him by a strange old woman with magic powers. A warm-hearted fantasy with a realistic setting, straightforward enough for juniors to read alone. LN

Hungarian Folk Tales

Retold and ill. Val Biro, Oxford (Apr 92), 0 19 274148 9, £4.95

Seven-headed dragons and flying palaces, triumphant simpletons and murderous stepmothers, honest thieves and salvational animals; these stories glitter with the repetitive, but endlessly fascinating, preoccupations of folklore. The final tale, 'Briar Peter', was a particular favourite with my audience – perhaps because its account of the triumph of an innocent exile through his kindness towards distressed wildlife elegantly subsumed so many of these motifs.

Concisely retold and simply illustrated, this well-presented book is ideal for sharing or for savouring alone. GH

Fay Cow and the Honey Machine

Peter Hunt, 0 7445 2314 1

Smudge

Alison Morgan, 0 7445 2302 8

Walker 'Doubles' (Apr 92), £2.99 each

The imprint Walker 'Doubles' simply means there are two stories in one book . . . not such a radical concept as the publicity would suggest. However, this does mean they're good value, being well-produced and satisfying to handle. Aimed at the fluent, but not yet sophisticated reader, the largish print is split up into short chapters and by small black-and-white drawings.

The first title here I found rather contrived and worthy, carrying lots of messages about where cheese and honey come from, being tolerant of those less socially fortunate than oneself, and being friends. However, it's well-written and interesting.

Smudge has two stories about an old dog who manages to lead the two children who take him for walks into quite plausible and entertaining adventures.

Both books have the virtue of not talking down to, or playing up to, their audience and young Juniors would certainly enjoy them. LW

Panic at Pinnacle Primary

Danny Spanner, ill. Tony Blundell, Simon & Schuster (May 92), 0 7500 0416 9, £3.50

Shades of Gradgrind and Dickens here with the 'progressive' Pinnacle Primary being closed down, and the 'traditional' Grindem County Primary taking on new children they don't really like the look of. The first nasty surprise comes after the reading test – inconveniently the Pinnacle Primary children come top! More surprises and intrigue follow in rapid succession, and fiddling the reading test results is nothing compared to what the children are prepared to do to regain their old school.

I loved it. A read-aloud that appeals to us teachers, with plenty of in-jokes, is long overdue. Oh yes, the children loved it, too! PH

A Child of Their Own

Justine Rendal, Young Lions (May 92), 0 00 674008 1, £2.99

The adventures of a family of upper-crust porcelain dolls and their more 'common' china companions when they are bought from a London toyshop and exported to America. All the social niceties and nastinesses that operate in 'the Real' are reflected in the lives of the dolls, leading to family tensions and eventual near-tragedy.

The narrator's voice is gentle and school ma'amish; she makes occasional asides to the reader and eventually steps into the story herself. The eeriness and poignancy which seems to characterise toyshop dramas is vividly conveyed in a book that deserves a wider and more critical audience than is usual for such stories. GH

Hannah and Darjeeling

Diana Hendry, Walker 'Doubles' (Apr 92), 0 7445 2303 6, £2.99

In 'The Not-Anywhere House' (the first story in this book), Hannah and her family's move from country village to the city is not one she faces with any enthusiasm: Dungee Farm Cottage has been her home for as long as she can remember and of course Darjeeling is a 'country cat'. Despite her parents' efforts to reassure and encourage her, both before and after moving day, Hannah has to find her own solace in the vast Monterey Pine growing outside her attic bedroom window.

The second story tells of Hannah's developing friendship with Jenny and Eliza and how Mrs Middlesome-Merry's Rainbow Watchers become not two but three. Hannah's feelings about moving are sensitively portrayed in a book whose emotional content is strong and whose imaginatively chosen language will draw and hold solo readers from about eight. JB

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

INKLINGS

Summer
is just around the corner
they say.

Look
the inklings of a shadow.
Hooray!

Pillow Talk – a book of poems

Roger McGough, ill. Steven Guarnaccia, Puffin (May 92), 0 14 032504 2, £2.99

POETRY

Roger McGough plays serious games with words in this splendid collection. He prises words apart then sets them up in new patterns that suddenly make something fresh, funny and unexpected – 'Tuna sandwiches' for instance is short, deceptively simple and incredibly clever. I read it with my class of Y6s and they wanted to try it too. I loved the alternative version of 'The Sun has got his hat on' – it could brighten up assembly no end. We explored the style of 'She thinks she's it' – brilliantly constructed, mind-numbingly difficult to do! PH

Pig

Paul Geraghty, Red Fox (May 92), 0 09 989710 5, £2.99

A recent move from the rural outposts of South Africa to an urban mêlée simply focuses the concerns and difficulties of any 11-year-old boy: the desire for peer approval, the need to have a place in the social order.

What singles Mike out for particularly brutal treatment is his inability to conform to a regime which refuses to acknowledge the worth of its black people. It's the universality of the theme and Mike's embarrassed, but determined, stoicism which make the book so appealing. The soccer content will also endear it to Lower School boys, as will its pacy style and manageable length. VR

The Red Towers of Granada

Geoffrey Trease, ill. Charles Keeping, Piper (May 92), 0 330 32628 7, £3.50

A swashbuckling adventure with the bonus of powerfully distinctive illustrative work. In this 1966 re-release, Trease evokes the flavour of thirteenth-century life in England and Spain with this usual meticulous attention to historical detail. Robin of Westwood is exiled from his village, wrongly believed to be suffering from leprosy. He falls in with Solomon of Stamford – a Jewish doctor – and his family. When Solomon is summoned by the dying Queen Eleanor to seek the Golden Essence which may save her life, their journey to Spain begins. They are pursued by ruthless villains, compelled to fight for their lives, sheltered by Jewish and Moslem communities. Tension and reader interest are maintained throughout and the two female characters are, refreshingly, more than the mere ciphers too often encountered in this genre.

A most useful addition to Lower School book boxes – second-year boys, in particular, will find much to hold their attention. Cross-curricular links with History are easily pursued through books of this kind. VR

Shapeshifter

Laurence Staig, Lions (May 92), 0 00 674373 0, £3.50

Slow to settle down, but a high energy fantasy after that with some very powerful scenes. A widower of a few years, Farris brings his three daughters to stay with him while he renovates the stained glass of an old church. The nasty past is bound up in the glass but is released by young Sprog who makes friends with 'Mr Damp' and his toad companions and is almost sacrificed by them in the chilling and dramatic ending. AJ

Juniper

Monica Furlong, Corgi (May 92), 0 552 52703 3, £2.99

The key to true wisdom comes from deep inside – this is what Ninnoc, Cornish princess and

erstwhile 'doran' (or wise woman), must learn. The lesson is not *taught* by Euny, her doran godmother: rather she sets the paths which lead Ninnoc to a fuller understanding of her own potential. Her first real test comes when she must lift the spell of sorcery laid by the witch, Meroot.

This is about the triumph of good over evil – it's also about the internal struggles for self-knowledge and understanding which beset us all. A wise book, indeed; the more distinctive for the very human qualities of its heroine. It's hard to identify with a remotely perfect figure – here, we are never asked to do so. VR

Prayers from the Ark

Carmen Bernos de Gasztold, trans. Rumer Godden, ill. Jean Primrose, Pan (Jun 92), 0 330 32438 1, £4.99

POETRY

'I . . . was instantly caught by their charm, but do not be alarmed; the charm has nothing to do with whimsy': Rumer Godden's prologue and epilogue give masses of background information about these 26 devotional poems (originally written in French) and their author. The essential characteristics of each creature are encapsulated with sensitivity and insight providing plenty to ponder upon and discuss. The illustrations add to the overall effect with their simple, expressive lines set in large white spaces. Worth inspecting with an eye on assemblies. DB

The King of Rock and Roll

Jon Blake, Walker (Apr 92), 0 7945 2311 7, £2.99

Like a late twentieth-century fairy story, this short tale has goodies, baddies, crumbling castles and magic moments set against a backdrop of faded rock 'n' roll showmanship. And like all good fairy stories it has at its heart a kernel of profound wisdom and insight. The message to follow your dreams and be positive about seeking your strengths and talents is strong, all of which the weird red-haired Johnny Zinc teaches the disparate gang of four in this well-recommended fast read. DB

Quest for a Queen – The Falcon

Frances Mary Hendry, Kelpie (Jun 92), 0 86241 365 6, £2.95

This is historical fiction with a wonderful density – full of life and action. The first of a trilogy about Mary Queen of Scots, it centres on Leezie, a dashing and hardened young girl, more at home in 'breeks' than a dress, who is drawn into the periphery of Mary's entourage. The facts and names of history come to life here in a world of smells and sounds where human feelings register the awfulness of the intrigue and murders that accompany Mary's career. It's not an easy read but it's worth it. Look out for the next two. AJ

French Legends, Tales and Fairy Stories

Retold by Barbara Leonie Picard, Oxford (Apr 92), 0 19 274149 7, £4.95

I wouldn't be surprised if the Nat. Curric. hasn't drawn this from the dust of the backlists. French epic heroes, medieval courtly tales and provincial folk legends are arranged in separate sections and told in a very acessible style, with a commendable variety of story lengths that encourages dipping at odd moments. It should prove a useful introduction to literature from other cultures, pre-twentieth century, and even for cross-curricular links; my copy has been commandeered by the modern languages dept. DB

Riding the Waves

Theresa Tomlinson, Walker (Apr 92), 0 7445 2312 5, £2.99

'You mustn't never give up. You have to sort yourself out, get yourself together and start all over again.' She might be referring to surfing but Florrie's words are also applicable to herself, on the doorstep of frail old age and riven by long-term guilt, and to Matt, suddenly sensitive to his situation as an adopted child.

There's good humour and sound wisdom in this worthy story which was a Carnegie recommendation. DB

The Second Hand Horse and other stories

William Mayne, Mammoth (May 92), 0 7497 0948 0, £2.99

These eight stories tinged with mystery and intrigue are comfortably well-crafted. The beast of the title embarrasses his teetotal pledged owner by stopping obstinately at every pub for reasons that only latterly become apparent. The motives of the children in 'A Stall in the Market' are to keep their injured father's place in the traders' pecking order, and the rejected bandmaster in 'Down in the Dump' seeks revenge through the music of other folks' garbage. Worth a copy for indulgent story-telling sessions. DB

Voices After Midnight

Richard Peck, Piper (Jun 92), 0 330 32448 9, £3.50

This has it all – time-slip, romance, the American culture (I use that word loosely!) so beloved of teenage TV addicts and an element of mystery and suspense. Brothers Chad and Luke discover, on a family trip to New York, that they are able to travel through time – back to the terrible blizzards of 1888. They become involved in a rescue which proves to be significant for them: they save their own relatives. The plot is often tense and well-paced, though the time-travel sequences are sometimes too wordy. The boys' sister, Heidi, is an irritating character who falls uneasily between humour and pathos.

I think Year 8 and up will be absorbed – it would probably transfer well to television, too. VR

Alf's Secret War

Donald Lightwood, Kelpie (June 92), 0 86241 383 4, £2.95

The plight of the child Music Hall performer, left in the care of relatives whilst his parents are engaged in the war effort is an unusual theme, but here told rather slowly. However, the detail is fascinating even down to the period figures of speech. The late introduction of Audrey, the utterly deprived ugly duckling, who under the mac was a swan, made me want to turn the pages more willingly. DB

OLDER READERS

Tehanu

Ursula Le Guin, Puffin (Mar 92), 0 14 034802 6, £3.50

Being drawn into this fourth and final 'Earthsea' novel is both to remember the power and skill of Le Guin's writing and to discover with enormous pleasure a whole new level of engagement with the material. As the characters have matured, so has the writer, choosing to recast this final version of Earthsea from the perspective of age, women and the powerless. The story centres on Tenar, the princess from the second book. Having just buried her husband, she acts as mother to a young girl, horribly scarred, physically and mentally as the victim of abuse, attends Ogion's final days and then receives Ged as he returns from the battle seen in the third book, drained of his power and confidence. Death, weakness and fear mark the whole book, there is no longer the childish security of magic to ward off evil and at several points we seem very close to losing the security of any kind of 'happy' ending. In seeing Earthsea from the point of view of the powerless and exposing the blindness and partiality of the male-dominated world of power, we are given a new, rich creation which flames out of the embers of the earlier books. It's difficult to see it standing apart from the trilogy preceding it, but what a conclusion, what a joy to read. AJ

I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine: Anthology of Women's Poetry

POETRY

Carol Ann Duffy, Viking, 0 670 83659 1, £6.99

Poems about various stages and roles in women's lives, with line-drawings and an eye-catching cover design by Trisha Rafferty. This is a multi-cultural contemporary mix, offering poems by familiar writers such as Phoebe Hesketh, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Fleur Adcock, as well as new names.

An attractive book for classroom use or for teenagers to read alone though, as with most such collections, it contains rather too much unremarkable free verse. LN

Mind the Gap

POETRY

Michael Rosen, Adlib (May 92), 0 590 55012 8, £4.99

Lots of anecdotes as poems with the usual bright and very funny voice of the poet clowning for attention. But there are other voices here too, sometimes harsh and even bitter, as Rosen edges his humour into areas of race and political injustice. Teenagers will love it – some of it immediately. Worth buying as many as you can afford. It's a fine collection, both in the poems themselves and the orchestration of the easy and uneasy laughter. AJ

Strange Orbit

Margaret Simpson, Adlib (May 92), 0 590 55013 6, £4.99

Combining scientific ideas from **A Brief History of Time** with the humour of **A Hitchhiker's Guide**, plus added elements of Eastern spiritual teachings and environmentalism, **Strange Orbit** is certainly different. Teenage Jessica is chosen as crew for a trip to the moon; when the spaceship misses its target and heads for the far reaches of the universe, she faces ordinary human problems of living in a cramped space as well as trying to solve the mystery of the Meaning of Life. The striking cover and engaging contents make this an ideal book for reluctant readers, although its appeal is by no means limited to them. LN

The Burning Baby and other ghosts

John Gordon, Walker (May 92), 0 7445 2133 5, £4.99

The kindly Walker bear and his candle look a bit out of place in these surroundings. The five ghost stories here are about death, and there is little gentleness except that which acts as a prelude to the nastiness. It's not hard to admire John Gordon's skill in plotting these stories, his ability to hold the tension is as strong as ever, but they are more disturbing for the lack and denial of human sympathy. AJ

Becca's Race

Bette Paul, Adlib (May 92), 0 590 55052 7, £4.99

Scholastic don't seem able to put a foot wrong – this addition to the Adlib list is both sensitive and entertaining. Becca is Digby's elder sister – as glamorous as he is plain, as athletic as he is bookish. When she contracts leukaemia, he must cope with many changes – in Becca, his parents, and his younger brother. Most of all in his attitude to himself. Suzy is the idol he worships from afar and when he realises his affection is reciprocated he must re-evaluate his own poor self-image.

An engaging book, never sentimental and with a credible cast of characters. Digby is the quietly witty and eccentric star. VR

The Shield Ring

Rosemary Sutcliff, Puffin (May 92), 0 14 034969 3, £3.99

Why re-release a book first published in 1956? Simply because it's a compelling narrative, rich in character, action and descriptive detail.

The Shield Ring is the Vikings' stronghold in the heart of the Lake District; a protection against the brutal treatment of the Normans. Bjorn fears that he may not withstand torture if captured and may betray his people. With Frytha, rescued as a small child from a Norman attack on her home and family, he proves his worth and, with his kinsmen, fights for the freedom of their land.

A meticulously researched story, accurate in place names, events and language. Though sometimes long-winded, it makes a consuming read for pupils of 12 and upwards. VR

REVIEWERS in this issue

David Bennett, Jill Bennett, Pam Harwood, George Hunt, Adrian Jackson, Linda Newbery, Val Randall, Judith Sharman, Moira Small and Liz Waterland.

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READATHON 92

YOUNG Telegraph

A Sponsored Reading Event in aid of The Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children

Organised by BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

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Readathon 1992 is dedicated to the memory of Roald Dahl, Honorary Chairman of Readathon for 5 years.

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The Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children

AUDIO TAPES

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

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

100 Nursery Rhymes, Parts 1 and 2

Performed by Mark Ponsford and Kirsty Purves, Webucational (PO Box 81, Wimborne, BH21 3UT; tel: 0202 887439), one cassette, 20 mins, £5.99 each + £1.95 p&p

A particularly useful cassette for babies and toddlers – leave it on while they're going to sleep to guard against spooks and spiders. Each lively rhyme lasts from 30 seconds to 1½ minutes, running straight into the next with a contrasting musical arrangement. The words are all perfectly clear, the pace is fast without being hectic and the rhythms much zippier than in traditional lullaby-like presentations. There are 50 rhymes on each cassette: in fact every one you can think of – and more!

Counting

Rhona Whiteford and James Fitzsimmons, perf. Anon, one cassette with 24-page Little Owl hardback, 30 mins, Little Owl (Egmont House, PO Box 111, 61 Gt Ducie Street, Manchester M60 3BL; tel: 061 834 3110), £3.49

The Little Owl range offers lively books and learning tapes for the 3-7 age range. **Counting** is a cheerful book with a brightly illustrated circus theme where a new numbered character joins the picture for each number up to 10. The rhyming text is simple: 'Next comes an acrobat / How many more? / Watch him somersault / That makes four.' One side of the tape goes through the book with catchy songs to a simple and infectious beat and a Little Owl turn-over-tone hoot. The other side has seven counting songs like 'Five Fat Sausages' attractively sung for joining in.

Times Tables

Rhona Whiteford, perf. Anon, one cassette with 24-page Little Owl hardback, 30 mins, Little Owl, £3.49

Infant teacher Rhona Whiteford says in her introduction 'learning can and should be enjoyable' and this certainly is a chirpy learning product. The book is clear and yet full of detail and includes a Certificate on the last page for a parent to sign when the tables are learned. The songs are intentionally and effectively repetitive, the female voice pleasant and young children really can learn from this package as they join in. All 12 times tables are covered and the songs progress from running through the tables to leaving gaps for the child to fill in.

Peter Pan

The Wind in the Willows

The Wizard of Oz

Just So Stories

Read by George Layton, Collins Audio 'Carnival Classics', each title one cassette with hardback, 23-32 mins, £3.49 each

These classics, all retold for young children, make good listening. There are plenty of lively, coloured illustrations in each sturdy book – the best for **Just So Stories**. The cassettes follow the text word for word so children can read along. George Layton's narration is straight: without sound effects or turn-over tone and with a variety of pace, accents and characterisation – like swaggering Toad, Captain Hook's bravado and the insistence of the Baby Elephant. The print is quite small, but each story makes satisfying listening and reading for up to 10-year-olds.

The Minpins

Roald Dahl, read by Richard Pasco, Random Century Tellastory, one cassette, 55 mins, £3.99

While his mother is doing the ironing, Little Billy wanders into the Forest of Sin where he discovers the tiny Minpins that populate the trees. They are preyed upon by a typically horrible Dahl monster and it's little Billy who outwits it, causing it to blunder into a pool, extinguish its cruel fire and drown. The tape is carefully and imaginatively produced with authentic sounds and atmospheric music underscoring the story. Little Billy's quick breathing as he runs away from the monster is particularly effective. Richard Pasco's professional narration really does draw the listener into the Minpin world.

Worzel Gummidge

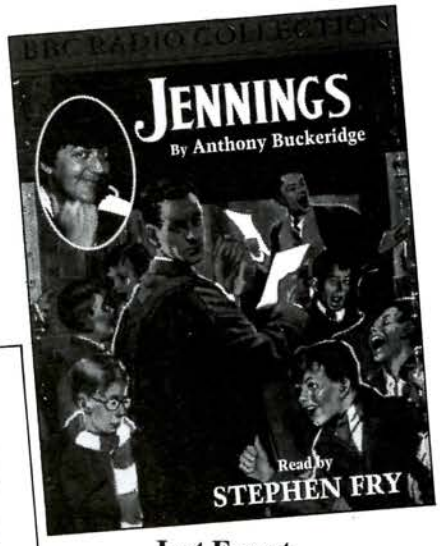
Barbara Euphan Todd, read by Jon Pertwee, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £6.99

An abridged version of the original Gummidge, not the one re-written for television. This is the first story in which John and Susan discover that Worzel the scarecrow is alive. Mrs Bloomsbury Barton's snobbish bossiness, the Village fair and Worzel's tricks are the stuff of these adventures. Jon Pertwee, the original (wonderful) TV Worzel, creates all the voices from the quavering aristocratic tones of Mrs Bloomsbury Barton to the rustic language of the gypsies. Best of all are Worzel's sulks, his mischievous moods and his scarecrow dialect. A classic recording.

Meet Posy Bates

Helen Cresswell, read by Judy Bennett, Chivers, two cassettes, 1 hr 48 mins, £11.95 + VAT

Posy is an intensely active, curious child, often the despair of her mother, Daph, harassed by the demands of baby Fred and by finding yet another of Posy's spider or stick insect collections. She's characterful and resourceful, organising chaotic pet shows, making friends with the Bag Lady at the fair and finally achieving her heart's desire when Daph allows her to keep a stray dog. Judy Bennett's Midlands accent for the dialogue makes the family realistic and she's an excellent creator of character through voice: Posy's childish enthusiasm, the slow, nasal twang of some of her friends and the quiet despair – and love – in over-worked Daph.



Just Ferret

Gene Kemp, read by John Green, Chivers, three cassettes, 3 hrs 10 mins, £14.95

Another story about Cricklepit Comprehensive that's as compulsive and gritty as the others. Ferret's overwhelmingly dominant Dad keeps moving to 'find himself' after Ferret's Mum walks out, and consequently Ferret has never learned to read. Yet another school, particularly one with a teacher's pet who's really a middle-class bully, doesn't bode too well. But life opens out for Ferret and the source of his reading block is discovered. John Green reads Ferret's story with gusto. All the characters are convincing and the whole is spiced with the best of Comprehensive humour.

Jennings

Anthony Buckeridge, read by Stephen Fry, BBC Radio Collection, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £6.99

> 'We're tired of French and tired of Maths
>
> And being taught by psychopaths.'

Stephen Fry is eminently right for the reading of Jennings prep school pranks of suspense and suspension, capturing brilliantly, through doddery hesitation or sergeant-major imperatives, the eccentric Englishness of the teachers. The world is one of dorms and tuck boxes where Jennings' establishing first rights to the wash basin is of paramount importance. Stephen Fry's impeccable sense of drama, humour and mimicry evokes that special atmosphere of those vintage adventures of Darbishire and 'that perennial school prankster', Jennings.

Authorgraph No. 76

Berlie Doherty with her son Tim's painting, the original for **White Peak Farm**.

It was a chilly, autumn afternoon when we went to talk to Berlie Doherty. As we travelled across Sheffield packed in our English teacher's Panda, at least one of us nursed the illusion that all writers live in mansions, so we were surprised to find Berlie in the front room of her comfortable semi-detached house in a Sheffield suburb.

Pictures on the walls included the original painting for the **Spellhorn** cover, a print of the cover of **Granny Was a Buffer Girl**, scenes from **Children of Winter** (which were used for the **Jackanory** special), and a horse who is soon to be featured in a picture book called **Snowy**, and others that we recognised from Berlie Doherty books. We took photographs of Berlie sitting in front of her son's painting for the television series of **White Peak Farm**.

We were welcomed by Berlie with chocolates (a recent birthday present!) and then we began the interview. We had tried out our tape-recorder that morning, but it behaved completely differently in the afternoon. We learnt that interviewers have to be totally familiar with any technology they use *and* be able to function without it!

Born in Knotty Ash, Liverpool, Berlie was the youngest of three children. Her older brother and sister (Denis and Jean) seemed like adults to her, rather than brother and sister: 'they were 16 and 13 when I was born, so I looked to them as being other adults'.

When Berlie was four she moved to Hoylake, 'where my first books were set. I lived in a house very much like the one on the front cover of **How Green You Are**. In fact it was that exact street. Five minutes' walk away was the sea. It was really nice. I was very lucky,' Berlie commented. 'I always wanted to be a writer most, but I can remember when I was little I had a list which I carried everywhere with me in my pocket. I wanted to be a writer, a singer, a ballet danger (I never had dancing lessons, but I fancied myself as a dancer!), a swimming-pool attendant, an air hostess, or a librarian. I have done some singing, so I've achieved two of the things on my list. But I prefer writing.' Behind her chair, resting against the wall, was her folk guitar, so we knew the kind of singing she does.

'My serious writing started at a university course I went on to train to be a teacher. We were invited to write a story as part of the course. It was the first real thing I'd started. It was called **Requiem**. After finishing it recently, I didn't start writing again for ten months. I've actually been working at it for ten years, on and off.

'My first job was as a social worker, but writing had been part of my life since childhood. I used to write for the children's page of the **Liverpool Echo** which was our local paper. My dad certainly used to encourage me to do that.'

Berlie gets on well with her publishers. They've liked everything she's written. Only when she was writing **Children of Winter** did she get a query –

> '"What's it about?" asked the publisher.
> "It's set in the plague," I replied.
> "Children don't like books about history," said the publisher . . .'

'Don't quote me on that,' said Berlie.

Children of Winter proved to be very popular and was made into a **Jackanory** special.

'My experiences come very much into **How Green You Are** and **The Making of Fingers Finnegan**: they were my first two books. In **Granny Was a Buffer Girl** there's a whole chapter about my mum and dad, called 'Bridie and Jack'. It's about how they ran away to get married and came back to live with their parents.'

When she actually finishes a book she's sad. 'It's usually a matter of making myself stop writing, rather than making myself start. After I have finished I feel terrible. I feel grieved that I have lost someone close; a great deal of myself is in my books.

'I like to read all kinds of books. It's important to keep up with what's been written. I don't like to read escapist books though.'

Berlie's ideas come from just about everywhere. 'All kinds of things can give you an idea as a starting point. For instance, the idea for **Granny Was a Buffer Girl** came from a painting in Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield. It was a painting of two buffer girls and it was the idea of these girls trapped forever in a painting, at the age of 18, which made me try to imagine what it would be like for them to step out of the painting and live real lives.

'My problem is not what to think of to write about, it's what to write next, because I've usually got lots of ideas in my head.'

About her writing habits, she said, 'I start writing quite early after posting my letters, up until around lunchtime. I never write in the afternoon; I'd fall asleep if I tried.

'I've got two favourite places. One is upstairs in my attic, which is where I usually work, and the other is Burbage Edge, where there is a big rock where I like to sit and write. If it's cold I just stay in the car and look down the valley. It doesn't always give me ideas, but it releases me. I just find it very relaxing to be there.

'When writing I always start off with a hand-written draft. I love that closeness to the page and the noise of the pen on the paper. I write on every other page and every other line. So I have lots of space for new ideas or to ask myself questions. Last of all I go to the word-processor and then it feels like a proper, posh book. It's like a tapestry with all the threads woven in.'

At about this time we were struck by the stunning pictures and photographs on the walls. We asked her about them: 'In the hall is the cover picture of **Spellhorn**. My daughter drew some illustrations for a TV feature of it. Janna illustrated **Tilly Mint and the Dodo** for me. Sally did a little bit of illustrating in **Spellhorn** and she did the music for it when it went on the radio. Tim did the pictures for the **White Peak Farm** TV series.

'I bought the original artwork of **Spellhorn** because it's my favourite book – it's very different from anything else I've written. It's a fantasy, I was literally taking steps in the dark because it's about blindness. I wrote it with children from Tapton Mount School for the Blind.'

'I'd love to be Tilly Mint because anything could happen to her. The other person I'd like to be is Laura in **Spellhorn**.'

About **Tilly Mint and the Dodo**, Berlie says: 'I care very much about the environment. I think it's important. The challenge was to write about such an issue in a style acceptable to younger children. I don't think books should give messages; I don't think that's what novels are about.'

Berlie can have ideas for new stories in her head for months – even years! But eventually she will write them down. She can have one or two ideas in her head while writing another book!

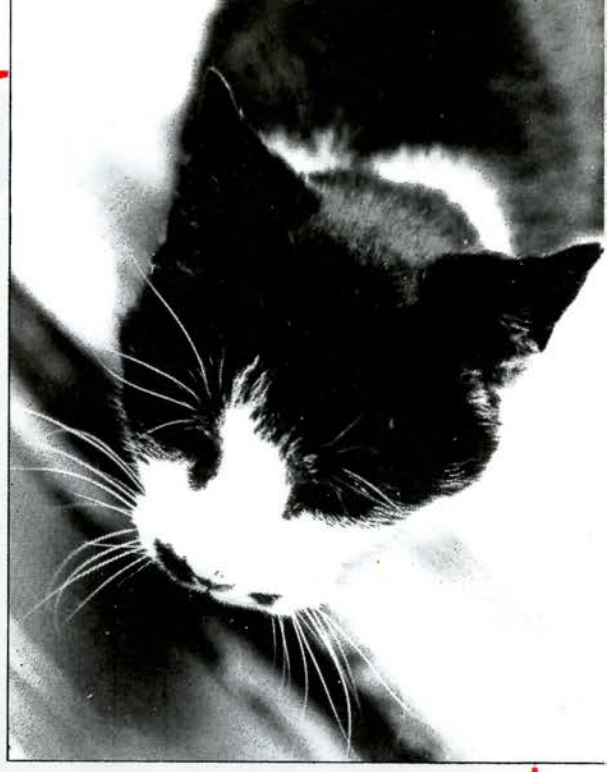
About 12 years ago she began to write professionally. She was working as an English teacher at Ecclesfield School, Sheffield, at the time and gradually went part-time as writing took over her life.

She began to test out her stories and ideas on her classes and her own children, who were still fairly young. 'Although at the time they didn't know it, the pupils from Ecclesfield School were a great help when I was writing **How Green You Are**. Later I wrote the book called **Tough Luck** with a whole class of Year 9 students at a school in Doncaster and **Spellhorn** with a group of blind students. I wrote **Dear Nobody** after talking to Year 10 and 11 students. Collaborating with my potential readers released me and got lots of ideas going in my head.

'It seems a bit of a cheek to think that I can write for 12-year-olds, say, if I don't know how 12-year-olds think. I made a promise to myself that I would always involve children at one stage or another when I was writing.'

Her most recent book is **Dear Nobody** (published in November 1991 and winner of this year's Carnegie Medal). It's a book she's wanted to do for a long time. '**Dear Nobody** is a novel about a teenage pregnancy and I'm looking at the effect on all the various members of the family back to the grandparents.'

The next question arose when Cosy the cat sauntered into the room. We'd never realised that Paddiwak and Cosy were real! Paddiwak unfortunately died a while ago. Was another collaboration with Teresa O'Brien going to happen we wondered? (She illustrated the book **Paddiwak and Cosy**.) 'I'd love to work with Teresa again. She's a wonderful artist, but at present I don't have the right kind of idea.'



Left, Paddiwack from **Paddiwak and Cosy**.
Above, Paddiwak himself.
Below, Berlie's beloved Burbage Edge.

Berlie recently finished a picture book all about a horse called **Snowy** which is due to be published this autumn. She has the idea for a new children's book in her head, but is currently working on a play for adults.

'The right time to stop writing is when people stop reading your books. I still enjoy writing. When I don't enjoy it then I think that would be a good time to stop.'

As we came to the end of our stay, we all had our Berlie Doherty books signed and then we reluctantly left – saying goodbyes and thank-yous to Berlie and Cosy, of course. ■

Berlie Doherty was interviewed by Angela Harding, Joanne Moorhouse and Jennifer Morris from Newfield School, Sheffield. Preliminary research for the interview was done by Stephen Yollen and a team of Y10, Y9 and Y8 pupils.

Book details:

How Green You Are, Methuen, 0 416 20940 8, £7.95

Children of Winter, Methuen, 0 416 51130 9, R£7.95; Lions, 0 00 672583 X, £2.50 pbk

The Making of Fingers Finnegan, Methuen, 0 416 02882 9, £7.95

Granny Was a Buffer Girl, Methuen, 0 416 53590 9, £8.95; Lions, 0 00 672792 1, £2.75 pbk

Spellhorn, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12624 X, £8.99; Young Lions, 0 00 673500 2, £2.99 pbk

Tilly Mint and the Dodo, Methuen, 0 416 04622 3, £7.95; Young Lions, 0 00 673250 X, £2.25 pbk

Tough Luck, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12016 0, £8.50

Paddiwak and Cosy, Methuen, 0 416 23610 3, £6.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 0299 0, £2.50 pbk

Dear Nobody, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13056 5, £8.99

Snowy, ill. Keith Bowen, will be published by Collins in October 1992.

Berlie's adult novel, **Requiem**, is published by Michael Joseph (0 7181 3465 6, £13.99) and Penguin (0 14 015690 9, £5.99 pbk).

REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Sound 0 7451 5141 8
Time and Space 0 7451 5142 6

Rosie Dalzell, Cherrytree (Bright Sparks series), £6.50 each
INFANT

'Bright Sparks' are aimed at infants and have a good mixture of ideas for activities and questions for the reader. The questions are well set, avoiding the banalities of some younger non-fiction. The suggested activities in **Sound**, such as making a musical washing line for banging, may appeal less to a peace-seeking adult.

Coverage is broad: **Time and Space** ranges from the seasons to DIY timers; **Sound** includes making and receiving sound. The design is good (and rather different from Cherrytree's usual look) and both the books include a glossary, and list of places to visit. Textual quality within the series does vary – these two examples seem the best so far.

Useful for school and home use, especially with adult intervention. GB

Distance 0 7136 3544 4
Speed 0 7136 3546 0
Size 0 7136 3545 2
Time 0 7136 3547 9

Brenda Walpole, A & C Black (Millipedes series), £6.50 each
JUNIOR

Attractive, relevant and entertaining, 'Millipedes' should prove valuable for primary schools. Each volume has a good mix of excellent colour photographs, history, anecdotes, things to do and helpful advice by a wise (and only slightly irritating) cartoon millipede. Traditionalists will enjoy references to Imperial measures, and teachers will welcome ideas for classroom activities. The linking of practical 'something to try' panels with examples from the outside world is successful.

The style is clear and explanatory - the distinction between mass and weight, for instance, is well defined. The books each have an index and a (rather perfunctory) time line and might have benefited from a glossary – but these are minor criticisms for enjoyable and stimulating books.

A final warning to teachers, though, if whole school planning is not in operation, check that some of the ideas in these books haven't already been tried in the infants, using the 'Bright Sparks' series (see review above). GB

Bird 0 7136 3548 7
Minibeast 0 7136 3550 9
Garden 0 7136 3549 5
Pond 0 7136 3551 7

Paul Wright, A & C Black (Hand-made Habitat series), £6.50 each
JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Our garden contains a fine specimen of rose bay willow-herb – just one – a plant that most people would eradicate as a weed but at least as handsome as the nearby buddleia, and as valuable to wildlife. Ordinary things have character, interest, use and, often, beauty in equal measure with exotic ones and this set of four books about enriching a school's surroundings recognises this.

Garden is particularly encouraging in its variety of ideas for developing a plot, and the message that it's easier to go along with the natural capabilities of the surroundings rather than try radically to change them is gently reinforced.

Similarly, **Bird** and **Minibeast** concentrate on achievable strategies to improve the lot of surrounding populations. **Pond** is more familiar territory, giving pond-creation instructions of inspiring simplicity.

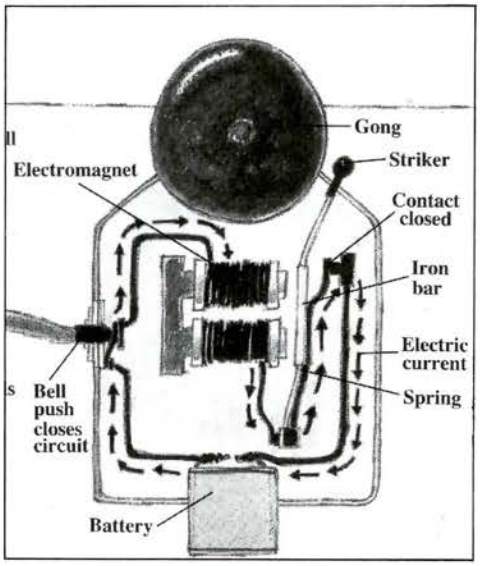
Of course, the separation of these four elements into different volumes is artificial and it would have been easy for an unscrupulous author and/or an unobservant editor to get away with a lot of repetition. All the more commendable, then, is the way in which these volumes dovetail rather than overlap. TP

Heat 0 7502 0251 3
It's Electric 0 7502 0252 1

Andrew Dunne, Wayland (How Things Work series), £7.50 each
JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Science books for children tend to adopt one of two approaches – one using colour photographs and involving lots of activities and experiments, the other (equally attractive) using lots of graphics and exciting cutaways. The 'How Things Work' series works well but doesn't adopt either of these approaches – relying on a clear explanatory text and diagrams which are slightly crude but admirably informative.

Heat, for example, considers radiation, conduction and convection, each having a small paragraph and an explanatory drawing (practical applications of all three are also given). **It's Electric** includes useful definitions of different types of electricity (static, mains, etc.) and shows how machines make use of each.



Both books have useful bibliographies, glossaries which *do* explain terms, and are indexed. They will be appropriate for a wide age range as there are no photographs of children which might pigeon-hole the audience. GB

DNA is here to stay

Fran Balkwill and Mic Rolph, HarperCollins, 0 00 196457 7, £7.99 hbk; 0 00 196458 5, £3.99 pbk
JUNIOR/MIDDLE/SECONDARY

When I was trying to learn bio-chemistry in the 1950s, DNA was the New Thing – very little about it in books and regarded by many as a 9-days' wonder. I didn't understand although I knew what the letters stood for. Now, although I dare say few police officers know what Deoxyribonucleic Acid is, they all recognise DNA fingerprinting as the biggest forensic advance since fingerprints themselves. It's still a wonder.

This little book does an agreeable job of presenting DNA as the body's protein-designer; it's still a challenge to understand but the clarity with which the authors build up their picture makes it a lot easier for people at school now than it was for undergraduates forty years ago. The happy informality of Balkwill's text and Rolph's illustration ensures that this is not just a book for bio-boffins (although they'll probably get most out of it) and the whole is a fine example of synergy between the two – the kind of synergy that makes the double helix of DNA the vital thing it is.

A treasure for curious families (well, you know what I mean) as well as a real good help on library shelves. TP

The Crusades

Peter Chrisp, Wayland (Themes in History series), 0 7502 0475 3, £8.99
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

A crusader at prayer. He wears a loose coat over his chain mail to keep cool under the hot sun of the Middle East. The crosses show that he is a soldier of Christ.

When Pope Urban II proclaimed the first crusade, he launched a movement that would span centuries. Although the prime objective was to liberate Jerusalem, motives became extremely complex and often involved a bewildering array of political and religious factions.

Between 1095 and 1300 there were at least seven major crusades to the Middle East, as well as many minor expeditions. Peter Chrisp not only succinctly summarises the protagonists, causes and consequences, he puts the main conflict between Christians and Muslims into perspective. He explains, for example, why Richard the Lionheart is 'a great hero to European Christians, but remembered by Muslims as a cold-blooded killer'.

In the final chapter the 'indirect benefits to the West' are noted; returning Crusaders brought many new skills and inventions home from the East.

This accessible, attractively presented title is a timely addition to the series, providing much useful background information, particularly when used in conjunction with the author's 'companion' volume **The Rise of Islam** (see **BfK 75**). VH

Inuit
Bryan and Cherry Alexander, 0 7502 0370 6

Rainforest Amerindians
Anna Lewington, 0 7502 0439 7
Wayland (Threatened Cultures series), £8.50 each
SECONDARY

These titles are attractively produced, well-illustrated and have an inviting format, but bland, glossy compilations they are not; they are authentic insights, written and photographed by people who have spent some time amongst the societies under discussion.

Their credentials are readily apparent – in the depth and breadth of the information provided, in the intensity of the prose when reporting perceived injustices, and in the obvious concern for the future survival of the cultures they so eloquently describe.

The text ranges widely over the historical, geographical, political, economic and social reasons why these indigenous peoples are struggling to preserve their traditional way of life. The rainforests of the Amerindians have been devastated by loggers, miners, ranchers and other developers, whilst the Inuit have suffered from the activities of fur traders, whalers, missionaries, and oil and gas companies.

The culture of the Inuit and Amerindians encompasses a respect for the environment and the balance nature, both glaringly absent amongst those who have exploited their habitats. Forced to become more overtly political in recent years, they are at last beginning to be successful in achieving legal recognition of communal lands, but they have a long struggle ahead of them. Books such as these will help focus on their problems and hopefully further their cause.

VH

Medicine and Health
Vicki Power, 0 7496 0779 3

Saving Planet Earth
Rosalind Kerven, 0 7496 0824 2
Franklin Watts (New Directions series), £7.99 each
SECONDARY

There are close parallels between our growing concern for the future safety of our planet and the increasing interest many of us are taking in our health. The overwhelmingly artificial lifestyle of the 'developed' world has seen to it that our conventional medicine has developed along lines as scientific as car design and that medical education is still largely training in physical diagnosis. Similarly we live by economic growth and business training is still largely about managing money rather than resources.

These two books successfully make the point that 'Western' approaches leave out a lot of considerations which can do much to benefit the health of person and planet. Each promotes an awareness of the holistic approach to its subject now reaching increasing numbers of us – even, sometimes, the Big Decision Makers.

Of the two, Kerven's covers the more familiar ground as it chronicles green initiatives from tree-hugging to peatless compost and emphasises the low-impact lifestyle of 'primitive' peoples. These benefits surface again in **Medicine** as it examines complementary and alternative practices with commendable objectivity.

There's a lot of entertainment in these books and much unfamiliar information in **Medicine**; they're at once abrasive and open-minded, which fit them well for a role as discussion-starters in secondary schools.

TP

Margaret Mead
Michael Pollard, Exley (Scientists who have changed the world series), 1 85015 258 6, £5.99
SECONDARY

'Nature or nurture?'; the great debate about whether heredity or culture determine human behaviour had been flourishing for many years when in 1928 a young American researcher entered the arena. Margaret Mead's first book not only made an immediate impact, but it also 'brought anthropology out of the lecture-room and into the understanding of the public'. **Coming of age in Samoa** was, and still is, the best-selling anthropological book of all time.

Michael Pollard has written an absorbing account of the life and career of this remarkable woman. His excellent narrative is enhanced by the extensive use of quotations from Mead's own writings, her biographers and critics, which together with the carefully selected and captioned photographs, combine to provide a well-rounded portrait. In addition, there are a great many fascinating insights into the problems encountered by the social anthropologist at work in the field.

Always a controversial figure, in later years her idyllic picture of Samoan life was challenged by critics who labelled it naive and simplistic. Nevertheless, Margaret Mead's enduring legacy is that she overturned many cherished Western beliefs about society and almost single-handedly brought anthropology in to the public domain.

VH

Geoff Brown is a Divisional Coordinator with Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.
Veronica Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.
Ted Percy, until he retired recently, was a Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.
Non-fiction Reviews Editor: **Eleanor von Schweinitz**.

Jenny Monk, Pat Davies and Sylvia Karavis, Primary Advisory Teachers for English for Oxfordshire Education Authority, describe

Helping Children Access Information from Non-fiction Books

Many teachers feel that the books in their classrooms frustrate children's attempts at research. Close scrutiny of the bookshelves reveal that many books are not only densely packed with detail but are outdated and contain inaccuracies. Children wade through shelves in order to find anything that will assist their work. They frequently collect a pile of books that are tenuously linked to a topic – more for security than for information.

Howevever, in times of financial constraint it is difficult to cull books and throw away out-dated stock.

We therefore need to consider how to:

i) evaluate existing book resources and develop criteria for selecting new books

ii) help children to find, read and use information texts

Developing criteria

On a recent Library Resources course in Oxfordshire, teachers and librarians together considered the criteria for purchasing new books and culling existing stock and the following framework incorporates points discussed on that occasion with those we have used with teachers in the county.

Readership – the book's intention

Is it for the beginner, the enthusiast or the expert?

What existing knowledge is assumed by the author?

Presentation

Is the book attractive with visual impact?

From where is most information obtained – pictures or text?

Are the illustrations, diagrams, charts relevant and complementary to the text?

Is anything particularly helpful/unhelpful about the way information is presented?

Could part or all of the information be presented in any other way?

Organisation

How is the information in the book organised?

Are there any organisational devices to help the reader?

e.g. chapters and sub headings
paragraphs
topic sentences
labels
print/type face

Page Layout

How is information presented on any one page?

Does the use of text and graphics in the layout actually make the information easier to follow or is it more for visual effect?

Are the illustration captions or written explanations clear, accurate and unambiguous? Are they positioned correctly?

Language

What type of language is being used?

Does the written text present the information in an accessible way?

Is the technical language explained?

Factual Accuracy

If the book is not a new publication, has it been revised or reprinted?

Is there any evidence of bias, intentional or unintentional, both generally in terms of race, class or gender, and particularly in controversial areas such as politics, history, environmental issues?

Retrieval devices

How many of the following does the book have? Are they helpful to the reader?

– Index
– Contents
– Chapter and page headings
– Paragraph headings and sub-titles
– Glossary
– Suggestions for further readings

Helping children to find, read and use information books

The process of selection and evaluation can be carried out with children to enable them to become more aware and critical. The following are examples of projects we have undertaken in local schools.

Classroom Activities

* Pairs of children aged 5-7 were asked to sort a mixed selection of fiction and non-fiction. They gave reasons for their decisions and explained how they knew the differences between the two. This activity helped some children make explicit what they implicitly knew, and helped others begin to understand the differences between stories and factual books.

One child engaged in this activity had some difficulty in deciding where to place a book from the 'Jump' Series. These books often include a mixture of information text and imaginative writing. After much deliberation he announced that the first part of the book was 'more important' and assigned the book to the non-fiction pile. He explained his decision by referring to the layout and ways in which illustrations are used in each section. Photographs and diagrams are 'real', but those in the story are 'only drawings'.

* Groups of 9-11 year old children were asked to consider the differences between fiction and non-fiction texts and their teacher listed their responses. The children observed that:

Non-fiction texts:
- contain factual information
- tell you about things
- contain pictures and photographs with captions
- include paintings, diagrams and drawings
- use main headings and sub-headings to tell the reader where to find the information
- sometimes use different fonts on the same page
- use topic sentences
- contain an index, a contents page and a glossary

Fiction texts:
- can be possible, or not true
- are made to amuse and entertain
- have covers with drawn pictures
- have imaginative drawings and illustrations
- have chapters and paragraphs that follow on
- use the same font throughout except for chapter headings

Involvement in this activity helped the children appreciate the continuous nature of factual information although, as one child observed, 'Nothing is constant; science is discovering new things all the time'.

The Teacher's Role

– using Big Books to make explicit the structure and organisation of information texts

Traditionally teachers have helped children develop an understanding of story structure and rhyme. In many cases this has been achieved through story telling and discussion. Pleasure has been an important part of this shared experience. Alas, few information texts readily lend themselves to being read aloud, consequently this area of the reading curriculum has been largely ignored. Large format books provide a means of sharing information texts with children. The 'Magic Bean' series gives teachers the opportunity to make explicit to children the structure and organisation of information texts. It is possible for this series to be used with whole classes or small groups to demonstrate text organisation, page layout and use of illustrations, such as photographs and diagrams.

By comparing this structural organisation with passages of unbroken narrative and discussing how texts may be read, children can be helped to understand that different kinds of writing require different ways of reading.

Looking at a page

Activities that require close attention to particular texts help children to develop the ability to select and read purposefully. We have found that by encouraging critical examination and discussion of information books, children have been helped to recognise that information is often embedded in complex paragraphs and convoluted sentences.

Children can be shown how to find the main points in a series of paragraphs. By making an overhead of a particular page and giving photocopies of the same page to pairs or small groups of children, the teacher can demonstrate that paragraphs have a main idea which may not be immediately apparent. By reading the text aloud to the group, and underlining topic sentences, the teacher encourages the children to make decisions as to the central point of the paragraph. Children can be hesitant and somewhat puzzled by this task but practice at this activity helps them become more adept at information retrieval.

Activities which encourage discussion and identification of central points of paragraphs, help children to understand how information is organised. Once they are able to recognise that main ideas can be separated by the inclusion of additional information, they become more confident about which information is essential to their research and which may be disregarded. We have noticed that it is when children have been actively involved in marking a text in this way, that they are then able to put the book away and feel that the information is their own. From this point it then becomes far more rewarding to represent what has been found out. They truly become researchers, rather than regulators of little understood facts.

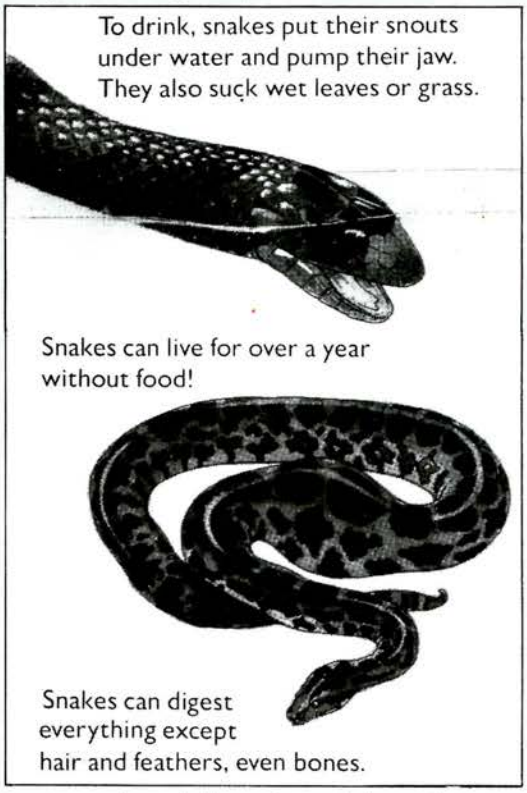
Looking at the language of information texts

It is becoming increasingly obvious that we need to explore with children the language of the text. It is the essential differences in the language structures of fiction and non-fiction texts that can make for difficulty in comprehension. Information texts frequently use constructions which are unknown to young children. The reader is not propelled forward by the sequence of events. There is frequent use of the passive tense, subordinate clauses and extended noun phrases.

We decided to examine the language of information texts with a group of 7-9 year olds who were working on the topic 'Snakes'. Starting from what they already knew the children listed everything they could remember about the eating habits of snakes, then added to their lists using information from a book on **Snakes** in the 'Jump' series. The appeal of this series lies in the quality of the photographs and well laid out information. The challenge lies in the language itself.

In order to obtain further information to add to their lists, the children were faced with a vocabulary and language that needed further explanation. The group underlined any words in the text that they did not immediately understand. These were mainly scientific or technical and included words such as particle, rodents, vibrations, digest. The children then referred to the glossary, but in many cases still needed help from an adult to understand the technical explanations.

It is not only vocabulary that confuses children. The sentence, 'Despite poor hearing and sight, snakes are efficient hunters even in the dark', was interpreted by some as meaning that snakes can see in the dark. The sentence, 'Snakes can digest everything except hair and feathers, even bones', was rephrased by children to avoid the ambiguity it holds for them. One child wrote 'Snakes can digest most of what they eat including bones, but not hair and feathers'.



If teachers recognise and discuss the confusion such texts produce, children's awareness of the meaning of the text is raised and the pitfalls of merely copying out chunks of misunderstood texts can be avoided.

Having all worked with the text from the 'Jump' book on **Snakes**, the group then researched the eating habits of their chosen snake, working in pairs and using a wide range of resources.

This involved:
* focussed questions
  - What does the snake eat?
  - How does it catch its prey?
  - How does it eat and digest its prey?
* the use of contents pages
* skimming to find references
* the use of diagrams and captions

It became clear that the children needed an outcome, so we decided that each group would represent their findings in the form of a TV documentary lasting no more than one and a half minutes. What followed was purposeful and exciting. The morning culminated in a presentation of the documentaries; they included child-made charts, interviews with experts, and Did-You-Know facts.

The great value of these collaborative sessions has been the ways in which children have attempted to define and clarify language. As in Booktalk (the discussion of fiction), discussion of non-fiction texts allows for interpretation, the sharing of existing and additional knowledge, and the questionning of factual information.

The work described here has helped children become active interrogators of texts and supportive of each other in the quest for information. Several schools, having bravely culled their stock and involved children in the process, are now noticing a marked improvement in the ways children use and write information. ■

References

The 'Magic Bean' series is published by Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich and is available in large and standard format.

Snakes, 'Jump Animal Books', Franklin Watts, 0 7496 0354 2, £6.99; Two-Can, 1 85434 041 7, £2.99 pbk

WRITER REPLY

Anti-Series?

Not so, say the Signal team taken to task by Steve Rosson in our last issue.

Nancy Chambers writes:

'Taking Series Seriously' (**BfK 75**, July 1992) is exactly what Elizabeth Hammill and I were doing in the January 1992 issue of **Signal**. Some of your readers might like to know what we actually wrote, so I'll be happy to supply photocopies of the relevant pages to anyone who sends a stamped self-addressed envelope marked READING NEW BOOKS: SERIES to me at Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ.

The July **BfK** article was a shrewdly compiled summary of what's good about series: an unanswerable case answering a question that was never asked. No one who's been around children's books for as long as Elizabeth or I would think that series are an intrinsically Bad Thing. 'Series' is a morally neutral concept, a convenient publishing practice. What we were (and still are; there's never an end to finding out why you think what you think) discussing is:

- Why do series predominate in publishing for 6- to 9-year-olds?

According to the article, it's a matter of targets and markets and what the kids want. So why bother with one-off publishing ever, in any sector of children's books? Accepting your interpretation, I am genuinely puzzled about this.

Series are a useful part of children's publishing, because standardizing books saves time all along the line: design and production time (at the publishers'), selecting time (for reviewers and in libraries and schools).

But what books need is a continually inventive emphasis – on the part of every adult lucky enough to be involved with them – on the utter individuality of each one. How far a series mentality gets in the way of this emphasis is a question we're entitled to ask . . . or so it seems to me.

Elizabeth Hamill writes:

The discussion in **Signal** was prompted by questions raised during a year's reading in preparation for an update to the **Signal** Bookguide, ***Fiction 6 to 9***: questions about the predominance of series publishing for 6-9s and about the practice of many who are currently involved in making and selecting books for this age group.

Perhaps you would find it useful to know my selection criteria. I **do** think that all books should be evaluated by the same standards (I would be happier if your reviewers were to write about series fiction along with other fiction – not separately). I look for books with one thing in common: a story that offers readers an adventure in print and that is also a growing point. It seems important to signal those books which enable readers to stride out by giving them a sense of the possibilities in story: of the ways in which language 'can be stretched to reconstruct, remake, extend and understand our experience of living' in the world (Margaret Meek, **How Texts Teach What Readers Learn**) and in which the most inventive authors keep literature in good shape for young readers. Of 122 books selected for the update, I believe 37 series titles (given their predominance, the proportion should have been much higher) do this, including: **Never Kiss Frogs!**, **Khumalo's Blanket**, **Bill's New Frock**, **Rosie and the Boredom Eater**, **The Hodgeheg**, **Boat Girl**, **ELF 61** and **The Twig Thing**. Hardly a 'sniffy' choice!

For me, language and meaning should have pride of place, whether we are talking about **Ging Gang Goolie, It's an Alien** or **The Marzipan Pig**.

Steve Rosson responds:

Oh dear! How do I reply when I agree with practically everything Nancy Chambers and Elizabeth Hamill are saying? There's some furious back-pedalling going on above because, when you send for your photocopy of their original **Signal** article, you'll see it wasn't a thoughtful discussion about why series predominate but a 'diatribe' which dismisses them as being 'books that are pre-digested formula in concept and content'.

Having kicked series books firmly into touch, Elizabeth Hamill then offers us a book which does get the **Signal** imprimatur. Step forward **Little Obie and the Flood** by Martin Waddell. Now this is a neatly crafted book by a fine author but, with its understated emotion and laconic dialogue, surely intended for the most sensitive and literate of children. *Of course we need books like this*. Actually, I have a copy in my school library. It's been borrowed *once*. Children who are less than fluent readers, children whose families do not value talk and reading or children using English as their second language – and that adds up to a substantial chunk of the school population – simply don't make sense of it.

Many series titles *do* make sense to precisely these children. I've lost count of the different attempts I've made over the years to cater for their needs and nothing, but nothing, has succeeded in the way that series books have. They are constantly in demand and give enormous pleasure and reading satisfaction. In my library I have to cater for a vast *range* of readers and series books are an important part of my strategy. So I bridle somewhat when I'm asked what on earth I think I'm offering young people when I give them such books.

You've got the address. Please do send for the original **Signal** article, compare it with my piece and see what you think. ■

Editor's Note:

Steve Rosson will be reviewing series titles in future issues of **BfK**. Later, as Elizabeth Hamill recommends, they'll be absorbed into our regular review pages where they properly belong – and where, if they go into paperback, they already appear.

BRINGING THE BULLY TO BOOK

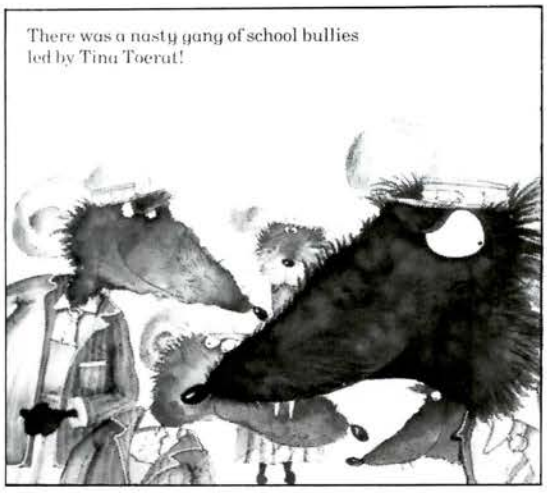
Chris Lutrario reviews a selection of currently available fiction and non-fiction on a perennial school problem.

From **The Snow Maze**.

Recently bullying has been much in the news. Tragic and sensational stories have hit the headlines; campaigning organisations have been formed and hotlines set up.

This may or may not reflect an increase in bullying. What's certain is that people are more aware than they used to be of children's rights and of the threats which children face. Authors and publishers have responded to this new mood, and many books about bullying have been published recently.

In Shirley Hughes' **Lucy and Tom go to School** (Puffin, 0 14 054415 1, £3.50 pbk), bullying is just one of those things you have to put up with. That was in 1973. Nowadays the attitude is different, and, in books for young children at least, bullies are always resoundingly defeated.

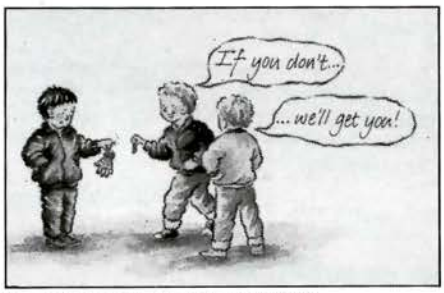


In Babette Cole's zany **Hurrah for Ethelyn** (Heinemann, 0 434 93293 0, £7.99), set in a boarding school for 'ratlettes', brainy Ethelyn is picked on because she's different. Her torment ends when she rescues the bully and performs an emergency operation on her 'probably squidged' brain.

The bullies' come-uppance is equally swift in Rosemary Wells' **Hazel's Amazing Mother** (Picture Lions, 0 00 663159 2, £3.99 pbk). The mother in question, telepathically in touch with her daughter, senses that something is wrong and routs the bullies with a stern cry of 'Wait just a minute' and some well-aimed tomatoes. Delightful, wacky and infinitely reassuring.

The latest title from Jean Van Leeuwen, **Oliver Pig at School** (Mammoth, 0 7497 0837 9, £2.99 pbk) hints gently at bullying. Oliver's first day at school is being spoiled by Bernard, who kicks and pokes him during storytime. But they discover a mutual interest in dinosaurs and quickly make friends.

Tyrone the Horrible (0 590 76029 7) and **Tyrone the Dirty Rotten Cheat** (0 590 55014 4) by Hans Wilhelm (both from Hippo, £2.99 each pbk) introduce us to 'the world's first big bully' – a Tyrannosaurus Rex, inevitably. Little Boland tries all sorts of strategies to prevent Tyrone from making his life a misery: avoidance, making friends, nonchalance, fighting. Nothing works. So Boland tricks Tyrone into eating a 'double-thick-red-hot-pepper-sandwich' and disturbing a nest of bees. There's a natural satisfaction in seeing a bully get his just deserts, but there's an unpleasant edge of violence here. The problem of how to stop a bully without using force crops up again and again, in books as in life.



From **Trouble with the Tucker Twins**.

The message of Rose Impey's **Trouble with the Tucker Twins** (Viking, 0 670 82587 2, £8.50), is that bullies are 'soft inside'. It takes both Tucker twins to make a bully: when one's away, the other goes to pieces, sobbing over his sums and his shoelaces. Mick, their victim, helps him, and goes home happily knowing that their power has gone.

Rosemary Stones' **No More Bullying**, a Dinosaur 'Talk It Over Book' (0 85122 806 2, £3.99 pbk), is a straightforward account of a young girl's experience of bullying and how the problem is solved. The story is rather thin, but close to children's experience and just the thing to get them talking.

Anthony Browne's three books about Willy the Wimp offer deeper insights. In the latest, **Willy and Hugh** (Julia MacRae, 1 85681 030 5, £6.99) Willy bumps into the aptly named Hugh Jape. Willy, and the reader, expect another humiliation. But Hugh and Willy become friends. Hugh saves Willy from Buster Nose and Willy rescues Hugh from a spider. In their puzzling, unsettling way, these books explore an issue at the heart of bullying: the relationship between physical strength, power and courage.

In the 7-9 age range, some of the most appealing new books about bullying mix reality and fantasy. In Anne Fine's delightful **The Angel of Nitshill Road** (Methuen, 0 416 17892 8, £6.99), it's a recording angel in the guise of a new girl who comes to the rescue. The bully cannot stand publicity and exposure.

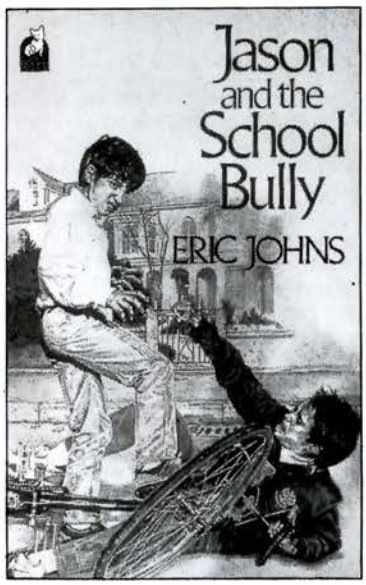
Although it depends on supernatural intervention, this story is full of acute perceptions about bullying and how to stop it.

Krindlekrax (Cape, 0 224 03149 X, £8.99; Red Fox, 0 09 997920 9, £2.99 pbk), a lively novel by Philip Ridley, mixes bullying with the stuff of legend. Two things are terrorising Lizard Street: Elvis Cave who smashes windows with his football, and a giant crocodile that lives in the sewers. Ruskin Splinter, Elvis's prime victim, summons up the courage to face them both, taming the crocodile and puncturing Elvis's football and his pretensions to power. In doing so he proves that courage has nothing to do with size, strength or aggression.

Nicholas Fisk's hilarious **Broops! Down the Chimney** (Walker, 0 7445 2121 1, £6.99) reaches out into science-fiction. Thugsy makes a mistake when he picks on Broops, an 'alien blob' which has fallen to earth. Broops sees the bully's behaviour not as a threat but as an invitation to play, and innocently thumps him into submission. Children will revel in Thugsy's downfall, which cleverly manages to both raise and sidestep the moral issues.

Jan Mark's gentle and imaginative **The Snow Maze** (Walker, 0 7445 2401 6,

£4.99) also steps into the fantastical, a world in which bullies do not feel at home. Akash mocks Joe's discovery of a mysterious maze which only Joe can see. Joe's friend, Irrum, small but brave, defies Akash.



The simple realism of Eric Johns' **Jason and the School Bully** (Corgi, 0 552 52497 2, £1.75 pbk) seems limited in comparison. It does, however, raise the question of how to resist bullies without responding in kind. The answer here is to hoist the bully's bike to the top of a tree – dubious, perhaps, but at least non-violent.

Two books in the popular 'Banana Books' series treat bullying in clever, amusing ways, and find non-violent solutions. In Robert Leeson's **Burper** (Heinemann, 0 434 93072 5, £2.95), the bully mends his ways when he falls in love, a fate which also extends the range of his conversation, previously limited to 'Gimme that', 'I'll thump you' and 'You wait till break'. Bullies are boring and no fun to be with. In Michael Morpurgo's **The Marble Crusher** (Heinemann, 0 434 97670 9, £3.99), the bully exercises power by telling tall tales to a trusting new boy. Unfortunately for the bully and his marbles, the tale about the marble crushing machine turns out to be true!

Amongst books for older juniors, Dick Cate's **Rodney Penfold, Genius** (Walker, 0 7445 2213 7, £8.99) stands out – for sheer wit at least. It is, as Rodney himself says, 'a comic detective story about a defective detective hunting a dog'. Corvel is the bully who spends his time 'shaking the sweets out of first-years' and threatening old ladies' pets. Rodney is the worm that turns, getting his own back and solving the mystery. An acute, sideways look at the subject.

Racist bullying is the subject of Alan Gibbons' time-shift novel, **Whose Side Are You On?** (Dent, 0 460 88049 7, £7.95). When the 'cocks of the school' taunt Mattie for being friends with Pravin, he knows he should take a stand, but runs away. Stumbling into an old house, he is drawn back through time to a sugar plantation in eighteenth-century Jamaica. Finding the courage which eluded him at school, he joins the slaves in an uprising. When he arrives back in the present, he knows whose side he is on. Although it often stumbles under the weight of historical information and the political message is too overt, the story is interesting and exciting.

The Trial of Anna Cotman by Vivien Alcock (Methuen, 0 416 13952 3, £8.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 0444 6, £2.25 pbk) is a forceful metaphoric treatment of bullying, especially acute in its examination of peer-group pressure. Joining a 'club' based on ritual and secret oaths, Anna finds herself imprisoned in a world where 'hidden horrors moved and [she was] unable to cry for help'. She breaks free only when the club's Master is literally unmasked and his power revealed as a sham.

Aidan Chambers' **The Present Takers** (Mammoth, 0 7497 0700 3, £2.50 pbk) is now almost ten years old, but still fresh and powerful. Melanie torments new girl Lucy in ever more vicious ways. The bullying spreads like a disease until Lucy and her friend Angus persuade all those who've been bullied by Melanie to write about it in the class newspaper – the kind of solution sought by everyone who tries to put an end to bullying. It's non-violent and prevents the bully from simply turning his/her attention to someone else.

Many of the new books for secondary school pupils set bullying in a social context, and in so doing offer more searching and disturbing explorations of the behaviour of bullies, their followers and their victims.

The bullying in Chris Nicholls' **The Ziggurat** (Bodley Head, 0 370 31487 5, £7.99; Red Fox, 0 09 986040 6, £2.99 pbk) is particularly disturbing. It's cool and systematic. Most of the victims collude in it. And its leader is neither stupid nor cowardly. His defeat comes only when his 'wizard-like' hold over people is broken in a confrontation which brings together natural and supernatural forces. This powerful novel is full of interesting ideas, but often wordy and over-explicit.

In Yvonne Coppard's **Bully** (Bodley Head, 0 370 31524 3, £6.99; Red Fox, 0 09 983860 5, £2.99 pbk) the victim is Kerry, a girl who's been crippled in a car crash. Shame and fear of making things worse prevent her, like most victims of bullying, from telling other people what's going on. Determined to fight back, she resorts to the bully's own weapons: blackmail and violence. The boundaries between victim and bully shift and blur. This is a brave, ambitious novel which refuses to accept easy solutions. It sets the behaviour of the characters against their social backgrounds and its portrait of a disabled person is utterly unsentimental.

The first part of Alick Rowe's **Voices of Danger** (Mammoth, 0 7497 0412 8, £2.99 pbk) sets bullying in the familiar surroundings of a school. But it is 1916, and the main characters are soon swept off into battle on the Somme. Neither bully nor victim can rid themselves of their previous experiences, and the consequences for both are tragic. This is a vivid, panoramic novel which raises disturbing questions about what power does to both those who have it and those who do not.

As well as this wealth of fiction about bullying, there are a number of relevant new information books.

Michele Elliott's **Feeling Happy, Feeling Safe** (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 55386 2, £3.99 pbk) prompts young children to talk about the situations, including bullying, in which their well-being might be threatened. Despite an occasionally patronising tone, this is a level-headed and useful book.

Older teenagers will find the frank tone of Helen Benedict's **Safe, Strong and Streetwise** (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 48495 0, £2.50 pbk) appealing. It's mainly about sexual abuse, but the chapter on self-defence, physical and non-physical, is relevant to bullying. The book is packed with information and advice.

The abstract, generalised approach of Angela Grunsell's **Bullying** (Franklin Watts, 0 7496 0056 X, £6.99, in the 'Let's Talk About' series, for children of seven and older) is less successful. A series of questions and answers about bullying soon becomes bogged down in complex definitions and analyses.

Practical, informative books like these have a role to play. But it's to fiction that we must turn if we want to understand the causes, the workings and the effects of a complex personal and social phenomenon like bullying. Using a selection of the new picture books and novels may not put an instant end to bullying, but it does offer children imaginative insights into the experiences of other people, bully and victim alike. And that can only help.■

Chris Lutrario was an Advisory Teacher with the ILEA and is now working as a freelance educational writer. He's the author of **Hooked on Books**, a complete resource pack published by Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 0 7466 0050 X, at £35.00, as well as several other books for teachers on the assessment of primary English.

How Fair is Your School's Bookfair?

Pat Clark believes in school bookselling . . . *honestly.*

My children's new school term always brings 'Dates for your Diary' and a groan from me. Yes, there it is – the Bookfair. Why do I groan? I examine my conscience. It's not that I don't want my children to own books, it's simply that I resent being told that by buying books **I can increase the school's income**. Given a choice, I'd prefer to send a donation and avoid the emotional blackmail. I also resent the feeling of guilt as I throw the advertising leaflet into the bin, and most of all I resent having to strengthen my children's resolve as they face the implicit criticism of their teachers when asked why they *still* have not brought back the order form.

Before anyone thinks I've lost all sense of proportion, perhaps I ought to explain.

First, let me make it clear that I fully appreciate the **educational** reasons for selling books in schools. It's not my intention to condemn the entire practice. What bothers me are some of the selling methods.

Specialist Firms

There are now several companies which offer schools a very comprehensive service and attractive commission. This service includes advice for teachers, leaflets and order forms for pupils, delivery and collection of books, and commission in cash or kind. For the hard-pressed teacher this *can* appear as the answer to a prayer but . . . there are sometimes less attractive features.

✗ No company staff are left in the school, so all the selling, collecting of money, etc. has to be done by teachers, ancillaries or parents. Often children are tempted to spend their money on peripherals – posters, notebooks, etc. – which means they then have less to spend on books. Also the receipts from these items are not included in the calculation of the school's commission. It's easy to understand how children are seduced into these purchases, especially if the books on sale aren't very appealing.

✗ Often books from well-established, highly-respected children's authors and publishers are outnumbered by TV spin-offs, American pulp serials (e.g. 'Sweet Valley High') and novelty books. There's little information about the reading or interest age of the books and, frequently, the name of the author isn't listed. How is a parent supposed to help a child choose wisely?

✗ Many parents also complain that there's little turnover of stock, so when they've had one Book Sale the children cannot find another book to buy. The parent then faces the prospect of sending back an empty form and appearing not to support the school's attempt to raise money.

✗ This restricted choice also becomes a problem for schools which choose to take their commission in books. Usually they're only able to choose from the existing stock – so the children are being presented yet again with the same uninspiring titles in the library or classroom!

Local Booksellers

Now, I'll admit I'm very much in favour of schools using local booksellers for practical as well as philosophical reasons. To take the latter first. Bookfairs are by their nature occasional and will not be around when children want to buy books at other times of the year. This is when they need a local bookshop. However, if the bookshop doesn't get regular business throughout the year it may not survive and therefore won't be there when you need it.

Of course, there may be some disadvantages in using a local bookseller. The school will not get an enormous commission: 10% is the norm and perhaps 12% for a *very* big event. Rarely will the bookseller provide attractively produced publicity leaflets. On the other hand, the school can have a say in which books are brought for sale, it won't be expected to provide sales staff or handle all the money and it will have freedom to buy whichever books it wants with its commission. A good bookseller will also assist in contacting children's publishers and may be able to get posters, authors' photographs, *free* bookmarks, etc. to help advertise the venture. They may also be able to offer help in arranging an author visit. Some have children's book experts in the shop who will be able to suggest authors and titles suitable for particular pupils.

There's more to books than selling them

Now is the time to reveal my guilty secret . . . I'm not just a mother who dislikes *some* Book Events, I'm an English teacher with a passionate interest in children's literature, who's been responsible for a whole range of book-related activities for pupils aged 5 to 16. **Underlying all that I've done has been my firm conviction that books should be sold in schools for their own sake, not to raise money. Consequently, anxiety over which option gives the highest rate of commission to the school is, in my opinion, the wrong priority**.

The guiding principle should be how we can persuade children to read for pleasure. Ignoring all the debate on how and why children learn to read, it's incontrovertible that if children develop the habit of reading they have a hobby and means of relaxation which they can pursue, no matter what their academic achievements and future employment. Selling books should, therefore, be just one of many strategies schools adopt to encourage children to become readers. The pleasure of owning a book to which you can return at any time, which you can lend to others and which is *yours*, not the school's or the library's, is one which **should be experienced by all children, irrespective of any financial benefit to the school**.

If you agree with me, as a parent or a teacher, and want to encourage children to read and own books for pleasure, do not despair. It can be done.

What to do

One of the best ways to convey the pleasure of books to children who are not natural readers is to adopt some of the techniques of advertisers. We all know the psychology which makes us associate a particular product with a pleasurable experience – so why not do the same with books? Go all out for a Book Week/Month/Event or whatever and involve as many people as possible in *fun* events.

✓ Make your Book Event a community event. Invite parents, grandparents, neighbours, dinner ladies, 'lollipop' men and women, caretakers, governors, etc. to come to the school and share books with children. Perhaps you'll discover a talented local storyteller or be able to take advantage of an ethnically mixed catchment area to introduce children to stories from different cultures.

✓ Make sure you publicise everything widely - through the local press, noticeboards in local shops, as well as letters home to parents.

✓ If you're going to have books on sale, arrange a time at the beginning or end of the day so parents can browse when delivering or collecting their children. If possible, have an evening session when working parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and others can call in.

✓ Make sure that all classes have a scheduled time when they can visit the bookshop to browse and choose books. They should be able to put them to one side and buy them later after discussion with their parents.

✓ Involve as many staff as possible by asking their advice about which books to offer for sale and what to spend the commission on afterwards.

There are lots of fun things which can be done: fancy-dress parades of book characters (this is even more enjoyable if *all* the staff take part, too), book quizzes, drama presentations based on books and so on. There's also a great deal of valuable work which can be developed from a Book Event. Mathematical work can be based on the construction of books – calculating area of words to pictures; computing the 16-page format in which all books are produced, to give a couple of obvious examples. There is, of course, vast scope for Art and Design and some basic technology, as well as the usual English tasks involved in pupils producing their own books.

Conscious of the demands of the National Curriculum, teachers can arrange oral activities ranging from discussion of the books' suitability for age-groups and examination of the language, to organised visits to other schools/playgroups so that pupils can 'test out' their books on real audiences. The scope for developing work across the curriculum is immense.

There is one other activity which is worth mentioning – Author Visits. It's difficult to over-estimate the impact a visit from an author or illustrator can have on children of all ages. At the most superficial level the children feel special because someone who has her/his name on a book has been to visit their class. More importantly, they gain an insight into a very substantial industry – they realise that books are manufactured and that writing or illustrating them is a *real* job. Many of the authors and illustrators who visit schools are very talented at working with children and can often enthuse young readers in a way which isn't possible for the normal class teacher with whom they work every day.

Organising such a visit may seem daunting, but it's well worth the effort and, if teachers follow a few basic guidelines, is quite manageable. If you have a local branch of the Federation of Children's Book Groups, contact them and enlist their help and practical advice. Many book groups do this sort of thing regularly and have a good idea of which authors and illustrators do or do not like visiting schools. The Children's Book Foundation's Bookfax or Author Directory gives similar information and your local branch of the Arts Council will also be able to help.

For children to get the most out of contact with a writer they must be well prepared in advance. **It's the teacher's responsibility to find out how much the writer expects the children to have read.** Some authors like children to know their books, others prefer to present their work to an unprepared audience and receive a spontaneous reaction. Do canvass pupils and staff for their preferences and see if you can get their favourites. However, don't be afraid to be adventurous and go for the less well-known, but clearly talented, newcomers to writing and illustrating.

In spite of all the reservations I have, I *do* think it's worthwhile selling books in schools. The teachers organising the event *must* be very clear about their objectives and be ruthless in keeping control. Below I've isolated and pinpointed a few things to consider:

Commission:	Rate – Cash or books – Freedom to spend – Restrictions
Stock:	Wide selection of titles – Good range of publishers – Can specific requirements be catered for?
Publicity:	Pupils – Staff – Parents – Others
Preparation:	Staff – Pupils
Follow-up Work:	Staff – Pupils
Author Visits:	Fee – Number and time of sessions – Size of groups

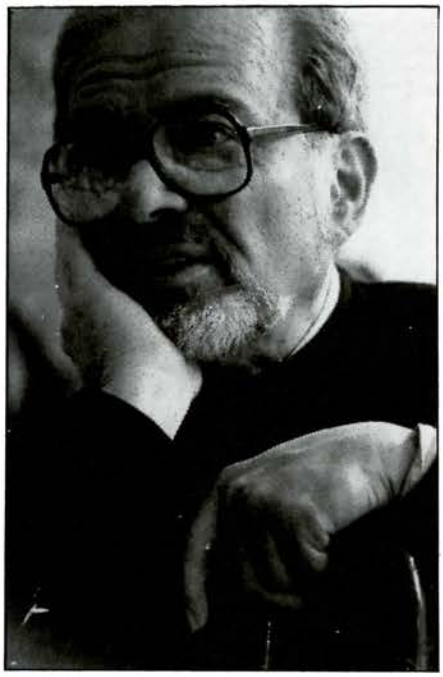
Above all remember that **your over-riding priority should be the children's access to a wide variety of good-quality literature** if they are to become the book-buying and book-reading adults of the future.

Your school's Book Event should be **about books not fundraising**. That's the only way to make it fair.■

Pat Clark is the current Chair of the Federation of Children's Book Groups as well as being a mother and English teacher.

Illustrations here are by Frank Rodgers from **B is for Book!** published earlier this year by Viking (0 670 84099 8, £8.50) and by Shirley Hughes from **Charlie Moon and the Big Bonanza Bust-Up** (Bodley Head, 0 370 30918 9, £5.50; Young Lions, 0 00 672160 5, £2.25 pbk).

Photos by Lucy Rogers.



SENDAK'S SCHOOLBOOK

Maurice Sendak talks to **Chris Powling** about **I SAW ESAU: The Schoolchild's Pocket Book**, which he describes as

'a major movement in my life'

Maurice Sendak is the first to emphasise how much his new book **I SAW ESAU** is a credit to others – Iona and Peter Opie, for instance, the compilers of these playground rhymes, riddles, tongue-twisters and teasers; or Amelia Edwards, its designer, who produced 'a book that's good enough to eat'; or Sebastian Walker himself, 'a kind of Prospero', who flew to New York with the sole surviving copy of the Opie's original 1947 edition hoping to persuade the world's most celebrated illustrator to take on his first project for more than 20 years involving someone else's text.

Luckily, as a life-long admirer of the Opie's scholarship Maurice Sendak didn't need much persuading. 'It was like a dream come true. What turned the dream into a nightmare was that Sebastian was dying . . . and everything had to be speeded up. I had to *fly* through this book. I don't normally work quickly but I had to here because I wanted him to see the pictures before he died – to feel justified for all the grand efforts he had made. And he did see them. And I knew he liked them. That was wonderful.'

'The Publisher, the Artist, the Editors.'

So are the pictures. Vibrant, idiosyncratic, endlessly inventive they're like a return to a younger, freer Sendak yet with an accumulated richness and skill only years of experience can bring. 'What happened with this book – and it sounds grandiose but it's simply the truth – is that a fierce inspiration took over. My own schooldays, you see, were a complete disaster that probably stemmed originally from a troubled childhood. Separation from parents was a big thing for me – nothing to do with school. But when I got there I found no sympathy at all for the child who was frightened. Here we're talking about the Thirties, a hopelessly uncivilised time in school when no child was differentiated. You were either "smart" or "stupid". Shyness, backwardness, any of those shades and colours of personality were treated simply as *dumb*. In fact I was only being selective about what excited me – I gave no signals, so nobody stopped to talk to me, nobody stopped to find out.'

His difficulties in the role of pupil were compounded with two further handicaps. The first was 'an extremely bookish, vastly intelligent elder brother and elder sister who both created expectations about me that were hopeless, dooming'. The second was that he was *left-handed*. This, in those days, was a punishable offence. 'It confirmed dullness and stupidity, that something was wrong with you. My left hand was strapped to my back . . . if ever I got my hand out of the strap to use a pencil, say, the teacher would thwack me. A note was sent home to my parents to tell them to hit me if I transgressed – and they did. They were warm, loving parents but they were Europeans who hardly spoke the language, who felt the American school system was the last word in correctness. So they did exactly as the teacher told them to do. Home became a torture, too . . . which affected my speech-patterns so I became a hopeless stammerer who struggled to write right-handed and had other children laugh at me when I tried to talk.'
50 years later, he's still ambidextrous, still has difficulty telling his right hand from his left, still stutters occasionally on the telephone.

As a child he was devastated. 'By the time I was in junior high-school, round about 12 years old, I'd developed a whole repertoire of physical ills.
I became a projectile thrower-upper – I was dangerous, like a walking Scud missile. If anybody frightened me, or tortured me, or just looked at me in the wrong way, I'd *vomit*. Very few teachers then had the inspiration or talent or courage to go to a singular child, a helpless child and make a special case.' He recalls just one exception: Grace Warshaw. 'We were reading **Macbeth** and I was having a terrible time till she said, "Instead of reading **Macbeth**, why don't you draw pictures for us – the scene where Banquo's ghost appears . . . or where Lady Macbeth assaults her husband for his cowardice?" She picked scenes which tantalised me and I did a series of watercolours. She lured and seduced me into the play because in order to do the drawings I had to read the play – just like a good illustrator. I loved it.'
Years later, when his old English teacher attended an opera Maurice designed in New York, she told him she still had that complete set of watercolours. Lucky lady.

Grace Warshaw aside, alas, the schooling of Maurice Sendak was only too apt a preparation for a pocket book which Iona Opie describes in her introduction as a child's '*vade-mecum* and armoury'. In Maurice Sendak's pictures, she points out, 'the child always wins' so that the book is 'more than ever a declaration of a child's brave defiance in the face of daunting odds'.

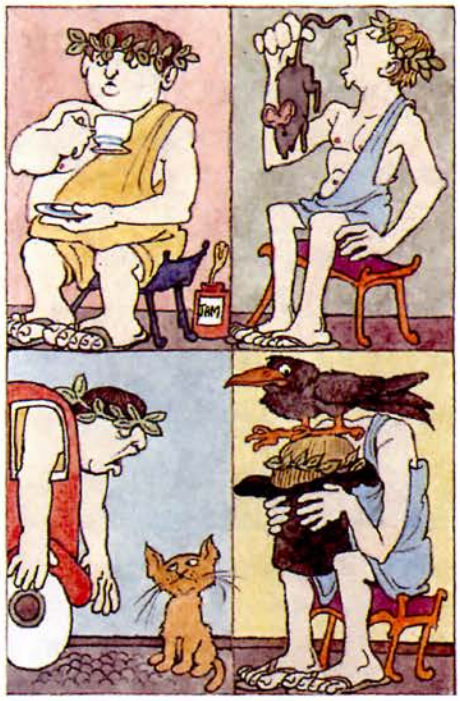
From the start of the project he found that his 'creative juices flowed' whether employing his right hand 'which has all the facility, correct drawing and careful cross-hatching' or his left hand 'which I use for loose watercolouring because it has all the freedom and sparkle'. Certainly critics have been quick to welcome the two-handedness of **I SAW ESAU** as in some sense an artistic summation of his career – a little too quick in his judgement. 'This is an easy thing to say. It has a superficial resemblance to early things I've done but there's no book like this in my repertoire. There's an exhilaration, a freedom that's never happened before and may never happen again.' What *is* true, he readily agrees, is that the book is a perfect expression of his work *thematically*. '**I SAW ESAU** is a child's defence . . . children are hopelessly vulnerable. They can't buy books, they can't go uptown, they can't choose their own food. Yes, of course, most of them – God willing, let's imagine, are loved and protected by their parents but lots of them are not. They're thrown out of windows and cooked in microwaves – ghastly things happen to children. This book is like a magic talisman, it's like a little Mao-ist handbook they can raise up to ward off Dracula.'

Which, then, are his own favourite images from the book? The composite pictures, perhaps, wittily bringing different verses together? 'Well, they certainly force you to think – like a very complicated puzzle. They're fun because I like being an illustrator – I really like it – yet some of these poems by themselves don't need a picture at all . . . but a composite you can make into a picture.' Characteristically, though, it's movement he finally opts for. '"Rain, rain, go away" frightened me because it's the most common verse of all so how do you do an uncommon picture to it? Well, let the mother who's protecting her baby become the tree in which the baby is secure during the rainstorm and then is carried away . . . with a little coda to the snow which she can't quite manage. You can pull these images out of yourself. I choreograph in a way – like "Nobody Loves Me" which is one of the most incredibly funny verses. I saw this straightaway as a ballet, a parody of a classical ballet. Everything is seen in terms of music with me. My first wish, if I'd been given the gift, was to be a musician.'

About his own gifts as an illustrator he's disarmingly clear-eyed. Grinning, he points out what he *can't* draw: a car. 'Just look at it. It's a Barney Google car – just a cartoon car. If I set out to draw a real automobile I'm sunk, I'm done for. But it's a funny poem so I can get away with it. I have severe weaknesses in my drawing and I have to be very adroit in disguising them. I have to choose very carefully . . . so does any illustrator. You can do so much. You have to learn, and be realistic, and get the geography of your talent so that as you get older you can push the borders out as gently as possible without making a fool of yourself. There's always a limitation to what you can do but as soon as you know it – oh my God! – how you can *hone* that limitation! The **ESAU** drawings just poured out of my hands and I knew they were good – I'm not a jerk, I *knew* how good they were. This book has been a turning point for me. It made me realise a certain kind of book is probably over. Work like **Outside Over There** and **Dear Mili** which were so important to me creatively . . . well, I think that bit of excavation is done. **I SAW ESAU** says I'm in another part of the garden now – a bit sunnier, a bit warmer than I've been for a long time. What's come out of **ESAU** is the most incredible blossoming.'

What next, then? Those Mother Goose verses he abandoned nearly 30 years ago? The pictures for Herman Melville's **Pierre** for which he's never felt ready?

After **ESAU** anything seems possible. 'I'm on a roll,' he laughs. 'For more reasons than I'm smart enough to know, this book has been a major movement in my life. I'm in one of my funny trucks and I'm going to keep on going till I roll right off the face of the earth. What more could anyone ask?'■



Brutus adsum jam forte,
Caesar aderat.
Brutus sic in omnibus,
Caesar sic inat.

To the Rain

Rain, rain, go away,
Come another summer's day;
Rain, rain, pour down,
And come no more to our town.

To the Snow

Snow, snow faster,
The cow's in the pasture.

Snow, snow, give over,
The cow's in the clover.

Nobody loves me,
Everybody hates me,
Going in the garden
To-eat-worms.

Big fat juicy ones,
Little squiggly niggly ones.
Going in the garden
To-eat-worms.

I SAW ESAU: The Schoolchild's Pocket Book, edited by Iona and Peter Opie, illustrated by Maurice Sendak, is published by Walker Books (0 7445 2151 3, £9.99).

Other books mentioned:

Outside Over There, Bodley Head, 0 370 30403 9, £7.99

Dear Mili, Viking, 0 670 80168 2, £10.99; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050938 0, £5.99 pbk

BOOKS FOR KEEPS FOR CHILDREN

ANNOUNCING Books for Keeps/Books For Children

AUTUMN COMPETITION FOR SCHOOLS

Can the children in your class produce two pages of **BfK**?

What we're after is a double-spread of book-related writing, drawing and designing based on one, or some, of our regular **BfK** features: reviews of fiction or non-fiction, articles, authorgraphs, editor's page, news, advertisements etc. In this case, though, the pages will be produced by and for the youngsters themselves – **Books for Keeps for Children**, in short.

THE PRIZES

An assortment of brand-new hardbacks and paperbacks, donated by our sponsors, **Books For Children**, and by **Books for Keeps** itself, valued as follows:

OVERALL COMPETITION WINNER to be selected from	£2,000
INFANT WINNER (Years 1 – 2):	£500
JUNIOR WINNER (Years 3 – 6):	£500
SECONDARY WINNER (Years 7 – 10):	£500

In addition to receiving £2,500 of books for the school library, the overall winning entry will be published in a future edition of **BfK**. In terms of writing with a clear sense of purpose and audience, how's that for meeting National Curriculum demands?

THE RULES

CLOSING DATE: 30th December 1992

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-page spread of **BfK** – that's 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 consult the report on last year's competition in **BfK 73** (March '92), 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 **BFC**; 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.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

Rosemary Sutcliff

14th December 1920 – 23rd July 1992

She described herself as 'of the minstrel kind', the best possible phrase to sum up a writer whose imagination was equally at home in the Bronze Age, in Roman-occupied Britain or in the eighteenth century. It was her novels of the Roman Empire, though, that made her famous – **Eagle of the Ninth** (1954), **The Silver Branch** (1957) and **The Lantern Bearers** which won her the Carnegie Medal in 1959. In 1978, rather to her amusement it's said, she also won The Other Award for **Song for a Dark Queen** with its formidable heroine Boudicca bent on her Holy War against the invader.

Rosemary Sutcliff's own story, which she recounted with characteristic modesty and humour in **Blue Remembered Hills** (1982), is hardly less heroic than the tales she told. Aged two, the daughter of a serving Naval officer, she contracted the progressively wasting Still's disease and spent most of her life in a wheelchair – which in no way prevented her from becoming both an accomplished painter of miniatures and an expert chronicler of battles lost and won. By common consent her best book, for adults as much as children, is **The Mark of the Horse Lord** (1965) about a Roman gladiator turned Northern tribal chief, but with so many superb narratives to choose from most readers will have a personal favourite of their own.

In **BfK 64** (Sept 90) Margaret Meek wrote of her: 'those who care for the company children keep when they read will see the relation between the events of now and the stories Rosemary Sutcliff writes to make heroic readers. The conflict of the light and the dark is the stuff of legends of all ages.' Of the minstrel kind, indeed. CP

The Pan Macmillan School Library Award

One of the judges, **Keith Barker**, reports

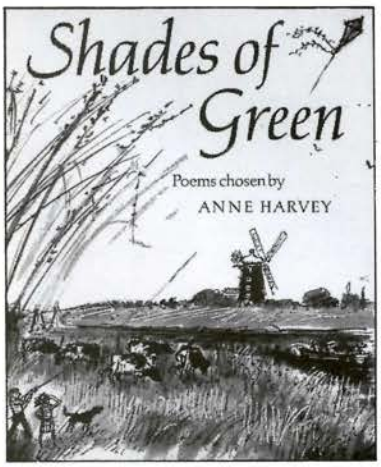
What makes an outstanding school library? This was the question which vexed the minds of the panel for this biennial award as we pored over the 100-odd entries from all parts of the UK.

We were confronted by a variety of presentations – some immediately appealing and attractive – produced in a variety of formats. We didn't necessarily go for the ones where huge amounts of money had been thrown at the library: indeed, a secondary school on the shortlist included this remark: 'we may not be a smart, modern school – we're short of space and resources – but we're rich in enthusiasm'. It was sad that, although there were more entries in the secondary category, this was where enthusiasm seemed most lacking, as if the further up the age-range children go, the less fun there seems to be in reading.

There was no shortage of fun from the infant and primary categories – **St Michael's School** in Belfast and **Maerdy Infants' School** in an ex-mining district of Wales won our hearts amid fierce competition. So did the justly famous **Linden Lodge School** – winner of the special school category.

In the secondary category, it was difficult to decide between **Bournville School** in Birmingham with its sparkling, brand-new library and **Kingstone School** in Barnsley – the overall Winner of the Award. Since receiving an HMI report some years ago, which castigated its provision, this library has put in a tremendous amount of work to turn things around and achieve success. Both schools shared important elements – they had charismatic teacher/librarians and splendid relationships with the local school library services. And school library services are, in general, under great threat! Need I say more?

1992 SIGNAL POETRY AWARD to



Shades of Green, edited by Anne Harvey, published by Julia MacRae Books, 1 85681 031 3, £14.99 Gerard Benson, winner of last year's award, writes: 'On the face of it, an anthology on the colour and concept of "green" might seem opportunistic and run-of-the-mill in the current climate of opinion . . . but Anne Harvey's commitment is to language itself and to the language of poetry in particular. She knows about children. She is widely and eclectically read, and has an excellent eye and ear for what is real and valid in poetry.' For a full report on the 130 books of poetry which were considered, see **Signal**, May 1992, available from Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ; Tel: 0453 87 3716.

Guidelines for School Libraries

Now available from the Library Association are their long-awaited guidelines on the necessary level of provision to both individual school libraries and the school library services.

The context, purpose and function of learning resources are fully considered along with their development, management and exploitation.

Available at £12.50 from Library Association Publishing Ltd, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WCIE 7AE.

The Daily Telegraph CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

3 – 10 October 1992

Susan Harvey reports:

In a major national initiative to increase interest in reading for pleasure, the **Daily Telegraph** has this year joined forces with the Children's Book Foundation to back the biggest ever **Children's Book Week** in schools, libraries and bookshops all over the country. This year's theme of "20 Writers to Read in '92" offers John Agard, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Bernard Ashley, Quentin Blake, Anthony Browne, Gillian Cross, Anne Fine, Michael Foreman, Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Jane Hissey, Shirley Hughes, Mick Inkpen, Gene Kemp, Dick King-Smith, Jill Murphy, Jan Pieńkowski, Terry Pratchett, Michael Rosen, Tony Ross and Martin Waddell. Over 20,000 primary schools and every library authority has been mailed with a poster and free **Daily Telegraph Children's Book Week Handbook** packed with ideas and advice, together with order forms for the striking posters, bookmarks and stickers, designed this year by Tony Ross. Friday, 2nd October has been chosen as launch day, and an exciting opening event and day of activity is promised in Covent Garden Market, London, to focus press attention on children's books and reading. The **Daily Telegraph** is issuing a special free supplement devoted to children's books on that day.

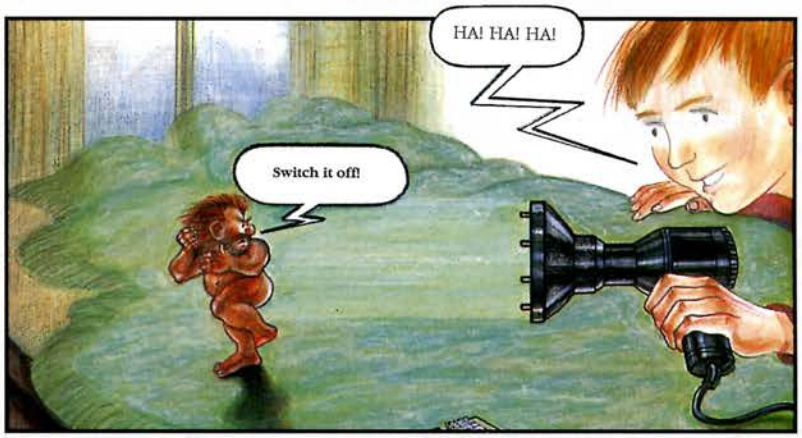
Return of the Book Bus . . .

Two years ago **BfK** lamented the closure of the Greenwich Book Bus, the mobile bookshop project which had operated a successful educational programme in London and Kent for more than a decade. Now, as part of their **Children's Book Week** sponsorship, the **Daily Telegraph** has funded a whistle-stop tour by the bus, between mid-September and mid-October, on a schedule that includes Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham, Cardiff, Bristol, Kent, Norwich and Cheltenham. Various themes will be explored – including pirates, dinosaurs and the environment – through poetry, craft, storytelling, fiction and non-fiction.

For a timetable, write to Anne Sarrag, 66a Court Road, Eltham, London SE9 5NP. ■

The Man behind THE MAN

Raymond Briggs talks about his latest book to Chris Powling.



He's hairy where the Snowman was smooth, grabs where Father Christmas would give and is only a fraction the size of Fungus the Bogeyman . . . otherwise, he's typically Briggsian. Who else, after all, could have created THE MAN, a tiny outsider who's 'adorable from behind, so baby-ish and vulnerable with his nappy and nappy-pin, but aggressive – even rat-like – from the front'?

Where did this odd combination of goblin and Alf Garnett spring from – deep in the Briggs psyche? 'I shouldn't think so.' Is reference being made to that common phenomenon, a Phantom Friend, then? 'That's never occurred to me till you just said it.'

Perhaps some allusion to other-worlds is intended . . .

Spit it out, boy!

Well, don't be offended, but ... er ... could it be that you are ... a fairy?

A WHAT!

Oh sorry ... I didn't mean -

How dare you!
Do I look like a blasted fairy?

No, no, not a bit -

Do you see any gossamer wings?

No, no, of course not ... sorry ... it's just that you are ... well ... tiny.

All size is relative.

But fairies are tiny people.

I am not tiny!
I am the size I am.
You are the size you are.
Pass the hair gel.

. . . which would seem to settle *that* line of argument. The Man who brings us **THE MAN** is as cagey as his central character when discussing the book's origins. 'I simply tried to imagine what would happen if you woke up one morning and found a small man on the bedside table, that was all. I was in the middle of doing another book at the time and had to give up to do this . . . somehow it was a bit more urgent. THE MAN is an ordinary human being, only different in size and slightly different – a bit aboriginal – physically. But he's not part of some elvish, underground Tolkien-ian culture at all. Because of his extremely small stature he can't live in the normal world – can't work or have a job, can't travel on public transport or do anything ordinary people do. He can't even turn on a tap or get the milk in. So he's forced to live a parasitical life hiding in other people's houses.'

Certainly the sheer logic of THE MAN's situation permits endless comedy as The Boy he adopts for a guardian is forced to help him cope – with dressing, with sleeping, with filling his stomach and emptying his bladder. Staying secret is itself an imperative in a world of Authorities:

Authorities?

Yes.
School, Town Council, DHSS, Police - that mob.
Nor the busybodies -

Busybodies?

Yes. Prodnoses, nosy parkers, tripe merchants - mucky newspapers, tatty magazines, soppy book publishers, twerp television, jabbering local radio - manufacturers and distributors of tripe by the ton. Tell them I'm here and they'll never let you alone. Or me. You'll be famous for a day and I'll be a comic turn. Our lives will be ruined.

Raymond Briggs goes on to exploit a range of satirical possibilities – not least the frustration and bafflement of a youngster who has to take on the role of a parent. First and foremost **THE MAN** is bitingly *funny*.

Is this the whole story, though? Isn't there another, odder resonance? For instance, can it be entirely an accident that The Boy, forty years on, would look somewhat like Raymond Briggs himself? 'Well . . . it's so easy to draw your own face or your mother's face which is very like your own. It's the first thing you see when you're a baby – probably the most important thing in your life for months, if not years. So it gets deep into your unconscious.' Beyond this Raymond Briggs won't be drawn except to refer you to Alan Bennett's notion of the writer-in-disguise which would apply equally, of course, to The Boy's earthy, irrepressible lodger. What's undeniable is that much of the tension in the book is generated by the opposing dangers of 'falling into fancy, artistic preciousness on the one hand' and 'coarseness, ignorance and stupidity on the other'. Craftsmanship, he reckons, provides a refuge from both. To clinch this point he jabs a finger upwards at his own roof, currently being overhauled. 'The blokes up there are laying this leadwork round the chimneypot and creating this valley down the middle – marvellously done with tiny panels and beautiful copper nails. I said to them "if you'd done that at the Art School in the sculpture department, you'd get a B.A. (Hons)".'

Raymond Briggs's craftsmanship, as always, is impeccable. **THE MAN** is twice the length of most picture-books, offers its script-like text wholly in dialogue differentiated by typeface and cartoon balloons, runs the gamut of design options with no double-spread repeated . . . and nearly wore its author out. 'I got terribly depressed doing it – it was so repetitive. Each character appears over a hundred times. I thought "my god, if I draw this bloody man again I'll *scream*". It's what I like about writing. You can't muck it up. With illustration, you do a day's work on a face then realise the eyes are slightly crossed . . . or he's staring past the glass he should be looking at. It's ghastly.'

In fact, it took two months to write **THE MAN**, another five to lay out the design and a total of two years to complete it in full colour. Like its central character, the project long outstayed its welcome – appropriately enough for a book which takes as its epigraph the Chinese Proverb, 'After three days, fish and visitors begin to stink'. Raymond Briggs is adamant that he'll 'never do it again'. The last picture of all, though, suggests that some aspects of THE MAN, or perhaps The Man, aren't so easily shaken off so we'd better stay on the alert for his next foray into Fungus or Father Christmas or Snowman territory. What Raymond Briggs does so well is invent mythical figures which remind us sharply of *ourselves* – especially those aspects we tend to hide in other people's houses. ■

THE MAN by Raymond Briggs was published in August by Julia MacRae, 1 85681 191 3, at £9.99. There's also a Tellastory tape available, read by Michael Palin and William Puttock (1 85656 209 3) at £4.99.