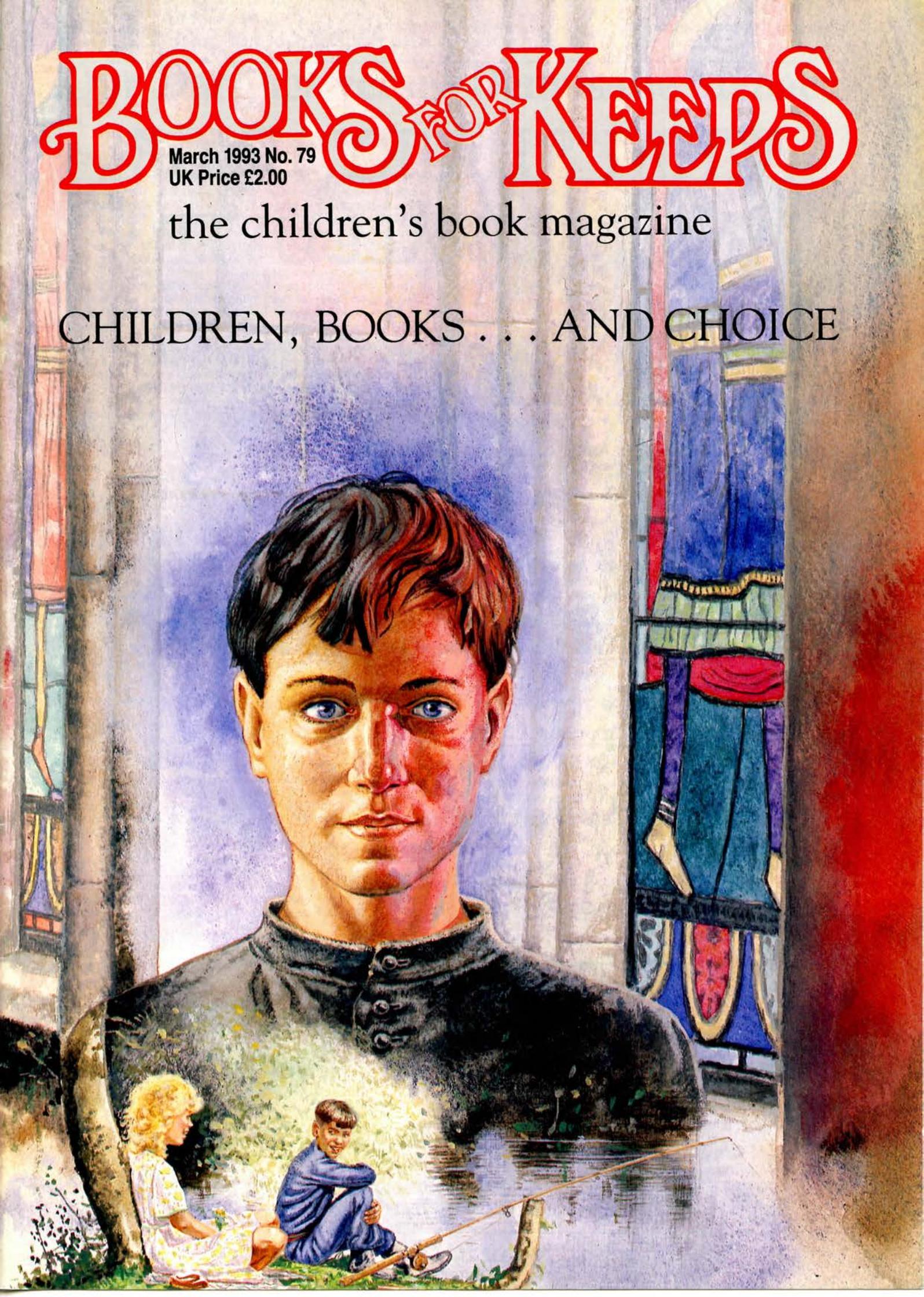


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

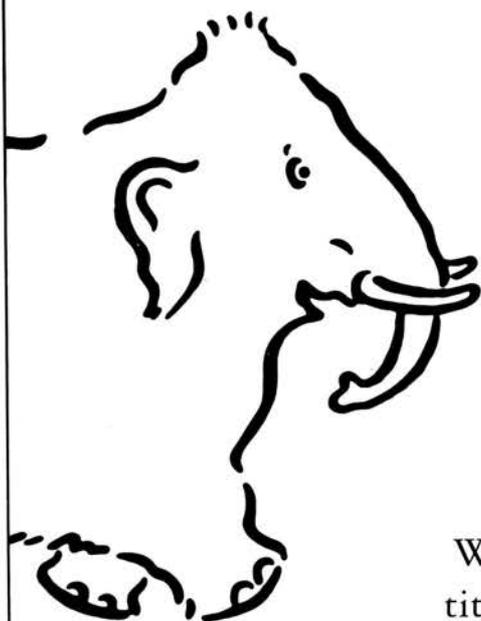
March 1993 No. 79
UK Price £2.00

the children's book magazine

CHILDREN, BOOKS . . . AND CHOICE



WHAT'S HAIRY, HUGE AND READ ALL OVER?



Which paperback list produces innovative picture books by Dick Bruna, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Babette Cole, Emma Chichester Clark and Peter Collington?

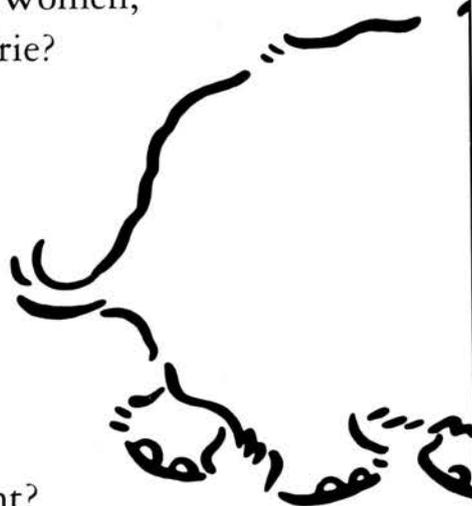
Which paperback list publishes Winnie-the-Pooh, Babar, Tintin and Thomas the Tank Engine?

Which paperback list has a significant number of titles recommended for the National Curriculum?

Which paperback list publishes classics like *The Railway Children*, *101 Dalmatians*, *Lorna Doone*, *Little Women*, *The Secret Garden* and *Little House on the Prairie*?

Which paperback list promotes fiction from prizewinning authors such as Anne Fine, Michael Morpurgo, Jenny Nimmo, Jean Ure, Penelope Lively, Diana Wynne Jones, Elizabeth Laird, Berlie Doherty and Robert Westall?

Which paperback list has over 800 titles in print?



ANSWER: *Mammoth* – the paperback imprint of Reed Children's Books.

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Cover story



On the front of **BfK** for March is the cover of **The War of Jenkins' Ear** by Michael Morpurgo – who is the subject of this month's Authorgraph. The artwork is by Anthony Kerins and we are grateful to Reed Children's Books for their help in using this illustration.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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EDITOR'S PAGE

and Rise

The Rise of Regulated Reading

Well, finally it's arrived. By way of multiple press-leaks, which is the closest He-of-the-Quiff comes to consultation these days, the list of prescribed books for the Nation's schoolchildren has now been laid out in full . . . hedged about with suitable provisos, of course. As **The Times** was quick to point out in its leader of 8th January, 'there is bound to be an unsavoury hint of totalitarianism about any government that seeks to control what happens in the classroom'. In this case, however, the seekers-after-control being such conspicuously Good Chaps in the estimate of **The Times**, we're told we need have no fear. After all, the leader continues, 'it is intended to be only a small part of the English programme and to ensure that all children have at least a taste of these recommended authors'. So that's all right, then.

Sorry?

What happens if, in some future political upheaval quite unimaginable at present, an alternative orthodoxy insists on *adding* to these recommended authors or even *re-writing the list altogether*?

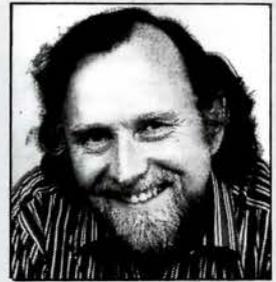
Worry not. This is **The Times**, remember. Its leader-writer has thought of that:

'Once the government has injected some sensible guidelines into the curriculum, it ought to be able to withdraw from this contentious area. This anthology is welcome. *May it also be the last of its kind.*' [our italics]

Thus, in one deft sentence, is a canon established forever – without the slightest hint of unsavoury totalitarianism, you understand. **BfK** readers who can send us a better example of double-think outside the pages of Orwell's **1984** will receive a year's free subscription to the magazine.

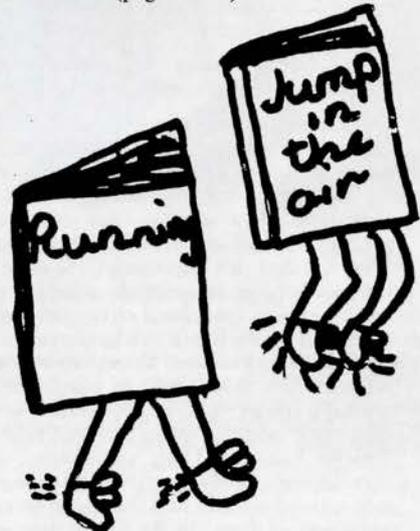
Luckily, objectors to the Government's increasing authoritarianism in educational matters ('corrective interference' is the term preferred by **The Times**) are growing in number. Professor Brian Cox, for example – remember him? – has predicted 'a major decline in literacy' as a consequence of the new draft Orders in English. Even Sheila Lawlor of the right-wing Centre for Policy Studies has condemned the latest revisions for being too prescriptive. 'A national curriculum should set out a minimum that children should have to master. Teachers should then be able to achieve that in the way they think best,' she commented. No doubt John Patten will dismiss both with the same word he applied recently to a group of parents who dared disagree with him . . . 'neanderthal'.

Oh dear. In that case, he'll find most of this issue downright palaeolithic. Page after page reflects a preoccupation with freedom, with choice and with the importance of sheer *diversity* in our approach to children's reading. Does this mean we reject the contribution of 'The Classics'? Not a bit . . . only 18 months ago, in **BfK 71** (November '91) we devoted the whole magazine to promoting them in every possible way. There's a world of difference, though, between Government-approved nostalgia trips down Heritage Lane and the sort of all-round awareness and personal engagement we were proposing. Why, Victor Watson actually began our own leading-article on the subject with the remark, 'I was relieved that the question I have to consider is: *What makes a children's classic?* – and not: *What are the*



children's classics?. On the second question, no two readers would ever agree.' Poor Victor! Incurably open-minded as he is, he'll never be a Government Adviser.

The pages that follow, then, should be treated as a SAT-free zone. Readers are invited to ponder, to query, to disagree, to come up with their own conclusions. On offer are Mike Rosen's powerful interrogation of the place of books in schools (pages 4-6), Jill Coleman's insider's account of the effect of the National Curriculum on a particular publishing house (pages 24-25), Gordon Dennis's celebration of the verse of Vernon Scannell (pages 26-27), and the description by Lucy Love et al of a particular initiative by one of the country's much-threatened Schools' Library Services (pages 18-19).



Yet **BfK** doesn't assume or require compliance with the views expressed by its feature-writers any more than with those of Margaret Clark, Morag Styles and the other reviewers who appear here. For all we know, some readers may even dissent from Colin Mills' high opinion of the work of Michael Morpurgo (see our Authorgraph, centre-spread) though we'll take some convincing about that. In the glorious argy-bargy of Art – which, at their best, is what children's books are – no judgement, however exalted, is beyond dispute.

There's one belief, mind you, which almost all our contributors share – along with most of our readers probably. As we move into an age when a 'virtual-reality' room will be as common in every household as computer-games, videos and multi-channel radio and television, it'll be harder than ever for books to win and retain readers . . . and we're convinced the best hope for their survival lies squarely in *delight* not doctrine.

How sad for us all, whatever our political persuasion, that the Government prefers it the other way round.

Chris



In the last few years a change has taken place in the relationship between schools and books.

I was at school between 1950 and 1964. I'm fairly certain that at no time before the sixth form did anyone either direct me towards any books to read outside of school, nor for that matter did they ask me what I was reading in my own time. My schools were state infant, junior and grammar schools in a largely middle class area in North West London. It's important to be clear about this because it's now become commonplace for politicians and journalists to refer to some kind of educational golden age where there was 100% literacy, where everybody could read, did read and schools were 'doing their job'. In the schools I attended this most certainly wasn't the case. There was a resistant cluster, who as I remember couldn't read at all – they were omitted when we read round the class out of 'Beacon Readers'. There was another group who found it very difficult – they stumbled and ground to a halt in these read-around sessions and the rest of us were given the space to snigger at them. In the fourth year at my junior school, there were two classes of over 40 children. Something like 25 of us passed the 11-plus. Because my class was where the 25 lived – the 'A' stream – most of the time in school was spent doing maths. All of every morning in fact. This was because the 11-plus was one third maths and one third formal logic, intelligence tests.

In essence, then, my primary school, along with hundreds of others, didn't see how what we would in normal speech call a 'book' had much of a part to play in education.

Later, at my grammar school, books – albeit often of a very specific kind – put in more of an appearance. We were encouraged to use the school library, there were class readers for English – *Jim Davis* by John Masefield, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the *New Testament* in RE and text books, text books and text books. These we had on one term or one year loan, we put our names in them and they covered Maths, Geography, History, the Sciences and languages. I recollect one English teacher urging us to read out of school, but he himself didn't initiate any discussion around our home reading or introduce books to us in lesson time to read at home apart from the class reader.

Luckily, my out of school literacy experience by this time was very wide-ranging, supported and scrutinised by my parents: 'I think it's time you gave Thomas Hardy a go'. 'Alec McCowen is playing Malvolio – I think you'll like it.' . . . That sort of thing. However, it wasn't until I reached the sixth form that I was exposed to any kind of home-school continuum in reading: Mike Benton, producer of many school anthologies of poetry since then, taught me English and sent us off to the library to read criticism. Only

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS IN SCHOOLS

Michael Rosen

then was I initiated into using more than one text for essays: Cambridge European History and Brogan on French history, for instance.

I labour this point in order to show that the misty-eyed view of education, especially grammar school education, that we hear from such people as Kenneth Clarke has to be qualified . . . At my grammar school over 60% of the students left in advance of the sixth form, before these later initiations I've just described came into play. In other words, the formalised and structured use of a variety of books to support learning in schools only arrived when the school population had been weeded down to less than 10% of pupils in state schools.

Between the time I left primary school in 1957 and the arrival of what Professor Ted Wragg has called Mad Curriculum Disease, huge changes took place in attitudes to literacy, children's books and children. These changes can be traced by taking a quick look at the new and expanded institutions that grew up at this time: school libraries in every school, class libraries, school bookshops, professional school librarians, a library support service from local libraries, teacher-parent reading programmes, the National Federation of Children's Book Groups, Children's Book Week and so on.

Magazines and book clubs grew up to support and inform these changes: *Books for Keeps*, *Books For Your Children*, *Dragon's Teeth*, *Letterbox Library* and the now defunct *Children's Rights Workshop*. Why am I describing what is to many of us so familiar? To remind us, to remind myself that all these features that surround us and support the reading of books are relatively new, were fought for by educationists, librarians and parents spending many, many hours of unpaid time.

The domination in children's books of all kinds by white middle class life-styles, heroes and heroines, anglo-centric perspectives on the rest of the world, white view of the third world – all these were challenged. One of my Christmas presents as a child had been the Puffin book, *Malay Adventure*:

Here and there they passed a group of broken-down huts, located beside a filthy pool of stagnant water, which smelt most foully.

'How can anyone bear to live there?' asked Brian.

'Only a Chinaman could,' Chapman admitted, 'it would kill anyone else. But they don't seem to mind either dirt or discomfort. As for smells, the worse they are the more they seem to like them.'

'Perhaps the Chinese nose is fitted with a special filter,' suggested Willem.

'Perhaps so, but it must be a particularly effective one – a semi-permeable membrane, maybe.'

In these times of mocking PC, political correctness, it does us no harm to remind ourselves that this was the political correctness of only a few years ago.

But let me return to the changes – totally out of reach of government directives – autonomous networks of information and self-education that sprang up around teachers' centres, libraries and teachers' associations like the National Association of Teachers of English and magazines.

It'll be seen in years to come, more clearly than now perhaps, that all this had a profound effect on what was written, who was writing, what was published and who was reading. We were on the verge, or perhaps in the middle, of a truly popular culture.

Yet this same period has been characterised recently in precisely the opposite terms – as the lost generation, a time when the adults concerned with children's literacy have failed. Let two things be said here:

- (i) there is no valid evidence whatsoever for this;
- (ii) any changes in literacy cannot possibly be attributed to one or other teaching method since the number of variables affecting children's literacy is so great – numbers of children for whom English is a second language, the increase or decrease of home support, the rapid turnover of teachers in one area as opposed to another and so on.

More than that, the teaching methods described under such headings as 'progressive' or 'look and say' are in fact so diverse that one-to-one correlations are not worth the paper they are written on.

We can be certain of one thing, though: this Government, in spite of all the rhetoric concerning literacy levels, has declared war on the reading of books. Let's look at their weapons:

- * the closing of public libraries
- * the elimination of the library support services
- * the forced amateurising of school librarians – professionals can't be afforded
- * budget restrictions on school book buying as documented by the NAS/UWT and the Children's Book Foundation
- * the domination of fixed courses of study, set texts and testing that limit casual and pupil-led reading and browsing
- * the contract arrangement with teachers that has resulted in a huge decrease in after-hours cultural activities
- * the elimination of text books for home reading and the consequent rise of the work-sheet.

This list is having and is going to have more effect than the sum of its parts. We are at this moment witnessing the elimination of a cadre of expertise that has informed and supported teachers in the hunt for books to suit the individual children in their classes. This matches the return of an idea of children's literature based on English Heritage – the idea that we are not entitled to be full members of British society unless we've been forced to read *Wind in the Willows* and, as Norman Tebbit would put it, support the England cricket team no matter what culture we belong to.

In addition school budgets available for buying books are now less. This has a direct class effect. Schools in middle class areas get subsidised to the tune of thousands of pounds. My step-daughter's school has raised something like £15,000 for a new school library from parents. Schools in working-class areas just have to lump it. At the secondary level, the removal of 100% coursework at GCSE, the arrival of compulsory Shakespeare for 13-16 year-olds, the narrowing down of set texts are all acts that discourage, not encourage, autonomous reading. This is matched by the elimination of coursework in other subjects, too. In order to do his coursework project on Science, my son had to read a book on the thyroid gland – not a text book – and a chapter in a text book from the library on the endocrine system. For his empathy work on the London blitz, a six-page diary – he read six or seven eye-witness accounts bought from the local community bookshops, THAP and Centreprise, and a chapter or two from A J P Taylor.

All this is under attack as we restrict our children to the photocopied sheet, the worksheet, the set text, the removal of coursework, and the constant testing and examining.

It's a dispiriting picture. Middle-class parents like me can and do compensate like crazy. We pile off to our local bookshop and buy the text book that the teacher is photocopying page by page. We buy one or two more in order to show our children that knowledge is not finite, absolute and restricted to one authority. We take our children to the theatre so that the cloze procedure on Shakespeare – 'To be or not to blank' (fill in the missing word) is supported by flesh and blood actors and emotions. We pull books off our shelves and say: 'First World War? Try Siegfried Sassoon.' With our smaller children, for every Peg and Jack and Jack and Mac they are sent home with by curriculum-dominated teachers, we read ten real books. We get in the *Beano* and *Snap*, and *Tintin* and *Asterix*, too.

We can be certain of one thing . . . this Government, in spite of all the rhetoric concerning literacy levels, has declared war on the reading of books.



In summary, what is happening, is that the access to books for working-class children is being limited by the day. That moment, that beginning of a child's literary popular culture is being wiped out. If there aren't the librarians, school bookshops, flexible school curricula and knowledgeable teachers to introduce, say, *No Hickory, No Dickory, No Dock* by John Agard and Grace Nichols, or *Daz 4 Zoe* by Robert Swindells, then the vast majority of children will not come across them in their lives. Yet it is books like these that made and make children's literature what I keep calling a popular culture: wide-ranging, inclusive, with roots in popular speech and popular forms of discourse.

Now, let's get this into perspective. No one will die as a result of all this. The world is in a terrible condition and we are living in Britain at a time when people can die of hypothermia while there is coal in the ground and miners are out-of-work.

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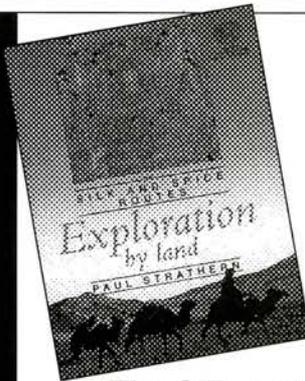
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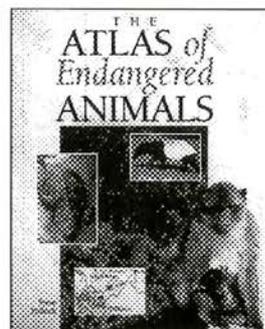
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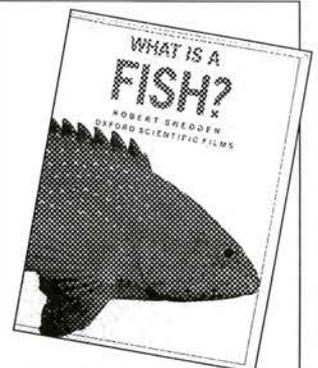
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Nor for that matter is the class-effect of what I've described particularly new. Schooling in this society has always meant the classing of children. It is through the school system from private, through the selective, the religious, and the sump schools that children are graded to slot into society's class system. Within schools, the streaming and classing of pupils goes on apace with assessment hitting kids so often and so fast it is occupying weeks and weeks of teacher/student time at all levels. My step-daughter, aged 14, will have been assessed six times in two years by the time she is sixteen.

What's more, the reading of books is no guarantee against barbarism nor is the not-reading of books evidence of barbarity. The man who rang me recently one night at 9.35 and said, 'Is that Michael Rosen?', 'Yes', 'You filthy fucking Jew ...' (I then put the phone down), would, if true to type, be highly literate in racist, fascist and antisemitic literature. Clearly, compassion, courage in the face of brutality, honest-dealing, and a whole gamut of desirable actions do not depend on our being active readers.

What follows from this is that in opposing what the Government is doing to the reading of books for all children, and working-class children in particular, we have to be quite clear, and much clearer than we have been in the past, about why we are defending book-reading.

We can say that the book has a kind of informal autonomy not matched by other media. You can take it with you, you can skip read it more quickly on a first reading than a film, TV or radio. You can mark it and refer to it, and read from it more conveniently than other media. You can scan a range of books, their content and their style more quickly than say a pile of videos. You can cross-check, cross-reference more easily when you're considering anything you're interested in whether it's for a formal essay or for your own interest. In other words books can put you just that bit more in charge of the form.

It's also now commonplace in theory to dwell on reading as a creative act – an imaginative re-creation of text with the tools of previous texts and knowledge doing the work. All reading – no matter how directive and limited relies on shared meaning. If I say: 'Do you know the joke about butter? No? I won't tell it to you or you might spread it ...' then clearly for the joke to work you have to know what butter is.

This recreative act has been described in wholesome terms on its own merit. In addition to this it has been said that reading opens up new possibilities. As we read we are able to try out emotions and actions in the safety of our own home, as the ads used to say. It provides a safe context to experience the dangerous, the absurd and whatever emotion the text suggests without having to suffer or get egg on our face. What would it be like to face up to something really dangerous like a wolf in your grannie's bonnet? What would it be like to discover that your father was killed by your mother's present husband? Read and find out.

I would agree with all these defences, these 'apologies' for literature, but as educators, writers and mediators I think we should be saying more than this.

The Government, through its English studies junta in particular, is positing a model of reading based on authority. The set text, the cloze procedure and the removal of the expertise to help teachers and pupils into personable reading, is a way of suggesting that books are sites of authority that should not really be challenged. The close-ended questions of the worksheets are the same. 'Describe socialisation', for example. No suggestion here that socialisation is itself a problematic concept.

Hence the 'good things' about reading I've mentioned – the recreative, possibility-opening, autonomy-encouraging features – are not sufficient to oppose the authoritarian mode.

What we need is more cogent defence of reading than we have so far. And we can only find this when the humanistic arguments we have used so far – autonomy, re-creation, imagination, possibility-showing – are put into the context in which the options and choices available to us in society are seen as differentially distributed. What those of us who create and mediate writing for children need to proclaim is that:

- A) We have to make as wide a range of experiences as possible available to children – ones that include all the culture and classes of the children themselves. This doesn't simply mean writing them, it now means fighting to save every part of the elaborate support structure I described earlier, because it's mainly through that structure that children receive the multi-cultural, the off-beat, and the dissident. They could not find those texts without the support structure.
- B) In a society where it's possible for there to be miscarriages of justice like the Birmingham 6, swindlers like Robert Maxwell or for millionaires to sack miners, and the stroke of a pen to turn away asylum seekers . . . in a society like that we are in desperate need for millions of people with the ability to interrogate texts – where text means every form of discourse from the teenage magazine to the politician's speech, the benefit entitlement form, or *Hamlet*. Of course, in one sense, we interrogate every text from the moment we hear and read. What I'm talking about is a widening and deepening of that interrogation which can only come about if we are given a wide and deep range of texts, where we can learn how to cross-reference from non-fiction to fiction, from TV to poetry from one text to another that directly contradicts it.

I once came home with an essay to do on the Chartists. 'What's your essay?' my father asked. 'Why Chartism failed.' 'Failed?' he said. 'Failed? Who said it failed?'

The moment we learn that authority does not lie in one source; that it doesn't necessarily lie in one book, one film, one magazine or one politician's statement then a qualitative change comes over us. It makes it more possible for us to question what we read and learn.

We are moving into a situation where children are to be presented with absolute truths absolutely – single texts, compulsorily read. And yet it is clear every day that single truths are not the way of the world. Open today's paper and discover that the man our leaders told us was second only to Hitler in his barbarity was being supplied with arms by these very same leaders so that he could kill civilians. And more, our leaders bust a gut trying to prevent us from knowing about it.

We are in desperate need for millions of people to interrogate this and imagine new possibilities, alternatives, other ways of going on. A humanistic defence of literature is not sufficient to bring this about. We need to insist that reading means: cultural cross-referencing, contrasting of oppositional texts, resourcing alternative views, and making space in classrooms for the socialised interpretation of multiple meanings.

That's what we need in an unequal world and it's something we have to organise ourselves into getting. We need, in short, to bring books – not political dogma – back into schools again. ■



Photos of Mike Rosen
by Richard Mewton.

This article is a condensed version of a talk given to the Children's Book Circle in November 1992. The full text will be published in the May 1993 issue of *Signal*.

Michael Rosen's latest book of poetry, *Mind the Gap*, illustrated by Caroline Holden, is published by Scholastic 'Adlib' (0 590 55012 8, £4.99) and he has recently edited a new anthology, *Action Replay* (0 670 83837 3, £6.50) for Viking Kestrel.

No Hickory, No Dickory, No Dock is published by Viking, 0 670 82661 8, £7.99; Puffin, 0 14 034027 0, £2.50 pbk

Daz 4 Zoe is published by Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12898 6, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 034320 2, £3.99 pbk

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

... along came Eric

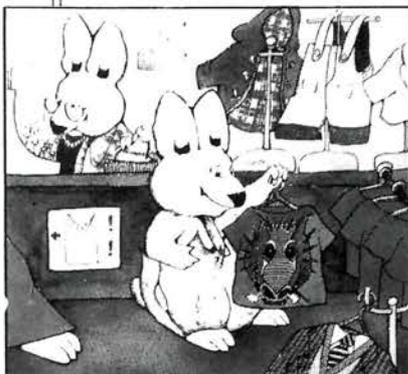
Gus Clarke, Little Mammoth (Oct 92), 0 7497 0968 5, £3.50

Gus Clarke gave us **Eddie and Teddy**, but has surpassed even that with this brilliantly funny and perceptive story of an older child coping with a new baby in the family. The illustrations are bright, full of humorous detail and very moving – perfectly matching the tightly controlled text which conveys so much that is left unsaid. JS

Max's Dragon Shirt

Rosemary Wells, Picture Lions (Oct 92), 0 00 664157 1, £2.50

Max does not want his blue dungarees replaced at all, he would rather have a dragon shirt. Needless to say he achieves his aim.



My 3-year-old has eaten, slept and bathed with this book; has lost it countless times and demanded that it be found 'NOW' on every occasion! Rosemary Wells has the knack of picking up on some of the most charming – and tiresome – characteristics of children at this age and putting them into unforgettable books. JS

Look Out Patrick!

Paul Geraghty, Red Fox (Nov 92), 0 09 910981 6, £3.99

Patrick the mouse sets off for a jaunty walk, completely unaware of the dangers behind him. The large, colourful pictures show how he nearly gets eaten or pounced upon, but moves away just before danger strikes. The child can take part in the feelings of anxiety and relief each time the mouse escapes and makes it to the end of the story without mishap. A fun book that's recommended for 3-5s. MS

Small Change

Rob Lewis, Red Fox (Nov 92), 0 09 997670 6, £3.99



Rob Lewis manages to capture the ordinary moment and turn it into a perfect vignette which leaves one grinning idiotically and as keen to read it again as the kids are to ask for more! Alice's discovery of a coin on the path when she's out walking leads Sam to wonderful fun and games. Rob Lewis, with the same deft touch as in his other stories, provides us with a gleefully wicked twist at the end of the tale – so read it and just watch the faces of the children listening... JS

Owliver

Robert Kraus, ill. Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey, Picture Puffin (Dec 92), 0 14 054499 2, £3.99

"I am an orphan."
"I have no father."
"I have no mother."
"I don't have anybody."
"Don't be so silly," said Owliver's father.
"You do have a father."
"And a mother, too," said Owliver's mother.

Kraus, Aruego and Dewey produce character after character with such an uncanny and sure touch that book after book are loved by children – with messages that parents ignore at their peril! When Owliver gives his dramatic and heartrending performance as the orphan and is brought up short by his down-to-earth father, there are many sympathetic grins from budding thespians in the audience. His parents' aspirations for him, however, are dealt with in typical Kraus style and *this* parent (of a potential Oscar winner) is taking heed. JS

The Snow Lady

Shirley Hughes, Walker (Sept 92), 0 7445 2357 5, £3.99

Two children living in Trotter Street don't like the grumpy old lady who lives next door. They decide to build a snow lady and label it Mrs Mean (after Mrs Dean), when she goes off to spend Christmas with her son. To their horror she comes home prematurely and they're very relieved as the snow melts and Mrs Mean is reduced to a heap of slush and pebbles. But when Mrs Dean comes for Christmas dinner they find she's not so bad after all.

This charming story is one of the Trotter Street Tales from Shirley Hughes. Each book has all the ingredients for a good story – humour, attention to detail, a few anxious moments, a home truth or two and a bit of a lump in the throat. Personally, I hope there are a lot more Trotter Street Tales to come – this one is excellent and recommended for 4-7 year-olds and all their families. MS

Threadbear

Mick Inkpen, Picture Knight (Aug 92), 0 340 57350 3, £3.99

Poor Threadbear, Ben's teddy, has lots of things wrong with him, but the worst is that his squeaker will not squeak! Ben's friends and family try to solve the problem, but it's the other toys who tell Threadbear to try Father Christmas. After a trip on FC's sleigh he lands back in Ben's garden and has to be put in the washing machine because he's so dirty. As a result his stuffing shrinks and lo and behold his squeaker works!

This delightful storybook (which won the Federation of Children's Books Award in 1991) is suitable for all ages, but particularly for 4-7 year-olds. MS

Sesame Street – Betty Lou's Bad Mood Blues
0 14 090357 7

Sesame Street – From Elmo With Love
0 14 090356 9

Jocelyn Stevenson, ill. Arkadia, Fantail in assoc. with Channel 4 TV (Nov 92), £2.99 each
Betty Lou's bad day worsens and it takes the intervention and understanding of her friends to help her express her

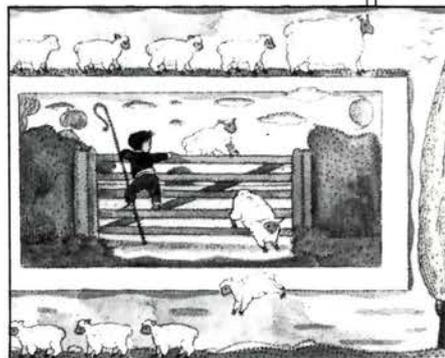
anger safely. Elmo learns that although his presents are welcomed when nearly all the friends of Sesame Street are ill, it's he himself, and not his generous gifts, who's most needed when his best friend Tilly catches the bug.

These are well thought out, well crafted stories which touch children and show a surprising amount of sensitivity and wisdom, without being in any way pedantic or patronising. JS

Hush-a-bye Baby

A First Book of Lullabies

Chosen by Caroline Fickling, ill. Ian Beck, Corgi (Nov 92), 0 552 42656 8, £3.99



A pleasing, landscape-format, picture book filled with lullabies old and new, known and unknown. It's a great idea; how nice to be reminded of 'Golden Slumbers', 'All Through the Night' and 'How Many Miles to Babylon?', and so on. Hopefully, this will become a favourite to sing through with all the family, and if you can't remember the tunes there's a tape available to help. Recommended for anyone with babies to 5-year-olds. MS

Bear in the Air

Benedict Blathwayt, Red Fox (Nov 92), 0 09 997970 5, £3.99

Bear is accidentally propelled into the air in a basket with balloons tied to it. Over the town and over the river he travels, on into the night. Next morning he lands in a vegetable garden where he's found and is then posted home in a parcel!

An amiable adventure story for small children who show a lot of interest in the detailed pictures. MS

The House That Jack Built

Elizabeth Falconer,
Little Mammoth
(Oct 92), 0 7497 0952 9,
£3.50

A new version of an old rhyme, with a most satisfactory rhythm and beat where the child can join in and where pictures are substituted for words – i.e. a Rebus book.

The detailed, attractive illustrations add to the charm and this is highly recommended for all under-5s. MS

Josh's Expedition

Margaret Nash, ill. Sue Broadley, Red Fox
(Dec 92), 0 09 986510 6,
£3.99

Josh sets off for 'an expedition' in and around his own back

garden which becomes, in his imagination, a jungle with a swamp and a tiger. Drawn in soft greens and yellows, the pictures add much in detail and atmosphere to the story. Interesting and challenging vocabulary is used throughout, e.g. Josh goes to the 'deepest' part of the jungle and 'the gold outsparkles' everything! The book has a strong and happy ending as Josh finds his mother's lost watch and is reassured that the tiger is, in fact, the family cat. MS

Spot Stays Overnight
Eric Hill, Picture Puffin
(Nov 92), 0 14 054289 2,
£4.50

A new lift-the-flap book about Spot who goes next door to spend the night with a friend. This is a delightfully simple and comforting addition to any book collection and children will easily relate to the story. Another highly recommended Spot title for all small people. MS

INFANT / JUNIOR

Jake's Magic

Alan Durant, ill.
Duncan Smith, Walker
(Nov 92), 0 7445 2358 3,
£2.99

A delightfully gentle story about Jake's insistence that, against all odds, he wants a cat. Never mind the frequent moves his family have to make because of Dad's work or the very real prospect of emigrating to Canada, Jake knows his own mind. As a lover of tabbies I can understand, and the rapport between him, Puss and Miss Barnes is perfectly balanced. This is very sensitively written and we share Jake's dilemma right up to the unexpected ending. PH

Space Dog in Trouble
0 09 983670 X

Space Dog the Hero
0 09 983680 7

Natalie Sandford, ill.
Tony Ross, Red Fox
(Dec 92), £2.99 each
By a wonderful twist of happy coincidence all the scientists from the planet Queekrg look exactly like grey, rough-coated dogs from the planet Earth. Wonderful for camouflage, but inconvenient for being taken seriously here. So when Space Dog crash lands into Roy's garden, he has to remember to walk on all fours, not to use his computer and keep quiet.

Boneshaker Rides Again

Paul and Emma Rogers, ill. Maureen Bradley, Puffin (Nov 92),
0 14 034482 9, £2.99

Three more sparkling stories about Boneshaker, the extraordinary bike who solves the most tricky problems, shows indefatigable strengths in the deepest snow and can be relied upon to come to the rescue of her best and only human friend, Oliver.



Truly wonderful for the newly fluent reader. The print is bold and clear and the line-drawings are full of movement and life. Oliver's adventures radiate exuberant fun and a joy for living that's shared by him, his 'Granfer' and the reader. PH

Cinderella

0 14 054257 4

Jack and the Beanstalk
0 14 054259 0

Rita Storey, ill. Amelia Rosato, Picture Puffin
(Dec 92), £3.50 each

Two re-tellings of the traditional stories which, to my mind, lose a great deal in the translation. The text is fairly conventional, although reduced to absolute basics; everything that happens is included, but not why it happens, so the events seem quite arbitrary and lacking in depth.

The illustrations are set in modern dress and are so matter-of-fact that all the magic is missing: Cinderella wears jeans and the Fairy Godmother looks like a bag lady; all sense of the hugeness of the giant is lost. The ugly sisters are suitably horrid, however, and the bright colours make the books attractive to look at.

If you like your fairy stories down-to-earth and stolid, these versions are for you. They're best suited to nearly independent readers to try for themselves. LW

The Lonely Lion

John Grant, ill. Susie Poole, Young Knight
(Dec 92), 0 340 58154 9,
£2.99

An attractively produced book, with good quality paper, print and colour, in a format rather unfortunately described by the publisher as 'a step up from picture books'... as if they were a lower form of print. However, this is a lively story about a lion who longs for his days in the circus (if you object to animal acts, the sentimentality of this stance may bother you) and who is befriended by a boy called Zak and helped to a happier life. There's a reference to 'Albert and the Lion' which may baffle young readers, but this is otherwise a workmanlike book for newly independent readers. LW

I Know

Bel Mooney, ill.
Margaret Chamberlain,
Mammoth (Oct 92),
0 7497 1134 5, £2.99

Further adventures of lively, funny Kitty who's very popular with all youngsters because they recognise so much of themselves in her! Each chapter is self-contained, short and entertaining – ideal to read aloud. I especially liked the way Kitty rescued Dad when he forgot Mum's Easter present, and the time when Kitty was so jealous of her brother she was really mean to him... for a little while. LW

Not a Worry in the World

Marcia Williams,
Walker (Nov 92),
0 7445 2375 3, £3.99

A very entertaining, thought-provoking book about worries and how to deal with them. In dozens of small detailed pictures and well-spaced lines of print, all the worries of a small boy are expressed, from being forgotten by the tooth fairy to being taken away by a

stranger. There's plenty of fun in the pictures and speech bubbles which often enhance the more deadpan text. At the end the message is that worries go away if you only talk about them – an important discussion point for young children. Good for shared reading. LW

Orange Paw Marks

Michelle Magorian,
Young Puffin (Nov 92),
0 14 034209 5, £2.99

Very old teachers, like me, will remember a book entitled **The Book of a Thousand Poems**, which provided every infant teacher with poems about fairies, flowers, babies and the weather. All were harmless, all were rhymed, all were sweet and light, some were also worth thinking about. This is the successor to that book, without the thought. The poems (perhaps verses, rather) are pleasant, suitable for very young children and about ordinary events like buses and red. If

*I can hop on one leg,
I can jump on two,
I can hop on the other one,
Can you do it too?*

is your idea of poetry for young children, you'll love this book... LW

Katherine and the Garbage Dump

Martha Morris, ill.
Yvonne Cathcart,
Second Story Press
(Nov 92), 0 929005 38 4,
£3.95

The story of how Katherine ignored a drinks can thrown away in her garden and ended up drowning in litter makes an entertaining introduction to the idea that we can all take responsibility for our own surroundings. Sometimes it's hard to believe that the odd can here or there makes much difference, but Katherine's determined action is an example to us all.

Jolly illustrations and a clear storyline make this an ideal book to read aloud to infants as a lead-in to work on environmental issues. LW



Only Roy knows Space Dog's true identity, which becomes a serious problem when Blanche, a friend's poodle, is smitten head over paws in love and when Space Dog becomes trapped in a Save-a-stray animal sanctuary. A gloriously funny pair of books for confident young readers and very successful read-alouds for the less than confident. PH

**Funnybones –
Mystery Tour**
0 7497 0911 1

**Funnybones –
The Black Cat**
0 7497 1040 3

Allan Ahlberg, ill.
Andre Amstutz, Little
Mammoth (Oct 92),
£3.50 each

Further adventures of the famous Funnybones skeletons will be welcomed in very Infant classroom. Few beginner readers can resist the sheer silliness of these stories and few teachers can resist the brilliance with which Allan Ahlberg writes stories which are full of repetition, so easy to read and yet are quirky, witty and original.

The Mystery Tour tells of the skeletons' night out ('What's a Mystery tour?' 'I can't tell you; it's a mystery!') and includes a simple, entertaining guessing game. **The Black Cat** is based on the idea of the black cat in a coal hole . . . but what about a white skeleton in the snow?

Highly recommended – as you'd expect – for all early readers and listeners. **LW**

**Pog climbs Mount
Everest**

Peter Haswell, Walker
(Nov 92), 0 7445 2374 5,
£3.99

If you loved **Pog** – you'll love this sequel. If you haven't discovered him yet, go out and buy both books right away!

Pog defies description – the books are just perfect for everyone of any age with a glimmering of a sense of humour. If you know someone without any sense of humour at all, give it to them immediately – you may be surprised! **JS**

**Philbert Frog:
The Naughty Cousin**
1 874371 06 7

Loses His Memory
1 874371 05 9

The Sunny Day
1 874371 07 5

The Wishing Wand
1 874371 04 0

Vincent James, Hazar
Publishing (Nov 92),
£3.50 each

These are beautifully produced paperbacks – they even smell good! Vincent James has provided us with a delightful new hero who muddles his way through life coping as best he can. Philbert Frog works so well as a character because, although we can feel slightly smug and superior as we follow his antics, the difficulties he faces as he's tormented by his cousin hit close to home and the solutions to these predicaments are very satisfying. The children found the books very appealing and I reckon Philbert will become a firm favourite if the television series lives up to the books. **JS**

In our January issue (No. 78) we gave the wrong ISBN for **Anna Magdalena: the little girl with the big name**. The correct ISBN is 0 7459 2421 2. Thank you, Lion Publishing, for pointing this out to us, and sorry to anyone who's tried to order by using the wrong number.

**Matty's Midnight
Monster**

Gene Kemp, ill. Diann
Timms, Picture Puffin
(Dec 92), 0 14 054429 1,
£3.99

One expects a lot from Gene Kemp and she pulls no punches with this book. Diann Timms' illustrations more than do her justice, too. It depicts Matty who likes to be scared – a little – coping with a positively terrifying nightmare, having insisted on borrowing a book her grandmother didn't really want her to read.

A title for school this isn't – but it ought to be prescribed for every parent suffering with their child's nightmares. It is catharsis with a vengeance and needs to be carefully and sensitively shared with children. **JS**

**Polly and the
Privet Bird**

Ann and Reg
Cartwright, Red Fox
(Nov 92), 0 09 980900 1,
£3.99

Polly is a lady who talks to flowers, which makes adults wary, but whom children love.



In this gorgeously illustrated book, the privet bird is the result of a long day's hedgecutting. The following morning 'with a shake and a shudder the privet bird lifted its proud head, spread its wings and soared into the air like a beautiful green aeroplane', with Polly aboard. Together they rescue children and help the village people during a flood. The adults find it hard to believe and so the children decide to keep 'the magic to themselves'. This sensitive and surreal book really reaches children of all ages. **GR**

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

The Wishing Seat
Anne de Menezes, ill.
Debbie Clark,
0 521 43862 4

Good Terms
Maggie Paun, ill. Shirley
Tourret, 0 521 43986 8

The Farnbury Frogs
Kay McManus, ill.
Norman Young,
0 521 43550 1

The Downhill
Stephanie Baudet, ill.
Ian Heard, 0 521 43867 5
Cambridge (Oct 92),
£2.95 each

Four offerings in a series called 'Moonstone'. Two of these, **The Wishing Seat** and **Good Terms** are collections of short stories about Asian families and festivals, namely Diwali and Dasshera. The stories are sensitively written and deal with the difficulties encountered when people leave their own environment. The problems faced by Asians living in this country has been well catalogued, but in **The Wishing Seat** we see the unwelcome conflict



experienced by Savio when he leaves his sick father in Bombay and goes to a small village in Goa to live temporarily with his grandmother.

The Farnbury Frogs and **The Downhill** are both full-length stories – again there's the undercurrent of conflict because the family has moved. Julie is from London and finds coming to terms with the

countryside difficult. Carl and Robert are on holiday in Switzerland when a ghostly skier tempts them towards danger and threatens to take over their lives.

A superb quartet of books providing material to dip into or to read for longer periods at one sitting. My Y5s loved **The Downhill**, especially where subtle time-slip changes occurred – this really provoked some intense listening. **PH**

**The Little Lame
Prince**

Rosemary Wells, Picture
Lions (Oct 92),
0 00 664131 8, £3.99

This extraordinary story is about a pig prince who, orphaned and lamed as a baby, is sent away by his wicked uncle to be brought up in obscurity. Meanwhile the uncle sets up a dictatorship, waxing fat on the misery of the downtrodden poor. How the prince eventually rescues his country and people, with the help of a fairy godmother, is told in complex, literary language full of rich metaphor. Partly because of the complexity of the language I

consider this book is for much older children than one would expect. It also raises interesting moral issues about handicap – is this a story of handicap overcome, or is the issue fudged by the intervention of the fairy? Questions of abuse of power and politics also arise, making this a demanding read. **LW**

**Fearless Fiona and the
Mothproof Hall
Mystery**

Karen Wallace and Judy
Brown, Young Lion
(Oct 92), 0 00 674381 1,
£2.75

A relentless, jokey story for older readers needing the encouragement of short, continuous text and plenty of slang and wham-bang action. Fearless Fiona is the daughter of a newspaper editor who undertakes to solve the theft of rubies from Mothproof Hall. The story isn't easy to follow and needs a fair degree of street awareness from the reader, so this is, perhaps, more suitable for the older, slower reader. **LW**

Fu-Dog

Rumer Godden, ill. Val Littlewood, Walker (Nov 92), 0 7445 2373 7, £5.99

This large-format adventure story feels great to handle and is good to look at, with vivid illustrations and decorations. The story centres on a mixed-race family, the daughter of which is given a magical fu-dog by her Chinese great-uncle. The action moves nimbly from Devon to the electric atmosphere of Chinese New Year in London, where the orient is captured with convincing mystery and benevolence.

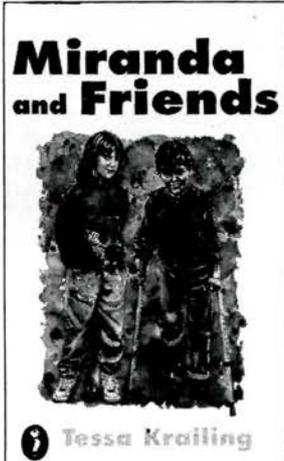
Many youngsters should derive pleasure from this story and learn a little about Chinese culture along the way. DB

Revenge of the Dinner Ladies

David Tinkler, Knight (Dec 92), 0 340 56809 7, £2.99

A fast, zany, easy read that's number three in a set. It's bound to thrill the 'bum, fart, poo' mob who just love seeing their favourite naughty words in print. The quartet of criminal, modern-day hags insinuate themselves into the mansion of a rich hag and kidnap her outwardly wonderful, secretly horrid, twin daughters. Fortunately Plughole, her undernourished and underestimated nephew, can save the day where a stereotyped, clod-hopping constabulary fails.

It's bound to be successful through sheer verve and nerve. DB



Miranda and Friends
Tessa Krailing, Puffin (Dec 92), 0 14 034855 7, £2.99

There's a genuine warmth in this follow-up to *Only Miranda*. The summer holidays stretch tediously ahead in the company of Gran and then Miranda encounters Eric at the bottom of the garden. Wheelchair bound, he wants to be treated as normal and Miranda is just the one to help him by involving him in schemes to find treasure and her own personal crusade against the school bully.

A highly recommended, entertaining read with a lot of worthy sentiment thrown in. DB

The Red Spectacles Gang

Gordon Snell, Red Fox (Nov 92), 0 09 989480 7, £2.99

The kind of story in which the school bully has cronies – a whimsical tale of a gang of friends outwitting their headmaster and a film crew. Flat characters, stilted dialogue and heavy-handed attempts at humour give the feel of a very, very long Beano cartoon. LN

Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales

Edited by Gordon Jarvie, Puffin Classics (Nov 92), 0 14 035140 X, £3.99

An enjoyable collection, peopled with brownies, selkies, kelpies, giants and fairies. Well-known tales and ballad adaptations such as 'Tam Lin' and 'Thomas the Rhymer' are combined with more recent additions from John Buchan and Alasdair MacLean. Fluent readers will be able to cope with the lot, including the substantial Victorian story by Andrew Lang, 'The Gold of Fairnilee'; for the less confident, or for reading aloud, there are plenty of shorter tales to sample. LN

Occasions

Edited by Anne Harvey, Puffin (Nov 92), 0 14 034872 7, £3.99

What's so good about this collection is the range of writing and the range of interpretations of the theme. There are the usual special occasions – birthdays and Christmas, for instance – but it's the poets' ability to make occasions out of the apparently ordinary and everyday that is so memorable: in fact there's a sense of occasion about every day that's the subject of the very first poem.



This collection makes you feel better, pleased to be alive and delighted that writers can spin words to catch these moments. A book for children to browse in and share and one for the teacher's collection, too. AJ

Marrying Off Mum

Janice Marriott, Piper (Dec 92), 0 330 31988 4, £3.50

There are lots of comic scenes

and a clever plot, too, holding this together. It starts with Henry's New Year resolutions and his new penfriend. Henry wants to be rich and find a man for his mum. Lesley, his penfriend, has a rich father and no mother – Henry thinks he sees the answer to his problems and the letters wing to-and-fro as the penfriends arrange a joint holiday for themselves and their parents. Nothing goes according to plan – well, Henry's plan. Lesley turns out to be a female determined to re-arrange Henry's perceptions about women. Good fun and worth adding to the class library. AJ

Dreamchild

Rosemary Hayes, Puffin (Nov 92), 0 14 036058 1, £2.99

The move to an old house, the room which has a strange chill, dreams that recapture the past... okay, the plot may not be new but this is well written. The story moves to its dramatic climax, where the resolution of present and past problems must converge, increasing its grip on the reader. This is a satisfying and short book which might be an easy entry into the whole range of high-quality fantasy writing. AJ

Juma's Goat

Judith Moore Sicard, Janus (Nov 92), 1 85756 095 7, £5.95

A series of short stories about Juma and his family in Tanzania. Each story is broken into short segments and they all combine to give us a rich sense of the family and the place. Juma walks the long, long journey to school and back each day. He yearns first for a bicycle and then for a watch. His younger brothers, Toro and Kimara, who is lame from polio, share the adventures. There's a lovely simplicity about the stories and a deep sense of kindness – they're ideal for reading aloud and will leave you wanting more. AJ

Broops Down the Chimney

Nicholas Fisk, Walker (Nov 92), 0 7445 2370 2, £2.99

Broops is an amorphous, shape-shifting, vaguely cuddly alien who tumbles down James' chimney one night. He vanishes a few days later into a magnificent spaceship that appears over the suburban rooftops. Those few days, however, are entertainingly depicted fiascos as Broops romps with naive enthusiasm through a range of Earthly phenomena, from rugby to riddles.

This is a brief and readable farce, with a touching conclusion, which sci-fi fans might turn to for some light relief. GH

The Lenski Kids and Dracula

Libby Hathorn, ill. Peter Viska, Puffin (Nov 92), 0 14 034973 1, £2.99

The Lenski kids are children from Hell, who torture babysitters into submission. Then along comes Kim Kip, who seems incapable of allowing any atrocity to disturb her serenity. She does, however, appear to have a supernatural assistant waiting in the wings.

Independent readers fond of fairly crude slapstick and transparent twists of plot will probably enjoy this knockabout comedy. I found it irritatingly obvious, and the caricatural illustrations glaring and cacophonous. GH

Dr Xargle's Book of Earth Tiggers

Jeanne Willis, ill. Tony Ross, Red Fox (Nov 92), 0 09 988140 3, £3.99

An hilarious book in which Dr Xargle imparts his obviously expert knowledge of Earthtiggers (cats) and Earthlets (guess who?). Tony Ross's distinctive illustrations are a perfect match to an already hugely funny text. It's in picture book format, but the very young will not fully appreciate the humour. Avid Dr Xargle fans will be clamouring for this and their numbers will be multiplying.



Press them in the middle to find the squeaker.

Great entertainment to be giggled over again and again. GR

The Sausage is a Cunning Bird

Jennifer and Graeme Curry, ill. Penny Simon, Knight (Dec 92), 0 340 33204 2, £2.50

A riotous collection of verse and rhyme That'll give most readers an enjoyable time. Thick on the page are the names we know, Rosen, Nash, McGough and Sparrow. 'An Ode to a Goldfish', 'Rabbit's Christmas Carol', 'Dad knows Best' by Christine Farrell. I'm quite worn out, they're *truly* funny. Especially the one about turtle and... rabbit. PH

POETRY

POETRY

The Tale of Christine Pristine

Laura Beaumont, Puffin (Nov 92), 0 14 034818 2, £2.99

Christine Pristine is such a perfectionist about matters of appearance and deportment that she wears a ring with a mirror in it for detecting the presence of stray bogeys. Her fastidiousness wins her the title of Queen Clean of Speen, but at the celebratory banquet she commits a breach of etiquette that unleashes an annihilating torrent of social pigswill.



Or so says Annie's grannie, the narrator of this rambling, anarchic, deadpan, cautionary tale, as she tries to persuade her granddaughter to keep her elbows off the table. A splendid, shaggy farce that should appeal to the mucky pup in many children of junior age. GH

The Battle for the Park

Colin Dann, Red Fox (Jan 92), 0 09 920561 0, £2.99

This book sees the Farthing Wood animals under threat from an invasion of rats. Colin Dann has ensured that all the ingredients for success are in place: a strong storyline, endearing, eccentric characters and an accessible style.

The personification of animals has an enduring appeal: it combines recognisable human traits with sentimental appeal. Years 7-9 will warm to the carefully structured tension of the narrative and the hard-won happy ending. VR

Second-Time Charley

Kathy Henderson, ill. Anthony Lewis, Walker (Nov 92), 0 7445 2371 0, £2.99

Charley wakes up one morning

and it's the day before yesterday. Thanks to his ability to move in time, a long unsolved jewel raid is finally cleared up, so allaying his mum's worst financial fears.

The often difficult concept of time is considered through Charley's own confusion about what's happening, and totally involves the reader. Family relations and domestic issues are realistic and ones which many children will recognise. With plentiful and pleasing illustrations, intrigue and lots of action, this is a readable story which many juniors of 8+ will enjoy for themselves. GR

Monsters

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Picture Lions (Oct 92), 0 00 664020 6, £3.99

The title and cover attract, and once the book is opened the mildest of interest is transformed into an ineluctable fascination. Monsters are categorised by physical form, habitat and behaviour and are accompanied by a host of amazing facts so that the Hawkins' become convincing experts on the subject. Many of the monsters are

It is said that any monster bits that are chopped off a monster will re-form into a complete monster again.
You have been warned.

Grrrr!



recognisable, making this truly hilarious!

Exciting, outrageous and creature-crammed, this book will be much appreciated by monster addicts from juniors upwards. But, be warned, there's nothing conventional about this 'picture book' - there's not a story and the print and format definitely won't suit the very young. GR

(See also review of tape on Audio page.)

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

The Alpha Box

Annie Dalton, Mammoth (Aug 92), 0 7497 1178 7, £2.99

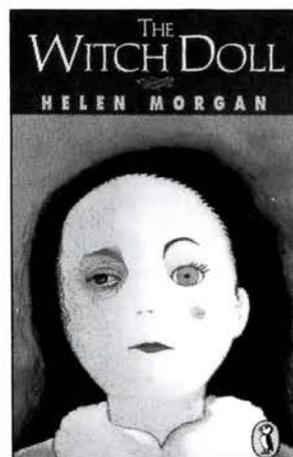
The sinister rock group, The Hoarsemen (yes, there's four of them and they play at the Apocalypse Cafe), seem to be taking over the youth of the world. A bizarre series of coincidences bring Joss and Asha together, along with the strange mystical powers of Asha's box. They and their friends have, finally, to defeat the dark forces of the rock music. I did keep trying to resist the mystical seriousness of it all but the story is mostly intensely riveting. The central characters' battles to learn who they are and remain faithful to themselves is handled very well. AJ

A Ghostly Gathering

Keneth Ireland, Knight (Oct 92), 0 340 57543 3, £2.99

Ireland offers a gathering of 13 standard ghost stories where the beyond revisits the here and now. Some of the visitations are beneficial as when a ghostly boy rescues a drowning maiden or timely warnings are given. Others are downright malicious, like the gorgeous girl who wrecks a chap's first date, or the tricky herbalist who induces a paper lad to run around the town starkers, under the impression he's invisible.

This will make an acceptable dip-read, for boys particularly, who want something immediate and not too taxing. DB



The Witch Doll

Helen Morgan, Puffin (Oct 92), 0 14 034741 0, £2.99

Linda and Angie are relieved to find that unpleasant Joanna has found a new friend for the summer. Their relief is short-lived when Linda realises that Tilda bears an uncanny resemblance to the doll she was given by Mr Baldock, a local second-hand dealer. Slowly the true history of the evil toy is revealed. Joanna is in great danger and the friends

are compelled to use all their ingenuity to save her.

The story is rich in character, with an abundance of cliff-hangers and the plot twists and turns intriguingly. It's written in a clear, accessible style and will appeal to 10-12 year-olds who love a mystery. VR

Hide and Seek

Yvonne Coppard, Red Fox (Sept 92), 0 09 997830 X, £2.99

For those who enjoyed *Bully*, another first-class offering from the same pen. Emma and her friends are pursuing a holiday game - surveillance of a suspicious bookshop - when she realises that one of its rare customers is her Uncle Jim. He callously draws her into a web of deceit and crime, manipulating her affection for him and attempting to alienate her from friends, whose characters are persuasively drawn by Coppard.

When Emma finds her life in danger, things take a dark and compelling turn - her confinement in the cellar of a derelict house is stunningly handled.

This book reveals the minutiae of family life, the bonds of childhood friendship and warns that adults aren't always the protectors they ought to be. A vital and convincing read. VR

The Road to Camlann

Rosemary Sutcliff, Red Fox (Oct 92), 0 09 997930 6, £2.99

In the third part of her King Arthur trilogy, Rosemary Sutcliff charts events after the finding of the Holy Grail. The story is redolent of the threat of coming darkness as Mordred, the King's out-of-wedlock son, plots to discredit Lancelot, kill Arthur and usurp the throne. Arthur accepts the fate foretold by Merlin, and Excalibur is returned to the lake, where 'white mists scarfed the water, shimmering in the white fire of the moon...' Such Sutcliffian descriptions bring the Arthurian legends magically to life in a trilogy whose appeal transcends age divisions. LN

Maid Marian and Her Merry Men

They Came from Outer Space 0 563 36709 1

Driving Ambition 0 563 36710 5

Tony Robinson, ill. Paul Cemmick, BBC Books (Nov 92), £4.99 each
These books are produced in conjunction with the current BBC children's TV series. They reflect Tony Robinson's irreverent sense of fun: children will love the 'no holds

barred' approach. The humour is a mixture of ripely corny jokes, heavy-handed word plays and slapstick situations.

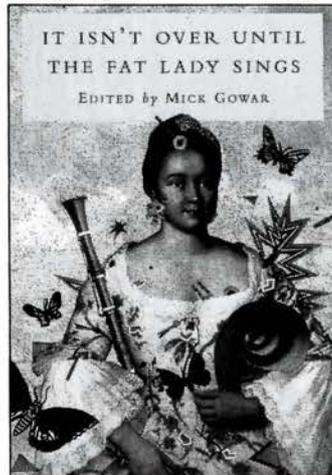
There's ample amusement for the less able reader and some of the ambitious jokes – verbal and visual – will stimulate the more competent. Paul Cemmick's manic illustrations perfectly capture the breathless pace of the narrative and each page is alive with asides to delight the observant reader.

One criticism – the humour in the text occasionally becomes self-conscious: beyond the scope of children and artily 'clever'. For example, a character has a bright idea which is represented by a light bulb – but it bears the legend 'anachronistic cartoon cliché'. Why spoil the ship . . . ? VR

The Pigman and Me
Paul Zindel, Red Fox
(Nov 92), 0 09 996790 1,
£3.50

Autobiography which weaves the fictional Pigman back into Zindel's own childhood, the book is interesting in its own right, with Zindel able to recreate his own growing amid the uncertainties of childhood when he moved to the new town. His own Pigman, Nonno Frankie, is a lovely character, full of awful jokes, knowledge of the world around him and worldly-wise. The scenes where he takes over are the real heart of the book – there's noise and energy to counter a sleepy world and there's certainty and understanding to counter Paul's doubts and fears.

Worth looking at in tandem with Zindel's fiction and a valuable addition to the small stock of autobiography for Key Stage 3. AJ

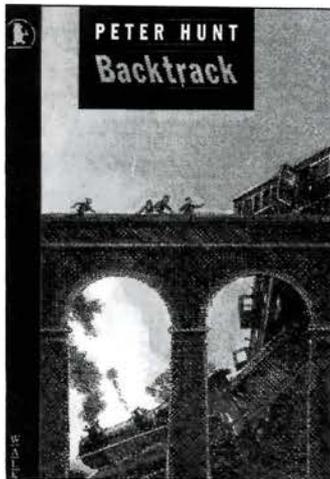


It Isn't Over Until the Fat Lady Sings

Edited by Mick Gowar,
Bodley Head (Dec 92),
0 370 31695 9, £8.99

An anthology based on stories from opera. Some tell it straight (Adèle Geras' 'Carmen'); others update to the present (Jon Blake's 'The Threepenny Opera') or give an unusual slant – Dennis Hamley's contribution has Nahum Tate and Virgil arguing on a tube train about how the story 'Dido and Aeneas' should be treated. One of the most enjoyable is the lesser-known 'The Makropulos Affair', retold by Penelope Farmer. Overall, a clever idea and an encouragement to children or adults to experience the operatic versions. LN

OLDER READERS



Backtrack

Peter Hunt, Walker
(Nov 92), 0 7445 1466 5,
£3.99

Two teenagers, 'peasant' Jack, and Rill, a boarder at a posh girls' school, join forces on realising that relatives of both were involved in an apparently inexplicable 1915 train accident, in which eight people died. Varied viewpoints and 'sources' – maps, first-hand accounts, court records, railway histories – throw an ever-changing light on the incident, so that the reader works as hard as the two protagonists to understand what happened and why. A clever, complex novel which rewards close attention. LN

Black Maria

0 7497 1043 8

Eight Days of Luke

0 7497 1225 2

Diana Wynne Jones,
Mammoth (Oct 92),
£2.99 each

Such an original and challenging fantasy writer should not be excluded from any library shelves. As ever, here are two books that work on many levels.

In the first book Aunt Maria is the Queen Bee of Cranbury-on-Sea. Daily she is visited by ladies of the town, who dance attendance to her sinister wishes. Meanwhile the menfolk, zombie-like, lost their own champion years ago in the power struggle between good and evil, which is on the verge of eruption once more. If everyone is to be free to use the power, they need to be without division according to sex. The Queen must be destroyed and the destroyers must come from her own family.

Eight Days of Luke, a modern version of the Norse Loko stories, was first published in 1975. Troublesome and extraordinary relatives figure here, too. They finally induce the exasperated David to summon up such a curse that he unwittingly sets free from incarceration Luke, a boy who never plays by the rules. In doing so David is drawn into a desperate and dangerous search for Thor's missing hammer. The pace is fast, the excitement and tension unremitting, with enough pure invention to gladden any fantasist's heart. DB

Dark Toys and Consumer Goods

Laurence Staig, Pan
(Dec 92), 0 330 31478 5,
£3.50

This collection is a timely warning of the consequences of over-indulgence in consumerism. The writer paints a bleak picture of a society obsessed with possessions – or, more importantly, with the need to acquire more.

What makes these stories so chilling is that the characters are all instantly recognisable as facets of our own natures, with behavioural patterns and thought-processes which are horribly familiar. The settings, too, strike chords – who won't

recognise the hi-tech Shopping Mall, the computer emporium, the car accessory showroom? They're all here, often terrifyingly personified.

Staig cleverly plays on our need to be frightened, but gives us none of the safety nets of less compulsive fiction. A wonderful resource for KS4 and an unflatteringly truthful exposition of what may be coming. VR

American Short Stories

Edited by Chris Brown,
Oxford (Oct 92),
0 19 831282 2, £4.25

This is a useful collection – not least because it prepares pupils for the realisation that literature has more to offer than an examination pass. It would be a churlish reader indeed who failed to be attracted by at least one of the writers here, and the Wider Reading List at the end of the book makes further exploration possible. The bedrock of ideas from which American Literature draws its inspiration is well-represented, as are male and female, black and white authors.

Activities based on the stories are generally well-structured and relevant, though there is occasional recourse to the clichéd, too.

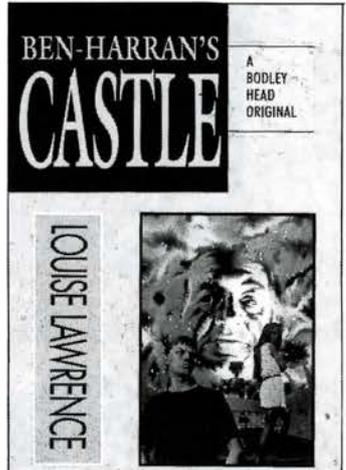
The dullness of the 60s-style cover belies the excellence of the contents of this anthology: a useful addition to any KS4 stock cupboard. VR

Ben Harran's Castle

Louise Lawrence,
Bodley Head (Sept 92),
0 370 31715 7, £7.99

The central dichotomy of this novel is the issue of personal growth through free choice or imposed doctrines.

Ben Harran, Galactic Controller, has allowed the



inhabitants of the planets under his jurisdiction to exercise free will in their development. The all-too-familiar pattern of irresponsible use of resources and mutual destruction is the result. Atuis' High Council closely control all aspects of its subjects' environment; subduing, soothing, but stifling creativity. The reader is asked to decide which philosophy is most acceptable: chillingly, Earth is abandoned as being beyond help.

Lawrence's religious convictions permeate the narrative and sit uneasily with the more lurid descriptions – 'thighs bronzed' and 'awesome power'. This is not her most successful novel, but it is, as ever, thought-provoking. VR

REVIEWERS in this issue

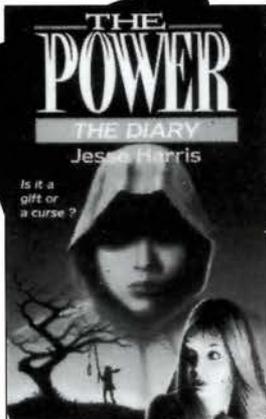
David Bennett, Pam Harwood,
George Hunt, Adrian Jackson,
Linda Newbery, Val Randall,
Gill Roberts, Judith Sharman,
Moirá Small and
Liz Waterland.

HAVE YOU GOT

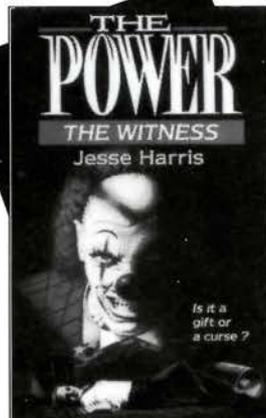
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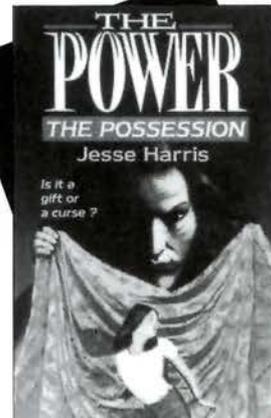
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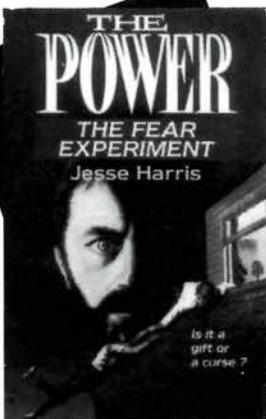
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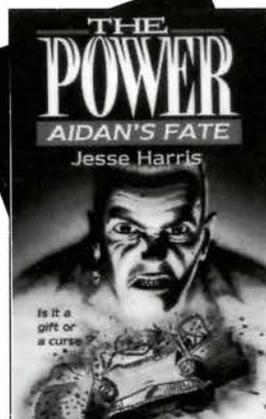
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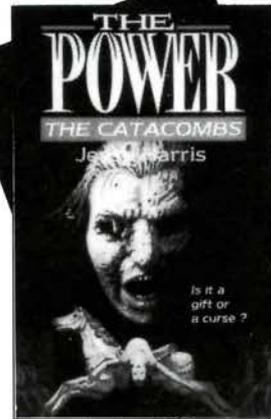
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AUDIO TAPES

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

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

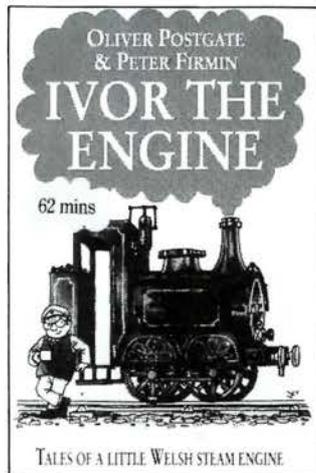
Alfie Stories

Shirley Hughes, read by Thora Hird, Collins, one cassette, 33 mins, £3.99

On a cassette the narration has to take the place of Shirley Hughes' illustrations – and this reading is just right for curling up with in bed or an armchair. Thora Hird manages to make listeners feel as though a fond Granny is reading especially for them. There are four stories here including **Alfie Gets in First**, when Alfie manages to lock himself in and Mum out, and **Alfie Lends a Hand** where he forgets his comfort-shawl and hold's little Min's hand because she's frightened of Bernard in a tiger mask. Vintage Shirley Hughes (even without the pictures).

Ivor the Engine

Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin, told by Oliver Postgate, Collins, one cassette, 62 mins, £3.99



These tales of a little Welsh steam engine feature music and sound effects from the original television series – and some very fine singing from the Welsh choir which Ivor wants to join so much. Like Postman Pat and Thomas the Tank Engine, Ivor the Engine has a leisurely pace and simple innocence which children respond to instinctively. The books are available from Collins Picture Lions, but the cassette with its huffings, puffings, whistles, hoots and the melodiousness Welshness of Jones the Steam and his friends can be enjoyed without them. Four stories are on this tape, including 'Ivor's Birthday' and 'The Dragon'.

Heidi

Johanna Spyri, read by Susan Sheridan, Random House Tellastory Classics, one cassette, 46 mins, £3.99

Heidi benefits from abridgement and this one certainly bowls along. There's a timeless charm in the story of little Heidi finding a new life snuggled up warm with the goats and her Grandfather in the Swiss Alps. There can be a sickliness in the story, especially Heidi's plan to cure her friend Clara with the pure mountain air, but Susan Sheridan's narration avoids any over-sweet sentimentality while retaining warmth and sympathy.

Pinocchio, **Tales of Ancient Greece** and **Robin Hood** are other titles in the Tellastory Classics range.

Monsters

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, read by Chris Barrie with additional voices, one cassette with Picture Lions pbk, 35 mins, £3.99

The cartoon format of this book with speech balloons and plenty of detail is a winner with children. The zany, busy illustrations are translated on the tape into the 'mutant music and slimy sounds' billed on the inlay card. The whole consists of sound-bytes of monster fun: fact, fiction and jokes about all kinds of monsters – the hairy, the scary, the weird and watery, from the sea, space and the movies. The sound effects – 'listen if you dare' – are curdling, shrieking, slurpy and spooky!

Dragons Flies Monsters and Spies

Poems by Grace E Knight, read by Grace Knight, Drew Forsythe and Dina Panozzo, ABC Spoken Word, one cassette, 50 mins, £5.95 + VAT (available from Craftsman, PO Box 38, Stevenage, SG1 2SP; tel: 0438 743280)

Australian TV stars bring Grace Knight's children's poems vigorously alive. With rhymes about nasty tummy bugs, blaming anti-social smells on the cat, Nanny's replacement hips melting in front of the fire, yucky frogs and smelly flies – this is no **Child's Garden of Verses**. It's

an unflinching child's eye view of life as it really is. The presentation is Australian, chatty, full of humour and bounce and refreshingly different.

Talks With My Skateboard, poems by Libby Hathorn, read by Glynn Nicholas, is also available on ABC from Craftsman.

Henry's Leg

Ann Pilling, read by Martin Jarvis, Chivers, four cassettes, 4 hrs, £16.95 + VAT

Here's an unabridged story that combines excitement with compassionate domestic realism. Henry's mum has been left on her own since Dad went off with a younger woman. Now Henry is alone much of the time as Mum has to work and it's chip-shop chips for tea most nights. Henry loves scavenging for treasures in skips and finds a shop dummy's leg which seems to hide real-live stolen treasure. It's a fast-paced plot with the undercurrent of Henry longing for his dad to come back home. Martin Jarvis' narration is as polished and direct as ever, making the often exasperating Henry and his barely-coping mother totally real people.

Why the Whales Came

Two cassettes with large print hbk, 3 hrs 50 mins, £19.95 + VAT

Waiting for Anya

Four cassettes, 4 hrs 30 mins, £16.95 + VAT

Written and read by Michael Morpurgo, both available from Chivers

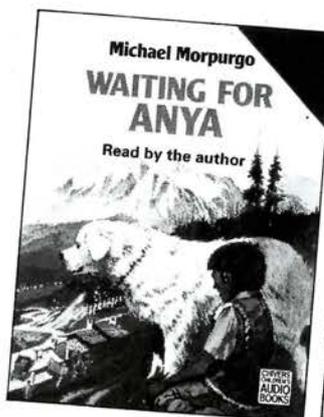
Michael Morpurgo is an excellent reader of his own work – dramatic and sympathetic – and these two stories illustrate the range of his writing. **Why the Whales Came** is set in the Scilly Isles during World War I. Adventure moves into mystery, tense danger and almost into the realms of myth with the supposedly mad birdman of Bryher and young Gracie's father returning from the dead from Gallipoli. Wartime tensions are conveyed equally convincingly in **Waiting for Anya** where Jo, the shepherd boy, on the Franco-Spanish border has to keep a dangerous secret to safeguard the lives of himself and those escaping across the border.

The stories are driven forward, packed with incident and detail. These unabridged readings do full justice to the author's economical and skilful storytelling.

Little Women

Louisa M Alcott, Radio 4 dramatisation, BBC Radio Collection, two cassettes, 2hrs 45 mins, £7.15

The March family left behind at home in New England whilst Father is away in the Civil Wars carry on with saintly fortitude. Mother nobly makes do and incites the children to Christian charity by giving them **The Pilgrim's Progress** as a moral guide and handing their Christmas breakfast to a poor family. It sound hopelessly sanctimonious in the materialistic 90s, but it's reassuring and surprising how much this cassette is enjoyed. The dramatisation, with a full professional cast of 25, dilutes the moralising and creates a lively, moving and credible family story.



Authorgraph No. 79

Michael Morpurgo

INTERVIEWED BY
COLIN MILLS

There can't be many successful children's writers who can say that they regularly spend evenings with large groups of children from all over the country, reading them stories, listening in to the ways they see the world. That's after helping to organise their days spent feeding calves and pigs, rounding up sheep, mucking out stables!

But all that is part of the pattern of Michael Morpurgo's life. As well as being a prolific writer for children, he manages Farms for City Children with his wife, Clare, and a large staff based at Nethercott Farm, in North Devon and at Treginnis, Pembrokeshire. Children (2,000 of them a year) come in groups of 30-40 for a week at a time throughout the school year for an intense and challenging week's work. And Thursday evenings are usually 'story night' with the resident famous author.

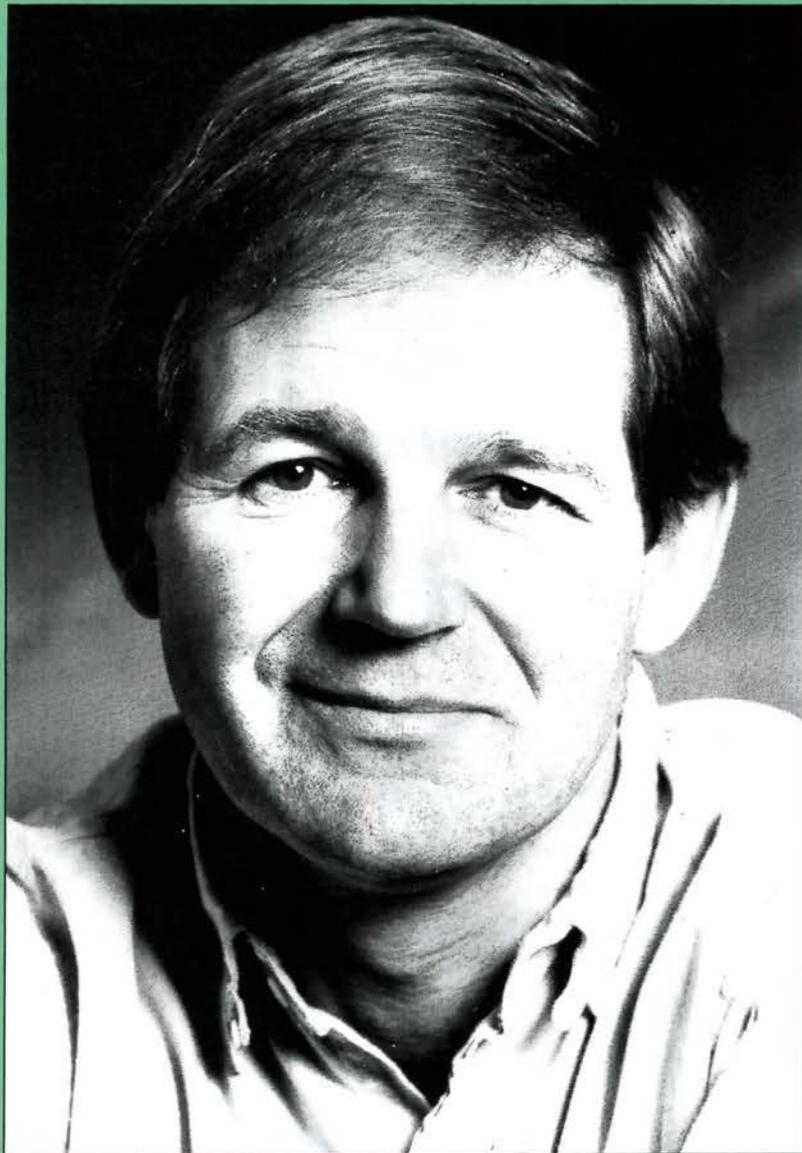


Photo by Katie Vandyck 1992.

The enterprise has been an important part of Morpurgo's life for nearly 20 years now, and continues to feed into his work as a writer. We talked at his home in Iddesleigh, a short swallow's flight from Nethercott Farm, on a bright and crisp January morning. Although there was a lull in the activity – the 'term' hadn't got started – there were constant phone calls, inquiries, negotiations going on. Clare Morpurgo works relentlessly (and very full time) on the project. I asked Michael how it got started. 'As a primary teacher in the sixties, I did an average-to-good job, but I felt that I wasn't having a great deal of impact on children's lives. I worked to "unglaze" their eyes . . . to find a way of changing their perceptions of the world.'

What started as 'an ideal' all those years ago involved a deal of risk (a move from Kent to Devon with three young children, dog, cat, chickens and two donkeys) but it's now a respected educational charity. The Princess Royal is their patron and work now proceeds on a third site – they hope to open in the next year or two in Gloucestershire.

As he talked with obviously undimmed enthusiasm of the thrill of seeing city kids during their first days on the farm, I was reminded of the vivid description in *Friend or Foe* when David and Tucky, the two evacuees, are transported from London to their new home (a farm in North Devon):

All that day and the next they saw things they'd never seen before as Mr Reynolds shepherded them around the farm. They watched him helping the foal born the night before, pulling him up on to wobbly legs. They discovered that the sheep on the steeply sloping fields were not wild after all; and three milking cows, golden brown with white patches, wandered slowly towards them and did not attack . . .

The concern for 'changing children's perceptions', for giving them more and intense experiences, runs like a thread through Morpurgo's writing and his conversation.

Born in 1943 into a family with exotic European connections (illustrious ancestors include a Belgian poet-anarchist grandfather who settled down as a professor at London University) he spent his early years in the 'smog-bound' London which found its way into his later writing in both *Friend or Foe* and the soon to be filmed *Mr Nobody's Eyes*. Each of these books also offers a strong sense of the intensity of experience that the Second World War gave children. It figured largely in his own childhood. 'The whole mythology for children growing up at that time was of the War. The evidence was all around you. The adults all talked about it. Everybody had lost somebody . . . an uncle, a father . . .'

Experiences in a boarding school in Sussex and, later, public school in Canterbury were echoed much later in stories which dealt with transition, with lonely children having to 'put on a show of normality' and make sense of new, often frightening surroundings. The peculiar ethos of the English public school has given him both the context and content for his new (and, for him, his most significant) book, *The War of Jenkins' Ear*.

Sandhurst and the army ('a debacle') followed school. Then, a degree in English ('I didn't really tune into reading and literature through that'). It was teaching in primary schools, after a PGCE, that led to his salvation, to an interest in children's stories. 'I found myself seeing children respond to the stories I read to them. I started reading widely. I got a *freshness* from children when I talked with them about their reading. I saw excitement in their eyes . . . and grew up in front of a class.' This led him to try out some writing – short stories – of his own.





Serendipity ('a friend knew a friend who worked for Macmillan Education') led him to Aidan Chambers who was at the time on the lookout for short stories for a series he was editing. A collection of Michael's, **It Never Rained**, was accepted. He's still grateful to Chambers and acknowledges the value of encouragement to novice writers – 'I now try to do that for the children I meet and work with.'

Around that time, the farm venture was getting started, so after his first 'long' and successful story, **Friend or Foe**, he began to combine the roles of co-manager of the farms and children's writer. Since then, his output has been increasingly ambitious. His stories have strong, involving plots. To the sturdy English tradition of the well-crafted adventure story, he's added social sensitivity and anthropological variety. Children in his stories often have to make hard choices. In **Friend or Foe**, the young evacuees have to decide whether to betray the German soldier who has saved one of their lives. The young hero of **Waiting for Anya** has to deceive his mother in order to keep secret the existence of the Jewish children he's helping to keep 'underground'. 'I'm interested in writing about dilemmas . . . in asking the reader to try and work out what's right and what's wrong. Life is full of dilemmas . . .'

Adults in Morpurgo's books are unusually three-dimensional. The young often form strong bonds with them, especially the very old: both learn, and gain, from the closeness. He's given young readers a memorable gallery of characters: the mysterious Birdman in **Why the Whales Came**; Uncle Sung in **King of the Cloud Forests**; Signor Blondini and Ochy, the chimp, in **Mr Nobody's Eyes**. One of his favourite creations is the very substantial and rumbustious 'ghost' of Walter Raleigh in **My Friend Walter**. 'I wanted a *real* character not just a fool in a white sheet.'

His books cover a distinctively wide historical and geographical canvas and it was fascinating to hear of their origins and of the meticulous research and detective work he does. **Why the Whales Came** had its start in a chance holiday to the Scilly Isles with his son, an avid birdwatcher. Local folklore led

him to the story (a true one) of the deserted island which is at the centre of the story. Old men's reminiscences, and pictures of World War One carnage found in an attic, were woven into the plot of **War Horse**. Research for that book meant many hours in the Imperial War Museum. **Waiting for Anya** entailed long conversations with an uncle who had been involved in resistance activities. **The King of the Cloud Forests** needed deep reading into the origins of the Yetis. **My Friend Walter** meant 'long chats with the Beefeaters at the Tower. Researching a book is *me* being a child. I want to *know*.'

His approach to writing is embedded in the tips he now gives to the many novices he meets in the course of school visits – and in the end-of-the-day farmhouse sessions. 'I tell them "give yourselves time". It's important to let stories work themselves out and grow, organically. Most of the "big" books I've written have taken me a year or so.'

He is generous with his ideas and values collaboration, having learned a lot from co-operation (on **All Around the Year**) with Ted Hughes, who is now President and a keen supporter of the Farms work.

His more recent work for younger children (he talks with modesty of his "big" books and "little" books) has involved him in another successful collaboration with the artist, Shoo Rayner. The 'Mudpuddle Farm' books echo the events, fun and feelings that he sees all the year round at Nethercott. The latest, **Martians at Mudpuddle Farm**, is a lovely example of pictures and text working together in a variety of formats – speech bubbles, cartoon frames – to invite your readers in and along.

He's also pleased with his Banana Books for the newly-independent readers: he knows that they reach children in schools and get them 'engaged' (a word he uses a lot) in reading. Some of his best stories for the young have animals at the centre. **Colly's Barn**, a Banana Book, has a little girl who fights to save the habitat of her favourite wildlife. The story catches wonderfully the natural rhythm of animals' lives. The rough edges aren't softened, either. The book, unusually, ends with a death. I asked him about the appeal that animals hold for young children. 'I think there's an elemental thing

that connects young children with animals. They do understand each other. There's something raw and real about animals and about children's emotions. I try to tune into those emotions through animals. Animals bring out a strong sense of fairness, of what's right in young children. I see this all the time.'

Morpurgo is a writer who is constantly doing that kind of observing. He now has a new and very immediate audience in young grandchildren of his own. **The Sandman and the Turtles**, a book which enables young children to explore the very essence of storymaking, is dedicated to one of them.

Although he's shyly courteous, measured in his speech and extraordinarily modest about his achievements, there's a quiet passion about the importance of writing well for children. Though not over-keen on a great deal of involvement in the 'children's lit' circuit, a recent invitation to judge the Smarties Prize has helped him clarify his ideas about what counts as quality (and what's dross). It's left him with the view that 'there's just too much produced, and too much that's samey'. He's enjoyed the learning that's come from his scriptwriting and the joint adaptations of his own books for TV and films.

There's a genuine enthusiasm for his new book, **The War of Jenkins' Ear**. 'It's the best yet,' he says, without a hint of artificiality or effect. His favoured themes are reworked: isolation, dealing with conflict against the odds. But there's a new sharpness in the writing of this tale about a boy arriving at a boarding school and proclaiming that he's Jesus Christ. The feuds between the schoolboys and the villagers are written with dash. In his own words: 'It's about class, that very English pre-occupation, and love, and strong emotions. It's about a society at war with the outside world. I want children (and adults) to read it and to have strong ideas . . .'

They will, I'm sure. It's a riveting read with which it's hard not to . . . well, *engage*. ■

Michael Morpurgo's books mentioned are:

Friend or Foe, Mammoth, 0 7497 0104 8, £2.99 pbk

Mr Nobody's Eyes, Mammoth, 0 7497 0104 8, £2.99 pbk

Waiting for Anya, Mammoth, 0 7497 0634 1, £2.99 pbk

War Horse, Mammoth, 0 7497 0203 6, £2.50 pbk

Why the Whales Came, Heinemann, 0 434 95200 1, £7.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 0537 X, £2.99 pbk

King of the Cloud Forests, Pan, 0 330 30560 3, £3.50 pbk

My Friend Walter, Mammoth, 0 7497 1216 3, £2.99 pbk

Martians at Mudpuddle Farm, ill Shoo Rayner, A & C Black 'Jets', 0 7136 3614 9, £4.99

Colly's Barn, ill. Claire Colvin, Heinemann 'Banana', 0 434 97666 0, £2.95

The Sandman and the Turtles, Heinemann, 0 434 95206 0, £7.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 1045 4, £2.99 pbk

The War of Jenkins' Ear is published in March 1993 by Heinemann, 0 434 96219 8, £9.99 hbk and 0 434 96408 5, £4.99 pbk. The cover of the book is featured on the front of **BfK** this month.

For further information about Farms for City Children, contact Clare Morpurgo at Nethercott House, Iddesleigh, Winkleigh, North Devon EX19 8BG.

PICK A WINNER!

OR

The Enfield Tales

A Librarian, an Adviser and a Teacher report on an experiment in the bringing together of children and books

Pick A Winner is a reviewing group for London Borough of Enfield Primary and Special teachers. Four meetings are held a year, at half-termly intervals. At the first meeting, the Librarian presents a collection of about 120 fiction titles to the Teachers who may each then borrow up to ten titles to use in the classroom. At the subsequent meetings, the Teachers talk about the books they have borrowed and bring written reviews by teaching colleagues and children. All the reviews are collected together at the end of the school year, edited by the Advisory Teacher, published as a booklet and distributed to Enfield schools . . .



Look What was MADE From
the Hurricane Tree.

The Librarian's Tale

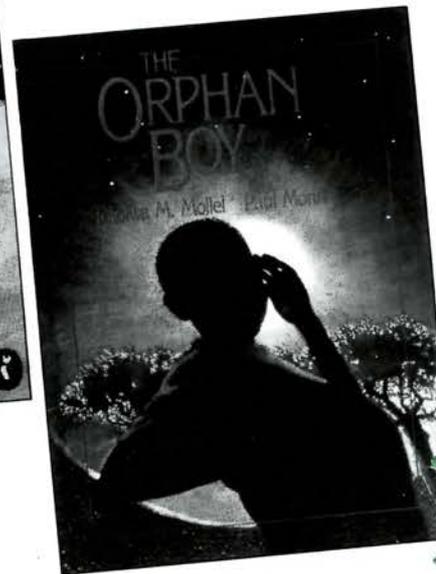
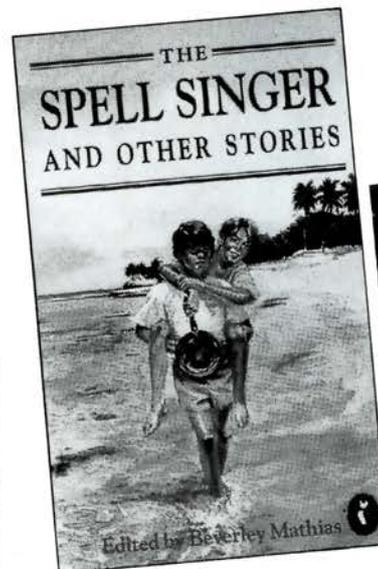
I had felt for a long time that librarians tend to select fiction in isolation from their audience and it was in response to this that Pick A Winner was conceived. Librarians are specialists on children's books and build up an enviable knowledge and expertise, but lack the opportunity to introduce literature to actual readers. Our role is often limited to recommending titles or authors. We're rarely there to experience children's responses at first hand.

Teachers, however, enjoy a unique opportunity to experiment with what their pupils read as well as a superior understanding of the reading level reached by the individual child . . . but often lack detailed knowledge of the literature. The purpose of Pick A Winner is therefore to acquaint teachers with the best as well as the most recent writing for children.

In the early sessions of Pick A Winner, my priority was to promote those authors whom I considered to be insufficiently well-known, but who were outstanding children's writers. I try to make the collection as wide-ranging as possible and, even before the National Curriculum documents confirmed the wisdom of doing so, I believed that children must be given the opportunity to sample stories in a multitude of different forms, such as picture books, short stories, traditional tales, poetry, dual text and pop-ups.

We've now established a core group of very knowledgeable teachers who enjoy the newest and most innovative books that have been published within the period since we last met. Award-winning titles feature frequently and I've gradually begun to use this group to pioneer some truly oddball books, especially those which are really pushing out the boundaries of imaginative fiction for children.

The learning process has not been one way either, for over the years I've become aware of how storybooks are used by teachers as learning tools, not simply through the sheer enjoyment of story, but as extensions of our understanding of the world around us. I now see an almost infinite number of possibilities in the texts and pictures for curriculum work. Infant teachers have used *Dearest Grandmama* for the history curriculum, and *The Orphan Boy* and *The Whales' Song* for the geography curriculum.



Of the many anecdotes recounted by teachers my favourite concerns a book which we knew might be difficult to promote in the public library, but was nevertheless worthy of special attention: *The Spell Singer and other stories*, a collection of stories, each of which takes a form of disability as a starting point. The collection was borrowed by a boy who was not normally motivated to read alone. He had a step-sister who was severely disabled and when he read one of the stories, according to his teacher, he simply fell in love with the book. 'It made him realise what his sister must go through. He read the story to his sister and was close to tears, so strongly did he identify with the characters in the story. Eventually, with some encouragement, he presented the book to the class and from then on, the book was never in the classroom but was passed round from pupil to pupil.'

That, for me, is what Pick A Winner is about.

Lucy Love

Principal Librarian, Education and Youth

The Teacher's Tale

Pick A Winner definitely helps continuity of access to books throughout our primary school. Older children and their teachers recommend books they have read which they think might be enjoyed by younger children and the younger children do the same for their older peers. The children's views are shared by the whole school. For example I chose **Six Dinner Sid** for my class and after I'd read it to them a lot of children wanted to read it themselves. When I realised its popularity, I recommended it to other members of staff and so we shared it around.

Pick A Winner helps to supplement the schools' resources by introducing teachers to new books and giving them more ideas about what to buy. We know what the children have enjoyed and when the library teacher goes to purchase new books we can advise her with confidence. We all keep a record of the titles and what the children thought of them. It has definitely increased our knowledge of what's available now. Also we're more flexible in trying out a wider range of books. Before, we categorised books according to the recommended ages, but Pick A Winner has given us the opportunity to broaden our ideas.

Having a specific set of books for a certain period also gives us the opportunity to get to know the books and their authors really well. I borrowed Tessa Dahl's **The Same But Different**. We also looked at some of Roald Dahl's books and thought about the father's and daughter's writings. It also happened that we were doing a topic on families and it fitted in with that. Another aspect of this point is that children get to remember their favourite parts or episodes really well; it's often the scary or funny parts, and they ask me to read those again. This made me realise how so often before we gave messages to children that said 'read it, done it, put it away, get the next one'. But children have always wanted to read books *again* for themselves. Perhaps we have pushed them on too often and perhaps there is a point when you must stop and read it again – play it again – it's just like singing favourite songs. You can enjoy it even though you know what it's going to say!

The Orphan boy

I think the orphan boy is an excellent book because the pictures look so life like and I really recommend it because it makes children understand that all things were made by God

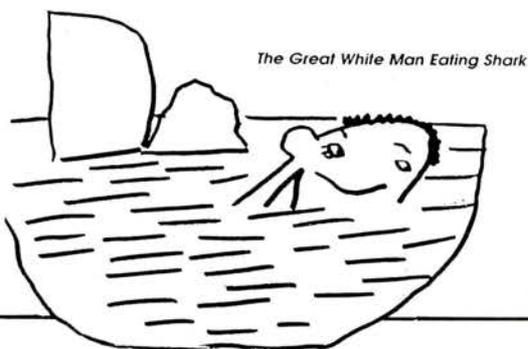
STAVROS DEMETRIOU
(age 9)

St Michael-at-Bowes JM School.

One last point: both teachers and children are now reviewing books for a real reason. When we go to Pick A Winner sessions we know that we will have to talk about the books we chose and the children's responses. We're asking them not only to think about whether they enjoyed a particular story but why they would want to recommend it to other children. This is building up a skill in talking about books which is helping when it comes to written reviews for the Pick A Winner booklet.

Maureen Berry

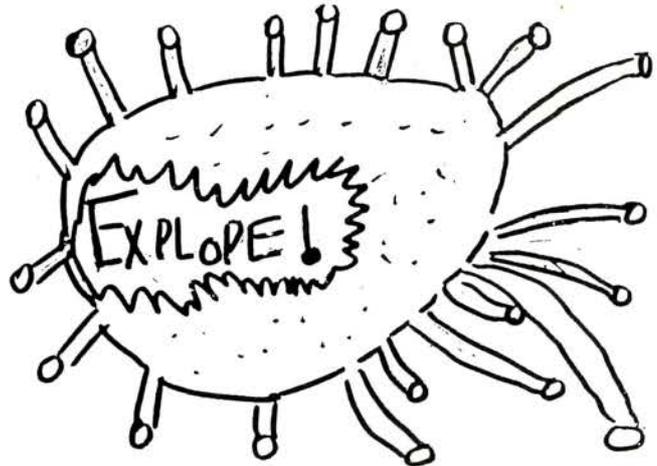
Language Co-ordinator, Grange Park Primary School



The Advisory Teacher's Tale

Pick A Winner took on another dimension after the introduction of the National Curriculum – though, by the time this article is published, the following quote may merely be lines taken from an educational revival of the Good Old Days: 'Reading should include picture books, nursery rhymes, folk tales, myths, legends and other literature . . . Boys and girls should experience a wide range of literature. Pupils should encounter an environment where they are surrounded by books and other reading material presented in an attractive and exciting way.' [**English in the National Curriculum**, Nat. Curric. Council, 1989]

In order to help teachers choose a wide range of books, Pick A Winner gave particular attention to the picture books for older children which required thoughtful, sophisticated responses.



From 'Kirsty Knows Best'

As an Advisory Teacher I've gained a great deal from listening to the teachers' responses and reading the comments made by the children for the Pick A Winner booklets. Also, there's no doubt that we have all become more confident in promoting children's literature as a result of the sessions. Equality of access is a central feature of Enfield's learning policy, but there can be no equality of access to children's literature if the teachers or librarians do not provide it for the children. We must not devalue the popular literature, both fiction and non-fiction, that children enjoy buying from their local newsagents and supermarkets but what we must ensure is the widest choice possible. (I often wonder what those people who advocate a return to narrow reading schemes are buying for their own children and grandchildren.) The London Borough of Enfield has no children's bookshop and the book manager at WH Smith admits that she has to give pride of place to publications featuring a red, spotted insect which, however popular, can only provide a narrow selection. Other books from specialist children's publishers are displayed so as to be virtually inaccessible to young customers. Pick A Winner gives many children access to fiction that wouldn't otherwise come their way.

The reviews and spontaneous work produced by Enfield pupils in response to these books underlines the importance of making quality material available in classrooms. Children deserve the best and Pick A Winner, although not a substitute for financial resourcing, makes it possible for many committed teachers to enable their pupils to enjoy and engage with quality literature. Long may it continue. ■

Sue Baylick

Advisory Teacher for English

Book details:

Dearest Grandmama, Catherine Brighton, Faber, 0 571 14068 8, £7.99

The Orphan Boy, Tololwa M Mollé, ill. Paul Morin, Oxford, 0 19 540783 0, £6.95

The Whales' Song, Dyan Sheldon and Gary Blythe, Hutchinson, 0 09 174250 1, £6.99

The Spell Singer and other stories, edited by Beverley Mathias, Puffin, 0 14 034398 9, £2.99 pbk

Six Dinner Sid, Inga Moore, Simon and Schuster, 0 7500 0297 2, £8.99; 0 7500 0304 9, £3.99 pbk

The Same But Different, Tessa Dahl, ill. Arthur Robins, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12456 5, £7.99

REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Heat

0 7496 0822 6

Light

0 7496 0823 4

Joy Richardson, Franklin Watts
(Lift off series), £5.99 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

'Life depends on light' asserts the author in *Light's* terminal sentence. Who but a blind Mexican cave-fish would disagree? Preceding this statement come 22 pages of excellent low-density text and high-topicality pictures starting with 'the biggest light of all' – the sun – and going on through other light sources, light waves and their straightness, transmission, reflection, colour and photosynthesis.

Heat does the same job for radiation, convection and conduction, and brings in insulation and the changes wrought by heat.

Both volumes are distinguished by their author's effectively simple style – 'insulation works like a duvet to keep the house warm' (well, who knows about tea-cosies these days?) and 'darkness falls because the sun cannot shine through the earth'. And the pictures help the text no end – returning to insulation, we find that the two men installing fibre-fill in a new house are insulating themselves with quilted waistcoats.

Such a combination of text and illustrations is a happy one and, for once in the long succession of 'science starters', it ensures that these not only look suitable for infants but actually are. TP

At the Seaside

Tim Wood, 0 7136 3637 8

Getting Dressed

Sheila Jackson and Tim Wood,
0 7136 3634 3

Going to the Fair

0 7136 3635 1

Housework

0 7136 3636 X

Gill Tanner

A & C Black (Turn of the Century series), £6.50 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

The continuing strength of this series, of which this is the third quartet of titles to be published, lies in its carefully considered approach to its audience.

The texts are immediately engaging, but never patronising, and the selection of contemporary documents, objects and photographs is imaginative. Picture libraries and other sources have been raided skilfully for material which is interesting, apposite and fresh, whilst the balance of archive material and period reconstructions is just about right.

Many products and inventions made their first appearance much earlier than one had imagined, so the time-lines always repay careful scrutiny for their frequently fascinating revelations. In *Getting Dressed*, for example, we learn not only that the zip was invented in the USA in 1893, but also that knicker elastic was introduced into Britain in 1887!

All in all, a wealth of information about the way things were a century ago is packed into a relatively small yet always accessible format. VH

At the Chemist

Nicky Chambers, 0 7502 0228 9

In the Wardrobe

Angela Grunsell, 0 7502 0323 4
Wayland (Green Detective series),
£7.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

The whole thing about our earthly environment is that it is a whole thing and whatever we do *in* it will have an effect *on* it. It is up to us to find out as much as we can about what this effect will be and, if it's harmful, to try to limit and compensate for it. So books that encourage their readers to investigate the green implications of some less obviously 'environmental' areas of life are much to be welcomed.

By discovering – via the chemist's – the difference in environmental effect between disposable nappies and washable ones, the green detective – encouraged at every turn to be objective and, if it helps, incredulous – can cover air and water pollution, fossil fuels and plastics, landfill, habitat loss and cash crops before deciding which type of nappy is environmentally preferable.

Cash crops are scrutinised again in *Wardrobe*. Should so much cotton grow on land where food could? How green are natural fibres when washing, bleaching and dyeing them pollute clean water? Again, the green detective must investigate before deciding.

By encouraging independent investigation rather than passive absorption of fact and opinion, and at the same time providing plenty of fact and opinion for active absorption, 'Green Detectives' are trying to do a useful job. I like to think that in spite of mundane typography and some scratchy artwork, they will succeed. TP

Skyscrapers

0 7502 0496 6

Tunnels

0 7502 0494 X

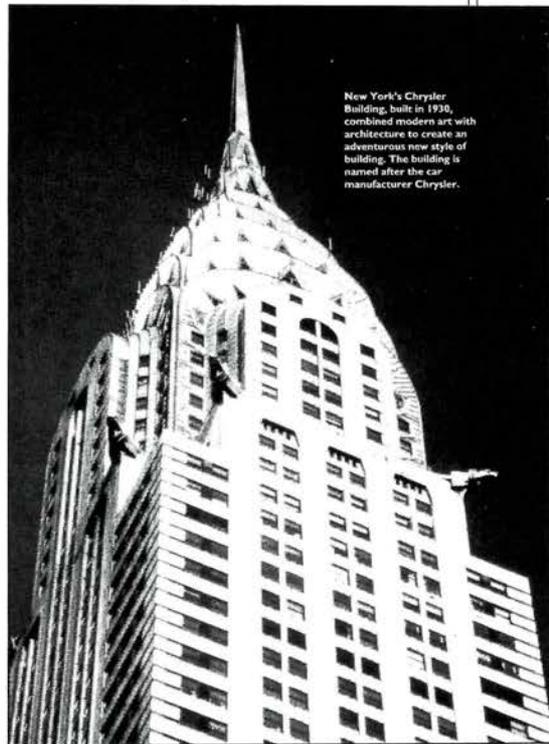
Andrew Dunn, Wayland
(Structures series), £7.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

'Structures' is a new and attractive series exploring large constructions, their

technology, and their impact on people and the environment.

Skyscrapers benefits from some dramatic photography and a sympathetic text – the 'adventurous design' of the Chrysler Building is evidently enjoyed and compared with Canary Wharf. Sections on construction of the buildings are clear and informative and benefit from pertinent experiments to illustrate the techniques. Chapters dealing with the advantages and drawbacks of living in a skyscraper age are well balanced.



New York's Chrysler Building, built in 1930, combined modern art with architecture to create an adventurous new style of building. The building is named after the car manufacturer Chrysler.

Tunnels lacks the dramatic photography of the above title but is sound, informative and nicely international in its coverage. The section on benefits and problems is again carefully balanced and includes some non-hackneyed examples – the unforeseen difficulties of the Seikan tunnel is a useful antidote to too much Channel tunnel debate! GB

Grow Your Own

Thompson Yardley, Cassell
(Spaceship Earth series),
0 304 32539 2, £6.99; 0 304 32691 7,
£3.99 pbk

JUNIOR/SECONDARY

Garden for Birds

Nigel Matthews, *SGC Books,
1 85116 805 2, £3.95 pbk
SECONDARY/ADULT

With Yardley's home-made humorous style having earned 'Spaceship Earth' a comfortable foothold in the green book market, it's particularly apt that he should be the one to fill the gap noted by the *Green Guide* two years ago by producing the first real organic gardening book for children.

Organic gardeners realise that, as Yardley says, 'you can't really grow plants, they do this by themselves'. They also realise that their whole plot, particularly its soil, is a living and lively thing, and it is here that Yardley starts. Simply and quickly he establishes the main strategies – rotation, companion planting, mulching, composting, green manuring, friendly predation – and, as usual, his instructions and exhortations are convincingly achievable. All this, with a commonsense explanation of the organic



'Roller skating was a very popular sport. Some women even played football wearing roller skates'. From *Getting Dressed*.

rationale, combines to produce a book that will encourage children to grow organically and enable them to do it even if surrounded by adult apathy.

Yardley makes the point that an organic garden is one where birds are welcome as partners, and Nigel Matthews' small paperback provides garden-managers with a handbook on how to extend this welcome. Starting with the birds and their habitat and food needs, Matthews provides sound adaptable planting lists and versatile plans to encourage gardens that cater excellently not only for wildlife but for their human occupants too. TP

(*SGC Books operate mail order at PO Box 49, Spalding, Lincolnshire PE11 1NZ; tel: 0775 769518.)

The Kingfisher Illustrated History of the World

Kingfisher, 0 86272 953 X, £25.00 MIDDLE

In 745 pages (plus ready reference tables and detailed index), this ambitious volume tackles the history of the world from 40,000 BC to the present day.

Although targeted at the 9-13 age-range, it may well appeal to a wider audience for the clear and comprehensive way it tackles this enormous time span.

The chronology has been divided into ten major periods, each of which opens with a global overview of significant events. Within each time period there are relevant essays accompanied by appropriate, well-chosen illustrations, whilst recurring thematic topics such as 'Food and Farming' and 'Science and Technology' help focus on how developments in these areas changed people's lives. Finally there are running time-lines down most pages to enable specific dates and events to be located easily.

If you are not too hot at history, even the index can help. Major subject entries also have their subheadings arranged chronologically rather than alphabetically; so under 'Germany' the first page reference is for 'Viking invasions' and the last for 'reunification'.

Presented with such an attractive publication, even reluctant seekers after facts should be tempted to put a toe in the water, whilst avid history buffs will no doubt dive straight in. VH

The Usborne Book of Scientists

Struan Reid and Patricia Fara, Usborne, 0 7460 1010 9, £6.50 hbk; 0 7460 1009 5, £4.50 pbk MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Tycho Brahe, whose name I still don't know how to pronounce, lost his nose in a youthful duel. A plastic surgeon could have helped, and plastic surgery was by then, in India, an ancient art, but poor old Tycho didn't know that so, vain but resourceful, the Danish astronomer fashioned a false nose from bronze which he wore for the rest of his life.

This is just one of the stories that can be assembled from Usborne's contribution to the history of science – a whistle stop through many areas and valuable in that it shows that 'science' is not something practised solely by men in white coats remote from real life but that it has its origin in worldly curiosity practised by ordinary men and women.

It proceeds, as Usbornes do, spread by six-column spread, from early civilizations (not just Europe and the Middle East) to mid 20th century radio astronomy, touching, among others, life sciences, electricity, medicine and geology *en route*. And this route is littered with anecdotes, portraits, dates and significant facts, with the pleasing pattern emerging that scientific 'progress' depends for its greatest effectiveness on well recorded and communicated observations.

There's a lot left out, for sure – I found nothing on anaesthetics, Humphrey Davy, or anything later than 1964 but I did discover why Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim called himself Paracelsus (a certainty for next week's pub quiz) and this is the only Usborne I've ever felt like reading from end to end. Really good stuff for middle school browsers but you need good glasses (first worn in 1352) to manage the index. TP

Proteins

Jane Inglis, Wayland (Food Facts series), 0 7502 0514 8, £7.50 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Digestion

Jenny Bryan, Wayland (Body Talk series), 0 7502 0416 8, £8.99 SECONDARY

Does anyone remember the original 'Food Facts'? They were pieces of punchy public information produced by the wartime food ministry to help us feed ourselves better by, *inter alia*, exploiting 'alternative' protein sources. They worked very well (look at me now!) and so it's fitting that Jane Inglis' excellent book should follow in such illustrious footsteps.

In most food books, protein (singular) turns up as 'nature's building blocks' and you'd think it could only be got from meat, fish, cheese and eggs and you could never get too much of it. Inglis first shows us the diversity of proteins (plural) within our bodies before going on to an equally diverse range of sources – from which we never need more than 56 grams of protein a day. We soon discover that we can get this from cereals and vegetables as well as from animal products – a two ounce egg contains only a little more than the same weight of brown bread – and that a mixture of proteins is better than any single sort. The point that growing cereals and pulses actually produces far more protein per acre than does growing meat is convincingly made and leads naturally to a straightforward look at world food-patterns and the likely planetary benefits of a meat-free diet.



'Most sumo wrestlers die young because they are so overweight.' From *Digestion*.

Digestion is all about how guts work and how to look after them. Again, it is very sensible. Ulcers, diabetes, cancer and anorexia are all discussed as calmly as are basic dietary requirements and it's especially gratifying to see a page devoted to the irritable bowel which troubles one in three of us. All readers should emerge with less irritated bowels and I can see this book being particularly helpful to teenagers with a growing number of food and health decisions to make. TP

Gauguin

Michael Howard, 0 86318 933 4

Monet

Jude Wetton, 0 86318 932 6

Van Gogh

Bruce Bernard, 0 86318 931 8

Perspective

Alison Cole, 0 86318 934 2

Dorling Kindersley (Eyewitness Art series), £9.99 each

SECONDARY

Until now, secondary schools seeking books on artists and the major art movements haven't had much choice between expensive, scholarly volumes purchased only for the sake of their colour-plates or slim introductory monographs featuring a few major paintings and texts which do little to stimulate further interest.

Harassed teachers and librarians desperately seeking attractive, affordable material to support the recently introduced Art National Curriculum need look no further than these first four titles in Dorling Kindersley's new 'Eyewitness Art' series.



Daring illusionism

Vault of the Nave of S. Ignazio, Rome

(*Allegory of the Missaextra Work of the Jesuits')

ANDREA POZZO 1691-94; fresco

The nave ceiling is designed to be seen from a disc on the floor, in the centre of the nave. From here, the distinction between real and painted architecture disappears and the eye is swept up, through the swirl of figures, to the vanishing point – the Son of God.

From Perspective.

The volumes dealing with individual painters contain a fascinating mix of biographical detail, information about contemporary artists and movements as well as commentary on their own developing styles, presented chronologically in the form of double-page spreads.

In the slightly more technical, but equally illuminating narrative in *Perspective* we are guided through the development of the theory with examples of selected artists' work, from the Renaissance to the Surrealists and Pop Art.

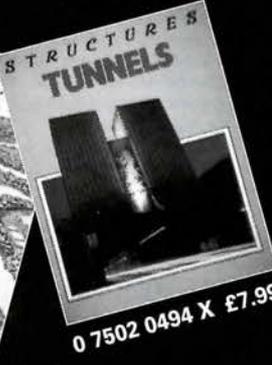
We have come to expect high quality colour photography from this publisher, but with these titles they have excelled themselves. Not only are paintings superbly reproduced



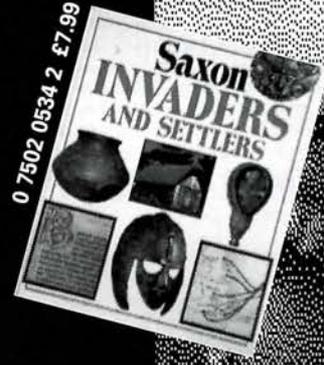
0 7502 0438 9 £8.99



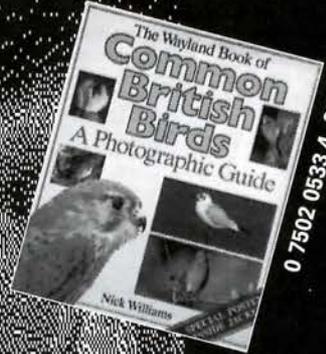
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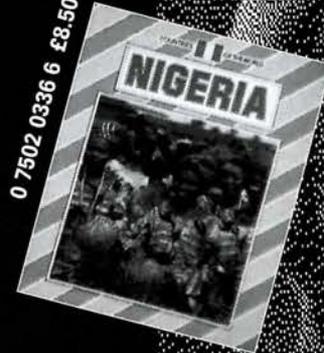
Children's Books of the Year 1993



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0 7502 0334 X £8.99



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0 7502 0422 2 £7.99



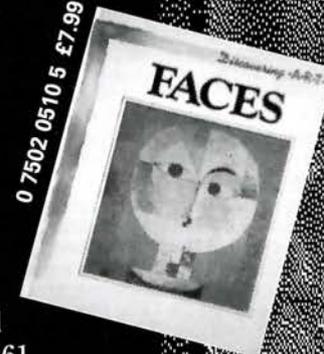
0 7502 0309 9 £8.99



0 7502 0478 8 £7.50



0 7502 0370 6 £8.99



0 7502 0510 5 £7.99

Wayland

Quality information books for children

For a full list of Wayland titles, please contact
The Sales Department, Wayland (Publishers) Ltd
61 Western Road, Hove, East Sussex Tel: 0273 722561

(the brushstrokes in some of the Van Gogh pictures are palpable), but small areas of some pictures have been 'put under the microscope' so that we can see the techniques used by individual artists. This series should prove invaluable in promoting a knowledge and understanding of influential artists and assessing the contributions they have made. VH

Getting Physical: a teenage health guide

Dr Aric Sigman, BBC, 0 563 36767 9, £3.99 pbk
SECONDARY

For those wishing for a gentle perambulation around health issues for teenagers with one or two sensible tips for health and beauty, stand well clear, this is not for you!

Dr Sigman pulls few punches. On women's magazines: 'they are contaminated by the beauty and fashion industry'. On sports drinks: 'these drinks or tablets can actually make you feel exhausted faster and your sporting performance worse'. On smoking: 'if passive smoking were a sexually transmitted disease the country would be up in arms about it'.

Chapters deal with spots, suntanning, weight, diet, emotions, drugs, sex, exam-taking and taking exercise (the most important chapter of all for the author). Advice and information is frank, helpful and accessible and useful addresses for further help are given.

The book provokes the reader into thinking responsibly about health issues for, as Dr Sigman puts it, 'Let's face it, at the end of the day it's really up to you what you do with your body - not parents, not teachers, not the law, not the Archbishop of Canterbury.'

GB

I for Invention: stories and facts about everyday inventions

Meredith Hooper, Piccolo, 0 330 32710 0, £4.99 pbk
SECONDARY

I for Invention is a fascinating book. Whereas many books on inventions stress the technology with dramatic full colour cut-aways to explain the workings, this volume deals with the stories behind inventions.

In paperback format but with better than average production (including colour photographs of advertisements for selected inventions), the approach is alphabetical by invention, covering 51 everyday things from jigsaw puzzles to false teeth, penicillin to lipstick.

The style is splendid, clear and engaging and the writer's fascination with her subject is evident and infectious. The stories will not appeal to others in the room who wish for no interruptions - it's very much a 'did you know?' book. For instance, way back in 1606 James I felt tobacco was dangerous to the lungs; Corn Flakes came from the dietary explorations of the Seventh Day Adventist, John Harvey Kellogg; Thomas Midgely invented both lead petrol and CFCs which, unknown to him, were to cause such pollution today.

A good read for teenagers and adults alike. GB

Below, two advertisements from **I for Invention**.

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CORN FLAKES

THE ORIGINAL HAS THIS SIGNATURE

W.K. Kellogg

ORIGINAL AND BEST

1910 USA

Geoff Brown is Resources Manager for 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

The Reading File



A new and valuable resource edited by Richard Brown, for the 9-14 age range to support work with fiction. Published in three termly editions. Over 40 pages in each edition including:

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RINGBINDER RULES

Jill Coleman, Editorial Director of Children's Books at A & C Black, considers the impact of the National Curriculum on publishing information books for primary schools

It's hard to believe that it was only 1989 when the first National Curriculum documents started arriving pre-packed from the DES.

Until then, the commissioning editor for non-fiction had two strategies to choose between when deciding which books to publish for primary schools.

She could tackle one of the old favourites in a new and hopefully interesting way (it's easy to spot an information book editor at a party, she's the one with an intimate knowledge of the sex life of various small animals). Alternatively, she could commission books in new areas, a task not unlike fortune telling, which involved spending time in schools, listening to children, teachers, advisers, librarians and authors, reading reports and the educational press, and waiting for several different ideas to come together and begin a new project.

A number of pitfalls had to be avoided. The teacher who argued, quite justifiably, that she desperately needed books about the River Thames couldn't be expected to know (or care) that this would be of little interest to ninety per cent of the publisher's market. The librarian who gave you the hot tip that there was a sudden insatiable demand for books on post-mills might not tell you that this was the subject of a popular schools TV series ending in a month's time, long before even the most hastily put together information book could be published. The adviser who was fascinating, inspiring and years ahead of her time, sometimes didn't appreciate that the hard-pressed classroom teacher might not have the resources to build a Viking longship in the local swimming pool.

Looking at the competition was important, but a book which had no competition was not necessarily a good publishing prospect. Teachers would, not surprisingly, often avoid topics which were insufficiently resourced – and one new information book might not be enough to change their minds.

Some decisions seemed to be based purely on superstition and taboo. Maxims such as 'White covers don't sell', or 'You can't teach juniors about electricity and magnetism' were part of publishing folklore.

Some publishers tried to carry out their market research in a more scientific fashion, sending out questionnaires most of which ended in the headteacher's wastepaper bin along with the rest of the junk mail. Others formed committees of experts for brainstorming sessions, which made for extremely stimulating afternoons but were generally too short to give rise to anything but a whirl of conflicting opinions, leaving the poor editor reeling from the latest educational argument.

Sadly, the only way of knowing that a new book was really needed was by looking at the sales figures, and by then it was far too late. What does one do with several thousand unwanted copies of 'A day in the life of a Victorian cabbie'? The sales

manager was likely to come up with several inventive solutions, none of them very comfortable for the poor editor who was responsible.

Like many publishers, we looked at proposals for the National Curriculum with mixed feelings. Would it give us more information on which to base our commissioning? Would it mean we were to be confined to the same old topics year after year? Would every publisher be producing identical and competing books to meet the new demands?

The documents for science had a tremendous impact on our publishing. For the first time, there was to be a set curriculum for primary schools, with a range of very specific subject areas to be covered. Suddenly we had far more definite information on which to base our commissioning.

We looked at our backlist and at our competitors to see which subject areas were poorly resourced. There were plenty of gaps. Many of the old 'taboo' subjects were included in the new attainment targets. Although the 'nature and biology' side of the science curriculum was well covered, there were huge gaps in the physical sciences, especially at key stage one. We could start commissioning in all these areas with some assurance that there would be a long term demand throughout England and Wales. The new science series we developed at this time, such as 'Simple Science' and 'Toybox Science' immediately sold well and have continued to be strong sellers.

At the same time, teachers and advisers were exploring how to teach the new science curriculum, and their discoveries gave rise to stimulating discussions and exciting new projects. Many teachers, experimenting with new ways of putting these ideas across, put pen to paper and became published authors.

Because there was such a wide variety of topics to be covered and it was possible to approach topics in a number of different ways, information book publishers didn't find themselves producing identical books. Using the same guidelines, it was still possible to publish a lively authoritative book, or a dull patronising book.

In 1990, when the attainment targets and programmes of study for English came out, we were extremely pleased to find that they included specific reference to reading for information. I hope this will help to improve the critical assessment of, and therefore the standard of, information books. It's a shame that this isn't recognised in the SEAC reading lists which, as far as I can gather, include no information books.

After statutory orders for science and English, the most influential documents have been those for history and geography. In the sixties and seventies we had a tremendous success with our series 'Looking at History' and 'Looking at Geography'. In the eighties, these series were much criticised, but the new ways into historical and geographical subjects seemed to us

confused and conflicting. Mostly we were asked for the tried and tested topics, 'Castles', 'A Roman Town', 'Volcanoes', 'Rivers', and so on. Many of our cross curricular books, such as the 'Threads' series include historical and geographical elements, but it has been hard to know how to develop historical and geographical themes in new ways.

There has been much argument about the content of the history attainment targets and programmes of study but we have found some of them helpful. The suggestions on the use of historical sources, for example, have helped to inspire 'History Mysteries', our new history series for key stage one which uses 'mystery objects' from different periods as a starting point. Before the National Curriculum, it would have been extremely difficult to publish history based topic books for this age group.

Coincidentally, some of our backlist titles such as 'Beans' and 'Wideworld' fit very well into human geography at key stage one and two, but it has been hard to persuade teachers of this. They seem to think that the guidelines are new so, as far as they can afford, they would like to have new books. We have planned some new geographical series for key stage one as there still don't seem to be many books for this age group, but these are not yet published.

The technology document has been more difficult to interpret. What sort of books would be most helpful to support this very 'hands on' subject? We have published two new series, 'Start to Finish' which looks at the design, manufacture and marketing of new products, and 'Built with a Purpose' which shows how new technological developments, such as windmills, have been developed from early designs to the present day. It now seems likely that the technology documents will be changed so we must wait to see what is finally decided.

On the whole, changes to the documents have been more of a headache for text book publishers than they have been for information book publishers. The library book is much more flexible than the text book which is expected to cover the complete curriculum and can be made redundant by a few changes to the attainment targets.

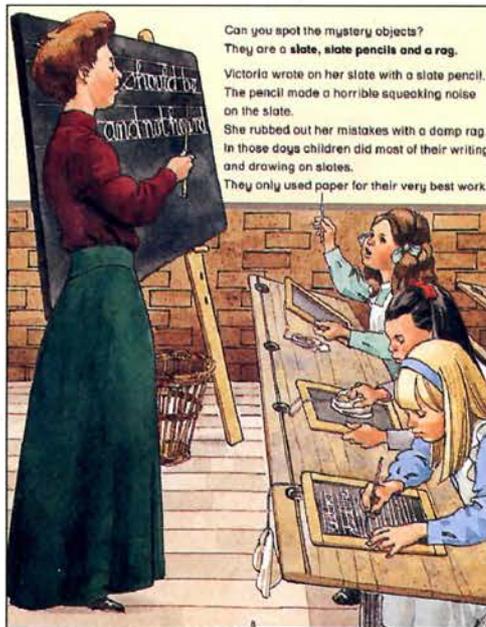
However, timing has been a problem for each of the subjects introduced. It takes between six months and two years to produce a new information book, and there was rarely more than a few months between the publication of the final orders and their implementation. Publishers have either had to base their new series on consultative documents, hoping that there wouldn't be too many changes, or be late with the new books.

Extra money for new books has been too little and made available over too short a time, encouraging panic buying of books which may have been hastily put together, or indeed are reissues of old books with new 'National Curriculum covers'.

Sara and Victoria used these things in their lessons.
The biggest mystery object
is about the same size as this book.



Turn the page to find out what they are.



Can you spot the mystery objects?
They are a slate, slate pencils and a rag.
Victoria wrote on her slate with a slate pencil.
The pencil made a horrible squaking noise
on the slate.
She rubbed out her mistakes with a damp rag.
In those days children did most of their writing
and drawing on slates.
They only used paper for their very best work.

The 'History Mysteries' series looks at
everyday objects and how they have
changed over the past 100 years.
These pages from *At School*.

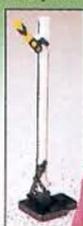
The National Curriculum has been more of a positive stimulus than we expected. But many worries still remain. As information book publishers, we have supported the cross curricular approach in primary schools but now increasingly find ourselves talking in terms of subject areas. How far will this go?

We have found that one or two excellent information books, published recently, which were difficult to label as belonging to one particular subject have not sold well. Will there still be a place for the inspired author who isn't easily fitted in to a National Curriculum category?

Encouragingly, the National Curriculum documents stress wide and varied reading. But will the attainment tests and the vast spectrum of topics which need to be taught in a short space of time push teachers towards using textbooks? Many of the large text book publishers are producing expensive new course books for primary schools, a market which used to be relatively unimportant to them. This is a worrying sign for information book publishers. I know I am biased, but I do feel that children who

Making things move

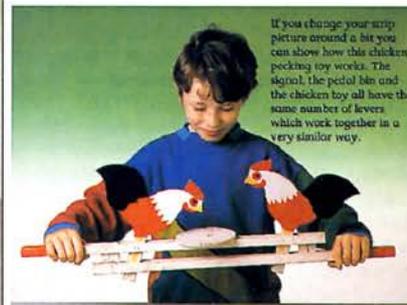
Here's a different toy signal. You can move the signal arm without touching it. Can you see how it works? Its levers are linked together in a sequence.



Make a picture on your board to show how the levers work together to move the signal arm.
If you are not sure whether a pin or fastener in your picture is a pivot, try taking it away. Does your signal still work? If it doesn't, you have removed a pivot and broken the chain of levers.



This pedal bin is a lid-lifting machine that works in almost exactly the same way as the signalling machine. Use your pins, fasteners and strips to show how it works on your board. You will not have to change the picture much. How could you show that when the pedal goes down, the lid goes up?



If you change your strip picture around a bit you can show how this chicken pecking toy works. The signal, the pedal bin and the chicken toy all have the same number of levers which work together in a very similar way.

A double-spread from *Toy Box Science: Levers*.

In the early 1980s we published a series of books called 'Science Explorers' covering similar subjects to this new series. The old series failed, the new one has been very successful.

select the library books which they have decided are appropriate for a topic or learning skills they couldn't learn by using text books, and are in control of the process rather than following a set programme.

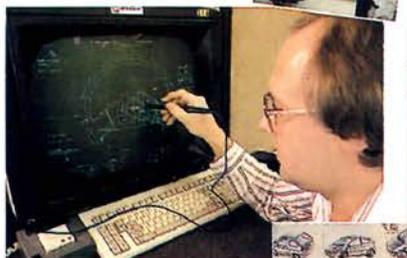
All library books will be seriously affected if the school library services are cut back as, under LMS, they lose their central funding from the education authorities and must rely on individual schools paying for their services. The library services are important to publishers not only for sales but for their invaluable feedback from the many schools they work with. Their collapse would make information books much more dependent on other markets, such as foreign sales, and therefore less relevant to British children and to the National Curriculum.

Since 1989, it has been relatively easy to predict which books were likely to sell best, as teachers and librarians attempted to resource each new subject. What will happen now that this process is more or less complete?

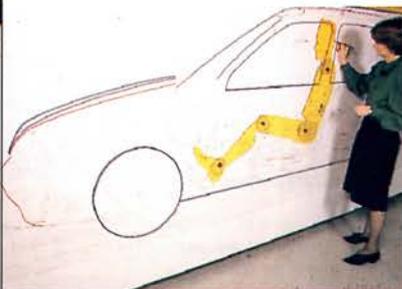
A period of calm would be useful. And then, perhaps, it will be back to fortune telling – with one important difference – the enterprising editor may be able to quote enough attainment targets and programmes of study to convince the sales department that her hunch is a 'sure thing'. On the other hand, publishers' reps have heard it all before. They'll probably have more sense. ■

Choosing the right design

Designing a new car can take months or even years. The designers meet with the marketing department to talk about their ideas. They narrow the choice to about four or five different versions. Then they start work on all the parts.



In the CAD/CAM (Computer Aided Design/Computer Aided Manufacturing) department, a computer is used to design the working parts of the car, such as the steering wheel. The designer can look at a section of the wheel close-up, and make sure that the size is right for the new car. The computer can make parts look bigger or smaller, or show a different section.



Engineers designing the car body produce accurate life-size diagrams of the car. They draw around flat plastic shapes of people, to check that the car will be comfortable. For example, the designer can move the leg shape to make sure the car will have enough leg room.

The next stage is to make a 'tape rendering' of the new car. This is a full-size picture of the car made with sticky tape. The designers can show people what the car will look like, and can make any necessary changes by moving the sticky tape.

The 'Start to Finish' series follows an everyday product through all stages of design and production – explaining not only how the product is made but why. From *New Car*.

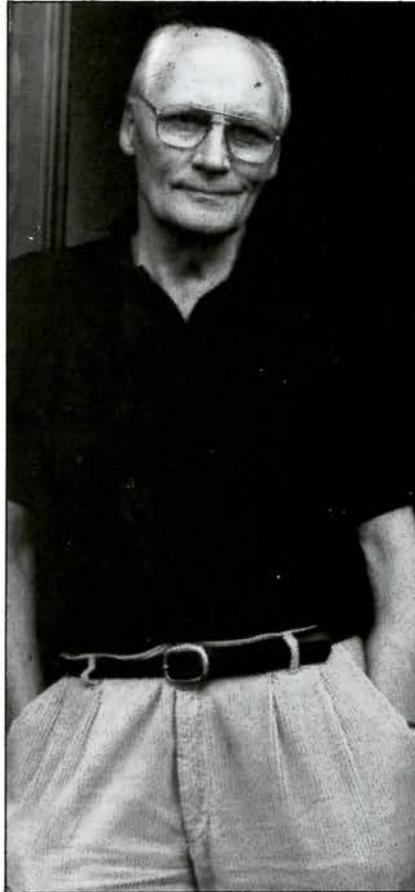
May We Recommend . . .

Gordon Dennis on the verse of VERNON SCANNELL

In these gossip-hungry days it's surprising that Vernon Scannell is not better known. As he thinks of telling hostile residents of Berinsfield, where for a year he was writer-in-residence (see **A Proper Gentleman**, Robson Books, 1977) 'I'm not posh. I'm one of "them". I left school at 14. I lived in a slum and know what it's like to go hungry. I never owned a pair of pyjamas until I was 20. I've been in the Army, a squaddie . . . I've done detention. I've been in the nick.' He could have told them he'd been Northern Universities amateur boxing champion, professional for a while, and had travelled with a fairground boxing-booth. They would have been less impressed by his five children and his seven years as a teacher.

Vernon Scannell is now over 70. He's one of a group of poets who write for both adults and children; others are Charles Causley, Edwin Morgan and Laurie Lee. Although he has been a full-time writer for 30 years, there hasn't been a Collected Poems since 1980 (it's now out of print) and the up-dated version is still six months off. There are two Red Fox paperbacks, clearly aimed at the Key Stage 2/3 market, but they don't show the Scannell I find indispensable. **Love Shouts and Whispers** (0 09 973950 X, £2.99) is illustrated in comic and/or winsome vein by Tony Ross (why is so much poetry marketed as though it's funny and an easy read?). The poems, in a variety of traditional forms, deal mostly with puppyish or romantic love, though there's a lightly cynical 'Words from the Father of the Bride'. But at least two poems touch on a love so special that it hurts: the book's title poem, 'Love-light', and 'The Power of Love'. Will pupils ready to be reached (helped?) by these poems be put off by the younger-than-them format of the collection overall? **On Your Cycle, Michael** (0 09 918601 2, £2.99) is, as it says, a fast-paced collection of poems about travel: by train, trap or bike; on and under water, through or over air. Again with illustration by Tony Ross, the book is fun, is adept enough and is quite often 'strenuous play' (one of Scannell's descriptions of poetry) but, with a handful of exceptions, does not offer poems that come from the depths of his mind, experience and talent.

Those are most handily seen in the poems included by Anne Harvey in her Puffin anthology, **Poets In Hand** (1985). Anthony Thwaite has described Scannell as concerned with 'the ordinary hurts of the ordinary world, the dark places and betrayals of everyday experience'. Harvey agrees about the themes but emphasizes 'the wry humour that creeps in' and admires 'his skill with shape, pattern and language, and the surprising ironic twists of mood'. Both Thwaite and Harvey are describing a poet whose



A Love Song



Even the vastness of the skies will lack
Space for this love, and send it back,
Sliding down the velvet night,
A meteor, a golden light,
A silent music falling.

At dawn, transformed to dew, it clings
To leaf and petal, then it sings
Through the throats of waking birds,
Steals meaning from all other words
Except your name, my darling.

From **Love Shouts and Whispers**.

topics and craft pass the Auden test: that while there are some good poems that are only for adults, there are no good poems that are only for children. And Scannell's great quality, writing poetry that young readers can engage with, is that he knows children but has ceased to be one. He once wrote: 'All children's lives are very much alike'; and his writing shows a clear-eyed, kindly knowledge of what they do and how they suffer. He understands how wounds can be caused, and how they may – perhaps – be comforted.

He can enter the mind of a small child ('View from a High Chair') and enact its insistent thumping for its mother to come and release it in the poem's heavy rhythms. He can describe his son's pain on falling into nettles, and having soothed him comfort himself by scything them; but 'My son would often feel sharp wounds again.' Some of these will be the wounds of love, first felt (at age 5) for Jessica; and the comfort? – "The pain will go in time," I said.' There are poems which gradually reveal the danger, or at least the scare, of camping out at night, or of climbing a tree. And always the child's predicament is feelingly, accurately created, sympathetically told, and then given a perspective which offers an understanding – though not always comfort.

The best example is 'A Case of Murder', about which Scannell writes in **How to Enjoy Poetry** (Piatkus, 0 86188 619 4, £4.95 pbk). This 50-line narrative has a factual starting-point: parents come home to find their nine-year-old son very distressed. He had 'accidentally killed the cat'. The poem leads us through the evening's events; alone in the flat, the boy becomes obsessed with the cat's presence and noises; he seeks to drive it from the room; and slams the door on it. That's the accident: *on it*. He stows the body under the stairs, where (and here the poem lifts off from the literal) 'It's been for years':

*There'll not be a corner for the boy
to hide
When the cupboard swells and all
sides split
And the huge black cat pads out of it.*

Is that a poem about Black Power (as one reader told Scannell) or about the nature of violence, repression, and guilt? Or . . . ? Before any of these, I suggest, it's a story which reads aloud grippingly and which lodges actively in the memory.

Other poems describe, or are for, older pupils. 'Schoolroom on a Wet Afternoon' (which should be read beside Causley's 'School at Four O'Clock') traces a morning's lessons: history, maths, English. Rain falls outside, and a note more ominous than boredom is struck: 'Is it their doomed innocence noon weeps for?'. Well, no; there are no sentimental elegies in Scannell, and the

poem ends with the same bleak insight as **Lord of the Flies**: discipline is merely surface, and school desks contain as well as books and pencils

Vicious rope, glaring blade, the gun cocked to kill.

And there are real guns in his poetry; their ghastly repertoire is shown in 'Walking Wounded', a poem about an incident in the Second World War (in which Scannell fought, and about whose poets he wrote in **Not Without Glory** (Woburn Press, 1976). But it's an earlier war which often activates his imagination:

*Whenever war is spoken of
I find
The war that was Great invades the
mind*

and the poems which result are varied, direct and powerfully surprising. In 'The Apple Raid', the narrator remembers scrumping apples 40 years earlier with David Kidd and John Peters. He wonders if David remembers the adventure. And then he realises that John can't, because of an altogether bigger adventure, he lies cold 'In an orchard in France'. There's a poem about Bonfire Night, and an Uncle brought into the children's fun who remembers – and fought in the midst of – lethal bangs. The children glory in their little, safely-circumscribed darings: 'Who's scared of bangers?' 'Uncle John's afraid!' An adult, *and any reader*, understands the sense of danger which here triggers memories of (and sometimes causes?) the experience of war.

The boy said, 'Did you fight a lot
And knock the Jerries out?'
The old man then looked sad: 'That's not
A thing I talk about.'



Part of 'Flying a Camel' from **On Your Cycle**, Michael.

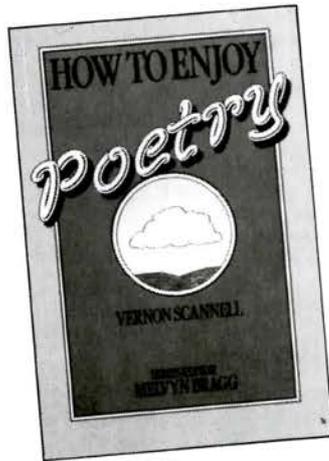
Lastly, I'd like to recommend 'Uncle Edward's Affliction'. It has similarities with Causley's 'Dick Lander', but whilst Dick is mocked for his shell-shock symptoms, Edward is mildly a curiosity for being colour-blind:

*Did he ken John Peel with his coat
so green
And Robin Hood in Lincoln Red?*

But the narrator knows what the children do not (it is the voice of experience and admonition which so salts the best of Scannell's poetry); for Edward has been in the war

*He must have crawled from neutral
mud
To lie in pastures dark and red
And seen, appalled, on every blade
The rain of innocent green blood.*

The poem ends in a deadly stillness, a silence of awed realisation. This is not now a joke, not even a joke-gone-wrong. It is the still sad music of humanity. ■



Vernon Scannell's **New and Collected Poems** will be published in Autumn 1993 by Robson Books.

Gordon Dennis is Principal Lecturer in English at Westminster College, Oxford, and a member of the team responsible for the College's well-established Children's Literature courses.



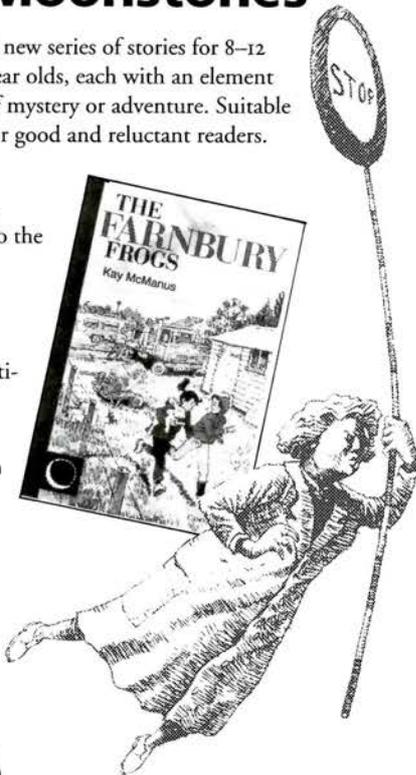
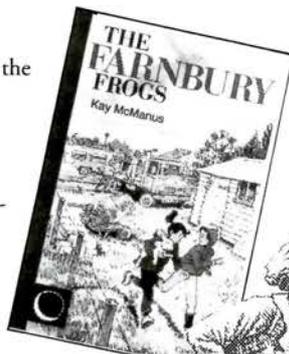
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A POETRY ROUND-UP

Morag Styles assesses recent collections and anthologies

My first reaction on looking at the box of goodies from **Books for Keeps** was to exclaim with delight at some glorious illustrating. As I dived into the anthologies I realised I was enjoying the kind of pleasure I get from picture books rather than immersing myself in the poetry. One reason for this could have been that the amount of good poetry about was rather thin; alternatively, perhaps the art of illustration had reached a stunning peak. I looked more closely. There were some exciting new collections, especially when Jackie Kay, Philip Gross, John Mole and others appeared by the second post. But there was also a fair amount of lacklustre poetry and some listless anthologising. Isn't it time that publishers thought again about what they commission for children? Presumably poetry is selling well; the market has been inundated for some time with new volumes of verse, but there isn't much that's memorable. I believe more quality-control is required.

Let's start with the good news. **Two's Company** by Jackie Kay (ill. Shirley Tourret, Blackie, 0 216 93317 X, £5.99 pbk) is a brilliant debut in writing for children. It's a spunky book by a black Scottish poet dealing with everything from divorce to a Burns Supper, sheep shearing in Skye to travels in Greece. Occasionally Kay writes in dialect:

*So I locked myself in the cludgie
and cried, so I did, so I did,
pulling the long roll of paper
onto the floor. Like that dug Andrex.*

Most of the poems are in standard English; but whichever tongue Kay chooses to write in, she captures the real voices of ordinary folk. There is plenty of fun, pain too, lyrical moments, compassion, but absolutely no sentimentality (the great fault of so many who attempt to write for the young). I was particularly captivated by the Carla persona who crops up in a number of the poems, a girl whose parents have separated, going about her double life with sadness yet grit:

*My friend Shola said to me that she said to her mum:
'It's not fair, Carla (that's me) has two of everything:*

*Carla has two bedrooms,
two sets of toys, two telephones,
two wardrobes, two door mats
two mummies, two cats
two water purifiers, two kitchens,
two environmentally friendly squeezies.'*

*My friend Shola said to me that she said to her mum:
'Why can't you and Dad get divorced?'*

*But the thing Shola doesn't even realise yet,
is that there are two of me.*

The Magnificent Callisto (ill. Cathy Benson, Blackie, 0 216 93267 X, £5.99 pbk) is Gerard Benson's first collection for children, although he has already won the Signal Award for his anthology, **This Poem Doesn't Rhyme**. The poetry is well-crafted (a nice mixture of rhyme and free verse) and thought-provoking with a lyrical quality:

*And still the waters reflecting the hillside
Green until all the summers have gone away
While the butterflies like little strobes
Rifle the blossom and then lurch away.*

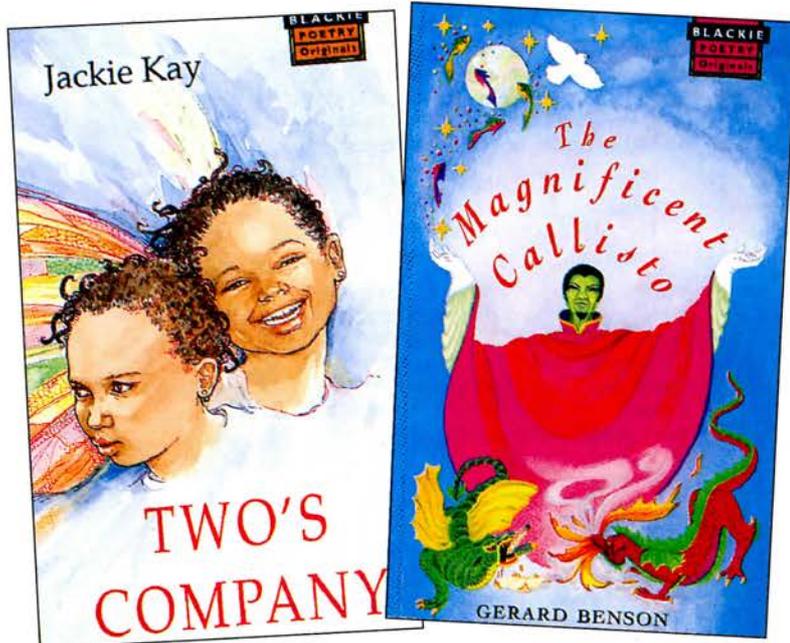
I like his nature poetry best. Benson, like so many other poets, writes wonderfully about cats:

*The white cat dreams of snow fields,
The small musical pipes of birds,
Licking his lips in sleep.*

I have two small reservations. One is a slight feeling of déjà vu when reading about a dancing bear and a shape-poem mouse. In the first I could not help comparing him with Causley. In the second Benson seemed to be writing somewhere between ee cummings and Keith Bosley. The poems are good, but will they appeal to the young? We'll see.

The Magnificent Callisto and **Two's Company** (both for older juniors upwards) are Blackie Poetry Originals, a new series edited by Anne Harvey.

Philip Gross's **All-Nite Cafe** (Faber, 0 571 16753 5, £4.99 pbk) is worth reading in one sitting (and short enough to do so). It has a slightly Chandleresque feel to it: a pitch black night with a few seedy houses and a cafe, not far from the seashore, someone is scribbling away; at another table a storytelling session has begun – some of the listeners look uneasy . . .



Gross is a talented poet with an impressive range. When he's amusing there is real wit:

*So come all you saucy sailors, any Tom, or Dick or Gerry,
on your tanker or container ship or roll-on-roll-off ferry.
You'll see us in your dreams as you're lying in your bunk.
Hope it makes you seasick. We're Lady Di Oxin,
Nora Noxious,
Scumbelina,
Toxic Tessa,
Effluenza
and Jenny the Junk.*

Stuff your pretty little ditties. We're singing punk!

When he makes you think, he packs quite a punch . . .

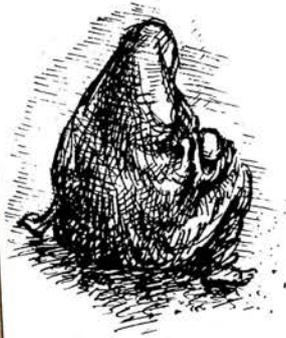
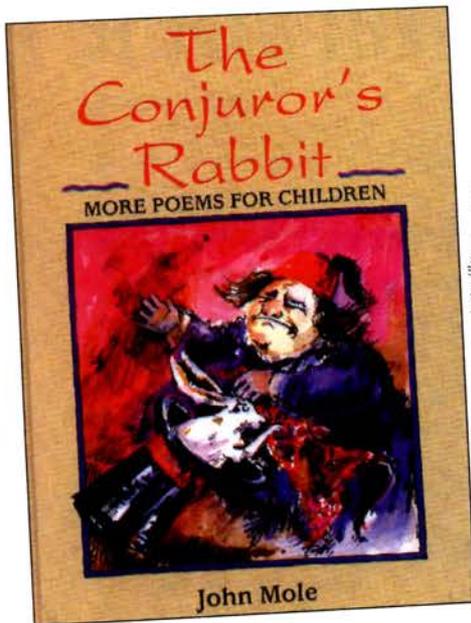
*they want to scratch. You are the itch.
A thousand years stand by, hissing Witch! Nigger! Yid!
All you hear is silence lumbered
shut around you. And the ten or hundred looking on
look on. They are learning not to see.
The bell rings, too late. Already this is history.*

This is a substantial book of poetry for fluent reader of ten and more. A grumble: surely Faber could have done better than produce a book with five blank pages at the end and why use such tiny print?

Look out for Norman Silver's **The Comic Shop** (0 571 16750 0, £4.99 pbk) also from Faber. It's a gutsy and provocative read for teenagers. Silver uses a tough-guy tone for some of the poems, including a final sequence which is a sort of comic-strip extravaganza. The cover is zappy and readers may be surprised to find that many poems use conventional forms and tackle uncomfortable issues like suicide, death and harassment. He's not afraid to make explicit sexual references or use violence in his poems. Most of his work will be approachable to young people, though I think he's more likely to appeal to males as he uses a lot of macho images. The term 'tarts' occurs several times (admittedly, where the speech is vernacular and the style mocking), though in other poems he shows sensitivity to women. I think Silver is sometimes guilty of bad taste which made me wince, but there are good things here and it's admirable to see someone trying to break the mould of poetry for this age group.

The Conjuror's Rabbit by John Mole (Blackie, 0 216 93272 6, £7.99) is his third collection for children. The book has attractive black-and-white line drawings by Mary Norman. Mole has an assured place in the children's canon, combining well-observed 'snapshots' of people and animals with a nice sense of humour. He uses form inventively: there's a triolet, a villanelle, riddles, of course, and a new version of a nursery rhyme. Here's an extract from one of the best poems:

*Millions of mothers crouching there,
Millions of children eating air.
I couldn't go, I had to stay.
It's only dreams that go away*



From 'Millions of Mothers' (The Conjuror's Rabbit).

*And this was not a dream, I knew.
The day had come, the night was through
And everyone was asking why,
And so was I. And so was I.*

A collection for thoughtful readers of about nine and older.

I mentioned earlier that the art of illustrating poetry books had reached a new peak. My next choices are a couple of the books that persuaded me. For younger readers there's a beautiful double-act between the artist Sarah Fox-Davies and poet Richard Edwards in **Moon Frog** (Walker, 0 7445 2157 2, £9.99). Most of the poems are slightly fantastic and playful: there's the Cloud-sheep:

*leaving wisps of wool behind,
Like flakes of fallen snow*

a celebration of the mammoth:

*Once I waved my wild tusks high,
Once I was colossal,
Now I never see the sky,
Now I'm just a fossil.*

a fox who outsmarts the hunters:

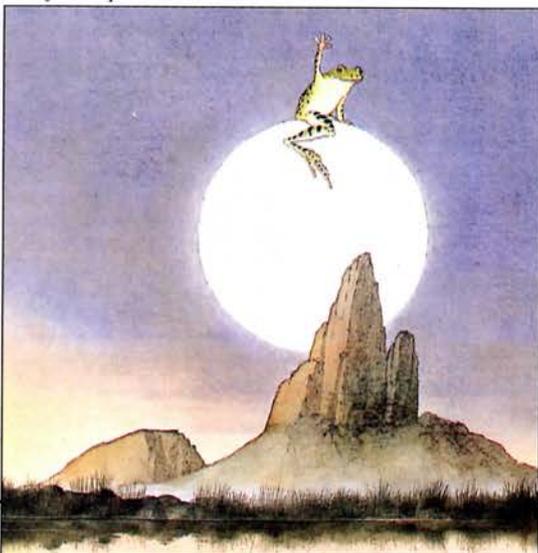
*How did we lose it, how?
It's run to the top of the rainbow,
And no one can catch it now.*

And much, much more. The full-colour illustrations are gorgeous. Sarah Fox-Davies is superb at realistic portrayal of animals, is a dab-hand at lush vegetation, has a lovely sense of fun and matches the delicacy of Edwards' writing. This is a delicious book for under-eights. There's nothing else quite like it on the market.

For little ones **Clicketty-Clack, Something to Pack** (Orchard, 1 85213 333 3, £7.99) is an enchanting picture book variation of the old game 'I packed my bag to London and into it I put . . .' Antony Lishak provides the couplets:

*five climbing kites that soar high in the sky
a spiralling box and some beetles that fly*

which build up to a surprise on the final spread. Ian Penney's exquisitely detailed paintings can be enjoyed by under-fives again and again. His toys are not the plastic horrors currently beloved by children – there's a real taste of nostalgia in the images which Penney conjures up. A true winner.



From **Moon Frog** (Walker)

Now to some anthologies worthy of mention.

I usually take issue with Oxford over their garish illustrations of poetry supplied by a medley of illustrators. However, **The Oxford Book of Animal Poems** (0 19 276105 6, £9.95) which is brightly coloured and has more than twelve artists, is an exception. This is a luscious book from the cover to the endpapers, and the quality of the artwork is superb. The poetry is rich and various as you would expect from the well-tryed team of Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark. The book is not broken up into themes, but the organisation is suggested by the contents pages which feature different parts of the globe – an unobtrusive, yet useful, device. This is excellent value and you cannot fail to be moved, excited and inspired.



'Parrots' from **The Oxford Book of Animal Poems**.

Poems for the Young (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1 55670 262 0, £9.99) edited by Neil Philip, is evocatively illustrated by John Lawrence who's rapidly becoming the Ardizzone of the present age. Lawrence is equally appealing in both black-and-white line drawings and full colour illustrations: he's an artist who is truly sympathetic to the poems, helping to open them up to the young reader. The selection of poetry is delightful (as you'd expect from Philip) and quite traditional: no Rosen or Wright, but Pope is there along with Jane Taylor, James Hogg and William Allingham. Here we have an anthology where the editor knows his poetry and his own mind, so the overall effect is convincing.

Finally, for older readers, **Free My Mind** is an anthology of Black and Asian poetry edited by Judith Elkin and Carlton Duncan (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12830 7, £8.50). They have come up with nearly a hundred poems ranging from well-known writers like John Agard, Valerie Bloom, Louise Bennett, Rabindranath Tagore, to those who are lesser known in Britain, but deserve a wider audience. The editors hardly put a foot wrong: the poems are powerful and profound, dealing with compelling issues of our times with compassion and irony. As Devendranath Capildeo says:

*To eat, to drink, to breathe, to sing –
it's joy to bring yourself to think of people,
careful and kind,
who restore that precious jewel –
your peace of mind.*

Despite publications like this last one, the fact that the poetry syllabus for Key Stages 3 and 4 hardly contains any women poets or black poets or that the selection is narrow, academic and dated comes as no surprise, alas. We must continue to resist crude, limiting, backward-looking encroachments on children and their reading. Many of the books of poetry mentioned above offer young readers vigorous and challenging ideas and language to free imaginations, bring new perspectives, open alternative worlds, console and entertain. That is the job of poetry, of all literature. I remain optimistic. As the Czech poet, Miroslav Holub, puts it in a poem about freedom:

*There is much promise
in the circumstance
that so many people have heads. ■*

Morag Styles is a Senior Lecturer at Homerton College, Cambridge. She has written several books about children and poetry and is a highly respected anthologist.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS



Margery Fisher died on Christmas Eve 1992

Pam Royds and Margaret Clark write:

Margery Fisher was known to everyone as Angus; few, perhaps, knew why. One of the first people she met when she went up to Somerville in 1933 was James Fisher, her future husband. A friend of his commented on the unruly lock of black hair which always hung across her face. 'You look like a Scottie dog,' he said. 'I'll call you Angus.' The name stuck.

Angus came down from Oxford with a first class degree in English literature and throughout her subsequent career she applied her considerable scholarship to the children's books in which she had such a passionate interest and which she regarded as an integral part of the world of books. She wrote four standard works of reference on children's literature, as well as reviewing regularly for the *Sunday Times* and writing articles for such specialist magazines as *Signal*.

But her unique achievement was her own journal, *Growing Point*, which she wrote, edited, produced and published single-handed for 30 years. What characterised her reviews was that in assessing a book for children she used the same criteria that held good for all books. In addition, she never judged a book in isolation; books would be grouped thematically, compared and contrasted as well as judged individually. There was also a page of 'Reminders' in each issue – books that were still worth reading even though they had been published decades before. In 1966, when *Growing Point* was four years old, Margery Fisher's 'Significant contribution to children's books' was recognised by the Children's Book Circle and she was the first recipient of the Eleanor Farjeon Award.

One story sums up Angus' special relationship with her reading – the pleasure she derived from it and her amazing memory. In 1922 she emigrated to New Zealand with her parents, and on the ship read, in instalments, a story about a party of dolls on an adventurous journey, led by a heroic wooden dog. Alas, the final instalment was missing. Years later, researching Margery Williams Bianco in the British Museum, 'I saw an entry for a book called *Poor Cecco*. Something stirred at the back of my mind. I ordered the book and . . . half an hour later I knew, at last, how the story ended.' How many of us would carry such a memory over 40 years?

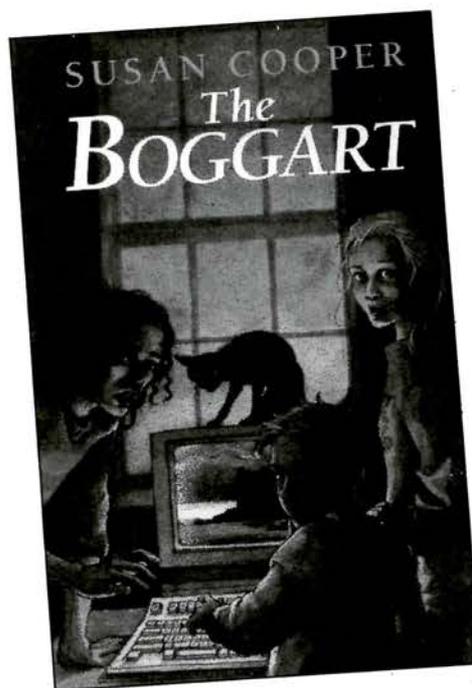
Margery Fisher was loved by her many friends in the book world for her integrity, her generosity of mind and her determination to share with others the joy of being 'intent upon reading'.

(BfK thanks the *Bookseller* for their permission to reprint this obituary, which was carried in their edition of 15 January 1993.)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

Random House Children's Books
in association with the
London/Home Counties Youth Libraries Group
and
Schools Libraries Group
invite
readers of *Books For Keeps* to meet novelist

Susan Cooper



Ms Cooper will be at Morley Books' showroom, Golden Lane, London EC1 on 29th April 1993 from 6.00 pm onwards to launch her long-awaited new novel, *The Boggart*, published by The Bodley Head.

This is a rare opportunity to meet her and numbers are strictly limited. For further information or to reserve your place, please telephone Morley Books on 071 251 2551 by 16th April.

Robert Cormier visits UK during May

If you'd like to hear him speak, he'll be giving the Royal Over-Seas League Literary Lecture at 7.00 pm on Wednesday, 12th May at St Andrews Hall, Over-Seas House, Park Place, St James's Street, London SW1. Tickets: £2 members, £2.50 non-members. Further information from Wendy Cooling at the Children's Book Foundation on 081 870 9055.

Also, on Friday, 14th May he'll be at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, where he'll be giving a lunchtime talk with Berlie Doherty for teenagers, teachers, librarians and booksellers. The talk begins at 1.00 pm and details can be obtained from Karen Forster on 061 833 9333.

Our Darlings versus Dennis the Menace

Nicholas Tucker on an important new exhibition

One particular battlefield in the perpetual war between adults and children is now open to visitors free at London's Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood. The issue is the nature of childhood itself, and the arena where competing definitions slug it out is **Trash or Treasure**, a new and permanent display drawn from 80,000 ancient and modern children's books owned by the late Anne and Fernand Renier. As well as collecting classy children's books, the Reniers also gave generous shelf-space to the cheaper, often discredited type of literature catering for an earthy rather than an idealised image of childhood. To that extent, the battle lines at Bethnal Green between these two opposing factions are fairly drawn up.

On the respectable side, numbers of the titles on view insist that children are sweet and lovable, or at least should always try to be. Magazines like **Our Darlings** feature simpering infant girls and boys posing in more ways than one. Older children are pictured in **The Guide** happily 'At work on the potatoes at Butterstone Hall'. Suggested attractions on other pages include a Camp Rubbish Puzzle Competition. Of the sexual and scatological jokes that give children such pleasure there is no trace. While all the various illustrated editions of **Gulliver's Travels** included pick on well-worn plot details such as his towing away of the miniature fleet, none depict the scene intrinsically most enjoyable to the young, where Gulliver extinguishes a town fire by the simple expedient of peeing on it.

Fictional animals are also shown living in an unnaturally ethereal world, where cats marry dogs and robins court wrens. When Anna Sewall's **Black Beauty** ('translated from the original equine'), writes that 'Before I was two years old, a circumstance happened which I have never forgotten', he is referring to his first glimpse of the hunt, not to the gelding he had to suffer. Adult humans, too, normally appear in a positive, trouble-free light. **The Town Clerk (They work for us)** depicts our hero in an untypically jovial mood, and there are also books about incongruously jolly policemen, farmworkers and cobblers. Only in **Alan Works with Atoms** is the title character too pre-occupied to beam from the cover picture at his young audience.

Children, eventually fed up with too many unreal portraits of themselves, sometimes get their revenge by turning to parody. The sentimentality of 'Mary had a little lamb' has made it into one of the most cruelly burlesqued of all nursery rhymes. A thwarted child can also become proficient at reading between the lines. Gulliver's adventures may have been partly enjoyed for the sexual excitement implicit in the notion of being tied down; a thrill some adults remember feeling when reading, as children, about Tom Kitten being trussed up by Mr and Mrs Samuel Whiskers. Other children have derived more entertainment than Captain W E Johns would have wished from the title of his novel, **Biggles Delivers the Goods**. And in a brisk chapter on human reproduction illustrated at a would-be safe distance by examples of chicken embryos, Lord Baden-Powell describes, in **Rovering to Success**, how 'The germ is born in the hen and fertilised by the cock'. One can almost hear young readers' delighted laughter echoing down over the years.

As this new wing to the museum abundantly shows, low literature and comics eventually arose to take on these forbidden



Catherine Sidwell, curatorial assistant, picking pop-ups for **Trash or Treasure**.

interests more directly. Children looking for violence could turn to Penny Dreadfuls like **Entombed Alive** or **From a Dead Man's Lips**. Fairy tales, originally revived by and for folklorists, also contained gratifying references to sex and violence, plus some far from flattering pictures of adults. The giants that loom out of the older fairy story illustrations have that irascible, flushed look of adults who may like the bottle but certainly detest all children.

The modern children's books on exhibition are now more able to accommodate both these sides of childhood. Raymond Briggs' **Fungus the Bogeyman Pop-up Book** is as lavatorial as the most obsessed child could wish, and manuals of sex instructions invite children to 'Draw a picture of your clitoris and other sexual parts' on the blank page provided. Today's fiction for older children comes over here as much more honest about what really goes on than the latest adult sex and shopping blockbuster. The only problem is whether enough children are still reading. Despite some enthusiastic juvenile entries in the visitor's book, this part of the museum could well be chiefly patronised by nostalgic adults. In all too many cases, their children may be happier at home playing with their Gameboys.

Trash or Treasure

A Dip into 400 years of Children's Books

is at the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA (tel: 081 980 3204). Opening times: Mondays to Thursdays and Saturday 10.00 - 18.00 (inc. Bank Holidays); Sundays 14.30 - 18.00. The Museum is closed every Friday.

Nicholas Tucker is a psychologist, critic and broadcaster. He teaches courses in psychology and children's literature at the University of Sussex. He's the author of **The Child and the Book (CUP)**, a standard text on the development of children's reading interests.

Nice to see some old friends on Royal Mail stamps . . .



STORY OPTIONS

Margaret Clark on some recent collections

I've always loved listening to stories, but as a reader I was desperately disappointed by my first encounter with a bumper collection. All I can remember is the book's spine: it was invitingly fat, so I was very excited by the prospect of hours in that otherworld of delight to which reading took me. When, after a few minutes, I finished Chapter 1 and turned to what I thought was Chapter 2, I was horrified to discover everything changed – different place, different people. I read no further. When I did try the book again, I found it was like going to a party and having to spend a few moments with each of many guests, when I really wanted to get to know one or two well, and then revel in their company for a long time.

I've been wary of story collections ever since, so I know I'm prejudiced in favour of those that have either a strong linking theme or a single narrator. I find the 'bran-tub' type of anthology hard to tackle, although I realise how useful to an adult this may be as the source of a story for a special occasion or a listener of certain taste. This will account for my very personal choice of books to recommend here.

Rose Impey's voice as the storyteller of *The Orchard Book of Fairy Tales* (Orchard, 1 85213 382 1, £12.99) is distinctive and beguiling, and I could almost hear the responses of Katie White's class in Birstall Highcliffe School, whose help is acknowledged in the dedication. They obviously had an influence on the easy, almost conversational style of the text, and while the original elements of the stories are preserved the telling is in the language and phraseology of today. The endings, in particular, are well done, bringing the reader back to earth without a bump, ready to take off again on the next flight of imagination. When the Sleeping Beauty awakens,

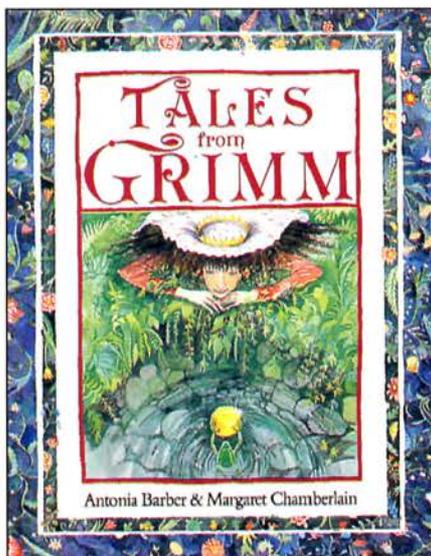
After a hundred years asleep everyone was highly excited at the prospect of a royal wedding. It was, after all, exactly what they had been waiting for.



Ian Beck's illustrations discreetly support the text, without intruding or interrupting.

By contrast, Antonia Barber's retelling of 15 *Tales from Grimm* (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0737 2, £12.99) is more formal, more literary in tone, taking the reader to the traditionally wondrous, far land of fairy tales where Rapunzel's mother is 'with child' rather than pregnant (as Impey has her). This is a text for reading slowly to oneself, rather than aloud. The story of the Sleeping Beauty (Briar Rose) ends on a quiet note:

Now the princess's birthday was



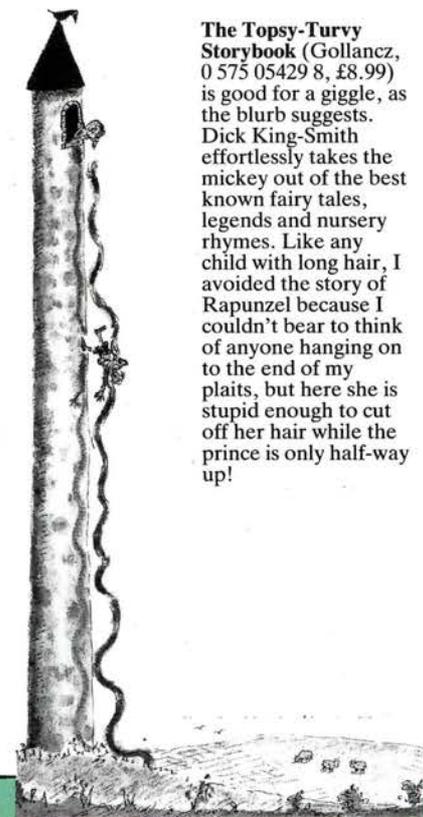
celebrated with even greater joy (though Briar Rose was a little uncertain whether she was fifteen or a hundred and fifteen). In due time, she was married to her prince and they lived together in contentment to the end of their days.

Margaret Chamberlain's artwork makes this a very pretty book, borders of wild roses, primroses or delicate patterns framing the text of each story.

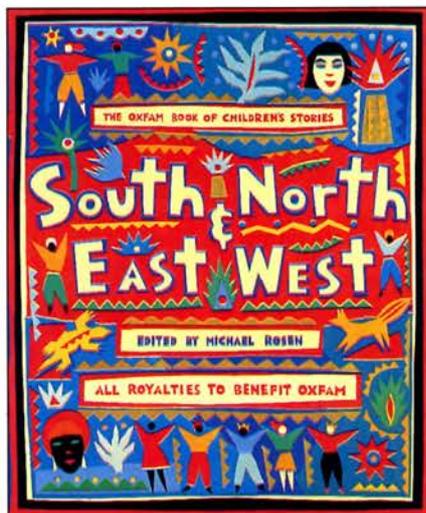
The *Animal Stories* (Orchard, 1 85213 381 3, £8.99) collected by Julia Eccleshare are by different authors, but these anthropomorphic tales share the same brand of humour – that cheerful but straight-faced commonsensical view of human frailty and potential hazard which is the natural approach of happy and confident children. Characterised by Richard Hughes' story of the elephant and the kangaroo enjoying a boiled kettle for breakfast (a child has told them to boil the kettle for a picnic), the contents of this anthology live up to their packaging in sparkling colour by Wendy Smith.

The *Topsy-Turvy Storybook* (Gollancz, 0 575 05429 8, £8.99) is good for a giggle, as the blurb suggests.

Dick King-Smith effortlessly takes the mickey out of the best known fairy tales, legends and nursery rhymes. Like any child with long hair, I avoided the story of Rapunzel because I couldn't bear to think of anyone hanging on to the end of my plaits, but here she is stupid enough to cut off her hair while the prince is only half-way up!



The contents list of Michael Rosen's *South and North, East and West* (Walker, 0 7445 2193 9, £12.99) suggested it was a book of animal fables – how the wily outwit the strong, why cows shiver, and so on, but it proved to be as stirring to the mind as its title. Michael Rosen knows just how few words are needed to tell a good story and to point its (unstated) moral. The tales come from countries where Oxfam is at work. I found myself reading at a different pace: I read, I smiled, I thought, I turned to the notes and I thought again, as my eyes rested on the brilliant, mysterious pictures by a number of artists. The gaps between stories were filled by my wondering (as is suggested in the foreword) about 'what other people think'. Snake has a horse; Toad shows him how it should be ridden: eyes forward, back straight, knees bent. Snake goes on swaying about in the saddle, horse ambling. 'Thing is, I own a horse and you don't.' A note tells me the story is popular in Africa 'as a parable of the post-colonial relationship'.



I think again: yes, there's more than one way to read a book of stories. Perhaps – at last – I've found it. ■

Margaret Clark retired from The Bodley Head in 1988, where she had been Head of Children's Books.

IN THE MAY ISSUE of BOOKS FOR KEEPS

- ★ Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch on their latest collaboration
- ★ Eleanor von Schweinitz assesses Walker's latest information books for young readers
- ★ Jeff Hynds with a Picture Book Round-Up
- ★ Rosemary Wells in Authorgraph plus reviews, reviews and more reviews