

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 1993 No. 80
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the children's book magazine



PICTURE

BOOK

ISSUE



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

The illustration on our cover is taken from **Think of an Eel**, Karen Wallace, ill. Mike Bostock, published by Walker (0 7445 2250 1, £6.99) – see 'Facts . . . With the Freshness of Fiction' on page 4 for more about this book and others in the 'Read and Wonder' series.

We are grateful to Walker Books for their help in using this illustration.

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EDITOR'S PAGE



One letter spoke for them all, perhaps:

Dear BfK,

Thanks for your superb recent edition, expressing so well all the anxieties that so many of us in the English Dept, and other departments, are feeling about SATs, libraries, etc. Keep up the good work!

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Dolan

Our thanks in return to Margaret and to the many other readers who wrote, 'phoned and in some cases called in to let us know how much our last issue, and Mike Rosen's article in particular, was appreciated.

Especially gratifying was the fact that nobody – or, at any rate, nobody who contacted us – mistook our purpose. Far from promoting some alternative political agenda of our own, we were objecting to any approach to children's reading that is test-led and Party-biased. We weren't in the least surprised to be told by a radio producer last month that he couldn't find a single independent expert on children's books who was prepared to go on his programme and endorse the Government's KS3 proposals.

One Way Forward . . .

For confirmation of just how feeble those KS3 proposals are, and how guaranteed to lower standards, we need look no further than a single sequence from a video-package which arrived recently at BfK for review. This shows a group of Year 5 children, in an East Sussex school, discussing Anthony Browne's **Gorilla**:

Leigh: It seems like a gorilla is telling the story really. Like it might be a wish from a gorilla.

Marc: I think it may just have been someone who was watching.

Vigiter: When I read I don't really think there's a main person or a narrator. When I read, you know, when Miss Read reads to us, well I get used to it so whenever I read I just get Miss Read's voice.

Amy: You think Miss Read is the narrator . . .

Such rich, ruminative talk, bringing genuine imaginative insight to a text encountered in a group situation, was one of the rewards of a year-long collaboration between two university teachers and two primary teachers working with children in otherwise routine state-school circumstances. Mind you, all four agreed on what they were about:

'We believe that reading is best learned not by individuals in isolation but in a social context . . . children need to belong to communities of readers for whom reading is seen as an important way of making sense of the world, as well as being an enjoyable activity in its own right.'

Both aspects are fully explored and documented in **Creating a Community of Readers**, a two-tape video-package produced by the University of Brighton. Aimed at students in initial-training and at primary and lower-secondary teachers keen to review and consolidate their practice, the ninety minutes of film (accompanied by a detailed commentary) offer convincing and entertaining evidence of the way in which good books can extend children as readers. How canny, for instance, to include discussion of **Gorilla** at both infant and junior age-levels . . . and how sobering to reflect that, if the Government refuses to modify its current plans, in three or four years' time the most able of these same children will find themselves playing jigsaws with ill-drawn scenes from **Romeo and Juliet**.

. . . And Another

By the same post as the Brighton package, we also received a copy of **Alive and Writing**

which must surely rate as The Ultimate Autograph Book of Children's Literature. With a foreword by P D James and contributions from just about every children's author and poet in the land, it's the magazine that fronts Reading for Pleasure – a campaign by Mike Rouse, Manager of The Resource Centre at The Village College, Soham in Cambridgeshire. Other initiatives on stream include the extension of the Centre's fiction and poetry sections, information files on all the writers studied by the youngsters and, when funds permit, a series of author-visits. Admirable at any time, such energy and flair in this ringbinder-bound era is particularly heartening . . . and matched, as well we know at BfK, by similar enterprises up and down the land. Congratulations to everyone at Soham. Who says the Good Guys can't win?

Forty Something

No, not even my age anymore. Could it be . . . yes, you've guessed! For only the second time in our history, the first being a couple of magazines ago, we've extended BfK to forty pages. And this, in mid-recession, really is Something. Once again we must thank our advertisers for their support – especially those who've also helped us, through their sponsorship, to make this Picture Book Edition probably our most colourful ever. Even more, though, we must thank our subscribers and contributors without whom we would have nothing to extend.

Enjoy the issue.

Chris

Creating a Community of Readers – for further details and an order form, contact Media Services, Watts Building, University of Brighton, Moulsecomb, Brighton, BN2 4GJ (tel. 0273 642778, fax. 0273 606093).

To obtain details of Reading for Pleasure and a copy of **Alive and Writing** (price £1.00) send a self-addressed A4 envelope to Mike Rouse, The Resource Centre, The Village College, Soham, Cambridgeshire CB7 5AA.



Happy Birthday Dear Fed!

1993 marks the 25th birthday of the Federation of Children's Book Groups which, judging by their recent Conference in Stratford-upon-Avon, is more lively and successful than ever in promoting literacy and the love of books.

To mark the occasion, the Federation sent its own birthday cards to assorted colleagues nationwide 'in recognition of your contribution to children's literature'. Well, if anyone deserves twenty-five bumps for the same reason – not to mention three more for luck over the next twenty-five – it's the Federation.

Congratulations to all its members – past, present and future, for helping so magnificently to keep alive the rumour of reading pleasure.

For details of the Federation of Children's Book Groups contact Marianne Adey at The Old Malt House, Aldbourne, Marlborough, Wiltshire SNB 2DW.

FACTS – with the freshness of FICTION

Eleanor von Schweinitz, BfK's Non-fiction Editor, assesses a new initiative in information books

Even the most attractive information books for children tend to lack the individual character of the best story books, so it's not surprising that amid all the outcry about omissions from the official SATs reading lists few questioned the absence of any non-fiction title.

We generally identify non-fiction by publisher's series and expect a certain uniformity in their approach, selection of content, visual presentation and design. (How often have you been prompted by the unmistakable voice of an enthusiast to turn back to the title page to discover who has written a series book?)

Walker Books, known for the quality of their picture books, have just launched the first six titles in the 'Read and Wonder' series. They challenge most of the stereotypes of current non-fiction publishing and, apart from their standard square format and twenty-six pages, each is a unique entity with a character all of its own. Designed to be read through at a sitting, their main aim is to share the excitement of discovery and sow the seeds of lasting curiosity; they are the antithesis of those children's information books that regiment their information into double-page spreads.

All but one of these books are about animals and yet each views its subject in a completely different way, conveying a great deal more 'real' information than might at first appear from the narrative style. After checking in a variety of sources I was impressed by just how much of the essential information about beavers, eels and caterpillars was to be found embedded in imaginative, readable narrative (unencumbered by the clumsy pedantry so often associated with non-fiction narrative texts).

What makes these books so different is the scope they give the authors to develop their own distinctive voice and vision. This can be demonstrated most clearly by some extracts. The first is in Dick King-Smith's familiar relaxed style as he reminisces about his favourite pig Monty:

'What he really loved, once he'd finished his grub, was to be scratched on the top of his head, between his great ears, and it always affected him in the same way. His eyes, with their long pale lashes, would close in ecstasy and slowly his hind quarters would sink down until he was sitting on his bottom like a huge dog.'

Another intensely remembered experience is expressed thus by Vivian French:

'Very gently, my grandfather lifted the stick and put it on the window-ledge in the sunshine. The creature crawled slowly up the stick, and stopped. Little by little it began to stretch out. It was just like watching a flower unfolding itself, only it had wings instead of petals.'

Contrast this with Karen Wallace's arresting opening words (impersonal, but just as strongly felt):

'Think of an eel.
He swims like a fish.
He slides like a snake.'

and Karen Wallace, again, this time describing a beaver in a rhythmic, incantatory style reminiscent of Longfellow's 'Hiawatha':

'Beaver feet are webbed
like duck's feet,
push like paddles
through the water
past the slowly
swimming salmon
down to where
the tangled roots
lie buried in
the reedy lake bed.'

Walker Books have done a splendid job in matching the spirit and atmosphere of each text with an appropriate illustrator; and by using illustrations in much the same way as they would in a picture story book they have achieved a symbiosis rare in non-fiction.

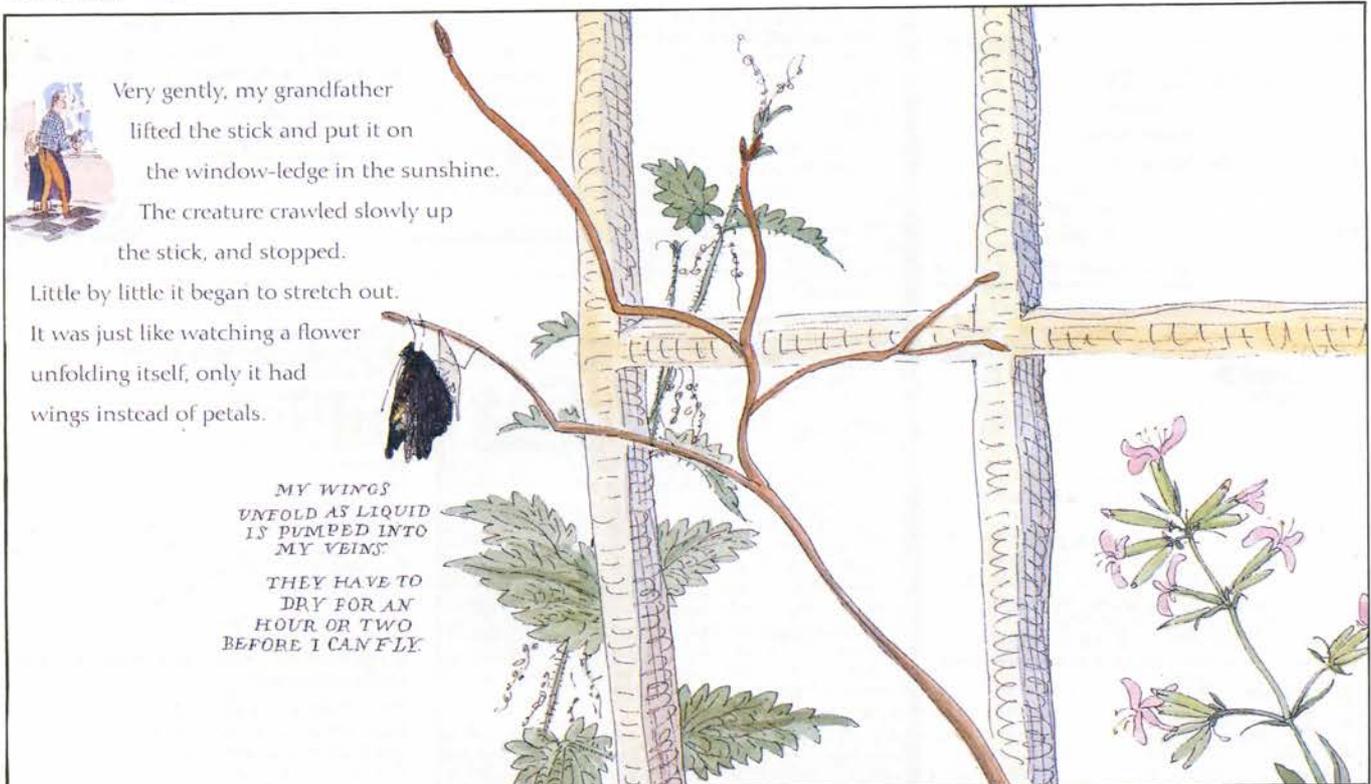
Anita Jeram's pigs are drawn with a liveliness and humour that exactly matches the tone of Dick King-Smith's enthusiastic text. If her pictures sometimes skate a thin line between anthropomorphism and nature so does the text. Pigs are domestic animals and our relationship with them is one of the strong threads in this book. The illustrations provide an opportunity to elaborate a point or provide further information. So we learn from the narrative that Monty 'liked to wallow' in a pond – and the caption to the accompanying illustration adds: 'A good coating of mud protects a pig from sunburn.' When the text tells us that 'Sows spend their lives having babies, loads of them . . .' a graphic illustration of young pigs suckling is captioned: 'A sow has between eight and twelve piglets at a time. Each piglet chooses its own private teat and returns to it for every feed.'

In *Caterpillar, Caterpillar* the delicacy of Charlotte Voake's illustrations complement the intimacy of Vivian French's first-person narrative as she recollects a childhood summer when she watched with wonder the transformation of egg to caterpillar, to pupa, to butterfly – in the company of her grandfather (who used to grow nettles because 'Stinging nettles grow butterflies'). The narrative carries a great deal of closely observed information which is supplemented by further details in the captions, their conversational tone blending unobtrusively with the text.

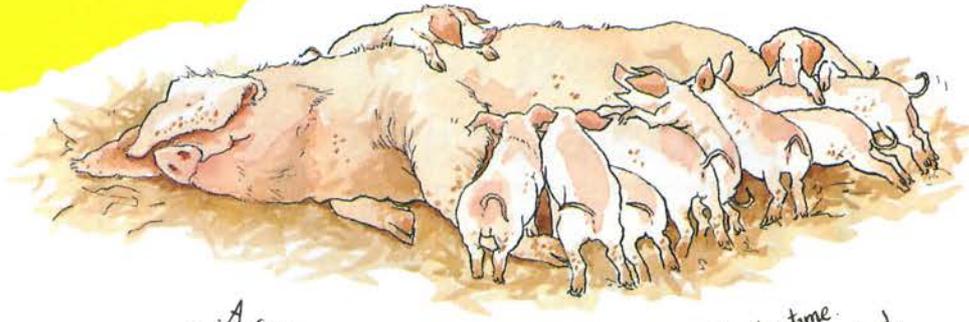
The illustrations support and develop the narrative – they never dominate it – but why has Charlotte Voake chosen not to show us the climax?

'And the wings began to tremble, and to shine in the sunlight, and then suddenly there it was – a real butterfly, with spidery legs and its wings spread wide open.'

Below, a spread from *Caterpillar, Caterpillar*.



From *All Pigs are Beautiful*.



A sow normally has between eight and twelve piglets at a time. Each piglet chooses its own private teat and returns to it for every feed.

It was so lovely I couldn't say anything at all.'

Am I a mere literal-minded seeker after facts to want to see what it actually looked like at that moment? (Fortunately there is a full frontal portrait, underneath the dedications, facing the title page.)

Karen Wallace uses a much more detached style in her texts for *Think of an Eel* and *Think of a Beaver*. Not surprisingly, Beaver has a greater sense of familiarity.

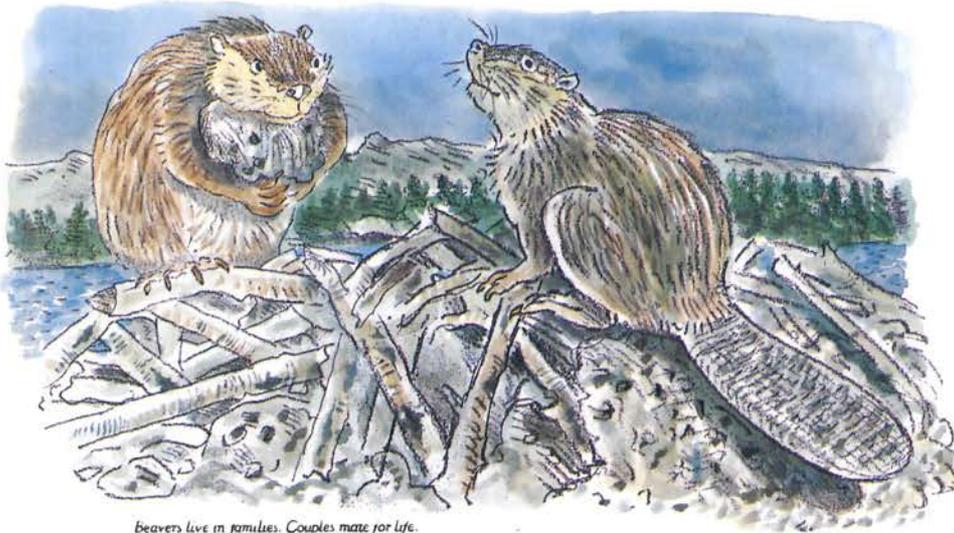
'Beaver breath is hot and woody he's grunting, puffing, dragging branches.'

We can almost imagine ourselves as a beaver, and Mick Manning's robust illustrations give, throughout the book, an appropriate solidity to Beaver's many ingenious activities. Because this text cries out to be read aloud it is disappointing that Karen Wallace has omitted Beaver's most spectacular engineering achievement from her resonant narrative – leaving us to learn about it through a panoramic illustration and the caption: 'Beavers dam the stream with sticks, stones, roots and mud to make a pond.'

'After eighty days swimming, not eating, not sleeping, eel's long, winding body is worn out and wasted.'

As one might expect from Walker Books, immense care has gone into the design of each book. Not just the layout of the text and illustrations, but type faces have been thoughtfully chosen and captions hand-lettered – each making their visual contribution to the harmony of the page. And in *Caterpillar*, *Caterpillar* the paper has been gently tinted to provide a sympathetic background for Charlotte Voake's delicate watercolours.

Unlike most information series these 'Read and Wonder' books are not primarily designed to be dipped into (although they each have a skeletal index). They demand to be read aloud, right through, and in the case of *Caterpillar*, *Caterpillar* and *Think of an Eel* there is a compelling story that has its own dramatic impetus. Karen Wallace has given *Think of a Beaver* a well-structured narrative flow but Dick King-Smith relies on getting us hooked on sheer infectious exuberance to carry us through *All Pigs are Beautiful*.



Beavers live in families. Couples mate for life.

From *Think of a Beaver*.

Think of an Eel is the most ambitious and demanding of these books, its subject the most mysterious. The amazing story of the eel's migration from the Sargasso Sea, its strange metamorphosis and its return to the Sargasso to spawn and die, has an inherent shapeliness and inner tension that is perfectly expressed through the taut rhythms and vivid imagery of Karen Wallace's text. This is matched by striking, stylised illustrations by Mike Bostock (see our front cover) which provide a sinuous counterpoint to the patterns of the text.

A Piece of String is a Wonderful Thing is less coherent, more fragmented. Judy Hindley's breathless text raises a host of thought-provoking questions as to how this essential component of everyday life came to be 'invented':

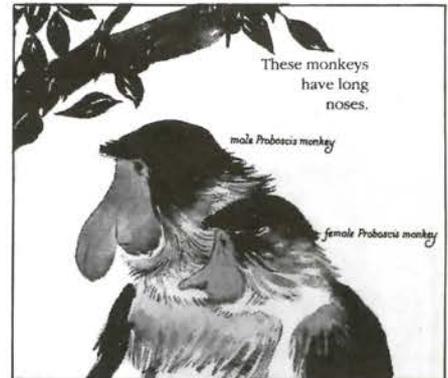
'Was it an accident?
Was it a guess?
Did it emerge
from a hideous mess?
Did it begin with
a sinuous twig,
a whippet willow,
a snaky vine . . . ?'

(followed by all those uses we subsequently found for it!) Most of the hard information is carried in the captions to Margaret Chamberlain's witty thread of illustrations that wind their frenetic way across each page. But perhaps its most valuable message is that we just don't know the answer to every question and that speculative imagination is a legitimate tool of enquiry.

Peter Hansard's *I like Monkeys Because . . .* is a rather uneasy miscellany of fact and personal response, lacking any clear focus. The text veers between the conversational and bare descriptive statement, which makes its use much more problematic.

'This monkey is beautiful
and black and white and hairy.
This monkey has a bald head.
These monkeys have long noses.'

These three sentences constitute the text on one double-page opening. They would be unrewarding to read aloud and can hardly be said to excite interest or further understanding; and they tell us less than we can observe from Patricia Casey's accompanying illustrations.



These monkeys have long noses.

male Proboscis monkey

female Proboscis monkey

The first six 'Read and Wonder' books, then, are not all equally successful but when read aloud by a committed teacher each should suggest a host of starting points, sparking off questions and providing a variety of exciting possibilities for discussion and follow-up. The texts don't lend themselves to mindless copying out into project folders – children will need to formulate what they have discovered in their own words and the experience could encourage a more imaginative and creative approach to learning.

The next six titles have already been announced. Walker Books have set themselves a challenging task: to discover talented creative writers with a real desire to communicate their enthusiasm to young children. They have already shown that they are prepared to encourage such writers to express their particular vision with a freshness and vitality rarely seen in non-fiction for children. It's to be hoped that they will never be tempted to reduce these books to a series formula of their own. ●

Caterpillar, Caterpillar
Vivian French, ill. Charlotte Voake,
0 7445 2275 7

I Like Monkeys Because . . .
Peter Hansard, ill. Patricia Casey,
0 7445 1857 1

A Piece of String is a Wonderful Thing
Judy Hindley, ill. Margaret Chamberlain,
0 7445 2185 8

All Pigs are Beautiful
Dick King-Smith, ill. Anita Jeram,
0 7445 2517 9

Think of a Beaver
Karen Wallace, ill. Mick Manning,
0 7445 2269 2

Think of an Eel
Karen Wallace, ill. Mike Bostock,
0 7445 2250 1

Published by Walker Books, £6.99 each.

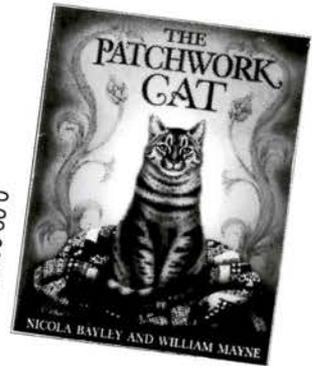
Random House Children's Books

RED FOX



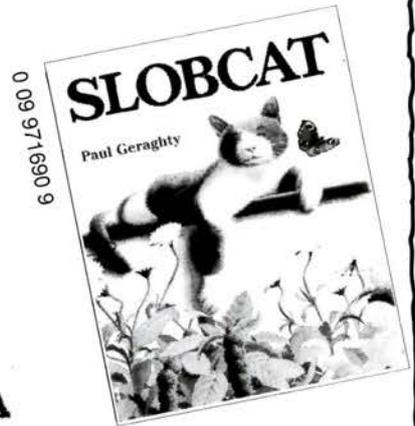
At last, the long-awaited paperback publication of these two classic picture books in full-size.

Ahoy There!



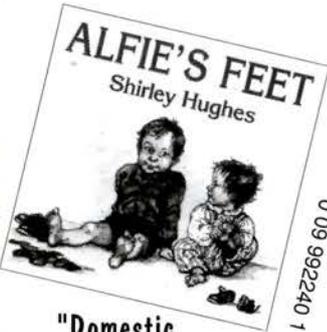
0 09 998320 6

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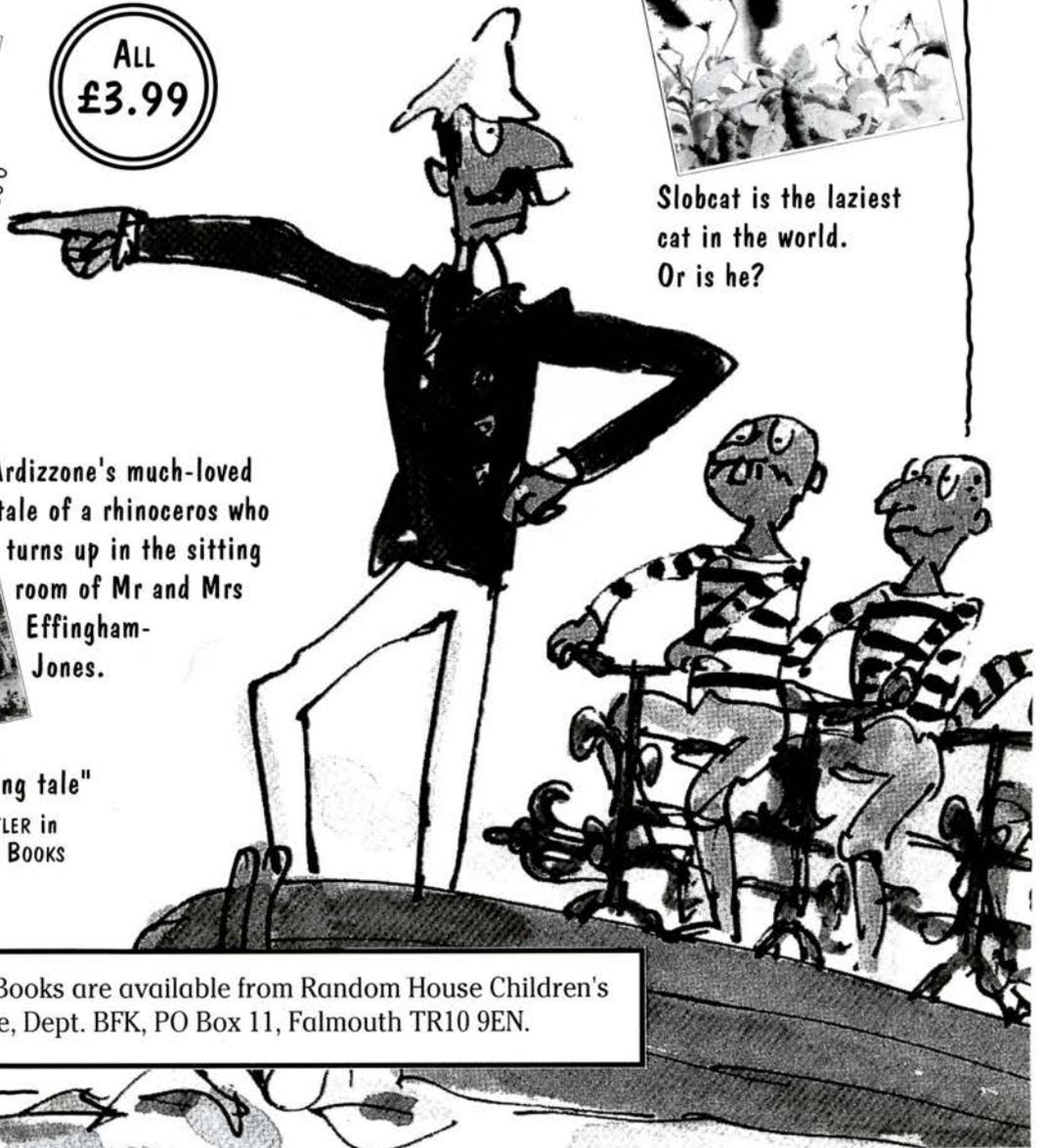
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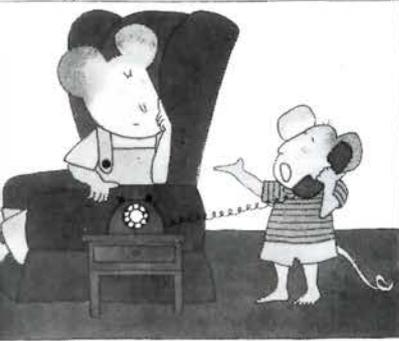
REVIEWS

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

NURSERY / INFANT

What Archie Wanted

Holly Keller, Walker (Jan 93), 0 7445 3001 6, £3.99



Yet another winner from Holly Keller – she has the ability to touch both the adult and the child who share her books, for they depict and value the reality of a young child's world with its fears, anger and inability to be quickly appeased. Archie is left by his mother in the charge of Libby and Sam, and we share their struggles to find out what is troubling him, but only one person knows the answer because she forgot to give him a goodbye kiss. Oh the guilt! JS

Busy! Busy! Busy!

Jonathan Shipton, ill. Michael Foreman, Picture Lions (Feb 93), 0 00 664039 7, £3.99



Mum is having a bad day and is in a bad mood; her small son finds her crying into the dishwasher and gives her a Great Big Kiss. He drags her away to see the geese flying and the housework is forgotten. This is a warm story with pastel-coloured pictures creating just the right atmosphere for each stage of the story. MS



My Cat Maisie

Pamela Allen, Picture Puffin (Jan 93), 0 14 054237 X, £3.99

Having a friend is important to small children. In this lovely picture book we meet Andrew who has no one to play with. One day a stray cat scratches at the door and Andrew and his mum give it milk, and encourage it to play for a while. Andrew is very rough and so the cat runs away. While searching for the cat Andrew encounters next door's dog who is too boisterous and makes him run home, frightened. That night the cat returns, and because she's treated more gently this time decides to stay.

A most satisfying book, with a clear message about treating animals carefully, and a safe and happy ending. MS

Black Dog

Pamela Allen, Picture Puffin (Jan 93), 0 14 054395 3, £3.50



The story of a black dog and a girl called Christina who are best friends. They have great fun together until one day Christina starts dreaming about a beautiful blue bird and forgets to play with Black Dog. Eventually he manages to get her attention by

pretending to be the blue bird flying up in the trees; only when he falls and hurts himself does Christina realise how much she loves him. What a good way of understanding how painful it can be to love and to feel jealous – something small children often need explained. I'm sure this book will help enormously. MS

Breakfast on Rosie's Farm

0 7445 3016 2

A Day on Rosie's Farm

0 7445 3017 2

Zita Newcome, Walker (Jan 93), £2.99 each

Two pleasant books telling the tale of Rosie who lives on a farm, feeding the animals and helping her mother.

Attractive, softly-coloured illustrations add to the simple stories which have warm and happy endings. Both titles offer plenty to talk about with 3- and 4-year-olds. MS

The Big Sneeze

Ruth Brown, Red Fox (Mar 93), 0 09 946150 X, £3.99

Once again Ruth Brown has produced a visual treat in this wonderful picture book . . . and a lesson in logic for small people! A farmer resting in a barn sneezes when a fly lands on his nose and sets off a train of events . . . the fly is sneezed into the spider's web to be captured by the spider who is chased by a sparrow, who wakens the bird and so on. Drowsy browns and golds add to the glow of the book which is highly recommended for 4-6s and their families. MS

Seasons

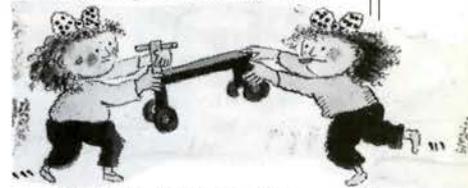
John Burningham, Red Fox (Feb 93), 0 09 989970 1, £4.99

John Burningham at his brilliant best. A beautiful book illustrating the smells and colours of each season. Touched with his usual humour, the sparse text gives a child vivid clues about different parts of the year – 'Spring is . . . birds nesting . . . pigs rooting . . . lambs playing . . . ducks dabbling . . . and flowers'. How reassuring to know that every season will come around with its special things to do. MS

What I like

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Walker (Jan 93), 0 7445 3019 9, £3.99

Six different children, two of them twins, give their views on what they like and dislike . . .



What I like is time to play, toys, a holiday, (some) boys, waking early, hair all curly' . . . and 'Sometimes we don't like . . . being a pair . . . people who stare . . . having to share'. Each love or hate is described on a double-spread with small illustrations on the right-hand page so the listening child can identify each phrase with the matching picture. The craftily structured rhyming text is good for learning new words and phrases. MS



INFANT / JUNIOR

Captain Pugwash and the Pigwig

John Ryan, Young Puffin (Jan 93), 0 14 034420 9, £2.99

Captain Pugwash is as irresistible now as he was 30 years ago and has won another generation of ardent followers – a marvellous book to challenge fledgling readers and one that has hardly rested on the shelf since we received it. A more greedy, cowardly, silly, charming hero is hard to find, so if you haven't met him yet buy this book and give it to any 6- or 7-year-old who'll bore you silly with smothered giggles as he or she tries to read you . . . just another 'funny' bit! JS

Don't Do That!

Tony Ross, Red Fox (Jan 93), 0 09 991710 6, £3.99

Nellie's nose wins her pretty nose competitions, but one day – one dreadful day – she pushes her finger up and it gets stuck! Everyone tries to get the finger out, but when Henry, casually swinging saw/hay-fork/pliers, etc., nonchalantly offers to get it out he's ignored, until in desperation (when even a rocket to the moon has failed to dislodge said finger) he's at last asked to try and proves . . . well, that would be telling.



Tony Ross keeps churning them out – super books that kids adore and parents greet with groans of 'Oh no, not again' as they read them aloud for the umpteenth time. JS

Frog and the Birdsong

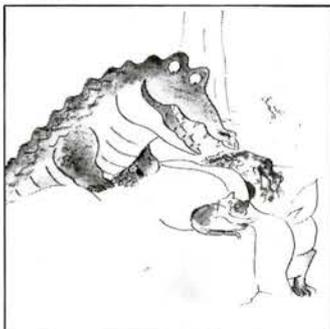
Max Velthuijs, Red Fox (Jan 93), 0 09 981780 2, £3.99

Max Velthuijs gives us a book that's perfect in its own right. Another in the tradition of **Granpa** – clear, unsentimental, dealing with fear and the angst of living when confronted with death, but leaving us aware of the wonder and sheer beauty of life with its inescapable transience softened by the

knowledge of continuity. A thoughtful and 'special' book to keep and treasure. JS

Dial-a-Croc

Mike Dumbleton, ill. Ann James, Puffin (Feb 93), 0 14 054413 5, £3.99



This is a great romp of a book with an enterprising new heroine, Vanessa, who builds fame into fortune with her partner, Croc. My children loved it. They adored the humour, with text and illustration vying right to the twist at the end leaving us all with satisfied smirks on our faces. We're dying to know when Vanessa's next brainwave will hit the publishing world. JS

Musical Max

Robert Kraus, ill. Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey, Red Fox (Mar 93), 0 09 991100 0, £3.99

Once again this partnership brings us another brilliant winner. Max drives his family and neighbours crazy with his practising, yet, when he stops the world is the poorer for it. In the end everyone joins him in creating music.



Music co-ordinators will fall on this book. It really isn't just a good tale with Kraus's clear-sighted wisdom tied to Aruego and Dewey's zany illustrations, but is also a tour of the orchestra and an affirmation of the importance of keeping music in our lives. JS

Thinking about Colours

Jessica Jenkins, Red Fox (Mar 93), 0 09 979580 9, £3.99

My initial reaction of irritation, of feeling I was being spoon-fed stereotype images of colour, was transformed by the realisation that Jessica Jenkins is actually throwing down a gauntlet. Very soon this book makes you itch to explore colours further. It challenges you to find more personal and better ways to describe colours – and it wasn't just me who reacted like this; the children wanted to argue with the text, and then each other, as they ended up mixing colours to prove their point! JS

Duncan's Tree House
0 00 664239 X

Duncan and the Bird
0 00 664147 4

Amanda Vesey, Picture Lions (Dec 92), £3.99 each

Duncan's Tree House appealed to all the children who listened to it. It has all the right ingredients: a furnished treehouse in which Duncan can stay all night, monsters safely in his imagination, humour in that his dog needs a wee but can't get down the ladder, an adventure in the dark with a wonderful serene dawn to bring everything crisply back to normal again. Amanda Vesey gives her audience all the trimmings in her flat, stylised illustrations – so much so that we had children making pretend treehouses all over the place.

Sadly, the sequel, **Duncan and the Bird**, was a real disappointment. The children fell on it as the next 'Duncan book', but did not get what they were expecting. The genre was quite different with fantasy abounding. This contradicted the tight leash on reality which played a large part in the success of the first book and, with the loosening, somehow the story drifts and the charm is lost. JS

The Lighthouse that ran away

Roger McGough, ill. Rosemary Woods, Red Fox (Jan 93), 0 09 997960 8, £3.99

Roger McGough's writing begs to be read aloud. This adventure has all the essential components – humour, panic, absurdity, pathos, bright lights and stormy depths. The superb illustrations match the mood and changes of pace perfectly. But it's the sheer rollicking rhythm of the language which makes the lurking thespian in every

teacher turn to drama and leaves the children clamouring for you to 'do it again, please!' JS

Late Kick-Off

Margaret Joy, Young Puffin (Feb 93), 0 14 036267 3, £2.99

One or two of my most ardent soccer enthusiasts were rather disappointed to discover that this is a collection of stories with a football theme rather than a 'real (action-packed) football story'. Their first glance at the cover had led them to assume otherwise. Other less committed football fans were satisfied with stories about shorts which turned pink in the wash, lost tickets and raising money for new gear. JB

Sonny Joe and the Ringdom Rhymes

Mike McCartney, ill. Graham Philpot, Collins (Dec 92), 0 00 193486 4, £6.99

When Sonny Joe's family desert the city and settle in the country, the frustrated little boy vents his anger on the wildlife and rips the wing off a butterfly. He's immediately confronted by a pair of pixieish creatures who conduct him through a sequence of purgatorial metamorphoses – from child to snail to spider to owl and back to child again – aimed at making him a better person.

The book is bright with lavish, but somewhat twee, illustrations that seem to suit its preachiness. A fairly interesting yarn, but rather sanctimonious and unfair to city dwellers. GH

The Calypso Alphabet

John Agard, ill. Jennifer Bent, Picture Lions (Feb 93), 0 00 663676 4, £3.99



n for navel-string.
Bury baby-cord then plant a tree.

John Agard takes us on a tour from 'a for Anancy. Spiderman of tricky-tricky fame.' via 'k for kaiso. Song with a sweet-

sweet jump-up beat.', and 'I for lickerish. So greedy all you do is eat-eat.' to 'z for zombie', offering 26 vignettes of Caribbean life and lovely-sounding words to savour. The vibrant illustrations are perfectly in tune with Agard's strongly rhythmic text. This book is rich in potential. JB

The Streetwise Kid

Lorraine Simeon, ill.
Sarah-Jane Stewart,
Blackie (Feb 93),
0 216 94039 7, £3.50

Unfortunately there are all too many dangers lurking in the streets for the unwary child: traffic, bullies, gangs and the attentions of unknown adults. These and other potential hazards are unthreateningly, but straightforwardly presented using the rap form and a series of well-observed illustrations which are excellent springboards for discussion with junior children. JB

Rolf and Rosie

Robert Swindells, ill.
David McKee, Red Fox
(Mar 93), 0 09 995610 1,
£2.50

An amiable read about a milkman who trades in his milk float for a spaceship and takes his daughter on a tour of the solar system. They are seeking escape from the dreariness of the English weather, but the climatic catastrophes they encounter on other planets soon convince them of the value of home. The book succeeds as an accessible, and occasionally witty, addition to the 'Read Alone' range, but is otherwise forgettable. JB

At the Crossroads

Rachel Isadora,
Red Fox (Mar 93),
0 09 910861 5, £3.99

A most attractive, large-format picture book which explores a day in the life of a small boy in a South African shanty town. It's a very special day; the day his father is expected back from working in the mines after ten months away. The text is in the first person and gives a real feel of the excitement, the waiting and the joy which the child and his friends feel.

Small children won't need to know anything about the political background to share in the experience and savour the bold and dramatic pictures. LW

The Toymaker

Martin Waddell, ill.
Terry Milne, Walker
(Jan 93), 0 7445 3018 0,
£3.99

A story for any child interested in the passage of time and the interplay of generations. The first part tells of the toymaker, his daughter and the dolls he makes for her; the second, of the daughter, now grown up,

who returns to her old home with her grandchild. The tale is simply told with large and delicate illustrations so that infants found it easy to understand. Slightly older children would enjoy the neat twist at the end. LW

Charlie Barley

Sally-Ann Lever, ill.
Andy Ellis, Picture
Lions (Feb 93),
0 00 664050 8, £3.99

I was quite exhausted after reading this book. Apart from the word 'Crikey', which seems rather dated, this is a story intended for a generation brought up on the crude whizz/thud of cartoon television. Charlie Barley is a naughty little boy who is very rude to his parents, wrecks shops and makes vulgar noises, all in the name of humour. It appeals unashamedly to the side of children which loves words like 'pooh' and 'botty' and I'm sure most 6-8 year-olds will love it. Whether one would want them to is a different question. LW

Prehistoric Pinkerton

Steven Kellogg,
Picturemac (Mar 93),
0 333 58333 7, £3.99



Another adventure of the bounding Great Dane puppy, Pinkerton, told with Steven Kellogg's usual demanding prose and active, witty drawings. Pinkerton causes havoc in the museum all because he is teething; the dinosaur skeletons are just so tempting. . .

Steven Kellogg expects a good deal of his young readers; the narrative must often be inferred from the pictures as much as the text and his vocabulary reflects the speaker, not the reader, which makes for difficult words at times. Funny and rewarding, this is well worth reading to younger children or for rather older ones to read for themselves. LW

Little Dog Lost

Inga Moore, Picture
Puffin (Feb 93),
0 14 054494 1, £3.99

A very good story to reassure all those children newly into school or just going on to The Juniors. Liz moves to the country and finds it hard to make friends. She waits and

waits for other children to come to her, but it takes the loss of her little dog to show her that sometimes you must go out and find friends for yourself. Attractively illustrated, realistically set and clearly told, this book would be well worth sharing with those confronting new relationships themselves. LW

Butterfingers

Dennis Reader, Picture
Lions (Jan 93),
0 00 664198 9, £3.99

The first of three picture books by Dennis Reader this month. It's a very funny story about Benjamin Butters who drops things all the time. We have awful thoughts about what will happen when he holds his new baby sister and I wouldn't spoil it for you by telling, either. Sufficient to say this is ideal for young children, especially those still wobbly on ball control, with several sly, little jokes in both text and illustration for the alert adult. LW

Fed Up!

Dennis Reader, Picture
Lions (Jan 93),
0 00 664290 X, £3.99

The next time one of your children comes up with that killer of a line, 'I'm fed up!', try giving them this book as a witty and purposeful antidote to boredom. It's hard to resist a story in which someone advises, 'Go and save the world from the horrors of pollution. . . it's time someone did.' The pictures, too, are just as interesting as the words. Younger children will welcome Anthony Anthony's adventures for their own sake; older ones can consider the implications of individual responsibility if they would like to. Otherwise they can just enjoy the story. LW

Joe Useless

Dennis Reader, Picture
Lions (Jan 93),
0 00 664258 6, £3.99

Another entertaining story from Dennis Reader, who was certainly author of the month in my batch of books.



Bernard Blossom longs for a real pet like the ones his friends have. Joe, a dachshund, arrives, but alas, cannot do the things other friends' dogs can do. The pictures of Joe's attempts to do tricks are very funny - no wonder Bernard thinks his dog is useless. In the end, of course, Joe shows his own special talent as he rescues Carmen Biggins' cat.

Most of Dennis Reader's stories seem to be about losers turned into winners. My only criticism is that all the heroes are boys; I'd like to see him writing about a girl for a change! LW

The Friendly Robin

Enid Blyton, ill.
Constance Marshall,
Knight (Jan 93),
0 340 18741 7, £2.50

Once there was a little girl called Elizabeth. Every day she went to Infant School. Her favourite lesson was Nature Study and she specially liked it when her teacher, Miss Cathey, told the children a story out of a big book called **Enid Blyton's Nature Reader**. The stories were all about birds, animals and plants. Quite often the creatures told each other about their lives or sometimes there were some children in the story who helped to look after them. That was all a long time ago, in the 1950s, so you can imagine Elizabeth's surprise when, one day when she was quite grown up, she was sent a book with some of those very same stories in it! 'Goodness,' she said to herself, 'I remember these almost word for word. How very old-fashioned they seem to be now. I'll take them to read to the children in my own Infant School.' The little girls and boys she read them to liked them very much, and said, 'Can we hear them again?' This really took the wind out of Elizabeth's sails, I can tell you. LW

Peter Potts the Plumber

Margaret Ryan, ill.
Caroline Crossland,
Young Puffin (Feb 93),
0 14 034804 2, £2.99

An entertaining set of short stories, suitable for reading out loud, about a very likeable character who helps everyone with their leaky taps or blocked gutters. . . at the end his many friends treat him to a special Birthday Party. Full of information and lots of fun. MS

Never Kiss Frogs!

Robert Leeson, ill.
David Simonds, Young
Puffin (Jan 93),
0 14 034740 2, £2.99

Tales of Gail and her problems with frogs, princes, princesses and her mum make an entertaining short novel for young juniors who are fluent

and fairly sophisticated readers. The combination of a very down-to-earth modern setting with a comic fairy tale element makes the book interesting and the story rattles along to a suitably down-beat ending . . . 'they all lived happily ever after - sort of'. LW

Rosa's Grandfather Sings Again

Leon Rosselson, ill.
Caroline Binch, Young Puffin (Feb 93),
0 14 034588 4, £2.99



Sensitive, amusing stories about Rosa and her embarrassing grandfather give lots of opportunity for children to think about old people and their hopes and fears. Rosa is very fond of her grandfather, but he is difficult and Mum has to look after them both. The problems aren't glossed over and the relationships remain close and happy despite the times when Grandfather ruins the carol concert or makes a scene at the zoo. The last story is rather ambiguous . . . has Grandfather died? LW

The Worst Child I Ever Had

Anne Fine, ill. Clara Vulliamy, Young Puffin (Feb 93), 0 14 034799 2, £2.99

A short, but demanding story, about three baby-sitters and their gossip as they look after their charges in the park. One, Mrs Mackle, tells of the worst child she ever had who had been obsessed with snails. What can the girl be like now? We find out part of the answer, unknown to Mrs Mackle, while she tells the story to her friends. Good for fluent young juniors to read for themselves, but also interesting to spark

off discussion about naughtiness and its definitions. LW

Below, from **Come on into my Tropical Garden**.



POETRY

Come on into my Tropical Garden

Grace Nichols, ill.
Caroline Binch, Young Lions (Feb 93),
0 00 664036 2, £2.99

The kaleidoscope of life in the Caribbean is vividly created in this superb collection of some 30 poems written from a child's point of view. Topics include listening to jumbie (ghost) stories, family relationships and the flora and fauna of the islands. It's good to see this book available in paperback at last, albeit it

without the colour illustrations of the hardback, but Grace Nichols' words are more than sufficient to paint colours in the imagination. JB

Rent-a-Genius

Gillian Cross, ill. Glenys Ambrus, Young Puffin (Feb 93), 0 14 036130 8, £2.99

A light-hearted account of how Sophy Simpson, who loves to give advice, sets up her own problem-solving service and finds herself with one very big problem of her own to overcome: how to deal with all her customers' troubles at the same time. The author makes effective use of dialogue in this fun story for junior solo readers. JB

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

Aliens for Lunch

Jonathan Etra and Stephanie Spinner, ill.
Steve Bjorkman, Red Fox (Feb 93),
0 09 917401 4, £2.50

I know space stories are bit spaced-out and pink aliens coming out of the popcorn are a bit corny, but that apart there are moments in this one that lift it above the ordinary. Honest!

To begin with, like Richard, I always suspected there was something subversive on the sweet trolley - anything that glorious has to be evil. Aric, Richard's bossy extraterrestrial friend, proves I was right all along; it's the XTC 1,000! Not to mention the T-shirt that makes the wearer irresistible to members of the opposite sex. Wow! I can handle this, does it come in a size 12? PH



his friends and himself.

Another story from Dick King-Smith that's as beautifully crafted as Daisy herself. I noted the gentle brush with the problem of secrets and violating traditional sexist values and the adjustments to expectations the family made in resolving them. But, mainly, thank you. Thank you for providing such wonderful, quality reading that fits in with National Curriculum History KS2. Clever Dick - lucky us! PH

Lady Daisy

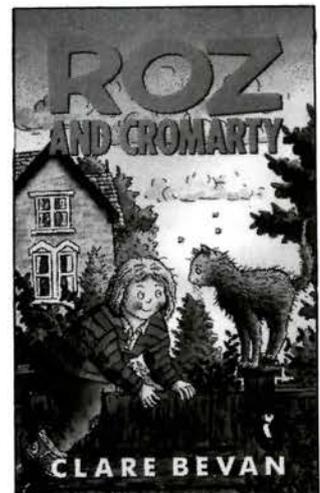
Dick King-Smith, ill.
Valerie Littlewood, Puffin (Jan 93),
0 14 034416 0, £2.99

What a lovely doll to find. Lady Daisy has slept soundly since her Victorian doll-mother died and is rather surprised to find herself woken up by a boy at the end of the twentieth century. Ned's school work improves no end as he swaps information with Lady Daisy, but when confronted by peer, parental and social pressures he begins to learn a lot about his family,

Vincent the Invisible

Eric Houghton, ill.
Scouler Anderson, Piper (Jan 93),
0 330 32709 7, £2.99

I'd love to be invisible like Vincent. I have only to think of my colleagues or friends and an endless, glittering stream of opportunities stretch out before me. Before I get carried away, let me say that Vincent's aspirations are just as mischievous as mine - he can be a non-existent paper boy, a ghastly, ghostly gorilla or make his sister truly magical. That's only the fun part, though. There's still Mum asking if he's washed hands she cannot see or scrubbed behind ears she cannot peer into. The big worry is will the doctor ever make Vincent visible again? His treatment seems ineffective, but then I suppose a case of invisibility is rather rare. An irresistible temptation, though. PH



element is balanced by a well-drawn picture of family life, focusing on Mum's diet, sister Thea's on/off romance and the imminent return of Dad from his lighthouse keeper's job. An engaging, humorous read for juniors. LN

Roz and Cromarty

Clare Bevan, Puffin (Feb 93), 0 14 036042 5, £2.99

Roz is overweight and fed-up with being teased about it. An unexpected ally comes in the shape of a stray cat, Cromarty, who has the power of speech and uses stories and challenges to improve Roz's view of herself. Under his guidance she loses weight and becomes more confident. The fantasy

The Seventh Seal

Julie Rainsbury, Pont Books, 0 86383 960 6, £2.75

Stories about seals are always popular, and this will be no exception. Reluctantly, Owen has come with his father and new stepmother to live in an isolated cottage on the Welsh coast. He's befriended by Eleri, a girl of his own age (11-ish), and her Merlin-like grandfather, though friction

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

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

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

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

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

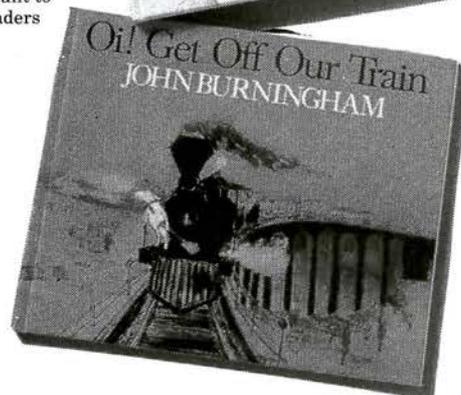
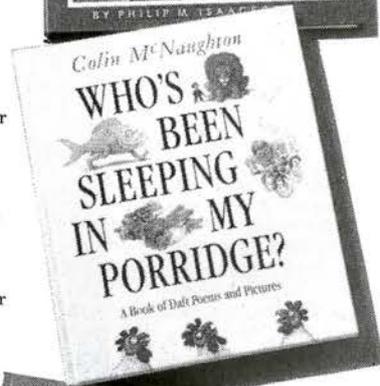
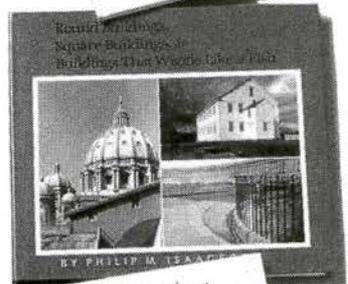
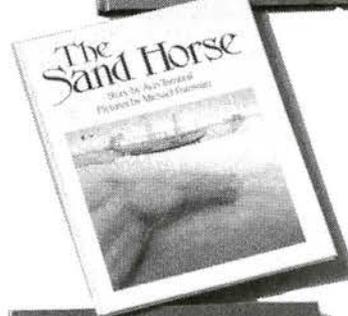
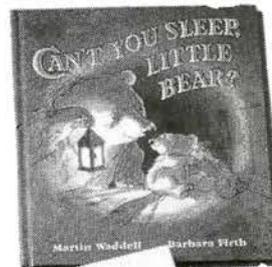
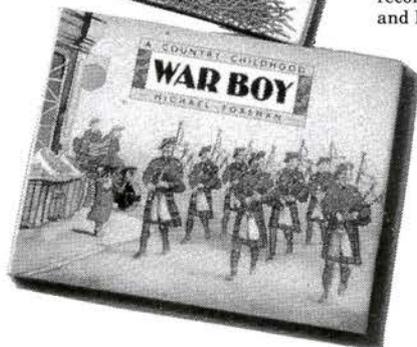
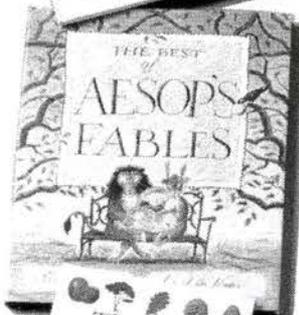
You only have to look at this page to see the calibre of books they have recommended over the past few months. And they are all offered at savings which range from between 20% to 50% off the publishers' prices.

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develops when Owen finds a magical stone and obstinately refuses to return it to the sea. The fantasy elements of the story are underdeveloped, but nevertheless this is an attractive novel to offer young readers or to read aloud. LN

Misery Guts

Morris Gleitzman, Piper (Nov 92), 0 330 32440 3, £2.99

Keith wants to put the smiles back on his parents' faces. They've turned into Misery Guts along with all their neighbours – overwhelmed by the greyness of everything. The book opens with Keith painting his father's fish shop, as a birthday surprise, in Tropical Mango Hi Gloss Orange. He keeps trying to make them happy, pinning his hopes finally on a real Tropical Paradise seen on an Australian poster. After he's accidentally burnt down the shop, the family succumb to his dream and emigrate. That's only half the book – paradise has its own problems and Keith almost becomes a misery guts in his attempts to 'protect' his parents from finding out. Great fun, lovely to read aloud and eagerly snapped up by fans of Gleitzman's brilliant earlier novel, *Two Weeks With The Queen*. AJ

Window

Jeannie Baker, Red Fox (Mar 93), 0 09 918211 4, £3.99

Window is a picture book of startling textual collages. Remember *Where the Forest meets the Sea*?

In this description of the incredible and frightening speed of environmental destruction, we witness our own folly through a single window over a period of 24 years. Swept away are the old bench marks of stages and levels – this is for everyone. Each reader will see something fresh every time they revisit the story and everyone will bring their own anecdotal evidence to prove its truth. PH

Mattie and Grandpa

Roberto Piummini, trans. Isabel Quigly, Puffin (Jan 93), 0 14 036153 7, £2.99

Unnoticed by a grieving family, Grandpa rises from what appears to be his deathbed and takes young Mattie on a mysterious ramble. Their adventures develop from encounters with evocative images: a bridge that recedes the more you long to cross it, an elusive horse which is half-black and half-white, a buried treasure-chest rifled by the roots of a tree. But the greatest mystery of all is the way in which Grandpa keeps shrinking, until he's small enough to fit inside the boy's head.

This is a touching, but

unsentimental book about bereavement and life beyond it. Its message is skilfully conveyed through a story that fascinated my audience of 9-year-olds. Highly recommended. GH

Mr Potter's Pigeon

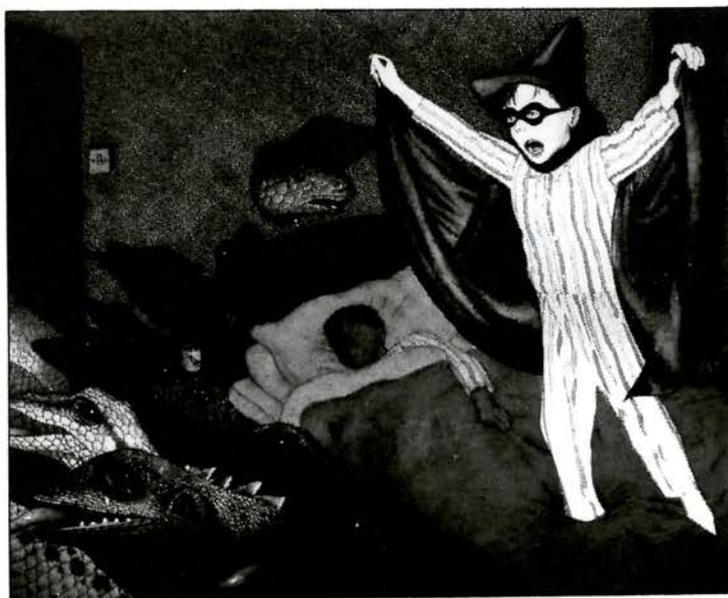
Patrick Kinmonth, ill. Reg Cartwright, Red Fox (Feb 93), 0 09 914911 7, £3.99

A well-established favourite: the tale of a racing pigeon much treasured by old Mr Potter, and her battles against the forces of nature to return to her home and win the race. Reg Cartwright's air-brush technique looks as fresh now as it did over a decade ago when this book was first published, and won its illustrator the Mother Goose Award for the best newcomer to British Children's Book Illustration. JB

The Night Shimmy

Gwen Strauss, ill. Anthony Browne, Red Fox (Mar 93), 0 09 996510 0, £3.99

Eric is a silent and solitary child whose minimal interactions with the rest of mankind are conducted through his imaginary friend, *The Night Shimmy*. When he meets a real child who accepts his personality unquestioningly, Eric is drawn into a brief, tempestuous and liberating rite of passage. *The Night Shimmy* waves goodbye from the final page.



From *The Night Shimmy*.

This is one of those short and simply told tales whose surface straightforwardness yields complex mysteries at the slightest touch. Both the economical text and the spectral illustrations are as quietly evocative of struggling forces as the child's initial silence. An excellent book for readers of all ages to talk about and enjoy. GH

The Rockingdown Mystery

Enid Blyton, Armada (Feb 93), 0 00 691569 8, £2.99

A secret river threading sepulchral caverns under a ruined mansion house; a handsome young circus boy strolling the world with a monkey on his shoulder; a summer-long surfeit of ice-cream and fruit cake . . . The skill with which the storyteller handles these powerful motifs is almost as striking as the sexism and the plastic plum dialogue of this intriguing adventure story.

There is, of course, no need to recommend this book to anyone, except perhaps those teachers, librarians and parents who might otherwise disdain it. The mechanisms by which so many children are held in rapture are fascinating and well worth examining. GH

A View to Thrill

0 14 090373 9

The Eiffel Target

0 14 090374 7

Sandblast

0 14 090376 3

Live and Let's Dance

0 14 090375 5

John Vincent, Fantail (Jan 93), £2.99 each

Being the adventures of James Bond Jnr., nephew to 007, a very adolescent schoolboy at Warfield Academy for the

be screened from January 1993 and the launch of a range of Hasbro toys already selling out in the US, James Bond Jnr. is taking over! There's stationery, toys, gifts . . .

Young readers deserve better than this. Avoid these books as you would a disease. GH

The Bullies Meet The Willow Street Kids

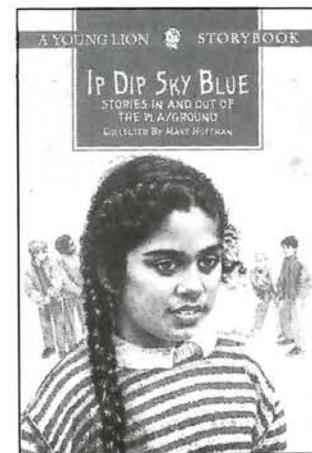
Michele Elliott, ill. Jill Bennett, Piccolo (Jan 93), 0 330 32800 X, £2.99



Books written specially to put a message across all too often fail as good stories. Here however, Michele Elliott, director of Kidscape, manages to make her account of Gill, Charlie and Marilyn's brushes with a gang of bullies during their first year of secondary school highly readable. The fears and emotions of the victims and the picture of school life are authentically portrayed and the story has pace and suspense as well as offering sound advice. JB

Ip Dip Sky Blue

Edited by Mary Hoffman, ill. David McTaggart, Young Lions (Dec 92), 0 00 673242 9, £2.99



Friends and friendship is the underlying theme of the eight stories in this collection. Even so, the variety of style and subject matter is wide-ranging and with writers of the calibre of John Agard, Margaret

scions of the ultra-elite. The books depict, in unveneered plywood prose, the adventures of James and his chums in their struggles against the various cardboard cut-out villains of saboteurs and criminals united in mayhem, an acronym I thought quite appropriate for the people who put together this vapid, venal and execrably illustrated package. At least the publicity material is honest about its literary aims: 'With an all-action animated ITV series to

BOOK POWER!



CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

2-9 OCTOBER 1993

The Daily Telegraph and Book Trust's Children's Book Foundation are once again joining forces to stage Children's Book Week, the national festival that unites schools, children, parents, publishers, librarians, booksellers and authors in a celebration of children's reading.

Children's Book Week '93 will be the most exciting ever. The launch will be literally electrifying, as we build an illuminated tower of 1,933 books...
and give the books away to two schools.

The easy to use CBW ideas and activities pack will help you plan your own events (you'll be surprised how many are free or at minimal cost). Children's Book Week also includes a Great Treasure Hunt and popular regulars like Readathon and The Daily Telegraph Book Bus tour.

Register before 1st June to receive your free Book Week Pack, along with the chance to win over £5,000 worth of books for your school library.

CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK '93 ENROLMENT FORM REQUEST

Complete and return to Phyllida Onslow, The Daily Telegraph, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DT.

Please send me an information leaflet and enrolment form for Children's Book Week 1993 plus details of Readathon and the Great Book Power Tower Competition.

The Book Week Pack containing Activities Pack, 3x A2 Posters, 100 Book Power stickers and 100 Book Power Bookmarks is free to schools who register before 1st June 1993. After that date, the cost per pack will be £10.00 plus VAT.

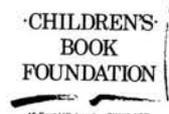
Name of teacher organising Book Week _____

Name of School _____

Full Mailing Address _____



The Daily Telegraph



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Mahy and Martin Waddell among the contributors, some readers will come to the book with high expectations: they will not be disappointed. For others it is both a good read and a good introduction to some new and exciting writers. JB

To Be a Ghost

Raymond Wilson, ill.
Alan Rowe, Puffin
(Feb 93), 0 14 034656 2,
£2.99

A fascinating collection of poems about ghosts, witches, death and the paranormal. Many of them take a light-hearted approach to the grisly subject matter, though a poignant description of the longing for life of a young terrorist victim is included, and a chilling parody of 'Who Killed Cock Robin' depicts the slow crawl of poison across the earth.

Some of the longer narrative poems, about dealing with the Devil, railway ghosts and the perils of the seance, will provide a rich resource for storytimes. GH

The Witch That Wasn't

Carlo Gébler, ill.
Valerie Littlewood,
Young Puffin (Jan 93),
0 14 036148 0, £2.99

Everyone has a list of fears – some rational, others less so. For 8-year-old Rose it was the corner on the corner and old Mrs Pritchard. For Connor, her father, back in his Irish childhood days it was the dark, dark nights and Gerry the poteen distiller with his purple birth-marked face. Connor's story, told in the cosy living room of a terraced house in London, about his encounters with Gerry in the dark of the Irish countryside and their next meeting on the dangerous bog, helps Rose to overcome her own irrational fears.

A very fine story: depth of characterisation and evocation of place and time are rarely so perfectly conveyed in a book for the under-tens. JB

Pet Poems

Edited by Robert Fisher,
ill. Sally Kindberg,
Faber (Mar 93),
0 571 16830 2, £3.99

A whole menagerie of pets and poems of different kinds to dip into. Creatures exotic and mundane inhabit a world that is both funny and tearful, well-known or crisply fresh.

I've always loved T S Eliot's 'The Rum Tum Tugger' and familiarity hasn't diminished this – the illustration here is amusingly appropriate. 'Family holiday' made me tearful for the dog whose holiday time abandonment is complete, utter and unresolved – a powerful and uncomfortable poem to be read alone and impossible to read aloud without a catch in the voice.

On a lighter note Gyles Brandreth's 'Ode to a goldfish' is a three word miracle. PH

Sink or Swim

Ghillian Potts, ill. Derek Brazell, Young Corgi
(Mar 93), 0 552 52753 X,
£2.50

The Dearest Boy in all the World

Ted Van Lieshout,
Young Puffin (Jan 93),
0 14 036238 X, £2.99

I have put these two books together because they are both concerned with young boys coming to terms with the deaths of their fathers. Vulnerable and insecure they react with heightened sensitivity to the raw world around them.

In *Sink or Swim*, William's fragility is exploited by 'Big Mark', the class bully. It's only when 'Big Mark' and William are pushed together in unexpected circumstances that Mark's weaknesses and William's underlying strengths really show. It's the peripheral action that gives deeper meaning to this remarkable story, making these rounded characters come alive through many seemingly incidental details.

Tim in *The Dearest Boy in all the World*, however, is a worrier and a well-meant comment at his father's funeral instigates his brilliant idea – the one that will solve all his problems. He'll get a job, though there is a small difficulty – he's only seven. All Tim's talents, identifying snails and drawing parallel lines, seem fruitless until he hits on a way that uses his skills best.

A pair of books that are not only good reading, but manage to deal with a sensitive and difficult subject very well. PH

Harvey Angell

Diana Hendry, Red Fox
(Jan 93), 0 09 995580 6,
£2.99

This is an exceptional book: a wonderfully human, imaginative and funny story told with great skill and awareness of what readers enjoy. Henry lives with his Aunt Agatha whose house of lodgers is run with the tightest and meanest economy of food and feeling. Harvey, the mysterious new lodger whose age is 'twenty-nine going on ninety', has a job which involves research into energy and making 'connections'. Connections are made and energy begins to flow again through the lives of Henry, Aunt Agatha and the lodgers in a way that's both exciting and heart-warming. It is a book which makes active readers, puzzling them with its plot and other side questions (how do you pronounce Harvey's surname?) and making them hungry for more story. It's also a neat parable for our mean-spirited political times. AJ

Wordspells

Edited by Judith Nicholls, ill. Alan Baker,
Faber (Feb 93),
0 571 16909 0, £3.99

A treasure chest of a book. From the wallowing rhythms of Edna St Vincent Millay's counting rhyme which opens the anthology, to the Song of Solomon's evocation of Spring



which closes it, the pages present an array of riches selected from a broad range of times and traditions. Ted Hughes and Charles Causley are interleaved with the Bible and Shakespeare; Anon and Traditional with translations from Gaelic, Yoruba and Chinese.

Alan Baker's delicate ink and stipple illustrations enhance the appeal of an excellent source of enjoyment. GH

The Nine Lives of Montezuma

Michael Morpurgo,
Mammoth (Feb 93),
0 7497 1229 5, £2.99

In nine sections we have the lives of Monty (for short) the cat. He's a survivor and a great fighter, a natural hero, growing in age and craft. There's insight and skill enough to make much more of this than just a sentimental pet lover's tale. It's a simple idea, but very well done with the sections neatly carrying the reader through a series of dramatic adventures with every assurance, for the first eight lives, that things will come out right at the end of the chapter. This title has taken a long time to appear in paperback where it can become a favourite with a great number of children – and teachers, I suspect. A real possibility for small-group reading. AJ

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

The Vandemark Mummy

Cynthia Voigt, Lions
(Dec 92), 0 00 674422 2,
£3.50

Although this is flagged as a mystery thriller, most young readers would find it a laborious 240-page plod. It concerns a mummy which forms part of an Egyptian collection entrusted to Phineas Hall's lecturer father; the mummy is stolen and returned, maimed, and then it's the turn of sister Althea to go missing. The book conspicuously lacks the vitality of the Tillerman

stories, and Voigt's intelligent, unflappable characters are in danger of seeming aloof and emotionless. LN

Telling the Sea

Pauline Fisk, Lion
Publishing (Feb 93),
0 7459 2246 5, £3.50

A Welsh coastal village in winter provides the setting for this story of family life. Nona, whose mother has escaped from her latest partner, wants a 'proper home', but learns from local boy, Owen, that family security can be constricting. Coping with

Mum's inadequacies leads Nona first to confide in the sea and then almost to drown herself. The pace falters badly at times: Nona's and Owen's fall into the sea, and a matching accident, fail to convince; Mum's religious conversion comes out of the blue and is hardly referred to again. The book's strength is its portrayal of difficult family relationships and of Nona's dilemmas, and it will have a ready appeal for teenage girls. LN

Del-Del

Victor Kelleher,
Red Fox (Feb 93),
0 09 918271 8, £3.50

'Del-Del' is Sam's name for various presences which apparently take over his body and make him behave in disturbed ways after the death of his sister. First, Sam appears to be possessed by a devil; then, in the second part of the book, Del-Del takes on a new guise as a voyager from a distant galaxy. Finally, the third and more plausible explanation is revealed. Although the three parts of

the book don't sit easily together, many teenagers will find it an original and engrossing read. LN

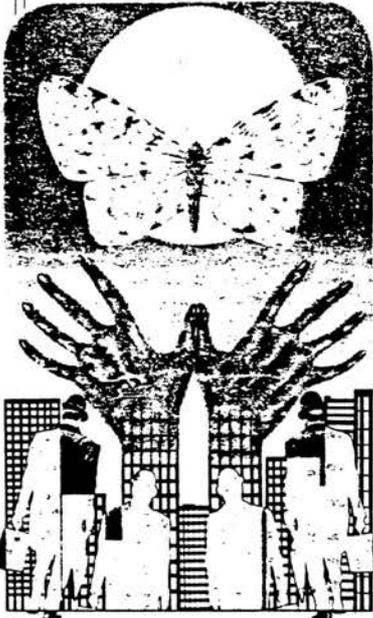
Homebird

Terence Blacker, Piper (Feb 93), 0 330 31998 1, £3.50

This novel has the topical theme of juvenile crime. Running away from school and home, 13-year-old Nicky moves to a Brixton squat, where he's expected to earn his keep by assisting in car thefts. This way of life is not at all glamorised, and eventually Nicky joins the homeless on London's streets before returning home. I found the first-person narrative sometimes irritating in style – 'I'm like, just try and stop me' – but young readers may be less inclined to object. An easy, well-paced short novel, worth recommending particularly to reluctant boy readers of 12 and over. LN

Gangsters, Ghosts and Dragonflies

Edited by Brian Patten, ill. Terry Oakes, Piper (Jan 93), 0 330 32506 X, £3.99



Brian Patten's choice focuses on the unusual, the eccentric and the plain daft, with occasional moments of seriousness. Contents range from Ted Hughes' 'A Knock at the Door', a marvellous description of a vagrant, to Roald Dahl's 'The Chewing Gum Song'. There's very little standard anthology fodder here and plenty of fresh discoveries. Other contributors include Roger McGough, Charles Causley, George MacBeth, Stevie Smith and Elizabeth Bishop. LN

Five Easy Lessons

Sally Odgers, Lions (Dec 92), 0 00 674387 0, £2.99

Coincidences abound when

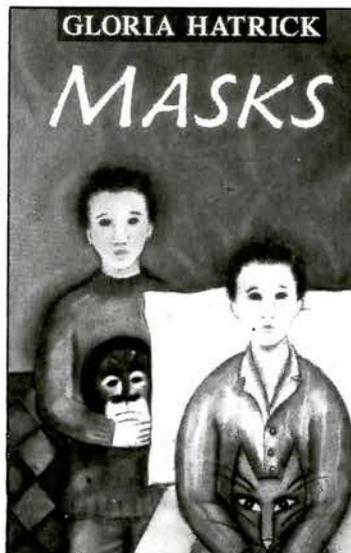


How to survive your impossible family...

Justin and his mum both decide to enrol for the same home study course; 'How To Survive Your Impossible Family...' Before B&K is inundated with letters of application perhaps a word of warning – it could be life threatening. Death by laughter is very painful around the ribs. One of the funniest books I've read for some time, it's written from Mellie (Mum) and Justin's alternative points of view, plus a postscript from Dad. The family are totally crazy and yet there are elements of the frighteningly familiar. One big surprise is the touchingly gentle meeting of Mum and Justin at the end, an unusual resolution that stops the fun dead in its track, with the comment by Dad bringing us safely back to reality. PH

Masks

Gloria Hatrick, Red Fox (Feb 93), 0 09 910891 7, £2.99



This is a fine, compelling addition to any collection of books about the differently-abled. The disease is Guillan-Barre Syndrome which strikes down Will on his return from America. The medics do their best for his body, but it is Peter, his younger brother, who senses that a more

spiritual, holistic approach is required and for this he uses the primitive masks that his anthropologist father has collected.

The movingly realised brotherly bond and sheer power of Peter's love for Will elevates this above the ordinary and makes it thoroughly worth recommending. DB

Action Replay

Edited by Michael Rosen, Kestrel (Jan 93), 0 670 83837 3, £6.50

This ought to attract a very wide audience. Each poem or piece of 'memorable speech' tells a story or anecdote, sometimes a familiar one, which is generally very accessible and often amusing.

POETRY



A wide range of styles is presented with contributions from India, China, Japan, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

In my experience these are just the sorts of writing to switch kids on to the possibilities of poetry. DB

Journey

Patricia MacLachlan, Red Fox (Mar 93), 0 09 910751 1, £2.50

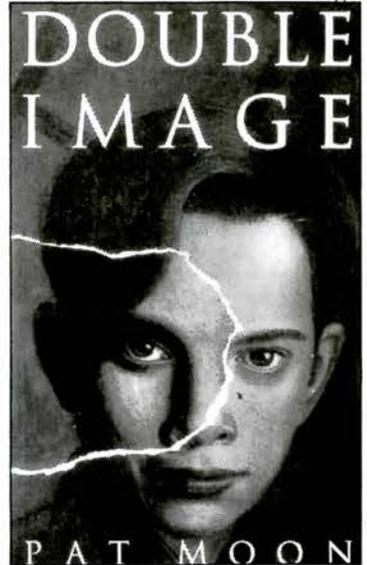
Really a long short-story, this intriguing exploration of family photographs and what they can reveal, is itself a series of snapshots, vividly realised in the sparsest prose.

Journey's restless mother has taken off, leaving Grandpa and Grandma to gather up the rags of their tattered family life and help their grandson and daughter get their jumbled emotions into focus. It's the albums and Grandpa's obsessive photography that becomes the medium for '... dealing with things that everybody knows about but isn't attending to'. A must! DB

Double Image

Pat Moon, Orchard (Jan 93), 1 85213 541 7, £4.99

'You can tell... just by looking what people are really like. You have to peel back the layers.'



An enforced stay with his grandfather, not long after his strange, distant grandmother's death, peels back the layers of family skeletons to reveal David's likeness to an uncle, Eric, whose name has never before been mentioned.

The unfolding mystery kept me turning the pages fairly willingly and I admired the very realistic, small details of family life. Thoughtful boy readers should be attracted by this one. DB

Irish Folk and Fairy Tales

Edited by Gordon Jarvie, Puffin (Nov 92), 0 14 035141 8, £3.99

One of the more admirable initiatives recommended by NCC was that children should know where the language they speak and write originates. It follows, then, that the origins of literature should be similarly revealed. That's one reason why anthologies like this are so welcome. The book is divided into seven sections, each dealing with a specific area of Irish legend. It gives a sensible coherence to the reader untutored in this subject. The tales vary in length, providing the opportunity for a differentiated approach in classroom activities.

The language used in the stories is quite difficult and this would be a collection for the more able reader. It provides a very useful addition to a classroom library as a work both for reference and for enjoyment. VR



ANDERSEN PRESS presents
a small selection of titles from their spring list



I WANT TO BE

TONY ROSS

32pp 230x
200mm
0 86264 447 X
£7.99

May

The hilarious sequel to *I Want my Potty* with a free height chart inside every copy of the book. Having mastered her potty, the little princess finally decides the time has come to grow up - but how?



CAT' KNEES AND BEE'S WHISKERS

Sandy Nightingale
32pp

250 x 200mm
0 86264 435 6
£7.99

April

When Baldrick, the witch's new cat, starts to dabble in spells all by himself, he gets into deep water! The first storybook by the creator of *Giraffe on the Moon* and *One Pink Pig*.



KING OF THE WOODS

David Day and Ken Brown

32pp
230 x 200mm
0 86264 422 4
£7.99

April

Brains master brawn in this traditional animal fable. Realism and humour are combined in stunning water colours from the illustrator of *Why Can't I Fly*.



KEEP ON CHOMPING

Philippe Dupasquier

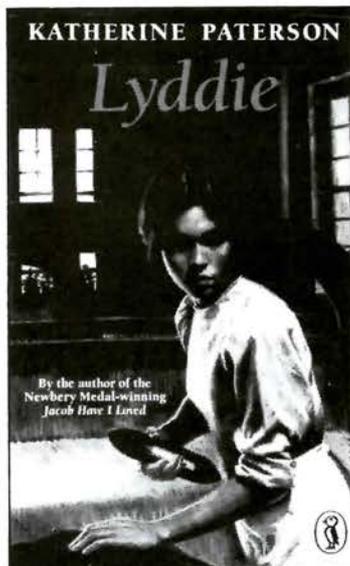
32pp 230 x 200mm
0 86264 448 8 £7.99

June

Everyone who has saved coupons for a special offer will laugh out loud at this family's antics. Cartoon style illustrations are full of fun.

ANDERSEN PRESS, 20 VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD, LONDON SW1V 2SA
Tel: 071 973 9720 Fax: 071 233 6263

OLDER READERS



Lyddie

Katherine Paterson, Puffin (Feb 93), 0 14 034981 2, £3.50

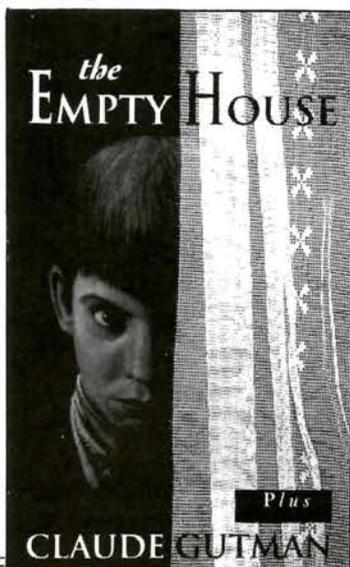
There's more than one kind of slave. Such a one is Lyddie Worthen, at first slave to the needs of her poverty-stricken Vermont family, then as skivvy at an inn and finally exploited as a factory girl in a cotton mill near Lowell in the 1840s. And truthfully she is cast in these roles because she is female. Yet Lyddie has the grit and determination to survive and conquer; she out-stared a bear!

This book has won a clutch of awards already, testimony to the fine writing, compelling story and important theme. I couldn't put it down. DB

The Empty House

Claude Gutman, trans. Anthea Bell, Puffin (Jan 93), 0 14 036169 3, £3.50

The Nazi occupation of France and their treatment of the Jews forms the core of this moving short story. In a non-



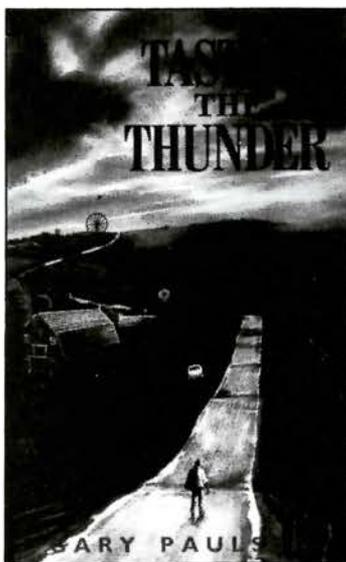
chronological retrospective David recounts the hardships, privations and sadnesses of his family and friends as they are persecuted, humiliated and finally separated by the brutal decrees of the Nazis.

Youngsters will learn much from such a work that relates so clearly and movingly '... what we went through, so that it can never happen again'. DB

Tasting the Thunder

Gary Paulsen, Piper (Jan 93), 0 330 32705 4, £3.50

I'm glad I didn't overlook this short, fast, rites-of-passage novel that balances aggression and excitement with wisdom. There's a rough unedifying underbelly of cynical exploitation at the centre of the book's scrutiny where the 16-year-old runaway learns '... all about life and sex and what it is to be a man'. The tuition is painful in this very masculine read that deserves promotion. DB

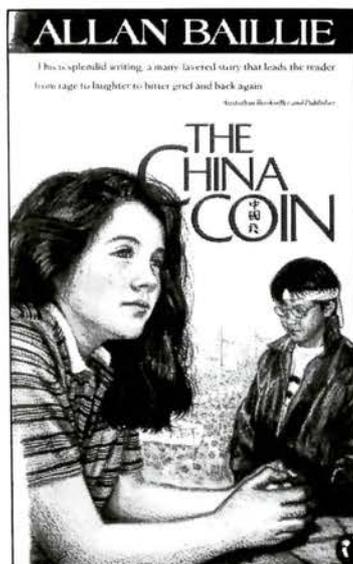


Die Softly

Christopher Pike, Hodder & Stoughton (Feb 93), 0 340 58000 3, £3.99

'The author who bridges the gap between Nancy Drew and Stephen King' proclaimed the press release extravagantly. This high-gloss, catch-all production looks adult and comes as part of a matching set designed to hook serial readers. The scam of printing the first two chapters of the next book at the end of this is nothing if not inspired.

If it all savours of intensive battery book farming - you've got my drift! The actual contents aren't bad and there's a market out there waiting. DB



The China Coin

Allan Baillie, Puffin (Jan 93), 0 14 034753 4, £3.99

The events of Tiananmen Square in 1989 are brought to life in a startlingly fresh and dramatic way which combines the excitement of plot and character with a sense of the deeper layers of story and history that lie embedded in China's current events.

Leah, half-Chinese, visits China with her mother to try to reunite their half of an ancient coin with its partner left behind in their 'home' village. This physical joining is a very clever metaphor for a range of broken relationships and the continual effort to mend personal, cultural and political divisions. It's a wonderful book where the events in Peking are re-seen in a living context, to shock and horrify as well as deepen our understanding of particular history and the bonds which unite us all. AJ

The Dark Card

Amy Ehrlich, Walker (Jan 93), 0 7445 3021 0, £2.99

In an implausible and inconsequential plot, a well-heeled American girl, whose mother has recently died, frequents the casinos in nearby Atlantic City. In spite of dressing provocatively, accepting lifts from strangers and stripping naked in a sophisticated gambler's hotel room, Laura somehow escapes unscathed, and is too mindless and self-centred a character to engage the reader's sympathies. Although several plot strands are suggested, none is developed satisfactorily. LN

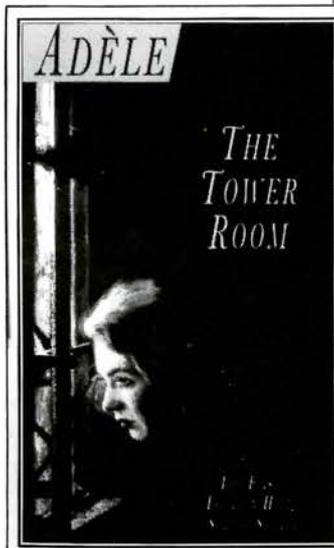
The Tower Room

0 00 673910 5

Watching the Roses

0 00 674383 8

Adèle Geras, Lions (Jan 93), £3.50 each



I admit to feeling apprehensive when I read 'Egerton Hall School Story' printed on the front covers: all manner of uneasy stereotypes reared up to threaten me.

My fears were groundless. These are excellent books with more to say about the psychology and motivation of their characters than the number of times a week they play lacrosse. The stories feature three characters, Megan, Alice and Bella, and each is given a different volume of her own - **Pictures of the Night**, Bella's story, has still to appear in paperback.

The Tower Room is Megan's story - her relationship with a male lab technician changes both her perceptions of love and her life: she must leave school and set up home elsewhere.

Watching the Roses is more harrowing, since Alice is raped on her 18th birthday surrounded by the roses on whose symbolism much of the book rests.

The delightful anachronisms of life at a girls' boarding school - Study Teas, prep and the San - contribute to the reader's knowledge and understanding of the forces shaping the girls' lives and provide the sort of books which invite involvement with the storyline - not least through resonances from the original fairy tales on which each of the stories is based. VR

Saturday Night

Caroline B Cooney,
Scholastic 'Point
Romance' (Feb 93),
0 590 55194 9, £2.50

I know that this book, with its garish cover, metallic lettering and idealised portrayal of romance will be borrowed more often than most in my book boxes. It's easy to criticise the sort of material it contains – stereotypical responses to love, a preoccupation with physical appearance, the inability to feel fulfilled without a partner – but these topics remain, for many readers, totally addictive.

A therapeutic escape into fantasy is something we all indulge in, but the danger is that this sort of fiction can too easily lay down inescapable ground rules for behaviour and attitude which many young female readers assimilate and aspire to emulate. 'Point Romance' will be as successful as its stablemate 'Point Horror', but we should encourage our young readers not to be entirely seduced by the overstated simplicity of the concepts it presents. VR

Face to Face

Frances Usher,
Mammoth (Feb 93),
0 7497 1054 3, £2.99

The book begins with Nick's attempts at communicating the horrors of his recurring nightmare to his closest friend, Phil. This dream motif propels the narrative along and the denouement of the story is reached when Nick finally allows himself to remember these signals from his past.

A compelling story in which the twists and turns of the plot remain utterly convincing – and even, on occasion, shocking. The inflexibility of National Curriculum reading lists will probably prevent **Face to Face** being purchased as a class text, which is a great shame since Year 9 pupils would enjoy, and be rewarded by, its inclusion in classroom teaching. VR

Here and Never

Rex Harley, Pan 'Young
Adults' (Feb 93),
0 330 31762 8, £3.50

It's clear from the first pages of this novel that there's a dreadful secret to be discovered. This, combined with the intriguing construction of the story – a parallel of past and present events in alternate sections, drew me on to read it in one sitting.

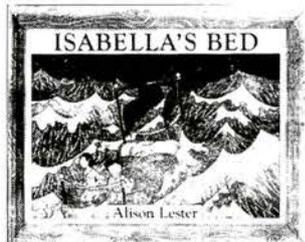
16-year-old Alice is staying with her Uncle Max in his remote house in Cornwall. Through a series of literary devices – overheard telephone calls, diary entries and a developing friendship between the two – the reason for Alice's depression is revealed.

Harley tackles contentious issues with aplomb – solvent abuse, suicide, grief and the supernatural run their course here and their treatment is never less than credible. This is a remarkable book, worthy of a wide audience amongst 14-16 year-old readers. VR

Reviewers in this issue:

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

Step into Summer with Oxford!

NEW PICTURE BOOKS FOR JUNE**ISABELLA'S BED**
Alison Lester

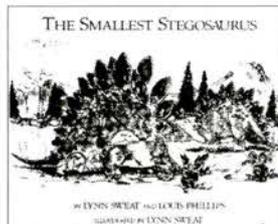
What is the secret of Isabella's Bed? Why is it kept in Grandmother's attic along with all her other things from South America?

0 19 553214 7 h/b £6.95

MIDNIGHT ON THE FARM
Stephen Eaton Hume • Regolo Ricci

A gentle story of farm creatures falling asleep and one small child watching at the window to catch a glimpse of their dreams under the stars . . .

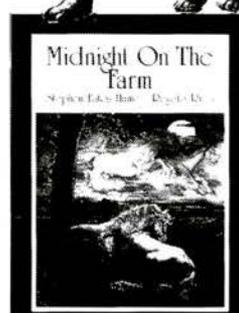
0 19 540876 4 h/b £6.99

**THE SMALLEST STEGOSAURUS**
Lynn Sweat • Louis Phillips

Step back 150 million years in time and meet the smallest stegosaurus who'd really rather not be that small at all!

0 19 279953 3 h/b £6.95

0 19 272266 2 p/b £2.95



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.

Let's Go to the Party

Let's Go to Playschool

Sung by Ruth Carver, narrated by Tony Ovenell, one cassette each title, 25 mins each, Cassettes for Young People, £2.99 each

These two titles are a cheerful mixture of songs, games, stories and rhymes for 3-5 year-olds. The first has the serious aim of teaching the country code in an entertainingly produced story, and the songs like 'Five Little Froggies' and 'Old MacDonald' are lively and infectious. **Let's Go to Playschool** will encourage young children nervous about starting playgroup. James on the tape wasn't sure about the idea until he found what fun it was. There are action rhymes, guessing games and varied musical backings throughout.

The Big Alfie Out-of-Doors Storytape

Shirley Hughes, read by Thora Hird, one cassette, 33 mins, Random House Tellastory, £3.99

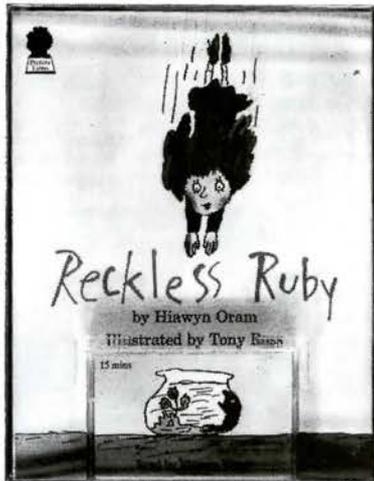
Tellastory have launched all their best-selling titles in a new sing tape format, 'perfect for little hands and little ears' – and this is one. Thora Hird is exactly the right cosy-Granny-narrator for these four Alfie adventures and four poems. Alfie goes camping with Dad and is terrified by a snuffling sheep in the night, has a wonderful visit to the seaside and nurtures his adopted pet stone. These stories are the sort that make comforting listening over and over again, and, of course, Thora Hird's narration is always welcome.

Rise and Shine

Music and lyrics by Roger Goslyn, storyline Tessa Early, one cassette with large-format paperback (available from New Peckham Varieties Ltd, Havil Hall, Havil Street, London SE5 7SD), £10 inc. p&p

This excitingly different book – a huge 12" x 16" paperback – is big enough for a group of children to see at the same time and it comes with a cassette of songs and music. Made following New Peckham Varieties' shows for the Under Fives, the songs and narrative links cover Johnny getting up

for his first day at school. Lazy and lively, the songs are about getting dressed, brushing teeth and so on, with plenty of join-in action and repetition. Good for young groups and also for ESL children or older listeners with learning difficulties.



Reckless Ruby

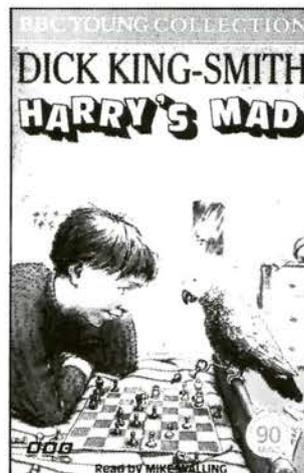
Hiawyn Oram, read by Victoria Wood, one cassette with Picture Lions paperback, 20 mins, £5.99

Ruby's parents would like their precious girl to marry a prince when she grows up, but that's the last thing Ruby wants. As *Reckless Ruby*, she dances like a Russian acrobat from the bars of her moving bike and dangles from skyscrapers by her shoe laces – until, having had her patched up, her parents agree she'll never be prince's-wife material. This is a wonderfully zippy story with sound effects, like Ruby's lead boots splashing through the water, plenty of funny character voices from Victoria Wood, and Ruby bursts out from the witty Tony Ross illustrations in the book.

Harry's Mad

Dick King-Smith, read by Mike Walling, one cassette, 90 mins, BBC Young Collection, £4.15

Harry's 'Mad' is Madison, a brilliantly special Grey African parrot which he inherits from his late, rich Great Uncle George. Mad is a smooth talker and a genius at games and puzzles: Harry's life is transformed – until precious Mad is stolen. Life is even worse when kindly, but misguided, Dad buys Harry a stupid, prattling replacement called Fweddy. Then Harry receives a reversed charges call from Madison – and the search is on! Mike Walling



characterises the parrots cleverly and makes the whole story vibrant with energy.

The Way to Sattin Shore

Philippa Pearce, read by Helena Bonham Carter, four cassettes, 5hrs 40 mins, unabridged, Chivers, £16.95 + VAT



Kate always believed her father had died the day she was born and the family tombstone seemed to confirm the fact. But then the tombstone is removed; Kate is sure she sees strange eyes looking at her and her grandmother and mother try to hide their shock when a letter is delivered. . . . Gradually, Kate is drawn to Sattin Shore where she learns about the past and sees a man who looks just like her brother, but older. . . . This is a reflective story and Helena Bonham Carter is a quiet, but compelling narrator who gets the listener right under Kate's skin.

The Cybil War

Betsy Byars, read by Kerry Shale, two cassettes, 2 hrs, unabridged, Chivers, £10.95 + VAT

This gripping Betsy Byars story has that successful mix of social realism and American gutsiness exploited to the full by Kerry Shale's authentic accent and intonation. 'Dad

left home' is the saddest sentence young Simon can imagine and he and his over-anxious mother are slowly adjusting to it. At the same time, Simon is waging war against his untrustworthy friend Tony for the trophy of spirited Cybil. Emotional pain is subtly explored, but so is the healing and the whole is full of resilience and humour. A great performance by Kerry Shale.

Wuthering Heights: Educational Package

Video: A Critical Guide to the Novel

With 52-page booklet: 'A Worksheet Guide', with Student Worksheet and Penguin Classic of **Wuthering Heights** by Emily Brontë (available from Literary Images Ltd, Braceborough, Lincs PE9 4NT, tel: 0778 560637), £24.95 inc. p&p

The video in this educational package is not a 'film of the book', but an unusual – and very successful – study guide on film. For a novel and writer so steeped in landscape, the beautiful and varied shots of the moors in all their moods and seasons are an invaluable and indelible background to a critical appreciation of the text. What's particularly good about this landscape-backed critical guide is that it's text-based and so directs and encourages students towards a close study of the words themselves.

A short introduction on the Brontës at Haworth is followed by an examination of the novel's structure and of its elemental, barrier and animal imagery. All is supported by sensitively chosen, powerful visual and musical background with plenty of quotation. The booklet follows up and expands all the themes in the video and gives suggestions for more detailed study. The package is aimed at A-level students who will find it inspiring and immensely useful. Able GCSE pupils, teachers and serious readers would also find it as good.

Literary Images, who made the video, have shown it to school parties at the Brontë Parsonage Museum. An Educational Resource Pack, with activity sheets particularly suitable for Key Stages 2 and 3, plus plenty of other material, is available from The Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, Keighley, W Yorks BD22 8DR, priced £11.50 inc. p&p. ●

Authorgraph No. 80

Rosemary Wells

Rosemary Wells, interviewed by Julia Eccleshare

Rosemary Wells talks a lot, and fast. She made it quite clear from the start of our interview that she hadn't much time – she had a hair appointment – with the underlying implication that she doesn't suffer fools gladly and if I wanted her to talk about her writing I had better look sharp. Look sharp I did, plunging straight in as there was clearly no time for chit-chat.

Rosemary has strong views about everything relating to children and children's books. In America, at least, she sees those who work in the field of children's literature as fighters and she is right out in front leading the battle. She talks with passionate revulsion of the junk culture which American children are fed – the television programmes with their endless commercials; the Nintendo games of simulated violence; and the children's books which hurry children out of their childhood into an unnaturally premature awareness of sex. Unless writers, publishers, librarians and booksellers stick together and resist these new distractions for children there will be no future for books, she asserts. She explains that American children are being reared as a generation of 'customers'. Their capabilities as 'doers' or 'thinkers' are being constantly eroded by the mindlessness of their activities. She firmly believes that the more TV a child watches – and she points out that children, on average, watch more TV in America than in Britain – the harder it is for them to think or concentrate at other times.

Strong stuff, but Wells does not waver. With another dig at American culture she makes the following bold claims: 'Good children's books are the only part of the culture that isn't about buying. In fact, the reverse is true when you read. You are more at the end of a book than you were at the beginning,' she asserts. 'Publishers, writers, booksellers and librarians must get together to show what good books are and to get them into schools so that children can know from their first experience of books that reading is a pleasure.' This is another important strand of her argument. Reading must be about enjoyment. 'The very worst thing is to be didactic. To put cause before character is fatal.' Her most recent book, *Voyage to the Bunny Planet* has been picked up as a 'green' propagandist book, but that is not how she wrote it. It comes from her warm feelings about her Mum and Dad and from learning to be alone. 'You must be able to remember being loved if you want to write for children.'



Whew! Against those strictures, how do her own books shape up and how do they come about?

Rosemary Wells knows a lot about where her work comes from and, more importantly as far as she's concerned, why. 'Never ask a writer where her ideas come from,' she says. 'Ask them why they come.' This is not just splitting hairs; Wells is curious as to why some people write and draw while others do not. In her own case she is



Above: Stanley and Rhoda.

Below: Rosemary Wells with Queen Janet from *The Bunny Planet*, photo courtesy of HarperCollins.

very clear. It is because she has been given two wonderful gifts. She can both write and illustrate. It is because she has those gifts that she does what she does. In this she is aided and abetted by the fact that she had wonderful parents and so can always draw on her own happy childhood. This may seem simplistic and immodest, but Rosemary Wells has no time for doubting or dallying. If she is immodest she has every right to be so with over twenty

books to her credit, in many of which she has created characters who have become household names. If she is simplistic it is because she has genuine belief that enables her to accept and enjoy the situation in which she finds herself.

As to where the specific ideas for her books come from, Rosemary's first answer is a mystical and profoundly fundamentalist one. 'Somewhere up there, there is an invisible room full of all the books, all the symphonies, all the paintings and every other created thing. I have been lucky enough to have been given a key to that room. I have a small key which allows me to do my books. Mozart had a much larger key.'

When pushed, Rosemary also has some more prosaic and practical answers. Much of the emotion that goes into the stories comes from her own vivid and contented upbringing, and, as a catalyst, she got many of her ideas from observing her own children, although, she emphasises, you cannot just record what you see. Scratch even further and you find that Rosemary (like all serious writers and illustrators) is wholly professional and cerebral about what she does. There is no whimsy about her work. Good ideas may come partly from an invisible room and partly from memory or observation but they must be carefully handled before they make satisfactory works of art. That careful handling comes from two sources as far as Rosemary is concerned. One is her own overwhelming enthusiasm for her work. It is, as she says with conviction, the greatest fun to do and never boring. In addition, she admits to having enormous ambition and great energy, both of which propel her towards new books and keep her working at them. The second reason that her books are as good as they are comes from the advice she gets from her editor, Phyllis Fogelman, to whom she *listens* – a point she is emphatic about.

Rosemary became an author/illustrator while working on layouts and jackets as a book designer for Macmillan publishers in New York. She had been to art school but stayed only a year, disliking the emphasis on the abstract. One weekend she heard 'A Song to Sing, O!' from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Yeoman of the Guard*. She sat down and put together a dummy picture book based on the words of the song which she took in to Susan Hirschman, the children's books editor at Macmillan. Hirschman accepted it immediately with the words 'You are now a Macmillan author'. Fairy tale stuff which Rosemary tells utterly straight-faced. She goes on to admit with modesty that there followed a period in which she was 'arch and arrogant' because she wasn't listening and wasn't learning. As a result she produced books that were less than her best and which she now dismisses.

It was at this point that she met Phyllis Fogelman and started to create the picture books for which she is now so well known. The artistic influences which she acknowledges are Robert Lawson, N C Wyeth, Beatrix Potter, Tenniel and Dulac, and certainly her

style as an illustrator is part of that fine-drawing tradition. Her 'Bunny Planet' books reflect the three days Rosemary spent studying the Beatrix Potter watercolours in the Victoria and Albert Museum, an experience she says, which changed her style forever by shifting the emphasis of her work away from its cartoon-like appearance.

But, although her illustrations are such a powerful part of her books, it is really her skill with words and with observing life that define her considerable contribution to children's books. She is a successful writer for teenagers with titles such as *When No One Was Looking*, which was runner-up for the Edgar Allen Poe Award, and *The Man in the Woods*, another tense and tightly plotted thriller and, at all levels, she sees the text as the driving force of a book. 'Without a good text a book is nothing.' In her writing she has two guiding principles. One on how words are used – 'A good work of children's literature should be read aloud 500 times' – ensures that she sees her texts as poetry that must be worked on until they say exactly what they should without wasting any words. The second relates to the content. Rosemary believes that books must be immediately appealing and light with lots of humour to carry their serious message. 'Children want to read about things that touch the heart or the funny bone.'

Benjamin and Tulip, **Noisy Nora**, **Morris's Disappearing Bag**, **Timothy Goes to School**, **Hazel's Amazing Mother** – all of these and many of Rosemary's other titles certainly live up to that dictate. The ebullient but controlled humour of both the texts and the pictures allow her to include all kinds of messages without ever appearing to preach. The underlying feminism of *Benjamin and Tulip* and *Timothy Goes to School* is a natural part of the stories and comes from within Rosemary not because she has a mission to convey it. Its place in the book is of minor importance compared with the hilarity of Timothy's dislike for Claude, or Violet's for Grace because 'She sings. She dances. She counts up to a thousand and she sits next to me.' How well all readers, young and old, can identify with that sentiment. The intricate dynamics of family life are caught to perfection again and again. There is the companionship of mouse brother and sister in *Stanley and Rhoda*; the way in which siblings negotiate, not letting anything go without a price in *Morris's Disappearing Bag*; and the importance of a mother who can fix impossible situations in *Hazel's Amazing Mother* (a story based on an incident in which her daughter, Victoria, wore the wrong thing to a Christmas concert and she, Rosemary, realised she would have to intervene). On first impression, the fact that her characters are animals may distract some readers and make it harder for them to see the point of what Rosemary is saying. But, she uses animals for a purpose. 'You can do with animals what you can't do with children. You can include violence and you can be much funnier.'

Rosemary has thought about all angles of her books. She knows why they come, how they come and has found ways of making them so successful by sheer hard work. Her own books do fulfil the criteria which she demands of books in general. Her witty style of writing, drawing and observing disguise the fervour of her beliefs and commitment from which in life she never lets up.

I think I proved to be not quite such a fool as Rosemary had feared. We covered a lot of ground and I'd listened and learned from her clear and incisive answers. Our allotted time was up. The hair appointment must be kept as Rosemary had the most hectic speaking schedule before her. But still she had things to say. Still talking we strode down the road, still talking she checked in to the hairdresser, still talking she put on an all-covering wrap-around. Instructions to the man with the scissors were made in the midst of a serious account of the woes of American youth. Only the absolute impossibility of continuing against the background of music, the need for Rosemary to keep her head at a certain angle and the difficulty of my knowing how to keep out of the poor 'stylist's' way, brought our conversation to an end.

Like the best children's books, Rosemary Wells makes you feel you are more after meeting her than you were before. ●



Some Rosemary Wells titles:

- Benjamin and Tulip**, Viking, 0 670 800848, £7.99; Puffin, 0 14 050 177 0, £3.50 pbk
- Noisy Nora**, Picture Lions, 0 00 661465 5, £3.99 pbk
- Morris's Disappearing Bag**, Viking, 0 670 805351, £6.99; Puffin, 0 14 050319 6, £3.50 pbk
- Timothy Goes to School**, Viking, 0 670 800201, £X.XX; Puffin, 0 14 050363 3, £2.99 pbk
- Hazel's Amazing Mother**, Picture Lions, 0 00 663159 2, £3.99 pbk
- Stanley and Rhoda**, Picture Lions, 0 00 661807 3, £3.99 pbk
- Fritz and the Mess Fairy**, HarperCollins, 0 00 193641 7, £7.99; Picture Lions, 0 00 664203 9, £3.99 pbk
- Max's Dragon Shirt**, Picture Lions, 0 00 664157 1, £3.50 pbk
- The Little Lame Prince**, Picture Lions, 0 00 664131 8, £3.99 pbk
- Voyage to the Bunny Planet**, HarperCollins (miniature slipcase containing three titles), 0 00 193640 9, £9.99
- When No One Was Looking and The Man in the Woods** are out of print.

REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Baby Animals on the Farm

0 7500 1305 2

Colours on the Farm

0 7500 1304 4

Jane Miller, Simon & Schuster,
£6.99 each

INFANT

Jane Miller's simple farm photography has always ranked with the best and these two posthumous publications show us why.

There are few helpful books about colour, and reflection being what it is, even fewer photographic ones. The trick is to take – and select – pictures which are clearly lit to avoid such reflection but at the same time to illustrate the range of tones that a single colour-name can represent. To this purpose, familiar objects help no end; as well as the predictable primaries (red combine harvester, yellow digger) Miller's pictures show a good variety of browns (ponies, cows, soil), greys and pinks (evening sky, spaniel's tongue and piglets).

The piglets crop up again in *Baby Animals* – so do goslings, kids and cygnets. Such coincidence is reassuring – confirming to the reader the essential real-ness of subjects and situations, which has always been the attraction of Jane Miller's work. TP

What Happens when Rain Falls?

Daphne Butler, Simon & Schuster
(What happens when? series),
0 7500 1278 1, £4.99

INFANT/JUNIOR

There is, and always has been, a lot of room for a simple book that explains a basic natural phenomenon in simple terms without being finger-waggingly dull. In a spare 'infant' text and a 7.5 inch square format such as this one the choice of words is vital; when this choice is well made, the results can be truly heartening, as here they are.

It's a basic look at the water cycle – where water is, how rain happens, the nature of clouds, monsoons, deserts and floods, wells and dewponds. Especially well made is the point that there is no new water and so all that we use has to be recycled.

Refreshingly radical definitions abound – 'Used water is called sewage' and 'Fog is cloud near the ground' – and it's a proper book too, with numbered pages, contents, index and glossary.

With the little margin for error that this miniature format allows, we cannot necessarily expect uniformity of excellence in this whole series, but any book that has enough imagination to define hailstones as 'hard frozen balls of rain' has got to have something going for it, and this little one has a lot. TP

Drinking water

All living things need water to drink—without water they die. People need very clean water. It must be purified so it is free of germs.

Where water is scarce, people save it in every way they can.

In the desert, it is quite chilly at night and dew forms. It is collected in tall towers.



From *What Happens when Rain Falls?*

In the Air

0 7496 1080 8

Under the Ground

0 7496 1081 6

Henry Pluckrose, Watts Books
(Walkabout series), £6.99 each
INFANT/JUNIOR

In his afterword addressed to adults at the end of each of these Walkabouts, the author makes the crucial point that 'children enjoy having information books read to them just as much as stories and poetry'. It is vital to a child's development that the vocabulary of information be encouraged to develop and that questions be asked and answered constructively – many so-called 'language experts' either forget or ignore this basic truth and produce dead texts as the result. Pluckrose, with his friendly challenges, has always been an exception.

These Walkabouts look at the backgrounds to familiar things. Underground we examine plant roots, worms, rabbit-, fox-, vole-, mole- and pot-holes and go down mines, tunnels, foundations and pipes, all of which may be, literally, beneath our feet. Air looks at wind and flight of all sorts. The texts are studied with sensibly stimulating questions like 'How does silence help the owl?' and 'Does all soil look the same?' and each volume ends with a statement about our environmental responsibility to soil or air. Photography, of course, is excellent.

The continued success of Henry Pluckrose comes from his ability to enter into a partnership with his reader, gently tapping that reader's experience to allow more things to be learnt than his books 'teach'. Surprisingly few people can do this well in a book, so even though Pluckrose's name and style are widely familiar, his skill remains special. TP

Oil Spills

0 7496 1075 1

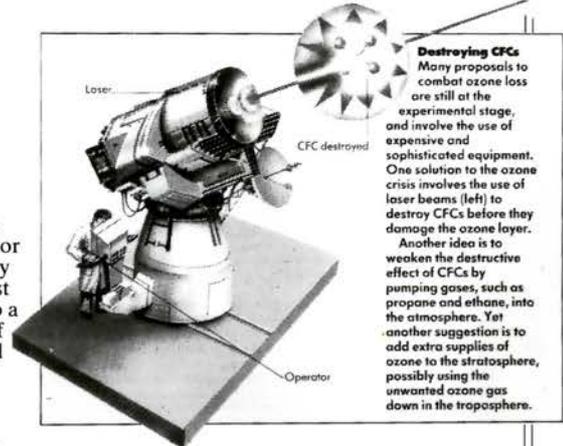
The Ozone Hole

0 7496 1074 3

Jane Walker, Watts Books
(Disaster series), £8.50 each
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Watts began this series by looking at natural catastrophes like earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. A sound approach and some particularly effective artwork established the series as a useful one and this usefulness has now been much enhanced by the addition of these two man-made disasters to the list.

The Ozone Hole is a fine title, for it defines exactly what's the matter, which the oft-preferred 'ozone layer' absolutely doesn't. The history and chemical nature of the problem are extremely well explained,



From *The Ozone Hole*.

as is the paradox of ozone being at once an atmospheric poison and a stratospheric shield. The dangers of ozone-layer depletion, too, range far beyond human skin cancer; plant life and oceanic food chains are shown to be particularly at risk.

Oceans suffer from oil spills too, which offer many dramatic photo-opportunities. Some of these feature in Jane Walker's book but its real strength lies in imaginative graphics, which show how and where leaks can occur, how they spread and how they can be cleaned up. Texts in both books are helpfully straightforward.

Now, if these disasters are man-made no book about them is complete without some ideas about how they may be man-reduced or even man-unmade. Happily, author and publisher have realised this and the final fifth of each volume is devoted to 'what can we do?' discussions, which range from oil and CFC recycling centres, alternative fuels and coolants, to better tanker design and shooting down heaven-bound CFCs with a laser gun.

These will be two useful additions to library shelves, increasing both awareness and information handsomely. TP

Soccer

Sean McSweeney, Wayland
(Go for Sport! series),
0 7502 0660 8, £8.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

'Go for Sport' is an appropriate name for a series which provides useful advice and encouragement for would-be players. The strength of this volume lies in its clear explanation of techniques and the suggestions for games which allow the practice and development of skills. These avoid the worthy but boring approaches which have sometimes prevailed in sports books for young people.

Soccer has a direct, accessible style and makes good use of both diagrams, drawings and photographs to explain the text. Photographs range from school matches to top sides including AC Milan, Liverpool and Doncaster Belles. Less effective is the book's arrangement, and its introduction is uninspiring – but this shouldn't deter the reader.

The author encourages two elements – skill development and enjoyment of the game and his final point is an appropriate one: 'Notice how hard the top players work. Note too how, despite the pressure of professional sport they still show sporting behaviour . . .' – a helpful perspective when players can so easily be worshipped or condemned. GB

When going for goal:

- › Take a quick look at the target and the goalkeeper's position before you shoot.
- › Place your non-striking foot beside the ball.
- › Keep your head down and over the ball as you shoot.
- › Follow through.
- › Follow up in case of rebounds.



This player really lets fly with a full-powered strike. With both feet off the ground and her head over the ball, she is in a classic follow-through position.

From Soccer.

The Sports Book

Carol Gold and Hugh Westrup,
Hodder & Stoughton,
0 340 57612 X, £2.99 pbk
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Sports books tend to fall into three categories: skills and tactics for the player, great stories about sporting stars, and statistical encyclopaedias (for adults a fourth class, sporting nostalgia, makes an appearance).

This book falls into none of these categories, focusing on how science can answer many puzzling questions in sport. Complicated scientific explanations are spelt out clearly and entertainingly. Readers learn, for instance, how skaters manage to avoid feeling dizzy or why sprinters need muscular arms, and they also get an opportunity to try out experiments which illustrate the text. This reader participation is feasible at home or on a rainy day; reaction time testing, for instance, needs only a ruler and a friend.

The style is rollicking, almost manic, punctuated by the most appalling puns which only add to its appeal. One word of warning to would-be readers (especially those who suffer from sporting nostalgia): scientific tests can sometimes offer a prosaic explanation for sporting mythology. GB

The Amazing World of Plants

Phil Gates, Puffin, 0 14 034976 6,
£2.99 pbk

SECONDARY/OLDER READERS

Many of us – most of us perhaps – see plants as the passive sector of wildlife; animals get all the action, plants are there for them to eat and pose among – or so it often seems. Phil Gates doesn't see it that way at all, as those who remember his *Aliens are Coming* will appreciate. He's a passionate botanist – a plant-power fan bent on infecting his readers with his own enthusiasms. A richly individual book results, as we are introduced to the killer vegetables (carnivorous plants), the rocket-propelled cucumbers (seed dispersal) and sweet temptation (pollination strategies) among much more. A short but really helpful chapter on the origin and structure of Linnaean nomenclature and a potted history of plant medicine and the Doctrine of Signatures fill out the serious side, and the catalogue of the world's most poisonous plants is wonderfully described (and, yes, it does include tobacco).

I could go on – Gates does, at gratifying length and with enviable relish. So much so that if I were a science teacher I'd read this aloud to my botany lot, for the combination of good laughs, high amazement quotient and odd sobering thoughts makes it a most entertaining mix. Like its predecessor, it's a

brilliant original and, Puffin as it is, a bargain.

TP

Australian Aborigines

Richard Nile, 0 7502 0371 4

Maori

Robert Macdonald, 0 7502 0503 2

Native Americans

James Wilson, 0 7502 0437 0

Wayland (Threatened Cultures series), £8.99 each
SECONDARY

Separated by thousands of miles, the peoples depicted in these three further titles in the Threatened Cultures series nevertheless share a common bond – their way of life was totally transformed and very nearly wiped out by the arrival of European explorers and settlers, and centuries later they are still counting the cost.

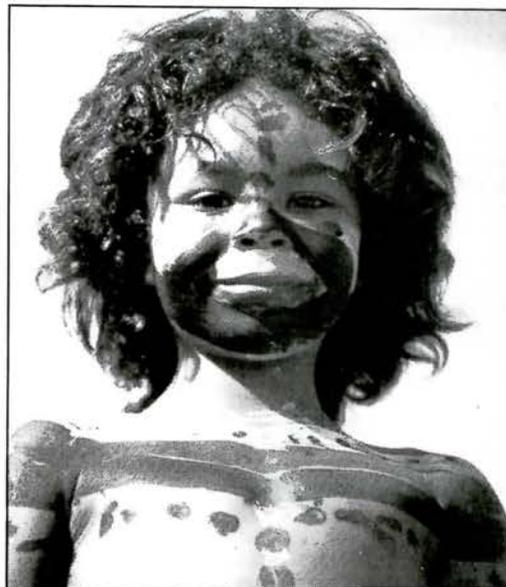
The 'civilised' immigrants not only deprived them of their lands, they used strikingly similar methods to try to destroy the peoples

themselves. 'Less than a generation ago it was common practice to take Aboriginal babies from their mothers' whilst 'from the 1880s until the 1960s, children were taken from their homes and sent to strict military-style boarding schools to be turned into "Americans" or "Canadians"' and 'were brutally punished for speaking their own languages'. Even today in Australia 'which prides itself on its social harmony', its 'original inhabitants remain socially and culturally disadvantaged and subject to terrible racism'.

Despite the many appalling social and economic injustices chronicled in these compelling narratives, there is some cause for optimism. A reaffirmation of pride in their heritage, coupled with a growing political acumen and determination to fight for their rights, hopefully will ensure that all three cultures will be able to preserve their unique identities and lifestyles.

This important and thought-provoking series deserves the widest promotion and readership amongst young readers of all cultures. ●

VH



An Aboriginal boy with modern-style face and body painting. The design is a development from the face and body painting of traditional society.

From *Australian Aborigines*.

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

Smiling at the Crocodile

The story of the sequel to
AMAZING GRACE

MARY HOFFMAN

Writing a best-seller is easy - because you don't know you're doing it. Writing a sequel to a best-seller is a totally different matter. The day I wrote down the text for **Amazing Grace**, I wrote another story, since bottom-drawered, and the outline for a third, which became the modestly successful **Leon's Lucky Lunchbreak**. I had no idea then, or even later when I saw Caroline Binch's first wonderful picture of Grace and her grandmother, that I had written my breakthrough book.

I don't think that sank in till I went on holiday to the States last April and agreed to do a few signing sessions in bookshops while I was there. Americans take children's books and their writers a lot more seriously than the British do. **Amazing Grace** had a review to itself across three columns in **The New York Times**, from a journalist who found more in it than I had remembered putting there.

Queues of eager children who kept me in a Denver bookshop for several hours contrasted with the two or three who'd gathered in my local North London one a few months earlier. When I got back to England, my editor at Frances Lincoln, Janetta Otter-Barry, dropped the casual remark, 'It's a pity you don't want to do a sequel,' and I had to do some serious thinking.

I'm not keen on the modern desire to turn every good thing into a series. **Back to the Future** was a perfectly constructed film and, although the next two were mildly enjoyable, we didn't really need them. Sequels are what readers construct in their heads after putting a book down. Who wants 'Son of Heathcliff', 'Return to Bleak House' or 'Ulysses 2'? But there are one or two successful follow-ups, notably **The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole**. Could Caroline and I match Sue Townsend?

The desire to do so is understandable: the satisfaction for readers of more-of-the-same comfort, which can so easily lead to indistinguishable and undistinguished writing like the 'Babysitter Club' books; for publishers, writers and illustrators, the assurance of a ready-made market at least initially. Spin-off publishing and merchandising is where the big money is - just think of **The Snowman** or **Spot** - and sequels are the most basic spin-off of all.

Why resist? Well, is it going to be a *real* book? Is there a genuine second story to be told about this character or will you just apply the formula, take the money and run? The original book had some clear underlying messages: all stories are for all people, girls can be strong, being Black is something to be proud of, life is what you make it, don't let people put you down, go for it . . .

If you read the newspaper coverage, both quality and tabloid, of the recent PEN survey, you might think I wrote those little slogans down on my cuff and consulted them every few minutes at my word-processor. Actually I was only wearing a towel, being in a women's health club at the time, and I just started to write 'Grace was a girl who loved stories', without knowing what was going to come next. Not quite as ultimately life-changing as 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit . . .' but almost as unplanned.



Mary Hoffman and 'Grace' (Salan) outside her home in Bakau, The Gambia.

The sequel wasn't ever going to be that relaxed. The family who modelled for Caroline's pictures had moved back to The Gambia in West Africa. Grace was approaching nine years old and the difficulties seemed enormous. But Frances Lincoln is a very enterprising person as well as a company, and she and they all seemed inspired by the first book's message that we could do anything we wanted, if only we put our minds to it.



Working sketch of Salan by Caroline Binch.

What clinched it was a story which suddenly started to nag at me to be told. Grace was now a role-model and heroine for thousands of children. She was from a warm and loving family, but in the original book there was no mention of her father. How would an imaginative, story-loving child like Grace react if she had an absent father? How would she feel if she went to visit him and met his second family? She could feel torn in two or she could come to feel like the link between the two halves of her family. If she could pull off that transformation, she could help and encourage many children who find themselves in that situation today.

'Write it, put down the phone and write it now. We need it!' said my Denver bookseller friend when I outlined the plot to her. Thus encouraged, I flew to The Gambia with Caroline one cold, grey morning last December. It was an overwhelming experience. I had never been to Africa, never met the people whose faces I had grown to know so well from Caroline's pictures, never spent more than an hour or two with Caroline herself, come to that.

We landed, three hours late, in brilliant afternoon sunshine and were met by drums and dancers and a terrifying figure called Mama Para. We were to see him a few times again in other entertainments. It is a Christmas character, basically benevolent, but must surely cause a few nightmares among Gambian children? Grace, whose real name is Salan, had gone to the airport to meet us at the right time, but because of the delay, was not there when we arrived. Her mother, Lorraine, was, and I searched her features for the Ma of the book as we drove the dusty road from Banjul airport to Bakau, where they live.

One of the well-intentioned ideas I had had for the second book was to show modern Africa – tall white buildings, thriving commerce, anything to get away from the mud-hut and famine images which is all that many British children, even Black ones, see of that continent. But The Gambia is not Kenya or Nigeria. Its only profitable trade is the tourist one and there is a big contrast between the hotels and the rest of the buildings. You see sheep and chickens wandering about the roads of the capital Banjul and only a few of those roads are metalled.

So that was one good intention out of the window! The Africa I saw was startling. To Western eyes, homes made up of odd bits and pieces, dirt roads and shoeless children make a strong first impression. It would be dishonest to pretend otherwise in my case. But very quickly your eye begins to take in other things. Palm trees, baobabs, casuarinas, hibiscus, vultures, batik butterflies, and above all colours.

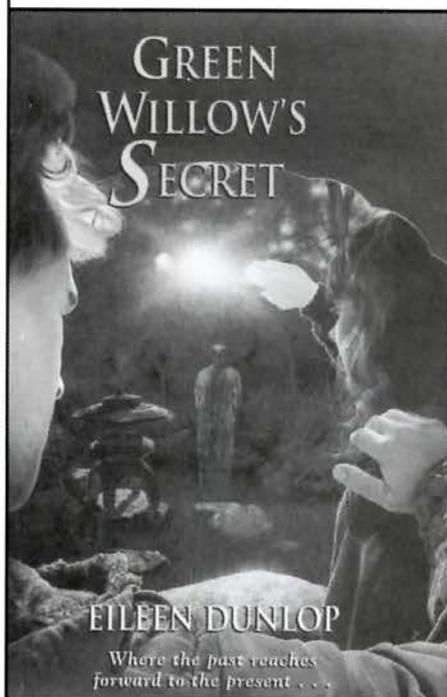


Vivid blue skies, purple flowers trailing over our hut-style room at the hotel, cloth of every shade and pattern worn by men and women, particularly spectacular on the women with their matching headcloths twisted into elaborate and becoming styles, piles of pink papaya and red water-melon on our breakfast table . . . it was like living in a kaleidoscope.



'After the ballet, Grace played the part of Juliet, dancing around her room in her imaginary tutu. "I can be anything I want," she thought. "I can even be Peter Pan."' From *Amazing Grace*.

Get Hooked on a Blackie



Green Willow's Secret

EILEEN DUNLOP

Although Kit is happy in her adopted family, she is also intensely jealous of her sister Juliet. Then tragedy strikes when Juliet is killed in a car accident, and Kit and her distraught mother move away to a new house. It is there that Kit meets Daniel, and together they discover the forgotten Japanese garden and unravel Green Willow's Secret...

A powerful and exciting story in which the past reaches forward to the present.

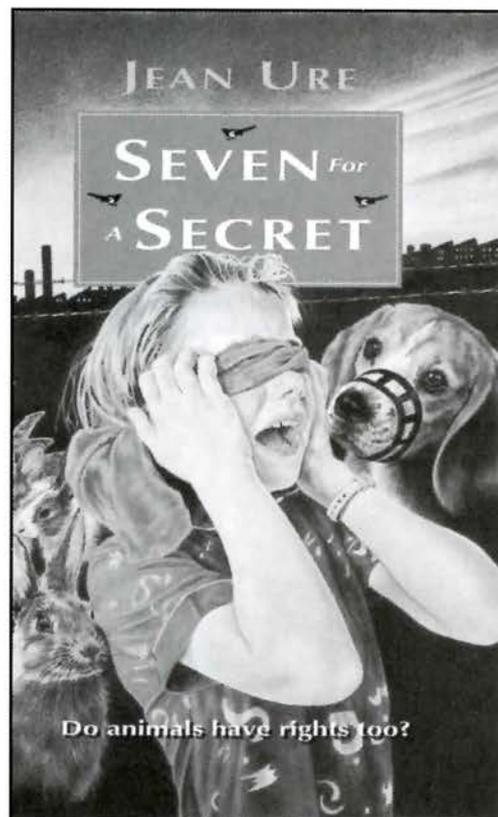
0216 940044 £8.99 February 1993 10 plus

Seven for a Secret

JEAN URE

Highly topical and thought-provoking, this exciting novel highlights the rights and wrongs of animal testing. Penny is very self-assured, and certainly knows her own mind. What she doesn't bargain for is being kidnapped by an animal rights group. Blindfolded and bound, Penny has little to do but think, and soon starts questioning her own fixed ideas about animal testing...

0216 932858 £8.99 March 1993 10 plus



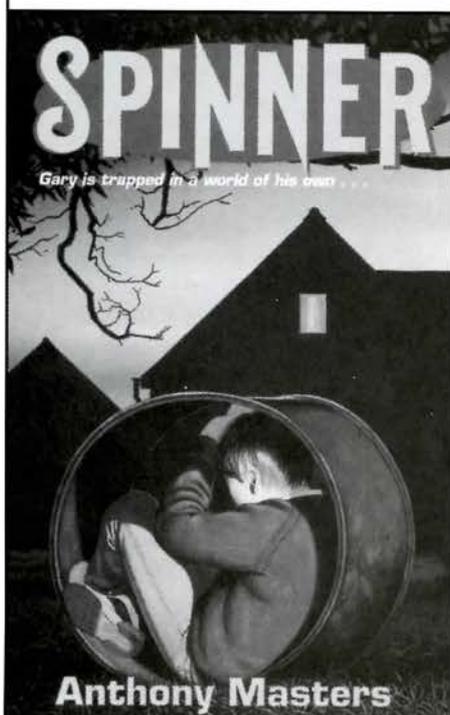
Spinner

ANTHONY MASTERS

A gripping and highly charged story about Gary, a boy who suffers from autism. Jane, his next-door neighbour, is determined to help him but soon finds how difficult it is for Gary to form any sort of emotional attachment. It is when Gary asks Jane to take him back to his father that the situation rapidly becomes dangerous ...

It is when Gary asks Jane to take him back to his father that the situation rapidly becomes dangerous ...

0216 93270X £8.99 May 1993 10 plus



For further information, or for a **FREE 1993 Blackie Catalogue**, simply contact:
Michael Addison, Children's Marketing,
Blackie, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ

Blackie Children's Books

Before I left, a colleague of my husband's, who'd recently come back from The Gambia, had said it was a dangerous place for Westerners and that there were armed guards on the hotels. What with that and the injections against yellow fever, cholera, hepatitis and meningitis and the course of anti-malaria pills I was taking, there had been moments when I wondered if this sequel idea had been such a good one.

All this had dispersed by the time we woke the next morning. We met Salan and she was just like her pictures. Fortunately she hadn't grown too much. She thought it was great fun that we had both come to see her, though she wondered why Caroline hadn't brought her son, Joe. Right outside our hut was a clear, turquoise swimming pool under a leaning palm tree and Caroline and I soon discovered that 'Gambian Time' always meant we had time for a swim before any morning appointment, which might take place up to two and a half hours later than arranged.

There were certainly no armed guards on our hotel – it was entirely open-plan with no guardable outside door anyway. We never felt a moment's unease the whole time we were there. Of course we were taken around by Lorraine, who works on the local paper, and knows a lot of people. But even when we left the hotel on our own and were besieged by the young hustlers who want to sell you cheap cigarettes or be your guide for the day, we had no trouble explaining that we knew where we were going and what we were doing, accompanied by lots of smiles.

We had some memorable experiences. We met Lorraine's boss, the Liberian editor of the ambitiously named **Daily Observer**, which still only comes out three times a week. Kenneth Best and his wife had fled from their own war-avaged country two years before and had made a new life for themselves. In their offices we met a young man who'd invented a bush telephone and made a prototype out of wood and bits of Walkman. Everybody joined in on testing it out, delightedly speaking to one another from room to room. Caroline and I were interviewed by a young reporter about the new book. The whole building was alive with enthusiasm and interest – no jaded Wapping hacks these.

We visited Salan's school and met her headmistress, Mrs Ndow, another impressive figure – a retired civil servant, who had started teaching poor children in the streets of Serrekunda, The Gambia's most populous town, and ended up starting three schools in Bakau. They have virtually no children's books in The Gambia and our slender gift of British paperbacks was well received.

We played in the warm Atlantic ocean outside our hotel with Salan and her friends and talked to Lorraine about her own experiences of coming back to The Gambia after a childhood in Britain. Caroline and I went on our own on a 'Roots' trip upriver to Juffure, supposedly the village of Alex Haley's ancestor, Kunta Kinte. And we wished we hadn't. The report in the **Sunday Times** in February this year that Haley had made most of his book up and plagiarised some of the rest, didn't surprise me at all. Self-appointed 'policemen' swatted children away from us with tree-branches and then expected to be tipped for it. Pre-arranged photo-sessions with a village Chieftain and an old woman descendant in Kinte Kunta (Kinte's compound) were designed to put money in the baskets of those individuals, not the villages. We got back on our pleasure boat to eat a lavish lunch and felt too sick to enjoy it.

The people of The Gambia aren't starving; they have enough food. But they are desperate for education, books, writing materials and for someone to take an interest in them. 'You will forget me,' said a girl of about 11 on the jetty at the fishing village of Albreda. I had nothing left to give her, but she has been with me ever since.

Happier trips were to the incredible wildlife reserve at Abuko, Serrekunda market and Lorraine's family compound in Banjul. We also spent some social time with Nana, a powerful figure in the books and as lovely off the page as on. By now Lorraine was a firm friend and Caroline and I were getting on famously. Apart from a terrible sleep problem over the last few days, caused by the multiple early-morning chorus of the Muezzin, churchbells, exotic birds and, even more maddening, British birdwatchers – 'Have you got the binoculars, Kevin?' – all before 6.30 am, we were having a great time.



On our last morning, we gave way to the importunities of two 'guides' who had been promising all week to take us to see the crocodiles. There is a sacred crocodile pit in Bakau, where women go to pray if they have fertility problems and where men take their business worries. We walked to it through back streets, far away from the world of the hotel and supermarket. Charles and Moses told us about a young girl of 18 who had just died in the village, days after giving birth to twins. Everyone was rallying round to look after the babies. Charles said he was himself a twin, one of several sets his mother had had. No crocodile pit for her.

When we got to the pit, we couldn't believe what we were seeing. There were no fences or barriers. 'Go on, touch them,' our guides encouraged us. There was one huge beast, known as Charlie, crossing the path ahead of us. He sank down on the edge of a very smelly canal. 'It's all right, this is a holy place,' said Charles, so I knelt down and touched the crocodile's sun-warmed scales and held his back leg. Caroline did it, too. If he had decided to turn his massive head and jaw round on us, there would have been only one kind of sequel. But he didn't. It was a tremendous last experience of The Gambia.

Back in England, I wanted to squeeze all this into my book. The first draft was a bit like a travelogue. But I soon realised that, although The Gambia had been a wonderful bonus and Caroline's new pictures were going to give the second book added vitality and glamour, the story I was going to tell could just as easily have taken place in a wet week in Neasden. I would have to find other ways of raising awareness of the little girl in Albreda. It wasn't the job of Grace's new story.

It doesn't have an official title as yet, though I call it 'Grace Unlimited'. It's a family story and as much concerned with Grace's inner world as the first book, but is longer and for a slightly older readership. I've made a few changes at the suggestion of my American publishers. They want to know things like why isn't Grace at school? How come she can just go and visit her Dad in The Gambia? British readers take a lot more for granted, but these changes were easy to accommodate. Now all we're waiting for is Caroline's second trip to take the final photographs.

By Autumn next year we may know whether we've got another bestseller. But I know already we've got another *real* book and that's what counts. Favourable reviews would be nice, but I'll be convinced we've succeeded when we get the first letter from a child like the one I had this morning from a little girl in Michigan. Too bad I shan't ever get one from a little girl in Albreda. She has no pen or paper and, even if the book becomes available in The Gambia, there is no way she could ever afford a copy. A satisfactory sequel for her is a much harder undertaking than writing a book. ●

We thank Caroline Binch for the use of her pencil sketches which accompany this article.

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman and illustrated by Caroline Binch, is published by Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0670 8, £7.95; 0 7112 0699 6, £3.99 pbk. The book has received many commendations and has just been chosen as one of the two titles for young readers included in the Feminist Book Festival's Top 20. (If you'd like more details of this Festival which runs from 1st to 21st June, contact Judith Palmer at 5 Prince George Road, London N16 8DL, tel/fax: 071 254 0663.)

The sequel is provisionally scheduled for publication by Frances Lincoln in the Autumn of 1994.

If you want to help the spread of literacy, storytelling and In-Service education in The Gambia, please contact Sheila Freeman and Esther Munns at 8 The Avenue, Gravesend, Kent DA11 0NA (tel: 0474 365554). They are ex-teachers, who run a mobile bookshop, and they're taking two months' unpaid leave to take loads of children's books to The Gambia in January and February 1994, for which they're seeking sponsorship and donations.

RAPSCALLION LAUREATE

James Marshall, the American author and illustrator, died on 13th October 1992. A preliminary attempt to assess the distinction ... and distinctiveness ... of his work is offered here by Brian Alderson.

Among the myriad happy purchasers of the new edition of Iona and Peter Opie's *I Saw Esau* I wonder how many paused at the dedication pages. And among those who paused, I wonder how many nodded in sage agreement to Maurice Sendak's acknowledgement of James Marshall. 'Who he?' tends to be the response I get when I wax lyrical about his books – and not just from averagely-interested adults. Today's emphasis on 'front-list' publishing means that plenty of professionals in the houses that publish him don't know who he is either.

This seems to be a pity. For although Maurice Sendak writes of him as friend, he also writes of him as colleague, and that dedication was as much as anything a mark of high respect. Nobody, I suppose, when confronted by *Wings*, or by *MacGoose's Grocery*, will gasp and lift their countenances heavenward as they do for *Where the Wild Things Are* or *Little Bear*, but there is in James Marshall's writing and illustrating a continuous warm-hearted hilarity which may be unassuming, but which places him among the few great creators of children's books in the last twenty years.

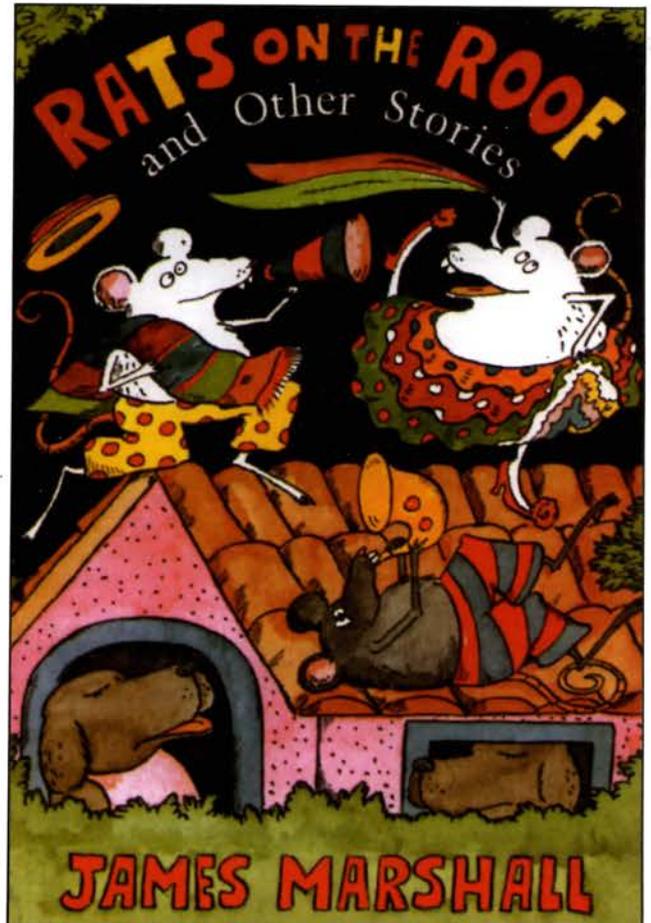
Part of the reason for our failure to recognise his stature probably stems from the fact that the wild things who inhabit so many of his books are not gob-smackingly metaphysical or semiotic idols, but are 'merely' figures of fun. What's more, they very often seem to be the same figures of fun drifting from one book to the next. If you look at the residents sitting round Mama Jo's boarding house table in *Rapscallion Jones*, you may get a sense of *deja vu*. 'Can this man draw nothing,' you may ask, 'except overweening foxes, self-satisfied pigs, lugubrious bears, devious striped cats and dopey dogs?' And Ma Jo herself, a toothy Marshall bulldog, looks even more Churchillian than usual on account of the large cigar with which she fumigates house and boarders alike.

These animals, joined by assorted crocodiles, parrots, rats and roosters, turn up in one guise or another through a couple of dozen of James Marshall's books: in full colour picture books, like *Wings*; in simple 'readers' like the Fox stories (which Messrs Red Fox are, appropriately, now republishing); and in longer books illustrated in monochrome-wash like the collection *Rats on the Roof*, the pseudo detective story *Summer in the South*, and the miniature travelogue *Taking Care of Carruthers*. They are joined by the series of picture books that feature those two amiable hippopotamuses George and Martha. (These nice people got their names from the lead characters in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?*, which Marshall's mother was watching on television when he was working on the books. At the time of publication the author was given as Edward Marshall – a Bunbury-style relative – but he had to be abandoned when demands for his attendance at conferences became too importunate.)

Alongside the Marshall menagerie there exists another one, peopled by people, where only a little more diversity is to be found. There's not much difference between the characters in those books (only published in America) about Miss Nelson – alias Miss Viola Swamp – and her class of unruly children, and those books about the 'cut-ups', who might well have stepped out of Miss Nelson's school. But there is also the entirely novel Stupid family, through whom Marshall achieved one of his earliest successes.

[The four books about the Stupids are ostensibly by Harry Allard, who, unlike Edward Marshall, does exist. But his texts are so completely in the Marshall grain that, for my money, he is simply a front-man. Indeed, such a protective buffer may well be necessary, since the stories of the Stupids may these days be seen as a satire on the intellectually-challenged. Should we really make fun of people who put pictures of fish on the wall and label them 'Dog', or who think that they have died when the electricity fails and all the lights go out?]

To accuse these books of 'sameness' however, is to miss a very individual wit that bubbles through each of them – and, at this level of excellence, who cares if they are all the same anyway? The chief characteristic of this wit is Marshall's irrepressible delight in the very short story. His single-story picture books usually make play with one simple idea: Portly McSwine, for instance, consumed with worry over his National Snout Day party; but Marshall also likes condensing several stories within one pair of covers. Sometimes he works with what are little more than one-liners, as in, say, the forty-eight unencumbered pages of *George and Martha Encore* into which he fits five separate stories (eg. George asks Martha what "Give me a kiss?" is in French; Martha tells him; so George gives her a kiss.) Sometimes he ingeniously sets these anecdotal quips into a larger frame, as in *Three by the Sea*, where stories told by the three kids are not only neatly

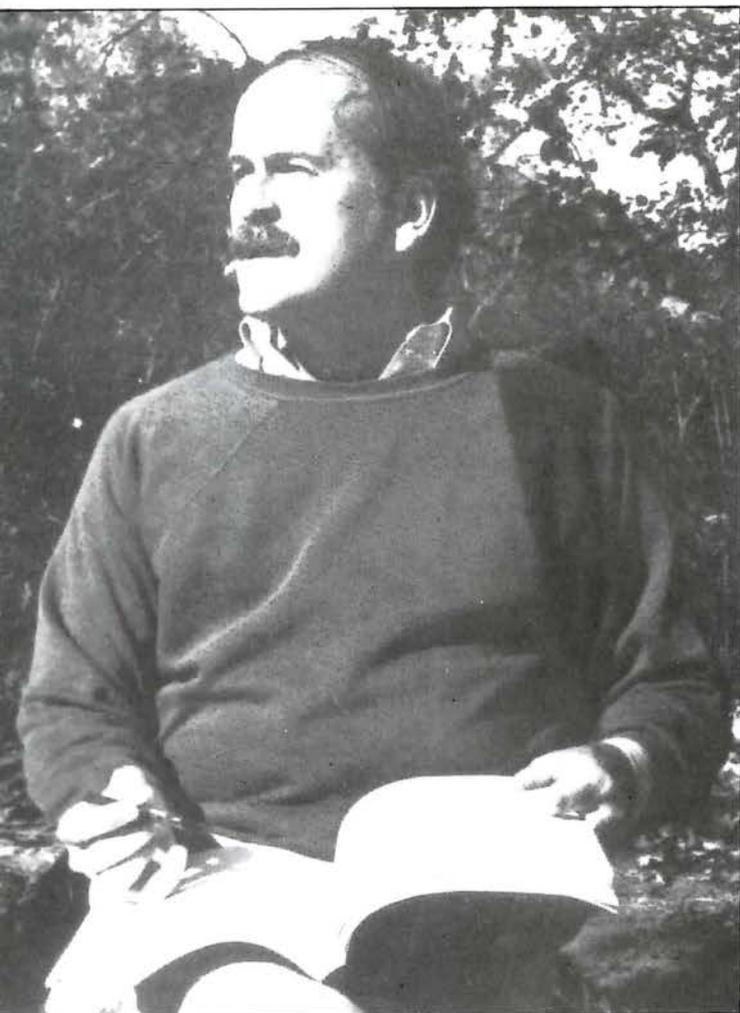


"Is that the story?" said Sam.

"Is that all?" said Spider.

"That's it," said Lolly.

From *Three by the Sea*.



James Marshall.

interconnected but also turn out to be a defence of Story itself against the brainlessness of reading schemes. His accretive method also goes into the construction of the longer books. **Taking Care of Carruthers** is nothing more than a set of dovetailed episodes which are themselves told as a story by Eugene the turtle to keep Carruthers the bear content while Emily pig looks on.

The briskness of Marshall's plotting in these little tales gains vital energy from his equivalent command of language and picture, working the two together in close harness. Look for instance at the opening three pages of **Wings: a tale of two chickens**:

'Harriet and Winnie were as different as two chickens could possibly be.

Harriet was enormously fond of reading.
"Frankly, I'd rather swat flies," said Winnie.

Many interesting hobbies kept Harriet busy all day.
"I'm so bored, I could just die," said Winnie.'

The taut phrasing sets the scene for a story in which Winnie's Puddle-Duck-like foolishness is redeemed by Harriet's sensible foresight, but the full impact of the sentences comes from the counterpointing pictures which are at once ludicrous and satirical. Winnie, at the teatable, or standing on two books to swat flies, or yawning on a garden seat, may be seen in every township of the nation.

Marshall makes his illustrative points with an almost child-like simplicity of line and colour, which conceals a highly practised skill. (He has the same gift as Quentin Blake for making two eye-dots reflect a multitude of expressions.) Look at the Cut-ups, fired into Lamar J Spurgle's zinnias in Mary Frances's rocket-ship, which is activated by a single coiled spring. It's totally daft, but it carries complete conviction through its wide-eyed acceptance of its own simplified date, to say nothing of the confident portrayal of Mary Frances herself in tracksuit and matching dark-green glasses.

Or look at Carruthers, who is persuaded to act in a play about Goldilocks where he is assigned the part of Baby Bear. The picture of him in a gigantic nappy, looming over a bewigged duck asleep in a tiny wooden bed, is one of the funniest drawings that you could ever wish to see.

In the last five years of his life, Marshall had also been playing about with picture-book versions of nursery stories – belated successors to his entertaining *Mother Goose* of 1979. Several of these were published in Britain by Collins and they exemplify his ability to set word against picture at its best. Assuredly **Hansel and Gretel** was a mistake; the story is too long and too varied in its demands to suit the jocose

Carruthers as Baby Bear, from **Taking Care of Carruthers**.

Marshall manner, but with tales like **Red Riding Hood** and **Goldilocks** (again) he brought pantomime into picture books. The stories were made for his sharp prose, his ear for repartee. ('Once there was a little girl called Goldilocks. "What a sweet child," said someone new in town. "That's what you think," said a neighbour') and the pictures add a dimension of comedy (Goldilocks is seen flying through the air from a garden swing, bound for a tub of water, while three fat Marshall cats doze contentedly, unaware of what is heading in their direction).

Book after book is characterised by this apparently casual, but very skilled, very beady-eyed, combination of verbal and visual effects. Marshall has none of the vulgar explosiveness of artists in the current scratch-and-scribble school, who enforce the notion that children desire at all times to be supplied with the frenetic. And he has none of the painterly overkill of those illustrators who promote the idea that picture books should be High Art. His way is the classic way of brevity and understatement, words and lines accumulating into experiences that are the more hilarious for not appearing to be so. We are not so rich that we can afford to lose the masters of this art, nor that we can wilfully neglect them. ●

James Marshall titles currently in print:

Rats on the Roof and Other Stories, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13315 7, £8.50

Taking Care of Carruthers, Young Lions, 0 00 672341 1, £2.99 pbk

The following titles are available in hardback from Bodley Head and in paperback from Red Fox:

Fox All Week, 0 370 30834 4, £5.99; 0 09 997240 9, £2.99 pbk

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Four on the Shore, 0 09 988760 6, £2.99 pbk

Three by the Sea, 0 09 993900 2, £2.99 pbk

Three up a Tree, 0 09 988770 3, £2.99 pbk

A fairly complete list of Marshall's work is given in **Twentieth Century Children's Writers**, edited by Tracey Chevalier and D L Kirkpatrick (St James Press, 1989).

Brian Alderson is a children's book reviewer for **The Times** and in September last year Gollancz published his version of **Arabian Nights** with illustrations by Michael Foreman, 0 575 04251 6, price £14.99. There is also a splendid limited edition of the book available (only 200 copies, signed and numbered) at a price of £75.00.

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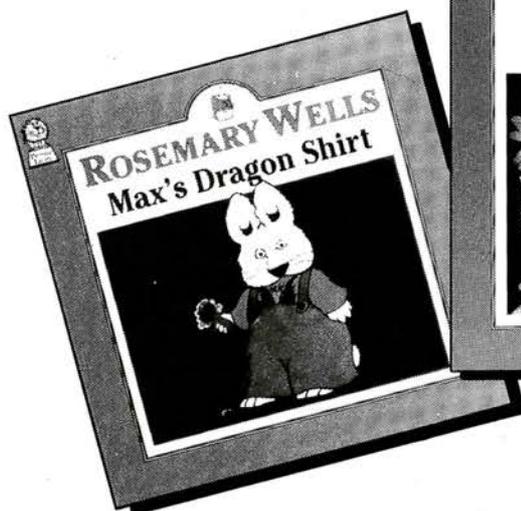
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WRITER
REPLY

PEN-ULTIMATA

Robert Leeson reflects on recent objections to Political Correctness

'Have you ever suffered unacceptable editorial interference on grounds of political correctness?' asked the *Daily Mail* reporter.

'No more than you do every day,' I answered snappily.

'Well, two-thirds of children's authors have,' came the reply.

I blinked. Two-thirds? If that's so, we do have a censorship problem in Britain. I've worked in countries where there really was censorship and am wary about devaluing the word by applying it to the editorial interference every children's author may meet, here.



In times of social change (like the 18th-19th century) literature proceeds from assertion to assumption. Children's literature is today emerging from a similar period. Today our children's books are as well-written, perhaps better, than 40 years ago. And they reflect the world of *all* children. This change has not been smooth. Some change-seekers have been insensitive to authors' feelings or ignorant of how literature works. But some of those resisting change failed to realise that disregarding or demeaning people on the basis of a false view of their essential nature (racism, sexism, snobbery, etc) is not just morally but aesthetically and creatively wrong. If you have real literary standards, you have moral standards in my view.

With respect, also, for PEN's 'unhindered transmission of thought', no writer for children is absolutely free. We are all, like editors, teachers and librarians, in loco parentis.

Politically-correct thought, police now control children's publishing in Britain. Here 15 leading authors tell how their works were tampered with...

This lunatic, evil censoring of our children's hearts and minds

A grim fairy tale

When I saw the PEN Censorship Committee report which started off the Press hounds, I discovered what 'two-thirds' meant. PEN had sent questionnaires to 428 members of the Society of Authors (not, alas, to the Writer's Guild which organises in films, TV, radio and theatre as well as books). Of the 428, 105 replied. Of those, 62 said they had been 'censored' in some way. So not two thirds, but one in eight or nine of all children's authors.

Press fantasies over the PEN report went much further. 'Minority pressure groups' it seemed were terrorising publishers. One headline suggested the 'Three Little Pigs' had been banned to please the Ayatollahs. I cannot tell you how far this is from the careful wording of the PEN report. You must read it yourselves. Let's just say we are talking about porkies not porkers. (A bit like that mythical teacher who forced the toddlers to sing 'Baa Baa Green Sheep'.)

The Press, or much of it (mainly those papers who bragged last year about winning the General Election for John Major) saw in the PEN report a chance to bash what they see as political enemies. It was, after all, a welcome diversion from the other news item concerning the books children read - Government plans to put English class books into a straitjacket again - to enforce political correctness as they see it.

'... they want to restore a unity and stability based on the hegemony imposed by the upper and middle classes in the 1930s and before. The texts they prescribe often seem more suited to the days of British imperialism.' No, that's not Leeson talking. That is Professor Brian Cox, of National Curriculum and Black Paper fame (*The Times*, 1.3.93).

Like the Government's plans for English Teaching, the Press assault on 'political correctness' in children's books is an attempt to wipe out the largely beneficial changes of the past three to four decades.

The *Sunday Telegraph* (16.8.92) defines political correctness (revealingly) as a 'battle to make children's literature politically acceptable to all sections of society'.

In a way that sums up what 'pressure groups' on issues like racism, sexism, class bias, etc. have been after. The old literature generally behaved as though most children did not exist or were inherently ridiculous or untrustworthy. But things have changed. As one publisher's editor told the PEN Committee, attitudes are now 'more balanced'.

Nor is the answer as one author put it 'responding legitimately to market forces'. The market is never neutral, least so in children's literature where it is often institutional/parental. 30 years ago the 'market' was used often to justify clinging on to the out-moded school story, of the Greyfriars era.

So negotiation between writer and editor becomes a matter for mutual respect, and a proper understanding of the issues. With this, I believe, a lot of the irritations quoted in the PEN report might have been avoided. Editors cannot solve large social/literary problems in the compass of each book. But if writers imagine they can write for children with the same freedom as for adults, they are in the wrong trade.

The PEN report calls for a discussion on these problems. A good idea, though I doubt whether Fleet Street (right now a graveyard for intellectual notions) was really the best place to start.

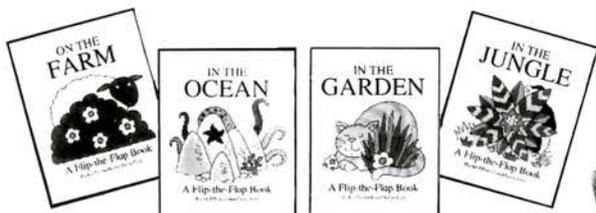
I could say more, but *BfK's* editor said 900 words only... interfering busybody! ●

The PEN report is available from The English Centre, 7 Dilke Street, London SW3 4JE (tel: 071 352 6303).

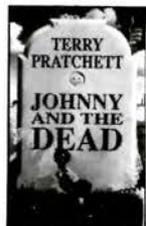
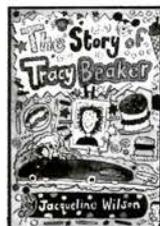
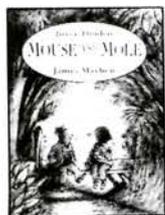
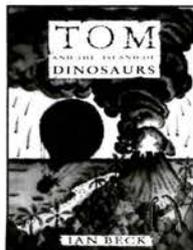
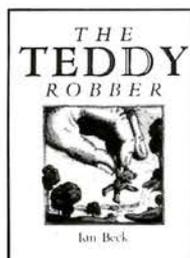
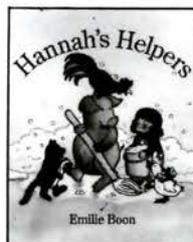
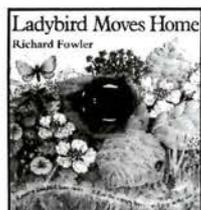
Robert Leeson has written many books for children, as well as writing for radio, theatre and TV. His latest title is *Ghosts at Hob Lane*, Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope', 0 241 13181 2, £4.99

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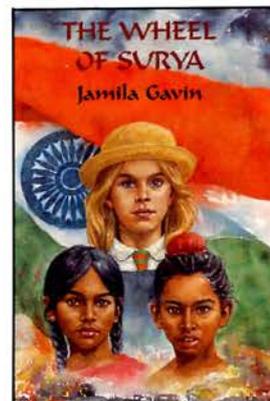
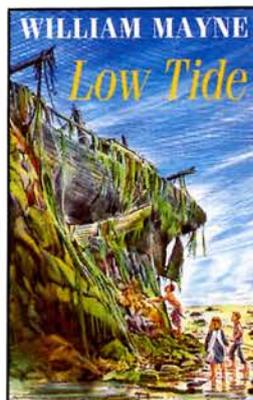
AWARDS

1993 Guardian Children's Fiction

Joanna Carey, the Guardian's new Children's Fiction Editor, reports . . .

The winner of the 1993 Guardian Children's Fiction Award is William Mayne, for *Low Tide* (Cape, 0 224 03151 1, £8.99). It's interesting to note that Mayne's first book was published in 1953 – 14 years before this Award came into existence. In 1958 he won the Carnegie Medal and over the years he's written an astonishing number of books and is unrivalled in the range and originality of his work for children of all ages.

Low Tide is an adventure, an exciting story of survival with an atmospheric dreamlike quality – indeed the idea, Mayne says, came to him in the form of something resembling an hallucination. Set in New Zealand at the turn of the century, the adventure starts when a phenomenally low tide lays bare the bed of the ocean. Charlie sets out to explore, together with his irrepressible little sister and his Maori friend, Wiremu. They discover the wreck of a long-drowned ship and as they finalise plans for the distribution of the treasure they will undoubtedly find, a massive tidal wave sweeps them up and throws them on to some remote jagged mountains. Here they encounter a terrifying, hairy, wild man who must surely be the Koroua, the legendary black-toothed cannibal. With humour, compassion and customary subtle insight Mayne describes how the children, in their various and curiously revealing ways, perceive and confront their predicament. Balanced there on the very edge of civilisation, they tacitly accept that it's the inscrutable, hairy Koroua upon whom their survival must ultimately depend, and learn to look after themselves and each other.



With its themes of mortality, culture, race and communications, this is a story of bewitching beauty, an intriguing puzzle which, long after the pieces are satisfyingly united, continues to fascinate.

The runner-up, *The Wheel of Surya* by Jamila Gavin (Methuen, 0 416 18572 X, £9.99), is a beautifully-written story on a grand scale. In 1947, separated from their mother in the chaos and confusion following India's partition, Marvinder and her young brother, Jaspal, set out on a desperate search for the father they hardly know. Their extra-ordinary journey takes them from the turbulent and extravagantly contrasting mysteries of India to the grim austerity of life in post-war London, where they must somehow adapt to a new way of life. Jamila Gavin, herself born in India of an Indian father and an English mother, writes perceptively and truthfully about children obliged to move between these two cultures. With its many strands this is a richly worked tapestry, a hugely rewarding and absorbing read.

The judges for The Guardian Award this year were the writers Rachel Anderson, Anne Fine, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, Andro Linklater and Brian Patten, chaired by Joanna Carey.

Mother Goose Award for 1993

Sally Grindley reports on the Award presented annually to the most exciting newcomer to British Children's Book Illustration.

This was not a vintage year for the Mother Goose Award. There was a lack of startling innovation, and a sense that someone, somewhere is playing safe. Art schools, or publishers, or both? Nevertheless, a string of impressive new talents are emerging if the 35 books submitted for this year's Award are anything to go by.

When the judges assembled an outright winner soon emerged after animated discussion about the individual merits of each book in turn. And though the decision about the runners-up took longer and caused more division along the way, the final selection was unanimous.

The judges commented upon the dearth of multicultural books and books reflecting modern urban life. They could only hope that this did not represent a regrettable trend in children's publishing generally.

Here then are the results:

WINNER

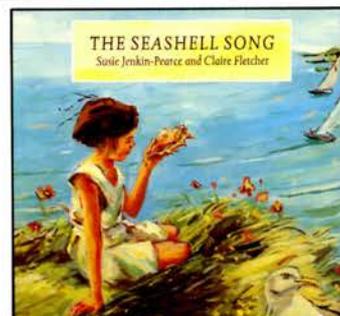
Claire Fletcher for *The Seashell Song* (Bodley Head, 0 370 31704 1, £7.99), written by Susie Jenkin-Pearce

This was an impressively original book, full of atmosphere and drama, tinged with nostalgia but nevertheless very much a contemporary triumph. There are some stunning double-page spreads – the child riding the elephant in the brilliance of the sun, the dusky fishermen and salty crews with mackerel nets – where the sense of movement and wonderful use of colour enable you to see the sky changing, to smell the sea, to feel the changing temperature of the passing day. There's a controlled confusion about some of the scenes; controlled because everything that's there is meant to be there, and the work as a whole has a great believability about it.

RUNNERS-UP

Paul Hunt for his *Night Diary* (Child's Play, 0 85953 925 3, £5.95)

This is a brave book indeed, set as it is entirely by night, and it's a



great accomplishment on Paul Hunt's part that he's managed to make every spread so different and so astonishing. His is a powerful, dramatic, believable night. He's a superb draughtsman. But what a pity such distinguished work is let down by a poor choice of typeface and the use of bright blue for the text.

Sophy Williams for *When Grandma Came* (Viking, 0 670 83581 1, £8.50), written by Jill Paton Walsh

Another artist who knows how to create atmosphere and drama. Her use of hazy definition to recall grandma's young days is masterly. This book has a wonderful quality of rhythm and time, perfectly captured in spreads that are beautifully coloured in subtle tones, pleasingly comfortable and very tender.

Selina Young for *Maybe It's a Pirate* (ABC, 1 85406 149 6, £6.95), written by Judy Hindley

Energy and fun abound in this boisterous work. Selina Young's style is loose, but contains lots of detail, a good control of patterns and a lively use of colour. Children will love exploring the pictures to find the stories going on independently of the text.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Kate Simpson for *But No Cheese!*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 56598 5, £7.99)

It's rare for the Mother Goose Panel to award an Honourable Mention. Kate Simpson's work, though, displays wonderful touches of wit, character and originality. Her use of watercolour is very accomplished, and her sense of scale and perspective provides great movement and excitement. Yet *But No Cheese!* is spoiled by several weak spreads and an awful cover, which could have been avoided by better art direction on her publisher's part.

Mother Goose judges this year were Bernard Ashley, Nicola Bayley, Patrick Benson, Julia Eccleshare, Sally Grindley, Colin Hawkins and Charlotte Voake. ●

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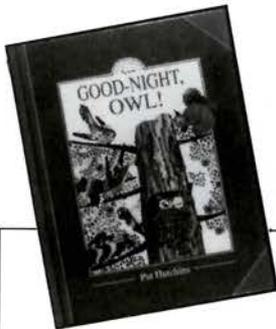
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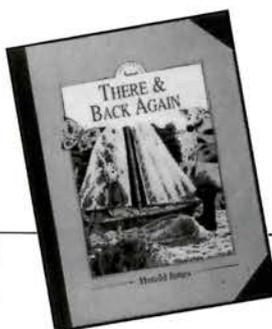
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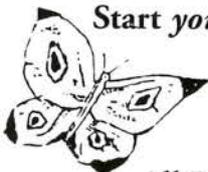
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SIGNS OF PLENTY

Jeff Hynds' Round-up of Spring Picture Books

While I've been writing this review article, I have discovered, somewhat to my surprise, that I've read and re-read – with great pleasure it must be said – well over *two hundred* picture books, virtually all of them published in the first few months of this year.

I just cannot believe, in these difficult times, that publishers would publish so extensively if they were not managing to do a bit of selling as well. This is hardly evidence of an illiterate nation. Mysteriously, none of the proliferating reports about our lamentable reading standards (and I think I've read them all) ever mentions the burgeoning children's book market.

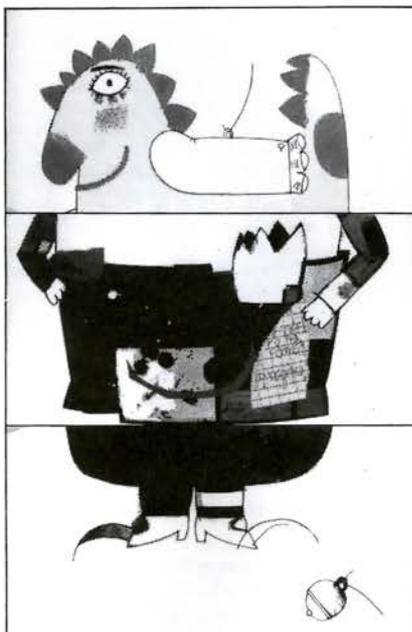
For obvious reasons I can't review everything I was sent, though, so I've been having a truly stimulating time bringing my critical faculties to bear. I looked for that full and satisfying conjuncture of picture and text that is the hallmark of the true picture book. I hoped for strength and depth, wit and energy – rejecting anything insipid, babyish, patronising, unnecessarily cluttered or over-sentimental. I have quite often been dubious about magnificent artwork when the accompanying text is – how shall I put it? – limp. In short, I've been RUTHLESS. And in the end made the selection that follows:-

Midnight Play, Květa Pacovská, Neugebauer/Ragged Bears, 1 85618 041 7, £19.50

Saranohair, Gillian Johnson, Annick Press/Ragged Bears, 1 55037 211 4, £6.95

The Widow's Broom, Chris Van Allsburg, Andersen, 0 86264 453 4, £8.99

We begin with the strange and surreal. I found myself going back time and time again to **Midnight Play**. It's the sort of book where you understand enough of it ('It's a play in 42 pieces' – I managed to work this out in the end) to realise there's quite a bit more to understand than that's beyond you. The book has ingenious split pages and cut-outs, as well as the moon on the end of a piece of string. It's all to do with drama being an illusion (I think) and with the indispensability of moonlight (OK, I give up). Actually I'd have liked an instruction book to go with it. A large book, lavish, expensive too, but definitely intriguing.



A split level character from **Midnight Play**.

Saranohair (yes, it's Sara No Hair because she hasn't got any) is quite extraordinary. It's a first children's book by a Canadian English teacher. The book opens at the top like a reporters notebook, and much use is made of the long, narrow shape that results. Again, it's

quite hard to work out what's going on – but very enjoyable trying. I decided it was either a send-up or an elaborate esoteric joke. It's some story! Really weird! I'm not sure that falling down holes in the ground into a completely different world peopled by grotesque creatures who all seem to be interested in hats is entirely appropriate for a children's book. About as unlikely as a caterpillar smoking a hookah, I'd say.

Chris Van Allsburg, master of the mysterious, has produced another eerie book in **The Widow's Broom**. With over 1,500 words this has quite a substantial text for a picture book, but is nevertheless a true picture book, since the striking sepia prints frequently carry the action as well as evoke the atmosphere. There are grim undertones to this story, about boorish, bullying behaviour and people destroying what they don't understand, but fortunately the widow's essential goodness and ingenuity win through.



Sophie on Garden-Chair Horse with Hooversaurus, **Under the Stairs**.

In contrast, there are a lot of picture books this year about family situations. These four all feature rather lonely, isolated children:

Under the Stairs, Fiona Dunbar, Hutchinson, 0 09 176187 5, £8.99

The Bear Under the Stairs, Helen Cooper, Doubleday, 0 385 40210 4, £8.99

Jackdaw, Ann Cartwright, ill. Reg Carwright, Hutchinson, 0 09 176427 0, £8.99

All the Better to See You With!, Margaret Wild, ill. Pat Reynolds, Little Ark/Ragged Bears, 1 86373 232 2, £7.95

In every case, however, they're able to cope because they are, each in their own way, very resourceful. In **Under the Stairs** young Sophie, bored by Sunday afternoons at Aunt Sarah's, manages to escape to another world below stairs. It's rather an alarming world, albeit (one supposes) a figment of her imagination, where household objects come to life and in some cases threaten her, but Sophie is more than a match for every situation. In **The Bear Under the Stairs** young William is terrified of 'the place under the stairs' because he believes a bear lives there. From time to time, in order to mollify it, he throws down scraps of food, slamming the door tight-shut afterwards. Again, this is a somewhat alarming story, for the presence of the bear is all pervasive in the excellent illustrations.

The bold, stylised paintings of Reg Cartwright illustrate **Jackdaw**, a true story from the illustrator's own childhood, of a lonely boy who, Kes-like, brings up a jackdaw single-handed. My heart missed a beat when I thought the jackdaw was about to suffer the same fate as the kestrel in Barrie Hines' novel, but this story ends happily enough. I'm not sure what the RSPB would have to say about all this, though.

All the Better to See You With! is the touching story of a little girl called Kate whose family is rather large and noisy. It's a caring family but inevitably Kate, who is 'small and quiet', sometimes gets overlooked. Accordingly she's quite old before her parents realise she's short-sighted. This works very well as a picture book, since the illus-

trations enable us to see the world through Kate's eyes, both before and after she gets her glasses.

More books about children and their family situations:

The Granny Who Wasn't Like Other Grannies, Denis Bond, ill. Valeria Petrone, Hippo/Scholastic, 0 590 55133 7, £2.99 pbk

The Tusk Fairy, Nicola Smee, Orchard, 1 85213 542 5, £7.99

The Long Weekend, Troon Harrison, ill. Michael Foreman, Andersen, 0 86264 426 7, £7.99

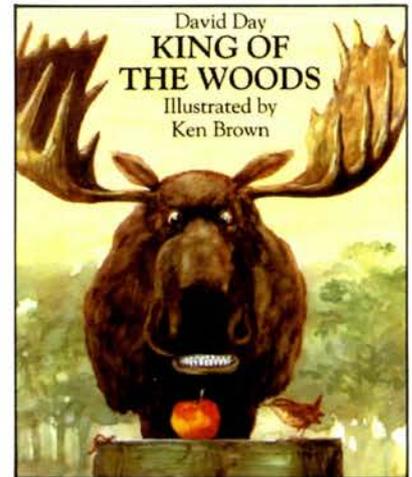
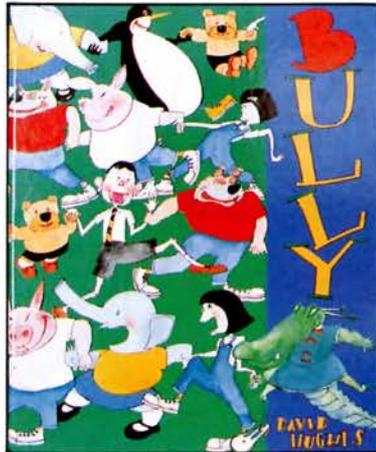
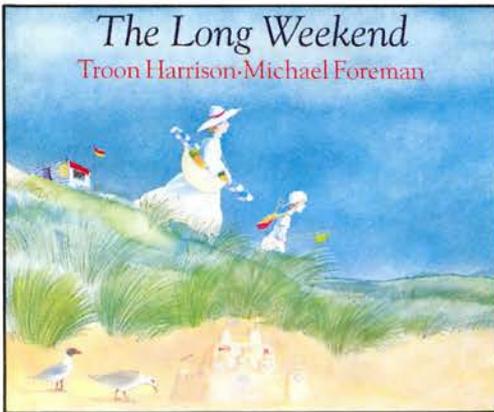
Farm Morning, David McPhail, Blackie, 0 216 93215 7, £8.99

Get Lost, Laura!, Jennifer Northway, Deutsch/Scholastic, 0 590 54023 8, £7.99

Bully, David Hughes, Walker, 0 7445 2169 6, £8.99

The Granny Who Wasn't Like Other Grannies and **The Tusk Fairy** are about Tim's granny in the first and Lizzie's in the second. Tim's embarrassed by the antics of his very unconventional granny and wishes she'd be more stereotypical and sit in a rocking-chair and knit. In contrast Lizzie's granny saves the day by a marathon knitting session. Both books are very humorous and entertaining and should be read by all grannies, as well as their grandchildren.

Two excellent books are **The Long Weekend** and **Farm Morning**. Both depict a child's relationship with a parent – a mother in one and a father in the other. Both, in different ways, are marvellously illustrated, and both touch deep emotional chords. Light-hearted on the face of it, in each story there's a sadness underneath.



Jennifer Northway's picture books always have a strong story, and a point to make. Her illustrations are not only beautiful but very keenly observed. This talented author-illustrator is at her best in **Get Lost, Laura!**, a cautionary tale with a social message particularly appropriate at the moment. Equally appropriate in these modern times is the theme of **Bully**, though it's a very unusual treatment of the subject. Bullying is a pretty crazy, mixed-up matter, and David Hughes has certainly conveyed this by innovative and eye-catching use of some very large pages, where the ramifications of the whole bullying syndrome appear before us in an amazing series of cartoon-like pictures. It has created quite a bit of interest in the Hynds' home since it arrived, and some mystification too. It's a mystifying area, of course.

And now, off to the forest:

The Owl Who Became the Moon, Jonathan London, ill. Ted Rand, Viking, 0 670 84896 4, £8.99

In Search of the Hidden Giant, Jeanne Willis, ill. Ruth Brown, Andersen, 0 86264 433 1, £7.99

Shadow the Deer, Theresa Radcliffe, ill. John Butler, Viking, 0 670 83852 7, £8.99

King of the Woods, David Day, ill. Ken Brown, Andersen, 0 86264 422 4, £6.99

The Heart of the Wood, Marguerite Davol, ill. Sheila Hamanaka, Viking, 0 670 84891 3, £8.99

The Ark, Rien Poortvliet, Lion, 0 7459 2213 9, £19.99

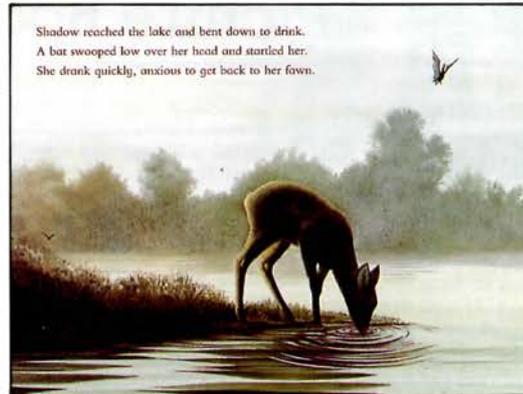
No Dodos, Amanda Wallwork, Ragged Bears, 1 85714 016 8, £6.99

'Wouldn't it be nice
to take a ride on a train
through a forest
in the dark
under the stars'

So begins **The Owl Who Became the Moon**, a poetic evocation, with dramatic painting, of a forest ride, with creatures all around and an owl, silhouetted against the moon, gliding across the sky. Somewhere in another forest lies a sleeping giant, and two children are searching. Is it just the trees, or is that the giant's hair we can see?

'A creature of enormous size,
With elms for arms and oaks for thighs'

Jean Willis' carefully crafted octosyllabic couplets are richly illustrated by Ruth Brown's paintings of the forest in the outstanding picture book, **In Search of the Hidden Giant**. Again we're deep in the forest with **Shadow the Deer**. Shadow has to leave her three-day-old fawn to fend for himself while she goes to the lakeside to drink. Meanwhile Redflank the fox has hungry cubs... The story is exciting and dramatic and beautifully illustrated by wildlife illustrator John Butler. Then we have the talented artist Ken Brown illustrating David Day's amusingly cumulative tale (or is it fable) of the wren



From
**Shadow of
the Deer.**

who triumphs over all the other much larger woodland creatures to become **King of the Woods** herself, evidently undergoing a sex-change at the same time. Now into Winderly Woods, to search for the tree that will give us **The Heart of the Wood** from which the wood-carver will create the fiddle that will fill the woods with music. Another cumulative tale, this time of the house-that-Jack-built type, only it's the fiddle that Jack built. A good rollicking text with strong, expressive paintings.

I'm pleased that Lion Publishing have re-launched **The Ark** in a new, smaller-format edition. It's a wonderful picture book (though I have to say I preferred the original large size, expensive though it was), with something for everyone – a journal, a commonplace book, an artist's notebook, an instruction manual, a collection of witty observations, a bible story, and above all a warning that if we are to save our environment we need, like Noah, to build another ark before it's too late.

This is exactly the point made by **No Dodos**, outwardly a counting book for the very young, but given universal significance because each animal counted is an endangered species. One is already extinct. A fuller explanation of the dangers faced by threatened species is included at the end. This is a first book for Amanda Wallwork, who illustrates by an ingenious torn-paper technique.

And quickly, on to some animal fables:

Mole in a Hole (and Bear in a Lair), M Christina Butler, ill. Meg Rutherford, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 1384 2, £3.99 pbk

The Brave Hare, Dave and Julie Saunders, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0760 7, £7.99; 0 7112 0761 5, £3.99 pbk

No Problem, Eileen Browne, ill David Perkins, Walker, 0 7445 2205 6, £8.99

The Grasshopper and the Ant, Graham Percy, David Bennett Books/Ragged Bears, 1 85602 059 2, £2.95

Four elegantly told animal fables, showing us in turn that collaboration is better than confrontation, that men of straw are not to be feared if you have the courage of your convictions, that it's advisable, when constructing something new, not to rush at it, and that if you don't choose to act when the moment is right then you'll pay for it later. I thought I might send copies of all four to the Department For Education.

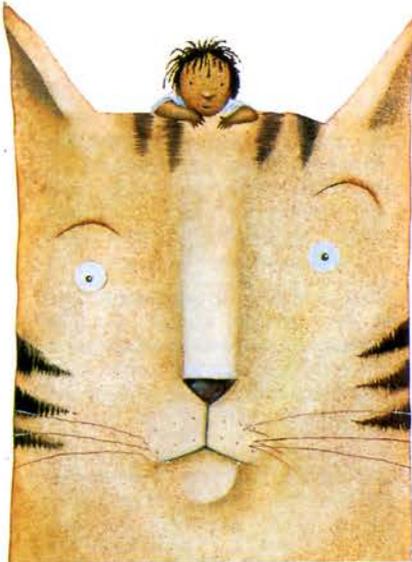
Finally, I come to my pick of the bunch:

Once Upon a Time, John Prater, with words by Vivian French, Walker, 0 7445 2252 8, £7.99

The Big Pets, Lane Smith, Viking, 0 670 83378 9, £8.99

The King of Spain's Daughter, Christine Gray, ill. Teresa Foster, Blackie, 0 216 93214 9, £8.50

I've decided to give my top accolade to these three, because, for me, these are books of outstanding quality. Although they are in some ways quite different, their similarity is that they each juxtapose, in a clever way, the ordinary with the unlikely. I think it is this which I found so compelling. In **Once Upon a Time** we have on each double-page spread the same country setting, with a cottage, fields and distant hills. In the cottage lives a small boy with his parents. As the day goes by the family follow their everyday routine as dad goes off to work, the sun comes up, the little boy rides his tricycle. So used to this is he that he takes in very little of the events which begin to unfold around him. But we see it all, and that is where the enjoyment and mounting excitement lie. The pictures are excellent, the telegraphic text perfect, the idea brilliant. We have here a classic, I'm sure, with an author-reader bond as strong as **Rosie's Walk**, and an intertextuality reminiscent of **The Jolly Postman**.



From **The Big Pets**.

It's ordinary enough for children to have pets, but in **The Big Pets** they are very big and the owners quite small. The central character, a small girl with a big cat, ventures out at night into a strange and surreal dream world. Lane Smith's illustrations are highly evocative, more symbolically powerful than in his **The True Story of the Three Little Pigs**, which is perhaps not surprising, since that was a work of parody. Here, however, we have an allegory. Cats, of course, drink milk, and it's milk that is the life-sustaining force throughout the book. This is a tale of longing, and escape to a world where children will be safe.

Woven round the classic nursery rhyme 'I had a little nut tree, nothing would it bear', **The King of Spain's Daughter** (which isn't actually published until July, but I *had* to include it) is a quite hilarious piece of comedy. An ordinary boy, living in an ordinary house with an ordinary mum and dad, opens his front door to find that a rather more than ordinary girl has called to play. She happens to be the daughter of the King of Spain. The little princess does indeed play with the little boy, happily if somewhat awkwardly in her regal attire, and is just sitting down to 'tea' (fish fingers and chips) when her dad, accompanied by the whole panoply of the medieval Spanish court, arrives to take her home. The narrative throughout is down to earth ("So that's your old nut tree," she said'), which of course adds to the humour.

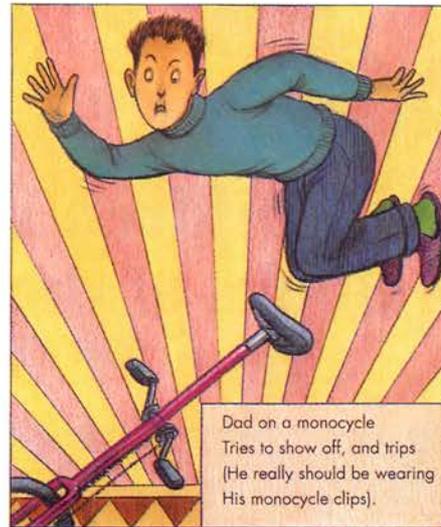
Well, that's just about it - some 30 titles in all. I'm sorry about the other 170. I'll just pluck three more from the pile, almost, but not quite, at random . . . it's hard to be ruthless, isn't it?

Another Custard Pie, Roger McGough, ill. Graham Percy, HarperCollins, 0 00 193742 1, £8.99

The Pied Piper of Hamelin, Robert Browning, ill. Andre Amstutz, Orchard, 1 85213 414 3, £8.99

Introducing Picasso, Juliet Heslewood, Little, Brown, 0 316 90470 8, £8.99

Here's Graham Percy again, straight from his fables, illustrating **Another Custard Pie**, a Roger McGough joke about the circus running away to join a little boy (yes, I've got it the right way round). Imagine a lion in your wardrobe, a seal in the bath and a Big Top in the living room. The whole family get involved. Mum does backward flips on a galloping pony, Dad falls off the monocycle because *he's*

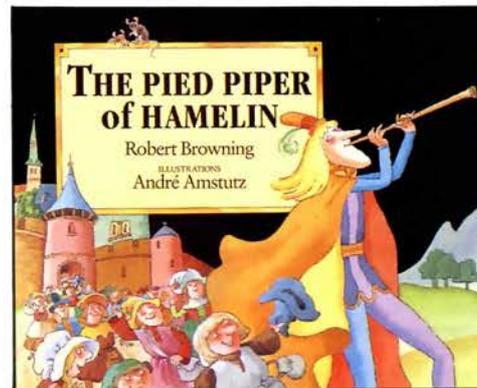


From **Another Custard Pie**.



'Is this your royal carriage?' she asked.

From **The King of Spain's Daughter**.



not wearing his monocycle clips and the house becomes a shambles. (See why I couldn't leave it out?) It all becomes too much for the boy because there's nothing left for tea except . . . yes, you've guessed it. And here's André Amstutz, straight from 'Funnybones', attractively illustrating **The Pied Piper of Hamelin** with busy, lively pictures, though I was surprised that the Transylvanian tribe ending was cut out. Finally, here's Pablo Picasso illustrating a picture book about himself. And not a bad artist either! Everyone who's seen this information book for juniors on my desk has been attracted to it. An excellent idea, suggesting untold possibilities. At the end of his life Picasso said 'That's enough isn't it? What more need I do? What can I add to all that? Everything is said.' I was startled to come across these words in **Introducing Picasso**, because that's exactly how I'm feeling right now. ●

Jeff Hynds is a major figure in the movement to promote 'real' reading. Some time ago he retired from Thames Polytechnic in South London, where he ran a famous reading course, to begin a new career as a freelance lecturer. He's now much in demand for in-service work with teachers all over Britain.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

Children's Books of the Year 1993



Detail from the front cover.

Alas, Julia Eccleshare's last year as selector, introducer and writer-up – and in each capacity she's never been on better form. Generous, sharp-eyed and deft, her annotations are as incisive as ever. So is her Introduction which takes the DFE and You-Know-Who roundly to task for misdemeanours all too familiar to BfK readers. 'Trumpets must be blown for children's books as never before if high standards are to be maintained,' she writes . . . and few have blown them more effectively than Julia.

Congratulations to her, to Andersen Press (who sponsor the publication) and to the Children's Book Foundation on another excellent edition. Next year, Madeleine Lindley takes over with a panel of 12 readers in support. They have a hard act to follow.

Copies, price £4.99, available from the Children's Book Foundation, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ, or 'phone 081 870 9055.

Catalog Llyfrau Plaant A Phobl Ifainc

. . . or The Catalogue of Welsh Books for Children is now available in a version updated from the 1991 original. 2,400 titles, arranged alphabetically within simple categories and with detailed indexes, have been compiled by William and Glenys Howells – both for leisure reading and educational needs. English annotations have been added to help non-Welsh-speaking parents.

'Un ysblennydd ac yn cynnwys llyfrau gyda'r gorau a gynhyrchir mewn unrhyw wlad' says BfK (with a little help from Gwerfyl Pierce Jones, Director of the Welsh Books Council).

For further information, contact Menna Lloyd Williams, Children's Book Dept, Welsh Books Council, Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 2JB.



MARGARET MAHY HONOURED

The Order of New Zealand, the country's highest honour, has been awarded to Margaret Mahy. Limited to twenty living people at any time, the Order brackets her with such celebrated New Zealanders as Sir Edmund Hillary and Janet Frame . . . recognition, indeed, of the contribution she's made to Children's Literature.

The recipient of the Esther Glen Award four times over, and twice of the UK's equivalent, the Carnegie Medal – for *The Haunting* (1982) and *The Changeover* (1984) – Margaret Mahy is equally celebrated in America where her books have often been chosen as ALA Notables and Best Books of the Year. To date, her work has also been translated into 15 languages.

For BfK's own tribute to one of the world's most distinguished writers for young people, see our Authorgraph in BfK 24 (January 1984) written when she was between Carnegie Medals. All readers will join us, we're sure, in offering warmest congratulations.

A VISIT TO GREEN KNOWE

Have you ever wanted to 'enter' a book – to visit Frances Hodgson Burnett's Mistlethwaite Manor, for instance, or the bridge where Christopher Robin played pooh-sticks, or (perish the thought) Blyton's Kirrin Island? Chances are the reality would fall a long way short of the literary . . . except, maybe, in the case of Lucy M Boston's famous manor-house, Green Knowe. Situated at Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire and reputedly the oldest continuously inhabited house in England, much of the Norman original remains – with its 3ft thick walls and round-headed windows. It's now open for visitors – at a charge of £2.50 per adult and £1.50 per child, but with a minimum tour charge of £7.50.

The tour includes much that's instantly recognisable from the Green Knowe novels – the green topiary deer in the garden, for example, or the bamboo grove which was where the *Stranger at Green Knowe* hid. Best of all, perhaps, especially if left till last, is the famous attic described so lovingly in *The Children of Green Knowe*:

'Here there was a room under the roof, with a ceiling the shape of the roof and all the beams showing . . . There were windows on three sides . . . a low bed . . . covered with a patchwork quilt . . . and lots of smooth, polished, empty floor. At one side there was a beautiful old rocking-horse-not a 'safety' rocking-horse . . . but a horse whose legs were stretched to full gallop, fixed to long rockers so that it could, if you rode it violently, both rear and kick. By the bed was a wooden box painted vermilion with bright patterns all over it . . . A wicker bird-cage hung from one of the beams . . . On the chest of drawers Tolly had seen . . . an ebony mouse, life-sized with shiny black eyes. It was so cleverly carved you could see every hair, and it felt like fur to stroke.'

Tempted? For full details, and to make an appointment, phone Diana Boston on 0480 463134. All proceeds contribute to the manor's upkeep.

Warmly recommended, too, is *Memories* (see ad. on this page), Lucy M Boston's own account of her life and work . . . and the house that inspired both. The book combines all her autobiographical writings with a linking passage by her son, and illustrator, Peter Boston, and an introduction by Jill Paton Walsh.

READING READING . . .



As part of the celebrations of its quarter-century, the Reading and Language Centre, University of Reading – now directed by Dr Viv Edwards – holds a Conference at Bulmershe Court, Reading on Saturday, 25th September 1993.

Programme to include:

Aidan Chambers – '25 Years of Children's Literature'

Workshop sessions with Tony Martin, Judith Nicholls, Anne Rowe and others

'Writing for children today' – discussion between a group of people concerned with books for young people, including Malorie Blackman, Wendy Cooling, Judith Nicholls, Chris Powling, Philip Pullman and Ira Saxena

Michael Rosen – 'Looking to the future'

For full information, contact Prue Goodwin (address and telephone number below).

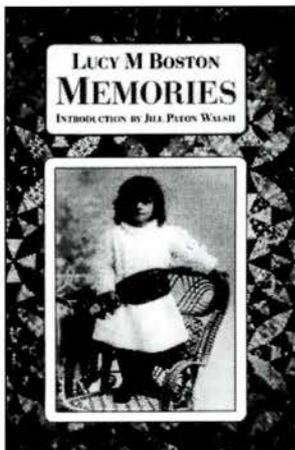
Also on offer on Saturday, 12th June 1993 from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm is: 'Reading the Curriculum' – the implications for schools of the new recommendations for reading in the National Curriculum for English. Speakers: Sue Horner (Professional Officer for English, NCC), Wendy Body (consultant on the teaching of reading), and Andrew Taylor (English Review Team, NCC).

Application form from Reading and Language Information Centre, University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Reading RG6 1HY (tel: 0734 318820). Conference fee: £15.00

Available, too, from Reading, and sponsored by the W H Smith Group, are three new Parent Teacher Guides:

- * **Helping children with reading** (price 30p)
- * **Helping children with spelling** (price 40p)
- * **Children with reading difficulties** (price 60p)

The pamphlets are available from the Reading and Language Information Centre (address above). Discounts can be negotiated on bulk orders.



MEMORIES by LUCY M BOSTON

Author of the
best-selling
'Green Knowe'
books.

£16.50

ISBN 0 905899 0 59

Lucy Boston's account of her childhood and the restoration of The Manor, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon, the setting for her books. The house and garden are now open to visitors where you can literally 'step into' her books.

MEMORIES is available from booksellers or from Colt Books Ltd, 9 Clarendon Road, Cambridge CB2 2BH.

Their Choice Too . . .

From the Children's Book Foundation, and sponsored by Random House, comes our choice: **Good Reads Recommended by Teenagers** – 74 titles assessed by the very readership to whom they're addressed (a rare occurrence with children's books). Fresh, honest and lively, the publication should also be required reading for those of us who review on their behalf!

Available, at £1.00 a copy, from the Children's Book Foundation (on page opposite).

BABIES NEED BOOKS – THE BOOKSTART REPORT

What, the Children's Book Foundation *again*? This time in association with Birmingham Library Services and South Birmingham Health Authority, the CBF offers **The Bookstart Report** – the culmination of the pilot stage of what's potentially a nationwide project to encourage early reading development. Bookstart packs containing a poetry card, local information on libraries and book-clubs, a booklist, a poster and a bookmark were given to parents by health visitors at the time of routine checks on nine-month-old babies (with outstanding success, according to the Report . . . not least because the packs overcame some of the factors that inhibit many parents).

Full details available from the Children's Book Foundation.

FOR THE STAFFROOM BOOKSHELF

Looking at Pictures in Picture Books, Jane Doonan, Thimble Press, 0 903355 40 X, £8.50

At last! A full-length text for teachers which takes picture-books seriously as Art Objects. Jane Doonan offers close scrutiny of particular books

and illustrations, provides instant INSET on drawing and painting techniques that's perfectly accessible to readers with no background in Fine Art (including a very handy Summary of Useful Terms), deftly links her recommendations with Nat. Curriculum Objectives and throws in, for good measure, a carefully annotated list of further reading. What more could we ask?

Well . . . a slightly longer book, perhaps. So anxious is the author to establish the aesthetic and intellectual credentials of picture-books as proper subjects of study at both primary and secondary level, she risks shunting the whole enterprise into Pseud Corner. You'd never guess from this what a *chore* illustration can be (ask Raymond Briggs). Why, for instance, aren't we shown a standard 32-page grid – the basic layout that torments, and inspires, every picture-book artist? Why doesn't she develop more fully picture-book roots in line-drawing, in the political cartoon, in comic books . . . not to mention the obvious connection with *cinema*? This wider approach would have offset her neglect of a crucial picture-book ingredient – what Brian Alderson calls 'the flow of the images'.

This said, the best possible person to rectify this weakness and write that longer text remains Jane Doonan herself. Till she does so, no one who values illustration and the contribution it makes to a child's Art Education can afford to overlook this groundbreaking book.

The People in the Playground, Iona Opie, Oxford, 0 19 811265 3, £15.95



Rude, funny and heart-warming, this write-up of almost three years' fieldwork in the playground of a Hampshire school reveals, in all their gory glory, those aspects of childhood which few children's authors dare depict . . . except Roald Dahl, maybe. In her exploration of the jokes, wisecracks and patter which children keep so cannily out of the teacher-on-duty's earshot, Iona Opie celebrates nothing less than the lure, persistence and purposes of storytelling itself. A truly marvellous book. ●

Chris Powling

QUICKNESS ON THE DRAW

Scoular Anderson on teach-yourself-illustration books

One fine day I went out with my sketchbook under my arm and a nicely sharpened pencil in my top pocket. I had not gone very far when a wicked wizard leapt out from behind a rock. 'Out of my way, politically incorrect creep!' I said, artistically waving the wizard aside with an HB. The wizard raised a hand and 'Vroomsh!' a spell was cast and, to my horror, I found I'd forgotten everything I knew about drawing.



However, being a resourceful soul, I headed straight for my local library where I was sure I'd find manuals on how to draw. But the wizard had another trick up his sleeve – he would make such books the most reviled things in the universe.

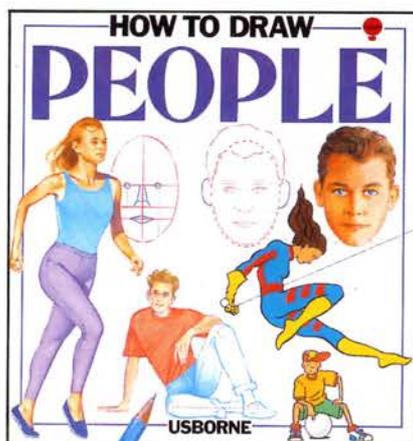
And lo, it was so. As I left the library, people pointed at the volumes I had under my arm and said things like 'Really tacky, these how-to-draw books!' and 'I wouldn't be seen dead giving one of those to my child!'

Now this puzzled me. What is the mysterious difference between a How-to-draw book and a My-first-recipe-book or Ten-easy-to-make-dinosaur-models? Was it because drawing is ART, something that floats invisibly through the ether like a virus and you either catch it or you don't?

I picked up my pencil, ready to be inspired but not daunted. I didn't want too much of the 'first-draw-two-egg-shapes-touching-at-one-end'. I wanted encouragement, but also to be able to stop and take a breather. Above all, I wanted results, FAST.

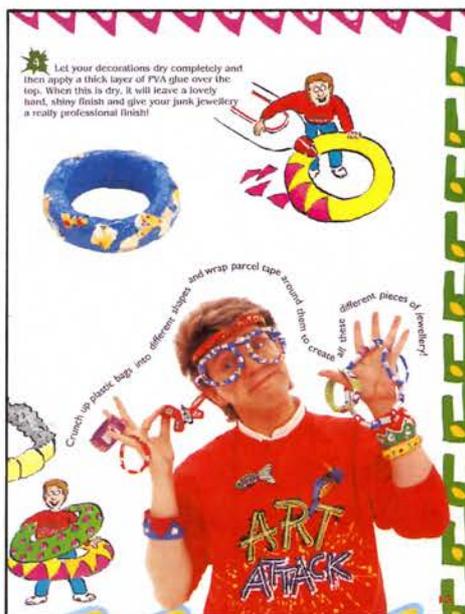
Each book in the 'Draw 50' series by Kingfisher starts off solemnly with a page addressed 'To the Reader' then falls silent. Thereafter it follows the step-by-step approach very much in the 'first-draw-two-eggs' mould. I'd be quite happy to draw one horse, let alone 50. It was a bit like being told to sit at the piano and play scales for a couple of hours ... a bit dry and best for oldies with stamina.

After that, Usborne's 'How to Draw' titles fairly exploded in an avalanche of images and facts. Written and put together by different teams, they vary enormously. For example, **People**, **Horses** and **Spacecraft** are for adept teenagers (some of the air-brush and perspective techniques would even tax an art student), while **Dinosaurs and Prehistoric Life**, **Monsters**, and **Ghosts, Vampires and Haunted Houses** are better suited for younger



readers. All books in the series explain about materials and effects in a lively, have-a-bash style. And if you get tired they're good simply to read and look at.

Rolf Harris and Neil Buchanan gaze out from their TV tie-in covers, mouths wide as if shrieking with creative joy. Dipping into **Rolf Harris's Your Cartoon Time** and **Your Animation Time** (both from Hodder & Stoughton), I found myself saying 'Never mind all this text and philosophy, I want to DRAW!' In one book there are 30 pages of tight text, almost unleavened by pictures or paragraphs. To be fair, the latter is about making films – a highly technical subject ... and a reasonable standard of drawing would be a prerequisite. Rolf Harris's enthusiastic TV style doesn't transfer easily to these books, but there are plenty of ideas for older children or children/adults with nimble brains and patience.



From Art Attack.

Neil Buchanan's **Art Attack** (Hodder & Stoughton) is filled with excitingly messy concepts – instant coffee and PVA (wicked!) – bandages and paint in squidgy bottles (Wow!). I didn't learn how to draw, but I could make bangles and fat spiders and do fancy lettering. Easy, fast and satisfying results providing plenty of sticky fun for younger children with minimum adult meddling.

Frank Rodgers has written three how-to-draw books for Hippo – **Cartoon Fun**, **Animal Art** and **Comic Fun**. The first leads the reader on at an exhilarating pace, the text is minimal and the examples not dauntingly glamorous, Pencil at the ready, I felt comfy and confident. The other two books are in the same style, but slightly more advanced. All three are user-friendly and funny.



'Well,' said the wizard, chewing on a sliver of putty-rubber, 'Did you find the ANSWER?' The answer, I told him, is as illusive as ever, which is the nature of art. What makes these books such a draw ... is their offer of bright hope. A few readers might make that leap from copying to creativity – others can go for Frank Rodgers' get-out clause, 'If you can't draw these figures in your own way ... just copy them.' Phew, what a relief! It's just fun taking part, as they say. ●

Book details:

'Draw 50' series, by Lee J Ames, Kingfisher, £3.50 and £3.99

'How to Draw' series, Usborne

People, 0 7460 0999 2, £4.50; 0 7460 0998 4, £2.95 pbk

Horses, 0 7460 1001 X, £4.50; 0 7460 1000 1, £2.95 pbk

Spacecraft, 0 7460 0294 7, £3.95; 0 7460 0293 9, £2.95 pbk

Dinosaurs and Prehistoric Life, 0 7460 0674 8, £4.50; 0 7460 0673 X, £2.95 pbk

Monsters, 0 7460 0082 0, £3.95; 0 7460 0081 2, £2.95

Ghosts, Vampires and Haunted Houses, 0 7460 0292 0, £3.95; 0 7460 0291 2, £2.95 pbk

There are many more titles in the series, together with some combined volumes.

Your Cartoon Time (0 340 39223 1) and **Your Animation Time** (0 340 56160 2), Rolf Harris, Hodder & Stoughton, £2.99 each

Art Attack, Neil Buchanan, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 58372 X, £3.99

Cartoon Fun (0 590 76422 5, £2.95), **Animal Art** (0 590 76476 4, £5.95; 0 590 76564 7, £2.99 pbk) and **Comic Fun** (0 590 54049 1, £7.99; 0 590 55112 4, £2.99 pbk), Frank Rodgers, Scholastic/Hippo

Scoular Anderson taught Art in secondary school before becoming a full-time illustrator. His own latest book is **Puzzling People**, Puffin, 0 14 034796 8, £2.99 pbk, and just published is his fourth Harry book on which he collaborates with **Bfk's** Editor – **Harry Moves House**, A & C Black, 0 7136 3701 3, £4.99.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Margaret Clark on Writing for Children

Robert Hull on the Language of History Books

Julia Eccleshare on the Rise of the Paperback Original

David Bennett on the Fiction of Teresa Tomlinson

Alison Leonard on Those Lists ...

plus Pete Johnson in Authorgraph and reviews, reviews, reviews ...