

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

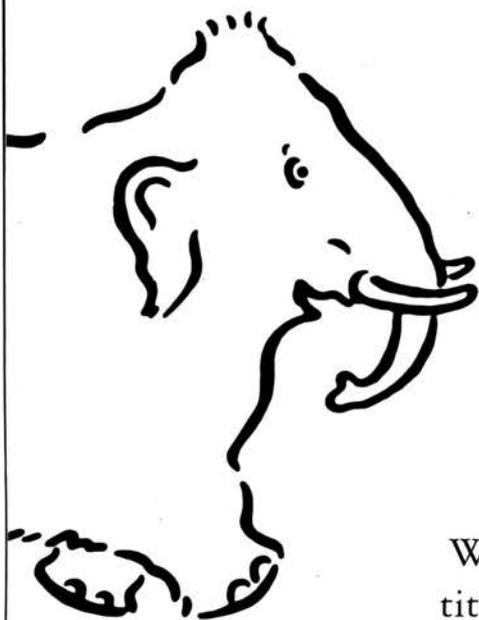
July 1993 No. 81
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the children's book magazine

EXTRACTAFACTOZOTL
OOGIE-WOOGIE-BOO ... AND MORE



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 (by George Smith) on our front cover this month is taken from Pete Johnson's **Everything Changes** (see Authorgraph on centre-spread for details).

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

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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EDITOR'S PAGE



Storytelling, in one form or another, crops up over and over again in this issue. On pages 4-5, Helen Cresswell celebrates the career of Eileen Colwell – librarian, anthologist and an outstanding purveyor of what a friend of mine calls 'out-loud' fiction. Margaret Clark's piece 'Writing for Children' (pages 6-7) addresses some of the fundamentals of the written-down version... while Julia Eccleshare (pages 26-27) looks at the rise of the Paperback Original as a marketing device. Pete Johnson, the subject of our Authorgraph (centre-spread), actually co-opts some of his readers into the creative process – an acknowledgement of consumer-rights to which, in a different way, Robert Hull also draws attention on pages 22-24 where he discusses current approaches to information texts for children. His specific focus is history – which re-appears, in fiction-mode, on our back page with David Bennett's enthusiastic account of the novels of Theresa Tomlinson.

'What?' do I hear you cry. 'Nothing in this issue about those lists, Chris?' Thanks for reminding me. Since it's always been BfK policy to give the Secretary of State for Education every opportunity to improve himself, he should turn at once to Peter Hunt's 'Blindspot' on page 25 and Alison Leonard's 'Writer Reply' on page 29 for a hint-or-two about the *personal* nature of reading response. Or, of course, he need look no further than the foot of this page where, with *The Guardian's* permission, we re-print a letter it published on May 19th. Since then, I gather, both Rumer Godden and Pat Hutchins have added their names.

Mind you, it's surprising who we've got on our side these days. Here's an extract

from a piece in *The Times*, on 10th May, by John Marenbom explaining why he felt obliged to resign from SEAC:

'Traditionalists like myself might be tempted to feel regret at giving up the chance to ensure that all children are introduced to some of the great literacy classics. We should not be. Once the principle of prescription is accepted, another government might use it to impose a very different and less edifying set of books. And, in any case, the love of literature is not something which can be instilled to order.'

To which BfK can only reply 'Welcome aboard, John. What kept you?'

Who knows, maybe we're getting our message across after all.

Enjoy the issue.

BUT NO... AUTHOR?

In Sally Grindley's report on the 1993 Mother Goose Award in our May issue, we mentioned that Kate Simpson is the illustrator of **But No Cheese!** (Hodder and Stoughton) but, inexplicably, omitted the name of the author. It's Saviour Pirota. Many apologies.

Letters to the Editor

Authors spurn school list

WE are writers whose names or works have been put on the new English National Curriculum lists.

We would like to dissociate ourselves from these lists for the following reasons:

1) In a democratic society, the distribution of literature is informed by open debate. This enables readers to engage with the arguments recommending or disapproving of any given work. However, this list comes without any critical commentary and yet it is armed with commands that our books should be read. We reject this authoritarian approach to reading.

2) The compilers, though acting as literary arbiters, are largely anonymous and inaccessible, so distancing themselves from open debate.

3) These lists will not contribute to teachers' understanding and enthusiasm for literature as their choice of books in schools would largely be a consequence of obeying orders from on high.

4) No matter how flexible these lists may seem to be, they dictate a view of what a

national literary heritage ought to be. They are unrepresentative of many cultural traditions that have prevailed in the past or are important today. In any case, we reject the attempt to use literature to express notions of a national heritage when writing has always consisted of a mosaic of international traditions and forms.

5) If we are "approved" authors, then by implication, other writers are "not approved". We do not wish to be part of such a blanket, uncritical rejection of fellow writers.

6a) These lists are part of the new education policy which involves: i) a crude enforcement of spoken and written standard English, which incidentally, was tried before the last war and failed then.

ii) testing at 7, 11, and 14 in order to stream children and select them for the new grammar schools. This approach has also been tried in the past and was seen to reject and fail the majority of children.

iii) testing, streaming and selection as a means by which large numbers of children receive less attention and fewer resources.

6b) We resent the fact that our work has been co-opted for these policies.

7) If authors and works are to be recommended to teachers – or for that matter rejected – then there are other ways of doing so, more in spirit with literature itself. There is, at present, a public and open discussion about books for children being conducted in universities, conferences, seminars, critical works, journals, associations and parent organisations. If money is to be spent on aiding the reading of books in schools, then it would be much better directed at encouraging what is already in place, assisting the circulation of information and raising the profile of all literature written expressly for, or simply suitable for, young people of all ages.

Joan Aiken, Antonia Barber, Jill Bennett, Ruth Brown, Helen Cresswell, Kevin Crossley-Holland, Michael Foreman, Leon Garfield, Grace Hallworth, Gene Kemp, Clive King, Michelle Magorian, Beverly Naidoo, Brian Patten, Henry Pluckrose, Michael Rosen, Ian Serailier, Catherine Storr.

LIBRARIAN FOR LIFE

Helen Cresswell writes about EILEEN COLWELL



Eileen Colwell

'Stories are still a main delight,
Man being still a child.'

John Masefield wrote this in *So Long to Learn*. He was one of my childhood heroes, but I had not read this book until Eileen Colwell lent it to me. It is an account of the poet's life-long passion for story and, above all, storytelling, which he regarded as the oldest and most honourable of arts. He even (rare, this, for a published and best-selling writer) half deplored the advent of printing. Until then story had been a living, fluid thing; cold print fixed it, like a fly in amber. Worse, it made the storyteller self-conscious, tempted to attach more importance to his own style than to the story itself.

Masefield, with the help of Gilbert Murray and others, established the Oxford Recitations, an annual festival of the spoken word, and he discovered – naturally – Eileen Colwell.

The borrowed copy of *So Long to Learn* is personally inscribed for Eileen and this, with other books and over 100 letters, is among her most prized possessions. John Masefield heard of her gifts as a storyteller and wrote to ask if he might come and hear her. He would sit in the back row, he said, and promised not to talk or be naughty. And so he did, beginning a friendship that lasted till his death.

Eileen would visit him at his home near Oxford, and she remembers his upright bearing, white hair and keen blue eyes. She would sit by him on a stool, and as the pair talked stories, heads bent together, Masefield's wife, who was very deaf, would hover anxiously, now and then darting forward to say to heedless ears, 'Now, John, you've had enough!' When it came to talk about storytelling neither John Masefield nor Eileen Colwell could ever have enough. And the poet, from that first time he heard her, recognised Eileen as a master of her art. When he was unable to attend the John Masefield Storytelling Festival in Canada it was Eileen he sent in his place, and with her a personal message for her to read on his behalf. Every year on her birthday he would send a cake specially ordered from Devonshire.

I know all this because I have been visiting Eileen recently at her home in Loughborough. By a cruel irony she has almost lost her sight, and the



'Miss Eileen Colwell, F.L.A., of Hendon, England, telling stories at Boys and Girls House during the John Masefield Story-Telling Festival.'

books she loves so much are now forever closed to her. Even the Talking Books which are such a godsend to the blind are a mixed pleasure for her.

'They tend to irritate me rather.'

Of course they do. The words were written for print, not for telling. How they must grate, however sensitively read, on that impeccable ear! Any reader knows that there are problems in listening to the uncut text of a book. Reading is an intensely personal and mysterious process, it includes skipping or glancing, a dwelling on certain phrases and passages. There is a sense in which you cannot read a book for someone any more than you can eat a meal for them.

And Eileen Colwell is no ordinary reader. She has spent a lifetime picking out the bones of a good story from a mess of verbiage. The onward flow and rhythm of story is an instinct, an extra sense she has. No one who has ever heard her storytelling or seen the rapt attention of her listeners can doubt that.

How did it all begin, one wonders, how did she come to recognise her rare gift? Like all children she loved to hear stories, but unlike most she also loved to tell them. The third of four children, she remembers going hand in hand with her younger sister, Vera, on expeditions deep into the countryside surrounding their home. As they went Eileen would tell stories – and that, no doubt, not simply to keep her little sister docile, but for the sheer joy of the telling.

It was when Eileen went to the splendid public library at Hendon that her work really began. She built up, almost from scratch, a library for children. Even then, at 23, she was no ordinary librarian, and from early photographs one can detect a rare poise, a determined glint in her eye. Having fought for her library, she set about making it an irresistible attraction for her young readers. She involved them, for instance, in the day-to-day running of the library, issuing and stamping books, checking the shelves. And she told stories.

'It's my library, and I'll read if I want to!' one can almost hear her saying. At her previous library in Bolton storytelling was frowned upon – as it still is, in some quarters, by what Masefield wittingly described as the 'half-baked'. Eileen has marked in pencil this passage in her copy of *So Long to Learn*:

'Even a very little joy is worth having in a world such as this, at this time.'

'In any case the children to whom lovely stories are as necessary as pure air, would be glad of them, and having heard (or watched) such tellings, would try to do something of the sort for themselves, and discover much in the attempt.'

Eileen was in Hendon during the war years. She has photographs of children in short trousers, and pixie hoods, sitting entranced in the blacked-out library.

'There was nothing else for them,' she says. 'It was all they had.'

All! Today's children have sports centres, television, computers and video games. They are starved of stories – and those such as they do meet are in danger of having been prescribed for them by government.

'Which are your favourite stories?' I ask, remembering for a moment that I am here not solely for my own enjoyment, but to gather material for this piece.

There are so many – Wanda Gaag's 'Gone is Gone', Eleanor Farjeon's 'Elsie Piddock Skips in her Sleep', Haldane's 'My Friend Mr Leaky' and

'The Magic Umbrella'.

This last was by Rose Fyleman, but ended up being by Eileen Colwell and assorted children. It grew and changed in the re-telling, even its ending changed. Eileen and the children changed it between them.

That is the joy of being a storyteller. One does not sit alone with a blank sheet of paper writing stories that in some distant future may be read and shared by others. As storyteller, you and your story are one, and you are here, now. Like the Ancient Mariner you must rivet your audience, fix them with your glittering eye. And the Ancient Mariner was only trying to catch the attention of a wedding guest, not a disparate bunch of fidgeting children who nowadays, we are told, have an attention span drastically reduced by the fast-moving films and videos they watch. Children, in any case, have always had a notoriously low boredom threshold.

But Eileen knows how to hook them, here, now. And having hooked them she can play them for five, ten, fifteen minutes and still have them clamouring for more. She can make them believe the impossible without benefit of Spielberg special effects. There can be few more unlikely tales than that of 'My Friend Mr Leaky', which features a servant who is an octopus. After one telling a group of boys came to Eileen and asked for Haldane's address in London. They wanted to write to him and request a visit to meet his octopus. When she told the story of a ghost who had been frozen, and then sent to a Deep Freeze Warehouse in London for storage, there were demands for the telephone number of this establishment – a suitable destination for a school visit, perhaps?

There are, of course, pitfalls, as anyone who visits schools will know. My own personal nightmare scenario was a row of infants sitting at the front, each with a taut, over-inflated balloon, on which tiny fingers and nails were restlessly rubbing and scratching. Eileen once paused for dramatic effect, and in the expectant silence one infant solemnly piped up 'When my auntie came to stay with me she fell out of bed in the middle of the night'.

They do not have this kind of thing to contend with at the Royal Court or the National.

Eileen wanted to read 'Elsie Piddock' at an International Conference of Storytelling in America. She rang Eleanor Farjeon to ask permission, and received an invitation to visit her.

And so Eileen went to Hampstead, to the converted stables with the little blue door, and found Eleanor Farjeon living in the loft among sagging furniture and piles of books. She had tea with her, and the talk was so fascinating it did not matter that the milk jug was thick with dust. So began another friendship.

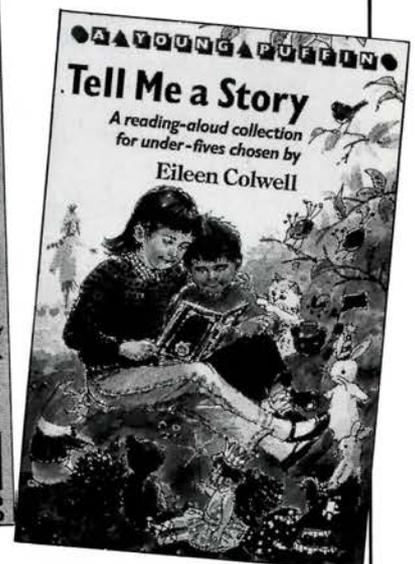
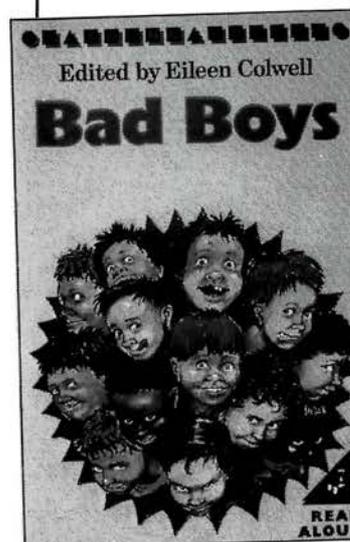
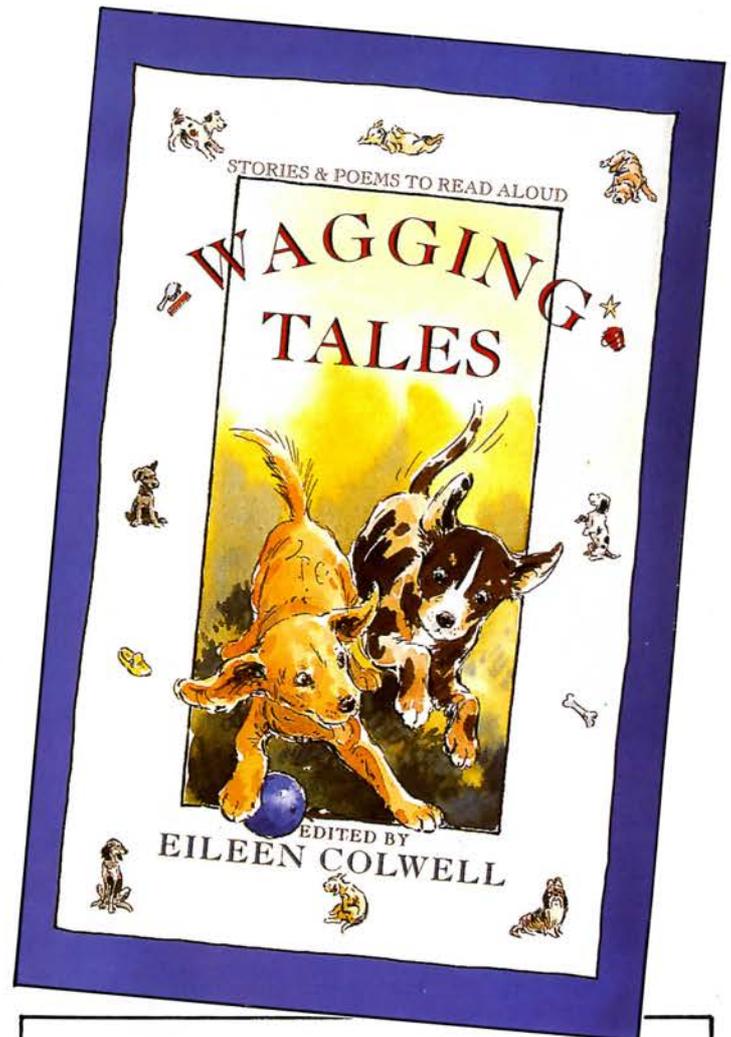
Soon Eileen's influence and reputation was reaching far beyond Hendon. She wrote articles, spoke at conferences, and for many years was the unofficial, unpaid representative of Great Britain on the international Hans Andersen Award, travelling to meetings on the continent at her own expense. Her Puffin anthologies of stories have sold over a million copies. She also produced four volumes of *A Storyteller's Choice* – an invaluable guide for any storyteller, amateur or professional. These books were published by The Bodley Head but are unbelievably, since the Random House takeover, out-of-print.

Perhaps the time is now ripe for their reprinting. There's a slow but definite revival of the art of storytelling. In Nottinghamshire, where I live, children's librarians are being trained in it. In June there was the inaugural Conference of the Society of Storytellers, in Birmingham. Eileen has been approached by the organisers, by a younger generation of storytellers who know there is a master in their midst and they had better learn what they can from her.

One of them has already visited her. He was much influenced as a child, he says, by Masefield's *Midnight Folk*. So now he will sit at her feet just as she sat at Masefield's, and there will be eager, endless discussion of stories and the secrets of telling them. Full circle. ●



'Children in short trousers, and pixie hoods, sitting entranced in the blacked-out library.'



Eileen Colwell's anthologies from Puffin:

- Bad Boys*, 0 14 030530 0, £3.50
- High Days and Holidays*, 0 14 032300 7, £2.99
- Tell Me a Story*, 0 14 030159 3, £2.99
- Tell Me Another Story*, 0 14 030210 7, £3.99
- Time for a Story*, 0 14 030282 4, £2.99
- More Stories to Tell*, 0 14 031062 2, £2.99

From Viking in October this year will come two further collections: *Cats in a Basket* and *Wagging Tales*.

John Masefield's *So Long to Learn: Chapters of an Autobiography* was published in 1952 by Heinemann. *Midnight Folk* (also from Heinemann) was published in 1927.

For information on the Society for Storytelling contact Joan Jones at 8 Bert Allen Drive, Old Leake, Boston, Lincs PE22 9LG.

Helen Cresswell has written over 80 books for children. Her latest, *Posy Bates and the Bag Lady*, is published by The Bodley Head (0 370 31764 5) at £7.99.

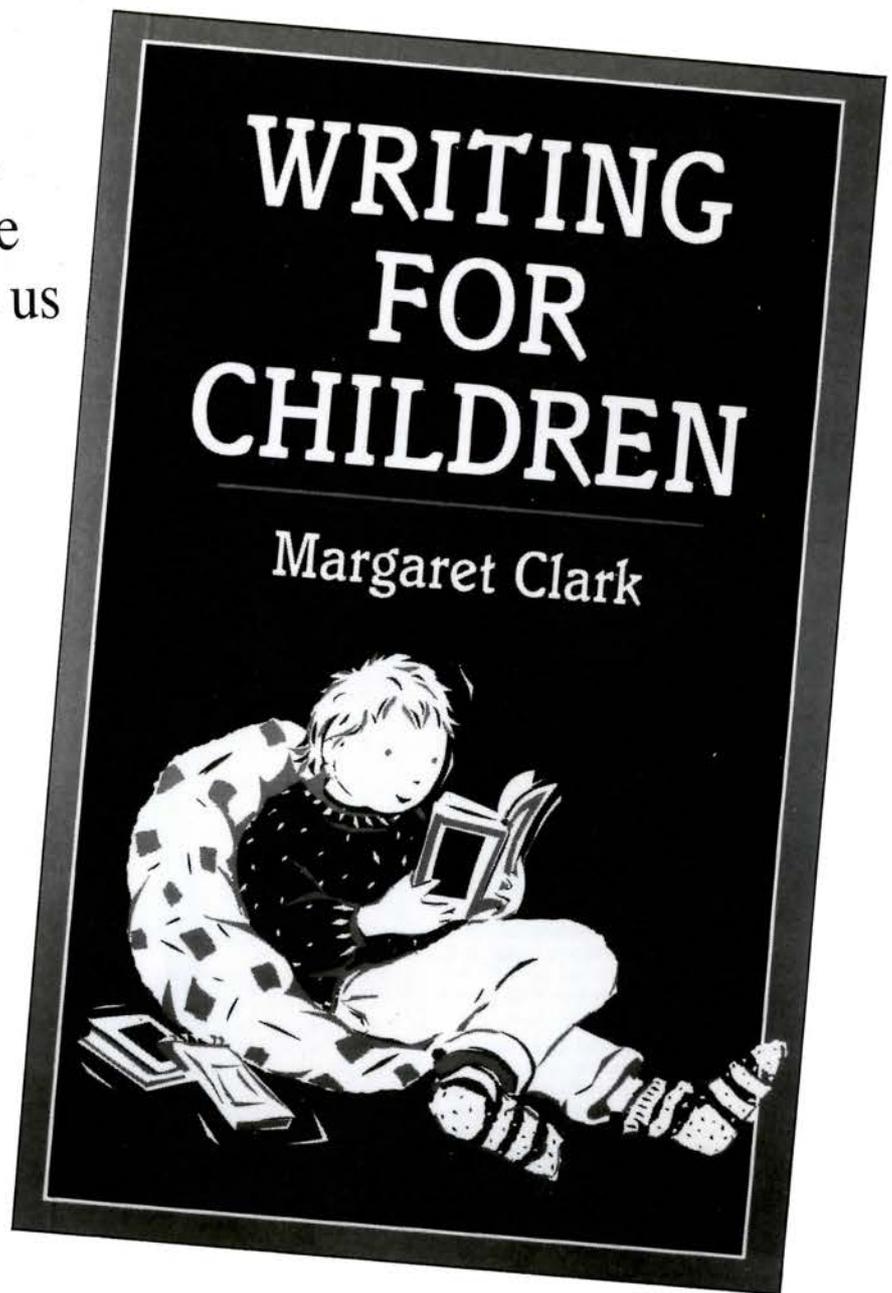
Margaret Clark, formerly Children's Book Editor for The Bodley Head, gives us a taste of her new book on –

Writing is hard work, and the hardest part of all is getting started, whether composing your first sentence or finding your first publisher. One of my favourite writers is Betsy Byars, because she so clearly enjoys her work and makes it look so easy. But even Betsy admitted:

'No project is undertaken with greater hope and a deeper sense of insecurity than the writing of a book. I once heard an author say, "I write the first sentence and trust to God Almighty for the second". And I'll never forget Robert Benchley telling that once when he couldn't think of anything to write, a friend told him to sit down at the typewriter, type the word "the" and wait. He did that, stared at the word "the" for an hour, typed "hell with it" and got up and left.'

That's a good story – but not the whole story. Before the writer sits down at the typewriter, or more likely switches on the WP, he has to have an *idea*. (I can't avoid the personal pronoun and use 'he' only because it's shorter than 'she'.) It may be no more than the shadowy figure of a person or an animal, a situation as yet undeveloped, an incident whose outcome the observer did not see; yet it must be something that so excites the writer, so fills his mind, he will not rest until he's found the exact words that will convey it to someone else. Without that driving force, writing becomes just a series of sentences, offering no incentive for the reader to make an effort to understand them.

It is taken for granted that would-be writers for adults write about what interests them or what they consider important. From the thousands of manuscripts I must have read when I worked for The Bodley Head, I found that many aspiring writers for children seemed to give little thought to the point of their stories. They choose (it still happens, I am told) themes of orphaned puppies or camping holidays or uncontrolled computer games or Hallowe'en witches simply because these are considered 'suitable for children' rather than something the writers care about or find interesting. That's why any publisher will tell you that reading the 'slush pile' is not difficult – almost from the first sentence you can tell whether the writer is seriously intent on transmitting to the reader's mind the loveliness of a character, the fascination of a certain



place, or the intriguing possibility of what will happen next.

Of course there is a paradox here, as in so much connected with children's books. I am not suggesting that the writer should have reached his second childhood and be concerned only with childish things before embarking on a story for children. I mean that he should be able to recapture the emotions of being a child or adolescent (as the late Robert Westall did so successfully in his first book, written for his son, *The Machine-Gunners*) and feel real enthusiasm for the subject matter of his tale. At the same time it's important to remember that today's children think and behave differently from yesterday's, and the writer must be aware of what they know now that previous generations didn't, what they don't know, and how they learn what they are being taught at school.

This was only one of the many aspects I knew I'd have to tackle when I agreed to contribute to A & C Black's series of 'Writing . . .' books. The enormity of the subject almost defeated me – after all, there are as many different kinds of book for children as there are for adults, but I kept remembering how

often I had wanted to expand the formal rejection letter that could say no more than 'not suitable for our list'. I decided to write the book in the only way I could, from the publisher's viewpoint, and this proved significant for it made me realise that the main differences between adults and children's books are in their publishing and marketing rather than their *writing*. Children's books are often bought not by their readers but by adults – parents, teachers, librarians, some of whom are dependent on public money for their spending power, but the paperback is an object children have raised to the status of desirable possession (it fits a child's pocket both literally and metaphorically), so I have briefly traced its development. I have included, with Black's help, a breakdown in percentages of a book's pricing – a topic about which there are many myths. By quoting statistics like the number of children's books in print in June 1992 (around 30,000) I have tried to show how much easier it is for both bookseller and buyer to choose a well-known classic such as *The Wind in the Willows* than a first book from an unknown writer – and that this is one very good reason for publishing in series. I have also tried to explain the

division between the publishing of text books and of children's picture story and information books, even though the latter are bought by schools and used both to teach and encourage reading and for the study of any subject from dinosaurs to vegetarian diets.

But I knew that, if my book were to have any readers, they would want, above all, a prescription for writing. Most people assume, rightly in my opinion, that for children they should write simply – but they go on to suppose that this entails limited vocabulary and spelling out every detail. Writing simply, I suggest, is writing lucidly and with care, so that your meaning is absolutely clear. You can find such writing in books of all kinds – the last novel I read, Rose Tremain's *Sacred Country*, is an excellent example – and you can use guidelines that apply generally, whoever your audience. The following precepts may sound old-fashioned, but they still work. Use the direct word in preference to the circumlocution; employ the transitive verb rather than the passive (thus eliminating many 'is's and 'was's); avoid the abstract word; use adverbs and adjectives sparingly. Avoid clichés; concentrate on meaning, so that your 'style' (your voice, unique to you) is not intrusive and nothing obstructs the connection between your mind and the reader's.

Many beginner writers also assume that the beginner reader needs long explanations and detailed background information before the story can start. On the contrary, the shorter the story (and most children's books, particularly for the younger age-group, are much shorter than adult books) the more important its shape and its pace. Young readers appear ready to accept any situation if it promises excitement and if the writer is serious about it. Ted Hughes writes 'The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff' and the reader is instantly alert. I write 'It was a sunny day at the end of June and it was Friday so the three children, Sophie, Simon and Peter, were at school and did not see the strange sight that would have met their eyes if they had been sitting on the warm turf at the top of the cliff that was just outside the village where they lived in a cottage with their mother who worked three days a week in the village shop (including Fridays, so she didn't see the strange sight either) and their father who . . .' and you can tell that my thoughts are all over the place – and so is the reader's attention. I've written down trivial chatter without thinking of focus, emphasis, or what I consider makes my story worth telling. And it is *storytelling* that characterises most books for children; yet here again narrative skill is the same craft, whatever the age of your reader. James Clavell, the very successful author of that blockbusting novel *Shogun*, said in a recent interview, 'The art of writing is rewriting. I wrote 850 pages and I had an editor in America who went through it line by line and taught me how to write tight. The first time you write a novel you go into ecstasy with the purple prose: how the clouds look, what the sunset is like. All bull. What

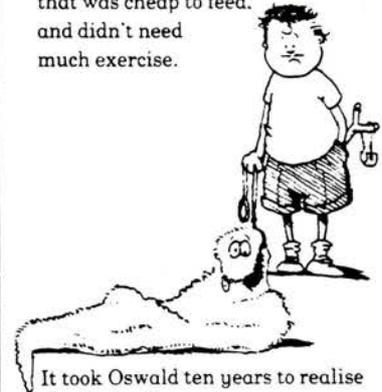
“What happens?
Who does what
to whom? That's
all you need.”
Writing tight;
paring down;
good advice for
a writer for
children who
must make
every word
count.’

happens? Who does what to whom? That's all you need.' Writing tight; paring down; good advice for a writer for children who must make every word count.

So what is different about writing a children's book? Of course, as the professionals explain, it is the viewpoint that is all-important, and everything follows from this. The writer needs to be able to view people, events, the world around us as they appear to a child, a child of today, at different ages and levels of development. Subject-matter, vocabulary, approach – all these things immediately become a matter of commonsense. Obviously there are practical considerations. You may find blank pages at the end of an adult novel, never at the end of a children's picture book – so the make-up of the book matters, and a picture-book story may have a better chance of acceptance if it is planned as a series of mini-chapters, each to make a satisfying double-spread of text and picture.

‘Writing is
hard work.’

When he was five, Oswald had begged his parents for a pet. They said that they would get him something quiet, that was cheap to feed, and didn't need much exercise.



It took Oswald ten years to realise that he had been given a pet carpet.

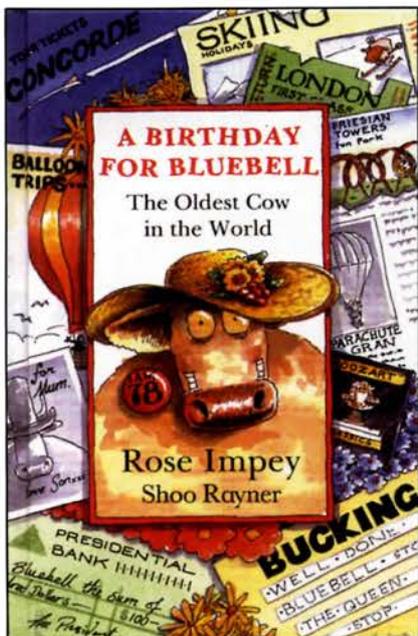
It was on the day that Oswald's father had the carpet put down that Oswald started being *really* mean.

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'In picture books and books for the beginning reader this 'flow of phrases' is especially significant, and the designer will try to arrange the text so that breaks in the sense come at the end of lines, where, if you were reading aloud, you might pause for effect or to take breath.'
From *Writing for Children*.

The easiest way of teaching (or advising) is by example, so in my book I've tried to analyse the texts of a picture book, a 'beginner reader', a story for the newly independent reader, a full-length novel for older children, a novel for teenagers, and an information book, hoping to show 'how it's done'. The creative process itself remains a mystery, although I did begin to see more clearly how this works. Having produced a synopsis for my publisher, I spent a happy time making notes. I did this for as long as I dare: anything to put off the job of giving them a logical shape. Then I'd take my dog for a walk and if the sun shone I'd come home with perfectly crafted phrases ringing in my head. When I typed them out, well . . . not so golden perhaps. Next day the sky would be grey and I knew what I'd written was rubbish. Oh, how I remembered the times I had spoken (as a publisher) about the loneliness of the writer. It is difficult, I learned bitterly, to be your own critic without losing your confidence altogether. That's really what an editor is there to provide – and I was fortunate to have a good one, who was calm and reassuring. But my respect for writers (whom I've always admired) has never been greater! ●

Margaret Clark's book, *Writing for Children* (0 7136 3736 6) is published by A & C Black at £7.99



This is the story of two interesting newcomers and some reliable old favourites.

From Puffin come the first four titles in their 'ready, steady, read!' series aimed at 4-7 year-olds. Stapled paperbacks are the order of the day here and I particularly liked *Cyril's Cat* by Shoo Rayner (0 14 036141 3, £3.50). Cyril is a lively old codger with an amiable pet cat named Charlie whose main aim in life is to find somewhere comfy to sleep. In both stories Charlie is at first discomfited but all is well in the end. Large, clear print and plenty of big pictures make this a terrific book for sharing with beginner readers.

Shoo Rayner features in the second new series, too, as the illustrator of Rose Impey's first four 'Animal Crackers' from Orchard Books, who claim to be trying to fill a 'black hole that currently exists for 5-7 year-olds'. The best of these is *A Birthday for Bluebell* (1 85213 455 0, £5.99). 'You're only as old as you feel' they say and this is certainly true for Bluebell. Life is great fun for the oldest cow in the world as she flies in Concorde at 73, hot air balloons at 74 and does a parachute jump at 75 but disaster strikes when she is given a TV set for her 77th birthday. She decides to slow down as she is now *old*; but her worried friends contrive a suitably happy ending and Bluebell looks forward to a spot of wind-surfing. The story progresses via narrative, speech bubbles and documents so there's much to look at and draw to the reader's attention and, of course, the moral is a sound one. Look out for the witty touches on the cover. The paperback is due in August.

The integration of text and illustration has been a feature of a number of series and it's particularly well used in Robin Kingsland's *Zoldo the Magnificent* (Viking 'Kites', 0 670 83600 1, £5.50). Plenty of witty wordplay and inventive page design in this tale of Windrush Gussett aka the magician Zoldo the Magnificent, his search for the Mysterious Hat Man who makes the most amazing Magic Top Hats in the world and his tangling with Milo Drumgooley the bungling jewel thief.

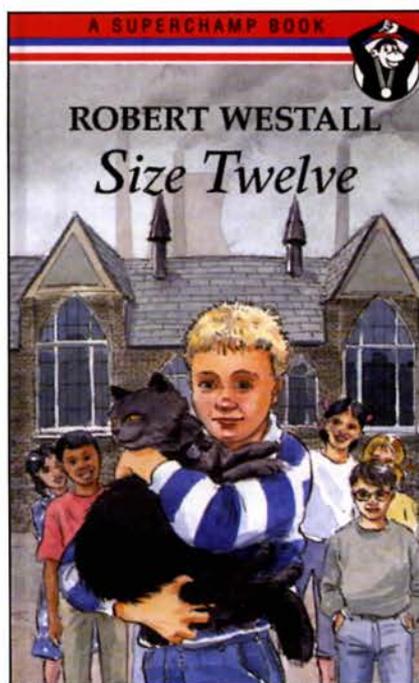
Moving up the age-range we come to *Cat's Eyes* (Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope', 0 241 13178 2, £4.99) by Narinder Dhami. Tony's life is doubly miserable as his pet cat is very ill and he's being bullied at school by the dreadful Grabber Dawkins. The decline and eventual death of Sam the cat is sensitively handled and the school scenes have the ring of truth. If the finding of the black stray, her help in the defeat of

STEVE ROSSON

reviews some of
the latest
SERIES
TITLES

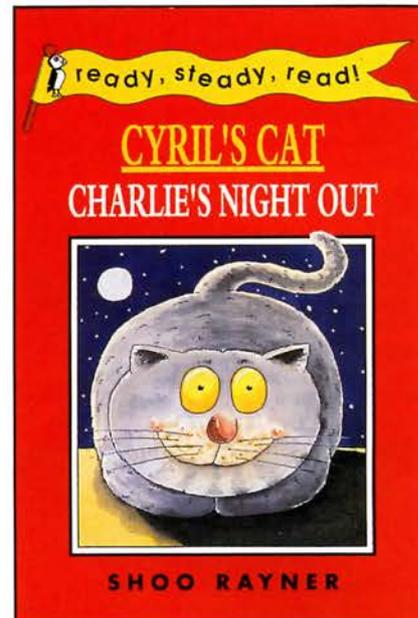


Bluebell looks forward to a spot of wind-surfing on her 78th birthday.



Dawkins and her adoption by Tony and family are a mite predictable, the story never flags, the dialogue is lively and the villain is the sort of nasty little so-and-so that many readers will know and loathe.

Dear old Mr Majeika has been with us for



some time now and is one of the old favourites I mentioned at the start. The title story in *Mr Majeika and the School Inspector* (Viking 'Kites', 0 670 84738 0, £5.50) offers us a fable of our times. Postlethwaite the inspector arrives with a large black book (surely in the interests of verisimilitude it should be a ring binder?) with the title 'Official Curriculum. What Is To Be Taught In Schools As Decided By The People In Charge. Nothing Else May Be Taught By Order.' Mr Majeika's magic finally saves the day and Postlethwaite is sent away a gibbering wreck. I dare you to be using it in a lesson when *your* school is inspected. (This title is also out in Young Puffin, 0 14 036288 6, at £2.99 pbk)

Heinemann's 'Superchamps' are for older readers, tend to avoid the zany humour of some of the other series and are often of a more serious tone. Valley Road Primary in Robert Westall's *Size Twelve* (0 434 97683 0, £4.99) is the pits. Situated next to the chemical works with decrepit buildings, disaffected staff, an ineffectual head and seriously tough kids, it would undoubtedly come bottom of any of The Grand Panjandrum's league tables. The black cat who finds his way into this hell hole is adopted by Taffy Thomas, the second worst boy in the school, and a remarkable change takes place in the school as the cat has a talismanic effect and the children at last find something to take an interest in. The possibility of supernatural powers is only hinted at in the last few pages but *Size Twelve* (from his big feet) has left his mark on Valley Road and things will not be allowed to slip back to their previous state. I can see this being very popular; especially with boys who'd like to think they're tough. Difficult to see them understanding the reference to Pamela Bordes though!

Cats seem to be prowling in everywhere at the moment and next door's moggy plays an important part in Jan Mark's *All the Kings and Queens* (Heinemann 'Superchamps', 0 434 97665 2, £4.99). The difficult topic of senile dementia runs through the book as Ken's great grandma begins to confuse him with her own long-dead brother of the same name killed in the Great War, and continually refers to a picture of him with 'all the Kings and Queens of Europe'. The mystery is eventually solved (thanks to the cat) by the finding of a long-hidden newspaper cutting. Much to think about here - relations between the generations, ageing, approaching death, our family links with the past - yet all handled with a deft touch. ●

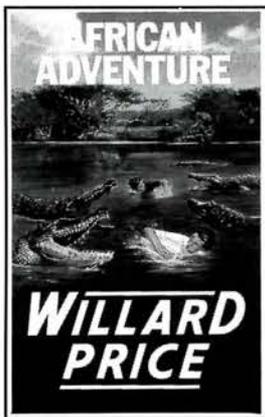
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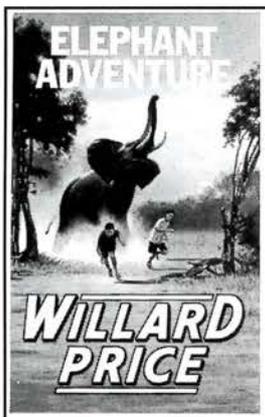
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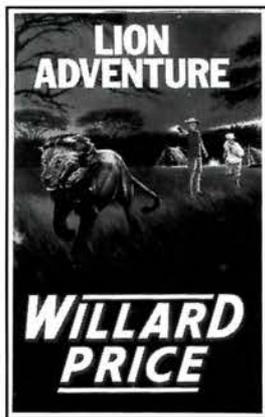
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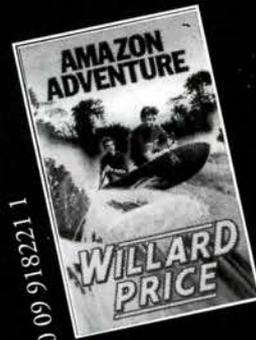
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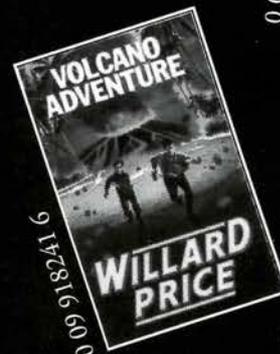
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REVIEWS

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

NURSERY / INFANT

skirt



la jupe

Opposites / Les Contraires

1 874735 20 4

Colours / Les Couleurs

1 874735 10 7

Clothes / Les Vetements

1 874735 30 1

Numbers / Les Nombres

1 874735 00 X

Claire Beaton, b small publishing (Mar 93), £2.99 each

Four cheerfully illustrated picture dictionaries in English and French for the very young child. Each opening shows a simple, brightly-coloured, clear picture with its caption in two languages and a phonetic guide to the French version. The illustrations all include teddy bears so the age-range is probably limited but, given the lack of suitable bi-lingual texts for the very young, these books are still very welcome.

Now I want to see bi-lingual storybooks for Infants and a wider variety of languages to choose from. It's nearly impossible to find such books at a normal price and schools would benefit greatly if publishers would produce suitable books in much greater numbers. If b small publishers can do it, surely the v big ones can manage it, too? LW

Quacky Quack Quack

Ian Whybrow and Russell Ayto, Walker (Mar 93), 0 7445 3037 7, £3.99

Especially good stories are often simple, and this charming book is just that with the addition of illustrations which have humour and

movement as well as an element of surprise. It's about a baby who, instead of feeding the ducks, feeds himself . . . and the ducks, then the geese and finally all the other animals join in and make a terrible noise. Eventually big brother comes along and bribes baby brother with ice-cream to give up the bag of bread and stop screaming! The plan works and the animals stop making their hullabaloo. What a good story! Recommended for all big brothers, sisters and their babies between one and five years. MS

Squeak-a-Lot

Martin Waddell, ill. Virginia Miller, Walker (Apr 93), 0 7445 3047 4, £3.99

Having a friend to play with is very important for every child . . . so most will quickly identify with the mouse in this story who sets off to look for a playmate. Bee plays Buzz-a-lot with him, Dog plays Woof-a-lot, Hen plays Cluck-a-lot and Cat sends him flying into the long grass where he finds some other mice to play with.

This is exceptionally good for young children. It helps them to see and name different animals and the repetitive phrases give them a chance to reinforce their language-learning while looking at interesting pictures. MS



Where's My Mummy?

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Walker (Mar 93), 0 7445 3041 5, £3.99

A simple picture book for very young children. It begins with a duckling hatching from an egg and saying 'Where's my Mummy?'. On each page he confronts a different animal in the search for his lost Mummy and asks the same question over and over again - thereby helping children sort out a variety of animals and birds. In the end, of course, he finds Mummy Duck . . . MS

I'm Not Sleepy

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Walker (Mar 93), 0 7445 3042 3, £3.99



Another recommendation for the very young. Baby Bear won't go to sleep and trots out all the usual excuses for not settling down. Finally Mother Bear tucks him up and wishes him Good Night. A comforting picture book for 2-4s. MS

Jasper's Beanstalk

Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen, Picture Knight (Apr 93), 0 340 58634 6, £3.50

A delightful picture book with a simple story to help very young children understand how things grow. Jasper is a cat who tries to grow a bean. Like most of us, he's impatient and finds it won't, even though he carefully weeds it, waters it and guards it from pests and slugs. His impatience gets the better of him and, yes, he digs it up . . . later, much later, some little beanstalks do sprout and one grows so high Jasper thinks it must be the beanstalk in the story about Jack. Highly recommended for all small people and their parents. MS

Machine Poems

Collected by Jill Bennett, ill. Nick Sharratt, Oxford (Mar 93), 0 19 276114 5, £2.50

An interesting and unusual book of poems - each one about machinery of some kind . . . a tractor, a washing machine that floods, cars and their start-up noises, and one about an underground train. Ideal to have around for children who enjoy having fun with rhyming words. Suitable, I think, for 4-6 year-olds. MS

POETRY

Horace

Holly Keller, Red Fox (Apr 93), 0 09 991110 8, £3.99

Holly Keller has such a sure touch with text and illustration that she can get away with what are clearly recipe books designed to help children cope with difficult life situations.



Later he tried to turn his spots into stripes, but it didn't work.

She produces book after book which all children can learn from and enjoy. This is no exception and Horace's struggle to search for his roots and identity, and the way in which he comes to terms with his adoption as a spotty leopard into a family of striped tigers, is so sensitively portrayed that even the youngest child will understand and respond. JS

Zoë's Tower

Paul and Emma Rogers, ill. Robin Bell Corfield, Walker (Apr 93), 0 7445 3046 6, £3.99

Some books send a shiver down your spine - this team have combined to catch the

freedom, the wonder, the intense awareness and the building excitement of a young child's adventure as she sets off through the countryside to climb to the top of Zoë's Tower. The stunning clarity with which she observes the world around her makes this a book with immediate appeal for children, but also for adults who want the frisson that comes with remembering . . . JS

Kipper's Toybox
Mick Inkpen, Picture Knight (Mar 93), 0 340 58049 6, £3.50



Kipper, the puppy, makes a welcome return in this charming counting book. Mick Inkpen's wonderfully expressive illustrations show Kipper at his most bewildered as his toys grow and diminish in number in the toy box which has mysteriously

developed a hole. When Sock Thing appears to come to life and inches ever closer, there is nothing for us but to hide behind Big Owl. The climax to the story challenges all budding mathematicians. This is another 'Please read it again' book and will complement the rest of the Inkpen titles that scarcely ever stay on the bookshelves. JS

Staying at Sam's
Jenny Hessell, ill. Jenny Williams, Picture Lion (Mar 93), 0 00 664183 0, £3.50

The children got a great deal out of this book – it clearly aims high in trying to show children that different styles of family life exist and that one is not necessarily better than another – just different. It's beautifully illustrated with interesting layout of text and pictures supporting the images of Sam's delightfully demonstrative and scatty family. A slight caveat is that the balance is not really fair . . . Sam's friend's family are not given as much time to show us the charm of their quieter and more ordered family life. The predominant colours for the illustrations of this style of family life reflect the cooler tones and so the disadvantage is reinforced still further and this was picked up by the children. Definitely worth having in an Infant classroom because very few books carry this specific message as overtly. It certainly acts as a stimulus to discussion



about differences in families, but it does need sensitive handling by an adult. JS

Margery Mo
Margaret Donaldson, ill. Debi Gliori, Picture Puffin (Apr 93), 0 14 054420 8, £3.99

Another useful book for the classroom as it allows children to see that poems are about real people, written by real people about real things as



well as the wild and wonderful. More importantly it's a jolly good read. Margery Mo is at the 'Why?' stage and driving the family mad with her questions but when they try to retaliate it doesn't work out quite as they imagine! Instead of a bedtime story her Mum and Dad write a poem about the questioning habit, and my children were a most appreciative audience – very impressed with her parents and totally oblivious to the fact that they were fiction too! JS

Noddy and his Bell
0 563 36860 8

Noddy and his New Friend
0 563 36859 4

Noddy and the Kite
0 563 36862 4

Noddy and Martha Monkey
0 563 36861 1

Enid Blyton, BBC Books (Mar 93), £2.99 each

Whether one hates or loves Noddy is irrelevant – the children have adored the Cosgrove Hall television series and clamour for these sumptuously produced books. They are up to Cosgrove Hall's usual brilliant standard with illustration and text that adults will appreciate but children will just take for granted. JS

INFANT/JUNIOR

The Nurgla's Magic Tear

Harry Secombe, ill. Priscilla Lamont, Young Puffin (Mar 93), 0 14 036261 4, £2.99



A second book about Katie and her outer space monster, the Nurgla. With a variety of themes, from the ozone layer to the building of Stonehenge, and a complex, involved text, this is for older Juniors who can cope with the rather arbitrary nature of the happenings and can appreciate the more involved jokes. A streak of sentimentality is also added and makes for a rather odd and uneasy mixture. If you enjoyed the first book you'll know what to expect. LW

The Little Dragon Nips Out

Ann Jungman, Young Corgi (Mar 93), 0 552 52748 3, £2.50

Readers need to be sophisticated enough to understand that the Little Dragon is himself in a book in a library and to know a little about dragon stories as a genre in order to make the most of this short novel. For this reason, although the print is large, I recommend a slightly older age-group than might initially appear suitable. It would also help if readers know the first story in the series. Young Juniors will enjoy finding out who stole the princess's treasure on the way to the happy ending. LW

A Cup of Starshine
Edited by Jill Bennett, ill. Graham Percy, Walker (Mar 93), 0 7445 3040 7, £5.99

Satisfyingly thick and well-produced, this is an anthology for young children which will make entertaining browsing. A wide range of rhymes and

poems are illustrated in pleasant, cool colour and will lead on admirably from a nursery rhyme collection. Many of the choices are unusual and the range is from the very simple to the demanding, from the familiar, everyday happening to the magical. This book is one which will widen many a child's horizons. LW

Bad Boris Moves House

Susie Jenkin-Pearce, Red Fox (Apr 93), 0 09 987480 6, £3.50

Another story about the little elephant, Boris, and his friend, Maisie. Susie Jenkin-Pearce is very good at taking small children's experiences and making a thoughtful story out of them, and in this case Boris has to face up to moving to a new house. He wants, of course, to stay with his old friends and familiar home but discovers that a new house can be a happy place too. Simply told, but effective and reassuring, this will be welcomed by many small Boris fans. LW

Finish the Story, Dad
Nicola Smee, Walker (Mar 93), 0 7445 3038 5, £3.99

A rather slight and, ultimately, unsatisfying book about a little girl whose Dad doesn't finish her bedtime story. She protests, falls asleep and dreams that she's asking a variety of animals to read to her. They all offer to take her on different adventures. Eventually she falls out of bed, Dad tucks her up and offers to finish her book but she's now fast asleep. This story doesn't seem finished either, somehow . . . LW

Postman Pat and the Toy Soldiers

John Cunliffe, ill. Ray Mutimer, Hippo (Apr 93), 0 590 55170 1, £2.99

One hardly needs to recommend a new Postman Pat story to his many friends and I must admit to an affection for all such gentle and cheerful characters. Pat comes from an illustrious line which runs from Andy Pandy and Trumpton through Ivor

the Engine and The Wombles. It is a kindly world which treats small children with affection and goodwill and we can't, in my opinion, get too much of it these days.



This story is about how Pat and Jess outwit some robbers and get a reward for their cleverness. The pictures are full of colour and interest and the words read aloud splendidly. The price makes it a bargain, both for the production quality and the pleasure it will give. LW

The Chocolate Wedding

Posy Simmonds, Picture Puffin (Mar 93), 0 14 054531 X, £3.99



Another Posy Simmonds' wonderfully detailed and lively cartoon-strip style of story, much in the format of **Fred** and featuring Lulu again (she of the Flying Babies). Prevented from being a bridesmaid by sickness brought on by eating too much chocolate, Lulu saves the day when her little brother, Willie, seems to have eaten the sugar bride from the top of the cake. An entertaining story with lots for a wide age-range to enjoy. LW

A Pig Called Shrimp

Lisa Taylor, ill. Jonathan Langley, Picture Lion (Apr 93), 0 00 664291 8, £3.99

A rather self-consciously moral tale about a stuck-up ram, called Gabriel, and his fervent admirer, a piglet. The story is well-told, however, and the character of Gabriel is amusing in his self-obsession. Poor Shrimp becomes ill in his attempt to please his hero and only Gabriel can save him by



giving up the wonderful woolly coat he is so proud of. Younger children will enjoy Gabriel's eventual kindness; slightly older ones will see the deeper issues. This could be a good story for primary school assemblies, as well as for young, fluent readers to enjoy. LW

Herbie Whistle

Martin Waddell, ill. Anthony Ian Lewis, Young Puffin (Apr 93), 0 14 034629 5, £2.99



Young Herbie is a beguiling character who seems to find himself in trouble no matter how laudable his intentions, like the time his helping to fix the roof leads to a smoke-filled schoolroom. A strong sense of time and place are evoked in these four charming short stories of Irish rural life. JB

A Fairy Tale

Tony Ross, Red Fox (May 93), 0 09 991700 9, £3.99

Feeling bored with her book full of silly tales of 'fairies' Bessie goes out to play ball with the result that she meets old Mrs Leaf, her neighbour, from whom she learns much about fairies and friendship. Set mainly in pre-World War 2 days, this magical, multi-layered story abounds in surprises both visual and verbal. JB

Ginger the Whinger

Wendy Smith, Picturemac (Apr 93), 0 333 58336 1, £3.99

An amusing cautionary tale



about a boy who drives his parents to distraction with his constant moaning. In desperation they take off on holiday leaving their son in the capable hands of a large super-efficient housekeeper, one Brenda Strong. Wash and line illustrations echo the humour of the story, giving added vigour to its telling. JB

Tangle and the Firesticks

Benedict Blathwayt, Walker (Mar 93), 0 7445 3039 3, £3.99

Tangle is one of the little people who live in burrows in Northwoods - in reality the countryside of northern America. His impetuous and thoughtless behaviour lands him in trouble and he is banished from the settlement and the company of his friends. Bored, he decides to explore and discovers a valley beyond the mountains where he meets a gentle giant and learns the secret of the firesticks and lessons about himself.



In his closely observed illustrations of the diminutive Northwoodsfolk and their world, the artist focuses upon the many small wonders of nature: a butterfly wing, a feather, an eggshell, as well as the expanse of the northern landscape and its flora and fauna. JB

Karlo's Tale

Robert Leeson, ill. Hilda Offen, Young Lion (Apr 93), 0 00 674320 X, £2.99

Taking as its starting point the town of Hamelin after the Pied Piper has left, the story that unfolds is Karlo's: Karlo

the lame boy who couldn't keep up with the others; Karlo who, with the help of his specially made wooden shoes, walks proud and straight; Karlo who undertakes a quest to bring back his friends and must make an agonising choice in order to defeat the child-stealer. Karlo's words on the march: 'If you are tired, find someone wearier, carry them on your back. If you're afraid, find someone who is scared and put your arm round them...' are just some of the lessons the characters in the story (and readers) learn.



A seemingly simple story which offers much to reflect on and explore about the nature of life and human experience. JB

The Tale of Benjamin Bunny

0 14 054300 7

The Tale of Two Bad Mice

0 14 054299 X

Beatrix Potter, Picture Puffin (Mar 93), £3.50 each

Two beautiful books by Beatrix Potter giving a new generation of children the chance to appreciate the fine pictures and charming stories written earlier this century.

Picture Puffin has done a good job, but personally I believe the original format of the little books, made especially for little hands, to be even more delightful than these modern editions. MS

Monty's Journey

Paul Geraghty, Picture Lion (Mar 93), 0 00 664234 9, £3.99

Monty is a mouse who has a series of exciting adventures on his way to a place called Town. He falls from a bicycle basket, gets put in a bag of rubbish and thrown on the dump, is nearly caught by a dog and gets swept away by the water from a splashy puddle... but he does eventually get to Town. After meeting some aggressive rats and a fierce cat, he finally finds his own mice friends. Detailed pictures make this an especially interesting book for the listening child as he/she can anticipate what might happen and get involved in the action while identifying with Monty and the situations he gets into. MS

Proud Rooster and the Fox

Colin Threadgall,
Red Fox (Apr 93),
0 09 998330 3, £3.99

This is the story of a clever, but proud, rooster who thinks he can beat the fox. Every time fox tries to steal a hen, the rooster calls 'Cock-a-doodle-doo' loudly and the farmer comes out with his gun to shoot the villain. However, one afternoon the fox persuades all the farm animals to play hide-and-seek with him and rooster has to call so much that he loses his voice. Finally fox is able to take the hens away triumphantly, but he does have an alternative motive for capturing them . . .

MS

Time Flies for Ms Wiz

Terence Blacker, ill.
Kate Simpson, Young
Piper (Apr 93),
0 330 32562 0, £2.99

Every time I pick up a Ms Wiz, I'm totally spellbound. This latest story of how she tries to add zest to a history lesson lives up to the reputation for crazy fun shared by all those that have gone before. In spite of her frequently renewed good intentions things rapidly get out of hand again! It's when Jack is lost somewhere in the last half-century and Nabila meets a witch that anything might happen – and it does.

If you're 'doing' sixteenth-century explorers or Tudors and Stuarts at History KS2, this is a 'find': well-researched and much-needed light relief giving lots of accurate social details of the times in a very palatable form. Even, perhaps especially, if you're not, this Ms Wiz is a wonderfully funny and exciting read.

PH

The Minpins

Roald Dahl, ill. Patrick
Benson, Picture Puffin
(Apr 93), 0 14 054371 6,
£4.99

Roald Dahl's last picture book is as mind-bogglingly wonderful as all the others. This is classic Dahl: the charming stories with that disquieting edge of fear that have always sounded as though they were told by a brilliantly talented child coupled with the gloriously crazy adjectives and nouns.

The Minpins are such delightful people – tiny amiable folk who live, with the help of their suction-soled boots, high among the trees in the Forest of Sin. It makes my local New Forest sound very tame indeed. Billy, against his mother's good advice, goes into the forest only to find out something terrible and something wonderful. He will have to keep them both a secret all his life.

Patrick Benson's illustrations are vibrant and so full of life that there is water splashing off the page and leaves swirling among the trees, yet there's a harmonious gentleness evident, too.

A superb book and how terribly sad that it's the last.

PH

Griselda F.G.M.

Margaret Ryan, ill.
John Eastwood, Young
Puffin (Apr 93),
0 14 036101 4, £2.99

One of those cosy little stories about modernised fairy godmothers whose spells keep going wrong with ultimately happy consequences. Griselda is an uncommonly youthful member of the sorority: she wears disintegrating jeans, carries an electronic watch and

a multi-coloured mouse, and directs her shambolic magic through disco dancing. Her adventures are rhythmically organised into chapters with repetitive introductions. A cheerful and accessible book for newly independent readers.

GH

Neptune and the Litter Louts

Gerald Rose, Young
Piper (Apr 93),
0 330 32667 8, £2.99

Another environmental wish-fulfilment yarn. When the sea god retreats to his summer palace for a holiday, he is dismayed to find it fouled with the noise, sewage, oil and litter emanating from a holiday development on the coral island. The millionaire responsible is dragged underwater for some vigorous re-education, but it takes more than one lesson before the island is restored to its pristine state. This is a brisk and vividly illustrated story, handling a depressing theme with humour and optimism.

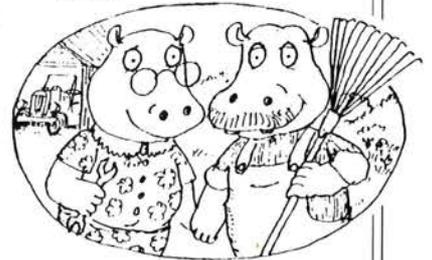


A stimulating story book for newly independent readers.

GH

Howard Helps Out

Colin West, Young Lion
(Apr 93), 0 00 674469 9,
£2.99



Colin West knows exactly how to appeal to children of this age and the format of this book says it all. It's introduced with a wonderful set of pen sketches of the principal characters, has brilliant supporting illustrations, text that's pitched perfectly for this level . . . and it's a chapter book. The children fell on it and wanted to know whether we had any more 'Howard' books.

JS

Paddington's Picnic

Michael Bond, ill. Nick
Ward, Young Lion
(Mar 93), 0 00 674673 X,
£2.75

A must for all young Paddington fans. Although the illustrations do support the text a great deal, there are a lot of 'difficult' words and phrases which a larger size of print face hardly mitigates. This is the sort of book that needs an adult reading first, followed by a lot of adult help during the first attempted readings, after which the fledgling reader really will fly!

JS

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

Roboskool

Jon Blake, ill. Alex
Ayliffe, Puffin (Apr 93),
0 14 036324 6, £2.99

A thin, one-idea story with little character development, though its theme will entertain young readers and have a more pointed topical relevance for teachers: Guy's school is taken over by Government-appointed robots who make the children sit in silence in neat rows, learning grammar, history dates and poetry by rote. After strict tests, the children are priced according to how they score!

Hmm . . . don't show this one to John Patten.

LN

Shades of Green

Edited by Anne Harvey,
ill. John Lawrence,
Red Fox (Apr 93),
0 09 925521 9, £3.50

This superb anthology is not to

be missed. It's intelligently organised, with surprising juxtapositions and a refreshing mix of traditional and contemporary. Its 'green' theme is explained by Anne Harvey in her introduction through reference to the 'Green Man' of folklore – a spirit of growth and regeneration. Poets through the centuries, from Chaucer to Charles Causley, are included here, using greenness as an emblem of optimism and fertility. This collection will be an invaluable classroom resource, and an enjoyable and inspiring read for children or adults.

LN

The House That Caught a Cold

Richard Edwards, ill.
Sarah Jane Stewart,
Puffin (Apr 93),
0 14 034574 4, £2.99

That the author is amused by

much he sees in the world around is reflected in many of the poems in this book; there's the 'yodelling scarecrow for farmers' found in 'The Vault of Unwanted Inventions' for instance. Though written in a similar apparently light-hearted style, some of the poems are of a more serious, thought-provoking kind, for example 'Stevie Scared' who's ' . . . so scared and people knowing, / Spends his whole time kicking, fighting, / . . . Bashing little kids about / (Just in case they find him out).'

Highly recommended for private and public reading.

JB

Enemies Are Dangerous

Gwen Grant, Lions
(Apr 93), 0 00 673785 4,
£3.50

24 years after its original

publication there's no dated feel about this fast, tense, Boy's Own adventure, which keeps the reader turning the pages. The two boys versus jewel thieves and a vicious black dog tale is given a new slant by being set in an abandoned sand quarry and by the inclusion of a cock-fighting racket.

Characterisation is a bit flat but overall it's a good entertaining read with plenty of incident, which should appeal especially to boys.

DB

Black Woolly Pony / White Chalk Horse

Jane Gardam, ill. Janet
Rawlins, Walker
'Doubles' (Mar 93),
0 7445 2226 9, £2.99

This 'two in one' book brings together two of Jane Gardam's fine pieces of writing for the under-tens. Strong female

characters emerge from both stories: Bridget, the Yorkshire girl in the first who, riding her beloved William, puts herself at risk when it seems the baby her mother is expecting will be born early; and Susan who is also anxious to save a horse, not her own this time, but the chalk one cut into the side of the hill above her village. Both stories are subtle but powerful pieces of characterisation drawn through the perfectly chosen words the author uses for dialogue.

A must for any Junior classroom and excellent value, too. JB

Moonglow

David Wiseman, ill. Tizzie Knowles, Puffin (Mar 93), 0 14 036109 X, £2.99

This slim tale is a kind of ghost story, where the ghost is a golden horse, a brilliant circus performer from 50-odd years ago, whose return to the field of his last performance heralds the death of his devoted trainer and owner, now a frail old man. His young friend, Nick, is the one who sees the apparitions and is spooked by the beast's incomparable loveliness, which intensifies daily as Mr O'Hanlon tells the story of times past and circus days all but forgotten. Hard to place but a useful read for thoughtful youngsters. DB

The Keep-Fit Canaries

Jonathan Allen, Yearling (Apr 93), 0 440 86293 0, £2.99

The story of a flock of bad-assed canaries who torment their owners and, after working out to a neighbour's aerobics tape, get fit enough to stage a cage break. Their subsequent guerilla existence, raiding food from urban picnickers, evading police poses and struggling for territory with other birds, is thick with inventively described adventures. The brash humour and aggressive action should appeal to many upper juniors. The book might also provide an offbeat addition to the library's ornithology section. GH

Picnic on the Moon

Brian Morse, ill. Joep Bertrams, Piper (Apr 93), 0 330 32720 8, £3.50



POETRY

These poems present a set of quirky observations from oblique perspectives: children commenting on adult rituals, animals observing nature and humanity, and in the final, more poignant sequence, aliens' and exiles' reflections on the Earth. There are also three short prose meditations on episodes of fear. Joep Bertram's illustrations provide an aptly surrealistic accompaniment to a collection of perplexities. GH

Something Big has been here

Jack Prelutsky, ill. James Stevenson, Mammoth (Mar 93), 0 7497 1014 4, £3.99

There are a lot of very commendable and funny poetry books on the shelves and although this one hasn't got the 200 poems the back cover says it has (there are 100 - I counted them all) it's well worthy of shelf-space.

POETRY



'An early worm got out of bed' conjured up a glorious picture of an extrovert worm with an obvious talent for disguise. To be honest it hardly needed illustration underneath. 'I am Wunk' offers further fun ways of approaching alliteration. My all time favourites were 'Benita Beane' and 'The Fuddies', not related! These two take the commonplace expressions we all use every day and give a whole new meaning to them. Truly playing with language. PH

Have You Seen Who's Just Moved In Next Door To Us?

Colin McNaughton, Walker (Apr 93), 0 7445 3043 1, £4.99

With a verse form that goes rollicking along similar lines to the popular *There's an Awful Lot of Weirdos in Our Neighbourhood*, this book takes us on a colourful tour of a street inhabited by a diverse multitude of freaks and oddballs from all areas of literature, popular culture and the communal unconscious. Monsters, ghosts, ghouls and aliens are all horrified by the arrival of the mysterious new neighbours, whose truly disturbing identity is at last revealed on the final panoramic fold-out spread. The pages are rich with pictorial and verbal jokes, the latter carried in a subtext of speech balloons.

This book will be an instant favourite with all ages, if the reactions of the children I showed it to are anything to go

by. Its message condemning prejudice just about manages to emerge from the sumptuous narrative through which it's expressed. GH

Knights of the Kitchen Table

Jon Scieszka, ill. Lane Smith, Puffin (Mar 93), 0 14 036398 X, £2.99

Three American schoolkids find themselves in Camelot after making an injudicious wish while in the presence of *The Book*, a gift from a magician. Once they have inveigled themselves into the court of King Arthur, they have to cope with another magician, the jealous Merlin, who puts their bona fides as enchanters to the test by arranging an encounter with a belching, farting, snot-spouting giant.



In this eventful little book the creators of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* have created another enjoyable parody, deflating the chivalrous Arthurian image and refracting it with some authentically malodorous medieval fumes. A good one to share with the Juniors over two or three story times. GH



MIDDLE / SECONDARY

The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur

Howard Pyle, Dover (Apr 93), 0 486 27361 X, £7.95

This, the final volume of Howard Pyle's labour of love, is a re-publication of the original 1910 New York edition (there are some American spellings - *checkered*, *armor*, *valor*). The text is richly enhanced by the author's own full-page, black-and-white illustrations in

Pre-Raphaelite style. The archaisms of the writing give a flavour of Malory - a dense, challenging but highly atmospheric book for capable readers and devotees of Arthurian legend. LN

So Far From Skye

Judith O'Neill, Puffin (Apr 93), 0 14 034980 4, £3.00

Drawing on her own family history in the 1850s. Judith O'Neill describes Morag McDonald's journey, with her parents and brother, from

their native Skye to a new life in Australia. The plot is eventful but never rushed; the details of shipboard life are skilfully conveyed, with the tensions and friendships which develop under cramped conditions. The Australian scenery, animals and way of life are initially strange to the Highland crofters, but the end sees them adapting, and finding parallels with their own myths and traditions. A moving and informative book for thoughtful readers. LN

Pigeon Summer

Ann Turnbull, Walker (Apr 93), 0 7445 3081 4, £2.99

Set in the Depression years of the 1930s, *Pigeon Summer* follows 11-year-old Mary Dyer's attempts to race her father's pigeons as he leaves home to find work in coal mines further afield. Mary is an outsider - a girl in a man's sport, flouting convention to achieve her ambitions and finding an unexpected ally in Arnold, similarly ostracised by the village community. The

family's struggle against poverty is seen and felt through Mary's eyes and stomach – most keenly when her mother kills and cooks two of the pigeons to keep the family from starvation.

A warm, engrossing story which resonates with quiet adventure. Honesty and determination are rewarded in a happy ending which scrupulously avoids patronising its young readers. VR

The Carpet People

Terry Pratchett, Corgi (Apr 93), 0 552 52752 1, £3.99

This is 17-year-old Pratchett's first published novel, co-written with his 43-year-old self for the hardback version. After reading it you'll never look at a carpet again without seeing the host of grain-sized people that Pratchett vividly

describes as its inhabitants, living in a world that is in danger of destruction from the Moulds, who crave total power. Fortunately there are heroes, albeit reluctant ones, willing to restore the balance by fighting a battle to end all battles.

The pace is fast, the humour wry and the wisdom profound. I already have a waiting list for my review copy. DB

The Camera Obscura

Hugh Scott, Walker (Mar 93), 0 7445 3024 5, £2.99

Through a series of mirrors set up in the room above his dusty antique shop, Grandfather shows his timid grandson the city that surrounds them. But there's more, he can also demonstrate the past and the future and so guide the boy how best to

understand and deal with the young thugs that are terrorising them both; it's all a question of looking with eyes and mind wide open to see all around, not just the confines of the small picture. DB

Asterix and the Secret Weapon

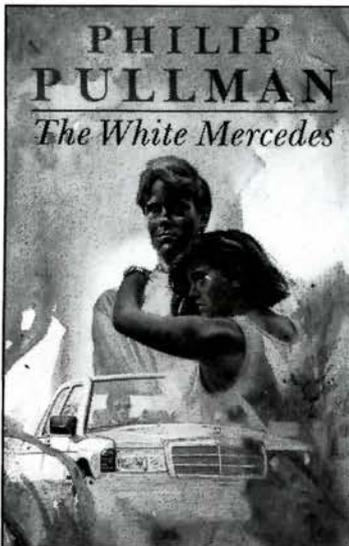
R Goscinnny and A Uderzo, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 56871 2, £3.99

Ever since *Asterix the Gaul*, Asterix has lent a special brand of linguistic humour to the English language. I don't know if this works in every translation, but it's instantly recognisable. You either like it or you don't – if you do, there's a strong compulsion to collect and read them all and then try your hand at the translations. PH



I find them very, very funny. Even when I'm revisiting for the nth time I can still see something fresh and clever that I missed before. To understand it fully needs a near-adult sense of humour and knowledge of vocabulary, but younger readers can find plenty for them, too. PH

OLDER READERS



The White Mercedes

Philip Pullman, Pan (Apr 93), 0 330 328131 1, £2.99

This is a profoundly cruel book, impaling its central character, Chris, on a spike of manipulation, innocence and love. It's also an agonisingly well-written one, snaring the reader in the same trap, building the horrifying sense of inevitability from the moment it begins.

Chris is unwittingly caught up in a gangland war, unsuspected in the quiet streets of his Oxford home and symbolised by the quiet menace of the white Mercedes whose driver's counterfeit identity draws him into a carefully set trap. He is led into a morass of betrayal and death in which Jenny, his girlfriend, loses her life.

The sense of tragedy is felt more keenly because the reader's belief in Chris is unquestioning and because the final sentence of the book is so unbearably poignant – to the

last, Chris remains unaware of the whole sickening truth. This is what the National Curriculum should be putting before our youngsters – a work of undisputed and breathtaking excellence. VR

Landmarks

Edited by Nadia Wheatley, Plus (Apr 93), 0 14 036234 7, £3.99

This collection of nine short stories by Australian writers offers readers variety, challenge and empathy with familiar teenage problems and thought processes.

Each story deals with a personal landmark – particularly strong are 'The Lady is My Night Nurse' where an unexpected and mysterious figure responds to a frightening accident; 'The Blast Furnace' in which Liv, overweight and unhappy, realises that she can break free of her own low expectations; and 'Only Two Hours by Train' demonstrating how a deepening friendship between two boys is enriched during a hazardous camping trip.

These stories represent excellent value for money and a real insight into the world of Australian writers. Consider *Landmarks* as a class set – perhaps to compare and contrast the work of modern and pre-twentieth-century writers. VR

You At The Back

Roger McGough, Plus (Mar 93), 0 14 034576 0, £3.99

Selected poems 1967-87. There are a few very familiar poems here, the muchlyanthologised ones and a whole lot more; some funny, some ruefully wise, a few saucy and in combination AN AMAZING TRICK-

CYCLING ADVENTURE with language. Every child has the right to relish such a performance. Here is a programme where McGough manipulates, smoothes and bashes words into shapes and notions that are guaranteed to thrill, delight, intrigue and inform the soul. DB

The Vampire Diaries

The Awakening

0 553 40604 3

The Struggle

0 553 40605 1

The Fury

0 553 40606 X

L J Smith, Bantam (Apr 93), £2.99 each

L J Smith has carefully cross-bred two varieties of teenage fiction – 'Point Horror' and 'Sweet Valley High' – to produce this curious and disturbing trilogy.

Elena, queen of Robert E Lee High, is irresistibly drawn to Stefan Salvatore, a mysterious and handsome newcomer – and a vampire. This underworld becomes more heavily populated when Damon (Stefan's brother and fellow-vampire) appears and Elena also joins their ranks. The Diaries reveal the source of the brothers' feud (the love of a girl, of course) and demonstrate the price Elena must pay for becoming involved with, and eventually reconciling, them.

What's most disturbing about these books is the tawdry combination of stereotypes, clichés and thinly veiled eroticism which they deliver to young and impressionable readers. If they are to be considered for library or book box use – and I would recommend them for *neither* – then they must first be read by

teachers. If we choose to put this sort of fiction before young people, we must be very sure of our motives for doing so. VR

The Hillingdon Fox

Jan Mark, Plus, 0 14 036235 5, £3.99

Here we have an exceptional book. Jan Mark's wit and perception of people and events have a sharpness and political edge held within an ingenious structure of two diaries whose entries are juxtaposed throughout the novel. Elder brother Gerald's diary is kept during the Falklands War and buried in a time capsule, meant to be opened in 100 years. Hugh keeps his diary during the Gulf War, eight years later, and discovers that the time capsule is being dug up to make way for building work. (Some witty comment on historical certainty here.) Gerald's alarm fuels the sense that there must be something highly dramatic within that capsule. And so the book leads us on, uncovering the past slowly against its parallel present: with global dramas unfolding against domestic ones (and truth and distortion equally hard to disentangle at both levels). We finally face, through intense narrative curiosity, the question of what we might really care about. AJ

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.

Authorgraph No. 81

Pete Johnson

INTERVIEWED BY JILL BURRIDGE

There are red marks all over Pete Johnson's manuscripts, with comments scrawled in the margins – 'Not clear, I didn't feel I knew this character' or 'No, this is trying too hard'. He relies on a panel of readers around the country who proof-read his novels, reacting frankly and spontaneously to the text. He now has a waiting list of volunteer editors, as well as a number of trusted stalwarts who have been reading his books for a long time and can be relied upon to spot any minor inconsistencies with character or plot in series such as 'Friends Forever'.

It was the library lessons that convinced Pete Johnson he should start writing. He was teaching at a secondary school in Buckinghamshire, a diversion from his previous job as film critic for local papers and for Radio 1 on the *Anne Nightingale Show*. Once a week, each class would have the chance to browse in the library, selecting the book of their choice from the wealth of English literature on display. In reality, the class would trail around the library complaining that all the books were boring. In the end, rather than forcing them to take out books they wouldn't read, Pete Johnson began to write his own stories. They weren't always a success. He once read aloud a story that had made him cry with laughter as he sat writing it. It was received in stony silence until one girl said kindly, 'Don't worry, all books have their boring bits.' Ever since, Pete has applied his golden rule of good writing: rewriting. 'That is why I still have a panel of readers, ever alert for any lapses into self-indulgence or self-importance.'

At that time, the shelves marked 'Teenage Fiction' were filled with American imports, largely rejected by the pupils, especially the boys, who considered anything that touched on relationships to be strictly female territory. Boys seemed reluctant to own their feelings, particularly in front of other boys and Pete wanted them to be able to acknowledge their emotions by seeing them reflected in fiction. 'Jealousy can really blaze through you and yet the only outlet for it, it seemed to me, was through violence and through destructive behaviour. I

thought it was important in books to show that you're not on your own, there are footsteps in the sand, other people have been there as well.'

Humour is the key element in giving the books that authentic tone, the make or break factor with a book for teenagers. 'Anyone who's a teacher acknowledges the sense of humour that is there in the classroom. You may not always like it, but you acknowledge it. And it seemed to me that that sense of humour was missing from a lot of the books I read; that wit, that cheekiness, that irreverence. And yet I found when I was reading books with classes, the one thing that commanded attention was humour. And I thought, if I could actually tap the humour and reflect that, it could be quite exciting.'

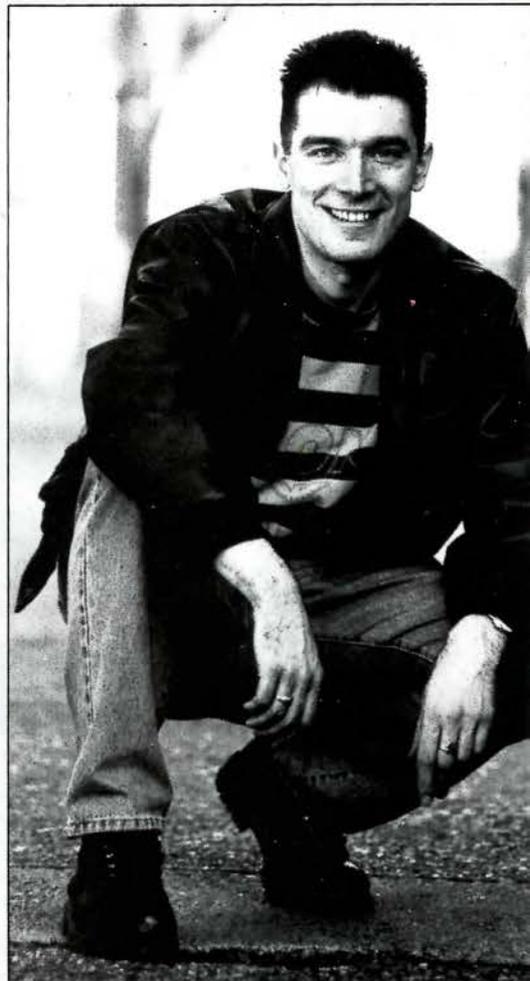
Pete admits he shares that adolescent sense of humour. Over extended lunches with his readers, he enjoys the banter and the repartee that develops as everyone relaxes and the barriers come down. He has an ear for expressions, dialogue, jokes, which he relays in a style that's colloquial but not patronising.

The spur for an idea is observation, Pete begins with a character who interests and intrigues him, such as Jez in the 'Friends Forever' series. He'll hear the voice of that character, the inflections, see him coming to life in his mind's eye. In *No Limits*, the first 'Friends Forever', Jez has decided that sixth form is too much effort when the wide world beckons. He hates hassle, needs a constant supply of carbohydrates and cigarettes, has a stock of witty remarks and a broad grin, designed to defuse tricky situations. He isn't a typical 16-year-old, there's no such thing, but he is an appealing mixture, alluring and annoying, and above all credible.

'He smiles. He smiles again when an attractive if rather matronly woman opens the door and gasps. She's clearly not used to receiving human slime on the doorstep. He puts on his talking to the headmaster and elderly aunt's voice.'

'Oh, good morning. Is Lauren in, please?'

Recovering herself now, she says, "Would you mind waiting in the hall while I go and see if she's available."



Seconds later Lauren tumbles into view. When her mother announced there was a tramp to see her, she should have guessed who she meant. "Jez," she cries. "This is brilliant. But Cathy said you wouldn't be back for another month yet."

He smiles. "For once I'm early."

"And you've gone all bearded. I like it. You look like a character out of an old Russian novel."

Lauren hasn't changed, Jez thinks, same silvery laugh, same way of looking right into your eyes when she talks to you. She still knows how to get your heart thumping all right.

"Mum, you must remember Jez... he's been working in Berlin."

"Oh really, how interesting." Her mother comes forward smiling bravely. Just treat these people as human. That's the secret. "And what was your job there, Jez?"

"Dishwasher."

The books (*No Limits*, *Breakout*, *Discovery* and *Everything Changes*) follow the fortunes of six close friends, who all branch out in different directions once they leave school. It was inspired by a reunion Pete went to with some old school friends which, after a shaky start, just took off picking up where everyone had left off years before. 'When I finish a book I really miss the characters. In a strange way I feel I've let them down by giving them life and then deserting them so thoroughly again. Perhaps that's why my 'Friends Forever' series follows characters over three years and spills into four books.'

Of course, the acid test for a lot of teenagers is the opening page of a book. If they're hooked on page one, they'll read on. Perhaps knowing its significance makes the task all the more daunting. It's the part Pete writes and rewrites over and over again. 'I have found that if you can hook into a feeling at the beginning of the book which somehow captures people's interest, that's a very strong way of doing it.'

We the Haunted does just that with hints from page one of the ominous events that form the centre of the story: the tragic death of Caroline's boyfriend Paul, her relentless grief and the impelling desire to be with him again, if only in a spiritual sense. 'I think the most important question anyone can ask is, "is there life after death?". My own father died suddenly when I was 15 and my mother wanted to go and see a spiritualist and I actually talked her out of it. As soon as I'd talked her out of it, I wondered if I'd done the right thing. When I was researching **We the Haunted** the old questions came back again and so in a way I was investigating questions I didn't know the answer to. I wasn't writing the book as an expose but it seemed to me that a lot of the people who went to see these mediums were putting off the process of mourning, they were living in a strange twilight world, and that's what I try to show in the book that when you lose someone you have to come to terms with that and it is very painful.'

Elements of the supernatural surface again in Pete's new book, **The Dead Hour**. A 17-year-old, tormented by nightmares and his terror of the dark, finds that his imagination is his enemy and, in an attempt to control his irrational fears, he tries to evoke supernatural forces and confront the unknown. 'I always liked scaring people. On camping trips I'd keep everyone awake with tales of headless ghosts, that only appeared when night was at its darkest. I loved the power of stories and I was fascinated by the way the best tales seemed to be fuelled by my fears. I've always, for example, hated the night and especially that time when the darkness is so thick it makes you choke.'

Pete Johnson's panel of readers has been hypercritical about this manuscript, but he reckons that if the book has stimulated them to discuss and analyse what is going on, it has succeeded. 'Every book is a gamble. Every book is an act of faith, you never really know if it's going to work or not.'

Other research has taken Pete off in very different directions. Fascinated by the idea of instant fame, he persuaded his sister to enter for **Blind Date**. Not only did she sail through all the qualifying sessions, she then went on the programme and 'won' a day in Bologna with a guy who did impressions of Benny Hill. What amazed Pete and his sister was all the adulation she received for months afterwards. People would stop her in the street to shake hands and congratulate her. Obviously, this provided a wealth of material for **I'd Rather Be Famous**, when Jade experiences this brief burst of fame, tempting her to pursue the dream.

"How would you like to be famous for a bit longer?"

"Yes, sure," I say.

He shifts about on his feet for a moment. "This is mighty embarrassing," he says.

"What is? Come on, tell me."

"Okay, here goes. I know someone in Fleet Street who'll take our pictures tomorrow morning."

"Great."

"He'll also bring a reporter along. But there is one catch."

"I've got to dance again."

He smiles briefly. "No, much worse. You've got to get engaged to the sexiest guy in the world."

I give him what you might call a long, meaningful look. He immediately turns away.

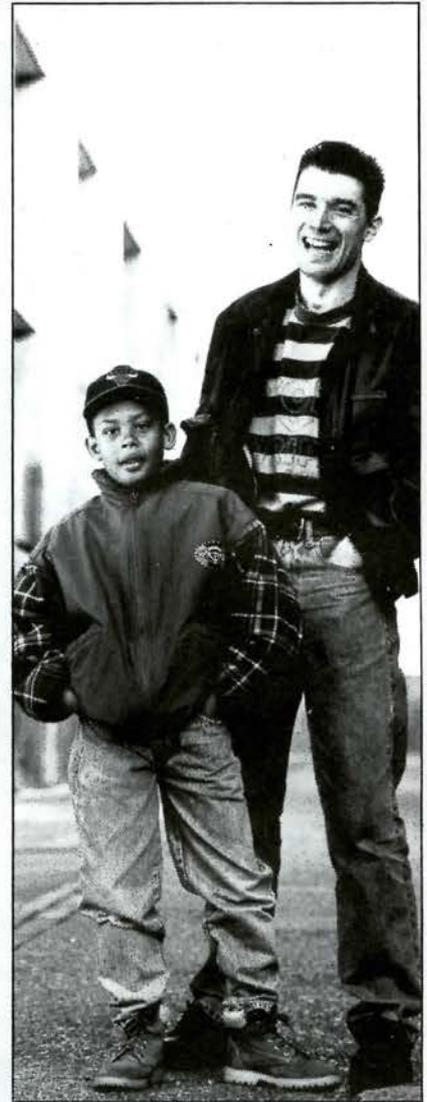
"Why have we got to get engaged?" I ask his back.

He whirls round, the words rushing out. "Because it's a much better story - you know - couple find true love on 'Who Do You Woo?' All that crap."

Pete Johnson has the knack of portraying the raw emotions, the ideals which don't match up to reality, the ambitions which don't conform to parents' wishes and the potent determination to go your own way which are so much a part of growing older. 'In those years you probably change more and try on more personas than at any other time. People are more open to possibilities and change then than at any other time in their lives. When you're younger you're often part of a group but when you get to 15 or 16, you start to think of yourself, you move away and you have to think about what you really want to do yourself.'

Now, from his home in Stevenage, Pete visits schools and libraries all over the country. His books are used for Key Stage 3 on the National Curriculum and as a writer-in-residence, he often works in schools encouraging pupils to develop their own style and expression, fuelling their enthusiasm for writing. His books are taking hold in Germany, **One Step Beyond** (a collection of eight short stories) has been dramatised on Radio 5 and a television adaptation of 'Friends Forever' is planned.

For many readers who from perhaps the age of 11 or 12 lose the urge to



explore fiction, Pete Johnson's novels can be a gateway back to books. Here teenagers have a setting and a style that reflects their own experiences and emotions, something which speaks directly to them. 'I think it's important that people see books as a living process. I remember reading **Catcher in the Rye** when I was about 13 and that got me back into books because it was a voice I responded to. If you can begin by showing how writers are reflecting experiences, thoughts and feelings of today, that is often then a spur to travel back.' ●

Photographs by Katie Vandyck.



Pete Johnson's books are all published in paperback by Teens Mandarin:

No Limits, 0 7497 0607 4, £2.99

Break Out, 0 7497 0623 6, £2.99

Discovery, 0 7497 0649 X, £2.99

Everything Changes, 0 7497 0650 3, £2.99

I'd Rather Be Famous, 0 7497 0606 6, £2.99

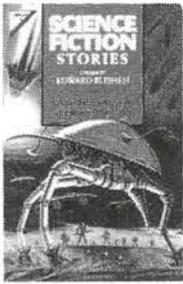
One Step Beyond, 0 7497 0171 6, £2.99

Secrets from the School Underground, 0 7497 1271 6, £2.99

We, the Haunted, 0 7497 1453 0, £2.99

The Dead Hour will be published in October 1993.

Pick up a paperback.



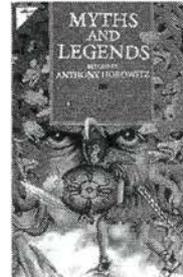
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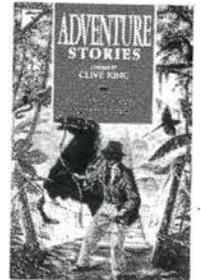
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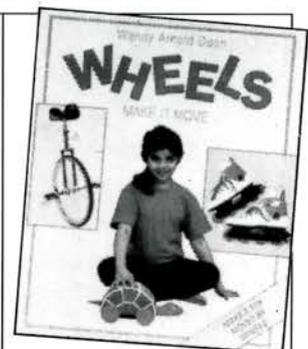
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AUDIO TAPES

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

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

Postman Pat's Breezy Day

John Cunliffe, read by Ken Barrie, one cassette, 40 mins, Tellastory, £3.99

Tellastory has changed to a single tape 'child-friendly' format and Postman Pat is comprehensively represented. Ken Barrie, TV Postman Pat, is the narrator of these familiar, secure Greendale Village 'adventures' and each starts with the jaunty Postman Pat song. **Postman Pat's Treasure Hunt** and **Postman Pat Takes a Message** have now been added, each title with four comforting stories about how he delivers his letters through ice, wind, fog and rain. For children of two and upwards – and often a great deal older!

Hear, too, **Postman Pat** (BBC Young Collection, £4.15) and **Postman Pat** (Little Owl! cassette and book, £3.99), a musical PP songbook and tape.

The Three Little Pigs / Little Red Riding Hood

Richard Scarry, read by Richard Shannon and Lisa Abbott, one cassette with 32-page hbk, Little Owl, £3.99

Attractive package with **Little Red Riding Hood** translated into a chirpy, distinctive Richard Scarry cat in the accompanying book. **The Three Little Pigs** has the same lively Scarry detail including a dastardly grey wolf who has an array of evil expressions. With only a few clear sentences to a page, the story and text are lively but simple enough for learning and newly independent readers. The story on the cassette is followed by ten questions and answers which go down well with young listeners.

Stories for 4-Year-Olds

Rachel Anderson, Margaret Ryan and four others, read by James Bolam and Stephanie Cole, one cassette with 92-page pbk, 54 mins, Collins Audio, £5.99; cassette only, £3.99

Little Rory is afraid of starting school (until he goes to the Fancy Dress Party); the Jelly Monster explodes into gelatinous fragments; the little dragon tricks his brothers out of bed so he can have some room to sleep... these are stories specially written for audio. The readers are creative



and complement one another. Released at the same time are **Stories for 5-Year-Olds**, **Stories for 6-Year-Olds** and **Stories for 7-Year-Olds**. Together they represent a vivacious audio library with good clear print in the illustrated books.

First Story Tapes

Roderick Huny, read by Miriam Margolyes, Michael Elphick, Hannah Gordon and Leo Wringer, six cassettes each 14 mins average with 12 paperbacks, Oxford Reading Tree, £25; pack of six books, £5.50

The respected Oxford Reading Tree has been extended with 12 wordless picture books full of domestic detail which accompany six cassettes in a most prestigious box. The stories are all professionally read in different voices and accents. The pack is to help the pre-reader understand story sequence and structure and re-tell it to an adult, whether parent or teacher. Also on offer is a Teachers' Extended Stories pack, full of questions and follow-up suggestions.

Lollop

Joyce Dunbar and Susan Varley, read by Josie Lawrence, one cassette with 32-page Picture Lion pbk, 15 mins, Collins Audio, £5.99

'Sophie's toy rabbit had long, lollopy ears and long, lollopy arms and long, lollopy legs... The illustrations of Sophie's dangly-limbed toy rabbit and of the family of rabbits who find him and patch him up



after Sophie leaves him behind in the bluebell wood are irresistible. Josie Lawrence's narration is exactly on little Sophie's wavelength. The music and sound effects, like Sophie's feet brushing the bluebells and the owl hooting during Lollop's lonely night, brighten the tape. It's a captivating package for young listeners and readers and makes particularly cosy bedtime reading.

The Tale of Tom Kitten and The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck

Beatrix Potter, dramatised with cast by John Taylor, one cassette, 30 mins, BBC Young Collection, £4.15 With music from the television animation, these are lovely dramatisations: successful and faithful versions of old favourites. Su Pollard is a most convincingly gullible, stubborn Jemima who tries valiantly to protect her eggs and finally bursts into human weeping when the dogs steal them. Dinsdale Landen as Mr Tod is suave, cunning and threatening. Impressive sound effects enhance the stories, like the feathery flapping of Jemima Puddle-Duck's wings and the barking of the invading hounds.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit and **The Tale of Benjamin Bunny** is also available.

A Dragon in Class 4

June Counsel, read by Rachel Wright, two cassettes, 2 hrs, Craftsman Audio Fiction, £10.95 + VAT

This is the unabridged story of the transformation of Class 4 after the advent of the miraculous and gifted Scales, the dragon which Sam rescues from the bars of the swings on his way to school. Spelling tests with Scales around are a whole lot easier because

letters and words whizz round the room. Gradually Scales reveals more and more of his talents. It's full of humour and primary school detail which this age-group identifies with. The specially commissioned music is most striking.

The War of Jenkin's Ear

Written and read by Michael Morpurgo, four cassettes, 4 hrs 40 mins, Chivers, £16.95 + VAT

This is a totally absorbing listening experience which makes the listener confront difficult and challenging issues like faith and loyalty. The new boy, Christopher, at Toby's school is different, but only gradually does he confide in Toby that he is Jesus Christ returned and Toby is to be his disciple. It's completely convincing and the clashes between village and prep school children, between Headmaster and vulnerable pupils are tense and forbidding. The denouement is powerful and leaves the listener wondering and questioning. Michael Morpurgo is an excellent reader of his own work.

Kes

Barry Hines, read by Colin Welland, two cassettes, 2 hrs, Listen for Pleasure, no rrp

Colin Welland is eminently suitable as sympathetic narrator of this tragic little modern classic. Growing up in the spiritual limbo of a broken family and of a community hardened by poverty and the grind of living, Billy's own focus of love and tenderness is his kestrel, Kes. He has nurtured it from young, learned to train it and respect it. Colin Welland's Northern narration of the dialogue is particularly successful and the emotional peaks are the more moving for their starkness.

REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Machines

0 7502 0649 7

Tools

0 7502 0650 0

John Williams, photographs by Zul Mukhida, Wayland (First Technology series), £7.99 each

INFANT

Appropriately called 'First Technology' these are super new titles for the infant classroom. The quality of the colour photography is very high but the particular strength of the series lies in the questions that the reader is asked. All too often in information books banal questions are used as an alternative to an explanatory text but here the questions probe, challenge and also explain. By answering why a paper bucket is not a good idea, the child is being introduced to the concept of materials.



27

Of these two new titles **Tools** is the more effective, with the everyday experiences of children used creatively to show both the purpose and value of tools – from pliers to knitting needles. There is an element of humour on some pages including a touch of the absurd (using a garden fork to eat spaghetti).

The strength of **Machines** comes from the way it shows machines of every type, shape and size – from sports car to deep fat fryer. An introduction is given to power supply whether it is clockwork, electricity or pedal power.

These are excellent titles for classroom and home use and include suggestions for parents and teachers for further development of the concepts covered. GB

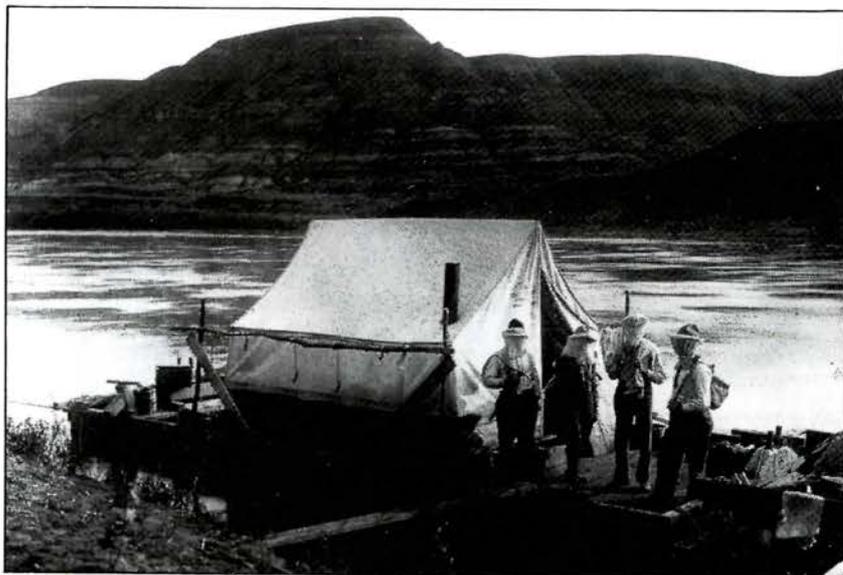
Corythosaurus

William Lindsay, Dorling Kindersley (Dinosaur Spotter's Guides series), 0 7513 5029 X, £6.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

About 78 million years ago this duck-billed dinosaur lived on the Red Deer River in Canada, eating plants and emitting a booming alarm call from its high crested head. It died there too – possibly drowned, for its rigid skeletal corset stopped it from swimming – and there it lay until in 1914 its fossil skeleton was discovered by Barnum Brown who gradually excavated it and took it by mule train to the American Museum of Natural History where it was equally gradually reassembled so we can see it now. So nearly complete was it that many discoveries about Corythosaurus' way of life could be made.

This book brings two things to life – Corythosaurus itself and, more importantly to my mind and certainly much rarer in this sort of book, the expedition that produced the fossils. Wonderful contemporary



From Corythosaurus.

photographs show Barnum Brown and his colleagues at work, illustrating the scale of the exercise and its difficulties. Their base camp was a flat bottomed boat on the river on which was pitched their mess tent – complete with stovepipe through the roof.

In choosing to focus thus individually upon one dinosaur species and one particular episode of palaeontology, William Lindsay has provided a characterful addition to the range of dinosaur books – already much enlivened by his **Dinosaur Atlas**. TP

What's under the ground?

0 7500 1231 5

What's under the sea?

0 7500 1230 7

Anita Ganeri, Simon & Schuster, £8.99 each

MIDDLE

The themes are hardy perennials but these two examples have produced some particularly choice blooms. Each book is a loosely classified collection of depth-related facts and phenomena of the 'strange and wonderful' sort, waiting to be grabbed and popped into middle school project files.

Underground we find giant radishes, birds' nest soup, Cappadocian caves, gemstones and the Terracotta Army. Submarine discoveries include seahorses, walrus, coral reefs, fishing for food, drilling for oil, Channel Tunnel and the Mary Rose – and submarines, of course.

Each collection is tastily arranged for instant consumption, making these the sort of book that will pass quickly through many pairs of hands, each reader discovering a prize or two before the inevitable 'Can I be after you?' TP

Gymnastics

0 7502 0748 5

Judo

0 7502 0747 7

Norman Barrett and David Jefferis, Wayland (Sports Skills series), £7.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

The latest volumes in the 'Sports Skills' series from Wayland would make useful additions to the primary school library and could also be used in secondary schools with potential for special needs applications.

The books contain an appropriate mix of action photographs, diagrams to demonstrate techniques, and text to provide both background information and further explanation. Both titles are aimed at beginners and would be particularly good if used in parallel with practical tuition.

As books to demonstrate skills, they wisely concentrate on depth of coverage rather than breadth. In **Judo**, for example, six pictures and a whole page are devoted to 'Tying the belt'. This book shows how to get started in the sport, grading, throws and falls, and competition – but rather skates over the origins of Judo and would have benefited from the provision of a pronunciation guide.

Gymnastics includes preparation, warming up and types of apparatus – each event is introduced through a dedicated double-page spread. The clarity of this information allows the reader to answer such puzzlers as: 'how many chances do boys and girls have at vaulting the horse and is it the same for both?' GB

Two useful basic sports books. GB

Giant radishes, from **What's under the Ground?**

The Victorian Years

Margaret Sharman, Evans,
0 237 51291 2, £10.95
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Belying her dour reputation, Queen Victoria once remarked, 'I am not at all an admirer or approver of our very dull Sunday'.

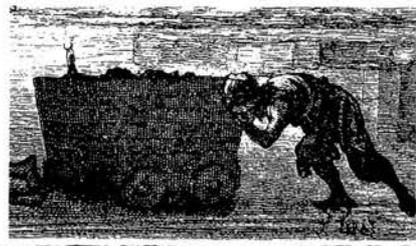
Primary source material needs to be carefully selected and skilfully used. Margaret Sharman deftly slots her judiciously chosen extracts into a very readable text, which is further enlivened by brief newspaper-style reports highlighting many of the significant issues and events of the period; such as 'Better conditions for mining children', 'Cheaper letters on the way' and 'Labourers champion an MP'.

At the end of an era spanning the longest reign in British history, Britain had doubled its population and acquired an Empire 'on which the sun never set'.

In 60 well-illustrated pages, concluding with a section on famous Victorians, the author attains a very wide, balanced coverage of many aspects of life during this tremendous period of economic development, advances in public welfare, and scientific and cultural achievements.

Better conditions for mining children

June 7, 1842, Westminster Parliament is going to make it illegal for women and young children to work underground. For 13 hours a day small children are chained to coal wagons, which they have to drag through narrow tunnels. Their mothers and sisters haul coal up long ladders to the surface.



Not all Victoria's subjects benefited from this age of expansion, however, and the author never lets us forget the great divide that still existed between the living and working conditions of the rich and the poor. VH

Conflict in Eastern Europe

Bernard Harbor, 0 7502 0392 7

Conflict in the Middle East

John King, 0 7502 0391 9

Wayland (Conflicts series),

£8.99 each

SECONDARY

These titles provide excellent starting points for students striving to understand the complex political situations in two very disparate regions of the world, especially the current conflict in the Balkans.

The political make-up of both areas was largely determined at international conferences following the two World Wars, and an overview of these events, as well as pertinent historical and geographical detail is provided in introductory chapters which are concisely yet clearly written.

Power broking between the USA, Britain and the Soviet Union after 1945 resulted in the creation of 'Eastern Europe', an essentially political definition for eight countries which 'had at least as many differences as they had similarities'.

Bernard Harbor gives an absorbing account of the revolutions which began in 1989, and provides a thoughtful and realistic appraisal of the political, religious and ethnic conflicts

which followed as fledgling democracies struggled to form effective governments. The harsh economic realities and the disillusionment felt by Eastern Europeans who expected a quick and easy transformation to Western life-styles is also well documented and explained.

Dr John King has opted for a series of double-page spread 'chapters' covering topics such as '1948 and Israel', 'Suez and Nasser', 'Terrorism and the PLO' and 'The Gulf War'. Whilst covering a lot of ground and providing a useful historical sequence of the main protagonists and events, this piecemeal format does occasionally leave the reader, like Oliver Twist, asking for more.

Excellent maps, well-chosen photographs and a further information section which includes novels and films as well as non-fiction books, round off these fascinating narratives. VH

The Body Atlas

Steve Parker, ill. Giuliano Fornari, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5004 0, £10.99

SECONDARY/ADULT

The Human Body

Steve Parker, Watts Books (Focus On series), 0 7496 1097 2, £8.50
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

One reason why it takes a long time to qualify as a doctor is because nobody ever designed the human body – it evolved the way it is without any specification to be maximally effective but very complicated, so it takes a lot of understanding and a lot of learning. The hardest thing for the tyro anatomist to grasp is that within the dense package it matters vitally what bits of it are neighbours to what other bits, and this is where a book like **The Body Atlas** helps enormously.

In essence it is a dissector's manual, working its way through the whole body showing all bones, muscles and soft tissues in surgical detail. The clarity of Fornari's illustrations and their labelling provide fine information about what's inside us. Parker's text does two jobs – it provides information to go with the pictures and little tasty extras about body function (how you burp, how much food you eat in a year and so on). And for once the book's layout and design really do enhance its content, so that as well as being a pre-medical book of great value, its general interest rating is also high. Only those who faint at the sight of skin should avoid it.

So remarkable is our body that it's provided inspiration in every field of human expression. Stories like 'Frankenstein' and songs like 'Your feet's too big' have been written about it, folklore and legend have sprung up around it and its owners' curiosity is still boundless. Steve Parker's second offering ranges widely in an engaging attempt to bring together anatomical facts with social history, scientific discovery, art and literature. The result is an entertaining mish-mash of side-lit body information, as far from a text book as you could get.

Obviously, seeing as we've all got one, the human body is the ultimate in cross-curricularity, but Parker has the grace to let us discover that for ourselves.

All secondary schools should buy the Atlas – it's essential; it would be nice to think that some would find room for the Focus, too. TP

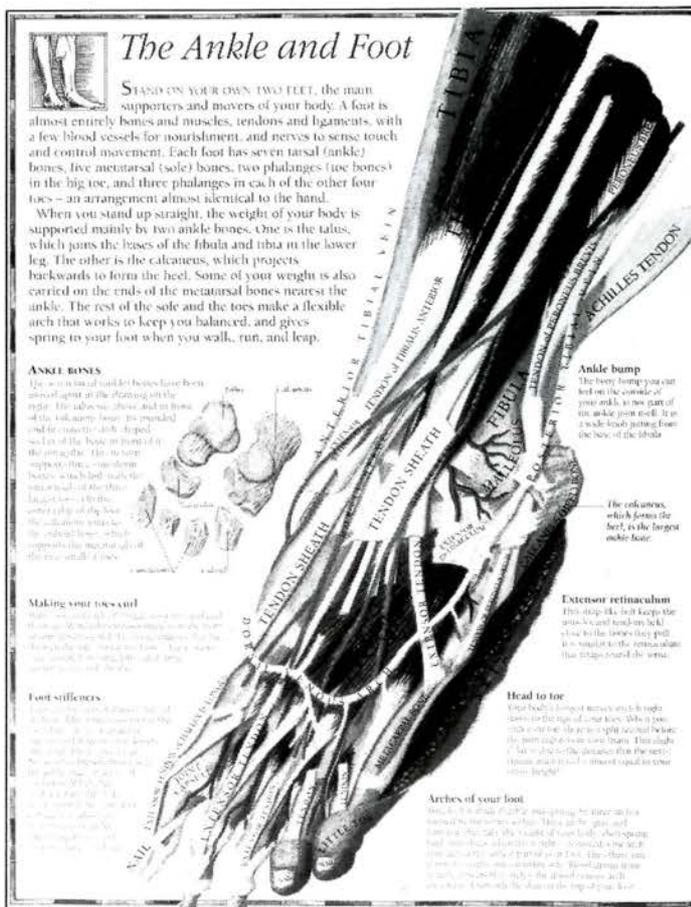
Geoff Brown is Resources Manager for Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.

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

A page from **The Body Atlas**.

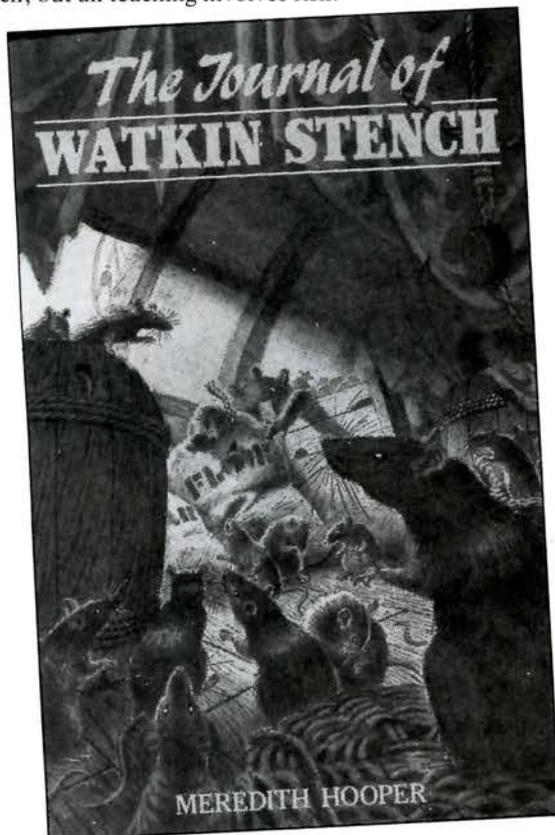


EXTRACTAFACTOZOTL

ROBERT HULL reviews a range of history books for children and argues for a richer, subtler approach to non-fiction.

A reviewer in The Times Educational Supplement remarked, of a recently published non-fiction series, that they 'are not books from which children can learn or extract facts . . . they (children) cannot read selectively but have to read the book from beginning to end . . .'

I read this while searching for history books which children might enjoy reading, preferably from beginning to end. I'd forgotten that non-fiction books are for 'extracting facts', and that 'learning' and 'extracting facts' are the same thing. That must be because I like the sight of children with their heads in a book, and don't mind if they're so enthralled by *The Journal of Watkin Stench* – by Meredith Hooper – that they don't want to stop to do some extractafacting for my project on Penal Settlements in Australia. True, the project might founder because the children have read a book and know too much, but all teaching involves risk.



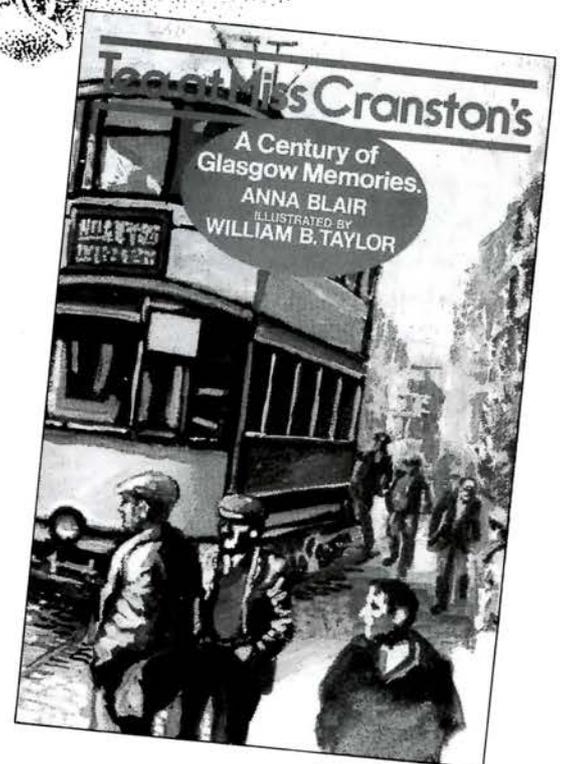
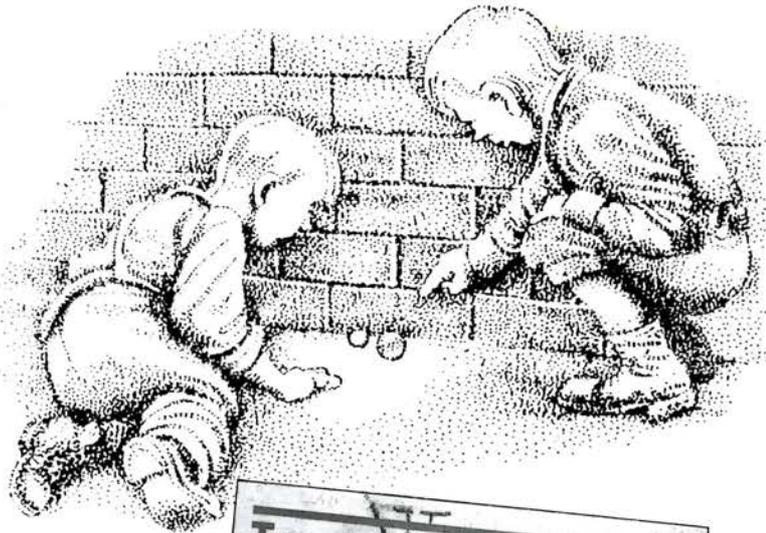
Children need books to look up facts in. It's a fact. It's also a fact that there are lots of books offering that extractive, dental kind of reading. But children have little natural interest in fact-extraction until questions are lit up in their heads. I've extracted this information from many sources, mainly the expressions on children's faces. That is one of life's more eloquent reference works, and should be consulted often.

Here is the biggest fact I've found doing my non-fiction history project. **THERE ARE FAR TOO FEW HISTORY BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO READ.**

If the typical children's history book isn't meant to be read, one looks to the a-typical; to history writing which, borrowing the TES reviewer's phrase, 'is not what one expects from a non-fiction book':

'Take marbles now. Since the 1890s marbles have been various big plunkers, steelies, brown clay dawds, white jauries; and glassies with their mysterious twists of colour

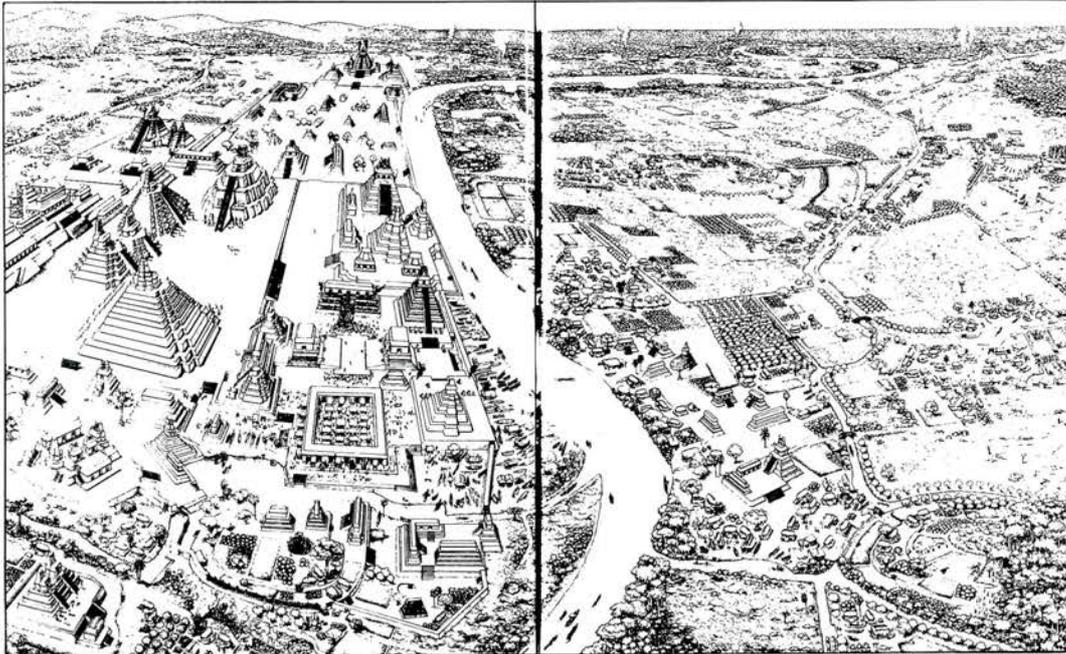
inside, sometimes winkled out of lemonade bottles, sometimes bought in packets by plutocrat weans. Whatever the name, stuff or size, they were all bools, and games of marbles clicked and bounced on, and mothers made wee bags to jingle them in, through three wars, depression and boom.



Many a 15-year-old would love much of Anna Blair's *Tea at Miss Cranston's – a Century of Glasgow Memories*. It isn't, however, written for youngsters. I wish – without wanting to deprive her adult readers – that it had been because I've not found, in books for children, words about their games written with anything like the same relish.

The a-typicality of *A Mayan Town Through History* seems less obvious. But it invites us to read, and tells a splendid, compelling story. Written by Xavier Hernandez and illustrated by Jordi Ballonga and Josep Escofet, it is a sumptuously detailed chronicle, from c 1000 BC to now, of a city's growth. The narrative is carried by the drawings, which painstakingly record changes across crucial centuries. The shifting city scene is drawn from one viewpoint throughout,

or the case of the Aztecs and the bent tadpole.



Spread from
A Mayan Town
Through
History.

like time-lapse photography. The written text, on alternate pages, adds eloquent 'vertical' expansion to the ongoing horizontal narrative. It resembles, in certain ways, reading a good novel.

Bill Boyle's *Local Directories* similarly and admirably stays with its own story long enough for the reader to really find out something. We follow the efforts of a school-pupil, John, to find out about his home town, Neston, using local directories from the library. I'd have liked more of John's tale and fewer suggestions for the reader, but what is fascinating about this adventure is the sense that, through one set of local particulars steadily pursued, John – and his readers – come to have access to a general sense of exploring the local. This is because the story preserves its own narrative and doesn't reel from region to region making 'general' points. Neston's history, as slowly uncovered, thus comes to be any local history. The photographs don't give off an anonymous picture-library feel. It's an actual, not an exemplary or hypothetical place.

One can find a-typical books, then, in which history is a story to be read. Some though, perhaps especially those for younger children, still suffer from lethal doses of adult reading consultant. These sentences are from the otherwise charming *Our Pets*, by Gail Durbin: 'This picture is from a Roman floor. It is made of tiny coloured bits of stone. It is called a mosaic floor. Someone made it about two thousand years ago. It shows a Roman guard-dog.' It goes on like that. Many books go on like that. That is the prose that children like. It is easy to read. It is good to edit.

Similarly with Ruth Thomson's *When I Was Young – Early 20th Century* the autobiographical story of Nancy Emery, born in 1906 in Yorkshire. The idea is lovely and right, but the prose sounds, again, heavily consulted, full of sentences that don't take off from the rhythms of the previous one, but lurch off afresh like items in a phrase book. And fatally for me, the text erases the teller's voice. Do elderly Yorkshire folks speak like this? 'Other people came to work for us as well. Miss Poole came to pluck the chickens in the wash-house. All the feathers were sorted and cleaned and kept in a bag to use for stuffing cushions, pillows and eiderdowns. If she was in the mood, Miss Poole would tell us our fortunes in tea-leaves.' No chickens squawk, no feathers fly – they were only sorted and kept in a bag. Feather-facts, to be extracted later.

In *Tea at Miss Cranstons* the 'rememberers' talk the way real people talk, occasionally even forgetting their Standard English Dialect: 'She used to do a funny wee thing, mamma, she used to save any feathers that came out the pillows when she was whacking them into place with her walking stick, and she saved the feathers in the toothbrush-rack till she'd a wee bundle to put back into the pillow ticking . . . very thrifty mamma was'. Relish for language.

And respect for the facts – of how people actually speak. "You should learn to keep more farrardst apart" a Lancashire woman called over the fence when my mother and her sister tangled bikes in about 1910. Or in consulted English: "You ought to learn to ride your cycles further apart".

For older children, Tony Kelly's *Children in Tudor England* juxtaposes passages about imaginary youngsters with passages about historically real children. This device isn't wholly successful, because a lot of facts clamour for a place in the fiction. It only takes two sentences for Master Carey to stroll underneath a woman emptying a chamber-pot, avoid it only by stepping into the open drain, and be ushered to the Proctors' table and sat in a carved oak chair. Even so, factuality in this text comes in anecdotal guise, atmospheric and quirky, not in ranks of generalities. It can be read, and explored.

The Hiroshima Story, told and drawn by Toshi Maruki and turned into English by Judith Elkin, was published in 1983. It's a picture-book story which very successfully performs non-fiction in the manner of fiction. There can be few as good as this, but every such book undermines the argument that, as the TES reviewer puts it, 'By its very nature, non-fiction cannot be written in the fiction mode'. Toshi Maruki's version of Hiroshima 'tells the truth' so convincingly that I'd turn the argument on its head and suggest that the most terrible historical events need to be written in precisely this mode – though, of course, not only this mode – which preserves and 'places' the horror without annihilating the reader's willingness to contemplate it. In Maruki's fictive-seeming but unambiguously 'true' images, children encounter the unimaginable: 'Hop, hop. Mii-Chan stirred as she sensed something move past her feet. They were swallows with their wings burnt and unable to fly'. And in another terrible moment, 'The woman waded deeper into the river until she was no longer to be seen'.



'They were swallows with their wings burnt and unable to fly.'
From *Hiroshima Story*.

In other words, surely there are different ways of doing non-fiction. Even the pair of terms 'non-fiction' and 'information book' suggests that.

I've come across, I think, about 6 types of non-fiction:

Type A is the overt reference work, of which two excellent examples are Watts' 'Timelines' series and Dorling Kindersley's *Great Atlas of Discovery*.

Type B is the type which is actually similar to A, while purporting to be something else; B's language is essentially that of 'entries' in a reference work, though its function, to be 'looked-up', is disguised by being located in a double-spread.

C is the fact-story in overtly informational or expository mode, of which Bill Boyle's book and Anna Blair's books are, and Nancy Emery's story might be, examples.

D is the fact-story which takes on the manner of fiction, as *Hiroshima Story* does.

And E is the historical fiction proper, as in *The Journal of Watkin Stench*.

At the moment the dominant type is B. It's dominant in three ways. First, numerically, when compared with the relative paucity of type A examples and the extreme paucity of examples in types C and D. Second, it's dominant by virtue of the fact that the language of types C and even D tends to model itself on that of B. The third kind of dominance is that endorsed by the TES reviewer I've referred to, who wants—apparently, in an argument calculated to give Procrustes a bad name—all non-fiction books for children to conform to types A and B.

My suggestion on the other hand, is that children are dismally served by being offered such a narrow selection from possible types of book. It is a sad prospect, if children are to continue meeting in the future only the kind of history books they're meeting now.

What kind? The answer is the staple product of children's history, the book of extractable and recapitulatable fact, 'covering' the National State Curriculum topic. Take the Aztecs, as they appear in three books—from Watts Books (in the 'Craft Topic' series), Oxford ('Insights'), and Heinemann ('Young Researcher'). All these books are 'great for projects'; they're 'packed with facts'. So packed there's no space for a poem, no time for a legend or myth in other than summary form, no extended treatment of a piece of craft or art.

Here is a key essential packed-in fact: '*The Spanish attacked and destroyed the Aztec Empire*'. Well, yes, but . . . was Cortes in 'attack-the-Empire' mode from the off? Wasn't he dead curious, too? How did he find out it was an empire? What sort of 'empire'? A Roman sort? Or . . . ? For children, facts are often—unfortunately—packed with questions. '*Montezuma was killed*', for instance. This is more sub-fact than fact: did he fall or was he pushed? Was it stones flying through his window or was he murdered? A lot of books, like some teachers, don't have time to answer.

In the empire of Aztec non-fiction, Extractafactozotl still rules. History is occupied territory, he says, despatching his priests to yank out the hearts of any competing read.

For this empire of generalities, detail is threatening, as well as messy. Spruce stereotypes are handier; they behave properly, they have 'essential facts'. In a small pond ten feet away from me as I write this there's a tadpole with a threateningly incorrect appearance. It's wiggling around with an essential fact wrong. Facing due north, its tail points south south-east, about 15 degrees out. So we'd better ignore it.

Extractafactozotl's empire has been beating off barbarian cases and particulars for so long that it has become blasé. The National State School History Curriculum says (said?) that the Aztec civilisation was 'without wheel', failing to add the bent-tadpole truth that they did have wheels, but only on toys. The Watts book, referring to human sacrifice, remarks with enviable problem-free decidedness that '*to the Aztecs sacrifice was neither cruel nor hateful. It was a most sacred act, and was carried out with elaborate ritual.*'

I'd sooner children heard inessential Aztecs with bent views:

*'Arrogant stand the warriors,
those who snatch whatever is precious,
gold, splendid feathers, turquoises,
those intoxicated with the liquor of death . . .
Let us spend our lives in peace and pleasure . . .
To invoke Him
with the strength
of the eagle and the jaguar
with the force of the warriors
will lead only to the speaking
of false words on earth.'*

I'd sooner they heard Spanish soldier Bernal Diaz, with all his 'ethnocentric' horror at the stench of temple slaughter, the priests' filthy matted hair, the blood smeared everywhere. It's real, like his amazement at the cleanliness and splendour of Tenochtitlan.

History is a voice telling it. With actual past life, as with the vicarious life of fiction, children have to feel the pulse of the teller. They have to make their own stories as they read, and to do that they need to exercise their own uncertainty, not exorcise it. Mysteries lie at the heart of any committed read, and a history that has no space for the reader's puzzlement and wonder is utterly dead.

No matter, we're delivering Curriculum. How many pints of project this week? There you go . . . ●

Details of books mentioned:

The Journal of Watkin Stench, Meredith Hooper, Piper, 0 330 32494 2, £2.99 pbk

Tea at Miss Cranston's – a Century of Glasgow Memories, Anna Blair, Shephard Walwyn, 0 85683 081 X, £4.95

A Mayan Town Through History, Xavier Hernandez, ill. Jordi Ballonga and Josep Escofet, Wayland, 0 7502 0619 5, £11.95

Local Directories, Bill Boyle, Collins Educational (1987), now o/p

Our Pets, Gail Durbin, Longman, 0 582 04021 3, £2.75

When I Was Young – Early 20th Century, Ruth Thomson, Watts Books, 0 86313 872 1, £8.50

Children in Tudor England, Tony Kelly, Stanley Thornes (1987), now o/p

The Hiroshima Story, Toshi Maruki, A & C Black, 0 7136 2357 8, £5.95

Great Atlas of Discovery, Dorling Kindersley, 0 86318 830 3, £10.99

Aztecs 'Craft Topics', Ruth Thomson, Watts Books, 0 7496 0839 0, £7.99

The Aztecs 'Insights', Fiona MacDonald, Oxford, 0 19 910049 7, £7.95

The Aztecs 'Young Researcher', Jacqueline Dineen, Heinemann, 0 431 00568 0, £9.99

'Timelines' from Watts Books are priced at £7.99

Robert Hull taught for 25 years in state schools and is now a freelance writer and lecturer. He is the author of *The Language Gap* (Methuen, 0 416 39400 0, £7.95) and *Behind the Poem* (Routledge, 0 415 00701 1, £10.95), and the ghost-writer of *My Childhood in Nazi Germany* (0 7502 0077 4, £8.95) from Wayland, for whom he also edited *A Prose Anthology of The First World War* (0 7502 0452 4) and *A Prose Anthology of The Second World War* (0 7502 0453 2), at £8.99 each.

BLIND SPOT

OOGIE-WOOGIE-BOO!

PETER HUNT on revisiting the Pooh books.



Having four daughters means we get through a fair amount of bedtime reading, and I would guess that like most people we have evolved a list of readable books and unreadable books. I know, for example, that Judith Kerr's *The Tiger Who Came To Tea*, and Rosemary Wells's *Stanley and Rhoda* should get awards for their beautiful readability for the younger ones: and that Laura Ingalls Wilder's 'Little House' series, and Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* should get prizes for stuff that flows off the tongue and keeps the older ones agog. On the down side, I can't get my tongue around Alison Uttley's prose at all, while Nesbitt's *The Wouldbegoods* is hard going, despite Oswald, and it needs more explanations than I can muster for inquisitive 9-year-olds.

But even with the unreadables, I'm inclined to persevere; there's good stuff in there, and I don't often feel like crawling under the sofa in embarrassment. But when it comes to the Pooh books, it's confession time. Because of an organisational quirk in the Hunt household, I had, until last week, never sat down to read them to the girls; now Abigail (5) and Chloe (3) have their stories together, and last week out came the A A Milne. It was a bit of a shock.

Now, I don't have the excuse of any normal person who might say that the last time they read *Winnie-the-Pooh* was thirty years ago, and so they remember it through a haze. I've written (allegedly) learned articles on Milne and his books, and quoted my favourite bits in lectures over the years – Piglet and the heffalump ('*Help, help, a Horrible Hoffalump!*'), Owl trying to spell ('*Pooh looked on admiringly*'), Eeyore and Pooh ('*Lost your way?*'). And, of course, I've read Ann Thwaite's biography of Milne, and her wonderful *The Brilliant Career of Winnie-the-Pooh*, and so I know that Milne himself was ambivalent about the books.

Well, sitting there with Abby and Chloe and *Winnie-the-Pooh*, I can now appreciate his point. To begin with, all the 'adult' male toys in the books are either unpleasant, like Rabbit, or incomprehensible (to children), like Eeyore. There's a good deal of comedy with Owl trying to fool Rabbit ('*Owl looked at him and wondered whether to push him off the tree*') – but who is it for? Now I think Eeyore is (up to a point) very funny, but

then I'm . . . over forty. I'm inclined to think that he only puzzles Abby and Chloe, as he does Pooh and Piglet.



The 'child' characters – Pooh, Piglet, Tigger and Roo – come off a lot better: but then we too often fall over Milne being either twee or smarty-pants. The fact that the 'oogie-woogie-boo' stuff (as Beachcomber called it) is nowhere near as bad as some of Milne's contemporaries could serve up may be academically interesting, but was not a lot of consolation last Tuesday. And from the joke about Pooh living 'under the name of Sanders' onwards, it's very uncomfortable to be reading sly wisecracks to myself. Some adults might find that sort of thing a relief from having to lower themselves to the level of children, but I don't think that says a great deal for their respect for children. All of this is quite apart from the fact that both the beginning of *Winnie-the-Pooh* and the end of *The House at Pooh Corner* are impossible to read aloud: there's not only my voice reading and the girls listening, there's Christopher Robin and Milne clattering up the place – which is, anyway, awash with sentiment. ('*Could you very sweetly?*') No.)

Now the theory is that the books work because children can identify with both the powerful Christopher Robin, while admiring or laughing at Pooh and Tigger, empathising with Piglet, and sympathising with Roo. Well, maybe. There's no doubt that when Milne can get himself off the page, there's stuff that suits everyone. Tigger, for instance, trying to find his breakfast, or Roo asking Kanga if he can go out to play:

"We'll see," said Kanga, and Roo, who knew what that meant, went into a corner and practised jumping out at himself, partly because he wanted to practise this, and partly because he didn't want Christopher Robin and Tigger to think he minded when they went off without him.

But getting to those bits requires a rather sticky wade through the unreadable and the unswallowable.

The same goes for the books of verses. Again, I know Milne admitted that 'They are a curious collection; some for children, some about children, some by, with or from children', but I do wish he'd stuck with the for children. 'Rice Pudding' and 'The King's

Breakfast' are family bywords, and Chloe is very fond (oh, well), of 'Hopppy'; but I'm extremely suspicious of the sentimental, not to say patronising, eye of 'Buttercup Days' ('*Where is Ann / Walking with her man*'), and I defy even the staunchest fans to bring themselves to read 'Corner of the Street' (where Percy's slippers go 'Tweet, tweet, tweet') without a sedative.

It's not so much that a lot of it is rather feeble: it's more that Milne's heart wasn't in it; he may have been a good craftsman – better than most – but he didn't have the real enthusiasm and love for children that makes me want to go on reading books which are otherwise unreadable.

What we really need, of course, is a slim volume of the best bits – the best bits for children, that is – stuffed with Shepard drawings. Not much chance of that: there's money in that there bear, and so Pooh's Brilliant Career will just have to go on without me. I'm sure he'll manage, but before my next session with Abby and Chloe, perhaps a little judicious scissor work is in order – or else it's back to *The Little Grey Rabbit*. ●



Peter Hunt is presently editing the *Oxford Illustrated History of Children's Literature*. His article on A A Milne appears in Dennis Butts' *Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context* (Macmillan, 0 333 52247 8, £13.99).

Ann Thwaite's books mentioned in this piece are *A A Milne: His Life* (Faber, 0 571 13888 8, £17.50) and *The Brilliant Career of Winnie-the-Pooh* (Methuen, 0 413 66710 3, £14.99).

Methuen publish the complete opus of A A Milne books about Winnie-the-Pooh, Christopher Robin, Kanga, Tigger, Roo, Piglet and Eeyore – all with the splendid E H Shepard illustrations.

PAPERBACK ORIGINALS

Julia Eccleshare
on a publishing trend that's gathering momentum

Once upon a time . . . books were judged by their leather-bound covers, gold-tooled writing and thick, high-quality paper. The physical weight of a book added to its gravitas. Its smell added quaintness and an aura of studiousness. Good children read good books.

Few repine for those far-off days. The shift in the emphasis of reading, so that it fell firmly on entertainment and availability to all, brought us cheap paperbacks. Hardbacks, especially as far as children's books are concerned, became increasingly the preserve of public libraries. The bookshop market for hardback fiction dwindled, and all but died, a few years ago. Even the most loving of grandparents would be loathe to chance their money on an 'unknown' novel, and for years children themselves have claimed they would rather read paperbacks – the image is better, even if the print size is not.

Paperbacks as the cheaper version of a hardback have long been with us. The risk was taken by the hardback publisher; origination costs were set against the small but secure hardback print run and the sale of paperback rights. Reviewers 'noticed' the hardback, informing prospective buyers. Those with big enough budgets bought it then and there, the rest could wait secure in the knowledge that in due course – at least a year later – they would be able to buy the same book in a different cover.

But then tough times came. The sales of hardback fiction grew less and less. Even libraries began to buy paperbacks, sensibly enough since children preferred reading them and they could buy far more stock with their decreasing funds. The time had come to take a long look at the hardback novel.

It's not easy to break the habits of a lifetime and the hardback novel is clearly not going to lie down and die quietly. Different publishers have responded to the dilemma in different ways and opinions are divided as to how best to protect the future of new fiction.

The conundrum goes something like this: if a new author is launched straight into paperback (a) how will anyone know about it and (b) how can the costs work out when they can only be set against the paperback sales?

Eureka! In the 1980s a solution was apparently found. The 'trade' paperback was invented. Large-format paperbacks, produced to a high standard on quality paper, were intended to replace the hardback at a more affordable price and in a format that would appeal directly to children. Teenage fiction, the most problematic area to sell, was the first to be given the treatment. In 1981 The Bodley Head, renowned at that point for its 'New Adult' imprint, put all its new teenage fiction into this format. For them it worked. By dint of enormous marketing effort, they got reviews for the new novels and were able to keep prices down by putting print-runs up.

This paradigm has been widely followed by other publishers with teenage novels to sell. Teenage fiction, never quick to sell, seems to have found a 'trade' paperback market. Libraries have accepted these hybrids instead of hardbacks. Bookshops have been more reluctant to do so, knowing that in an area as price-sensitive as children's fiction the extra couple of pounds on a trade paperback will be a distinct disadvantage. Like librarians, reviewers slowly got the measure of the whys and wherefores of the trade paperback and began to treat it as it deserved, in terms of review coverage. They are now, rightly, finding their places on prize lists alongside hardbacks.



It seems astonishing that this should even need mentioning. Surely the difference between an original and a reprint is more important than the difference between a hardback and a paperback? Apparently not. Paperbacks have for so long been seen as a second bite at a cherry that they rarely receive the attention they deserve.

Just as 'trade' paperbacks have been absorbed into the culture some publishers are taking the second obvious and almost certainly necessary step away from the hardback original. It is here that different publishers are following different paths. Junior fiction sells far more freely than teenage fiction and it sells especially well through the non-bookshop outlets of book clubs, school bookshops and school book fairs. These are committed paperback markets. If fiction is to compete with the obvious 'paperback' titles of jokes, quiz books, choose your own adventure stories and the rest, then it must be readily available in paperback. Of course it always has been, as a reprint. Now some publishers are chancing putting fiction straight into mass-market paperbacks. A risky commitment and, financially, a large one. To keep costs down, print-runs must be large. To draw attention to its arrival, the books and the authors must be seriously and heavily marketed. The price is a matter of enormous sensitivity as there is no shortage of titles for the buyers to choose from.

All of these strategies will work better for some books than others. Series such as 'The Babysitter Club', 'Point Horror', 'Point Crime', etc. sell happily on the backs of each other and have, therefore, always existed as paperbacks only. Their market is a mass one, they are passed on by the children themselves who therefore need them at affordable, pocket-money prices. Similarly, there are one-off junior fiction stories which find their way comfortably, without the need for signposting by reviewers. (Interestingly, there have always been exceptional books for which this has worked. Clive King's **Stig of the Dump** was published straight into paperback in 1963 because no one wanted it in hardback and Robert Leeson's **The Third Class Genie** was published by Collins in 1975 as a paperback original because it was felt to be a book which children would find for themselves – and they did.)

But, there are no formulae to follow and publishers are backing their own hunches. For some, the hardback is beginning to feel like something out of the dark ages. Picture books, novelties, junior and teenage fiction are all being launched straight into paperback. As one editor said, 'It concentrates the mind wonderfully. The work on a book and the commitment to it are just the same for us as originators in paperback as for a hardback editor.'

Others take a more cautious view believing that fiction, and especially 'quality' fiction, needs building through the commitment and support of librarians. 'Librarians generate the enthusiasm that gets books to teachers and children. It is a grassroots movement that creates a quality author.' They are also concerned that the absence of reviews makes books less likely to succeed in shops, libraries or, increasingly important, in the award stakes. 'It takes a tremendous marketing effort to get a new paperback known.'

Who is right? There are no hard and fast answers, since each company must do what works best for its particular list. Obviously, it depends to some extent on the structure of the list that's being created – Puffin is richly fed by three flourishing hardback imprints; Red Fox by four or five. HarperCollins has only its own hardbacks to draw directly into paperback, Scholastic and Walker work on similar principles. All want to sell their books as effectively as possible. The days of publishing a book for reasons of prestige rather than sales have all but gone.

Sales, too, are what encourage authors but, again, different companies take different views on what authors and agents think about publishing straight into paperback. 'Going straight into paperback looks like a lack of commitment,' was set against 'After all, authors mind most about getting their books sold.' Agents, too, seem divided in their feelings about the virtues or otherwise of direct paperback publishing. The increased volume sales are attractive – if they materialise – but authors and agents like the serious review coverage which still sticks more closely to hardbacks than paperbacks. Authors, too, are very reluctant to give up the notion of their book in hardback. There is a dignity and sense of achievement about a hardback which few paperbacks can match.

At the end of the day, perception of what a book is lies at the heart of the debate. Is the book what it looks like from the outside or the words that are written on the inside? Or is it a sum of the two? Are books about immediate large sales but no built-in long life or are they to be treasured and handed down from one generation to another?

Traditionally children's publishing has been committed to books that will last over a number of years. Publishing them in hardback could be afforded and then, a leisurely two years or so later, they could be given a new lease of life by the appearance of a paperback version. Thus established, they could hope to remain in print for a good few years, selling comfortably for a decade or so. But, times are changing. Most books do not have that leisurely life (and nor do the rest of us). They must make their mark quickly and then keep their profile high if they are not to be eclipsed by newcomers to the shelves. Paperbacks will always do this more effectively which is why Paperback Originals are the way of the future.

Julia Eccleshare has, for nine years, been the selector of **Children's Books of the Year**. She's been Children's Books Editor for **The Times Literary Supplement** and a Fiction Editor for Puffin and Hamish Hamilton. Now she works as a freelance reviewer, is married, has four children and lives in London.

Children's Book Week 1991 at Hulbert Middle School, Hampshire.



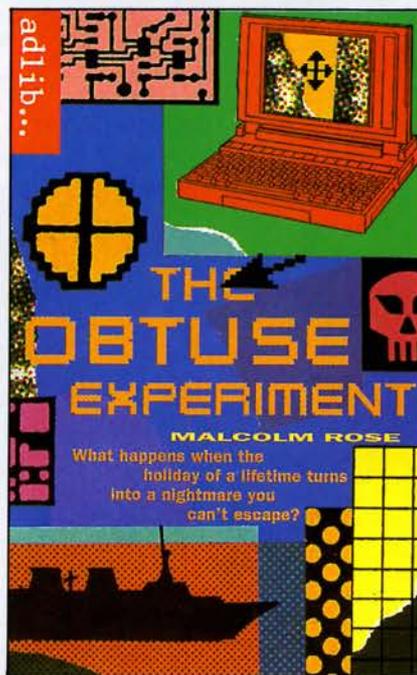
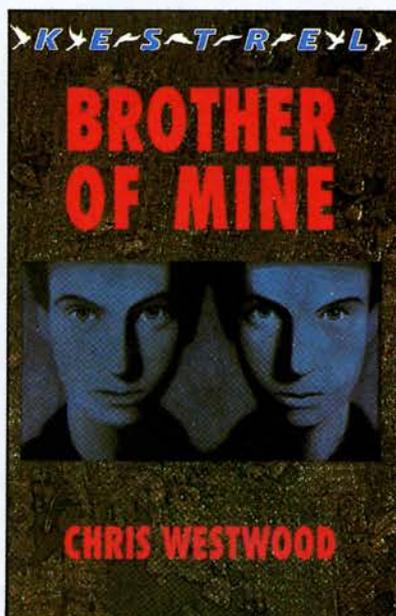
PAPERBACK ORIGINALS

Adrian Jackson reviews some recent publications

This group of paperback originals is a fairly typical slice of what's on offer for teenage readers apart from the fact that there's only one American novel. Some focus on the way the world is. In **Tall, Thin and Blonde** by Dyan Sheldon (Walker, 0 7445 2438 5, £4.99), the sole American book, Jenny is amazed when Amy suddenly develops an interest in boys, clothes and cheerleading. She is one of the beautiful people of the title, but Jenny isn't. Cue the story where the beautiful people are shallow, unreliable and terrified of being different while the uncool and unslim Jenny shows her social conscience (demonstrating against the dissection of frogs) and gains a thinking boyfriend. Michelle in **Hands in Contrary Motion** by Sue Mayfield (Adlib, 0 590 55168 X, £4.99) is similarly troubled: her three brothers call her 'monsterhighs'. There are more problems when dad leaves home to live with a young girl. Piano playing is the means by which Michelle expresses her sense of a better life and through her piano teacher, who manages to combine various kinds of apparent perfection (she's artistic, sympathetic, calm, religious, happily living with a male nurse and expecting a baby) she comes to a sense of her own worth.

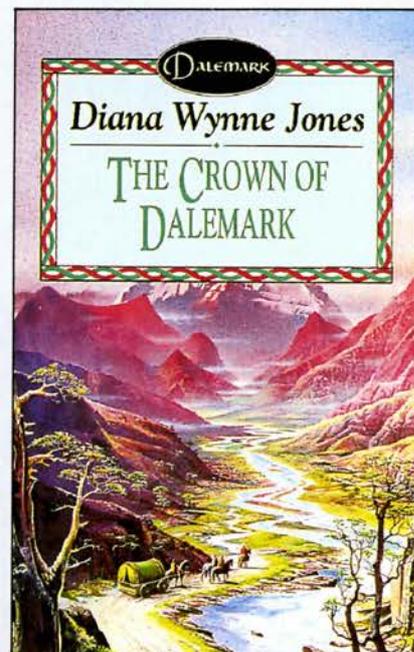
It's the worth of animals which concern the characters in Jean Ure's **Always Sebastian** (Bodley Head, 0 370 31536 7, £7.99). We are back to the Maggie and Sebastian story that this author has dealt with before. Sebastian is involved, yet again, in animal rights campaigns. Maggie is mostly left to the background while her two daughters take up the ethical battles of what not to eat, what not to wear and the protection of the environment. Chris Westwood seems to thrive on being more destructive and sinister. In his **Brother of Mine** (Viking Kestrel, 0 670 84770 4, £7.50) twin brothers share a similar appearance and a hatred of each other. When Tony allows his brother's girlfriend to mistake him for Nick, Nick tries to exact revenge. It's powerful writing, particularly when it deals with strong feelings of anger and hatred.

A strange inversion seems to leave these novels of the present looking like fantasies while the fantasies give a sharp edge to our view of the present as Jean Ure shows in **A Place to Scream** (Doubleday, 0 385 40013 6, £6.99). In the not too distant future, old people are abandoned, beggars crowd the streets, only the lucky few have employment. Gillian, striking out against conformity, loses her precious job and then, in tracking down her beloved Gramps, decides to help look after dumped geriatrics. This is no simple fantasy and we are continually reminded of the bleaker elements in our present world. **The Obtuse Experiment** by Malcolm Rose (Adlib, 0 590 55169 8, £4.99) is also set in the future. 350 'unsettled' (delinquent) schoolchildren are packed off on an educational cruise. Creatures from another world, who dedicate themselves to righting disasters from the past, know



that all the children die when their ship hits an iceberg. Mel, one of the aliens, is sent to avert this disaster and finds himself caught up in a wonderful piece of intrigue. While fighting diseases to which he has no immunity, he has to enlist all the talents of the students, including computer hacking, to confound not an iceberg but a submarine. It's tense and very moving. In Mark Haddon's **Gridzbi Spudvetch!** (Walker, 0 7445 2425 3, £4.99) aliens also come to earth, but not to help. They want to steal humans and repopulate their own planet, but they haven't bargained for Charlie and Jimbo who uncover the plot and finally destroy it.

Placing Diana Wynne Jones' **The Crown of Dalemark** (Mammoth, 0 7497 1255 4,



£3.99) against these other books is probably unfair. She writes with a skill and subtlety that creates her fantasy world in sharp colours and hues of tones and meaning. It's a half-brick of a book, the fourth and grand conclusion to the 'Dalemark' sequence, with almost 100 pages at the end devoted to a guide to Dalemark. Once read, it's hard to forget it or remember the stumbling awkwardness of first getting into this slice of richly detailed and invented history which confounds any notion of fantasy. This is solidly real in a way few writers can achieve.

Completing the range are three distinctly individual books, all of which I would want in school. **Well, I'm Still Here** (Pan, 0 330 32714 3, £2.99) by Joanne Gillespie, is the second account by the young Joanne of her life since twice having cancerous tumours removed from her brain. It's a mixture of styles, part account and part poems with additions from mum and dad, together with pictures by her younger sister. It's easy to read, moving and thought-provoking – particularly in the way pity is seen to change to jealousy as Joanne ceases to be a tragic victim. Tony Robinson's latest TV storytelling, **Blood and Honey** (ill. Adam Willis, BBC, 0 563 36234 0, £7.99) makes its appearance in book form, which is mostly good news. There's a determined attempt to make a good story available to a modern audience but also a concern to see those historical events against present day politics. The style of the telling does this, helped by striking contrasts with contemporary photographs. The use of cartoon illustrations makes it all accessible, but their comic style and the dreadful use of pink colouring throughout finally jar with the text. **Travel Writing** edited by Geoff Barton (Oxford, 0 19 831283 0, £4.25) is a reminder of the quality of educational publishing and the way a good editor can make a whole genre available and accessible to students. This collection is full of nuggets, continually opening up texts and writers for further exploration, and the juxtapositions are often intriguing, particularly setting Jules Verne and Michael Palin together in their very different versions of **Around the World in Eighty Days**. ●

WRITER
REPLY

A CAUTIONARY TALE

by
ALISON LEONARD



Bedtime with Cathy (2), Alison and Anna (4).

This is a tale about some tales: about a whopping great giant, and the age-old, wise and revered tellers of classic, time-honoured stories, and about a really stupid little girl.

At my school (for I, Best Beloved, was the really stupid little girl) they had a splendid system for getting children to read the classic, time-honoured tales by writers remembered and revered. It was a system which I scarcely dare to describe, for fear it will instantly be adopted by the whopping great giant in London who knows what is Best For Us.

THERE WAS A LIST

The system was this. There was a List. (Who was the whopping giant that invented the list? How, and why, did he invent it? Ah - that is a secret lost in mystery.) And on that List lay, neatly, in quiet instructive columns, all the tales one should ever be required to read. If one had read all the tales on the List, one (and by 'one', Best Beloved, I mean that really stupid little girl and her much wiser friends and relations, of whom there were almost as many as dear old Rabbit used to have) would be as conversant with Our Literary Heritage as any whopping old giant in London could possibly wish.

AND ONCE A YEAR THERE WAS A TEST

Every little girl in the school took The Test, and answered questions on Our Literary Heritage: questions about

little girls with grandfathers on Swiss hillsides, and dirty little chimney sweeps in the sea, and salty wooden boats up-turned on the shore, and other such enchantments.

For they were, and are, enchantments, Best Beloved.

But this little girl didn't know they were enchantments. For they were not offered as a rapture, a passion, an obsession or a delight. They were offered as a List, and a Test.

The little girl was really, truly stupid - as the whopping giant in London would see it, and the mysterious inventor of the List would see it, too. She wasn't stupid in the 'no marbles' sense of the word 'stupid', but stupid in the sense, if you will excuse the horribly non-standard English, that she was bloody-minded. If somebody ordered her to do something, she quite simply didn't feel like doing it. If somebody gave her orders about Becoming Conversant with Our Literary Heritage, she picked up the nearest Enid Blyton in self-defence. If Teacher told her to go and read *David Copperfield*, she felt like *Jemima Puddle-Duck* being told to go and fetch the sage and onion to make the stuffing for the roast bird.

So, what did this really stupid little girl do with her marbles and her Test? It was quite simple, Best Beloved. She used her marbles to do very well in the Test. She chatted up the *Jemima Puddle-Ducks* who were happy to fetch the sage and onion, and she found out who lived on a Swiss hillside with her grandfather, and which dirty chimney-sweeps swam in the sea, and who lived in a salty up-turned boat on the shore. She cheated, and she did very well in the Test, and she lived ignorantly ever after.

Now, it's never too late to have a happy childhood.

I grew up, and understood a little better what makes people stupid, and makes them happy. And then I had my happy childhood with my own children. I sat on their beds and cuddled them

and read them Beatrix Potter, and Rudyard Kipling, and John Burningham and Helen Cresswell and Helen Oxenbury and Noel Streatfeild (my goodness, that one couldn't even spell her name) and eventually even the Charleses Kingsley and Dickens. It was my daughter who lay awake long after what should have been 'lights out' reading *The Water Babies* over and over again; later, it was the same daughter who said, 'Mum, haven't you even read *Great Expectations*? It's my favourite book!' When the other daughter fell sick with the vapours (only now it's called glandular fever) I sat on the sofa with my arm around her and read her *Pride and Prejudice* and *Orlando* and even Shaw's *Prefaces*, simply because I love them (the daughters and the books). And they, the daughters, both go on reading Our Literary Heritage with no problem at all, and so do I, now.

And the moral of that is, Best Beloved? Well, you can see it as clear as mud, I've no doubt. I can see it now, though I couldn't see it then, when I was a stupid little girl. And the whopping old giant in London seems to wear the kind of magic spectacles that stop him seeing anything at all.

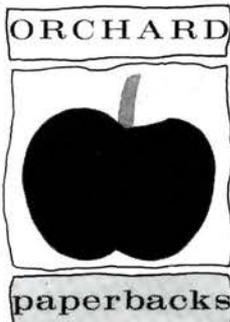
If Our Literary Heritage is offered with rapture, with passion, with obsession or delight, it will live. If it is offered as a List, and a Test, it will die.

LOVE IS INFECTIOUS

It's as simple as that, O Best Beloved, O Giant. Not many things in life are simple, but this one is. Love is infectious. Lists ain't.

Alison Leonard's most recent book (for the 7-10 age group) is *Rugglesmoor Dinosaur*, published by Walker, 0 7445 2198 X, at £6.99.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS
NEWS



David Bennett

BOOKS LIMITED

Publishing Plus . . .

Now – in these days of cutbacks and commercial re-thinks – for the good news: two publishing ventures well worth noting.

First, a new list from David Bennett – formerly of Usborne, Collins, Walker and, most recently, Kingfisher but now going it alone with a mixture of hardbacks and paperbacks, picture books, storybooks and non-fiction. Already the flair that went into the innovative Sainsbury's Children's Books and inspired the world-wide success of Martin Handford's *Wally* books looks much in evidence. 'I hope we can all look forward to a happy and prosperous future,' says DB to his prospective customers 'and that you will enjoy not only the books in this catalogue but also those still to come.' Not much doubt about that, says **BfK**.

Not much doubt, either, about the success of a new paperback list from Orchard Books, part of the Watts Group. Backing up authors and illustrators of the calibre of Ian Beck, Rose Impey, Sheila Lavelle, Shoo Rayner and Jack Prelutsky comes a novel use of fly-leaves. Each book offers a gloss on the text it contains which goes well beyond the usual author-notes – questions are asked, facts are reinforced, jokes are cracked, maps are drawn, all in splendid kid's-eye-catching profusion. Already children prefer paperbacks to hardbacks, that we know. This lively initiative seems set to capitalise on that.

Equality Street

From Penguin comes the third edition of the *Equality Street* Multi-Cultural Booklist compiled by Susan Adler. It includes books which show oppression and resistance to oppression; books set in multi-ethnic Britain; and poems and stories from around the world.

For further information contact Alison Marshall on 071 416 3000, ext 2433, at Penguin Children's Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ.



ROBERT WESTALL

7th October 1929
– 15th April 1993

A belated **BfK** tribute, this. Robert Westall died suddenly just after our last issue had gone to press. Unusually, though, for a children's author, his passing was widely noted in the national press – as we'd hope, but not necessarily expect. He won the Carnegie Medal with his first book, *The Machine Gunners* (1979), won it again with *The Scarecrows* (1981), carried off the overall Smarties Prize with *Blitzcat* (1989) and the Guardian Award with *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1991) as well as a number of other major prizes. Given such success, critics were surprisingly divided by the tough, gritty writing of this art-teacher turned antiques dealer from Tyneside who lost his only son, Chris, in a tragic motorbike accident in 1978. It wasn't this that led to his preoccupation with ghosts and hauntings, however. 'Perhaps I use the supernatural as a viewpoint to comment on the inner world of psychology,' he commented. 'Is the supernatural psychology without psychologists?' He was also interested in cats. A black, battered and rather special one is at the centre of his latest book, *Size Twelve*, which Steve Rosson reviews on page 8 of this issue. It's a typical Westall tale: gripping, uncompromising and totally individual. He'll be much missed.

CP



Happy 10th
Birthday
Letterbox

love Jo
X



TEN YEARS OF LETTERBOX

Is it really ten years since the founding of Letterbox Library – the co-operative children's bookclub that specialises in anti-sexist, anti-racist books? True, but hard to believe. The latest newsletter is as fresh as ever, lays out its literary and picture-book wares with clarity and flair, and offers a rare combination of supplier-and-consultant. Celebrations this month include the launch of a special South Africa edition with, in the autumn, the promise of a special new prize. Another Other Award? Very welcome it'll be, too, since the demise of the original Other Award in 1988. Everyone at **BfK** sends congratulations and good wishes for the next ten years.

For details contact The Letterbox Library, Unit 2D, Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London N1 3QP (tel: 071 226 1633).

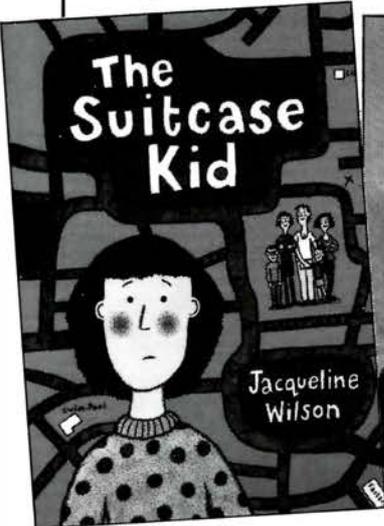
AWARDS ROUND-UP



The Library Association

The Library Association 1993 Carnegie Medal goes to Anne Fine for **Flour Babies**, published by Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13252 5, £8.99.

and the Kate Greenaway Medal goes to Anthony Browne for **Zoo**, published by Julia MacRae, 1 85681 232 4, £8.99.



Jacqueline Wilson

The Children's Book Award for 1993 has been won by **The Suitcase Kid** by Jacqueline Wilson, published by Doubleday (0 385 40175 2, £8.99), with the paperback due in August this year.

The Macmillan Prize for a Children's Picture Book was awarded this year to a student from Liverpool John Moores University, Joanne Kouyoumdjian, for **Look Out, Look Out, Mad Animals About**. (Look out for the publication of this title on the Macmillan list sometime in the future.)

The Signal Poetry Award for work published during 1992 has been given to **Two's Company** by Jackie Kay, ill. Shirley Tourret, published by Blackie (0 216 93317 X, £5.99 pbk).



The Copus Science Book Prize (Junior Category) has been awarded to **Mighty Microbes** by Thompson Yardley, published by Cassell (0 304 32692 5, £3.99 pbk).

And CONGRATULATIONS to **Judith Elkin**, well-known for her work in the world of children's books, especially multi-cultural concerns, who has been awarded a personal chair at the School of Information Studies, University of Birmingham. It's something BfK feels especially pleased about as Judith has worked with us for many years. Well done, Professor!

Also Puffin's **Liz Attenborough** receives our Salute for being honoured as one of only six publishers to be included in a weighty volume called **The Best of British Women** (by Martin Miller in association with Reed International). Deserved recognition for her committed work with children's books over so many years.

FOR THE STAFFROOM BOOKSHELF

Into the Box of Delights, Anna Home, BBC, 0 563 36061 5, £15.99

More than a nostalgia trip (though it's certainly that, too) this *History of Children's Television* could hardly be more timely in its reminder of the quality, and commitment, we can no longer take for granted in these de-regulated days. The text plods a bit because Anna Home is no writer. What she is, though, as one of the begetters of **Playschool**, **Jackanory** and **Grange Hill** amongst other innovations, is a tele-person to her fingertips. When she pleads, in her final chapter, for the protection of distinct and distinguished programmes for children, it's impossible to doubt her authority.

Audacious Kids, Jerry Griswold, Oxford, 0 19 505888 7, £22.50

If you distrust Grand Theory or regard Children's Literature as perfect material on which to exercise the latest critical fad, this text is to be avoided at all costs. Jerry Griswold focuses on the era from 1865 to 1914 in

America when 'the majors wrote for minors' and 'Children's Books was not some satellite department, but at the very center of publishing houses'. Hence it's no accident, he claims, that the work for juveniles of such writers as Mark Twain, Louisa M Alcott, Frank L Baum, Frances Hodgson Burnett and Edgar Rice Burrows represents a kind of National Coming of Age.

His evaluation of twelve classic texts and conclusion that they all tell the same story – of a child who is 'orphaned, makes a journey, is adopted by harassing adults, triumphs over them, and comes into his or her own' – is hardly less audacious than the kids he describes. But even where a particular judgement, or the thrust of his argument, had me lifting a sceptical eyebrow, I was also beaming with pleasure – and itching to re-read the texts he examines. **Audacious Kids** is the kind of book that gets critics a good name.

Chris Powling

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David Bennett on the Novels of THERESA TOMLINSON

May We Recommend...



Theresa Tomlinson has published five books with a sixth, **The Forestwife**, due this month. Readers might be forgiven for thinking that her first book was **The Water Cat** which came out in 1988, but in fact a small publisher had produced **The Flither Pickers** in 1987, and that was later re-packaged by Walker.

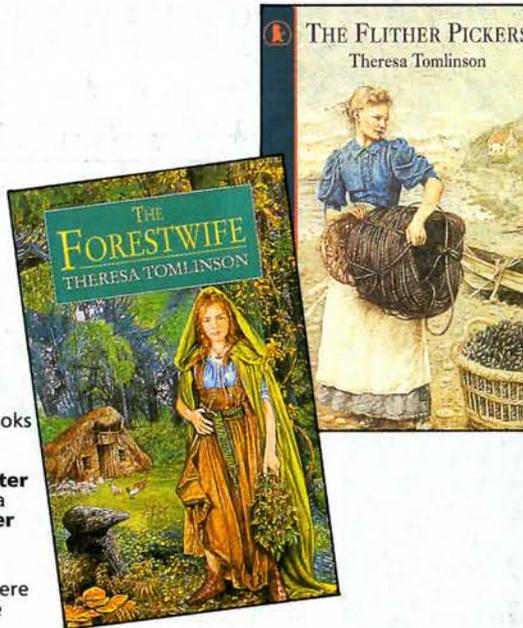
Helen Cresswell and Lynne Reid Banks were leading an Arvon creative writing course when a very shy and diffident Theresa offered them a story to read. Both cried and both were highly impressed. Helen told me later that it was a story she wished she had written herself and felt so confident about it that she offered to bet £1,000 that **The Water Cat** would be accepted within the year. The novel was indeed published but I can't discover whether Theresa took Helen up on the bet.

The story is a fantasy that combines fact and fiction as ancient local lore imprints itself on a present, which is Coronation Year, 1953. As with all of Theresa's books the places are real and part of her own experience. Using real places, usually around Sheffield or the North Yorkshire coast, enables her to concentrate on the story and not worry too much about background. At the centre of **The Water Cat** is the legend of the merman, Catterstyn. His friendship with Enid, the girl who rescued him from death, and his role in the relief of a village famine when a ship full of carlins was washed up on the coast, are told in a story that ebbs and flows between the real world, the past world and the fantasy world. Underpinning all of this is the sense that what modern man's 'magic', i.e. steel-making, has created is at odds with the benign magics of the past, toxic more than potent.

Old magic featured in the next book, **The Secret Place**, a short novel where two friends playing in an abandoned bomb shelter discover that two little girls, Rose and Lily, played there before them and one was the seemingly strange old lady whom that they are now convinced is a witch. Circumstances forced the friends to assist Miss Lilly in a time of need and they discover that behind her strangeness is her inability to speak or hear and a great weight of guilt surrounding her own mother's death in a bombing raid. Their prejudices and fears about someone who is simply different melt away and they start to learn from her a closeness to the earth that we should respect and care for, not fill with rubbish and pollution.

"But did they have magic?" Susanna asked. "Only the magic that's all around us. The magic that brings the sun and fresh shoots each spring. I think that they saw each season as magical. We seem to take it all for granted now."

This is a modern version of the village wise woman. Reviled by many, yet talented and clever beyond the understanding of most. She is frightening and fascinating, shunned and yet vital to the community in which she lives.



This theme is picked up again in **The Forestwife**, which has Maid Marian as its heroine. Theresa Tomlinson seems concerned to look back and to see what strengths women had in the past and to afford them due acknowledgement in the present. There is perhaps a notion that, forgetting the likes of Nightingale and Curie, women, ordinary women, had a negative or passive share in events. In fact their lives are dominated by the very basic but absolutely vital events of birth, life and death and the all importance of love. This love is not reserved for the family alone but also for the community in which they live.

The Flither Pickers demonstrates this in a very compelling, unsentimental way as it leads us into the harrowingly harsh lives of North Yorkshire womenfolk who gathered their flithers to bait the lines of their menfolk. They were the ones who supported each other as each fought to stave off grinding poverty and waited with stoic patience for their husbands and sons to return from the sea, or not, depending on the vagaries of weather and tide. In 1901 a group of such women were the only ones who could launch a lifeboat off the beach at Runswick Bay when all their men were caught out at sea in a storm. Their lives were captured by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, the Whitby photographer, whose photos accompany the text and inspired Theresa to write the novel. The juxtaposition of story and pictures makes up one of the best produced and affecting paperbacks I've come across in the twelve years I've been reviewing fiction for young people.

Scrupulous research goes into Theresa's work and undoubtedly enables her to write so vividly. She has come to a passion for History later on in life. She attends a local History Workshop one morning per week in Sheffield, where she lives, and often spends one other day a week in the Local Studies Library researching her novels. **The Rope Carrier** came out of her studies of the file

cutters and ropemakers of the eighteenth century, who lived around Castleton, Derbyshire. The latter actually inhabited a subterranean village inside the Peak Cavern, visited by Queen Victoria in 1842, when she was entertained by three old women, the last residents. With increasing skill and maturity of style since the earlier books, Theresa has blended all of the historical detail into her story with striking compassion and has succeeded in not producing an historical novel laden down with the facts of the past. This one picks up the earlier themes and concerns and yet manages to be freshly up to date for modern readers. Minni Daykin is an ordinary/extraordinary girl, positive and resourceful whatever fate and man might try to do with her. In a male-orientated environment she determines to take control of her own destiny against the odds. We are relieved that she succeeds. Contemporary drawings accompany the text and make this an impressive companion to **The Flither Pickers**.

Riding the Waves saw a return to the north-east coast and earned a commendation for the Carnegie Medal. Research for this was closer at home. Of her three teenage children two are adopted. Together the family decided that a storybook was due about modern, ordinary kids who are adopted in relatively ordinary circumstances. **Anne of Green Gables**, **Pollyanna** and the like were Theresa's favourite reading when she was young but they don't have too much that is ordinary about them for today's readers. Matt's story emerges not without humour from the pen of an assured and confident writer. The important adoption theme is overlaid with the relationship of the young to the old. It was a school History project that brought Matt and Florrie together into a relationship that didn't start well but was to prove mutually beneficial. We have again the old woman with a secret guilt and she's a wise old bird, who can solve deep wounds as she advises her troubled friend from her own experience:

"You mustn't give up. You have to sort yourself out, get yourself together and start all over again."

As ever the characterisation and motivation are sure-footed and the dialogue convincing whilst the background and supporting detail is sketched in fully, though not heavily-handedly.

Theresa tells me that she writes remembering how she felt about books when she was young. She liked books that had action, were interesting, about the basic things in life and above all weren't too long to cope with. That memory has helped her to produce an impressive range and collection of work so far. The only way to find out is to go forth, read and see if you agree . . . ●

Theresa Tomlinson's books:

The Water Cat, Walker, 0 7445 1399 5, £2.99 pbk

The Secret Place, Walker, 0 7445 1486 X, £2.99 pbk

The Flither Pickers, Walker, 0 86203 450 7, £8.95; 0 7445 2043 6, £3.99 pbk

The Rope Carrier, Julia MacRae, 1 85681 241 3, £8.99

Riding the Waves, Walker, 0 86203 476 0, £8.99; 0 7445 2312 5, £2.99 pbk

The Forestwife, Julia MacRae, 1 85681 193 X, £8.99

In September's BfK:

- * Betsy Byars on Child Humour
- * George Hunt on The Ted Dewan Non-Fiction Show
- * Angela Beeching on filming **Arabel and Mortimer**
- * Rosalind Kerven on Writing Myths with Children
- * John Agard in Authorgraph . . . plus Reviews, reviews, reviews

David Bennett is a regular **BfK** reviewer and feature writer, as well as a senior teacher responsible for English and Modern Languages at George Spencer School in Nottinghamshire. He's not to be confused with the publisher David Bennett mentioned on our News Pages.