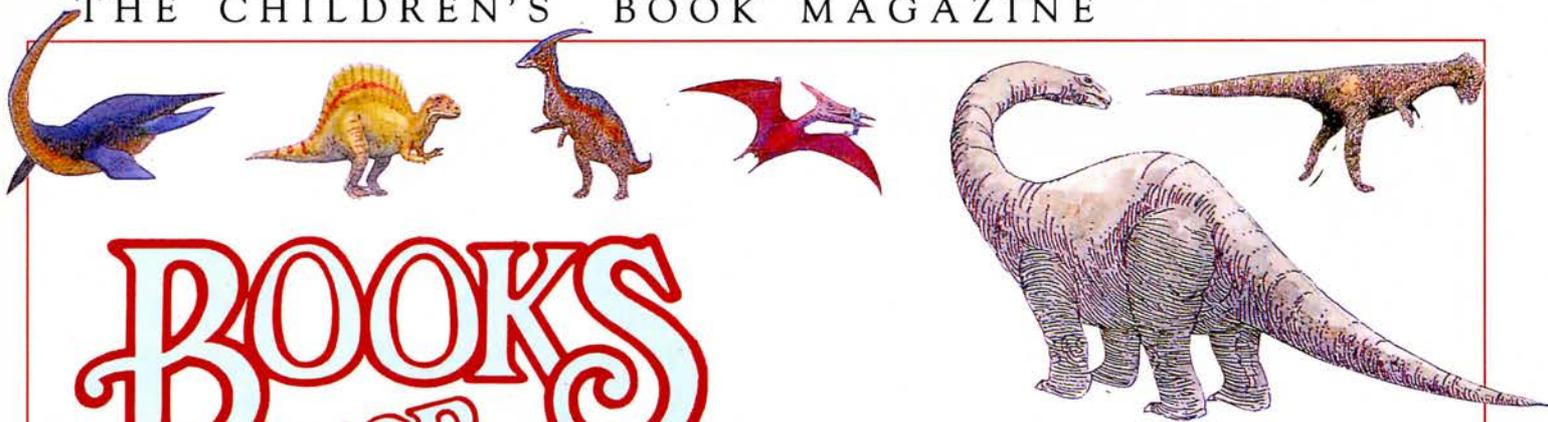
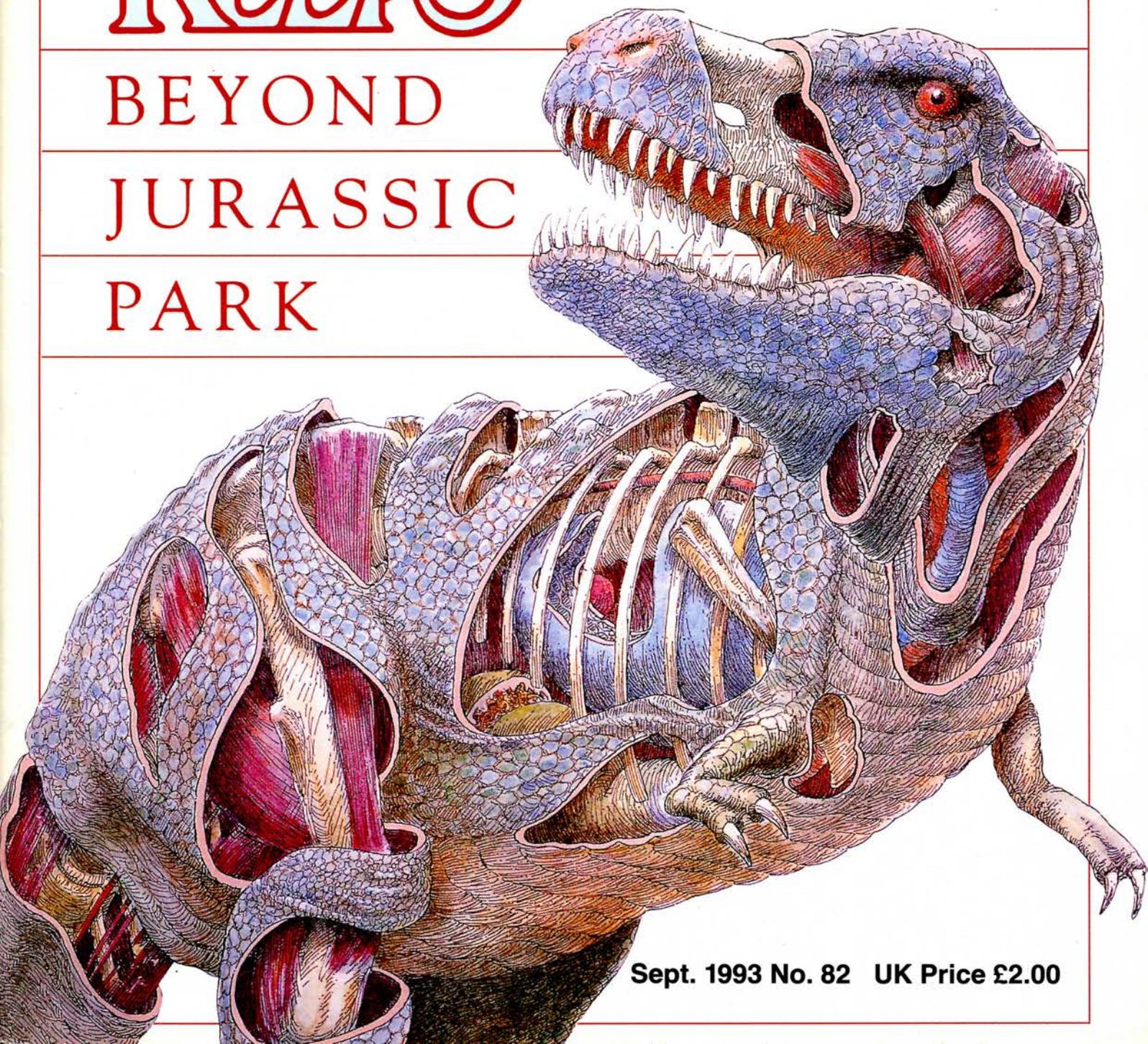


THE CHILDREN'S BOOK MAGAZINE



BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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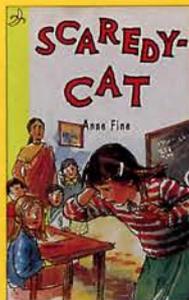


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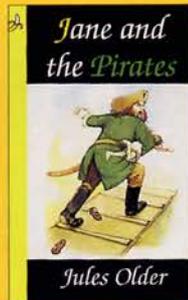
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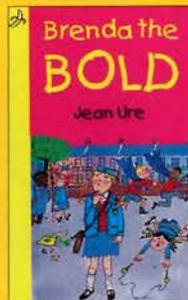
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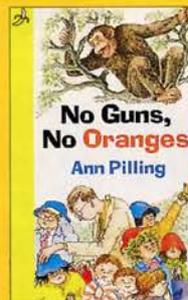


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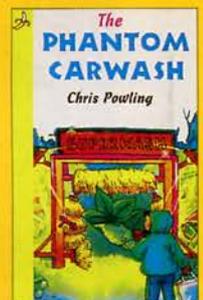
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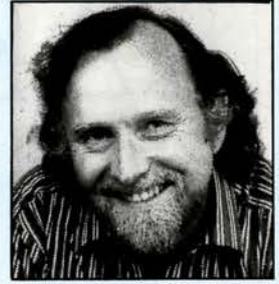
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banana books no monkey business

EDITOR'S PAGE

CONTEMPLATING CARNEGIE



What's wrong with the Carnegie Medal?

From Anne Fine's point of view, nothing. She's just won this 'Booker of the Playground' for the second time in three years. 'And I was just as thrilled as the first time,' she said on Radio 4. Good for her... but is it good for Carnegie, I wonder? Not according to Julia Eccleshare in the **Bookseller**:

'All four of the finalists have won the Carnegie medal before: two out of the four have won it *twice* before. Should librarians be looking at some of the newer talents or do they really not measure up?'

In fact, the situation is even worse than Julia suggests: in the last 20 years or so, no less than six writers have won the Carnegie Medal more than once, yet in the previous 40 years of the Award's existence *not a single author managed this feat*. And those, let it be remembered, were years when there was nothing like the volume and range of writing for children we see today.

Of course, for the More Means Worse brigade that probably says it all – a straightforward example of Excellence, vouchsafed to a dwindling band of devotees, warding off an Avalanche of Mediocrity. Since such Mediocrity apparently includes writers of the calibre of Adèle Geras, Philip Pullman and Teresa Tomlinson – all of whom, in my opinion, have produced at least one novel in recent years of Carnegie-winning stature (and these are just the first three I've thought of) – those of us of less sclerotic critical disposition may well look elsewhere for an explanation.

It lies, I'd suggest, in the very reverse of the above proposition: that More, in fact, Means Better – not proportionately, perhaps, but certainly numerically. For amongst the undeniable and deepening dross of the last couple of decades, it seems to me, there's actually been an increase in worthwhile writing for children. This leads to a double difficulty for today's award panellists. In the first place, it's harder to separate out the best titles... and in the

second, it's harder to evaluate them against each other. Hence the likelihood of a loss of critical nerve and the near-irresistible temptation to play safe. As a veteran of half a dozen different award panels myself, I recognise the psychological mechanism only too well. 'The next one's got to be outstanding, hasn't it? After all, it's a *previous winner*.' In the case of Carnegie, I suspect, this tendency (which vitiates the basis of all awards) is compounded by the very elaboration of its otherwise admirable selection procedures. What we end up with are titles that have been strained through the sieve of far too many committees.

So what's to be done?

Well, never let it be said that **BfK** shrinks from offering constructive advice. Here are two possibilities:

- 1) Winning the Medal should become strictly a one-off event on the grounds that what was good enough for the likes of Walter de la Mare, Mary Norton and Rosemary Sutcliff is surely good enough for anybody else. If in doubt the panel can always declare 'Prize withheld as no book considered suitable', as it did in 1943, 1945 and 1966 thereby adding instantly to the Medal's allure.
- 2) The Youth Libraries Group, which judges the Medal, should take a long overdue look at the current Carnegie criteria. A starting-point might be Jane Inglis's article 'Shadowing Carnegie' on page 32 of this issue. Why, with a brief as flexible as the one adopted by the youngsters of Hillside school (much less biased than Carnegie's towards the traditional adult novel), the YLG might even have arrived at the same winner: Jacqueline Wilson's **The Suitcase Kid**, a tale so funny, sparky and sharp it could have come from the pen of Anne Fine herself.

Of course, such a radical approach has its drawbacks – notably the threat to those twin pillars of modern book promotion, Publicity and Sponsorship. So alternatively...

Mind you, even with Anne's name on the spine, **The Suitcase Kid** would never have won the Carnegie. Wrong age-group, you see. For the truth of the matter is that Britain's premier prize for a children's book ceased long ago to be 'The Booker of the Playground' and traded upwards in the direction of the teen-scene. These days 'The Booker of Behind the Bicycle Shed' would be an apter description. As a result, the Medal now routinely passes over the most important and perhaps most difficult of all writing for children: the kind that *creates* readers in the first place. So the message, alas, is all too clear for Jacqueline Wilson... or Annie Dalton, or Diana Hendry, or Philip Ridley or Ann Turnbull et al: to win *The Big One* *age up your act*.

Assuming it stays *The Big One*, that is. If the chief interest the Carnegie Medal can generate over the next few years is whether it will be Peter Dickinson, Berlie Doherty, Anne Fine, Margaret Mahy or Jan Mark who's first to pull off a hat-trick, then it deserves to be overtaken by other, more open awards and probably will be. If I were a member of YLG right now, I'd be pondering this list of the first Carnegie winners as a matter of urgency:

- 1936 Arthur Ransome – **Pigeon Post**
 1937 Eve Garnett – **The Family from One End Street**
 1938 Noel Streatfeild – **The Circus is Coming**

Then I'd mutter three words to myself as a reminder of a decade or more of literary injustice fit to rank alongside Hollywood's treatment of Steven Spielberg. The words are 'Dick', 'King' and 'Smith'. After that, with next year in mind, I'd *age down* my act. For who knows, maybe it isn't too late after all to right this particular wrong. Or to rescue the Carnegie Medal itself from terminal tedium.

Over to you, YLG.

Chris

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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Cover Story

The illustration on our cover this month is by Ted Dewan from **Inside Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Creatures**. The book was written by Steve Parker and published by Dorling Kindersley, to whom we are grateful for help in using this illustration.

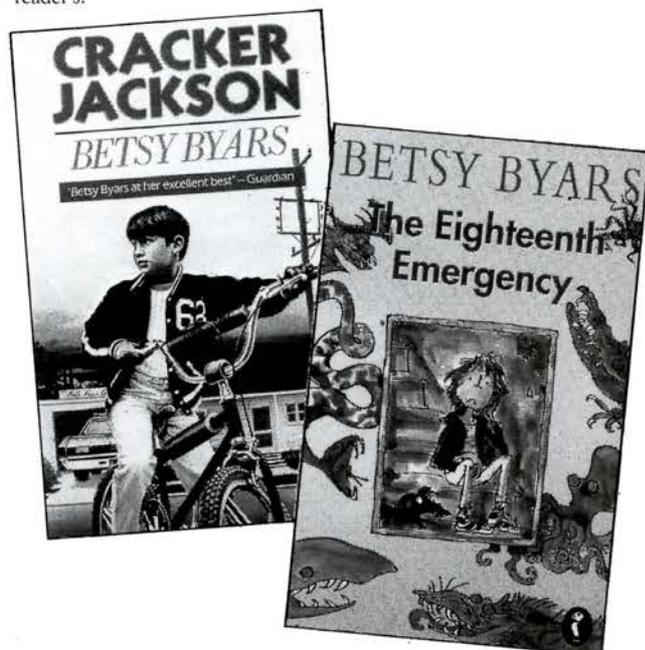
For details of the book, see the article on pages 26-29.

TAKING HUMOUR SERIOUSLY

BETSY BYARS

I went to a school once, and I took a manuscript with me. I had just gotten it back, complete with editor's notes in the margin, and I showed the kids some of the comments, one of which was 'Make this funny!'. There was a lot of interest in this, and the general consensus was that the editor meant me to put in some jokes. If only it were so simple, for the truth is that there are far too many jokes in the world and far too little humour.

I have always been drawn to humour, but I am not a humorist. My books are serious, with comic episodes. The humour serves a dual purpose. It balances out the serious things. The tougher the theme, the more humour is needed – for my own relief as well as the reader's.

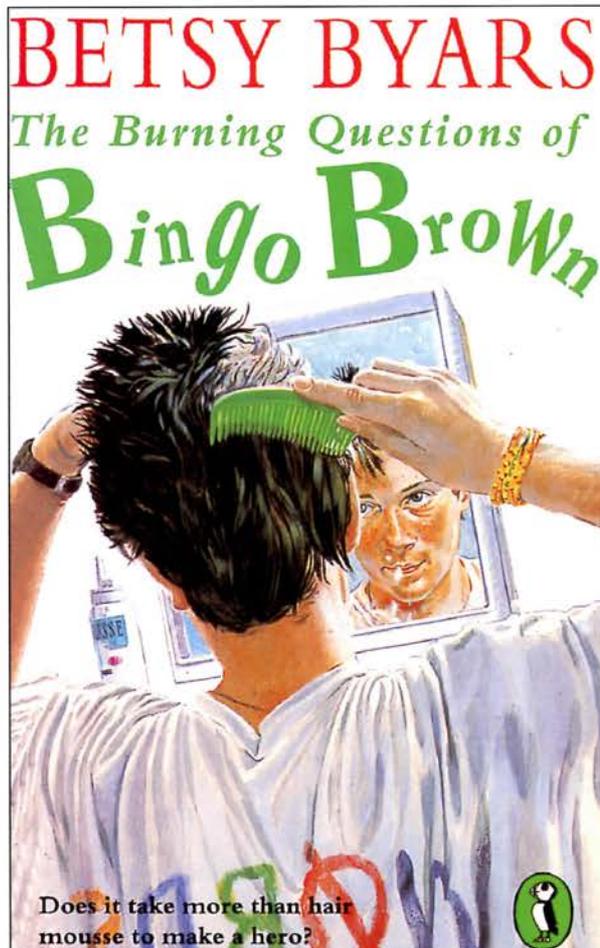


The gap between what adults find funny and what kids think is funny is considerable. So I'm always looking for things that are funny to kids. When one of my daughters had some friends over, one of the boys noticed there were two cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. He got up on the piano bench and pretended to be Tarzan, attempting to swing from one to the other. It was very funny.

And so, in *The Eighteenth Emergency*, when Mouse Fawley looks up on his ceiling and sees a cobweb, he doesn't try to swing on it, but he had previously written UNSAFE FOR PUBLIC SWINGING and drawn an arrow to it. This opened up a whole facet of Mouse's personality. When he sees a crack in the wall, he writes, TO OPEN BUILDING TEAR ALONG THIS LINE, and I would never have thought of that on my own.

My son had a friend who did whale imitations. I was never privileged to see them, because Phil never did his imitations on request, but only when moved to do so. When this happened, the word would spread and kids would appear from blocks around to watch, helpless with laughter. 'What are the imitations like?' I asked my son. 'They're like – whales,' was his explanation. I sometimes found myself looking at Phil, the comic imitator of whales, wondering, but he looked back with his face in neutral, as all my son's friends did, and I could never imagine the imitations for myself. Years later, while writing *Cracker Jackson*, with Jackson's friend Percy doing the whale imitations, I did see it quite clearly, and my son was right – the imitations were like whales.

The forbidden is always funny, and usually the first kind of humour kids discover is bathroom humour. At first certain words are just plain hilarious, and the appeal of reducing one's friends to helpless laughter and, at the same time, shocking adults is considerable.

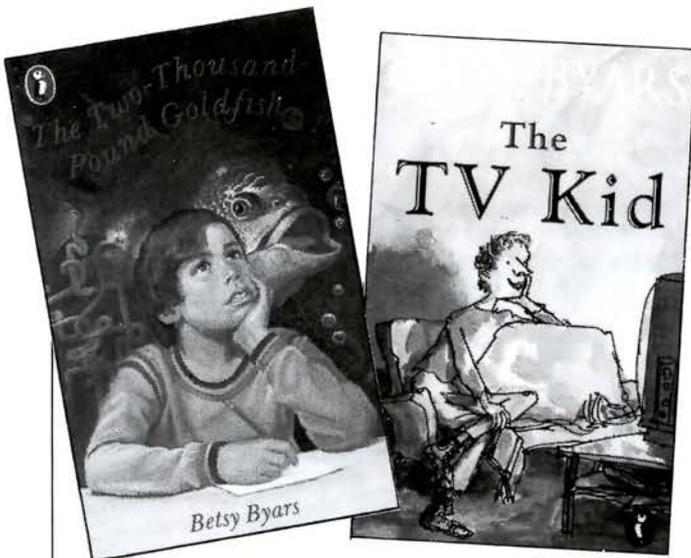


The funniest word in the vocabulary of an American six/seven-year-old is 'underwear'. When I speak to their classes, I always read the opening sentence of *The Night Swimmers*. 'When the swimming pool lights were turned out and Colonel and Mrs Roberts had gone to bed, the Anderson kids came out of the bushes in their underwear.' It is such a successful sentence that I often have to repeat it. I have even been asked if I had any other funny sentences.

I reached my peak as a bathroom humorist in *The Two-Thousand-Pound Goldfish*. The goldfish has been flushed down the toilet, into the sewer, where it comes to weigh two thousand pounds and slurps five or six people to death. The soldiers are marching into the sewer to kill Bubbles, and Warren gets the idea that if everyone in the city flushed their toilets at, say, 10 o'clock, the floodgates would open and Bubbles would be swept out to sea 'where she could live the rest of her life in peace and harmony'.

There follows a seven-page countdown in which the announcer entreats the listeners to flush their toilets. 'It's five minutes to ten. If you have more than one bathroom, get a neighbour to come flush with you.' 'It's four minutes to ten, open your windows, yell, "Flush!" to the people in the streets below.' It takes two pages to get everyone in their bathrooms, and the final countdown is 'five-four-three-two-one-FLUSH!' Sometimes I read this to classes and usually I never have to actually say the word 'flush', because the entire room will make the sound of a toilet flushing. The thought of 50 kids flushing like toilets may not thrill you, but it has never failed to move me.

Bad grammar is more amusing than good grammar. My particular weakness has always been for the double negative. I love it. Some-



times I use it not to be funny, but to make the character's speech more authentic. In *Trouble River*, the grandmother says, 'We ain't got no chance . . .' and 'I didn't come no one thousand miles to . . .' That was not meant to be funny, and it actually turned out to be unfunny because I got letters from English teachers chastising me for reinforcing the unfortunate speech patterns which they were trying to change.

Used properly, the double negative is amusing. In *The Eighteenth Emergency*, Mouse remembers when the boys decided, during a recess lull, to put the girls in the school trash cans. There's a long screaming charge, which ends with Mouse having Viola Angotti pinned against the garbage cans. He realises he's not going to be able to get Viola in the garbage can without a great deal of help.

'He called again, "Come on you guys, get the lid off this garbage can, will you?"

And then, when he said that, Viola Angotti had taken two steps forward. She said, "Nobody's putting me in no garbage can."

He cried, "Hey, you guys!" It was a plea. "Where are you?"

And then Viola Angotti had taken one more step, and with a faint sigh she had socked him in the stomach so hard that he had doubled over and lost his lunch.

As she walked past his crumpled body she had said again, "Nobody's putting me in no garbage can." It had sounded like one of the world's basic truths. The sun will rise. The tides will flow.

Nobody's putting Viola Angotti in no garbage can.'

When I was in school, the simile and the metaphor were things I encountered on English worksheets. 'Find two similes and one metaphor in the second chapter of *Moby Dick*.' A simile in a children's book must be within the child's reach. The Bingo Brown books lend themselves to the simile, because the reader accepts that these are Bingo's comparisons, rather than mine. When Bingo has a mixed-sex conversation with Melissa, it's 'like the olympics of mixed-sex conversations'. When he lies down on his Smurf sheets, he's 'as comfortable as if he were lying on real Smurfs'. When he takes off half his eyebrow during his first shave, the remaining eyebrow has 'a suggestive snarl, like the curl of Elvis Presley's lip'.

Children need parody, just as adults do, because it is a form of humorous protest. The essential point in the use of parody, I think, is to prick a balloon, to show how ridiculous or even how painful some element of our daily life is.

My favourite target is the *National Enquirer*. Among the headlines Bingo Brown fears to appear in is **BOY LOVES TWO GIRLS FOR INFINITY - SETS WORLD RECORD**, but in *The Midnight Fox*, long before I was aware of the *Enquirer*, I parodied headlines. Petie Burkis writes of a personal humiliation at a park - **BOY FALLS DOWN BANK WHILE GIRL ONLOOKERS CHEER** - and then goes on to write a story that sounds like it had come from a real newspaper.

TV lends itself particularly well to parody, which is one of the reasons I enjoyed writing *The TV Kid*. I relished the creation of 'Give It a Spin', the game show where you pick your prizes and we see that you take them, and the commercial for 'Friend', the lifesize doll that allows you to have someone to talk to. 'With Friend, you'll never have to go to the movies alone. And remember, Friend comes with a special ID card that lets him enter all movie theaters and sports events for half price.' My favourite was a commercial that Lennie imagines for Fail-Ease, the tablet that eases failure and makes you less afraid to fail the next time. 'Yes, for the nagging relief from failure, take Fail-Ease, the failure reliever that requires no prescription.' Don't we wish.

Actually it is not I who thinks up these parodies and similes. It is a character in the book, in the same way that while I could never write a country-western song, I can create a character who can write 'My Angel Went to Heaven in a DC-3'. I cannot write poetry, but I can create a character who, without batting an eye, can turn out such a complicated rhyme as 'I love the roof and that's the roof'.

There's a whole area of what I would call negative humour - insults, sarcasm, ridicule. Children, in real life, dread ridicule so much, they guard against it. If they are afraid they won't get an invitation they say, 'I wouldn't go to the party if I was invited'. If scorned for sloppiness, they become twice as sloppy to show they don't care.

But they like insults as long as someone else is the target. When I needed insults in *The Burning Questions of Bingo Brown*, I got a book of insults, just as Billy Wentworth did, and I dealt them out with the same ruthlessness as he did.

"Mamie Lou, you are a perfect ten. Your face is a two, your body is a two, your legs are a two -" Mamie Lou wisely didn't wait around to hear what her other twos were.'

'Harriet, you may not have invented ugliness, but you sure are the local distributor.'

'Miss Fanucci is so ugly that when she goes to the zoo she has to buy two tickets - one to get in and one to get out.'

Since Miss Fanucci overhears her insult, that puts a blessed end to the insults.

Understatement is a form of humour easily lost on kids. The knack of producing humour by using understatement is to finish a sentence with a word or phrase that is milder than the listener expected, anticlimactic. Kids have an innate ability for this kind of humour and do it without even trying. My favourite letter was written, not to me, but to Laura Ingalls Wilder, and I used it in *The Burning Questions of Bingo Brown*. 'Dear Laura Ingalls Wilder, I know that you are dead, but please write if you can and let me know where you get your ideas.'

In Max Eastman's *Ten Commandments of the Comic Art*, Commandment Three is 'Be effortless'. I especially like that, because it is almost my sole commandment, my goal in writing. I work on something until it looks as if I haven't worked on it at all. If it looks as if I've worked on it, I go back and work some more. But it's especially important in humour. Humour demands naturalness and simplicity. To appear spontaneous may require a week's work. More than any other type of writing, humour has got to resemble play, which is really what it is. ■



Betsy Byars lives in South Carolina and has written over 30 children's books. Details of the titles mentioned in this article are:

Eighteenth Emergency, Bodley Head, 0 370 10924 4, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 030863 6, £2.50 pbk

Cracker Jackson, Puffin, 0 14 031881 1, £2.99 pbk

The Night Swimmers, Puffin, 0 14 031409 1, £2.99 pbk

The Two-Thousand-Pound Goldfish, Puffin, 0 14 031607 8, £2.50 pbk

The TV Kid, Puffin, 0 14 031065 7, £2.50 pbk

The Burning Questions of Bingo Brown, Bodley Head, 0 370 31186 8, £6.99; Puffin, 0 14 034319 9, £2.99 pbk

Trouble River is out of print.

Her most recent titles are both published by Bodley Head and cost £8.99 each:

Coast to Coast, 0 370 31820 X

The Moon and Me, 0 370 31827 7 - That rare offering, an autobiography of a children's writer written for her readers. Warm BFK recommendations.

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

Mrs Honey's Holiday
0 85953 756 0

Mrs Honey's Glasses
0 85953 758 7

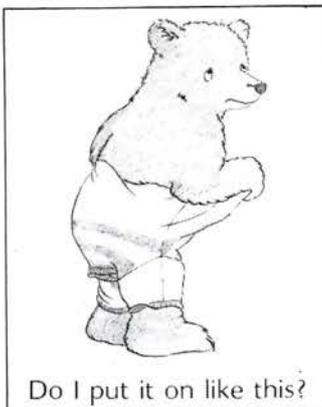
Mrs Honey's Dream
0 85953 760 9

Pam Adams, Child's Play (June 93), £2.50 each

Three simple stories about a granny and her two grandchildren all ranged round familiar, easily identifiable themes, as the titles suggest. The looking/listening child cannot help but pick up vocabulary and enjoy the humour in the everyday situations described both in words and bright pictures. MS

How Do I Put It On?

Shigeo Watanbe, ill. Yasuo Ohtomo, Red Fox (May 93), 0 09 999940 4, £3.50



Do I put it on like this?

A welcome reissue of this charming book for small people encouraging them to learn to dress themselves. Using simple text and taking one garment at a time, the little bear puts each item of clothing on the wrong way first of all, but finally he gets himself dressed properly. Ideal for 2-3 year-olds. MS

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear

Carol Lawson, David Bennett Books (May 93), 1 85602 040 1, £3.50

What better way to start your baby off on poetry than with the old familiar rhyme about 'Teddy who is asked to 'wake up now', 'make your bow', 'dance on your toes' and 'touch your nose'. This charming version with pictures of Teddy doing everything



he's requested to do is sure to become a favourite with very small children. MS

Lizzie and Her Puppy
0 7445 3116 0

Lizzie and Her Friend
0 7445 3117 9



David Martin, ill. Debi Gliori, Walker (May 93), £2.99 each

Two small books about Lizzie getting into mischief - firstly with her puppy and then her friend, Penny. I liked the simplicity of the stories, the sparse rhyming text and the bright amusing pictures which will be enjoyed by children of about Lizzie's age. MS

Peek-a-Book Who Does What?
0 14 054914 5

Opposites
0 14 054913 7

Animals
0 14 054912 9

Nursery Rhymes
0 14 054915 3



Eric Hill, Puffin (May 93), £3.99 each

A set of four brightly illustrated books with questions which are answered when you look under the flaps. Useful to help 3-5s learn new words and anticipate responses. **Animals** has some flaps which, when lifted, give more than one-word answers, almost becoming a very first information book and **Nursery Rhymes** prints the entire verse by way of an answer to the question posed. Beware... the flaps are fun but dangerously fragile in the hands of young enthusiasts! MS

Doing the Garden

Sarah Garland, Puffin (June 93), 0 14 054827 0, £3.99

What fun to plant and grow things at home... that's the message conveyed with humour by this excellent picture book. Mum (who's wonderfully relaxed) decides the garden needs re-furbishing and so takes her small children to the garden shop; she returns home with a tree and a garden gnome. This is an informative, gentle and modern story for 3-5 year-olds. MS

Brinkworth Bear's New Baby Sister

0 216 94008 7

Brinkworth Bear Goes to Hospital

0 216 94008 7

Annie West, Blackie (May 93), £1.99 each

New stories about Brinkworth are always welcome. The large print, unforced rhymes and clear pictures make them very popular with infants. Both of these are about common experiences and would be gently reassuring for children who are worrying about a new baby or going into hospital. LW

The Happy Hedgehog Band

Martin Waddell, ill. Jill Barton, Walker (May 93), 0 7445 3049 0, £3.99

A lively, noisy romp of a book about woodland animals who decide to join together to make a band, even though they don't all have instruments. Not exactly a story as nothing really happens at the end, but full of lots and lots of noises to make and it does have the most attractive watercolour illustrations. LW

Lollop

Joyce Dunbar, ill. Susan Varley, Picture Lions (May 93), 0 00 664187 3, £3.99

This manages to be an interesting variation on the lost-toy-is-dropped-in-the-wood-and-gets-found-later theme. Beginning in the usual way, a little girl loses her cuddly rabbit, the story gains interest from the family of real (although talking) rabbits who find him. Their responses add a nice twist to the plot. It's a little confusing to find a toy real rabbit and pretend real rabbits in the same story, but this is a possible talking point; which are the real ones, if any? [See next review.] LW

The Purrfect Carpet

David Passes, ill. Norman Johnson, David Bennett Books (May 93), 1 85602 029 0, £2.50

I Am a Frog

Linda Bygrave, ill. Louise Voce, David Bennett Books (May 93), 1 85602 051 7, £2.95

I've chosen these two as representative of a whole

batch of books sent recently under the David Bennett logo called 'Paperbacks'. The first is one of a set of 'Paperback Sparklers'. These are fiction stories, all in the same livery, but varying quite alarmingly in quality. This one, a variation of a traditional Indian story, is attractively told and illustrated. It's about a poor but resourceful cat who gets to marry the cat princess by his clever answer to this task her suitors are set. Another in the batch, **Barnyard Bash**, is of similar quality, two are so-and-so and two, **Bed Bugs** and **The Boy Who Ate the Sun**, are nastily vulgar.

The second book is also under the 'Paperback' imprint but this time one of a set of simple non-fiction about the habits of well-known animals. You have to be able to like the jokey cartoon-style of the pictures but the facts and the bold, clear text are useful. These would be attractive to very young children wanting to know a little about the lives of rabbits, ducks or butterflies. All in all, these books just underline, yet again, that titles must be judged on their individual merits and that uniformity under one logo is no guarantee of a consistent standard. LW

Rosie Runs Away
Maryann Macdonald, ill. Melissa Sweet, Little Mammoth (May 93), 0 7497 1004 7, £3.50

Mum doesn't seem to have time for Rosie so she tries to help by taking baby brother, Fat Mat, out of the house to play; but mud pies and blueberries are messy and Mum is far from pleased... so Rosie runs away.

This tale of sibling jealousy featuring a rabbit family is prettily illustrated in watercolours which, like the story, have plenty of child appeal whilst avoiding being over-sentimental. A well-designed book which should prove seductive to learner readers. JB

I'm Green and I'm Grumpy

Alison Lester, Picture Puffin (June 93), 0 14 054478 X, £4.50

A guessing game of a picture book which uses split-page technique and repeating rhyming refrain to involve the reader as s/he tries to identify the fancy-dress character behind the green cupboard door. Not a story, but a text



which offers a number of lessons about language and reading in an imaginative and colourful way. JB

One Cow Moo Moo!

David Bennett, ill. Andy Cooke, David Bennett Paperbacks (May 93), 1 85602 042 8, £3.50

This works wonderfully well with fledgling Infant readers but be prepared to read it over and over and over again to any Nursery age child - it's one of those books! The simple cumulative tale of animals chasing each other watched by a mildly curious boy narrator

is beautifully crafted with humorous illustrations, animals to count (which children of this age love, somehow making a bedtime story last forever) and a gloriously happy ending. JS



INFANT / JUNIOR

Hurrah for Ethelyn

Babette Cole, Little Mammoth (May 93), 0 7497 1013 6, £3.99

What glorious illustrations in this 'ratalogue' of events that happen at Miss Nibbles' College for Richer Ratlettes. Ethelyn, super brainy ratlette, wins a scholarship and is eager to learn. Bullied and unfairly accused of stealing cheeses, she feels so sad she summons brother Errol to take her home. While leaving for ever, the pair discover the true thieves, the dreaded Tina Toerat and her gang! In the rush that follows, disaster befalls Tina - can Ethelyn help or will Tina reap her just deserts?

This truly is a fun read, which manages to deal with the sensitive issues of bullying and changing schools in a delicate manner. PH

Little Elephant

W J Corbett, ill. Tony Ross, Mammoth (May 93), 0 7497 1008 X, £2.99

Tumf's comfortable life is destroyed one day while he enjoys a bathe at the waterhole - during his absence his entire family are killed by ivory hunters. Devastated in his sadness and only fortified by a song and friends he meets along the way, Tumf sets out to find his extended family. His journey takes him through all kinds of physical dangers



and emotional turmoils until he feels he can go on no longer.

W J Corbett is a long-standing campaigner for animal conservation, remember **Toby's Iceberg?** **Little Elephant** combines an exciting read with a clear message condemning ivory poaching. Tony Ross's illustrations illuminate the cover wonderfully showing the affection in Tumf's family, and the line drawings inside are crisply expressive. PH

Jack and the Beanstalk

Alan Garner, ill. Julek Heller, Collins (May 93), 0 00 664294 2, £3.99

When Alan Garner takes on this old tale we see it afresh

through his darker, powerfully poetic language. This is no compromise - the story is told so we can almost smell the smoke, see the flames at the fireside and hear the gravelly storyteller's gruff voice from ages past. Julek Heller's grimly evocative illustrations only fuel the illusion further. Not a light, comfortably sanitised retelling but the real thing. JS

A Pot of Gold **POETRY**

Compiled by Jill Bennett, ill. Paddy Mounter, Corgi (June 93), 0 552 52590 1, £4.99



'If you are a dreamer, come in...' An invitation from Shel Silverstein, Jill Bennett's name on the cover, illustrations from Paddy Mounter which are vital and yet sensitive as he moves confidently between zany humour and delicate poems - this collection cannot fail. Jill

Bennett's brilliance shines through. It's her sure touch and care in the selection and juxtaposition of poems which rings so confident and true that, to name but a few, Peake, Wright, Rosen and Prelutsky sit comfortably with Tennyson, Tolkien, Longfellow and Lawrence leading the reader on and on. This is a book for dreamers, it's a book of visions and a book to savour. JS

Mallory Cox and his Interstellar Socks

Andrew Matthews, ill. Tony Ross, Knight (May 93), 0 340 58227 8, £2.99



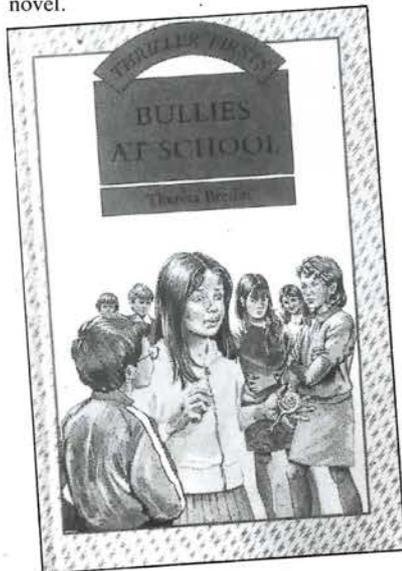
When another Mallory Cox book wings its way into the classroom, you can guarantee that children will trip over each other to be first to take it on. Mallory Cox's socks are the stuff of which legends are made and if, to my mind, neither this nor the second book quite match up to **Mallory Cox and his Magic Socks** (where know-it-all, show-off Mallory really does get his just deserts) I'm probably quibbling. After all, none of the children agree with me! JS

SERIES TITLES

Some of the latest, reviewed by Steve Rosson

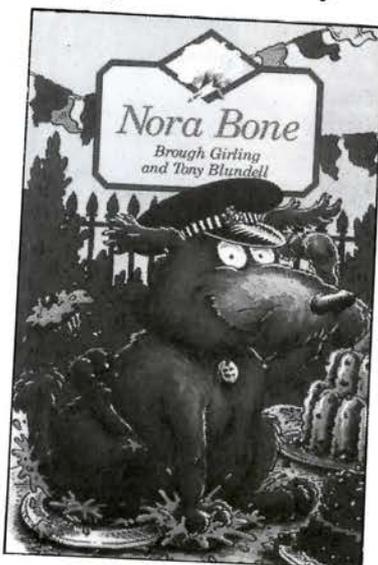
'Booky' people to the fore in the first couple of offerings from the latest postbag.

In **Form IIIIM Strike Back** by newcomer David Ross (Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope', 0 241 13228 2, £4.99), best-selling author Denzil Doxford lives a well-ordered, comfortable bachelor life funded by the enormous success of his books about the dreaded third-years at Oakwood Vale School. Returning home one day from his after constitutional he finds to his horror that his own creations are lolling around his front garden and are determined to have a say in their own existence. A light-hearted tale with unashamedly stereotypical characters including a madcap school cook, a daft head and a lonely female biology teacher as well as the kids, who wreak havoc in Denzil's life before disappearing whence they came leaving the poor man resolved to write non-fiction in future. A lot of fun with some neat punning along the way, especially for some of the names. An encouraging first novel.



In an altogether more serious vein is Theresa Breslin's **Bullies at School** (Blackie 'Thriller Firsts', 0 216 94038 9, £6.99). It hardly ranks as one of the year's most original titles but it's a good, solid read. Kindly school librarian, Mrs Allan, is the only adult perceptive enough to notice that Siobhan is being bullied. She arranges for Siobhan to accompany her on a visit to the county Resource Centre to borrow books and artefacts for project work on the Celts and this leads to Siobhan's discovery of the legend of 'Siobhan of the Seven Valleys' and, more importantly, a plaid pin in the form of a coiled snake, mysteriously not catalogued by the librarians, which gives her the power to face down her persecutors. The first part is one of gritty realism; Siobhan's mum is a single parent working all hours to make ends meet and one of the supply teachers is a fully paid up member of the school of hard knocks tendency. The move into the supernatural is smooth and, finally, Mrs Allan is wise enough to ensure that the power of the snake is not abused. You learn a lot about the Celts on the way as well.

'Jets' continue to entertain with their lively mix of text and illustration. **Nora Bone** (A & C Black, 0 7136 3700 5, £4.99) is a mangy police dog, the creation of Brough Girling and Tony Blundell, who goes about her business totally oblivious to the mayhem she's causing. You almost get two stories in one here as Nora's own tale of her actions is set against the reality in the pictures; so



whilst Nora's handler is getting an ear-bashing from the Chief Inspector and being given one last chance to keep the dog in check, our heroine is saving his briefcase as she thinks she's found a bomb only to realise it's his sandwich lunch which she cheerfully demolishes. Needless to say Nora inadvertently covers herself in glory at 'the last chance' and her place in the force is secure. The publishers are right to give writer and illustrator equal billing as, at their best, 'Jets' display a total integration of words and pictures.

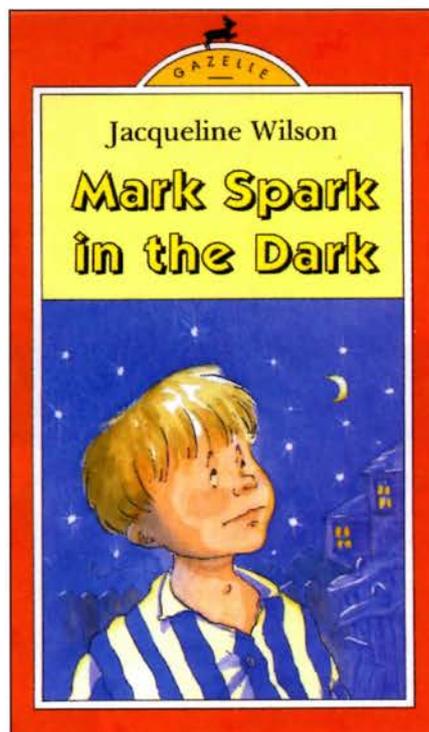
Whilst on 'Jets', and at the risk of accusations of sycophancy, I must mention Chris Powling's latest, **Harry Moves House** (A & C Black, 0 7136 3701 3, £4.99) in collaboration with Scoular Anderson. I feel that this is the best of the Harry books so far as the storyline provides for some quite splendid visuals including the estate agent's details quickly followed by Harry's own, more truthful version. The pleasantly chatty first-person style and judicious use of repetition help to make this an eminently approachable book for early readers, especially any who have gone through the traumas of moving house.

MID-TERRACE TRADITIONAL VILLA In quiet residential area	
<p>CONTAINING:</p> <p>LOUNGE: with bay window formation and log-effect living flame gas fire. Pleasing wall covering, TV aerial and ample power sockets.</p> <p>KITCHEN: Fully-fitted matching cupboards and work surfaces. Stainless steel sink with mixer tap. Plumbing for washing machine. Italian-style tiled floor.</p> <p>HALL: Stairway to upper floor. Spacious walk-in cupboard with shelf and six coat hooks.</p>	
BEDROOM 1:	Large room with stunning views of street. Fitted carpet.
BEDROOM 2:	Good sized small room fitted bookcase, interesting wallpaper.
BATHROOM:	Three-piece suite in banana yellow, including smart-finish toilet bowl. Good-sized bath with taps and shower. Tiled throughout.
GARDEN:	Roomy garden back end front in traditional design, containing mature shrubs, rocks, lawn etc. Paths to front and back doors.

32 Winchester Avenue	
Hall:	very dark and creepy at night. Stairs have seven squeaky floorboards.
LOUNGE:	Really boring view. The wallpaper above the door keeps peeling off. Dad has stuck it back hundreds of times. The cat was sick on the carpet under the window.
Kitchen:	The cat flap in the back door bangs when the wind blows. There's a gap beside the cooker full of things that have dropped down, like baked beans and bits of cabbage.
Bathroom:	If you turn on the hot tap in the bath, the water really hard. Scooshes out from under the third tile on the left. It takes about ten tries to flush the loo (you really need the knock).
Bedroom 1:	Really boring cold room. Really draughty all the year round.
Bedroom 2:	Secret hidey-hole under the carpet behind the door, good for keeping things. Window slithers down and chops off your fingers if you're not careful.
Garden:	Full of boring shrubs and things. Most of them are dead. Full of smelly old dog bones.

From **Harry Moves House**.

The next few lines might get a bit repetitive so apologies in advance but I really can't see any way round it: Louise's invitation to a birthday camp-out causes a Big Problem for Mark in Jacqueline Wilson's **Mark Spark in the Dark** (Hamish Hamilton 'Gazelle', 0 241 13379 3, £3.99) as Mark, the bravest boy in the school is afraid of the dark. Great Gran understands his worries and engineers an excuse and a replacement treat for him. Night time concern for the safety of his blind Great Gran eventually leads Mark to confront and conquer his fears. Warm observation of the adult-child relationship, and the section dealing with Mark's bedtime worries will touch a chord with many youngsters.



I started with a new author so I'll finish with another. Anna Trenter has made an encouraging debut with **A Hairy Story** (Hamish Hamilton 'Gazelle', 0 241 13394 7, £3.99). Any parent who names their daughter Rapunzel must be a few seeds short of the full packet and this is certainly the case with the dad in this story who spends all his time gardening (including talking to his roses) whilst poor Rapunzel has to stay at home reading an encyclopaedia to give her 'Strength of Character' and teach her to 'Think for Herself'. The plot revolves



around the girl's determination to go to her friend's party when she should be studying and, would you believe, her incredibly long hair is central to the plan. Rapunzel goes to the party, has a great time and finally comes to an understanding with dad about how she should spend her weekends.



ANDERSEN PRESS Autumn Books



SIR PERCY AND THE DRAGON

Helen Leatham

32pp 230 x 200mm
0-86264-273-6 £7.99
August

Comic and colourful pictures show how tradition is turned topsy turvy when a cowardly knight is forced to fight a friendly dragon.



THE SNOW QUEEN

HC Andersen and PJ Lynch
48pp 270 x 220mm
0-86264-413-5 £8.99
October

Powerful and haunting new illustrations ensure this classic a place in every child's collection along with *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*.



TIME TO GET OUT

Fulvio Testa

32pp 230 x 200mm
0-86264-469-0 £7.99
August

Join Nick the explorer as he seeks adventure on a mysterious tropical island. Beautifully designed pictures by an internationally acclaimed artist.



ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

Lewis Carroll and Tony Ross

100pp 245 x 185mm
0-86264-423-2 £9.99
September

This abridged version of the classic text has been interpreted by Britain's best-loved children's illustrator and made more accessible to today's children.

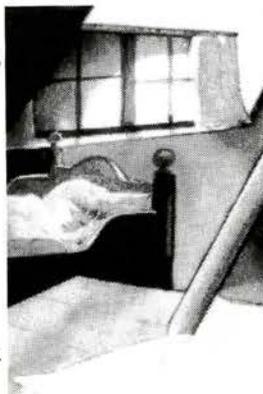


GRANDFATHER'S PENCIL AND THE ROOM OF STORIES

Michael Foreman

40pp 250 x 200mm
0-86264-457-7 £7.99
September

Story and illustrations span several generations as a boy finds a pencil that tells its own story. A multi-layered book of interwoven stories; the perfect sequel to *Jack's Fantastic Voyage*.



TOM'S PIRATE SHIP

Philippe Dupasquier

32pp 270 x 220mm
0-86264-463-1 £7.99

September
This **spot the difference** book is crammed with details to keep children busy for hours! See the band round each book for details of 100 prizes worth £25 each!



FROG AND THE STRANGER

Max Velthuijs
32pp 230 x 200mm
0-86264-431-3 £7.99

August
In this well-loved Frog's fourth adventure, a rat comes to the wood and helps the animals learn to overcome their prejudice. An important story for today.

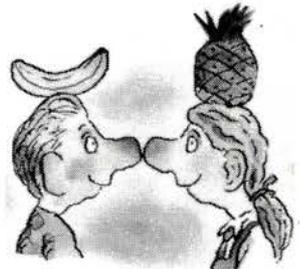


DR XARGLE'S BOOK OF EARTH RELATIONS

Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross
32pp 230 x 200mm

0-86264-403-8 £6.99
October

The sixth title in this popular series where Dr Xargle takes a sidelong look at families, whose members have identical ear flaps and hooter shapes.



SEVEN SILLIES

Joyce Dunbar and Chris Downing

32pp 250 x 200mm
0-86264-363-5 £7.99

October
Which of the six vain animals admiring their reflection is the most beautiful - and which is the most foolish! Detailed and realistic art captures all this story's humour!



THE SCHOOL BUS COMES AT 8 O'CLOCK

David McKee

32pp 270 x 220mm
0-86264-373-2 £8.99

October
Why is Time such an obsession? Stunning pastel drawings are the accompaniment to this wry look at clocks and punctuality by the creator of *Elmer* and *Not Now, Bernard*.



**Oxford Poetry
Paintbox****Twin Poems**
0 19 916594 7**Night Poems**
0 19 916602 1**Monster Poems**
0 19 916601 3**Star Poems**
0 19 916599 8**Wizard Poems**
0 19 916595 5Compiled by John
Foster, Oxford
(May 93), £1.50 each

I must admit to considerable resistance to these books at first – booklets of 'poetry to topics' seemed rather like a combination of the old class poetry text books and a **Reader's Digest** approach. This initial reaction was very *wrong*. The books give just enough for a single sitting and are a brilliant taster, as well as being an excellent way of getting poetry into the homes of some children without overwhelming the child or, indeed, the parent expected to share the book. The wide style of illustrations, a few of which sometimes jarred to my eye, proved popular probably because they helped keep up the speedy pace. The selection of poems is a strong introduction and these titles are a must to supplement any class or school poetry collection. They're also incredible value for money.

JS

Beware of BoysTony Blundell, Picture
Puffin (June 93),
0 14 054156 X, £3.99

If a small boy took a short cut through the forest and was captured by a wolf, we might think his future looked bleak.



Not a bit of it – in the tradition of **Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf**, the small boy foils the wolf's plans by appealing to his greed and devising ever more exotically bizarre dishes to tempt him further and further into exhaustion and towards a very suitable downfall. Blundell's illustrations capture the mood and his recipes will surely appeal to adults and children alike.

JS

POETRY**The Tin Can Puppy**Wendy Orr, ill. Brian
Kogler, Young Piper
(May 93), 0 330 32582 5,
£2.99

Dylan's parents felt he was too young to take on the responsibility for the puppy he so desperately wanted, so when he found one in the unlikeliest of places subterfuge was necessary. Wendy Orr gives us food for thought as she develops a relationship between Dylan and the dog – 'he didn't tell the puppy its name in case he would not be allowed to keep it. If he said the name out loud, it would belong to him, and then he would never be able to give it away.' His secret struggles as he tries to care for the puppy are illustrated with humour and sensitivity by Brian Kogler.

This is a romp of a book for children who have taken off as readers, but also one to share with fledgling readers.

JS

**Pugwash and the
Buried Treasure**John Ryan, Picture
Puffin (June 93),
0 14 054532 8, £3.99

Nice to see Pugwash back again and just his old self, too – lazy, boastful, cowardly and lovable. Thanks to Tom the cabin boy, Pugwash gets the treasure in the end, of course, despite Cut Throat Jake's dirty tricks. Big, cheerful and colourful illustrations help the text along and make this good for older, less mature readers.

LW

**Girl Wonder and the
Terrific Twins**Malorie Blackman, ill.
Lis Toft, Young Puffin
(May 93), 0 14 036162 6,
£2.99

Funny stories about a young girl and her twin brothers. She's always dreaming up clever ideas for solving problems which her little brothers follow enthusiastically and then get straight into trouble, of course. Told in a series of short chapters, this is ideal for young fluent readers with a sense of humour. After all, her ideas do work, in a funny sort of way.

LW

SlobcatPaul Geraghty, Red Fox
(June 93), 0 09 971690 9,
£3.99

A successful combination of text and illustration makes this

an interesting and demanding story. Slobcat is viewed from two perspectives, that of his young owner and that of his other life. Apparently too lazy to do anything much, Slobcat is described affectionately in the text as hopeless at any of the things cats are supposed to do. In fact, as we see in the pictures, he's actually very active and successful. As the story says, 'people say that all cats have a secret life we don't know about . . .' Well, this book points that up admirably.

LW

Tin Can HeroKaye Umansky, ill.
John Dyke, Knight
(May 93), 0 340 59107 2,
£2.99

A mildly touching story about a robot rebelling against his species' lack of appetite for adventure. Otto Matic is expelled from robot school after losing his fourteenth oil can, and he soon becomes embroiled in fire, burglary and unemployment, much to the dismay of his conservative family. The author successfully conjures up a cosily weird and oddly ordinary world where domestic automatons live the same kind of humdrum lives as their human counterparts.

This pleasant little tale went down well with a group of top infants, who were particularly amused by the names of Otto's family (Math, Arro, Diplo, Prag and Grandfather Roo).

GH

**Zebra's Hiccups**David McKee, Red Fox
(June 93), 0 09 918381 1,
£3.99

When serious, dignified Zebra gets an attack of hiccups he's much too pompous to try the sure-fire cures the other animals suggest. But when suddenly his stripes start to re-arrange themselves, he'll resort to anything. Deftly illustrated in McKee's characteristic witty style.

JB

Reckless RubyHiawyn Oram, ill. Tony
Ross, Picture Lions
(May 93), 0 00 664064 8,
£3.99

You'll have to warn the

children not to emulate too literally the doughty heroine of this spirited story. Ruby is a child cursed by beauty, whose parents want to bring her up precisely so that she can save her good looks for a handsome prince. Ruby has other ideas and defiantly embarks on a course of self-mutilation, which involves, among other things, handlebar dancing on a moving bicycle, porcupine swallowing, the smoking of multiple cheroots, and an attempt to walk on water in lead boots.

A wild and hilarious tale, inviting a serious sidelong look at the contortions girls may have to go through in order to achieve self-determination.

GH

Noah and the AnimalsPrue Theobalds, Blackie
(May 93), 0 216 94003 6,
£3.99

In this version of the familiar Bible story, Prue Theobalds invites the reader to think about what the human race is doing to the world. On the first spread Noah's well-tended garden is contrasted with the exploited and polluted world outside, while on the succeeding pages the diversity of the animal kingdom is catalogued. There is gentle humour in the illustrations as a slightly doddering and ancient Noah seeks out and amasses his precious cargo.

JB

**If Dinosaurs Were
Cats and Dogs**Colin McNaughton,
Picturemac (June 93),
0 333 58331 0, £4.50

A group of Year 5 children thought this book was brilliant. The idea is simple: take any common or garden pet, wild or domestic animal, and cross it with a dinosaur, then depict the consequences in rollicking verse and huge, vibrant, ridiculous paintings. The children delighted in the Snakeydon undulating across an entire landscape, stilt-legged Chickasauri dropping skull-crushing eggs, and a hulking Parrodactyl with a pirate on its shoulder. An excellent book for demonstrating some of the sheer enjoyment to be had from the play of words, pictures and ideas.

GH

Hector's New Trainers

Amanda Vesey, Picture Lions (May 93), 0 00 664292 6, £3.99

A scenario most parents will immediately recognise. At first glance, Hector's new birthday trainers look just like the real thing, but the vital football logo is missing and he's so disappointed. However, his 'yellow star' trainers soon become the thing thanks to skate-boarding school hero, Leroy, who first rescues Hector from a street corner gang and then turns up at his birthday party sporting – guess what? – a pair of trainers just like Hector's.

A tale which pokes fun at the 'street-cred' culture, crocodile style. JB

**Ten Little Mice**

Joyce Dunbar, ill. Maria Majewska, Mammoth (June 93), 0 7497 0973 1, £3.50

Ten little mice explore the real world of the great outdoors before scurrying home to a nest. Maria Majewska offers us in her illustrations – which would not be out of place in a natural history field guide, so realistic are they – a veritable feast of flora and fauna. The layout, design and well-chosen words make this much more than a counting up and counting-down book. JB

Tea with Aunt Augusta

Emma Chichester Clark, Little Mammoth (June 93), 0 7497 1274 0, £3.99

Three young ring-tailed bandicoots set out in eager anticipation for tea with Aunt Augusta. But Jemima, the youngest, eats and eats; in fact she eats so much she gets left behind. Fortunately a flock of friendly fruit bats comes to her rescue transporting her home through the night sky on an enormous flying frond. An amusing tale and a striking portrayal of tropical abundance. JB

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

The Demon Piano

Rachel Dixon, ill. Jon Riley, Yearling (June 93), 0 440 86297 3, £2.99

A perfect example of how the most familiar, domestic object can become the most feared and fearful. Guaranteed to appeal to everyone who hated their piano practice, these instruments bewitch the players until they have total control. Demanding to be played, they captivate the players in the most insidious way. More sinister still, when the power of one instrument has been negated, others, even an aristocratic Bechstein, will take up the challenge. It takes a voice from beyond the grave to break the vicious circle of the nightmare. PH

The Secrets of Celia

Hazel Townson, Red Fox (June 93), 0 09 913851 4, £2.50

This unusual format – it's a series of 'fair copy' essays – brings some of the secrets of Celia's family to light. Each essay in her book, starting with the inevitable September title, 'Our Family', throws a fresh insight into the mysterious and the commonplace events of her life. Through the writing we learn about her dreams, her ambitions and some of the pretty odd things that appear to be happening in and around her extended family.

These are ideal for a reader who feels daunted by the challenge of a full-length book and yet enjoys an extended story. They don't have to be read in order, although it's better if you can, but whatever you do, *don't* read the last one first! PH

Love and Be Wise

Charles Perrault's story of 'Riquet of the Quiff', retold by Anne Carter, ill. Jean Claverie, Walker (May 93), 0 7445 3055 5, £4.99

Leafing through this book when it first arrived, I was instantly struck by the breathtaking beauty of the illustrations. Vivid and yet subtle, gentle and eye-catching, it immediately went on my list of books I like to use for face-on display.



The tale is a charming blend of beauty, brains, sense and stupidity. How wonderful to be as gorgeous as Dora and be able to make the man of your dreams as handsome as you wish. How daring to be the brilliant Riquet and have the courage to make your bride as clever as yourself. A happy ending, of course – and how egalitarian for a seventeenth-century fairy tale! PH

Find the White Horse

Dick King-Smith, ill. Larry Wilkes, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 034415 2, £2.99

Find the White Horse is a masterpiece, a charming, epic

adventure undertaken by two dogs, a cat and, would you believe it, a racing pigeon. Lubber is a lazy and lost mongrel dog whose life in the dogs' home is saved by Squintum, an intelligent and brave Siamese cat. Travelling together, the four friends set out to find Lubber's home. A big problem is Lubber's characteristic vagueness about where he lives. 'Near a white horse', 'in a thatched cottage', 'under a hill' are not great clues, but with a little help along the way, who knows?

Dick King-Smith draws his characters with such affection that Lubber, Squintum, Colleen and Katie quickly become our friends. Theirs proves to be an awesome and crisis-ridden journey which has us alternately holding our breath or cheering them on their way. And always, in the shadows, the whisper that reminds us of our animal-owning responsibilities. PH

Birds, Beasts and Fishes

Selected by Anne Carter, ill. Reg Cartwright, Walker (May 93), 0 7445 3056 3, £6.99

This is a large, handsome book, full of bold and bright pictures, containing a fascinating selection of animal poems. Many of these would appeal to children younger than the age-range I've put the book in. There are riddles and rhymes from oral tradition, comical miniatures from Ogden Nash and fantasies from Edward Lear. But there are also troubled meditations from Ted Hughes and D H Lawrence, and Gerard Manley Hopkins' complex, radiant vision of the windhover as an image of Christ. Simplicity and sophistication, celebration and lament, share the pages of a rich and varied bestiary. Highly recommended for readers of all ages. GH

Triv in Pursuit

Michael Coleman, Red Fox (June 93), 0 09 991660 6, £2.99

When the disappearance of five teachers leaves Triv's class at the mercy of a brutish and clumsily grandiloquent headteacher, the fact-fanatic sets out to solve the mystery. The plot oscillates chaotically between the twin poles of post-hypnotic suggestion and a recipe for tea involving flour and sawdust. It packs in romantic interest, puns, repartee, chase scenes and plenty of good jokes. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and would recommend it to anyone with a fondness for both school stories and surrealism. GH

Samson Superslug

Ken Adams, ill. Susan Hellard, Lions (May 93), 0 00 674386 2, £2.99

A cleverly constructed book based on the scrawled letters of Samson Superslug to his teachers, local council, Prime Minister, **Jim'll Fix It** and anybody else he feels like whinging to about a world too mundane for his raging, conspiracy-haunted imagination. The letters, written in a rather unconvincing attempt at child dialect, are interleaved with sardonic responses, newspaper cuttings and reports from school, police and child psychologists – all of them struggling to cope with a delinquent who thinks the country is in the grip of aliens, spies and vampires.

The irreverence of the humour should appeal to most junior school children although, old grump as I am, I found myself flinching at the sexism in some of Superslug's quips. GH

The most fun you can have with fiction

YEARLING

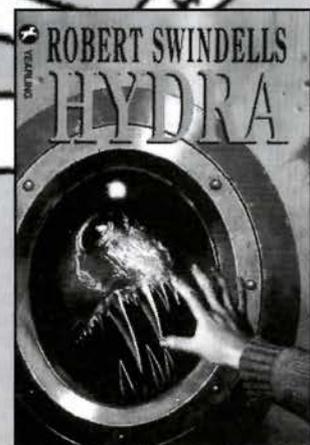
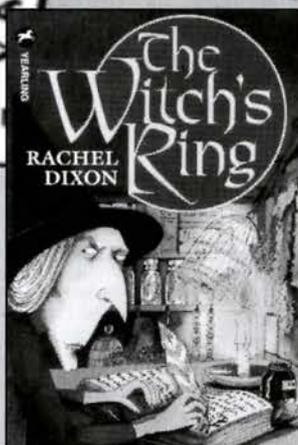
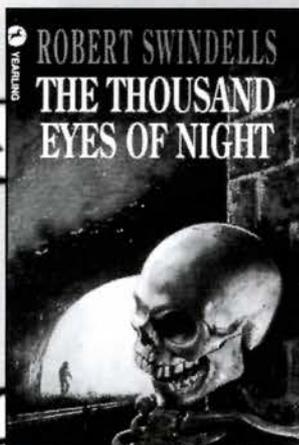
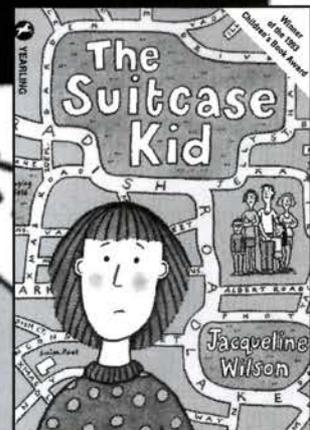
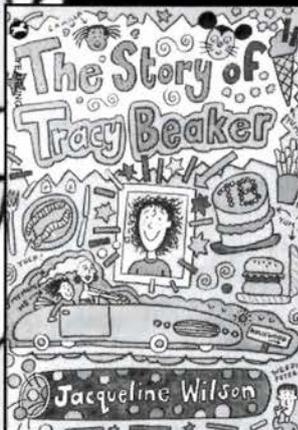
Thoroughbred writing for the 8-11s

Yearling is a bright, high-quality list for children getting into their stride with longer reading.

It offers a variety of fiction from highly-respected and popular authors providing just what children of this reading ability want and need: exciting, fast-moving plots, and accessible stories to hold the attention

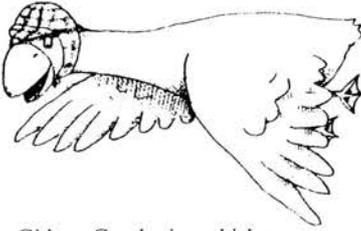


from start to finish. Designed for easy readability with large type and wide margins, all Yearling books are illustrated throughout with fresh black and white line drawings. Great titles this autumn include acclaimed fiction from Robert Swindells, Jacqueline Wilson, Jonathan Allen and Rachel Dixon.



Gideon Gander Solves the World's Greatest Mysteries

David Henry Wilson, ill. Jonathan Allen, Piper (May 93), 0 330 32550 7, £2.99



Gideon Gander is as thick as half a dozen sacks of wet cement, but considers himself the intellectual giant of the detecting world. For the purposes of this book, that world is the land of nursery rhyme, where the gander strains his meagre resources of intelligence and probity in striving to solve the mysteries of Solomon Grundy's death, the disappearance of Little Bo Peep's sheep, the theft of Miss Muffet's curds and whey, and the precise nature of the fiddling that Old King Cole experienced. Mr Wilson sustains the groaningly corny, mock-Chandlerese prose marvellously well, loading almost every other line with a gag. Anybody who finds the Rolling Rock advertisements funny will feast on this book.

GH



Best Friends, Worst Luck

Mary Hooper, Walker (May 93), 0 7445 3079 2, £2.99

A witty and well-observed book about the tribulations experienced by a fashion-conscious 12-year-old who leaves London in order to live in Somerset at her new stepfather's farm. Her struggles to cope with the unromantic smells and textures of farm life, with the loss of old friends and the messy creation of new ones are described amusingly, but with great feeling. The happy resolution is easy to see coming, but arrives not

tinged by sadness. A good story, reflecting challenges that will be familiar to many children. GH

Mud Pies and Water-Bombs

David Schutte, Piper (June 93), 0 330 32627 9, £2.99

Warfare between two gangs – the 'Naitabals' and their rivals, Cedric and Doris (hmm . . .) – breaks out when interest is aroused in Miss Coates' fishpond. The plot, involving Blyton-ish ingredients such as a secret code, underground tunnels, stolen paintings and a happy-ever-after ending, takes precedence over characterisation, and is stretched unnecessarily over 158 pages, a length which may deter some of the readers otherwise likely to choose this undemanding book. LN

Greg's Revenge

George Hendry, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 036265 7, £2.99

Moving to a new home in rural Scotland, Greg delights in his surroundings and in his friendship with a tinker's daughter, Clunie. The final part involves the defeat of two callous landowners who lure falcons to their deaths, although this is the book's least convincing episode. Physical description is direct and vivid, but the presentation of Greg's emotions is less assured; the adult tone of the narrative is sometimes at odds with Greg's reactions. However, the theme and setting of this accessible story will appeal. LN

The Princess in the Pigeon

Jane Resh Thomas, Lions (May 93), 0 00 674199 1, £2.99

What may at first seem a rather silly idea – a girl is inexplicably transported from her sick-bed in Elizabethan England to a pig-farm in Iowa – succeeds because of the attention to detail. Elizabeth tries to accustom herself to the flush toilet, the TV and the TIME magazine picture of the current Royals, while convincing her kindly hosts that she belongs to the past and must return there. It's still unexplained – but engaging. LN

Earthways, Earthwise

Compiled by Judith Nicholls, Oxford (May 93), 0 19 272248 4, £4.99

This attractive compilation of mainly contemporary poems, with a sprinkling from Rabindranath Tagore and James Reeves, alternates in mood between imagination, wonder, regret and admiration. The varied styles of illustration, from detailed

Our Tree

It takes so long for a tree to grow
So many years of pushing the sky.

Long branches stretch their arms
Reach out with their wooden fingers.

Years drift by, fall like leaves
From green to yellow then back to green.

Since my Grandad was a boy
And then before his father's father

There's been an elm outside our school
Its shadow long across our playground.

Today three men ripped it down,
Chopped it up. It took ten minutes.

David Harner



From *Earthways, Earthwise*.

vignettes to whole-page pastel effusions, make browsing a real pleasure, and the Haikus and other poems by children will encourage young writers as well as readers. A worthy addition to poetry collections for all ages. LN

The Trumpet of the Swan

E B White, Puffin (June 93), 0 14 036274 6, £3.99

From the author of *Charlotte's Web*, another story in which an animal communicates with humans. Louis, a Trumpeter Swan born dumb, learns to read, write and play the trumpet, becoming famous as he earns enough money to pay for the instrument stolen to provide him with a voice. There is little sign of the darker side of human and animal nature, resulting in a story with little conflict or tension, but young readers will enjoy the characterisation of well-meaning Louis and his pompous father, and the unlikely situations Louis gets into. LN

Round the Twist

Paul Jennings, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 036354 8, £3.99

'Pink Bow Tie' and 'Nails', two previously published stories, have been re-formatted in picture-book style complete with 'Spridiong!'s, 'Sprang's' and every other gimmick in the cartoonist's armoury. More are threatened in this TV tie-in series.

I hope this doesn't set a trend with other short stories; I enjoyed visualising the utterly bizarre nature of these originals and here it's all done for me – a bit lack lustrely, too. DB

Along a Lonely Road

Catherine Sefton, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 034853 0, £3.50

Life on the remote Irish headland of Dooney is quiet and self-contained for Ruth, her sister Katya, brother James and their mother. Sefton carefully weaves the cocoon of this harsh but secure existence before shattering it with the arrival of the Gettigans, who imprison the family in their own home as they attempt to retrieve and remove gold bullion hidden nearby.

It's Ruth who orchestrates much of the action which saves the family – hers is the 'lonely road' of the title. No tale of unlikely heroism; the low-key narrative style and down-to-earth denouement of this thriller make it utterly convincing. This is excellent storytelling – tense, well-paced and ideal for reading aloud to Years 7 and 8. VR

Myth Busters

Bowwayne and Chris Strange, Dynaton Productions (July 93), 0 646 04001 4, £3.95

The personas of the writers (creators?) and the actual content of the three cases are so mixed-muddled, it's a job to sort out myth and magic from fact here. Let's just say if reading is believing this is the first book of several in a 'Project' (sic) and there's a TV series and song in the pipeline. Basically two rather unusual young men, who describe themselves as adventurers, explore mysteries all over the world and this is their attempt at writing it up and making it exciting and amusing. DB

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

Wild Magic

Tamora Pierce, 'Point Fiction' Scholastic (May 93), 0 590 55179 5, £3.99

The energy and liveliness of imagination in this book make it easy to see why a further three books are promised. The jarring oddness of fantasy – names and customs (and a breezy modern colloquialism to represent the conversation of the past) – quickly fades. Daine has the gift of wild magic and it's lovely to have her imagined close contact with all animals, talking with them and being them (from birds to horses, from the Kraken to dragons). Her gifts are a vital help in the battle against the demons unleashed and attacking the kingdom of Tortall. It's very exciting and, once into it, readers will be dying to lay hands on the sequels. AJ

Low Tide

William Mayne, Red Fox (May 93), 0 09 918311 0, £3.50

New Zealand at the end of the last century. Charlie, his young sister and their Maori friend walk out where the sea has strangely retreated and find an old, sunken boat, suddenly high and dry on a rock. They are dramatically caught by a tidal wave that gives their sunken boat a second life. In a remarkable book whose short sentences leave great gaps for the reader to fill, things are not what they seem, from the legendary wild man to the ruins of their village. Sunken ships voyage again, the children walk where there was once sea and sail where there was once dry land. Garner's *The Stone Book* is the nearest equivalent I can think of where the writing is spare and richly suggestive, leaving your head echoing with the possibilities of things reseen and reinterpreted. AJ

Down a Dark Hall

Lois Duncan, Piper (May 93), 0 330 31369 X, £3.50

This is a reissue of a book first published in 1974; the wisdom of bringing out such a reprint is dubious when the quality is so noticeably inferior to the writer's more recent offerings. Sensationalism outweighs craftsmanship in this tale of four girls, selected for their telepathic insights, who are exploited at a bizarre boarding school. This book wouldn't be out of place in the 'Point Horror' series – which is to say that it'll have immediate appeal for many teenage girls. LN

Forbidden Doors

Susan Price, ill. Patrick Lynch, Faber (June 93), 0 571 16837 X, £3.99

This collection is like a glorious narrative advent calendar: open each story 'door' to find the delight which hides behind it. The thematic link of the stories – opening forbidden doors – is irresistible to children and here it's used intriguingly in a variety of fables which reward, punish and warn.



There is endless scope for individual, collaborative and cross-curricular work, or the stories could simply be read aloud and enjoyed. Patrick Lynch's illustrations are meticulously drawn, contributing to the quality of this superb, competitively priced anthology which bridges the gap between top Junior and Year 7 bookshelves. VR

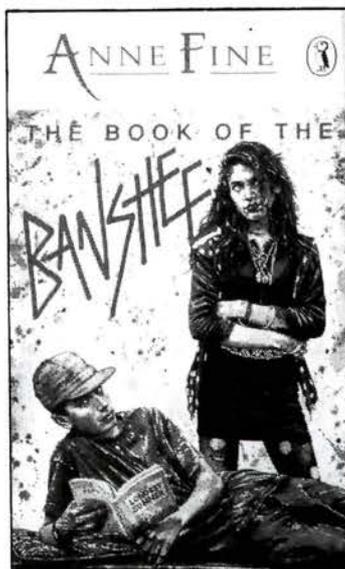


Vote for Baz
Ann Pilling, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 034517 5, £3.50

Baz Bradshaw wins a scholarship to Bryce's, the

anachronistic and elitist school next door to his former comprehensive. The stage is set for confrontation – Baz is half-caste, an intellectually gifted rebel who finds his voice against the system's inequalities when he leads his Common Man Party to near-victory in the school's mock elections.

Bryce's headmaster, Mr Lyme, slides closest to caricature but the gentle tongue-in-cheek ridicule of Ann Pilling's tale saves him from disaster. She writes in a contemporary style which is authentic and devoid of condescension. This book will be thoroughly enjoyed by both sexes from Year 8 upwards. VR



The Book of the Banshee

Anne Fine, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 034704 6, £3.50

Will Flowers, ace war correspondent, is reporting as an onlooker from the front lines in the trench warfare at 27 Beechcroft Avenue – Estelle, Year 8 teenage daughter versus the world, the universe and everything, especially her family. But, hold on . . . our correspondent has suddenly lost his objectivity: 'They think of everything in this bloody war, except how to bloody well end it!'

Anne Fine has achieved a brilliant mingling of wit, humour and how it is in an embattled family, alongside the war memoirs of a WWI recruit. I'm sure I know the prototypes for this novel! All adolescents should be detailed to read it when there's even a whiff of teenage animosity and then pass it on to their parents. DB

Gulf

Robert Westall, Mammoth (May 93), 0 7497 1472 7, £2.99

Sensational media images of Stormin' Norman's Gulf War are subtly juxtaposed to the reality of Iraq as experienced by Andy, a hyper-sensitive lad, who is possessed across the miles by boy soldier, Latif. The real story of Baghdad painfully and harrowingly comes home to Tom, who watches helplessly his young brother's acute suffering and deepening madness – or is it deepening sanity?

Only a skilled storyteller could pull this off so successfully. My book of the year so far. DB

The Stones of Muncaster Cathedral

Robert Westall, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 034843 3, £3.99



'The Stones of Muncaster Cathedral' is the title tale of a brace of creepy supernatural stories that bear all the Westall hallmarks. A foul corruption pervades the very stones of a tower that regularly claims lives. When steeplejack Joe Clarke takes on the job of repairs, he lets himself and his young son into a dangerous situation where evil, embodied in a gargoyle, is determined to retain the upper hand and feed its vile energy.

Similarly the landlady in 'Brangwyn Gardens' uses very odd means to bewitch her student lodger.

Readable and compelling, this is a title worth buying. DB

My Daniel

Pam Conrad, Puffin (May 93), 0 14 036379 3, £2.99

Julie Creath, now a grandma, escorts her two grandchildren around the museum that houses the dinosaur her brother discovered in the wilds of Nebraska. As she does so the story of her close relationship with Daniel is movingly unfolded, plus the corruption and greed that the find spawned. Pam Conrad has a style that creeps up on you and entrances you. I had a job putting this one down. DB

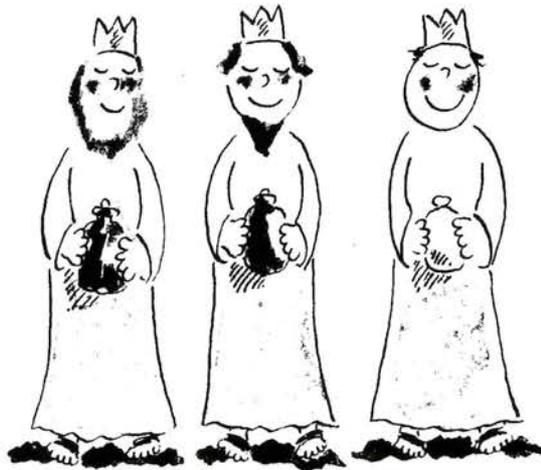
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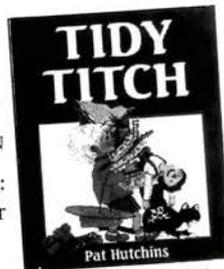


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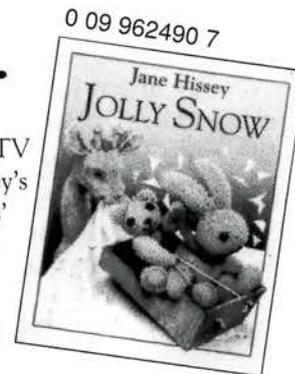


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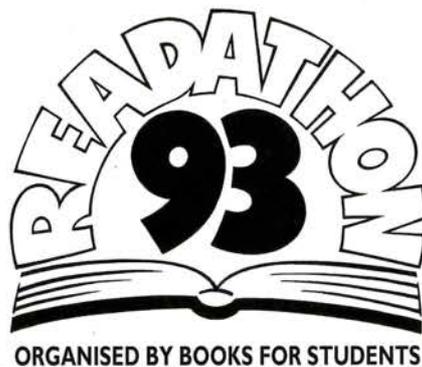
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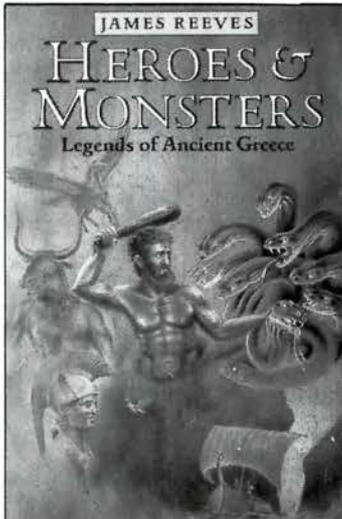
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S.M.

OLDER READERS



Heroes and Monsters: Legends of Ancient Greece

James Reeves, Piccolo
(May 93), 0 330 29707 4,
£3.99

The Children of Odin
Padraic Colum, ill. Willy
Pogeny, Floris Books
(May 93), 0 86315 522 7,
£6.99

PAPERBACK
ORIGINAL

Two for the heavyweight, serious end of the myth shelf, worth considering if you have pupils who want to research and dig below the surface, making their own connections and following through ideas.

Colum's classic version of northern myths first came out in 1920. The language is poetic and the descriptions authoritative and vivid, matched by Willy Pogeny's original, wispy line drawings.

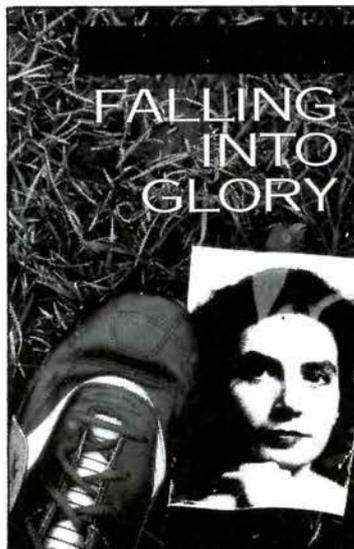
Reeves' rendering of the Greek legends seems a bit didactic at the onset with an introductory lecture and a pronunciation guide. However, the stories make a good book for chasing up classical references. DB

We Are All Guilty
Kingsley Amis, Puffin
(May 93), 0 14 034846 8,
£3.50

After Clive Rayner, an unemployed teenager, breaks into a warehouse and inadvertently injures the night-watchman, his sense of guilt is more powerful than either the authoritarian stance of the police or the protestations of his defence counsel that society is the real culprit. The portrayal of working-class characters, particularly Clive, is unconvincing and frequently patronising, and the teenage dialogue is a curious mixture of 1950s' and current slang. The final chapters are less than engrossing, so readers may miss the point of this essentially moral tale. LN

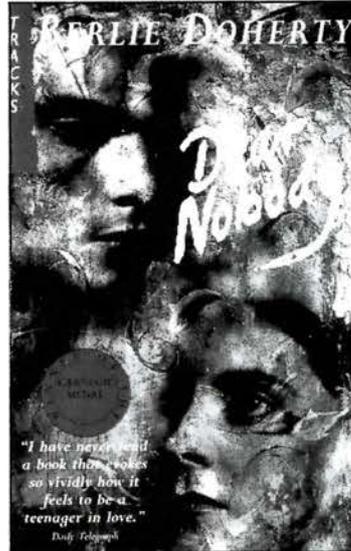
We All Fall Down
Robert Cormier, Lions
Tracks (May 93),
0 00 674406 0, £3.50

In the first page and a half we have the 49 minutes it takes for four teenagers to trash a family's house, attempt to rape the daughter and push her down the cellar steps, leaving her in a coma. Cormier always shocks but not by violence alone. The shock is gained because he makes us care. He shows us a world where sensitive human beings are always vulnerable to the manipulators and to the violence which can erupt with random awfulness. Cormier is quite superb at this blend of romantic realism – juxtaposing romance with harsh reality. It's like staring at evil and, as one of the characters says, there's 'no place to hide'. AJ



Falling Into Glory
Robert Westall, PAPERBACK
ORIGINAL
Methuen (June 93),
0 416 18811 7, £5.99

Post-war Tyneside where 17-year-old Robbie is enjoying a growing sense of being intellectually, as well as physically, strong: he's madly keen on playing rugby and he's studying for his A-levels. Hearty adolescence is the ground soil out of which Westall writes a moving love story about Robbie and Emma, a teacher almost twice his age. The book mixes gawky masculinity with a sensitive and tender depiction of a love-affair which moves in delicate stages from the idealism of infatuation to the physical realities of commitment. The mixture is both in Robbie and Westall, too. It's a dramatic, powerful and often surprisingly tender story which many older KS4 pupils could enjoy. AJ



Dear Nobody
Berlie Doherty, Lions
Tracks (May 93),
0 00 674618 7, £3.50

An unwanted pregnancy shatters lives – especially teenage lives. Yet, by the end of this remarkable Carnegie Medal winner, Chris and Helen's baby is 'a fine thread being drawn through a garment, mending tears'.

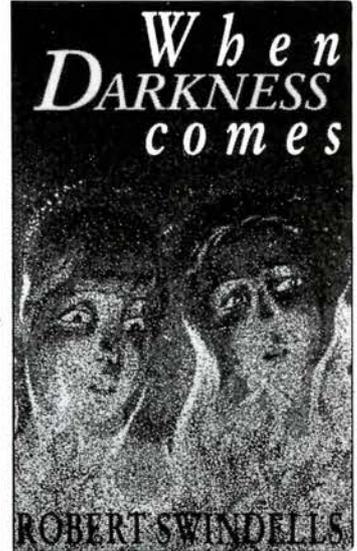
Helen's pregnancy arouses a variety of emotion in those closest to her and it is this multiple layer of reactions which is so compellingly and convincingly examined. Her career in music and Chris' university place are jeopardised, giving both a sense of waste and urgency; if Helen is to have an abortion, it must be soon. She refuses to terminate the pregnancy and, unable to cope with the convolutions of her closest relationships, begins to correspond with the foetus – 'Dear Nobody'.

This book is, above all else, honest – there are no easy answers and many hard decisions must be made, which lend sharp poignancy to the sensitive and skilful narrative. The prescriptive nature of National Curriculum reading should not prevent books like this being read as widely as possible. Buy a class set or get copies for the library. VR

**When Darkness
Comes**

Robert Swindells,
Knight (May 93),
0 340 58228 6, £2.99

This is Swindells' first novel, written 20 years ago and only now released in paperback. It's a modern-day parable whose special irony is not apparent until its final pages. The focal point of the story is a tribe of primitive people, platform dwellers, who are split by ambition and jealousy.



The community divides and crises threaten the survival of both groups. They re-unite in the face of a common threat – fierce warriors with weapons unlike any seen before.

The newcomers are defeated but it's during evening storytelling around the home fire that the true significance of recent events emerges. The people are survivors of nuclear warfare who have shunned technology and reverted to ancient tribal customs.

This is a sobering and absorbing book in which echoes of *Brother in the Land* can be clearly heard. VR

**Alessandra – Alex in
Rome**

Tessa Duder, Plus
(Apr 93), 0 14 036065 4,
£3.99

The third in the 'Alex' quartet finds Alex in Rome to compete as New Zealand's only swimmer in the 1960 Olympics. Tessa Duder's writing is stylish and confident, but this volume lacks plot development – initially, sinister motives or an undisclosed secret are hinted at when an attractive young man devotes himself to Alex, but this aspect of the plot fizzles out rather lamely, perhaps to be left to the final volume. Having a main character who is talented, successful, beautiful and widely admired risks distancing the reader, a problem which Tessa Duder hasn't solved as well here as she did in the first book. For all that, *Alessandra* will have wide appeal. LN

Reviewers in this issue:

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

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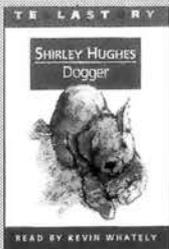
TELLASTORY

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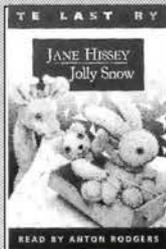
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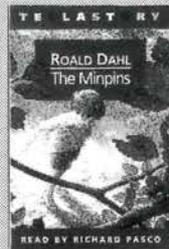
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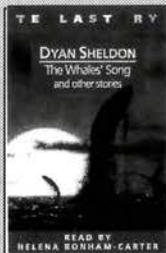
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AUDIO TAPES

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

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

A Night of Lullabies

Selected by Sarah Pooley, sung by children, one cassette, 28 mins, Tellastory, £3.99

Playdays:

Lizzie Singalong

Elizabeth Watts and Dave Benson Phillips, one cassette, 55 mins, BBC Young Collection, £4.15

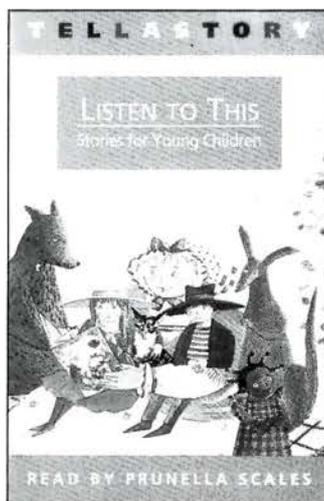
An attractive couple of music cassettes which are pleasant and catchy for adults too – worth considering when tapes are played over and over! Sarah Pooley's selection of rhymes, poems and songs are varied, soothing and beautifully sung or recited by children against delicate musical backgrounds of guitar, harp and percussion. Her collection *A Day of Rhymes* is already out on Tellastory.

Lizzie Singalong will be welcomed by slightly older children who watch *Playdays* on television. Over 30 songs are performed with plenty of zip, their lively rhythms and choruses encouraging listeners to join in.

Listen to This

Stuff and Nonsense

Miscellaneous authors, read by Prunella Scales, two cassettes, 55 mins and 58 mins respectively, Tellastory, £3.99 each



These stories, 16 in all, are aimed at the round-about-4-year-olds for playtimes and bedtimes. Prunella Scales has her own special characterisation, whether she's reading *How The Rhinoceros Got His Skin* or explaining how some silly animals kept prodding the

boiling kettle to see if it was cooked. The tales are a mixture of traditional, classic and modern, all with a touch of magic, including a voracious vacuum cleaner which gobbles up everything, and Mr and Mrs Giraffe who are looking for somewhere tall and thin to live. Ideal for quiet moments.

Magical Stories

Compiled by Chris Powling, read by Michael Angelis, one cassette, 59 mins, HarperCollins, £4.99

Six fantasy stories specially chosen for 6-8 year-olds offering a lively range of magical elements based firmly in the real world which makes them more persuasively gripping for this age-group. Bella's dragon needs a den to live in and, disappointed by the estate agent, he settles down in the school basement, doubling as the central heating system. Leonie meets the last wolf in England which protects her from the traffic on the way to her grandmother's, whilst Aziz's motorbike can talk. All the stories are read with a down-to-earth directness by Michael Angelis.

Mystery on Tape

Compiled by Tony Bradman, read by Kevin Whately, one cassette, 69 mins, HarperCollins, £4.99

Four stories written specially for audio by Robert Westall, Geraldine Kaye, Helen Dunmore and Mary Ross aimed at 8-11 year-olds, and read with convincing authority by Sgt Lewis of *Inspector Morse*, Kevin Whately. 'The Man' maintains intense sinister suspense when a stranger gets into Walter's carriage and terrifies him by knowing everything about him, even the name of his sister's pet rabbit. 'Solving Ettrick' is the tale of a new foster brother who creeps out in the middle of the night and tells lies. All the stories are tautly written, end happily and create a compelling sense of mystery and threat.

Snotty Bumstead

Hunter Davies, read by Christian Rodska, three cassettes, 3 hrs 29 mins, Chivers, £14.95 + VAT

Snotty's self-absorbed mother flies off to Africa on a 'project', leaving 12-year-old Snotty to his own devices – and her credit cards. Over the weeks the house becomes a glorious arcade of hi-tech

machines, games and music, and the stairs are a skateboard slide for him and his friends who feed off pizza and Coke. But there are increasing problems from neighbours, school, Social Services and the plumber who demands cash. Hunter Davies' resourceful children are always wholly credible and the narration makes the most of the fast pace and 90s' dialogue in this wish-fulfilment story tinged with nightmare.

The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett, read by Carole Lloyd, six cassettes, 7 hrs 30 mins, unabridged, Isis Audio Books, £19.99

Newly released, this is a sympathetic yet vivacious reading of the classic story of sullen, young Mary Lennox being transformed, by the magic of a garden and the moors, into a sensitive child who restores the invalid, Colin. Carole Boyd is particularly good at conveying the Yorkshire warmth of Mrs Medlock and her children whom Mary grows to love, as well as Mary's gradually dissolving haughtiness. Being unabridged, it includes what must be the most chilling opening to a children's story – the rescue of abandoned little Mary in India when all around her have been wiped out by cholera.

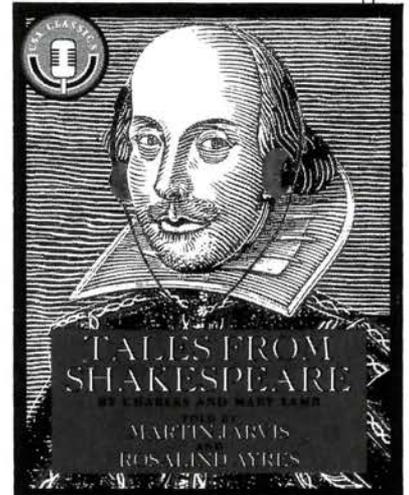
Rags and Riches

Joan Lingard, read by Eve Karpf, three cassettes, 3 hrs 37 mins, Chivers, £14.95 + VAT

This is an unusual, spirited and moving story. Sam and Seb's mother runs a second-hand clothes shop at the 'wrong' end of Edinburgh, whilst their feckless father flits in and out of their lives. Money's very tight and they all have their emotional problems, too: Seb falls for the upper-class, moneyed Viola; mad-cap auntie flees from her husband and descends with her unruly children; Mum and Dad tentatively try to mend their marriage; even Granny falls in – and out – of love with a dominant butcher. Eve Karpf's narration conveys the vitality of this warm, very real family.

Tales from Shakespeare

Charles and Mary Lamb, read by Martin Jarvis and Rosalind Ayers,



two cassettes, 3 hrs, CSA Tell Tapes (tel: 081 960 8466), £7.99

Apart from providing pleasant listening with the Lambs' mellifluous prose, these tapes could give useful classroom back-up before a theatre visit or starting to study a Shakespeare play. Martin Jarvis and Rosalind Ayers make the stories accessible, entertaining and lively as in the former's impressive narration of *Hamlet* who 'grew weary of the world, which seemed to him an unweeded garden'. Ms Ayers portrays the light-hearted intertwining of deception and error in *Twelfth Night* which makes up the charming love story of Orsino and Viola on which the Lambs concentrate. *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* are the other four stories.

Twopence to Cross the Mersey

Helen Forrester, read by Diana Quick, two cassettes, 3 hrs, HarperCollins, £7.49

Although actually on the adult list, this autobiographic story could be a real ear-opener for Key Stages 3 and 4. Finding themselves suddenly without an income, Helen's middle-class parents moved to Liverpool where her father naively expected to get a job. Long years of the Depression without work or money followed – grinding, vermin-infested poverty with real hunger. Burdened with the adult responsibilities of caring for her young brothers and sisters whilst being denied schooling herself, Helen never relinquished her tenacious determination to resume her education. Read with a lively warmth, this makes absorbing listening.

Authorgraph No.82

Interview by
MORAG STYLES

*I am a seed growing
a bird calling
the rain falling'*

which matches perfectly the artlessness of the dancers.

John Agard

*'Take the mountain
off your tired mind.
Come unwind
in the arms of a rhyme.*

*A stone's throw from the
Embankment
Why not risk enchantment?'*

(from **Happy Birthday Poetry Library** [Find your way to Level 5])

Enchantment is what I got when I went to visit John Agard as Writer-in-Residence at the South Bank Centre. The enchantment reflected in his enthusiasm for all the events and people associated with the place, from the music-making that happens daily in the Royal Festival Hall foyer, to the dancers working with the disabled; the young artist whose work is currently on display, to the people who serve in the cafes and bars; the Gamelan instrument session he took part in, to the avant-garde sculpture where celebrities, including John, who were not sculptors, were invited to give a lunch-time talk on their favourite exhibit (in John's case the exhibit included a live parrot who turned his back pointedly on the audience!); the current Aboriginal exhibition, to the Doisneau photographs of last month. The latter provoked a poem based on Doisneau's famous photograph of a couple kissing passionately in a public place. John homed in on the man in the background who appears to be taking no notice at all:

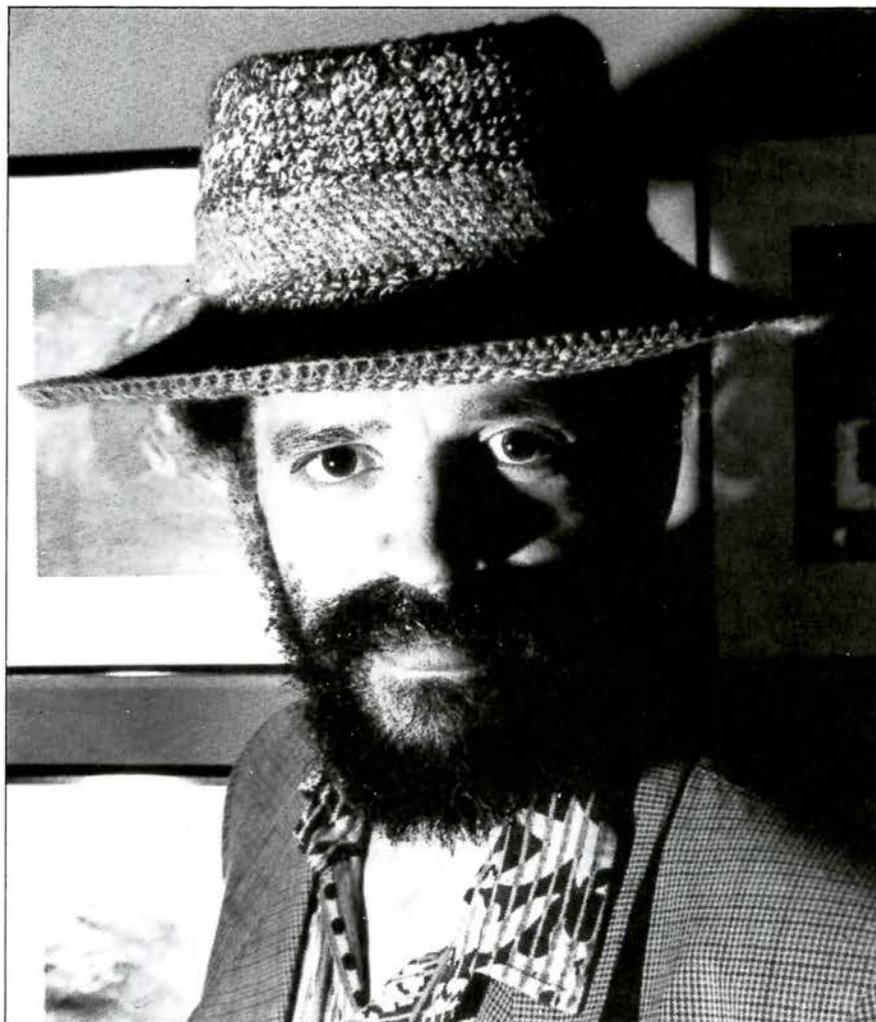
*'I am the man in the beret
sternly walking past the kiss.
No spring in my step, no bouquet
borne in the vase of my fist.'*

Sitting over a sandwich together, we exchange many greetings and it's clear that John has already established himself as a very popular part of the South Bank. One reason for this is simply that he's excellent company – amusing, modest, kind, thoughtful and deeply interested in all that's going on around. He has the easy gift of friendship – everyone likes him. Working in a multi-media environment like the South Bank is John Agard's natural metier, because he believes in 'cross-fertilization of the arts: it's the most exciting part of the job . . . 'instead of doing a workshop in a vacuum, I can relate to other art forms'. His poetry has always had strong links with music, drama and performance. Now he writes a poem based on Caroline Lee's photograph of her sculpture of glazed stoneware shoes.

*'In shoes of twigs and shard of clay
We made our steps in the caterpillar's
tracks
and followed the hedgehog's footprint of
wonder*

*See, we have left you
our shoes in enchanting circles.'*

'Enchanting' again. Later we watch the workshop where the same photograph is used as the basis of a beautiful dance accompanied by haunting music, performed by mentally disabled people whose bodies are vivid with expression.



I try not to weep, being moved by brilliant teaching and the responsiveness of the group, while John is greeted with affection by the dancers. Already they know him well and he takes a keen interest in the progress of their work, penning a few lines to accompany their movements:

'the wind is blowing

Apart from these activities, John's job involves poetry with children and teachers: he had also run four writing workshops for retired people in the previous weeks. When you invite John Agard to be Writer-in-Residence, clearly anything can happen! And he has certainly earned his distinction. After coming to Britain from Guyana in 1977, he worked for the Commonwealth Institute for eight years, travelling the length and breadth of the country, 'and the better part of 2000 schools', to promote understanding of the culture of the Caribbean. He realised then that dry talks did nothing to foster children's understanding or enthusiasm for a different culture, and used poetry, music, and genuine artefacts to bring the Caribbean experience alive in countless classrooms.

As a published author in a small way in Guyana, John began his writing career with two books: one a collection of

poetry, **Shoot Me With Flowers**, the other a picture book for small children. Since then he has continued to pursue the parallel tracks of writing for adults and children. His range is wide and includes poetry which can be provocative, political and passionate, as well as entertaining. (**Lovelines for a Goat-born Lady** is his latest.) He has

never returned to Guyana, but the 'distance lends enchantment to the view' and he frequently draws on memories of his homeland. 'My appreciation of the language, Creole, and the rich culture of Guyana was heightened by moving away from it . . . the wonderful mixture of races with the African, Asian and European connection, our folklore, the hinterland with its forests and rivers . . .'

In fact, John grew up in Georgetown, an only child, where he spent many happy hours devouring the books in its excellent public library. His memories include paying overdue fines, being told to 'wait a minute - don't rush' and looking longingly to see if there was a new Enid Blyton or Hardy Boys adventure. He loved cricket and was charmed by John Arlott's commentaries which he used to improvise on his own. "It's a wonderful day in the West Indies and a glorious breeze is blowing . . . here's Boycott . . . a marvellous boundary . . . magnificent hooking action . . . a wonderful delivery . . . the West Indies 900 without loss!" It was all to do with words. At the same period he was an altar boy who longed to be a priest; dressed in a white sheet, he used to get his cousin to pour out a cheap version of communion wine while he declaimed the Latin of the service.

At school John was an academic pupil, but even he got fed up with exams. He was nearly thrown out when he penned an Ode to Wordsworth and Byron, instead of answering the literature question.

*'Imprisoned in my classroom cell
I chew my pen, as words come tumbling
down
on printed lines
before my eyes.
Oh Wordsworth, why were you born
to rack my brains with songs of praise
to lifelong nature?'*

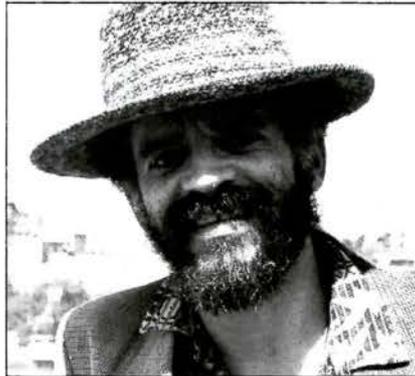
After leaving school, John began work as a pupil-teacher, then a librarian, before working as a sub-editor and feature writer on the **Guyana Sunday Chronicle**. Later he followed his father who had emigrated to Britain, but Guyana still features strongly in his poetry.

I Din Do Nuttin' (his first book of poetry for children published in Britain) is a mixture of Caribbean and black British experience. **Say It Again, Granny!** is a book of Caribbean proverbs in Creole for children; **The Calypso Alphabet** offers a taste of the Caribbean in John's words and Jennifer Bent's illustrations -

*'S is for sugarcane
It gives sugar and sweet to chew.
T for tanty.
She's your aunty. You don't hear her
calling you?'*

No Hickory, No Dickory, No Dock is a collection of Caribbean nursery rhymes, some new, some from the oral tradition, written with his partner, Grace Nichols. John and Grace travelled together to Britain and have established themselves with fine reputations as poets for adults and children. One impetus for the latter may be their daughter, Kalera, who is four years old.

John is, indeed, interested in 'the bridging of the two worlds', the two formative places in his life, Guyana and Britain. He misses the easy spontaneity of life in the Caribbean. 'Quite simple things in England require a bit of thought. Do I need my cardigan? Should I phone the people I plan to visit first? But even the weather has its appeal. People here are physically affected by the weather . . . it's sensual . . . you can see them opening up, almost like flowers in the summer . . . September comes and they withdraw again. People here are much more attuned to the cyclic rhythms of nature . . . it's a pagan type of ecstasy about the weather that has its own charm.'



He is, however, conscious of himself as a Caribbean writer. 'I can't be indifferent to racism, although it hasn't happened to me personally. I'm aware of the danger of becoming bitter - it can cripple your creativity. You can't make it the whole obsession of your life or your writing gets ghetto-ised. If you shut yourself up from what is positive, you narrow your life. I write about a wide range of things . . . something that touches you . . . maybe the River Thames . . . there's lot of different streams that feed things inside you. I want to deal with injustice and cruelty, but without a dead-end feeling. In fairy tales there's cruelty, but there's still delight.' This is one of John's great talents: in poetry for children and adults alike, he makes you face injustice, but rarely with anger.

*'My birthday cards say,
Happy Birthday, Dilroy!
But, Mummy, tell me why
they don't put a little boy
that looks a bit like me.
Why the boy on the card so white?'*

(from 'Happy Birthday, Dilroy' in **I Din Do Nuttin'**.)

*'Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and
Waterloo
But dem never tell me about Shaka de
great Zulu
Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492
but what happen to de Caribs and de
Arawaks too?'*

*Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me
By now I checking out me own history
I carving out me identity.'*

(from 'Checking out me History' in **Life Doesn't Frighten Me At All**.)

Acting was John's first great love: as a schoolboy he played Bottom in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, the White Rabbit in **Alice** and Captain Hook in **Peter Pan**, continuing his amateur dramatics as a young man in Guyana. When the Little Angel Marionette Theatre at Islington recently asked him

to write a play for them, it was an opportunity to combine poetry and drama and he is revelling in the experience. 'I looked at the puppets to see how I could weave a story involving them and I fell in love with them . . . there's a lovely spirit about these African puppets . . . they have their own personalities . . . you want to keep shaking their hands.' The end result is a play called **Odessa and the Magic Goat** which will be performed at the South Bank in September and will tour with the Little Angel Theatre later.

John's birthday is 21st June, Midsummer Day itself, on the cusp of Gemini, the sign of communication, with Leo rising. It's difficult to imagine a more apt horoscope. One of my greatest memories of John Agard is a vision of him on stage performing to a couple of hundred schoolchildren, after three exhausting weeks as poetry 'animateur' for the 1985 Cambridge Children's Poetry Festival. He had made up new verses of 'Poetry Jump-Up' featuring Helen Cook, the festival co-ordinator, and me which had us laughing hysterically. A moment later he had the entire audience on its feet, dancing to the poem.

*'dis is poetry carnival
dis is poetry bacchanal
when inspiration call
take yu pen in yu hand
if you don't have a pen
take yu pencil in yu hand
if you don't have a pencil
what the hell
so long de feeling start to swell
just shout de poem out'*

'My granny always told me, "that tall man, he'll die with a horse". The man stayed indoors, but one day he fell over a clothes-horse, had to have his leg amputated and then he died. You can't escape your destiny.'

John is fulfilling his. Who knows how far Leo will rise? ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

The Poetry Library is situated at Level 5 of The Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, London, SE1. For a programme of events, send an s.a.e. to that address. The Library is open daily between 11.00 am and 8.00 pm.

Some of John Agard's books:

I Din Do Nuttin', ill. Susanna Gretz, Red Fox, 0 09 918451 6, £2.99 pbk

Say It Again, Granny!, Mammoth, 0 7497 0747 X, £2.99 pbk

The Calypso Alphabet, ill. Jennifer Bent, Picture Lion, 0 00 663676 4, £3.99 pbk

No Hickory, No Dickory, No Dock, Viking, 0 670 82661 8, £7.99; Puffin, 0 14 034027 0, £2.99 pbk

Life Doesn't Frighten Me At All, Heinemann, 0 434 92523 3, £7.95

Laughter Is An Egg, Viking, 0 670 82730 4, £7.99; Puffin, 0 14 034072 6, £2.99 pbk (tape also available with music by Keith Waithe, known as the 'poet of the flute', HarperCollins, 0 00 101734 9, £4.25)

The Great Snakeskin (a play in verse), Ginn (pack of 4 books), 0 602 25710 7, £10.80

John's adult book **Lovelines for a Goat-born Lady** is published by Serpent's Tail, 1 85242 201 7, at £7.99.

REVIEWS – NON FICTION



'People are not the only animals that go fishing', from **Gathering Food**.

Caring for Young

0 7500 1282 X

Gathering Food

0 7500 1281 1

Daphne Butler, Simon & Schuster
(Patterns of Life series), £4.99 each
INFANT

These are two books about ordinary activities that humans share with other animals. **Gathering Food** shows families in shops, sheep and cattle (themselves food for somebody) grazing, bears fishing, eagles preying, chameleons in ambush, elephants browsing and bees sharing their honey. A gentle text explains clear photographs and promotes thought by asking questions like 'How do people share their food?', 'Do you eat grass or leaves?', 'How much of your food is processed?' (having first explained 'processed').

Caring looks at upbringing – growing and learning, among mammals, birds, insects, amphibia and reptiles, showing the development of a two-way responsibility and using the same formula to the same purpose and effect. Again, it works very well.

In adopting a deliberately small (7.5 inch square) format, the publishers provide a welcome reversal of the 'bigger is better' trend. And there are, mercifully, no design gimmicks, just plain words and pictures that infants can handle and understand and which, importantly, parents can confidently share. It's good to see them costing under a fiver too. TP

Spring

0 7496 1300 9

Summer

0 7496 1301 7

Ruth Thomson, Watts Books
(Get set, go! series), £6.99 each
INFANT/JUNIOR

This is a series of concept/activity books based on the seasons. The formula is very basic – one activity per spread, words on one side, pictures the other, and each one split into:

- Get ready – the things you need
- Get set – how to prepare and set it all up
- Go! – what you do to make it happen and what you might observe when it does

Spring shows us the phallic urgency* of horse-chestnut buds, the radical growth of peas and beans and the fundamentals of pond-dipping (including the cautionary

'NEVER go near water without an adult').

Summer brings pictures with dried flowers and shells, sunflower culture and lemonade making (full marks for specifying 'a plastic or china jug' – enamel ones can be fatal).

There is nothing ground-breaking about the selection of activities or about the season-based approach but what does distinguish these two is the clarity of instruction and the absence of 'significance' accorded to each activity – so things can be enjoyed for their own sake. Perhaps not John Patten's idea of a purposeful series but definitely one for use and one that primary teachers will enjoy using – they may even look forward to autumn and winter. (* Stella Gibbons, **Cold Comfort Farm**) TP

Power from Plants

Susan Bullen, 0 7502 0814 7

Power from the Earth

Janet De Saulles, 0 7502 0813 9

Power from the Wind

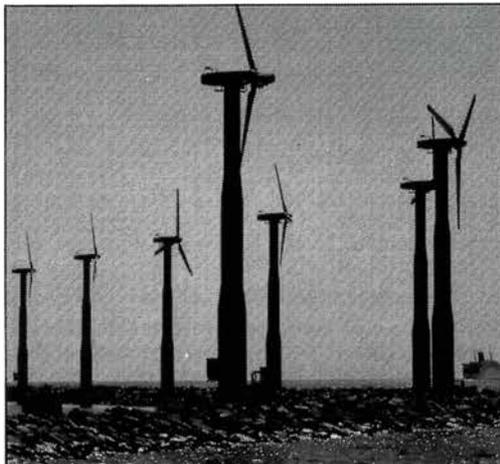
Hazel Songhurst, 0 7502 0812 0

Wayland (Energy series),

£7.50 each

JUNIOR

Wayland's 'Alternative Energy' series came out in 1990/91 and was notable for its clarity, up-to-dateness and relevance. The Books for Keeps **Green Guide** saw it as a real good help in the field of energy information. The only thing really wrong with the series was its title, for it dealt with sources of basic



'This wind farm is on the coast of Denmark. It makes electricity for 600 homes.'

natural energy – sun, wind, water, etc. – to which fossil fuels are in fact a sophisticated alternative. So it's very pleasing to see this revamping of the original series to reach a lower age range just called 'Energy' and to find that the volume titles are simplified too.

Wind and **Earth** are competent filletings of their predecessors. Wind power is pretty easy to understand (sails and turbines) so Hazel Songhurst has been able to give us a very simple text which serves the illustrations well (although can it be right that one of the turbines has a blade-span of 'nearly one kilometre'?). **Earth** is rather more complex, as is the concept of geothermal energy, but both hot springs and hot dry rocks are considered and properly explained.

The greatest change has happened in the bioenergy volume where **Power from Plants** is not just a re-write but a whole new text, with some new pictures too. This makes it a fresher and more lively offering than the other two. Plant energy as food or fuel are explained before the methane digesters and alcohol fermenters get going. Plenty of space is given to the ways in which we can get energy from waste, and this is right for, these days, waste and wind are all that most of us produce.

In serving up a series whose members stand quite confidently away from their parents, the publishers have provided a useful junior-wards extension of the energy-information spectrum, as well as providing us regulars at The Plough with the idea of running the lights on the collected methane that we produce. TP

Seashells of Great Britain and Europe

R. Tucker Abbott, edited by Theodore Rowland-Entwistle, Dragon's World (Junior Nature Guide series), 1 85028 218 8, £7.95
JUNIOR UPWARDS

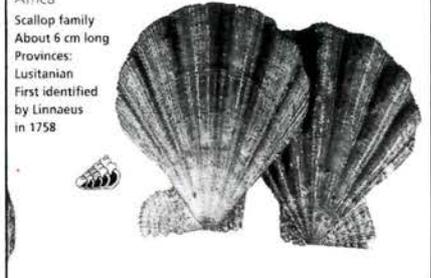
Did you know that conchologists divide the Western European seaboard into four provinces and classify shells according to their provincial origin? Or that Gualtieri's Topshell originated from the Lusitanian province? (I bet you thought it came from Belgrano.)

If so, or if not, there's a treat for you here in this fine shell book.

Cat's Paw Scallop

This scallop has one ear much larger than the other. It has several large ribs, each sculptured with riblets. It is orange in colour. It lives off-shore and is common in the Mediterranean and off north-west Africa

Scallop family
About 6 cm long
Provinces:
Lusitanian
First identified
by Linnaeus
in 1758



By skilfully editing Tucker Abbott's **Seashells of the Northern Hemisphere**, old pro Rowland-Entwistle has produced an approachable and really helpful text, organised in a thoroughly practical way to accompany the splendid photographs. One of the easiest things to know and remember about seashells is where you found them, so the arrangement of them according to where they mainly occur (mudflats, rocky pools,

high, low or intertidal zones, etc.) is just right for identification, and an easily applied size-guide supplements basic measurements. The original identifier of every shell is credited (Linnaeus turns up on nearly every page) and although Latin names are omitted, which I think is a pity, the rich variety of common names is fascinating. So if you want to enter the world of Turton's Wentletrap Warty Venus, Violet Bittersweet and (I kid you not) the Story Tellin, this is the finest introduction I have so far seen. TP

Create your own Magazine

Barbara Taylor, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 1249 8, £7.99

MIDDLE

Making your own magazine is surely an activity enjoyed by many in their middle school years. Endless rehashes of **Women's Realm**, the **Radio Times**, and **Shoot!** have appeared in classrooms and homes. Often these have been rather amateurish affairs but they no longer need be with the arrival of this book - filled with ideas and suggestions, it covers everything from initial thoughts to the format of the final version (including determining content, choosing words and pictures, design and printing). In giving advice to would-be editors, it is especially valuable in introducing the reader to differences in style to suit different content.

At first glance the book itself resembles something from the Usborne stable and has much the same appeal, with crowded page layout conveying interesting and useful information. It provides a sensible mixture of the easy and the more difficult, and for the enthusiast there are hours of 'serious' fun. It also has lots of potential for classroom use. GB

Spacefacts

Susan Goodman, Oxford University Press (Facts at your Fingertips series), 0 19 910262 7, £8.99 hbk; 0 19 910277 5, £3.99 pbk

MIDDLE/SECONDARY
'Facts at your Fingertips' is an apt series title as this useful little book is brim-full of all sorts of mind-blowing details of the 'Did you know?' variety (for instance, the mass of the Milky Way Galaxy is 100 billions times that of the Sun).

Not designed for reading from cover to cover, the approach is information provision - bullet points of information are directed at the reader with coverage broad rather than deep (144 small pages cover the solar system, stars, space travel, constellations, telescopes, a chronology, glossary and index). The small format has its drawbacks but clarity of image is maintained in the full-colour illustrations.

A valuable feature is its reminder of our ever increasing knowledge about space... and hence the need to reassess outdated books (those which see Uranus and Neptune with pre Voyager eyes for example) and our need to keep buying new ones.

This is recommended in the inexpensive paperback version for home and school use and it would be a good buy for a keen novice who is fascinated by the facts. GB

Mummy

James Putnam, Dorling Kindersley (Eyewitness Guides series), 0 7513 6007 4, £8.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY
Mummies are a source of great fascination to many young and not so young readers who will not be disappointed by this latest addition to the Eyewitness stable with its familiar format of high quality full-colour illustration and integrated text.

Natural mummies



Flint knife buried in sand with body



GRAVE GOODS
All over the world, the dead are buried with beautiful objects. They are usually put there for religious reasons. This 5000-year-old pot was part of a sand burial. It was meant to hold food the dead person would need in the afterlife.

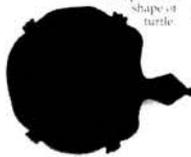


SAND MUMMY
The earliest surviving Egyptian mummies date from around 3200 B.C. This is just before the first written records, so very little is known about them. The dead person was placed in a simple grave that was little more than a shallow oval dug in the desert sand. The body lay in a crumpled position, with the head to the south and the feet turned to the west, towards the setting sun. It was then covered in sand, which mummified it naturally. The many objects buried with the "sand mummies" show that the Egyptians already believed in life after death. The rough graves must have been soaked in the desert's moving sands, and uncovering such life-like bodies by accident may have encouraged the Egyptians' beliefs. The most famous sand mummy is nicknamed "Ginger" because of his red hair. This female mummy, also in the British Museum, is known as "Gingerella".

Flint knife buried in sand with body

Dry skin stretched tightly over skeleton

Knees pulled up against face



ADORNING THE BODY
The most curious items found with sand burials were slate palettes. They were used to grind up make-up, and also had an unknown magical function. Necklaces of beads and shells have also been found.



Necklaces of beads and shells

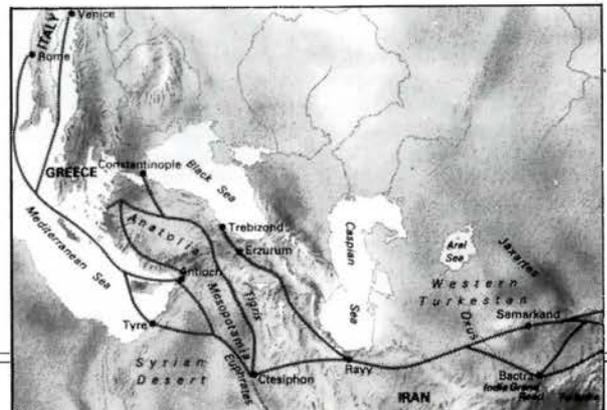
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A page from Mummy.

Mummification sometimes occurred by accident, like the recently discovered Iceman who died between 3350 and 3300 B.C. and has thus become the 'oldest well-preserved mummy in the world'; more often it was by design, usually for religious reasons. Whilst briefly reviewing customs world-wide, notably in North and South America, and, astonishingly, Sicily, the majority of the book is devoted to the best known and most accomplished exponents, the Ancient Egyptians.

The whole of the elaborate ritual of preparing the dead for a better future life, from the 70-day embalming process, the bandaging of the mummy and its placing in inner and outer mummy cases before being consigned to the tomb, is described in absorbing and meticulous detail by the author, who is a curator in the British Museum's Department of Egyptian Antiquities.

The Silk Route from the Pamirs to the Mediterranean, a 'clear, well-labelled map' from **Exploration by Land**.



Thanks to modern technology, scientific studies of mummies can be achieved without disturbing the remains, which would be both 'destructive and disrespectful', and their findings provide valuable evidence not only about how people died but also about how they lived. VH

Exploration by Land
Paul Strathem, 1 85561 160 0

Exploration by Sea
Struan Reid, 1 85561 161 9
Belitha Press (The Silk and Spice Routes series), £9.99 each

MIDDLE/SECONDARY
It was the quest for larger and stronger horses which spurred the Chinese to venture beyond their western boundaries during the Han dynasty and ultimately led to the opening up of one of the world's great trading routes at around the start of the first century BCE (Before the Common Era).

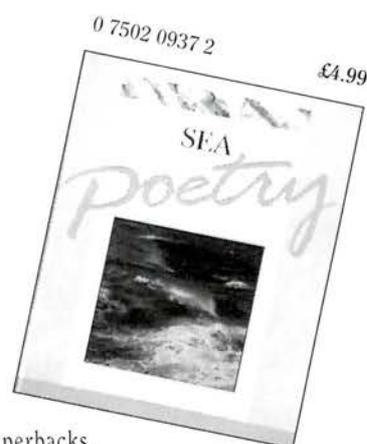
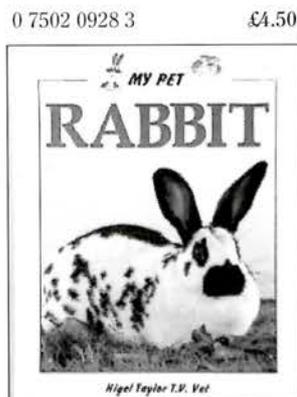
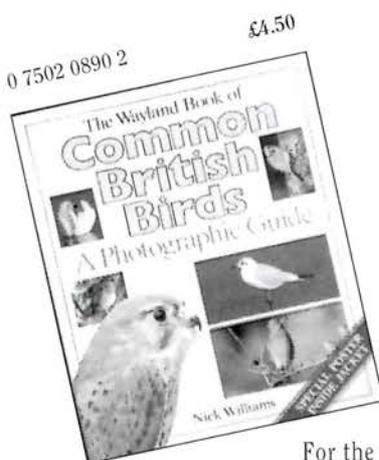
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The story of the Silk Road, some 8,000 kilometres in length, and the 15,000 kilometre (but often safer) sea route, the Spice Route, is told in these two titles published in association with UNESCO, which recently funded a project 'to explore and highlight the rich cultural exchanges and contacts' that took place along the paths which first linked East with West.

The early trailblazers were more than mere commercial travellers, they were also the means of exchanging an equally valuable but more intangible commodity, knowledge. News about developments in science, medicine and technology, styles of art from many cultures, and the beliefs of religions both old (Buddhism) and new (Christianity and Islam) were transmitted most effectively, whilst the rise and fall of cities, and sometimes empires, occurred because of the influence that this great network of trading routes commanded.

The fascinating history of these two great arteries, spanning many centuries, countries and civilizations, is well chronicled in these attractively produced and illustrated books whilst clear, well-labelled maps (an essential ingredient) enhance our understanding and enjoyment of the narrative. VH

Impressionism

Jude Wetton, 0 7513 1019 0

Manet

Patricia Wright, 0 7513 1017 4

Watercolour

Michael Clarke, 0 7513 1018 2

Dorling Kindersley (Eyewitness Art series), £9.99 each

SECONDARY

These new 'Eyewitness Art' titles cover a single artist, a movement and a technique. The limitations imposed by a series framework are evident in some of the texts, all of which are very accessible but sometimes leave the reader wishing there was scope for a more leisurely and detailed analysis of their subject.

Whilst many people probably think of watercolour in terms of its nineteenth-century exponents, the medium has in fact been used for hundreds of years, with Durer 'often regarded as the first all-round master'. Michael Clarke has to cover an awful lot of ground – from Ancient Greece to Picasso, taking in many other artistic styles on the way – so perhaps it's not surprising that his prose occasionally seems rather cerebral.

Focusing attention on one individual painter provides scope for a well-rounded portrait of his life, work and technique, and all the high and low points of Manet's influential career are included in Patricia Wright's narrative. Despite her best efforts, however, the real essence of the man remains somewhat elusive – perhaps because, as she herself suggests, 'underneath his suave public exterior there existed a very different private character that found expression in his paintings'.

Manet was derided almost as much as the Impressionists. Jude Wetton gives us fascinating insights into their controversial approach to painting and how it was also affected by external sources such as Haussman's modernisation of Paris, the rise of the railway, and the development of photography, in addition to Chevreul's influential treatise on colour.

As always, the quality of the reproduced illustrations is excellent. My one regret is that having whetted our appetite so successfully there are no bibliographies to encourage further study. VH

NOW IN PAPERBACK



How the *Titanic* Sank

- 1) At approximately 2:17 a.m. as flooding fills its forward compartments, the *Titanic* lurches downwards and the Number 1 funnel collapses.
- 2) The ship cannot bear the stress of having its stern in the air and breaks in two between the third and fourth funnels.
- 3) After the bow section has broken away, the stern section swings around. It remains perpendicular for a few moments before disappearing from sight.
- 4) As the stern section sinks, much debris falls out and the Poop Deck is peeled over backwards.
- 5) The stern section falls more or less straight down as the bow section planes off downwards below.
- 6) The two pieces of the ship land 1,970 feet apart, facing in different directions.
- 7) The stern slams into the bottom with great force. For several hours afterwards, debris continues to drift down and settle around the wreck.

A scale diagram of the descent of the wreck.

SOLVING THE MYSTERIES 59

Exploring the *Titanic*

Robert D. Ballard, Scholastic,
0 590 41952 8, £4.99
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

The reissue in paperback format of Ballard's *Exploring the Titanic* is very much to be welcomed. This is an excellent example of narrative non-fiction; the style is well-suited to the subject but will not be universally popular, particularly with those who prefer a more dispassionate approach to information giving. Illustrative material includes an

appropriate mixture of modern colour photographs, original monochrome photographs of the ship's fittings, and dramatic artwork portraying both sinking and recovery.

Ballard's enthusiasm for his quest, amounting to an obsession, is strongly conveyed to the reader. But the book's most powerful qualities are its compassion and sensitivity – the author never forgets the 1500 people who did not survive, nor does he forget that the sunken ship is a graveyard. GB

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.



BEYOND JURASSIC PARK

George Hunt reports on the work of **Ted Dewan** at Brindishe Primary School, London . . . an author visit with a difference.

Ted Dewan came into the classroom in a professorial white coat, a palaeontologist's fossil brush in his breast pocket and two watches strapped to his wrist – one for GMT and one for geological time, perhaps. He carried spare copies of *Inside the Whale and Other Animals*, a bundle of proof illustrations from the forthcoming *Inside Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Creatures*, and a plastic carrier bag which he claimed contained a stegosaurus, a couple of triceratops and maybe a pterodactyl or two. The Year 5 children found this rather perplexing. They began to doubt their visitor's credentials when he took from the carrier bag a bottle of common engine oil and decanted it into a jar, reciting a litany of the names of the dinosaurs he claimed he could see billowing about amongst the emulsified forests of the Jurassic Era.

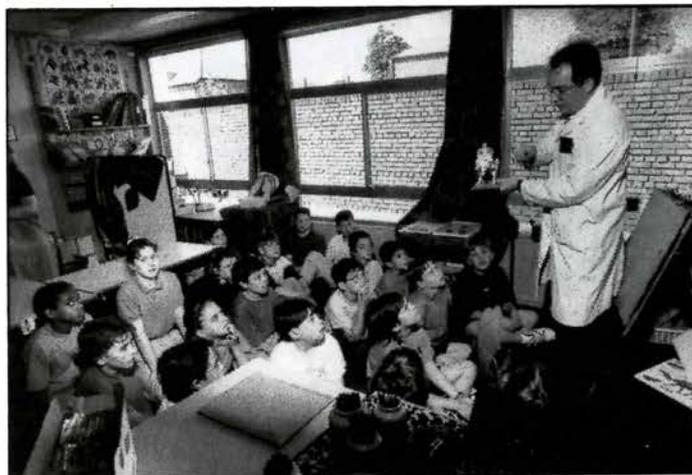


The children had been looking forward to the visit. They'd been intrigued by the panoramic cross-sections of *Inside the Whale*, and the witty little inset drawings accompanying the double-spreads, which relate each creature's anatomy to the mechanics of an analogous machine. They'd wanted to meet the artist who'd given them glimpses into such gutsy arcana as the reversible stomach of the starfish, the inside of the camel's hump, and what the male blue whale does with his three metre penis when he isn't using it. Now here he was

talking nonsense about invisible dinosaurs in Sainsbury bags and Esso bottles.

The explanation that followed related palaeontology to the children's experiences of seeing food putrefy in neglected corners of the larder or refrigerator.

'Dinosaurs have been at the back of the refrigerator for about 70 million years, so most of them have turned into this gloopy gunk we use to stop our engines from melting down into dollops of molten steel. We also use it for making plastic and driving power stations, so every time you switch on a light you're using dino-power. However, some of them got lucky and turned into these precious things we call fossils. But fossils are all we have to go on. These pictures of diplodocus and tyrannosaurus rex and so on are just reconstructions, educated guess-work.'



Then came the challenge. Four fossilised dinosaur skeletons had recently been discovered, and it was the job of the children to apply their imaginations to this evidence. They had to visualise the creatures moving, feeding, excreting, socialising and mating in a fanciful habitat, then invent an anatomy and external appearance to suit these visions. Ted encouraged the children to be as whimsical as they liked; since nobody actually *knows* what was available in the Jurassic period, robotics and electronics were not ruled out.

Working with felt pens onto photocopies of the skeletons, the children set about cultivating their gardens of glistening viscera.

'Looks like a chicken skeleton. You always think of them as huge but mine's as small as a sparrow so it can run fast. How fast can yours go, Si?'

'Don't know. It's imaginary.'

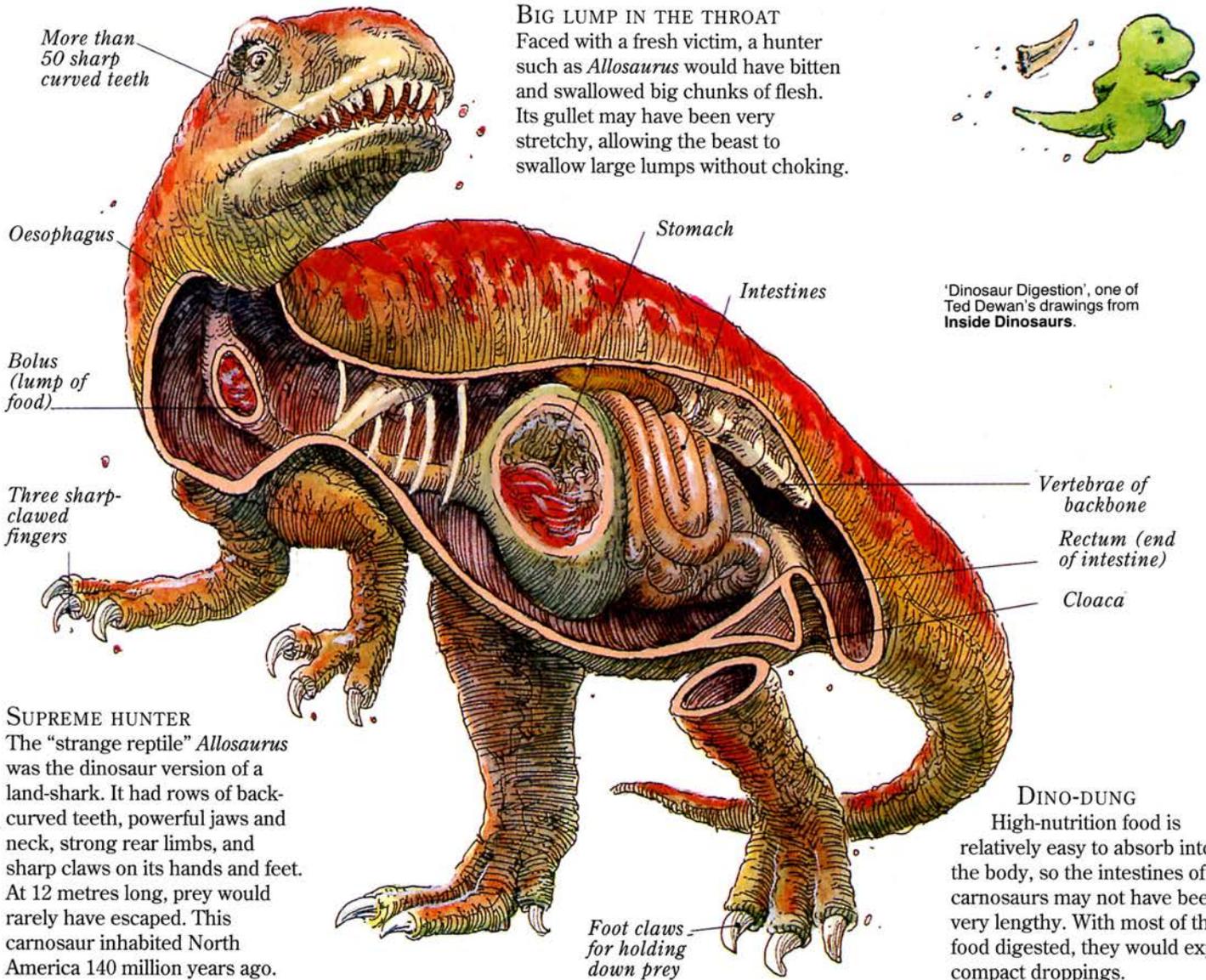
'Mine can go a million light years an hour.'

'That's no good. By the time it took one step it would have gone past where it was meant to be going.'

'Mine's going to be a rollersaurus. When it curls up all these armour plates lock together and it turns into a ball like a gigantic woodlouse. Then it rolls through the jungle flattening a pathway.'



At another table, a group were considering the functions of the tail.



BIG LUMP IN THE THROAT
Faced with a fresh victim, a hunter such as *Allosaurus* would have bitten and swallowed big chunks of flesh. Its gullet may have been very stretchy, allowing the beast to swallow large lumps without choking.

'Dinosaur Digestion', one of Ted Dewan's drawings from *Inside Dinosaurs*.

SUPREME HUNTER
The "strange reptile" *Allosaurus* was the dinosaur version of a land-shark. It had rows of back-curved teeth, powerful jaws and neck, strong rear limbs, and sharp claws on its hands and feet. At 12 metres long, prey would rarely have escaped. This carnosaur inhabited North America 140 million years ago.

DINO-DUNG
High-nutrition food is relatively easy to absorb into the body, so the intestines of carnosaur may not have been very lengthy. With most of the food digested, they would expel compact droppings.

'First time I saw a picture of a brontosaurus I thought it was an elephant with no head but a trunk at each end, so that's what this dinosaur's got. It can suck up food through both trunks at once.'

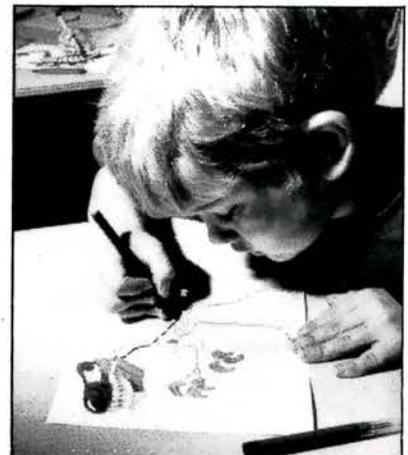
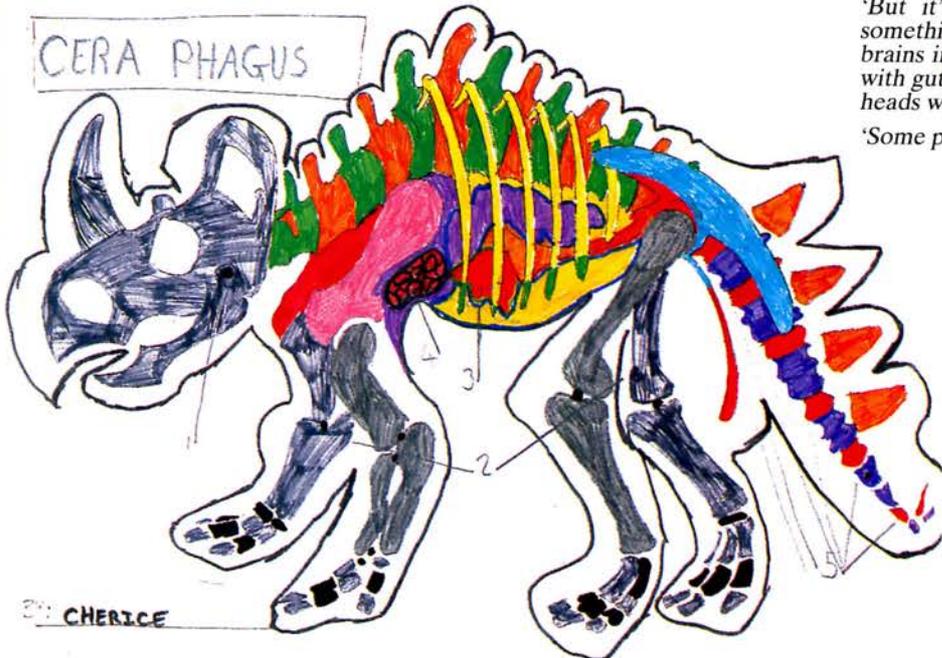
Carrie had equipped her dinosaur's tail with sharpened scales for felling trees. Two oesophagi spiralled down its cervical vertebrae like serpents on a caduceus.

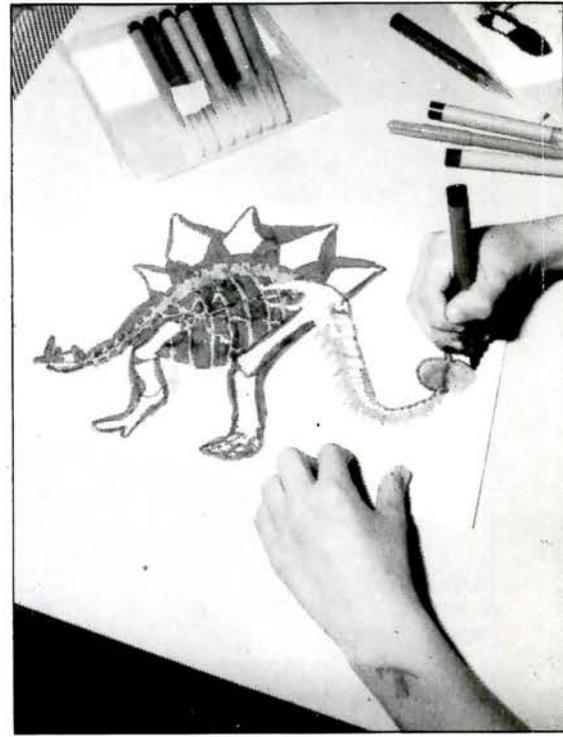
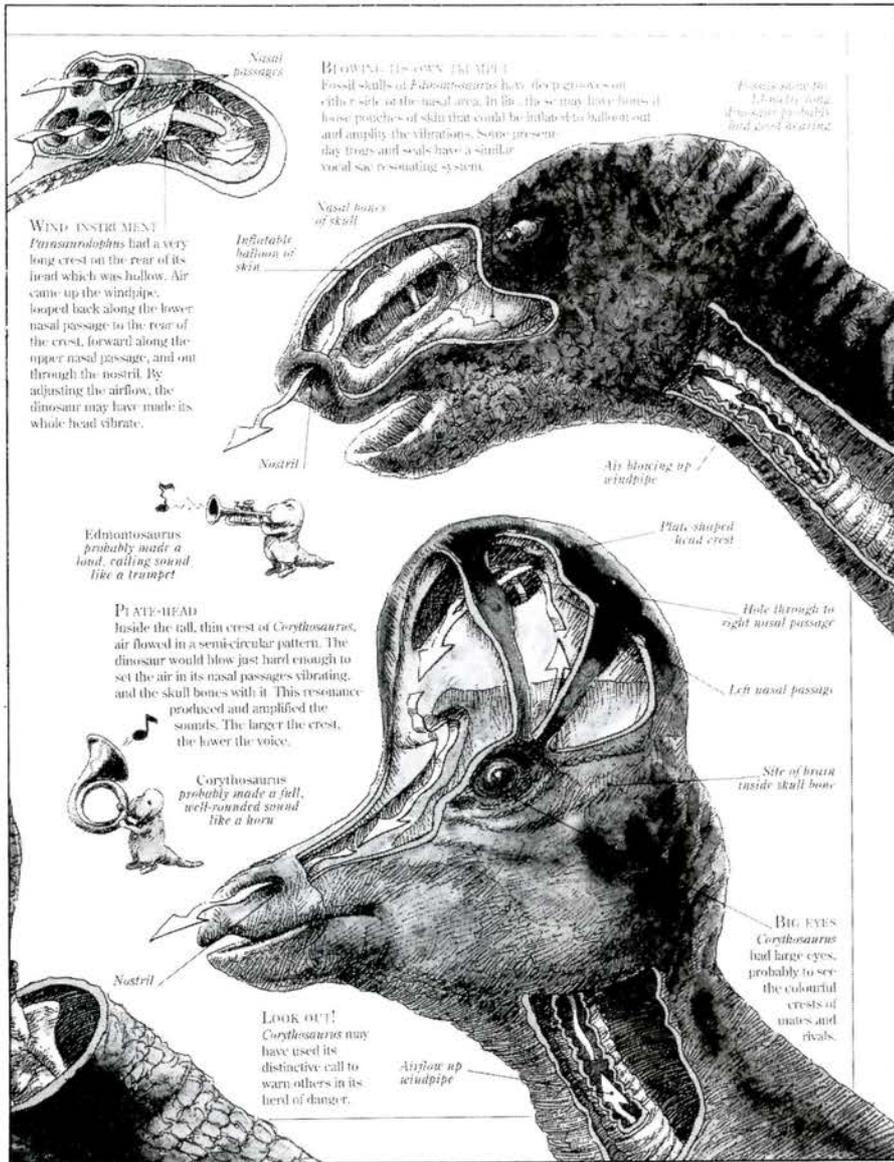
'I made a mistake on my drawing so I turned it into something interesting. One throat for eating and one for drinking. And it's got separate stomachs for solid and liquid.'

'My dinosaur keeps its brains in its tail,' Cherie said. 'That way it can go on living if another dinosaur bites its head off.'

'But it'd get brain damage every time it whacked something. I think we'd all be better off if we had our brains in our stomachs where they could be all padded with guts. Why do you think people have brains in their heads where they can get all banged about?'

'Some people don't . . .'





Liam and Benjamin were comparing defence systems in the two magnificent creatures that were emerging from their pages like images in an acid bath.

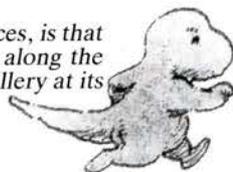
'Mine's going to have a huge ball and chain of solid bone at the end of its tail so that it can swing it round like a mace.'

'How could it manage all that weight, though?'

'See this tube leading from the gullet to that bag on the tail? It swallows air and inflates the bag like a hot air balloon to carry the weight.'

Benjamin's defence system was even more ingenious. A laocoon of bowel coils connected a nest of stomachs to the horny armour plates along the creature's spine.

'The muck that comes out of the bowels - faeces, is that the proper word? - it comes out like bullets along the dinosaur's back, and the plates fire it like artillery at its enemies.'



Later that day, Ted conducted the same activity with a group of Year 2 children and again the lively talk that surrounded the creation of the cross-sectional drawings was as intriguing as the swampy imagery accumulating on the bare bones of the photocopies.

Sandhya had consulted the picture of the egg factory that accompanies the anatomy of the chicken in *Inside the Whale*. She drew a dinosaur dropping eggs from a very robust uterus.

'These eggs've got stone shells so other things can't gobble them up. So this dinosaur has to eat lots of pebbles and things and there's like a cement mixer in the stomach to make the eggshell stuff.'

'Don't be shy with colours,' Ted told the children. 'We've no idea what these guys looked like on the outside. They could've been flaming bronze for all we know.'

Jade declined the invitation to flamboyance. She had tucked her creature's twin hearts away behind its shoulder blades for protection, and she wanted the exterior to be equally practical.

'I'm not making mine silly. The skin's going to be sort of a greeny-brown so it's camouflaged.'

'Why would it have to be camouflaged? They were so big they wouldn't have to hide from anything?'

'Perhaps they wanted to hide from each other.'

'And we don't know there weren't other monsters that were even bigger than them. Things like giant slugs and jelly fish wouldn't leave any fossils. They could've wiped the dinosaurs out.'

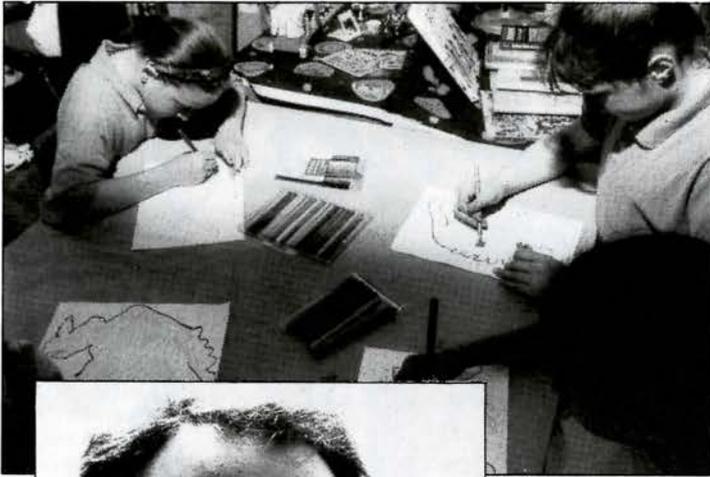
'I'm giving mine green and purple stripes like a snake. Different colours for male and female. It's like a warning signal: "Keep out of my swamp or I'll kill you."'

'Maybe they could talk. When my dog says woof, I think it's saying "Give me something to eat."'

'If dinosaurs could talk, we wouldn't be able to understand them.'

This fascination with language was also evident when Ted asked the children to name their dinosaurs. He provided a list of Latin morphemes for inspiration.

'Mine's got little tiny feet so it won't leave any tracks to follow. How do you say little foot dinosaur? Micro... micropodo... micropodosaurus!'



Jack scanned the list to permute a name for the narwhal headed reptile he had created.

'One is uni like in unicorn and unicycle, so this would be called uni . . . tops? Uni . . . cera . . . tops? Uniceratops . . .'

A group of children consulted the adults in the room for advice on the Latin equivalents of 'my dinosaur' and 'toothless dinosaur'. After scruntung around in the collective linguistic archives, we came up with Measaurus and Zeröodontosaurus, with which the children were well pleased.

At the end of the day the creatures were herded together into a class book, and Ted said goodbye to two grateful classes.

Ted Dewan used to be a high school physics teacher in Massachusetts before taking up illustration full time. Once, he trained a group of students in Aristotelian concepts before throwing them into a state of creative perplexity by getting them to compare notes with students trained in a Newtonian model. The basic idea of science as an uncertain process of interpretation and re-interpretation, involving conjecture, play and serendipity, was conveyed to these infant and junior children in a manner which inspired their curiosity and inventiveness. An inspiring task, a stimulating teacher, and an exciting information text had come together and created some highly entertaining education. ■



Ted Dewan.

Our thanks to the teachers and children of Brindishe Primary School in Lewisham, South London for allowing us to spend the day in their school.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Inside the Whale and Other Animals, 0 86318 813 3, £7.99

Inside Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Creatures, 0 7513 5055 9, £8.99

Both books are illustrated by Ted Dewan, written by Steve Parker and published by Dorling Kindersley.

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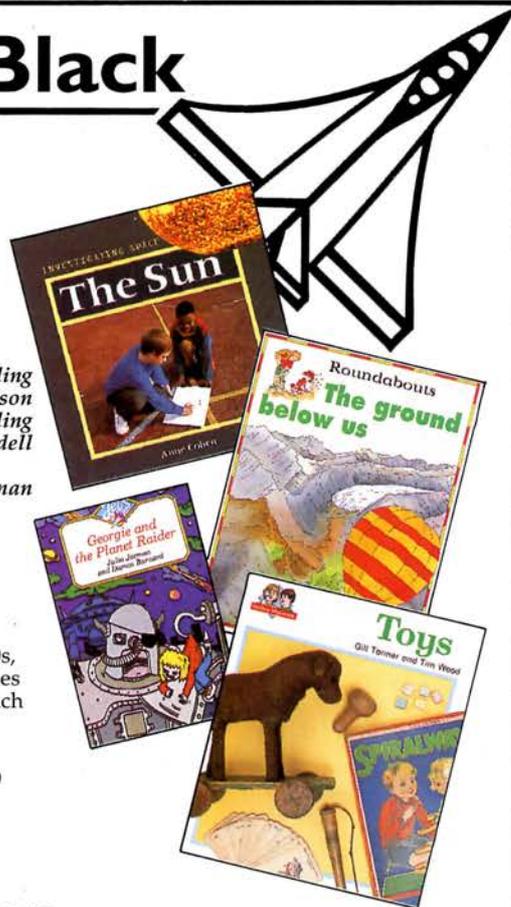
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Topsy + Tim



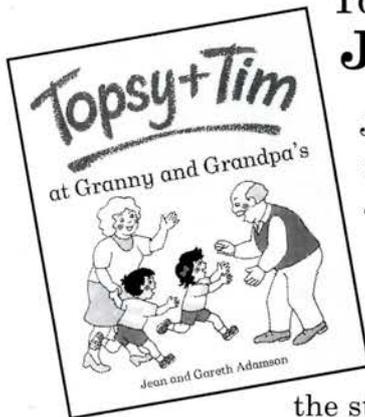
The Story of TOPSY & TIM

The first Topsy & Tim book to be published appeared in 1959.

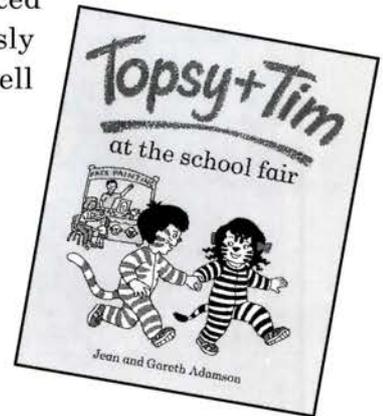
Since then they have continued to delight young children and have become firmly established as classic characters of children's fiction. Although they are now thirty-something, the key to Topsy & Tim's continuing popularity is that they appeal directly to children. To a young child, every real life event is a new challenge. The mixture of the new with the familiar gives a small child a strong sense of security and helps to explain why children return to Topsy & Tim again and again.

Topsy & Tim's creators:

Jean and Gareth Adamson



Jean and Gareth Adamson formed a very successful writer and illustrator team. 'Our first story was **Topsy & Tim's Monday Book**,' Jean explains. 'We presented Blackie with ideas for seven full colour books - one for every day of the week. Remember, this was at a time when most picture books were limited in colour. Blackie produced the books, not only in full colour but at a ridiculously low price - 3/6d. We were astonished to see how well the stories were received. Blackie promptly asked us to write more.'



Since Gareth's sudden death in 1982, Jean has continued to write and illustrate Topsy & Tim books on her own under their joint names. Now a grandmother, Jean is also a school governor and she keeps in close contact with her young audience, updating texts and illustrations to reflect the needs of today's children.



Promotion for Libraries

Join our great Topsy & Tim promotion which features:

- a stylishly designed unit to display the range of Topsy & Tim titles in libraries
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Blackie Children's Books

For more information, speak to your library supplier, or to Pauline Cooke, Children's Marketing, Penguin Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ Tel: 071 416 3000

THE ELEANOR FARJEON AWARD

Wendy Cooling meets the 1993 winner, Susan Belgrave

The Eleanor Farjeon Award, established in 1965, is conferred annually by the Children's Book Circle for outstanding services to the world of children's books. This year's ceremony began with a tribute by Elaine Moss to Marjorie Fisher, the first in a list of distinguished recipients, who died on Christmas Eve 1992. It seemed especially appropriate that the 1993 Award should go to Susan Belgrave, the founder of Volunteer Reading Help, as the charity enters its twentieth year.

It's easy to see how Susan Belgrave, a woman of real determination and commitment, opened the way into London's primary schools. As a secondary school governor she saw that children entering the school with poor reading skills had little chance of catching up afterwards. She thought about it, became a Care Committee worker to get real experience of primary schools, observed, listened, got to grips with the bureaucratic workings of the education service and then went into action. Susan's idea was simple, but inspired, and was based on a belief in a grass roots approach which is still very much with her today. She was certain that many children experiencing difficulties with reading could be helped by one-to-one support and that this was unlikely to be provided on a regular basis by hard-pressed class teachers. Here was a role for volunteers, volunteers from all walks of life, who would work with children in school and help them 'to have a happy time with the printed word'.

It was 1973, the Bullock Report which was to focus minds on reading was still unwritten and many primary schools had signs on their gates saying, NO PARENTS BEYOND THIS POINT. Susan Belgrave took on the authorities, used all her diplomatic skills and got her seven volunteers into the classrooms. The seven have expanded to nearly 900, their ages range from 18 to 80 and they are from all cultures and backgrounds. There are now 12 Volunteer Reading Help branches around the country and volunteers are working in 427 primary schools with just over 2,600 children aged six and above. Susan's volunteers, her 'nuggets of gold', have proved the value of the organisation and have helped thousands of children to feel good about themselves and their reading. Sometimes progress is slow and a volunteer wonder whether to continue... only to be inspired afresh by the class teacher commenting on how different the child is in class - joining in group activities and growing in self-confidence. Volunteer Reading Helpers aim 'to give as many children as possible a better chance in life, through literacy and the dramatic improvement in self-esteem it brings'.

How does it work?

Well-designed posters asking for people to 'help a child to read' are displayed in public libraries, health centres, etc. Patience and interest are the only qualifications needed. Volunteers are invited to meet VRH staff and, as they are applying to work alone with children, are asked for a medical reference to ensure that they are emotionally stable. Three training sessions follow - one run by VRH staff, one by a teacher and one a few weeks into the work when Volunteers really know the questions they need to ask. One of the first trainers was John Welch, a former ILEA Staff Inspector for English and an inspiring speaker on reading. The



Susan Belgrave with two young readers.

commitment of a man who was constantly in demand and who also did excellent work for gifted children indicates the strength of Susan Belgrave's idea. As the number of Volunteers has grown, regular support by telephone, visits and newsletters is now offered and there are termly meetings, refresher courses and book exchanges.



Volunteers go into schools with a suitcase of 26 carefully chosen books and four games. The teachers select the children to be helped - children with little confidence, under achievers, those for whom English is a second language and those with little parental support. Volunteers do not offer specialised help but simply read with three children, individually, for half-an-hour, twice a week. They aim to match the books to the child's interest, to create a feeling of friendship and confidence and to make the reading sessions fun.

VRH was run from home for the first seven years and Susan Belgrave raised funds and persuaded her friends to become Volunteers. In 1980 VRH became a registered charity and grants from several Trusts helped to fund book-buying and a part-time secretary. Today Lady Plowden and Sir Peter Newsam are active patrons and there is a Director, a small national staff and a regional organisation. Funds are received from the Department for Education, local authorities and, with LMS, direct from schools but the

main income is still raised via donations from companies, trusts and individuals.

Susan Belgrave is now VRH's first President; her commitment has never wavered and she is an outstanding ambassador for a flourishing organisation. In accepting the Eleanor Farjeon Award she did so on behalf of all the Volunteers who have given 'love, time and patience' to children who, for whatever reason, had become discouraged in their reading. She began VRH she told me because she enjoys a challenge, believes in the value of unpressured encouragement and is an incurable optimist.

Meeting Susan is quite an experience. I was caught up in her enthusiasm for action and touched by the warmth and determination of her personality. She talked of literacy in her speech, and of her concern that still children leave school with inadequate skills to deal with our complex society, and she referred to the 99 by 99 Campaign, launched that morning. Her voice must be listened to as she calls for action rather than words. ■

The VRH national office is at Room 438, High Holborn House, 49/51 Bedford Row, London WC1V 6RL (tel: 071 404 6204).

The Eleanor Farjeon Award is sponsored by the Books For Children Book Club, and is administered by the Children's Book Circle. For details on how to become a member of CBC, contact Francesca Dow at Orchard Books (tel: 071 739 2929).

Until recently Wendy Cooling was Head of the Children's Book Foundation. Before that she had been a teacher for 20 years, and now plans to spend her time on consultancies and in-service work.

FICTION CRITERIA FOR CARNEGIE

Characterisation

Can be revealed through narration
conversation
thoughts of others
action

Are the characters convincing; credible or stereo-typed; are they consistent with age and background and known child development?

Style

Is it appropriate to the subject?
Is there natural dialogue?
Do narration and dialogue balance?
Are the sentence patterns appropriate?
Is there creation of mood, e.g. mystery, gloom, evil, joy, security?

Plot

The storyline may vary between historical, fantasy, social realism, science fiction, adventure, etc, but the working out of the plot, the basic theme, must be well constructed in that events and characters progress, not necessarily logically, but acceptably within the limits set by the theme. Apart from fantasy and magical themes a solving of the problem by agencies hitherto unrelated to the plot is not considered acceptable.

According to the genre of the book and the age of the child reader, the plot should be constructive in the sense that

- a it ties up the loose ends in a secure and satisfying manner, returning the child to the known world or
- b provides inspiration based on the working out of the events, and
- c produces a sense of having extended knowledge, emotional capacity, taking the reader a step forward even, occasionally, into a disturbed state.

There may be plot characteristics such as the elements of anticipation, humour, suspense, strong elemental human nature aspects such as love, hate, fear, greed, good and evil.

The whole work should provide pleasure from the integration of the plot, style and characters, pleasure not merely from surface enjoyment of a good read, but the deeper of subconscious satisfaction of having gone through a vicarious, but at the time of reading, a real experience, that is retained afterwards.

SHADOWING

Jane Inglis of Hillside School, Bore
an experiment

Whatever one thinks of book prizes and shortlists, there's no doubt that the hype surrounding a prestigious award like the Carnegie Medal generates a glamour and excitement that can be used to motivate children to read. Last year we took Hertfordshire Library Service's Carnegie shortlist and invited our top Year 10 English group to read all six books and vote for a winner. The children chose **Dear Nobody** by Berlie Doherty (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13056 5, £8.99; Tracks, 0 00 674618 7, £3.50 pbk) which went on to win the medal. As a group they certainly read more than usual, they thought more about books, enjoyed the novelty of the discussions and produced written coursework for their GCSE examination.

Encouraged by the success of the project, we decided this year to wait for the national shortlist and repeat the exercise. The schedule was crowded, the list being announced right at the start of the summer term and the prize awarded on 30th June. As soon as the list came out I 'phoned publishers and begged for donations or discounts. As before, I had a varied reception, but with donated books and some 25%-30% discounts we were able to collect nearly 60 volumes, including one complete set given by Peters Library Service, the sponsors of the Award, and several copies borrowed from our Schools' Library Service. Unfortunately, the publisher's promised copies of Robert Westall's **Gulf** never arrived, so we managed with three. The children passed them around and a number managed to read this very popular title which, luckily, is quite short.

We spent most of the lessons concerned with this project in the library. At the first session, I sat the children in a semi-circle round a display of all the available copies, at least one of each book. I gave them a quick introduction to the Carnegie Medal, and briefly presented each of the shortlisted titles. I explained that they would be shadowing the selection process, acknowledging the difficulty, for adult judges as well as for them, of comparing **The Angel of Nitshill Road**, written for newly competent readers, with **A Bone from a Dry Sea**, a challenging novel for teenagers. My colleague Carl Heap, their English teacher, then explained how the time would be used and what exactly would be expected of them. Carl and I had agreed that our objectives were threefold: to get the children to read more, and more critically, than they otherwise would; to increase their oral skills both in small and larger groups; and finally to provide them with material which some at least would use for GCSE written work.

This early session generated a gratifying amount of excitement. The class responded well to the challenge of reading so many books in such a short time. They coped sensibly with the problems posed by Geography field trips, a History expedition to Belgium, and the half-term holiday, making their own arrangements to pass books around and put scarce copies to the best possible use. We soon realised that having two titles well below their reading age (**The Suitcase Kid** and **The Angel of Nitshill Road**) helped the children feel their way into their role as judges, and of course notched up a quick score of two titles read.

Early in the term Carl spent a double lesson with the children designing a questionnaire which was then issued to every child for each book read. This double-sided A4 document contributed a great deal to the success of the project, particularly as the children had helped draw it up and were invited at intervals to assess the usefulness of each question.

Straight after half-term we divided the class into six groups of four to five pupils. They had their completed questionnaires to prompt memory and boost their confidence, and they spent an hour discussing the eight books. After this session they were given for homework the task of drawing up a private order of preference.



Pupils (centre) from Hillside School, Borehamwood and (front) Stirchley Junior and Infants, Birmingham with Anthony Browne, Michael Palin and Anne Fine (winner of of the Carnegie Award).



CARNEGIE

Hamwood, Hertfordshire, describes
n reading

The next day we planned a further discussion, differently structured. This time the questionnaires were sorted out by title, and eight groups of three to four pupils were scattered round the library, one to each book. All the pupils in each group had read the book. Their brief was to collate the questionnaire responses, consider some further questions (Would it make a good film or television programme? Is there a message or a moral, and if so, what?) and decide how best to present their book to the whole class. Great excitement was caused by the presence at this session of a young reporter from Radio 5's *Education Matters*. He went round each group recording their deliberations, and the following day Hillside pupils heard themselves on a programme about the Carnegie Medal.

The last two library sessions involved these small groups presenting their books to the class as a whole, an exercise which our pupils found much more daunting than the discussion that led up to it.

The final vote was synchronised with the announcement of the medal. It wasn't easy to devise a fair voting system when not all had read each book. Two lists were drawn up. Each child was asked to select the eight titles in order of personal preference. We also used a percentage system devised by the class to select a single winner, each child being asked to name their favourite and say how many they had read. In both lists *The Suitcase Kid* finished first. The table below summarises relevant statistics.

Four of the eight pupils who read all the books were invited to the Award ceremony, and although we dissented from the final official choice (Anne Fine's *The Flour Babies*) everyone at Hillside agreed the Carnegie Medal project had been a great success. ■

	Book	No. of Readers	Adjusted %	Individual 1st Choices
1st	<i>Suitcase Kid</i>	25	84%	14
2nd	<i>Gulf</i>	19	79%	7
3rd	<i>Skye</i>	17	71%	4
4th	<i>Flour Babies</i>	18	66%	0
5th	<i>Nitshill Road</i>	28	61%	0
6th	<i>Elephant Chase</i>	20	58%	0
7th	<i>Angel for May</i>	16	54%	0
8th	<i>Bone from Dry Sea</i>	21	46%	4

One voter, absent on holiday, would almost certainly have chosen *The Suitcase Kid*.

Jane Inglis is part-time librarian at Hillside School, as well as being a translator, reviewer and writer. Her book *Some People Don't Eat Meat* (Oakroyd Press) was featured in the *BfK Green Guide to Children's Books*.

Details of the Carnegie shortlist books:

An Angel for May, Melvin Burgess, Andersen, 0 86264 398 8, £8.99

The Angel of Nitshill Road, Anne Fine, ill. Kate Aldous, Methuen, 0 416 17892 8, £6.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 0974 X, £2.99 pbk

A Bone from a Dry Sea, Peter Dickinson, Gollancz, 0 575 05306 2, £9.99

Flour Babies, Anne Fine, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13252 5, £8.99

FICTION CRITERIA FOR HILLSIDE SCHOOL

Have you read any other by this author? YES/NO If yes, which?

Does the book have a recommended reader age? YES/NO

If yes, what?

Do you agree with this recommended age? YES/NO

If no, what should it be? Why?

Is the story intended more for (1) Boys (2) Girls (3) Both?

If (1) or (2), in what ways does this show?

Where is the story set? In what time(s) is the story set?

Name

Key Characters

Age

Sex

1.

2.

3.

etc.

Did any of the characters have unusual powers or abilities? Give details.

Were there any important animals in the story? Give details.

Give a brief description of the family circumstances of the central characters.

Did someone recommend the book to you? YES/NO Who?

What did they recommend about it?

If you had just seen it on the library shelves, would you have picked it up and read it? YES/NO

If yes, why? (e.g. cover design, blurb, reviews, author, title, read a bit etc.) If not, why not?

Did you enjoy it? YES/NO/MIXED FEELINGS If not, why not?

If yes, at (roughly or exactly) what point in the book did you start to become hooked or engrossed?

What aspects of the book hooked you?

(If you had mixed feelings, fill in both spaces above.)

If this had been your own personal reading, would you have read to the end of the book? YES/NO If no, are you glad you did? YES/NO

(If yes, well done for being humble)

Would you recommend it? YES/NO

Does it make you want to read other books by the same author? YES/NO

Was there anything unusual about the way the story was structured? Describe briefly.

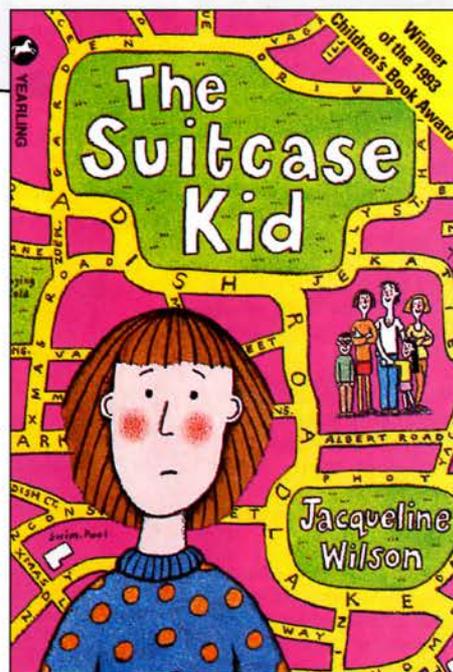
Was the story predictable? YES/NO If yes, did that matter?

Was the conclusion of the story satisfying? YES/NO

If no, how would you have preferred it to end?

Put down a few adjectives to describe any emotions that you came away with.

Was the book like anything else you've read or seen? (Book, Film, T.V. etc.) If so, what?



The Great Elephant Chase, Gillian Cross, Oxford, 0 19 271672 7, £8.95

Gulf, Robert Westall, Methuen, 0 416 18590 8, £9.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 1472 7, 2.99 pbk

So Far from Skye, Judith O'Neill, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13213 4, £9.99; Puffin, 0 14 034980 4, £3.99 pbk

The Suitcase Kid, Jacqueline Wilson, Doubleday, 0 385 40175 2, £8.99; Yearling, 0 440 86311 2, £2.99 pbk

The Making of MORTIMER AND ARABEL

Angela Beeching on a new
BBC series



Angela Beeching.

More than 20 years ago Joan Aiken was commissioned to write a story for **Jackanory**. The brief was simple – she could write anything she wanted – Joan remembers. What arrived in the **Jackanory** office was a story called **Arabel's Raven**. Arabel Jones, as everybody must know by now, is a little girl of five (going on 35, I always think) who lives in Rainwater Crescent, Rumbury Town, a district of London, with her taxi-driver father, Ben, his outrageous wife, Martha, and Arabel's pet raven, Mortimer. The first story explained how Mortimer came to be part of their lives much to the delight of Arabel, who adores him, the despair of Mrs Jones who has a love/hate relationship with him, and the long-suffering patience of Mr Jones. Mortimer is a lovable fiend, a walking disaster, prone to eating everything in sight including the staircase given the chance but the Jones family, in their own peculiar way, are devoted to him. They defend him to the last when the need arises and go to extraordinary lengths to extricate him from whatever unbelievable situation he has got the family into.

Quentin Blake, who had already illustrated one or two stories for **Jackanory**, was commissioned to do the artwork for the programmes: something in the region of 50 to 60 colour drawings for the story, which was serialised over five days.

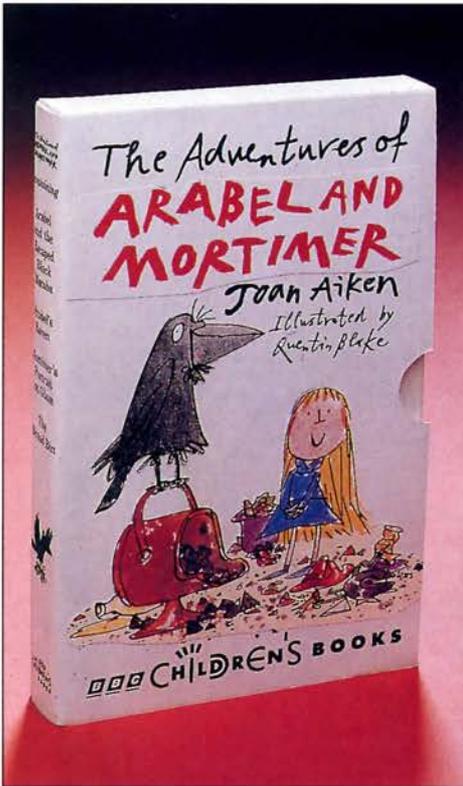
Further Arabel and Mortimer stories arrived, uncommissioned, at regular intervals and so began a long-standing relationship between Joan, Quentin, Bernard Cribbins (who read all but the first story), and all of us in the **Jackanory** office. It's a relationship which continued over a period of more than 10 years.

Then Quentin became so busy he was unable to continue doing any more illustrations for us and I felt that his pictures were so inextricably tied up with Mortimer and Arabel that it would be almost impossible to ask somebody



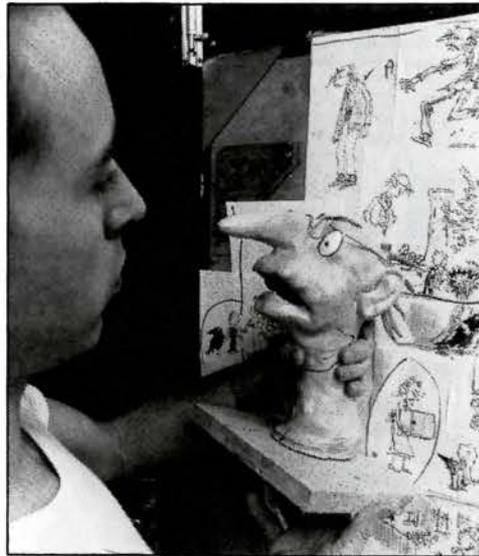
The Jones family and Mortimer in drawn and puppet form.





BBC Books' boxed set of four Arabel and Mortimer books (details at end of this article).

Above right: Quentin Blake's drawing of Mr Leggit, with his puppet head below.



else to take over the work. In any case, the series had had a good run for its money, perhaps it was time to call a halt. So, no more Arabel and Mortimer stories were done apart from a special one-off *Arabel's Tree-House*, which Joan wrote for *Jackanory's* 25th birthday programme in 1991. On this occasion Quentin agreed to do the illustrations for the story and the jacket for the special *Silver Jackanory Book*.

However, in the meantime I'd started producing drama programmes for a younger audience – something we hadn't done before – based on characters from existing books. The first of these was *Jonny Briggs* from Joan Eadington's stories which had been specially written for *Jackanory*, followed by *Simon and the Witch* by Margaret Stuart Barry and *Happy Families* from the books by Allan

Ahlberg. In 1986, while we were still making *Jonny Briggs*, it occurred to me that perhaps there was scope for developing Arabel Jones and family, including Mortimer, of course, into a fully-fledged live-action drama series – though the bird would not be live!

I had a meeting with Joan at her daughter Lizza's house and asked her whether she liked the idea and whether she was able to devise some original storylines for a 12-part series which could then be dramatised. Joan agreed, but in return asked whether I'd let Lizza write the scripts. A lengthy gestation period then followed in order to get the storylines and scripts right.

A lot of correspondence flew back and forth between Joan and me, and the script-writing continued between Joan's various trips to New York (where she lives part of the time), to Greece, Rome and other exotic locations. As we had planned that Mortimer would need to be a fully electronic, walking, wing-flapping, beak-opening, eye-moving animatronic bird, it was finally agreed we would spend some money to develop him and produce a mini-pilot programme to test his movements and see whether the whole project would work. Actually, as it was not possible for one creature to contain the mechanisms for all these movements, several versions had to be made to cover the different actions. What we ended up with was something which *did* move, *did* flap its wings, *did* roll its eyes, *did* open its beak, but had so many working parts inside each variation and so many wires trailing out of their backsides that they were enormously heavy and very difficult to balance on small bird-like legs. Coupled with this we also had a straightforward common or garden glove puppet version and one or two strings! Two little girls were duly cast as try-outs for Arabel, a kitchen 'set' was specially built and two days were spent testing the whole operation.

It wasn't exactly a disaster, but we all knew it hadn't really worked. The bird was far too cumbersome and it totally lacked the charm and cheekiness in Joan and Quentin's original creation. The little girls, through no fault of their own, did not look young enough (it wasn't possible to cast real five-year-olds because of legal restrictions on the use of children, so we'd cast small eight and nine-year-olds) and, more to the point, they didn't look anything like Quentin Blake's illustrations!

At the post-mortem we came to the conclusion that we'd been too ambitious with the bird, and the mechanisms had been over-complicated. What seemed to have worked best was the very simple glove-puppet version à la Emu and Basil Brush. The human beings were also a problem: they just didn't look as though they'd been drawn by Quentin. Malcolm James, the designer of the bird, suggested that perhaps we should mount the entire production using puppets in the likeness of Quentin's illustrations and that all the sets, furniture and props should be specially built to look as though they were a three-dimensional visualisation of Quentin's pictures. We all thought

this was a terrific idea, but I wasn't certain whether Joan and Lizza would agree. After the initial shock, and helped I'm sure by the fact that Lizza had worked in puppet theatre, they gave their blessing. The project had by now been so long in the pre-production stage I think Joan was beginning to wonder if it was ever going to see the light of day.

Two years were indeed to elapse while budgets were drawn up and decisions made as to whether **Mortimer and Arabel** really was to go ahead. Finally we got the green light.

Malcolm James, who is a Scenic Designer in the BBC Visual Effects Department, and had been responsible among other things for creating the Psammead for the dramatisation of **Five Children and It** and **The Return of the Psammead** was to head a team to make all the puppets (17 named characters and various 'extras'), design and build the sets, select and adapt the props, make the furniture, cars, police vans and everything else visually required for the production – all to look like Quentin's drawings. Quentin provided us with reference sketches which all the people working on the project had photocopied and pinned up in every available place so they could keep as near as possible to his likenesses. Work began in the last week of January this year. The puppets were completed first so that the Costume Designer had them in plenty of time to make the clothes. Meanwhile the sets were being built in the order that we would need them for shooting and props were being bought and adapted or specially made.

A team of puppeteers led by Francis Wright, who, with several helpers, had been responsible for the manipulation of the Psammead, was selected not just for their ability as 'dolly-wagglers' but for the suitability of their voices for the parts. The camera crew was contracted and a whole heap of technical equipment ordered.

Meetings were held between the Director, Roger Singleton-Turner (a long-serving member of the Children's Department who'd worked on programmes from **Jackanory** to **Grange Hill**), me and Lizza over the final points of the script; with the various workers in the Visual Effects Department; with the Costume Designer, and with John Christie, the Lighting Cameraman.

Finally, in mid-May, rehearsals began. During this period the technical equipment was moved into the studio and the first of the sets put up.

The shooting of the series took seven weeks: an exhausting business, especially for the puppeteers who had to stand with their arms in the air while doing all manner of manipulations which they couldn't see except with the use of small monitors, all the while speaking lines, moving the puppets motions and trying not to get any parts of their bodies in shot! It was great fun, though a little fraught at times. In spite of the length of the enterprise we were all quite sad when the end finally arrived and we had to contemplate the thought of going on to other different projects.



Post-production is now under way: editing the entire series, adding opening and closing titles and the specially commissioned music. The finished programmes will be shown on BBC-1 at 4.20 pm on Mondays and Wednesdays from 15th November to 22nd December.

It's been a very long haul, but I hope it will have been worthwhile. ■

Angela Beeching is the Executive Producer for Children's Fiction at the BBC and is the Producer responsible for **Mortimer and Arabel**. She was a junior member of the production team when **Jackanory** first started in 1965.

Details of Joan Aiken's books, with illustrations by Quentin Blake, all published by BBC Books:

Arabel's Raven, 0 563 20909 7, £2.25 pbk

Arabel and the Escaped Black Mamba, 0 563 20910 0, £2.25 pbk

Mortimer's Tie, 0 563 20911 9, £2.25 pbk

Mortimer and the Sword Excalibur, 0 562 36034 8, £2.25 pbk

Mortimer's Portrait on Glass, 0 563 20915 1, £2.25 pbk

The Bread Bin, 0 563 20912 7, £2.25 pbk

The Mystery of Mr Jones's Disappearing Taxi, 0 563 20917 8, £2.25 pbk

Mortimer's Cross, 0 563 20809 0, £2.50 pbk

The Spiral Stair, 0 563 17605 9, £2.50 pbk

Mortimer and Arabel, by Joan and Lizza Aiken, 0 563 36396 7, £8.99; 0 563 403276, £2.99 pbk

The Adventures of Arabel and Mortimer (boxed set of 4 titles), 0 563 40338 1, £11.99

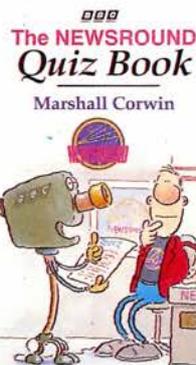
BBC CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Have a Happy New Term and a successful
Children's Book Week with the best of BBC Children's Books



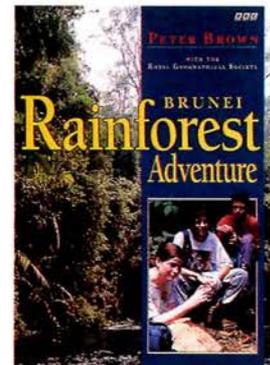
The Newsround Book of Space

"An evaluating look at all aspects of space travel, exploration and research. Good photographs bring highly factual text to life."
Children's Books of the Year 1993
Includes Index and Space Log.
Shortlisted for the COPUS Science Award 1993
Pbk £4.99 0 563 40309 8



The Newsround Quiz Book

A series of ingenious news quizzes to entertain and challenge, reflecting the wide range of stories which appear on BBC Television's *Newsround*.
Pbk £1.99 0 563 40305 5



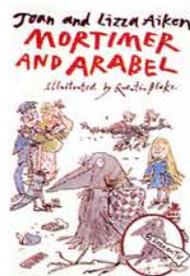
Brunei Rainforest Adventure

Published with the Royal Geographical Society, this is a stunning pictorial record of an expedition to the Brunei Rainforest by three British teenagers. Includes Index, Useful Addresses and ideas to follow up.
Hdbk £6.99 0 563 36756 3



The Blue Peter Action Book

Bursting with bright ideas to get children activated, from city farms to raising money for charity. Indispensable for the classroom!
Hdbk £4.99 0 563 36495 5



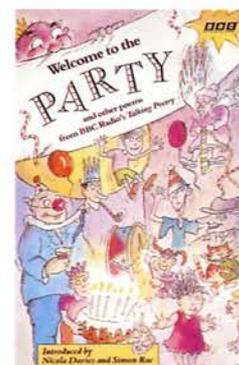
Mortimer and Arabel

"Joan and Lizza Aiken's hilarious and slightly off beat sense of humour makes the book an excellent class reader . . . highly recommended." *The Essex Review*
New BBC dramatisation starting in November.

Pbk £2.99 0 563 40327 6

Arabel and Mortimer Slipcase
containing: *Arabel's Raven*, *The Bread Bin*, *Arabel and the Escaped Black Mamba* and *Mortimer's Portrait on Glass*

£11.99 0 563 40338 1



Welcome to the Party

Compiled by Susan Roberts, producer of Radio 4's *Talking Poetry*, this bumper anthology ranges from classics to rap and is arranged thematically to make it easy for classroom use.

Pbk £3.99 0 563 36482 3

BBC Children's Books, Room A3132, BBC Enterprises,
80 Wood Lane, London W12 0TT. Tel 081 576 2641

BOOKS FOR KEEPS
NEWS

BOOK
TRUST

FAREWELL TO THE CHILDREN'S BOOK FOUNDATION

Alas, it's goodbye to Wendy Cooling and the CBF. Both are casualties of the re-organised Book Trust, under its new Chief Executive, Beverly Anderson, in response to the major projected financial deficit for 1993/1994.

The good news, of course, is that Beverly Anderson's own track record as an educationist committed to children's books and the promotion of children's reading is exemplary. The bad news – or what could turn out to be the bad news – is that the Book Trust remit, which covers publishers, booksellers, writers, librarians and readers, is so broad. Without the Children's Book Foundation as a separate entity to combat it, the depressingly familiar marginalisation of children's books in the nation's cultural consciousness looks more likely than ever. If any one person can reverse this tendency then Beverly Anderson can. Let's hope, though, she hasn't underestimated the pressure she'll be under to attend to other, higher status, imperatives.

And let's thank Wendy Cooling for her success in raising the profile of the CBF during her time as Director . . . and wish her well in her new, freelance career. She can be contacted at 41A Highbury Hill, London N5 1SU (tel: 071 359 0761).

Orion
Children's Books

Orion rising

A newcomer on the publishing scene but with a starry look already thanks to the Dent backlist (which includes **The Borrowers**), Orion Children's Books Ltd was launched in September with a dozen titles that include Kevin Crossley-Holland's **The Labours of Herakles** (1 85881 009 4, £8.99) and Margaret Mahy's **Tick Tock Tales** (1 85881 004 3, £9.99) along with Antonia Fraser's **Robin Hood** (1 85881 002 7) and **King Arthur** (1 85881 003 5) both at £9.99. Since the Managing Director is the redoubtable

Judith Elliott, success looks assured. 'We'll be market-led, of course, in terms of providing books children really want,' she says, 'but also *bold*, we hope, in offering original, enjoyable books from within the perspective of a mainstream publishing house that's radical and innovative in its approach.'

For a catalogue, contact Orion Publishing Group, Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane, London WC2H 9EH (tel: 071 240 3444).

BACK TO SCHOOL ... AND BACK TO BOOKS

There's no shortage of book promotion opportunities this autumn, BfK is glad to report. Below, with details for follow-up, are some of them.



The National Literacy Association's 99 by 99 Campaign aims to ensure that 'by 1999, 99% of children will be leaving school with adequate literacy'. This, the organisers point out, is not just a matter for schools but concerns us all – parents and employers as much as reading and writing 'professionals'. Pledges are invited to take on specific activities to promote literacy . . . from sharing books with particular children to writing a letter to local MPs enlisting their support.



Duncan Goodhew and daughter Victoria (2) sign the pledge.

Contact: National Literacy Association, 5 Airspeed Road, Priory Industrial Park, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 4HD (tel: 0425 272232).

BOOK POWER!



CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

Sponsored once again by the **Daily Telegraph**, this takes place from 2nd-9th October kicking off with a spectacular event at Eureka! the Museum for Children in Halifax on 2nd October. Children, teachers, authors, illustrators and celebrities will build The Book Power Tower of 1,993 books which can be won by a lucky primary and secondary school for their libraries. Other events include Readathon (which raises money for charity), the Book Bus Roadshow and events in schools, libraries and bookshops nationwide.

Contact: Andrea Marks Public Relations on 081 958 4398 or send s.a.e. to the Daily Telegraph Children's Book Week, Dept. AMPR, Laburnum House, 1 Spring Villa Road, Edgware, Middlesex HA8 7EB.

NATIONAL Library WEEK

takes place from 1st-7th November with coverage on BBC Radio 2 in the form of interviews, features and outside broadcasts. Also News International will be working with Collins Children's Books in sponsoring a national children's competition launched last July in public libraries... where, along with schools, prisons, colleges and companies, a huge range of regional events will be on offer.

The centrally organised national events include a new opinion poll about libraries; a public debate chaired by Melvyn Bragg; a photographic competition; a major launch with a celebrity 'trading places' with a librarian and a Community Initiative Award 'highlighting the pivotal social role libraries play'. Amen to that, says BfK.

Contact: Donna MacLean, Library Association, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE (tel: 071 636 7543).

OTHER LIVEWIRE LIBRARIES...

Lancashire County Library/
Nat West Bank Children's Book of
the Year Award 1993



Joint Winners:

Salamandastron by Brian Jacques, Hutchinson, 0 09 176433 5, £12.99

Gulf by Robert Westall, Methuen, 0 416 18590 8, £9.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 1472 7, 2.99 pbk

Runner-up:

Underworld by Peter Beere, Scholastic, 0 590 55006 3, £7.99

Presented back in June, the Award was judged by a panel of children representing 14 schools (one from every district in Lancashire) under the chairmanship of Hazel Townson. For the first time in the competition's seven-year history, the Award was shared jointly.

FANTASY AND S.F.

is the theme of November's BfK

READ:

Terry Pratchett on Why We
Need Dragons

Douglas Hill on Writing Science
Fiction

Victor Watson on the stories of
C S Lewis

Philippa Milne-Smith on Wolves in
Children's Books

Jessica Yates on a Beginner's
Bibliography of Fantasy

Susan Cooper in Authorgraph

... plus reviews, reviews, reviews

Kick-starts from Cornwall

With over 50 years of experience in professional librarianship between them, who better than Christina Dyer, Jan Newton and Julie Webster of Cornwall Education Library Services, to answer two key questions? They are:

'Can you suggest some books to interest an able but reluctant reader?'

'Can you suggest some books that might suit an older child who finds reading difficult?'

The list they came up with, after looking at thousands of titles, is aimed at the teachers, parents and librarians who may be desperate for an answer. About 150 titles are included from the junior age-range upwards including some non-fiction. For a free copy, contact Jan Newton, Education Library Services, Library and Arts HQ, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, Cornwall (tel: 0872 74282).

Barnicoats, the independent library supplier helped with the design and production of the catalogue and you can also obtain it from them by speaking to Helen Carlyle on 0326 372628.

Centenary Celebrations at The Book Room

Birmingham's specialist children's bookshop and library supplier, which has done business with local schools since Victorian days, was 100 years old in June. The company's strong connections with The Federation of Children's Book Groups, with Ragdoll Productions and **Books For Your Children** magazine are all worthy of note... and, not surprisingly, the shop often bustles with parents and teachers. Nearly 200 guests attended the Centenary Celebration evening in June. There's a special 28-page souvenir brochure offered on request from The Book Room, 7 Carrs Lane, Birmingham B4 7TG (tel: 021 643 9235).

A Move for Charles Wilson Ltd

Founder members of the School Bookshop Association and booksellers to over 400 school bookshops in 27 years, Charles Wilson of Liverpool have recently made some changes. A move from 46 Renshaw Street after 64 years, linked to the retirement of David and Angela Stewart, means new premises and a new generation - Stephen Stewart is now in charge at 55 Seymour Terrace, Liverpool L3 5PE.

Good luck, Stephen, says BfK... and a happy retirement to David and Angela who've been tireless supporters of this magazine since it was first launched.

Posters from YLG



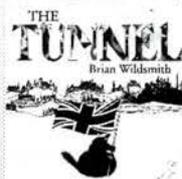
This time concentrating on teenagers, the latest batch of posters is now available from the Youth Libraries Group - a set of six, size A3, in full-colour, costs £17.00 from Remploy, London Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs ST5 1RX. ■

TELL A STORY WITH OXFORD

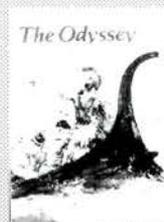
FIVE DELIGHTFUL NEW PICTURE BOOKS FOR YOUNGSTERS



SANJI AND THE BAKER
0 19 279960 6 £6.99 h/b



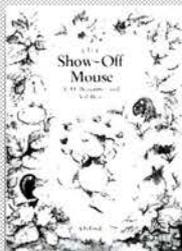
THE TUNNEL
0 19 279962 2 £7.99 h/b



THE ODYSSEY
0 19 274130 6 £9.99 h/b



ALL ALONE
0 19 272268 9 £2.99 p/b
0 19 279906 1 £5.95 h/b



THE SHOW-OFF MOUSE
0 19 279954 1 £6.99 h/b

Oxford
University
Press

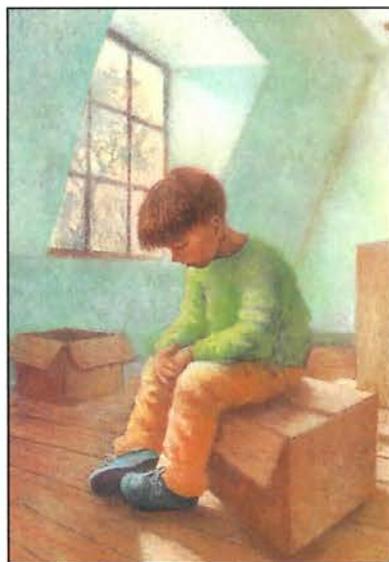
EDITOR'S CHOICE

Chris Powling takes his pick from new hardbacks

After death and divorce, we're told moving house is the next most stressful of human predicaments. This may account for the downbeat, sepia tints of **Moving** (Viking Kestrel, 0 670 84865 4, £8.99) which comes complete with a poster 'to frame and keep'. Sophy Williams' painterly illustrations have a haunting and addictive charm, though, that will outlast many a flashier foray into the subject. The colour variations she achieves with her restricted palette catch perfectly the mood of Michael Rosen's text.

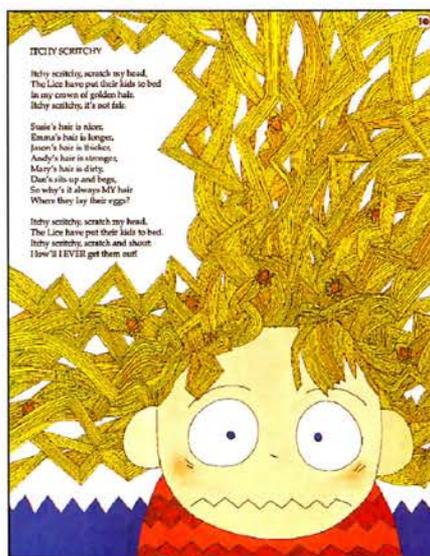
Take the spread, for instance, that shows the boy alone in his new, bare bedroom with his parents fully occupied off-page:

*'Now they will worry,
now they will be sorry,
now they will want me
to come from nowhere,
but I won't.'*



Does this refer to the child or the tabbycat telling the story? The answer is both, of course. The counterpoint of kid's-eye view and cat's-eye view, in matching word and image, is one of the delights of this rich, subtle picture book.

The shift from **Moving** to Ifeoma Onyefulu's **A is for Africa** (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0848 4, £8.99) is like stepping from a darkened room straight into noon sunshine so bright and needle-sharp are the author's photographs. She takes us, quite literally, on an A to Z of the Nigeria where she grew up. Since the trip includes, among other heresies, 'C is for Canoe', 'H is for mud Houses' and 'T is for Turban', those for whom Political Correctness is paramount had better stay at home... to their loss, let it be said. This splendidly upbeat celebration of a traditional Igbo village manages to be both exotic and easy for youngsters to relate to – as in 'G is for Grandmother, telling wonderful stories about animals and people who lived long ago'.

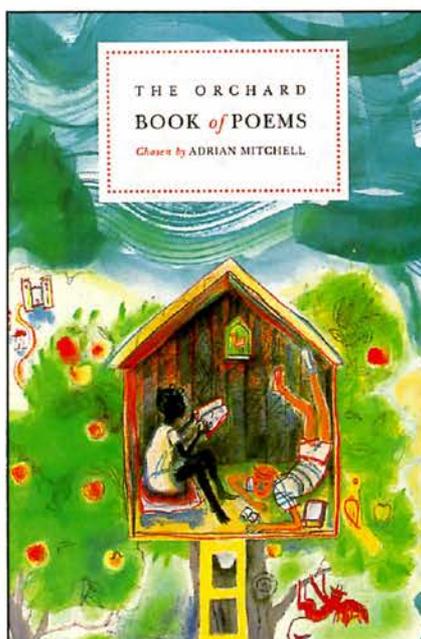


'Itchy Scritchy' from ...

Just as ravishing to look at is **Creepy Crawly Song Book** (Andersen, 0 86264 361 9, £9.99) which provides instant musical relief for any mini-beasts topic... assuming, that is, you can read or play a score. I can't, so merely pass on the warm admiration of a pianist mate of mine for Carl Davis's original songs. What I can recommend are the brilliant, full-colour illustrations of Satoshi Kitamura who deserves a vote of thanks from all spiders-in-the-bath, not to mention snails, ants, fleas, caterpillars, praying mantises et al. Mind you, Hiawyn Oram – with whom he always does his best work – is also on the team so dapper, witty lyrics are guaranteed:

*'Susie's hair is nicer
Emma's hair is longer,
Jason's hair is thicker
Andy's hair is stronger,
Mary's hair is dirty,
Dan's sits up and begs,
So why's it always MY hair
Where they lay their eggs?'*

Enough, I'd have thought, to make any parent or classteacher reach for the Prionderm.

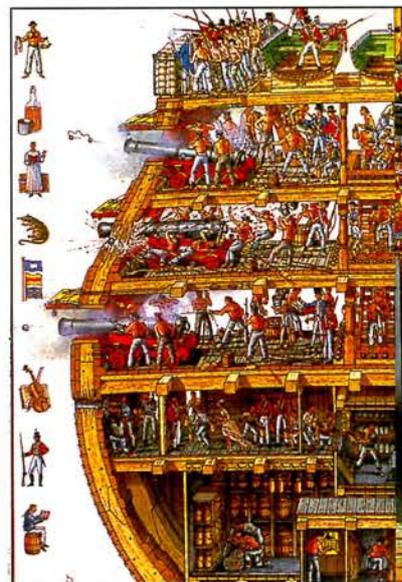


Or, perhaps, for a verse antidote from Adrian Mitchell's **The Orchard Book of Poems** (Orchard, 1 85213 316 3, £14.99).

This beautifully designed and printed volume, with line-drawings by Chloe Cheese, is the best possible talisman against any Official Anthology from you-know-who. It's quirky, wide-ranging and packed with poems you recognise, poems you're ashamed not to recognise and poems which, for all their ink-wet freshness, seem to recognise you:

*'Poetry is your mind dancing
To the drumbeat of your heart'*

... says Adrian Mitchell. He divides the collection into sections representing journeys or destinations of one kind or another but there's nothing to stop random browsing if that's your preference. Be prepared, though, to have your attention arrested since page after page brings a showstopper: by Shakespeare, by Lennon and McCartney and, among more than 100 other contributors, by Adrian Mitchell himself. He has the touch of the true anthologist – the ability to suggest his every offering is so uniquely valuable he couldn't possibly have left it out... yet, at the same time, that there's plenty more where that came from.



Man-of-War (Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5045 1, £12.00) is the latest Cross-Sections enterprise illustrated by Stephen Biesty and written by Richard Platt. Here are pages to be visited and re-visited at any age susceptible to the creak of timbers and clang of a ship's bell – a glorious, press-gang of a book from which few will be tempted to desert once they're aboard. Each of ten double-spreads, teeming with sea-salty detail, considers a different aspect of Nelson's flagship, *Victory*... but the reader is free to follow a personal route through all the maritime clamour since the facts are acted out in front of us so vividly and so fully we're not so much informed about what's going as enlisted into it. True there's a conventional glossary at the back of the book, along with an index, but these are strictly for committed landlubbers. For the full flavour of life as a rating, a midshipman, a captain or an admiral, far better to pick your own way across decks, up and down companionways and high into the shrouds – why, you may even encounter the stowaway whose progress is one of the running-gags on this witty, warm-hearted and totally unsentimental voyage. Amazingly, thanks to smart DK marketing world-wide, the fare is a mere twelve quid. Only a year's subscription to **BfK** can match such value. ■