

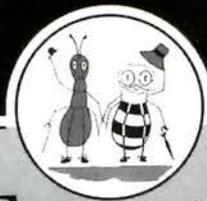
BOOKS FOR KEEPS

January 1994 No. 84
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the children's book magazine

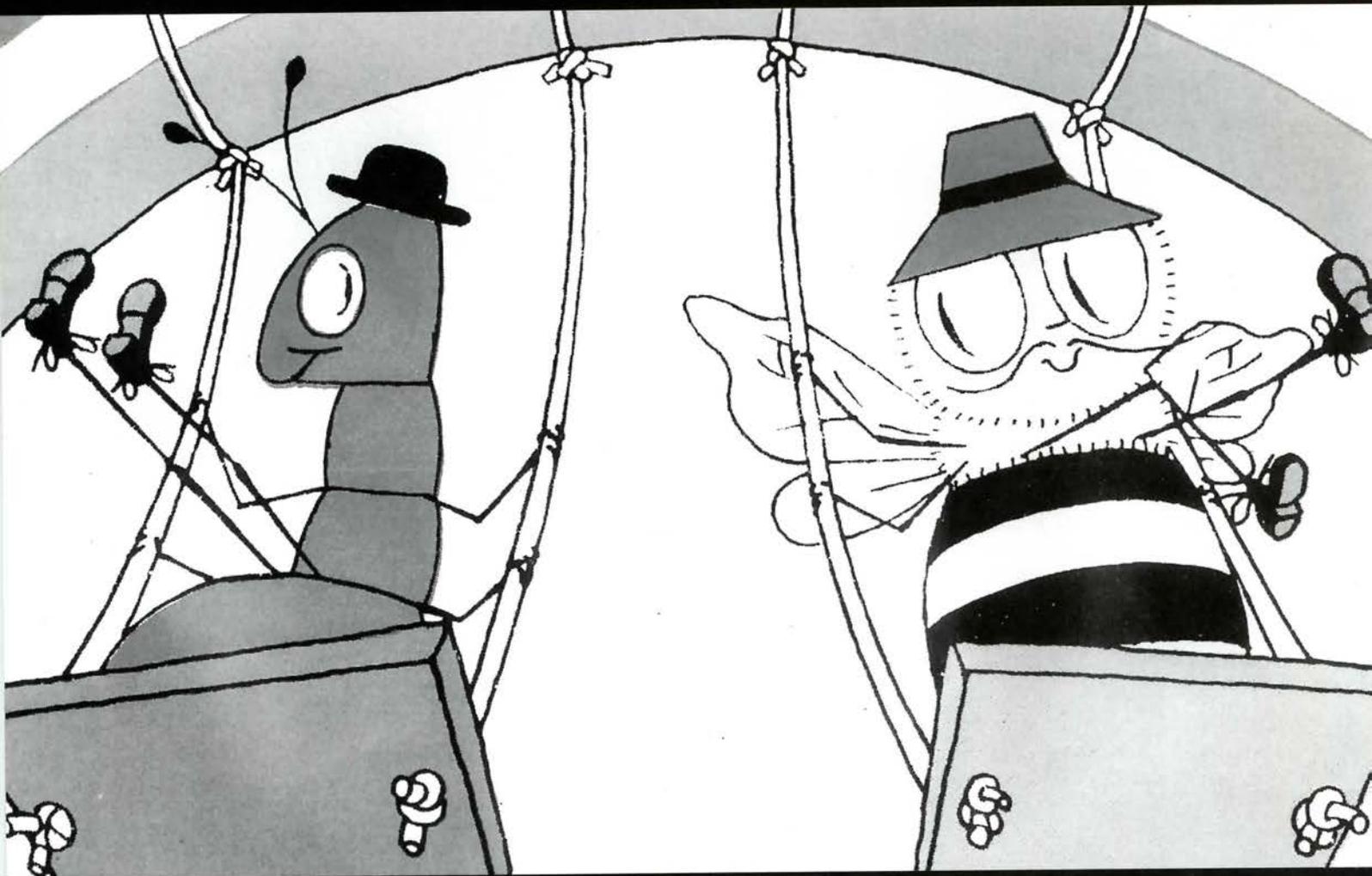


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Geoffrey Trease (left) with his two elder brothers, about 1912.

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Cover Story

The illustration on our cover this month is by George Underwood. It is from Geoffrey Trease's latest book, **Fire on the Wind**, published by Pan Macmillan, to whom we are grateful for help in using this illustration. Details of the book are given in our Authorgraph on pages 12-13.

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JANUARY 1994 No. 84

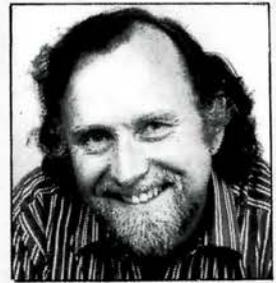
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EDITOR'S PAGE



The sheer ferocity of the phonecall took us completely aback:

'What on *earth* did you think you were doing . . . utter irresponsibility . . . BfK sinking to such depths . . . wildly over the top . . . too much for any youngster to absorb . . . how does occult exhibitionism like this promote children's reading . . . total decadence on your part . . .' etc.

Well, not those words exactly but that was the gist of it. Afterwards it was hard to reconstruct the detail since the delivery was so impassioned. What we did gather though, before the caller slammed down the phone on us without identifying himself, was the focus of his wrath – our November cover.

Pretty scary, we'd agree. So, indeed, is the book for which this was the dustjacket – Susan Cooper's **Over Sea, Under Stone**. At least three people, presumably, were satisfied that this particular image gets the Fright Factor about right: Susan Cooper herself, her editor at Bodley Head and the actual illustrator, Andrew Skilleter. Certainly, and let's admit this at once, it never occurred to any of us that his work here was terrifying above and beyond the call of pictorial duty.

So does this mean our caller's protest should be treated as null, void and generally out-of-order?

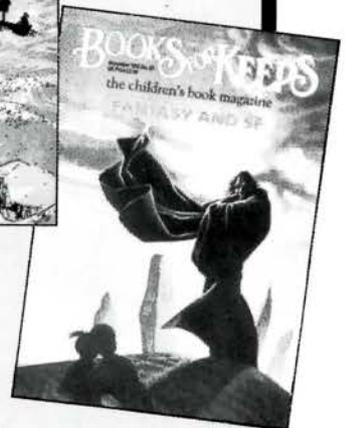
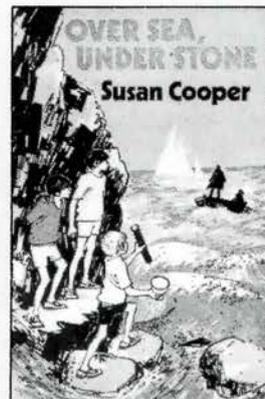
Not at all.

Surely, the proposition that too much scariness harms children is impossible to contest, both logically and psychologically. The real problem – the problem raised by our caller – lies in determining just how much is too much. After all, the quality we call scariness is not in itself reprehensible. Short of the moment (whenever this is) at which scary becomes *too scary*, most children actually enjoy the excitement that's involved – never mind its usefulness as a rehearsal of what to avoid. In this respect, as in many others, youngsters bear an uncanny resemblance to the rest of the human race.

Nor, let it be said, is this a new concern. From Charles Lamb's fear of the Witch of Endor, as portrayed in Stackhouse's **History of the Bible**, to Roald Dahl's horrified fascination with the great, long, red-legged scissor-man in Hoffman's **Struwwelpeter**, evidence that illustration can determine at least the 'shape and manner' of midnight terrors isn't difficult to find. Lewis Carroll, for instance, was so doubtful about Tenniel's drawing of the Jabberwocky that he took a poll of 30 mothers asking whether it should be retained as the frontispiece to **Through the Looking Glass**, transferred to its proper place in the text or dropped altogether. They decided, and he agreed, on the second option. Ever since, I guess, children have been as scared of the beast as I was . . . and turned to that particular page as often as I did.

Coping with the vagaries of individual response is only part of the problem, moreover. Context would seem to play an important part, too – on the cuddles-can-

counteract-creepiness principle. So does the medium involved. When it comes to tabulating potential trauma, how does a book under the bedclothes rate with a seat at the cinema, for example? And what significance ought we to assign to wider social and cultural factors? Here, it may be instructive to compare the 1993 dustjacket of Susan Cooper's novel with Margery Gill's 1974 version:



Rather different, yes? Behind this striking shift in visual imagery, is it entirely fanciful to detect the imperatives of an age which can produce videos like **Childsplay 1, 2 and 3**? On the other hand, the Gill cover seems oblivious of real-life risk-taking which may well send a shiver down our spines in the more safety-conscious 90s.

In short, the depiction of danger, of whatever kind, is bound to be contentious in a children's book and is always worth discussing. If we'd been able to get a word in edgeways, we'd have agreed with our caller that he had a point – a hardly perennial of a point, what's more. How sad, then, that he seemed more eager to close down the debate than re-open it. Would other readers like to make a contribution?

Enjoy this (rather less scary) issue!

Chris

Subscription price increase to Books for Keeps

It is the time of year when we announce price increases to your **BfK** subscription. Normally we like to do this in November but this year we were awaiting, with bated breath, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget Statement regarding the possibility of VAT being imposed upon books, newspapers and magazines. In the event it wasn't and sighs of relief were audible here and, no doubt, all over the publishing world.

However, the Budget came too late for an announcement in our November edition so, from 1st January 1994, **BfK** prices will be as follows:

* UK and Ireland	£12.90
* Overseas surface and Europe	£18.80
* Airmail worldwide	£21.50

We are also able to offer a range of bulk discounts from 10% to 55% to LEAs, libraries, colleges, booksellers and anyone else interested in multiple subscriptions. All enquiries to Richard Hill on 081 852 4953.

Meeting Morris

"Colin", said Dr Graham, "I've been in touch with the hospital in Sydney where Luke is."

Colin was impressed. They didn't mess around, these top blokes.

"I rang early this morning and I spoke to one of the doctors treating Luke," continued Dr Graham.

"Mum and Dad'll want to pay you back for that call," said Colin. "Or perhaps Dad'll just give you a couple of shirts."

Dr Graham shifted forward slightly on the corner of his desk.

"The doctor told me exactly what type of cancer Luke has, Colin. He told me the exact location and exactly how far advanced it is. His diagnosis is correct, Colin. Luke can't be cured. He's going to die."

from **Two Weeks with the Queen**

'The first impetus I ever had to be a writer was the realisation that words on a piece of paper could make people laugh. Incongruous words, perhaps, from an author whose most famous book is about the desperate, ultimately futile efforts of a child to save his younger brother from cancer. In **Two Weeks with the Queen**, Colin Mudford's parents banish him from his brother's bedside and send him to England in an attempt to shield him from grief. While staying with his repressed relatives, he campaigns to get Royal assistance for Luke, enlisting the reluctant support of his painfully inhibited cousin, Alistair. Later, at the hospital where he seeks out a cancer specialist, he befriends Ted, a young gay man whose lover is dying from Aids, and they help each other to come to terms with bereavement.

Though this hardly sounds like promising material for a light-hearted read, everybody I know who's read the book has enjoyed a good laugh on almost every page, and derived a sense of fulfilment from the story. The readers I talked to included parents whose two children are in a similar plight to that of the Mudford brothers. They were impressed by the emotional accuracy of the story, recognising in particular Colin's fear of exclusion from the love of his parents. They had few doubts about the book's suitability for their children.

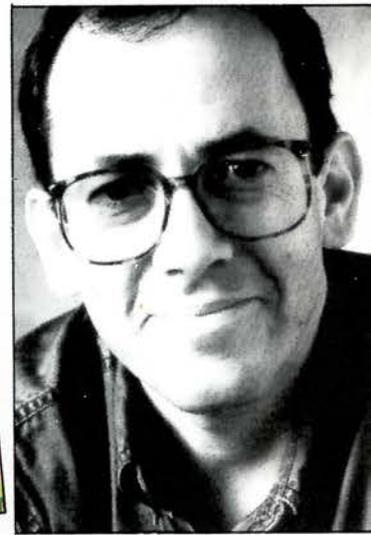
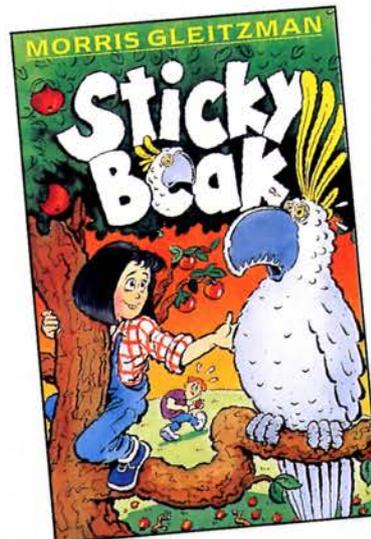
Gleitzman's other books also depict children playing David against the Goliaths of anguish. In **Blabber Mouth** a mute girl, Rowena Batts, endeavours to tell her puerile father, a Country and Western fan given to sequin shirts and public displays of emotional singing, that he should 'pull his head in' and stop crucifying her with embarrassment. In **Misery Guts** and its sequel **Worry Warts**, Keith Shipley attempts to save his parents' marriage by wrenching them away from a failing Lewisham fish and chip shop to the perilous tropical paradise of Orchard Cove, Queensland.

Morris Gleitzman himself moved from London to Australia as a teenager. He spent his childhood devouring the resources of the Welling public Library in South East London ('I was a classic three times a week visitor: the librarians were very enlightened and let me range at will through the adult sections'). After a rebellious youth he abandoned both books and formal education. While he was 'dogsbodying' in Australia, a friend lent him **The Horse's Mouth** by Joyce Carey to read on the bus, and he rediscovered a passion for literature. He took a degree course in professional writing, then worked producing TV scripts before beginning his current successful career as a children's author.

When I spoke to him in London recently, I asked whether the tribulations depicted in his fiction had any autobiographical basis.

'I've never been able to reflect my own childhood experiences as a writer. The moment I try to, I become very self-conscious about the writing process. My characters come from me as I am now: part of me is an 11-year-old and the books seems to come from a co-writing process between the 40-year-old and the kid inside him.'

Might this joint venture explain the adult-like predicaments these child characters get into?



George Hunt interviews an author for whom tragedy and a good laugh are not incompatible.

'It's certainly true that my characters, adults and children, have some duality. All my child characters have an adult, a parent, inside them as well. My stories are about young people often having to fight to preserve their childhood in the face of circumstances that push them into something like a parental role. At the same time, they're having to deal with adults who've lost touch with the child inside themselves. So there's interplay, very often tension, between kids and adults but also between the kid and adult parts of each character. That's probably the major theme in everything I'm writing.'

'Dad lifted a big sack of flour onto the counter. And a big drum of fat. He didn't look as if he was suffering from anything too bad.'

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

Keith nodded. "Fat and flour."

Dad lifted a sack of potatoes onto the counter and took a block of fish out of the freezer.

"And this?"

Oh no, thought Keith. Don't tell me Dad's banged his head on the fryer hood and forgotten the basic ingredients of fish and chips.

"Fish and potatoes," he said. "The potatoes are the round ones."

"Not just fat and flour and fish and potatoes," said Dad. "Cheap fat and cheap flour and cheap fish and cheap potatoes."

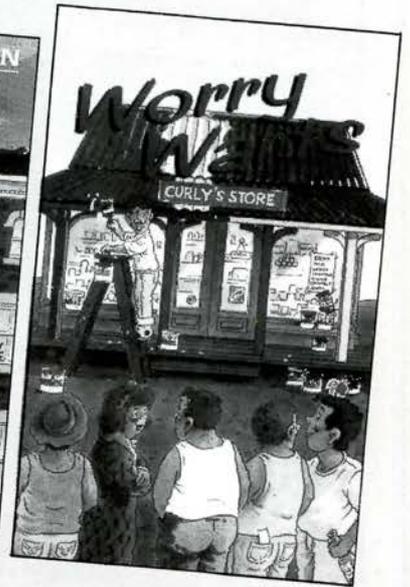
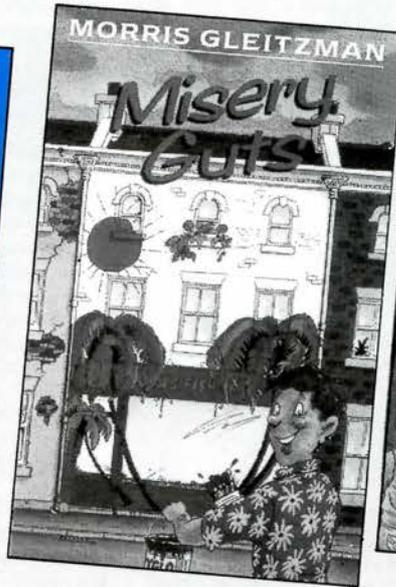
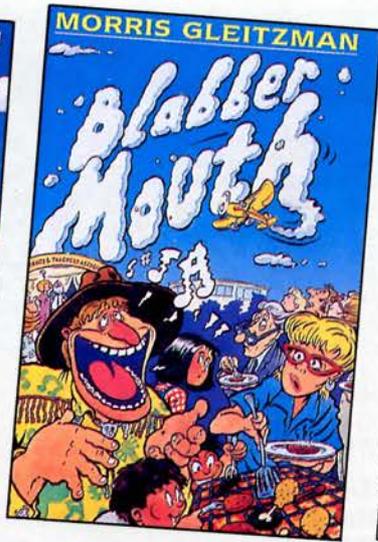
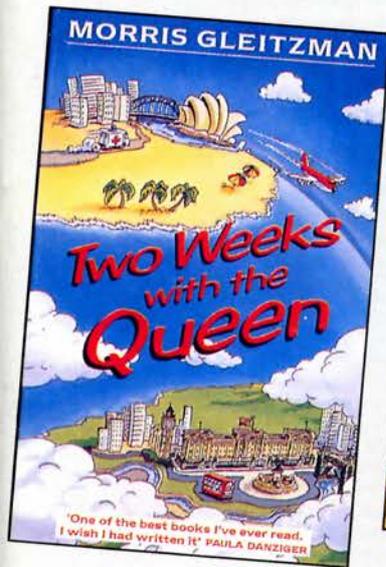
Keith realised with a shock that there was a wobble in Dad's voice.

"The sort of fat and flour and fish and potatoes I said I'd never use. When I started this shop, before you were born, I only used the best vegetable oil and the best matzo flour and the freshest fish and the best potatoes. I used to turn out the best fish and chips in South London. I don't anymore and that's why I don't spend much time cracking jokes and kicking up my heels."

from **Misery Guts**

I mentioned the talent shown by his characters for casting a hectic radiance into life's gloomier corners: Keith painting his parents' chippy a raging orange and viridian to enliven the

Gleitzman



dismal street it slouches in; Ted's theatrical distribution of chocolate frogs to anxious visitors in the hospital cafe; Colin's transformation of Alistair from a cringing neurotic to an adventurous sidekick.

This brought us back to **Two Weeks with the Queen**, which Morris Gleitzman argues is as much about death deferred as the loss of life.

'When I was writing that story I knew from the start Luke was going to die, but Colin as well was threatened by a form of death. That kind of experience could have destroyed his childhood, his determination, all the things that make us like him, but he survives and he grows. And not only that: he doesn't save Luke but he does save Alistair, he gives him his childhood back. He also helps to give Ted and Griff something real and important during their last days together.'

I admitted my own initial qualms about sharing the book with children, particularly those who were in the throes of such a predicament themselves.

'Look – it's quite fascinating, quite ironic, that the book itself has I guess become subject to exactly the dilemma the story is about. Colin's parents are very loving and caring, but they do the wrong thing and send him away. It's his good fortune that through Ted and Griff he has an experience similar to what he would have had if he'd stayed: an experience he needed. This notion of turning away is crucially important. I can understand the desire to flinch, and I don't condemn anybody for wanting to shield children from harshness, but I think there's a lot of adult fear and superstition at work here. Kids don't have it innately. Kids turn away a lot less frequently than we do until they are *taught* that they're too fragile to face things. Maybe if we hadn't been taught that fear and fragility, as a community we wouldn't turn away so readily from really difficult things like cancer and Aids.

'Now with the book itself, a lot of librarians and teachers have confided that they initially felt they should shield children from the stuff it deals with. In England, there was also the problem that at the time the book was published the Thatcher government had passed an amendment to the Local Government Act making people nervous about anything that depicted gay relationships in a positive light. But after reading the book for themselves, these people realised it would be mistaken to withhold it from children, and I think it was the humour in the book that convinced them.'

In **Blabber Mouth**, the central character has a speech disability. Why did he choose to introduce this theme?

'I didn't know Rowena was mute when I started that story. But it's about a communication crisis. Rowena's in the situation where she has to tell someone she loves something he needs to be told, but which she knows will hurt him. We're all familiar with such a situation. I thought it would be a more

interesting story if the main character was physically unable to talk. There's a kind of polarity there with Dad, who's an extremely vocal character.'

One of the fascinating things about this book is the paradoxical influence of three powerful female figures who never actually appear in the story: Rowena's mother and best friend, both dead, and the semi-mythological figure of Carla Tamworth, the Country and Western star. Was this an attempt to provide a counterpoise to the hulking male 'Ozziness' of Dad?

'Not consciously. He's certainly an extremely 'male' character, but he's also very much a child and, again, Rowena has to save her own childhood by playing the parental role. As for the Ozziness, I'm proud to be part of a culture that's so wonderfully unconstrained by convention.'

Through our conversation, Morris Gleitzman had talked with warmth and humour about 'his characters', as if they continued to thrive like real children somewhere beyond the pages of his books. Rowena Batts will soon re-appear in **Sticky Beak**, and Keith Shipley's adventures are to become a trilogy. How far was his writing influenced by the contact he maintains with his child readers?

'When I sit down and talk to kids I'm always surprised and delighted by the multitude of individual variations in the way they interpret my books. It's a reminder that, though a writer can pretend to play God with the lives of his characters, as soon as a reader picks up the book, the writer loses control.

'Also, the fear I've had of being seen to trample on the sensitivities of people who've been through ordeals has largely been quashed by the responses from such people to my stories. That's the most important kind of feedback I've had.

'What I take away from talking to kids is a reminder of the child in me. I think we all need to keep in touch with that optimism, irrepressibility, cheekiness, irreverence. I remember once talking to a bunch of kids about my books, then getting them to ask me any questions they liked. One girl stuck her hand up and said straightaway, "Mr Gleitzman, how do you feel about going bald?"' ■

Morris Gleitzman's books:

Two Weeks with the Queen, Piper, 0 330 31376 2, £2.99

Misery Guts, Piper, 0 330 32440 3, £2.99

Worry Warts, Piper, 0 330 32845 X, £2.99

Blabber Mouth, Macmillan, 0 333 59501 7, £8.99. The Piper paperback (0 330 33283 X, £2.99) will be published on 25th February 1994.

Sticky Beak will also be published in February by Macmillan (0 333 60185 8, £8.99).

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



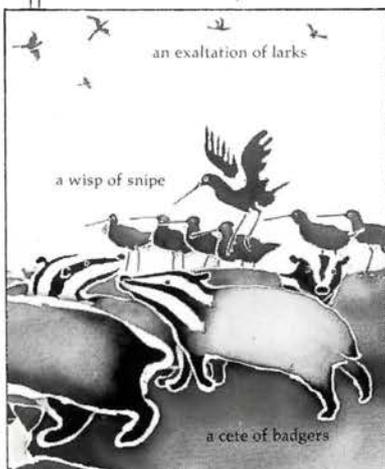
We're Going on a Bear Hunt

Retold by Michael Rosen, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Walker (Sept 93), 0 7445 2323 0, £3.99

An amazing bargain at £3.99! This large picture book recounts the action song many of us learned in Cubs and Brownies long ago. It's great fun to *do* all the actions, *say* all the words and then *look* at the delightful pictures. Because it's a little scary, it would probably be wise to make this a book to share. Definitely recommended for families with active Dads like the one in the pictures. MS

Herd of Words

Patricia McCarthy, Picturemac (Sept 93), 0 333 58337 X, £3.99



Young children require help to sort out and make sense of their world. They need to

'Splash splash! Splash splash! Splash splash!' From *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*.

learn 'words' to assist them with this . . . and here's a splendid book to work with. Beautiful illustrations show a 'galaxy' of stars, a 'coven' of witches, a 'parliament' of owls, a 'leap' of leopards and a 'raft' of hippos, etc. What fun to practise using words like these - try it in the classroom or at home with the family. MS

A Giraffe on the Moon

Sandy Nightingale, Picture Puffin (Sept 93), 0 14 054562 X, £3.99

'I didn't expect to see . . . a giraffe on the moon, a cat in a balloon, a snowman on a very hot day . . . and so it goes on. A book which most 4-year-olds will find funny because of their newly acquired knowledge of reality - they know fishes don't swim in the sky, don't they? In the end it all turns out to be a dream, anyway. A good book with much detail to enjoy. MS

Do You Know What Grandad Did?

Brian Smith, ill. Rachel Pank, Orchard (Sept 93), 1 85213 507 7, £3.50

A book full of nostalgia for the sort of jolly grandad so few children seem to have these days. Grandad is looking after the children for the day in a big, untidy, country house which such grandads seem to have. He's a cheerful subversive, letting the children do all sorts of things their

mum doesn't allow and spilling the beans about Mum's behaviour as a child.

The end-papers of the book show how to make your own family tree and suggest ways for exploring the reader's own family history. Both ideas offer an extra dimension to the book's use in the classroom. LW

Topsy and Tim Go Camping

0 216 94043 5

Topsy and Tim Go to the Seaside

0 216 94041 9

Jean and Gareth Adamson, novelisation by Carol Watson, Blackie, £3.99 each

These books fall into a reassuring niche by providing comfortable everyday tales of Topsy and Tim's exploits on holiday and on a school trip to the seaside. They're produced in cartoon format which is quite a good introduction to this style for some, although the reading level and emotional, social appeal are very different. Good children's literature they aren't but popular books they undoubtedly are. JS

Floss

Kim Lewis, Walker (Sept 93), 0 7445 2071 1, £3.99



The transformation of Floss from family pet to sheep dog unfolds beautifully with Kim Lewis' evocative illustrations and deliberately spare text. This follows *Emma's Lamb* and my favourite, *The Shepherd Boy*, with the same warmth, simplicity and total lack of sentimentality. All three titles create a vivid picture of country life for us all to share. JS

Mr Henry and the Sea Serpent

Andy Ellis, Hippo (Aug 93), 0 590 55273 2, £3.50

This has been one of the most read books in my latest batch, with children of all infant and nursery groups clamouring for it. Superb illustration complements a yarn of stormy seas, a rowing boat tossed by wild waves, a motley crew of animals sheltering from the storm . . . only to meet a mighty sea serpent. All is satisfactorily resolved in the appropriately glorious technicolor style of the fisherman's tale! JS

Billy's Beetle

Mick Inkpen, Picture Knight (Aug 93), 0 340 58635 4, £3.99

Mick Inkpen has done it again! *Billy's Beetle* follows in the tradition of *One Bear at Bedtime* and is already the most favourite night-time read for my nearly 4-year-old and yet is never sniffed at by my 6-year-old as we read it 'again'.

Actually it was me who found it!



It doesn't matter how many times it's read, the children still delight in knowing the whereabouts of the beetle when no-one on the pages can find him . . . and the grand denouement with a three-spread concertina page is pure magic. JS

Here Comes Tod!

Philippa Pearce, Walker (Sept 93), 0 7445 3089 X, £2.99

Six highly enjoyable, perfectly crafted stories designed to be read aloud featuring a small boy and his everyday experiences. He's sent a special jumper with a large 'T' on it (or rather four special jumpers), plants a pip from his enormous orange, rescues a cat, finds a way of relating to Susie 'who's not my friend', creates a very special birthday present for his mother and explores 'the wildest country in the world'. JB

INFANT/JUNIOR

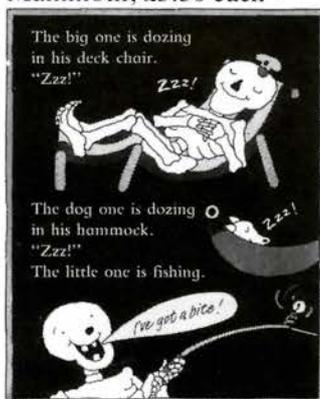
From Acorn to Zoo
Satoshi Kitamura, Red Fox (Sept 93), 0 09 913951 0, £3.99

An alphabet book illustrated in the deadpan style of Satoshi Kitamura is bound to be entertaining and intriguing. Each page has a scene full of people, animals and objects, all arranged with a sort of mad logic and all related to one letter. Purists should note that the arrangement is alphabetic not phonic (thus 'umpire' and 'uniform') but this adds to the richness and interest for those readers who are exploring words, both spoken and written, for the first time. I wish the print had been larger – the tiny labels are very hard to read – but the pictures are delightful and the ingenuity with which the scenes are created is often very funny. **LB**

Funnybones: Skeleton Crew
0 7497 1476 X

Funnybones: The Ghost Train
0 7497 1475 1

Allan Ahlberg, ill.
Andre Amstutz,
Mammoth, £3.50 each



As you'd expect, brilliant exceptions to the usual law of diminishing returns is provided by these two additions to the 'Funnybones' series. Full of invention and wit, they give beginning readers and the adults who support them every reason to read and be read to. I hope you can all remember the tune of 'The Run Away Train' and, even if you don't believe in ghosts, that you believe in babies, since both attributes are needed for **The Ghost Train**. **Skeleton Crew** introduces the cat fish ('Miaow') and King Kong alongside the pirate crew. Welcome fun for any infant. **LB**

Follow That Chimp
Philippe Dupasquier, Walker (Sept 93), 0 7445 2511 X, £3.99

The gift of a banana from a boy to a chimp in the zoo is the

start of an unlikely friendship and leads to the chimp's escape. There follows a prolonged, hectic, hilarious chase by a band of green-clad keepers armed with a net over land, air and sea as chimp goes in search of his friend. This wordless strip-cartoon demands concentration and close attention from readers if they are to unravel the story and enjoy all the twists and jokes in Dupasquier's pictures. **JB**

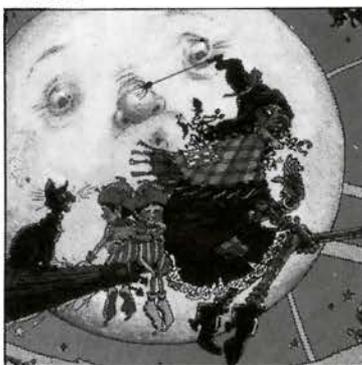
Where's Our Mama? Où est Maman?

Diane Goode, Red Fox (Sept 93), 0 09 999170 5, £3.99

This has to be the most intriguing book I've reviewed for a while. The story of a little girl and boy lost in Paris which is told in both French and English is a rarity. There are simply not enough bi-lingual books of any sort for young children and certainly very few modern picture books. Unfortunately, this one is marred by the way the French text is printed in minuscule italics at the bottom of each page making it hard to read, in contrast to the English which is in bold print. However, the story is witty and lively and the illustrations, especially of the poor, frayed gendarme, are amusing. Well worth having as an indication to young children of the possibilities of another language. **LB**

The Wacky Book of Witches

Annie Civardi, ill.
Graham Philpot, David Bennett Books (Sept 93), 1 85602 100 9, £3.99



To describe this book as a picture book about witches that's written in rhyme tells you nothing. There's so much richly-coloured detail on the pages, it takes hours to turn over and, would you believe it, some pages are read sideways. Gosh! There isn't much printing either, but there's a lot of gorgeous hand-lettering by Roger Hands – some of which is not only sideways, but even upside down. Golly gosh! All in all it

seems witches have a pretty exciting time. A pity it only happens one night a year, though. **JB**

School Secretary on the Warpath

Brough Girling, ill.
Tony Blundell, Puffin (Aug 93), 0 14 036095 6, £2.99



The story gives a whole new meaning to the concept of 'Starting with the child's experience'. We discover a fresh and startling side to the school secretary, a side we've always suspected but seen only briefly, usually just before the Christmas concert. We know the office staff keep us all together, but their reserves of strength, courage and resourcefulness are tested to the full by Hairy Harry and his band of nasties. Yes, there is a happy ending but we expected that from anyone who can cope with ten different dilemmas simultaneously and provide tea and biscuits for the Chair of Governors. **PH**

I Spy Numbers in Art
Lucy Micklethwait, Collins (Aug 93), 0 00 664298 5, £6.99

What a brilliantly beautiful idea, to use glorious works of fine art to create a counting book from one to 20. There are no rules that say wonderful masterpieces from the past and present are only for adult pleasure, and here they are presented to the young in a very clever way in the original, bright, attractive colours. The format invites talk and counting, and begs to be used in small groups or individually. It just proves that the best ideas are the simple ones done really well. **PH**

(See also page 14 for a review of Lucy Micklethwait's **A Child's Book of Art**.)

Story of the Year

Edited by David Fickling, Scholastic (Oct 93), 0 590 55510 3, £4.99

This is an anthology of the ten winning stories from the **Independent/Scholastic Story of the Year Competition**.

They're a mixed bunch, some realistic, some fairy tales; some funny, some sad. There's something for most tastes and the quality is uniformly high. In my opinion the collection would make an excellent book for reading to over-7s or for experienced and fluent readers (level 3-4) to enjoy independently. What I do *not* think is that the stories are suitable for the 'children who have just learned to read' between 6 and 9 which was the competition's remit. All the stories require a high degree of sophistication and understanding of the written code and the conventions of storytelling. The subject matter and vocabulary are also well up the ability range in their expectations. This may well reflect the fact that none of the judges was actually experienced in working regularly with early readers. However, with that reservation, this is an entertaining collection. **LB**

Into the Jungle

Dennis Reader, Lions (Aug 93), 0 00 664280 2, £3.99

A meaty book in which many archetypal images are challenged without the reader ever feeling that it's contrived. This title has been returned to a lot of times so it clearly appeals to children, too. When Mr Stallebrass moves next door, Jonathan Jones is thrilled to hear that he's a Jungle Explorer. Reality is a paunchy, ageing and infirm gentleman whose gift to Jonathan is invaluable: he teaches him how to use his imagination. The story delicately covers their relationship; we see what is actually happening through his parents' eyes but we share in the wonderful world of fantasy through Mr Stallebrass and Jonathan. We also share in sadness when Mr Stallebrass becomes more and more ill and finally moves away to live with his sister – but his gift to Jonathan remains. **JS**

Betsey Biggalow is Here!

Malorie Blackman, Mammoth (Aug 93), 0 7497 1421 2, £2.99

Four stories set in the Caribbean relating to the everyday experiences of a spirited young miss, Elizabeth Ruby Biggalow. Betsey, as she's usually called, is the youngest of three children and there's a warm portrayal of family life in the stories with Betsey emerging a little wiser from each of the episodes. Gentle humour and a real feeling of place pervade the stories which are highly recommended for sharing with under-8s or for solo reading. **JB**

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

Full Moon Soup

Alastair Graham, David Bennett Books, (Sept 93), 1 85602 071 1, £3.99

There are dozens of stories to follow in this large picture book. The tranquility that reigns in the sleepy country town Hotel Splendide and revealed through its rooms on the first double-spread, slowly disintegrates along with the hotel as ghosts, ghouls, Godzilla and other unearthly and extra-terrestrial beings invade the property from basement to rooftop.

A deceptively sophisticated read which encourages such skills as concentration, skimming, selective reading and reviewing, but which may at first glance be thought of by some as only a simple and (mostly) wordless diversion.

JB



Swan Sister

Annie Dalton, Mammoth (Sept 93), 0 7497 1065 9, £2.99

When Ellen moves with her mother to a new home in Suffolk, she senses a haunting sadness which is in some way connected to her baby sister, and the pollution of the local marshland; Ellen realises that Lily, the baby, will not stay with the family for long. When Lily disappears, Ellen knows she's gone with the sad swans who haunt the area. An engrossing and well-written story which effortlessly combines fantasy and reality.

LN

The Big Goal

Rob Childs, ill. Tim Marwood, Young Corgi (Sept 93), 0 552 52760 2, £2.50

A fast-moving football story that has all the excitement and fervour the fans expect. Andrew Weston, as captain of the 'Vikings', manages to achieve a very delicate balance, a determination to win and yet an obvious pride in playing cleanly to achieve a

worthwhile victory. This reader message comes through loud and clear and the demise Rob Childs achieves for the dirty 'Demons' is the perfect vehicle for it. The girls will like it too when the 'New Stars', an all girls team, do so well and overcome the inevitable prejudice. A very cleverly constructed story and a splendid read – a worthy addition to the other five in the series.

PH

The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, Puffin (Aug 93), 0 14 054896 3, £4.99

The title is a very honest one. These are indeed fairly stupid stories. Characters stroll from story to story demanding the reader's attention, print vanishes into the unseen depths beneath the bottom of the page, narratives are crudely truncated, shuffled, scrambled and downright trivialised. The illustrations, deranged collages of garish imagery, look like the victims of demented surgeons.

This is, however, one of the best fiver's worth of literature you're likely to get hold of. Scieszka sabotages all the conventions of traditional tales and book layout, and from the wreckage constructs a ramshackle, Heath-Robinson joke and storytelling machine that most children will find fascinating.

GH

Rising in the East

Poems by young writers from London's East End

Introduction by Benjamin Zephania, Eastside (Dec 93), 0 906698 18 9, £4.95

Benjamin Zephania's introduction declares he's against judging poetry, since no one has the authority to say that a mastery of technique creates poetry which is superior to that which arises from unsophisticated integrity of expression. The writing presented here certainly has an abundance of such integrity. It describes in compact and very direct language the everyday lives of the children of the East End. Racism, violence and urban poverty are bemoaned, but the main theme is a delight in the virtues of this area. There is little in the way of verbal cleverness here, but the honesty and variety of the collection make it well worth acquiring.

GH

The Comic Strip Odyssey

Retold by Diane Redmond, ill. Robin Kingsland, Puffin (Aug 93), 0 14 034630 9, £3.50



Given the contribution of Homer, or whatever tradition of storytelling that name stood for, to this book, it could hardly fail to provide readers with some excitement and enjoyment. Redmond and Kingsland have done a commendable job in providing access to the legend for those children unwilling or unable to tackle extended text. Several readers in the class I showed it to expressed a keen interest. However, I felt the tradition of comic art might have made something more striking out of Odysseus' excursion into Hell and other holes. This great saga of survival, comradeship, defeat and triumph, with its deities, monsters, heroes and enchantresses, cries out for all the reprehensible excesses of the horror mag. This restrained treatment denies us a surfeit of wholesome schlock.

GH

Take a Good Look

Jacqueline Wilson, Puffin (Aug 93), 0 14 036108 1, £2.99

Mary, a child with impaired sight, decides to demonstrate her independence to an over-protective family by making an unsupervised visit to the corner shop, where she is promptly kidnapped by a pair of armed robbers. Her subsequent adventures, isolated and threatened in a squalid flat, will make ugly and very uneasy reading for many children. However, her courage and resourcefulness provide a reassuring counterpoise to the terrors of the abduction, and ultimately emphasise the important message that she is indeed 'differently abled'.

GH

Simple Simon

Yvonne Coppard, Red Fox (Oct 93), 0 09 910531 4, £2.99

This story of family life is told from the viewpoint of 14-year-old Simon, whose opinion of himself as impractical and inadequate is challenged when his divorced mother is taken into hospital. Rejecting their father's reluctant help, he takes his two younger sisters to their absent aunt's Yorkshire cottage. This creates further problems and fears, but meanwhile Simon learns a great deal about adult relationships, finding that his parents' split wasn't as one-sided as he'd thought. A straightforward and absorbing novel for the middle years.

LN

The Bear Nobody Wanted

Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Puffin (Oct 93), 0 14 034809 3, £3.50

The bear in the story, 'our bear', has an unattractive demeanour and as a result, remains nameless right until the penultimate page of this splendid book for it's only then that he becomes 'wanted'. The story traces the bear's somewhat degrading passage through life from the factory where he was made just before World War Two, as he passed from one owner to another until he's finally given to 4-year-old Sophie and becomes the happiest of toys: 'an altogether wanted bear'.

As well as being a compelling read, Allan Ahlberg's story is a marvellous history lesson for, woven into the narrative, are details of domestic life in the early 1940s. This strong sense of time is furthered by Janet Ahlberg's beguiling line drawings. A thoroughly enjoyable and potentially rewarding read for anyone aged around eight or for slightly younger listeners.

JB

Danger at Dark Hows

Patricia Sibley, Lion Publishing (Aug 93), 0 7324 0674 9, £3.50

It is 1782, and Will and Lucy's carpenter father is drowned on the Royal George; Will barely escapes with his life. Orphaned but robust, he's sent to work in the dreaded Dark Hows Derbyshire cotton mill where the children are starved and beaten by the owner and his overseer, Badger. This dependable story ensures that right triumphs, and there are plenty of moments of high tension along the way.

Many rewarding historical links here: this is a winner for top junior/Year 7 pupils – it may even fill the neglected niche of good books for boys.

VR

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

Rainbow and Mr Zed

Jenny Nimmo,
Mammoth (Aug),
0 7497 1288 0, £2.99

The battle between little Nell (secretly Rainbow) and Mr Zed, her bad uncle Zebedee, aspiring to control forces that he should leave alone, builds to a marvellous climax of storm and contrary powers. Jenny Nimmo writes fantasy which is frequently magical while always plausible and readers who know her books generally or who have read *Ultramarine*, which precedes this, will need no further encouragement. AJ

Journey to a Dream

Thurley Fowler, Puffin
(Aug 93), 0 14 036464 1,
£3.50

The Woods family trek to their farm and begin to try and cultivate fruit out of the wild in post Great War Australia. We follow this through the children's lives, particularly the wonderfully headstrong Belinda. The characters are rich and the drama of events is often very moving which make it good for reading aloud and a pleasure to be snapped up by fluent readers. AJ

Juliet's Story

William Trevor, Red Fox
(Sept 93), 0 09 913481 0,
£2.99

Depressed after the death of the lovely old storyteller in her Connemara town, Juliet is taken by her Grandmama on a journey which becomes the thread for a series of stories.



It's a celebration of stories and storytelling, playful but always touching on mysteries. Excellent for reading aloud and as an invitation to join in. AJ

The Dollmaker and other sinister stories

Edited by Jean Russell,
Mammoth (Oct 93),
0 7497 1490 5, £2.99

A re-issue of *The Methuen/Magnet Book of Sinister Stories* which has a range of excellent writers contributing some nicely eerie stories. Individually, good read-alouds, sometimes interesting introductions to the author's other work (Dennis Hamley's story is a precursor to his novel, *Dangleboots*) or to other stories of the kind (Gwen Grant's version offers an excuse to uncover the other Spring-Heeled Jack versions). Joan Aiken's story is wonderful, straight-faced lunacy. AJ

The Shark Callers

Eric Campbell, Pan
Piper (Oct 93),
0 330 32999 5, £3.50

Set in Papua New Guinea, this book tells two stories: that of Andy and his family, sailing the oceans of the world in their own boat, and that of Kaleku, a local boy who must progress into manhood by killing a shark. Although the two never meet, their stories, told in alternate episodes, come together in the aftermath of a terrifying volcanic explosion. This is an exciting, well-told adventure story; Eric Campbell excels at giving a knowledgeable and vivid sense of the beauties and dangers of the natural world. LN

Dracula's Late Night TV Show

Victor G Ambrus,
Oxford (Sept 93),
0 19 272257 3, £3.99

A very clever cartoon picture book for older readers. There are masses of references to television characters and public figures, even royalty. Some are current and others are from the past, but all are easily recognisable in their wild characterisations. The humour is along the lines of 'Asterix', howling puns and terrible contortions of television programme titles that leave the reader aching with laughter. The illustrations are a riot of brilliant colours, and details that demand to be looked at closely. One of my favourites was 'The Untouchables' - look for the dire demise of the night potty and the faux pas in the numbering of the Count's gang. When you've got the laughter under control, look at the subtle backgrounds to the pictures. Amid the mayhem they really are lovely. PH

All in the Blue Unclouded Weather

Robin Klein, Puffin
(Sept 93), 0 14 034982 0,
£3.99

Each chapter is a separate short story, about four sisters and their friends growing up in Australia in the 1940s. Robin Klein has a sure touch in showing the warmth and friction, the security and the rivalries of family and school in these engaging tales of rural life. LN



Hacker

Malorie Blackman,
Corgi (Aug 93),
0 552 52751 3, £2.99

This story of a young, black female computer expert trying to clear her father of electronic embezzlement, while simultaneously struggling with the uncertainties caused by adoption into a mixed race family, takes the reader on a meandering ramble through the superimposed labyrinths of identity crisis and artificial intelligence. This might sound like daunting stuff, but the telling is so nimble that average independent readers should find the book absorbing.

Only those children with a sound knowledge of database operation will appreciate all the technical nuances. I certainly didn't, but my ignorance didn't detract from my enjoyment of a clever and well-paced thriller. The climax requires a fairly strenuous suspension of disbelief, but the narrative twists and cliff-hangers make the exercise well worthwhile. Very highly recommended. GH

Can I Buy a Slice of Sky?

POETRY

Poems from Black, Asian and American Indian Cultures

Edited by Grace
Nichols, Knight
(Aug 93), 0 340 58828 4,
£3.50

This is an uncommonly varied anthology, containing venerable oral traditions as well as the work of unrecognised writers as young as nine.



The range of subject matter is also vast: there are school poems and nursery rhymes, laments on oppression and the fragility of human life, and lyrics to landscape and nature. There are poems in Creole, in American dialects, in conversational language and in more rarefied idioms. The overall mood is one of celebration: of diversity and of commonalities within that diversity. An essential collection. GH

Dead Man at the Door

Anthony Masters, Puffin
(Oct 93), 0 14 034861 1,
£3.50

Gary and his family move to the Isle of Wight, but they have more than some unfriendly islanders to deal with. Gary begins to have nightmares in which a mysterious stranger knocks ceaselessly at the garage door. His new friend, Ted behaves strangely and The Watchers on the cliffs complete the supernatural triangle.

This is a tense and heady brew with an eerie denouement which readers of both sexes from Year 7 onwards will find difficult to put down. VR

The Thousand Eyes of Night

Robert Swindells,
Yearling (Aug 93),
0 440 863163, £2.99

Clean-picked skeletons in old rail tunnels and swarms of mice with extra toes form the horror focus in this good, exciting yarn. Tan and his two

mates enter a forbidden, derelict plot and get drawn into a desperate adventure far more deadly than their usual bully-boy adversary. Only they and their reporter friends can save the town from an alien evil. A good cover and a well-paced, satisfying read.

DB

Vampires, Phantoms and Werewolves of the Night

Winifred Finlay, Mammoth (Oct 93), 0 7497 1491 3, £2.99

'Got any real scary books, sir?' is probably the question I

get asked most frequently in the library. They mean Stephen King. However, I wouldn't shrink from offering this one. Ten European folk tales are told engagingly without gratuitous nastiness. 'The Houndpriest of Melrose' follows the rejuvenating quaffs of blood theme, as does 'The Creature of Croglin Grange', whilst 'The Phantom Bride' delves into ancient, pagan beliefs and magics. 'The Beast of Auvergne' sees a young wife bereft of her bejewelled hand after attacking her husband's best friend, she in the shape of a wolf. Worth a classroom copy.

DB

Strider

Beverly Cleary, Puffin (Sept 93), 0 14 034817 4, £3.50

In this sequel to the award-winning **Dear Mr Henshaw**, Leigh Botts confronts his own bad attitude and gains confidence and better awareness about his relationships, especially with his separated parents. He also learns how to identify his true talents and thereby to become clearer about his future . . . and all this principally because he found an abandoned dog on a beach.

Reviewers in this issue:

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

Slightly humorous, a bit romantic and gently wise, this should find a readership amongst thinking boys. DB

OLDER READERS

Song for a Tattered Flag

Geoffrey Trease, Walker (Jun 93), 0 7445 3082 2, £2.99

Another good value, high-quality offering from Walker Books and the vintage pen of Geoffrey Trease. Nick, visiting Bucharest with his youth orchestra, contacts a long-lost cousin and becomes involved in the events leading to the downfall of Nicolae Ceausescu.

Trease communicates the tension and fear generated in ordinary people by Ceausescu's rule and, though his prose is occasionally rather old-fashioned, he recreates the people's revolution in an utterly believable way.

Both sexes would enjoy this, since hero and heroine play equal parts. Book box collections from Year 9 upwards would benefit from the inclusion of such a fascinating and finely detailed novel.

VR

Goodbye & Hello

Edited by Clodagh Corcoran and Margot Tyrrell, Puffin (Aug 93), 0 14 036057 3, £3.99

I'm always uneasy about anthologies written to order: their inspiration must surely come in part from the stimulus of a deadline rather than the need to write something so deeply felt it demands expression. That's the feeling with several of these offerings from Ireland and Australia which rely on formulae so tried and tested they decay into cliché.

There are some gems – Eilis Dillon's 'The Letter', Nadia Wheatley's 'The Convict Box' and Martin Waddell's 'The Butterfly Girl', but in the main it's too easy for the reader to predict early on what's going to happen. However, at £3.99 for 16 stories this is a good value – if uneven – collection.

VR

Orfe

Cynthia Voigt, Lions (Sept 93), 0 00 674586 5, £3.50

Orfe is an odd mixture of fantasy and reality. The main character, a rock musician and latter-day Orpheus, must rescue her lover, Yuri, from returning to the drug-dependence he has fought to overcome. The story is told by a self-effacing narrator, Enny, whose uncritical admiration for Orfe is partly explained by a contrived accident in the last-but-one chapter. Although the 'druggies' and the threat they pose remain shadowy, as befits the 'Underworld' theme, Cynthia Voigt's main characters are always individuals; Orfe's and Yuri's love story is set against a background very different from those she usually chooses.

LN

Hands Off my Sister

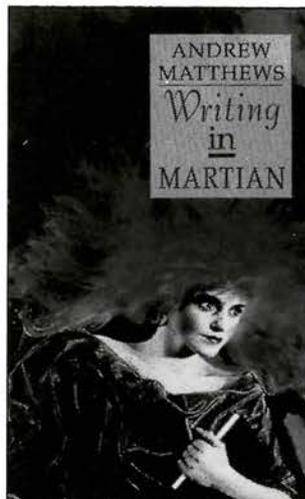
Geraldine Kaye, Adlib (Aug 93), 0 590 55355 0, £4.99

15-year-old Emy falls for an older medical student, Alex, and discovers the joy, doubt and anguish of first love; her brother's warnings about Alex make her more determined to pursue the relationship. Emy's money problems, her difficulties with both parents



and her response to a streetwise friend's predicament will easily engage teenage readers, although they will certainly notice curious anachronisms in the supposedly contemporary school background. A worse fault is that the book has been carelessly edited, and shows an irritating disregard for the basic conventions of punctuation.

LN



Writing in Martian

Andrew Matthews, Mammoth (Aug 93), 0 7497 1482 4, £2.99

Surrounded by emotional immaturity, Wayne, Bron and Mikki make a pact to write honestly in their diaries and exchange them when they leave school. The result is a triple insight into a fortnight's events: this in itself is appealing – there's a voyeur in each of us. The problem lies in the uneven nature of the writing. There is striking imagery, strong and memorable, but some clumsy stereotyping, too. Mikki as the abrasive 'wild child' is given some particularly embarrassing lines: 'On hold, sis. Your tush stays on the bed.'

This is a fast and entertaining read for Year 9 pupils upwards which would have benefited from firmer editing.

VR

Python Dance

Norman Silver, Faber (Sept 93), 0 571 16942 2, £3.99



This brings the political history of 1960s South Africa to life through the power of a well-told story where teenage Ruth's prejudices are wittily and sharply seen as both sexual and political naivety. In running away from her stepfather, Ruth encounters young radicals, white and black, whose treatment by the state is a grander version of the domestic tyranny she's already experienced. This may be an entry point into a list of books about South Africa, or a stepping stone to adult novels.

AJ

Rainbows of the Moon

Tom McCaughren, Kelpie (Oct 93), 0 86241 419 9, £2.99

Impending tragedy and a sad waste pervades this very tense and very masculine read about two boys from opposing sides of the troubles in Ireland, both squabbling over their religious and ideological differences as they dispute the ownership of a model boat they found simultaneously by a lake. Unbeknown to them, the adults are also playing games; British soldiers and the IRA are similarly battling for possession, but they're more interested in its top secret cargo.

The complex situation in Ireland refuses simplification so McCaughren's exploration deserves high commendation for its intelligence, compassion and even-handedness.

DB

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.

Flour Babies

Anne Fine, read by Richard Mitchley, three cassettes, 4 hrs 12 mins, Chivers, £14.95 + VAT

Typical Anne Fine – a sympathetic and subtle handling of the emotional impact on a child of marital break-up disguised in an entertaining story. 4C is a class of no-hopers and at first they scoff at the compulsory project of carrying around with them at all times a 6lb bag of flour – a flour baby – to teach them awareness of parental responsibility. The boys react in different ways and Simon comes to terms with his father's abandonment of him. Richard Mitchley's narration brings out both the humour and the underlying seriousness.

Carrie's War

Nina Bawden, read by Zelah Clarke, three cassettes, 4 hrs 20 mins, unabridged, Cover to Cover, £9.99

The unabridged narration of this classic story about evacuees, Carrie and Nick, is flawless. The hyper-religious Mr Evans, timid Aunt Lou with her last chance of happiness, simple, gentle Mr Johnny and the mystery of Hepzibah all entrance the listener.

The Cover to Cover titles, including *Stig of the Dump*, *The Silver Sword* and *The Worst Witch Stories*, are now in attractive three-cassette boxed sets at £9.99 and the longer stories like *The Railway Children* and *The Machine Gunners* in two double cassette boxes with 6 hours' listening for £13.99. Excellent value and an incomparable audio library.

Along a Lonely Road

Catherine Sefton, read by Frances Tomelty, three cassettes, 3 hrs 7 mins, Chivers, £14.95 + VAT

This is a tense story all the more frightening for its authenticity. Ruth Maguire lives by the sea in Ireland far from anywhere. A young woman and man insinuate their way into her home and only gradually does Ruth realise they're not the friends they pretend to be, but bombers using the vulnerable family as hostages. Frances Tomelty's Irish intonation with her dramatic and emotional performance makes the listener live Ruth's terror as she and the soldiers are one side of the door and her little sister with a gun at her head the other. Serious issues are raised.

Tess of the D'Urbevilles

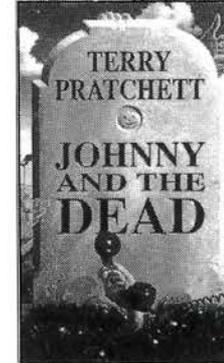
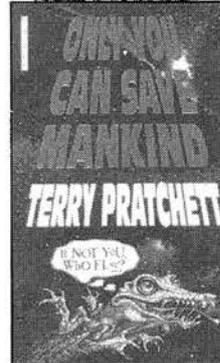
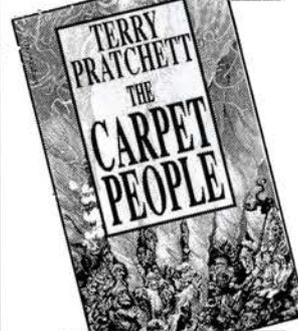
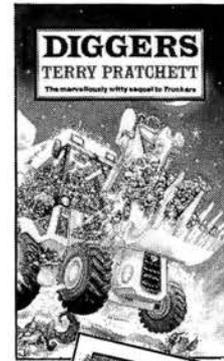
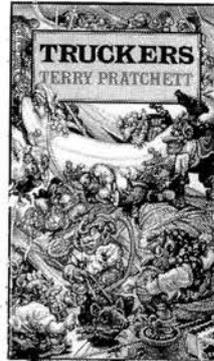
Thomas Hardy, Educational Package by Jane O'Neill, 64-page Worksheet Guide with Student Worksheet and Penguin Classic edition of the novel, 60-minute video, Literary Images Ltd, Braceborough, Lincolnshire PE9 4NT (tel. 0778 560637), £27.50

A guide to the novel in which sensitively chosen visual effects are used to introduce sophisticated concepts to a 1990s' audience reared on television who don't find critical essays approachable or digestible. The beautifully atmospheric landscape, which permeates the novel and the video, captures Hardy's Wessex in all its guises and illustrates his symbolic use of nature to reflect mood: the warnings, harshness and indifference of nature as well as its seductive beauty.

The video starts with a short biography of Hardy, recalling his witnessing of a hanging, his loss of Christian faith and his own 'D'Urville complex'. Critical approaches include the *Pilgrim's Progress*-like structure with its use of 'phases' and symbolic journeys and places and Hardy's ironic contrasts between Christianity and paganism. The versatility of Hardy's style is examined along with the metaphors of snaring and entrapment. What makes this effective is that all the critical content is text-based, referring the student back to the novel with copious quotation, and is expanded in the excellent accompanying Guide. A final detail typical of the care with which the Package has been compiled: the tunes played by the Yetties are played on Thomas Hardy's own fiddle.

TERRY PRATCHETT

The master of mirth



*Recommended by
teenagers everywhere!*



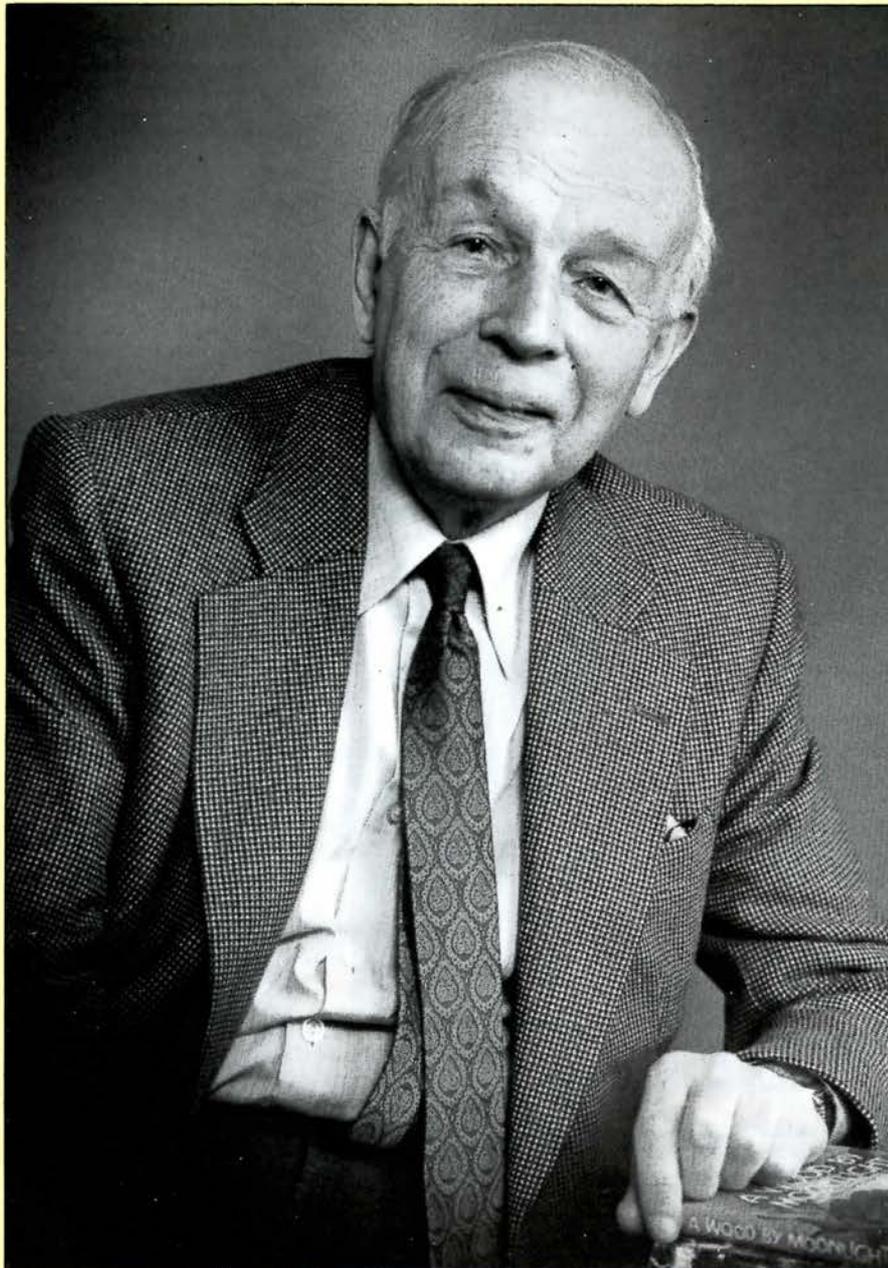
TRANSWORLD CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Authorgraph No. 84

Geoffrey Trease

INTERVIEWED BY
CHRIS POWLING

Photographs from Pan Macmillan.



Geoffrey Trease has never stuck to the rules. A 'strong awareness of his readers' says Margaret Meek in an early monograph 'has made him an innovator in ways that are often overlooked'.

From his very first book, **Bows Against the Barons** (1934) with its portrayal of Robin Hood as a revolutionary figure, he challenged received opinion about historical fiction for children. Later books, **Cue for Treason** (1940) for instance, established another of his

trademarks – strong female characters – long before the imperatives of Political Correctness. Similarly, his 'Bannermere' books in the 1950s did much to transfer the school story from independent to state establishments. More recently, books like **Song for a Tattered Flag** (1991), a vivid account of the last days of Ceausescu's Rumania, have reminded us that contemporary political events can provide appropriate material for children's fiction.

In short, the career of Geoffrey Trease so far – 60 years long and 104 books

wide – demonstrates that writing for children about public issues can be consistent with integrity, with artistry and with a willingness to allow young readers to think for themselves.

He can also paint a scene in swift, sharp strokes:

'All the way down to the bridge the river was dotted with lighters and wherries transporting fugitives and their chattels to safety. The houses built along the northern end of the bridge were burning. Much of Thames Street, along which Hugh had walked only a few hours before, was now on fire. But the wind had veered. The advance of the flames along the riverside seemed to be slowing down. The conflagration was wheeling away and roaring into the heart of the City.'

Conspicuous among the humbler craft was the royal barge, which came surging grandly past them on its way back to Whitehall. The tall figure of the King was unmistakable as he stood talking with his brother, pointing excitedly towards the bank.

"Seeing for themselves – at a safe distance," said Grandfather tartly.'

Actually, even this latest book, **Fire on the Wind**, is something of a departure. At first, he wasn't much attracted by his publisher's suggestion of a book on the Fire of London. 'All my books are about human conflict. I'm never very interested in natural disasters – I'm sorry about them but you can't do anything, really. But I said I'd read around it and think . . . and eventually I saw how to do it in my own way. By focusing on the book trade, it became sympathetic to me and delighted her because she said "Even the reps will have to read this!"'

It's easy to see why this amuses someone who's lived on the earnings from his books all his professional life.



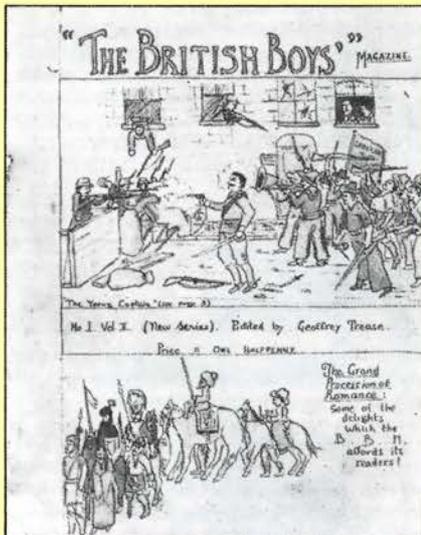
© Geoffrey Trease.

Professional, in fact, describes his approach to writing exactly. Since his much-loved wife Marian died in 1989, after 56 years of marriage, he's lived with his daughter Jocelyn in Bath – but in a separate apartment that allows him the conviviality and fun of family life, along with the privacy an author needs. His rooms are as neat and orderly as Geoffrey Trease himself and just as work-orientated: the sitting-room bookshelves offer row after row of titles in a variety of languages, but with only one name on the spine. It's a

reminder that from his very first book, which sold 100,000 copies in Soviet Russia, his appeal has been international.

His workroom is where he looks most at home, though. Here, from the position of the typewriter (manual, his seventh in a working lifetime) to the reference volumes on diet, on costume and on a diversity of historical settings, everything is ergonomic – and already set up for this interview. The day-bed is spread with articles, documents and memorabilia. Whatever the occasion, Geoffrey Trease is always well-prepared and appreciates it if others are, too.

So where did it all begin? Was his childhood, as the third of three sons in the family of a Nottingham wine-merchant, especially bookish? 'Not really. I read what my elder brothers preferred and that was always adventure. I remember the Chatterbox volume of 1914 when I was barely five . . . and Ballantyne, Henty, and Gordon Stables. No fantasy, no nonsense. I never read the best things till later – Ainsworth instead of Scott, for instance.' What he loved was stories. 'I don't know where the itch to tell a story came from but the fact that I could not write shows how early it was. My father came home with a wine-and-spirit trade desk diary for the year, which he never used, and said "you have this, kipper, to scribble in" and scribble I did – I can see myself, still, sitting in the corner of the room scribbling away and muttering the narrative under my breath.'



'Cover of my single-handed publication for friends, at the age of about thirteen.'

Once he could write, his grasp of a strong opening sentence was immediate. Compare this, for example –

'Crash! The captain's head struck the deck.'

(Geoffrey Trease, aged 7, starting the first story he can remember)

with this

'Crack! The long whip curled round his shoulders, burning the deck under his ragged tunic.'

(Geoffrey Trease, aged 25, starting **Bows Against the Barons**)

or this

'It was fun at first. The gnawing fear came later . . .'

(Geoffrey Trease, aged 78, starting **Tomorrow is a Stranger**).

The storytelling itch was well established. By the age of 13 when, as a reward for his scholarship to Nottingham High School, he chose his first typewriter instead of the bike or cricket bat offered by his father. And it was certainly his desire 'to be a writer not a learned professor' which led to him giving up another scholarship, this time in Classics to Queen's College, Oxford, when he was 20.

Brief periods as a social worker, a journalist and a schoolmaster followed, till – newly married at 25 and occupying a rent-free flat in the basement of a friend's elegant town house in Bath – he sent off a proposal to a publisher for a book about the *real* Robin Hood. The response was immediate . . . and the rest, as they say, is history.

But not entirely historical novels. Only the intervention of Adolf Hitler, perhaps, blocked a promising career as a dramatist when **Colony**, his play for adults, was withdrawn from London's West End on the outbreak of war. Subsequently, he was called up to the Army Education Corps and service in India. Like the 16 other works he's written for adults (travel, autobiography and novels), it's a reminder of just how versatile Geoffrey Trease is – of his ability to write well in almost any form, including the scripts for radio and, later, television he wrote as occasion demanded when the war was over.

His approach to writing, in fact, is inherently dramatic as he acknowledges in one of his autobiographical pieces:

'In planning a play I had learned the value of deciding first upon the ending, that all important final curtain which sends the audience streaming out, satisfied and exhilarated, into the night . . . and so, backwards, step by step, to the beginning of the scene, and similarly backwards, scene by scene, act by act, to the beginning of the play itself. The method worked just as well with a novel, especially one with a strong storyline of adventure or mystery. I still plan my books like that, the closing chapter first, then backwards, episode by episode to the opening, until I have a firmly linked storyline of perhaps twenty chapters, most of them with their own dramatic climax (like the drop of a curtain ending the scene) to make the reader turn the page and hurry on to the next.'

Of course, the more successful an author is, so other demands on his time multiply. In Geoffrey's case, true to his principle of never writing about a country he doesn't know at first hand, there was much foreign travel. Also there were letters from readers to answer, his work on the Council of the Society of Authors and an increasing number of speaking engagements as a pioneer of what has come to be known as Writers-in-School. He enjoyed it all

enormously but was always happy to return to The Croft, in the Malvern Hills, which was the family home for more than 30 years.

Then again, there was research to be done – with a fastidious readership to satisfy. When in **Mist Over Athelney** (1958) he described a hermit settling down to a rabbit stew, a 10-year-old from Inverness wrote him an indignant letter protesting that there were no rabbits in England during the time of the Danish invasion. 'I sent him my apologies and a signed copy of the book. Since then I gather rabbit bones have turned up on Anglo-Saxon archaeological sites.' Mind you, he had his expert admirers, too. His description of the details of Queen Anne's obstetric history was queried by Sir Charles Trevelyan with his brother, G M Trevelyan, author of **The Age of Queen Anne**. From the Master's Lodge at Trinity College, Cambridge, came the reply 'Haven't the faintest idea . . . but, if Trease says so, he must be right'.

His commitment to historical fact remains as firm as ever. For all his sympathy with the Left, he refuses to doctor the evidence. 'I'm all in favour of race and gender equality . . . but I do object to any distortion of history. The fact that people in the past, even heroes, may have had views of which we disapprove strongly nowadays may lead you to tone something down . . . if you let your young hero treat animals, for instance, as he might easily have done 500 years ago, you'd immediately forfeit all sympathy on the part of the reader. But you can't *disavow* history or alter it as if these things had never been.'

So, having remained popular and celebrated throughout six decades of shifting taste and ideology, has he any advice for today's would-be writers for children? He ponders this for a while, then says, 'my general advice, which I'd have given at any time, is to make sure of an alternative career. Only when your part-time writing is doing so well that your salaried work is an intolerable interruption, should you give up the latter.'

Sound words . . . except, of course, they don't apply to Geoffrey Trease himself. When I pointed this out he smiled broadly and, with a maverick glint in his eye, said 'Ah yes . . . but I break all my own rules, you see'. ■

The Geoffrey Trease titles mentioned above are:

Fire on the Wind, Macmillan, 0 333 58568 2, £9.99

Cue for Treason, Goodchild, 0 86391 079 3, £6.99; Puffin, 0 14 030231 X, £3.99 pbk

Song for a Tattered Flag, Walker, 0 7445 2412 1, £4.99; 0 7445 3082 2, £2.99 pbk

Tomorrow is a Stranger, Pan Piper, 0 330 30903 X, £3.50 pbk

Bows Against the Barons and **Mist Over Athelney** are both o/p, but watch out for a batch of Trease reprints this year from Pan Macmillan.

In the pipeline are **The White Nights of St Petersburg** and **Trumpets in the West**, completely rewritten for the tercentenary of the Purcell period.

REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Who are your Family?

0 7502 0790 6

Who are your Friends?

0 7502 0789 2

Jillian Powell, Wayland (All About You series), £7.99 each
INFANT

Some information books for infants can appear to be based on a formula, using high colour photographs and a few rather banal questions. **Who are your Friends?** and **Who are your Family?** show that much more is possible. The text is relevant and clear, photographs are wisely chosen and informative, and an attempt is made to introduce the conventions of non-fiction for older children – including a contents page, something of a rarity for this age group.

The nature of friendship and what makes a family are effectively explored, neither book is judgemental or unduly simplistic and both avoid a tokenistic approach to a multicultural society. The books are also cheerful and happy without being sentimental – I particularly liked the photographs illustrating long-term and now quite elderly friends.



From **Who are your Friends?**

Some friends stay friends for years.

For the teacher each book includes a topic web with lots of ideas for classroom work but they would be useful for library or home too. GB

A Child's Book of Art

Lucy Micklethwait, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5070 2, £9.99
INFANT/JUNIOR

What an imaginative concept – a first word book for young children in which all the examples chosen to represent such familiar subjects as 'The Family', 'Pets' and 'The Five Senses' are illustrated by great works of art.

Lucy Micklethwait has selected over one hundred paintings and prints covering a wide spectrum from Egyptian tomb paintings to contemporary artists. Thus 'Action Words' are depicted by an ancient Greek vase (running), a seventeenth-century Indian gouache (dancing) and paintings by Fragonard (swinging), Toulouse-Lautrec (riding) and Hockney (swimming).

The painstaking care with which every illustration has been chosen is further reflected in the way each has been placed on the page to give maximum impact. The book's generous format and superb colour reproductions ensure that even the smallest detail is clearly visible.

The depth and breadth of the compilation is such that every child will surely find

something here to fire the imagination and hopefully foster a lifelong interest in art. Although designed with the youngest in mind, this is a super browser book which can be enjoyed by everyone in the family. VH (See also page 7 for a review of Lucy Micklethwait's **I Spy Numbers in Art.**)

Commuter Village

Neil Thomson, Watts Books (Where I Live series), 0 7496 1272 X, £8.50

JUNIOR

Neil Thomson employs the technique used so successfully in Watts' 'When I was Young' series (now available in paperback) – namely, focusing on an individual and looking at a topic through their eyes. This approach has once again resulted in a lively and idiosyncratic text which has an immediacy even the most reluctant factfinder will be unable to resist.

In this instance the 'narrator' is the sub-postmistress of a small Hertfordshire village about twenty miles from the centre of London. Born and bred in the locality, she is ideally qualified to comment on the events which have turned what was still a farming village until less than twenty years ago into a commuter community.

Changing times have affected shops, services, public transport, housing and employment opportunities; only petitions and protests saved the primary school from closure. Using her local knowledge and profiles of some of the other inhabitants, we explore the reasons behind the transformation.

Plenty of colour photos and an enticing user-friendly format ensure that the relevant data is gleaned painlessly and pleasurably.

Although produced with National Curriculum geography in mind, the many interwoven social and historical strands make this an excellent cross-curricular resource. VH

Grassland Wildlife

Kamini Khanduri, Usborne (World Wildlife series), 0 7460 1453 8, £5.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

I'm not always a great fan of Usborne books their splattered-spread approach to information probably has more to offer to habitual cereal-packet readers than to dedicated avenophiles* like me, but occasionally they hit on something which seems to do a good job and here is an instance.

By pulling all grasslands – tropical and temperate – together, this book provides an illustration of the general principles of grassland ecology, be it Siberian or South American, as well as many particular embodiments of these principles. Heavily slanted towards the popular and picturesque, most of the space is devoted to mammals and most of the examples shown are African, so those looking for Saiga antelopes won't find much and those looking for Rheas won't find anything. But – and here's Usborne serendipity at its best – who knows how a baby kangaroo turns round in its mother's pouch, or how far a blackfooted ferret travelled in four and a half hours on 30th October 1982? I do, and I saw it here first!

So here's a good Usborne ramble – not for looking things up in but for coming across them – with an aim more laudable than many and an achievement better than most.

*Avenophile = Oat lover or porridge-freak. TP

The Blue Whale

Melissa Kim, Hutchinson (Wildlifers series), 0 09 176480 7, £8.99

Whale

Vassili Papastavrou, Dorling Kindersley (Eyewitness Guides series), 0 7513 6018 X, £8.99
JUNIOR UPWARDS

Here are two very different books about whales, each one offering more than its title suggests.

Melissa Kim's steady text, aided and amplified at every step by accurate and sympathetic water-colours from Shirley Felts, introduces our largest-ever mammal in the context of other whales – so we learn a fair bit about minke, sperm and right as well as blue. A surprising amount of detail emerges from this simple account as variety, vital statistics, habitat and migration and social patterns are explored. Half way through, the book takes a more sombre turn to examine the development and current state of the whaling industry and provide a sensible defence of the whale's protected status. The renegade whaling activities of Japan, Norway and Iceland are well spotted – and embassy addresses provided.

Papastavrou delivers facts, figures and fancies, not only about whales but other marine mammals, all being subjected to the familiar Eyewitness treatment. This means that as well as the expected whale facts we get welcome space devoted to walrus, dugongs and manatees (hard to find elsewhere) but it also means that facts that can't be introduced by a high-quality photograph, archive engraving or punning headline often don't get in.

Both books succeed, in very different ways. The Eyewitness does so because of its authoritative slickness, multitudinous facts and masterful presentation and the Wildlifer because, in a way that the other could never hope to, it exudes, through a harmonious blend of carefully considered text and highly atmospheric illustration, the very essence of whale-ness. A disparate but worthwhile pair. TP



Babies that have left the pouch jump back in if there is danger.



They jump in head first so their tails and back feet are sticking out.



Then they turn around inside the pouch and poke their heads out too.

A joey entering his mother's pouch, from **Grassland Wildlife**.

Advertising

Brenda Mann, Wayland (Media Watch series), 0 7502 0758 2, £8.99
SECONDARY

As something of an enthusiast, ready to bore others with my home-spun analysis of the latest advertising campaign, a new book on advertising always excites my interest. This title does not disappoint – it is both informative and stimulating and the style avoids patronising its readers. The section on advertising and society is especially strong, tackling significant and contentious issues. The book would be valuable for both classroom discussion on the ethics of advertising, and for library use as an introductory text on the advertising industry for GCSE/Key Stage 4 (although it's a pity that a more international perspective was not included).

Wayland's front cover design, plugging the other titles in the series, may well be counterproductive – merely confusing readers about the contents of each book. I found **Advertising** more accessible and challenging than **Newspapers** in the same series – so it's worth examining each title independently. GB

Winter Survival: nature's ways of coping with the cold

Mari Friend, Blandford,
0 7137 2348 3, £16.99
SECONDARY/FAMILIES

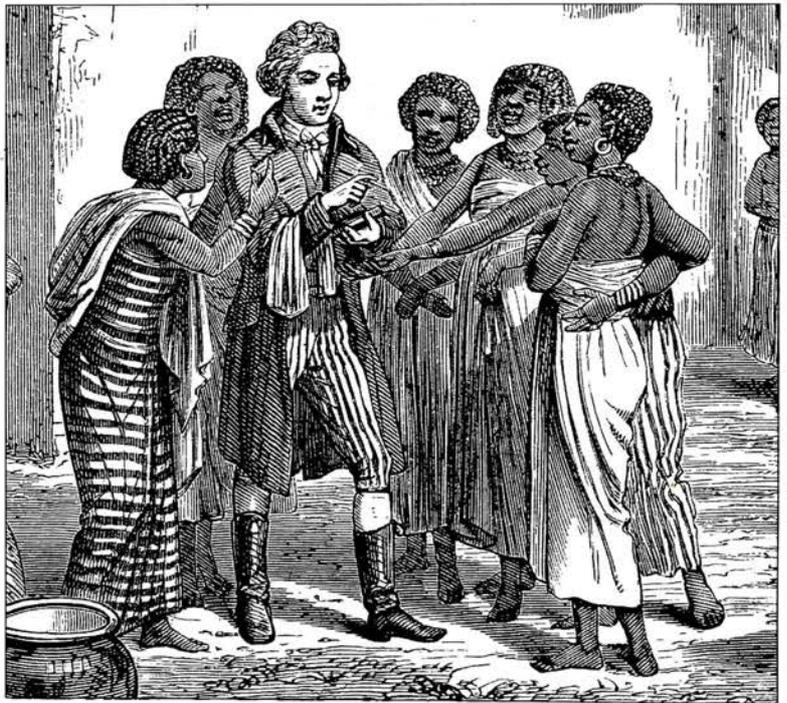
Where we live now, winter comes early and stays late, and by this time of year we've already had enough of it, so it's great to sit by the fire with a book that makes the season seem worthwhile. For here winter is presented as the waiting time – the natural world getting its act together for its next growing binge and going into survival mode – the variants of which and the way different animals and plants employ them being the burden of this book. So we get hibernation, migration, leaf-fall, delayed implantation and all the rest, but not in a pedestrian account (though the author's a great walker) but in a remarkable mix of hard fact, folklore, reminiscence and personal opinion.

The author takes her own rambling but enthusiastic route through her subject, enriching every step with observation and loading the reader with nuggets of knowledge at every turn. For she is a compulsive informant who can't bear not to tell us what she knows, and luckily she writes and draws beautifully so a delightful and unique book results. As it is so personal an account it has the added value of reading aloud superbly and thus being eminently shareable. So this is a family book – compelling reading at one sitting if you like but forever a source of delightful dips – a Friend for life, you might say.



When the author produced **Small Wonder** two years ago it seemed as if it might be just that – a brilliant one-off. Now it seems that there might be plenty more where that came from. We must grab all we can of this amiable talent. TP

'Held captive for three months on his way to the Niger, Park was visited daily by Africans who found his color, his clothing, and his habits odd and amusing.'
From **Scientific Explorers**.



Scientific Explorers

Rebecca Steffoff, Oxford University Press (Extraordinary Explorers series), 0 19 507689 3, £9.99
SECONDARY/ADULT

My all-time favourite explorer – Charles Waterton – doesn't appear here – he doesn't appear in most 'explorer' books, but then he was a Yorkshire rhubarb addict. The same thirst for knowledge, though, that propelled Waterton into the South American depths was the motivator for all those explorers assembled here – who went to find something out rather than just 'because it's there'. The author shows how, as the need to measure everything became an Enlightenment passion, scientific exploration began. It was mapping and measuring the world that took Cook and Darwin to the Pacific – Australia and evolution were just by-products.

Steffoff clearly relishes her subject – which she divides into three parts. First, 'Knowledge in Far Places' – including the Rosetta Stone, the American West, Cook's tours and the unbearable Charles Wilkes. Then come 'Naturalists in the Great Unknown' – South America, Asia, Africa (full marks for the story of how Mungo

Park, mugged in Pisanía, was robbed of all but his hat – which held his journal) and Darwin. 'Exploring New Worlds' looks at deep sea and deep space, making the essential point that exploration never finishes.

Although the maps are small and hard to follow, there are serviceable contemporary illustrations and a useful chronology to save dates and sequences from spoiling the read. For it is a really good read; its American origin is an advantage, allowing a refreshing objectivity as well as introducing Zebulon Pike.

I hope the other series members are as original and stimulating; if they are, they will provide an enjoyable addition to a secondary school library. TP

Geoff Brown is Resources Manager for Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.

Vee 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

Buyer's Guide to Encyclopedias

Nicholas Tucker, Cressida Press,
1 871327 04 0, revised ed. 1993,
£2.75

A multi-volume encyclopaedia is a considerable investment for a school (or a family), so making the right choice is especially important. Even finding out what exists can be a problem – and then there's the question of comparative strengths and weaknesses and suitability for different ages and stages.

First published in 1988 and now into its fifth revision, Nicholas Tucker's 48-page **Buyer's Guide** offers a friendly helping hand to those wanting an answer to all these questions. Starting with a lively introduction on the uses of encyclopaedias and a checklist of points to look out for in their assessment, he goes on to examine nine multi-volume encyclopaedias currently available in the UK.

He is especially good at conveying the flavour of each set, how user-friendly they are in text, illustration and retrieval devices

and whether they have undue American bias (five of the nine sets are edited in the United States). The assessment of subject coverage is rather more patchy and judgement is less certain when it comes to age/ability suitability.

A further eight pages of tabulated data (consisting of 30 columns of comparative figures) allow a comparison of such matters as number of words, pages, articles, illustrations (b/w, coloured, photos, artwork, maps), index entries, cross references, etc. Although this information is supplied by the publishers and so subject to obvious reservations, it does provide a further comparative dimension to the assessment of each set.

There is some evidence that there has not been a complete updating of all the information for the 1993 revision, nonetheless this pamphlet is a bargain at £2.75 – whether you are considering laying out £125 for the **Oxford Children's Encyclopedia** or £1438 for **Encyclopaedia Britannica**. EvS



"Where are you going, Little Red Riding Hood?"

Wolves probably disappeared from England in the sixteenth century. There are traces still of their presence in place names such as Woolley, Woolmer, or 'wolf-mere' (the lake where wolves drank) and possibly Howl Moor in Yorkshire. But, although three hundred or so years have now passed, wolves are alive, well and positively thriving in contemporary children's fiction. Nor am I referring only to picture books, but to fiction for more mature readers, particularly those who enjoy, if you'll pardon the pun, a good meaty read.

Most children are likely to be introduced to the wolf when they're quite young. There are enough versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'The Three Little Pigs' alone to fill the average school library. But the wolf is not something a child grows out of – rather it's something he or she can grow into. The wolf provides an opportunity for writers to explore human nature and moral issues in a way children respond to from an early age and from which they can take even more meaning as they grow older. Even more importantly for children's writers, the character of the wolf allows them to handle difficult subjects such as sexuality and violence in a way that is acceptable even to the most puritanical adult. But why the wolf?

Historically the wolf has been our major predator in Europe and therefore one of our great adversaries. While wolves, over the centuries, may have devoured relatively few human beings, they would have posed a constant threat to rural communities whose survival was often dependent on livestock. The survival instincts we share with our ancestors and the predatory characteristics we share with the wolf still link us strongly to this history.

Joan Aiken's classic story, *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*, takes us back into an imaginary past where wolves have come back into the country through a newly opened Channel Tunnel. They're symbolic, of course. For Sylvia and Bonnie, the two children at the centre of the novel, the real predators are closer to home. These predators take the form of 'responsible adults'. Led by the unforgettable Miss Slighcarp, the governess beside whom any wolf pales into insignificance, they're all a child could wish for in terms of real villains. No child ever has a problem in understanding Miss Slighcarp's greed, and rapaciousness – nor the implication of what happens once they combine with an adult's position of authority and a veneer of 'benevolence'.

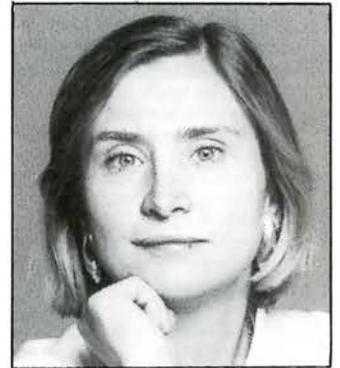
Kathryn Cave's *William and the Wolves* sees the wolf reintroduced to England in a rather different way. William is a boy going through the worst of sibling rivalry. Irritated by his sister Mary's imaginary pet lamb and his mother's claims that of course he never had an imagination like Mary, he retaliates by inventing his own imaginary pack of wolves (fresh from Siberia) whose role is ultimately, of course, to devour his sister's lamb.

As the story progresses the wolves become more and more real – not only to Mary as William had planned – but also to himself as his feelings become more out of control:

'William found it difficult to remember the rest of that Friday

The True Story of the Big Bad Wolf

Philippa Milnes-Smith investigates a continuing phenomenon.



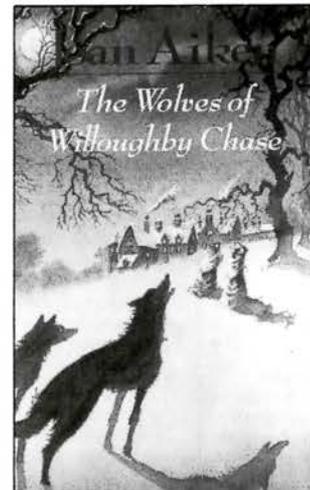
properly. He never forgot it either, though, however hard he tried. Some things you never do forget.

The wolves in assembly for instance – chewing Mr Turner's shoelaces . . . ambushing late arrivals in the senior cloakroom . . . sneaking along the curtain at the back of the platform while the Head made announcements . . . There was the howling that broke out when Miss Simms started to play 'All Things Bright and Beautiful', the menacing advance upon the piano . . . his own fatal moment of panic. There was the interview with the Head afterwards . . . the questions that had no answers.'

William and the Wolves is a funny book, but has a serious point to make about the intensity of children's emotions and the difficulty of sibling relationships. The exploration of such negative emotions are vitally important for children. They do nurture feelings of resentment, hatred and revenge. They are selfish. They are destructive. *William and the Wolves* deals with all these issues without compromise. And yet it remains a warm, witty and appealing book which successfully represents the complexity of family life.

It's also interesting how easily the wolf moves from predator to anarchist. Anarchy is certainly at work in William's back garden and Willoughby Chase but perhaps comes more strongly to the fore in *The House of Rats* by Stephen Elboz. This spectacular book (rightly voted a children's choice in 1992's Smarties Awards) begins with the mysterious disappearance of the man who called himself 'the master'. His disappearance signals the beginning of chaos in the House of Rats where, up to now, order has been the most important thing:

'How could he – the master – break our daily routine? This man who ran the big house to a published timetable? Who was known to dismiss a servant for a minute's lateness? Who had a clock in every room – sometimes whole banks of them, their pendulums swinging in silent unison?'



As in Willoughby Chase the children at the centre of the book have more to fear from the people inside the house who are now intent on the struggle for power than the wolves who prowl incessantly outside. But unlike Willoughby Chase the very fabric of the house is actually overrun by wolves and destroyed by fire before a new future can be built. In this context it's worth making an historical reference to Fenrir, the wolf-man of Scandinavian mythology. It was said that when the end of the world came, there would be a time of anarchy on earth and then Fenrir would finally devour the sun and the moon, plunging the earth into a bitter winter lasting three years. This in turn would be followed by the final great battles and the doom of the gods.

The image of the anarchist is not the only one we have inherited. Our bonds with the beliefs and traditions of the past, particularly Christian ones, are often stronger than we think. The idea of the 'big bad wolf', now a cosy euphemism for the animal so often portrayed as representing evil incarnate, probably began with the medieval bestiaries, the nearest equivalent to best-selling coffee table books in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Superficially they were books on animal behaviour but in fact they featured both real and imaginary animals whose purpose was to demonstrate the way of God, Man and the Devil. The wolf rather drew the short straw, taking on the full persona of the devil. It was portrayed as brutish and rapacious, with a voracious appetite for food and sex. It prowled in the dark, its eyes shining like seductive beacons in search of human souls. Such images of wolves can still be found in the marvellous 'growlers; who haunt the terrifying world of Nigel Hinton's **Beaver Towers**. C S Lewis, too, chose a wolf, called Maugrim, to accompany the White Witch in **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, whose brutality is never far from the surface despite his smooth-talking forked tongue. Remember how he welcomes Edmund to the White Witch's stronghold:

"Come in! Come in! Fortunate favourite of the Queen – or else not so fortunate."

Maugrim is a direct descendent from the medieval bestiary.

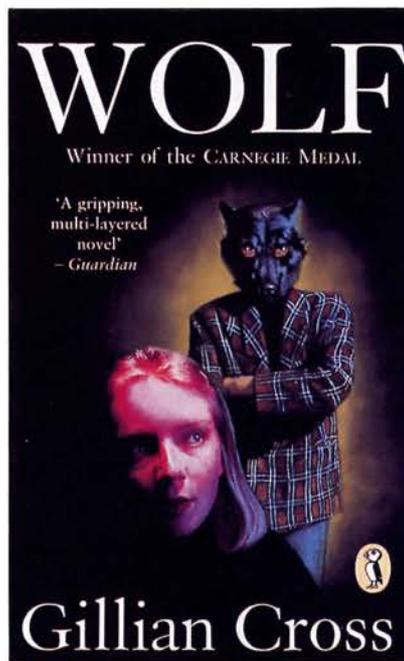
The nature of evil and whether it's something that comes primarily from outside or within ourselves is an eternal debate, but evil is far easier for children to handle when it's externalised. The big bad wolf is undoubtedly one of the most successful devices for presenting evil to children in this externalised way, even though its specifically Christian context may be missing in our increasingly secular society.

The wolf was not only a symbol of the Devil but also a symbol of the Devil in Man. The fact that legends of werewolves exist wherever wolves themselves have existed indicates an early recognition that the image of the wolf held a less than complimentary mirror up to human nature. In the werewolf, the devil and animal deep within were seen to surface, creating a myth that's gone from strength to strength. It's also proved popular with a wider variety of writers than one might initially think. For example, the popular graphic novel character **Wolverine** (affectionately known as 'Wolvie' to its creators) leapt into a series of its own having been transformed from 'wild man psycho butcher' to 'failed samurai'! Contrast this macho mass market approach to Tanith Lee's story 'Wolfland' or Angela Carter's 'Wolf-Alice', two of the stories to feature female werewolves, which use this image to explore the strength of the female psyche. Go back to the medieval Breton lays of Marie de France for the sympathetic courtly tale of Bisclavret in which a nobleman/werewolf is betrayed by his wife and compare this to the entertaining mix of horror, romance and comedy of the film **An American Werewolf in London**.

But for me the ultimate werewolf book has to be Gillian Cross's **Wolf**. Of course it's not literally a werewolf book but, if werewolf literally means 'man-wolf', it's more than close enough.

Wolf is a disturbing but rewarding book. Underneath the fast-moving plot of a tense and realistic thriller lies an extraordinary exploration of the emotions of a 13-year-old girl about the father she's never really known, the father who is also a killer. And from her childhood, from her subconscious comes the story of Red Riding Hood, now a terrifying reality:

'... and the thing leaped out of the shadows – mouth open vast, black, slavering – its red eyes glaring and its hot, foul breath strong on her face – huge and grey, with the wolf legs kicking free of the human clothing – all animal, all beast – and



Wolf ... and Wolverine.



no time to think of Nan or what to do or how to avoid the stained, curving, murderous teeth ...'

This is a book about violence, about sexuality, about oedipal desires, about the disintegration of family and society – but none of that ever needs to be said overtly. Indeed, what do any children reading the book care about an intellectual analysis of this kind? All they know is the book is alive and real, keeps them turning the pages till the end, and keeps them thinking about the story long after the book is finished.

For anyone who would argue that this might not be material for a children's book, now might be the time to remind them of the original Red Riding Hood. And it's worth noting that some early versions of the story feature a werewolf rather than a wolf.

Lastly, I do want to make a formal apology to all wolves everywhere. They've been treated most unfairly. We have exploited animals in literature almost as shamelessly as we have in real life. Let's hope at least we learn something from it about ourselves. ■

Philippa Milnes-Smith is Editorial Director for Puffin and Viking.

Details of books mentioned:

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase (1962), Joan Aiken, Cape, 0 224 60004 4, £7.99; Red Fox, 0 09 997250 6, £2.99 pbk

William and the Wolves (1991), Kathryn Cave, Viking, 0 670 834874, £7.50; Puffin, 0 14 034516 7, £2.99 pbk

The House of Rats (1991), Stephen Elboz, Oxford, 0 19 271664 6, £7.95; 0 19 271727 8, £3.75 pbk

Beaver Towers (1983), Nigel Hinton, Hodder, 0 340 32105 9, £2.99 pbk

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1951), C S Lewis, HarperCollins, 0 00 183180 1, £6.95; Lions, 0 00 671663 6, £3.50 pbk

Wolverine (1987), Chris Claremont, Frank Miller and Josef Rubinstein, Marvel Books, 1 85400 015 2, £5.50

Wolf (1980), Gillian Cross, Oxford, 0 19 271633 6, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 034826 3, £3.50 pbk

Tanith Lee's story 'Wolfland' and Angela Carter's 'Wolf-Alice' are both in **The Bloody Chamber and other stories** (1979), Penguin, 0 14 012837 9, £5.99 pbk

For background reading on wolves (and much else besides) we'd recommend:

Don't Bet on the Prince (1986), ed. Jack Zipes, Gower, 0 566 05460 4, £7.95 pbk

Breaking the Magic Spell (1979), Jack Zipes, Heinemann Ed., now o/p

The Uses of Enchantment (1976), Bruno Bettelheim, Penguin, 0 14 013727 0, £8.99 pbk

BEYOND THE *Designer* ? LABEL

DAVID BENNETT shares a few thoughts about reluctant readers

Hardly a Parents' Evening goes by without an anxious Mum or Dad leaning towards me and saying something along those lines familiar to all teachers: '... Of course, he never reads any books. Can you suggest anything we can do?'

Firstly, notice the *HE* who never reads any books. It isn't true that all reluctant readers are male but perhaps it's almost true. Secondly, do these children *really* not read anything? When I delve a little further it's usually the case that the child doesn't pick up what the parent thinks is real reading, which can be generalised as a fiction book, preferably with few pictures, that the adults remember from their youth. (If you torture your mind with recent Nat. Curric. booklists, you'll get the picture.)

In reality the same reluctant reader is often poring over mountain bike magazines, computer and motorcycle manuals, fishing part-works and non-fiction, etc. If you've ever looked at these, you'll know many of them make significant language demands and they undoubtedly require reading stickability. Alternatively the youngsters are reading such materials as comics, which, like the magazines, are at least keeping them open to print. A cynic might say that in the sub-basement level they're only reading the labels on their designer clothes, since that's what concerns them most, but if we look on the bright side at least their brains are getting access to some print.

The important thing, and it's what I try to tell anxious parents, is that this is where their child is at, at this moment and it's the base from which we adults must work if we wish to effect any sort of change.

School Library at George Spencer School.

Television

A word here about the oft-repeated claim that too much TV and too much leisure has rung the knell on teenagers' reading habits. Is it maybe that the youngsters are not reading books but television is showing them sports or activities that are actually stimulating the reading of plenty of magazine material? Furthermore, I can think of plenty of programmes that have spawned books which the most reluctant and unlikely characters have read and enjoyed. **Grange Hill** and **Tales of the Unexpected** are cases in point.

F Whitehead in **Children and Their Books** (Macmillan, 1977) estimated that 15.8% of children are non-readers at the age of 10+ and this has risen to 40% at 14+. These children are not unable to read... their ability would enable them to read interesting books if they so wished. What they lack, unlike our reading dynamos, is *motivation*. In my estimation, that's the principal factor to examine and the major players are Home, The Library, Peers and The School.

If I probe a bit further with the anxious parents, it's not unusual to find they aren't actually setting any example because they don't read much, either. So that which they are recommending to their children as important is not so very important that the adults are ever seen settling down with a 'good book'. If adults don't count magazines and newspapers as proper reading for children, then presumably they don't count for adults. A reading environment in the home where the use and discussion of books is as common an activity as arguing about who does the washing-up or who fed the rabbit last is bound to contribute to the making of readers.

Libraries

Public libraries and school librarians are labouring under enormous pressures and I wouldn't wish to undervalue the great efforts being made to attract young readers. The trouble is that many youngsters never set foot over the doorstep; library visiting is about as hip as admitting that you ever watched **Blue Peter**. Obviously, we must seek ways to make libraries even more pro-active in the community and even more vital in community life. Youngsters I talk to often mention they're overwhelmed and intimidated by the sheer volume of choice in a library. They don't know where to begin. Since choosing the book to read is part of the process of reading and comes right at the start, perhaps that's something libraries could look into yet further. The same youngsters place great value on books vouched for by others in their own age group. Indeed, it can't be bad that it's book titles that are being traded here on a par with the hottest film in town or where to get the best value takeaway. Exercise caution though. A girl once asked me for the same book as her friend, who said it was good. The title was elusive for the moment but it was definitely an animal book. I was steering us both towards non-fiction when the title came to my companion... it was **Planet of the Apes!**

School

Children don't enter school planning to be reluctant readers or book haters. Something happens to them along the way. Is it that some of them get the idea that books are only for retrieving facts and information - enjoyment as such doesn't come into it? Does contact with fiction too often equal an exercise at the end with entertainment squeezed out and tasks ladled in? Are the adults in their schools like those at home? They say reading is good for you and ever so pleasurable, yet you never see them doing much of it themselves and they can seem very latched on to what they call 'quality reading', when there's still a million and six 'Sweet Valley High' titles to be read.



Quality reading is perhaps in the eye of the beholder. For me it's the material which sets out to stretch the imagination. It makes a huge contribution to the development and mastery of language. Discovery of self, of feelings, emotions and behaviour and reactions to situations is inherent in its pages. It challenges and shapes views and opinions, extends experience and permits a safe spectator role where problems can be solved without the painfulness of reality.

Put like that, it's pretty potent stuff. No wonder some youngsters can't take it wholesale without generous helpings of the non-quality material as well. Which of we so-called mature readers don't at times heed the call of something utterly trashy and undemanding (and enjoyable!) as a break from 'good books'?

At our chalk faces we have to believe every child is entitled to a glimpse of the pleasure that can be gained from reading. This demands teachers who are aware of the materials available – a pretty tall order, so keep your subscriptions to **BfK** going! It must be supported by a positive and generous reading environment and, most important of all, it must allow pupils time to read and discuss books.

By my reckoning, to accomplish at least some of this, almost anything in print that's legal is permissible. So, on the basis of 'if you see a good idea, steal it', here are a few tactics I've picked up and used in my time. I don't claim they've all been sure-fire hits, but you never know until you try. The essential tactic to aim for is *variety* and there's plenty of that here:

The Book Area or Resources Area

Go for the user-friendly approach. Make this area a community focal point, from which red noses, play tickets or whatever are sold. It must be attractive and comfortable. Displays and exhibitions should be colourful and inviting incorporating the pupils' own ideas, work and materials. If books can be displayed with the cover facing outwards so much the better. Gaining access to materials should be easy and choosing facilitated by plenty of book information, quick-read subject indexes or colour coding. In this respect I never cluttered subject indexes with more Dewey numbers than were absolutely necessary to encourage browsing and I 'spotted' the fiction spines with pink for short stories, yellow for SF etc. Good library induction is important but we should never kid ourselves that it'll all stick at once.

The Stock

If the spirit is to start from where the pupils are, then I'd expect paperbacks to outnumber hardbacks, since the former have much more street cred. Quality fiction will rub shoulders with non-quality and picture books will be well represented. Stock will range from that intended for below the audience age-range to that written for the group above. A good selection of magazines and comics is advised, but we can be forgiven for thinking the pupils often buy these themselves – in which case encourage them to bring in back numbers. Academic stock is necessary but to attract certain customers leisure stock is needed as well as maps, atlases, timetables and telephone directories. It's financially risky but the 'now thing' for our pupils is cassettes and videos. A selection of book-related specimens does pull in the punters but personally I'd make a point of never releasing either without the accompanying text.

I have this notion that for some reluctant readers one of the turn-offs is that they never seem to finish anything. For this reason I always get to know as much as I can about short story collections and poetry collections. You can read a few pages of these and actually complete a piece with no unfinished business.

Series and sets can be compulsive once you get across the hurdle of the first book. I'm never too thrilled with 'Series for reading recovery' programmes. I can't shift the feeling that the very best way of bringing pupils and books together has to be on a one-to-one, individual basis. But I'm open to persuasion and if series do the job all well and good.

Reading Involvement

This is about flooding the pupils' school day with reading and books and making it all seem perfectly normal. Book swaps and taster sessions are fairly easy to organise. Reading weeks, book events and author visits take a bit more orchestration. Focus weeks to tie in with national events like the Olympics or the British Music Awards need a bit of advance planning and a regular bookshop needs a dedicated organiser. But staff needn't do it all. The whole point is to involve pupils and their families, to talk to them and see what they want. Pupils should be given the chance to put up their own displays – 'Hobbies with related books' and 'Class Z's favourite library books' were two good ones that spring to mind.



Hobbies with related books? Photo courtesy of Youth Libraries Group.

Children are ace at thinking up competitions and puzzles, whilst their annotated booklists and reviews are usually seen as more reliable than ours. Keep them within bounds, though. A booklist with 50 titles is a turn-off for anyone. Five at most seems about right to me.

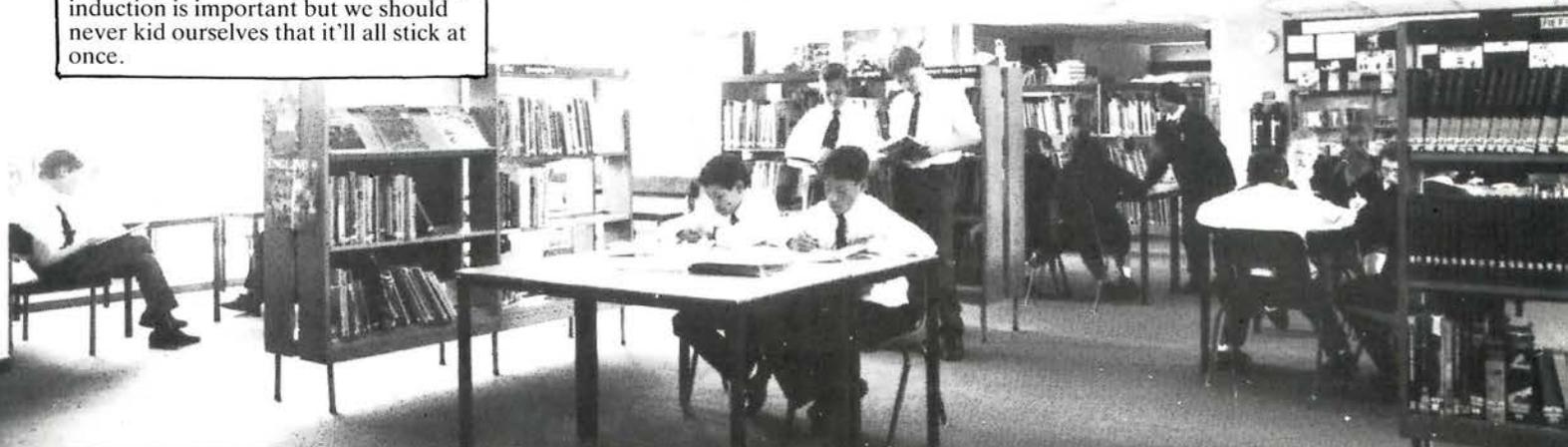
In a classroom/library liaison, we've developed what can best be described as the DFE Award of the book world. Bearing in mind the requirements of the Nat. Curric., we've developed a reading programme that leads through bronze to platinum. Each of the four stages has tasks to complete, viz. for silver, pupils must read:

- at least one short story collection
- a collection of story poems (or a long story poem)
- a SF or fantasy book
- a book on animals or sport
- two storybooks and two non-fiction books, on two of which a review is required, on another a quiz or puzzle is expected and on the last a class talk for 2 minutes

So far the response from a majority of pupils has been very positive. Obviously each school would have to adjust its requirements to the needs and standards of its pupils.

Good luck. Keep trying and hang on in there – even if it's only by the seat of your designer pants! ■

David Bennett is a regular **BfK** reviewer as well as being a senior teacher responsible for English and Modern Languages at George Spencer School in Nottinghamshire.



SERIES OF DESIRE

Sally Feldman on the books teenagers buy . . .

A strange sense of excitement and fear stole over me as I began to read – first slowly, then with an urgent, devouring passion as I tore open book after book in an orgy of need and longing. And yet, each time there was something missing – something not quite satisfying enough. It was totally weird . . .

Series books for young teenagers divide roughly into three genres: there's the straightforward romance and relationships, usually with a dose of self-doubt turning into self-discovery. There's horror – market leaders here by quite a way are the 'Point Horror' series, followed by 'Nightmares'. And, for those who like to thrill as they chill, a heady combination of both.

You're first likely to get hooked on the series concept with Scholastic's 'Babysitters Club', an amiable set of some 40 stories about a bunch of lovable high school kids who get into wholesome scrapes while running their babysitting enterprise. No romance, but lots of tests of loyalty and friendship to prepare you for the next big step: 'Sweet Valley High' from Transworld.

It's California; it's high school; it's a gang of kids you'd love to hang around with yourself. And it's fantastically successful. There are around 100 SVH titles if you count all the specials. The series was created by Francine Pascal who never actually writes any of them. She doesn't need to; the concept is so strong that it unites every title. It's easy to be cynical about formula writing of this kind but I am impressed by these: the series is honest and direct, the writing basic but readable and, sometimes, witty. And it's way ahead of market rivals like the insipid 'Sweet Dreams' (again by Transworld).

"Well, I, personally, can't believe you'd even consider going out with John," Jessica said. "He's not your type at all." An impish grin turned up the corners of her mouth. "Let's face it, Lila. If boys were automobiles, you usually go out with Corvettes. John's more like a Volvo with an air bag."

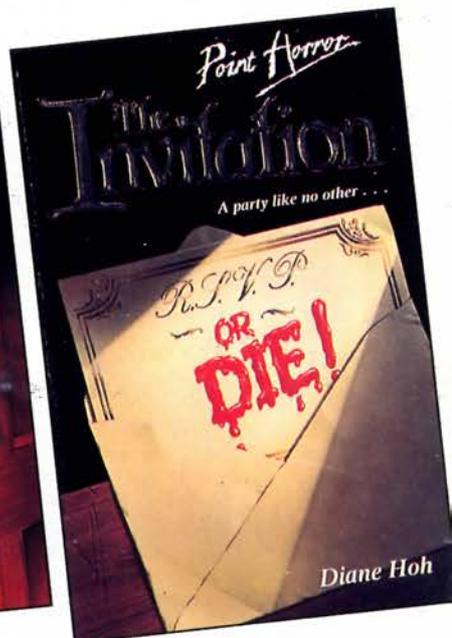
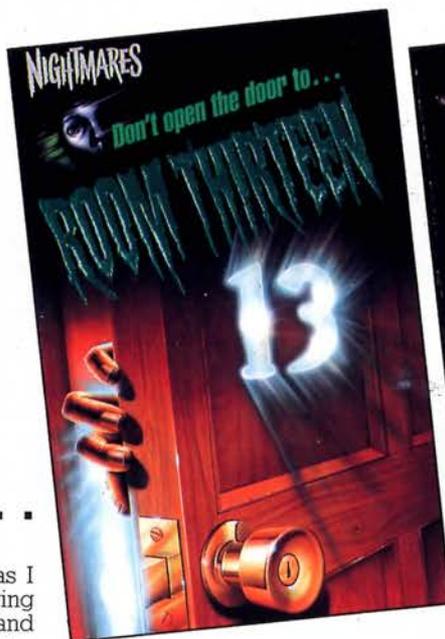
"I'll have you know that I'm not just a pretty face," Lila said archly. "Just because I like to have a good time doesn't mean I'm not a serious person myself, you know."

"Oh, sure," said Jessica. "Very serious about shopping."

from *Don't Go Home With John*

Everybody in 'Sweet Valley High' struggles to be decent, and there's a light morality to the books which is actually very effective. *Don't Go Home With John* (0 553 292366, £2.50) is a rather powerful account of an attempted date rape and its repercussions: the victim's loss of confidence and the collective sympathy for the perpetrator. Eventually, when the kids realise what he's done, they persuade him to see the school counsellor – a helpful reminder to impressionable readers that men who force their will on women are sick.

Scholastic's 'Point Horror', a more recent phenomenon, has already achieved cult status among young teens including – a rare feat, this – boys! Fostered doubtless by the movie industry and video nasties, as well as adult horror writers like Stephen King, there's a huge appetite among the 12-plusses for terror of all kinds. 'Point Horror' sounds cool, the books look cool and, for the most part, I have to admit, they are rather cool.



"What I did to your stupid new friends," Lynn said coldly in answer to Shane's question, "I'm going to do to you. They're dead. I killed them. All but one. She got away. But I'll take care of her later when I've finished with you."

Shane stopped breathing. No! Lynn was lying. It wasn't possible. No one could kill four people at a party crowded with guests. That was crazy. Someone would have stopped something so horrible from happening. The idea was, simply, insane . . .

Then Shane remembered the wail of the ambulance and looked into Lynn's eyes. Insane? Shane felt sick. Was that what she saw in those eyes? Insanity? Was that what had happened to Lynn when their world fell apart around the two of them?

If my friends are dead, she thought despairingly, it's because of me. I should never have tried to have friends again.'

from *The Invitation* by Diane Hoh
(Point Horror, 0 590 55060 8, £2.99)

What you don't want to do is read too many of them on the trot because then you do enter this Halloween style world where everything always starts out very safe and suburban, and then before you know it there's a psychopath in your midst who wreaks havoc, terror, heavy casualties and sometimes even death. Severe mental disorder appears to be more popular than supernatural threat; the undead will make appearances occasionally but now have their own sub-genre, 'Point Fantasy', leaving the Horror field quite clear for vengeful ex-girlfriends, axe-wielding surrogate mothers and the rest of the set.

'Nightmares' from Collins Lions, a close rival, seems to deal more in the dead coming to life and evil running rampant. They're not as scary as they claim, but I experienced a certain frisson when I read *Room Thirteen* by T S Rue (0 00 674797 3, £2.99). The ghost in this one urges the heroine to kill her father because he won't let her go out on dates:

"It's your father, Erin," Sam said. "He just really bums me out. It seems like every time I want to be with you, he gets in the way."

"I know," Erin nodded sadly.

"You said you hated him."

"I do," Erin said. "I can't stand him."

Sam looked up and into her eyes. "Suppose we get rid of him?"

"Sam, it's not funny. Stop joking."

He sat up. "I'm not joking, Erin."

Not for sensitive parents.

Most of the series originate in America. A few – like the romantically titled 'Lovelines' from Pan or the rather leaden romantic thriller series 'Hot Pursuit' (Puffin Plus) – are

Australian. I wondered if their success here had anything to do with the popularity of television soaps and sitcoms, but according to Liz Attenborough from Puffin it's more to do with marketing techniques. There are no comparable series generated in this country, although Scholastic in 'Point Romance' are beginning to publish some British titles.

There are definite national differences in attitude and style. American series books are very romantic, even the horrors. Love and relationships are the unquestioned ideal. The Australians seem embarrassed with such unashamed sweetness. "D'you really read that stuff, that romance garbage?" shudders Marlee, heroine of **Something About Zac** by Kimberley Gregg ('Lovelines', 0 330 33023 3, £2.99). Kristi, a 'Hot Pursuit' heroine, is quite deliberately presented as anti-romance: "What was I supposed to do? Melt? Swoon? Drop everything for my handsome hero? Naturally, I shook him off. I was busy - and he almost made me lose my game." (from **Kristi** by Merrilee Moss, 0 14 036499 4, £3.99).

The Australian books do tend to be sour and stiffly-written, which I put down to discomfort with the form. They're particularly hopeless when it comes to sex. But they are not alone. Most series books have problems between the sheets.

I'd naively assumed that sex was the motivating force for series lovers. Teenagers are curious about sex; they are obsessed with sex; they're often appallingly ignorant about it and desperate for enlightenment. In this area, satisfaction can not, I'm afraid, be guaranteed.

In 'Sweet Valley High' the matter is simple: you don't do it. You just don't. It gets mentioned, of course, but that's all. True, Jessica has such hots for Sam that she imposes a necking ban because she can't trust herself to stop in time. However, this turns out to be a device for Sam to explain that he's not a beast and would never hurt her.

What you mostly get is a lot of earnest pontificating about the importance of not rushing things and of waiting until you're ready. Since many of these books attract a following of 12- and 13-year-olds, it's a fair message. But hardly enough for the panting, ready, older reader. Good, old-fashioned True Romance morality is the sub-text of one or two of the slightly more grown-up titles. **Cradle Snatcher** by Alison Creaghan (0 590 55278 3, £2.99) is one of the very few British 'Point Romance' titles. Here, sexual behaviour is a gauge to character. Kevin is a good guy because he doesn't pressurise Amelia (he is, after all, only 15 and doesn't feel in the least bit ready). Andy does, so is bad. Rick does, too, and when Amelia says no she loses him. But her friend Gill says yes - and loses him as well. At least I felt at home - this was what romantic fiction used to be all about.

In the 'Point Horror' story, **Beach Party** by R L Stine (0 590 76526 4, £2.50), sex is even more of a giveaway. The dual-personality boyfriend kisses gently when he's Mr Nice. Other times, he does it so hard he makes Karen's lips bleed. And even then she doesn't catch on, poor girl, presumably

because savagery, sadly, can be rather a turn-on:

'As she started to back away, she was startled to feel his arms around her waist. He pulled her to him with surprising strength and, holding her so tight she could hardly breathe, pushed his lips against hers, pressing harder, harder until the kiss actually hurt.'

What's going on? Karen thought. I just meant to give him a peck on the cheek. He seems so... desperate. So needy.

She returned his kiss. His hands moved to the back of her head. He pressed her face against his.

This kiss is never going to end, she thought, her heart pounding.'

They certainly have sex in the Australian 'Lovelines' but it's no use at all for the seeker after lust. In **All the Right Moves** by Linda Hollan (0 330 33022 5, £2.99), they actually get as far as the bedroom before she announces, tantalisingly, that the next bit is censored. In any case, where's that delicious forbidden urgency when your mum is so liberal she's actually bought the condoms for you?

If there's sex, there have to be condoms, and there's no way you can introduce the word without also introducing comedy, albeit unwittingly, as in **The Last Great Summer** by Carol Stanley (0 590 55166 3, £2.50), from 'Point Romance'.

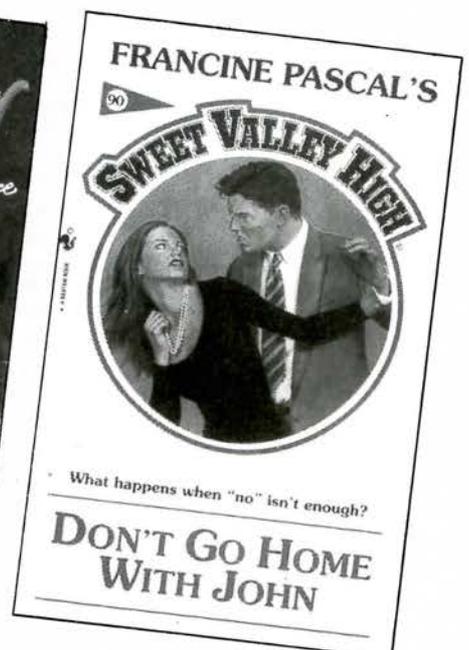
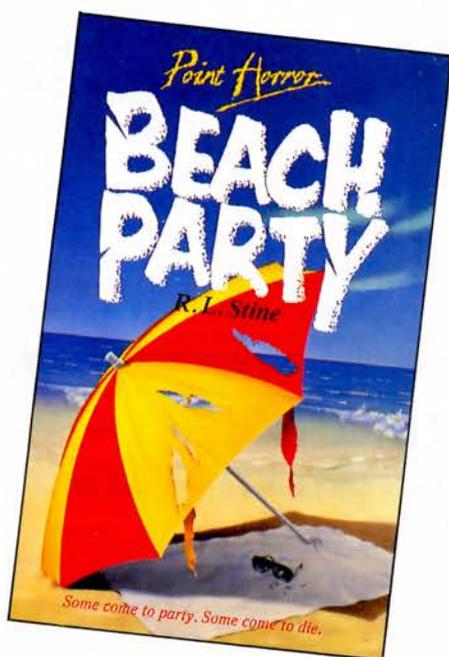
'She pulled out one of the condoms she'd bought this week (nearly dying of embarrassment at the check-out) and slipped it into her back pocket. She didn't know how she was going to bring this up to Dom, but she knew she had to... Dying of embarrassment was better than dying, period.'

Fans are obviously buying these books for the familiar, recognisable imprint, rather than for the individual authors. But there's considerable variation within each series and some of the writers are very good indeed. One of these is the prolific Dyan Sheldon, who's written a two-part horror-romance called **Haunted** for the Bantam 'Young Adult' series - **You Can Never Go Home Anymore**, 0 553 40608 6, £2.99, and **Save the Last Dance For Me**, 0 553 40609 4, £2.99. Poignant, pacy and funny, it's about an Elvis-loving ghost who died in a motor bike crash in 1959. The heroine, Angel, finds him as irritating as a real boy and wishes he were alive so she could kill him herself.

'Terrific, she thought. Other families get demons and luminous ectoplasm, and we get James Dean... I feel like I'm trapped in an episode of Happy Days.'

Now, you really know something's happening when you start getting the pastiche of the pastiche of the pastiche. ■

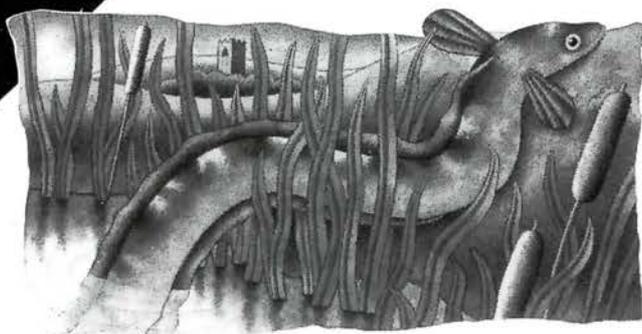
Sally Feldman is Editor of Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* and *Treasure Islands*, the children's book programme.



BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

AWARDS UPDATE

1993 EMIL/KURT MASCHLER AWARD



'Eels feed mostly at night'. From ...

Think of an Eel, Karen Wallace and Mike Bostock, Walker, 0 7445 2250 1, £6.99

RADICAL READING ... AND WRITING

**BOOK
TRUST**
SCOTLAND

From Book Trust (Scotland) comes a package of admirable initiatives of which **Radical Reading** is perhaps the most striking – a full-colour, handsomely produced leaflet funded by the Scottish Arts Council that foregrounds 82 titles targeted at that ever elusive 11-15 readership. 'This is not a recommended reading list' claim the authors. **BfK** agrees ... for a start it's much too snappy, open-minded and persuasive to fit a DFE ringbinder.

Also, miraculously, it's *free*. Single copies with order details are available on receipt of an A4 sae sent to Lindsey Fraser, Book Trust Scotland, Scottish Book Centre, 137 Dundee Street, Edinburgh EH11 1BG.

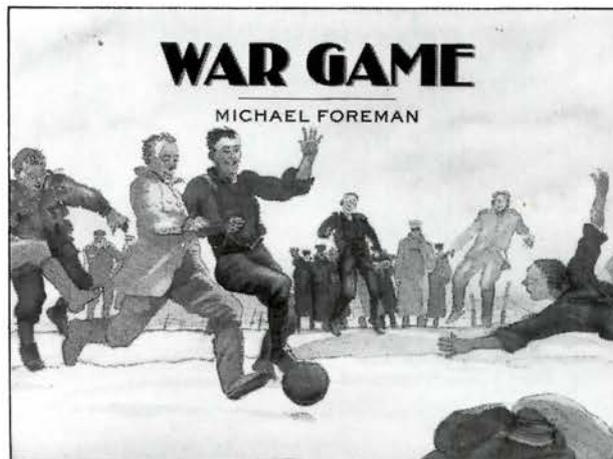
Available from the same source is **Off the Shelf – A Guide to Scotland's Writers and Illustrators for Children**, a lively, comprehensive round-up, historical as well as current, of authors whose regional base is perfectly consistent with world-wide appeal. Deftly illustrated by Debi Gliori and, for all its details, light-hearted in tone, it's a model of the way this sort of thing should be done.

So is **Picture Books for Sharing** by Alan Hill and Sheila Jackson with its commentaries on selected titles and its suggestions about ways to stimulate conversation with young children. Send £4.50 plus 10% for post and packing to Moray House Publications, Moray House Institute of Education, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ.

... and that's not all. Book Trust (Scotland) also administers **The Kathleen Fidler Award** which is sponsored by Blackie Children's Books. This offers a cash prize of £1,000, a rosewood and silver trophy and – the biggest lure of all – guaranteed publication. It's an international award so **BfK** readers *everywhere* are eligible. A leaflet with details and conditions of entry is available from Book Trust (Scotland) at the address given above.

This year's winner, by the way, is **48 Hours with Franklin** by Mij Kelly. It will be published by Blackie and is a book with much child-appeal and considerable promise for books to come.

SMARTIES BOOK PRIZE 1993



0-5 Category:

Hue Boy, Rita Phillips Mitchell and Caroline Binch, Gollancz, 0 575 04798 4, £7.99

6-8 Category and Overall Prize Winner:

War Game, Michael Foreman, Pavilion, 1 85793 069 X, £9.99

9-11 Category:

Listen to the Dark, Maeve Henry, Heinemann, 0 434 96388 7, £9.99

KEY DEBATES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



From the Roehampton Institute's Children's Literature Research Centre comes the first of a proposed series of one-day courses:

INTRODUCING EUROPEAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN TRANSLATION with AIDAN CHAMBERS

26th February 1994 – Roehampton Institute
23rd April 1994 – Sheffield Hallam University
4th June 1994 – University of Bristol

- * Why are British readers resistant to translated books? Is it something we learn when young?
- * Are British children missing out on the innovative fiction produced on the continent?
- * Could reading the same books help in the development of a shared culture within Europe?

For details contact Maria Walker, External Relations Dept, Senate House, Roehampton Institute, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PU, tel: 081 392 3192.

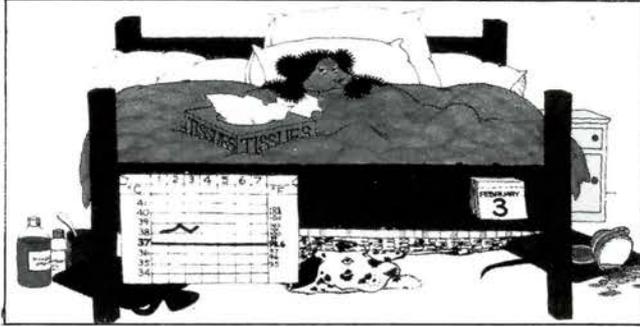


CONFERENCE

THE POWER OF POETRY FOR CHILDREN

A one-day Conference
Saturday 5th March 1994
Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley, Oxford.
For details contact Lesley Mackay on 0865 485913.

'MY TUMMY HAS A HEADACHE ...'



A neat title for the latest publication from the National Library for the Handicapped Child. Over 100 titles, compiled and annotated by Beverley Mathias and Desmond Spiers, give information and advice on helping children understand illnesses such as chicken pox and measles and often occurring conditions like asthma, eczema, epilepsy and hearing loss. Like previous publications from the same

source, this offers parents, teachers, librarians and other carers invaluable support that incorporates sharp-eyed recognition of those crucial ABC factors – accessibility, brevity and comprehensiveness.

Price £3.99 plus p&p, it's available from The NLHC Reach Resource Centre, Wellington House, Wellington Road, Wokingham, Berks RG11 2AG.

On Death and Bereavement

From Camden Leisure Services comes this list of books that help children come to terms with the loss of a loved one – an experience with which many an adult can't cope. It ranges from picture books to teenage fiction and covers titles suitable for a wide spread of abilities. There's also an information section, a where-to-get-help section and a warmly endorsing introduction from Dr Dora Black of Cruse Bereavement Care. True, many of the list's recommendations are well known and there are some startling omissions (Morris Gleitzman's *Two Weeks with the Queen*, for instance) but the pamphlet is free to Camden residents and costs only 50p, inclusive of postage and packing, to anyone else. That must make it Bargain Booklist of the Year, says **BfK!**

Write to Grace McElwee/Natasha Innocent, Children's Services Librarians, Schools Library Service, Swiss Cottage Library, 88 Avenue Road, London, NW3.3HA or telephone 071 413 6509.

STORIES IN TRANSLATION

This latest Penguin Booklist has been compiled by Aidan Chambers. It's a comprehensive guide to children's books in translation from the companies within the Penguin group, and includes titles originally written in Swedish, Norwegian, German, Dutch, French, Italian and Danish. For details of how to get hold of this free Guide contact Helen McAleer on 071 416 3134.

Please look after this Bier

Alas, there was no room in our last issue for a wonderful howler that appeared in *The Times*, 15th October 1993, as follows:

'... In another unprecedented ruling against a BBC programme, the council also criticised a schools' television programme, *English File*, on BBC2. It ruled that an episode of *Tuesday*, a drama written by Edward Bond, the author of the Paddington Bear books, contained material of a violent nature unsuitable for broadcasting between midday and 12.30 pm.

The BBC claimed that viewing at schools was supervised by teachers. However, the council upheld a complaint about a scene depicting a young man being shot dead by police.'

BfK's thanks to both Quentin Blake and Mary Hoffman who drew our attention to the above. No doubt Michael Bond, who really did write the Paddington Bear books, is consulting his lawyers. Come to think of it, maybe Edward Bond is doing the same.

Readers of **BfK** who spot similar Kid-Lit Clangers in the national press are invited to pass them on to us post-haste. We'll pay the senders handsomely on publication ... well, a crisp fiver, perhaps. ■

'My greatest triumph is that my books have uncovered a whole bunch of kids who never read before.'

Francine Pascal

Francine Pascal's SWEET VALLEY HIGH



The most popular teenage series ever written – there's much more to it than just romance!

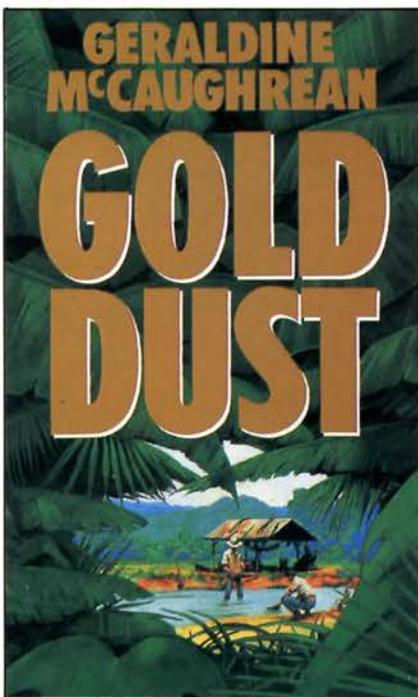


TRANSWORLD CHILDREN'S BOOKS

MONEY, MYTHS . . . AND A MONSTER

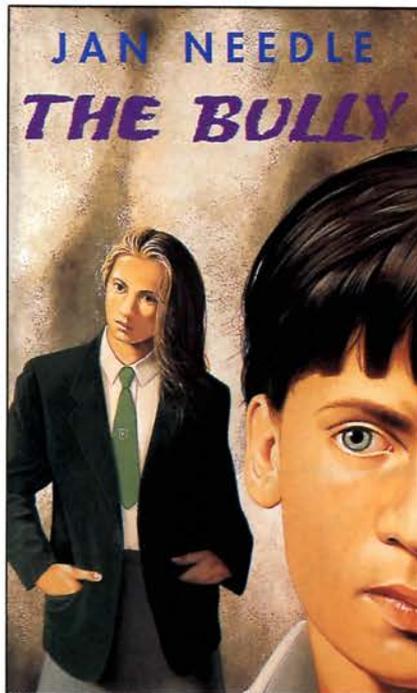
JILL BURRIDGE reviews current hardback fiction for teenagers.

You can't judge a book by the cover but I have to confess that I do fall for titles. Melvin Burgess hooked me with **The Baby and Fly Pie** (Andersen, 0 86264 461 5, £8.99). Fly Pie and his accomplice, Sly Sam, are rubbish kids, orphans who work for Mother Shelly sorting the tips in East London for anything that can be turned into cash. You wonder at first if this is set in the past, till you come to the chilling realisation that this is the future. No welfare state cares for Fly Pie (he got his name when he baked a chocolate pie for Mother Shelly and accidentally included a large bluebottle with the filling). Mother Shelly just keeps him and others like him to sift the rubbish. But everything changes for Fly and Sam the day they find a baby on the tip, a baby who's been kidnapped and is worth a £17 million ransom. It sounds bleak and the tension of the story is such that you know there can be no last-minute rescue. But the tale is compulsive and its wry tone brings flashes of humour and occasional warmth. Gritty and realistic, this novel touches and challenges, and certainly can't be put down.



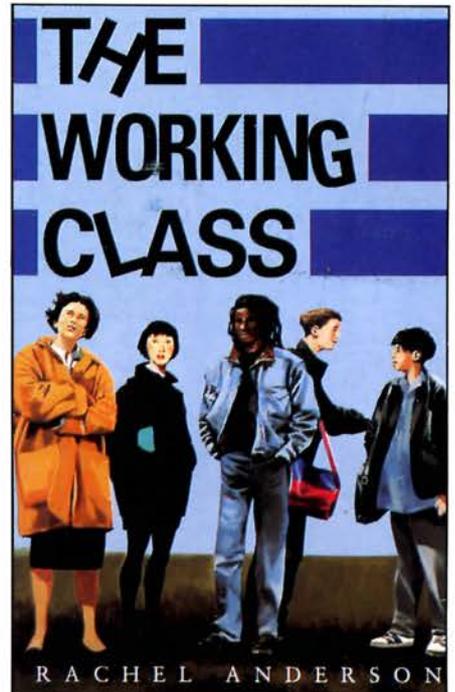
If money was the root of evil for Fly Pie, it's also the root of all the problems which beset Inez and her brother Maro in Geraldine McCaughrean's **Gold Dust** (Oxford, 0 19 271721 9, £9.99). Again, it isn't money for the sake of wealth, it's money for the sake of survival. Inez and Maro live in modern-day Brazil, in a village called Serra Vazia on the edge of the rainforest. Life exists in a time warp, the juke box still plays Nat King Cole and Doris Day, until one day two local layabouts dig a hole in the main street and start excavating for gold. Soon Serra Vazia is a mish-mash of intriguing characters, strongly drawn and warmly portrayed. The close attention to detail takes you right into the heart of this community to share their sadness and laugh at their eccentricities. In their own way, everyone falls prey to the lure of wealth. Inez' ideals are undermined, her

illusions shattered, but she comes to understand human nature, as she and her brother retrieve the situation with a climax that's credible, exciting and amusing.



Jan Needle goes straight to the heart of the matter with his novel, **The Bully** (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13381 5, £8.99). It's a provocative piece of writing which makes you question your own attitudes. On the face of it, Simon Mason is a bully; he's clumsy and withdrawn, a loner who gets picked on by his classmates and the only way he can express his frustration is to lash out physically. He's intimidating Anna Royle, her brother David and her friend Rebekkah. Well, that's the way it seems to the teachers, even to Simon's mother. But reading between the lines a very different story emerges. It's Anna who is articulate and intelligent enough to manipulate the situation to her advantage against Simon. She's devious and malicious and her vicious intentions know no bounds, even when one teacher, Louise Shaw, is perceptive enough to question what's going on. What this story offers is the disturbing psychology behind events that sadly often make the news.

A school setting of a very different nature comes with Rachel Anderson's **The Working Class** (Oxford, 0 19 271717 0, £9.99). A class of fifth-formers is assigned a fortnight's work experience and each chapter pursues the students as they get their first taste of a nine-to-five job. There's Julie dying to imitate the doctors and nurses on her favourite TV programme, until she discovers that her sort of nursing involves cups of tea, tidying the ward and hiding in the sluice. Almost despite himself, Leroy finds an outlet for his particular brand of music and ends up playing the organ in the local funeral parlour. Some of the stories work better than others – introducing historical flashbacks, that give an insight into the world of work for youngsters in the past, was perhaps a mistake since it disturbs the continuity of the theme, but here you have a quietly observed, varied and well-characterised selection of stories.



For those who prefer folk tale to reality, Susan Price has written **Head and Tales** (Faber, 0 571 16914 7, £9.99), another collection of short stories which are chilling and sober, and make compulsive reading. The macabre setting focuses on Linnet, a storyteller, whose dying wish involves cutting off his head, wrapping it in cloth and giving it to his two children, First Born and Little Un, to carry with them to their grandmother's house far away. Don't be put off by that because, though devoid of emotional involvement, these narratives have a power of their own. As each stage of the journey brings some new threat or hazard, the head comes to life and tells a story to avert disaster and help the children on their way. The tales are sharp and succinct, a mixture of fable, myth, even legend. It's the story of Alexander, the knight in golden armour, which finally gains the head a burial and provides us with a well-crafted conclusion. Susan Price has the ability to mesmerise her readers, haunting them with the aura of the story. She writes with a dispassionate, but thought-provoking voice. ■

Jill Burridge is Producer of **Treasure Islands**, Radio 4's children's book programme. She's just written, with Michael Rosen, a book based on recordings from the programme over the last six years. It's called **Treasure Islands 2**, BBC Books (0 563 36773 3), and costs £5.00.

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Wendy Cooling on **Rising Stars** in **Children's Books**
 Rosalind Kerven on **Myths and Legends** in the **Primary Classroom**
 Tessa Strickland recommends **Going to School on a Story**
 Ted Percy looks at **Gardening Books for Young People**
 Margaret Meek reviews current **hardbacks**
 Philip Ridley in **Authorgraph . . .**
 plus reviews, news and more reviews