

Rising Stars in

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

March 1994 No. 85
UK Price £2.15

the children's book magazine





Over 150
WINNIE-THE-POOH
 books are now available
 to learn from and enjoy –
 from story books
 to stationery.



*Timeless classics to charm
 all age groups.*



METHUEN · MAMMOTH · DEAN

Imprints of Reed Children's Books

A member of the Reed Elsevier group

Contents

Editor's Page 3

News and comment from the Editor

Rising Stars 4

Wendy Cooling on new talent



Shakespeare 8

Susan Elkin reviews adaptations

Reviews 9

Paperbacks 14

Series 15

Audio 18

Non-fiction 16

Authorgraph No. 85 16

Philip Ridley interviewed by George Hunt

A Bit of Earth 20

Ted Percy selects books on gardening

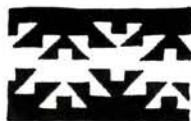
Contemplating Carnegie 25

(continued)

Letters

Going to School on a Story 27

Tessa Strickland



Into the Realms of Myth 28

Rosalind Kerven on writing with children

News 31

A Kind of Catching Up 32

Margaret Meek looks at new books from old favourites

Cover Story

The illustration on our March cover is by Chris Riddell. It is taken from Philip Ridley's new book, *Meteorite Spoon*, published next month by Viking, to whom we're grateful for help in using this illustration. Details of the book are given in the Authorgraph on pages 16-17.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

MARCH 1994 No. 85

ISSN 0143-909X; © School Bookshop Assoc. 1994
Editor: Chris Powling; Managing Director: Richard Hill
Design & typeset: Rondale Ltd., Lydney, Glos.
Printed by: Wiltshire (Bristol) Ltd.

Editorial correspondence: **Books for Keeps**,
The Old Chapel, Easton, Nr Winchester,
Hampshire SO21 1EG Tel: 0962 779600.

Subscription correspondence: **081-852 4953**
Books for Keeps can be obtained on subscription by
sending a cheque or postal order to Books for Keeps,
6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. You can
also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or
Mastercard).

Annual subscription for six issues:
£12.90 (UK); £18.80 (Europe/overseas surface mail);
£21.50 (airmail)

Single copies:
£2.15 (UK); £3.15 (Europe/overseas surface mail);
£3.60 (airmail)

EDITOR'S PAGE

Mrs Surefire

Anne Fine has had her triumphs of late: two Carnegie medals, a Whitbread Award, the Smarties Prize . . . but who's counting? Suffice it to say that in the last few years she's scooped the Kid Lit pool.

Now, surely, she's surpassed herself. After all, Pratchetts may come and Dahls may go but how many writers for young people can claim to have provided a star vehicle for Robin Williams? The movie, *Mrs Doubtfire*, based on Anne Fine's novel *Madame Doubtfire*, currently tops the American box office and promises to be a similar smash-hit in Britain judging by the almost full auditorium on a cold Tuesday in Basingstoke when I saw it.



Of course, much has changed in the transition from page to screen. Though the basic storyline has been retained – the antics of an out-of-work actor with a broken marriage who cross-dresses in order to gain access to his children – the narrative has received the full Hollywood Treatment at the hands of director Chris Columbus and co-writers Leslie Dixon and Randi Mayem Singer. And very effective treatment it is, too. The shift to a family audience has upped the quota of wisecracks, screwed a tight plot even tighter and, by way of re-location to glorious San Francinema-sco, greatly augmented the glamour. Add to this some highly professional performances from the three children, from Sally Field as the exasperated Mum, from the Man Himself as you-know-who, and I defy anyone, except perhaps a critic, not to laugh as loud and as long as I did.

So that's all right, then.

Well . . . almost. As I left the auditorium alongside other satisfied customers, a query or two was already surfacing. What bothered me was something my daughter, then aged eleven, had said seven years ago when we'd finished reading the book as her bedtime story. 'Dad,' she remarked, 'it's not really a funny book, is it . . . underneath it's quite serious.' She meant passages like this, I think:

He was in full blast. Lydia and Christopher stood in sullen silence, while Natalie looked weepy and confused.

'I've sat through as many boring old child health clinics and grisly playgroups in church halls as she has. I assure you. I've iced your birthday cakes, and wallpapered your bedrooms.' He banged his chest. 'I was even the sodding tooth fairy! Oh, yes. Make no mistake, I did as much as she did. You are my children as much as hers!'

Lydia and Christopher glowered, deeply indignant at the lecture, and smarting particularly under its implications of ownership. Natalie stood with her eyes lowered, inspecting her thumbs. She hadn't realised that before, about the tooth fairy . . .



Here, there's a dimension the movie never attempts. At the time, the tooth fairy reference had Ellie and me giggling helplessly – indeed, the phrase 'sodding tooth-fairy' has passed into household parlance. What wasn't lost on us, though, is the pain underlying the comedy. Anne Fine's free-wheeling farce has an Ayckbournian blackness and edge.

The movie ignores this completely. So attractive are the central characters on screen – whether child or adult – that the main suspension of disbelief required of the audience concerns the break-up of this Wackily Wonderful family in the first place. After this, accepting Robin Williams in drag is a doddle.

There's a similar retreat from the sheer toughness of reality at the climax of the film when Dad's belated success as a TV presenter brings about a suspiciously promising resolution to some of his marital difficulties. Again, the novel tells it rather differently:

'How did you get here?' he asked her.

'I had a fight. She didn't want me to come. She called me disloyal. She said you'd forfeited your right to a visit today.'

'What did you say?'

Lydia turned. Her eyes were filled with tears. She looked exhausted.

'I told her I was not going to live my life between the two of you any more, thinking about her rights and yours. I told her I thought I had rights of my own, and from now on you two had better start thinking of mine.'

Daniel's eyes widened.

'What did she say when you said that?'

'I didn't actually say it,' confessed Lydia. 'I yelled it.'

No shrinking from antagonism, or agony, here.

In short, the jokes in the film version are bought much more cheaply and charmingly than the novel's. Instead of the tooth fairy we get sodding Tinkerbell.

Is this simply because Anne Fine is a better and more daring writer than Leslie Dixon and Randi Mayem Singer? Very probably . . . but, in all fairness, it's hard to be sure. As team-players, screenwriters have much less control over their text than writers of books. Also, given the financial imperatives of a big budget movie, a vital part of their task is to minimise the risks of audience disapproval. My guess is that Dixon and Singer would concede, and even envy, the greater depth and bite of Fine.

Luckily, of course, as a side-effect of their own success and the book sales it will promote, that depth and bite now promises to reach a wider readership than ever. So we have all the more reason to welcome the Doubtfires, Mrs or Madame . . . and all the more reason to celebrate the surefire talent which made both possible. If there were an Oscar for best original source-material, I bet I know who'd win it in '94 . . .

Chris

RISING STARS

Wendy Cooling on new talent in children's books

The wealth of children's writers and illustrators currently at work is one good reason not to be constrained by those 'Lists' but instead to give children access to the widest possible range of books. Our aim is surely to encourage children to develop their own taste in reading and to hope that they will choose to read the best of the new books as well as the best of the old.

So what is the best?

Different for all of us perhaps, but one element I'm looking for is what Margaret Mahy would call 'astonishment'. I hope all the books mentioned have something in them that will astonish the young reader – will give them a moment to sit up and think 'WOW!'. The writers and illustrators I've chosen are all developing in interesting ways and have all been enthused about by young readers – they've all been picked by me and at least one child.

Helen Cooper has been writing and illustrating children's books since 1986, but I first took real notice of her work when I saw her magical illustrations in Saviour Pirotta's *Soloman's Secret*. 1993 was a good year for Helen as she had three books published, books that really show us an extraordinary artist and storyteller developing. In *Chestnut Grey* she re-tells and illustrates a Russian folktale in which a supernatural horse enables a poor boy to win the hand of a princess. We've heard the story before, but this is a very fresh interpretation as the story is told in simple and effective language and illustrated with elegance. She uses space and colour well and the result is a well-designed, whole book.

The Bear Under the Stairs looks at childhood fear in an imaginative way – it was shortlisted for the Smarties Prize. William is afraid of bears, especially the one that lives in the cupboard under the stairs. He tries to keep the bear happy by throwing in food whenever he passes – 'He fed it bananas, bacon and bread. He fed it hazelnuts, haddock and honey . . .' Soon bad smells drift under the cupboard door and William and his mum investigate. They find the rotting food, but no bear. The rather gentle pictures tell a different story – we see a bear arriving, exploring the house, hiding from the family and in the end packing up and leaving when the food supply is withdrawn. This rather beautiful book is a delight to read with under-5s who have so many questions to ask, questions that can't be answered, for, who knows, is it all in William's imagination or does the shadowy bear really take up residence?

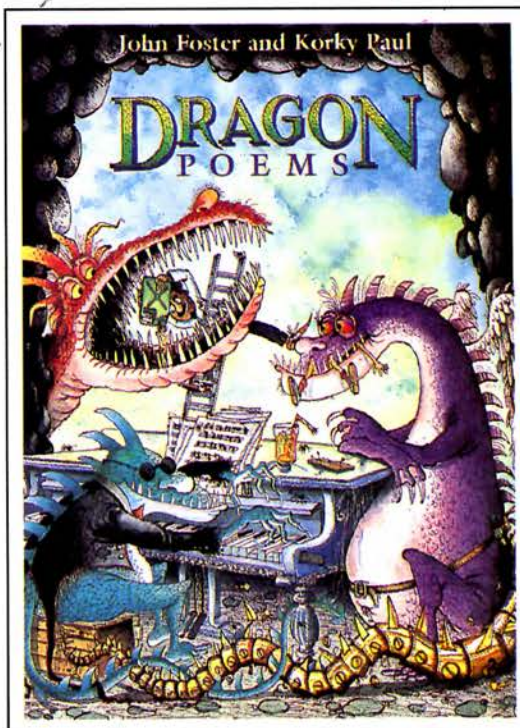
Helen's illustrations are even more inventive in *The House Cat* as she shows the cat making two great and contrasting journeys. The first journey is shown through the eyes of the cat peering through a hole he's scratched in his travelling box – he remembers it all ready for the journey back – alone. I loved the return journey across the tops of cars, by raft and rope across the river, up a tree and home! Helen Cooper uses the page in exciting ways to express mood and movement and has produced a book to delight cat lovers, children and adults alike. What I wonder will 1994 bring?

Korky Paul's contribution to children's books is very exciting – he's not a newcomer but does he really get the attention he deserves? His work is crammed with humour and details, it's lively, full of movement and forces the reader to turn the page. *Winnie the Witch*, published in 1987, won The Children's Book Award and has become a classic. It's clearly a huge hit for I often see children in primary schools drawing witches with orange and yellow

striped legs. Both illustrations and story are hugely memorable.

In *Captain Teachum's Buried Treasure*, shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal, he uses the pages imaginatively and creates a fantastic pirate character, surpassed only by 'Mrs Pirate' who is really in charge and makes the wickedest pirate in the world do the washing-up. *The Fish Who Could Wish* is even more wonderful with amazing underwater scenes really supporting the rhythmic text in which wishes, as always, are badly used. The poetry books Korky Paul has produced in partnership with John Foster are surely a must for all primary classrooms – the illustrations match and extend the poems rather than just decorating the pages. My favourite is *Dragon Poems* – it's full of dragons of real character, all colours, shapes and sizes and in all sorts of situations. The stunning page of ice dragons reflects the power and range of the artist's imagination. Incidentally, these books are extremely good value at under £3.00.

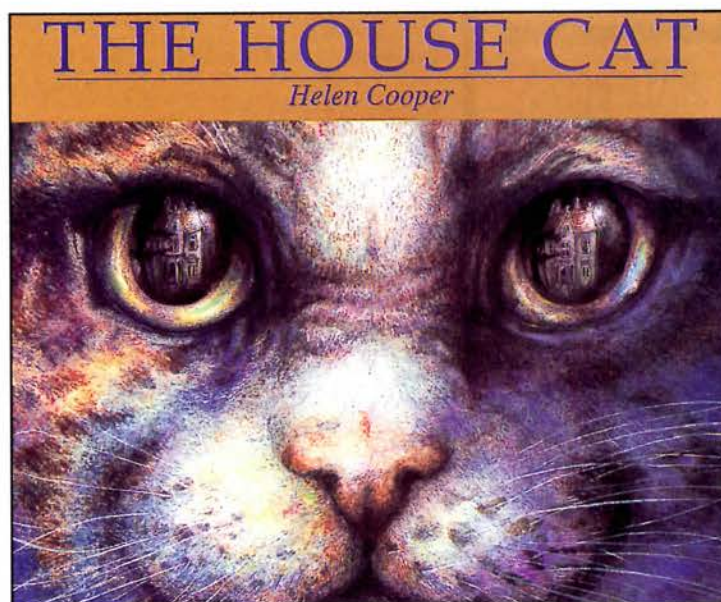
I loved the female scientist in *Professor Puffendorf's Secret* and the colour and detail in the pictures of her laboratory are mind-boggling for young readers. Last year Korky Paul again made the Greenaway shortlist with *The Dog That Dug*, a book that looks sensational from cover to cover – including end-papers – and where the illustrations bring the rhyming text to life. Dare I go on about *Sanji and the Baker*, a tale of wisdom in which Sanji is taken to



court, accused of stealing the Baker's smells – the artwork is so evocative that I could smell the fresh bread, the cinnamon buns, the sesame biscuits and the date nut loaves!

Sonia Holleyman's *Mona* is loved and laughed at by readers of 5+. *Mona the Vampire* came first and was followed by *Mona the Hairdresser* and *Mona the Champion*. *Mona*, a crazy, cartoon character, is never short of an answer – she needs money for a new bicycle so she sets up in business as a hairdresser, with disastrous results, of course. The preparations, *Mona* in her hairdressing clothes and the hairstyles she gives her clients are hilarious. In *Mona the Champion* she takes her cat, Fang, and her shark fin to the swimming pool which amazingly is soon empty and perfect to swim in. These mad and lively illustrations are adored by children and the books have wide appeal, even to the most reluctant readers.

I particularly like Sonia's illustrations in Humphrey Carpenter's *What Did You Do at School Today?* – they cleverly reveal the





Mona and Fang created unusual effects with Dad's shaving cream and some other handy things from the bathroom shelf.

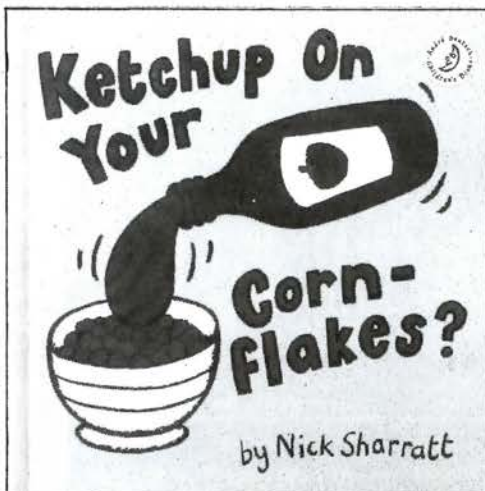
From *Mona the Hairdresser*.

difference in the thinking of children and adults. The Frankenstein family and the human friend created to illustrate Tony Bradman's *Frankie Meets a Friend* are very popular with children as the young Frankie gets what he wants in the end.

A cockerel falls in love with a beautiful chicken in *Tanya the Chicken*, which Sonia Holleyman both wrote and illustrated. He has to rescue her in a flying machine built by his farmyard friends. The book is a first reader in which the story is well-told and the large black-and-white drawings support and divide the text into manageable chunks. It's good to see this artist branching out in her work so successfully.

It was Nick Sharratt who gave Jacqueline Wilson's wonderfully readable books – *The Story of Tracy Beaker*, *The Suitcase Kid*, *The Mum-Minder* and *The Bed and Breakfast Star* – their own distinctive 'look'. His illustration is exactly right – just enough to help newish readers along, yet giving them space to imagine so much for themselves – excellent book design, I think.

In partnership with Jill Bennett, he's produced *Machine Poems*, *People Poems*, *Tasty Poems* and *Noisy Poems* – bright and exciting combinations of poems and pictures that really do switch young readers on to poetry. The illustrations are full of variety and humour – look for Uncle Paul of Pimlico's cats, the 'Yickety-yaks', the thunderstorm and the ladies dressed for winter weather. Don't share *Tasty Poems* with a 6-year-old who's just beginning to read unless you have time to go through the book five or six times, allowing for a little finger to follow the straw from chocolate milk to mouth, to count the snow-cones the octopus has in its tentacles and to describe the taste of a mango.



As well as illustrating, Nick is now writing. In *Don't Put Your Finger in the Jelly, Nelly!*

he uses photographs for the first time in his work. The resulting book invites children to put their fingers into all sorts of foods with surprising results. Coming this month is *Ketchup on Your Cornflakes?* which looks like being very tasty – clearly, as he admits, eating is his 'favourite pastime'.

I first came across Malorie Blackman's writing in *School Tales*, a book of short stories by young women. Hers is the final story, 'Child's Play', a tale of bullying, revenge and murder; it's tightly constructed, shocking and completely unexpected. Here I thought was a writer with ideas, ideas that needed bravery if they were to be used in children's stories. 'Child's Play' was published in 1990 and Malorie Blackman has since given up her job in computing, become a full-time writer and written successfully for a range of age groups.

Her *Betsey Biggalow* stories, set in the Caribbean, are for children newly confident in their reading and they're a delight – the books look enticing and the stories are fun, moving and very real. In *Betsey Biggalow is Here!*, the story of Betsey's longing for a special, and expensive, pair of trainers reflects an understanding, or a clear memory, of how children think. These are stories for 6-, 7- and 8-year-olds to fight over.

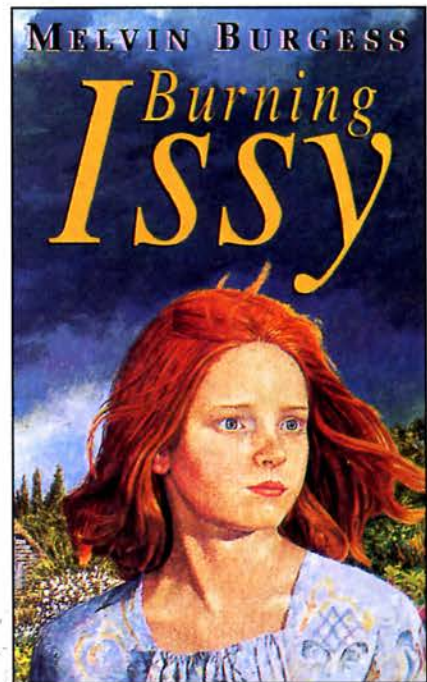
Then there are her books like *Hacker* and *Operation Gadgetman!* for the next age group. *Hacker* is a thrilling detective novel in which Vicky's passion for computers plays a central part. It's not just an exciting thriller, for it touches on issues of family relationships, adoption, colour and self-image in a thoughtful, non-preachy way – it's a most satisfying read on many levels. In *Operation Gadgetman!*, Beatrice, known to all but her teachers as Beans, is the central character. Her father, an inventor who seldom gets things right the first time, is kidnapped for the plans of his latest invention and so it's Beans to the rescue! A good story, full of humour and excitement that's sure to turn lots of young readers on to books.

Malorie has also written short stories for teenagers as in *Not So Stupid!*, again full of original ideas, and *Trust Me*, a novel for young adults. I do wonder what this talented writer will produce next.

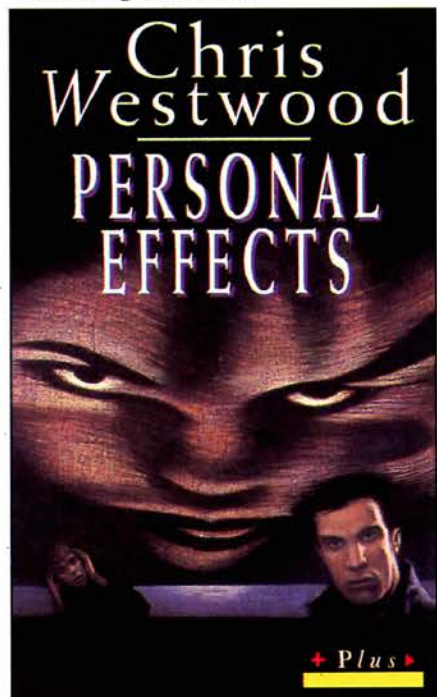
The four published novels of Melvin Burgess deal with difficult subjects – hunting, witches and homelessness – and do not end comfortably, but they do all reveal a very skilled storyteller. *The Cry of the Wolf* (which has one of the best covers ever) and *An Angel for May* were shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and surely the quality and power of his writing must bring him an award one day.

Burning Issy, set in Lancashire during the witch hunts of the seventeenth-century and strongly rooted in fact, is for me his most powerful novel. Issy, badly burnt as a baby, is taken in by the kindly Nat and brought up with love, but her past is a part of her that has to be faced and that involves her in witchcraft both good and evil. The author vividly describes a time when men talked about God but were taken over by their fear of the devil.

His latest novel, *The Baby and Fly Pie*, is set in the world of the homeless where children need the protection of the 'Mothers' they scavenge for if they're to have any security. Three of Mother Shelly's children find a dying gunman and a kidnapped baby and see a chance to escape to a better world – if they can only return the baby and claim the reward, they'll be able to leave Mother Shelly, the dump and the city. Sadly, their problems follow them and there's no fairytale ending to this compulsive and harrowing book. How I wanted things to work out for the children, but this writer involves the reader, plays havoc with the emotions and is certainly not about cosy endings.



Robert Swindells wrote: 'I'm a Stephen King fan and Chris Westwood comes as close to matching the Master as any writer I know.' Now I had to read Stephen King when students of mine, usually those reluctant to read, chose to write their GCSE Open Studies on horror books – I didn't particularly enjoy the experience. Chris Westwood I read willingly, but admit that his most recent novel, *Brother of Mine*, to do with the horror that can build up in a real relationship rather than with haunting, murder or possession, is for me by far his best book. Readers of 12+ won't all agree with me and will find the suspense and horror of *Calling All Monsters*, *A Light in the Black* and *Personal Effects* chilling and compulsive. The writing is powerful and the plots original and well-sustained as the books rush to sometimes shocking endings – as in *Calling All Monsters*.



For me *Brother of Mine* really demonstrates how much Chris Westwood has developed as a writer as he explores the relationship of twin brothers, trapped by their similarity and by their differences into a hatred of each other. When Tony meets Nick's girlfriend and allows her to believe he's his brother, the hatred grows and Nick looks for

PUFFIN BOOKS

proudly presents



including

Gillian Cross
THE GREAT
ELEPHANT CHASE

Anne Fine
FLOUR BABIES

Margaret Mahy
UNDERRUNNERS

Philip Pullman
The SALLY LOCKHART
Quartet

All published in paperback in April

ONLY PUFFIN CAN BOAST
A FICTION MONTH LIKE THIS!

Librarians: a star studded display bin is available from your library supplier, with 4 fabulous author posters with your order. Order your dumpbin now for release in April.



Puffin Books. Growing up with your children.



THE RUBY IN THE SMOKE
£3.99 0140 36627X

THE SHADOW IN THE NORTH
£3.99 0140 366083

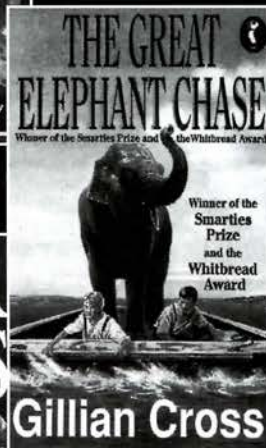
THE TIGER IN THE WELL
£4.99 0140 366288

THE TIN PRINCESS
£3.99 0140 366040

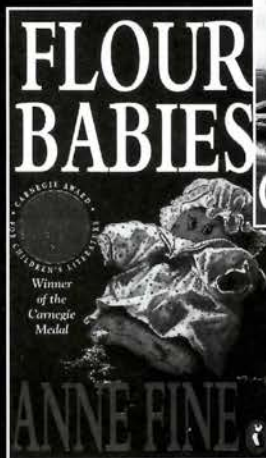


UNDERRUNNERS
£3.99 0140 348581

THE GREAT
ELEPHANT CHASE
£3.99 0140 363610



FLOUR BABIES
£3.50 0140 361472

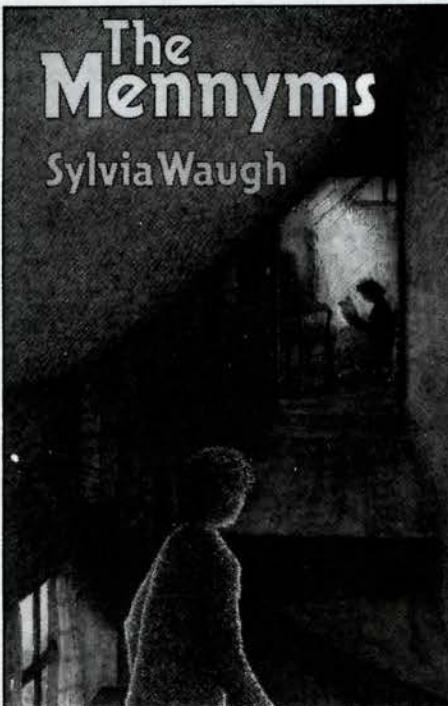


Puffin Books, Penguin Books Ltd., 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ.

revenge. Alternate chapters tell the story from both points of view and at times, like Alex and Vicky, I found it hard not to confuse the two. This is a well-shaped novel, shockingly realistic and very disturbing; its high quality offers promise of even better to come.

1993 saw the arrival of three exceptional new writers for readers of 10+. Pat Moon gave us two books and **Double Image**, her first book for older readers, was shortlisted for the Smarties Prize. The central character, David, goes reluctantly to stay with his grandad after his nan's death and the discovery of an old photograph leads him to investigate a long-kept family secret. The past, not talked about for years, is suddenly faced and the family are able to laugh and cry together again. It's fast-paced and I couldn't put the book down. Pat Moon's development of character is strong, particularly in the growing relationship between David and his grandad.

The second novel, **The Spying Game**, is of the same high standard and reflects a real knowledge and understanding of young people. 11-year-old Joe is hurt and angry; his dad has been killed in a road accident and somebody must pay. Talking is impossible and Joe alone decides that the other driver involved has 'murdered' his dad and must be punished. Joe begins to persecute the Moss family cruelly and things really get out of hand when he starts a new school and finds Alex Moss is in his class. Joe slowly faces the truth of the situation, understands the results of his own dreadful behaviour and so begins to cope with big issues and with simply growing up. Pat Moon provides gripping reads and really gets into the minds of her totally convincing characters.



Sylvia Waugh's first novel, **The Mennymys**, is very different and certainly not rooted in reality. It's a book that demands a strong response; you'll love it . . . or hate it! I loved it as I was immediately intrigued and captivated by the imaginative leap of the writer. The devoted Mennym family have lived at No 5 Brocklehurst Grove for over 40 years. They're life-size rag dolls who 'came out of their silence and methodically took over the house' when the old lady who made them died. An unexpected letter from Albert Pond, their Australian landlord, proposes a visit and life at No 5 is never quite calm again. Read it now if you haven't already and join in the argument. I'm eagerly awaiting **Mennymys in the Wilderness** promised for July this year.

There's a lot to celebrate in the world of children's books but I can't think of anything more worth celebrating than the publication of **Someone Came Knocking** by Anne Merrick. She tells the story of Tod, a boy cruelly treated and abused by the man he supposes to be his father, and the journey he takes to regain his memory and his home. Tod's companion is Mim, a doll with forget-me-not blue eyes and a red bow of a mouth, made as a Guy to earn him some money for the journey. Mim seems to speak to Tod, to somehow prompt his memory with scraps of old rhymes and songs and so help him as he travels 'over the hills and far away'. Anne Merrick is a wonderful storyteller and has given the book a touch of magic that makes the incredible events of

the journey seem credible. She forces the reader to care about the characters and uses all the elements of the traditional story to move the novel to a most satisfying ending. This really is a very special book from an exciting new writer and I give the last word to an 11-year-old girl living a life full of problems who talked to me after reading **Someone Came Knocking** and said: 'That Tod, is he real? I didn't know other people forgot things they didn't want to remember.' ■

[Ed's note: Two of the books mentioned here are included in our paperback review pages - see **The Dog That Dug**, page 9, and **Burning Issy**, page 12.]

Book Details:

MALORIE BLACKMAN

Betsy Biggalow is Here!, Piccadilly, 1 85340 172 2, £6.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 1421 1, £2.99 pbk

'Child's Play' in **School Tales**, ed. Jill Dawson, Livewire, 0 7043 4922 1, £3.99 pbk

Hacker, Doubleday, 0 385 40278 3, £8.99; Corgi, 0 552 52751 3, £2.99 pbk

Not So Stupid!, Livewire, 0 7043 4924 8, £3.50 pbk

Operation Gadgetman!, Doubleday, 0 385 40337 2, £8.99

Trust Me, Livewire, 0 7043 4931 0, £3.99 pbk

MELVIN BURGESS

(from Andersen unless stated)

An Angel for May, 0 86264 398 8, £8.99

The Baby and Fly Pie, 0 86264 461 5, £9.99

Burning Issy, 0 86264 381 3, £7.99; Knight, 0 340 59024 6, £3.50 pbk

The Cry of the Wolf, 0 86264 308 2, £6.99; Plus, 0 14 034459 4, £3.50 pbk

HELEN COOPER

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

Chestnut Grey, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0725 9, £7.99

The House Cat, Scholastic, 0 590 54117 X, £8.99

Soloman's Secret, Saviour Pirota, Mammoth, 0 7497 0934 0, £3.50 pbk

SONIA HOLLEYMAN

(Orchard unless stated)

Frankie Makes a Friend, Tony Bradman, Andersen, 0 86264 378 3, £6.50; 0 86264 420 8, £2.99 pbk

Mona the Champion, 1 85213 549 2, £7.99; **Mona the Hairdresser**, 1 85213 305 8, £7.99; 1 85213 499 2, £3.50 pbk; **Mona the Vampire**, 1 85213 240 X, £7.95; 1 85213 328 7, £2.99 pbk

Tanya the Chicken, 1 85213 239 6, £5.99

What Did You Do at School Today?, Humphrey Carpenter, 1 85213 388 0, £7.99; 1 85213 521 2, £3.50 pbk

ANNE MERRICK

Someone Came Knocking, Spindlewood, 0 907349 32, £9.95

PAT MOON

(Orchard)

Double Image, 1 85213 496 8, £8.99; 1 85213 761 5, £3.50 pbk

The Spying Game, 1 85213 623 5, £8.99; 1 85213 624 3, £4.99 pbk



KORKY PAUL

(Oxford unless stated)

Captain Teachum's Buried Treasure, with Peter Carter, 0 19 272230 1, £2.95 pbk

The Dog That Dug, with Jonathan Long, Bodley Head, 0 370 31652 5, £7.99; Red Fox, 0 09 998610 8, £3.99 pbk

Dragon Poems, with John Foster, 0 19 276108 0, £2.99 pbk

The Fish Who Could Wish, with John Bush, 0 19 272240 9, £2.95 pbk

Professor Puffendorf's Secret Potions, with Robin Tzannes, 0 19 279925 8, £6.95; 0 19 272261 1, £2.95 pbk

Sanji and the Baker, with Robin Tzannes, 0 19 279960 6, £6.99

Winnie the Witch, with Valerie Thomas, 0 19 279847 2, £6.95; 0 19 272197 6, £2.99 pbk

NICK SHARRATT

Don't Put Your Finger in the Jelly, Nelly!, Scholastic, 0 590 54085 8, £7.99

Ketchup on Your Cornflakes?, Scholastic, 0 590 54151 X, £6.99

With Jill Bennett, from Oxford:

Machine Poems, 0 19 276114 5, £2.50 pbk; **Noisy Poems**, 0 19 278219 3, £2.50 pbk; **People Poems**, 0 19 276086 6, £4.95; 0 19 276110 2, £2.50 pbk; **Tasty Poems**, 0 19 276109 9, £4.95; 0 19 276133 1, £2.50 pbk

With Jacqueline Wilson, from Doubleday:

The Bed and Breakfast Star, 0 385 40321 6, £8.99; **The Mum-Minder**, 0 385 40321 6, £8.99; **The Story of Tracy Beaker**, 0 385 400756, £8.99; Yearling, 0 440 86279 5, £2.99; **The Suitcase Kid**, 0 385 401752, £8.99; Yearling, 0 440 86311 2, £2.99 pbk

SYLVIA WAUGH

The Mennymys, Julia MacRae, 1 85681 208 1, £8.99

CHRIS WESTWOOD

(Viking hbks, Puffin pbks)

Brother of Mine, 0 670 84770 4, £7.50

Calling All Monsters, 0 14 034421 7, £3.99 pbk

A Light in the Black, 0 670 82726 6, £5.99; 0 14 034075 0, £3.99 pbk

Personal Effects, 0 670 38799 1, £6.99; 0 14 034759 3, £3.99 pbk

Wendy Cooling is now working freelance on consultancies and in-service work. Before that she taught for 20 years in London schools and was, for all too short a spell in BfK's view, Head of the Children's Book Foundation.

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.

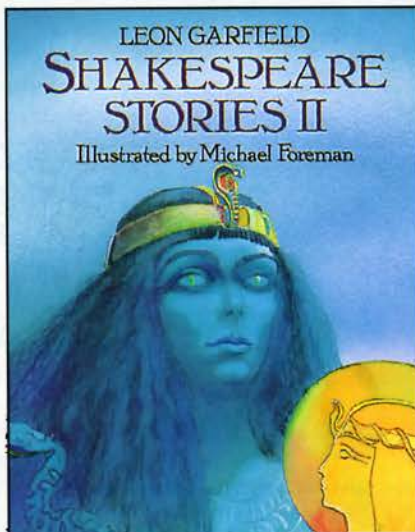
LEON GARFIELD'S SHAKESPEARE

Susan Elkin welcomes a second instalment

Many of us are familiar with Leon Garfield's 1985 volume which crisply and evocatively presented the stories of 12 plays – including the two less obviously attractive histories, **Richard II** and **Henry IV, Part I**. The joy of Garfield is that he seamlessly blends his own vibrantly poetic prose passages with words, phrases or sentences taken directly from Shakespeare. Thus we have "Get thee to a nunnery!" shouted Hamlet wildly. Yet at the same time he ached with remorse for the frightened girl' and "What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here, so near the bed of the Fairy Queen?" Puck, lurking among leaves, peered out at the worthy workmen's solemn antics. He grinned crookedly, and his eyes glittered like spots of dew.' Michael Foreman's spikily sinister illustrations are spot on, too.

Garfield also wrote the screenplay for each of the six plays in the recently televised **Animated Shakespeare** series. Although the text was pruned down to the bone in order to reduce the time to 25 minutes, the words left were almost entirely Shakespeare's. While I felt uneasy with these fripperies, many people reported that their very young children were captivated. Dozens of older children told me themselves in school how much they were enjoying them, too. If the next generation is wooed by 'cartoonised' Shakespeare and maybe comes later to a more authentic rendering, then who am I to condemn it? It's good news therefore that six further animated Shakespeare plays are in preparation for transmission late in 1994.

Leon Garfield's new book, with its enigmatic depiction of a blue and gold Cleopatra on the cover, offers retellings of a further nine plays. As in the earlier book, to which it is a companion volume, the choice is eclectic and unpatronising. **Measure for Measure** and **Richard III** are not the most obvious choices for presenting to children



but the accessible text and Foreman's thoughtful pictures will help readers towards understanding some of the complex and universal adult issues involved. An imaginative way into the confusions of lust and embittered ambition, for instance. Many children will be able to read **Much Ado about Nothing** and tie it in with the spell-binding new Kenneth Branagh film. **Julius Caesar** and **As You Like It** are also there, among others.

Traditionally teachers relied on dusty old Lamb to make Shakespeare more approachable for children but in the last few years there have been other story versions of the plays. Bernard Miles's 1976 account of five, for example, is resonantly chatty as ever. Although Victor Ambrus's flamboyant illustrations are attractive, I worry that the

stories and the language seem to have strayed too far from Shakespeare's text. In short: strong on Miles but weak on Shakespeare.

An updated, illustrated, Czech-produced version of 15 of Lamb's original tales has also just arrived from Sunburst Books. After Garfield they have all the excitement of flat beer. There is little poetry. The unnamed writer merely follows Lamb's dull text fairly closely with occasional modern 'improvements' such as the replacement of 'refractory' with 'disobedient' and 'Herculean task' with 'difficult labour'. The drawings (also anonymous) are greily uninspired.

Of course, there's a great deal more to Shakespeare than his stories but it's not such a bad place to start since almost anyone can relate to a clear narrative. And **Shakespeare Stories** from Leon Garfield and Michael Foreman remains unsurpassed. ■

The books:

Shakespeare Stories, Leon Garfield, ill. Michael Foreman, Gollancz, 0 575 03095 X, £14.95; 0 575 04340 7, £8.99 pbk

Shakespeare Stories II, Leon Garfield, ill. Michael Foreman, Gollancz, 0 575 05049 7, £14.99

Tales from Shakespeare, Charles and Mary Lamb, Puffin, 0 14 035088 8, £3.50 pbk

Favourite Tales from Shakespeare, Bernard Miles, ill. Victor Ambrus, Hamlyn, o/p

Illustrated Tales from Shakespeare: A modern adaptation from Charles and Mary Lamb, Sunburst Books, 1 85778 021 3, £9.99

Susan Elkin is a teacher of English, and sometimes other subjects, as well as being a freelance journalist. She lives in Kent and has two grown-up sons.

NURSERY / INFANT

Ruby to the Rescue

Maggie Glen, Red Fox (Nov 93), 0 09 995490 7, £3.99



Ruby is back – as an ardent fan, I feel like shouting from the rooftops because this second book is just as good as the first! When Ruby rescues two of the school's playhouse bears from a woeful existence,

I felt honour-bound to search out our own motley crew and try to improve their lot before I was shamed, with the children, into feelings of total guilt. The illustrations, the ingenuity and appeal of Ruby herself and the scheme she devises are, as one of my children put it, 'just brill'. JS

One Winter's Night

Primrose Lockwood, ill. Elaine Mills, Mammoth (Dec 93), 0 7497 1492 1, £3.99

Primrose Lockwood's beautifully subtle and tantalising text seems to capture the mood of this special cold winter's night. The pace of the verse builds as image after image is added until the joyful climax is created and we share in Joseph's glorious moment.

The illustrations by Elaine Mills complement and extend the mood of anticipation for, with skilful use of light and dark and glowing colours, she evokes warm and comfortable feelings of happy childhood excitement. JS

The Elephant Tree

Penny Dale, Walker (Oct 93), 0 7445 3071 7, £3.99



No Nursery or Reception class should be without the whole Penny Dale collection in my view. She has the perception matched with the enviable artistic ability to tap into the very essence of children of this age. Elephant wants to climb a tree but it must be a special elephant tree and, as he and his friends set out to find one, we travel through their fantasy to share in his glory at achieving his quest. Buy it! JS

Benjamin and the Bear Twins

Martine Beck, trans. Jennifer Taylor, ill. Marie H Henry, Picture Puffin (Nov 93), 0 14 054579 4, £3.99

I must admit to a slight tinge of disappointment in this latest offering from the team that

brought us the delightful Brown Bear series. I have to say, though, this was not the reaction of the children. They fell on it, particularly my romantic girls, and it has passed from hand to hand.

The illustrations are just as sensitive but this story seems to have lost its delicate touch and become much more overt. Benjamin's difficulties, as he comes to terms with the changes in his life following the appearance of twin sisters, are depicted graphically and his attempts to gain attention become more and more alarming. The story is resolved . . . but the adult in me feels uncertain about this book. JS

The Way Home

Judith Benet
Richardson, ill. Salley Mavor, Red Fox
(Dec 93), 0 09 914418 6, £3.99

A warm and comforting story, illustrated with delightful photographs of collage pictures, about a disobedient baby elephant whose mother leaves her alone on the beach because she refuses to go home when asked. Eventually she begins to feel cold and hungry and decides to eat the bananas laid out through the jungle. At the end of the trail she finds her mother and they make their way home by the light of the banana-shaped moon. MS

How Many Days to my Birthday?

Gus Clarke, Mammoth
(Dec 93), 0 7497 1211 2, £3.99

A book to which every adult who lives with young children (as well as young children themselves) can relate. Danny is waiting and waiting for his birthday, nagging and nagging his mother about it. She has quite saintly patience and at last the great day comes (the pictures of the birthday party are particularly jolly). Nicely told with well-spaced text, this would be popular in any infant classroom. LW

Home Sweet Home

Colin Smithson,
Red Fox (Nov 93),
0 09 922191 8, £3.99

A charming, funny story about a farmer and his wife who feel sorry for their animals out in the cold and gradually let them into the kitchen one by one . . . there are lots of them — sheep, bullocks, hens and geese. At first it's fun and they all ride out the storm safely. Next day the animals leave but when night falls want to come in again. Eventually the humans move into the barn and let the animals live in the house. MS

Tidy Titch

Pat Hutchins, Red Fox
(Nov 93), 0 09 920741 9, £3.99

How nice to meet Titch in a new book. This time he benefits from being the smallest child when he inherits all the toys as his older brother and sister tidy their rooms. It's a familiar theme and one to which most children and their mums can easily relate. As ever Pat Hutchins conveys pleasant, comfortable, homey things and feelings with pictures that have pattern, detail and colour, as well as humour. MS

When Grandma Came

Jill Paton Walsh, ill.
Sophy Williams, Picture Puffin (Nov 93),
0 14 054327 9, £4.50



A well-travelled and youthful grandmother arrives to live with her new grand-daughter. Grandma compares wonderful

beasts from faraway places to the child's wakefulness, messiness, bounciness and so on. This book has a dreamlike quality and we swing from grandmother to child to arctic, jungle, desert or city. There's a delight and wonder throughout the pages and a sense of security as the attachment forms between grandmother and grand-daughter. A most unusual and beautiful book recommended for 3-5s and their families. MS

Little Mouse Twitchy Whiskers

Margaret Mayo, ill.
Penny Dann, Orchard
(Oct 93), 1 85213 514 X, £3.50

A well-illustrated picture storybook about a mouse who discovers a cardboard box and makes it into a house. A frog, a rabbit, a hen and a duck come along and all manage to fit in together. But then a huge bear turns up and spoils the box by sitting on it.

What a good book for 2-4 year-olds! Each animal is clearly described and the listening/looking child can learn about size and shape as the bear is much bigger than all the others. And the word 'down' (not an easy abstract concept for the young child) can be understood as the bear lowers its bulky body 'down' onto the cardboard box. MS

INFANT/JUNIOR

Kachunka!

Enid Richemont, ill.
Margaret Chamberlain,
Walker (Oct 93),
0 7445 3100 4, £2.99

Prejudices rage when a shabby, blue-haired woman with 14 fingers walks into a primary school and claims a job as a dinner lady. However, Mrs Kachunka appears to have a mysterious gift for quelling such negative feelings by making people feel at one with everything. Her presence in the school has dramatic consequences, especially for Thomas, a withdrawn child from a deprived background.



This is a refreshingly quirky story, told largely through very naturalistic dialogue. Younger juniors should enjoy speculating on the source of Mrs Kachunka's power. GH

The Dog That Dug

Jonathan Long and
Korky Paul, Red Fox
(Dec 93), 0 09 998610 8,
£3.99

A jolly, rhyming story about a dog who works his way through layers of underground excavations in the search for his lost bone. He discovers a variety of interesting objects, which are shown in the busy cross-sectional pictures, and finally unearths a whole dinosaur. I just wonder where the professor who buys it from him gets the two million pounds she pays him! LW

I never saw a purple cow

Emma Chichester Clark,
Walker (Oct 93),
0 7445 3077 6, £6.99

A collection of nonsense rhymes of all sorts, ages and authors that's satisfyingly thick and attractively illustrated. I find that nonsense is often wasted on young children who haven't enough grasp of the possible or the probable to see the joke, but several of these could be enjoyed by the very young, such as 'The Owl and the Pussycat' and 'I Had a Cat'. Most, however, would be appreciated by younger

Juniors who'd adore the wordplay, silliness and rich language. Some of the rhymes are very familiar, but there's enough new material to offer something to every reader. LW

Bloop and the Big Bad Barons

Peter Haswell,
Picturemac (Dec 93),
0 333 59249 2, £3.99

A romp of a book with all the ingredients to keep a complete class on the edge of their seats as Prince Benedict Leopold Orlando Oswald Percival, aged seven, and (it has to be said) a rather unlikely hero, defends his kingdom against the motley crew of Big Bad Barons. We gallop along as Peter Haswell's verse and illustrations impel us to find out what will happen next. I have to tell you that it seems this desire doesn't diminish in young readers when you've read the book umpteen times! JS

Billy and Belle

Sarah Garland, Picture Puffin (Dec 93),
0 14 054437 2, £3.99

Chaos and kindness surround Billy and Belle's family the day their new baby brother is

born. Little sister Belle goes with big brother Billy to school and as it happens it's 'Pet's Day'. Belle doesn't have a pet with her but finds a spider which she temporarily adopts. Sensibly the teacher puts all the pets outside, but Belle wants another look at her spider and opens all the cages and boxes in her search for it. Eventually calm is restored and going-home time comes. Later that evening Mum arrives home with the new baby and the family is together again.

I really like this book; it's full of fun and there's lots of action with varied page layouts, including speech bubbles. It also reflects our intercultural community as Dad is black, Mum is white and some of Billy's schoolfriends represent other nationalities. MS

The Monster Birthday Party

Carolyn Dinan, Picture Puffin (Nov 93),
0 14 054432 1, £3.99

When Tom wakes in the middle of the night before his birthday and finds a beautifully wrapped and rather strange box labelled 'Do Not Open Before Your Birthday' . . . well, he just can't resist. The

consequences of this action lead him into another world in which he spends the day with a Stegosaurus family and finds that Steg's mother's response to him is to leap on a chair and scream because she's frightened of little things that wiggle! There are many flashes of humour and adventure as the day progresses – or is it the night since he finds himself back in his own bed with a small version of Steg beside him? My class reviewers indicated: Story – great; Illustrations – great... and there were no dissenters. JS

Tigress

Helen Cowcher, Picture Corgi (Oct 93), 0 552 52736 X, £3.99

Helen Cowcher has produced another winner with this disturbing book. Brilliant artwork and tight spare text challenge the reader to face the question of rivaling demands of man and beast. We're skilfully played along, shown the tigress's need to feed her cubs but shown too the terror on the face of the herdsman as he realises the scale of his loss. We share the panic of the other herdsman he tells, we feel fear as we hear their suggestion that they should leave poisoned meat for the tigress to share with her cubs. The solution is dramatic, acceptable, but we're left feeling that it's only tenuous. JS

POETRY

Don't Step On That Earwig

Compiled by Rowena Sommerville, Red Fox (Nov 93), 0 09 927441 8, £2.99

The compiler (who is also the illustrator and numbers among the poets) has collected together some 45 poems about mini-beasts. These she's arranged under three inviting-sounding headings: 'Flitters', 'Critters' and 'Leapers and Creepers'. There's a variety of moods and style from the humorous anon three-worder:

'Adam
Had em'

whose title is longer than the content to an offering from Carmen Bernos de Gasztold's 'The Creatures' Choir'. There's also a wide range of poets: William Blake to Alan Brownjohn and George Barker; John Clare to June Crebbin; and it's good to see Manley Young's 'Anancy!' and George Awooner-Williams' 'The Gone Locusts' featured.

Recommended for individual browsers (who'll also enjoy the black and white illustrations) and for sharing with 6-10s. JB

Bubblegum Magic

Susan Lacy, Mammoth (Nov 93), 0 7497 1293 7, £2.99

A second volume about Mussarat, a little Muslim girl, and her special bubblegum friend, Mr Monster. This blobby creature loves bananas and has the happy knack of averting disasters by sneezing. These four stories about a school outing to the seaside, the Louis Street School's carnival procession, a family visit to the zoo and a big family wedding paint a reassuring and harmonious picture of Muslim family life.



The everyday incidents, events and little mishaps should be enjoyed by infant listeners though those who haven't read the first book may be puzzled as to the origins of Mr Monster. JB

Captain Ding, The Double-Decker Pirate

David Cox, ill. Graham Round, Red Fox (Oct 93), 0 09 918511 3, £3.99

A rampaging sort of story with the interesting idea that a double-decker bus has been taken over by a pirate down on his luck. Stan gets on the bus and goes supermarket raiding with the gang. I was just getting worried that the book was going to incite shop-lifting when the author let the Goody-goodies win at the last moment – a result that will either disappoint or relieve you depending on your age. The illustrations, as well as the story, are bright and lively. LW

Cannonball Simp

John Burningham, Red Fox (Nov 93), 0 09 989920 5, £3.99

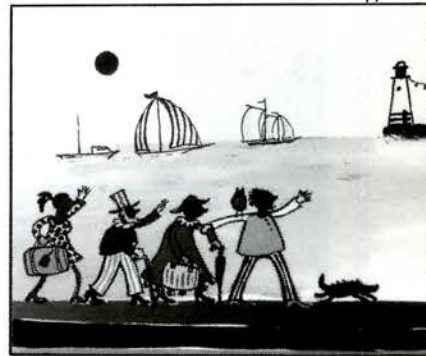


It's lovely to see another of John Burningham's classic stories re-published in a high-quality paperback edition. After the re-issue of *Borka*, this story of the little black dog, Simp, who finds fulfilment in a very unusual role with a circus, continues to show how well the simple but satisfying style of Burningham lasts. More boldly illustrated than some of his later work, this is an ideal read-aloud or for young fluent readers to try for themselves. LW

The Jumblies

POETRY

Edward Lear, ill. Emily Bolam, Orchard (Oct 93), 1 85213 513 1, £3.50



The jolly, brightly coloured child-like illustrative style of Emily Bolam is perfect for Lear's well-loved nonsense rhyme. The book is pleasingly designed, the text being integrated with the illustrations, making it highly accessible to children reading it for themselves. JB

Five Mice and the Moon

Joyce Dunbar, ill. James Mayhew, Orchard (Oct 93), 1 85213 520 4, £3.99

A very attractive, rhythmical story in good clear print about five mice who try to reach the moon to see if it really is made of cheese. One by one they fail, frightened by the dangers they encounter, until one little mouse solves the whole problem by accident.

This book is thoroughly enjoyable and well-produced, but I'm less happy about Orchard's new policy of putting questions about their books inside the front covers. There's more than a slight air of an exam about being asked 'which of these animals might you find in the woods?' or being instructed to give each mouse a name ('Look at each character closely throughout the book').

However, this book is recommended in all other respects and you don't have to pass the exam to enjoy it. LW

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

The Exiles

Hilary McKay, Lions (Nov 93), 0 00 674643 8, £3.50

Four highly spirited and unusual (one daren't say odd!), sisters are exiled to their grandma in Cumbria for the long summer holiday. Big Grandma is without a doubt the old block from which the girls were chipped. After unpromising beginnings certain understandings are reached, compromises made and each wayward character, young and old, developed.

This Guardian Award winner, with its unique humour and gently unravelling plot, is a first novel that suggests good reads in the future. DB

Dark Hills Hollow Clocks

Garry Kilworth, Mammoth (Dec 93), 0 7497 1048 9, £2.99

The ten stories here cover dragons, goblins, ghosts, trows, etc. in an imaginative and vivid way, using a wide variety of styles and locations,

which serve to keep the pages turning. I was particularly struck by the scarecrows who invade and take over a village that tried to repel tourists and the tale of the Warrior Wizards in the Chilterns, especially the victor's revenge.

Children who enjoy rich, evocative language will be well served here; some of Kilworth's lists, as in 'The Goblin Jag', are magnificent. DB

The Witch's Ring

Rachel Dixon, ill. Doffy Weir, Yearling (Oct 93), 0 440 86299 X, £2.99

A beautiful ring and a magic word mean Castanetta and Amy Settle can live each other's lives with dreadful effect. It's only when the swap is complete that we realise their differences are far more profound than the surface similarities. Quite serious social comment comes gift-wrapped in a story with enough wicked and witchy goings-on to satisfy anybody, and



sufficient hold upon the ordinary as to make it compulsively fascinating. PH

The Screaming Field

Wendy Eyton,
0 00 674663 2

Bump in the Night

Mary Hoffman,
0 00 674737 X

Illustrated by George Buchanan, Lions
(Oct 93), £2.99 each

Two of the three titles in Lions' 'Stories Under the Bedclothes' series, exploiting the child's tense delight in the supernatural. In both books all the stories are set within contemporary environments, and both authors summon the occult into the mundane with a sly skill that delighted my listeners when I read a selection to them.

Mary Hoffman's stories are typically humane and wistful: departed souls ache their way back from beyond the grave, striving to salve their remorse for unfinished business. In my favourite, an entire house resurrects itself in an attempt to rescue the birthday party it was anticipating at the moment of its destruction in the blitz.

Wendy Eyton deals with stronger stuff; in her tales, moral and physical putrefaction seep out into the daylight like suspicious liquid dripping from a coffin. In one of the most striking, a timid girl endeavours to embolden herself by touching the hologram of a witch, who promptly devours her.

A restive classroom first thing on a Monday morning might be a more propitious setting than under the bedclothes for the reading of these very enjoyable stories. GH

The Broonie, Silkies and Fairies

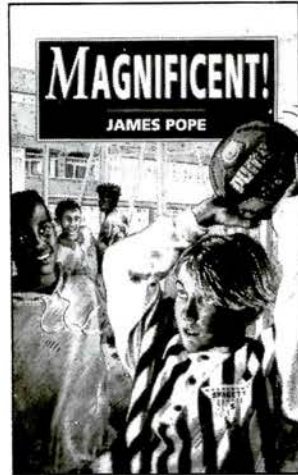
Duncan Williamson, ill.
Alan Heriot, Canongate
(Nov 93), 0 86241 456 3,
£3.50

The appropriate age for these stories is hard to determine. Infants can love them, and may have the advantage over older readers of not having to relearn how to tune into and accept the fairy tale conventions. They're tales for telling, not necessarily ones to introduce the rich range of such material, but in this form are a magical resource. AJ

Magnificent!

James Pope, Red Fox
(Nov 93), 0 09 914181 7,
£2.99

What a sensitively written book this is. Jeremy's realisation of the ill-feeling between his parents and then the dreadful upheaval that he and his mother experience after his parents separate, all in the awful knowledge that, yes, Dad has gone off with the long-haired blonde, is perfectly caught.



At first, after they move house, Jeremy is horrified by the street-wise Pencil and his mates. He takes time to learn not only a new vocabulary and lifestyle, but also that beyond the Doc Martens and the reggae are sincere and genuine individuals with a strong sense of loyalty. Best of all, his mum overcomes her mistrust and hostility and finds a different kind of happiness in the warmth and humanity of her new neighbours. PH

The Green Kids

Sam McBratney, ill.
Virginia Chalcraft,
Walker (Oct 93),
0 7445 3111 X, £2.99

The Greens take a holiday in a mountain cottage. Mr and Mrs relish the simple, wholesome quality of life but Sally, Lottie and Charlie, the little Greens, are frankly horrified at their loss of the 20th century. It proves not to be an idyllic break as the children fight and squabble between themselves and it's only the appearance of Thatcher Collins that stops them in their tracks. He wants to be a birdman and has spent ages collecting feathers to this effect - never mind aerodynamics or hollow bones, one of our last glimpses is the flap of huge, sinister wings as they launch off Black Cliff into swirling, empty air.

A witty tale with a depth and sensitivity of feeling that's rare in books for the newly competent reader. PH

'The chicken gave it to me'

Anne Fine, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Mammoth
(Dec 93), 0 7497 1477 8,
£2.99



The 'it' of the title refers to the book within this book, a battery chicken's account of its release from a cramped death cell by visiting aliens, who then convert the poultry factory into forcing sheds for human meat. The chicken manages to forgive its erstwhile captors and travels to the alien planet in order to wage a media campaign against cruelty in farming.

The message of this book is carried quite nimbly in the discussion of the boy and girl who read the chicken's testament, and the story itself has some good jokes and sideswipes at media idiocy. GH

Jumble Joan

0 00 674851 1

The Flat Man

0 00 674853 8

Rose Impey, ill. Moira Kemp, Lions (Oct 93),
£3.99 each

Two deliciously creepy books. In *Jumble Joan*, a brother and friend Mick take his younger sister up to Grandma's dark and dusty attic to frighten her. An ancient rocking horse, a stuffed parrot in a cage and a wardrobe crammed with old clothes, are in turn props for the pair's scary storying which proves all too successful thanks to a helping hand from little sister.

The Flat Man is the product of another boy's lively imagination as he translates the sights and sounds in his darkened bedroom into an unlikely monster.

Children love to be frightened but at the same time like the reassurance of being in control. Rose Impey puts her characters firmly in charge, and the reader too by using a first-person telling. The mostly short lines of text add to the drama. Moira Kemp's illustrations in shadowy colours are suitably atmospheric. Absolutely ideal for readers of all ages up to ten and highly recommended. JB

Prince Cinders

Babette Cole, Puffin
(Dec 93), 0 14 054900 5,
£4.50

You may have seen the cartoon film of this on television at Christmas. The illustrations in this version are stills from the film and tell the story well even if you don't read the words, which are slangy, lively and require a fluent reader or can be read aloud by an adult. There's a lot to cope with in the quick-fire pace and humour of the plot. The story is several twists on the tale of Cinderella with some cheerful jokes in text and pictures, both of which work closely together. Juniors with a sense of parody will enjoy this hugely. LW

Snow-White

Retold by Josephine Poole, ill. Angela Barrett, Red Fox
(Nov 93), 0 09 918561 X,
£3.99



Josephine Poole retells this story in language which is gracefully ornate but without too much formality. Events unfold to a dramatic rhythm and due emphasis is given to the hatred and envy which propel the narrative.

In Angela Barrett's illustrations, pastel tints and hues are saturated with shadow, providing a sombre mood in keeping with the gloomy passions underlying the story: at the end, the Wicked Queen dies after embracing a poisoned rose, rather than perishing in a pair of molten iron dancing shoes. A perennially powerful tale and, like Snow-White herself, beautifully revived. GH

The Eleventh Hour

Graeme Base, Puffin
(Nov 93), 0 14 054148 9,
£4.99

A visual banquet tells the tale of an edible banquet, while providing the reader's mind with a feat of enigmas. It's Horace's eleventh birthday, and he plans a feast for the eleventh hour, inviting along ten friends who play games until dinner time, when they discover that one of their number has surreptitiously hogged all the food. That's about it for the storyline, but the magnificently elaborate pictures which accompany the verse narrative conceal encoded clues identifying the thief. An appendix provides a key to unlock all these clues, but it should not be consulted until the reader has enjoyed a thorough search of the text. This is a beautiful and intriguing book, highly recommended for everybody. GH

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children

Duncan Williamson, Canongate (Nov 93), 0 86241 457 1, £3.50

A fascinating and intriguing collection of traditional Scottish travellers' tales. By their very nature they're probably best read aloud; the storyteller's individual voice and easy familiar style keeps them firmly rooted in the oral tradition. Magic, humour and a dash of horror are the main timeless themes and there are tantalising glimpses into the life and culture of travellers, especially between 1914 and 1955. Definitely worth a try in late KS2 and early KS3 classrooms. DB



Sweetgrass

Jan Hudson, Canongate (Oct 93), 0 86241 441 5, £2.99

Male domination in the Blackfoot tribes and the restrictions this imposes on the womenfolk is the backcloth against which Jan Hudson explores Sweetgrass's reaching of womanhood and route to marriage. A hard, precarious way of life is also revealed in convincing, unglamorised detail. This Canadian award winner was first published 10 years ago and the feminist message might feel a shade too strident for the 1990s. However, it'll make a welcome title for thoughtful female readers. DB

I Want Doesn't Get

Rony Robinson, Faber (Nov 93), 0 571 16940 6, £3.99

Family values are shot to pieces right from the start of this delightfully readable book. Stridently maverick mother sells the car and suddenly takes off around the world; woefully inadequate, though well-meaning, dad barely copes with single parenthood and the three kids go totally peculiar. At the end mother re-appears with an

unexplained baby brother strapped to her chest.

It's funny, it's original in style and content, and it says a lot about being 10 in a mad, confusing world dominated by so-called adults. DB

The Fisherwoman

Anne Carter, ill. Louise Brierley, Walker (Oct 93), 0 7445 3076 8, £4.99



A gentle, softly-watercoloured picture book on the most exquisite terracota backgrounds that complement the story perfectly. Maud, a fisherwoman, lives by the coast in a leaky cottage. One wet night she's forced to collect the water coming through the roof in a pink vase she found in the sea. From the vase grows a magical plant that provides her with the means to fulfil her dearest wish. Sadly, once her dreams are reality, they seem to turn sour and slip through her fingers like grains of sand. She quickly realises that it's the steady, sturdier stuff of life that has true worth. A disquieting and thought-provoking story. At its deepest this tale works on many, many levels and is living proof that not all picture books are for the very young. I loved it! PH

Smokescreen

Elsie McCutcheon, Dent (Nov 93), 0 460 88197 3, £2.99

This television tie-in will attract readers and the story itself is a strong one: the early part of the century, Chrissie's father has left her and her brothers and, rather than troop off to grandmother, Chrissie determines that they'll fend for themselves – which is how she comes to apply for, and get, a job acting in one of the first moving pictures. AJ



Burning Issy

Melvin Burgess, Knight (Oct 93), 0 340 59024 6, £3.50

Ignorance breeds prejudice and prejudice breeds fear – the fear that hanged eight people in 1613 for witchcraft. These people came from my area – a small corner of NE Lancashire – and this book looks at what their lives and deaths were like.

Issy acquired her nickname because she'd been scarred in a fire whose origins she couldn't remember and was adopted by Nat, a cunning man or healer. The story is told by Issy and the flavour of those miserable and suspicious times is clearly conveyed through the narrative.

What chills most is the realisation that very little has changed over three centuries. People are still persecuted because they're different, or tolerated until some legitimate form of removal can be found. Issy is imprisoned (and her friend Iohan is brutally tortured to death) because she has healing powers and chooses to worship the god from whom she believes they come.

Issy is given her freedom by the use of benign magic and joins her friends for a new beginning, living in the way she feels is right: surely a basic tenet of a civilised world? VR

The Wall

Elizabeth Lutzeier, Canongate (Dec 93), 0 86241 442 3, £2.99

It comes as no surprise that this excellent book is published by Canongate: their list is consistently outstanding. The wall in question is the Berlin Wall and the narration is focused on Hannah, whose mother was shot as she tried to cross from East to West. The details of everyday life in East Germany are coolly described: it's this lack of hyperbole which gives the book its conviction. Hannah longs to tell the truth about her life and through her rebellious friend, Steffi, she's finally able to do so.

The Wall would make a substantial contribution to Year 8 or 9 class reader lists. VR

The Zagor Chronicles

Firestorm
0 14 036864 7

Darkthrone
0 14 036865 5

Ian Livingstone and Carl Sargent, Puffin (Nov 93), £3.99 each

There's much which inhibits the outsider (and, no doubt, soothes the insider) as you try to read these: the seemingly



interminable need for names like anagrams of machine parts, the mix of fairy tale fantasy and constant battle, the gruesome discharge of blood, acid and gore. But once you're in, the imaginative pull of plot and character is tremendous and the strangeness eases. These are dense and packed stories which can hook a whole group of readers. AJ

Baa Baa Dead Sheep

Jill Bennett, 'Point Crime' Scholastic (Nov 93), 0 590 55309 7, £2.99

It's easy for teachers to dismiss the formula of black covers and raised gold lettering but there's no denying the attraction of these books, both as series and in the stories they tell. This is the standard whodunnit – many of the kids in the theatre group had a motive for killing the nasty caretaker, but who actually did it? Lots of children will like the genre which is one to keep them going as readers – and a potential route into all those murder mysteries, often adult ones, which television mines for each new series. AJ

A Gift of Magic

Lois Duncan, Pan Piper (Dec 93), 0 330 32843 3, £3.50

Each of the children is given a talent by their grandmother – one is to be a dancer, another a musician while Nancy is to be a seer. The naturalness of her gift is one of the attractions of the book. Her brother and sister just accept it and the author leaves us to accept it too. The double-edged nature of the imposition of talents could be made more of – Kirby's compulsion to dance and her flair for it are in conflict with her physique – but the drama is well handled and gripping. All Lois Duncan fans will be more than happy. AJ

OLDER READERS

Treasure: the trials of a teenage terror

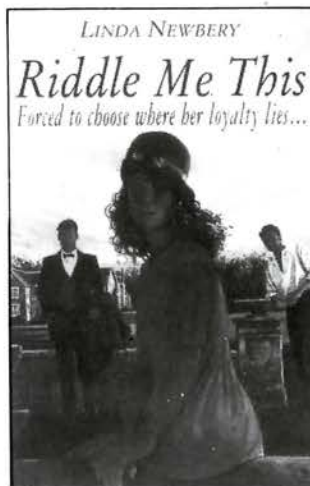
Gina Davidson, Virago (Oct 93), 1 85381 711 2, £4.99

A mother's series of often very funny (and horribly correct) reports, first published in the *Guardian*, about life with her teenage Treasure – often open warfare with battlegrounds over the telephone, independence, boys, clothes, food and fairness. Teenagers and their parents seem to love it and it's great for re-reading. Try it alongside *The Book of the Banshee* (Anne Fine) and *Not Dressed Like That, You Don't* (Yvonne Coppard) . . . It offers a good model for pupils' own accounts of life on the Home Front. AJ

Riddle Me This

Linda Newbery, Lions (Nov 93), 0 00 674763 9, £3.50

Irish politics of 1920, not so very different from today's, played out as the English-educated Catherine returns to Ireland and is attracted by the shell-shocked English soldier, Martin, and her childhood Irish friend, Conor. Teenage readers will anticipate a great



deal about the style of this – particularly from the cover design and promotional blurb. Through the formulas of the blockbuster saga and its relationships, they will be deftly introduced to some of the realities of English/Irish relationships past and present. AJ

The Dead Hour

Pete Johnson, Mammoth (Oct 93), 0 7497 1460 3, £2.99

'The dead hour; that's when there were more dead roaming

the earth than there were blades of grass.'

The problem lies with the living coming to terms with the passing of the dead. Louise still grieves inwardly for her little brother, Ben, after a year. Rich's Nan is close to death. Both teenagers find themselves trapped in their imaginations and creating spirit manifestations that seem to terrorise, but once the haunted pair manage to find understanding the same spirits have the power to heal the deepest wounds.

An intriguing ghost tale that oughtn't to remain too long on the shelves. DB

The Man Without a Face

Isabelle Holland, Pan (Dec 93), 0 330 33287 2, £3.50

Justin McLeod is the man without a face, since he was badly burned in a drunken car crash in which he killed a child. Charles is fourteen and miserable at home, determined to pass the boarding school entrance exam and get away. McLeod is an ex-teacher and Charles penetrates his physical and emotional isolation, forming a working partnership

which turns to friendship and then to love.

Isabelle Holland successfully depicts a fraught household, tense with sibling rivalry and she's equally adept at the much trickier task of exploring a homosexual relationship between Charles and McLeod. Charles' rejection of these emotional ties is also credible, but the book's ending, where he returns to repair the damage and finds McLeod has died a month earlier, has a manufactured and awkward feel.

This is a brave attempt at a contentious subject and should be made available for young people to read, explore and make of it what they will. VR

Reviewers in this issue:

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

All about...

Primary to Secondary

Hardbacks/Paperbacks

Servicing

Cassettes/CD Rom

Library Furnishings

Excellent Authors List

Posters

Free Delivery

the principal children's
library supplier



Peters
LIBRARY SERVICE

Sponsors of the LA Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Awards

All about...

Showroom

The Kit Shop

Approvals

Catalogues on Demand

EDI / On-Line / SIMS

Events

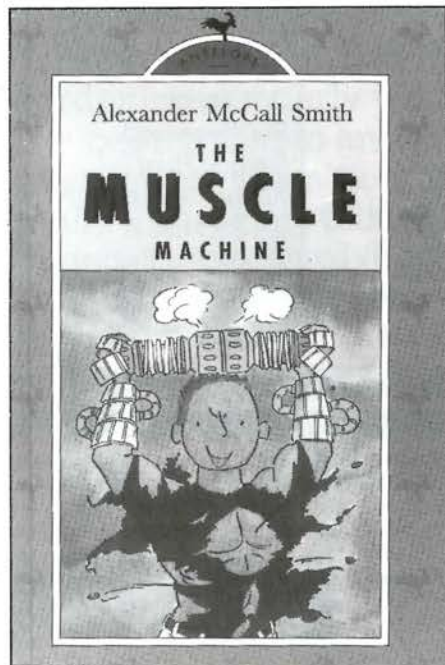
Packington Hall

Promotions Directory

SERIES TITLES

Some of the latest, reviewed by Steve Rosson

Can you handle more dinosaurs after the excesses of Jurassic Park? Mind you, Terrance Dicks' creation **The Littlest Dinosaur** (ill. Bethan Matthews, Hamish Hamilton 'Gazelle', 0 241 13382 3, £3.99) poses no threat. He's a lovable little soul hatched out of an egg that Olly and Elly persuade their mum to buy from the local junk-cum-antique shop. The twins' big fear, of course, is 'it'll go on growing, won't it? Growing and growing... It'll get too big for the toy cupboard, too big for the room. It'll burst out and go stumping around London smashing down houses... Mum will be furious.' Off to the Dinosaur Exhibition at the Natural History Museum – an escape – a chase – a meeting with a suitably dishevelled Professor – Littlest is identified as an Echinodon who definitely won't grow any bigger and is a vegetarian to boot – the children are allowed to take him home. Cue the sequel.

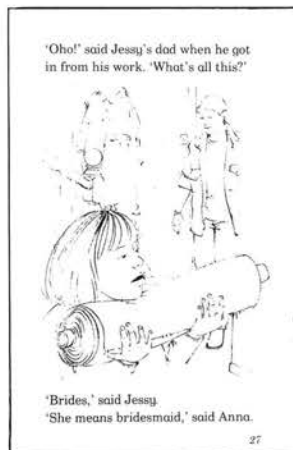


Alexander McCall Smith's **The Muscle Machine** (Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope', 0 241 13329 7, £4.99) set me to wondering when was the last time I saw a Charles Atlas advert, as this is surely the inspiration for the ad. that Gordon responds to after being bullied at school, even down to 'People used to kick sand in my face'. Here it's Walter World who promises a mighty physique through the use of his Muscle Machine (Patent Pending) which illustrator Terry McKenna makes look like a cross between a Bullworker and some reject props from a **Dr Who** episode. It's all strangely old-fashioned and predictable but it has a certain charm and Walter World's message of modesty and gentleness is a worthy one. Charles Atlas may have gone but body-building retains its curious fascination for some – witness the success of Schwarzenegger, the cult of the Gladiators and that woman, whose name escapes me, who appears in the Volkswagen ad. Macho boys may be attracted by the cover – let's hope they absorb the message.

Sheila Lavelle certainly likes her alliterating 'Ms' as Messy Maisy Morris stars in **Maisy in the Mud/Maisy's Masterpiece** (Macmillan 'Flippers', 0 333 58377 9, £4.99). Perhaps she was a girlhood fan of Mary Mary? Maisy sets out for the Fancy Dress Contest as a Fairy Queen but ends up winning first prize for her scarecrow outfit after a number of

mishaps en route. Her entry for the painting competition is left in the garden to dry only to attract the attention of the chickens and the dog. As Maisy tries to rescue it, it gets dropped in the pond. Naturally, the Head declares it a masterpiece of modern art. Nothing new here, but it's skilfully done and Thelma Lambert's pictures almost fill every page.

Katie is suitably disgusted by Mum's babytalk as she looks after sister Gillian's baby – and even more disgusted at the thought of helping with the nappy change. Still, when a crisis arrives in Mary Hooper's **The Revolting Baby** (Blackie 'Snappers', 0 216 94030 3, £6.50) Katie is determined to manage, including taking little Emily to the photographer for the 'full studio sitting and six mounted portraits'. Emily's adventures with a log from the basket by the fire, golden syrup, shoe polish and tomato soup ensure the title is an apt one. Any reader with a baby in the family will appreciate this one and some of the minor characters are splendidly done with a light, but assured, touch.



From **Jessy and the Long-short Dress**.

Jessy and the Long-short Dress (A & C Black 'Jets', 0 7136 3798 6, £5.50) by Rachel Anderson and Shelagh McNicholas is well up to the standard of the previous Jessy titles. Once again the young girl with Downs Syndrome is portrayed with love and understanding as she acts as bridesmaid for her teacher. I was on the verge of saying the pictures played the dominant role till I re-read the book taking more care for the words, which led me to my conclusion that here is another series title in which text and illustration work together perfectly to produce a story that's a joy to go back to again and again.

Nigel Gray and Cathy Wilcox go for street-cred in **Sharon and Darren** (A & C Black 'Jets', 0 7136 3537 1, £5.50).

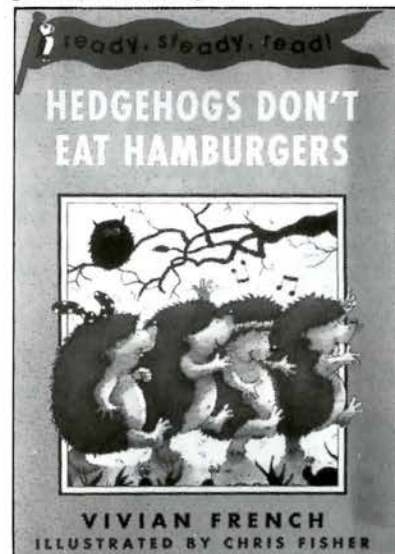
It's 3.31.

Darren hasn't come.



While Sharon waits outside the corner shop thinking up increasingly outlandish reasons why her date hasn't arrived, Darren is leaning on the wall round the corner eating the crunchy bar he promised her. They eventually bump into each other and the news of the crunchy bar provokes her to dump him. Throughout the book the minute by minute count from 3.30 to 3.45 works effectively and her imagination really does run wild, but with nose-picking, bums stuck in lavatory seats and unmentionable goings-on under the desk, perhaps this is one for the coarser elements in the class.

'What's that up there in the trees? Is it a bird? Is it a chimp? Is it Rita the Rescuer with an urchin cut? No, it's Rabbit Girl.' Now it's the Tarzan/Mowgli tradition that Hilda Offen reworks in **Grubble Trouble** (A & C Black 'Jets', 0 7136 3796 X, £5.50) and our heroine bears a disconcerting resemblance to her character Rita. Anyway, Nigel Goodchild (geddit?) is harassed, abused and generally discomfited by the dreadful Grubble family who indulge in all the sort of anti-social behaviour fit to mention in a story for this age-group. Whilst being chased through the woods he's rescued by Rabbit Girl who, lost at any early age, has been brought up by a family of rabbits, has all the skills of the animal kingdom and goes about doing generally 'greeny' things. The defeat of the Grubbles, their reform and the revelation of Rabbit Girl's true identity (I'll give you three guesses) all follow apace.



Puffin's 'Ready, Steady, Read!' series continues strongly. Charlie's production of a litter of four tiny kittens is certainly a surprise for owner Cyril but presumably not for her in Shoo Rayner's **Cyril's Cat and the Big Surprise** (0 14 036142 1, £3.50). The star of this particular batch, though, was **Hedgehogs Don't Eat Hamburgers** (0 14 036409 9, £3.50) by Vivian French and illustrated by Chris Fisher. Two stories feature Hector and you'd have to go a long way to beat the title story where he sets off in pursuit of the item in question. On his way he collects Hattie and Harry and Hestor, rejects fine fat snails, slow slimy slugs and big black beetles and ignores the constant admonition that 'hedgehogs don't eat hamburgers'. An encounter with Fox and a sniff of the town persuade him of the error of his ways. Lots of alliteration and repetition; some sing-along bits; jolly main characters; green issues; big, clear print and super pictures. What more could you want for early readers?

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.

The Adventures of Peter Rabbit and 9 Other Favourite Tales

Beatrix Potter, read by Rosemary Leach, Gary Bond, Michael Hordern, Janet Maw, Patricia Routledge and Timothy West, two cassettes, 2 hrs, Penguin Audio, £7.99

Penguin joined the audio market in November with these very collectable titles. The recordings were first produced by Helen Nicoll in 1987 with sympathetic mood music specially written by Carl Davis – like the musically leaping Miss Moppet and a little jig for the escaped mouse. All the narrators are particularly enchanting.

Adventures of Tom Kitten and Mrs Tiggy-winkle and Friends are the other two Penguin double cassettes. The three together cover all Beatrix Potter's little books.

Winter Story

Jill Barklem, dramatised and narrated by Anna Massey, one cassette with hardback, 20 mins, Collins Audio, £6.99

Wintertime is busy for the Brambly Hedge animal-people and the excited chattering of the young mice when snow falls and there are snow pancakes for tea is echoed in the music of the pipes ricocheting from ear-to-ear of the listener. **Autumn Story** has also been released, with **Spring Story** and **Summer Story** following, naturally enough, later this year. They're delightful packages – no wonder Jill Barklem's book sales have now topped 3 million world-wide.

Pesters of the West

Lisa Taylor and Tony Blundell, read by Harry Enfield, one cassette with paperback, 24 mins, Collins Audio, £5.99

There are now eight of these 'Jets' book and cassette packages. Harry Enfield translates the ebullience of the humour and cartoon presentation of the books into outrageously funny sound effects and voices – a real tried- and-tested incentive to reading. Esther and Hester Pester are grotesque pea-shooting champion twins who have nothing to do in middle-of-nowhere Chipmunk Creek – until a bank robber escapes and Uncle Sylvester plans to



From *Pesters of the West*.

marry the big, ugly woman with a five o'clock shadow, moving bosoms, a 100% nylon label on her hair and a burping voice with which Harry Enfield has great fun.

The Tiger and the Brahmin

Indian Tales told by Ben Kingsley, one cassette, 50 mins, BMG Kidz (contact Laura Turner Lang on 071 973 0011), £5.99

This is a thoughtful blend of story and music appropriately related by Ben (Gandhi) Kingsley, with striking and haunting music by Ravi Shankar. The story of the Brahmin and the Tiger has that typical Indian simplicity which shifts easily into moral fable. The Brahmin releases a trapped tiger and through the consequences and the R'cleverness of the jackal and the deceit of the lions, he learned the ways of the world'. This is one of eight story tapes from BMG Kidz, including **Anansi** (with music by UB 40), and Michael Palin reading **Jack and the Beanstalk**.

Spooky Stories

Chosen by Chris Powling, read by Sian Phillips, one cassette, 77 mins, Collins Audio, £4.99

Listed as six stories for 7-8 year-olds, there are some really spooky moments here: dauntless Mary in Diana Starkey's story who entertains a headless ghost and even more chilling is Pamela Oldfield's tale where Fiona is trapped inside the garden shed whilst her cousin, locked outside, can hear only the sound of a spade hitting the ground and a man's voice calling 'Dig faster'!

Atmosphere is further heightened by sound effects – Fiona's desperate sobbing; the echoing scream of the Witch mingling with the wind in Paul Biegel's story. There's humour, too, in Penelope Lively's ghost oozing out of the bottom drawer and starting to knit.

Laughter Is An Egg

Poems hatched and performed by John Agard, one cassette, 64 mins, Collins Audio, £4.99

There are no less than 49 laughter-bites on this unusual cassette. For John Agard words and performance go together – the whole is an arresting and magical blend of chanting, incantation, charms, spells and rhythms with haunting music provided by gato drum, ocarina, flutes, pan pipes and penny whistle. There's also an atmospheric and seductive calypso theme. He explores the magic of laughter from 'jokes on toast' to the sad clown's clowning wife, through ballads, riddles and myth. Powerful listening.

The Toby Man

Dick King-Smith, read by Tony Robinson, one cassette, 68 mins, BBC Young Collection, £4.15

A really meaty story by Dick King-Smith at his best. Young Tod Golightly is following in his dead father's footsteps to become a highwayman – with a difference: his accomplices are a donkey, a dog, a magpie and a ferret. Together they carry out a daring robbery. Tom is caught and sure to hang, but he's saved by a parson who's impressed with his goodness. Somehow Dick King-Smith has made an eighteenth-century picaresque novel for Juniors and Tony Robinson provides a dramatic presentation enabling it all to unfold in the mind's eye.

Everyone Else's Parents Said Yes

Written and read by Paula Danziger, two unabridged cassettes, 2 hrs 32 mins, Chivers, £11.95 + VAT

Hearing Paula Danziger read her own work adds an extra dimension of authenticity to this American everyday story of stressed family life. Matthew is designing elaborate invitations to his 11th birthday party on his computer and planning the indulgent food. It all gets complicated by a row with his best friend, the teasing of his older sister about her first date and the attempts of his health-food-freak mother to ban junk food from the party! The appeal is in the overall pace and fast dialogue which Paula Danziger writes and reads so convincingly.



Of Mice and Men

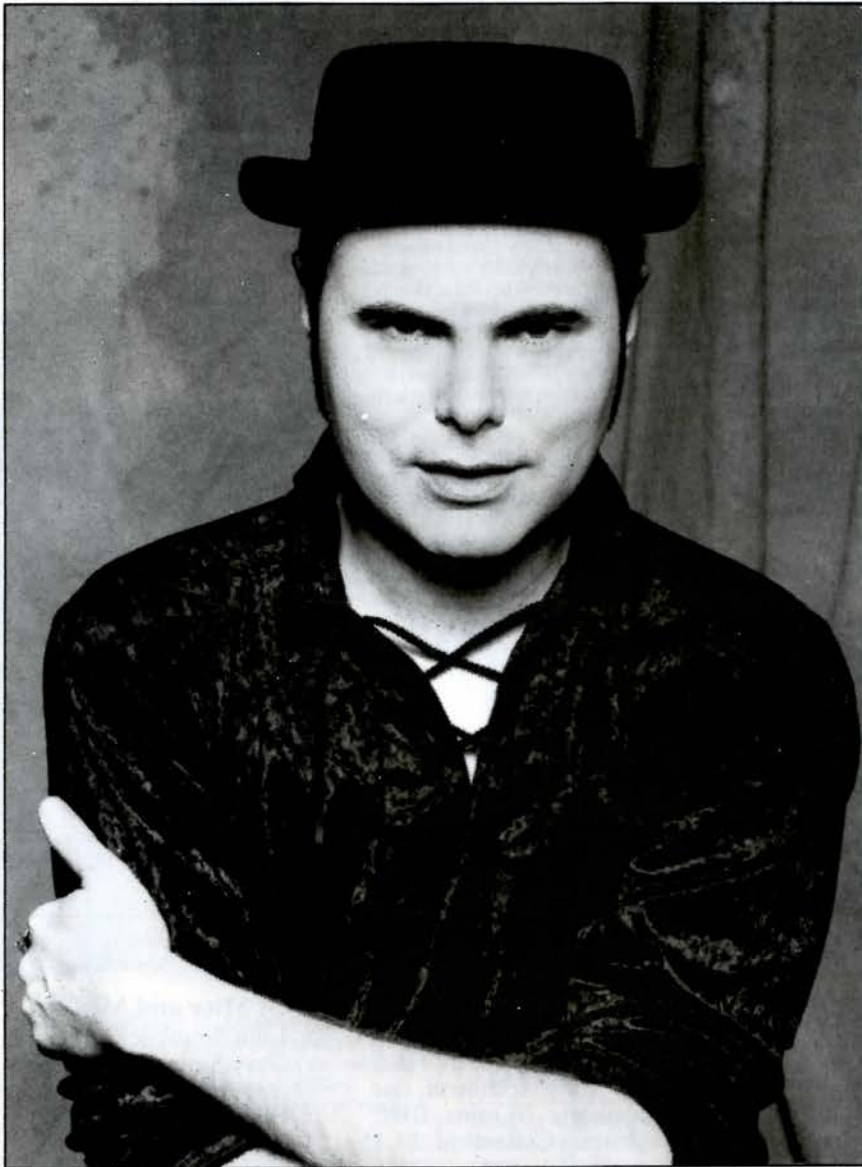
John Steinbeck, read by Gary Sinise, two cassettes, 3 hours, Penguin Audio, £7.99

George looks after simple-minded Lennie – one day they'll have their own farm and Lennie will look after rabbits, meanwhile they're just hired hands stopping wherever they can find work. Curly's wife is precocious with strokable hair and, like the puppy, Lennie kills her because he doesn't understand his massive strength. This is a popular text at GCSE and here Gary Sinise's quietly dramatic narration in authentic accent conveys the power of Steinbeck's understated prose and dialogue. The tragic fable of the doomed and the drifting is as clear as the literal story.

Authorgraph No. 85

Philip Ridley

INTERVIEWED BY
GEORGE HUNT



On the day I met Philip Ridley we were both late for the appointment. Converging on a rain-soaked Soho from opposite poles of East London, our rail journeys had been harried by both official and freelance vandalism of the neglected infrastructure serving the capital. This seemed an appropriate prelude for a chat with an author whose work is drenched with visions of urban dereliction.

'A friend once pointed out that the most frequent adjective in my writing is "broken",' he said, as we drank coffee in the Amalfi Bar, 'closely followed by words like "cracked" and "decaying".'

My first encounter with the work of this author came when I was sent a copy of **Dakota of the White Flats** to review, a book in which the mangled supermarket trolley, that quintessential emblem of modern Britain, plays a crucial role. After reading the first sentence, '*Dakota Pink was woken by screaming*', I couldn't put the book down until I'd savoured every disconcerting image in this dazzling amalgam of dirty and magic realism.

The following day, my class of eight-year-olds were similarly entranced. The tale is resplendent with a diseased magnificence typical of Ridley's fiction. A jewelled turtle is stolen from a demented Haversham figure living on a dilapidated housing estate. Dakota and her sidekick identify the thief as a hypochondriac who lives in a fortress of broken glass, but in order to recover the turtle the girls have to cross a polluted canal infested with mutant eels.

Other books offer similar enchantments. In **Mercedes Ice**, his first children's novel, a romantic power struggle between a princess in a cloak of spider webs and a prince in a robe of rat skins is played out within an immense tower block which slowly putrefies into a birdshit-sheathed necropolis. **Krindlekrax**, which won both the Smarties Prize and the W H Smith Mind-boggling Books Award in 1991, depicts a combat between a dragon-like crocodile and a bullied, wimpish adolescent in the sewers beneath an East End street. In **Meteorite Spoon**, to be published next month, the children of a violently bickering couple are magically transported from their collapsing slum to the paradisaical island where their parents honeymooned, only to witness its immolation into a volcanic eruption. In all of the stories, powerful female figures strive against vain and self-indulgent men, and the quixotic aspirations by which ordinary people seek the extraordinary are mocked by invincible drudgery and physical decline.

Slightly over 30, and far more cheerful than the bleakness of his settings would lead one to anticipate, Philip Ridley has enjoyed the kind of success that eludes his fictional protagonists. He's published four children's novels, with another (**Kaspar in the Glitter**) to come in the autumn, as well as three works of fiction for adults. (He finds it disconcerting to become a best-selling children's author having had his first novel, **In the Eyes of Mr Fury**, dismissed as 'pure pornography' by one critic.) He's made one feature film, is working on another, he wrote the filmscript for **The Krays**, and also has two stage plays to his name, with a third in the offing. He was born and still lives in the East End, the setting for all his fiction.

The environment has been providing him with stories since he was first able to pick up a pencil, and he insists he'll never leave it, fearing that inspiration will desert him if he does. The first audience for his fiction was his younger brother, Tony, who refused to go to sleep at night until he heard another of



Philip's stories. It wasn't until he was 25, however, that he became a professional writer. Educated at St Martin's College of Art, his first career was in painting, and he's exhibited his work ('Not quite surrealism, but definitely bizarre') at the ICA and internationally.

I wondered whether a painterly aesthetic determined his decision to ground all his stories in post-industrial badlands, or did political and autobiographical influences come into it as well?

'I've become gradually more explicit in showing that the setting for my stories is the Bethnal Green in which I grew up, though it's a Bethnal Green of the mind, given a gothic twist in order to create a sequence of modern fairy tales. I used to claim my writing was apolitical, but I've come to realise that just in the choice of setting the writer is making a political statement. I suppose I'm concerned with the plight of children growing up in dysfunctional families, and the main theme of my stories is the child's struggle against this, the child's ability to cut through the pessimism that cripples adults. And I do think there's a peculiar beauty and energy in landscapes often dismissed as ugly by condescending people who don't have to live in them. If you live among the ruins, you can't see them as ruins; you've got to find a way of celebrating them.'

Ridley himself grew up in the kind of matriarchy celebrated in his film script for *The Krays*. 'I'm very much a child of the sixties. It was a time of full employment, and during the days the streets were clear of men; dads would come home from work completely exhausted at six, have their tea, sprawl in front of the telly for a while and then go to bed. I suppose the sorceress figures who keep cropping up in my stories are embodiments of the powerful women who seemed to hold families together then.'

Ridley's genius is in fusing such domestic details and recognisable settings with archetypal motifs, a process which he identifies as being at the core of children's language and play.

'Right up until the late sixties and early seventies, the most common playground for East End children was the bomb site, which was also a rubbish dump. There was a huge one just opposite the house where I grew up, so it's hardly surprising I chose to write about that rather than telling lollipoppy stories about Hampstead kids quarrelling with their nannies. I can still recall the smell of those places in summer, the powerful weeds struggling through the wreckage, and the magic of finding a ladybird or a butterfly. Every single one of those memories could be the start of a new novel. This sort of scenery breeds its own mythology: a car can become a chariot, a sewer a dungeon, a disused factory a castle.

'I grew up with the tower block from *Mercedes Ice* overshadowing our school as it was built, and the man killed in an industrial accident in that story was a

builder I befriended who was, indeed, killed. Now, those are quite archetypal experiences, and the archetypal is an instinctive language for children. You don't have to force them to believe that polluted canals spawn monster eels, or that you might meet a soothsayer on a demolition site who gives you a spoon made out of a meteorite, or that dragons prowl the sewers. It's only as we get older we think of that kind of imagery as clichéd, or, that awful English word, pretentious.'

The influences on his work are cinematic rather than literary. During our conversation he cited Spielberg as a major influence, and suggested his own fictional territory was that of Scorsese's *Mean Streets* visited by the magic carpet of Walt Disney's *Aladdin*.

'Children now are more visually literate than ever before. They can cope with incredibly complex sequences of imagery and I'm trying to reflect that in my stories, where I try to maintain the pace of a film or a computer game rather than that of a traditional novel. In *Meteorite Spoon*, once the reader has been briefed on the setting, the chapters get shorter and shorter, and many of them consist entirely of dialogue and onomatopoeia. If you can carry the story in powerful speech rhythms, it enables you to slash all the extraneous verbiage away. The children I've read the book to seem to find the stripped down, kaleidoscopic style very exciting. They seem to fly with it.'

This impetuous, cartoon-strip pace, reminiscent of children's own attempts at story, is nowhere more apparent than in the outrageous over-the-top dialogues which illuminate Ridley's narratives. Characters engage in neurotic badinage and escalating verbal rituals, in which increasingly baroque insults or endearments are traded. Here, for example, Dakota Pink seeks to overcome her best friend's reluctance to join in an adventure:

'You're nothing but a useless flake of septic toe nail, Treacle Duck, you're a tealeaf, a rat-bag, a large green bogey with burst blood vessels, a lump of sleep from somebody's eyes, a teabag that's been used twenty times and turning mouldy, a carbuncle full of pus and slimy watery bits, you're nothing but bits of toast caught between the teeth of a story, a throbbing blister in the marathon of my adventures, a rustling crisp bag in the motion picture of my story, a torn page in the paperback of my ambition, a piece of diced carrot in the recurring vomit of life's throw-ups, you're a boil, a pimple, a walking lump of smelly breath . . .'

and so on for several more lines.

'I find children love that kind of rhythm and exaggeration! I suppose it's a more poetic or musical version of what they do themselves on the street or the playground. I never have to think too hard about what my characters might say. A character might be based on the memory of an actual person, like the school-keeper in *Krindlekrax*, or they

might be purely imaginary, but they all emerge with their verbal mannerisms intact. I draw pictures of them to keep on display while I'm writing, and I often talk to them to check out whether the things I'm getting them to say or do are really in character.'

Philip Ridley also maintains a dialogue with the huge audience of children who appear to recognise their own down-to-earth predicaments in his surrealistic rhapsodies. He personally responds to the letters he receives, and has been particularly impressed by the 'phenomenally acute' interpretations children bring to the image of the dragon in *Krindlekrax*. He enjoys reading his stories to children, an



experience which has influenced the style of his latest book, where the narrator's voice emerges like that of a storyteller talking directly to his audience. *Krindlekrax* and *Meteorite Spoon* also seem to have a warmth and optimism that was entirely absent from *Mercedes Ice* and barely perceptible in *Dakota*.

'I'm increasingly concerned to help children confront their problems. My stories are obsessed with all the modern sources of anxiety: with money, poverty, vanity, ageing, decay, but I want to express these anxieties in a way that cuts through all that stuff to the core of what really matters, which is, I suppose, a kind of solidarity in adversity. In *Krindlekrax* it's Ruskin's love for his friend the school-keeper that causes him to confront the dragon, and in doing so to heal a whole street. *Meteorite Spoon* is almost entirely about violent argument and disappointment, but in the end the children teach their parents the value of love. If I had to sum up what I'm trying to do with these modern fairy tales, I'd say it's an attempt to make children feel less lonely in their fears.' ■

Photograph by courtesy of Puffin Books.

Book details:

Krindlekrax, Red Fox, 0 09 997920 9, £2.99 pbk

Viking hardbacks:

Meteorite Spoon (0 670 85418 2, £8.99) is published in April 1994.

Kaspar in the Glitter will be published in September 1994.

Mercedes Ice will be reissued in March 1995.

Dakota of the White Flats will be reissued in October 1995.

REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Riding a bike



When you first learn to ride a bike, it is a wonderful feeling! Bikes are great fun but you have to think about what you are doing.

Always wear a cycle helmet. They are especially made to take the force of a fall from your bike and help protect your head. ▶



'Always wear a cycle helmet' from **Stay Safe**.

Stay Safe!

Anna Qualter and John Quinn, *Wayland (Look After Yourself series)*, 0 7502 0893 7, £7.99

INFANT/JUNIOR

Whatever happened to the bicycle bell? The last one I heard rung in urgency was attached to a thirsty Wiltshireman's empty pint pot, but the pedalling helmeted glow-worms exemplified by the lad on the cover of this book don't seem to possess them. I thought you could get nicked for that – else where was the point of that old 'knock-knock' joke about Isobel?*

Seriously, though, this basic safety primer provides a good opportunity for infants and their minders to get together and discover safe behaviour. It covers most of the expected ground with plain text and useful pictures, dealing with safety at home, on the road, with water and in possibly dangerous open spaces.

The emphasis is on physical safety so abductors and molesters hardly feature. Amongst the sound advice some excellent but less obvious points deserve notice – anorak hoods restrict vision and hearing, sweets and pills may be indistinguishable, as may bleach and lemonade (good pictures of these two) and swimming and canals is dangerous.

This lattermost point is particularly pertinent since the chances nowadays of an unscheduled dip in your local cut are much enhanced by the abundance of bell-less all-terrain bikes that approach from behind on every towpath!

* 'Isobel who?' – 'Isobel necessary on a bicycle'

TP

Colour in Communication

Sally and Adrian Morgan, Evans (*The Wonderful World of Colour series*), 0 237 51274 2, £9.50

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

There is a good range of general books on colour currently available but 'The Wonderful World of Colour' series (rather a 1960s sounding title) aims at a more detailed and textual approach than its competitors. It includes an analysis of colour in signing, flags, body painting, religion, festivals, and colour associations – and makes use of a wide variety of examples. There is a wealth of suggestions of things to do (those requiring adult intervention are indicated).

The writing is clear and the reader can almost hear the authors' voices explaining the concepts. Although there is more text than one expects to find in books for this age group, there are plenty of well-chosen, relevant colour photographs.

This volume should be useful to teacher and student alike. Buyers may need to be selective and assess their priorities within the series though – it is likely to have at least eight volumes covering everything from colour in food to colour in art and advertising.

GB

Dead! The story of death and dying

0 7496 1186 3

Sick! The story of illness and getting better

0 7496 1184 7

Jim Hatfield, Watts Books (*Horrible Histories series*), £7.99 each

MIDDLE

Although funeral jokes ('one of the mourners fell dead at the graveside, which cast a gloom on the proceedings') abound, books about death don't, and those that there are tend to deal with bereavement rather than – as this one does – the business of becoming and being dead. The author is one of the gifted gang at 'Lazy Summer Books' whose 'Spaceship Earth' series for Cassell showed a refreshing combination of irreverence and caring seriousness, and that is the approach applied here. It works very well because that irreverence is never directed at dead people but to some of the practices of us survivors and is usually distanced by an historical dimension.



In the nineteenth century there was a market for second hand coffins which had been stolen from graves.

From *Dead! The story of death and dying*.

Starting with definitions of and tests for death (Native Americans used a smoke enema while Europeans preferred nipple forceps) we go on to look at decomposition, funerals, embalming, burial and other ways of disposal. Graveyards and mausolea lead us then to beliefs about life after death. The book's strengths are its matter-of-factness ('Nowadays many bodies are embalmed . . . it stops them smelling before the funeral'), the catholicity of its fact sampling and the respectful humour of its illustrations.

There will doubtless be tastes to which it does not appeal (I didn't, for instance, think much of the 'Home guide to head-shrinking') but I predict a wide, healthy and useful popularity for this one – a brave venture which libraries would be foolish to miss.

Illness and the history of medicine need less bravery but are treated similarly in *Sick!* where the mixture, as before, of mainstream

facts, exotic examples and funny pictures provides a potent stimulant of interest. TP

Fakes and Forgeries

Ian Graham, Evans (*Science Spotlight series*), 0 237 51294 7, £8.95

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

The processes and techniques involved in detecting fakes and forgeries are, in themselves, almost totally unexciting: chemical analysis, radiocarbon dating, X- and other rays, spectrometry, refractometry and thermoluminescence arouse few passions on the page. So what is it that makes a book like this such compelling reading? It's the enormous range of things that people have thought it worthwhile to counterfeit – from Yeti scalps to the pound in your pocket – and the uneasy feeling that we may be the forger's next victim.

Here we have such an array, well displayed – for each in a succession of examples we find out how the dissembling was done and how it was detected. Piltown Man, Hitler diaries, the Conan Doyle-seducing Cottingly Fairies, Tom Keating's 'Sexton Blakes' and assorted antiques, gems and coinage all get the treatment.

The appeal of the book is further widened by the inclusion of mysteries which may themselves attract fraudulent evidence, so Nessie, crop circles and UFOs get space too as we gradually learn about all the -ometries and -ologies involved, with sidelights on security.

Less of a science book than its series title suggests, this is a competently assembled list of famous fakes with a serviceably informative text capable of creating genuine interest. TP

Industrial Revolution

John D Clare, Bodley Head (*I Was There series*), 0 370 31835 8, £8.99

SECONDARY

In a fascinating afterword, John Clare tells us that 'the historian has to consult as many sources as possible and try to come to a fair decision'. It's a shame that he's not provided his readers with a fuller bibliography as he has certainly not stinted in his research and the result is a fascinating, wide-ranging exposition of the technological achievements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their impact on society.

Clare points out that 'historians do not know exactly when Britain's industrial "take-off" happened' and he examines the interaction of economic, social and technological factors that encouraged the many inventions associated with industrialization. His survey takes in the industrial development of continental Europe, showing how countries such as Belgium attempted to gain industrial know-how by employing British workers when their own population found it hard to adapt to industrialization. He even touches on developments in the fledgling United States of America where 'innovative businessmen contributed ideas and inventions to the development of the Industrial Revolution from its beginning'.

Unlike many other titles in this series a range of illustrative materials are used, with photographs and engravings of the period as well as the much-vaunted colour photographic 'reenactments' – which here blend less self-consciously into the proceedings.

The only blemish in an otherwise admirable production is the frustration induced by trying to use a thoughtfully compiled index when page numbers are often printed against such a dark background as to be barely visible. VH

Charles Ball and American Slavery

Heinemann (History Eyewitness series), 0 431 07148 9, £7.99
SECONDARY

Charles Ball almost certainly dictated this account of his life, probably to an abolitionist. The result is a compelling narrative told in a direct, almost understated style which lends added poignancy to his painful recollections.

Born on a Maryland tobacco plantation, Ball was about four years old in 1785 when the planter died and several of his slaves were subsequently auctioned – 'among them my family, all sold on the same day to different purchasers'. From then on his life was entirely at the mercy of others, a mere commodity to be traded as circumstances dictated.

Despite being married, with a family, he was acquired by a slaver and forced to travel all the way to South Carolina in chains where ironically he was sold on 4th July when 'people were celebrating and making speeches about freedom and equality'. Determined to escape he nevertheless had to spend many years on cotton plantations before making his bid for freedom.

With a little luck and great resourcefulness he succeeded in making his way back home and rebuilt his life, only to be recaptured about sixteen years later and returned south. He eventually escaped again and made his way to Philadelphia.

Paintings, engravings, photographs and information panels have been included to provide additional resource material for this engrossing commentary by a man of extraordinary resilience and strength of character.

No one knows what became of him after he told his story. As it says in the postscript, we can only hope that he managed to avoid capture until the end of his life or that he lived to see slavery abolished. VH

Growing Up

Edited by Felicia Law and Josephine Paker, Merlion, 1 85737 077 5, £19.99

SECONDARY

Most books about adolescence tend to fall into two main types: cheap paperbacks (usually useful, portable and often transient in nature) where agony aunts and uncles help their readers with problems, or 32-page hardbacks (with photographs and double-page spreads) which focus on specialised aspects such as health or relationships.

Growing Up is most certainly neither of these – it is comprehensive, international in scope, and momentarily arresting in its cost of just a penny under £20. Don't linger over the price nor the oversize 'annual' appearance, linger instead on the contents with over 300 pages of expert input and relevant coverage – better value than some £8 books which only dip toes into their subject.

The book concentrates on five main areas: exercise, diet, appearance, emotional issues and sexuality. Each section includes information, advice, case studies and a good mixture of illustrations with both photographs and artwork. The advice is sympathetic but forthright, the information clear and unambiguous. Although it attempts an international perspective it may be more appropriate for a western cultural context (for example running shoes are deemed essential for running and we are told that everyone is able to run upstairs). In the appropriate context, though, it's a valuable book for home or school. GB



Harriet Tubman (left) with some of the slaves she helped to escape to the free states, on the 'Underground Railroad'. From *Charles Ball and American Slavery*.

Take a look at what's new from A&C BLACK



CHILLERS

A great new series of thrillers, ghost stories and mysteries for 7-9 year olds.

- **Clive and the Missing Finger**
Sarah Garland
- **The Real Porky Philips**
Mark Haddon
- **Jimmy Woods and the Big Bad Wolf**
Mick Gowar
- **The Day Matt Sold Great-Grandma**
Eleanor Allen

each: 64 pages b/w illus throughout
laminated boards £5.50

WORLD WIDE CRAFTS

Chris Deshpande & Iain Macleod-Brundenell
Photographs by *Zul Mukhida*

An exciting new series of craft books packed with activities and craft ideas from around the world.

- Celebrations
- Animals
- Food
- The Body

each: 32 pages hardback
full colour photographs £7.50

THE MOOMIN BOOKS

NOW ON TV

Tove Jansson

Widely regarded as modern classics, Tove Jansson's books have a rare enchantment which spans all age groups.

reissued:

- **Moominland Midwinter**
- **Moominland Summermadness**

each: 168 pp b/w illus throughout
laminated boards £7.99

already available:

- **Comet in Moominland**
- **Finn Family Moomintroll**

each: 176 - 192 pp b/w illus throughout
laminated boards £6.95

Available through bookshops, in case of difficulty contact:
A&C Black, PO Box 19,
Huntingdon, Cambs, PE19 3SF

tel: (0480) 212666
fax: (0480) 405014

A BIT OF EARTH

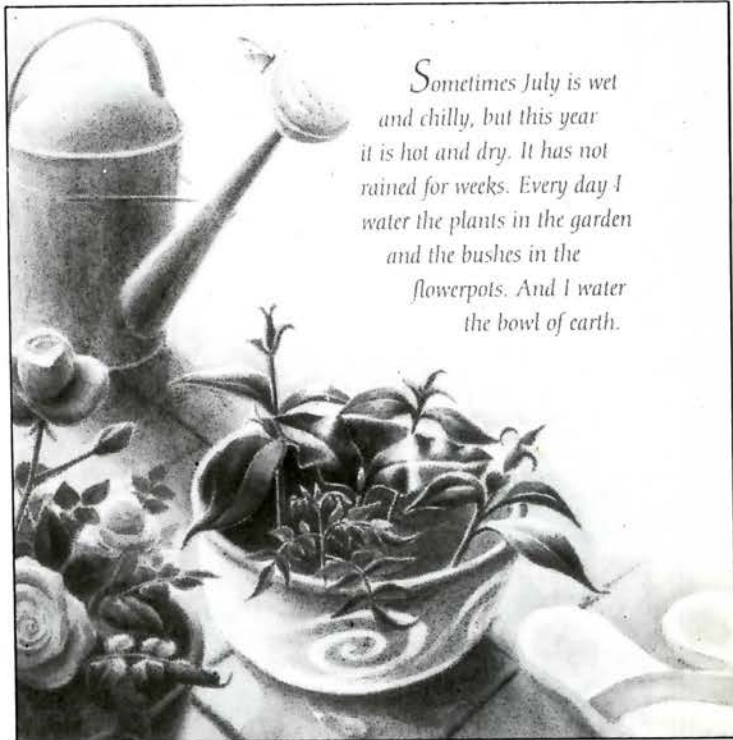
Ted Percy on where the answer lies . . . and books that point in the right direction

What is it, after all, that makes gardening so utterly worth doing? I've been trying to answer this question for years now and still don't really know, but I think the important thing is the stewardship of soil – your own soil – however much or little.

This is why the whole drama of **The Secret Garden** hinges on that part of the story where, surprising herself by the directness of her question, Mary asks Mr Craven 'might I have a bit of earth?' When the bewildered benefactor asks why, Mary falters 'to plant seeds in – to make things grow – to see them come alive'. Confused but convinced, Craven invites her to take whatever earth she wants, then in the next chapter she finds Colin and the story – uncertain in its progress to this point – climbs hand over green-fingered hand to feature film status.

It's the bit of earth that matters, be it in yard or yoghurt pot; the gardener's buzz comes from letting that bit of earth come alive and from tending the life that comes to it – to be a secret best shared with the right company at the right time. I've been looking for books which portray this special relationship. A perennial delight has been Pat Hutchins' **Titch**, where the littlest member of a family trio, relegated always to the least impressive roles, plants a 'tiny seed . . . and it grew and it grew and it grew' and Titch's self-esteem grows with it. Then, six years ago, Beverly and Nick Birch produced **Our Hidden Garden**. Here a happily multicultural crowd enjoys enormous enrichment of life in the garden that is both centre and surroundings for their outwardly ordinary inner London infants' school. The pleasure and purpose that the garden brings to its school is a joy to see and I only hope that the garden still survives – in the current educational climate it's needed more than ever. A particular private joy motivates Jan Mark's **This Bowl of Earth**. By the back door, warmed by the heating vent and damped by the drain, the bowl is a perfect nursery for cuttings to grow until they are ready for planting in the author's garden of trees. Here we get narrative and information in a harmonious real-life mix and, as in real life, some of the cuttings take and some don't. But the bowl goes on – an absorbing and utterly achievable garden in its own right as the author's gentle words explain how so lowly a thing can be so special.

Any gardener needs to know about plants. Conventional flora are abundant but not necessarily all that approachable or entertaining. Henry Pluckrose's **Flowers** – one of Watts



A perfect nursery for cuttings is **This Bowl of Earth**.

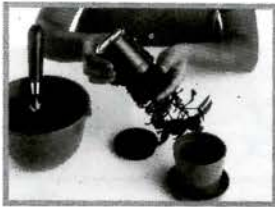
Sometimes July is wet and chilly, but this year it is hot and dry. It has not rained for weeks. Every day I water the plants in the garden and the bushes in the flowerpots. And I water the bowl of earth.

'Walkabouts' – is a lovely collection of flower photographs, bits of information and perceptive questions highly likely to stimulate an interest in growing and tending them. But gardeners know that plants have character that goes beyond the physical and, in her **Child's Book of Flowers**, Janet Marsh has provided not only her own botanically accurate water-colours but snippets of poetry, things to do, recipes and folklore fragments for each of 25 common sorts, to round their character out. That vegetables have character, too, is recognised by Phyllis King in her **Apple Green, Runner Bean** which looks at a dozen different fruit and veg. in a cheerfully informative way; she does her own pictures too so you can see what she means when she calls her potatoes 'cool beauties'. Another good vegetable primer is Julia Eccleshare's **Mixed Vegetables** – useful because in each case the whole plant is introduced and also the selection includes some exotics – like okras and aubergines – that can be entertained on a warm window-sill.

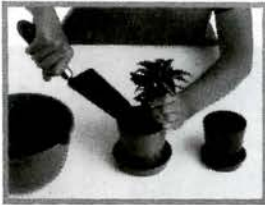
When it comes to understanding how plants grow there can't be a better way than watching a broad bean undo its stuff in a jam jar and we're lucky that the doyen of life-cycle books, Back and Watts' **Broad Bean**, is still in print to show us this happening. We watch the seed grow into a plant meticulously photographed and described in probably the best 'Stopwatch' that A & C Black have ever produced. In the same series, **Strawberry, Hyacinth** and **Potato** explain vegetative generation really well. An even more scientific look at plant growth, with meaningful experiments, comes in Barbara Taylor's **Growing Plants**, which has a valuable bit on soil types and constituents.

Having found out a bit about seeds, plants, bulbs and things you need to know what to do with them to make sure that what goes down comes up. An admirable starter is **Growing Plants at Home** by Althea – it's out of print at the moment but I've seen good numbers in local libraries of late, so track it down if you can. It's a no-nonsense introduction to propagating and growing ordinary house plants and other things that go well in pots (like carrot tops, peanuts, tree seeds and bulbs). Pictures and words are excellently clear, and simple enough to attract the conversation and help which is so much part of any kind of gardening. Still pot-bound but more ambitious in scope, size and production is Dorling Kindersley's **My First Garden Book** written by Angela Wilkes). All done by photographs, many life size, we get seed sowing, sprouting, bulbs, hanging baskets, succulents, cuttings and runners, window-boxes and indoor herbs and vegetables. The book's strength lies in its clarity and variety – and I wish I knew where they found that brand new miniature watering can – it's a beauty.

Repotting



1 If roots are showing at the bottom of a plant's pot, you should replot the plant. Gently tip the plant out into your hand.



2 Plant it in a new pot, one size larger, filled with fresh new compost. Water the plant and put it in a shady place for about a week.

My First Garden Book shows you clearly what to do.

Moving outside a bit, have a look at Deri Robins and Charlotte Stowells's **Gardening Book**. Here we're introduced to simple tools, digging, weeding, compost and 'pests' (a charming rule of thumb suggests that slow movers are pests, quick movers aren't, for they eat the slow movers). We also learn the essential skill of reading a seed packet. The book establishes, too, that most beginning gardeners start out in borrowed space and that a two-way cooperative relationship with some form of Head Gardener must be maintained. And this relationship often teaches more than any one book.

Now it is an inescapable fact that natural or 'organic' gardening is easier on the environment and on the gardener than other known ways. It's been going on since Cain and Abel's time whereas artificial 'fertilisers' and poisons are an invention of the last century and - I think time will show - just a phase we're going through. So you want a good easy organic gardening book. Luckily there are some now - three years ago, according to **BfK's Green Guide**, there weren't. Thompson Yardley's **Grow Your Own** is rooted firmly in the belief that 'you look after the soil and it will look after you'. The home-made presentation at which Yardley excels deals with the destructive spiral of agribusiness before advising local fresh food. 'Don't buy much' counsels the author as a cooperative start on a small plot is advised, beginning with easy veg. before moving into weed and pest control, green manuring and compost. Definitely a get up and go book, with some good laughs too, **Grow Your Own** has its serious counterpart in Jo Readman's **Muck and Magic**. This is much more conventional and it also starts with the soil. Its 'getting started', 'what to grow and when' and 'crop rotation' pages are really useful confidence-builders, backed up by plenty of ways to get plants off to a good start - like no-tread beds.

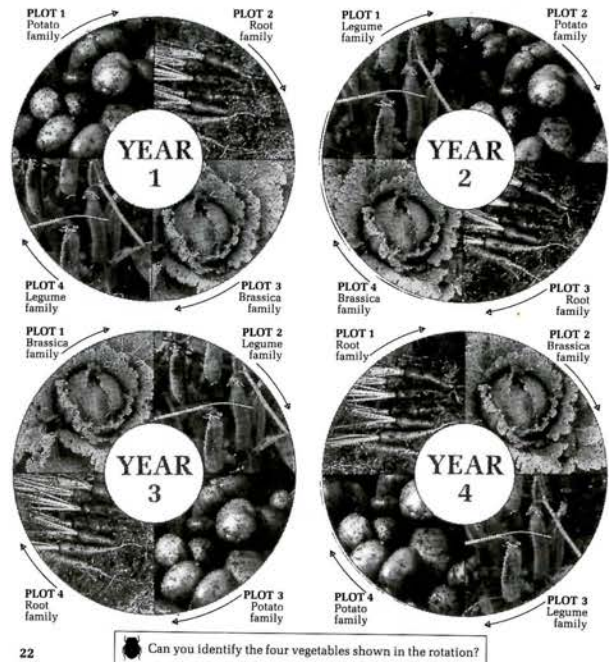
These two provide excellent preparation for the best natural gardening book of all, Lawrence Hills' **Month by Month Organic Gardening**. Hills ran the seminal Henry Doubleday Research Association for years, was the moving spirit behind the **Muck and Magic** TV series and was the embodiment of practical energy and common sense, of which this book is a crystallization. Simply and persuasively written it's the ideal handbook for any family or school group that wants to make natural gardening work well.

But there are lots more things in the garden than the gardener puts there. After all most gardeners spend less time in their gardens than out of them, so most of the time the garden is a wild environment looking after itself and host to anything that comes along. The business of appreciating this is an important part of a garden's management. A simple book like **In My Garden** by Ron Maris introduces us to the idea of celebrating the pond life, field mice and birds that live there as well as the intentional plants and furniture. In **Garden**

Crop rotation

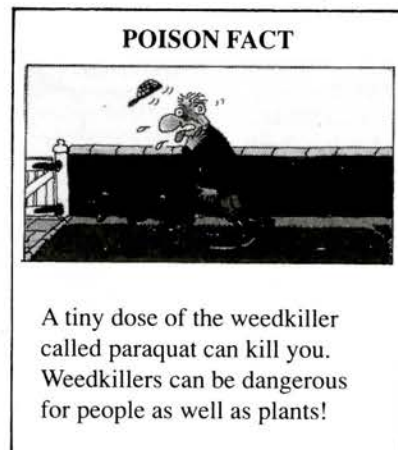
It is a good idea to grow different families of vegetables in separate plots and move them around (rotate them) each year. This helps to keep soil pests and diseases under control, and it makes the best use of your valuable compost.

You can sow a green manure, such as clover, in a plot that is not being used.



Crop rotation is best shown in pictures, as here from **Muck and Magic**.

Birds, Simon Perry further investigates avian inhabitants, concentrating on the bird's we're most likely to see from the kitchen window, with good pictures and sound natural history backed up by advice on attracting, feeding and housing them. All this and lots more comes in Tony Soper's **Bird Table Book**. Now in its sixth edition, this is still the classic guide to establishing a wildlife garden, dealing as it does with much more than birds. The vital point is that what attracts birds does well for other life forms too. It's a book for the whole family for ever. In **Worm's Eye View**, Kipchak Johnson encourages the reader to 'make your own wild life park', either in a garden or on a bit of spare ground. This is all about controlled intervention and the creation of encouraging habitats; the pictures are by Thompson 'Grow Your Own' Yardley and the humour is out of the same cackle-barrel and very effective.



Worm's Eye View uses humour to reinforce important points.

So, when is a weed not a weed? Well, when it does a good job. When Vivian French's grandfather grew nettles it was their capacity for growing butterflies that promoted them from the weed status her father had assigned to them. Vivian tells us all about this, and the butterflies, in her charming and very informative **Caterpillar, Caterpillar** - apart from being good natural history the toleration message is irresistible as the book shows Walker's 'Read and Wonder' concept at its very best. In Black's 'Handmade Habitats' series **Garden** by

ANDERSEN PRESS

Outstanding Spring Titles

TEDDY! WHERE ARE YOU?

Ralph Steadman

32pp 230 x 200mm
0-86264-484-4 £7.99
March

Britain's most highly acclaimed artist has created a little masterpiece set in the future when children don't know what a teddy bear is, a book full of warmth and surprises.



THE SPRING RABBIT

Joyce Dunbar and Susan Varley

32pp 206 x 257mm
0-86264-455-0 £7.99
February

Smudge's search for a sibling is accompanied by appealing woodland scenes from a classic illustrator. A refreshingly positive child's view of a new baby in the family.

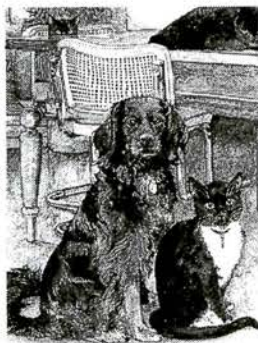


COPYCAT

Ruth Brown

32pp 230 x 200mm
0-86264-462-3 £7.99
February

Buddy the copycat gets more than he bargains for when he copies Bessie the dog. Beautiful paintings and a simple, humorous story are brought to life by discovering the animals underneath half pages.



JIMMY'S SUNNY BOOK

Paul Dowling

32pp 230 x 230mm
0-86264-483-6 £6.99
10 copy counterpack
0-86264-531 X £69.90
April

Toddlers will love pulling the tabs, seeing the pictures move and joining in Jimmy's fun in this original novelty window book.

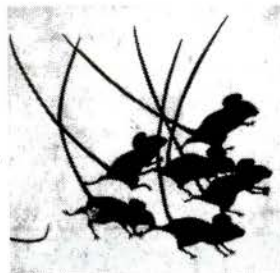


SEVEN BLIND MICE

Ed Young

32pp 250 x 200mm
0-86264-472-0 £8.99
April

Exquisite and vibrant paper collages accompany this joyous modern retelling of an ancient fable of wisdom and truth.



THE RASCALLY CAKE

Jeanne Willis and Korky Paul

32pp 250 x 200mm
0-86264-477-1 £8.99
May

The hilarious rhyming tale of ghastly Skumskins O'Parsley and his man-eating cake. Witty and detailed pictures will make you squirm!



AN EXTRAORDINARY EGG

Leo Lionni

32pp 225 x 278mm
0-86264-537-9 £8.99
June

A case of mistaken identity brings Jessica the frog, and her friends Marilyn and August a new friend in this colourful animal fable, one of Leo Lionni's funniest and simplest yet.



TIGERS: READ-ALONE FICTION

CABBAGES FROM OUTER SPACE

Lindsay Camp, ill. Tony Ross

64pp 198 x 129mm
0-86264-486-0 £4.99
April

Computer-mad Emma is sucked into the fantasy game world struggling to master her new game, Cabbages From Outer Space.



MORRIS MACMILLIPEDE

Mick Fitzmaurice, ill. Satoshi Kitamura

64pp 198 x 129mm
0-86264-487-9 £4.99
April

A touching and amusing story of a millipede who is determined to become a dancer and succeeds against all the odds.



ANDERSEN YOUNG READERS' LIBRARY

THE SIGN OF THE CRAB

Hazel Townson

80pp 198 x 129mm
0-86264-370-8 £6.99
March

In the twelfth in this exciting adventure series, Lenny and Jake are kidnapped by thieves but manage to escape and track down the villains by means of a tattoo.



Paul Wright is about devising and planning a school garden. It's strong on the wildflower element and, even more usefully, encourages the starter to work with, rather than against, prevailing conditions, which may range from soil type to possibilities of vandalism. It's probably best read cooperatively.

While researching for the **Green Guide** I unearthed the School Garden Company – a modest publishing house which has produced a number of extremely useful handbooks for garden-planners. Ostensibly aimed at teachers they are just as applicable to families, hotels, local authorities and hospitals, to all of whose budgets their slim prices should appeal. Formats are slim, too, but the amount of information jammed into each before you get to the excellent bibliography and address list is truly remarkable. The titles are helpfully descriptive. David Gale advises on **Starting a School Garden**, Peter Cawdell on **Starting a Butterfly Garden**. Starling and Loosley have contributed volumes on wildflowers and herbs, Nigel Matthews on birds and Shirley Thompson on bats. My own favourite, possibly because it contains elements of all the others, is Peter Sibley's **Starting a Wildlife Pond**. It's a really good set for the staffroom.

But formally published books aren't the whole story. Some of the most immediately attractive and memorable gardening help comes from the many seed catalogues that it's still not too late to try and find. Here plants are listed with their characters and virtues alongside helpful pictures. Horticultural hints abound as the seed merchants woo the customer with 'highly selected strains' and 'exceptional cropping qualities'. My favourite is the **Organic Gardening Catalogue** which does 'supplies for the the whole garden' and is generous with practical advice. It even lists a prismatic dog-shaped cat and fox deterrent called GETZ! Then there's the seed packets themselves – all the information you want ('rake the seeds in with the tips of the teeth', I remember) just when and where you want it and without getting grubby finger-marks on the books. And if you open the packet at the bottom you can still read the name of it when you've folded it up with half the seeds yet to sow – I never saw any book that tells you that.

Last of all, don't forget the most valuable book of all, your own notebook. Keep a daily garden diary right from day 1 and you'll be surprised how soon and how often you turn to it for information and help. For fifteen years I lived in the same garden and every day wrote a bit about it in a 5-year diary. It's all there – what works, what doesn't, what to do and expect when, and every day's weather. Indispensable and entertaining, I almost bequeathed them to our successors when we moved, but the wrench would have been too great. For they crystallise the personal relationship that gardening is all about – the gardener and the bit of earth. I wonder what would have happened if Archibald Craven had misunderstood Mary Lennox and only accorded her a couple of pounds of Misslethwaite loam? I think I know. I think that 'The Secret Flowerpot' would have become a classic. ■

Bibliographical details of titles, listed in order of their appearance.

The Secret Garden, Frances Hodgson Burnett, many editions but particularly Everyman, 1 85715 915 2, £7.99; Puffin Classic, 0 14 035004 7, £2.50 pbk (J/M)

Fitch, Pat Hutchins, Bodley Head (1972), 0 370 01137 6, £7.99; Julia MacRae 'Little Greats', 1 85681 142 5, £3.99; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050096 0, £3.99 pbk (I)

Our Hidden Garden, Beverley and Nick Birch, Hamish Hamilton (1988), 0 241 12519 7, £4.95 (J/M)

This Bowl of Earth, Jan Mark, Walker (1993), 0 7445 2190 4, £6.99 (I/J)

Flowers, Henry Pluckrose, Watts (1993), 0 7496 1116 2, £6.99 (I/J)

A Child's Book of Flowers, Janet Marsh, Hutchinson (1993), 0 09 176231 6, £9.99 (J/M)

Apple Green, Runner Bean, Phyllis King, Walker (1993), 0 7445 2528 4, £6.99 (I/J)

Mixed Vegetables, Julia Eccleshare, Evans (1986), 0 237 60268 7, £5.95 (J/M)

Broad Bean, Christine Back and Barrie Watts, A & C Black (1985), 0 7136 3495 2, £2.99 pbk (I/J)

Strawberry, Jennifer Coldrey and George Bernard, A & C Black (1988), 0 7136 3052 3, £5.99 (I/J)

Hyacinth, Jennifer Coldrey and George Bernard, A & C Black (1989), 0 7136 3095 7, £5.99; 0 7136 3719 6, £2.99 pbk (I/J)

Potato, Barrie Watts, A & C Black (1987), 0 7136 2929 0, £5.99 (I/J)

Growing Plants, Barbara Taylor, Kingfisher (1991), 0 86272 751 0, £2.99 pbk (J/M)

Growing Plants at Home, Althea, Dinosaur (1985), 0 85122 503 9, o/p (J)

My First Garden Book, Angela Wilkes, Dorling Kindersley (1992), 0 86318 740 4, £6.99 (J)

Gardening Book, Deri Robins, Kingfisher (1992), 0 86272 878 9, £2.99 pbk (M)

Green Guide to Children's Books, Books for Keeps (1991), 1 871566 01 0, £2.00 pbk (A)

Grow Your Own, Thompson Yardley, Cassell (1992), 0 304 32691 7, £3.99 pbk (J/M/S)

Muck and Magic, Jo Readman, Heinemann Library (1993), 0 431 07448 8, £7.99 (J/M/S)

Month by Month Organic Gardening, Lawrence D Hills, Thorsons (1989), 0 7225 1863 3, £7.99 pbk (A)

In My Garden, Ron Maris, Walker (1989), 0 86203 274 1, £6.95; 0 7445 1347 2, £2.99 pbk (I)

Garden Birds, Simon Perry, Hodder & Stoughton (1993), 0 340 56596 9, £8.99 (J/M)

The Bird Table Book, Tony Soper, David & Charles (1965 but now in 6th edition), 0 7153 0053 9, £12.99 (M/S)

Worm's Eye View, Kipchak Johnson, Cassell (1991), 0 304 32527 9, £3.99 pbk (J/M/S)

Caterpillar, Caterpillar, Vivian French, Walker (1993), 0 7445 2275 7, £6.99 (I/J)

Garden, Paul Wright, A & C Black (1992), 0 7136 3549 5, £6.50 (M/S)

The following are published by The School Garden Company, PO Box 49, Spalding, Lincolnshire PE11 1NZ, at £3.75 each unless otherwise stated (telephone 0775 769518 for mail order details):

Starting a School Garden, David Gale, 1 85116 800 1 (A)

Starting a Butterfly Garden, Peter Cawdell, 1 85116 801 X (A)

Wildflowers in the Garden, Anne Starling and Peter Loosley, 1 85116 806 0 (A)

Your Herb Garden, Anne Starling and Peter Loosley, 1 85116 807 9 (A)

Garden for Birds, Nigel Matthews, 1 85116 805 2, £3.95 (A)

Bats in the Garden, Shirley Thompson, 1 85116 803 6 (A)

Starting a Wildlife Pond, Peter Sibley, 1 85116 808 7 (A)

The Organic Gardening Catalogue is available free from Chase Organics, Coombelands Lane, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 1HY, tel: 0932 820958. (A)



Ted Percy, who claims this drawing from **Starting a Butterfly Garden** is of him, was Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library, until he retired recently. He is a regular non-fiction reviewer for **BfK**.



The Books for Keeps Green Guide to Children's Books

The essential book and environmental resource with over 450 fully annotated children's book titles (including fiction, poetry and information books) for children from pre-school through to older readers of 14+. Issues dealt with include population, the earth's threatened resources, waste and recycling, atmosphere and climate, habitats and animals (the largest section) – in fact all the major environmental topics which children want and need to know about. The entire bibliography has been incorporated into a unique subject index listing over 200 different green themes. In addition there are several feature articles from environmentalists, authors and teachers including a seminal introduction by Jonathon Porritt. At £2.00 (inc. p&p), **The Green Guide** represents exceptional value. First published May 1991.

UK price: £2.00. Overseas airmail: £6.50. Range of discounts between 15% and 60% for bulk orders.

If you would like to order a copy or obtain more information, phone 081 852 4953 (we accept most credit cards) or write to **Books for Keeps**, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF.

BORROW A BOOK 1994



Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book
**"Borrow A Book ... was easy to organise,
 did not require specific titles to be
 available and was not too staff intensive.
 We will definitely do it again!!"**

Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book
Lesley Sim, Divisional Children's Librarian, Hampshire

Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book
 Order **£250** worth of Penguin
 Children's Books for your library and
 receive your free **BORROW A BOOK** kit.

Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book
 Display the **BORROW A BOOK** poster and
 watch six to twelve year-olds come flocking to
 claim their **BORROW A BOOK** passports,
 featuring recommended authors by age group.

Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book
 Get ready to hand out the **BORROW A
 BOOK** certificates, stickers and bookmarks
 for completed passports.

Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book Borrow a Book
 Sit back and watch those shelves empty!



BORROW A BOOK 1994
 BORROW A BOOK is only available from your usual library supplier.
 If you have any queries, please contact Elaine McQuade, Penguin
 Children's Marketing, telephone: 071 416 3131.

CONTEMPLATING CARNEGIE (continued)

Will Philip Ridley (very much established) or Malorie Blackman (a rising star) ever win the Carnegie Medal, Britain's premier Award for a children's author? Unless members of the Youth Libraries Group choose to buck the trend of recent years, *neither* has a chance. Their tendency is to write for pre-teens.

Indeed, even authors who do specialise in fiction for older readers, which nowadays has virtually taken the Medal

over, are less likely than ever to win The Big One. Despite the massive increase in the number of children's books published in the last 20 years, no less than six preferred authors have won the Carnegie *twice* – a feat quite unknown in the first 40 years of the Award's existence.

Our editorial in **BfK 82** (September 1993) drew attention to both facts and queried what lay behind them – to which Susan Greenfield and Margaret



Andrew Carnegie

Bell, current co-ordinators of Carnegie/Greenaway, responded in the November 1993 issue.

Below, though, we print a selection of letters from other readers on the subject – abbreviated in some cases but pretty representative of the opinions we've gathered by post, by 'phone and from face-to-face meetings. Clearly the debate isn't yet over. Think on, YLG!

Liz Attenborough of Puffin writes:

CONGRATULATIONS on a great piece about the Carnegie Medal – I do so agree, and will be very interested in the response. (You might also be interested to know that during some recent cover research we did, book-buying people took no notice of award-winning stickers and thought the Carnegie mention indicated it was an American book . . .)

Robert Leeson writes:

Sue Greenfield and Margaret Bell suggest that writers 'must think more sensitively about the needs of younger children'.

I will leave aside the rebuke implied to all of us who do write for the younger age groups and always give of our best.

For some years now writing for young children has attracted all the famous names, including the Carnegie winners. Are we to understand that they are taking a rest and not producing good enough writing to win 'The Big One'. Or is it possible (a thought reinforced by the Carnegie Panel's habit of returning to the same writers) that the judges' perceptions work from the top down? Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Storm* is a few years away now. But I recall one judge describing it as 'perfect piece of miniaturisation'. Does that not suggest a certain fixed, if implicit, notion of what a prize winner looks like?

Is the message really: we have chosen the best book, no other choice is possible.

If that is so, what is wrong with having another age category? (With the Greenaway we already have two; why not three?) And if it is not the best, what is wrong with following the *Guardian's* rule of once-only prize winners?

Should the judges wish to make a general point about excellence, why not an occasional 'Body of Work' award for a distinguished author?

There's nothing new in any of these proposals. I have made them from time to time at YLG meetings. Up to now I always had the impression the librarians were listening.

Sally Christie of Walker Books writes:

The purpose of this letter is very straightforward. Simply, I wanted to write and say, Yes! Well said! to your piece about the Carnegie in the *BfK* September issue. It can't be right – and my literary judgement, such as it is, tells me it definitely isn't – for there to emerge such a beast as a Carnegie winner *veteran*. The phenomenon smacks not so much of the herd as the flock instinct.

Peter Sheldon of Peters Library Service writes:

I'm sure the Youth Libraries Group will respond to your very FINE – if I may use that author's name – 'Contemplating Carnegie' editorial. But the mention of publicity and sponsorship has me lunging for my pen for, together with the awards, we are really doing tremendous things in promoting and marketing the Carnegie/Kate Greenaway shortlist through special posters mailed to 12,500 schools and libraries nationally. Now, if next year provides us with a full list of easy readers and young fiction, great, no problem; and then if the award was withheld, what a publicity coup! But only for one year, YLG please note.

Philippa Milnes-Smith of Viking Children's Books writes:

While both poetry and non-fiction are eligible for the Carnegie Medal, fiction pretty well always wins and the Carnegie has now become known as a fiction prize. If this is the case should not other, separate awards, be available for non-fiction or poetry? I have never even seen any poetry on the long, long shortlist for the Carnegie. Do librarians feel unable to evaluate poetry? Do they not rate it at all?

Sonia Benster of the Children's Bookshop in Huddersfield writes:

As a recent Smarties judge, I've read the 'Contemplating Carnegie' exchange of views with heightened interest. If previous winners of any particular prize are precluded from winning a second time, will their publishers be prepared to submit books of merit when the farthest they can go will be the Shortlist, resulting in an unrepresentative selection of books.

True, less famous, but equally deserving authors, could have an increased chance of winning – but can such a restriction result in a prize which truly reflects the best of the books published in a given year?

It is the responsibility of the judges to evaluate each and every book submitted, using identical criteria, regardless of the author's track record. Judges can be very opinionated and subjective and, with a less than perfect system of assessment, sadly, the merit of some outstanding authors will not be acknowledged.

Adèle Geras writes:

Three points about the Carnegie Medal:

1. The choosing process seems to be very thorough and democratic BUT it is a pity that the prize has to pit the teenage novel against the shorter book for much younger children. I reckon the younger the child is, the harder it is to write a real masterpiece, but would something like *The Sign on Rosie's Door* ever win the Carnegie? Shame we couldn't have three age-groups. Does a picture book text ever win?
2. It's part of the Carnegie rubric that the winning book should be IMPROVING in some way. This rules out a hell of a lot of good stuff! I reckon there should be a 'pure pleasure' prize for books (thrillers, SF, fantasy, etc., plus many others) that do you no good at all.
3. As to the vexed question of winning more than once: I don't think it's a good idea now, but if I were a two-time winner I'd think it was a terrific notion! ■

The Rain Forest Storybook

NEW IN APRIL

Traditional stories from the original forest peoples of South America, Africa and South-East Asia

Rosalind Kerven

A challenging, important and highly readable book which brings alive the human voices behind a major environmental tragedy. It will take children on a fascinating journey to meet some of the peoples who live in the world's disappearing rain forests. Readers will share their traditional stories, absorbing new ideas about the natural world, about their fellow human beings – and even about themselves.

They will travel to the Amazon to hear about the mysterious transformations of Jaguar-Man; and then to central Africa to discover what happened when the Most Beautiful Song in the Forest was destroyed ...

The Rain Forest Storybook also contains a wealth of factual information about the original forest peoples' ways of life.

80 pp. illustrated with line drawings
 0 521 43533 1 Paperback about £4.50
 0 521 43502 1 Hardback about £9.95 net

In the Court of the Jade Emperor

Stories from Old China

Rosalind Kerven

In the Court of the Jade Emperor contains 15 myths, legends and folk-tales, meticulously researched and retold in lively atmospheric language, with a factual introduction. This rich tapestry of stories evokes powerfully the spirit of Ancient China – one of the oldest and greatest civilisations in the world.

80 pp. illustrated with line drawings
 0 521 43538 2 Paperback £4.50
 0 521 43489 0 Hardback £9.95 net

Earth Magic, Sky Magic

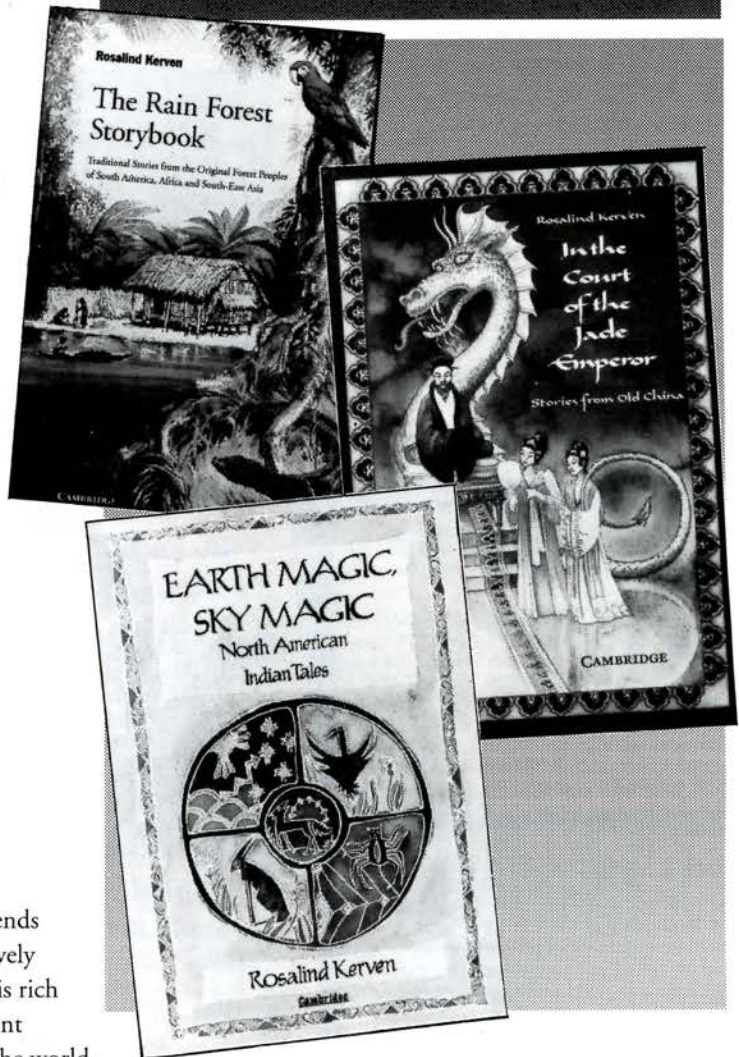
North American Indian tales

Rosalind Kerven

This book features a selection of traditional stories from 12 different North American Indian peoples. They are grouped around the recurrent themes of: the sun, moon and stars; fantastical journeys; and two popular heroes, Spider Woman and Coyote the trickster. Rosalind Kerven's retellings convey vividly the atmosphere of the original stories. A factual introduction explains the traditional role of storytelling and gives background to North American culture past and present.

80 pp. illustrated with line drawings
 0 521 36806 5 Paperback £4.50
 0 521 36235 0 Hardback £8.50 net

Myths and Legends from Cambridge



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Please send me, on inspection:

- The Rain Forest Storybook 0 521 43533 1
- In the Court of the Jade Emperor 0 521 43538 2
- Earth Magic, Sky Magic 0 521 36806 5

Please send me further details of Myths and Legends from Cambridge

Name

School address

.....

..... Postcode

Please return this form to: Louise Whitson, Cambridge University Press, FREEPOST, The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 1BR, or telephone the Educational Marketing Department on 0223 325013/014/889.

Source Code: A64337

GOING TO SCHOOL ON A STORY

Tessa Strickland

'Imagination is more important than knowledge' Albert Einstein remarked.

Each term as I prepare my three children for the return to school, I find myself pondering his words. Does our education system, ridden as it is with test as the punctuation marks of progress, and our wider culture with its dwindling funds for arts programmes, accord this kind of regard to the world of the imagination?

Perhaps the most important containers of imagination for any culture are its myths and stories. For an archaic culture, such myths are infused with a significance that is as real as sunrise. For the western teacher and parent, they're more likely to be regarded as fantasy – stories may carry a moral, bear an interesting lesson, stand a situation on its head, or entertain us of an evening but are, at the end of the day, only make-believe. Such an attitude is emphasised by the division in adult reading between fiction on the one hand and non-fiction on the other. The danger of this division is that it devalues myths and stories as the conveyors of certain truths about life that cannot be as effectively conveyed in other ways – ways that cannot be taught and tested, but rather suggested and appreciated.

Might there be a middle territory between the realms of so-called fiction and non-fiction – a more common regard for stories, myths and legends not as an escape into fantasy, but as a way of mirroring back to ourselves the challenges and mysteries of our lives? Since Freud psychoanalysed Oedipus, psychologists of many persuasions have shown the benefits of dismantling myths and fairy tales in a therapeutic context. By extension, we can see that storytelling is of itself a healing process. The popularity of adult titles that use myth as a tool – Robert Bly's *Iron John*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes' *Women Who Run With the Wolves* – suggest there's a hunger among parents, let alone their children, for a way of reclaiming imagination as a carrier of meaning in our everyday lives.

'Tell me a story,' my children clamour. Usually, when I respond to this demand, I draw on my repertoire of old stories. This isn't because I think modern storytellers aren't marvellous – many of them are – but because in the themes they explore, the adventures they describe, and the language of enchantment with which they've been handed down, the old stories seem to me to deal with the larger issues of our existence – growth and change, fear and courage, friendship and betrayal, suffering and death – in a more robust fashion than many contemporary tales.

There are other reasons, too: with the characters I select, the words I choose, the way in which I tell of the adventures of heroes and heroines of the past, I realise I'm connecting my children to their human history as well as helping to mould the attitudes with which they will approach the future. I'm also laying a pattern of guidelines with which to approach those experiences and feelings that will visit us all – success and loss, joy and pain, loneliness, confusion. How, in new situations, should we feel our way forward? Good stories offer us guidelines with which to navigate the thrills and dangers of growing up – and growing old. They also provide us with clues and the qualities we need to cultivate in particular circumstances: when it pays to be cautious ('I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts'); when to be generous, like the heroine of the old German folk tale 'Mother Holle';



Tessa Strickland, founder and publisher of Barefoot Books.

when to take risks (what kind of a wimp would Jack have grown into if he hadn't defied his mother and scaled the beanstalk?); how to persevere. Are the adventures and lessons of 'Beowulf' and 'Gilgamesh', 'The Ramayana' or 'The Arabian Nights' inappropriate to the predicaments of our time? In a sense, they're always appropriate, for like their creators, they turn around the question of human choice, of love and hate, of intention, desire and power.

I've noticed, in my explorations of old stories, that as often as not advice and assistance comes, for those who listen to it, from animals, and from those who live in the wilds and are familiar with animals' ways. In such tales these animals are not sentimentalised, they serve a serious – sometimes crucial – purpose. In the myth of Isis and Osiris, the native wisdom of the animal world is beautifully conveyed through the animal god Anubis; in the American Indian story 'Jumping Mouse', animals are each other's teachers. Nothing, it seems, is as ecological as a good old story, for in these tales the theme of right relationships – of parents to children, humans to animals, activities to seasons – has deep and ancient roots in the processes of the natural world.

I know that telling them stories will not secure my children top marks in their exams since 'imaginative' is a word that seems to become increasingly perjorative (and non-vocational) as children ascend the academic ladder. But it's imagination, rather than knowledge, that shows us how to connect, qualify, enjoy, value – fair versus unfair, better versus worse, good versus bad. It's through imagination that we learn how to pass time fruitfully. It's through imagination that we befriend each other – across tables, across playgrounds, across cultures and generations – and ourselves. That's why, when I've ironed their clothes, named their shoes and labelled their folders, I shall send my children back to school on a story. ■

Details of the adult books mentioned:

Iron John, Robert Bly, Orbit, 1 85230 419 7, £3.99

Women Who Run With the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Rider, 0 7126 5747 9, £9.99

Besides being a mum, Tessa Strickland recently launched a new children's publishing company called Barefoot Books – for more information, see page 31 in *BfK 83* (Nov 93).

INTO THE REALMS OF MYTH



Rosalind Kerven on an experiment in writing with children

Up to now I've always preferred to get on quietly with writing books rather than talking about them. But of course, having school-age children of your own changes everything. 'You'll have to come in and do some story work with the children,' insisted my oldest daughter's teacher, Isobel Hope, every time I saw her. Infected by her enthusiasm, how could I say no?

We live in rural Northumberland and Natasha's school is a small village one offering a friendly atmosphere and lots of individual attention. The top class that I was to work with has only 18 pupils but their ages range from six to nine and their abilities from the barely literate to those who constantly have their noses glued to a good book.

Where to start? Our interests converged splendidly when Isobel began to plan a class project on myths and legends. I have written eight collections of these from many cultures, and traditional stories are one of my passions. She was keen to use my skills not just to share and talk about the stories with the children, but also to stimulate them into some 'better' writing of their own. One of my most successful books has been *Earth Magic, Sky Magic*, a collection of traditional tales from the North American Indians, and it was to these extraordinary and uplifting tales that we turned for inspiration.

We launched into the project with a couple of simple story-telling sessions. I was gratified to see how much power a good story can exert on a normally fidgety, wriggly, day-dreamy class of young children. For a blissful 15 minutes, as they listened to the strange adventures of 'The Great Mystery Lake' and then to 'Moon Woman and the Arrow Chain Boys', the room was still and silent and the children enrapt – an author's reward worth any amount of adult reviews, I can assure you.

So what grabbed them about these tales? The words and interpretations of the retellings are mine, of course; but the plots, the characters, the settings, all come from the great storytellers of a distant place, a lost time. Firstly, in their present form they are short and to the point. There's no room for waffle: they're really action-packed. And the action itself is so 'different' from run of the mill fiction, this is a world where mere children set out to 'prove' themselves by embarking on long and dangerous quests, where a boy can

magically transform himself into a kingfisher and back again; and where it's possible to tame even the most terrifying giants of nature if you only treat them with the correct type of respect. The characters, sparsely yet vividly sketched, are larger than life and include an irresistible gallery of monsters, tricksters and heroes of both sexes and many species. The settings are equally dramatic: one can climb to the moon, dive to strange underwater worlds or walk to beyond the edge of the earth.

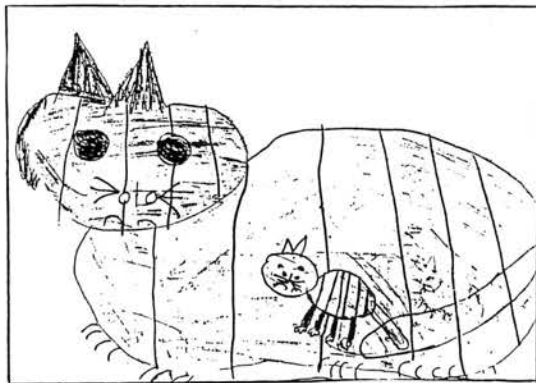
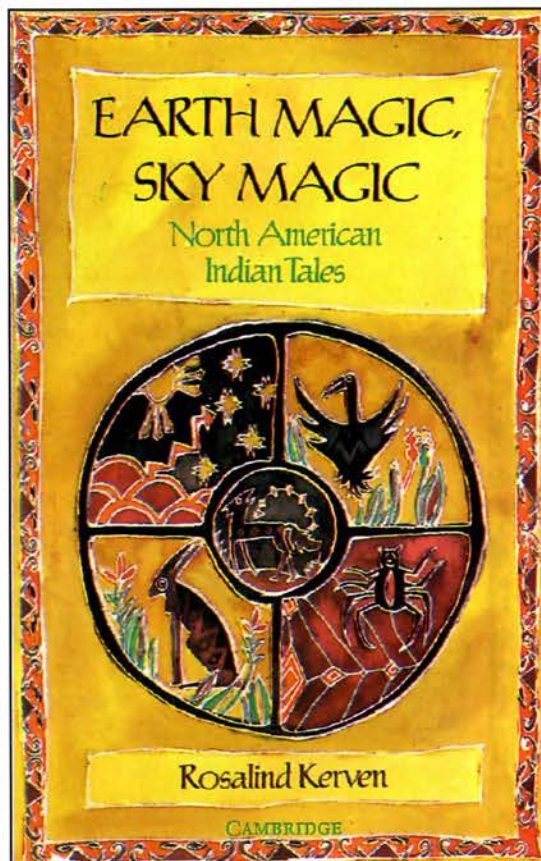
American Indian stories have another particularly useful quality: their cultural setting is the tribe, a compact, neatly defined social unit with its own rules and beliefs. Isobel agreed that this would make a convenient and intriguing framework within which the children could set their own stories.

The class invented its own tribe, which we named Thropton after the school and village. Isobel spent a number of sessions helping them work out their lifestyles and rules. Most of the boys opted to be hunters, whilst the girls generally wanted to look after their tree-houses and wigwams. (As an anthropologist I was intrigued that despite the current climate for change and a preponderance of working mums, these children still preferred the traditional patterns of work practised by virtually every so-called 'primitive' society in the world.) They agreed on a highly democratic system of rule by consensus, without formal leaders: this provided a welcome opportunity for talking about morals, and some of the ideas thrown up later formed the basis of the children's stories, with supernatural punishments imposed on members of the tribe who broke the rules.

Quite a lot of American Indian stories feature culture-heroes – sometimes human, more often animal – a concept which I translated to the children as 'magic helpers'. For example there is Spider Woman, a strict but kindly demi-goddess, always ready to help and reform those who get themselves into trouble; and Coyote whose mischievously comical exploits rival Anansi or Brer Rabbit any day. Fortunately, our own 'magic helper' was eagerly waiting in the wings, in the shape of Tigger the school cat. The children agreed she would be an excellent hook on which to hang their stories.



Rosalind Kerven (photo by Richard Kerven).



Tigger and her mum by Domini, age 7.

The ultimate aim was to produce our own, original book of Thropton myths and legends, but first we tried to improve the children's general writing skills. As a group, and then individually, we practised describing both characters and settings in new, more evocative ways. We also talked more generally about how to go about story writing. Isobel is a great one for *planning* a story carefully before the actual writing. I was able to balance this formality by talking about using *imagination*, which of course is the creative writer's most indispensable tool. 'Imagination is like a tube of toothpaste,' I told them; 'you might think you've used it all, but give it an extra squeeze and you'll be amazed how much more comes out.' I also urged them to spend lots of time simply *thinking* about their ideas outside the classroom 'in the bath, on a long journey, before you go to sleep . . .'. Thinking is another important but rather vague writer's skill which can easily get overlooked (I'm sure I can't be the only writer who's spent a whole three years growing a particular novel in my head before writing down a single word of it!). Another trick of the trade we both tried to impress on them was the ability to work on a first draft, not to be afraid to change things and especially to cross things out. Anyone who's written for publication knows that making a passage shorter almost always improves it, but of course this is a discipline that doesn't come easily to youthful authors who feel that the more lines they fill, the greater the achievement.

TIGGER AND THE EVERLASTING WINTER

Once upon a time there lived a good witch who wore silver and white. She had blonde hair and made the seasons of summer and spring.

One day the wicked wizard who was the good witch's husband killed the good witch because he didn't like summer and spring. From then all the tribe were very sad. There was a terrible winter, blizzards and storms raged. It was so cold that nobody could move except Tigger.

Tigger was a tabby striped cat. She was the good witch's cat. Tigger felt sorry for the tribe, so she decided to help. She didn't like the wizard and she knew that all the people were sad.

She decided to make a nettle cover for the witch's grave-stone. Tigger had to be very brave to do this task. She scraped away all the snow and picked nettles until her paws started to bleed and still she didn't stop. She carried them gingerly in her mouth to the cave and miaoowed these magic words:

"Witch, witch
come out of ditch
twitich a little
your bones are brittle
so you will tickle."

Then a very frightening thing happened: the grave-stone lifted up and out popped the good witch!

Everyone was delighted except . . . the evil wizard! He was so angry that smoke came out of his ears!

They had a party for Tigger. The witch had to start summer and spring all over again. As for the wizard, he was kicked out of the tribe and was left walking in the world till this very day.

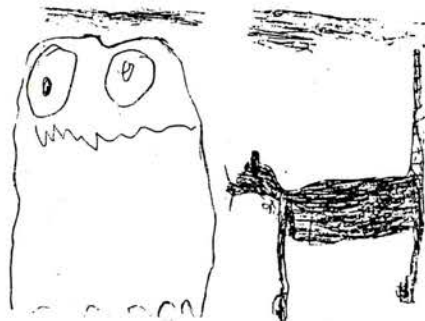


9-year-old Clare's work contained lots of typical traditional story ingredients: the conquest of good over evil, a sense of wonder at natural phenomena such as the seasons, and a moral lesson.

At last it was time to get to work on the stories for their 'big book'. I suggested a wide selection of titles to get them going, ranging from the traditional 'How Tigger Got Her Magic' to the

contemporary 'Tigger and the Space Aliens'; several of the children subsequently invented their own. The first drafts were laboriously written, then Isobel and I took turns to sit with each child and cajole them to make improvements. By the end of term we had 18 highly original tales about the Thropton Tribe and Tigger the Cat, of which even the least able could feel justly proud.

To my delight, most of the stories really did have the feel of a genuine traditional tale. The plots tended to feature a near disaster averted with the help of Tigger's magic, and a moral message either explicitly or implicitly included. There was lots of 'other worldliness', a good selection of magic songs and a few truly memorable inventions, such as Tigger's powers to make rain when the tribe pulled her tail; and the rainbow-coloured mushrooms that caused new trees to grow after the tribal lands were devastated by fire. Each child illustrated her/his own story, and they held a class competition with everyone voting to choose the cover picture. With a bit of amateur desk-top publishing, everyone had their own copy to keep, and we printed extras to sell at the school summer fair.



Tigger meets a ghost, by Jonathon, age 7.

So what did we all get out of it?

The children learned that good writing always requires hard work – but the thrill of seeing yourself in print makes it all worthwhile. Isobel reports that most have continued to produce 'better' writing in the classroom. They also gained a glimpse into the totally different world of the North American Indians – a world where life was simple and close to nature, and where sadly forgotten values such as courage, loyalty, gentleness, respect and steadfastness still reigned supreme. Such insights contribute to the general ethos of looking at different cultures with sympathy and understanding. Maybe they also saw that the skilful use of words and imagination can create its own special kind of magic.

Working with Isobel made us both appreciate how stimulating it can be for two totally different types of professional to mix their ideas in the melting pot. This was virtually unexplored territory for both of us, and we let each session evolve naturally from the last. The end result was probably better than either of us had dared to hope for. It would be very

interesting to repeat the exercise with older children, who would be more receptive to the myths' deeper meanings, and more able to imitate the particular style of the traditional storyteller.

As a writer, I learned many useful lessons about my readers. Firstly, I discovered that today's children tend to perceive many things differently from my own childhood memories, and that authors who assume they share the same language risk leaving their readers puzzled and disconnected from the story. One of our most enlightening discussions centred on the American Indians' belief in magic. To my horror, most of the children defined 'magic' as Paul Daniels' TV-style magic tricks! We solved the problem by using the phrase 'mystery-magic'; but it made me realise the dangers of taking old-fashioned cultural norms for granted.

I also confirmed my feeling that beautifully produced books of myth and legend risk hanging in a vacuum unless they contain some information about the people who first told the stories. As educated adults we already have some in-built knowledge of 'American Indians' or 'Ancient Greeks', but for young children such names merely conjure up blanks. I've made a point of including simple but comprehensive introductions in most of my traditional collections, and I would urge publishers to insist on these for future volumes.

Finally, the project made me realise more than ever just what riches lie within the realms of traditional tales. Herein lie direct hot-lines to the great 'imaginings' and storymakers of all times and all places. Herein lie strange mirrors which enable us to see our own lifestyles and beliefs with new eyes. And for those in the educational world who need to see everything in terms of practicality and proven results, herein lie paths along which language and practical writing skills can be explored and developed in the most enjoyable and rewarding of ways. ■

Rosalind Kerven's books of traditional stories are:

Earth Magic, Sky Magic: North American Indian Tales, Cambridge, 0 521 36235 0, £7.95; 0 521 36806 5, £4.25 pbk

The Slaying of the Dragon: Tales of the Hindu Gods, Deutsch, 0 233 98037 7, £5.95

The Woman Who Went to Fairyland: A Welsh Folk Tale, Blackie, 0 216 93263 7, £8.50

King Leopard's Gift and other legends of the animal world, Cambridge, 0 521 36180 X, £9.50

The Tree in the Moon and other legends of plants and trees, Cambridge, 0 521 34269 4, £8.50

Legends of the Animal World, Cambridge, 0 521 30576 4, £8.50

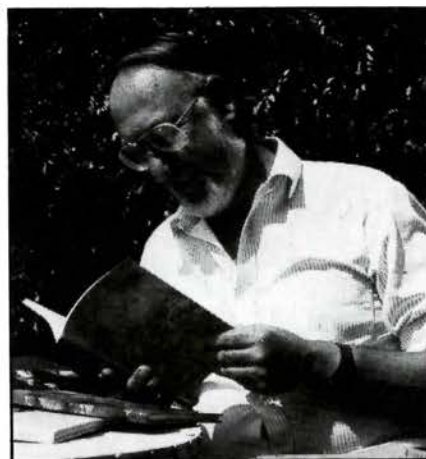
In the Court of the Jade Emperor: Stories from Old China, Cambridge, 0 521 43489 0, £7.95; 0 521 43538 2, £4.25 pbk

In April this year Cambridge are publishing **The Rain Forest Storybook**, a collection of traditional stories from the original forest people of South America, Africa and South-East Asia, with full factual introductions.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS
NEWS

BLACK AND WHITE AND READ ALL OVER

Jay Heale reports from South Africa



Jay Heale

Children's literature so often holds up the mirror to social change. For many years, the English-speaking white population were the liberals, outspoken against apartheid – while the Afrikaans-speakers (or a majority of them) seemed contented with things as they were. So it was hardly surprising that the indigenous children's books (written in English) should reflect liberal thinking.

The earlier stock storyline had been: white boy and black boy grow up together on a South African farm, great buddies, until, naturally, the white boy goes off to boarding school and the black boy stays to look after the goats. This plot was updated and condemned for all time in Sheila Gordon's powerful novel, *Waiting for the Rain* (Orchard, 1987), in which the two meet again over a gun-barrel. Such condemnations of apartheid as *Journey to Jo'burg* (Longman, 1985) by Beverley Naidoo had been banned in South Africa.

The new cliché plot became: gang of white boys meets a black boy, are suspicious of him until he proves that he's 'all right'. Then all can be friends together. Curiously, there were no stories of a gang of black boys welcoming in a lone white! Such a supposedly with-it novel as Lawrence Bransby's *Down Street* (Tafelberg) in which a white high school lad dares to declare his affection for a coloured girl, was applauded by liberal white librarians but spurned by coloured ones. (Oh, we still have a problem in South Africa differentiating between pure black Africans and brown-skinned coloureds of mixed ancestry or possibly pure Malay blood. While some whites lump them all together as 'blacks', few are keener to emphasise the difference than the so-called coloureds.)

But the main character in all those children's books remained the white child. Publishers pointed out that it was whites who bought books, after all. A black protagonist was only found in ethnic folktales, safely relegated to the fantasy shelf. Then the pendulum began to move. I keep statistics on certain aspects of the English language children's books written in South Africa. The male/female statistics are as interesting as the white/black ratio on the central character:

	male	female	white	black
1989	78%	22%	70%	30%
1990	74%	26%	57%	43%
1991	73%	27%	52%	48%
1992	61%	39%	43%	57%
1993	56%	44%	13%	87%

(up to end of October 1993)

In this male-dominated country, we're heading towards some sort of parity in our male/female children's literature protagonists! And though the number of 1993 books has been few (due to our staggering economy) only three so far have had a white central character (one of which was written by me).

But the weapons of war are still perishing around us (even if the Zulu maintain their right to flourish an assegai on parade as a 'cultural weapon'). For we have just seen the publication of the first trickle of indigenous Graphic Novels.

If ever a cultural form was destined to strike horror into the hearts of educationists, the Comic and the Graphic Novel loom like the inventions of Frankenstein. Yet the Storyteller Group has continued to produce a stream of carefully educational comic books (in style owing much to Hergé's *Tintin*) with such underlying themes as conservation, library use and first aid. The novel, *Down Second Avenue* (once banned), by the eminent Es'kia Mphahlele, was rendered into graphic form by Sached. And now three short stories by Can Themba, Alex la Guma and Bessie Head have been published as Graphic Literature in the book, *Deep Cuts* (Maskew Miller Longman/Storyteller Group).

The use of such works in school is still hotly resisted in many quarters (though finding immediate use in the education of semi-literate adults). What! Must the purity of the written word be cheapened in such a way? they cry. Our local publishers still tend to accept a manuscript (of a children's book) and then look for an illustrator. Seldom are the words and pictures created together. Noteworthy exceptions to this method have been the excellently conceived 'Little Library' books from READ organisation and the 'Fun-to-Read' series from Tafelberg.

In June 1992 there was a Children's Summit Meeting near Cape Town where representative groups of children from all over the country talked over (in commendably serious manner) and produced a *Children's Charter of South Africa*.

In this document, it was required that 'all teachers should be qualified and should treat children with patience, respect and dignity'. There's a long road to travel in that direction, I fear. But the phrase which sticks in my mind is 'so that children can be children'. Children like what comes to them in visual form. If children had their way, books in comic strip format would be used in school without question.

In South Africa, we look set to have a new government some time in 1994. Our previous 16 educational departments *should* then be amalgamated into one, which would be a good thing. Whether that one education department will issue proclamations upon what books South African children should or should not read, nobody knows. In my opinion, that would be less of a good thing.

The **Recommendations** from a conference on Publishing for Democratic Education held last year did decide that:

'In publishing for a future democratic educational dispensation, the publishers present commit themselves to ensuring that they do not publish publications which promote racist or sexist ideas through text or illustration.'

They didn't mention Comics or Graphic Novels, but surely they've got to come? The new South Africa is on it way.

As well as writing children's books, Jay Heale is the editor of South Africa's children's book magazine, *Bookchat*. For details contact 7 Louis Trichardt Street, Grabouw 7160, S.A.

LICKING LITERACY

The latest batch of stamps featuring characters from children's classics were released in February by the Royal Mail, in this case featuring Paddington Bear, Rupert Bear, Peter Rabbit, Noggin the Nogg, Orlando the Marmalade Cat, Alice in Wonderland, Dan Dare, Biggles, Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Bears. The stamps will be available for a year and will cost £2.50 for ten in booklet form, including 20 fun stickers. They're the result of a survey commissioned by Royal Mail which showed that while 99% of children aged 11-14 had heard of Sonic the Hedgehog and Super Mario a much smaller percentage knew of the characters above. The Royal Mail comment: 'We hope the new Greetings Stamps will tempt children both into reading more and taking up the fun and popular hobby of stamp collecting.' (For details of The Collector's Club, contact Kate Murphy and Susan Turner on 071 436 4060.)



BOOK TRUST

Just after Christmas, when we'd already gone to press with our January issue, we heard of Beverley Anderson's resignation from her post as Chief Executive of Book Trust. 'What?' do we hear you cry. 'Only a couple of issues ago BfK announced her arrival.' Er . . . yes. *Exactly* two issues ago, to be precise.

Quite why Ms Anderson made her exit so soon is a matter of speculation (and rumours abound) but the sad fact remains that her main contribution to the promotion of children's reading was to close down the Children's Book Foundation and sack its director, Wendy Cooling.

Let's hope the new Chief Executive, Brian Perman, that is, stays a little longer . . . and perhaps reinstates the CBF or something like it. Books, at the present time, need all the friends they can get as demonstrated by the following report . . .

PUBLIC LIBRARIES ONLY 45 PAGES OF A BOOK PER PERSON PER YEAR . . .

The National Book Committee has released its annual survey of public library spending on books, revealing a further decline compared to the 1992 figures.

Book funding in public libraries has reduced to such a low level that, on average, local authorities can buy only 45 pages of a book per person.

After many years of dominance, London, spending £2.27 per person on library books has lost its place as best provider to Scotland, spending £2.35. Northern Ireland trails heavily behind all other areas of the UK with book spending at £1.42 per head.

The report is accompanied by a special statement from the Committee on School Libraries and School Library Services. This urges schools, local authorities and central Government to seek to defend and maintain school library services, pointing out that if these disappear under delegation of education services, schoolchildren could lose the benefit of over £15 million worth of books every year.

Burly by name -

A crisp fiver to Rosanna Nissen, of Walker Books, for sending us the following howler which appeared in *The Times Educational Supplement* of 21st January on the TV and Radio page:

9.46 TALK, WRITE
AND READ

Delve into literature. Berlie Doherty talks about his work (7-11) (Rpt Wed 9.46am)

HELP WITH READING

Newcastle City Libraries & Arts and Waterstone's Booksellers, have published two leaflets: **Get Set for Reading** and **Ready Set Read**, which offer advice to parents and carers on how they can help prepare children for reading and how to support children when they start learning to read. Book lists of recommended titles accompany the leaflets - which are brief, attractive and accessible.

For free copies, contact Dilys Harding, Youth Services, Central Library, Princess Square, Newcastle upon Tyne NE99 1DX (tel: 091 261 0691, fax: 091 261 1435).

Ready, Set, Read...



READING READING RULES!



Stories to help resource Maths? And Geography? Two more lively publications from a well-tryed team:

Counting on Stories, Bill Goodwin and Anne Rowe, £2.95 inc. p&p

An annotated list of excellent reads that support the maths curriculum at KS1 organised according to the following

topics: Number, Measure, Shape and Space, Fractions, Time, Data.

A Place for Stories at KS2, Chris Routh and Anne Rowe, £3.00 inc. p&p

The promotion of Geography is what this booklet is about, but the stories 'have been selected first and foremost because we consider them worthy of recommendation in their own right' say the authors.

Both available from the Reading and Language Information Centre, University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY (cheques payable to The University of Reading).

POETRY RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Now available are updates of the Poetry Society's BP Teacher's Poetry Resource Files - and very attractive they are, too. **Updates 1** are available in both primary and secondary versions and focus on the process of writing. Articles by well-known poetry practitioners - including Judith Nicholls, Graham Mort and Jill Pirrie.

The **Updates** concentrate on ways to encourage and develop the writing of poetry in the classroom. They're practical in their approach and will keep teachers informed about the latest approaches to poetry.

In addition, sections for schools in Wales have been produced with support from the Welsh Office, the Curriculum Council for Wales and the National Language Unit of Wales. Contributors include Gillian Clarke and Menna Elfyf, and articles explore the relationship between the Welsh language and poetry using the themes of 'sense of place' and 'myth'.

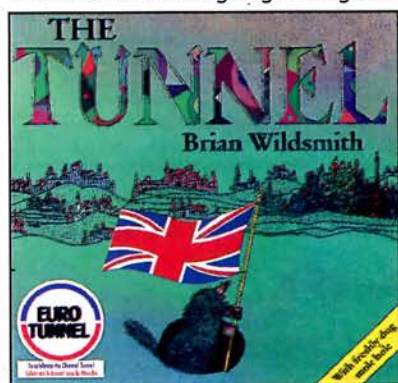
Priced £4.00, Poetry Resources File **Update** sheets will build every File into a permanent resource. For further information, contact Pel Plowden, Education Officer, on 071 240 4810. ■

A KIND OF CATCHING UP

Margaret Meek on new books by old favourites

This review is a kind of catching-up, to discover how three authors I've known, enjoyed and been grateful to over a number of years are now 'getting on'. (The ominous phrase haunts both children and adults.) Also, I'm always on the look-out for new experiences of what reading can be like, and how authors, illustrators and publishers show young readers, at every stage of skill and experience, what books are good for.

Picture books are, essentially, about transformations; readers see what changes as they are told what happens. Subtle artists exploit visual metamorphoses to show that the ordinary is not always the expected. Here is Brian Wildsmith, whose 1966 version of **The Hare and the Tortoise** epitomised a new era in learning to read, anticipating our new bi-lingualism. Marcus, the London mole, and his French cousin, Pierre, decide to cut through the difficulties that prevent their visiting each other by digging their way across the Channel. The result is a book called on one cover **The Tunnel** and on the other **Le Tunnel** (Oxford, 0 19 279962 2, £7.99). The text is in English and French from Marcus' end, and in French and English from Pierre's, each tactfully varied for cultural correctness. The cousins exchange computerised plans and surveys. Marcus endures the delays imposed by the illiterate Techno-rat, the complaints of the sea-dwellers ('All our water will leak away'), but he finds buried treasure which lets him buy a mechanical digger. He pays his tolls to the sea monsters by beating them at darts. In the middle of the book, and the Channel, voilà Pierre. He has survived the complaints of Le Rat-Bureaucrate, bored his way with a laser rock-grinder and won a game of boules. The pictures of thronged roads, traffic hold-ups, crowded skies and seaways all piled at the top of each page carry the argument for the obvious sense of going underground.



Skill and imagination solve problems reminiscent of the *actualité*, while the picture wheel shows what the cousins are joyously up to on arrival. The pictures are smaller than they were in the more spacious sixties; the production, like life, is more constrained, but still hopeful.



From **M.O.L.E.**

Moles are in. The handsome portrait format of **M.O.L.E.** by Russell Hoban and Jan Pieńkowski (Cape, 0 224 03061 2, £9.99) with its fine-ribbed brown card endpapers and spacious print, proclaims a special collaboration of two acknowledged artists and their publisher. The picture sequence, we are told, came first: hand-painted etchings of the history of a pastoral world gradually overwhelmed by industrial gigantomachy. We are to see the changes from underground, through the senses of the 'much overworked little earthmover' (named by Adam), who endures the thumps and dangers of increasing urbanisation overhead. His closest shave is with electric cables mistaken for worms. The end nearly comes when 'the soil seemed to have lost all hope - it was dry and crumbly and had a burnt out smell'. But Mole is saved by a new Deluge. 'Find something that floats,' Noah tells him. Who but Russell Hoban could thus blend wit, humour and apocalyptic vision. (Mole is on friendly terms with 'the chap with the flaming sword' at the gate of the garden.) This allusive skill (that is, the reader does at least half of the work) combines with biblical parable: apple eating results in ever more grandiose self-destruction.

Although moles are implicitly male, authors who have animal protagonists generally avoid the difficulties now associated with gender-related reading behaviour. Sue Pidgeon, writing with careful consideration of the evidence, and producing some of her own from school reading encounters in **Reading the Difference** (CLPE, 1 872267 05, £12.00) shows that the concept of gender difference is growing in children at the same time as they are learning to read. With this in mind, I've been looking at books by Michael Foreman whom I first encountered as a social satirist in the seventies. (Have you read **War and**

Peas?) In his recent books, **War Boy** and **War Game**, he taps into a strong vein of family history and recollections which localise, bring home, national events, distinctly male in kind, as remembered experience. In his new picture book for younger readers, **Grandfather's Pencil and the Room of Stories** (Andersen, 0 86264 457 7, £7.99) he illustrates a dream sequence in which a pencil, by itself, writes the story of its origin, together with that of the paper, the table, the window and the floorboards of the bedroom. The story satisfaction lies in the reader's knowledge of the events, which the sleeping boy lacks, when the story begins again in the life of a grandson. The details in the pictures, London buses for example, establish the time line as they do in the war books, although here domestic gentleness is included with sailing and log-rolling. All these history-tinged books have what teachers say boys prefer to read about: adventure and information. So now, instead of simply agreeing that this is so, we should ask: how do girls read a story like **Grandfather's Pencil** before their early constructs are set? Sue Pidgeon's assertion that 'reading may be one of the behaviours that reflects and confirms gender identity, but it also has the potential to extend it' suggests that's where we could begin. ■



'Then there was a scratchy, scribbly sound. The pencil was writing.' From **Grandfather's Pencil**.

In our next issue . . . PICTURE BOOKS

Jane Doonan on Analysing a Picture Book

Douglas Martin on the Art of Charles Keeping

Trevor Dickinson's Picture Book Round-Up

Chris Powling meets Jon Scieszka

Jane Hissey in Authorgraph

. . . plus reviews, news and more reviews