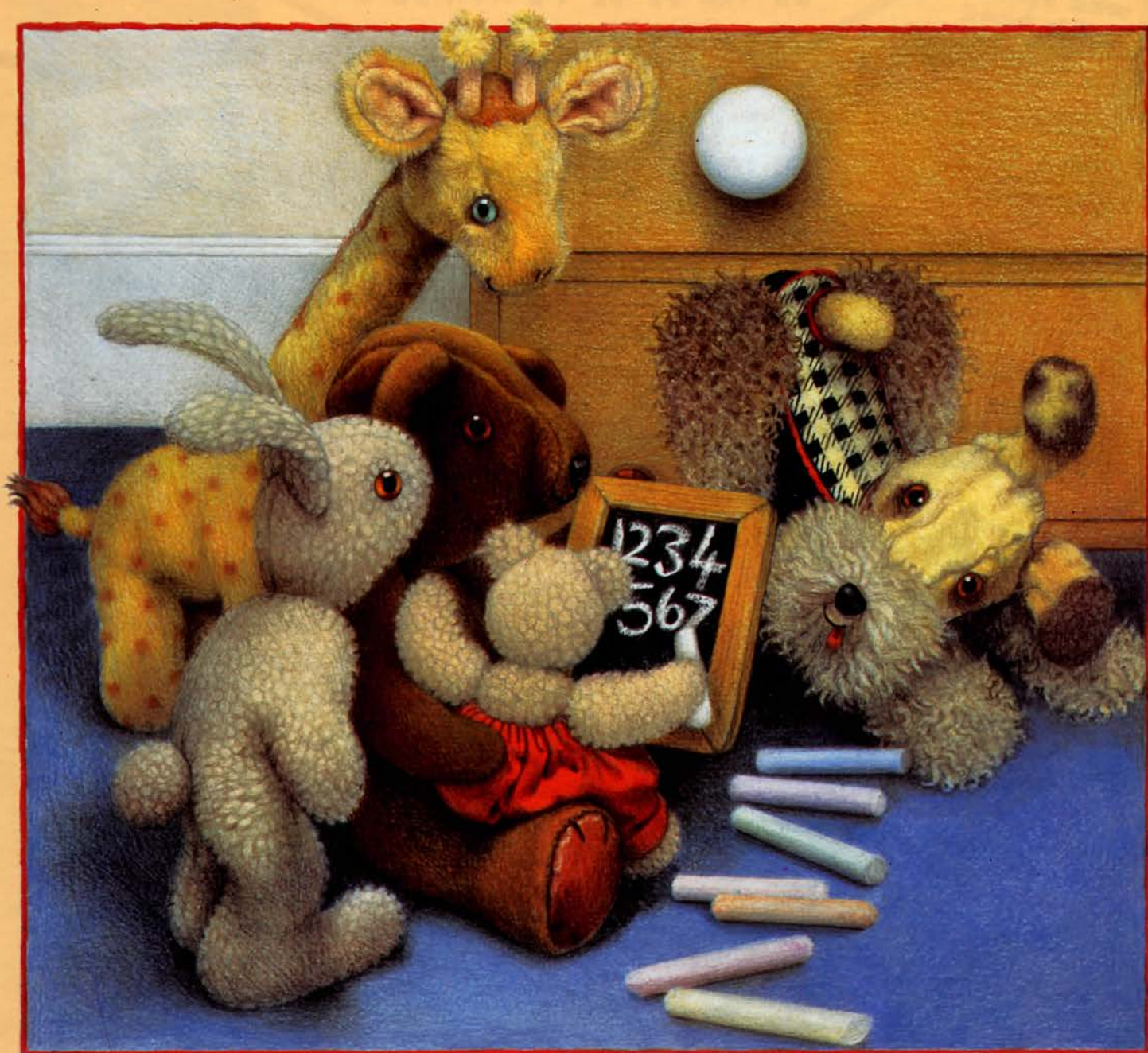


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 1994 No. 86
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the children's book magazine



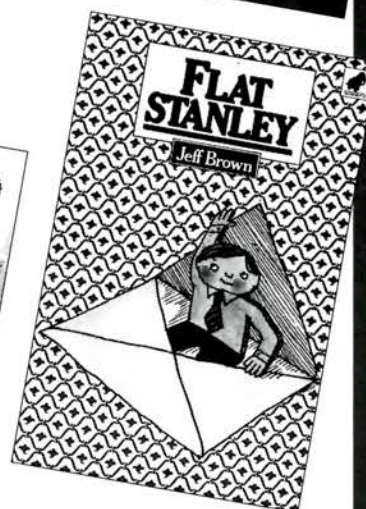
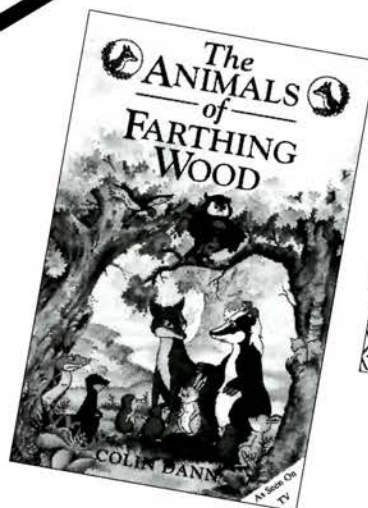
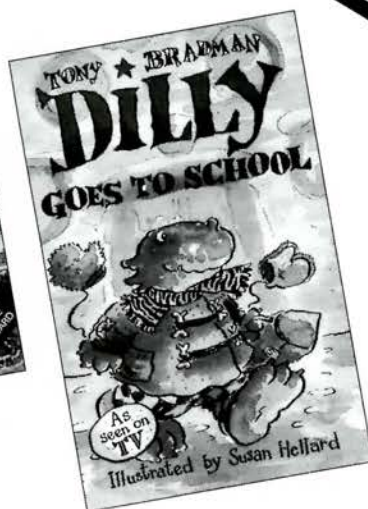
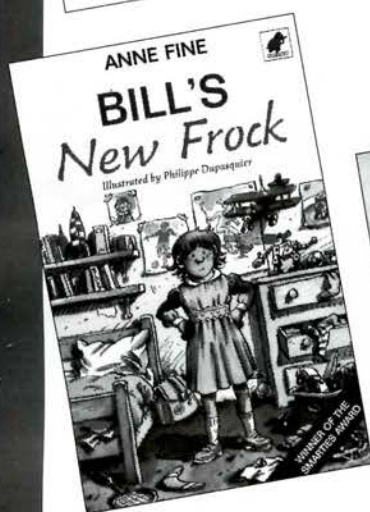
PICTURE BOOK ISSUE

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Contents

Editor's page	3
News and comment from the Editor	
Analysing a Picture Book	4
Jane Doonan	
Reviews	
Series	8
Fiction	10
Audio	17
Special Review by Margaret Meek: Mayne's new Hob	17
Non-fiction	24
Awards:	19
Guardian and Mother Goose	
Rachel Anderson and Michael Foreman	
Authorgraph No. 86	20
Jane Hissey interviewed by Stephanie Nettell	
Encyclopedias in the Age of the Ringbinder	22
Nick Tucker	
	
Celebrating Keeping	26
Douglas Martin	
A Visit to The Keeping Gallery	28
Jeff Hynds	
Feed and Grow	33
Trevor Dickinson selects Spring Picture Books	
News	38
New (-ish) Tales for Old ...	40
Chris Powling talks to Jon Scieszka	

Cover Story

Our cover this month is taken from Jane Hissey's new book, *Ruff* (see Authorgraph on centre pages for details), which is published by Hutchinson. We're grateful to them for their help in reproducing this illustration.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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EDITOR'S PAGE

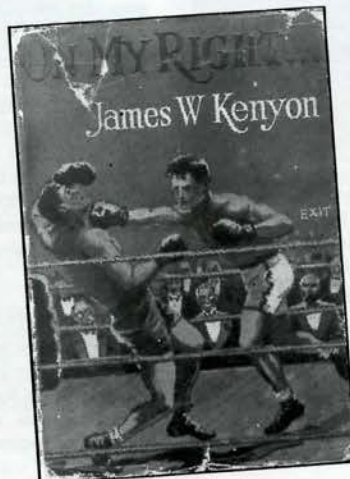


On My Right

Yes, I adored **Just William**. And certainly I thought *Treasure Island* was wonderful (though a bit wordy). As for *The Hobbit*, terrific – especially the chapters about Gollum and Smaug. However, my favourite book at primary school, the one I used to put back on the classroom shelf *behind* the other books so it would be there, ready for me, when I wanted to borrow it again, i.e. next week, was a boxing story called **On My Right**. Between the ages of nine and eleven, I read it 22 times. I know this because I kept careful count.

On My Right was a great disappointment to Miss Bowe, my classteacher, who knew me to be a Good Reader and had been particularly proud of my struggles with Jim Hawkins, Blind Pew, Long John Silver et al. 'What do you see in it, Chris?' she often asked me.

I couldn't say. Something inside me simply chimed with this blow-by-blow account of a young man's rise to boxing stardom. Even then, I'm pretty sure, I had few illusions about the quality of the book's writing which – at any rate compared with Crompton, Stevenson and Tolkien – managed to be both plodding and over-excited. Wasn't it a touch like Blyton, to be honest, another author whom Miss Bowe permitted in her classroom only through gritted teeth? Anyway, who cared? For whatever reason, **On My Right** was my book.



In recent years, as the books we make available for children have fallen increasingly under the sway of those whose prime concern is with notches on a cultural totem pole (a pole pre-designed by them, naturally), **On My Right** has loomed larger and larger in my thoughts about what, fundamentally, brings children to the reading of books as a continuing, pleasurable habit. At some point, I'm sure, an essential aspect is that chiming I mentioned – a correspondence between a particular reader and a particular title, or titles, or even a whole genre, that's too personal to be predicted but once it's come about brings a permanent ring of truth to the whole activity.

Of course, nothing in principle disqualifies a classic text from such a revelation. Nor is this one aspect, in itself, sufficient for a proper pedagogy of reading. But I am quite certain it's *necessary* – and calls for the sort of approach advocated by Margery Fisher who argued that the Classics 'should be tossed to children as interesting food to be sampled not virtuously but as sandwiches whose fillings might surprise them'. Miss Bowe, bless her, let me sample the sandwiches between meals at a time when the most important item on my menu was a

book whose plot, characters and style were so nondescript they've been wiped from my mind ever since. I couldn't even recall, if I ever registered it in the first place, who wrote **On My Right**.

That is, I couldn't till a couple of months ago. That's when, care of a student of mine called Martyn Fearn, I received a note from Waterstone's Booksearch Limited with the information: 'Kenyon – **On My Right** (re. Boxing) price £12.50 plus £2.50 for postage & packing'. One 'phone-call, followed by a fortnight's turn-around, and it was mine: **On My Right**, by James W. Kenyon, part of Thomas Nelson's Apex Series, no year of publication given, but luckily dated in an epigraph as 'Xmas 1951'. Thanks Martin! I felt as if part of my childhood had been disinterred.

More than I realised, in fact. For the details of the book certainly check out with my vague memories – of a narrative much closer to my 'other' reading, *The Wizard and The Hotspur*, than books proper. Admittedly, the plot is more cunning and better paced than I remembered but my hunch, outlined in umpteen seminars over the years, that part of the book's attraction for me was the way in which its hero's career, fight by fight, seemed to prefigure my own career, exam by exam, as prophesied (at length) by Miss Bowe... well, that stays pretty intact. But what rocks me to my socks, here in 1994, is a sub-plot I'd forgotten completely. This concerns the parent who died before Jerry Webb, future champion, was born and about whom his surviving parent, from sheer pain, never speaks till the secret is finally revealed to Jerry deep in the story.

How could I have overlooked this?

For I had a parent, who died in childbirth, about whom my surviving parent, from sheer pain, never spoke. In my case, aided and abetted by my beady-eyed twin brother, I'd half-rumbled the secret already through a cautious investigation of family photographs... but we had to keep this to ourselves for another five years till at last we were taken into my father's, and step-mother's, confidence. No wonder I returned to **On My Right** so obsessively.

Of course, such an oddball case proves nothing. Some might argue, and in the light of my forty-year memory-lapse I'm not sure I'd disagree, that it belongs less to the psychology of reading than to its psychopathology. What fascinates me, though, is that the first book which forced me to behave as if it were literature – that is, it compelled me to constant re-reading – couldn't possibly have been foretold even by the redoubtable Miss Bowe. What a pity that SCAA's Advisory Committee for English, which is about to inflict its latest little list of required reading on us all, no longer trusts teachers like her.

Oh... the rest of this magazine. It's **BfK's** traditional Spring picture book issue so the sandwiches and other food we toss your way are exceptionally multi-coloured.

Enjoy! And be surprised...

Chris

ANALYSING A PICTURE BOOK

Jane Doonan explores
Helen Cooper's

THE BEAR UNDER THE STAIRS

Do you remember, when you were young, being just a bit scared of parts of the house which seemed to be creepy when grown-ups weren't there, and of dark spaces – the upper hall landing in the evening, or the cupboard under the stairs? Was something wandering around at night? Even though you knew it was silly, the fears were real but you couldn't bring yourself to tell anyone. By finding a form for such common childhood experiences Helen Cooper has made a remarkable picture book which deserves to become a classic.

The Bear Under the Stairs plays with the delightful absurdity of a grizzly bear inviting itself to stay in an ordinary family house. We can share its experience on a literal level. Or, if you look at this picture book another way, it is centred on William, who is afraid of bears and the cupboard under the stairs and who lets his imagination run away with him, so that William and the bear are one. For in this picture book there are two stories interwoven in a complex counterpoint between the words and the pictures: William and the bear seamlessly exchange roles as hero, villain, perpetrator, and victim, depending on where we do our viewing from – inside or outside the cupboard. Who says picture books for the young are a simple art form?

We meet the bear, twinkle in its eye, smile on its muzzle, on the cover of the book, and watch it travel into its story in a wordless visual prologue. The bear, a Michael Palin of animals, is depicted stepping briskly off a boat, carrying cases and a jolly green umbrella, next waiting for a coach, and then striding up a garden path.



It tactfully takes up residence in a cupboard, does a little unobtrusive snuffling around by day, and reserves serious domestic exploring until night time when it has tremendous fun, playing with a train set, taking a bath, trying on clothes, dancing, watching television and making pancakes. However, William, the small boy who lives in the house, is distinctly unfriendly and he and his mother sweep the bear into the open. A visual epilogue shows this resilient character on its travels again, this time by air. The last time we see the bear, it's parachuting towards a neat timber-clad cottage . . . no doubt hoping for a better reception . . . after all, one person's fears might be another one's joys.

The text begins William's story. We first see him on a small scale, from behind, climbing a darkened staircase, which curves from right to left. The bannisters throw shadows of bars on his body, as if caging him in fear. His form moves away from us literally, and because of the orientation of the staircase, he appears to be turning in on himself psychologically: we follow. Although the fear of bears is directly addressed, it is perfectly possible to interpret the story as being about fear of the dark, which William justifies by the invention of a bear which he really believes in. William's fear gets out of control and the bear is everywhere. As a defence measure, in case a hungry bear might eat little boys, he takes to throwing food into the cupboard, feeding the bear, and thus feeding his fears at the same time. The decaying food begins to 'pong' as his mum puts it, and she decides to do some cleaning. William, terrified that the bear will attack her, bars the door by standing against it. She cuddles him into telling her what's been happening and together they go into the cupboard with mop and brush. William is helped to overcome his fear of bears by the gift of a toy one, and to control the fear of the cupboard by being shown that there is not necessarily anything wrong with dark, empty spaces in themselves.

Just how Helen Cooper manages to find equivalences for fear and the strategies we devise for handling it, without giving her young viewers a terrible dose of the horrors, is a tribute to her skill with picture book form. She exploits the structure, the tone of the text, compositions, and the layout, so that she can get the effects she wants. Structurally, for instance, using the opening and closing pages, as a visual prologue and epilogue, without any text, is a brilliant device. The bear's story is extended independently of William's, giving us a chance to know it on its own terms. The tone of the text plays a key role in counter-balancing the seriousness of the theme.

Poetry was one of Helen's great childhood pleasures and this comes through in her writing. *The Bear Under the Stairs* has plenty of robust rhythms and rhymes, about 'the bear in its lair under the stairs', and the repeated 'wham, bang, thump!' of the cupboard door prompts young listener participation; who wouldn't relish hearing about the 'bananas, bacon and bread' and the 'hazelnuts, haddocks and honey . . .' which William lobbs into the cupboard. The little dialogues between William and his mother, which carry a sense of their personalities, are utterly natural.

For the artwork Helen employs various distancing techniques. There are no close-ups of William's face: the hunched shoulders, the worried expression, the timid gesture, his closed eyes, are sufficient to show his frame of mind. Quite often the face is averted, or we see him from behind, so we empathise with his feelings through the pose rather than look at his features. Helen also keeps the action at a middle distance – no looming close-ups to narrow the gap between the image and the viewer. And when the bear goes jolly about all over the house from attic to kitchen, the only room in which it is not shown is William's. That might have been too disturbing for a young viewer.



'And at night . . . while William dreamed . . .'

Helen's painterly style is an antidote for the marshmallow school of children's illustrators. Angela Lee, Helen's art teacher at school, encouraged her to experiment with technique and to trust her own judgement. Helen's influences now include the Dutch artist, Lidia Postma, whose human forms have a slightly distorted quality, Edward Gorey, that master of the telling pose, and Gennadij Spirin, the Russian illustrator, whose paintings are often sombre-hued, interestingly detailed and elegantly wrought. Both William and the bear are unsentimental, unстереotypical images. William, with his spiky hair and pallid face, is a boy saved from plainness by the curve of his cheek. The bear is not a toy, an inflatable or a monster. It menaces the child in as much as the child is menaced by his own imagination, and in places William is given a bear-shaped shadow to make the point.

For *The Bear Under the Stairs*, Helen's pictures are reminiscent of late Victorian watercolours. The surface is densely worked, the medium layered with a relatively large brush and a very delicate meticulous gesture; you can almost see her 'feeling' for the form. Additions of fine spatterings of paint promote the impression of texture and depth, and settle the image on the page. (More 'distancing', in effect.) Colour and tone are used expressively. Muted greys, sepia cooled with blue or warmed with rose and orange, and earthy browns, contrast with passages of intense cobalt, ultramarine, and violet, when feelings run high. Darker tones act as a metaphor for shadowy fears, whereas in the prologue and epilogue the bear, as hero in his own right, is bathed in a benevolent (and decidedly otherworldly) light. After the climax of the action, the penultimate opening has four beautiful vignettes with a wonderful sense of time and space created by sensitive modulations of colour and texture, and through diminishing scale: this holds back the viewer before the final surge – the picture of the bear dropping in for his next call. Musical analogies suggest themselves.



Just as the colour serves the emotional development of *The Bear Under the Stairs*, so, too, does the layout; illustrations come in all shapes and sizes, double-spreads to vignettes, ovals, squares, rectangles, with soft edges and harder ones. Helen chose not to use a grid when designing the pages. (A grid is an underlying framework which shapes and places the illustrations so there is visual unification throughout the sequence of turned pages.) Her freestyle layout represents the best way she could show *this* story and a couple of examples will serve to make the point. In the moment of William's greatest terror when he's stopping his mother from going in the cupboard, he's depicted not much bigger than a postage stamp, isolated on the expanse of white page-space, and dwarfed by a huge printed 'No!' which he screams. After a pause (suggested by the words being set at the bottom of the page) and in a quieter voice (suggested by reduction in the size of type) he adds 'Don't go in there!'

'No!'

screamed William, very scared.



'Don't go in there!'



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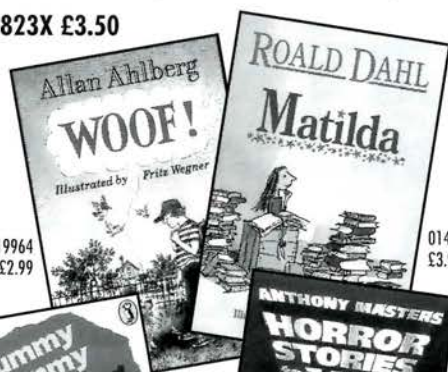
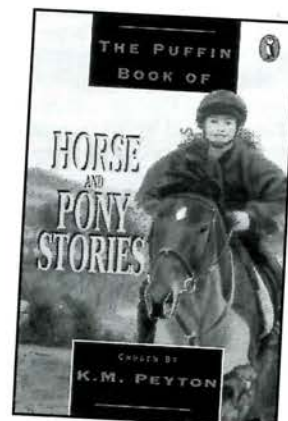
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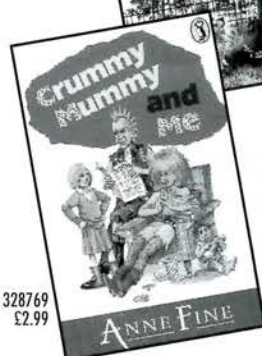
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Earlier, when he is bombarding the bear in the cupboard with food, the composition is structured as a pyramid of action, William at the apex in command (even if he does have his eyes shut) and the bear depicted four times, bewildered, assaulted, miffed, and mollified by what hits it. Neither this wild freefall of food and feelings, nor William's heroic stand, could have been given these particular dramatic visual patterns had Helen been working in conditions imposed by a grid.

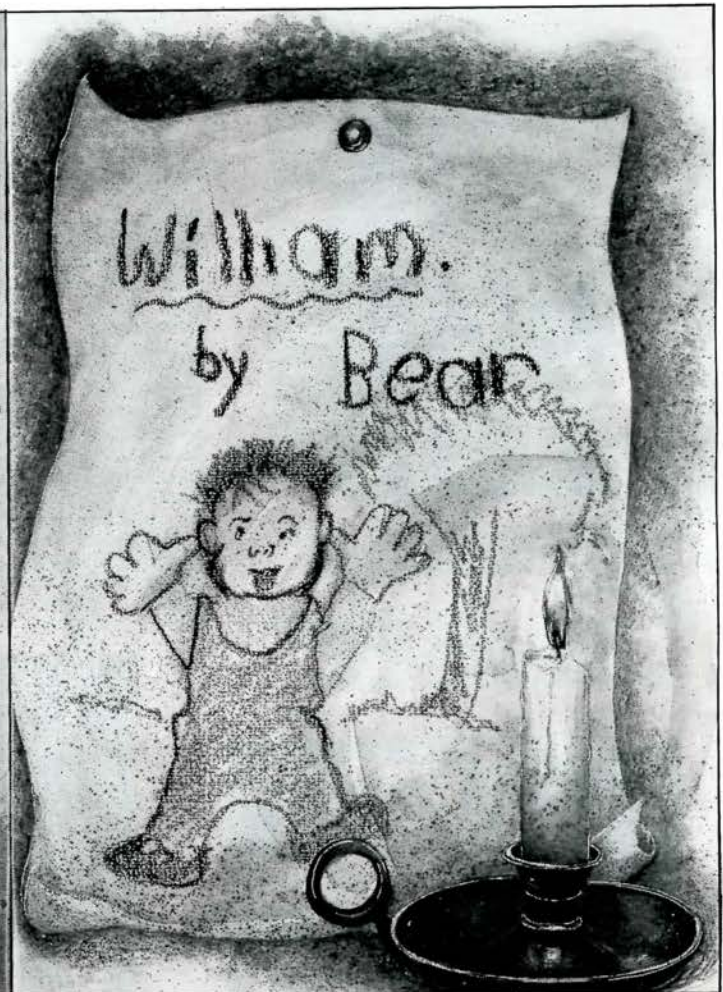
How cleverly Helen exploits the device of viewpoint can be seen in the two openings which show William drawing the bear opposed by the picture he has made, and the bear a little later in the book doing likewise. In William's case he's placed low on the picture plane, in small scale, and the big bear observes him from behind a tall chest of drawers: the viewpoint is the bear's eye-level. Looking vulnerable, William sucks his fingers, then draws a savage bear, claws and all. Helen minimises the effect by making traces of where William rested his drink of blackcurrant juice during his labours – a realistic and homely detail.

The bear, by contrast, is comfortably positioned in the middle of the picture plane, and given a surreal setting, which accords with the text telling us William is dreaming and equally well as a symbol for the bear's pleasure. From a vantage point outside William's house as if looking in through a window, we observe the bear about to start drawing. Everything within the frame glows in mellow golden candlelight and shares the bear's furry quality. This framed portrait of the artist as a happy bear is set not in the outside wall of the house as would be logical, but in luminous blue space, dissolving and swirling in crystalline patterns and spangled with carmine stars. The bear's picture of William, which shows him sticking out his tongue and wagging his fingers in cheeky defiance, is about as close to the reality as William's rendering of the animal, a point which will not be missed by observant young viewers.

Children like searching pictures for details which carry meaning, as Helen knows. Rewards here include Bear's green umbrella hanging on the handle of the cupboard door, the pear-patterned hall wallpaper pre-figuring the 'pear for the bear' which William palms at the tea table, Superbear on the television, and the levels of honey going down in a jar every time we see this motif.

Although Helen has made the bear as endearing as possible, there's a frightening aspect to the story in that William is alone in his ordeal. This promotes an underlying message to young listeners that it's better not to keep fears hidden, to tell parents or friends, and really the 'worry' may be nothing to worry about after all. Fruitful discussion between reader and listener could enable this picture book to be a 'helping text' for overcoming fears of all kinds.

There's a last little tale to be told about the bear. Helen's text begins as Helen's history. When she was a small girl she had an imaginary pet lion who lived under the stairs, but slowly he got out of hand, and she grew scared of him. He got bigger and bigger and she can remember feeding him Smarties and cabbage leaves. Some time ago Helen wrote down her childhood experience. Originally she did not intend to have the animal represented at all, in case it frightened children – but she also knew that as an idea for a picture book it somehow didn't work, so the manuscript went into a drawer. Then in 1990 she illustrated Stephen Gammell's text, 'Wake Up, Bear . . . It's Christmas' in *Christmas Stories for the Very Young*, selected and edited by Sally Grindley for Kingfisher. She enjoyed drawing the bear so much she just had to find a story for it. So, she opened the drawer and there it was. No wonder Bear has such a pleased expression on its muzzle; it's been waiting to go travelling for a long time. ■



The Bear Under the Stairs (0 385 40210 4) is published by Doubleday, priced £8.99. The paperback will be available in September.

Jane Doonan is the author of *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* (0 903355 40 X), published by Thimble Press and costing £8.50 – see the News page in *BfK* 80, May 1993.

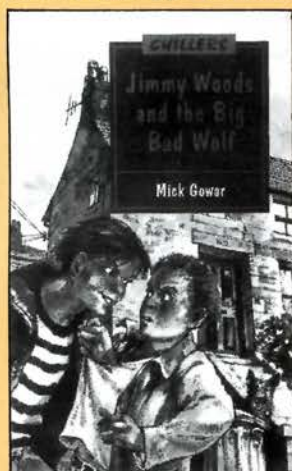
REVIEWS

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.

SERIES TITLES

Some of the latest, reviewed by Steve Rosson

In all the adverts A & C Black tell us that their new series 'Chillers' is for 7-9 year-olds but they are wise to use the phrase 'for young readers' on the back of the books as, on the evidence of the first four, they will entertain well into the secondary age range. I particularly liked Mick Gowar's **Jimmy Woods and the Big Bad Wolf** (0 7136 3757 6, £5.50). Jimmy is a nasty little toe-rag who bullies all the kids in the neighbourhood until a chance encounter with our nameless narrator's German Shepherd, Prince, reveals his fear of big dogs and he branches out into terrorising Granny Timpson across the road. The narrator and his big sister, Debbie, save the day using Prince's ability to sit motionless and his violent reaction to a dog whistle. The adult characters, especially, are eminently believable – mum and dad are less than sympathetic to the boy's complaints about being bullied and Granny Timpson is a cantankerous old soul who is terrified of being put in a home.

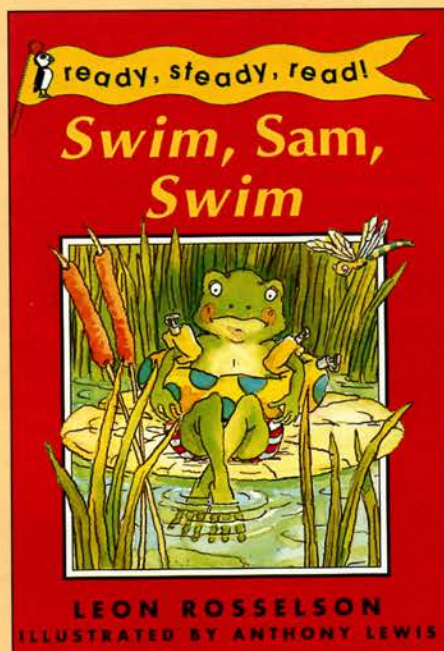


Barry Wilkinson's realistic style of illustration will satisfy older readers and there are some fine, gloomy double-page spreads in Granny's house.

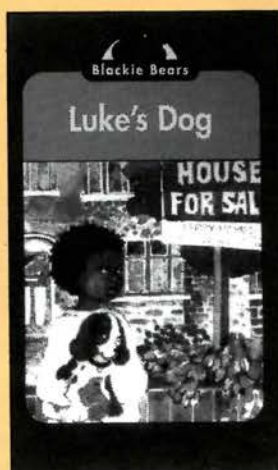
Conversely, it's the cartoon-style illustration in **The Real Porky Phillips** by Mark Haddon (A & C Black 'Chillers', 0 7136 3756 0, £5.50) that might interest its readership.



From **The Real Porky Phillips**.



This would be a shame as it's an interesting tale with some nicely observed family detail. Martin, or Porky, is a retiring lad who 'liked things quiet and simple', so when he's dragooned into being the genie in the school panto he can't help wishing he could fade away into thin air. This is the cue for the arrival on the scene of Martin's doppelgänger – a Martin who puts burgers down snotty kids' trousers, who scores brilliant goals in the park, who joins the swimming club, who actually makes his sister laugh. In fact, a Martin with 'oomph'. Needless to say the real Martin triumphs in the end through his realisation that confidence is all and he just needs to 'go for it'. I was left, though, with the niggling thought that the world would be a very tiring place if we had too many 'laddish' lads like the new 'improved' Martin.



Blackie Bears are for 'beginner readers of 6 and up' but **Luke's Dog** by Linda Jennings (0 216 94045 1, £4.50) will please many

older, less sophisticated readers. Luke's life is full of uncertainty when the landlady has a stroke and the house where he and Mum have a flat is put up for sale. While Mum has to cope with the practicalities of showing round prospective buyers and getting put on the council waiting list, Luke's only concern is that he will not be separated from his Cavalier King Charles spaniel, Rosita. There's a happy ending, with a lovely, warm concluding sketch from illustrator Jacqui Thomas, but just enough anxiety and heart-ache along the long way.

Puffin's 'ready, steady, read!' series has another hit with Leon Rosselson's **Swim, Sam, Swim** (0 14 036552 4, £3.50 pbk), illustrated by Anthony Lewis. 'Sam looks glum. He can't swim. Whoever heard of a frog that can't swim?' Well, there he sits on the opening page in his stripy trunks and water wings and, despite all the best endeavours of instructors, mum and dad, Sam does not learn to swim. 'Swim, Sam, swim,' they all say over and over again. 'Just do what I do. Move your arms like this and your legs like this. It's easy.' My own boys are well past the swimming lessons stage but it brought back vivid memories for me and I'm sure many of the youngsters who pick up this book will find their own experiences reflected here every time Sam 'moves his arms like this and his legs like this, sinks to the bottom, gulps down a bucketful of water and comes up spluttering'. A genuinely funny read.

I'm not a 'doggie' person so you'll have to forgive me if I can't get too excited about a poodle being left 15 million smackeros by its owner – no, sorry, mustn't say 'it', nearly caused a family row once by referring to a dog as 'it' – in **A Fortune for Yo-Yo** (Orchard 'Animal Crackers', 1 85213 583 2, £5.99) by Rose Impey with illustrations by Shoo Rayner. Indeed I found myself siding with the dastardly butler and maid as they dream up increasingly more fiendish ways of ridding themselves of this pampered mutt.



Yo-Yo, of course, is able to foil all their plans and the lugubrious pair end up behind bars to be replaced by what look like a couple of grinning presenters from children's TV. A shame, I call it. Prejudices aside, here's another really good book from this series with simple text and very funny pictures. It's sure to go down well with youngsters who, for some strange reason, seem to find dogs attractive.

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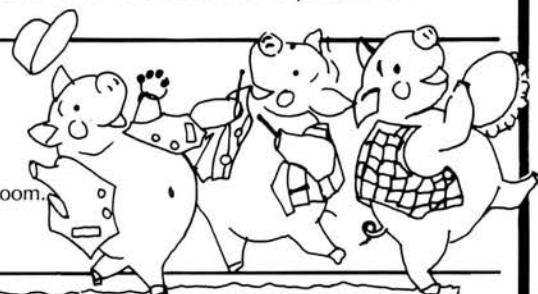
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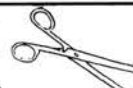
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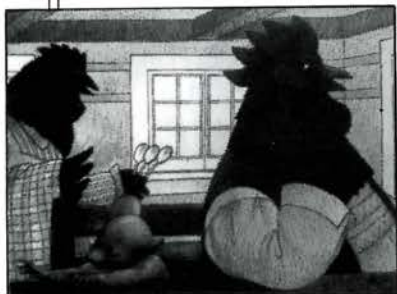
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NURSERY / INFANT

The Cock, the Mouse and the Little Red Hen

A traditional tale, ill. Graham Percy, Walker (Feb 94), 0 7445 3143 4, £3.99



A big format for this attractive retelling of the traditional story – or at least one of the traditional stories – about these characters. If your children have had, as I hope they have, a good measure of their fairy tale heritage told to them, they'll recognise many echoes and resonances. The Little Red Hen has at least two other tales told about her, both of which have elements in this one. The fox's comeuppance is surely repeated in 'The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids' and the Old Woman who let little dog Turpie out in 'The Hobyahs' is in here somewhere, too. A fascinating game of Connect and a lovely tale in its own right makes this worth having in any classroom. **LSW**

The New Boy

Holly Keller, Red Fox (Jan 94), 0 09 910871 2, £3.99

Holly Keller has just the right touch in this book. She depicts Milton's struggle as a new boy trying to become accepted and sensitively shows the difficulties the rest of the group have in adapting to fit him in. No matter what he does, whether he is good or bad, he remains the odd one out until another child joins the class and becomes 'the new boy'. Holly Keller seems to specialise in books exploring areas that children find hard to deal with but her charm is that she never judges – just lays the situation before us and leaves us to come to our own conclusions. **JS**

Mr Archimedes' Bath

Pamela Allen, Picture Puffin (Jan 94), 0 14 050162 2, £3.99

Mr Archimedes is wonderful – as he wobbles in and out of the bath, as he orders his friends about in experimenting with every permutation he can come up with, we see science truly in action! The inevitable climax of Eureka just leaves



one and all with wide grins of satisfaction and glints of future experiments at bath time twinkling in our eyes. This is not a new book but a timely reissue of an old favourite. **JS**

A Busy Day at the Building Site

0 7445 3138 1

A Busy Day at the Harbour

0 7445 3137 3

A Busy Day at the Railway Station

0 7445 3135 7

A Busy Day at the Garage

0 7445 3136 5

A Busy Day at the Factory

0 7445 3140 3

A Busy Day at the Airport

0 7445 3139 X

Philippe Dupasquier, Walker (Jan 94), £3.99 each

Having found the original edition of this set of information books for the very young invaluable ever since I first reviewed them, I was suspicious of any changes that might have been made in these new versions. The books focus on one scene depicting the changes that occur throughout a day. Each double-spread is full of everyday detail as well as quirky and amusing touches which appeal to adult and child. However, Philippe Dupasquier and Walker have not only improved on the series but have turned it into the best set of books in this genre I've ever used! The actual contents of the books remain the same but the front and back covers now open up and extend to provide five or six puzzles for each double-page with objects to find, true or false statements, mixed up characters and a whole host of other ideas that can be easily extended. Although the books need to be used with small

groups, because of the size and detail of the illustrations, from Nursery through to Year One children were enthralled and have asked for them again and again. **JS**

Jake's Birthday

Rob Lewis, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 923701 6, £3.99

Jake is counting the days to his birthday, planning down to the finest detail, and the great day is only two weeks away – but before it comes his brother's. We follow Jake as he tries to cope with Henry's own special day. Rob Lewis' deliberate low key text and illustrations in no way diminish the strength of the feelings but allow us to be knowing and sympathetic observers of Jake's struggles to be nice so he doesn't spoil things for Henry. With Rob Lewis there is always a twist in the tail and the chorus of 'Oh Jake!' that greeted the end of the book would surely amuse him. **JS**

Cockatoos

Quentin Blake, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 996490 2, £3.99

Buy it! No infant class library or home bookshelf is complete without this book. Quentin Blake's particular wit and sheer joie de vivre surely cannot be matched. In this story ten cherished cockatoos can bear their totally predictable owner no longer and in desperation escape to find hiding places anywhere in the house, just anywhere to get away from him. It makes a wonderful counting book that will be enjoyed by adult and child as it's read over and over again. **JS**

Tasty Poems

Collected by Jill Bennett, ill. Nick Sharratt, Oxford (Feb 94), 0 19 276133 1, £2.50

Jill Bennett has an unerring ability to pick just the right poems to make each book in this series (**Noisy Poems**, **People Poems**, **Machine Poems**) one that you have to gallop through and never stop until, disappointingly, you reach the end. Nick Sharratt's illustrations match the mood with verve and pace. They are romps of books that make poetry as much an everyday part of classroom life as taking the register. **JS**

Impo

Jon Blake, ill. Arthur Robins, Walker (Jan 94), 0 7445 3144 6, £3.99

This is the story of Impo (the Imperial School Bus) whose

engine finally dies as he takes the boys and girls on a school treat. Left in the scrapyard to rust, it seems that's the end, until... Beryl from Beryl's Garage appears.

Remembering Impo from her own schooldays, she tows him away for revitalisation. Impo emerges as a hot-rod and after that Beryl drives the school children to the baths each week and everyone is delighted.

There's much to look at, think about and feel as this story, like Impo, speeds along. It's an excellent read for 4-6 year-olds. **MS**

On Your Potty!

Virginia Miller, Walker (Jan 94), 0 7445 3141 1, £3.99



Anyone who has ever had a toddler in the house will love this story as George (a big bear) tries to persuade Bartholomew (a little bear) to use his potty. Not much success at first but, then, just at the right moment... he does! Beautifully, but simply drawn, this big square book will be fun to have around for all pre-schoolers, whether at home or in the Nursery. **MS**

Noisy Farm

Rod Campbell, Picture Puffin (Jan 94), 0 14 050293 9, £4.50

From the author of **Dear Zoo**, a lift-the-flap book about farm animals. Sound clues are given for the child to anticipate which animal and its young will be on the next page and under the flap. 2- and 3-year-olds should get a lot of fun from this book. **MS**

This Is the Bear and the Scary Night

Sarah Hayes, ill. Helen Craig, Walker (Feb 94), 0 7445 3147 0, £3.99

A lovely poem-in-a-picture-book about a very personable bear who is left alone in the

park all night. Charming pictures, with much detail and humour, chronicle the bear's scary adventure which has a safe and happy ending. A rather special book to add to any collection. MS

The Twins, Two by Two

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Walker (Jan 94), 0 7445 3142 X, £3.99

Getting children settled down at night isn't always easy... maybe this comfortable story about twins playing out the sequence of events from Noah's Ark will help if they'll settle eventually for being two little mice, instead of tigers, crocodiles, elephants or lions. It should certainly help 2-4 year-olds recognise and

differentiate between animals, and the safe, happy ending might contribute to calm at the end of the day. MS

Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?

Bill Martin Jr, ill. Eric Carle, Picture Puffin (Jan 94), 0 14 054519 0, £3.99

What a spectacular picture book! Eric Carle, a master pattern painter, provides stunning animal illustrations to match a question and answer text: 'Polar Bear, Polar Bear what do you hear? I hear a lion roaring in my ear.' Words like braying, hissing, trumpeting, snarling, yelping, billowing and whistling follow the zoo

animals through the book until the zookeeper can hear the children, all dressed in animal masks, on the last page.

A treat for all ages, a bargain at £3.99. Picture Puffin at its very best. MS

A Fox Got My Socks

Hilda Offen, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 999780 0, £3.99

'Yesterday was washing day
My clothes flip-flapped and
flew away
A cat got my hat
A fox got my socks...'

An action song made into a charming picture book: what could be better, as within the homey setting the child can practise the sounds and intonations of her/his own language? Highly



recommended for babies, very young children and their carers. MS

INFANT/JUNIOR

book, if Grandfather is telling the truth about his sea-dog past but, like Jack, we no longer think it matters. LW

New Blue Shoes

Eve Rice, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 929951 8, £3.50

A reprint of an old favourite of mine about a right young madam who wants blue shoes... until she gets them. Mama handles it all very well, however, and Rebecca is reconciled to her new blue shoes - and her mama - at the end of the story. Nicely produced with clear, simple pictures and print, plus a story recognisable enough to hundreds of little girls (and boys) and their long-suffering parents. LW

B is for Book!

Frank Rodgers, Picture Puffin (Jan 94), 0 14 054419 4, £3.99

I thought this was a total winner at first. The tale of the worst class in the school and its visit to the library began well with a particular success in Beastly Barrett and Biff Higson who delight in calling out stupid comments and making the other children giggle and snigger. Everyone who has taught children has met these two and Frank Rodgers knows them well. The Librarian's storytime goes from bad to worse in a dreadfully inevitable way until she reads a ghost story which brings the two horrors to heel. At this point I felt the book was ruined by a trick (the ghostly castle seems to come to life) rather than by a continuation of the very realistic beginning. This is a pity but the story is enjoyable none the less... although Miss Snitchell's appraisal will criticise her habit of leaving her class during school outings. LW

Josie, Click and Bun and the Little Tree House

Enid Blyton, ill. Dorothy Wheeler, Red Fox (Jan 94), 0 09 999710 X, £2.50

If this book had been written by a 6-year-old and put together using 'Pendown', one could almost justify the use of the school's comb-binder for the child to take home to proud parents. Unfortunately, it was written by a grown woman and proper grown-up publishers have decided to spend real money reissuing it. On these terms it is abysmal. Crude, silly events and crude, silly characters insult the intelligence of even the youngest child. Plainly this was written as a cheap pot boiler and in my opinion it should have been left to moulder 50 years ago when it first came out. Red Fox, who do so many good things, should be ashamed of themselves. I suppose they're hoping to make a lot of money. Don't buy this... it will only encourage them to think they can get away with it another time. LW

Mouse and Mole

Joyce Dunbar, ill. James Mayhew, Picture Corgi (Feb 94), 0 552 52704 1, £2.99

I thought as I read this book that it seemed oddly familiar.



The dedication at the front explained all; 'for dear old Frog and Toad' it says, but it might as well be *about* dear old Frog and Toad since it's written in almost the same style. The two characters share Frog and Toad's habit of speaking in short, formal sentences, their relationship is very much the same, even the happenings which revolve around greed, laziness, affection and friendship are alike and they're similarly quietly humorous.

The book is good value for money, nicely produced and illustrated. If you've been wishing for some time that Frog and Toad could have further adventures, this will be the next best thing. LW

Madame Nightingale Will Sing Tonight

James Mayhew, Orchard (Feb 94), 1 85213 641 3, £3.99

I think it's pitching a bit high to describe this book as 'a great introduction to the wonderful world of opera' as the publishers do on the back. One might as well describe *Jack and the Beanstalk* as an introduction to the wonderful world of horticulture or *Bambi* as an introduction to the wonderful world of the Forestry Commission. The word 'opera' is mentioned in the story, certainly, but it's actually about a nightingale who gets stage fright and how her friends cure her of it. James Mayhew's attractive woodland illustrations make this a pleasant addition to a young child's library, and the instructions for making a toy theatre at the back of this good quality book are a real bonus. LW



The Pirate Queen

Marianne MacDonald, ill. Jan Smith, Orchard (Feb 94), 1 85213 645 6, £3.99

A jolly, likeable story, in which the pictures and words work together admirably and which is full of sly humour and imaginative ideas. Maggie is a girl who enjoys playing pirates. In the course of the game she gets filthy, wrecks the shed, tips up the dustbin and vandalises her mother's dressing table. All has to be put right when she falls into the power of the Great Ma who manages to make the inevitable clearing up quite bearable. Good fun for a wide age-range. LW

Jack's Fantastic Voyage

Michael Foreman, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 930138 5, £3.99

As one might expect, it's the illustrations that make this book the success it is. From misty, pinky dawns to the navy blue of midnight storms, Michael Foreman's pictures of Grandfather's house and the wonderful adventure of its night-time sailing through icy seas, pick up the story and turn it into magic. We still don't know, at the end of the

Hattie Pearl Click Click

Emily Hern, ill. Yvonne Cathcart, Second Story Press via Airlift Book Company (Jul 93), 0 929005 44 9, £4.99

This is one of the most unusual stories I've come across in quite a while. Written in the first-person, it's the autobiographical tale of the author's childhood when she was a slow reader who loved to make up imaginative stories. With the help of a young lodger in her house, who is learning to type, her stories are put down on paper and become the catalyst for eventual reading success. Set in Canada, the story would be a real boost to any junior having trouble reading with its reassurance that it's not a sign of stupidity. A sensitive teacher who could help a child into this book will also find support for sharing as a means of teaching.

The author now helps other children through the medium of the computer. She's a 'wired writer' working in schools through computer modem links. Long may she continue to do so. **LW**

What Did You Do at School Today?

Humphrey Carpenter, ill. Sonia Holleyman, Orchard (Feb 94), 1 85213 521 2, £3.99



As father and daughter walk home from school talking over the day, we see their different interpretations of what went on. This is sheer escapism fun with wonderful Thurber-like images. When the traffic was held up, for instance, was it by roadworks... or was it by highwaymen? The book finishes with two versions of a letter outlining a trip the next day - one in code for the child and the other an innocuous letter for parents asking that the child wear wellies and sensible clothes. We're left to decide just where we think the children will really be going. **JS**

Ms Wiz Loves Dracula

Terence Blacker, ill. Kate Simpson, Young Piper (Jan 94), 0 330 32564 7, £2.99

The ninth book featuring Ms Wiz whose popularity is well established, not only with pupils at St Barnabas School but among many junior readers who will relish another zany tale about the paranormal operative who here finds true love at last. **JB**

The Melanie Brown Stories

Pamela Oldfield, ill. Carolyn Dinan, Faber (Feb 94), 0 571 17064 1, £3.99

Here are all the Melanie Brown stories (three books' worth) collected together in one volume. Melanie Brown is a self-confident, somewhat over-zealous young miss whose exploits at infant school have delighted young audiences for some 20 years. Infant classrooms aren't quite the same as they were in Melanie's day but the misdemeanours of the heroine still ring true with today's listeners. Perfect for sharing with those around Melanie's age (5 years) and for younger juniors who enjoy revisiting familiar territory. **JB**

Dr Xargle's Book of Earth Weather

Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 929941 0, £3.99

According to Dr Xargle there are only four sorts of weather on earth: 'Too hot. Too cold.



'Too wet and too windy.' His talk to his class of shaggy, green, multi-eyed aliens is only slightly off-beam. Why else would earthlings rub each other with fat and lie out in the sun until brown if not to get cooked? And what other explanation is there for the sudden appearance in winter of strange white earthlings with black eyes and orange noses than an invasion? Tony Ross has fun illustrating these and other misinterpretations of the vagaries of the Earth Climate for the amusement of earthlings and earthlings alike. **JB**

Under the Moon

Vivian French, ill. Chris Fisher, Walker (Feb 94), 0 7445 3176 4, £2.99



Three stories in the fairy tale tradition and with all the right ingredients to hold children spellbound. There's the little old woman who's so busy cleaning her little old house she has no time to sit with her little old husband. Then there's little Ivan who's tricked out of his dinner by a wolf and her three cubs and, finally, the trial of strength between the apple child and the thoroughly nasty elder bogle. With plenty of full-page, black-and-white atmospheric illustrations, a well laid out text and the familiar fairy tale structures and conventions, these excellent stories are perfect for junior solo readers or for sharing with infants. **JB**

The Paperbag Prince

Colin Thompson, Red Fox (Jan 94), 0 09 993320 9, £3.99

Yet another splendid book that's concerned with the environment and our protection of it, while at the same time providing an absolutely riveting story. The pictures are brilliantly rich in colour having a wealth of detail that is both Monty Python and Jan Pieńkowski! Illustrations that demand this amount of meticulous looking at hold as many well-hidden treasures as the dump itself. There's also an unexpected twist in the tale where the Paperbag Prince is apparently not the 'totter' we've accepted him to be. This proves again that a green theme and exciting writing are, thank goodness, not necessarily mutually exclusive. **PH**

Ig and Tig's Trip to Earth

Keith Brumpton, Orchard (Feb 94), 1 85213 644 8, £3.99

This is a hilarious picture book with cartoon-type drawings, diary entries, annotations, newspaper cuttings and speech bubbles all over the place. We

see ourselves for what we really are from the perspective of Ig and Tig, a couple of aliens who happen to drop in from planet Aquarius, which is a long way from anywhere. This has enough fun, excitement and variety in written style to switch on even the most mega-reluctant reader. It's quite, quite addictive and very, very funny. For me the high spot was their first encounter with New York where 'the buildings are very tall, but the earth people are just the same size'. Imagine if they weren't! **PH**

The Princess and the Admiral

Charlotte Pomerantz, ill. Tony Chen, The Feminist Press via Airlift Book Company (Nov 93), 1 55861 061 8, £6.99

A princess governing an unprotected realm which has known a century of peace learns that the celebrations are to be disrupted by an invading fleet. Dismissing her despairing wise men, she consults the court astrologer and conceives an ingenious plan which mingles creative cunning with compassion for the invader.

Based on a thirteenth-century incident between Vietnam and the Imperial Navy of Kublai Khan, this lucidly illustrated story has the simplicity and power of a folk tale making it ideal for reading aloud. Its unlaboured advocacy of gentleness and ingenuity is emphasised by a fable embedded in the main story. **GH**

In the Middle of the Night

Kathy Henderson and Jennifer Eachus, Walker (Jan 94), 0 7445 3143 8, £3.99



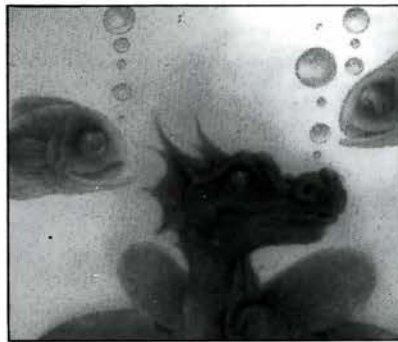
This is one of the best picture books I've ever seen. It succeeds in celebrating the profound magic of the ordinary phenomena that occur every night in sleeping cities: cats prowling deserted streets; the

lonely passing of night trains; unseen and unsung labour in factories, bakeries, hospitals and office blocks; quiet little transitions between life and death. Anybody who has ever worked a night shift, or walked home in the hours before dawn, will instantly recognise the spell cast by the poetically economical text and the subdued magnificence of the illustrations. Children, too, will recognise the enchantment of a realm that is, for most of them, forbidden. GH

Dragon

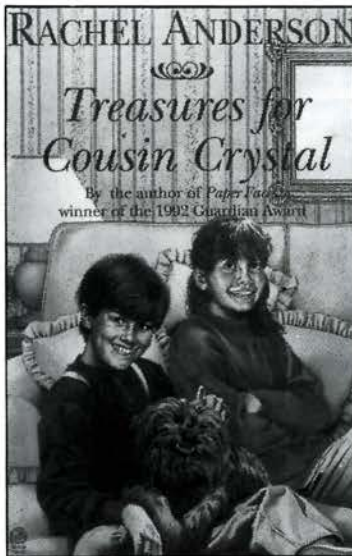
Wayne Anderson, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 925901 X, £3.99

The 'who will be my mother?' theme is given a mythological twist in this handsome picture book. An egg tumbles from the sky and breaks open in the sea, releasing a baby dragon who roams the earth and the heavens in search of its own kind. Eventually, his quest succeeds after a human child intervenes.



This is a variant of an oft-told tale, but Wayne Anderson's opalescent dreamscapes, double-spreads embedding the short text in tropical, arctic and pelagic hues, provide a gentle but striking dramatisation of a simple, appealing story. Highly recommended for reading to youngsters, and for older children to enjoy on their own. GH

JUNIOR / MIDDLE



Treasures for Cousin Crystal

0 00 674642 X

Paper Faces

0 00 674641 1

Rachel Anderson, Lions (Dec 93), £3.50 each

Both novels explore the relationships between parents and children very convincingly from the youngsters' point of view. In each one the parents' actions are well-meaning by their own, adult, terms but they demand too much understanding by their offspring for the children to be able to cope.

The prospect of an exciting TV job for their mother and a problem at work for their father eventually leads Ollie, Jessica and Harry to an over-pampered, rich, distant relative, who treats them in much the same way as she spoils her bad-tempered canine. Somehow the trio manage to get the best they can out of the situation and not feel totally like left luggage.

The second book has the historical perspective of London at the end of the second world war where a woefully scatty, albeit loving, young mother tries to make the best of things for herself and her young daughter whilst she waits for her husband's demob. Dot does not react well to change; unfortunately

that's all Gloria, her mum, seems to be able to offer. Stability only comes fleetingly with a stay in the country and then hospital. Finally, there is the biggest change of all, the return of her unknown father. Both books are very well written and deserve to be stocked. DB

[Ed's note: see too the audio review of *Treasures for Cousin Crystal* on page 17 which appears under the book's original title of *When Mother Went to Work*.]

Wyvern Winter

Toby Forward, ill. Michael Foreman, Puffin (Jan 94), 0 14 036560 5, £3.50

First in a quartet, this fast-moving fantasy concerns the usual good and evil motif, here fighting for power over the dragon-like wyverns that are cast in stone on the gates of Herpeton Manor. The vicar is dodgy, his woman friend who keeps snakes is sinister and Mr Parcel, who carries out experiments on dogs, is malevolent. The connection of young Thomas Ketch to an old-time village wise man and consequently his power to save the village forms the dramatic climax. Throughout, the question lurks in the background – to what lengths should we be prepared to go to bring about relief from human suffering? DB

Rotten Island

William Steig, David R Godine via Airlift Book Company (Jul 93) 0 87923 960 3, £5.99

Rotten Island is an extremely unpleasant place, so hot by day the sea boils, so cold at night that all life freezes. And what life: ugly, vicious monsters whose chief aim is to make one another suffer. But it's the blooming of a beautiful flower in this hostile environment which leads to the destruction and transformation of this terrible world. Steig's creatures are angry in colour, shape and deed and, though this is a moral tale, there seems to be rather too much emphasis on the negative for my taste. For sophisticated readers only. JB

Blabbermouth

Morris Gleitzman, Piper (Jan 94), 0 330 33283 X, £2.99

Quite a title when the main character cannot speak. This is not, at first glance, a story sensitising us to the needs of those with speech problems, yet that's what it does. It's a hysterically funny tale about a girl who can 'talk' with fingers, chalk or pen as well as the rest of her class can speak. Concerned about her Dad's tractor driving and his terrible dress sense, she gets him out of trouble time and time again. I felt uncomfortable with her father's sudden burst into Country and Western singing, but so did she. Perhaps on Australian apple farms these things happen? PH

Metalmis

Linda Pitt, ill. Paul Dowling, Red Fox (Jan 94), 0 09 997290 5, £2.50



Look out for your pension and hang on to the Supply list – Professor Potter has built a robot teacher after a staff resignation leaves Pinkerton Primary bereft of the human version. Proving that no one is indispensable, this is child-centred writing at its best – not just an everyday story of school folk. We see the children at first afraid of their robot (who wouldn't be?) but they quickly discover and respond to her warmth and friendliness. This needs only

the smallest tweak of adjustment to be an appropriate first story for any teacher with a new class. 'We' in turn squirm with delight at her flawless manipulation of the school inspector when he comes to visit. PH

A Child's Guide to Adoption, Andy's Big Question

0 7459 2761 0

Divorce, Mike's Lonely Summer

0 7459 2762 9

Growing Old, Jenny and Grandpa

0 7459 2760 2

Bereavement, Emma Says Goodbye

0 7459 2759 9


Carolyn Nystrom, ill. Ann Baum, Lion Publishing (Jan 94), £3.99 each

Each title deals with a family crisis which may severely disrupt a child's life. Carefully written, they deal with each situation in a sensible and down-to-earth way. Three of the stories (good reads in their own right) give running commentaries that provide a solid Christian background upon which to base talk when reading aloud. The fourth, *Emma Says Goodbye*, brings Christian ethics about death and life after death into the story in a more direct way. Emotional support is given all the way through and the stories make great efforts to provide the questions that children may feel too insecure or upset to ask at the time. PH

Inside the Worm

Robert Swindells, ill. Jon Riley, Yearling (Mar 94), 0 440 86300 7, £2.99

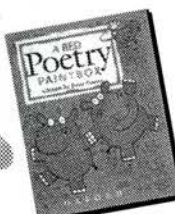
First Room 13, now *Inside the Worm* – Robert Swindells should produce a series of books with the qualities of these two titles. Here are short, finely-paced chapters, action without melodrama, chill without garish theatricality.



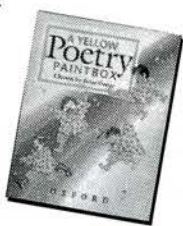
Poetry by
John Foster

Dip into the Poetry Paintbox

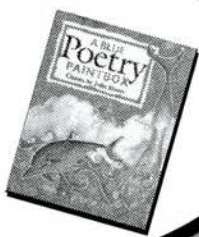
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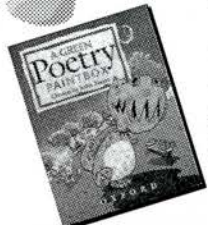


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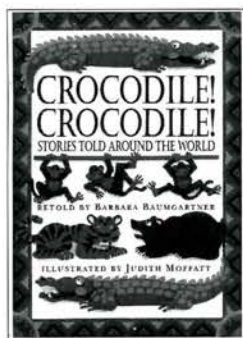
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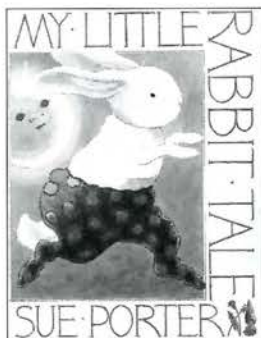
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Timeless Tales from Dorling Kindersley



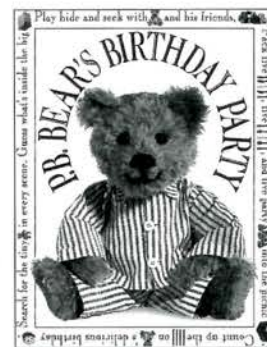
CROCODILE, CROCODILE
Retold by Barbara Baumgartner
Illustrated by Judith Moffatt
Publication: 16 June
ISBN: 0 7513 7021 5 • £7.99



MY LITTLE RABBIT TALE
Sue Porter
Publication: 31 March
ISBN: 0 7513 7008 8 • £7.99



THE UGLY DUCKLING
Retold by Adrian Mitchell
Woodcuts by Jonathan Heale
Publication: 26 May
ISBN: 0 7513 7018 5 • £7.99



P.B. BEAR'S BIRTHDAY PARTY
Publication: 19 May
ISBN: 0 7513 5072 9 • £6.99



A festival celebrating 1000 years of freedom from the Elsworth Worm, vanquished by the maid Ceridwen, takes on a sinister element. The four children inside the Worm's costume become instruments of its latent malevolent power. Read on and make sure this is a class set! VR

Penelope's Protest

Douglas Hill, ill.
Annabel Spenceley,
Piper (Jan 94),
0 330 32727 5, £2.99

An adventure yarn about a girl with a damaged magic pendant which responds to her wishes in unpredictable ways. When Penny is called upon to help her energetically green mother in a protest against the destruction of a local nature reserve, she discovers the hiding place of a couple of rather stereotypical diamond thieves. Her use of the pendant in an attempt to extricate herself from the resulting toils leads to a splendid climax in which a horde of excavator machines turn on both the thieves and the perpetrators of the development project. A brisk, suspenseful fantasy which should appeal to newly fluent readers. GH

Crystal Maze Mystery

3: The Sacred Necklace

Illustrated by Mick Reid, 0 7497 1488 3.

4: Phantom in the Tower

Illustrated by Steve Cox, 0 7497 1489 1
Peter Arnold,
Mammoth (Jan 94),
£3.99 each

Two more fun additions to the 'Crystal Maze' series, a spin-off from the very successful Channel Four television programme. Full of stimulating and lively pictures, the two stories are not for quiet, passive reading. The simply written text demands comprehension and the riddles, codes and puzzles need a definite response from the reader. This interaction can either be shared when read aloud or giggled over quietly when read alone. There are enough time zones and sunken ships to satisfy even the most demanding SF enthusiast – and what a clever brush with Key Stage 2 History! PH

Fowl Pest

James Andrew Hall, ill.
Lucy Case, Red Fox
(Feb 94), 0 09 928419 9,
£2.99

An extremely meandering story about Amy Picket, who wants to be a chicken, and the convulsions endured by her family, friends and school when her father's purchase of a trio of fowls suddenly makes her ambitions realisable. Amy learns chick-speak, and her subsequent actions convince everybody that her eccentricity has intensified into madness.



The great joy of this book is not so much the wacky storyline (though the climax is brilliantly bizarre) as the relentless and cleverly silly wordplay for which it's a vehicle. Scarcely a paragraph passes without some felicitous flight of linguistic fancy, even

if it's only at the level of 'How do you stop a cow from charging?' 'Take away its credit card.' A good story, and a great book for developing enjoyment of language. GH

The Time Travelling Cat

Julia Jarman, ill. David Atack, Lions (Dec 93),
0 00 674634 9, £3.50

Tophers lives with his father in an emotional limbo after the death of his Egyptologist mother. One night, the sardonyx cat that stands at his bedside appears to come to life, acquiring the name Ka, and bearing the ankh, the symbol of life, on its brow. Soon Tophers is involved in a flight through time and space to ancient Egypt and a rite of passage that transforms his life.

If this sounds outlandishly whimsical, then I'm not doing justice to the careful emotional realism of this intriguing and well-written fantasy. The nature of time, change and relationships is sensitively explored in a book that offers both excitement and opportunities for reflection to the fluent reader. GH

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

Hiding Out

Elizabeth Laird,
Mammoth (Jan 94),
0 7497 1664 9, £2.99

I can see why this won the Smarties Young Judges Award. It meets a lot of wish fulfilment – parents left to their confusing lives, holing up in a cave, in this case in France, and going feral.

When I read the cover blurb, I couldn't imagine how anyone would succeed in making me believe that parents could leave their child behind by mistake – credit to Ms Laird; she did it admirably.

As well as the action and tension, there's a thoughtful under-current of how isolated from each other parents and their offspring can be without necessarily recognising it. DB

Naming the Dark

Annie Dalton,
Mammoth (Mar 94),
0 7497 1580 4, £2.99

Fantasy readers who relish long, complex, challenging reads should have this one placed their way.

The town of Loxely seems to have a hold over its citizens: none of them can actually sever bonds and leave. Now dark undercurrents and forces appear to be massing towards an inevitable destruction. The destined hero of the day should be Owen Fisher but he has no idea of his mission and is painfully slow to realise that, like all the others, he is

'... trying to pull names and shapes out of the darkness... in an attempt to make sense of it and the names are different for every person.' DB

Blood and Mortar

Peggy Woodford, Corgi
Freeway (Feb 94),
0 552 52774 2, £2.99

White, middle-class, 15-year-old accused of GBH on his own uncle, who subsequently dies in hospital... the nightmare of Nick's situation is given added drama by being told in the present tense; the police cells and interrogation, the remand home, the hearings and the malice of the widow are all relayed with convincing realism in this taut and compelling novel that never disappoints right up to the final court room confrontation. I had a job putting it down and will recommend it to many older youngsters. DB

The Rollickers and other stories

Andrew Gibson, Faber
(Jan 94), 0 571 17045 5,
£3.99

The pleasures of these stories are partly the pleasures of imagination and storytelling – lots of playing with words, people and ideas. The seven stories (interestingly illustrated by different people) have all kinds of strange things happening: Oswald Loon challenged in awful rhyme by a mysterious aggressor; Little Mudd (yes his name is...)



persecuted by the Dreebies; the Jigbat's intellectual understanding of life beyond itself and its brave struggle to find the rest of the world; and the title story with its fine eccentric humour exposing the dullness of small town living... These are stories to read aloud and tell. Make time for Year 6/7 pupils to hear them. AJ

Just Like Superman

Clare Bevan, Puffin
(Jan 94), 0 14 036441 2,
£2.99

Goggles doesn't look tough but his toughness is in his willingness to stand up to the rest of the gang on principles of rightness. In a marvellous time shift when the gang,

roaming the London Underground, find themselves in the Blitz, Goggles and other members of the group reveal their strengths. This title is memorable for its story and for the warmth of the character creations and relationships – especially the young girl DD and Goggles' far-sighted grandmother. It's good to see strengths registered not in physique but in holding principles, in friendship and in family ties. AJ



Mandragora

David McRobbie,
Mammoth (Feb 94),
0 7497 1265 1, £3.50

A shipful of emigrants sailed to Australia from Scotland 100 years ago. Present-day children piece together what

happened on the voyage from fragments of diaries and other information and, in doing that, begin to recreate the series of disasters and also relieve them. It's an exciting read blending spooky nastiness with a well-recreated historical voyage and teenage romance. The twists of plot alone will hook many readers. **AJ**

The Diary of Anne Frank

David Adler, ill. Karen Ritz, Piccolo (Mar 94), 0 330 33192 2, £3.99

A faithful version of the well-known diary. The illustrations treat this most unusual of subjects for a picture book in a very sensitive manner. The subtle watercolours work very well, the tones reflecting the changing emotions in the text:



Anne also carried her school bag. She could have packed it with clothes, but she didn't. She put in books, old letters, and her diary. 'Memories mean more to me than clothes,' Anne wrote later.

the more desperate the position of the family, the more restricted the sombre greys and creams become. This book provides a means of introducing the holocaust to younger children in a non-threatening way and will be a very useful text for the older, but less proficient, reader where the reading ability and interest level do not match. **PH**

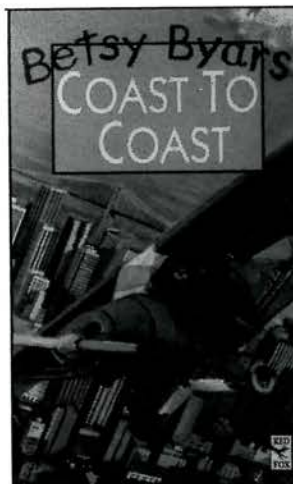
[Ed's note: see also page 25 for a review of *Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary*.]

A Ghost in Waiting

Hugh Scott, Walker (Feb 94), 0 7445 3181 0, £2.99

Why can't all writers of ghost stories for young people handle the genre as superbly as Hugh Scott? The spareness of his style is like a sublime solo on a musical instrument: it's the spaces between the ideas which are as important as the ideas themselves.

Andrew and Rosie's older brother, James, is dead, yet his spirit lingers to protect his fearless younger brother from a centuries-dead bishop who needs the energy from unvanquished souls to remain on the earthly plane. The denouement is as masterly and teasingly oblique as the rest of this utterly addictive narrative. **VR**



Coast to Coast

Betsy Byars, Red Fox (Feb 94), 0 09 922071 7, £2.99

A delightful story woven around the warmth and love in the relationship between grandfather and granddaughter, Birch. Running away from a bleak future in a retirement home, Pop takes Birch on one final adventure together, flying East to West across America in the tiniest of planes. The

journey involves personal discovery for both of them. What they find out about America is only exceeded by what they discover about themselves and each other. **PH**

No Gun for Asmir

Christobel Mattingley, ill. Elizabeth Honey, Puffin (Jan 94), 0 14 036729 2, £3.50

The power of story has been a constant in human experience since narratives were first articulated. News items about Sarajevo, televised and written, sadly dull public perception and reaction over a period of time.

This, however, is another true story told as 7-year-old Asmir experiences it. His family's flight from Sarajevo, leaving his father behind, is vividly affecting in its simplicity. This should be read – young people challenge complacency, and exposure to this book will help them in some small way to empathise with the plight of the world's refugee population. Empathy engenders action through the medium of literature. **VR**

OLDER READERS

Down Came a Blackbird

Nicholas Wilde, Collins Lions (Dec 93), 0 00 674677 2, £3.50

The book opens with James stalking a blackbird and then killing it. James apparently wants to shock and be hated. He manipulates and steals. But he begins to dream about an earlier James at the house and this forms a developing sequence which finally meshes with the present as he comes to care for, and be involved with, others. The climax of the dream-past and present coming together is very dramatic. A book which will grip those readers who discover it. **AJ**

Love Hurts

A Book of Love Stories Edited by Miriam Hodgson, Mammoth (Feb 94), 0 7497 1536 7, £3.50

24 stories, 363 pages and a bumper crop of accomplished writers: Geras, Ure, Johnson, Alcock, Nimmo, Masters and Wynne Jones to name but a few – all for £3.50.

This collection is an amalgamation of three previous Mammoth titles and it really is one of the best anthologies I've encountered. There are a variety of styles here – material sufficient for a study in itself – and none with the, sometimes, suspiciously manufactured feel of stories

commissioned for anthologies. The writing is consistently sensitive and excellent – a pity the rather disappointing cover fails to do justice to its meritorious contents. **VR**

Cutting Loose

Carole Lloyd, Red Fox (Jan 94), 0 09 913831 X, £3.50

All the characters in this sequel to *The Charlie Barber Treatment* move on, but Charlie's is the pivotal role. She illuminates the common experience: family rifts, distracted and distanced parents, problems of identity, self-image and relationships. Charlie's discoveries are the reader's and there are no easy options for either. Carole Lloyd never patronises and accessibility combines with sharply focused writing to produce a book which should be widely read by Year 9 students and above. **VR**

Reviewers in this issue:

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

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SPECIAL REVIEW

MAYNE'S NEW HOB

Margaret Meek



For as long as I have read children's books I've been in awe of William Mayne. He drives a wedge into my everyday reading, prisms it open to air it and make me look at how it works. So I discover that holes have socks, laces are full of shoes, pockets have breeches, whereas, until then, I'd never noticed.

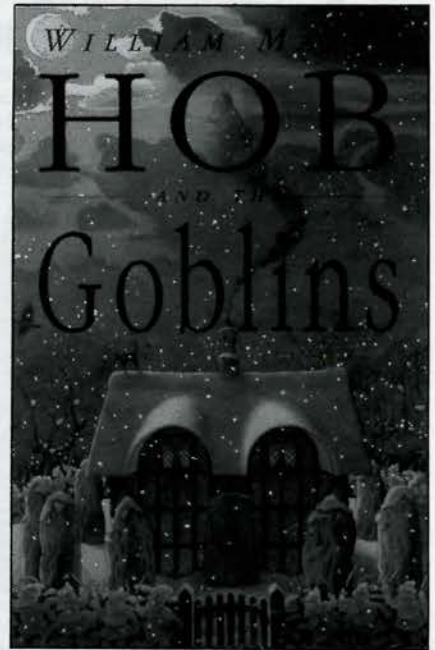
Did you ever meet Hob, in a picture book?

He's back, in **Hob and the Goblins**, beautifully protected by endpapers and chapter headings composed of a spellbinding alphabet by Norman Messenger. (N.B. Goblins without Hob as prefix are malicious. Everyday life with Mayne for the uninitiated or forgetful needs Katharine Briggs' **A Dictionary of Fairies**, as well as one for Scrabble, or acquaintance with Alan Garner.) Do you know what a *cutch* is? Hob lives in one under the stairs (O.E.D. var. of 'couch'). He has become the permanent helper of the Grimes family: parents, two Hob-spotting children, a budgie and a baby, all splendid talkers. They have bought, unsuspecting, 'the wickedest house in the country'. It sits over a crock of gold a sorcerer once went to steal. Hob knows he will return, bringing with him a host of malevolent fairies. (Hob: 'they say fairies but they mean something else'.) Overground the neighbour is a witch; goblin children curtsey to her. There are also other dwarves.

War is threatened. Hob's powers are limited to here and now, so when the witch seduces him with a suit of clothes, he follows the Hobgoblin culture, becomes a swank and a layabout (as prefigured in the first chapter) until events wear them out and he returns to face the forces of darkness.

This is one of the best of the best kind of stories for children, digging deep into the fairy tale hoard, children's own literature, and glittering with its own, modern, treasures as a reading experience for adults and children alike. It may need to be read aloud to the inexperienced, though not often, before the sheer magic of the words takes over. Like Hob, Mayne is a boundary crosser. He shows language to his readers, turning the complexities of thought and feeling into metaphors of unexpected, pellucid simplicity. So children immediately know and feel what FloorShiver, PlasterCrack and LarderMould are, and don't have to wrestle with, 'Something had driven out things like Helter scuttling under the floor, and Skelter, jumping in the loft at two in the morning, not there when you look'. For adults, to read Mayne is to rediscover reading; for children, it's a whole new game of discovering ideas as events.

How can we explain to those who want normative levels for children's reading what this is all about?



Hob and the Goblins is published by Dorling Kindersley (0 7513 7006 1) priced £8.99.

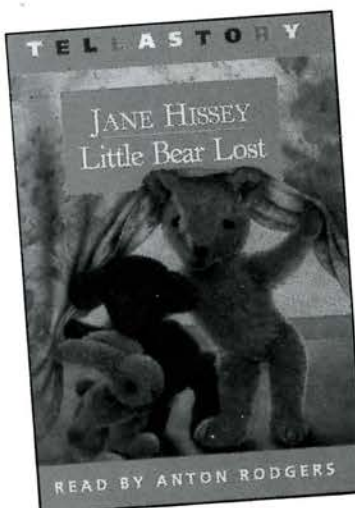
The picture book referred to in this piece is **The Complete Book of Hob Stories**, published by Walker (0 7445 1483 5) at £4.99 pbk, with illustrations by Patrick Benson.

A Dictionary of Fairies by Katharine Briggs is published by Penguin (0 14 017658 6) at £8.99 pbk.

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.



Jane Hissey titles

Read by Anton Rogers, Tellastory

The single cassettes of **Jolly Snow**, **Jolly Tall**, **Nursery Stories** and **Little Bear Lost** (33 mins and £3.99 each) all include other stories about the well-loved nursery animals. The book and tape pack of **Jolly Tall** (£6.99) is a splendid

gift. Most covetable is the package of **Old Bear Story Box** (£6.99): tape with paperback miniatures – always child-friendly winners – of **Old Bear**, **Little Bear Lost** and **Little Bear's Trousers**. Another Hissey special is the quality **Old Bear's Audiobook**: four titles packaged for £14.99. Anton Rogers is an ideal reader: cosy, comfortable and secure whilst giving status to bears, a rabbit and a giraffe so irresistibly created by Jane Hissey in her illustrations.

The Rescue Party

Nick Butterworth, read by Richard Briers, one cassette with 26-page hbk, 19 mins, Collins Audio, £10.99

An outstanding package. Nick Butterworth's Percy (an established new favourite) and his animal friends form a long line tugging on a rope to rescue the little rabbit that has fallen down an old well. Behind them all is the rabbit they're trying to rescue, watching bemused, having popped out of a secret passage. It's illustrated on a 3-page

pull-out. Richard Briers is a wonderfully avuncular Percy and gives all the animals distinctive credible voices. A magic combination.

After the Storm and **One Snowy Night** are now on a double cassette with both paperbacks, particularly good value at £9.99.

When Mum Went to Work

Rachel Anderson, read by Brigit Forsyth, three cassettes, 3 hrs 50 mins, Chivers, £14.95 + VAT

This is a children's-eye-view of a mother who decides to give up being Earth Mother in a home in the country with a lovely garden, full of fruit trees, to take up a job in town. Jessica and Ollie are horrified and baby Harry reacts with screams and naughtiness as they are farmed out to Mrs Crabbe, the short-tempered child-minder who is not amused by Harry's drawings on the wall. Weekends with their self-obsessed father aren't much more successful, but Mother works on. Brigit Forsyth conveys the humour

and love in this chaotic clash of interests.

[Ed's note: see page 13 for a review of the paperback edition of this story, renamed as **Treasures for Cousin Crystal**.]

The Secret Summer of Daniel Lyons

Roy Apps, read by Dermot Crowley, three cassettes, 3 hrs 36 mins, Chivers, £14.95 + VAT

Here we have an unusual story set in a Sussex fishing port – even though the accents of the fishermen sound more Wessex than Sussex! 13-year-old Tom Jue is in his last, dull year at school and his strict Primitive Methodist parents expect him to follow an apprenticeship. But Tom is fascinated by photography – a sinful outrage in his parents' eyes – and when the South Seas Film Company sets up on the beach, Tom is seduced by its allure. He becomes involved under the pseudonym Daniel Lyons, but the emotional stress of deceit and the clash of values becomes difficult to handle. Convincingly read with verve. ■



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THE SECOND PRINCESS

Hiawyn Oram and Tony Ross

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0-86264-414-3 £7.99

March

It's hard being number two, and the little princess takes drastic corrective measures! Vintage Ross illustrations make this funny story a must for all younger children and their parents.



SARAH AND THE SANDHORSE

Andrew Baynes and Michael Foreman

32pp 260 x 200mm
0-86264-476-3 £8.99

May

A little girl's dream comes alive through dazzling watercolour spreads of her journey into a fantastic night world with a magical sandhorse.



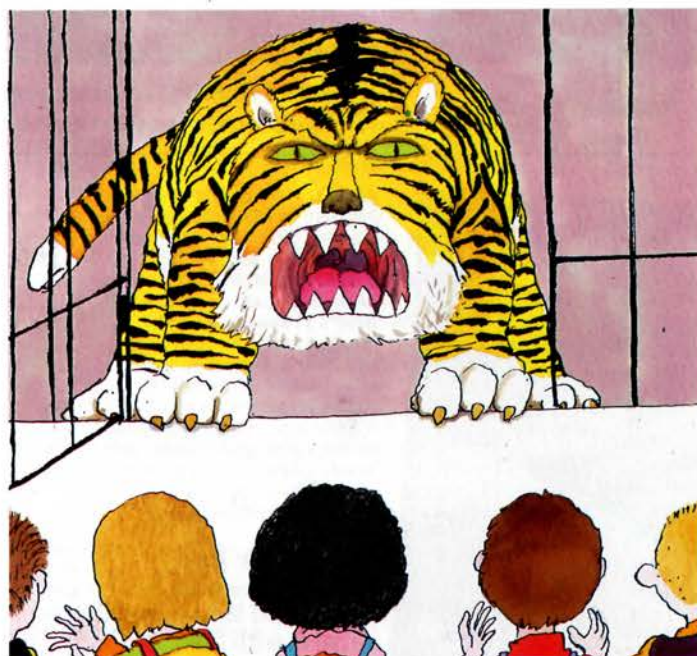
PAT THE DOG

Gus Clarke

32pp 230 x 200mm
0-86264-503-4 £7.99

May

Children will love joining in the storytelling as Pat's shopping list gets longer and longer - but there's a twist in the tale! Appealing illustrations by the author of *Ten Green Monsters*.



ISABEL'S NOISY TUMMY

David McKee

32pp 230 x 200mm
0-86264-497-6 £7.99

April

Isabel's rumbling tummy causes hilarity in the classroom, but it can come in useful! Bold illustrations packed with witty observations make this a book to chuckle over again and again.

The Guardian Children's Fiction Award is won by THE MENNYMS

Rachel Anderson, one of the judges, reports

The best reward for having been a previous winner was to be asked onto this year's judging team. What joy! But eek, what responsibility in case we got it wrong.

We had three months' reading time, then met round the *Guardian's* boardroom table with clean copies of the contending titles, waiting like nervous guests, down one end. The other judges were writers Roger McGough, Geraldine McCaughrean and Chris Pwling, with *Guardian Children's* Books Editor, Joanna Carey.

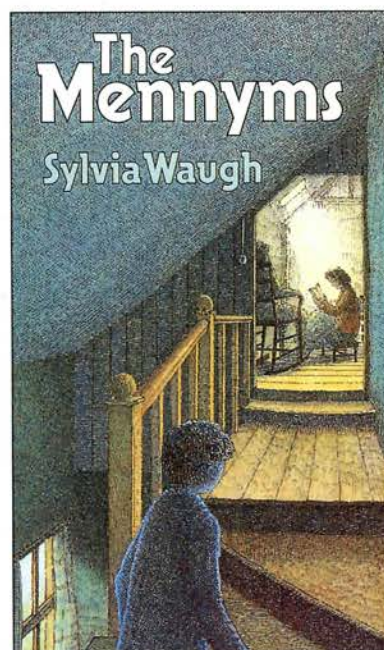
Each title on our long-list was given a thorough airing before we dared draw up a short-list. How durable was its appeal? Would it stand up to re-reading, maybe many times over. How well did it read aloud?

Robert Leeson's *Smart Girls* (Walker, 0 7445 2441 5, £6.99) is the nicest volume to hold and feel – slim format, crisp jacket, decent paper, clear typeface, containing five witty folk tales from around the world, linked by the theme of girls as champions. The most striking cover, on front and back of Lesley Howarth's *The Flower King* (Walker, 0 7445 2451 2, £4.99 pbk), is a glowing Van Gogh-style landscape out of which the hero broods moodily, as well he might with all the Cornish goings-on he has to uncover.

The Mennymys (Julia MacRae, 1 85681 208 1, £9.99) by Sylvia Waugh offers the most unusual subject-matter, an everyday story of knitted folk. Almost a juvenile *Diary of Mr Pooter*, it chronicles a year in the Mennymys' gentle suburban lives, crossing back and forth over the borders of reality and pretend.

The most startling opening line is in Pat Moon's *The Spying Game* (Orchard, 1 85213 624 3, £4.99 pbk), a breathless detective novel about bullying in which the narrator-sleuth is, unwittingly, the most menacing of all bullies. Yes please, Pat Moon, more. **The Baby and Fly Pie** (Andersen, 0 86263 461 5, £8.99) by Melvin Burgess is funny, fast and chirpy, despite its ultra-serious subject – rubbish-tip urchins eking out a dangerously varied existence in some future apocalyptic London. It's uncompromisingly harsh and caused one of the judges to suggest it should come with a literary health warning: 'Not to be approached by sensitive readers'. **The Frozen Waterfall** (Faber, 0 571 16794 2, £10.99) by Gaye Hicilymaz is another dark tale of modern times, rural Turks meeting the richest country in Europe. A long and thoughtful book, attending carefully to the delight and shock experienced by a spirited heroine who settles in Switzerland.

Once you've won the *Guardian Children's* Fiction Award, you're never allowed to win again. Is this supposed to make it fairer for the others? How can selecting a single winner from such diversity of talent and theme ever be fair? So, I proposed to



Richard Gott, *Guardian* literary editor and our referee, that we make not one Award but six, with correspondingly smaller amounts of glory and cash (i.e. £1000 ÷ 6 = £166.66 each).

But he said, 'Sorry, no go.' So this year's Award goes to **The Mennymys**. The other five are pretty good, too. Don't take our word for it. Try them all. Decide for yourself.

[Ed's note: Red Fox publish a paperback version of *The Mennymys* in July.]

A Gander at Mother Goose

... by Michael Foreman who was on the judging panel

This was my first time as a judge of The Mother Goose Award, given annually to the best newcomer to British children's book illustration. The best bit was receiving a daily jiffy-bag of books. Each evening the family enjoyed them to varying degrees and I couldn't decide on an outright winner.

When I walked through Embankment Gardens on my way to the judging, I had three books on my shortlist. I would be happy for any of the three to emerge in First Place.

All the books entered were spread on the table. Chairperson, Colin Hawkins, held up each in turn and a book which received no vote went on the floor. After three rounds five books remained on the table. My shortlist of three were still there.

By now my choice had narrowed to two. It happened we were unanimous about the leading two but split on which should be first. The leaders were so different and difficult to compare. We also had to remove one more book from the table as only three runners-up were allowed.

There was a long discussion. No blows were exchanged and no sandwiches thrown. The hardest decision was which book should join the others on the floor.

In the end, First Place by a clear majority was **Where the Great Bear Watches**, illustrated by Lisa Flather, published by ABC (text James Sage, 1 85406 177 1, £6.95). The pictures are stunning wood or lino cuts and have the bold shapes you'd expect from such a process. But they also have delicate and subtle detail and a feeling for facial expression that suggest a real ability to draw and the promise of a rich variety of work to come. We await her next book with great anticipation. After the final voting, we discovered Lisa Flather is a graduate of the excellent Natural History Illustration course at the Royal College of Art.

The other three winners were:

Think of an Eel illustrated by Mike Bostock (text Karen Wallace, Walker, 0 7445 2250 1, £6.99). Elegantly designed and beautifully painted watercolours give a glowing treatment to a fine factual text helped by the usual high production values of Walker Books. Probably the most complete book of all the entries.

Cat Song illustrated by Alan Curless (text Andrew Matthews, Hutchinson, 0 09 176221 9, £8.99) has masses of cats hurly-burling over the pages with a great variety of movement and expression. Very difficult to do and very well done here.

Three Bags Full illustrated by Sally Hobson (text by Ragnhild Scamell, ABC, 1 85406 178 X, £6.95) is exuberant and boldly painted in strong colours across double-page spreads which contain wit and feeling.



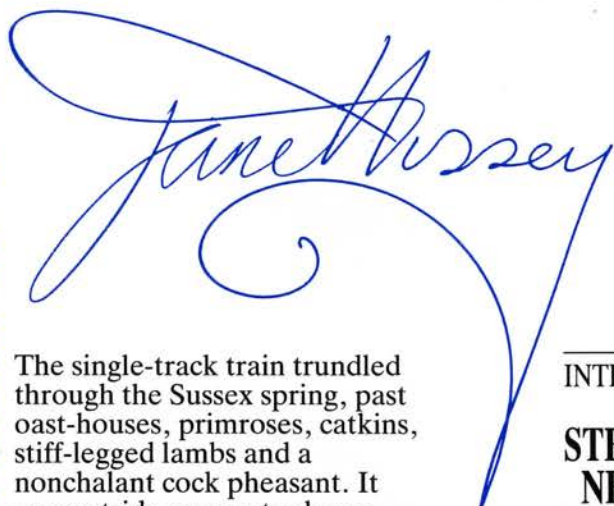
From *Where the Great Bear Watches*.

All the judges were happy with the variety of approach shown in the prize-winning quartet. To have selected four rather similar books would have given a poor signal to new illustrators. Once again, we hope not just to have selected the books with the most successful illustrations, but also the artists who appeared to have real potential to produce more books and continue to get better and better. Sometimes the first book is as good as the artist gets.

We look forward to future books from the four winners to support our confidence in their talent, and books from the other entrants to show we got it wrong.

Michael Foreman's fellow judges were Colin Hawkins, Wendy Cooling, Charlotte Voake, Nicola Bayley, and Sally Grindley of the book club, Books For Children, who sponsor the Mother Goose Award. ■

Authorgraph No. 86



The single-track train trundled through the Sussex spring, past oast-houses, primroses, catkins, stiff-legged lambs and a nonchalant cock pheasant. It was outside commuter hours, and no one left and no one came on the bare platforms – which, like Adlestrop, will probably perish in the approaching blizzard of market forces. Jane Hissey and three-year-old Ralph waited for the train and me, and then, in another nostalgia-filled moment, we all waved to the guard as he hung smiling from the train as it jogged gently to the next and last stop on the line.

I've been to launch parties for Jane Hissey where her career has sounded like a fairy story of discovery and fabulous success – which is scarcely how 10 years of painstaking work feels to her. But now, not a day passes without a deep 'Can a dream come true?' appreciation of the house the family were able to buy two years ago. Surrounded by vast rough lawns and a dishevelled orchard bright with run-wild daffodils, it looks downhill over six acres of fields and woods, from which deer emerge in the early morning to drink at their ponds and stream.

A copy of a French farmhouse, it was started near the beginning of the century by an author who'd had one book published, but, failing with the next, he had been forced to sell before it was finished – his spirit should be content now with the success of its present owners. It was bought and developed by an artist couple (small, somewhat pre-Raphaelite-ish, paintings decorate the back walls) who added studios on both floors – huge, white and pure, with gigantic northern windows, they're like airy, vaulted chapels. Here Jane's houseplants, which green every sill and corner of the house, turn into tropical-forest trees.

Husband Ivan, artist and freelance designer, has one studio (shared usually with Ralph), but Jane herself has no need of a studio nor such light. She works in a tiny neighbouring room, setting up her still-life toy scenes on a table-top stage arched over with a wooden frame. Her lamp is fixed to this

INTERVIEWED
BY
**STEPHANIE
NETTELL**

(when not 'borrowed' by 13-year-old Owen), and from it hang twists of thread to fix in mid-action the positions of her floppy characters. A polythene sheet keeps out nosy hands and a cat with a fetish for sleeping on Old Bear.

Plastic ice-cream boxes are filled with pencil crayons in various stages of depreciation (Ivan gave her an ingenious device that will grip an otherwise hopeless stub-end, transforming it into a pencil again) and divided into colour groups. Two great filing chests with enormously wide, shallow drawers (thrown out by British Rail) hold artwork, and on the walls are shelves of stuffed toys, her own, the children's, and those donated or discovered, all of them worn by years of loving.

Here is the real home of Old Bear and Little Bear, of Jolly Tall (who suffers a sex change in France and becomes Julie the Giraffe), Duck and Zebra, or Ruff, Bramwell Brown (who's 'Caramel' in French) and Sailor Boy (who was given to Jane's young sister to comfort her when their big brother went away at 11 to naval school). There is even a whole shelf of ancient golliwogs, looking down with round eyes at scenes everyone knows they can now never join.

This is where *everything* is created and set up exactly as we see in the pictures – not just the characters or the scene, but such props as the birthday cake sandwiched with jam, the pass-the-parcel, the bone-shaped cake (the decorator working on the house had to go on a diet after Ruff), the cardboard-box train, every piece of curtain, or carpet, or bedspread. . . . When her editor, Caroline Roberts of Hutchinson, was anxious about the unexpectedly 'bright' cover for Ruff, done abnormally early for a dummy to sell foreign rights at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, Jane didn't simply repeat the original drawing against a new background of carpet and skirting-board, but once more set up all the characters and started again.



Photographs by Richard Mewton.

'Doing a drawing a second time is usually a mistake, and though I tried to make slight improvements in the group, I didn't really want to do it, so perhaps it was a bit static. But everyone seemed content. Then Caroline phoned. 'Please don't be cross with me, but I've just walked past someone's office, and seen your old jacket on the wall, and, you know, it looked really nice. . . . 'I won't be cross,' I said, but I was thinking *Great!*' So Ruff got his bouncy cover after all.

On the back flap is a photograph (astonishingly recognisable) of Jane aged three, 'in one of those pixie knitted hats of the fifties' and with a smartly furry Old Bear. 'My grandmother had given me Old Bear when I was one, but eventually I did wear him out. In those days you had few toys, so you remember them all – the doll, the bear.' I had always thought my elder son eccentric for carrying his teddy by its nose gripped in his teeth, but in **Old Bear and His Friends** there is a story about Teddy no-Nose, named after the bear of a friend's small boy who did just that. There's little that Jane Hissey doesn't know about teddies.

Jane's father was in the Navy, so the family regularly moved – Londonderry, Portsmouth, Malta (which she thinks



was the source of a little chequered-cloth donkey, whose tails of threads she used to plait in those pre-My Little Pony days - she was thrilled to find one uncannily like it in a car-boot sale, which is surely about to make its public debut). He died at 39, leaving her young mother with three children - Jane, in the middle, was eight. Jane had been born in Norwich, and they returned to an old cottage 'out in the sticks' which they'd left while they were away and Jane travelled in to Norwich High School.

Her brother, abandoning the Navy, became a social worker, her sister a physiotherapist, but all of them (like their mother, if she'd had the chance) were talented at art. With zoology, botany and art at A-level, Jane seemed destined for medical illustration, but at Brighton College of Art, John Vernon Lord, her personal tutor, recognising her work was not sufficiently tight or technical, wisely put her off.

'A brilliant, lovely man, he kept me going when I lost heart. Until I discovered pencil crayons in my last year, I floundered a bit with every medium. I knew what I wanted to do - I preferred drawing to painting, but pen and ink was too scratchy - yet it never worked. Then suddenly what came out was what I'd planned! I enjoyed the physical nature of them, the *action* (I nearly did wood carving and welding), and I liked the colour, the way I used them - really heavily, not soft and light.

Her books suggest she avoids the human body? 'I loved life drawing, but once I was using pencil crayons I never did it. Building up colour and texture is a slow laborious process, so it demands still life. By the end it's right, but it won't look right halfway through: it's the opposite of water colour, where you look for a long time and then do a few strokes, a little work and a lot of thinking.' She chooses her characters primarily for their *texture*, and it is texture which her crayons build up so miraculously - fluffy curls or wiry coats, corded carpets or woodgrain, glass eyes or velvet ears. . . . One drawing can take a week, a book like **Ruff** a year of daily labour.

Jane and Ivan had met at college; after teacher-training in Brighton, she taught in a Worthing sixth-form college for five years. 'That was fun. I put day-and-night enthusiasm into all the projects, which didn't leave much time for my own work.' Only when she left to have Owen did she begin to build a portfolio, one based on the principle of 'Draw what's to hand' - which turned out to be Owen's bear.

She couldn't handle touting her portfolio as a freelance - 'Agents always want *backgrounds*, and I wasn't tough enough to say, "So what's wrong with my *foregrounds*?"' - but gained a contract to do Teddy Bear Portraits for customers of The General Trading Company (such an unexpected offer that few customers asked for it). When a friend sent her work to a greetings card company, she moved into print with about a dozen designs for various firms.



Caroline Roberts saw one, and rang to discuss, Jane assumed, commissions for illustrations or jackets. Instead, **Old Bear** was born. That was 10 books and 10 years ago, when Alison was a baby. Perhaps when Ralph, who, with his playgroup friends provides such a valuable testing ground, is older she will break out of the Hissey nursery world?

It has its pressures now, 'though I wouldn't do it if I weren't enjoying it'. The 12 stories demanded for the TV series meant not only an inversion of her usual working process ('it's hard to write without a picture to shape the story') but intensive writing 'which isn't my forte', in spite of her stories being popular in 10 countries and in National Curriculum favour. Normally a month of writing would be followed by nine of drawing 'to recover', but now she had to write continuously because there was a film crew waiting - and another series! Mind you, as with most Hissey projects, the hard slog seems to pay off. The first series has just won Jane the 1993 BAFTA Award for The Best Children's Programme (Fiction/Entertainment).

The technique is freeze-frame animation. The books formed the first storyboards; now Jane has to work with the team to provide, say, her visualised viewpoint ('behind the door'), and, for stories she may want to use herself later, the exact props. The essentially simple style and restricted world of a toddler can mean one sentence being revised twenty times, testing, reading aloud, looking for the best point to end on.

Ivan is her guide, support and vital critic, reducing his own workload in order to accommodate her, while still

teaching at Eastbourne Art College 'to get him away from me and the children! He's incredibly versatile and talented - The One in our year at college. He spends so much time with Ralph he's totally tuned in, so he can write the first draft of an idea we've had, rather than lose it while I'm finishing another.'

Together as a team they juggle work, children, garden and house. But while she frets about cobwebs and curtainless bedrooms, it's clear they delight in labour: stretching across the expansive garden is the treat TV success allowed her - a great bare rockery, whose colours and textures are slowly building up layer by layer. It's a technique with a proven record. ■

Jane Hissey's books are all published in hardback by Hutchinson and in paperback by Red Fox:

Old Bear, 0 09 165290 1, £6.99;
0 09 955440 2, £3.99 pbk

Little Bear's Trousers, 0 09 172140 7, £6.99;
0 09 959780 2, £3.99 pbk

Little Bear Lost, 0 09 173715 X, £6.99;
0 09 962470 2, £3.99 pbk

The Jane Hissey Collection is a boxed set of three miniature editions of the above three titles, 0 09 174330 3, £10.99

Jolly Snow, 0 09 176414 9, £7.99;
0 09 962490 7, £3.99 pbk

Jolly Tall, 0 09 173720 6, £7.99;
0 09 962480 X, £3.99 pbk

Old Bear and His Friends, 0 09 987780 5,
£6.99 pbk

Old Bear Tales, 0 09 988000 8, £6.99 pbk

Ruff, 0 09 176487 4, £8.99

[For details of Jane Hissey's stories on tape, see our Audio Reviews on page 17.]

ENCYCLOPEDIAS IN THE AGE

Nick Tucker reports

National Curriculum demands have posed new problems for encyclopedia publishers. While non-fiction books spring up overnight covering Key Stage 2 in this or Key Stage 3 in that, encyclopedias normally treat all subjects according to their intrinsic importance. Should they ever give disproportionate space to *The Great Fire of London* or *Acid and Alkalinity* because both subjects have been picked out by the National Curriculum for History and Science respectively, then readers from other countries in which these encyclopedias are sold may wonder at this sudden surge of interest. And while National Curriculum syllabus suggestions can be extremely specific ('Listen to pieces of music by composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich'), they also sometimes come over as rather more diffuse, challenging even the most carefully composed encyclopedia index to locate them successfully. There is also no guarantee that current syllabus requirements will remain the same for long, given the speedy rate of change so far and promises from Sir Ron Dearing of more upheavals to come in 1995.

Using encyclopedias to help with National Curriculum subjects can therefore be a hit or miss affair, especially where shorter, less comprehensive sets are concerned. But the three main sets catering roughly for ages 7-14, and so spanning the distance between Key Stage 2 (7-11) and Key Stage 3 (11-14), all do something different. Far from competing with each other they are better seen as complementary, one leading to another as the child matures and school work becomes more demanding. The **Oxford Children's Encyclopedia** (7 volumes, 1,648 pages, £125) is the obvious choice for stimulating a child of seven or so at the stage of building up initial interests. **Children's Britannica** (20 volumes, 6,768 pages, £275) then takes the child from the end of Key Stage 2 and into Key Stage 3, consolidating early interests and providing more detail on a wider range of subjects. **World Book Encyclopedia** (22 volumes, 12,000 pages, £529) completes the job up to the end of Key Stage 3 and beyond, providing a comprehensive range of topics in much fuller, more analytic detail.

The **Oxford Children's Encyclopedia** is easily the most fun. Print is large, and there are many brightly coloured pictures and diagrams ingeniously worked in around its brief text. Margins are wide, and can therefore be used for additional 'fascinating facts' of the type that children used to enjoy in their comics. Only the index is over-severe, consisting of lists of names and number references just occasionally broken up by modest line drawings. Younger readers are not naturally attracted to indexes, but they must learn how to work them if an encyclopedia is to be put to full use. Oxford should try harder here, incorporating the user-friendly readers' aids so skilfully deployed in its other six volumes.

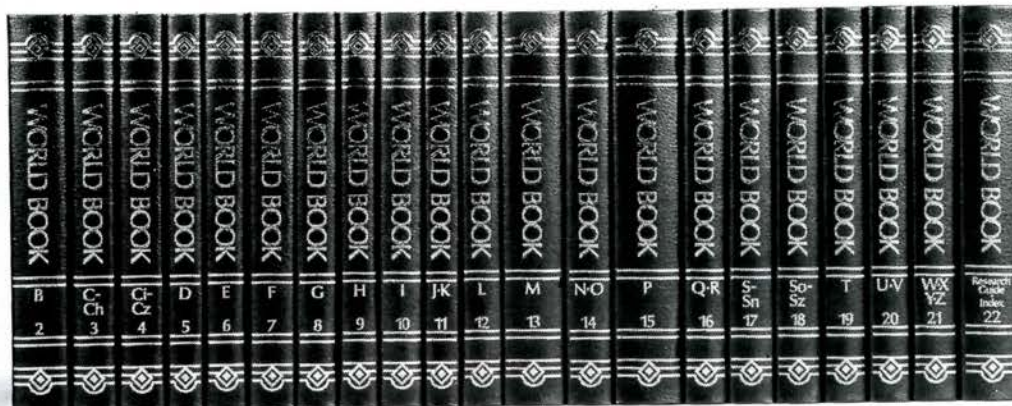
Given that children were widely consulted about the choice of contents, entries like *Table-tennis*, *Darts*, or *Dragons* owe more to their popularity with the young than to whatever role

they play in any tree of essential knowledge. But early National Curriculum needs are also well served, although more important entries rarely extend over two pages, so limiting the treatment of subjects like *Roman Britain*. Such brevity helps make the set easy to handle, but much is lost too. Entries on *Decimals* and *Percentages* are somewhat bewildering, with not enough room to explain the basics of these subjects adequately. The entry on *Sculpture* has some lovely illustrations, but once again is forced to rush its fences in the effort to be brief. Pupils who think that all modern sculpture is merely silly will not have much chance of correcting this view here or during the entry on *Henry Moore*: 'He never tried to copy precisely the source of his ideas, but rather to suggest a likeness.'

As this last quotation suggests, there are still some fairly hard concepts in this set. An average younger reader will sometimes have problems, for example with Dylan Thomas's delightful but wayward definition of *Poetry*: 'What makes me laugh or cry or yawn, what makes my toenails twinkle . . .' The core subjects of English, Maths and Science cannot be treated in depth, and bare statements too often serve as explanations at the same time. But if we are thinking mainly of Key Stage 2 with its emphasis on accumulating facts and the first understanding of simple theories, this set has much to commend it. Page lay-outs are often brilliant compared with the cramped, prose-heavy appearance of the more traditional encyclopedia sets. Language is direct: *Tchaikovsky* 'tried to hide his homosexuality from society', rather than suffering from nameless 'events in his personal life' in the mealy-mouthed version preferred by the **Children's Britannica**. For children from 7-10, this set is an excellent choice, even though readers will soon have to graduate from it after starting secondary school at the age of 11.

Passing on to **Children's Britannica**, the 1988 fourth edition although updated to 1993 now shows signs of age above and beyond its dedication to 'Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales'. Many of its pictures are in dull black and white or pale colour, and some entries need revision. Given the emphasis in the National Curriculum on written English skills, it is unfortunate that while there is reference to *spell* in the entry on *Magic*, there is nothing about *Spelling*. No encyclopedia could have predicted every topic the National Curriculum would concentrate upon, but when put to the test some of the entries here prove disappointing. *Weather* is illustrated by three exceptionally dreary black and white pictures. *Energy* and *Gravity* are no more exciting and receive less than adequate coverage, although other cross-references eventually provide a fuller picture.

World Book Encyclopedia.



OF THE RINGBINDER

On the positive side, **Children's Britannica** is the only set that addresses younger children successfully at length as well as at their 'own level'. The entry on *Poetry* really explains what happens in a poem; *Ancient Rome* is also excellent – all 15 pages of it. The one volume index serves most usefully as a mini-encyclopedia, including a few brief facts and figures and one-line definitions among all its various page references. It also carries an excellent, child-friendly introduction explaining how an index actually works.

Put your Question into Words

Before you start looking, you will have to put the thing you are searching for into words: music, jazz, rock music, Beethoven, Presley. It is worth making an effort to find the best word. If your interest is birds, then perhaps bird is your word. But are you interested in birds in general, or are you really looking for ducks? If it is ducks you want, then duck is your word. If it is not even ducks but mallards that interests you, then the word you want is mallard.

So the first rule is this: choose the word that most precisely fits your interest. Don't choose France if it is Paris you want, or Paris, if it is the Eiffel Tower you are looking for. The encyclopaedia has a fair amount of information on aircraft: if you choose aircraft when what you really want is Concorde, then you will waste time. Go straight to Concorde.

From 'How to Use the Index' in **Children's Britannica**.

Such seriousness of purpose does not always make this set easy to read. Print is small, sometimes especially so. Pages are crowded, with few breaks between slabs of prose to rest the eye. While some attempt has been made to cater for younger readers, the general tone points firmly at brightish 13-14 year olds and beyond. The stage of education mainly catered for is therefore a time when learning becomes more real and earnest and less a matter of random interest and the sheer fun of open-ended exploration.

Neither Science nor Maths are as well served as the humanities, but it is always easier explaining *Christopher Columbus* (very well put over here) than *Algebra*, where the entry is too compressed and occasionally puzzling. While a

child can follow the basics about a historical figure possibly at first glance, maths comprehension depends on a step by step intellectual process impossible to put over in just a few pages. But all intermediate encyclopedias could at least aim at providing readers with a useful revision course in basic mathematical and scientific concepts, while not attempting to teach many more complex processes at the same time.

A more imaginative use of page design and graphics would certainly help this set, whose layout is still reminiscent of basic, nineteenth-century conventions. *Population* does not have a single illustration, and without sight of that steeply rising graph it is difficult for young readers to get a true understanding of this particular problem. Yet the **Children's Britannica's** relaxed writing style still makes it a very friendly set: a bit wordy, like an ageing teacher now set in their ways, but also able to draw on years of experience in communicating with pupils. For the first half of Key Stage 3 (11-14) this would still be my best buy.

World Book Encyclopedia is a much longer, more thorough work, covering all the topics specifically suggested in the National Curriculum. To make it easier to locate these subjects, the publishers have issued their own **National Curriculum Guidelines** in a separate pamphlet. This summarises the contents of the National Curriculum and then shows where to find its main topics, or their nearest equivalent, in the set itself (an idea other publishers could usefully copy). The tally between what the National Curriculum requires and what the **World Book Encyclopedia** provides is virtually complete.

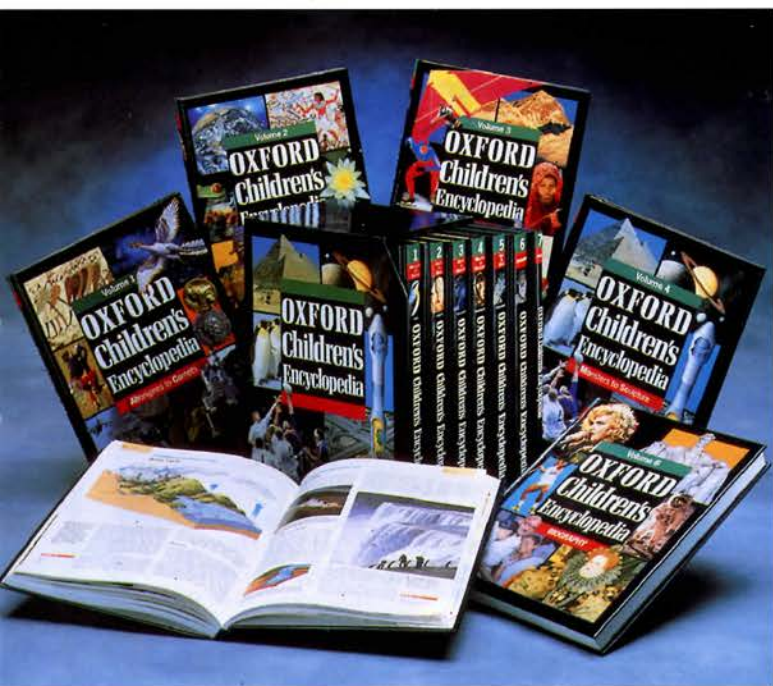
In general, entries on Science and Maths are more successful here. The relaxed professionalism of the writers and the greater space they have at their disposal make it possible to explain a number of complex matters more clearly. Shorter entries on historical figures are often not so effective, and the treatment of literary subjects can be rather dull. But the seriousness with which major topics are followed through (7 pages on *Fractions*; 5 pages on *Climate*) will prove welcome to older readers involved in home or course-work and needing a full discussion to draw upon.

All three sets make few concessions to less skilled or motivated readers. Explanations are often brisk, with few safety-nets for children who might not understand the first paragraph and who then look in vain for additional help in what comes next. **World Book Encyclopedia** includes some questions for readers to answer for themselves after longer entries, but the other two sets have little by way of any self-checking techniques. These would be easier to build in if and when these encyclopedias one day also appear on CD-ROM, where it should then be possible to incorporate various interactive programmes through which readers could check how much they have followed at different levels of difficulty.

I would also welcome a much greater emphasis on teaching young readers how to use encyclopedias. This could be another area where children might initially be set a variety of simple learning tasks aimed at showing them what exactly cross-references are and how best to use them along with an index. But currently even the most user-friendly sets are like those teachers who cater well for able children but sometimes go too fast for many of the others. It would of course be hard to market an encyclopedia specifically aimed at slower learners. But there are ways of making sets more manageable for more children without losing the excellence found in the volumes I have reviewed here; still very good value compared with so much other non-fiction now written for the young. ■

Nicholas Tucker is a lecturer in Developmental Psychology at the University of Sussex, with a special interest in children's reactions to literature.

He has written a 48-page **Buyer's Guide to Encyclopedias**, published by Cressida Press (1 871327 04 0), costing £2.75. Our Non Fiction Reviews Editor, Eleanor von Schweinitz, reviewed this pamphlet in **BfK 84** (Jan 94).



REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Amazing Magnets

0 7496 1482 X

Build it Strong

0 7496 1485 4

Using Energy

0 7496 1483 8

Weather Watch

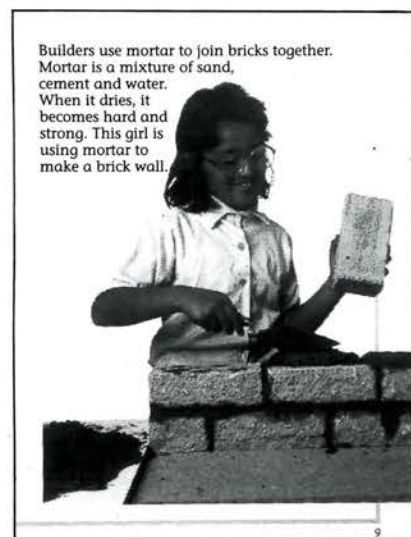
0 7496 1486 2

Julian Rowe and Molly Perham, Watts (First Science series), £7.50 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

Each of these four – harbingers of a whole fresh dozen from Watts – looks at the bones of its subject and fleshes them out with friendly information challenges to find more and with little construction projects.

In *Weather Watch* we learn to make the tools of the meteorologist's trade and what they measure. *Build it Strong* shows how good building is all about geometrical reinforcement of the innate strengths of materials (nice to see books in their traditional role as components of model bridges, as well as space devoted to tent structure.)



Builders use mortar to join bricks together. Mortar is a mixture of sand, cement and water. When it dries, it becomes hard and strong. This girl is using mortar to make a brick wall.

Bricklaying from *Build it Strong*.

Magnets reveals just how abundant they are in daily life, shows us an actual lodestone and encourages cooperation in the making of an engaging little toy theatre. The widest ranging of the four, *Using Energy*, very properly accords equal status to wind, water and solar power alongside fossil fuel and electricity (which is helpfully separated into current and static sorts).

This highly approachable quartet has a lot to say to this writer – whose house is in the throes of a radical doing-up in an attempt to make and keep it warm and dry in a region where the weather forecast is sponsored by Gore-tex. It should also have a lot to say to primary science teachers for some time to come.

TP

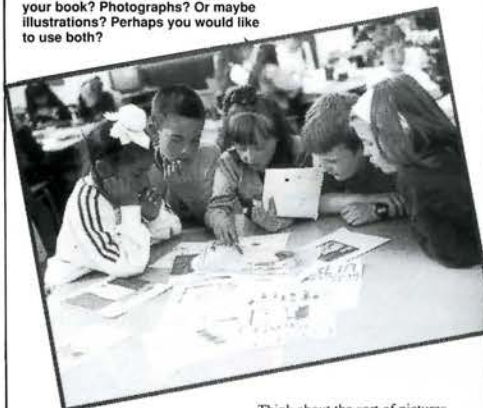
Making a Book

Mandy Suhr, Wayland, 0 7502 0883 X, £8.99

JUNIOR

Books about making books can fall into two categories – the 'hands on' DIY type craft book and the slightly worthy commodity type approach 'from timber to page'. This volume chooses the strengths of each by

What kind of pictures would you like in your book? Photographs? Or maybe illustrations? Perhaps you would like to use both?



First think about the size, shape and number of pages that will be in your book. The instructions in this book are for a twelve-page book, but you may wish to make your book longer.

Think about the sort of pictures you will use. Will your book have illustrations or photographs? Will it have coloured borders around the pages? Will it have lift-up flaps or pop-ups? Try to think of ways to make your book look eye-catching and different.

Design conference in the classroom, from *Making a Book*.

encouraging the child reader to produce his or her own book through following the stages (if not the techniques) of commercial production.

A clear explanation of these stages is accompanied by attractive colour photographs of modern publishers and printers at work. Interwoven with this is a systematic account of how to create a book of one's own, with sound practical advice and discussion of the choices available together with useful tips on issues such as choosing a typeface. More photographs show a group of children in the classroom producing their own book on the weather.

By choosing to go for 48 pages instead of the more usual 32, Wayland have given themselves space to pursue the two parallel strands of their subject without subjecting either to undue compression.

Most valuable in the context of classroom work, this would also be a useful title for the school library where it might complement the Aliki book dealing with the same subject.

GB

Pond and Stream

0 7502 0823 6

Wasteland

0 7502 0824 4

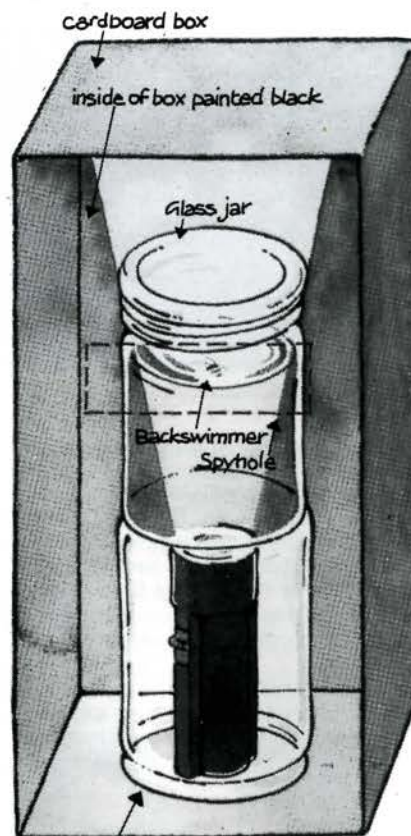
Colin S Milkins, Wayland (Starting Ecology series), £7.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Heaven knows there are lots of ecology books about, and at first glance these look like just two more, but further inspection reveals something a little different. Milkins is an award-winning photographer and his highly illustrative pictures forge an excellent partnership with his straightforward conversational texts to provide books with more of an authorial stamp than have many such.

Here *Wasteland* is defined as 'land that is no longer used' – whose purpose has been abandoned rather than never was – so it's old railways, demolition sites, and all the odd corners that allow wilderness to persist in the most organised of places. Such sites show great variety and we find ways of investigating their diversity and surveying their flora and fauna. The author demonstrates virtues in the abandoned crisp packets but induces different conclusions

from other litter. And all the time the reader is issued with little challenges like 'are there more minibeasts on your wasteland area than on mown grass?' after being shown how to find out. Small print notes tell us the expected answer but we're left in no doubt that the only real one is the one we get on the spot at the time. Thus does the author, heartwarming, show respect for his readers.



Large glass jar big enough to take a small torch

Make a darkened box through which to watch your backswimmer.

From *Pond and Stream*.

Pond and Stream is just as good – learn how to time a snail's breathing, see how bloodworms clean dirty water and, using a marvellous device made from a jam jar, a torch and a shoe box, get a water-boatman to turn over and swim on its front!

This is an excellent couple which gets out of the well-worn ecology rut and scores heavily from having an author as good with pen as with camera. So get these and look out for his *Wood* and *Seashore* which complete the series.

TP

How your Body Works

Christopher Maynard, Janet de Saulles and Hazel Songhurst, Watts (Big Books series), 0 7496 1234 7, £7.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Far from an exhaustive text, this is an entertaining large (250x330mm) format collection of picturesque bits of anatomy and physiology. So we learn how muscles oppose each other, how vein-valves work, that Queen Alexandra used an electric hearing aid and that we wake up taller than we went to bed.

Adding value to every spread is a time chart of medical history running along the bottom of each page. Starting with trepanning for headaches in 10,000 B.C., it ends with genetic research in the present decade. This provides a very good picture of the jerky and patchy development of medical knowledge, so more's the pity that the sequence has got jumbled in the early 20th century and that nothing – not even McIndoe's plastic surgery – seems to have happened between 1929 and 1950.

With an arbitrary seeming selection and arrangement of contents, this is first and foremost a browsing book – indeed it's hard to imagine it rewarding any other approach – but as such it's a pleasant one and may well lead the right reader onto more substantial fare. TP

Environmental Disasters

John Baines, Wayland (The World's Disasters series), 0 7502 0849 X, £9.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Environmental disasters come in two sorts – natural and man-made. Demonstrating his awareness of both, the author chooses to concentrate on the latter – gradual as well as sudden – which he groups together according to causative agent. So under 'Nuclear Danger', following an objective stating of the nuclear rationale, we get Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, 'Stripping the Earth' shows us American dustbowls and African famine, and 'Oil on Water' laments Exxon Valdez and Braer. The book also deals with poisoned water, poisoned landfill, military pollution, chemical hazards and industrially fouled air. In each case Baines shows what happened and how, what the effects were and may still be, and includes eyewitness/survivor accounts to add impact. He is professional enough to avoid pontification over rights and wrongs, so the tide of facts and impressions flows unhindered, preferring, more potently, to end up citing all the foregoing as 'a warning to us all'.

Baines is a fluent writer with excellent credentials for this sort of job (three entries in the *BfK Green Guide* for starters) and this is another example of his excellent work for Wayland. TP

Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary

Ruud van der Rol and Rian Verhoeven, Viking, 0 670 84932 4, £9.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Around 600,000 people a year visit the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam; a living testimony to the powerful legacy of her diary which for millions of young readers has come to symbolise a dark and terrible era.

Yet prior to her life in hiding in the Secret Annex, Anne, a friendly outgoing personality with a wide range of interests, had experienced a carefree, happy childhood.

This photobiography serves as a timely reminder of that 'other' Anne, hitherto only glimpsed through a glass darkly. Many of the photographs (there are over a hundred) have never been published before, including a number taken by Anne's father, Otto. The very first one in this attractively produced album is of a day-old Anne snapped by her doting papa, whilst others record Anne's early life in Germany before the family moved to Holland.

Extracts from her diary have been skilfully incorporated into the captions and the accompanying narrative which includes essential background material on the political situation in addition to chronicling Anne's life and tragic death.

A fascinating postscript explains how the famous diary came to be published. For

readers of the diary, both old and new, this publication will surely prove to be an essential companion volume, for, as it states in the introduction, it provides us with the evidence that 'Anne Frank the victim and Anne Frank the fugitive' was also at one time 'Anne Frank the free'. VH

[Ed's note: for a review of a picture book version of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, see page 16.]

The Mediterranean and its People

David Flint, 0 7502 0489 3

The Alps and their People

Susan Bullen, 0 7502 0873 2

The Arctic and its People

Susan Bullen, 0 7502 0487 7

Wayland (People and Places series), £9.99 each

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Wayland's 'People and Places' series takes a different stance from the usual political or economic regional geography, concentrating instead on how people have been affected by their environment and, of increasing significance, how they have changed it. Each volume in the series has adopted a different interpretation of this theme – so blanket series buying is not recommended.

The Mediterranean and its People, for example, stresses the dangers of destroying the ecosystem in the creation of an increasingly industrialised and commercial region. The point is well made both generally and by example, alternative strategies are suggested and well chosen photographs with their captions illustrate the issues raised in the text. As an assessment of the key environmental questions, this would be an ideal starting point; as a more general analysis of the lives of people in the region, it is rather sketchy and the book would be best used to investigate a case study.

The Alps and their People attempts a broader look at life for the people of this region and is full of attractive photographs and artwork – a two-page spread of the Lauterbrunnen valley and a full-page photograph of a marmot on sentry duty are both very nice but neither brings the reader any great insight into the issues. This book would be most useful used in conjunction with other material for a more in-depth view of the environmental questions touched upon here. GB

The Arctic and its People considers first the land itself, then its indigenous peoples before going on to commercial ventures both ancient (whaling and the Yukon gold rush) and modern (whale-watching and the Siberian gold rush). We discover how the balance of the polar ecosystem – at least as delicate as that of equatorial regions – may be threatened by deliberate acts such as the James Bay Hydroelectric scheme as well as by accidents like Chernobyl and Exxon Valdez, and we find that it is our job to maintain this balance, otherwise the whole Arctic may become the mess that parts of it already are. TP

The Breakup of Yugoslavia

Martyn Rady, Wayland (Conflicts series), 0 7502 1147 4, £8.99

SECONDARY

In 1929, the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was changed to Yugoslavia in an attempt to persuade its citizens to 'forget their old identities and think of themselves instead as a single people'. Despite the change of name, however, King Alexander 'found it impossible to create Yugoslavs'.

This telling phrase neatly encapsulates the main reasons which eventually lead, some 60 years later, to the breakup of Yugoslavia, for the name concealed a bewildering mixture of languages, religions, cultures and even alphabets.

Martyn Rady has succeeded in clearly and concisely unravelling the multifarious threads of this tangled historical web. He identifies the main social, economic and political factors which have played such a crucial role in determining the fate of the six republics from the beginning of the century through to the Second World War, the rise of Tito and the communists, expulsion from the soviet Bloc, a bankrupt economy and the emergence of today's political figures.

In clarifying past issues so succinctly, Dr Rady enables his readers to gain an insight into the bitterness and hatred underlying the current bloody conflict and appreciate why finding a solution is proving such a complex task. ■ VH

Below, Anne Frank and elder sister Margot before the Occupation. From *Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary*.



Geoff Brown is Resources Manager for Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.

Vee Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

Ted Percy, until he retired recently, was a Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

Non-Fiction Reviews Editor: Eleanor von Schweinitz.

CELEBRATING

From *The Mark of the Horse Lord* (1965).

Keeping

From *Little Dorrit* (1986).

DOUGLAS MARTIN

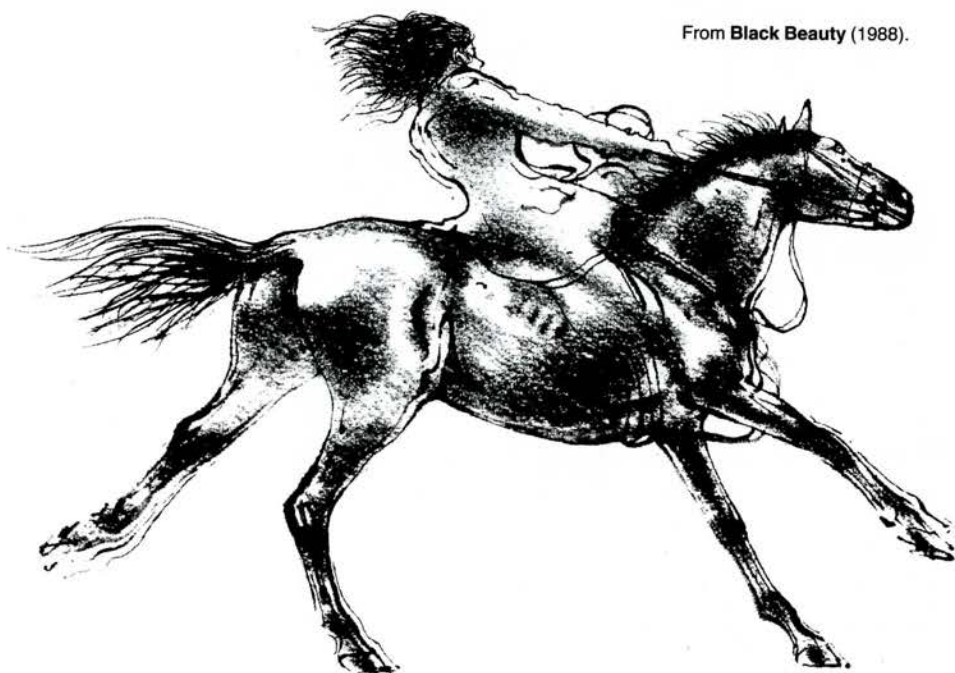
In the early 1960s, a batch of drawings by Charles Keeping landed on my desk. As a junior designer, I was still stage-struck at being among the first handful to read a famous writer's latest typescript, to see an illustrator's original sketches, or to correct the printer's actual proofs. But here was something different: these drawings had the audacity, intensity and quality of the greatest art you could ever hope to see in any gallery or print room. That first impression has never wavered. I still open any book illustrated by Charles Keeping with a sense of excitement, and know many readers do the same.

Charles was very proud of being a book illustrator and hated to be described as anything else. He was controversial and had fun trying to defend the profession to its critics, but felt that the core of it was something that couldn't be taught. His range was immense. Few people are aware of all the different kinds of books for children and adults that he was involved with throughout a long working career. He illustrated well over 200 titles, and it is unlikely these will ever be brought together on the same shelves. Charles did not see books as products directed at separate collecting, informational, education or religious markets. I think that, whilst making common sense professional allowances, he resented all boundaries between children's books and adult ones since he recognised no

such barrier in his own life. So rather than look at his picture books, his illustrated novels, his non-fiction and so forth as categories, this brief survey looks at his work under four headings which he himself might have recognised: childhood, London and horses; history and heroes; responses to poetry and writing; and self-portraits.

Childhood, London and Horses

The first of these four cross-sections through his world looks back to Charles's childhood in a London of vanished shops and trades, costermongers and working horses – closer in spirit to Dickens's city than any televised reconstruction can be. He was born not in the East End as is often thought, but south of the river near Lambeth Walk, on 22 September 1924. Aspects of this secure Cockney childhood are recreated in nearly all his picture storybooks, from *Shaun and the Cart Horse* (1966) to *Adam and Paradise Island* (1989). As a young man, a job emptying gas meters took him into conditions of extreme squalor, which he told me was a great help and experience when it came to illustrating the whole of Dickens for The Folio Society, just as his childhood observation and later care for maltreated horses informed his definitive *Black Beauty* illustrations for Gollancz. So his colour picture books are based on his early childhood, and will always have something special to say to the child – perhaps to the one in twenty, for they are not to all children's tastes – who encounters them in the right circumstances.

From *Black Beauty* (1988).

History and Heroes

Like his picture books, a second angle was initiated by Mabel George of Oxford University Press. That legendary children's editor also commissioned the artists she had discovered (and at the same time as Charles Keeping she had recognised two other virtual unknowns – Brian Wildsmith and Victor Ambrus), to illustrate historical fiction. As Charles thought at first: 'All those Romans and Vikings. Oh no! Not all those blokes clanging about with shields. Last thing I want to do!' But do them he did, for the two writers with whom Mabel George linked his work – Rosemary Sutcliff and Henry Treece – and gave them an immediacy and power all his own.

From *The Last of the Vikings* (1964).

In the background to all the vigour and violence of these drawings, was his insistence that no child could be altogether shielded from accident, horror and inevitable realities, and it was not for publishers to veto the sensitive handling of these topics. Merchant seamen and soldiers had been plentiful among his ancestry, and Charles had inherited an old-fashioned sense of decorum and morals, which he combined with an artist's sensibilities. A severe head injury sustained in an accident on board a Royal Navy ship, and the privations of working his way through art school and struggling to establish a living for his young family, resulted in an emphatic, almost daredevil quality in his early drawing which suited the Vikings admirably. This may help to account for the breathtaking originality he brought to book illustration, the honesty and risk of many of his statements, and his disdain for illustration as mere decoration or accompaniment.

These books illustrated for Oxford still stand up magnificently, as well as being experiments with the power and scope of illustration in the depiction of the heroic. Thereafter came numerous variations on this subject matter, and the mastery and refinement of his drawing simply continued to increase over the years. Here, as elsewhere, much remains out of print at present, but the classic collaborations with Edward Blishen and Leon Garfield: **The God Beneath the Sea** and **The Golden Shadow**, have recently been reissued.

Poetry and Writing

There is a third area I would like to distinguish, which is closely aligned to that just mentioned, but takes its character from Charles's free choice of work by his favourite poets and writers. His visual storytelling in parallel to verse and narrative is striking and innovative. This is not quite the same thing as illustration as it is generally understood; as he says of his work with Leon Garfield on **The Wedding Ghost**: 'Leon writes one story, and I almost illustrate a separate idea, a secondary theme . . . It's like two jazz musicians playing together.'

When they shot him down on the highway,
Down like a dog on the highway,
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with the bunch of lace at his
throat



From **The Highwayman** (1981).

The Highwayman, Beowulf and The Lady of Shalott, together with Leon Garfield's **The Wedding Ghost**, form a quartet of black-and-white picture books which were the brainchild of Ron Heapy at Oxford University Press. The idea of monochrome picture books was wonderfully simple; all it required was a master illustrator who actually wanted to move in that direction. Charles's gods included Goya, Daumier and Doré; and he was moving in any case in an ever more tenebrous and gothic direction during his final years. Ghost stories had gripped him since childhood, and he had earlier collaborated on several collections with Helen Hoke Watts. He embarked on a further monochrome quartet for Blackie (**Charles Keeping's Book of Classic Ghost Stories, Charles Keeping's Classic Tales of the Macabre, Dracula and Frankenstein**). Charles was working on magnificent, but only preparatory, drawings for 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' with Oxford until shortly before his death.

Self-portraits

A fourth characteristic was self-portraiture (and, to a lesser extent, that of family and friends). This cuts across all the other categories. You can recognise him as the ticket-seller from **Wasteground Circus** or staring across a compartment at you in **Inter-City**; as Poe's degenerating **Monsieur**



The author passes his 'younger self' in front of the bookshop, in **Adam and Paradise Island** (1989).

Valdemar or Kevin Crossley-Holland's **The Wildman**; doing a paper-hatted 'knees-up' in his now scarce autobiographical songbook **Cockney Ding-Dong**, or carousing amidst the drunken warriors in **Beowulf**. As Patsy Lambe, once his agent at B L Kearley Ltd, told me: 'Today I returned to look at some of Charles's later children's books. It gave me such an extraordinary feeling of sadness because there was Charles in the little boy, in the faces of the people, and sometimes even in his treatment of the animals. I opened the book again and there he was looking out at me; it was quite frightening but when I turned the page there were all the laughing faces.'

Charles was only 63 when he died on 16 May 1988, and with so much left to say. Talent on the scale he possessed it transcends comparisons, and this, coupled with the power of his imagery, set up feelings of awe and apprehension which proved to be quite at odds with the man. As Renate Keeping puts it: 'Librarians, who on the whole were great followers and admirers of his work, sometimes asked Charles to give a talk. They would expect a brooding, depressed, bad-tempered man, and were surprised to meet such a charming, kind and humorous person.'

As Craig Raine said recently of Kipling, we are dealing with one of those rare individuals with whom the reader can go through life, starting with the children's stories and eventually coming to terms with the later and more complex. In Keeping's case this leads us from an early picture book (just re-published) like **Charley, Charlotte and the Golden Canary** on to the **Complete Works** of Charles Dickens (to be reissued later this year) in seamless transition. One of his major contributions was in breaking down barriers between kinds of children's books and between those and adult books; he 'just made the books', and valued teachers' and librarians' professional skill in guiding and signposting the individual to them. In Keeping's hands, illustration was simply a rightful and at times indispensable part of the printed book. He believed that there was scarcely a book which he could not illustrate if invited to, unless he found it politically or morally objectionable. Charles always encouraged aspiring illustrators and

created openings for the determined, and through his own example gave resoundingly affirmative answers as to why book illustration exists at all, and what riches it has to offer. ■

Douglas Martin is a freelance book designer and author. As he points out, Charles Keeping 'illustrated well over 200 titles and it is unlikely these will ever be brought together on the same shelves'. For the next best overview of this extraordinary artist, though, readers should turn to a new publication by Douglas himself. It's called **Charles Keeping: An Illustrator's Life** (Julia MacRae, 1 85681 062 3, £40.00) Beautifully designed and produced, with a wise, well-informed text and more than 150 illustrations in full colour and black-and-white, it's one of the best pictorial biographies I've ever come across. No college, school or library which takes illustration seriously should be without it. Illustrations accompanying this piece are taken from Douglas Martin's book. *Ed.*

Currently available books mentioned in this article are all published by Oxford, unless otherwise stated.*

Adam and Paradise Island, 0 19 279842 1, £6.95

The Highwayman, Alfred Noyes, 0 19 279748 4, £6.99; 0 19 272133 X, £2.99 pbk

Beowulf, retold by Kevin Crossley-Holland,
0 19 279770 0, £5.95; 0 19 272184 4, £2.99 pbk

The Lady of Shalott, Alfred Lord Tennyson,
0 19 276057 2, £6.95; 0 19 272211 5, £3.95 pbk

The Wedding Ghost, Leon Garfield, 0 19 279779 4, £6.95, 0 19 272246 8, £3.99 pbk

Charley, Charlotte and the Golden Canary,
0 19 279628, £9.99 [for a review of this title, see
page 37]

The God Beneath the Sea, Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen, Gollancz, 0 575 04831 X, £12.99; 0 575 05256 2, £7.99 pbk

The Golden Shadow, Leon Garfield and Edward
Blishen, 0 575 05255 4, £7.99 pbk

The 16 volumes of Dickens with Keeping illustrations will be published during 1994/95 by The Folio Society. For details, contact them at 202 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 1PR or telephone 071 407 7411.

Sadly, all other titles are now out of print.

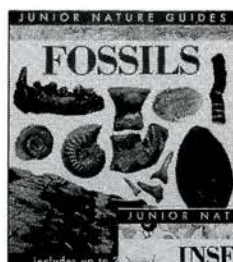
DRAGON'S WORLD

 CHILDREN'S BOOKS
 JUNIOR

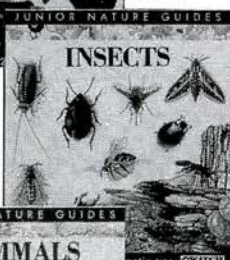
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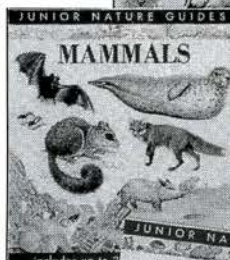
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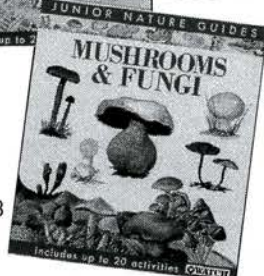
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Trees of Great Britain and Europe
Wild Flowers of Great Britain and Europe

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A VISIT TO THE Keeping GALLERY BY JEFF HYNDS

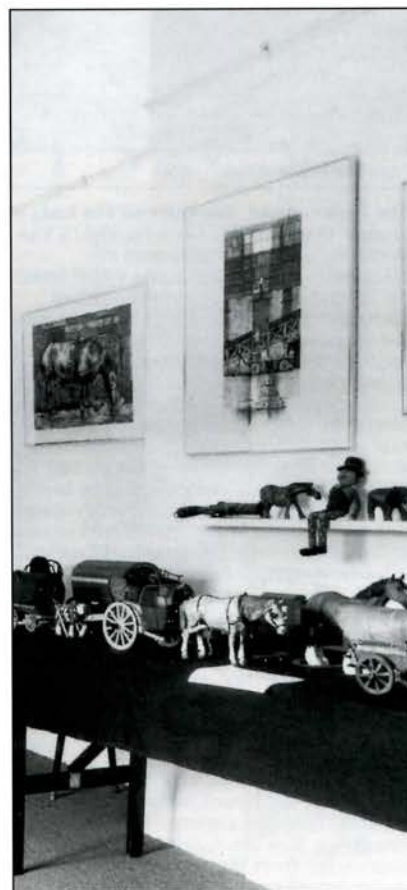


Renate Keeping at work.

We are apt to forget (well, I am anyway,) that an illustrator's published work is often but the tip of an enormous iceberg, and this was particularly so in Charles Keeping's case.

Over the last few years his vast output has been carefully sorted, selected and organised by his widow, Renate. This has now been put on exhibition throughout several rooms of the large Keeping home in Shortlands, Kent. For example, one room, Charles's actual workroom, is given over to two of his most dominant preoccupations: the theme of horses – he was devoted to horses – and the theme of unusual or unearthly creatures, for which he also had a passion. These latter can certainly evoke strong reactions, and I found myself experiencing a slight shudder every now and then! (It was a shudder with a thrill though.) The drawings and paintings are arranged chronologically, and the artist's development and way of working over several decades is there to see. This is an utterly fascinating experience.

Another room has the most amazing frieze which has been constructed with painstaking skill by Renate to celebrate the life that she and Charles shared together. You could spend hours in this room, and the work is not finished yet. Not only is Renate quite indefatigable in her promotion of her husband's reputation, she is herself an artist of

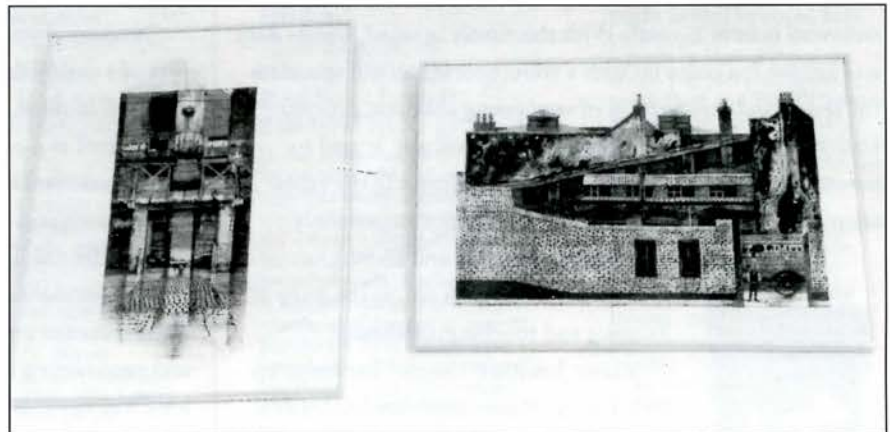




distinction. Some of her own striking work, including her wonderful 'soft' sculpture, is set out in another room in the house.

The Keeping Gallery is a developing enterprise that first opened its doors last year. Parties of children have visited the Gallery and on these occasions Renate gives a guided tour and talks about Charles's work, and also her own. The general theme of each visit is 'There are many ways of telling a story' and in each room the children can find different approaches to storytelling, both verbal and visual. The visit concludes with a workshop session in which all the children participate. There are refreshments too!

Other, more advanced students of Art and Design can have conducted tours or attend the seminars which Renate arranges from time to time. Here artists, working in various disciplines, discuss and demonstrate their work, and answer questions. But even if you are, like me, simply an admirer of Charles Keeping's work, you'll be very welcome.



Visitors have recorded their reactions: 'Riveting,' said one. 'I'm lost for words – it's just amazing,' wrote another. Other visitors used words like 'fabulous', 'inspiring', 'awesome'. Personally, I found The Keeping Gallery quite enthralling and Renate a very frank and interesting raconteur.

It's a place that deserves to be much better known and to have many more visitors.

Details of school visits, workshops, seminars, admission charges and a map are available from:

**Renate Keeping
The Keeping Gallery
16 Church Road
Shortlands
Kent BR2 0HP
(tel: 081 460 7679)**

It's advisable to telephone before making a visit. Church Road is a wide road with ample space for parking cars. Shortlands Station, with trains from Victoria and Blackfriars (25 minutes), is a short distance away. ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Jeff Hynds is a major figure in the movement to promote more enlightened approaches to the development of reading. Since retiring, some years ago, from Thames Polytechnic in South London, he's been a freelance lecturer and is much in demand for in-service work with teachers all over Britain.



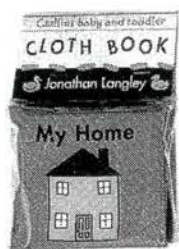
Baby Boom for Collins Children's Books

Early research shows that there is a real developmental advantage in sharing books with children at an early age and that parents are very grateful for guidance in selecting appropriate titles. To meet these needs, *Collins Children's Books* are launching a brand new range this May for youngsters aged between 3 months and 3 years. Filling a gap in the market which has existed for too long, the *Collins Baby and Toddler* range is bright, appealing and designed especially to encourage first reading enjoyment (and there are plans to add more to the list in September).

Says children's books expert, Wendy Cooling, "it is never too early to share books with babies...even before they can talk. The sheer pleasure of this early reading...will lead children to be highly motivated to learn to read". With this firmly in mind, *Collins Baby and Toddler* has come up with a collection which will stimulate the senses and imagination of very young children, providing a source of comfort and entertainment; it will also appeal to parents in terms of value-for money! (All books in the range are non-toxic, have been CE tested, and are competitively

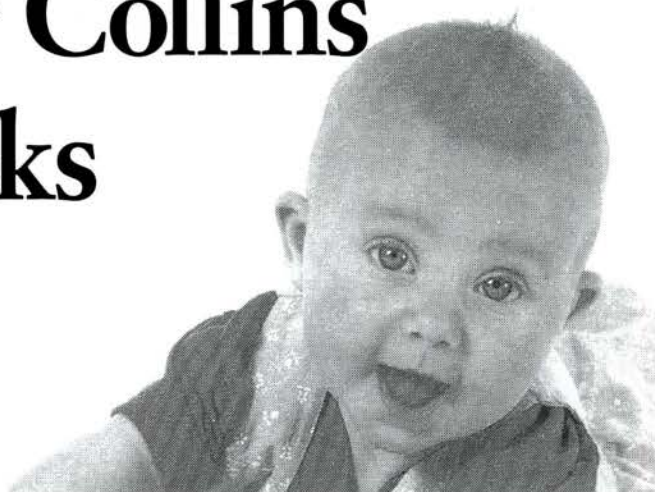
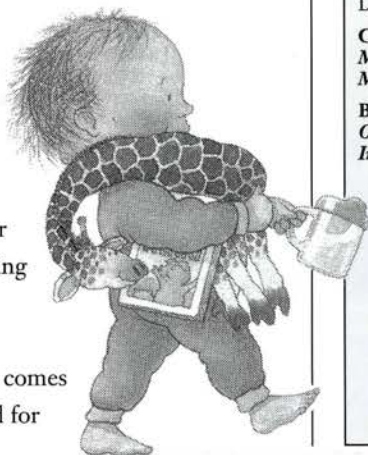
priced between £2.50 and £3.99.)

For the 3-6 month old, at the stage of focusing and touching, celebrated illustrator Jonathan Langley has come up with a series of four cloth books (*My Pets*, *My Toys*, *My Clothes* and *My Home*), whose small, neat size and vivid illustrations are ideal for prompting babies' responses. To complement the cloth book range, there are four bath books too, (*In the Water*, *On the Water*, *In the Sky* and *On the Ground*) from Mark Burgess, on popular subjects and themes.



Older babies are fascinated with images of themselves so, for the 6-12 month old, Britain's foremost child photographer, Fiona Pragoff, has produced *Baby Plays* and *Baby Says*, two spectacular photographic board books portraying babies within that age group, with simple naming text alongside.

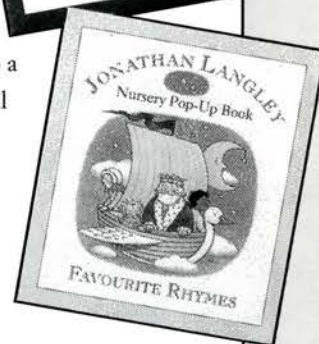
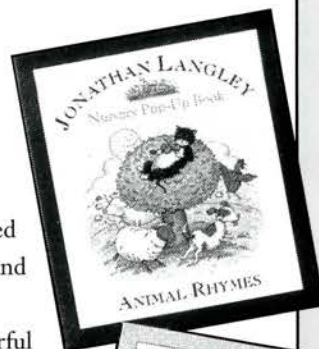
With the onset of toddlerhood comes the discovery of independence, and for



this stage, *Collins* is offering an imaginative new series of board books from Nick Butterworth, creator of the bestselling *Percy's Park* series. *When We Play Together*, *When There's Work to Do*, *When We Go Shopping* and *When it's Time for Bed* depict the world from the toddler's point of view, using familiar situations that he or she will appreciate.

Nursery rhymes are a traditional part of a child's development and, with this in mind, Jonathan Langley has devised two compact little collections combining classic nursery rhymes with pop-up enjoyment. Aimed at the older toddler, aged between 2 and 3 years, *Animal Rhymes* and *Favourite Rhymes* are not only humorous, colourful and entertaining to read, but they'll also go a long way towards strengthening that special bond between parent and child.

Dr. Barrie Wade, FRSA, Reader in English in Education, commented that "*Collins Baby and Toddler books fulfil the need for bright, attractive, relatively inexpensive books that are durable and easy to handle. They are fun for children and adults alike and will encourage lots of interaction as well as the early learning that leads to literacy.*"



DETAILS OF BOOKS MENTIONED:

Cloth Books by Jonathan Langley (1994):

My Pets 0 00 137481 8, £2.50, *My Toys* 0 00 137482 6, £2.50, *My Home* 0 00 137483 4, £2.50, *My Clothes* 0 00 137484 2, £2.50.

Bath Books by Mark Burgess (1994):

On the Water 0 00 137477 X, £2.50, *On the Ground* 0 00 137478 8, £2.50, *In the Sky* 0 00 137479 6, £2.50, *In the Water* 0 00 137480 X, £2.50.

Photographic Board Books by Fiona Pragoff (1994):

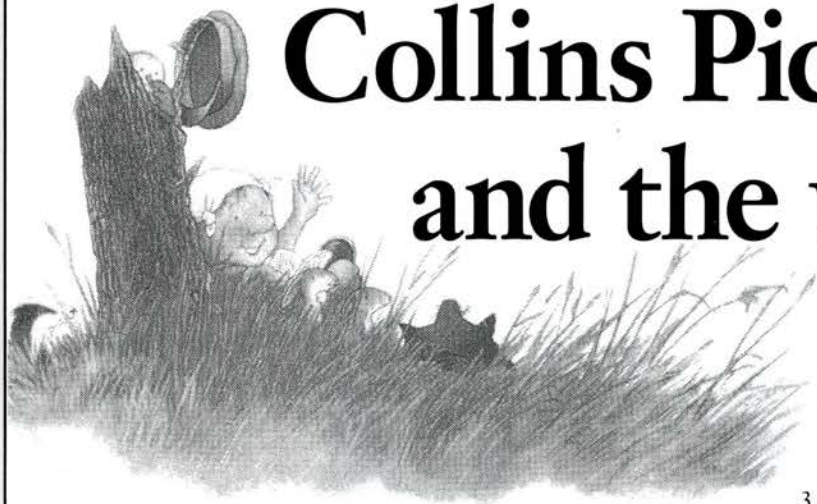
Baby Says 0 00137488 5, £2.99, *Baby Plays* 0 00 137486 9, £2.99

Board Books by Nick Butterworth (1994):

When We Play Together 0 00 137435 4, £2.99, *When it's Time for Bed* 0 00 137436 2, £2.99, *When There's Work to Do* 0 00 137437 0, £2.99, *When We Go to the Shops* 0 00 137438 9, £2.99

Nursery Pop-ups by Jonathan Langley (1994):

Animal Rhymes 0 00 137433 8, £3.99, hdbk
Favourite Rhymes 0 00 137434 6, £3.99 hdbk



Collins Picture Lions and the under-fives

All parents want their children to become proficient readers and all children need to develop confidence in using language. It is widely recognised that good picture books, comprising a blend of lively text and vibrant illustration, are vital to set pre-school children on the road to reading as a lifelong habit.

Collins
Picture Lions

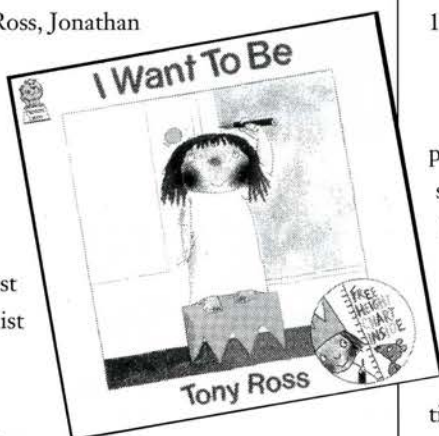
Collins Picture Lions not only fulfil these criteria, but also boast some of the most widely acclaimed authors and illustrators in the world of children's books. With names like Nick Butterworth, Tony Ross, Jonathan Langley, Judith Kerr, Shirley Hughes, Colin Hawkins and Maurice Sendak embellishing the list, parents, teachers and librarians can be sure that they are purchasing the best that money can buy. The list has also been enhanced in terms of production, with new large format editions, spines, a fresh new logo and superb quality printing, creating an even more attractive and user-friendly prospect for the pre-school age group.

A huge additional assurance is that the *Collins Picture Lions* list carries the exclusive endorsement of the highly respected *Pre-school Playgroups Association* – the largest single provider of care and education for the under-fives in England. Understanding the difficulty faced by parents choosing books for young children, the two organisations are well qualified to offer guidance in selecting the right titles for 2-5 year olds. Parents can now be confident that books on the *Collins Picture Lions* list have been endorsed by an Association which is well acquainted with the needs of young children.

Collins Children's Books and the *Pre-school Playgroups Association* have compiled the following guidelines for choosing appropriate books for 2-5 year olds. Look out for:

1. Clear and attractive illustrations, which help children to understand the text.
2. Subjects and ideas with which children are able to identify. The length needs to be right for their attention span.
3. Creative language with interesting vocabulary to encourage a love of words.
4. Bold, simple typeface on an uncluttered background.
5. Characters and situations that come alive.
6. Anticipation in the story; a sense of "what will happen next?"
7. Repetition which gives children the security of knowing what comes next, and encourages early word recognition.
8. Action and humour to catch children's imaginations and hold their interest.
9. Rhyme and rhythm; word sounds and patterns are important, and help children remember the story.
10. Robust books for maximum wear and tear. A well-loved book will get lots of use!

The *Collins Picture Lions* list is being featured even more prominently this year since the April launch of a highly successful Collector's Card scheme which has been running in bookshops throughout the country. The scheme is based on ten top titles which have been singled out as representing the very best in picture book publishing. Then, of course, there are the forthcoming titles themselves and, throughout 1994, *Collins Picture Lions* will be strengthened by the addition of (amongst others), such highlights as *The Rescue Party* by Nick Butterworth and *Dear Bear* by Joanna Harrison (both in June), and *I Want to Be* by Tony Ross (July), the sequel to his contemporary classic, *I Want my Potty*.



DETAILS OF BOOKS MENTIONED:

The Rescue Party by Nick Butterworth (1993)
0 00 664376 0, £4.99 pbk, 0 00 193820 7, £8.99, hdbk

Dear Bear by Joanna Harrison (1994)
0 00 664361 2, £3.99 pbk, 0 00 193783 9, £8.99, hdbk

I Want To Be by Tony Ross (1994) 0 00 664357 4, £4.99 pbk



Collins Children's Books
A division of HarperCollinsPublishers



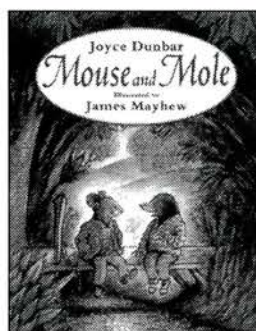
PICTURE THIS!

A growing range of carefully selected, quality picture books from Doubleday and Picture Corgi with an increasing emphasis on titles for the very young...

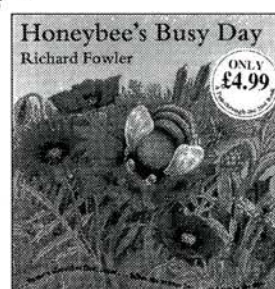
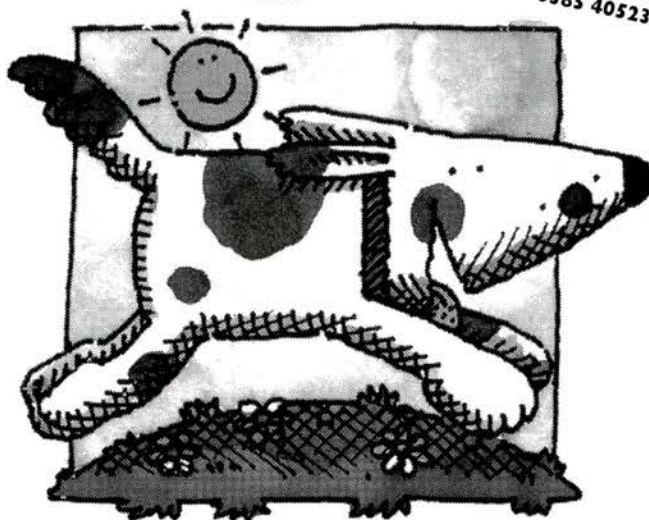
Baby Dinosaurs series by Mark Haddon



**Doubleday
£2.50 each**



Mouse and Mole
by Joyce Dunbar
illustrated by
James Mayhew
Picture Corgi £2.99
0552 527041

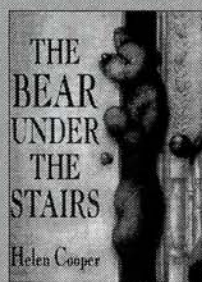


Honeybee's Busy Day
by Richard Fowler
Doubleday
£4.99 May
0385 404980

First Farmyard Tales series by Alan Snow



**Doubleday
£2.99 each
June**

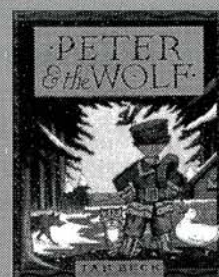


The Bear Under The Stairs
by Helen Cooper
Picture Corgi
£2.99 September
0552 527068

Forthcoming highlights for Autumn 1994...



Timothy's Toys by Helen Cooper
Doubleday £3.99 each September



Peter And The Wolf
by Ian Beck
Doubleday
£8.99 October
0385 403437

Transworld Children's Books, 61-63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA.

FEED AND GROW

Trevor Dickinson on
this year's crop of
spring picture books

Much that's been written recently about British standards of literacy is marked by malice, madness or mere ignorance. The one reality behind illiteracy myths is the fact that the poor are likely to read worse than the rich. Meanwhile the £8.99 average cost of the books I've looked at this spring would absorb well over 10% of the weekly income of our nation's poorest families. That fact makes me no less angry about threats to, and real cuts in, public and school library services than I was when I last reviewed Spring picture books for **BfK** in 1992. To take the issue of literacy with real political seriousness is to refuse to accept a discriminatory, evil, literacy-denying philistinism. It is to understand the essential truth of Stevie Smith's assertion that:

Reading is an appetite which grows as it feeds, and if you give it weak and second-rate stuff it will never grow strong.

IN THE BEGINNING

Kipper's Books of **Counting** (0 340 59848 4), of **Colours** (0 340 59847 6), of **Weather** (0 340 59850 6) and of **Opposites** (0 340 59849 2) by Mick Inkpen are £3.99 Hodder & Stoughton hardbacks. They're clear, simple, witty, entertaining and instructive with never more than two bold words per page.

Alan Baker has given us four distinguished books published by Kingfisher, each costing £5.99, and each centred on a rabbit. They are: **Black and White Rabbit's ABC** (1 85697 179 1); **White Rabbit's Colour Book** (1 85697 182 1); **Brown Rabbit's Shape Book** (1 85697 181 3); and **Grey**

Rabbit's 1, 2, 3 (1 85697 180 5). The titles are self-explanatory. The vividness of the colour work combined with touches of young verse, humour and happy educational purpose is unique.

Kathy Henderson's infectious light verse observations of aspects of early childhood in **Bounce Bounce Bounce** (Walker, 0 7445 2241 2, £5.99) and **Bumpety Bump** (Walker, 0 7445 2240 4, £5.99) are marvellously matched by Carol Thompson's gently pastel illustrations. These books will be nursery winners.

Where's My Mum? (Walker, 0 7445 3222 1, £7.99) is another case of perfect match of words, pictures and insight into children. Leon Rosselson's simple rhymes and Priscilla Lamont's quietly humorous illustrations blend brilliantly as Mum is searched for high and low.

From Mary Rayner, there are two minor Garth Pig counting miracles with **One by One** (0 333 59497 5) and **Ten Little Piglets** (0 333 59496 7). Both are published by Macmillan at £4.99. Both, with the musical text on the first page, are re-jigged versions of traditional songs. Both have all the usual fun associated with Mary Rayner's work. They make rewarding demands of observant sharers of illustrations.

One, Two, Three, Count with Me by Catherine and Laurence Anholt (Heinemann, 0 434 96624 X, £7.99) is, as the title hints, a counting book with a strong rhyming element. Starting at one and going up to a million, the book is entertainingly and colourfully drawn, encouraging children, through a host of pictures, to take a watchful delight in number, in language and in the world around them.



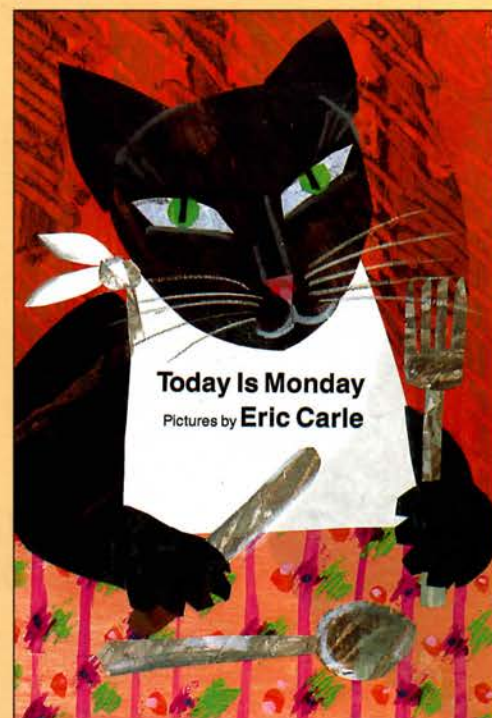
From **Little Robin Redbreast** (North South).

Shari Halpern's hand-painted cut-paper collages have made her version of the traditional nursery rhyme, **Little Robin Redbreast** (North South, 1 55858 247 9, £8.95), a book of extraordinarily simple, boldly effective beauty long to be treasured.



From **What Is the Sun?** (Walker).

What Is the Sun? by Reeve Lindbergh (Walker, 0 7445 3202 7, £7.99) is another book of lasting distinction. His neatly skilled, simple verse, allied perfectly to Stephen Lambert's sensitive artwork, captures with quiet, accurate humour the relentless questioning adults undergo from young children. There is also much to be learned here about the natural world.



From **Today Is Monday** (Hamish Hamilton).

Twenty-six years after the appearance of his first picture book, Eric Carle's strength and quality are undiminished. His large format **Today is Monday** (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 00233 8, £8.99) takes young readers on a bright journey through the days of the week, through foods, and offers them also a musical sing-along text. Lovely to look at; delightful to know.

ANIMAL MATTERS

The natural world is lovingly and engagingly explored in Flora McDonnell's **I Love Animals** (Walker, 0 7445 2246 3, £8.99). Simple text with a strong, helpful, repetitive element introduces a knowledgeably observed collection of farmyard animals. Instruction and delight are happily married here.

New resources for reading

*Two exciting new titles from Rosalind Kerven,
whose previous traditional story collections have attracted wide acclaim*

The Rain Forest Storybook

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

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, their fellow human beings – and even about themselves.

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 £4.75
0 521 43502 1 Hardback £9.50 net



In the Court of the Jade Emperor

Stories from Old China

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 civilizations in the world.

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



*Two stimulating new poetry collections
from Brian Moses, with related
comments and activities to encourage
talking and writing*

Hippopotamus Dancing



Knock Down Ginger

Both books feature rhyming and non-rhyming poems, some to be read aloud and some for quiet reflection. 'Springboard' activities encourage thinking or discussion about points which arise in the poems, while other activities give specific suggestions for children to write a poem of their own. A variety of topics is covered, from observations about creatures real and imaginary, to personal relationships with other children and with adults.

Hippopotamus Dancing (ages 6–9)
48 pp. illustrated with line drawings
0 521 44684 8 Paperback £3.95
0 521 44141 2 Hardback £7.95 net



**CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS**

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Knock Down Ginger (ages 9–12)
56 pp. illustrated with line drawings
0 521 44683 X Paperback £3.95
0 521 44140 4 Hardback £7.95 net

Please send me, on inspection:

The Rain Forest Storybook	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 521 45333 1
In the Court of the Jade Emperor	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 521 43538 2
Hippopotamus Dancing	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 521 44684 8
Knock Down Ginger	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 521 44683 X

Name

School address

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.

Postcode

Source Code: A 64338

Helen Lester's **Me First** (Pan Macmillan, 0 395 58706 9, £7.99), illustrated cleverly and amusingly by Lynn Munsinger, first appeared in the USA a couple of years ago. It's a moral tale which has lost nothing of its vitality and point on the trans-Atlantic journey. Pinkerton, the pushy little anthropomorphic pig at the centre of the story, receives his eventual come-uppance from the Sandwich. The message will not easily be ignored by young readers – or their adult mentors!

An Extraordinary Egg by Leo Lionni (Andersen, 0 86264 537 9, £8.99) is another large-format American import. Three innocent young frogs are convinced that the large alligator egg they examine has been produced by a chicken. The gently amusing energy of the illustrations makes this book a pleasure to look at – along with the near certainty of the delight some young readers will take in being somewhat brighter than the frogs.

Andrew and Janet McLean's tidily rhymed **Dog Tales** (Little Ark, Allen and Unwin, 1 86373 488 0, £7.99) comes from Australia. Helped by acutely observed, light-hearted artwork and amusing marginal details, it examines the lifestyles and characters of the five family dogs. It will give appeal here as much as it must have done in the southern hemisphere – and not, I suspect, only to dog-lovers.

Paper collage work is employed to excellent effect in Ed Young's **Seven Blind Mice** (Andersen, 0 86264 472 0, £8.99), which won a Caldecott Honour on its 1992 USA publication. Based on the old fable of the Blind Men and the Elephant, Ed Young's book is boldly bright in its colours and in its sharp white text against a jet-black background. It has that essential quality of encouraging the youngest children to look closely and to predict likely outcomes.

Charles Fuge, winner of the 1989 Mother Goose Award, teams up with Karen Hayles to deliver **Whale Is Stuck** (BBC, 0 563 36365 7, £7.99; 0 563 40356 X, £3.99 pbk). Young, confident readers will be helped by the large print narrative which tells the tale of unproductive efforts by Whale's friends, led by a profoundly wrinkled and pompous Walrus, to free him from the Arctic floe on which he's become stranded. They'll take constant pleasure in, and learn from, these excellent illustrations.

Andy and Linda DaVolls have collaborated on **Tano and Binti** (Heinemann, 0 434 96630 4, £8.99), a most remarkable book rooted in the reality of two zoo-bred chimpanzees who are returned to their natural African forest habitat. Occasional flatness in the text is more than adequately compensated for by what the publishers rightly describe as captivating illustrations in a gently touching book that will have wide appeal not only amongst young children.



He changed into waiter's clothes and served the family round the table.

From **Courtney** (Cape).

The eponymous hero of John Burningham's **Courtney** (Cape, 0 224 03868 0, £8.99) is a cooking, table-waiting, violin-playing, juggling, fire-fighting, child-rescuing mongrel dog. My early doubts about a book which blends reality and extravagant fancy have been totally overcome by the responses of eager infants in my wife's school: they take whole-heartedly to JB's narrative and illustrative wit.

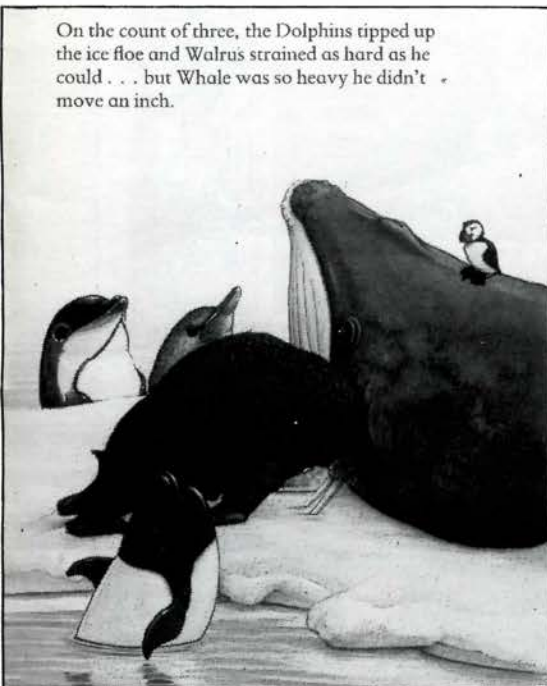
David McPhail's **Pigs A-plenty, Pigs Galore** (Blackie, 0 216 94129 6, £8.99) first appeared in the USA last year, and is assured of a warm and highly amused welcome elsewhere. Brilliantly and lovingly illustrated, it tells in light-hearted verse the story of pigs – eating, dressed bizarrely, behaving badly and inhabiting the narrator's dreams. Every page is a feast.

FANCY THAT

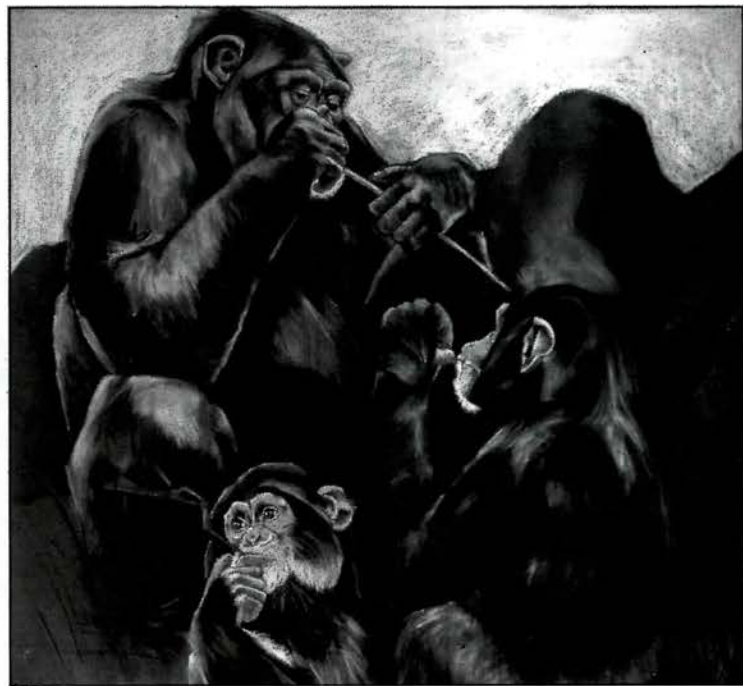
Teddy! Where Are You? (Andersen, 0 86264 484 4, £7.00) sees Ralph Steadman at his prominent best. Here, blending fact and fancy, he lovingly and humorously draws together different generations in their enthusiasm for teddy bears, seemingly those most shabbily worn ever the most carefully loved. For the adult there are thinly disguised and rejected teddy bears in cardboard cities. The storyline keeps firm hold of the attention and the artwork is brilliant, despite its surface ease.

Sarah and the Sandhorse (Andersen, 0 86264 476 3, £8.99) is the result of a partnership between Andrew Baynes and Michael Foreman. The former tells, with a well-handled and haunting simplicity, the magical story of Sarah and the seaside sand-sculpted horse. At every point there's the unfailingly apt support of Michael Foreman's unsurpassably sensitive watercolours.

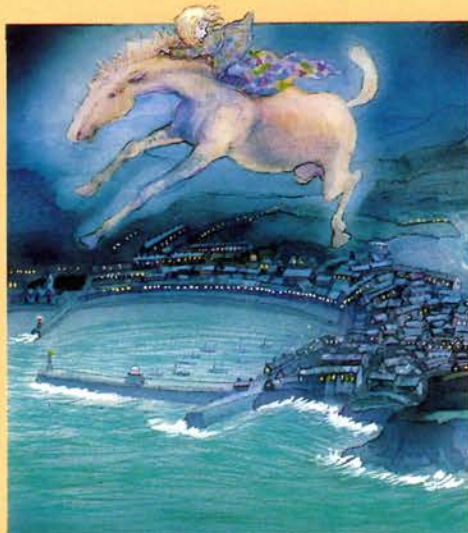
On the count of three, the Dolphins tipped up the ice floe and Walrus strained as hard as he could . . . but Whale was so heavy he didn't move an inch.



From **Whale Is Stuck** (BBC).



From **Tano and Binti** (Heinemann).



From *Sarah and the Sandhorse* (Andersen)
on previous page.

MORAL TALES

Ken Brown has illustrated Ivan Jones' *The Golden Cage* (Andersen, 0 86264 490 9, £7.99) in gently powerful and effective fashion. There's a nicely old-fashioned, slightly sentimental, fabled air about this book, although, in keeping with the traditions of such tales, there is a contemporary relevance. All focuses on self-centred, pampered only child, Abigail, for whom the blackbird she cages will not sing – until . . .

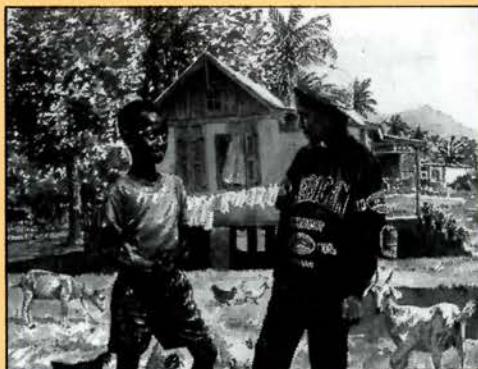
Tony Ross and Hiawyn Oram meet again with marvellous success in *The Second Princess* (Andersen, 0 86264 414 3, £7.99) an amusing tale of sibling jealousy which manages to include a humane Wolf, a happily married Bear, a slightly sinister Cook and a King who must surely have been influenced by the best advice on parenting from Dr Spock. The story bounces briskly along, helped at every point by Tony Ross's abundantly comic joie de vivre.

The Little Apple Tree by Inga Moore (Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 1258 7, £8.99) sees lame little Lucy pleading with her father not to uproot the frail, barren apple tree in the corner of the garden. It's a sentimental tale – and none the worse for that – simply told and illustrated with a totally appropriate softness that's bound to have wide appeal.

First published in the USA, *The Big Big Sea* (Walker, 0 7445 2521 7, £7.99) is a miracle which draws together the unobtrusively poetic prose of Martin Waddell and the truly beautiful, sensitively touching artwork of Jennifer Eachus. This stunning combination explores mother and child's moonlit walk by the sea – nothing more or less than that. The outcome is a work of art of the highest quality.

OTHER PEOPLE, OTHER PLACES, OTHER TIMES

It's no surprise that Caroline Binch's reputation seems to rise daily. Her *Gregory Cool* (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0817 4, £8.99) is the splendidly rich, authentically observed and simply



told story of young Gregory's holiday away from the UK with his grandparents in their home on the island of Tobago. Those lucky enough to have tasted the Caribbean will delight in the recollections stirred by this lovely book: for those less lucky, there are life-enhancing eye-openings – to scenery, to customs and to people.

A Little Tiger by Song Nan Zhang (Tundra, 0 88776 320 0, £9.99) is described as an 'Autobiography in Art' – an account of the artist's upbringing and life in Communist China until his escape. It won't, I suspect, appeal to everybody. There is, perhaps inevitably, an unease about the prose. Not all will accept the validity of the artist's account; but there are insights here into a way of life with which most of us are likely for some time to be less than familiar. There is, moreover, a rewarding liveliness about the many full-page illustrations that ought to interest readers beyond the primary years.

Fiona French's *Little Inchkin* (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0804 2, £8.99) is yet more proof of her artistic flair and flexibility. Here, she retells a Japanese version of the Tom Thumb legend. Little Inchkin slays the dragon, wins



From *Little Inchkin* (Frances Lincoln).



"I used to kidnap Teddy, tie his arms with a skipping rope, lock him in the cellar and demand a ransom."
From *Teddy! Where Are You?* (Andersen)
on previous page.



Once there were two princesses, the First Princess and the Second Princess.
The First Princess liked being first but the Second Princess did not like being second.

From *The Second Princess* (Andersen).

the princess, is blessed by Buddha and grows to full size. There is a dignity about the text that's enriched by the sumptuous formality of the vividly coloured artwork.

Grandfather's Dream (Random House, 0 688 12339 2, £8.99) initially appeared in the USA. Holly Keller takes us through text and through her watercolour artwork into what is, once more, likely to be unfamiliar territory – this time, Vietnam. However, the simply told story, of an ambition to reclaim wetlands and to see the Sarus cranes return, is universal in its implications and its green credentials. The pictures of landscape and of people are convincingly illuminating. The note of hope is welcome.

Another book first published in the USA in 1992 with pictures by Caldecott Medal winner, Barbara Cooney, is Michael Bedard's **Emily** (Julia MacRae, 1 85681 039 9, £9.99) and it's a most rewarding oddity. There's a quaintness about the artwork that's totally in keeping with the book's subject, the inimitably quirky American poet, Emily Dickinson. At the centre of the story is her reputed friendliness towards children despite her reclusive nature. Perhaps her amity was an outcome of her apparent inability at the age of 53 to meet the current National Curriculum requirement for joined-up writing?

Prince Ivan and the Firebird (Barefoot, 1 898000 60 3, £9.99) sees a combination of Cherry Gilchrist's words and Andrei Troshkov's art in this re-telling of the Firebird tale. The story reads well aloud and, with outstanding support from rich and carefully stylized illustrations, is likely to be a new cultural experience for many young readers.

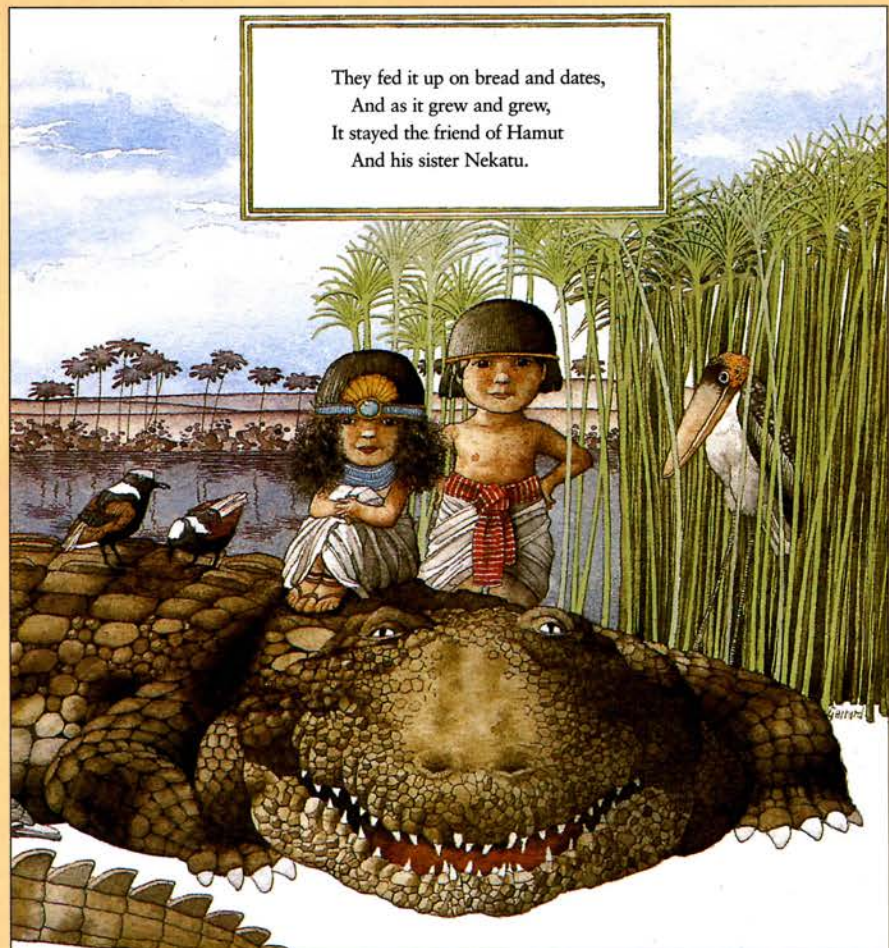
Roy Gerrard gives us a minor masterpiece in **Croco'nile** (Gollancz, 0 575 05600 2, £8.99). His rhymed verse narrative moves apace along the Nile, among pyramids, through hieroglyphics, gloriously matched by entertaining illustrations which combine off-beat humour and a closeness of observation that can only serve to enlarge understanding and appreciation of ancient Egyptian life.

HAPPY RETURNS

The Alfie Treasury (Bodley Head, 0 370 31935 4, £9.99) by Shirley Hughes brings into one new hardback collection four of the much-loved Alfie stories which appeared first in 1981. Her **Nursery Collection** (Walker, 0 7445 3210 8, £8.99) comprises five of her wonderful early years' books from 1985 and 1986.

John Burningham's **First Steps** (Walker, 0 7445 3247 7, £7.99) draws together four 1985 infant concept books – on numbers, the alphabet, colours and opposites – their relevance undiminished by time, their initial praise no less deserved.

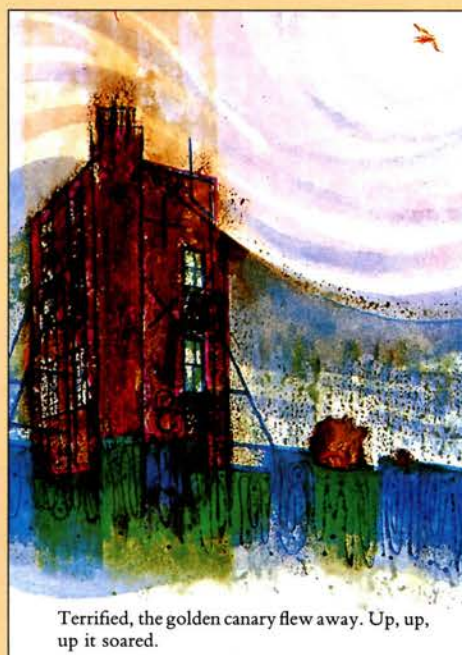
Also highly praised on their first separate appearances nine and ten years ago are the five animal stories by Derek Hall appearing now as **Baby Animals** (Walker, 0 7445 3279 5,



From **Croco'nile** (Gollancz).

£7.99). John Butler's excellently attentive artwork has not faded and the prose has lost nothing of its simple strength.

It is impossible to resist a mention of the return of Charles Keeping's **Charley, Charlotte and the Golden Canary** (Oxford, 0 19 279628 3, £9.99). Since first appearing in 1967, it has retained all its initial energy and penetrating social concern. Brilliantly



Terrified, the golden canary flew away. Up, up, up it soared.

From **Charley, Charlotte and the Golden Canary** (Oxford).



"Look, it's got my name on it," said Alfie, pointing.

Mum said that it was an invitation to Bernard's birthday tea party.

From **The Alfie Treasury** (Bodley Head).

blurred, the illustrations perfectly complement the text in telling the tale of two children separated by urban renewal but miraculously reunited by the golden canary. In a gloomy world Keeping's hopeful candle is still much needed. ■

Trevor Dickinson OBE retired two years ago from being a member of HM Inspectorate. His travelling roadshow promoting children's books and reading was well-known throughout the UK and is still fondly remembered.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

CELEBRATE

BOOK POWER!



CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

The Daily Telegraph



What are you planning for the autumn? It may seem early to ask the question, but Children's Book Week (an annual initiative of Book Trust, sponsored for the third year running by the **Daily Telegraph**) runs from the 8th to 15th October and information is now making its way into schools all over the country.

Over 6,000 schools and hundreds of bookshops and libraries participated last year. Schools who enrol will receive a bumper pack of free materials at the beginning of the autumn term, including posters, bookmarks, stickers, Readathon sponsorship forms and a handbook of ideas and activities to interest children of all ages.

Schools are encouraged to make Readathon the centrepiece of their book weeks. The national charity which encourages children to read recreationally by raising money for sick children is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, with an aim of raising over £1-million for the Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund and the Roald Dahl Foundation.

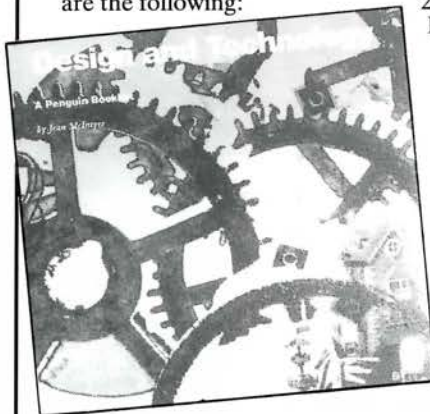
Readathon Live! events will take place in bookshops, libraries and on the Book Bus, and a calendar of public activities will be available in September. School parties are invited to visit the Children's Book Week reading and advice centre at the BBC Big Bash Exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham from 6th to 9th October, which will include a number of initiatives to entertain and inform children and teachers about books and reading.

Enrolment leaflets are included in this issue of **BfK** (overseas subscribers excluded). All schools enrolling before 30th June will enter a draw to win one of ten sets of the 22-volume 1994 international edition **World Book Encyclopedia**, each worth £529. [See Nick Tucker's article on page 22 for more information on this publication.]

FREEBIES from BfK . . .

Well, via **BfK**, to be strictly accurate. On offer, free of charge while stocks last, are the following:

them with requests addressed to Hearsay Tapes Offer, PO Box 1375, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA.



Design and Technology – A Penguin Booklist

How can a classic work of children's fiction like **The Borrowers** help in design and technology education? To find out – along with many other suggestions for incorporating books into your school's D & T curriculum – contact Emma Judge on 071 416 3000, ext. 2433, at Puffin Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ.

Hearsay Performance Poems

From Bodley Head, a tape of selected reading to publicise their new series, edited by Paul Beasley and launched last month. It's a neat promotional idea that's well worth encouraging . . . so deluge

Ruff Stuff

From Hutchinson, a poster to promote Jane Hissey's latest (see this issue's Authorgraph and front cover) showing Old Bear plus friends, new and old, in full colour. Postcards, with your name and address, to Ruff Poster Offer, Children's Publicity, PO Box 1375, London SW1V 2JA.

Not free, this one, but worth every penny . . . See Hear!

A guide to audio-visual resources in the primary school – Chris Routh's beautifully produced listing of story and video cassettes, picture and photo-packs, posters, multi-media packs and slide sets. It's not exhaustive but gives a flavour of the kind of material currently available . . . backed up with sound advice about how best to implement it in the primary classroom. Available, at £2.95 (inc. p&p), from Reading and Language Information Centre, University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading, RG6 1HY, or phone 0734 318820.

BARBARA WILLARD

born 12th March 1909, died 18th February 1994.

Though not confined to historical novels, Barbara Willard's best fiction tended to be located in the past – in particular the Mantlemass sequence, set in her beloved Ashdown Forest, which traces the fortunes of two families, the Mallorlys and the Medleys, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Margaret Meek wrote that 'her characters . . . are not cast in the heroic mould of Rosemary Sutcliff's heroes. Instead their very frailty makes them human, rounded.' Many would regard her as Sutcliff's equal as a writer and some, at least in respect of dialogue, Sutcliff's superior.

She came late to children's literature. Born in Brighton, Sussex, of an acting family, she was herself an actress before becoming a novelist for adults. Her first children's book, **Portrait of Philip** (1954), was revised from an earlier adult novel . . . and led to 60 more books for young people. She won the Guardian Award in 1974 for **The Iron Lily** and the Whitbread 10 years later for **The Queen of the Pharisees' Children**. Newcomers to her work should perhaps begin with **A Cold Wind Blowing** (1972), the third of the Mantlemass novels and arguably the best. Of her two 'intermingled families', she remarks, 'I have tried to imagine how they would have lived, and how they would have been affected by the events in the outside world – the change of dynasty from Plantagenet to Tudor, the Reformation, the Civil War. Because these people have come to seem so real to me, living as I do on their ground, I think perhaps they have some reality for readers.' They have indeed. CP

CONFERENCES

The Summer Season for these is now upon us. Here, in diary order, are brief notes about what's on offer with addresses for further details:

IMAGINE THAT

IMAGINE THAT - Dublin Writers' Museum, 13th-15th May. Features Gillian Cross, P J Lynch, Margaret Meek, Roger McGough... Contact Church of Ireland College of Education, 96 Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin 6, Ireland (tel: 01 970033, fax: 01 970878). Be quick, though!

CBC

THE CBC CONFERENCE - Cumberland Hotel, London on 1st June. Details still to be fixed but centred on the children's book today, its position within the wider market place, and its likely future. Contact Anna Trenter at Hamish Hamilton (071 416 3100) or David Morton at Random House (071 973 9000) for further details.

VOICES OFF

VOICES OFF - Homerton College, Cambridge, 2nd-4th September. Features

Victor Watson, Geoff Fox, Jan Mark, Jill Paton Walsh, Jackie Kay... and, in its optional sessions, an impressive line-up of seminar leaders, e.g. John Rowe Townsend and Satoshi Kitamura. Contact Eve Bearne, Homerton College, Cambridge CB2 2PH. Applicants are advised to get in touch as soon as possible.

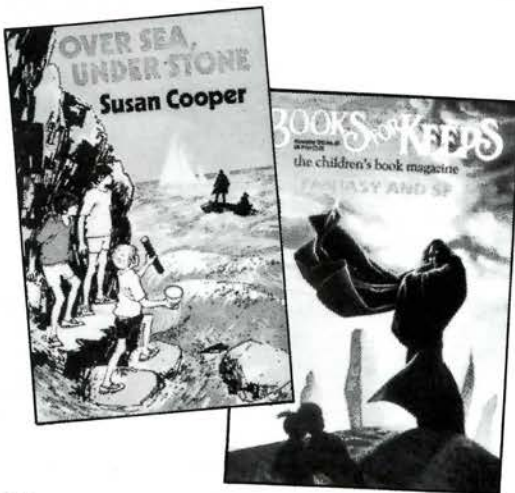


WORCESTER CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CONFERENCE - The Conference Centre,

Worcester College, 29th and 30th July.

Features Aidan Chambers, Alison Leonard, Peter Hunt and Wendy Stone. Contact In-Service Office, Worcester College of Higher Education, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ (tel. 0905 748089).

A LETTER FROM SUSAN COOPER



Dear BfK

Your ferocious phone-caller (who complained of your cover on BfK 83 reproducing Bodley Head's new jacket for my book *Over Sea, Under Stone*) sounds like that Times letter-writer of long ago who signed himself 'Disgusted, Tunbridge Wells'. He called the picture, 'Occult exhibitionism'? Oh come now, Disgusted. Andrew Skilleter's jacket is scary, but so, I hope, is the part of the story it represents.

A child sees a book, in library or bookshop or even supermarket. Nine times out of ten, it's the jacket that will induce him or her to pick up the book and investigate its contents. A good jacket, it seems to me, should simultaneously reflect truthfully the nature of the story and shout at the child, 'Pick me up!'. These days, after all, it has to compete with a lot of other visual shouts, from the television screen, from the computer, from video games.

In the last few years I've lived through three reissues of the five 'Dark is Rising' books, from three different publishers, two British, one American: that's 15 new jackets. I grumbled at a few, but only if I thought the drawing was bad or if it showed something that wasn't in the actual book (which kids resent). Most of the 15 were powerful and dramatic: more frightening than earlier jackets, but less frightening than the images a modern child can see every day on the TV news. The acceptable Fright Factor, like everything else (except perhaps Disgusted), has adjusted itself to 1994.

But children themselves are as resilient as they've always been. I've been hearing variations of the same reaction for 25 years, from the Everychild who goes from the jacket to the text of one of the 'Dark is Rising' books. 'I liked that bit in the dark,' he (or she) says. 'I was scared!'

And he/she grins, happily.

MIND BOGGLING BOOKS AWARD 1994

Organised by W H Smith for the best children's book published in paperback for the 9-12 age-group... and judged by a panel of ten children aged 9-12. The winner is *Hacker* by Malorie Blackman (Doubleday, 0 385 40378 3, £8.99; Corgi, 0 552 52751 3, £2.99 pbk). Wendy Cooling talked about Malorie's work in an article called 'Rising Stars' in the last issue of BfK. Nice to know we agree with the kids.

What Katy Really Did?

BfK's third crisp fiver for Kid Lit Howlers goes to David Lewis, of Exeter, Devon. He sent us the following mis-print from the Armada Classics edition of Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did at School*:

'They went upstairs. Some girls, who were peeing over the baluster, hurried away at their approach. Mrs Florence shook her head at them.'

'The first day is always one of licence,' she said...'

David Lewis comments, 'I can't believe it was an accidental error and strongly suspect a naughty operative somewhere along the type-setting line.' Lovely thought! Any more howlers, anyone? ■

In July's BfK...

Colin McNaughton celebrates Asterix

Robert Leeson on reworking the Robin Hood legend

David Bennett assesses Bible Story collections

Grace Hallworth launches a new BfK series

K M Peyton in Authorgraph... and, of course, Reviews, News and more Reviews.



NEW (-ish) TALES FOR OLD

As the son of a New York elementary school principal, never mind being a former teacher himself and a would-be medical student who was diverted into writing fiction, Jon Scieszka has no doubts about the need to keep educational options open – especially with regard to children's reading. 'I can understand the anxieties of parents, or people in general, who want the best for their kids . . . but you can't just make a list and say "this book when you're four, this book when you're seven" because it gives an entirely false sense of security. Also I think we've probably all had the experience of having books ruined for us by a teacher.' Even his own work has suffered from over-zealous pedagogy. 'I hear sometimes from kids who've had to do seven different lessons on *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* . . . I'm worried they may want to come and murder me in my sleep.'

It's a point well made – though the sheer flair of his stories, with their maverick attitude to their own subject-matter, to language, and to established storytelling techniques, almost certainly keeps them safe from classroom catastrophe. *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, for instance, is told from the point of view of the wolf, while *The Frog Prince Continued* begins with

*The Princess kissed the frog.
He turned into a prince.
And they lived happily ever after...*



but goes on

*'Well, let's just say they lived sort of happily for a long time.
Okay, so they weren't so happy.
In fact, they were miserable . . .'*

and soon reveals the kind of reality behind a Royal Marriage that most kids, these days, will recognise instantly. Small wonder that at the end of the tale . . . well, readers are best left to find this out for themselves.

His most recent picture book, *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales*, begins ahead of its own title page and proceeds immediately afterwards to an upside-down dedication. Thereafter, well-known nursery narratives are given the Scieszka treatment – 'Chicken Licken', 'The Really Ugly Duckling', 'The Tortoise and the Hair' (sic), 'Cinderumpelstiltskin', 'Little Red Running Shorts', 'Jack's Bean Problem' and, as the sub-title puts it, 'much, much more!'. More, in this case, includes



Cinderumpelstiltskin, from *The Stinky Cheese Man*.

ongoing gags involving his two narrators, Jack and the Little Red Hen (whose own tale never quite gets told), and some of the zaniest typographical and bibliographical jokes I've ever come across in a children's book. Jon Scieszka makes no apologies for this pirating of established folk and fairy tales 'since these are stories that have really held up and can best bear infinite variation'. He's also well aware that his self-referential and inter-textual approach has a perfectly respectable intellectual pedigree. He cites a string of past practitioners, from that arch subversive Laurence Sterne in the eighteenth century to Joyce, Nabokov and Borges in our own day, not forgetting current children's writers like Allan Ahlberg whom he much admires. His own approach, he's quick to add, has less literary roots too – in the humour of Monty Python and Buster Keaton.

In fact, the visual aspect is crucial. His writing career only took off when he was shown some paintings by Lane Smith. 'I just took a look and said "that's what I want my book to look like!"' Soon they were collaborating. 'My imagination is almost purely visual and textual . . . so I used to come over and look at what he was doing with my stuff and say "this is amazing".'

Even so, Lane Smith's sombre, formalist approach, with its own witty references to favourite painters such as Paul Klee, at first actually added to their difficulties in finding a publisher for *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. 'People would tell us that the artwork was too dark, too sophisticated, and so was the text – they didn't give kids credit for seeing what we were about.'

Nowadays, of course, following this and other successes, such sophistication has become something of a Lane-Scieszka trademark – indeed, he insists that a third collaborator on *The Stinky Cheese Man* was the book's designer, Molly Leach. 'We'd take the book to her and she'd say, "Well, that idea doesn't really work . . ." and come up with something better.' Recently, he says, he was delighted when a young reader explained a Leach typographical joke to him which he'd completely missed.



But, then, Jon Scieszka trusts kids. His series with Lane Smith, called 'The Time Warp Trio' takes Joe, Fred and Sam back to the days of King Arthur in *The Knights of the Kitchen Table*, the age of pirates in *The Not-So-Jolly Roger*, and the Wild West in *The Good, The Bad and The Goofy*, with

JON SCIESZKA, revamper extraordinary, talks to Chris Powling

other time-travelling adventures to follow. It doesn't bother him in the slightest that these affectionate romps might be a child's first literary encounter with the genre he's sending up. His own early experience of fairy tales, he points out, was watching the famous Tex Avery cartoons on television's *Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*. 'It's a perfect teach-able moment when the kid at the back says "sounds sort of familiar . . . is that like, say, "The Gingerbread Man"?'" They can then work back from my stories. The important thing is to give kids a handle, a connection. Then you don't have to tell them reading is FUN. If you have to come out and say it, if they haven't discovered it for themselves, then you've missed out, and messed up, somewhere along the line.'

Amen to that, says BFK.

Jon Scieszka's name, by the way (pronounced Shess-ka) is the Polish word for 'path'. If only John Patten, and the devisers of our English Orders, could be persuaded to follow it. ■



I'm the wolf. Alexander T. Wolf.
You can call me Al.

I don't know how this whole Big Bad Wolf thing got started, but it's all wrong.

From *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*.

Book details

All hardbacks are from Viking and all paperbacks from Puffin.

By Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith:

The True Story of the Three Little Pigs, 0 14 054056 3, £3.99 pbk

The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales, 0 670 84487 X, £9.99; 0 14 054896 3, £4.99 pbk

The Knights of the Kitchen Table, 0 670 84194 3, £7.50; 0 14 036398 X, £2.99 pbk

The Not-So-Jolly Roger, 0 670 84193 5, £7.50; 0 14 036397 1, £2.99 pbk

The Good, The Bad and The Goofy, 0 14 036399 8, £2.99 pbk

By Jon Scieszka and Steve Johnson:

The Frog Prince Continued, 0 670 84119 6, £7.99; 0 14 054285 X, £3.99 pbk