

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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the children's book magazine



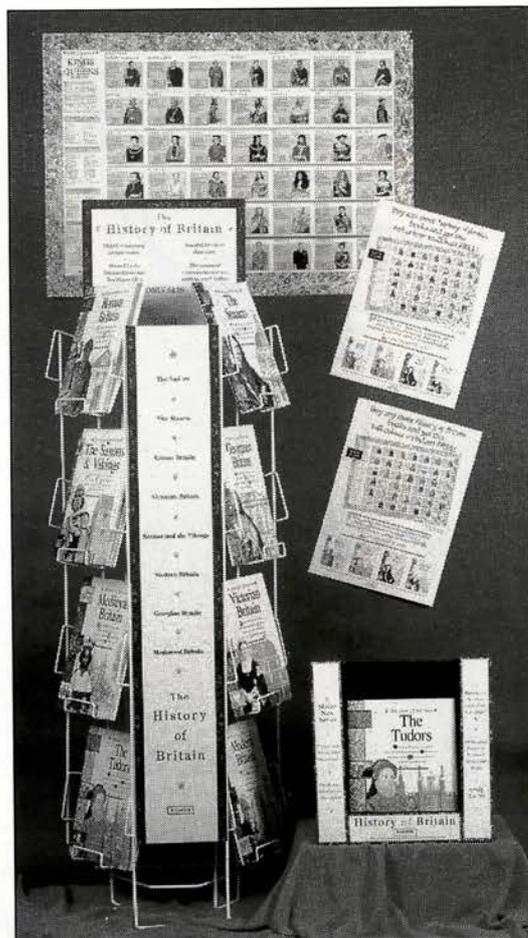
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## Cover Story



Our cover this month features Asterix. To mark the 25th Anniversary of Asterix in Britain, Hodder & Stoughton are giving the books a brand new look and releasing two omnibus editions (for details of these and other celebrations, see pages 4 and 5). We are most grateful to Hodder & Stoughton for their help in using this illustration by Albert Uderzo.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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# EDITOR'S PAGE



From left to right: David Sheldrake, Chris Powling, Julia Eccleshare, Elizabeth Roberts, Katya Genieva and Helen Svojtokova. Photo by Sergei Pominor.

## A Tale of Two Libraries

Officially, it was a two-day conference on Modern British Children's Books for Russian librarians, translators and publishers to mark the arrival in Moscow of Julia Eccleshare's exhibition, **Children's Books of the Year 1993**. Julia herself was the main speaker with me in support. Since the British contingent also included David Sheldrake, Production Director of Egmont Publishers, and Helen Svojtokova, East European Sales Manager of Dorling Kindersley, and was organised at the British end – courtesy of Book Trust and the British Council – by Elizabeth Roberts, translator and writer on Russian affairs, it was obvious at the outset that our mission had a pretty wide remit.

That's where the first of my libraries comes in. For the conference was initiated by the All Russia Library for Foreign Literature, an organisation of 600 professionals headed by Director General Ekaterina U Genieva who chaired every session personally – and that included a day beforehand setting the agenda and a day afterwards for de-briefing and careful follow-up planning. In Russia children's books, particularly British children's books, are treated completely seriously.

Of course, it's our classics for older readers that predominate there. Young Russians are offered a heady, not to say heavy, brew of Dickens, Stevenson, Tolkien and Lewis consumed alongside their own literature which develops from a rich diet of indigenous folktales. What impressed me most about our discussions, though, was their *openness*. At present there's no equivalent in Russia of what we'd call teenage fiction, for instance, or of fiction that deals directly with issues like homosexuality or AIDS. 'Until recently teenagers with problems didn't exist in Russia,' commented one delegate, drily. 'They weren't allowed.' This didn't prevent huge interest, if expressed a little warily, in a glossy example of the sort of pulp-novel that's routine in the UK, or a warmly appreciative response to an impromptu summary of Morris Gleitzman's **Two Weeks with the Queen**. Whether we were exploring picture-books, reviewing journals or the pros and cons of literary prizes (and they all got a look in), the attitude throughout was positive and genuinely enquiring.

And who was hosting this whole event, remember?

Yes, a library.

That such a public institution should see itself at the cutting edge of cultural change, and the way in which this is best delivered, didn't seem in the least bit odd at the time. It was only when we'd returned to Britain that I was struck by the irony. For here, private enterprise is assumed to make all the running for public initiatives not the other way round. According to the current orthodoxy, dynamism of the Genieva kind doesn't exist in the state sector.

Perhaps that explains our Government's apparent indifference to the effects of its policies on a service that, up till now, we've had every reason to place at the very centre of our support for reading. For I'd hardly arrived back home before I got a 'phone call from Hampshire's Deputy Chief Librarian. Would I be willing, he asked, to lend my influence as a critic and children's author to the county's campaign against the proposed re-organisation of local government and the devastating effect this would have on library provisions

everywhere – in particular specialised provision for young people? Bring me up to date on the details, I said.

So he did. And a sorry picture emerged . . . of an estimated two-thirds loss in access to all the books, collections and other materials across the county; of a significant reduction in the range of books on offer as a result of reduced budgets; of a diminution in special services to business, to ethnic minorities, to the handicapped, the elderly and the infirm; of the doubts about the very survival of resources and advice for schools. All this is a side effect of an ideological preference for a series of small, unitary authorities (there would be seven of these in Hampshire) intended to replace the current two-tier county and district system.

I agreed, of course. I was duly photographed by the local press at my branch library here in Winchester with a stack of letters from library-users all over the county protesting at the proposed changes. Moscow suddenly seemed far, far away. Our message to Katya Genieva and her team had been one of warm encouragement for their efforts to spearhead new approaches to children's reading in Russia. How sad that at home we seem bent on undermining the system that's contributed so crucially to our own success.

Chris

## Reorganisation . . . and libraries

The Local Government Commission will be mailing every household in the affected counties to sound out public opinion . . . do make sure you respond!

For information on the Library Association's campaign to ensure that your library service doesn't suffer from local government reorganisation, write to Donna MacLean at the Library Association, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE.



## PER ARDUA AD

## Asterix

## COLIN McNAUGHTON RUMINATES ON HIS LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST CARTOON CHARACTERS

One day in 1970 I was poking about the basement of a house in the medieval town of Lavaur in south-west France (as you do) when I came across a huge stack of magazines. There were hundreds of them. All bore the masthead 'Pilote' and all of them were absolutely stuffed with page after page of comic strips. I sat down on the stone floor and started to read . . .

\*\*\*

There weren't many books in my house when I was a kid: a set of encyclopedias, a home doctor book, a family Bible and an atlas made up our library (all of them maroon for some reason). Apart from the huge brassbound and clasped Bible which had marvellous tissue-covered, sticky-inked, vivid-gory, technicolour biblical scenes (I'll never forget the deliciously bloody, nail in the head picture – forget video-nasties, I'm talking the stuff of nightmares here!) I had none of the classic picture books that so many illustrators drool on about when discussing their childhood influences. No, my influences came from comics. A mixture of British and American – from the genius of Dudley D Watkins, creator of wonderful characters such as 'Oor Wullie', 'The Broons', 'Desperate Dan' and 'Jimmy and his Magic Patch' to the super-slick brushwork and full-colour of the American super-hero publications. Most of the kids I knew then collected them. Negotiating 'swaps' under lamp-posts and on back doorsteps is one of my strongest childhood memories:

'I'll give you two Superboys for one Captain America.'

'Get lost!'

'All right, two Superboys and a Captain Marvel.'

'It's a deal.'

I learned how to tell stories from Dudley D Watkins, not from Robert Louis Stevenson. Look at any page of 'Oor Wullie' and see a master picture book author/artist at play. (Check for his signature at the bottom of the strip – if it's not there it's almost certainly not by him and, usually, inferior.)

\*\*\*

Cut back to dank basement in south-west France several hours later. A bat detaches itself from whatever bats attach themselves to and flaps noisily over the head of the authors 'Sacre Bleu' he cries (the author, not the bat – he sort of squeaked ultra-sonically) and

pulls himself together. Strange expression that 'Pull yourself together!' I've always preferred my friend Pete's expression 'Pull yourself to pieces!' – more of Peter, later. [Get on with it, McNaughton . . . Ed.]

\*\*\*

You see, and here's the connection with all that drivel about my childhood, I thought I'd left comics behind in the fifties and early sixties. I reckoned comics (apart, of course from Robert Crumm and the American underground comix) were kids' stuff.

Fool! Fool! and thrice Fool!

Here was our old enemy the French showing me that comics have nothing to do with age. They are for the child in everyone. In France everybody reads comics and throughout the late 1950s and 1960s everyone was reading *Pilote*.

Underneath the title *Pilote* were six little words, 'The Journal of Asterix and Obelix' (in French, of course – it would be silly if it was in English, wouldn't it, I mean what would be the point?). Contained within the hallowed pages were dozens of strips and buried in the middle – a double-page spread entitled: 'Asterix the Gaul'.

Over the next few days (I'm still in France here) I read through those piles of *Pilote* and, to be honest, I wasn't bowled over by the Asterix strips. This was mainly because there were so many other wonderful things to devour – 'Lucky Luke' by Morris and Goscinny, 'Le Grand Duduche' by Cabu, 'Philemon' by Fred, 'La Rubrique-a-brac' by Gotlib and 'Lieutenant Blueberry' drawn by a man called Gir, aka Jean Giraud – later to become better known as Moebius, one of the

LIFE'S MORE FUN WI' MUDDY BOOTS!



Oor Wullie, with authentic signature.



Obelix, Asterix's inseparable friend.

half-dozen best comic book artists in the world (a legend to comic freaks). So you see it wasn't surprising that the poor old vertically-challenged, moustachioed Gaul didn't stand out – he was just one of many.

Perhaps I should point out that at this time my French was almost non-existent. What knocked me sideways was the visual strength of these comics so the almost slick brushwork of Uderzo (I prefer pen and line) was far too Disneyesque for my taste. Both Uderzo and Goscinny were brought up on, and heavily influenced by, Disney. Also, whereas many of the other artists in *Pilote* were experimenting with layout, I found Asterix rather too conventional. And so I found myself flipping past Asterix onto something more visually interesting. It wasn't until I got back to England and started to read the texts in English that I began to appreciate fully the world of Asterix and Obelix.

I use the word 'world' quite deliberately because that is the secret of Asterix. Goscinny and Uderzo have brilliantly created a complete world. It's so complete, and consequently believable, one never questions the incredible

adventures: one just enjoys them. I still don't really like the drawings, but in the end it doesn't affect my enjoyment of the books. Very quickly I stop looking at the technique and become submerged in the story.

Of course, the attraction of the stories is obvious: as Uderzo told Tony Bradman in *BfK* 7 (March 1981), 'People have said that it was because it's about the "indomitable minority" fighting back against the great machine of the state. There's an element of that, of course, and it's based on the contrast which we tried to emphasise between the rigid, rectilinear Romans with their roads and laws, and the anarchy of the Celts.'

However, more to the point and again in Uderzo's own words, 'We wrote it originally for children, but we never aimed it at a specific age range or audience. We realised at the beginning that adults would probably like it, too. The spirit in which we started was very simple. We wanted to amuse ourselves and we weren't surprised when adults liked it as much as they did - we liked it, and we're adults after all.'

I'll go along with that, especially when he adds - 'I think humour is universal, anyway. It doesn't need to be too intellectual or too simple, it's just got to be good. In the end, either it's funny or it isn't. There are no other rules. Our sole aim at the beginning - and it hasn't changed - was very simple - we wanted to give people enjoyment.'

That, my dear French friend, you have certainly succeeded in doing - by the chariot-load!

One huge beef (or perhaps that should be boar) I have about Asterix has nothing to do with the authors. I've never understood why such poor quality paper is used in the printing. Could it be because they're only comics? I mean, would the publisher print a picture book on this sort of paper (it goes yellow after five years for goodness sake!)?

I don't think so. I beg the publishers: Please, please, please next time you're reprinting, spend a titchy bit of the Asterix millions on some decent paper. The little guy has earned it!

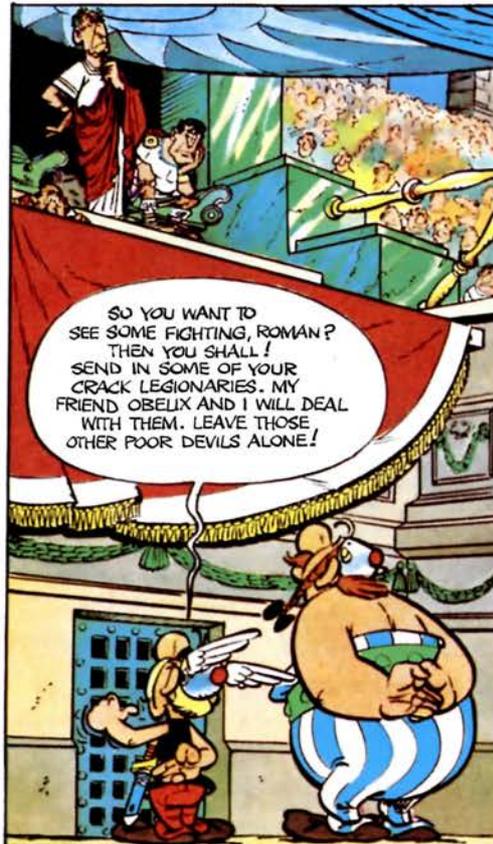
The translations: sometimes they're great, sometimes not so great - usually within the same book. Anthea Bell and David Hockridge have, on the whole, done a splendid job for the past 25 years on what is an incredibly difficult task - that of translating humour. Occasionally they seem to get a little lost (at least, they lose me) as they desperately try to find equivalent jokes and puns. But, as Anthea Bell says: 'In the end, however, it all depends on the wholeness of Goscinny and Uderzo's imaginary world. The soil of that world is rich enough to cling to the roots of the joke and keep it alive even when it's transplanted to another language.' (Which just goes to show, you shouldn't ask a writer's opinion if you're short of space.)

\*\*\*

Back in the basement (did I ever leave?) ... Interestingly all the comic

strips in *Pilote* were credited with both author and artist's name - some even had little caricatures of them, too. As a waiter in my hotel in Kingston, Jamaica said, after seeing me on Jamaican TV: 'Maximum respect'. Show me a British comic of this time which ever credited the creators in this way, apart from perhaps *The Eagle* with Frank Hampson - and then only because he wrote it on the artwork himself. Moreover, the paper *Pilote* was printed on was proper paper! Bright, white and smooth. The colours shone! Compare that to *The Dandy* and *Beano* which looked as if they were made from recycled beer mats.

\*\*\*



Anarchic Celts and rigid Romans ...

My friend Pete [At last! I thought you'd forgotten about him ... Ed.] and I used to share a studio in the Caledonian Road many years ago. When we weren't playing ping-pong on the desk or solving the world's problems in the pub opposite, we would talk comic technique. Pete would often say 'There are two sorts of people in the world: Tintin (i.e. pen) people and Asterix (i.e. brush) people. I'm an Asterix sort of guy and you, if you'll pardon the presumption, you pumpkin-headed plonker, are a Tintin-type person.' I would ponder this deep philosophical notion for several minutes and reply, 'Pete, my old china, you're drunk.'

PS. That pile of comics, I've been blathering on about, patient reader, is still in the basement of that house in France (my mother-in-law's as it happens). The scurrilous rumour that I, soon after discovering the hoard, did woo and marry the daughter of the house simply to gain possession of said treasure is, unlike the house in question, wholly without foundation - By Toutatis! ■



Asterix stories are all published by Hodder & Stoughton. Two new omnibus editions are to be published shortly: *Asterix the Strong* - a paperback bind-up of *Asterix in Britain* and *Asterix and Cleopatra* (0 340 61947 3, £4.99); and a hardback bind-up of *Asterix in Spain*, *Asterix in Britain*, *Asterix and Cleopatra*, *Asterix and the Soothsayer*, *The Twelve Tasks of Asterix* and *Obelix & Co* (0 340 62658 5, £9.99).

Among the festivities to celebrate 25 Years of Asterix in Great Britain will be a one-day Convention at the Commonwealth Institute, London on Saturday, 17th September 1994.

The Convention will include something for Asterix fans of all ages - games and competitions, discussions and literary debates, as well as stands from Parc Asterix and Sega. Albert Uderzo will be the guest of honour and there'll even be a wild boar buffet!

If you'd like to know more about it, contact Andrea Reece of Hodder & Stoughton at 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH (tel: 071 873 6212).

Colin McNaughton is ... well, do we really need to tell you? His latest title, *Captain Abdul's Pirate School*, has just been published by Walker Books (0 7445 2562 4) at £10.99. Wisely, his friend Pete wishes to remain anonymous.

UDERZO  
&  
GOSCINNY



# 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 review.

## Nursery/Infant REVIEWS

### The Minister's Cat ABC

Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin (Feb 94),  
0 14 054952 8, £3.99

Another cat classic from Lynley Dodd. Children from across the Infant age-range had huge fun being re-introduced to her well-loved, distinctively different cats and their owners. Vivid illustrations full of typical feline majesty and movement match exactly the aptly selected adjectives - which read alphabetically as if, almost, by accident.

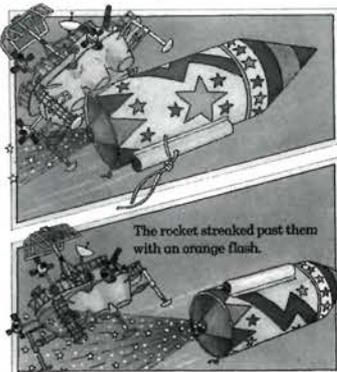


The Minister's cat is a  
**C**razy cat,

Total attention is demanded on every page as the reader/listener meets the Airborne, Busy, Crazy, Dizzy Minister's cat, the Quarrelsome, Rough Farmer's cat and is driven on to a 'Zooming' finale with the Postman's cat. An extremely rich book at many levels. **GR**

### The Mice on the Moon

Rodney Peppé, Picture Puffin (Feb 94),  
0 14 054374 0, £3.99



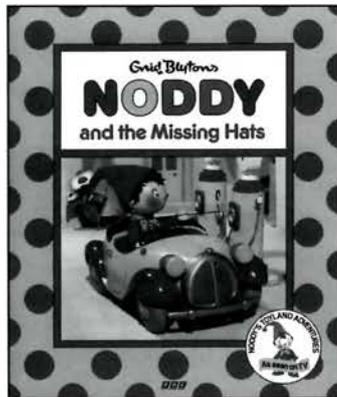
The rocket strooked past them  
with an orange flush.

Another Peppé success. This time, on discovering an unused firework, the mice family decide to go to the moon with the intention of finding out whether it's made of cheese - a wonderfully powerful incentive to the younger mice ... and to the dastardly D Rat! Following the winning formula of previous Mice books, it's well constructed and carefully thought through. The only disappointment to confirmed Peppé fans is the lack of the original photograph of the spaceship that we expect to find at the back - where is it, Mr Peppé and Puffin? **JS**

### Mr Little's Noisy Truck

Richard Fowler, Mammoth (May 94),  
0 7497 1025 X, £3.99

The fourth in the series of Mr Little books, all of which involve terrifying demands on the noise-making talents of a reader-aloud. A boldly printed story about the things carried in and on Mr Little's truck is combined with tiny factual captions labelling the parts of vehicles and machines with a wide range of sound effects. This ought to be an uneasy mix, but small children love all three aspects of the book and it will be popular with any under-5. **LW**



### Noddy and the Missing Hats

0 563 36886 1

### Noddy and the Useful Rope

0 563 36887 X

Enid Blyton, BBC Children's Books (Apr 94),  
£2.99 each

Whatever your views on Noddy, one can only bow to the artistry of Cosgrove Hall Productions and, I feel, accept the inevitable - the children love 'em! I tried, honestly I did - surreptitiously putting them on the shelf, hiding them amongst other books, giving them none of the fanfare intros I often give new titles - but Noddy prevailed. They've scarcely touched the shelves and demands for re-reads have been deafening, so I suggest you don't try to fight it - just give in and buy them. **JS**

### Guess Where?

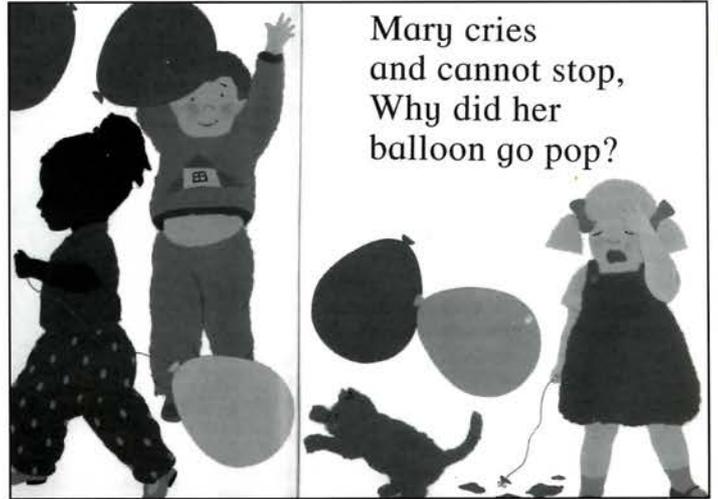
0 7445 3008 3

### Guess Why?

0 7445 20091

Pam Ayres, ill. Julie Lacome, Walker (Mar 94),  
£2.99 each

Two more titles in this delightful series. Julie Lacome's large, bright illustrations hold the answer to each of Pam Ayres' simple rhyme ques-



Mary cries  
and cannot stop,  
Why did her  
balloon go pop?

tions. The large clear print enables children to follow the words, the rhythm of which, when read aloud, triggers a spontaneous rush to be first with the answer. 4- and 5-year-olds, individually or in groups, found these books great fun. Invaluable for developing observational skills and a sense of rhythm in very young children. **GR**

### One Pink Pig

Sandy Nightingale, Picture Puffin (Mar 94),  
0 14 054864 5, £3.99

A beautifully designed counting book with bold print and lots of detail in the action-packed colourful illustrations. Active participation is prompted immediately with the 'How many?' question which forces keen examination of the first picture and necessitates practice in counting from one to ten before attention is given to each digit in turn on the subsequent pages. Lots of scope for improving observation and memory, reinforcing basic number work and a source of real enjoyment generally. All my infants really giggled at the pigs' antics. **GR**

### All About You

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Mammoth (Mar 94),  
0 7497 1297 X, £3.99

Does someone else live  
with you?



sister granny brother

Above, from **Guess Why?**

This book presents a series of questions such as 'Are you feeling hungry?', 'What do you like?', 'Where do you like to go?' and offers a wide range of possible answers in the form of one word and a matching picture. This will be a valuable stimulus in any infant classroom for it is directly relevant and easy to follow with well-spaced illustrations and large, clear print. Even the shyest class member was clamouring to contribute orally and several children enjoyed matching the words and pictures for themselves. The Anholts have produced another quality book which must neither be missed nor rushed over. **GR**

### Poems from the Sac Magique

**POETRY**

Jack Ousbey, ill. Penny Lane,  
Hippo (Mar 94),  
0 590 55740 8, £2.50



A collection of short poems, in an interestingly shaped book, all of which are based on the Channel 4 programme for small children, **Tots TV** - the series in which one of the characters speaks French - though none of the children I asked had ever watched it. This somewhat limited the appeal of the book for it relies heavily on the listener knowing the **Tots** as all the poems are about them - in fact, it's described as 'a reading experience to accompany the TV series'. The poems have a certain charm, however, and will be enjoyed by young fans of the programme. **GR**

# Infant/Junior REVIEWS



## Featherbrains

John Yeoman and Quentin Blake, Young Puffin (Feb 94),

0 14 036296 7, £2.99

Flossie and Bessie are accidentally released by Jack (daw) from their battery cage. At first they find the world outside strange – how can you walk on the ground when there's no wire to hold on to? – and want to go back to their 20,000 companions in the battery shed. But with the help of the worldly-wise Jack, they discover what it's like to be real chickens.

John Yeoman uses humour and irony in this entertaining exposé of factory farming, egged on by Quentin Blake, whose scruffy and naïve hens are a treat to behold. **JB**

## The Witches of Creaky Cranky Castle

Victoria Whitehead, ill. Jan Smith, Orchard (Mar 94),

1 85213 606 5, £3.50



These witches are gloriously inefficient! They need to raise money from the Real World for castle repairs and decide a magazine competition will be the answer. With few clear ideas about how things work, not surprisingly, everything begins to go wrong. Their magic soon begins to wane and when part of their paraphernalia goes missing it takes outside help to resolve their problems. **PH**

## The Smell That Got Away

Rosemary Hayes, ill. Tony Blundell, Young Puffin (Feb 94),

0 14 034807 7, £3.25

This is a tremendous read-aloud, with a wonderful hook in the wildly eccentric Mr Bentwhistle, a new teacher joining Class 4. The deviously appropriate retribution he metes out to the inquisitive duo, who have the temerity to pinch one of his mysterious boxes, and the hilarious consequences of their action is guaran-

teed to have children/readers sitting on the edge of their seats. Although in a large font size, the text is not as easy as the 'Read Alone' title suggests. However, the compelling plot, supportive illustration and clever use of cliffhangers at the end of each chapter ensure this will undoubtedly be a winner. Tony Blundell's extravagant linedrawings perfectly match the text which was most appositely described by one young reviewer as 'zappy and doesn't let you stop until you get to the end!' **JS**

## Clever Clive / Loopy Lucy

Joan Lingard, ill. Jacqui Thomas, Young Piper

'Flippers' (Mar 94),

0 330 33292 9, £2.99

This '2 books in 1' format always appeals and these two stories have been very popular. Joan Lingard brings a twist of the unusual to an everyday situation. Clever Clive amazes everyone, including himself, when he can suddenly and most uncharacteristically provide an instant answer to any question he's asked. Loopy Lucy loves doing cartwheels. One day she loops over a high wall into a new and magical garden which others see only as a piece of wasteland used to dump rubbish. These are both stories to be read and re-read, delightfully and helpfully illustrated, to be shared with children or ideal for the child who is in the early stages of solo reading. **JS**

## More Stories for 6 Year Olds

Compiled by Julia Eccleshare, ill. Barbara Walker, Young Lions

(Feb 94),

0 00 674723 X, £3.50

My inbuilt resistance to compilations such as these has been totally overcome by this collection. Virtually every story has so appealed to a bunch of very discerning 6-year-olds that I'm currently having to hunt for the first *Stories for 6 Year Olds* selected by Julia Eccleshare! Traditional stories, stories from different cultures, humorous ones, unusual and haunting ones all rest within these covers so that this 'red' book already has the well-worn look of a favourite. **JS**

## Tom Takes Tea / Tom the Hero

Althea Braithwaite, ill. Rob McCaig, Young Piper

'Flippers' (Mar 94),

0 330 33291 0, £2.99

Two more really satisfying stories in the 'Flippers' series. Althea Braithwaite's sure touch and empathy for animals, matched with Rob McCaig's gently humorous illustrations, give us a charming character – Tom, Hannah's pet dog – who struggles wistfully on and, though woefully misunderstood, rises unwittingly to hero status and thoroughly enjoys it. **JS**



## Jump!

Michelle Magorian, ill. Jan Ormerod, Walker (Apr 94),

0 7445 2073 8, £3.99

'Real boys don't go to dance classes' is Mum's genuinely horrified response to jump-crazy Steven's desperate pleas to join ballet lessons. Steven's enthusiasm and Mum's authoritative concern are parallel forces running throughout as both compromise by allowing, and participating in, basketball and a starring role in the 'basketball dance', with the final acceptance that 'real' boys can dance. 6- and 7-year-olds made enlightening admissions regarding school PE and much valuable discussion resulted generally. The sensitive and relevant storyline, combined with plentiful, lively illustrations, makes this book a potential success with many age groups. **GR**

## Another Custard Pie

Roger McGough, ill. Graham Percy, Picture Lions (Feb 94),

0 00 664351 5, £3.99

Joining a circus is rather different from waking up to find the circus has not only joined you, but taken over your house. This hilarious and zany twist of fate delivers a Big Top to the living room, a fire-eater to the fire-place, a seal (with a potty on its nose) to the bath and 'A custard pie in the face' at every doorway. Mum, Dad and poor Aunt Flo are subjected to some amazing treatment. The cleverly crazy illustrations are a brilliant addition to this exhaustingly funny book, making it a must for all ages. **GR**

## Sailor Bear

Martin Waddell, ill. Virginia Austin, Walker (Mar 94),

0 7445 3150 0, £3.99

This book chronicles Small Bear's adventures as he bravely tries to solve the two major problems of being lost and having no one to play with.

The recurring 'Now what shall I do?' ensures the reader's total involvement in his predicaments and when, eventually, a very sad Small Bear is forced to 'give up' the most poignant part of the book is reached. Hopeless, alone and silent, printed words also cease as Virginia Austin's vivid illustrations continue the tale

alone for two double-pages. Thankfully there's the contrast of a happy ending. A sad/happy story which infants loved and independent readers will enjoy for themselves. **GR**

## Julian, Dream Doctor

Ann Cameron, ill. Lis Toft, Yearling (Apr 94),

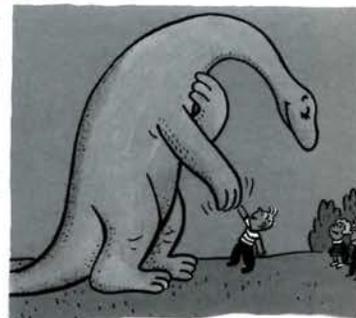
0 440 86315 5, £2.50

Julian is set on giving his father the birthday present of his dreams. The problem is, what is dad's dream? 'Sleep talkers always tell the truth,' Gloria assures him, so when dad falls asleep in the hammock one Saturday afternoon the perfect opportunity presents itself. Then it's surprises all round!

Warmth, humour and vivid imagery – 'My mum is like a cool green planet with forests and flowers and waterfalls. Any place around her is a good place to be,' Julian tells us are the hallmarks of the Julian stories and this one is no exception. Perfect for sharing or for solo enjoyment. **JB**

## Danny and the Dinosaur

0 7497 1670 3



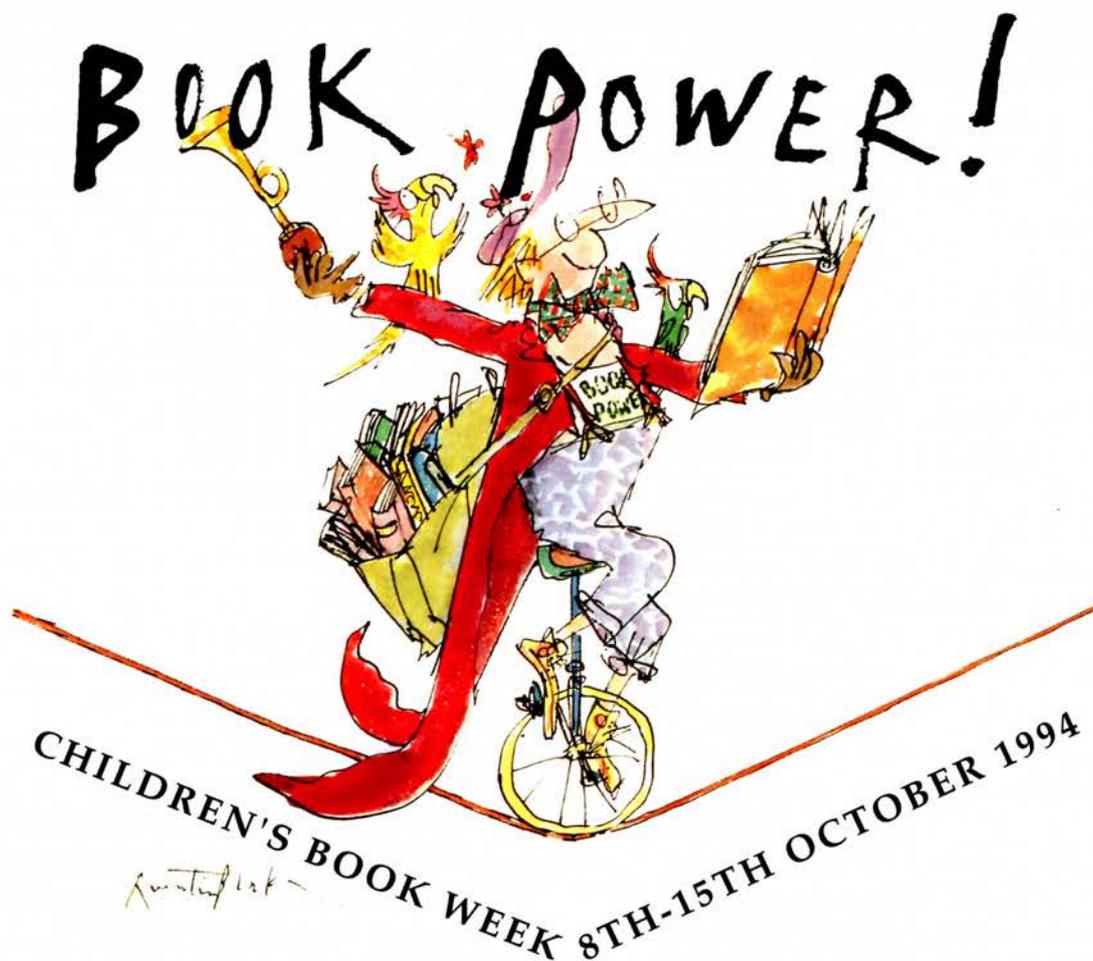
## Stanley

0 7497 1661 4

Syd Hoff, Mammoth (Apr 94),

£3.50 each

When these two classic 'I Can Read' stories (about Stanley, the kind and civilised caveman, and a small boy's day of adventure in the company of a dinosaur) were first published, TV was in black-and-white: colour was added by the imagination. Today the full-colour fantasy world of advertisements and computer games demands and distracts the attention of children. In such a world, the more subdued appearance of the original titles with their limited use of colour may have been thought to be in danger of being ignored. But it's the humour and simplicity of the stories which have proved so appealing to generations of apprentice readers. These strengths and the added attraction of full-colour illustrations should ensure their continued appeal with today's more sophisticated children. That the world has grown smaller is reflected in the fact that British children are now thought able to cope with the American texts. **JB**



Relish the challenge of Book Power! The Daily Telegraph Children's Book Week (8th–15th October) is the largest investment in children's reading in the UK. Readers and non readers will be encouraged to join in the fun at the BBC Big Bash exhibition, at Readathon events and on the Book Bus. Keep an eye out for the The Daily Telegraph Readathon Live – a big, bold reading marathon to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the sponsored read that raises money for sick children.

Enrol your school for The Daily Telegraph Children's Book Week and you'll receive the 1994 School's Pack (free of charge). This includes colourful posters, bookmarks and stickers designed by Quentin Blake, a definitive handbook crammed with ideas and activities, plus Readathon materials and gifts for each child.

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### THE DAILY TELEGRAPH CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK '94 ENROLMENT FORM REQUEST

*Complete and return to Phyllida Onslow, The Daily Telegraph, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DT*

Please send me an information leaflet and enrolment form for Children's Book Week 1994.

The Book Week Pack containing a definitive Handbook, 2XA2 posters, 1XA2 events poster, 100 bookmarks, 100 stickers, calendar of Book Week events plus special Readathon materials is free to schools. Additional packs available at £5 plus VAT (£5.87 – please make cheques payable to The Telegraph plc).

Name of teacher organising Book Week \_\_\_\_\_

School Name \_\_\_\_\_

Full mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

*Block capitals please*

# CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

## The Daily Telegraph



## Jemima Sweet the Police Officer

Margaret Ryan, ill. Caroline Crossland, Young Puffin (Feb 94),  
0 14 036280 0, £2.99

A rather charming collection of stories about a young black woman police officer and the everyday events of her working life. These are rather tame compared with, say, *The Bill*, but they're all the sort of activities young children will be used to seeing the police engaged in; traffic duty, school road safety talks, even

dealing with a bag snatcher in the park (there's a sponge cake involved . . . but I won't spoil it for you). All right, it lacks guns and car chases but I see this as a bonus. Good for reading aloud or for young fluent readers to tackle themselves. **LW**

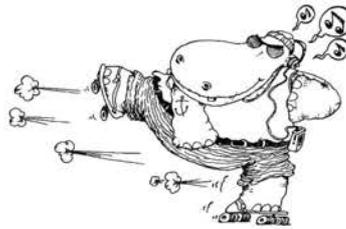
## Does Daniel Wilmott Tell Lies?

Juliet Martin, ill. David Johnstone, Picture Puffin (Feb 94),  
0 14 050324 3, £3.99



This is a wonderful book for both adult and child. David Johnstone is a brilliant illustrator with such a good eye for body language in his depiction of the wonderfully ghastly Daniel Wilmott and his doubting audience, as well as the tongue-in-cheek humour of the double-spreads showing Aunt Johanna's exploits . . . according to Daniel. Juliet Martin's storyline is just right, as is her use of rhythm and repetition which inevitably compels audience participation. The twist at the end of the tale finishes the whole thing perfectly. **JS**

# Junior/Middle REVIEWS



## Hippopotamus Dancing and other poems

Brian Moses, ill. Frank James, Cambridge (Mar 94), 0 521 44684 8, £3.95

Very often the best kept secret in writing is the moment when authors or poets suddenly realise an idea would make a smashing story, poem, play, whatever. Brian Moses, with unheard of generosity, allows us into that magical moment giving us millions of ideas we can use to create poems of our own. Sandy Brownjohn lit the torch but Brian Moses waves it high for all to see. **PH**

ries capture the eternal timeless quality of the Aboriginal dreamtime in the first and the speech rhythms of the North American Indians in the second. Both books have beautiful illustrations with masses of detail to talk about, count and ponder on. The colours are rich, clear and crisp and the styles vary from page to page - silhouettes, print, repeated patterns and annotated cartoons - all adding lively interest. **PH**

## The Moon Lady

Amy Tan, ill. Gretchen Shields, Picture Puffin (Apr 94), 0 14 054575 1, £4.99

A book of very delicate, exotic illustrations - they would make a valuable resource for any art lesson as well as gracing this story of the Chinese Moon Festival. Grandmother tells her three granddaughters the story on a wet day when they are fractious and want to go out. The story is powerful and compelling with the text and illustrations complementing each other perfectly. I love the languid quality to the water and the detail of each feather on the birds. This one is a pleasure. **PH**

## The Indian Trilogy

Lynne Reid Banks, Lions (Mar 94), 0 00 674952 6, £5.99

Three for the price of one! Lynne Reid Banks' classics - *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *Return of the Indian* and *The Secret of the Indian* - gathered together in one volume. If, by an extraordinary stroke of ill luck, you missed these gems first time round, lose no time in getting this omnibus edition. They're superb stories of a small plastic Indian, Little Bull, who comes to life when his owner, Omri, places him in a small cupboard which he's been given as a present.



No whimsical characters here, but real flesh and blood people who fight battles, pick quarrels and fall in love. The reader is drawn into their world and becomes engrossed in how Little Bull and the other figures which are brought to life cope with being transported into another world. 8-year-olds upwards are captivated by these stories. **VB**

## Knock Down Ginger and other poems

Brian Moses, ill. Jolyon Webb, Cambridge (Mar 94), 0 521 44683 X, £3.95

Poems based on everyday school life with introductions to each one from the author. Brian Moses draws on his time as a teacher with these sharply observed verses - playground duty, taking part in 'Readathon' and harvest festivals. Particularly useful is the final chapter on working with poems in class - he suggests using words and poems as catalysts for encouraging further creative writing. A pity the black and white illustrations give such a dated look to this useful collection. **VB**

## My Granny is a Sumo Wrestler

Gareth Owen, ill. John Bendall-Brunello, Young Lions (Feb 94), 0 00 674883 X, £3.50

The title poem and the cover picture which illustrates it give, perhaps, too flippant a first impression of the interesting and very varied poems on offer here. Many of them have the slapstick humour and rhythmic vigour of the opener, but there are also mournful poems and frighteners, surrealistic nonsense poems and quiet reflections on creation and transience. This is a rich and highly recommended collection. **GH**

## Saint George and the Dragon

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Nicki Palin, Oxford (Feb 94), 0 19 272276 X, £3.50

A lucid and powerfully illustrated retelling of the Christian legend. Geraldine McCaughrean's prose is economical but with telling poetic flourishes reminiscent of folk tale. The fiery paintings which surround the print present a traditional, chivalric idealisation of the hero and a vivid account of the horrors within the besieged city. George's departure into sainthood and folklore is strikingly conveyed by both text and image, and is alluded to in an interesting historical postscript which emphasises the universality of the dragon-slaying archetype. A splendid book for storytime and for supporting topics on myths and legends. **GH**



**Tiger Roars, Eagle Soars**  
Ruskin Bond, ill. Valerie Littlewood, Walker 'Doubles' (Mar 94),  
0 7445 3177 2, £2.99

Two stories from the 1980s about endangered species of animals, reissued in Walker's sturdy, attractive and good value 'Doubles' series. In the first story, a solitary tiger takes to attacking buffalo and is hunted down by villagers who cannot afford to indulge his tastes. In the second, a shepherd in a Himalayan community fights to protect his family's sheep from the depredations of a pair of golden eagles. Both stories are short, simple and exciting. They neither wax sentimental about the animals whose strength and beauty they depict, nor exoticise the lives of the communities who struggle against these animals. Excellent as read-aloud stories, and for stimulating discussion about the issues involved. **GH**

## Survival Guide to Parents

Scoular Anderson,  
0 00 674739 6

## Survival Guide to School

Brough Girling, ill. Judy Brown,  
0 00 674740 X

Lions (Jan 94), £2.99 each

Two farcical books that have wicked caricatures of everyone and everything we meet in school and that children see in their parents. In the

## What Made Tiddalik Laugh

0 14 050674 8

## How Rabbit Stole the Fire

0 14 050667 5

Joanna Troughton, Puffin 'Folk Tales of the World' (Mar 94), £4.99 each

Lovely read-alouds. These two sto-



But still Tiddalik did not laugh.

# THE WORST WITCH ALL AT SEA

by Jill Murphy

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**PUFFIN BOOKS. Growing up with your children.**

**Survival Guide to School** we meet Laura Ashili, a gentle, sunlit, flowery creature who inhabits her classroom like a fragile butterfly. Montessori would have felt at home here and the Nat. Curric. can't even get a toehold. The **Survival Guide to Parents** has, among the cartoons and text, a very witty subplot with dinosaurs demanding their civil rights in a 'Fair

Treatment for Dinosaurs Campaign'. There's masses of activity in both books; they're truly interactive with things to fill in and puzzles to do. No one will doze off while reading these two. PH

**The Children Next Door**  
Jean Ure, Scholastic  
(Feb 94), 0 590 54150 1, £5.99

Jean Ure is probably thought of primarily as a writer for teenagers, but this engaging novel shows that she can produce just as satisfying a story for junior readers. Laura, newly

moved to a Victorian terraced house, longs to befriend the brother and sister who play in the garden next door. Slowly she pieces together the fragments of an old tragedy and realises how she can comfort a dying old woman. Even for alert readers who will be a step or two ahead of Laura, there are surprises in store, and a warm-hearted ending. LN

## Middle/Secondary REVIEWS



**The Echoing Green**  
Mary Rayner, ill. Michael Foreman, Puffin (Mar 94), 0 14 036006 9, £3.25

Michael Foreman's distinctive illustrations make this an obvious companion to *War Boy* and *War Game*, even if the text is not his. While staying with Great-Aunt Kitty, Kath feels keenly the contrast between her own family and the strained atmosphere of Aunt Kitty's cottage. It takes time for her to understand the long-standing bitterness, re-awakened by poppy day, that she senses beneath the superficial calm around her.

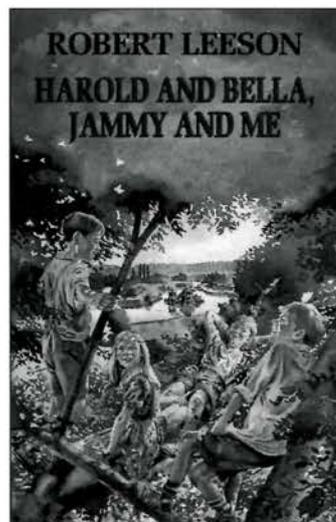
An unusually constructed story where memories of the First World War and the army camp come and go, flickering in Chalkie White's conversation like a wind-blown candle. The present and the past have little importance amid the timeless suffering Kath sees around her. PH

**My Hand is Elastic**  
Award-winning entries from the 1993 W H Smith Young Writers' Competition, Pan Macmillan (Apr 94), 0 333 60636 1, £4.99

It's not unexpected, but always so cheering, to find in these collections such lively writing and so many nuggets to read aloud and share. As you enjoy the immediacy and freshness of young authors at their best, you wonder what occasions allowed this creativity to be caught in writing – and how much more exists in the children you teach, if only it could be released? A book all teachers need to read and share with their pupils. AJ

**The Puffin Book of Song and Dance**

Chosen by Jan Mark, Puffin (Mar 94), 0 14 034752 6, £3.99  
A collection based in drama, dance and music. The links are mostly a good reason to gather some individual stories and extracts from novels, including *A Little Lower Than the Angels*, *A Swarm in May* and *The Enchanted Castle*. There's a funny William story interpreting Shakespeare and strong contributions by Denis Hamley and Adèle Geras. Ideal for teachers to read from and for children to dip into and gain tasters of some excellent books. AJ



**Harold and Bella, Jammy and Me**  
Robert Leeson, Mammoth (Mar 94), 0 7497 1576 6, £2.99

A welcome reissue of this collection of stories which centre on the lives of four friends in a small northern town just before the outbreak of the Second World War and just before the narrator wins a scholarship to grammar school. The stories are sharply detailed, warm and often funny, with the discoveries of childhood and relationships embedded in adventures like the search of the caves where King Arthur and his knights might still sleep or in just listening to blind Ollie tell of the landscapes of the old salt workings. Excellent for reading aloud. AJ

**The Naming of William Rutherford**  
Linda Kempton, Mammoth (Apr 94), 0 7497 1581 2, £3.50

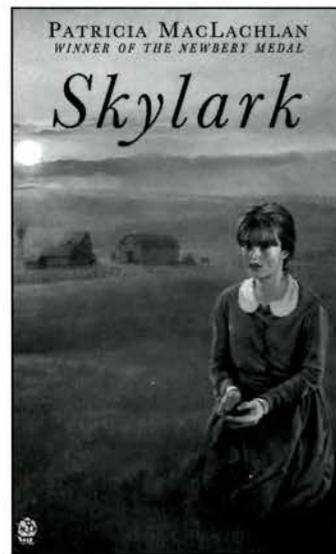
Another book based on the outbreak of the plague in Eyam in 1665. Jack's parents are doctors and his mother is expecting another child. The wood-

en crib she buys is what enables Jack to go back in time to Eyam where the crib was first made and used. When the plague breaks out Jack uses his links with the present to bring a cure for the plague-stricken baby. The life of the Eyam family is finely recreated and it's very moving, in retrospect, to discover what happened to them.

A worthy complement to *A Parcel of Patterns* by Jill Paton Walsh. AJ

**Final Act**  
Robin Campbell, Fantail 'Cold Blood' (Mar 94), 0 14 090402 6, £2.99

First in a series of packaged suspense stories with a horror/mystery format. The ingredients are well presented – skeletons (literally) in cupboards, shadowy half-recognised figures up to sinister mischief, red-herring suspects, a bit of local legend, witchcraft and gruesome death, a smidgeon of 'lurve' and hey presto everything is sorted out admirably at the end. Let's not knock it – most teenagers I know will read and enjoy this, swiftly moving on to the next from the production line! DB



**Skylark**  
Patricia MacLachlan, ill. Elsie Lennox, Lions (Mar 94), 0 00 674962 3, £2.99

Slight in length but not in its capacity to provoke thought, this carries on from the award-winning *Sarah Plain and Tall*.

Longed-for rain doesn't come to the prairie and, despite their initial resilience, Caleb, Anna and their step-mother, Sarah, eventually concede that they must remove themselves to the latter's original home back east. Then the children understand for themselves the longing Sarah must have been suppressing

for the green wetness of Maine.

This is so beautifully written it wraps itself around you from start to finish. Highly recommended for serious readers. DB

**Saving the Dinosaurs**  
Jane Waller, Piper (Mar 94), 0 330 33098 5, £3.50

An environmentally-aware story with an unusual twist and one that will be a source of delight to readers in Years 7 and 8.



Peter Phillips receives a mysterious computer disc, rather different from the one he ordered, and realises he can timetravel by using its program. He journeys to the Cretaceous Age where he's befriended by two dinosaurs, Jahunda and Segui. He repays their friendship by rescuing them from the after-effects of a giant meteorite's collision with the earth.

Descriptions throughout vividly recreate a prehistoric world and the empathy achieved through Peter's friendship with the dinosaurs engenders a real appreciation of life 65 million years ago. This is a remarkable book, ambitious but totally accessible, educational but enthralling. VR

**Stonewords**  
Pam Conrad, Puffin (Mar 94), 0 14 036378 5, £3.50

Zoe lives with her grandparents since her mother's wandering spirit keeps her away from home. Young children often have imaginary friends, so when she begins playing with Zoe Louise her grandparents take little notice.

Zoe Louise died 100 years ago in a fire and she haunts the house, trying to draw Zoe into her time – with eerie consequences. Zoe determines to save her friend from death and by using the time travel Zoe Louise has taught her, she's able to do so.

Stated baldly, the plot seems contrived and formulaic – but this is far from the case. Pam Conrad's descriptions of the time-travel are remarkable – subtle, detailed and very readable. On offer here is a very accomplished reworking of an old theme. It will absorb lovers of gently haunting tales from Years 7 to 9. VR

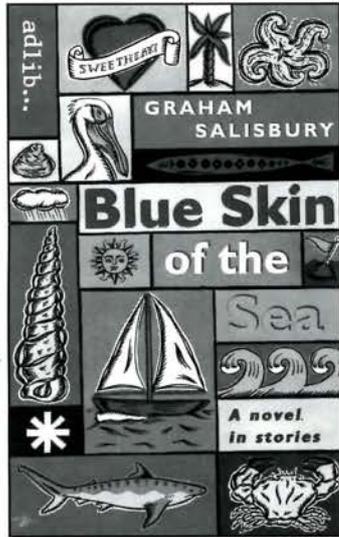
# Older Readers REVIEWS

## Driven to Death

Anne Cassidy, Scholastic  
'Point Crime' (Mar 94),  
0 590 55429 8, £2.99

Laurie Drake is in fact a little tease with a penchant for older men. However, her friend Jessie and erstwhile boyfriend don't know that when they set out to investigate the real circumstances behind the devious Laurie's suicide. Their trail leads them not only into unexpected places, including Jessie's own father's secret hoard of photos, but also into the den of a druggie with a stanley-knife.

Fast, read-it-and-move-on-to-the-next-in-the-series stuff that keeps many kids plugged in to print for bit longer. **DB**



## Blue Skin of the Sea

Graham Salisbury,  
Scholastic 'Adlib' (Mar 94),  
0 590 55427 1, £5.99

This multi-award-winning novel comes as 11 stories set between 1953 and 1966 on the Hawaiian Big Island, charting the childhood and youth of Sonny Mendoza. He's an islander, living in a fishing community, who fears the sea, is bewilderingly out of kilter with his close-knit family and at a painful distance from his widower father.

Sonny's journey into adulthood is set with milestones that will be identifiable to any culture and is written with such sensitivity and sharply drawn observation that it cannot fail to be good for the soul. **DB**

## Breaking the Ties

Bette Paul,  
Scholastic 'Adlib' (Mar 94), 0 590 55426 3, £5.99

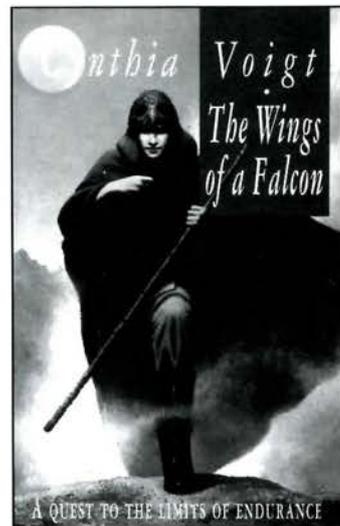
The book begins as Dorinda becomes 18 and everything changes dramatically. The life and the past she's run away from is gradually revealed, rediscovered and come to terms with as Dorinda returns to her old home as new owner, financially independent. She's now able to educate herself formally and informally, schooling herself in her own person-

al history, learning about her mother who died as she was born, the secrets of her step-brother Jem's birth and the repressed emotions of her relationship with him. As she does so, she's able to break the ties – and reforge them for a new future that builds on her past. This is a strong novel of selfrealisation but I fear that constraints of GCSE and Revised National Curriculum set texts will make it harder for teachers and students to discover it – and perhaps it ought to be sixth-formers who read it. **AJ**

## Falling Apart

Jacqueline Wilson, Lions  
'Tracks' (Mar 94),  
0 00 674053 7, £3.99

Never has a novel portrayed the pain of first love so accurately! The highs and lows of that tortured state are devastatingly depicted here. 15-year-old Tina is still coming to terms with the accidental death of her twin brother when she meets Simon, a pupil at Christopher's, the posh public school. The two have an intense relationship with Tina trying desperately to be the sophisticate she thinks Simon admires. Suddenly, he tells her he wants to end the relationship and she is devastated. There seems to be only one way out. A compassionate, realistic and totally honest novel... Forget 'Sweet Dreams', 'Point Romance' and the rest of the Never-Never Land narratives; try this one instead. **VB**



## The Wings of a Falcon

Cynthia Voigt, Lions  
(Mar 94), 0 00 674621 7, £3.99

Cynthia Voigt has created a legend – Oriel, boy-prisoner on a despot's island, with his travelling companion, Griff, escape their master's clutches and journey together in search of their fortunes. Oriel is a boy born to rule, Griff to follow – but as adviser, guide and friend.

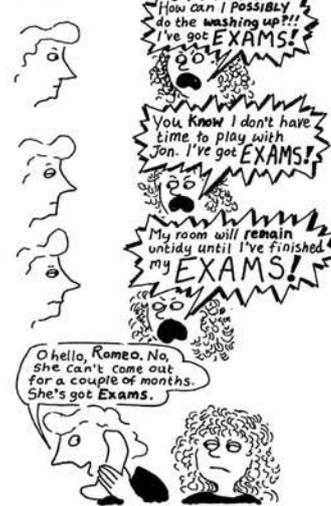
Their travels are long – almost 500 pages – and end in both triumph and tragedy with the customary skilful Voigt sting in the tale. This is her best writing since the Tillerman family series, but it's dense and philosophical, making it most appropriate for able Year 9 readers.

I feel a sequel coming on... **VR**

## Everybody else does! Why can't I?

Yvonne Coppard, ill. Ros  
Asquith, Puffin Plus  
(Mar 94), 0 14 036595 8, £3.50

This sequel to *Not Dressed Like That, You Don't* sees an older (and somewhat wiser) Jenny and her mother diaring their various traumas. In Jenny's case, these are the looming threat of GCSEs and friends' problems; in her mother's, a late pregnancy after a romantic trip to Paris.



All the required ingredients are here – humour, accessible yet thoughtful writing and unerring relevance to the modern teenager. The tone never patronises, it simply explores and empathises in a highly entertaining way. Buy at least two copies for the bookshelf. This will be very popular. **VR**

## The Attic

T S Rue, Lions  
'Nightmares' (Jan 94),  
0 00 674776 0, £2.99

Consider this: four girls with names as mundane as Brittany and Sierra stay for a long weekend in the strangely deserted New Arcadia Inn. Inexplicable accidents befall them and curious noises emanate from above their room. Tessa is arachnophobic, but during a game of Truth or Dare the four girls become trapped in the attic at the mercy of a giant spider called Fluffy who is taken on nightly walks by the hotel's owner, Sebastian. (Really!)

All the girls die – three are wound in spider's web cocoons and Tessa plunges to her death from the attic window. Sadly, Nick, 'a good-looking guy... with wavy chestnut-coloured hair, dark blue eyes and a shy smile', is unable to save her.

In the words of Brittany, that 'tall, slim redhead with the brittle personality' – Chill Out! **VR**

## The Snow-Walker's Son

Catherine Fisher, Red Fox  
(Mar 94), 0 09 919351 5, £2.99

A chilling fantasy land of ice and snow is the setting for this novel which has echoes of Andersen's 'Snow Queen' and the Norse myths. Gudrun, the terrifying Ice Witch, has

banished her son to the ends of the Earth to live out his days in the freezing darkness. No one had ever set eyes on him – was he the monster the legend suggested or worse? When Jess and Thorkhill, the last survivors of their race, are also banished by Gudrun, the two embark on a perilous journey to join him in his icy prison. But their journey's end reveals a surprising discovery.

Competent readers, especially fantasy enthusiasts, will enjoy this imaginative and unusual read. **VB**

## The Ghosts of Glencoe

Mollie Hunter, Canongate  
Kelpie (Mar 94),  
0 86241 467 9, £2.99

Fort William, 1691, and Robert Stewart's regiment is overseeing the defeated Scottish clans' swearing of the oath of allegiance to the hated William III of England. Knowing full well that he will not arrive in time before the deadline expires, the Chief of the McDonald's is sent on to Inverary, ostensibly to swear in front of a civil authority. The scene is then set for the most treacherous betrayal in Scots' history.

Robert Stewart's regiment, under the leadership of Campbell of Glenlyon, a distant kinsman of the McDonald's, is ordered into Glencoe to put the entire clan to the sword. Stewart is faced with a terrible dilemma – obey orders as a soldier or listen to his conscience.

The author brings alive this bloody episode which is still spoken of with bitterness today. **VB**

## Blue Remembered Hills

**ORIGINAL**

Rosemary Sutcliff, Bodley  
Head (Mar 94),  
0 370 30940 5, £8.99

I put down this autobiography with a real sense of loss and a desire to become better acquainted with its writer: too late, of course. The book ends where Sutcliff's career begins and a sequel would have been most welcome. It's a warm, lively story of a woman struck down in infancy by the arthritis which was to cripple but never quell her.

Most striking are her achievements and redoubtable personality, her honesty and evocative descriptions of family and friends. Most moving is the account of her love affair with Rupert King: a remarkable relationship.

This would make a welcome addition to school or class library for older, able readers who are devotees of Rosemary Sutcliff's work. **VR**

## Reviewers in this issue:

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

# Audio REVIEWS

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

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

## The Very Hungry Caterpillar and Other Stories

Eric Carle, read by Roger McGough and Juliet Stevenson, one cassette, 1 hr, Speaking Volumes, £4.99

Eric Carle's classic caterpillar story still sells 100,000 copies every year in the UK and now it's on audio and video. These five stories have a charm which the presentation enhances. Iain Harvey wrote the music for this and for *The Snowman* and *Father Christmas*. It rises stirringly when the butterfly emerges and when the cricket finally manages to produce his telephone-ring cricket noise. The insect sounds are clear and bright and the narrators are well chosen, capturing the wistful nature of the stories which include Monica, who wanted the moon, and the Confused Chameleon.

## Dogger and Other Stories

Shirley Hughes, read by Kevin Whately, one cassette with Red Fox pbk, 20 mins, Tellastory, £6.99

Three stories for the under-5s. Kevin Whately adopts the right tone of authority and conspiracy for these typical Shirley Hughes domestic adventures. Every young child has a Dogger and will immediately identify with bereft Dave who loses his beloved floppy-eared toy dog at the school fair. Sound effects on the tape – like Dave crying over the lost Dogger – add to the appeal of the stories.

## The Tale of Pigling Bland

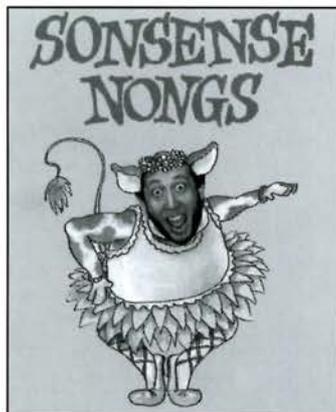
Beatrix Potter, performed by Niamh Cusack and cast, one cassette, 30 mins, BBC Young Collection, £3.99

An addition to the Beatrix Potter titles based on the original stories and the television animations. Pam Ferris is a flustered, maternal Aunt Pettitoes surrounded by squealing and guzzling pigs (just one of the many impressive sound effects). The farmer who plans to kill Pigling Bland before he escapes with the beautiful coal-black Pig-Wig is effectively sinister. The music is specially written and complements each stage in the narrative. It begins and ends with a hauntingly pretty little song and the music reaches a crescendo in the pigs' jig of exultant freedom with the pursuing farmer's angry cries echoing in the background.

## The Further Adventures of Farthing Wood

Based on stories by Colin Dann, dramatised by Valerie Georgeson, boxed set of four cassettes, 5 hrs, BBC Young Collection, £15.99

This attractive boxed set features both BBC television series with Ron Moody as Badger and Rupert Farley as Fox, the two leaders who shepherd the fleeing Farthing Wood animals to the safety of the nature reserve. Its environmental issues in animated animal form have proved immensely popular and this audio version, full of voices and sounds, leaves the imagination free. There are some realistically frightening army explosions and the animals' voices are full of personality – like Owl's supercilious speech that sends the animals to sleep, whilst Weasel deserves lynching for her laugh!



## Sonsense Nongs

Performed by Michael Rosen and Captain Keyboards (Peter Gosling), one cassette, 1 hr, Stickysongs (Huntsmans Cottage, Kennel Lane, Windlesham, Surrey GU20 6AA, tel: 0276 479255), £3.99

A & C Black published the book *Sonsense Nongs*, Michael Rosen's 'silly songs, daft ditties and loony lyrics for the young' which directly key into playground humour with a lively blend of pop and music hall. The musical arrangements with Peter Gosling are brilliantly inventive and the whole is great for car journeys. There are funny versions of well-known songs like 'Do Your Ears Hang Low?' and others with infectious choruses and the sort of silly-story songs children love. It's all so well produced that grown-ups won't be driven crazy. In fact, I think, they'll be happy to join in.

## First Term at Malory Towers

**The Twins at St Clare's**  
Enid Blyton, multi-voiced with narration by Jan Francis, two cassettes, 80 and 78 mins, Collins Audio, £5.99 each

There's still a place for these innocent school stories and this multi-voiced presentation draws on Enid Blyton's strengths. Schools like Malory Towers (with the 'Head of the Dormy') and St Clare's (with stern 'Mamselle' and 'decent' girls playing lacrosse and eating pork pies at mid-

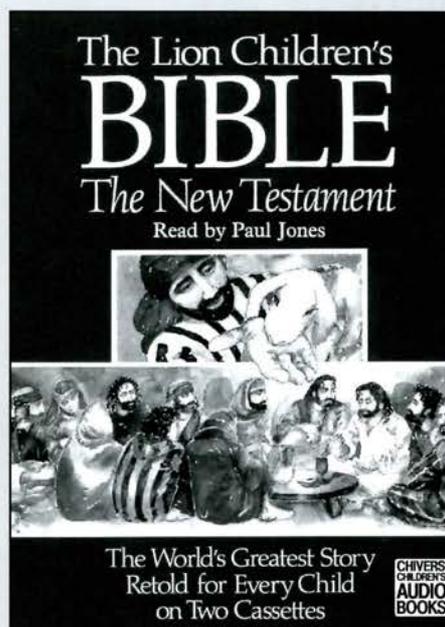
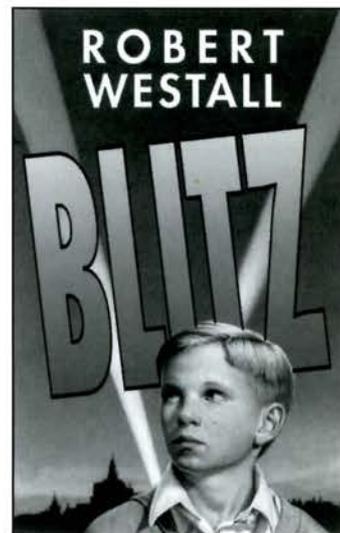
night) don't exist any more, but it's a scenario that continues to appeal. The extra dimension of the girls' whispers and giggles, with sound effects like the steam train leaving the station, add to the attraction of listening, as the stuck-up twins become better people at St Clare's and Darrell has adventures at Malory Towers.

## Blitz

Robert Westall, read by James Bolam and Susan Jameson, one cassette, 74 mins, Collins Audio, £4.40

A most impressive listening experience, this is one of Collins' new Author Collections specially written for Audio. The four short stories have the unmistakable hard-hitting Robert Westall stamp where the sympathy is with the ordinary soldier, not the cushioned officer. James Bolam has the right tone and accent for these startlingly real incidents from wartime Tyneside – like the souvenir-hunting boys who discover the crashed plane and the

dazed pilot-survivor whilst Susan Jameson conveys the suspense and fear of the girl whose father deserts. The sparing sound effects of sirens and air-raids add to the tension.



## The Lion Children's Bible

### The Old Testament / The New Testament

Retold by Pat Alexander, read by Paul Jones, 3 hrs 35 mins each pack, Chivers Cavalcade, £7.99 each

Paul Jones' narration tells the stories close to the Bible's words. He keeps the listener interested and the stories flow into one another, making a cohesive whole. Cavalcade is Chivers' retail sector; library editions are also available.

## Stories from The Bible

### The Old Testament / The New Testament

Retold by Jennifer Rees Larcombe, read by Sally Magnusson, 1 hr each single cassette, Collins Audio, £4.49 each

Jennifer Rees Larcombe offers us more contemporary retellings in these stories published only two years ago. The language is fresh – 'People need light, so God made the moon' – and there's plenty of lively dialogue which makes for pleasant listening.

[See also David Bennett's article on page 23 of this issue where he writes about current Bible story publications.]

# Authorgraph No. 87

K.M. Peyton

INTERVIEWED BY  
LINDA NEWBERY



Kathleen Peyton's Essex home is not unlike those inhabited by some of her characters: two farm cottages knocked into one, with an informal garden behind and views over open fields. Immediately inside the back door is evidence of an active country life – walking boots, waxed coats, and, not surprisingly to readers of K M Peyton, a saddle and bridle. Four horses, including Kathleen's own grey mare, graze in a field behind the house.

Horses appear frequently in Kathleen Peyton's books. Her knowledge and understanding of them, the excitement of riding and the hopes and disappointments of competing, are wonderfully conveyed in her writing, whether the setting is the modest Pony Club event of some of the younger novels, or the training-stable and race-track in books for teenagers and adults. The reader feels the surge of energy and smells the sweat: 'Jonathan never saw the tape at all, only the bank of horseflesh

bounding forward, tight frightened cars pricked to the sky, the gaudy colours jerked into motion. He felt the immense strength of his own horse lift him, heard the sudden thrilling pounding of hooves. His right leg was crushed against another momentarily; stirrups clinked, a curse, the straining of girth and leather and the tremendous pulling of Dogwood against his sweaty hands, almost more than he could contain . . . ' (The Last Ditch)

Against the glamour and thrill of top-class racing, Kathleen Peyton sets the sordid under-side of the horse world. In **The Sound of Distant Cheering**, stable-girl Rosie's favourite horse is sold to an unscrupulous owner when he develops an injury. "Oh, Jesus," Jeremy, the trainer, thinks; "who would be in the racing game! It was so magnificent at its best, seedy – to put it kindly – at the bottom. Human greed ruined it; the exploitation of one of the kindest, gamest animals on earth for money . . ."

Even when dreams do come true, real life gets in the way; in **Darkling**, where an impulse-bought colt turns out to be a winner, Jenny is faced with a tough decision: she can spend a year racing in the USA with her boyfriend Goddard, or stay at home to support her ailing and eccentric grandfather through a terminal illness. To be single-mindedly in pursuit of success, like Goddard, means being selfish as well.

As Kathleen Herald, K M Peyton had her first book published when she was at school. She still has exercise books with her juvenile stories, one of which was read by a teacher who encouraged her to submit it for publication. Unusual as this early success was, it didn't immediately suggest to Kathleen that her future career would be as a writer; she intended to be a painter, and trained at art school. The writing started up again when she and her husband, Mike, needed money and wrote thrillers for serialisation. 'Mike supplied the cliff-hanger endings for each episode; I did the actual writing.' Several of these adventure stories were later published; soon she wanted to do a 'proper book', on her own, and wrote **Windfall**. This, like her next few novels, was shortlisted for the Carnegie Award, which she won in 1969 with **The Edge of the Cloud**, the second part of the **Flambards** trilogy.

In **Flambards**, which must surely be regarded as a modern classic, Christina arrives at the decrepit Essex house as a 12-year-old orphan. Maturing, she becomes aware of the social inequalities of Edwardian life and of the very different brands of bravery demonstrated by her two cousins: Mark in the hunting field, Will in defying his tyrannical father. The end of this novel sees Christina leaving Flambards with Will; the story continues immediately in **The Edge of the Cloud**, where Will is trying to establish himself as a pioneer aviator. Fighting her terror, Christina joins him in a cross-Channel flight.

Kathleen Peyton demands a lot from her characters in terms of physical courage, I suggest. She agrees: 'I suppose I've had quite a physically

challenging life, and we are quite tough in our family.' (Besides the horse-riding, the Peytons are keen sailors, one of their daughters has crewed across the Atlantic.) Did Kathleen have the chance to fly in an early aircraft while researching the book? 'No, but I based it on plenty of times when I've been terrified. I've often thought I was going to die – more often at sea than anywhere else.'

Another kind of physical action is featured in a new teenage novel, **Snowfall**, with which Kathleen Peyton is justifiably pleased. She refers to it as 'a Mills and Boon', although of course

A prolific writer with more than 30 books to her name, made me wonder if the task of writing comes easily to Kathleen Peyton? 'I don't write very quickly and don't do much at a time, not like these people who sit and work at it all day long. Two pages would be quite a good day.' She works straight on to a word processor and hardly ever revises. Her books are now published by Transworld and Scholastic. 'You want support and encouragement from an editor. You want to feel that they're really interested in how your book's coming along, almost as if you're their only writer. David Fickling at Scholastic makes you feel that; so does Philippa

around that time that Kathleen won both the Carnegie and Guardian awards – the latter for the whole **Flambards** trilogy. 'It was tremendously gratifying, but it makes you worried that you've reached your peak. I went straight off and wrote **Pennington's Seventeenth Summer** and was convinced no one would read it.' She needn't have worried. She receives more letters about Pennington than about any other character, and Scholastic have just re-issued **Seventeenth Summer**, as it's now titled.

The 'teenage/almost grown-up' novel is her favourite, but she's branched out in both directions from there. Four adult novels, including **Dear Fred** and **The Sound of Distant Cheering**, were a new challenge: 'I wanted to see if I could do it. I got a lot out of it, even if only to learn that it's not really my cup of tea. But I enjoyed the freedom; I could be far more self-indulgent than I usually am. I'm much more severe with myself when working on my younger books.' At this other end of the age-range, she's written for the 'Cartwheels' first-reader series, illustrating two titles with her own water-colours, which provide a perfect match for the stories.

Kathleen Peyton makes light of her outstanding talent and achievements. Asked what she wants readers to get from her books, she replies: 'I just want them to enjoy reading, and keep turning the pages. I write to entertain; I don't want to harrow my readers, or preach to them. I've never set out to write a serious book to tell children something they ought to know, but of course your own views on life come out in your books.'

Are there more books to come? Yes – a book under way, two or three more waiting to be written, and good news for her admirers of all ages: 'When I stop having ideas I shall stop writing, but at the moment I still keep having ideas.' ■



Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Peyton fans will expect, and get, a good deal more than a formula story. Set in Victorian times, it's the story of vicar's daughter Charlotte, who breaks away from her sage background and the expectation of a dull marriage to join her brother and his friends on a climbing expedition in Switzerland. As well as showing the exhilaration of climbing, Kathleen depicts the beauties of the scenery with a painterly eye: *'The valley sank into dusk as the sun's fiery disc slipped away behind the ridge between the Weisshorn and the Zinal Rothorn. For a few minutes the upper snow slopes were bathed in the unearthly glow of sunset. The sky flared, faded; the crimson snow dissolved softly into grey light. The valley smelt of cold earth and glacier water ...'*

Dickinson at Transworld. A lot of editors don't understand what it's like, working in a vacuum. The literary world doesn't come out to meet you.'

Her work first came to prominence during the 'golden age' of children's publishing in the late sixties and early seventies, and she's been credited with being one of the first to establish the teenage novel. 'When I started, by pure coincidence a lot of others started to write for the same age group – Leon Garfield, Alan Garner, John Rowe Townsend. At that time Mabel George was at the Oxford University Press, an editor of colossal intelligence and integrity, and she built up a list of novels for teenage readership.' It was

#### Some of K M Peyton's books:

**Darkling**, Doubleday, 0 385 269633, £8.99; Corgi, 0 552 52594 4, £2.99 pbk

**Flambards**, Puffin, 0 14 034153 6, £3.50 pbk

**The Edge of the Cloud**, Puffin, 0 14 030905 5, £3.99 pbk

**Flambards in Summer**, Puffin, 0 14 034154 4, £3.50 pbk

**Flambards Divided**, Puffin, 0 14 034701 1, £2.99 pbk

**Fly-By-Night**, Red Fox, 0 09 926390 4, £2.99 pbk

**Thunder in the Sky**, Red Fox, 0 09 975150, £2.99 pbk

**The Wild Boy and Queen Moon**, Doubleday, 0 385 40310 0, £8.99

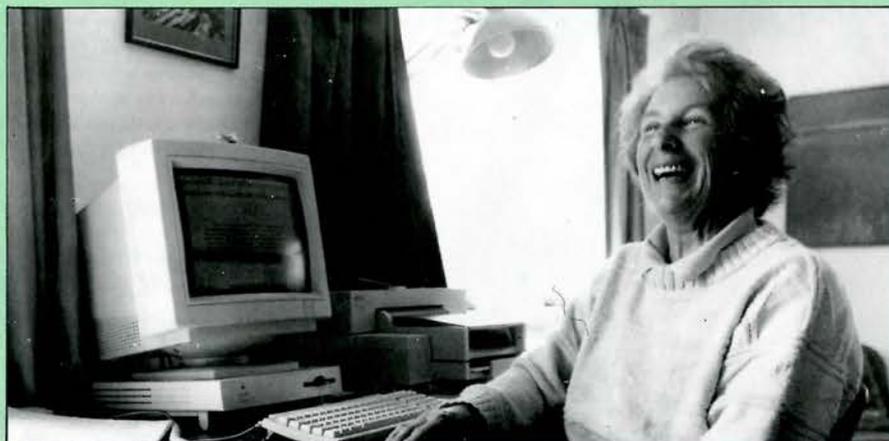
**Snowfall**, Scholastic, 0 590 54153 6, £6.99

**Seventeenth Summer**, Scholastic, 0 590 55443 3, £2.99 pbk

The 'Cartwheels' mentioned are **Plain Jack**, 0 241 12146 9, and **Apple Won't Jump**, 0 241 13111 1, published by Hamish Hamilton at £5.50 each.

Her adult novel, **The Sound of Distant Cheering**, is published by Bodley Head, 0 370 30700 3, £9.95.

**The Last Ditch** and **Windfall** are sadly now out of print.



# Non Fiction REVIEWS

## Changing Shape

0 7502 1062 1

## Making a Nest

0 7502 1060 5

Paul Bennett, Wayland (Nature's Secrets series), £8.50 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

Birds do it, bees do it, gorillas, moles and chimpanzees do it, according to this lively collection of nesting examples from across the animal kingdom. We discover that, like turtles, jackass penguins dig holes in the ground, termites build temples of earth taller than a bus and squirrels have both summer and winter dreys.



'In Africa the thick-billed weaver bird twists grass together to make its nest.'  
From *Making a Nest*.

*Changing Shape* shows us maggot to fly, tadpole to frog and the gradual flattening of a striped sole – among many others. It also, incidentally, shows us how apiarists change shape when they don their protective beekeeping gear.

Quite why the series is called 'Nature's Secrets' I don't know – everyone knows nests, and poets have been celebrating metamorphosis since Ovid – although I see we have hibernation and pollination to come so the justification may be eventual. Actually these two immensely likeable volumes are little more than a very well and widely selected collection of pictures with fulsome captions, the kind of thing you could make yourself – now there's an idea!

For those in need of further ideas but not new spectacles, there are some small-print 'notes for ... teachers' at the back, but these are no bar to the books' imaginative use. TP

## A Ruined House

Mick Manning, Walker (Read and Wonder series), 0 7445 2811 9, £7.99

INFANT UPWARDS

I always enjoy informal domestic ruins – our favourite walk has one as its halfway point – surrounded by intimations of mortality you realise that when 'uninhabited' a house is a home for more life than it was when people lived in it and discouraged competition. Mick Manning captures this feeling absolutely as he shows us a decaying stone house in a remote Northumbrian valley. From barn owls to lichens, we explore the diversity of wildlife that has taken up residence and we find clues as to the nature of the last human occupants, wondering why they left and where they went.

Right, from *A Ruined House*.

A simple text, hand-lettered and near poetic, accompanies Manning's atmospheric pictures – a telling mixture of soft washes and tactile wax-resists according well with meticulous delineation of artifacts and living things – to produce a book of satisfying wholeness. Here is a 'Read and Wonder' which retains and maintains the original spirit of the series (remember its brilliant start with Karen Wallace's *Eel*), which is very gratifying when some of the intervening members have not been half as good. All the more reason, then, for buying this one and helping convince publishers that quality pays. TP

## The Hospital Highway Code

Diana Kimpton, Pan Macmillan,  
0 330 32957 X, £3.50 pbk

## We're Talking About AIDS

Karen Bryant-Mole, Wayland,

0 7502 0738 8, £7.99

JUNIOR UPWARDS

Hospitals are a different world. Although I spent my early twenties working in some, the confusion and loneliness I felt when admitted for routine repairs a score of years later were very real. So what must it be like for children? Well, whatever it's like it should be a good deal better if they, or their helpers, have had a good look at this book first.

Working from the viewpoint that to be forewarned is to travel more hopefully, Diana Kimpton has produced a very practical and often amusing explanation of the significant things that hospitals get up to while trying to help people get better. It's particularly good at recognising as natural the many unvoiced worries that patients (of any age, actually) may have – 'Who will wipe my bottom if I can't?', 'Will everyone laugh at me?' and that kind of thing. Sensible 'What to do if ...' advice abounds by the bedpanful, with the recurring burden of 'If you're worried – tell someone'.

This is easy enough for juniors and up to read for themselves but, for anyone, it'll be even better value if shared with a parent figure – or even another patient. As a discussion book it's streets ahead of the real life 'Cindy has her tonsils out' variety and should help give new patients and their families the confidence-graft they need to face treatment, tests and operations with equanimity. Hospital bookshops, please stock.

Commonsense also pervades *We're Talking About AIDS*. The explanation of the syndrome and how it's acquired is clear and basic. So too the need for and methods of self-protection, but the book's strongest point is its lucid drawing of the distinction between HIV and AIDS. The fact that having one is not the same as having the other often seems to be reluctantly understood and for its excellent treatment of this point the book deserves notice. TP



To get to it, you have to walk across boggy fields and past a huge holly tree. Then you climb a fence into what used to be the garden. Wild plants have taken it over.



## Focus on Fishing

Tony Whieldon, Hamlyn,

0 600 57472 5, £7.99

JUNIOR UPWARDS



### PREPARING BREAD PASTE

Remove the crust from a stale sliced white loaf of bread.

Soak the slices in some cold water until they are soggy but not breaking up.

Wrap the slices in a clean cloth and squeeze them to remove excess water.

Knead the bread until it becomes a firm, smooth but non-sticky paste.

Mould the paste right around the hook, leaving the point exposed.

Of all sports, angling has probably occasioned more fine writing than any other – it is, after all, 'the contemplative man's recreation' – and in it I must admit to being somewhat steeped. So a slick presentation consisting of almost more pictures than prose and more captions than formal text causes in this old angler a precautionary raising of reactionary hackles until, that is, the actual subject matter is reached. For what we have here is a good modern fishing book – state of the art in layout and presentation as well as tackle and techniques.

Whieldon is an experienced angling writer and takes us through the basics of coarse, game and sea fishing with the greatest share going properly to the first of these. Tackle recommendations are sound and tactics well proven. In particular is it pleasant to see plenty of emphasis given to considerate treatment of the quarry while landing, unhooking and returning it – something the fishing books of my youth never mentioned. One thing those old books always mentioned, however, was the preparation of bread paste bait – which, refreshingly, hasn't changed a whit in 45 years! But all the tackle, technique and bait in the world won't help if you can't tie a decent knot – Whieldon's knots are well selected, well described and well illustrated.

It is not the purpose of this book to woo the reader to angling, but for the already committed beginner and improver it provides an extremely useful and reliable guide. TP

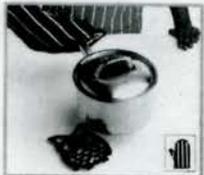
## KITCHEN RULES



**1** Before you start cooking, wash your hands and put on an apron. You may need to roll up your sleeves too.



**5** When you are cooking on top of the cooker, turn the saucepan handles to the side, so you do not knock them.



**9** Always wear oven gloves when picking up anything hot, or when putting things into or taking them out of the oven.



**2** Collect all the ingredients together. Weigh the dry ingredients and measure the liquid ones in a measuring jug.



**6** When you are stirring food in a pan, use a wooden spoon and hold the pan firmly by the handle.



**10** Always make sure your hands are dry before you plug in or disconnect an electric gadget, such as a blender.



**3** Check the recipe as you do this, to make sure that you have everything you need and know exactly what to do.



**7** Whenever you find it difficult to do something or have to handle hot things, ask an adult to help you.



**11** Keep a cloth nearby so that you can wipe up any spills. Clean up anything that spills on the floor immediately.



**4** Be very careful with sharp knives. Hold them with the blade pointing downwards and always use a chopping board.



**8** Have a space ready for hot things. Put them on a mat or a wooden board, not straight on to a table or work surface.



**12** Wash up as you go along. When you have finished cooking, put everything away and clean up any mess.

Kitchen Rules from *The Children's Step-By-Step Cook Book*.

## The Children's Step-By-Step Cook Book

Angela Wilkes, Dorling Kindersley,  
0 7513 5121 0, £9.99

**JUNIOR (with adult help) UPWARDS**

Reviewing a cookery book when one is hungry can be a daunting experience, particularly when it's a Dorling Kindersley, sumptuously photographed, one. So how does it stand up if judged more objectively?

The book is well produced and includes a lot of good advice, particularly in the picture glossary. Its handling of safety issues is serious and clear. The step-by-step instructions in the recipes are good. Are the recipes suitably appealing to children? Yes. Food chosen is appropriate in terms of nutrition (although aimed at the more carnivorous child), and child and adult may need to be in negotiation about some of the more expensive ingredients. It is fair to say that although the recipes are international in origin they are taken from a Western perspective.

This would be a good investment for the keen young cook but would equally serve as a basic text for the kitchen novice about to leave home for the first time. **GB**

## Lewis and Clark: Exploring North America

Clint Twist, Evans (Beyond the Horizons series), 0 237 51365 X, £8.95

**MIDDLE/SECONDARY**

The purchase of Louisiana in 1803 was probably one of the greatest bargains in American history, but at the time President Thomas Jefferson had no idea whether fifteen million dollars had been well spent! The following year, therefore, Lewis and Clark and a corps of 42 men were despatched from St Louis to explore the territory.

In his admirable introduction Clint Twist summarises the key events in U.S. history leading up to Jefferson's acquisition to enable its true significance to be understood. He then proceeds to the central focus of his lively and informative narrative – an account of Lewis and Clark's two and a half year expedition.

Their preparations were as detailed and meticulous as their subsequent journal entries. At the President's behest, Lewis studied native American culture in Philadelphia, for Jefferson wanted to know all about the various tribes. He also gave strict instructions that all encounters were to be amicable.

Although they did not find a practical river route to the Pacific, Lewis and Clark's expedition was a great success, for in essence they helped to open up the West for the early settlers. (It's a pity there wasn't space for more of their journal extracts to be included.)

The author concludes his fascinating documentary with a description of the various native American groups extant at the time and a summary of 'what happened later'. As he so eloquently remarks, the tragedy of the American West was that Lewis and Clark's legacy of treating 'everyone they met with humanity and respect' was not continued by later generations. **VH**

## Cricket

Andy Sellins, Wayland (Go For Sport series), 0 7502 1032 X, £9.50

**MIDDLE/SECONDARY**

Attempting both to explain and stimulate an interest in cricket in 48 pages is an ambitious task admirably tackled in this book. It benefits from the author's voice (very much in favour of sporting, entertainment cricket) with useful tips for the would-be player, and good action photographs. But it suffers from the quantum leap from broad introductory generalisations to a fairly detailed analysis of specific skills in but a few pages.

Used alongside other books it has much useful information to offer, not least its straightforward explanation, by diagrams, of both the LBW law and the intricacies of good line and length bowling. Other strengths are a positive approach to women's cricket and its international perspective – an unfortunate exclusion is advice for the potential umpire. I am intrigued too by the description of Devon Malcolm (a noted bowler) as a 'top batsman' – is this a nice irony or a desperately inaccurate caption?

Overall this is an enthusiastic and helpful book for the young enthusiast – though at £9.50 it will need to be bought on their behalf. **GB**

## United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Jean Trier, Exley (Organizations that Help the World series),

1 85015 365 5, £7.99

**SECONDARY**

Although set up in 1951, UNHCR is surprisingly still designated by the UN as a 'temporary organization that will no longer be needed when the problem of the world's refugees has been solved'. Consequently it has no fixed budget and its mandate has to be periodically renewed.

Jean Trier's perceptive account of the work of the UNHCR gives a clear insight into the many difficulties it encounters in carrying out its activities. Poignant photos accompany a text which documents not only some of the large scale disasters with which it has had to cope, but also cites specific case histories to emphasise that 'refugees are first and foremost individual human beings, not an abstract problem'.

Regrettably this is easily forgotten: media exposure is often fleeting. Countries are often happy to give aid but not asylum. Public attitudes are hardening, due in part to the growing number of 'economic migrants'. It can take months, even years, for someone to be officially designated a refugee. In Britain alone there is a backlog of over 50,000 cases waiting to be heard.

Despite UNHCR's many successes, the stark reality remains that at the end of 1993 the number of refugees world wide was a staggering nineteen million.

This is a welcome addition to a very useful series which provides young people with accessible information on international organisations (such as Amnesty International) not easily obtained elsewhere. **VH**

**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.**

## ENCYCLOPEDIAS: an apology and a correction

In the article on encyclopedias in the May issue, it was erroneously stated that the *Children's Britannica* is dedicated to 'Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales'. The dedication is, in fact, to 'Prince William of Wales' ('by gracious permission' of the Prince and Princess of Wales).

In preparing the issue for print the following paragraph referring to *World Book Encyclopedia* was displaced and printed in the section on the *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.'

This transposition must have caused readers some bewilderment since its purport was in contradiction to earlier remarks on the *Children's Britannica*.

For these errors we apologise unreservedly to both *Children's Britannica* and *World Book Encyclopedia*.

# The Real Robin Hood

Robert Leeson on his new book

There were outlaws in England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. One, or more, may have been called Robin Hood. But he's a shadowy figure, despite much detective work by serious historians and many suspect 'pedigrees' (the latest was produced seven years ago and immediately demolished by a sceptical academic).

But Robin Hood the legend, by contrast, is excitingly vivid, and has grown in size and detail over centuries, tended by many hands known and unknown. The legend has, with difficulty, been traced back to mid-twelfth century, which fits very well. Then royal forests covered nearly a sixth of England. Death, crippling injury, or fines waited those who hunted the deer. Lesser punishments were the lot of the poor who even cut leaf or branch without leave. Once a man had taken venison or 'vert', he accepted his penalty or was outside the law. He bore the 'wolf's head' and could be hanged on the spot.

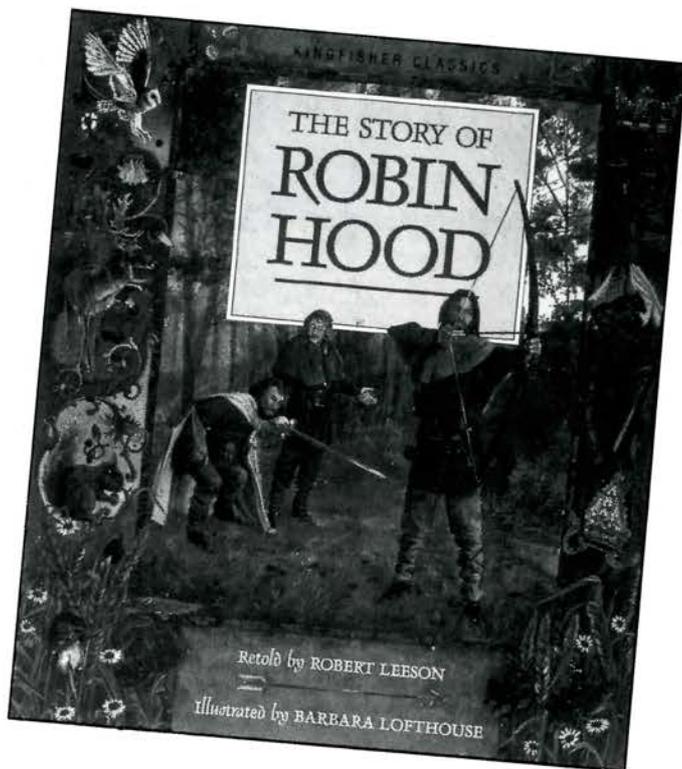
Enforcing these harsh laws were the Sheriffs (at county level) and the Foresters (locally). Many earned a name for brutality. They took protection money like modern gangsters. At a time when feudal order was collapsing, they got a name for injustice and corruption. The Sheriff of Nottinghamshire became a legend in himself. Outlaws hated them since in the name of the King's Law they committed crimes. Hiding in the greenwood, outlaws made their own justice and it was rough.

But the depth of outlaw contempt fell on rich bishops and abbots who owned land and wealth and were as cruel as any secular officer. The men of the greenwood despised them because they preached poverty while living in luxury and urged goodness while practising deceit.



Robin and Allan-a-Dale.

Out of this lawless age grew tales of robbers who, beyond the law, made their own justice. Robin Hood, the yeoman outlaw in his lodge of branches under his 'trysting tree', was more than a rebel. He was uncrowned king of a forest realm. He was courteous, absolutely fair and generous. In his kingdom, the sun always shone, the wine flowed and the food was inexhaustible. Every meal was paid for by the next traveller (unless he were ploughman, yeoman or knight who told the truth).



Where was it? Originally, in the earliest minstrel 'tellings', in Barnesdale, Yorkshire. At some point in the setting down of the oral tales it's thought Robin's legend and that of the wicked Sheriff of Nottingham were fused. Since then Nottingham and Sherwood have taken over the legend. There's a good deal more left of Sherwood Forest than of Barnesdale, and Nottingham's publicity machine is a powerful one. The Yorkshire sites of the legend are scattered and the crucial one – Kirkstall Priory where the legendary Robin met his doom – is off-limits to sightseers. (I was lucky enough to get permission to go there and the ancient gatehouse by the dark stream still holds its spell.)

When I came to write my retelling of the Robin Hood story, I saw the outlaws as hiding in both Barnesdale and Sherwood as the tales imply. The two places are not very far apart and the earliest tales give a picture of the deer moving from the high land to the low. There are only a handful of these first stories still existing. The story of Robin Hood's death was rescued from use as a firelighter and has crucial parts missing. But there are other late medieval sources of a fascinating kind.

Early in the fifteenth century, strangely, villagers celebrating their Summer (May) King and Queen began to substitute the figures of Robin Hood, Friar Tuck and Little John. A new figure – that of Maid Marian – appears (the only woman in the early tales, apart from the Sheriff's wife, is the Virgin Mary to whom, with her sister Magdalene, Robin was devoted). Robin and his friends paraded with the Morris Dancers on May Day. They danced round the tree felled illegally before dawn and carried home in triumph. Often the proceedings were so riotous it was forbidden by law to dress up as Robin or Marian. Robin, outlaw in the forest, became a rebel in the town – life imitating art. Thus the oldest minstrel tellings, the May Games or Plays, and later ballad poems form a fragmented folk epic of chivalry, violence, courtesy, justice, rough fellowship and good humour. It has been called the Arthurian Cycle of the common folk. This, I think, undervalues the Tales of Robin Hood. Their morality and merry-making are of the real world; no giants, no dragons, but human villains bite the dust.



Why was he an outlaw? I will tell you. There are times when it is easier to be an honest man outside the law than within it.

Shoot a deer in the Royal Forest and the Sheriff's men will hang you, if they can catch you. Take your dog hunting and they'll hack off his claws – by the law. Cut a branch or a twig from the greenwood and they'll thrash you for it.

Better to live free an outlaw in the forest than live a slave at home.



The legend was evolved through the late Middle Ages. But as the Robin of song drew further from the times, customs and concerns that gave him birth, so the blood of the ballads thinned through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Action was debased to knockabout combat in banal repetition and parody. Originality vanished, early tales were reworked and garbled by hack writers.

On the other hand, professional playwrights, from the 1590s onwards, tried to give Robin Hood a heroic stature in a style appealing to court and town. Later, Walter Scott and nineteenth-century romantic writers created a whole new 'noble' outlaw and handed him on to the twentieth century and Hollywood. In place of the yeoman outlaw and Summer King, came an earl, unjustly robbed of title and estates, or a Saxon nobleman fighting Norman oppressors (Walter Scott/Errol Flynn) or a returned Crusader supporting Richard the Lionheart against wicked King John (who was also accused of raping Lady Matilda/Maid Marian). Kevin Costner's **Prince of Thieves** owes a lot to the fancies of seventeenth-century professionals.

There is no historical basis for any of this adornment except for one date given by a Scots historian (called John Major) in Tudor times. The rest is hokum. Nor is there any legendary basis. The oldest tales speak of a King Edward. Only one ballad (seventeenth-century) features King Richard, and Joseph Ritson, contemporary collector, described it as the work of 'some miserable retainer of the Press'.

In my retelling I've tried to penetrate beyond this curtain of fantasy to the original stories. Why? After all the later inventions are just part of the fiction, aren't they? My reason is a single, simple one. England's folk hero, the yeoman, needs no fabricated pedigree or motivation. He's one of us, not one of them.

I tried to remake the picture of Robin as seen by the people who lived at the time when the story was fresh and real. To attempt this I took six of the oldest 'tellings' (this includes the renowned 'Gest', containing four tales and nearly 14,000 words long). I added all or part of eight ballads of later date, choosing only those consistent in feeling and meaning with the original stories.



On this basis, I also took certain liberties and risks. To give flesh to Maid Marian, who exists only in fragments of May plays and one slender ballad, I drew on contemporary accounts and the haunting fifteenth-century 'Nut Brown Maid'. In foreshadowing and retelling the Death of Robin Hood, I gave more substance to the mysterious figure of the Red Priest-Knight, Sir Roger, a kind of symbol of autumn to match Robin's spring guise. Rather more recklessly I tried to fill the gap in the Death poem left by fire damage to the manuscript.

These slight additions apart, I held to my intention to retell those legendary tales first told some seven centuries ago, when villains were often in power and honest men sometimes on the run. The message of Robin Hood and his 'Meinee' – that truth, justice, courtesy should be defended, even against the 'Law' – is as valid for the twentieth/twenty-first century as it was for the thirteenth/fourteenth.

In this re-creation, a vital part is played by the visual, and Barbara Lofthouse's illustrations and decorations to the book, with their gorgeous colours will, I hope, give it a long life in many hands.

**The Story of Robin Hood** will be published in September by Kingfisher (1 85697 254 2) at £9.99. It is Robert Leeson's fifty-first book for children and young people.

Further reading:

**Robin Hood** by J C Holt (Thames and Hudson, 1989)

**Rymes of Robin Hood** by R B Dobson and J Taylor (Heinemann, 1976)

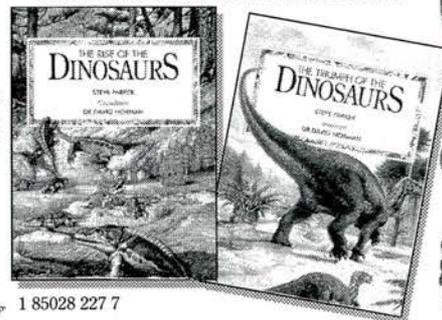
**The Early Plays of Robin Hood** by David Wiles (Brewer, 1981)

**The Quest for Robin Hood** by Jim Lees (Temple Nostalgia Press, 1987)

**The Outlaw Robin Hood, His Yorkshire Legend** by Barbara Green (Kirklees Cultural Services, 1990)

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## Is a favourite book of yours out of print? Grace Hallworth launches a new series

**The Tenth Good Thing About Barney** by Judith Viorst, illustrated by Erik Blegvad, was published by William Collins Sons & Co Ltd in 1971.

Children have an optimistic view of life so death strikes at the heart of their belief that everything exists forever.

In his work on the language and thought processes of pre-school children, Chukovsky exemplifies ways in which young people 'recreate optimism' in order to maintain psychological balance when they encounter death. A three-year-old believes that

'They bury old people - that is, they plant them in the ground and from them grow little children like flowers.'

This concept is analogous to that employed in traditional literature - myth, legend, folk and fairy-tale - in which death is not an end but a necessary phase in the process of rebirth and transformation.

Judith Viorst's classic story, **The Tenth Good Thing About Barney**, is a portrayal of a small child's experience of the death of a pet. It begins with direct simplicity:

'My cat Barney died last Friday.  
I was very sad.  
I cried, and I didn't watch television.  
I cried, and I didn't eat my chicken or  
even the chocolate pudding.  
I went to bed, and I cried.'

The child is encouraged by its mother to think of ten good things about the cat to tell at the funeral. Memories flood back:

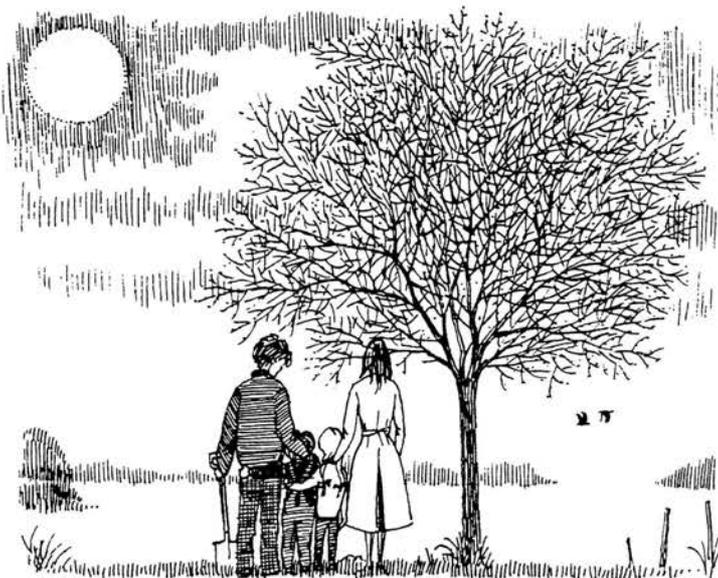
'Barney was brave . . .  
And smart and funny and clean.  
Also cuddly and handsome,  
and he only once ate a bird.  
It was sweet . . . to hear him purr in  
my ear.  
And sometimes he slept on my tummy  
and kept it warm.  
Those are all good things said my mother,  
but I just count nine.'

Later on the child's father explains how the seeds he is planting in the ground will get food and shelter so they can grow into trees and shrubs with stems and leaves and flowers.

'Things change in the ground, said  
my father.  
In the ground everything changes.'

And so the child discovers the tenth good thing about Barney.

In reconciling the stark reality of death with nature's extraordinary recycling process, the author presents a nice balance between the rational and imaginative elements within the child. Viorst is perceptive to the child's concerns and responses and treats the encounter with death sensitively but without condescension.



We couldn't remember any cat songs, so we  
sang one about a  
pussywillow.  
Even my father knew the words.



Annie, the little girl from next door believes that

' . . . Barney was in heaven, with lots of  
cats and angels,  
drinking cream and eating tins of tuna.  
I said Barney was in the ground . . .  
Tell her who's right, I asked Father . . .  
Maybe Barney's in heaven, my father  
began.  
Aha, said Annie, and stuck her tongue  
out at me.  
And maybe, said my father, Barney  
isn't . . .  
We don't know too much about heaven,  
he told Annie.  
We can't be absolutely sure that it's  
there.'

But Viorst is also aware of the need for laughter as well as tears and relieves the trauma of death with gentle humour as well as optimism:

'At the end of the funeral we sang a song  
for Barney.  
We couldn't remember any cat songs,  
so we sang one about a pussy willow.  
Even my father knew the words.'

A true storyteller, Viorst has a keen ear for the rhythms of language which border on the poetic and make this an ideal story for sharing with a group of children. Her spare style, repetition, structure and ordering of sentences on the page are features which help make this book accessible to the beginner reader.

'In the morning my mother wrapped  
Barney in a yellow scarf.  
My father buried Barney in the ground  
by a tree in the garden.  
Annie, my friend from next door, came  
over with flowers.  
And I told good things about Barney.'

This description of the funeral for a dead pet, which parallels the ritual adults act out, provides creative release and a coming to terms with loss.

Erik Blegvad's illustrations - black-and-white line drawings and cross-hatching - reflect the sombre mood of the story. The emphasis of cross-hatching for the indoor scenes makes an effective contrast with the plain black-and-white line drawings used mainly for the outdoor scenes. But his forte lies in his sensitivity about what should be left out and what clearly defined. His skill in complementing, as well as reflecting, the story is an added appeal to this unusual book.

I've used this deceptively simply-told story with children from six to nine years and it never fails to provoke a stream of tales and anecdotes, many of which are humorous as well as sad. Like myth it has a textured quality but its real strength and wide appeal lies in the way it presents death, which is shown to have a function and meaning.

The author has been tacit about the chronicler's identity, never declaring whether 'I' is a boy or girl. The child becomes a representative figure of every child moved to enact or identify with the story's events. Thus the sombre illustrations, so expressive of the mood and style of the story, enhance the text's more explicit statement. ■

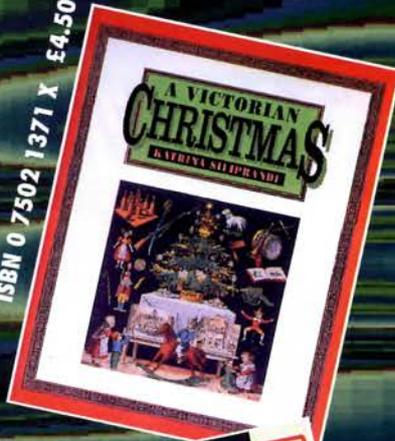
**Grace Hallworth** was born and brought up in Trinidad. She has lived in Britain for many years working as a librarian, storyteller and writer. This month Mammoth publish two paperback collections by her - **A Web of Stories** (0 7497 0553 1, £2.99) and **Cric Crac** (0 7497 1717 3, £2.99).



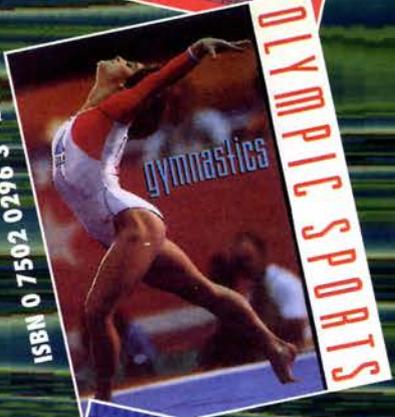
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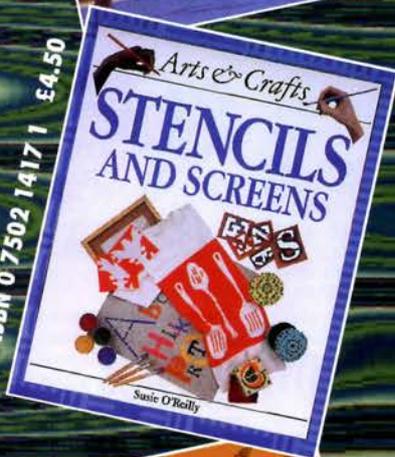
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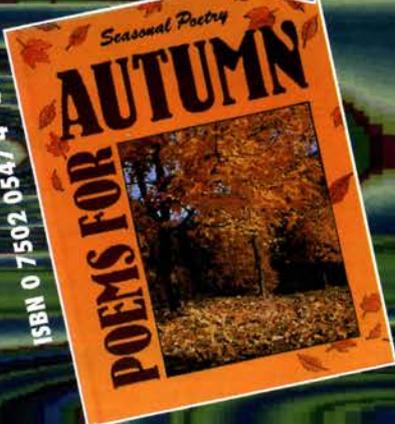
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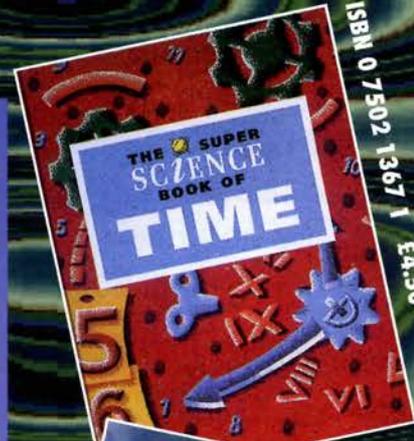
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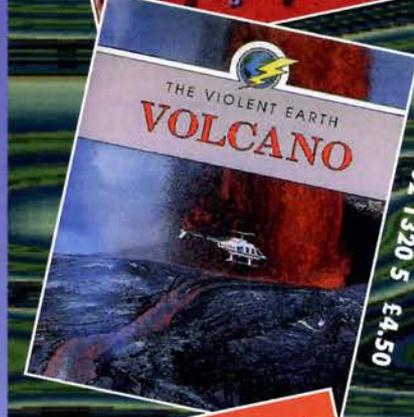
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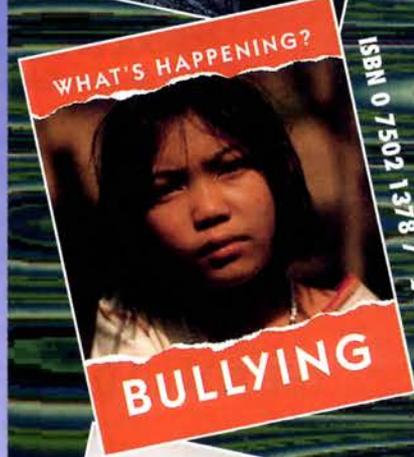
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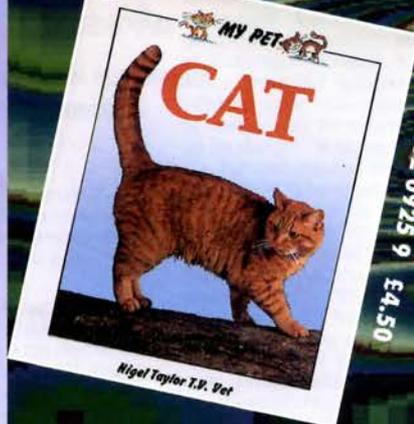
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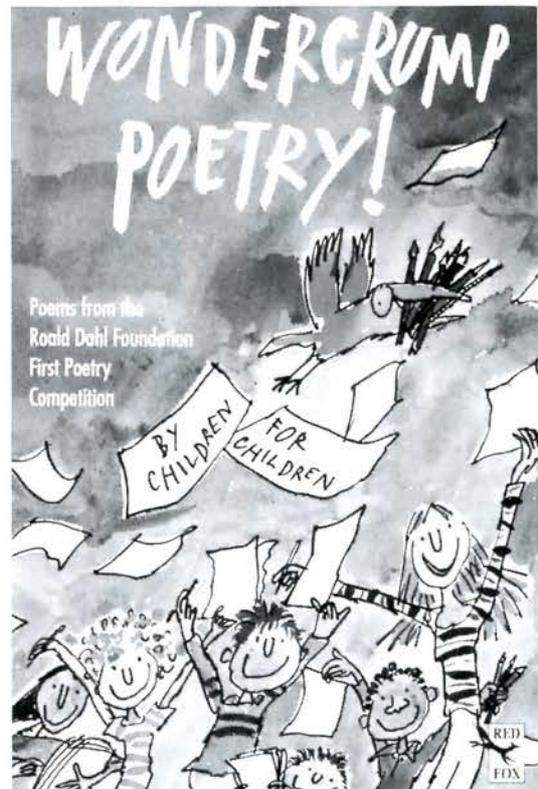
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# BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

David Bennett on a continuing need... and on current publications which aim to meet it.

At the end of January 1994 a Sunday broadsheet conducted a survey of 20 questions on religion which 'yielded varying degrees of ignorance or misunderstanding'. Scores out of 20 for 10-11 year-olds averaged at 2.4; for sixth formers at 7.2; for university students at 8.8; and for 22-49 year-olds from the professional classes at 13.8.

On the same day I came across the report of a Nottinghamshire head-teacher, who, at his school prize-giving, talked of living in a country 'increasingly displaying ignorance of faith, of Christ and of Bible stories'.

The two model syllabuses currently in circulation seem to have taken this aboard already, since their first aim is to help pupils to:

*'Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.'*

The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) structures its first model around knowledge and understanding of religions, its second around knowledge and understanding of key beliefs in each religion.

Regular readers of **BfK** might remember I touched very briefly on this issue in the January '93 magazine in an article on Myth and Legend. Compared with the great debate on the Government's January '94 guidelines, that the time maintained schools devote to religious education should comprise a minimum of 51% Christianity, this might seem like a bit of an oblique bywater, but some biblical knowledge, religious knowledge of any kind, is pretty necessary if our pupils are to develop a fuller understanding of all kinds of literature. Fundamentally we are a western, and therefore a Christian, country with a Christian culture; our history has been moulded by Christianity; Old and New Testament references abound in significant numbers of the works we teach and call 'Literature'. I'm well aware that other great religions make a contribution to the cultural and spiritual diversity of modern British society and that references to other religions also occur and need explanation, but an informed article on that will need another writer.

There are obvious texts like 'Samson Agonistes', 'Paradise Lost' and 'Absalom Achitophel' that ooze biblical bits. But should pupils know too that **The Chronicles of Narnia** are Christian allegories with Aslan as Christ, or that **Z for Zachariah** has its source in Zachariah chapter 14, verses 12-13? I suspect that for much of the time the answer is no, but it'd be a poor understanding of Edwin Muir's **The Horses** or of Charles Causley's **Ballad of the Bread Man** if the students never appreciated the biblical sources.

D H Lawrence is a good example of a writer who slips in biblical references that really need to be followed up for a more perfect understanding of where he's coming from. Sometimes they're as subtle as the parallels of the preparation of the body of Christ for burial to the body washing and laying-out of Walter Bates by his wife and mother in **Odour of Chrysanthemums**. On the other hand they can be crucial to a comprehension of his characterisation and the relationship between characters as with the two sisters in **You Touched Me**:

*'Matilda was a tall, thin, graceful, fair girl, with a rather large nose. She was Mary to Emmie's Martha.'*

My group completely passed this one over - not spotting the reference and not thinking to ask. I've encountered the same blissful ignorance with the obvious comparisons between Atahualpa and Christ in **The Royal Hunt of the Sun**. The Inca king's entry into Cajamarca is an almost perfect Andean re-run of the entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, his age is that of Christ when he died, his attributed powers are not dissimilar and his death has a crucial, sacrificial dimension.

In the light of these few, brief comments, KS3, 4 and 5 Heads of English might wonder whether they oughtn't to reach for their order books and provide a few Bibles in their English classrooms, alongside the dictionaries, myths and legends, etc. Not such a fanciful notion



Jairus's daughter raised from death by Jesus in **The Children's Illustrated Bible** (Dorling Kindersley).

... although essentially the acquisition of biblical knowledge and the fundamental beliefs of our culture should have begun much earlier in the child's school career. Obviously, after their 18 months of deliberation, those who are espousing the models of RE teaching for the future are underlining the fact that in the majority of cases schools will have to be the prime-movers because only a minority of youngsters will pick up knowledge and belief on Sundays in a House of God. In an integrated, planned curriculum all teachers, just as much as RE specialists, will be obliged to have a hand in delivering Moral and Spiritual education. Many of these folk will freely admit they need as much help with the factual side of religion as their pupils!

Publishers appear to have foreseen the market and increasing numbers of titles relating to Bible stories are on offer. These should serve to support teachers and pupils and should enable them to gain the background required to make the most of literature at a higher level. But, be warned:

*'Of making many books there is no end and much studying wearies the body.'* Ecclesiastes XIII (12)

Here's a selection of the best I've come across in my researches. I've ascribed a key stage, but, as with most books of this type, they have applications right across the age-ranges.

## KEY STAGE ONE

From Walker Books: **The Amazing Story of Noah's Ark** (1988), 0 7445 1469 X, £3.99 pbk; **Joseph and His Magnificent Coat of Many Colours** (1990), 0 7445 1788 5, £3.99 pbk; **Jonah and the Whale** (1989), 0 7445 1735 4, £3.99 pbk

Marcia Williams has picked up the lively adventure stories you'd expect for three busy, colourful and humorous picture books that read aloud well. There are masses of intricate details and jokey bits. Even the margins to the pictures are intriguing. The texts are uncluttered with the essential stories undiminished.

From Orchard: **Noah's Ark** (1990), 1 85213 206 X, £7.99; **The Story of the Creation** (1992), 1 85213 281 7, £8.99

Jane Ray has also chosen Noah for a picture book and has used the Creation for a companion title. Her beautiful illustrations have a fascinating ethnic, multi-cultural quality that repays constant re-visiting. The language of **Noah's Ark** offers the poetry of the Authorised King James version of the Bible, which will require a confident reader. That in **The Story of the Creation** has a freshness and immediacy which makes it special and utterly engaging.

From Oxford: **The Easter Story** (1993), 0 19 279952 5, £7.95; 0 19 272286 7, £3.99 pbk

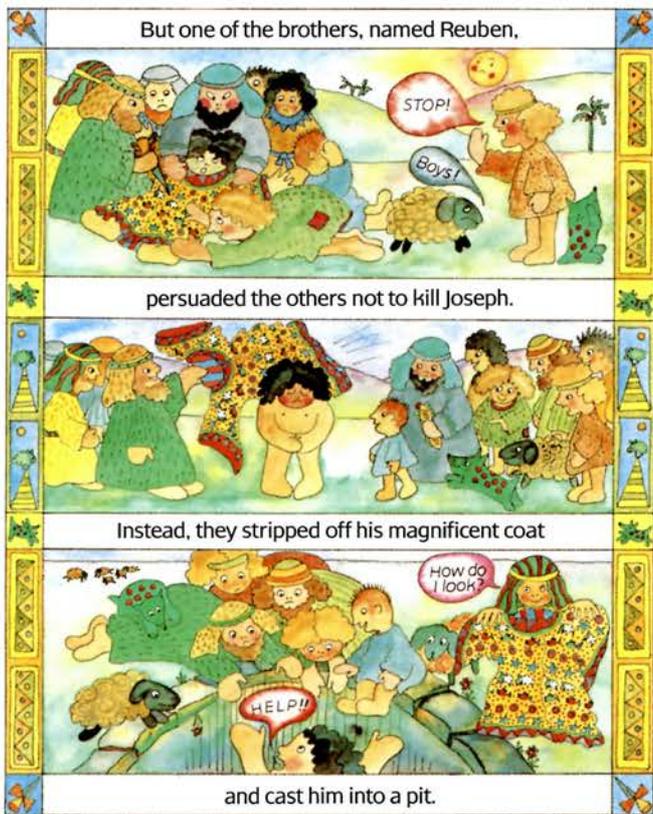
Now available in both hardback and paperback is Brian Wildsmith's sumptuous version of the Easter story. Some of the brilliant illustrations are as vibrant as Italianate altar pieces, architectural backdrops lavish with golds, reds and purples. The conceit of having the donkey as a central character is masterful and lends an identifiable and commonplace charm to the wondrous last week of Christ's life. The text is as dignified as the presentation, reverent and without condescension.

## KEY STAGE TWO

Collected reworkings of Bible stories, Old and New Testament, seem to start their proliferation here.

From Kingfisher: **The Kingfisher Children's Bible** (1993), 1 85697 115 5, £12.99

This version offers Ann Pilling's faithful retellings with Kady MacDonald Denton's relatively sparsely peppered illustrations. I don't think I've ever seen so many characters in profile in one book!



From **Joseph and his Magnificent Coat of Many Colours** (Walker).



And God remembered Noah, and made a wind to pass over the earth. The rain from heaven was restrained, and the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until the tops of the mountains were seen.



From **Noah's Ark** (Orchard).

The ubiquitous double-page spread format, so beloved of most publishers, has been waived to give us 62 tales from the Old Testament and 32 from the New with very essential original source references. This is definitely one for the upper end and will require considerable personal reading skills.

From Frances Lincoln: **Stories from the Bible** (1993), 0 7112 0803 4, £9.99

Here Martin Waddell tells us he wants his 17 Old Testament stories to 'be read with the Bible, and not instead of it'. So, where are the references? He's forgiven, however, because his style is so refreshingly intimate, breezy and pally:

*'Eve had lots of babies. Adam must have been pleased!'*

This is a near perfect introduction to the Bible that'll read aloud a treat. Shame about the illustrations by Geoffrey Patterson; only the Jonah one seemed less than flat.

From Viking: **A First Puffin Book of Bible Stories** (1993), 0 670 84871 9, £10.99

Puffin's offering in this area has a comic, enjoyment-enriched look to it with masses of Barry Smith's cartoon angels of mixed gender, race and epoch. Annabel Shilson-Thomas has elected to forsake strict chronology for a more thematic approach which she intends will 'help children to see how the Jewish and Christian understanding of God developed'.

This ought to make a read-alone since the text is very child-friendly with short sentences and easy vocabulary.

Should you ever be asked 'What's the only thinking bird in the Bible?' reach for **Amazing Facts from the Bible** by Betsy Rossen Elliott and J Stephen Lang from Joshua Morris Publishing (1 857 24832 5, £4.99). It's whacky and great fun to dip into with an underlying very serious theme.

**Bible Dictionary - A First Reference Book** from Alpha (1 872 059 84 8) plus its companion **Bible Atlas** (1 872 059 82 1) at £4.99 each, are also well worth stocking. Both are by E Wilson and S Lloyd Jones with illustrations by S Schindler.

### KEY STAGE THREE

From Lion Publishing: **Settlers, Warriors and Kings** (1994), 0 7459 2172 8, £7.99; **The Life That Changed the World**, 0 7459 2174 4, £7.99

Just issued are the first two titles in this new 'Bible World' reference series. Ten volumes are being introduced between March 1994 and February 1996. Five books cover the Bible story and five more 'Provide background information for understanding its meaning'. 'Finding Out More' reference sections and handy indexing, plus double-page spreads should make them user-friendly. Pupils will like them, too, for the illustrations. The ones I've seen (above) capture the drama of Bible stories and the additions of back-up information and maps culled from recent scholarship, plus photographs used to illustrate scenery and artefacts, provide plenty for youngsters to pore over.

### 13 Who Was This Man?

Everyone who met him could see that Jesus must be someone special. But just who was he?

**John the Baptist's question**  
John the Baptist was one of the first to recognize that Jesus must be the promised Messiah. Like everyone else, John expected him to be a soldier. If the Messiah had come to deliver people, then there was only one thing they needed saving from: the Romans, who had occupied their land. But Jesus came to found an army. He actually told people to love their enemies.

John was arrested and thrown into prison for criticizing the king, Herod Antipas. Afterwards, he sent his disciples to Jesus with a question.

"Tell us," they asked, "are you the one John said was going to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus pointed to all the remarkable things that were happening because of him: "The blind can see, the lame can walk, those who suffer from leprosy are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor." These were all things God had promised would happen when the Messiah came.

**The disciples wonder**  
Even the disciples had questions about who Jesus was. One day, Jesus asked Peter who people thought he was. Peter replied that since said Jesus was a great prophet and a great teacher.

But who do you say I am? Jesus asked. And Peter gave his answer: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Just after this, Jesus went to a lonely mountain to pray. He took only three disciples who were especially close to him: Peter, James and John. As they watched, a remarkable change came over Jesus. His face and his clothes became dazzlingly bright. And a voice spoke: "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased - listen to him."

**'I Am...'**  
John was one of the disciples and he wrote a book about Jesus. In his book he recorded seven sayings describing Jesus.

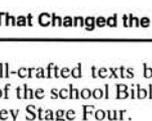
**'I Bread'**  
Carnal bread is made from the sweat of people's hands. Jesus said that he was the bread of life. He said that anyone who ate of his bread would never be hungry.



**'I Light'**  
Jesus said that he was the light of the world. He said that anyone who followed him would not be in darkness.



**'I Vine'**  
Jesus said that he was the vine and his disciples were the branches. He said that anyone who remained in him would bear much fruit.



**The Messiah's aim**  
Even when the disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah, one thing still puzzled them. Why did he not do what they expected their Messiah to do - gather an army and fight the Romans? Everybody hated them and wanted to see them defeated. How could someone as powerless as Jesus be a truly important person?

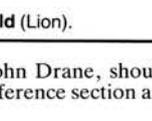
**'I Lion'**  
Jesus said that he was the lion of the tribe of Judah. He said that anyone who followed him would be like a lion.



**'I Sheep'**  
Jesus said that he was the shepherd of his sheep. He said that anyone who followed him would be like a sheep.



**'I Fish'**  
Jesus said that he was the fish of the sea. He said that anyone who followed him would be like a fish.



The disciples still had to learn an important lesson. It is not strong, violent people who are valued by God, but those who are weak and powerless. Jesus told them they must become like children to follow him, but they found it hard to understand what that meant.



Spread from **The Life That Changed the World** (Lion).

The series, with well-crafted texts by John Drane, should form the backbone resource of the school Bible reference section and will have currency well into Key Stage Four.

From Hamlyn: **The Children's Bible** (1993), 0 600 57412 1, £10.99

David Christie-Murray has retold the Bible for a lavish gift edition, presumably aimed, like many others, at the parents and grandparents market. There is a worthy information page, 'People of the New Testament', and background maps. The quality of the storytelling is modern with no condescension. Andrew Wheatcroft's often arresting illustrations give the stories tangible flesh and blood, and are no doubt designed to catch the eye of would-be present givers looking for a quality production.

From Collins: **Children's Bible Story Book** (1992), 0 551 02080 6, £7.95

The cover of Jennifer Rees Larcombe's Bible Story Book doesn't

exactly thrill, yet inside Alan Parry's pictures are startlingly focused on the characters; literally warts-and-all in the case of Job, whilst King Hezekiah wouldn't look out of place as a contender for the 'strongest man in Jerusalem' context. The telling is given life and personal interest by plenty of vivid dialogue to engage the listener. It's not surprising that these started out as stories told to the author's young family.

[Ed's note: The audio version of this title is reviewed on page 13]

From Conran-Octopus: **Cliff Richard's Favourite Bible Stories** (1993), 1 85029 519 0, £8.99

Cliff Richard's chosen Bible stories, retold by Sue Shaw and illustrated by John Brennan, also have a tape version. The 42 stories have been modernised and simplified, with a pacy dialogue at the core of the chosen style, lending them energy and humour. The vibrant drawings took a bit of adjusting to because primary colours leap off the page and the artist seems to delight in surprising the reader by coming in from unexpected angles. The Noah illustration has a tremendous impact for it captures the overcrowded ark with an infectious humour that left me smiling for quite a while.

**KEY STAGE FOUR**

Very little seems to be aimed directly at this level, but we do have

From Dorling Kindersley: **The Children's Illustrated Bible** (1994), 0 7513 5113 X, £14.99

This is a painstakingly researched and edited illustrated Bible, which serves well as a succinct reference book. I could see pupils being directed to it when Bible allusions crop up in the literature lesson. Its production has many visual similarities to the 'Bible World' series. A bonus is the 'Who's Who in Bible Stories' section and the 'Introduction to the Bible' at the beginning. Some of the pastel-coloured drawings by Eric Thomas look a bit flat and static, but Selina Hastings' oral storytelling style is vigorously geared to capturing the listeners' interest and keeping it.

This is the one I'd recommend as a single copy of the Bible for the English classroom. ■



From **The Children's Illustrated Bible** (Dorling Kindersley).

**Open Books Open Minds**

is an annotated list of fiction, compiled by librarians from Library Services for Education in Leicestershire, to support RE in primary and secondary schools. The stories included are not religious ones in the accepted sense. They are titles which have been chosen to illustrate a wide range of topics covering such issues as family relationships, friendships, environmental concerns and the effects of prejudice and war. Titles can be accessed via author, title or theme.

Copies are available from Library Services for Education, Thames Tower, 99 Burleys Way, Leicester LE1 3TZ, at a cost of £3.50 each (inc. p&p).

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

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# BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS 10 YEARS OF READATHON

In 1984, when Books for Students first launched their annual reading event Readathon – to promote both books and a range of children's charities – over £100,000 was raised. Last year the amount reached a Magic Million for the first time, with more than 702,000 children taking part nationwide. The Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children and the Roald Dahl Foundation were the receiving charities.

So how will this year go? Readathon, headed by former Children's Book Foundation Director Brough Girling, is a central part of the **Daily Telegraph's** Children's Book Week which runs this year from 8-15 October, but can be organised at any time in the autumn term for as long or short a period as suits a particular school.

Interested? All participating schools are sent a free pack with everything that's needed including sponsor forms, display and classroom project materials and a gift for every child taking part.

Further details concerning the Readathon campaign are available from Christine Kenny on 0926 314366.

## Summer Storyboat



Smaller scale than Readathon, but just as much fun, this charity aims to bring children, parents, storytellers, authors and illustrators together for a week of book and story-related activities. The day begins at 10.00 am, continues 'til 5.00 pm and includes drawing, face-painting, badge-making, storytelling, singing and dancing . . . but, **BfK** is assured, no walking of the plank.

John Ryan called it 'a remarkable and highly entertaining enterprise' and, as the creator of Captain Pugwash, he should know. Jan Mark wrote 'It does wonders for morale because, even at the height of an English summer, under monsoon skies and sub-arctic temperatures, people turn up.'

Details of this summer's voyages are:

- Mon 15 August – HERTFORD – Hartham Common off Hill Road – Mick Gowar
- Tue 16 August – WARE – Sacred Heart School – Colin West and Jan Mark
- Wed 17 August – STANSTEAD ABBOTS – near the Marina off Station Road – John Ryan and Rob Lewis
- Thu 18 August – BROXBORNE – near the Fish and Eels Public House, Dobbs Weir – Julia Marriage and Sonia Holleyman
- Fri 19 August – BROXBORNE – near the Lido – June Counsel and Julia Jarman

This year's 'author on board' is Robert Leeson, no Jonah he. For more information contact M A Spalding at 46 Hampton Close, Stevenage, Herts SG2 8SP; tel. 0438 815091 (home) or 0462 682908 (school).

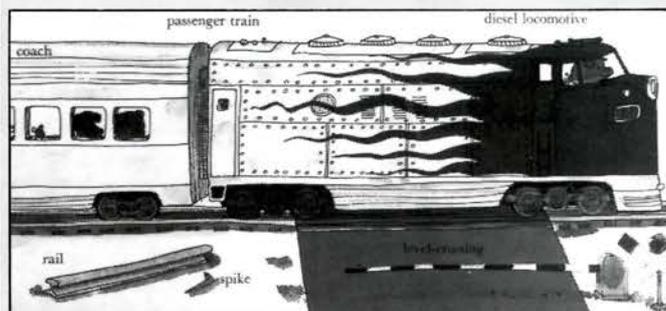
## Eileen Colwell wins the 1994 Eleanor Farjeon Award

Administered by the Children's Book Circle and sponsored by Books For Children, the Eleanor Farjeon Award for Services to Children's Books is one of the most prestigious in the industry. Previous winners include Anne Wood, Robert Leeson, Jill Bennett, Margaret Meek . . . but 1994's winner surely ranks alongside the best of them. Regular readers of **BfK** will need no introduction to Eileen Colwell whose career was celebrated by Helen Cresswell's article 'Librarian for Life' in our July '93 issue.

Eileen Colwell's achievements go well beyond even innovative, energetic librarianship, however. Primarily, and all over the world, she's known as a storyteller. The presentation ceremony in London on 19th May showed why. After her acceptance speech, which centred on her friendship with Eleanor Farjeon herself, Eileen told one of her favourite Farjeon stories to a spellbound audience of publishers, writers and assorted children's book people. The applause at the end threatened to raise the roof of the Artworker's Guild. 'That's why we bother with all this,' one CBC member was heard to murmur afterwards.

So salutations to Eileen Colwell says **BfK**. And our sympathy to whoever has to make next year's acceptance speech.

## RICHARD SCARRY 1919 – 1994



Back in 1963, the 44-year-old Richard Scarry never dreamt of the fame and success he would come to enjoy. When the president of his publishing house suggested the title **The Best Word Book Ever**, and one of his assistants had dared to doubt – 'Perhaps it won't be the best ever?' – he'd replied, 'But it's Richard Scarry's best word book ever!'

And indeed so it turned out, still selling and selling as part of the sixty million copies of his books sold throughout the world in 28 languages.

'If my characters were Caucasian blond children, they wouldn't sell, but as they're animals (though I consider them people) there's no racial problem,' Scarry once said. His houses look vaguely Swiss-American, his uniforms crazily mixed-up, with firemen wearing anything from a colander to a Roman feathered helmet, while no one could possibly tell if his bumbly cars have left- or right-hand drive. What mattered to him was that a child should laugh as much as he himself did when a car exploded.

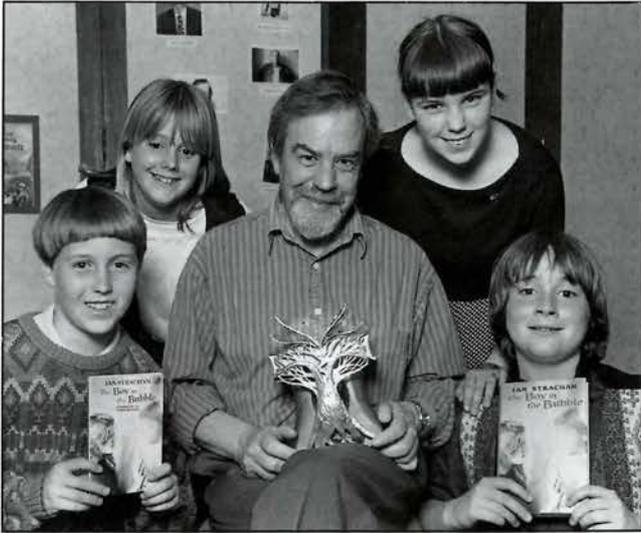
Every artist wants to do a children's book, he said. He himself did nothing else. He shunned the burden of becoming involved with a TV show (no one else but he could portray his little creatures) and simply sat back and enjoyed the rewards of a contract with a giant merchandising company.

He was justly proud of teaching children not only counting and spelling, but about daily life and the organisation of the working world around them. His holy text was that learning should be fun. He said he could be heard laughing to himself as he worked, but he was deeply aware of his responsibilities: told by a mother that her son endlessly climbed into the washing machine after seeing a joky Scarry repairman doing so, he re-drew later editions.

He was thrilled and moved by the response from his international audience. 'I had a letter from a mother whose child had been horribly injured, and was lying in hospital almost like a vegetable, not interested in anything. She gave him **The Best Word Book Ever** and immediately he came to life as it were, took an interest and got well. OK, maybe it would have happened anyway, but she felt it was a turning point.' Scarry earned himself more than one kind of riches.

Stephanie Nettell

# The Children's Book Award.



Ian Strachan with testers from the Sussex region.

The following Category Winners were presented with silver bowls and a trophy went to the Overall Winner:

#### Category 1 – Picture Book

**Amazing Anthony Ant** by Lorna and Graham Philpot (Orion, 1 85881 005 1, £8.99)

#### Category 2 – Shorter Novels

**The Finders** by Nigel Hinton

(Viking, 0 670 84641 4, £8.99; in September from Puffin, 0 14 036239 8, £3.50 pbk)

#### Category 3 – Longer Novels and Overall Winner

**The Boy in the Bubble** by Ian Strachan (Methuen, 0 416 18739 0, £9.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 1685 1, £2.99 pbk)

## CONFERENCES etc.

**The Cape Clear International Storytelling Workshop**, 29th October – 5th November 1994, conducted by Eddie Lenihan and Liz Weir. Cost £50 for course, accommodation extra. For full details, contact Chuck and Nell Kruger, Cape Clear Island, Co Cork, Ireland (tel/fax 028 39157).

**Reading University – 10th Anniversary Conference**, Saturday, 8th October 1994 – to celebrate a decade of the MA in Children's Literature.

Speakers include Fred Inglis and Peter Dickinson with academic papers by Michael Rosen and others . . . along with the opening of a new archive collection of BBC Radio 4's **Treasure Islands** radio programme. Cost £20 (£10 students). Applications to Catriona Nicholson, The Meadow, Chalkshire Road, Butler's Cross, Aylesbury, Bucks. HP17 0TJ (cheques payable to the University of Reading).

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

### Warmly Recommended:

**Meet the Authors and Illustrators** by Stephanie Nettell, Scholastic, 0 590 55578 2, £9.99

**Mini-BfK-style** authorographs of 60 children's book celebrities by an accomplished interviewer and critic. Shrewd, warm-hearted, well informed . . . and not to be missed.

**Red Pages: A Guide to Children's Books Relevant to Special Needs** by Frances Ball (available from 16 Poplar Farm Close, Milton-under-Wychwood, Chipping Norton, Oxon OX7 6LX), £4.00 post free

Comprehensive, user-friendly and excellent value.

**Commended Books for Under-Twelves**, Alasdair Campbell (available from LISE Publications, Education Library, University College, Hendrefoilan, Gower Road, Swansea SA2 7NB), £4.00 post free

Sharp-eyed compilation by the Outstanding Children's Book Project Team based on commendations for the Carnegie Medal and other British book awards.

**Making Books Work and Rhymes, Jingles . . . and All That Stuff** (available from Janet Evans, St Katharine's College, Stand Park Road, Childwall, Liverpool L16 8ND), £5.50 each post free

A variety of book activities, expertly put together, but with a fetching personal flavour. ■

# Awards

## TIR NA N-OG AWARDS

For the best English book with an authentic Welsh background, the 1994 Award goes to **Denny and the Magic Pool** by Pamela Purnell (Pont Books, 0 86383 990 8, £2.75).

## The Macmillan Prize

This year's winner is Ross Collins who receives a £1,000 cheque and publication of his book, **The Sea Horse**. Michael Wace, director of Pan Macmillan, comments 'Ross Collins' entry was outstanding. It's rare to find a student who is not only an able illustrator, in full control of an interesting palette, but also has a strong design sense and the ability to write an entertaining story.'

BOOKS FOR KEEPS  
NEWS

## The CLAI Summer School Award for Outstanding Service to Children's Literature

On Friday, 13th May, Ireland's Minister for Education announced that the 1994 Award had been made to Eilís Dillon in recognition of her support for all facets of children's literature in Ireland – by encouraging emerging writers and by working to bring books of quality, in particular those written by Irish authors or published in Ireland, to a wide audience of young people.

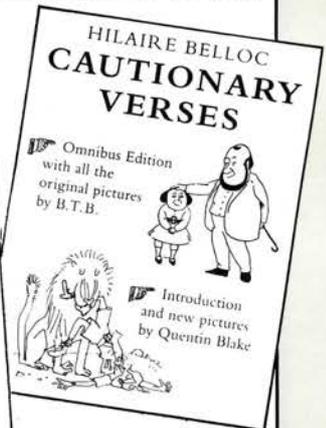
## Dare we say Hilairious?

Another crisp fiver to Quentin Blake for passing on the following invitation – to us, not HB:

Young Book Trust  
invite:

*Hilaire Belloc*  
to celebrate the launch of  
**Children's Books of the Year 1994**  
on Thursday 9 June from 6.30pm  
at Book House

RSVP  
Sandra Vince, Young Book Trust  
Book House, 45 East Hill,  
London SW18 2QZ  
Telephone: 081 870 9655  
Fax: 081 874 4790



'Innocence or optimism at Book House?' Quentin asks. Maybe immortality breaking new ground, says BfK.

Keep the Howlers coming . . .

## September's BfK . . . highlights poetry and multi-cultural issues.

Poetry selections by Judith Nicholls and Morag Styles  
Ruskin Bond on how he became a reader  
Eleanor von Schweinitz on finding your way around  
information books

Jamila Gavin in Authorgraph

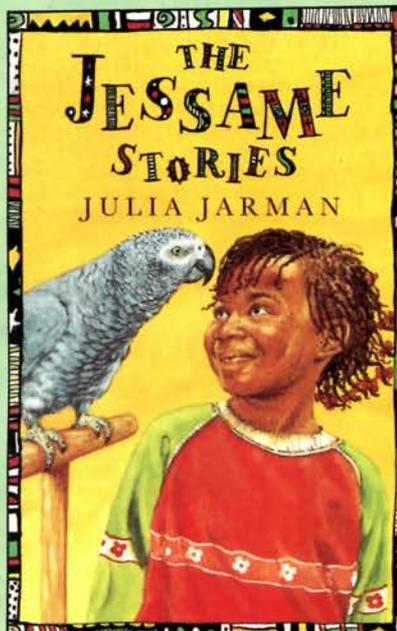
. . . plus reviews, reviews, reviews

# JUNIOR TO MIDDLING

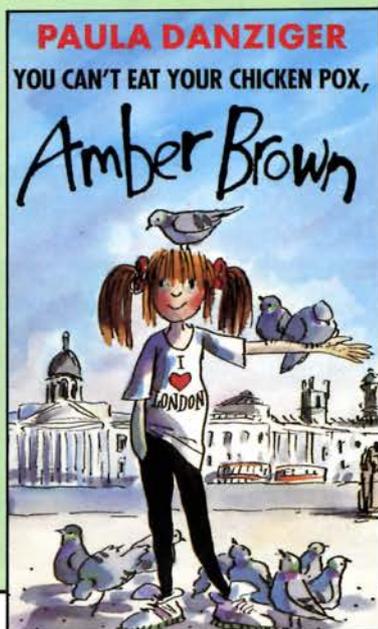
## Chris Powling takes his pick from new hardbacks

Books which can carry young readers from the new fluency of Key Stage One through the new reluctance that tends to arrive around Key Stage Three depend on two crucial features: a turn-over-the-page momentum and an unashamed relish for language. Everything else is optional.

Julia Jarman's **The Jessame Stories** (Heinemann, 0 434 96392 5, £7.99), for instance, rely for their hook on children's 'satiated curiosity about the home-life of other children... in this case of Jessame Aduke Olusanya who's 'small looking up' compared with her mum who's 'tall looking down'. Mix in Granpa Williams, Uncle Sharp and Aunt Gbee (whose G is just about the only silent thing about her) and on offer is a family that manages to be completely ordinary yet quite irresistible.



So is the setting – Bethnal Green, with the Museum of Childhood close by. Jessame's exploits are described so exactly you feel you're inside her head, sharing them. Add Duncan Smith's bold, inventive line drawings and the book is a delight from start to finish.



The same could be said of Paula Danziger's **You Can't Eat Your Chicken Pox, Amber Brown** (Heinemann, 0 434 97569 9, £3.99). Here, the illustrations come from Tony Ross at his breezy, black-and-white best, but there's plenty of breezy black-and-white in the writing, too, since Amber describes her incident-prone trip from New York to Paris via London with the same frankness and engaging good humour she brings to her parents' imminent divorce. Of course, Paula Danziger incorporates shades of grey as well but Amber's growing awareness of the complexity of life is never allowed to compromise the childlike sharpness of her viewpoint. It's easy to underestimate the sheer skill that lies behind a sparky, first-person narrative like this.

Robert Nye's **Beowulf** (Orion, 1 85881 031 0, £9.99) is much more obviously literary. First published in 1968, this hardback reprint feels like the return of an old friend – though one who's not without the odd flaw. I still groan at 'Out in the black fen something stirred' but this momentary lapse is soon overcome:

*'A trail of blood was left on the mud where the creature crawled. This was because it fed on living things and had grown so far and swollen in its greed that bits of the people it had eaten dripped from its scummy lips and crooked teeth.'*

Nye's writing grips as powerfully as Beowulf's famous fist... more powerfully, in my estimation, even than **Dragon Slayer** – Rosemary Sutcliff's version of this wonderful Old English poem.

**JEAN  
URE  
WATCHERS  
AT THE  
SHRINE**

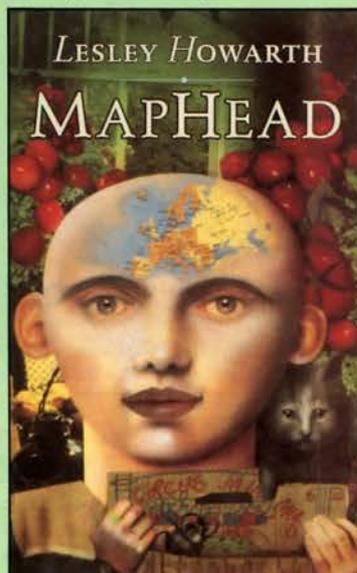


Jean Ure's **Watchers at the Shrine** (Methuen, 0 416 18824 9, £9.99) also has a shortcoming: it's far too short. Yes, I realise it's the final volume of the trilogy that began with **Plague 99** and continued with **Come Lucky April** but so compelling is this portrayal of post-disaster Britain a century and a half hence, and so important the theme of individual integrity pitted against group conformity, I'd have welcomed much, much more. Jean Ure's writing relies on a sort of penny-plain directness to transmit her message. Put most 12-plus-year-old imaginations on the receiving end of prose like this, though, and they'll erupt into tuppence-coloured:

*'Round a smouldering fire were squatted a group of perhaps twenty to thirty human beings – but such human beings as he had never in his life seen before.'*

*Dwarfish, twisted, misshapen, they hunkered about the burning embers...*

For strong stomachs only.



Altogether gentler is Lesley Howarth's **Maphead** (Walker, 0 7445 2458 X, £8.99). Her first novel, **The Flower King**, was shortlisted for both the Whitbread and the Guardian awards so she's set herself the hardest of acts to follow. Could she possibly re-mobilise that glorious verbal exuberance, that tightrope-treading combination of the lush and the sharply precise?

No problem.

Not only that, there's a marked improvement in the plotting and structure of her story – certainly the weakest aspect of her earlier book. Now she tells the tale of Boothe, aka Maphead, whose father Powers is a visitor from the Subtle World which exists alongside our own. Boothe, however, being the offspring of Power's relationship with a woman struck by lightning during an electric storm, is both Subtle and Earthly... and longs to track down his real mother. And so he does, in a tale that's weird, moving and funny by turns.

Language, though, is its chief attraction. Maphead can project meaning pictorially onto his own scalp but he must master human speech if his quest is to succeed. Thus, in a writerly tour de force, his progress is measured by the very words he uses – often with hilarious effect:

*'She fished out her book. "No waiting between nine and six. That sign over there. I'm booking your father."*

*Booking your father. Booking. Your father. Maphead ran it over twice, three times. Powers liked books. Books were ideal. But somewhere there was a threat, he was sure.*

*Suddenly he laughed sardonically. "Hey," he said, mimicking the acid tones of the man in the black shell-suit. "Hey. Get a life, why don't you?"'*

Whether setting a scene, describing events or analysing emotion, Lesley Howarth has a William Mayne-like ability to mint language afresh as she uses it. So, like that Old Master, she won't be to everyone's taste. Also like him, she has a touch of genius. Remember, you heard it here first. ■