

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 1995

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the children's book magazine



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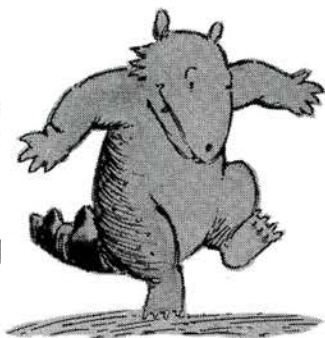


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CoverSTORY

This month's front cover features Nick Butterworth's **All Together Now!** (see Authorgraph on page 16 for details). The book is published by HarperCollins and we thank them for their help in using this illustration.

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the children's book magazine

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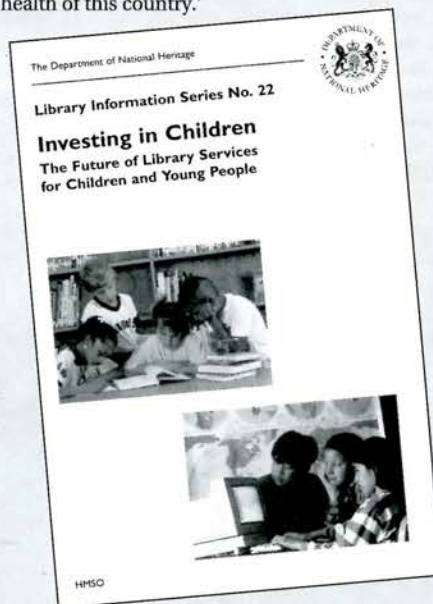
INVESTING IN ALIBIS

So now it's official:

'Public libraries are not adequately resourced to make up for the deficiencies of educational institutions that can not or will not provide sufficient text books and library books.'

For anyone who's tempted to say 'so what?' here's why this under-funding matters:

'The role of the public library in meeting the needs of children and young people is of paramount importance to the future economic and cultural health of this country.'



Both statements – blindingly obvious, no doubt, to the bulk of BfK readers – come from a new report called **Investing in Children: The future of Library Services for Children and Young People**. It was commissioned by the Department of National Heritage but produced by an independent working party of teachers, librarians, writers and others chaired by David Leabeater of the National Consumer Council. Their findings make sober reading:

- 'Funding levels are cause for concern in a significant number of areas of the country and reflect the continuing pressure from central government to restrain local authority expenditure... charge-capping and exceeding the Statutory Spending Allowance (SSA) are an ever present threat or reality for most authorities.' (page 20)
- 'There are huge disparities in levels of real purchase between authorities.' (page 21)
- 'Although the pattern to be imposed by [local government] reform in many counties of England has not yet been determined, it is clear that existing proposals would result in the dismemberment of some county authorities, with consequent dispersal of county library systems and their resources.' (page 25)
- 'Schools library services have been subject to fundamental change in recent years from the passing of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS)... the situation is not only complex but volatile... a few services have been disbanded altogether or run down to a minimum level.' (pages 35-36)
- 'Standards within individual services are dictated partly by funding levels but also – and perhaps more potently – by internal priorities in the allocation of budgets, management perceptions of the importance of the library, and the quality of staff whose function it is to observe and maintain specified standards.' (page 21)

Pretty depressing stuff.

Still, as Ross Shimmom of the Library Association remarked in welcoming the Report: 'at last it looks as if the Government may address the hugely neglected role of school and public libraries in delivering the National Curriculum.'

Will it, though?

Take another look at my five quotations which I

Editor's PAGE



CHRIS POWLING

chose as fairly as I could both to catch the drift of the Report as a whole and to reflect the worries expressed to BfK by countless librarians in recent years. The first four, it seems to me, are the direct result of political decision-making: about rate-capping, about provision at local level, about local government reorganisation, about the 'reform' of Education. These determine, overwhelmingly, the context of the fifth factor – the efficiency and initiative of individuals within the various library services.

Now, no one should underestimate the latter. The Report certainly doesn't... it's packed with advice about prioritising, about coordination, about the difference sheer flair can make as evidenced by a number of case histories. What it's careful to avoid, though, is the suggestion that these alone provide a solution – on the contrary, it spells out the exact opposite using heavy type for emphasis:

'While quality is not exclusively a product of funding, the ability to meet high standards of service does depend on adequate funding.' (page 21)

Is that clear enough?

Well, maybe it is to you and me – but not, apparently, to Stephen Dorrell. His response, as National Heritage Secretary, was as follows:

'By taking a hard look at what is available for children, and putting their heads together, school libraries and local libraries in any given area will find that their resources can go much further.'

That, substantially, is his answer.

The Report's cool but entirely unequivocal appraisal of the effects of current Government policy is simply ignored.

It's all the professionals' fault, you see. Knock the heads of a few book-ish softies together and the following facts, gathered earlier this year from a national survey by The Library Association, need no longer detain us:

- Nine authorities reported closures of a total of 37 branch libraries and five mobiles in 1995/6.
- Somerset has had its book fund cut by 37% and will be buying no fiction in 1995/6. In Lancashire, no new books at all were bought between December 1994 and April 1995.
- In the late 1970s there were 116 libraries in Britain which opened for at least 60 hours a week; by 1993 this had dropped to 10.

I could go on... but I'd better stop immediately before Stephen Dorrell arrives in person to smack my head and give me a hard look.

One thought does occur to me, though. The Law of the Land, on which our Government is normally so keen, requires 'a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof', insists on sufficient materials 'to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children' and places a statutory duty on the Secretary of State for National Heritage to 'superintend, and promote the improvement of [my italics] the public library service provided by local authorities in England'.

This being the case... anyone care to join me in a Citizen's Arrest?

Chris

Investing in Children (0 11 701994 1) is available from HMSO, priced £10.95.

'Library Power' culminates in a week of national and local activity from 15-21 May 1995. For further information about 'Library Power', contact The Library Association on 0171 636 7543.

REMINDER: Have you filled in our Reader Survey yet? If you haven't, please spare the time to complete the yellow sheet which arrived with your March issue of BfK and return it to us. Many thanks.

PROTOCOLS OF READING: THE LITTLE BOOKS OF BEATRIX POTTER

MARGARET MEEK

In the summer of 1992 the Beatrix Potter Society held its conference at Ambleside to discuss 'the little books' and invited me to talk about them as texts for modern children now learning to read. The exercise engaged me in ways I hadn't anticipated, not least because the many current versions of the stories – big books, videos, the ballet, plates, calendars and the rest – create a different context for looking at the originals. So I invited my audience of Potter experts to re-read the words and pictures of the little books with me as something 'anthropologically strange' to see what children could learn from the texts that might be 'protocols' for their later experiences. Here, taken more or less directly from the talk, are some of the things I still think about.

The importance of the little books of Beatrix Potter in children's reading is the same as that of any others they enjoy to help them to know what reading is like and what it is good for. These are superb stories which become complete and memorable reading acts. As they listen to adults reading them, children do not know that they are hearing not only the words of the author, but the tune of the reader's, and the author's, recollected childhood. As their familiarity with the stories increases they begin to realise that, in each story, everything is not quite as it seems. The world in the tale, in both words and pictures, has certain unfamiliarities, especially to modern city children for whom Mr McGregor's garden is an allotment. The interesting and strange thing is that they are quite ready to accept the convention of animals who talk and wear clothes, but are perplexed by the hints that earlier readers would take up more quickly, that is, references to all the other stories Beatrix Potter assumed her readers already knew. This intertextuality is the distinctive mark of children's literature in English. Some children learn it earlier than others.

Here is Jemima Puddle-duck, not really, but in a picture of a conversation between her and a foxy gentleman: her eager, upturned talking face; his condescending tilt of the head, his hands behind his back under his 'tail' coat. Adult readers grasp the semiotic significance of this at once, but children's experience of this kind of interpretation is still a-growing. The full detail of the picture contrasts with the laconic nature of the words. 'Indeed! how interesting!', the foxy gentleman is saying. So the readings include interpretations of facial expressions, steps (see the placing of the feet), flowers (fox-gloves, with a hyphen). 'You would not find my earth – my winter house – so convenient', is typical Potter: deliberate use of the right word, followed by what seems like an explanation for the inexperienced reader, but, at the same time, a piece of double play with Jemima's ignorance. Can you recollect when you came to this kind of understanding? When, do you think, children have a conscious grasp of it? My experience suggests that they are intrigued by 'what's going on' some time before they can explain it. They catch the implications in the adult reader's tune and emphases as particular to this author.

Like most of the little books, *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck* is a story about hints, of not saying what is meant. As experienced adult readers

we know *not* to treat most of the things and incidents illustrated in the pictures as they are presented: the feathers piled up in the 'tumble-down shed . . . made of old soap-boxes' are 'comfortable and very soft'. Then there is the foxy *politesse*: 'he promised to take great care of her nest'. Next comes the piling up of the threats by hints of association, 'sage and onions' in the context of 'a dinner-party all to ourselves!'. This is the play of significant details of the cultural code to be interpreted as *menace*. As we watch children discovering it, we might ask ourselves how we learned to construct understanding on at least two levels of awareness, as when the author tells us that the hound puppies are 'out at walk with the butcher'. The faithful dog, Kep, does not tell Jemima, so the readers are left to speculate about the part they played in her release. The story moves to its climax – Jemima hears a noise outside and doesn't quite know what is happening. The words are simply: 'and nothing more was ever seen of that foxy-whiskered gentleman'. Right from the start we have been made aware of Jemima's inadequacies: a wearying stubbornness and a lack of nous come in phrases such as 'not much in the habit of flying' and 'rather fancied a tree-stump amongst some tall fox-gloves'.

Unlike music, the score of Beatrix Potter's texts has no expression marks. The reader has to orchestrate all the polysemic layers of implications from the words and pictures alone. We are impressed by the shop-keeperiness of *Ginger and Pickles*, the turned-aroundness of the rat problem in *Samuel Whiskers*, the brutish anger of *Squirrel Nutkin*, the frantic house-keeping of *Mrs Tittlemouse*. We discover how economical their creator is with details. Chase that red cotton handkerchief from the onions to *Mrs Tiggy-winkle* and we are really in the know. Detect the exaggerated niceties of politeness – like the greeting in the street – in *The Tale of the Pie and the*

Patty-pan. Notice the enchantment of naming – not just characters but also actions: 'some are coughing in a fat voice', or the secrecy of the rats saying 'I fear we shall be obliged to leave this pudding'.

Adults and other experts look for help with all this from the details of Beatrix Potter's life: mewed up in London, twelve painting lessons, illicit pets, close observation, a brilliant ear for conversations and a keen eye for looking. The rituals of conversational exchange, so clearly part of middle-class life in *The Boltons*, bring with them overtones of moral judgement and implicit criticism. Just how havoc-making are the two bad mice I realised quite late when, for the first time, I saw the dolls in the dolls' house as a couple whose universe was being turned upside down. The American critic, Robert Sale says that Beatrix Potter is constantly urging us to look at animals and to ask about 'the animalness of people and the peopleness of animals', because 'animals are the backbone of children's literature as we know it'. A boy whose mother I knew told me that although he wanted *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* read to him at bedtime, he did not want the book in the room with him overnight. Beatrix Potter knew herself as a creator with power, the kind that authors want over their readers.



Beatrix Potter at Hill Top, Sawrey, 1913.
Courtesy of Frederick Warne Archive.



Above: Illustration for the frontispiece of *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck*. Jemima walks along a woodland path with the foxy gentleman.
© F. Warne & Co. 1908, 1987

Right: Illustration for page 13 of *The Tale of Ginger and Pickles*. Ginger and Pickles stand behind the counter of their shop. Samuel Whiskers has his hands on the counter, Mr Jeremy Fisher tries on galoshes.

© F. Warne & Co. 1909, 1987



My suggestion so far has been that we cannot know how children read the little books, what they 'make' of them, unless we understand something of what we, the older generation, are up to when we read to inexperienced readers these laden texts from a culture that is part of our history but no longer present. Here are some short cuts through newish areas of awareness. First, children recognise pictures and drawings as feelings: 'She's sad', 'he's angry' are the easy ones. Their way into Beatrix Potter's stories is by means of the visual clues interpreted from the pictures because children know, from television and advertising, how to do that before they read print. They also learn to treat words as oral playthings, so they can adopt Appley Dapply's *Nursery Rhymes* as a book friend, and enjoy 'amiable' and 'periwig' and the attraction of 'Tap, tap, tappit! Tap tappit! Why – I really believe it's a little black rabbit.'

The author's words linger in the ear by means of these vocalic textual devices. When certain phrases are well known we hear them repeated in other dramatic contexts; 'No teeth, no teeth, no teeth' said Mr Jackson. 'Doing the voices' lets the tune of the text be part of the feeling that comes with understanding the implications of the pictures. Word recognition comes last, and memory seals up the whole reading act as inner speech, so that young readers become, in their time, both the teller and the told. What they repeat as they re-read is what they keep – the pleasure of the text – the word play interwoven with the feeling for characters in dire straits.

Beatrix Potter was very fussy about the appearance of her words on the page. Scrupulous punctuation, phrase markers, are responsible for part of the build-up of Peter Rabbit's inevitable encounter with Mr McGregor. We hardly notice that one of the earliest lessons sorted out in these little pages is the English tense system: the past, within the past, in the past, 'Old Mrs Rabbit was a widow; she earned her living by knitting rabbit-wool mittens and muffetees. (I once bought a pair at a bazaar).' One young reader stopped to ask, 'Does she use her own hair?'. How many questions of this kind arise from first encounters? 'She also sold herbs, and rosemary tea, and rabbit tobacco (which is what we call lavender)'. Do we? Not really. But some children remember later the link between the book and the bush.

The most impressive thing for me about Beatrix Potter's little books is the number of reading lessons that lurk in these brilliantly economical texts constructed to meet her exigent artistic demands. Children learning to read, especially after they go to school, are very conscious of the cost-benefit ratio. The texts *seem* easy, yet each re-reading confirms the protocols that beginners have to understand if they are to be successful. These are not simply about how to get the words right, but, equally, if not more

importantly, beginners need experience of and attitudes towards reading which carry them beyond the early disentangling struggles.

Briefly, here are some of the reading experiences the little books make possible by giving young readers pleasure and showing reading as different from any other activity: word play, memorable phrases, unforgettable episodes remembered as images, splendid stories which set standards for all those that follow. Sense and sentences, actions and intentions are all subtly textured. In each story Beatrix Potter offers a totality of experience, thought and feeling woven together. The littleness of the books in their original format makes them undaunting. They are portable, for dipping into, remembering and savouring. This pausability makes reading special; stopping to wonder, to ask about a world which makes questions about rabbit hair important, and offering the understanding that literature is, in the end, made of words, images and imagination. Only later do adults see that the miniature worlds which children enter with such pleasure are also worlds of *longing*, like the dolls' house, and of the beauty of fine almost invisible stitching on a wedding garment. Yet, throughout the little books there runs a good plain sense of what life is all about – all that household chattering.

Perhaps the most important reading lesson of the little books, and the one all children must learn is persistence, in both life and reading. Beatrix Potter encourages children to fix a level exploratory gaze on the intricacies of her words and pictures. She understood that reality is the fantasy we live by. ■

Margaret Meek, a world-renowned expert on children's reading, is Emeritus Reader in Education at the Institute of Education, London. She's also on the Executive Committee of the National Literacy Trust.

For further information on The Beatrix Potter Society, write to The Membership Secretary, High Banks, Stoneborough Lane, Budleigh Salterton, Devon EX9 6HL.

Beatrix Potter's books are all published by Frederick Warne and we thank them for their help in using these illustrations. They produce a *Resource Pack for Teachers* costing £3.99 including p&p. Send cheque to Frederick Warne at 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ.



BOOKS INTO ART

Chris Chivers on the way in which children's reading and children's artwork can interact

To create a quality argument about the merits, or otherwise, of an author's intention and to discuss these with others allows children to move beyond a merely descriptive catalogue of events. Framing questions based on 'How . . . When . . . and Why?' leads to a deeper understanding than just 'What?' By using books as the basis for artwork, children can be freed to externalise wider thoughts than are often voiced within even the best book conference.

When a number of people said that the display created for Helen Cresswell's stand at the Wessex Children's Book Fair in 1994 was interesting, unusual and eye-catching the children present swelled with pride. 'Can you organise a display for three screens based on Helen Cresswell's books?' had been the organiser's request. Having handed the task to a mixed class of 10/11 year-olds, taught by our deputy head, I thought I'd offer to help as the work was short-term and in addition to that already planned.

Children scoured the school and were pleasantly surprised at the number of Helen's books in our library with **Moondial** and **The Secret World of Polly Flint** being the most widely available. These were made accessible for all the class to read over a three-week period. In that time some read one title while others devoured several, but they knew they had a common theme to discuss at the end of the time – to describe how the author used settings within the novel.

Scene-setting words were brainstormed, followed by the draft of a storyboard with the emphasis on backgrounds. The whole exercise could have stopped at this stage – the storyboards, when mounted, would have been an acceptable display in their own right – but each child was asked to create a large painting of one scene. It was at this point that a minor interference led to a major shift in the children's thinking.

With several of the pictures' horizons being absolutely straight, as is often the case, it was too tempting to ignore discussing the effect of *folding* the pictures. Immediately there were exclamations of surprise.

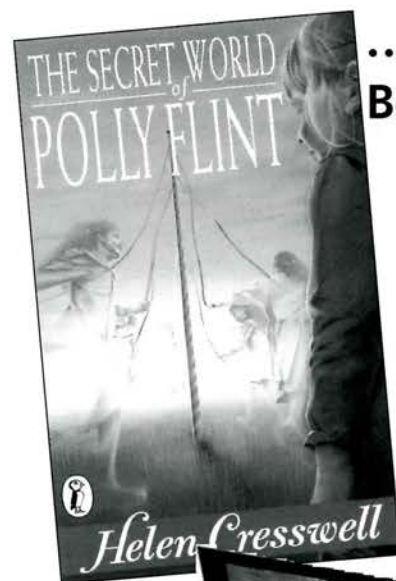
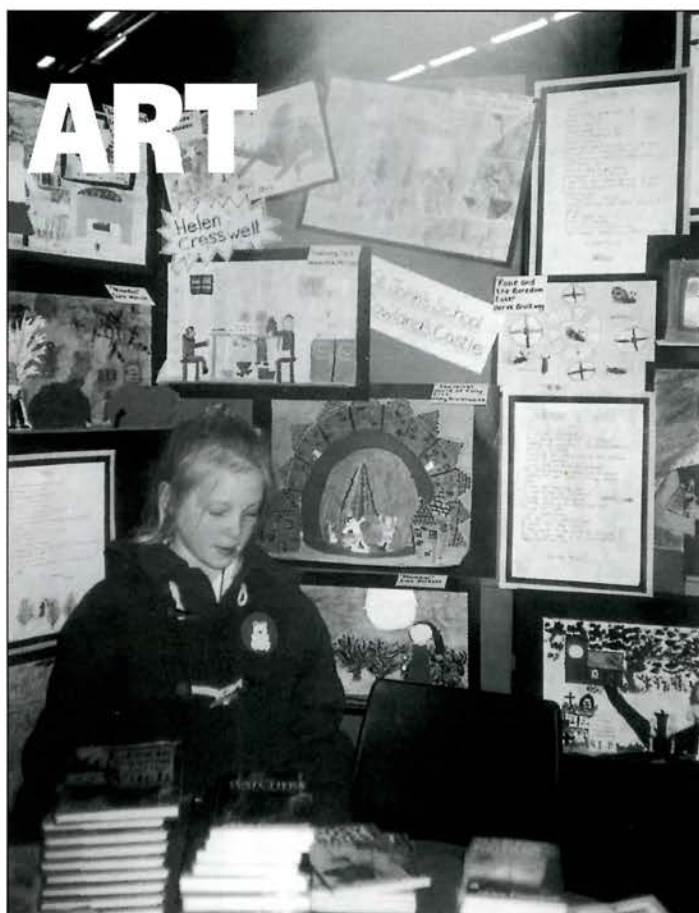


'It looks as if it's moving away.'

'It has distance.'

'It's 3-D.'

This moved the discussion on to three-dimensional modelling and someone came up with the idea that we could create a stage



Puppet character

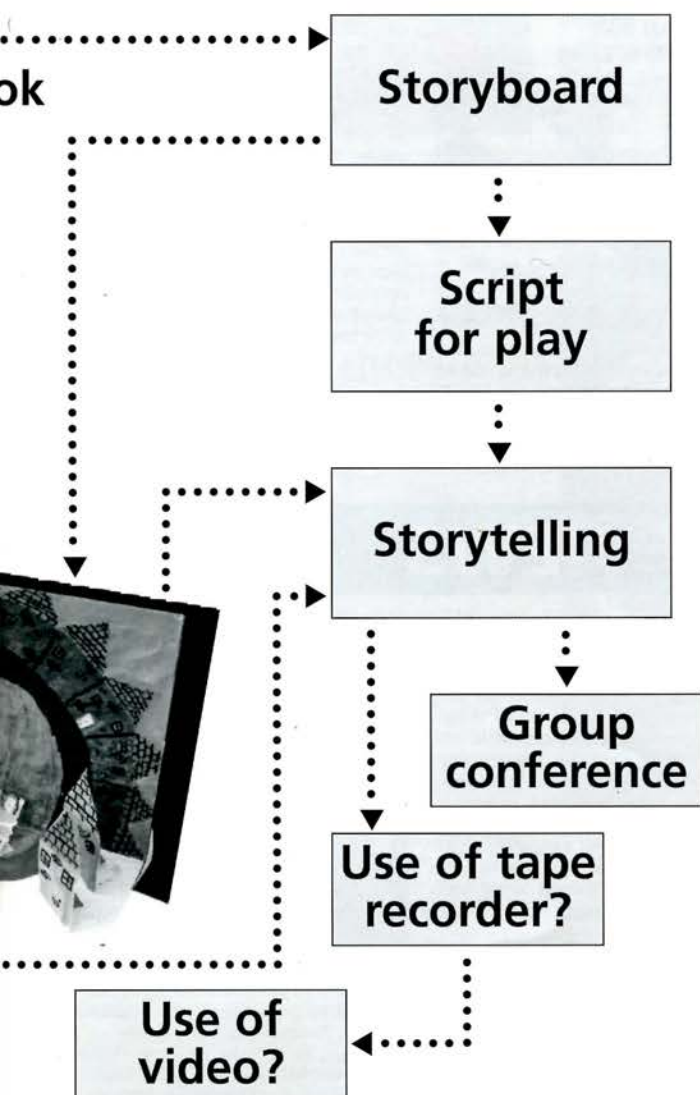
Background

set (These children had recently experienced puppet plays.) At least one child was enthused by the possibilities, working quicker than her peers and showing them what was possible. A head of steam built up as more children tried, with varied success, to create their own versions.

Backgrounds having been created, foregrounds developed through the addition of free-standing houses, trees, buses and characters. Eventually, static three-dimensional models were created which were then displayed at the Book Fair in Winchester. However, there's always a nagging thought. What could have been the next step in the development of the task? Could each of the creations have been used as the basis for a puppet play involving the book characters? Could a script have been developed from the original storyboard? With the availability of Camcorders, what would be the possibilities of working towards animation?

The discussion generated through the activity was invariably book-based, focusing on the author's intention within a scene. Sheer familiarity with the books improved the quality of the argument, with alternative hypotheses being offered, discussed and revised. Children are often left alone to enjoy a book (which may be an individual need). This solitary approach can be reinforced through a solo book review . . . but collaboration also brings its rewards.

Children might be asked to create a puppet based on the main character in their book and to tell the story through that puppet at a conference, with their classmates asking questions. They could create an environment or setting for the character to inhabit, and then make the story come alive through storytelling. Such responses to literature would provide coverage of English

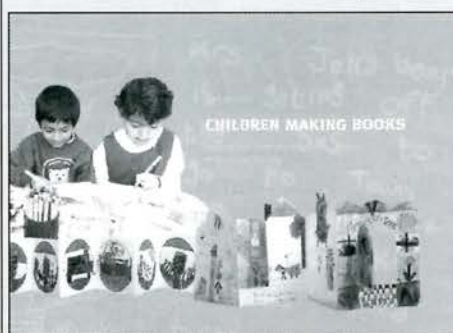


from speaking and listening, through reading to writing with the capacity for drafting and varieties of presentations.

Probably someone will have had similar bright ideas already and I'd be very pleased to hear about interpretations of books that have involved puppets and animation. I'm convinced these can be important elements in exciting children as readers . . . ■

Chris Chivers is headteacher at St John's Primary School, Rowlands Castle, Hampshire.

Helen Cresswell's **Moondial** is available from Puffin (0 14 032523 9, £3.99) as is **The Secret World of Polly Flint** (0 14 031542 X, £3.75).



Readers interested in developing children's ability to make their own books might like to take a look at a recent publication by Paul Johnson of the Book Art Project. It's called **Children Making Books** (0 7049 0714 3), costs £3.50 and can be obtained from the Reading and

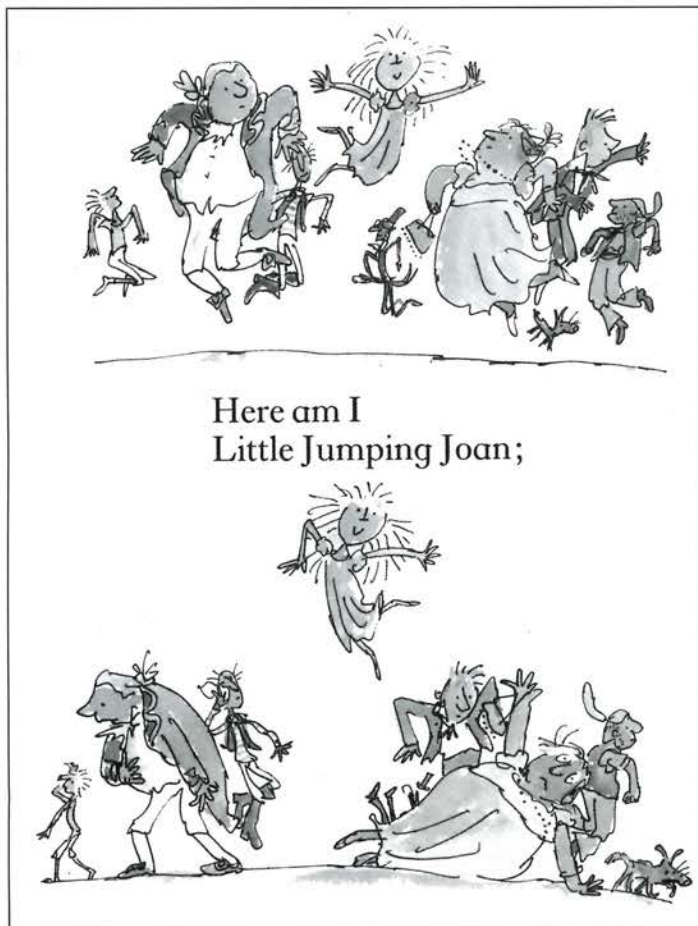
Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY. Cheques should be made payable to 'University of Reading'.

Also available, direct from Paul Johnson, are two sets of hand-bound, colour-illustrated, story books produced by children aged 6 to 10. They come in a presentation box with accompanying notes and aim to encourage schools to do the same kind of work with their children. **Book Box 1** and **Book Box 2** cost £6 each (cheques to 'The Book Art Project') and are available from Paul Johnson, The Book Art Project, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M20 2RR.

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



Here am I
Little Jumping Joan;

From Quentin Blake's Nursery Rhyme Book.

I Can't Get to Sleep

Frank Rodgers, Mammoth
(Dec 94), 0 7497 1676 2, £3.99

Tom's family try lulling him to sleep with a succession of bedtime stories,

all of which turn out to be stimulating rather than soothing. Even when the characters attempt singing him to sleep, they only start to doze themselves, leaving Tom as wakeful as ever. Eventually, he nods off with

the help of his favourite teddy. Domestic, but interesting and nicely illustrated. This is a good read aloud... especially, of course, at bedtime. LW

Quentin Blake's Nursery Rhyme Book

Quentin Blake, Red Fox
(Jan 95), 0 09 950071 X, £4.50

Quentin Blake's idiosyncratic style of illustration is exactly right for this collection of lesser-known nursery rhymes and characters. Large, clear print and short pieces will encourage both young readers and listeners, while the rich, odd language of these old verses will entertain and enhance children's speech. Who could resist knowing about William McTrimbletow or Little Jumping Joan? Lovely stuff to read or recite out loud. LW

Slinky Malinki, Open the Door

Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin (Jan 95),
0 14 055326 6, £3.99



If you've ever thought dogs have had things their own way in the world of Hairy Maclary for far too long, you'll welcome this second story about the black cat, Slinky Malinki, teamed in mischief with Stickybeak Syd, the

rainbow lorrieket.

Inevitably, perhaps, this lacks the fresh originality of the early books by Lynley Dodd, but the rhymes jog along well. The refrain will encourage joining in and the pictures are lively and amusing. LW

Grandad Pot

Siobhan Dodds, Walker
(Jan 95), 0 7445 3631 6, £3.99



'Ring, ring, ring' - a call from granddaughter Polly sends Grandad Pot into a frenzy of activity making chocolate cake for tea. But that's not all: the telephone rings again and again as Polly invites Harry, Rosie and George too, each of whom has a favourite dish, and there's a surprise in store when Polly finally does arrive. Whether there's a surprise for readers depends on how well they've read the pictures.

This book has everything the learner reader could wish for: natural repetition, a cumulative patterned text and appealing pictures which act as clues as well as extending the story. It begs to be read over and over again. JB

Infant/Junior REVIEWS

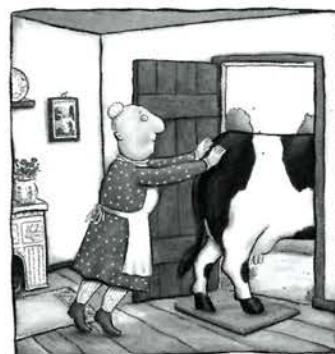
Jess Was the Brave One

Jean Little, ill. Janet Wilson,
Picture Puffin (Jan 95),
0 14 054309 0, £3.99

The illustrations here are particularly impressive and greatly enrich this story of two sisters. The younger, Jess, is 'the brave one' who has her injections without fussing and loves thunderstorms while big sister, Claire, has 'an over-active imagination' and is therefore frightened of almost everything. Her love of her grandfather's bedtime stories, however, enables her to deal with the bullies who take Jess's teddy. Perhaps there is something to be said for an imagination after all. Lots to talk and think about means this will appeal to a wide age range. LW

A Squash and a Squeeze

Julia Donaldson, ill. Axel Scheffler, Mammoth
(Jan 95), 0 7497 1778 5, £3.99



A jolly version of the traditional tale in which a little old lady complains that her house is too small. Advised by the wise man to take in all her animals and then to get rid of them again, she realises the house is, in fact, 'weeny for five', but 'gigantic for one' and lives contentedly thereafter. Written in lively rhyming couplets and amusingly illustrated in bold colour, this will entertain children from 5 to about 8. And it will interest adults to see at what age children 'get' the point. LW

Island Baby

Holly Keller, Red Fox
(Jan 95), 0 09 950061 2, £4.50

A large-format, beautifully produced picture book about a young boy, Simon, who helps his grandfather



with his bird hospital. One particular patient, rescued by Simon himself, becomes a special pet... but must, at last, be set free. How Simon comes to terms with losing his favourite is nicely dealt with and

related, interestingly, to his own situation as he leaves mum and starts school. Splendidly illustrated and with clear, rich text, this has many possibilities. **LW**

Elizabeth, Larry and Ed
Marilyn Sadler, ill. Roger Bollen, Picturemac
(Jan 95), 0 333 58764 2, £3.99



Like the first book about Elizabeth and Larry, the old lady and her dinosaur friend, this has more to say about relationships than meets the eye. When Elizabeth takes in Ed, a homeless swamp creature, Larry has to battle with problems of dislike, jealousy and the need to be welcoming to one less fortunate than himself. Luckily, the problem is resolved when Ed's mum comes to take him home and peace returns.

Cheerful, cartoony pictures and a deadpan text add to the attraction of this entertaining book. **LW**

In Search of the Hidden Giant
Jeanne Willis, ill. Ruth Brown, Red Fox (Feb 95),
0 09 943281 1, £4.50

A rich and challenging picture book in verse. Two children set off into the woods to find a giant; their imaginations gradually create him out of the trees and plants of the dense undergrowth. Eventually they thoroughly frighten themselves, running in terror into the sunlight where he doesn't seem so terrible after all. The brilliant trick of Ruth Brown's illustrations enables us to slowly create the giant as well; do we imagine him or is he really there? We're no more sure than the children. The language is complex and yet clear enough for a young child, while the conclusion, 'the less we see, the more I know our giant imaginations grow', has much to make the reader, of any age, wonder. **LW**

Real Sisters

Susan Wright, ill. Bo-Kim Louie, Ragweed (Jan 95),
0 921556 42 X, £3.50

'Kids can be so mean', as seven-year-old, adopted Claire finds out when she switches schools. Taunts about the difference in her skin colour and her older sister Jennifer's set her thinking about what makes a 'real' sister. The recollections of incidents in their life together, and Jennifer's reaction when she finds out why Claire is so upset give her the answer.

A warm, gentle book, realistically and sympathetically illustrated. **JB**

The Day it Rained in Colours

Roy Etherton, ill. Julie Park, Lion (Jan 95),
0 7459 3034 4, £3.99

When Sarah, Tom and Nick descend in a brightly coloured balloon, the people of Greyland discover something is missing from their world - colour. They all want their land to be colourful too, but both the wizard's and the witch's efforts at brightening things up are less than satisfactory. It's only when they ask the long-forgotten Maker for help that colour returns.

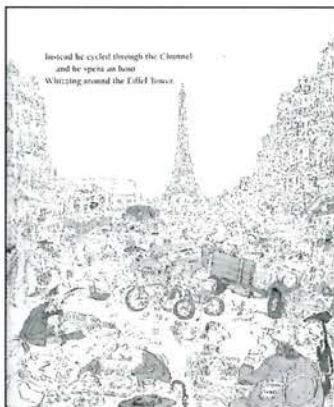
There is a clear, though not obtrusive, religious element in this story which was first published in the 1970s and has long been popular with teachers doing a topic on 'colours'. It's a pity, however, that Julie Park's illustrations, which portray a multi-racial Greyland, don't show Little Grey Boy as the 'Brown Boy' the text dictates. **JB**

The Magic Bicycle

Brian Patten, ill. Arthur Robins, Walker (Feb 95),
0 7445 3651 0, £3.99

*'Like it or lump it, lump it or like,
Ride on forever, little tike!'*

With these words a witch sets Danny Harris on an eventful journey round the world glued to his enchanted bicycle. His encounters with Bearskins and Bedouins, camel and crocodile, penguin and polar bear, not to mention a skeleton crew of a Ghostly Galleon, are rollickingly recounted in rhyme.



The frenetic and funny illustrations match the mood of the tale and Danny's journey can be traced on the map which forms the endpapers of the book. However, I found the caricatures of some of the people unacceptable, and since when were penguins to be found in the Arctic? **JB**

Fox on Stage

James Marshall, Red Fox (Feb 95), 0 09 945781 4, £3.99

Impulsive and optimistic Fox applies all his efforts to achieving his latest ambition, be it creating a video (of unsuspecting neighbours), becoming a great magician or directing and starring in a stage drama. Despite seriously silly setbacks, Fox always manages to rebound cheerfully and re-energise his talents ready for the next challenge. Unsophisticated humour and sparse, large, clear print make this welcomingly manageable for Year 2 children. **GR**

Gilly the Kid

Adèle Geras, ill. Sue Heap, Macdonald (Feb 95),
0 7500 1682 5, £3.50

Gilly the Kid is a determined baddie-catcher and Biscuit, the pony, is a long-suffering team mate on the trail of prime suspect, Harry Hiram. Finally Sasparilla Suzie, Widow Ruby and Dozy Rosie can rest assured that the real culprit has been cornered - and oldest resident, Whiskery Pete, can resume his belief that there are still no really bad baddies in Vulture Gulch.

Adèle Geras has created a neatly structured story packed with action and humour. Recently confident readers will enjoy this (from the new Macdonald Storybooks series) and quality language makes it great for reading aloud. **GR**

The Jessame Stories

Julia Jarman, ill. Duncan Smith, Mammoth (Jan 95),
0 7497 1930 3, £2.99

Julia Jarman knows child logic and child concerns as well as just the sort of place that makes you think of the Big Bad Troll who lived under the bridge in 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'. This book contains six warmly recounted episodes of Jessame's life in a multi-cultural setting, including a realistic retelling of when she had a very bad day. These are credible, entertaining, sensitively written stories to which 6/7 year-olds enjoy listening and which 8-10 year-olds enjoy reading for themselves. **GR**

Addy the Baddy

Margaret Joy, ill. Lauren Child, Puffin (Jan 95),
0 14 036260 6, £3.25



Addy is determined not to like her new school even before she gets there, but when she arrives and finds



From Fox on Stage.

the class doing maths she's not familiar with, she makes up her mind. 'I'm not staying here long,' she tells herself and Kath who's been asked to look after her. Her antics to try to get sent home include flooding the toilets, ruining the paint colours and hiding her lunchtime sprouts. However, no one seems unduly worried by her misdemeanours and at the end of the day the new school doesn't seem so bad.

Lauren Child's seemingly artless, almost scribbled illustrations are highly effective and will give added pleasure to the reader. **JB**

Beware the Killer Coat

Susan Gates, ill. Josip Lizatović, Walker (Feb 95),
0 7445 3666 9, £2.99



From the outset Andrew is convinced the second-hand red winter coat his mum buys him is out to get him. It nearly eats him when he tries it on in the shop. 'You're letting your imagination run away with you again,' says his mum. But when the coat eats the parents' evening note from school, then his new gloves and finally his pet, Ratty, Andrew knows it's only a matter of time before the coat, with its silver teeth and red tongue, will finish him off.

With its first-person telling, bubble talk and text integrated with line drawings, which cleverly portray the coat so that its malevolence increases along with Andrew's convictions, this book is a real treat for solo readers from around 7. **JB**

Martha Speaks

Susan Meddaugh, Picturemac (Jan 95),
0 333 60208 0, £3.99



A diet of alphabet soup turns Helen's dog, Martha, into a veritable chatter-box. At first Helen and her family find it both fascinating and fun to have a talking dog as they show off Martha's talents to their friends and relations. Soon she's driving everyone crazy with her chatter, until she takes her family's shouted command to 'Shut up' to heart and things get back to normal. But there are occasions when it's good to talk, especially on the telephone, as the family and a burglar discover. Lots to read and laugh over here and readers may well be inspired to invent their own episodes involving Martha and her linguistic prowess. **JB**

Come Back, Grandma

Sue Limb, ill. Claudio Muñoz, Red Fox (Feb 95), 0 09 921951 4, £4.50

I'm often asked for books that will help small children come to terms with the death of a grandparent. This sensitively told story not only does that but also leads on to thoughts about the continuity of the family and the endless renewal of life.

Very simply told, the book describes Bessie's loving relationship with her Grandma, her grief when she dies (and the various ways other adults try explaining death to a child) and her pleasure when, as a grown-up, she realises her own child is going to look just like Grandma; Grandma has, in a way, come back. Full of things to talk about, this is a valuable and thoughtful book. **LW**



'Bessie missed Grandma' from *Come Back, Grandma*.

Bags of Poems: POETRY Family Album

Edited by Jill Bennett, ill. Sami Sweeten, Picture Corgi (Feb 95), 0 552 52715 7, £2.99

A collection of poems and verse, from a variety of sources, with the common theme of families. This theme is interpreted imaginatively and includes not only parents and siblings but also the family of humanity in its widest sense. Most of the poems are amusing – many are also thought-provoking and challenging for young readers and listeners. Lively illustrations add greatly to the quality of the words. **LW**



'It so nice to have a Granny when you've had it from yuh Mammy and you feeling down and dammy' from *Bags of Poems: Family Album*.

Junior/Middle REVIEWS

No Friend of Mine

Ann Turnbull, Walker (Feb 95), 0 7445 3657 X, £3.99

In this story set in 1937, Lennie is bullied both in and out of school. Discovering a ruined house in the woods he finds that someone has already made it a secret hideout. Ralph is a boy unlike any he's met previously – well-spoken, well-fed, well-educated. The two become friends, but then Lennie realises Ralph is from the 'enemy' – son of the disliked owner of a mill where his dad is campaigning against the appalling conditions in which men work underground. Is it possible for their friendship to continue? A sequel to *Pigeon Summer* which explores relationships and class differences, intolerance and exploitation. **VB**

In the Money

Helen Dunmore, Red Fox (Jan 95), 0 09 927601 1, £3.50

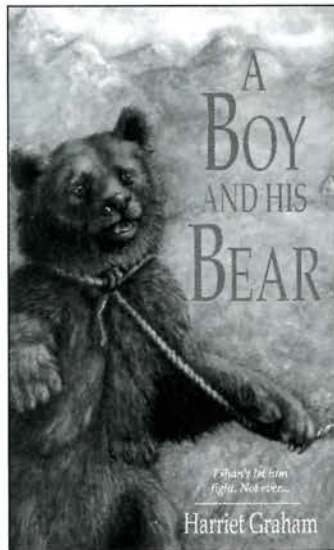
This is an uneasy mixture of adventure and timeslip. Two children move to a vast, expensive house in the country. Suddenly money is pouring in, but from where? Why does Dad have secret meetings and mysterious packages delivered to the house? As Paul is exploring the numerous rooms and corridors, he finds a small girl in one of the passages. She's dirty, hungry and frightened. She knows everything about the big house and its housekeeper, only she died 100 years ago ... her link with the present as well as the past is a warning.

I found the ending unsatisfactory – Dad and his shady dealings vanish, the money vanishes too, and the children and their mother return to a more frugal lifestyle. Has Dad got away with his cash? I would have liked to know. **VB**

A Boy and His Bear

Harriet Graham, Scholastic (Nov 94), 0 590 54170 6, £6.99

Dickon, a young tanner's apprentice in Elizabethan England, is sent on an errand by his master to the Bear Garden and there he sees a small cub



recently captured in France. He feels great pity for the animal and is determined to gain its trust and save it from a life filled with cruelty. But his endeavours are not welcomed – by his master nor by the evil Osric. His attempts to rescue the cub lead him to many adventures both in England and in France. This is an exciting and moving story told both from the animal's point of view as well as that of his young friend. **VB**

Lucy Jane and the Russian Ballet

Susan Hampshire, ill. Honey de Lacey, Mammoth (Jan 95), 0 7497 1844 7, £2.99

From 'the blurb' it's clear that Lucy Jane does get chosen to study at The Hirkov Ballet and yet there's real tension until Chapter 5 as she goes through a rigorous selection process. Fourth in the series (which began in 1985 with *Lucy Jane and the Ballet*) this can be read successfully on its own, though if you've liked one, you'll probably read them all for they're gripping from start to finish and underline that hard work is necessary to achieve great things. Boys feature too but the stories definitely hold most appeal for girls. **GR**

The Big Chance

Rob Childs, ill. Aidan Potts, Young Corgi (Feb 95), 0 552 52824 2, £2.99

More about Chris Weston and Danebridge School football team. It's Pud's big chance to be in the school squad if he can only curb his violent temper which can lead to broken windows, demolished huts and even bloodshed. This is as exciting and fast-moving as others in the series, presenting rounded personalities as well as plentiful football action. Grandad is as direct and encouraging, Andrew as blunt as ever and the interaction between 'Little' and 'Large' Jamie and Pud is sensitive, realistic and entertaining. **GR**

Stanley Bagshaw and the Ice-cream Ghost

Bob Wilson, Picture Puffin (Jan 95), 0 14 050757 4, £3.99

Anyone who's met Stanley Bagshaw before will want to pick this up immediately. The condensed riches in these books mean you'll be glued to every page so as not to miss a detail in the illustrations or a snippet of wit in the comic-strip text.



Here Stanley, predictably and hilariously, meets Big Sid and Specs who happen to be robbing Poshington Towers just as Stanley and the Townswomen's Circle are on a guided tour. These books are accessible across the entire age range (even into old age) as the humour operates on so many levels. Not to be missed. **GR**

Cliffhanger

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Yearling (Feb 95), 0 440 86338 4, £2.99

Abandoned by his parents to the somewhat doubtful thrills and excitements of a planned adventure holiday, Tim is having second thoughts even before his first ones. He hates games and feeling homesick and is afraid he looks as though he'd be more likely to run off home to mum than run away with the first prize. This is a touching and endearing story of Tim growing up fast and learning to be a boy in his own right, which manages, at the same time, to be very funny. **PH**

Sticky Beak

Morris Gleitzman, Macmillan (Jan 95), 0 330 33681 9, £3.50

Possibly the funniest story about Rowena Batts ever! Although unable to speak, she signs her way through one disaster after another managing not only to communicate very effectively but to create crises with enviable efficiency. As if her response to life wasn't enough, her newly adopted and totally crackers cockatoo proves to be the 'cherry' the jelly and custard never had. I loved *Blabbermouth*, but this has to be the best – though beware of the happy ending and get the tissues ready. **PH**

Granny

Anthony Horowitz, Walker (Jan 95), 0 7445 3681 2, £3.99

A book that starts at the end and then begins again going on almost to the end which is where it began. Joe Warden's granny scares everyone witless and seems indestructible, surviving enough disasters to wipe out a regiment let alone a frail and elderly lady. That she is not, and yet just towards the end we do get the most disquieting niggle of doubt – have we the readers been indescribably cruel? Tony Ross's cover illustration is enough to strike fear into the stoutest heart. All told, this is just the book to share with a granny, providing she's got a sense of humour! **PH**

Flashback: The Amazing Adventures of a Film Horse

Gillian Rubinstein,
Mammoth (Feb 95),
0 7497 0743 7, £2.50

With its most eye-catching cover in the gaudy colours of 1950s vintage cowboy films and an amazingly clever alliterative chapter list (any word you like as long as it begins with F), this has to be the sort of book 'they' love and we think we're going to hate, hide and keep off the shelves. Wrong. Any book that has a major character saying on the first page 'Reading is very important' gets my vote for sentiments if not for subtlety. The story is exciting and funny with horses, but it's not 'horsey', and cowboys but it isn't a western. It's about as deceptive and misleading as the world Anthony and Flash discover when they become involved in the movies. PH

Winni Allfours

Babette Cole, Picture
Puffin (Jan 95),
0 14 054917 X, £3.99

Frivolity, fantasy and fun, Babette Cole style, feature in this tale of Winni and her passion for ponies. Winni's parents refuse to buy her a pony but insist she gives up eating hamburgers and chips and switches to vegetables. This change in diet turns Winni into not just a pony but a racehorse – and a winning one at that!

Both the crazy storyline and zany illustrations make this a book which will appeal to older readers, especially the less confident. JB

Snoggers

Selected by
David Orme, ill.
Lucy Maddison, Piper
(Jan 95), 0 330 33786 6, £3.50

Snoggers, filthily sub-titled 'slap 'n' tickle poems', is a collection of three dozen verses about the sort of tongue butties you don't get in a school packed lunch.

**POETRY
ORIGINAL**

Reading this stuff was a bit like downing a lengthy draught of somebody else's saliva, though I suppose the subject matter ('oodles of canoodles', 'slobbery wet smackers', and 'smoochy wet crackers') is guaranteed to provide embarrassing reading for anybody under 10 and over 15. Prosaic puddles abound, mired about with the tackiness that attends adults' attempts to ape the argot and outlook of the adolescent, and male attempts to ventriloquise female voices. Having said this, a group of readers within the aforementioned age range lapped it all up like ambrosia. *Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait.* GH

Puppy Fat

Morris Gleitzman,
Macmillan (Feb 95),
0 330 34211 8, £3.50

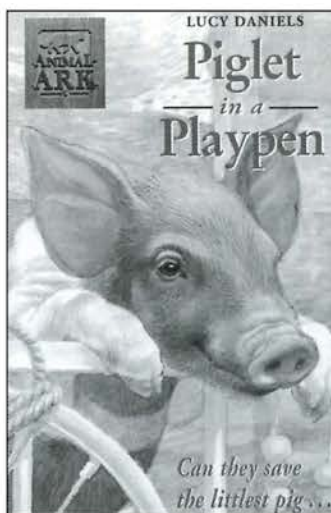
Readers who've followed the mixed fortunes of amateur painter and would-be heart-healer, Keith Shipley, will be happy to have this update on his fractured family's latest tribulations. Keith is desperate to haul his parents from the slough of post matrimonial despond, and in order to do so he enlists the help of Auntie Bev, a beautician who is accompanying Keith's old mate Tracy on a visit from Australia. Keith is impressed with the zeal and efficacy of Bev's campaign, but it takes him a while to realise that her devotion to glam-fascism is at least as destructive to happiness as his parents' erstwhile lethargy.

Morris Gleitzman accomplishes a nimble balance between outlandish wit, a helter-skelter plot and a concern for moral issues that's never compromised by the farcical narrative. Highly recommended for fluent readers and for reading aloud, preferably as part of the trilogy which began with *Misery Guts* and continued with *Worry Warts*. GH

Piglet in a Playpen

Lucy Daniels, ill. Shelagh
McNicholas, Hodder
(Dec 94), 0 240 61930 9, £2.99

The eponymous heroine is the runt of a litter condemned to death by a



struggling farmer. His surly son, Brandon, has, however, fallen in love with the doomed little saddleback, and his efforts to save her are supported by the daughter of the local vet and by her animal-loving friend. The tension between sentimental and hard-nosed views of farming is well represented in the ordeal suffered by the tough but tender Brandon, whose passion for pigs strives for expression in a classroom oral assessment scene.

A happy ending is a foregone conclusion in this sort of story, but the author provides us with some instruction and entertainment on the way. GH

The Mystery of the House of Pigeons

Subhadra Sengupta, ill.
Tapas Guha, Puffin
(Feb 95), 0 14 036309 2, £3.99

Three children in nineteenth-century Delhi meet a half-crazed old trinket seller who mistakes one of them for his long-dead charge, giving him a precious ring which sets off a hunt for the lost jewels of Samarkand. The children's subsequent adventures follow a frayed skein of clues into a tangle of old but still lethal animosities. The conclusion is a pell-mell chase and counter

chase with an inadvertent touch of the Keystone Cops about it. This is an exciting story in which a carefully calibrated amount of cultural information and local vocabulary add to the interest without detracting from the storyline. GH

A Ruby, a Rug and a Prince Called Doug

Kaye Umansky, Lions
(Jan 95), 0 00 674794 9, £3.99

A rambling romp of a book, in which a dim but nice prince is packed off to a bedlam school and on his way there falls foul of a sprawling cast of prats and picaroons, all in pursuit of his festered old rug, a magic carpet in disguise. There is much juggling of genres as distorted fairy-story motifs collide with imagery and language from comic-strip culture and the soaps. The result is anarchically uneven but enjoyable.

Incidentally, Robert Browning once used the word 'twats' in a poem, thinking that it referred to a nun's headgear. It doesn't. I don't know what Kaye Umansky thinks it means but I was very surprised indeed to find it on page 2 of a children's book, and so will your young readers be. GH

Attila the Bluebottle and more wild stories

Colin Thompson, Hodder
(Feb 95), 0 340 61995 3, £3.50

Like a zoom lens tour of an evolving habitat in a nature documentary, the first chapter of this book familiarises us with the ecology of a house and garden abandoned by an elderly owner and twice rehabilitated, once by wildlife and then by a young family. The subsequent stories, which describe how the two sets of colonists get along with each other, are full of quirky humour and offbeat observations. There are romances and catastrophes, comedies and tragedies, all set within a lusciously vivid milieu of growth and decay and rebirth. A couple of lapidary little nature poems are slipped in gratis. This is good rich stuff for reading aloud or savouring alone. GH

Middle/Secondary REVIEWS

Operation Gadgetman!

Malorie Blackman, ill.
Derek Brazell, Yearling
(Mar 95), 0 440 86307 4,
£2.99

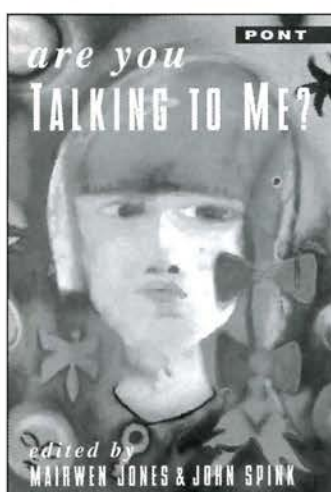
Several mugs of tea went cold because of this. With the help of friends Ann and Louisa, Beans (real name Beatrice) makes essential progress in detecting inventor Dad's whereabouts which, for their own safety, becomes known as 'Operation Gadgetman'. The quirky workings of Dad's 'induction ascillator' invention, plus his honesty, have led to a kidnapping; and the special Gadgetman Spy Kits and amazing Animal Crunchies are responsible for the rescue. There's great originality in the storyline as well as strong emotions, humour, loads of excitement and a lovely Gran. You'll be driven to read this in one go. GR

Are You Talking to Me?

Edited by Mairwen
Jones and John Spink,
ill. Karen Pearce, Pont
(Dec 94), 1 85902 178 6, £3.95

I already have several favourites because of the words, the styles, the themes, the subjects – and not because I, too, live in Wales. Response was favourable at a nearby school as I'm sure it will be elsewhere in the country. Subjects range from animals, family, famous events, first love, education, how long it takes to write a poem... and there are the ever relevant themes of time, change, loss, resilience... by five poets: Mike Jenkins, Penny Windsor, Owen Sheers, Christine Evans and John Tripp. A worthy read for any thinking person. GR

**POETRY
ORIGINAL**



The Rope School

Sam Llewellyn, Walker
(Feb 95), 0 7445 3663 4, £3.99

If you're looking for an action story with a strong female lead, you needn't look much further than this; a girl called Kate disguised as a boy on an 1813 sailing ship stalking American vessels in the Atlantic!

How all this comes about and how it ends creaks a bit in places, but it makes a fast and exciting yarn with a crew of suitably salty characters. DB

Angel Face

Narinder Dhama, Lions
(Feb 95), 0 00 675021 4, £3.99

I haven't found a book so entertaining in a long while; I couldn't put it down until I'd finished it. The style, the pace, the humour are so well judged that virtually any young reader will warm to it.

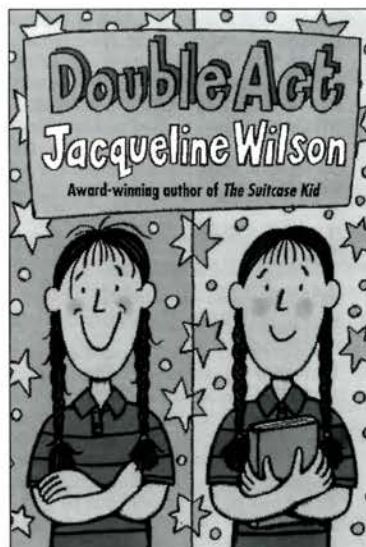
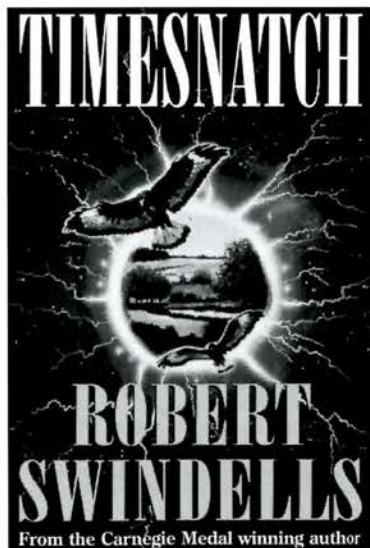
TIME TO SNATCH THE LATEST FROM TRANSWORLD CHILDREN'S BOOKS

TIMESNATCH

Robert Swindells
0440 863228 £2.99

June 1995

Physicist Harper Rye has created an incredible machine which can travel back in time, snatch any living thing and bring it into the present. As the secret leaks out and requests flood in to resurrect everything from dinosaurs to dead pop stars, Kizzy and Frazer find their mother's dream becoming a nightmare.



DOUBLE ACT

Jacqueline Wilson
0385 405375 £8.99

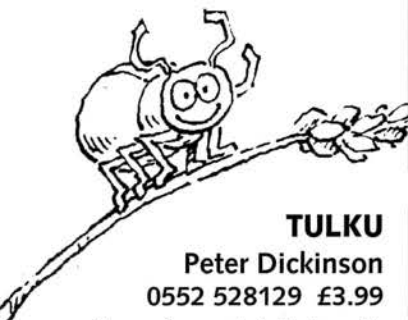
Ruby and Garnet are twins. Their dad's got a new girlfriend called Rose and she's spoiling everything. Dad wants them all to live together but the twins hate the idea. At least they've got each other. But can being a double act work forever?



OMNIBOMBULATOR

Dick King-Smith
0385 404794 £8.99

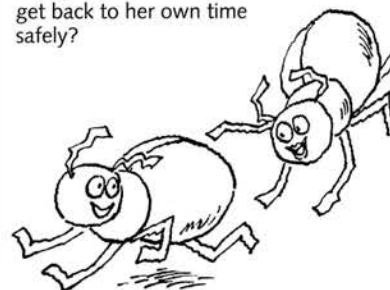
Omnibombulator is a very small beetle. So small, in fact, that his mother and father give him a really long name to make him feel important. But he still gets pushed around by everybody. Then one day he sets out to seek his fortune - and discovers just how useful being small can be.



THIEF!

Malorie Blackman
0385 405049 £9.99

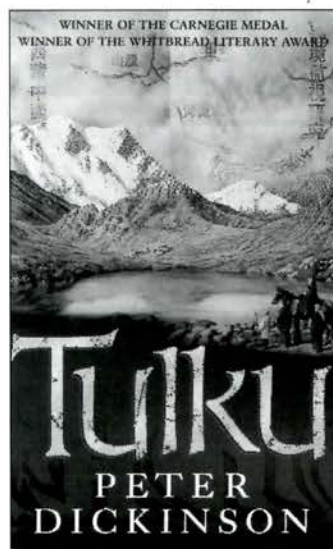
A strange storm whirls Lydia into the future ... a bleak, terrible future. Why has she been brought here? How is she connected to the evil Tyrant? And will she ever get back to her own time safely?



TULKU

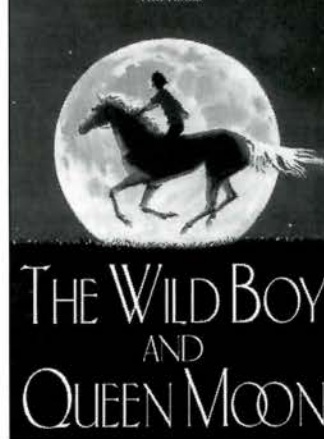
Peter Dickinson
0552 528129 £3.99

Alone after a rebel attack on his father's mission settlement in remote China, young Theodore is relieved to meet the earthy Mrs Jones, a botanist. Together, they flee for the forbidden land of Tibet. But are they really fleeing? Or being summoned?



K.M. PEYTON

'There are very few born story-tellers. K.M. Peyton is one of them' THE TIMES



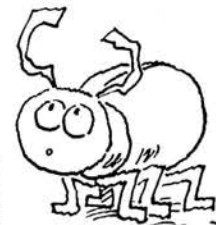
THE WILD BOY AND QUEEN MOON

K. M. Peyton
0552 527505 £2.99
June 1995

One night Sandy glimpses a daring bareback rider astride a beautiful grey mare. Who is this boy? Was he involved in the incident at her parents' stables? Sandy feels she can trust nobody and as mystery follows mystery she begins to suspect a shocking truth.



GET BEETLING!



'Stupid, no-brained bighead' Aidan is assigned by his heavenly hippy minder Jo-Jo to be guardian angel to 'the Schoolgirl from Horrorville', Catherine Lucas. She's definitely not going to be the pushover that Mr 'outsize ego' expects and the Big Boss is not pleased with the way things are progressing... or are matters running according to a divine plan? God knows. **DB**

Zlata's Diary

Zlata Filipovic, Puffin (Jan 95), 0 14 037463 9, £3.99

Worthy seems the best adjective to describe this real diary of a young girl trapped in the war-torn madness of Sarajevo. With Zlata's writing we are led through all the emotions of conflict, made more poignant because this is a child's voice and she's so confused about what 'politics' is inflicting on her, her friends and her family.

It should be stocked for what it is and what it reveals about the last decade of the twentieth century. Great literature it ain't; but then, that wasn't the point of its inception and publication. **DB**

Prices

David McRobbie, Mammoth (Jan 95), 0 7497 1849 8, £3.50

Frank was often an absentee father during Sara's childhood but he fled to his wife and daughter when he was trying to break with his underworld friends and wanted to kick his drug habit. However, death stalked him, and Sara came to think of herself as the cause of that death. Her relationship with Ben, amid its traumas, taught her that her art-forger father was no paragon and he controlled his own destiny, paying the price for his own mistakes. A shade too long, this is generally intriguing and certainly believable. **DB**

Bullies at School

Theresa Breslin, ill. Scoular Anderson, Canongate (Feb 95), 0 86241 505 5, £3.50

Writing a strong, appealing story that also communicates a 'message' is almost impossible, but Theresa Breslin pulls it off. Siobhan finds herself in the unenviable position of being the victim of bullying by her classmates and lacking the confidence, courage and skills to cope. The long lost Celtic Plaid Pin that's displayed in school captures her attention and enables the 'new' Siobhan to show her true courage

and face the bullies with bravery and dignity.

A checklist and contact addresses at the end of the book help the vulnerable strengthen their resolve and tell them where to look for help. **PH**

Uncle Albert and the Quantum Quest

Russell Stannard, ill. John Levers, Faber (Feb 95), 0 571 17344 6, £3.99

Making quantum physics so user-friendly that we might be forgiven for thinking it was painless, Uncle Albert (Einstein, of course) examines the very, very tiny in this third investigation with his thought bubble. A fascinating story in its own right, this really does prove that the imagined barriers between science and literature can be crossed in fresh and exciting ways. **PH**

Ice Magic

ill. Byron Goto, 0 316 13991 2

Tackle Without a Team ill. Margaret Sanfilippo, 0 316 14268 9

Matt Christopher, Little Brown (Feb 95), £2.99 each

These super sporty stories, one about ice-hockey and the other about American football, are strong, exciting and grab the attention. Pie Pennelli and Scott Kramer are misunderstood, underestimated superheroes to their teams. Together they have us holding our breath at every crisis as we wonder if they can ever turn events around and make good in the end. Of course, there's a brilliant sunlit ending but we're never too sure until we get there. **PH**

Killing the Demons

Jay Ashton, Puffin (Jan 95), 0 14 036992 9, £3.25

This slim volume - 88 pages in all - is a rather expensive but rewarding read.

Sam is confined to a wheelchair after an accident in which her younger brother was killed and for which she blames herself. When the family is uprooted to a remote part of Wales, she withdraws even more into the private fantasy world created by her computer games. She must take up the reins of her life and put guilt behind her and it's through her attempts to make handicapped Lucy's dream come true that she's finally able to let someone else take centre stage.

A tense and stimulating read for Year 8/9 class libraries. **VR**

Bring in the Spring

Hannah Cole, Red Fox (Jan 95), 0 09 925481 6, £3.50

Bel begins a community project at Willowbank School for handicapped children. She's initially reluctant, embarrassed and patronising: her reactions clearly mirror those of the able-bodied population. This is one of the real strengths of the book - its refusal to skirt round painful issues and its ability to ensure that readers face their own prejudices head-on.

Bel becomes determined to secure better treatment for Sarah, who's assumed to understand little and to require no teaching. She encounters opposition from Mrs Hinksey, Sarah's class teacher, and Bel finds she must carefully analyse her own motives. Sarah is helped, reunited with her mother and returns to live at home. The reader, however, is never allowed to be complacent; there's always direct involvement with characters and prejudices, and stereotypes are constantly challenged. This would be an excellent class reader for Year 8. **VR**

Vampire Stories to Tell in the Dark

Anthony Masters, Puffin (Jan 95), 0 14 036954 6, £2.99

Anthony Masters has a convincing array of ghost and horror stories to his credit. This collection of ten short stories follows the pattern of his best work: believable story lines with low-key descriptions. The cover is arresting in the way it distorts the expected - just as the stories do.

This book provides a model for competent horror writing - never overstate your case and be sure your characters and settings are firmly rooted in the everyday. **VR**

The Forestwife

Theresa Tomlinson, Red Fox (Feb 95), 0 09 926431 5, £2.99

Theresa Tomlinson has made a speciality of these well-told, historically detailed stories and here she makes fascinating play with conventional legend, offering both a strongly female and strongly realistic version of the Robin Hood story. It's a very striking book in its own right and in the way that Errol Flynn heroics are replaced by female courage and compassion battling against enormous physical hardship and

callous male domination. Rich in detail and emotional range, it offers a compelling sense of the bonds which tie people to each other and to the roles they play. **AJ**

The Amazing Witherspoon's Amazing Circus Crew

Andrew Gibson, ill. Chris Riddell, Faber (Feb 95), 0 571 17166 4, £3.99

An exuberantly told and imagined story full of exotic characters and grand action. Jo and her Dad face eviction from the Hulks and The Bodge by the rich Jonty Worsthorne Cripps. But the wonderful Circus and its crew come to the rescue. With the help of some more extravagantly imagined characters, they defeat Cripps and preserve The Bodge in a marvellous finale of action involving a last-minute court order and the literal bringing down to earth of Cripps by the flying Vivaci brothers. **AJ**

The Strollers

Lesley Beake, Red Fox (Jan 95), 0 09 929571 7, £2.99

These are the children who live on the streets of Cape Town begging, bedding down where they can and trying to survive. The book vividly presents the lives of Johnny and the rest of his group, particularly in the use of their slang and the detail of their lives. This nightmarish life is dramatically created, often in scenes at night, but the abiding quality of the book is the strength of the bonds between the children, nicely enacted in the scene where Johnny is rescued from police custody by a wonderful assortment of 'brothers' and friends. **AJ**

Bonnie Fitch

Lynda Waterhouse, Red Fox (Jan 95), 0 09 924891 3, £3.50

Bonnie is 14 and fat and her repetition of all the insults thrown at her is both funny and painful as she battles to get her first boyfriend and a kiss. The story also deals with bullying and a whole range of ways that children are humiliated by other children. It's great fun, the tone is well maintained and the story rushes along, keeping you entertained but aware of what it's like to be out of step with the tribe of 'normal' people. Comedy with an edge that'll appeal to a great many readers. **AJ**

Older Readers REVIEWS

Tommy Granite

Jay Ravendale, The Book Guild (Feb 95), 0 86332 979 9, £6.95

'Before the summer, if it didn't have goal posts, it wasn't worth looking at. He didn't seem to think that way any more.' Along with a fascinating assortment of characterful travellers Tommy and his mother are on the final leg of an overland adventure holiday, London to Kathmandu, during which he's undergone a transformation from kid to man-of-the-world. **ORIGINAL**

Vivid and convincing travelogue punctuates various memorable encounters, with a slightly gratuitous dollop of bodily functions and titillation. Older readers only, to avoid parental discontent. **DB**

Magician

Allan Baillie, Puffin (Jan 95), 0 14 036127 8, £3.99

When we founded the Kathleen Fidler Award in Scotland, the first recipient was Allan Baillie whose career I've watched since with a proprietorial interest. Born in Scotland, Baillie

moved to his adoptive country, Australia, when he was seven and is now established as one of their leading writers with a string of awards to his credit. He moves through various genres with ease - picture book, adventure, fantasy - *Magician* being one of his most complex themes. Set in a bleak Australia of the future, it's a chilling story of deceit, superstition and fear as the inhabitants of Howling Gap wait for the Golden People to return and help destroy the Darkness which creeps ever nearer to their precarious world. From his Tower, Maldaur rules with fear but his authority and beliefs are chal-

lenged when Kim meets a strange alien who teaches him to question and fight. A brilliantly inventive story for older readers. **VB**

REVIEWERS in this issue:

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

KEY STAGES 1 - 4

Although the National Curriculum stipulates a wide range of literature that children should be reading, it does not provide guidelines as to which books are appropriate. In our two new booklists Wendy Cooling has chosen a range of books from the Penguin Adult and Children's lists which fulfil the criteria laid down for Key Stages 1&2 and 3&4.

Puffin have also produced a booklist for children and teenagers who have mastered the mechanics of reading but who need encouragement to read for pleasure. Written by Wendy Cooling, **WAYS INTO READING FOR RELUCTANT READERS AGED 8-14 YEARS** is a selection of books guaranteed to generate enthusiasm in even the most reluctant readers.

All three booklists are available FREE.

Call Puffin on: 0500 807 981.

Wendy Cooling is an ex teacher and former Head of the Children's Book Foundation. She is now a freelance children's book consultant, reviewer and in-service trainer.



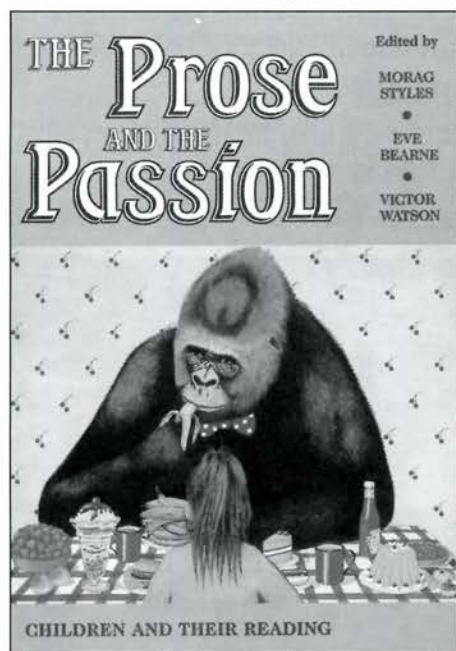
About CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Reviews by Chris Powling

Behold the Child

Gillian Avery, Bodley Head,
0 370 31952 4, £25

The first historical study of American children's books as a separate genre, it's claimed. If so, then this scholarly, sharply written and warm-hearted survey – which spans new world texts from 1621 to 1922 along with the old world texts that influenced them – could postpone the second indefinitely. For me there were revelations, and re-evaluations, on almost every spread.



The Prose and the Passion

Edited by Morag Styles, Eve Bearne
and Victor Watson, Cassell,
0 304 32771 9, £12.99

The book of the conference – at Homerton College, Cambridge in 1992. Articles from Wendy Cope, Ben Haggerty, Robert Leeson and Anthony Browne jostle in good-humoured diversity with those of a dozen other contributors including the editors themselves. It's the sort of book that squeezes a quart of thinking into a pint of page and still leaves room for the reader's own viewpoint. Highly recommended.

An Introduction to Children's Literature

Peter Hunt, Oxford,
0 19 289243 6, £7.99

Oh dear. Early in this study, BfK is described as conservative, untheoretical and anti-intellectual. This baffled me . . . until I noticed Peter Hunt's assessment was based very largely on a single review and on his mis-dating, by nine years, of an article he'd failed to spot was a re-print. Sadly, this suspect scholarship is typical of an account which never quite makes up its mind whether it's an introduction to actual texts for children or to current literary theory. As a result, not surprisingly, it short changes the reader on both – treating the latter entirely uncritically and the former, all too often, as mere exempla.

Children's Literature in the 1890s and the 1990s

Kimberley Reynolds, Northcote House, 0 7463 0728 4, £7.99

Kimberley Reynolds, too, is interested in shifts in critical thinking but manages to do justice to these without trivialising the primary sources which are

the *raison d'être* of the entire enterprise. Steering clear of a synoptic view, she opts instead for the handful of texts she regards as representative. As a result, her discussion of particular titles is both richer and deeper . . . and conveys all the more convincingly why children's reading actually matters.

About Children's Literature: A Coming of Age?

Edited by Neil Broadbent, Anne Hogan, Gillian Inkson and Maggie Miller, LSU Publications,
1 897914 12 1, £5.50

Another book of the conference – in this case at Le Sainte Union, Southampton, in June 1994. Lively and varied contributions from, amongst others, Jean Webb, Nigel Hand, Pat Pinsent . . . and the ubiquitous Peter Hunt who's much surer of himself in this company. A 'coming-of-age', though? Not, alas, till researchers into children's literature stop swooning over currently fashionable approaches and subject them instead to an analysis that's beady-eyed rather than starry-eyed.

Not So Simple Picture Books

Pam Baddeley and Chris Eddershaw, Trentham Books,
0 948080 79 5, £8.95

The book's sub-title is a bit of a giveaway – 'Developing Responses to Literature with 4-12 Year-olds'. Literature? Why not developing responses to Art? Look elsewhere, then – to Jane Doonan and Brian Alderson amongst others – for an approach to picture book narrative that doesn't implicitly prioritise words. That said, what makes this book special are the transcripts, page after page of them, which demonstrate how teachers as skilled as Pam Baddeley and Chris Eddershaw can encourage children to explore what they see.

The Cool Web

Edited by Margaret Meek, Aidan Warlow and Griselda Barton,
0 370 30144 7

Learning to Read

Margaret Meek,
0 370 30722 4

On Being Literate

Margaret Meek,
0 370 31190 6

Bodley Head,
£12.99 each

Re-issues of texts published in 1977, 1982 and 1990 respectively. All three helped define an approach to children's books, and to the teaching of reading that most of us, deep in our bones – not to mention our hearts and minds – know is the right one. Newcomers to the field should buy these books as a matter of urgency and oldcomers as a matter of practicality since their original copies must surely be read-to-pieces by now.

The Penguin Book of Childhood

Edited by Michael Rosen, Viking,
0 670 84759 3, £15.00

Not a book about children's books, it's true. A literary conspectus of childhood itself, rather, with a historical sweep that's never allowed to obscure its editor's predisposition in children's favour and his determination to show 'some ungolden moments to counterbalance the usual codswallop'. Biased, perhaps . . . but quite irresistible.

H

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in publishing
for children



Hodder and Stoughton have relaunched their children's list as *Hodder Children's Books*.

The new name and new logo signify an exciting new approach to publishing. The list will expand rapidly in 1995 making *Hodder Children's Books* the publisher to watch!

Authorgraph No.92

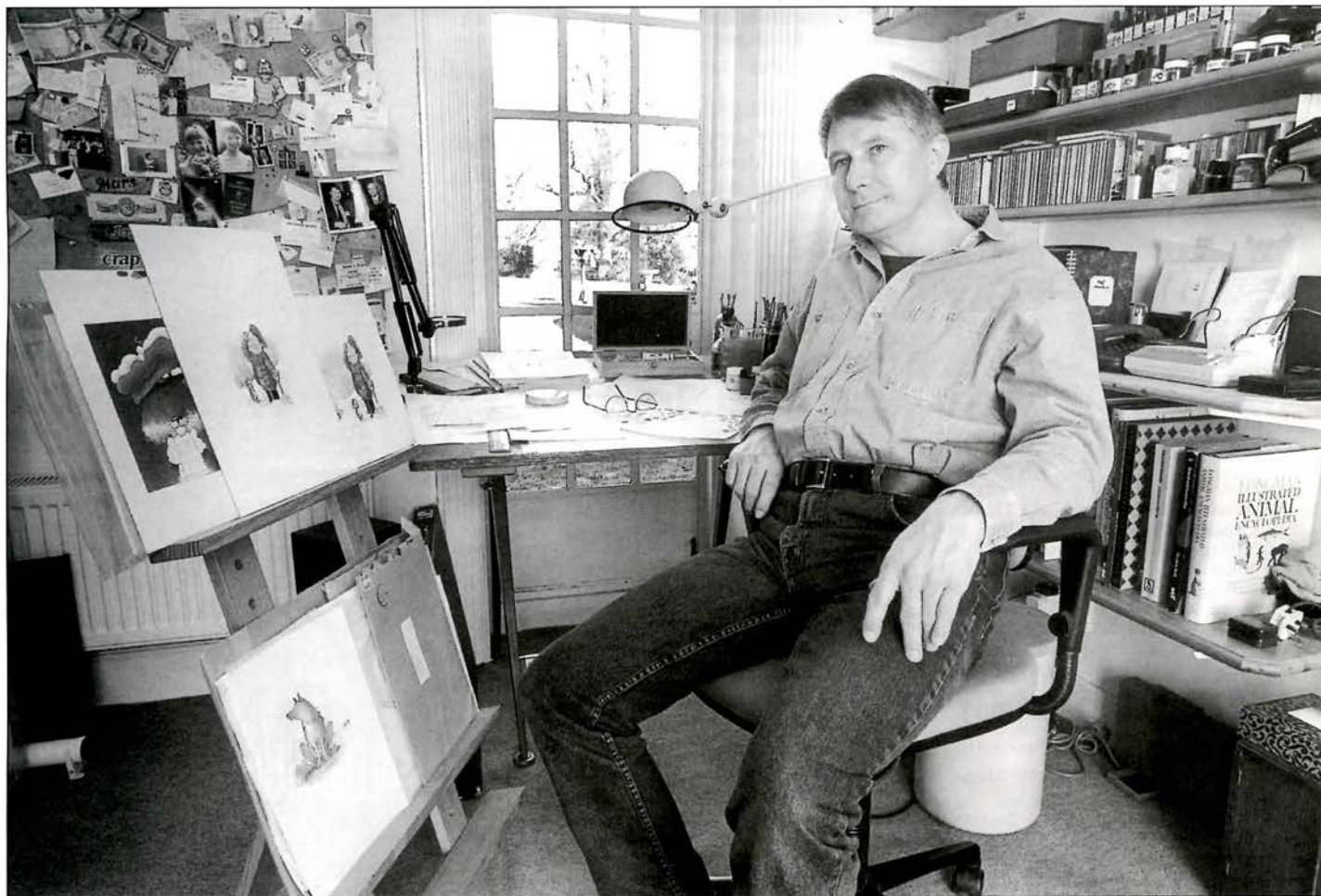
Nick Butterworth

NICK BUTTERWORTH interviewed by Stephanie Nettell

Joke No. 324: Two drunks fishing from a parapet: one says, 'Quick, pull your line in, there's a train coming.'

Joke No. 74: I was once engaged to a girl with a wooden leg, but I broke it off. Boom boom.

Nick Butterworth's dad had masses of these Ted Ray/Al Read jokes and sketches, which he listed by number in a special book. When Nick went into Graphics he made a cover for it: **Joking by Numbers**, by George Butterworth. He'd dearly love to know where it's gone.



Humour's valuable not only for a belly laugh but for easing situations and bonding people. I like humour that works on two levels, a straight joke for children but with a turn of phrase to make an adult smile – a bit A A Milne-ish. Sometimes a little gem comes to you that can fan the flames for a book.' Does he keep them in a son-of-George collection? 'I've a list of ideas as long as, well, as long as a very long thing, like the stuff that made us laugh about our own children' (Ben's now 16, Amanda 13) 'but I can't get round to them because of this wretched park keeper! I enjoy Percy, but I do have a life outside Percy's park ...'

Before the war his father had appeared in amateur

revues, and the whole family was constantly vying to score off each other. George Butterworth was a POW for three years, and Nick was a bulge kid, born five years after one brother and six before the other. When his father came home at last, his brother asked heart-rendingly, not in the voice of his native London but in the sing-song northern accent of his parents, 'Is this me dad?' It became a family catchphrase, leading Nick, toasting his parents' 40th anniversary, to suggest he'd actually said, 'Is *this* me dad?'

Early in 1949, when Nick was two, his parents bought a sweet shop in Romford. Did customers ever wonder at the total absence of those extra little bars of chocolate in their Cadbury's Roses ...? These were

the days of 50 to a class and Nick, a passive child who didn't cause trouble, was pretty much ignored – he remembers getting Leslie Medcalf, star pupil and object of his undying love, to teach him take-away sums. He failed even the re-sits of the 11-plus, but passed a 13-plus to follow his brother to the Royal Liberty School, where an alarmingly successful year led, he believes, to over-promotion and panicky skiving off. His parents, busy now with three businesses, seemed not to notice.

But he still had his drawing. From the beginning he would fill books with copies of his brother's copies of comic-book characters. Mike, whose skimpily dressed women and muscle-bound weight lifters

were pretty good, went on to collect armfuls of degrees and become the Rev Dr Butterworth, lecturer in OT theology; Nick stayed faithful to cartoons and posters for fictitious films, teaming up with another lad, Leon Baxter, to spend a patently ludicrous number of 'free periods' in the art room. Curiously, the master let them do what they liked at the back of his classes, but it was only at the end, when Nick, with a miserable trio of O-levels, asked bleakly 'Do you think I'm good enough for art school?', that he uttered the first encouraging words Nick had ever received. 'Good Lord, yes!'

He was ill-equipped: his portfolio held predominantly cartoon work, with a cover declaring in comic-style lettering (he has always had an affinity with calligraphy and typographic design) that it belonged to Melvin da Vinci. He got an offer conditional on re-taking English Language, but then his mother heard of an interesting five-year apprenticeship in the design department of a printing school – and a salary of £4 1s 6d.

'I don't regret the way my life's gone, but I wish I'd worked harder. I would have liked to have been to art school, though they did send me one day a week to the printing department at Watford College.' When he was 19, a Watford lecturer told him of a London design consultancy who needed a junior, and it felt a good move. He joined a small established practice where his bottom ranking meant fourth from top. 'I was suddenly working to a much higher standard, flying round the country presenting designs to prestigious clients like British Ropes or Post Office Telecommunications.'

He'd been working for a year on a new corporate identity for Cunard, under the overall direction of Crosby Fletcher Forbes – later Pentagram – when Cunard suffered a great cut-back. Nick continued as a freelance for Pentagram from his parents' home (the QE2 directional signs at that time were his). By 1968, freelance success encouraged him to set up an independent studio; a year later 'BBC' was in action from a Romford office – Butterworth plus Leon Baxter and another school art-class friend, Bernard Cope. 'A lot of catalogue and packaging work came from our art teacher's wife, who was advertising manager for Lovable bras. I still remember about pantie girdles, "The higher the number the longer the leg!"'

Here we must shunt back to a crucial pivot in Butterworth's life. Through his elder brother he'd been drawn to a lively youth group attached to a local Baptist church, prompted by an ex-missionary called Sheaffer concerned 'with opening up orthodox Christianity to a much more contemporary situation than it was used to addressing.'

Nick became a Sheaffer fan, and a group of youngsters used to assemble in his flat on Sunday nights. 'Somehow I ended up leading the group – that's always my trouble. I'm quite a good front man; I'm not terribly extrovert in unfamiliar company, but give me an audience and I'll perform!' Here he bumped into Bernard Cope again, and also met a youngster whose name, Inkpen, was familiar from the shop's newspaper bills. Here, too, he met Annette – teamed up then with young Inkpen, and at that stage far too young for Nick! And here was the spiritual ground which nourished much of the Butterworth-Inkpen production.

Back to 1970, when Mick Inkpen joins the studio in his pre-Cambridge year off – and stays. Seven years younger than the rest, they enjoyed calling him 'the lad' because he was far more qualified than any of them yet worked for £10 a week (which they weren't always flush enough to pay). Those were days of riotous fun, of crazy 'mealy-mealy' races (*mille miglia*, it later dawned on Nick) when they ferociously propelled their chairs on castors along the tiled floor. Everyone moved into a house Leon and Nick bought, which eventually contained 11 people, including three couples and children. It was gloriously young and wild, and couldn't go on, but from it grew four flourishing concerns.



In 1975 Nick married Annette, who'd become a teacher and his best friend. 'We've got respect for each other going back to those early days.' Today they're partners in 'the firm' (i.e. Nick) and she does the accounts. They bought another house in Romford, which became a 'hive of creative activity' with Mick and Bernard renting upstairs rooms. Mick's was just across from Nick's, and those castors began rolling back and forth again with bright ideas.

Doodling one day, Nick developed four nursery rhyme illustrations intended as greetings cards, including a wool merchant Black Sheep in Romford market, with the fish stall of Annette's dad in the background. 'Why don't you do a book?' said all the galleries, so, overcoming his horror at the thought of doing 22 more, and encouraged by a near-miss at Hutchinson, he battled round ten publishers until Macdonald took it. Appearing in 1981, it led to the offer of a strip in the *Sunday Express*, alternating every six weeks with Rupert: he and Mick came up with a group of mice living on a deserted railway station – Upney Junction. It was to deal with this workload that the long partnership developed where Nick drew and Mick coloured. Together, for instance, they could in a day produce, one, even two, Gordon Fraser cards at £120, a useful back-up income and a proving ground for technique.

When the strip ended, Nick's request to Anne Wood to spare an hour to talk about television brought them a nerve-racking 18 months with TV AM's *Rub-A-Dub-Tub* and Steven the Punk, Nick presenting and 'Mick proving what a prolific, good writer he was!' *The Nativity Play* was Butterworth's first text (Hodder had asked for a Bible but 'it wouldn't have been a very mainstream Bible' and he didn't fancy drawing robes), coloured as usual by Inkpen but now with equal credit.

'Until then I'd had star billing as a sort of senior partner in the production line' (they'd once managed 450 illustrations in six months for a Nelson reading scheme), 'as more of a front man than Mick, using my contacts, my personality. I hacked through the jungle, and he did the landscape gardening. But I learned a lot from his colouring, when he was exploring watercolours and I'd been using pen and inks with occasional pencil. My work has always been line-oriented and it used to be more laboured – a lot of texture, pattern work, airbrush work – until I realised that reproducing reality isn't necessarily the best way of getting what you want across. Mick's spontaneity and feeling for washes, his appreciation for abstract art, filled gaps for me; my strength in composition and draughtsmanship was perhaps something he could learn from. Over the years we shipped quite a lot across the bridge between us.'

The formidable number of their lovingly frolicsome

books (partly because board books arrive in fours, like the nice little earners from Sainsbury's) ended with *Jasper's Beanstalk* in 1992, when their individual careers were gaining unstoppable momentum. They're still good mates, living in the same neck of the woods and skiing together.

It might seem that Percy rules the Butterworth roost right now. *One Snowy Night*, rejected by Hodder but, after a little editorial tinkering, a bestseller for Collins, is due to take the Briggs slot on Christmas television in a classy animation he will supervise himself, and there is Percy merchandise in the offing. 'Percy's my best ticket to seeing this place paid for one day', this place being a lovely old porticoed house in Constable country, light streaming through a row of full-length windows, with a bird-filled garden and acres of wild land behind.

But Percy may not have it all his own way. When Collins suggested Nick could fill the dearth of *quality* board books, he'd been nervous about abandoning Percy's sales – until *Croc*, *Whitey*, *George* and their pals, with 11 foreign editions, sold over 660,000 in one year. Then their lift-the-flap adventures in *All Together Now!* seemed a very desirable next step. The flaps in this chuckly game of hide-and-seek themselves form part of the pictures, because, no matter how simple the design, he insists babies still get their money's worth of detail – there's even a second-reading secret to discover. Hippo he sees as a chubby baby, Wilson's there because he likes giraffes, *Croc* was a draught excluder, while *George*, *Millie* (who was *Nellie* really) and *Whitey* the polar bear (who had to fight for his name against American sensitivities, a PC daftness Nick felt 'undervalues the serious issues you do believe in') belong to Amanda.

In any case he refuses to commit his future: 'There's no next time – this is my go, and I must make the most of it. I'd love to do experimental TV with children on location, spraying ideas, getting feedback from having the kids relaxed, not awestruck in a studio. I like performing, I like audiences as well as the solitude of the world I've created.'

It seems he's inherited more than warmth and humour from his Dad. ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.



Some of Nick Butterworth's books:

All Together Now!, Collins, 0 00 198134 X, £8.99

Percy's Park series:

One Snowy Night, 0 00 664318 3 pbk; 0 00 101046 8 pbk & tape

After the Storm, 0 00 664252 7 pbk; 0 00 100449 4 pbk & tape

The Rescue Party, 0 00 664376 0 pbk; 0 00 100600 2 pbk & tape

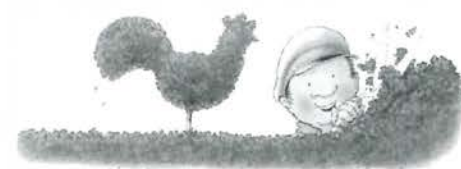
The Secret Path, 0 00 664505 4 pbk; 0 00 100602 9 pbk & tape

Collins Lions, pbk £4.99 each; pbk & tape packs £5.99 each

With Mick Inkpen:

The Nativity Play, Hodder, 0 340 38300 3, £7.99; 0 340 39894 9, £3.99 pbk

Jasper's Beanstalk, Hodder, 0 340 55660 9, £8.99; 0 340 58634 6, £3.99 pbk



Percy (Nick Butterworth lookalike?) from *The Secret Path*.

Partners in a Dance

PHILIP PULLMAN ON HIS
ENTHUSIASM FOR THE
GRAPHIC NOVEL

A graphic novel is any work that grown-ups would be ashamed to be seen reading if it were called a comic. Children, of course, aren't shamed by the same things, and read comics quite cheerfully without feeling the need to call them anything but that. In fact, the term graphic novel is rather like erotica, which is the fancy name for something else you might feel a bit shy to be caught with.

Is there really a difference, though? Roger Sabin, in his **Adult Comics: An Introduction** (1993), says graphic novels are 'a definable category of comic – a longer than usual work, in book form, with a thematic unity'. So Tintin is, but Dennis the Menace isn't; Peanuts isn't either, but Batman might be. The comics form – the narrative related in a series of pictures in frames, with the only words being dialogue in balloons, thoughts in bubbles, and the occasional caption or sound effect – is the same whether the work is several hundred pages long or only four frames in a daily newspaper strip: it's only length, binding, and 'thematic unity' that make a comic into a graphic novel. Personally, I'm getting a little tired of the term. It's the form itself that's interesting, the interplay between the words and the pictures, and I'd be happy to call them comics and have done with it.

But defining the form, however slippery it might be, is easier than persuading people (grown-ups, I mean) to take it seriously. I think the reason for that is paradoxical. Comics are both easier and harder to read than conventional prose, and people who are good at reading *Middlemarch* or *Tom's Midnight Garden* don't like to feel disdainful of the medium while they're being puzzled by the message. Not at the same time, anyway. If all the comics had the moral seriousness of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, or the narrative complexity of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, there wouldn't be a problem; we could study them with the appropriate solemnity of demeanour and not be embarrassed about it. But they will insist on being fun as well, which is difficult, and some of the best are difficult as well as fun, which is impossible.

The comics form becomes 'difficult', it seems to me, at the point where the pictures force you to read the words more slowly than you want to. Comics that are easy, on the other hand, let you gulp down the words as quickly as you like, and don't allow the pictures to contradict them. Here's a recent example:



The Judy Picture Library ('for girls' it explains helpfully on the cover) is a curious survival from an earlier and less sophisticated age. It's reminiscent both in content and style

of the old *School Friend* or *Girl's Crystal* of the 40s and 50s. The interesting thing here is how dominant the words are. The pictures in this story, 'Wee Slavey's Christmas Mystery', are as dutiful as little Nellie herself; they know their place. The caption is what gives it away. When a caption is in the past tense, the story thinks it's being told in words, and that the illustrations are only incidental. When a caption is in the present tense, the story acknowledges the importance of the pictures, because the present is the only tense pictures have. But here the words are in charge, and everything is designed to make reading them easy.

Raymond Briggs' *Father Christmas* of 1973, the first of his great series of stories in the comics format, is also easy to read, but in a much more subtle and powerful way. The balance between words and pictures is achieved with a perfect sense of pitch: the pictures are integral and dominant, but the words that are here are all essential, because they contribute what the pictures alone couldn't: quite simply, a human voice.



From the final page of *Father Christmas* by Raymond Briggs.

Another matter that *Father Christmas* raises is that of quality. People who talk about picture books – teachers, students, librarians – tend to come to them from a word-centred experience rather than one familiar with the making of pictures. They know whether the texts are good or not, but there's often a tentativeness in what they say about the artwork, an unwillingness to commit themselves to an opinion about whether one picture is better than another, or why. One shining exception here is Jane Doonan, whose *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* is a superb introduction to the business of thinking about how pictures work.

And in *Father Christmas*, the pictures are not only integral to the story-telling method, they are also good pictures. They're full of witty detail – we can all see that – but witty detail could still be badly drawn and clumsily finished (or, worse, badly drawn and then given a deceptive and inappropriate gloss of very high finish). These pictures are done so beautifully that the eye lingers or returns time and again for the sheer pleasure of looking at the forms and the colours, and the delight of seeing how the effects are achieved: the old man's eyes, for instance – simple dots throughout most of the story, then at the end, when he's making cocoa and filling his hot-water bottle, drawn as little double lines. How simple, and yet how

effectively it makes him look tired and full of sleep.

The comics form – what we might call the grammar – settled down quite early on, and once it had settled there was no need to change it, because it worked so well. Readers of the first great comics, those of Winsor McCay (*Little Nemo*) or George Herriman (*Krazy Kat*), would have felt perfectly at home with the pages of *Father Christmas*. The relationship between word and picture is the classic one.

When Shirley Hughes produced *Chips and Jessie* in 1985, on the other hand, she was doing something quite different. She put a past-tense prose narrative on the page with comic-style pictures, complete with speech balloons.



She set up a great hue and cry, saying that her fur had been stolen. Chips turned scarlet in the face when he realized what had happened. He looked round desperately for the young lady, but she seemed to have disappeared completely.



Chips plunged into the crowd, leaving Jessie to look after the By-Gones. Mrs Sharp walked off in a rage. She and her friend were going to ask the Vicar to make an announcement on his loudspeaker.



When I first saw this, I was so enchanted that I stole the idea wholesale, and my own *Spring-Heeled Jack* and *Count Karlstein* were direct imitations. The best way to produce this kind of thing, of course, is to do the whole of it, pictures as well as words. Thanks to Shirley Hughes' single overall vision, *Chips and Jessie* has a unity and playfulness I admired greatly; and I was keen to achieve something similar myself, but I couldn't draw well enough. I can only salute the two artists I worked with, David Mostyn and Patrice Aggs, for their endless patience and skill, but it isn't an entirely satisfactory way of collaborating: one person has to be in charge, and the other has to subdue their own individuality to some extent to fit in with the demands of the first.

In the field of 'pure' comics, there are two classics no-one should ignore. One is *Tintin*. The work of Hergé is so familiar it's easy to overlook how good it is, but it bears endless re-examination.

According to Harry Thompson in his informative and intelligent *Tintin: Hergé and his Creation* (1992), Hergé was once asked which, out of the thousands of frames he had drawn, he thought the best. This frame (from *Red Rackham's Treasure*) was one of the two he chose. The other was the second frame on page 38 of *The Crab with the Golden*



From *Red Rackham's Treasure*: Haddock striding ashore.

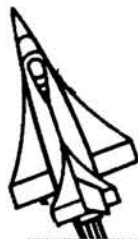
Claws. Thompson says 'Hergé liked them both so much because in one frame they encapsulate an entire sequence of events, advancing the plot rapidly and explicitly'. One way this picture moves the story forward involves a basic point of comics grammar: if the characters move as the eye does in reading, from left to right, they won't contradict the flow of the text. Hergé discovered that quite early, and re-drew some of the panels in his early stories to take account of it.

The other classic no-one should ignore is more recent. Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, parts I and II (1987-92), tells the true story of how the author's father and mother survived the horrors of Auschwitz. One of the things that make this book instantly memorable is Spiegelman's decision to depict the Jews as mice and the Germans as cats, with other groups similarly distinguished: the Poles are pigs, the Americans dogs.

In doing this, Spiegelman took two enormous risks. One was that making the humans into animals might trivialise the appalling events he recounts. The other was more subtle. Cats kill mice: that is their nature. We don't regard them as evil, because they can't help it; that's what cats do. But is it in the nature of Germans to kill Jews? Is that what Spiegelman is saying? That question hovers over the book until it's dispelled by the sheer moral power of the tale. No, that's not what he's saying; he's saying that people kill other people. What the depiction does is allow him to show at a glance things that would take much longer in prose. For instance, Anja the wife, in disguise as a Pole (with a pig mask) is betrayed by her long mouse-tail; and in this haunting picture, the two little mice on the ground can't see what we, from our higher viewpoint, can; that they are walking right into the very heart of danger.



From *Maus* I.



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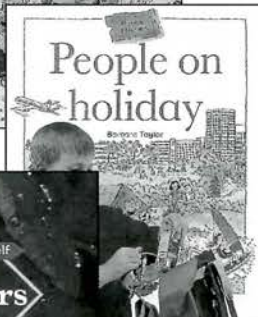
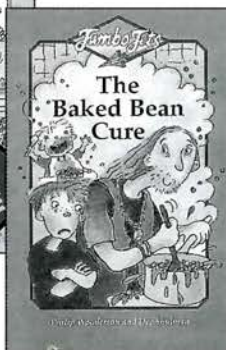
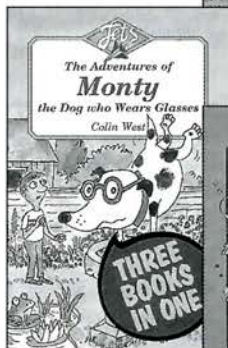
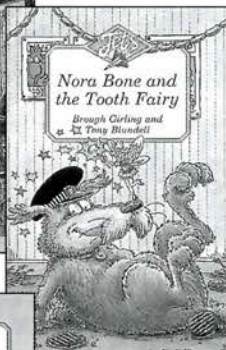
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(Incidentally, the past-tense caption here is justified, because it's spoken by one of the characters, so it functions like a first-person voice-over in a film.)

Maus is a triumph. Horrifying, humane and brilliant, it is like nothing else in print or image.

Finally, there appeared last year the best introduction to the informed study of comics that I have seen. It's called **Understanding Comics**, and is written and drawn by Scott McCloud; drawn, because the book is itself in the form of a comic. McCloud's point is that comics are capable of expressing anything, and to demonstrate it, he couches his whole argument in the form. It works splendidly.



From *Understanding Comics*.

Anyone looking for evidence of intelligent life on the planet Comix need look no further. McCloud is a superb companion and guide to the delight available in this place where words and pictures come together to dance, but the most

important thing a reader needs is simple curiosity and the willingness to look. Those who try will find their efforts richly rewarded.■

Book details:

Adult Comics: An Introduction, Roger Sabin, Routledge, 0 415 04418 9, £40.00

Watchmen, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, Titan, 1 85286 024 3, £11.50
 'Wee Slavey's Christmas Mystery' (no author named), D C Thomson & Co Ltd, Judy Picture Story Library for Girls

Father Christmas, Raymond Briggs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 02260 6, £9.99; Puffin, 0 14 050125 8, £4.50 pbk

Looking at Pictures in Picture Books, Jane Doonan, Thimble Press, 0 905355 40 X, £8.50

Chips and Jessie, Shirley Hughes, Bodley Head, 0 370 30666 X, £5.99

Spring-Heeled Jack, Philip Pullman, ill. David Mostyn, Transworld, 0 440 86229 9, £2.50 pbk

Count Karlstein, Philip Pullman, ill. Patrice Aggs, Transworld, 0 385 40048 9, £8.99; 0 440 86266 3, £2.99 pbk

Red Rackham's Treasure, Hergé, Methuen, 0 416 92540 5, £6.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 0465 2, £5.99 pbk

The Crab with the Golden Claws, Hergé, Methuen, 0 416 60500 1, £6.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 0350 4, £5.99 pbk

Tintin: Hergé and his Creation, Harry Thompson, Hodder, 0 340 52395 X, £17.95; Sceptre, 0 340 56462 8, £5.99

Maus: A Survivor's Tale, Part I, 0 14 017315 3, **Part II**, 0 14 015206 6, Penguin, £9.99 each

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art, Scott McCloud, HarperCollins, 0 06 097625 X, £14.99

Also: Graphic Account: The Selection and Promotion of Graphic Novels in Libraries for Young People, edited by Keith Barker, The Library Association Youth Libraries Group, 1993

Philip Pullman has both written and illustrated his next book. It's the first volume of a fantasy trilogy – **His Dark Materials, Volume One: Northern Lights** – to be published in July by Scholastic.

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CHOOSING AN ATLAS

Colin Harris
recommends atlases
for Key Stage 1
through to
Key Stage 4

*Geographers, in Afric maps,
With savage pictures fill their gaps;
O'er uninhabitable downs
Place animals for want of towns.*

Atlases bring great pleasure. Imagine opening one for the first time and being enthralled by its magic. While they rightly contribute to the development of geographical skills as part of classroom learning for the National Curriculum, they should also be found on the shelves of school libraries where pupils can browse across a wider selection of maybe four or five versions. Yet the choice is daunting. In preparation for this article thirty-six different atlases were considered but only those deemed suitable by both format and purpose as library stock reached the final frame.

WHEN IS AN ATLAS NOT AN ATLAS?

Certain essential questions need to be asked before making a decision. First of all what do you *expect* of an atlas? By definition it is, not surprisingly, a book of maps, not a book *with* maps which can turn out to be something altogether different. Some examples described on the cover as 'atlas' in reality are encyclopaedias or reference books. Those where maps cover less than half the page surface area hardly count as atlases in the strictest sense, but they do represent a significant slice of market potential and therefore command consideration.

No fewer than fourteen fall into this category. Most are visually attractive though caution is advised where photographs veer towards the travel industry view of geography with shots of cuckoo clocks, cherry blossom and the Taj Mahal – as in Philip's *First Picture Atlas*. Far better is the same publisher's *Children's Atlas* combining illustrations which enhance children's understanding of geographical issues with clear and well balanced maps.

THE ATLAS AS A DATABASE

Equally crucial is what you want an atlas *for*. Some titles expect children to be excited about the world and challenge them to find

excitement and fascination merely dipping into their colourful pages – manna from Heaven to godmothers and others desperate for suitably intelligent but not boring gifts. But the prime purpose of an atlas must surely be to enable the reader to locate places on the earth's surface and to give a symbolic impression of what the world is really like. If you want to know where a place is, you look it up in an atlas.

The map is therefore a form of visual database showing a selected range of information about places on the earth, with the nature of that information entirely determined by the kinds of maps included in the atlas. It is clearly impossible to include every detail of the earth's geography, so selection becomes all-important.

WHAT DATA SHOULD IT PROVIDE?

The range of maps offered in a good atlas should combine sets of data labelled conventionally as 'political' and 'physical'. To the commonly found cities and frontiers could be added lines of communication, land use, crops and resources; and to relief, altitude and rivers could be added vegetation, climate, ecological features and conservation data.

While ancient atlases and early published versions for schools contained little more than straightforward maps of the world, continents and countries, with perhaps a selection of climate graphs for good measure, modern tastes demand increasingly ingenious selections of thematic maps, most of which offer rich veins for digging out information on conservation, leisure, pollution, and disasters as well as the more conventional soils and vegetation. So the best atlases will combine both topographical maps (what places are like) with thematic ones (distributions of selected topical information).

PRESENTING DATA VISUALLY

In trying to show the world as it is, map makers face two main dilemmas. How do you draw a curved earth on a flat page? How can you show differences in altitude (relief)?

Projections

No portrayal of the earth can be 'correct'. While Peters' equal area projection shows continents and countries at the correct size in relation to each other, the peculiar elongation of the southern continents detract from its value, especially with younger children. Atlases which over-use Mercator (e.g. showing Greenland bigger than China) should be avoided. The best compromise for world maps is Gall's projection used in many of the best atlases. For maps of the British Isles the choice of projection is not critical.

Relief

When it comes to showing relief, the choice available ranges from no attempt at all, through a series of symbolic representations (with hills like little lumps and mountains so universally pointed as to obscure most other detail for large stretches of Asia and North America), to shades of layer colouring, some garish, some confusingly muted, and combinations of semi-3D hill shading. Old county maps of England certainly do show little lines of rolling hills. While young children might be attracted initially to this format, some of the simpler coloured layer schemes in the end may be more helpful. There may be some understandable confusion over oblique and vertical views. Certainly very young children draw 'maps' with front elevation views of houses and only later adopt a conventional plan view. Atlases generally should encourage a more abstract depiction of the world.

Symbols

Some young children's atlases, as well as some 'reference' versions, revert to the early African cartographer's ploy of spreading little pictures across the map. These may look interesting (they are certainly popular) but what messages do they convey about both maps and the places they depict? In Dorling Kindersley's *My First Atlas*, for example, Crete is entirely occupied by a couple of sun-bathing tourists and in Philip's *Picture Atlas for Children* Wales has a rugby player and England rejoices in Stonehenge, Shakespeare, Parliament, cricket, a horse rider and Wedgwood china.

Collins' **Picture Atlas of the World** displays an ingenious combination of pictorial symbols for relief and land use. Mountains, forests and farmland are clearly identified, though the misleading impression given is that all arable land forms a patchwork of little fields, with southern England no different from the Deccan of India.

Maps should be easy to understand so clarity ranks high on the choice scale. If children open an atlas and are immediately confused, they will soon lose interest. They can, however, cope with a wealth of finely drawn detail, as the success of the 'Where's Wally?' books testifies, but maps which have too many bits of overlapping information will sow confusion. On the other hand, maps free of clutter may also be unhelpfully empty. While commendably original, **The Children's First Atlas Using the Peters' Projection** gives us map outlines totally devoid of detail save for located references to marginal illustrations and examples. This is really a challenging reference book with location maps.

Closely linked to clarity is *attractiveness*: atlases should be attractive to look at and use. The best ones simply shout to be read. Watts **First Atlas** 'for the very young', offers a fresh enticing cover, as does, in a more conventional sense, Philip's **Children's Atlas**. But it's what unfolds when the atlas is opened that determines ultimate success.

Maps of individual countries cannot successfully be represented on the same scale as world maps. The smaller the scale, the less the detail that can be shown. A world map covering two pages can hardly include many British towns and rivers while a map of England and Wales will not show these countries in relation to Australia. What is important is the provision of maps of varying scales, with some indication of relative size by including an insert of some familiar place (like the British Isles) at the same scale. Some larger scale maps of regions and even cities enable children to relate scale to amount of detail.

Some atlases identify ways of showing physical and 'human' features only in the opening pages, requiring readers constantly to refer back to the key. Others provide a key on each page opening. For younger children the representative fraction (RF) – e.g. 1:1 million – is less helpful than what some call the 'scale bar' – i.e. a linear scale with miles and kilometres marked off.

An atlas should be accurate and up-to-date. Publishers certainly evoke sympathy as they diligently try to keep up with rapidly changing eastern European frontiers and unpredictable name changes, principally in Africa but now also in Asia. The alert student of current affairs will know that Burma is now Myanma (with or without an 'r' at the end). Only the latest editions will acknowledge this change, while some atlases cautiously print both names. Maps showing economic and demographic data will inevitably lack validity if the dates for which they are accurate are not given.

We do have to take in faith that certain places are where they are when we see them in an atlas. Children who spot St Basil's Church both inside and outside the Kremlin (for the record it is in Red Square) may be encouraged to develop a degree of healthy scepticism.



All atlases have something to commend them and the choice is very much a matter of preference. For the school library the following are certainly worth considering.

A delightful little atlas, easy on small hands, simple and in full colour. Rather flimsy and may not survive constant library use. KS1.

Highly appealing to the young reader. Contains pages of enticing cartoons and speech bubbles with maps vividly illustrated. Less strong on cartography but designed to attract attention. KS1.

Clear bold maps, uncluttered though with some empty spaces. More than half the pages are of maps. Reference knowledge a little eccentric. KS1/2.

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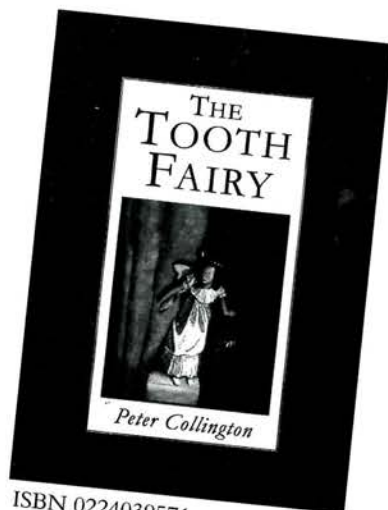
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Random House Children's Books

THE BODLEY HEAD • JONATHAN CAPE • HUTCHINSON

Children's Atlas of the World

Collins (1994), 0 00 448131 3, £8.99

Good blend of clearly readable maps and useful information. Would be well thumbed in a library. No maps of regions in UK. KS2.

Children's World Atlas

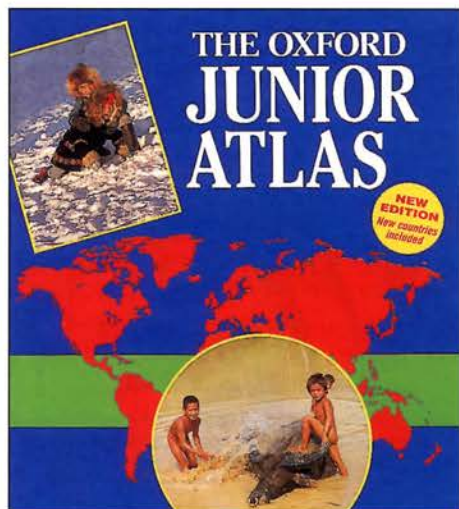
Kingfisher (1992, with revisions),
1 85697 058 2, £5.99

Has been around since 1987 in this form. Still worth considering for the clarity of the maps though the country information does take up too much of the space. KS2.

Junior School Atlas

Philip's (1993), 0 540 05748 7, £5.99

Particularly good value; good range of maps and cartographic style. Unusually bright browns and greens on physical maps add to the clarity. Country maps of the UK but no regional ones. KS2.



The Oxford Junior Atlas

OUP (1995), 0 19 831697 6, £5.99

An excellent choice with good clear cartography and selection of maps which emphasise the regions of Great Britain. Will serve as a reference for Key Stage 2 as well as a class atlas. Pictures slightly more than required in an atlas and there is no index to world places. KS2.

Picture Atlas of the World

Collins (1994), 0 00 196570 0, £9.99

Entertaining as well as informative. Worth considering if only for the novel, if sometimes confusing, use of pictorial symbols. Marginal information not too intrusive. KS2.

Children's Atlas

Philip's (1994, sixth edition revised),
0 540 05830 0, £8.99

Superb combination of non-stereotypical world geographical information and excellently drawn maps (human and physical features on the same maps). Text by David and Jill Wright fascinates and informs. The best atlas and reference book. KS2/3.

The Children's First Atlas Using the Peters' Projection

Belitha Press (1995), 1 85561 304 2, £9.99

Printed in landscape format. Hardly an atlas because you cannot find where places are, but does locate geographical features and discusses major global zones. All maps are of the world. KS2/3.

The New Oxford School Atlas

OUP (1993, 2nd edition), 0 19 831682 8,
£8.50

Still the best choice for the secondary school library and classroom. This is a real atlas, crammed with exciting detail. KS3.

Philip's World Atlas

Philip's (1994), 0 540 05827 0, £12.99

Illustrated World Atlas

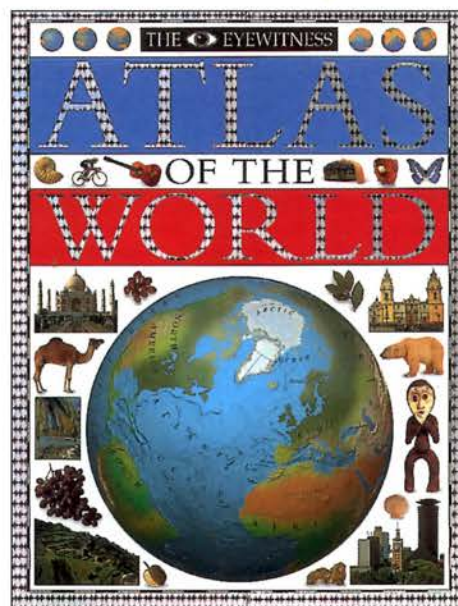
Bartholomew (1994), 0 7028 2616 2, £12.99

Two definitive atlases worthy of the name. Both are based on classic cartography drawn to inform rather than for novelty. More suitable for Key Stage 4 and beyond. KS4.

The Eyewitness Atlas of the World

Dorling Kindersley (1994), 0 7513 5126 1,
£14.99

The most expensive, and biggest, but good value for money. More a pot pourri of interesting geographical detail than a formal atlas. Family use.



Colin Harris was formerly Hertfordshire's advisor for geography and environmental education. He's now an OFSTED inspector, a freelance consultant overseas, Joint Honorary Secretary to the Geographical Association and author of several books for children.

Ted Percy reports on . . .

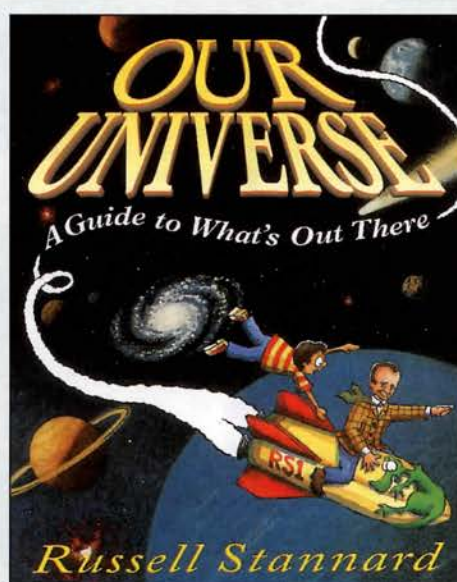
Our Universe – a guide to what's out there

Russell Stannard, Kingfisher
1 85697 317 4, £9.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY/ADULT

Some areas of knowledge are no-go for us ordinary terrestrials; we traditionally label them unapproachable and happily leave it at that. Then, once or twice in a generation comes a book so well conceived and written that the dim no-go area becomes a brilliantly lit highway and solitary ignorance becomes shared knowledge. *The Double Helix* did this for DNA and *Origin of Species* for evolution. Common to all such groundbreakers are a pronounced authorial stamp, a commitment amounting to passion and an absorbing end-to-end read. *Our Universe* shows all these properties, as Professor Stannard initiates our exploration by looking (seemingly through the wrong end of the telescope) at atomic physics – showing us not only that nuclear fusion is the essence of sun (and other star) power but that your average atom is a very handy scale model of your actual Universe: a study of one is integral to an understanding of the other.

This established, the rest of the journey, reinforced by informative little quizzes and help-



ful pictures is far, far easier and much more interesting than we'd ever suppose. Moving out from earth we look at planets, sun and other stars, and galaxies galore to the point at which astronomy becomes cosmology. And now I understand the Big Bang, Blue Giants, Brown Dwarfs, Neutrinos and Super Novae.

Addressing his readers directly and on level terms, Stannard proves an amiable guide. His is the gift of interpreting the obscure simply:

his equation of the Universe (as he – and by then his readers – know it) and the existence of God is a gem of quiet logic.

When, a few years ago, I read the author's first 'Uncle Albert' book I was loudly unimpressed. I've always distrusted the 'information novel' and found Stannard's style irksome. Here, though, practising his proper trade, he has produced an impressive and memorable guide to the galaxies, for which my stars predict a wide and enthusiastic readership. ■



"What existed before the Big Bang, Professor?"

★★★★★★★★★★

Non Fiction REVIEWS

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1 85434 336 X,
1 85434 187 1 (pbk)

Measure

1 85434 337 8,
1 85434 197 9 (pbk)

Patterns

1 85434 334 3,
1 85434 177 4 (pbk)

Shapes

1 85434 335 1,
1 85434 167 7 (pbk)

Ivan Bulloch, Two-Can/Watts
(Action Maths series),
£9.99 each (£2.99 pbk)

INFANT/JUNIOR with ADULT

Fashions in teaching mathematics are ever evanescent and many happily numerate grown-ups have trouble understanding how contemporary maths works. So a series subtitled 'help your child have fun with maths' must be looked at. And this quartet does everything to boost adult confidence by putting a parent's charter on every spread – as well as colourful instructions for a range of mathematic activities, we get little boxes of grey matter saying 'here's what you learn'. So not only does it do you good but you know what good it's doing you.

Shapes introduces basic and exotic, regular and irregular shapes in two and three dimensions, **Patterns** combines shape and rhythm, **Measure** is about customary and unconventional units of size and their practical application, and **Games** brings together elements of the other three to emphasise counting and matching.

Presentation is typical Two-Can – bright and unambiguous like Bulloch's text which fits the books to their prime purpose: shareability between parents and not just infants but older children with learning difficulties – all of which looks fun to me. TP

Ears

0 7502 1455 4

Stephen Savage, Wayland (Adapting for Survival series),
£8.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Eyes

0 7502 1454 6

Keeping cool, keeping warm



Elephants have large ears, but their hearing is not especially good. An elephant will gently wave its large ears so that the blood in them will cool. The cool blood circulates around the body, helping to keep the elephant cool in very hot weather.

The Indian elephant has smaller ears than the African elephant. This may be because the Indian elephant lives in the jungle where there is more shade. The African bat-eared fox has very large ears for good hearing and to help it keep cool.

An elephant has lots of blood vessels near the surface of its ears. These large ears are good for getting rid of body heat on a very hot day. Elephants also wave their ears on a warning. The elephant flap its ears aggressively and tremble through its trunk to warn off a dangerous animal.

16

Elephants' ears are wonderful things – their size and flexibility lets them hear their special low-frequency language, regulate their body temperature, signal their moods and pinpoint the direction of any sound. Owls have ears which guide them to their prey in total darkness and tarantulas hear through hairs on their legs. These are just a few examples of what **Ears** is all about – the adaptation of sense organs to life-style and environment.

The same goes for **Eyes** which is particularly good on the differential advantages of binocular (for hunters) and monocular (for hunted) vision. Did you know that scallops have eyes but sea anemones don't? This is because scallops need to escape from starfish while anemones are happy to

stand and slug it out with them; the author should know – he set up the Education Department at Brighton Aquarium.

There's a spare but explicit text in these two – making the most of the copious illustrations. TP

Counting

0 7136 3706 4

Brenda Walpole, A & C Black
(Millipedes series),
£7.50 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

A & C Black have always been good at series titles. 'Beans', 'Threads' and 'Stopwatch' were all touchstones of quality and now, devoted to measurement in many forms, come 'Millipedes'.

Counting starts with early ways of recording quantities before moving on to modern numerals and number bases. Abacus, tallysticks, Napier's bones and Babbage's engine all come in and lead to mathematical curiosities like magic squares and the self-fulfilling properties of the Fibonacci series. Even for an incorrigible innumerate like me all the descriptions are intelligible and all the instructions work out; here's a book that gets you counting pineapples, daisies and terrapins, knowing why, and enjoying it.

Temperature is more diffuse but covers many hows and whys of measuring it and the effects of temperature change. Imagine – the Forth Rail Bridge is a metre longer in hot weather than in cold, so a round trip from Stenhousemuir to Cowdenbeath is over six feet further in summer than at Christmas. It makes you think – they both do, and, on this showing, may Millipedes' thousand feet take them far! TP

Mary Queen of Scots

Sheila Watson,
0 7502 1447 3

Wayland, (Kings and Queens series),
£8.99 each

MIDDLE

The aim of this new series is to examine the most important events in the public and personal lives of British kings and queens and, apart from the few occasions when a little more information would have proved both interesting and illuminating (as, for example, that protocol decreed that Victoria propose to Albert) these titles serve as compact and readable introductions.



'One of the rare photographs that shows the queen smiling' from *Queen Victoria*.

In his synopsis of the longest reign in English history, Richard Wood also reveals many of Victoria's more endearing attributes including her kind nature, sense of humour and 'sudden and charming smile'. It's good to see this side of her personality underscored rather than the dour figure for which she's more commonly remembered. His text is accompanied by an equally revealing selec-

tion of illustrations which perfectly encapsulate aspects of her life as both matriarch and monarch.

Sheila Watson has ostensibly the more difficult task in conveying the main twists and turns in the troubled life of Mary Queen of Scots, but she's succeeded in simplifying a complicated scenario with her admirably straightforward and lucid portrayal. VH

The World of Music

Nicola Barber and Mary Mure,
Evans, 0 237 51483 4, £12.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Until recently music books seemed always tacitly to acknowledge that reading about it came a poor fourth to playing, hearing and discussing it. It still does, of course, but now music books have realised that they can become big, colourful, lively and, best of all, multi-disciplinary. And here's one: Messiaen rubs shoulders with Scott Joplin, Debussy with Dylan and Frank Zappa with Dolly Parton (well, perhaps not shoulders) in a cheerful jumble of musical facts, ideas and listening leads.



'There are many kinds of dance to lots of different rhythms. This dance is a tango and the rhythm is syncopated' from *The World of Music*.

A variety of instruments as wide as the late Astor Piazzolla's accordion occupies one third of the book before we come to how music has developed, formally and folkwise. There follows a really helpful section on staves, dots, time signatures and other music anatomy. In the somewhat threadbare composer glossary (No Ellington?) it's good to see women well represented but the book's real coup is its devotion of considerable space to the theremin. This earliest and most difficult of electronic instruments with its hands-off technique and unearthly sound is currently staging an energetic revival at the cutting edge of contemporary pop and at the Science Museum. Definitely an informative stimulus to future interest. TP

What Makes a Bruegel a Bruegel?

0 7451 5247 3, 0 7451 5225 2 (pbk)

What Makes a Degas a Degas?

0 7451 5248 1, 0 7451 5226 0 (pbk)

What Makes a Monet a Monet?

0 7451 5249 X, 0 7451 5227 9 (pbk)

What Makes a Raphael a Raphael?

0 7451 5250 3, 0 7451 5228 7 (pbk)

What Makes a Rembrandt a Rembrandt?

0 7451 5251 1, 0 7451 5229 5 (pbk)

What Makes a Van Gogh a Van Gogh?

0 7451 5252 X, 0 7451 5230 9 (pbk)

Richard Muhlberger, Cherrytree Books (What Makes a...? series),
£9.95 each (£6.95 pbk)

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Our response to a great work of art is often spontaneous and purely subjective, and many of us don't get further than an initial gut reaction.

Richard Muhlberger, a former vice-president for education at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, has written a series of books which cannot fail to enhance the enjoyment and understanding of young people who may be encountering an artist's work for the first time.

The framework for each title is the same – twelve masterpieces are analysed in order to show how the artist's own recognisable style evolved. However the paintings are not discussed in isolation but throughout a text which effortlessly blends biographical details with information about what the artist was trying to achieve, the techniques he employed and the ways in which other artists influenced him.

The author's sureness of touch reveals itself further in the intimate and personal details he manages to include – such as Degas' apparent reluctance to enter a Parisian hat shop until Mary Cassatt agreed to accompany him. 'Many paintings of millinery shops followed.'

Indeed the whole concept and production of these titles cannot be faulted – from the high quality reproductions to the user-friendly format with its attractively designed layout. **VH**

Global Cities

0 7502 1307 8

Town Life

0 7502 1306 X

Philip Parker, Wayland (Project Eco-city), £9.99 each

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Fans of these pages may remember my enthusing about Parker's first two 'Project Eco-city' books (Precocity for short, if you must). Well, here are the next two and, as I suspected, I enthuse just as much.

What this series so successfully does is treat the urban conglomeration as a living creature in itself – a being that eats and excretes, inspires and exhales; so **Town Life** isn't the usual sort of 'Nature at your

feet' that we might expect from the title but a look at the way the town itself lives and how we have to look after it to keep it healthy and stop it from choking on its own vomit. **Global City** exposes the gallop towards unsustainability that our biggest conurbations seem hell-bent upon, pointing out our need to reform building practices, planning strategies and transport systems at least, if the city is to remain a viable way of living together.

The bibliographies and address lists are truly comprehensive and contemporary. Highly recommended. **TP**

Eating Disorders

Kate Haycock, Wayland (Dealing with . . . series),

0 7502 0989 5, £9.50

SECONDARY

Eating disorders are getting a good airing in contemporary media, with their more sensational aspects taking most of the space. Young wives' tales and commercial pressures to gain or lose weight further confuse the issue, so there's a heartfelt need for a book to provide a balanced look at the subject.

And this seems to be such a book – the first half is an objective look at the nature and aetiology of anorexia and bulimia – no holds barred nor unnecessary hares started. Image-pressure comes out of this section very badly. Then we go on to see what can be done to help – the best line seeming to be assisted self-help and the development of a good self-image, to which development the final chapter is devoted.

While this book may be of help to those already suffering from an eating disorder, to those who are worried about developing one or who are trying to understand other peoples' it will be really useful – life-saving, even, perhaps. **TP**

George Eastman and Kodak

Peter Brooke-Ball,

1 85015 492 9

Bill Gates and Microsoft

David Marshall,

1 85015 483 X

Exley (Great Business Stories),
£7.99 each

SECONDARY

These titles explore the careers of two phenomenally successful American entrepreneurs whose vision, talent and shrewd business instincts prove to be remarkably similar even though they were born almost exactly a century apart.

Eastman's goal was to make photography popular and accessible. Gates' ambition was 'a computer on every desk and in every home'. They succeeded brilliantly; by 1896 over 100,000 Kodak cameras had been sold, whilst in 1986 Bill Gates, at the age of 31, became the youngest billionaire in American history.

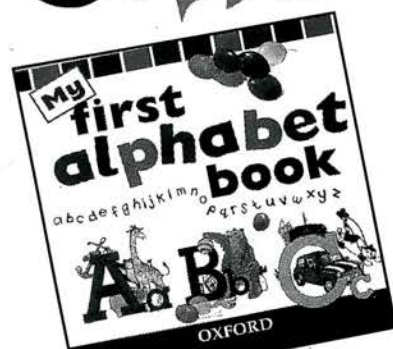
In describing just how these innovative and unconventional businessmen achieved their objectives – marketing strategies, product diversification and a stream of new ideas to keep one step ahead of their rivals – the authors provide a fascinating insight into the highly competitive world of big business in general, famous brand names in particular, and the history of two products many young people throughout the world now take for granted. **VH**

Non Fiction REVIEWERS:

Vee Holliday and Ted Percy

Non Fiction Reviews Editor:
Eleanor von Schweinitz

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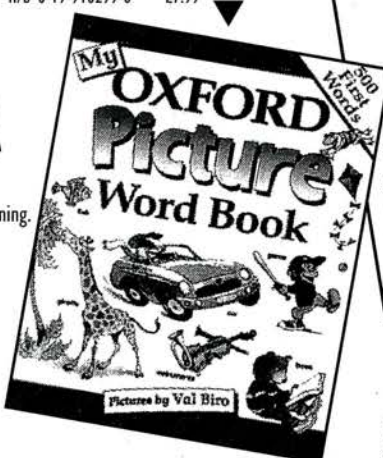
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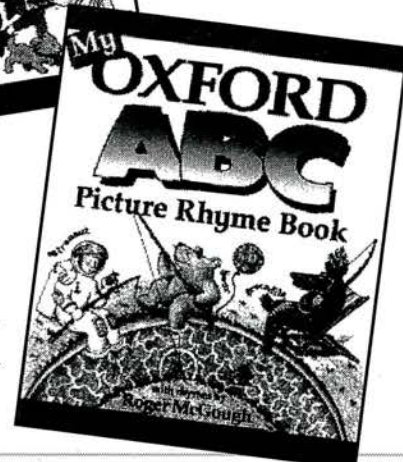
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Lapping It Up

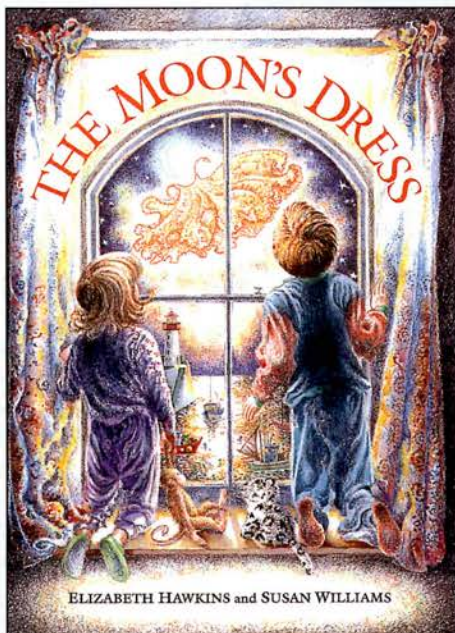
Ted Percy selects some of 1995's Spring picture books

Interviewed recently by the *Yorkshire Post* (25 Jan '95, Women's Post, pp 4-5), Alec Williams, sandalled sage of Calderdale, remarked 'the best thing about a picture book is that it goes across two laps'. Now a lap can be a bit metaphorical – it might just as well be a table in a school library or a floor at home – but if a picture book isn't something that is too good always to be kept to oneself, isn't something that, on certain occasions, gains from being huddled or cuddled over, then for me – and Alec – it's not up to snuff.

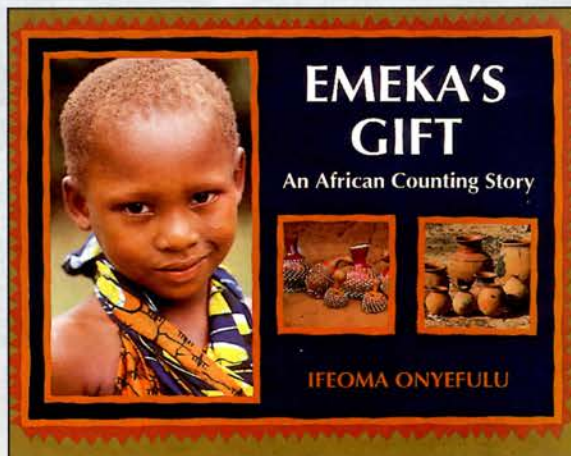
And a picture book must not only go across two laps, it must also get round two laps, at least, of the sustained interest circuit. Its ability to do this depends upon the extent to which it derives its own momentum from the engagement of the story with its pictures. These must potentiate and drive each other so the two are inconceivable separately. Collections of lovely pictures with a naff text are a waste of ability and would often be more honestly presented and have more effect as calendars or friezes. Conversely, pictures which don't illustrate but merely decorate a self-sufficient tale again demonstrate a misapplication of talent.

So with the mesh set at these limits, let's see the net result of a trawl through the myriad shoals of recent output.

A good tale is a good tale and so there's always room for a skilled and sympathetic retelling like Jan Pancheri's *The Twelve Poodle Princesses* (Hutchinson, 0 09 176710 5, £8.99), which transforms the well-known dancers into enthusiastic poodlettes (yes, they still wear out their slippers, they dance on their hind feet) whose secret is unmasked by honest mongrel, Valentine. Bright-eyed and tousled, he properly engages our sympathy before returning enriched with 'marrowbone jelly and custard' as well as cash to his rural roots. Rural roots, too, pertain for *Jig, Fig and Mrs Pig* by Peter Hansard, ill. Francesca Martin (Walker, 0 7445 3294 9, £7.99). Poor downtrodden Jig Pig discharges all the rotten jobs she gets with a serene generosity of spirit. Predictably, after an encounter of the traditional kind, she utters a jewel with every word whereas bullying Fig Pig, after the same encounter, spits forth only toads and snakes. Of course this story doesn't work if you accord toads and snakes a price above rubies, but the pleasant, rather medieval pictures, help dispel that problem. Mediocrity rules again in Marcia Williams' *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Walker, 0 7445 3283 3, £8.99). Eleven adventures – one per handsomely large spread – get the Williams 'bande desiree' treatment with lots of Lincoln green, benign jokes, traditional (i.e. Good King Richard, Bad King



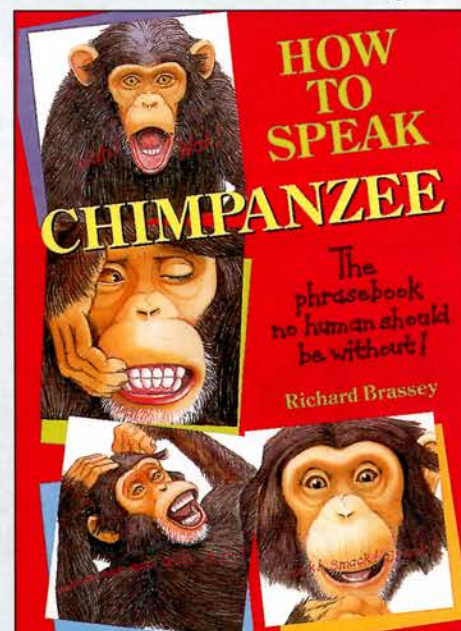
John) history and a Much the Miller's Son who's obviously an antecedent of Stanley Bagshaw. Susan Williams does the pictures for Elizabeth Hawkins' *The Moon's Dress* (Oxford, 0 19 279957 6, £7.99) – an expansion of the Aesop fable about the celestial dressmaking mother who twice fails to fit the figure of her waxing, waning daughter. She eventually decides to go out naked every night, to the delight of the terrestrial crowds. A near lyric text is well matched by soft pastely pictures full of affectionate detail in an imaginative layout. The whole effect is utterly restful. Vibrant jangling colours and bold shapes beat out a very different rhythm in Jessica Souhami's *The Leopard's Drum* (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0906 5, £8.99) – a traditional West African tale whose presentation here derives from Mme. Souhami's successful shadow-puppet show. Osebo the leopard gets his come-uppance and Aehicheri the tortoise gets the hard shell she always wanted. This cumulatively repetitive and many-charactered story really begs performance.



Moving away from retellings but staying in West Africa, we come to *Emeka's Gift* (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0934 0, £8.99). Billed as a

'Counting Story' the book's strength is its collection of photographic images of contemporary Nigeria and the utterly integrated text, all by Ifeoma Onyefulu. We learn a lot, too. With Richard Brassey we can learn *How to speak Chimpanzee* (Orion, 1 85881 220 8, £8.99). As chimps continue to attract our curiosity, an illustrated guide to their language must be a good thing; when it comes with excellently precise facial illustrations and performance hints for the student, it's a sensation. 'Try this on your parents when you're hungry' counsels Brassey: 'stick out your lips in a big pout. Grunt lots of times. Point to what you want and hold out your hand. It usually works.' There's lots of humour here and, above all, total respect for the chimpanzee in a remarkably original book from an author/illustrator utterly new to me.

There would be no Africa without elephants.

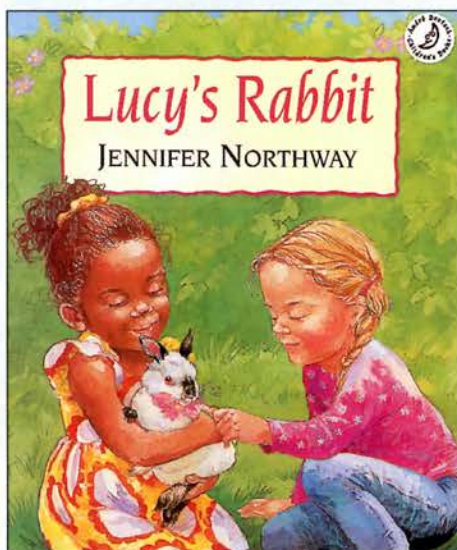


Natascha Biebow's *Elephants never Forget* (ABC, 1 85406 226 3, £7.95) pleases me enormously. It's a simple and true story of elephant life and death; the text is slow and gentle,

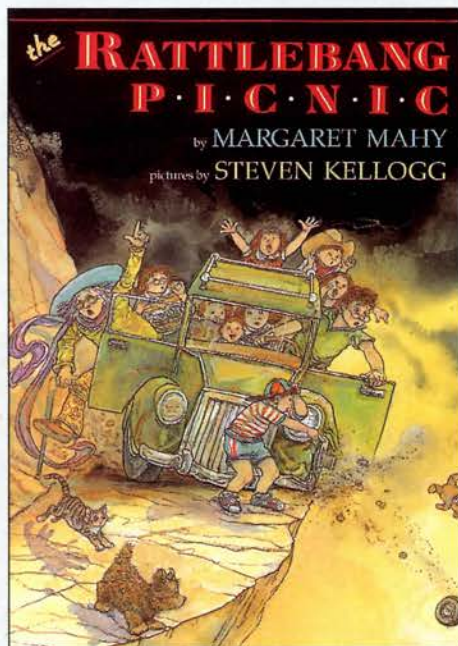
marvellously matched by Britta Teckentrup's spacious clear-aided and utterly African painting. It shows beautifully the extent of elephants' dignity, loyalty and family feeling.

Family life with animals is always a fertile field. Kathryn Lasky's *Pond Year* (Walker, 0 7445 2807 0, £7.99) is a celebration of the ungla-morous, muddy, scummy things that many small ponds are and how well they can provide a focus for friendship. There's a lot of good natural history here – well pictured by Mike (Think of an Eel) Bostock – American but none the worse for that, although when there are muskrats (which the 'scum chums' never see) and crawdaddies, how come they call their pollywogs 'tadpoles'? Is American folk-nomenclature changing? Jennifer

Northway fans (count me in) may remember Lucy and Alice from earlier books. Here these nice back-garden girls recede into the middle distance as **Lucy's Rabbit** (Scholastic, 0 590 54185 4, £8.99) runs riot in house and garden, outsmarting everyone in the extended mixed-race family before settling into proper quarters. Great portraits of the star, and, yes, it's black and white.



Diana Hendry's lead characters often seem to bring out the best in their supporting casts and **Dog Dottington** (Walker, 0 7445 3284 1, £7.99) is no exception. All the Dottingtons are scared of something – from spiders to puddles – so they get a dog to help them cope. But, oh dear, 'Hero' Dottington's even more scared of everything than they are. Magically, by trying to assuage Hero's fears, the Dottingtons lose their own. Margaret Chamberlain's rubber-jointed pictures are a joy and her image of aquaphobic Molly Dottington gamely carrying a resigned Hero over a puddle is my favourite image of the whole year. This book is a real gem.



The Rattlebang Picnic (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13477 3, £8.99) is written by Margaret Mahy, whose chaotic narrative style consorts well with Steven Kellogg's illustrations to tell the story of the McTavish family's enormously lucky escape (aided by Granny's indestructible pizza doing duty as a car wheel) from a volcanic cataclysm. 'Hilarious' is a much over-used word but here I think it's well deserved in this

portrait of a family whose eccentricities are its strengths. A gentler sort of hilarity pervades Benedict Blathway's **The Runaway Train** (Julia MacRae, 1 85681 077 1, £8.99). In his efforts to help an old lady board his train, Duffy Driver lets it run away without him. Chasing it by helicopter, lorry, tractor, boat, bike and horse through landscapes of an Anno-like busy-ness, he finally catches it arriving at its seaside destination. Naturally, the old lady has a lovely day out and returns safely. Duffy's train is, of course, hauled by a little red engine; now, can the Diana Ross who's just written **Prickety Prackety** (Julia MacRae, 1 85681 600 1, £9.99) be that same supreme storyteller who delighted me with the original L.R.E. all those years ago? I'm disposed to think so, for this is a lovely story – about a little red hen – which reads smooth as silk. Showing traditional little-red-henly independence, Prickety Prackety successfully minds her own business which is the production of an equally traditional dozen fluffy yellow chicks to everyone's admiration. A thoroughly satisfying story, gaining extra character from Caroline Crossland's pictures. Another little red hen tale comes from Mary Wormell whose bold linocuts show us what happened on **Hilda Hen's Happy Birthday** (Gollancz, 0 575 05745 9, £8.99). Jill Tomlinson and Kathleen Hale have already provided two memorable hens called Hilda, and then there was another who, for a while became Prime Minister, but this Hilda has much more to do with **Rosie's Walk**. Like Rosie she takes a gentle stroll round the farm, indulging herself all the way, oblivious of the consternation she causes (but *we* know, don't we, children!). A trite little story, perhaps, but with splendidly narrative pictures and, come to think of it, perhaps the Thatcherian similarity isn't so faint after all.

When I started John Prater's **The Greatest Show on Earth** (Walker, 0 7445 3221 3, £7.99) I thought it must be the story of the young John Major – who ran away from the circus to join the bank – but no – Harry, youngest and least competent member of a large circus family, emerges after a chapter of spectacular accidents as a gifted clown. Harry's family are all unremotely good-humoured; not so Andrew in **Andrew's Angry Words** (North-South, 1 55858 435 8, £8.95). He lets fly a volley of pictorial abuse when his sister trips over him. The imprecations travel on and on from person to person in a splenetic torrent until a wise market lady collects and dumps them in the sea, providing instead 'all the kind and happy words I know' which helps Andrew put everything right. Line and wash drawings by Thé Tjong Khing actually look rather French (by de Brunhoff out of Sempé, say) and serve the story well. Dennis, the ineffective monster, gets cross, too, in Jeanne Willis and Susan Varley's **The Monster Storm** (Andersen, 0 86264 553 0, £7.99). Frightened and annoyed by his first thunderstorm he wreaks vengeance by making his own rough music – which becomes even louder when a saucepan gets stuck on his head. Appalled by the noise, a baby rabbit, is consoled by his mum:

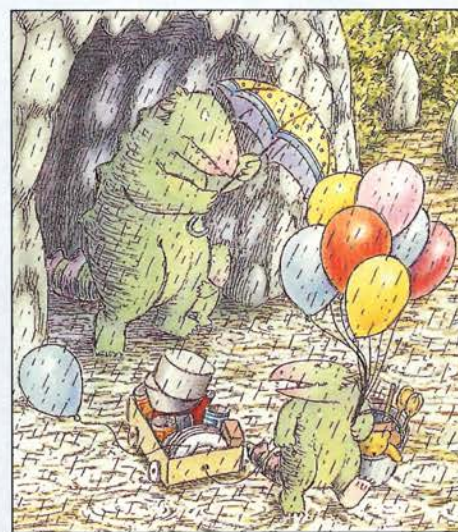
*It's only a thunderstorm. Sleep if you can,
It isn't a monster attacking a pan,
Monsters aren't real...*

and then they go and find out!

Another mum who gets a surprise is Little Panda's in Michael Foreman's **Surprise! Surprise!** (Andersen, 0 86264 572 7, £7.99). Little Panda doesn't like the dark but bravely uses his bedside moon-light to help grow a plant in the attic for his mother's birthday. Come the day, Mum, Dad and LP all troop up to the attic and – Surprise! Surprise! (and p.s. Little Panda's not afraid of the dark now). This is Foreman in playful, colourful mode.

More in-family surprises in Lucy Cousins' **Za-za's Baby Brother** (Walker, 0 7445 3759 2, £8.99). It's a familiar plot – Za-za's nose is put out of joint by the arrival of the all-consuming brother but she recovers when she finds that she can cuddle as well as be cuddled. Cousins naive style displays a lot of observation, is easy to appreciate under stress and is ideally suited to the early stages of sibling rivalry; it amuses grown-ups too. (Oh, did I say, Za-za is a zebra.) Naïveté of a different kind pervades Sarah Fanelli's **My Map Book** (ABC, 1 85406 225 5, £8.95). The publisher's puff says Fanelli's technique 'combines collage, drawing and painting in an *almost imperceptible style*' (my italics). Well, I perceive it all right – it's a sort of Raoul Dufy meets Spike Milligan and very effective, too, in providing a series of personal maps of 'my family', 'Saturday and Sunday', 'favourite foods' and 'my dog', as well as neighbourhood and seaside. This is a book to return to again and again, each time discovering more. The publishers bless them, say it's 'perfect to *pour over*' (my italics, again) by which I suppose they mean it's perfect for a rainy day – they're right.

Zoom (Viking, 0 670 85804 8, £9.99) by Istvan Banyai is a sort of map as well. As we zoom out from a farmyard, we see it as part of a far larger and ever expanding landscape whose identity and location keep surprising us. Then, when all is ingeniously revealed, we zoom off again leaving, eventually, a world the size of a pinhead. There are few words in this book – all in the pictures and all essential. I look forward to the next one, but if it never comes this will still be a brilliant original which those who remember

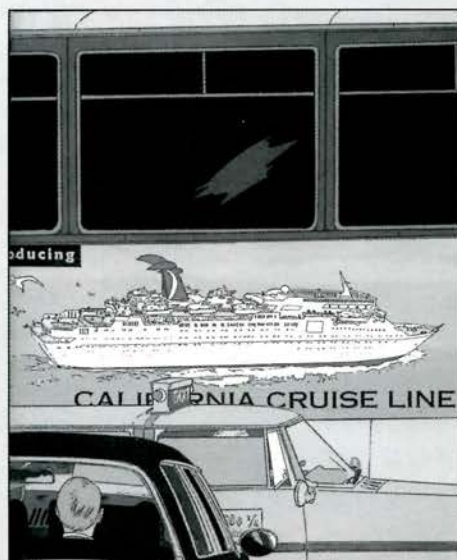
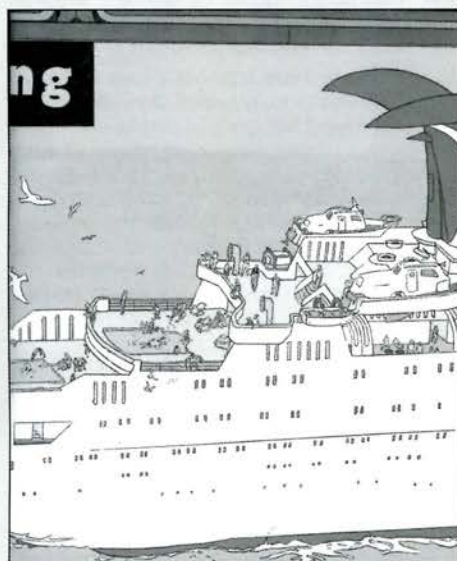
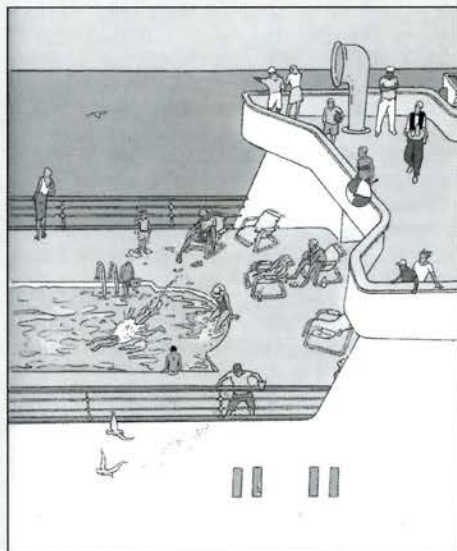


From **The Monster Storm**.



Mum finished the story and kissed Little Panda goodnight. Little Panda snuggled down in his bed and went to sleep in the glow of his Moonlight.

From **Surprise! Surprise!**



the Bonzo Dog conundrum in **The Mouse and His Child** will love.

Back to earth with a bump to meet **Tattybogle**, Sandra Horn's characterful scarecrow (Andersen, 0 86264 596 4, £8.99). Wind and weather may dismember him but his spirit and his central stick remain to take root and become a catkinned willow tree – much admired by all, including Tattybogle's scarecrow successor. It's a lovely idea – the up-side of reincarnation and some great drawing (dog especially) from Ken Brown. Things grow, too, in **Rachel's Roses** (Barefoot, 1 898000 37 9, £8.99) by Karen Christensen. Bernadette Watts did the pictures for this simple tale of a little girl and her mum growing a rose bush. It's really nice and pretty and contains what seedsmen call 'cultural directions' so you can grow your own roses (organically, too). We'd all be a lot worse off without Bernadette Watts' steady output of thoroughly pleasant work.

In Michael Morpurgo's **Blodin the Beast** (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0850 6, £8.99), hideous Blodin stalks the land condemning its inhabitants to slavery or death by the fire he breathes, which is fuelled by their labours, for his thirst for oil is unquenchable. There's one wise man in a so far untouched village who knows how to destroy Blodin. In a classic combination of wisdom and faith, Old Shanga and young Hosea succeed – at the cost of Shanga's life – in ridding the land of its tyrant and forging a fairer future. I've never seen a style like Christina Balit's but her contribution to this book is immense. Her tenebrous images of Blodin are made all the more menacing because she never shows us all of him – he's woven into the landscape and remains always a partial mystery. This is one terrific book which deserves a lap of honour, and anyone who wants to regard it as an allegory for our times will find in it plenty to justify such a claim.

And lastly, a little indulgence. I don't normally go for gimmick books. All too often artifice is their master rather than their servant, but for Babette Cole's **Dogs** (Heinemann, 0 434 97146 4, £2.99) and **Ponies** (Heinemann, 0 434 97144 8,

£2.99) I have to make an exception. Here are the very essences of hippophilia and dogginess distilled into two tiny volumes each with five spreads. There's paper engineering at its durable best (watch the pony kick the vet) and lots of love and laughter. Tiny they may be but these are two-lappers most certainly. And two laps – as you will remember best beloved – is what it's all about. ■



Young Hosea from **Blodin the Beast**.

Ted Percy is a regular reviewer of non-fiction books for **BfK**. Before retiring to live in Roxburghshire, he was Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

A sequence from **Zoom**.

'When the wind blew, he rocked from side to side and his hat jumped up and down, but it never blew away because it was tied under his chin with good strong twine. "I like a bit of a dance," said Tattybogle.'

From **Tattybogle**.



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OOPS!

BfK's apologies to Viv Edwards and her team at Reading. When we published her article 'Books and Bi-lingual Pupils' in our last issue (BfK 91, pp 24-25), we'd intended to give details about the training packs she'd devised in support of the GEST 16 initiative. Alas, these were eaten by Gremlins. So here they are now:

The three training packs – **Reading in multilingual classrooms, Writing in multilingual classrooms and Speaking and listening in multilingual classrooms** – consist of a course

leader's handbook, overhead transparencies, handouts and teacher's book (£85 each or £225 for all three). The teacher's books contain clear and concise accounts of the main issues covered in the packs and are available separately (£5.95 each, or £14.95 for three). Packs and teacher's books can be obtained from the Reading and Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY (tel: 01734 318820).

Two book selections to support second language learners in the process of learning to read – **Books for beginners and Moving on** – are available from Badger Publishing Ltd, Unit 1, Parson's Green Estate, Stevenage, Herts SG1 4QG (tel: 01438 356906).

Back Into BbY

UK membership of IBBY, which was founded in 1953 to promote the belief that children's books can play an important part in promoting tolerance and international understanding, foundered in 1991. This was partly owing to lack of funds and partly to a lack of people able and willing to take an active role in this world-wide network of writers, illustrators, publishers, librarians, teachers et al. Regular BfK readers may recall Alison Leonard's article in BfK 77 (Nov '92) bewailing Britain's exclusion from the international scene. Well, now we're back – thanks to a group called UK Friends of IBBY formed in 1993. Following the group's first conference in November 1994 and the many new members it generated, the corporate membership fee of £3,000 annually was met and an application for re-entry has been made.

That's this year, though... unlike many countries, whose fees are paid by government and/or publishers, the UK depends on individual contributions for continuing membership. This costs £15 (£30 for corporations) and brings a regular newsletter plus the chance to nominate British writers and illustrators for the prestigious Hans Andersen Award and the IBBY Honours list. Plans for 1995 include a celebration at Book House in London on 21st June.

Well done, UK Friends of IBBY!

For information and membership details, please contact UK Friends of IBBY, c/o CLRC, Downshire House, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 4HT (tel: 0181 392 3008, fax: 0181 392 3031).

A PREVIEW FREE VIEW

Two more freebies for BfK readers. From Walker Books, a sample chapter from Martin Waddell's new novel, *Tango's Baby*. Send a postcard with your name and address on the back marked 'Tango's Baby – Books for Keeps Offer' to Walker Books at 87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ.

And from Bodley Head, to the first 100 applicants, a sample chapter from Paul Zindel's suspense novel, *Loch*. Again, a postcard with your name and address on it to 'Loch Chapter Sample Offer (BfK)', PO Box 1375, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA.

An In-House Howler

No, not one of our own – though doubtless this will happen some day. Our source is *Writers News* (March '95), which reports as follows on this year's Public Lending Rights details: 'John Cunliffe, Shirley Hughes and Jamie Suzanne were among the new children's authors accounting for all but half of the total in the top category of over a million borrowings.'

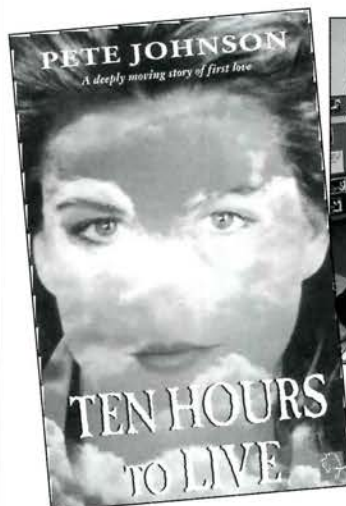
Wow!

What happens when they really hit their stride?

Our thanks, and the usual crisp fiver, to Pippa Goodhart for passing on this gem.

BfK News

Braille at Bramcote



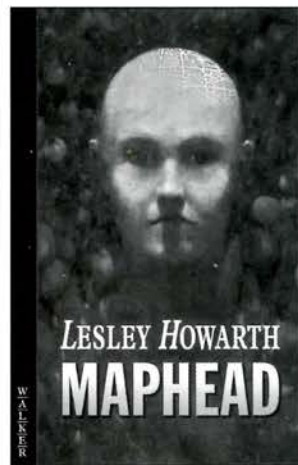
Caryn Welch with Pete Johnson and young readers at the braille book launch.

When Caryn Welch, school librarian at Bramcote Park comprehensive in Nottinghamshire, met novelist Pete Johnson at last year's Youth Librarians' annual conference, she knew exactly what she wanted – permission to turn his latest book, *Ten Hours to Live* (Mammoth, 0 7497 1793 9, £3.50) into braille. Bramcote Park is also a focus school for blind and partially sighted pupils so Caryn was only too aware of how much mainstream reading they miss.

Pete agreed at once... and to Caryn's delight, British Telecom, Courtaulds Textiles, Vision Express, Powergen, Severn Trent Water, GPT and Birds Confectioners all donated the necessary funds to cover binding costs.

Each braille copy of *Ten Hours to Live* runs into three volumes and takes as many hours to run through the translation programme on a computer. Undaunted by the task, however, Caryn said: 'To me, working in a mainstream school, it's very important that blind teenagers have access to the same fiction as their sighted friends are reading. I'm very pleased that our entry into this field has been with one of the most popular British authors writing for teenagers. If all goes well, we're hoping to transcribe all of Pete Johnson's books and then move on to another author.'

Obviously the main cost involved in producing these braille versions is the binding, but unit costs come down as the number of volumes to be bound goes up, which is a good reason to establish a network of users. Caryn is keen to do just this and if you'd like to know more about her initiative, contact Caryn Welch at Bramcote Park School, Bramcote, Beeston, Nottinghamshire NG9 3GD (tel: 0115 922 6816, fax: 0115 925 3400).



Guardian Children's Fiction Award

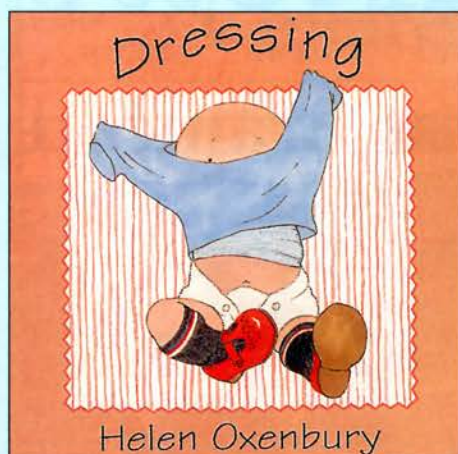
This year's winner, who received prize-money of £1,000, is Lesley Howarth for her fantasy novel *Maphead*, published by Walker Books (0 7445 2458 X, £8.99; 0 7445 3647 2, £3.99 pbk).

1995's judges were Nina Bawden, Geraldine McCaughrean, Philip Pullman and Sue Limb.

July BfK will bring you

- Dennis Hamley on crime-writing for the young
 - Adèle Geras on the pace of children's fiction
 - Nicholas Tucker on the demise of the amateur writer
 - Bev Mathias's O.P. Plea
 - Wendy Cooling's round-up of Summer reading
 - Paula Danziger in Authorgraph
- plus reviews, reviews, reviews

BOOKS FOR BABIES



We've been past the learning to crawl/nappy changing/toddler tantrum stage with our three for a long time, although now we're at the GCSE options/£60 for a pair of Doc Martens, please/teenage tantrum stage I have to say I do feel a certain amount of nostalgia for earlier, simpler days.

Things don't appear to have changed a great deal, but then neither have babies and toddlers – or publishers. Babies do need books, but publishers still produce too many aimed at the very young that are mediocre or unnecessarily complicated. Never in the field of human endeavour has so much effort and ingenuity been expended to such little effect.

So thanks heavens for Helen Oxenbury, whose books were a much-loved part of my children's early years. Four of her classic 'Baby Books' have just been re-issued by Walker – *Playing* (0 7445 3713 4), *Dressing* (0 7445 3714 2), *Working* (0 7445 3715 0) and *Friends* (0 7445 3712 6), £2.99 each – along with a mini boxed set of four others – *Clap Hands*, *Say Goodnight*, *Tickle, Tickle*, and *All Fall Down* (0 7445 3711 8) at £4.99 for the set.

The secret of their success rests in a seamless combination of simplicity, warmth and humour, their loving depiction of babies doing just what babies do. As anyone who's used these books with a baby will testify, the very young see *themselves* in the pictures and respond accordingly. Would that books for children of all ages could do the same...

I found myself rather liking the 'Padded Board Books' from Dorling Kindersley (four titles – *Good Morning, Baby* (1 85948 007 1), *Baby and Friends* (1 85948 004 7), *All About Baby* (1 85948 005 5) and *Goodnight, Baby* (1 85948 006 3) – at £2.99 each. Their chunky, padded covers make them a genuine pleasure to handle and, as babies are very tactile creatures, this gets the books off to a good start.

They feature bright, clear photographs of various babies involved in a range of everyday activities with other children, toys, pets, etc. so that interest level is pretty high. Another DK photographic title worth looking at is *See How I Grow* by Angela Wilkes (0 7513 5127 X, £5.99), a simple but beautifully produced large-format hardback which follows one little girl from birth to 18 months – fascinating for tinies and their larger siblings.

Big brothers and sisters might enjoy reading *Three Little Puppies* (1 85602 066 5) and *Three Little Kittens* (1 85602 067 3) by Nicola Smee,

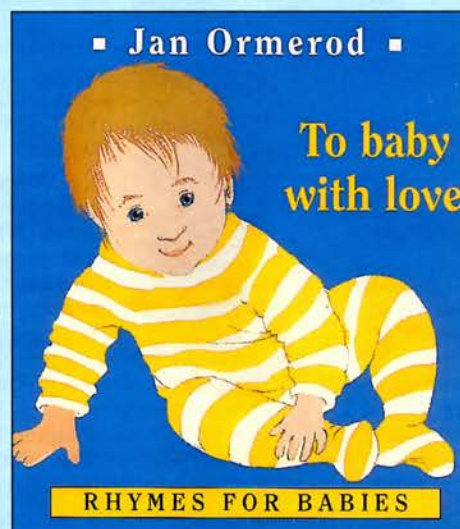
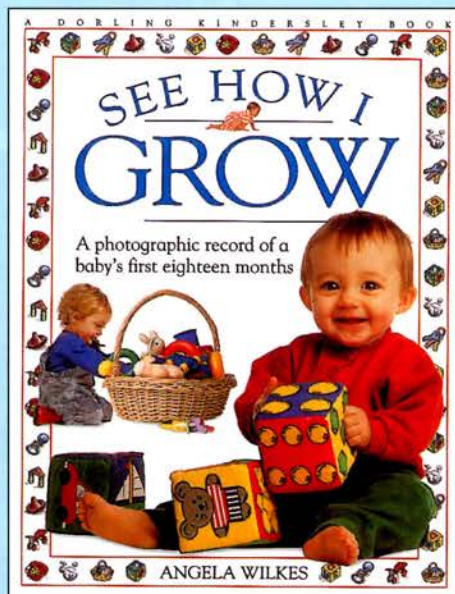
TONY BRADMAN



from David Bennett Books costing £4.99 each, to the new baby. Each of these shaped board books incorporates cosy artwork, finger puppets representing the eponymous small furry creatures, a simple hide-and-seek story to act out and even a couple of little flaps – all of which adds up to pretty good value for money in my opinion.

Nursery rhymes score every time, of course. It's the lilt of the language and the chime of the rhymes that make babies and toddlers sit up and pay attention, although good, simple illustration can help to enhance the effect. I didn't think you could do much that's new with nursery rhymes, but I'm pleased to say Maureen Roffey has proved me wrong with one of the best uses of paper engineering I've seen for a long time.

Her two small and brilliantly simple 'Slip Slide Books' – *Humpty Dumpty and Other Rhymes* (0 370 31929 X) and *Miss Muffet and Other Rhymes* (0 370 31930 3) at £2.99 each from Bodley Head – feature familiar rhymes on left-hand pages, and tab-controlled reveals on the right. These show, for example, Humpty whole, then Humpty broken, or Jack and Jill going up, then tumbling down the hill. Babies will adore the sudden, hilarious transformations.



They'll also enjoy the glorious visuals in Jan Ormerod's *To Baby With Love* (Viking, 0 670 85531 6, £9.99), a book which works on the Oxenbury principle, i.e. do the simple thing well and you won't go wrong. Five rhymes featuring animals and children are illustrated in big, bold pictures. Images and text work perfectly together to make a delightful reading experience.

I have to confess my heart sunk when I saw *The Pop-Up Potty Book* by Marianne Borgardt and Maxie Chamblis (Orion, 1 85881 140 6, £5.99). I opened it with trepidation, wondering what was going to pop-up... and, anyway, isn't Tony Ross's *I Want My Potty* the definitive word on this subject? What else could you say, even with the marvels of paper mechanics?

In fact, thankfully, it turned out to be a lot better than I thought. None of the flaps or tabs reveals anything that's remotely yucky, and the simple text is bright, encouraging and relentlessly cheery. I can see this being very useful in households where a fraught toddler might be experiencing a few problems with this particular stage of development.

HarperCollins have just launched a new series for toddlers called, appropriately enough, 'Collins Toddler'. The first batch features (among others) two jolly little books about a new character from Colin and Jacqui Hawkins – *Foxy and the Spots* (0 00 198146 3 hbk, 0 00 664537 2 pbk) and *Foxy Loses His Tail* (0 00 198145 5 hbk, 0 00 664536 4 pbk). At £5.99 in hardback and £3.99 for the paperback, Foxy is, I think, going to be very popular.

I also liked *Oops-a-Daisy* by Joyce Dunbar, illustrated by Carol Thompson (Walker, 0 7445 3257 4, £7.99), a picture book containing four tales about a little girl's everyday life. It's rare that you come across the sort of insight into a toddler's feelings exhibited by Joyce Dunbar, and Carol Thompson's warm pictures help to make this the kind of book which toddlers will return to again and again. You can't ask for more than that... ■

Tony Bradman has one of his own books coming out in the 'Collins Toddler' series this month – it's illustrated by Lynn Breeze and is called *Our Baby* (0 00 664510 0, £3.99).