

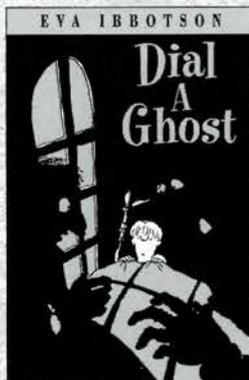
# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

July 1996 No.99  
UK Price £2.70

*the children's*  
**book magazine**

10 Years of Orchard Books  
And the winner of the 1996  
Eleanor Farjeon Award is ...

# Ghosts, witches, gerbils and fleas are just some of the things you will find in this great new fiction for Summer 1996 from Macmillan Children's Books



**DIAL A GHOST**  
by *Eva Ibbotson*  
HB £8.99  
PB £3.99  
October



**DO GERBILS GO TO HEAVEN?**  
by *David Henry Wilson*  
PB £2.99



**CATHERINE,  
CALLED BIRDY**  
by *Karen Cushman*  
PB £3.99  
•• A WH Smith Mind-  
Boggling Book ••

**YOU'RE KIDDING,  
Ms WIZ**  
by *Terence Blacker*  
HB £8.99 PB £2.99  
September



For further information or a current catalogue please contact:  
The Marketing Department, Macmillan Children's Books, 25 Eccleston Place, London, SW1W 9NF



**THE MASTER AUSTRALIAN STORYTELLER**



# HE'S UNBELIEVABLE!

Puffin Books. Growing up with your children.



# Contents

- 2** **Editor's Page**  
News and comment from the Editor
- 4** **Puppy Dogs' Tales . . .**  
George Hunt meets Paul Jennings and Gary Paulsen
- 6** **Reviews**  
Fiction 6 / Non Fiction 22
- 8** **Blue Bananas . . . The First Bunch**  
Gill Roberts
- 14** **Authorgraph No. 99**  
Malorie Blackman, interviewed by Stephanie Nettell
- 16** **A Blooming Good Read**  
David Morton celebrates 10 Years of Orchard Books
- 18** **The Reading Scheme is Dead . . . Long Live the Reading Scheme?**  
Annemarie Young on the development of Cambridge Reading
- 20** **The 'F' Factor**  
Mike Rouse
- 25** **Sophie or Sophistry?**  
Reynold Jones writes about Sophie's World
- 26** **Awards News**  
Jay Heale on The Andersen Award  
Nicholas Tucker on the Carnegie Medal
- 28** **Visiting Uncle Albert**  
Russell Stannard

## CoverSTORY

This month BfK features Jane Ray's cover for *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* (see page 17 for details). We're particularly delighted to have the opportunity to use this illustration as it enables us to say HAPPY BIRTHDAY to Orchard Books - they're 10 this year! And also to thank them for their help in producing our July cover.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

JULY 1996 No. 99

ISSN 0143-909X © School Bookshop Assoc. 1996  
Editor: Chris Powling  
Managing Director: Richard Hill  
Design and typeset: Rondale Ltd., Lydney, Glos.  
Printed by: The Friary Press, Dorchester.

Books for Keeps can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to Books for Keeps, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. You can also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard) or use the telephone order service on

**0181-852 4953**

Editorial correspondence should also be sent to the BfK office.

Annual subscription for six issues:  
£16.20 (UK); £20.00 (Europe including Ireland);  
£23.00 (airmail)

Single copies:  
£2.70 (UK); £3.35 (Europe including Ireland);  
£3.85 (airmail)

## . . . yes, it's us!

As we mention so modestly on our front cover, Books for Keeps has been awarded the 1996 Eleanor Farjeon Award in recognition of 'distinguished service to children's books'. To say we're flattered and delighted is to understate the case by a number of Dolby decibels - we've been beaming with pride and pleasure ever since The Children's Book Circle, who administer the Award, gave us the good news last month.

What's especially satisfying, as the citation makes clear, is that this is an award to the *whole* BfK team: our regular reviewers and contributors (many of whom have been with us since the magazine was launched in March 1980) have been as crucial to our success as our backstage and editorial teams in Lee and Winchester. Of course, two team members - Jill Bennett and Stephanie Nettell - have been Eleanor Farjeon recipients in their own right already. In adding our name to theirs, as well as to previous winners like Margery Fisher, Brian Alderson, Kaye Webb, Nancy and Aidan Chambers, Robert Leeson and Eileen Colwell, the Children's Book Circle has honoured us mightily. We'll do our best to deserve it.



## Editor's PAGE

CHRIS POWLING

The presentation of the Award will be made in London on 17th September . . . which will coincide, we hope, with the publication of BfK's One Hundredth Edition. Watch out for a very special number.

In the meantime, amongst all the notes of congratulation we've received, there was one which couldn't help catching our eye. It came from the 1984 winner of the Eleanor Farjeon Award and, with her permission, we've reproduced it below.

Enjoy the issue!

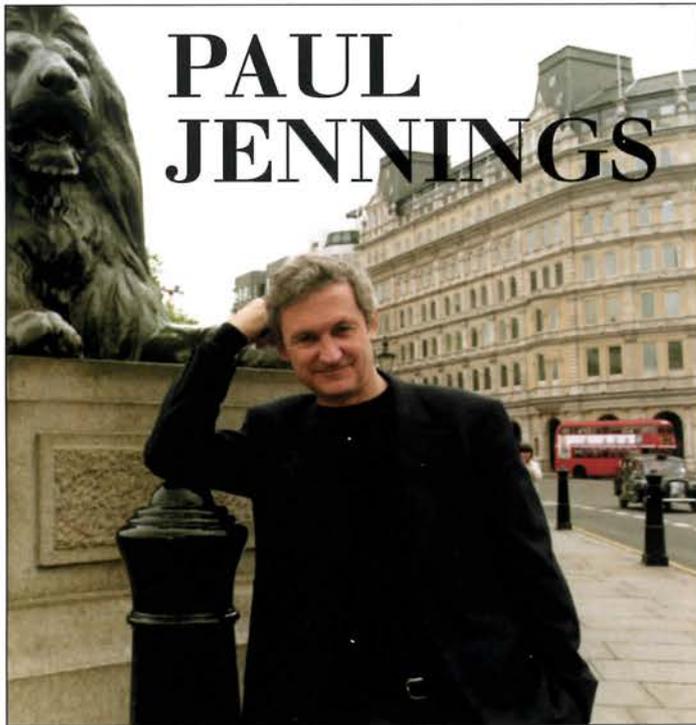
*Chris*

VERY MANY CONGRATULATIONS TO BOOKS FOR KEEPS FOR WINNING THE 1996 ELEANOR FARJEON AWARD



## HOT FROM THE PRESS

Poetry 0-13, co-published by BfK and the University of Reading's Reading and Information Centre, is now available. Edited by Chris Powling and Morag Styles, with contributions from Prof. Brian Cox, Prue Goodwin, Iona Opie, Jill Pirrie and Michael Rosen amongst others, this Guide to Poetry for Children offers assessments by an expert critical team of more than 200 currently available books of verse. See page 10 of this issue for details.



# PAUL JENNINGS

**W**hen I was 16 I sent a story in an old exercise book to the Australian Women's Weekly. They sent it back, and I felt mortified. I thought, I'm no good, I'm simply no good. It just goes to show how authors feel about what they do: if you present something you've written to somebody, you're revealing your secret self, you're definitely offering your love, and if you get it rejected, it's devastating. I never wanted to go through that again, and I didn't even think about writing again until I was 39.'

Paul Jennings is a reserved man, and when he talks about his work, there is a tremor of restraint in his quiet voice that might come from modesty, or from mild astonishment that the hurt he suffered has been redeemed by massive success as a writer of surreal and hilarious short stories. He returned to writing when he became concerned about his son's reluctance to read. Unimpressed by the material the child was offered at school, he realised he could do better himself. His first collection, *Unreal!*, set the pattern for the sequence of similarly entitled books which have followed. Combining his gift for telling jokes, an Australian outback talent for exaggeration which he claims to have inherited from his Yorkshireman father, and his own childhood love for the works of Richmal Crompton, Enid Blyton and W E Johns, he creates brisk, fantastic rhapsodies whose outlandish episodes, often involving contortions of time and identity, suddenly resolve themselves in spectacular punchlines.

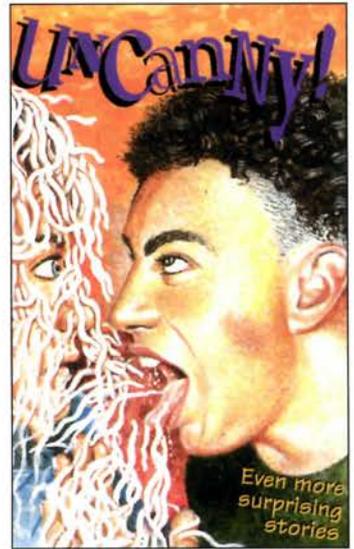
Jennings' sentences tend to be short, simple and rhythmic. Before returning to writing, he worked as a teacher of disabled children and as a speech pathologist. His linguistic expertise is evident in the highly accessible prose that he painstakingly constructs, but such is his skill as a storyteller, there is not a trace of condescension or of contrived simplification in his books. 'The thing about reading is that you've got to get kids to love doing it. You're not going to do that by writing down to them. Sure, your writing's got to be accessible to kids who are struggling, but I don't believe that there's such a thing as a good book that's just for reluctant readers. If a book's too dull to appeal to a good reader, it's sure as hell not going to appeal to a reluctant one.'

The content of Jennings' stories celebrates children's sense of limitless possibility, and their love of the absurd and the taboo. His heroes and heroines learn how to fly, traverse dimensions, and practice telekinesis. Bullies and pompous authorities are humbled. The more embarrassing bodily functions are winkled out of their closets and subjected to the gaze and the laughter of the crowd. However, the stories do share a profoundly serious emotional element: the intense vulnerability that is at the core of so much childhood experience.

'I can remember so vividly what it was like to be small and powerless, frightened of what was to come next, worried about getting it wrong.' Jennings recounts his own experience of being forced for the first time to strip for school showers, and being jeered at by his classmates. This sense of intensely fragile carnality permeates much of his fiction, along with an adolescent dread of losing control of one's flesh as the body, relentlessly and mysteriously, transmutes itself. A boy's own face appears in the wallpaper of his room and pursues him around the house; an extra eye grows on a fingertip, a youth watches horrified as his nails multiply and overspread his entire skin. There

# Puppy Dogs

George Hunt interviews two writers who seem to bridge the gender gap in

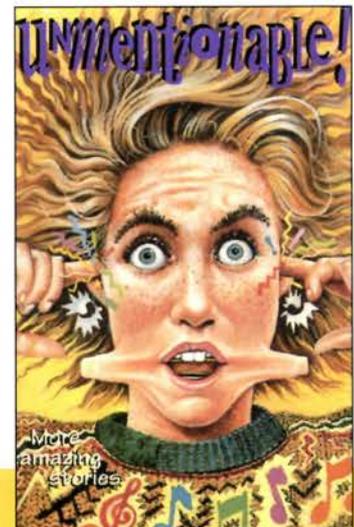
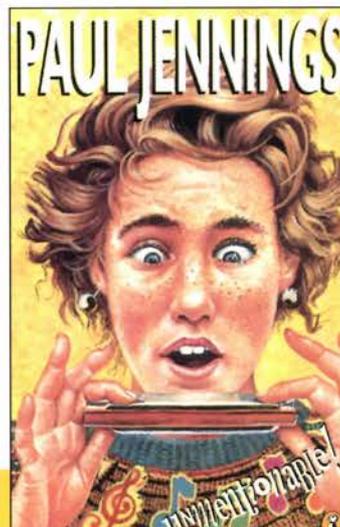


are also scaring accounts of social degradation, from the everyday plight of the fame-craving child who is never even picked for the football team, to more bizarre ordeals like being sent to a sewage plant to reclaim a set of false teeth which have fallen down the toilet. The power that parents have to inflict massive embarrassment on their children is explored in all of its shameful variants.

In his more recent work, Jennings' interests seem to be bifurcating. A set of picture books written in conjunction with Ted Greenwood and Terry Denton (a pun collection, *Duck for Cover* and the Spooner-inspired *Spooner or Later*, to be followed by a book of conundrums) are recreational wordplay compendia which combine a linguist's love of lexis and phonology with a raconteur's delight in a joke well cracked.

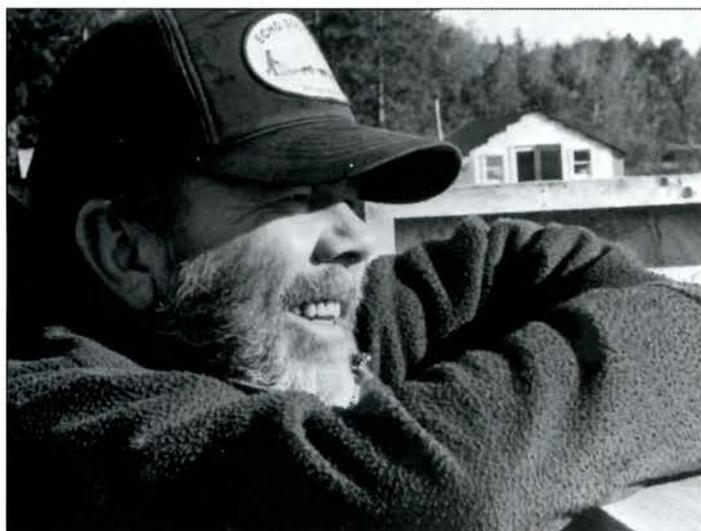
His fiction, on the other hand, seems to be shifting towards less obviously comical themes. The opening story of his latest collection, *Uncovered!*, is a lachrymatory account of the relationship between a dying, Tiny Tim-like figure and his autistic brother; another story deals with bedwetting, and the finale, 'Pubic Hare', is a re-enactment of his own purgatory in the shower room. He concedes that this is daring ground for a writer who has established a reputation for making children laugh, but the absurdity remains undiluted, and the stories extend into more quaggy territory the foundational principle of empowerment which underlies all his work. In 'Ringing Wet', for example, the enuretic heroine deliberately wets herself in order to trigger the alarm which leads to the abduction of a neighbourhood burglar, thus liberating herself from a sense of shaming helplessness.

'I want to reassure children who are worried about things that it's good to be alive,' he concludes. 'Don't be scared of growing up. Don't be scared of the world. It's a fascinating place.'



# Tales . . .

, one Australian and one American, enthusiasm for reading here in the UK



**W**e're sitting in the lounge of a posh hotel in Kensington, and Gary Paulsen, a bearded, youthful-grandfatherly figure with a meditative American drawl, is giving me a bit of man to man advice.

'If you want to kill a bear, you've got to hit them real hard and fast. They have a very slow metabolism, so even if you get one right through the heart, he still has two or three minutes before he drops, which can be a hell of a long time if he manages to grab you. I used to use a high-calibre rifle, and great big slugs with expanding heads. The trouble with high tech rifles though, is that they let you kill from too great a distance. I gave mine up after I shot a doe at 200 yards, not seeing she had a faun inside her. Now I prefer to hunt with an old muzzle loader or a bow.'

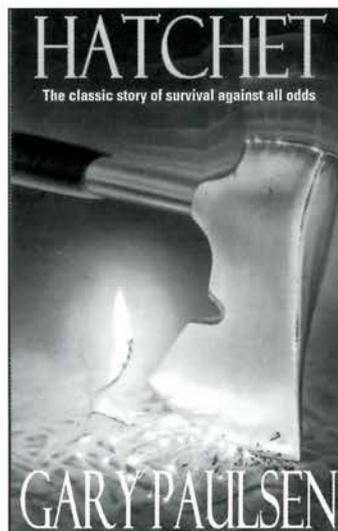
Wilderness is the central idea in Paulsen's fiction and in his life. His history is of the type that many would-be fiction writers might envy looking back on, but only if they didn't have to live it first. His biography, *Eastern Sun, Winter Moon*, is a harrowing chronicle of sexual abuse and early exposure to extreme violence, both in his native Chicago and in the squalor of post-war Manila, where his mother and serviceman father were reunited before descending into alcoholism. Back in America, Paulsen 'fostered himself to the forest' whenever things got too rough at home, and discovered a second haven in literature when a librarian gave him a ticket after he'd wandered in freezing from his newspaper round. Later, he ran away with a carnival, joined the army on false papers, learned aeronautics, and then took to journalism after the 'epiphany' that turned him into a writer.

'We were satellite tracking one of the Gemini probes through deep space one night, I think it was heading for Venus, and I was sitting at one of those consoles with all the dials and so on in front of me, when I suddenly realised - instantly, fundamentally, to the core of what I was - that I had to be a writer.'

So Paulsen chucked his job and became a Hollywood proof-reader and freelance copywriter, contributing to everything from men's mags to plumbing journals, and working the 18-hour day that he still adheres to. Early success came with *Mr Tucket*, a highly gung-ho children's book about the Wild West, but the hopes of fame it aroused were soon dashed. Having fled Hollywood for an isolated cabin in the backwoods of Minnesota, he survived through trapping and hunting, while continuing to write hungrily and to drink destructively. 'I used to get drunk every night and go brawling in redneck bars. Hardly ever won a fight. It's a miracle I'm still here.'

He conquered alcoholism, and 10 years later won the Newbery medal with *Dogsong*, a story based on his encounter with an Inuit boy while competing in the Iditarod, a gruelling trans-Alaskan dog race that Paulsen is one of the few people to have completed. *Hatchet*, a detailed, how-to account of a boy's survival in the Canadian bush after being marooned by an air crash, consolidated his success.

## GARY PAULSEN



Many of the books that have followed have focused on adolescent rites of passage and survival ordeals, endured in vast solitude or with the spiritual support of tough, venerable mentors. In *Canyons*, a youth embarks on an obsessive quest to return a murdered Native American's skull to its ancestral home; in *The Fourteenth Summer*, a teenage farmhand is sent into a remote pass to protect a huge herd of sheep from wolves and bears; in *The Voyage of the Frog*, a boy is swept out into the Pacific while on a mission to scatter his uncle's ashes. Paulsen's prose has the lupine leanness and acuity of perception essential to a believable realisation of such potentially melodramatic themes; its sentences are as terse and densely packed as those of a taciturn philosopher, and its sawtooth rhythms seem to imitate the adrenalinised thought flashes of a reckless adventurer faced with his final come-uppance.

He is unapologetic about the macho aura around much of what he writes. In *The Car*, his most recent publication, a neglected 14-year-old builds a custom auto from a kit, heads west, and teams up with a couple of golden-hearted ex-professional killer 'Nam vets. An intensely laddish, turbo-charged peregrination follows, involving car chases, gambling, voluptuous ladies and righteous combat. The book climaxes in a miniature revision of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, with the vets kicking the shit out of a horde of predatory thugs. The book is a strident and defiant paean to gasoline and testosterone, just as Paulsen intended it to be. 'I wanted to write a boys' book, because I happen to be a boy; I love gear and tools and fixing engines, and girls don't tend to go for that stuff.' Snarling assertions of gender equality do, however, punctuate the story, and Paulsen is quick to point out that many of the 200 to 300 letters he receives from readers every day are written by girls. His readers often describe experiences of abuse that Paulsen devotes much effort to ameliorating, though he doubts the therapeutic role that some assign to his work. 'I'm a storyteller,' he concludes. 'Someone who puts on bloody skins and dances around the fire and tells what the hunt was like. I don't presume to say I help or heal.' ■

### Paul Jennings' books mentioned:

*Unreal!*, Puffin, 0 14 037099 4, £3.50 pbk  
*Uncovered!*, Puffin, 0 14 036900 7, £3.50 pbk  
 (and several other books with similar titles are published by Puffin)  
*Duck for Cover*, ill. Ted Greenwood, Viking, 0 670 83719 9, £9.99  
*Spooner or Later*, ill. Ted Greenwood, Viking, 0 670 83745 8, £9.99

### Gary Paulsen's books mentioned:

*Eastern Sun, Winter Moon*, published by Gollancz in their adult list  
*Mr Tucket*, Hodder, 0 540 65127 X, £3.99 pbk (for reviews of this title, see page 13)  
*Dogsong*, not available in UK yet but Pan hope to publish soon  
*Hatchet*, Pan, 0 350 70077 4, £3.99 pbk  
*Canyons*, Pan, 0 350 34520 6, £3.99 pbk  
*The Fourteenth Summer*, Pan, 0 350 70080 4, £3.99 pbk  
*The Voyage of the Frog*, Pan, 0 350 52181 1, £3.99 pbk  
*The Car*, Pan Macmillan, 0 535 66204 0, £9.99

# REVIEWS

Reviews of paperback fiction are grouped for convenience under teaching range. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendation for use can be found within the review.

## Nursery/Infant REVIEWS

### Danny's Duck

June Crebbin, ill. Clara Vulliamy, Walker, 0 7445 4371 1, £4.99

Danny is a little boy who discovers a duck's nest hidden away by the edge of the school playground. He draws pictures of the nest and its inhabitants for his teacher but doesn't give away his secret until the nest is empty. He's then so upset his teacher guesses the reality of his pictures. Together they go to the pond where the mother duck and her ducklings are safely swimming. Simply told and beautifully illustrated, this is an ideal book for young children who enjoy animal stories.

LW

### A Birthday Cake for Little Bear

Max Velthuijs, North-South, 1 55858 512 5, £4.99

A very attractive, large-format picture book with a pleasantly child-like set of animal characters and an entertaining story. It's Little Bear's birthday and Little Pig decides to make him a cake. Of course, all the other friends need to try the cake, just to make sure it's all right. Luckily Little Bear arrives before it has entirely disappeared and there's a Happy Birthday party after all.

LW

### Big Fish, Little Fish

Alan Durant and Ant Parker, Macmillan, 0 333 65122 7, £3.99

Now, you can either read this book as a moral example of pride going before a fall or you can read it as an anti-achievement message about getting ideas above your station. The little fish thinks he's too big for the pond he belongs in and sets out for the sea. Once there, however, after several adventures and encounters along the way, he discovers a shark, loses his nerve and swims back to the pond where he stays happily and undemandingly from then on. With large black type and illustrations in big, bold colours on fold-out pages whenever the action spills over the format, this is an entertaining story for small children. But don't let it stop them being ambitious!

LW

### Ruff

Jane Hissey, Red Fox, 0 09 932781 3, £4.99

Another in the very successful set of stories about Old Bear and his friends. In this one Ruff, a toy dog, is the new arrival in the playroom. Unfortunately, he's never had a birthday, even though he thinks he's now seven, and so the animals decide to give him a week of birthdays to help him catch up. As long as you explain that normally one has to have a year between birthdays (a



difficult idea for many young children as it is) this is a hugely enjoyable addition to a popular series with a comforting and satisfyingly happy ending.

LW

### First Things First, A Baby's Companion

Charlotte Voake, Walker, 0 7445 4709 1, £4.99



A chunky and entertaining book that has something of the Ahlbergs' *The Babies Catalogue* in its background, but is also entirely Charlotte Voake's own charming and stylish invention. Nursery rhymes, the alphabet, numbers, shapes, animals, colours, all follow each other through cheerful, busy pages which demand to be shared with a small child sitting on an adult's knee - a one-to-one book, I think, rather than for a group to share. It would be nice to think that all small children had a copy for bedtime.

LW

### So Much

Trish Cooke, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Walker, 0 7445 4396 7, £5.99

This is a book that should be in all Nursery and Reception classes. It's set in an Afro-Caribbean home, and encapsulates the anticipation, the excitement and the joyful bewilderment of any young child in the build-up to a family celebration. Trish Cooke's lovely lilting language and Helen Oxenbury's clever characterisation make it a book to smile over again and again.

JS

### Ten Out of Bed

Penny Dale, Walker, 0 7445 4383 5, £4.99

For all fans of Penny Dale's *Ten in the Bed*, this is a must. The book uses the same toy animals but this time

we explore the imaginary fantasy of each - ranging through Bear's choice of Pirates, Sheep's idea of heaven as starring in *Come Dancing to Croc's* game of Ghosts! There's so much to talk about on every page until, tired and sleepy, one by one, the bed is full of the sleeping friends. Penny Dale's illustrations are always stunning, but her text is also 'special'.

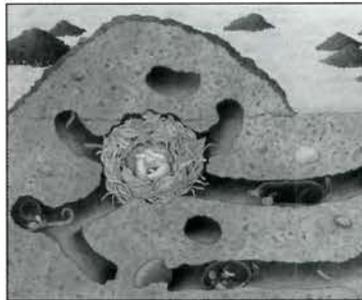
JS

### Animal Families

1 85681 329 0

### Animal Homes

1 85681 330 4



Colin Threadgall, Julia MacRae, £2.99 each

Two concept books which use fold-out flaps to reinforce a learning point. *Animal Families* concentrates on teaching younger children about collective words by showing, for example, one fish on a page which then cleverly opens out to reveal a shoal of fish. *Animal Homes* makes an excellent early reference book aimed at slightly older children. It explores the habitats and breeding patterns of various species. In this case the double-spread initially shows the surface picture while the fold-out takes the reader inside the habitat. Both are excellent examples of books that have been really care-

fully thought out to teach some fairly complex ideas to young children.

### Tickling Tigers

Anna Currey, Hodder, 0 340 63635 1, £4.99



Hannibal is a mouse in search of something to boast about - but tickling tigers is slightly more hazardous than he bargains for. The illustrations are magnificent, in scale, in characterisation, and match a very cleverly worded text.

JS

### What's Up the Coconut Tree?

A H Benjamin, 0 19 272298 0

### The Show-Off Mouse

A H Benjamin, 0 19 272296 4

### The Odd Job Man and the Thousand Mile Boots

Jean Kenward, 0 19 272297 2

Ill. Val Biro, Oxford, £2.99 each



From *So Much*.

Three books in a series which, loosely, takes traditional tales and puts them in a picture book format, making them more accessible to young children. Val Biro's distinctive illustrations give an immediate entrée to all groups, while the text is well placed and a delight to read aloud. All three have been positively received but the 'sneaky' illustrations in *The Show-Off Mouse* gained the greatest praise! JS

### Kipper's Book of Opposites

0 340 63483 9

### Kipper's Book of Weather

0 340 63482 0

### Kipper's Book of Counting

0 340 63481 2

Mick Inkpen, Hodder, £3.50 each

These books illustrate perfectly just how difficult it is to free early concept books from confusion. For example, in the *Opposites* book is Kipper demonstrating a full balloon

and a burst one or is he, as the text indicates, showing us a 'happy' Kipper and a 'sad' Kipper? My young reviewers picked up some similar 'for instances', so... a slightly mixed review, then. But, as with any books involving Mick Inkpen, these have been very popular and have hardly touched the shelves. JS

### Ketchup on Your Cornflakes?

0 590 13663 1

### I went to the Zoopermarket

0 590 13665 8

### Don't Put Your Finger in the Jelly, Nelly!

0 590 13664 X

Nick Sharratt, Hippo, £5.99 each

Nick Sharratt has picked on food and shopping – two areas which fascinate young children – and lifted them into delightful absurdity. The simple concept of split pages in *Ketchup on Your Cornflakes?* is magic – ketchup in your cornflakes or on your toes, custard on your egg or in your bed? A



'I went to the Zoopermarket and I bought some BARMY BISCUITS.' From *I went to the Zoopermarket*.

shiver of horror may well go down the adult's spine but these ideas are irresistible to children. In *Don't Put Your Finger in the Jelly, Nelly!*, Nick Sharratt points out that you have to be careful where you put your finger because not everything is as it first seems. *I went to the Zoopermarket* uses the device of illustration for packaging which can be opened to show a line drawing of an animal on top of a photograph of a kind of food. Parents need to be prepared that nothing in their store cupboard will retain the correct name once chil-

dren have been through this book – families will be beset with Salt and Fin-egar crisps and Roarsberry Ripple Ice Cream – until the craze is over.

Teachers note: *Ketchup* works brilliantly as an early reader and lends itself to all sorts of work with early phonics as well as sight word retention. *Zoopermarket* and *Jelly, Nelly!* work extremely well in the early stages of teaching reading and, later, in showing children how language can be manipulated. JS

## Infant/Junior REVIEWS



### Stinkerbell

J J Murhall, ill. Tony Blundell, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 2511 0, £3.99

A fairy who stinks at the bottom of the garden is the eponymous heroine of this book. She's rude, doesn't like washing, is no good at magic, and her incompetent attempts to master the art land her in more trouble than she knows how to deal with. However, when the Fairy Queen's baby is abducted by a band of Elvis-impersonating Gobs (goblins), she's given the chance to prove herself. The theme of the punk fairy is a somewhat over-worked one, but J J Murhall manages to breathe some frenetic life into it in this short and spicy book. Younger juniors might find it entertaining. GH

### Baby Crow

John A Rowe, North-South, 1 55858 541 9, £5.50

An unusual and visually striking book, concerning a family of crows who sit around wearing elegant hats and discussing the family's prowess in operatic singing. Baby Crow, however, suffers an identity crisis when his parents discover that he can make only a beeping noise. Grandfather Crow rectifies this failing quite easily, but Baby Crow's discovery of his true voice leads to another set of problems altogether. The story is simple, but both ironic and surreal, presented in bold,



black capital text to match the intensity of the pictures. Highly recommended as a very engaging oddity. GH

### Twenty Mini Mysteries You Can Solve

Dina Anastasio, ill. Kevin Faerber, Hippo, 0 590 13389 6, £2.99

A collection of very short stories that stand up in their own right and have a mystery that in some cases is not too easy to solve. This is a wonderful dip-in that creates masses of conversation especially among the know-it-alls! If the mysteries defeat you by the way, the answers are at the end. PH

### The Big-Wide-Mouthed Toad-Frog and other stories

0 7534 0002 2

### The King with Dirty Feet and other stories

0 7534 0003 0

Compiled by Mary Medicott, ill. Sue Williams, Kingfisher, £3.99 each

In each of these books, Mary Medicott has taken a handful of stories from a range of different cultures in versions by modern storytellers. These retellings retain the directness and lively rhythms of the oral tradition, and are excellent for reading aloud. They encompass moral tales and nonsense tales, a lie-telling yarn or two, and a range of explanatory myths about the origins of natural features. Sue Williams' illustrations are bright, gentle and uncomplicated, illuminating the rainbow like radiance of these tales. I would recommend these books very highly as a reading aloud resource, and for newly fluent readers to enjoy on their own. GH

### Country Tales

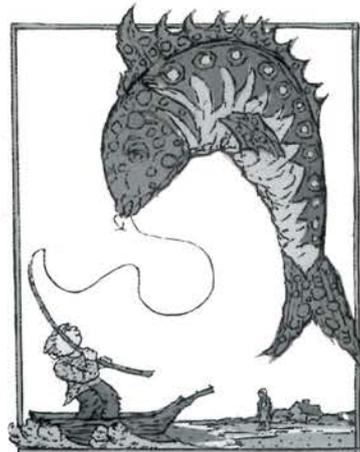
Elizabeth Clark, ill. Amanda Harvey, Hodder, 0 340 65146 6, £3.99

An intriguing book that fills a well-known, but little documented, gap in the market – that of the confident but younger reader. The stories are fresh and funny and have lots of repetition, a toe-hold when you're into a 'big book' for the first time, and they work excellently when read aloud, too. My class couldn't make up their minds whether to laugh with them or to giggle at them, but the end result was the same – unexpected enjoyment for us all. PH

### Baba Yaga

Retold and ill. Katya Arnold, North-South, 1 55858 593 1, £4.99

Countless generations of children have been enthralled by the legendary Baba Yaga of Russian folklore who flies over the country in her pestle and mortar, and lives in the deep, dark woods in a hut which revolves on its chicken legs. Here's a version of a Baba Yaga story which



reads aloud well, and is dramatically illustrated with gouache pictures inspired by seventeenth-century 'lubok' woodcuts (a kind of Russian folk art). JB

### Look What I've Got

Anthony Browne, Walker, 0 7445 4372 X, £4.99

There are some picture book opening pages which are absolutely perfect. 'Mr Magnolia has only one boot' is one; so is 'The hour was late' and 'Once upon a time there was an elephant'. The essentials are one obvious, simple sentence, an illustration that says much more about that sentence than the words can and a certainty that there is more to know if you turn the page. *Look What I've Got* has such an opening. 'Sam went for a walk' it begins and we see him, stolid, hands in pockets, walking past a wall. Looking at the wall we are immediately drawn into a strangely ordinary and ordinarily strange world; the world of Anthony Browne, in fact, in which a little boy's encounters with a braggart can be transformed into a triumph of imagination against the barbarian.

# Special REVIEW



## Blue Bananas

### ... The First Bunch

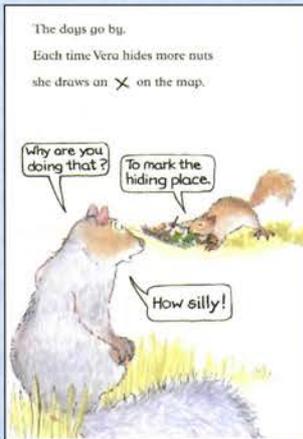
Gill Roberts on new additions, at a lower age-range, to the popular Banana Books series.



Now Big Dog and Little Dog go and visit Moon every Monday.



There was a flurry of feathers. Owl had come to the rescue.



The dogs go by. Each time Vera hides more nuts she draws an X on the map.

From *Big Dog and Little Dog Visit the Moon* ... *Baby Bear comes home* ... and *The Nut Map*.

'You've brought Blue Bananas, again,' six-year-old Daniel shouted excitedly. Everyone knows 'Banana Books'. Well, these are blue, from Heinemann Educational or Mammoth, and aimed at 'Beginner Readers' aged about six or seven (i.e. the age of my class). So far there are six in the series by André Amstutz, Tony Bradman, Chris d'Lacey, Susanna Gretz, Antony Lishak and Selina Young.

Each is a brightly coloured, A5-size book averaging 48 pages – no chapters, a maximum of nine lines per page (most usually three or four) and print that's double-line spaced. Extra room is given to illustrations, too, than in the original 'Banana Books'.

And more than ever, the pictures are a crucial part of the story. André Amstutz details the whirlwind adventures of *Tom's Hats*; Susan Hellard's illustrations of Tony Bradman's *Dilly and the Goody-Goody* add brilliantly to the humour – the expressions of fun-starved Dodie being particularly hilarious; and Susanna Gretz's *The Nut Map* illustrations beautifully depict wildlife and the transition from autumn to winter. Ian Newsham definitely develops character with his illustrations for Antony Lishak's *Baby Bear comes home* by portraying a flamboyant pink – with spotty necktie – Father Bear who's a mixture of strength, fear and clumsy vulnerability. Selina Young's canines in *Big Dog and Little Dog Visit the Moon* are whimsically eccentric and Gus Clarke's Jeremy, in *Juggling with Jeremy* by Chris d'Lacey, is frustra-tingly jovial to the end.

All the illustrations, in fact, are first-class. They're valuable on their own terms, but are particularly welcome to the beginner reader who's been used to picture clues as part of reading strategies. Fun,

danger, adventure, pathos, determination and retribution are very much features of all the stories. Each is exciting and each held every child's interest.

In *Big Dog and Little Dog Visit the Moon* the two characters do just that, 'Lumpily, bumpily through the night sky – past the stars and through the clouds', in an amazing rocket they built themselves, and all because 'Poor Moon' looked so sad. Now they go every Monday – though young Daniel in my class insists he saw them last Tuesday ...

Hat-happy Tom is immediately endearing because he suffers embarrassment thanks to Fred Potter and his gang, but the kindly, cap-clad lollipop man silently encourages him to wear his helmet regardless. 'Tom's Hats is my best,' seven-year-old Stefan volunteered, 'because I like all these things happening.' He's referring to escaping from monsters thanks to the magician's hat, being saved from pirates because of a space helmet and riding on an elephant wearing a zoo-keeper's hat.

Nothing and nobody could save well-behaved Dodie from Tony Bradman's naughty Dilly. After visiting Dilly and his family, Dodie's meek countenance is disturbed drastically and forever. All the bad behaviour left my class feeling quite exhausted!

*Baby Bear comes home* held very popular appeal. The parent bears must search for Baby Bear ... past the monster-like cat napping in the kitchen, paddling hard across the pond on their empty bottle of a boat ... while 'the silver face of the moon quivered like a jelly in the puddles.' Once rescued from the night-time magic of a classroom, Baby Bear can't wait to return to school and we're left optimistically wondering if Jessica will feel the same about her second day there. This led to an effusion

of protective kindness, which was soon diffused by cringingly confident Juggling Jeremy. Many of my children fancied developing muscles like Tiny Tom, who quite rightly gives Jeremy a dose of his own juggling juice.

Katie and Sarah reacted immediately to *The Nut Map* with 'It's like Jack and Vera in Coronation Street.' Actually, it's not, and they still liked it. Jack and Vera are squirrels busy collecting and storing their winter supplies. Jack ridicules Vera's nut map idea, but by the time *Dickie Shuffle* (great name for a hedgehog) appears and adds his 'It's a stupid map', Jack can no longer agree. The present tense throughout provides a great sense of involvement as we're led through the changing seasons, while the hiding and searching out of nuts (via the map) is dictated by hunger and the need to survive.

This story is original, informative and entertaining and is virtually unique in its relevance to the Geography Curriculum at KS1 which requires children to 'use maps' and 'make maps or plans of real and imaginary places'. What's more, Jack's very real need of the map is appreciated by the children. (Though children's books are primarily for children, teachers are thrilled to find QUALITY books which have a relevance to a curriculum which *must* be taught.)

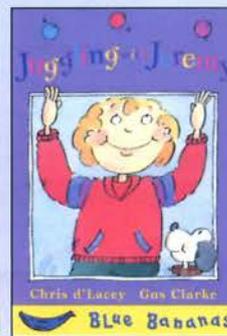
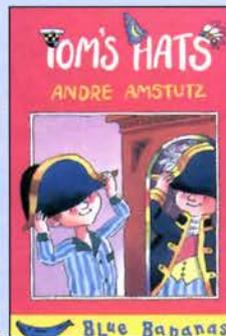
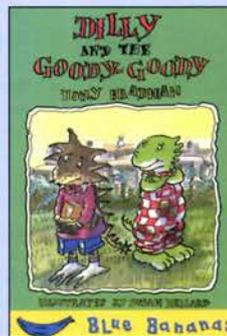
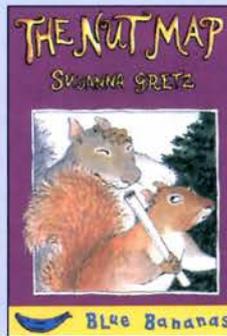
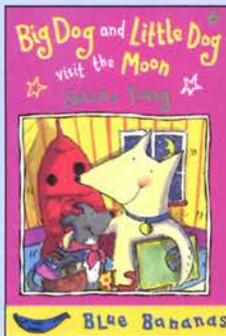
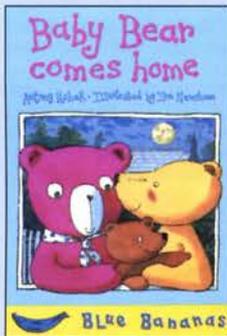
'Blue Bananas', then, are highly readable and relevant. They were lapped up at class storytime and approximately one-third of a very mixed ability class, who are building reading confidence, enjoyed tackling them alone. The sentences are simply structured, facilitating understanding of the straightforward plots and characterisation. Though an unnecessary link between text and quality illustrations, the speech bubbles were popular. Occasionally some of the speech bubble humour, particularly in *Juggling with Jeremy*, was not understood and did confuse. Interestingly, many children used the pictures, read the print and then went back to read the bubbles ... seven-year-old Lisa loved 'hearing what the bears are saying'.

In all, this is a quality new series which is, so far, successful with beginner readers. However, as the books are written for children and hopefully not for a 'curriculum', my only real grumble is with the publishers for that needless back cover label – National Curriculum Key Stage 1. Why must they be associated with school? And more importantly, though they're aimed at six- and seven-year-olds, why risk excluding the slightly older beginner readers of 7+ for whom the interest level of Dilly, Jeremy and Co. is still appropriate? ■

'Blue Bananas' come in hardback from Heinemann Educational at £5.99 each and from Mammoth in paperback at £3.99 each.

- Tom's Hats*, 0 434 97456 0 hbk, 0 7497 1830 7 pbk
- Dilly and the Goody-Goody*, 0 434 97459 5 hbk, 0 7497 1863 3 pbk
- Juggling with Jeremy*, 0 434 97460 9 hbk, 0 7497 2631 8 pbk
- The Nut Map*, 0 434 97458 7 hbk, 0 7497 2347 5 pbk
- Baby Bear comes home*, 0 434 97461 7 hbk, 0 7497 1828 5 pbk
- Big Dog and Little Dog Visit the Moon*, 0 434 97457 9 hbk, 0 7497 1871 4 pbk

\* Geographical Skills 2 – p. 108. Key Stages 1 and 2 of *The National Curriculum*, HMSO, Jan 1995, 0 11 701 821 X, £9.95



This re-issue of one of Anthony Browne's early classics will be welcomed as a reminder of the layers of meaning and intensity of experience that pictures and words can achieve when in the hands of a master. **LW**

### Squeaky Cleaners in a Muddle

0 340 64066 9

### Squeaky Cleaners in a Hole

0 340 64067 7

Vivian French and Anna Currey, Hodder, £2.99 each

These are two perfectly serviceable, mildly amusing books about a family of three mice who run a sort of home help and cleaning service on the lines of Universal Aunts for other animals. In one they help out mole who is to give a party and needs his house cleaned fast and in the other they have to look after some baby birds. In the familiar format of straightforward, simple text interspersed with line drawings at frequent intervals, both books would be good for children just moving into chapter books.

However, I have to say that the publishers and Young Book Trust have really laid their head on the block by putting a big sticker on the front which proclaims, 'Learn to Love Reading! This book will (sic) encourage confidence and enjoyment in young readers.' Such ridiculous hubris deserves to be punished. I look forward to the first action against them under the trade descriptions act. **LW**

### Mystery at Winklesea

Helen Cresswell, ill. Susan Winter, Hodder, 0 340 64643 8, £2.99

Children who have met *A Gift from Winklesea*, Helen Cresswell's first book about the strange creature that hatched out of a seaside souvenir, will welcome this next story about the creature's adventures with the Kane family. Written with her usual ability to make the everyday world seem magical and magic seem everyday, Helen Cresswell has given the Gift a life of its own which seems perfectly likely and convincing. As a result we're drawn into the family's struggles with the neighbours and the police and their delight in the way the Gift finally acquires a family of its own.

Enjoyable and intelligent, this is marred only by another of those ridiculous 'Learn to Love Reading' stickers - which do peel off very easily, thank goodness. **LW**

### In Crack Willow Wood

Sam McBratney, ill. Ivan Bates, Walker, 0 7445 4335 5, £3.50

The school in Crack Willow Wood has some very familiar characters in it. There are, among others, the lad who's always playing the fool, the hardworking and quiet little girl, the ordinary little boy who wants to be liked and the worrier. The difference is that these are all animal characters in five stories about their school in the wood. Younger juniors will enjoy hearing or reading about their alter-egos and recognising many of the situations and happenings from

their own school life. Well-written and well-paced, this book will be welcome in any class of seven- to nine-year-olds. **LW**

### Dear Mum, Don't Panic

Edited by Tony Bradman, ill. Stephen Lewis, Mammoth, 0 7497 1989 3, £2.99

Three poems and nine short stories on a theme which always appeals to young readers and listeners: naughtiness. Here the misdemeanours range from breaking the rules in Muckabout School - playing pranks at Sunday Bible class, and sabotaging a birthday party (Dilly the Dinosaur style) - to being incurably good, no less. In addition, the variety of styles (including a letter) and settings (Kate Elizabeth Ernest's story is set in Jamaica) make this a fun book for sharing with fives to eights, who are good and not so good! **JB**

### The Pond Year

Kathryn Lasky, ill. Mike Bostock, Walker, 0 7445 4398 3, £4.99

I'm in two minds about this book. It's certainly a beautiful one. It tells of a year in the life of a large pond and the creatures that live there, with illustrations that are lovely, accurate and pleasingly watery. The little girl who narrates the story from her observations and play at the pond is full of interest in the wildlife and full of care for the lush, rich environment she's watching. In all these respects, this is a valuable and accessible nature book. However, the pond described is so far removed from the tiny ponds most junior children will know of in their school grounds, hanging on desperately to life despite vandals, dogs, rubbish and spawn stealers, that I wonder if *Pond Year* is the best book for such circumstances. No one could wade into most of the school ponds I know of and the scum that settles on them isn't a rich, nourishing environment but is instead the wretched blanket weed that chokes everything in the water. We're more likely to want to prevent our children from scooping out the creatures and from sliding on the ice than to encourage them. A rich, natural and well-established pond is one thing, but point out to your children the need for different treatment of the pond in the corner of the playing field... or you'll lose it. **LW**

### Jig, Fig and Mrs Pig

Peter Hansard, ill. Francesca Martin, Walker, 0 7445 4386 X, £4.50



This very attractively produced little book tells of nasty Mrs Pig, her bullying son, Fig, and their poor, put-

upon servant, Jig. Echoes of fairy tales, 'Cinderella', 'Mother Holly', 'The Well at the World's End' will come to mind at once, and with a pleasantly ornate artistic style, reminiscent of illuminated manuscript, the book has a classic appeal. The piggy characters are real personalities and the story is told with the matter-of-factness of the oral tradition. Good little Jig gets the gold and diamonds, nasty Fig gets the snakes and toads and banishment, along with his horrid mother. The moral is suitably clear and the whole is satisfying and charming. **LW**

### The Twelve Poodle Princesses

Jan Pancheri, Red Fox, 0 09 933721 5, £4.99

This is another re-telling of an old tale, 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses', and, again, the original human characters are transformed into animals - in this case, dogs. I feel this is less successful than *Jig, Fig and Mrs Pig*, however. It's so close to the very well-known original that a change of species seems pointless and the story is told in a complex style that loses the tone of the traditional without convincingly replacing it. The illustrations, too, seem to share the air of stiffness that seems inappropriate to the story. **LW**

(For a delightful version of the original, see the Orchard version with Jane Ray's illustrations which is featured on our front cover - details on page 17. Ed.)

### Good Night, Sleep Tight

Penelope Lively, ill. Adriano Gon, Walker, 0 7445 4376 2, £4.99

The little girl has finished playing with her 'large family' of toys and taken them to bed with her. She is sleepy but they aren't and each one wants to take her on an adventure before they go to sleep. Every adventure is inventive and fun, from the bottom of the pond with the frog, to the doll's dance party, and all are described with satisfyingly rich vocabulary which will stretch a small child's imagination. The story is told in large, clear print with bold and busy illustrations. **LW**

### Jake - The Adventures of an Unusual Dog

Annette Butterworth, ill. Nick Butterworth, Hodder, 0 340 66749 4, £2.99

*Jake* is one of the best stories I've ever come across that's been written specifically for the reader just starting to fly. The antics of *Jake* appeal to boys and girls alike, which gives it tremendous cachet. His transformation from the lovable rascal, but undoubtedly underdog of the canine fraternity, to the ending where 'e finds himself celebr'ed at Crufts makes for a wonderfully satisfying tale. **JS**

### Mia the Beach Cat

Wolfram Hanel, ill. Kirsten Hocker, North-South 1 55858 508 7, £4.50

On their summer holiday Maggie's parents only want to lie in the sun; they're not the slightest bit interested in her collection of stones, feathers, seaweed and shells. But

what good is a collection if you have nobody to share it with, wonders Maggie? As she sits musing, she spies a small grey and white cat playing in the water. A tumbling wave rolls in bringing the little cat to her. From then on Maggie's holiday becomes much more exciting. Soon it's time to return home and Mother has already made one thing clear: 'No cats in my car... and that's final.' But Maggie has a plan...

There's much appeal for developing independent readers here: an engaging story with plenty of dialogue and sufficient detail and suspense to keep them turning the pages, complemented by delightful, gently humorous, muted watercolours. **JB**

### Grandpa Comes to Stay

Rob Lewis, Red Fox, 0 09 933681 2, £3.99

Feet on the sofa, loud television, crumbs and spill drinks; these are the things that upset Grandpa, or so Finley's mum tells him. But Grandpa Bear proves to be just as messy as Finley even if Mum doesn't see it that way. Grandpa's more than a match for Finley at fishing and cooking, too.

Warm humour, episodic style - ideal for first solo flights. **JB**

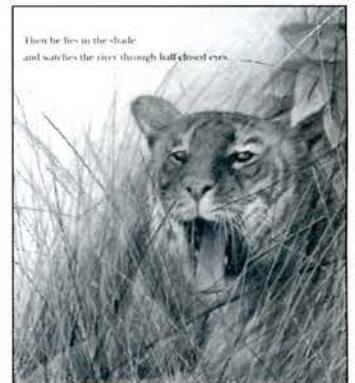
### One for Me, One for You

Rita Phillips Mitchell, Walker, 0 7445 4381 9, £3.50

A sensitive portrayal of the relationship between Melanie and her younger sister, Flora, set against a colourful Caribbean background of mango trees, markets, moonlight and more than occasional mischief. It's this mischief (and their parents' intervention in it) which forms the substance of four amusing stories that together make a delightful read-aloud book for sixes to eights and an inviting proposition for confident solo readers. **JB**

### Imagine You Are a Tiger

Karen Wallace, ill. Peter Melnyczuk, Hodder, 0 340 65134 2, £4.99



It's seldom that I'm excited by a non-fiction book or feel I want to share one with a whole class as much as I would a good story. But here is such a one. From the opening invitation 'Imagine you are a tiger', it draws readers and listeners into the world of a growing tiger cub; a world of shade and shimmering heat, hunger and hunting, fear and feasting, camouflage and cunning. Karen Wallace carefully crafts a beautifully controlled drama through her present-tense telling, her use of short, finely honed sentences and figurative language.

# A GUIDE TO POETRY 0-13

Co-published by

**Books for Keeps & The Reading and Language Information Centre**  
Edited by **Chris Powling & Morag Styles**

Bibliography compiled by Jill Bennett, Robert Hull, John Lynch, Jack Ousbey,  
Chris Powling, Susanna Steele, Morag Styles and Helen Taylor

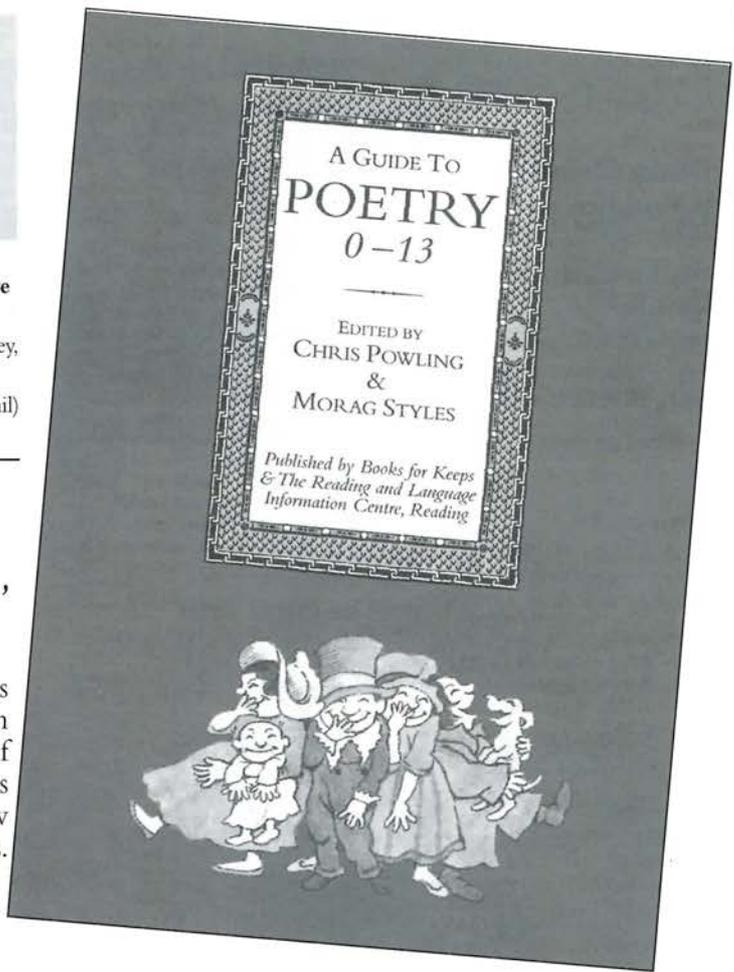
Price: **UK** - £5.50 (range of discounts available); **Overseas** - £7.50 (Airmail)  
A4, 52 pages; ISBN: 1 871566 03 7

*'Writing verse is so much fun,  
Cheering as the summer weather,  
Makes you feel alert and bright,  
'Specially when you get it more or less the way you want it.'*

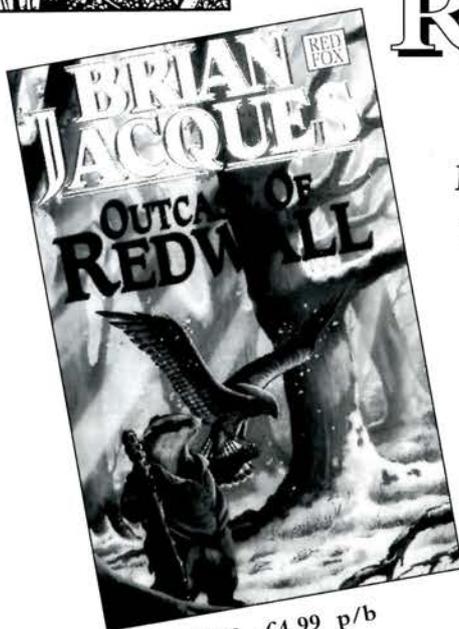
(Wendy Cope from *The Orchard Book of Funny Poems*)

**Poetry 0-13** is a complete revision and update of **BfK's Poetry 0-16**, published in 1988, which sold more than 10,000 copies. The new Guide, in a condensed format of 52 pages, incorporates the most successful features of its predecessor while taking account of the wealth of new verse for children published in the intervening eight years.

Telephone **BOOKS FOR KEEPS** on  
**0181-852 4953** to place your order

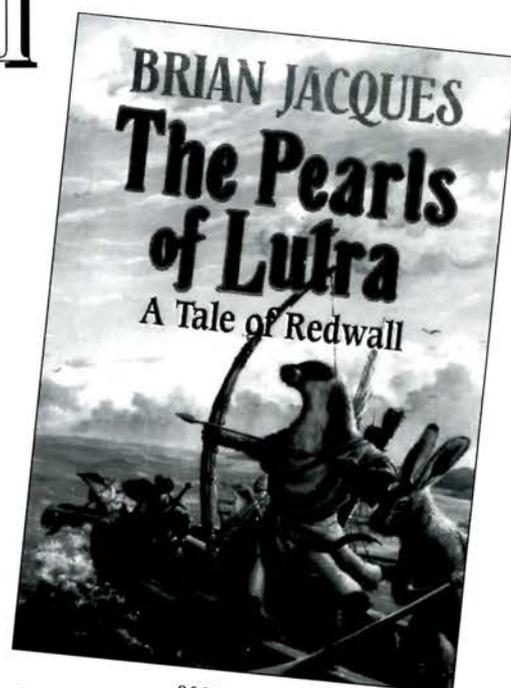


## More Tales of Redwall



0099600919 £4.99 p/b

Make sure you read  
the latest additions  
to Brian Jacques'  
award-winning  
Redwall saga  
this Summer.



0091765366 £12.99 h/b

Random House Children's Books  
HUTCHINSON · RED FOX

Every line of Peter Melnyczuk's evocative illustrations has been just as skilfully employed to produce some stunning images. This is an immensely powerful book; not only does it offer accurate, scientific information, but also it educates the mind, the eye, the ear and, most importantly, the imagination. **JB**

### The Littlest Dragon

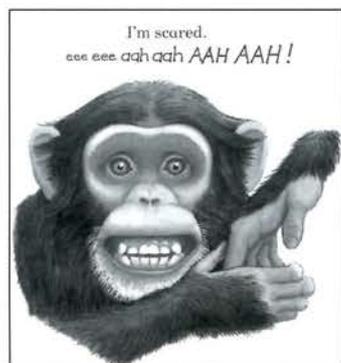
Margaret Ryan, ill. Jamie Smith, Collins, 0 00 674624 1, £2.99

Never underestimate the littlest and youngest in the family! This little dragon calmly and capably succeeds

in securing his own right to a peaceful and comfortable night's sleep and he cleverly acquires the most impressive football jersey by just a bit of extra thoughtfulness. The 'pest' now commands attention and consideration from his nine big brothers. The wisdom and realism of the theme is balanced brilliantly by

sheer fun. Hilarious illustration and storyline are cleverly spontaneous, and lots of word and syntax repetition and rhythm, with the abundance of pictures, ensure success with beginner readers. Competent six-year-olds loved it. **GR**

## Junior/Middle REVIEWS



### How to Speak Chimpanzee

Richard Brassey, Dolphin, 1 85881 220 8, £3.99

Should you ever find yourself in the company of mankind's closest cousins, this large-format picture book will prove invaluable. An admirably crisp introduction gives some background to chimp language studies (did you know that they speak in a variety of accents?), then we are introduced to a core collection of universal voice and facial expressions, each illustrated with alarmingly vivid portraits, and clear, helpful instructions which warn against over-confidence and the possibility of misunderstanding.

The Year 4 children I showed this book to found it fascinating. The author's encouragement to children to practise chimpanzee might prove less popular with parents. **GH**

### Bonechillers: Teacher Creature

B R Haynes, Collins, 0 00 675216 0, £2.99

Two lads vying to out-dare each other decide to brave a Florida hurricane, eluding evacuation together with a female classmate who becomes embroiled in their plot. While sheltering from the storm in their school, they see a sinister humanoid emerge from a nearby swamp. After they are rescued, nobody believes their tale, but everybody is intrigued by their new teacher, a Mr Batrachian, who seems to be intent on varying his diet of flies by studying a book on how to cook children. This is a highly entertaining fantasy for upper juniors, its depiction of the hurricane and Mr Batrachian's machinations generously providing two dramatic climaxes. **GH**

### Fearsome Tales for Fiendish Kids

Jamie Rix, ill. Ross Collins, Hodder, 0 340 64095 2, £3.99

The cover of this book shows a demented girl hammering a spike

into the head of a boy who is trying to remove her legs with a saw. This is aptly emblematic of a book which features a flock of pink butterflies made from amputated human eyelids, a youth reduced to ashes while playing a stolen trumpet in an electric storm, and a junior embezzler who inflates a flattened road-kill with a bicycle pump – all within just three stories. These are, however, moral tales, told in a honey-lush prose spiced with salutary bolts of carboic, and with an amoral relish for the deserving victims' ghastly Nemeses. In my favourite (an hilarious spoof on the Famous Five) the odious Chipper Chums end up as macerating carrion in the cider vat of a murderous farmer. If only real life were like this! **GH**

### Ukrainian Folk Tales

Christina Oparenko, Oxford, 0 19 274168 3, £5.99

One of the best collections of traditional stories I've read in a long time. Many of the themes will be familiar to lovers of folk tales: you'll find several instances of the fates befalling the kindly daughter and the selfish step-daughter here; of contests between talking animals; of the foolish rich and the wise impoverished. You'll also find the tale of a disembodied mare's head inviting an abandoned child to enter it, a girl playing blind man's buff with a bear, mountains of gold and glass, and a flying ship full of fools and prodigies. Both familiar and unfamiliar tales are told in a lively and lucid manner, and the fiction is augmented by brief notes and recipes for Ukrainian dishes mentioned in the stories. This is clearly a labour of love, and a deeply enjoyable book. **GH**

### My Barmy Aunt Boomerang, The Coolest Act in School

Roy Apps, ill. Jamie Smith, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 2513 7, £3.99



Roy Apps' television writing skills come to the fore here with the crazy, zany 'Aunt' from Oz. She's very visual and totally uninhibited, saying just what she thinks at full volume, everywhere. A clever exposé on how

to acquire self-confidence, this has to be read for the sheer fun of it all. Do look for her wonderful taste in hats. They have to be seen to be believed. **PH**

### Soccer Mad

Rob Childs, ill. Aiden Potts, Corgi, 0 440 86344 9, £2.99

Rob Child's love for football is obvious and sincere; I'm so glad he writes and gives me yet more material to offer my book-hating boys. There's no loss of 'street cred' when you're seen reading this by your mates! And it might help them to fill that awful void every summer when the rest of us try to play tennis and cricket. . . **PH**

### Morris Macmillipede

Mick Fitzmaurice, ill. Satoshi Kitamura, Red Fox, 0 09 942781 8, £2.50



This is the sad, funny tale of Morris in pursuit of his dream and there's real pathos: 'as a tear rolled down onto Morris's cheek . . . If his own mother laughed at him, who would take him seriously?' Indeed, his attempts at controlling 42 pairs of ballet shoes gracefully in Madame Butterfly's ballet class are ridiculed – and, even worse, such humiliation must be borne before a huge audience. However, Stag Beetle's wisdom and Morris's strength of character win through and his ambition, with some compromise, is realised bringing an immense sense of achievement and happiness. Clever, sensitive and very funny. **GR**

### The True Story of Balto

Natalie Standiford, Red Fox, 0 09 966061 X, £3.99

An amazing true story of courage in most extreme circumstances, and also the subject of Steven Spielberg's latest film.

In 1928 Balto was a lead dog in the dog-sled relay which, in treacherous Alaskan blizzard conditions, was the only way to obtain life-saving medicine for two children (and possibly the whole town) to avoid diphtheria. Balto journeyed relentlessly as

conditions worsened, returning exhausted with the medicine. Short staccato-style sentences convey the importance and intense urgency of the mission. Beautifully illustrated, uniquely memorable and of interest to all. **GR**

### Carlos and Little Wolf

Lesley Harker, Red Fox, 0 09 964451 7, £3.99

One story with two parts. Despite being printed in double-line spacing with smallish print, this is still accessible to newly confident readers.

While Carlos is examining the pomegranates which he will take to market, Wolf is examining Carlos, who he will take to his tummy. But Wolf finds himself in a pram full of pomegranates and 'Down, down, down the clitter clatter steps. Bump! Bump! Bump!' to the school room where he meets the tough (but tasty?) teacher, who's a much more interesting prospect than Carlos. As their priorities and predicaments change, Wolf and Carlos become firm friends. There's plenty of excitement in this one. **GR**

### Diggory and the Boa Conductor

Philippa Gregory, ill. Jacqueline East, Hippo, 0 590 55950 8, £2.99

Big bully Tommy Vincent victimises Diggory, and his loneliness and fear are all too recognisable. Diggory remarkably and deservedly stands up to him, 'silently smiling, with his arms full of heavy green [magical] Boa Conductor, while Tommy Vincent shook with fright'.

A relevant subject developed realistically and sensitively is made even more captivating by the subtle, inexplicable qualities of Diggory's mother and cat. They both add a wondrous quality to the other two equally gripping tales in this book from the 'Young Hippo Magic' series which has great illustrations on every page. **GR**

### Delilah and the Dogspell

Jenny Nimmo, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Mammoth, 0 7497 0984 7,

'It is after midnight; Delilah knows that this is a special time when humans sleep and cats are queen. It is her first night in a new home . . .'

'Mustapha Marzavan had said. "You will always be safe, because, I have given you the gift of magic."'

Readers are thereby drawn into the spellbinding tale of Delilah, queen of the night and garden, a feline witch who can shrink dogs and even make them vanish. Interesting use of alter-

nating present and past tense adds to the dramatic effect of the story which would be a good read-aloud for younger juniors as well as enticing solo reading for those with confidence.

Enthusiasts will enjoy the sequel, **Delilah and the Dishwasher Dogs** (ill. Ben Cort, 0 7497 1846 3, £3.50) which is also full of action and fun. **JB**

### The Giant Baby

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Fritz Wegner, Puffin, 0 14 036380 7, £4.99

The Giant Baby is deposited on Alice's doorstep one night and stays in our small world until many nights and adventures later 'a giant eye showed itself at the skylight, a giant handbag was set down in the garden and the roof on the house (like the lid of a teapot) Judder! Creak! Crash! was lifted off . . . and Mama and Giant Baby 'moved off into the night'.



Humour, huge attention to the practical and emotional implications, an instinctive interest in any abandoned baby, plus Ahlberg's personal writing style make this absolutely riveting. Even the small print on the 150-plus pages won't deter. **GR**

### How to Write Really Badly

Anne Fine, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Mammoth, 0 7497 2023 9, £2.99

When the 'epic windbag' of a teacher 'spread her hands like someone glowing in a holy painting' and the children 'trill' meekly, offer each other crisps and are so 'peachy sweet' the 'bloodcurling niceness' is just too much for new boy Chester Howard (or Howard Chester). But 'thimble brain' Joe Gardener is good at more than 'counting to three without having to take off [his] mittens', and Chester reveals how school has 'tortured' his classmate and underestimated him and his true talents. A strong friendship develops, founded on honesty and mutual respect. The wickedly funny humour mixes wonderfully with lively realism and sensitivity. Addictive! **GR**

### Spilling the Magic

Stephen Moore, Hodder, 0 340 66098 8, £3.99

Cats talk, pigs fly and the grass and mountains are blue in this inventive fantasy yarn that puts fun into reading. The pacy, racy style of the boy narrator gives it a safe, familiar feel, despite the totally bizarre and unrealistic things that are happening to Murn since the Spellbinders carelessly split the magic and set the 97 mountains on the road to oblivion. Only our hero, his sister and his cat can rescue the situation . . . oh, and Aunt Lilly!

Fun and worth recommending. **DB**

### Watch Out for the Giant-Killers!

Colin McNaughton, Walker, 0 7445 4777 6, £5.99

Colin McNaughton takes the Green Man of folk legend as his inspiration for this giant tale wherein the spirit of the forest in the shape of a leaf-

covered giant encounters a small Indian boy deep in the Amazon forest. Their conversation together is highly entertaining and full of jokes and wordplay, but behind the banter - giant's in bold print, boy's in standard - and the lush cartoon-style illustrations is a more serious message about human nature and its impact on the planet. Readers will need to bring some knowledge of fairy tales as well as geography and history to this, and be able to tackle a longish text, if they are to reap maximum enjoyment. **JB**

### Cybercats

Garry Kilworth, Bantam, 0 553 50327 8, £3.50

Sequel to the award-winning **The Electric Kid**. Set in a nightmarish, over-populated future world where kids scavenge for a living on the garbage heaps of the city, this sounds as though it ought to be pretty bleak but in fact it's a nicely judged, amusing amalgam of SF, hard-boiled crime novel and comic book adventure. Hotwire and Blindboy are ex-street-kid computer whizzes who develop the cybercats to devour the city rubbish. All goes well until news breaks that the evil master criminal, Mouseman, who the kids sent to the chokey in the previous book, has escaped. Mouseman now has other plans for the cats and needs the kids' know-how. Knowingly PC, in that Hotwire is a girl and Blindboy is, well, blind, there are some telling side swipes at our present society and attitudes but these do not get in the way of a rollicking good read. **SR**

### The Emperor's Gruckle Hound

Kathryn Cave, Hodder, 0 340 65599 2, £3.50

You've never heard of a gruckle hound? Well, that's not surprising. Lots of people haven't. They're very rare and exotic, and not in any of the

books. They're from Austria. They live in the mountains and hunt gruckles. That's why they're called gruckle hounds.' At least that's what young Fred, the gardener's assistant, tells the Emperor to get himself out of a spot of difficulty to do with muddling up the presents on the Emperor's birthday. Needless to say the beast in question is a scruffy mongrel and he has a twin brother out in the city who's been taken in by the tinker's daughter, Anna. In the palace Sam, the gruckle hound, gets used to a life of pampered luxury while outside Scruff gets up to all manner of doggy things. Chaos and confusion then reign when the two dogs inadvertently swap places. With a nod to 'The Emperor's New Clothes' and the role reversal genre, this is lots of fun for nine-year-olds and up. **SR**

### The Ghost Dog

Pete Johnson, ill. Peter Dennis, Yearling, 0 440 86341 4, £2.99

Daniel thought it was only mad scientists who could create blood thirsty monsters, not 10-year-old boys. It started as a joke between him and his friends, Harry and Laura, to scare Aaron. Big, tough Aaron wouldn't be afraid of the ghost dog, would he? After all, it's only a story and they can't come true. But soon the four friends realise stories can indeed come true - and be frighteningly real.

This is an incredibly enjoyable book, quite scary for younger readers in places, from a very accomplished writer. The children are drawn convincingly and the author gets into his main character very well. There are shades of modern concerns such as separated parents, but on the whole it remains an exciting and touching story about friendship and the power of imagination, especially that of a child. **JW**

## Middle/Secondary REVIEWS

### Give Yourself a Hug

Grace Nichols, ill. Kim Harley, Puffin, 0 14 937218 0, £3.50

A bright, zingy collection of poems - some sensitive, some alive with perceptive observations and some painting the most succinct word-pictures imaginable. I loved the eight words of sheer magic comparing the daffodils to yellow swans. Now why hadn't I thought of that? The rhyme and rhythm of 'My Gran Visits England' invites accents and a discussion about differences and similarities. A fabulously rich resource. **PH**

### How Could You Do This to Me, Mum?

Rosie Rushton, Piccadilly, 1 85340 303 2, £5.99

A tad expensive but worth every penny of it for the sheer awful fun of adolescence, described in zit-filled

**POETRY**

**ORIGINAL**

detail. Expensive, because this is one of those reads 'they' will devour in one sitting, meaning further visits to the bookshop. But it will also be read to death, passed around in bags and eventually 'stolen', and so the circle goes on. The teenagers (is that word still cool?) found in the other two parts of the trilogy cope with all the humiliations imaginable - Chelsea's father sells soup from a van to make ends meet when his regular job folds up; John's mother, despite her dotage (she's probably all of 35), goes to demos . . . I could carry on and on - it's wonderful. **PH**

(The other titles in the Leehampton trilogy are **Just Don't Make a Scene, Mum!**, 1 85340 360 1, and **I Think I'll Just Curl Up and Die**, 1 85340 396 2, at £5.99 each.)

### The Beat: Smokescreen

David Belbin, Scholastic 'Point Crime', 0 590 13368 3, £3.50

The 'Point' books increasingly have got the answer to most potential readers' needs. This one is a kind of

Point Bill, with a sequence of police stories set in a Nottingham police station - crimes, ambition, love-lives and convictions. Well, it works on TV and the formula mostly works here, too, with Clare tracking down a dreadful arsonist. As with the 'Point Horror' titles, the plot tracks a range of suspects until, finally, we encounter the actual criminal - always a surprise. Now, will Clare continue to see Neil? **AJ**

### The Face at the Window

Vivien Alcock, Mammoth, 0 7497 2646 6, £3.99

Leslie, recuperating with her aunt, may well be lonely, highly strung and only imagining the face she sees at the attic window. But what starts out as a possible fantasy becomes a hard-edged realistic story of a boy avoiding deportation and the struggles of the children next door to help him. They've hidden him away, sure at first that their mother, who's always looking for good causes, will support them. When she can't or won't, Leslie tries to take over.

There's a complex balancing of moral issues here within an exciting story that has a suddenly dramatic climax. **AJ**

### Aliens Stole My Dad

Bruce Coville, Hodder, 0 340 63593 2, £3.50

Another in the Rod Allbright sequence which is remarkable for the splendid oddity of the science fiction characters and happenings. Here Rod goes in search of his father, discovers how old his father really is - not that old surely - and where his dad hid the secret which BKR is after (in Rod's brain). Rod is pursued for his brain and the climax leaves him, as before, gaining some things and losing others. Cue, another book . . . **AJ**

### Plundering Paradise

Geraldine McCaughrean, Oxford, 0 19 271547 X, £5.99

Poor Nathan is hounded from Greylake School in 1717, following the death of his father, penniless and

**ORIGINAL**

still owing school fees. Along with his equally helpless sister, Maude, he ends up following another boy, Tamo White, the son of a pirate, to Madagascar. From here on we have a truly exotic adventure of pirates and deception. The characterisation is full of subtleties along with the growth of the three main characters, especially Maude, into strong and independent people. Swashbuckling galore, and the final chase, well... AJ

### Mr Tucket

Gary Paulsen, Hodder,  
0 340 65127 X, £3.99

'There was a time when I didn't even think of things that died. I didn't know anything about all this killing. Nothing died, ever, except a farm animal now and again.'

Francise Alphonse Tucket learns about death and faces the reality of much else when he's separated from the wagon-train and captured by Indians. Rescued by a 'Mountain Man', he is subsequently taught survival in the Rockies of 1848.

This sensitive and exciting western will make a valuable addition to KS3 shelves, especially as a middle-of-the-road book for boys. DB

### Tango's Baby

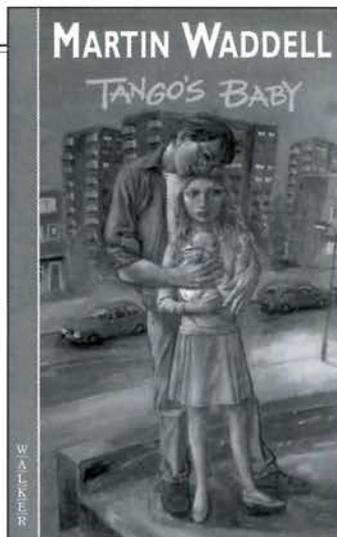
Martin Waddell, Walker,  
0 7445 4304 5, £3.99

You need something like superman's skills to survive the run-down estate that is 'The Loop'. When you're a soft 'Big Man', like Brian Tangelo, and you've made an under-age girl pregnant, you need skills and friends aplenty just to stay ahead of the pack, especially to parent your own child. The characters Waddell creates and the identifiable style of Chris, the narrator, plus an amazing empathy for the predicament of Tango and Crystal makes this a very important read that screams out for promotion. DB

### The Byzantium Bazaar

Stephen Elboz, Oxford,  
0 19 271578 X, £5.99

A shut-down department store, standing like a liner in a derelict wasteland, captained by a mad old woman, obsessed with nutrition and saving animals, is becalmed at the core of this off-beat, tantalising tale. One-off characters weave in and out



of the exotic plot as Bridie struggles to retrieve her disappeared Gramps and do the best by everyone, man or beast. The cover is not too thrilling, but there are some little nuggets within. DB

### The Alibi

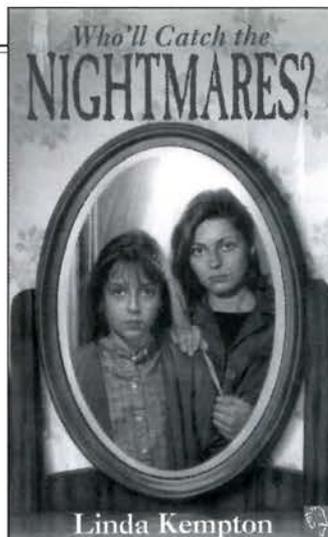
Malcolm Rose, Scholastic  
'Point Crime',  
0 590 13370 5, £3.50

Grisly opening as successful barrister, Stuart Burrage, has his throat slit by hooded intruder to family home. Some convincing police procedural stuff as sympathetic local fuzz use the computer at which he was working, to help establish time of death and other useful leads. Son, Kieran, immediately suspects acquisitive stepmother Rhia, despite her alibi of a shopping trip to Paris supported by security camera film of her passing through Heathrow and visiting the Louvre at appropriate times. Kieran and girlfriend, Ali, doggedly pursue the case which leads to the seemingly obligatory violent showdown. (If you haven't sussed it already - there's an identical twin sister.) Entertaining stuff for Year 8 and above. SR

### Daughter of Storms

Louise Cooper, Hodder,  
0 340 64070 7, £3.99

Shar is a Daughter of Storms, a Dark-Caller, possessed of very special powers in a world where the gods of Chaos and Order are carefully balanced. Her uncle, Thel Stamor, has ambitions to rule this world, to overthrow the High Initiate and to



seize power by using Shar against her will.

Her resistance and the struggle to prevent the treachery are told at fast pace in a world which becomes credible through Louise Cooper's meticulous descriptions. This is not just fantasy - another sugar confection in the 'Point Fantasy' world - it's a parable, and one which ends with the promise of a sequel. Soon, I hope! VR

### Creepers

Keith Gray, Mammoth,  
0 7497 2651 2, £3.99

This unconventional first novel bravely devotes its early chapters to describing the game - and art - of Creeping (travelling undetected through back gardens for the whole length of a street). Unusually, there's no mention of the narrator's name, but he tells a quirky, thoughtful story.

His Creeping buddie, Jamie, is killed in a fire before they can attempt Derwent Drive, the ultimate Creep. When Jamie returns, having escaped the fire but afraid to face his parents' wrath, the Creep is attempted - and succeeds. This confounds the school bullies - Mark and Conno - and the narrator, until he discovers he's been accompanied only by Jamie's ghost. When Jamie is buried, many things are laid to rest; fear, uncertainty, bullying and the solitary state in which the narrator has existed. He's found new friends and can go forward.

Creepers would make a superb class reader for Year 9 but, unfortunately,

the frequent use of bad language debars it from this role. VR

### Who'll Catch the Nightmares?

Linda Kempton,  
Mammoth, 0 7497 1707 6,  
£3.99

Gemma Gladwin is determined to be an actress and is overjoyed when she lands the leading role in the school play. Home life is not so rewarding, however, since her mother is haunted by a nightmare from the past which blights all their lives. Family tensions and affections are created surely: Danny, nine years old, is struggling to read and sensitive; Mr Gladwin is denying his wife's illness; and Uncle Bill is the mediator - warm, charismatic and capable.

When Danny runs away, his mother faces her demons and opens the way to new understandings for both herself and Gemma. The relationships in the novel are its strongest feature but the author's exploration of the themes of loss and love is strikingly well-handled and will be enjoyed by Year 8 readers upwards. VR

### Electric Full Stops

ORIGINAL

Award-winning entries from the 1995 W H Smith Young Writers' Competition, Macmillan,  
0 333 65489 7, £4.99

Everything in this book - including its title - is written by youngsters from both junior and secondary schools. The standard of writing, whether story or poetry, is consistently high and occasionally inspired - Heather Macnaught, Eva Okwonga and Sarah Stringer must surely be names to watch out for in the future.

Section headings are imaginative and the artwork accompanying the writing is often stunning. These submissions largely lack the self-consciousness of some adult writing and are blessedly free from the desire - sometimes evident in the work of established authors - to be fashionable in literary terms.

This anthology is a rewarding source of material for use in the classroom and, quite simply, a joy to read. VR

## Older Readers REVIEWS

### Variations on a Dream

Bette Paul, Scholastic  
'Adlib', 0 590 54246 X, £8.99

Suzy Millar's father has been in prison for two years on a fraud charge, during which time she's been running the household and ministering to her fragile mother. Suzy's cello-playing has taken second place and she's unable - and unwilling - to realise her father's ambition of a place for her at a prestigious music college. Unhappy at her father's determination to run her life, she dabbles in jazz with a local band, and samples alternative lifestyles - including a residential teaching community for handicapped young people. It's here that

she finds her true talent, as a teacher, becoming aware of music as a healing, spiritual force rather than merely something to be performed with exacting technique.

There's the obligatory romantic interest along the way, yet the book successfully avoids the cliché-trap, holds the reader's attention and communicates a good deal about learning and growing to Year 9 readers and above. VR

### Burning Issues

Alan Frewin Jones,  
Red Fox, 0 09 932091 6, £3.50

Quite simply one of the best novels, adult, teenage or children's, I've read for a very long time. Julie, alias Spider, meets Ricky at her Nan's

funeral. Discovering that he was once involved with the Animal Rescue Campaign, she encourages him to remake contact through letter writing, petitions and demos. Inexorably she's drawn towards increasingly violent direct action against a local scientist who is involved with vivisection, ending with a fire bombing. Eventually Julie realises that the doe-eyed, animal-loving Ricky has not only lied to her but actually enjoys the violence. The book ends leaving the reader asking many questions as Julie makes her way to the police station to confess.

The animal rights issues, while presented cogently, are only a part of this marvellous book as it also takes in Julie's grief at the loss of her Nan, her inability to communicate or

build any decent relationship with her mother, similar problems with her sisters and the pleasure and pain of first love. Through her personal crisis, Julie - spiky, arrogant, difficult to like at times, but also uncertain and vulnerable - moves to an understanding of herself and her family. How come this didn't win any awards? ■ SR

### REVIEWERS in this issue:

David Bennett, Jill Bennett, Pam Harwood, George Hunt, Adrian Jackson, Val Randall, Gill Roberts, Steve Rosson, Judith Sharman, Liz Waterland and Jonathan Weir.

## Authorgraph No.99

*Malorie Blackman*

Malorie Blackman interviewed by Stephanie Nettell

Gusts of laughter billow from Malorie Blackman; words tumble and cascade in a free flow. She nuzzles Elizabeth, 8-month-old sweet-pea Lizzie, whose gummy grin mirrors her mum's and who herself couldn't wait to start life. 'For me, every day is now so wonderful, I couldn't be any happier - my husband, my family, my daughter, my writing. I'm lucky because I'm doing the very thing I want to do and not many can say that.' But if life seems fun, it's largely because she has made it so. Malorie Blackman owes her writing to one great sorrow and two stupid people.

She was 13 when her parents split up, and has not seen her father since she was 16. It was a rough time. 'For three years I was utterly miserable, and I coped by making up fantasies for myself. I'd walk along inventing dialogues: "If an alien came down what would I say to it?" I love Jacqueline Wilson's work, but she uses subjects I couldn't write about - not ones I've been through anyway! - so I deal in the escapist things which kept me sane then. It never occurred to me to write my stories down (writing was for English lessons), but I wrote out all the pain, all the feelings I couldn't share, in secret poems.'

She did well at grammar school, with nine O-levels, and aimed at a degree from Goldsmiths' College to teach English and drama. That is, until the careers teacher inexplicably refused a reference on the grounds that she would fail her English A-level - 'Try business studies at Huddersfield Poly.' She dutifully did, but made certain her three A's included a 'B' in English.

Not only did she hate Huddersfield but, coming round from an appendix operation in her first term, this 18-year-old overheard a doctor and nurse talking across her bed. "It's a shame about her disease," and the reply, "Yes, she won't live much beyond 30." I was devastated: I had sickle-cell.

Recuperating in London she rebelled and got herself a Goldsmiths' place after all, but in the intervening year she worked for a software house, and found it so enjoyable she decided instead to study computer science at Thames Poly. In three years of night study she got her HNC with distinction. She also discovered that the doctor had been wrong.

'For years I was bitter and angry about it,' she wails in vivid illustration. 'I'd had a brilliant job in computing, travelling round the world with Reuters, and by 28 I was a database manager dealing with money markets, when I suddenly thought "What do I really want to do?" I tried classes in acting, but that wasn't me, and then I realised it had to be writing - it always had been. Although I knew that the diagnosis was false, I'd got the notion well and truly into my head, and it made me realise I didn't want to shuffle off this mortal coil without leaving something behind! Now I look back and think, yes, you really did do me a favour.'

Her older sister and brother were born in Barbados, but Malorie and her younger twin brothers are south Londoners through and through - she was born in Morden, lived in Clapham and settled in Lewisham. Their father was a carpenter, their mother has



always worked in hospitals: at Lewisham Hospital she was able to knock on the door moments after Elizabeth was born, and lives close enough to Malorie to pop in and help. It's her mother's and aunt's stories and their voices that echo in the **Betsey Biggalow** books; she had written three before she'd ever been to Barbados, but feels less of a fraud after her 1994 visit. This was a holiday designed to overcome the despair of a miscarriage - and so successful it brought Elizabeth.

All Malorie's books seem dedicated to her husband Neil, in fact all 33, it turns out. She mentions him constantly - the backbone of her life, a moral support as well as the vital source of subsidy in the early writing days. 'Originally I was going to give up my job for just a year to see how I got on, and I couldn't have done it without him.'

Neil, from Edinburgh, is a systems specialist for the Bank of Kuwait, and they met when she was 19 through computing. In 1987,

having abandoned acting, she had begun evening classes at the City Literary Institute - cradle of many a success - where her tutor encouraged her to send work off. 22 rejection slips later some short stories were accepted by The Women's Press, but it was only in 1990 that she plunged in full-time. Children's writing was, and always will be, her first choice. 'I remember my own childhood very vividly, the feeling of what it was like to be six, seven, eight.'

Her family's books had consisted of the Encyclopedia Britannica 'and that was it'. The memory of Saturday mornings searching the library in vain for straightforward, ordinary stories with a black central character - reinforced years later when she discovered as a Voluntary Reading Helper that children were still searching - prompted her to write them herself. Her mission was to *normalise* black kids' roles.

'I wanted to show black children just getting on with their lives, having adventures like

any other characters. On a tour last year for Transworld one boy asked me, "Are any of your books about racism?" It kind of threw me - "Well no, not really" - but afterwards I thought, that's not true. All my books are about racism because what I hope I'm doing is presenting positive images of black children simply *living*, instead of coping with A Problem. As one girl said, "I don't wake up thinking, Oh my God, I'm black! I get up and get on with the day."

'I tackle racism by showing black people doing worthwhile things - Vicky's dad works in a bank (**Hacker**), Elaine's dad is a computing manager (**Elaine, You're a Brat!**), Beans's dad is an inventor (**Gadgetman**) - no big deal, let's get on with the story.' That her characters have mixed friendships is usually unremarked, with the sole reference to their colour in the jacket illustration. 'The only time I went into it was where Vicky was adopted; in a black family you don't sit around agonising about being black - and when it comes up it's to do with outside attitudes.'

But those attitudes create lasting scars, and beneath the irritation at how reactions to colour dog her work, she is actually ambivalent, her own past pain undimmed. 'When I was six this white boy (I still remember him) spat at me and called me names: he was my age so obviously he'd got it from his parents. I arrived home crying. My mum was washing up, curlers in her hair, slippers on her feet, apron round her waist. She took the apron off, but didn't bother with the curlers or slippers, and marched down the High Street and up his road, where she confronted his parents. There I was, embarrassed about everyone looking at her curlers but at the same time thinking how wonderful she was!' Malorie knows, too, about the wearisome drip of trivia: how someone always rushes up as soon as she enters a shop to serve her before she nicks something; about always,

always being stopped when flying, whether travelling the world for Reuters, the only black person on the flight, or holidaying with Neil.

It's not, she insists, every moment of the day - then remembers an incident with Neil at the start of their relationship. 'We were in Smith's, with two huge aisles of magazines and maybe three on the bottom row like **Ebony** or **Black Essence**, which I was looking at. Neil commented that "You don't get magazines for white people like that, do you?" - and I said, "Neil, what do you call all these?" waving at the hundreds of others on the stall. Then I could see the wheels going round!' She rocks with delighted laughter.

She is less tolerant of shops who judge her books by the face on the cover. "We don't have that big a black population here", or even, "They don't sell like normal books!" As David Fickling once said, "**Farmer Duck** did well and there's not that big a duck population round here either." Or of publishers who suggest 'putting her on your multicultural shelf' when they could be recommending her to those who enjoy computers or thrillers. 'Transworld are brilliant at promoting them simply as books, and **Hacker's** winning the W H Smith Award and the Young Telegraph's - both chosen by children - did me so much good.'

She is hugely prolific (though Elizabeth has pushed back a few deadlines), with an inexhaustible imagination providing strong, ingenious plots for any sub-teen. Reviewers who depress her with accusations of 'unbelievable' are missing the point: against an everyday background, her characters empower young readers to achieve what in reality they never could - solve the mystery, be smarter than the police, see the future and return. 'They're the books I loved best when I was young,' and in many ways she has the readability knack of a modern, PC

and livelier Blyton. And she writes almost as compulsively, touch-typing 50 words a minute for 12 hours a day. 'Neil: "That's enough, that's enough." Me: "Just one more page, one more page!"'

Picture books are hardest ('I like to witter on'), although **That New Dress** was a notable success, and **Mrs Spoon's Family**, about a dog and cat arguing ('a blatant message, but there you go!') promises well. She loves line-drawings, provided they don't cross-hatch a black face (her *bête noir*?), and feels indebted to Lis Toft (**Girl Wonder** and **Betsey**), Doffy Weir (**Elaine**) and Patrice Aggs, her partner in the Orchard puzzle-stories she typically invented. A graduate of a script-writing course at the National Film and Television School, she revelled in personally scripting the Channel Four dramatisation of **Thief!**, her most ambitious novel, part thriller, part time-travel fantasy, and an earlier 10-minute drama about 'Trust' for BBC2. She longs for, and may get, more, and also to try adult drama.

Yes, she's a go-getter. Herself undaunted by life's mis-routings, she urges youngsters 'If you want something, go for it.' Don't be channelled into stereotyped jobs by others' low expectations, as her generation too often were.

Few people realise that there are far more black women writers and illustrators than five years ago: does their invisible blackness mean they are at last being taken for granted? 'I'm relaxed around children because I know they'll take me for what I am, whereas I get very nervous addressing adults. There's always another agenda there, what it's like to be a black writer, etc., whereas kids just want to know what it's like to be a writer.'

'I'm not a representative of anything. I'm Malorie Blackman.' ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.



### Some of Malorie's books:

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

**Elaine, You're a Brat!**, ill. Doffy Weir, Orchard, 1 85213 365 1, £7.99; 0 85213 642 1, £3.50 pbk

**Operation Gadgetman!**, Yearling, 0 440 86307 4, £2.99 pbk

**Thief!**, Doubleday, 0 385 40504 9, £9.99; Corgi, 0 552 52808 0, £3.50 pbk

**Mrs Spoon's Family**, ill. Jan McCafferty, Andersen, 0 86264 582 4, £8.99

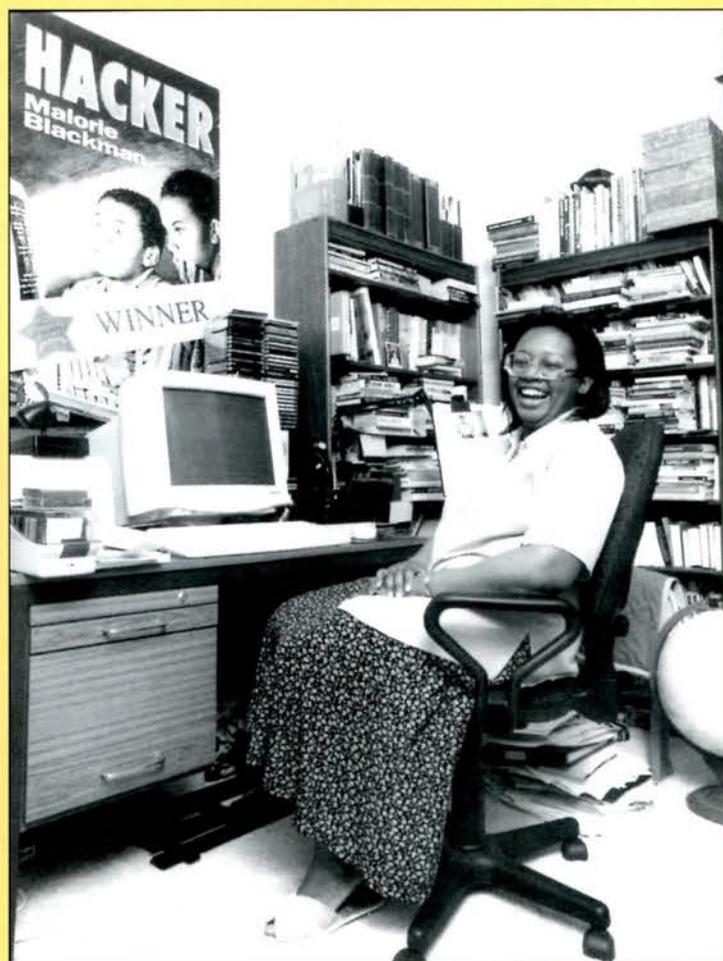
**A.N.T.I.D.O.T.E.**, Doubleday, 0 385 40679 7, £8.99

The Orchard 'Puzzle Planet Adventures' with illustrations from Patrice Aggs cost £6.99 in hardback.

**Girl Wonder** titles are published by Gollancz (hbk) and Puffin (pbk).

**Betsey Biggalow** titles are published by Piccadilly (hbk) and Mammoth (pbk).

**That New Dress** is now out of print.



# A BLOOMING GOOD READ

## Ten Years of Orchard Books

David Morton celebrates the anniversary of a publishing house

Orchard Books is ten years old this year. This small, focused list, known especially for its novelties, picture books, and collections, and increasingly, for its fiction, has grown from a launch of just nine titles to a comprehensive and well-loved publishing package of over 300 hardbacks and 200 paperbacks. Orchard has bloomed by nurturing its distinctive approach to children's books – keeping small but beautiful – through one of the most difficult periods in publishing history.

Orchard Books is the trade publishing arm of The Watts Group, part of the US company, Grolier, which, in turn, belongs to the multi-national Hachette Group. Back in 1986, the Watts group already had a successful fiction list in house, Julia MacRae Books, geared largely towards the library market, and containing a stable of authors all remarkably adept at winning awards. The Orchard list was to be different, yet complementary. With Judith Elliott at the helm, a publisher known for her huge successes at Heinemann – including, for example, *The Jolly Postman* and the first 'Banana Books' – the focus was to be more on books which were geared towards the commercial markets. 'My thrust was to do books that sold to bookshops and the co-edition market and to round out what the Watts group were doing at that point,' Elliott comments. 'I wanted it to be innovative, and to have an atmosphere that was very open to new people. I hoped it would be a series of discoveries.'

In her six years at Orchard, Judith Elliott most definitely achieved her aims. The list steadily developed a reputation for excellence and originality, through discovering new authors and illustrators such as Jane Ray, Sonia Holleyman, James Mayhew, and through its increasing range of outstanding novelty books, like Jan Pieńkowski's inventive pop-ups. Attracting well-known talents such as Rose Impey, Bernard Ashley, Geraldine McCaughrean and Margaret Mayo further established the Orchard list within the trade and helped to entice new talent through the door.

Now, with Elliott four years into her new list at Orion Children's Books, and Orchard under the firm guidance of Editorial Director, Francesca Dow, and Managing Director, Marlene Johnson, it appears that all of Elliott's original maxims are still adhered to. There's a real thrust for originality, for publishing books which, perhaps, other publishers wouldn't, while making sure that they are still books which will sell. 'The key to Orchard is a mix of the commercial, the child-friendly and the original and individual,' says Dow. 'It's trying to be as original and fun as possible – also trying to keep an eye on the market.' Dow talks earnestly of her constant search for books which 'surprise . . . in a pleasurable way', not only for their intended audience, but also for the staff of eight editors in-house. After all if the editor working on a book isn't excited by it, how can the child be for whom it is intended?

They talk of 'ownership' at Orchard – that sense that each book is part of an organic whole, that when you own it, you really do care about it, and it really does matter that it is right. 'If you can't buy into what you're

producing,' Johnson comments, 'if you don't have a feeling of ownership, then you're just working on a book.' Though Orchard is owned by The Watts Group, an independence is claimed which not only allows them the creative freedom to develop projects which they really care about, but one which fosters their own individuality and an almost familial sense of belonging. 'If we take something on here, we all own it from top to bottom,' she adds. There's also an attention to detail, a care and a consideration of whether the next book will be innovative enough yet still fit within the fairly tight parameters of a small list: 'we look at each book to see how it fits into the whole philosophy,' Dow reveals, 'so that each person has their own individual integrity, but the project they are working on has got to be part of our whole.'

Keeping itself small has enabled Orchard to maintain control of, and to strategically engineer, their own success. They've never tried to play the big boys at their own game, and they dismiss the prospect of growing significantly larger. 'It's terribly important to keep small so that everyone knows all the books and knows the authors and illustrators very well,' says Dow, 'and it's vital to know what your strength is. A lot of publishers have, in the past, thought they could do everything, and they've failed. We've only ever done what we've felt comfortable with.' The fact that Orchard have kept themselves small, both in terms of staff size and of the list, has also allowed them the resources and wherewithal to pay each book the due attention it deserves, to really go over the fine detail to ensure that the finished product has the essential ingredients of an Orchard book.

'In our view, it can only work on a comparatively small basis,' agrees Marlene Johnson. Financially speaking, it must be easier to keep a tight rein if you are small, even if that's part of a larger, more established company. It would be easy to assume that The Watts Group have kept Orchard afloat during the lean times, but Johnson is quick to point out that there has been no 'interference', and that their size does not mean they are 'simply another division of a large group . . . we are a self-funding publishing company. Nothing that we have done has been funded by anyone other than ourselves.'

Keeping it all contained has given the staff at Orchard the chance to develop really strong relationships with their authors, something about which they are genuinely proud. The authors and illustrators are an essential part of our everyday lives – they are the reason why we can do such exciting new books,' says Dow, and the authors themselves seem very happy to be there. Jane Ray, author of, amongst others, the 1992 Smarties Award-winning *The Story of Creation*, and the book featured on our front cover this month – *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* – has glowing praise: 'It's a privilege to work with Orchard. To work with them is to work with a happy and supportive family, full of ideas, enthusiasm and warmth; the whole thing is a joy.'

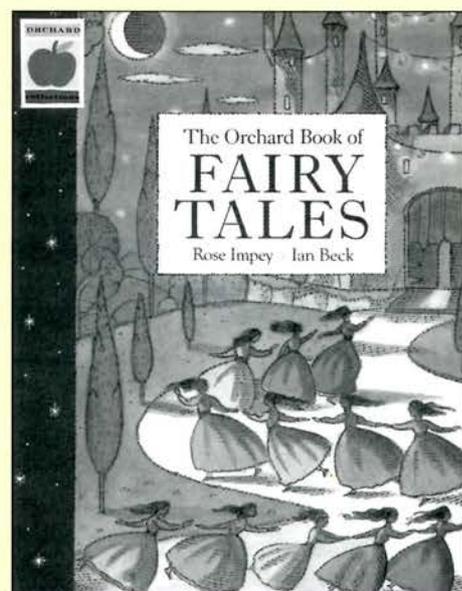
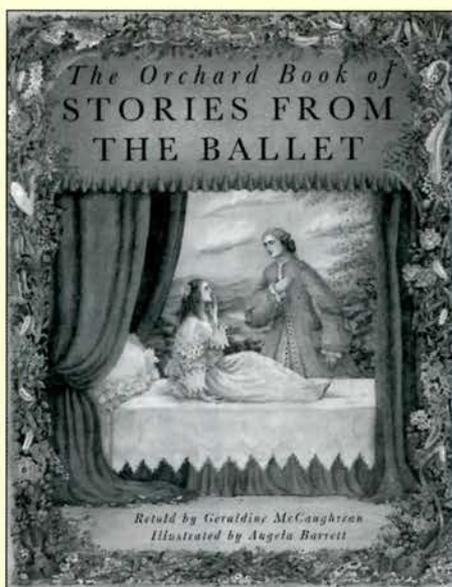
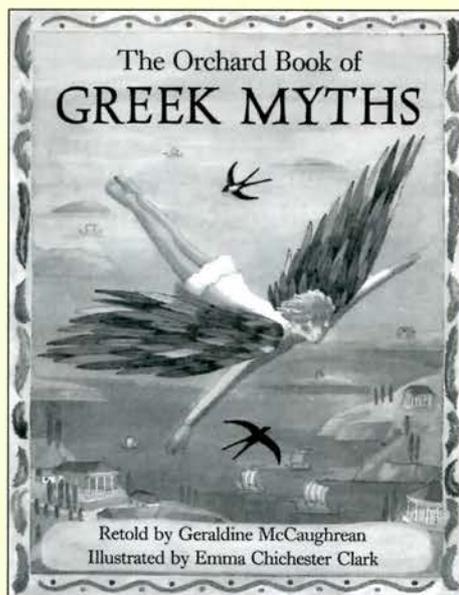
And now Orchard are ten, and the congratulations have been pouring in from all over the trade: Elizabeth Hammill of Waterstone's agrees that 'Orchard can be relied upon for books which . . . delight the eye and engage



ORCHARD BOOKS  
TEN YEARS OLD  
AND BLOOMING



The Creative Orchard Team – back row (l. to r.) Nicola Noble, Editor; Katie Short, Editorial Assistant; Sarah Hodder, Art Director; Francesca Dow, Editorial Director; front row (l. to r.) Mandy Suhr, Editor; Mary Hamley, Paperback Editor and Jemima Lumley, Designer. Absent from photograph, Rosemary Davies, Senior Editor.



the ear', while one-time publishing bedfellow, Julia MacRae, says 'it's a great list,' and adds, 'I've watched its growth with pleasure – and not a little envy!' Judith Elliott is also glowing in her praise. 'I admire enormously their integrity,' she says, 'and I am truly thrilled to see them thriving.' This success is, she feels, due to the fact that Orchard is 'an entity that you feel, and one which has stuck to its ethos.' Linda Banner, Promotion and Marketing Manager, agrees, and says 'I don't think the philosophy has actually changed in ten years. It really is publishing from the heart.'

When she looks forward to the next ten years, Francesca Dow is quick to assure me that she will still opt for originality: 'my worst fear is being thought of as pedestrian, as another predictable list,' she insists. 'We have to be surprised ourselves and react to the illustrators and ideas around.' They've begun this with a new list of audio titles, book and tape story packs of their hugely successful Orchard collections, all of which are, impressively, still in print in both hard- and paperback ten years on. They're also expanding their fiction lists – for many years, Orchard was known for its gift, picture and novelty books, but that's all changed in the last two years. 'Fiction has been one of the fastest growing areas of our list,' says Johnson, and with new books from Geraldine McCaughrean, Ann Jungman, Jonathan Allen and Hiawyn Oram, that's hardly surprising. They're also working on older fiction, bringing Pat Moon, Elizabeth Hawkins, Michael Coleman and Anthony Masters on board. Building a list is, for Orchard, a slow and careful process, and Johnson is philosophical about the next few years: 'we'll be developing what we have achieved over the last five years. We want to see the authors we've been

establishing really take off. What I would like, is for more people to know Orchard, and the only way to do that is to continue to publish quality, child-friendly books.'

Other publishers could learn many lessons from Orchard Books – remember what you're good at and don't try to do everything; keep a firm eye on who you're publishing books for; and above all, don't publish anything you don't believe in. We've all seen larger publishing houses producing rubbish just to get on a particular bandwagon. Too many books are still being published and the success of Orchard provides evidence that less can truly mean better. 'What large companies do, is they get caught up in something and start pumping it out,' explains Johnson. 'It's only when they get to number 53 that they realise it wasn't worth it. That's not what we do.'

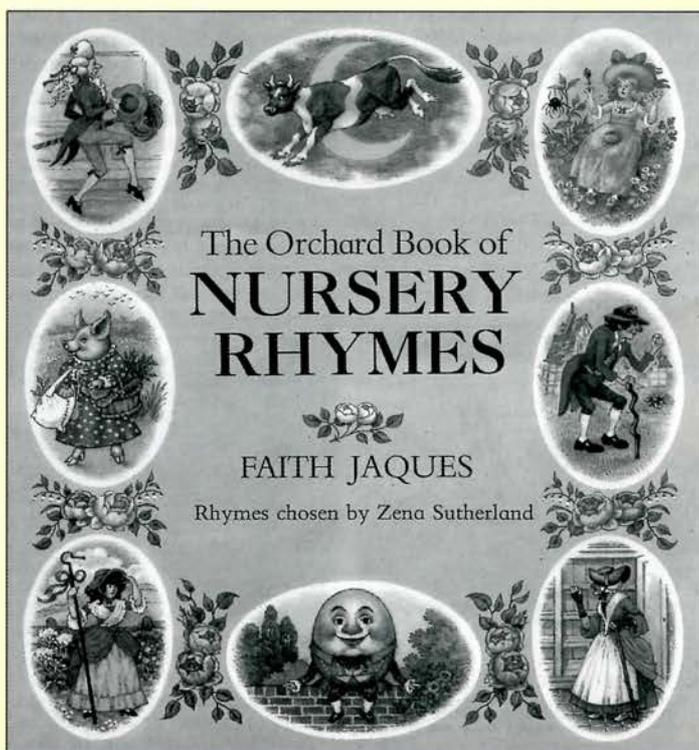
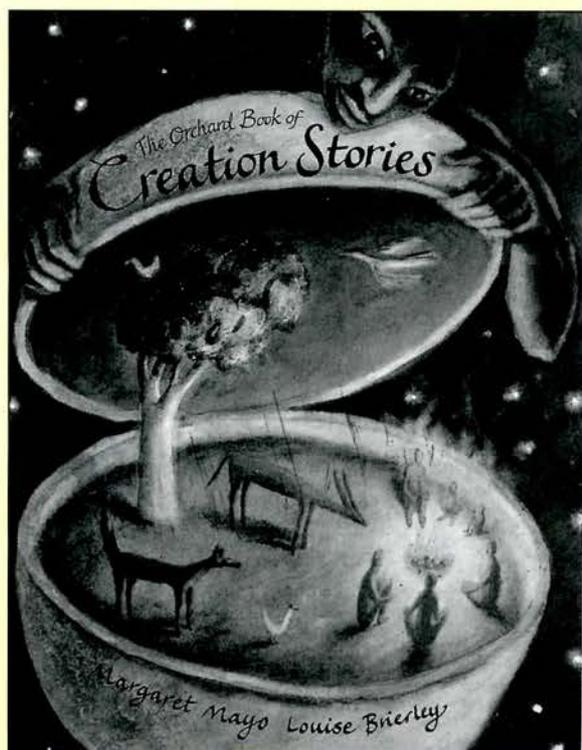
You just have to look at their list to see that this is true: original, individual titles which all have that Orchardness about them. You can tell when a book is an Orchard book, which is more than you can say for many other publishers. There's a distinct 'something' about an Orchard book: perhaps it's the quality of production; perhaps it's the quality of the text or the illustrations. Or perhaps what stands out is that you can see the care and attention that has been put into each book. 'We love our books,' says Banner. 'Don't you worry,' I say in reply, 'We can tell.'

David Morton is a freelance writer and journalist specialising in children's books.

Details of the two Jane Ray titles mentioned:

The Story of Creation, 1 85213 281 7, £9.99; 1 85213 948 X, £4.99 pbk

The Twelve Dancing Princesses, 1 85213 997 8, £9.99 (see our front cover)



# THE READING SCHEME IS DEAD ... LONG LIVE THE READING SCHEME?

The attempt to combine Pedagogy with Literature in the teaching of reading has exercised a number of publishers of late. Amongst the latest initiatives is **Cambridge Reading**. Annemarie Young, its Senior Editor, outlines her approach.

Four years ago, when we started developing **Cambridge Reading**, the real books versus reading schemes debate was raging. There were very valid arguments on both sides. On the one hand, there was the importance of high-quality books while on the other there was the need for structure for children and support material for teachers.

The general editors – Kate Ruttle, Richard Brown, Jean Glasberg and I – soon decided that the dichotomy was unnecessary. We became convinced that with careful planning, and the right authors and illustrators, it would be possible to satisfy both sides of the equation – good books *and* a framework with support material to help teachers teach reading. So we set out to produce a reading scheme made up of really good books. When I explained our intentions to the potential contributors I approached, I was delighted at their positive and enthusiastic response.

But I must confess I couldn't bring myself to refer to **Cambridge Reading** as a reading scheme for a long time – not until the first books came in and we saw that we had achieved the 'really good books' part of the equation as well as the teaching framework. Lisa Kopper has called it 'a new kind of reading scheme', and I'm happy with that.

We knew our task would not be easy. There aren't many authors who can write good stories for beginner and early readers. This requires a particular sensitivity to language as well as the ability to distil a story to its essentials *and* provide a humorous twist. We wanted people who were willing to be part of a creative team in which there is an absolute commitment to quality and everyone's expertise is respected. Good relations between authors, editors and illustrators are, after all, crucial to the process of producing really good books of any sort.

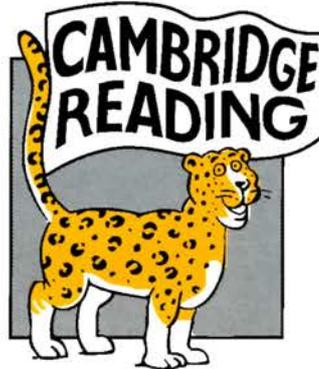
Our first task was to set up the framework. Most children need manageable texts, progression and an underlying continuity when they are learning. The first three phases, Beginning to Read, Becoming a Reader and Towards Independence, cover children's reading development between the ages of about 4-plus to 7 or 8. (The first two phases were published in February and the third will be published in the autumn.)

We wanted to ensure variety of both text-types and illustration styles. To achieve this we commissioned, from the second phase, a range of authors and illustrators to write books within different genres: contemporary fiction, fantasy, traditional tales, poetry and rhyme, information books, and an original series of autobiographical stories of childhood.

We gave the authors guidelines on length and the age of the readers but we did not give them word lists. We wanted good stories – with amusing texts, enhanced by imaginative and supportive illustrations – which children would want to read again and again. We did not want boringly repetitive texts written in unnatural language because these features actually make reading and understanding *more* difficult for beginner and early readers, and poor quality writing and illustrations are thoroughly demotivating for children.

As you can see from the quotes which accompany this piece, authors found the parameters a creative challenge, and they also appreciated the opportunity to brainstorm ideas.

As if in response to Chris Powling's general question in the May editorial of **BfK**, we knew that to get the best books we *had* to pay careful attention to the *overall design* of each book not just to the text itself. In the same issue of **BfK**, Korky Paul underlined how essential this integration is to the success of a story. He also talked about pictures enhancing the text. Good illustrators



Cambridge Reading's Senior Editor,  
Annemarie Young.



can do this even for beginner and early readers without confusing them. We have some wonderful examples of this in Sami Sweeten's illustrations for Juliet Partridge's books, especially **The Picnic** and **Blowing Bubbles**. And David Parkins' hilarious illustrations for **Two by Two** have children poring over them and going back again and again to find new surprises.



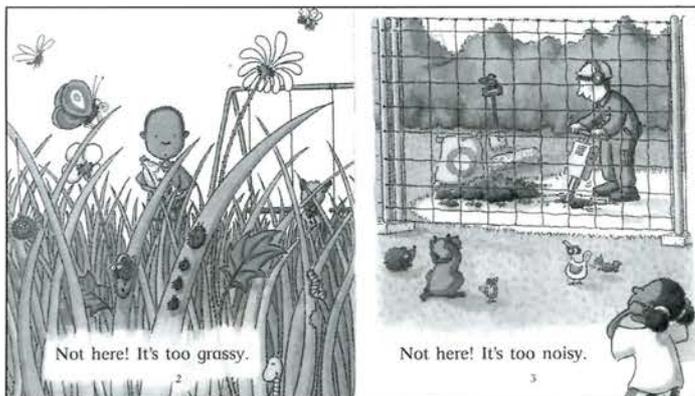
The tiger that had been so free and wild and beautiful was gone.

24

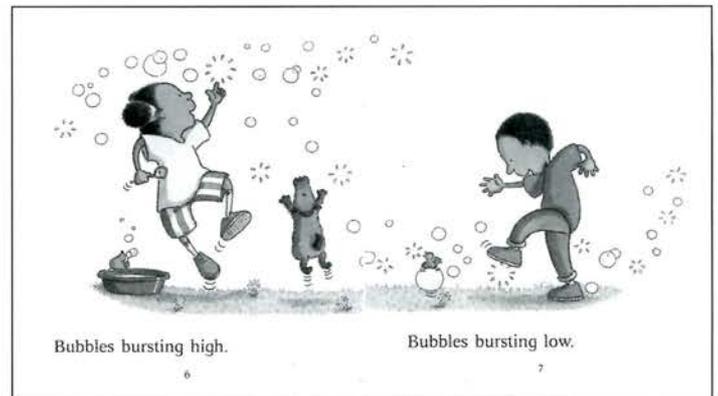
From **Tiger Dreams**.

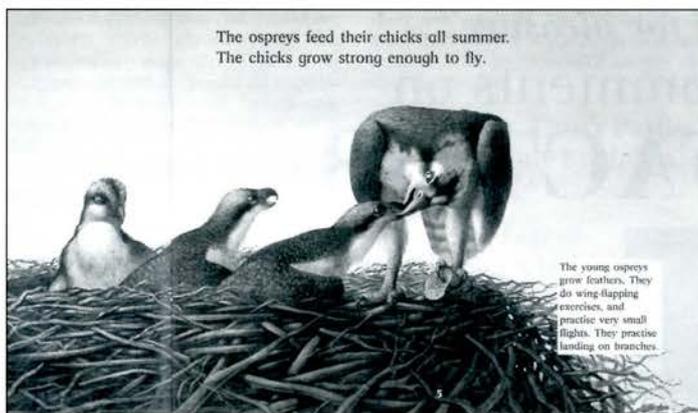
It's true that children are always the first to see mistakes of continuity, as we discovered in our trialling, but they also love visual cross-references and delight in spotting these in John Prater's set of fantasy stories. Children's comments from the trialling have often been the most perceptive, and certainly the most entertaining!

Children also love the recurring characters in Tony Bradman's **Class One** stories. Priscilla Lamont's pictures made the characters come alive for all of us. I'll never forget one editorial discussion we had when someone protested, 'But Paul wouldn't do that!'

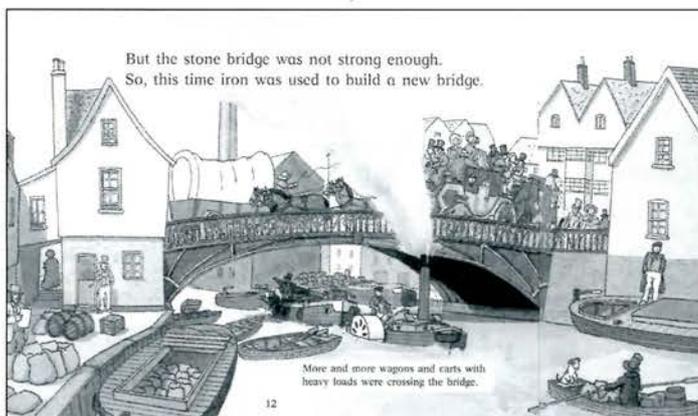


Picture enhancing the text, from **The Picnic** ... and **Blowing Bubbles**.





Bert Kitchen's stunning and meticulous artwork for **Osprey** . . .



. . . and Peter Kent's imaginative detail in **The Bridge**.

With the information books we were determined to provide children with what Meredith Hooper calls 'insider information'. The facts had to be accurate but also had to be accessible. The author's task was greatly helped by Bert Kitchen's stunning and meticulous artwork and Peter Kent's imaginative detail.

Some texts were worked on until all of us (especially the authors) were happy with them, but some were right almost at once, like Gerald Rose's sad but compelling autobiographical story, **Tiger Dreams**.

At the other end of the spectrum, we are now working on novels for 8- to 11-year-olds, and that's just as interesting and rewarding, for us and the authors, as Judith O'Neill confirms.

The development of **Cambridge Reading** has been immensely exciting for all concerned and we're proud of the results, especially when we see or hear of the reactions of children to the published books, like this one from a class of children in a large Essex primary school, 'Hey Miss, these are brill! Can we have them?' If children love the books, that's the best test.

## Comments from some of the Cambridge Reading authors and illustrators

### Tony Bradman

'I tackled the stories as I would any stories – I thought long and hard about the characters involved, their backgrounds, their wants, needs and problems. I had quite a lot of discussions with Annemarie and her team – all very useful. I didn't set out with any preconceptions about repetition or restricted vocabulary – I was given some guidelines but didn't find this a limitation. In fact throughout my writing career I've always tried to use any parameters as a creative challenge.

'The actual editorial process was very positive – in fact, it was the kind of editing that isn't as common in trade publishing as it should be, with plenty of attention to details and an enormous commitment to getting the books right for the children who will read them.



'I'd worked with Priscilla Lamont before, so was confident that she'd do a good job, but I award top marks to the CUP team for their commitment to the design of the books – they showed the same level of application to detail as with the texts. I'm delighted with the way the books have turned out.'

### Priscilla Lamont

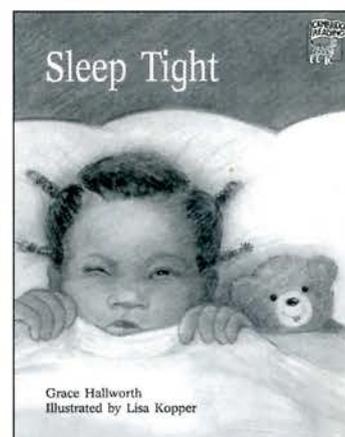
'I found the sheer volume of work a little daunting to start with. However, before long I was immersed in the world of Class One and the various story-lines. We wanted the children reading them to really get to know the characters and have a genuine interest in the stories – in the way that any reader needs to want to turn the page and go on reading. Simple and obvious really. Certain guidelines had to be followed, but these really weren't inhibiting, or indeed inappropriate.'

### Bill Gillham

'Being set the discipline of a length for the text (but no restriction on vocabulary) is excellent for writers and results in a creative response that surprises themselves.'

### Lisa Kopper

'Annemarie Young sent me a story by Grace Hallworth called **Sleep Tight**. I liked it very much. The text was full of visual imagery and had a lovely poetic quality. I was surprised and delighted to find it was part of a new kind of reading scheme. As an illustrator, an evocative text can make all the difference in the world to the expressiveness of my own work. This particular project was well conceived, aggro free and brought me a great deal of pleasure.'



### Susan Hellard

'It was very helpful to come to a meeting with the publishing team and talk through the series. It's amazing how rare, in my experience, this is. Hearing June [Crebbin] talk about the characters made them "gel" in my head a lot better. I've never experienced trialling before. It was interesting to hear that the caretaker character was liked and that children tried to pat the puppy.' 'There were guidelines, concerning length, number of characters, increasing complexity of the plot, but not the nature of the characters, the subject matter or the style of writing. These were left to me. The stories were mine.

### June Crebbin

'At every stage I was kept informed and consulted. Suggestions for improvements were made, but they were suggestions, not directives. Nothing was too much trouble. Stories, words, phrases, layouts were checked and re-checked. I appreciated and admired the attention to detail.

'Throughout the project, I felt a valued member of the team. There was always a positive atmosphere – a desire to get it right – to achieve books that children would want to read again and again.'

### Judith O'Neill

'I very much enjoyed my visit to meet the editorial team for **Cambridge Reading**. I'd written them a story for 11-year-olds. Their enthusiasm and their thoughtful, probing questions made me want to look at it all over again and do some drastic rewriting. The whole experience has been exhilarating for me as a writer. My story is certainly very much better now as a result of that morning's discussion. ■

All of the published titles in **Cambridge Reading** should be generally available through specialist children's bookshops around the country, or direct from Cambridge University Press. For further information, contact Louise Whitson on 01223 325915.

**Annemarie Young**, the senior commissioning editor for **Cambridge Reading**, was a teacher and teacher educator before joining Cambridge University Press in 1985. In 1992 she took on the development of this new reading resource for primary school children.

*BfK will be returning to the subject of re-vamped reading schemes in comparison with 'real' books for beginning readers in a future issue. In the meantime, letters on this topic from our readers will be very welcome.*

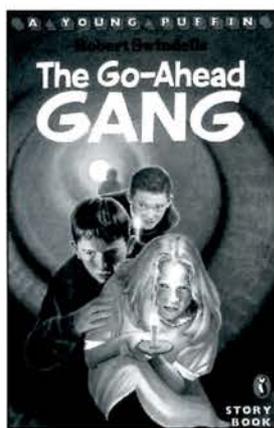
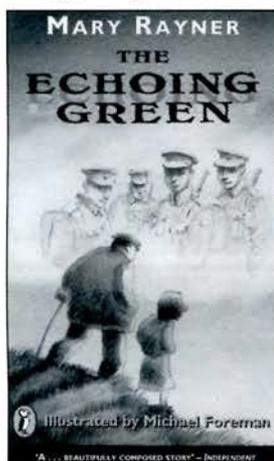
*'Thou shalt not read for pleasure . . .'*

Mike Rouse comments on

# THE 'F' FACTOR

The 'F' factor wasn't there when I was young. I would read for hours. Anything I could get my hands on: Christmas annuals, books from jumble sales and especially my beloved comics – **Tip Top, Wonder, Illustrated Chips, Comic Cuts, Film Fun, Radio Fun, Dandy** – there were so many to choose from and sometimes, by a great stroke of luck, from friendly Americans at the local East Anglian bases, American coloured comic books or the comic supplements from the papers with Prince Valiant and the like.

It was the comics above all that satisfied my reading. Later, **Classic Illustrated** and the small 64-page picture libraries told me stories of the classics in a form I could enjoy and understand. Even then in those carefree days my mother would occasionally say – 'You'll strain your eyes with all that reading, why not go outside and play?' or otherwise entreat me to get 'some fresh air' (we had some in the days of my youth).



But I was relatively free from the 'F' factor, as the young are. Then the harsh world crept up and suddenly it's: 'I thought you had work to do, how come you've got time to sit and read?'; or, when I was a young English teacher, the Head would arrive at the end of a lesson and enquire of my pupils, 'What work have you been doing?' And, believe me, reading did not count – only something written on paper was classified as 'work'.

Now, in middle-age, I'm in the full grip of the 'F' for 'Fidget' factor. Somewhere along the way an extra commandment was instilled in me: 'Thou shalt not read for pleasure' (you've got more important things to do). So, despite managing a Resource Centre, choosing all the fiction for over 1100 secondary pupils and teaching English, I get that guilty feeling if I'm reading for any length of time.

I'm probably too old to be cured, but what relieves the guilt are those blissfully short and exciting books that seem to be published in greater quantities. They're the publishing world's response to the 'Fidget' factor and all the other distractions that we face. From my observations the pressures begin to hit children in Year 8 and somewhere around that time it's impressed upon them that they have more important work to do than read.

For the educated Victorian child from a middle-class home, books could be made to last and run to hundreds of pages. Whenever I think that, I recall an old friend who I interviewed and taped many years ago. She grew up at the turn of the century and loved

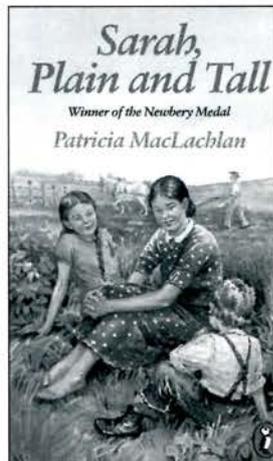
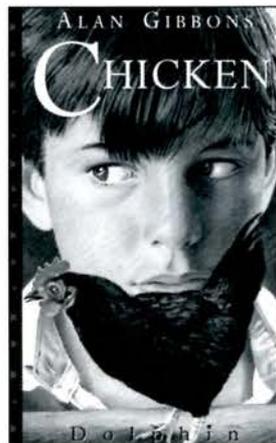


Mike Rouse  
Photo by Vernon Place.

to read but, coming from a poor background, rarely had a book. Once she won one as a prize and her mother allowed her to read it for half an hour on a Sunday morning as a treat. She had many household chores to do with several younger siblings, but it meant the book, 'my precious book', lasted so much longer.

Today we're surrounded by books, never perhaps have so many been published for children. And never has there been so much pressure on youngsters, not just from other leisure pursuits equally as valuable as reading, but from the pressure of guilt that reading is a waste of time. I envy the child who can simply let time stand still when immersed in a book. I hope with my own children I'll be able to let them be lost in a book, realising the value of that experience.

In the meantime, thank you for the short books, that I can finish before the 'Fidget' factor makes a coward



of me. Recently, I've enjoyed: Adèle Geras's **My Grandmother's Stories** (Mammoth, 0 7497 1718 1, £2.99); Robert Westall's **The Christmas Cat** (Mammoth, 0 7497 1292 9, £2.99); Mary Rayner's **The Echoing Green** (Puffin, 0 14 036006 9, £5.25); Michael Morpurgo's **The Wreck of the Zanzibar** (Mammoth, 0 7497 2620 2, £2.99); Patricia MacLachlan's **Sarah, Plain and Tall** (Puffin, 0 14 032596 1, £2.99); and its sequel **Skylark** (Collins, 0 00 674962 3, £2.99); Gary Paulsen's **Nightjohn** (Macmillan, 0 330 33604 5, £3.50); Alan Gibbons' **Chicken** (Dolphin, 1 85881 051 5, £5.50); and Robert Swindells' **The Go-Ahead Gang** (Puffin, 0 14 036507 9, £5.25).

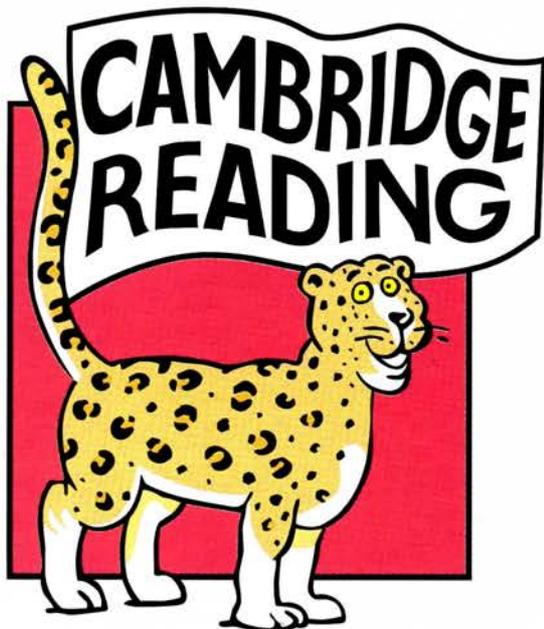
Now I hear a nagging voice from one of those famous National Curriculum documents on what our children should be reading. Would they be classified as 'demanding reads'?

Not a bad list, though. Something for nearly everyone. Good writers, wonderfully satisfying, but short books. However, if our yardstick is a long-dead author and a long book, they don't measure up. It's quite apparent by now that I'm bedevilled by the 'Fidget' factor and racked with guilt and I haven't even mentioned my passion for picture books . . .

So, in my present state of mind, short is beautiful, as long as it keeps the 'F' factor at bay. ■

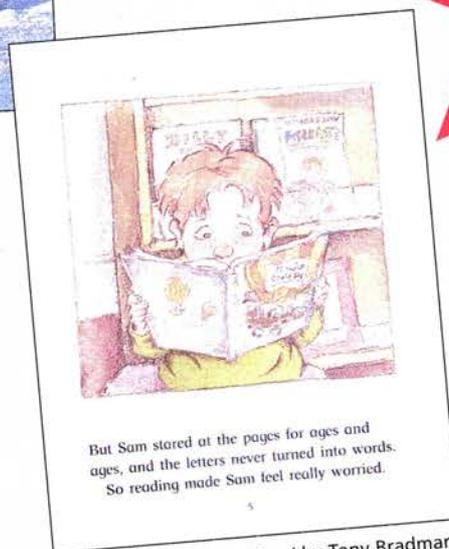
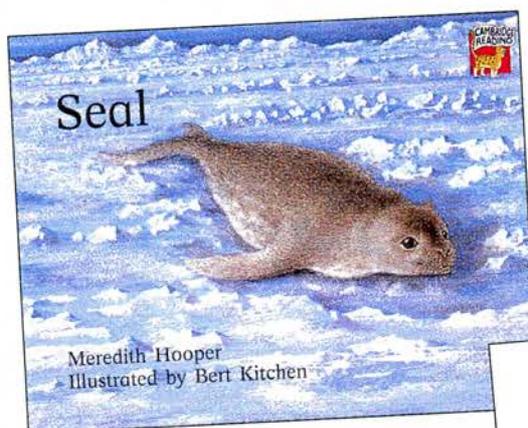
Mike Rouse is Manager at The Resource Centre, Soham Village College in Ely, Cambridgeshire.

We've given paperback details only of the books mentioned. Hardbacks are available in some cases.

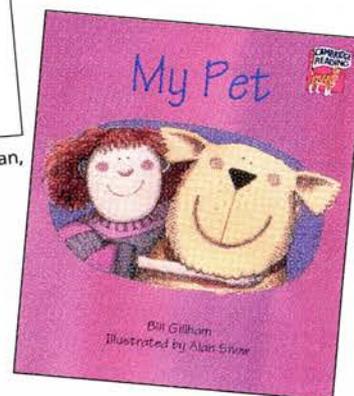
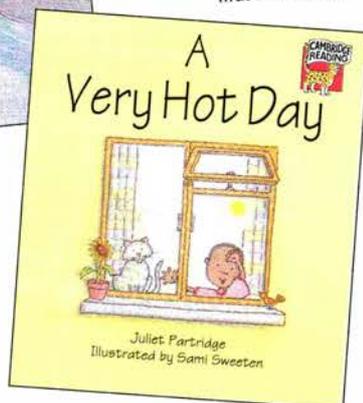
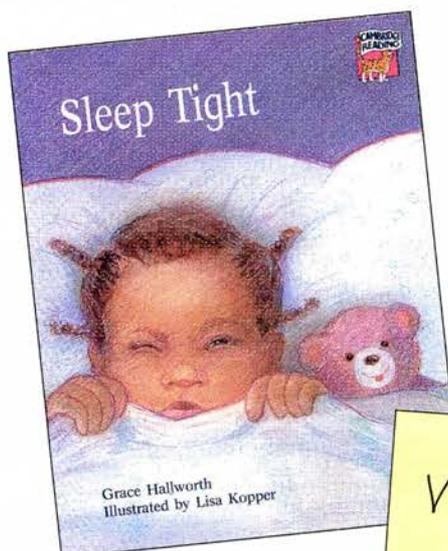


## A new kind of reading scheme

- High quality story, poetry and information books
- Well-known authors and illustrators, including *Tony Bradman, Priscilla Lamont, Joanna Troughton, Gerald Rose, June Crebbin, Bill Gillham, John Prater, Bert Kitchen* and *Rosemary Hayes*
- Easy-to-use, flexible structure with an integrated phonics programme
- Full range of support materials



Page from *Well Done, Sam!* by Tony Bradman, illustrated by Priscilla Lamont



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU

# Non Fiction REVIEWS

Press down on the top end of the stick.  
Can you see how the bottom end  
is forced up, making the box move?



11

## Lever

0 7502 1835 5

## Wheels and Cogs

0 7502 1834 7

Caroline Rush, ill. Mike Gordon,  
Wayland (Simple Technology series),  
£6.99 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

Eighteen months ago we first saw Maria and Mike Gordon's 'Simple Science' series and welcomed Maria's simply expressed ideas and Mike's expressly simple – but effective – pictures. That series has grown since, and has now spawned 'Simple Technology' in which illustrator Mike is joined by Caroline Rush on words. The result is as agreeable and assimilable as its predecessor. We observe the force-amplifying principle of the lever and its many involvements in daily life – from gardener's barrow to burglar's jemmy. Being, in effect, a rosette of radially arranged levers, a cogwheel is a force-amplifier too, and the basics of the wheel having been discovered the cog is a logical step, with the vicar's bicycle handily available to illustrate it.

This series promises **Slopes** and **Pulleys** next and should make a useful addition to infant technology shelves. TP

## Giraffes

Ill. John Lobban, 0 7496 2442 6

## Sharks

Ill. Tony Kenyon, 0 7496 2482 5

Steve Parker, Aladdin/Watts  
(What If series), £8.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Most 'Question' books don't make it into these columns because they're nothing less than con tricks full of pompous queries devised only to elicit statements of useless information that their compilers couldn't fit into real books. Here, however, the con trick works in reverse as old hand Steve Parker shows us the characteristics of mammals and fishes in a well sequenced flow of information disguised as a series of answers to a succession of endearingly doty questions. For instance the whole front-cover title of **Giraffes** is:

Above, from **Lever**.  
Right, from **Grasses**.

'What if Giraffes had short necks, leopards could change their spots, elephants had no trunks, monkeys had no tails and mammals didn't make milk'. By asking what if things were vastly different from how they are, Parker shows us the very features of fishdom and mammalhood that characterise their members. The result is an easy-paced ramble of usefully indexed information from which, without any obvious attempt at an overall thesis, we learn a lot. Friendly pictures too, especially from John Lobban.

One question Mr Parker doesn't ask, though, is 'What if fish didn't have trunks?' Answer, of course, is that they couldn't go swimming – well, not in public, anyway. TP

## Mapping the Unknown

Peter Chrisp, Wayland (Quest series),  
0 7502 1384 1, £9.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

This book covers a lot of territory, in more ways than one, in its exploration of how man has gone about surveying the land, the ocean depths and the night sky.

Inevitably in such a wide-ranging 'quest' the author has had to be selective in his choice of material and some aspects are only briefly touched upon. Notwithstanding this, we are taken on a fascinating journey which begins with such basic considerations as why we need maps and how map-makers have wrestled with the problem of showing 'our round world on a flat surface'. We also encounter such diverse subjects as the Flat Earth Society, plate tectonics and how the dark side of the moon was mapped.

It's a tribute to Peter Chrisp's clear, concise style and narrative skills that he's woven it all into a seamless, easily assimilated and absorbing text – which has been augmented by a plethora of diagrams, photos and illustrations. VH



### A grass orchestra!

Huge pieces of hollow bamboo make a good xylophone. Thick bamboo makes different notes from thin bamboo. This orchestra from Bali uses only bamboo instruments.



### Piping a tune

Short and long hollow canes make up these Chinese pan pipes. Each length gives a different note. The player blows across the top of each hollow pipe to make the sound.

27

## Grasses

Catherine Chambers, Evans (Would you believe it? series),  
0 237 51541 5, £8.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Rural life depends for its success on grass more than anything else – only in towns and suburbs can there be too much of it for, in its various forms, grass is the world's number one provider.

Just how varied these forms can be is shown in this first 'Would you believe it?' that I've seen. You can eat grass (cereals), build with it (bamboo), drink it (beer and saké), sit on it (cane and rush), make paper and boats (papyrus) and, in Hawaii, wear it for a skirt.

This lovely book shows with great and picturesque clarity a lot of what grass does worldwide and is a really effective contribution to the information spectrum. TP

## Farm

Ned Halley, Dorling Kindersley  
(Eyewitness Guides series)  
0 7513 6065, £8.99

JUNIOR UPWARDS

**Farm**, a million miles from BSE and animal rights, isn't so much an exposé of contemporary husbandry as a trip round the D.K. Museum of Rural Life – the only milking shown, for instance, is hand done – but a brilliant sequence of knowledgeably captioned pictures showing the shearing of a Norfolk Horn ewe has instructed me better than any sheep-book I've so far found.

A background for those farm visits but of limited help to all who practise what Ralph Whitlock perceptively called 'Farming from the Road'. TP

My pebble is four hundred and eighty million years old. So far.  
Keep travelling, pebble!

Every pebble in the world is different from every other pebble.  
Every pebble has its own story. Pick up a pebble and you are holding  
a little piece of the history of our planet.



From *The Pebble in My Pocket*.

### The Pebble in My Pocket

Meredith Hooper, ill. Chris Coady,  
Frances Lincoln,  
0 7112 1022 5, £8.99

#### JUNIOR UPWARDS

Meredith Hooper specialises in making celebrities out of ordinary things and here, by featuring an undistinguished pebble as a reader-hooking McGuffin, she shows us 480 million years of geological evolution, with the pebble gradually achieving its current form. Watercolourist Chris Coady has turned this story into a compelling picture book through which Hooper's narrative rolls easily. It tells us not only the pebble's story but explains the gentle continuum of the geosphere in which sand still hardens into rock as much as sandstone breaks down into seashores. It's an excellent idea and beautifully written.

Having come, as I did, to this book straight from flinging gravel about by the barrowload and having read that 'every pebble in the world is different from every other pebble', I felt both shock and delight. To read this book is to realise that no pebble is undistinguished and each has its story – and to realise that you'll never feel quite the same about gravel. TP

### The Norman Conquest

Peter Chrisp, Wayland (Medieval Britain series),  
0 7502 1743 X, £10.99

#### MIDDLE

This is a straightforward, uncomplicated account of the events leading up to the Norman invasion in 1066 and its consequences.

Throughout the book excellent use is made of carefully chosen extracts from contemporary source material such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the writings of William of Poitiers ('note: the language used in some of the quotations has been changed to make them easier to understand'). Not surprisingly, these often express diametrically opposite points of view, for as Peter Chrisp states, 'history is usually written by the winners, or people trying to please them' and, as he goes on to tell us, writers are still debating the pros and cons of the Conquest.

This is a well-illustrated, attractive volume only marred by having both the timeline and most of the quotations overprinted on what appears to be a ghostly refugee from the Bayeux Tapestry. VH

### The Olympic Spirit

Norman Barrett, Wayland,  
0 7502 1613 1, £9.99

#### MIDDLE/SECONDARY

With an obvious eye on Atlanta 96 this is a comprehensive look at the history of the Olympics and some of the major stories and characters over the years.

Starting with the Ancient Games in Olympia and moving through de Coubertin's vision, the book goes on to cover both Summer and Winter Olympics, although there is a heavy concentration on athletics. Most of the stories focus on achievement, success (often in the face of adversity) and friendly rivalry, so whilst there is a spread on 'Cheats' including Ben Johnson and Onischenko of the doctored foil, there's no room here for the



'Wheelchair basketball is a popular sport among disabled people, and calls for great skill in manoeuvring the special wheelchairs.'  
From *The Olympic Spirit*.

political protests, boycotts and terrorism which have sullied some of the more recent Games.

Clearly designed with two or three main stories on each spread, fact boxes for further information and a very comprehensive index, this is an excellent introduction to the topic for Year 6 and above. SR

### Non Fiction REVIEWERS

Vee Holliday, Ted Percy and Steve Rosson.  
Non Fiction Reviews Editor: Eleanor von Schweinitz

### World of Soccer

Michael Nevin, Wayland,  
0 7502 1804 5, £9.99; 0 7502 1963 7,  
£5.99 pbk

#### MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Sports books date so quickly and there is such a range of soccer magazines available now that it's often difficult to justify spending much on them. This one is bang up to date with plenty of colour photos of the modern game from all over the world. It's not an instructional book but a wide-ranging look at the mass appeal, history, tactics, personnel and commercial activities of 'the beautiful game'. In 48 pages none of these topics is dealt with in any detail but the book should encourage readers to take a wider view and think beyond the immediate appeal of their own particular team.

Not a 'must buy' but a useful acquisition. A quibble – does any kid interested enough to pick up a book on soccer really need a glossary that includes corner, free-kick, penalty and tackle? SR

### Introducing Gershwin

1 85561 517 7

### Introducing Mozart

1 85561 516 9

Roland Vernon, Belitha Press,  
£8.99 each

#### SECONDARY

Gershwin was the American Musician *par excellence*, pulling together as he did for the first time the diverse strands of jazz, ragtime, European folk and Western 'classical' musics to form his own utterly American style.

Here, well embedded into the context of his times, is a very full account of the whole man from his Tin Pan Alley beginnings to his tragically early death, from his early friendship with Astaire to his later devotion to Schoenberg. Perhaps the best appreciation of Gershwin comes from listening to his own stiff-fingered strutting recordings of his piano pieces but this book is a valuable corollary.

As any Horse of the Year will tell you, Mozart wrote some damn good tunes too, and his story is oddly parallel to Gershwin's – what a formidable duo they'd have been. What Vernon has done for one,

he has done for the other in a book which allows us to realise that no study of Wolfgang will be the same after Amadeus. TP

### Black and British

David W Bygott, Oxford University Press, 0 19 913305 0, £5.99 pbk

#### SECONDARY

Winner of the 1992 TES Information Book Award and warmly reviewed in *The Multicultural Guide* and *BfK*, *Black and British* is now out in paperback. Scholarly but accessible, to be read from cover to cover or dipped into at leisure. A remarkable book – make sure you've got a copy in your library. SR



**SOPHIE'S WORLD**, first published in 1992, is a book for young adults which quickly established itself as a cult novel throughout Scandinavia, has been translated into 25 languages and sold more than a million copies in both Germany and Japan. Basically, it's a history of western philosophy with a touch of *Alice in Wonderland* . . . but just how good a thinker is its author, Jostein Gaarder?

BfK asked **Reynold Jones**, a professional philosopher, to investigate.

This book is mainly a history of western philosophy. It starts at the beginning, about 600BC, with Thales from the Greek colony of Miletus in Asia Minor who claimed that everything was made of water. It ends with Jean-Paul Sartre's version of existentialism (Sartre died in 1980) but, inexplicably, Sartre is the only philosopher of this century who is discussed, and there is no mention of Wittgenstein or the 'analytic' brand of philosophy that has dominated universities in English-speaking countries for decades. The book's aim is to introduce people, especially younger people, to philosophy and it has to be regarded as a success. Hundreds of thousands of hardback copies were sold and now the paperback version is outselling every other book in this country. If only a fraction of those who buy or are given the book read it, then Gaarder will have reached an extraordinary number of people with an extremely well-informed and lucid exposition of difficult ideas.

The longest quotation in the book is from St Paul's address to the Athenians; Darwin gets more space than either Plato or Aristotle; there is an exceptionally clear account of the physics developed by Galileo and Newton; the last chapter summarises what modern astronomy knows about the size of the universe, its origin and its future. A conscientious reader will end up knowing what, where and when Hellenism was, what the Middle Ages were between and whether Romanticism came before or after the Enlightenment. And much else besides.

As well as all this, there is a story. Sophie is a Norwegian teenager soon to be 15. She receives, and accepts, the unsolicited offer of a course in the history of philosophy. The offer has come from the mysterious Alberto Knox. Alberto's lessons are the book's history of philosophy. At first it is a correspondence course that Sophie gets but, unfortunately, Alberto is soon instructing her face-to-face. Sophie's responses of 'You don't say', 'How heavy', etc. don't do much for the book.

After not very long it emerges that Sophie and Alberto are not 'real'. They discover they are characters in a novel written by a Norwegian major serving in the Lebanon with the UN as a present for his teenage daughter's impending birthday. The discovery is unwelcome and they make a successful attempt to escape from the Major's imagination.

The story is a lot more eventful than this summary has brought out, and there are appearances by, amongst many others, Winnie-the-Pooh, Scrooge and Little Red Riding Hood. But however successful the story is in persuading people to read *Sophie's World*, and keep reading it when the philosophy gets tough, it adds nothing to the book's philosophical content and sheds no light on any of the problems it deals with.

*Sophie or Sophistry?*

A history of over 2,000 years of philosophy is not the only way in which the subject could be introduced, moreover. Another way, and it is used a lot, is to work through some philosophical problems looking, for instance, at what can be said for and against the belief that human beings, despite our growing understanding of why they behave as they do, can 'help it' and can, appropriately, be punished for transgressions.

Gaarder's approach also has drawbacks. Here are three. First, when you work through the history of the subject there will always be difficulties, not suitable in an introduction, which cannot be dodged. For instance, the development of philosophy from Descartes onwards is such that no honest account can leave out some of the trickiest bits of the inaccessible works of Immanuel Kant. Sophie has to be told that space and time are 'forms of intuition', modes of our perception and not attributes of the physical world.

We know now, thanks largely to the work of Gareth Matthews, that even young children take easily to philosophy and have a good grasp of problems like how we can tell whether

we are awake or dreaming. Sometimes they can even come up with interesting answers like the child who argued that we could be sure we were not dreaming because, if we were, we would not be asking questions like whether we are dreaming. Doses of Kant may not be the best way to develop this talent.

Secondly, while the historical approach does help one to learn a little about philosophy, there is a built-in danger that it may conceal *how* little. Ten pages of *Sophie's World* are about Plato, for example, but his collected works fill 1,600 densely printed pages. Aristotle's thoughts on morality are dealt with in 20 or so lines, while his best known work on the subject runs to over 300 pages in the Penguin edition, each one closely argued.

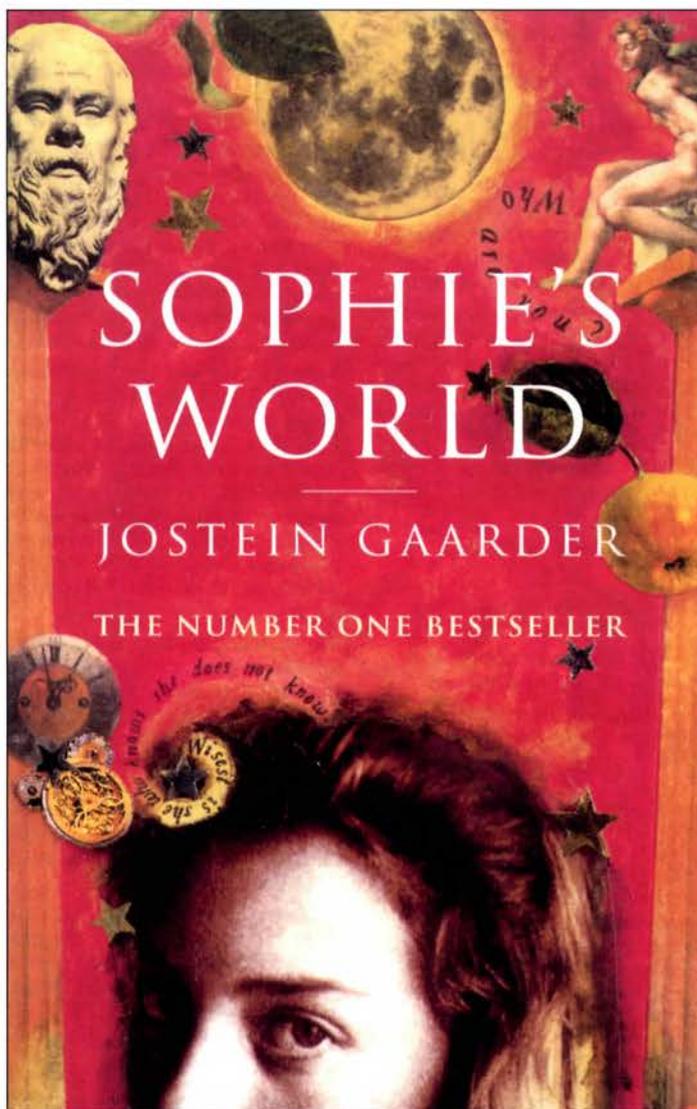
Thirdly, the historical approach inevitably means that the conclusions of the philosophers overshadow the arguments by which those conclusions were established and defended. A problem-centred approach shows more of philosophy in action. *Sophie's World*, just to take one example, would have given a better picture of philosophy if, in addition to the excellent brief account of Kant's view of morality as consisting of treating people as ends in themselves and not amusing them, that view could have been tested. There sounds something right about it, but doesn't it imply that how we treat animals has nothing to do with morality?

However, if lots of the people who read *Sophie's World* go on to read

another book on philosophy, please ignore these reservations! ■

*Sophie's World*, Jostein Gaarder, Phoenix, 1 897580 42 8, £16.99; 1 85799 722 0, £5.99 pbk

**Reynold Jones** is a Lecturer in Primary Education at the Institute of Education, London.



# BfK News Awards

How are children's book awards actually . . . well, awarded? In a special News Feature, two distinguished commentators report on the deliberations that lay behind two of this year's top prizes: The Hans Christian Andersen Award and the Carnegie Medal.

## The Best Children's Author in the World? (And the best illustrator, while we're at it.)

Jay Heale

INTERNATIONAL BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE **IBBY**

Often referred to as 'the Little Nobel Prize', the Andersen Award is the top international award for an author and an illustrator of children's books. It is awarded for the complete body of work judged to 'have made a lasting contribution to literature for children and young people'.

The 60-something member countries of IBBY submit their nominations. (This year there were 23 authors nominated and 24 illustrators.) At the same time, a jury of eight is selected from similar international nominations. I was honoured to be one of the eight.

Our first task, as a jury, was to set out our criteria for the job ahead of us. The chairman of the jury, Péter Schneck from Austria, circulated all our replies. I was fascinated – firstly by the way that it seemed possible to judge writing and illustration under very similar headings; and secondly, by the way judges more experienced than I admitted openly that 'gut reaction' was a potent factor.

Determined to approach my judging with some degree of logic, I scanned through my fellow jurors' criteria and settled on five main points:

**Aesthetic quality:** the sheer skill involved in the writing or illustrating.

**Worthwhile themes:** that there was something beyond just enjoyment or adventure.

**Child appeal:** too many award-winning books are accused of being suited to adult judges rather than young readers.

**National importance:** the author or illustrator nominated must clearly have been highly honoured in her or his own country.

**Originality:** it seemed important that something new, fresh, and progressive was on offer.

Then the boxes of books started arriving – five or more titles to represent each contender, together with a folder containing the Motivation for that person's proposal. I have to say that many doubtless excellent nominations faltered at this stage, as their country had not supplied enough background material. For the authors, I set out to find readers in as many of the languages involved as possible. I contacted universities, embassies, schools, and put letters in the newspapers. I asked all my readers, including more than 100 children, for their 'gut reactions'. Did this author grab them? If so,

could they explain why? Believe me: the reactions of many 'ordinary parents' proved to be almost identical to those of supposed experts. The way that child and parent react to a book is the best way of judging it.

Armed with all these opinions, together with my own, I arrived in Basel in April 1996. We deliberated for two solid days. The actual voting was done by the eight jurors, with the Chairman and the President of IBBY (Carmen Diana Dearden from Venezuela) there with a voice but not a vote. In turn, each author was 'presented' by a juror sympathetic to that country, after which each person round the table offered a free opinion. In the first round of voting, seven of my own eight choices won through. As we narrowed down the voting, the discussion turned from 'Good, but not really up to Andersen standard', towards 'Very good, but still young – not a sufficient body of work yet'. Decisions were swayed by the fact that, though clearly excellent, some writers did not have books in translation in sufficient languages for the jury to have read them personally. (And the jury's collective linguistic coverage was considerable.)

Our final decision, the Israeli author, Uri Orlev, was agreed upon warmly. His writing has humour and adventure, is full of realism, yet contains a deeper message of a loving, accepting attitude towards others. His boyhood experience inside the Warsaw ghetto in war-torn Poland forms the background of some of his stories; so does his new country, Israel; and he tells simple tales in skilled Hebrew as well. He writes at a high literary level in a way which is never sentimental. *The Island on Bird Street* and *Lydia, Queen of Palestine* are two of his best-known books.

Next day we tackled the illustrators. Before long the others were saying, 'Right, Jay, what do your 100 children think of *this* one?' (They hadn't done badly: their 'top 10' included five of the jury's final six.) What became clear to me was the obvious rift between east and west Europe (for there were very few contenders from outside this literary sphere). Eastern countries are used to harsher, more grotesque illustrative styles, more atmospheric, even caricatured or surreal. Children from the west are used to a more friendly, photographic style, with 'cute 'n cuddly' creatures and an accessible technique. It proved difficult (perhaps impossible) for the jurors to set aside their own personal artistic likes and dislikes.

We ended the long afternoon with Tomi Ungerer (France), Klaus Ensikat (Germany) and Anthony Browne (United Kingdom) as our final choices. For sheer child appeal, proven beyond doubt, Ungerer was supreme. But he'd not illustrated a children's book for 20 years. Why had France nominated him now? Was Ensikat's sophisticated humour and exquisite line truly 'child friendly'? Were Browne's surrealism and personified gorilla tales of lasting quality? We talked passionately. We voted. Klaus Ensikat was the winner. No doubt that he deserved this honour. Doubt only (in my mind) how clear we had all been on exactly *how* to choose between one artist and another.

In August 1996, at the IBBY Congress in Groningen (Netherlands), flash-bulbs will explode around Uri Orlev and Klaus Ensikat. They will join the ranks of such previous winners as Eleanor Farjeon (the first ever, in 1956), Astrid Lindgren, Erich Kästner, Meindert DeJong, Maurice Sendak, Scott O'Dell, Paula Fox, Mitsumasa Anno, Patricia Wrightson and Virginia Hamilton.

Neither Uri Orlev or Klaus Ensikat have books in print in this country.

Jay Heale was born in Great Britain and has lived in South Africa since 1968, where he edits *Bookchat*, the only magazine in that country devoted to children's books. The author of several children's books, Jay also conducts ongoing research into South African children's literature and is the Liaison Officer for South Africa with IBBY.

September's BfK is our 100th edition. Watch out for a special celebratory issue!

As sponsors of the Eleanor Farjeon & Mother Goose Awards,



would like to congratulate the winners. BFC Customer Services can be contacted on PO Box 413, Uxbridge, Middx. UP11 1DX; 0181 606 3030.

# Carping about Carnegie

Nicholas Tucker reports on his observation of how our premier award for children's literature is judged

Book prizes always involve disagreements, with no guarantee that history will necessarily agree with the final decision. Judging a children's book award is even more difficult, because panel members are arguing not just for themselves but also for the particular child reader they have in mind. This figure may be based on their own family, on a child they work with and even on the child the panel members themselves once were. Successfully pooling all these private agendas into a communal judging session has to be hard.

So it is with no spirit of condescension that I am now making a few mild criticisms of the judging session for the Carnegie Medal short-list I was invited to observe this April. The judges in this search for the outstanding book written for children last year were experienced children's librarians drawn from all over Britain. They knew far more about what children read day to day than I did. They listened politely to each other, and good humour was maintained throughout. Everyone involved had their fair say; some voices were stronger than others, but that's inevitable in any group discussion.

What then could I possibly find to gripe about? Well, for starters, this was an all-women group – not by design, but simply because this year no male librarians were nominated. Since females dominate this profession, it is not surprising they were so well represented here. Yet imagine the concern if it was an all-male jury sitting in judgement on the best children's book of the year! The presence of even one male may not have materially altered the discussion, but it is still surely a mistake to allow such gender bias.

This is not just a matter of good public relations. Boys are not very persistent readers these days, nor have they been for some time. Both boys and girls often go for the same books, but sometimes each sex will opt for different ones. A male judge may not necessarily be better at looking after boys' reading interests but he might more easily remember his own former taste or that of his friends for the active, adventure-bound type of literature so rarely found in modern children's books, and particularly among those that win prizes. Should anyone ever endow a prize for the best boys' book of the year, it would be difficult to define nowadays what exactly was meant by that phrase... and then find enough titles to choose from!

By contrast, there's plenty of good fiction around that concentrates on the importance of feelings, sensitivity to others and maintaining wider emotional relationships. In *a Different Voice*, an influential book by the feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan, finds such values

highly represented in current female priorities. Many males share these concerns too, but Gilligan suggests they often tend to place most value on individual achievement in a world of clear rights and wrongs. Someone should be speaking up for readers with these interests as well. Female librarians may do so, but male librarians surely deserve to be heard, too, on this topic when awarding national book prizes.



In fact, the judges on the occasion I was there talked about quite different issues. Persistent claims were made for a novel's veracity, sometimes as if non-fiction was being discussed rather than works of imagination. 'This wouldn't have happened in 1960.' 'Why didn't she take the road rather than going over the hill?' 'Surely the school inspector would have recommended computer studies?' Yet fiction is different from life. It has its own conventions and imaginative certainties. Constantly measuring it against reality in order to condemn contrived endings, unlikely coincidences and unreal conclusions is to close the door on some fine books that stay in the mind because of their emotional truth whatever their surface likelihood.

I was left wondering whether it's a good idea to have all judges from the same profession as well as from the same sex. They appeared to share very similar outlooks, fair and sensitive in themselves, but still somewhat exclusive as is the case with all of us with common values. Open disagreements tended to be muted rather than followed through, perhaps because to persevere would seem to be challenging other judges' competence as professionals in close touch with children and literature. The literary criteria laid down by the Library Association for judging the Carnegie Medal are sensible enough, but they were not always consistently applied and room must still be left for those flawed writers who also possess giant merits. Two of my own awkward customers fell by the wayside this time; whether the ultimate winner is clearly better than the lot remains to be seen. ■

Nicholas Tucker is Lecturer in Developmental Psychology at the University of Sussex.

The winner of this year's Carnegie Medal will be announced on the 17th July at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London.

In *a Different Voice* by Carol Gilligan is published by Harvard University Press, 0 674 44544 9, £6.95

*Editor's Note: Oh dear! My own doubts about the way the Carnegie Medal is judged are pretty well known (see BfK 82, Sept 1993, and BfK 83, Nov 1993) so I was a little alarmed, on receiving Nick Tucker's copy, that we might be thought to be conducting some sort of vendetta. Not so, let me assure our readers. Clearly, though, there's a substantive case to answer here. Would any librarians – male librarians in particular, perhaps – like to respond to Nick's comments?*

## AWARDS UPDATE

### The Mother Goose Award for 1995

has been awarded to *When Martha's Away* by Bruce Ingman, published by Methuen (hardback currently out of stock, with a Mandarin paperback due in September this year).



This award is sponsored by Books for Children and the 1995 judges were Jill Slotover, Sally Grindley, Ian Beck, Michael Foreman, Nicola Bayley, Tony Ross and Wendy Cooling.

### The Children's Book Award

has been won by Jacqueline Wilson for her book, *Double Act*, published by Doubleday and illustrated by Nick Sharratt and Sue Heap (0 385 405375, £8.99; Yearling, 0 440 86334 1, £3.50 pbk).



Jacqueline also won the award in 1993 for *The Suitcase Kid* (Doubleday, 0 385 401752, £8.99; Yearling, 0 440 86311 2, £2.99 pbk).

## Summer Storyboat '96

### Programme Details & Locations

Between 10am and 5pm, activities will include painting, face-painting, badge-making, storytelling, singing, dancing and the opportunity to buy books.

Monday 12th August

#### HERTFORD

Rob Lewis and Vivian French (authors) and Jan Williams (storyteller)

Tuesday 13th August

#### WARE PRIORY

June Counsel and Julia Jarman (authors)

Wednesday 14th August

#### STANSTEAD ABBOTS

Georgie Adams and Rob Lewis (authors)

Thursday 15th August

#### BROXBOURNE LIDO

Julia Marriage and Mick Gowar (authors)

Friday 16th August

#### WALTHAM ABBEY

Squidge (storyteller/clown) and Colin West (author)

If you want more information, contact Anne Spalding on 01438 815091 or 01462 682908.



# Visiting Uncle Albert

Russell Stannard on a non-fiction character who enjoys the popularity of a storybook hero

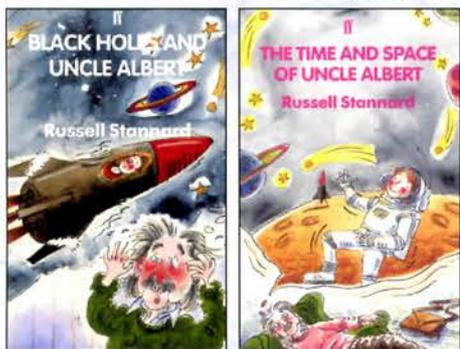


Russell Stannard.

What gave me the idea of writing the Uncle Albert books?

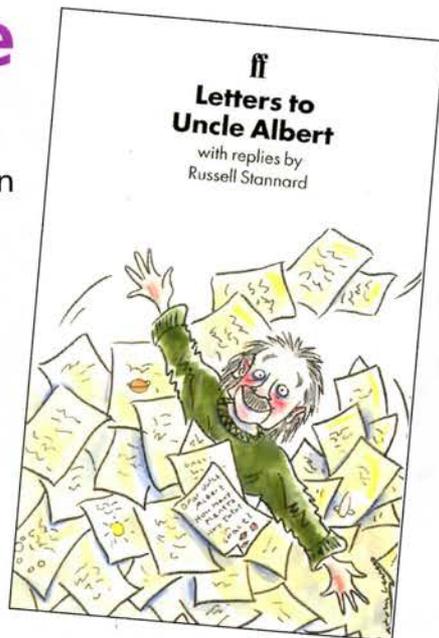
I had long wanted to share with others my own excitement and sense of wonder at the extraordinary discoveries of Albert Einstein – his Theory of Relativity, and his contributions to Quantum Theory. But I found I could make little or no headway with adults. When it came to the new ideas of space and time, and the bizarre behaviour of sub-atomic particles, they would shy away from me mumbling, 'I'm sorry, but I was never any good with physics at school.' Or, 'I don't believe it. It's against common sense.'

It was Einstein himself who once described common sense as 'that layer of prejudice laid down in the mind prior to the age of 18'. Exactly! That's why I resolved to try out these ideas on children instead. Children's minds are more open than those of most adults; they are eager to learn, and still possess that precious gift of wonder. They have yet to learn that Relativity is supposed to be too difficult for them.



So it was I embarked on **The Time and Space of Uncle Albert**, the first in the Uncle Albert trilogy. It describes how nothing can travel faster than light; the faster you go, the heavier you become; space squashes up; and time slows down. Go fast enough and you could live forever. These ideas are wrapped up in a story – one that reads like science fiction, but is actually based on scientific fact. 'What I like about your stories is that you learn things without knowing it,' declared one young reader.

But do children learn from the books? An early version of each book was trialled in a number of schools on a random sample of 10-12 year-olds. Having read the book, they were asked questions, not only to do

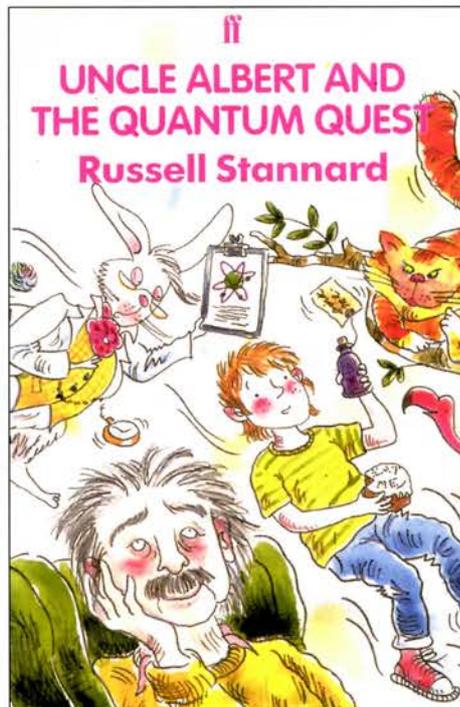
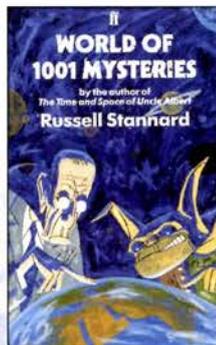


with whether they had enjoyed it and found it interesting (78% did), but they had also to sit a written exam to test their comprehension of the underlying science. The results were most gratifying.

The rest, as they say, is history. Shortlisted for both the non-fiction Children's Science Book Prize and the Whitbread Children's Novel of the Year, the **Uncle Albert** books are now in 15 translations. The third book in the series, **Uncle Albert and the Quantum Quest**, became the Number 1 children's best-seller, and even got to Number 5 in the overall paperback best-seller list (for one week!).

I found my involvement with children enormous fun. There was so much I wanted to share with them. Further books followed in rapid succession: **World of 1001 Mysteries**; **A Short History of God, Me and the Universe** (a flap-book for five- to seven-year-olds); **Our Universe** (recently nominated for the Carnegie Medal and the Rhone-Poulenc Children's Science Book Prize); and **Here I Am!**. The latter looks at religious belief and how that might be squared with the scientific outlook. Although I am myself a committed Christian, the book does not set out to make converts; rather it aims to raise questions about the meaning of life, and encourage readers to make up their own minds on the issues, based on the information provided concerning science, theology and different interpretations of The Bible. Like my other books, **Here I Am!** was progressively developed through trials conducted in schools, this time under the guidance of Religious Education teachers.

One of the things that has surprised me about my books is the number that are being used as a basis for school lessons. This I had not expected; one could hardly regard subjects such as Relativity and Quantum Theory as having much bearing on the National Curriculum. Their popularity with teachers appears to derive from the fact that children *enjoy* them; they find them stimulating. At a time when there is



a marked drift away from the sciences – particularly from my own subject of physics – it makes a pleasant change. What's more, having been fired with enthusiasm over, for example, the exotic black hole gravitational effects of General Relativity, the children appear more willing to learn other things about gravity – the aspects that do later figure in the National Curriculum. Motivation is everything!

Something else that has surprised me is the number of letters I receive from children (many of them addressed to Uncle Albert himself). Often they include some deep and profound question which, presumably, their parents haven't managed to handle. These range from 'How did the world begin?' and 'When God dies, who'll be the next God?' to 'How can you be sure that the light has gone out once you have shut the fridge door?' In my very latest book, **Letters to Uncle Albert**, we reproduce a first selection of these letters (complete with spelling mistakes and drawings) and I try to answer them as best I can – on behalf of Uncle Albert. I've heard that this book, like the others, is already finding its way into the classroom. At the back of the book there is an invitation to readers – those who are being fobbed off by parents to teachers – to write to Uncle Albert with their mind-boggling questions. Who knows, their letter might appear in a subsequent book in the Letters series! ■

Russell Stannard is Professor of Physics at the Open University at Milton Keynes. He has recently spent a year in America as Visiting Fellow at the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton. His books listed below are published by Faber, unless otherwise stated:

**The Time and Space of Uncle Albert**, 0 571 14282 6, £3.99 pbk

**Black Holes and Uncle Albert**, 0 571 14452 7, £8.99; 0 571 14453 5, £3.99 pbk

**Uncle Albert and the Quantum Quest**, 0 571 17066 8, £9.99; 0 571 17344 6, £3.99 pbk

**Here I Am!**, 0 571 16612 1, £8.99; 0 571 16829 9, £3.99 pbk

**World of 1001 Mysteries**, 0 571 16775 6, £9.99; 0 571 17049 8, £3.99 pbk

**A Short History of God, Me and the Universe**, Hunt & Thorpe, 1 85608 200 8, £5.99

**Our Universe: A Guide To What's Out There**, Kingfisher, 1 85697 317 4, £9.99 (see Ted Percy's review in **BfK** 92, May 1995)

**Letters to Uncle Albert**, 0 571 17508 2, £5.99 pbk